STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA

GAME

AND

FISH

DEPARTMENT

BIENNIAL REPORT
JULY 1, 2023 – JUNE 30, 2025

JEB WILLIAMS
DIRECTOR

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Agency History

The creation, in 1930, of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department was a continuation of efforts to preserve fish and game species in the state. At its inception, the enforcement of game and fish laws was the Department's primary conservation tool. Over the years, the legislature has increased enforcement authority and assigned regulatory powers to the agency aiding its efforts to preserve fish and wildlife and their habitats.

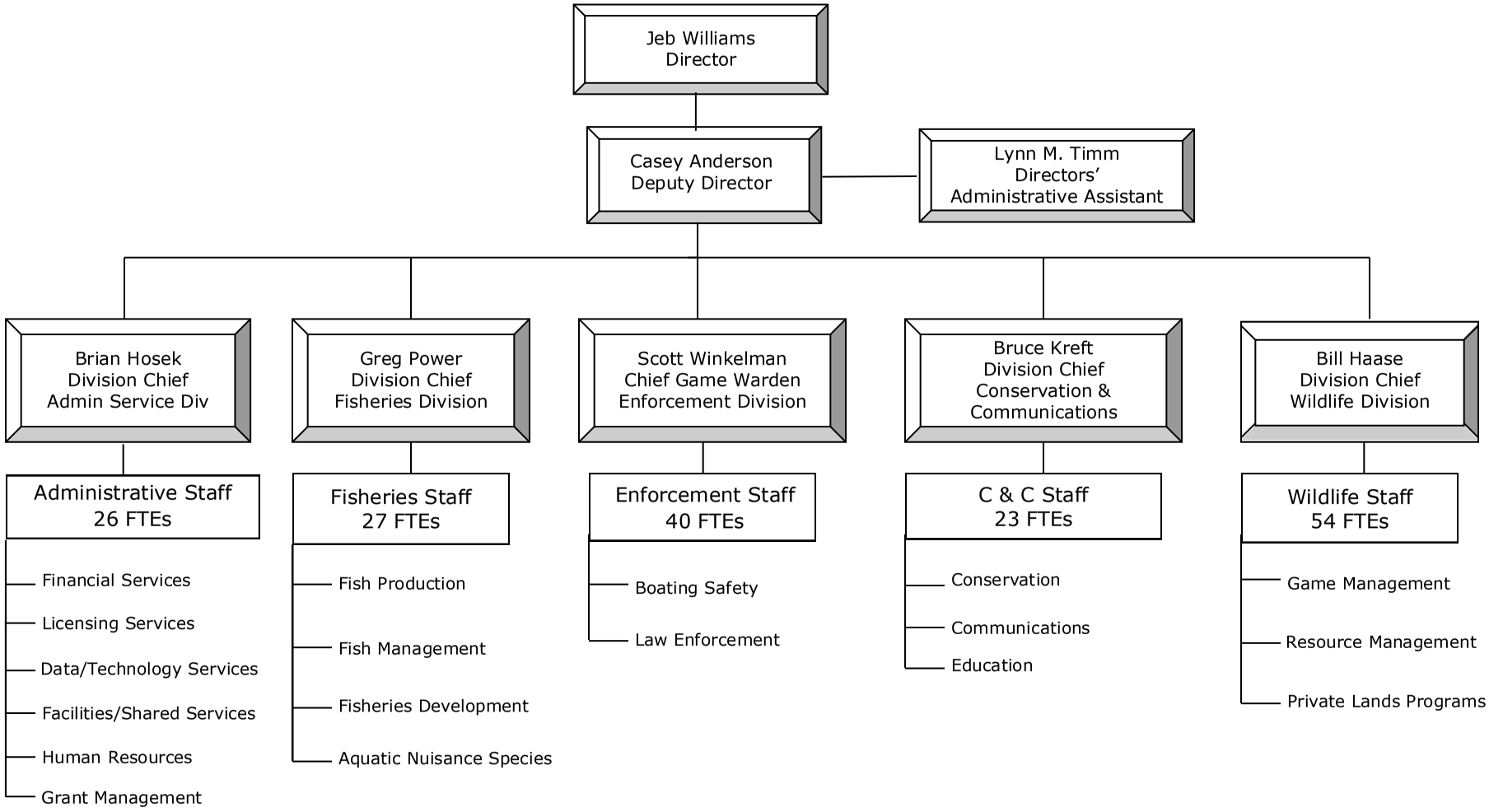
The availability of federal funds for wildlife management programs through the Pittman-Robertson Act (1937) enabled North Dakota and other states to begin scientific management of wildlife resources on a large scale. The Federal Aid in Fish Restoration Act, or the Dingell- Johnson Act (1950,) enabled fisheries restoration. In the 1980's, an amendment to the act expanded the tax to motor boat fuels and imported equipment, making more money available to states.

Since 1983, the Game and Fish Department has had regulatory powers over game, fish, and wildlife resources in North Dakota (S. L. 1983, Ch. 261). Specifically, under the direction of the Commissioner (Director), the Department has authority to promulgate rules and regulations governing management of game and fish resources; collaborate with the USFWS on the two federal hatcheries (Riverdale and Valley City) to produce fish to stock across the state's wildlife management areas; administer the state's habitat improvement program; survey and research fish and wildlife species; issue hunting and fishing licenses; enforce hunting and fishing laws; inform and educate the public on the Department's wildlife management programs; and publish the agency's magazine, North Dakota OUTDOORS (first issue published in 1930), and other informational publications as required by state law.

In 1991, the Commissioner was renamed the Director (S. L. 1991, Ch. 231). The Director was required to submit a proposed wildlife and fish restoration program and project plan and to update segments involving the proposed acquisition of area wetlands, water and land by purchase, lease, easement, or servitude. The Director was given authority to establish a statewide acquisition plan (S. L. 1991, Ch. 42). The Director was charged to appoint a deputy director, a chief state warden, biologists, and technicians all of whom were to enforce the rules and regulations of the Department. Under the supervision of the Director and the advisement of the State Game and Fish Advisory Board, the Department administers regulatory powers over game, fish, and wildlife resources in North Dakota.

The mission of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department is to protect, conserve, and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitat for sustained public consumptive and appreciative use. The Department is currently headquartered in Bismarck and consists of five major divisions: Administrative Services, Fisheries, Enforcement, Conservation and Communications, and Wildlife. There are seven district offices: Dickinson, Williston, Riverdale, Devils Lake, Lonetree, Jamestown, and the Bismarck Shop/Lab.

North Dakota
Game And Fish Department



07/1/2025

170 FTEs

Administrative Services Division Biennial Summary (2023–2025)

The Administrative Services Division, through the Director, establishes policy and provides critical organizational, business, and administrative support across the entire Department. The Division is comprised of the Director, Deputy Director, and Administrative Services Chief, and oversees the following core areas:

- Financial Services
- Grant Management
- Human Resources
- Licensing Services
- Data and Technology
- Facilities and Shared Services

Note: The Game and Fish related bills from the 2025 legislative session are provided in the attached appendix.

Department Funding and Economic Impact

The Department operates as a special fund agency, deriving 48% of its revenue from game and fish license sales and 52% from federal funding sources. During the 2023–2025 biennium, the Department received a legislative appropriation of $107,611,466.

The 2023–2025 biennium included a study by NDSU Agricultural Economics. The study estimated hunting and fishing generated $1.3 billion in economic value for North Dakota, with $383 million in direct spending in rural areas. This activity produced an estimated $47 million in annual sales tax revenue.

Note: The Game and Fish Department revenue, expenditure, and appropriation report is provided in the attached appendix.

Workforce

The Department maintained a workforce of 170 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, supplemented by up to 70 temporary and seasonal staff. The Department saw a 5% turnover in the workforce. Notably, the biennium saw 6 retirements in 2023 and 2 in 2024.

Facilities Capital Projects

Two major infrastructure projects were completed during the reporting period. In Jamestown, a new facility was constructed to support the Aquatic Nuisance Species lab, provide equipment storage, and house seasonal staff. In Devils Lake, the Department renovated its existing bunkhouse to better accommodate temporary housing needs.

Technology and Data Services

The Data and Technology section continued to enhance the Department's digital capabilities of internal business systems, online services, and field operational technologies. These included public-facing tools such as mapping applications, landowner tools/electronic posting systems, gratis land parcels, and mobile applications for hunters and anglers. Throughout the biennium, the Department expanded its digital offerings, including nominal license and permit services, and improved its payment processing system to include additional digital payment options and electronic checks.

Licensing Services

Licensing Services processed over one million transactions involving licenses, permits, applications, and watercraft registrations. Customer service was provided to roughly 300,000 North Dakota residents and over 450,000 nonresidents. The Department also served more than 3,700 international customers representing over 40 different countries. License sales and participation levels remained steady during the biennium.

License/Participation	2024 Value	Rank (25-Year)	Change from 2023
Resident General Game	100,959	16th highest	▼ -1
Nonresident General Game	49,624	5th highest	▲ +2,401
Resident Small Game	74,274	17th highest	▼ -157
Nonresident Small Game	27,796	15th highest	▲ +1,811
Resident Waterfowl Hunters	18,059	5th lowest	▲ +1,600
Nonresident Waterfowl Hunters	26,216	3rd highest	▲ +1,288
Resident Deer	50,100	4th lowest	▼ -3,300
Youth Deer-Gun	6,503	1st (record high)	▲ +71
Resident Bow Deer	23,993	9th highest	▼ -286
Nonresident Deer Bow	3,113	6th highest	▼ -257
Resident Fishing	145,366	10th highest	▲ +3,442
Nonresident Fishing	64,789	4th highest	▲ +2,396

Watercraft registrations, which follow a three-year renewal cycle, saw 21,527 new registrations during the biennium, with approximately 66,000 active vessels statewide.

Note: Graphs and detailed license sales data are provided in the attached appendix.

APPENDIX

69th Legislative Assembly Associated Bills:

HB 1017 - Appropriates $114,864,690 to the Game and Fish Department for the biennium beginning July 1, 2025 and ending June 30, 2027.

HB 1082 – Defines farmed elk as mammals of the North American elk genus and species (cervus canadensis) confined in a manmade enclosure designed to prevent escape.

HB 1094 - Nonprofit organizations eligible to apply for special allocation big game hunting licenses for fundraising must be exempt from federal income taxation under section 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(19), and must contribute at least 20% of the net proceeds of any raffle of a license to a conservation-related project.

HB 1147 - A resident disabled veteran who has at least a 50% service connected disability qualifies for the $3 combined general game, habitat, small game and furbearer license.

HB 1174 - The department may establish educational and community outreach programs to promote public understanding of fisheries and wildlife management and promote interest in pursuing careers in fields employed by the department, including by job shadowing of field activities and ride-alongs.

HB 1260 - Fifteen percent of the total mule deer gun licenses made available in the current year must be made available as nonresident any-deer bow licenses.

HB 1412 - The director shall provide that each application for a deer lottery license contain the option for an unsuccessful applicant to donate the license fee to the private land open to sportsmen program.

HB 1470 - Increases the fees of some hunting and fishing licenses, and changes hunting guide and outfitter requirements.

HB 1598 - An individual, while hunting big game or small game, other than waterfowl or cranes, may not use a motor-driven vehicle on any land other than an established road or trail without the written permission of the landowner, unless that individual has reduced a big game animal to possession.

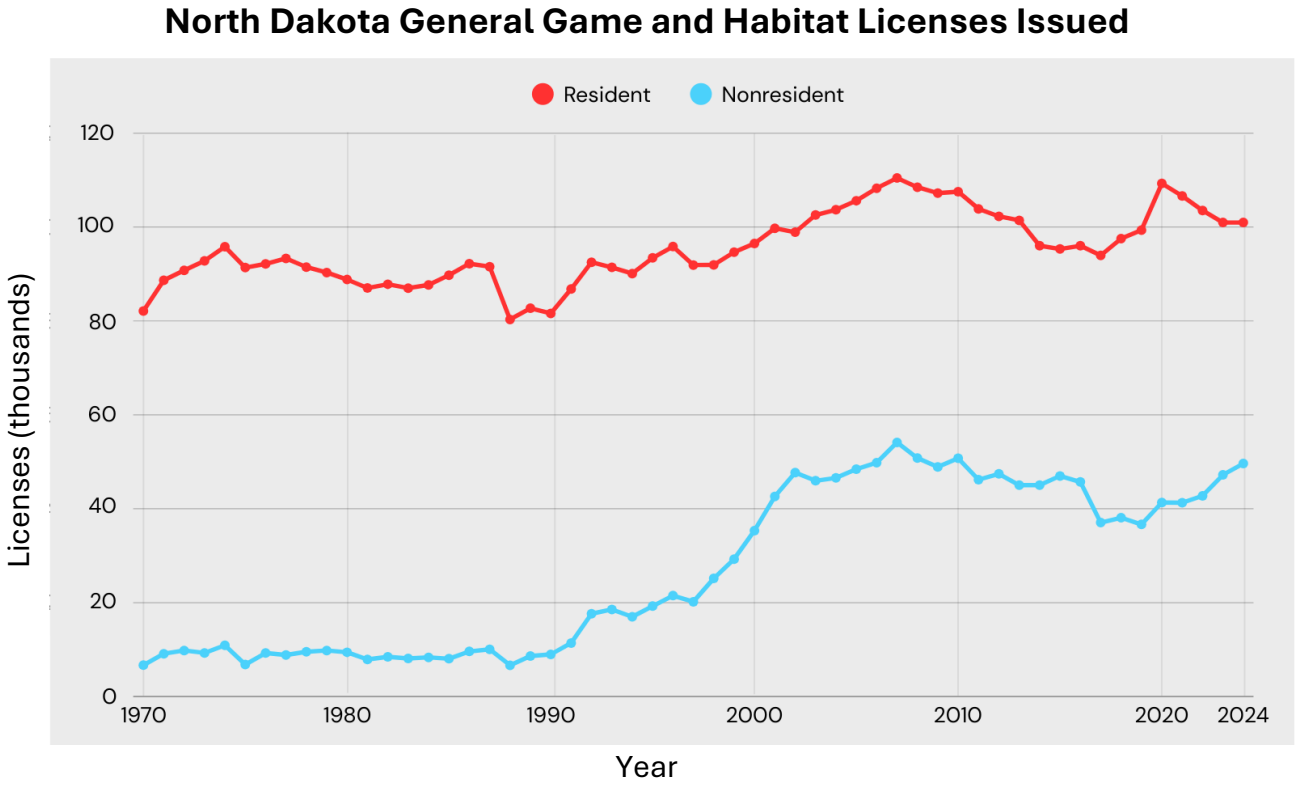
SB 2137 - The department may not adopt a rule or implement a policy prohibiting or restricting the use of supplemental feed on private property for hunting a big game animal. Has a sunset clause of July 31, 2029.

SB 2155 - The number of pronghorn gratis licenses issued may not exceed one-half of any pronghorn licenses available. In addition, if the individual is unsuccessful in the landowner lottery, that application may be included in a lottery for remaining licenses.

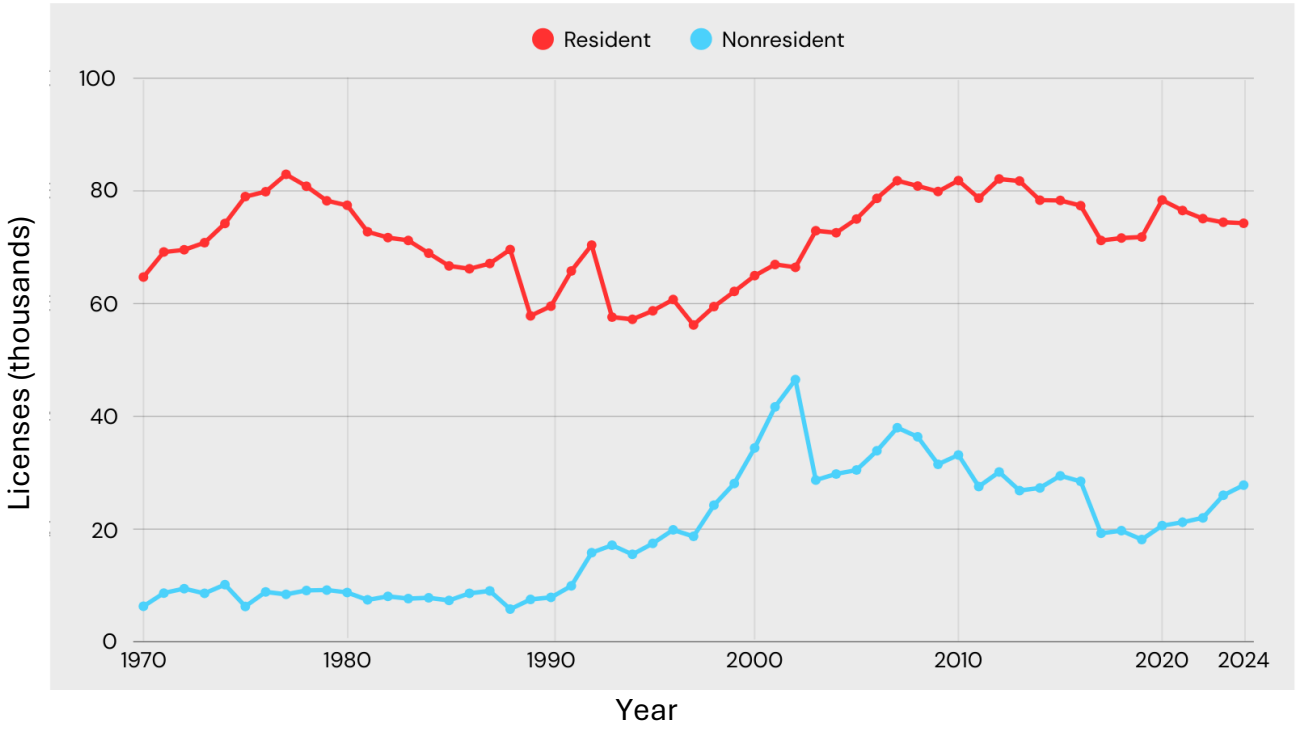
SB 2216 - A waterfowl habitat restoration electronic stamp is required for every resident and nonresident to hunt waterfowl at a fee of $5. In addition, creates a waterfowl habitat improvement fund for improving and restoring waterfowl habitat and supporting youth hunting programs.

