

Spotted Dog Minutes 9/17/2013

Member Present: John Hollenback, Tim Quigley, John Stavlo, Louie Smith, Jodi Pauley, Jason Swant, Donna Young, John Beck, Dan McQuery, Liz Smith, Jim Flynn

FWP Present: Joe Kambic, Ray Vinkey, Vivaca Crowser, Mike Thompson, Bob White

Guests Present: Pat Hansen

Meeting was called to order by John Hollenback at 6:35 pm at the Powell County Community Center. John said they met in Drummond prior to this meeting to come up with an agenda; tonight's agenda will be a discussion on the hunting season for Spotted Dog and our tour that took place on August 2.

Discussion on the tour:

Brian Quigley felt that the tour was very educational. He felt that another tour should take place between bow and general hunting season and that one tour was not enough.

Liz Smith thought the WMA is in good shape and would like to see it again after the cattle have been removed.

John Beck said it is a big chunk of property. He talked about weed spraying and thought it will be interesting to see what happens to the cheat grass in the next couple of years. He felt the tour was great as he learned more about the property.

Jason Swant said it was an eye opener to learn more about the property and would like to see what the condition of the property is right before we go into winter. He said he didn't think there is a lot of grass there right now for what elk like to eat, he would like to see maybe some re-vegetation on some parts to bring in more elk for the fall season. He said he learned more about the fence boundaries.

Donna Young was in a vehicle with ranch folks and learned how it could be a benefit to ranching enterprises as well as how it can benefit the wildlife. She had not seen the western and southern end and was happy to see that part of the WMA. Great tour.

Dan McQuery said he is very familiar with this property and would like to point out that there is two pieces to this property concerning elk. The eastern half is not winter range for elk and he said out of the 40,000 acres there are probably only 800 to 1000 acres of problems and most of that is probably caused by elk. He said he would not like to see the whole thing taken out of production and that it can be managed for cattle especially in Freeze Out as elk do not winter in Freeze Out.

Brian Quigley said he wanted to point out as well that this was not a good grass year and has not been for the past 5 years.

Jodi Pauley said she learned a lot more about the property as well and that it has huge potentials in the area of education. It is a great resource to learn about range, habitat, forestry management and domestic, wildlife interactions. She felt that grazing is an important component to the WMA in certain

areas but not to the whole WMA. Some of the ground in Rocky ridge and O'Neil creek is very marginal at producing much forage however areas toward the east and in Freeze out need better utilization of grazing management. She said MSU Extension would like to set up some range monitoring plots and partner with FWP on monitoring range conditions in the WMA.

John Hollenback said from the road some of the WMA looks pretty tough but by getting out on the ground you do realize that because of the soil it is as good as it gets. There are also some areas that are under-utilized and that some of those grasses are struggling from not being grazed. He also said that weed management is critical and that the Pauly ranch area has some potential and has some historical base. He felt that the bonding in the tour was valuable to get to know folks better, and value those opinions.

Liz wondered about the DNRC harvesting timber? John H. said that is up to DNRC to manage their timber.

Brian wondered about the DNRC grazing leases that come up and who would that impact and how those leases would work for FWP, etc.?

Hunting Season:

John H. said we will now discuss hunting season on the Spotted Dog. Ray Vinkey had a hand-out that outlined the regulations, harvest numbers, and numbers within the WMA. He discussed the hunting regulations for the WMA in detail. He discussed the elk harvest from 2004 to 2012 in HD 215 that runs from Butte to Garrison and east of Deer Lodge to south of McDonald Pass. He said the numbers were higher in 2010 with the opening of the WMA. He said the increased access to lands in 2010 significantly brought those numbers up.

John B. asked how FWP estimates bull harvest, Ray said it is based on phone interviews and these are estimates and not the actual number. John asked when they do these interviews do they ask if the kill came off of Spotted Dog only. Ray said no, it is for the whole district.

Ray said there is an increasing elk population in the Spotted Dog area. He does his observations mostly in the winter. He said most of the elk are on the Spotted Dog during the winter and very little in the rest of HD 215. John asked how does FWP count the elk. Ray said they split the groups from the air and count them or at times you can take pictures if they are in the right situation.

John H. wondered from the graphs it shows a declining number of bulls and calves then why are elk numbers increasing. Ray said there are a lot of extra cows. John Stavlo said there may be more elk moving into the Spotted Dog from other areas. John H. and Brian said the numbers are not adding up. Ray said he did not have an answer for why the graphs are showing these numbers. He also discussed deer and antelope numbers for the district.

