

# MISSOURI-MADISON WILDLIFE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (WildTAC)

## MINUTES OF ANNUAL MEETING FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2020

Montana Wild, Helena, MT

2 December 2019

AND

End of Year Budget Report

### Attendees

**Attendees:** Grant Grisak (NWE, Chair); Randy Scarlett (USFS); Catherine Wightman (FWP); George Liknes (USFS); Alli Russell (USFS); Mary Gail Sullivan (NWE); Jordan Tollefson (NWE); Jon Hanson (NWE); Cory Loecker (FWP); Joe Offer (FMRBM); Lacey Gunther (Big Sky Watershed Corps); Keenan Storrar (DEQ-Helena); Anna Noson (UofM); John Muhlfeld (RDG).

### WildTAC Business Items

**Recent NWE Staff Changes/Transition.** Grant Grisak (NWE) announced that Brent Mabbott retired from NWE in March and Jon Hanson was hired to take over the licensing compliance responsibilities for Mystic Lake, Madison Fisheries and Thompson Falls.

**Status of Project Completion Reports.** Grant reviewed the list of project completion reports from 2016-2019. All but one report from 2016 is complete and there are several from 2018 and 2019 that are outstanding. NorthWestern Energy submitted the 5-year progress reports to FERC in 2017. 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.

### Review of 2019 Projects

**2019-1. Wood Bottom Habitat Enhancement.** Cory Loecker reported the purpose is to convert all but 200 acres to native grasses for wildlife habitat. Methods include seeding, spraying, fencing and grazing management. A fence was installed and grazing plan was developed with the neighboring landowner. Fallowing and seeding was conducted on 230 acres. Phase 1 is complete. Billing on the NWE contribution was \$21,500/\$97,000 in 2019.

**2019-2. Weed Control – Hebgen & Quake Lakes.** Randy Scarlet reported weed spraying was conducted on 150 of the anticipated 160 acres. An MCC crew also performed manual pulling at some sites. Randy said the weed program is “keeping it at bay, but it is not growing.” Other funding was provided by West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce and Yellowstone Alliance. Randy said he submitted a proposal to the TAC in 2020 but withdrew it the day of the meeting. The FS still sees the hydro development as one of the problems contributing to weeds. Depending on the status of other soft money, the FS may come back to the TAC in future years seeking funds for weed spraying.

**2019-3. Bald Eagle Monitoring - Hebgen & Quake Lakes.** Randy reported no new nests were discovered. Seven nests were active early in the year but only 3 were successful and fledged young. Nest failure was attributed to either cold/wet weather in the spring, or a newly developing helicopter scenic tour business that may have caused excessive disturbance. All of the surviving nests were in the Horse Butte area. Randy spoke with neighbors who had complaints about low altitude flights from the scenic tours. Randy also spoke with the FWS about this development.

**2019-4. Spadefoot Toad Habitat.** Randy reported previous wetland projects funded by NWE were successful as toad habitat. The FS planned to use a skidsteer loader to create 5 ponds, but ended up using an excavator to create 3 ponds ranging 2-3 feet max depth. As such, the contour of the ponds was “rougher” than planned. This is largely an aesthetic issue and should not impede function. Pond dimensions were 40’x20’, 25’x20’ and 30’x30’. Still need to install woody debris to improve complexity of the habitat. Monitoring will continue in 2020 to evaluate success.

**2019-6. Bird Monitoring –Systemwide.** Anna Noson provided an overview of the long term monitoring along the project corridor. Riparian areas support 80% percent of Montana bird species. The protocol involves stratifying the project area into 3 sections. Added Hebgen area in 2013. Seventy percent of the sites are accessible by boat. Surveyors spend 10 minutes at each site conducting standard point count for birds and 4 plots at each site for habitat measurements. This year 98% (223 sites) of the survey plots were accessed; 41 of which are on private land. Only a few private landowners did not allow access in 2019. A few public sites were not accessible due to the high ice/water in the spring. Over 40,000 birds have been surveyed since 2004. There have been 157 species surveyed including 24 species of special concern and 59% of the species that breed in Montana. This year a crew observed an indigo bunting. At the request of NWE, one objective was to identify habitat improvement sites. They targeted sites for black billed cuckoo’s. Haven’t seen/heard any since 2015 when 5 were surveyed. Rowe Coulee had the highest density of yellow breasted chats. There was some discussion about expanding the surveys for cuckoo’s using electronic calls and playback recordings.

**2019-7. Missouri River Cottonwood Planting.** Joe Offer and Lacey Gunther reported 785 trees were planted at 8 sites since the project began in 2013. This year crews measured crown height, percent vegetative cover, DBH, alive;dead, and competing vegetation. Principle competing vegetation was wild licorice, knapweed and spurge. Seventy-three percent of the sites had competing vegetation. In 2019, ice, high water and flooding precluded spring plantings. As such, the trees were planted in the fall. BLM staffing was reduced. Plans are underway to execute the project with lower partner staffing.