SB 2245 - Allows the hunting of waterfowl from a floating craft without a motor propelled exclusively by paddle, oars or pole; or with a motor if the craft is at rest and the motor has been turned off.

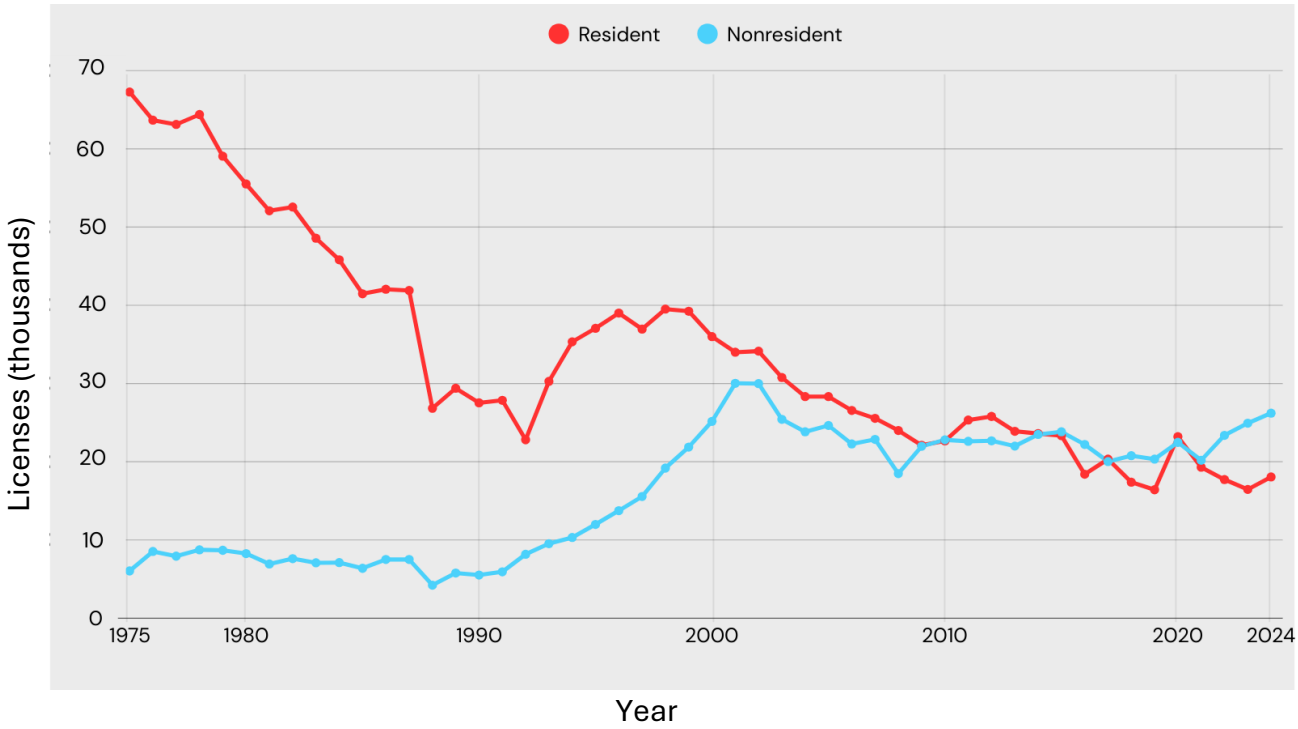
SB 2309 - Allows the statewide antlerless white-tailed youth deer license to be issued as an antlerless license through governor's proclamation.



