

# fiscal forum

---

October 2015 A Legislative Briefing



Mary Ann Cleary, Director  
P.O. Box 30014, Lansing, MI 48909-7514  
517-373-8080 • [www.house.mi.gov/hfa](http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa)

---

## Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement

*Austin Scott, Fiscal Analyst*

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is charged with the task of protecting, conserving, and managing Michigan's natural and cultural resources. The department's Law Enforcement Division is staffed by fully commissioned Conservation Officers (COs) who are charged with the task of enforcing the state laws and rules that regulate Michigan's public lands and recreational activities. Funding for DNR's Law Enforcement Division is included in the annual DNR budget.

### *Background*

Michigan's COs trace their roots back to 1887 when the state's first game warden was appointed. These early wardens focused primarily on the enforcement of hunting, fishing, and forestry regulations. The mission of DNR law enforcement has evolved over the past 128 years to include public health and safety, off road vehicle (ORV) safety, boating and snowmobile safety, and rural and urban law enforcement, as well as environmental protection. Today COs are responsible for public lands including 102 state parks, 138 state forest campgrounds, and over 12,000 miles of trails. Conservation Officers work in concert with the Michigan State Police as well as local and federal authorities to carry out their expanded mission. The job competencies of COs are divided into four primary categories:<sup>1</sup>

- Cognitive – The communicative standards and sound judgment-based decision-making required to carry out strenuous duties in adverse conditions
- Agility – The physical standards required to meet the demands of a wide variety of law enforcement activities
- Enforcement – The effective employment of law enforcement equipment including arms and vehicles as well as subject searches and apprehension
- Skills – Conduct searches of specific areas, proficiency with firearms, proficiency with operating land and water vessels, maintain licensure inspection and record keeping standards

Additional functions include proper presentation of departmental uniforms and further responsibilities assigned as necessary. Prospective COs must have earned a high school diploma or GED at minimum and many have higher education and/or military experience as well. The extensive application process includes cognitive and physical testing as well as background checks. Applicants who are hired complete a 22-week Conservation Officer academy and an 18-week probationary training period in the field of duty.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: [http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-42199\\_67298-236862--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-42199_67298-236862--,00.html)

## Organization

The Department of Natural Resources' law enforcement efforts are organized into nine field districts, one Lansing district (education and public safety programming, officer training, emergency management, communications) and one Specialist district (Great Lakes Enforcement Unit and Special Investigations Unit). The COs stationed in each of the field districts are responsible for enforcement and conservation in their respective districts. At present there are 218 commissioned COs, which includes 37 probationary COs. These districts are organized as follows:

**Table 1  
Conservation Officers by District**

District	Total COs	Counties
1 Western Upper Peninsula	19	Baraga, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Keweenaw, Marquette, Menominee, Ontonagon
2 Eastern Upper Peninsula	15	Alger, Chippewa, Delta, Mackinac, Luce, Schoolcraft
3 Northern Lower Peninsula	20	Alpena, Antrim, Cheboygan, Charlevoix, Emmet, Montmorency, Otsego, Presque Isle
4 Northwest Coast	26	Benzie, Grand Traverse, Lake, Leelanau, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, Wexford
5 Northeast Coast	24	Alcona, Arenac, Clare, Crawford, Gladwin, Iosco, Kalkaska, Missaukee, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Roscommon
6 Bay Area	19	Bay, Gratiot, Huron, Isabella, Midland, Montcalm, Saginaw, Sanilac, Tuscola
7 Southwest Coast	24	Allegan, Barry, Berrien, Cass, Ionia, Kalamazoo, Kent, Muskegon, Ottawa, St. Joseph, Van Buren
8 Central Lower Michigan	24	Branch, Calhoun, Clinton, Eaton, Hillsdale, Ingham, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Shiawassee, Washtenaw
9 Southeast Coast	19	Genesee, Lapeer, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, Wayne
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>190</b>	
Lansing	18	Education and public safety programming, officer training, emergency management, communications
Specialists	10	Great Lakes Enforcement Unit, Special Investigations Unit
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>218</b>	

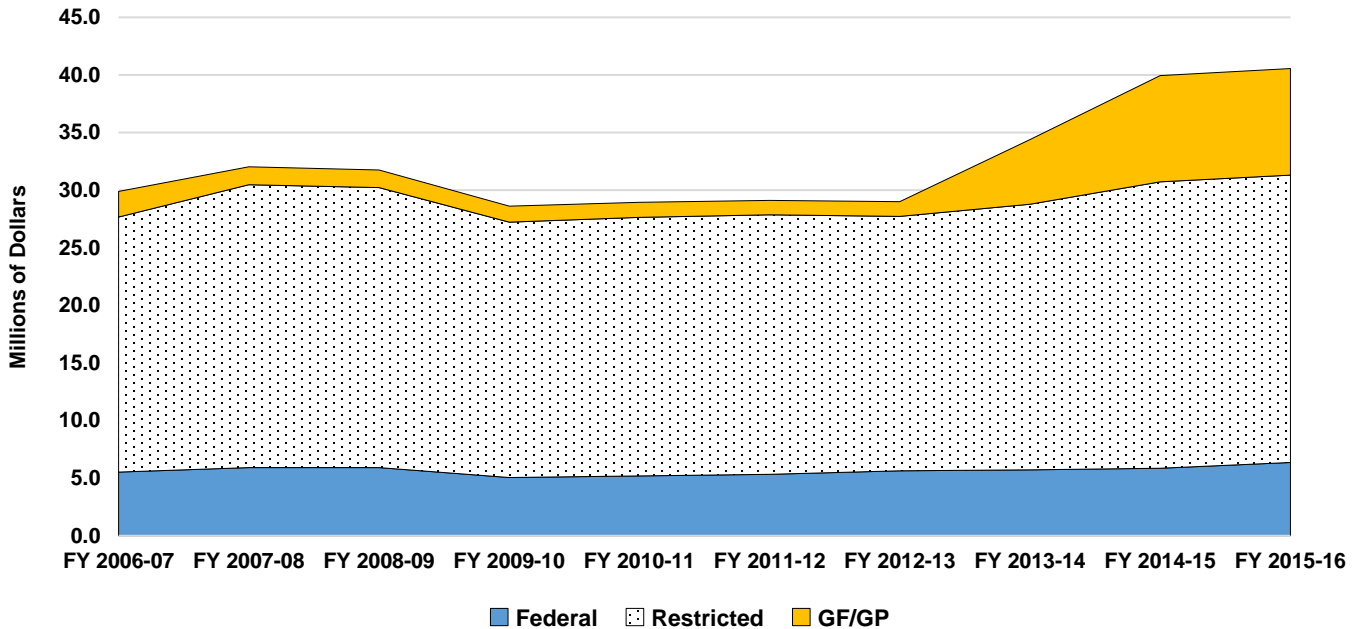
## Appropriation History

The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions and amount of line item appropriations for DNR's Law Enforcement Division have varied over the past decade. From FY 2006-07 to FY 2015-06 the department and division have undergone changes, including DNR's short-lived consolidation with the Department of Environmental Quality to comprise the Department of Natural Resources & Environment (DNRE) for FY 2010-11. This united department included the Environmental Investigations line item under the DNRE umbrella. Further changes have included increases and decreases in federal, restricted, and General Fund/General Purpose (GF/GP) funding as well as ebbs and flows in FTEs.

## Line Item Funding

Over the past decade the Law Enforcement Division’s budget has consisted of a single line item labeled “General Law Enforcement” with two additional exceptions: \$1.6 million in restricted funding for Wildlife Resource Protection in FY 2006-07, and the aforementioned \$2.7 million in gross funding for Environmental Investigations in FY 2010-11 (DNRE).

**Figure 1  
Law Enforcement Division Annual Appropriations**



Total appropriations for the Law Enforcement Division remained in the \$29.0 million to \$32.0 million range from FY 2006-07 to FY 2012-13. Restricted funding has remained relatively consistent as well, the majority of which has come from the Game and Fish Protection Fund. However, annual increases in GF/GP funding from FY 2013-14 through FY 2015-16 has led to an increase in the General Law Enforcement line item from \$29.0 million (FY 2012-13) to \$40.6 million (FY 2015-16). These GF/GP increases in FY 2013-14 and FY 2014-15, and their corresponding FTE increases, funded CO academies in their respective fiscal years. These academies addressed the department’s need for additional COs to staff the state’s nine DNR law enforcement field districts.

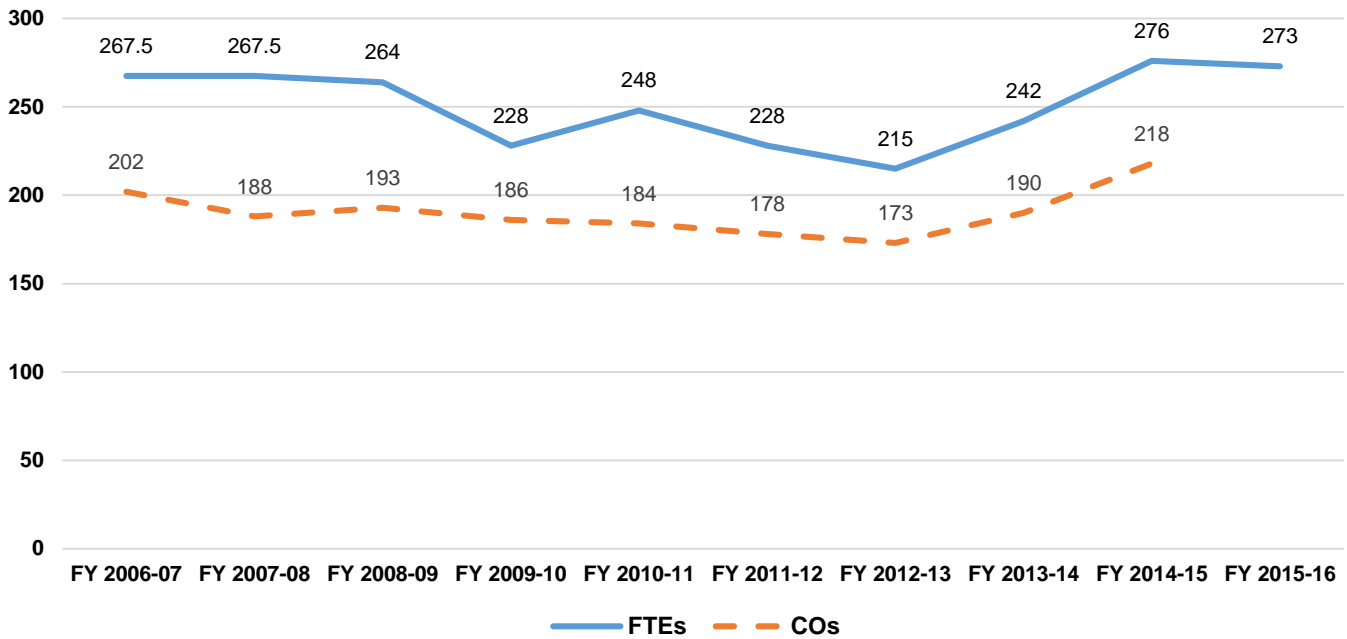
## FTEs and Commissioned COs

Law Enforcement Division FTEs saw a downturn from 267.5 positions in FY 2006-07 to 228.0 positions in FY 2009-10. The aforementioned creation of DNRE for FY 2010-11 brought an additional 20.0 FTEs for Environmental Investigations, but the number of FTEs then decreased to a decade-low of 215.0 in FY 2012-13. Division FTEs have since increased to more than 270.0 FTEs in the two most recently enacted budgets, due in part to a new CO academy authorized as part of the FY 2014-15 budget.

The number of commissioned COs has followed a similar trend over the same period but without a spike caused by the creation of DNRE in FY 2010-11. There were 202 commissioned COs at year-end in 2007, which dipped to 188 the following year and hit a low of 173 in 2013. However, the number of commissioned COs grew to 190 in 2014 and is currently at 218 as of September 2015. These recent increases are consequences of the CO academies funded in FY

2013-14 and FY 2014-15. The division also employs 20 non-commissioned staff members in a variety of capacities. These staff members work in law enforcement dispatch, training and policy development, recreational safety programming, and divisional finance management.

**Figure 2**  
**Division Full Time Equivalents and Conservation Officers**



**Conservation Officer Academies**

The FY 2013-14 and FY 2014-15 budgets provided \$4.6 million and \$3.5 million increases (respectively) in GF/GP to fund Conservation Officer academies. The FY 2013-14 academy graduated 23 COs and the FY 2014-15 academy produced 37 graduates. Two of the 2014 academy graduates are no longer with the department and all 37 of the 2015 academy graduates are still serving in probationary status. These new COs are assigned as follows:

**Table 2**  
**Conservation Officer Graduates by District**

District	2014 Academy Graduates	2015 Academy Graduates	Total
1	2	3	5
2	3	4	7
3	3	1	4
4	1	4	5
5	1	5	6
6	2	4	6
7	3	1	4
8	2	9	11
9	4	6	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>58</b>

## Conclusion

The recent appropriation increase in DNR's General Law Enforcement line item is due to an increase in GF/GP funding. This funding has been necessary to cover the higher personnel costs associated with employing the additional COs who have graduated from the 2014 and 2015 academies. In FY 2014-15 the number of commissioned COs exceeded 200 for the first time in over a decade, bringing this number of COs back to pre-2006 levels. The State of Michigan began prefunding postemployment benefits for retired state employees in FY 2011-12 which has increased retirement legacy costs applied across all payroll including that of the new COs. Additional funding for a CO academy has not been included in the FY 2015-16 DNR budget.

\* \* \*

*NOTE: This report was written by Austin Scott, Fiscal Analyst. Kathryn Bateson, Administrative Assistant, prepared the report for publication.*



P.O. Box 30014 ■ Lansing, MI 48909-7514  
(517) 373-8080  
[www.house.mi.gov/hfa](http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa)