

Montana Department
of
Fish, Wildlife & Parks



WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

PLEASE RETURN
NEWSLETTER

No. 1

January 3, 1994

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) initiated a comprehensive review of its entire wildlife program in 1991. This review is designed to comply with the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). You are an active participant in this process because of your comments and concerns expressed at one of our scoping meetings or by having mailed your comments. We want to thank you for your participation and to assure you that your comments continue to guide us.

SCOPING MEETINGS

Comments received from FWP employees during November-December 1991 directed us toward a broad approach, using a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) rather than a single issue approach for this review. Employees also listed problems that they've encountered with the current program and comments heard from the public about it.

We then received 674 verbal comments (issues and concerns) during 24 public scoping meetings during 1992. We will address over 78% of those comments in the PEIS document. The remaining comments are not within FWP's jurisdiction or fall outside the scope of this particular PEIS. We will, however, forward those other comments to the appropriate management agency or region for consideration.

WRITTEN SUGGESTIONS

We received 601 written comments from 63 individuals, 51 organizations, 7 Montana legislators and 5 government agencies during an extended comment period in 1992. Eighty-eight percent have direct bearing on the direction of the PEIS; again, the remainder were outside the scope of the wildlife program or FWP's jurisdiction.

MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

A range of alternatives, including a Proposed Action, are being developed. They will ultimately chart our direction for managing Montana's wildlife. We have identified several issues that will shape these alternatives.

Attitudes toward wildlife in Montana range broadly from negative (certain species are pests) to favorable (using wildlife for recreation through harvesting and viewing). Some Montanans believe wildlife should be managed as ecosystem components. The No Action Alternative (continuing our present program) focuses on management of individual species or groups of species, with emphasis on species that are hunted or trapped. Although it identifies relationships between species and habitats, it is weak in recognizing relationships among wildlife species. While the current Program emphasizes man's role in managing wildlife it does not adequately address the broad range of current societal attitudes toward wildlife.

The preliminary Proposed Action calls for managing wildlife with a focus on ecological systems to reflect the diversity of all wildlife and their habitats while maintaining a commitment to preserving Montana's hunting heritage. It is certainly broader and more complex than the current Program. If we adopt this approach, we will need new activities in our existing subprograms (Management, Habitat, Research, Law Enforcement and Conservation Education). Overall program administration and direction of funding may also require some change.

From your input we have identified 19 major issues that will serve as a basis for evaluating our current Program, our developing Proposed Action and other management alternatives. These are presented on pages 2-7. We hope each statement and its subpoints capture issues and concerns you raised at meetings or in letters. We'd

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appreciate your taking a few minutes to determine if the issue statements include your concerns. You may send us any thoughts on the last page of this newsletter. Please remember that many of your previous comments are summarized in these statements. Please forward those additional concerns to us by February 10, 1994. If you would like a more detailed listing of the issues, please request a copy of this list by telephone (994-3285) or by letter (Wildlife PEIS, FWP Building - MSU Campus, Bozeman, MT, 59717-0322).

All management approaches will be examined for biological-ecological, social-cultural, and economic impacts. Those discussions will appear in the Draft PEIS, which we hope to have available for public review and comment by late 1994. You will receive a copy of this Draft PEIS because you are already an active participant in the process.

THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

A Preferred Alternative will be identified after public review and comment on the Draft PEIS. Your review of that document will assure that ideas offered by our public will be considered before its final formulation and adoption by FWP and the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. The Preferred Alternative will be presented in the Final PEIS.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

A seven-member Steering Committee within FWP provides both general and specific directions for the PEIS process. Members include: Don Childress (Administrator, Wildlife Division), Bob Martinka (Deputy Director), Bobbi Balaz (Federal Aid Coordinator), Beate Galda (Attorney), Gary Burke (Law Enforcement), Kurt Cunningham (Conservation Education), and Mike Aderhold (Region 4 Supervisor). Full-time members of the core Technical Committee are responsible for carrying out those directions. These people are: John Weigand (Wildlife Research Bureau Chief and PEIS Leader), Gary Dusek (Wildlife Research Specialist) and Scott McCollough (Environmental Impact Specialist).

