

WAFWA

COMMISSIONERS' COMMITTEE



STATE-OF-THE-STATE REPORTS

Virtual Meeting
July 9, 2020

Alaska Dept of Fish & Game State of the State Report

Commissioner Douglas Vincent-Lang

Summer 2020

Biggest Successes Last 6 Months

1. COVID - Enacted protocols to ensure the Department had the necessary research and management infrastructure in place to manage fisheries this summer. We also worked with users and medical staff to ensure operational protocols were in place to allow fishing operations to conduct operations that protected community health and the health of fishery participants including Department staff.
2. Getting the National Park Service to publish a new rule restoring state management authority thereby rescinding their 2015 rule and allowing for state management on park preserve lands. This was accomplished through the combined efforts of the Alaska Attorney Generals office, Alaska's Congressional Delegation, Governor Dunleavy, a few NGO's and our ADF&G leadership.
3. Finalized the COOP agreement with Conservation Visions and provided support to their Wild Harvest Initiative (WHI). This initiative has as its overall platform the gathering of necessary data to provide critical support in our efforts to sustain America's hunting culture, thereby stabilizing our traditional revenue stream derived from the sale of hunting licenses and big game tags.
4. Received the 2020 Wildlife Restoration Award from The Wildlife Society on ADF&G's work on moose research in Alaska funded by PR that has informed the interrelationships between moose reproductive biology, nutrition, and populations density, thereby guiding management to achieve increased levels of sustained harvest.
5. Contracted with Timmons Group and began work to build a mobile app with license/permit, reporting/recording, geo-referenced hunting and fishing regulations with trip planning functionality, and notification features.
6. Following participation in NCLI, the Sport Fish Division Leadership Team established expectations for a respectful workplace and communicated those expectations to the majority of its staff. The department has since formed an interdivisional team to both examine ADF&G's current culture and make recommendations to ensure ADF&G is place where all of its employees feel respected.
7. Collaboratively addressing concerns over sustainable management of black (*Sebastes melanops*) and yelloweye rockfish (*S. ruberrimus*) which comprise the largest proportion of rockfish species harvested in Alaska and have been prioritized in focusing research and improving management policies. The goal is to create and implement sustainable management practices for rockfish fisheries in Alaska in order to maintain stocks at healthy levels and provide opportunity for anglers.
8. Working with our Canadian counterparts we were able to re-open a caribou hunt on the Forty Mile herd based on findings that there was still a significant harvestable surplus available. The creation of this opportunity allowed for many rural Alaskans to establish a higher level of food security.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns Last 6 Months

1. Management uncertainty in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Dealing with a significant decline in anticipated revenue due to the coronavirus the associated health mandates that came with it.
3. Projected revenue declines due to COVID-19 pandemic and associated health mandates are severe. The Sport Fish Division has reduced its FY20 and FY21 budgets by nearly \$7.5 million which will noticeably impact core service delivery. The sport fish guide industry will also be severely impacted.

Alaska Dept of Fish & Game State of the State Report

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Summer 2020

Biggest Challenges or Concerns Last 6 Months Cont'd

4. Continuing to deal with intrusive federal initiatives that erode state management such as the creation of massive new critical habitat areas and the ESA listing of ice seal populations currently numbering in the millions.
5. On remand to the federal district court, the significant decision favoring state management by the Supreme Court in the Sturgeon Case was watered down by the district judge by his decision limiting his decision to the water body in question which basically contradicts the Supreme Court's ruling recognizing the deference to Alaska under ANILCA.
6. Hatchery surcharge on fishing licenses is set to expire when hatchery development bonds have been paid in full which could be this year or next. The legislature has failed to act on renewing the surcharge this year which will result in a significant loss of revenue dedicated to hatchery enhancement in areas of the state that the division's sport fish hatcheries cannot support and long-term hatchery facility maintenance needs.
7. The illegal introduction of non-native and invasive species to Alaskan waters seem to be on the rise and are threatening salmon and resident species. Offenders and the general public seemingly lack awareness of the negative impact their actions have and enforcement is challenging.

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

1. Uncertainty regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications on operations. We expect to continue to have many of our staff telework to pandemic proof our operations to the extent possible.
2. As a result of budget reductions, it is likely the Sport Fish Division will manage some fisheries more conservatively in the absence of essential research.
3. We will continue to deal with attempts by federal land management agencies to pre-empt or thwart state management authority through litigation and negotiations.
4. The major issue confronting the Division of Wildlife Conservation is the uncertainty caused by COVID-19. If tourism in Alaska returns to normal levels this fall our revenue stream should be sufficient to avoid any further budget cuts. However, if travel restrictions continue our funding will be drastically reduced to the point we may have to drastically reduce staff and operations.
5. Virtual delivery of education and outreach services in an attempt to keep Alaskans sport fishing.
6. Communication and digital outreach strategy designed to deter illegal introduction of non-native and invasive species to Alaskan waters and increase awareness of the impact those species have on the ecosystem.

Biggest Successes Last 6 Months

1st online only draw for the largest of the Department's draws. Record number of applications and results posted for customers in 23 days.

State's authority recognized in the reopening of access to Lake Powell after early and non-consulted closure in response to COVID-19.

The BLM published the final EA and Decision Record approving five recreational shooting sites near the Phoenix metropolitan area. The Department consulted the BLM on these first of their kind opportunities and construction of the first site is underway.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns Last 6 Months

Maintaining public access and recreational opportunities during closures on Federal lands due to COVID-19.

Increased Endangered Species Act litigation, including use of the Equal Access to Justice Act.

Managing impacts to wildlife and habitat in the face of Federally unregulated management of feral horses and burros.

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

Economic impacts and anticipated budget shortfalls due to COVID-19.

Revisions to Departmental operational processes, based on lessons learned during COVID-19 operations, including use of technology for meetings, telework, etc.

Expected downlisting of the Colorado River native Humpback Chub from Endangered to Threatened.



Biggest Successes Last 6 Months

- 1 - Maintaining core business operations with a large proportion of staff working remotely and seasonal hiring slowdowns.
- 2 - On August 21, 2019, Governor Jared Polis directed both Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) to work cooperatively to conserve Colorado's valuable big game resources through executive order D 2019 011: Conserving Colorado's Big Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors. This executive order directed CPW to compile a big game status report to guide both agencies, as well as its partners, to collectively improve the conservation of big game winter range and migration corridors. This recently completed report is now available on CPW's website: 2020 Status Report: Big Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns Last 6 Months

- 1 - Adopting technologies to allow remote working and holding virtual meetings, conferences, and Commission meetings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2 - Adopting guidelines and policies to continue critical field functions while ensuring employee and public safety.

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

- 1 - A significant portion of agency review is derived from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, in particular big game hunting (and especially nonresident license sales). It remains to be seen to what extent COVID-19 restrictions and concerns, coupled with the associated economic decline will impact big game license sales and hunting participation. The recession of 2008 had a large negative impact.
- 2 - Determining when and how to ramp back up our customer service functions, marinas, swimming beaches, etc. and responding to legislative actions in response to large declines in state revenues.
- 3 - On December 10, 2019, the Rocky Mountain Wolf Action Fund submitted more than 200,000 signatures to the Colorado Secretary of State's Office to place restoration of wolves on Colorado's 2020 statewide ballot. On November 3, 2020, voters in Colorado will vote on Ballot Initiative 107, which, if approved, will direct the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission to "take the steps necessary to begin reintroduction of gray wolves by December 31, 2023..." Under the initiative, the costs for the development and implementation of the management plan and reintroduction, and for fair compensation for livestock losses will be paid from Colorado Parks and Wildlife's (CPW) wildlife cash fund (hunting- and fishing-derived revenue), unless the wildlife cash fund cannot pay for such expenses. State employees operating in their official capacity are prohibited by law from urging voters to support or oppose the initiative.

Biggest Successes Last 6 Months

- Administration – Signed a new contract for a license system provider (Brandt) that goes live November 1, 2020.
- Enforcement – Hired 9 new conservation officers during COVID-19 and conducted their new employee orientation online for the first time.
- Fisheries – Partnered with University of Idaho to conduct an innovative and large-scale assessment of angler effects on wild steelhead populations using tagging and angler/outfitter outreach to provide important insight into angler encounter rates and the effects of catch-and-release fishing on wild steelhead to inform future management.
- Wildlife – Produced the first-ever statewide wolf population estimate including confidence intervals using a camera-based monitoring technique.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns Last 6 Months

- Administration – Addressing onset of COVID-19 and PPE resource and response coordination, including modifications to regional/HQ office operations and customer service.
- Enforcement – Training, professional, and career development opportunities were postponed, including cancellation of Post academies impacting new hire “on-boarding”.
- Fisheries – Salmon and steelhead returns to Idaho in 2019 and 2020 are the lowest in 20 years significantly squeezing our ability to balance management priorities including non-treaty and treaty fisheries, ESA requirements, and hatchery broodstock needs.
- Wildlife – Managing a substantial increase in mountain lion conflicts (attacks on pets, proximity to homes) in residential areas in southern Idaho that is challenged by diverse public opinion about lethal removal of lions to resolve conflict.

