

# **WAFWA**

## **COMMISSIONERS' COMMITTEE**



## **STATE-OF-THE-STATE REPORTS**

WAFWA Virtual Mid-Winter Meeting  
January 2021

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## WAFWA Issue Topics Response 2021 Mid-Winter Meeting Virtual Platform

State: Alaska Dept of Fish & Game  
Agency Director: Doug Vincent-Lang

### Fair Chase & New Technology

Alaska is often viewed as the mecca for hunting big game animals in one of the wildest, untamed landscapes in North America. It's rich hunting history and abundant natural resources were not lost on Alaska lawmakers, and even Alaska's constitution includes language for people to utilize Alaska's wildlife, and to develop and manage it using the sustained yield principle. With the continual advancement of technology, the methods and means used to hunt big game in Alaska has changed, and discussions regarding "fair chase hunting" are had by lawmakers, wildlife managers, and hunters alike.

The Boone and Crockett Club defines fair chase as the ethical, sportsmanlike, and lawful pursuit and taking of any free-ranging wild, native North American big game animal in a manner that does not give the hunter an improper advantage over such animals. Every hunter who heads out into the field makes their own decisions on the use of current technology based not only on their personal beliefs, but on the statutory regulations passed by the Alaska Board of Game (BOG). The BOG is the state's regulatory authority that passes regulations to conserve and develop Alaska's wildlife resources and are charged with making allocative and regulatory decisions. During the BOG proposal process, many public proposals to change regulations are based on current technological advancements in weaponry, hunting accessories, communications, and motorized access.

### **Weaponry**

The public's perception of technology when applied to weapons or equipment used to harvest an animal has varying degrees, with the majority of hunters falling somewhere in the middle. On one side of the spectrum there are those who feel that a longbow with cedar shaft arrows or a flintlock musket is the epitome of fair chase, while on the opposite side of the spectrum there are people who believe long-range rifles, high-powered air rifles, or airbows make the hunt more

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challenging for the hunter. Alaska's current regulations highlight some of these differences in the following ways:

- *Weapons restricted hunts*-these hunts exclude the use of other weapons and instead specify "bow and arrow only" or "muzzleloader only".
- *Education requirements*-hunters participating in weapons restricted hunts (bowhunter, crossbow, or muzzleloader education) or in more populated areas (hunter education) must participate in certification courses which provide training in equipment-specific techniques and safety, wildlife conservation, and outdoor preparedness.
- *Equipment requirements*-the regulations require specific equipment to be used to decrease wounding losses. For example, big game must be harvested using a centerfire rifle (excluding swimming caribou in Units 23 & 26 can be harvested with a .22 caliber rimfire cartridge) or a bow needs to have a minimum draw weight of 40 or 50-pounds depending on the species.

### **Hunting Accessories**

The market for items which will enhance or assist a hunter in harvesting game has greatly increased over the years, and the legality of items varies greatly. With the advancement of technology, items such as a laser sight or electronically-enhanced night vision devices are not allowed when hunting big game, however rangefinders and ballistic scopes are permitted since the ability to correctly judge distance can increase accurate shot placement. In following a more traditional fair chase view, scopes are not permitted on muzzleloaders in weapons restricted hunts. Wildlife attractants including scent lures, food plots, and electronic calls are advertised on tv, in magazines, and on social media. In Alaska, electronic calls can be used for all game animals except moose. Advances in computers and communication devices has become a topic for discussion since mobile phones, wireless game cameras, and drones are all devices which can notify hunters of animals' locations. In Alaska the regulations specify that illegal items include, "any device that has been airborne, controlled remotely, or communicates wirelessly, and used to spot or locate game with the use of a camera or video device (wireless game cameras), any camera or other sensory device that can send messages through wireless communication." However, there are specific instances, such as a Unit 20D bison hunt or targeted moose hunts where the use of ground-based wireless communications to locate an individual animal for harvest is allowed.

### **Motorized Access**

Hunting on foot, using pack animals, and traveling by watercraft (kayak, canoe, etc). have long-standing traditions in Alaska and many hunters still prefer these methods today. Technological advancements which benefit hunters include off-road vehicles, motorized boats, airplanes, and snowmobiles. With the idea of fair chase in mind, in Alaska, helicopters cannot be used for hunting or for transporting hunters, hunting gear, game meat, trophies, or any equipment used to pursue or retrieve game. It is also illegal to pursue an animal that is fleeing with a vehicle. Additional restrictions with more traditional fair chase values in mind are applied in various game management units to motorized vehicles. For example in Unit 20, there are two separate sheep hunt permits. The first permit only allows non-motorized access at the beginning of the season and during the second permit which is later in the season, hunters can use off-road vehicles or airplanes to access the area. In a popular caribou hunt in Unit 13 often accessed using off-road vehicles, there is an entire area where hunters are not allowed the aid of motorized

vehicles, and hunters can be spotted biking or hiking across the tundra to reach areas further from the road. Because of the vastness of Alaska, lawmakers and hunters recognize the aid provided by motorized vehicles (especially airplanes) to transport hunters to otherwise unreachable areas and so the regulations state “It is against the law to hunt or help someone else take big game until 3:00am the day following the day you have flown. This does not apply if you have flown on a regularly scheduled commercial or commuter airplane, and there are exceptions.”

Modern technological improvements and a growing urbanized world population will continue to change the way hunters go afield and the belief systems that will govern their hunts. The idea and definition of what “fair chase” is has morphed and expanded since the late 1800’s, and it will continue to do so far into the future. By involving lawmakers, hunters, and wildlife managers in the BOG process, Alaska will continue to adopt and change regulations to meet conservation needs while also being mindful of the definition of “fair chase”.

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WAFWA State of the State Report  
2021 Mid-Winter Meeting  
Virtual Platform

State: Arizona  
Agency Director: Ty Gray

Biggest Successes in the Last 6 Months

1. Revenue from licenses and tags is up and revenue from Ben Avery Shooting Facility is on target. License sales this fiscal year are 21% higher than the same period last year.
2. Positive angler response to the Department reducing trout bag limits and stocking larger, higher quality fish.
3. Efforts to transition all third-party dealers to providing online licenses to customers is ahead of schedule and largest dealer is online only at all 84 locations.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns in the Last 6 Months

1. Mission deployment during Covid; collecting data and performing surveys.
2. Navigating ongoing drought conditions.
3. Restrictions on Federal lands during record demands of outdoor recreation.

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

1. Identifying eligible match sources for nontraditional grants.
2. Retaining the recent increases in user groups of outdoor recreation.
3. Impacts of a Federal Administration change and the Department's authority to manage wildlife.

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WAFWA State of the State Report  
2021 Mid-Winter Meeting (Virtual Platform)

State: Colorado

Agency Director: Dan Prenzlowl

**Biggest Successes in the Last 6 Months**

1. Pursuant to Senate Bill 181, passed by the Colorado legislature, and signed into law by Governor Polis in 2019, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) worked with its sister agency, the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission on a major rewrite of wildlife protection rules associated with oil and gas production, significantly strengthening the state's "avoid, minimize, mitigate" habitat protection hierarchy. The rules improve consultation practices between the two agencies, enact a 300 – 500 foot setback from riparian areas, and strengthen no surface occupancy zones for the most important habitats. In addition, they limit well density to ensure permeability of habitat in order to protect seasonal migrations. They also create a structured compensatory mitigation program in the event mitigation is needed. Implementation of these rules, along with increased cooperation between these two agencies, will broadly improve protection for wildlife statewide.
2. West Slope Mountain Lion Management Plan: adopted and implemented. The new plan introduces new harvest-based monitoring metrics to manage a stable population of mountain lions across the West Slope of Colorado. The plan establishes a special management area around Glenwood Springs to address local challenges with human-lion conflict.
3. CPW has documented that eastern black rails do, in fact, breed in southeastern Colorado. Although CPW and the birding community have known for years that black rails are present in marshes along the lower Arkansas River drainage, we did not have any documentation of breeding in the form of a nest, chicks, or fledglings. Black rails inhabit dense cattail and bulrush marshes and are often heard, but rarely - if ever - seen. This spring, CPW set up several camera trap arrays in order to capture the elusive birds on film. The effort was successful and we now have documentation of breeding through photos of both chicks and fledglings. Analysis of the photos is ongoing and will greatly improve our understanding of breeding phenology in Colorado, which can then be used to inform marsh habitat management.
4. From 2016-2019, CPW, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT), and Kansas State University (KSU) caught over 400 lesser prairie-chickens in the Shortgrass/CRP Ecoregion in central Kansas and translocated them to the Sand Sagebrush Ecoregion. The birds were released on the Comanche and Cimarron National Grasslands in SE Colorado and SW Kansas. This spring, one year after the translocation project was completed, CPW, KDWPT, and KSU biologists documented at least 115 males on 20 leks in the translocation area where, in 2016, CPW and KDWPT were counting fewer than 10 males on two leks. The 2020 lesser prairie-chicken lek counts show that our collective efforts to

recover and restore this iconic species to SE Colorado and SW Kansas are working. [This video captures the effort and dedication](#) of these partnership efforts.

### **Biggest Challenges or Concerns in the Last 6 Months**

1. The year 2020 will go down in infamy as one of the toughest fire seasons in the history of Colorado. Intense wildfires and the resulting harmful air quality will be remembered as one of the prevailing storylines of this extraordinary year. The Centennial State is accustomed to damaging wildfires, especially over the last 20 years, as summers have become drier, warmer, and longer. But this year, the blazes were so extreme that they were cemented in the record books. The three largest fires ever in Colorado occurred in 2020 and two of them were not 100% contained until the first week of December. Those fires are: (1) the Cameron Peak fire at 208,913 acres burned, (2) the East Troublesome Fire at 193,812 acres burned, and (3) the Pine Gulch fire at 139,007 acres burned. Impacts to wildlife, habitat, and water quality will be felt for years to come.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant increases in outdoor recreation in Colorado, putting more pressure on already-stressed state parks and to some extent wildlife areas. While increased public appreciation of and need for outdoor experiences is welcome, many participants were unfamiliar with standard etiquette and it was not uncommon to find trailheads and trails crowded and littered with waste.

