



LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

"... conserving our natural resources and your right to enjoy them."



SUBJECT: PROPOSED NEW AND INCREASED LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES USER FEES

WHEREAS, the various programs and operation of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) are supported by revenue from a number of sources including: mineral and other royalties, bonuses, rentals, fees, licenses and permits for use of, and extraction of resources from, department-owned lands and state waterbottoms; commercial fishing and related license fees; recreational hunting and fishing license fees; motorboat registration fees; and federal funds - primarily from the Dingell-Johnson/Wallop-Breaux and Pittman-Robertson federal aid in sport fish and wildlife restoration programs, with approximately 25 to 30 percent of LDWF's funding generated by recreational licenses and motorboat registration fees, and

WHEREAS, the last general increase in LDWF recreational license fees occurred in 1987, over 13 years ago, and the costs for the LDWF to provide services to recreational users have understandably exceeded license fee revenue over this period of time, and

WHEREAS, the amounts generated by most sources of LDWF operating revenue have not kept pace with the cost of operating the agency and its programs, and

WHEREAS, as far back as 1995 the Legislature recognized the need for more frequent assessment of the sufficiency of LDWF's license and fee structure and directed that the agency make a biannual assessment of its fee structure and financing needs and report its findings to the House and Senate Natural Resources Committees; the Legislature further authorized the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission to set nonresident recreational license fees and considered, but did not pass legislation authorizing same for resident license fees, and

WHEREAS, recognizing the need for additional financing for LDWF, particularly for operation and maintenance its fish hatchery program and for aquatic weed control, the Louisiana Wildlife Federation adopted a resolution at its 59th Annual Meeting in Gonzales in March of 1998 suggesting modest fishing license and motorboat registration fee increases that would have raised about \$4 million for the LDWF, and offering to work with the agency to generate public support for fair and reasonable fee increases, and

WHEREAS, leaders of the Louisiana Wildlife Federation met with LDWF officials in October of 1998 to discuss appropriate fee increases and offer LWF's assistance in developing public, legislative and administration support for specific fishing license and motorboat registration fee increases, but apparently LDWF was not able or willing to participate in such an effort at that time, and

WHEREAS, as an apparent indication of the severity of its budget problems, last year the LDWF was not able to commit to providing its FY '99/'00 share (\$600,000) toward the implementation of the State Master Conservation and Recreation Plan for the Atchafalyaya Basin despite LDWF's obvious relationship to the success of this wildly popular conservation initiative of the Foster Administration, and

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WHEREAS, as further evidence of its financial predicament, last year LDWF had legislation introduced and passed dissolving the State Wildlife Refuge and Game Preserve Fund which freed up the fund's nearly \$3 million in mineral income and interest for agency operation, funds which could have been more appropriately invested in the acquisition of wildlife habitat or some other project with long-term future conservation benefit, and

WHEREAS, on several occasions in the recent past the Louisiana Wildlife Federation has proposed and/or supported measures to generate additional revenue for the LDWF including: (1) raising the age of exemption from recreational license requirements from 60 to 65 years of age; (2) dedicating ATV-related sales tax and registration fees to the Conservation Fund for acquisition and stewardship of state wildlife areas; (3) establishing an annual wildlife management area user "pass" for a reasonable fee dedicated to acquisition and stewardship of state WMAs; (4) allocating the state taxes collected on the sale of fuel used by recreational boaters, anglers and commercial fishers to LDWF to help finance boating access development, aquatic weed control, boating safety, water patrol and other related agency responsibilities; (5) dedication of a small percentage of state sales tax for habitat acquisition and other LDWF programs and functions not directly supported by user fees, and

WHEREAS, should the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) be passed by the U. S. Congress, up to \$5 million will be available to LDWF each year if it can provide a 25% match from the Conservation or other state funds, making it even more compelling to boost the finances of the agency, and

