

MAFWA Public Lands Working Group

Respectfully submitted by
Anne Reis-Boyle, Public Lands Specialist
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources



Meeting Time and Place

The MAFWA Public Lands Working Group met via video-conference on May 12, 2021. The continued concerns and restrictions associated with COVID-19 prevented an in-person meeting for the second year in a row.

Attendance

In attendance for the video-conference were the following members: Mitch Hess (IL), Brad Feaster (IN), Brian Hickman (IA), Dustin Mengarelli (KS), Derek Beard (KY), Earl Flegler (MI), Joel Porath (MO), Pat Molini (NE), Kent Luttschwager (ND), Mike Ervin (OH), Paul Coughlin (SD), Anne Reis-Boyle (WI) and Clayton Lenk (NWTF).

Executive Summary

The 2021 MAFWA Public Lands Working Group met via video-conference call to discuss topics relevant to management of state wildlife lands and consider Action and Information Items for the Directors' attention. Kent Van Horn, Chief of the Birds & Habitat Section in the Bureau of Wildlife Management kicked off the Public and Private Lands Working Group concurrent meetings with a brief welcome. Members of both groups also agreed to reset the state rotation so that South Dakota will host the 2022 joint meetings followed by Wisconsin in 2023. Public Lands topics included 5-10 minute state updates, implementation of Relevancy Roadmap strategies, public lands grazing, perceived non-resident overcrowding on WMAs and a brief discussion on the science needs questionnaire. Common themes across the states include discontinuing use of neonic-treated seeds and pesticides on state lands and in farming contracts, tracking cooperators compliance as well as testing seed for neonics, staffing vacancies and hiring frosts, covid restrictions and/or lack of restrictions, land acquisition barriers (state legislatures, boards), and a pandemic inspired increase in hunting license purchases.

Director Action Items

During the covid-19 pandemic, government and public health agencies promoted and emphasized the importance of outdoor recreation and the nation responded accordingly. Recent data show that the overall revenue for wildlife-dependent recreation increased in 2020. While some public lands saw an increase in visitors that resulted in conflicts and perceived overcrowding, other public land usership was seemingly unchanged. Without a comprehensive and standardized dataset to address public questions, agencies have had difficulty in accounting for public concerns.

We request that the MAFWA State Directors commit resources to creating a standardized process and/or application for quantifying short-term (daily) and long-term (decades) recreational use of wildlife areas and/or other public lands by various demographics, including

but not limited to residents, non-residents, hunters, non-hunters, urban and rural users. Wisconsin, Nebraska and Indiana currently have pilot projects to quantify and assess public use on wildlife areas and could serve as models for a larger study or research project.

We propose the AFWA Technology & Data Committee evaluate existing applications and explore developing new technological solutions to have consistency and standardization in data collection. This will allow member states to compare public lands use across various geographic scales, tie the use back to state R3 and Relevancy roadmap initiatives and outcomes, as well as investigate overcrowding and compatible use issues for the public.

Director Information Items

The following Information Items were discussed by the Working Group:

Opportunity/Issue | All MAFWA states are moving toward discontinuing use of neonicotinoid insecticides and neonic-treated seeds on public lands. Indiana, Ohio, Nebraska, Missouri, Minnesota and Wisconsin all have policies in place to prohibit neonic insecticide use and seed treatments. While public land is only a fraction of the landscape in MAFWA states, natural resource and fish and wildlife agencies must set the example for private lands. As we know, wildlife do not adhere to man-made boundaries. Of particular concern is research by Berheim et al (2019) that shows neonic insecticides have been found to accumulate in captive white-tailed doe and fawn organs and are correlated with negative physiological and reproductive impacts. In addition, a recent data analysis of non-neonic popcorn seeds in ND that showed residual concentrations in parts per billion of the following three neonicotinoids: clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam. While non-neonic treated seeds are desired and are being used on public lands, states should continue monitoring and analyzing seeds and working with vendors to ensure non-detectable levels of neonicotinoid pesticides in corn, soybean, sunflower and other crops and habitat restoration seed mixes.

Action:

Opportunity/Issue: In many states, total unique hunter numbers have been declining over the past two decades. In response, states have implemented robust R3 (recruitment, retention and re-engagement) programs, but there is general concern regarding the outcomes of the efforts and initiatives. Questions remain regarding positive outcomes including: 1) recruitment translating to an increase in total unique hunters; 2) importance of connecting people to natural resources rather than hunting; and, 3) retention practices for new license buyers, especially during 2020. With the small increase in wildlife-dependent hunting and recreation, states should develop unique marketing plans to foster future engagement by new license buyers. MAFWA should continue tracking results of R3 efforts.

Action:

Opportunity/Issue We recommend an after-pandemic action review both for MAFWA as well as for the benefit of the member states. While individual state governments affected differences in public health guidelines, MAFWA should consider best management practices for communication and preparedness for future large-scale disasters or pandemics.

Action:

Time and Place of Next Meeting

South Dakota, early May 2022

**MIDWEST PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING
Wisconsin • May 12, 2021**

**ILLINOIS REPORT FOR 2020-2021
Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division**

TOP THREE PUBLIC LANDS SUCCESSES:

- We were able to conduct most of our public hunting programs on our state sites (with certain public health modifications). Spring Turkey hunting on state sites was cancelled in 2020.
- We were able to safely conduct prescribed burns, habitat projects, and goose, wood duck, and mourning dove banding in 2020 (with additional COVID protocols).
- We were able to safely conduct CWD targeted surveillance operations in 2021 (with additional COVID protocols). Only one of our sharpshooters tested positive for COVID 19 and it appears that none of his lab mates contracted the disease.

HIGHLIGHTS

- We managed to adapt to work from home and get much of key work done.
- Developed a proposal to improve the W-76-D Grant
- Our Section Head of Field Operations (Wefer's backfill) has recently been filled.