### **What to Expect in the Next 6 Months**

1. During this year's election, Proposition 114 (wolf restoration) was passed by the voters of Colorado with 50.91% in support and 49.09% opposed. Predictions were that it would pass with about 80% support. Rural counties overwhelmingly opposed the initiative. The ballot initiative requires the Parks and Wildlife Commission to develop a plan to restore and manage gray wolves using the best scientific data available. Statewide hearings are required to acquire information pertaining to scientific, economic, and social considerations. The Commission must "take the steps necessary to begin reintroductions of gray wolves by December 31, 2023" only on designated lands (i.e., west of the continental divide). The initiative states that funds will be distributed to assist owners of livestock in preventing and resolving conflicts between wolves and livestock, and to pay owners of livestock for any losses caused by gray wolves. The ballot requires that CPW use hunting and fishing license revenue to fund reintroduction, management, and compensation if other state funds are not provided. The plan to restore and manage wolves is not in place; the Commission has 3 years to develop it. Staff will propose that the Commission adopt a stakeholder and technical advisory team process, led by a professional facilitator. Representation on those groups has not been determined, and part of the role of the Commission is to determine membership. Staff envisions the public will have many opportunities to provide input as the plan is developed. Some proponents of the successful initiative would like to see reintroduction fast-tracked, advocating for reintroductions beginning in 2021, while the species remains delisted.
2. Several environmental and animal rights groups filed a petition with the Commission in November 2020 to prohibit trapping on all public lands in Colorado. Currently, only live-traps are legal for trapping on public lands in the state. Leg-hold and body-gripping traps are prohibited.

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WAFWA State of the State Report  
2021 Mid-Winter Meeting  
Virtual Platform

State:

Agency Director: Martha Williams

Biggest Successes in the Last 6 Months

1. Refreshed and updated website. See: [www.fwp.mt.gov](http://www.fwp.mt.gov)
2. Real investment in and implementation in collaborative leadership. Includes agency cycle of leadership development from revamped new employee orientation to supervisory training to intensive mutual learning training for 24 more senior managers and full FWP statewide management team.
3. Comprehensive legislative and administrative package to address recreation.
4. Completion of Grizzly Bear Advisory Council leading to starting statewide grizzly bear management plan, Elk Advisory Committee setting framework for Elk Management Plan.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns in the Last 6 Months

1. Covid
2. Capacity
3. Recreation and its impacts
4. Need for strategic planning

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

1. Legislative challenges
2. Capacity challenges
3. Progress on new licensing system, ExploreMT
4. Strategic planning

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WAFWA State of the State Report  
2021 Mid-Winter Meeting

State: Nebraska

Agency Director: Jim Douglas

Biggest Successes in the Last 6 Months

1. **Surge in Hunting and Fishing** – Nebraska has experienced continued fishing activity through the fall and high levels of hunting activity. Through November, fishing permit sales are at an all-time high and hunting permit sales also increased, led by increased sales of deer, fall turkey, and antelope permits to both resident and nonresident hunters. We are developing strategies to keep the enthusiasm going into the next year and beyond.

2. **Hidden Hills Outfitter Poaching Case** - 2020 saw the near conclusion of a case uncovering the most egregious abuse of our natural resources in State history. This multi-year intensive investigation led to the successful prosecution of over thirty-two (32) individuals involved in the illegal take of our States wildlife. Public outcry has expressed loud support for our efforts and the court system who has levied in excess of \$570,453 in fines and restitution, over 53 years of hunting and fishing permits being forfeited along with 30 months in jail time. This case is not an isolated incident as our law enforcement division continues to investigate several similar abuses of our natural resources across the State.

3. **Navigating the Covid-19 pandemic** - The agency took actions to limit activities and operations of facilities where social distancing could and would be an issue, with safety of our staff and the public as our number one priority. While there has been a disruption of normal routines, the agency has maintained essential functions and serve the public. Activities were phased back in to operation following the Directed Health Measures issued at the state or local levels, and continue to fluctuate as surges occur in various parts of the state. Safety of our staff and the public continues to be our number one priority. Many of our educational programs, R3 and skills-based programs, and naturalist programs were converted to virtual programming. We see that the virtual programming options allow great reach across the state for schools, families, adults, and children and provides new tools that we will continue to use into the future. Hunting and fishing activities have been popular and largely unhindered summer through fall.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns in the Last 6 Months

1. **Permit system issues.** NGPC's permit system crashed multiple times due to high traffic loads on the first day of big-game over the counter permit sales, resulting in many upset customers. Permits staff went into overdrive providing customer service -- tracking permits that were



selected and not purchased, or had purchases interrupted, due to system issues and went above and beyond to fulfill permit selections for deer and antelope permits. Our customers were appreciative of their efforts to email and call them to resolve these issues. This has happened during high traffic times for big-game over the last several years. We are taking multiple steps, as we have previously with OCIO, to avoid this happening next year. Since that time, the agency has fast-tracked an RFP for a 3<sup>rd</sup> party vendor to program and operate our permits system.

**2. Elk damage to crops.** Elk damage to crops, especially standing irrigated corn, in late summer and fall continues to be a challenging issue in Nebraska. Cow elk and bull elk are moving into standing corn and staying, and bulls are creating wallows and chasing cows in corn fields during the rut. The agency held meetings with multiple groups of landowners in the western half of the state regarding elk damage to crops and discussing short and long term solutions. Damage control permits allowing landowners and shooters they identify to remove elk from standing corn continues to be a lightning rod issue with hunters. We are continuing to work on strategies and potential legislation to help address this challenge with a balanced approach that engages the Commission, landowners and hunters in the solutions.

**3. No in-person check stations for rifle deer season.** NGPC cancelled in-person check stations for rifle deer season and allow rifle deer to be checked through telecheck (on-line or on the phone) due to concerns with increasing COVID throughout the state, in order to protect, staff, the public, and our check station operators in private businesses. This was a difficult decision weighing our needs for accurate harvest, age and sex data; disease sampling and communication with hunters. Plans are to resume those next year. There were also law enforcement concerns raised with cancelling the in-person check stations, and

#### What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

1. The Commission hopes to get a new RFP for a permit system out in January of 2021, with a goal of selecting a vendor in 2021 and implementing a new system during 2022.
2. Crop damage by elk and other big game will continue to be an issue we work to address through current regulations and orders, as well as legislatively.
3. We will continue to be adaptive to the COVID-19 situation and adjusting our agency activities appropriately to protect the public and our staff.



## WAFWA Commissioners Committee Brief – use of trail cameras and airbows/airguns

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission currently does not restrict the use of trail cameras on private or public lands within the state. There are no restrictions that limit electronically sending notification or pictures of wildlife in a wireless environment from trail cameras to other devices (computer, tablet, cell phone). As technology continues to improve and change, this may be an area where future legislation will need to be considered.

Airbows are currently illegal to use in Nebraska as they do not meet the statutory definition for archery equipment or firearms. They also do not meet our regulations for big game hunting. Since no legal method of take is identified in our regulations for rabbits and squirrels in Nebraska, airbows would be legal for hunting those species.

Airguns are not legal to use in the harvest of big game species in Nebraska as they do not meet our regulatory definitions for weapons allowed. As well there is some ambiguity in Nebraska statute regarding their status as a firearm. Airguns could be legally used to hunt rabbits and squirrels in Nebraska, as we do not identify legal weapons for taking those species.

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## WAFWA State of the State Report 2021 Mid-Winter Meeting Virtual Platform

### **State: Nevada**

### **Agency Director: Tony Wasley**

#### **Biggest Successes in the Last 6 Months**

During the summer drought of 2020, the Department augmented 36 of our water development projects spread over 16 mountain ranges with over 150,000 gallons of water. Starting in July 2020, the Department began to observe water developments that were approaching the extent of their water storage capacity. Water hauls began mid-July and from August through November 2020, another 35 water developments were augmented using water trucks, ATVs, and helicopters. Department staff from across all divisions worked for weeks to address the critical dry units. While COVID-19 conditions limited volunteer assistance, many sportsmen's organizations offered funding support to conduct these emergency operations. While the state has received some fall precipitation, the Department continues to monitor our water developments and hope that the units fill to their capacity before next summer.

The Geographic Information System (GIS) staff launched a new FishNV App. The application consists of an interactive map of all Nevada's fishable waters, information about the fish that can be caught in those waters, and the Trophy Fish that the Department has on record for each water. The application was recently released to the public and can be found at: <https://fish.wildlifenv.com/>

The Information Technology Division secured over \$78k of CARES Act money in order to replace 38 desktop computers with laptops. These replacements will allow staff to be more mobile and have easier transition between working in the office and working remotely.

#### **Biggest Challenges or Concerns in the Last 6 Months**

The State of Nevada is currently in a hiring freeze which has taken a toll on staffing capacity. All divisions within the Department have felt the pressure of meeting regular deadlines and client expectations while covering duties their positions are responsible for and additional duties that are the responsibility of vacant positions. The Department has recently received approval to fill over 20 critical positions but the approvals and hiring process has progressed at a slower pace than before the pandemic closures.

Game wardens have been rising to the challenge of a significant increase in outdoor recreating public due to the pandemic. With a record number of tag applications and an increased interest in

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hunting from our traditional base as well as persons new to the angling and hunting aspects of outdoor activity, it has proven to be a busy year for investigations. Department officers have been doing an outstanding job of addressing these issues throughout the state.

Department dispatchers and Western Region staff have been inundated with reports and complaints about Black Bears in 2020. Dry habitat conditions in Nevada have caused bears to search for food in urban environments earlier and in increased numbers than most years. Many divisions throughout the Department have worked to respond to the increased number of bear complaints and to educate the public of the increase in wildlife and human contact and the steps the public can take to prevent urban wildlife incidents.

### **What to Expect in the Next 6 Months**

The Nevada Legislature will convene on February 1, 2021 for 120 days. The Department foresees bills coming forward regarding issues such as the makeup of the Wildlife Commission and falconry regulations. Two bill draft requests were proposed by the Department that would address boat registration fees and senior hunting/fishing license fees. Department staff is preparing to monitor the process of the bill progressing through the legislative process and are ready to testify should questions of the Department arise.

The Game Division has received direction by the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commission to begin a mule deer enhancement program with the objective of identifying limiting factors for mule deer, deciding the appropriate response to the highest ranking limiting factors, and proposing projects that would address those limiting factors. Thirteen mule deer teams have been created around the state as well as a Commission created Oversight Committee. This effort will begin approving suggested projects in 2021 and implementing projects that may begin by using existing sources of funding. Future projects will be submitted for analysis and new funding sources will be sought after to implement projects for the benefit of mule deer and other wildlife throughout the state.

The Nevada Department of Wildlife has begun revision of the 2012 Nevada Wildlife Action Plan. Wildlife Diversity staff conducted a survey to understand the current use of the Plan and to learn from partners and the public what they would like to see changed or included in the next revision. The survey concluded with 109 responses showing 60 percent of the responders stating they used the plan regularly, especially for analyzing effects of proposed projects on wildlife as well as species and habitat information. Changes recommended by respondents include creating a more user friendly, web-enabled plan and including more regional landscape conservation topics. Progress on the revised Wildlife Action Plan will continue with hopes of a draft ready for approval in the next fiscal year.

The continuation of creative uses of technology to engage teachers, students, and volunteers will be part of the communication, education and information delivery and program development throughout the duration of the pandemic. Due to the successes that the Department has seen with the advancements in technology based educational programs, the platform will most likely be a tool utilized by the Department moving forward.



## **WAFWA Report, Mid-Winter 2021**

### **WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT DIVISION (WMD)**

*Biggest Success* – WMD initiated a project to conduct at-scale habitat expansion and restoration along the Rio Chamita and its headwaters on the Edward Sargent Wildlife Management Area. These activities are aligned closely with landscape-scale plans and objectives for riparian and forest habitat improvements by larger collaborative efforts in the Upper Rio Chama region of southwest Colorado and northern New Mexico.

*Biggest Challenge* - White-tailed ptarmigan are a state-listed species that are under review for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Initial surveys revealed only a small remnant population in New Mexico. A translocation of birds from Colorado to New Mexico is planned for Spring 2021. The project was delayed one year due to late snows prohibiting capture, and was delayed a second year due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

*Next Six Months* - WMD has implemented a program to estimate cougar density in various mountain ranges and habitats in the state. The study will occur in the NE corner of New Mexico. Cougars will be GPS collared along with use of a camera grid to derive population estimates using spatial capture-recapture modeling. An analogous study will occur in SE New Mexico in the Sacramento/Guadalupe Mountains concurrently.

### **FISHERIES MANAGEMENT DIVISION (FMD)**

*Biggest Success* - FMD completed the restoration of Gila trout to Whitewater Creek by confirming the absence of non-native trout after additional rotenone applications and stocking Gila trout throughout the drainage in the summer of 2020. This project increased the distribution of Gila trout by 26% and is critical to overall recovery efforts.

*Biggest Challenge* - FMD completed the final phase of a largescale Rio Grande cutthroat trout restoration project in the Rio Costilla basin following statewide COVID-19 restrictions. Concerns with COVID-19 required months of additional planning to ensure crew and public safety as well as compliance with public health orders.

*Next Six Months* - FMD will be renovating the Glenwood Hatchery for Gila trout conservation, completing a large migration barrier for Rio Grande cutthroat trout restoration and constructing a refuge pond for Chihuahua chub.

### **ECOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING DIVISION (EPPD)**

*Biggest Success* - The Share with Wildlife Program received 33 grant proposals that address species of greatest conservation need or habitat conservation, of which 11 were proposed for funding in 2021. Those chosen consist of research projects, wildlife rehabilitation efforts, conservation education and wetland habitat improvements.

*Biggest Challenge* - Design and installation of an animal detection system along Interstate 40 at an important wildlife crossing structure between the Sandia and Manzano mountain ranges in central New Mexico has proved very challenging. The Department of Transportation continues to raise objections based on installation and ongoing maintenance costs.

*Next Six Months* - EEPD will continue to work with Natural Heritage New Mexico to finish web enabling the State Wildlife Action Plan and add feature enhancements to the Department's Environmental Review Tool.

## **FIELD OPERATIONS DIVISION (FOD)**

*Biggest Success* - Officers continue to provide valuable customer service and wildlife law enforcement during the pandemic. Adaptations have been made to keep an acceptable level of service for our citizens. We are working to keep Department employees safe with COVID-19 practices, personal protective equipment and training while recognizing these additional stresses on our employees.

*Biggest Challenge* - FOD has a significant shortage of officers statewide. The pandemic has created more users in the field, away from urban areas, which has created more work, violations and stress for fewer officers. Hiring new officers is on hold due to COVID-19 restrictions. New Mexico passed new legislation requiring body cameras for law enforcement officers. This legislation mandates expenditures for cameras without an increase in budget.

*Next Six Months* – FOD will continue to provide customer service and wildlife law enforcement. We will seek new ways to keep employees safe, motivated and encouraged during these trying times. Officers recognize this additional stress on our public and are adapting well to dealing with the public, remaining professional and courteous.

## **INFORMATION AND EDUCATION DIVISION (IED)**

*Biggest Success* – Throughout the pandemic, IED has created and posted numerous educational lesson plans and home activities on the website, social media pages, fishing reports and e-newsletters. IED has implemented numerous virtual classes and webinars including hunter education classes, conservation education presentations and aquatic education presentations as well as hosting numerous virtual public meetings.

*Biggest Challenge* – IED's biggest challenge is the continued need to create, mobilize, prioritize and communicate online services and publications as well as identifying delivery methods and implementation to meet needs of hunter education students and other customers.

*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. IED staff will continue to develop and implement virtual training opportunities and online lesson plans and other publications to engage with teachers, students and other customers on virtual platforms. The Department is working hard to position itself to continue building future successes in outreach and education efforts.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES DIVISION (ASD)**

*Biggest Success* – ASD's biggest success was maintaining business operations for the Department with limited staff in offices and the majority of staff working from home. Current license sales and applicant draw data shows an increase from the previous license year. The 2020 audit was completed on time despite virtual interactions with the independent auditors.

*Biggest Challenge* – ASD's biggest challenge was managing the Department's finances and assets during a period of financial distress for the state. Declining state revenues and the inability to hire rapidly to fill essential positions presented additional challenges. Maintaining business operations without having to shutdown facilities due to exposure to COVID-19 was also challenging.

*Next Six Months* - There may be a potential reduction in spending depending on the outcome of the special legislative session. The Department will need to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on hunting and fishing license sales for the remainder of the year. We will need to adapt to the fiscal condition as it changes based on revenue impacts from COVID-19.

## **INFORMATION SERVICES DIVISION (ISD)**

*Biggest Success* – ISD implemented digital signature on documents, an application for Call Center staff at home to answer customer calls and successfully passed PCI audits.

*Biggest Challenge* - The IT Operations teams' biggest challenge has been deploying equipment with limited access to the office due to pandemic concerns.

*Next Six Months* – ISD will be setting up 30 staff at home to take customer calls and credit card payments. We will implement Mobile Device Management to remotely manage computers and implement a new IT Service Desk application.

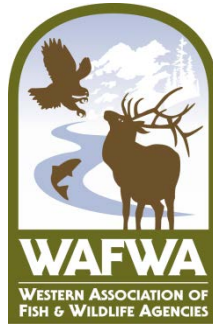


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WAFWA State of the State Report  
2021 Mid-Winter Meeting  
Virtual Platform

State: North Dakota  
Agency Director: Terry Steinwand

Biggest Successes in the Last 6 Months

1. Certified 1,800 students through an online hunter education course due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students were required to complete an online course, and then a written and practical exam by the end of 2020.
2. Hired an R3 coordinator to lead our R3 initiative.
3. Expanded CWD surveillance efforts to include additional deer units where CWD was documented, and in other areas where it was of a greater concern. In addition, hunters were notified of pending results within two weeks by email/text messaging services.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns in the Last 6 Months

1. COVID-19: Offices remained closed to public access due to coronavirus pandemic. However, arrangements were made in advance to open by appointment only, if necessary. Field work continued to be a challenge and sacrifices were made, although completed all field work despite COVID obstacles.
2. Meeting both internal and external communication expectations while complying with COVID-related travel/gathering restrictions.

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3. Converting in-person hunter education classes to online courses to students who were affected by the coronavirus pandemic, and finding staff and the time to certify those students by the end of December.

#### What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

1. COVID-19 – same challenges to confront as we have in the past several months
2. Legislation – confronted with several issues as the legislative assembly meets for 80 days beginning in January, with our biggest issue most likely being electronic posting/trespassing.
3. Most likely facing a concentrated effort from those wanting to restrict nonresident fishing license sales.

## **WAFWA State of the State Report**

2021 Mid-Winter Meeting

Virtual Platform

State: Oklahoma

Agency Director: J.D. Strong

### **Biggest Successes in the Last 6 Months**

1. While many activities and routines were upended by COVID-19, ODWC worked with the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, the Oklahoma State Department of Health and Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse to develop a plan to remind Oklahomans that time spent outdoors is good for both mental and physical health. Staff developed a new communications campaign: "The Outdoors Are Always Open." The plan positioned springtime outdoor activities as viable options during COVID-19 and informed Oklahomans that our vast outdoor resources are the perfect places to practice social distancing and build family bonding time. Oklahomans' response to the plan was outstanding, including a 106 percent increase in total sales for the month of May alone. Fishing and other outdoor activities have seen a huge spike in participation, which has continued through this fall with the advent of Oklahoma's most popular hunting seasons. This campaign received a Special Recognition Award from the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.
2. ODWC developed a unique in-house Game Warden Academy for all new hires. During a rigorous four-week training regimen, Game Wardens are taught by top instructors and given hands-on experience on the various situations they will face on the job.
3. Fostering Outdoor Oklahoma Families was launched this fall. This unique partnership between ODWC, the Department of Human Services and the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation gives Oklahoma children in foster care and their host families the chance to enjoy the outdoors and learn all about fishing. After holding a few events in Oklahoma City and Perry, plus a special event at Blake Shelton's ranch near Tishomingo, the intent is to expand FOOF statewide beginning in spring. Local families are invited to a special clinic by ODWC staff. The children get a new rod-reel-tackle combo to use at the event and to take home for future fishing adventures. The kids are given instruction on how to fish, and then they enjoy actual fishing time.

### **Biggest Challenges or Concerns in the Last 6 Months**

1. Amid shutdowns, restrictive guidelines from health officials, etc., ODWC staff successfully kept the state's wildlife management areas open. This was critical for the public to have a place to get outdoors and enjoy hunting, fishing, and other outdoor opportunities on our WMAs. With this came much higher demand for these areas, and staff successfully rose to the challenge by addressing infrastructure needs such as parking and road maintenance issues, as funding allowed. Also, Game Wardens successfully maintained a law enforcement presence across the state, protecting wildlife resources and the public during the pandemic. While most office staff adapted to telework, a skeleton staff continued to conduct vital customer service and accounting functions at ODWC headquarters. ODWC's online license system and mobile app proved to be great resources.
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 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 has

revamped a 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 Oklahoma wild cervids, but it has in wild herds in every bordering state. ODWC biologists continue testing and planning to manage any finding of CWD in the state's wild cervid populations. New rules are now in place to restrict importing cervid carcasses and parts into the state. Informational campaigns have been conducted to inform hunters how to spot potential CWD in deer and how to report it. A comprehensive action plan is in place and staff is prepared to address any confirmation of CWD in the state's wild cervid herds.
2. ODWC created a team in June known as R2-4-R3 with a major goal to identify and remove regulation barriers to recruitment, retention and reactivation. ODWC is working to enhance Legislature engagement and to assuming a greater role in rulemaking by moving license consolidation, streamlining and right-pricing under ODWC's purview.
3. ODWC is ramping up efforts to grow R3. With the National Wild Turkey Federation, a hunting R3 coordinator joined ODWC, and the agency added a fishing R3 coordinator too. A how-to video series is underway on basic outdoors-related skills; ODWC was awarded a First-Catch Trailer by the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation; and ODWC received an R3 development grant from the Association for Conservation Information. The agency's Outdoor Oklahoma magazine is putting greater emphasis on R3 content partially through relaxed restrictions on the use of federal grant funding.

WAFWA State of the State Report  
2021 Mid-Winter Meeting  
Virtual Platform

State: Oregon

Agency Director: Curt Melcher

Biggest Successes in the Last 6 Months

1. License sales increase – License sales increased, with many first-time buyers especially in fishing. Efforts are underway to retain those new customers by providing timely, relevant information for beginners, including web, email and video. We are also developing a survey to learn more about these new customers and find out what they need from us in order to keep on hunting and fishing in the future.
2. The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted a new Climate and Ocean Change Policy at their July 2020 meeting. The Policy lays out a consistent framework by which the Department will integrate climate change, climate change impacts, and greenhouse gas reductions into planning, budgets, and policy decisions.
3. Despite being challenged with having to deal with four mega fires and multiple other large fires in the course of a week, the immediate response phase did a phenomenal job of minimizing infrastructure damage, loss of fish in production facilities and loss of life.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns in the Last 6 Months

1. Workshops, public meetings and public events are important to agency operations for rule making and R3. The inability to hold in-person meetings and events due to COVID-19 restrictions made it challenging to reach out to the public and new individuals and families interested in fishing and other outdoor skills. Fires also disrupted planned events.
2. The fires impacted over a million acres of fish and wildlife habitat. While we expect many long term benefits, there will be short term impacts from sedimentation of streams, higher stream temperatures, and loss of forage and cover. It will take many years (decades) to recover the late seral habitat that was highly impacted by the fires.
3. The loss of fish and hatchery facilities mean we will be unable to meet all production goals.

What to Expect in the Next Six Months

1. Retaining new customers – significant energy will be put into retaining Pandemic Participants who were new or returning hunters and anglers in 2020. Initial efforts are already underway and additional strategies will be informed by surveys and other analysis of this cohort.
2. Roll-up of damage and risk assessments to inform mid-long term recovery planning. Clean up and planning/rebuild of hatchery facilities. Emergency stabilization actions such as hazard tree removal, slope stabilization, and early detection and treatment of invasive plants.
3. Development of an agency climate and ocean change communication plan as well as assessment of the Department's current carbon footprint.

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WAFWA State of the State Report  
2021 Mid-Winter Meeting  
Virtual Platform

State/Province: Saskatchewan

Agency Director: Brant Kirychuk, Executive Director; Fish, Wildlife and Lands

Biggest Successes in the Last 6 Months

1. Increased capacity for collecting ungulate heads from hunters and completing sampling has improved turn-around times for Chronic Wasting Disease surveillance and testing.
2. Added 60,000 acres of land to Saskatchewan's Representative Area Network by transferring lands to the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund which can be used for public access for hunting and other recreational activities.
3. Amended the Outfitter and Guide regulations to provide support to the outfitting industry significantly impacted by travel restrictions for American hunters and anglers. This included eliminating fees for outfitting camps on Crown land, eliminating licence fees for outfitters who did not operate, and reducing licence fees for outfitters who operated in 2020.
4. Made the Hunter Harvest survey mandatory for all licenced hunters.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns in the Last 6 Months

1. Heavy early snowfall in November will likely impact pronghorn populations, and are already seeing concerns from farmers and ranchers with mule and white-tailed deer feeding on stored feed and grain.
2. Reduced licence fee revenue, thus reduced contributions to the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund due to travel restrictions for American hunters and anglers.
3. Determining equitable policy to allow disabled hunters a reasonable opportunity to participate in hunting activities while still maintaining "fair chase" principles.

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

1. Moving significant amendments of the *Captive Wildlife Regulations* forward which will get mixed reaction from very supportive from the environmental and animal rights community to negative feedback from exotic wildlife enthusiasts. These regulations regulate: import and export

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of wildlife; wildlife held for personal purposes, sale, zoo or research use; rehabilitation; and falconry.

2. Begin comprehensive review of the Wildlife Act to modernize and address changing attitudes and approaches to wildlife management.

3. Completion of a provincial Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan in conjunction with Ministries of Health and Agriculture.

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WAFWA State of the State Report  
2021 Mid-Winter Meeting  
Virtual Platform

State: Idaho

Agency Director: Ed Schriever

Biggest Successes in the Last 6 Months

1. Managing resident hunter concerns about hunt area congestion and overcrowding. Actions include working with the Idaho Legislature to secure authority for the IDFG Commission to manage the distribution of nonresident hunters in general (over-the-counter) hunts. Prior to this action, nonresident hunter distribution in general season hunts was not limited.
2. Worked with the Idaho Legislature to receive authorization to increase nonresident license, tag and permit fees. This action was taken to offset an expected reduction in nonresident hunter numbers (and revenue) associated with the Commission's action to manage nonresident hunter distribution in general season hunts.
3. Acquired a new license vendor capable of managing our robust menu of hunting, trapping and fishing opportunities including managing controlled hunt, capped hunt and general hunt product sales each with multiple opportunities for residents and nonresidents.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns in the Last 6 Months

1. Working with the Legislature, the Commission and the public to coordinate the new nonresident management strategy identified above.
2. Working with our new licensing contractor to stand up the new "Go Outdoors Idaho" online purchasing platform for licenses, tags and permits.
3. Maintaining services and outdoor opportunities for the public during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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### What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

1. Emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis as a stronger, more adaptive and nimble agency with a renewed appreciation of the importance and value of the outdoor hunting, trapping, fishing and wildlife viewing opportunities we manage on behalf of our constituents.
2. Continuing to address the Commission's objective to comprehensively address hunt area congestion and crowding.
3. Adaptively managing priority objectives including: monitoring for introduction of Chronic Wasting Disease including the development of a readiness response plan, managing to reduce incidences of agricultural crop depredation by ungulates, providing increased hunting, trapping and fishing access opportunities for the public, managing livestock depredation by grey wolves and maintaining state sovereignty and state management of wildlife.

## **WAFWA State of the State Report – 2020 Winter**

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

### **Biggest Successes Last 6 months:**

#### **1. Centralized E-Commerce System – A Shift in Providing Online Customer Service**

The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) makes it a top priority to provide excellent customer service to South Dakotans and visitors. In the last two decades, GFP has had two separate e-commerce sites; one for purchasing/applying for a hunting or fishing license and another for making state park camping reservations, purchasing park entrance licenses and other merchandise. The sites never integrated with one another and were hosted separately; requiring separate usernames and log ins.

Over the past year, the department has placed a high priority on bridging the services and requirements of these two systems so that by 2022, we can launch a centralized e-commerce system. In turn this will greatly enhance how customers make purchases and store data in our brand's online space. It will also allow staff to interact with and use that information more efficiently, in daily duties and for future recruitment and retention efforts. The primary goal is to have a replacement system that includes current and enhanced business functionality, as well as upgraded technology that supports agency and public needs. Security, flexibility, ease of use, reliability, and accuracy for customers and the department are the top priorities for this system.

The new centralized e-commerce system will be a one-stop shop, incorporating consumer interactions of all types. In the new system, users will be able to:

- purchase hunting, fishing, and park entrance licenses
- make camping reservations
- enter big game hunting license lotteries
- complete forms and applications (including commercial licenses and special use permits)
- download appropriate ETags (this is pending updated legislative language)
- purchase merchandise
- share and rate their experiences
- register for programs and events
- access their account with a single sign-on, using the same login information for any e-commerce system managed by the State of South Dakota

Additionally, the department will have access to electronic reporting and customer tracking management, along with the ability to create, implement, and provide measurement of marketing campaigns all in one location. Overall, the system will improve and increase the department's recruitment, retention and reactivation efforts for hunting, fishing, camping, trapping, and all other forms of outdoor recreation. What's more is that it will assist with and improve efficiency in administrative tasks, such as completing license draws, tracking preference points, assigning eligibility and discounts, tracking attendees and volunteers of educational programs, and more.

A nationwide Request for Proposal (RFP) was published on October 15, 2020, to establish a multi-year contract with a qualified vendor to develop this system. Proposals are due December 11, 2020, and a contract will be signed by mid-January 2021. Construction of the new system will take place throughout 2021.

#### **2. Development of Law Enforcement Section**

In May of 2020 Secretary Hepler announced the decision to create a law enforcement section within the Wildlife Division of the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) and to hire a new Section Chief to lead this effort. The purpose of this transition was to provide consistent communication and direction to the officers in

the field, merge all GFP law enforcement into one section to include Park Rangers, and to improve operational efficiency within the Agency. Sam Schelhaas was chosen for this position.

Sam began his career as a Wildlife Conservation Officer in 2003 in Salem and has worked in multiple stations and in multiple capacities within the Department. He currently lives in Yankton where he and his family have lived for the past 15 years.

Moving forward there is a lot of work in store for the law enforcement section. Sam's Team is working diligently to incorporate the Department strategic plan by establishing clear goals, efficient communication and expectation plans, evaluating the recruitment and retention of officers and merging Wildlife Conservation Officers and Park Rangers into one section.

### **3. Parks Stay Open during Pandemic**

Keeping South Dakota's State Parks open and safe during the pandemic was not business as usual. Operating and maintaining South Dakota's park areas relies on a diverse work force including seasonal staff, volunteers, and permanent staff. There were reductions in the availability of seasonal staff and volunteers which put tremendous pressure on permanent staff, especially late in the summer. Priorities had to shift to make sure critical services were being provided. Keeping park staff safe and protected was a top priority. Staff members were required to wear masks when interacting with the public. Procedures were modified to reduce the amount of exposure between staff and visitors. Sanitation and cleaning practices were enhanced. Visitors were encouraged to social distance while at the park. The public overwhelmingly embraced the measures. Many new users were introduced to the outdoors and sales of boats, tents, campers, bicycles and other outdoor equipment left the shelves. Undoubtedly these new users will be back again in years to come so South Dakota State Parks is readying itself for 2021.

### **Biggest Challenges or Concerns Last 6 Months:**

#### **1. Impact of COVID on licenses, processes, and participation**

While initially our license sales were very strong, we had lower participation from nonresidents during our small game/pheasant season. This is a primary source of income for South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Wildlife Division. We were fortunate to have great participation numbers for residents throughout the year, but their license fees are lower than nonresidents.

To combat this, we have started a small game marketing campaign to try to encourage sportsmen and women to come pheasant hunting in South Dakota. The marketing campaign is utilizing tracking mechanisms so we can determine efficacy of the campaign by tracking when people click on one of our ads and go to our licensing system to purchase a license.

#### **2. Chronic Wasting Disease / Aquatic Invasive Species**

##### **Chronic Wasting Disease**

A priority for South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP), chronic wasting disease (CWD) has been in the news over the past year with the adoption and implementation of an action plan, increased surveillance efforts to determine the distribution of this disease amongst our deer and elk herds, and enhanced outreach to inform stakeholders of CWD and potential implications.

