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# January 18, 2023 Meet and Confer Meeting Notes

Guest: Maggie Snyder, DNR information officer, Office of Outreach and Communications

Attendees: Jed Becher, Kristi Coughlon, Megan Eiting, Monica Weber, Jim Wilson, Denise Legato, Barb Naramore

Jed opened the meeting with review of agenda. The action item spreadsheet was skipped until the next meeting, as Megan Benage was not in attendance.

**CRC Recap**

Jed went through the main takeaways of the CRC facilitated sessions, highlighting that the parental leave and telework appeal items were good examples of our collaborative work – MAPE was kept in the loop; MAPE was given opportunity to review.

Regarding the Parks and Trails mental health liaison pilot position, Denise clarified that to date she is not aware of a request.

Regarding reallocation denials for the Assistant Fisheries Supervisor, Jed said that MAPE was unaware of communications between Human Resources and the Fish and Wildlife Division. Denise commented that this topic has been on the agenda numerous times and apparently, she didn’t do a good job explaining that she was keeping this issue at a higher level. She wanted the record to accurately reflect that this is an ongoing issue with a lot of communication and that specifics around employees can’t always be communicated.

As for timelines, MAPE would like to have established timelines, responsiveness, and realistic timelines. Jed said MAPE realizes things are busy; however, management responses are often much longer than agreed. If a timeline is not realistic, MAPE needs a realistic timeline from management, as we do not want to continue to ask for updates as it hurts the relationship.

Barb said she appreciates the frustrations and all of us should identify realistic timelines while being cognizant that timelines, while thought to be realistic, may need to shift as things come up.

Jed agreed that things can change, but MAPE feels blown off at times when we don’t hear from management when timelines change on their end, but we aren’t made aware of the timeline change.

Barb suggested we don’t wait while Megan and Adam work out a new timeline and that we bring it forward to management between these meetings. She said Adam is making a conscious effort to address timelines and changes.

Regarding the Organizational Health proposal for a Culture of Respect position, Jed indicated MAPE would like to work with management on this Position Description if it was to move forward. Denise said HR is working on the position and is open to thoughts and encouraged MAPE to provide feedback.

**Wildfire**

Megan Eiting reiterated frustrations from staff and supervisors and that there were rumors going around, but no specific word. It feels secretive and dismissive. MAPE would like closure and resolution, as we already went through this past fall fire season without resolution.

**Guidance on boots** – Megan said there has been one denial on boots without explanation. She heard rumors that DNR Safety has become involved, but they don’t really know and would appreciate any information. Denise said she thought the issue was settled with added clarification on who is required to have boots. She said she will need to go to folks in fire management to find out why there is still a boot issue.

**Guidance on MOU** – Megan E said she was afraid there will be a scramble on R&R, too, before the next fire season. Denise felt it would be wrapped into the fire business manual. MOU language stands as is, the fire business manual should reference the MOU. **MSL is the code to use.** Need to have the letter from the out of state fire incident, documenting time frame on assignment. Denise thought we were farther along than we are and will follow up on boots, MOU and on-call situation by next M&C to determine if a meeting is needed or if communication will be written or what will be best.

**Guidance for On Call** – Megan said they are still waiting on the comprehensive guidance and the messaging from the fire section if there is no change. If there are no changes, staff needs to know the expectations from management.

Denise asked if Megan was saying that people are working over 16 hours and getting paid for 8 hours. Megan said yes, it’s the culture, and Duty Officers are dispatch for all emergencies and there needs to be coverage. It is inherently expected, and the undertone is “you will answer the phone.”

Denise asked if what Megan was saying is that if you are appropriated for 8 hours, you are expected to work more hours if the phone rings? Megan said yes.

Jim Wilson mentioned that it is a statutory responsibility for DNR to respond. He also shared that there was a fire management meeting yesterday and they did not mention updating the manual, which hasn’t been updated since 2021 on the Intranet. He added that fire incidents are still going on, such as peat fires, and people are still responding to fires. He said there needs to be resolution, guidance and directives. They went through fall fire season with no change in how field staff has been operating. Not a word from Forestry fire section at 3-day supervisors meeting in December. At a December fire team leader meeting, Paul Lundgren reportedly said that no big changes were coming but would involve supervisors more in On Call.

