

MISSOURI-MADISON WILDLIFE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (WildTAC)

MINUTES OF ANNUAL MEETING FOR 2019

Delta Radisson Colonial Hotel, Helena, MT

5 December 2018

AND

End of Year Budget Report

Attendees

Attendees: Randy Scarlett (USFS); Drew Stroberg (USFS); Catherine Wightman (FWP); Claire Gower (FWP); Grant Grisak (NWE, Chair); Mary Gail Sullivan (NWE); Jordan Tollefson (NWE); Andy Welch (NWE).

Guests: Tara Luna (Rocky Mtn Botany); Selita Ammond (River Design Group); Anna Noson (U of M); Tim Dwyer (Friends of Missouri River Breaks Monument); Kelsey Anderson (FMRBM); Cory Loecker (FWP); Jake Doggett (FWP).

WildTAC Business Items

Recent NWE Staff Changes/Transition. Grant Grisak (NWE) announced that Steve Leathe retired from NWE in September and Grant will be taking over the Chair position for the WildTAC.

Status of Project Completion Reports. Grant reviewed the list of project completion reports from 2013-2018. All reports from 2013-2017 are complete except one and about half of the 2018 reports are complete. NorthWestern Energy submitted the 5-year progress reports to FERC last year. Grant reminded the TAC to submit reports within 6-9 months of project completion. Reports should contain location map, timeframe, summary of accomplishment, project photos (before, during and after) and a budget summary that includes all funding amounts and sources as well as an itemization of in-kind services.

Summary of WildTAC projects funded 2000-2017. Grant provided an overview of the summary on page ii of the TAC proposal book. During this period, 102 projects were completed including 620 acres of restored wetlands, 26.8 miles of riparian habitat protected, 13.9 miles of streambank enhancement, and 3,561 acres of habitat protected by easement. Northwestern Energy spent \$5.14 million and leveraged an additional \$5.03 million (\$10.17 mil total). Although fund matching is not a condition of awarding WildTAC funds, it remains a common practice and can make some projects more competitive. Because Northwestern Energy TAC funds are considered private, they are attractive to other funding sources for aspects of project development like planning, permitting and design.

Award from the Society for Ecological Restoration. Grant provided a brief summary of the award by SER for the O'Dell Creek restoration project that cited cooperation from NWE, Granger Ranch, Longhorn Ranch and River Design Group. Grant pointed out the unique opportunity for multiple partners to receive recognition and the broad scale of disciplines involved in this project. Congratulations were extended to the TAC and partners for this success and award.

Review of 2018 Projects

2018-1. O'Dell Creek Bird Monitoring. Anna Noson (UofM) provided an overview of the long term monitoring at O'Dell Creek. This is an important migratory corridor for raptors and cranes. Uses the BACI sample design with 3 control sites. Restoration activities are becoming so extensive that variation in population is difficult to assign to restoration or chance. May need to expand control sites and look for other reference reaches. Sampling for playback vocalization identified 4 spp. Before restoration 29 species of birds were sampled. After restoration 116 species have been sampled,

including 18 SOC. Four waterfowl species were sampled before restoration and 16 species after. There was also an increase in abundance. Pelicans increased in 2018. Grant asked if it could be an artifact of more fish available for forage. Claire indicated CFR nesting pond 3 was drawn down for maintenance in 2018 and may have displaced nesting birds. Bittern, sora and Virginia rail were sampled. Playback surveys generally occur over a 3 month period (May-July). Results can vary due to broad time period. Sandhill cranes increased from 20-30 before to 500-2000 after restoration. This project is valuable by providing a long-term data set. Most surveys are very short.

2018-2. Missouri River Cottonwood Planting. Tim Dwyer (FMRBM) reported this was the 6th year of the cottonwood planting project with 565 trees having been planted. They used 35-45 volunteers. In 2013, 30 trees were planted with 70% survival. During 2014-2015 at Dark Butte they had 59% survival to 2 years. Learned the necessity of watering for 1st two years. So far planting survival is; ABN - 83%, Slaughter River - 97%, Eagle Creek - 83%, Terry Ranch - 80%. Terry Ranch experienced an unexplainable loss. FMRBM plans to have a botanist review the Terry Ranch die-off and to replant. In 2018, high water precluded planting at Eagle Creek and Pablo. The 150 trees were planted at Hazlewood instead. Past weed inventories found 21 species, 17/21 were observed in 2018. Data collection will continue to monitor survival of cottonwood plantings. Looking at possible screening on old growth trees to prevent beaver damage. Tim stated there have been six BLM Monument managers in the past 5 years. One question was raised about livestock enclosures. Tim mentioned Terry Ranch and Little Sandy were not in enclosures, but there is no cattle grazing at those sites. Tim indicated other funding comes from Cinnabar Foundation, Cross Foundation and BLM.

