

# **Management of Wildlife Law Enforcement Operations Within the Concept of Community Oriented Policing**

**N. Tyson Laney, Major, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, Division of Enforcement, Field Operations Program, Raleigh, NC 27604-1188**

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*Abstract:* Traditional wildlife law enforcement epitomizes the concept of community oriented policing. Many problems of supervision, performance tracking, evaluation, and uniformity in front line law enforcement operations arise because the nature of conservation law enforcement is remote in terms of territory, communication, and routine operations. The successful implementation of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission's Five Point Plan is bringing about a paradigm shift. Supervisory training, performance evaluation, and law enforcement ethics receive top priority under the plan. Communication and professionalism are top concerns for the law enforcement programs. The present agency standards exemplify management of community oriented policing.

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Supervisory personnel in the wildlife regulatory agency in North Carolina must cope with daily management of law enforcement personnel and tracking of operations through remote methods. Supervisory staff for wildlife enforcement officer employees must depend more on administrative review rather than direct observation of the officer's work. The bulk of our officer's daily field work occurs in geographically remote areas of North Carolina, usually out of sight of any supervisor. Unlike many departments that operate with supervisors in close proximity to the work force, most often it is not feasible for our supervisory staff to get on site in many critical situations. Often there is a critical need for help in deciding issues, the need for guidance and support, or the need for the supervisor to view circumstances of situations first hand.

Each of our 150 officers has the responsibility to respond to violation complaints, hunting and boating accident investigations, and public assistance requests within an area of approximately 777 km<sup>2</sup> miles. This includes both urban and rural areas. We cover thousands of kilometers of rivers and streams, over

31,000 ha of impounded water area, forests, fields, and many kilometers of ocean coastline.

Our field supervisory structure consists of 36 sergeants, 18 lieutenants, and 9 captains. The field supervisory staff has strategic residence assignment throughout the State within 9 districts. Each district has 1 captain who is the district supervisor responsible for 2 platoons made up of 4 patrol areas. Each captain supervises 2 lieutenants who are platoon supervisors responsible for 2 patrol areas. A lieutenant supervises 2 sergeants who are area supervisors responsible for a patrol area that usually consists of 3 counties.

Candidates for Wildlife Officer Basic School receive screening for trainability, good character, and self reliance. Officer training emphasizes working as an individual. Advanced work planning is routinely in conjunction with other officers within the work unit designated as the patrol area. Patrol areas normally consist of 3 officers and a sergeant. Activity and operational reports come to a single central office in Raleigh via the supervisory chain.

The emphasis on the officer-individual-work-unit concept leads to a natural tendency to develop individualized forms of daily operations. This tendency manifests itself at all levels from the first line officer's operations to the district unit operations. While the individual-work-unit concept is necessary and effective in accomplishing our type of law enforcement work, supervision and interpretation or implementation of policy can easily become inconsistent across the State. In extreme cases, work units—both the individual officer and the group units—can become too independent for the good of the agency.

The most common effect of the problem is that the trend described above leads to faulty communication. The most dreaded and treacherous effect of the problem is a decline in employee morale. Low morale breeds on the notion that performance standards are unfair and inconsistent with regard to opportunities for promotion, preferred assignment, and other employee benefits.

Those of us who allow our desire to be competitive, unique, and distinguished in our work operations outweigh our desire to work for the overall benefit of our organization perpetuate the problem. Every employee will be a key player in moving toward a solution to the problem. We as administrators must provide the means to recognize unique operational methods of all employees and address the results appropriately. We must direct competitiveness to the appropriate and desired results and we must provide a means for employees to distinguish their service consistent with the work plan for the agency.

Until recently, the performance work plan did not effectively deal with the inappropriateness of the work unit becoming too independent. The North Carolina Performance Management System<sup>1</sup> embraced by the Wildlife Resources Commission in the early 1990s works well for wildlife officers and their supervi-

<sup>1</sup> North Carolina Performance Management System, Development Dimensions International, copyright 1990. All rights reserved. Reproduction rights granted for the State of North Carolina only.

sors. Most wildlife enforcement officers and their supervisors view the work standards with much more clarity. We see the expected results of our work as being much more realistic. Also, we see the approach to performance evaluation as being much more professional than in the past.

