

WAFWP

*Washington Association of Fish and Wildlife
Professionals*

P.O. Box 551

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Website: www.wafwp.org



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Winter 2007

President's Message

By Russell Rogers

A little over eleven years ago I took my first job in WDFW as a temporary employee while I was finishing up graduate school. Since then I have worked in the Habitat, Wildlife, and Fish Program, and on projects that covered both sides of the Cascades. I began my career studying habitat selection in nongame birds which...*naturally* evolved into my current position as the statewide coordinator for shellfish disease, pest, and predator control. *Naturally*, right? Clearly, some things are difficult to explain, if they can be explained at all. What's not hard to explain is the enormous respect that I have gained for the many dedicated and knowledgeable WDFW employees that I have met in these past eleven years. In my observation, the common bond that runs through us all is a deep desire to see that Washington's fish and wildlife are cared for in the best possible way. I am honored to be able to work as your colleague and serve as your president of WAFWP.

A couple of years ago, like many of you, the civil service reform act forced me to be a part of a bargaining unit. I was relieved that there were three different unions to choose from and it did not take long to realize that WAFWP was the right union for me. While the other unions were larger in total members, the specialized nature of WAFWP to focus on the particular needs of fish and wildlife professionals was the key selling point. Another key selling point was it was a 100% member run organization. No one from out of state, in state, or even within our department dictated the direction of the organization. My gut feeling was that this had to be a good thing. Once I became a member, it did not take me long to get involved. From my very first interactions

with other union volunteers and leaders, I could tell that the same passion to be good stewards of Washington's fish and wildlife was also important when it came to working for the rights of those fish and wildlife stewards. Looking at the past two collective bargaining agreements and my first hand observations behind the scenes, I can tell you that my gut feeling was correct.

The past several years have seen many changes within WDFW. Many of those changes were giant steps backwards to our members. WAFWP has worked hard to see that as many rights and privileges that our members once enjoyed are restored. While WAFWP has made great strides in that direction, there is still much to be done. We are seeing positive steps being made with issues such as exchange time. However, there is still much to be done with alternative schedules, telecommuting, and pay. I promise that WAFWP will continue working hard on all of these issues and others.

Finally, I would like to express many thanks to out-going President Steve Bell. Steve has served tirelessly as president for the past four years. Chief among his many achievements as president, Steve guided WAFWP through the civil service reform, which included the accretion of many new members (myself included) and our first two collective bargaining agreements, no small task. Steve has been as passionate advocate for the rights of all of our members and has guided many class and individual grievances to successful outcomes. I will do my best to live up to the high standard that Steve established.

Exchange Time and Flex Time

Many members have contacted us saying that they are still having problems with the accrual of exchange time. In our meetings with executive management they have assured us that they have no problem with the accrual of exchange time and approve all requests that reach the appointing authorities. The problem is that many requests never make it that far. Many lower level managers and supervisors are still under the impression that the accrual of exchange time is simply not allowed.

Here are the facts. The collective bargaining agreement (article 7.8(c)) states that “the salary paid to overtime-exempt employees is full compensation for all hours worked.” It goes on to say (article 7.8 (d)) “With approval of the Appointing Authority, overtime exempt employees will accrue exchange time for hours worked in excess of the normal forty (40) hour workweek.” This has been further codified with a Memorandum of Understanding which can be found as an appendix to the collective bargaining agreement. In short, you can not be denied exchange time for hours beyond 40 in any given week.

For our part, we agreed that when ever possible to seek approval prior to the accrual of exchange time. But as many of you already know, this is not always possible when working in the field. To accommodate this, WAFWP members have an exemption that other bargaining units and unrepresented employees do not have. On the form for exchange time accrual there is a box which can be checked labeled “Coalition Exemption.” If you are required to work over 40 hours in a given week and were not able to obtain prior approval you can check this box and approval must be given to you. Further, you need to list the work week that you accrued the exchange time and not the pay period. It is best to be as specific as possible.

Management has done a very poor job at passing this information down the chain of command!

If you request to accrue exchange time using this method and it is denied, contact a job representative or officer as soon as possible and we will see to it that it gets rectified.

The other major problem that has arisen is the practice of flexing your schedule to accommodate field work to avoid the accrual of exchange time. Again, the problem is the unpredictable nature of field work. When it goes as planned, pre-flexing your time works out fine; when it doesn't, you may end up short on hours worked. In this case, some members have been told that they must use annual leave to make up for the short hours. This is not so and is an inappropriate use of annual leave. You should never be forced to use annual leave to make up for scheduling irregularities surrounding field work. The employer should provide you with alternative work in case field work gets cut short.