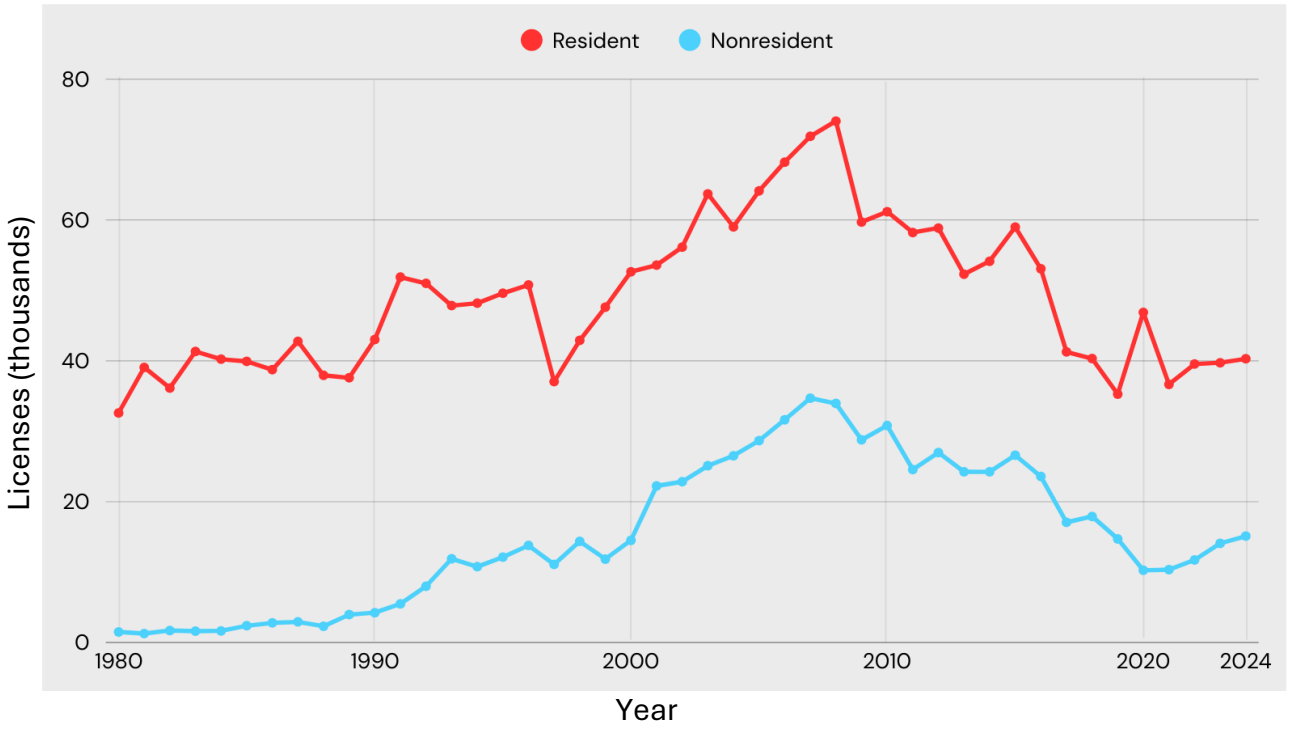
North Dakota Small Game Licenses Issued



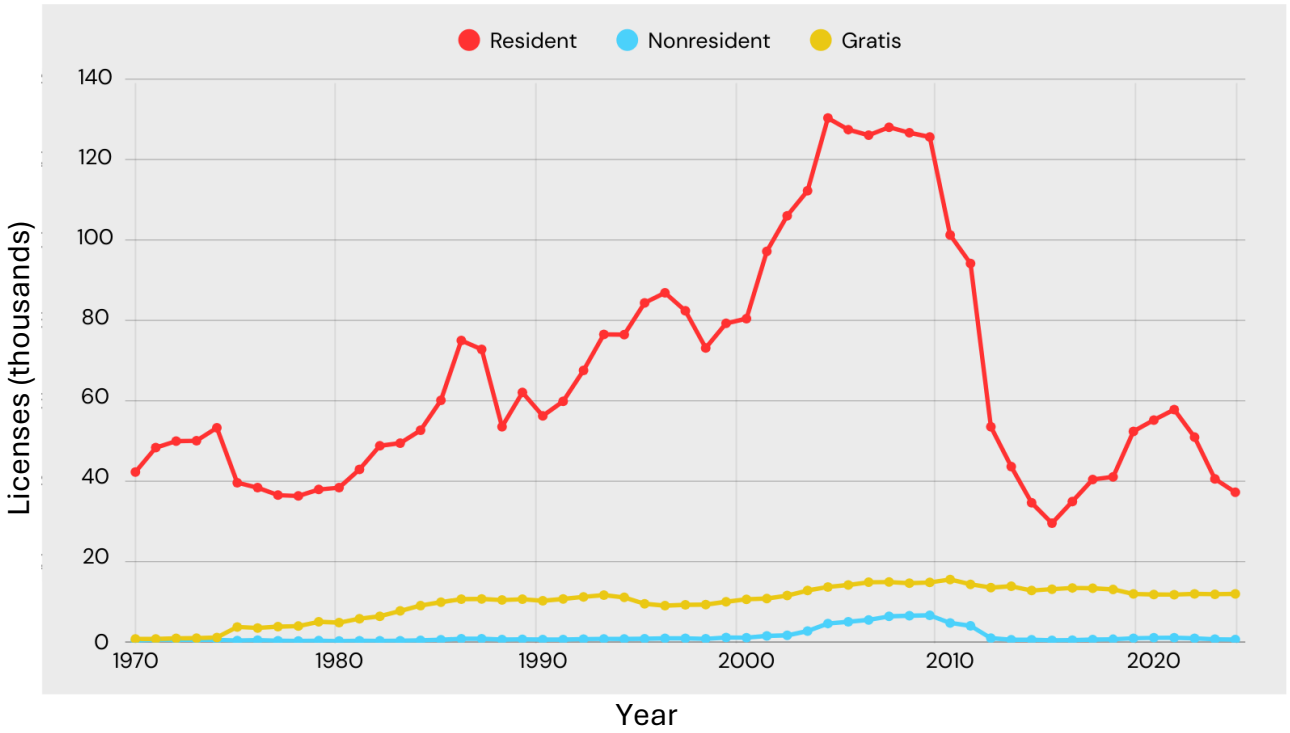
North Dakota Waterfowl Hunters



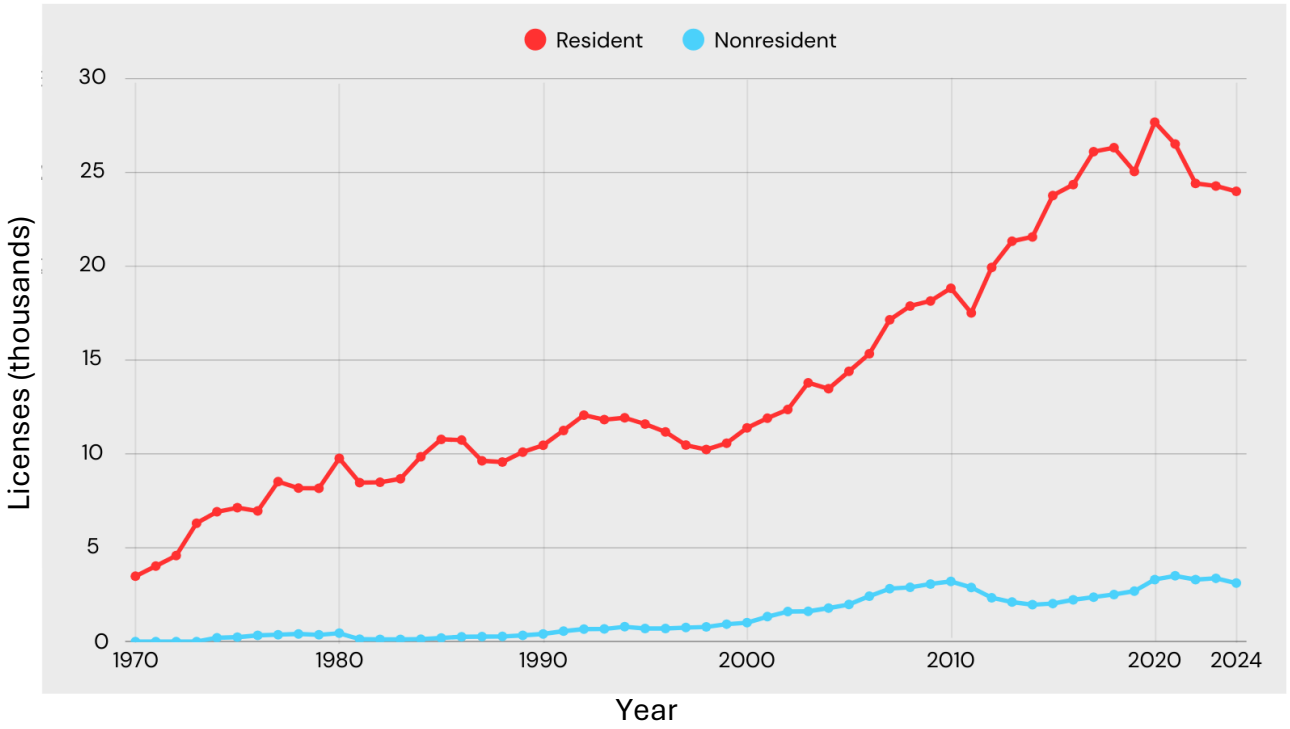
North Dakota Pheasant Hunters



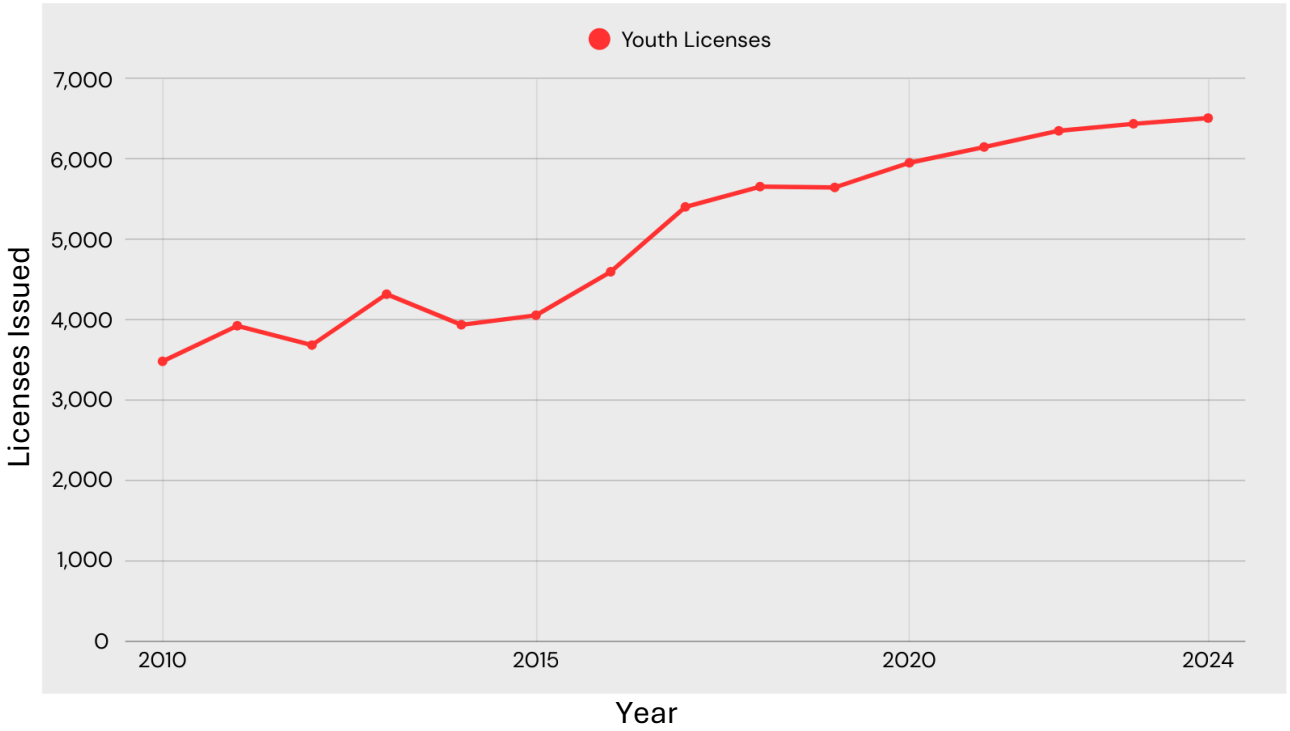
North Dakota Deer Gun Licenses Issued



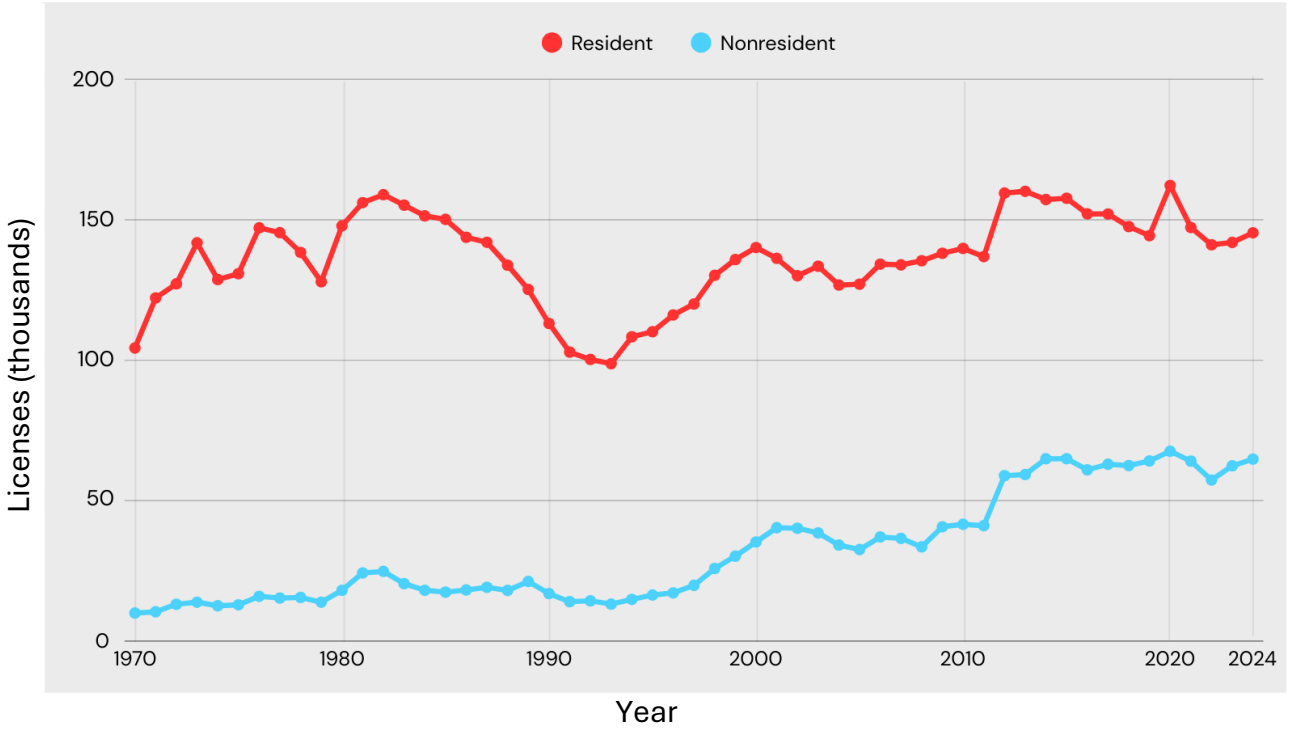
North Dakota Deer Bow Licenses Issued



North Dakota Youth Deer Gun Licenses Issued



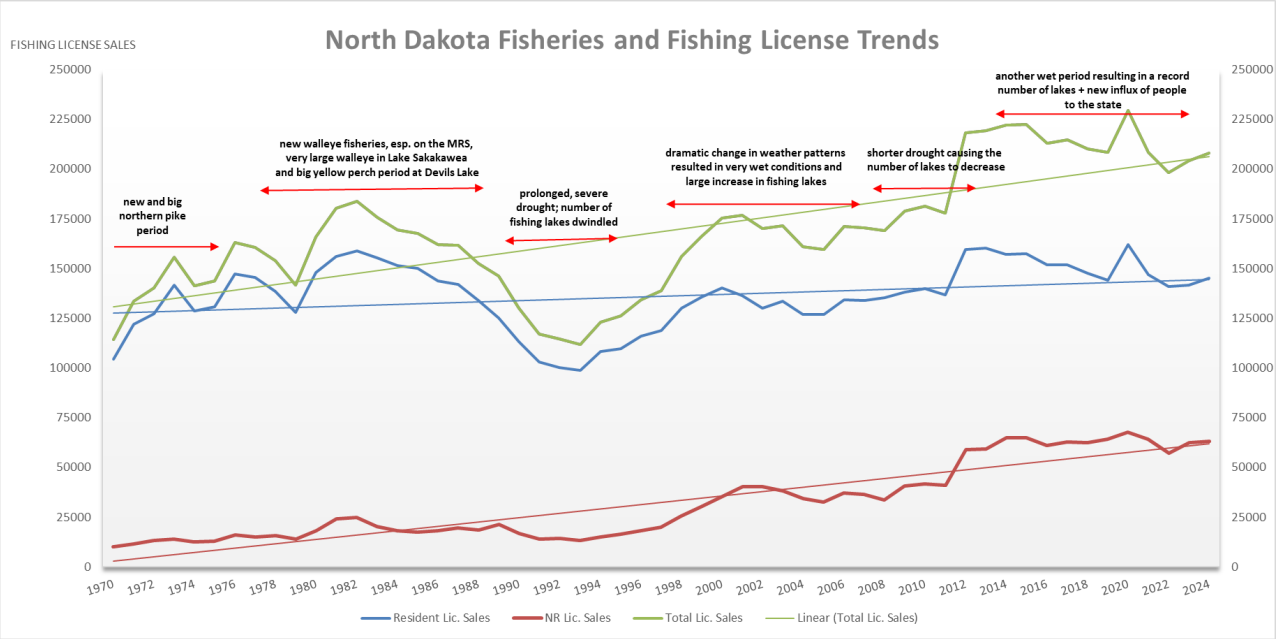
North Dakota Fishing Licenses Issued



Fisheries Division Biennial Summary (2023–2025)

The Fisheries Division is responsible for managing fish populations in nearly 450 public waters scattered across the state. As such, “The mission of the Fisheries Division is to provide diverse and valued fishing opportunities for public enjoyment while safeguarding the fishery resource”.

Decades of relatively wet weather has caused a transformation of shallow wetlands into recreational lakes. The more than doubling of fishable waters caused by years of rising water, and an aggressive approach toward fish management in North Dakota, have helped enhance fishing license sales. According to the most recent information (2024-25 fishing season), nearly 208,000 fishing licenses were issued. During this period, about 178,000 anglers spent almost 1.6M days fishing North Dakota waters.



The Fisheries Division of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department includes several sections that protect, regulate, and enhance fishing opportunities throughout the state. These sections include administration, fisheries management, production (stocking, etc.), development (access, infrastructure), and aquatic nuisance species (ANS). These different sections work together to ensure good fishing opportunities. In addition, the Fisheries Division has established strong working relationships with other Department divisions as well as various public and private entities, resulting in the creation and maintenance of some of the finest fishing that can be found anywhere. Specific section results can be found in the following narratives:

FISHERIES ADMINISTRATION

In 2023 and 2024, North Dakota had 203 and 212 licensed wholesale and retail bait vendors respectively. These numbers were similar to the previous biennium. The number of licensed private fish hatcheries was five in 2023 and four in 2024. The number of fishing

tournaments in 2023 was 140 but declined to 119 in 2024. The reason for this decline was legislation passed during the 2021-23 legislative session that made considerable changes to rules governing fishing tournaments (contests). Group home fishing licenses have remained relatively stable with about 130 licensed organizations receiving approximately 1200 individual licenses. Cormorant predation on desirable fish stocks continues to be a problem in some waters across the state with a long-term solution remaining elusive. Intensive take of cormorants has been limited by the USFWS. There were a few administrative rule changes during the 2023-25 biennium dealing with ANS, bait vendors and fishing contests. Fishing proclamation changes were few and minor.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SECTION

In 2024, Fisheries Division personnel conducted 261 standard adult population surveys, 125 reproduction surveys, 23 miscellaneous surveys, 15 trap and transport operations, two undesirable fish removal surveys, five spawning operations, and five tagging projects. In addition, other activities such as creel surveys, water quality monitoring, and fish kill investigations were conducted as needed. Creel surveys took place on the Missouri River System and Lake Audubon in 2024, as well as Devils Lake and Stump Lake in 2023. Drought gripped the western half of the state for most of the biennium, with the rest of the state seeing steady to declining water levels in many fishing lakes. Winter snowpack across North Dakota was relatively light during the winter of 2023-24 and 2024-25, which produced limited runoff to replenish our fishing lakes. On the plus side, mild conditions were very favorable for overwinter fish survival allowing re-establishing many fisheries that were lost or affected by the previous harsh winter. In 2024 and 2025 combined, only one total winterkill was documented, along with 9 partial fish kills (in stark contrast to the 76 documented winterkills in 2022-23). In recent years biologists have placed special emphasis on providing local fishing opportunities for residents across the state, stocking 40 community ponds with a variety of species, many of which are trapped from other lakes and transported to the community ponds as adult fish to provide immediate recreation.

FISHERIES PRODUCTION SECTION

A strong demand for hatchery production with all the new fishing waters across the state continues to push for maximum production output. During the 2023-2025 biennium, just under 24 million 1.5” fish, representing thirteen species, were stocked into nearly 308 North Dakota waters. Most of the fish stocked were walleye and northern pike, and Lake Sakakawea and Devils Lake were the go-to spawning sites for these two species. In addition, approximately 800,000 adult fish (generally panfish) were trapped from various waters across the state where surplus existed and transported/stocked into water bodies (often community fisheries) in need. A total of 75,815 pounds of fish were stocked into new water bodies. Five ponds at Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery East Rearing Unit were lined to reduce leakage and increase production output. At both the Garrison and the Valley City National Fish Hatchery, spot graveling was completed to keep roadway surfaces safe for travel during wet weather.

FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT SECTION

North Dakota is a land of extremes and precipitation during the 2023-2025 biennium varied not just over the span of time, but also throughout different regions of the state. Generally, the eastern and northern portions experienced normal to record precipitation while the west and southwest were drier with some areas suffering from moderate to severe drought conditions. The Missouri River system is largely impacted by annual mountain snow and runoff and water levels on Lake Sakakawea and Lake Oahe have remained relatively stable throughout the 23/25 period. Devils Lake water levels also remained relatively stable over the last two years. Elevations on the big three (Sakakawea, Oahe, and Devils Lake) are at a pivotal level and any notable decline will start to create significant issues and problems with boat ramps, docks and other facilities throughout these systems.

The number of active fishing lakes dropped slightly during this period, mainly due to winterkill conditions from the harsh winter and record snowfall of 2022/2023. The Department continues to partner with local entities to construct, renovate and jointly manage thousands of facilities at nearly 440 lakes throughout the state. One of the primary focuses is to continue efforts to replace, upgrade and modernize existing facilities which are deteriorating, damaged and have outlived their useful life.

During the 23/25 biennium, around 50 new development projects were completed along with 400+ individual maintenance activities. Twenty-two boat ramps were constructed, upgraded, or extended during this period and approximately half of those were on lakes where there was no developed access in the past. The Department continues to manufacture courtesy docks and twenty six new courtesy docks were built and installed during the 23/25 biennium. Four new floating fishing piers were constructed and installed to provide shore fishing access with a focus on families, youth, the elderly and those with disabilities. Five new precast vault toilets were installed and porta potty toilets were deployed at more than a dozen additional lakes during the summer open water seasons. Fifteen existing fish cleaning stations were upgraded with the installation of a new Barracuda grinder/table units. Over half of the existing fish cleaning stations around the state have now been upgraded to the Barracuda style grinder unit which are much more reliable and dependable.

AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES PROGRAM

One of the largest threats to North Dakota's aquatic ecosystems is the establishment of Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS). In the 2023-25 biennium, the Department continued to focus on the key elements of its ANS program, prevention, monitoring, education, and enforcement. During the biennium, the Department inspected 19,172 watercraft and funded the establishment and maintenance of many ANS prevention devices, including CD3s, ILDS, and wash stations, to promote good habits and compliance with ANS regulations. The ANS education program was bolstered thanks to some additional funding sources and the work of the Department's marketing specialist.

The Department continued to work closely with partners to inspect high-risk commercial equipment and found zebra mussels on more than thirty pieces of equipment (e.g., barges and tugboats). ANS monitoring efforts continued, including the utilization of several specialized techniques, plankton tow netting, snorkeling, and eDNA. In 2024, the Department confirmed a new zebra mussel population at South Golden Lake using microscopy. Eurasian watermilfoil was found for the first time at the confluence ramp on the Missouri River. Flowering rush became established at School Section Lake due to downstream drift from Carpentar Lake. In 2025, curly-leaf pondweed was found established at Horseshoe Lake. Finally, The ND Aquatic Invasive Species Committee made updates to the 2018 North Dakota State ANS Management Plan.

Conservation and Communications Division Biennial Summary (2023–2025)

The Conservation and Communications Division is comprised of three sections; communications, conservation, and education. The Communications Section functions as the Department's liaison to the general public, providing the most up-to-date, department-wide information through all media formats and marketing tools. The Conservation Section reviews development-related projects and offers recommendations to both private and government agencies for minimizing impacts to our state's wildlife and their habitats. This Section's focus also includes management of nongame wildlife and species of greatest conservation need. The Education Section is responsible for all facets of educating the public, e.g. hunter education, fishing, archery, fur harvester education, boating and water safety, etc., offering state-wide, hands-on conservation and skills learning opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts of all ages.

COMMUNICATIONS SECTION

The Communications Section includes production of North Dakota OUTDOORS magazine, weekly television broadcast news feature, weekly online webcast and other video products, weekly news release, website (internet), internal website (intranet), bi-monthly podcast, social media, including Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, the Department's R3 initiative, marketing efforts, hunting and fishing regulations/guides, the annual PLOTS guide and other publication development, handling of phone and email inquiries from the public, media relations and public information projects.

Telephone and Written Correspondence

The Communications Section is responsible for handling telephone information calls, answering and/or distributing emails that come into the Department's main email account, and responding to written inquiries. Section staff handle several hundred calls per week, depending on the season, and thousands of emails and requests annually. The section also maintains fisheries Whopper and Catch and Release files.

Publications

The Game and Fish Department produces a four-color magazine, North Dakota OUTDOORS, published 10 times per year and ranging from 24 – 40 pages. OUTDOORS had a mailing list of about 30,000 in August 2025. About 22,000 subscriptions were paid.

Media/Public Information

The Communications Section is responsible for weekly and special news releases distributed to about 155 media outlets, and another 40,000-plus individuals and organizations signed up to receive regular and news alerts; and an online legislative

newsletter compiled and updated daily during the biennial legislative session. Section staff answer hundreds of phone calls and emails weekly, and are also responsible for developing the various hunting and fishing regulation guides.

Photography

Section personnel take thousands of photographs each biennium for illustrating articles in North Dakota OUTDOORS, and for use on the agency website, social media channels and use by all staff for slide shows, power point presentations, newspapers, media and other private and public publications.

Videography

North Dakota OUTDOORS, a weekly television news feature, maintained its appearance on major North Dakota stations with a weekly audience of approximately 100,000 viewers. The weekly online news webcast also has consistent broadcasts on cable access channels in most major cities. The webcast attracts several thousand viewers per week. These programs are also valuable content shared on agency social media platforms on a consistent basis.

Game and Fish Website

The website includes most of the basic Game and Fish Department information such as season regulations, lake and species information, the Department's magazine and video features, and a variety of other topics. It attracts between 3,000 and 7,000 individual visits per day, and also handles a great majority of license sales in the state. Game and Fish's website editor also manages an internal intranet website for staff.

Social Media

Section staff manage and contribute to the agency's social media presence on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. The Facebook page has more than 36,000 followers, Instagram 13,900 followers, and our YouTube channel has more than 2.5 million views.

R3

Game and Fish administration identified hunter and angler recruitment, retention and reactivation as one of the agency's top priorities. In fall 2020, the Department hired an R3 coordinator, and the communications section is tasked with leading this initiative.

Marketing

Section staff create and implement innovative marketing campaigns to help the agency reach goals centered around its major initiatives and priorities.

Podcast

Section staff produce, edit and distribute the bi-monthly NDO podcast, which features in-depth discussions with both internal staff and external experts in their field.

CONSERVATION SECTION

Coordination, Technical Assistance, and Special Projects

Conservation section staff continued their primary task of reviewing development-related projects and offering recommendations intended to lessen the severity of such projects on fish and wildlife resources. During the 2023-2025 biennium, staff reviewed and commented on roughly 713 proposed development-related projects. These projects range from construction of roads, oil wells, wind turbines and transmission lines, to drainage projects, dams, and changes in land use practices. In addition to written requests, staff receive and respond to numerous informal inquiries via phone, email, and walk-in traffic.