Dan said he flew this area 3 times last year and he said the elk they observed on these trips were all on private ground. He said he wintered 300 head of elk on his place and there were elk on trout creek on private ground. He said the other elk were on rocky ridge and Beck Hill on private ground. He said during

hunting season a lot of elk left the WMA and never did come back. He said he looks at elk all winter long and he said the only time he observed elk in the WMA is when he chased them out of his property and back to the WMA. He said when Rock Creek owned the property the elk would return to the WMA in the Jake Freeze out area and a few on Rocky Ridge. He said the WMA has created a situation in which the elk are being chased out of there because of the hunting numbers. He feels that the hunters need to be limited to keep the elk there and he said he cannot put up with another 300 elk for the winter. Brian Q. said there were 500 cow tags put out and not all of that harvest is happening. His recommendation is to take care of the over abundance of cows. Brian Q. felt it was a lucky day that FWP found so many elk to count on the WMA. John Stavlo said he sees the whole face of Rocky Ridge and some days he sees several elk and other times they are on him during the night. He felt there is a lot of hunting pressure and most of those elk do go to private lands. With a lot of driving through the WMA that moves those elk around more.

John B. said as a FWP biologist how do you recommend taking care of these large elk numbers. Ray said currently that is a discussion on the table to see if they are going to give out more tags, etc. John Stavlo asked what about a late season damage hunt? Dan said that has been somewhat successful if it is managed right. He felt landowners would be receptive to a late season hunt. He said it has to be managed with the right number of hunters with landowner cooperation.

Jason S. wondered what the optimal number of bulls per cow is. Ray said the minimum number is 8 percent. Jason said he has shared his thoughts and feedback with other hunters and he said hunting on that land before was very limited and in 2010 it turned to unlimited access. He said they look at districts across the state and what is available and to have quality and quantity of hunting, hunting pressure has to be limited. He felt there is support for the department to look at hunting limitations, etc. He said there are districts that do have certain restrictions and HD 215 needs some of those in place. He said it may be a good recommendation to divide the hunting district into 2 districts or more. He said this may create more pressure outside of the WMA on how hunting permits are given out. He said there is plenty of tension between private landowners and the elk that are encroaching their properties and by either redistricting or restricting permits in the area may help this problem.

John Stavlo asked what failed with Quigley's block management? Brian said one thing was wolves. He also said it was feedback from hunters in that there was no interaction between the landowner and the hunters. He felt that the whole block management system needs to be revamped. John Stavlo said there is a lot of inconsistency of landowners around the WMA as far as access to hunting.

Ray asked what John B. and Dan M. would think about antlerless hunting permits and would they let people on their property. Brian Q. said he thinks that if a 14 year old can shoot an either sex then why not let the folks over 60 also have the same opportunity. John H. wondered if the regulations are already set for this year? Ray said yes that is correct. John H. said perhaps that those late season hunts, etc. may be an approach to take. Ray said yes, his recommendations for some of these changes would be for the 2014 season. Dan M. said on his property they have gone to all extremes with hunter access by shutting their property down and then opening it wide open. He said they created a list of the problem hunters, the good hunters, etc. and they only let certain hunters that know the rules and what

is expected and they harvest elk. He felt that letting kids harvest elk is also important. He felt that late season hunts are okay but it cannot be wide open.

John H. wondered if any of the ideas that the committee had come up with for hunting could FWP use them? Ray said he is hearing support from landowners and hunters for a late season hunt. Jason asked about the thought on additional pressure outside the WMA and less pressure within the WMA. Mike said this would be a recommendation to take to the commission in December. Dan said this would have been a lot easier to manage also if Spotted Dog had not been logged because the elk had some cover and this has also changed the pattern of the elk.

Jason said one other strategy is limiting the number of days that hunting can take place in HD 215. Hunting for 3 days and closed for 4 days a week. Dan said if you go to that make sure the days are rotated around so all hunters get an opportunity to hunt. John Stavlo said if you made it walk in only it would also help alleviate this pressure.

John B. asked if it was too late for an either sex tag for this year. Ray said yes those recommendations would have to go in next year. John B. asked if they could have an early season damage hunt. Ray said it would work if there was cooperation between landowners, etc.

Mike said they could do a report at a later meeting on hunting recommendations that have been discussed tonight.

Brian Q. asked if there was another interest in a tour. Brian said he would like to see the condition of the range and to get out and understand the ground more. He said it would also be beneficial to have the FWP director and the commission out on the ground as well.

Next meeting will be tentatively set for October 17. Meeting was adjourned at 8:50.

Respectfully Submitted:

Jodi Pauley, Secretary