

**Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Fish and Wildlife Licensing and Funding Advisory Council
Meeting Summary, June 25, 2014**

Council Members Present: Mark Aagenes, Tim Aldrich, Ed Beall, Robin Cunningham, Bob Gilbert, Jim Olson, Debby Perry, Brett Todd, Senator Kendall Van Dyk, Representative Jeff Welborn. Not present: Arthur Hayes, Dan Vermillion.

Fish, Wildlife and Parks: Sue Daly, Quentin Kujala, Paul Sihler, Charlie Sperry, Neal Whitney, Hank Worsech

Environmental Quality Council (EQC): Hope Stockwell

Facilitator: Barb Beck, Beck Consulting

Public: Nick Gevock, Joe Perry, Laura Lundquist of the Bozeman Chronicle, Brett French of the Billings Gazette joined via video link from Billings

Welcome

The agenda was reviewed. The primary pieces of business will be to discuss the public comments to determine if the Council wishes to make changes to the recommendations, and to go through the bill draft prepared by EQC staff, Hope Stockwell.

Council members reported that some newspapers had run the announcements for the public meetings. The effort did not attract much attention from the press.

Public Input

LFAC Council members were asked for their observations on the public meetings they had attended. Many council members attended several meetings. Paul Sihler thanked the Council members for attending and presenting. The Council made the following comments about their experiences;

- No complaints about the recommendations
- Heard that seniors shouldn't get a free ride any longer
- General support for the recommendations
- Attendance was generally modest and this was disappointing
- Legislators attended in many locations
- Support for engaging non-consumptive users in funding the Department
- Heard concerns that were on issues other than what this Council was charged with
- Concerns about recommendations related to youth licenses
- People will support recommendations if they address access and/or quality opportunities
- Lots of interest in other FWP-related topics
- People seemed unaware of the existing access programs
- People were respectful and made good comments
- Some expressed the opinion that the Council didn't go far enough (under bidding)
- Some people just don't want to pay more money for anything, had no convincing argument
- Low attendance at some meetings may indicate that people don't think this is a big deal
- Several people thought the reference to Social Security wasn't necessary
- Most earmarks are for access and opportunity, people didn't want those changed

- Observation from a sportsman that Montana hasn't raised license prices in a long time
- Suggestion that the Council should have had a nonresident member
- Nonresident fishing license prices are a bargain, don't want to drive away customers
- One commenter was concerned with the effort FWP will have to expend working with the legislature for a 4-year budget cycle.

Public Input Summary

Charlie Sperry compiled and analyzed all of the input. This included all meeting testimony and the online comments. He provided a written Summary of Public Comments and presented the highlights. The Department received 88 total comments. FWP issued a press release notifying people that the comment period closed as of June 24.

Charlie explained that support for the work of the LFAC was clearly high. Comments were very supportive. Just get it done. Some were supportive in general and others had read the material and offered informed support. People understood the issue of the 10-year cycle and the budget situation. There was also general opposition although this was a minority. The opposition seemed to be related to three things—people that don't believe FWP needs money, people with problems related to a specific FWP management decision (on an unrelated item), and people concerned about cumulative increases. Don't mess with earmarks was a clear message as was be careful about things that have come about from citizen initiatives. There was strong support for developing avenues for non-consumptive users to participate in supporting FWP financially. People felt this was appropriate sooner rather than later. There was no specific opposition to the increase in fishing license prices. Access (lack of access for hunting) continued to come up. People commented that the regulations are too complex and they lumped license structure and regulations together.

Council Discussion

Doesn't appear anything new surfaced during the public comments. The Council had discussed the items raised by the public. The Council discussed its own recommendations on the following items.

Recommendation	Consideration	Discussion/Decision
Changing age for senior discount to 67	Phasing this in over time	Phasing this in would not be consistent with the goal to simplify. This would initially cost \$ \$750,000/year in lost revenue, but would balance out after five years. No change to existing recommendation.
Using social security age in rationale for above decision	Removing reference to social security	This won't be referenced in legislation. No change to existing recommendation.
\$400,000 contingency fund	Recommend what license prices should be altered if EQC desires to remove contingency funding	Council believes it is an important and needed "emergency fund." If EQC removes this, the Council believes FWP should determine the response. No change to existing recommendation.
LFAC's recommendation to develop non-consumptive users' support of FWP	Strengthen recommendation	Language in existing recommendation covers this adequately. Needs its own comprehensive effort. No change to existing recommendation.