A continued area of emphasis this past biennium has been the review of proposed 'wind farms' around the state. As wind projects become more and more numerous, the Department decided to take a more active stance in reviewing and assessing their impacts on fish and wildlife resources. This includes consultation with companies proposing wind projects, the general public, environmental groups and permitting authorities. It's worth noting that the process the Department started using to assess wildlife related impacts from wind turbines is being used by both the PSC and wind prospectors. The Department has strived to provide an unbiased assessment of potential project impacts on fish and wildlife resources. In some instances, developers are now providing voluntary offsets as a means of mitigating their impacts. Recent legislation has created a mitigation fund managed by the ND Department of Agriculture to develop and implement off-set acres from energy conversion projects.

This biennium marked the sections first foray into solar energy projects. Three separate projects were proposed in ND. This required staff to become up to date on current development practices to best be able to understand the impacts on the landscape. Meetings were held with each of the project leaders to discuss but to date none have begun construction.

Staff spent a considerable amount of time this past biennium dealing with issues impacting public lands in North Dakota. The majority of the efforts involved lands administered by the US Forest Service (USFS) and the US Bureau of Land Management, which total about 1.3 million acres. These lands are located primarily in western North Dakota. The primary purpose of the Department's involvement is to ensure adequate consideration of natural resources and the interests of state sportsmen and women in public land management policies and actions. Examples of the conservation section's involvement includes the review of oil well placement, road and pipeline alignments,

wildlife transplants such as bighorn sheep, land trades and divestitures, grazing issues, unique or rare species, access and natural resource protection and proposed closures of lands to hunters. During the past biennium, staff also continued to provide input on issues related to the Forest Plan for USFS managed lands. This includes reviewing and commenting on various pasture allotments throughout the grasslands.

Energy issues have been a major issue during the past biennium. Oil and Gas drilling, pipeline construction and a number of transmission line projects have required attention. Transmission line maintenance and development were a focus with the demand to move more energy across the landscape. These projects will continue to expand as we add renewable energy to the state.

Department personnel have worked diligently with the Corps of Engineers and communities of Fargo and West Fargo on the Fargo Moorhead Diversion Project. The diversion has numerous environmental challenges including the crossing of five tributaries, loss of river channel and riparian forest, construction of two in-channel control structures and numerous fish bypass structures. Additional efforts have and will be expended working on Missouri and Souris River flood related projects (i.e. high-water diversion channels, stabilization measures). Ongoing efforts have included the near completion of the Diversion inlet structure and the Wild Rice Structure. Construction on the Red River structure, the diversion outlet structure and the diversion channel have also been initiated.

Staff time continues to be spent on integrating 'wildlife crossings' in the design of various highway projects across the state. Staff provided valuable technical assistance in the development of where to place proposed sites and the type of design. The fencing project portion of the highway 85 crossing has been completed. Use of that crossing by wildlife is being monitored and documented by staff. Additionally, the wildlife crossing on Highway 85 in the Missouri River bottoms near Williston has seen considerable use by moose, deer, and a host of smaller mammals. The next phase north of the Long X bridge has started with the planning of fencing completed but not yet constructed.

The Department has continued its efforts to ensure that mitigation commitments associated with development projects are carried forth and maintained. These efforts have focused on three major areas: roadside mitigation along major highways for Department of Transportation commitments, mitigation for Corps of Engineers Section 404 permits and State Engineer Sovereign Land permits.

Nongame and Species of Conservation Priority

In North Dakota, nongame wildlife represents more than 80 percent of the state's vertebrate fauna, with more than 300 bird species, roughly 80 mammal species, 75 fish species, 15 reptile species and 11 amphibian species. Freshwater mussels, insects and many other small organisms are also considered nongame. Oftentimes, they are the rarer

and/or less studied species. Many of these species serve as biological indicators, reflecting the general health of our environment.

In order to focus its management of nongame species, the Department developed a strategic planning document called the Wildlife Action Plan in 2005. North Dakota's Wildlife Action Plan focuses on those species of fish and wildlife considered to be species of conservation priority or the most at risk in terms of extirpation from the state. The plan includes information relating to the distribution, abundance, habitat requirements, threats, conservation actions, and monitoring techniques for species of greatest conservation need. Section staff completed a 2-year revision process of the Plan and submitted a copy of it to the US Fish and Wildlife Service's regional office in July of 2025. This included a number of new species and species designations to better inform the management of the state's wildlife. The 2-year process included many partners including state and federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations.

Prior to 2001, funding to manage nongame species was limited. Since that time, however, federal funding has been made available to states with approved Wildlife Action Plans through the State Wildlife Grant (SWG) program. The SWG program is a matching grants program, meaning all federal dollars awarded must be matched with nonfederal dollars. All projects require at least 35 percent nonfederal match. The Department receives an annual federal apportionment of approximately $500,000. The knowledge gained from projects funded with SWG has proved invaluable in revising the State Wildlife Action Plan.

Currently 11 species of animals are listed as federally threatened or endangered in North Dakota with an additional three species being 'petitioned' for listing.

In order to help reduce the likelihood of species being federally listed, a great deal of the emphasis of the SWG program has been gathering baseline information on species of conservation priority (those species that are rare and/or are in decline) to get a better understanding of their status, distribution and relative abundance and problems contributing to their decline. During the past decade, studies have been initiated on grassland nesting passerines, prairie dogs, fringe mammals, bats, raptors, snapping turtles and leopard frogs. Considerable effort has also been made to implement projects to conserve or enhance habitat. For example, over the past 2-3 years, approximately 2000 acres of privately owned riparian areas were voluntary reseeded to native grass/trees thereby providing valuable habitat to numerous species of fish and wildlife. Additional emphasis and work has been placed on determining the effectiveness of conservation actions as they are implemented, such as monitoring grassland bird use of prairie restoration sites funded through SWG.

Staff spent considerable time attending meetings, networking with conservation and regulatory interests to provide information and feedback on federal listing actions that may affect North Dakota. Recent examples include monarch butterfly, swift fox, sicklefin and sturgeon chub, and pollinators as a whole.

Section staff also spend considerable time handling phone calls, emails and walk-ins from the public regarding nongame and/or rare wildlife. Staff conduct field surveys such as monitoring bald eagle nests, shorebird counts, studying grassland bird use of PLOTS, and monitoring key habitat.

EDUCATION SECTION

Conservation and Outdoor Skills Park (State Fair Area)

For nearly 20 years, the Game and Fish Department has partnered with the North Dakota State Fair (NDSF) to showcase the outdoor opportunities and skills training during the nine days of the fair. Activities include fishing, hunting, trapping, archery, and a chance to visit with Department staff. During the nine-day event, the Department has roughly 30 staff members on hand, and nearly 50 volunteers who assist with this effort. The Conservation and Outdoor Skills Park averages 30,000 visitors.

In addition to the areas use during the fair, it is also a big hit locally from year around as an urban fishery with local school and other groups and the general angling public. The area has become a great spot for youth and women's pre-hunt meetings. Many of the local wildlife clubs and Boy Scouts use the area for meetings and other outdoor activities. The area is approximately 5 acres, which includes a fishing pond, several cabins, a large meeting area, and plenty of grass and trees. Following the 2011 flood, fair officials offered the Department more land and an additional building that was refurbished, which the Department heats and cools. It is a very popular site for wildlife club meetings and various other outdoor events year-round.

For over 15 years, the area is also the site of the youth outdoor festival where over a dozen local wildlife clubs and camps and nearly 500 participants gather early in the fall to showcase what they do for youth and promote several of the events that they will be holding for the youth hunting seasons. This event is a hands-on event with two pellet gun stations, furbearer exhibit, archery, fishing and much more.

Hunter Education

State law requires those born after December 31, 1961, to successfully complete an approved hunter education course before buying or applying for a North Dakota hunting license. Our department courses are offered through a network of more than 500 active volunteer instructors. We provide a traditional in person hunter education course or a home study course for individuals to choose from. Our traditional course is 14-hours in length and is taught entirely in the classroom with students who turn 11 in the calendar year. Our home study offering is a 14-hour course that is split between the classroom and online learning. Students must turn 12 within the calendar year to complete the home study course. The home study course is increasing in popularity with the public and the

Department sees this as a proactive means of addressing students' increasingly busy schedules while maintaining educational standards. The Department requires all students take and pass the same in-person certification exam that includes our state written and "hands-on" practical exam.

In 2023, our department began offering an all-online bow hunter education course. North Dakota law does not require bow hunter education, but occasionally we have residents who travel to a state that has a law requiring certification (Alaska/Colorado). We continue to offer the in-person offering of the class, however the majority of people requesting the course were people who are lifelong bow hunters traveling out of state.

Throughout the 2023-2025 biennium, approximately 9,208 students completed hunter education and 564 completed bow hunter education. To date, 256,892 North Dakotan's have become hunter education certified and an additional 3,480 have completed bow hunter education. During the 2023 and 2024 North Dakota State Fairs, 5,981 individuals participated in the educational sessions and live fire pellet gun range.

Several times a year the hunter education program partners with our Department's Communication Staff to produce webcasts on the hunter education program.

We hosted our Department's Annual Volunteer Training Event located in Bismarck, Regional Workshops in the eight major cities and Instructor Academies in Bismarck. In the 2023-2025 biennium, we had 228 instructors attend an Annual Training Event, 138 attend a Regional Instructor Workshop and 18 new instructors complete the Instructor Academy.

Shooting Ranges

The department provides $240,000 in shooting range grants every biennium. In addition, the department started a plan to build all-inclusive shooting sports venues in locations throughout the state. The first one was built outside of Velva, ND in conjunction with the Velva Sportsmen's Club. This facility has a meeting room, an indoor archery building, a 100-yard rifle and pistol range, 3 trap fields, and an indoor archery building. Work was also started on a similar project in Watford City with the McKenzie County Sportsmen's group. The entire project was completed by June 30, 2021. This biennium we constructed another facility in Hankinson, ND. Trap shooting fields, archery, and club house will be built on adjoining land in the following year. Construction on both properties is currently in the works. There is continued interest from other clubs around the state to build facilities.

Boating and Water Safety

In 1985, a state law was passed that required individuals between 12-15 years of age who would like to operate watercraft with a motor greater than 10 horsepower to complete a state-approved boater education course. The Department provides an in-classroom, online and home study option for students to take the Department's boater education

course. Since the North Dakota boater education was developed, over 20,000 students have successfully completed the course with 1541 graduates from 1/1/2023 to 6/30/2025. North Dakota is at an all-time high with over 67,000 boats registered in the state.

Several radio advertisements, news interviews and web casts were developed to promote and remind boaters of the navigation rules and safety issues. Staff continue to work with the Department's Communication Section to promote safe boating messages statewide.

North Dakota Hooked on Fishing

Department instructors teach about the basics of fishing including bait and tackle, fish biology, aquatic habitats, and where to find a variety of North Dakota fish species. Classes are often taught near a body of water for hands-on opportunities. On average 2000 hours are donated annually by aquatic volunteer instructors who participate in a wide variety of fishing events around the state to include small community events sponsored by groups such as Lure Em' For Life, and the North Dakota State Fair.

In addition to dozens of smaller community fishing events, four major fishing events were conducted throughout the state utilizing a variety of partnerships. Three kids fish camps; one in the spring, conducted in partnership with the ND National Guard specifically for the kids of our soldiers, and two open enrollment camps, one in the spring and one in the summer were conducted. The Department supported the fourth event called Warriors on the Water, an annual event where active and retired military members are taken fishing.

Family Fishing Days program was discontinued during the 2021-2023 biennium. Participation was declining year over year, and we observed a high number of repeat customers. Another perhaps more important factor was a decline in volunteers and not wanting to burn out the volunteer base we rely upon for other projects.

Several libraries in the state are still operating a rod check out program.

During the 2017-2019 biennium, a pilot program was initiated called Trout in the Classroom. The program is run nationally by Trout Unlimited but delivered and coordinated locally by state natural resource agencies and local chapters of Trout Unlimited. As the name implies trout are raised from eggs to fingerling size in the classroom, then in the spring stocked into approved waters. Kids learn about watersheds, water quality, aquatic nuisance species and of course fish ecology. Career opportunities in fisheries management, fish production and aquaculture may also be incorporated. Equipment and eggs are provided by the Department and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Volunteers from local Trout Unlimited chapters are often relied upon to help with egg delivery and to be present for the stocking efforts. Unfortunately, there are no Trout Unlimited chapters in North Dakota, which will limit full expansion of the program. The 2021-2023 began with a total of 15 established TIC schools adding one in 2020 bringing the number to 16. The number actually operating the program from year to year fluctuates but averages 10 as

teachers are constantly moving sometimes leaving the program to a teacher that is not interested or familiar enough with the program to commit to it their first year. We added 5 new schools in the 2024/2025 school year with 255 students participating at 11 schools. As of this report 10 of the 11 schools have reported.

Fur Harvester Education

Game and Fish furbearer hunting and trapping instructors teach the history of furbearer hunting and trapping and their role in future wildlife management, ethical hunting and trapping, use of trapping equipment, techniques of hunting and trapping, and proper preparation and marketing of furs.

During the 2023-2025 reporting period, 9 volunteer instructors taught 12 courses to 108 students for a total of 209 volunteer hours. This represents only the full 16-hour certification workshop and only for 2024 as classes are still underway and not yet reported for the 2025 teaching season as of this report. Students who successfully complete the course are certified in trapper education and receive a unique number. This number is recognized by all states that require completion of a trapper education course before trapping, using certain types of equipment or trapping certain species. North Dakota does not require this certification to trap, snare or hunt furbearers. The demand for the certification course varies widely depending on fur prices.

National Archery in the Schools Program

NASP is a widely popular, in-school archery program operating in 50 states, Australia, Canada, Mexico, and Africa. NASP is a two-week introductory archery program designed to be taught by physical education teachers in grades 4–12, coordinated on a state level in most cases by state wildlife conservation agencies.

In 2008, the Department became the coordinating agency for NASP in North Dakota. To date, one staff member is trained as an Archery Instructor Trainer Specialist, five staff members have been trained as Basic Archery Instructor Trainers and 10 staff members are certified as Basic Archery Instructors.

The program has been implemented in 214 schools in North Dakota. During the 2023-2025 biennium an average of 11,175 participated in NASP in North Dakota Schools. With a goal of implementing the project in 50 percent of North Dakota schools, the grant program continued with $80,000 available to schools and other archery organizations to purchase equipment and expand the program during the 2025-2027 biennium.

The tournament series continues to grow in popularity and is a major factor in driving participation both after school and during school and attracts new schools. The newest addition to NASP is the NASP IBO 3-D program and its popularity is growing faster than the original Bullseye program. Each year more schools host tournaments to the point where

there is at least one, if not two or three, local tournaments every weekend from January to Mid-March when the state tournament is held. The state tournament now attracts 950 kids for Bullseye and 750 in 3-D. Each year approximately 150 students from several North Dakota schools travel to the National Tournaments to represent North Dakota, an event that now attracts more than 18,000 students from 37 states.

During 2015-2017 biennium, a non-profit organization called the North Dakota Youth Archery Advisory Council formed. Its mission is to assist the Department with the growth of the NASP program in North Dakota. Hundreds of volunteer hours were reported by the members of this organization for the reporting period. Since their inception, they have raised over $140,000 in college scholarships which are awarded to the top five boys and girls at the state tournament.

In 2019, the Department was the first state to pilot a project called Varsity Archery. This program was conceived here in North Dakota but caught the attention of two nationwide archery organizations. These organizations helped design the program, train instructors, operate the first ever tournament and provided $11,000 in grants to place equipment in the first 11 schools. The program was designed to dovetail seamlessly into the NASP program, the intent of which is to keep the older students, those in high school interested and engaged in their school archery program by offering them more advanced equipment and shooting techniques. The school count for Varsity Archery grew to 22 during the 2023-2025 biennium. Schools are now starting to offer Varsity Archery as an option within their local NASP tournaments and there were 61 participants at the 2025 Varsity Archery State 3-D Tournaments and 64 shooting in the bullseye category. It has spread to 13 other states with three more committed for the 24-25 school year and several other states are interested.

Habitats of North Dakota

The Habitats of North Dakota program continues to be an important component in the fourth-grade studies curriculum and life science curriculum for kindergarten through 12th grade. The program that was initiated in 2008 has grown to encompass topics such as habitats, wildlife of North Dakota, elementary science resources provided by the Department, preschool methods of teaching life science, integration of the visual arts into life science curriculum, and graduate credit courses offered through the University of North Dakota (UND), North Dakota State University (NDSU), Valley City State University (VCSU), Minot State University (MSU), and Dickinson State University (DSU).

Habitats of North Dakota workshops are provided at the University of Mary, Valley City State University, Minot State University, North Dakota State University, Dickinson State University (both Bismarck and Dickinson campuses), and Mayville State University for all pre-service elementary education majors. Additional graduate credit workshops are offered for licensed teachers in Fargo, Mayville, Minot, Bismarck, Valley City, Devils Lake, Bottineau, Williston, and Dickinson.

Continuing education in-service workshops are offered statewide, and presentations are made at the North Dakota Science Teachers Conference each year. Approximately 140 teachers received graduate credit for completing in Habitats of North Dakota related workshops. Additionally, approximately 300 more receive information through shorter training opportunities. In addition to Face-to-Face workshops, The Habitats of North Dakota program is now offered online through regional teaching universities and North Dakota State University. This online format, while not as interactive as face-to-face training, is more flexible for participant's schedules and is providing additional teacher professional development opportunities.

