

MAFWA Public Lands Working Group

Respectfully submitted by

Paul Coughlin, Habitat Program Manager, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

Meeting Time and Place

The MAFWA Public Lands Working Group (MPLWG) met via video-conference on May 3, 2022. The lingering concerns and restrictions associated with COVID-19 prevented an in-person meeting for the third year in a row. While appreciating the efficiencies of time and expenses realized through virtual meetings, MPLWG participants expressed a strong desire to return to in-person meetings. Additionally, participants encouraged returning to convening a joint meeting with the Midwest Private Lands Working Group as had been the tradition pre-pandemic.

Attendance

In attendance for the video-conference were the following members: Mitch Hess and Don Kahl (IL); Brian Hickman (IA); Dustin Mengarelli (KS); Derek Beard (KY); Earl Flegler, Kerry Fitzpatrick, Valery Frawley, Kristin Wildman, and Christine Hanaburgh (MI); Dan Stark (MN); Joel Porath and Matt Boyer (MO); Pat Molini (NE); Mike Ervin (OH), Paul Coughlin (SD); Anne Reis-Boyle (WI); and Claire Beck (MAFWA-MLI).

Executive Summary

The 2022 MPLWG 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. Each attending state presented a brief 5-10 minute update that included the top challenges and opportunities related to operation and maintenance of state wildlife lands. Common themes across the states include staffing challenges, infrastructure and equipment needs, and increasing and diversifying uses on state wildlife lands. Claire Beck also presented information regarding the Midwest Landscape Initiative and efforts being made through the Midwest Conservation Action Plan.

Director Action Items

Participants agree there is great value in the annual MPLWG meeting and encourage the Directors to continue supporting the working group and prioritizing attendance and participation by agency public lands program managers in annual meetings. The meeting connects names and faces, and greatly enhances year round communications amongst members regarding common and emerging opportunities and challenges faced by state public land managers across the Midwest states. Additionally, MPLWG members encourage the Directors to utilize the groups collective knowledge network to forward MAFWA initiatives and priorities as they relate to state wildlife lands and the expanding base of users and uses of these lands.

Action: Reinstate/maintain the Midwest Public Lands Working Group as a technical working group of MAFWA.

Director Information Items

The following Information Items were discussed by the Working Group:

Opportunity/Issue: Staffing

Hiring and retaining a qualified land management staff continues to challenge state public land managers across the Midwest states. Challenges result from limited employment pools of qualified individuals for existing management positions as well as ever present FTE limitations. Some states have developed work-arounds to address FTE limitation through contracting with NGOs such as Pheasant Forever. These arrangements can be beneficial in the long-term by serving as training opportunities for future agency employment. However, retaining qualified employees in the current employment market remains a concern.

Opportunity/Issue: Equipment and Infrastructure

Maintaining and upgrading infrastructure on state wildlife lands, along with securing necessary equipment continues to challenge state public land managers. While in most cases funding seems available, supply chain issues, equipment availability, and contractor shortages are limiting progress in meeting these needs.

Opportunity/Issue: Public Land Users

All Midwest states are experiencing increased use on state wildlife lands, and often by a diverse set of users pursuing activities outside those traditionally reserved for state wildlife land (e.g. hunting and fishing). While this expanding user base provides opportunities to expose a larger population to outdoor recreation and increased appreciation for fish and wildlife resources under state management, challenges exist with ensuring new and diverse uses are compatible with the primary purposes of state fish and wildlife lands (i.e. providing fish and wildlife habitat, and public hunting and fishing opportunities).

Along with an expanded and diversified user group, obtaining quality public land user data is an important issue for state land managers. Whether it's traditional users such as hunter and anglers, or determining residency of those users, obtaining user data is important in driving management direction on state wildlife lands. In the case of non-traditional users, demographic data on all public land users can serve as an important information source as states begin developing implementation plans for their relevancy roadmaps and determining the role state wildlife lands play in the relevancy discussion.

