

**SOUTH DAKOTA  
STATE REPORT**  
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**Second Century Initiative**

Governor Noem announced her Second Century Initiative during the State of the State Address stating; *"The first century of pheasant hunting put South Dakota on the map as a destination for every hunter. Now we must conserve and expand habitat to ensure that the second century of pheasant hunting will be as great as the first."* The Second Century Initiative has an overall focus on creating habitat and ensuring South Dakota's hunting heritage remains strong for the next 100 years. It is comprised of new programs that are geared towards getting families outdoors and ways to generate additional funding for habitat development.

*Second Century Habitat Program:* The department has worked with the Governor's office and the Second Century Habitat Fund (501c3 non-profit organization) to develop and implement a working lands approach to attract producers in establishing wildlife habitat while providing a program that fits within their operation. The program provides an up-front \$150/acre incentive to enroll the acres for 5 years. Seed to establish the habitat will be provided at no charge (\$50/acre value). Producers will be able to hay or graze the acres enrolled with only half allowed each year if haying or all hayed every other year. Haying and grazing is only allowed between August 1 and March 1. A minimum of 10 acres per site can be enrolled and there is a maximum of 160 acres to be enrolled per participant. The focus of the program is to enroll acres with saline soils, marginal acres, and less productive acres.

*Hunt for Habitat:* Hunt for Habitat is an approach to generate habitat funding using highly coveted licenses (elk, deer, antelope) in a raffle concept. State statute and administrative rules have been passed to allow and authorize the department to carry out these fund raising efforts. It is limited to a total of 10 tags under the structure of three 3-tag licenses that include a tag for an elk, deer, and antelope. One additional tag is for a bison hunt in Custer State Park. An individual will have the ability to choose from two calendar year hunting seasons to use the tags. Chances to win one of these licenses will be \$10 for residents and \$20 for nonresidents. A maximum of one license may go to a nonresident.

*Trap Giveaway Program:* GFP held an online registration process for South Dakota residents to register for up to three free live traps. This effort was intended to engage and encourage people to get outside and trap as well as enhance nest success of pheasants and duck via predator removal. On March 1, within 12 hours of opening, more than 5,500 people successfully registered for more than 16,000 live traps. Two companies are currently manufacturing these live traps and GFP plans to have all live traps distributed to registrants by October 15, 2019.

*Bounty Program:* GFP implemented the Nest Predator Bounty Program in conjunction with the Live Trap Give Away Program. This program offers a \$10 bounty for tails of five primary nest predators (raccoon, striped skunk, opossum, red fox and badger) that are submitted at GFP offices. While the focus of this program is engaging youth and getting families in the outdoors it is also focused on enhancing duck and pheasant nest survival by utilizing predator control (a management tool that has been used for decades in South Dakota). Participants have the opportunity to learn about predators, trapping, obtaining landowner permission, habitat and how all the different components work together across the landscape. In the end, this program is building broader support for habitat and outdoor recreation by people across South Dakota and from a broader group of people than our traditional users. As of May 20, approximately \$160,000 has been paid out in bounty payments. The program runs from April 1 through August 31, or if a \$500,000 cap is reached.

*Trapping Classes:* Education and wildlife damage specialist staff teamed up to offer fifteen Live-Trapping 101 education classes across the state from April 3<sup>rd</sup>-May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The classes reached approximately 300 participants interested in learning trap placement, target species, ethical and humane treatment of wildlife, trap baiting and setting, laws and regulations, humane dispatch, and various uses and benefits of trapping. Classes were open to all ages, with youth requiring an adult accompaniment. Participants who did not successfully participate in the state live-trap giveaway program were given a live trap during the class. Interest and demand will drive future in-depth trapping class development and scheduling.

*Crowdsourcing Habitat Solutions:* Good ideas can come from any one; anywhere. The crowdsourcing for habitat solutions began in mid-February, per the direction of Governor Noem, and the effort sparked a conversation leading to over 750 emails and an online dialogue that has over 300 group members thinking, talking and exploring habitat solutions. This is all taking place through the Habitat Pays website – which has traditionally been marketed towards ag producers - however, providing a platform where sportsmen and women and the ag community can come together to find habitat solutions is important. This crowdsourcing effort is one way to bring a shift to the conversation and help people understand all sides of the issue while finding common ground. If an idea or two is implemented, the department will waive the hunting license or park entrance license fee to those whose ideas are being put to work.

