

# **Game Management Advisory Council (GMAC) Notes**

August 24, 2024

Washington Cattlemen's Association (WCA) Boardroom

1301 N. Dollarway Road  
Ellensburg, WA 98926

**Members Present:** Bill Essman, Jason Bolser, Rob McCoy, Mark Pidgeon, Dave Duncan, Bart George, James Horan.

**Staff Present:** Anis Aoude.

**Welcome and Introductions:** We dispensed with this item as everyone present knew each other.

## **Approval of Meeting Minutes:**

Motion by Bill Essman, Seconded by Mark Pidgeon to approve the minutes of the June 1, 2024, meeting as written. Motion passed.

## **Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Update and Discussion:**

Anis summarized the current situation as the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) reported a deer was discovered in NE Washington in January that tested positive for CWD. The Department implemented a CWD plan for containing the disease including 3 Game Management Units (GMU's) surrounding the area the deer was discovered. They are GMU's 124, 127, & 130. Hunters taking any deer shot in these areas must stop and report at check stations. Anis also said emergency rules just got filed and will be permanent in 120 days.

Additionally, the Department is considering rule making for prohibiting feeding and baiting deer in particular because concentrating these animals increases the opportunity for passing on CWD. Of concern is how this might affect emergency feeding of deer in winter months. It will be important for the Department to engage in public outreach, working with hunters directly and through the regulations brochure, working with the tribes, etc to contain any spread of the disease. CWD doesn't have a population effect as its not genetic but rather a disease. Most western states have had CWD for several years and in many cases is more prevalent in populated areas since that where deer become somewhat concentrated due to loss of historical habitat.

Most effective methods of prevention seem to be keeping carcasses from being shoved around the countryside (ie buried or burnt in place of a safe designate location), don't concentrate animals by feeding, don't use concentrated urine scents because it causes the animals to be attracted to a location.

The prevalence of CWD seems to be lower in elk suggesting they have a predetermined resistance to it.

Well organized groups like archers will likely be supportive of the Departments rules and guidelines regarding dealing with CWD. Representatives of different hunting methods on GMAC can help by informing their groups and contacts about the importance of understanding and getting support for preventing and controlling CWD.

**Elk Hoof Disease:**

It was pointed out that Elk Hoof Disease is not limited solely to Western Washington and so the GMAC would like an update on the status of the disease i.e. prevalence, location, etc.

**Game Management Plan (GMP) Update and Discussion:**

(Secretary's note: Rob McCoy reviewed a document he handed out summarizing comments by Council members solicited at our last meeting, titled "GMAC Comments on Game Management Plan Chapters: Small Game/Furbearer, Mule Deer, Moose, and Cougar" (attached by reference). Some of the discussions were general and some were specific to elements of the plan by chapter as follows):

General:

- Issues may be balance between predators and ungulates,
- Departments data may be way off since local observations by private parties (hunters, landowners, etc) not factored in,
- Cougar effect on livestock far exceeds any actual reporting,
- Kittitas County has more cats (cougars) than ever before resulting in forcing deer into town and farm buildings,
- Same is true on the west side of the Cascades,
- Department should remove restrictions on cougar hunting,
- Need predators on the landscape but controlled for balance,
- There is a lack of data to set animal population levels,
- General human population seems to lean toward non hunting/trapping as a legitimate method of taking animals,
- Department needs a nimble approach to manage more locally vs statewide ie by district or Game Management Unit,
- Decision making process is very slow,
- Need various options on how to have a greater influence on importance of hunting as part of successful game management,
- Perception is social issues have greater value than hunting,
- In some cases, there appears to be a philosophical difference between DFW Commissioners and the GMAC re methods of taking animals.

Specific:

- Predator prey chapters will be incorporated into each ungulate chapter,
- Small Game Chapter:
  - Spotted skunks are all over the state,
  - The Department feels the concerns have to do mostly with the Puget Sound trough area and Anis committed to changing the spotted skunk verbiage from implying that it was a specific concern to species requiring additional research in Puget Sound.
  - Language on this chapter needs to be updated,

- There is a lack of information, and the Department wants to learn more about prevalence, distribution, etc,
- Beaver relocation:
  - Not in the GMP, just an issue,
  - There is a strong advocacy in stopping trapping beaver in some places,
  - Yet they need to be removed because of property depredation (ie blocking waterways),
  - May want to move beaver into unclassified category,
- Mule Deer Chapter:
  - There is no distribution by age,
  - They are being replaced by white tail deer and elk,
- Moose Chapter:
  - Needs more discussion by GMAC,
  - Currently once in a lifetime opportunity – high bull to cow ratio,
  - No CWD evidenced so far,
  - Maybe a permit approach to redistribute hunters would work better vs general hunting.
- Cougar Chapter:
  - There is some thinking that there is more habitat now but that’s not necessarily the case ex never had cougars in some places 30 years ago whereas they are prevalent now,
  - Never used to see cougars but see them all the time now,

**Membership Strategy Discussion:**

The Council listed the following organizations and methods of hunting that Anis should focus on recruiting:

- Archers,
- Muzzleloaders,
- Trappers,
- Cattlemen,
- Hunter Heritage Council,
- Mule Deer Foundation,
- Rocky Mtn Elk Foundation,
- WA State Farm Bureau?
- Upland bird hunters,
- Back country hunters and anglers,
- WA Conservation Coalition,
- Sportsman’s groups,
- Tribes?
- Inland Northwest Wildlife Council
- Northeast Washington Wildlife Group

**GMAC Letterhead:**

Anis showed the draft letterhead developed by Jake Weise and it was accepted as shown.

**Action Items:**

- Anis to begin GMAC recruitment process,
- James will get draft minutes to all GMAC,
- GMAC encouraged to read and comment to Jake, Rob, and Anis,
- Anis, Jake, Rob to finalize,
- Anis to follow internal process for review and publish on Department website.

**Future Agenda Items:**

- Elk hoof disease update,
- Moose chapter update,
- Membership status,
- Legislative issues,
- GMP update,
- R3 recruitment, retention, re-engagement presentation (history, status, plans, budget, who responsible staff, etc),
- Points and sequence draw system presentation,
- Sharecroppers vs CRP,
- Moose biology presentation,
- CWD update,

**Future Meeting dates:**

- December 7, 2024
- March 1, 2025
- June 7, 2025

**Adjourn:**

- The meeting adjourned at 2:15 pm.