

USE OF CIVILIAN CONSERVATIONISTS IN WILDLIFE RESERVE PROGRAM

by

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For many years, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission has had the offer of assistance from numerous individuals who were interested in wildlife conservation and management and wanted to help our cause. All of these offers were appreciated, but the Commission's problem was how to utilize these well meaning and dedicated people.

Various types of programs and efforts were made to accomplish this. The first program consisted of issuing honorary wildlife officer cards to certain volunteers. These cards had no meaning other than to give the individual a warm feeling toward the Commission and influence him to be a better sportsman. Many abuses occurred during this program. Honorary wildlife officers used their ID cards to throw their weight around, especially during hunting season.

This program was terminated and a Deputy Wildlife Officer's Program was initiated. Deputy wildlife officers were made up of large landowners, ranch hands and land managers. The sole purpose was to give them more authority in protecting their lands. In most cases these people were also deputy sheriffs. Their authority was restricted to certain lands under their ownership and management. This program served a purpose and is still in effect; however, due to the qualifications many individuals could not meet the requirements.

Approximately ten years ago, the Commission appointed a special committee made up of various division personnel to investigate the possibility and feasibility of forming a GFC Reserve or auxiliary type program. This committee investigated the Highway Patrol Auxiliary and many sheriffs' and police reserve programs. A proposed plan was submitted to the Commission and for some reason was tabled. In 1968, through some prodding of civilian conservationists, the Commission again asked for an investigation to be made and for a proposed plan to be presented. The old plan was up-dated and approved by the Commission.

GFC RESERVE PROGRAM

- I. *Name:* GFC RESERVE
- II. *Purpose:* To give conscientious sportsmen of the state an opportunity to be trained in Wildlife Conservation Work and THEN use this training to benefit the overall Commission Program by working with the regular personnel on field problems. This program could give the sportsmen an outlet for their energies and relieve the regular personnel of some of their routine duties.
- III. *Firearms:* Members will not under any circumstances be permitted to carry firearms unless authorized by the Chief of Law Enforcement or his designated representative.
- IV. *Maximum Strength* of the GFC RESERVE will not exceed three (3) times the number of regularly assigned Wildlife Officers. The authorized strength, with the consent of the Director and Chief of Law Enforcement, will be determined by the Supervisors of Law Enforcement.

- V. *Selection of Reserve Personnel:*
1. All resident male citizens of the State of Florida over 25 years of age may volunteer for assignment into the GFC RESERVE. Each volunteer must successfully pass written exams and an interview board before being appointed.
 2. All Reservists must be of good moral character as determined by thorough investigation of their community background and past records.
 3. All Reservists must be in good health.
 4. All Reservists should be approved by the Wildlife Officer in the area in which the Reservist resides.
- VI. Reservists shall receive no financial benefits from this program. Reservists shall pay for insurance necessary to properly cover Workman's Compensation.
- VII. *Personal Injury Accidents:* Each Reservist will report immediately all personal injuries as a result of accidents in the line of duty.
- VIII. *Training:* Reservists shall attend training sessions set up by the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. The sessions will be held one night each month. Sessions will last for two to three hours each night, Reservists shall receive training in:
1. Code Book
 2. Court Procedures
 3. Principals of Law Enforcement (Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission)
 4. Game Management Fundamentals
 5. Fish Management Fundamentals
 6. Public Relations
 7. Radio Procedure
 8. Marksmanship with Sidearms
 9. First Aid
 10. Techniques of Game and Fresh Water Fish Law Enforcement
 11. State Statutes
 12. Citizens Arrest
- IX. *Promotions:* During the first year of service, all Reservists will be rated as Reservists. Upon completion of one year's service, Reservists will be eligible for promotions. Promotions shall include:
1. Reserve Sergeant (three stripes)
 2. Reserve Lieutenant (one gold bar)
- X. *Duties:* In addition to the regular meetings, Reservists will be called upon to perform duties that they are qualified for. These duties may include:
1. Enforcement patrol with Wildlife Officers
 2. Working with Junior and Senior Conservation Clubs
 3. Operating exhibits
 4. Searching for lost persons
 5. Wildlife habitat improvement projects
 6. Attending Commission functions
 7. Appearing in court as a witness for the state
 8. Assisting other police officers in case of an emergency
 9. Assist regular officers in field projects
- XI. *Uniform:* Reservists shall wear a khaki type uniform when on duty. The uniform shall be furnished by the Reservists. Insignias, brass and shoulder patches will be furnished by the Commission.

