Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners
Wildlife Damage Management Committee

Approved Minutes

Nevada Department of Wildlife
1100 Valley Road
Reno, NV 89512
Thursday, May 14, 2015 / 2:30 p.m.

Committee Members Present:
Commissioner Chad Bliss, Chair
Commissioner Karen Layne (via teleconference)
Commissioner Pete Mori
Commissioner Brad Johnston
Tom Cassinelli

Staff Members Present:
Brian Wakeling, Game Chief, Nevada Department of Wildlife

Others Present:
Mark Jensen, State Director, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services
Joe Bennett, East District Supervisor, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services
Daryl Capurro
Gerald Lent
Sean Shea
Rex Flowers

1. **Call to Order**

   Meeting called to order by Chair Bliss at 2:30 p.m.

2. **Approval of Agenda**

   Committee Member Tom Cassinelli moved to approve the agenda.
   Commissioner Johnston seconded the motion.
   The motion carried unanimously.

3. **Approval of Minutes for March 19, 2015**

   Commissioner Johnston moved to approve March 19, 2015 minutes as drafted.
   Commissioner Mori seconded.
   The motion carried unanimously.

4. **Review Fiscal Year 2016 Final Draft Predation Management Plan and make recommendations to the Commission**

Brian Wakeling (Game Chief, Nevada Department of Wildlife):
We incorporated input from the Wildlife Damage Management Committee and the Board of Wildlife Commissioners into another draft of the Predation Management Plan. This new draft has been posted on the NDOW website for review.

There are three different areas in the Plan's budget. One area is planned expenditures, where one looks at the money available and plans a way to expend those dollars. Another area is revenue, which is the money that comes into the Plan. Despite the fact that a specific dollar amount has been budgeted, the revenue that arrives may be drastically different.

The third area is the expenditures, which may differ from the revenue and the budget.

There was a question raised about how the Plan did in the last fiscal year. It is still Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15), so no review is on hand.

At the beginning of FY14 there was $377,674 in the account. There was total revenue of $570,368. The authorized budget was $526,360; total expenditures were $509,156, leaving an ending balance of $437,529. The Plan started FY15 with that $437,529.

As FY15 is still in progress, the outcome cannot be reported and the Plan's expenditures will not be reconciled with the overall budget until the fiscal year ends. The outcome will be part of the status report that will be presented to the Commissioners this fall.

Pete Bradley was able to keep accurate project-by-project accounting, but I have not been able to figure out how he accomplished that. I have reported what every dollar was spent on, but we have a difficult time tracking personnel time internally. We can determine the money was spent on the Plan, but we have not tracked the individual projects on which the money was spent.

Effective FY16 will be improved accounting on projects so individual internal expenditures will be tied to a project. Wildlife Services is able to give its breakdown on a project-by-project basis so the reporting issue is not with external vendors; it is an internal issue. The reporting system will be improved for FY16 and from that improvement the Committee will receive a detailed breakdown on how money was spent.

Commissioner Johnston:
Is the authorized budget from only the $3.00 fee?

Mr. Wakeling:
Yes, the money is from the $3.00 fee. The matter is complicated by our decision to place more of the predator activities under the Federal aid budget. One of the changes that will be implemented in FY16 is if Pat Jackson is involved in coordinating the project, his salary will be paid for through the Federal aid budget. If Mr. Jackson engages in any lethal removal projects within the Plan, Federal aid dollars cannot be used. The $3.00 fee comes from State dollars, not Federal, so that money can be used to make up the difference.

There are instances where Federal aid money can be used for lethal removal projects, but those instances tend to pertain to research. Such a project needs to be well-defined and be part of a NEPA analysis in order to use Federal dollars.

When NDOW gives Wildlife Services nonfederal money for tasks, they are operating under a programmatic environmental impact statement that allows them to conduct lethal removal projects. The Plan's Federal aid dollars cannot be used for predator management and using that money to pay for lethal removal is not allowed. Stock-and-release activities — like when a shooting preserve releases birds — are also not allowed. There are other rules.

For FY15, there is $372,000 budgeted for limited lethal removal. There is $84,000 budgeted for nonlethal projects. This sums up as a $456,000 total budget and that money is from the predator fee. This amount does not include Federal aid.

From the predator fee dollars, limited lethal removal comprises just over 81% of the projected expenditures within the budget. This percent is not revenue or expenditures. This is the budget. For FY16, the expenditures for limited lethal removal are expected to be about 81-82% of the expenditures.

In this draft, we incorporated the changes requested by the Committee. We also received questions from the Committee. One question pertained to raven removal and the ability to raise the cap above the 2500 limit. We contacted USFWS. The Service stated that lethal removal of ravens is not designed to be the primary tool used and was to be temporary.

