

Public Administration Committee

From: Ian Blevin
Sent: Friday, 28 March 2014 10:35 PM
To: Public Administration Committee
Subject: Inquiry in to Recreational Hunting on Public Lands

Dear Ms Mesiti,

As a conservationist and hunter with experience gained in eco-tourism, hunting and other similar activities in Africa, Europe, the USA and Australasia, I feel that I can constructively contribute to the debate and consideration as it pertains to the 'Inquiry in to Recreational Hunting on WA Lands'.

Consumptive vs Non-Consumptive Use of WA Lands

Tremblay (2001) presents an interesting perspective on consumptiveness in wildlife tourism in suggesting that how we view 'consumptive' has generally advocated one form of tourism (non-consumptive wildlife viewing) at the expense of others (consumptive hunting and fishing). He challenges the belief that non-consumptive activities convey morally superior values leading to more desirable experiences, on the basis that these lead to increased understanding, education and respect. This dichotomy between good and bad is potentially damaging based on the fact that tourists might alienate local people because of their utilitarian reliance on wildlife as a form of sustenance. Tremblay argues for complementarity in regard to so-called consumptive and non-consumptive activities in a balanced provision of nature-based services – a stance that I will advocate in my submission to you. This complementarity bridges over to a shared interest in attractions, such that the hunter's experience is enhanced by the quality of flora and fauna in the vicinity to be viewed. What is subject to debate, however, is the degree to which the flora and fauna (wildlife) viewing tourist's experience is heightened by the opportunity to hunt or fish in diversifying their experience. Undoubtedly, when applied to WA Lands, the hunting and subjugation of recognised *Feral Predator* populations inevitably results in enhanced sustainability of resident flora and fauna (wildlife) populations and to the non-consumptive tourism experience.

The Common Lament

If you hang around a group of hunters long enough and you're likely to hear a common lament: Hunting in Western Australia is out of reach for the common man or woman. Opportunities are scarce, and those that exist are just too expensive, requiring ownership of or access to tracts of land, travel to interstate or overseas hunting destinations. The bottom line: Hunting has become a sport for land owners, the wealthy and the well-connected.

While that assessment might not be totally off-target – especially considering that a hunt for a simple feral goat can cost \$1,000 or more for a single weekend, requiring travel north to suitable private property at the invitation of the owner.

Recent Experience – Texas, USA

Whilst on business in Texas last year, I decided to spend an interim spare weekend in the national parks. So with a little research at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's office, I found out that they have a public hunting program. I feel that by relating this experience, I will convey to the committee the very message I believe many hunters wish to convey to both the 'Inquiry in to Recreational Hunting on WA Lands' and to the local Press and to the Public at large.

In Texas, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's public hunting program, offers a range of hunting opportunities as diverse as the state itself. Practically everything that is legally huntable in Texas, can be hunted. Pheasant hunting is available in the Panhandle, blue quail hunting in West Texas, quail hunting in South Texas, dove hunting all over the state and Eastern turkey hunting in the East. In the San Angelo, in the Fall, it is possible to do a little bow hunting for Rio Grande turkeys. Deer rabbit, hare and Feral 'hog' (pig) hunting is available in a lot of places. Given the confines and grazing/feeding population limitations of some national parks, even something rare, like alligator, javelinas, waterfowl, bighorn, pronghorn or chachalaca is made available (via ballot) to control numbers and to raise critical funding for conservation efforts.

Additionally, a variety of introduced 'feral' exotics are available, from oryx to gemsbok. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department have in an efficient, well-organized, safety –conscious program made this all available to the public. Some participants rely on the program as their sole hunting option, while others use it to diversify their hunting experiences or simply as a good excuse to explore other parts of the state. The biggest challenge I had was choosing how I wanted to participate. Participation is via an annual public hunting permit (also known as "walk-in-hunting"), through the drawn hunt system or by a combination of the two. There are also plenty of opportunities for young hunters through the program's youth-only hunts.

