

## **TWRA PROPOSES CHANGES TO LICENSE FEE STRUCTURE**

*Only the Second Increase Sought in 25 Years; New User Groups Asked to Contribute*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – For only the second time in 25 years, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) is seeking to adjust the way hunting and fishing licenses and fees are structured in order to maintain its successful wildlife, fisheries and education programs. The proposal includes some incremental fee increases and the inclusion of new user groups.

It wasn't too long ago that the sight of a white-tailed deer, a bald eagle or a wild turkey in Tennessee was a rare treat. These and other key wildlife and fish are now thriving across the state, thanks to intensive restoration and management by the TWRA.

“The reality is that managing our wildlife and fisheries has never been more expensive than it is today,” said TWRA Executive Director Ed Carter. “Our objective with this proposal is to spread the cost of these programs across more user groups who utilize Tennessee’s public lands and waters.”

This license fee change proposal is the first since 2005, and only the second to be sought since 1990. It's also the smallest increase in the TWRA's 65-year history. The Agency, which is funded almost exclusively by hunting and fishing licenses, boating registrations and federal excise taxes on related equipment, has seen operating costs increase dramatically. This includes everything from fertilizer to fish food and other essential expenses over the last 10 years.

“We employ 46 fewer people Agency-wide now than we did eight years ago, and salaries and benefits such as health insurance have increased significantly,” Carter said. “Our wildlife officers, biologists and other staff do an incredible job, and we're doing more work with fewer people than ever before to provide world-class outdoor opportunities.”

Changes to the way license fees are structured can be found across the board in the new proposal, which will be considered by the Tennessee Fish and Wildlife Commission in January. If approved, the new fee structure would go into effect on July 1, 2015. Tennessee hunting and fishing licenses expire on Feb. 28, and new licenses will be on sale at the current prices from mid-February through the end of June.

Highlights include: incremental increases for resident hunting and fishing licenses; elimination of certain short-term non-resident licenses; a new fee for professional hunting and fishing guides; new senior citizen license options; and fees related to the use of TWRA firing ranges, as well as for horseback, off-highway vehicle and mountain bike riders whose activities have a maintenance impact on state Wildlife Management Areas. More details on the proposal can be viewed at [www.tnwildlife.org](http://www.tnwildlife.org).

“Our mission is to manage the fish and wildlife of the state and their habitats for the use, benefit and enjoyment of the citizens of Tennessee and its visitors,” Carter said. “We take that responsibility very seriously and have been very successful in creating access for all user groups to these incredible public resources. We’re now asking more of those users to contribute to the effort.”

TWRA’s success stories are many. Plentiful wildlife such as white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, bald eagles, black bears and wild elk were severely threatened or thought lost forever well in to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All are thriving today, thanks to the efforts of TWRA.

The Agency has also stocked more than 100 million fish into Tennessee waters, and now manages more than 250 public boat access points across the state. TWRA also oversees more than 1.5 million acres of publicly accessible land. In the last decade alone, the Agency has planted more than three million trees and protected 42,000 acres of wetlands across the state.

Meanwhile, examples of significant cost increases abound: fish food pellets are up 76 percent since 2004, milo seed is up 150 percent, and farm diesel is up 58 percent. Items including vehicles, boats and motors, pond liners and other significant expenses have all increased at or above the approximately 25 percent rate of inflation over the last decade.

“This new fee structure will allow us to continue doing the good work we do every day for Tennessee’s wildlife and fisheries into the foreseeable future, without having further cuts to programs,” Carter said. “We don’t take these increases lightly, which is why this is only the second time in 25 years that we’ve sought such an action. But it’s the reality of today’s economy, and a burden we can all share incrementally.

“There’s no question that the world-class hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities available today in Tennessee simply didn’t exist 25 years ago, and we’re excited to continue enhancing those resources for the public good.”

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