

Improving Communication with our Constituents

“The 8-Point Conservation Officer Communications Enhancement Plan”

Division of Wildlife
South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

Governor’s Challenge

- **Explore ways to improve communications with South Dakota citizens**
- **Specifically focus on mechanisms to enhance relationships with agricultural producers and rural constituents**
- **Consider opportunities to educate inadvertent violators as a means to build officer and agency support**

Additional Support for Communications Enhancement Efforts

- **GFP Administrators**
- **GFP Commission**
- **South Dakota Legislature (Resolution)**
- **GFP West River Issues Working Group**
- **GFP Wildlife Issues Panel**
- **Wildlife Conservation NGOs**

What about staff support?

- Generally very supportive
- Some concerns about plan efforts
 - concerns about potential for “second guessing” by supervisors & others re. use of discretion
 - concerns over changes in job responsibilities
 - recent survey of hunter/angler attitudes towards conservation officers indicate officers already have high rating from public, why do more?

Specifics of the Plan

1. Develop & Formalize Process to Document Landowner Contacts
2. Review & Revise Conservation Officer Work Responsibilities
3. Develop Communications Planning Process for Conservation Officers
4. Review & Revise Conservation Officer Trainee Hiring Process
5. Review & Revise Agency Field Training Program
6. Assess Communication Training Needs & Develop Program
7. Develop Agency Statement of Philosophy re. Regulation & Conservation Law Enforcement
8. Develop, Review & Revise Protocols & Process re. Citizen Complaints Against Staff

1. Develop & Formalize Process to Document Landowner Contacts



- Conservation Officers submit monthly reports detailing landowner contacts
- “Landowner Contact Packets” developed to encourage CO contacts on farm/ranch and to share information on agency private lands habitat, depredation management & other programs

2. Review & Revise Conservation Officer Work Responsibilities

- Conducted review of conservation officer work responsibilities
- Prioritized duties where public & landowner contacts would be maximized (law enforcement, private lands habitat & depredation assistance programs, etc.)
- Reassigned duties or hired additional staff, if necessary (game surveys, public land management, etc.)



3. Develop Communications Planning Process for Conservation Officers

- CO & supervisor develop specific work plan, identifying events, outreach opportunities & specific communication tools employed
- Identifies individuals who are “key” players in communities
- Plan must be tailored to specific work districts in order to take into account specific communication challenges & opportunities available



4. Review & Revise Conservation Officer Trainee Hiring Process

- Improve hiring practices to focus on identifying individuals who exhibit strong communication skills and 'public service orientation'
- Develop additional screening tools to assess candidate strengths & weaknesses (focus questions, mock TV interview, personality profiling, etc.)



5. Review & Revise Agency Field Training Program



- Revise or modify field training program & investigate other training models which emphasize outreach, communication & community relationships
- New field training program emphasizes critical thinking & problem-solving skills and focuses on community-oriented policing concepts - modified to fit conservation law work
- Enhance training of field training officers (WTO) (e.g. adult learning styles, concepts of emotional intelligence, ethics & integrity, etc.)

6. Assess Communication Training Needs & Develop Program

- Need for 'retraining' of current conservation officer force
- Identification of specific training needs, topics & consultants (interpersonal communication skills, approach behavior, etc.)
- Dovetail with agency Leadership Training Program
- Development of "IMPACT Project" - cooperative project with a number of other state fish & wildlife agencies to develop & enhance interpersonal skills training & assessment



7. Develop Agency Statement of Philosophy re. Regulation & Conservation Law Enforcement

- Develop guiding principles for use in development of regulations & enforcement actions
- Involves staff at all levels & GFP Commission to encourage clarity in regulations
- Encourage use of compliance vs. punitive mindset in enforcement and challenge staff to use full-spectrum of "Compliance Continuum"
- Provide staff training in critical thinking & problem solving
- Develop strategic plan for conservation law enforcement



8. Develop, Review & Revise Protocols & Process re. Citizen Complaints

- Develop & revise citizen complaint & report forms and reporting protocols
- Develop 'flow chart' of complaint review process
- Develop mechanism to document & share information on complaints with staff & public
- Implement review process for assessment purposes

