

**Department of Fish and Wildlife**

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*Agency of Natural Resources**Delivered Electronically***Memorandum**

TO: House Committee on Environment

FROM: Andrea Shortsleeve, Interim Commissioner, Vermont Department of Fish &amp; Wildlife

SUBJECT: Responses to questions from 2/20/25 Testimony

DATE: 3/8/25

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for taking our testimony on 2/20/25 on the Governor's Proposed Budget for FY26. Below are the questions what the Committee asked, and we were unable to answer at the time of testimony, along with the appropriate responses.

- *What is the current Pittman-Robbinson excise tax rate?*

The current excise tax rate is 10% for pistols and revolvers, 11% for other firearms and ammunition, and 11% for bows and archery equipment.

- *What is the actual cost of timber sales to the Department? Is the loss revenue a net loss?*

Revenues associated with commercial timber harvests on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) are considered program income within the State Lands Management PR grant. USFWS requires that program income associated with a grant is to be spent in that same grant. Timber harvest revenues are used as non-federal match to our PR funds for WMA management. These funds are additive to the grant budget in that they are additional, necessary non-federal funds that are used mostly for match to support staff salaries. Timber sales are administered by FPR foresters who are paid 75% PR funds and FPR provides the match, meaning the cost of these timber sales to the Department of Fish and Wildlife is zero.



- *Quantify the ongoing initiatives and significant challenges for the Department.*

- Act 59 & Act 181:

Act 59 (Vermont's Biodiversity Conservation Law) requires that the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources develop an inventory and plan for achieving the conservation of 30% of the Vermont landscape by 2030 and 50% by 2050. While this effort involves many conservation partners, VDFW is providing extensive technical expertise for both the inventory and planning phases of this process. VDFW is providing at least 1FTE of staff time for this effort. Once complete, it will be incumbent on VDFW to expand capacity to support achieving the ambitious goals of this law in addition to the effects on staff capacity to manage a greater area of conserved land under the authority of the VDFW.

Act 181 (the Act 250 reform law) establishes two significant requirements involving the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife. The first is establishing new criteria for the consideration of impacts from proposed projects on forest fragmentation and ecological connectivity. This will require the creation of rules to define and govern the application of these criteria. VDFW is expected to provide the technical expertise for developing rules and subsequently reviewing permit applications for issues associated with these criteria, as well. This will require substantial time from some VDFW experts on the order of 1 FTE.

Another requirement of Act 181 is the establishment of Tier III critical resource areas. These will serve as jurisdictional triggers for projects being subjected to Act 250 review and permitting and will be ecological and natural resources based. Defining these criteria and establishing the process by which they are applied will require technical support and guidance from some VDFW experts on the order of 0.5 FTEs for the period of time it takes to identify the critical resource areas and define the process for application.

Both of these new laws highlight existing capacity challenges for the VDFW. Even without Act 181, VDFW provides substantial technical support to the Act 250 process. This support, on the order of 4FTEs from existing staff, is funded entirely from the VDFW's existing budget using license revenues, federal Pittman Robertson funds, and general funds. Even without Act 59, the VDFW already owns over 135,000 acres of land that requires substantial stewardship, management, and planning oversight. We are limited in our capacity to adequately steward and manage the land we already own.

- Disaster Recovery and Response:

Fish and Wildlife infrastructure sustained damages in both the July 2023 and July 2024 flooding events. The Department has been engaged with FEMA and projects are being obligated and completed. The access area damages include access roads, parking lots and sedimentation on

boat ramps. Damages at the WMA's included access roads and culverts. The July 2023 flood also included content losses at two locations. Below is a summary of the specific projects. Of note, 508 staff hours (all current staff, no new staffing) to date have been allocated to disaster recovery and response. The Agency of Administration has committed to providing the match (10%) for the July 2023 damages. Fish and Wildlife will cover the match (25%) for the July 2024 projects using available cash balance from motorboat registrations for the access area projects and available capital funds for WMA projects.

| Location                             | Damages (\$)              |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| July 2023 Flood                      |                           |
| Valley Lake Access Area              | 5,680                     |
| Rood Pond Access Area                | 8,171                     |
| Heineberg Bridge                     | 4,752                     |
| Bald Hill                            | 15,762                    |
| Sladyk WMA                           | 1,122,270                 |
| Hoyts Landing                        | 40,000                    |
| Seymore Lake Access Area             | 256,000                   |
| Shadow Lake Access Area              | 5,738                     |
| Salisbury Hatchery – Contents        | 162,900                   |
| Annex Storage – Contents             | 305,405                   |
| Gale Meadows Dam – Temporary Repairs | 138,00                    |
| Gale Meadows Dam – Permanent Repairs | TBD, Engineer on contract |
| July 2024 Flood                      |                           |
| Shadow Lake Access Area              | 30,000                    |
| Wallace Pond Access Area             | 5,888                     |
| Upper Lamoille River Access Area     | 2,872                     |
| Wolcott Pond Access Area             | 3,096                     |
| Sladyk WMA                           | 372,212                   |
| Addison County WMAs                  | 13,000                    |
| Steam Mill Brook WMA                 | 30,000                    |
| Robbins Mountain WMA                 | 6,360                     |
| Seymour Lake Access Area             | 113,125                   |
| West Mountain WMA                    | 33,400                    |

- State Lands Infrastructure and Facility Management:

VDFW currently owns 105 Wildlife Management Areas and numerous Streambank Management Areas, totaling 135,000 acres. Infrastructure on these properties includes 70+ dams, 150+ miles of roads, 100s of kiosks and parking areas, and many gates, boundary lines, and fences. The Department spends over \$300,000 a year on WMA infrastructure maintenance, which isn't enough to address all annual needs. Capital funds are used to match our federal Pittman-Robbinson dollars for infrastructure projects at a 3:1 match rate.

Please let us know if there are additional questions or if there is additional information that we can provide.

Respectfully,



Andrea Shortsleeve, Interim Commissioner  
Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife