

**MINNESOTA
STATE REPORT**
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Dedicated Funding Efforts

In November 2008, Minnesota voters passed a constitutional amendment (56% majority) to raise the state sales tax by three-eighths of one percent to be used for habitat, clean water, parks and culture. The funding is not available for agency operational expenditures but rather for specific projects and initiatives. The tax goes into effect on July 1, 2009 and will be available in FY10 as five separate dedicated accounts including:

- 33 % to restore, preserve and enhance fish and wildlife habitat and other natural resources;
- 33 % to protect and restore the state's surface water and groundwater;
- 14.25 % to support the state's parks and trails;
- 15 % to protect the state's drinking water sources;
- 19.75 % for the arts and cultural heritage purposes

During the 2009 session, the Legislature appropriated a total of \$213.4 million from the new dedicated funding for FY2010 including \$69.5 million to restore, preserve, and enhance fish and wildlife habitat and other natural resources (in consultation with Lessard - Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Recommendations), \$69.5 million to protect and restore surface and groundwater (in consultation with Clean Water Council), \$29.9 million for parks and trails, and \$44.5 million for arts and cultural heritage purposes.

The new dedicated funding results in DNR appropriations totaling \$57.8 million in FY2010. This includes \$1.7 million for accelerated Wildlife Management Area (WMA) prairie grassland management, \$3.9 million for prairie grassland WMA acquisitions, \$2.9 million for WMA wetland acquisitions, and \$5.7 million for Aquatic Management Area (AMA) acquisitions. FY2010 appropriations totaling \$15.2 million for work by conservation partners (e.g., Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, USFWS, and Trout Unlimited) will improve habitat on WMAs, AMAs, and USFWS waterfowl production areas and refuges. A total of \$36.0 million over two years was appropriated for Forest Legacy easements on 187,000 acres from the Blandin Paper Company.

Legislature 2009

The Legislature approved a FY2010 – 2011 biennial budget during grim economic conditions continued to fund all but \$40,000 of the Working Lands Initiative grants program, 1837 treaty work, and a portion of general fund support for the aquatic plant restoration program. Funding initiatives for wildlife health (\$600,000 per year for FY2010-11), wolf population and

monitoring (\$220,000 per year), and the new walleye stamp (\$285,000 per year, contingent on stamp sales) were all approved, as was a proposal to capture accrued balances in the dedicated surcharge and dedicated stamp accounts (approximately \$500,000 per year).

The next two years will be very challenging for the Division and the Department. Like other Minnesota state agencies, DNR was not funded for inflationary costs for the biennium and was also assessed a \$800,000 general fund reduction. State agencies will be subject to "un-allotting" general fund appropriations after July 1. FAW will have approximately \$500,000 less per year available in the next two years and anticipates the need to continue to hold most vacancies as they occur and seek out additional efficiencies in how we do our business.

Fishing related policy mandates provide for night bowfishing statewide from May 1 to the last Sunday in February, resident angling in state parks without an angling license, angling by residents age 90 or older without a license, and adoption of DNR recommendations for minimum size limits for muskies on inland waters. Modification of fishing contest rules include reduction or elimination of certain permit requirements and fees and development of an online web-based fishing contest permit application process through a \$15,000 appropriation. DNR is also mandated to develop best practices certification for fishing contests to assure proper handling and release of fish.

Data on individuals created, collected, stored or maintained by DNR for electronic licensing transactions are now classified as private. The data may be disclosed for law enforcement purposes and may be used for natural resource management purposes, including recruitment, retention and training certification and verification.

DNR is mandated to develop a report with recommended policy changes, authorities and penalties related to feral swine and other escaped animals by no later than Jan. 15, 2010. Additional authorities for controlling feral or domestic animals running at large have been provided.

A policy highlight for the 2009 session provides more protections for WMAs. Statute changes provide protection for WMAs (160 contiguous acres or larger) from local ordinances that limit the use and management of the area, and exempts WMAs (40 - 159 acres) from ordinances that restrict trapping; the discharge of archery equipment and certain firearms, or noise; require dogs to be leashed; or otherwise restrict the management of the area.

