

**INDIANA
STATE REPORT**

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Strategic Plan

Division of Fish & Wildlife (DFW) completed a 5-year strategic plan with a focus on the following themes: engaged citizens, healthy fish and wildlife populations, sustainable funding, and an excellent workforce. During the course of the next 5 years, these 4 focus areas will help take DFW to the next level for conservation of natural resources and serving the public. With the recent emphasis on an engaged and informed citizenry, 5 new positions were added to the Outreach & Education unit: two Outreach Specialists, an Education Outreach Specialist, Volunteer Outreach Specialist, and Human Dimensions Specialist.

Online Customer Platform

DFW successfully completed a Request for Information process with Division of State Parks for a new online customer platform with the goal of a more customer centered portal for all Fish & Wildlife and State Parks services. This new platform will deliver a high-quality customer experience and valuable products in an efficient manner that will reduce agency costs. The agency is now moving to a full Request for Proposal process.

Financial Update

DFW has been operating at full staff for the past two fiscal years and is getting caught up on addressing various needs for research, equipment, and facilities. While this is great news, it is placing additional pressure on existing revenues and budgets. We continue to leverage existing funds with third-party partners, volunteers, and in-kind match and investigate new funding opportunities. The Division has received or helped partners to receive new funding through RBFF, Indiana's Natural Resources Foundation, and Duke Energy.

There has been increased attention towards modernizing state facilities and deferred maintenance needs. Additional funding has been approved in the budget bill during this year's General Assembly and we are hopeful DFW will be able to utilize this new funding towards improving aging infrastructure.

In March 2019, Indiana DNR received a clean audit report for the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program by the Office of Inspector General (OIG). The audit covered approximately

\$62.7 million on 68 open grants that covered state fiscal years 2016-2017. This is the second consecutive time Indiana DNR has received an OIG report with no findings and is a testament on the agency's internal controls and staff diligence towards compliance.

Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation of Hunters and Anglers (R3):

DFW conducted 115 public angling events with a total of 8,405 participants and 54 hunting, trapping and shooting events with a total of 1,252 participants. Data collection was enhanced by utilizing digital solutions (online forms, tablets, and smartphones). In an effort to expand internal support of the R3 program, the R3 coordinators created a report that identified internal challenges and barriers. A list of action items and next steps were identified and assigned. One of these actions was the creation of a R3 workshop calendar for 2019 with the goal of increasing public awareness of R3 events to help us better reach our target audiences (families, women, adults, and locavores) and create a multitude of next step opportunities. "Learn to" workshop curriculum were created and released to DFW staff for hunting and fishing workshops. Curriculum for trapping and shooting is under development. Pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys were developed for R3 participants to ensure thorough evaluation of programming. DFW planned Indiana's first R3 Summit (Spring 2019) to build external capacity. Partners were engaged and motivated during this one day meeting that aimed to summarize the Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model in relation to hunting, fishing, trapping, & shooting sports. Following the summit, DFW is continuing to work with partners to draft a statewide R3 Plan.

DFW has engaged in an aggressive direct email campaign in an effort to boost license sales in the current year and retain anglers into the future. A general license renewal reminder was emailed to all anglers who purchased a license in 2018. New recruits and reactivated long-term lapsed anglers will receive an email from their respective District Fisheries Biologists highlighting local fishing hotspots, fishing tips, and providing other relevant information. Short-term lapsed and nonresidents lapsed anglers will receive emails (some will also receive postcards) following RBFF's email reactivation toolkit encouraging these anglers to purchase a license this year and go fishing. Avid anglers, those who have purchased a license five of the last five years, will receive an email from Indiana's Chief of Fisheries thanking them for their continued support of fishing and conservation in the state.

Land Acquisition

DFW continues to acquire more land. In 2018, 1,053 acres were added onto Fish & Wildlife Areas and 1 acre was donated for a Public Access site. Through the Healthy Rivers Initiative (HRI), the state's largest land conservation initiative, an additional 145 new acres were purchased. In total, 1,199 new acres were acquired by DFW.

State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP)

A minor revision of Indiana's SWAP was completed. The revision entailed the removal of six species of mussels and Northern Leopard Frog from species of greatest conservation need

and the addition of Plains Gartersnake. In 2018, 2,026 acres of habitat were purchased by Indiana DNR within SWAP identified conservation opportunity areas and another 2,565 acres were permanently protected (either through easements or outright purchase) by our conservation partners. Since 2015, that brings the total habitat permanently protected within conservation opportunity areas to 15,178 acres.

In recognition of the need for better collaboration among conservation partners and the need for more diverse support and understanding of Indiana's SWAP, there were three "Conservation Happenings" meetings held across the state. These meetings provide a forum for the conservation community to meet, discuss barriers to doing conservation work, and identify specific actions and opportunities to collaborate in addressing those barriers.

