

GAME COMMISSION TO CLOSE TWO PHEASANT FARMS

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HARRISBURG, PA - The Pennsylvania Game Commission today announced plans to close two pheasant farms – the Western Game Farm in Crawford County and the Northcentral Game Farm in Lycoming County.

As a result of the closures, 14 employees were notified their positions are being eliminated, effective Jan. 27.

The decision to close the farms strictly is a financial one.

Revenue from the sale of hunting and furtaker licenses makes up the majority of the Game Commission's budget. Legislation that would have provided a much-needed increase in license-fee revenue was not approved in the General Assembly's 2016 session. The Game Commission now is preparing to enter a third decade without an increase in the cost of a hunting or furtaker license, and the agency faces an \$8 million budget shortfall in the coming fiscal year.

Game Commission Executive Director R. Matthew Hough said closing the two pheasant farms figures to save the agency about \$1.5 million in the next fiscal year.

"It's a difficult decision to make," Hough said. "Our employees at the Western Game Farm and Northcentral Game Farm have worked hard throughout their careers to make our pheasant propagation program the best it can be. They've done an outstanding job, and it's tough to look them in the eyes and tell them their positions are being eliminated – especially at this time of year. But, as an agency that has not seen its primary revenue source increase in almost 18 years, it – unfortunately – is necessary to make these types of reductions."

The Game Commission will continue to operate two pheasant farms – the Loyalsock Game Farm in Lycoming County and the Southwest Game Farm in Armstrong County.

Bob Boyd, who heads up the Game Commission's pheasant propagation program, said the agency will strive to produce the same quality birds it has. Obviously, pheasant production will decrease overall in 2017-18 due to the closure of the two farms, Boyd said. But the agency has hopes to release about 170,000 pheasants for hunting in the fall of 2017, he said.

Meanwhile, the Pennsylvania Board of Game Commissioners is considering adopting regulations to create a “pheasant hunting permit” as a requirement to hunt Pennsylvania pheasants. The current proposed cost of the permit is \$25 for adults, and \$1 for junior hunters.

Revenue from the permit fees could sustain the program into the future.

While the Game Commission is permitted under law to create new permits, hunting and furtaker license fees must be approved by the General Assembly.

For several years, the Game Commission has sought to increase license revenues through pursuing legislation to increase the cost of a hunting license, or allow the agency’s Board of Commissioners to set license fees. However, neither proposal has been approved by the General Assembly. The latest attempt, Senate Bill 1166, expired in the House of Representatives at the completion of the 2016 legislative session, despite near-unanimous approval in the Senate.

Senate Bill 1166 also was supported by all major statewide sporting groups, such as the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen’s Clubs, the United Bowhunters of Pennsylvania, the Quality Deer Management Association, the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Keystone Elk Country Alliance, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, the Pennsylvania Trappers Association and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

Hough said that, without legislative support to increase revenues, the Game Commission will have no choice but to continue to curtail programs.

“While making program cuts is very difficult for me because of the impact those cuts have on our employees, all reductions in the programs and services the agency provides affect our hunters and trappers, and every citizen of the Commonwealth,” Hough said. “And unfortunately, without a license revenue increase, additional programs will have to be reduced or eliminated.”

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