



**State of Maine Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
124th Legislature, Second Session
February, 11th 2010**

LD 225 Resolve, Chapter 107 to Provide for the Long-term Funding of Programs of the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Executive Summary

The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife has, for many years, been struggling to meet the expectations of an ever-widening constituent base. Maine people expect the Department to ensure that fish and wildlife resources in Maine will be there for our grandchildren's children to enjoy. In an effort to meet these expectations, the Maine State Legislature passed LD 225, *A Resolve, To Provide for the Long-term Funding of Programs of the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife*.

The resolve recognizes that the Department provides services to the general public, but is largely funded by sporting recreationalists, and that these revenues alone cannot continue to provide the services expected by either the general public or sportsmen. To meet the goals of the Resolve, the Department reached out to The Nature Conservancy, Maine Audubon, and the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine to help develop a strategy for stable, long-term funding.

The partners conducted extensive research on how other states fund their natural resource agencies, conducted a public opinion poll to gauge support for the work of the Department and reaction to a variety of potential options for long-term funding. Additionally, the group met with some 60 legislators to get feedback, advice, reaction and to test support for the effort.

Overall, the public opinion polling revealed broad, strong support from the public for the Department, for the state's natural resources and a willingness to invest. Moreover, nearly all the Legislators echoed the public support and offered strong guidance and advice for moving forward. One of the main points centered on the timing for the initiative. Given the state's current focus on budget issues, it is clear that the 2010 session is not the right time to put legislation forward, rather 2011 makes the most sense to the legislators contacted.

This report suggests a continued effort to: 1) seek advice and feedback from legislators through the spring, summer and fall; 2) to build a broad coalition of sportsmen, conservation groups, business leaders, and many others. This should place advocates in the best position to work with the Legislature in 2011 to introduce a bill and bring this issue to Maine voters in November of 2011.

Introduction

In 2009, the 124th Maine Legislature passed LD 225: *A Resolve, To Provide for the Long-term Funding of Programs of the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife*. LD 225 requires the Department to "consult with hunting and fishing groups, environmental and conservation groups and other interested parties to identify long-term funding sources other than the license, permit

and registration revenues currently realized by the Department, and to develop language and a strategy for amending the Constitution of Maine to protect funding for those programs administered by the Department that are not related to hunting, fishing or trapping.”

To meet the terms of the Resolve, the Maine Department Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (Department) reached out to The Nature Conservancy, Maine Audubon and the Sportsman’s Alliance of Maine to help the Department assess funding options and voter reactions to them and voter attitudes toward the Department. The group also interviewed legislators to understand their opinions on options on dedicated, long-term funding for the Department.

This outreach effort follows the 2001 Future’s Report, Citizens Advisory Committee to Secure the Future of Maine’s Wildlife and Fish. At that time, a citizens’ advisory committee created, and led by the Legislature and comprised of a broad array of stakeholders. The group developed a list of recommendations of services and outcomes they felt the public wanted from the Department and were necessary to achieve the long-term sustainability of Maine’s wildlife. Further, the Report developed expected costs needed to provide those additional services and recommended that the Department’s budget be increased by over \$20 million per year to accomplish these important tasks. The charge of the committee was to identify funding needs for adequate protection of Maine’s natural heritage and to propose funding mechanisms to break the Department’s reliance on declining license fees and unpredictable and insufficient general fund allocations. A key recommendation of that committee was to amend the Constitution of Maine to require that at least 1/8 of one percent of the state sales tax revenues be dedicated to fish and wildlife conservation programs.

State of IF&W

The Maine tradition of outdoor recreation is one of the longest and richest in the nation. It is a heritage rooted in the expansive natural environment and in our healthy wildlife and fish resources. Historically, much of our time outdoors focused on hunting, fishing and trapping. Enjoyment of the fish and wildlife resources was passed from generation to generation. Over the years, Maine’s outdoor recreation tradition has broadened and non-consumptive recreational activities like hiking, birdwatching, camping and canoeing have great popularity. The enthusiasm is the same for all and is based, in large part, on the opportunity to benefit from fish and wildlife resources whether as game or for wildlife watching.

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The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is the state agency charged with conserving, managing, protecting and enhancing our native freshwater fish and wildlife resources. It carries out a wide variety of fish and wildlife conservation programs. These programs focus on maintaining game resources, as well as managing non-game wildlife and restoring endangered species – as it has done with the recently de-listed bald eagle. The Department is comprised of five Bureaus and Divisions – Administrative Services, Resource

Management, Warden Service, Engineering and Realty and Public Information and Education. Over time, the Department's mission has broadened significantly: it now manages white-water rafting, registration of watercraft, snowmobiles, ATVs, hunter, trapper and recreational vehicle safety, conservation education, and other matters.