Grassland for Gamebirds & Songbirds

Grasslands for Gamebirds & Songbirds (GGS) is a landscape partnership program launched in the fall of 2018 that develops grassland & pollinator habitat within 5 focal regions of Indiana. Targeted accomplishments in the first 3 years of the programs' existence include habitat development with 70 producers, development of 2,250 acres of grassland/pollinator habitat using EQIP funds, habitat development of another 1,000 acres of grassland and early successional habitat using partner financial assistance funds, and approximately 1,500 acres of quality Northern Bobwhite Quail habitat as part of National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (NBCI) focal area protocols. To date, partner habitat contributions total 11 projects developing 253.8 acres of habitat. EQIP habitat projects total 41 presently pending approval for development in 2019. A robust number of landowners have expressed interest in participation with 805,683 potential producers reached to date through promotion efforts. An NBCI focal area in southwestern Indiana will serve as the brunt of the monitoring efforts, while also allowing DFW to implement an NBCI focal area on Indiana's landscape. Monitoring efforts are being finalized and will begin in late spring/summer of 2019.

Access Program Providing Land Easements (APPLE)

APPLE, an acronym for Access Program Providing Land Enhancements, is DFW's first private lands hunter access program. This program provides financial incentive payments to private landowners who allow controlled public access hunting for gamebirds on their private lands. In 2018, DFW enrolled 5 tracts accessing 550.4 acres of quality gamebird habitat. In all, 30 hunting opportunities were provided through this program. APPLE will significantly expand the acreages enrolled and the hunting opportunities in the fall of 2019. Plans are underway for this program to grow beyond hunting access for gamebirds into a program providing access for deer, turkey, waterfowl, gamebird, and other small game hunting as well as fishing, birding, and wildlife viewing opportunities. The monies used to fund the APPLE program are used as "in kind contribution" (a form of match) for our RCPP that funds the GGS initiative.

Community Hunter Access Program (CHAP)

CHAP, or Community Hunter Access Program, is a program designed to increase hunting opportunities for White-Tailed Deer and help alleviate human/deer conflicts. The program provides community partners with financial and technical assistance to administer hunting programs in their communities. For the 2018 hunting seasons, there were 3 successful community hunts. These 3 community hunts provided 1,303 acres of access for deer hunting in the fall of 2018 that yielded 730 hunting opportunities. For the 2019 deer hunting seasons, it is believed that the number of communities participating in this program will grow from 3 to 7. With that growth, more acres accessed and more hunting opportunities are anticipated.

Monarch Wings Across The Eastern Broadleaf Forest

Monarch Wings Across The Eastern Broadleaf Forest (MWAEBF), led by Pollinator Partnership (P2) and funded by a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), trains and organizes volunteer seed collection networks to collect seed from important nectar (forbs) and larval (milkweeds) species to expand the availability of plant material to enhance monarch and pollinator habitat in Indiana and across the Midwest. This initiative has been co-led in Indiana through the DNR- Division of Fish and Wildlife and USFWS-Partners for Fish and Wildlife. Seeds collected by volunteer teams are shipped, cleaned, and prepared by Mason State Nursery in Illinois. In Indiana, 12 volunteer seed collection teams were formed and 257 volunteers were trained. Indiana's dedicated volunteers have made over 160 collections, logged an estimated 1,800 hours, and driven over 5,000 miles. In Indiana alone, more than 20 projects have received plant materials (planted in 2018) to enhance pollinator habitat. To date, 15,000 native plugs and 24 lbs. of seed have been provided for pollinator habitat projects from seed collected in 2017 alone (anticipated to double with 2018 collected seed). Through an additional NFWF grant awarded to P2, this effort is going to be continued and expanded as "Project Wingspan" through 2021. This continuation will expand this effort from 5 to 8 states, as well as expand the focus from monarchs to include the rusty-patched bumblebee.

Wildlife Science Update

The first documented outbreak of avian cholera in the state occurred near the lower Wabash River in southwest Indiana. About 700 birds, most of which were snow geese, were found dead in association with the 3-month outbreak that lasted into March 2018.

A total of 111,251 deer were harvested during the 2018 season, a 2.1% drop from the previous year's harvest. DFW increased surveillance efforts for chronic wasting disease and bovine tuberculosis in hunter-harvested deer in targeted areas of the state; sample results to date have been negative.

Thirty-nine juvenile hellbenders were released into the Blue River; this is the second release of hellbenders that were reared in captivity from eggs collected in the wild.

DFW expanded its analytical capabilities with the hiring of its first wildlife biometrician in August.

