

draft

MEETING SUMMARY
Wolverine Creek Management Committee

May 4, 2005
Kenai Peninsula College

Meeting participants

Committee members and alternates: Lance DeSaw, Carl Dixon, Alan Helfer, Pete Heppe, Tom Thibodeau, Peter Thompson, Mark Glassmaker, Jeremy Schimmel (by phone), Steve Stringham.

Meeting attendees: Doug Brewer, Bill Davis, Shelly Helfer, Greg Bell, John Czarneski

ADF&G staff: John Hechtel, Grant Hilderbrand, Doug Hill, Cindi Jacobson, Joe Meehan, Dave Rutz, Tom Vania

Meeting purpose: To discuss the status of implementing user fees and the upcoming season

Welcome and opening remarks

Cindi Jacobson welcomed everyone. The members of the Wolverine Creek Management Committee (WCMC), members of the public, staff, and other attendees introduced themselves. Grant thanked everyone for their commitment to the WCMC process. Cindi gave a brief summary of the last meeting and the outcome of the subcommittee meeting in January (see *Meeting Summary and Update 10-6-04*). The meeting summary for the October 6, 2004 meeting was adopted.

User fees update and discussion

Grant reviewed the funding history of the Wolverine Creek (WC) program including the involvement of federal grants under the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (WCRP) and State Wildlife Grants (SWG). These grants will no longer be available for programs like WC. Further, Grant emphasized that the Division is facing budget shortfalls and is working with the legislature to get a hunting license fee increase approved by legislature¹. The bottom line is that we need to look for other funds to maintain the ADF&G program at WC.

Joe briefly reviewed past discussions of a user fee for WC and the various options for levels of service. Since those options were all based on user fees being matched by a grant, discussions concentrated on the most basic (and least expensive) option and the level of user fees required to raise those funds.

Discussions concerned whether a user fee should apply to both commercially guided visitors and private users. Some thought private users should pay, other felt they should be

¹ The hunting license fee increase was not approved by the legislature during the 2005 session.

exempted. Tom Vania said that the Sport Fish Division would oppose a user fee applied to private users as they feel private anglers already contribute to the program through the purchase of their sport fishing license; however they would not oppose a user fee applied only to commercially guided visitors.

Other fee-related discussion concerned the geographic area for which fees would apply (i.e. in the WC cove only or for any access to the Big River Lake area). Joe said the original user fee proposal would apply to any visitor in the Big River Lake area during summer operations. Some people suggested that the user fee should apply only to those people who use the cove and that we should stop collecting fees later in the season (i.e., once most of the visitors start fishing for Coho salmon at the outlet of the lake). Others thought the fees should only apply to visitors to the cove and that ADF&G's presence should be terminated once most of the activity shifts out of the cove in late July.

A lengthy discussion pursued concerning whether the group should move forward with a user fee. Some points that were raised include the following:

- The group agreed that ADF&G should retain active management of the site. If ADF&G is not onsite, guidelines won't be enforced (peer pressure will not work).
- Tom and Dave Rutz discussed enforcement of guidelines should they be adopted in regulations and the problems associated with trying to enforce such laws.
- Most people supported a user fee only if matching funds were available.
- ADF&G should contribute more funds to this program.
- Some would support a user fee only if private users pay also. Others would support user fees regardless of private user involvement.
- Would like to see a non-profit fund established to deposit funds, which would then be donated to ADF&G for use in managing WC.
- Funds need to be raised in advance of summer operations.
- Users could start collecting funds (voluntarily) in 2005 and place in a trust fund for the 2006 season.
- WCMC could break from ADF&G and become it's own entity.
- No fees and no ADF&G presence in 2006. If "all goes to hell," then look at other alternatives for 2007 and beyond.
- Some members felt they should pressure the legislature and administration to make funds available for WC.
- There was a brief discussion on the logistics of collecting user fees (who and how).

The WCMC reached consensus on the following items:

- Guide training: All members wanted to see a guide training program. ADF&G will design a curriculum for guide training. John Hechtel will send a draft of the curriculum to the WCMC and alternates to review and provide input. John will offer two training sessions this year, one in early June and one in mid-June². ADF&G will provide similar guide training sessions in subsequent years. Some members felt the guide training should be mandatory, others suggested charging a fee for the training.

² Guide training did not occur this year because of scheduling conflicts, but ADF&G will work with the WCMC to ensure that guide training is available next year.

- ADF&G presence at Wolverine Creek Cove: ADF&G will be on-site during the 2005 season. Next season, ADF&G will not likely be on-site, unless funds become available or the WCMC agrees on an alternate way to provide funding.
- WCMC: All members felt strongly that the WCMC should continue meeting. ADF&G will support (e.g., provide Cindi's time and assistance as well as other staff presence at meetings) the WCMC for the next two meetings. During this time, Cindi will work with the WCMC to help it transition into a self-sustaining group.

Fish Camera: Dave discussed the results from the fish escapement camera located along WC as well as the problems and improvements for this coming season.

Briefing regarding last season

Joe and Doug H. reviewed the 6 management objectives for WC and gave an assessment regarding whether those objectives are being met. For the most part, things are going well and continue to be greatly improved since active management of the site began in 1998 and since the WCMC convened. Some improvement needs to be made with fish handling and carcass disposal but few (if any) bears are conditioned to getting fish or food from people. Compliance with guideline 14 occurred approximately half the time and when guides did comply, the bear occasionally went on to catch a fish (however, when there was no compliance, the bear never caught a fish).

Boat storage is increasingly impacting shoreline habitat. This issue still needs to be addressed.

While fewer complaints were received last year, there still appears to be some concerns from some bear viewing guides who feel as if they do not have equal access for their clients.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held in Anchorage in early October.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.