

Senate Finance Committee

Deb Martone 271-4980

AMENDMENT #2025-0234s, Appropriating funds to the fish and game department for continuing environmental review and to cover a deficit for previously instituted salary increases to SB 239-FN, requiring the general fund to cover the costs of the fish and game department retirement contributions and technology services.

Hearing Date: February 11, 2025

Time Opened: 1:21 p.m.

Time Closed: 1:30 p.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Gray, Birdsell, Rosenwald and Watters

Members of the Committee Absent: Senators Innis, Carson, Pearl and Lang

Amendment Analysis: This bill makes an appropriation to the fish and game department for continuing environmental review for threatened and endangered species and makes an appropriation to the fish and game fund.

Sponsors:

Sen. Watters

Sen. Altschiller

Sen. Fenton

Sen. Avard

Rep. Darby

Rep. C. Harvey

Rep. K. Murray

Who supports the bill: Kevin Sullivan; Meredith Hatfield; Matt Leahy.

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator Watters, Prime Sponsor:

- Senate Watters introduced Amendment #2025-0234s to SB 239-FN. It proposes \$400,000 to cover the environmental review for threatened and endangered species. It includes \$2 million to cover the deficit previously instituted for salary increases.
- There have been discussions on the possibility of designating some kind of a fee structure to support the work of the Fish and Game Department.
- We are awaiting the Governor's Budget, which may propose some changes to environmental regulation which may relate to this issue.
- The bottom line is, what emerged from the very extensive study committee of last summer is deep concern for the sustainability of this department.

Colonel Kevin Jordan and Kevin Sullivan, NH Fish and Game Department:

- Colonel Jordan reiterated the Department struggles year after year.

- Former Governor Chris Sununu gave the department General Fund monies to cover the previous 12 percent salary increases. Former Executive Director Scott Mason was led to believe that appropriation would be given to the department annually. Thus the reason for not placing this item into the prioritized needs list this year. Subsequently, the department learned they would not continue to receive the funds.
- Senator Rosenwald stated the 10 percent raise was given to Fish and Game from the General Fund two years ago. She inquired if the department was able to cover that portion this year without having to make service cuts. Colonel Jordan replied they would not be able to cover the expense without additional funding. It would result in some loss of staff if these funds are not secured. Senator Rosenwald again reiterated if they can't cover the previous raise they will be cutting services. Colonel Jordan agreed they will have to cut staff. With the upcoming budget, all of the money in the unrestricted Fish and Game Fund will be depleted.

Meredith Hatfield, The Nature Conservancy:

- The Nature Conservancy strongly supports Fish and Game and the many duties it performs for the state of New Hampshire. They are willing to work on a creative solution either through legislation or the upcoming state budget.

Matt Leahy, Public Policy Director, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests:

- They support Amendment #2025-0234s.
- The mission and responsibilities of Fish and Game go to the heart of what makes New Hampshire a unique place, our natural resources, wildlife diversity and outdoor recreation. The amendment will help the department carry out these responsibilities.

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Date Hearing Report completed: February 12, 2025