

January 2004

I am Jim Morkin, a private citizen in my mid-70's. I've spent thousands of unpaid volunteer hours since 1975 in the service of our State's citizens and Wildlife, often in positions of trust and responsibility including 2 terms on the Habitat Council and formerly, as an appointed member of the Northern Regional Advisory Council. In the course of my activities I have become aware of a very serious financial crisis for the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) that has been building for the past 10 years. This crisis is having a growing impact not only on how the DWR manages our wildlife, but also has a negative impact on overall General tax revenues and the Utah economy.

Fortunately, this crisis can be handled without excessive pain . It is difficult to explain completely in a short letter, so please bear with me, I will try to present the facts in a thoughtful, concise and competent manner.

Many citizens realize the benefits Utah wildlife provides for hunters, anglers and those who enjoy non-consumptive (wildlife viewing) pursuits. However many do not know of the benefits wildlife provides to our state in terms of raising General Fund dollars. It is a well-documented fact that wildlife-oriented pursuits contribute more than \$1.4 billion (Yes, that's with a B) to Utah's economy each year.^[1,2,3,4]

Wildlife Recreation alone directly supports thousands of private sector jobs and millions of dollars in sales of a wide variety of goods. All of this adds direct tax dollars to the State of Utah Coffers to the tune of more than \$186 millions each year and that figure does not include peripheral benefits.^[1,2,3,4]

A small percentage of DWR's funding is returned from Utah's general fund (where the millions in wildlife related tax monies go). However, in the past 10 years this source of DWR "non lapsing" funding has steadily declined as General Funds have been diverted elsewhere, at the same time, because of population increases, demands on Wildlife Personnel are increasing. Currently, DWR receives less than 2 percent of the (more than) \$186 million Wildlife activities "contribute directly in tax contributions" to our State economy.^[7,9]

To try to keep up, the DWR, at the direction of the Legislature, is forced to raise hunting and fishing license fees. Sales of fishing and hunting licenses (resulting from fee increases), are declining by tens of thousands each year, 55,000 angling licenses in 2001 alone (and the decline continues). The loss of 55,000 angling licenses amounts to a direct revenue loss to DWR of close to \$2 million (including lost federal matching funds that are tied to licenses). Hunting license sales are even more adversely affected. Our devoted license & permit purchasers are bewildered and uncomfortable with paying far more for less, year after year. In other words, as DWR dollars from the General Fund have declined, so has the funding it is getting from licenses and this trend is continuing. That loss does not include loss of related dollars and civilian job losses.^[9]

DWR and Utah's Wildlife are caught together in this downward monetary spiral. Each year programs are being eliminated and critical personnel positions go unstaffed (DWR currently has several dozens of "critical" positions that are not filled). Add to this the loss of related civilian jobs in the private sector (see attachment), fewer home and other big ticket purchases (vehicles, boats, ATV's, etc.) reduced buying of support equipment, loss of trip expenses, gas taxes, sales taxes, income taxes, property taxes ... the losses to Utah's economy balloons astronomically, far beyond the damage to Utah's wildlife. Funding cuts to DWR are simply causing more Revenue dollar losses than gains.^[5,9,10]

So why is this not a problem the DWR can solve ? Because you, the Legislators, totally control the General Fund purse strings. Add to that the fact that DWR appointees and employees work within a system that discourages them from speaking out or criticizing their funding sources, the public hears little of their plight.

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Over the past years DWR has gotten much of the blame for failures that are not of their making. As money becomes tighter many of our biologists will continue to leave Utah for better pay and conditions in other states, and those who remain will constantly struggle with whether to manage our wildlife biologically or scramble for income dollars. License sales will continue to decrease.

How do we deal with this situation? What the DWR and Utah's Wildlife needs to help our economy grow is simply for you, the Legislature, to support the wildlife of our state by giving back a tiny bit more from the massive tax revenues that wildlife enthusiasts already contribute, by returning 6 percent rather than the current less than 2% percent of the \$186,000,000.00 (millions) that we (wildlife) annually gift to the state in direct retail sales and state and federal income taxes. Such an allocation, although a small percentage, would help tremendously to save our historical wildlife heritage and certainly improve the health of Utah's economy.