The goal of the CWD Action Plan is to determine the presence of CWD, reduce the spread of CWD, and to have an informed public that understand, support and participate with CWD management practices to ensure viable deer and elk populations for future generations. Preventative measures, surveillance efforts, and communication and outreach serve as the supportive pillars.

The GFP Commission adopted new regulations for the transportation and disposal of deer and elk harvested from known endemic areas to reduce the artificial spread of CWD. Since carcass parts can serve as a vector to introduce the disease into new areas, the following regulations are in place for the 2020 deer and elk hunting seasons:

- Defined endemic areas (where the disease has been detected) at the deer and elk hunting unit level where the regulations would apply.
- Any deer or elk carcass part harvested from another state and brought into South Dakota will need to be disposed of in a garbage container or a permitted landfill.
- Any deer or elk carcass part that is transported out of a South Dakota endemic will need to be disposed of in a garbage container or a permitted landfill.

In summary, these new regulations do not prohibit a hunter from transporting a deer or elk but does require a disposal requirement if taken out of a known CWD endemic area. If a hunter does not leave a known CWD endemic area, the disposal regulations do not apply.

Surveillance efforts from the 2019 hunting season and urban deer removals resulted in 1,858 samples, with hunters providing 66% of all samples. Methods for sample collections included SD Game, Fish and Parks offices, collection stations at designated locations, city deer removals, taxidermists, vehicle kill contractors and hunter submissions. A total of 76 positives were confirmed, including 57 white-tailed deer, 12 mule deer and 7 elk. CWD has now been confirmed in twelve counties in South Dakota, which includes eight counties added during 2019. At this time, CWD has not been detected east of the Missouri River in South Dakota within free-ranging deer.

Priority surveillance areas have been identified for the 2020 deer and elk hunting seasons. Landowners and hunters provide valuable information by providing voluntary samples in assisting GFP in monitoring the presence of CWD.

Current information on CWD, new regulations, best management practices and how to submit samples for testing can be found at <https://gfp.sd.gov/chronic-wasting-disease/>. Any questions or concerns can be directed to Chad Switzer, wildlife program administrator, at 605-773-4193 or [chad.switzer@state.sd.us](mailto:chad.switzer@state.sd.us).

### **Zebra Mussel Spread Complicates Management**

A major expansion in the distribution of zebra mussels occurred in South Dakota in 2020. As of 2019, all zebra mussel infestations in the state were associated with the Missouri River system. Reproducing zebra mussel populations were documented in three eastern glacial lakes in 2020.

Eastern South Dakota has a series of interconnected glacial lakes and wetlands and an intricate series of roads. The Missouri River has over 60 boat ramps on infested portions of the system. Containment of zebra mussels to currently infested waters is not feasible, even if resources for a watercraft inspection and decontamination (WID) program were greatly increased. In 2021, WID stations will be used in eastern South Dakota and the Missouri River corridor to aid in adoption of best practices to minimize transport of raw water and vegetation by watercraft.

Western South Dakota contains six larger (150 ha to 5,072 ha) Bureau of Reclamation and Forest Service reservoirs. Preventing the introduction of zebra and quagga mussels to these reservoirs is feasible, if enough resources can be secured and this is the top priority for 2021. Game, Fish and Parks receives no state general funds and generates no revenue off fishing licenses or watercraft registrations specifically for AIS management.

Therefore, we are actively pursuing funding from federal agency partners to implement an effective WID program for these western waters.

### **3. COVID Preparations**

Beginning in April of 2020, it was becoming apparent that parks and recreation areas were going to be in high demand as people sought places to escape from stay-at-home situations. That role for parks would expand as the season went on. In order to provide for a safe place to recreate and instill public confidence, the Department of Game, Fish and Parks quickly formulated a response plan. This plan addressed critical public safety items while at the same time keeping park staff safe so that disruptions to services would be minimal or unnoticed. First, GFP expanded and promoted as many online services as possible for visitors to take care of park requirements and fees prior to entering the park. Most park entrance licenses and camping reservations can be purchased online without the need to stop at a park office or booth. Second, park administrative facilities were modified to provide protective barriers, and access to these facilities were routed in ways to minimize contact between visitors and staff. Third, cleaning and disinfecting measures were strengthened to minimize contact with the virus. The 2020 season proved to be a tremendous success with record numbers of visitors and campers taking advantage of beaches, trails, play courts, fishing, nature watching, and shooting sports.

### **What to Expect in the Next 6 Months:**

#### **1. Completion of Internal Control Risk Identification Activities**

Senate Bill 162 signed during the 2016 Legislative Session established SD's State Board of Internal Control. In September of 2020 SDGFP was chosen as the 4<sup>th</sup> agency to implement the state's new internal control framework. Once implemented, this framework will provide state leadership with a reasonable assurance that SDGFP is meeting its operational, reporting, and compliance objectives. Staff from BFM as well as consultants from PwC/Guidehouse are actively helping complete this implementation.

Once onboarding is complete SDGFP will have much greater understanding about the risks to the achievement of department objectives. SDGFP is currently identifying

- 1) the controls that mitigate the most critical risks
- 2) the people who are responsible for those controls, and
- 3) documenting all of this in a consistent and clear way.

All documentation will be reported to the State Board of Internal Control and other leaders across state government through the new statewide IC system. Onboarding is in progress and occurring over an intense 3-month schedule. Onboarding work should be completed in December of 2020. SDGFP identified many individuals and 9 distinct program teams who are tasked with much of the work necessary to facilitate the implementation. This is a top priority for the state and the department has been directed to provide the necessary time and resources to ensure our successful implementation. Many will be required to devote a portion of time every year to reviewing controls, completing self-assessments on those controls, and identifying additional risks and controls. The time spent on this effort should benefit the department in many ways, including a clearer understanding of the critical risks to achieving our department objectives and improved prioritization of our day-to-day tasks which we use to manage those risks.

#### **2. Implementation of Habitat Stamp projects**

With the passage of Senate Bill 75 in Legislative Session 2020, GFP began planning for implementation of the Habitat Stamp. By utilizing LEAN and Six Sigma concepts, GFP developed an implementation plan that includes

budgeting, project submission and a detailed communications plan with best practices. This detailed approach will help ensure that GFP stays in compliance with the guidelines set out in Senate Bill 75 and are prepared to report out to GOAC annually on the Habitat Stamp and how funds were utilized.

In 2018, GFP conducted a Game Production Area (GPA) Habitat and Access Assessment wherein \$19 million in habitat and access improvement needs on GPAs were identified. With resources made available through the newly enacted Habitat Stamp, GFP for 2020-2021 is focusing on high-impact priority habitat and access developments identified in the 2018 assessment. These habitat and access developments are in addition to the existing annual operation, maintenance, and development activities. Planned Habitat Stamp projects for the 2020-2021 season include native grass and nesting cover plantings on 25 GPAs, high diversity pollinator habitat plantings on 10 GPAs, woody cover plantings on 12 GPAs, and improved public access trails - including waterfowl access points - on 16 GPAs.

For 2021 and beyond, GFP will maintain and keep current the priority list of GPA habitat and access projects both identified in the 2018 Assessment and new opportunities as they arise. Additionally, efforts continue to prioritize long-term fiscal requirements for equipment and FTE needs identified in the 2018 Assessment. GFP is also tracking annual habitat and access accomplishments in order to measure success towards accomplishment of the 2018 assessment objectives.

Resources made available through the Habitat Stamp are also providing an opportunity to accomplish full enrollment of the James River Watershed CREP, where 18,000 acres of the 100,000 authorized acres remain available.

GFP also has identified multiple areas of access and habitat improvement on popular fisheries as well as dams located within the state. GFP utilized this list to determine where Habitat Stamp funds can be spent to help alleviate structural issues within many of the spillways in the state.

The Department provided a formal report of this process to the Game, Fish and Parks Commission during the September Commission meeting.

**The three issue topics that were identified in July 2020 to be discussed in January include the following:**

#### **Fees for Wildlife Management Area (WMA) Access**

SDGFP currently does not require purchasing a specific certification or "pass" to access Game Production Areas or Water Access Areas, whether for hunting/fishing access or other allowable recreation access.

- Implementing an access fee would likely require legislation.
- While not an access fee per se, requiring a person to possess a valid hunting or fishing license or a Habitat Stamp as an access certification is an option. This would be like several USFWS Refuges that require an access fee in the form of a Federal Duck Stamp.
- Funds collected from a fee required to access Game Production Areas or Water Access Areas would constitute program income and would thus be deducted as such from our Federal Aid land management grant.

## Shed Hunting Season Coordination

Shed hunting is allowed and open year-round in South Dakota on SD Game, Fish and Parks (SDGFP) owned lands, including state parks, recreation areas and game production areas. Some federal lands (e.g. Wind Cave National Park, Badlands National Park, Mount Rushmore National Monument, national wildlife refuges, etc.) prohibit shed hunting. National Forest Service lands are open to shed hunting and the Black Hills National Forest is a destination for many shed hunters. Landowner permission is required to shed hunt on private property. Privately owned land leased by SDGFP for public hunting (Walk In Areas, Controlled Hunter Access Program, etc.) also requires landowner permission to shed hunt.

Prior to 2016 shed hunting was prohibited on lands owned by SDGFP (see administrative rule below). The SDGFP Commission took action to change administrative rule and allow shed hunting on SDGFP lands starting in 2017.

**41:03:01:05.** *Destruction or removal of natural or cultural features prohibited -- Exception. A person may not destroy, damage, or remove a living or dead tree, shrub, or vegetation; disturb any earth, rocks, minerals, natural formations, or cultural resources; or destroy, damage, or remove skulls or other parts of animal carcass located on lands owned or leased by the department without written permission from the secretary or a designated agent. However, a person participating in religious activities in Bear Butte State Park or on department land owned or leased adjacent to the Missouri River may use grasses and forbs taken from these lands for ceremonial purposes. For purposes of this rule, a cultural resource includes historic properties, archaeological resources, and Native American cultural items (including human remains, associated funerary objects, unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony, as defined in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, 25 U.S.C. § 3001, as amended through February 2, 2009).*

## Fair Chase and New Technology

South Dakota continues to wrestle with the challenges associated with the issues of fair chase and the changes and advances in technology in the hunting, fishing and trapping world. This is a vast topic that is not unique to South Dakota in the complexities associated with it. Every year there are laws and rules put in place, adjusted or amended which fit into this conversation. Below are several laws and rules that were address in the past year in South Dakota.

Like most states South Dakota is searching for the balance between the traditional hunting, fishing and trapping and the digital age of hunting, fishing and trapping.