### **2018 Walk-In Area Program for Hunter Access**

Through the use of a grant from the Voluntary Public Access & Habitat Incentive program, 24,605 acres of private land not previously open to public hunting were added to the existing 1.25 million acres enrolled statewide in the Walk-In Area (WIA) program providing public hunting access by 1,474 cooperators. GFP also leased private land for public hunting access through our Controlled Hunting Access Program (CHAP) which provides additional flexibility for the landowner and more control of the number of hunters using the area. Thirteen CHAP areas totaling over 23,000 acres were enrolled statewide providing 1,200 hunter days of use.

### **Effort to Gain Access to Landlocked Parcels of Public Hunting Lands**

There are just over 300,000 acres of landlocked public lands in South Dakota, primarily in the western half of the state. The Department's goal is to open or improve access to 50,000

acres of previously inaccessible public lands by 2020. As of May 2019, we've finalized agreements with 15 new private land cooperators signing a total of 25,727 acres of new Walk-In Access Areas which have unlocked 21,743 acres of formerly inaccessible public land parcels. In addition, discussions were initiated with the other public land management agencies affected (Office of SD School & Public Lands, US Bureau of Land Management, and the US Forest Service) towards achieving this shared goal of gaining public access to landlocked public lands. We have also gained support from the major conservation NGOs in South Dakota to potentially pool resources and work on any cooperative projects in the future where their help would be beneficial.

### **Reducing Waterfowl Regulatory Complexity**

Despite abundant duck and goose populations and accompanying hunting opportunity, the number of waterfowl hunters across the U.S. has steadily decreased. In SD, duck hunter numbers have declined from over 25,000 in the late 1990's to just over 10,000 in 2017. While the full impact of regulatory complexity is not fully understood, regulatory complexity is one factor inhibiting duck hunter recruitment. Research has documented that while regulatory complexity has little effect on duck hunter retention, it was twice to three times more of a barrier to waterfowl hunting participation by big game and small game hunters and anglers who didn't hunt waterfowl.

In 2012 the Central Flyway Council adopted a 2-tiered licensing system that would have allowed avid hunters the ability to continue to enjoy liberal duck harvests by species and sex while providing novice and lapsed duck hunters less restrictive but conservative bag limits (3-duck splash). The concept was not approved by the USFWS. It is time to bring this or a similar concept back for consideration and SD will be leading this effort.

### **Wildlife Damage Management Program – Independent Review**

During Governor Noem's campaign, constituents raised concern over current programs and services as well as efficacy of program operations. These programs offer assistance to South Dakota landowners and producers with all types of wildlife damage and predator control needs. As a result, Governor Noem suggested an external review of GFP's WDM/ADC program with an outside entity to review the programs and services to evaluate if changes are needed to better serve South Dakota landowners and producers. The Governor's Office will facilitate the process throughout the entire review and evaluation. After a 30-day request for proposals, the Governor's Office awarded the project to the Wildlife Management Institute (WMI) and is in the contract development stage. WMI has conducted similar reviews for other state wildlife management agencies as well as completing a review of GFP's Big Game Management Program in 2013.

Over the course of the next six months, WMI will complete the review looking back at the past 10 years of the program's services and operations. The review will evaluate the following areas: policies and procedures, administration and organizational structure, budget and revenue sources, communication and outreach (internally and externally), transparency and accountability, and strengths and weaknesses. WMI will also conduct public surveys of specific audiences and host interviews with GFP staff, ADC Policy Advisory Committee members, GFP

commissioners and other stakeholders. At the end of the project, WMI will present their final report and findings to the GFP Commission at the December 2019 meeting.

### **Pheasant Population Status & Harvest**

During the 2018–2019 pheasant hunting season, 53,577 resident and 69,018 non-resident hunters harvested an estimated 950,000 rooster pheasants. Total pheasant hunters increased by 2.4% while total harvest increased 15% from the previous year. Harvest averaged 1,383,000 during the previous ten years. The pre-hunt population estimate was 7.1 million, a 54% increase from the previous year estimate of 4.6 million. The previous ten years' average was 7.7 million. An increase in hunter numbers and harvest was expected given the 47% in August roadside survey results. However, survey results were still 41% below the 10-year average and nearly 50% below the 20-year average. Long term declines in hunters and harvest remains a concern.

