

**STATE OF NEVADA
BOARD OF WILDLIFE COMMISSIONERS**

Commission Policy Number 66

Number: **P-66**
Title: Management and Use of Wildlife
Management Areas
Reference: NRS 501.105, 501.181
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PURPOSE

The primary purpose of this document is to provide policy-level guidance to the Department of Wildlife in the development of site specific operational plans for all the individual wildlife management areas (WMAs) in the State of Nevada.

JUSTIFICATION

In accordance with the provisions of NRS 501.105, the Board of Wildlife Commissioners is responsible for establishing policies and adopting regulations necessary to the preservation, protection, management and restoration of wildlife and its habitat. These duties are further refined in NRS 501.181, which allows the Commission to establish policies for areas of interest including the acquisition of lands, water rights and easements and other property, including the entry, access to, and occupancy and use of such property, including leases of grazing rights, and sales or agricultural products.

BACKGROUND

Nevada not only has the distinction of being the driest state in the nation, but also continues to be one of the fastest growing from a human population perspective. The increased demands for the limited water resources has escalated the importance of maintaining viable and functioning wetlands, and other water-related habitats, upon which a variety of game, nongame, and sensitive species of fish and wildlife depend. It has been estimated that 85 percent of the historic wetlands in the western part of the State, and 52 percent of the wetlands statewide have been lost. The desire to acquire and maintain wetlands in public ownership was also identified as a priority initiative in the recently adopted Comprehensive Management (CMS) planning process.

Nevada also has an inherent obligation from a national and international perspective to participate in efforts to insure the future well being of migratory birds, a majority of which utilize the wetlands and other habitats of Nevada for only a part of their life cycle. The wildlife management areas of this State are an extremely important component of the North American Waterfowl Plan, the National Shorebird Conservation Plan, and the Partners in Flight Bird Conservation Plan, a plan which considers the needs of neotropical migratory birds.

The State of Nevada through the Department of Wildlife currently owns in fee title, and/or maintains long-term leases for over 120,000 acres of real property, including attendant water rights in some cases. A vast majority of this land was acquired for the primary purpose of protecting wetlands, inclusive of maintaining public shooting grounds. Opportunities continue to exist for acquiring additional wetlands and other critical habitats for fish and wildlife through the Park and Wildlife Bond Bill program, use of the Federal Aid in Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration projects, and other funding initiatives.

Planning the future of Nevada's wildlife management areas is essential due to the increased and sometimes conflicting demands being placed upon these limited resources. The adoption of broad policies and attendant long-range plans can therefore assist in meeting the present and future use demands, help maintain and enhance the resource, and resolve the problems of the conflicting resource uses.

POLICIES

In order to address the current and future needs of the fish and wildlife resources, and the publics that utilize these resources, the Board of Wildlife Commissioners does hereby establish the following policies to provide for the preservation, protection, management and restoration of wildlife and its habitats on State owned or controlled wildlife management areas (WMAs):

Priority Uses: The primary objectives governing the management and use of WMAs must necessarily be linked to the purposes for which the areas were purchased, particularly from a Federal Aid or other funding source perspective. Based upon this premise, priority management for the following listed WMAs will be directed toward wetland development and waterfowl activities, including the use of these areas as public shooting grounds, with all other uses being secondary: Stillwater, Mason Valley, Scripps, Fernley, Humboldt, Alkali Lake, Franklin Lake, Overton, Key Pittman, Railroad Valley, and Wayne E. Kirch.

Using similar justification and rationale as described above, the following listed areas will receive priority management for fisheries-related programs: Kingston Canyon, Birch Creek, Cave Lake, Bruneau River, Schroeder Reservoir and Eagle Valley Reservoir. It is the intent of this policy to maximize available opportunities for all consumptive and nonconsumptive fish and wildlife uses within the WMA system, after consideration of the primary uses described above and within limits posed by provisions of the Endangered Species Act, Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, and other similar state and federal legislative mandates.

Multiple Uses: Because of the limited availability and subsequent high demand for wetland-related resources in Nevada, all WMAs purchased with Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration funds shall be developed, maintained and managed primarily for wetland values. In the same manner, all WMAs purchased with Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration funds shall be developed, maintained and managed primarily for fisheries-

related values. The maximum recreational or other public use will be pursued whenever and wherever feasible, but with the limits posed by the above reference priorities, within habitat capabilities, and as may be limited by budget constraints or regulations applicable to lands purchased using Federal Aid.

Consumptive Uses: Hunters and anglers benefit fish and wildlife by funding most of the WMA programs in the State of Nevada. Therefore, the hunting and fishing public shall continue to have priority standing in establishing the direction for future management and use of all the WMA system properties, when such lands were purchased with consumptive user derived funds. Hunting and fishing shall also be allowed where appropriate on lands purchased with the Park and Wildlife Bond Bill program or with other general public funds. On some WMAs, the scope of activities and the number of hunters and/or hunter days may be limited to protect natural resources, to maintain an optimum recreational experience and to provide for public safety.

