

**1999 Survey of the  
Nebraska Game & Parks Commission**

**Response Rate = 56%**

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**KEY: "Fish"** = Wildlife, Fish, Realty & Environmental Services - 88 responded (120 sent) **"Parks"** = Parks, Info & Ed, Outdoor Ed - 63 responded (162 sent)

**"Law"** = Law Enforcement - 38 responded (57 sent)

**TOTAL # of SURVEYS SENT: 339, TOTAL RECEIVED: 189**

This survey was sent to all NGPC professional (excluding data entry and maintenance) staff.

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**PRIORITIES**

1. NGPC has sufficient staff to adequately protect resources.

**Strongly Agree    Agree    No Opinion    Disagree    Strongly Disagree**

2. NGPC is following its own strategic plan, "Focusing on the Future," in the management of fish, wildlife and park resources.

**Strongly Agree    Agree    No Opinion    Disagree    Strongly Disagree**

3. In my opinion, NGPC administration puts the agency mission of resource protection ahead of politics.

**Always      Often      Sometimes      Rarely      Never**

## **LEADERSHIP**

*According to Nebraska law (81-807) the agency director should have "knowledge of, and experience in, the requirements of the protection, propagation, conservation and restoration of the wildlife resources of the state."*

4. Director Rex Amack exemplifies these qualifications.

**Strongly Agree      Agree      No Opinion      Disagree      Strongly Disagree**

5. Rex Amack has been an effective Director of NGPC.

**Strongly Agree      Agree      No Opinion      Disagree      Strongly Disagree**

6. Under Director Amack, the NGPC has been a strong advocate for the conservation of fish and wildlife resources.

**Strongly Agree    Agree    No Opinion    Disagree    Strongly Disagree**

7. If you are familiar with the work of any of the Assistant Directors, please choose the most appropriate term to describe the quality of their leadership.

*Parks Division:*

**Very Good    Good    Fair    Poor**

*Fish & Wildlife Division:*

**Very Good    Good    Fair    Poor**

*Administration Division:*

**Very Good      Good      Fair      Poor**

8. I believe one or more of the current Assistant Directors has the professional credentials and proven leadership skills to assume the position of Director.

**Strongly Agree      Agree      No Opinion      Disagree      Strongly Disagree**

9. The Commission should conduct a national search for professionally qualified candidates to be the next Director.

**Strongly Agree      Agree      No Opinion      Disagree      Strongly Disagree**

## **RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

10a. On tough issues, NGPC follows the scientific recommendations of its staff rather than bowing to political expediency. (This question answered by Fish & Wildlife Division only.)

**Strongly Agree      Agree      No Opinion      Disagree      Strongly Disagree**

10b. On tough issues, NGPC follows the recommendations of its professional staff rather than giving in to political expediency. (This question answered by Parks Division only.)

**Strongly Agree   Agree   No Opinion   Disagree   Strongly Disagree**

10c. On tough issues, NGPC follows the recommendations of its law enforcement professionals rather than bowing to political expediency. (This question answered by Law Enforcement only.)

**Strongly Agree   Agree   No Opinion   Disagree   Strongly Disagree**

11. In my experience, special interest groups have inappropriately influenced NGPC decision-making to the detriment of natural resources or agency integrity.

**Strongly Agree   Agree   No Opinion   Disagree   Strongly Disagree**

12a. NGPC encourages independent review of its scientific data. (Answered by F&W only)

**Strongly Agree   Agree   No Opinion   Disagree   Strongly Disagree**

12b. NGPC seeks outside opinions before making resource decisions. (Parks only)

**Strongly Agree    Agree    No Opinion    Disagree    Strongly Disagree**

12c. The top administration of NGPC does not interfere with official investigations. (Law only)

**Strongly Agree    Agree    No Opinion    Disagree    Strongly Disagree**

13. NGPC encourages public review of its administrative decisions/actions.

**Strongly Agree    Agree    No Opinion    Disagree    Strongly Disagree**

## **OPENNESS**

14. NGPC public statements about controversial issues tend to be honest and forthright.

**Strongly Agree    Agree    No Opinion    Disagree    Strongly Disagree**

15. NGPC encourages meaningful public participation in resource decision-making.

**Strongly Agree    Agree    No Opinion    Disagree    Strongly Disagree**

16. In its decision-making NGPC top administrators cater to people with apparent political power rather than ordinary citizens, including those with environmental interests.