WHEREAS, LDWF is now taking the initiative in proposing a wide range of new and increased resident recreational user fees that, if adopted, is projected to generate \$10-\$12 million per year over the next 5 years; the proposal includes: (1) increasing the basic resident fishing license (which is required to fish fresh or saltwater) and the saltwater license to \$15 each; (2) increasing the various hunting licences (not stamps) to \$15 each; (3) raising the age of exemption from licensing to 65, phased in over 5 years; (4) establishing "senior" licenses for those 65 and older at a fee of \$5 for all fishing and \$5 for all hunting; (5) increasing the 3-year motorboat registration and renewal fee to \$27.50 (by mail); (6) increasing the ATV registration fee to \$24 for 4 years with 50% of the revenue allocated to LDWF; (7) establishing an annual \$25 fee for "consumptive use" (hunting, fishing, camping, trail riding, etc.) on wildlife management areas; (8) increasing the "cane pole" license to \$5, among others, and

WHEREAS, the LDWF has provided extensive documentation and analysis of its funding sources and the need for additional operating revenue but thus far has not given an accounting to its constituents, who will have to pay the new and increased fees if they are adopted, of what continuing and new programs and services it intends to use the new revenue for, but has only threatened to lay off enforcement and fish division personnel and close wildlife management areas if it doesn't get the funds it needs, and

WHEREAS, prior to the last general increase in recreational user fees, LDWF commissioned the Wildlife Management Institute to review its budget, programs, statutory authorities, accomplishments and future needs; WMI issued its report to the LDWF secretary in the spring of 1985 and it was subsequently made public; this review and report was helpful in garnering public and legislative support for a range of user fee increases that the Legislature approved the following year, and

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WHEREAS, the Louisiana Wildlife Federation has historically supported fair and reasonable user fees provided that their uses are dedicated to specific, appropriate purposes related to the interests and activities of the users who are being asked to pay them.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Louisiana Wildlife Federation recognizes the need to provide additional revenue to the Conservation Fund for the operation of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and conditionally supports the following: (1) increasing the basic, big game, muzzleloader and archery resident hunting license fees provided a sufficient portion of the new revenues generated by this increase are dedicated to fully funding the LDWF's wildlife and habitat management role in implementing the State Master Conservation and Recreation Plan for the Atchafalaya Basin; (2) increasing the 3-year motorboat registration and renewal fees provided that the new revenues so generated are dedicated to the development and maintenance of public boating access facilities, aquatic weed control, boating safety and education, and boating law enforcement; (3) increasing the ATV 4-year registration fee with 50% of that amount dedicated to the maintenance of appropriate trails, roads, and parking/camping areas on Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), and wildlife habitat acquisition and stewardship; (4) increasing resident basic and saltwater fishing license fees provided that the new revenues generated by these fee increases are dedicated primarily to maintaining the LDWF hatchery program at capacity, fully supporting LDWF's role in implementing the State Master Conservation and Recreation Plan for the Atchafalaya Basin, marine and inland recreational fish/fisheries surveys, research and management, lake management, aquatic weed control, and enforcement of laws pertinent to the benefit of recreational fishing; (5) increasing the "cane pole" license fee provided that some of the increased revenue therefrom is dedicated to the development of appropriate bank-fishing and pier-fishing opportunities; (6) raising the age of exemption from standard recreational hunting and fishing license fees to 65 phased in over 5 years and establishing "senior" hunting and fishing licenses to include all hunting and all fishing privileges for persons aged 65 and over, or requiring such "senior" hunting and fishing licenses of persons aged 60 and over, with the new revenue generated from these fees dedicated to a special account in the Conservation Fund to be used to establish and sustain youth hunting and fishing programs throughout the state.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that in light of the recent consideration of raising the state sales tax, the Louisiana Wildlife Federation supports dedicating a portion of any new state sales tax annually to acquisition and stewardship of wildlife habitat by the LDWF and the support of other general public benefit programs and services of the agency including aquatic weed control, hunter and boating safety education, fish and wildlife management education, scenic rivers, rare/threatened/endangered species research and management, nongame and urban wildlife, natural heritage inventory and registry, and boating law enforcement.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Louisiana Wildlife Federation implores the Governor and the Louisiana Legislature to acknowledge that Louisiana's fish and wildlife resources and the habitats they require are important to all people living in this "Sportsman's Paradise" and, considering our changing demography, it is imperative that LDWF be allocated the necessary general fund dollars to accomplish its mandated functions.

Adopted by the Louisiana Wildlife Federation in convention assembled, March 12, 2000 in Alexandria, Louisiana.