



STATE OF NEW YORK CONSERVATION FUND ADVISORY BOARD
625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12233-4800

**February 13th 2017 Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2017-2018 Executive Budget
“Environmental Conservation”**

Testimony Presented by the New York State Conservation Fund Advisory Board

Conservation Fund Background

Good morning, I'm Jason Kemper, Chairman of the NYS Conservation Fund Advisory Board. I would like to thank the members of the Senate and Assembly for taking time to here this testimony today. The purpose of the Conservation Fund is “the care, management, protection and enlargement of the fish, game and shell fish resources of the state and for the promotion of public fishing and shooting” (NY Finance Law § 83). The Conservation Fund is unlike any other special revenue fund in the State. The hunting, fishing and trapping community in New York State is the only interest group that funds the management of the resources that are important to them. It is funded by the sale of hunting, trapping, and fishing licenses. These sales generate approximately \$47 million dollars per year which is deposited into the Conservation Fund. Those license sales then leverage an additional \$30 million in federal aid. As of February 1st, 2017 there are 327 employees at the NYSDEC that are paid for out of the Conservation Fund. This is an example of the large contribution sportsmen make to the funding of the DEC. No other outdoor user group in NYS contributes more to supporting the protection and enhancement of fish, wildlife and natural resources.

A 2015 NYS Comptrollers Report estimated that consumer spending relating to hunting and fishing generated \$5 billion annually, this ranks New York 3rd in the nation. The report goes on to state “The revenue generated from the sale of licenses and permits for hunting and fishing, which totaled nearly \$50 million in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2012-13, supports important fish and wildlife programs. Over the past five fiscal years, spending by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) from the State’s Conservation Fund for fish and wildlife programs averaged \$44.3 million annually. In addition, two key federal programs provide additional grant support to State fish and wildlife programs. Over the past five years, federal Wildlife Restoration grants to New York State and Sport Fish Restoration grants have averaged a combined total of more than \$24 million annually.” The ripple effect of those expenditures amounts to over \$8 billion per year in NYS. The Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation has stated that there are over 56,000 jobs across New York related to hunting, fishing and trapping (#5 in Nation). We feel a greater effort should be made to highlight the unique contribution that sportsman make to the economy and to conservation in general.

Recruitment/Opportunities for Youth

The average age of a sporting license buyer in NYS is approximately 48 years of age. As this age continues to rise, recruitment of young individuals is crucial. CFAB encourages the NYS Legislature to take steps that encourage the youth in NYS to participate in outdoor activities. The Board realizes that a portion of the youth participating in outdoor activities will then go on to pursue hunting, fishing or trapping. CFAB along with the NYS Sportsmen’s Advisory Council, and the majority of all other sporting groups, support establishing a universal hunting age of 12.

New York requires you to be at least 14 years old to participate in big game hunting with a firearm. Every other state in the nation allows 12 year old hunters or younger, under the supervision of their parents or other licensed mentor, to pursue big game with a firearm. Statistics have proven that youth hunters under the supervision of an

adult are the safest group of hunters. Starting youth at a young age with a mentor results in an increased long-term retention rate and has proven to make them safer and more responsible hunters when they are old enough to hunt on their own.

Hunting provides quality time for parents to bond with their children in an outdoor setting and affords excellent opportunities to introduce young people to nature, conservation, and responsible wildlife management. When children are deprived of these types of outdoor experiences some become entrenched in activities that disconnect them from the natural world around them. Hunting, especially at an early age, imprints in youth the mindset, that game management and environmental stewardship go hand and hand along with proper gun handling and safety. In addition, NYSDEC's five year Deer Management Plan recommends that the minimum age for hunting with a firearm be lowered to 12 years of age.

The future of hunting, as well as the conservation of our natural resources, is directly tied to the recruitment and retention of our youth to these time-honored traditions. Providing New York State the legal opportunity to enact a uniform hunting age of 12 years old will have a positive impact on youth, families, hunting safety, hunter recruitment and retention, local and statewide economies, and conservation funding.

The youth of today seem to have an endless number of choices on how they spend their time...much more so than just one generation ago. One could argue that the internet is a big challenge to more traditional outdoor pursuits...and perhaps it is. We feel NYS should do everything possible to encourage young people to get outdoors and learn about the natural world around them. Developing an appreciation for conservation, wildlife and fisheries management and environmental stewardship can only help to make our youth more productive citizens.

