

## **GENERAL BACKGROUND**

### **STUDIED ONCE...STUDIED TWICE**

- **For over 20 years, lack of funding has forced Vermont to cut vital wildlife programs**
- The Dept has traditionally focused on law enforcement, management of game species, biological research, management of state lands designated for wildlife habitat, and public education
- But the Dept’s charge is “the conservation of fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the people of VT”
  - Its roles have become more numerous and more complex, benefiting all Vermonters:
    - helping communities meet development goals without harming sensitive habitat
    - conducting environmental assessments
    - protecting Vermont’s streams from toxic chemicals
    - providing search-and-rescue services...and more
- **Traditional sporting-revenue financing was never intended to address these issues**
- In 1989-1990 and again in 2006-2007, State Task Forces studied VT F&W Dept funding
  - Both studies concluded that the funding base for the VT F&W Dept must be broadened
  - The 2007 report’s top recommendation was to redirect “1/8 of 1 cent” of the State Sales Tax to the VT Fish and Wildlife Dept
- It’s time for the Legislature to act on this recommendation

### **“1/8 OF 1 CENT”**

- 1/8 of a penny from every \$1 sale would go to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Dept
  - This would provide the Dept with an estimated \$6 to 7 million annually
  - This money would leverage millions more in Federal funds each year
  - The Legislature could stop appropriating \$2-plus million from the General Fund
- Missouri and Arkansas—where “1/8 of 1 cent” already goes to conservation—are nationally renowned for:
  - Hunter and conservation education (with a projected *rise* in hunter participation)
  - Public access to woods and waters
  - Wildlife and forestry research
  - Technical assistance to private landowners
  - Water-quality monitoring

### **FEDERAL FUNDS JUST OUT OF REACH**

- Federal fish and wildlife funding pays as much as \$3 for every \$1 the state contributes
- For Vermont to claim all Federal funds, it must have dedicated matching funds in hand
  - At the end of FY06, VT left \$2.9 million in Federal funds on the table
    - This included over \$800,000 in Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson funds (federal excise taxes paid by sportsmen that Vermont could not reclaim)
  - At the end of FY07, \$1.5 million went unclaimed
  - **VT cannot afford to continue missing out on these funds**
- The “1/8 of 1 cent” solution would give Vermont full access to Federal funds

### **OVERWHELMING PUBLIC SUPPORT**

- Three surveys conducted between 1995 and 2007 by Responsive Management—a nationally renowned polling firm—showed that:
  - Vermonters overwhelmingly support increased, broad-based funding for the VT F&W Dept
  - **4 out of 5 Vermonters support the redirection of “1/8 of 1 cent” to the VT F&W Dept**

## **SPECIFIC ISSUES**

### **Business/Tourism/Economy**

- According to a 2006 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report:
  - Wildlife-watching, hunting, and fishing add almost **\$400 million/year to Vermont’s economy**
  - In 2006 alone, 150,000 people—residents and nonresidents—fished or hunted in Vermont and 468,000 participated in wildlife-watching
- National sales of hunting and fishing gear (\$6 billion) are **10 times those of ski equipment** (\$615 million)
- According a 1996 report by the Izaak Walton League of America, the ripple effect of these activities in VT:
  - Had a total annual economic impact of \$724 million
  - Sustained over 10,000 jobs and \$175 million in wages and salaries
  - Accounted for 5% of Vermont’s GSP (gross state product)
  - Generated nearly \$24 million in State Sales and Income Tax revenues
- **Vermont is only reinvesting a tiny fraction of wildlife-related tax revenue back into those resources**
  - Dedicating a small fraction of sales tax to fish and wildlife is a smart, responsible investment
  - This is critical to Vermont’s tourist economy and financial future

### **Conservation and Wildlife - General**

- 55% of Vermonters actively observe wildlife (2006 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service report)
- 97% of surveyed Vermont residents say that the protection of fish and wildlife resources is important to them, as is the opportunity to participate in wildlife-related recreation (2000 Responsive Managemt. survey)
- **For over 20 years, Vermont’s fish and wildlife programs have been under-funded and cut back**
  - Today, Vermont cannot afford to:
    - Hire enough game wardens—there are now fewer in the field than in 1971, putting the public and wildlife at risk (Vermont needs another \$500,000 to do the job adequately)
    - Meet the demand for conservation education programs
    - Improve stream habitat and restore lost spawning grounds
    - Enhance habitat for grassland birds and other wildlife
    - Effectively recover rare and endangered species, like the sturgeon and bald eagle
- **VT has a Wildlife Action Plan**, a comprehensive conservation strategy for all fish and wildlife
  - Rare and endangered species recovery is difficult and expensive
  - The Wildlife Action Plan is designed to conserve species *before* they become rare or endangered
- To implement the Wildlife Action Plan, there are substantial **State Wildlife Grants** funds available from the Federal government
  - These available funds are projected to grow in coming years
  - This money is critical to Vermont’s environment and quality of life
  - **Vermont is not getting its share of this money**
  - Millions of dollars go unclaimed each year
  - See **“FEDERAL FUNDS JUST OUT OF REACH”** on Page 1

### Private property owners

- 85% of Vermont is privately owned
  - Many land owners are interested in restoring and improving fish and wildlife habitat
- Today, Vermont cannot afford to provide them with the technical assistance and equipment they need
  - Another \$500,000 for the Technical Assistance Program would bring \$1.5 million in Federal funds
  - Another \$80,000 for the culvert improvement program—to reconnect fragmented habitat for brook trout and other fish and amphibians—would leverage \$240,000 in Federal funds
- **Personally, what kinds of work have YOU not seen being done?**

