



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #477

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

[LFB 2011-13 Budget Summary: Page 313, #6]

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, DNR also provides recruits with police certification according to Wisconsin Department of Justice guidelines.

GOVERNOR

Provide \$175,000 annually to create a permanent base for costs associated with an annual 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, 172 are filled with permanent wardens, with 10 recruits in training (leaving 24 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 vacancies on a more consistent basis. Of the 172 current permanent wardens, 33 are eligible to retire by the end of 2013. If no additional wardens were recruited during the 2011-13 biennium, DNR could end the biennium with up to 57 vacancies, or approximately 27% of authorized positions.

3. 2009 Act 28 provided \$175,000 in one-time funding to support a recruit class during the 2009-11 biennium. DNR utilized this funding in 2010 to hire a conservation warden recruit class of 10. The funding provided under the bill would allow the Department to hire a recruit class of between 10 to 15 recruits (depending on the number of expected warden retirements and vacancies) on an annual basis. The \$175,000 provided under the bill would be provided as follows:

	<u>Annual</u>
Conservation Fund	
Fish and Wildlife Account	\$133,500
Boat Registration Account	20,400
ATV Account	8,800
Water Resources Account	2,100
Environmental Fund	7,900
Environmental Fund(formerly Recycling Fund)	<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 2011-13 biennium. Therefore, to the extent additional expenditures are authorized, base level fish and wildlife account programs would need to be reduced. Further, to the extent additional expenditures are provided, the 2013-15 structural imbalance in the fish and wildlife account will be increased. One option would be to not increase expenditure authority from the account in order to help maintain a positive balance (Alternative 3).

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. In addition, DNR indicates that continued warden vacancies could result in delayed response time to incidents reported by the public and reduced capacity to respond to search and rescue situations. As such, it is likely that funding would be allocated for this purpose whether or not a recruit class is specifically funded under the bill. While DNR has not identified specific reductions that would be made in order to support a warden recruit class, the Department may hold other positions vacant and reduce other law enforcement efforts to maintain its recruit class. It could also reduce other fish or wildlife management programs or associated administrative costs.

6. Another alternative would be to provide \$175,000 in one-time funding to support one recruit class during the 2011-13 biennium (Alternative 2). This would help to address the 2013-15 structural deficit in the fish and wildlife account (expenditure authority has exceeded revenues for the past several fiscal years), and still support the Department in hiring at least one recruit class over the biennium.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Adopt the Governor's recommendation to provide \$175,000 annually to support an annual warden recruit class.

2. Provide \$175,000 in 2011-12 only to support a warden recruit class.

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

3. Delete provision.

ALT 3	Change to Bill
	Funding
SEG	- \$350,000

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