**Strongly Agree    Agree    No Opinion    Disagree    Strongly Disagree**

## **MORALE**

17. I respect and trust the NGPC administration.

**Strongly Agree    Agree    No Opinion    Disagree    Strongly Disagree**

18. The top administration of NGPC welcomes employee input.

**Strongly Agree   Agree   No Opinion   Disagree   Strongly Disagree**

19. Morale among NGPC employees is:

**Excellent   Good   Fair   Don't Know   Poor   Very Poor**

20. I fear retaliation for disclosing problems about NGPC management.

**Yes   No**

21. I know of instances where NGPC administration has retaliated against an employee for doing their job "too well."

**Yes   No**

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***NGPC EMPLOYEES SPEAK OUT!***

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**"THE GREATEST CHALLENGE FACING NGPC IS..."**

[Most frequent essay topic in descending order of frequency]

- 1. Politics Override Natural Resources**
- 2. Weak Executive Leadership**
- 3. The Legacy of Eugene Mahoney**

#### **4. The Commissioners**

#### **5. Overemphasis on Parks at the Expense of Wildlife**

#### **6. Lack of Resources**

#### **7. Poor Morale and Other Internal Problems**

#### **8. Comments About the Survey**

##### **1. Politics Override Natural Resources**

"To quote a former 'Commissioner' when announcing the results of a nation-wide search for a new Agency Director: 'I turned around and there he was in the blind with me!!' The selection of that particularly evil Director pretty well set the tenor of the agency direction from 1976 to the present, and frankly, quite probably into the foreseeable future. With all the powers of Kiewit, Con Agra, the World Herald and most other media 'in their pocket' there is no likelihood of reform. Everyone knows who will replace Rex just as everyone knew who would replace Gene. Qualifications, seniority, education, experience mean nothing when an administration anoints its own politically expedient, incestuous clique members." (P)

"Stop bowing to political influences and make decisions that benefit the resource and the public." (LE)

"NGPC is developing a history of tainting resource issues with politics of the day and continues to ignore its responsibility to protect wildlife resources in this state." (FW)

"Focusing on the protection of the wildlife resource rather than exploiting it for the sake of dollars." (LE)

"Getting politics out of the administration." (P)

"We have been told several times to outright lie so the agency could get what it wanted (bird numbers up when they really aren't) one example!" (LE)

"To become an agency that will take a stand for the protection of all natural resources regardless of political consequences and therefore re-establish the respect of employees, constituents, and general public." (FW)

"Credible administrators that will accurately and effectively present science-based fish and wildlife management in the face of political pressures." (FW)

"After 20 years of bowing to special interest groups at the expense of our resources there is very little trust in top administrators." (LE)

"Making decisions based on science, not political pressure." (FW)

"Letting field personnel do the job they were hired to do, without worrying whose toes get stepped on. The dollar is very strong! We cater to those with lots of it. Admin. needs to listen to its professionals." (P)

"Not caving to political pressure and pet projects and keeping in the front of our mind who pays our wages." (FW)

"Eliminate Strategic Planning. It has become a scapegoat (we have to study that) to hide behind and not address the dynamics of fish & wildlife." (LE)

"Restore and strengthen agency's ability and credibility to manage resources in the best long-term interest of those resources and the people. Steps to accomplish this include the following: Demonstrate professionalism at all levels; advocate and demonstrate wise resource management at every opportunity; and build a supportive constituency." (FW)

"The greatest challenge I think is to get back on track as far as letting the biologists make the decisions for our fish, wildlife, and natural resources." (FW)

"Getting away from being so political and getting back to being focused on what's best for the wildlife and its resources. The NGPC needs to listen more to the people out in the field every day than what they do now." (LE)

"The current administration occasionally bows to political pressure on controversial issues. However, it could be much worse. Overall, I think NGPC is doing a progressive and aggressive job of managing the resource." (FW)

"We need to get away from funding through donations whereby the donors need to be repaid through favors." (FW)

"Administration needs to be politically strong enough to protect the environmental resources of Nebraska. Decisions should be made based on their [Fisheries & Wildlife staff ] research and resources to restore the effectiveness and integrity of the agency." (P)

"Effective resource protection in the face of increasing political pressure promoting development. To accomplish this, NGPC staff must feel that they will be backed up by top administrators when making difficult decisions to protect resources. This is currently not the case, so morale is correspondingly low." (FW)

"Following the agency vision/mission without intense politicization as it currently does. The agency has both a legal and moral obligation to fulfill its obligation as trustee of the public trust rather than to cater to political pressures." (P)

## **2. Weak Executive Leadership**

"Poor leadership = poor morale!" (P)

