



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #646

Fisheries Management Staffing (DNR -- Fish, Wildlife and Recreation)

[LFB 2001-03 Budget Summary: Page 468, #1]

CURRENT LAW

The DNR undertakes various activities related to monitoring, maintaining, and enhancing aquatic ecosystems and sport and commercial fisheries. Assessment and habitat protection surveys are conducted to identify critical areas where fish habitat is deteriorating or fish populations are declining. Surveys yield data relating to fish population structure and harvests, which are used in preparing environmental impact statements, developing regulations for the commercial fishing industry, and assessing the impact of Native Americans exercising treaty rights. In addition, DNR is responsible for Great Lakes fish management activities.

The Department also undertakes fish propagation and stocking efforts throughout the state. This function utilizes 10 cold-water (trout and salmon) facilities, three warm-water facilities (primarily for walleye, muskellunge, and bass), two dual-purpose hatcheries, and three spawning facilities where eggs from feral trout and salmon are collected. In addition, DNR complements these facilities with additional rearing ponds throughout the state. During 1999, DNR estimates that it stocked inland streams and the Great Lakes with 6.8 million cold-water fish. In addition, inland lakes were stocked with nearly six million warm-water fish, including 5.3 million walleye, 354,000 large-mouth bass, 122,000 northern pike, and 150,000 muskellunge.

GOVERNOR

Provide \$431,700 in 2001-02 and \$459,000 in 2002-03 with 3.0 fisheries biologists and technicians from the fish and wildlife account of the conservation fund.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. In addition to supporting the fisheries management positions, DNR indicates that funds would be used for hatcheries maintenance and lake monitoring costs. Potential maintenance demands include roof replacement at the Thunder River hatchery, repairing security fencing at the Lake Mills hatchery, installation of new rearing tanks at the Osceola hatchery, repairing the Kettle Moraine hatchery's ozone unit, repairing a water supply main at the Nevin hatchery, and repairing Woodruff hatchery's hot/cold water control system, upgrading computer hardware and software, and installing an ultraviolet (UV) light disinfectant system.

2. The fish and wildlife account of the conservation fund is estimated to have a closing balance of approximately \$11.3 million on June 30, 2003. The main source of revenue to the fish and wildlife account is fees paid by hunters and fishers for approvals and licenses authorizing them to hunt or fish for various species.

3. In addition, given the popularity of fishing in Wisconsin (over 1.3 million fishing-related licenses and stamps were sold in fiscal year 2000), and the financial support that the fish and wildlife account has received from individuals purchasing fishing licenses and approvals, some have argued that additional field staff beyond the Governor's provision could be considered. In its budget request, DNR identified nine positions that would deliver fisheries management services to anglers. Projects include monitoring of water quality and fish habitat, fish management, hatcheries maintenance and improvement, and fisheries technical support to ongoing projects. To the extent that the fish and wildlife account of the conservation fund is able to support additional fisheries management field staff positions, additional priorities could be addressed under this initiative. The specific positions DNR has prioritized filling are detailed in the Attachment. The order of the positions is consistent with the Department's hiring priorities; however, further review may be undertaken before actual staff would be assigned to a specific location. An entry-level fisheries biologist would cost approximately \$24,200 in 2001-02 and \$42,200 in 2002-03. An entry-level fisheries technician would require approximately \$19,600 in 2001-02 and \$32,900 in 2002-03. These costs include salary, fringe benefits, supplies and one-time funding. Providing the DNR's original request for nine staff (four fisheries biologists and five fisheries technicians) would cost an additional \$133,400 in 2001-02 and \$225,300 in 2002-03 (over the three staff provided in the bill).

4. The Department has argued that reductions in field staff have complicated their efforts to provide a level of field support adequate to appropriately manage the state's fisheries habitats and resources. However, few of the documentable reductions in field staff in recent years have taken place because of legislative action. Between 1993 and 1999, legislation resulted in a fisheries management net loss of 0.5 position. Between 1993 and 1998, however, approximately 40.42 field staff were transferred away from fisheries management field work to a variety of activities, including 13 positions within facilities and lands, 12 positions moved to water division field operations, reallocation of 5.67 staff to customer service and licensing, and a position transferred to administration and field services. Some of these transfers retained fisheries management duties: for example, seven positions were transferred to the Mississippi River Work unit under departmental reorganization, to continue performing fisheries-related activities. In

addition, eight of the fisheries technician positions transferred were to continue to address responsibilities that had been relocated to facilities and land under DNR reorganization. The net affect of these transfers, however, was to reduce the overall number of fisheries biologists and technicians available to perform field work. It could be argued that the current difficulties being experienced within the bureau of fisheries management and habitat protection were most directly the result of changes in DNR departmentwide priorities rather than actual budget reductions. As such, they could be addressed through a reallocation of staff from administrative or management priorities back to positions emphasizing fisheries management field work.

