

**Response from Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to
the Budgetary Oversight Committee's Citizen Oversight
Report on Game and Fish Fund Expenditures Fiscal Year 2006**

January 2008

January 17, 2008

Mr. Brad Cobb, Chair
Budgetary Oversight Committee
333 - 4th Ave SE
St. Joseph, MN 56374

c: Game and Fish Fund citizen oversight appointees

Subject: Response to the Citizen Oversight Review of DNR's FY06 Game and Fish Fund Report

Dear Brad:

Thank you for your thorough review of DNR's Game and Fish Fund Report for Fiscal Year 2006. We have prepared a point-by-point response for your consideration.

Regarding the following points of general interest to the Budgetary Oversight Committee:

Funding imbalance

DNR response: In the past year we have worked with the BOC, legislators, and other stakeholders in investigating the issue and discussing solutions. We are currently preparing options. We plan on meeting with the BOC to review current imbalance, discuss the status of the Game and Fish Fund, and review the prepared options. We also plan to present this information to the Legislature and to stakeholders at the January Roundtable.

Biennial reporting cycle proposal

DNR response: Since there was no consensus reached by the subcommittees of the BOC, the DNR is not pursuing this change.

Sincerely,

Mark Holsten, Commissioner
Department of Natural Resources

RESPONSE TO FISHERIES OPERATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

Fiscal Issues

Treaty Costs

The portion of Treaty management cost that the GFF pays is still rising unfairly. The subcommittee still strongly urges the Legislatures to fund from General Funds all the cost directly related to negotiation on treaty issues with native tribes. The Subcommittee feels that 50% of all costs would be covered.

DNR response: Our position is that treaty costs should not be borne by the Game and Fish Fund. The DNR did propose to the Legislature to fund these costs from the General Fund through internal reallocation. At the conclusion of the legislative process, the re-allocated general fund was used on other legislative priorities.

Spending Inconsistency

DNR response: See cover letter.

Fishing Tournament Cost

The cost of managing tournaments is subsidized by the Game and Fish Fund. The Governor proposed a change in Minnesota Statutes to create a tournament fee structure for small, medium and large tournaments. We support this measure and are looking that funds spent by the DNR for monitoring tournaments will be recovered.

DNR response: Legislation was proposed and passed during the 2007 legislative session (Laws of Minnesota Chapter 57, Article 1, Section 101) that would recoup up to \$108,000 in fisheries administrative costs. The Commissioner's Order to establish the fees was published in the July 23, 2007 State Register. Collection of fees began on August 1, 2007. The final legislation provided an exemption for charitable organizations and a cap on fees were included that may limit the ability to fully recover costs.

Policy Issues

Biennial Cycle in reporting

DNR response: See cover letter.

Loss of Shoreline & Littoral Habitat

Only a small percentage of counties (12 out of 87) are now utilizing all or part of the standards from the Alternate Shoreline Rules. Eight others are looking into it. We would like to see all counties by a certain date adopt all (not just a selections) of the alternative shoreland standards.

DNR response: Minnesota's Alternative Shoreland Management Standards are actively promoted by the DNR as pragmatic and modernized development standards for selective and voluntary use by local governments. We continue to work with counties and cities helping them adopt elements of these standards. While the shoreland standards apply above the ordinary high water (OHW) they do not have a direct impact to littoral habitat compared to activities below the OHW that require either a Public Waters and/or Aquatic Plant Management permit. The DNR has commenced rule making to revise these shoreland rules with an extensive public consultation process. The experiences from the alternative standards will be essential in the development of new statewide rules.

Aquatic Plant Management

DNR fishing in the Neighborhood is a great program but the fishing piers are being choked by Aquatic vegetation by early summer. The subcommittee would like to see a proposal to find funding for the maintaining of keeping piers fishable.

DNR response: The DNR will work with organizations and volunteers through our aquatic plant management staff to conduct site inspections to determine how best to implement plant control efforts around piers on a case-by-case basis. The Fishing in the Neighborhood Program manages nearly 60 sites across the Twin Cities for shore fishing opportunities close to home. Approximately one-half of these basins have fishing piers installed. In any given year, 15-20 of these sites may benefit from aquatic plant control to enhance fishing experiences. Some piers may benefit from a second treatment.

