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Maine Department of Conservation Memo to Employees: February 24, 1993

Maine Department of Conservation

C Edwin Meadows Jr

Maine Department of Conservation

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John R. McKernan, Jr.
Governor



C. Edwin Meadows, Jr.
Commissioner

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

Telephone (207) 287-2211

Fax # (207) 287-2400

February 24, 1993

Dear DOC Employee:

Attached is a summary of the budget reductions the department must make to meet its target for FY 94 and FY 95.

As in past budget reductions, our overall departmental goal remains to provide effective service in our core functions within the limits of available funding.

You are welcome to share this information with others who may be interested.

In addition to the changes proposed specifically for the department, there are changes proposed in the budget that affect all state employees. The changes fall into three categories of wages, health insurance and retirement.

WAGES - Effective July 1, 1993, shutdown and furlough days would be eliminated. The 7 percent and 3 percent raises that were offset by shutdowns, furloughs, and the 39 hour workweek would be eliminated, along with the 5 percent differential for supervisors.

HEALTH INSURANCE - Effective July 1, 1993, the state's portion of employee health care cost would change from 100 percent to 90 percent with the remaining 10 percent to be picked up by the employee. Health care coverage for dependents would change from the state picking up 60 percent and employees paying 40 percent, to each paying 50 percent of the cost of coverage. This proposal will not affect the state's new "Maine State Select" health insurance program that is scheduled to be implemented on April 1, 1993.

RETIREMENT - Effective July 1, 1993, no employees would receive retirement credit for unused vacation or sick leave.

The employee contribution towards retirement would increase from 6.5 percent to 7.65 percent for most employees; Forest Rangers on a special retirement plan will increase to 8.651 percent; and all confidential employees will be increased by 1.15 percent.

In calculating an employees' high three years of earnings for the purpose of determining retirement benefits, employees may not exceed the previous year's salary by more than 5 percent.



February 24, 1993
Page two

I want to take this opportunity to again thank you for your patience, understanding, and continued commitment as state government grapples with the challenges it faces.

We are working to help Maine assure a sound future for our state's natural resources. We appreciate your support and hard work to make this possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "C. Meadows, Jr.", written in dark ink.

C. Edwin Meadows, Jr.
Commissioner

gr

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
BUDGET SUMMARY FOR FY 94/95

This summary describes the proposed program reductions the Department of Conservation must make to meet its budget target for FY 94 and FY 95.

OVERVIEW

Rising costs of state services and programs have grown beyond the revenues available. To help reduce the state's overall budget needs, departments have been asked to design budgets which absorb projected cost increases within existing FY 93 funding levels. This requires that projected increases in operating costs (such as utilities, insurance, vehicle costs, capital equipment, supplies and repairs) must be funded out of existing budget levels. In addition, the departments must also fund the projected cost of past salary and benefit increases with current level of funding. These costs include increases in health insurance, retirement contributions, negotiated salary increases, the supervisory differential and merit increases for those who are eligible once the freeze is lifted.

For Conservation, absorbing these increased costs within the target budget amount we were given will mean that serious reductions in departmental services must be made and in a few cases, programs eliminated.

In order to absorb these increased costs, the department must layoff 81 employees (full-time and seasonal) and make significant reductions in capital equipment and operating funds.

The Department of Conservation's budget proposal maintains support for those programs which are the basic core functions of the department, while eliminating programs or functions which, although they are important, are not central to our mandate. All programs and divisions of the department are affected by these reductions. The department's goal is to continue providing effective service in core functions within the limits of available funding.

The following is a summary of the proposed reductions.

Maine Forest Service

The Forest Service will reduce its current services budget through a fundamental restructuring that will combine the responsibilities of forest management and forest fire control.

The cuts will necessitate the following actions:

Elimination of 10 forest rangers; 8 foresters (6 vacant); 1 clerical position;

Elimination of two Forest Fire Control regional offices and two Forest Fire Control district offices; create a statewide supervisor of field operations;

Elimination of funds for annual fire suppression costs and reduction of funds to replace worn-out fire control equipment to insufficient levels;

Reduction of capacity to assess forest insect, disease and environmental stresses, such as gypsy moth and hemlock looper, and to provide technical assistance to property owners, forest industries and municipalities.

Elimination of a clerical position responsible for coordinating public requests for information pertaining to wood supply and harvesting information will be eliminated.

