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*Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Division of Enforcement*

*Special Investigations Unit
1999 Legislative Report*

January 2000

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Enforcement is directed by MS Chapter 335, Article 1, Section 21, Subdivision 8, to submit an annual financial report of funds expended by its Special Investigations Unit. This legislation was passed by the 1989 regular session of the seventy-sixth Minnesota Legislature. Pursuant to this requirement the following report is submitted to the House Appropriations Committee and the Senate Finance Committee.

SUMMARY

ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES

In fiscal year 1999, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Enforcement, Special Investigations Unit (SIU) accounted for the disbursement of approximately 2% of the Divisions budgetary allotment. The Special Investigations Unit conducted activities using three full time Special Investigators and two Conservation Officers certified to conduct part time overt and covert wildlife investigations. A summary of fiscal year 1999 Special Investigations Unit operations includes:

SPECIALIZED TRAINING

Special Investigators attended the National Technical Investigators Association Seminar and received specialized training sufficient to construct, install, maintain and troubleshoot stationary video surveillance systems. This highly advanced instruction has resulted in a cost saving approach to evidence documentation. In addition, the application of this training to field level operations has resulted in the successful detection of several illicit commercial wildlife crimes.

The MN SIU and Wisconsin (WI) Special Operations Section cosponsored a three-day training exercise at the annual Midwest Covert Training Seminar. During this time, more than one hundred natural resource wildlife investigators received hands-on training detailing the technical aspects of still camera and video surveillance photography. Investigators were trained to incorporate time lapse, infrared, trip devices, and weight bearing activation units into video recording systems.

Two Conservation Officers serving as part time investigators attended the annual International Association of Marine Investigators training sessions. This training provides valuable insight into the complexities of recreational vehicle crimes including title and insurance fraud, recreational vehicle theft and organized fencing operations. Officers share intelligence information, discuss trends and propose federal legislation to deter the expansion of these highly sophisticated white collar crimes.

The Special Investigations Unit provided training to MN DNR and WI DNR wildfire investigators at the Camp Ripley Military Installation. This instruction gave participants a technical approach to hidden video surveillance systems and their ability to detect wildfire arson activity. Attendees assessed the training as an integral facet in developing target specific fire prevention plans.

* Divisional budgetary restraints restricted additional training opportunities

ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES

Enforcement activities conducted by the Special Investigations Unit during fiscal year 1999 included but were not limited to the following:

The Special Investigations Unit (SIU) concluded the investigative phases of four covert operations. Three investigations required the use of field officers to conduct follow up interviews and further corroborate document illicit activities. All investigations have now entered the prosecutorial phase and are at varying levels of completion. They include:

- Prosecutorial phase of a two-year illegal bear guiding investigation. Covert officers substantiated citizen and officer complaints detailing unlicensed guiding, taking bear during closed hours/with aid of dogs, transporting loaded firearms, et.al. Currently, seven defendants have been charged and await prosecution.
- Prosecutorial phase of an additional illegal bear guiding operation. This two-year covert investigation documented continual attempts by hunters and guides to circumvent most regulated activities associated with bear hunting. The Special Investigations Unit also coordinated the interviews and interrogations of twenty suspects/witnesses to the acts. Besides substantiating all alleged bear taking violations, investigators also documented the illegal taking and attempted sale of gray wolves. Currently, three primary co-conspirators have been charged and are at varying levels of plea negotiations in state and federal court. Thirteen secondary defendants have plead guilty with resulting fines and restitution exceeding \$6500.
- Prosecutorial phase of a two-year covert investigation initiated through complaints registered by resource stakeholders and field officers. Complaints included sale of game fish, trespass, gross over limiting of waterfowl, borrowing and lending of big game licenses, et.al. The investigation failed to substantiate only the sale of game fish, however, the covert phase proved one defendant's total disregard for waterfowl limits and methods of taking. The investigative operative documented gross over limit taking of mallards and wood ducks. Approximately ten suspects/witnesses to the acts have been interviewed. Five defendants currently await prosecution relating to illicit waterfowl and big game hunting activities.
- Prosecutorial phase of a two-year surveillance operation conducted on the Little Fork river. Investigation was based on complaints relating to the large scale illegal harvest and possible sale of spawning sturgeon. Surveillance and subsequent arrests resulted in the convictions of five defendants. Charges included: possession of illegal equipment (snare poles), illegal gill netting, and felon in possession of a hand gun. Fines and penalties exceeded \$1800 and six months incarceration. Upon further review of surveillance video, five additional defendants await prosecution.

Special Investigators supported field level operations primarily through the installation and monitoring of six stationary video surveillance systems. This highly effective method of crime detection has resulted in several arrests, is cost effective, and has diminished the need for officers to physically witness illegal activities as they occur.

The Special Investigations Unit analyzed approximately 1200 annual reports submitted by licensed game farm operators. Inconsistencies in reporting, unlawful receipting, illegal species, and unlicensed operators were identified and referred to uniform field officers for further investigation.

