The Minnesota DNR is examining how hunting and angling license fees are structured to make sure the revenue they generate can continue to support the core work necessary to maintain Minnesota’s great outdoors traditions.

**Q: Don’t Legacy Amendment dollars fund the DNR?**

**A:** Legacy Amendment dollars are improving many things, including habitat conditions, impaired waters and the infrastructure of state parks and trails. However, Legacy Amendment dollars do not – nor were they ever intended to – pay for core fish, wildlife and enforcement operations. In fact, the Legislature specifically stated that Legacy dollars could not be used for those functions. This means expenditures for staff, field offices, vehicles, and other infrastructure will continue to come largely from the Game and Fish Fund, which is dependent upon license sale revenues. Contrary to what many believe, Legacy Amendment dollars do not go directly to the DNR.

**Q: Why are license fee adjustments being proposed?**

**A:** Because high quality hunting and angling are important to Minnesotans, and raising more revenue is the only realistic way to maintain the core fish, wildlife and enforcement programs that support good hunting and fishing. Costs have increased. The basic prices of fishing and hunting licenses haven’t, at least not since the year 2001. The upshot is that despite implementing millions of dollars of cost-saving measures (office consolidations, not replacing staff, converting to more fuel-efficient vehicles) the DNR is approaching a time when it will no longer be able to provide the basic services that hunters, anglers and citizens expect. In short, without additional revenue, programs critical to great hunting and fishing will need to be cut.

**Q: What will a fee adjustment accomplish?**

**A:** It will provide the financial foundation for maintaining great hunting and angling. It will accomplish this by restoring financial health to the Game and Fish Fund, which is projected to “go negative” by 2014. This fund is the foundation of core fish, wildlife and law enforcement work. Currently, expenditures exceed revenues by $2.6 million per year. The intent is to raise enough revenue so the fund stays solvent for about a decade. An adjustment would also ensure that revenue raised by fishing licenses is applied to fish management and revenue raised by wildlife licenses is applied to wildlife management. That’s not happening now.
Q: Can’t other revenue sources be used to offset a fee adjustment?

A: Not really. While it’s true the DNR receives bonding dollars for construction projects, Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) funding for select projects, and a small portion of state lottery revenues, all these appropriations have statutory limitations. In most instances, they are not intended to pay for the staff, offices, hatchery operations, vehicles and other infrastructure necessary to manage natural resources. The Game and Fish Fund does that. It is the primary source of funding for the work that hunters, anglers and other conservation organizations depend upon. Years ago, Minnesota’s General Fund (tax dollars) contributed significantly to the Fish and Wildlife Division budget. Today, the General Fund is a much smaller portion of the budget.

Q: What if there is no fee adjustment?

A: This would worsen three problems facing the Fish and Wildlife and Law Enforcement divisions.

Fisheries management would be reduced. Many activities critical to effective resource and recreation management would not get done due to a lack of funds.

Without additional revenue, the Enforcement Division’s ability to enforce laws pertaining to game and fish, invasive species, wetland conservation and the like will be reduced. It will also result in reduced response times and less participation in firearms and other safety training programs.

It would result in reductions to wildlife and habitat management operations. Many activities would no longer be done due to inadequate funding.

Q: How does the cost of Minnesota hunting and angling licenses compare to other states?

A: Minnesota’s angling licenses rank 37th in the nation and well below the national median. For example, the national median price for a resident freshwater fishing license is $21.50 or $4.50 cents more than Minnesota’s. Similarly, the national median price for a nonresident freshwater fishing license is $46.50 or $7.00 more than Minnesota’s. This despite the fact that Minnesota provides some of the nation’s premier walleye, muskellunge, and bass fishing, plus excellent fishing for stream trout, lake sturgeon, catfish and many other species. The DNR’s intent isn’t so much to set prices relative to other states, but to establish prices that enable the agency to accomplish its goals while also providing customers an array of “right-priced” license options. Ultimately, it is the Legislature – not the DNR – that approves a fee adjustment before it can go into effect.

Q: When would a fee adjustment occur?

A: That’s unknown. The citizen-comprised Game and Fish Fund Budget Oversight Committee has recommended the State Legislature address a fee adjustment during the session that starts in January. The Legislature could enact a fee adjust as early as the 2012 license year or conversely it could opt to retain the current fee structure. Time will tell.

For more information contact:
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