

MISSOURI-MADISON WILDLIFE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (WildTAC)

MINUTES OF ANNUAL MEETING FOR CALENDAR 2021 YEAR

Virtual meeting by GoToMeeting

3 December 2020

AND

End of Year Budget Report

Attendees

Attendees: Grant Grisak (NWE, Chair); Lauren Michelson (USFS); Claire Gower (FWP); Jim Boyd (USFWS); Alli Russell (USFS); Mary Gail Sullivan (NWE); Jordan Tollefson (NWE); Jon Hanson (NWE); Jake Doggett (FWP); Scott Hemmer (FWP), Sonja Andersen (FWP); Joe Offer (FMRBM); Mikayla Moss (FMRBM); Anna Noson (UofM); John Muhlfeld (RDG); Selita Ammond (RDG); Tara Luna (RMB).

WildTAC Business Items

Grant read from section IV C of the Agency MOU that describes TAC Operations. By virtue of having a representative from NWE and FWP and FWS or FS or BLM, a quorum was present for making TAC decisions this day.

Environmental Webpage. Grant provided an overview of NWE Environmental Webpage that warehouses all of the documents normally given out at the annual meetings in TAC booklets. The webpage has information relating the current 5-year plan, Agency MOU, 10- year agreement between NWE and FWP, project reports, meeting minutes, proposals, annual meeting information, etc. Grant provided a brief tour of the site while presenting to the group. All of the information for the 2021 meeting is posted on the site and can be accessed at any time, even from a mobile device.

Recent Staff Changes/Transition. Grant announced that Catheryn Wightman (FWP) took a new job and is no longer the TAC representative for FWP. Claire Gower will be the TAC rep for today's meeting. Randy Scarlett (USFS) is on detail and Lauren Michelson is detailing in his position and will be the USFS TAC rep for today's meeting.

Status of Project Completion Reports. Grant reviewed the list of project completion reports from 2016-2020 and there are several reports that are outstanding. 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 2020 Projects

2019-1. Wood Bottom Habitat Enhancement. Jake Doggett reported the progress of this 6-year project. 2020 was the second year. Due to logistical reasons, the upper portion of the project was seeded first and the lower portion was sprayed before reseeding. Although the lower portion looks like there are a lot of weeds present, it is in the process of being seeded to native grass. 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.

2019-8. O'Dell Creek Revegetation Plan. Selita provided an overview of the project that was funded in 2019 and implemented between October 2019 and April 2020. Design included six planting units on outer meander bends where 2,100 willow cuttings and 260 containerized plants were installed. Willows were collected from a donor site south of the Longhorn Ranch. A portion of the sites were fenced to exclude wildlife browsing. Fences were initially designed at 7 feet

high, but the landowner requested they be lowered to 5 feet for aesthetic reasons. Selita reported the enclosures were narrowed to prevent deer from jumping the fences. Photographs from late 2020 showed willows had produced leaves in 2020. Selita expects the remaining vegetation to establish. Future evaluations will determine the effectiveness of this effort. John Muhlfeld later showed photographs of relic willows on an abandoned channel in the proposed phase 18 reach. This provides evidence that willows were historically present.

2020-1. O'Dell & Beaver Creeks Bird Monitoring. Anna Noson reported on the continued monitoring of bird populations within habitat enhancement and protection project areas funded by the Wildlife TAC on O'Dell Creek since 2005. This meets Article 423 requirements. The purpose is to evaluate bird response to the riparian/wetland restoration program. This year a new monitoring site at Beaver Creek (Holter Lake tributary) was established prior to start of that riparian/wetland restoration project. The project used three methods to sample birds; 1) ten minute point count surveys that recorded all bird species seen or heard, 2) point counts with recordings of 4 secretive marshbirds following national protocols, and 3) visual counts of waterfowl on open water wetlands. O'Dell results included an increase of 13 additional waterfowl species, pelicans were down to 22 from 50 last survey, 15 new water bird species. Songbird species richness is higher in early restoration phase sites for riparian obligate songbirds. Observed 3 pairs of breeding Sprague's pipit this summer. The birds were observed defending their nesting territory by calling while hovering high above the nest.

