

## DNR/WCC Open House Pilot:

**Overview of this Pilot Project:** The week before (4/3/23-4/6/23) the Spring Hearings (SH) survey goes live online (4/10/23), the DNR and WCC will hold “open houses” in each county. This will afford face to face time with DNR staff and WCC delegates with the constituents from their county.

- Fisheries, Wildlife, and LE staff will be assigned to attend. Other programs may decide they’d like to have a presence at the event (ie. Forestry or Parks may want to participate in some counties where they have a large interest, maybe R&R wants to participate in a county that has a big brownfield project—this can be open and flexible with regards to needs around the state). This “open house” will allow staff to provide updates about issues/topics pertinent to that county as well as statewide matters of interest and will afford the public the ability to ask questions.
- WCC delegates will also be required to attend as they would have done at the SH’s. This structure provides them an opportunity to engage with the public and promote their organization, let the public know what the WCC is all about, how they could get involved, and build relationships with their constituents. This event will also afford the WCC the ability to hold in-person elections for their WCC delegates which is a primary goal/need for the WCC.
- These “open houses” will be held within a 4-day period during the week prior to the opening of the SH survey online (like what is currently done for CDAC meetings). This will allow limited staff (some of whom cover multiple counties but may be the best to participate and answer questions/ engage with the public) to attend multiple events (as opposed to holding them all on the same night which makes it difficult to cover all the meetings with the staff that are best suited to participate).
- LE staff in conjunction with WCC delegates will identify facilities to hold these events. LE staff will continue to make the initial request with the facility securing the facility and any tech equipment needed for the date and time necessary and I will work with the LTE in LE to finalize the contracts as needed.
- The intent is to change the “feel” of the event and give it a less formal and more conversational tone. This will help give it a clean separation from the former SH’s and may help to clearly separate the two. The intent of this new format is to keep it separate from the SH’s and not have it morph into a slightly different version of the SH’s. While attendees can certainly ask questions about issues and items that will come up the following week during the online survey, the spring hearings questions will not be reviewed as was previously done at the in-person SH’s.

No public comments will be taken on the SH items at these open forums (although it is the perfect opportunity to let the public know about the input opportunity and encourage the attendees to utilize the online survey). In addition, citizen resolutions will not be submitted, reviewed, nor debated at these meetings (online submittal only).

### **Preliminary Schedule:**

-Doors open at 6:00 pm for meet/greet and mingle (public wishing to participate in election can get ballots at this time)

-7:00 pm WCC elections

-7:30 pm (or immediately following elections) program staff and WCC delegates will participate in a panel discussion. Each DNR program will provide a brief update on issues/items pertinent to the county. WCC delegates will provide an overview of their work on the WCC and what the organization is all about. They could also encourage the public to provide input on the CDAC recommendations and the Spring Hearing questions.

Following the program updates, the public will have time to ask questions of staff and delegates.

-Open house will conclude at 9:00 pm

### **Panel Discussion/ Facility Requirements:**

To facilitate a panel discussion, the facility should be a large enough room to accommodate any members of the public that may want to participate in the open house. There will need to be tables and chairs for staff and WCC delegates at the front of the room with theater style seating facing the tables. Microphones may be needed in large spaces with high attendance anticipated. It would be preferable for there to be an open "lobby" type area for staff and delegates to mingle and chat prior to the elections. The set up for this is almost identical to the requirements for the Spring Hearings, but it would be nice if it had a bit of a less formal feel.

### **Benefits:**

- DNR staff and WCC delegates get face to face time with the public to engage with them, answer questions, build relationships, and promote the work going on locally
- Provides a forum for in-person elections desired by WCC
- Continues virtual format for the annual spring hearing which has resulted record levels/increased participation
- Cost savings from no longer printing a questionnaire or the input forms. Also includes the cost savings of staff time or other resources needed to handle and process hard copy input forms (often referred to as "ballots")

- It will also continue to move the spring hearings towards a more inclusive and relevant process by continuing to utilize technology and social platforms to participate, thereby likely increasing public participation, or maintaining the higher participation levels and diversity of participants experienced during the pandemic.
- This can be used as an opportunity for the DNR and the WCC to get more value and engagement out of this format versus the value from the previous “public hearing” format which, in many counties, rendered little interaction or meaningful discussion.
- This sets the stage for a meaningful, mutual relevancy project for both the DNR and WCC to actively engage and reach out to new and different segments of the population, while also maintaining the relationships with existing stakeholders.

**Looking ahead to 2024** and beyond – this pilot project will need to be evaluated to inform what 2024 and beyond will look like. Sideboards/criteria to evaluate attendance and assess where in person makes sense to continue vs. where costs to hold may outweigh attendance.

The metrics used to evaluate “success” with this change to the DNR/WCC public engagement effort will be worked on together with both DNR staff and a subgroup of the WCC (the relevancy committee may be the best committee to weigh in on this).