Time and Place of Next Meeting

MPLWG participants expressed a strong desire to return to in-person meetings and encourage a joint meeting with the Midwest Private Lands Working Group as has been the tradition.

Wisconsin, May 2022

MAFWA Public Lands Working Group Agenda May 3, 2022

Member States: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin

Time	Agenda Item	Presenter
8:30 - 8:45	Welcome and Introductions	Paul Coughlin
8:45 - 10:30	State Reports (5 to 10 minutes/state)	All States
10:30 - 10:45	Break	
10:45 - 11:00	Midwest Landscape Initiative	Claire Beck, MAFWA
11:00 - 12:00	Opportunities/Issues/Action Items for Directors	All States

MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING
May 3, 2022
Illinois DNR

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges

- Inadequate staffing
- Procurement system
- IL is running an outdated and restrictive harvest reporting system

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities

- Steady funds and support for acquiring new acreage
- IRAP continues to grow, providing public hunting on private land

MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING
May 3, 2022
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Brian Hickman

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges

Public land use: The public demand for recreational use on Iowa's public lands continues to increase. Ultimately interest in Iowa's public lands is a good thing. However, there is a growing concern over the volume of users and the constant pressure from non-compatible recreational groups wanting to utilize Iowa's public lands. We continue to think about how we can grow support from the public and stakeholder groups for public lands while staying true to compatible uses and providing quality habitat for Iowa's native wildlife species and species that migrate through our state.

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. The 2021/22 season was the second year of targeting our surveillance methods using 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. Two new counties in Iowa had CWD detected. Greene county in Central Iowa and Fremont county in far SW Iowa.

Total CWD Positives in Iowa since 2013:

2013 – 1

2014 – 3

2015 – 2

2016 – 12

2017 – 10

2018 – 18

2019 – 44

2020 – 21

2021 - 52

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities

Staffing: The Wildlife Bureau currently has 4 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 State Wildlife Veterinarian position for which the primary focus is to manage wildlife population health and educate the public.

Three of the five planned subunits have been fully staffed. This effort is proving successful in bridging geographic hurdles in managing Iowa's public lands. Sub Unit locations were determined by considering the following factors:

- 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.

CWD Interactive Dashboard and dedicated staffing: This year marked the launch of Iowa's interactive dashboard sharing information about CWD in Iowa.

<https://www.iowadnr.gov/Hunting/Deer-Hunting/Deer-Health/Chronic-Wasting-Disease/Surveillance-Results>

This new tool allows Iowans to see up to date information on current and historic surveillance efforts, sample statistics and locations of positive samples.

In addition to the dashboard two dedicated CWD Outreach Specialists in partnership with Iowa State Extension. These positions located in NE Iowa carry out Chronic Wasting Disease incentive hunts, educate the local public on CWD management practices and work one-on-one with local landowners and hunters.

Good Neighbor Meetings: The Wildlife Bureaus 17 Units have begun hosting Good Neighbor meetings across the state. Each Unit is hosting an open house gathering once annually at or near a Wildlife Management Area where members from the public can come discuss current management, future plans, wildlife trends or diseases and what private land services we offer. The Unit, Private Lands and Depredation Biologists are all present to answer questions as well as the District Forester and local Conservation Officer. Initial open houses have been well received and have helped gained support from our neighbors and users.

Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism
State Report for Midwest Public Lands Working Group
May 2022

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

- FY22 Total Public Lands Budget - \$10,416,769
- FY 22 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 - \$6.5 million
- Sport Fish Grant - \$800,000

Land Acquisition

FY22 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 Sandsage Bison Range and Wildlife Area to provide 111 bison tours to 949 guests.
- ISportsman continues on 28 properties –61579 Accounts, 135148 Check-Ins. 1.3% non-checkout. We are migrating to Brandt on June 1st, 2022. This should be a step up for the sportsman as it will be tied to their license purchasing account. New App will allow you to checkin/out of a property buy licenses etc.
- Special Hunts (Public & Private Land): Spring 2022 = 94 Turkey Hunts available this spring with 154 permits. There were 538 Applications - all choices. Applications came from 15 different states. Fall '21-'22 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
 - Proposed regulations to combat is not based on data but more desires
- Providing adequate opportunity for hunters and anglers
- Homeless camping on State Fishing Lakes (will be going to a 7 day max stay in 2022)

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
May 3, 2022
(Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources)
(Derek Beard)

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges

- Replacing aging infrastructure and equipment typically only occurs on an emergency basis due to limited funds. Recent budget builds for FY23 will only allow for approximately \$150,000 for public lands staff to purchase needed equipment.
- Staffing—the division is rapidly losing highly qualified and knowledgeable employees. We are seeing a low level of interest in our posted vacancies with applicants that do not meet minimum qualifications and/or experience. To increase our applicant pool the agency recently updated minimum qualifications for the Wildlife Biologist series to simplify the education requirements for all five classifications. We removed the complex and specific coursework requirements (course hours as specified by TWS certifications) and replaced with simple and appropriate bachelor's degree requirements. Minimum education requirements now include a graduate of a college or university with a bachelor's degree in a biological science, wildlife biology, fish and wildlife management, conservation biology, natural resources, environmental sciences, or related field.
- Funding—Kentucky continues to rank among the lowest paid wildlife staff and is one of the top two underfunded pension systems in the nation. House Bill 1 passed this legislative session providing state employees a much-needed raise. Employees will receive 8% increase on July 1st with up to a 12% in year two of the biennium. The financial impact to the agency will change the landscape of our agency in the very near future if alternative forms of income is not identified soon. At the current rate approximately 80% of our Wildlife division budget is consumed by personnel salaries and benefits.
- Both a challenge and opportunity the legislature passed Senate Bill 217 this session. The historic legislation gives the Agency a level of independence. The Governor vetoed it on April 6th followed by the Senate (29-8) and House (69-24) taking action to override the veto on April 13th. Due to the emergency clause the legislation takes effect immediately. The Agency is working diligently to establish new operational protocols to allow the agency to conduct all procurements necessary, make all contracts and agreements subject to Governmental Contract Review, and conduct its own bidding. The Agency is now only attached to the Tourism Arts and Heritage Cabinet administratively for limited functions and purposes as requested by the Agency.

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities

- Passed legislation (SB217) that will allow the Agency to acquire a perpetual conservation easement on approximately 54,000 acre WMA in southeast KY. Funds for purchasing the easement will come from state general fund which will provide the 25% federal match. The property is located in Knox, Bell, and Leslie counties.
- WMA categories has been approved by our commission. WMA's will be categorized into High, Moderate, or Low levels of management. High management areas being staffed and intensively managed while Low will be areas with staff some distance away that will receive the minimum in the way of management but are still available to hunting, hiking, wildlife watching, etc. Ideally, this approach will give area users a better idea of what to expect on areas when visiting or planning a trip and will also help focus our staff, budget and sometimes commission to prioritize efforts on Highly managed areas. Staff are in process of finalizing the roll out, advertise and market this approach on the areas this Fall.
- Southeast Kentucky Habitat Initiative started in 2022 focusing staff efforts to help control invasive shrubs that are encroaching on open fields with reclaimed areas, create more suitable brooding and nesting cover for grassland birds, and improve forage for elk. Reclaimed mine lands have its challenges as each unit we must communicate with the Division of Mining to get help determining if the proposed area is currently under bond and if so, would burning the site cause issues with compliance. The plan was to burn the areas no earlier than mid-February and no later than mid-September. Burning during this period would ensure quick vegetation response providing cover as well as help with soil stabilization. Currently staff have identified approximately 8,000 acres to burn. In year one staff was able to complete nearly 2,000 acres

MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING
May 3, 2022
(Michigan DNR, Wildlife Division)
(Earl Flegler)

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges

Public Land Without Public Access - With the increased access to GIS mapping tools (like OnX Hunt) that identify public and private landowners, the interest in landlocked public lands has increased-both on a national level and in Michigan. A total of 15.87 million acres of landlocked public land in western states has been identified, including 8.3 million acres landlocked by corner-to-corner connections.