As the Department's role in the state has expanded, it remains focused on the protection and enhancement of the state's inland fisheries and wildlife, while at the same time providing for the wise use of these resources. Assuring the conservation and use of these resources is vital to the state's economy. Fish and wildlife continue to be highly valued by Maine people and hundreds of thousands of people who come to Maine each year. Direct economic value that is attributable to the use of these resources is some \$1.8 billion dollars annually. These expenditures play a major role in the State's economy.

However, the Department is at a crossroads and facing a steep financial crisis that threatens to diminish the ability of the Department to fulfill its mission. It also places an undue burden on the

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sportsmen and sportswomen who pay license fees. As it stands today, the Department's receives little funding from the State's General Fund tax dollars. In 2002, the Legislature enacted a law requiring that 18 percent of the Department's budget be comprised of General Fund tax revenues in recognition of the services that the Department provides to the general public each year.

Each year thereafter, decisions were made to reduce the 18 percent general fund allocation to some much lesser amount, resulting in the current situation. Last year this requirement was repealed.

The Department's existing funding structure is primarily dependent on license fees, permits, and registrations and matching federal funds dedicated to particular programs. This system has left it chronically underfunded and continues to present significant challenges to its efforts to manage, steward and protect the state's fish and wildlife. Moreover, the Department is struggling to meet the expectations of an ever-widening constituent base all of whom expects that the Department will ensure that fish and wildlife resources in Maine will be there for future generations to enjoy.

Funding from taxpayers has evaporated and the sale of licenses and permits is down substantially from historical highs in the 1980s and 1990s, while the mission of the department continues to expand.

Why More funding?

Fish and wildlife-based outdoor recreation provides enjoyment to Maine citizens and visitors and is an important part of our heritage, defining the state's quality of life that is recognized as our principle asset. Outdoor recreation opportunities is often cited as the reason Maine residents remain in the state rather than move away for more lucrative jobs. It also provides significant

economic benefits. In search of these out-of-doors experiences, recreationists leave many economic footprints. They buy gear, licenses, supplies, food and memberships. They pay for accommodations, rent equipment, hire boat and float plane transportation and pay for professional guide services.

All of these activities are based on well managed and well-protected wildlife and habitat, and the assurance of traditional uses of and access to forest and lakes. Much of this management rests with the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

Lack of sufficient financial resources is a problem that cuts across the spectrum of our fish and wildlife needs and affects the state's management and protection work. Current resources are inadequate to collect biological information and develop and implement strategies for habitat protection and species management. For example, the Department currently has 2 or 3 wildlife biologists and 2 or 3 fisheries biologists focused on each of the state's seven ecological regions. Each region is roughly the size of the state of Connecticut (in that State, more than 20 fisheries biologists are charged with protecting and enhancing its waterways and fish.) In a state that prides itself on its brook trout, game and nongame animals, canoeing opportunities and its crystal clear waters, a bigger investment must be made or our fish and wildlife resources will decline.

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The mission of the Warden Service has also grown to include search and rescue, recreational vehicle enforcement, animal damage control and all sorts of landowner problems – even protection of piping plovers nest. Wardens now spend less than 50 percent of their time on the traditional fish and game responsibilities.

Leveraging precious state resources is also a concern for the Department. Currently, many of the Departments projects are leveraged and matched by federal dollars. As its budget shrinks, it will be unable to provide the required match for these federal investments in wildlife management, and Maine's natural resources will suffer.

Based on a current budget of some \$24 million per year and faced with expanded responsibilities to meet the expectations of Maine people and tourists, the Department needs to increase its budget to roughly \$50 million per year. Funding is needed all across the Department's programs, and we anticipate that the money will be appropriated through the normal process by the governor and legislature.

The most pressing needs right now are fisheries and wildlife habitat protection and enhancement, recreational access to land and water, conservation law enforcement, protection of public waters, fostering our outdoor economy, maintaining opportunities to hunt and fish, and assuring that our natural resources are available to future generations.

