

Operations and Performance of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

Study resolution

Review the operations, performance, and management of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF)

- revenue and cash balances
- conservation police officer operations and structure
- land acquisition process
- coordination with other agencies

JLARC study resolution, 2017

Research activities

Structured interviews

- DGIF staff
- Stakeholders and subject-matter experts
- Federal agency and other states' staff

Surveys

- Hunters, anglers, & boaters
- DGIF staff
- Board of Game and Inland Fisheries

Data and document analysis

- DGIF spending and revenue
- License structure and fees in Virginia and in other states
- Enforcement actions
- Policies and guidance documents

In brief

DGIF currently has sufficient revenue, but options exist to raise additional revenue if necessary.

The conservation police force leadership position has been vacant for 3.5 years, and officers lack adequate guidance.

DGIF's land acquisition process is effective but lacks overarching strategy and maintenance focus.

DGIF staff and conservation police are cited as professional and high quality.

Staff are satisfied with working at DGIF but expressed concerns about leadership and workplace culture.

In this presentation

Background

Revenue & licensing

Conservation police officers

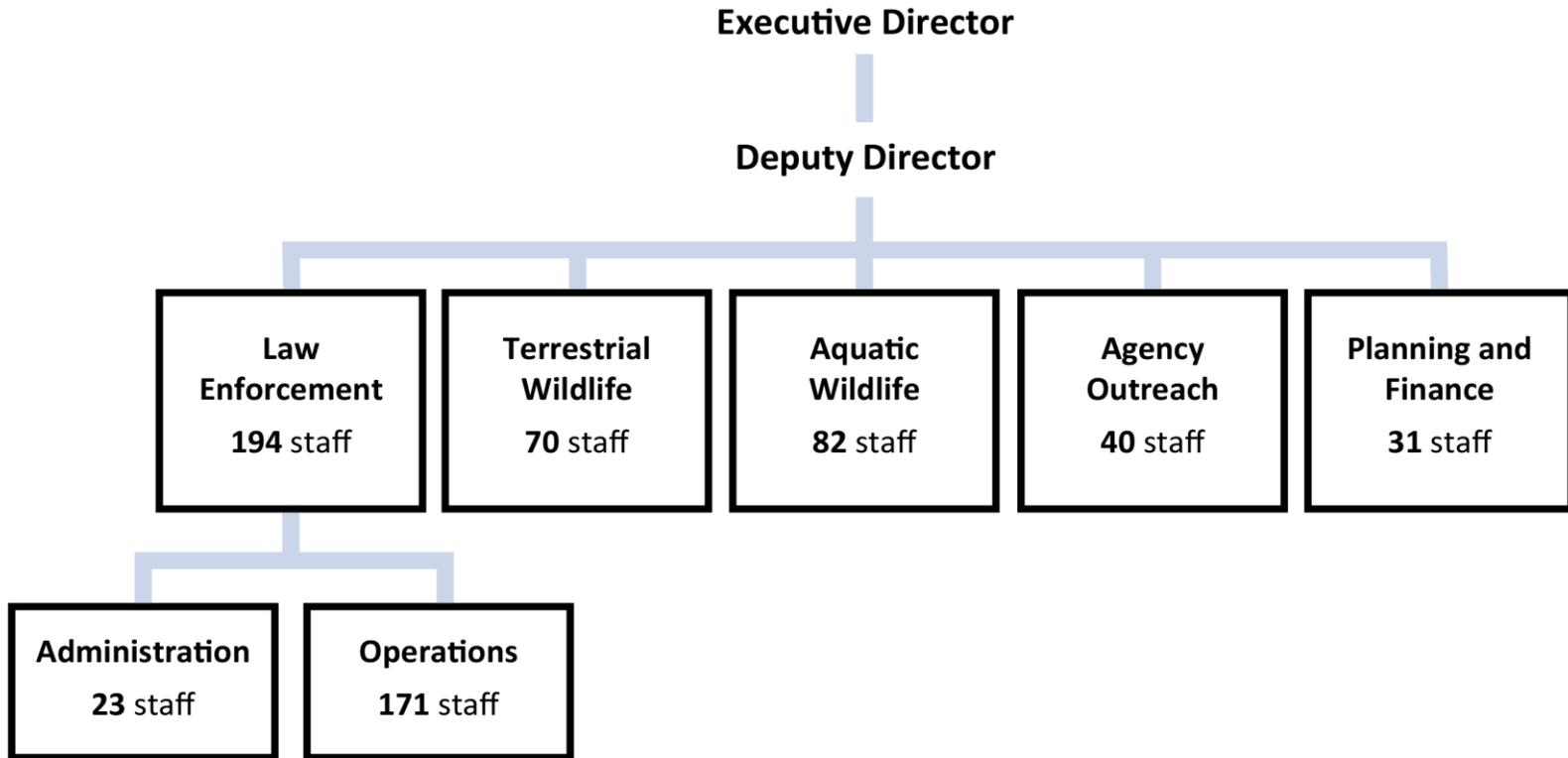
Wildlife management & land conservation

Agency management

DGIF enforces laws and regulations, and manages and conserves wildlife and habitat

- DGIF employs \approx 200 conservation police who enforce hunting, fishing, and boating laws and regulations
- DGIF sold more than 1 million licenses, permits, or stamps to hunt and fish in FY19
- DGIF owns 46 wildlife management areas and other property totaling more than 220,000 acres

DGIF employs ≈ 440 staff, led by a new executive director appointed earlier this year



DGIF receives revenue from 20 federal and state sources

- About half of DGIF's revenue is from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and boat registrations
- Another one-quarter is federal revenue primarily resulting from a federal excise tax on firearms, ammunition, and hunting and fishing equipment
- DGIF also receives proceeds from the state's (i) sales tax on hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching equipment, and (ii) watercraft sales and use tax

