



WAFWP



Washington Association of Fish and Wildlife Professionals

Summer 2006

President's Corner

The River of Inconvenience

by Steve Bell

At the June 30th all-hands meeting, the Director referred to the "temporary" denial of certain forms of compensation as a "pretty minor inconvenience" for those agency personnel affected. He went on to say that those of us who claim that these "minor inconveniences" are a catastrophic change in how we do our jobs is a "far reach". "You learn how to live with it. You morph. You change. You go on. That's how you deal with it" he said.

Ask any river how she creates her gorges, wide and deep, and she will tell you it is by constantly eroding the banks away - one pebble at a time. The loss of each pebble, in and of itself, is a minor inconvenience that goes unnoticed by the trees on the shore. But sooner or later the erosion will weaken the bank to the point of making it vulnerable to catastrophic failure at the next high water. When that happens, the trees discover they can no longer stand upright. They fall from the bank and are swept away under the power of the river.

So it is with our rights as state employees. We are asked to take on a little more work here, put in some uncompensated time there - and a vacated FTE remains unfilled. We accept extra duties or work longer hours every now and again (without the minor inconvenience of additional compensation) - and another FTE is lost. Cost-of-living increases fail to keep pace with inflation and the result is a net-loss of income.

Like the constant erosion of the river's stream bank, we learn to live with it. We morph. We change. We go on. All the time losing a pebble here, a pebble there, never knowing when the next high water will come and sweep us downstream. No, we would not mind or miss the minor inconvenience of a few lost pebbles every now and again if it were not for the unmitigated cumulative impacts that set the stage for catastrophic changes that threaten and endanger our careers.

But there is hope. Rivers, by their very nature, must take the path of least resistance. If the banks refuse to surrender any more pebbles we can minimize the losses we may experience when the high waters return. Put an end to the unmitigated erosion of your rights. Always document all of your time and always claim whatever form of additional compensation that you are entitled.

Contract Negotiations

By Bryan Murphie

Patience is a virtue. This is quite true and with regards to contract negotiations, quite necessary. Steve Bell and I are representing WAFWP at contract negotiations this year. We began negotiating our 2007-2008 contract with the state back in April. So far, we have had modest success at coming to agreement on the Articles within the contract. The ground rules guiding negotiations prohibits a detailed discussion of the meetings we have held; however, I can say that we have come to a tentative agreement on 20 Articles. We have yet to delve into the more difficult issues, such as salary, exchange time, benefits, work schedules, and so on. Compensation issues are on hold until negotiations regarding health care are finished. The goal is to have a contract ready for ratification before October 2006. Stay tuned...

Health Care Bargaining Stalemate

By Rhonda Fenrich

The General Government Union Coalition met with the State on July 12-13 to negotiate health insurance premium contributions by the State for the upcoming biennium. These sessions did not result in an agreement. Unfortunately, failure to reach an agreement on health care premiums will likely result in a delayed agreement in the remaining economic issues, such as wage increases, since they are intimately connected to the amount of money the legislature will appropriate towards the implementation of your contract.

It became perfectly clear on the first day of health care bargaining that the State and the unions were operating from two very different sets of assumptions regarding the

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State's obligation under the current collective bargaining agreements. For your current contract, the State agreed to contribute \$663.00 towards your health insurance premiums from July 1, 2005 – June 30, 2006, and \$744.00 towards your premiums from July 1, 2006 – June 30, 2007. While it appears that the legislature appropriated \$744.00 for each represented position, it only appropriated \$618.00 for each non-represented employee. Even though the \$744.00 should result in an average premium cost-sharing of \$4.00 per represented employee, the PEBB board is requiring an average contribution of \$73.00, regardless if an employee is represented or not. Thus, a portion of your \$744.00 is either being used to offset the costs of insurance for unrepresented employees, or is being used to bolster the State's \$70 million unrestricted health insurance reserve fund. Either way, the State's actions violate the contract and can be considered unjust enrichment. We agreed to take part in a grievance on behalf of all unionized employees on this issue. (Check your website to view a copy of the grievance.)

This fundamental disagreement on the application of your current contract resulted in further disagreement regarding the starting point for the current contract. The State would like employees to contribute a minimum of 12% of your health care premiums. PEBB has proposed to almost double your contribution effective January 1, 2007, even though the \$744.00 contribution should actually result in a reduction of your contribution. Obviously a lot of work still needs to be done in order to achieve a meeting of the minds on this issue.

Stay tuned to your website for more timely updates!

Aircraft Safety SOP

By Pat Miller

The Wildlife Program has recently begun implementation of new aircraft safety Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for Wildlife Program personnel. The Agency Safety Office will take the Wildlife Program's SOP and develop an agency-wide policy that will impact Fish and Habitat Program personnel, as well. This SOP has been in development for several years and was reviewed recently at a Program School.

The SOP creates an advisory committee that will help guide the implementation and improvement of the SOP in the future. Several WAFWP members are on the committee, including Scott McCorqudale, Dana Base, Woody Myers, and myself.

The SOP outlines FAA certification requirements that the aircraft and pilot must meet in an effort to evaluate pilot performance. This is part of the existing SOP, although the exact structure is not well defined. The intent is to develop a database that employees can use to view other biologist evaluations for different charter companies and aircraft pilots before selecting a new vendor. Flight plans will need to be filed for each flight.