Hunting/Fishing Revenue and Expenditure

Following discussions with the Citizen Oversight Committee for the Game and Fish Fund (GFF) since 2005 showing that expenditures for fisheries programs exceeded angling revenues to GFF, while expenditures for wildlife programs were less than revenues generated from hunters and trappers, the Legislature mandated that DNR prepare a report by November 2008 on the issue. The report outlined short-term and long-term solutions for the imbalance and concluded that "recent state policy and funding decisions have actually lead to a widening of the 'imbalance,' not a narrowing. Over the long term, policy and finance decision makers will need to decide the importance of this balance relative to the priority of programs, as well as the appropriate mix of revenues and expenditures from the game and fish fund relative to the role of other funding sources."

Long Range Organization Planning

FAW embarked on a long range organization planning process to consider future organization functions and structures that may be appropriate in the next 10 – 50 years. A core planning team of managers and future leaders have considered trends and implications for FAW work and begun to formulate strategies in response to these trends. Staff input is being solicited on mission, vision and values through small group discussions involving approximately 180 individuals, on-line forums and surveys. In addition, Divisions of Water and Ecological Resources are undergoing a transition to merge the two divisions by July 2010. Activities and programs spanning all three divisions will be reviewed in terms of optimal functions and structure. Management Analysis and Development, a Minnesota state agency, is facilitating aspects of these planning processes in conjunction with DNR staff.

WMA/AMA Acquisition

AMAs are established to protect, develop, and manage lakes, rivers, streams, and adjacent wetlands and lands that are critical for fish and other aquatic life, for water quality, and for their intrinsic biological value, public fishing, or other compatible outdoor recreational uses. WMAs are established to protect lands and waters which have a high potential for wildlife production. These lands are managed for wildlife values and for public hunting, trapping, fishing and other compatible outdoor recreational uses.

In FY08 the DNR purchased 3.96 miles of cold-water shoreline with a value of \$130,000/mile and 4.46 miles of warm-water shoreline with a value of \$446,300/mile for inclusion in the AMA program. Minnesota currently has approximately 1.3 million acres in 1,400 units in the WMA program. During 2008, 6,482 acres were purchased or donated at a cost of \$12 million.

Climate Change Planning

FAW assisted the AFWA Climate Change Committee think tank with the development of a briefing, *A Recommended Approach for State Agencies to Incorporate Climate Change Considerations in Fish and Wildlife Conservation*, which was presented and accepted at the 2008 fall annual meeting. The think tank is comprised of state agency staff from Alaska, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. The briefing statement can be found at http://www.fishwildlife.org/about_comm_climatechangewg.html .

Recruitment, Retention, and Education

DNR doubled its outreach efforts from 2008 to 90,000 in the 2009 direct mail postcard campaign to Minnesota anglers in partnership with Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation. This year's efforts included an additional pilot test using a MN model of current anglers to predict who were most likely to lapse. These anglers were also sent a postcard to remind them to purchase their 2009 angling license. These efforts were complimented by radio advertising and national and state Take Me Fishing web sites.

Minnesota's statewide angling and aquatic resources education curriculum placed first in the interpretive curriculum category of National Association for Interpretation's 2008

Interpretive Media Awards competition. Additional information can be found at www.mndnr.gov/leadersguide. As a way to keep educators motivated and provide them with additional information, MinnAqua also started *MinnAqua Moments* an online e-newsletter. Additional information can be found at www.mndnr.gov/minnaqua

MinnAqua kicked off a “Pay it Forward” project to get fishing equipment into the hands of educators who are familiar with the *Fishing: Get in the Habitat! Leaders* guide. As a result of educators identifying in a recent evaluation survey that access to equipment is a barrier, MinnAqua provided \$700 (MSR) worth of equipment to educators who completed an online application. In exchange for a fishing package of items including rod/reel combos, tackle box with starter tackle, leader fishing vests and safety bag, the educators were asked to submit a web-based description of how they intended to make use of the equipment and extend the give by “paying it forward”.