Habitat presentation requests throughout the state continue for classrooms, scout groups, and pre-service teachers. Classroom presentations reach 844 students throughout the State. Habitats of North Dakota is also part of the annual Earth Day celebration in April, reaching approximately 150 students. The Habitats program participated in the Marketplace for Kids presenting on the program and what a wildlife biologist does. In one day, we reached 150 students.

The updated Habitats Activity guide has been published. It provides ready to use lesson plans for teachers that are standards based. The new guide has been well received among teachers.

Urban Pollinator Program (UPP) has been launched, and educator workshops and classroom presentations have been launched. The UPP has been well received. Teachers are readily signing up for professional development using the UPP curriculum guide as well as requests for classroom visits. So far, graduate level workshops for the UPP have been offered in Bottineau, Bismarck, Dickinson, Grand Forks, and Valley City.

Additional duties of the Education Section include judging local and regional science fairs, curriculum development, and working with the Hunter Safety Education program to ensure the presentations are educationally sound, which includes how to effectively teach to your audience.

Outreach Biologists

In 2021, Game and Fish administration reassigned the outreach biologists, stationed in Fargo, Grand Forks, and Minot, from the Communications Section to the Education Section, to even out workload between section leaders within the division. The outreach biologists are vital, local experts for interacting with wildlife clubs, local leaders, local media, and assisting other Department divisions with local issues.

The outreach biologists all have weekly radio programs on major local stations, produce a weekly agency audio news release, and a weekly newspaper column that is widely distributed and used.

Wildlife Division Biennial Summary (2023–2025)

Our Wildlife Division functions within three sections. Our Game Management Section is responsible for population monitoring and harvest management of wildlife species that are hunted and trapped in the state. Our primary surveys consist of ground and aerial observations, and harvest surveys completed by hunters and trappers. Our Wildlife Resource Management Section is responsible for the management of approximately 222,000 acres of wildlife management areas for wildlife production and public hunting opportunities. These areas offer a wide variety of public hunting opportunity across North Dakota. Our Private Lands Section is responsible for the Private Lands Open to Sportsmen program working directly with private landowners who are willing to open their property to public walk-in hunting. The landowner is compensated for hunting access along with habitat improvements on their property.

GAME MANAGEMENT SECTION

Our Game Management Section is responsible for population monitoring and harvest management of wildlife species that are hunted and trapped in the state. The overall goal of our section is to maximize sustainable hunting and trapping opportunities, while minimizing human-wildlife conflicts. Our work is accomplished through a series of surveys, censuses, and inventories to monitor population status and harvest of these important resources. Research studies also provide new information to better understand the ecology of species and their habitats, as well as improve monitoring techniques. The information and knowledge gained from these activities are used to guide management decisions, to make hunting and trapping season recommendations to our Director and the Governor, and to provide information to the public and other agencies and organizations.

Our section staff includes four big game biologists, two upland game biologists, two migratory game bird biologists, one furbearer biologist (which also serves as the section leader), one wildlife veterinarian, one wildlife health biologist, one harvest survey coordinator, one pilot, and one game management technician. Throughout the year, temporary/seasonal employees assist with portions of our workload. Because of this minimal staffing, our section staff work cooperatively with each other whenever possible, and other Department personnel provide much needed assistance.

During the 2023-2025 biennium, we saw good and bad effects of weather, habitat, and disease on various game species. Moose and elk “once in a lifetime” licenses provided opportunities for hundreds of hunters each year. Bighorn sheep populations were holding steady, despite the presence of pneumonia. Special seasons (spring light geese and resident Canada geese) continued to provide abundant opportunity while we tried to bring populations back down to management objectives. Two back-to-back mild winters resulted in good upland game opportunities. And furbearer harvesting opportunities were outstanding. On the other hand, reductions in the acreage of CRP continued to negatively

impact grassland dependent species such as deer, pheasants, grouse, and ducks. And chronic wasting disease (CWD) and epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) in deer continued to be major concerns.

Summaries of activities by program area follow:

Big Game

The overall goal for the big game management program in North Dakota is to maximize hunting opportunities, while maintaining populations within landowner tolerance levels and the carrying capacity of the land. To achieve this goal, we have both short-term and long-term objectives. Our long-term objective is to develop predictive models for managing each of our big game species through adaptive harvest management techniques (i.e., process of continually updating and evaluating new survey and harvest data and incorporating the results into updated models). To achieve our long-term goals, our short-term goal is to evaluate historical databases for each of the species. This analysis allows us to decipher which variables provide the greatest predictive value of future changes in big game populations.

White-tailed deer

In general, population indices for white-tailed deer suggest decreasing numbers in the eastern and stable to decreasing numbers in the western part of the state. Mild winters in 2024 and 2025 resulted in minimal winter losses though, habitat loss continues to reduce the carrying capacity of the land and has slowed the growth and recovery of deer herds after recent population level disturbances. A moderate outbreak of EHD occurred in some Badlands and Slope hunting units in late-summer and early-fall of 2024 resulting in localized mortality events in white-tailed deer. Regular deer-gun license numbers were reduced 6.2% in 2024 and 15.5% in 2025 to promote population growth.

We continued to use aerial surveys to monitor big game population trends throughout the state, evaluate the use of hunter observation questionnaires as a means of providing population indices (deer sighted per hour of effort, and buck/doe/fawn ratios), and listen to field staff and landowners about tolerance levels to big game populations.

Highlights to the 2024 and 2025 deer hunting seasons are as follows:

- In 2024, 50,100 licenses were available for the regular season, a decrease of 3,300 licenses from 2023. In 2025, 42,300 licenses are available for the regular season, a decrease of 7,800 licenses from 2024.
    - Any Antlered licenses decreased by 1,000 in 2024, and 2,700 in 2025.
    - Any Antlerless licenses decreased by 2,000 in 2024, and 2,150 in 2025.
    - Antlered white-tailed deer licenses did not change in 2024 and decreased by 950 in 2025.

    - Antlerless white-tailed deer licenses decreased by 300 in 2024 and 1,750 in 2025.
    - Antlered mule deer licenses remained the same in 2024 and 2025.
    - Antlerless mule deer licenses did not change in 2024 and decreased by 250 in 2025.
- A total of 956 muzzleloader licenses (478 antlered white-tail, 478 antlerless white-tail) were available in 2024 and 806 (403 antlered white-tail, 403 antlerless white-tail) are available in 2025. This was a decrease of 66 muzzleloader licenses from 2023 and 150 from 2024.
- In 2024 and 2025, there was 160 "I" licenses available for the youth deer hunting season, which was which was unchanged from 2023. "I" licenses were limited in number for units 3B1, 3B2, and 4A-4F, and were valid for any deer. There were unlimited "H" youth deer hunting licenses that were valid for any deer statewide except antlered mule deer in the above restricted units.
- A total of 337 nonresident any deer archery licenses were available in 2024 and 300 available in 2025; this was a decrease of 525 from 2023 and 37 from 2024.
- Beginning in 2025, 100 "N" licenses are made available to youth hunters aged 11, 12, and 13, these licenses are valid for any antlerless deer in units 3B1, 3B2, and 4A-4F. There are an unlimited number of "O" licenses available that are valid for any antlerless deer statewide except antlerless mule deer in the above restricted units.

Mule deer

Mule deer in the western badlands are monitored by annually conducting a fall production survey and spring population index, where we aerially survey 23 study areas covering 298.8 square miles. The 2025 spring index was 14% lower than 2024 index and 18% below the long-term average; this was the lowest spring index since 2013. Mule deer abundance in the badlands has trended downward since 2022 due to poor fawn production. Mule deer numbers in secondary range remain stable to increasing.

- The 2024 fawn:doe ratio was 75 fawns per 100 does, which was significantly higher than 2023 (0.57:1.0), but below long-term average of 86 fawns per 100 does. The 2024 buck:doe ratio was 39 bucks per 100 does, which was the same as 2023 (0.39:1.0) and similar to the long-term average (0.43:1.0).
- A total of 2,250 mule deer gun licenses were made available in 2024 and 2,000 were available in 2025 via lottery application.
- Randomly sampled license holders were mailed a questionnaire to determine harvest statistics.

Pronghorn

Although winter of 2024-2025 was mild, range-wide increase of pronghorn did not occur in 2025. The population estimate of 7,138 was 11% lower than 2024. The lack of range-wide

population growth was due to record low fawn production. Fawn production in 2025 was 39 fawns per 100 does, which is well below 20 year-average of 56 fawns per 100 does. Six pronghorn were confirmed to have died from EHD across western North Dakota which accounted for 10% of EHD reports in 2024. EHD can cause direct mortality in pronghorn and negatively impact next year's fawn production due to fetal loss in pregnant does infected by the virus. Future population recovery will be dependent on upcoming winter conditions and fawning success in 2026.

- We determine pronghorn abundance, distribution, reproduction, and sex ratios by aerially surveying selected survey units (from a total of 51 survey units) covering 30,142 square miles of pronghorn habitat in July. The annual aerial survey consists of approximately 25 survey units covering 15,000 square miles. The 2025 statewide pronghorn survey showed a population of 7,138 with a buck-to-doe ratio of 31 bucks per 100 does and a fawn-to-doe ratio of 39 fawns per 100 does.
- A total of 1,265 licenses were made available in 2024, and 1,310 were available in 2025 via lottery application.
- All license holders were mailed a questionnaire to determine harvest statistics.

Moose

Our moose population is stable to slightly increasing in the northwest portions of the state in units M10 and M11 and stable in units M5, M6, M8 and M9 in the northeast, southeast and north central portions of the state. Numbers continued to remain low in what was once considered traditional habitat in the Pembina Hills, Turtle Mountains, and Red River Valley region. Moose hunting units M1C (Pembina Hills) and hunting unit M4 (Turtle Mountains) remain closed due to low observed numbers.

- A total of 238 moose licenses were made available in 2024, and 292 were available in 2025 via lottery application.
- We conducted aerial surveys annually on 400 square miles of primary moose range as well as 2,700 square miles of secondary moose range when snow conditions were adequate.
- All moose license holders were contacted after the annual hunting season for harvest statistics.

Elk

We are managing elk populations at stable to decreasing numbers because of depredation concerns and low landowner tolerance. Our population of elk in unit E1W is stable to increasing and units E1E and E2 continue to remain stable. Elk numbers in units E3 and E4 appear to be stable to increasing as herds have expanded outside Teddy Roosevelt National Park. The elk population in elk unit E6 also appears to be stable. Elk unit E7 was

established in 2025 to address an increasing elk population in and surround J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge.

- A total of 829 licenses were made available in 2024, and 956 were available in 2025 via lottery application.
- We conduct annual aerial surveys on 500 square miles of primary elk range as permitted by weather conditions.
- All elk license holders were contacted after the annual hunting season for harvest statistics.
- Mobile check stations are conducted annually on opening weekends of the elk seasons.
- A large-scale elk research study in western North Dakota was conducted from 2019-2023 and completed in 2025. The research determined elk home ranges and movements, resource selection, survival and cause-specific mortality, and developed a population monitoring protocol to assess elk numbers annually. Results from this study are used to manage elk in western North Dakota.

Bighorn sheep

The state's population of bighorn sheep continues to increase, as a record 361 bighorns were counted during the 2023 population survey. An all-age pneumonia-related die-off occurred during summer 2014 that has persisted in some lambs through 2025, albeit to a much lesser degree. Approximately 15% of the adult population was lost during 2014-2016; however, the rate of mortality has declined substantially since 2014, and most northern herds are showing great improvement in adult and lamb survival. We continued to document and assess the impacts of the die-off and persistence of *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* in the population during the 2023-2025 biennium.

The Department received 19,892 lottery applications for a bighorn sheep hunting license in 2024, and a record 21,225 applications in 2025. Six adult rams were harvested in 2023 (100% success) and seven in 2024 (100% success). Eight licenses were issued in 2025. All hunter-harvested bighorn sheep were horn-plugged and biological samples and measurements were collected.

The Department also provides one bighorn sheep license for auction annually by the Wild Sheep Foundation – Midwest Chapter. A record $226,000 and $260,000 were generated in 2024 and 2025, respectively. All proceeds were directed to bighorn sheep management projects in North Dakota.

We continued to collect and analyze location data from GPS-collared bighorn sheep to gather data pertaining to home range, lambing areas, adult survivability, and providing empirical data to land management agencies.

We recently completed a collaborative research project with the University of Nevada at Reno, Utah Department of Fish and Wildlife, Three Affiliated Tribes Fish and Wildlife Division, and Rocky Boy's Reservation. The project compared habitat and forage selection among translocated and source populations of bighorn sheep; and developed a predictive map of preferred habitat by bighorn sheep in North Dakota. This data will increase effectiveness of identifying future release locations for bighorn sheep in the badlands.

We collaborated with the Three Affiliated Tribes Fish & Wildlife Division in 2020 to translocate 30 bighorn sheep from Rocky Boy's Reservation, Montana to Fort Berthold Reservation, ND. The bighorns introduced to the reservation continue to do well and have nearly tripled since their release.

Upland Game

Our upland game section is responsible for maintaining population trend data for 16 species of upland and small game. Population trend data are gathered through long-term established surveys conducted in spring and summer and hunter-submitted samples in fall. These surveys form the basis of population trend estimates that are used to establish annual hunting seasons and provide hunter forecasts. Upland game hunters are one of the largest contingents of hunters in North Dakota. During the period 2023-2024, resident small game or combination license sales were roughly 74,000-88,000 licenses and non-resident small game license sales were roughly 25,000-28,000.

Ring-necked pheasants

Ring-necked pheasant numbers in North Dakota are up from the previous biennium and continue to rebound following the low in 2018 after the previous year's drought. Pheasant winter survival has been aided by mild winters in 2023-2024 and 2024-2025. Recent short-term fluctuations are normal due to climactic conditions. However, changes in land-use due to high commodity prices and removal of grassland acres from the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) continue to occur, so without habitat programs to replenish vanishing CRP, we expect to see deeper troughs and lower peaks in the long-term pheasant population trend. Additionally, new research suggests that increased application of agricultural insecticides can negatively affect upland game bird survival and may compound negative influences on long-term population trends.

During 2025, 285 late-summer roadside counts for pheasants were conducted on a total of 100 census routes in North Dakota. Statewide, there was a 3% decrease in total number of pheasants observed per 100 miles, a 2% decrease in the number of pheasant broods observed per 100 miles, a 16% decrease in age ratio (Young/Adult) and a 6% decrease in average brood size from 2024.

Hunter harvest questionnaires are mailed out annually to estimate number of hunters, hunting trips, and harvest. In 2024, 55,401 hunters harvested 357,018 roosters as

compared to 2023 where 53,819 hunters harvested 319,287 roosters. The top 5 harvest counties included Hettinger, Divide, Burleigh, Williams, and McClean. Hunters submitted 3,698 wings, up 6% from 2023 (*n* = 3,462). The age ratio of hunter-harvested wings was 2.7 juveniles per adult (compared to 3.2 in 2023). The age ratio from hunter-submitted wings was higher than what we observed during our Late Summer Roadside Counts (LSRC; 2.1 juveniles per adult).

Although our spring crowing count index was near all-time highs in 2025 (reflecting high carryover from 2024), we did not see nearly the spike we should have seen in pheasant harvest. The number of hunters and hunting trips continues to decline, correlating with declining access.

Sharp-tailed grouse

Sharp-tailed grouse are the most widely distributed and abundant grouse species in North Dakota. We used data from spring lek counts, LSRC, and hunter surveys to evaluate the population trends of sharp-tailed grouse. During spring lek counts, biologists census over 700 square miles to get counts of all males displaying on leks within a census block. LSRC are run in July and August to count adults and juveniles to gauge annual reproductive success. Hunter questionnaires are used to estimate number of hunters, hunting trips, and harvest. We use data on hunter-harvested wing, tail and head feathers to estimate sex ratios, age ratios and peak hatch dates. Envelopes are mailed each year to approximately 1,600 hunters and hunters can request additional envelopes online or at any NDGF office.

The sharp-tailed grouse index for 2025 was down 13% statewide from 2024. The decline was consistent in majority of the state: Southwest (-8%), the Prairie Potholes (-18%) and Drift Prairie (-16%); however, we did see a slight increase in Grand Forks County (10%). This is slightly misleading because Grand Forks County is the only remaining survey block in the Red River Valley; much of the prime farmland in the Red River is no longer suitable for sharp-tailed grouse. Observers counted 3,994 male sharptail on all blocks in 2025 compared to 4,409 in 2024 (total only includes blocks and leks that were counted both years). The density of male grouse counted on all census blocks in 2025 (4.0 males/mi^2) remains slightly below the 20-year average (4.4 males/mi^2) and is near the 10-year average (4.1 males/mi^2). Note, Sheyenne National Grasslands (SNG), counted by the US Forest Service, is not included in summaries because their survey block is much larger than other census blocks and has inconsistent effort dependent on staffing. On the SNG, observers counted 312 sharptail males in 2025 vs. 113 in 2024 and 297 in 2023.

