



Wyoming Legislative Service Office

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wyoming Game & Fish Department: Private Lands Public Wildlife Access Program

Program Evaluation Division

December 2002

Purpose

The Management Audit Committee directed staff to undertake a review of the Game & Fish Department's Private Lands Public Wildlife Access program (PLPW). The Committee requested basic information explaining PLPW objectives and progress, and an analysis of operational and policy challenges faced by the Game and Fish Department (WG&F) in managing the program.

Background

The Game and Fish Commission developed PLPW to enhance public access to wildlife, and to maintain and enhance wildlife habitat on private lands. Its four component programs, Walk-in Area, Hunter Management, AccessYes, and Habitat Enhancement (a pilot program), engage important WG&F constituents: sportsmen and landowners.

In exchange for allowing hunters and anglers access to their land, participating landowners receive modest financial or in-kind compensation. As of November 2002, PLPW had enrolled nearly one million acres of land for hunting access, and hundreds of lake acres and stream miles for fishing access. These areas are found in 22 of Wyoming's 23 counties.

In FY '02, the cost of operating the program was nearly \$970,000. One-third of PLPW expenditures were covered by a dedicated

portion of Conservation Stamp proceeds, direct donations, and interest earnings. The WG&F operating fund supplied the bulk of funding for PLPW, \$656,515.

Results in Brief

PLPW became a permanent program in July 2001. Because staff is still defining program scope, direction, and procedures, extensive evaluation at this time would be premature. However, our review suggests two areas in need of attention at this early stage. We found that WG&F needs to improve its information tracking and reporting systems to address stakeholder concerns about the value of PLPW. Also, the long-term success of PLPW may be affected by the lack of statewide consensus or policy with regard to the value of wildlife resources. We suggest collaborative efforts to build consensus.

Principal Findings

PLPW is not currently reporting results in ways that clearly inform stakeholders of progress towards program goals. Good reporting of program information can demonstrate success to stakeholders and policy makers. We recommend that PLPW expand and improve its reporting of program performance.

In Wyoming, where over fifty percent of wildlife habitat is on private lands, deeply-held values regarding the rights of private land ownership can conflict with values regarding public ownership of wildlife.

These issues extend far beyond the scope of the PLPW program, but this review can serve as an impetus to begin developing statewide accord. We recommend that the Commission request the Institute for Environment and Natural Resources (IENR) at the University of Wyoming to bring together the diverse groups and interests surrounding wildlife issues.

Agency Comments

WG&F agrees with the report's recommendation that PLPW should expand and improve its reporting of program performance. They note they are in the process of developing the first PLPW annual report. WG&F partially agrees with the report's recommendation that the Commission request IENR to bring together the diverse groups and interests surrounding wildlife issues. Instead, WG&F suggests working with IENR on a case-by-case basis as IENR's abilities and resources allow.

Copies of the full report are available from the Wyoming Legislative Service Office. If you would like to receive the full report, please fill out the enclosed response card or phone 307-777-7881. The report is also available on the Wyoming Legislature's website a legisweb.state.wy.us