**OHIO**

**STATE REPORT**

*May 1, 2018*

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**STEWARDSHIP**

STEWARDSHIP ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2017

* Continued enforcement and inspections relating to invasive aquatic species.
* Coordinated a multi-agency planned action to further our understanding of grass carp distribution and abundance in the Sandusky River and Sandusky Bay in August of 2017. State, federal, university and provincial partners spent two days collecting a total of 8 grass carp. Additionally, weekly sampling events from late May through early August were used to evaluate the efficiency of catching grass carp in the Sandusky River with electroshocking.
* Developed a new policy for the determination of injurious aquatic invasive species in Ohio that formalizes the process the Division will use to assess risk of invasion from non-native aquatic species and prevent introduction of those species that may pose a risk.
* Used Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant funding to isolate water and potential invasive species transfer between the Lake Erie and Ohio River Basins through completion of infrastructure improvements at St. Marys State Fish Hatchery.
* Expanded knowledge of trophy blue and flathead catfish movement in the Ohio River through a tagging study to improve management and regulations of this important trophy fishery. Biologists have implanted acoustic telemetry tags in trophy-size (>25 inches) blue and flathead catfish in the Meidahl Pool, Ohio River to document inter-pool movement and evaluate habitat used of these fishes in the Ohio River. Preliminary fish tracking results suggest that both species can travel relatively long distances in short periods of time and blue catfish move upstream and downstream between pools. The study will provide insights about management regulation of trophy catfish in this inter-jurisdictional fishery.
* Conducted Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) roadkill sampling statewide and in the Disease Surveillance Area (DSA) in Holmes County, division staff in partnership with the Wildlife Management Institute, have collected more than 1,200 hunter harvested samples to be tested for CWD from the DSA during the 2016-17 and 2017-18 deer seasons.
* The state endangered and threatened species list was updated. Changes included adding the rusty patched bumble bee. In addition, activities to conserve state-listed species were conducted; improving nesting habitat for common terns; conducting surveys for massasauga; and captive rearing of Karner blue butterflies and plains gartersnakes.
* Conducted Bovine Tuberculosis (Tb) sampling in deer in Hamilton and Preble counties following the discovery of Tb in cattle herds and a wild white-tailed deer in an adjacent county in Indiana. Division staff collected more than 175 hunter harvested samples that tested negative for Tb during the 2016-17 deer season.
* In partnership with the Ohio Pollinator Habitat Initiative a statewide milkweed pod collection was conducted. Division Private Lands Biologists were instrumental in the transportation of pods from County Soil & Water Conservation Districts to various prisons across the state for pod and seed processing. Over 2,500 gallons of pods were collected in each of the past 2 years.
* Statewide habitat management activities on public lands included: 5,855 acres of grassland habitat management (1,204 acres of burning, 4,080 acres of vegetation control, and 571 acres of establishment); 13,016 acres of wetland habitat management including establishment at Berlin (11 acres) and Mercer (36 acres) Wildlife Areas; and 32 acres of unique habitat management (e.g. oak openings, etc.).
* Repaired the class 2 dam at Pond 27 at Killdeer Plains to enhance waterfowl habitat and decommissioned several classified dams including Jockey Hollow Conservation Ponds 1 and 2 and Killdeer Plains Upground Reservoir in FY18.

STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVES FOR 2018

* Partnered with City of Fremont, USFWS, USACE, and Ohio EPA to facilitate notching and reduction in water level at the Ballville Dam which will allow for removal in Fall 2018.
* Develop a web-based fishing tournament scheduling and reporting system in partnership with Parks & Watercraft to allow one-stop registration, report tournament results, and allow boaters to determine potential ramp use/congestion prior to visitation.
* Complete the new *Fishes of Ohio* guide in time for Christmas 2018 through a partnership with The Ohio State University and Ohio Biological Survey that targets both casual and avid fish enthusiasts.
* Reintroduce the rare and endangered wetland and glacial lake oriented Iowa Darter, Blacknose Shiner, and Lake Chubsucker fishes through collaborative production and stocking efforts with The Ohio State University.
* Protect Ohio’s Aquatic Resources in Ohio with appropriate inspections and enforcement.
* Complete a 10-year deer management plan based off recommendations of the deer stakeholder committee workshops completed in 2018.
* Continue to pursue partnership projects that are 100% reimbursable to improve wildlife habitat and maximize use of Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration funds. Partners include Ducks Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation, Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever, and the Nature Conservancy among others.
* Cooperate with Ohio University to develop a population estimate for bobcats and model the effects of a conservation trapping season on bobcat population growth and expansion in southeastern Ohio.
* Develop management plans, conduct forest inventories, and implement forest habitat management projects on wildlife areas in Districts 3, 4, and 5 to create early successional habitat.
* Continue to develop Monarch/pollinator habitat via the Ohio Pollinator Habitat Initiative (OPHI) with non-traditional partners such as ODOT, AEP, First Energy, golf courses, county and state parks, and Marathon Petroleum.
* Seek partnerships to provide matching funds for the Lake Erie and Scioto Conservat6ion Reserve Enhancement Programs (CREP) to maintain wild pheasant populations and important grassland habitat. State match funds will be required for these CREP projects to continue.
* In conjunction with Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), division staff will provide input into the 2018 Farm Bill conservation programs. Emphasis will be on increasing the national cap for CRP acres from 24 million to 40 million and ensuring adequate funding for the Wetland Easement Program.
* Conduct deer population goal setting surveys with hunters and framers in 2018 to set deer management direction for the next 3 years.
* Hold a gamebird summit in fall 2018 to discuss management, research, surveys, and hunting regulations for bobwhite quail, ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasants, and American woodcock with constituents.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