At Beaver Creek, ten point-count locations were established. We documented 24 bird species, 12 of which are riparian obligate or dependent riparian. Observed one adult Sandhill crane with a juvenile. Data from this year will be added to the system wide survey data set.

2020-2. Beaver Creek Riparian Restoration – Phase I. Alli Russell reported the project started on October 25 and about 3,200 feet of stream channel has been constructed with 1,200 remaining. Weather caused a slight delay. The contractor is working long hours to finish the project. Phase I should be completed by the second week of December. Alli has submitted applications to several programs to help fund Phase II which is expected to occur next year. Her application to DNRC's RRG grant preliminarily ranked high.

2020-3. Trumpeter Swan Release. Claire reported 5 swans were released in the Madison Valley in 2020. Birds were monitored by FWP interns in collaboration with Blackfoot project. Sixteen nest sites were successful ranging from Henry's Lake ID to O'Dell Creek and several nests laterally dispersed between. One of the Henry's lake swans is believed to be an O'Dell release bird because it had a leg band on. Several birds were observed at Ennis Lake. GPS monitoring showed a number of Blackfoot birds are wintering in the Ruby River valley and near Ennis. Other birds from Red Rocks Lake are moving back and forth to Idaho. One goal is to determine the connectivity of Montana, Idaho and Wyoming birds. In 2020 birds from all three states were intersecting at some point during the year. One banded bird was killed by a power line strike.

2020-4. Bat Roost Enhancement. Lauren reported 7 bat boxes were installed to improve habitat. Initial plan was to fabricate 10 boxes with the assistance of West Yellowstone school students, but Covid 19 restrictions required purchasing 7 prefabricated boxes. USFS personnel installed the boxes at 5 campgrounds. Boxes will be monitored in future years for use by bats.

2020-5. Bald Eagle Monitoring - Hebgen & Quake Lakes. Lauren reported 14 territories are known to occur in the project area, with 13 that currently have usable nests (i.e., nests that have not fallen or been blown out of trees). Highlights of the 2020 field season include the discovery of 3 new nests 2 in Whits/Parade Rest Territory and 1 in Quake Territory). Nine nests were active early in the nesting season. Four nests (Lonesomehurst, Horse Butte, Ridge and Beaver Creek Delta) fledged a total of six chicks this year. The once-growing BAEA population in the Hebgen Basin appears to be leveling off within the past decade. Although pairs are tending to produce fewer chicks per nest each year, the total number of chicks produced is generally flat. FS suspects low level flight seeing tours in the canyon and around Horse Butte may be affecting eagle behavior. Future monitoring will attempt to ascertain whether these activities are affecting bald eagles in the area.

2020-7. Missouri River Cottonwood Planting. Joe Offer and Mikayla Moss reported 762 trees have been planted since the project began in 2013. In late March-early April this year, materials were collected and staged for planting but Covid 19 restrictions prevented volunteers and BLM staff from assisting with the planting. Cuttings were stored at the Hazelwood property. Considered a fall planting but condition of the cuttings was not ideal. To date survival of trees

planted under this program is 80%. Grant asked what the survival of the fall 2019 planting was and Joe said it was 45%. Planning to use the 2020 TAC funds to conduct spring planting in 2021. BLM is fully staffed which should help conducting planting and monitoring in 2021. Next year we plan to conduct the survival analysis.

2020-8. Whiskey Ridge Conservation Easement. Sonja reported the CE was approved by the F&W Commission in October and should close on Dec 17. There are 4,319 acres involved in the CE. It is a good partnership of FWP goals and NWE TAC requirements to ensure protection of existing wildlife, upland, and water resources in perpetuity. It includes a grazing plan designed to maintain and improve forage productivity for livestock/wildlife, maintain cover values for a variety of species, and protect riparian/wetland areas by minimizing erosion. The area supports 45 species of greatest conservation need plus 5 habitat community types valuable to wildlife. It supports game/furbearer species such as mule deer, elk, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, mountain lion, Greater sage grouse, sharp tailed grouse, bobcat, coyote, red fox, badger, raccoon, and skunk. It includes 2 hunting districts for deer/elk and one bighorn sheep district. CE specifically lists type of livestock that can/cannot be run on these lands in an effort to protect big game species vulnerable to disease spread by certain domestic livestock. Sonja reported the next step after signing the CE is to implement the infrastructure improvement aspect before the grazing/ land management program commences.

