

10 September 2020

Governor Steve Bullock
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 200801
Helena, MT 59620-0801

Director Martha Williams
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East Sixth Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Ms. Heather Stokes & Mr. Shawn Johnson
Center for Natural Resources & Environmental Policy
32 Campus Drive
University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812

Dear Governor Bullock, Director Williams, Ms. Stokes, and Mr. Johnson:

This letter outlines some grave concerns I have about the recently adjourned Grizzly Bear Advisory Council (GBAC) arising from how the Council was created, facilitated, and informed by science. Given the nature of this communication, it is probably essential that I offer some personal background before I get into the details of my concerns—especially as it relates to my credentials for appraising performance of the GBAC.

My Background

My over 40 years of research have focused not only on policy, but also the ecology of large carnivores—notably grizzly bears in the Yellowstone Ecosystem and mountain lions in the Southwest. My grizzly bear-focused research led me to reside since 1979 mostly in southwestern Montana, to which I relocated from northern Idaho and, before that, from western South Dakota where I grew up as part of families descended from homesteading ranchers and farmers.

My experiences teaching, appraising, and practicing natural resources policy go back to 1990 when I first started leading seminars at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, now Yale School of the Environment. Between 2006 and 2014 I was Lecturer and Senior Visiting Scientist at the School, with a 2-year interlude as a Visiting Scholar at MIT's Department of Urban Studies & Planning. Between 2008 and 2013 I was also Western Field Director of the MIT-USGS Science Impact Collaborative. My focus throughout has been on relations between science and policy.

Of perhaps parenthetical interest, I count among my colleagues, friends, and sometimes collaborators Bill Ascher (Claremont-McKenna College), Bill Burch (emeritus Yale University), Steve Brown (emeritus, Kent State University), Ron Brunner (emeritus University of Colorado), Susan Clark (Yale University), Herman Karl (emeritus MIT & USGS), Amanda Lynch (Brown University), Toddi Steelman (Duke University), and Larry Susskind (MIT-Harvard). All of these individuals are highly respected scholars in the field of natural resources policy and

governance who have shaped my perspective on public policy. My work with these academics and practitioners included an appraisal of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program, Adaptive Management Working Group, well as workshops designed to help participants in contentious issues find common ground (for example, Mattson et al. 2006 “Finding common ground in large carnivore conservation: Mapping contending perspectives.” *Environmental Science & Policy*, 9, 392-405).

My Concerns

I am concerned about how the GBAC was constituted and implemented. I am alarmed at the extent to which information used in this process was politicized and degraded, not only because of the Council’s design, but also because of short-comings in facilitation. Evidence for this can be found not only in video recordings of proceedings and materials produced by the Council, but also in communications among and between facilitators, council members, and representatives of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks (FWP).

The objective basis for this critique arises from comparing the constitution and implementation of the GBAC to well-accepted standards for judging the quality of collaborative processes convened to build common ground as a basis for, turn, developing widely-accepted solutions to shared problems. As you perhaps know, these standards minimally include: (1) meaningful representation of the spectrum of public interests; (2) transparent criteria for selection of participants; (3) independence of the process, itself, from the partisan interests of conveners; (3) independence of facilitators from the special interests of either conveners or a subset of participants; (4) provisioning and co-creation of information in ways maximizing odds that participants develop a shared view of how the relevant world works; and (5) transparent, mutually agreed-upon, and rigorously implemented standards for deliberations.

Without going into exhaustive detail, the GBAC failed on all of these counts. The selection process was opaque. The resulting composition was clearly weighted towards the interests of extraction industries, ranchers, and hunters—out of proportion to their representation in the broader population of Montana. Some interests, notably rooted in the new economies of technology and ecotourism, were not represented at all, even accounting for the single representative of traditional ranch-based outfitting. FWP conveners dictated the agenda, either directly or through the charter created by the Governor’s Office. Facilitation was also seemingly done to advance partisan interests. And implementation of decision-making was disturbingly vagarious.

Sources of information from outside FWP were, moreover, deliberately and systematically excluded from authoritative deliberations, often in ways that inflamed rather than ameliorated divides. Instead, a cumbersome system organized around “public comments” was constructed, without any clear indications of how, whether, and to what extent these comments were introduced into deliberations. In the end, the role of science, information, and proof were polarized and politicized as much due to failings of facilitation as to design of the process.

But, importantly, all of these failings were rooted in what was clearly the promotion of a partisan agenda manifest in patterns of authoritative bias in all aspects and at all stages of the process.

From what I witnessed, the GBAC was in no small measure constituted and run to promote the removal of Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections, followed by institution of a grizzly bear hunt, and this despite what was stated in the GBAC Charter. This imbedded bias resulted in a focus during much of the proceedings on two of the most contentious and divisive issues in grizzly bear management—which, in itself, defeated the ostensible purposes of a collaborative problem-solving process. FWP officials repeatedly advocated the virtues of—even

need for—grizzly bear hunting during Council proceedings. They worked assiduously behind the scenes with pro-hunting advocates on the Council to develop pro-hunting arguments. FWP officials further served partisan purposes by selectively providing the Council with information about the ecology and management of bears in ways overtly designed to make the presumed virtues of hunting inescapable. And all of this was largely uncontested by facilitation.

These are highly problematic failings for several important reasons. For one, the potential benefit of science to society was subverted. For another, the legitimacy of collaborative processes was undermined. Last but not least, facilitators and government officials failed in their responsibilities to the public trust.

I welcome any interest you may have in working to remedy these problems, either in the immediate aftermath of the GBAC or in the design of future collaborative processes.

Respectfully and out of concern for our democratic society,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David J. Mattson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "D".

David J. Mattson, Ph.D.
Livingston, Montana