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

- Administration – Initiation of the Brandt license system that complies with the new Commission rule limiting nonresident over-the-counter tags by unit and zone and modifies the method for rush sales event to improve customer service. Features that remove the requirement for a user ID and password for online purchase and provide a “hard card” license option are also new service improvements.
- Enforcement – Defining the new normal of officer protocol for routine license checks and compliance-oriented law enforcement.
- Fisheries – Continued poor returns of salmon and steelhead that amplify stakeholder urgency to develop consensus solutions for recovery.
- Wildlife – Continued surveillance and planning for a Chronic Wasting Disease detection that has not yet been detected in Idaho but has been in 3 states bordering Idaho.

WAFWA State of the State Report

2020 Summer

Brad Loveless, Secretary, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism

Biggest Successes Last 6 Months

1. Successfully kept lakes, state parks and wildlife areas open during the COVID-19 pandemic, making outdoor recreation available to Kansans at a critical time. Department employees developed protocols and remained healthy while ensuring safe recreational opportunities. Kansans responded and the number of resident fishing licenses sold between Jan. 1-May 25, 2020 was up nearly 50 percent compared to what was sold over the same time period in 2019.
2. Kansas expanded its Aquatic Nuisance Species program and has benefited from additional manpower. The program is moving from primarily outreach and education to on-the-ground prevention, eradication, and control. Much of this has been made possible with additional funds from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
3. The Intensive Walleye Rearing and the Early-spawn Largemouth Bass programs were expanded and fine-tuned to bolster sport fish populations through more efficient stockings.
4. A \$2.1 million grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) will be used for long-term leases that provide hunting and fishing opportunities on private land, expanding and improving the Walk-In Hunting Access program, which currently has more than 1 million acres enrolled. Some leases may be negotiated in conjunction with Conservation Reserve Program sign-ups to make that program more attractive to landowners.
5. Launched the HuntFish KS app, which allows hunters to keep electronic licenses and permits on a mobile device while in the field. The app also provides access to regulations, reports and online license and permit sales and will eventually have electronic carcass tags and access to a public land check-in system.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns Last 6 Months

1. Land acquisition is always a challenge in an agricultural state that is 97 percent privately owned.
2. Managing wild turkeys to reduce a declining population trend and restoring high hunter satisfaction rates recorded just a few years ago.

3. Dealing with increased usage of wildlife areas and fishing lakes as a result of users with more time and fewer activity options.
4. Negotiating an RFP for license and permit sales vendor.

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

1. The pandemic has shown that competition for leisure time is the biggest barrier to participation in outdoor recreational activities. The next challenge will be to engage new users and ensure they renew licenses next year.
2. Managing budget shortfalls because of the suspension of nonresident turkey permit sales in April, resulting in a loss of more than \$2 million in revenue.
3. Navigating the ever-changing COVID-19 landscape and being prepared to refund more than \$12 million dollars in nonresident deer permits if travel restrictions are in place next fall.
4. Continuing the ongoing battle against the spread of aquatic nuisance species and funneling designated federal funding to the most effective efforts.
5. Ensuring COVID-19 does not impact vulnerable wildlife populations.

Biggest Successes Last 6 Months

- 1. ___ of acres protected, block management agreements allowing public access on – acres
- 2. Maintained agency function despite COVID. For example: Licenses sold, sites remained open, much research continued, enforcement continued, seasons mostly moved forward as proposed (except 2 week period for nonresident spring bear and turkey due to nonresident quarantine requirements, cancelled lower Yellowstone paddlefish)
- 3. Maintained effective bulwark against aquatic invasive species, stopping fouled boats in winter and getting check stations up and running during COVID pandemic

Biggest Challenges or Concerns Last 6 Months

- 1. COVID
- 2. Wildlife Diseases
- 3. Increased recreation, day use, river recreation planning, allocation

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

- 1. Tough discussions on allocation over an ever busy landscape
- 2. Species management planning, elk, grizzly bears, goat...
- 3. Prepare for upcoming legislative session that we know will be austere
- 4. Continue to build one agency, one vision



NEBRASKA STATE REPORT

WAFWA – June 9, 2020

Jim Douglas, Director
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
2200 N. 33rd Street, Lincoln, NE 68503

Take ‘em Hunting- Last fall, we announced the Take ‘em Hunting Challenge – asking hunters to take along a new or beginning hunter. Partners included AKRS Equipment, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation and SCHEELS.

2,367 people took the pledge online to take someone hunting and 2,916 entries were submitted from 2,175 people in the challenge. Most hunters took youth including children and grandchildren. 54 percent of entries took a first-time hunter. Most mentors took people deer hunting (48 percent) followed by turkey (14 percent), upland (13 percent) and waterfowl (10 percent).

We created a series of videos, encouraging hunters to take someone hunting and shared them on social media. Marketing also included paid social and a paid PSA featuring Husker football coach Scott Frost. Direct mail and emails were sent to current and previous hunters. The challenge had a strong social media presence and following. Highlights, photos and stories from submissions were shared weekly on our Facebook page. This helped create tremendous excitement from both participants and additional prospective hunting mentors. One story of a mom who took her young kids turkey hunting, reached 92,000 people!

Each week, we announced prizes winners from our partners. The Grand Prize, a John Deer UTV was awarded Wednesday, June 10 to a family from Grand Island, Nebraska. For more information go to OutdoorNebraska.org/TakeEmHunting.

Mountain Lion Season - The Commission held Nebraska’s third harvest season for mountain lions during January – March 2020 in the Pine Ridge Unit (northwest Nebraska). The season allowed for up to 8 mountain lions to be harvested, with a limit of 4 lions and a sublimit of 2 females in each of two sub-units.

The 2020 harvest season was a success with 7 cougars harvested. Our objective is to provide a harvest opportunity that allows the population to remain resilient and healthy, while halting growth or moderately reducing the population size. Our target density is 5-7 mountain lions/100km² of suitable habitat, similar to other states. We also want to reduce depredation events.

Our new 2019 Pine Ridge population estimate is 34 total animals, down from 59 in 2017, and our estimated density is on target at around 5 mountain lions/100km² of suitable habitat. We also had no documented depredation events in the Pine Ridge since 2019.

State Parks Engage People in the Outdoors - Our parks are at the heart of many Nebraskans' lives. They provide the perfect place for people to get in touch with nature, explore the outdoors and find new outdoor pursuits. Over the past decade, the Commission has dramatically expanded its educational offerings at our 76 state parks and recreation areas. Park naturalists plan educational and recreational events to draw new visitors to our parks, while teaching outdoor skills. Popular events include outdoor expos attended by more than 60,000 people; and outdoor discovery programs that introduce more than 5,000 fourth and fifth graders to hands-on activities such as outdoor cooking, kayaking, fishing, and shooting sports. Bioblitzes invite the public to come count unique species. Guided hiking tours and horse rides give people the chance to see parts of the state they would not otherwise have. Fishing clinics and family fishing events introduce thousands to the sport of fishing. Shooting ranges in parks provide great introductions to shooting activities for families, kids, and new shooters in a safe and friendly atmosphere. These events and others bring people together in the outdoors to create family memories.

Reaching Broad Audiences Through Social Media- The Commission has very diverse customers, from hunters, to wildlife viewers and park-goers, and boaters and anglers. Each person's motivation for outdoor participation varies depending on what they love to do outdoors. Social media is an important part of the agency's promotional mix, educating diverse audiences on the state's fish and wildlife, promoting opportunities for fun and recreation and sharing important reminders. Live streaming of big game meetings allows for statewide participation from hunters. Promoting unique special events and training opportunities through social media helps the Commission engage with people in a cost-effective and timely manner. Social media also connects us to our customers, creating engagement and allowing people to share their experiences with us. This brings awareness of the diversity of outdoor opportunities in Nebraska. Instagram is the Commission's fastest growing channel, with over 24,000 followers that are mostly urban-area residents under the age of 25. Facebook is where most of our customers go to for timely information. With 115,000 followers, it is second only to the website and word of mouth. In 2019, the Commission's website had close to 1.8 million unique visitors.

Growing Education and Interpretation- The Commission developed a new education plan in 2019 to help connect constituents to our natural and cultural legacy and outdoor recreation opportunities. Developed through an analysis of our current education initiatives and a broad look towards the future, this plan has six goals: natural resource education, cultural and historical education, outdoor and recreation education, cohesive team development, maintaining and growing strong partnerships, and developing ideas to ensure sustainable funding. A new Fish and Wildlife Education Division was created to assist with implementation of the plan and to educate Nebraskans about our state's natural resources. This division will work to advance and expand ecological education development of Nebraska-specific resources.

Mentoring Videos Encourage People to Share Their Passion- Hunting is an important part of our Nebraska heritage, and the sale of hunting and fishing permits fund conservation efforts in our state. For these two reasons, it is critical that we attract new hunters and re-engage those who may have let hunting fall by the wayside. Game and Parks worked with several partner groups in 2019 to produce a sixpart video series underscoring the reasons mentors take new hunters

into the field each year. The reasons shared included anything from creating family memories, spending time with friends, and spending time in the field with the dog. The videos were released on Facebook channels between August 2019 and November 2019, in tandem with the agency's Take 'Em Hunting campaign. Partner organizations shared the six videos throughout the year on their own social media channels. In total, the six part series received over 40,000 views.