CHALLENGES

- State administrative processes focus on compliance rather than accomplishment/completion. Combined with new automated procurement and fiscal processes, our purchase of goods and services and paying and tracking bills is severely delayed and impeded. This and hiring challenges have made it difficult for us to deliver our mission and meet our federal grant obligations.
- Numerous retirements and vacancies along with a hiring cap. Several positions were caught up in COVID 19 including half (3) of our program manager positions, a Regional Wildlife Biologist position (days from making an offer), and 4 District Wildlife positions.
- The agency is in the midst of a transition to a new permit and harvest reporting system. The vendor did not do a test prior to going live and we are off to a difficult start.

MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS' WORKING GROUP MEETING
Virtual Meeting Hosted by Wisconsin • May 12, 2021
INDIANA REPORT FOR 2020-2021
Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife

Top 3 Continuing Covid-19 Challenges, Adjustments, or Impacts (this could include, but not limited to, prognosis for re-opening summer/fall, last year's hunting/fishing seasons outcomes, revenue/license sales, staffing, vacancies, season structure issues)

- We were able to conduct all of our in persons hunting draws on our fish and wildlife areas. Staff did an excellent job of developing protocols and ensuring our visitors followed the guidelines. 806 in person draws were conducted statewide.
- Our public lands staff remained at work, on site throughout all of 2020.
- Public use on our properties was up nearly 30% from the 5 year average and many of those new users were unfamiliar with rules or even proper public lands etiquette. Keeping areas clean and visitors in line was often challenging.

Top 3 Land Management or Access Issues

(this could include, but not limited to, progress on Neonic prohibitions, contracting with Partners/NGOs (Pheasants Forever, DU) for public land biologists, data systems to track habitat projects, infrastructure)

- Huge numbers of recreational kayakers and canoers (many hosted by commercial liveries) clogged up our public access sites. Sometimes to the exclusion of anglers.
- Hiring slow down has impacted management.
- We have recently started requiring all property visitors to fish and wildlife areas to go through the sign in process so we can better track non-hunting visitors.

Top 3 Unique Opportunities, new Funding Sources, Relevancy Roadmap initiatives, Public Outreach

(this could include, but not limited to, marketing campaigns for more inclusive participation, state funding sources for new initiatives or unique hunting/fishing opportunity/events)

- We are growing our volunteer program and are now applying volunteer hours as match for our fish and wildlife area operation and maintenance grant.
- We are celebrating/recognizing a public lands staff member via the Division's FB page on the last Saturday of each month. This is intended to not only thank that staff for the great work they do but also to help "put a face" to the division for the public.
- All public lands staff have public outreach goals in their 2021 performance. We have staff trying their hand at photography/videography, unique programming ideas and generally focusing more on making connections with visitors (new & old).



Midwest Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies Meeting - May 12, 2021
State Report to the Midwest Public Lands Working Group
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Successes & Highlights

Staffing: The Wildlife Bureau currently has 9 position vacancies; however, at the start of the State's budget fiscal year 2018 we had 24. Great progress has been made in addressing staffing needs. The Bureau also added a Forest Wildlife Stewardship position for which the primary focus is to facilitate the writing and implementation of Forest Wildlife Stewardship plans on our WMA's.

Sub Units:

Recently Wildlife Bureau leadership began a process where it completed a review of operations to identify where greater opportunities for management or growth existed but we struggle delivering due to geographic hurdles. In doing so all staff at every Wildlife Unit (16) provided input into this process. Considered in this process:

- Existing Unit Headquarters locations,
- Distance from headquarters to managed WMA's,
- Acres managed per permanent staff,
- Proximity to other conservation areas and
- Future opportunities for growth.

The result of this was the identification of five locations where Sub Units would be developed to address those needs. Two of the sub units were staffed with existing FTE's and plans are being made to fully staff all locations.

Public Land Use:

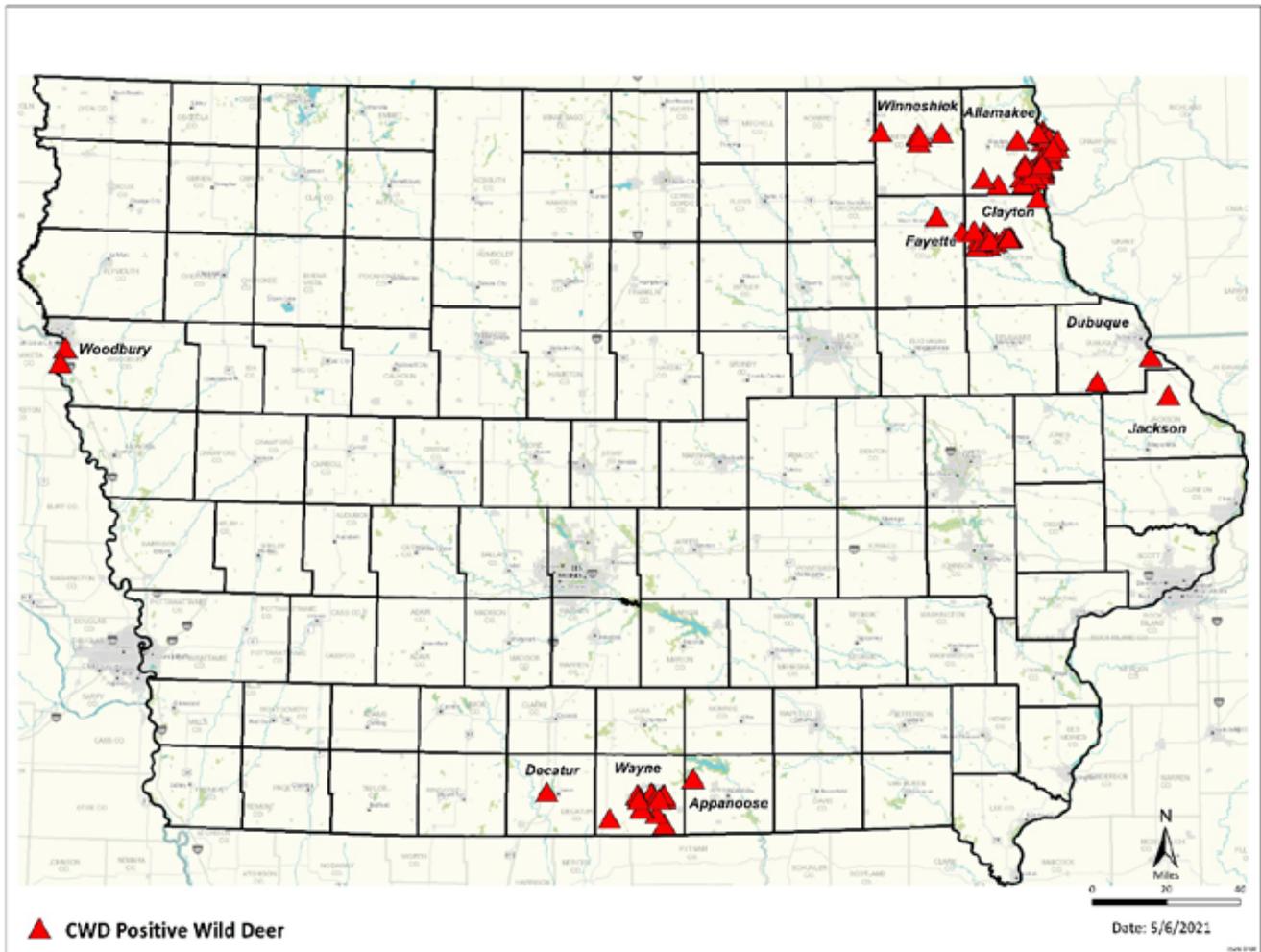
Iowa's public land usage was high in 2020. This was evident by the increase in license sales. Iowa general hunting license and deer tag sales increased by ~10% and turkey tags increased by ~28%. Staff indicated increased users of their areas through the entire 2020/2021 hunting season. This increase in users was not subject to just the hunting seasons as use was up year-round, indicating an increase in non-consumptive users as well.

