

12/6/2021

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from interim work of the 66th Legislature. The Joint Corporations Committee met on December 1 and 2 in Cheyenne. I do not serve on this committee, but I attended the meeting to protect Sublette County's interests in redistricting. On December 3, I participated in the Wyoming Wildlife Taskforce meeting in Casper to further discuss the contentious issues of hunting preference points and hunter access.

Every 10 years, each state uses the federal census to apportion members of its state legislature. Changes to apportionment after a census is called redistricting, and the Wyoming Legislature is in the process of realigning legislative districts based upon population changes in the 2020 census. Sublette County had the second largest population decline of any county, losing 1,519 people. What that means for Sublette County is that my house district, HD20, will have to be enlarged significantly. To compound the challenge of Sublette County losing significant population, our neighbors along the I-80 corridor, Sweetwater, Carbon, and Uinta Counties, have declined in population by a total of 3,550, which is a reduction in population of 5,069 for the four counties. At the same time, Lincoln and Teton counties have increased their population by a total of only 3,512.

On December 1, the Joint Corporations Committee discussed redistricting, and listened to each region of the state bring forth its proposals. Region 10 (Sublette, Teton, Lincoln, and Uinta) put forth a plan that kept most of our communities intact, but the house districts were smaller than is likely constitutionally. Several of the regional plans, such as those put forward by Region 9 (Carbon and Sweetwater) and our Region 10, conflicted with each other.

On December 2, the Joint Corporations Committee debated how to pull all of the regional plans together into a statewide plan. House Chairman Dan Zwonitzer of Laramie County proposed a plan that takes a house district away from the west/central I-80 corridor and adds one in Laramie County. Laramie County, mostly Cheyenne, grew by nearly 9,000 people, and is poised to continue growing.

The Zwonitzer Plan utilizes Region 10's Option 2, which would merge Sublette County with the LaBarge and Farson areas to reorganize House District 20. This plan solves many issues in western Wyoming, but Carbon/Sweetwater counties lose a house seat, and Cheyenne gains one. Region 10 representatives supported this, and it passed the committee as a draft plan.

The plan can be viewed here when it is posted:

<https://www.wyoleg.gov/Legislature/LegislatureAbout?tab=4>.

The Zwonitzer Plan may not have enough Senate support to pass the Joint Corporations Committee in bill form. It takes a majority of both House and Senate members to move a redistricting bill out of committee to the 2022 Budget Session. One of the Senators who did not like the Zwonitzer Plan suggested splitting Sublette County to make his plan work, and I will fight that approach. Anything could happen at this point!

On December 3, the Wyoming Wildlife Taskforce met in Casper. Its charge is to study top-priority wildlife policy issues facing the state related to the allocation of hunting opportunity, sportsperson access and other issues. The Taskforce discussed the following proposal and passed it as a recommendation to the Legislature on a 14-2 vote:

- Effective four years after the effective date of legislation, all preference points held by individuals for bighorn sheep and moose will be converted to bonus points.
- Applicants for moose and bighorn sheep will earn one bonus point for each year they apply and are unsuccessful in drawing their first choice on their application for the respective species.
- Individuals may also purchase a bonus point in years they do not apply for a license.
- The draw will be random, but the number of entries an individual has into the drawing for a specific species will be equal to the number of bonus points they have squared (example - 4 points = 16 entries, 10 points = 100 entries).
- Bonus points will be converted to history (or lost) as before if individuals fail to apply for two years.

- Specific rules and regulations to be developed and promulgated by the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission.

I did not support this proposal, because I heard from no hunters in my area who supported moving to a bonus point system. This proposal does create more opportunity and better odds to draw, but takes away certainty for some hunters who have accumulated points. The delayed effective date is designed to allow those hunters with the highest number of points to be able to get a license prior to the conversion to a bonus point system. I made a motion to move the effective date out 8 years, in an attempt to preserve the investment of more high point holders. My motion failed.

The Taskforce continued to discuss hunter access issues and landowner tags, which are very passionate issues in eastern Wyoming. Access and landowner tags bring out the old animosities between landowners, hunters and outfitters. I hope the Taskforce focuses on what is possible, and not on issues that create further division.

Please submit comments to the Wildlife Taskforce members at

<https://sites.google.com/wyo.gov/wyomingwildlifetaskforce/home/taskforce-topics>.

I can be reached at albert@albertsommers.com with questions or comments.