Trails & Waterways report to committee on boat license dedicated to public water access

The Fisheries Subcommittee urges the Commissioner to create a new COC subcommittee to be responsible to report, oversight the budget and offer solutions to the Trails & Waterways Division.

DNR response: The Trails and Waterways Division (TAW) has been reporting its Game and Fish Fund expenditures to the COC since the inception of the COC in FY1994. The DNR believes there has been mutual value in those discussions throughout the years. TAW looks forward to continuing to work cooperatively with the COC Fisheries subcommittee to address budget management of the federal Sport Fish Restoration Program monies appropriated to Minnesota.

TAW has numerous advisory committees in place. They exist for cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, equestrians, ATVs, off highway motorcycles, and 4x4 trucks. In addition, TAW is in the process of developing a water recreation strategic plan. Plan input will be sought from a variety of affected parties with interest in water recreation resource management and utilization. TAW will seek strategic plan input from the appropriate COC Subcommittees. Water recreation users consist of a wide array of participants including anglers, power boaters, canoe and kayak enthusiasts, personal watercraft operators, sailors, and others.

Forming an additional oversight committee to oversee the Division's budget seems duplicative when one considers the TAW user group advisory committees currently in place.

NEW ISSUES

Recruitment & Enlisting

Social trends show declining interest in fishing, hunting and other nature type activities. We would like to see more marketing done. The Subcommittee would like to see a vision created with a plan that has marketing as a top budget item.

DNR response: The DNR agrees with this recommendation and has made recruitment, retention, and marketing a priority. A strategic plan (R&R) has been drafted. A number of measures have been taken in 2007 which include, 1) scientific analysis of the 2007 direct mail marketing campaign to lapsed anglers, 2) the DNR will aggressively market its new and nation-leading fishing and aquatic education curriculum to schools and non-formal educators, and 3) through a legislative appropriation the DNR plans to develop a mentoring program and will market new mentoring opportunities to youth.

Non Profit Groups

Non-profit groups are requesting grants using funding from Game & Fish monies. The DNR needs to set-up a request form that would seek what the money would be used for, what their budget is and projected budgets are, and what benefit their program would bring to Fisheries.

DNR response: The DNR believes if the Legislature is to fund grants to non-profit groups for the benefit of fish or wildlife, a competitive grants process is needed. Process should include pre-determined set of priorities, application submittal, program review, and outcome measure.

RESPONSE TO TROUT & SALMON STAMP SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

ONGOING ISSUES

Lake Superior Cormorant Control

Cormorants continue to decimate the vegetation on Knife Island and have been documented by USDA-WS to eat young steelhead in the vicinity of the Knife River mouth and lower pools. The harassment option does not adequately protect the Knife River fishery, nor does it address vegetation loss on Knife Island and fecal contamination of the surrounding waters. Hopefully 2008 will allow for a more comprehensive cormorant control program similar to that originally proposed by USDA-WS for 2007.

DNR response: Double crested cormorants are protected under federal law, not under Minnesota state law. Under the Public Resource Depredation Order, several states, tribal entities, and the US DNR of Agriculture, Wildlife Services, may control cormorants under certain circumstances. Any control or culling efforts require the permission of the landowner on which a colony exists, and a case must be made to the Fish and Wildlife Service if there are intentions to remove more than 10% of any given colony. The state did support the harassment option used in the spring of 2007, and will meet with the Lake Superior Steelhead Association and other parties to further discuss the issue.

Minntac Discharge to the Dark River and St. Louis River Watersheds

The Subcommittee is concerned about the possible discharge by U.S. Steel Minntac of 7.2 million gallons per day of contaminated tailings basin water into 3 area watersheds near Mt. Iron, Minnesota, including those of the Dark and St. Louis Rivers. Despite preparation of an EIS and the presentation of information at 2 public meetings, the Subcommittee would like to know more specifically how the PCA and DNR might be working together to insure that the trout and other aquatic life in the Dark River will be protected from the contaminants emanating from the Minntac tailings pond.

DNR response: We have provided formal comments to PCA on the EIS. The EIS alternative chosen was Saint Louis River. We continue to communicate with PCA to remain current on the status of this project.

Minntac did pilot testing on a Sulfate-reducing Packed-bed Bioreactor (SPB). In August 2006, PCA determined that more information was needed, and ordered Minntac to develop alternative treatment systems for the tailings water. Minntac has until July 2008 to complete the pilot testing of alternative treatment technology. Water seepage from the tailings will continue to be monitored where it is discharging to the Dark River and Sandy River Headwaters.

