

Budget in Brief: Enforcement

What is the problem we are trying to solve?

We have 21 vacant stations due to retirements. These vacancies cannot be filled because the salaries for these positions have been used to pay for underfunded and unfunded increases in our operating costs. Each Conservation Officer's patrol area averages 650 square miles, which means there are 13,650 square miles in the state that don't have adequate natural resource protection. That is an area larger than the states of Massachusetts and Rhode Island combined.

There isn't an ethical sportsman who doesn't want game & fish laws enforced, and there isn't a person in this state who doesn't want clean water and sustainable natural resources now and for future generations. Conservation Officer's work in outreach, education, and law enforcement meets those needs.

What has Minnesota tried? What has worked, and what hasn't?

We have re-organized and eliminated a number of non-field oriented positions and re-distributed specialty work. We are also holding a number of non-licensed positions vacant to make sure that we have as many field stations filled as our current budget permits. However, the number of vacancies (21) is still too great to deliver the service expected by tax-payers.

We are already doing more with less. Despite growth in responsibilities and a changing population of those who participate in outdoor recreation, the number of field officers today matches what it did in the 1950s. More than 50 of the Division's licensed peace officers will be eligible for retirement by 2018, which is approximately 24 percent of the Division's licensed staff.

What do we propose?

We propose providing adequate funding to restore enforcement staffing so natural resource management program goals that are met, which are vital to the state's economic, public health, heritage, and quality of life. Minnesotans expect to have their natural resources protected. During hard economic times they voted to increase their own taxes and have invested significant amounts of money into our natural resources through the clean water, land and legacy amendment. As financial investments to restore, protect and enhance Minnesota's wetlands, prairies, forests and habitat for fish, game and wildlife have increased, the men and women who have sworn an oath to protect these resources have been left behind.

What positive impact do we believe this will have?

Conservation officers are most people's only interaction with the DNR. Our officers provide a connection between the public and DNR resource managers. By the nature of our field work, we engage one-on-one with people and are able to provide vital information about rules, regulations, laws, the reasoning behind them, and the impacts if they are not followed. Many citizens don't know where to start if they have a question related to the DNR; these field contacts provide the opportunity to start citizen engagement.

Budget in Brief: Enforcement

Today, the demands of a Conservation Officer's time involves much more than enforcing bag limits and checking for licenses. They now have added responsibilities such as ground water protection, enforcing and educating the public on invasive species laws, increased commercial use of our resources, and other broader natural resource protections beyond game & fish.

With the changing population of the state we would be able to recruit more diverse officers that reflect the communities we serve. A more diverse workforce will also allow for better outreach and recruitment to new users of our natural resources.

[If the legislature doesn't adopt this proposal, what alternate approaches has DNR considered?](#)

Vacant Conservation Officer positions will continue to grow, which will result in a continued decline in services to every Minnesotan. Compliance rates, responses to calls for service, numbers of public outreach contacts and reaching resource management objectives will suffer. Investments in clean water, enhancing our wetlands, prairies, & forests and healthy fish, game, and wildlife populations will never be fully realized.