In this presentation

Background

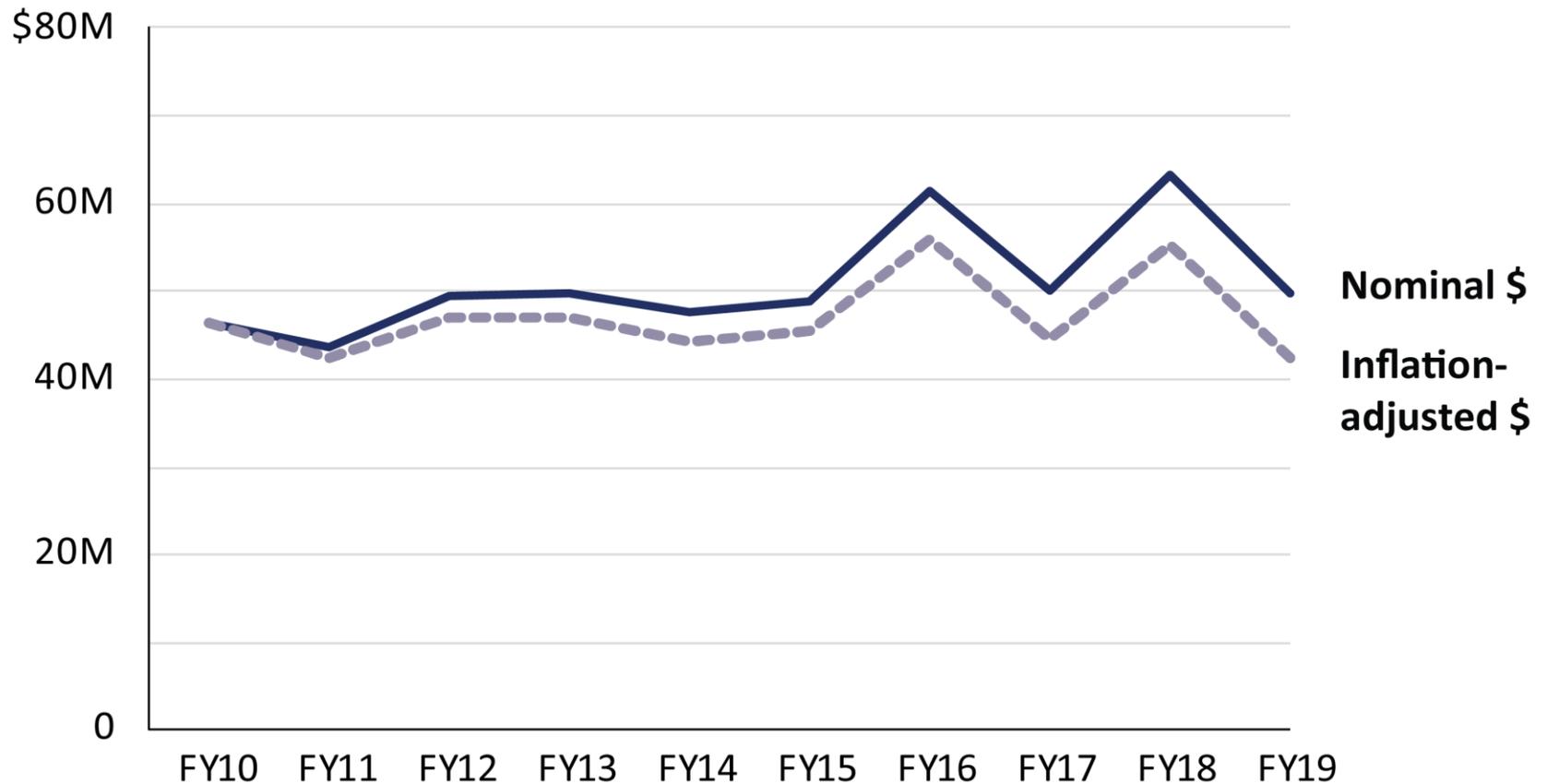
Revenue & licensing

Conservation police officers

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DGIF revenue has increased but is not keeping pace with inflation



Findings

DGIF has sufficient revenue in the near term, but additional revenue could be raised through changes to licensing and registration (if necessary in the future).

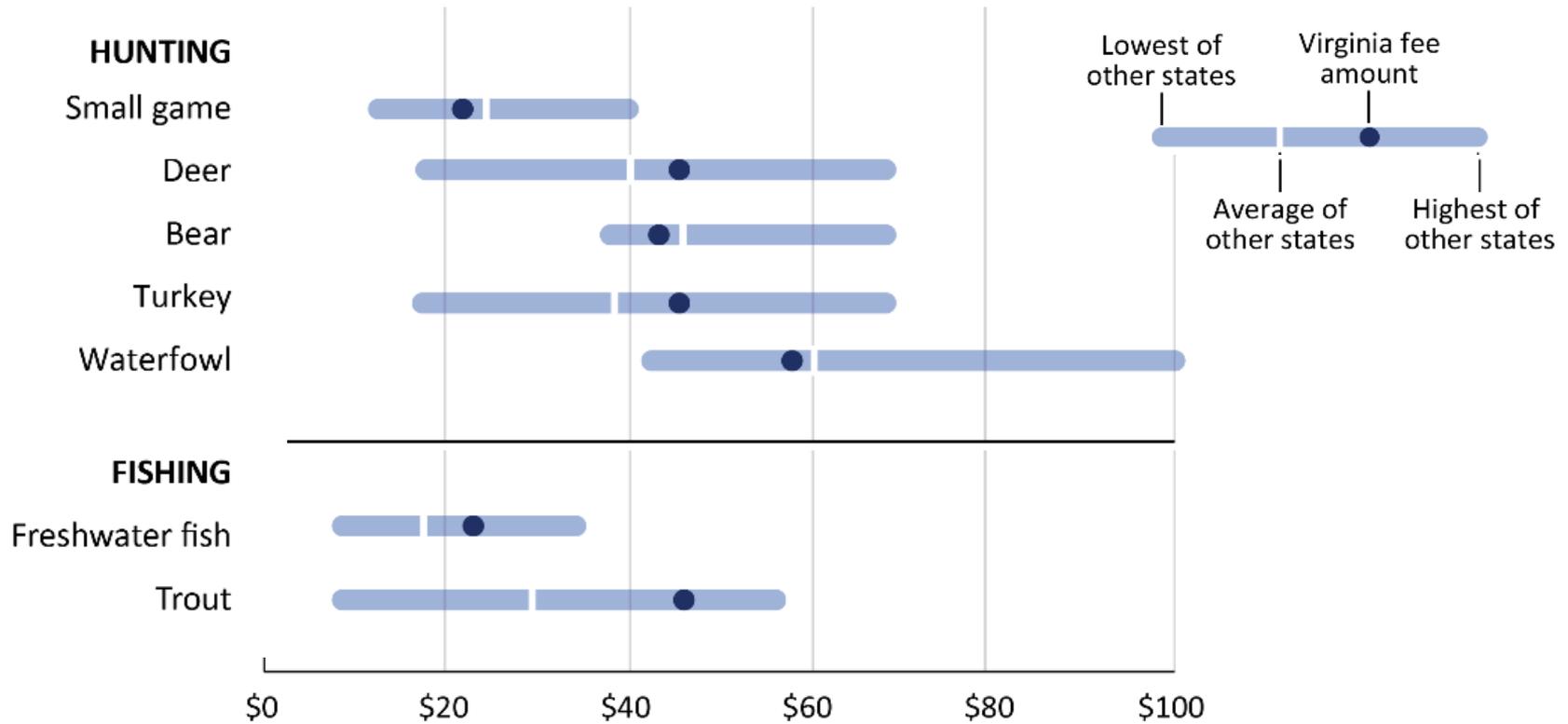
DGIF revenue covers payroll and other key spending and has available cash balances

