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Bulletin: Information for Maine Department of Conservation Employees, August 1991

Maine Department of Conservation

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August
1991

BULLETIN

Information for Maine Department of Conservation Employees

Commissioner's Column

A summary of legislative action on the department's budget is provided in this *Bulletin*.

Major funding was restored to several programs. However, the funding restored by the legislature was not evenly distributed among all programs and, in some cases, reflected different priorities than in the department's original proposal. We are fortunate to have the funding and positions restored, especially in this economic environment. Most programs however, will still experience major reductions in the funds needed for full operation. Even though the budget has now passed, revenues could still be tight due to continuing weakness in the state and national economies. Therefore, we will all need to be especially careful in controlling expenses.

We are very pleased with the support from the administration and the legislature which is represented by these additions to our budget. It is recognition of the quality service, team work and professionalism of all department employees. As you see, whatever your job, your efforts make a difference.

The proposed consolidation of several natural resource departments into one "super agency" was defeated. A special Commission on Governmental Restructuring will look at all of state government and present its findings to the legislature in December.

A \$5 million bond issue for major capital improvements to state parks and historic sites was approved. There also will be a \$5 million bond issue for additional funds for the Land for Maine's Future Program.

The department received a large amount of news coverage during the period state government was closed down. This was due to both high fire danger and the demand on parks during the Fourth of July holiday. I believe this attention shows the strong interest and support that exists for our programs. It also helped a great deal in getting the message out to the public about the importance of resource protection and management-and the need for adequate staff and funding to do the job properly. Department employees who were contacted by the media were very effective in making those points. Thanks go to those contacted by the press for their efforts and the contribution their statements made to building support for the department.

We are waiting for specific details, but it is our understanding that for those who did not work, the unpaid days off will count toward the number of furlough days required in FY 92. Discussions continue between the administration and employee representatives on how the furlough day plan will be implemented.

Once again, thank you all for your cooperation during the close down.

Ed Meadows

Anniversaries to be Celebrated

The 100th anniversary of the Maine Forest Service and the 25th anniversary of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway will be celebrated this month. *Forest Heritage Days* in Greenville, on August 23, 24 and 25, will honor the Forest Service. Contact Gary Morse in Greenville for a schedule of events. On Sunday, August 25, friends of the Allagash will celebrate at Churchill Dam. Contact Herb Hartman, BPR, Augusta.

FY 92/93 Budget Highlights

Major changes have occurred in the DOC budget since our original proposal last December. That proposal was designed to reduce DOC spending by \$4.5 million in FY 92 and \$4.7 million in FY 93 to meet the requirements we were given as part of the overall state budget process. The amount added back was \$2.1 million in FY 92 and \$1.6 million in FY 93. As a result, our FY92/93 budget is approximately 11 percent above the original proposal. However, it is still 13 percent below what we projected to be needed to operate all programs at full funding.

Much of the funding added back will be offset in the General Fund by fee increases, along with income from a variety of additional taxes and other revenues. The revenue that will go to the General Fund as a result of increases in BPR and LURC fees, and the expected LURC mining application fees, is \$728,517 in FY 92 and \$640,172 in FY 93. The number of layoffs is reduced to seven. In all, 22 positions have been eliminated.

Below is a summary of the changes and other budget items.

Bureau of Parks and Recreation

- Over \$700,000 was restored each year to the bureau's general operations budget. Over 80 % of this amount will be used to restore positions to keep parks, historic sites, the Allagash Wilderness Waterway and the Penobscot River Corridor as fully-staffed as possible. Some "all other" and "capital" was also restored. In addition, \$100,000 was appropriated each year for repairs in anticipation that little or no repair funds would be available from the Bureau of Public Improvements.
- More than 70 % of the funds restored to the bureau is offset by increased user fees at state parks and historic sites. The fee increases took effect in March and July, 1991.
- All but 23 positions of the 58 positions proposed for elimination were restored. The 23 positions not restored are all currently vacant.
- The bureau's bond issue request for major improvements at state parks and historic sites will once again be placed before voters in November. This bond will include \$3.5 million for major work on water, septic and electrical systems, as well as access improvements for persons with disabilities, and restorations at Fort Knox.

Land Use Regulation Commission

- Four environmental specialist II positions were restored from the proposed elimination of 6.5 positions. This level of staffing will enable the agency to maintain recent gains in the number of permits issued and in the timely review of complex applications.
- LURC also secured funding approval for two environmental specialist III positions. One of these corrects a problem in the position count for an existing position and the other adds a position to process mining permits and other complex development proposals.
- The cost of these positions will be offset by several sources of increased revenue to the General Fund: LURC was authorized to charge higher fees for subdivision applications; there will be additional revenue from the fee increase which was approved in the FY 91 emergency budget bill; minimum fees for minor building permits will be changed from \$25 to \$40; and revenue will be received from mining permit applications.

Continued on back

Maine Forest Service

- The Forest Fire Control Division had fourteen out of fifteen ranger positions and an auto mechanic foreman position restored.
- Funding was restored to keep open 22 of the 27 watchtowers proposed to be closed in FY 92. There are no funds for the towers in FY 93. The department must present to the legislature in February, 1992, a plan that describes current use of the towers and a proposal to phase out staffing for them.
- The Forest Management and Utilization Division had one forester I position restored.

