

Realigning for better wildlife management

In a world where the only constant is change, it is sometimes tempting to dig in, hunker down and fight to keep things the same. It's often harder to recognize the need for change and find the will to meet new challenges. Occasionally, it's easy to see that change is necessary and good, as is the case with the restructuring of the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Wildlife branches.

The Arizona Game and Fish Commission recently approved a fundamental restructuring of the department that more accurately reflects the department's overall mission to conserve and protect all wildlife, not just those that are hunted or harvested. The new comprehensive wildlife management structure consolidates our Game, Nongame and Fisheries branches into two new branches, Terrestrial Wildlife Branch and Aquatic Wildlife Branch, emphasizing the science-based management of the more than 800 species of wildlife in Arizona. With more wildlife biological talent than any other organization in the state, our two new wildlife branches will be a new model of scientific effectiveness and wildlife management success.

This new alignment allows our 340 professional wildlife biologists new opportunities to work across the spectrum of many different species, increasing their skills and sharing their expertise with others. As an example, under the old system, we could have had biologists from our fisheries, habitat, amphibian and non-game branches all working in the same geographic area without crossing paths or sharing notes. Starting in January, the new alignment will allow them to work together on each other's projects, managing not just specific species but the entire ecosystem, resulting in a new standard in comprehensive wildlife management.

This improved structure follows Governor Ducey's direction that government should be "lean, effective and efficient," and it gives the department greater financial flexibility, but our reorganization also brings great improvements for Arizona's wildlife, fisheries resources, and wildlife habitats across the state. The Arizona Game and Fish Department will still lead the efforts to save threatened and endangered species, such as black-footed ferrets, Sonoran pronghorn and several rare native fish species, and we will still manage all game and nongame species, as the department has for more than 80 years. More importantly, we will seek to keep species (like the Arizona Desert Tortoise) from being listed in the first place, which will have significant, positive impact on Arizona's economy.

While fiscal responsibility is a high priority, the department's primary responsibility remains the conservation and protection of Arizona's wildlife. Our national-leading wildlife agency accomplishes great things with NO Arizona general fund tax dollars because we carefully manage our resources and personnel and operate as a business. Our realignment ensures that our state will have the best biologists and wildlife professionals working for the betterment of Arizona's wildlife now and into the future. For more information, visit www.AZGFDportal.az.gov.

Kurt R. Davis is Chairman of the Arizona Game and Fish Commission.