**2019-8. O’Dell Creek Revegetation Plan.** John Muhlfeld reported the O’Dell Creek upper basin is 6,000 acres. Since 2003, 13 miles of stream and 888 acres of wetlands restored. 265 wetland plant species have been identified. There are 5 rare plant species in the project area. Five reference plots were established. Plant species, location, planting methods and fencing was identified. A pilot demonstration project was implemented at 6 sites and involved sprigging dormant willow cuttings. Hard ground freeze prevented planting containerized plants, so they were stored near the site and will be planted next spring.

**2019-10. O’Dell Creek Restoration – Phase 16.** John reported the project was completed in early summer. Over 3,000 feet of channel and 33 acres of wetland were restored. Reseeding was successful and germination appeared to be ideal. The site is healing in nicely.

### **Review of 2019 Expenses & Reserve Account**

The budget for 2019 was \$380,288 and the amount approved by the TAC was \$451,110. Of the approved amount, \$447,942 was spent, which includes \$70,822 from the Reserve Account. The estimated WildTAC Reserve Account balance at the beginning of 2019 was \$142,527. Of this amount, \$32,503 was spent on two previous projects (2018-7, 2018-9), \$70,489 was spent on two 2019 projects (2019-10, 2019-11), \$14,097 is dedicated to project 2018-9 and \$25,438 remains as uncommitted Reserve funds.

<b>Wildlife TAC Projects &amp; Budget for CY2019</b>				
	<i>As of Dec 12, 2019</i>			
<b>Project #</b>	<b>Project description</b>	<b>Proposed amount for 2019</b>	<b>Approved amount for 2019</b>	<b>Spent in 2019</b>
2019-1	Missouri River Woods Bottom habitat	\$97,000	\$97,000	\$97,000.00
2019-2	Weed Control - Hebgen & Quake	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$12,000.00
2019-3	Bald Eagle Monitoring - Hebgen & Quake	\$2,750	\$2,750	\$2,750.00
2019-4	Spadefoot Toad Habitat	\$5,100	\$5,100	\$5,100.00
2019-5	O'Dell Alkaline Primrose monitoring and genetics	\$19,000	\$0	\$0.00
2019-6	Riparian Bird Monitoring Systemwide	\$37,436	\$37,436	\$37,436.00
2019-7	Missouri River Cottonwood Tree Planting	\$45,000	\$45,000	\$45,000.00
2019-8	O'Dell Creek Revegetation Plan	\$34,757	\$34,757	\$34,744.54
2019-9	O'Dell Creek Temp Data Analysis	\$12,479	\$0	\$0.00
2019-10	O'Dell Creek Restoration Phase 16	\$214,060	\$214,060	\$143,421.24
2019-11	INTERIM O'Dell phase 16 CRM	\$3,007	\$3,007	\$2,674.74
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$482,589</b>	<b>\$451,110</b>	\$380,126.52
	Budget for CY2019	\$380,288	\$451,110	
	Amount approved from Reserve in 2019		(\$70,822)	
	<b>***RESERVE ACCOUNT***</b>	Order 10007921-003		
<b>Projects Approved in Prior Year(s) But Not Fully Completed:</b>				
	<b>Project</b>	<b>Project Cost</b>	<b>Amt Spent 2019</b>	<b>Remaining Commitment</b>
2018-7	Mo River Conserv Easement - Tall Grass Ranch	\$16,700	\$16,700	\$0
2018-9	Middle O'Dell Cr Restoration Plan	\$29,900	\$15,803	\$14,097
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$14,097</b>
	<i>Estimated Reserve Account balance beginning of 2019 (Reserve Account capped at \$250K beginning in 2017) as of 12/7/18</i>		<b>\$142,527</b>	
	<i>Subtract Remaining Reserve Account Commitments for 2018</i>		<b>\$14,097</b>	
	<i>Subtract Approved use from 2019</i>		<b>\$102,993</b>	
	<i>Estimated Uncommitted Reserve Account funds available end of 2019</i>		<b>\$25,438</b>	

## Review and Comments on Selected 2020 Proposals

There were 10 projects proposed for 2020, totaling \$409,779. In most cases, there was little discussion following the brief presentations by project sponsors. There were questions or comments on a few of the proposals as follows:

**2020-0. CRM-Legacy Consulting Inc.** Grant introduced this proposal as a new mechanism to track CRM for NWE-funded projects. The proposal is a placeholder for projects requiring CRM. The NWE consulting archaeologist reviewed the 2020 proposals before the TAC meeting and determined only one project (2020-9) would require additional CRM and the estimated cost of the inventory was \$3,105. If this project were approved by the TAC, funds would be dedicated specifically toward the CRM inventory.

**2020-1. O'Dell Creek Bird Monitoring.** A portion of this proposal included adding Beaver Creek-pre construction survey to the O'Dell monitoring for this year, if approved. Catherine asked if there would be a difference in the budget if Beaver Creek? Anna thought she could do it with the existing budget.