Federal funds were obligated for two new external research projects: "*Integrated Deer Management*" uses biological, ecological, and sociological information on deer populations to inform management decisions in a holistic context; and "*Effects of Nuisance Control on the Ecology, Harvest, and Management of Temperate Breeding Canada Geese*" improves the understanding of how management of the large and sometimes aggressive birds impacts urban areas and long-term populations.

Flood Response on Public Lands

In early 2018, residents in northwest Indiana experienced a perfect storm. After a winter that had been filled with large amounts of snow and frozen ground, the weather pattern shifted and the sky let loose with vast amounts of precipitation in the region. While several Fish and Wildlife Areas were dealing with flood issues, Kankakee Fish and Wildlife Area was shaping up to be at the epicenter of this developing situation. Local staff began to prepare levees for the potential of flooding. Staff worked with locals to begin placing sandbags along the river to protect neighboring lands from the swelling rivers. Despite extensive efforts, levees started to fail as flood waters continued to rise. Over the next few days, several spots along the levees fell victim to the rising floodwaters and gave way causing extensive floodwaters to inundate the area. As levees began to fail, efforts started to shift from monitoring and preventative measures to emergency management. DFW along with Indiana Department of Transportation mobilized additional assets into the area. Neighboring farmers were contracted to help expedite the efforts to minimize the overall impact and law enforcement assisted with drone recon to help assess the situation. There were over a dozen breaches and damage was over \$1 million on Kankakee Fish and Wildlife Area. Staff worked long days, holidays, and weekends for several weeks straight to provide relief for neighboring lands and minimize local damage. While these events caused an amazing amount of damage, it would have been far worse had it not been for the efforts of so many involved. Efforts are still underway to repair the damage from this flood event.

Eradication of *Hydrilla verticillata* from Lake Manitou

In August 2006, DNR biologists discovered hydrilla during routine sampling at Lake Manitou, an 809 acre lake located in northern Indiana. In response to this first discovery of hydrilla in the Midwest, Indiana DNR implemented a rapid response plan that included initial quarantine of the lake to prevent its spread and an eradication program utilizing season-long herbicide application strategies. Along with an aggressive control effort with the goal of eradication, Indiana DNR implemented an adaptive surveillance program that included tuber sampling, aquatic vegetation sampling, and scuba diver visual surveys. Over a 12 year history that involved 10 years of season long herbicide applications and the last 5 consecutive years without hydrilla detection within the lake, we have declared this project a successful

eradication. The total cost for the project was \$2,950,000. While that number seems large, it is a small price to pay to keep one of the world's worst invasive species out of Indiana waters.

Lake Webster Muskellunge

After several years of declining numbers of Muskellunge in northeast Indiana's Lake Webster, the population and popular muskie fishery is on the rebound. This April's catch of 305 muskies during DFW's muskie egg-taking operation was the highest on record dating back to 2005. In contrast, only 42 muskies were captured in 2016. This year's catch also included numerous small muskies less than 32 inches long that had been PIT-tagged prior to stocking, either as age-0 fall-stocked fingerlings or age-1 spring-stocked fingerlings. The tagging project will enable biologists to compare survival and cost-efficiency of stocking both groups. Although the exact cause of the decline is not known, DFW biologists suspect a combination of excessive adult densities, reduced sizes of stocked fingerlings, and increases in aquatic vegetation control may have led toward poor survival of stocked fingerlings.

Info Fisheries Database

DFW has partnered with the Indiana Office of Technology to construct a statewide fisheries database. This database will provide a centralized location for the storage of fisheries information, stocking records, aquatic vegetation data, and other fisheries related data. The database will also allow for the analysis of larger and long-term data sets.

Aquatic Habitat Enhancement

DFW partnered with Indiana Bass Federation on aquatic habitat projects on Lake Monroe. A total of 240 habitat structures were placed east of the State Road 446 causeway. As a follow up to the project, DFW is doing experimental Largemouth Bass stocking of large fish (8-10 inches) in the spring. 3,200 Largemouth Bass were purchased by the Indiana Bass Federation. DFW will evaluate the stockings to determine if they are making a positive impact on the fishery. In addition, DFW is researching how Channel Catfish nesting boxes can improve Channel Catfish recruitment. Nesting boxes have been placed at Pigeon Pit, Springs Valley Lake, Saddle Lake, Catfish Pond, and Crooked Creek Lake.

Asian Carp

DFW is involved in cooperative projects researching Asian carp with Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources, West Virginia Department of Natural Resources, USFWS, and West Virginia University. DFW has received \$52,000 in grant funding from USFWS for participating in the following projects: 1. Abundance and Distribution of Early Life Stages of Asian carp; 2. Quantifying Lock and Dam Passage, Habitat, and Survival of Asian carp; 3. Early Detection and Evaluation of Asian carp Removal.