

**Private Land/Public Wildlife Council  
Meeting Summary  
Jorgenson's Inn & Suites, Helena  
February 13, 2013**

**Council Members Present:** Kathy Hadley, Chair; Chris King; Alex Nixon; Joe Cohenour; FWP Commissioner Bob Ream; **Absent:** Mike Penfold; Jack Billingsley;

FWP staff in attendance for some or all of the meeting included: Jeff Hagener, FWP Director; Ken McDonald, Wildlife Division Administrator; Alan Charles, Council staff support;

**Wednesday, February 13, 9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.**

- I. Access Program Budget Discussion:** Ken McDonald explained the current status of the budget for primarily the Block Management Program, but also for Special Access Projects. He noted that the past 2 years of license sales under the law enacted as a result of I-161, coupled with results of legislation passed in the 2011 session called HB 607, had produced significantly less revenue for the Hunting Access Account, resulting in close to a \$1 million shortfall. As a result of the fiscal uncertainty as to what long-term license sales might be, FWP plans to use Pittman Robertson funds to fill the gap for the short-term over the next two fiscal years, while also maintaining the program at approximately the 2012 hunting season level of enrollment. Over the interim, the Department plans to take a comprehensive look at all the many types of licenses and earmarked license accounts that currently exist to see if there might be ways in the 2015 legislative session to streamline license types and obtain the funding necessary to maintain various FWP programs at appropriate levels.
- II. Brucellosis Working Group Update:** Joe Cohenour explained the product produced by this group and how it was being addressed by the FWP Commission, emphasizing that the statewide working group had produced recommendations that would provide a framework for local working groups to develop local solutions that could be implemented by the Department. FWP Commissioner Ream noted that the Commission would be taking action on Thursday, February 14, on first-year workplans developed by FWP Wildlife Division staff to help move things forward for this first year.
- III. Jeff Hagener's Address to the Council:** Jeff apologized for being late, noting that he was with Governor Bullock for the signing of the HB 73, which was a bill that authorized FWP to sell more than one wolf license to a hunter, allowed the use of electronic calls when hunting wolves, removed the requirement for wearing hunter orange while hunting wolves outside the general big game hunting season, and addressed issues regarding FWP actions related to hunting wolves in a buffer zone around Yellowstone Park. He said he thinks the Private Land/Public Wildlife Council is very important, noting he served as an ex-officio member on the original Council, and has observed how the group can be a way to bring all factions together – the hunters, landowners, and outfitters who make up what is sometimes referred to as “the 3-legged stool.” He spoke about FWP funding issues, suggesting that while in the next legislative session, there may need to be a fee increase of

some kind, that there might also be a study resolution and perhaps a Governor's Task Force appointed in the interim to take a look at the FWP license structure to address the many different types of licenses and types of earmarked accounts that currently exist. He suggested that the PL/PW Council is the best group to take a look at the current Block Management Program to see what else might be needed in the way of other incentives or ideas to encourage landowners to allow some level of access. He also acknowledged that some landowners had closed their land because of policy issues over the past months, and said FWP needs to look at the issue of acquisitions as opposed to leases and easements, and make decisions thoughtfully on what projects best qualify for what kind of land management or ownership agreement. He mentioned that he had attended a meeting that included staff from One Montana LLC, as well as some legislators and hunters, during which concerns were discussed about landowner/sportsman/FWP relations, with one of the outcomes of the meeting being an impression that FWP had done too much in recent years regarding land acquisitions and perhaps not enough regarding hunter access. Jeff indicated that he felt that the PL/PW Council is the right group to work on landowner/hunter/outfitter relations, and his directive will be that with the Council that gets up and rolling after the legislative cycle, as soon thereafter as possible, will have only 18 months to work toward consensus and bring something forward for the 2015 legislature to consider.

- IV. Public Comment:** One member of the public chose to give comment to the Council at this time – Jean Johnson, representing the Montana Outfitters & Guides Association, spoke about various legislative proposals that MOGA either supported or did not support.
- V. Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters:** Debbie Hohler, FWP Coordinator of the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program, provided a brief summary of this new program that was implemented in 2012 as a pilot program using federal Farm Bill funds obtained through a Farm Services Agency grant award. Debbie noted that high interest from landowners resulted in 224 applications, with FWP being able to enroll 55 landowners (all new partners with FWP) and 16,796 acres, at a one-time cost of \$369,397. Contracts average 8 years, with landowners receiving a one-time payment of \$5/per acre/per year for tracts of CRP up to a maximum of 160 acres. Additional land not qualifying for payment could be offered to make an application more competitive. Program information can be found at: [fwp.mt.gov/ugbep](http://fwp.mt.gov/ugbep)
- VI. Ranch Appreciation Work Days:** Alan Charles explained that FWP had sponsored several Farm/Ranch Appreciation Work Days in 2012, focused on helping landowners in southeast Montana repair fences damaged by wildfire. He said that FWP would be exploring ways to encourage more of these types of activities, partially by providing local clubs and groups with some basic how-to materials to help them sponsor their own projects, and partially by FWP staff working with local landowners and hunters to initiate joint FWP/public projects. Joe Cohenour mentioned that some Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) chapters sponsored local “cleaner uppers,” often focused on rolling up old fence wire. He mentioned that RMEF National has a database that list volunteers. Other members mentioned that the gate latches were popular with landowners, and Bob Ream suggested that the FWP website might be a good place to post information about

these projects. Joe also mentioned that the local high school had proven to be good place to solicit for volunteers for RMEF projects.