Council members believe that seniors will become more vocal about the recommendation that pertains to them as the recommendations move forward. Those that support the council's work have been following it and understand. More general education will be needed to be successful.

Public Comments

Joe Perry, Chair of the Private Lands/Public Wildlife Council addressed the Council. The PL/PW is looking into the Coming Home to Hunt and Native Montana Licenses. These are unpopular with sportsmen. PL/PW and the Montana Sportsman's Alliance (MSA) will help sell the LFAC's recommendations to the legislature. Joe suggested not referring to these recommendations as a fee increase and supported the use of the phrase "emergency" fund as a more accurate description. He suggested the LFAC should not violate the citizen initiative by recommending a ceiling price but rather consider a cap and sunset. Don't phase in the change in the age for senior licenses—keep it simple. Joe believes an increase in resident license prices is still needed. Montana is a cheap date. Be prepared to see this through and be at the EQC meetings. What has been missing is a discussion on how we run this Department, it's our Department, we want the best people and we should pay them well.

The Council members reached a consensus to leave the recommendations as is after considering all public comments received.

FWP Video

FWP showed a 5-minute video titled "Conservation Kids, Student Perspectives on Conservation." The video was made with students from Helena High School and the Salish and Kootenai College.

Bill Draft

EQC staff, Hope Stockwell, reviewed hard copies of a bill draft of the LFAC's recommendations that she is preparing in response to direction from the EQC. The EQC authorized the bill drafting at its meeting in May. The EQC will decide at its next meeting (July) whether to make changes to the draft and/or go out for public comment, or to take no action. If the EQC does not move forward with the bill, one or more individual lawmakers could do so. The bill draft is a work in progress.

Hope walked the LFAC through the bill draft asking for clarification of intent in several sections. She modeled the language for the proposed base hunting license after the wildlife conservation license statute. Council members were comfortable with the approach she had taken where there were questions. The EQC has incorporated the LFAC's work into its study of FWP's licensing system.

Hope closed by expressing that it had been a privilege working with the Council members and she appreciated the time and effort they had put into these recommendations. The Council similarly thanked Hope for her work with them.

Next Steps

Paul Sihler reported that FWP has initiated a budget cutting exercise. The effort is guided by a small number of criteria such as minimizing the loss of federal funds, minimizing the reduction in services to constituents, and the ability to deliver the mission. Without implementation of the LFAC's recommendations there would be a loss of Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson (federal) funds and there would be staff reductions. Paul anticipates FWP will complete this exercise by the end of July. In August, the agency will have a complete package of the Council's recommendations along with what reductions in both the earmarks and general license account would look like. At that point FWP can go out to the public with a complete picture. The Department's goal is to help constituents and decision-makers understand the choices at the start of the 2015 legislative session.

In September, FWP's legislative proposals will come to the EQC. If the EQC doesn't move this bill draft forward, FWP could request a bill. One LFAC member asked about other issues that could arise and negatively affect the potential success of the LFAC's recommendations. Paul responded that the legislature is currently auditing the game damage assistance program and he expects there will be some inconsistencies with that program the Department will need to address.

Paul's belief is that the LFAC's recommendations will live or die in the session depending on whether constituents show up to support them. The work of the LFAC is officially concluded. However, Paul will send information to the LFAC about key steps by the EQC, Department budget information, information on open houses, etc. FWP can provide staff and materials if the Council members identify opportunities to let groups know about their work. The LFAC members believe they are a good resource for the Department to call upon now that they have learned so much about the budget and licensing situations.

Joe Perry explained that the Montana Sportsman's Alliance will support this package. He recommended trying to get it passed as a package. PL/PW's charge is access—not how to fund it. They understood that the LFAC would know where to find the money. He encouraged the LFAC members to stay together because their relationships and knowledge are valuable.

Paul closed out the meeting by once again thanking the Council members for donating their time to this process for the benefit of the resources and the people.