

## **UTAH'S WILDLIFE REVOLUTION IS NOW COMPLETE**

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Utah's wildlife-management revolution is complete.

Shortly after taking office in 1992, the Leavitt administration reorganized the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources in an effort to improve the agency's efficiency.

Sections were merged, positions eliminated and managers shuffled.

Some longtime employees lost their jobs or quit in disgust, taking positions in other states or the federal government. Bob Valentine replaced Tim Provan as the agency's director, vowing to improve internal morale and bring better financial management into the agency.

Then, in a major change from the past, Utah's once-sacrosanct rifle deer season was altered, apparently forever.

Instead of being able to hunt anywhere during an 11-day buck-only hunt, managers and politicians quickly moved toward a system that eventually will result in limited-entry hunting.

Finally, in the recently completed session of the state Legislature, Utah's antiquated two-board wildlife-management system was junked in favor of a single, seven-person board.

The Regional Wildlife Advisory Committees, a key component of Valentine's reform program, were established as a lawful component of the system.

Moreover, the creation of a \$5 wildlife-habitat license helped complete the three years of massive changes.

While raising the cost to fish and hunt in Utah, the license also should simplify the process of purchasing a license or applying for a big-game hunting permit.

These are all changes that Utah's wildlife establishment -- including most of the state's major conservation organizations -- supported for years.

Thus, the revolution is over.

It is now time to see if the changes work. The Legislature and the Leavitt administration need to give the DWR a chance to see if the revolution in wildlife management was ultimately the right thing to do.

Armed with an increase of general funds, habitat money generated by the new license and cash from the Central Utah Project mitigation fund, the agency can no longer plead poverty.

The DWR now should have the tools to begin long-term habitat-improvement projects.

These must include investments in private and public rangelands, improvements in riparian habitats and the protection of Utah's rare and valuable fishing rivers.

Legislators -- who have been quick to negate the benefits of license increases in the past by trimming general wildlife funding -- need to provide a steady flow of tax dollars so the dwindling habitat so crucial to the future of fish and wildlife can be improved.

That is the value of the new habitat license. Proponents promise the money -- expected to be \$2.2 million in 1996 -- will go toward building better wildlife habitat. Coupled with the millions available for similar projects from the Central Utah Project mitigation program, this money must be spent wisely if all wild creatures have a chance to survive Utah's booming economy.

As has always been the case in modern wildlife management, hunters and anglers will provide the bulk of the funding. Their efforts should be rewarded. Managers have an obligation to improve habitat and preserve hunting and fishing opportunities.

The revolution is complete. It's now time to give it some time to work.