"Finding a Director who is competent to lead the agency in performing and accomplishing our mission statement. A Director who can relate to politicians the needs of the sportsmen and women of this state instead of sacrificing the people's needs to the whims of politics." (FW)

"We need to go outside the state to fill the top FOUR Jobs." (LE)

"To get back into the mode of professional leadership--someone trained in the wildlife field and not a political pawn." (FW)

"To bring in new, qualified people to fill Director and Assistant Director positions. In this agency politics drives the ship. Many division administrators are afraid to speak their minds or make decisions. Professional ability and qualifications take a back seat to agreeing with the current political system in place in the agency. It's too bad, it could be a good place to work." (P)

"Hiring the next director--who will be genuinely oriented toward biological Fish & Game management and active law enforcement." (LE)

"We could use a field-trained candidate for the next director. Not just promote one of our asst. directors. The challenge is the politics of hiring for upper job positions like director and asst. directors." (FW)

"Finding competent leadership that is truly concerned with environmental issues and not preoccupied with their own self-serving agendas. Finding administrators that have the "courage" to administrate according to the law, to the Game and Parks mission, and with the general public's best interest in mind." (LE)

"Selection of a competent Director, with knowledge, who will not consistently (preferably never) bow to political pressure and ill-advised public pressure. Following this, selection of similarly qualified Asst. Directors and Administrators." (FW)

"Top administrators are myopic and do not rely on science for decision making. It is disheartening to hear them constantly try to cover up mistakes." (FW)

"Finding a suitable director with a nation-wide search." (P)

"Finding a director and an administrator that is respected and trusted by the staff and public and doesn't cater to political powers. Our natural resources are in jeopardy under our current leadership." (FW)

"Rex Amack's incompetency is an embarrassment to NGPC. The damage done to this Agency during the 12 years of Dir. Amack's leadership will probably take the next 12 years to reverse." (FW)

"The inability to follow the agency's vision statement in any way, shape, or form. The inability comes from a director who either does not care or is totally ineffectual in his leadership role." (P)

"Poor leadership, lack of listening to the general public/stakeholders, afraid to deal with conflict, unprofessional conduct by Board of Commissioners and Administration, lack of integrity on the part of Administration." (FW)

"We need an outside administrator brought in, who is business-like in running and cleaning up the current state of confusion. That person should also know wildlife management and not only parks."

House cleaning needs to take place." (LE)

"Finding a new director that will not have any connections to past and present administration and [will have] sound biological/wildlife resources background." (FW)

"NGPC administration needs to be replaced with personnel that take public issues pertaining to wildlife seriously." (P)

"Hiring highly qualified administrators to run the agency. The current good ol' boy system has not served the agency well." (FW)

"Conducting a nationwide search for the best professionally qualified candidate to replace Director Amack. The Director must have proven leadership experience and knowledge of fish and wildlife and be a strong advocate for fish and wildlife conservation. The Game and Parks Commission has not had this kind of leader for more than 20 years." (FW)

"Lack of moral and ethical leadership. This is becoming obvious to the public and is tainting their view of the motives of the "field" workers. It is the hope of many field level biologists that we can hang on long enough to contribute to the recovery process." (FW)

"Replacement of Director with qualified individual who has absolutely NO ties, past or present, with the agency." (P)

"We need a director who trusts and uses their staff (biologists) to their fullest potential to obtain information and make decisions, instead of one who stifles their employees because science interferes with someone's political agenda. We need to make sure the new director is actually qualified to be a leader of a natural resources agency and is not chosen as a "political favor" or a puppet for Mahoney and his cronies to control. It seems that the only fair way to do this is to allow for a panel of qualified professionals from the groups mentioned above [NGPC division chiefs, NE sportsman's groups, academia, and private environmental groups within the state] to search and select an individual for the job." (FW)

### **3. The Legacy of Eugene Mahoney**

"The NGPC must remove itself from the influence of Eugene Mahoney. I know of no other agency where you can go from a Driver for the Director of the NGPC to an Asst. Director of the NGPC." (LE)

"Removing all the political cronies put in by Eugene Mahoney." (FW)

"The NGPC will not function as our mission statement requires until we can get out from under the political influences that Gene Mahoney has established with the NGPC." (P)

"Escaping the Mahoney era. Eugene T. Mahoney still does run this commission the way he wants by using fear and extortion. Those below him kiss his ass at every turn." (LE)

"To get out of the Gene Mahoney era and move ahead to accomplish goals decided by the experts and not by who gives the most money to develop the parks and recreation areas." (FW)

