

Dear Mono County Board of Supervisors,

May 14, 2021

The purpose of this letter is to provide the Board of Supervisors information on the responsibilities and accomplishments of the Fish and Wildlife Commission that have been facilitated by the efforts of the Chair. After the tumultuous January 6, 2021 meeting, and the subsequent February meeting, I realized the Board needs more information of what the Fish and Wildlife Commission achieves each year and how I, as the Chair of the Commission, facilitates these accomplishments.

I understand that the Chair's role is to simply run the meetings and that according to the ByLaws, the Chair's position is rotated with other commission members every year. I have been on the Commission since 2009 and we have not followed this as no Commissioners has wanted to be the Chair. I have taken the volunteer role of meetings manager to include my passion for promoting the ES fishing economy for the benefit of visitors and local small businesses. My strengths are in networking and behind the scenes work and I can facilitate this with the Commission because I have the enthusiasm and contacts.

For the past 12 years, I have produced Mammoth's KIDS FISHING FESTIVAL which has helped me connect with everyone involved in our fishing industry: all the resort owners, CDFW, CDFW's volunteers, Berkley, the TOML/MLT/Parks & Rec, Trout Unlimited, Cal Trout, Inyo County, and Desert Springs to name a few. I have worked with CDFW to promote Trout in the Classroom and I am happy to announce they have hired a dedicated biologist, Julia Swanson, to expand the program in Mono County which has 5 aquariums in classrooms compared with 30 in Inyo County. This program is very beneficial for teaching our students the importance of science and getting them outdoors. She will also be helping me with the fishing festival, TroutFest, and growing other kids fishing events around the County. The Commission has been very supportive of these kids fishing events!

Since I live in Inyo County, I attend their F & W Commission meetings and work with the Bishop Chamber. I have been researching the possibility for Inyo Co. to take over the historic Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery creating the potential to raise LCT's, Golden Trout, and Pupfish.

Sue Burak and I have been on field trips around Mono Basin trying to get an understanding of the water issues and who controls what. We have worked with the Dechambeau Foundation and locals to get the ponds upgraded and are proud of their efforts. Sue is also on the FERQ Relicensing Team for the Lee Vining Hydroelectric Power Plant which is addressing peaking flows from water release, fish stocking in the Canyon, public safety and other issues.

Since it's inception, I have attended CalTrans' Deer Crossing Stewardship Team meetings and give periodic updates to the Commission.

When I was finding sponsors for the Trail of the Trout sculptures as ED for Mono Council for the Arts, Tim Alpers and Emil Rummel saw that I was very interested in fishing and taught me everything they knew. I wish I had written all of it down! I have historical data going back to 2007 and stocking data to the 70's which I am able to share with the Commissioners & Staff.

When the Commission was researching the creation of a Management Plan, I repeatedly asked if anyone had asked CDFW if they had a Plan. I worked with Jim Erdman and Russell Black to get access to their 2004 Strategic Plan that was exactly what we were looking for. This Plan identifies Mono County as a "Put-and-Take Fishery" to create trout fisheries where natural production is not adequate to support the high angling demand from SoCal. We will never be a

“Self-Sustaining Fishery” like the catch & release trophy trout rivers in Montana. I think we should be very grateful to CDFW stocking our waters for 100 years, building 4 hatcheries for us and pouring billions of dollars into our economy, plus caring enough about the ES to have 6 Fishery Biologists in our area. Our fisheries are quite unique and they acknowledge this.

Over the years, the Commission has worked hand in hand with CDFW. We have done spawning studies resulting in regulation changes. With our support, CDFW has gone back to stocking diploid trout which can reproduce. We’ve had Dr. Tom Jenkins analyze CDFW’s stocking data from 1970 to 2011. We’ve continually worked with CDFW on Regulation changes. The 2018 Tourism Study has been a big help showing us why visitors come to Mono Co. and how important fishing is to our visitors. 28% of County visitors come to fish and spend approximately \$198 million out of the \$601 million spent by tourists. But this study is not a specific angler study which we have considered pursuing. I feel there are things we can address for the purpose of sustaining our trout populations and have talked with Russell Black (CDFW’s Regional Supervisor) about his thoughts on this.

Russell suggested a study to see the results of overwintering sub-catchable fish in nutrient rich waters, studying growth rates and survival rates. I am in talks with Jim Erdman to propose this study focusing on Walker Lake. This is a once in a lifetime chance as CDFW is currently not stocking this lake. I have found 140,000 diploid rainbows from a private hatchery that would be willing to grow these fish to sub-catchable size and stock them in the fall. We are brainstorming with TU and CalTrout to see who can lead this study, done in conjunction with CDFW’s scientific metrics. If this proves feasible, we will present the idea of this study to the Commission and the Board.

I have been Chair since 2015 I believe, and have expanded the role of Chair significantly. I am not sure how I would feel if there is no Chair and would I be willing to do all this work as a caring volunteer since 2009? I also have a concern about Staff running the Commission which is supposed to be an Advisory group to the Board. Is that a conflict of interest? Do we even need a Commission then? I also do not see how the Commission can report to the Board annually during budget talks with what we wish to accomplish when things come up continually during the year.

I have been negligent in keeping the Board updated about the F & W Commission. I feel it is important that the Chair reports to the Board especially now that we have new Supervisors. I hope that the Board sees the importance of this Commission and finds a way to strengthen our Commission. I look forward to the May 11th discussion. Thank you for listening.

Gaye Mueller