NEW ISSUES

Fiscal Issues

Biennial Game and Fish Fund Reporting

DNR response: See cover letter.

Policy Issues

VHS and other Exotics

The Subcommittee is concerned about the effects of exotic organisms and pathogens such as spiny water fleas, New Zealand mud snails, zebra mussels and viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS) on trout and salmon populations, or the ecosystems themselves, of Lake Superior and its tributaries. The Subcommittee urges the DNR to redouble its efforts to find solutions (technical, political, or other) to the problem of the transport of exotic species and pathogens into lake Superior as a result of foreign and domestic shipping activities.

DNR response: The DNR will continue to voice concerns and build coalitions on the issue of invasive species brought in through ballast water. In fact, the DNR supported PCA's LCCMR proposal concerning Ballast water. The DNR is implementing an action plan for VHS monitoring and actions across the state. Efforts include working in cooperation with Wisconsin and APHIS in monitoring and surveying waters of 90 lakes including Lake Superior. We expect to strengthen several existing regulations in order to fully implement the VHS action plan. The Minnesota DNR will remain vigilant to invasive species and pathogens.

Hunting & Fishing Revenue/Expenditure Disparity

DNR response: See cover letter.

RESPONSE TO WILDLIFE OPERATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY REPORTED ISSUES

Fishing Overspending and Wildlife Underspending

DNR response: See cover letter.

Heritage Enhancement Reporting

In 2005, 2006, and again this year we recommend treating Heritage Enhancement receipts as a transfer from the General Fund. The DNR reply has been that Heritage Enhancement receipts are reported pursuant to MS 2974.94; since this statute is silent on accounting treatment and financial reporting we have yet to receive a meaningful response to our recommendation.

DNR response: DNR has shared these comments with the Department of Finance and will continue to report Heritage Enhancement receipts as revenue into the Game and Fish Fund consistent with past reports.

Wildlife Management Areas

In 2006, we recommended the Game and Fish Report incorporate a “progress report” on the DNR adoption of a 2002 citizen recommendation to acquire 210,000 acres of new WMA land by 2012. We recommend that this progress report be a biennial report, provided to the BOC by October 1, so that the data can be reviewed with the annual GFF Report. Additionally, include the biennial report in the GFF report. We also recommend that the 10–year (2002-2012) goal be restated in the Land Acquisition portion of the GFF Report, and the biennial progress report be referenced along with at least a general goal progress statement.

DNR response: In the December 2005 DNR response to the FY 2005 BOC report we agreed to produce a land acquisition progress report. DNR agrees that this report will be a biennial report. This report has been completed and is available for distribution to the subcommittee as a separate document. A summary of the land acquisition progress report has been included in the FY 2007 G&F report including the goals from the Citizens Report.

Development Funds for Wildlife Management Areas

There is a need to identify and fund revitalization of degraded WMAs to ensure quality habitat and sporting experiences, beyond the initial development. We recommend the DNR implement an interactive DNR website link that will allow real time user input on WMA conditions and timely DNR response.

DNR response: DNR agrees to develop a web site for citizen sportsmen to provide comments and suggestions on facility and habitat management ideas on individual WMAs through the Internet. DNR will automatically direct the comment to the appropriate Area Wildlife Manager as an information item for future management planning. The web site application will be evaluated after two years.

Land and Minerals Division

The Land and Minerals Division spent \$843,000 in FY 2006 and \$938,000 in FY 2005 from direct appropriations LAM received from the Game and Fish Fund. Improve accountability and transparency by requiring LAM to bill the Division of Fish and Wildlife for all professional services. Reduce the direct appropriation to the amount necessary for LAM support staff functions only.

DNR response: The DNR agrees that expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund need to be accountable and transparent. That said, Land and Minerals staff look forward to discussions with the subcommittee on existing accounting methods, outcomes, and annual appropriations from the Game and Fish Fund. DNR believes that these discussions will lead to greater understanding and, eventually, better business options. The DNR would like to work with the subcommittee on increasing the transparency of Lands and Mineral Division work done with Game and Fish Fund expenditures.

