

Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW) Employee Survey

Rocky Mountain PEER, with the assistance of Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW) employees, developed this survey to allow the professionals within the department to express their views concerning the direction of the agency. The following essay responses were organized according to topic areas in which they fell; however the overlap in response topics was considerable.

In my opinion, DOW would become a more effective steward of Colorado wildlife by:

I. Reducing the Role of Politics

Removing the political influence from managing wildlife. The DOW has the best field personnel in the U.S. (world!). Because of the political climate and the politically motivated lack of proper salaries and benefits, recruitment of “excellent” employees has disappeared. Employees are leaving the DOW because of these same frustrating situations. Let them do their jobs and reward them for doing them!

Political factors need to be part of the equation in wildlife management but should not be the overriding or dominant factor. Current DNR management has made politics the dominating factor to the point of micromanagement to the detriment of the wildlife resource.

Not always having to bow to political pressure.

Basing decisions regarding wildlife on the biology of the resources rather than the political pressure applied by special interest groups and/or politicians. Politics has no place in this business!

Reducing over political influences in policy-making and agency administration.

Getting out of politics. Go back to basics. Present sound biological information and let the public decide where we should go. Do not tailor DOW input to fit political agenda.

No question has been asked regarding the wildlife commission. This too has been filled by the Owens administration with people who either care little for wildlife, or have actively opposed DOW efforts to fulfill our mission in the past. Axes are being ground, old scores are being settled and the welfare of both the wildlife and the sportsman are being ignored.

Getting rid of Greg Walcher, allowing the DOW to be less of a political entity by separating wildlife commission appointments from governor’s political/environmental leanings – but, we are and will always be a political creature and will always have to walk a fine line to get legislative approval. Also, need to remove AG’s stranglehold – probably the greatest deterrent.

Not having to run decisions through the political gauntlet.

Not having the Executive Director of the DNR appointed as a political appointee. This in turn makes the DOW Director a political appointee, which makes the assistant DOW Director base decisions on what the current administration desires. DOW would also be a better steward of Colorado's wildlife if decisions were based on scientific information and data rather than on political pressure including political pressure from the Governor appointed Wildlife Commission.

Getting out under the thumb of politically appointed individuals. Forget politics; let's work to protect, conserve and manage wildlife.

Removing politics from wildlife management.

No political appointees.

Being advocates for wildlife and not advocates for politicians &/or their agendas!

II. New Leadership

Not be controlled by legislators. Greg Walcher and funds directed by general fund, we need to stay decentralized and self funded. DOW does not need to be controlled by Big State Government and let DOW professionals control the destiny of Fisheries.

Less political/micro-management by DNR (Greg Walcher)

Micromanagement by DNR has even reached into hiring and promotions at our lowest level field biologists.

Get rid of Greg Walcher!

Too many decisions are being made by political hacks like Mr. Walcher.

Being free from the constant, direct, and often intrusive oversight by Greg Walcher @ DNR since the Owens administration began several years ago.

Removing the political appointees on the Wildlife Commission. They don't have any working knowledge about wildlife.

Remove Bruce McCloskey; he has no credibility with the field staff after the White River Forest Plan.

We are currently being micro-managed from the Governor's & Dept. of Natural Resources levels & wildlife-related input is being screened from this level, preventing effective wildlife-related input.

Staff is micro managing things that should be handled at lower levels. Let employees do their jobs and trust them to do a good job. Most problems are originating at the DNR or governor's office level. DOW on its own is doing a pretty good job except when DNR is controlling things.

We are in a period of transition. Currently CDOW leadership is strong and providing guidance and protection to field personnel from politics. Loss of Russell George as director, or increased politically driven interventions by DNR/Owens administration may limit our effectiveness to manage wildlife in the future. Time will tell – maybe we should all vote for Walcher in his current political bid for office!!

Commission is a sham with current members and participation by Dept. of Ag. Head and Walcher.

