

Social networking has become a quick and easy way for the agency to learn what's on the minds of those who value our natural resources. On a recent discussion board I asked fans and friends what they would like to see on the Department of Natural Resources Facebook page, and I believe one line of discussion bears repeating here.



One friend asked that DNR more readily recognize that hunting and fishing are not the only ways that people enjoy the outdoors in Illinois, and that a vast majority of people who make use of Illinois's public and private lands do so without hunting and fishing them.

In response, I offered for consideration the fact that roughly 20 percent of the DNR budget—roughly \$16 million this year—comes from sportsmen and woman and their purchase of licenses and stamps. There is a long tradition—about 100 years—of sportsmen and women funding conservation and land acquisition throughout the United States. Two of the biggest conservation victories of the last century were the Pittman-Robertson (1937) and Dingell-Johnson (1950) acts that collect excise taxes from sale of sporting goods and distribute the funds back to state agencies for wildlife and fish restoration.

And, to their credit, sportsmen and women recently supported fee increases to help offset declines in other non-dedicated funding sources.

If you are enjoying a state park, riding trails or watching wildlife, chances are that some type of a dedicated funding source helped pay for the purchase or for habitat improvements. Here are a few examples of how dedicated funds benefit Illinois' economy and all who value our natural resources.

■ Average annual proceeds from the sale of **Salmon Stamps** are used to produce salmon and trout at Jake Wolf Memorial Fish Hatchery for release in Lake Michigan—where a significant tourism industry funnels additional revenue to the state.

■ **Inland Trout Stamp** revenues have covered 100 percent of the costs to purchase in excess of 129,000 trout from private vendors each year.

■ Revenue from the **State Waterfowl Stamp** is used to improve public migratory waterfowl areas in Illinois and assist non-profit organizations develop waterfowl habitat in Canada which specifically provide waterfowl for the Mississippi Flyway.

■ **State Habitat Stamp** income is deposited in three funds: Pheasant Fund (30 percent), State Furbearer Fund (6 percent) and Habitat Fund (64 percent). The **Pheasant Fund** supports DNR and not-for-profit organizations working toward the conservation of wild pheasant populations through land acquisition, habitat improvement, research or education. **Furbearer Fund** resources support, among other things, improving public habitat management areas within the state. The **Illinois Habitat Fund** supports activities and programs that preserve, protect, acquire and manage habitat for future generations.

In addition, two new funding sources have recently started providing dedicated, sustainable funding for conservation efforts.

■ The **Natural Areas Acquisition Fund** is a dedicated 1/10th of 1 percent real estate transfer tax collected by the county on land transfers that occur throughout the state, and was established by legislation specifically to develop or acquire high-quality natural areas and endangered species habitat. To date, more than \$55 million has been spent on the acquisition of 23,449

acres, some in partnership with other funding sources or private donors.

■ **State Wildlife Grants** are dedicated funds derived from Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas royalties, which are apportioned to states annually by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These funds help Illinois complete large-scale habitat improvement projects that previously lacked basic funding. Since 2002, more than \$19.5 million has been utilized to complete 66 State Wildlife Grants within Illinois (see article pages 8-11).

A daunting challenge faces this nation's fish and wildlife agencies: Given today's fiscal climate of diminishing state financial resources, with millions of dollars slashed from budgets, we need to look to the future and identify sustainable ways to fund conservation programs for future generations. How can wildlife viewers, trail riders and other users pay for conservation and land management that will replace the potential loss of tens of millions of dollars in diminished hunting and fishing license revenues or state funds required annually to preserve the services and sites we have?

Getting people with widely divergent views together to support DNR programs is a tough challenge. Today's social networks, and efforts to enhance communication through Conservation Congress, help bring people together to begin to understand others' viewpoints, and ultimately work on common goals—specifically to preserve, protect and manage Illinois' natural resources.

Marc Miller, Director

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