RESPONSE TO BIG GAME SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

ONGOING ISSUES

Funding for CWD and TB efforts

We renew our 2005 request for the DNR to fund CWD and TB efforts from sources other than hunter dollars.

DNR response: The Department requested and the Legislature provided general funds for FY 2007 for wildlife disease management. In addition, the Department applied for and was successful in securing federal funds for animal disease monitoring. During FY07, 100% of both CWD and bovine TB surveillance were paid using non-fish and game fund revenue. For CWD, a limited number of samples (~1,100) were collected and a grant provided by USDA covered the cost of surveillance. For bovine TB, approximately 5,000 samples were collected and DNR received general fund dollars from the state legislature to accomplish this task as well.

NEW ISSUES

Fiscal Issues

Use of Hunter License Dollars for Other Purposes

DNR response: See cover letter.

Policy Issues

Hunter Recruitment and Retention Programs

One of the topics that we feel has been overlooked is that access to hunting land is also crucial to the retention of new hunters. We recommend that additional measures be taken to increase land access, either through hunter education courses that teach land ethics, stewardship, and hunter/landowner relations, or landowner incentive programs, which provide reasonable encouragement for landowners to open their property to hunters.

DNR response: Each of the 1,569 firearms safety, advanced hunter education and bow hunter education classes conducted in 2006 (reaching 25,415 students) included a portion of time devoted to hunter ethics/landowner relations. A tool that is commonly used is the brochure, "Hunting Private Lands-It's a Privilege", which was recently reprinted with the help of a number of conservation groups and farm organizations. The DNR has completed a Walk-in access plan as required by the legislature in Minnesota Session Law 2007, Chapter 131, Section 85. Finally the DNR and its partners are actively pursuing permanent Forest Legacy Program easements that include public hunting in 5 areas of the state. The most recent additions to the Forest Legacy Program are the 1,660 acres Sugar Hills tract and 51,163 acres in easements from Forest Capital Partners.

Unexplained Mortality in Northern Moose Population

In recent years, the moose population in northern Minnesota has seen a significant increase in the mortality of otherwise healthy animals. We feel that additional studies should be designed and implemented with expediency in order to determine the etiology of this problem.

DNR response: Currently, DNR and tribal biologists are conducting a research project looking at survival of radio-collared moose. As of yet, there is no conclusive evidence that explains the population decline. This fall, DNR began a research project looking at blood and tissue samples of hunter-harvested moose to identify specific diseases. There are also plans to continue the ongoing radio-telemetry work to identify a cause. DNR staff are always interested in participating in projects that protect and enhance moose habitat. We will continue to work with our Federal and Tribal counterparts on cooperative projects that benefit moose and other species.

RESPONSE TO PHEASANT STAMP SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

NEW ISSUES

FY06 Game and Fish Report

The Subcommittee expresses disappointment with the response it received from the DNR concerning the 2006 Report. Although the DNR acknowledged its intention to develop “activity guidance” to Area Wildlife Managers to help achieve the goals set forth in the Long Range Pheasant Plan, to the best of the Committee’s knowledge none of this work had been done for the current fiscal year (2007). It is also a disappointment that there was no feedback from the DNR concerning the tactics and strategies identified by the PSOSC. Therefore, many of the same suggestions are present in this year’s report.

DNR response: We will work with the Subcommittee to address the concerns expressed above. With the high turn over in subcommittee members and lack of meetings this past year we regret that we were unable to meet and address these issues during the normal subcommittee process. The Department is continuing to developing multiple WMA management directives and best management practice documents to address issues such as woody cover, food plots, grassland harvest for biomass production that will directly benefit pheasant management.

We have also initiated a review of the strategies and actions delineated in the Long Range Pheasant Plan using 2002 as the base line year (the year that these were written). This assessment is due to be completed by the end of fiscal year 2008. Additionally we are conducting a review and assessment of our food plot program.

Fiscal Issues

The PSOSC again noted that the PHIP account had a substantial carry-over balance from current and prior fiscal years. The PSOSC recommends that the DNR meet with the members of the PSOSC to discuss how the PHIP carry over funds are going to be spent. The PSOSC strongly recommends some portion of the current account balance should be made available for habitat projects. These funds would be applied for and weighed in to achieve the greatest benefit for the investment (i.e. “block” grant for CREP II Initiative, other group efforts as well as individual efforts).

