

**Montana Department
of
Fish, Wildlife & Parks**



1420 East Sixth Avenue
Helena, MT 59620
June 5, 1990

Mr. Jack Connelly
Idaho Chapter The Wildlife Society
1035 Surrey
Blackfoot, ID 83221

Dear Mr. Connelly:

We are forwarding to you a copy of the minutes of the recent RMP trumpeter swan working group meeting in Boise, ID. Please review this information and if you have any questions call Gary Will or myself (406/444-2612).

It was also the recommendation of the group that Gary meet with you to discuss the status of these on-going activities and your concerns with RMP trumpeter swan management. I spoke with Gary yesterday and he indicated that you had met and discussed these topics.

The final recommendation of the group was to extend an invitation to the ICTWS to attend the July subcommittee meeting in Reno and any future working group meetings that are scheduled. If you are interested in attending the Reno meeting you should contact Gary for specific details and likewise consider making a short presentation to the subcommittee relative to your group's position concerning the petition.

Sincerely,

Jeff Herbert
Statewide Waterfowl Coordinator
Wildlife Division

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**Montana Department
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Fish, Wildlife & Parks**



TO: RMP Trumpeter Swan Subcommittee & Working Group
FROM: Jeff Herbert *JH*
SUBJECT: Minutes From Boise Meeting, May 8, 1990

I. STATUS REPORTS

Winter Monitoring: RRLNWR experienced mild conditions during the 1989-90 winter period. Trumpeter swan numbers were generally stable until late winter when an influx of 500+ swans occurred. The refuge fed their 2000 bushel capacity of grain with the influx of swans from Harriman. A total of 2007 trumpeters were observed during the cooperative survey. Chuck Peck indicated that the Service had agreed to monitor swans outside the R.R.L. coverage including the translocated birds. His office has also picked up the expanded winter range habitat inventory. Mike Fisher explained that the emphasis had been on Harriman Park during this past winter and that their efforts had concentrated on the physical conditions, counts (more than 700 trumpeters on several occasions) and collar observations. Projected surveys next winter at Harriman will include bi-weekly coverage there with other areas to be covered on a monthly basis.

Ruth Gale indicated that trumpeters were atypically distributed this winter under the mild conditions that generally prevailed. Approximately 1100 trumpeters were concentrated at Harriman and Red Rock Lakes. During the mid-December to mid-March period water releases from Island Park Dam averaged 300 cfs. These flows, in combination with the mild temperatures and sunny days, kept the river open. Water depths appeared to be quite shallow. By late February the waterfowl concentrated at Harriman had consumed a majority of the aquatic vegetation available at the site. Approximately 500 swans then moved to RRL and 200 switched to Silver and Golden Lakes near Harriman.

Observations indicate that 300 cfs may be insufficient to maintain open water areas during severe weather periods, that concentrations of 700 swans at Harriman exceed the aquatic forage capacity, that vegetation productivity may be reduced due to septic tank improvements and that R.R.L. winter feeding capacities are not sufficient to handle a large influx of additional trumpeters.

EXPANSION EFFORTS: RRLNWR provided a summary of range expansion efforts to date. Release sites have included Salt River, Wyoming, Grays Lake NWR, Idaho and Fort Hall Indian Reservation, Idaho. Translocations to date have included 61 swans (not including

flightless adults) with the following results: 29 alive (48%), 19 dead (31%) and 13 unaccounted for (21%). Some migration traditions appear to have been established between Grays Lake and Salt River and between Grays Lake, Fish Springs Utah and RRL. Emphasis needs to be directed to Ft. Hall to solve those problems encountered to date.

CANADIAN EFFORTS: Len Shandruk summarized activities related to trumpeter swan management of the Interior Canada subpopulation. He discussed NWT banding efforts, production surveys, Elk Island National Park re-introduction efforts, Grande Prairie breeding and production surveys, and the Prairie Conservation Action Plan.

EXPANDED WINTER RANGE INVENTORY: Ruth Gale summarized areas of emphasis: Location of potential winter habitat was initially focused on SE Idaho and SW Wyoming. SE Idaho potential is thought to be low except for development as staging areas for points further south. The Fort Hall/American Falls Reservoir complex will be inventoried this summer to determine its potential capacity. Recommendations will be forwarded to Council by 1991. Short term goals need to define where we'd like to see trumpeters wintering and where the trumpeters would like to be wintering. Long term goals need to address winter range expansion to the south. John Cornely indicated that two challenge grants are currently available.

