

Do affluent youngsters shun great outdoors?

By Tim Richard
staff writer

One reason Michigan's Department of Natural Resources has money troubles is that young people are turning up their noses at hunting, fishing and trapping — and those license fees support many DNR activities.

That observation came from Dr. Ronald Skoog, the former Alaskan biologist who has been DNR director the last eight months. Skoog was interviewed after a question-and-answer session with the Western Wayne County Conservation Club.

"We're in a budget crisis," said Skoog, who fielded questions on law enforcement from the club's hunters and fishermen. "Our fisheries and wildlife depend on license fees. We've got a \$1.8 million deficit (shortfall), and next year it will be \$4.5 million unless there are license fee increases."

"THE NUMBER of licenses has declined," Skoog said. "On a national level, federal money from the tax on hunting and fishing equipment is down."

"It used to be that a lot of youngsters trapped to make pocket money. They don't any more. You can blame it on affluence. Some blame it on TV and say kids are looking at other things than hunting and fishing."

"But I blame it on affluence. Standards are changing."

DNR staffers are working on a maze of fee changes to propose to the Michigan Legislature. The attitude of most Michigan United Conservation Clubs affiliates is one of acceptance.

Until 1981, the DNR general purpose game and fish protection fund was aided by oil and gas lease sales in the Pi-

gon River Country State Forest. Since then, oil revenues have tapered off, and the department has been living off the surplus.

The fund averages about \$30 million a year.

TO A CLUB member who asked whether sportsmen should write their legislators asking for bigger appropriations for law enforcement, Skoog had a different idea.

"We could stand some help in letters to the governor's office, particularly at the time the budget is being drafted. In other states, each department gets about the same percentage as the year before."

"Once the governor has made a decision, we (department heads) are pretty much obligated to go along with it."

For the fiscal 1985 budget (beginning Oct. 1), Gov. James J. Blanchard recommended a total of \$218.5 million in combined federal and state funding, up about 4 percent from the current year. Blanchard put a high priority on attacking the toxic waste problem, which is in DNR's bailiwick.

FOR HUNTERS, Skoog had these answers:

• **Mourning doves** — Has DNR given up its battle with the Audubon Society over a mourning dove season? "Across the U.S., more mourning doves are shot than any other bird. Doves are a resource that should be used. There are not many dove hunters here (in Michigan). It's a great sport, and they're not an easy shot. They nest three times a year," he said, indicating the population can bounce back easily.

"They come to bird feeders. There's a lot of sentiment against shooting

them," Skoog said. "I'm for it, and I'm running the state (DNR)."

• **Wild turkeys** — Turkeys are declining. I went turkey hunting last weekend. The next day I found tracks on top of my tracks. "A new area of stocking around Roseconium is doing well because the habitat has improved immensely since pristine times. In southern Michigan we'll introduce more turkeys."

Tim Payne, a district wildlife biologist, said wild turkeys from states with habitats similar to Michigan's are being stocked in Washtenaw and northwestern Oakland counties.

• **Pheasants** — Michigan isn't alone in noticing a decline in the popular, flashy game bird. New York, Ohio, Indiana and even South Dakota have seen declines. "South Dakota has built up since then — one thing was a \$5 stamp for habitat improvement. If we can improve our habitat, we'll have good pheasant hunting again."

Ironically, the first Michigan pheasant Skoog saw landed in the infamous toxic waste site in Genesee County.

• **Hungarian partridge** — These have been stocked where the habitat was adequate for pheasant. "The Hungarian partridge fills a niche between pheasants and grouse."

• **Elk** — "The Natural Resources Commission has approved a hunt for 50 elk in the northeastern lower peninsula in the front part of December. Details of the drawings (for issuance of licenses) haven't been worked out." An expected harvest of 40 cows and 10 bulls will allow the herd to level out at 650-800 "without causing damage to farms and browse."

• **Cow elk** — "If we only take bulls, we're not going to control the population. If you want to control the population, the key is to control the females."

• **Two-deer limit** — Michigan's bag limit on deer has been set for generations, but a two-deer proposal is awaiting legislative action, Payne said. It would require two separate licenses. Skoog added, "It would only be in areas designated by the Natural Resources Commission, and that's not across the board."

• **UP deer habitat** — Some increase in upper peninsula lumbering will result in better habitat for whitetail deer and ruffed grouse.

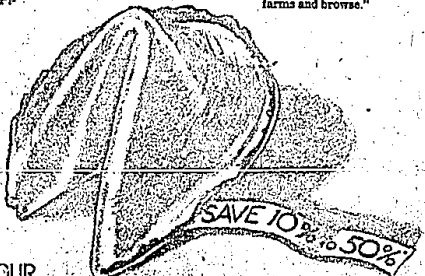
TO HUNT more game, Skoog said, "We need more land. We need more land to be bought. We need more land to be donated. We need more land to be leased. We need more land to be managed."

• **Walleys** — "Walleys are being caught. But rather than allow commercial fishermen to take walleys, there's more sport fishing license to be the answer."

• **New fish species** — Results of introducing a new species aren't always predictable. "The salmon was an experiment that turned out extremely well." Both Michigan and Wisconsin have introduced into the Great Lakes about as many salmon as they can support. The Great Lakes Fisheries Commission advises against stocking any more.

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Dr. Ronald Skoog
DNR director



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