**Current staffing plans** – Megan would like a bigger discussion on current staffing plans once the boots, MOU and on-call items are addressed. Right now, they are running at %80 permanent staff. Historically, forestry has had a pool of day-to-day emergency hires, but they no longer do even though there was a bump in pay. There are training concerns when there is not a reliable work force and there is a benefit to hiring permanent, career staff. Megan said fire needs stability to get qualifications covered and the experience of staff for safe operations. Losing workforce is a big concern in the field. We need to look down the road.

Barb said it is important to distinguish between funded positions we have and additional positions we want or need. She did not see the DNR workforce growing as that is not where the legislature is at right now.

**Student Loan Forgiveness Presentation by Maggie Snyder**

\*See attached proposal that mirrors DHS

After the presentation, Barb asked how we would determine or frame this as a pilot project. How many employees, who is included and how DNR determines who is included? She said there are challenges with equity because people are situated differently with respect to student loan debt. There are also costs to DNR, which has scarce resources to employ. Other considerations include:

* Duration
* How to access success
* How spending resources fall on taxpayers since we are a state agency, not a private company.
* Barb and Denise are interested in MAPE’s perspective on scope, duration and who is involved.

Kristi asked where DNR is at with this program. Barb said DNR hasn’t implemented anything yet and we need a current, in depth look at recruitment and retention. DNR wants to be competitive, and this could be helpful to recruiting and retaining. Barb would like to give some serious thought to this program.

MAPE agreed to come page with something for management to consider and discuss further.

**MMB Hay Study**

A Hay study is a method used by corporations and organizations to map out and align job roles in the context of the organizational structure. Denise said that not all information officers will be involved in the study. Right now, they are looking at communication managers and supervisors. DNR has no control over the study and MMB hasn’t fully defined it yet. She said MMB often uses the DNR position descriptions as study benchmarks.

**Conflict of Interest Training**

The training was revised and the DNR has received some disclosures from staff and worked through them. Staff can continue to work with Colleen Schmitz.

**Questions and Answers about the DNR Budget**

General Questions about Plans and Process

* What is the process of creating the DNR’s budget plan, including who is in charge and timelines? *Recommendations to the Governor – starts at programmatic and division level and roles up to the department level. Commissioner makes decisions about what is sent to MMB.*
* How are Divisions approaching this? And where the gaps might be in funding for each? *Divisions are an important part of this process. It is important for leadership team to own the budget request/process.* Monica asked if the budget proposal grew at all for inflation. *Yes. There is a consideration for the impacts of inflation.*
* What is the internal deadline for this to be done before submission to MMB? *It varies.*
* How can MAPE and other unions have an opportunity to look at a draft or offer suggestions and offer creative solutions before it is sent to MMB? *This is not possible given the way budgets are developed. If unions have funding priorities those should be communicated early in process - late spring of even numbered years.*
* What is our budget outlook for the next year? We’ll see. Lots of money out there and we put together a compelling package. Government budgets mean a lot of legislative process.
* What are we asking for in terms of asset preservation? *Don’t have anything to share yet. We do a good job communicating the importance of those assets and need to invest strategically*
* Are we asking for any of that in budget vs bonding?
* What have you budgeted for raises in the next round of collective bargaining agreements, are you anticipating a sizeable increase? *Not something agencies budget for in advance.*

Staffing Questions

* Are there areas where we intend to add more staff? Any certain areas? *We are not as an employer in a major growth mode-overall staffing. We are evaluating needs in particular areas. COs – we are always hiring, but not in a posture of creating new duty stations.*
* How many currently open vacancies is the agency planning to leave vacant and if so, why? *We don’t plan vacancies on division level.*
* What is our HR staffing plan so we can hire in a timely manner? *The board has budgeted for more positions in HR.*
* How will the state consider representation and retention of MAPE employees from underrepresented populations or protected classes? *We just submitted updated AA plan, not sure if it is on the intranet. We are waiting for MMB so that we can sign it. The document will give overall view with respect to protected classes. The AA officer is working with HR on hiring process to ensure supervisors have information and basic tools to take ownership in process.*

Question we did not get addressed due to time

* Is the DNR experiencing any difficulty in filling certain positions given the low unemployment rate and if so, what is being done about out it?
* Do we intend to offer more programming to the pubic in PAT or FAW that would need more staff to deliver properly?
* Does the DNR plan to pursue any kind of “grow your own” to fill hard to find/fill positions? Might be a way to incentivize DNR positions to minority candidates that DNR cannot find.

Items on the agenda we did not discuss due to time

* Length of service credit
* Individual meetings with Naturalists
* Nursing mothers update