The 1981 Idaho Legislature...

Most Idaho legislators cool to Fish & Game Dept.

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(Editor's note: This is the 13th in a series of 16 articles giving the views of East Idaho legislators and the leadership on the salient issues shaping up for the coming session. This is on Fish and Game Department funding and administration.)

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The Idaho Fish & Game Department has few friends among East Idaho legislators and the leadership if replies to a Post-Register questionnaire are any criteria.

The vast majority sharply fault the department for what they say is poor management and most of them express opposition to funding increases, just as they do for most other state functions.

The powerful leadership, such as Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls; Majority Leader Walter E. Little, R-New Plymouth; Assistant Majority Leader Darwin Young, R-Blackfoot; House Minority Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg; Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs; and Senate Majority Leader James Risch, R-Boise, are among the department's severest critics.

Hammond said he wanted a better handle on administration of the department, that he doesn't want to see increased license fees and supports giving the department only what money is available.

Olmstead said he would favor a modest increase but all the others expressed disfavor of the department for its management, administration and against license increases.

These same views are voiced by most other lawmakers in East Idaho.

Sen. Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby, just added as a member of the powerful Joint Finance Appropriation Committee, said, "The department lacks management." He feels the department should pay more attention to predatory control, reduce salaries for some of the executives and not be given increased funding.

Rep. Kurt L. Johnson, R-Idaho Falls, feels more kindly by saying "with dedicated funds, such as the Fish and Game Dept. depends upon, they do need this fee increase."

Sen. William Floyd, R-Idaho Falls, calls for developing a quality program. He favors increased out-of-state licenses, adding the out-of-state hunters just don't come in for the meat but for the total experience.

Floyd, who has spent considerable time in Wyoming, suggests Idaho's using the Wyoming system as a model and keep fish and game out of politics.

Rep. Martin Trillhaase, R-Idaho Falls, also favors out-of-state fee increases to match those of neighboring states. He says, "Funding should be adjusted to assure competent management and give sportsmen and citizens the programs they demand."

From Sen. Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, also a JFAC member, comes the novel suggestion for the Fish and Game Department director to be elected, adding, "It would be an inducement for him to be more responsible to the people."

Rep. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls, said she would like to see expanded fish and game programs and likely get more money but agrees with most others the department is not doing a good job.

Sen. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, chairman of the Senate Resources and Environment Committee, is one of the few who feels there should be some area for fish and game program expansion but takes dim views on increased funding.

Such legislators as Sens. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, and Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, both JFAC members, who are usually found on opposite sides, agreed against any increased fish and game funding.

Rep. Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls, is more flexible, saying with the rapid increase in population it is necessary for Idaho to provide added protection to its wildlife resources. He calls for more enforcement officials in the field and for an increase in license fees.