The USFWS was reassured to hear about our nonlethal ravel activities; however, to change the cap, another environmental compliance exercise will need to be completed. The USFWS Sacramento office has two staff, so it is not likely that an NEPA evaluation will be in the near future.

In the draft, we identify the project manager for each project, detail each plan's objectives, and show detailed maps of the involved counties.

Commissioner Johnston:
What were the authorized expenditures for the plan for FY15?

Mr. Wakeling:
I can pull up the last plan and see what our authorized expenditures were.

Commissioner Johnston:
Does the account have a spending limitation? Is there a minimum amount that is supposed to be there?

I see a beginning balance of $377,000 and an ending balance of $438,000. If revenue is estimated to be roughly $500,000 a year, then the account is building up. I see FY16 has authorized expenditures of $456,000. That does not even match the revenue of this year.

We should have more programs in place or allocate more money to existing programs since this account seems to be building. The people who are paying the fee believe that fee money is spent and not building up in an account. The amount should not be taken down to zero, but if a hundred thousand dollars a year is being added to the predator management account, then programs need to be expanded or added.

Mr. Wakeling:
There is no limit on the amount of money that is spent annually. No percentage needs to be retained. Since Mr. Jackson is new to the program, we made a point of identifying the Plan's needs. If the Plan's funds were to be removed, we have enough reserves to carry its programs one year forward.

Commissioner Layne:
We have limited staff overseeing these projects. Some of the issues seen by this Committee in the past have been little definition of the successful programs — or even a determination of what programs are successful. Success cannot be measured until there is a better handle on how these programs are developing and how the money expended is making an impact.

Chair Bliss:
There is an approved reporting form, Policy 23 and reports from contractors. We have NDOW staff surveying mule deer, counting leks and other things to keep track of projects in order to measure their success. With contractors and NDOW working together, we can get to that point.

Commissioner Johnston:
Seeing the amount of revenue and expenditure and seeing how this account continues to grow, it is important to find successful programs to put more money into. If FY15 is consistent to FY14 — which I expect it will be — the account's ending balance will be $480,000-$490,000 at the end of the FY15. We can anticipate revenue of about $500,000-$550,000 or more in FY16, which the account roughly $1 million dollars — and we have a plan of $456,000. That is a big gap.

Do not spend the money to just spend it; however, we should do what we can to spend the money that is coming in and build projects that warrant the expenditure.

Chair Bliss:
We have approved projects in the past that did not pan out, i.e. the money was never spent, which may be why that account has built up. We need to take advantage of those dollars. The account should not be depleted to zero, but the money is there because we approved projects that essentially did not get done.

Mr. Wakeling:
We do have the opportunity over the next year to look at ways to expand this program effectively.

Chair Bliss:
Instead of taking little pieces out of a problem over 3 to 4 years, this money would allow for a long-term project of 1 to 2 years. If a project is not funded to the level that it needs to be, money is wasted.

Mr. Wakeling:
The peer review literature supports that completely. A situation where predators need to be reduced in order to get a response from prey populations, there has to be a concerted effort for a period of time to get that population reduced substantially. Rarely does one year fix the problem. It usually takes at least 3 years of intense focus.

Commissioner Layne:
Is the $14,000 for Wildlife Services base operations to fund their people to do predation removals or is that money a required minimum payment?

Mr. Wakeling:
That line item has not been placed out separately previously. We put it separate on purpose.

There are many things that come with our contract with Wildlife Services. We request they have personnel available and ready to operate when we choose to use them and, as a result, sometimes their staff is unavailable for other projects. There is overhead associated with using Wildlife Services and that overhead needs to be on a line in the budget this year.

Chair Bliss:
Mr. Jensen and Mr. Bennett, do you have any comments at this time?

Mark Jensen (State Director, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services):
Regarding the $14,000, the amount used to be $40,000 and that money was never from the $3.00 fee. The $40,000 was a transfer from NDOW to the Department of Agriculture to help pay for one State mountain lion hunter. NDOW contributed because mountain lions are big game animals and revenue is generated from licenses for hunting mountain lions. Over the years, the amount went from $40,000 down to $14,000. This is the first year that I have seen the $14,000 included in the $3.00 fee.

There should be more specifics for the goals and objectives of the programs. If mule deer are to be protected in a specific area, the reason why should be stated clearly. Statements need to be made about what is being done is for the fawn to doe ratio, the buck ratio or just the population trends. There should be a clear start and finish to a project if it is to be evaluated as being successful. If an impact is not made over 2-3 years, then the money needs to go somewhere else.