The elimination of the two forest fire control districts will increase the size of the remaining districts by 20 percent, making fire prevention less certain and resulting in longer response time to fires. This increases the risk of larger, more frequent and more expensive fires and the risk to public safety and private property. The lack of funds will result in further delays in payment for fire bills (such as the cost of fire fighter wages, equipment and supplies).

Cuts to the fire control budget will require municipalities to shoulder a greater responsibility for first response to fires and for fire prevention, detection and suppression.

Field foresters will retain the responsibility for providing forest management services to private non-industrial landowners and for monitoring and enforcing the Forest Practices Act. However, during the fire season their first responsibility will be fire prevention and suppression actions. The current level of landowner assistance will diminish as a result, particularly during fire season.

PARKS and Recreation

In order to meet higher operating costs, the Bureau of Parks and Recreation will eliminate 81 positions in FY 94 and an additional 11 positions in FY 95. These positions are from both the seasonal and year-round work force. Twenty-five of these positions are presently vacant.

The reductions will eliminate bureau staff at and/or close 10 areas: Montpelier State Historic Site, Fort Edgecomb State Historic Site, Scarborough Beach Park, Warren Island State Park, Hermon Pond, Nickerson Lake, Andrews Beach, Birch Point, Eagle Lake, and Deboullie recreational areas.

Campgrounds will be closed at Bradbury Mountain, Lamoine and Aroostook State Parks due to lack of staff.

Twenty-two areas--including the Allagash Wilderness Waterway--will have staff reductions and services curtailed.

Peacock Beach will be open only on weekends. Nearly half of the lifeguard staff will be cut--leaving most inland beaches with no

lifeguard coverage. The campsite reservation system will be discontinued in 1994. The ten year plan for replacing capital equipment will be abandoned.

As a result of staff reductions and eliminations, the system is likely to see increased vandalism and disrepair, curtailed public access, diminished public safety, and deterioration in the quality of the park experience.

The parks infrastructure is stressed by aging facilities, heavy use and decades of deferred maintenance. The bureau identified \$350,000 in high priority projects necessary each year to insure continued public health, public safety, and access to the park system. With repair funds not available, the bureau will not be able to make many of these needed repairs except for extreme emergencies, nor will it be able to make the necessary modifications in the state park system to fully comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Land Use Regulation Commission

To meet its spending constraints LURC will eliminate six positions, including four in enforcement, the public outreach & education position, and one position in planning. All regional offices will be closed. A fifth enforcement position will be unfunded in FY 94, but is proposed to be funded in FY 95.

The reductions will virtually eliminate most of the enforcement and compliance activities which are essential to the avoidance and remediation of land use violations. Voluntary compliance with land use laws will likely diminish. Based on current activity, at least 1,800 fewer site inspections and 400 fewer case resolutions will result from these staff cuts. Production of updated land use maps and information needed to assist the public will be curtailed as well.

The long term implications of these funding reductions are less timely assistance to applicants and the public, reduced ability to assist landowners and developers in meeting land use requirements, potential damage to the natural resources, increased violations of land use laws, and increased conflicts between competing uses of the natural resources in the unorganized areas of Maine.

Maine Geological Survey

The Geological Survey will eliminate funding for the cooperative program between the state and the U.S. Geological Survey on surface water and groundwater. This will remove state matching funds needed to maintain the stream gauging network used by many agencies and industries for flood forecasting and data on water supply, water quality, waste treatment, hydropower, flood insurance, fisheries, and recreational assessments. Based on the FEMA/State 1987 flood plan, the elimination of these funds could jeopardize federal disaster relief funds and assistance.

The cuts also reduce the geologic assessment program and will eliminate one position. The department's ability to secure federal grants will be adversely affected.

The overall impact of these reductions will be to reduce technical assistance to the public, other agencies, municipalities, and the private sector on projects such as application review, waste siting studies, data interpretation and resource evaluation.

Geographic Information Systems

Funding for the state's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) will be eliminated under this proposal. GIS is an efficient information management system used to develop, store and manage diverse types of data which support decision-making in policy areas such as economic development, emergency response, natural resource management, and general operations. The system provides a single source in state government where diverse and common information is available and eliminates increased costs that would result from duplication.

The department recognizes that GIS provides important benefits to state government as a whole and is a valuable tool for cost effective service delivery. However, it cannot be considered a core function critical to the department's central mission. Over the past four years other programs in the department absorbed extra reductions to help maintain GIS. With the level of cuts being made now in our most basic functions, the department is unable to maintain general fund support for GIS. Since the program provides important benefits, it is our hope that alternative funding can be found to keep it in operation. The department is working with the GIS Steering Committee to explore alternative means for funding.