FY19

Payroll (salaries & benefits)	\$40.6M
Other key spending (facilities, utilities, IT)	6.7M
Key spending	47.3M
Revenue	\$49.8M
Revenue minus key spending	\$2.5M

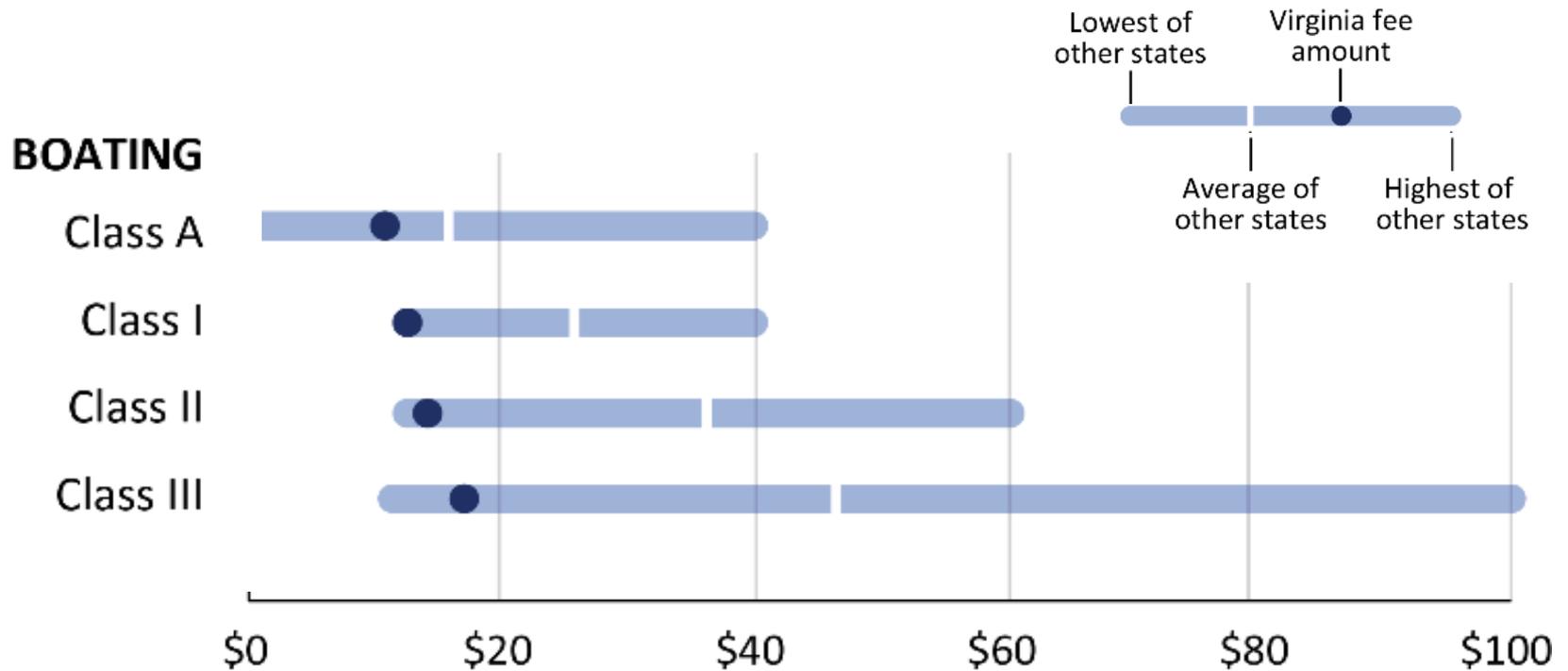
- DGIF also has \$37 million in available fund balances that it can access as needed if revenue shortfalls occur

Virginia's hunting and freshwater fishing fees are similar to other states; trout fees are higher