FWP biologists have been writing about the biology, ecology and management of individual species or groups of species of wildlife in Montana. Additional department and university experts have been writing on wildlife management, law enforcement, conservation education, department funding and accountability, economics, socio-cultural aspects of wildlife management, and environmental law. Other disciplinary experts will be involved as they are needed.

The magnitude and importance of this effort is unparalleled in FWP's long history. We want to ensure the conservation of our wildlife for future generations of Montanans and its visitors.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT ISSUES IDENTIFIED FROM PUBLIC SCOPING

1. ACCESS is essential to equitably distribute recreational opportunity over Montana's land base and to obtain optimal distribution of harvests of game and fur species. FWP has authority to manage access on lands to which it holds fee title or leases but serves as a facilitator or cooperator relative to access on other lands.
 - a. Access to wildlife on both public and private lands is desirable, and FWP is encouraged to increase its role in obtaining access. General concerns relative to access include:
 - levels of access
 - equity among user groups
 - b. Concerns about access to private lands center around:
 - travel restrictions, primarily those related to use of motorized vehicles
 - impacts to the land base including cumulative impacts of recreational and nonrecreational use
 - declining access to private lands because of increased pressure vs. travel restriction on public lands

- FWP dealing with landowner discontent and clarification of access/trespass regulations
 - definition of the scope and intent of block management agreements and its effect on improving access for both hunting and nonhunting recreation
 - public access as a prerequisite for acquisition of easements, etc.
- c. There are concerns about access to federal lands relative to restrictions intended to address wildlife values. These concerns include:
- a right of access to public lands inherent in public ownership
 - timing and level of motorized access and for purposes other than hunting
 - impacts of all motorized travel
- d. FWP enforces access restrictions on state school trust lands. Specific concerns are timing of use, expanding recreational use to activities other than hunting, and clarification of rules governing access.
- e. Other concerns involved:
- special citizen groups, such as senior citizens and physically challenged
 - purchase of large tracts of land by nonresidents for recreation at the exclusion of public access
 - the effect of access fees on public access
2. There is a desire for FWP to define its role in managing **RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITY** for both consumptive and nonconsumptive uses.
- a. Concerns related to quality and diversity of consumptive uses include:
- the manner in which FWP responds to public input
 - managing habitats and populations with emphasis on hunting and trapping opportunity vs. maintaining biological diversity
 - trophy hunting
- b. Concerns about Montana's hunting and trapping heritage include:
- retaining the opportunity to hunt and trap
 - outside interests compromising opportunity for Montana residents
 - biological and economic impacts of consumptive recreation on the resource
 - the appropriateness of hunting or trapping of some species, such as bison, grizzly bear and lynx, based on socio-cultural perceptions
- c. Nonconsumptive recreation
- re-examination of FWP's role in managing game species
 - involving the nonhunting public in wildlife conservation
 - conflicts between recreational users, such as hunters and viewers, and conflicts with other land uses, such as abating wildlife damage
3. There is a desire for FWP to evaluate enhancement of habitats and providing hunting opportunity based on **ECONOMIC** costs and benefits.
- a. Concern centering around FWP recognition and interaction with other resource interests include:
- economic values of both game and nongame wildlife vs. other basic industries and societal benefits
 - integrating other wildlife values in resource decisions, such as socio-cultural and ecological