OPPORTUNITIES ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2017

* Implemented a new hunter education curriculum, including a new on-line hunter education course for Ohio residents 12 years of age or older.
* Developed Learn-to-guide to be implemented by conservation clubs in 2018.
* Constructed new air gun, archery and fish house buildings at the Ohio State Fairgrounds. ~5,000 people shot at the air gun range during the 12 days of the fair.
* Entered into a 5-year agreement with Cardinal Shooting Center to allow public access for pistol/rifle shooting.
* AEP Acquisition – Submitted year-1 grant application to FWS
* State Fish Hatcheries produced over 65 million fish stocked in water areas across the state of Ohio during calendar year 2017. Nearly all production targets were met or exceeded for the 12 different species and various life stages requested by fisheries managers to promote fish opportunities statewide.
* Completed construction of new boat ramps at Berlin Lake, Grand Lake St. Marys and partnered with the Division of Parks and Watercraft on the Marysville Upground Reservoir as well as a major renovation to the ramp at Hargus Lake.
* Informed future fish stocking strategies through completion of research evaluating the success of Walleye and Saugeye stocked as fry and fingerlings in 18 reservoirs throughout Ohio. Results indicate that less expensive to raise fry stocking is effective at some, but not all reservoirs, and can result in very high numbers of fish in some years.
* Statewide wildlife recreation management activities on public lands included maintenance of 181 facilities: boundary maintenance was completed on 402 miles of boundary; 91 controlled hunts; 2,379 acres of food plots and dove fields; and 406 acres of forest openings.
* Restored 800 acres of wetland habitat at Howard Marsh in partnership with Toledo Metroparks, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and Ducks Unlimited (DU), and The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

OPPORTUNITIES INITIATIVES FOR 2018

* Develop iSportsman App and Hunter Access Program.
* Continued to work with partners to finalize the Maumee River Lake Sturgeon Restoration Plan.
* Fall young-of-year sturgeon will be stocked in the Maumee river in the fall of 2018 after formal approval from the Lake Erie committee was confirmed in 2017.
* Submit grant to FWS for year-2 AEP acquisition.
* Cooperate with Ohio State University to evaluate the current Cooperative Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Program to measure effectiveness, locations, and quality of habitat of the private land access program.

**CONNECTIONS**

CONNECTIONS ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2017

* Surpassed 100,000 followers on the division’s main Facebook page and 14,000 viewers on Instagram.
* Wild Ohio Magazine memberships (mailing) increased to more than 23,000 (and continues to grow). This is an increase of 53 percent from previous years.
* Hosted the 1st Annual Student Wildlife Symposium, over 60 in attendance.
* Implemented new species and sizes for Fish Ohio program and a new URL.
* Three wildlife officers were issued police bicycles for patrol work. The bikes allow officers to better engage citizens and be more efficient with enforcement efforts in many areas versus on foot or from the vehicle. The bikes were utilized in a variety of areas around the state and are an exciting new avenue for wildlife law enforcement and public relations.
* 764 permits inspected for the 2016 fiscal year. (LE)
* Collected fish tissue samples for collaborative work with OSU on a research project to assess microcystin toxin contaminant levels in Lake Erie sportfish.
* Convened an external stakeholder group to set the direction for deer management in Ohio for the next 10 years using a facilitated structured decision making process.
* Engaged stakeholders to complete the revision of the Nuisance Trapping Rules and submitted to Wildlife Council for approval in winter 2018. Stakeholders were engaged throughout the revision process.

CONNECTIONS INITIATIVES FOR 2018

* Align main magazine article with photo, video, and social media push.
* Develop a strategic plan for angler and public access to the Sandusky River with removal of the Ballville Dam in partnership with the City of Fremont and local communities and park systems.
* Conduct a Bass Angler summit in February 2018 to update bass anglers on fisheries management, the proposed new fishing tournaments registration and reporting system, and discuss angler interests/concerns.
* Worked with interagency partners and the Michigan State University Quantitative Fisheries Center through the Lake Erie Perch Management Action Group (LEPMAG) process to make progress towards completing a yellow perch management strategy evaluation that will result in new harvest policies in each Lake Erie management unit for inclusion in the eventual Yellow Perch Management Plan.
* Work with FWS to outline plan to populate Tracking and Reporting Actions for the Conservation of Species (TRACS) with necessary data and information from past and present grants.

**TRADITIONS**

TRADITIONS INITIATIVES FOR 2018

* Develop a landing page for the Division’s R3 efforts.
* Improve youth fishing at the State Fair Kids Fishing Pond through evaluation and institution of changes to sunfish production at Hebron State Fish Hatchery.

**EXCELLENCE**

EXCELLENCE ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2017

* Trained division staff and volunteers provided shooting opportunities at events, and supported 52 events that reached 10,796 participants.
* More than 32,000 hours of in-kind match was provided to federal aid in PR and DJ.
* Worked with Sovereign Sportsman Solutions to successfully build a new system to sell licenses, check game and mange customers.
* The Call Center answered 61,555 customer service calls.
* Reviewed License structure and made recommendations.
* All commissioned staff received I-phones.
* Al major update to commissioned officer radio communications equipment was completed with all officers receiving new portable and vehicle mobile radios, as well as training on the new equipment. The new radios feature many improvements such as blue-tooth microphones and advanced GPS capability.
* The Report Management System (RMS) was initiated with the Office of Law Enforcement and the Division of Parks and Watercraft.
* Wildlife has purchased and begun using remote trail cameras which may be monitored via a secure website. Made by an Ohio company, the appropriately named Buckeye Cam allows 5 separate cameras to send signals to a transmitter up to a mile away. The signal is then transmitted via cell signal to the website. These cameras have proven to be very useful for the detection and deterrence of illegal activity on public hunting areas. Their use has resulted in a number of cases being made.
* Completed LeanOhio Training.
* 3-year update of the CMS was submitted to FWS.
* Navigated 5-year OIG audit of FWS funded grants.
* Continued updates to WL land database.
* Obligated and expended $12M+ for Wildlife Restoration and Hunter Education
* Obligated and expended $7M+ for Sport Restoration, Aquatic Ed and Boating Access.
* Continued development of in-state Blue catfish annual stocking program, producing fish for the third time in 2017 at St. Marys SFH and for the first time at Hebron SFH.
* Completed first year of new net survey technique to more effectively catch young smallmouth bass and better predict year class strength and future potential for catchable-sized fish.

EXCELLENCE INITIATVIES FOR 2018

* Initiate a new research project to evaluate the inland yellow perch stocking program aimed at refining protocols that fisheries staff use to assess reservoir yellow perch populations, which will allow us to better evaluate the success of stocked yellow perch and to optimize this program.
* Develop a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) addressing any findings by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) regarding the 2017 audit.
* Work with districts/work units to process compliance, any issues and to streamline the process.
* Coordinate and update DOW Tactical Plans (2-year cycle).
* Utilize the new state-wide Grants Enterprise System.
* Complete customer management components of the new license system.
* Convert current and develop new license reports in Tableau.
* Develop project financial reports.
* Review current fiscal processes and procedures for efficiencies.
* The application and fulfillment processes for most of the division specialty permits will move to OWLS in FY2018
* The use of wildlife detecting K-9s will begin in FY2018beginning with training and implementation of three K-9s in April 2018.
* The Evidence module of RMS will be implemented.
* Starting the process to hire and train approximately 20 wildlife officer cadets to fill vacant assignments and provide improved customer service and law enforcement capabilities in all districts and on Lake Erie.
* A field uniform change will be implemented for wildlife law enforcement personnel featuring a change to a distinguishing all-green uniform. The new shirts, pants and external body armor carrier option are more functional and comfortable in the field, accost savings over the current field uniform, and provide for a recognizable and professional appearance when conducting field duties.
* Review, compile and submit the Dingell-Johnson (DJ), Pittman-Robertson (PR) and State Wide Grants (SWG) in the upcoming grant cycle.