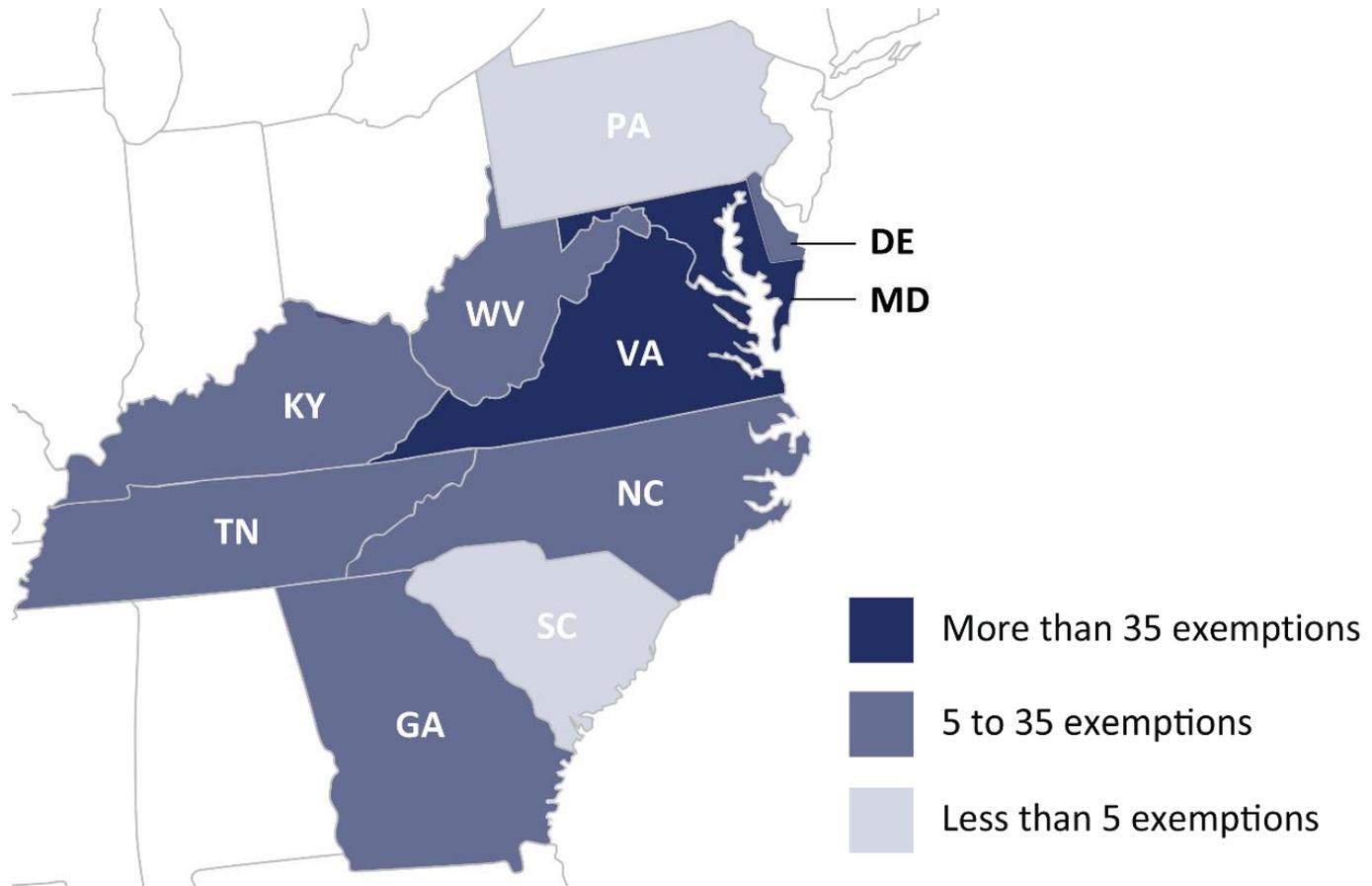
States for comparison: Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Virginia's fees to register medium and large boats are substantially less than other states

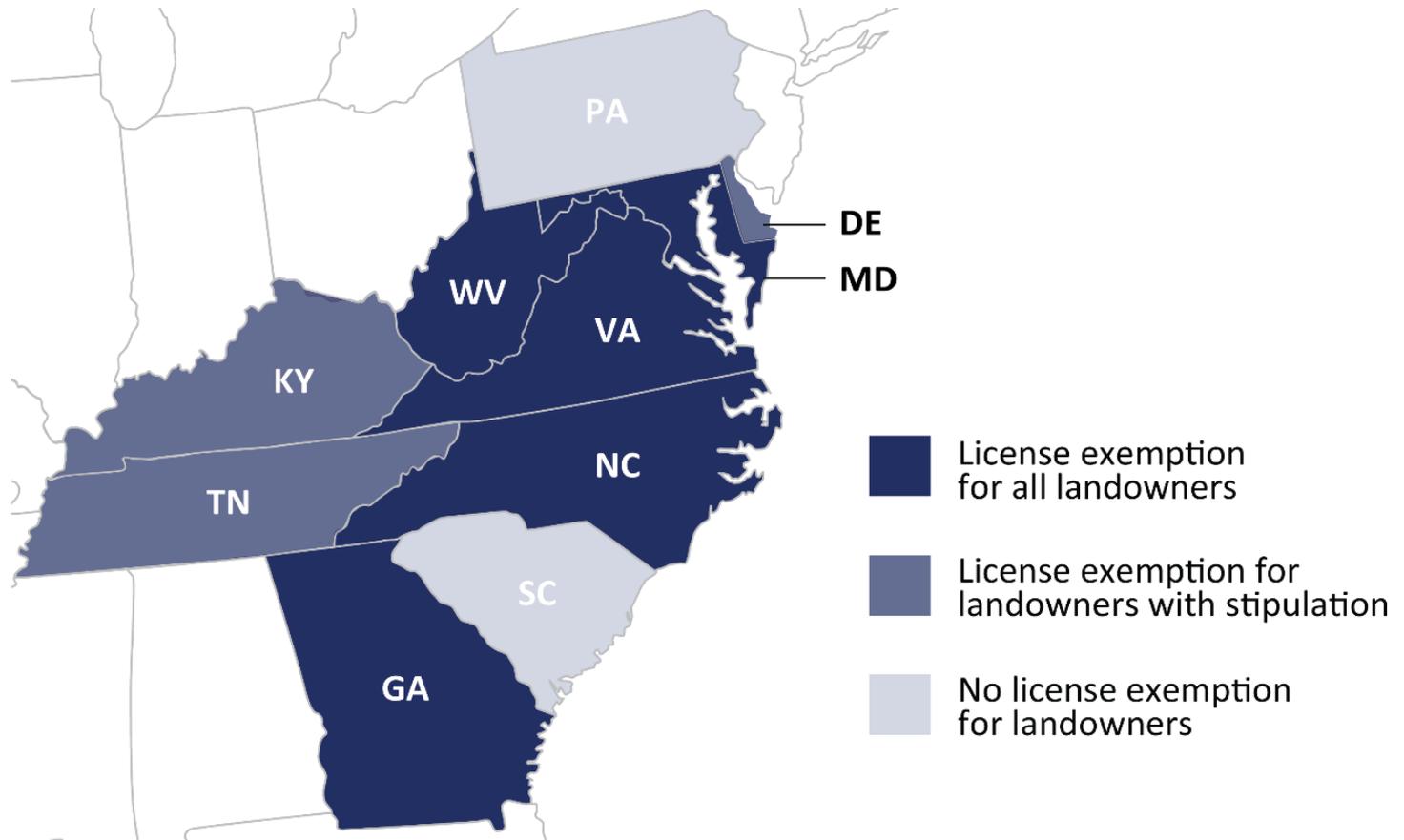


States for comparison: Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Virginia has more hunting and fishing license exemptions than most other states



Virginia has broader exemptions than most other states



Options

Increase boat registration fees to raise additional revenue as needed.

