**OHIO**

**STATE REPORT**

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**STEWARDSHIP**

STEWARDSHIP ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2019

* Provided technical assistance and proposed H2Ohio incentives to implement Farm Bill conservation programs on private lands that improve water quality, reduce soil erosion, and provide quality wildlife habitat. Program assistance was emphasized in the Lake Erie watershed and the Scioto River Watershed Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.
* As a result of constituent input from the 2019 gamebird summit, the Ohio Wildlife Council received proposed quail and grouse hunting restrictions for the 2020 season to help protect declining populations of these important gamebirds.
* Reduced ecosystem threats of invasive species such as grass carp, bighead carp, and silver carp with the help of partners. Fisheries crews removed 171 adult grass carp from the Ohio waters of Lake Erie as part of a regional adaptive response strategy.
* Worked with partners to restore species such as lake sturgeon in the Maumee River, eastern hellbenders in four sites in eastern Ohio, and helped preserve the Allegheny woodrat in Adams County.

STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVES FOR 2020

* Cooperate with partners to identify and restore wetlands on both public and private lands in Lake Erie’s western basin as part of Governor’s H2Ohio initiative to reduce nutrient runoff in Lake Erie and Ohio’s waterways. Staff will continue to provide expertise and recommendations to benefit people and wildlife.
* Conduct landscape-scale habitat assessments to determine feasibility of reintroducing some wildlife species (loggerhead shrike, fisher, Allegheny woodrat) or restoring others (ruffed grouse, bobwhite quail, gray fox, butterflies, American burying beetle, , lake sturgeon, and eastern hellbender) in Ohio.
* Develop a habitat management policy for staff to assess and prescribe appropriate management techniques for grasslands, wetlands, and forestlands on wildlife areas. Steps include completing habitat inventories on wildlife areas, identifying focal wildlife species for management, setting measurable expectations for management by habitat type, and ensuring field staff have the appropriate hardware and software to access habitat inventories.
* Close the connection between the Ohio River and Lake Erie watersheds at the Ohio-Erie Canal and Long Lake (Portage Lakes) by May 2020 to reduce risk of bighead carp and silver carp from entering Lake Erie.
* Remove the Six-mile Dam on the Walhonding River, east of Warsaw during fall of 2020 through a partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This will restore natural river conditions and improve habitat for federally endangered sheepnose, rabbitsfoot, snuffbox, catspaw, and clubshell mussels.
* Knox Lake Dam, a Class I structure in Knox County, is being renovated in 2020. This work will bring this dam into compliance with safety standards so that the lake can continue to provide quality fishing opportunities into the future.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

OPPORTUNITIES ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2019

* Increased hunting, fishing and trapping access and opportunities through the acquisition of 800-acre Andreoff Wildlife Area in Hardin County, 4,213 acres of ReCreation Lands in Morgan and Muskingum counties, and 476 additional acres at Eagle Creek Wildlife Area in Brown County. Partnered with Trout Unlimited to acquire property to access the Mad River in Champaign County, and completed the Darr-Root boat ramp on the Sandusky River in Fremont.
* The purchase agreement with AEP was signed allowing for the acquisition of 31,000+ acres in Morgan, Guernsey, Noble and Muskingum Counties to be transferred quarterly beginning March 30, 2020 and providing for the option to purchase the remaining acres known as the ReCreation Lands.
* The restoration of the wetlands at Howard Marsh Metropark resulted in state and national recognition. The publicity from this recognition helped contribute to an increased user base and visitation to participate in birding, hiking, kayaking, and controlled waterfowl hunting opportunities.
* Building on walleye hatch success from previous years, strong reproduction of walleye in 2019 allowed for the increase of daily limits of walleye throughout the year to 6 fish in all waters of Lake Erie, except the Sandusky River and Bay. In this specific location, the limit is 4 fish per day during March and April to promote recovery of fish spawning in the habitats newly available following recent removal of the Ballville Dam. It is estimated that the adult walleye population is around 120 million fish.
* Anglers fishing Lake Erie and the Eastern and Western Units of the Ohio River are now allowed a maximum of three rods per angler, rather than two, which still applies statewide. These changes ease restrictions on specialized anglers.
* Customers can now automatically renew their hunting and fishing licenses. In addition, annual fishing licenses are now valid one year from the date of purchase, instead of the traditional February end date.