2018-3. Hebgen and Quake Lakes Bald Eagle Monitoring. Randy Scarlett (USFS) reported 5/7 bald eagle nests were active in 2018 and 8 eaglets were fledged. Eagle nests abundance appears to have stabilized at 7 and 7-9 ranges are known to occur in the area. One golden eagle was observed at the mouth of Cabin Creek but no nest was discovered. Ospreys are also monitored. USFS paced timing restrictions on two timber sales out of concern for eagle nesting. Two new osprey nests were discovered at Rainbow Point and Trapper. Last year one bald eagle was discovered with a broken wing. This bird had survived a previous broken wing. Another bird was found with acute lead poisoning.

2018-4. Hebgen Area Aspen and Cottonwood Restoration. Randy reported the aspen project was conducted to reverse conifer encroachment and excessive browsing by moose on aspens. Most aspens in the area are 1-3 feet tall. Forest Service sawyers felled conifers on 9 acres that were overshadowing smaller aspens. Only 4 adult aspen trees were discovered in this stand. Trees were felled in a manner that provided a temporary physical barrier for moose. Most felled trees had long limbs which made for deep/high slash. Those trees will be removed to prevent choking out the aspen understory. Twenty acres were mapped that have aspen.

2018-5. Hebgen Area Grizzly Bear Conflict Mitigation. Randy reported the grizzly bear conflict mitigation project focused on contacting recreationists in the field, campgrounds and in West Yellowstone. Most users are not bear aware. The rail-mounted charging-bear simulator had problems this year so it was replaced with a new remote operated simulator. Staff were trained on how to use it. Public response to the new simulator was positive. Public education contacts were up in 2018. The simulator was covered on National Geographic Yellowstone Live program.

2018-6. ABN Conservation Easement. Grant reported ABN Conservation Easement was slowed by process of some partners. Conversations with Montana Land Reliance indicate it's scheduled to close in late 2018. Grant reported NWE is working to pay MLR up front for in order to get the payment off of the 2018 budget. NWE processed past easements in a similar manner. ABN has until Feb 2019 to close on ABN or refund the money to the TAC.

2018-7. Tall Grass Conservation Easement. Grant reported Tall Grass Conservation Easement will not close in 2018. That project will roll into the reserve account in 2019.

2018-8. O'Dell Creek Restoration- phase 15. Selita Ammond (RGD) reported O'Dell Creek phase 15 was completed on time and on budget. A change to the original plan involved isolating a previous on-stream pond to reduce thermal pollution. Result of the project was 4,100 feet of restored stream channel that covered 42 acres.

2018-9. Middle O'Dell Creek Restoration Plan. Selita Ammond reported the Middle O'Dell Creek restoration plan data collection was completed in 2018. Analysis and reporting will continue into 2019. Preliminary results indicate severe channel degradation including diminished aquatic and wildlife habitat, high sedimentation, impaired water quality and

decadent willow stands. Scope included both private and DNRC land. Report with recommendations will be completed in 2019.

2018-10. Weed Control at Hebgen and Quake Lakes. Randy Scarlet reported FS replaced its weed contractor with MCC crew. Most efforts focused on Quake, Hebgen and river between them. About 180 acres total were sprayed.

2018-11. Trumpeter Swan Restoration – Madison. Claire Gower (FWP) reported low cygnet production in 2018 from the provider. Only 10 birds were available from a request of 30. Sites in Oregon and Yellowstone National Park were northern flyzone priorities given their status in the queue for meeting restoration goals. Grant indicated the project was paid from the 2018 budget and the contract runs through June 2019. Claire indicated the funding would be spent during the contract period as intended for flights, operations and identifying release sites.

Review of Projects Carried Over From Previous Years

No projects were carried over from previous years into 2018.

Review of 2018 Expenses & Reserve Account

The estimated WildTAC Reserve Account balance at the beginning of 2018 was \$179,000. After end-of-year 2017 corrections, the balance was closer to \$171,000. WildTAC budget for 2018 was \$372,831 and the WildTAC approved 11 projects totaling \$434,427 which included \$61,596 from the Reserve Account. WildTAC expenses for 2018 were estimated \$372,831 from the 2018 budget as well as \$28,698 from the Reserve Account. The estimated remaining 2018 Reserve Account commitment of \$34,305 will roll over into the 2019 Reserve as Committed funds. As such, at the end of 2018, the estimated Reserve Account balance includes \$34,305 in commitments (2018-7, \$16,700 and 2018-9, \$17,605) and \$108,222 in uncommitted funds. The total Reserve Account balance at the end of 2018 is \$142,527.

Wildlife TAC Projects & Budget for CY2018					
Project #	Project description	Approved amount for 2018	Amount spent in 2018	Page #	Numbers in PINK are estimates
2018-1	Bird Monitoring - O'Dell Cr Project Area	\$26,417	\$26,417	1	
2018-2	Cottonwood Restore & Weed Inventory - Mo River	\$45,000	\$45,000	5	
2018-3	Bald Eagle Monitoring - Hebgen & Quake	\$3,675	\$3,675	11	
2018-4	Hebgen Area Aspen & Cottonwood Restoration	\$5,100	\$5,100	14	
2018-5	Hebgen Grizzly Bear Conflict Mitigation	\$6,200	\$6,200	17	
2018-6	Mo River Conservation Easement - ABN Ranch	\$75,000	\$75,000	23	
2018-7	Mo River Conserv Easement - Tall Grass Ranch	\$16,700	\$0	26	Will not close in 2018
2018-8	O'Dell Cr Construction - Phase 15 - Longhorn	\$210,435	\$210,435	29	TAC approved adding \$15,000 for wetland #6
2018-9	Middle O'Dell Cr Restoration Plan	\$29,900	\$12,295	35	Will not finish in 2018
2018-10	Weed Control - Hebgen & Quake	\$12,000	\$12,000	41	
2018-11	Trumpeter Swan Restoration - Madison	\$4,000	\$4,000	44	
TOTAL		\$434,427	\$400,122		
Budget for CY2018			\$372,831		
Total approved for CY2018			\$434,427		
Balance			(\$61,596)		
Actual amount used from Reserve in 2018			\$28,698		Charged to Reserve for O'Dell Phase 15
Amount not spent in 2018 that will roll over to 2019			\$34,305		
RESERVE ACCOUNT					
Projects Approved in Prior Year(s) But Not Fully Completed:					
Project	Project Cost	Amount Spent in 2018	Remaining Commitment		
			TOTAL	\$0	
Estimated Reserve Account balance beginning of 2018 (Reserve Account capped at \$250K beginning in 2017)			\$171,224		
Subtract Remaining Reserve Account Commitments for 2018			\$0		
Estimated Uncommitted Reserve Account funds available in 2018			\$171,224		

Review of 2019 Proposals & Funding Decisions

There were 10 proposed projects for 2019, totaling approximately \$479,582. In some cases, there was little discussion following the brief presentations by project sponsors. For projects that had substantive discussion, the questions or comments are as follows:

Cottonwood Restoration and Weed Inventory – Missouri River.

2019-2. Weed Control at Hebgen and Quake Lakes. Catherine expressed concern with the long term commitment of weed control. Grant pointed out the TAC raised the same concern with past proposals submitted for the lower project area as a reason for not funding those projects and suggested reaching a consistent position on funding weed control. Drew stated the high public use is the causative agent for spreading weeds and control is important to maintain habitat for bears, bison, moose, ect. Andy pointed out the TAC has funded \$98,200 since 2004 for weed control in the Upper Madison Valley (\$86,200 to USFS and \$12,000 to Madison Valley Ranchlands Group). After a lengthy discussion the TAC agreed to fund the project as prosed for 2019 with the understanding that it would not continue to fund this project in the future and the FS agreed to pursue other sources of funding for weed control.

2019-4. Spadefoot Toad Habitat Enhancement. Grant raised questions about NEPA, ACOE permitting, SHPO concurrence with Forest archaeologist finding and clarification on whether a water right was necessary. Randy indicated all of those questions would be addressed.

2019-5. Odell Creek Alkaline Primrose Monitoring and Genetics. Drew and Catherine raised questions about the tangible product from this project. Grant pointed out that Article 423 requires monitoring and enhancement of native plant species, including species of special concern. The discussion included prioritizing the remaining projects on the basis of funding. Action on this proposal was tabled until after other proposals were heard.