Authorize charging exempt hunters and anglers a nominal fee to register, allowing Virginia to claim forgone federal revenue.

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Revenue & licensing

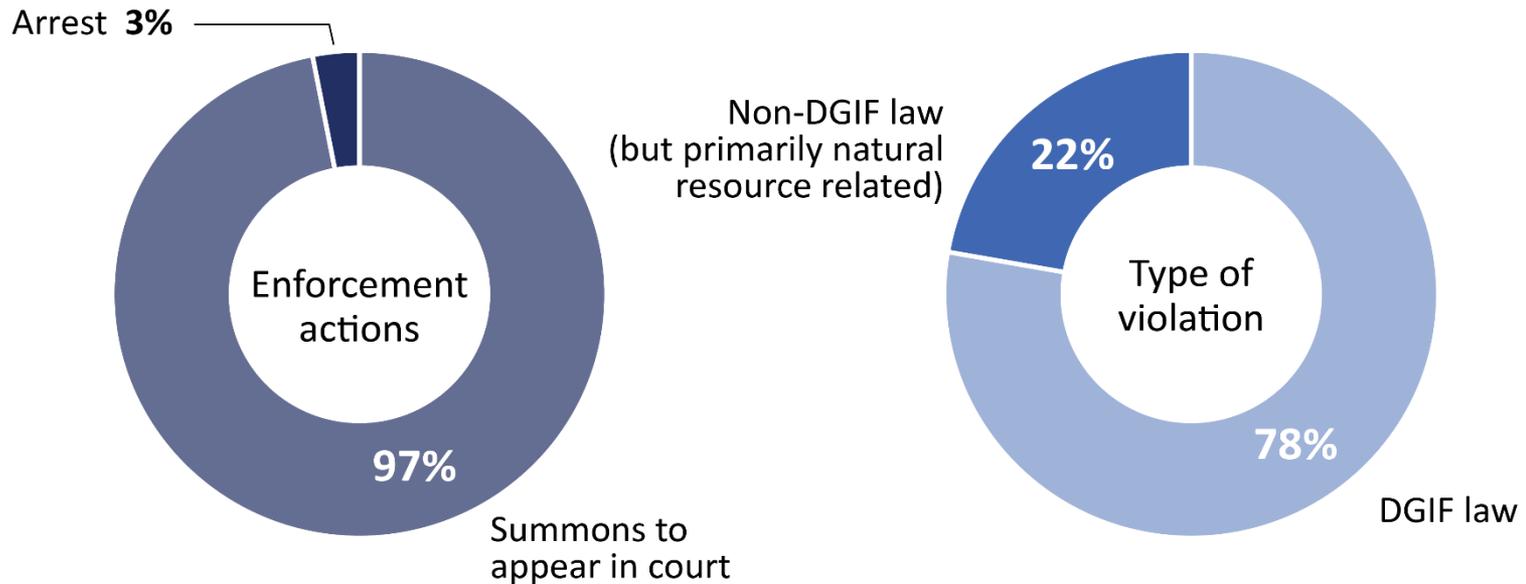
Conservation police officers (CPOs)

Wildlife management & land conservation

Agency management

Conservation police officers have authority to enforce all laws but focus on DGIF-related laws

- Enforcement authority similar to nearly all other states
- Most CPO enforcement actions are issuing summons for violating a DGIF-related law (FY13–18)



Findings

Conservation police officers are led by a colonel, but the position has been vacant since June 2016.

DGIF lacks a structured supervisory and leadership identification and development program for CPOs.

The colonel position has been vacant for 3.5 years

- During this time, there has been a general lack of leadership and decisiveness on key issues
 - “We lack direction and foresight”
 - “No clear, consistent guidance ... since we have been without a colonel”
- Code requires supervisory CPO vacancies to be filled with internal candidates, unless the director determines (in writing) there are no qualified, internal candidates

CPO supervisor identification and development is inadequate, and promotions may not be fully objective

- Lack of defined method to identify and develop conservation police officers for supervisory roles
- Only 13% of CPOs perceived that promotion decisions are based on merit
 - DGIF does not use a written exam
 - North Carolina, Georgia, and Maryland use written exams to provide some objectivity in promotion decisions

Recommendations

DGIF should hire a colonel no later than September 2020.

General Assembly should amend the Code to exempt the colonel position from the requirement to determine internal candidates are not qualified.

DGIF should implement a conservation police officer supervisory and leadership development program.

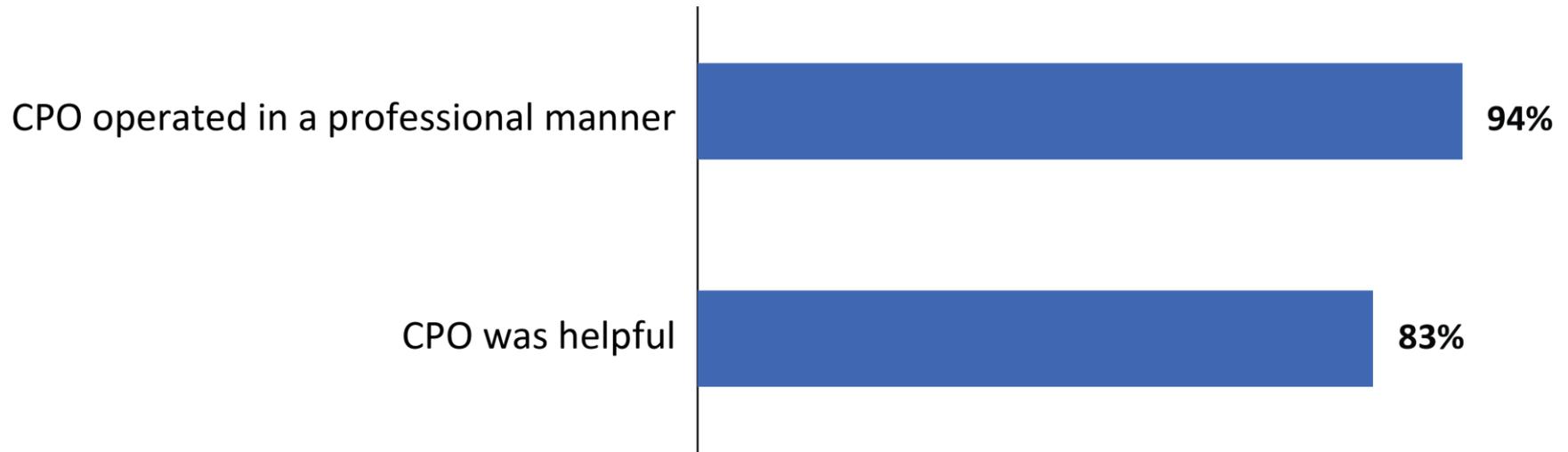
DGIF should supplement its conservation police officer promotion process with a written exam to provide additional, objective information.

