

Region 7 Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)
Field Trip Minutes
August 12, 2016

FWP Staff Present: Brad Schmitz, John Ensign, Mike Backes, Erin O'Connor, Marla Prell, Steve Atwood, Jackie Tooke and Ethan Fornshell

CAC Members Present: Gary Sparks, Ed Bukoskey, Bob Hagedorn and Ed Joiner

CAC Members Absent: Glenn Heitz, Dale Kreiman, George Luther, Bob Gilbert, Bill Klunder and Mark Frisinger

Members met at the Region 7 Headquarters in Miles City. Staff and members then traveled to the Hysham area for a field trip to Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and Amelia Island WMA, which is also a Fishing Access Site (FAS).

Upon arriving at Isaac Homestead first, Brad welcomed CAC members and asked everyone in attendance to introduce themselves. Brad noted that Steve is the Wildlife Biologist and Ethan is the Warden that covers the area encompassing both of these WMA's. He also mentioned that Jackie's upland game bird project work spans the entire region, so she does some work in the area as well.

John began the discussion by providing a bit of information on Lands projects, conservation easements, etc. John and Steve briefly discussed a potential upcoming project in the Hardin area, Grant Marsh.

Steve started his discussion on Isaac Homestead by providing some history of the area. The area is named for Joseph Isaac, who was discharged from the Army and settled here. Isaac Homestead is a "woodland/cropland complex" that became a WMA in 1969. Two additional purchases in 1970 and 1973 added to the original property. The management goal is to provide an interspersion of habitat types that enhances wildlife abundance and also provides recreational opportunities. This WMA is approximately 1200 acres, 200 of which are actively farmed through a cost-share agreement. This arrangement seems to work well for both parties. The current sharecropper also farms some food plots in the WMA for us.

The WMA is home to abundant numbers of whitetail deer, turkeys, pheasants and geese. It also boasts numerous other species of song birds, raptors, waterfowl and furbearers. Steve has noted that the WMA is especially popular with goose hunters and deer archers. It is walk-in hunting accessible from a county road and the WMA access road.

John discussed how the area was flooded during the large ice-out event in 2014 and demonstrated the large cottonwood stand that has since grown in. Attendees took a walk and viewed a small area where Steve has created a beetle patch and cover area beneficial for young pheasants.

Next, Jackie provided information on her position and what the Upland Game Bird Program does, as well as how the Open Fields program works. She provided brochures on the Open Fields and Upland Game Bird Enhancement programs. Recently, she has been working on some pheasant release projects around the region. She also just received approval from the Commission for a large Upland Game Bird Enhancement program grazing system on the Veebaray Ranch near Enid, MT. This is an exciting opportunity on a great ranch that has not been open to public access for a long time.

Lastly, she gave a brief explanation of the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program Access Guide, which should be out any day. These are very similar to the Block Management tabloid and detail projects around the state. The Open Fields program information can also be found in the Access Guide.

After lunch onsite, members and staff continued on to Amelia Island. Mike spoke about Amelia from a Fishing Access Site (FAS) standpoint. Amelia Island is located at river mile 273. Amelia Island was already in existence as a WMA when the Department was approached by a local family who wished to donate the five acres where the FAS now is to FWP. Seeing as how it's a goal to try to fill in gaps in access to the Yellowstone River, we gladly accepted. It is 36 river miles downstream to the next FAS with a boat ramp. There is also a diversion 10 miles upstream. The FAS features a concrete boat ramp, vault latrine and small parking area, but otherwise has no major improvements in order to preserve the integrity of the WMA.

Mike distributed the statewide Fishing Access Site guide and referenced the part of the booklet that features FAS's in this part of the state. His goal is to get people out on the water to use it and enjoy it in hopes that those people will become voices for our FAS's.

Amelia Island WMA is home to geese, ducks, pheasants and whitetail deer. It is walk-in hunting and accessible from the county road and the WMA access road. The WMA is about 239 acres in size.

'15 & Forward Update

Erin noted that the new 2016 – 2026 Vision and Guide document is available. Copies were distributed to members in attendance.

Roundtable Discussion

Brad then asked CAC members if they had any news, questions, items of concern, etc. Ed Bukoskey mentioned that he is heading to Helena for PLPW on Monday. He also discussed a few potential things he sees coming in the next Legislative Session.

Bob Hagedorn noted that it seems to him like some of the same people draw either-sex elk tags every year, and he wonders about that. He feels there should be a waiting period for successful applicants, similar to bighorn sheep for example.

Gary Sparks says the Department is doing just fine. He's not sure how we keep everyone happy, but thinks we're doing fine.

Conclusion

Brad gave a brief overview of what's next for the Department. Regardless of who our next governor is, we quite possibly will have a new Director by next year. He also reminded members that we will be having a legislative session again before we know it. For now, our next big thing is the various hunting seasons that will be kicking off as soon as the following Monday.

Brad thanked CAC members for attending and inquired if they'd enjoyed the field trip, compared to our usual meetings. Members commented that they like seeing what we're doing on the ground and one mentioned that it was nice to get to another part of the region. The next CAC meeting will likely be sometime in January. Brad reminded members that Marla is the Information Officer and communications will be coming mostly from her now.