

Spotted Dog May 18, 2017

John Hollenback, Bill Pierce, Jason Swant, Brian Quigley, Dan Mcquerry, Liz 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, Kristi DuBois

John Hollenback called meeting to order. Mike went over the draft of the Spotted Dog Wildlife Management Area Habitat Plan. Mike said he is not as familiar with the ground as some of the others in the group but he did a lot of studying on google maps, etc. to learn drainages and areas better on the Spotted Dog. He said this document by all means could be thrown out and we could start over but felt it is a good place to start. He said the one thing he did was took all the minutes of this group and put them in a word cloud and it develops the words that come up the most.

Julie said we have been having landowner meetings and there is a lot of interest in having the Spotted Dog being a part of their landscape. It was explained that right now it is very preliminary on how this plan would look between the adjoining landowners to the Spotted Dog. She said right now they have met with 6 landowners out of the 20 plus packets they mailed out. She said that right now her and Kelvin's plan is to do some monitoring this summer of the areas that may be grazed in the future and how those areas look and what those pastures might look like in the future whether it is with electric fence, water management, etc. Neil wondered how this management might look, like who puts up the fence, etc. Kelvin said we sent out a brief synopsis of our management plan with the landowners and when they sit down with the landowners they go over the FWP grazing standards like the exchange of use, etc. Kelvin said we would be purchasing fencing supplies and whoever we are cooperating with they would be responsible for putting up the fence and maintaining it, etc. Kelvin said we have been very clear with landowners that this is not something we could get done this summer of 2017. He said right now it is figuring out if it is a combination of a large lease or several separate leases, but everyone wants to work together. Kelvin said right now this is step one and getting input from landowners. Kelvin said we have several cooperative grazing agreements across the state and everyone is different, with different sizes and is always a work in progress. John said talking to some of the other landowners in other areas that have FWP grazing agreements it does change from year to year depending on forage, resources, etc. and those landowners understand that it is a work in progress from year to year to make it fit for all parties. Randy said we also look at the resources that the landowner may have and it is a two way evaluation between FWP and the private landowner.

The group went through the document page by page. Dan said the document says we have an elk issue, is there a goal on the number of elk in this region. Julie said this document does not have to have a specific number as Spotted Dog is a piece of a larger landscape. She didn't feel we need an objective number of elk addressed in the Spotted Dog but we do realize that we have too many elk within this region of the state. Dan said when we look at the Region 2 that number keeps rising, at one time it was addressed there was enough winter range for 700 elk and now it is pushing 1680. Mike said in 2005 there was an elk objective set and then it was revisited and the upper bound was set so that we can tell if those numbers are getting too high. Dan said other species are suffering because the elk numbers are too high. Dan said for over 5 years we have been over the limit and there has been no management to

take care of these elk. Mike said you are right and we have to address that and they do need to go away by putting elk in the freezer. We cannot just manage the resources on the WMA's but the wildlife as well. Brian said it is not only winter range we need to address but what are the elk doing to the range right now in the spring, they are killing our range and they need to be managed. Mike said we realize that is the plan and this management plan is not to manage elk but to manage the Spotted Dog wildlife management area. Brian said we have not been doing any management in these meetings, we have not gotten anywhere. Mike said he will walk out the door right now as this management plan is a document in working progress, this is not a management plan for elk. John said we have spent a lot of time and we are not going to solve the elk problem in this room but we need to still keep up as we have accomplished a lot with this working group. John said Mike has spent a lot of time working on this document and we know it is not perfect but it is a working document.

Liz said on page 7 of purpose and goals, said the word permanently stuck out in the language. Rick thought that was verbatim words from the grant and how it was originally written. Kristi said this document is a habitat plan and managing elk and habitat does go hand in hand. Krisit said this district is not the only one having problems and we have not met our objectives to managing our elk numbers. She said we have tried with different hunting strategies, etc. but this document is a habitat document that is a work in progress. She said don't confuse a habitat plan with how to manage elk as it is a whole different problem. Brian said he thought one of the goals was to draw elk onto the WMA. Yes that is the goal but only one of the goals of the Spotted Dog WMA.

Bill wondered if we specifically talked about the five priority areas of Native Species diversity, Elk Winter habitat, Aspen, wetlands and streams, native bunchgrass and antelope bitterbrush. Dan said yes if we are defining habitat for the WMA then those are the priorities. Addressing access, hunting etc. goes in other sections. Mike said those five areas came from an accumulation from FWP and our priorities. Rick said the discussion did happen within the group, he just didn't think it was defined specifically but we have talked about all those areas in a bigger context. Kristi said if we look at the original documents those priority areas are discussed.

There was discussion about the elk and the word cloud and that it could be confusing to someone picking up this document, with the larger words of Elk, Need, WMA, Road, Plan it could be confusing that we are developing more roads in the WMA.

Jason Swant thought there should be more addressed about fish habitat. Jason Linstrom agreed that there needed to be more specific language about fish habitat. Dan wondered if there had been anymore discussion on the land exchange. Rick said we are moving again with Cross Canyon ranch with some modification from what was originally sent out to the public. Rick said within the next week there will be a scoping release on the purchase of the DNRC lands within the Spotted Dog. Rick said we have also gotten the green light of building a fence on the east boundary against the forest service as they are not willing to move or trade sections to bring the WMA together so FWP is going build a boundary fence on that eastside. Jodi asked if they were doing a trade with the DNRC. Rick said no we are purchasing them from DNRC. John said where does the money come from to purchase these sections. Rick said Pittman

Robinson funds and habitat funds is where the money is coming from to purchase those sections from DNRC.

The group thought Political boundaries should be reworded to stewardship boundaries or WMA boundaries, etc. Mike said they are also working on the upland vegetation and make the key more user friendly, etc. It was decided maybe the richness map was not needed.

The management units is split into 5 sections. Mike said it was done somewhat geographically by drainages, etc. Dan wondered if this is how perhaps grazing units would be split up. Mike said possibly and also looking at protecting winter range, etc. There was some discussion on the Health Assessment page that FWP should look at doing some range monitoring sites so that we have some history and some documentation of range, riparian and ecological problems, etc.

Dan thought that the management direction should be not just naming Anaconda Sportsmen but Montana Sportsmen.

Neil said he is concerned about the language on Elk Winter habitat that saying hunting during the winter months may push elk onto private property and then they will stay there. Julie said we would like to move these elk around and during the shoulder season we saw more of that. John Beck said the shoulder season did move elk off of his property back to the Spotted Dog and vise versa. Julie said it is a moving target on the management and the first priority is managing elk to a manageable number. Julie said we are trying new management tools and it is going to take some time to get our numbers down. Kelvin said they had an over population of deer on the milk river and they did reduce the density of deer by 40 per square mile. And we may have to look at extreme measures on managing elk. Louis said one of the other management problems is out of state owners locking up their land and not being able to harvest those elk. Dan said we used to kill 75 to 90 elk in the past on our private lands of about 5000 acres and this year they killed less than 50. We need to make sure we have some hunting on the WMA to move those elk. Dan said we need to find some balance.

John wondered if we should meet next month to work through some more of this document. I think it is important to meet and set goals and keep moving forward.

Next meeting will be June 15, 2017 at 6:30 pm at the Elks Club in Deer Lodge