

Spotted Dog 9/22/2016

FWP present: Rick Northrup, Julie Golla

Spotted Dog members: Neil Horne, Dan McQuery, Jodi Pauley, Bill Mosier, Bill Pierce, Brian Quigley, and Liz Smith.

Jodi Pauley called the meeting to order. She did some highlighting of the last meeting. She said we need to think about a vice chairman and also revisiting the original group of members and who maybe needs a personal letter to see if they still want to be on the committee or if we need to have some new members come on the advisory board.

Bill Pierce talked about that he would like to work some more on access and recreation.

Liz Smith felt we need to work more on long and short range goals in the management plan and they need to be addressed better.

Bill felt the letter to the commissioners on the Old Stage Road should be included in the management plan. He said they had a discussion at the last planning meeting that the county is moving forward. Rick said they are in the scoping process right now. Bill wondered if there is an issue with the land swap with Cross Canyon Ranch on the Old Stage Road. Rick said we are working with them on those issues and also bringing DNRC into the mix to make sure that it is feasible for everyone. He said it has been a slow process. Bill wondered if we needed to take a stance on this committee as it could be a reality that the road will be access through the WMA. Bill Mosier said he has expressed his opinion to the county that it is not a good management decision to have a road open through the middle of the WMA especially during hunting season. Bill Mosier said the worst part is that the road is undefined and they are going to travel off the road and it will be a mess especially when we get some weather. Neil asked if the road can be closed during hunting season. Rick said we need to go through the district court hearing first before we can start any negotiations and that hasn't happened yet. Bill said perhaps we need to have some recommendations then for the management plan. Rick said right now we have seasonal closure on the WMA. Dan said it is a public road that in his opinion is open 365 days a year. So he thinks we cannot nor can FWP stop the public from being on that road. He said it won't stop people from snow machining on it either. Neil said he thinks it should be closed year around. Brian thinks we don't need to keep talking about the road until the county makes a decision. Rick said one of the recommendations from this group is to make sure that it has good signage of where the road is so that if people do get off the road FWP can enforce that, etc.

Dan said when they closed the Sam Beck, Freezeout access that created a haven for those elk. Dan said thinking about some closures during hunting season may be helpful. Neil said if they open the Stage Coach road then perhaps other roads should be closed into the WMA. Rick said that has been a discussion already if there is a major access route opened into the WMA like the stage road then they would revisit those access points to see if they are feasible to keep open. Julie said forest service does have policy that says how much road access can be on public ground for security of elk.

Bill asked about access to the reservoir. Dan said if the county road goes through then there will be access. Dan said access in the summer for fisherman may be important to have.

Bill said access on the far east side of the WMA is open to snowmobiling and motorized use in the summertime. The tricky part is part of that is on Forest Service, WMA and DNRC.

Neil said we have worked hard on education with horseback riders and mountain bikes and how they can work together.

Dan said maybe access in the spring would be important at different times. Rick said we don't want to create camping problems around the reservoir. DNRC lands you cannot camp on but you can camp on other areas of the WMA. Bicycles have to stay on designated roads. Bill asked if there is gopher shooting in the WMA. Rick said that is correct but no other recreational shooting is allowed. Bill asked about cutting wood. Rick said you can cut wood for use on the WMA but it cannot be taken off. Neil said most people respect the WMA because there is good signage, etc. Dan said he still thinks that we need to have public access especially in the summer time for the public because that is partly what it was bought for. Bill Mosier said in the summer time if you opened up O'Neil Creek road it would a nice drive but only in the summer months. This would also bring access to the rock cairn which could be a public historical point. There was talk of fencing the cairn and protecting it.

Forest: Julie said their FWP forester Jason Park came out as well as Kelvin and toured the Spotted Dog since we last met. The biggest topic was the aspen and how some of those areas are starting to recover. They also went to the clear cut areas and right now they are going to take some time to grow back and improve. She said they did a lot of brainstorming on the resources that are available. Dan said there should have been some good examples of good forest sections on the DNRC ground and good wildlife habitat. Brian asked if there was any discussion of tree planting. Rick said they felt it was going in the right direction and they didn't feel like it probably needing any planting. The only area may be planting Doug Fir to increase that over Lodge Pole. Rick said as a general rule we let nature take a natural path. Brian said sometimes we need to help nature along to increase that habitat.

We discussed the draft of the management plan: Liz wondered on lines 159 through 166 how are they addressing these issues. How is FWP maintaining a local tax base and promoting habitat friendly agriculture? Rick said FWP pays property taxes equivalent to all properties that are part of our fisheries, etc. He said we also have some NRD funds for weed management, roads and fences. Bill said what will happen when NRD funds are gone. Rick said that was almost like a grant to get started on the management of the WMA. He said it helped pay for survey work, etc. Brian said but how does FWP pay for maintenance in the future of the WMA. Rick said region 2 has their own maintenance funds for these WMA's that can be used for such projects. There was some discussion on weed management and biological use on the WMA. Julie said Dave said they had done some biological releases. Neil asked how much fence maintenance have they done on the WMA? Rick said he was not positive. Dan said they have not done a lot on his side. There are lots of trees on the fence and also wildlife has gotten tangled in the fence. Bill Mosier said even though he has property inside the WMA it is still considered boundary fence and it has not been maintained. He will maintain his half but not FWP's half. Jodi said

perhaps that needs to be in the management plan that FWP follow the state law of maintaining half of the fence between landowners. Dan said the statement was made that the fence was put in one foot on the FWP boundary so they did not have to follow state law and so they should have to maintain all of their fence with landowners inside the WMA.

Dan said he is still concerned about the number of elk and the carrying capacity for winter elk range. He said at one time it was 700 elk and we need this issue addressed as there is still the same amount of ground and the same amount of winter range. He said in the early 1990's they polled every landowner and how many elk each landowner was comfortable with. They started comparing years when they had problems and that is where they came up the 700 head of elk. Jodi said in the Beartooth management plan they specifically identify how many elk and deer the winter range will provide so I don't think it is out of the realm of this group to identify those numbers and stick to it. Neil asked what is the goal for the number of elk on the WMA? Rick and Julie did not know right now. Dan said we need to identify those numbers and how to keep those elk there and how to keep that habitat.

At the next meeting we need to identify a Vice Chairman and keep working on the management plan. It would be nice if Kelvin could give us a little more insight on the landowner package and his goals. Rick said they have hired a new person to replace Dave Dziak.

Next meeting will be November 17, 2016

Respectfully submitted;

Jodi Pauley