Another common problem associated with flex time occurs when you have worked many hours early in the week and are left with a small amount to work on a Friday. For many employees, this works out just fine. However, some members have been forced to drive long commutes to work one or two hours at their desk to round out the week. This can be an unproductive use of time for both the employer and the employee.

Again, if you have any problems with exchange time accrual or flexing your schedule, please contact a job representative or officer as soon as you can. If you have any further questions about this topic, please feel free to contact Russell Rogers at any time.

Remembering Rocky

Bryan Murphie



For each of us that knew him, Rocky had a unique and positive impact upon our lives. His confident swagger and warm, friendly smile had a way of winning over volunteers and professionals alike, but it was really his ability to share his knowledge and experience with others that endeared him to us.

The WAFWP Board would like to recognize Rocky's significant contribution to bear and cougar management in both Washington state as well as nationally, and his positive impact upon colleagues and the public. Rocky had a love for Karelian bear dogs and believed in their use as an effective alternative to lethal removal. He also believed that education and outreach would go a long way in minimizing conflicts and misconceptions about bear and cougars. Combining these two passions, the Board decided to donate \$3500 on behalf of Rocky to the Wind River Bear Institute for the purpose of funding their public outreach and education program for one year. This seems a most appropriate recognition of a man who has had such a positive influence on so many.

Rocky's unfortunate passing highlights the often over-looked hazards that many field biologists face on a daily basis. I sincerely wish you all the safest of journeys.

Email and Internet Usage: A Cautionary Tale

By Rhonda Fenrich

Improper internet and/or email usage has become a hot bed for employee investigations and discipline since the turn of the century. The widespread usage and ease of information exchange on the internet has created a culture which is potentially fraught with pitfalls for the unsuspecting employee. A good rule of thumb for all employees is to not use your work internet access or email account for anything that is not work related.

All of the email traffic that you send or receive through the State email system is considered the property of the State and is subject to public disclosure. While email is an efficient means of communicating, always keep in mind that whatever you send over the State's system could end up on the front page of your local paper. Keep that in mind when hitting the send button.

WDFW has taken a zero tolerance stance on the inappropriate use of the internet system for personal use. We have had several members disciplined, including one termination for inappropriate use. We therefore encourage you to review the WDFW policy and make sure your use is in compliance.

WAFWP Financial Security Procedures: to audit or not to audit?

Derek Stinson

The WAFWP bylaws call for an audit to be conducted every 10 years, the first of which would happen in 2008. Since the addition of that item in the bylaws, WAFWP has begun having our certified public accountant (CPA) do "Agreed-Upon Procedures" (AUP) which was necessitated to determine how much was spent on 'ideological' activities which certain members refused to pay. That % of dues is reimbursed to those members (FYI, it is a tiny amount). The AUP includes reconciling our accounts for 3 months picked at random in the past year, an activity that serves many of the functions of an audit in that it would uncover irregularities, for example, in banking and reimbursements. The AUP and our tax return cost around \$1,500. A full audit, which would look at the books for a full year, picked out of the previous several, would cost about \$7-10,000 if done by an outside firm.

The bylaws allow for an audit to be conducted by a committee of members, which would take a couple of days, require several volunteers, and probably the services of our CPA. If this process took 15 hours, compensating the committee and the CPA's time might cost \$3,500-\$4000. Another approach would be to have another board position or 'auditor' who had no involvement in money (i.e. their name was not on the bank accounts), periodically check bank statements and financial records and receive and review the CPA's annual AUP report. The Secretary could fulfill the duties of the auditor whenever the position is vacant. The auditor, like board members, would be compensated for time spent on WAFWP business. However, I anticipate that this would require only a few hours per year. So here are the options:

- 1) Have an audit conducted by an outside firm for \$7-10K.
- 2) Recruit a committee of members to do the audit (maybe \$3-4K).
- 3) Change the bylaws so that the AUP fulfills the purpose of the audits (tweak the AUP as necessary to tighten controls) and establish an auditor position to ensure financial accountability.