**2020-2. Beaver Creek Riparian Restoration-Phase 1.** Alli Russell explained the project incorporates snag habitat for cavity nesting birds and bats. Catherine asked about the success of this in other areas? Alli reported there has been success with this method at other sites. John Muhfeld acknowledged snag trees were incorporated at another site [west of the continental divide] with success. Anna was asked to provide her expertise in choosing the proper tree species and height. Anna said she could work with Alli and John to provide the information.

**2020-4. Bat Roost Enhancement.** Grant asked if the FS could provide the CRM review prior to using NWE funds; similar to last years FS projects. Randy said he can do that.

**2020-6. Hebgen-Quake Weed Treatment.** Randy withdrew this application. The FS feels that weeds are associated with the Hebgen Dam development and they will continue to pursue TAC funds in the future if other soft money is not available.

**2020-8. Whisky Ridge Conservation Easement.** This project does not border the Missouri River. Grant indicated the language in the License states wildlife projects should be "about 1 mile from the river" and by his measurements, the deeded lands of the project were a mean 1.96 mile (range 1.26-2.73), and the leased lands were a mean 0.85 mile (range 0.31-1.26) from the river. Grant stated because the deeded and leased lands would be managed under a grazing plan, the project met the requirements defined in the license. There was no objection.

**2020-9. O'Dell Creek Restoration-Phase 17.** John stated this project is likely one of the final projects on O'Dell Creek that involves significant wetland development, primarily due to the physical characteristics to the stream channel and riparian zone. John also mentioned that although the budget request is for \$81,340, he submitted an application to the MadTAC to fund \$15,000 of this. Grant and Jon Hanson indicated they would be discussing the project with the MadTAC the following day. If funded by MadTAC, the \$15,000 would be refunded to WildTAC.

**2020-10. Antelope Creek Prescribed Burn CRM Inventory.** Grant presented this proposal on behalf of the US FWS. The NWE consulting archaeologist reviewed this proposal and made recommendations to the FWS for a modified class 1 inventory that should be pre-approved by SHPO. The \$20,000 budget is an estimate given the scale of the project.

## Review of 2020 Proposals & Funding Decisions

The budget for 2020 is \$387,894. There were 10 proposed projects for 2020, but one was withdrawn at the meeting. The total budget request for 2020 was \$393,805, which includes the estimated \$3,105 for CRM inventory for project 2020-9. As such, the 2020 budget would be overspent by \$5,911. The TAC discussed using Reserve Account funds to cover the over budget.

After review, comments and questions for the 9 proposals, and the budget strategy noted above, the WildTAC voted unanimously to approve the 10 projects proposed for 2020. The projected 2020 budget is attached below:

<b>Wildlife TAC Projects &amp; Budget for CY2020</b>				Numbers in <b>PINK</b> are
	As of Jan 1, 2020			
<b>Project #</b>	<b>Project description</b>	<b>Proposed amount for 2020</b>	<b>Approved amount for 2020</b>	
2020-0	CRM-Legacy Consulting Inc.		\$3,106	
2020-1	O'Dell Creek Bird Monitoring	\$26,639	\$26,639	
2020-2	Beaver Creek Riparian Restoration-Phase 1	\$200,000	\$200,000	
2020-3	Trumpeter Swan Release	\$5,000	\$5,000	
2020-4	Bat Roost Enhancement	\$3,060	\$3,060	
2020-5	Bald Eagle Monitoring	\$3,160	\$3,160	
2020-6	Hebgen-Quake Weed Treatment	\$4,080	\$0	
2020-7	Missouri Breaks Cottonwood Planting	\$16,500	\$16,500	
2020-8	Missouri Breaks Whisky Ridge CE	\$50,000	\$50,000	
2020-9	O'Dell Creek Restoration - phase 17	\$81,340	\$66,340	
2020-10	Antelope Creek Prescribed Burn CRM inventory	\$20,000	\$20,000	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$409,779</b>	<b>\$393,805</b>	
	Budget for CY2020	\$387,894	\$387,894	
	Total approved for CY2020		\$393,805	
	Difference	-\$21,885	(\$5,911)	
	<b>***RESERVE ACCOUNT***</b>	Order 10007921-003		
	<b>Projects Approved in Prior Year(s) But Not Fully Completed:</b>			
	<b>Project</b>	<b>Project Cost</b>	<b>Amt Spent 2018 and 2019</b>	<b>Remaining Commitment</b>
2018-9	Middle O'Dell Cr Restoration Plan	\$29,900	\$13,793	\$16,108
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$16,108</b>
	<i>Estimated Reserve Account balance beginning of 2020</i>		<b>\$42,049</b>	
	<i>Subtract Remaining Reserve Account Commitments for 2018</i>		<b>\$16,108</b>	
	<i>Estimated Uncommitted Reserve Account funds available in 2020</i>		<b>\$25,942</b>	