

**Upper Missouri River Citizens Advisory Committee (UMR CAC)
Annual Meeting – FWP Annex, South Conference Room
9:00AM on 12/15/2022**

Participants

UMR CAC Members: Mike Agee, Bart Bratlien, Pete Cardinal, Dale Gilbert, Lance Kresge

FWP: Eileen Ryce, Mike Duncan, Coltan Pipinich, Jason Rhoten, Adam Strainer, Troy Humphrey, Chris Hurley

Other Attendees: Pat Byorth (FWP R3 F&W Commissioner) via Zoom.

Meeting Introduction

Rhoten – Introductions and agreement on meeting agenda

1. Participants approved meeting agenda
2. Offered Travel Expense Vouchers pertinent to non-FWP employee participants
3. Briefly described CAC framework, provided outline of the meeting, specifically the format for discussion for proposed management actions. Described the process if a management change was to be proposed.

FWP Fisheries HQ Updates – Ryce (1 hr. 45 mins.)

Updated the CAC on the following topics:

1. Statewide Fisheries Management Plan (SFMP) is nearing completion. The SFMP is being updated due to HB 360. Part II of the SFMP is drainage-by-drainage so please comment on all sections you're interested in. The document is very large and will be much more prescriptive than previous versions. Waterbody specific plans still supersede the SFMP. It is likely that there will be an extended public comment period because of the document complexity.
2. Waterbody specific plans will no longer go to the commission for approval
 - a. SFMP and waterbody specific plans such as the UMRRFMP and Ft Peck Plan will go out for public comment simultaneously.
3. Fishing Regulations will change from a 4-year cycle to a 2-year cycle. Fishing and Hunting regulations will happen on opposite years.
 - a. Commission process changed:
 - i. Regulation proposals go out for public comment, Commission reviews public comment, final action taken at the Commission meeting.
 - b. FWP staff will provide only biological input and recommendation. Social input comes from the public and considered by the Commission. Commission will use biological input and social considerations when taking final actions on regulation proposals.
 - c. Once FWP provides a regulation proposal, FWP will not change the recommendation. Only the Commission can make amendments to a proposal.
4. Two current Commissioners will likely be replaced in the near future.

Commissioner Byorth -CAC's are more important now than ever. Thanked the group for their work on the CAC and including him in the process.

UMR CAC Member Updates/Reports

Agee – Reported that he thought the reservoir system in the Plan area is in good shape, spoke to many happy anglers and continues to see an increase in anglers and “weed growth” throughout the system.

Bratlien – Reported a good year for selling fishing tackle in Helena. Most customers were happy with their angling experiences throughout the Plan area. He did report that Hauser anglers have yet to find the kokanee.

Cardinal – He and those he spoke with were excited about fishing in the area. He's concerned about the continued increasing amount of nutrients in the systems over time. Suggested he'd like to discuss potential changes to the current Holter Reservoir yellow perch regulations.

Gilbert – Reported that a lot of folks he spoke to were happy with fishing trends in the Plan area. He pointed out that current walleye trends are leading to an increase in the number of larger walleye being caught. He specifically mentioned good angler reports from the Canyon Ferry walleye fishing tournament. Overall he stated he heard the “most positive comments in 30-40 years of experience “ in the area.

Kresge – Canyon Ferry walleye size is up a little and he'd like to see more improvement.

Waterbody Updates

Pipinich – Presented 2022 data related to Plan goals for the **Missouri River from Toston Dam to Canyon Ferry Reservoir** and updates on the Deep Creek and Brown trout telemetry projects.

Discussion regarding presentation -CAC interest in why temperature related fishing closures are not considered for the Missouri River in the Toston Section.

Strainer – Presented 2022 data related to plan goals for the **Missouri River from Hauser Dam to Holter Reservoir**.

Discussion regarding presentation – Discussed angling pressure.

Humphrey – Presented 2022 data related to plan goals for **Canyon Ferry Reservoir**.

Discussion regarding presentation – Discussed walleye, water, and rainbow plant increases.

Strainer – Presented 2022 data related to plan goals for **Hauser Reservoir**.