Findings

When surveyed by JLARC, the public reported that CPOs were professional and helpful.

CPOs, though, lack adequate procedural guidance to ensure appropriate and consistent enforcement actions.

Citizens reported positive interactions with CPOs



JLARC survey of DGIF customers, June 2019.

Until recently, procedural guidance for CPOs had not been updated as frequently as required

- Most CPO guidance was written in 2005 and 2006, last reviewed and updated in 2012
- DGIF internal policy and best practice recommend reviewing and updating policy each year
- Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission requires reviewing and updating every four years
- DGIF began revising and issuing some new guidance last year, effort still underway

CPOs report guidance is not fully accurate; some report only minimal awareness of guidance

- 70% of CPO supervisors (sergeants, lieutenants, and captains) reported only “some” or “few or none” of guidance documents are accurate
- 30% of CPOs reported guidance is difficult to access; 13% were only “somewhat” or “slightly” aware of the contents of available guidance

Inadequate guidance may be contributing to varying enforcement actions across officers

- Across regions, CPOs surveyed by JLARC responded
 - consistently when asked how they would enforce a “fishing without a freshwater fishing license” violation
 - inconsistently when asked how they would enforce a “boating safety education requirement” violation
- Enforcement data shows that, on average, a CPO makes an arrest in 3% of enforcement actions (FY13–18)
 - 26 officers made arrests in fewer than 1%
 - 14 officers made arrests in 7% or more

Recommendations

DGIF should train and provide adequate written guidance as needed to ensure all officers consistently understand appropriate enforcement actions for given violations.

DGIF should analyze enforcement data for each officer annually to identify officers who may need additional training and guidance.

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Background

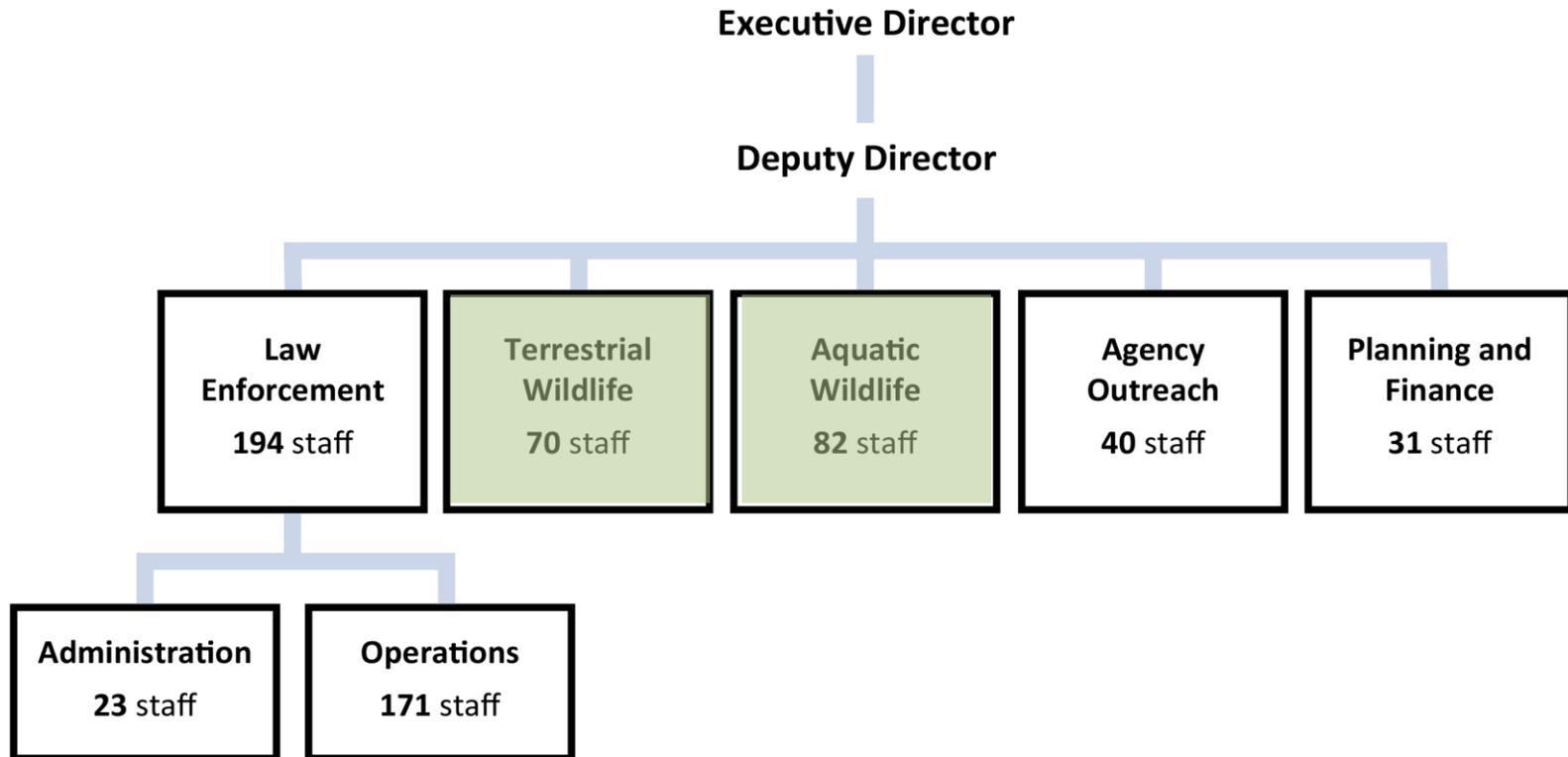
Revenue & licensing

Conservation police officers

Wildlife management & land conservation

Agency management

Wildlife management and land conservation is another major part of DGIF's mission