Challenges

Compatibles Use: The public demand for non-consumptive recreational opportunities continues to increase. We continue to think about how we can grow and gain support from the public and stakeholder groups for public lands while staying true to compatible uses and managing to provide habitat for Iowa's native wildlife species and species that migrate through our state. Pressure from OHV groups to access existing public land is growing from the groups themselves and from Legislators.

Energy Development: Iowa's installed wind capacity is second only to Texas, and the industry continues to grow. Solar energy development is now beginning to arrive in the state and the transmission lines that accompany both. These projects impact wildlife, opportunities for WMA expansion and current WMA's with their proximity to these developments.

CWD: CWD surveillance and management continues to be a Department priority in an effort to sustain a healthy and sustainable whitetail deer herd in our State. In the 2020/21 season we began transitioning our surveillance methods to a weighted approach which placed added emphasis on male deer, specifically adult bucks. This reduced the overall number of samples taken but allowed us to target individuals of higher disease risk.



Total CWD Positives in Iowa since 2013:

- 2013 – 1
- 2014 – 3
- 2015 – 2
- 2016 – 12
- 2017 – 10
- 2018 – 18
- 2019 – 44
- 2020 – 21

Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism
State Report for Midwest Public Lands Working Group
May 2021

Overview

KDWPT – Public Lands Division in the Fisheries, Wildlife, Education and Boating Branch is responsible for the management of over 390,000 acres. These acres include 40 state fishing lakes, 80 wildlife areas, 10 public access area, as well as a number of other areas under agreements, including 16 USACE and 6 BOR reservoirs managed under license agreements and two power plant properties.

Budget

- FY21 Total Public Lands Budget - \$10,416,769
- FY 21 Salaries and O&M – \$4,631,844 Wildlife Fee Fund, \$1.8 million Federal Ag Funds and \$700,000 State Ag Funds
- Temp Salaries - \$443,500 Ag fund and \$302,000 Wildlife Fee Fund
- PR Grant - \$5.5 million
- Sport Fish Grant - \$800,000

Land Acquisition

FY21 land acquisition budget - \$100,000 total.

- Land Acquisition has been at a standstill for the most part.
- Push Back for Legislature for purchasing any land.

Operation and Management

- Agricultural Production – approximately 195 permits are issued to farm more than 44955 acres. In addition, 8653 acres are planted by Public Lands staff.
- Grazing – 26,850 acres are under grazing management plans in 37 contracts.
- Haying – 1788 acres were hayed on 29 contracts.
- All agricultural/grazing/haying income exceeds \$2.78 million. Current Ag fund balances exceeds \$6.5 million.
- Noxious Weed Control – 50,000 acres
- Prescribed burns –27,000 acres
- Food plots – 5,000 acres
- Invasive species control - > 12,800 acres

- Water level (pumped) – 15,639 acre feet
- Managed Dove Fields – 1343 acres most require non-toxic shot.
- Bison Management – Three herds comprising 288 head on 8058 acres
- Law enforcement – 38 certified PL LEO's completed 8,000 license checks
- Cabin program- Public Land Section operates three cabins on State Fishing Lakes and Wildlife areas. Reduced from seven a couple years ago.

Partnerships/Projects

- North American Wetlands Conservation grants (NAWCA) working in cooperation with Ducks Unlimited continues to add new projects.
- Kansas Forest Service – Received a new \$300,000 grant to apply landscape forest stewardship practices across public and private boundaries in eastern KS. Foresters will develop forest inventories, forest management plans, and cover habitat work on public lands. In addition, they will host demonstration days and workshops for landowners. Beginning new projects and finishing old projects for new grant.
- Pheasants Forever – Agreement renewed in 2020 for habitat specialist positions on public lands. Currently all 13 positions are full. Agreement expires Dec 31, 2022.
- Missouri River mitigation work continues in northeast Kansas, including land acquisition, restoration, and public access in 5 properties totaling 6094 acres.
- SSWA partnered with Friends of Sand Sage Bison Range and Wildlife Area to provide 111 bison tours to 949 guests.
- ISportsman continues on 28 properties –54372 Accounts, 314635 Check-Ins. 2.3% non-checkout.
- Special Hunts (Public & Private Land): Spring 2021 = 88 Turkey Hunts available this spring with 154 permits. There were 538 Applications - all choices. Applications came from 15 different states. Fall '20-'21 Special Hunts = There were 742 Total Permits, 5122 Applications (all choices).