As required by the Legislature, the DNR convened a citizen workgroup to make recommendations for the teaching of outdoor education in grades 7-12. The Outreach Section led this effort in coordination with the Minnesota Department of Education. Though the Legislature did not act on the recommendations during this budget-setting year, the recommendations were used as the basis for a \$300,000 funding request that is pending before Minnesota’s Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources. The workgroup’s recommendations focused on eliminating barriers to the teaching of outdoor skills in grades 7-12. The full report can be found at http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/legislative/outdoor_ed.pdf.

In an effort to meet the angling interests of Minnesota’s southeast Asian community, FAW initiated a first-ever white bass stocking program in the Twin Cities. The white bass is prized by southeast Asian, especially Hmong, because it is similar to a favored fish in their homeland. Additionally, the agency will highlight white bass fishing opportunity locations on its website, will soon update fish consumption recommendations for white bass based on new testing information, and is providing a mentored fishing opportunity for southeastern Asians as part of Take A Kid Fishing weekend. FAW in cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Health conducted a large focus group with southeast Asian anglers to assess the number and type of fish they regularly consume in order to better understand the health impacts of their fish consumption. On the wildlife side, the division is in the midst of literature reviews and other activities that address Hmong interest in expanded squirrel hunting and management opportunities. The squirrel is favored species of Hmong hunters.

In an effort to make deeper inroads into the Hispanic community, FAW developed an abbreviated fishing regulations brochure. This new communication tool was used as part of the DNR involvement at a Twin Cities Cinco de Mayo event and will have long-term applications.

The top male and female student archers who participated in spring 2009 DNR National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) state tournament each received their choice of a lifetime hunting or fishing license. Nearly 700 students from throughout the state participated in the tournament. Statewide, 96,656 students from 285 schools participate in NASP. The Minnesota DNR Archery in the Schools Program currently has 285 Schools enrolled in the

program and has trained 605 Instructors reaching 97,000 students ranking Minnesota among the top 5 state conducting the NASP program.

The Apprentice Hunter Validation Program allows an individual to try hunting without having completed Firearms Safety Training; apprentice hunters must be accompanied by a licensed adult hunter. This past season, more than 3,500 individuals took their first hunts or re-kindled their interest in hunting as a result of this program, a 25% increase from 2007.

Participation in Becoming an Outdoor Woman and Becoming an Outdoor Family programs increased 20% between 2008 and 2009 reaching more the 1,700 individuals. A new College Outdoor Skills Day was held at University of Minnesota Crookston in conjunction with the local natural resource club. Becoming an Outdoors Family programs are now also being offered (<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/education/bow/index.html>).

In 2008, 557, 318 hunters purchased 610,303 deer hunting licenses, 95,711 duck stamps, and 123,327 pheasant stamps. The state's hunting heritage continues to be strong and unlike many states, Minnesota has actually seen an increase in hunting license sales over the past decade.

Aquaculture and Wetlands

In 2008 the Minnesota Legislature mandated that DNR develop aquaculture best management practices (BMP) by 2010. DNR is working with scientists at University of Minnesota (Anne Kapuscinski and Deborah Brister) and University of St. Thomas (Kyle Zimmer) to develop BMPs in collaboration with the aquaculture industry in Minnesota.

National Fish Habitat – Midwest Glacial Lakes Project

The Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership, a coalition of public and private entities across eight Midwest states, received recognition as a “full partner” from the National Fish Habitat Board. This designation opens the door to additional opportunities for fish habitat grants and funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The funds will be used to sustain lake systems in the Midwest through strategic investments in habitat and water quality. Ultimately, the national board's goal is to obtain habitat funding similar to the North American Wetlands Conservation Act that has funded wetland conservation since the 1980s. To earn the designation as a Fish Habitat Partnership, Project Manager Pat Rivers had to assemble partnerships across eight states, define geographically significant projects based on scientific data, develop a strategic plan and identify evaluation and assessment methods. The Section of Fisheries provides the funding for Rivers to work on this project. See <http://www.midwestglaciallakes.org/> for more details.

