

IDNR tries to overlook officer's actions

Written by By Don Mulligan
Thursday, 02 February 2012 09:29 -



Twenty-five years ago, while I was still attending school, I spent three years as a probation officer. I had no arrest powers, but did have a badge. I took little away from that job other than a respect for law enforcement and a couple life lessons from a stern, but fair, chief.

One of the things he told me the first day I met him was that as an officer, I would be held to a higher standard when it came to abiding by the law. If I was arrested or broke even a minor law for any reason, I would get no help from him and would be fired.

It was a matter of character for him, and I agreed.

So, when the Indianapolis Star newspaper recently reported that in 2007, two Indiana Conservation Officers falsely used an Ohio address on their fishing applications in 2007 to buy Ohio resident licenses and save \$21 each, I assumed the story would end with their dismissal. It did not.

Despite the fact that two Ohio Officers received written reprimands for their role in aiding the Indiana Conservation Officers in their acts, our DNR took another position.

According to the Star, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources decided not to discipline the Indiana officers because the Ohio prosecutor closed the case without filing any charges.

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Falsifying residence on an Ohio license for anyone else could result in a first-degree misdemeanor and 180 days in jail. The Indiana officers likely knew they could get away with it, however, since at least one of them had done it before.

One of the Indiana officers had previously received an Ohio deer permit using the same bogus address. When pressed, he said the practice has been accepted and practiced in Kentucky as well.

Evidently, though it is against the law for everyone else, our DNR has a history of allowing out-of-state employees of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and conservation officers of other states to buy an Indiana license to hunt or fish at resident rates.

All of this might have just been swept under the rug, but for the Star article. Soon after the piece ran, House Bill 1279 was introduced, buried in a multitude of housekeeping rules for the IDNR.

HB1279 "removes a provision allowing a Federal Fish and Wildlife Service Officer or conservation officer from a jurisdiction to hunt or fish in Indiana after obtaining a resident license."

The necessity of this bill is infuriating to anyone who has been cited for the crime by an Indiana conservation officer.

What is most disturbing about the entire incident, however, is that the IDNR is only quietly remedying the situation after being caught.

Rob Carter, the current IDNR director, was the director of law enforcement for two years before taking the helm. Before that, he was a sheriff.

It is unlikely he hasn't known about the practice for a long time.

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One year into my stint as a probation officer, another officer was arrested for public intoxication. He tried to use his badge to avoid arrest, but was unsuccessful.

True to his word, the chief had that officer's belongings waiting for him in a box when he returned to the office the next day.

"It just comes down to a matter of character," he reminded the rest of us.

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