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Local News

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Coalitions push for higher fees

Proposed fishing license increase falls short, they say

Chris Vetter

Chippewa Falls News Bureau

Three conservation groups say a proposal to increase fishing license fees isn't enough.

"We believe the package before the Legislature is woefully inadequate," said Dan Gunderson, executive director of Wisconsin Outdoors Alliance in Madison. "The Legislature is saying they are taking a sabbatical on managing wildlife for a few years."

The organization along with the Wisconsin Conservation Congress and the Wisconsin Wildlife Organization said in a release that increases in hunting and fishing licenses would help fund natural resources programs.

The three groups sought to increase the cost of an annual fishing license from \$14 to \$20, which would be the first such increase in seven years. The proposal also sought to increase a deer hunting license from \$20 to \$32.

"This would just be to stabilize the department," said Russell Hitz, a member of the executive council of the Conservation Congress, a citizens' advisory group. "This is our way of helping the natural resources keep its funds stable."

However, the state's Joint Finance Committee did not recommend any changes to the deer hunting licenses and suggested only a \$3 increase for fishing licenses.

State Sen. Sheila Harsdorf, R-River Falls, who sits on Joint Finance Committee, said she couldn't support the suggested increases.

"Some of (the governor's) increases were excessive," Harsdorf said. "There's a recognition of not shifting everything to fees."

Harsdorf said a fee increase would be bad while the state



Leader-Telegram staff photo

Van Jorstead of Eau Claire fished for bluegills Tuesday on Half Moon Lake.

EAU CLAIRE WEATHER

74°



P/SUNNY

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is fighting chronic wasting disease in its deer herd.

“We want to make sure people continue to hunt,” Harsdorf said. “A 60 percent increase would jeopardize the number of deer licenses we sell.”

The committee wrapped up more than two months of work last week in revising Gov. Jim Doyle’s proposed 2003-05 budget plan.

The full Legislature and Doyle must approve the committee’s changes for them to become law.

Hitz said he is disappointed with the Joint Finance Committee’s recommendations.

“Joint Finance has pretty much gutted the proposal by the (Conservation) Congress and the DNR,” Hitz said. “The license increase was not over-drastring.”

Gunderson said the lack of new funding would mean positions in the DNR would not be filled.

This would mean fish stocking would be reduced, and operational funds that manage public hunting grounds could be cut by 70 percent, he said.

“This current proposal is bad for Wisconsin,” Gunderson said. “This will impact our tourism industry.”