Annual public hunting permit

A \$48 annual public hunting permit, added to your hunting license as an endorsement, gives you access to just about everything the program has to offer. That includes hunting, but also a variety of other family-oriented outdoor recreational activities – fishing, camping, nature-watching and more – on public and private leased lands throughout the state, on your own schedule.

This is the do-it-yourself part of the public hunting program that is available to all licensed gun owners. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department make a little more than a million acres open to walk-in hunting. For that entire license year, a hunter can go anywhere that is open, that has a season. That includes all small game leases on private lands, many of their wildlife management areas and also some state parks.

The Texan 'walk-in hunting' programme requires a little more planning and effort than drawn hunts. Hunters have to look at the map booklet, figure out where they want to go and scout it. But the booklet is very clear. The booklet has all the maps, it tells you how to get there, when you can go, what firearms you can use and what game you can harvest.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department employees who implement the public hunting program strive to balance supply and demand – to maximize hunting opportunities without creating too great an impact on available wildlife resources. For example, the state wildlife biologist who manages hunts at the Granger Wildlife Management Area, combines archery hunting and a burgeoning feral pig population to serve as many hunters as possible.

Approximately 12 years ago, they suffered huge and damaging hog populations so now it has been opened up where you can come out with archery equipment or a crossbow year-round and hunt hogs. The hunting public are very thankful of that as are the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department who suffer virtually no costs imposed to control their feral hog populations.

Drawn Hunts

The drawn-hunt component of the public hunting program is exactly what it sounds like. You decide what type of species you'd like to hunt, select from the available hunting areas and hunt dates for that species, then fill out a special permit application and hope you get drawn.

What are your chances of being selected? That, of course, depends on what, how and where you want to hunt, because some species and locations are in more demand than others.

Say you'd like to hunt the "Gun Deer; Either Sex" category. For the 2009-10 seasons, 167 applicants put in for 100 permits at White Oak Creek Wildlife Management Area. Decent odds. Conversely, Chaparral WMA – always one of the most popular destinations – is a much tougher ticket, with 3,000 to 4,000 applicants vying for only 50 permits.

Summarising, if you really just want to go on a hunt, there are some places where you've got better than even odds of getting selected. You may not get selected each year, but you probably have pretty good odds of getting to hunt every other year. It depends on what the individual is looking for.

Another option is hunting standby – hoping to fill the spot of any drawn hunter who doesn't show up. Standby hunting can be fruitful in certain areas. Many public hunters have found that if they call in advance to the area, sometimes they can get an idea of whether the hunt manager thinks all the positions will be filled. And, of course, they use a very fair method to distribute those standby positions.

Then there are the Big Time Texas Hunts – seven once-in-a-lifetime hunting packages on some of the finest private ranches and prime wildlife management areas in the state. The crown jewel is the Grand Slam, with four guided hunts for the desert bighorn sheep, pronghorn antelope, white-tailed deer and mule deer. Each premium hunt includes food, lodging and taxidermy. Cost to enter? Just \$9 online.

You can find a wealth of information including application and permit fees, the previous year's number of permits and applicants for each area, hunter success rates and much more – in a handy booklet published each year by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Youth-Only Hunts

The youth-only portion of the public hunting program provides an excellent way to give younger hunters an educational and memorable outdoor experience that stresses ethics, responsibility and conversation. Both drawn hunts and walk-in hunts are available, for big game and small game, on lands throughout the state. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department provides detailed information regarding youth hunting licenses, necessary supervision and hunter education requirements.

Public hunt managers understand the importance of youth hunting and go to great lengths to keep up with demand. They are continually trying to add hunting blinds and things of that nature that will accommodate youth.

CONCLUSION:

Whilst we all clearly acknowledge that WA is not Texas, there is much that can be learnt by this beautiful State of Western Australia (huge area and low PPSK) from places like Texas (smaller area and much greater PPSK) wherein hunting and hunters are accepted and promoted as a sustainable, value-add component of lands and feral animal management.

I remain available to contribute further or to be contacted or consulted in any manner as it relates to this important inquiry.

Yours sincerely
Ian Blevin