Personnel

- 1 – Public Lands Division Director
- 1 – Public Lands Assistant Director
- 4 – Regional Supervisors
- 33 – Area Managers
- 1 – NRDA Coordinator
- 13 – Assistant Managers
- 13 – Pheasants Forever Habitat Specialists
- 2 – Equipment Operators
- ~150 – Temporary/seasonal laborers
- *38 – LE certified LEOs*
- 7500 acres per State FTE
- Loss of 5 FTE's as a result of Voluntary Retirement Incentive, still lingers.

New arising issues

- Secondary Use on Public Lands: Kayaks, trails, geocaching, etc.
- Non Resident Hunter influx perception vs reality
 - Wetland popularity as it pertains to safety,
- Providing adequate opportunity for hunters and anglers
- Homeless camping on State Fishing Lakes

Legislative issues

- Land Acquisition obstacles

Top Issues facing our Division

- Constant political heat; acquisitions mostly (some want us to sell wildlife area's)
- Salary inconsistencies and compression
- Concerns about fee fund revenue not being as sustainable into the future unless we can get license cap increases through legislature
- Spending authority cap
- Inconsistencies with COE and BOR offices
- Blue Green Algae
- Invasive species control
- Staffing

MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS' WORKING GROUP MEETING
Virtual Meeting Hosted by Wisconsin • May 12, 2021
KY STATE REPORT FOR 2020-2021
KDFWR

Top 3 Continuing Covid-19 Challenges, Adjustments, or Impacts (this could include, but not limited to, prognosis for re-opening summer/fall, last year's hunting/fishing seasons outcomes, revenue/license sales, staffing, vacancies, season structure issues)

- We are currently operating at maximum 60% in person staffing. No public access to state gov't buildings. Events at WMAs are proceeding pending event organizers submit and receive pre-approved Covid Safety Plan and can adhere to CDC guidelines. Outdoors events up to 1000 people currently do not require masking.
- Administrative staffing continues to work virtually despite employees struggling to obtain gov't issued laptops. All commission meetings are virtual.
- In 2020, non-resident hunters harvested just 412 turkeys due to license sales restrictions and travel limitations during the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, the non-resident harvest increased to 3,766 this spring compared to 3,456 in 2019 (a 9.0% change) and the 5-year average (2015-2019) of 3,235 (a 16.4% change).
Hunting effort appeared to decline this year compared to last year (-26% change;). These figures are based on responses by hunters who checked their turkey online. Those hunters were prompted with a question asking them to report the number of days they hunted to harvest the turkey they had just harvested. Contributors to reduced hunting effort, and to the lower harvest totals for weekdays and youth season), may have included weather (rain and cold temperatures during the general season), Easter (occurred during youth season), and COVID-19 recovery (more hunters returning to work with less time off).

Top 3 Land Management or Access Issues

(this could include, but not limited to, progress on Neonic prohibitions, contracting with Partners/NGOs (Pheasants Forever, DU) for public land biologists, data systems to track habitat projects, infrastructure)

- Land acquisition continues to be a struggle and there are unknowns as to how much land acquisition will be valued by the current Administration. We have not been able to purchase land for approximately 3 years with an exception for FILO program.
- Rapidly losing our highly qualified and knowledgeable staff to retirements as well as some staff completely making career change decisions. Obtaining and keeping technical staff is becoming a challenge as well as our ability to attract and retain high-level biologists.
- Collaborating with Ruffed Grouse Society and American Woodcock Society to expand forest management on public lands and broadening and strengthening partnerships to improve conservation opportunities on private and public WMA lands-both with the goal of enhancing species diversity statewide by hiring a shared cost Wildlife Forester position. Specifically, the proposed activities will lead to measureable success with objectives in our Ruffed Grouse and Young Forest Strategic Plan.

Top 3 Unique Opportunities, new Funding Sources, Relevancy Roadmap initiatives, Public Outreach

(this could include, but not limited to, marketing campaigns for more inclusive participation, state funding sources for new initiatives or unique hunting/fishing opportunity/events)

- Funding continues to hinder our operations. A very large percentage of our budget is personnel costs even though KY ranks among the lowest paid staff in the nation.
- Our fringe benefit contribution is 110% of employee salary. E.g. Biologist Salary is \$50,000 the total budget impact is \$105,000
- KY Wild program allows non-traditional supporters to donate direct money to fund surveys and monitor projects, purchase research equipment, enhance habitat, and protect and improve habitat for pollinators and migrating birds. Membership levels start at \$25 to \$1000. KY Wild members may have opportunities to participate in member experiences such as assisting with banding geese, mist netting, monitor nest boxes, and other surveys. Pandemic restrictions cancelled events through fall 2020; several small group events were held September-December 2020.

MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS' WORKING GROUP MEETING
Virtual Meeting Hosted by Wisconsin • May 12, 2021
MICHIGAN REPORT FOR 2020-2021
Michigan Department of Natural Resources-Wildlife Division

Overview

The public land base in the state of Michigan includes both state and federal lands and totals 8 million acres. These include 3.6 million acres of federal lands including 3 national forests, 4 million acres of state forest (co-managed by Forest Resources Division, Wildlife Division, and Fisheries Division), 400,000 acres within 111 state game and wildlife areas managed by Wildlife Division, and 103 parks and recreation areas covering 285,000 acres managed by Parks and Recreation Division.