Addressing Wildlife Damage - Nebraska's landowners are important partners in conservation. Creating and providing wildlife habitat, providing access for public hunting to control populations and continual communication provide for successful wildlife management.

The Commission has been proactive in response to crop damage by deer, pronghorn and elk. The agency's Damage Control Permit protocol was rewritten in 2019. The new protocol removed obstacles preventing the use of damage control permits as a tool for addressing crop damage done by big game. Although damage control permits have been issued for deer for many years, 2019 saw a more aggressive use of these permits for pronghorn and elk. Other steps taken to address depredation were:

- Landowner meetings in areas with high prevalence of damage complaints.
- Encouraging landowners to contact Commission personnel to report damage caused by big game.
- Commission staff contacting landowners who have had damage in the past.
- The Commission issued a series of outreach messages throughout the year, through news releases and broadcast announcements, reminding landowners of the many resources available to address depredation issues.
- The new Antlerless Hunter Database was created in the summer. Hunters willing to harvest only antlerless deer can sign up online and offer their contact information. Landowners can access this database to find hunters in their area willing to harvest antlerless deer.
- A Contact a Biologist online tool was created to allow landowners to contact the Commission and get immediate help addressing depredation issues.

The Commission's renewed and increased response to depredation is an effort to connect landowners experiencing damage losses by big game to solutions that work.

Expanding Public Access on Private Lands- Nebraska supports nearly one million acres of publicly-accessible lands, much in part to the Open Fields and Waters (OFW) Program. Nebraska is over 97% privately-owned and increasing access to private lands continues to be one of the agency's primary objectives. OFW provides financial incentives to private landowners willing to allow walk-in hunting, trapping and/or fishing. The program has grown during each of the last four years, and last years enrollment totals nearly 347,000 acres – a record for the program. Since 2016-17, over 113,000 acres have been added to OFW, a 48% increase. In recent years, new OFW enrollments have been targeted within the Berggren Plan priority areas in an effort to increase public hunting opportunities for pheasants and other upland gamebirds, and public access opportunities have increased by 93% within these priority areas. Over the past two years, we also targeted additional hunting opportunities for prairie grouse, deer and turkey, and 1 northern bobwhite. A 2020 Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) award for \$3M from USDA-NRCS will help continue our efforts to grow the program.

Bighorn Sheep Research Continues-

South Dakota State University researchers in 2019 gathered another year of information in the effort to keep Nebraska bighorn sheep populations healthy. Preliminary information from the 2019 lamb crop indicated higher success rates than in years past. In particular, Pine Ridge herds had nearly doubled lamb survival rates from 2018 as five out of 15 lambs were well. The researchers and Commission staff experimentally removed ewes chronically ill with the deadly strain of pneumonia, which had been identified as influencing poor lamb survival over the last decade. The Wildcat Hills herd saw another banner year for lamb survival, with 14 of the initial 22 captured in the spring still alive. The study will continue for another year with hopes of gauging the effectiveness of removing chronically sick adults on lamb survival. Researchers also hope to understand what is influencing the continued high lamb survival in the Wildcat Hills, where since 2018, 38 of the 73 lambs observed survived.

Salt Creek Tiger Beetle Releases- The Commission continued its recovery efforts for the endangered Salt Creek tiger beetle in 2019 by releasing 315 lab-reared larvae and adult beetles onto critical habitat at Little Salt Creek WMA. It was the first time the agency released Salt Creek tiger beetles onto Commission property. Also in 2019, the Commission partnered with a Kansas zoo to help raise the tiger beetles in the lab. In March, staff at the Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center began raising larvae transferred from Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium. Having another zoo partner will help us increase our lab-reared beetles and help speed our recovery efforts. Other partners raising beetles include the Lincoln Children's Zoo and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Rehabilitating Waters for Future Recreation - The Aquatic Habitat Program works to improve conditions for aquatic life through better management or rehabilitation of existing resources, and collaborates with partners to do so. Funding is provided by the purchase of the Aquatic Habitat Stamp, included in the price of a fishing license. Major projects in 2019 were:

- The Conestoga Reservoir rehabilitation was completed, producing a fantastic recreational area for Nebraskans. Investments in the angler and boating access will provide facilities for anglers, birders and hikers and bikers. Work began in 2011, and three years of construction were needed to modify the outlet structure, excavate over one-half million cubic yards of sediment, stabilize shorelines, install sediment retention cells and build wetlands to protect water quality. The Aquatic Habitat Program, Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy, Environmental Protection Agency and Sport Fish Restoration provided the funding for the \$8 million project.
- A major coolwater stream restoration project on Dry Spotted Tail Creek is nearly complete. Efforts to restore natural stream function, riparian and wetland habitat has involved the replacement of the straightened and incised channel with a new, constructed reach of meandering stream to support healthy aquatic and wetland communities. Public access improvements will be included when the project is completed in 2020 with help from Platte River Basin Environments, Trout Unlimited and Ducks Unlimited.
- Fort Robinson State Park's Grabel, Cherry Creek and Ice House ponds are being rehabilitated. They are being excavated to remove sediments, water-control structures are being modernized, shorelines are being shaped for better access and underwater habitat structures are being installed to improve fishing. Maintaining fishing opportunities throughout construction is a goal of this project.

Enhancing Coolwater Streams - Coolwater streams account for less than 28 percent of all stream miles in Nebraska, but they are still a tremendous resource. Good land stewardship has preserved the relatively pristine condition of some stream reaches, which provide habitat for a variety of aquatic organisms, including native and at-risk species, and angling opportunities for trout. In 2019, staff and partners completed projects to create or enhance an estimated 1.6 miles of coolwater streams. Staff conducted pre- and post-construction surveys to assess the fish community's response to stream enhancements and sampled several at-risk species.

In addition, instream flow appropriations were renewed at Long Pine Creek for another 15 years. These flows sustain naturally reproducing rainbow and brown trout populations.

Fighting Aquatic Invasive Species - Aquatic invasive species (AIS) continue to threaten Nebraska's waterways. The Commission partners with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to educate people about AIS and how to combat them. The agency also is exploring new cleaning stations, and renovating lakes to reduce threats. A new, waterless boating-cleaning station was installed at Lewis and Clark Reservoir in 2019. It was used 391 times in its first two months as zebra mussels continue to be an issue for Lewis and Clark and the Missouri River. Glenn Cunningham Lake was found positive for zebra mussels in 2018, was drained to facilitate freezing the mussels during the 2018/2019 winter, and will be refilled and restocked in 2020.

Restoring Freshwater Mussels - Efforts began in 2014 to restore native freshwater mussels back into their historical range in Nebraska streams. Since 2016, 14,000 plain pocketbook mussels and 5,700 fat muckets have been released. Mussels were not released in 2019 into streams where high water existed; instead, those mussels are being held in hatcheries. Mussel production in 2019 includes 42,000 plain pocketbook and 23,000 fat muckets. All released mussels have been marked or tagged to identify them.

Law Enforcement and Public Safety - Conservation officers frequently answer the call for assistance from a variety of other agencies whenever a tragedy occurs. These calls for service triggering a response from our enforcement personnel in 2019 ranged from searching for homicide and cold-case victims to retrieving stranded motorists during the Thanksgiving blizzard. Our personnel are well equipped for many of these search operations, utilizing drones, 4-wheelers, side-scan sonar and a fleet of vessels.

Three large, long-term cooperative investigations into the illegal and fraudulent take of fish and wildlife are in the prosecution phase. Investigations have involved state and federal officials, and 21 defendants have pled to fines of more than \$117,000, along with multiple years of probation and permit revocation. In addition to the illegal take of wildlife, many of the cases centered on the illegal commercialization of natural resources. With a number of plea agreements still in process, the case is expected to culminate in 2020.

Helping protect our natural resources and landowner rights is important to the Wildlife Protectors Association (WPA) and the Commission. The two collaborate in implementing the successful Nebraska Wildlife Crime Stoppers Program. The WPA solicits private funds to offer as possible reward monies for information in solving wildlife crimes, which has resulted in more than 1,000 arrests.

Biggest Successes Last 6 Months

Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) staff are becoming accustomed to and experts on digital platforms for communication. Cooperation in teaching fellow staff members knowledge of digital program use and understanding has been outstanding. Department wide Microsoft Teams meetings are being held weekly to connect with each other on a personal level where Department business is not the headlining discussion topic. Staff has expressed that, through this time apart, they have never felt more connected to each other and have had better collaboration on specific projects than ever before. Having work stations at home also gives the flexibility to work when you are the most productive, when there are fewer distractions, and the ability to go do something else and come back and finish whatever project was being worked on without being confined to a standard workday when motivation waxes and wanes. This has shown a different perspective in productivity.

The Department has initiated the revision of its Wildlife Action Plan. This comprehensive plan is required to be updated every ten years and is due in 2022. We plan to develop and send out a survey to partner and plan implementers to understand how the current plan is used and what should be updated or included

The Department wrapped up the 2020 hunter application period in early May. Customer support staff were on phones, email, and social media to answer hunting application questions from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm, seven days a week for a seven-week period. The entire period was conducted while staff was working from home due to the COVID-19 closures. This was a huge effort and gained NDOW huge kudos with the hunting community. This effort gained respect and admiration from all hunters both resident and nonresident that needed support and received it in a timely manner. This period also broke NDOW records with the most applications submitted in the history of the Department.

