

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
AGENCIES II SUBCOMMITTEE

January 25, 1979
8:15 A.M.
Room 343
State Capitol Building

Subject: Fish and Game
Hearing

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Rex Manuel. All members were present. Also present were Bob Robinson, LFA; Mike Koehnke, OBPP; John Wilson, Montana Council of Trout Unlimited and from the Fish and Game: Robert F. Wambach, Fletcher E. Newby, Art Whitney, Orville W. Lewis, Don L. Brown, Irwin Kent, Gene Allen, Ron Holliday, Larry Putnam and Tom Rippengale.

Enforcement

The department was asked to explain the additional FTE requested in the ex-officio warden program. The department felt that this was an important program and requested the addition. They are considering expanding the program into the fish and recreation programs. This would provide even further assistance during the peak seasons and make it possible to open more areas for recreation. The program has been rewarding and the department hopes to continue it, with the assistance of the additional FTE.

The department felt this should be an ongoing program, geared toward extending this effort into other programs. It was explained that this FTE was to be spread through the various programs.

There is also an effort to reciprocate by training the wardens in wild-life duties. The department feels that having everyone know each other's job, the department will benefit.

The original request by the department was for 2 FTE. The Executive recommended the addition of 1 FTE. The ex-officio program was strongly supported by both the Executive and the LFA.

Warden Retirement Fund

Currently, the Fish and Game employees are contributing 7% to the fund, and the state is contributing 11%. If kept at this level the program will continue to operate without going any further in the red. The department has proposed that if \$150,000 were to be taken from fees collected in the fish program, over a forty year period there would be no unfunded liability. However, this cannot be put in as a modification unless a bill proposed passes. Should this bill pass, there would have to be an increase in the proposed budgets.

This would do nothing to help ex-wardens already collecting retirement.

It was explained that the department's policy in retirement states that a warden can retire after 25 years of service and collect 50% of his final average salary. However, there is a minimum age requirement of 55 years. Each additional year of service adds another 1% to this retirement salary. There is a mandatory retirement at age 60.

This proposal would carry with it, the stipulation that this fine money will be paid into the fund, so long as there is an unfunded liability. Once this is covered, the money would no longer be taken.

Concern was expressed that this would cause undue harrassment by the wardens in order to get more money into this fund. It was explained that the law states that this money will be paid into the fund, whether the wardens make this contribution or not. Therefore, the department did not see that the wardens would have to be overzealous in this matter.

The LFA explained further, that the money paid into this account would not be available to cover other costs within the department.

This is the only retirement fund in the state that the state is not liable for, the department is liable. The department believes that it is not possible to ask employees to contribute more to this fund, without an increase in benefits.

One other alternative would be to take a little from all the other department funds. The department prefers to take from the fines and felt this would be the best allocation.

Wildlife Division

The department was asked to explain the current ratio of 60/40 for federally matched funds. The department could be matching funds up to a 75/25 ratio. This money is only available for certain qualifying projects. It was explained that if the department were to go to the 75/25 ratio it would draw down all available revenue. Currently, the account has about \$1 million to be drawn on, should they decide to make a major land acquisition. If they were to change to a higher matching level, they would stand the risk of a further leveling off of revenue. In a very short time, the cost of operating would exceed the incoming revenue.

Mr. Rippingale explained that an increase to 75/25 matching would in fact represent a 15% increase, but would cause a 25% drain on existing funds. The department would go into the red in the second year of the biennium.

Conservation Education

This division is primarily responsible for public information. Question was raised as to whether the Montana Outdoors magazine should be a self-supporting operation.

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It was explained that the magazine does generate about \$165,000 a year. The department felt they had taken significant steps toward supporting this publication and were striving for a 50% self-support. However, it was stated that this publication was never intended to be self-supporting.

Also in order to avoid publication controversy, the magazine has taken a conservationist point of view. This has helped to improve relations with land owners.

Special Staff

For budget purposes this program is responsible for the support services for enforcement, centralized services and conservation education divisions. The department consists of a management coordinator, special projects coordinator, associate director, administration assistant, information officer and two secretaries. Currently, the information officer is conducting a feasibility study on publication of a youth magazine, he is in charge of educational programs in the schools and is working on a teacher education program, which is expected to be funded by a private source.

