

**MINUTES AND MEETING SUMMARY -- FINAL**  
**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks UGBEP CAC Meeting**  
**Helena, MT (Meeting 25)**

Council Members: Doug Bonsell, Rob Brunelle, Darlyne Dascher (absent), Sen. Jason Ellsworth, Trent Kleppen, Tana Kradolfer, Rep. Marilyn Marler, Bill McChesney, Charlie Noland, Dustin Ramoie, Josh Schrecengost, and Art Soukkala.

FWP Employees and Conservation Partners: Aaron Clausen (PF—Farm Bill Biologist), Jake Doggett, Ben Hoesl, Debbie Hohler, Justin Hughes, Jason Kool, Ken McDonald, Matt O'Connor (Habitat Forever—Team Coordinator), Dave Nikonow (NWTf Cooperative Wildlife Biologist), Ken Plourde, Collin Smith (NWTf—District Biologist), Rick Sojda, Hunter VanDonsel (PF—Farm Bill Biologist), Jay Watson.

**Monday, May 6**

**INTRODUCTIONS**

Charlie began the meeting at 8:30 am. Introductions were made. Charlie gave an overview of the Council's purpose, as described in statute.

**DIVISION/LEGISLATURE UPDATES**

Ken McDonald also provided an overview of the Council, whose chief purpose is to review program implementation and provide recommends on areas of program interest. Ken went over highlights of the UGBEP, including recent changes to the pheasant release side of the program, recent legislative audits and Council input. Ken thanked the Council for their dedication to the program and the changes they've recommended to improve program delivery.

Ken provided an overview of the legislature: Quiet session for the most part.

HB 29: Revising bird hunting dog laws; establishing requirements for bird hunting dog training and field trials; requiring a permit for field trials on public land; defining terms; providing rulemaking authority.

HB 94: Revising laws related to hunting access programs; reorganizing provisions; providing necessary license prerequisites for free to landowners participating in the block management program; providing rulemaking authority.

HB104: An act providing necessary license prerequisites for free to Landowners who receive a free combination license for cooperating in the hunter management program.

HB 143: An act repealing the sunset on 3-day nonresident upland game bird licenses.

HB 239: An act authorizing limited drawing refunds to be redirected to the block management program.

SB 299: An act generally revising laws related to sage grouse conservation; exempting certain land uses and activities from regulation; revising Montana sage grouse oversight team authority; revising reporting requirements; revising compensatory mitigation requirements.

SB 341: An act allowing the issuance of public access land agreements; providing rulemaking authority; creating the private land/public wildlife advisory committee and assigning duties. Private Land/Public Wildlife (PL/PW) Committee reviews and makes recommendations on the access.

Charlie reminded the UGBEP council that any UGBEP dollars used for a project must have a component for public access.

Fish Wildlife Commission: 4 of the 5 Commissioners were up for confirmation. All were confirmed, and now we have a full commission.

HB 2 (Operations Budget): The budget passed, FWP received authority for everything that was asked for: elk plan; CWD, grizzly bear, Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP). WHIP allocates up to \$2M a year for collaborative efforts to manage weeds and that benefit wildlife.

HB 5: (Capital Projects): Legislature approved request based on projected income.

Pittman-Roberts: Legislation told game wardens that 30% of P-R will fund positions (habitat, not enforcement). That amounts to 65,000 hours or 30 FTE.

Debbie reviewed the October 1 and 2, 2018 minutes. Charlie wanted to ensure that the motion was noted and update the draft minutes if needed.

October 1 and 2, 2018 minutes approved, amended if needed. Dustin moved and Trent seconded.  
**Motion carried.**

## **STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND PROGRAM OBJECTIVES/PROGRAM UPDATES**

Debbie provided Council with a handout containing information on fiscal reporting.

Charlie expressed concern about the estimated ending balance for FY 2023. The big question for most of the Council was how to define an appropriate “ending balance. Bill McChesney pointed out that we need to justify the ending balance relative to the annual revenue. Matt O’Connor commented that any proposed revenue increase has better odds with a lower, unspent balance. Josh asked the Habitat Specialists where the program is at as far as capacity:

Jake: More high-dollar proposals, he’s been the busiest this year.

