

New York State FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD



**Joint Legislative Hearing on the 2015-2016 Executive Budget for Environmental
Conservation, 28 January, 2015**

Testimony of Lance Robson, Chairman, New York State Fish and Wildlife Management Board

The Fish and Wildlife Management Board is a statutorily established volunteer board made up of regionally elected delegates representing the more than 1.7 million members of the sporting public, the state's landowners and the county governments of 55 of the 62 counties of the state. The board's main tasks are to advise on matters of fish, wildlife and habitat management and sporting access.

US Census Bureau and the US Fish and Wildlife Service research, updated annually, confirms that fish and wildlife related recreation generates well over \$8 billion in annual economic activity in New York State.

The board welcomes and applauds the increased funding for fish, wildlife and habitat management and access projects included in the proposed budget. We also welcome the intent to formalize a dedicated funding stream of sporting license sale funds and related federal fish and wildlife restoration grant funds to hire 18 new fulltime staff to work exclusively on habitat and access related work. While very welcome, these 18 new hires will replace only about one quarter of the boots on the ground fish and wildlife staff lost since 2009.

There is therefore, a need for further funds to restore something closer to the level of staff needed to accomplish work and projects at nearer the levels we experienced prior to the economic downturn in 2009. Over one hundred DEC staff not directly related to on-the-ground fish and wildlife management were shifted to the traditional Conservation Fund during the heart of the recession. If, due to our improving economic status, these personnel were placed back on the general fund that would free up more than \$10 million per year of the sporting license Conservation Fund moneys for on-the-ground fish, wildlife and habitat related work.

Of additional concern are the staff and funding cuts since 2009 in the Division of Operations who actually perform much of the construction, upkeep and repair of roads, trails, boat launches, Wildlife Management Areas, DEC parks etc owned by the DEC. In addition to quite deep staff cuts and program funding cuts much of their equipment has aged to the point of desperately needing replacement. Nearly all of the bulldozers, dump trucks, skid steers etc date to the 1990s or earlier and are in need of replacement. We cannot expect to properly and safely maintain the 4 million acres of land that the DEC manages without the personnel and equipment to do so.

Cuts in Division of Lands and Forests personnel and spending have led to a decrease in timber sales, a drop in forest stand improvement work and forest infrastructure work. This has led to reduced values for standing timber, lost opportunities for wildlife habitat improvements and a steady deterioration of state forest infrastructure. While there will be some foresters hired in the near future to increase timber sales the need additional personnel is still great. As with other parts of the DEC their vehicles and equipment are generally well past their prime and are in need of replacement.

All of these personnel and funding shortfalls act together to reduce the amount and quality of fish, wildlife, habitat and access related work the Department can do as compared to pre-2009 totals. They have also led to a steady deterioration of much of the infrastructure on state owned lands.

Again, we welcome the partial restoration of some of the recession related personnel and spending cuts that affect fish, wildlife and habitat management and sporting access. We look forward to working with you in the times ahead in the hopes of returning closer to prerecession levels of staffing and funding in order to more properly care for the natural resources of the State.

Respectfully submitted,

Lance Robson
Chairman, New York State
Fish and Wildlife Management Board