DNR response: The majority of pheasant stamp funds are currently expended on habitat projects. It is not uncommon for substantial sums of money to be carried over from the first to second year of a biennium. This occurs because we cannot encumber funds for expenditure until they is appropriated. A significant amount of Pheasant Stamp expenditures are for private land habitat contracts such as food plots and since cropping years cross fiscal years there is a lag time between encumbering the funds and paying out the expenditures. In addition, some activities such as land acquisitions or major habitat restorations take longer then one year to complete or are best accomplished by pooling funds over multiple fiscal years. As you know the BOC has been discussing conducting the financial review every second year for this reason. The FY07 statement shows that of the \$1,780,000 allocated over the biennium the unspent balance cancelled to the fund was \$35,000 (<2%).

Policy Issues

Long-Range Pheasant Plan Implementation

The PHIP account budget should be aligned to support those tactics and strategies that have the greatest impact on the success of the long-range pheasant plan. The PSOSC is recommending that the DNR submit a comprehensive review of the PHIP’s account to ensure that all area/regional DNR managers spend monies on “best practices” according to the long-range plan. The PSOSC strongly recommends that the DNR develop short and intermediate term tactics and strategies that ensure progress toward achieving the Long-Range Pheasant Plan’s strategic vision.

DNR response: We agree that the PHIP expenditures should support practices that have the greatest impact on implementation of the long-range pheasant plan. We are currently in the process

of conducting a 5-year evaluation of the strategies and actions delineated in the Long Range Pheasant Plan using 2002 as the base line year. Upon completion of the 5-year evaluation of the Long Range Pheasant Plan and the food plot program review we may change the emphasis that some practices receive based upon this information.

Pheasant Stamp Fee Increase

The PSOSC recommends that the DNR continue to study the idea of another license fee increase and further develop the process of educating the public on the need for additional funds to achieve the goals of the long-range pheasant plan through the use of the DNR Hunters Handbook.

DNR response: The DNR is not proposing a pheasant stamp fee increase at this time. We will continue to work with the subcommittee on this issue.

Promotion of Farm Habitat Programs

The 2007 Farm Bill is a key opportunity to increasing winter cover and nesting habitat in the Minnesota pheasant range. The PSOSC strongly recommends using an appropriate amount of PHIP funds for lobbying efforts and grass roots tools to influence a positive outcome of the 2007 Farm Bill.

The PSOSC strongly recommends public awareness, marketing and conservation consultants be available to work with landowners to utilize currently available programs (more or new programs might focus too much energy away from current programs).

DNR response: The DNR continues to partner with Pheasants Forever to provide critical education to decision makers to promote the conservation provisions of the Federal Farm Bill.

As in the past, the DNR is working in partnership with the Board of Water and Soil Resources, Pheasants Forever, and local Soil and Water Conservation Districts to field approximately 35 technicians to work directly with landowners to provide technical assistance and education throughout the vast majority of the pheasant range. The DNR also has four Private Lands Specialists that work within the pheasant range and provides additional private lands assistance through area wildlife offices.

Application Process for Use of PHIP monies

The PSOSC strongly recommends there be an application process for use of PHIP's monies (private groups/individuals/Block Grants / WMA acquisitions / etc.) that would score applicants based on best practices and greatest return on the investment.

DNR response: DNR already has a delivery mechanism for private lands work through Private Lands Agreements. These agreements are developed through local Wildlife Area offices using PHIP funds which are allocated by county through a prioritization formula developed by the DNR's Farmland Committee which takes several factors into account; including the amount of existing habitat (e.g. WMAs, WPAs CRP, etc.), land use patterns (e.g. hay/pasture/small grains), Winter Severity Index, and pheasant population based upon August Roadside Counts. This formula directs funds to counties where pheasant habitat and pheasant populations can be maximized yet still allows for some funds to be allocated to sub-optimal areas so that they can improve habitat conditions for the future. We support using our professionally trained, locally based, wildlife biologists to make these funding decisions. We also support continuing education and training for Area staff to ensure appropriate and effective pheasant management and provide such training as appropriate.

Please note that the DNR has several grant programs that fund work on both public and private lands. These programs include: Heritage Enhancement Grants, Working Lands Initiative Grants, Roadsides, and the Landowner Incentive Program to name a few.

