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## Fish and Game chief to retire

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CONCORD – The embattled chief executive of the state’s Fish and Game Department will retire when his term ends in August.

Executive Director Lee Perry, 62, told The Telegraph his decision has nothing to do with the fierce battle over his agency budget that has him at odds with Gov. John Lynch.

“I’ve been in this business for 40 years. This seemed the appropriate time to finish up and return to the Southwest where many in my family already are,” Perry said.

Prior to working in Maine and New Hampshire, Perry, 62, worked in Arizona for 14 years.

“This is something my wife and I have been planning to do,” Perry said.

In recent months, relations between Lynch’s office and Perry have become strained.

When Lynch didn’t mention the agency’s budget crunch in the January inaugural address, Perry sent out an e-mail urging supporters to contact the governor’s office.

“The governor thanks Director Perry for his service,” said Lynch Communications Director Colin Manning.

Perry recently informed Lynch and the state Fish and Game Commission of his decision to ask Lynch not to reappoint him when his four-year term ends Aug. 13.

To find a replacement, state law requires the commission to do a search and recommend a candidate to the governor who has to also gain the Executive Council’s approval. “I was reluctant to make any announcement because it could take the focus off the department’s task of balancing this budget,” Perry said.

For eight months, Perry lobbied the Legislature and Lynch administration to get state tax and fee money for his agency, which relies on hunting and fishing fees, federal grants and other sources.

Since the agency’s inception in 1935, the only state support has been an annual \$50,000 expense to generate a federal grant of the same amount.

Perry maintains the agency needs at least \$3.2 million in state dollars over the next two years.

Lynch presented his two-year budget proposal last month that had two changes, one to

generate \$250,000 more income a year, and another to reduce the department's spending obligations by \$300,000.

The department doesn't need any state spending support beyond these proposals, Lynch insisted.

Lynch would shift \$300,000 for maintaining dams out of Perry's agency to the Department of Environmental Services.

He also called for a high-bid auction to obtain 50 additional permits to hunt moose to raise \$500,000 for the Fish and Game Department over the two years.

Lynch abandoned the moose auction idea last month and instead asked the Legislature to do a study.

On Monday, Perry publicly disagreed with Lynch and told the House Finance Committee the department needs more support.

The Lynch budget is still nearly \$600,000 short of money needed for the agency and could jeopardize the agency receiving as much as \$1.6 million in other grants, he warned.

Perry said he and Lynch are working together and plan to offer alternatives.

At a minimum, Perry asked House budget writers to give him the \$3.2 million in state support he requested in August.

"We need your help in finding a solution," Perry said.

Giving the department state dollars rather than part of a fee or tax makes the most sense to Perry.

"Spending from the general fund seems to be the best solution rather than try to put a hidden tax or something like that on people," Perry said

Supporting lawmakers have offered several initiatives to raise money for the department. The House of Representatives will debate one to carve out for the department some of the state tax on meal purchases and hotel room rents later this week.

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