OPPORTUNITIES INITIATIVES FOR 2020

* Expand private land hunting access in locations with a lack of public hunting areas. To further this effort, a $1.8 million grant proposal was submitted and award from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to secure future incentives.
* The 1st transfer of 6,657 acres of AEP lands will occur March 30, 2020.
* Identify approaches to increase visitation and make our wildlife areas more user friendly to the general public. This will include conducting a survey of wildlife area users to gather information about their perceptions on how wildlife areas are currently managed and the purpose for which future management should occur.
* Multiple boat ramp projects are being planned on the Scioto River at South Bloomfield and Elmon Richards. Other planned improvements will occur at Zepernick Lake in Columbiana County, Griggs Reservoir in Columbus, as well as Fox Lake in Athens County. Courtesy docks are planned at Tycoon and Rupert lakes.
* Develop a shooting range access grant to provide opportunities near urbanized centers in Ohio.
* Implement human dimensions studies to understand societal trends and apply findings to increasing relevancy of wildlife conservation among a broader constituency

**CONNECTIONS**

CONNECTIONS ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2019

* Developed and implemented a permitting process to allow bat exclusion during the restricted period (May 16 – July 31) in cases where human health and safety may be compromised.
* Hosted open houses at all six state fish hatcheries. Also performed hatchery tours for clubs, students, and legislators where staff explained fish production, fisheries management, and demonstrated equipment. Opportunities for youth archery, casting, and other outdoor skills were available at these events.
* Engaged with neighboring jurisdictions and partners to refine yellow perch harvest policies and extend the Walleye Management Plan an additional five years. Lake Erie’s yellow perch and walleye fisheries are certified as sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council.
* Free range days at Wildlife’s Class A, B and C shooting ranges allowed visitors to gain hands-on experience with firearms at no charge from certified instructors at one of five ranges. Staff offered on-site instruction and provided equipment, ammunition, as well as ear and eye protection free of charge.
* The wild game “mobile kitchen” made its debut at the Governor’s Fall Fish Ohio event and was scheduled at special events around the state to demonstrate cooking techniques and provide samples of delicious wild game recipes.

CONNECTIONS INITIATIVES FOR 2020

* Review and update website content associated with human-wildlife coexistence, and create a wildlife co-existence guidebook for the public that describes management techniques for handling typical wildlife interactions.
* Develop an application to schedule fishing tournaments and report tournament results to help biologists and anglers follow fishing trends and minimize user conflicts.
* Increase participation in Wild Ohio Harvest Community events and experiences, as well as evaluate educational programming.
* Implement strategic marketing and communications efforts with the goal of increasing relevancy of wildlife conservation among a broader constituency.
* Remodel the Migratory Bird Center to provide better connections to the birding community.
* A Birding Academy was developed to teach staff about birding behaviors and identification along with bird-habitat relationships that will help staff to engage birders and be more comfortable working with a broader constituency.

**TRADITIONS**

TRADITIONS ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2019

* Collaborated with volunteer instructors to educate more than 8,000 students about knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be safe and skilled hunters. These volunteers contribute thousands of hours of in-kind labor while helping to preserve our sporting traditions.
* Organized events to introduce participants to various aspects of hunting, from field dressing to cooking and canning techniques, to help them gain knowledge on how to pursue hunting as a lifelong activity.
* Hosted three Governor’s Fish Ohio Days, including the 40th Governor’s Fish Ohio Day in the western basin of Lake Erie, the inaugural Inland Governor’s Fish Ohio at Cowan Lake, and a second Governor’s Fall Fish Ohio Day in Ashtabula County, featuring Lake Erie’s Central basin.

TRADITIONS INITIATIVES FOR 2020

* Identify gaps in access to recreational opportunities and identify cost solutions which might include acquisitions or partnership projects.
* Opening two Class A ranges with education centers at Spring Valley and Delaware wildlife areas during the summer of 2020.
* Develop a mobile app to further work with partner organizations to improve availability of information about wildlife recreation education, events and experiences to the public.
* Implement a new event management system and email marketing system tied to wildlife education events and experiences to improve outreach. Develop strategic marketing and communications plans for initiatives that are tied to direction of the national Relevancy Roadmap, aimed at increasing relevancy of wildlife conservation among a broader constituency.

**EXCELLENCE**

EXCELLENCE ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2019

* Hosted regional meetings including the Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference and the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies director’s meeting.
* Renovations were completed at the St. Marys State Fish Hatchery to add production wells and iron filters, modify a holding house, and upgrade biosecurity to reduce the risk of transferring invasive species between the Ohio and Lake Erie watersheds.
* Improved process efficiency with the development of an online grant application and performance reporting for conservation clubs and streamlined the disabled veteran application process.

EXCELLENCE INITIATVIES FOR 2020

* Complete peace officer basic training for 12 wildlife officer cadets. Conduct and administer the wildlife officer pre-service training academy, manage and document the completion of the field officer training program.
* Host the Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers meeting and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Great Lakes Region, Federal Aid Conference.
* Launch a redesigned and updated website on the new Innovate Ohio Platform. The design and usability of the new website will better meet the needs of Ohioans.
* Revise and update the Comprehensive Management System manual and tactical plans (2021-2030) to direct long-term planning and prioritizing of projects and budgeting.