



**HABITAT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM
STATE COUNCIL MEETING
February 24 and 25, 2020 Glenwood Springs, CO**

Attendees: Pat Tucker, Dean Riggs, Ken Morgan, Hunter Seim, Sheila Lamb, Mick Davis, Greg Jungman, Gary Visintainer, John Hardwick, Robbie LeValley, Teri Polley, Samantha Sorensen, Hanna Cook, Katie Richman

Absent: Terry Everhart

Guests: JT Romatzke (Northwest Regional Manager), Joe Phillips (Assistant Attorney General)

February 24 - 7 PM to 9 PM

Discussion with JT Romatzke, Northwest Regional Manager

JT updated the State Council on the current work being done on the mountain lion plans that will not only give stability in management but also flexibility for the agency. There are fourteen public meetings scheduled in Denver and other places. The draft plan will go out for public review on the internet for thirty days and then the first hearing will be heard at the commission meeting in May in Grand Junction. The second and final hearing is in Trinidad in June. If passed, the implementation will be fall of 2020.

JT also talked about the wolf ballot initiative. Wolves will change the distribution of our deer and elk herds significantly and make changes to AUMs and allotment permits on federal lands. There are some assumptions made about wolves that are farfetched like bringing wolves in to save the riparian areas or that wolves can change chronic wasting disease. It seems unfair not to engage with our neighboring states, Utah and Wyoming, regarding wolf introduction. New Mexico and Arizona are just as concerned. There is much tension and polarization over wolves right now.

There was some discussion with the state council on the E2 elk herd in the Northwest Region and the winter conditions. JT also touched on competition or contest killing of coyotes, prairie dogs and ground squirrels has taken new light with the commission. This does not include angling

competitions. There is a citizen's petition that the commission will hear in May effectively removing all public land live trapping.

The new wildlife commissioners have gone through senate confirmation. June will be the final meeting for commissioners Robert Bray and Jim Vigil. They have both served on the commission representing agriculture for a long time.

Regarding the legislation for HPP and the sunset date of June 2023, there has been many conversations with DNR and the director, keeping it on their radar. JT encourages his staff and HPP to be as innovative as can be and to wisely use funds; spend down. When we do go to legislation, we will continue to show the success of the HPP program. Financially, with the Future Generations Act, the agency is seeing many benefits having this tied with the consumer price index and the qualifying license.

JT recognized Dean Riggs and his accomplishments with the agency. HPP and the State Council is better off because of the things Dean has done. This is Dean's final HPP meeting; his retirement is February 29, 2020.

Highway Projects

Pat discussed the rising importance of wildlife in highway projects and reminded the Council about the Hwy 9 project, the \$5000 of Middle Park committee funds but the Council declined to participate. Recently, the local Northwest Colorado committee had a proposal for Highway 13 north of Craig involving fencing, underpasses and overpasses and they also declined to participate.

Dean shared with the council about the west slope study, commissioned by CDOT and CPW that could involve Game Damage and HPP. The plan for corridors, over/under passes had fencing that channeled wildlife to agricultural locations. The highway projects could start moving animals around the landscape and the game could end up in places where they are not wanted. The Highway 285 project in Buena Vista is another example of possible conflicts because of the highway fencing.

It was decided that HPP should not be involved in the funding for these large highway projects but there could be impacts or opportunities to work with local adjacent landowners to address impacts caused by the highway project and that would be appropriate for HPP to be involved in.

Kencove Wire

State Council agreed to duplicate their previous white wire order from 2019.

HPP Expansion

The State Council had a brief discussion regarding HPP expansion in the Republican Rivers area to include all of Area 3 as well as the area between Rifle and Glade Park in Area 7 and the area east of I-25 south of Pueblo. JT encouraged the council to have a conversation with Garrett Watson and game damage to understand the conflicts on these private lands. Pat said the current ways to expand HPP are to 1) create a new committee or 2) expand the existing committee. Both options have pros and cons involved. The other idea that would be a part of HPP's legislative rewrite would be to give the State Council authority to spend HPP money in areas that have problems but no committee.

Game Damage and HPP

Currently there is a box on the Game Damage Claim Form that asks if HPP was contacted. About five years ago, this box was added specifically to generate the question so either the Regional Manager, or in case of denial, the Wildlife Commission would at least know if HPP was included. To inform the conversation, it would be interesting to ask Garrett to pull the last three years of game damage claims and tell HPP what percentage of those claims replied no to HPP. Further, JT suggested an AWM or DWM come to a local committee once a year and talk about game damage in that committee's area; sharing with the committee, what Game Damage is working on to focus on those issues. In addition, have a conversation with Garrett to understand what that framework looks like and invite him to a State Council meeting to talk about this more. JT would be supportive of this council coming out with guidance for each of the committees that would encourage the local committees to look at game damage within their boundaries and discuss the effect, either positively or negatively, what issues the agency is compelled to deal with.

February 25 - 8 AM to 3 PM

Attorney General Presentation on Boards and Commissions

Joe Phillips, Assistant Attorney General is general council for parks, wildlife and trust lands. Joe discussed with the State Council about laws, transparency and ethics specifically the Open Records Act, the Open Meetings Law and specific government volunteer ethics rules.