### **SD Deer Collaring Effort**

Annual rates of change within a deer population are influenced primarily by adult survival and the number of fawns that reach one year of age. Thus, the primary objective of these efforts is to estimate annual survival rates of whitetail and mule deer adults, juveniles, and fawns in agricultural, prairie and forested landscapes throughout South Dakota. These data were used to model deer populations and rates of change, and ultimately assisted GFP staff and the Commission in developing the 2019-20 deer season structure. In 2018, survival monitoring for white-tailed deer was conducted in 6 study areas. White-tailed deer survival rates varied depending on study area and age class, and preliminary rates documented as follows: adult females (n=593) ranged from 84-85%, juveniles (n=569) ranged from 58-81%, fawns (n=101; 1 study area) averaged 82%, and adult males (n=200; 2 study areas) ranged from 66-70%. Survival monitoring for mule deer was conducted in 4 study areas – Black Hills, White River, Belle Fourche River, and Upper Missouri River. Preliminary survival estimates for mule deer were documented as follows: adult females (n=348) ranged from 83-84%, juveniles (n=345) ranged from 44-85%, and fawns (n=68; 1 study area) averaged 83%. Adult and juvenile deer were again captured and radio-collared in the winter of 2019 in order to supplement sample sizes and replace mortalities. Overall, winter captures added 430 radio-collared deer to the survival monitoring efforts across the state.

### **Chronic Wasting Disease Action Plan Update**

In South Dakota, CWD was discovered in seven captive elk facilities during the winter of 1997-98 and in wild populations in 2001. Over the past two decades, samples have been submitted from hunter harvest, sick surveillance, and other mortalities to monitor this disease. These efforts have resulted in the testing of 12,742 white-tailed deer (125 positives), 5,764 mule deer (79 positives), and 6,689 elk (194 positives) from across the state, including Wind Cave National Park and Custer State Park. Additional information on CWD can be found at <https://gfp.sd.gov/wildlife-disease/>.

Public comment of the draft action plan has been completed. Department staff and a CWD stakeholder group have recently met to discuss and incorporate any relevant comments. A revised draft will be shared with the Commission in June and likely another 30 day public comment period will occur. The Commission will be asked to formally adopt the plan and any modified or new rules will be presented in July and finalized in September, with new rules going

into effect for the 2020 hunting seasons. A targeted outreach and communication plan will be implemented immediately on best management practices and new regulations.

### **Deer License Drawing Structure Change**

For the past two years, the department and commission have been working on alternative drawing structures with an end goal of getting more people in the field on an annual basis. Hundreds of public comments were received throughout this process and at moments became very contentious. The commission made several proposal considerations and adjustments based on public input, and a new structure was ultimately adopted. In the spring of 2019 the GFP Commission finalized rule that allows applicants to apply for two of the six firearm deer seasons in the first draw. These seasons consist of East River Deer/Special Buck, West River Deer/Special Buck, Refuge Deer, Muzzleloader Deer, Refuge Deer and Custer Deer. Before this change, applicants would apply for all of the deer seasons. Now, applicants who are successful for drawing two licenses in the first draw cannot apply for additional licenses until the third draw, and only in those seasons they do not already hold a license. One other change that the commission passed was to allow applicants the abilities to use preference for their second choice in the first draw, and also for their first and second choices in the second and third draws. One of the conditions from the commission directed at the department was the necessity for a thorough review to occur after the third year of implementation to assure the structure was accomplishing the desired goals and to bring forward any necessary changes at that time.

### **Development of an Environmental Review Tool**

A customized Environmental Review Tool (ERT) is currently in development for SDGFP by NatureServe, an international network of biological inventories known as natural heritage programs. When completed, the tool will host and share data on rare and unique species and habitats to improve awareness of these resources and for environmental review and conservation planning. NatureServe has completed the development of ERTs in nine other states with several others expressing interest, indicating this will likely become a standard tool for facilitating environmental review.

Potential users of the tool include the general public, environmental consulting firms, and staff within state, tribal and federal agencies to help inform resource and land management activities. The highlight of the ERT is that users can submit a project for review and have an automated report produced that is customized based on the project type and location. This will significantly improve SDGFP staff efficiency and allow more time for staff involvement in environmental review requests that require additional coordination because of potential resource impacts or associated permit requirements.

### **Hunt Safe in the Public Schools**

In 2019, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) will begin a pilot HuntSAFE program in schools across the state. The goal of the course is to teach students the responsible, respectful and safe handling of firearms. The course is also intended to encourage a lifelong activity of hunting and/or target shooting while providing HuntSAFE certification to students who choose to hunt. In addition, this course offers the opportunity for students and staff to have a positive interaction with their local Conservation Officer. The course was created using International Hunter Education Association standards. The certification standards are intended to

prescribe the minimum body of knowledge necessary to affect safe, legal and enjoyable hunting. There is a lot of flexibility in how the course is offered to best fit into existing school schedules. The students are required to have 10 contact hours with instructors and take a final exam to get their hunter safety card. The course is designed to meet content standard requirements the schools have in place like physical education, science and environmental science. The classes are best taught hands-on, but they can be taught in a standard classroom with non-gun props. No functional guns are used in the course and all the materials, training and curriculum are provided by GFP.

