

Spotted Dog February 16, 2017

John Hollenback, Jason Swant, Bill Mosier, Brian Quigley, Dan Mcquery, Bill Smith, Louis Smith, Neil Horne, John Beck, Jodi Pauley, FWP Present: Mike Thompson, Brady Shortman, Randy Arnold, Rick Northrup, Kelvin Johnson, Jason Lindstrom, Julie Golla

John Hollenback called meeting to order. Julie passed out a draft alternative for some of the WMA management strategies. She said the history of land use of the WMA is important to include in the management plan and then where do we want to take this management moving forward. Jodi felt like the mission statement was too narrow or too specific in saying that lost and injured natural resources that were subject of Montana v. Arco is not really correct in that most of Spotted Dog was not subjected to Arco damage. Julie said yes they wanted to recognize that this property was bought with some NRD monies but yes that may be too narrow. Jodi suggested taking that language out and putting it somewhere else as it too narrow for a mission statement.

Mike said there was some discussion that right now the draft does not flow real well, there are some more notes from each of the committees that also need to be injected into the management plan. There was quite a bit of discussion about the description of the Spotted Dog and how detailed it should be. Most of the committee felt it should be fairly simple and explain what the highlights are of the Spotted Dog from resources to recreational opportunities, hunting, etc.

The history is important to know how to manage it into the future. Dan felt it was important to talk about why FWP bought Spotted Dog, he said it is because of how it was managed historically. Dan said you need to have the history in order to move forward because if it was mismanaged the resources would not be there today. Kelvin wondered if we should have the history in the front or should it be an appendices. Dan felt it should be in the back of the document so that if someone wants to read it they can but the management plan needs to be the here and now. Jason Swant said it also was kept together and will stay undeveloped as long as the department still owns it.

There was discussion on how much should be put into the management plan on what FWP has done since it was purchased. Would that be important to the general public or once again more of an appendix document. Jason Swant said it needs to be included somewhere in the document so that if the document is challenged or for future management. Brian felt we needed to have Jeff Mosley's, MSU Extension Range Specialist views when we did our tour and those need to be included into the document as well. Jason Swant said he would like a document that is a fairly quick read and then have appendices to support the document. Mike said this committee really needs to look at how long this document needs to be. There was discussion that the Beartooth Management Plan is 73 pages. The goals are not identified until page 63. Most of the group felt it should be around 10 to 15 pages. Kelvin said they are just finishing up one for the WMA in Havre that is about 22 pages long. The goals would be defined earlier in the document and would be what was identified by this group. Jodi read what the goal was in the Beartooth management plan in that it was one goal with 8 objectives underneath it on how to reach that goal.

Neal said there are several moving targets, with increased access there is no hunting, if we don't let the cows on their the rancher is not happy, if the hunter can't drive on the WMA he is not happy, this is very tough to come to a happy medium. Julie said right now we have to go with the mindset to manage the resource and there are several moving parts to reach some of those goals.

Bill Mosier asked if we are going to identify numbers within this document. Julie said we need to be careful that we don't restrict ourselves on numbers because of elk movement. Right now yes we are overstocked but we need to be more broad in those goals perhaps over the next 100 years. Dan said in the 80's landowners were interviewed and Fish and Game had a number that they worked with and it was around 700 head. Buying the property did not gain winter range all it did was change ownership. Dan said the conception out there that this property was a haven for elk and that this is the best hunting around, etc. and we have a complex problem and a lot of misconceptions. We have a responsibility to address the local resources, the surrounding landowners, the hunter, the general public, etc. Dan felt we need to identify some numbers on what this property will support so that the general public understands the specific goals of the WMA. Julie said we have the ecological resources and what will the WMA support but we also have the social aspect of what is tolerable for the WMA. Julie said it comes down to working on the habitat and making it appealing to wildlife and how do we reach those goals. Bill said he has elk that are 20 miles from the WMA that are over grazing his property right now and we are not going to manage a habitat unless it is regional. Jodi said maybe to get around quantifying a number of elk number perhaps you need to identify how many pounds of forage this property would produce and how many animals it would support as a baseline and a starting point. Jodi did all of this earlier for the committee and could provide that for the management plan if it is feasible. Randy said we need to reference the larger landscape and the travel patterns and habitat of those elk. He said we need to use Spotted Dog as a tool for the whole landscape and not get too narrow in our management scheme of the Spotted Dog. Dan said when it was in private ownership, the elk were hunted on the weekend and then they migrated back to Spotted Dog during the week and there were more elk killed with this scenario. He also felt there is not enough bulls to service all the cows and the calves are being born late and they are not making it through the winter. The elk are causing the most problems, they are over grazing the WMA, overgrazing the neighbors and FWP must become managers because right now FWP is not being a good neighbor and managing elk. FWP has the final responsibility for that piece of property and it doesn't matter what this group says because you are not managing that property. You are not being good neighbors, fences have not been maintained, weeds are not managed and the elk have to be your responsibility. As a land manager you have to show some responsibility to manage these game animals and fish. The public has given you this directive to manage these resources. There will be no land owner cooperation until FWP starts to manage this WMA.

John said we still need to get this working document on the ground and to get those goals and start to make some decisions. John said we could scrap this working group and let FWP move forward on their own but the headway we have made is valuable and is it still worth our time. Neal said he would like FWP to respond to Dan's comments. Mike said the response is thank you as we are closer to the same page than this group thinks. Julie is new and she is learning and we are starting to think about things a little differently on the management of this property. He thinks that he and Julie can work on this 20

page document and get this in front of the group. Julie said it would take until at least April to get this document together and the draft is a good place to start and work on consolidating the management plan. John said this is an opportunity over the next few months for FWP to work with individual landowners and to work on this management plan.

Next meeting will be April 20, 2017 at 6:30 pm at the Elks Club in Deer Lodge