
CHAPTER 2

Stakeholder Concerns About the Value of PLPW Are Not Fully Addressed By Current Information Reporting

Program information should be organized so it informs stakeholders.

To date, the Private Lands Public Wildlife Access Program (PLPW) has not reported its progress in terms of the stated objectives, or in terms that are relevant to stakeholders' expectations. As a consequence, we found incomplete support for PLPW among its constituent groups, and this may have implications for its funding and long-term viability. PLPW has access to extensive information through its own recruitment and enrollment processes, as well as information generated by WG&F and other programs and agencies. However, this information needs to be organized and reported so it can easily be used in decision-making and so it informs stakeholders of PLPW's accomplishments.

PLPW Needs to Report Program Progress In Terms of Its Stated Objectives

Reported information shows little about PLPW's progress towards enhancing access.

As required by W.S. 23-1-501(e), PLPW reports annually the total number of access acres contracted for and the costs of leases. However, this means of reporting progress does not demonstrate the extent to which the program is meeting its goals of maintaining and enhancing public access and habitat. Summary level information such as this is unlikely to satisfy stakeholder questions about program performance.

In 2002, the fourth full year of operations, PLPW reports it leased hunting and fishing access on 978,321 acres of land, 275.4 lake acres, and 97.4 stream miles. While these appear to be relatively large numbers, accounting for 3.6 percent of private lands and 2.9 percent of land in agricultural use, the numbers do not provide information specific to the program's goal of opening up additional access for sportsmen.

Thus, a basic question about PLPW remains unanswered: Does this amount of acreage provide more, less, or the same access to

How much access to landlocked public land does the program provide?

state wildlife than existed before PLPW began? This measure does not, for example, reveal how much access to public lands has been opened up that was previously landlocked by private owners — one of the concerns that provided the initial impetus for developing the program. Nor does it indicate PLPW’s progress in maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitat on private lands.

PLPW affects a variety of stakeholders with a wide range of interests, each having a particular set of expectations for the program. Table 2 provides an example of one PLPW program goal and numerous stakeholders identified in our research. It illustrates that many, including some who are traditionally considered adversaries, share common ground such as an underlying interest in maintaining the health of Wyoming wildlife.

Table 2.
One of PLPW’s Objectives and Its Stakeholders

Individual stakeholders have distinct information needs.

Objective	Stakeholders
To maintain and enhance wildlife on public and private land	WG&F administrators Wildlife populations Wyoming citizens Landowners WG&F staff Sportsmen Conservationists PLPW staff

Source: WG&F literature and staff interviews

Even so, each stakeholder requires a different set of information to be satisfied that the program benefits their particular interest. To convince stakeholders of the program’s value, progress needs to be reported in terms relevant to each group. No single measurement can address all their concerns or convince program skeptics that the program is producing the desired outcomes.

Without Solid Support, Program Funding and Viability May Be Jeopardized

While the program is popular, support is not unqualified.

Stakeholder buy-in and program support are closely related, but we found support for the program is less than complete among the groups we interviewed. A similar theme emerged from WG&F's own customer satisfaction surveys for PLPW. In the long term, a lack of support could threaten program funding, diminish the program's contributions to the overall WG&F mission, and threaten PLPW's viability.

Financially, PLPW relies on donations from sportsmen and on Commission backing.

Hunters and anglers. Although resident hunters and anglers originally proposed the AccessYes funding mechanism, they provide only a small portion of the donations. For FY '02, WG&F reported total donations to AccessYes of \$132,617, of which \$106,816 was raised through mail-in donations.¹

According to 2002 data, only 9 percent of resident sportsmen made donations to the program through application and license check-offs. On average each donated \$3.48, for a total of \$34,729. By contrast, non-resident hunters and anglers donated \$72,087 or 66 percent of the revenues generated through mail-in. Non-residents contributed, on average, \$5.92 each. Thus, resident sportsmen have not demonstrated the same willingness to donate through AccessYes as non-residents, although the reasons for this reluctance are not clear.

Game and Fish Commission. The Commission's ongoing support, including budget approval, is essential to the continuation of PLPW. Administrative expenses, including all costs other than payments to landowners for access easements, are covered by licensing revenues. In 2001, administration amounted to 54 percent of budgeted program costs. Despite the importance of Commission support, in interviews with selected current and former Commission members, we did not find a shared understanding of the program's primary goals or of its long-term potential contribution to the WG&F mission.

¹ The remaining donations, accounting for 20 percent of the total, were made through license agents. Since over-the-counter donations are not tracked according to residency, we could not determine a residential differential for this portion of the funds.