Shoreland Management

Several Minnesota homeowners, contractors and local units of government were honored by the Brainerd Area Environmental Learning Network (BALEN) on Oct. 16 for choosing to develop or redevelop their lakeshore or riverfront properties in eco-friendly ways. BALEN is a collaborative effort between the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), 1000 Friends of Minnesota, DNR, the Northland Arboretum, Crow Wing Soil and Water Conservation District, the Paul Bunyan Trail Committee, Central Lakes College, the Initiative Foundation, and the University of Minnesota Extension Service. The group has presented these awards for the last six

years and hope that these awards help other landowners implement ecologically sensitive development along lakeshore and river shore.

Fisheries Planning

Special and experimental regulations are being increasingly used to manage fish populations in order to meet multiple and divergent social needs and interests. Public participation processes are being used to develop long range plans and guidelines for species and habitats.

Long Range Plan For Muskellunge and Large Northern Pike Management Through 2020: This plan enhances muskellunge and northern pike fishing by establishing reasonable goals and decision making processes to responsibly manage these high-profile fisheries through 2020. The DNR began work on the plan in 2006, with fisheries managers sharing their expertise and soliciting input from stakeholders. Interested stakeholders were invited to review and comment on earlier versions of the plan. Stakeholders provided many comments, the majority of which supported the goals and objectives.

The department will manage muskellunge to emphasize trophy angling opportunities in waters the fish now inhabit, and will add up to eight new muskellunge lakes during the next 12 years. New waters will be selected based on biological, physical and social considerations, including written proposals and a public meeting. The northern pike management plan focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of existing special and experimental regulations, modifying or dropping regulations as appropriate, and potentially adding up to 19 new waters for large northern pike management. Copies of the plan are available on the DNR Web site at www.mndnr.gov/esocid .

Long Range Planning for Walleye: FAW launched a Walleye Advisory Committee (WAC) in 2008 to generate advice on the walleye management programs. Currently WAC is discussing walleye stocking guidelines and anticipate completing recommendations in late 2009. The Committee will begin discussions on statewide approaches for walleye management in August 2009. WAC is one source of public input and all interests will be considered in final implementation.

Fish Production Costs

An independent analysis of walleye and muskie programs state found that private producers can produce these fish at a lower cost. The report also suggests that purchasing more fish from private vendors is no guarantee of additional savings. The cost comparison was conducted by the Minnesota Management Analysis and Development (MAD) unit at the DNR's request due to legislative interest in fish production costs and was the subject of a legislative hearing in March 2009. According to MAD's analysis, DNR's average cost per pound of walleye is \$18.04 which compares to \$14.34 by private vendors. DNR average cost per muskie fish is \$16.95 which compares to \$16.02 by private vendors. The report provides a valuable benchmark for tracking private and public production costs into the future. The report's data also is helpful for explaining the actual costs of raising and releasing fish into public waters. The new report offers economic insight as FAW seeks to balance the best possible blend of

private and public production to provide fish for anglers and efficiency in our operations and distribution systems.

Information Technology

Several projects are underway including: (1) Fisheries Information System stream and river survey data module similar to the lake survey module completed in 2006, (2) upgrades to stocking and hatchery modules, (3) on-line fish tournament database likely modeled after Wisconsin DNR's application, and (4) data loading for Multi-State Aquatic Resources System (<http://www.marisdata.org/>).

Fish and Wildlife Disease Efforts

Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS): Since 2007, DNR has focused on implementation of control plans, education campaigns, and enhanced legislation to better protect the state's water and fish populations. In the past year, DNR continues to focus on VHS surveillance efforts for both public and private waters and has completed biosecurity upgrades at all DNR hatcheries.

Chronic Wasting Disease: DNR conducted aerial and ground surveillance to assess the deer population in the area around an Olmsted County elk farm in early 2009 where a 7-year old female elk tested positive for CWD. Deer were in the area but there were no significant concentrations of deer adjacent to the farm. DNR plans significant testing of deer this fall in the vicinity of the farm and southeastern Minnesota. Until then opportunistic sampling of deer acquired through road kill and depredation will take place.

