



STATE OF VERMONT
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 14, 2019

Rep. Janet Ancel
Chair, House Committee on
Ways and Means
Vermont House of Representatives

Dear Chair Ancel:

We are writing to you on behalf of all members of the Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife to recommend that the fees on the hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses issued by the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) be increased to offset budget shortfalls at DFW caused by increased personal services costs and decreased revenues from license sales.

Vermont maintains a long and valued tradition of hunting, fishing, and trapping reflected most notably in the right under the Vermont Constitution for State citizens to hunt and fowl. However, as the average age of State citizens increases, the number of residents obtaining hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses decreases. As a result, the annual revenues from the sale of hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses have declined steadily since 1990.

These revenue decreases are reflected in DFW's proposed FY 2020 budget. From 2017 to 2018, the number of resident fishing, hunting, and combination licenses sold decreased by 3.3% and decreased 7.6% in 2018 compared to the previous 3-year average. Consequently, DFW is facing approximately \$474,809.00 in lost fee revenue in FY 2020.

To offset its budget shortfall, DFW is proposing to defund programs important to the support and protection of the State's fish and wildlife. Specifically, DFW proposes to decommission the Salisbury Fish Culture Station, which provides 20% to 25% of the fish stocked in Vermont Waters. DFW also proposes eliminating in its entirety the grant to the University of Vermont's Cooperative Research Unit that focuses on fish and wildlife research. DFW also proposes reducing a fishing promotion sub-grant by half. The Committee also is concerned that budget shortfalls will reduce the amount of DFW staff time available during the Act 250 process for review of potential impacts on critical wildlife habitat or ecologically sensitive areas.

The Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife strongly recommends that the General Assembly reject DFW's proposal to defund these important programs. Instead, the Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife recommends a modest

4% fee increase for resident hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses and an 8% increase on all nonresident licenses. The Joint Fiscal Office has developed a spreadsheet with the recommended dollar amount of increase for each license type.

These proposed fee increases are overdue. DFW has not proposed extensive fee increases for over eight years, instead recommending individual or piecemeal increases annually. In addition, because license fees in neighboring states are comparable or higher than the proposed fees, the proposed fee increases would not put Vermont at a competitive disadvantage regionally in attracting hunters, anglers, and trappers.

Funding of fish and wildlife departments is a national problem as license revenues decrease in almost every state in the country. Cutting, defunding, or decommissioning important programs that support the fish and wildlife of the State is not the answer to revenue losses from decreased license sales. The State should instead look to address the problem comprehensively by identifying new funding sources for DFW programs.

The Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife plans to review alternatives for DFW funding. During this review, the State should not establish a precedent of offsetting DFW license revenue shortfalls by cutting important programs. Instead, the Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife asks that the modest proposed increases to license fees be included in the fee bill to fully fund all of DFW's important programs.

If you need additional information or would like a member of the Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife to testify before your committee, please contact Laura Bozarth at (802) 828-2266.

Sincerely,

Rep. Amy Sheldon
Chair, Committee on Natural
Resources, Fish, and Wildlife

Rep. Paul Lefebvre
Vice Chair, Committee on Natural
Resources, Fish, and Wildlife