Summary of Research

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Selected Results From a 2007 Survey of the Public Concerning FWP Wardens and the Agency's Enforcement Program in General

RMU Research Summary No. 24

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In 1889, the Montana Legislature, in its first year, authorized counties to hire county game wardens for the protection and propagation of the fish and wildlife of the state. In 1895, the Montana State Legislature authorized counties to hire state game wardens with jurisdiction across county lines. Under this provision, W.F. Scott became the first State Game Warden hired in 1901. This was also the first year Montana law required hunters and anglers to purchase a license.

As we all know, much has changed since then. The laws to be enforced, the biological reasoning behind those laws, the subsequent management recommendations based on the science, the wildlife itself (both in distribution and numbers) have developed and changed. At the same time, the human population both in number and distribution, their influences on the landscape and their expectations of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) has drastically changed over time. Some have come to believe and would argue that FWP now manages people and their combined influences (biologically, sociologically and economically) more directly than the fish, wildlife, and park resources that the agency is statutorily charged to protect and sustain. Is the culture of FWP in general, matching the culture of the people and resources that are served? And more to the point, is the culture of the Enforcement Division within FWP cognizant and/or responsive to these changing times?

To answer these and other questions, FWP conducted a survey of the public concerning their attitudes towards FWP Wardens and agency's enforcement program in general. In the late summer and fall of 2007, FWP Wardens randomly recorded the names and addresses of a sample of the public they came into contact with as part of conducting normal enforcement related duties at fishing access sites (FAS), state parks, and public/private land hunting locations. In total, addresses for 962 members of the public were gathered, and each of these members of the public was sent an in-depth mail back questionnaire. Survey respondents were asked questions in the following areas:

1. *What was their perception of the contact in the field by the warden? In particular, was the warden courteous and professional?*
2. *How important are the primary duties of FWP wardens?*
3. *How effective are the tools used by FWP to deter illegal fish, wildlife and parks activities?*
4. *In their opinion, why do people violate fish, wildlife, and parks related laws? Have they ever witnessed a violation? If so, what did they do? And, prior to receiving the survey had they ever heard of TIP MONT (a hotline to report fish, wildlife, and parks violations)?*
5. *Are current levels of FWP enforcement adequate and is there a need for increased enforcement efforts in the future?*

Montana resident hunters, anglers, park users and other members of the recreating public have never been specifically queried as to their interaction with and attitudes toward FWP Wardens. FWP Wardens collectively contact more people in the field and disseminate more information than other employees in the agency. How are these interactions with FWP Wardens perceived by the public? What are their attitudes toward wardens? In this relationship, are there areas of strengths and weaknesses that can be recognized and/or addressed?

Of the 962 members of the public who were sent the in-depth mail back questionnaire, 57 percent (N=554) completed and returned their survey. This research summary provides the most salient findings from this important survey effort.

RESULTS

CONTACT WITH A FWP WARDEN IN THE FIELD

Overall, 92 percent of the survey respondents viewed their contact in the field with a FWP warden as a "positive" or a "very positive" experience.

Particular to the individual warden who contacted them in the field, the respondents indicated that they would rate the warden as:

	Agree	Strongly Agree
Professional	**33%**	**61%**
Courteous	**29%**	**68%**
Knowledgeable	**34%**	**58%**
Fair	**32%**	**64%**
Friendly	**27%**	**71%**

Eighty-three percent of the respondents reported they thought FWP Wardens are doing a "good" or "very good" job enforcing the laws and regulations of FWP.

IMPORTANCE OF FWP WARDEN DUTIES

The survey asked respondents to rate the relative importance of current FWP Warden duties. The highest ratings indicated by the respondents was for FWP Wardens to enforce rules and regulations:

- 98 percent of the respondents thought it was important or very important that FWP wardens enforce hunting rules/regulations.
- 95 percent of the respondents thought it was important or very important that FWP wardens enforce fishing rules/regulations.

- 88 percent of the respondents thought it was important or very important that FWP wardens enforce Fishing Access Site (FAS) rules/regulations.
- 82 percent of the respondents thought it was important or very important that FWP wardens enforce state park rules/regulations

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The next highest rating indicated by the respondents (and consistent with the above) was patrolling in the field:

- 95 percent of the respondents thought it was important or very important that FWP wardens patrol in the field during hunting season.
- 91 percent of the respondents thought it was important or very important that FWP wardens patrol in the field during the fishing season.
- 83 percent of the respondents thought it was important or very important that FWP wardens patrol at fishing access sites (FAS).
- 76 percent of the respondents thought it was important or very important that FWP wardens patrol state parks.

Although important, regulating commercial licensing (e.g., fish ponds, taxidermy, alternative livestock, etc.) and responding to urban wildlife generally scored lower than the other FWP Warden duties listed.

EFFECTIVENESS OF ENFORCEMENT TOOLS

Survey respondents identified the relative effectiveness of several enforcement tools that a warden may use to deter illegal fish, wildlife and parks violations. Respondents perceived the strongest among them to be:

- **Random patrols** (rated effective or very effective by 93 percent of the respondents).
- **Issuing citations** (rated effective or very effective by 91 percent of the respondents).
- **Issuing written warnings** (rated effective or very effective by 88 percent of the respondents).
- **Use of random game check stations** (rated effective or very effective by 88 percent of the respondents).

Tools that were perceived by respondents to be less effective included: scheduled patrolling, saturation patrols, and the use of game check stations at historical locations/times.

VIOLATIONS AND TIP MONT

Respondents were asked what they think is the most common reason why people violated fish, wildlife, and parks laws. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents believe the most common reason is an honest mistake or lack of knowledge regarding the law. Forty percent thought the most common reason is that people know the law but take the opportunity (when presented) to violate anyway. Only two percent thought the most common reason is attributed to people who are specifically (or intentionally) going out to violate the law.

Fifty-two percent of the respondents believe violators are caught sometimes and 44 percent believe violators are hardly ever caught. Only four percent of the respondents thought violators are almost always caught.

Results concerning the TIP-MONT Hot Line indicate that 86 percent of the respondents had heard of the hot line and 47 percent of the respondents had witnessed a fish and game violation in the field. Of those who had witnessed a violation in the field, 49 percent reported the violation and 62 percent of those respondents indicated they reported the violation to a FWP warden or FWP office. Only 28 percent reported the violation using the TIP-MONT Hot Line.

PRESENT & FUTURE ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

Relative to present and future enforcement efforts, 57 percent of the respondents indicated that currently there are adequate enforcement levels to protect Montana's fish, wildlife and park resources. Sixty-two percent of the respondents think FWP should increase enforcement efforts in the next 10 years. Also in the next 10 years, results indicate moderately strong support for providing better or more training to wardens and increasing the operation budget for individual wardens. The result also suggest support for developing more regional warden investigator positions.

DISCUSSION

Prior to this survey, FWP had never specifically queried the recreating public about their perceptions and attitudes toward FWP wardens and the agency's enforcement program in general. Results of this survey will provide information critical to FWP's goal of striving to meet ever changing public demands and needs. More specifically, the goal of the FWP Enforcement Division is to use this survey data to build on its recognized strengths, improve in areas where deficiencies have been identified, and strategically plan for the future.

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