Maine Conservation Corps

The department's budget proposal also eliminates the Maine Conservation Corps (MCC) and the SERVE/Maine programs. MCC provides jobs, job training and conservation education to approximately 130 disadvantaged youths. The SERVE/Maine program provided 39,000 hours of volunteer service to natural resource projects in 1992. The department very conservatively estimates the direct benefit of this voluntary service at \$250,000.

These programs provide important benefits to the department, other state agencies and the public, however, they do not meet the test of being directly critical to the central mission of the department. The clerical position which provides support for MCC is being eliminated as part of the reductions in the Engineering & Realty Division.

Administrative Services

Reductions in this account further reduce the ability to provide support services to the bureaus in delivering the department's programs at a time when central administrative controls and demands

are increasing. This will require the bureaus to absorb more administrative duties in order to meet these demands. The position responsible for overseeing the department's workers' compensation program and other personnel functions is eliminated. Many of these duties will not be performed, thereby increasing costs to programs, or will have to be absorbed by others, thereby reducing and slowing service and support to other programs. An additional one-half position is transferred to a special revenue account in order to maintain necessary capital inventory and other administrative functions.

Engineering and Realty

The cuts will eliminate the Division of Engineering & Realty by reallocating staff to other programs and eliminating the clerical position. One position will remain to ensure all facility projects comply with local, state and federal standards. As a result, the department will have only limited engineering and realty services available to support department activities.

Bureau of Public Lands

While the budget problem is largely a general fund issue, and the Bureau of Public Lands is a dedicated account agency, the impacts of the budget cuts will be felt on the operations of Public Lands. Just as with the state's budget, the bureau's budget is affected by the health of the state economy; income and, therefore by necessity, expenditures decrease during weak economic times. The bureau must absorb all cost increases such as insurance, contracts and inflation within existing resources. At the same time, the land base and other bureau mandates have increased with no corresponding increase in revenue.

The bureau contributes to the state's general fund efforts through interagency agreements providing assistance to other agencies where appropriate and through paying appropriate administrative support costs. The bureau's activities contribute to the state's economy, provide private sector jobs in timber harvesting and manufacturing, and manage the state's public lands at no cost to the general fund.

RESTRUCTURING PROPOSAL

The Governor's budget includes a proposal to merge the Department of Conservation and the Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife into a new Department of Inland Fisheries, Forestry & Wildlife. This new department would also provide administrative services to the Departments of Agriculture, Environmental Protection and Marine Resources. The proposal calls for a plan to be developed by January, 1994 for how the new department would operate. Additional budget cuts would be made as part of the merger totalling \$700,000 in FY 95 from the five agencies, including \$430,000 in DOC.

CENTRAL FLEET MANAGEMENT

State government has centralized the purchase and control of all state vehicles except for State Police. Reductions of \$326,000 in FY 94 and \$225,000 in FY 95 have been made to Conservation's budget in addition to the department's target reduction level. This additional deappropriation is for the purchase and lease-back of vehicles to the state fleet. This will have significant effect on the department's ability to deliver programs and services. However, the total impact of motor pool costs on the department operating budget is unclear at this time.

INVESTING FOR A SOUND FUTURE FOR MAINE

As Maine citizens reassess the role of state government during the current public discussions of downsizing government and budget reductions, it is helpful to examine the role which natural resource agencies--in particular the Department of Conservation--have played in shaping the way Maine looks today. An examination of the historical investment in the Department of Conservation, as well as the impacts of current budget proposals, is critical to the discussion of downsizing.

Natural resources are the backbone of Maine's economy. They account for 17 percent of Maine's total employment, 13 percent of personal income and nearly one-half of the manufactured products in the state. They also are the basis of our heritage, our way of life and the quality of life that makes Maine special. The Department of Conservation is integral to both the economy and the health of Maine's natural resources.

Today natural resources are at a crossroads in Maine. The department recognizes the need to balance the state budget and meet the realities of the 1990's. It is also imperative to create a strong foundation for a successful future. However, the supply of natural resources is limited, and the demand for those resources continues to increase. Programs in the Department of Conservation provide the management, protection, oversight and data needed to ensure these resources are available on a sustainable basis. The department's ability to manage these issues is strained at the same time the demands on our natural resources are growing. Maintaining adequate investments in natural resource programs is essential to safeguard the natural resources which sustain our economy and to assure a strong and sustainable future for our state.