Out with the bastard => Greg Walcher

He's totally not trustworthy. Example: He said CORE was not about cutting jobs but was quoted in Rocky Mtn. News saying "bureaucrats" were afraid of it because they would lose their jobs – I have no idea who he labels bureaucrats?

Since Greg Walcher has been appointed, he has never given clear policy direction to staff – he treats us as opposition but has never said what he wants to accomplish and how that differs from what we are doing.

Selection of wildlife commissioner by the governor that are 1) sympathetic to wildlife issues and wildlife constituent groups and 2) willing and able to understand and consider valid staff biological data.

III. Improved Resource Protection

Strengthen land use planning

Giving the ability to field personnel (DWM & Biologists) to officially oppose (and thus recommend denial of applied for permits, i.e., 404 permits, development proposals, aggregate mining applications) those land use issues that would negatively impact wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Returning to the fundamental basics of wildlife mgmt. that emphasize good science.

Be allowed to advocate for wildlife.

Recent emphasis on T + E species protection has been positive, but is being done for all the wrong reasons. Species recovery is not the goal of our efforts, preventing their listing under the ESA is the motivating factor.

Standing up for the resource and being an advocate for wildlife as our mission statement says.

Be able to be an advocate for wildlife without fear of retaliation from above.

Redefining “wildlife” to include additional (all!!) invertebrate species!.

Put more emphasis on biology than social-economic-political aspects.

Managers should be required to provide the biological proof/facts of why they won't support field recommendations or why they change them.

[retaliation] Many people have - some former employees have been “blacklisted” from any contract work or even being published in Colorado outdoors (non controversial articles – because the aim is to hurt them as much as possible.

Focusing on the public trust resources we are charged with conserving and taking a strong stance as wildlife advocates.

We must manage elk/deer for diversity rather than \$ so that the strongest and most successful members of the opposition have the greatest opportunity for expression. It is so vital to the health and long term survival ungulates that the right for reproduction is won through stealth and intense competition. The character of our elk and deer communities is softening, very fast.

Pursue land acquisitions to protect habitat and provide for public access to hunting and fishing.

Generating more specific/biological data/fact to support or give a good basis to substantiate our management goals, objectives or recommendations. We need to do a better job of estimating populations of all species particularly the species which are being hunted in some cases we have very poor/weak information as to population density (ie. Mtn lion, black bear, etc.) therefore our recommendations for most part are highly speculations as opposed to being based on good/sound data scientific/biological fact.

IV. Stronger Structure

Becoming a Type I agency – not guided by DNR & Governor as much.

Fewer reorganizations would improve morale

Changing the structure of the wildlife commission to be more representative of the interests of the general public in Colorado AND having an adequate dedicated funding source for non-game, endangered/threatened, or species of special concern and their habitats.

Encouraging the DNR to be more “transparent” in generating policies that affect DOW

Reduced involvement of DNR. Welcher/Pollard have proven to be oppressive. Prime example, Pollard left phone messages regarding report to legislature on the effect of predators stating his disappointment that predators were not indicted as the cause of low deer numbers. He also used the phrase “I warned you” 6 or 7 times. Also stated that DNR would not support any legislation favorable to the DOW. A copy of this telephone could probably be obtained.

Exhibiting or re-asserting its autonomy from DNR. DNR and the governor are the biggest threat to the wildlife resource. DNR’s pro-development and pro-full utilization policies are what the real threat is. Gov. Owens, through his political agenda and his truly pathetic appointments to the wildlife commission (on all boards and commissions in DNR) have lowered the overall IQ of these boards to point that they are mouth pieces for industry and developers. The anti-federal rhetoric has reached an all-time high. Director George is the shining star in this but the masters he serves are truly evil. The organization is strong and committed but is very disheartened right now.

Far less micro management and political oversight from DNR (on everything from T&E conservation/recovery, out-of-state travel, environment and land use comments, water quality, regulation setting, and much more)

Returning to a type I agency Greg Walcher and his administration has done irreparable harm to the DOW.

