

11-10-2018

Hello Sublette County this is Albert Sommers. I would like to thank the voters of Sublette County and House District 20 for supporting me in the recent General Election. I look forward to continuing to represent you folks in the Wyoming Legislature for the next two years. The State's economic outlook is a little brighter, due to a bump in oil prices and strong investment returns, but we still have an education funding deficit that will challenge lawmakers. I have been working on a few bills for the upcoming legislative session, and I would like to ask Sublette County citizens for their opinions on them.

I know there are many devout horn hunters in Sublette County, and one of the bills I am examining deals with this issue. Currently in statute, horn hunting opens May 1<sup>st</sup> west of the Continental Divide, which means it opens at 12:00 AM, midnight. There have been issues with this midnight opening, as horn hunters have incurred accidents in the middle of the night, such as drowned horses, and other incidents have occurred that make enforcement difficult. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department. has no authority to alter that date or time, regardless of the circumstance, because it is law. I am having a bill drafted that would give the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission the authority to set the date and time of the antler hunting season opener. There are years with lots of snow when it might make sense to open the season later to protect wintering wildlife, and there are light snow years when the season could be opened earlier. I think the date and time of day for the antler hunting season opener is best left to the Commission, through rule and regulation, rather than through legislative action. Even if you support a yearlong antler hunting season, this is an easier route for change than through legislative action, and is still a formal process that involves public comment.

The number of guided boats floating the rivers in Sublette County has risen significantly in recent years, and I have been receiving complaints from local guides and fishermen/fisherwomen that the quality of the fishing experience is declining. Wyoming Game and Fish Department fisheries personnel maintain that the number and size of fish are not declining in the New Fork and Green rivers, but fisher folk know these fish are getting wiser. Both Montana and Idaho have regulated fishing guides, as the number of boats increased on

their rivers. In Wyoming, hunting guides are licensed, but fishing guides are not licensed. Many of my local guides feel that guides should be licensed and insured. I am having a bill drafted that would license fishing outfitters and guides in a similar fashion as hunting outfitters and guides, with the exception that fishing guides would be licensed by the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission, not by an Outfitter Board. This bill would also give the Commission the authority to regulate the number of boats on rivers, through a public rule making process. I am getting the bill drafted so I can show fishing outfitters what the licensing process might look like, but ultimately if local fishing guides do not want to be licensed, I will NOT pursue the bill.

I am also working on a bill to create an invasive mussel task force, which would pull several agencies together to evaluate our current prevention efforts and to develop a mitigation plan if one of Wyoming's waters become infected. These species are hard on fisheries and create severe problems for irrigation and municipal water systems. How much money would it take to clean up a major waterway in Wyoming after a zebra mussel invasion?

Please give me feedback on these bill ideas! I can be reached at [albert@albertsommers.com](mailto:albert@albertsommers.com) or by phone at 307-360-7060.