Nonconsumptive Uses: The WMA system will be made available for educational, scientific, aesthetic and other nonconsumptive uses, whenever these activities can be accommodated without interfering with the primary purposes for which the areas were established, and without decreasing the opportunity or experience for consumptive users. Because of the many opportunities these areas provide for the general public, nonconsumptive uses associated with the fish and wildlife resources such as bird watching, nature trails, educational pursuits, scientific endeavors and other associated activities will be encouraged whenever and wherever possible.

Water Rights: Whenever water becomes available, the Department shall, subject to available manpower and money, apply for and/or purchase such waters as deemed necessary to maintain existing wetlands and/or develop new wetlands necessary for the preservation, maintenance and enhancement of wildlife and their habitats on WMAs.

Land Acquisition: In concert with public input provided as part of the inventory portion of the CMA planning process, strategies developed in the CMA plan, and in accordance with policies established under the Park and Wildlife Bond Bill program, the Department will continue to pursue a land acquisition program that meets the needs and desires of the public, and provides for the preservation, protection, and restoration of wildlife and their habitats within the WMA system.

Wetlands Management: An overall goal of no net loss of wetlands and the enhancement of wetland quantity and quality are the long-term wetlands management objectives on WMAs purchased with Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration funds. Comprehensive strategies for protecting and enhancing wetlands will be developed for each WMA using the Geographical Information System (GIS) natural resource inventory. The condition of present water delivery facilities will be reviewed, and improvement projects developed where needed on WMAs to increase efficiency of water delivery and promote water conservation.

Vegetation Management: Strategies to promote vegetation that is of maximum value to

waterfowl and other migratory birds will be developed through water level manipulation, prescribed burning, herbicide applications and other means in an effort to meet plan-specific objectives on each WMA. Procedures will also be developed to control and eradicate invasive and undesirable plants such as tamarisk and whitetop. Upland habitats on WMAs will be managed to maximize biodiversity, which may also require periodic vegetative manipulation.

Public Access: appropriate road and trail systems will be established and maintained within each WMA to insure adequate public access to the resource, recognizing however, that some seasonal road closures may be necessary to protect the resource, and/or enhance the recreational experience. Roadways, parking areas and other vehicular control measures will be adequately signed to insure public compliance.

Camping: although camping is recognized as an important part of the outdoor recreational experience, and that overnight and/or day-use facilities may be needed at some WMA locations, the Department of Wildlife is not in the camping business simply for the sake of camping. Facilities will therefore be provided only in those areas where there is an expressed demand by fish and wildlife resource users, and only to specifically meet the identified needs of the users.

On those WMAs where improved camping facilities are deemed necessary to address the needs of the general public, and the development of such sites are compatible with fish and wildlife management objectives of the area, the Department of Wildlife shall work in cooperation with the Division of State Parks to provide upgraded camping facilities through the use of site-specific Memorandums of Agreement.

Boat Ramps: Recognizing that boating access is an important component associated with recreational opportunity at many of the WMAs, adequate boat ramp facilities will be provided for launching medium to small boats on reservoirs and ponds where appropriate.

Grazing Practices: It is recognized that livestock grazing frequently provides a viable and cost-effective management tool for enhancing habitat conditions for certain species of wildlife, and livestock grazing may therefore be utilized periodically on some WMAs to meet area-specific plan objectives.

Farming Practices: It is recognized that agricultural production of farmland crops is an extremely beneficial asset to many species of wildlife, particularly some species of migratory birds, and that such practices add to the biodiversity of wildlife in Nevada. Although the major focus of the WMA program will be directed toward developing, enhancing and maintaining natural wetland systems, farming may be initiated on some areas to meet site-specific management area needs. Because of the high cost of farming for agricultural products, a cost benefit analysis will be one of the factors used in determining whether or not an area will be farmed.

Funding Sources: The ownership, maintenance and management of real property,

particularly land and water, is an expensive program component of fish and wildlife management. The current WMA system provides both direct and indirect benefits to the general public through habitat and migratory bird protection. However, it is the consumptive users that are currently paying a majority of the costs for maintaining these areas. Therefore, it is the intent of this Board that the Department develop strategies and implement programs in an attempt to assess the nonconsumptive users a fee to offset the high costs of management, particularly for those users receiving direct benefits from the WMA system.

This policy shall remain in effect until amended, repealed, or superseded by the Board of Wildlife Commissioners.

BY ORDER OF THE BOARD OF WILDLIFE COMMISSIONERS IN REGULAR
SESSION, AUGUST 15, 1998.

Bill Bradley, Chairman
Board of Wildlife Commissioners