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### Comments On Budget Cuts & There Effect ON The IDNR

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## Comments On Budget Cuts & There Effect ON The IDNR

Most citizens of Illinois desire a professional team to manage the natural resources of this State. For years constituents lobbied to get politics and the good ole boy appointments out of the IDNR & to have it become a science based, professional agency. We made great strides towards this goal, but recent budget cuts has destroyed these efforts. We have lost numerous professionals from the department and frankly I don't know their politics nor do I care. We simply want the best management team in control of the resources of this State. The citizens of Illinois fully understand the change of leadership in agencies when the political stature changes in Springfield, but they don't understand or agree with eliminating masses to serve a political agenda. We need to evaluate the talents of a staff prior to making wholesale cuts. Our Department of Natural Resources was once considered the best in the country and many states sought their advice on management techniques. Today, we have lost that status and are not considered a professional agency anymore.

Once the departments doors were open to constituents and their participation was encouraged. Programs like Conservation Congress that provided a vehicle for constituent input has been scaled back drastically and recently the head of that program was dismissed. The C-2000 program that has supported efforts on the Kankakee River has been severely cut to the point that no projects statewide were funded this year. Their staff has been cut

by more than 50%. This program encouraged volunteer participation and partnered with the private sector to restore and enhance our natural resources. Grants were provided that had a private sector match to conduct improvements to our natural resources. This is a method for the State of Illinois to improve the impact of the funding. Programs such as these encouraged constituent participation and actually developed an army of volunteers Statewide to serve as stewards to our natural resources. Today this army is dwindling and discouraged. It seems as though the State doesn't want the citizens to become involved in protecting our natural resources.

There have been many cuts in the IDNR and naturally to meet the required budget cuts, personnel cuts provide the greatest savings to meet the budget offerings. The IDNR has been raided the most of any agency since they grew the fastest in recent years. One must understand their growth if they are to make reasonable cuts. The IDNR has taken many agencies under their umbrella in recent years and naturally their numbers have swelled, but these were already State employees in agencies that were placed under the IDNR umbrella. These include the Illinois Water Survey, Mines & Minerals, and the Sciences. Therefore the actual growth rate of the IDNR is falsely inflated.

To state that the cuts won't affect the services to the citizens of Illinois is absolutely ridiculous. In the northeastern portion of this state, there are limited opportunities for hunting and many look to the IDNR to provide opportunity. Many of these have been cut.

Locally, the Handicap Deer Hunt will be scaled back due to the cuts. The put and take pheasant hunting will be limited if provided at all. Camping will be limited and the list goes on. We are cutting youth gun safety instructors, boat safety instructors, and site interpreters that serve to educate the youth of Illinois. We even have gas restrictions that were in place when gasoline was \$1.80 per gallon and now that it is nearing \$2.10 per gallon, the same restrictions apply that further shrinks the service the IDNR staff can provide. I personally take offense when we hear that we don't need these staff members, but rather ones that can mow grass and clean toilets. I think our priorities are out of line.

Constituents have worked for years to increase the public lands for wildlife and recreation. We have made some progress in this area but now the management for these lands has been cut.

In a limited amount of time, I can not address all the issues but it is not good management to lose professional staff, fail to use funds to encourage federal and private matches, walk away from educating our youth, turning your backs on volunteers, and destroying an agency that was a leader in the nation.

Our Department of Natural Resources needs to address three issues:

Bring professionalism back into the department at all levels.

Need a dedicated funding mechanism to support the department and prevent the on again off again budget woes.

Again, have an open door policy to encourage constituent participation in the management of our natural resources.