Game and Fish staff. Staff support for PLPW ranged from absolute commitment to, in some cases, severe criticism. PLPW program operations depend on contributions from field biologists, game wardens, regional supervisors, and administrators. In this context of interdependence, if consistent backing from personnel at all levels of the agency is lacking, PLPW staff may not receive the level of cooperation necessary to achieve program objectives.

Operationally, PLPW relies on staff involvement and landowner participation.

Landowners. With half of Wyoming's land in private ownership, the support and cooperation of private landowners is essential to PLPW success. Many landowners have enrolled and are re-enrolling in the program, and WG&F claims PLPW is an effective tool in building better relations with these stakeholders. Nevertheless, PLPW can have limited effects even under the best of circumstances. It was designed to appeal to landowners who already support WG&F objectives, and who are willing to allow hunters and anglers on their land in exchange for a relatively small amount of money. Whether there is an additional pool of landowners willing to enroll under these conditions is one of the factors on which PLPW's continued growth will depend. With changing land ownership patterns in the state, such as the loss of agricultural land to low-density development, it is not certain that this potential exists.

More Detailed Information Is Needed to Verify Assumptions About PLPW Performance

Data addressing specific concerns is not available.

Good information helps clarify program goals and priorities, and can serve to dispel misconceptions held by some stakeholders. We heard concerns for which we found no corresponding data, such as whether the program is paying for land that was already accessible, or whether the quality of lands enrolled meets a defined standard. In addition, we identified a number of underlying assumptions about PLPW that existing data, in its current forms, neither supports nor refutes. These assumptions include:

- Participating landowners will enroll more acreage and more species as they become comfortable with the program.

Determining the validity of program assumptions may help staff develop and fine-tune procedures.

- Adjacent landowners will enroll once they see the benefit to their neighbors.
- Participants re-enroll for longer periods.
- This program is an entrée into better landowner relationships and will lead to participation in and support for other WG&F habitat enhancement programs.

Tracking information related to these concerns and assumptions will allow staff to evaluate their validity and then adjust procedures as necessary. For example, we reviewed primary data from 1999 for the Hunter Management Program throughout the state and for walk-in areas in a sample county, Goshen County. Our analysis supports the possibility that the first three assumptions may be accurate, but we were unable to find data related to the fourth assumption.

Government Programs Need to Be Accountable to the Public

Stakeholders want proof that PLPW is doing what it is intended to.

A public agency should be able to demonstrate that a program is meeting its goals in terms that are relevant to citizens affected by the program. A basic level of accountability requires that PLPW demonstrate the extent to which it is meeting its goals: maintaining and enhancing public access to wildlife, and maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitat on private lands. Further, PLPW needs to report information that will allow policy makers, staff, and stakeholders to make informed decisions about the program's value.

Additional Information Is Available to PLPW

PLPW has access to a wide range of information obtained through its own recruitment and enrollment processes. It also has access to information generated by other WG&F programs, by federal, state, and local agencies, and by private foundations.

However, this information has not as yet been organized or coordinated to answer core questions about the program.

Other WG&F programs produce information suggesting PLPW contributions.

Data tracked in 2002 is more comprehensive than in previous years, and staff is in the process of converting to a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping system that will compute the private and public acres opened through enrollment

Numerous WG&F programs generate information of value to PLPW, which combined with external sources of data, can provide a powerful tool for measuring program performance. The accompanying box provides examples of other types and sources of information that can answer stakeholder questions.

Other Game and Fish Information Sources

- Herd Unit reports
- Harvest reports
- Fiscal Division's cost accounting data system
- Warden logs
- Damage claims data
- HMA permit application data
- Landowner coupon payment data
- Checkpoint data, including HMA exclusion lists
- Regional lists of private landowners who allow hunting
- Customer satisfaction surveys

Recommendation: PLPW should expand and improve its reporting of program performance.

At this early point in the program's history, PLPW appears to be popular and promising. In order to demonstrate its real value to the various constituencies that are key to its continued success, PLPW needs to build a reporting system that includes:

- Attention to concerns for each of the program's stakeholder groups
- Outcome measures that address those concerns
- Information collected from internal and external sources
- A means of coordinating and disseminating the information

***Clearly showing how
PLPW contributes
may build
program support.***

Reporting systems that enable WG&F to engage supporters and critics alike in an effort to build support can benefit the program and, ultimately, WG&F overall. The Legislature needs assurance that AccessYes donations are used for the intended purpose, and the Commission needs evidence that PLPW benefits justify the expense. Whether or not they hunt, citizens benefit from wildlife, both in terms of tourist dollars brought in and, less tangibly, wildlife's aesthetic contribution to the state's quality of life. Continued support for PLPW depends on making clear its contributions to those interests.

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