**VII. Access Programs Update:** Alan Charles discussed the **Block Management Program**, noting that for the 2012 hunting season, no new lands were enrolled due to lack of funding, and that actually the number of enrolled landowners and enrolled acres dropped due a variety of reasons, including death of the landowner, changes of ownership, and landowners wanting to make statements regarding various FWP policies or actions. While the rate of attrition was within the 3-5% margin which has been the norm since 1997, the inability of FWP to backfill with new cooperators caused the numbers to decline. Alan reiterated what Director Hagener and Ken McDonald said previously, that FWP would continue to monitor revenue projections while trying to assess what level of expenditures can be sustained over the longer term as FWP and the program adjust to a new system of funding. Alan also noted that the Legislative Services Division had begun work on a limited performance program audit that would be taking place over the next 6-9 months, with results anticipated in late September or October. Regarding the **Access Public Lands Program**, Alan referred members to a project synopsis which showed that FWP had initiated 8 projects in recent years, of which some had been completed, some were in progress, and some were on hold or inactive. The funding for these projects is currently coming from the sales of the Coming Home to Hunt licenses, the sales of which were dramatically reduced by other license types adopted during the 2011 legislative session. But Alan noted that a legislative proposal had been introduced to remove the sunset provision from this license statute, which would allow the license to remain available and perhaps offer an opportunity to amend the statute in the future to make the license more attractive. Alan reported there was approximately \$400,000 available in this account for current and future projects. Alan also referred members to the **Hunter-Landowner Stewardship Project** survey report in their folders, noting that FWP would be exploring ways to improve this program based upon the largely favorable responses provided by graduates who completed the survey.

**VIII. Private & Public Land Access Data Needs:** Adam Messer, from the FWP GIS Unit and Mike Lewis, from the FWP Human Dimensions Unit, explained a project currently underway to help FWP get better data to help understand how land in Montana is managed for hunting access. Where a previous survey was designed to obtain a baseline of what systems of hunting access management private landowners used to manage lands under their control, this effort will be focused on trying to understand how many acres, by FWP Region and statewide, are managed under the different types of hunting access management systems. While some information is already available through data from the Montana Board of Outfitters and Block Management Program, much is not, and both the PL/PW Council and FWP have identified this as one of their high-priority needs in understanding trends and needs for hunting access programs. FWP staff indicated that this research project is scheduled to be completed by mid-to-late summer.

**IX. Access Issues Roundtable Discussion:** During this discussion, Council members adopted two recommendations regarding action item.

- **Action Item 1.** Have Alan draft a letter from the Council to Director Hagener, for Council review and adoption, that requests that the Director consider using his discretionary authority to redirect some or all of the money that was directed away from the Hunting Access Account through the provisions of HB 607, to honor the spirit of the original license earmarks, beginning with FY12 license revenues;
- **Action Item 2.** Have Alan draft a letter from the Council to Governor Bullock, for Council review and adoption, requesting that he consider revitalizing Council membership to its previous size, which consisted of 15 members and included 2 legislators (one from each house), with members being appointed through some system of staggered terms rather than the current system where all members' terms expire at the same time. The letter should also request that a new Council be appointed as soon as possible after the end of the 2013 legislative session, to allow for as much time as possible for members to work during the interim on whatever charge is offered to them through the Governor and FWP Director Hagener.

**X. Public Comment Session:** Maggie Nutter, representing herself and the Marias River Stockman's Association, offered various thoughts regarding some of the topics discussed during the meeting. She suggested consideration might be given to hosting volunteer workdays for landowners not in Block Management, with project ideas including harvest time when various types of work need to get done, roadway trash cleanup during hunting season, signage on ranch roads identifying ranch names, gate latches built and installed, and trail clearing on ranch trails similar to work done on USFS lands. She also suggested using ag-related groups and publications to advertise these projects and solicit interested landowners.

**XI. Next Meeting:** No next meeting date was scheduled. Instead, Alan will provide members with legislative updates on bills specifically related to Council charge, and will relay information as it becomes available from Director Hagener and Governor Bullock regarding future Council appointments.

Council adjourned.