



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

# PENNSYLVANIA GAME COMMISSION

2001 ELMERTON AVENUE  
HARRISBURG, PA 17110-9797

## ADMINISTRATIVE BUREAUS:

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October 29, 1997

Local Government Commission  
Senate Box 203078  
Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3078

Attn: Virgil F. Puskarich, Executive Director

Dear Mr. Puskarich:

Enclosed is the requested report regarding law enforcement responsibilities of the Pennsylvania Game Commission. If I have not sufficiently covered the areas of authority and training, please let me know and I will be glad to submit supplemental information. Although Game and Fish share many ethical responsibilities regarding the protection of wildlife and our environment, I think you would best understand each agency through a separate initial report.

It is my understanding that the next meeting of the Task Force is scheduled for Thursday, December 11, 1997, beginning at 9:00 AM.

Respectfully,

Thomas R. Littwin  
Bureau of Law Enforcement

cc: M. Schmit, Deputy Executive Director  
J.R. Fagan, Bureau Director  
T. Kamerzel, PF&BC

## Pennsylvania Game Commission Law Enforcement

The Pennsylvania Game Commission was established by the State Legislature as an independent public wildlife protection agency in 1895. The Commission's mission, in part, is to protect, conserve, and manage the Commonwealth's wildlife and their habitat.

The total authorized complement of the agency is 731 full-time employees, of which 135 are Wildlife Conservation Officer (WCO) positions. WCOs are commissioned upon graduation from the agency's training school, the Ross Leffler School of Conservation (RLSC). A WCO who laterally transfers into one of the 29 Land Management Group Supervisor slots retains his commissioned status, but his primary responsibility becomes land management. Each of the six regional offices is headed by a director supported by five staff officers who supervise specialized areas within that region, one of which is law enforcement. Currently, with one exception, all regional directors and staff officers are commissioned RLSC graduates. The lone exception supervises a public relations area. Finally, the Bureau of Law Enforcement at the central headquarters is administered by a Bureau Director and five staff officers, all of which are commissioned graduates of the RLSC. In summary, of the 731 full-time agency positions, law enforcement is the primary responsibility of 153 slots. Another 52 positions are filled by commissioned officers whose law enforcement activities are secondary to their primary (non-law enforcement) responsibilities.

Each WCO is assigned to a district which comprises 200-350 square miles, normally one-half of a county. The entire state is divided into 135 districts. The WCO is responsible for recruiting and administering a staff of deputies who reside and work within the district. Currently, there are approximately 950 deputies statewide averaging 7 per district. These deputy positions are not included in the total agency complement. Although deputies are commissioned officers who have the same law enforcement authority as WCOs regarding enforcement of the Game and Wildlife Code, it must be noted that they are not salaried and function as a stipend-compensated auxilliary. A deputy's primary employment is not the Game Commission. The bulk of the deputy's Game Commission time is accrued during evening hours, weekends, and peak times during the hunting season. Deputies devote most of their time to enforcement of the Game and Wildlife Code. Although their primary responsibility is to Game Commission functions within their district, both WCOs and their deputies have jurisdiction statewide.

### Law Enforcement Authority

A commissioned officer's primary responsibility is enforcement of the Game and Wildlife Code and its attendant regulations. In addition, Game Commission officers are also authorized to enforce all laws of the Commonwealth relating to fish, boats, parks and forestry and other environmental matters, under the direction of those agencies charged with the administration of those laws. When acting within the scope of their employment, WCOs function much the same as a municipal police officer or state trooper. Officers conduct patrols, stop/inspect/search, carry firearms, secure and execute warrants, seize/confiscate unlawfully killed wildlife and hunting-related paraphernalia, detain and/or arrest persons, operate a vehicle equipped with emergency lighting and audible warning devices, and prosecute violations.

Salaried WCOs (deputies exempted) are empowered to enforce other Acts and Titles when acting within the scope of their employment. These are:

1. The Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act
2. Title 75 (limited)
3. The Solid Waste Management Act (limited to misdemeanors and felonies)
4. The Clean Streams Law (limited to misdemeanors)
5. Title 18 relating to the Crimes Code (limited to eighteen specific chapters)

WCOs may arrest for violations of these Acts and Titles if the offense occurs in the officer's presence and the officer is acting within the scope of his employment. Also, the officer may arrest for these violations only when necessary to protect life or property.

### Training

Training is best broken into two categories, initial and ongoing. Initial training is that which an officer receives when he begins his career with the agency. Ongoing training is that which must be completed on an annual basis. While the initial training for a salaried WCO is more lengthy than for a deputy, the ongoing training requirements are almost identical.

Initial training for WCOs is conducted at the Ross Leffler School of Conservation, part of the Pennsylvania Game Commission, located in Harrisburg. The training period is 38 weeks in length which includes a 10-week period when each trainee is individually placed with a veteran WCO in a district for field experience. The total curriculum is 1,520 hours, of which 478 hours relate directly to law enforcement. This law enforcement training can be broadly separated into the following areas:

Law Enforcement Administration	31 hours
Laws, Regulations, Procedures	133 hours
Law Enforcement Techniques	94 hours
Communications	22 hours
Hunting/Trapping Methods	44 hours
Officer Safety (includes firearms and defensive tactics)	154 hours

Written and practical testing is conducted periodically throughout the entire curriculum to determine each trainee's competency and proficiency. Minimum standards must be met for successful completion. Failure to meet these minimum standards can result in a trainee being terminated at any point during the training period.

Initial training for a deputy consists of 88 hours of instruction, after entrance requirements (written and physical) are met. Sixteen hours are completed at the regional office and the remaining 72 hours are given at RLSC. During this training, 31 hours are devoted to firearms and defensive tactics alone. The deputy is commissioned following successful completion of a comprehensive written examination given at the end of the initial training. During the first year after commissioning, a deputy also receives an additional 150 hours of personal instruction directly from the WCO he will be working under.

After the initial training, WCOs and deputies both serve a one-year probationary period during which time their performance is regularly evaluated.

Ongoing, or annual, training is mandatory for all employees commissioned as WCOs or deputies. The minimum training is as follows:

Firearms (range).....	16 hours.....	WCO and Deputy
Use of Force (classroom).....	3 hours.....	WCO and Deputy
Defensive Tactics.....	8 hours.....	WCO and Deputy
Hazardous Materials (First Responder).....		WCO and Deputy
First Aid.....		WCO
District Meetings .....	1-3 hours each.....	A minimum of 6 are conducted by each WCO within his district per year and his deputies must attend at least 4.

Firearms training consists of both techniques and qualification and includes issued revolvers and shotguns as well as any other handguns the officer is authorized to carry when engaged in law enforcement activities. Every officer must meet minimum proficiency standards on the daylight survival course for both handgun and shotgun in order to perform law enforcement duties. All officers must also complete survival courses conducted under dimlight as well as foulweather conditions with their duty firearms. Failure to complete any mandatory training can subject the officer to disciplinary action.