2020-9. O'Dell Creek Restoration – Phase 17. John Muhlfeld provided a summary of O'Dell basin restoration accomplishments since 2005. Since then, 14 miles of new stream and over 900 acres of wetland habitat have been restored. Although stream temperature monitoring began in 2005, the sites were refined to 6 in 2016. Analysis is ongoing but Initial results indicate reductions in both average daily and max daily temperature. Bird species increased from 29 to 121 and Montana species of Concern increased from 3 to 18. In phase 17 4,200 feet of channel was restored on the East Branch of O'Dell Creek and 11 acres of wetland were restored or enhanced.

2020-10. Antelope Creek Prescribed Burn CRM Inventory. Grant reported the project involves conducting a prescribed burn on approximately 11,000 acres of land on the CMR Refuge that includes USFWS, BLM and Montana DNRC ownership. It spans from Fred Robinson Bridge upstream 8 miles to Grand Island and the breaks transition zone and uplands north about 4 miles. LeClaire Bottom would be excluded from the burn. Purpose is to reduce fuels load to prevent catastrophic wildland fire and to stimulate native plant growth. Grant dealt with NWE consulting archaeologist to identify a potential method of conducting a CRM inventory on such a large scale that would be acceptable to SHPO. That information was forwarded to the FWS and BLM archaeologists for consideration. The survey was conducted in 2020. Most of the contacts Grant dealt with in early 2020 were detailed on fire this year so there was not much of an update. The prescribed burn is expected to be implemented in May 2021. A CRM report will be provided to NWE consulting archaeologist.

Review of 2020 Expenses & Reserve Account

The budget for 2020 was \$387,894 and the amount approved by the TAC was \$393,805 (\$5,911 approved from Reserve). Of the approved amount, \$377,729 was spent. Project 2020-7 was not implemented in 2020, so \$16,500 was not spent. The estimated WildTAC Reserve Account balance at the beginning of 2020 was \$54,667, which is \$14,097 for project 2018-9 and \$40,570 in uncommitted funds. On June 10 the USFS returned \$449.66 of unspent previous contract funds. Reserve Account expenses in 2020 totaled \$8,116 for project 2018-9. Estimated Reserve Account balance at the end of 2020 was \$46,550, which includes the USFS credit of \$449.60.

The 2020 end-of-year budget status is outlined as follows;

Wildlife TAC Projects & Budget for CY2020				Numbers in PINK are
	As of Oct 12, 2020			
Project #	Project description	Proposed amount for 2020	Approved amount for 2020	Spent
2020-0	CRM-Legacy Consulting Inc.		\$3,106	\$2,579.95
2020-1	O'Dell Creek Bird Monitoring	\$26,639	\$26,639	\$27,639.00
2020-2	Beaver Creek Riparian Restoration-Phase 1	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$200,000.00
2020-3	Trumpeter Swan Release	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000.00
2020-4	Bat Roost Enhancement	\$3,060	\$3,060	\$3,060.00
2020-5	Bald Eagle Monitoring	\$3,160	\$3,160	\$3,160.00
2020-6	Hebgen-Quake Weed Treatment	\$4,080	\$0	\$0.00
2020-7	Missouri Breaks Cottonwood Planting	\$16,500	\$16,500	\$0.00
2020-8	Missouri Breaks Whisky Ridge CE	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000.00
2020-9	O'Dell Creek Restoration - phase 17	\$81,340	\$66,340	\$66,290.40
2020-10	Antelope Creek Prescribed Burn CRM inventory	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000.00
	TOTAL	\$409,779	\$393,805	\$377,729.35
	Budget for CY2020	\$387,894	\$387,894	
	Total approved for CY2020		\$393,805	
	Difference	-\$21,885	(\$5,911)	\$16,075.65
RESERVE ACCOUNT		Order 10007921-003		
Projects Approved in Prior Year(s) But Not Fully Completed:				
	Project	Project Cost	Amt Spent	Remaining Commitment
2018-9	Middle O'Dell Cr Restoration Plan	\$29,900	\$23,919	\$5,981
			TOTAL	\$5,981
	<i>Estimated Reserve Account balance beginning of 2020</i>		\$54,667	
	<i>Reserve Account expenses 2020</i>		\$8,116	
	<i>Subtract Remaining Reserve Account Commitments</i>		\$5,981	
	<i>Estimated Uncommitted Reserve Account funds end of 2020</i>		\$40,569	