Findings

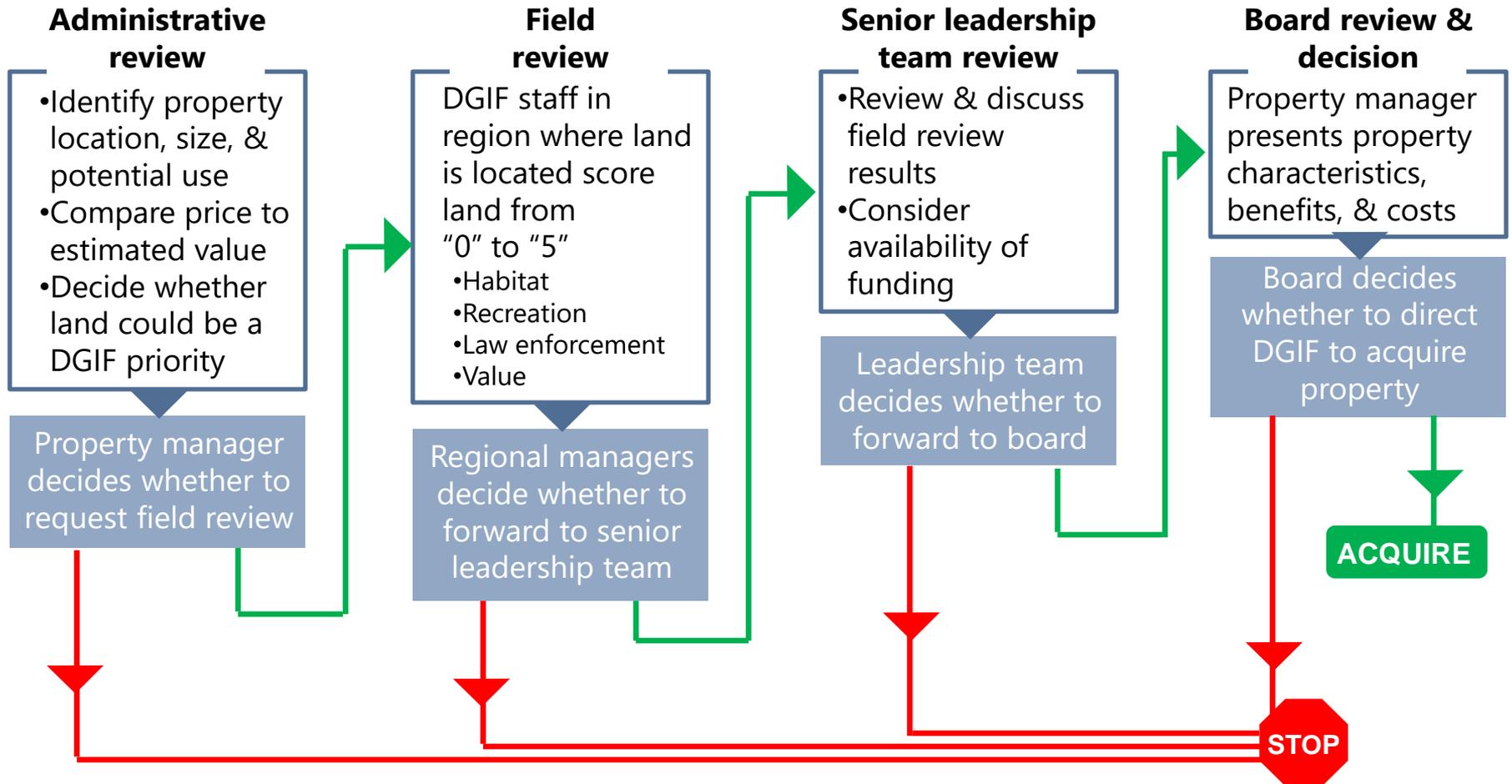
DGIF wildlife management and conservation staff and programs are highly regarded by stakeholders.

DGIF has an effective land acquisition process but needs an overarching strategy and better focus on maintenance.

DGIF wildlife management and conservation staff are well respected and highly regarded

- Stakeholder groups, federal officials, and conservation experts
 - Wildlife and conservation staff and programs are well respected
 - Leader among states in certain program areas

DGIF's land acquisition process is effective, featuring several cumulative process steps



DGIF's land acquisition process lacks an overarching strategy and focus on maintenance

- Lacks an updated acquisition strategy detailing the type of land it wants to acquire and the regions of the state where land is most needed
- Has not fully budgeted and staffed for necessary maintenance on current and future land holdings
 - Physical structures (roads, boat ramps, parking lots)
 - Natural habitat (forest management, prescribed burning, mowing)

Recommendation

DGIF should develop an updated land acquisition strategy that articulates (i) the type of land that is a priority, (ii) regions where land is most needed, and (iii) how it will adequately maintain current and future land.

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Finding

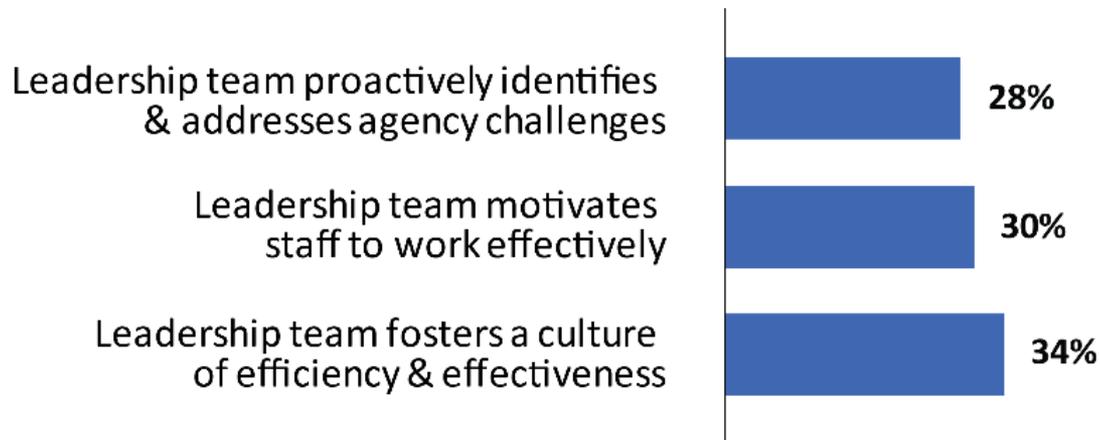
DGIF staff are generally satisfied and believe they can be productive but express concern about leadership and workplace culture.