Top 3 Continuing Covid-19 Challenges, Adjustments, or Impacts

- **Remote Work:** 2020 was a year to remember. The COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted the world, also impacted the way Michigan's Wildlife Division worked. In mid-March, a Stay Home, Stay Safe Executive Order sent our 160-member workforce home to become a telecommuting workforce. In short order, we had to sort out equipment, technology, and internet connectivity for working from home. We all learned to work in a whole new way.

Executive Directives gave us hiring freezes and strict spending restrictions, which made getting some of our work done a challenge. We were unable to hire seasonal staff, making the maintenance and enhancement of state lands more difficult. Additionally, we faced temporary layoffs meant to help balance state budgets. In incredible fashion, several partners stepped up to help us complete our work by contributing materials and pitching in to complete tasks. We continued to work for our stakeholders, modifying deer check, bear and furbearer check and waterfowl check station procedures to keep our workers and customers safe.

While some are now working outdoors in remote locations, many still expect to work from home until at least July 12. Efforts are ongoing to look beyond the pandemic and determine the role that remote work may play in how many of our employees perform their work in the future. Department directors have been provided guidance on what remote work guidelines will apply to all departments and where there is flexibility based on a department's mission and operations.

Michigan's Governor Gretchen Whitmer had set 55 % as the threshold when she would lift a prohibition that has been in place for more than a year that required all work to be done remotely unless it could only be done in person. The prohibition on in-person work to slow the spread of COVID-19 will end May 24, as the state hit 55 percent of its population 16 and older having received at least their first dose of a vaccine. Under the governor's reopening plan, called "Vacc to Normal," that prohibition lifts two weeks after the state hits 55 percent. Additional restrictions are removed two weeks after 60, 65, and 70% vaccination rates are reached.

- **License Sales:** The number of hunters in the state, in decline for many years, actually increased this year, with an astounding 67% spike in new hunters. Fishing license sales jumped 9% this year over last.

Top 3 Land Management or Access Issues

- **Project Boundary Review:** In 2020, Department staff reviewed DNR project boundaries (Project Acquisition Boundaries) to accurately reflect current priorities for DNR ownership/purchase. These boundary lines are used largely for internal planning and external transparency to identify private lands adjacent to current ownership that would be a priority for the state to acquire if it becomes available. We were able to remove over 1,000,000 acres of private land contained within those boundaries. Removing these lands, many of which are now developed, will serve to focus our future land acquisition efforts more strategically. Almost 900,000 acres of non-DNR land still remain within the project boundaries.
- **State Land Review:** The Department Managed Public Land Strategy requires the DNR to review approximately 240,000 acres of state-owned land to determine whether these lands contribute to the department's mission. The parcels are either 200 acres or less, or have irregular shapes resulting in a significant shared private-public boundary, making it potentially difficult to manage. The intent of this new approach is to focus ownership on priority areas, ensure quality outdoor public recreation opportunities, protection of natural and cultural resources and promotion of sound resource management. It will also increase efficiencies in state land management. The parcels will be classified to either retain them as important to the DNR mission, offer to conservation partners, use them to trade to consolidate ownership, or make them available as surplus.

The DNR has completed review of this first of 8 groups, with 10 counties in a group as part of the multiyear state land review process. The DNR's initial recommended classifications break down as follows: retain (74% of parcels), offer to alternate conservation partner (7%), exchange (1%) or dispose (18%).

Top 3 Unique Opportunities, new Funding Sources, Relevancy Roadmap initiatives, Public Outreach

- **The Bluesource/Michigan DNR Big Wild Forest Carbon Project** is the first-of-its-kind in the nation that will leverage the carbon storage capacity of trees on state forest lands. This pilot project, taking place on over 100,000 acres of the celebrated Pigeon River Country State Forest - known as "The Big Wild," will develop a portfolio of carbon offset credits generated from sustainable forest management activities. Industries that produce carbon emissions may voluntarily purchase these credits from Bluesource, a developer and retailer of these and other environmental instruments. This allows industries to invest in forests as carbon sinks and offset their emissions. Revenues from the project's carbon credit sales will support forest management activities including reforestation efforts.
- **Solar Initiatives (Utility Scale and Small Office Scale):** As part of the State of Michigan's efforts to implement more sustainable practices in state-managed buildings and reduce energy where

possible, the Department has launched initiatives for large utility scale and small office scale solar projects.

Circle Power of Royal Oak has been awarded a 5-year land lease agreement with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to develop large-scale solar arrays on two former mine sites. The two sites to be developed for solar power include the Groveland Mine in Dickinson County, a former 347-acre iron mine tailings site gifted to the state and 7 Mile Pit in Crawford County, a 169-acre property previously use for sand and gravel mining the state acquired through tax reversion. The energy produced at these sites would supplement, or help to replace, current nonrenewable forms of energy generation, like oil, gas and other fossil fuels. The projects would continue Michigan's progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and lowering energy costs by moving to renewable energy sources.

A new pilot initiative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and convert to renewable energy at DNR facilities, started with installing solar power panels at the Oden State Fish Hatchery Visitor's Center in Emmet County. To reduce energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions, along with furthering the state's progress toward converting facilities to renewable energy use, the DNR contracted with the non-profit organization, Michigan Energy Options and has since put out a request for proposals in SW Michigan to develop solar on more DNR facilities.

- **Centennial Celebration:** CARING FOR MICHIGAN'S OUTDOOR PLACES AND STORIES SINCE 1921
The Michigan Department of Conservation - now the Department of Natural Resources - was created March 30, 1921. To mark the DNR's centennial in 2021, we're excited to celebrate 100 years of taking care of Michigan's great outdoors, where fish, wildlife and forests thrive and opportunities to enjoy and connect to nature and our state's heritage are diverse and plentiful.

For the past century, the DNR has worked to conserve Michigan's unparalleled natural and cultural resources and ensure outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities for residents and visitors. From reintroducing elk, moose and turkey to protecting wild places like the Pigeon River Country State Forest to bringing salmon to the Great Lakes, we are proud to celebrate and share our story.



MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS' WORKING GROUP MEETING
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MISSOURI REPORT FOR 2020-2021
[MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION]

Top 3 Continuing Covid-19 Challenges, Adjustments, or Impacts (this could include, but not limited to, prognosis for re-opening summer/fall, last year's hunting/fishing seasons outcomes, revenue/license sales, staffing, vacancies, season structure issues)

- Vacancies because of a July 1, 2020 reorganization and operating under the new organization structure continues to be a process of improvement and prioritization of workloads on a statewide level.
- Hopefully by the end of this summer public programs and events will be nearly back to the new normal of social distancing and masks but at least we will be able to serve the public.
- Using information we learned from the 2020 waterfowl season and how we had to make modifications to the drawing to keep staff and the public safe, we are looking at ways to streamline and improve the process in the future.

Top 3 Land Management or Access Issues

(this could include, but not limited to, progress on Neonic prohibitions, contracting with Partners/NGOs (Pheasants Forever, DU) for public land biologists, data systems to track habitat projects, infrastructure)

- Phasing out the usage of neonics.
- Invasive and exotic species identification and control and prioritizing land management activities using a tiered importance system.
- Increasing the opportunities and desires for recreation on MDC owned and managed lands.

Top 3 Unique Opportunities, new Funding Sources, Relevancy Roadmap initiatives, Public Outreach

(this could include, but not limited to, marketing campaigns for more inclusive participation, state funding sources for new initiatives or unique hunting/fishing opportunity/events)

- RAWA!
- Inclusion and Diversity coordinator hired as an assistant to the director to guide staff and the public on Inclusion and Diversity knowledge and enhancing opportunities.
- First elk hunting season was held in 2020 and first bear hunting season will be held in 2021.

MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS' WORKING GROUP MEETING
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NEBRASKA REPORT FOR 2020-2021
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Public Lands

Top 3 Continuing Covid-19 Challenges, Adjustments, or Impacts (this could include, but not limited to, prognosis for re-opening summer/fall, last year's hunting/fishing seasons outcomes, revenue/license sales, staffing, vacancies, season structure issues)

- As with other states, Nebraska saw an increase in many of our permit sales for 2020 with sales in 2021 thus far closer to what they had been prior.
- Most all Commission staff will be reporting back to their official offices by June 1, 2021.
- Some state agencies are discussing the possibility of having employees office from their homes in the future.

Top 3 Land Management or Access Issues

(this could include, but not limited to, progress on Neonic prohibitions, contracting with Partners/NGOs (Pheasants Forever, DU) for public land biologists, data systems to track habitat projects, infrastructure)

- Big game management including depredation are housed in our public lands section and have taken an enormous effort over the last couple years affecting time available to address public land issues/responsibilities.
- Nebraska's land acquisitions have slowed greatly and are rewriting our plan in 2022.
- Continue to discuss and work toward a land management/habitat geospatial data system for public and private lands.

Top 3 Unique Opportunities, new Funding Sources, Relevancy Roadmap initiatives, Public Outreach

(this could include, but not limited to, marketing campaigns for more inclusive participation, state funding sources for new initiatives or unique hunting/fishing opportunity/events)

- Two-Tier duck hunting system: NE & SD are studying the effects of allowing duck hunters to choose the tradition point system on species/sex of ducks or hunt with a 3 duck limit. Hunters must sign up for one or the other when they sign up for HIP #. It is hoped that the 3 duck limit is inviting to those hunters that find identifying ducks as a hindrance to duck hunting.
- Nebraska is moving forward to legalize trapping otters since populations are at levels to support this.
- Have added a number of license plates that citizens can buy with a portion going to our conservation fund.

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North Dakota REPORT FOR 2020-2021
North Dakota Game and Fish Department

Top 3 Continuing Covid-19 Challenges, Adjustments, or Impacts (this could include, but not limited to, prognosis for re-opening summer/fall, last year's hunting/fishing seasons outcomes, revenue/license sales, staffing, vacancies, season structure issues)

- The North Dakota Game and Fish Department has been able to function at a high and effective level amid the Covid pandemic. Although most staff from the main office worked from home, most district field offices basically operated business as usual and accomplished almost all land management and survey objectives.
- North Dakota made some survey protocol adjustments and was the only state in the Central Flyway to complete last 2020 Spring Breeding Waterfowl Survey.
- Walk-in traffic was limited to secured entry doorways and significantly decreased amount of activity at field and main offices. Offices are now open for appointment only and masks are encouraged. Restrictions continue to decrease, and everyone is hopeful to return to normal.
- North Dakota (probably like most states) saw a significant surge in camping, fishing, and boating activities last summer as people sought to get out and about but remain at a supposed safe social distance.
- In recent years, North Dakota has been transitioning to all on-line licensing and applications. On-line apps and an effective Department web page were extremely beneficial and useful for our constituents.
- North Dakota fall waterfowl hunting season was extremely busy last fall. Non-resident duck hunters continue to increase, and appears we saw an additional surge due to American hunters unable to get into Canada due to Covid19, so they came to North Dakota.

Top 3 Land Management or Access Issues (this could include, but not limited to, progress on Neonic prohibitions, contracting with Partners/NGOs (Pheasants Forever, DU) for public land biologists, data systems to track habitat projects, infrastructure)

- The North Dakota Game and Fish Department manages 234 Wildlife Management Areas on 219,540 acres.
- Although not official policy driven, land managers have transitioned out of using neonicotinoid treated seed on food plots established by Department staff and some contractors. However, we are still allowing farm cooperators to use seed of their choice but will begin the transition and requirement to use neonic free feed. The ND Game and Fish Department has struggled to find neonic free seed but have increased our search efforts and ordering to late fall instead of the spring. We were able to get corn seed but decided to send in for an independent test. The test indicated 1900ppb of Clothianidin and 309 ppb of Thiamethoxam. Although still working through the process with the seed dealers – they seem to indicate it may be from the bagging machine not being adequately cleaned or something else. One response we got from a dealer rep was:

"This is obviously speculation and I'm sure I'm not the only thinking this, but how much of this dilemma is because these chemicals were found within the kernel itself...and this is why the industry standard is to only dilute the coating (i.e. testing only their actual input)? They can't control what is being absorbed into the kernel from previous farming practices, so they leave that variable out of the equation. However, these numbers appear a little high to be casually absorbed from the soil. There's a lot we do not know."