Sharptail declines in 2025 should be viewed in context with strong increases in 2024, following good reproduction in 2023. The numbers in the SW and Prairie Pothole region remain above the 10-year averages and have rebounded to double what they were during the trough in 2018. Although reproductive rates of hens during our 2024 late summer roadside counts were low (1.7 juveniles per adult), once again, we observed a high count for broods per 100 miles (2.4 broods)—the highest consecutive years since 2015-2016.

Historically sharptail populations were highest in the SW corner of ND, but the Prairie Pothole region had been at similar or higher densities since the 2017-2018 drought years. The strong rebounds in the southwest last year, helped the southwest remain slightly higher than the prairie potholes for the spring of 2025.

Although the winter of 2024-2025 was considered mild, we experienced a sustained deep freeze in late February through early March. Subsequently, we had warmer than average weather for much of April and early spring. Much of the state remains behind our normal annual precipitation, but we did experience a 4-day soaking rain event in mid-May, which was followed by warm weather and rapidly growing new nesting cover. The cold rainy weather should have been early enough in the nesting period that we don't expect it will have strong negative impacts on nesting, and the vegetation growth following the rain should make up for any early incubation losses. Much of the reproductive success will depend on weather trends from mid-June through July as chicks are hatching.

Despite short-term population pulses, the long-term outlook for prairie grouse remains poor due to grassland conversion to row crops. Although sharp-tailed grouse are an adaptable grouse species, they nest almost exclusively in native prairies, grazed pastures or planted hay fields. Early haying could have potential short-term effects in planted hay fields, but grassland conversion is the most concerning long-term threat.

In 2024, 21,660 hunters harvested 73,010 sharp-tailed grouse as compared to 2023 where 21,512 hunters harvested 67,710 sharp-tailed grouse. The top 5 harvest counties included Divide, Hettinger, Williams, Morton and Bowman. We received 1,050 sharptail wings from hunters in 2024 (vs. 1,393 in 2023), and the age ratio of hunter-harvested sharptail was 0.8 juveniles/adult, lower than 1.8 juveniles/adult in 2023. The age ratio from hunter-submitted wings was lower than what we observed during our LSRC (1.4 juveniles per adult). Typically, fall juvenile-to-adult ratios around 2 indicate good reproduction and an increasing population.

Sage-grouse

We conduct annual spring counts at all known active sage-grouse strutting grounds (leks) in North Dakota and re-visit historical grounds periodically to check for resumed activity. Active leks are counted at least two separate mornings, at least a week apart to try to capture the peak in strutting activity. Our sage-grouse population has been decimated from the record high recorded in 1980 when biologists counted 380 males on 23 leks. The trend over the past 50 years followed a slow, steady decline. After a West Nile virus outbreak in 2007-2008, the population plummeted. Beginning in 2008, we closed the sage-grouse hunting season due to lek counts below management objectives (250 males observed on leks). In 2025, for the first time ever, we were not able to find a single male sage-grouse on our lek surveys. One hen was observed, and photos of a confirmed sage-grouse hen were submitted to NDGF after our survey results were released.

The causes of sage-grouse declines include: sagebrush removal for “improved” rangelands, conversion to improved hay crops (like alfalfa), conversion to agriculture, fragmentation by energy development, disease introduction (West Nile virus and possibly Avian Influenza), and overall reduction of sagebrush quality with long-term heavy grazing. North Dakota is on the fringe of the sage-grouse range in North America, and small changes to our fringe habitat components have had negative effects on sage-grouse.

Previously, NDGF wrote a sage-grouse management plan in 2005 to identify threats to sage-grouse habitat and revised the plan in 2014. The final draft is available on our website. In addition, we translocated over 200 sage-grouse to North Dakota from Wyoming, 2017-2020. In 2020 and 2021, after 4 years of translocations, we counted 27 and 22 male sage-grouse, respectively, and the majority of the males counted were near our release sites. Despite the bump from our 2017 low, our sage-grouse populations have failed to make substantial rebounds.

The main finding was that, although effective, the scale would have to be 10-fold in individuals translocated and in years to get us back near our goal. We would need to continue translocations of 100-200 sage-grouse (males and hens with broods) annually for 10-15 years to expect a significant response, which the Department does not believe is practical. We are unconvinced that even after such efforts, the population would sustain itself without constant translocations. Although too late to realistically recover sage-grouse in North Dakota, we should apply this lesson to sharp-tailed grouse, which will also continue to decline as long as grasslands acreage and quality continues to decline in the state.

Gray partridge

We used several surveys to determine population trends of gray partridge in North Dakota. In addition to brood surveys, hunter questionnaires, and a wing survey, we also used rural mail carriers to estimate the spring breeding population. Cooperating carriers cover approximately 30,000 miles surveyed statewide. These data indicated a statewide increase from April 2024 (0.6) to April 2025 (0.8).

In 2024, we observed a decrease of -27% in our partridge density from 2024 to 2025 (21.3 to 15.6 partridge per 100 miles); however, we are still above our 10-year average (11.4 partridge per 100 miles). Longer term, populations continue to fluctuate with winter weather and availability of suitable habitat (crop edges with forbs and diversity of plant species for food and cover). Perhaps concerning is that partridge remain more abundant than sharp-tailed grouse (2023 was the first time ever this happened). Since partridge prefer crop edge and fragmented landscapes and sharptail prefer native prairies with intermingled crops, this hints toward the continued loss of native prairie or pasture on the North Dakota landscape.

Ruffed grouse

Twelve drumming routes are run annually in two districts to determine the breeding population of ruffed grouse in North Dakota. The ruffed grouse population in North Dakota used to be considered cyclical with a peak approximately every 10 years. However, since we dropped below an average of 0.5 drums heard per stop (in 2013), we have not seen another peak in the population. During the 20-year period from 1980 to 2000 our average drums heard per stop was ≥ 1.5 for 11 years. In the past 20 years, we have only recorded ≥ 1.5 drums per stop in 1999.

In 2025, we completed 8 routes in the Turtle Mountains and 3 routes in the Pembina Hills. Survey results indicated fewer ruffed grouse drums heard in the Turtle Mountains in 2025 compared to 2024 (-23%). Although the routes run were not the same for the Pembina Hills, the number of drums heard per stop (1.8) was identical to 2024. The trend of the number of males heard drumming per stop (average of the maximum number of males heard at each stop) since 1980. The statewide trend was -17% compared to 2024.

We also monitor ruffed grouse harvest via our small game hunting questionnaire, the same survey used for other upland game bird species. Ruffed grouse harvest was estimated at 193 birds (probably an all-time low) in 2002, jumped to 2,163 birds in 2008 and has remained around 1,000 birds through 2016 (exception was 2015 when only 306 birds were harvested). In 2019 we developed an automated logistical model to estimate harvest for upland game species. The model produced higher harvest estimates but revealed high variability in the number of ruffed grouse harvested by the few hunters who responded hunting for ruffed grouse. We are exploring new ways to estimate ruffed grouse harvest, but with the new method we estimated 3,514 and 4,737 ruffed grouse were harvested in 2023 and 2024, respectively.

Ruffed grouse habitat (mixed-aged aspen forests) continues to decline in the three areas in the state where we have ruffed grouse. Aspen are cleared for residential, recreational and agricultural development. Further, fire and floods are more controlled in the remaining aspen stands, resulting in older, even-aged stands that do not provide the diversity of mixed-age stands. More recently, studies in Minnesota have revealed that ruffed grouse populations are susceptible to West Nile virus.

Prairie chickens

We conduct annual counts at over 200 historic and active leks in the prairie chicken range in North Dakota. Both prairie chicken booming grounds and sharp-tailed grouse dancing grounds are included in the survey, and some breeding grounds include both species. The two main populations are on the Sheyenne National Grasslands and a smaller re-introduced population west of Grand Forks.

We started new contracts with the University of North Dakota and a retired Minnesota DNR biologist to complete prairie chicken counts starting in 2019. Initial counts were low with the new observers, and we hoped it was due to observer familiarity, but after 4 years, we continue to see significant declines in their numbers. In 2021, we spent time collecting photographs and video of remaining greater prairie-chickens in the Grand Forks population and discovered that many of the "prairie chickens" were hybridized with sharp-tailed grouse. We expected rare hybrids but counted more hybrids (8) than pure greater prairie-chickens (1) on two of the larger booming grounds

In 2025, observers only counted 5 male prairie chickens (9 in 2024) at Grand Forks County on 3 mixed leks this spring (there are no remaining pure prairie chicken booming grounds in the Grand Forks population). Jodie Provost counted 4 (vs.8 in 2024, 4 in 2023) prairie chickens on 1 pure booming ground and 1 mixed ground surrounding the SNG and the USFS counted 7 male prairie chickens (vs. 15 in 2024, 18 in 2023, 38 in 2022). The Sheyenne National Grasslands total was 11 males in 2025 (vs. 23 in 2024).
Prairie chickens will no doubt follow the same fate as sage-grouse in North Dakota without a large-scale tallgrass prairie restoration effort. This type of effort would be a serious undertaking because our tallgrass prairie range in the state overlaps the Red River Valley, where we cannot compete with farming prices for conservation projects. Although we have many "protected" acres in the Sheyenne National Grasslands, the US Forest Service manages for multiple uses, and therefore, expansive tallgrass prairie habitats, which prairie chickens require, are not their only goal. The tallgrass prairie is hampered by a lack of regular fire regimes (which would improve grass stands and limit woody encroachment) and, in some areas, over-grazing.

Wild turkeys

Three subspecies of wild turkeys have been introduced into North Dakota (Merriam's, Eastern, Rio Grande) and are managed as a single species. Season recommendations are based upon population trend data gathered on summer brood surveys. Two hunting seasons are held each year; a spring 'gobbler only' season and a fall season where any turkey is legal.

We sent hunter harvest questionnaires to a sample of hunters after the close of each season to estimate hunter activity and harvest. Turkey numbers steadily increased from 2021 to 2024. During the fall of 2024, there were 4,545 permits available and 4,620 were issued (337 gratis and 4,283 general permits). From the wild turkey questionnaire, it was determined that 2,949 license holders hunted during the fall. Hunters harvested 1,282 wild turkeys for a success of 43%. Data regarding sex and age of the harvest was determined by a voluntary sample of wing tips and breast feathers sent in by hunters and resulted in 864 samples with 606 adults compared to 258 juveniles in 2024.

During the 2025 spring gobbler hunting season, a total of 8,971 regular season licenses were available. Gratis and youth licenses were not included in the regular season license

allocation. A total of 7,194 hunters harvested 3,543 turkeys with a success rate of 50% in 2025.

We are evaluating the survival, movement, and reproduction of translocated and control (i.e., birds not relocated) wild turkeys in western North Dakota using GPS transmitters. From 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2024, a total of 211 wild turkeys were captured and fitted with transmitters. At the time of this report being written, there were 105 active birds on the landscape. This means that there has been a total of 106 transmitter recovery events, a majority of which were caused by mortality.

Tree squirrels (gray, fox, red), rabbits, and hares (snowshoe, cottontail, jackrabbit)

Rural mail carriers conducted a statewide survey of tree squirrels during July and October 2024, and January and April 2025. They observed more tree squirrels in July 2024 (1.5 squirrels/mile) than in July 2023 (1.1); more in October 2024 (1.7) than in October 2023 (1.2); fewer squirrels in January 2025 (1.5) than in January 2024 (1.7); and the same amount in April 2025 survey (1.7) compared to April 2024 (1.7). They observed more cottontails during the July 2024 survey (0.8 cottontails/100 miles) than in July 2022 (0.4); fewer cottontails during October 2023 (0.1) than in October 2024 (0.6); more cottontails during the January 2025 survey (1.0) than January 2024 (0.3); and the same number of cottontails during April 2025 (0.4) compared to April 2024 (0.40).

In 2024, harvest data from the small game questionnaire indicated that 1,527 tree squirrel hunters harvested 6,365 squirrels during the fall hunting season and 2,034 hunters harvested 6,336 cottontail rabbits in North Dakota during the 2024 hunting season.

Migratory Game Birds

Migratory game birds in North Dakota include ducks (18+ species), geese (five species), tundra swans, coots, sandhill cranes, mourning doves, snipe, and woodcock. Because these game birds are migratory, they are protected by international treaties and their management is shared by the states, provinces, and countries throughout their range. Thus, migratory game bird program activities encompass a great deal of coordination and cooperative work with government and non-government organizations, officials, and biologists throughout North America. In most cases, their harvest and/or population management are guided by multi-jurisdictional management plans. Overall duck harvest management is delivered using adaptive harvest management and is an exemplary case study of cooperative, sustainable, objective-driven harvest management. In addition, the migratory game bird staff handles all endangered whooping crane coordination because of the close associations between whooping crane management and migratory game bird management.

The migratory game bird staff conducted 11 regular surveys to measure the population status and harvest of more than 29 species of migratory game birds. These surveys along

with other annual monitoring efforts are part of the cooperative continent-wide management of migratory game birds. This year, 2025, marked the 78th year of our statewide breeding duck survey. To our knowledge, this is the longest running, systematic breeding waterfowl survey in the world.

In addition to those regular surveys and projects, migratory game bird staff worked on and contributed to a number of research and management projects including monitoring efforts to justify ultra-liberal hunting regulations for Giant Canada geese, Central Flyway preseason duck banding program, two studies using GPS transmitter implants to examine movements and habitat use by mallards and pintails, long-term changes in duck nesting success, national waterfowl parts collection harvest survey, Adaptive Harvest Management, updating the national pintail harvest management strategy, and other work on harvest strategies for waterfowl and sandhill crane surveys, a pilot study to examine methods for collecting age-specific sandhill crane harvest data, a pilot effort to determine alternative methods to collect age-specific goose harvest data, national mourning dove banding program, national mourning dove harvest management strategy, waterfowl rest area establishment, hunting proclamations and guides, informational presentations and work with media, wildlife, university, and school groups and citizens throughout North America, peer review and publication of professional literature and presentations, and work on various other committees and projects within the Department and with other agencies and organizations.

Migratory game bird staff administer a wide variety of hunting opportunities in the state: three special waterfowl hunting seasons (Youth Waterfowl, Veteran and Active Military Waterfowl, and September Canada goose), five regular waterfowl seasons, (Duck and Coot, Canada goose, White-fronted goose, Light geese, and Tundra swans), five webless migratory bird seasons (Dove, Sandhill crane, Snipe, Woodcock, and Crow), one Spring Conservation Order (light geese), and one August Management Take (Canada geese).

During 1995-2016, duck numbers reached record highs in North Dakota, peaking in 2002. Abundant CRP, which provided nesting cover, and excellent wetland conditions ushered in a new era for waterfowl hunting opportunity in the state, not seen since before WWII. However, recent losses of wetland and grassland habitats have resulted in breeding duck numbers in North Dakota dropping to their lowest level in more than two decades. In 2017, breeding duck numbers in the state dropped below 3 million for the first time since 1994. Since then, wet and dry conditions have swung wildly between years. During the 2025 survey, breeding mallard and pintail indices were their lowest since 1993. Beginning in 2017, we have averaged 3.3 million breeding ducks, despite having wetland conditions that would have attracted 4 - 4.75 million ducks prior to 2016. Statewide, we have less than 1/3 the CRP acres that once covered the landscape in 2007. Without secure nesting cover in the form of perennial grasses, it will be difficult for duck numbers to rebound in any sustained manner.

Since 1998, numbers of nonresident waterfowl hunter numbers have been quite high, often rivaling or exceeding numbers of resident waterfowl hunter numbers, especially in recent years. The attraction was reflective of record breeding duck populations in the early-2000s, abundant habitat, and easily attainable access for places to hunt. However, declining habitat conditions, decreased amounts of private lands accessible to hunting, and declining populations of ducks have resulted in increased conflict amongst hunters and increased numbers of complaints, despite decreasing numbers of resident hunters. During 1994-1998, there was an average of 14,200 nonresident waterfowl hunters and an average of 37,600 resident waterfowl hunters. During the past five years, there was an average of 23,436 nonresident waterfowl hunters and an average of 18,948 resident waterfowl hunters. Numbers of residents hunting waterfowl hit an all-time low in 2019 with only 16,421 participants. In 2025, there were 18,059 resident waterfowl hunters and 26,216 nonresident waterfowl hunters.

Locally breeding Canada goose numbers have declined but are above the population objective. We expended considerable effort managing a permit program (landowners are sub-permitted under a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Special State Canada Goose Permit that is issued to the Department) that allowed agricultural producers and other entities to take adult and gosling Canada geese, and their nests and eggs to manage crop depredations. We also worked with our Director's office to issue other permits to address human health and safety issues and nuisance concerns caused by locally breeding Canada geese. Urban Canada goose issues are consuming more time each year with each situation requiring a different set of solutions. Canada goose population control efforts are done in conjunction with ultra-liberal hunting opportunities and regulations that require considerable monitoring efforts to ensure their viability. Hunting effort and harvest during the August Management Take and Early September Hunting Season remain strong. Over the past five years, an average of 4,886 hunters have harvested an average of 36,324 Canada geese per year during special early Canada goose hunting opportunities.