More specifically, funding could be invested in the following types of programs and projects:

1. Fisheries and Wildlife Habitat management, protection, enhancement
 - A. Strategic habitat investments to address fish and wildlife needs including incentives to private landowners and acquisition projects to improve habitat, native fisheries, deer wintering grounds, recreational access, facilitate climate change adaptation and ensure long-term wildlife population health.
 - B. Protect, maintain and enhance opportunities to hunt, fish and recreate by conserving recreational access to land and water resources.
 - C. Continue to provide municipalities and organizations concerned about the conservation of Maine's natural heritage a single source of information about plant and wildlife habitat. The comprehensive information on riparian areas, large undeveloped blocks, and important habitats is utilized to inform local planning decisions by town planners, planning boards, and others.

2. Science and Research
 - A. Improve deer and moose management
 - B. Enhance and maintain comprehensive fish and wildlife programs
 - C. Conduct statewide surveys and expand monitoring of fish and wildlife species
 - D. Survey the public waters in the state for aquatic habitat health
 - E. Better evaluate management programs and strategies and conduct aquatic habitat enhancement projects
 - F. Continue research and assessment of threats and impacts to fish and wildlife species by environmental toxins
 - G. Provide better coordination of information for environmental permitting and how proposed projects impact fish and wildlife

3. Compliance and Maine's Outdoor Economy
 - A. Reduce time Game Wardens expend on nuisance wildlife, dead and injured wildlife and crop damage – more than 6,000 hours per year in 2001 - by employing auxiliary personnel
 - B. Increase compliance with conservation laws and reduce impacts on intensive recreation by providing additional Wardens and part-time Deputy Wardens in the field.
 - C. Build public awareness and appreciation of wildlife and wildlife management and promote access for 'wildlife enjoyment' by working with communities and landowners.
 - D. Maintain opportunities to hunt and fish and assure that Maine's natural resources are available to future generation.

Public Attitudes

In December of 2009, The Nature Conservancy, Maine Audubon and the Sportmen's Alliance of Maine conducted a privately-funded statewide poll of 608 likely voters across Maine. Critical Insights, the bi-partisan research firm based in Portland, developed the poll. Eligible participants for the survey were required to be registered, "active" voters residing in Maine who self-reported that they voted in the recent November election and would also vote in the upcoming statewide election in November of 2010. The data was statistically balanced according to relevant demographic dimensions to be reflective of recent voter turnout in Maine. It carries a 3.4 percent margin of error. A sampling of the questions and responses are below.

At the outset of the poll, voters were provided with the following potential ballot language:

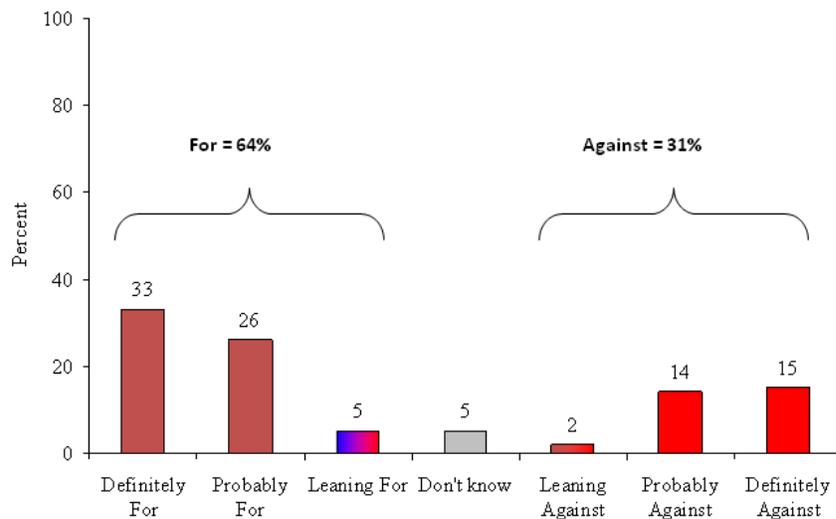
"Shall the Maine State Constitution be amended to dedicate funding to the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to enhance management for fish and wildlife; protect endangered species; and preserve and protect wildlife habitat and natural resources by dedicating 1/8th percent of the sales tax receipts to the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife?"

After initial consideration, close to two-thirds of Maine voters (64%) support this language, with 31% opposed and just 5% uncertain.

Preliminary Reaction to Prospective Ballot Language

"Shall the Maine State Constitution be amended to dedicate funding to the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to enhance management for fish and wildlife; protect endangered species; and preserve and protect wildlife habitat and natural resources by dedicating 1/8th percent of the sales tax receipts to the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife?"

If the election were held tomorrow, would you vote for or against this proposal?

