

News Release

**For Immediate
Release**
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Contact Colonel Mike Bise, Major Steve Pike, Major Dee
Watts, 804-367-0171

"Game Warden" Name Changing to "Conservation Police Officer"

Richmond, VA — Effective July 1, 2007, Virginia's game wardens will have a new name. The sworn officers in the Law Enforcement Division of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) will be called "conservation police officers." The Virginia General Assembly approved the change at their recent session. The name change is intended to clarify the authority of these officers who have full police powers and statewide jurisdiction.

Game wardens have been serving in law enforcement in Virginia since 1903, when the Virginia General Assembly established a statewide system of game wardens to enforce wildlife laws. In fact, game wardens in Virginia have a history that predates the creation of VDGIF which wasn't established until 1916.

In today's more urban Virginia, game warden work often intersects with mainstream law enforcement. In the course of performing duties related to the agency mission — enforcing wildlife, fisheries and boating laws — game wardens are now dealing with situations requiring immediate police intervention, such as drivers under the influence, reckless drivers, drug and gang activities, homeland security issues and frequent assistance to other law enforcement agencies. VDGIF's law enforcement personnel patrol the Commonwealth every day. They are on the waters, in the woods, and on the roadways, encountering all the same public safety issues as other police officers do. According to Colonel Mike Bise, chief of the Law Enforcement Division, "When situations create a threat to public safety, the public expects the person with a gun and a badge to act." But, more and more frequently VDGIF officers find themselves dealing with people who do not understand their law enforcement authority.

In addition to being more suburban and urban, Virginia is more culturally diverse than ever before and the word "police" is almost universally recognized. Early last summer the Board of Game and Inland Fisheries approved using the word "police" in the markings of many of VDGIF's larger patrol boats. According to Bise, "The response from the public was great with noticeably more respect for what our officers do." Bise went on to say, "To the people we routinely interact with we will be game wardens for the next 25 years and we think that's great. This name change is so folks who don't know who we are will better understand our law enforcement role. It does not mean we are changing our mission focus."

Bise added, "We certainly appreciate the support of Delegate Rob Wittman, who was the patron of the bill, the General Assembly for their unanimous passage of the bill, and Governor Tim

Kaine for his support of what is an important step for our officers in better serving the Commonwealth."

The name change from "game warden" to "conservation police officer" will involve changes to badges, uniform patches and patrol vehicle door decals. The modest costs of these changes are covered in the existing agency budget.

It is the mission of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; and to promote safety for persons and property in connection with these outdoor activities. For more information, visit the Department web site at www.dgif.virginia.gov.