

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TOURISM AND PARKS.

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Becky Hutchins at 3:35 p.m. on February 5, 2003 in Room 243-N of the Capitol.

All members were present except: Representative Clark Shultz - excused

Committee staff present: Mary Torrence, Revisor of Statutes' Office
Hank Avila, Legislative Research Department
Russell Mills, Legislative Research Department
Sarah Samuelson, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee:

proponent: Chad Luce, Department of Wildlife and Parks
opponents: Marvin Stous, Mustang Camping Club, Kansas Campers' Association
Doris Kehler, District 1 Director, Family Campers and RV'ers

Others attending: see attached list

Chairperson Hutchins asked for bill introductions from committee members. No bills were requested. She asked for bill requests from the gallery. No bills were requested.

HB 2054: Removing age exemption applicable to certain persons for permits and licenses issued by department of wildlife and parks.

Chad Luce, Department of Wildlife and Parks, addressed the committee as a proponent of the bill (Attachment 1). He said that this bill is necessary for the continued maintenance of facilities because of decreased allocations from the State General Fund, from over 50% of the state parks budget a decade ago to 22% now. He emphasized the concept of user fees, that the natural resources of Kansas should be maintained by those using those resources. The burden should not rest solely on the segment of population under age 65. He also discussed the apportionment of federal aid that Kansas is not receiving because of hunting and fishing licenses not being sold to senior citizens.

Mr. Luce requested an amendment to the bill, changing the effective date of the bill to January 1, 2004.

Representative Kauffman asked the amounts of the present fees. Mr. Luce referred her to his written testimony (Attachment 1, page 3), and explained that there are different prices for passes purchased in-season and out-of-season, and that the current prices for senior citizens are one-half of each full price quoted.

Representative Merrick asked whether the rates for non-residents is different; Mr. Luce replied that non-Kansans always pay the full price, even if they are senior citizens.

Representative Merrick asked about the policies and pricing of nearby states. Mr. Luce replied that regulations differ. Nebraska only counts as senior citizens those over age 70; Colorado, Iowa, and South Dakota offer no exemptions for licenses. For state park entrance fees, Colorado, Nebraska, South Dakota,

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and Texas offer a discounted rate for senior citizens. In total, 28 states have no discount, 12 states offer a partial discount, and 10 states fully exempt senior citizens.

Representative Hutchins asked whether the federal excise taxes could be reapportioned if the license fees for senior citizens were a minimal amount, such as one dollar. Mr. Luce replied that federal policy requires the license fee charged by the state to be greater than the cost to the state of issuing the license. A study has not yet been done to determine this cost, but one dollar would be almost certainly be too low.

Representative Hutchins asked how much federal money is being lost in this way; Mr. Luce said the exact figures are unavailable because those who are not required to purchase licenses do not register with the department in any way. An extrapolation from census data would yield an estimate, in the year 2005, of \$38,000 in licenses sold and an additional \$15,000 in federal aid. This would increase each year because of more people turning 65.

Representative Hutchins asked Mr. Luce to explain "land area" (Attachment 1, p.2). Mr. Luce replied that this is simply the total land area of each state; for example, Texas receives more than Rhode Island.

Representative Schwab asked who receives the revenue from the migratory bird stamps. Mr Luce replied that there is a federal stamp and a state stamp each year, whose revenues go to the federal and state levels, respectively. Senior citizens, like other hunters, must purchase both. For the purpose of apportionment of excise taxes, the federal government does not count stamps as licenses sold.

Representative Hayzlett asked whether park visits are increasing. Mr. Luce said yes, most recently there have been seven million visits per year, whereas a decade ago there were only five million. This includes repeat visitors.

Representative Hayzlett asked whether the increased funds from these increased visits are going back into the budget for maintenance; Mr. Luce replied that they are, and referred him to his written testimony (Attachment 1, p.4).

Representative Hayzlett asked what attrition was expected as a result of the proposed fee increases. Mr. Luce replied that the department estimates a 30% attrition initially, with people eventually returning. This is similar to the attrition experienced as a result of past fee increases.

Marvin Stous, representing the Mustang Camping Club, the Kansas Campers' Association, and Mustang's parent organization, Family Campers and RV'ers, addressed the committee as an opponent of the bill (Attachment 2). He noted that fees or permits are just another name for taxes, and that the senior citizens targeted by the proposed legislation have been paying taxes all their lives. Also, senior citizens often face financial challenges that would prevent them from being able to afford fee increases. He suggested that the department should find ways to work within their financial limits. He noted that since he lives in northeast Kansas, he and his friends have the option of camping in Missouri or in Nebraska; these parks are well maintained, and they offer senior citizen discounts.

Representative Long asked what fees Nebraska and Missouri charge to non-Kansans; Mr. Stous replied

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that he cannot recall the exact figures, and he cannot predict what the fees will be in future years.

Doris Kehler, District 1 Director, Family Campers and RV'ers, addressed the committee as an opponent of the bill (Attachment 3). She said that most senior citizens live on fixed incomes, whose finances have been greatly hurt by the weak economy. She also noted the senior citizens' contributions to maintaining the parks, building a shelter and birdhouses, and keeping campgrounds clean.

The committee had no further questions, and the hearing was closed.

Chairperson Hutchins asked the committee members if they would be interested in attending the Treasures of the Czars exhibit, which would be counted as an \$18 gift in the Topeka Convention and Visitors' Bureau lobbyists' report. A majority of members expressed interest, and the visit was tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, February 19.

Chairperson Hutchins reminded the committee of next week's schedule:

Monday: hearing on **HB 2106** - membership of Council on Travel and Tourism

Wednesday: hearing on **HB 2083** - tourism advertising fund

The minutes from January 29, 2003 were distributed and approved without amendment.

Chairperson Hutchins adjourned the meeting at 4:00 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 10, 2003.