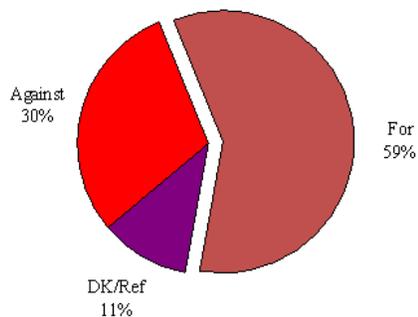


Voters were provided the proposed ballot question at the beginning of the survey in order to get an unvarnished response. Providing any related information prior to the opening ballot question could color the response.

When respondents were asked to indicate why they would vote in favor of the question, themes such as valuing, protecting and preserving wildlife and natural resources, a love of the outdoors and related activities, and a general support of environmental causes tended to arise most often.

Initial Support for Prospective Ballot Language

*Would you say you would
definitely or probably be voting
for this proposal?*



<i>What are your reasons for being in favor of this proposal? *</i>	%
Protecting/Preserving wildlife/resources is important	43
Love outdoors, participate in outdoor activities (hunt, fish, etc.)	18
Support environmental conservation	17
Good investment, good for economy/future	13
Dept. is under-funded/needs more support	7
Open space needs preservation, more open space needed	7
Maine fishermen need protection/support	6

* Based on those initially supportive of initiative (either definitely or probably); n=357. Top responses shown.

Reaction to Potential Funding Mechanisms

After being asked to react to a potential ballot measure, voters were then asked to indicate their support or opposition to several funding options for programs involving conservation, wildlife management and natural resource protection.

The survey tested four funding mechanisms:

- Dedicating a portion of sales tax receipts from outdoor gear/equipment
- Increase taxes on outdoor equipment/gear
- Dedicate portion of existing tax receipts
- Dedicate 1% of General Fund

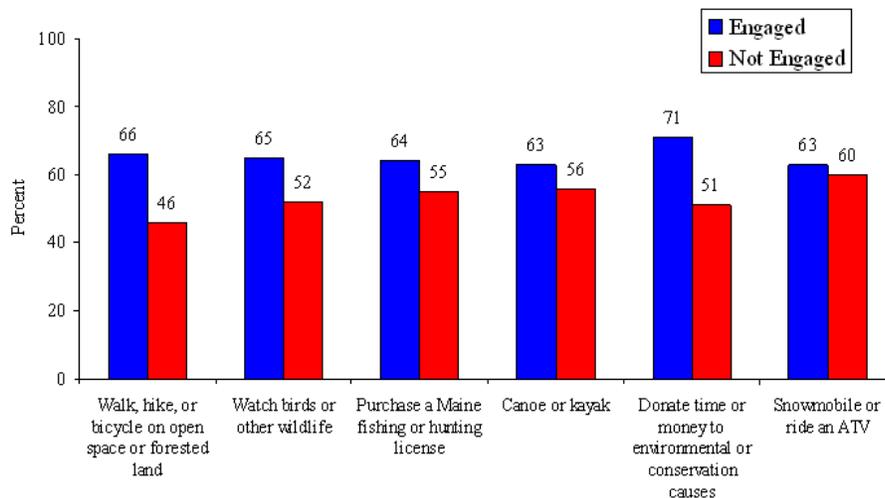
In the end, all four of the funding options received solid public support. Each option presents a number of challenges and opportunities moving forward. There are significant benefits to each option as well and it will be important for the legislature to weigh these issues carefully. There are also several other potential funding options that were not tested in this public opinion survey. They include a canoe and kayak registration fee, an outdoor user card and various others.

Support from “non-consumptive users”

A key issue for the Department is expanding its funding base to accommodate and manage Maine’s fish and wildlife species broadly. To that end, the poll revealed strong support for increased funding from voters who do not hunt or fish.

- 66 percent of respondents who hike, walk or bicycle support the proposed ballot measure;
- 65 percent of respondents who watch birds or other wildlife support the proposed ballot measure; and,
- 63 percent of respondents who canoe or kayak support the proposed ballot measure

**Support for Ballot Initiative,
According to Engagement in Outdoor Activities**



Generally, those engaged in outdoor activities in Maine tended to be more supportive of the ballot initiative (at post-measurement), particularly those donating time to associated causes or taking part in activities such as walking, hiking, biking or watching wildlife.

These other users are willing to share the costs, because if the resources we all use and value are lost, the sportsmen and sportswomen will not be alone in mourning that loss.

Indeed, there was little difference in the level of support between sportsmen and nonsportsmen.