Changing the CDOW back to a type I agency – freeing us from the tyranny of the executive director’s office.

Getting more diverse representation of Colorado citizens on the wildlife commission.

The answers depend on who you mean by “DOW administration” – top managers vs. director vs. DNR executive director. DNR is the problem. I have a lot of faith in leaders below dep. Director.

Give the chief of law enforcement line authority over officers, do away with the all-purpose and utilize public involvement to guide more decisions.

The wildlife commission has too much authority. Wildlife population can only be managed effectively based on sound biological principles. However, often the opinions of special interest groups and politicians have more of an influence on decisions made by the wildlife commission than the recommendations of staff.

Not having position in the agency hired with direct DNR involvement. DNR should not be involved in DOW promotions and hiring belong Director level. DNR should not be able to scrutinize/review/reject CDOW staff comments on land use issues. DNR needs to stay out of professional wildlife management!

The DOW needs to become a “type 1” agency as it was prior to the Owens administration. Division field managers and supervisors have been hindered in their ability to do their jobs. This is particularly true on issues involving headless areas, oil and gas development, growth etc.

V. Lack of Resources

Obtain funding and staffing for non-game and species work

Improved budgeting and accounting process

CDOW has far too few field employees to adequately perform the numerous tasks we are expected to complete.

Increasing number of field biologists so they have manageable workload
Doing away with the pay per performance system and paying its wildlife manager three people an adequate salary compared to a first line supervisor.

Start paying for the wildlife officers for all the god damn hours they are working...

Increasing field personnel.

Paying its employees better. Pay For Performance is arbitrary, not funded and is ruining this agency – by design of the Governor and legislature.

Compensating its employees on a competitive basis. We work normally 80-100 hours beyond what is required on a month occurrence. I am a relatively new officer and at the current PPP pay, I will have to work 61 more years to reach max pay.

Focusing more resources on biology vs. law enforcement.

Providing more resources and funding for wildlife research.

VI. Better Communication

Better communication from Directors staff to field personnel

Increased ability to comment on controversial biological issues

Throwing out the censorship of DNR

Allow the employees to make comments on land use issues like they could before DNR Director Walcher had a rewrite of the land use directive.

The DOW is not perfect, there is room for improvement in the areas of communication and professionalism, but by and large the DOW has a good team of dedicated

professionals who work hard to protect resources and the strong hunting and fishing heritage in the state.

Abolishing the prohibition on speaking to the media about impacts of threats to the wildlife resource, allowing wildlife professionals to comment on development projects that affect wildlife and returning wildlife policy and management decision making to the DOW, away from the Executive Director's office of DNR.

Being allowed to manage wildlife and communicate with the public without intervention by DNR.

Being open to considering sound research findings by other agencies/universities.

Rescinding requirement of submitting all press releases to DNR office.

Promote free exchange of information throughout DOW.

Providing the honest biological facts for the public to see, and ...then allow the public to decide.

Valuing opinions/perspectives of all their employees – not just the ones that fit the gold ole boy mold.

VII. Miscellaneous

I believe this agency is in very bad shape. Employees that feel they receive quality training and adequate recognition are confident in their effectiveness and in their job responsibilities...This is not how things are currently operating within the CDOW.

Not just having a more diverse work force but changing the agency culture so that people will stay.

Implementing specified (limited) elk hunting statewide in the new 5-year season structure beginning in 2005.

Not putting as much effort and especially money into education. A large part of this program does not relate to wildlife.

We would also benefit from BLM and USFS doing their jobs and giving voice to their biologists.

Hiring best people for jobs without regard to moving them to Denver or regional offices to further some middle managers' "empires." Denver sucks the life out of employees to the extent that the 3 best people don't even apply for promotions because they would be forced to move to Denver and join the bureaucracy.

