

A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF THE TURNOVER IN LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL OF THE FLORIDA GAME AND FRESH WATER FISH COMMISSION

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The concern of the Commission regarding the rather high rate of separation of its employees in the various classes of positions has recently initiated a study of this problem. Due to the nature of the problem, there is still a great deal of work to be done in order to reach any definite conclusions. This report will represent only the preliminary findings and will endeavor to present some of the factors which influence the turnover of personnel in our Law Enforcement Division.

The study presented here represents the period from 1955 to the end of the 1964 fiscal year. This beginning date was selected because it is the date the Florida Commission began to operate under merit system standards for the selection and management of its personnel.

It is well known that a personnel turnover is costly to the affected agency. There is increased financial expenditure for training, uniforms, and other related costs; as well as the reduced efficiency which always results from replacing an experienced man with a new employee. This is particularly true for a fish and game agency where the specialized work of the wildlife enforcement office is unique to the field of law enforcement. Rarely indeed, do we have the opportunity to employ an individual whose background is such that he can begin to fulfill adequately his responsibilities as a wildlife officer without going through an extended formative period. Normally, we expect the average new officer to require about two years to approach his potential worth as a member of the enforcement team, but we recognize that he must continue to develop throughout his career if he is to perform as expected in the rapidly changing responsibilities of a modern game and fish agency. In Florida we have noted a steady increase in the number of officers who annually leave the employ of the Commission. Today an examination of our roster of officers who have completed their probationary year and attained a status as permanent employees shows:

36.6%	have worked	1-4 years
24.4%	have worked	5-9 years
15.6%	have worked	10-14 years
16.4%	have worked	15-19 years
7.0%	have worked	20 or more years

In 1960-61 the Commission experienced a loss of 12 wildlife officers; in 1961-62 the loss was 14; and in 1962-63 this figure increased to 20. During the 1963-64 year terminations reached a total of 31 enforcement officers—almost 1/3 of whom were in their probationary year. Fourteen of the total loss were voluntary resignations; 11 were separated due to the Commission's dissatisfaction with their work; 4 retired from service; and 2 resigned rather than accept transfer. Of the 11 separated because of unsatisfactory work, approximately 1/3 were in their probationary year.

A study of the reasons for voluntary termination is complicated by the fact that employees upon leaving often do not offer adequate explanations for their action. The most frequently occurring explanation is simply "personal reasons." In recent years we have attracted relatively high type personnel who, therefore, have potential for equally good or better paying jobs outside the Commission. Such an individual is not hesitant to leave our employ when he becomes dissatisfied with his salary or working conditions.

Officers who have voluntarily left Commission employment since 1955 may be classified into the following categories representing their primary reason for leaving:

Inadequate Income: The fact that this is a major factor is supported by a comparison of our Commission with the Florida Highway Patrol. In 1963-64, our Commission's turnover was approximately 20%; our wildlife officer's salary starts at \$320.00 per month; at the end of ten years it is \$378.00. In the Patrol, the turnover in 1963 was about 5%; the trooper's salary begins at \$398.00 and reaches \$520.00 at the end of his tenth year. Inadequate income accounted for about 50% of the voluntary separations from the Commission. A significant number of the men employed in recent years has enjoyed an income somewhat greater than that of a wildlife officer in probationary status. The adjustment to a reduced income is always difficult even though the officer may have a sincere desire to make the sacrifice. He often brings with him financial obligations requiring fixed payments which result in a heavy drain on his new pay check. The problem is frequently further compounded by necessary expenditures for special equipment, the costs of moving to his assigned location, and the increased costs of housing in many areas. With disturbing frequency, we see men who were current on their obligations at the time of employment fall in arrears on their payments within their first few months as a wildlife officer.

Often we find that we employ a bright, personable young man who has had limited job opportunities in his home community. In his new assignment with the Commission he gains stature and soon finds that job opportunities automatically open up to him. Thus it seems that the public contacts and associations of the wildlife officer's job builds poise and a degree of prestige which works to our detriment in that our officer moves on to a better salary in someone else's employ. It is significant that the vast majority of officers leaving because of inadequate income were assigned to counties having high populations and attendant high costs of living.

Working Conditions: This item ranked next in frequency of occurrence and represents many of the situations peculiar to the wildlife officer's job . . . irregularity of work schedule, long hours, community living conditions, relations with the community, family relations, and inter-relationships with his supervisor and fellow officers.

In this age of a standard 40-hour week with definite duty hours,, overtime pay, and frequent holidays—to say nothing of future prospects of a *35 hour week* and *even more holidays*—it is hard for the wildlife officer to face an average 60-hour work week with frequent changes of duty hours and its attendant upset of family meal and leisure schedules. I know of no fish and game agency that can observe the standard procedure of industry in paying for overtime work.

Many of the younger working men of today have become accustomed to close supervision of the "foreman" type with daily and even hourly assignments. Release from such supervision has high appeal; but often such men are lost and unable to perform productively under the independence of action required of the conservation officer.