Fish stocking has continued throughout the state during the COVID-19 closures. This was part due to the abundance of fish in our hatcheries that needed to be released as well as preparation for sportsmen and women when stay at home orders would be lifted and they could get back into the field. Advertisement of our activities were postponed respecting the Governor's stay at home orders. Future angler experience and success were a high priority to NDOW considering the needed health safety shutdown.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns Last 6 Months

Trying to adjust to the COVID19 related directives has been an effort for all staff members. All the agency's staff have worked from home while focusing on their families' health and safety. Only recently have some been able to transition back. This transition has been a snail's pace with health and safety at the forefront. This time has provided opportunities for staff to adjust their perspectives to realize what is truly important in their lives, the people, and the time that we have with them. It has shown how interdependent we are on one another, not only as co-workers but on a social level as well.

The state of Nevada has implemented a hiring freeze. This freeze includes seasonal hires that are imperative to many future planned management projects. There have also been changes in many key roles for the Department, including the retirement of our Deputy Director or Administrative Services, Liz O'Brien. As we hope to fill needed positions as soon as possible, the approval to fill is needed and a time to be able to fill remains unknown.

With COVID-19 health restrictions and social distancing, our volunteer program has been postponed. Programs run on volunteer help have been told to push out project dates or find alternative staff members to help. This postponement of the volunteer program will have an effect on our in-kind fund matching. The extent of which remains unknown.

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

Finding a new normal for all staff will be the major concern in future months. A back to work plan has been created and will be constantly updated with the Government regulated phases and as unforeseen problems arise that need to be addressed.

We expect there to be a surge in boating and outdoor recreational activities this summer with the easing of restrictions and a public eager to get outside and out of the house. With record numbers of fishing license sales and reported RV rental activities, wardens on waterways and in the field plan to execute new social interaction strategies to keep staff and recreators safe. We will continue to standardize and train for our public contacts at the statewide level, so that everyone who meets an NDOW game warden is treated in a similar and professional fashion. We will also continue to ensure proper tactics and training with the right equipment to keep our operational units on the cutting edge of what they can lawfully, capably, and safely perform in boating and wildlife enforcement.

As we move forward, we anticipate that priority projects, such as our Fisheries division's sport fish management and aquatic species conservation and recovery will continue effectively but may look somewhat different in implementation than they would have previously. For example, critical survey activities will be maintained, but may require extended timelines using one or two staff members using COVID specific guidance rather than as a larger project using multiple staff and partners. The Department anticipates having the ability to continue activities identified as essential. This would include activities such as Watercraft Inspection Stations statewide and the 17th annual spotted frog surveys in Indian Valley, located in central Nevada. We will continue to prioritize essential activities and maintain the capacity to address the most critical needs for state wildlife resources and recreational opportunities.

A redesign and redevelopment of the agency's website is underway. Staff is working with the vendor to create a user-friendly, more accessible website that matches the branding of the agency's licensing site. With this new website, staff aims to make purchasing a license a more seamless process and allow users to easily find the information they are looking for. Right now, staff is in the research and discovery phase, and by the end of the June 2020 the agency will enter the design phase. The new website is on schedule to be deployed by March 2021.

With the state slowly beginning to open us, staff will start to promote outdoor recreation and, on a Staycation, Discover Nevada Campaign. The focus will be to recreate locally, responsibly and discover what Nevada has to offer.



WAFWA Report, Summer 2020

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT DIVISION (WMD)

Biggest Success – The Department initiated investigations of Gould's turkey distribution, abundance and natural history in the Peloncillo Mountains. Although the study is ongoing, preliminary data have greatly improved our understanding of roost site characteristics and use, limits of the occupied range, seasonal range use, nesting and brood rearing habitat and movements between widely separated habitat use areas.

Biggest Challenge - One of the state's Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep herds has recently been exposed to *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*. Biologists have begun the process of monitoring the disease; documenting coughing and lethargic sheep, assessing movements and recording lamb survival. Ultimately this data will inform management recommendations.

Next Six Months - The Department is continuing to focus on wetland/riparian restoration, recognizing the considerable influence these habitat types have on maintaining healthy wildlife populations and diversity in the desert southwest. Pending completion of the NEPA process, the Department plans to collaborate with the Forest Service to organize a multi-year, landscape scale wetland restoration program across three forests.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT DIVISION (FMD)

Biggest Success - Test results indicated that non-native trout persisted after two years of rotenone applications in a short reach of Whitewater Creek, a Gila trout restoration area. Staff completed an additional application of rotenone to 20 miles of the creek. Habitat occupied by Gila trout will be increased by 26% and this project is critical to overall recovery efforts.

Biggest Challenge - The Department operates six state fish hatcheries originally constructed in the 1930s to 1960s. The greatest concern in the last six months was completing maintenance projects to keep operations going and then planning for near and long-term infrastructure improvements and funding.

Next Six Months - In the next six months, we anticipate completing the Whitewater Creek renovation for Gila trout, completing about 25 miles of restoration work in the Rio Costilla drainage for Rio Grande cutthroat trout and final planning for renovating Glenwood Hatchery for Gila trout conservation efforts.

ECOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING DIVISION (EPPD)

Biggest Success - The biggest achievement would be the detailed analysis and technical response to the national forest plans and Environmental Impact Assessments that include the Carson, Santa Fe, Cibola and Gila National Forests.

Biggest Challenge - Moving forward with the Tijeras Canyon Animal Detection System replacement has been challenging. This wildlife crossing helps provide passage between the Sandia and Manzano Mountains. It is

not clear how the partner agencies will come to agreement on installation and maintenance of this important habitat connectivity project.

Next Six Months - The division has been working to make improvements to the Environmental Review Tool, in response to existing work from home requirements, to be implemented in the new fiscal year.

FIELD OPERATIONS DIVISION (FOD)

Biggest Success - Our biggest success is continuing to provide wildlife law enforcement, community policing and public relations as seamlessly as possible during the pandemic. All of FOD has had to adapt and overcome many obstacles. Officers have done a fantastic job ensuring the protection of New Mexico's wildlife resources.

Biggest Challenge - The division's biggest challenge has been trying to work through the pandemic — working with officers with limited PPE and trying to figure out how to keep them safe while doing their jobs effectively. So far, we are keeping them safe but are not sure.

Next Six Months - We will figure out ways to do our jobs more effectively, especially through the upcoming hunting season with regards to keeping officers safe, their ability to make contacts and conduct law enforcement investigations.

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION DIVISION (IED)

Biggest Success – During the COVID-19 public health crisis, the Department has posted new content on the website and social media daily. On Facebook alone, customers have engaged and downloaded new lesson plans more than 650k times. Hunter education lessons, weekly fishing reports and e-newsletters also provided new digital content for customers stuck at home.

Biggest Challenge - The COVID-19 public health crisis created the need to mobilize, prioritize and communicate online services. In response the Department's homepage was redesigned and communication efforts increased across multiple platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and GovDelivery.

Next Six Months - The Department recognizes the importance of skills-based education in our R3 efforts and staff are working feverously to ensure FY-21 needs will be met. From increasing virtual training opportunities to engaging with teachers on virtual platforms, the Department is working hard to position itself to continue building future successes.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES DIVISION (ASD)

Biggest Success - The biggest success within the last six months has been maintaining business operations for the Department with limited staff in the building and working from home. The Department had 102,500 individuals apply for draw hunts which is an increase of 4,374 over the previous license year.

Biggest Challenge - The biggest challenge will be managing the Department's finances and assets during a period of financial distress for the state. With declining state revenues and the inability to hire rapidly to fill necessary positions, the Department will need to diligently manage and hire essential positions.

Next Six Months - In the next six months, ASD anticipates a potential reduction in spending depending on the outcome of the special legislative session. Also, depending on the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department will need to manage the impact on hunting and fishing license sales for the remainder of the year.

INFORMATION SERVICES DIVISION (ISD)

Biggest Success - Our biggest success in the past six months has been continuing to develop and deliver a high level of service and support to our customers while undergoing a change in IT leadership.

Biggest Challenge - The IT Operations teams' biggest challenge has been maintaining continuity and open communication between the teams, and maintaining appropriate prioritization when a level of technical leadership was no longer available to support the balance.

Next Six Months - A new CIO will be hired, which should assist with formulating additional short-term and long-term plans for the agency and the ISD teams.

Biggest Successes Last 6 Months

- 1..... Provided an online hunter education course for students who were already enrolled in in-person classes that were canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and also to qualifying students who were not enrolled in a class, at a 25% discount. The student received temporary certification upon completion of the online course, and then is required to complete a written and practical exam by the end of 2020.
- 2..... Most spring activities for fisheries and wildlife crews, while having to adjust accordingly due to guidelines established because of the coronavirus pandemic, went ahead as planned, such as spawning activities.
- 3..... Conducted annual spring advisory board meetings online due to COVID-19.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns Last 6 Months

- 1..... COVID-19: Close offices to public access due to coronavirus pandemic; adjusting field operations accordingly; anglers, public pressure and social distancing.
- 2..... Teleworking. Conducting business with staff and the public was/is trial and error for everyone involved.
- 3..... Having enough dedicated staff time to spend on our R3 efforts.