- Other challenges – increasing use and public requests to use Wildlife Management Areas for activities not necessarily consistent with wildlife management (hiking, biking, trails, ATVs, etc)
- Housing and cabin developments adjacent to WMA's, especially Corps of Engineers owned property leased to ND Game and Fish for WMA's. (Various requests for private exclusive access, water lines, boat mooring, mowed access trails from cabin site, water intakes for lawns and gardens, request to close to hunting, etc)
- The Department has an \$800,000 biennial acquisition budget, has willing sellers that have contacted the Department, but has not been aggressive in recent years acquiring additional property.

Top 3 Unique Opportunities, new Funding Sources, Relevancy Roadmap initiatives, Public Outreach

(this could include, but not limited to, marketing campaigns for more inclusive participation, state funding sources for new initiatives or unique hunting/fishing opportunity/events)

- Budgets for the ND Game and Fish Department are stable or increasing. So, if work items not accomplished on WMA's is generally due to lack of manpower rather than budget shortfalls.
- In most cases, North Dakota is 10 years behind the rest of the country. Hunting license sales are stable or increasing. Thanks to communication with MAFWA groups and others we are in the position to see other states challenges and hopefully visionary enough to be prepared for the future. The Department recently hired an R3 Coordinator, so we hopefully do not get behind the curve.
- North Dakota has been a state where permission was NOT required to hunt on private land unless the land was posted No Hunting or Trespassing by the owner or leasee. However, the North Dakota Legislature changed that this past session and passed SB2036 allowing landowners to electronically post land as No Hunting or Trespassing on a database which we be available on a phone app.

MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS' WORKING GROUP MEETING
Virtual Meeting Hosted by Wisconsin • May 12, 2021
OHIO REPORT FOR 2020-2021
ODNR DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

Top 3 Continuing Covid-19 Challenges, Adjustments, or Impacts (this could include, but not limited to, prognosis for re-opening summer/fall, last year's hunting/fishing seasons outcomes, revenue/license sales, staffing, vacancies, season structure issues)

- Bump in revenue both directly through license sales as well as the impending PR bump.
- Staff working from home and continued COVID protocols while in the field.
- Hiring and pay freezes put in place during COVID have been lifted and we're hiring. Taking a top-down approach to fill the T.O., but we do have 3 WA Supervisor positions, and 7 Wildlife Management Consultant positions slated to be filled this summer. Big step for us!

Top 3 Land Management or Access Issues

(this could include, but not limited to, progress on Neonic prohibitions, contracting with Partners/NGOs (Pheasants Forever, DU) for public land biologists, data systems to track habitat projects, infrastructure)

- We have an (almost signed) neonic directive in place. We're operating as if it's effective this year.
- We continue to develop web based GIS applications via ArcGIS Online and ESRI Field Maps to plan and report public land management activities, private lands initiatives, and house wildlife research data. COVID prioritized this for us as well as offered barriers to overcome. We still have a lot of work to do, but we're making progress.
- For the first time in the history of the agency we're receiving true state capital money to complete infrastructure projects. Notably the Magee Marsh Lake Front Levee is a \$12mil project and the first true capital project that will hit the ground. Building renovations and demolitions, dam decommissioning projects, fuel storage tank removals/replacements are all proposed projects in the FY23-24 capital biennium.

Top 3 Unique Opportunities, new Funding Sources, Relevancy Roadmap initiatives, Public Outreach

(this could include, but not limited to, marketing campaigns for more inclusive participation, state funding sources for new initiatives or unique hunting/fishing opportunity/events)

- Wetland mitigation at Mosquito Creek WA with Stream and Wetlands Foundation, as well as smaller projects with TNC.
- Relevancy training offered to about 60 staff this spring. A few of the 19 identified barriers are being worked on.
- We received our first VPA-HIP grant last year and hope to have a system in place this fall to offer access to private lands. Ohio Hunter/Landowner Access Partnership (OHLAP).

MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS' WORKING GROUP MEETING
Virtual Meeting Hosted by Wisconsin • May 12, 2021
SOUTH DAKOTA REPORT FOR 2020-2021
SOUTH DAKOTA GAME, FISH & PARKS

Top 3 Continuing Covid-19 Challenges, Adjustments, or Impacts

- Hunting and fishing license sales have been healthy both in 2020 at the height of the pandemic, but also into 2021 as pandemic induced limitations begin to lessen. We've also experienced a corresponding increase in use of public lands and waters across the state.
- Pandemic "best management practices" presented challenges for SDGFP staff at all levels, with many people navigating to remote work. Field staff faced challenges with meeting operation and maintenance responsibilities on our Game Production Areas (GPAs) while maintaining safety protocols such as social distancing and proper equipment and vehicle sanitization.
- Challenges also continue to exist with the timely hiring and availability of seasonal labor. SDGFP relies heavily on seasonal positions to conduct operation and maintenance of GPAs.

Top 3 Land Management or Access Issues

- Despite positive revenue outlooks, budget stagnation continues to affect GPA operations, maintenance, and habitat developments, particularly with staffing - both permanent and seasonal positions - and equipment needs - both cost and availability of farm equipment and implements. However, we are beginning to see a turn-around with this issue (see below).
- Compatible uses on GPAs continues to present challenges as more people begin to participate in outdoor related activities. While a challenge, we also recognize the importance of a larger and broader public land user base as advocates for public lands, including in state and local political arenas.
- While not a problematic issue, in response to appeals from several state waterfowl hunting organizations SDGFP has increased its focus and development efforts on providing enhanced waterfowl hunting access opportunities on public lands. This includes improvements to and development of vehicle access trails, primitive boat ramps, and equipment drop off sites.

