Group members in attendance: Curt Bales, Jim Klebba, Chip Clouse, Tim Fagan, Barney Henrich, Theresa Lineberger, Lee Livingston, Doug McWhirter, Steve Brock, Dan Morris, Justin Sanders, and Jim Yockey.

Absent: None

Facilitator: Dennie Hammer

Notetaker: Dan Smith

Welcome

- Hammer started the meeting at 6:00 pm.
- Hammer recognized some new faces in the audience, and reviewed the roles of the group and of the observers in the room.
- Reviewed agenda for the meeting and asked for additional agenda items.
  - Old hunt area 57
  - Game and Fish Commissioner license hunts
  - Public comment period during meetings
  - Update on recent Brucellosis Management Action Plan (BMAP) Meeting.
  - Discussion on media issue from last meeting.

Ice-Breaker

- Hammer had sent out by e-mail to the group a handout on the top ten mistakes in consensus, and had asked the group to reflect on the group’s interactions. Are we making any mistakes?
  - McWhirter advised he had not seen the handout until the meeting. Was not prepared to discuss.
  - Other members noted they had not had time to consider the handout.
- Group decided to move on for now and time to reflect for the future.

Area 57 Discussion

- Hammer asked the group for input on the old hunt area 57. It gets discussed a lot, but doesn’t exist anymore because it was combined with area 56. What does the group want to do with area 57?
- If the Southfork is looked at as a whole, the count block works. Sometimes the elk numbers are higher in hunt area 59, sometimes in area 56.
- Hunt area 57 went away so hunters could hunt both sides of the ridge in hunt areas 56 and 57. It made sense to combine the hunt areas, and take some of the pressure off hunters. Elk numbers were over objective, and it made it easier to get a harvest on cow elk that moved back and forth between hunt areas 56 and 57.
- Bales noted that elk numbers seem to be lower in “57” this year.
- McWhirter advised that references to the old hunt area 57 even though it doesn’t exist anymore remains to clarify the number of elk that winter in the Northfork drainage, and what elk winter in the Southfork drainage. Without that reference, it may appear the elk are all in the Northfork drainage. The hunt area 57 count block is used to determine how many elk are in the Southfork drainage. The count block was established in the early 1990’s.
- Talking about hunt area 57 is confusing to the public since it is not on any maps.
- Hammer asked if the group wanted a count block for the Southfork drainage side of hunt area 56 (the old hunt area 57), or the entire Southfork drainage?
  - Elk move back and forth between hunt areas 57 and 59.
  - During survey time the elk are usually in hunt area 57
- Hammer showed the group flip charts from earlier discussions.
The group decided the count block for the old hunt area 57 should be split; 325 elk added to the count block for 58/59, and 325 elk added to the count block for 55/56.

Commissioner Licenses in Area 59
- McWhirter had been asked about the number of Game and Fish Commissioner licenses in area 59.
  - Have commissioner licenses increased in hunt area 59?
    - McWhirter advised the number has decreased in the entire herd unit.
    - In hunt area 59 there has been 11 Commissioner’s tags
      - 2 tags in 2011
      - 0 tags in 2010
      - 4 tags in 2009
      - Either 0 or 1 tag in each year from 2001 to 2008

Discussion on Public Comment Period
- Sanders advised the group that after further thought, he wanted to discuss the decision to allow public comment in the middle of the meeting. Public comment is very important, and it definitely needs to be taken and considered. However public comment in the middle of the meeting is distracting.
  - Doesn’t give the group time to digest/absorb.
  - Distracts from the agenda.
- Group decided to move the public comment back to the end of the meeting. If topics come up that need to be discussed they can be added to future agendas.

Brucellosis Management Action Plan (BMAP) Meeting Update
- BMAP meeting occurred on Thursday, January 27 in Cody.
- The BMAP is used to deal with commingling issues between elk and livestock.
- There was an original plan that was sent out for edits. This meeting was to discuss the edits.
  - Predation and it’s influence
  - Commingling of elk and livestock from February through June.
    - Department will take action to prevent comingling.
    - Department will continue brucellosis sampling on elk.
      - More samples were taken this year than in past.
      - Results not back yet.
- Hunt Access Coordinators gave an update on the Hunter Management Access Program.
  - 173 elk harvested through the first year of the program, primarily on private land.
- Discussion:
  - Is there an issue in hunt area 63 with elk/bison interactions (Antler Ranch)?
    - Buffalo may be vaccinated.
  - Concern expressed on the post-season classification of 4,000+ elk counted in hunt area 61 this winter. Is the Department taking steps now?
    - The Department does not want elk to expand eastward into area 66 or beyond.
    - The elk have a 30% calf crop.
    - Elk are on the winter range.
    - This is a huge issue. Must be flexible in management and think outside the box.
  - Has anyone successfully moved elk?
    - Yes – Yellowstone to the Big Horn Mountains by railroad many years ago.
  - When the Department finishes the surveys of the Cody elk herd, we’ll have a better feel for the entire herd.
**Media Issue Discussion**
- Lineberger shared a press release from July describing the group’s recommendations and stating that they could be used setting future seasons.
- It was noted that the newspapers are no longer attending the meetings.
- It was noted that information on the Department’s webpage was not easy to find.
  - Hammer advised it was being corrected and eventually will be moved to the Public Working Group area of the web page.