Pheasant Habitat Designs

The Subcommittee strongly recommends identifying and promoting habitat designs that will increase more pheasants per acre of habitat and identify those "negative habitats" which should be discouraged.

DNR response: We agree. The DNR has been providing pheasant management guidance for decades and continues to research the topic. Most recently, the data collection for the recently completed five-year winter cover study has been finalized. The next year will be spent in data entry, analysis, and write-up. Upon completion of data analysis we will distribute information to DNR staff and the public and promote pheasant BMPs. For example, we have worked with the US Fish and Wildlife Service during the last two years to develop new BMPs for woody cover management on WMAs and WPAs. These guidelines are being distributed to DNR and FWS staff.

Roadside Habitat Management Best Practices

The PSOSC recommends a continued study on the data on roadside wildlife management and improvements and determine best practices.

DNR response: We agree and expect that our new Farmland Bird Research Biologist may be able to take on some of these duties in terms of analysis and synthesis of existing information. The Roadside Program will continue to be funded at the same level with PHIP dollars as it has been in the past. Additionally the Roadside Program currently has a Game and Fish Fund appropriation of \$300,000 for the biennium to address some of the items suggested in this report. As an example of something that the new funding is being used for; this year a new poster was created promoting delaying mowing until August 1. Ten thousand copies of the poster were distributed to County Engineers, county offices, 1786 township clerks, SWCD offices, BWSR offices, USFWS, Mn/DOT District Offices, and PF. Additionally similar billboards were put up in 8 locations in high traffic areas in the pheasant range.

Pheasant Stamp Anniversary Recognition

We encourage the DNR to acquire a WMA and formally dedicate it to identify the significant role the Minnesota Pheasant Habitat Stamp funds have played since 1983 – the first year of the stamp.

DNR response: Completed. The 25th Anniversary Pheasant Stamp WMA in Lac Qui Parle County was dedicated on August 4, 2007.

Food Plots Guidance

The Subcommittee recommends that food plot programs be given direction and guidance for best location and size to assure that they are providing the best benefit and not actually a detriment.

DNR response: We agree. DNR has hired a Farmland Bird Research Biologist to work out of the Madelia office and one of the first habitat evaluation projects this new position will engage in is to study the effectiveness of the current food plot program. We are also conducting a comprehensive wildlife food plot inventory for both public and private lands. We expect the project to take two years to complete.

RESPONSE TO TURKEY STAMP SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

ONGOING ISSUES

Trap & Transplant Program

Complete the Trap & Transplant Program and continue to develop the criteria to determine what IS turkey habitat and develop a plan to stock it with sufficient releases.

DNR response: The 2006 Hunters Observing Wild Turkeys Survey (HOWT) has been completed and the northern range line has been extended accordingly. Some potential release areas have dropped off due to this but we had anticipated this in the Long Range Plan for the Wild Turkey in Minnesota (Turkey Plan). The Plan will be revised and pending the outcome of the northwest survival study (results due spring 2008) additional releases may be warranted. In FY06, 119 turkey were trapped and relocated to release sites within the state.

Turkey Habitat Increase

Little effort has been made to increase turkey habitat in South Central, Southwestern, and West Central Minnesota on public and private lands. Form a cooperative partnership with the DNR and the NWTF for a wild turkey biologist. Other recommendations include promoting hardwood restoration and management and leveraging farm bill assistance.

DNR response: The Farm Bill Assistance Partnership (FBAP) will be re-evaluated during this upcoming year and there may be opportunities to partner with NWTF through FBAP to accomplish additional turkey habitat work. Additionally DNR has a half time Private Lands Specialist position in the Rochester office that we may be able to leverage into a full time position in partnership with NWTF. As a point of clarification we view this recommendation and these positions as habitat positions rather than a traditional wild turkey biologist (population assessment, research, etc) position.

We would also like to note that increased effort is being invested into the state's Forest Legacy Program, which is designed to maintain forested acres and provide additional public access.

Information & Education About Wild Turkey Management

There is increasing need to inform and educate the general public, land owners, and hunters about the management of wild turkeys, especially in the new areas of the State where turkeys are being released. The Subcommittee offered several promotional ideas.

DNR response: During the past year there have been an increasing number of workshops in the turkey range geared towards private landowners that have included turkey management information. The DNR would like to continue to partner with NWTF to hold additional workshops.

