

## Proposed License Package Increase

Attention all members and non-members alike, there is an important issue confronting the Michigan Sportsman and I am asking you to read the following information here, then check into the D.N.R. web site, check out your local newspapers and follow the legislative action in our Mich. House and Senate before you make a decision on the action before us, unfortunately some have already formed an opinion with out hearing or knowing all of the facts. What I ask is that you find out all the facts before you make your decision, I am not trying to sway anybody one way or another but please let's make an informed decision.

The issue that has come up is the possible hike in license fees for the Mich. hunting and fishing licenses. I am the first to admit I was a bit uneasy when I first saw some of the proposed fee increase's and I am still concerned that some of them may be out of line , but the proposal was put together by a group of representatives from Michigan sportsmen and organizations , including the Michigan Steelheaders , Trout Unlimited , Michigan Charter Boat Association , National Wild Turkey Federation , UP Whitetails , UP Tourism and Recreation Association , Michigan Trappers Association , Michigan United Conservation Club , Michigan Farm Bureau , Saginaw Field and Stream Club and several others. Check out the members of this Working Group, they are some pretty big name players. They are also a pretty wide ranging group of people with different interests and agendas but they all came together to work on the proposal and have come up with something they feel is fair and yet will continue to keep our outdoor heritage alive and growing .

This group was put together by our Natural Resources Commission, not the D.N.R. to look at ideas for funding the D.N.R. This group of people spent several hours of each meeting over the past year to research ideas, forms of funding, budgets from the Dept. of Natural Resources various divisions, surrounding state license fees, social pressures and alternatives to fund our Mich. DNR in the way we expect it should be with out breaking the bank. I have to trust this group of dedicated people and hope that after researching it a bit you can trust them too and make a decision based on their work and not on emotion.

The following is some of the interesting things I got out of the meetings and information presented. First of all , there has not been a license fee increase since the mid 90's , and if the license fee's had been increased at the " Rate of Inflation" , our 15 dollar hunting license of today would actually cost 36 dollars. While surrounding states have increased their resident and non resident license fees over the past several years, Michigan has not.

In 1996 / 97 the State Legislature provided the Mich. D.N.R. with over 23% ( 51.2 million dollars) of its budget from the general fund , for 2006 / 07 it will provide just over 8 % ( 25.3 million) of the D.N.R. budget from the general fund. And if the figures for the 1996 / 97 budget were adjusted for inflation the amount would be 65.9 million today. In other words, the Dept. of Natural Resources receives very little general fund money to take care of the resources of the state that is here for ALL of the Mich. residents and non-residents alike to use.

The D.N.R. relies on user fees ( licenses and permits) , federal money from excise taxes and restricted funds to fund the D.N.R. and manage our hunting , fishing , state parks , boating access , snowmobile , waterways , ORV , forest management and so on as part of its operational budget . The game and fish fund provides the dept. with 25% of its budget. They, the D.N.R. are also responsible for paying the property taxes on all of the state land in Mich. in the form of “Payment in Lieu of Tax’s” to the local townships and municipalities.

Also, on a very touchy subject, the D.N.R. is also the only state agency that I know of that gives a discount to senior citizens. The discount offered to seniors by the dept. used to be reimbursed by the Legislature from the general fund, but that reimbursement was discontinued several years ago and yet the discount is still offered by the dept. and though the senior discount would be changed somewhat with the proposal , it was left in place to help our senior sportsmen.

The costs of operating the dept. goes up every year with the increase cost of gasoline, health care, utilities and so on, annually at about 4% per year. So far the dept. has had to cut back in several areas to remain operating, such as hatchery reduction , a cut in the Coho plants , 30 to 50% reduction in fish surveys of lakes and streams , suspension of the “ Inland Fisheries Grant” program , delayed major habitat restoration on the AuSable River , reduced or eliminated several research programs , reduced maintenance of buildings and equipment , fish marking programs reduced , deer habitat and management and food plot programs reduced , reduced wildlife surveys , reduced bovine TB and CWD monitoring , reduction in dam/dike maintenance for waterfowl flooding , less signing on the state game and wildlife areas , less trash and litter pickup , a reduction in Conservation officers for law enforcement and the elimination of 66 seasonal jobs. Did you know that the State of Mich. has over 97 state parks, and only a little over 300 employees for those parks, that’s a 3 employees per park average? What more can we stand to do with out? If the funding is restored by the license fee increase or by some other means, there would be no more reductions and the above programs could be restored.

There also has been a reduction in licenses sold in the state the past several years, both hunting and fishing and this hurts the budget as well. More importantly we have less anglers and hunter out there and we do need to do something about that as well from the sportsman side, WE need to try to encourage and invite more non-hunters and anglers to participate in our passions.

Something else that needs to be remembered is that, fishing and hunting in the state of Mich. brings somewhere in the neighborhood of 3 to 5 billion dollars into the states economy and that boating and snowmobiling brings in approx. 3 billion dollars, state parks 484 million, and the forestry system brings in approx. 12 billion dollars, and the D.N.R. has a budget of approx. 280 million dollars. Now if you were to look at the cost vs. return value here it looks pretty simple, over 15 BILLION dollars contributed to the Mich. economy for a cost of 288 million dollars in D.N.R. funding, sounds like a wise investment by the state to me.

Now weather you agree with the license fee package or not doesn’t matter, what does matter is that the D.N.R. needs to be properly funded, and you can help by contacting your state representative and senator and letting them know that you are tired of the axe falling on the D.N.R, that they need to make sure the dept. is properly funded, let them

know how you feel about the license fee increase and that they need to make sure the funding is there. You can tell them that you don't like the license package but then they had better fund the D.N.R. with more general fund money, or you can tell them that you feel that you get a lot of value out of your hunting and fishing privileges' and you don't mind spending more on a license and that they need to support the license package, either way it is important that they hear from you. Remind them as some of us were reminded by Dr. Howard Tanner at one of the meetings, to read the Mich. State Constitution and pay attention to the part where it states "The conservation and development of the natural resources of the state are hereby declared to be of paramount public concern in the interest of the health, safety and general welfare of the people. The Legislature shall provide for the protection of the air, water and other natural resources of the state from pollution, impairment and destruction."

As I said earlier, please check out the Mich. D.N.R. web site and read a copy of the "Hunting and Fishing License Package Development Work Group" final draft, all 30 some pages and see where they are coming from, and while you are there check out some of the other info. as well, check out the internet, and newspapers for more info. , contact the Natural Resources Commission or you can e-mail me and I will try to answer your questions if I can, but most of all, please be informed before you make a decision on what you have heard. Please remember also that with out some kind of an increase from somewhere, that the D.N.R. will be in the red by about 9 to 11 million dollars for the 2007/08 fiscal year and then what will be cut? Thanks for your time and hope every one takes the time to make a difference.

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