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FOR BRANCH COUNTY —  
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BRONSON, QUINCY, UNION  
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BRANCH DISTRICT LIBRARY

## Library faces major cuts, low income

By Matt Thompson

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Beginning the first of the year the Branch District Library will see cuts across the board from hours, staff and content.

For the Coldwater Branch Library it includes cutting half its book budget, cutting 43 percent of CD, audiobooks and DVD's as well as six less hours a week open to the

public. There will also be less staff to assist people while it is open.

The library has two major sources of income and that's taxes and penal fines. While taxes have gone down slightly over the past three years the penal fines have taken a major blow.

John Rucker, the Branch District Library Associate Director, added what the library has

received so far this year and estimated December and gave a calculated estimate of \$140,000 for the district from penal fines this year.

That is down 39 percent from last year's \$228,361 and 66 percent from \$413,441 penal fines from 2007.

"Our biggest hit has been from penal fines," Rucker said.

He said penal fines

downturn are from cuts in other parts in the government that trickled down to the library.

"For example the weight station open off I-69 used to make fines, but now its not open daily," he said. "The sheriff cutbacks and tickets written have been down with their cuts and people in the courthouse said people have even

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opted to go jail to instead of paying fines."

The amount of penal fines this year was the lowest since opening in 1991 according to Rucker.

These cutbacks are happening to a district library that already has one of the lowest expenses in the state. In the 2010-11 Michigan Public Library Statistics it showed that the Branch District Library spent \$2.17 expenditures per capita when the state average for libraries were \$4.33.

"It's getting to a point where we can only cut so much," Rucker said. "We don't know what the future holds. The truth is we are in rough shape."

Two online cuts could be happening in July. The Ancestry.com (helps track heritage) and Mango which helps learn languages are two online tools the library provides, but in July the contract ends.

"We have had a couple of donations sent for those,

but not enough yet," Rucker said. "If we don't get more those might have to go, but we don't know yet."

Last year \$80,000 was spent on new books, cutting it in half would take away from the library providing several copies of best sellers for the community. And from the original district contract from 1991 none of the branches outside Coldwater can have its books budget cut anymore, meaning the Coldwater Branch will take the big hit.

Aside from donations, the Branch District Library is looking to get awareness out about how much people like the library and that it needs help. Geekthelibrary.org gives library lovers a place to support it and raise awareness to what is going on.

"I spent a lot of time at the library growing up," one resident wrote on a Facebook post supporting the library that is facing cuts.

"I don't live in Coldwater anymore, but it is important to keep this resource for future generations!"