- Bait Stations – GFP Commission expanded the dates that bait stations can be utilized (Aug 1 – Feb. 1 and March 15 – May 31) to align with the dates that tree stands can be placed on Department lands.
- Tree Stands – GFP Commission expanded the dates (Aug. 1 – March 31) that portable tree stands, portable blinds, and climbing devices can be placed on Department lands.
- Artificial Light – SD Legislature amended laws to streamline provisions associated with hunting predator/varmint species at night, as well as establishing new definitions of “night vision equipment” and “artificial light”.
- Hunting with Aircraft – SD Legislature created provisions to allow the use of a drone to spot predator/varmints on private land by the landowner, provided FAA laws are followed and it falls outside of the period September 1 through November 30.
- Dove Hunting – SD Legislature repealed a provision that previously prohibited hunting doves within 50 yards of a public road. This repeal increased hunting opportunity on both private and public lands. Road hunting for doves is still prohibited.

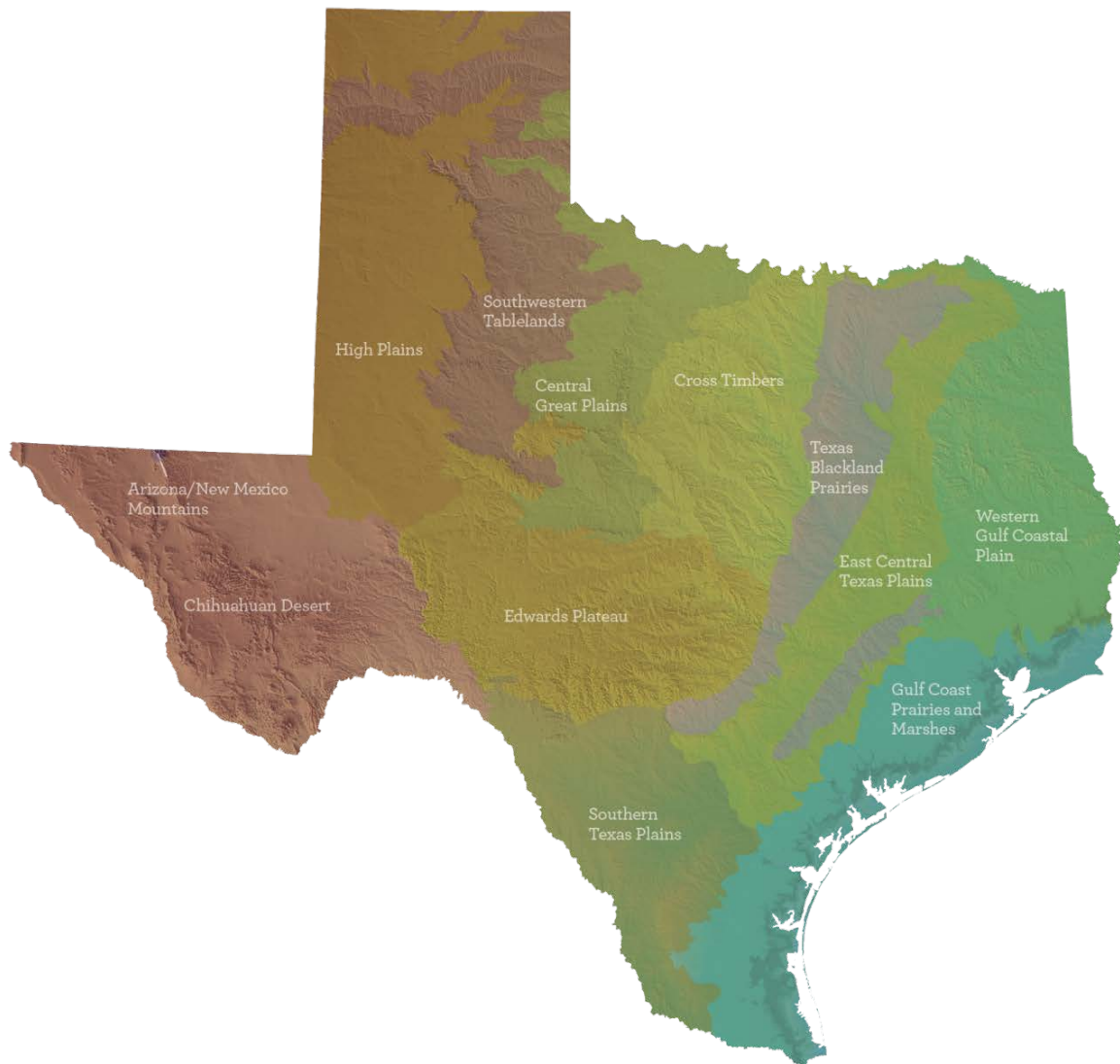


Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies - Winter Meeting

# Texas Parks & Wildlife Department State of the State Report

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*June 1, 2020 – November 30, 2020*





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## **Biggest Successes in the Last 6 Months**

### ***License Sales and Draw Hunt Applications***

While the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on license sales remains to be seen, participation in hunting and fishing activities has remained consistently strong and translated into very robust license sales in license year 2020 (LY2020) and the early months of license year 2021 (LY2021). Overall, license sales were up just over 9 percent when compared year-to-year. LY2020 led by resident fishing sales which were up 24 percent and followed by drawn hunts which were up almost 12 percent during that same period.

In LY2021 through October 2020, overall sales are continuing at above 9.5 percent when compared year-to-year. Again, this is led by resident fishing at a 24 percent increase, combination hunting/fishing license sales increase of approximately 8 percent, resident hunting licenses slight increase of about 0.7 percent, while drawn hunts were up 28 percent. The lone decrease is non-resident hunting sales which were down about 10 percent.

## **Biggest Challenges or Concerns in the Last 6 Months**

### ***COVID-19 Impacts on Operations***

Beginning on March 13, 2020, as the Texas Governor issued the first COVID-19 related disaster declaration, TPWD modified operations in response to COVID-19, including closing the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) headquarters complex to the public, closing fish hatchery visitor centers, keeping state parks and wildlife management areas open, and authorizing widespread telework. To help facilitate these changes, TPWD quickly rolled out policy and time-keeping modifications, provided enhanced technical support, and accelerated its evaluation of electronic conferencing tools, ultimately implementing the Microsoft Teams videoconferencing tool agencywide. TPWD staff also worked tirelessly to acquire cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE) for those facilities that remained open.

### **State Parks**

As individuals and families who were at home began seeking opportunities for outdoor recreation, TPWD began to see increased demand for access to its facilities. Except for about two weeks in April, most Texas state parks have remained open throughout the pandemic, implementing capacity limits and operational changes such as eliminating cash transactions, requiring on-line reservations, closing visitor centers, enhancing routine cleaning and disinfecting, and spacing out facility use to enable more thorough cleaning and disinfecting. Cash transactions and walk-in visitation have since been reinstated and visitor centers are now open, with several safety precautions in place. State parks are now operating at around 75 percent capacity and for the most part, have settled into a new way of operating.

### **Public Hunting**

In mid-March, when TPWD began to make decisions about closing or continuing activities, there were still over 20 public hunts scheduled for the 2019-2020 season. Although hunting is well-suited for social distancing, there was the need to implement protocols to ensure the safety of public hunters and staff. In March and April, while a few public hunts were cancelled, most of the remaining public hunts (turkey and

hog) were able to continue with additional safety and operational changes. Prior to the hunts, TPWD sent an email blast to all public hunters notifying them of safety protocols. For the 2020-2021 season, with further refinements to the protocols, public hunts resumed in September 2020.

#### Water Recreation

TPWD saw a deviation from the traditional seasonal fluctuation of certain activities and required that game wardens modify their historic patrol efforts, as well as the division's public outreach strategies. The increased activity on lakes and other waterways warranted modified game warden engagement around the state. Unfortunately, there were also several water safety incidents, including several boating accidents and drownings.

#### Wildlife Management Areas

Much of the work on wildlife management areas (WMAs), which is well-suited for social distancing, was able to continue with additional safety protocols; however, WMAs also saw an increased interest in outdoor activities, especially during the period in which Texas state parks were closed. Technical guidance on the other hand, which normally involves in-person interactions between TPWD biologists and private landowners on private land, was significantly impacted; although in some instances, biologists were able to utilize some other means of communicating with landowners. Some of these activities were able to resume in early June, so long as appropriate safety protocols were observed. However, TPWD biologists are also respecting the wishes of landowners who may continue to have concerns about in-person interactions.

#### Game Warden Training Academy

Modifications were also made to the 63<sup>rd</sup> academy for game wardens and state park police at the Game Warden Training Center (GWTC) which was underway when TPWD began to make decisions about closures in mid-March. After a brief shutdown in April, during which the GWTC facilities were reconfigured and sanitized, plans were developed to compress the remaining weeks of the academy. Cadets were commissioned on April 24, 2020 in an abbreviated ceremony at the GWTC. TPWD began the 64<sup>th</sup> academy in October 2020 but is pausing recruitment for the 65<sup>th</sup> academy until it can evaluate how the 64<sup>th</sup> is progressing under the new protocols.

#### ***Coping with the Tragic Loss of Three Employees***

On August 8, 2020, TPWD lost 3 Wildlife Division employees, in a tragic helicopter crash, while conducting sheep surveys. This event had far-reaching repercussions for our employees, their families, and the entire Department. Not surprisingly, colleagues came together and supported each other and compassionately supported the families of Dr. Bob Dittmar, Dewey Stockbridge, and Brandon White. Grieving colleagues, and an agency in shock, obtained some solace from the tremendous outpouring of sentiment and heartfelt condolences from our friends and from those in the greater conservation community around the country. We were especially thankful and appreciative of the support and generosity demonstrated by hundreds of individuals and groups that will assist the families of our fallen colleagues for years to come.

As expected, media coverage and various communications about our fallen colleagues, impacts they had following their chosen career, were widespread. Similarly, the memorial services that occurred over the

weeks, and the way these men were honored and respected during the services, helped in some small way to begin the healing process. Finally, the local design and development of a memorial is in-progress which will forever honor the lives and accomplishments of our fallen friends.

Since the incident, TPWD leadership suspended all aerial wildlife work in order to re-evaluate survey protocols and safety procedures. TPWD understands that unless and until greater progress is achieved in unmanned aerial technologies, manned aerial survey work will continue to be a necessary component of managing certain wildlife resources in Texas. Only after TPWD has fully evaluated each survey process and made each one as safe as is practicable, will TPWD allow our dedicated resource teams to once again go about the business of aerially monitoring and managing the Texas wildlife they are passionate about.

## **What to Expect in the Next 6 Months**

### ***Legislative Session and Agency Sunset Review***

The 87<sup>th</sup> Texas legislative session begins on January 12, 2021 and ends on May 31, 2021. At this time, it is uncertain how the pandemic will impact the daily protocols of the legislative session.