**Approval of Minutes from January 25, 2012**
- In the discussion of hunt area 60, the minutes stated there were 1,500 additional licenses recommended. There is a need to reduce elk by 1,500 in hunt areas 59 and 61 to get to the count block objective.
- **Correction to the minutes.** “The group has recommended a reduction of approximately 1,500 elk in the front country in the draft recommendations suggested to this point.”
- Minutes approved with correction.

**Break – 7:00-7:10**

**Discussion of handout on Commission Presentation of Economics of Hunting**
- The handout was compiled by Steve Tessman, Staff Biologist—WGFD
- Refer to handout
- Information presented on a state-wide basis and for northwest Wyoming.
- Fewer General license hunters in northwest Wyoming, but not statewide.
- Report also considers recreation days as opposed to just hunter days.

**Six-Point Elk Restriction Presentation**
- McWhirter gave a PowerPoint presentation on 6-point antler restrictions.
- Antler point restrictions in other areas:
  - Alberta – 3pt and 6pt seasons
  - AZ – no antler point restrictions
  - British Columbia – 6pt season
  - CO – 4pt season
  - ID – 6pt season (also brow-tine bull and spike only)
  - NM – 6pt season (late archery only)
  - OR – 3pt season
- British Columbia – East Kootenays
  - As calf ratios decline, bull harvest declines. Hence, calf ratios increase, bull harvest increases.
  - Many of the goals in the East Kootenays are very similar to the Cody elk herd.
    - Harvest depends on the goals – Sustainability and opportunity
- Discussion
  - Is there an effect on genetics?
    - Bull ratios must get very low (single digits) before it affects genetics of the herd.
    - It becomes a matter of age; older bulls get bigger.
    - Brock suggested that in areas where a mature 5-point bull (poor genetics) was protected with a 6-point season, it could produce a lot of calves passing on his genetics.
In areas of high hunter density, bulls tend to plateau at a certain age. They don’t get any older because of hunter harvest.
  - Remote areas have more age diversity.

In deer, focusing hunters on a point restriction reduces the older age class over time. It focuses all of the antlered deer hunting pressure on the older age class.

Is there any data on age of harvested Thorofare elk?
  - Outfitters used to report the number of points on the bulls harvested, but now only report male or female.
  - Fagan noted that based on harvest checks about 50% of the bulls taken are 6-point.
    - Would a 6-point restriction save half of the bulls?

Livingston suggested the group is in a great position to try a 6-point season, or at least consider it.

Is a 6-point season a temporary fix? A band aid for the problem? Will we be back here again in ten years?
  - McWhirter advised he was not sure and would spend more time investigating data from British Columbia. It still appears to be related to calf production.
  - There are a lot of variables. Bull harvest can only increase as the population increases.

Crandall elk herd is above objective, but still went limited quota.
  - There is an increase of elk in the front country.
  - Even in Sunlight, the elk numbers are above count block objectives.

What’s going on with Jackson elk herds? Notes from a discussion between Theresa Lineberger and Doug Brimeyer (wildlife biologist-Jackson, WY-WGFD)
  - There were 15,000+ elk in 2000, 12,000 elk now.
    - Decline in calf production.
    - Hunt area 79 (Yellowstone migratory elk) – there has been a reduction of 1,750 type, any elk licenses over the past 12 year period.
      - Area 79 used to be open from September to December 4.
    - Hunt area 70 (Teton Wilderness) – shortened gun season, spikes excluded in 2010.
    - Hunt area 82 (Gros Ventre) – shortened season, spikes excluded.
    - Why are there less resident hunters?
      - Lineberger advised that according to Brimeyer the reason is predators—primarily grizzly bears.
    - Since the 1950’s, this is only the second time there was no bull elk hunting in Teton Park.
    - There will be a request from the National Park Service to close hunt area 79 in 2013.