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

- 1.... Hire an R3 coordinator.
- 2..... Operating at the "New Normal" phase level for COVID-19 and conducting business as usual.
- 3..... Expanding CWD surveillance efforts to additional deer units.



Biggest Successes Last 6 Months

1. While other states have seen declines in license sales, Oklahoma has been able to increase license sales and revenues. Some of this success has been due to increased targeted email marketing made possible by segregating data from the agency's new Go Outdoors Oklahoma (Brandt) online licensing system. As the nation began stay-at-home and social distancing protocols with the COVID-19 outbreak, ODWC began working with state health agencies and executives to get the message out that Oklahoma's "Outdoors Are Always Open." Those efforts likely played a role in getting more people to buy fishing licenses in the same period compared to last year, and increasing sales of resident turkey hunting licenses to a point that offset losses in sales of nonresident hunting licenses.
2. The National Wild Turkey Federation selected ODWC for several of its nationwide awards in 2020. The Department was named winner of the NWTF 2020 Land Stewardship Award. Also, Oklahoma Game Warden Kenny Lawson was named NWTF's 2020 National Wildlife Officer of the Year.
3. More than 300 people toting antlers and horns gathered on a Tuesday in February at ODWC headquarters in Oklahoma City for the annual "Rack Madness!" event. Over 20 certified scorers were on hand to measure mounts, racks and skulls during the daylong event. Attendees were provided giveaways, seminars, free lunch, food trucks and drawings for two lifetime combination licenses as grand prizes. In total, 384 items were scored, and 165 items met requirements to be added to ODWC's Cy Curtis Awards Program to recognize hunters and their trophies.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns Last 6 Months

1. The COVID-19 outbreak prompted most state government offices to shut their office doors, and ODWC was no different. As the national state of emergency ramped up, most office workers got a crash course in teleworking, as they were sent to "shelter at home" during much of March, April and May. A mostly virtual staff continued to conduct vital customer service and funding functions at ODWC headquarters. Field employees had to adapt their methods of interacting with the public and each other with social distancing in mind. Overall, office staff adapted well to working from their makeshift home offices, and the ODWC's new online license system and mobile app proved to be great resources during the shutdown.
2. With a five-year downward trend in the harvest of antlerless deer, the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission approved more liberal bag limits and expanded hunting opportunities for does for the 2020-21 deer seasons. Biologists said that increasing doe harvest will keep the state's deer herd in balance and contribute to overall herd health. As a result, the Department's Information and Education Division will revamp a previously successful public education campaign from 15 years ago with the message "Hunters in the Know ... Take a Doe!"

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

1. Chronic Wasting Disease still hasn't been detected in any testing of wild cervids in Oklahoma, but it has infected wild herds in every state bordering Oklahoma and has been found in cervids quite close to Oklahoma's borders. A CWD response plan was updated last year, and ODWC's biologists continue testing and planning to manage any finding of CWD in the state's wild cervid populations. That plan includes establishing containment zones, ramped-up testing, eradication and extensive public outreach efforts to educate about CWD.
2. ODWC continues putting the agency's strategic plan initiatives into practice for a second year, including studying potential license restructuring and fee changes. The plan provides a vision for the future of the agency (Mission, Values and Goals) and how the agency will turn that vision into action (Objectives, Strategies and Implementation) over the next five years. Fourteen priorities were identified for attention during the first year, and teams of employees have been meeting to act on those priorities. Among those are Building a Team Culture, Rewarding Excellence, Finding New Revenue Resources, Listening for Change, Stewarding Our Lands, and Boosting Communications.
3. ODWC will continue promoting R3 initiatives that will include a "Learn to Hunt" mentoring program set to launch in July, and targeted marketing efforts at segregated audiences such as lapsed license buyers and hunter education students. An emphasis on R3 will become more evident in ODWC activities such as the Department's annual Wildlife Expo event in September, Outdoor Oklahoma magazine and TV show, and the controlled hunts program.



Biggest Successes Last 6 Months

- 1. Maintained fishing and hunting opportunity and all Department operations during pandemic.
- 2. Hunting and fishing license sales are up year over year for 2020.
- 3. New electronic license system continues to perform well and up to 60% of our customers are purchasing on-line with full self-service.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns Last 6 Months

- 1. Canceled all educational programs and shifted all meetings to virtual.
- 2. Anxiety from staff due to all the COVID-19 uncertainty and varying degrees of fear.
- 3. Conducting traditional public processes associated with agency and Commission policy development and rule making.

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

- 1. Re-starting of educational programs.
- 2. Enhanced marketing/messaging of fishing and hunting opportunities as healthy recreation, not just during a pandemic.
- 3. Focus on long term impacts of climate change and important adaptations for fish and wildlife.



WAFWA State of the State Report – 2020 Summer

Agency Director: Kelly Hepler, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

Biggest Successes Last 6 months:

1. R3 Plan: Participation and Commission involvement – Through monthly meetings of the GFP R3 Work Group, comprised of department staff and members of the GFP Commission, the department has developed the framework for a state R3 plan. The work group considered hunting license data, the R3 achievements of the previous Education Plan, identified current and future needs of the department, and involved all sections of staff for input and suggestions for ways to improve the efficacy of department R3 strategies. The plan includes action items for recruitment, retention, and reactivation in the areas of hunting, shooting sports, aquatic education, conservation, and outdoor skills development. Once finalized and adopted by the commission, the R3 Work Group hopes to host partner summits to discuss how South Dakota can move forward with R3 efforts as a collective whole. Several initiatives are occurring parallel to the development of the R3 Plan and are resulting in greater R3 momentum in the state. The development of a pheasant hunting strategic marketing plan in partnership with SD Department of Tourism, and the potential adoption of the “3-Splash” 2-tiered waterfowl license option have the potential to dramatically increase participation in small game and waterfowl hunting opportunities in the state of South Dakota over the next 3-5 years.

2. Nest Predator Bounty Program – As part of Governor Noem’s Second Century Initiative, GFP implemented the Nest Predator Bounty Program, again for 2020. The initial program was conducted in 2019, where more than 3,000 participants removed over 54,00 nest predators (at \$10 per tail), primarily in eastern South Dakota. This initial program ran from April 1 to August 12, 2019. The 2020 program offers a \$5 bounty for the tails of five primary nest predators (raccoon, striped skunk, opossum, red fox and badger) that are submitted at GFP offices. While the focus of this program is to enhance duck and pheasant nest survival by utilizing predator control (a management tool that has been used for decades in South Dakota), the program is also about engaging youth and others in the outdoors. Participants can learn about predators, trapping, obtaining landowner permission, habitat and how all the different components work together across the landscape. In the end, this program is building broader support for habitat and outdoor recreation by people across South Dakota and from a broader group of people than our traditional users. A 2019 survey conducted by Responsive Management, found that 82% of South Dakota residents supported the program. As of June 16, 2020, approximately \$85,000 has been paid out in bounty payments. The 2020 program runs from April 1 through July 1, or if a \$250,000 cap is reached.

3. Hunt Safe in Schools – In order to increase HuntSAFE instructor recruitment and to meet the need for Hunter Education certification for students who currently struggle to make it to in-person classes, GFP developed the HuntSAFE in the Schools curriculum. Teachers can be trained as HuntSAFE instructors and offer the curriculum to students as part of their physical education or agricultural studies curriculum. HuntSAFE in the Schools is aligned with public school education standards and provides an excellent experiential education opportunity to learn safe firearm practices for students

who are interested in hunting or may come across firearms in the home or in a friend's home. No functional guns are used in the course and all materials are provided by GFP. After running the pilot program in 7 schools during the 2018-2019 school year and through community outreach directly to schools and school administrators, GFP has received great interest in the program. To date 40 teachers and 10 scholastic shooting sports coaches have been certified to teach HuntSAFE in the Schools, with many more interested teachers and coaches waiting to be trained. Those existing instructors have certified 281 students. To continue to grow the program GFP will be working directly with Department of Education to broadly advertise the instructor training opportunity and gain school district support for the program. Additionally, GFP will offer a summer Teacher Academy where teachers can participate in a free 1-stop-shop training in all programs GFP offers including: HuntSAFE in the Schools, National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP), Project Wild, and FISH SD.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns Last 6 Months:

1. **2019 Flooding Impacts** – South Dakota Parks continue to deal with the ramifications of flooding events experienced in 2019. The impacts of these floods, and the subsequent financial burden created, will likely be felt over the next decade. The latest estimate submitted to FEMA identifies almost \$14 million in flood damage. This includes damage to dams, bridges, campgrounds and roads. GFP is still working through the FEMA process in hopes of identifying some funding to help with these repairs. Absent FEMA funding, the cost must be borne by license dollars and other federal funding sources. Governor Noem submitted a bill in the most recent legislative session that allows state reserve funds to be loaned to governmental entities for flood projects. Any FEMA dollars provided for these projects will go to offset the loan, with the balance being paid over a seven-year period at low interest. This creative funding program will allow projects to be completed in a timely manner while relieving the burden of funding these projects strictly with dedicated dollars. This process also allows scheduled preventative maintenance to continue by not requiring maintenance dollars to be allocated to flood repair efforts.
2. **Budget** – Coinciding with the flooding events of 2019, we saw a drastic drop in license sales. With participation numbers decreasing nationwide, we have seen a decline in most of our license categories. South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks has been reviewing budget expenditures closely this year. We have been taking the steps to evaluate programs, purchases, and open positions to determine where we can make reasonable and responsible budget cuts without reducing the services that we offer the public. We have been evaluating license sales on a weekly basis to ensure that we are making data driven decisions when reviewing budget cuts and expenditures. We have been focusing on R3 data by utilizing an ESRI dashboard to help measure the efficacy of our programming and marketing outreach to try to generate license sales.
3. **Covid-19 Responses and Impacts:**
 - a. *Law Enforcement Program* – As with many law enforcement agencies across the country, SD Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) conservation officers and park rangers have also been challenged to effectively conduct compliance checks and other routine law enforcement public contacts while adhering to CDC guidance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our Agency's initial COVID-19 response efforts were to ensure all law enforcement staff had

access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and to direct these staff to limit their 'general patrol' activities in early March 2020. By late-March, law enforcement staff were directed to resume regular patrol activities and to effectively 'social distance' during their contacts. Staff were also encouraged to use sound judgement while approaching various law enforcement situations in order to protect their health and that of the public. Officers were discouraged from riding 'tandem' in vehicles to reduce potential exposure to the COVID-19 virus and several changes were made to field training program protocols for these same reasons. Some scheduled annual and semi-annual law enforcement training in firearms, defensive tactics and law enforcement scenarios were rescheduled to late spring and then modified to ensure staff safety. Due to the impact of the pandemic, members of the public continue to exhibit a strong desire to 'get outdoors', so fishing license sales and campground reservations have increased substantially this spring.

b. *Habitat Program* – Initial responses to the COVID-19 pandemic had all staff working remotely and only able to complete electronic tasks. The timing of this meant habitat staff lost 1-2 weeks of prep and field time which put them behind schedule. After making allowances for staff to conduct limited field work most crews were able to catch up on priority projects. However, some direct impacts listed below included:

- the cancellation of prescribed fires on nearly 6,000 acres of public property; much of the prep work for these burns had already been completed and will need to be started over if they are to be done next year
- a large reduction in temporary staff which will reduce capabilities over the summer, particularly in noxious weed control
- a reduction in the number and potential quality of food plots on public land
- the cancellation of grassland restoration projects that were scheduled for completion after prescribed fires
- the cancellation of education projects with local schools and youth groups, including "Pollinator Days" and other cooperative projects

Staff have found innovative ways to work with private landowners to deliver seed, sign contracts, and complete other private lands projects.

c. *Fisheries Program* – The department response to COVID-19 began on March 13, 2020. Because most fisheries field work involves two or more people working in close proximity, fisheries field work and hatchery stockings were suspended at that time. In late March, fish spawning activities for walleye and yellow perch were canceled for the year. Stocking of trout from GFP hatcheries had to resume, on a limited basis, due to loading concerns and fish mortalities beginning to occur. General field work and stocking activities have since resumed for activities where social distancing and PPE can be utilized to conform with work directives. The biggest impacts to fisheries management related to COVID-19 is the lack of walleye and yellow perch stockings this year and reduced trap-and-transfer stockings to support urban fisheries. However, high water conditions and stable weather set the stage for successful natural production and

many fish populations were in good shape in 2019, so impacts to fishery quality should be minimal. In-person creel surveys were canceled though some fishing pressure information will be gathered remotely. Watercraft inspection and decontamination stations will be operated using modified protocols for public interaction and use of PPE.

- d. *Wildlife Damage Management Program* – With the arrival of COVID-19 in early March, wildlife damage specialist field staff were advised to continue providing these focused services to producers while being mindful of social distancing requirements during the early stages of the pandemic. Because these staff normally work alone and have limited daily public contact, staff were well able to continue their focus on predator control activities despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Historic high-water levels across much of the state have also caused an increase in beaver damage complaints and we expect high water will again require staff to address soybean producer damage caused by a healthy resident Canada goose population. Although ongoing budget challenges have somewhat limited our ability to hire seasonal and intern staff across our agency, the wildlife damage program was authorized to fill at least a portion of the seasonal and intern staff positions necessary to meet our needs to assist producers.
- e. *Education Program* – All in-person education programs have been postponed until further notice. To continue to meet the needs of community outreach and education, Parks and Wildlife staff have shifted their programming to digital formats.
 - Social media “how to” videos, online printable conservation lesson plans, and video conferencing interviews and presentations have been the primary focus of education efforts for the months of April and May.
 - State parks have remained open and have offered many self-guided activities for visitors including scavenger hunts, fitness challenges, and virtual park tours for those still at home.
 - The field day requirement has been waived for all HuntSAFE students at this time, allowing individuals ages 12+ to become HuntSAFE certified using the all-online course alone. The online class fee has been waived until in-person classes can be scheduled again.

Education staff are currently engaged in discussions for how to potentially hold in person classes in the future while maintaining social distance and taking appropriate precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- f. *Parks* - State parks and recreation areas were able to stay open during most of the pandemic. Operations were closed for roughly two weeks in March, but fortunately very little activity takes place at this time. Operations resumed shortly after April 1, with camping and cabin rentals available to the public. Comfort stations and fish cleaning stations remained winterized through mid-May but were brought online for Open House Weekend on May 15. Visitor numbers have been extremely strong through April and May, and park entrance licenses were reinstated on May 18 after a grace period was implemented mid-March. Reservations appear to be strong through July, and we are looking forward to providing a safe outdoor opportunity for our customers.

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months:

1. Waterfowl regulation experiment in the Central Flyway (3 Splash daily bag limit) –

Current duck regulations are designed to maximize harvest potential and necessitate a complex system of species-specific regulations. Many experienced hunters support this approach but present a challenge for inexperienced hunters to comply with. The ability to identify ducks on the wing has been identified as a potential barrier to duck hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3). A regulatory system where all available duck hunting opportunity is afforded to those individuals that desire it but complemented by a less complex regulatory system that increases participation, would be ideal in meeting these dual objectives. A two-tier regulation system, where hunters indicate their preference for either maximum opportunity or easier regulations may provide a solution. Working cooperatively with the all flyways and the USFWS, a study design and evaluation plan has been developed and approved by the Service Regulations Committee (SRC). Beginning in the 2021-2022 duck hunting season South Dakota and Nebraska will implement and evaluate a pilot two-tier system of duck hunting regulations for a minimum of four years. In this system, duck hunters will register themselves under one of two different regulatory options, where one tier (Tier I) of hunters is afforded maximum hunting opportunity (i.e., current daily bag limits with all species-specific daily bag restrictions) while the other tier (Tier II) is afforded simplified regulations (i.e. 3 splash daily bag limit).

2. Palisades State Park Expansion - Palisades is a small, 167-acre park located about 25 miles northeast of Sioux Falls near Garretson. Over 90,000 visitors each year are drawn to the park's quartzite rock formations along Split Rock Creek. The campground has more than a 98 percent occupancy rating and trails have seen an increasing number of users. With the increasing growth of the Sioux Falls metro area, these numbers are sure to keep growing as well. In the fall of 2018, the South Dakota Parks and Wildlife Foundation (SDPWF) purchased and donated 267.5 acres of adjoining property to Palisades State Park. This more than doubles the current acreage of the park, bringing the new total to 434.5 acres. Development of the property will follow a phased planning approach over the course of five years, with an estimated cost of \$8.3 million. Governor Noem and the Legislature have committed \$500,000 for development and habitat on the new land. The SDPWF has agreed to raise \$1.6 million in private funds to match the Governor's commitment. Beginning in 2020, portions of the new property will be planted into native grasses, pollinator plots and shelterbelts. Construction of the future entrance and campground road system is planned to begin in the fall of 2020 with the final construction anticipated in spring of 2025.