TPWD is currently under review by the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission who is responsible for assessing the need for a state agency or program to exist approximately every 12 years. Beginning in September 2019, the Sunset Advisory Commission's staff performed an extensive review of TPWD and evaluated the Department's programs and operations. The Sunset Staff Report, published on June 4, 2020, identified four issues with corresponding statutory and management recommendations for improvement to TPWD's operations. The Sunset Advisory Commission will make their final decisions on Sunset Staff's recommendations in December 2020. Any adopted statutory recommendations will be incorporated into TPWD's Sunset bill during the 87<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session, while adopted management recommendations will immediately go into effect and implementation will need to occur by TPWD.

### ***Will our work ever be the same pre-COVID-19?***

With the move to a remote working environment, staff have had to be more deliberate in seeking to achieve the type of collaboration that often occurs naturally in an office setting.

Over time, some activities that were initially halted have resumed. TPWD's two primary fish hatchery visitor centers reopened to public visitation and law enforcement offices around the state reopened. TPWD also implemented an agencywide reopening plan and began to reopen offices at no more than 25 percent occupancy. TPWD is continuing to monitor COVID-19 infection rates across the state to determine when to further reopen facilities

### ***Managed Lands Deer Program Biologists***

The fee for voluntary participation in the Managed Lands Deer Program (MLDP), adopted by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission in January 2020, will go into effect for the 2021-2022 season. The revenue generated from that fee will be used to hire 15 biologists. This will allow the Department to increase its capacity to serve MLDP participants, enhance technical guidance to all constituents, and to support the Land Management Assistance (LMA) online program that manages all data and administrative processes related to MLDP.

## WAFWA State of the State Report

### 2021 Mid-Winter Meeting

#### Kansas

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

#### **Biggest Successes Last 6 Months**

1. Normal business operations and constituent services were maintained during the various COVID-19 surges. Through November, work places were safe and a low number of employees contracted the virus and those who did were traced to a contact outside of the work place. Conducting public Commission Meetings virtually through ZOOM has been surprisingly successful, allowing for more public involvement than previous in-person meetings.
2. The decision was made to provide refunds to hunters who successfully drew limited nonresident deer permits last April if they were unable to travel due to COVID-19. Each permit returned for a refund was then offered to the unsuccessful applicant next in the draw order, and most were glad to purchase the permit. Demand for refunds was relatively light through the summer, but picked up noticeably in October and November as the virus surged in Kansas.
3. Through partnerships with the Kansas Wildlife Federation and the Kansas Hispanic and Latino American Affairs Commission the department produced the first-ever Spanish-language hunting and furharvesting regulations, available online and in a printed version. The regulation pamphlet is just one facet of a new language access program, "Afuera Para Todos" meaning "Outdoors For All." The program includes immediate plans to offer additional Spanish-translated materials, to include the *2021 Kansas Fishing Regulations Summary* (produced annually), *2022-2023 Kansas Boating Regulations Summary* (produced every two years), area signage, website and social media content, and more. In addition to offering Spanish-translated materials, KDWPT has increased its capacity to field phone and email communications in Spanish through the hiring of a dedicated bilingual information representative.
4. In the 2020 fall hunting seasons, iWIHA properties saw more than twice as many check-ins on the limited-access private land compared to last year. While the traditional Walk-in Hunting Access Program leases private land for open hunting access, iWIHA provides electronic check-in and limited access to private tracts, so that at any given time, only a few hunters will be on a property. The majority of the more than 1 million acres of land enrolled in WIHA is located in the less populated western half of the state where hunting pressure is not heavy. Landowners in the urban eastern half of the state show more interest in the program if they can be ensured of limited hunting pressure. iWIHA is providing high-quality hunting experiences and additional access in an area of the state where more hunters live. For the fall of 2020, there are 68 tracts totaling 12,000 acres enrolled in iWIHA, most located near urban centers.

5. Construction began on a new facility at the Meade Fish Hatchery that will produce 13.5 million walleye fry, 650,000 two-inch walleye fingerlings, and 30,000 ten-inch walleye intermediates for stocking annually. The intensive recirculating system tanks will produce as many walleye fingerlings as 18 earthen ponds.
6. Launched a comprehensive public awareness campaign designed to slow the spread of chronic wasting disease.

### **Biggest Challenges or Concerns Last 6 Months**

1. Keeping employees safe, healthy and working positively while providing essential services to hunters and anglers.
2. Managing heavy use of state fishing lakes and wildlife areas and keeping the public safe.
3. Impact to revenue and federal aid due to COVID was a concern.
4. Negotiating an RFP for license and permit sales vendor.

### **What to Expect in the Next 6 Months**

1. Avoiding large-scale work outages due to quarantines and maintaining essential functions and customer services prior to a vaccine.
2. Engaging new and returning customers who hunted and fished as a result of the pandemic. How do we ensure they keep purchasing licenses and permits?
3. Getting legislative approval for land acquisition and amending the statute that establishes caps on fees, many of which are at or near the limits, preventing even modest fee increases.
4. Finalizing a new electronic license and permit sales contract.



GARY R. HERBERT  
Governor

SPENCER J. COX  
Lieutenant Governor

# State of Utah

## DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

BRIAN C. STEED  
Executive Director

### Division of Wildlife Resources

MICHAEL D. FOWLKS  
Division Director

## WAFWA State-of-the-State Report for Utah Mid-Winter Meeting, Jan. 5–8, 2021 Virtual Platform

State: Utah

Agency Director: Rory Reynolds (starting Jan. 1, 2021)

### Biggest Successes in the Last 6 Months

1. **Increased hunting and fishing license sales** — Utah has seen substantial increases in hunting and fishing license sales throughout 2020. As of Dec. 1, 2020, the number of licenses issued was up 19% compared to 2019, and license revenue had increased 21%.
2. **Use of technology to benefit customers and employees** — Throughout 2020, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) used technology in innovative ways to overcome COVID-19 pandemic challenges. These solutions helped to keep DWR employees and customers safe during license purchases, Hunter Education classes, wildlife-viewing events and other interactions.
3. **Extensive habitat restoration after wildfires** — In 2020, Utah had a record wildfire season. There were well over 1,500 fires that burned more than 316,000 acres. Approximately 78% of the fires were caused by humans. Over the past few months, the DWR and its partners in Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative have been working to rehabilitate and reseed more than 100,000 acres of burned terrain.

### Biggest Challenges or Concerns in the Last 6 Months

1. **COVID-19 pandemic** — The COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions have been the DWR's biggest challenge in recent months. Many standard events, meetings and field projects had to be modified or postponed to prevent the spread of the disease.
2. **Ongoing, statewide drought** — As of late November 2020, most of Utah was experiencing extreme or exceptional drought. Only a few areas in the northern part of the state fell in the moderate and severe drought categories. There is currently **no** part of Utah that is not experiencing some degree of drought.
3. **Implementing new predator-control laws** — The DWR took multiple steps throughout 2020 to implement Utah's new predator-control laws. These laws gave the DWR additional flexibility but also had a ripple effect that required changes to many administrative rules and hunting opportunities.

What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

1. **Ongoing COVID-19 pandemic** — Until a vaccine for COVID-19 is widely available and distributed, the DWR will continue using technology and other workarounds to keep employees and customers safe.
2. **Changes in leadership** — Utahns elected Gov. Spencer Cox in 2020, and his inauguration occurred Jan. 4, 2021. DWR Director Mike Fowlks retired on Dec. 31, and now Rory Reynolds is serving as the agency's interim director. Director Reynolds most recently served as deputy director of the Utah Department of Natural Resources.
3. **Potentially harsh winter weather** — Although the winter of 2020-21 started with little precipitation, DWR biologists are concerned that deep snow or extreme cold temperatures could be problematic for Utah's big game herds. Because of ongoing widespread drought, many animals entered the winter with low fat reserves, and they might struggle to survive a difficult winter.



WAFWA State of the State Report  
2021 Mid-Winter Meeting  
Virtual Platform

State: Washington

Agency Director: Kelly Susewind

**Biggest Successes in the Last 6 Months**

- 25-Year Strategic Plan

In 2019, the Department began an effort to craft a strategic plan based on the diverse perspectives of stakeholders, partners, and employees.

On October 23, 2020, the Commission approved a 25-Year Strategic Plan designed to proactively address conservation challenges, engage communities through recreation and stewardship, deliver science that informs Washington's most pressing fish and wildlife questions, and move WDFW toward operational and environmental excellence. Designed to serve as a "living document," the plan will be revisited every two years. The plan will guide the Department's collaboration, policy, and funding decisions.

2. Operational Response to COVID -19

On March 16, WDFW closed all offices and implemented mandatory telework. Staff remained fully engaged in their work with the implementation of telework systems, enforcement remained in the field and the essential work of marking and tagging hatchery fish was completed. As a result of increases in outdoor activities in response to the pandemic, WDFW has seen an increase of 30-40% in use of WDFW public lands and significant increases in license sales. The prioritization of safety has resulted in development of specific safety standard operating procedures to keep staff in the field and effective throughout the state. WDFW implemented internal contact tracing to ensure exposed staff were notified and directed to quarantine in accordance with CDC guidelines and Washington Department of Health. WDFW is scheduled to continue in remote work status through June 2021.

3. Goat Translocation

In May 2018, the National Park Service released the Final Mountain Goat Management Plan which outlined the effort to remove the 725 mountain goats estimated on the Olympic Peninsula at that time. Both the plan and the associated environmental impact statement were finalized after an extensive public review process which began in 2014.

This effort was a partnership between the National Park Service, WDFW, and the US Forest Service to re-establish and assist in connecting depleted populations of mountain goats in the Washington Cascades while also removing non-native goats from the Olympic Mountains. Mountain goats were introduced to the Olympics in the 1920s.

The past three years of this project have been a culmination of federal, state, tribal co-managers, and volunteers working together to move the mountain goats to the North Cascades. Mountain goats were removed in four, two-week long operational periods from September 2018 to August 2020. Capture and translocation operations are now complete. Since September 2018, a total of 325 mountain goats have been translocated to the northern Cascade Mountains.

Overall Mountain Goat Capture and Translocation Results  
September 2018 - August 2020

Total Removed	Translocated to Cascades	Transferred to Zoo	Capture Mortalities	Transport Mortalities	Euthanized	Lethally Removed
381	325	16	22	4	6	8

Since the translocation effort, the Olympic National Park has partnered with highly skilled, qualified volunteers for ground-based lethal removal. The ground-based lethal removal program ended in October with a total of 31 mountain goats culled from the population in the park.

**Biggest Challenges or Concerns in the Last 6 Months**

1. COVID-19 closures and re-openings

WDFW provides active management for more than one million acres of publicly owned land and over 500 water access areas. Our vision is a Washington where fish and wildlife thrive in healthy habitats, and where people experience and enjoy our state's natural gifts for generations to come. WDFW-managed lands receive approximately 23.2 million visits per year.

