

This is a printer-friendly version of an article from the Concord Monitor at <http://www.concordmonitor.com>.



Article published Mar 6, 2007

Fish and Game head again asks for tax money
Director requests \$1.6 million a year

By NORMA LOVE
The Associated Press

Mar 6, 2007

Fish and Game Executive Director Lee Perry told House budget writers yesterday his agency can no longer survive on a funding diet limited to license fees and federal grants.

Perry renewed his request for millions of dollars in state taxes to help pay the agency's rising costs.

He has been telling lawmakers that he needs at least \$1.6 million annually from the state's general fund at a minimum and that more money would let him replace equipment and perform much-needed maintenance.

Gov. John Lynch did not include the requested funding in his budget, and Perry said that means the agency will end up in the red without an infusion of money from somewhere.

To help shore up the agency, Lynch had counted on Fish and Game auctioning 50 additional moose hunting permits to raise \$250,000 a year, but he has since backed away from the idea. Perry said the agency's revenue estimate from an auction were far lower than Lynch's.

Perry also said biologists set the number of moose hunting permits allocated by lottery after determining how many can be harvested from the population.

"As many of you now realize, few sports men and women support the revised allocation system," he said.

Lynch cut agency spending and eliminated 10 positions - including two that aren't vacant, he said.

Perry said he is working with Lynch to try to adequately fund the agency. He said they are discussing providing \$200,000 in state taxes to help pay for search and rescue operations.

"Last summer, we submitted a budget request that barely covers our basic needs, and leaves no cash reserves for absorbing unanticipated costs resulting from contract

negotiations, employee retirements or equipment failure," he said in his budget statement. "We need your help in finding a solution."

House Ways and Means Chairwoman Susan Almy also urged the budget committee to give the agency more money. She said the tax writing committee agrees with Perry that the agency can't live on what it is projected to get from fees.

"We do believe they need more money," said Almy, a Democrat from Lebanon.

Founded in 1935, the agency has relied on a patchwork of federal grants and user fees, including a share of snowmobile and off-road vehicle licenses, to fund its operations. It has been self-sufficient except for \$50,000 from the state's general fund for a nongame species program.

However, sales of hunting and fishing license have declined, following a national trend. At the same time, the agency's mission has expanded as the state's population has increased.

For example, Fish and Game is the lead agency on wilderness search and rescue operations, while conservation officers respond to an increasing number of rabid raccoon calls and requests to analyze dead birds for West Nile virus.

----- End of article

By NORMA LOVE

The Associated Press

This article is: 0 days old.