These facts scare the heck right out of me. I hope you can see how continuing losses will negatively affect your local constituents. To further illustrate how we are shooting ourselves in the foot with our current short sighted funding philosophy, attached to this letter I have provided specific, referenced, "Dollar Numbers" for your consideration. Reference numbers shown refer to data sources shown on the attached data sheet.

I have, with the aid of others, thoroughly researched the facts on this matter, using source materials that are readily available in the public domain ... and in carefully worded conversations with Public Officials. I have no motive whatsoever for personal gain. Please contact me if you question any of the content of this letter.

We must act on this before we lose our valuable Wildlife Heritage and further damage our economy. I strongly urge you to read the facts, investigate this further and make the necessary financial corrections.

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P.S. I realize the importance of educational needs (my mother was a teacher plus I served as an Adjunct Professor at a local University for a number of years) ... however, if we are actually losing more tax dollars than we are gaining by cutting DWR budgets (and we are) , our school kids lose right along with the Utah's Wildlife.

Attachment: Sources, references, comments.

Original and copies to: Governor Walker, Legislators, County Commissioners, Wildlife Groups, Media, et al.

**The mission statement of the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources is to
“protect and preserve Wildlife throughout the State”.**

- ! In 2001, one billion four hundred million dollars (\$1,400,000,000.00) were spent on wildlife recreation activities in Utah.^[1,2,3]
- ! In the same period State and Federal income and retail sales taxes, directly related to wildlife recreation, were paid to the State of Utah in the minimum amount of one hundred eighty six million dollars (\$186,000,000.00). A vast amount of that money went to Education^[5,7].
- ! For each dollar of Federal income taxes Utah's pay, our State receives \$1.14 in return, .^[7]
- ! Wildlife Activities create more than twenty two thousand four hundred and three (22,403) jobs in Utah. (How many homes, cars, trucks, ATV's, boats, motor homes, groceries, clothing, etc, does that buy?).^[5,10]
- ! In the decade between 1990 and 2000, Utah's population increased to two million two hundred thirty three thousand one hundred and sixty nine (2,233,169) or more than twenty nine percent (29.6%). In spite of the population increase and upsurge in demand for more Wildlife Services, Non-lapsing State funding to DWR was reduced resulting in a significant reduction of Personnel.^[6]
- ! There are more than forty three million (43,000,000) acres in the State of Utah that are served by some 216 “DWR career field employees”, working to comply with the DWR Mission statement. That requires each employee to serve the needs of Utah's wildlife on almost two hundred thousand (199,074) acres. Duties range from Law Enforcement / restoring Habitat following fire or other natural disaster / caring for streams, rivers and lakes / supporting agricultural needs through wildlife management / normal performance of biological duties ... even to removing wild Cougars from residential garages ... day to day one never knows what's next.^[2,6,8]
- ! To offset budget shortfalls, license and permit fees were increased repeatedly. As a result, since 2001 more than one hundred fifty thousand (150,000) Angling License Buyers alone have “gone away”, a direct revenue loss of nearly five millions of dollars (\$5,000,000.00) to the DWR. Hunters are even worse off.^[3,9]
- ! Currently, for every \$57.00 generated by Wildlife related activities in Utah State Tax revenues, DWR is given less than \$1.00 in return from the General Fund .^[4,5,9,10]

References: (Web addresses shown are direct or contain links to all data)

- (1) Department of the Interior: <http://fa.r9.fws.gov/surveys/surveys.html>
- (2) U.S. Census Bureau (contributor to (1) and (3) dtd. March 2003)
- (3) U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: <http://fa.r9.fws.gov/surveys/surveys.html>
- (4) Division of Federal Aid: <http://fa.r9.fws.gov/surveys/surveys.html>
- (5) NSFHWAR (National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation)
- (6) Center of American West: www.centerwest.org/futures/people/population_ut.html
- (7) The Tax Foundation: www.taxfoundation.org/taxingspending.html
- (8) Annual Report, State of Utah: www.utah.gov
- (9) Utah Division of Wildlife Resource, financial overview and funding process (presented at Regional Advisory Council (Orientation meeting, 2003)
- (10) 2001 National and State Economic Impacts of Wildlife Watching: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/01fhw/fhw01-ut.pdf>