I know it is difficult to come up with numbers. Sage-grouse is difficult because most of the counts are associated with males strutting on a lek. Nests and birds are being protected and evaluations are based on males that have to survive two years before they might show up on a lek. It is hard to draw a line from here to there. There are not enough resources to check nest

success across everywhere we are working, so instead we might consider looking at raven densities.

These are the conversations we need to have to know where we are and where we need to be going. We have struggled with this for many years. Even on Project 18 that ran for 10 years, we never had end goals established.

Chair Bliss:
I agree having goals is important, but there are so many factors that it is difficult to know if goals can even be successfully reached. Some projects state the goal is to enhance the mule deer population, but it does not say to what number. The assumption is to enhance it closer to carrying capacity.

Mr. Jensen:
We are optimistic that methods and procedures will change. Mr. Bennett mentioned that Mr. Jackson went to the east side of the State and rode with him. That is the first time that has happened in years. We will continue to provide input when asked to do so.

Regarding the draft plan, I believe I know what NDOW is going to ask Wildlife Service to do, but there is nothing in this draft that is specific. Those specifics may come later in an agreement and work financial plan between Wildlife Services and NDOW.

Chair Bliss:
As Wildlife Services' reports come back to Mr. Wakeling and Mr. Jackson and they are able to put a report together, at that time, NDOW could state their goals.

Mr. Jensen:
Wildlife Services already keeps track of every dollar spent and it is reported by project. It basically comes down to "We spent this." and "We killed this." These two statements are not a good way to represent this program, though.

We need to represent what are we protecting and why and that is information that NDOW has to provide. If bighorn sheep are to be protected, then state why. If depredations are to be reduced, state how many depredations there were to begin with and did the number of depredations get reduced? If we are trying to increase the fawns, what were the numbers and where do they need to be?

Chair Bliss:
One of the projects with sheep does state the sheep are being protected because it is a newly established population and they need protection from predation so the population can grow. That is a clearly stated goal. There are clear goals with some projects.

Mr. Wakeling:
This reporting is a process that takes time to master. It is easy to say how many animals we have taken; we refer to that as an output. What we really want to know is the outcome and that is when we evaluate things that may take a couple years.

We may be able to reduce the abundance of ravens, but unless we are able to demonstrate that it has a commensurate increase in sage-grouse coming to the leks, we may still question if that program is a valuable use of money.

There are a lot of factors that influence the outcome and that does not mean that the program was a waste of dollars; we need to find the right measure. If we are able to establish a self-sustaining bighorn sheep population, we call that a success. We may not have removed a single mountain lion in the process of doing it, or we may have removed a large number of mountain lions. Our objective (output) is to have a self-sustaining population of bighorn sheep. The discussion about what is the appropriate output to measure and how to record measurement is not simple and requires more attention.

Mr. Jensen:
I have been through this for many years with the ranchers. I have to remind them it is not important how many coyotes Wildlife Services killed. The important question to answer is, was your problem solved? If you called, did we show up — and did we solve your problem?

Counting dead animals is a lose-lose deal for all agencies. I want the ranchers and NDOW to focus on the resource that is being protected.

Mr. Wakeling:
We have to articulate the output effectively and that is the real challenge.

Joe Bennett (East District Supervisor, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services):
Wildlife Services recently finished a project in Jackpot in Unit 074. We were asked to go in because no one knew what was happening with the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. They may have been sick, predated or moved. We were not hired to go in and kill lions. We were hired to send 2 guys in for 5 weeks to determine what was going on with the sheep.

Three lions were removed, although we did not find many sheep killed by lions. If we calculated out the cost, it was $5,000 a lion. That sounds like high cost, but Wildlife Services also identified some sheep no one knew about. It is projects like this that I would like to see written up. I want to read about how we worked with NDOW and it was in direct communication with the biologist. We provided GPS coordinates of sheep that no one knew about. We went in to see if there were sick sheep. We documented a number of kills on deer and elk. That was a very successful project and it should be reported like that. Yes, we removed 3 male lions right in the core center of Unit 074, but we did a lot more, too.

Commissioner Layne:
I am concerned when there is an assumption that if lions are removed, the problem is resolved and the bighorn sheep populations, particularly the ones that are newly reintroduced, are going to reach sustainable levels.

There is drought and there is disease and all the talk is about how many animals were killed. Looking at outcomes instead of outputs is extremely important, particularly from the public perception of the predator plan.

Public Comment:

Daryl Capurro:
Project 21-02 is raven removal and greater sage-grouse nest success. That is 2 different projects. One is a study and the other is lethal removal. How much of that $50,000 went to each project? The same can be said for Sub-project 22-074. It is mountain lion removal and then diet analysis of protection. Part of it is lethal, part of it is not. I do not think these projects should be included under "limited lethal." It should be under the categories of either nonlethal or studies. It distorts the figures some.