Lifetime License Account

When a lifetime sporting license is purchased in NYS, those funds are deposited into the Lifetime Trust Account. The principal from this account cannot be touched, but the interest is transferred to the Conservation Fund on an annual basis. Historically, the interest rate earned on this account has been less than .1% percent. The Conservation Fund Advisory Board has worked with the NYS Comptroller's office to diversify the principal investment to a point where the interest revenue has increased from approximately \$70K per year to over \$570K in 2016 (8 times the historical average).

However, the board has been advised that some minor changes to the State Finance Law would allow the Comptroller to invest the principal in the Lifetime License Account similarly to the NYS Pension Fund. This change would be in paragraph 4 of subdivision A of Section 83 of the State Finance Law. This change would give the Comptroller's Office more options to invest the Lifetime License funds. It is estimated that this change would increase the interest revenue to the Conservation Fund to several million dollars. As expenses to the Conservation Fund continue to increase, this simple solution will help to ensure that the fund stays solvent for a longer period of time.

Correcting this investment issue is a very important issue to CFAB and we ask that it be given the highest priority and consideration. What we are asking for makes good business sense for all who are involved. Just imagine the opposition that would erupt if employees who are part of the NYS retirement plan had their pension funds invested at less than 1%. We need to leverage our resources in the most intelligent ways possible... making this change will reap huge dividends for sportsmen and the environment.

Staffing Levels within the Division of Fish and Wildlife

In 2009, CFAB and the sporting community were faced with a decision, either raise substantially more revenue or face a significant reduction in the level of services provided by NYSDEC for the support of game fish and wildlife.

CFAB and every other sportsman's advocacy group supported a substantial license fee increase with the understanding that the level of service provided by the Department would remain as it was previously. Since 2009 revenue to the Conservation Fund has increased as well as the federal aid (increase of \$10 million) that is generated by those license sales. Despite the increase in revenue the number of staff in the Division of Fish and Wildlife has decreased.

When the license fee increase took effect in August of 2009, DEC had 412 staff persons assigned to the Division of Fish, Wildlife, and Marine Resources. 189 of the DFWMR staff were being paid for by the Conservation Fund and an additional 14 other NYSDEC employees outside of that division were also being supported by the Conservation Fund. In February of 2016, there are 303 staff persons in the Division of Fish and Wildlife. Of those, 235 were paid for under the Conservation Fund Main Account. However, there are now an additional 92 NYSDEC employees who don't work for the Division of Fish and Wildlife – that's a total of 327 DEC staff being paid for by the Conservation Fund.

Since the license fee increase in 2009, there has been a slight license fee decrease and a simplification of available licenses, but there are now 109 less staff in the Division of Fish and Wildlife. In short, since 2009, the sportsmen of NYS have lost the services of 109 staff persons from the Division of Fish and Wildlife and Marine Resources....there are 46 more positions in the DFW being charged to the CF Main Account...and there are 124 more total DEC Staff being funded out of the Conservation Fund. In essence, what is happening is the sportsmen in this state are paying for more of DEC's fish and wildlife programs...and paying more for staff outside of the Division of Fish and Wildlife.

As this trend continues the Fish and Wildlife Programs will definitely suffer, and the sporting community will as well. The 'Filled Position' reports below tell the story...an increase of over 1/3 in just 7 years. This process of shifting more of the financial load to the Conservation Fund will eventually undermine or destroy what we have worked on to accomplish and may be a catalyst for raising fees.

August 2009 Filled Position Report
412 Total Staff in DFWMR
189 DFWMR staff on CF Main Account
203 Total DEC Staff on CF

February 2016 Filled Position Report
303 Total Staff in DFW
235 DFWMR Staff on CF Main Account
327 Total DEC Staff on CF

Conclusion

I would like to thank the members of the Senate and Assembly for participating today in these critically important discussions. The Conservation Fund Advisory Board looks forward to working with you in the future to improve and enhance the sporting opportunities in New York State and to make sure that the Conservation Fund remains viable and produces the best results for everyone.