### **Outdoor Archery Range and Facility – Outdoor Campus West**

In October of 2018, SDGFP completed construction on a new 19 acre, \$1.3 million archery park and hunter education building. The public, outdoor archery park includes a fourteen station practice range (targets from 20-80 yards) with two ADA accessible lanes and a fourteen station walking course (targets from 11-80 yards) with four ADA accessible lanes. The hunter education building was built specifically for archery, BB gun, game cleaning, and similar classes. The project was funded with a combination of Pittman-Robertson funds, hunting license dollars, and private donations. The first few months of the archery park have been very busy. Average daily use is approximately fifteen people per day from January-May. Usage during March-May has averaged nearly 20 people per day, with multiple days topping over 90 people per day.

### **State Parks celebrate a Century**

South Dakota's state park system is 100 years old in 2019. Custer State Forest became Custer State Park in 1919. Since then, South Dakota's legislature has added 12 more state parks, 43 recreation areas, 5 mature areas, 1 historic prairie, 69 lakeside use areas, and a 114-mile rail-trail. The park system also manages a 400 mile snowmobile trail system in the Black Hills and oversees 1,100 miles of club maintained snowmobile trails in eastern South Dakota. Last year, 7.5 million visited state park areas and 332,000 camping units were hosted. Game, Fish and Parks will celebrate the park system's centennial with contests, events, prize-giveaways, concerts, merchandise, history-themed programs and more. Several parks will host birthday bashes. The 100 Year Scavenger Hunt encourages visitors to follow the clues to find markers in each of 30 participating parks. By sending in selfies with the markers, participants are entered into the drawing for that park's prize package, which include items such as kayaks, lawn games, hiking gear, tent camping equipment and mountain bikes.

### **Blood Run Bi-State Advisory Committee**

A Bi-State Advisory Committee continues to meet and discuss what could become a rare "bi-state park". The Blood Run National Historic site straddles the Big Sioux River just south of Sioux Falls. Both South Dakota and Iowa own land that was home to the Oneota Indian culture over 600 years ago. In 2013 South Dakota christened its property as Good Earth State Park and has since constructed a visitor center, amphitheater and hiking trails. The advisory committee is made up of officials from Iowa and South Dakota, citizen representatives from each state and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers from the primary tribes who descended from the people that occupied the site centuries ago. The focus of recent meetings has been to review accomplishments and the status of each state's respective master planning efforts. A key project

being promoted is a pedestrian bridge across the Big Sioux River that would connect South Dakota and Iowa Blood Run properties and greatly enhance the “bi-state park” concept.

### **Palisades State Park Expansion**

The South Dakota Parks and Wildlife Foundation, using private donations, has acquired and transferred 267 acres of adjacent property at Palisades State Park to Game, Fish and Parks. Palisades, located 20 miles northeast of Sioux Falls, is one of our state’s smallest and most popular state parks. The deal involving purchases from four adjacent land owners will provide for significant park and recreation opportunity expansion. The Foundation is committed to continue raising private funds to supplement a \$500,000 special appropriation requested by the Governor and approved by the legislature. The new acres will accommodate much demanded campground expansion, stream access, day use facilities, hiking trail expansion, additional camping cabins and a new visitor center to greet the public and administer interpretive and educational services – all in the center of South Dakota’s most urban area.

### **Eco-Sun Prairie Native Grasses Partnership**

The department is finalizing the terms of a partnership arrangement with Eco-Sun Prairie for the use of 100 acres of ground currently being farmed at Good Earth State Park beginning in 2020. Eco-Sun Prairie is a non-profit group that offers expertise in the planting and management of native grasses and habitat. They seek to develop sustainable habitat based plantings that offer landowners alternative land-use practices on marginal lands or with lands that are not being utilized for row crop production. Native grass seed harvest, forage production and grazing options will all be implemented to demonstrate both sustainability and their economic benefits. Eco-Sun Prairie would serve as a partner for GFP in managing existing native grass stands at Good Earth while showcasing alternative land use practices. The research site will include 100 acres that has been farmed for the last 20+ years. Eco-Sun Prairie will incur the expense of land use conversion as well as the annual maintenance of the 100 acre research site. Future plans also call for the development of an educational center on or near this site.