3. Habitat Stamp – During the 2020 legislative session a bill was passed and signed by Governor Noem that requires a person eighteen years of age or older to purchase a habitat stamp when applying for or purchasing a hunting, trapping or fishing license in South Dakota. The fee for the

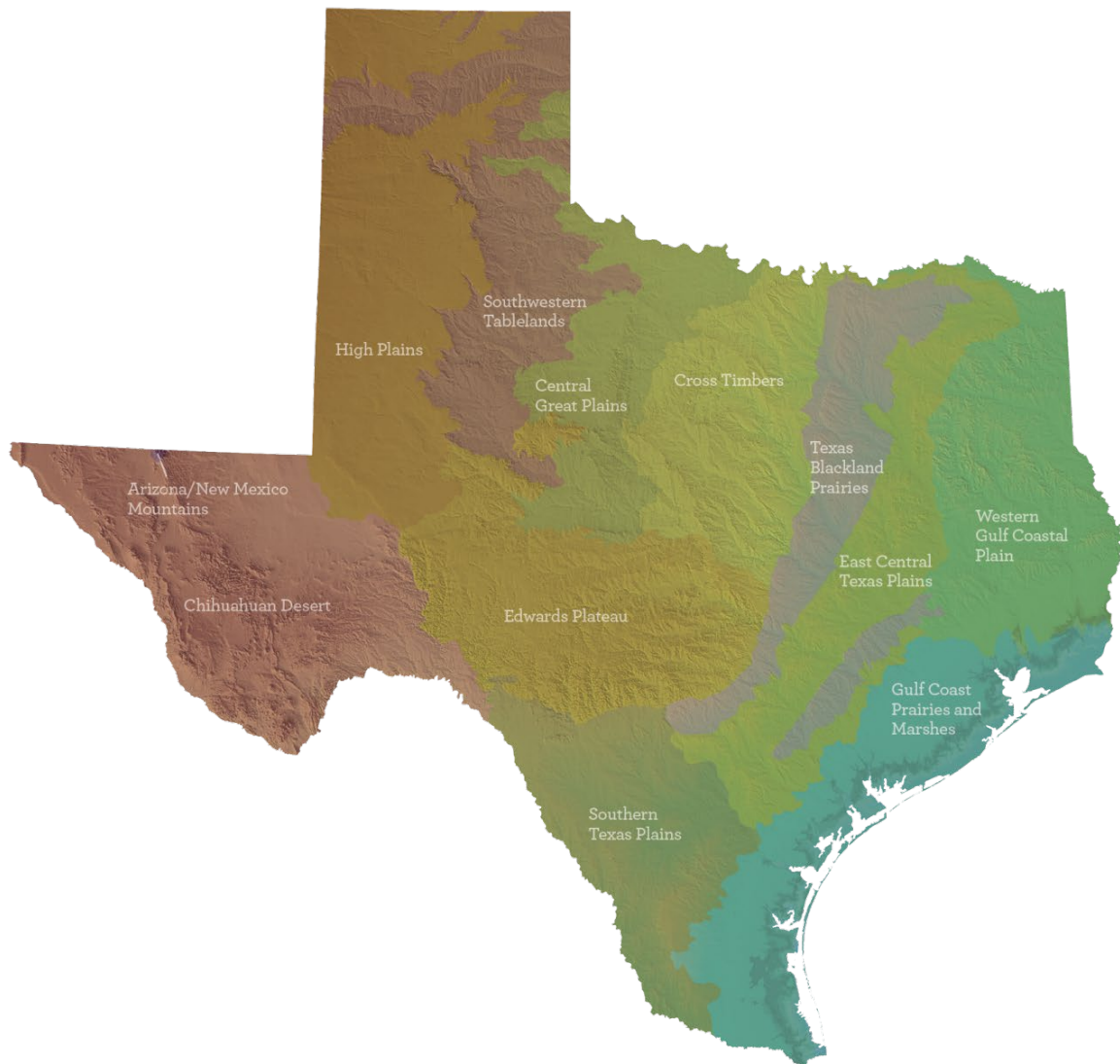
habitat stamp was set at ten dollars for residents and twenty-five dollars for nonresidents. Exemptions to purchase a habitat stamp were made for the one-day hunting or fishing license, youth hunting licenses, private shooting preserve license, hunt for habitat application fee, and landowner own-land hunting license. All revenue collected from the sale of the habitat stamp must be used for enhancing terrestrial habitat on public lands, providing additional public access to private lands and aquatic habitat enhancements on public waters. Fees collected from persons who only purchase fishing licenses shall be used solely for aquatic habitat and access projects in public waters and fees collected from persons who only purchase hunting or trapping licenses shall be used solely for terrestrial habitat and public access programs. Fees collected from persons that purchase privileges to fish and hunt, or trap must be split equally for aquatic and terrestrial habitat. The legislation also stated that proceeds from the habitat stamp fee collected may not be used to purchase property in fee title. Revenue projections from the new fee should exceed 5 million dollars. The Habitat Stamp will be required beginning July 1, 2020.



Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies - Summer Meeting

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department State of the State Report

December 1, 2019 – May 31, 2020



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Biggest Successes in the Last 6 Months

Proposition 5 - State Parks Sporting Goods Sales Tax Voter Approval

In November 2019, Texans passed a constitutional amendment dedicating the taxes generated by sporting goods sales to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and the Texas Historical Commission for support of state parks and historic sites. The vote reflected broad support for the measure from across the political spectrum and backing by a broad coalition of more than 70 outdoor user groups, leading to 88% of voters approving the measure. Approval of the amendment will ensure a reliable and predictable source of funding to keep facilities in working order and maintain the quality of service that the people of Texas expect from their state park system. In addition, the funding will help bring undeveloped park sites owned by TPWD online, expanding park capacity to help meet the needs of a growing population. The broad support of the amendment illustrates the importance of parks in providing access to the outdoors in a time of increasing urbanization and was heightened by recognition of the economic benefits provided by parks to local economies, especially in rural areas, as well as the public health benefits provided by outdoor recreation.

Managing Through the Pandemic

A noteworthy success has been all TPWD divisions working together, even more closely, to continue to put the TPWD mission at the forefront during the COVID–19 pandemic. The agency managed to adapt quickly and refocus communication and operations during the pandemic, safeguarding employee health and well-being, and maintaining staff morale. New creative processes were developed, including the expanded use of technology not only for employees but for the general public as well. During the pandemic there continues to be a strong public interest in nature and the outdoors, requiring all field divisions to go above and beyond to continue to provide protection of natural resources and access to the outdoors. State parks have continued to safely serve the public while experiencing unprecedented use, fishing and hunting activities continue to thrive, and game wardens continue to actively patrol the state and assist with duties at the State Operations Center (SOC). TPWD has continued to carry out the agency mission during these trying times because we understand that Life's better outside®.

Oyster Mariculture Rule Development and Program

During the 86th Regular Legislative Session, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1300 which provided the authority to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission to adopt rules to establish a program governing cultivated oyster mariculture (oyster aquaculture in Texas coastal waters). The department worked with various stakeholder interests to develop the governance structure and in May 2020, the Parks and Wildlife Commission adopted rules creating a commercial off-bottom oyster mariculture program that will allow individuals to raise oysters in floating cages or suspended within the water column from long-line systems. In developing this program, the department incorporated siting requirements to protect sensitive habitat and avoid impacts to

other natural resources while also minimizing user conflicts. Due to Texas having two distinct genetic populations of eastern oysters, mariculture operations can only utilize seed oysters produced from broodstock originating from the population where the site is located. Triploid oysters produced at hatcheries located along the Gulf Coast will be permitted in the northern zone but a pure Texas polyploid line must be utilized after December 31, 2027. Once fully operational, this program will result in year-round availability of oysters destined for the half-shell, raw market.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns in the Last 6 Months

COVID-19 Impacts on Operations and Revenue

Employee and public safety has been TPWD's biggest concern during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ensuring that our employees and their families remain safe is crucial. In these unprecedented times with family obligations being top priority, at times operations staff were challenged with being short-handed. Unfortunately, some field locations had to limit activity due to the decreased staffing levels. This limited activity, and state leadership's decision to close field sites for a short duration, had a financial impact on the agency. As of May 1, 2020, the department has spent more than \$855,000 in actuals (this does not include April labor charges) and has experienced a revenue loss in excess of \$3.6 million when comparing March 2020 to March 2019. The department expects continued revenue loss relative to revenues earned over the same time period in 2019. Reopening of most park sites for limited day use, and some for limited overnight camping, may slow the pace of revenue loss somewhat. Costs should increase as eligible overtime in the Law Enforcement Division gets fully distributed through the system and purchases related to initial mitigation efforts, continued monitoring, and maintenance efforts continue through the event. It is too early at this point to make an accurate projection of the overall impact the event had on the agency.

Legislative Session Preparation

Over the last year, TPWD has been engaged in several major efforts aimed at assessing programs, evaluating finances, and identifying opportunities and challenges facing the agency. The Sunset Review evaluation process, which is guided by the Sunset Advisory Commission, is aimed at examining the efficiency and performance of an agency's programs and operations every twelve years and to determine if the agency should be continued or abolished. TPWD submitted its Self-Evaluation Report to the Sunset Advisory Commission in August 2019. Sunset staff's recommendations are expected in June 2020, public hearings are currently scheduled for July and August 2020, and a final report with the Sunset Advisory Commission's decisions is expected to be issued to the 87th Texas Legislature in January 2021. As a result of undergoing Sunset Review, TPWD was also required to participate in the Strategic Fiscal Review process, which

entails a deep budgetary analysis of agency programs to better inform the Legislature in making funding decisions. Finally, in the spring of 2020, TPWD staff-initiated work on the Natural Agenda, the legislatively mandated 5-year strategic plan which is updated every two years. Each of these initiatives lays important groundwork for the agency leading into the next legislative session by identifying major program/funding issues and priorities. While at this time it is not possible to predict the specific recommendations that will emerge from the Sunset Review or Strategic Fiscal Review processes, these could potentially have a significant impact on agency operations and funding.