Since hunting and fishing are pleasant recreational experiences, many applicants regard the job of the wildlife officer as an association with this recreation which will be equally enjoyable, but discover that daily contact with the outdoors through long hours and adverse conditions become onerous. The working conditions category also embraces those men whose initial attraction to the work lay chiefly in the uniform, the badge, and the gun; but who found that the glamour quickly wore off while the work remained. As would be expected, approximately 75% of the men leaving due to working conditions and problems of adjustment were assigned to rural counties

having low human populations, good game and fish populations, and relatively high numbers of violations of game and fish laws.

Desire for Advancement in Similar or Related Work: This factor is related to the income factor but involves more than money. The feeling of progress and advancement is often important to an individual even though his income change is relatively slight. Men in this category have usually left Commission employment for better paying jobs with the Florida Highway Patrol, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sheriff's Department, or some other governmental agency. We recognize the limited promotional opportunities which our Commission has to offer, but by the nature of our organization, can do little to add to such opportunities. As a step toward alleviating this situation, our Commission, some years ago, adopted a system of recognizing officers whose knowledge of and performance of their duties were above the standard. This recognition is made through a special merit designation and a \$25.00 monthly raise. In this category it is somewhat peculiar that the majority of persons leaving for advancement were assigned to counties which were not heavily populated.

Refusal to Transfer: Men who left Commission employment because of a refusal to accept reassignment were nearly always individuals who had been originally employed for duty in their home county. Most had property and social ties which they would not relinquish. This condition will be minimized in succeeding years by our policy of not assigning a new man to his home county. This will break such ties initially and thereby give the Commission much greater freedom to deploy their enforcement officers so as to achieve maximum results.

Retirement: The Commission has a policy which will not permit enforcement or other field personnel to remain in their employ after reaching an age of 65. In recent years, from 3 to 5 officers have retired because of this requirement. Certainly there are numerous other contributing factors and most voluntary separations result from a combination of several of the above mentioned causes.

We have long recognized that the wife's failure to adjust to the demands of her husband's work often forces the resignation of a good officer. Factors which contribute to her discontent may be a desire for higher living standards; for the opportunity to reside in a community of her liking; for an adherence to regular meal schedules; or for shorter duty hours which will permit more attention to the family. The wife's discontent may also stem from a fear of being alone at night or to suspicions of infidelity which arises from the officer's unpredictably late hours of return.

An examination of the reasons which brought about the voluntary termination or "firing" of enforcement officers since 1955 reveals that many of the same reasons noted in the voluntary separations apply; but that termination action by the Commission was necessary due to the failure of the officer to recognize and accept the facts. Approximately 40 wildlife officers were discharged or asked to resign for the following reasons, listed in the order of greatest frequency of occurrence:

Failure to Adjust: This category is almost identical to that discussed in voluntary terminations, but a significant minority of the category involved the inability of the individuals to conform to the prescribed relations with their immediate supervisor.

Inefficiency: This category ranked equally in frequency or occurrence with inability to adjust. It appears that inefficiency may be attributable to two general causes.

The first of these comes from an increasing loss of interest in the job itself and, when this occurs, there is a steady decline in the officer's efforts to perform his duties. This usually results in a reduction in actual work hours and low productivity from such work.

This type individual is often difficult to eliminate since he usually has a clear understanding of what "firing grade" transgressions he should avoid and the necessary minimum of performance which will allow him to "get by."

The second, more disturbing cause, stems from the steady increase in duties and responsibilities which have been added to the work requirements of the wildlife officer. In the case of some of the employees with longer service, this change of philosophy has not been accepted and they resist the idea of doing anything which is a departure from the old concept of "catch 'em and arrest 'em but don't bother me with anything else." Unfortunately some of the men in this category are ill-fitted to do an adequate job at these related duties and few indeed will put forth the effort to learn to apply the new concepts. We all know of the officer with some years of service who was regarded as one of the better officers in past years but with whom we are less than pleased today. This man's change of status is often directly traceable to his failure to adjust to the changing work requirements.

Moral Misconduct: This represents actions which are contrary to the dictates of society, which usually occur off duty, but which reflect upon the Commission's public image. They are characterized by the expression "wine, women, and song."

Ethical Misconduct: This category embraces flagrant misuse of Commission equipment, situations involving violations of the wildlife code and other laws, and "irregularities" in the handling of license monies.

Debts: Involuntary terminations in this category result from repeated failures to satisfy obligations thereby resulting in damage to the Commission's public image.

Refusal to Transfer: Persons terminated in this category are those who want to do it the "hard" way and refuse to resign or to move when a move is deemed necessary for the best interests of the Commission.

Unfortunately I am unable to advance a solution which, if put into practice, will be a complete answer to the problem. It is doubtful that a perfect solution will ever be found, since personnel managers have been working for many years without discovering a way to eliminate the problem. The extreme of possible solution to the turnover in law enforcement personnel are:

1. Lower our employment standards and performance requirements to a degree that our employees would remain on our payroll because this would be the best job they could get, or,

2. Improve our salary, working conditions, and other compensation; initiate more thorough initial training, provide for better quality guidance, and concern for our employees' personal problems, all to the end that our better employees cannot afford to leave us.

Obviously the first solution is out of the question. The second is limited primarily by our ability to meet the increased costs of such a program but clearly is the only acceptable approach to the problem.