Bovine Tuberculosis: The discovery of another TB-positive deer in northwestern Minnesota indicates the state's aggressive approach to disease control is appropriate. This finding proves intensive deer surveillance and control efforts are working, eliminating both at-risk and TB-infected deer. The TB-positive deer, a 6-year old male, showed clinical signs of bovine TB, which was later confirmed by laboratory analysis. No other deer removed this winter exhibited similar signs of infection. The DNR has conducted surveillance for TB in hunter-harvested deer within a 15-mile radius of the once-infected cattle farms every fall since 2005. To date, more than 6,000 deer taken by hunters and sharp-shooters have been tested. All of the 25 infected deer detected since testing began in 2005 have been born in 2005 or earlier, and were taken within the core area. The older ages of infected deer, the lack of infection in younger deer, and the close proximity of infected deer suggest the disease is not efficiently spreading in the deer population. DNR sampled 1,246 deer taken in the Bovine TB Surveillance Zone during the fall 2008 hunt. Spring sharp-shooting efforts, which began in March and concluded April 30, have resulted in an additional 738 deer being removed near previously infected cattle operations inside the Management Zone. DNR will continue monitoring for the disease through sampling of hunter-harvested deer. Hunter-harvested surveillance will be conducted within the larger Bovine TB Surveillance Zone in fall 2009, with a sampling goal of 1,800 deer. Surveillance will continue every year until no positive animals are detected for five consecutive years.
<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/hunting/deer/tb/index.html>

Wildlife Planning

Elk Management: Minnesota's elk draft management plan has been the focus of several public meetings as the agency works with stakeholders to identify population levels, crop depredation management, and hunting season management in northwestern Minnesota. Elk are native to Minnesota but likely were nearly extinct from the state in the early 20th century. In 1935, the relocation of rocky mountain elk, combined with natural immigration from Manitoba and possibly North Dakota, have resulted in small elk populations in Kittson and Marshall counties. The Legislature (2009 session) mandated DNR to present an elk management plan to 3 northwestern counties prior to implementation.

Moose Management and Research Plan: The DNR established the Moose Advisory Committee to develop a moose research and management plan that addresses the needs of changing moose populations and habitats. Topics being discussed range from the likely causes of observed changes and trends – including effects of habitat and climate change – to moose habitat and hunting management, and future study needs. Advisory committee membership consists of state and federal wildlife researchers, biologists and resource managers; resort owners; Native American resource managers; and representatives of nature and habitat conservation, preservation and improvement organizations. The advisory committee's purpose is to develop recommendations for future moose management, monitoring, and research in the state for both northeastern and northwestern Minnesota. Specifically, the committee has been asked to: (1) identify future research needs for moose, (2) determine if and when to stop hunting a declining moose population, (3) determine whether management actions can forestall the rate of decline in Minnesota's moose populations. A summit of moose biologists from Minnesota and surrounding states and provinces launched the planning efforts in December 2008. The final report is anticipated in June 2009.

Ruffed Grouse Management Plan: The DNR completed the draft *Ruffed Grouse in Minnesota: A Long-Range Plan for Management*. Minnesota is regularly one of the top three states in total ruffed grouse harvest, alternating with Michigan or Wisconsin for the number one rank. Grouse populations and habitat suitability continue to be strong in Minnesota, and the future of grouse in the state is encouraging. Long-term goals for ruffed grouse management in Minnesota are as follows:

1. Ensure the present and future viability of ruffed grouse populations and their forest habitat,
2. Manage ruffed grouse as an integral part of Minnesota's forested landscapes, and
3. Encourage and promote the recreational enjoyment (hunting and observing) of ruffed grouse to maintain Minnesota's status as one of the premier grouse regions in the nation.

As a management indicator of progress towards meeting ruffed grouse management goals, we will monitor the average annual harvest, striving to attain and maintain an average annual harvest of 650,000 ruffed grouse. Conservation drivers, management issues, and preliminary management strategies are identified. The draft will be released for public review in mid 2009 and finalized once feedback received is processed.