Review and Comments on Selected 2021 Proposals

There were 10 projects proposed for 2021, totaling \$392,137. 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:

2021-0. CRM-Legacy Consulting Inc. Grant introduced this proposal to track CRM for NWE-funded projects. The proposal is a placeholder for projects requiring CRM. Grant identified the 5 proposals for 2021 that involved ground breaking activities. All were reviewed by the NWE consulting archaeologist. Project 2021-2 (Beaver Ck Phase II) had CRM completed by the USFS in 2020. Project 2021-4 (Lone Tree CE) involves reseeded cultivated fields back to native grass which does not warrant a CRM inventory. Project 2021-5 (O'Dell Ck Restoration Phase 18) would require CRM inventory and the estimated cost is \$2,795. Project 2021-6 (O'Dell Revegetation Phase II) is within the footprint of previous restoration projects that had CRM inventories completed, so no further inventory is necessary. Project 2021-8 (Whiskey Ridge CE Infrastructure) involves installing fences and a watering system. Montana FWP's application stated the agency would consult with SHPO for this action, so no further CRM inventory is required. As such, if approved, project 2021-5, and would require additional funds approved specifically toward the CRM inventory.

2021-1. O'Dell Creek Rare Plant Monitoring. Tara Luna presented information on the rare plants located in the O'Dell Creek basin, results of past surveys and the biological response by rare plants to restoration activities. Grant added this project has been funded 7 times from 2011-2017 for \$28,000 and suggested it may be time to perform the survey again.

2021-2. Beaver Creek Riparian Restoration-Phase II. Alli Russell stated phase I is underway and almost complete. Phase II is planned for 2021, or when implementation funds are secured. The contractor was able to find materials on site which helped to implement this project in such a remote area. Alli provided photos of the phase I project and indicated phase II would essentially be the same. Alli informed the TAC that she secured funding from MoTAC for \$220,000 on November 17, and her RRG grant ranked #7. Alli plans to submit an application to Future Fisheries in June 2021.

2021-3. Systemwide Bird Monitoring. Anna provided an overview on the history of developing this monitoring program as required by Article 423 of the license. In 2021 the survey would include the Beaver Creek Restoration site downstream of Hauser Dam.

2021-4. Lone Tree CE Native Grass Seeding. Scott Hemmer provided an overview of the proposal. The CE involves 11,285 acres, which includes reseeded 2,301 acres to native grasses and forbes, livestock watering system and cross fencing. Scott said the landowner/cooperator would be performing the reseeded over the course of 5 years. Scott provided a list of wildlife that would benefit from the project and listed the cooperators that are providing cost share.

2021-5, 2021-6, 2021-7. Three O'Dell Creek projects. John and Selita provided an overview of the proposed projects. Grant asked for clarification on the scale of the LiDAR survey, specifically if it was limited to Phase 18. John said the survey continues down valley to the Hwy 287 crossing, which essentially provides a digital map of the remaining O'Dell restoration project area and would be valuable for future design activities. Grant raised the question about funding for Phase 18 being contingent on a MadTAC proposal that would be considered on December 9. John Muhlfeld stated if implementation funds could not be raised, it would be possible to continue with survey, wetland delineation, permitting and design for phase 18 for approximately \$38,000. Grant suggested the TAC consider this contingency plan during today's TAC vote.