Sandhill crane numbers remain abundant and mourning dove numbers appear to be increasing in the Central Management Unit. Populations of migrant Canada geese, snow geese and Ross's geese are all above objective levels. During the last 5 years, participation in the Spring Light Goose Conservation Order has remained strong. Roughly 3,000 hunters participated, on average, and harvested an average of 68,200 light geese per year in the spring.

Furbearers

Our furbearer management program is responsible for estimating species distributions, population trends, numbers of commercially important fur species that are sold, and harvest of furbearers statewide. Common furbearing species include badger, bobcat, beaver, coyote, mink, muskrat, raccoon, red fox, striped skunk, and weasel. Furbearing species that are less common include American marten, black bear, grey and swift fox, gray wolf, fisher, mountain lion, river otter, and spotted skunk. To meet our annual

objectives during the 2023-2025 biennium, we used a combination of statewide surveys, population modeling, and individual investigations.

During the 2023-2025 biennium, we conducted three statewide surveys for furbearers. First, the April rural mail carrier survey was used to obtain population trends by physiographic region. We have been cooperating annually with rural mail carriers for this survey since 1970. Second, state law required fur buyers to turn in their fur buying records to be eligible to purchase a fur buying permit the following year. We have been collecting and compiling these annual fur buyers' reports since 1937. And third, we mailed furbearer harvest questionnaires in April of each year to a random sample of hunters and trappers who bought a resident furbearer, resident combination, nonresident coyote/fox hunting, or nonresident reciprocal trapping license during the previous year. We have been surveying fur harvesters annually since 1971.

For those furbearers that were difficult to monitor using the above methods, including bobcats, mountain lions, fishers, and river otters, we required mandatory tagging and carcass collection of harvested animals. We then used age and reproductive information from those carcasses to model population trends.

Additionally, we investigated reports of less common furbearer occurrences (e.g., sightings, incidental captures, road kills, etc.) to monitor changes in distribution and abundance. Furbearer carcasses that were collected through incidental trapping, automobile collisions, depredation removals, etc. were also examined and necropsied to monitor population health and reproduction. As such, we routinely necropsied American marten, bobcats, fishers, mountain lions, river otters, and swift fox, as well as the occasional black bear or gray wolf.

We communicated with many organizations and agencies when gathering and interpreting information on furbearers in North Dakota, including USDA-Wildlife Services, USGS-Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, Theodore Roosevelt National Park, Three Affiliated Tribes, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, Fur Takers of North Dakota, North Dakota Fur Hunters and Trappers Association, North Dakota Houndsmen Association, Delta Waterfowl, state Universities, Midwest Furbearer Workgroup, and Swift Fox Conservation Team.

We sold an average of 5,970 resident furbearer, 60,898 resident combination, 2,697 nonresident coyote/fox hunting, and 10 nonresident reciprocal trapping licenses annually during 2023 and 2024. The rural mail carrier survey indicated fluctuating (up and down) trends during the past two years for all furbearers in all regions, both years. Fur buyers' reports indicated that during the past two years, coyotes were the most commonly purchased furbearer. Number of coyote pelts bought during the 2023-2024 season was 2,289. Prices paid per pelt were highest among bobcat and beaver. Coyote pelts were the highest income generator to the state annually. Results from questionnaires indicated that coyotes, muskrats, and raccoons were the most commonly harvested furbearers. Bobcat

harvest during the past two seasons (25 in 2022-2023, 60 in 2023-2024) was below or similar to the long-term average. Fishers and river otters had limited (i.e. short season length and/or small season limits) regulated trapping seasons. Additionally, there was a limited hunting season on mountain lions each year and model trends indicate the population has been relatively stable the past several years.

Wildlife Health

Our Wildlife Health program is responsible for monitoring and managing disease status and trends. Disease related projects and work during the 2023-2025 biennium concentrated heavily on CWD, EHD, highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), rabies and other disease outbreaks as they occurred.

Since 2002, we have conducted CWD surveillance in North Dakota using 2 methods. We conducted *targeted surveillance* statewide and year-round for early detection of disease in the state or new areas of the state. Targeted animals include free-ranging deer, elk, and moose that show signs consistent with CWD, died of unknown causes, or were killed by vehicle collision; and free-ranging cervids removed from farmed facilities. We used h*unter-harvested surveillance* to estimate prevalence over time and space. In the past, h*unter-harvested surveillance* was conducted annually in areas where CWD was previously detected, and in rotating, three-year cycles in the remainder of the state. Starting in 2023, we transitioned to a four-year surveillance plan, focusing on a fourth of the state every year to get a CWD infection status and therefore surveilling whole state every four years.

We tested 2,791 white-tailed deer, 703 mule deer, 128 elk, and 74 moose for CWD in 2023 and 2024. During that time, CWD was detected in 28 deer in 7 hunting units. In 2025, we will be conducting surveillance in one of our endemic areas, unit 3A1, which is in the far northwest part of North Dakota. The last time we conducted surveillance in this unit was 2022 when infection rate estimates climbed to 9.8% in mule deer.

In 2023, we moved from instate carcass transportation restrictions to disposal requirements. Hunters can now transport full carcass big game animals out of CWD positive units if they dispose of the carcass waste properly in a landfill. Out of state carcass transportation guidelines remain the same in which it is illegal to transport full carcasses or high-risk carcass parts into North Dakota. Recent legislation passed which restricts the Department from implementing baiting bans across the state. A sunset clause was added to that bill, and it will be looked at again in 2029.

In 2024, we monitored an EHD mortality event of moderate severity. We received the first report on August 13, 2024, and the final report on November 3, 2024. Most reports centered in Stark County. While the mortality event primarily involved white-tailed deer, a higher than usual number of pronghorn was also involved.

We received scattered reports of mortality attributed to HPAI during the 2023-2025 biennium. In November 2023, mortality events occurred in approximately six large bodies of open water in central North Dakota. Several thousand carcasses were observed at each location. Involved species primarily included snow geese and Ross's geese with mallards, greater white-fronted geese, great crested cormorants, gull species, and buffleheads also found. We also received scattered, infrequent reports of mortality attributed to HPAI in 2024. Notable events included CAGO mortality events on Jamestown Reservoir in December 2024 and the Missouri River in February 2025, in which several hundred dead geese were observed, and a neurologic red fox euthanized in Lisbon, ND.

Additionally, we investigated numerous die-offs and necropsied various species including waterfowl, upland game birds, nongame birds and mammals, big game, and furbearers to determine causes of death and illness. We also assisted our Law Enforcement Division with determining cause of death in potential criminal investigations.

Our Wildlife Health program works with a variety of state and federal wildlife and livestock related agencies. All meetings of the ND Board of Animal Health were attended, and we continued to work with their non-traditional livestock committee on farmed cervid issues and toward the elimination of contact between free-ranging and farmed cervids. We are also a part of the feral swine eradication working group. Updates on wildlife disease in ND were given to various groups, including the Midwest Fish and Wildlife Health Committee.

PRIVATE LANDS SECTION

Overview and Funding

The Department's Private Land Initiative (PLI) includes two components as part of the game and fish department private land habitat and access improvement fund: the Private Land Open To Sportsmen (PLOTS) program and big game depredation assistance.

N.D.C.C. 20.1-02-05 (16) provides for the funding of a private land habitat and access improvement program with moneys derived from the interest earned on the game and fish fund and habitat restoration stamp fees. The director shall place these funds in a special fund called the "game and fish department private land habitat and access improvement fund".

N.D.C.C. 201.-02-05 (17) allows the Director to carry out a private land habitat and access improvement program. N.D.C.C. 20.1-02-05 (17h), the Department is authorized to carry over any unexpended funds, up to $2M to future bienniums, for big game depredation; $1,522,922.00 was carried over, bringing the total appropriation for 2023-2025 Private lands habitat and deer depredation line to $29,393,401.00. Total expenditures for the biennium were $28,743,426.34, remaining appropriation totaled $649,974.66.

- $2,379,277.00 was used to alleviate big game depredation problems on private livestock feed supplies.
- $16,640,591.42 in program payments were made to private landowners to improve wildlife habitat and provide hunting access through PLOTS and other habitat programs.
- $4,621,492.03 in program payments were made to private landowners for protection of native grasslands through the Rangeland Legacy Program.
- $5,060,921.44 in salaries, indirect, travel, motor pool, printing, equipment, supplies, administrative expenses, grants and partnerships, title work and abstract reviews.

Big Game Depredation Assistance

N.D.C.C. 20.1.02-05 (17) allows the Director to carry out practices or designating an individual to carry out practices or authorizing or having the designee authorize landowners to carry out practices that will alleviate depredations caused by predatory animals and big game animals. $2,379,277.00 was used to alleviate big game depredation problems on private livestock feed supplies. Of this amount, $1,677,385.78 was provided as cost-share to landowners for the construction of deer-proof hay yards or panels. $382,767.80 used on materials for deer-proof hay yards including gates, wire and other supplies. $25,559.02 was used on depredation food plots, approximately $293,450.00, including salaries, indirect costs, travel and motorpool, equipment and other expenses for Department personnel carrying out depredation activities.

Private Land Open To Sportsmen (PLOTS)

The PLOTS program contains different types of agreements, lengths, payment and program options. At the time of this report, there are 880,000 acres of private land enrolled in the program, with over 100,000 acres of prospective acres. The program remains popular amongst private landowners and hunters. The Department has a goal to add 40,000 acres of access and 6,000 acres of habitat annually to reach a goal of 1,000,000 acres by 2028.

The Habitat Plot Program provides rental payments for nesting, wintering and other key wildlife habitats. The habitat can be newly established habitat, existing habitat, or a combination of both. During the 2023-2025 biennium, $1,299,098.48 in annual rental payments and $2,319,189.80
in upfront rental payments were made to private landowners. 64,052 acres are currently enrolled in this program.

The Working Lands Program provides rental payments for maintaining conservation practices, current habitat features, and management activities that have a positive impact on wildlife habitat. During the 2023-2025 biennium, $8,010,625.80 in annual rental payments were made to private landowners. $10,737.36 was paid for neonicotinoid-free

(untreated, insecticide free) wildlife food plot seed. 582,062 acres are currently enrolled in this program.

The CRP Access Program provides assistance to landowners who are establishing or maintaining USDA Conservation Reserve Program acres in exchange for public access. Landowners are paid a one-time PLOTS payment for the term of their USDA CRP contract. During the 2023-2025 biennium, $2,761,678.34 in payments were made to private landowners. 172,038 acres are currently enrolled in this program. As CRP acreage continues to decrease in the state, fewer acres are available to enroll in this program.

The Wetland Reserve Easement Incentive provides incentive payments on USDA Wetland Reserve Easements acres in exchange for public access. Landowners are paid a one-time, upfront payment for up to term of their USDA WRE contract. During the 2023-2025 biennium, $874,952.60 in payments were made to private landowners. 42,719 acres are currently enrolled in this program.

Promotion and Outreach

Private lands staff did a considerable amount of promotion and outreach for habitat and access during the 2023-2025 biennium. $92,829.38 was spent on production of two PLOTS guides as postcards, social media ads, internet ads and other promotional materials.

New Habitat and Food Plots

Private lands staff worked with several landowners during the 2023-2025 biennium to establish new habitat and wildlife food plots on their property. Approximately 7,000 acres of new grassland habitat were developed. The Department provided neonicotinoid-free (untreated, insecticide free) wildlife food plot seed to landowners. During the 2023-2025 biennium, $51,857.07 was used to purchase food plot seed and made available to 459 landowners, totaling approximately 2,035 acres.

Habitat and Access Summit

The Department hosted a Habitat and Access Summit in December 2024 to bring awareness to habitat loss and access issues. Governor Kelly Armstrong kicked off the event while several hundred hunters, landowners and decision makers attended the Summit. The Department sought input from the public prior to, during and following the Summit. Recommendations were developed from collected input. The Department is formally implementing several of the recommendations through pursuit of Outdoor Heritage Fund Grants, improvements to electronic posting, developing new controlled access programs, improving hunter-landowner relationships, and expanding existing or creating new partnerships to develop habitat and access.

Outdoor Heritage Fund Projects

PATH (Public Access To Hunting) - In 2023, the Mondak Pheasants Forever Chapter received an OHF grant that provides a one-time incentive for new grass and CRP enrolled in PLOTS in Williams and Divide Counties. The grant provided enough funding to cover approximately 5,000 acres of new grass/CRP and access. The Department committed $1.7M towards this project for new habitat development and public access. In spring 2025, Pheasants Forever expanded the project to an additional 36 additional counties in the state's main pheasant region (excluding the Northeast and Red River Valley). The grant provides enough funding to cover 10,000 new habitat and access. The Department committed $5.8M towards this project for new habitat development and public access. No funds have been spent on this project yet as Pheasants Forever is awaiting an agreement from the ND Industrial Commission.

Western ND PLOTS OHF grant - In 2025, the Department received an OHF grant that will provide $2.1 million for PLOTS in southwest North Dakota for 10- and 20-year agreements. The ND Wildlife Federation committed $100,000 for additional upfront incentive payments of $2 an acre for 10-year agreements and $4 an acre for 20-year agreements in Dunn and McKenzie Counties. Other partners such as Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation will offer the same incentive structure in Golden Valley, Billings, and Slope. The Department committed $500,000 in match towards this project. No funds have been spent on this project yet as the Department is awaiting an agreement from the ND Industrial Commission.

Red River Basin Wildlife and Water Quality Outdoor Heritage grant - The Department continued its partnership with seven soil conservation districts (SCDs) in the Red River Valley and the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality through the Red River Basin Wildlife and Water Quality Outdoor Heritage grant. The grant provides cost share and rental payments for select practices that benefit wildlife and water quality. $362,388.61 was reimbursed to SCDs for conservation practices this biennium.

The Department also partnered with Ducks Unlimited, North Dakota Natural Resources Trust and United Prairie Foundation on their OHF grants aimed at improving and restoring habitat and providing public access. No funds have been spent on these projects yet as the partners are awaiting an agreement from the ND Industrial Commission.

North Dakota Meadowlark Initiative

The Department worked with NRCS to obtain a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) grant in 2021, which included $7.1M in NRCS funds and $12M in matching partner funds. This 5-year grant was fully exhausted in approximately 3 years. Grant funds did not come to the Department; NRCS retained the funds and delivered the grant. In 2024 a second RCPP grant was awarded, which included $13M in NRCS funds and $10.4M in matching partner funds. The second grant is just getting underway at the time of this report writing. 20,596 acres of grasslands have been restored, 932 acres of wetlands have been

enhanced, and 201,639 acres of grasslands have been enhanced since the inception of the ND Meadowlark Initiative.

Rangeland Legacy Program - A new feature of the Meadowlark Initiative was added in 2025; the Rangeland Legacy Program, which is a 30-year agreement that provides long term protection to native grasslands while supporting working grasslands and ranches. To date, 13,796 acres enrolled across Adams, Bowman, and Grant counties for a total cost of $4,621,492. These agreements were funded with various grants and using a small amount of Department funds as match. The Department also supported a portion of the North Dakota Meadowlark Initiative Coordinator position with ND Natural Resources Trust. $160,000 was spent on this position and Meadowlark Initiative related activities, promotion and outreach.

Partnerships

Precision Ag Program - The Department continued to support an agreement with Pheasants Forever to deliver Best Management Practices (BMPs) through a Precision Ag Program to improve water quality, reduce soil erosion, and enhance habitat for wildlife on private lands. During the 2023-2025 biennium, $142,000 was reimbursed to Pheasants Forever through this grant.

WRE Stewardship Funds – The Department has developed an MOU with ND Natural Resources Trust and USDA-NRCS to remove invasive trees on WRE lands. Approximately $300K in USDA Wetland Reserve Easement stewardship dollars are available to the ND Natural Resources Trust. The Department will work directly with private landowners to coordinate tree removal efforts and work with ND Natural Resources Trust who will issue payments to contractors.

United Prairie Foundation – The Department entered into an agreement with United Prairie Foundation (UPF) to implement a patch burn graze project in southeastern North Dakota. Approximately 300 acres of native grasslands were restored with local ecotype native seed and enrolled into a prescribed fire management plan for 5 years. This project was used as a catalyst to create educational and outreach opportunities and expand landowner knowledge and awareness about the importance of well managed native grasslands using prescribed fire and managed grazing. In June 2025, UPF applied for, and was awarded, an OHF grant to continue and expand this project. The Department is a contributing partner on the OHF grant.

USDA Continuous CRP - The Department continued an effort to provide incentives for select Continuous CRP practices in Adams, Barnes, Grand Forks, Nelson and Sargent counties through PLOTS and other partners including ND Natural Resources Trust, Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever. Approximately 1,937 acres of CRP were enrolled through this incentive with 1,612 acres of those acres also available for public access through PLOTS.

Grassland Habitat Partnership - The Department entered into three grant agreements with Traill, Renville and Ward County Soil Conservation Districts to cost share on native grass drills to assist with protecting, conserving, and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat on private lands through Grassland Habitat Partnership grass plantings. During the 2023-2025 biennium the Department provided $32,250.00 in cost share funds to Soil Conservation Districts for native grass drills.

