

MINUTES
FISH AND GAME COMMITTEE
MONTANA STATE SENATE

January 8, 1981

The first meeting was a joint House and Senate Fish and Game Committee meeting which was called to order by Chairman Ed Smith at 12:35 p.m. in Room 402 of the Capitol.

ROLL CALL: Membership of the committee is as follows: Senator Ed Smith, Chairman; Senator Jack Galt, Vice Chairman; Senator Elmer Severson; Senator Gary Lee; Senator Dorothy Eck; Senator Harry Berg; and Senator Judy Jacobson. All members were present except Senator Galt who was excused. Also present was Andrea Merrill, legislative researcher, who will be working with the Senate Fish and Game Committee.

Chairman Smith announced that the purpose of the meeting was to become acquainted with fellow legislators, tour the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and meet department officials. The Fish and Game Commission is meeting today.

Senator Smith introduced Representative Orval Ellison, Chairman of the House Fish and Game Committee, who introduced members of his committee.

Chairman Smith spoke of a department request for a license fee increase which will be a controversial subject. For anyone interested, he has a letter for distribution from Ralph Brownell of Billings, a long-time correspondent, regarding his views on department funding.

Senator Smith said he was looking forward to working with the House Fish and Game Committee and expressed a desire for the committees to develop a good relationship.

Senator Smith announced that the committee thus far has two bills for consideration. Senate Bill 18 introduced by Senator Tom Towe provides for regulation of private game animal shooting preserves. This is a controversial bill. No date has been set for committee hearing pending notification of various people who have an interest in game farms.

The other bill in committee is Senate Bill 51 introduced by Senator Galt which provides compensation for qualifying wardens for hours worked in excess of 40 hours per week. Senator Galt has asked that we hold this bill in committee pending department negotiations. This situation may not require legislation.

The meeting was adjourned to tour the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.



Senator Ed Smith, Chairman

Dec. 10, '80

Senator Ed Smith,
Senate Office Bldg.,
Helena, Mt., 59601

Dear Senator Smith;

The 1981 Legislature will again be presented with various proposals to raise more money for the State Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, (previously Fish and Game Dep't). They will plead hardship and reduction of 'services'. They are now 'reduced' to about 470 people. This is still at least 150 more than Wyoming who has a much more successful game program.

When we take a look at their present heavily inflated budget, another picture appears. The '79-'81 biennium allowance is approximately \$24,000,000. The Parks Dep't. is another \$4,000,000 or so, but is separately funded and is not paid out of Fish and Game income. This 24 million is an increase of about 440% in 15 years. This windfall money was possible through unlimited sales of game licenses, particularly the non-resident type.

Let's see where some of this money goes. About \$5,000,000 is used in 'Game Management'. This is a 450% increase in the same period and pays for about 100 biologists, whose 'management' has been unbelievably bad.

This 'ivory tower' group, obviously mostly interested in money, engineered a loss of well over half of our mule deer. Previous to the '70's we had a harvest of about 90,000 mules a year for 20 years. From '75 to now we have killed less than 40,000, (plus some whitetails). This is a drop of about 60%. The reason is simple and sickening. The early 70's saw the sale of up to 190,000 either sex permits each year. This was against the advice and pleading of game wardens, ranchers and hunters who could see the drastic reduction developing. Again, Wyoming has no such problem. Their deer continue to increase.

The elk situation is even more indicative of the 'more money' syndrome. More and more expensive out-of-state licenses were sold until in 1975 they reached the incredible total of 25,580. Our elk take only averages about 12,000 a year! Wyoming has half again more elk and limits non-residents to 6,000 permits. Idaho to 9,000. Finally our legislature set a limit of 17,000, which, of course, is still too high. The Game Dep't had again proven it could not turn down a dollar.

The way antelope have been 'managed' shows a similar ineptitude. For twenty years we took about 18,000 a year. Then in the 70's the Dep't. kept putting out more and more permits until they reached about 30,000 annually. Now our kill has averaged only about 14,000 for the last five seasons. Again, money won out over the animals; and again, Wyoming gives another picture. They harvest 4 times as many, and their herd is still increasing.

One nasty by-product of these excessive license sales is the bad effect on hunter-rancher relations. With thousands of unsuccessful permit holders looking for places to hunt, many ranchers simply close up to avoid the hassle or to protect the remaining animals.

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This dismal record has been allowed to accumulate partly because of The Dep't's total lack of accountability. At no time since 1964 has a short general account of licenses sold, animals harvested, dollars in and out and employee numbers been published. Not in their own magazine, Montana Outdoors, nor in the newspapers.

This lack of basic annual summaries has not been due to lack of money. The "Information, Education & etc." Dep't is the biggest waste of them all. In 15 years their budget has increased around 750%, from \$323,000 in the '63-'64 biennium to about \$3,000,000 in 78-'79. We don't need this kind of 'information', but we could sure use some facts.

The Enforcement Division has also increased around 400%, but we really can't quarrel with that. The game wardens do an essential job. Through the years they have provided the factual information and experience so lacking in the 'manager' group. However we notice recently that the wardens were the first to have their money cut. To do this right at hunting season makes the Dep't's "poverty" highly visible!

The F & G. Dep't's "Centralized Services" Division has a present budget about 600% over 1964. In spite of this expansion, or maybe because of it, the difficulty of getting information has increased. They have stacks of computer printouts in infinite detail, but no summary. About the only place to get budget figures is through Legislative reports. To get license and game count figures takes additional digging.

Here in the West, wildlife, game and hunting is sort of sacrosanct. The Dep't would like to bathe in this aura. But remember, there is a sharp distinction between the welfare of wildlife and the desires of the Dep't.. The last 15 years or so has shown a definite reverse relationship. The more Dep't. expansion, the less game. Certainly it appears that much more fat should be removed from several areas before any increase could be considered desirable.

Sincerely,

Ralph Brownell

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PS

Here we go again. At least we have the Dept copying and cutting out some things. We rather think of it as a waste of money and to remove a document that is 99% useless.

I really don't know what you mean by 'poverty' and 'fat' and 'desires' and 'welfare' and 'game' and 'hunting' and 'wildlife' and 'aura' and 'distinction' and 'relationship' and 'reverse' and 'expansion' and 'less' and 'game' and 'fat' and 'removed' and 'several' and 'areas' and 'before' and 'increase' and 'desirable'.