Due to concerns over public health implications of people traveling around the state and potential implications of transmission of COVID-19 as well as creating stress on rural economic supply chains, WDFW closed all lands and access areas at the end of March. We re-opened these lands at the beginning of May for day use only. Camping was re-opened county by county as counties reached Phase 3 in the Governor's Safe Start Re-Opening Plan.

This was a monumental effort requiring coordination with the Governor's office and our sister state agencies. Internal coordination between leadership, enforcement, front-line land managers, and public affairs was critical and constant. This work to close and re-open lands demonstrated the clear public value for access to public lands for outdoor recreation and the clear benefits to physical and mental health, especially at a time when stress was at an all-time high. Visits to our lands were up 25-35% during the summer of 2020, with commensurate increased incidents of pileups of trash, human waste, vandalism and unauthorized activity. This increased use has created a strain at many of the department's busiest and most popular locations, further stretching our limited capacity to meet the needs of the public we serve in a safe and sanitary manner.

2. Furloughs / budget

In June, facing a projected multi-billion dollar shortfall for the remainder of this and next biennia, Governor Inslee directed agencies to implement furloughs. In June, July and August, WDFW implemented furloughs one day each month. In addition, state agencies were directed not to implement the 3% general wage increase scheduled for July 1 for management positions.

3. Losses due to wildfires

Historic and unprecedented large wildfires occurred in 2020 burning close to 650,000 acres in Washington's shrubsteppe landscape. There were significant impacts to WDFW wildlife areas and to

listed species occurring on and off WDFW land. Two large WDFW wildlife areas were burned almost completely – totaling 30,000 of 33,000 acres. Approximately 50% of the area in Washington occupied by greater sage-grouse and Columbian sharp-tailed grouse was burned. We are concerned about there being adequate cover and forage for overwinter survival as well as longer term effects. While we will not know the full impacts to grouse populations until spring, we anticipate population decline due to additional habitat loss as a direct result of the 2020 wildfires, including loss of leks or breeding areas. The federally endangered Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit was also seriously impacted by the fires. One of three recovery areas in the state where significant recent recovery effort was demonstrating gains, was completely burned over and will be unsuitable for pygmy rabbits for 15 to 20 years. We estimate loss of half of the known statewide pygmy rabbit population. There are a small remaining number of rabbits in breeding enclosures that may be sufficient for future reintroduction efforts as long as we don't have higher than normal overwinter mortality and/or lower than normal spring reproduction. In addition to listed species impacts and short-term habitat loss, many other species of greatest conservation need use the affected shrubsteppe landscape, including sagebrush sparrow, jackrabbits, and ferruginous hawk. While fire impacts are significant, they are not spread evenly across the landscape. In areas of low intensity burns, with time, we expect habitat to recover without significant investment. In areas with high burn severity and likelihood of cheatgrass invasion, WDFW and our conservation partners are working together to respond with restoration efforts that can provide the most benefit for wildlife.

### **What to Expect in the Next 6 Months**

#### **1. SRKW Commercial Whale Watch rules.**

In spring 2019, the Washington Legislature passed Senate Bill 5577: a bill concerning the protection of Southern Resident Orca Whales from vessels, which developed a license for commercial whale watching and directed the WDFW to administer the licensing program and develop rules for commercial viewing of Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW). (See [RCW 77.65.615](#) and [RCW 77.65.620](#))

The purpose of developing rules for how, when, and where commercial whale watching of SRKW can happen is to reduce the impacts of vessel noise and disturbance on the whales' ability to forage, rest, and socialize while enabling sustainable whale watching

Draft rule language was developed in a year-long process. This included deliberations of a stakeholder advisory committee, insight on best available science from an independent science panel, and implementation guidance from inter-governmental partners. WDFW also conducted a state environmental review (SEPA) process and an analysis of the economic impacts of various measures on the viability of the whale watching industry.

Two alternatives of the draft rules were posted on October 21, 2020 for public comment. The rules limit viewing of SRKW to certain days and times within certain months of the year, and within that, restrict the number of motorized commercial whale watching vessels permitted in the vicinity of SRKW at one time. The rules also formalize a no-go zone for commercial whale watching vessels that is currently voluntary.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission will have a briefing and hearing on the proposed rules December 4, 2020. The Commission is expected to adopt final rules on December 18, 2020, for implementation beginning in 2021.

## 2. Hatchery Policy

At the June 15, 2018 Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting, the Commission directed the agency to conduct a review of all sections and aspects of the Hatchery and Fishery Reform Policy (C-3619). Subsequently, the following primary project elements emerged:

- Policy Review by Commission
- Science Update and Synthesis, including Emerging Science (Completed)
- Policy Performance Evaluation document (Completed)
- Engaging Tribal Co-managers in Joint Policy development •
- Public Outreach and Engagement (led by consultant and WDFW)
- Commission considers final reports and policy recommendations (synthesizing information from the three documents above, incorporating input from tribes, partners, stakeholders, and the public).

### Current Actions and Issues

- WDFW and commissioners have met multiple times with tribal co-managers to discuss concerns with existing policy and the draft new policy.
- WDFW recognizes that hatcheries mitigate for the loss of habitat.
- There are concerns that risks associated with increased production of hatchery fish to natural origin fish need to be better accounted for in policy revisions which may be at odds with the goal of increasing production.
- Wild salmon advocates are concerned with increasing hatchery fish on spawning grounds and in the ecosystem.
- There is also a desire to address SRKW needs through increased hatchery production.
- Short of returning to historical hatchery releases, some tribes are opposed to revision.
- Moving Forward: WDFW will continue to work with tribal co-managers on a science-based policy to ensure hatchery reform.



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

**BIGGEST SUCCESSES – LAST 6 MONTHS**

**Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Management Plan**

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (Department) continued its statewide public engagement process to increase communication regarding CWD 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 Wyoming Game and Fish Commission (Commission) approved the statewide plan, as recommended, in July.

**Wildlife Crossings**

Wildlife crossings continue to be a priority for the Department, the Commission, and conservation partners. The Commission approved the Department to move forward three large statewide wildlife crossing projects into a fund raising phase. They prioritized the Interstate 25 project and allocated \$500,000 towards it with an additional \$250,000 commitment if matched. In February, the Governor launched the Department and Wyoming Department of Transportation joint 'Wildlife Crossing' initiative, a campaign to keep wildlife and drivers on the go by reducing wildlife collisions. A challenge was set to have 2,020 Conservation License Plates on the road by the end of 2020. Numerous partners have stepped in to assist with the promotion of this initiative.

**Aquatic Invasive Species Rapid Response Plans**

The Fisheries Division completed all 22 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 have been through administrator review and the partner and stakeholder review process is now underway.

## BIGGEST CHALLENGES OR CONCERNS – LAST 6 MONTHS

### **COVID-19 Department Operations**

The Department transitioned to teleworking and social distancing operations. A great deal of time was spent making sure the public was still served and providing our staff a safe way to operate. The Department found a creative and effective way to hold Commission meetings that allow for public participation and the continuation of Commission business.

### **Trapping**

In April, the Commission was petitioned by several groups to modify trapping regulations. The Commission directed the Department to review the petitions and bring back recommendations at a future meeting. The Department formed an internal team to review the issues and engage stakeholder input to determine areas of concern and potential agreement regarding trapping regulation changes. Based on stakeholder input and recommendations by the Department's internal team, the Commission directed the Department to move forward. These recommendations involved additional outreach and education by the Department along with two recommendations that require legislative support.

## WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS

### **Migration Corridors**

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. The Governor's office has selected the members of a Platte Valley local working group that will assess the effectiveness of the Executive Order on the designated corridor.

### **Elk Feedgrounds**

The Department has become increasingly concerned about the spread of wildlife diseases and the implications CWD and other issues may have on elk attending winter feedgrounds in western Wyoming. To address these challenges the Department is inviting the public to participate in the development of a long-term management plan. This effort is kicking off with a series of virtual meetings or "listen and learn" sessions on the many intricacies of elk feedgrounds.

### **Expanding Hatchery Production to Warm/Cool Water Species**

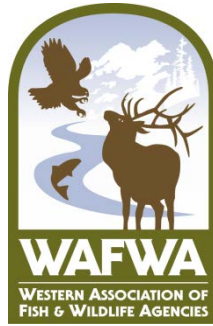
The Fisheries Division continues to explore opportunities for, and is moving closer to developing warm/cool water species within our existing hatcheries system. Currently, the Department relies on other states to import warm/cool water species to stock in Wyoming waters. Developing our own production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

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WAFWA State of the State Report  
2021 Mid-Winter Meeting  
Virtual Platform

Province: Yukon

Agency Director: Ryan Hennings

Biggest Successes in the Last 6 Months

1.Branch pivoting in March to work remotely, develop Covid-19 safety protocols and continue operations and program delivery. As a result we were able to minimize program delivery to the public and had a successful field season due to the dedication and professionalism demonstrated by all staff within the Department and Fish and Wildlife Branch.

2.Under Covid conditions the Branch working with our First Nation partners completed an extensive grizzly bear population study in the Beaver River Water shed.

Biggest Challenges or Concerns in the Last 6 Months

1. First Nation Governments concerns related to travel concerns of licence residents hunting and fishing in their traditional territories. ( not in my back yard concerns) These led to public closures of these lands and increases conflicts between subsistence harvesters and licence anglers and hunters.

2. Territorial moose management has dominated the conversation with all stakeholders this year. The Department in 2019, proposed a new adaptive moose management regime which has been opposed by some stakeholders. Public engagement continues on this adaptive management conversation as local fish and game association continues its public and political opposition to this proposal.

3. Alaska, Yukon and stakeholders in both jurisdictions for many years formed a coalition group to manage an international caribou herd known as the Forty Mile Caribou. This herd population has been steadily increasing and in the last five years starting to reoccupy historical range in Yukon. Currently, herd health indicators has signaled concerns by some state managers that overall herd and range health is deteriorating. As a result Alaska officials have taken action to drastically increase harvest (10,000 animals) to reduce herd size outside of the coalition table. This action has created tension at the coalition table and with local Yukon First Nation Government who see these affect their subsistence rights.

#### What to Expect in the Next 6 Months

1. Yukon to continue working towards our goal of modernizing moose management in Yukon through increase collaboration with stakeholders including First Nation Governments, improved harvest reporting by all users, revising non-resident outfitting allocations and regulation changes.
2. Land planning continues to be a priority to First Nation Governments and Government of Yukon. Fish and Wildlife Branch will continue to take a leading role in these planning initiatives across the territory.
3. Continued work with our partners in Alaska to strengthen the coalition management approach for the effective management of this important caribou herd so the interests of both jurisdictions are better recognized.