2021-8. Whiskey Ridge Conservation Easement. Sonja indicated the CE will close on December 17, after which fence and water infrastructure would be installed. This proposal is to assist with a livestock water system and fencing. Grant asked if FWP would be consulting with SHPO on CRM and she said yes and NWE would be provided a copy of the report before ground breaking activity occurred.

2021-9. Madison Valley Swan Introduction and Monitoring. Claire indicated this proposal is similar to past years. Madison Valley was not as high priority for receiving swans as other focal areas, but the goals in those areas have been met which moves the Madison Valley higher on the ranking list. As such, the Madison is expected to receive signets in successive future years.

2021-10. Hebgen and Quake Lakes Bald Eagle Monitoring. Lauren provided an over view of this longstanding project. There were no additional comments from the group.

Review of 2021 Proposals & Funding Decisions

The budget for 2021 is \$395,652. The total budget request was \$394,932 (\$392,137, plus an estimated \$2,795 for CRM inventory if proposal 2021-5 were funded). As such, the 2021 budget would be underspent by \$720.

After review, comments and questions for the 10 proposals, and the budget strategy noted above, the WildTAC voted unanimously to approve the 10 projects proposed for 2021. In addition the TAC considered the contingency strategy described above for project 2021-5, in which the TAC would fund survey, wetland delineation, permitting and design for phase 18 for approximately \$38,000, if implementation funds cannot be secured from other sources. The TAC voted unanimously to fund this contingency strategy for 2021-5.

As such, the estimated Reserve Account balance at the beginning of 2021 is \$57,165 which includes \$22,481 in previous commitments (\$5,981 for 2018-9, \$16,500 for 2020-7) and \$34,684 in uncommitted funds. The projected 2021 budget status is attached below:

Wildlife TAC Projects & Budget for CY2021				Numbers in PINK
As of Jan 4, 2021				
Project #	Project description	Proposed budget for 2021	Approved budget for 2021	Spent
2021-0	CRM-Legacy Consulting Inc.	\$0	\$2,795	
2021-1	O'Dell Creek Rare Plant Monitoring	\$6,000	\$6,000	
2021-2	Beaver Creek Restoration Phase 2	\$130,000	\$130,000	
2021-3	Systemwide Bird Monitoring	\$38,521	\$38,521	
2021-4	Lone Tree CE Native Plant Reseeding	\$80,000	\$80,000	
2021-5	O'Dell Creek Restoration Phase 18	\$50,000	\$50,000	
2021-6	O'Dell Creek Revegetation Phase 2	\$31,762	\$31,762	
2021-7	O'Dell Creek LiDAR Acquisition	\$13,300	\$13,300	
2021-8	Whisky Ridge CE Infrastructure	\$33,394	\$33,394	
2021-9	Madison Valley Swan Intro & Monitoring	\$6,000	\$6,000	
2021-10	Hebgen & Quake Bald Eagle Monitoring	\$3,160	\$3,160	
Total Request 2021		\$392,137	\$394,932	
Budget for CY 2021		\$395,652	\$394,932	
Total Approved for CY 2021			\$0	
Difference		\$3,515	\$720	
Estimated WildTAC RESERVE beginning 2021		\$54,667		
RESERVE ACCOUNT				Order 10007921-003
Projects Approved in Prior Year(s) But Not Fully Completed Yet:				
	Project	Project Cost	Amt Spent	Remaining Commitment
2018-9	Middle O'Dell Cr Restoration Plan	\$29,900	\$23,919	\$5,981
2020-7	Missouri Breaks Cottonwood Planting	\$16,500	\$0	\$16,500
TOTAL		\$46,400	\$23,919	\$22,481
Reserve Account balance start of 2021-NWE Accounting			\$57,165	
Subtract Remaining Reserve Account Commitments			\$22,481	
Estimated Uncommitted Reserve Account funds available in 2021			\$34,684	