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Hello Chas, *EQC Committee*

I was thrilled to see the article in the paper Feb. 16th that State Parks will seek its own commission. And even better that Joe Maurier advocated moving out of Fish and Game. I was making those arguments regarding Chief Plenty Coups and Heritage parks in the 1990s. I am encouraged that possibly we now have administrators that can see outside of the F&G culture. I offer this letter in total support of those concepts and would be open to offering detail letters or testimony to help that happen.

1. Every organization has a culture. The F&G culture of independence and entitlement has been a matter of dispute and discontent for a very long time. Ask many state legislators, many of the sport advocacy groups, and ask most State Park employees through the decades. Then ask any of the constituencies that believed cultural parks should be educational and economic assets to our tourism economy. Much of the public gave up and many park professionals moved on to other agencies or resigned. Fish and Game thrives on hunting and fishing licenses, fees, and grants. They want public involvement for hunting quotas etc. but want to keep the public, groups, and legislature out of their business. Parks is dependent on public involvement, support, and funding. Some of us were successful partners with tourism, educational and heritage organizations until we were pushed out by unethical F&G parks staff.

2. Most of the Park supervisors were hunting and fishing advocates, some who even wanted to be biologists but settled for the maintenance arm of F&G. Some wanted the public to see them as F&G and would do anything to be accepted. Some wanted to be game wardens. Many park seasonals were young biologists trying to get their foot in the door by taking parks jobs. They continued to attend F&G meetings and training, help tag fish or game rather than cut grass, clean toilets, pick up litter, collect fees, meet the public, etc. Those of us who felt the parks job came first were put at odds with each division. Our Park leaders would rarely put park issues on regional or Commission agendas. My attempts to get museum, cultural park issues and even a national law reviewed (Native American Graves Repatriation Act- which if not complied could have cost F&G to forfeit federal funding.) resulted in verbal reprimands and harassment.

Many of us served as road kill haulers, game taggers, check station laborers, HQ custodians, etc. Many of us quit going to restaurants for lunch etc. since we wore the same yellow target on our sleeves and were confronted by people upset about not getting their elk permit, what we were going to do about the wolves, or where the fishing was hot. And at a cultural facility like Chief Plenty Coups we were not trusted because game wardens interrogated Indian suspects in the museum basement. Any government presence is suspect on the reservations, especially given the history of conflict on the Bighorn River. One reason I pushed for CPC shirts but was denied.

3. The Game Warden culture is unethical. An ethics policy was discussed but not as related to public accountability or elitism but to deal with wardens guiding for hunters. I refused to work more check stations when I saw the competition for dollar amounts to win the Safari International award and to pad their retirement benefits. Wardens could retire at 20 years, because law enforcement jobs were dangerous, yet those of us in parks were required to have 30 years. Many times our jobs were made more dangerous than

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Exhibit 1

theirs because they wrote tickets each day then went home. We then had to sort out camping, alcohol and various conflicts and collect fees.

Many wasted hours were spent in regional meetings and gatherings listening to discussions of trapping regs, game quotas, fish counts and some wardens grumbling about dirt bags and hairballs. It seemed to be acceptable for them to degrade their clientele and Montana citizens while most of us in parks knew our publics as friends and neighbors. The wardens were resentful of sharing their turf with maintenance (parks) guys. They used the parks division for all they could get but were uncooperative when we needed their professional help. (Much in previous letter) A few of us insisted we were not a government welfare program but accountable to our park profession. Of course then we were not team players, criticized and blacklisted.

4. Historical, cultural, and heritage parks would fit much better with the Montana Historical Society, Commerce or Tourism since areas like Makoshika, Bannack, Pictograph Cave and Plenty Coups are educational and tourism resources. The only two state government museums are in Pryor and Helena. The cyclical neglect of the Plenty Coups Park & Museum can be well documented. In the 1980s asbestos was removed from all hatcheries, wildlife management buildings etc. except the CPC museum. Fire codes were ignored. Artifacts were not secured or professionally archived. Packrats, mice, bugs, and maggots had access to spiritual and sensitive natural collections. Only when a foolish manager challenged the system in the 90s and let cultural, educational, and tourism groups become involved was the issues dealt with. But so was the manager. The log home was not secured, the museum roof leaked on collections, the facility was not opened as advertised. Why? Because it was in the lowly Parks Div. of F&G, cultural parks was the lowest priority in the Parks Div., It was the only museum in the system, it is on an Indian reservation, its in Eastern Montana. The F&G culture was ignorant of the issues and too busy to be educated. But the regional Supervisor and friends hunted pheasants there and the fishing was better than thought, so it had some value to F&G.

Today managers have insulted the rare individuals that saw values at Chief Plenty Coups State Park as larger than our personal distractions. Budgets have increased significantly and funds found to improve interpretation and basics but partnerships have suffered. Involvement with constituencies has been minimized, signage to the park has been altered to an F&G facility, unethical and dishonest activities have somehow avoided public scrutiny. Significant change is needed. Public and cultural accountability and co-management is essential. This can only happen outside the culture of F&G.

If we accept a salary from public funds, programs, and grants- if we accept the benefit of health coverage, retirement, etc. – with the use of public vehicles, computers, uniforms, phones, offices, secretaries, etc. are we also accountable to the taxpayers? If understanding our heritage, what values we have at present and what that may mean for our future has any importance it has to be assessed by caring and knowledgeable citizens outside the box of a fishing and hunting bureaucracy.

Others could add to these arguments if contacted. As usual I have probably said too much.

Thanks for proceeding with this necessary change.

CC Joe Maurier

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