Three (3) license fraud investigations have been conducted for out state natural resource law enforcement agencies.

Thirteen (13) additional investigations involving unlawful natural resource commercialization have been conducted and/or initiated and include multiple suspects/defendants. During this fiscal year, the Special Investigations Unit attained a 100% conviction rate.

Part-time Special Investigators conducted three stolen ATV/snowmobile investigations and have assisted local law enforcement agencies with recreational vehicle theft detection and prevention.

The Special Investigations Unit assisted many federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies by providing specialized equipment and technical expertise to their criminal investigations.

Receipt, review, maintenance, and associated enforcement of commercial licenses and reporting requirements. These include:

- 1194 Game Farm Operators
- 67 Raw Fur Dealers
- 15 Raw Fur Tanners/Dressers
- 10 Wild Rice Dealers
- 78 Shooting Preserves
- 141 Bear Guides
- 344 Minnow Dealers

1849 TOTAL COMMERCIAL LICENSES

ADMINISTRATION

The Special Investigations Unit conducted a detailed analysis of commercial licensee densities and identified heavy work loads. Each licensee was identified by activity, and through postal zip code assignment, incorporated into each Conservation Officers area of responsibility. As a result, accountability can be ensured, more effective inspections conducted, and professional relationships developed between stakeholders and the Division.

The Special Investigations Unit Support has computerized commercial bear guide annual reporting. As a result, valuable intelligence information can be extrapolated, link analysis conducted, and bear hunter/guide associations identified.

Special Investigations Support continues to coordinate the Divisional statewide pager system. Purchases, replacements, software, cost analysis and trouble shooting are responsibilities assigned to the Unit.

The Unit provided background intelligence information to MN DNR fisheries managers on issues relating to the illegal commercialization of protected game fish and made recommendations for legislative change.

The Unit maintains the Divisional statewide intelligence section. Information is collected and computerized in a central repository and disseminated to field level Conservation Officers and other law enforcement agencies when appropriate.

The Special Investigations Unit administered the Division's forensic research and testing program. During the past year, 30 samples, associated with the securing of evidence in criminal cases, were transferred from the Unit to University of Minnesota pathobiologists and USFWS laboratories for forensic analysis.

The Unit provided specialized equipment, training, surveillance, and interview assistance to uniformed Conservation Officers upon request.

**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Division of Enforcement
Special Investigations Unit**

FINANCIAL REPORT - FISCAL YEAR 1999

LINE	DESCRIPTION	ALLOCATION	EXPENDITURE
1	Salaries * Full-time	\$249,011	249,011
2	Overtime Pay	22,100	17,584
	Subtotal	\$271,111	\$266,595
3	Rents and Leases	2,000	954
4	Repairs, Alterations	6,500	472
5	Printing	500	1,071
6	Professional & Technical	15,000	16,959
7	Purchased Services (Claims)	25,600	12,832
8	Communications	9,300	5,373
9	Travel	3,300	1,056
10	Employment Development	1,200	1,398
	Subtotal	\$63,400	\$40,115
11	Supplies and Materials	5,700	7,868
12	Fleet Mangement	21,069	21,069
13	Equipment	14,500	2,629
	Subtotal	\$41,269	\$31,566
	TOTAL	\$375,780	\$338,276

<u>LINE</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>EXPENDITURE</u>
1	Salaries, full time classified with benefits (Two N.R. Spec III, one N.R. Spec IV) (Unclassified and temporary assignments)	\$249,011
2	Overtime Pay	17,584
3	Rents and Leases (Maintenance contracts, parking cards for state vehicles, contracts for equipment)	954
4	Repairs (Equipment)	472
5	Printing	1,071
6	Professional and Technical Services (Laboratory costs and scientific research for the testing and verification of Divisional evidence)	16,959
7	Purchased Services and Claims, fines, etc. (Seminars, film processing, aircraft, meeting rooms and Funds dedicated for the purchase of evidence associated costs of commercial resource investigations)	12,832
8	Communications (Telephone charges, cell phones, pager rental, etc.)	5,373
9	Travel, In and Out State (Expenses incurred for intelligence sharing, training, etc.)	1,056
10	Employment Development	1,398
11	Supplies and Materials (Gasoline, audio/video tapes, batteries, office supplies, etc.)	7,868
12	Fleet Management (Vehicle operational costs paid to DNR fleet management)	21,069
13	Equipment	2,629
	TOTAL	\$338,276

ANTICIPATED FISCAL YEAR 2000 EXPENDITURES

<u>LINE</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>ALLOCATION</u>
1	Salaries Full-time	256,080
2	Overtime Pay	25,512
3	Rents and Leases	1,400
4	Repairs, Alterations	4,550
5	Printing	1,850
6	Professional and Technical Services	17,000
7	Computer and System Services	400
8	Purchased Services (Claims, fines, etc.)	9,520
9	Communications	6,510
10	Travel In-State	2,310
11	Supplies and Materials	3,990
12	Employee Development	840
13	Equipment	10,150
	TOTAL	\$340,112

