



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #562

Warden Recruit Class Support (DNR -- Fish, Wildlife, and Recreation)

[LFB 2009-11 Budget Summary: Page 462, #3]

CURRENT LAW

Conservation warden recruits receive in-depth classroom and field training to prepare for working with a variety of hunters, anglers, other outdoor sports participants, and recreational vehicle enthusiasts in the field. In addition, since 2006, DNR has also provided recruits with police certification according to Wisconsin Department of Justice guidelines.

GOVERNOR

Provide \$175,000 SEG in 2009-10 to support a conservation warden recruit class.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Warden recruit training covers a wide variety of topics, including firearms instruction, interview and interrogation, communications and field contact training, leadership, stress management, defensive tactics, and training on standard field equipment. The process of interviewing, hiring, and fully training a recruit class can take up to a year, requiring some advance planning in anticipation of retirements and warden staff turnover.

2. Currently, the Department has 206 credentialed law enforcement positions authorized including supervisors, regional wardens, recreational safety wardens, and investigators. Of the 206 authorized positions, 184 are filled with permanent wardens (leaving 22 vacancies). In the past, the Department has delayed hiring a recruit class, or has maintained conservation warden vacancies and reallocated operations funding to cover budget shortfalls. However, due to the increasing number of wardens eligible for retirement and an increase in overall conservation warden workload, the Department is attempting to fill more vacancies in the near future. The Department

plans to hire a recruit class of 10- to 14-members to begin training by fall, 2009.

3. Prior to fiscal year 2005-06, no base funding was provided specifically for the cost of recruiting, hiring, and training new conservation warden recruits. The 2005-07 budget provided \$197,200 annually for this purpose. However, in order to expand its pool of applicants, in 2006 DNR no longer required conservation warden applicants to obtain police certification prior to applying for a warden position. Instead, the Department revised its academy to provide the certification using Wisconsin Department of Justice guidelines. As a result, DNR expended \$374,900 in 2005-06 to manage the first warden recruit class (10 recruits) certified according to DOJ guidelines (approximately \$177,700 more than provided under 2005 Act 25). The costs beyond the \$197,200 in base funding were reallocated from allotments provided from other DNR enforcement purposes (such as supplies, services, mileage, limited-term employee assistance, and other operations expenditures). DNR hired a recruit class of 10 in fiscal year 2006-07 and a recruit class of 12 in fiscal year 2007-08 and spent approximately \$352,600 in 2006-07 and approximately \$424,500 in 2007-08 for warden recruitment and training costs. DNR did not hire a recruit class during fiscal year 2008-09 due to budget constraints. The \$175,000 provided in 2009-10 under the bill would allow the Department to hire a 10 to 14 member recruit class in the fall of 2009 and cover most of the costs associated with DOJ certification (academy tuition, lodging, meals, and instructor salary). The \$175,000 provided under the bill would be provided from the following conservation fund accounts:

	<u>2009-10</u>
Fish and Wildlife Account	\$141,200
Boat Registration Account	22,100
ATV Account	9,400
Water Resources Account	<u>2,300</u>
Total	\$175,000

4. Revenues in the fish and wildlife account of the conservation fund are expected to fall short of authorized expenditures in the 2009-11 biennium. An alternative to increasing revenues to the account is to reduce expenditures in order to maintain a positive balance. In addition to concerns over the fish and wildlife account balance, a boat registration fee increase is included in the bill, and the water resources account is anticipated to have commitments that exceed available revenues under the bill.

5. The Department has indicated that the support of a warden class is a high priority for the program. Training of new conservation wardens is necessary to maintain a viable law enforcement presence as retirements and other vacancies occur. As such, it is likely that funding would continue to be reallocated for this purpose even if the provision is not fully funded under the bill. DNR may continue to hold positions vacant and reduce other law enforcement efforts to maintain its recruit class. However, DNR indicates that, without the funding in the bill, hiring a second recruit class to begin in 2011, may not be possible.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Adopt the Governor's recommendation to provide \$175,000 in 2009-10 to support a conservation warden recruit class.
2. Delete provision.

ALT 2	Change to Bill
	Funding
SEG	- \$175,000

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