WATER NEGOTIATIONS: Signe Sather-Blair (USFWS) and Max Vandenburg (BOR) discussed the status of the negotiations. The Bureau of Reclamation took the lead in the negotiations with the hydroproducers and the irrigators. BOR will continue these efforts and hopes to have a product by the end of the summer. BOR has requested that the FWS concurrently pursue range expansion efforts. The FWS will also pursue the establishment of a trust fund for water purchases on both the Henry's and South Fork. Senator McClure may be instrumental in sponsoring this legislation. Surplus water must be available in the water bank storage and the power entities would buy water from the bank for winter releases. Under this scenario approximately 120,000 acre feet over a 120 day period would be required to supplement the Henry's Fork and 50,000 acre feet would be needed for the North Fork. This would necessitate being able to exchange water between the two systems and BOR stated that this is possible. The State Water Board would have to agree to the proposals.

Water conservation measures have reduced diversion rates by about 1 million acre feet since 1977. Vandenburg stressed that we as a group need to ask for the help of the water users in resolving this situation and not demand it.

ICING MODEL: Jeff Snyder provided a summary of his two year study at Harriman and reported he will have a working model for the Henry's Fork at Harriman by this winter. Two goals of his study were to answer the questions of 1) can a program be developed that will predict how the ice will break up and 2) can we predict how

various flows will impact different sections of the river? He feels the answer to the first is yes and in regards to the second, a set of recommendations will be developed soon.

The following observations were passed along to the group:

- There was a significant increase in the number of trumpeters present during the two winters.
- The swans preferred four or five different sections of the river.
- Significant differences were noted in the macrophytes between winters. During the winter of 1988/89 100% of the feeding areas were frozen and the spring fed areas that remained open were dominated by Myriophyllum. The feeding areas contain about 95% of the vegetative cover. These areas were open during the 1989/90 winter.
- It is more important to keep areas open during the winter period than to permit freezing and then pulsing flows to open them up.
- 300 cfs release from Island Park Dam will probably not maintain open water areas under more severe conditions. A release of 500 cfs would be considered optimum.

Jeff also submitted a proposal for winter trapping swans at Harriman. This proposal will be incorporated into the proposed management efforts being developed for Harriman next winter.

II. WORK PLANS 1990

TRANSLOCATION AND WINTER RANGE EXPANSION: RRLNWR could provide up to 30 subadults for transplants to Gray's Lake and Ft. Hall. A number of these swans should be radio-marked and the Idaho Ducks Unlimited Chapter is willing to provide funds for the radio packages. The FWS (C. Peck) indicated that costs associated with monitoring the birds are available.

Additional subadults may be available from the Grand Prairie flock according to Len Shandruk and he could provide an additional 10 radio packages. Shandruk and Gomez will work on the necessary permits. Up to 30 swans would be available and would mean that a total of 30 subadults could potentially be translocated to each of the two transplant sites. Additional efforts will be needed to monitor the water situation at Grays Lake NWR (Fisher) and the suitability of the Ft. Hall site (Christopherson and Gale).

Idaho (Will) will check into the use of the department's vet to conduct a fecal analysis for parasites with possible medication prior to release.

HARRIMAN PARK MANAGEMENT EFFORTS: A three pronged approach to the upcoming winter period was agreed to by the working group. This includes 1) an early season hazing program to push migrants on through, 2) initiation of a winter trapping program in order to refine techniques and move up to 100 swans, and 3) development of a proactive information program. A subcommittee of C. Peck, D. Gomez, G. Eyraud, D. Lockman and J. Snyder was directed to develop

a plan anticipating manpower needs, operational costs and schedules for these efforts. This is to be accomplished by July 1 and will be presented at the July meeting of the Pacific Flyway Study Committee.

Other considerations need to include potential impacts to existing Tundra swan or white goose hunt zones, documentation of the occurrence of trumpeters in these areas, and development of a consistent Federal/State enforcement policy concerning the expansion program and movements of trumpeters into existing swan hunt zones.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:

Both RRLNWR and SEIC are to be commended for their efforts in providing the periodic newsletter updating the committee on program activities.

A recommendation was passed to forward the proceedings of the meeting to the Idaho Chapter of the Wildlife Society, to meet with the Chapter and discuss the impacts of the petition to list, and to invite Chapter representatives to the July meetings.