

7. UPDATE ON THE PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM – BRIEFING

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“GREEN SHEET”

Meeting: January 11-12, 2008

Agenda Item 7: Update on the Private Lands Access Program – **Briefing**

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Presented By: Mick Cope, Upland Game Section Manager, Wildlife Program
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Background:

The Department's Private Lands Access Program has provided public access to private lands since the 1940's. Through time, landowners have been able to choose from a variety of access programs requiring a range of landowner involvement. In addition to various access programs, several administrative rules and a Fish and Wildlife Commission policy (Policy C-6002) have been developed to help landowners and the Department manage hunters and wildlife on private lands.

Through surveys, private landowners and hunters have provided their opinions about their public access to private lands preferences. Results of these surveys have helped guide development of agency management strategies. Additional surveys are planned for December 2007 as part of the development of the 2009-2014 Game Management Plan.

Funding has been a significant issue for the private lands program. From the early 1990's through 2003, the Department had approximately 17 employees in the program, funded through a combination of Federal and State fund sources. In 2003, a large portion of Federal funding was lost, which required a decrease in private lands staff of over 50%. More recently, a contract with the Corps of Engineers was the funding source for approximately 3 FTEs for the past 18 years ended. During the 2005, 2006, and 2007 legislative sessions, the Department made proposals to use a \$5 surcharge on big game and small game licenses as an alternate funding source. Additionally, the Department is proposing agency request legislation for 2008 that would affect small game licenses and prohibit using the revenue on private industrial timberlands.

Policy Issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

Private lands hunter access policy implementation.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

Several public advisory groups including the Game Management Advisory Council (GMAC), Upland Game Advisory Committee, and Waterfowl Advisory Group have discussed public access to private lands. A special Hunter Access Task Force, made up of hunters and landowners, was created through the GMAC. The task force was asked to review Department policies and programs and provide recommendations for changes. These activities, in addition to the public rule making process, helped the Department recommend private lands access WACs 232-12-421, 232-12-422, and 232-12-423.

The Department has also conducted several surveys that asked landowners, hunters, and the general public about a variety of private lands access issues. Surveys indicated that all groups thought that private lands were important to wildlife and wildlife-related recreation. In addition, surveys of hunters have indicated that access to private lands for hunting is one of the most important factors for the future of hunting. Landowners who were surveyed indicated a willingness to allow public access, but have concerns over liability, protection of equipment, wild fire, and safety.

Action requested (identify the specific Commission decisions you are seeking):

None, briefing only. This is a recurring Commission request for annual updates on the Private Lands Access Program.

Draft motion language:

Briefing only.

Justification for Commission action:

Briefing only.
