

Sportsmen's FEES bill PASSES House/Senate Signed by the Governor!

By CHRISTOPHER KEATING The Hartford Courant April 15, 2010

If you're going fishing on opening day Saturday, you could be in luck.

The cost of a fishing license just went down.

The state legislature and Gov. M. **Jodi Rell** scrambled this week to reduce hunting and fishing fees before the official start of the season. Rell signed a budget-cutting bill **Wednesday evening** that includes the fee reductions and closes the state's projected budget deficit of \$350 million in the current fiscal year.

The bipartisan, consensus bill that cuts the fees was passed unanimously by the state Senate, 36-0, one day after the measure passed the House of Representatives, 147-1. It reduces 47 hunting and fishing fees, but it also raises 15 motor vehicle fees — such as the fine for failing to wear your seat belt — to pay for it. About 180,000 people pay the hunting and fishing fees each year.

Some lawmakers were stunned that Senate **Democrats** and **Republicans** — after disagreeing for the past 14 months on many budget issues — voted unanimously for a budget bill.

"We should take a picture for posterity purposes of that vote on the board," said Senate Majority Leader Martin Looney, a New Haven Democrat.

The cuts in the sporting fees would apply only to payments made after the bill was approved and signed Wednesday. Anglers who bought fishing licenses for \$40 last week will not be able to get the reduced fee — \$28 — retroactively, officials said.

Most, but not all, of the bill's provisions took effect immediately.

Overall, the sporting fees statewide will drop by \$5.35 million, but the legislature is raising other fees and making moves to cover that.

For example, the fine for failing to wear a seat belt will jump to \$50, up from the current level of \$15. The seat-belt fines had not been changed since 1985.

In addition, the minimum fee for speeding will increase to \$50, up from \$35. If you are caught without your registration or insurance card in your car, get ready to pay a \$50 fine — up from \$35.

Sen. John Kissel, an Enfield Republican who pushed for the fee cuts, said it was a good idea to drop the cost of a hunting license for a Connecticut resident from \$28 to \$19.

"I know that the hunters, sportsmen and campers in my neck of the woods are going to be happy when they read what we did," said Kissel. "I would like to have seen this happen months and months and months ago, but I'm reasonable enough to know that half a loaf of bread is better than nothing at all."

The bill also reduces the state parks and camping fees by 32.5 percent for in-state residents and 25 percent for non-residents, according to the Senate Democrats.

For example, the fee for Connecticut residents at [Hammonasset Beach State Park](#) on weekends and holidays will drop from \$20 to a maximum of \$13.50. The final camping and parks fees will be set later by the Department of Environmental Protection.

Republicans and Democrats have clashed sharply over proposed changes in the estate tax and creating a new gross receipts tax on hospitals, but those debates were put off for another day.

"We shouldn't pat ourselves on the back too hard. This was the easy part," said Sen. Leonard Fasano, R-North Haven. "Our obligation is much, much more than 2010. We have an over \$700 million deficit in 2011. We waited until April 14 to tackle 2010's problem. Before we get too jubilant and excited about doing our job, we have a big deficit ahead of us."

Senate President Pro Tem Donald Williams, D-Brooklyn, said plenty of work was done behind the scenes to find savings.

"It is a milestone," Williams said. "Three weeks ago, people would have been surprised if they were told that there would be an agreement" among Republicans, Democrats and Rell. <http://www.courant.com/news/politics/hc-senate-deficit-fees-0415.artapr15.0.786658.story>

The NEW Sportsmen's license fees and camping fees are effective April 14, the day the Governor signed the bill.

Comments on many of the news sites relate mostly to reimbursement of previously paid fees. We sympathize, but those who bought licenses, other than those who ice fish, trappers, and January hunters, should have listened to their club officers, CCS, and sportsmen in the know who were advising not to buy licenses until absolutely needed. The Legislature is always unpredictable and virtually anything can happen. In this case beneficial to sportsmen. There is NO way DEP could possibly refund fees due to cost and administrative requirements. Those that bought early are simply out of luck – again communications and involvement are the keys to knowledge.

We urge you to communicate with those legislators you wrote, called, e-mailed and THANK THEM for their support! Our efforts and yours paid off by getting the many State Representative and Senators publically supporting the fee reduction. Their support and efforts to pass the bill before fishing season opening day was noteworthy. Particularly remarkable were the efforts of Senator DeFronzo (D-New Britain, Berlin, and the easternmost portion of Farmington) who initiated the concept of combining DMV fines to offset the reduction in sportsmen's fees to provide revenue neutrality. Even more involved, Rep. Craig Miner (R-Litchfield) worked both this year and in 2009 to correct the fees. Shepherding this bill through committee (unanimous vote) and the budget process in addition to the many other bills with which he has concern was more than outstanding. Passage can be primarily attributed to the enormous amount work, coordination with other legislators, and perseverance he demonstrated.

Best of luck in the woods and waters at a more reasoned price.

DEP has updated new license fees!

http://www.ct.gov/dep/cwp/view.asp?a=2709&q=324224&depNav_GID=1643&depNav=
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