Ken: Hasn’t seen a lot of movement, which tends to correlate with the Farm Bill.

Justin: Has had a lot of good projects this year, busiest he’s been. Justin has had to turn away people.

Josh: are we at capacity or looking to grow the program more?

Trent: He feels the demand for enrollment is increasing. Commodity prices are down; production value has increased on properties on Sheridan and Daniels counties.

Debbie provided additional input on the Habitat Forever, National Wild Turkey Federation, and Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Bios contract updates. Additional updates on the program database and outreach materials. Finally, an update on the ~1,600 mailing that went out the end of April to solicit interest in habitat management leases and food plots specifically while also calling attention to other program opportunities.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND WORK PLANS, INCLUDING OVERVIEW**

1. Jake: Gave an overview of R4 strategic plan and priorities plus provided a map with geographic information. Jake has several projects in the works. He has 1 delayed haying project and will report on that project in September. Jake is happy about the 4H kids raising pheasants for the pheasant release in Pondera County.
2. Ken: Gave an overview of the strategic workplan for R6, identifying focus areas and priorities. Ken described the Emergency Winter Feeding Plan for NE Montana. Ken recently had a news release on diverse food plots. Mailings went out to neighbors of existing UGBEP and/or Block Management cooperators. Ken also plans to do outreach for shelterbelts in the future. Ken provided an overview of the projects he has lined up for this season
3. Justin: Justin provided an overview of the R7 strategic plan, identifying focus areas and priorities. This season has been one of his busiest, renewing contracts, generating new contracts and meeting with landowners.
4. Matt O'Connor, Habitat Forever: Matt gave an overview of the Farm Bill Biologists role, including how these positions grew into a great network of passionate people.
5. Aaron Clausen, Bozeman-area Farm Bill Biologist: Aaron gave an overview of the partnerships as they pertain to delivering programs with NRCS, FWP, and other partners. For the Montana positions, they've been around since 2015, adding a 4<sup>th</sup> position in Bozeman and a 5<sup>th</sup> position in Billings. The goal of these positions is to provide free technical advice to landowners, especially involving CRP. In 2016, the FB Biologists and FWP staff held a series of workshops across the Montana in areas with expiring CRP. Conservation priorities include grassland conservation, expiring CRP, upland wildlife habitat conservation, wetland conservation, and other wildlife habitat issues, such as pollinator habitats.

The pheasants Forever chapters raise funds and decide where money goes. Most of the money stays in Montana.

6. Hunter VanDonsel, Chinook Area: Hunter actively works with Ken and Scott Hemmer on projects. Hunter provided an overview of the pronghorn corridor of Blaine County based on Andrew Jakes research., He feels there are opportunities to help convert cropland to native seedings. Turner area boasts good waterfowl areas as well.

Erin Fairbank was unable to attend the meeting, but it was mentioned that she had the highest pollinator contracts in the state, a real good accomplishment. Erin worked with Jake to develop a proposal on the Teton property, which is now in Block Management.

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## Meeting Summary

### General CAC recommendations from March 2018 meeting:

- Move public comment period on first day of meeting when meeting is in Helena. Public comment period will be on the second day in the morning when meetings have scheduled habitat tours.
- Continue funding of partner positions (Habitat Forever, NWTf) if funding allows.
- Revising 2 program statutes. See statutory changes section on Page 6 (#4).
- UGBEP will provide up to \$125,000 in 2019 and will revisit this amount once the Farm Bill is renewed.

### Action Items for Oct. 1, 2018, meeting:

- Add FYE 2017 to next fiscal report to compare with projections; add line graphs to report.
  - Update CAC on dog training rule
  - Invite Ryan Weiss, DNRC—Public Access Specialist
  - Review sage-grouse population estimate in 2018 and compare with 2017 estimates
  - Recheck costs for 8-foot wire fence. It seems high.
  - Provide the CAC with UGB hunting HD and Harvest information for each region and species.
  - Provide CAC with additional information for wildlife-friendly practices.
  - Department to give additional thoughts on ways we might use Rick Sodja's poll on MSU Extension Agents relative to program outreach.
  - Review the final proposal of the Region 7 Conservation Easement prior to FW Commission. This action may require a teleconference in the interim.
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**Next Meeting: Conrad, October 1 and 2**