ALTERNATIVES TO BASE

1. Approve the Governor’s recommendation to provide \$431,700 in 2001-02 and \$459,000 in 2002-03 for 3.0 fisheries biologists and technicians from the fish and wildlife account of the conservation fund.

Alternative 1	SEG
2001-03 FUNDING (Change to Base)	\$890,700
<i>[Change to Bill]</i>	<i>\$0</i>
2002-03 POSITIONS (Change to Base)	3.00
<i>[Change to Bill]</i>	<i>0.00</i>

2. Adopt the Governor’s recommendation. In addition, provide \$131,400 in 2001-02 and \$225,300 in 2002-03 for 3.0 fisheries biologists and 3.0 fisheries technicians to address DNR fisheries management priorities statewide. (A total of 9.0 staff would be provided.)

Alternative 2	SEG
2001-03 FUNDING (Change to Base)	\$1,247,400
<i>[Change to Bill]</i>	<i>\$356,700</i>
2002-03 POSITIONS (Change to Base)	9.00
<i>[Change to Bill]</i>	<i>6.00</i>

3. Transfer \$89,400 in 2001-02 and \$108,000 in 2002-03 and 3.0 positions to provide for a fisheries biologist and two fisheries technicians. Specify that 2.0 positions and \$120,800 (\$55,000 in 2001-02 and \$65,800 in 2002-03) be transferred from the Bureau of Facilities and Lands, and 1.0 position and \$76,600 (\$34,400 in 2001-02 and \$42,200 in 2002-03) be transferred from Customer Service and Licensing. (This could be in addition to, or in lieu of, Alternative #1.)

4. Maintain current law.

Alternative 4	SEG
2001-03 FUNDING (Change to Base)	\$0
<i>[Change to Bill</i>	<i>- \$890,700]</i>
2002-03 POSITIONS (Change to Base)	0.00
<i>[Change to Bill</i>	<i>- 3.00]</i>

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ATTACHMENT

Position 1: Fisheries technician (Green Bay)

This position would have primary responsibility for piloting and maintaining the fisheries research vessel (The PERCA). It would also support ongoing perch research in Green Bay and Lake Michigan.

Position 2: Fisheries technician (Wild Rose, Langlade, Fitchburg)

This position would be split to increase three part time LTE fisheries technicians to full time. These positions include a coldwater production specialist at the Wild Rose fish hatchery, a fisheries technician providing salmonid support at the Thunder River fish hatchery (who also assists at the Langlade and Lakewood fish hatcheries), and a propagation technician at Nevin fish hatchery in Fitchburg.

Position 3: Fisheries biologist (Park Falls)

This position would have primary responsibility for resource monitoring within the region, including data quality assurance and assisting regional biologists with sampling efforts. The Department indicates that with 820 lakes larger than 100 acres and 44% of all trout streams located in this region, demand for fish and water quality monitoring is high. This position would also be involved in treaty work, monitoring walleye and muskellunge resources.

Position 4: Fisheries technician (Park Falls)

This position would provide support to the biologist position requested for the region. Duties would be similar, including fish regulation evaluations and evaluations of stocking efforts in the area as well.

Position 5: Fisheries technician (Sturtevant)

This position would be responsible for a variety of activities at the Root River Steelhead facility, including propagation activities, fish health monitoring, management surveys, and trends monitoring. The Root River facility supports a significant portion of the Lake Michigan steelhead and coho propagation program, and provides some backup support for the Chinook salmon stocking program (including providing eggs to other states).

Position 6: Fisheries biologist (Northern Marathon County and Wisconsin Dells)

This position would be responsible for Wisconsin River fish management activities for approximately 52,225 acres of flowages and 60 miles of river. Potential duties include

management of exotic species invasion, contaminants, algae blooms, rough fish control (including carp), sturgeon reintroduction, and fishing regulation assessments.

Position 7: Fisheries biologist (Lower St. Croix River)

This position would be responsible for water quality and fish management activities along the lower St. Croix River.

Position 8: Fisheries technician (Horicon)

This position would support the fisheries biologist who is assigned to the Upper Rock River basin.

Position 9: Fisheries biologist (Lower Wisconsin basin)

This position would be responsible for fish management and water quality sampling efforts throughout the region.