Elk Management Goals

- Should the group develop goals for the Cody Elk Herd?
  - Lineberger – We should create a list of things we can all agree on.
  - McWhirter – We should consider ratios; bull:cow
  - Lineberger – The goals should be ideas or feelings toward the herd, not numbers.
  - Klebba – We should adopt the goals British Columbia used in their plan.

Hammer advised that the decision did not have to be made tonight, but it would be good to have a goal statement in the group’s recommendations.
  - Goals provide direction to the group as to what we are working toward.
  - Gives the group something to check themselves against as the process goes along.

Bales noted that the group has basically been doing that. The group recognizes there are different needs for the front country and the back country. Would be good to do, but needs some more thought.
• Fagan asked if setting goals was starting with a solution instead of a problem (referring to the 10 mistakes document).
  o Goals are not the same as solutions.
• Goals and objectives would help the group move forward.
• **ACTION ITEM** – The group will give thought to goals and objectives prior to the next meeting, and come to the meeting with a list of goals or criteria that need to happen to narrow the focus of the group. The goals may vary from hunt area to hunt area.

**Press Release Suggestion**
• Clouse suggested the group provide a press release to the media to give a short overview of the group and where to find information. This would direct interested parties to the webpage for further information.
• Hammer advised he would work with Tara Teaschner (Cody, I&E Specialist-WGFD) to make that happen.

**Further Discussion on 6-point Season**
• Klebba asked McWhirter for his thoughts on a 6-point antler restriction versus a shortened hunting season.
  o Depends on what the desired outcome is?
  o A 6-point season can work to maximize opportunity. If you want to grow big bulls, a 6-point season might not work.
  o The vulnerability issues and escapement issues are big issues when considering 6 pt seasons.
• Does a 6-point season require more monitoring by the department?
  o Basically no more monitoring involved than what is currently done.
  o Bull ratios should increase under a 6 pt regulation.
  o Probably won’t produce bigger bulls.
• Is there sufficient escapement in the Thorofare?
  o There are no roads, and no ATV’s which is a positive.
  o Hunter pressure may affect escapement as there is a lot of competition for bulls in the Thorofare.
    ▪ Bull ratios are much higher in Yellowstone National Park.
• What about vulnerability?
  o There’s an outfitter in every drainage, and the outfitters there are very good at hunting.
  o Vulnerability is high. There are probably not as many elk escaping as one would think.
• Migration to the Southfork drainage of the Shoshone River is primarily from Yellowstone National Park. Some years the migration gets hunted, some years it doesn’t.
• Will reducing elk harvest in the Thorofare result in or provide more elk in the Southfork drainage?
  o Not during the hunting season. The elk that are hunted during the Southfork seasons are already there.

**Public Comment:**
• Colby Gines
  o A lot of people’s livelihood will be affected by this group. Gines is already restricting his hunters to 6-point or better bulls, and there is no need for a shorter season.
  o The group needs to define what success is.
  o Gines stated there has not been a migration during the hunting season since 2007.
  o On the escapement issue, Gines feels that wolves and bears are better hunters than people are. There is plenty of escapement for elk if there is a 6-point season. The group should reach out to people who live in the Thorofare. They know what is going on there. Gines stated he lives there 3 months out of the year.
  o The group should consider an archery season.
  o By September 20, all cows have been bred by bulls. There is no loss of genetics in the herd.
Gines stated he does allow disabled hunters and youth hunters to harvest smaller bulls, but the rest of his hunters are restricted to 6-point or better.

- Lyn Madsen – Jackson Hole Outfitters
  - There is a lot of area within hunt are 60 that does not include the Thorofare. Some of the elk go south out of hunt area 60 to the Dunoir. Some go to the Gros Ventre.
  - On the issue of escapement, Madsen does not agree with Fagan.
  - Madsen’s hunters do take less than 6-point bulls. The older the elk get the smarter they get.
  - Madsen supports a 6-point season.
  - We all know what the problem is, and what has been dumped on us.
  - Madsen believes a lot of the elk are not getting hunted because of the access. He is seeing more bulls in the last few years.
  - Don’t underestimate the elk; they’ve adapted to wolves.
  - More data is needed. The flights in August this year were good. He hopes it keeps going.

- Ken Heinrich
  - Heinrich agreed with setting goals. The Clark’s Fork elk working group had goals.
  - Heinrich thanked the group for their participation in this process.

- Terry Dolan
  - Dolan stated there was a lot of speculation. Only people who have been there (in the Thorofare) know what’s going on.
  - Escapement is there. Not all of hunt area 60 is burnt (vulnerability).

**Next Meeting**
February 7, 2012 – 6:00-9:00pm – Cody Regional Office

**ACTION ITEM** – Each working group member is to create a list of goals to bring to the group.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:05pm