

# Valley Angler

## Fish & Game in Crises

### By Bill Thompson

As per my usual evening schedule I set down at the computer last night to check my E mail. In amongst the dozen or so spam messages there was one of special interest to not only me, but to anyone who hunts or fishes in New Hampshire. The message was from Lee Perry the director of the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department who was getting out the word that the Department is in financial trouble.

If you have been reading the various press releases that have appeared in this newspaper then you are probably already aware of this. As it stands right now the Department is solely funded by revenue from the sale of licenses to hunters and fishermen. Unfortunately the numbers of hunters and fishermen are getting smaller resulting in less revenue. At the same time Fish and Game has been taking on more and more responsibilities not related to hunting and fishing.

I would doubt that the average New Hampshire resident has any idea how much our Fish and Game Department does for the state. If you do not hunt or fish you may never have any interaction with the Department. However, should you ever have the misfortune of being lost or injured while hiking it is the Fish and Game Officer that will come to your rescue. How many times have you read in this newspaper of some injured hiker being hauled out of the woods by members of the Department? To be sure other state agencies and volunteer groups are often part of the rescue, but it is the Fish and Game people that run the show and bears most of the financial burden.

Most of us who work in this Valley derive a portion of our income from the tourist trade. The reason we have a tourist industry is because of the incredible scenic beauty and nature that surrounds us. Without this we are just another outlet mall. I wonder if anyone has ever set down and figured out how much income comes from the sale of moose paraphernalia. Needless to say the health and well being of all wildlife is the responsibility of the Fish and Game Department.

In order to meet the financial shortfall that the Department is facing the Director has asked for the state to appropriate \$1.6 million per year from the general fund revenue into the F&G Department. Without this added funding the Department will be forced to lay off as many as 28 full time employees and eliminate 36 part time workers. Other cost cutting measures call for the closing of fish hatcheries and regional offices.

The Director has also asked that in the future the Department receive a portion of the State's rooms and meal tax. The Department is asking for 4% of the portion that goes to the general fund. At present hunters, fishermen and bird watchers contribute about 7.4% of the total rooms and meal tax. To quote Mr. Perry, "It makes only sense to reinvest some of that money into the resources that generate it".

There are other measures being considered by the State legislature to aid in the funding of the Department and I intend to comment on them in future columns. I don't claim to be any kind of expert on the subject, but all of us whether or not if we are hunters or anglers need to be informed and involved in helping to save our Fish and Game Department. I would urge anyone that loves the outdoors or derives their living from the tourist industry, and that would be just about all of us who live in this Valley, to contact your representatives to support these stop gap measures to save F&G.

See you on the river.