Turkey Habitat Acquisition

More turkey hunters take up the sport – over 50,000 apply for Spring 2007. Continue to seek out and acquire public lands that have turkey habitat.

DNR response: The DNR will continue to use turkey stamp funds and leverage other funding sources whenever possible to acquire turkey habitat and important connective corridors. The Turkey Plan establishes an annual goal of acquiring 20-50 acres of wild turkey habitat using turkey stamp funds. We will continue to strive to meet this goal on an annual basis. During the biennium DNR acquired nearly 9,500 acres within the turkey range at a cost of over \$19,000,000. Much of these new acres provide some form of turkey habitat. FY06 turkey stamp rollover dollars were used in FY07 for the Ferndale Ridge WMA project in Houston County (660 acres total), which is the culmination of a multi year effort.

NEW ISSUES

Turkey Stamps and ELS purchase

Turkey stamp funds could be affected by the current situation at ELS terminals that hunters purchasing turkey licenses may not have purchased turkey stamps. This may need to be changed to a mandatory inclusion with turkey licenses.

DNR response: Approximately 3,000 licenses are sold without turkey stamps. Presumably these purchasers are hunting illegally. The DNR is proposing to combine the turkey stamp fee and license fee into one fee.

Policy Issues

Public Lands Inaccessible for Public Recreation

The State owns land (Forestry) in many areas of Minnesota that are landlocked by private lands and unavailable to public recreation. Develop a program to purchase “walk in” access easements to the landlocked public parcels to provide turkey hunters and others access to many landlocked public Forestry lands.

DNR response: The DNR has started to write a Walk-in access plan as required by the Minnesota legislature in Minnesota Session Law 2007, Chapter 131 Section 85. This plan will address the access aspects mentioned above and is due to the legislature by January 15, 2008.

RESPONSE TO WATERFOWL STAMP SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY REPORTED ISSUES

Ongoing Issues

Duck Plan Accomplishments Reporting

The Subcommittee still contends that there is significant value in DNR staff compiling a brief report on accomplishments as it relates to the DNR duck recovery plan and publicizing that to the 100,000 waterfowl hunters in the state.

DNR response: The DNR will convene a biennial meeting of the Duck Recovery Plan Partnership Team to review a biennial progress report. This report and discussion can serve as the basis for publicizing accomplishments and challenges.

NEW ISSUES

30th Anniversary of Minnesota Waterfowl Stamp

2007 represents the 30th Anniversary of the creation of the Minnesota Waterfowl Stamp. The WSS urges the DNR to publicize this important milestone in the waterfowl regulations book and in other related communication materials.

DNR response: The 30th Anniversary was celebrated on September 15 at the public access of Lake Onamia in cooperation with the Minnesota Waterfowl Association (MWA), Ducks Unlimited (DU), Onamia City Council, Onamia Fire DNR, and local Firearms Safety Program instructors. The celebration also commemorated the completion of the new Lake Onamia outlet structure, the Youth Waterfowl Hunt, 40th anniversary of the Minnesota Waterfowl Association, and the 70th anniversary of Ducks Unlimited. Youth "tee shirts featuring the anniversary stamp were distributed at the event as well as sold at the State Fair. Posters featuring all of the waterfowl stamps to date were distributed to attendees. Seven youth hunters participated in the morning hunt. Local firemen and Firearms Safety instructors served lunch. Total attendance was 48. Additional posters will be distributed free to area offices and requesting members of the public. Articles on the anniversary appeared in the September-October issue of the Conservation Volunteer and in the Waterfowl Regulations Supplement.

Implementation of DNR Duck Recovery Plan

In 2006, the DNR's Duck Recovery Plan was finalized and called for the addition of two million acres of wetlands and grasslands and the enhancement and management of 1,800 shallow lakes. The WSS suggests the DNR assemble an implementation team . . . to identify barriers to the Plan's success and work together to ensure a positive outcome.

DNR response: The DNR will convene a biennial meeting of the Duck Recovery Plan Partnership Team to review a biennial progress report. This will provide a suitable venue to discuss barriers to success and cooperative ventures.

Policy Issues

Electronic Licensing and concerns over disappearance of waterfowl stamp

The WSS is fully supportive of eliminating the requirement to sign the stamps and have them in possession. The WSS supports making the hard copy stamp available to those who request it (at the time of purchasing) for no additional charge.