Maine Conservation Corps

- Proposed funding cuts of \$18,547 in FY 92 and \$36,323 in FY 93 were fully restored.

Part II items that were approved include:

- BPR's authority to accept dedicated donations into non-lapsing accounts (such as Holbrook Island) was clarified.
- Two positions were established using federal funds for the Northern Forest Lands Study, one to work on the study, the other to work on the natural resource inventory.
- The Division of Insect & Disease Management received an allocation to use increased federal funds to continue the Forest Health Monitoring Program.
- The Boating Facilities Fund received an increased allocation to increase maintenance and capital equipment and to support existing positions.
- BPR and BPL received allocations to spend funds provided by the Land for Maine's Future Board to increase public access on lands acquired by the board.

General Fund Reduction

- To balance the budget at the end of the process, a General Fund budget cut of approximately 1% in FY 92 and 2% in FY 93 was enacted for all departments. The amount will be calculated based on the total appropriation for each account, but the cut may be taken against any line item in the account. This will be implemented in the FY 92 work programs.

Other items that affect the Department:

- The cap for restitution payments for fire violations is raised from \$2,000 to \$10,000.
- A Central Motor Pool was established to be operated by the Bureau of Purchases for all state government. The VRA will operate as usual until the new state program gets underway some time in August. The assets and liabilities of the VRA will then move to the Central Motor Pool. All credits for vehicles turned in to VRA, and the lease equities that have been accumulated by the bureaus, will be honored by the new agency. The Department of Administration is working on plans for this transition and we will keep you informed as details become available.
- Before March 1, 1993, LURC will prepare a report for the legislature on the transfer from DEP to LURC of the responsibility for establishing water levels on impounded lakes and ponds in the unorganized territory.
- Rules are established for the use of herbicides for forest management in the one-mile zone of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway.

Personnel Items

- The 7 percent pay increase has been approved. The details of how the cost will be offset by unpaid time off are still being developed.
- A Voluntary Employee Cost Savings Program is authorized for FY 92/93. This will be similar to the FY 91 cost savings program allowing reduced work weeks, sporadic leave, unpaid leave and flexible position staffing. Details on the program have been distributed.

- A number of changes have been made to the state retirement system. The major ones are summarized below.

1. The proposal to increase the employee retirement contribution was **not** adopted.
2. The normal retirement age was changed from 60 to 62, **however, this change will only affect employees who have less than 7 years of creditable service as of December 1, 1991.**
3. As before, members who have completed at least 25 years of creditable service may select early retirement. For a member in service who has 7 years of creditable service on December 1, 1991, the retirement allowance will be reduced based on the member's number of years of age under 60 when retiring. For a member who has less than 7 years of creditable service on December 1, 1991, the retirement allowance will be reduced based on the member's number of years of age under 62 when retiring.
4. Any employee who retires after October 30, 1991, having reached normal retirement age, and who is restored to service, is not subject to previous earnings limitations.

The FY 92/93 budget contains an unusually large number of items which must be interpreted by the Budget Office. Further information will be provided as it becomes available.

Conservation Notebook

BPR held a well attended "open house" at Holbrook Island Sanctuary State Park in Brooksville and Castine, Saturday, August 10. **Herb Hartman, Steve Curtis and Phil Farr**(BPR) and **Hartley LaDuke**(Admin. Serv.) attended the event that familiarized local residents with management of recently acquired Holbrook Island and the sanctuary. •• Campers at Camden Hills State Park are participating in the first state park solid waste recycling project according to **Gordon Bell**, park manager. •• **Jeanne Kannegieser** has resigned from BPL to attend graduate school at the University of Michigan. •• BPL has timber sales scheduled in T5 R13, T6 R11, T16 R5, Little Squaw Unit and Duck Lake Unit. The bureau will complete a 200 acre pre-commercial thinning with spacing saws in September. •• **Fred Todd**, of LURC, participated in a panel discussion of "Lakes, Laws and Legislature" at the annual meeting of the Congress of Lakes Association. Fred and **Caroline Eliot** have been conducting a series of public meetings on revisions to the commission's Comprehensive Land Use Plan. •• Twenty-three Maine Conservation Corps summer projects are wrapping up. The sites ranged from the Allagash Wilderness Waterway where the team worked with **Larry Nadeau, Eric Hoar** and other rangers, to Bradbury Mountain State Park in Pownal where the team worked with **Dan Bell** and his staff. Recognition Day will be held tomorrow at the University of Maine at Augusta where corpsmembers will receive Certificates of Achievement, recommendation letters for future employment and will enjoy a chicken barbecue. Ten corpsmembers begin a three day Outward Bound course in August. The MCC's Yellowstone team will return next week after having spent five weeks in the park. •• For the second summer, BPL and Outward Bound are hosting an International Workcamp on the Mahossuc Unit. **Ralph Knoll and Steve Spencer** organized the camp of seven volunteers from France, Wales, Germany, England and Colorado. BPL's **Mike Cooper** is the crew leader. Ten more international volunteers will work with BPR staff in the central region and the Allagash Wilderness Waterway. This is the third year BPR and Tanglewood 4-H Camp have co-hosted an international camp. **W.E.(Wimpy) Burnham**, recently retired from the BPR, signed on as a SERVE/Maine volunteer to coordinate the international crew.