DGIF staff are satisfied with their job and supervisor and know what is expected of them



JLARC survey of DGIF employees, 2019.

Staff expressed concerns about the senior leadership team's ability in certain areas



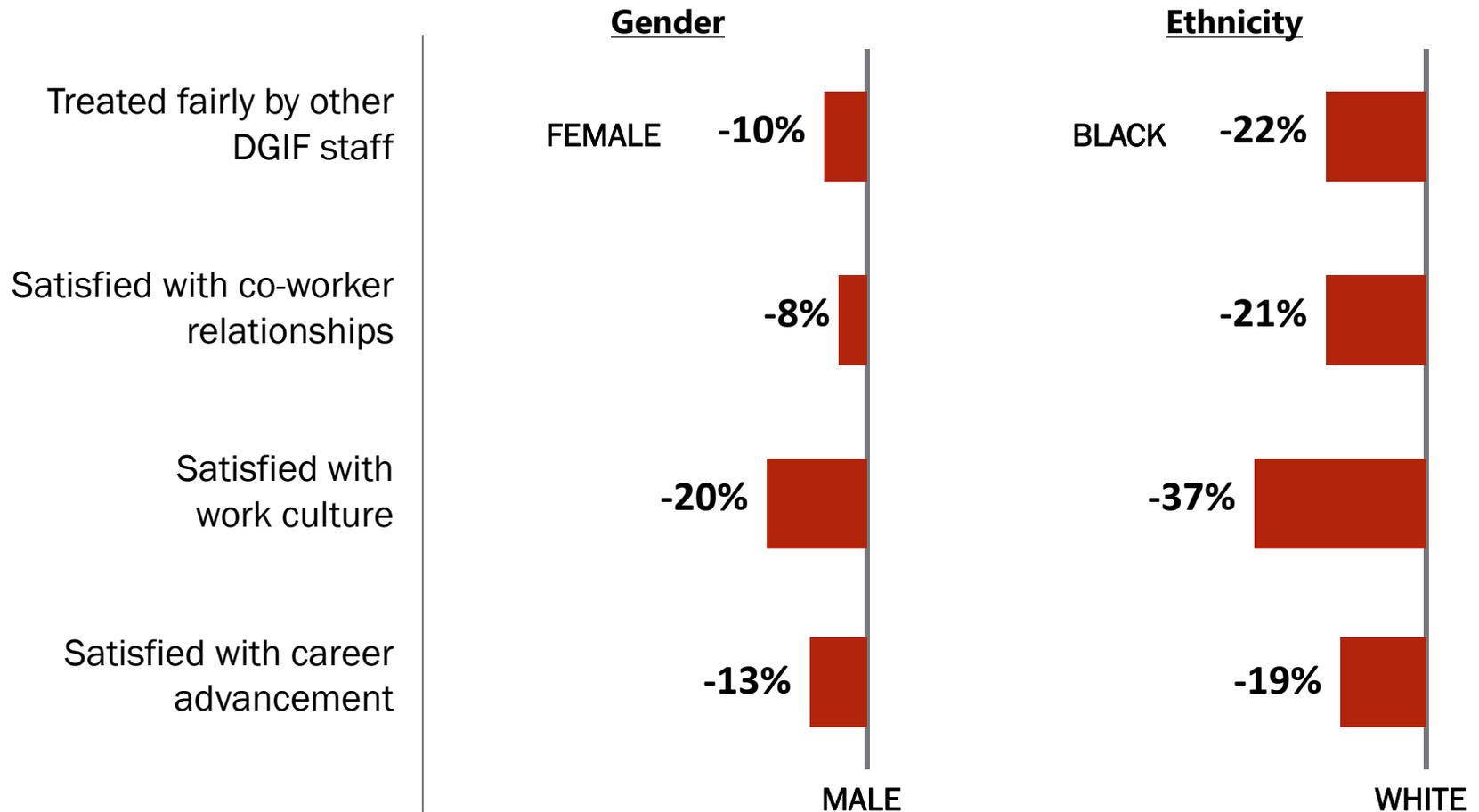
Senior leadership team = executive director, deputy director, and division directors.

Note: Survey was administered by JLARC when the prior executive director was in charge; before the recently appointed executive director was hired.

Staff noted the senior leadership team could improve communication and transparency

- “The senior leadership team is a black box. We have no idea what decisions they make or why.”
- “Leadership needs to be more transparent, visible, and better communicators.”

Staff satisfaction differs among females and minorities



The recently appointed executive director has several relevant initiatives underway

- Attempting to be more transparent with staff
 - Implementing an internal communications plan
 - Releasing minutes of senior leadership team meetings
- Attempting to better understand and address staff concerns across all staff
 - Board passed a resolution about importance of a diverse and inclusive workplace (August 2019)
 - Created and filled a diversity and inclusion officer position (October, December 2019)

Recommendations

DGIF should develop and implement a plan to gain staff confidence through (i) outreach, (ii) actions to address concerns, and (iii) improving communication.

Board of Game and Inland Fisheries should administer and review the results of a DGIF staff survey in 2021 to reassess staff perceptions.

Key findings

- The conservation police force colonel position has been vacant for 3.5 years.
- CPOs lack adequate procedural guidance, raising the risk of inappropriate or inconsistent enforcement.
- DGIF's land acquisition process is effective but lacks overarching strategy and maintenance focus.
- CPOs and wildlife staff are cited as professional and high quality.
- Staff are satisfied with working at DGIF but expressed concerns about leadership and workplace culture.

JLARC staff for this report

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