

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Wisconsin Deer Hunters Association**



**March 21, 2005**

### **WDHA Objects to Deer Hunters Being Used as Leverage by Legislators**

The Wisconsin Deer Hunters Association (WDHA) objects to deer hunters being used as leverage in a game of politics by our legislative leaders. Statewide hunters and fishers are very concerned that our game and fish programs are in serious decline, and now we are being asked to pay more because many fees haven't been increased in 8 years and the legislature has cut funding. "While a favorite excuse is the budget shortfall the truth is many funding cuts are the result of an ongoing turf war at the capitol over who controls our natural resources" says WDHA president Mark Toso. "Even so you'd think our elected officials would be more protective of the multi-billion dollar outdoor recreation industry," he continues.

It is especially frustrating that pro-hunting legislators are attempting to hold our game and fish programs hostage by accusing the DNR of misappropriating hunting and fishing license fee revenue. The DNR's 2004 Fish and Wildlife Annual Report show these accusations to be completely false; license fees can only be spent on fish and game programs. In addition state statutes and federal regulations prohibit the diversion of fish and game licensing fees to other purposes. "The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service audits the DNR fish and wildlife accounts every five years and if there were any diversion of license funds we'd know it," says Toso. In addition information provided to legislators clearly indicates that DNR wardens have not been engaged in unauthorized environmental enforcement activities. The suggestion that license fees fund the stewardship program is also not true. "This is clearly an attempt to use our game and fish programs as political leverage for other issues," continues Toso. "Talk about a diversion, our legislative leaders are using the license fee increases in an attempt to gain further concessions to rules they already agreed to for the Jobs Creation Act of 2003. We demand to know what that has to do with deer hunting."

The cost of the turf war waged by legislators to our hunting and fishing programs is very clear. "Violence is at an all time high with shootings and assaults occurring during the deer hunting season, yet per capita we have one of the smallest warden forces in the nation. Poaching and game violations are out of control, and pheasant and fish stockings have been drastically reduced," says Toso. "These so-called pro-hunting legislators know the burden of all those cuts continues to fall on us and our wildlife even though they have the means to fix it, so what are they really doing for us?" he asks. In addition CWD costs are eating up the DNR budget. Even more alarming are these legislators who say they want to get rid of CWD yet they don't provide the DNR funding or the tools, and they refuse to address problems on game farms. "We keep reading of more and more CWD infected deer being found on game farms yet they continue to operate and the legislature does nothing to stop them. It's as if they don't care if CWD spreads to the rest of the state," continues Toso.

Deer hunters also question the seriousness of many legislators about protecting us from drastic license fee increases while they refuse to look at alternative funding sources so everybody who benefits from our wildlife, including non-hunters, pay their fair share. "Perhaps they see a benefit in the fact that steep fee increases required to keep the fish and game programs afloat can be used to manipulate opinions as to the real reason for them," says Toso.

The WDHA supports the proposed deer hunting license fee increase because at this time we have no other options. Until so called pro-hunting legislators take outdoor recreation seriously game and fish programs will only continue to deteriorate. The WDHA feels it's time for our

legislators to stop pretending that everything wrong is somehow our fault, or that of the “evil” DNR and they need to quit playing politics with our wildlife programs before its too late.

The WDHA is a statewide group of conservation minded deer enthusiasts whose mission is to promote scientific and ecological based deer management in Wisconsin. Our philosophy is do what’s best for the deer herd, as we believe that is ultimately what’s best for the deer hunter.

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