The lethal removal of predators shown on graph 3 accounts for 81.6% of the $3.00 predator fee. That is not right. It amounts to 81.6% of the expenditures. The expenditures are only 80% of what the $3.00 predator fee produces, yet NDOW always wants to deal strictly with the expenditures. That is why there is a continuing uptake in the ending balance. If a balance that high is going to be maintained, it is time to reduce the fee.

When I apply the numbers to the actual expenditures shown, of the expenditures totally lethal is 60.8%, the combination ones were 20.8% that is the 81.6% they talk times 80% leaves roughly 65%. You are spending 65% of the revenues produced over a period of time for that.

To give you an example, in FY10, 90% of the fee was expended in 2010. In FY11 81%. This year, we have not finished the fiscal year and it is 36%. It has been a steady downward trend of the amount that is spent of the fee that is produced. That is not acceptable to most of the sportsmen in Nevada.

Gerald Lent:
There are no specific goals or objectives in any of the projects and no science behind them in the plan.

Sean Shea:
Regarding the $14,000 for Wildlife Services, a description would be helpful. All you see is this figure and people ask why.

Rex Flowers:
I have issues with the $14,000 for Wildlife Services base operation. Coming from the private sector, that is a signing bonus. We should consider if it should be there or built back into the program someplace. Revenues are up right now because there are more tags on offer. We have almost reached that pinnacle — like with the elk — where tags should be reduced within the next couple of years.

Commissioner Johnston:
I understand the concern about $14,000. There should be transparency as to what the $14,000 is for and that it is not going towards lethal control.

Mr. Jensen:
That $14,000 is identified in another place in NDOW's budget. In years past, the $40,000 gift was in a different location in NDOW's budget.

Mr. Wakeling:
We have revised the Memorandum of Understanding that we have with Wildlife Services. We have a draft that is in the Director's office and we are close to having signatures on it. Mr. Jensen referred to work and financial plans and cooperative stewardship agreements. In the past, we worked this through the Department of Agriculture because the Nevada Department of Wildlife did not have a direct relationship with Wildlife Services.

It is our intent to have that that direct relationship from this point forward. The $14,000 that we routinely provide for their services would in the future be housed within the $3.00 predator fee.

Mr. Jensen:
The $14,000 is in the State Department of Agriculture's budget as revenue. So, the $14,000 won't come to me on the Federal side.

Mr. Wakeling:
We will more clearly define this and get it so it is more understandable.

Commissioner Johnston:
We need to add in a summary of what was provided from FY14. Something that states what the beginning balance in FY14 was, the authorized expenditures, what was expended, and our ending balance.

Since we are still in FY15, we can say the beginning balance in 2015 is X amount. We know what the revenue was for FY15. We know what the authorized expenditures were, although we do not know what actual expenditures are until the end of the fiscal year. You can have a predicted ending balance in 2015. When you have your predicting beginning balance in FY16, you can compare that.

I was prepared to say that you could increase the authorized budget for Projects 37 and 38 $40,000 to $90,000. It does not mean the money is going to be spent. If you could increase those authorized expenditures under those projects, which are statewide removal of coyotes and lions — a significant amount — and start bringing in the authorized expenditures, to what I believe to be just the revenue in FY16.

I want to see more defined goals. I support increasing the authorized expenditures in Projects 37 and 38 based upon potential new knowledge on where we are on the financial side of the predator management.

Committee Member Johnston moved to recommend approval of the FY16 Nevada Department of Wildlife Predator Management Plan to the Commission with the following changes:

- **Project 37 authorized budget be increased from $40,000 to $90,000.**
- **Project 38 authorized expenditures be increased from $40,000 to $90,000**
- **Wildlife Services base operations budget item of $14,000 be provided and explained within the plan and added to the end of the plan with the overall budget for fiscal year financial information available from FY14 and FY15; projections for the FY16 in terms of the prior year of FY14 as discussed. The beginning balance, revenue, authorized expenditures, total expenditures and ending balance for FY15 and then has the beginning balance, revenue, authorized expenditures and the estimated ending balance.**

Commissioner Mori seconded the motion.

Commissioner Layne:
I cannot support this motion. I have concerns about allocating money that has not yet been received, particularly for Project 37 and 38. Project 37 and 38 are not well delineated in terms of what is going to be accomplished.

The motion carried. (Commissioner Layne voted No.)

5. **Public Comment Period**
None.

Meeting adjourned at 3:46 p.m.