- b. Large numbers of game on private agricultural lands affect landowners economically. General concerns include:
 - landowner incentive vs. landowner acceptance of wildlife
 - restriction of agricultural uses on public lands vs. landowner acceptance of wildlife on private lands
 - economic implication of timing and level of FWP response to control wildlife damage
- c. Concerns related to commercialization and privatization of wildlife include:
 - guiding and outfitting
 - game and fur ranching and farming including facility condition and maintenance
 - economic incentives that encourage illegal taking of wildlife, such as market for animal parts and local trophy contests
 - economic compensation vs. recreational opportunity
 - allocating hunting licenses for sale by landowners
 - replacing Montana's domestic livestock economy with one dominated by indigenous and exotic game species that provides both economic incentive and recreational opportunity
- d. There is concern about economic impacts of wildlife damage to private property and crops and a desire for FWP to better define its role in damage control. Specific concerns center around vertebrate pests, predator control, and game damage.
- 4. General concerns center around REGULATION of harvest through restriction of bag limit, season length, sex and age of animals harvested, and access.
 - a. Concerns relative to hunting and trapping include:
 - season length and reduced bag limits vs. restriction of access to regulate game harvests
 - maximum recreational opportunity vs. impacts on populations
 - opening dates that accommodate needs and concerns of landowners
 - delineation and description of hunting district boundaries
 - population goals and objectives
- b. There is a concern about means of taking game and fur species for humane reasons relative to wounding rates specific to weapon or device and the use of dogs.
- c. Concerns about decision making and implementing regulations at the local level center around:
 - timeliness of FWP response
 - specific management problems, such as special regulations to reduce crop depredation by big game
 - use of nonresident hunters to control big game numbers
- d. Concerns relative to licensing include timing of purchase, a preference system, residency requirements, landowner preference for permits, and distribution of nonresident hunters vs. opportunity for resident hunters
- e. Another concern centers around mandates for public input related to the regulatory process and decision-making.
- 5. FWP obtains most of its information relative to species habitat status, distribution, trend, productivity and mortality through periodic SURVEYS AND INVENTORIES. Concerns center around:
 - a. timing, consistency, efficiency and accuracy of population and hunter harvest surveys

- b. decisions based on professional judgement vs. site-specific data
 - c. impacts of aerial reconnaissance and quality of information vs. cost of aerial surveys
 - d. effects of capture and handling of wildlife used for study
 - e. information needed to determine the effect of control measures on population dynamics
6. Concerns about **CONSERVATION EDUCATION** emphasize the need for more information about wildlife, how the department functions and coordinating educational efforts with other organizations. Specifically there are needs for:
- a. general wildlife knowledge programs for adults and youth
 - b. improved and expanded hunter education that includes adult-level as well as youth programs
 - c. keeping the public and legislature informed about the PEIS process and implementation
7. The main concerns about wildlife **LAW ENFORCEMENT** in Montana involve:
- a. inadequate penalties for violations of harvest regulations and harassment of legal hunter activities that center around fines, loss of privileges and rewards for information leading to arrests
 - b. greater participation by citizens in law enforcement
 - c. numbers of dead wildlife required for successful covert operations
 - d. donations of game meat
8. Concerns about **FWP FUNDING AND ACCOUNTABILITY** included:
- a. the use of funds generated via licenses being spent on work related to other species or other or unrelated department programs
 - b. allocation of funds from resident vs. non-resident licenses and permits
 - c. use of license revenue to fund other wildlife activities like those related to non-game and threatened and endangered species
 - d. rationale for levels of license fees
 - e. appropriate fee levels for wildlife recreationists on State School Lands
 - f. FWP and Commission responsibilities and policies including an examination of the influence of hunting and trapping programs on management priorities
 - g. recognition of private property rights
11. Concerns about **WILDLIFE DISEASES AND PUBLIC SAFETY** include:
- a. the need for computerized information on wildlife diseases that includes risk assessments for livestock and humans
 - b. wildlife-motor vehicle collisions and potentials for wildlife-airplane collisions
 - c. high numbers of dangerous wildlife vs. risks to human safety
 - d. adulteration of wild meat resulting from immobilizing drugs
12. Concerns about **COORDINATION and COOPERATION** in wildlife management focus on:
- a. wildlife management and research between FWP and the federal agencies and American Indian governments
 - b. FWP, other state agencies, and local governments managing state lands, highway corridors, and predators
 - c. assistance to private landowners in improving wildlife habitat with consideration of the needs of agriculture and extractive industries