The nature of wildlife enforcement requires self reliance, independence from direct on site supervision, and unusual trust between the employer and employee with regard to employee accountability. The natural competitiveness of the wildlife enforcement officer further complicates the problem. Wildlife officer competitiveness can easily become misdirected in our type of law enforcement work.

The absence of close daily contact with the supervisor in routine wildlife enforcement operations causes us to rely more heavily on effective recruiting, selection, and employee tracking methods to maintain a work team concept.

In 1991 the Enforcement Division of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission began to develop ongoing in-service physical fitness programs to assess fitness of each wildlife officer. A clear objective of this program was to channel the individual officer's competitiveness to a productive and appropriate result. Also, the assessment process validates the physical fitness requirements and agility standards for wildlife officer selection.

The result and benefit to the Division of establishing the in-service fitness programs are positive. The assessment scores for in-service officers are substantially higher than the minimum score candidates need to advance in the competition for selection as cadets for the Wildlife Office's Basic School. Validation of the Commission's selection process and the enhancement of our recruit training programs are important benefits of the in-service officer assessments. The in-service fitness programs improve the individual physical and mental wellness of wildlife officers by directing the natural competitiveness among them to desirable results. The short term and long term effect for employees and for the agency are very healthy and positive.

In the early 1990s, the Wildlife Resources Commission began an in-depth specialized supervisory training program for officers at the rank of sergeant and above. We refer to this training officially as the Developmental Supervision Program.<sup>2</sup> It involves outside consultation with professionals who research and address the unique difficulties of supervision of wildlife law-enforcement officers.

The Developmental Supervision Program is working well at all levels within the supervisory chain. Non-supervisory officers receive training in acceptance of the program. Frequently, graduates who are interviewing for advancement to lieutenant or captain describe the change in their perspective brought about by Developmental Supervision Program participation. Almost everyone seems to agree that the program aids our agency in our efforts to standardize operations and manage personnel within our organization.

<sup>2</sup> Developmental Supervision Program, Stephen K. Straus, Ph.D., Public Administration Program, North Carolina State University, Raleigh.

The Division moved quickly to implement the State-mandated Performance Management System. The work plan is simple, clear, and standard for both supervisory and non-supervisory personnel. Tracking systems are standard and effective. Clear documentation exists to show that performance and professionalism of the officers has improved dramatically.

The agency Five Point Plan began in January 1991. The result is that we see dramatic improvement in standardization of Division of Enforcement operations. There are many major accomplishments of the Five Point Plan. Accomplishments include compensation for wildlife officers by payment for leave and overtime earned. Lines of communication between officers in the field continue to improve through a Professional Development Council. The council members who are representatives from each district, discuss all matters of concern to the wildlife enforcement officer in an open forum.

Management training for supervisory personnel continues as a priority under the plan through the Developmental Supervision Program. Finally, the establishment of a Commission policy known as the Code of Ethics continues to address the need for high standards of conduct. One result is that professional law enforcement ethical dilemma training began with the 1995 officer's in-service school. A Division mandate for refresher training exists. Ethical dilemma training and officer accountability group discussions continue in field workshops at the patrol area level.

Law enforcement officials within the Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies must build on the successes and learn from the trials and errors of our predecessors. Our attitudes in service to sportsmen and all citizens in the community must continue to exemplify professionalism. Our ability to provide excellent law enforcement services with a small group of officers against such adverse odds, is in itself, a testimony to the concept of cooperation in the community. Most likely, no one understands or appreciates better than the wildlife enforcement officer, the benefits of community relations. We know first hand that the real wildlife protectors are the members of the public who get active in conservation and sportsmanship.

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission wishes to acknowledge the contributions of the sportsmen and the citizens of North Carolina who serve in the community as the eyes and ears for wildlife law enforcement officers. The Commission continues to show appreciation to the wildlife officers and Wildlife officers show their appreciation to the Wildlife Resources Commission and North Carolina citizens. Wildlife officers show their appreciation through good politics. In the words of L. Poindexter Watts, professor of law at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, in his charge to the 1990 Basic Wildlife Officer's School graduates: "the best politics an enforcement officer can have is the politics of a job well done in the highest of professional standards."