

Shooting Range Ad Hoc Committee Minutes

The second meeting of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress Shooting Range Ad Hoc Committee was held on Friday, December, 16, 2011 at the Comfort Inn in Plover, WI.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by Chairman Murphy. Present were Mike Murphy, Kevin Smaby, Doug Burroughs, Steven Ninneman and Allan Pribnow. This was all members of the committee. Also present were: Tim Weiss, DNR Wildlife; Colleen Runey, public citizen; Ralph Fritsch, WCC delegate with concerns; Steve Gibbs, Eau Claire attorney with association with NRA who was an invited guest; and Kari Lee-Zimmerman, DNR WCC liaison. Keith Warnke was excused but was to report via teleconference.

First order of business was the reading, review and approval of the mission statement for the committee. Motion to approve as written by Ninneman, seconded by Pribnow. Motion passed unanimously.

The previous minutes from October 14, 2011, were read with no changes to be made. Motion to approve by Burroughs, seconded by Pribnow. Passed unanimously.

Steve Gibbs, attorney from Eau Claire (associated with Friends of the NRA, has represented many gun clubs in lawsuits, is an NRA certified instructor, is an NRA training councilor, an NRA range technical adviser, has taken many courses to become as educated as possible with regards to shooting ranges, and is an NRA referral attorney) wrote an amendment to the zoning act and has another amendment in Madison awaiting action.

In the Range Protection Act, zoning covers clubs in existence in 2010 and before, ranges cannot be closed because of noise. Every existing club in terms of zoning are non-conforming and grandfathered in. The minute the clubs try to improve, fix, or expand the clubs they then have to go to a conditional use permit and conditional use permits can be taken away. Latest amendment says that if you are non-conforming, conditional use, you can improve or expand without having to get a new permit. Biggest problem now with every gun range in the State is that they don't meet the standards nationally. If we set standards in the State, we are setting a road map to shut down 99% of the gun ranges. Steve implored the committee not to set standards. Improve ranges, but don't set standards.

New amendment that Steve has proposed will deal with how ranges can be shut down, this will be from the range side and will make it so that ranges have every opportunity to fix the problems. It will put the onus on the district attorney. This amendment is a compilation of 20 states' laws taking the best of each. We need to band together and (NRA, WCC, trap shooters and rifle clubs) do some things together. First, we all need to get on board and go in the same direction working as a whole not as individual units. Second, acting as a team we can get things done in Madison (with 900 clubs statewide) powerful things can get done with these numbers in Madison.

Committee discussed this information and the thoughts all led in the direction of forming a coalition of different user groups to band together to help improve gun ranges. Also suggested was that at the WCC State Convention, that Steve could give a seminar or a break out session on his presentation for range improvements and banding groups together. Getting a network to help the ranges update themselves. This to be asked of the executive committee as to either present in a break out session or to the whole general assembly.

The next discussion was on lead problems. As Steve had said, those out to close ranges will start with noise, then not being able to it this way, then they may go after the safety aspect. If we can get ranges up to safety, this is not a way for them either. After this avenue, the next thing they will go to is lead issues to close ranges down.

The biggest study of lead was where there was more lead bullets ever shot in history, Gettysburg battleground. It was found that the lead bullets go down about a foot and coat themselves and the sit there and no leach. As long as the soil is not acidic, the lead will be fine in this State. Lead comes from the ground naturally, it is a natural element, if it is so bad why are we not all dead presently. Lead will be the next battle that shooting ranges have to face.

Keith Warnke was next on the agenda but was unable to physically attend the meeting. He made his presentation via the telephone. He gave the committee a report on Pittman-Robertson funds for shooting ranges. Keith will check into making an allotment of P-R funds to be put into shooting range improvements under NR50.17. The ranges that would be covered are the totally public ranges and private ranges that have reasonable rates for daily or yearly use and are open to hunter's education programs.

There are presently 14 shooting ranges that are totally public ranges. It is planned through the DNR that each of these ranges will over time be reviewed and hopefully updated through a master plan. At present, two ranges (Yellowstone Lake range and Snaketrack range) are being renovated in 2012 totally with P-R funds and will be done by late summer 2012. Two other ranges (Caywood range and McMiller range) are under consideration for 2012 P-R funded upgrades. There is a priority ranking system being set (from NR50.17) that will review ranges for projects in the future. The projects listed above will spend over half a million dollars in the coming year. Keith also provided a copy of the range grant form for the State of Wisconsin.

The committee asked if P-R funds could be used to educate facilitators to help with education of gun ranges to help them out with where to go to get funding for improvements. Keith said he thought that this would be okay but he would follow up on this.

Tim Weiss followed up on Keith's conference call by trying to explain public vs. private on P-R funding use. Tim and Keith had talked with each other previously about this issue and nothing could be found to have restrictions on funding. It was then mentioned that Keith should contact Bethany Collins, who is the WDNR-Fed coordinator to get the true Federal interpretation of this. It was added that the wording is that: It must be for public benefit, not to exceed reasonable charges, having reasonable hours and be with reasonable limitations. The unfortunate thing is that nobody knows what the reasonable standard is. This committee is formally asking Keith to follow up on this and get the Federal position on it.

At this point the questions for the questionnaire were discussed and proposed as follows:

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The Pittman-Robertson act is an excise tax money fund from firearm, ammunition and archery sales. It is money that is returned to the state from the federal government and has not been utilized in recent years to help improve the ranges, build new ranges, increase safety, expand education or help purchase new shooting equipment. The Congress is currently working to restore and get these funds back to the public for range improvements.

Do you support this action?

Shooting Range Initiative

There are over 900 shooting ranges in the state of Wisconsin and at present, no unified single group to work with these ranges, shooting groups, and the user factions to unite them and promote and protect the shooting sports.

Do you support a move by the congress to work with the WDNR to bring these ranges, shooting groups, and factions together working to further promote and educate the public on the shooting sports?

Motion to forward questions by Smaby, seconded by Ninneman. Approved three yes, one no, one abstained.

Under member matters, Allan Pribnow informed the committee of a shooting sports meeting in March, 2012 that will cover lead and shooting ranges. The meeting will be held in the Fox Valley whereabouts presently unknown (Allan will get us more information via email). It was suggested that all members of this committee should be in attendance at the meeting. Also thought that any other WCC members with interest should attend as well. Motion to adjourn by Burroughs, seconded by Pribnow. Meeting adjourned at 9:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Kevin Smaby, secretary of the Ad Hoc Shooting Range Committee