2019-9. Odell Creek Temperature Data Analysis. Some TAC members raised questions about whether this was a responsibility of the WildTAC or MadTAC. Grant pointed out the proposal would be covered under Article 423 which does not specifically limit this type of monitoring on lands and waters within the project zone and that it could be argued that it is connected with the restoration goals of O'Dell Creek upper basin. Andy suggested it was an important project but it could be deferred until next year. Action on this proposal was tabled until after other proposals were heard.

There was considerable discussion on how to manage the Reserve Account, specifically about spending it down to fund all the proposals for 2019. Grant indicated the mean annual balance of the Reserve Account over the past 5 years was \$166,000 (range \$128,000 to \$186,000) and the mean annual commitment from the Reserve Account over that time was \$29,000 (range 0-\$61,000). The recent use of the WildTAC Reserve Account has been to maintain a high balance with few commitments, emergencies or large projects. Grant reported the Reserve Account cap was increased from \$100,000 to \$200,000 in 2014 and from \$200,000 to \$250,000 in 2017. The intent of the Reserve Account is to bank funds for large projects, to take advantage of projects of opportunity or maintain committed funds from prior years. After discussion over the 10 proposals was finished, the TAC returned to the two projects that were tabled. A vote was taken on funding proposal 2019-5 and was; USFS=NO, FWP=NO, NWE=YES. The proposal was not funded. A vote was taken on funding proposal 2019-9 and was; USFS=NO, FWP=NO, NWE=YES. The proposal was not funded. Both USFS and FWP representatives recommended revisiting proposal 2019-9 next year. A vote was taken on funding the remaining 8 proposals and was USFS=YES, FWP=YES, NWE=YES. The 8 proposals were funded.

2019 Budget & Reserve Account and End of Year Budget Status

The WildTAC voted unanimously to approve 8 of the projects as proposed for 2019, for a total commitment of \$448,103. This exceeds the 2019 budget of \$380,288 by \$67,815. The TAC approved funding the overbudget from the Reserve Account. The Reserve Account at the beginning of 2019 includes \$34,305 in commitments from 2018 (2018-7, \$16,700 and 2018-9, \$17,605), \$67,815 in new commitments made in 2019, and \$40,407 in uncommitted funds. The Total Reserve Account balance at the beginning of 2019 is \$142,527. The projected 2019 budget is attached below:

Wildlife TAC Projects & Budget for CY2019					
Project #	Project description	Proposed amount for 2019	Approved amount for 2019	Page #	
2019-1	Missouri River Woods Bottom habitat	\$97,000	\$97,000	1	Numbers in PINK are estimates
2019-2	Weed Control - Hebgren & Quake	\$12,000	\$12,000	20	
2019-3	Bald Eagle Monitoring - Hebgren & Quake	\$2,750	\$2,750	23	
2019-4	Spadefoot Toad Habitat	\$5,100	\$5,100	27	
2019-5	O'Dell Alkaline Primrose monitoring and genetics	\$19,000	\$0	31	
2019-6	Riparian Bird Monitoring Systemwide	\$37,436	\$37,436	35	
2019-7	Missouri River Cottonwood Tree Planting	\$45,000	\$45,000	40	
2019-8	O'Dell Creek Revegetation Plan	\$34,757	\$34,757	47	
2019-9	O'Dell Creek Temp Data Analysis	\$12,479	\$0	53	
2019-10	O'Dell Creek Restoration Phase 16	\$214,060	\$214,060	57	
TOTAL		\$479,582	\$448,103		
Budget for CY2019			\$380,288		
Total approved for CY2019			\$448,103		
Amount approved from Reserve in 2019			(\$67,815)		
RESERVE ACCOUNT					
Projects Approved in Prior Year(s) But Not Fully Completed:					
	Project	Project Cost	Amount Spent in 2018	Remaining Commitment	
2018-7	Mo River Conserv Easement - Tall Grass Ranch	\$16,700	\$0	\$16,700	Will not close in 2018
2018-9	Middle O'Dell Cr Restoration Plan	\$29,900	\$12,295	\$17,605	Analysis and report due in early 2019
				TOTAL	\$34,305
Estimated Reserve Account balance beginning of 2019 (Reserve Account capped at \$250K beginning in 2017) as of 11/30/18			\$142,527		
Subtract Remaining Reserve Account Commitments for 2018			\$34,305		
Subtract Approved use from 2019			\$67,815		
Estimated Uncommitted Reserve Account funds available in 2019			\$40,407		