DMPs Review/Approval

Middle Park, Mount Blanca, South Park, Arkansas River, Gunnison, North Fork of the Gunnison, Montelores, Uncompahgre, Grand Mesa Distribution Management Plans were reviewed and approved. In addition, Pat is working on language to be written into the plans for misconduct and violations and will be added to in the operating guidelines, which the State Council agreed with. The State Council approved all plans for forwarding to the Parks and Wildlife Commission for final approval.

Hiring of Meeting Outreach Person

The question was raised about a committee hiring a person to represent and promote HPP at local meetings, events, etc. The State Council felt this was one of the expectations that the program had for committee members and that consistency in messaging was needed. There are plenty of materials available for folks to hand out if needed but the Council did not want to pay an outside person to do this. The request was denied.

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies Project Request

State Council discussed this project and decided it was not directly tied with HPP.

Dean Goodbye

HPP is one of the highlights of Deans career. Dean shared that HPP was a natural fit for him having both wildlife and agricultural sides with a wildlife biology degree and an animal scientist major. Discussing these plans today, hats off to the council. Thank you.

Succession planning

Pat said he is not in the position and he will not tell anyone it is time to resign. The same message is to the committees; it is on their schedule. If you happen to know of someone that would be a good replacement for you, and you are in the position to step down, Pat encouraged the council to let him know. Let go when you are ready, and then he will put out an announcement to fill.

Budget update and FY21 approval

Effective 7/1/20, the State Council made some changes to committee budgets and requesting additional money from the Council. Specifically:

1. The Council approved a 10% increase in all committee budgets for FY21, starting July 1st. Even though few committees are spending their entire budgets now, and it varies from year to year, the Council felt that money existed in HPP to do this and to let committees accomplish projects that might not have been done, or that would be put off until the new budget year.
2. The new increased budgets will remain in effect for 2 years, FY21 and FY22.
3. The State Council will re-evaluate committee budgets in 2 years. The decision to keep budgets at this higher level, reduce them back to current budgets or even increase them above the 10% will depend on several things, ie. how committees utilized these additional funds, if any new project types were undertaken as a result of the additional money or if existing projects just increased and a status update on other larger scale projects that are currently in the Council's pipeline which may affect money being available.
4. The Council still encourages committees to spend all their budgets with the standard caveat that it is spent on HPP appropriate projects and have acceptable partner matches.
5. If a committee has more project requests than their current budget allows for, pre-approval for additional funds for these projects are needed. As is the practice now, the Council has given Pat Tucker approval authority for additional immediate project funding up to \$20,000. However, projects greater than \$20,000 - either singularly or in aggregate when submitted by the same person - will be submitted to the State Council for their review and decision.

State Wildlife Area Update

Out of the \$250,000 that state council offered up for state wildlife area fencing and weed control, approximately ½ was spent. The Council will continue this offer again starting July 1st.

Access Issues

Public hunting access is not a condition to HPP projects. There may be a limited role for HPP by using hunt coordinators or signage. The committees could ask the landowners about hunting possibilities when they come in for projects, ie. youth hunting, or December cow hunting after all the other hunters are gone. Pat knows of 2 committees who have done this as a project requirement. There may be opportunities to expand hunting access but not as a requirement for HPP funding.

Tamarisk Discussion

Historically, the state council has avoided tamarisk treatment. River, riparian restoration in confined areas, does not fit a HPP big game project. Not denying the value of water consumption and native cottonwood trees, it's difficult to connect tamarisk removal with HPP big game conflicts.

2019 Meeting Wrapup

Discussion of successes and challenges. 30% attendance of committees was disappointing. The event was intended to reward the committee folks that volunteer their time.

USFS Burn Request

A request for \$142,000 was made by the USFS for the Boggy Draw and Haycamp Mesa burns. The Montelores committee had already approved \$32,000. The Council had several questions about the project concerning funding, timing, weed control, etc but they couldn't be answered at the time. Forest Service Rep, Sheila Lamb offered to gather addition information with the applicant. A telephone conference is scheduled for March 2, 7:00 pm.

Grand Mesa Irrigation Project

The state council approved this \$35,000 Grand Mesa pipeline project.

Partners Conference April 27-29

Pat Tucker and Sheila Lamb will be giving an HPP presentation at the Partner Conference.

Committee Recognition Awards

Agreed to tally the people on the committees for over 20 years and give them recognition.

June Field Trip

Discussion of ideas for the June 23 & 24 field trip in Steamboat Springs (tentatively) with South Park being the backup.

Arch Clearances

Given 2 recent examples in the Lower Colorado River and White River committee areas, the State Council discussed the appropriate role for HPP in arch clearances. Ultimately, it is the agency's responsibility to complete the arch clearances and other NEPA reviews. There may be extenuating circumstances why HPP would pay for these but, in those cases, HPP will only become involved if the agency has the funds and commits to immediately implementing the project after the preliminary clearances are completed. The Council does not want to spend HPP money for this work (or any up front work) without a firm commitment to do the project immediately afterwards.

Roundtable

Overall, this was a good meeting; much more than expected. A lot of material was covered and the good discussion was appreciated.

Next meeting scheduled for June 23 and 24th