### Hunting, angling, trapping - General

- These outdoor sports are important traditions in Vermont
  - Nearly 1 in 5 Vermonters hunt and/or fish (2006 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service report)
  - The VT Fish & Wildlife Dept has been traditionally funded by:
    - (A) license sales
    - (B) federal excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment
- But Vermont hunting and fishing license sales have been declining since the 1970s
  - In 1990, license sales accounted for 64% of the VT F&W Dept budget
  - In 2006, license sales were just 37% of the budget
  - The Fish & Wildlife Department is being asked to do more and more with less and less
    - Its work—including public education and environmental assessments—benefits everyone
    - Hunters and anglers cannot carry the burden alone
    - Increases in license fees only provide a temporary boost; raising them too high can backfire, making participation rates and license sales drop even further
- **For over 20 years, Vermont’s fish and wildlife programs have been under-funded and cut back**
- **Vermont is not even getting back its share of Federal excise taxes (taxes paid by VT sportsmen)**
  - Millions of dollars go unclaimed each year
  - See **“FEDERAL FUNDS JUST OUT OF REACH”** on Page 1

### Hunting

- Today, Vermont cannot afford to:
  - Adequately care for over 118,000 acres of Wildlife Management Areas (would cost \$240,000/year)
  - Monitor and protect “deer yards”, critical for the winter survival of over 100 wildlife species
    - More of Vermont’s deer winter range is lost each year
    - These areas haven’t been fully studied since 1987
  - Invest in new technologies for managing moose and other wildlife populations
  - Create incentives that encourage private landowners to allow public hunting access
- **Personally, what kinds of work have YOU not seen being done?**

### Angling

- Today, Vermont cannot afford to:
  - Restore fish habitat and upgrade century-old hatchery facilities
  - Evaluate bio-security needs to defend hatcheries against encroaching diseases (\$400,000 cost)
  - Conserve Missisquoi muskie and consider a Champlain muskie fishery (would cost \$120,000/year)
  - Reconnect brook trout habitat fragmented by culverts (would cost \$80,000/year)
  - Develop new public access areas to Vermont’s lakes and rivers
  - Create incentives that encourage private landowners to allow public fishing access
- **Personally, what kinds of work have YOU not seen being done?**

## **QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGES**

### **Where will this money be re-directed from?**

- This is a leadership question for the Governor and the Legislature. They have found money for many other priorities and, starting in FY05, found \$2 million for the Department.
- If they understand that this money is an important investment in the quality of life for all Vermonters and a crucial business investment, they will find the needed funds.
- Short term, this investment will allow the Department to claim millions of dollars in federal money.
- Long term, the work of the Department has a direct impact on the value of Vermont as a tourist destination.
  - Tourism is a crucial economic engine for our state.
  - Currently none of the \$20-plus million in Vermont taxes generated by wildlife-related recreation is dedicated to the Department. We are only asking for a fraction of that total to be reinvested.
  - Where the “1/8th of 1 cent” solution has been enacted (Missouri and Arkansas) this investment has paid off in increased economic activity.

### **Is there a precedent for this kind of dedicated funding?**

- Yes. Other states like Missouri and Arkansas dedicate a “1/8 of 1 cent” sales tax to natural resources.
- In Vermont, the Fish and Wildlife Fund is a dedicated fund; this is required in order to receive federal funds.
- Also in Vermont, 50% of the Property Transfer Tax is dedicated to the Housing and Conservation Board.

### **Why not use Property Transfer Tax revenue from the VT Housing and Conservation Board?**

- This could help. But it will not generate enough money to fix the problem.

### **Aren’t license sales increasing?**

- The number of hunting licenses sold in Vermont does bump up a little now and then. But the trend is down.
- We are down over 40% from the 1970s. It means little that sales bumped up 2.8% from 2005 to 2006.
- The trend is similar with fishing licenses.

### **Won’t there more Federal money available in years to come?**

- Yes. Vermont’s Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson allocations will increase next year and broad conservation funding (such as State Wildlife Grants) is also projected to rise in coming years.
- But without the state match it will do us no good. For lack of state match money, we are already unable to claim millions in federal funding.

### **Hasn’t the Commissioner testified that F&W has the resources it needs to continue the work it’s doing?**

- Yes, under pressure from the Douglas Administration, the Commissioner has said this.
- But it does NOT have the resources to do the work it SHOULD be doing. Everyone in the F&W Dept knows this, but—because of heavy political pressure—they are reluctant to say so in public.
- See earlier pages for: (A) inability to claim Federal funds and (B) inability to do important work in all areas.

### **Will the reorganization of the Agency of Natural Resources fix the problem?**

- It is not anticipated that the F&W Department and its funding will be altered in any significant way.

### **Will the VT Fish and Wildlife Department pay less attention to hunting and angling?**

- No. Hunting and fishing will remain central to the Department’s work. The Vermont Federation of Sportsmen’s Clubs—representing over 14,000 Vermont hunters and anglers—is a leader of this effort.
- Missouri, where roughly 60% of F&W funding comes from a 32-year-old “1/8th of 1 cent” sales tax, has the highest hunter-replacement ratio in the country. Participation rates are actually rising there.