Top 3 Unique Opportunities, new Funding Sources, Relevancy Roadmap initiatives, Public Outreach

- In 2020 the South Dakota Legislature passed SB75 establishing on July 1, 2020 a Habitat Stamp required for nearly all South Dakota hunting or fishing licenses (\$10 for residents/\$25 for non-residents). The Habitat Stamp is a license certification that raises money for habitat and access enhancements across South Dakota. Funds are used to develop and enhance fish and wildlife habitats on public lands and waters and provide additional hunting and fishing access to private lands. The Habitat Stamp has resulted in SDGFP being able to address a number of habitat and access improvement opportunities on GPAs.
- While Habitat Stamp funds are not available for land acquisitions, SDGFP anticipates additional future land acquisition opportunities with prospects of increased PR/DJ funding allocations.
- Through ongoing efforts, SDGFP continued to make strides in enhancing hunting and fishing opportunities by simplifying regulations and other means of removing barriers to participation.

MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS' WORKING GROUP MEETING
Virtual Meeting Hosted by Wisconsin • May 12, 2021
WI REPORT FOR 2020-2021
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Top 3 Continuing Covid-19 Challenges, Adjustments, or Impacts (this could include, but not limited to, prognosis for re-opening summer/fall, last year's hunting/fishing seasons outcomes, revenue/license sales, staffing, vacancies, season structure issues)

- While the majority of our Central Office staff continue to work from home, field staff have been able to conduct field work including prescribed burns and other habitat and capital development projects (with smaller crews of 10 or less) since last summer. We continue to work our way through \$3+ million of capital development infrastructure projects funded by a 2017 PR bump grant. Some of this work has been accomplished by contractors.
- All hunting seasons were open in 2020; as expected, 2020 saw an increase in license sales and revenue. Total unique hunters of 670K was up from 656K in 2019 (both draft numbers), but still down from the most recent high of 719K in 2013.
- We continue to be in a hiring frost; there are over 30 vacancies currently in the Bureau of Wildlife Management that includes Wildlife Biologists, Technicians and Supervisors. Currently, there is a recruitment for an Area Wildlife Supervisor and a District Supervisor. We await the outcome of the 21-23 biennial budget. The Legislature just cut 300+ items from Governor Evers proposed budget during this back and forth process.

Top 3 Land Management or Access Issues

(this could include, but not limited to, progress on Neonic prohibitions, contracting with Partners/NGOs (Pheasants Forever, DU) for public land biologists, data systems to track habitat projects, infrastructure)

- In February 2021, the Division of Fish, Wildlife and Parks rolled out updated Farming Agreement Policy and Guidance for staff and Cooperators that included a phased approach to discontinuing neonicotinoid insecticide treated seeds used in crop production. Emergency use is allowed if Integrated Pest Management practices are followed on cropland. Emergency forest health use (i.e., hemlock woolly adelgid) would be allowed to treat forest pests on DNR managed land.
- All habitat managers completed a large task of updating recon (cover typing) on 600,000 acres of DNR managed land at the end of June 2020. We continue to refine the Wisconsin Field Inventory and Reporting System (WisFIRS) for non-forested habitat including Rx burn planning and Pesticide Use reporting.
- We are still implementing our 2017 Alignment prescriptions including detailing recreational responsibilities of our parks and recreation specialists who provide maintenance for parking lots, roads and other recreational infrastructure on state wildlife areas as well as parks and forests. Following alignment, additional lead responsibility for land management issues across all property types has increased workload in areas of farming agreements, grazing, wetland management and assessment of 1000 water control structures across the state.

Top 3 Unique Opportunities, new Funding Sources, Relevancy Roadmap initiatives, Public Outreach

(this could include, but not limited to, marketing campaigns for more inclusive participation, state funding sources for new initiatives or unique hunting/fishing opportunity/events)

- We are working with our Division and our Office of Communications to hire a marketing firm to provide customer insight (for both non-hunting and hunting public), develop key products for the recreational opportunities on wildlife areas and to create a marketing plan that can be used in conjunction with internal and external communications plans.
- We now have chartered Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Teams in Wildlife Management, Natural Heritage Conservation (ER), and our Parks programs. Many of our Division programs posted internship opportunities as a part of the State of Wisconsin Student Diversity Internship Program which is focused on racial/ethnic minorities, women, veterans and disabled students. There will be a 2021 Fellows class of these interns with specific instruction and education on state employment and careers.
- The Bureau of Wildlife Management has been aligning our program strategic plan with the AFWA Relevancy Road map to find areas where we are implementing or planning to implement strategies outlined in the roadmap or where we are not currently doing the work. Based on the analysis of 219 strategies by our Northern District Supervisor, Marc Kenyon, we have either done or are planning to do 75% of the steps outlined in the roadmap. For those strategies that are within our authority, we are not doing or planning to do 20% of these steps.

MLI Technical Committee Brainstorming Results to AFWA Science Needs Questions

What fish and wildlife diseases are most important/challenging in the Midwest region? Why?

- Neonicotinoid insecticide impacts on fish, wildlife and pollinators.

If plant diseases are also a fish and wildlife management concern, which plant diseases are especially concerning? Why?

- No additional items.

What changes in weather and/or precipitation regimes are impacting fish, wildlife, and habitat management at the present time?

- No additional items.

What are your concerns about changing regimes in the future?

- No additional items

Which aquatic and terrestrial invasive species are, at present, of greatest concern? Why?

- No additional items

What needs for more advanced technologies are most pressing in the Midwest region (e.g., animal side tests or decontamination regimes for CWD)?

- No additional items

What are the greatest needs for alignment between multiple agencies in the region for the management of fish and wildlife? What management concerns would be better addressed through interagency science-based approaches?

- No additional items