DNR response: The DNR is committed to maintaining the pictorial stamp.

RESPONSE TO ECOLOGICAL SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

Policy Issues

Lakes and Rivers

Identifying Sensitive Shoreland Areas

Sensitive shoreland areas provide critical fish and wildlife habitat, but are increasingly threatened by development. The DNR Division of Ecological Services is currently funding this effort with federal dollars through the FY 2008-2009 biennium. If this program is expanded after the next biennium, Game and Fish Fund dollars should be used to support it.

DNR response: It is not be the sole responsibility of the Game and Fish Fund to fund the sensitive shoreland assessment project, because this work has broad environmental benefits. If this project continues into the next biennium, the DNR will consider funding a portion of it with Game and Fish Fund dollars, but would also expect other funding sources to be used.

Ecosystem Health

Terrestrial Invasive Species Management

Terrestrial invasive species are a growing problem on DNR-managed lands. Ongoing funding is needed for an emergency response fund and for cooperative projects with local land managers.

DNR response: The DNR concurs that terrestrial invasive species are a growing problem and that stable funding is needed. The legislature provided an additional \$1.26 million in General Fund for terrestrial invasive species management on DNR lands for the FY 2008-2009 biennium. The DNR will continue to explore options for an ongoing dedicated funding source for this conservation challenge.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Management

Thirty-five (35) percent of Minnesota's primary recreational lakes (general development and recreational development lakes) contain at least one AIS, and the number of infested lakes continues to grow each year. Additional sources of ongoing funding for management, prevention, enforcement, and rapid response to AIS must be secured. Game and Fish Funds should be considered to be a legitimate partial funding source for AIS prevention, management, and rapid response.

DNR response: The budget for AIS increased dramatically for the current biennium and will almost double by FY 2009 from increases in General Fund and Natural Resource Fund appropriations. Nevertheless, an additional source of revenue will be needed in order to maintain or increase this level of effort for the FY 2010-2011 biennium. While the DNR does consider the Game and Fish Fund to be a legitimate partial funding source for AIS, we would rather see needed revenue come from an alternative source. In addition, increasing Game and Fish Fund expenditures on AIS could exacerbate the current imbalance in spending between fisheries and wildlife. The DNR is considering a proposal for the 2009 legislative session to increase the watercraft license surcharge.

Nongame and Rare Resources

Biofuel opportunities and challenges

Renewable energy sources are receiving increased attention and interest, including biomass for fuel production. The DNR should encourage the plantings of mixed perennial native prairie grasses that can be harvested for biofuel production [and] educate the public.

DNR response: While the industry has many challenges ahead in developing technologies and markets for "prairie biofuels," opportunities are ever increasing for Minnesota. The DNR's challenge will be insuring future biomass production does not place further demands on existing and limited restored prairies, but creates additional grasslands and environmental benefits. It is also essential we

protect the few remaining native prairies from potential biomass production pressures, such as, fertilizing, intensive cutting, or introduction of cultivar species.

Scientific and Natural Areas (SNAs)

The SNA program needs to have broader public support and recognition. DNR needs to market SNAs to a broader segment of the public and look for opportunities to increase recreational activities on SNAs without diminishing the ecological values that SNAs were purchased and established to protect.

DNR response: Clearly, increasing public support for SNAs is very important. However, the SNA program's limited resources have been focused on protecting and sustaining the rare features for which they are established. Nonetheless, in FY08-09, the SNA Program and Commissioner's Advisory Committee will strategize on how to innovatively target increased public engagement in SNAs, such as opportunities for virtual visits and partnerships to increase visitation at selected SNAs. Funding for key outreach strategies would assure implementation.

RESPONSE TO ENFORCEMENT, SUPPORT SERVICES, AND ADMINISTRATION SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

Statewide Indirect Costs

The “indirect costs” associated with federal dollars received by the State are recoverable through guidelines identified in “OMB Circular A-87 Revised.” This subcommittee recommends the DNR review the State “indirect cost plan” to assure it meets the specific needs associated with the Game and Fish Fund maximizing federal reimbursement.

DNR response: DNR’s Office of Management and Budget Services has reviewed the statewide indirect cost plan and the costs assessed against the Game and Fish Fund. We are confident the costs are appropriate and in compliance with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service federal aid requirements and pose no hindrance to our maximizing federal reimbursements to the fund.