While hunting and fishing participation has remained relatively stable, other uses of our fish and wildlife habitats are growing. From bird watching to hiking to recreational boating to horseback riding to leaf peeping, the public is demanding more services and placing more pressure on Fish and Wildlife personnel. These other users are willing to share the costs, because if the resources we all use and value are lost, the sportsmen and sportswomen will not be alone in mourning that loss.

Public Attitudes on the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

When asked to indicate their level of familiarity with Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, there is a clear range of knowledge with 29 percent claiming to be more familiar, 36 percent neutral and 34 percent saying they are less familiar with IF&W.

That said, when asked to assess the level of importance of a variety of Department efforts, virtually all measured dimensions received a robust level of stated importance, particularly issues related to the protection of natural resources, sustainable and responsible use of the state's resources, preservation of resources for future generations, and protection of resources for the enjoyment of all residents.

Here are some examples:

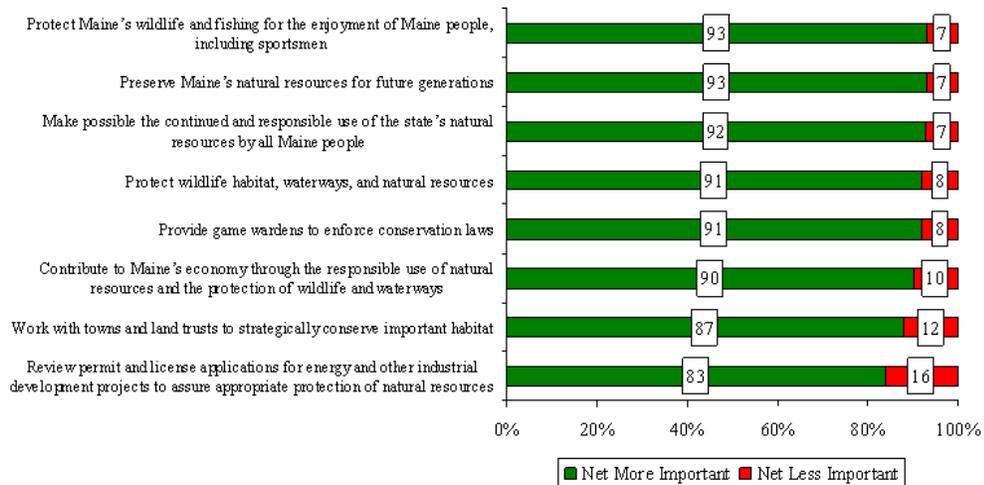
- 95 percent agree that it is vitally important to preserve Maine's lakes, streams, and other natural resources for future generations;
- 93 percent of voters believe it is important for the Department to protect Maine's wildlife and fishing for the enjoyment of Maine people;
- 93 percent of voters believe it is important preserve Maine's natural resources for future generations;
- 91 percent of voters believe it is important to provide game wardens to enforce conservation laws;
- 92 percent of voters believe it is important to make possible the continued and responsible use of the state's natural resources by all Maine people;
- 90 percent agree that Maine's natural resources are a critical component of Maine's economy and must be protected and preserved;

- 85 percent agree that Maine’s Department of IF&W fills an important role in managing wildlife for fishing and hunting in Maine; and,
- 84 percent agree that Maine’s Department of IF&W provides a vital service through its work preserving the State’s natural resources for all to enjoy.

Net Importance of IF&W’s Efforts

I'm going to read you a brief list of statements about the some of the roles filled by the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. After I read each one, please tell me how important it is for the Department to be filling that role; use a 4-point scale where a 1 means "not at all important" and a 4 means "very important."

How important is it for the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to...



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Views on IF&W Funding

One key and very encouraging finding stands out: Mainers think their tax money is funding IF&W. They want and expect that to happen.

When asked to indicate how they believe the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife obtains most of its funding, some of the most commonly viewed funding sources are inaccurate, such as taxes - mentioned by 43 percent of voters - and the state’s general fund - 30 percent. Another 15 percent of voters said they “Don’t know” how the Department receives funding.