WILDLIFE RESOURCE SECTION

The Wildlife Resource Section's primary responsibility is to manage approximately 222,017 acres of habitat on 243 of the State Wildlife Management Area (WMA) system. These lands are incredibly diverse in terms of habitat and provide extensive wildlife production and hunting opportunities. In addition, limited compatible recreational and educational opportunities are allowed. WMA's located in unique places such as the Killdeer Mountains, Turtle Mountains, Pembina Hills, Missouri River, and the prairie coteau, offer the public the chance to experience the variety of North Dakota's wildlife habitats.

The Wildlife Resource Section includes a total staff of 22 with 9 Wildlife Technicians, 6 Resource Biologists, and 7 Resource Supervisors (1 which also serves as Section Leader). The staff are located at seven district offices with primary duties of WMA land management. Staff also provide a significant number of other services including conducting numerous wildlife surveys, responding to wildlife depredation and complaints, disease monitoring, and provide public information and assistance.

WMA's are owned in fee title by the Department or managed through cooperative agreements. Cooperative agreements with other entities include the Bureau of Reclamation, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and State Department of Trust lands/Department of Transportation which grants authority and responsibility to manage those lands for fish and wildlife management purposes. The Department also has working cooperative agreements with entities to provide services on some WMA's that have area fishing lakes and campgrounds. The agreements are with local water boards or park boards for maintenance items at boat ramps, vault toilets, camping areas, mowing, garbage removal, etc.

Resource Section staff complete work items on WMA's to provide public access, manage boundaries, and enhance and maintain habitat are just a few of the responsibilities associated with the WMA system. Projects include working on buildings, road and trails, public access sites, site renovation, fences, signs and boundary markers, water level wetland management, bridges, herbaceous grass seeding, tree and shrub plantings, vegetation and forest management, noxious weed treatment, and custodial functions. Land management activities include prescribed burning, haying, grazing, and farming.

A major challenge continues to be the control of noxious weeds. The Department spends approximately $750,000 per biennium on chemical, biological, and mechanical weed control efforts. The Department is also a member of the North Dakota Weed Control Association and cooperates with private landowners and other state and federal agencies to find innovative and effective methods of controlling noxious weeds.

The Department's management objectives for specific WMA's are met by conducting various management techniques on these WMA's. Management techniques are based on sound biological practices and may include prescribed burning, rotational haying, rotational grazing, farming and in some cases, establishing wildlife food plots. The Department works with numerous cooperators to conduct haying, farming and grazing on WMA's.

Prescribed burning is conducted on grasslands primarily for the purposes of controlling the spread of exotic invasive species, controlling noxious weeds, or removing dead or decadent herbaceous growth to stimulate new and more vigorous growth. Prescribed burns are completed by a qualified contractor or by Department staff. All personnel involved in prescribed burning have met the Department's prescribed fire training needs. Prescribed burning is a great management tool but presents logistical challenges including availability of staff, training requirements, planning, smoke management, fire break preparation, and ability to complete during a small window of time to accomplish habitat management objectives. Approximately 1,450 acres were burned with the goal of burning 5,000 acres.

Rotational haying is generally conducted on tame grass stands or dense nesting cover plantings on certain WMAs. This practice is done to remove old growth so that these fields can be opened up to stimulate new growth. Haying practices are generally not conducted on the same planting in consecutive years. Annual haying is allowed after Primary Nesting season August 1 and was conducted on 6,802 acres per year conducted by a 56 local cooperators.

Livestock grazing is generally conducted on native grass stands to control invasion by exotic (non-native) species, to prevent a build-up of decadent grass, and to remove old growth so that these native stands can be opened to stimulate new growth of native grasses. Grazing practices are generally not conducted on the same stands in consecutive years and grazing dates, stocking rates and rotations are set up to accomplish habitat management objectives. Grazing prescriptions vary for each WMA depending on soils, existing vegetation, and goals. Grazing was conducted on approximately 24,196 acres per year and is done by 75 local cooperators. Water availability for livestock has been a limiting factor for grazing on some WMAs, and the Department is addressing this by drilling water wells or accessing water supply lines. Also, fencing in rough areas can be problematic. Due to the drought in 2021, the Department had numerous requests for additional grazing and was able to accommodate several requests. In some cases, livestock permittees had to haul water or graze in areas they were not interested in grazing

in past years. The Department was able to take advantage of the drought to get grazing management in areas that had not been grazed in several years. However, due to the challenges of grazing on some of those WMA's – requests for additional grazing in 2023-25 significantly decreased with return of normal precipitation.

Farming on WMA's can provide income for cooperators and can be used by the Department to rotate existing grass fields and farmed fields. Wildlife food plots are established to help sustain local wildlife populations through the winter months, help alleviate wildlife depredation problems to adjacent private landowners, and enhance hunting opportunities on WMAs. Wildlife food plots are established by Department staff, contracted, or through crop share agreements with local cooperators each year. Local cooperators farm on a WMA with a 70:30 cropshare agreement, in which 70% is harvested by the cooperator and the Department's 30% is generally left standing unharvested as a food plot. Farming was conducted on 4,195 acres with 38 local cooperators. In addition, NDGF established 2,481 acres of annual food plots. Neonicotinoids are a prophylactic seed treatment that provide systemic insect control to the crops. However, research has indicated mortality to critical insects utilized by passerine and upland game birds as well as numerous species of pollinators. Therefore, the Department has phased out the use of seeds treated with neonicotinoids on WMA's and by 2021 no treated seed was planted by Department personnel. However, cooperators that farm on WMA's had been advised and their use of treated seed was discontinued in 2025.

WMA's are managed to provide high quality habitat for wildlife production including nesting and fawning seasons, and to provide quality areas for hunting. Other uses of these cherished public lands are not allowed or limited if they conflict with the primary purposes. Wild things need wild places and WMAs are not managed for a park like setting. The Department continually addresses off-trail driving, illegal dumping, parties, etc and has numerous requests for other uses such as ATV and hiking trails, etc. WMA's can not be everything to everyone, so uses that are not compatible with the goals and objectives are limited. This continues to be a challenge as more people look for outdoor recreation on the limited amount of public land in North Dakota.

Enforcement Division Biennial Summary (2023–2025)

History and Current Status

In 1875, 14 years before North Dakota was to become a state, the people of the territory concerned by the low populations of wildlife and the continued downward trend of many species, enacted the first laws for the taking of game. These were followed quickly in 1877 with restrictions on the commercial sale of wildlife, and in 1881 by a wanton waste law. These laws necessitated the need for enforcement, and in 1897 George E. Bowers became the first North Dakota Game Warden. Six years later the state was divided into two Game Enforcement districts with a Chief Game Warden for each. In 1930, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department was created, and the Game and Fish Department Enforcement Division was established as we know it.

The Enforcement Division consisted of a Chief Game Warden and 12 Deputy Game Wardens. Hunting, trapping, and fishing were the main recreational activities the wardens dealt with and at a level of participation quite different than today. According to the 1933 annual report the following number and type of licenses sold: 16,152 resident and 14 nonresident fishing, 34,223 resident and 57 nonresident hunting, 3,112 resident big game (these were for deer as that was the only big game season), and 2,267 resident and one nonresident trapping. The seasons and lengths were also quite different. In addition to fishing, the seasons were only a nine and one-half day pheasant in central and southeast North Dakota, a five and one-half day ruffed grouse in four counties, a 22 and one-half day sharp-tailed grouse, a four-day deer season, and seasons for waterfowl and trapping. License sales graphs for the biennium can be found in this report. Seasons have become longer and more diverse. The first hunting season opens in mid-August for elk and the last one, spring turkey, closes in May. Fishing and furbearer seasons are open year-round.

Today the Enforcement Division includes the Chief Game Warden, Commercial/Investigations Supervisor, Wildlife Investigator, Operations Supervisor, Game Warden Pilot, Administrative Assistant, four District Warden Supervisors, and 30 District Game Wardens.

Importance of the Program

The passage of laws to protect and regulate the use of wildlife resources, along with the funding necessary to accomplish this, created the foundation for ensuring sustainable populations of wildlife species allowing for both consumptive and non-consumptive public use. Laws without enforcement become merely suggestions and without the foundation this provides wildlife crumbles.

The Enforcement Division is tasked with the enforcement of Title 20.1 of the North Dakota Century Code, the Governor’s proclamations, and Department regulations to assure an

orderly and controlled harvest of wildlife populations and to protect the wildlife resources and the rights of all citizens. Additional tasks such as boat safety, education and outreach, working with other divisions within Game and Fish to accomplish their goals, providing for the public safety, and assisting other law enforcement agencies when requested, are also important functions of the Enforcement Program.

Program Objectives

1. Maintain and guide an adequate number of well trained, educated and motivated game wardens throughout the state to achieve compliance.
   The division hired seven Game Wardens during the biennium and completed 10,755 hours of Peace Officer Standards and Training certified training. Recruitment and retention efforts have increased with new advertising and social media marketing being utilized.
2. Maintain an effective and visible boat safety enforcement program.
   Boat safety continues to be a priority, and the division participated in Operation Dry Water, which is a national boat safety enforcement initiative. We also continue to partner with other local law enforcement agencies on a Missouri river Task Force in the Bismarck/Mandan area.
3. Address the commercialization of wildlife.
   The commercial investigations section completed investigations regarding the commercialization of wildlife.
4. Provide for the appropriate response to requests for assistance from citizens.
   The division responded to 288 landowner complaints and thousands of other calls.
5. Maintain and provide enforcement responses for requests from other law enforcement entities to provide for public safety.
   New body worn cameras were obtained and are now being used to collect evidence and provide transparency.
6. Educate the public and promote the Enforcement Division and its activities.
   The division participated in numerous events including sports shows, toy drives, back to school events, school programs and the State Fair. Behind the Badge, a blog with articles written by game wardens, continues to be extremely popular with the public.
7. Develop a strategy to meet the needs for enforcement from other divisions within the department.
   The division assists other divisions in the department including education, completing wildlife and fisheries surveys, and collecting samples for Chronic Wasting Disease sampling efforts.

Biennium Statistics

Citations:	4,784
Written Warnings:	520
Resident Field Contacts:	78,325
Nonresident Field Contacts:	27,247
Boat Accident Investigations:	24
Hunting Accident Investigations:	10
Landowner/Tenant Complaints:	288
Assist Other Agencies:	127
Medical:	3
Search and Rescue:	13

The Enforcement Division annual report is printed in the North Dakota OUTDOORS magazine. The most recent publication was February 2025. It can be found on our website at:
https://gf.nd.gov/magazine/2025/feb/2024-enforcement-division-review#summary

ND GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
DEPARTMENT REVENUE REPORT
JULY 1, 2023 - JUNE 30 2025

ACCOUNT CODE	ACCOUNT NAME	23-25 NET AMOUNT
421025	Game & Fish-Fishing Licenses	8,275,323.50
421030	Game & Fish-Hunting Licenses	20,038,981.20
421040	Game & Fish-Other Licenses	4,449,984.57
421050	Motorboat License Fees	447,156.00
421065	Wildlife Habitat Stamp	2,799,907.00
421070	PLI Sportsmen Habitat Stamp	3,627,457.00
430040	Revenue From Fed Government	44,203,299.25
431005	Revenue from Counties	46,045.39
432005	Reimbursement from Other State	23,000.00
441015	Fines-Forfeitures-Escheat	17,324.00
441045	Sale of Confiscated Property	0.00
442025	Interest Income	123,712.04
442040	Interest On Investment	1,420,455.92
442045	Loss on Sale of Investments	(7,875.00)
443005	Donations	756,471.35
443015	Non-Game Contributions	2,491.81
462115	Postage	232.96
462135	Resale-Special Orders	7,122.15
463029	Sale Of Publications	168,940.50
472010	Lease-Rental Of Land	324,061.67
472015	Lease-Rental of Rooms-Bldgs	3,950.00
472025	Mineral Royalties	820,725.57
473015	Insurance Recoveries	17,630.63
473025	Misc Refunds	122,527.74
473035	Other Reimb. - Jury Pay, Etc.	10,414.58
473120	Refund Of Prior Bienn Expen	1,166.35
474045	Misc. Unclassifed Revenue	566.06
482008	Sale Of Salvage & Scrap	2,992.45
490002	Tsfr Fm Federal Fund	9,813.00
490294	Tsfr Fm ND Outdoor Heritage Fund	215,616.02
490400	Tsfr Fm Highway Tax Dist. Fund	274,277.50
	TOTAL REVENUES	**88,203,771.21**

NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
DEPARTMENT APPROPIATION REPORT
JULY 1, 2023 - JUNE 30, 2025

	ORIGINAL 2023-25 APPROPRIATION	ADJUSTED 2023-25 APPROPRIATION	BIENNIUM EXPENDITURES	UNEXPENDED BALANCE
Salaries & Wages	$36,487,747.00	$37,958,881.00	$37,308,768.05	$650,112.95
Operating Expenses	$17,820,498.00	$17,820,498.00	$14,017,568.02	$3,802,929.98
Capital Assets	$8,548,661.00	$8,575,661.00	$7,647,487.47	$928,173.53
Construction Carryover	$0.00	$3,166,244.00	$2,840,969.32	$325,274.68
Grants-Game And Fish	$10,089,976.00	$10,089,976.00	$6,913,872.61	$3,176,103.39
Shooting Sports Grant Program	$250,000.00	$250,000.00	$172,905.02	$77,094.98
Habitat & Deer Depredation	$27,207,769.00	$29,393,401.00	$28,743,426.34	$649,974.66
Noxious Weed Control	$725,000.00	$725,000.00	$561,653.28	$163,346.72
Missouri River Enforcement	$313,341.00	$319,797.00	$280,091.13	$39,705.87
Grant-Gift-Donation	$676,986.00	$689,029.00	$483,970.50	$205,058.50
Nongame Wildlife	$100,000.00	$100,000.00	$91,035.96	$8,964.04
Aquatic Nuisance Species Prog.	$2,738,844.00	$2,971,471.00	$2,587,037.94	$384,433.06
Lonetree Reservoir	$2,152,644.00	$2,202,484.00	$1,871,637.79	$330,846.21
Wildlife Services	$500,000.00	$500,000.00	$500,000.00	$0.00
Total Expenditures	**$107,611,466.00**	**$114,762,442.00**	**$104,020,423.43**	**$10,742,018.57**

NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
EXPENDITURES BY PROGRAM
JULY 1, 2023 - JUNE 30, 2025

	DEPARTMENT TOTALS	ADMINISTRATION	FISHERIES	ENFORCEMENT	CONSERVATION & COMMUNICATION	WILDLIFE	DIFFERENCE
Salaries & Wages	$37,308,768.05	$12,021,588.04	$5,033,439.75	$8,533,466.81	$4,742,501.05	$6,977,772.40	$0.00
Operating Expenses	$14,017,568.02	$4,032,406.03	$2,520,570.89	$2,311,908.37	$1,514,977.14	$3,637,705.59	$0.00
Capital Assets	$7,647,487.47	$4,648,584.80	$1,286,068.69	$415,226.92	$36,974.03	$1,260,633.03	$0.00
Construction Carryover	$2,840,969.32	$1,543,587.42	$728,149.64	$0.00	$484,232.26	$85,000.00	$0.00
Grants-Game And Fish	$6,913,872.61	$243,676.19	$1,587,522.54	$27,596.33	$2,802,053.09	$2,253,024.46	$0.00
Shooting Sports Program	$172,905.02	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$172,905.02	$0.00	$0.00
Habitat & Deer Depredation	$28,743,426.34	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$28,743,426.34	$0.00
Noxious Weed Control	$561,653.28	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$561,653.28	$0.00
Missouri River Enforcement	$280,091.13	$0.00	$0.00	$280,091.13	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Grant-Gift-Donation	$483,970.50	$234,051.69	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$249,918.81	$0.00
Nongame Wildlife	$91,035.96	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$91,035.96	$0.00	$0.00
Aquatic Nuisance Species Fund	$2,587,037.94	$0.00	$2,587,037.94	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Lonetree Reservoir	$1,871,637.79	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$1,871,637.79	$0.00
Wildlife Services	$500,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$500,000.00	$0.00
TOTAL	**$104,020,423.43**	**$22,723,894.17**	**$13,742,789.45**	**$11,568,289.56**	**$9,844,678.55**	**$46,140,771.70**	**$0.00**

RESOURCES AVAILABLE FROM THE DEPARTMENT

Copies of the minutes from meetings conducted by the Department are available at the Game and Fish Department's Bismarck office. Requests should be sent to: Director, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095.

Wildlife survey results and fish and wildlife status reports are published annually. Single copies of these reports (Progress or Job Completion) are available at the Bismarck office.

The Department publishes a magazine, North Dakota OUTDOORS, available at the address listed above. Single copies of the magazine are available at $2 per copy. The yearly subscription rate (10 issues) is $15. The three-year subscription rate is $30.

A variety of pamphlets, brochures and booklets pertaining to fish, wildlife, lakes, wildlife habitat, and other topics are available for free distribution at the Bismarck office. The Department's web page is: http://gf.nd.gov. The Department's email address is ndgf@nd.gov.