Centralized Accounting and Payroll/Personnel System (CAPPS) Financial Transition

TPWD is in the process of transitioning its financial system to the state mandated CAPPS system, a change that is scheduled to be fully implemented by September 1, 2020. This project has required significant effort from Financial Resources and agency-wide staff to ensure TPWD maintains current services while conducting the research, testing, and related activities required to successfully implement the new system. Ensuring attainment of key project milestones has become a greater challenge in recent months due to COVID-19, as in-person interactions have been limited, user acceptance testing is being performed remotely, and new plans are being developed for online training.

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

Budget Cuts and Transition to CAPPS Financial

Similar to other states, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the Texas economy. Response to the pandemic, combined with drastically reduced natural gas and oil prices and production, will result in significant declines in state tax revenues. TPWD specific revenue streams such as license fees, boat registrations, and state park user fees have been similarly negatively affected. While at this time the full extent of these revenue declines is difficult to predict, TPWD anticipates that statewide budget reductions will soon be mandated, possibly for the current biennium as well as the next. As such, TPWD has started the process of planning for various future reduction scenarios and is currently working to implement a 5% state-mandated budget reduction. The level of future reductions will have implications, though in varying degrees, on our ability to effectively manage the state's fish and wildlife resources.

According to current timelines, the transition to the CAPPS Financial module is scheduled for September 1, 2020. Once implemented, TPWD expects that the new system will result in several organizational and process changes agency-wide, as some functional areas in the Financial Resources Division, Human Resources Division, and other areas may merge, expand, or evolve new responsibilities in response to the new requirements of this system. In the face of possible future budget reductions, TPWD may face new challenges in regard to this project, as

continuation of current funding and FTEs for CAPPS Financials into the upcoming biennium is critical to ensuring the ongoing success of this major initiative post-implementation.

Resuming Operations in a COVID-19 Environment

The next six months will bring uncertainty and a slow resumption to a “new” normal. It is hard to say what “normal” will look like in the future; however, it is likely that there will be increased teleworking and use of teleconferencing tools such as Microsoft TEAMS. These tools will continue to allow business to be conducted as usual and reduce the employee population in large buildings such as the headquarters complex. It is likely that future COVID-19 outbreaks will occur, and it is crucial that TPWD continue to proactively plan and prepare for these outbreaks. The better prepared the agency is, the less impact the outbreaks will have on staff safety, morale, and production levels.





WAFWA State-of-the-State Report
Summer 2020 Meeting
Agency: Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
Agency Director: Mike Fowlks

Biggest successes in the last six months

- **Adapting quickly and smoothly to the COVID-19 outbreak.** Although our offices remained open, most employees began working remotely in mid-March. We successfully shifted our entire public-input and regulatory process online using Google Hangouts.
- **Achieving a record-high number of applications for big game hunts.** Despite a challenging 2019 deer-hunting season, hunters were eager to apply for the 2020 season. We received 524,092 big game applications in 2020, compared to 514,583 in 2019.
- **Reintroducing bighorn sheep to Antelope Island.** In January 2020, we reintroduced bighorn sheep to Antelope Island. The previous nursery herd had to be removed because of respiratory disease. New measures, including fencing, will hopefully help keep the sheep on the island and prevent future interactions with diseased animals.

Biggest challenges or concerns in the last six months

- **Preparing for pandemic-driven budget cuts.** The Utah Legislature requested that we prepare a list of potential budget cuts at the 2%, 5% and 10% levels. Legislators will be meeting in mid-June, which is when they will finalize a round of cuts.
- **Overcoming logistical challenges.** Although we handled the COVID-19 pandemic relatively smoothly, it took extra time, communication and flexibility to ensure that employees had the tools and resources to be successful while working remotely.
- **Dealing with drought and wild horses.** The combination of widespread drought and overabundant wild horse populations is detrimental to wildlife habitat and survival. We have been working with federal, state and local partners to address both issues.

What to expect in the next six months

- **Navigating widespread uncertainty.** The combination of pandemic, recession, civil unrest and an election year are all still in progress. Despite these challenges, we will continue adapting and innovating as we do our jobs.

- **Implementing predator-management changes.** The Utah Legislature and Wildlife Board passed new predator-management laws and rules this year. As those changes go into effect, we will have more regulatory tools to control the growth of predator populations.
- **Updating and renovating fish hatcheries.** During the second half of 2020, we will begin extensive modifications to two of our fish hatcheries. The changes will improve efficiency, save money and allow us to grow more warmwater fish species.



**State Report for Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Mid-Summer Meeting, December 2019 – June 2020
Director Brian Nesvik**

BIGGEST SUCCESSES – LAST 6 MONTHS

“Inspire a Kid, It’s for Life”

Inspire a Kid, It’s for Life is a new initiative that was recently kicked off by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (Department) to help inspire kids to get outside and enjoy all the wonderful opportunities the state has to offer. A webpage was launched where anyone can go to find ideas and events to take part in nature and conservation. <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Get-Involved/Inspire-a-Kid/>. COVID-19 has delayed the launch. A formal launch will move forward in June.

Migration Corridors and Wildlife Crossings

On February 13, the Governor signed an Executive Order for Wyoming Mule Deer and Antelope Migration Corridor Protection. The broad process that led to the Executive Order began with the establishment of the Migration Corridor Advisory Group last May. The Executive Order outlines a science-based approach for identifying and designating migration corridors and outlines state protections for designated migration corridors.

In addition, the Governor launched the Department and Wyoming Department of Transportation joint initiative ‘Wildlife Crossing’, a campaign to keep wildlife and drivers on the go by reducing wildlife collisions. The challenge is to have 2,020 Conservation License Plates on the road by the end of 2020. Meeting this challenge will directly help fund wildlife crossings.

Aquatic Invasive Species Rapid Response Plans

The Fisheries Division completed eight draft Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Rapid Response Plans for waters in the state that were identified as medium to high risk for infestation. These plans went through administrator review and have started the partner and stakeholder review process. The remaining 15 plans are being drafted and completion is scheduled for the middle of 2020.

New Fisheries Captive Kokanee Salmon Broodstock Program

Over this past year, the Department was successful in developing a captive brood for late-run kokanee salmon at the Tillett Rearing Station. Over a six-week period, beginning in November, 3,600 females were spawned. In total, nearly 2.7 million eggs were taken with an eye-up success of 93%. The Department now has the capability to consistently fulfill our own statewide kokanee egg requests as well as potentially provide for other states that may have a need.

BIGGEST CHALLENGES OR CONCERNS – LAST 6 MONTHS

COVID-19 Department Operations

The Department moved into teleworking and social distancing operations. A great deal of time was spent making sure we still served the public and provided our staff a safe way to operate. The Department found a creative and effective way to hold Commission meetings to ensure season setting rules were put in place. The Department suspended the sale of 1 and 5-day nonresident fishing licenses to align with the Governor's directive for out of state residents to self-quarantine for 14 days upon entering the state. In addition, after the nonresident quarantine directive was lifted, the Department passed an emergency rule to extend the turkey season from May 15 until May 31 to increase hunting opportunity.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS

Expanding Hatchery Production to Warm/Cool Water Species

The Fisheries Division is exploring opportunities to develop warm/cool water species within our existing hatcheries system. Currently, the Department relies on other states to import warm/cool water species to stock in Wyoming waters. Developing our own production in our own facilities will lower AIS risk to the state due to importation.

Decision on Grizzly Bears

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and the States of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming have appealed a lower federal court decision that vacated the Service's action removing grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem from the list of threatened and endangered species. The case is pending before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Oral arguments were held on May 5th. A decision is expected towards the end of the year. Pending the result of the appeal, for now the species remains listed and all law enforcement and management actions involving grizzly bears are again led by the Service. The Department will continue to assist the Service in management of grizzly bear conflicts and help with population monitoring efforts.

Decision Herrera v. Wyoming

A member of the Crow Tribe, Herrera, challenged his conviction for taking trophy bull elk during a closed season and without a permit during January 2014 in Wyoming within the Bighorn National Forest. In May 2019, in a 5-4 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court determined that Wyoming's admission to the Union in 1890 did not terminate the Crow Tribe's 1868 treaty hunting right to hunt "unoccupied lands of the United States".

The Court remanded to the Sheridan County, Wyoming court for further proceedings. Wyoming has filed a brief in state court on remand, requesting the court adopt Justice Alito's view and precludes Herrera from relitigating the two issues settled against the Crow Tribe in the 1990s on occupation of the forest and the conservation necessity of Wyoming law protecting elk with closed seasons. Parties have briefed the issue and oral arguments were held in February. Until this case is decided, Wyoming intends to enforce all its game laws on federal lands.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Management Plan

The Department continued its statewide public engagement process to increase CWD communication and revise the Department's CWD management plan. This process utilized a 32 member working group that reviewed the applicable scientific, management, social, and policy information regarding CWD to generate nine recommendations (Reduction of Artificial Concentrations, Cervid Remains, Education/Communication, Habitat, Cervid CWD Management and Harvest Actions, Migratory Herds, Surveillance/Monitoring, Research, and Human Health) and 43 sub-recommendations to the Department for consideration into the revised plan. The working group reviewed the public comments in February and made final recommendations to the Department. A final revised CWD management plan will be presented to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission in July for their review and approval.