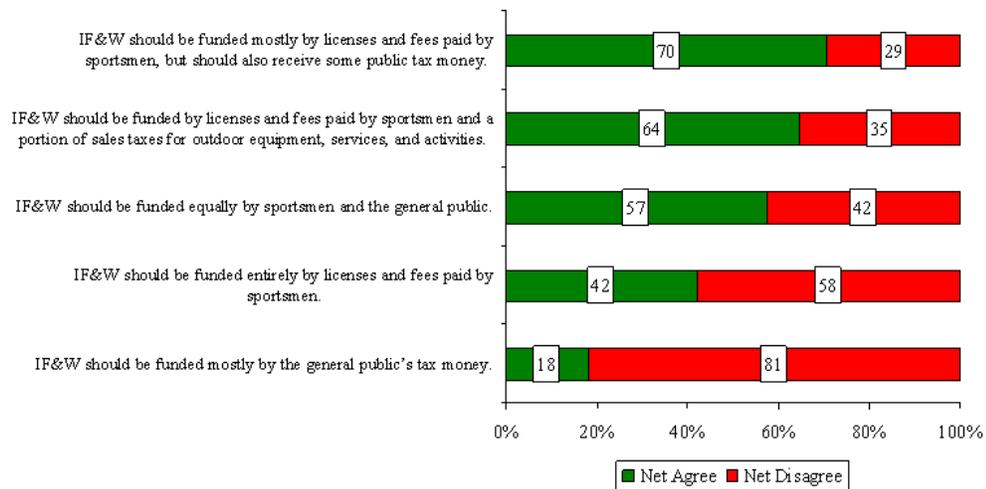
Mainers think their tax money is funding IF&W. They want and expect that to happen.

As a follow-up, those polled were asked if they were aware that the Department’s current budget is almost entirely funded by license and fees paid by sportsmen, and receives little public funding. Some 74 percent of voters were unaware of the current funding structure.

When presented with a variety of potential funding options for IF&W, voters were most receptive to a mix of sportsmen’s licenses/fees and public dollars (70% agree), a mix of sportsmen’s licenses/fees and a portion of sales tax for related goods and services (64%), and an equal mix of funding via sportsmen and the general public, respectively (57%). Support was more limited for having IF&W funded entirely by sportsmen’s fees (42% agree) and, especially, using only public tax money (18%).

Views on Funding for IF&W

I’m going to read you a brief list of statements about funding for Maine’s Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife sometimes known as “IF&W.” After I read each one, please tell me how much you agree or disagree with that statement, using a 4-point scale where a 1 means “disagree strongly” and a 4 means “agree strongly.”



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When asked to select one funding option, the greatest support was for either funding mostly through sportsmen’s licenses and fees, but with some public tax money (29 percent) or funding through licenses and fees paid by sportsmen as well as a portion of sales taxes for outdoor equipment, services, and activities (also 29 percent).

Despite the economic downturn, Maine voters remain committed to protecting the state’s natural resources. When asked whether or not they agree with the following statement: “In these economic times, we can’t afford to spend money on protecting fish and wildlife habitat,” a full 71 percent disagreed.

Voter Attitudes, Beliefs & Activities

A majority of voters polled expressed concern about loss of access to land, Maine's ability to protect and preserve its resources, and tax-related issues (property taxes, sales tax). Maine voters polled say they take part in a variety of outdoor-related activities, with those who participate in these activities being more likely to support the potential ballot measure. **Notably, this is especially true among voters who donate time to conservation causes, take part in walking, hiking, or biking, or watch birds or wildlife.** In response to a number of attitudinal measures in the survey, the vast majority of voters polled concurred with sentiments regarding the importance of natural resource protection and preservation, maintaining recreational opportunities for all, and the important roles filled by IF&W. While supporters of the potential ballot measure are almost universally in agreement with these core beliefs, even large blocks of ballot opponents still agree with measures of the importance of natural resource preservation, recreational sustainability, economic vitality, and access to land and water in Maine.

Funding Options

In meeting the terms of the Resolve, the group examined funding mechanisms that would meet four requirements:

1. Stable, long-term funding for the Department
2. Broaden the Department's funding base
3. Protect the funding through Maine State Constitution
4. Meet the Department's \$25 million annual unmet needs estimate

Other funding mechanisms that failed to meet that criteria included a registration on canoes and kayaks, General Obligation bonds, a percentage of the Real Estate Transfer tax. Based on those criteria, the group was focused on the Maine's sales and use tax. These funding options were then poll-tested and discussed with more than 60 legislators representing urban and rural constituencies and encircled in all parties.

1. 1/8 percent increase in the state sales and use tax
2. Dedicating existing 1/8 percent of the sales and use tax
3. Allocating existing sales and use tax from outdoor equipment
4. Dedicating 1 percent of the General Fund

Constitutional Amendment

Giving constitutional protection to the new source of public funding would be matching the protection IF&W already receives for its funding from sportsmen. This is important to assure Mainers that their money will go to the programs they wish and expect to fund. The Department would be able to create and implement long-term plans for fisheries and wildlife habitat, fight threats to our water bodies, assure access to land and water, help Maine's outdoor industry,

protect and enhance our quality of life, foster our way of life for future generations, and position the Department to successfully meet the increased expectations of the public.

