

Summary

Game Management Unit 23 User Conflicts Meeting USFWS Building, Kotzebue May 11, 2007

Members present: LeeAnne Ayres (USFWS), Colin Brown (BGCSB), Jim Dau (ADF&G), Mike Fleagle (FSB), Kim Franklin (NAB), George Helfrich (NPS), Shelly Jacobson (BLM), Victor Karmun (Kotzebue Sound Fish & Game Advisory Committee and the RAC), Steve Machida (ADF&G), Caleb Pungowiyi (Maniilaq), Walter Sampson (NANA), Pete Schaeffer (Kotzebue Sound Fish & Game Advisory Committee), Ron Somerville (BOG), Alex Whiting (KIRA/NVOK)

Observers: Helen Clough (USF&WS), Roger Delaney (BLM), Adrienne Lindholm (NPS), Homer Wells (NWAB)

Others: Teri Arnold (facilitator), Cindi Jacobson (ADF&G), Marian Snively (ADF&G)

Invited but unable to attend: Roy Ashenfelter (Vice Chair, WACHWG), Chris Milles (DNR, Fairbanks), Ted Spraker (BOG, BGCSB), Raymond Stoney (Chair, WACHWG)

Meeting purpose: to (1) provide an overview of stakeholder input regarding user conflicts in Game Management Unit (GMU) 23; (2) discuss the pros and cons of implementing a planning process to address issues in the area; (3) decide whether or not to make a recommendation to ADF&G to spearhead a planning process; and (4) if a planning process is desired, to achieve agreement on the general parameters and funding mechanism for such a process.

Welcome, agenda, and opening remarks

Teri welcomed the group, and participants introduced themselves. Teri went over the agenda and ground rules, and she discussed how decisions would be made by the group.

Steve thanked everyone for attending the meeting and followed with a brief background of some of the issues and concerns in GMU 23. He noted that the user conflict issue is the most significant wildlife management problem in GMU 23, and it surfaces at all Board of Game (BOG), Big Game Commercial Services Board (BGCSB), and advisory committee (AC) meetings. Steve said that ADF&G is committed to addressing the problem but not necessary to a specific tool to do so. He stressed that because of the complexity of land ownership and management authority, it was imperative that all of the governmental agencies and NANA work together, as well as with the local community and non-local users of the area, to develop workable solutions.

Steve noted that although a public planning process may be an effective vehicle for dealing with the issues, it is not the only way. He stressed that ADF&G's goal for the

meeting was to facilitate discussion and agreement regarding the best possible way forward. He also noted that the specific decision that ADF&G was asking the group was for a recommendation to ADF&G on whether or not to go forward with a planning process. Each participant would have to go back to their respective agencies and groups to assess their level of support for whatever the group decides.

Overview of stakeholder interviews

Cindi presented the results of her interviews with 68 stakeholders. Interviewees included village residents, guides, hunters, local opinion leaders, transporters, local governmental representatives, and state and federal agency employees. See Appendix A for a summary and recommendations based on the interviews. A report will be sent to meeting attendees and other interested people this summer.

Discussion

Teri gave some background on the planning process and led a discussion of what makes a public process successful.

The group discussed issues and concerns (see Appendix B) regarding GMU 23 and the need to work together on ways to address problems. Participants agreed that the timing was right for a cooperative effort, particularly because the federal agencies are interested in obtaining public input to facilitate their respective, future planning processes. The group discussed the merits of the various types of planning approaches (i.e., ranging from a full-blown comprehensive public process to a smaller scale, focused effort) available to address issues in Unit 23. Mike stressed that participation of all interests was key to coming up with solutions. Walter said that it was important that the public is engaged in a meaningful way in any process that was used. Roger noted that it was imperative that DNR, a major landowner, is involved.

Ron suggested that sophisticated time and area zoning concepts might, if coordinated, provide for maximum use by the general public and provide reasonable opportunity for local subsistence users to get their caribou. Mike suggested that the working group model would likely be a good approach, and the group agreed. The general design would consist of the following elements:

- A group comprised of agency representatives/decision makers/opinion leaders, likely the participants at the meeting (including those who were unable to attend) and a few more people to represent missing interests (e.g., a DNR representative).
- The geographic scope would be broad (GMU 23), but the charge would be narrow (see below).
- The group would have a sunset date of two to three years post the first meeting date.
- The group would agree on ways to gain input from the public.

The following purpose and objectives were agreed to conceptually:

Purpose: to minimize user conflicts resulting from increasing numbers of hunters in GMU23.