The SOP also calls for specific equipment requirements for flights below 500 AGL (Above Ground Level). Such items include Nomex III flight suits, helmets such as the SPH-4 or 5 or the UGH, gloves, and all-leather, or all-rubber boots for personal protection. Other requirements for survival gear, such as Emergency Location Transmitters and communication equipment, are listed as well.

The most controversial component of the SOP is the requirement for flight-following on flights below 500 AGL. Checking in with an appropriate party will be required after every 30 minutes, or when the work area changes significantly. The SOP allows employees to create their own system for flight-following. Examples of a flight-following system might include employees on mountain tops using the DNR radio system, regional offices or district offices using the DNR system, vendor fuel trucks using company radio systems, and landowner radio nets that grant permission and agree to flight follow. WDFW employees in Region One are evaluating a new semi-automatic flight-following system. This system utilizes a transponder in the aircraft that sends a signal to a computer terminal, which in turn provides location and other data every two minutes. This system may provide an easy alternative to the flight-following process.

WAFWP is monitoring the SOP closely to insure that equipment required by the policy is provided as required by the Contract. One proposal is that extra suits and helmets be available for occasional flight participants. An inventory of existing equipment is being completed and the program will develop a purchase plan.

Please feel free to contact Scott or me if you have any questions or concerns.

Treasurer's Report



By Derek Stinson

The 2006 year-to-date income (dues and interest) as of 9 July was \$70,920. Expenses for attorney fees, bookkeeper, board travel, reimbursement, and other miscellaneous items was \$55,182, resulting in a positive cash flow of \$15,738. The interest rate on CDs has become fairly attractive recently (around 4% or better), so we are purchasing 12 month CDs that come due on a rotating basis quarterly. Account balances were \$101,925 in savings and checking accounts, and \$71,490 in CDs, for a balance of \$173,416. Upcoming arbitration is expected to increase expenses in the 2nd half of the year.

Consolidated Arbitrations

By Steve Bell

On June 16th we met with representatives from WDFW, OFM and the AGs Office prior to a scheduled arbitration hearing for the Oil Spill Team. We were pleased to hammer out a last minute agreement that was acceptable to all parties. However, after the subpoenaed witnesses, arbitrator, and complainants had all been released, the State unilaterally changed the agreed-to language of the settlement. For no clear reason they insisted that the agreement include a withdrawal of the other pending grievances, including Exchange Time, Demand-to-Bargain and the Unfair Labor Practices we filed.

None of this had been discussed, and certainly not agreed to, when we thought we had reached a settlement. We have been twice blind-sided by the State; first, when they unilaterally changed the conditions that we work under, and again when they changed the language and scope of the potential settlement.

WAFWP contacted the American Arbitrator's Association (AAA) and asked them to reschedule the arbitration. We have asked that the next arbitration occur over a two day period and be consolidated to include all three of the pending arbitrations. We are still waiting for an arbitration date from AAA.

Election News

By Tom Cyra

The upcoming annual meeting in Olympia on August 30th brings us around, once again, to election time. This year, four board positions are open for elections: Vice-President, Treasurer, Member-At-Large, and Habitat Board Member. A call for candidates went out to Association members earlier this summer, and there is still a need for additional candidates. It is not too late to add your name to the ballot. Look for candidate biographies included with your ballot.

After two terms on the board, Bryan Murphie is stepping down as Vice-President. With no candidates stepping forward thus far, Russell Rogers, currently the Fish Board Member has graciously offered to run for Vice-President. Russell works in the Shellfish Program at Point Whitney. Derek Stinson, who last year was appointed to fill the remaining term of Treasurer, is running for re-election. Derek works in Olympia in the Wildlife Program. Camille Speck has agreed to run for re-election for Member-At-Large. Camille works in the Marine Resources Program at Point Whitney. The Habitat Program appears to be continuing its unrepresented streak, as no one has come forward to run for the Habitat Board Member.



Total Time

by Russell Rogers

By now, you all have interacted with Total Time, the electronic system for accounting our time for the Department. In general, the reviews for the new system have been good, and we should applaud the department for moving to a more user-friendly and paperless system for submitting our time sheets. While the transition to this system as been pretty smooth for an agency the size of WDFW, there have been a few glitches along the way which have been fairly minor for the end user. I have submitted my time sheet from both work and at a remote location (home) without any major problems.



One item that may take some getting use to is all the categories for leave. By my count, there are at least 56. Since I could not find out exactly why the Department needs such detailed accounting of our leave time, it remains a mystery. I had trouble figuring out which category to use for sick leave for an L&I doctor's appointment. The only category that is labeled with an L&I claim is "9188 LWOP - Industrial L&I" in the "Other Leave" menu. That is not the option that I wanted as we should be allowed to use our sick leave and have L&I reimburse the Department. Doing so would avoid having reductions in our paycheck. According to the Personnel Office, the correct category to use is "9062 Sick Leave - On time loss" also in the "Other Leave" menu. If it is not clear to you which category to use, check with your supervisor, payroll, or personnel.

Another problem that many WAFWP members have encountered pertains to the requirement to submit their time sheet before the end of the pay period. If your actual hours worked is different than what you submitted, the process for correcting it can be very cumbersome, requiring that you print a hard copy of your timesheet and make the changes with a pen (remember that primitive technology). This may be more of a problem of the logistical transition to the system than of the system itself. My conversations with people in the Personnel Office indicate that the Department is working to shorten and eventually eliminate this issue. They also informed me that they hope to have all of our leave slips worked into the system, as well.

If you run into a problem that results in an unwanted loss to your paycheck or to your leave balances, please contact me, or your job rep, as soon as you identify the problem.

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