How Other States Fund Fish and Wildlife

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to state funding fish and wildlife activities. Indeed, there is a broad range of options from lottery proceeds to oil and game revenue to increases in state sales tax. The following is a handful of case studies.

Minnesota, Increase in the state sales tax:

After a decade-long legislative battle, on November 4th, 2008, in the face of the largest economic crisis facing the country in more than 50 years, Minnesota voters overwhelmingly supported the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Constitutional Amendment with 56.09% of all votes cast, the highest percentage in the state. The measure asked voters to amend the State Constitution and raise and dedicate a small percentage of the state's sales tax to protect Minnesota's water, wildlife and arts and cultural heritage for future generations. It received more yes votes than any other candidate or issue in the state with 1,635,040 yes votes. In fact, it received 61,796 more votes than President-Elect Obama, a credit to the bipartisan nature of the campaign and the broad-based coalition that supported the measure.

The Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment is the single largest conservation finance measure to pass in American history. It is projected to generate \$7.5 billion over the next 25 years, with \$5.5 billion going toward natural resources; the remainder will be invested in cultural resources. Additionally, the Amendment represents the largest arts and cultural initiative ever in the country, generating some \$2 billion over 25 years for arts, arts education, and cultural resources.

Arkansas, Sales Tax

A 1/8 cent sales tax is dedicated to the Arkansas' Game and Fish Commission and Parks and Tourism Commission and by the Department of Arkansas Heritage. The sales tax was created through a constitutional amendment passed twice by voter initiative – once in 1994 (but not implemented due to technicalities) and again in November of 1996. The sales tax generates about \$32 million in annual revenue. Funding is used to purchase land for recreation, open space and habitat. The Department of Arkansas Heritage does not use their funding for land acquisition.

Iowa, Habitat and Duck Stamp

The habitat and state duck stamp programs generate revenue through the sale of hunting or fur harvester licenses. In past years the habitat stamp has generated \$600,000 per year, while the state duck stamp has generated \$150,000 per year. Funds are used for habitat development and some habitat acquisition.

Louisiana, Oil and Gas Severance Tax

In 1988, the Wildlife Habitat and Natural Heritage Trust Fund was established to acquire land in order to conserve critical habitat for wildlife and unique natural areas. These funds are derived from a severance tax on offshore oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. The tax also funds the Wetland Conservation and Restoration Trust Fund for the development and implementation of a program to help conserve and restore state coastal vegetated wetlands. The program generates about \$25 million per year.

Missouri, Sales Tax Increase

In 1976, voters approved Missouri's first statewide tax for conservation purposes. A permanent 1/8 of one-cent sales tax was approved to bring in approximately \$25 million a year for conservation projects. Today the sales tax brings in approximately \$90-\$100 million a year for the Missouri Department of Conservation. The money is used for the "Design for Conservation" plan that includes land acquisition for wildlife habitat and parks, and environmental education among other purposes. Then in 1984 during a special election in August, voters approved a new Soil and Water Conservation tax managed by the Department of Natural Resources. The one-tenth of one percent sales and use tax is evenly split between soil and water conservation and state park purposes. Although the amendment barely passed in 1984, just four years later the Missouri voters passed the sales tax again. In 1988, with 69 percent of voter support, the tax was put into effect for an additional ten years. Voters granted a further extension of ten years in 1996 and again in 2006. This sales tax is not used to acquire land for conservation, but rather for park improvements.

Ohio, General Obligation Bonds

In November 2000, Ohio voters passed a four-year, \$200 million statewide bond measure for "Brownfield" environmental clean up projects and "Greenfield" conservation and open space projects. The Fund is divided into four sub-programs: Brownfield Revitalization, Clean Ohio Conservation Program, Farmland Preservation, and Recreational Trails. Of these, only the Clean Ohio Conservation and Farmland Preservation programs use funds primarily for land acquisition. Applicants for the bond funds may be local governments or non-profit entities and must provide a 25 percent local funding match, which can be in-kind services. In 2008 voters overwhelmingly approved a ballot initiative that provides another \$400 million towards the Clean Ohio Fund.