My recommendation is number 3, because an audit would seem to be a needless expense given our annual AUP, but a little more oversight by someone that does not have the ability to access bank accounts would be healthy. I have full faith in the people involved in our money (our book keeper, president, and me), but who knows who will be in these positions in 5 or 10 years? Let us know what you think; what option makes sense to you? Send your comments to: treasurer@wafwp.org by **1 January**, so we can proceed with a bylaw change or audit.

The WAFWP Website is Evolving

Joe Evenson – WAFWP Webmaster

If you have looked at the union Web site recently, you will have noticed that the URL has changed and we now have our own domain (www.wafwp.org). This is the first step in fulfilling our new President's vision of placing emphasis on the WAFWP web site and is important for several reasons: first, saving on paper and reducing carbon emissions ultimately reduces impacts on the fish and wildlife we manage; second, timely and up-to-date information regarding union matters can now be readily accessed by members, and third, board members and job representatives can now be emailed directly through union web addresses (see the list elsewhere in this newsletter).

Some of the things that are in the process of being changed on the Web site are:

- A new more user-friendly design.
- A FAQ's section.
- A new calendar that includes upcoming union and employee meetings and events.
- An updated Employee Rights page.
- A Current Grievance and Arbitration Section, as well as an archived section for past issues.
- Retirees Page that will include a section honoring WAFWP members who have retired, as well as information pertinent to retirement planning.
- Employee benefits page that will include timely and useful information pertaining to benefits and open enrollment.

Our goal is for the website to be recognized as a place where union members can obtain timely information related to Union and WDFW work issues and as a place where answers to commonly asked questions can be found. Also, it contains important contact information in case you have a

question for one of the board members or job representatives. One of the primary objectives for doing this is to have the web site be a tool that is available and readily accessible to union members.

Most importantly, the Web page is **your** Web page. If you have suggestions or criticisms on its content or format, please forward them on to me so we can continue to make improvements.

A final note, the website is in need of digital images depicting the work we do throughout the state. Currently, the page has a marine emphasis as that is where this webmaster's WDFW position finds him. Ideally, the imagery on the site would be reflective of all of us, so any images you might have that you feel are appropriate would be much appreciated (photos will be credited). Suggestions, criticisms, and images can be emailed to webmaster@wafwp.org.

WAFWP Web Site – www.wafwp.org



Welcome New Bargaining Unit Members

Recently WAFWP acquired new members to our bargaining unit. Please welcome the Fish Program's Biological Data System bargaining unit, unrepresented Environmental Planners in the Habitat Program, Natural Resource Technicians and Scientific Technicians in the Wildlife Program's Weed Control unit, Community Outreach and Environmental Education Specialist in the Wildlife and Fish programs, Scientific Technicians in the Fish Program's Inland Warm Water unit, and Scientific Technicians in Region 1.
WELCOME ALL!



E-MAIL ADDRESSES

We are always looking for better ways to communicate with members. E-mail is fast, cheap, and efficient, but we do not have a comprehensive list of member's HOME e-mail addresses (We cannot use agency e-mail for union communication). If you would like to be included in the e-mail updates, please send your home e-mail address to <http://www.wafwp.org>

Would You Like to Serve?

WAFWP is a member-run organization. WAFWP will only be as good as the time and energy that its members put into it. Help your fellow members as well as yourself by volunteering to serve. We are always in need of people to serve as board members, job representatives and on standing committees. Please contact Russell Rogers if you are interested.

Assignment Pay

Remember that with the new contract, you are now eligible for Assignment Pay when you are engaged in low level flight operations or chemical immobilization utilizing Class B drugs.

Benefits

Health Care – New employees have to choose a health plan within 31 days of employment. For current employees, open enrollment for 2008 is over, but under certain circumstances you may still be able to add or remove dependents, or change plans.

VEBA - If you are eligible to retire in 2008 you may be eligible to take advantage of the medical expense plan for retired employees (referred to as VEBA, or voluntary employees' beneficiary association). In order to WAFWP members to qualify as a group, we will need a simple majority vote from our eligible members. Look for a letter and ballot from WAFWP in December with this important ballot attached.

For more information on these topics, please visit the benefits section at <http://www.wafwp.org>

Need to find a creative outlet? Our current newsletter editor, Pam Erstad is moving on, and WAFWP is need of a new editor for our newsletter. If you have an interest or talent for wordsmithing and would like to contribute to your association, please contact Russell Rogers at president@wafwp.org

WAFWP Contacts

WAFWP Email Address: <http://www.wafwp.org>

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