Objectives:

- Determine the social carrying capacity for areas in which user conflicts exist within GMU23
- Minimize the detrimental impacts to natural resources
- Maximize the benefits to the public, where possible
- Protect the way of life and the cultural values of the local people
- Ensure the quality of experience for hunters
- Ensure equality among commercial service operators

Consensus agreement:¹ Participants will take the idea of a working group, including conceptual purpose and objectives, to their respective agencies and groups to assess necessary support.

Funding: Although no specific commitments were made regarding funding (we ran out of time), the USFWS, USNPS, and NWAB indicated that they were interested and likely would be able to contribute to the cost associated with running the working group. The federal agencies stressed the importance of getting MOUs in place as soon as possible in order to guarantee funding.

Timing: It will take time to lay the groundwork (agreements, funding, membership, facilitator, etc.) for the working group. That, in addition to the difficulties with scheduling meetings during summer, fall, and the holidays, makes it difficult to start actual meetings prior to January, 2008. Perhaps, an organizational meeting to agree on a charter and specific objectives could occur prior (maybe late fall), but this will depend on factors such as the ability of agencies to obtain funding, schedules, etc.

Next steps: Each member of the group was charged with going back to their respective agencies and groups and assessing buy-in for the working group idea. ADF&G will take the lead in coordinating communication among attendees and making sure that, if there is support for the working group concept, that the idea would go forward in a timely but realistic fashion.

¹ Walter had to leave before the meeting was over so was not able to participate in this decision.

Appendix A

Summary and recommendations based on stakeholder interviews

Summary

- Considerable deep-rooted concerns exist.
- Concerns broad in nature and degree.
- Many issues are values versus interest-oriented.
- All interviewees identified concerns, but the desire to address concerns is not universal.
- Some areas of potential agreement, but expectations must be reasonable.
- Distrust of agencies among some stakeholders.
- Buy-in from decision makers and opinion leaders critical.

Recommendations

- Convene a planning group comprised of agencies/governments (tribal, local, state, and federal), decision makers (BOG, BGCSB, FSB, etc.), and local opinion leaders (advisory committee members, etc.).
- Use the interview data as a starting point for discussion.
- Assess agreement on whether (or not) a public process is desirable.
- If a public process is desirable, agree on general parameters of the process (e.g., timing, scope).
- Agree on a general plan for obtaining funding.
- Planning group involved throughout process.

Appendix B
Issues and concerns identified by meeting attendees

- Mulchatna herd is crashing and causing the displacement of hunters who are looking for new territory.
- More permits are being written for mining compared to past years, so increased activity may cause more user conflicts.
- Different interest groups may define the problems in different ways and not all will be on the same page.
- There are many different landowners with different plans presently being developed.
- Need to regulate transporters.
- The periodic influx of transporters decreases the quality of life of the local people.
- Need to provide economic relief to villages and communities.
- Local people have to rely more on traditional gathering of animals and other resources for their livelihood and they need to have continuous access to these resources.
- Need for the public to know how a planning process will affect them.
- Need for realizing the problems directly from a public perspective as opposed to indirectly (i.e., through agencies and organizations). A public process is needed since planning without public input has gone on for too long.
- Need to increase the level of trust of the public toward the state and federal agencies.
- Equity may be a problem.
- Need for local preference since it is expensive to live here (Kotzebue and surrounding villages).
- The possibility of displacing hunters to other areas of the state if too many restrictions in GMU23.
- The competition for resources is a definite problem at certain times of the year.

- The local perspective is that they are in a win (others)/lose (locals) situation and must cut off some of their losses. If the situation shifts to be more balanced, i.e., more win on the local side, then participation in a planning group would be more likely.
- This is a geo-political situation.
- There is a problem with the way the federal system is set up. It does not represent people the way it used to. State employees are now migrating into the federal process.
- Wanton waste of meat.
- Need for regulating transporters as is done with guides.
- The timing and location of transporter activity is part of the problem.
- People are waiting in the caribou migratory path which disrupts the herd, causing a change in the expected herd crossing location.
- Individual groups or agencies are limited in scope of their jurisdiction, and joining with other groups or agencies would be helpful.
- DNR is a major landowner and needs to be represented.
- People have different tolerance levels for crowding and those with the most tolerance will win.
- People who live in Unit 23 feel the area has met it's social carrying capacity. People who live elsewhere but hunt in Unit 23 feel the same. The numbers of people are too high. The limiting factor is the access points and space.
- Is this a people management problem or resource management problem?
- Unit 23 is running out of real estate.
- There is a lot of trash in the area especially toilet tissue found in trees and on the tundra.
- Sometimes the problems are perceived versus real.
- There is a fear of top-down dictation.
- Need for hunters to have a quality experience.