- d. federal laws that can interfere with enjoyment of wildlife and control of predators
- c. other concerns: wetlands management, habitat and block management integration, insect control, and developing species management plans
13. FWP recognition that **MULTIPLE USE** considers other legitimate land uses including mining, logging, livestock grazing, and recreational uses beyond hunting, trapping, and wildlife viewing.
14. There are concerns that the FWP Wildlife Program consider **NONGAME AND THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES**. Related concerns are:
- a. sources and adequacy of funding
- b. impacts of managing game species
- c. FWP's role and direction
- d. decision making at local, regional, statewide levels
- e. reintroductions vs. natural recovery
- f. adequacy of information on populations and habitats
- g. conflicts between controlling predators and recovery
- h. impacts recreational and economic opportunities
- i. use of legal means to gain and keep management of all wildlife species
- j. research on nongame species
15. There is a concern that wildlife management needs to focus on **ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS**. This includes:
- a. public knowledge of ecosystem functioning and relationships between humans and wildlife
- b. identification of habitat requirements for various species
- c. fostering biodiversity and protecting old growth forests and riparian areas
- d. impacts of maintaining streamflows
- e. supplemental feeding of wildlife
- f. balancing wildlife numbers with available habitat
- g. accuracy of biological information
- h. impacts of natural disasters and seasons
- i. impacts of recreation, such as trophy hunting, relative to species management plans
- j. management of wide-ranging and uncommon species, like the lynx
- k. impacts of controlling nuisance animals
- l. definitions (legal versus ecological) of furbearers and predators
- m. research on species interactions
16. There are concerns relative to **HABITAT** acquisition and alteration.
- a. Concerns relative to acquisition include:
- FWP ownership of land
 - alternatives to purchase, such as leasing and conservation easements
 - conditions for purchase, such as multiple species/multiple values
 - protection of archaeological sites
- b. Concerns relative to alteration or enhancement include:
- habitat goals, recreation, and multiple use
 - effects of wildlife use, livestock grazing, logging, fire, development, and other land uses
 - protection of wetlands
 - habitat loss, especially due to increased human population and roles of state and local

- agencies in addressing habitat loss
 - spread and control of noxious weeds on FWP land and other wildlife habitats
17. Items related to **PEIS FORMAT, ORGANIZATION, AND CONTENT** include:
- a. composition of PEIS team
 - b. literature review on all wildlife species
 - c. additional authority needed from legislature
 - d. global perspectives
 - e. trends for long-term future
 - f. FWP goals
 - g. references to wolf, bison, and grizzly environmental review documents
 - h. funding for PEIS
 - i. arranging the PEIS into an easily used format
 - j. communication of PEIS implications
 - k. publicly-reviewed management plans for all game species
18. Concerns about **ADMINISTRATION** include:
- a. developing checks and balances within FWP
 - b. compliance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act and all environmental regulations
- c. an appeals process for decisions
 - d. policy-making role of the PEIS
 - e. use of legal means to gain and keep management of all species
 - f. development of balanced and flexible programs
 - g. identification of decision-makers
 - h. holding wildlife observations confidential
19. Concerns relative to **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING** include:
- a. political influences and voting on FWP decisions
 - b. contacting groups/individuals vs. holding open meetings
 - c. getting out information on the FWP appeals process
 - d. adding committees of private citizens or business representatives to the PEIS process
 - e. keeping government input together with other public input
 - f. following suggestions gathered at public meetings
 - g. having decision-makers present at public meetings
 - h. expanding public opinion surveys beyond traditional constituencies