Virginia, Sales Tax on outdoor goods

Beginning on July 1, 2000, legislation passed by Virginia's General Assembly appropriated the State's 2 percent share of the sales tax revenue generated for hunting, fishing and wildlife watching as set forth in two categories (equipment and auxiliary equipment) into the Game Protection Fund. These classifications are based on the US Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service and US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation which comes out every five years. These two categories in the survey gained the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries \$12.3 million in its first fiscal year. Since then, budgetary problems forced the legislature to raid the fund, which now stands at approximately \$10 million each year.

Legislative Reaction and Feedback

Any effort to bring long-term funding to the Department will require strong leadership, guidance and commitment in the Legislature. Over a three-month period, the group reached out to some 60 legislators, representing both sides of the aisle, leadership, rural, urban, northern, southern, coastal, rank-and-file and various joint standing committee chairs.

The goals in canvassing the Legislature were to:

- Test overall reaction and support for the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
- Test reaction to long-term funding for the Department
- Test reaction to various funding options
- Seek advice and reaction to timing for legislative push
- Seek advice on additional funding options

It became clear that this is not a partisan issue, but rather that there is genuine broad-based interest and support for adequately funding the management, stewardship and protection of the state's natural resources.

During discussions with legislators, the feedback was nearly universal in favor of securing long-term, dedicated funding for the Department. Through these conversations, it became clear that this is not a partisan issue, but rather that there is genuine broad-based interest and support for adequately funding the management, stewardship and protection of the state's natural resources. As noted above, this issue cuts across party lines and had broad appeal among urban, suburban and rural legislators.

It is important to note that more than 90 percent of the legislators interviewed indicated that the timing for this effort should focus on 2011 and the 125th Legislature.

Given the current state budget climate, most legislators believed that proceeding this session would be a serious mistake. Indeed, as the Legislature seeks to make extremely difficult choices with the state budget, moving ahead on this project now would negatively impact support in the long-term. Members believed it is important to build grassroots, community and partner support for long-term funding this session and in the succeeding months and then work toward a focused legislative strategy in late fall and in the 1st session of the 125th Legislature.

Several key areas of support were raised during these meetings.

- Support for constitutional amendment to ensure the funds are permanently protected
- Strong support for the work of the Department
- Support for targeted funding through outdoor equipment
- Support for the 2011 proposed timeline
- Strong support for broadening the funding base
- Support for existing revenue
- Support for new revenue
- Encouragement to articulate unmet needs and how the money will be spent
- Nearly every legislator expressed a willingness to help shape the effort as it gathers more steam

Several additional areas of consideration were raised during these meetings. There were concerns raised around a constitutional amendment. More specifically, the issues focused on the difficulty in passing a constitutional amendment as it requires a two-thirds majority legislative vote.

Additionally, a handful of legislators believe the proposed 2011 timeline for moving ahead on this project was too far away. They encouraged the group to press ahead now, citing the strong legislative momentum. **The questions around existing revenue versus new revenue sparked a lot of discussion and advice in one-on-one meetings with legislators. This will be the biggest issue moving forward and one that coalition partners and legislators will have to answer.**

Finally, for one legislator, there were other more urgent state priorities to tackle. The protection of the state's natural resources was farther down the list.

Conclusions

Despite the recent economic downturn, several crosscutting policy reports including the Brookings Institute's Charting Maine's Future and the Governor's Commission on Quality of Place have identified investment in Maine's natural character as fundamental to our future economic prosperity. It seems that current political interest, as demonstrated by the passage of LD 225, is broad and growing.

That said this is the first step in long journey to secure funding for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and thereby protect the state's vast fish and wildlife resources. This report presents many reasons for optimism, but the reality is that this will be a difficult effort that will take the collective work of the Legislature, sporting groups, conservation organizations, environmentalists, business interests, tourism groups and local community leaders.

This report presents many reasons for optimism, but the reality is that this will be a difficult effort that will take the collective work of the Legislature, sporting groups, conservation organizations, environmentalists, business interests, tourism groups and local community leaders.

Since its inception, sportsmen and sportswomen have been carrying the financial burden for the Department. Today, there is good reason to look to others to help carry the burden. The foundation of the Department lies in ensuring future generations experience moose in our forests, brook trout in our streams and bald eagles in our skies just as we have.

Whatever the future of hunting and fishing, other uses of our fish and wildlife habitats will continue to grow. From wildlife watching to hiking to recreational boating to horseback riding, the public is demanding more services and placing more pressure on Fish and Wildlife personnel. We know from polling that these other users are willing to share the costs.

Even as the country works its way out of a severe recession and as the Legislature faces a difficult budgeting process, the people of Maine have clearly demonstrated a desire to increase the state's investment in the management and conservation of our natural resources.