Discussion regarding presentation– Discussed increased yellow perch abundance and kokanee plant success.

Strainer – Presented 2021 data related to plan goals for **Holter Reservoir**.

Discussion regarding presentation – Discussed the kokanee fishery and the yellow perch population trends.

Lunch

FWP Management Recommendations - Discussion

Missouri River – Toston Dam to Canyon Ferry Reservoir

FWP Recommendation: Change the current walleye regulation (10 daily only 1 over 15”) to 5 daily and 10 in possession. Regulation would be in effect from Toston Dam to HWY 287 bridge near Townsend.

CAC Input

- 3 CAC Members (Agee, Gilbert and Kresge) opposed the FWP recommendation
- 2 CAC Members (Cardinal and Bratlien) supported the FWP recommendation

Discussion: Much discussion was had about the recommendation. Below briefly summarizes the discussions

- FWP -- Based on the current Toston section walleye population size structure (PSD of 70; average length > 17 in.), the current regulation is not biologically warranted, does not benefit trout management and is too restrictive for harvest-oriented anglers. Additionally, simplifying the regulation to the Central Fishing District Standard for walleye in the section removes an unnecessary exception in the regulation booklet.
- Bratlien and Cardinal stated the biology dictates that a special walleye regulation is currently not warranted and support the proposed regulation. Cardinal suggested additional population estimate and creel survey data is warranted.
- Agee stated that most current information indicates that the river and reservoir walleye population is the same, so the same regulation should be in place in both Canyon Ferry and the Toston section. Kresge and Gilbert stated the same as Agee.
- Agee, Gilbert and Kresge all opposed the proposed regulation.
- Gilbert asked what additional information is available to suggest walleye are affecting trout in the river; otherwise, he doesn't support the proposed regulation change.
- Kresge questioned what information has changed since the current plan was adopted in 2020 and reminded the group of strong opposition, by walleye advocates, to any walleye regulation different from Canyon Ferry.
- Kresge also suggested enforcement issues will arise with proposed regulation boundary and increasing harvest on larger fish in the river will negatively affect Canyon Ferry walleye PSD's.

Missouri River – Hauser Dam to Holter Reservoir

FWP Recommended Status Quo

CAC Input

- Unanimous CAC support for FWP recommendation

Canyon Ferry Reservoir

FWP Recommended Status Quo

CAC Input

- Unanimous CAC support for FWP recommendation

Hauser Reservoir

FWP Recommended Status Quo

CAC Input

- Unanimous CAC support for FWP recommendation

Holter Reservoir

FWP Recommendation: Change the current yellow perch regulation (25 daily and in possession) to 25 daily and 50 in possession.

CAC Input

- 4 CAC members (Agee, Bratlien, Gilbert, and Kresge) supported the FWP recommendation
- 1 CAC member (Cardinal) opposed the FWP recommendation

Discussion: Below briefly summarizes the discussions

- FWP – The management plan states, “To maximize fishing opportunity, consider more liberal bag limits when abundance trends increase above goal range.” The yellow perch Plan goal range is 8 to 12 per net. A robust age class was identified in a standardized FWP survey in 2021 (30.2 per net) and confirmed again in 2022 (32.0 per net). The proposed change that doubles the possession limit will increase angler harvest opportunity. The current catch rate is the second largest on record and approximately 1/2 the abundance level of the record high of 66.6 per net in 2013.
- Cardinal suggested that yellow perch abundance is not driven by angler harvest and there is no biological justification for the recommended regulation proposal.
- Cardinal suggested a limit of 50 daily and no possession limit.
- Four CAC members (Agee, Bratlien, Gilbert and Kresge) viewed the FWP recommended proposal as warranted and reasonable.

Note: Regulation process – Regulation proposals will be released for public comment and out for public comment for 3-4 weeks. The Commission will take a final action at the February commission meeting.

UMR CAC Member Reappointment

The plan requires annual CAC reappointment by the Commission. All current UMR CAC members were asked if they were interested in serving another term on the CAC. All UMR CAC stated they would like to be reappointed. Reappointment recommendation will likely go before the Commission in April 2023.