

Senator Ridgeway Capitol Report Hunting and fishing permit changes

Missouri is full of avid outdoorsmen who take great pleasure in the limitless opportunities available in this state for hunting, fishing and other outdoor pursuits. So when the Missouri Conservation Commission recently approved some significant changes that will affect thousands of Missouri hunters and fishermen, news spread quickly.

Your voice must be heard quickly on these issues for you to impact, or perhaps stop, the new rules from going into effect.

These changes, which will take effect July 1, 2009, affect practically everyone who would like to apply for a hunting or fishing permit—from Missouri youth to Missouri seniors—and are a considerable departure from the current permit rules. I want to make it clear that the idea for the permit changes resulted from the Conservation Department's regulations committee—not the Legislature. The committee approved these changes at its September meeting.

Probably the most talked-about and concerning change is the increasing of the minimum acreage for no-cost landowner deer and turkey permits from five to 80 contiguous acres. This recommendation could affect approximately 75,000 Missouri landowners.

Other recommendations approved by the committee include:

- Creating a "landowner registry" for property owners seeking no-cost permits.
- Increasing most sport-permit fees—increases of two to three dollars for most permits are likely, though non-residents can expect to pay more hefty fees for some permits.
- Establishing a 50 percent discounted price for resident and non-resident youth on deer, turkey, and trout permits and eliminating youth permits for deer, turkey and antlerless hunting.
- Eliminating non-resident landowner reduced-priced deer and turkey hunting permits.
- Creating "forever" permits for seniors who hunt small game and fish.
- Allowing non-resident college and technical school students to purchase resident permits.
- Requiring that age 6 be the minimum age for obtaining deer and turkey permits.
- No longer allowing lessees who reside on the property to qualify for landowner privileges.

I wanted to bring these possible changes to your attention and let you know how to provide feedback to the Department of Conservation. The 17th Senate District is chock full of hunting and fishing opportunities, and I wanted to make sure that all of my constituents have an opportunity to enjoy the many outdoor recreational opportunities found within our district and state.

Because the Missouri Department of Conservation has a protected status due to our state Constitution, your voice concerning these proposed rules will have the most immediate impact on whether they are implemented. Per the State Constitution, the Department of Conservation does not receive any general revenue funds, so the legislature has little control over their budget. Their budget is drawn from a

voter approved sales tax that was adopted in 1976, permit sales, and federal funding. There is no sunset on the sales tax.

In addition, there is already a pre-filed bill for the 2009 legislative session that would reverse some of the Conservation Commission's changes. Senate Bill 10 would allow any Missouri resident who owns at least five acres of land in the state to hunt or fish on his or her own land without having to obtain a hunting or fishing permit from the Department of Conservation. If a permit is required, the landowner would be able to obtain the permit from the department at no cost. These same privileges would also extend to Missouri residents who lease and reside on at least five acres, and to members of the landowner or leaseholder's immediate family who reside on the land.

Because these proposed changes directly affect the citizens of the 17th Senate District, I encourage you to voice your views on these recommendations directly to the Department of Conservation. To comment, you can log on to www.mdc.mo.gov or write to: Missouri Department of Conservation, Attn: Assistant Director David Erickson, P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102 (no later than Dec. 16).

If you have any questions or comments about this Capitol Report, or any other issue, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail at luann.ridgeway@senate.mo.gov or by phone at 573-751-2547.