"The greatest challenge facing NGPC is what to do with Eugene T. Mahoney. Ever since he became Director back in about 1974 the Commission has operated and made its decisions in a political manner. More money has been spent in developing a state park named after him than can ever be justified. When the park opened Mahoney put his personal car driver in as the park superintendent. He did not have a day of experience in park management. Today he is one of the assistant directors." (P)

"To get rid of the Eugene T. Mahoney (previous director) influence in current staff (Director Amack) and the Commission." (FW)

"Big challenge: Find a director who will have the balls to stand up to the Mahoney Machine, work for the people--not just a special interest group, be a leader." (LE)

"Convincing policy-makers that it is time to hire an agency director with no personal or political connections to former director Eugene T. Mahoney or his politically powerful associates, who possesses demonstrated leadership abilities and is professionally and philosophically qualified in the field of conservation administration." (FW)

"The greatest challenge facing NGPC is "cleansing" the agency of the influence and control from former Director Mahoney. The current Director and other top administrators were put in their current positions due to Mahoney even though they lacked needed skills, knowledge, and qualifications for their jobs." (FW)

"Healing an inter-divisional divisiveness started 3 years ago by a now-retired administrator." (P)

"Taking control of the NGPC away from Eugene T. Mahoney and all the people he and his successor have put in nearly every position of authority." (FW)

"Repairing the damage done by hiring Gene Mahoney as Director many years ago. Though the record may indicate accomplishment on former Director Mahoney's part, these accomplishments largely served to feed his ego and self-interests. He made politics and power a way of doing business and downplayed what was biologically sound for the natural resources and the sportsmen. His political power and influence have carried over to Rex Amack, our current Director. It seem imperative to break this cycle of political power and influence that in no way best serves the State of Nebraska." (FW)

"Finding a way to completely free itself and its commissioners of the puppet-like influence of former director Eugene T. Mahoney while trusting that the "new blood" will not give in to the certain threat of lack of legislative cooperation unless everything has Gene's blessing." (FW)

"We are still operating under Gene Mahoney. I think there are almost daily conversations with him." (FW)

#### **4. The Commissioners**

"The Commissioners who theoretically are supposed to guide policy have become a group of well-to-do semi-political hacks who have no ethics or intentions of managing a resource agency in a professional manner. For them it has become a social club that can benefit their own personal desires or enhance their friends' need for attention in the fish and wildlife arena." (P)

"In my opinion the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission has lost its direction on fish and wildlife issues. Our wildlife resources are viewed as commodities which must be sold to the public." (LE)

"Maintaining the integrity of the commission in the eyes of the public and its employees when dealing with issues that are politically charged." (FW)

"To select commissioners with knowledge and experience in conservation management and the integrity to ignore strong political influences that go against our mission statement goals." (FW)

"Job positions in the Law Enforcement Division are filled by political interests of the Commissioners. Areas that should have been filled are left vacant and the positions are transferred elsewhere at the requests of the Commissioners." (LE)

"I think it would greatly enhance the Agency if the Commissioners were elected instead of appointed in the political process." (FW)

"Removing political influences which dominate every facet of the commission." (P)

"Our current commissioners are for the most part focused on political rather than biological decision-making." (FW)

"The commissioners don't have any back ground in wildlife. They should be required to have education and experience in wildlife and wildlife management." (FW)

"To guard against the appointment of commissioners who favor uses of the state's resources, particularly water, for agriculture and industry at the expense of wildlife." (P)

"Getting rid of the political appointees for the commissioners. The commissioners are, for the most part, not very personable and they don't stand behind the working staff recommendations." (FW)

"Getting commissioners who are interested in serving the public instead of satisfying their political needs. We need people that are interested in our fish and game resources, that will work with and listen to our field and technical personnel recommendations." (FW)

"The commission is too politically motivated and our resource suffers because of it!!" (FW)

"Irrigated agriculture interests are better represented by the Board of Commissioners than are the fish and wildlife resource interests." (FW)

## **5. Overemphasis on Parks at the Expense of Wildlife**

"Making the welfare and management of the wildlife resource a priority. Encourage participation in the fishing and hunting opportunity. Less emphasis on parks and marketing of our resources." (LE)

"I feel that NGPC is becoming too much parks and not enough fish and wildlife." (FW)

"Too much marketing and not enough management and conservation of our natural resources." (P)

"Quit sacrificing wildlife for those who want to domesticate it (i.e. pheasant, elk, etc.) And make a profit from it." (LE)

"To get off a park-heavy administration. They are a viable and important part of the Game & Parks. However, the game department is hard pushed to get a skilled answer by our current director." (FW)

"New direction to focus on Fish & Wildlife issues rather than Parks!" (LE)

"To keep focused on the resources, more interest put on fish and wildlife and a little less on parks. We need to protect the natural resources of Nebraska for the future generations." (FW)

"Parks Division should be split from Wildlife & Fisheries. Two separate agencies. Any wildlife/resource issues should be worked out by biologist/enforcement personnel with no influence from the parks division. We need a biologist at the top. Enforcement that works without political interference." (LE)

"Parks should be separate entity from the Wildlife, Fisheries Division." (FW)

"Parks are indeed well taken care of. Fish and wildlife resources are not." (FW)

## **6. Lack of Resources**

"The biggest challenge is to fund a staff in the field adequate to handle the agency goals and mission." (LE)

"Too many chiefs not enough Indians!" (FW)

"Funding is and always will be a challenge." (P)

"The greatest challenge for NGPC is funding for the protection and management of our wildlife resources. With funding low we are unable to be at full strength with employees. The employees also need good equipment to do a job to the fullest." (LE)

"Paying their employees enough to get top notch individuals who truly have the resources of the state as their #1 priority." (P)

"Game management is ineffective without officers to enforce the laws." (LE)

"Rectifying staff shortages and keeping well-motivated personnel. It is my opinion that being short of staff is a key to many of the problems within this agency. In other words, it is becoming a safety concern for the public and NGPC personnel." (P)

"Following our mission statement while continuing to not have adequate staff to enforce and protect the resources." (LE)

## **7. Poor Morale and Other Internal Problems**

"Administration needs to rebuild moral among staff and seriously listen to staffing needs and desires." (P)

"Director and assistant directors do use bullying techniques to keep employees quiet. I've only called an assistant director once to voice my opinion. He hung up on me when my opinion differed from his." (LE)

"Staff Morale: We are doing all the work with no recognition. The only time we hear from the administration is when we receive a complaint. I rarely, if ever, hear something positive." (P)

"There are way too many bosses and not nearly enough workers to accomplish the task." (FW)

"Reduce time spent in meetings, conferences, retreats, writing memos and similar "pseudo-work" that is largely inefficient and diverts the commission's personnel resources away from the agency's primary objectives and responsibilities." (P)

"Create a truly working relationship between law enforcement personnel and other divisions." (LE)

"I think through our growth we have lost all of the employee camaraderie. Many of us feel that many management jobs have been filled with political appointments, and as such our level of input is non-existent. Because of these feelings, many employees are just doing their jobs and not giving it that **extra**

**shove** that historically made the NGPC one of the finest organizations in the state." (P)

"There is very poor communication between Parks Administration and Field Personnel." (P)

"Reversing the trend of creating administrative positions at the expense of field staff, primarily in the fish & wildlife division(s)." (FW)

"Rebuilding morale." (P)

"The NGPC is so top heavy there are people sitting around in the offices, but they never cut any of these positions; only the field positions get cut." (P)

"Morale is pathetic and good employees are getting to where they really don't care about their jobs." (LE)

"The agency's policies are not professional or respectful of the staff. Appointments to positions within the agency are not based on any professional criteria, but whether you are one of the 'good old boys.'" (P)

"To regain the respect and support of staff. Staff morale at the lowest I have seen in the 23+ years I have been with the Agency. A hiring policy in which nationwide searches are typically used when hiring program manager/biologist level positions but administrative positions from Division Administrator through Director are filled by 'good old boys.'" (FW)

"The gap between administration and its workers has grown every year." (P)

"Personnel problems with the state are 1<sup>st</sup>. Promotional system is based on who you know and politics (favorite son)." (P)

"Improve employee morale: Leadership in the parks division is extremely poor. Stress is very high at this time." (P)

"Our agency is losing entirely too many highly qualified individuals simply because they dared to express their true feelings." (FW)

"Employee morale is at its lowest right now. The agency has lost a lot of very good people lately. This was not due to retirement but people being very upset with their jobs and all the bad politics around here." (P)

"Agency staff no longer feel their recommendations or work are valued by the Administration and Commissioners. Many other issues are involved as well in this process which has caused a drop in morale with agency employees." (P)

## **8. Comments About the Survey**

"Thank you for letting us speak." (FW)

"Post your results on the web." (LE)

"Thanks for this opportunity to speak up!!" (FW)

"Thank you very much for giving the employees of Nebraska Game and Parks Commission a chance to express our opinions about the issues of Priorities, Leadership, Resource Management, Openness, and Morale at our agency." (P)

"We wouldn't be doing surveys such as this if there weren't a problem! I can only hope for results to be 'positive' from this survey." (FW)