Senator Boylan expressed the concern that this would lead to the downgrading of farmers. It was explained that the department hoped to avoid this through the education of the teachers. The thrust of this program would be in support of the hunters, to counter the current move toward anti-hunter sentiment. The department will just assist in the publication, the teachers will be responsible for the actual writing. This was the result of many requests received from the schools for such assistance in conservation education. There has been no decision made yet as to whether this magazine will be published.

The department is currently looking for financial contributions from the education field.

Mr. Wambach felt that the magazine would help to educate school age children in sportsmen ethics and help to correct some of the distorted information they are now receiving.

Paper Work

Senator Smith expressed the concern that there were perhaps too few wardens in the field, and too many people in administration. The department recognized this problem and expressed the desire for more game wardens. This was the reason for the ex-officio program. In this way, the department has been able to almost double the number of people in the field. But, the fact remains that a certain amount of paperwork is unavoidable.

Parks and Recreation

The department has requested \$513,000 for 1980 and \$522,000 for 1981. Modified figures are \$215,000 for 1980 and \$213,000 for 1981. These

modifications were requested for additional maintenance in such areas as Wild Horse Island, Giant Springs State Park and the Rosebud Battlefield. In effect, the department is asking for the capability to administer these areas. This would reflect in a general fund increase.

The department should not be acquiring these areas if money is not available to take care of them. Total request is for 4.91 FTE to include all these projects.

The Executive general fund recommendation was for \$470,000 and the LFA was \$492,000. However, it is difficult to compare the two figures, because the LFA is for divisions and Executive is program budgeted. Due to the seasonal operation of the department, these 4.91 FTE could include up to 20 people.

Coal Tax

Last session the coal tax allocation was amended to allow use of a portion of the money for the operation and management of state parks. Bills are being introduced this session that would make these funds only available for land acquisition, to abolish this funding source for parks and to firm up coal tax money going to the parks.

If more coal tax money was allocated to parks for operation, this could replace the level of general fund coming into the department. This would be one way to reduce the strain on the general fund.

The budget proposal is based on the estimated revenue from the interest from the park acquisition trust fund. The department requests authority to operate areas acquired and to improve other areas. The members asked that a listing of these requests be made available for the subcommittee's review.

General Fund

Bob Robinson asked how the department would feel about taking all the money currently being placed in the earmarked account, and putting it in the general fund to be appropriated. The general feeling was that this would not be acceptable to the department.

State Aircraft Pool

The department was asked to justify their non-involvement in the state aircraft pool. It was stated that the department had no objection to participating with DCA, the problem arises with their special aircraft. The Cassna 180 could be transferred to the pool with no trouble as long as the department was paid for it. The aircraft was bought with department money.

There was a ten minute break at this point.

Funding by Division VS Program

The department was asked to comment on problems encountered with budgeting by division, rather than by program. Of primary concern was

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the department's authority to transfer funds from one division to another. With a program budget, the department maintained this flexibility. Therefore, it was generally agreed that the department would prefer to be appropriated on a program basis.

To further support this preference it was explained that the new SYDAS accounting system made it possible for the department to break down expenditures anyway the LFA requested. Program budgeting makes the scope much easier to administer.

The Executive used the program budget, but suggested another alternative would be to appropriate by accounting entities. And, include with this a letter of intent from the subcommittee as to how the appropriations are to be spent. The department saw no problem with this compromise, as long as they could negotiate on the figures listed. The department could still maintain a significant amount of control.

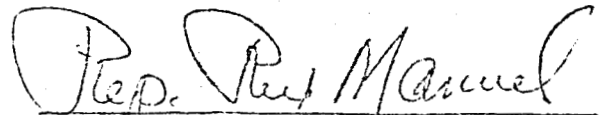
Fish Program

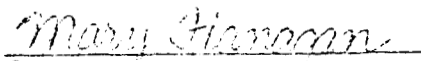
Mr. Whitney explained that the \$66,000 supplement had to do with payment for fish planted in the Libby Dam area over the last five years. Many of the fish hatcheries in the state are in need of repair and the department felt this would be a good thing to spend this money on. The department is requesting the authority to use this money to make these repairs. This would require a budget amendment to the 1979 appropriation.

This will be discussed further at tomorrow's executive session.

For the subcommittee's information it was announced that there would be a public hearing on the Wild Horse Island project if any of the members wanted more detail.

There was no further business, the meeting was adjourned as 11:00 A.M.


REP. REX MANUEL, Chairman


Secretary