- XII. *Powers of Arrest:* All GFC RESERVE officers shall have the powers of arrest only when under the supervision of a regular officer. This does not permit the reserve officers to carry side arms nor does it permit him to make an arrest by force.
- XIII. *Dismissal:* The personnel board may dismiss a Reservist when just cause is found. Just cause may include:
1. Misconduct while on duty
 2. Misuse of authority
 3. Game or fish violation
 4. Drinking alcoholic beverages while on duty
 5. Violation of established operating policy
 6. Any act of violence, felony or misdemeanor
- XIV. *Personnel Board:* The personnel board shall be a five-man board made up of:
1. Regular officer in charge of GFC RESERVE unit
 2. Area Supervisor
 3. GFC RESERVE Supervisor
 4. GFC RESERVE Officer
 5. Chief of Law Enforcement
- XV. *Training Program for First Year:*
- 1st period - 3 hours of history of the Commission
 - 2nd period - 2 hours statutes, 1 hour rules
 - 3rd period - 1 hour court procedure, 2 hours administration
 - 4th period - 2 hours techniques of law enforcement, 1 hour public speaking
 - 5th period - 1 hour public speaking, 2 hours techniques of law enforcement
 - 6th period - 3 hours game management
 - 7th period - 3 hours fish management
 - 8th period - 3 hours first aid
 - 9th period - 3 hours hunter safety
 - 10th period - 3 hours pistol range
 - 11th period - Review
 - 12th period - Exams for Promotion

It was decided that a pilot program be started in Orange, Seminole and Volusia counties. These three counties are urban counties.

In order to maintain high standards of reserve personnel, the same testing and interviewing procedures were maintained as we use in selecting full time personnel. Volunteers were recruited by simple newspaper and TV publicity. A day was selected for examinations and interviews and approximately 50 people were examined. The old army general classification test was given which required a minimum raw score of 110. The same aptitude test was given that we give prospective wildlife officers. Minimum score on this test was 60. Each volunteer that passed the written test was interviewed by a board consisting of Game Commission personnel, one outdoor columnist and one member from a conservation club.

Eighteen men were selected and sworn in as GFC Reserve Officers. These men were from various fields in civilian life and included: one construction engineer; a missile launch officer; a gun smith; a machinist; a service station owner; a pharmaceutical salesman; a 2nd-class navy petty officer, whose job was to interview recruits and recommend job placement for them; and several retired military people.

Monthly meetings were set up which included a short business meeting and three hours of instruction. These people were also used during the month in regular conservation projects.

The program has been considered very successful and the Commission has authorized extending it to three rural counties. Unless something unforeseen happens, the program will go statewide in the near future.

Accomplishments

Reserve officers have been very helpful in answering alligator complaints, speaking to school, scouts, civic clubs, assisting law enforcement officers, constructing and operating exhibits and generally conveying the Commission's messages to the public. They are all Hunter Safety instructors and will carry a big load if Florida ever goes to compulsory Hunter Safety certification. It is also a training area for prospective employees. Two of the original reservists are now full time employees.

Problems

The problems that have occurred are not numerous; however, they are important in evaluating such a program. One problem that has caused trouble is that these people must work for a living and their schedules sometimes conflict with regular officer's work schedules. These people are not always available.

The inherent ambition exists that every officer should carry sidearms. This is prohibited by statutory law in the State of Florida for Deputy Wildlife Officers or GFC Reserve Officers. This is no real enforcement problem, but it is a morale problem for the GFC Reserve Officers.

Occasionally, you have an over ambitious reserve officer. This can be controlled by careful screening.

Occasionally, you have a lazy GFC Reserve Officer that simply likes to wear the uniform and be seen. These officers are dropped from the program.

The primary fear is that reserve officers will become so powerful that they will attempt to dictate to the parent agency.

Conclusion

In concluding, I can only say that I am confident the program is workable and can be a tremendous asset to any conservation agency if the program has a strong leader and that the program is properly sold to the regular personnel as well as the staff and commissioners.