Lead in Venison

Hunters donated venison to food shelves at no cost in 2008 because of changes to the venison donation program managed by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), with

assistance from the DNR. Only whole muscle cuts were made available at food shelves due to concerns about lead fragments. MDA venison tests showed that lead fragments tended to be more prevalent in ground venison. The results of a DNR bullet fragmentation study in 2008 showed that copper bullets (and lead bullets fully jacketed with copper) fragment less than lead bullets. A lead advisory statement from Minnesota Department of Health was distributed along with the donated venison recommending that food shelf users not feed the venison to children under 6 or to pregnant women. Results of a study designed to give hunters information about bullet fragmentation tendencies is available at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/hunting/lead/index.html> .

Wolf Management

The U.S. Secretary of Interior has affirmed the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decision to delist gray wolves in Minnesota and the Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment. As of May 4, 2009, wolves are officially delisted in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and portions of North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. DNR will resume management of gray wolves in compliance with Minnesota Statute and guided by the Minnesota wolf management plan. There are no changes to how wolves will be managed from the previous period they were delisted in Minnesota from March 2007 to September 2008. DNR will implement the Minnesota wolf management plan as it was completed and approved in 2001 with no changes. There will be no hunting authorized for at least five years to ensure a stable wolf population. Legal challenges are expected based on the Humane Society of the United States notice of intent sent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that they will be filing a law suit to challenge the delisting.

Deer Management

Major changes to simplify deer seasons and licensing were implemented for the 2008 season including allowing a person to individually purchase licenses for regular firearms, muzzleloader and archery in any combination (eliminating the all-season license option); consolidating deer zones so that licensed firearms hunters can hunt anywhere in the state; simplifying legal big game rifle calibers to allow any center-fire that is at least .220 caliber; and eliminating the need to validate the license when tagging an animal.

The changes are the result of recommendations of a citizens' work group convened by the DNR in 2007 and 2008 to recommend simplification of the deer seasons. Minnesota previously had more license types and options for deer than any other Midwestern state. With the new system, hunters are no longer limited to a particular zone boundary, but must adhere to the different open season dates in permit areas within the zone. Beginning in 2008, the definition of legal calibers has been simplified to .220 centerfire or larger. Previously, the regulation had a larger minimum, minimum case length, and numerous exceptions. The new regulation is consistent with most of the midwestern states that allow centerfire rifles. The regulation requiring hunters to validate their deer license has been eliminated. However, the tag must still be validated and site tagging regulations have not changed.

In spite of ongoing efforts to consider season modifications in collaboration with multiple stakeholders groups in the southeastern portion of the state including several interested in quality deer management objectives, the Legislature established the dates and restrictions for the Zone 3

(southeastern Minnesota) deer season for 2009. Plans for conducting hunter surveys to evaluate acceptance of alternative deer harvest strategies remain unchanged.

Woodcock Initiative

The DNR is involved in a broad partnership of federal, state, and private partners, under the leadership of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, to address declining American woodcock populations. An *Upper Great Lakes Woodcock Initiative*, under the direction of the Wildlife Management Institute, has been formed. The associated plan, stepped-down from the broader *Woodcock Conservation Plan*, identifies woodcock density and habitat goals for Minnesota counties. Specific projects are currently being developed to implement this plan through application of Best Management Practices for woodcock, creation of demonstration areas, monitoring of population responses, and focused outreach to landowners.

Wild Turkey Management

The 2009 turkey season resulted in another record harvest. National Wild Turkey Federation continues to advocate for relocation of turkeys to areas in the northern part of the state despite growing turkey populations and hunting opportunities.

Partnership Highlights

The Annual Roundtable was held on January 9 – 10, 2009. Three stakeholder planning committees worked with Division of Ecological Resources, Fisheries, and Wildlife staff to develop agendas, processes, and identify speakers for the public participation event attended by 350 conservation leaders. Jim Martin, Director of Conservation for Berkley Conservation Institute, was the keynote speaker delivering a powerful message on the realities of climate change, human population growth, development, and conservation strategies that address what is truly important rather than merely urgent. Jim's address can be heard at http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/fish_wildlife/roundtable/index.html.