A collaborative report from OnX and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, "The Upper Midwest's Inaccessible Public Lands," suggests that Minnesota is home to 248,000 total landlocked acres and Wisconsin has 55,000 acres. Michigan has not calculated landlocked acres. We frequently dispose of parcels that lack public access, seek trades to consolidate ownership, and require reciprocal easements when a private landowner seeks an easement across public land. We are also exploring mapping of legal easements across private land that lead to public land.

On corporate forest lands in the Upper Peninsula, transfer of ownership to Timber Investment Management Organizations (TIMOs) and private landowners is affecting public access. Access to public lands by 2-track trails that run through the former corporate lands is increasingly being questioned.

A recent trial in Wyoming has highlighted the issue of corner-crossing to obtain access to public ownerships. No law exists that specifically outlaws corner-crossing, but various attempts to make it either definitively legal or illegal have thus far failed. In Michigan, a 1980 Attorney General Opinion determined that the public does not have an easement to cross cornering parcels.

Best Management Practices for Renewable Energy Projects - Wildlife Division has formed a small group to develop best management practices for wind and solar projects. We are seeking fence specifications that would prohibit wildlife from getting trapped within the fencing area or lodged on the fence (less than 52 inches tall or greater than or equal to 10 feet tall without using barbed wire). Local zoning requirements require barbed wire fencing of at least 6 feet in height and another agency requirement is 7' fence or 6' + 3-string barbed wire.

Bike Trails on Wildlife Administered Lands – A Wildlife Division workgroup was created to develop a unified stance and communication to help address bike trails on wildlife-administered lands. We have a desire to increase the use/relevancy of wildlife areas by the general public and see non-traditional use as a possible gateway, at least a way to increase appreciation for wildlife-related recreation recruitment. However, the

intensity and frequency of these non-traditional uses may detract from the primary purpose (wildlife habitat and wildlife-related recreation). We have some unauthorized bike trails on our managed wildlife areas, and we have continued interest from user groups for additional trails. The workgroup will develop recommendations and present them to the Wildlife Division Management Team for consideration.

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities

DNR Public Land Strategy – Public Act 240 of 2018 required the DNR to prepare an update to the 2013 DNR Public Land Strategy and provide it to the Legislature by July 2021. An internal DNR sprint team was formed in 2019 to accomplish this goal. Their efforts involved extensive engagement both within the Department and with the public, stakeholders, and local units of government. The focus of the original goals set in 2013 remain in the updated plan, but they were restructured to better align with agency mission and management objectives and leverage the department’s other strategic plans. The new proposed goals center around the ideas of “protect, provide and perform:”

- Goal 1: Protect natural and cultural resources
- Goal 2: Provide access to outdoor public recreation opportunities
- Goal 3: Perform responsible natural resources management.

The plan will be implemented upon review and approval of the Michigan Legislature. Here is the link to the plan: [The Power of Public Lands: Michigan Department of Natural Resources Public Land Strategy 2021-2027](#)

Here is a report on progress made towards the 2013 strategy and an overview of the main changes including the 2021 strategy: [Proposed Updated Plan](#).

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 reviews for 40 of the 83 counties (4,121 parcels, 76,628 acres). The recommended classifications break down are as follows: retain (81% of

parcels, 86% of acres), offer to alternate conservation partner (3% of parcels, 3% of acres), exchange (2% of parcels, 3% of acres) or dispose (14% of parcels, 8% of acres).

Land Acquisitions: Successful grant applications from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and funds from disposal of lands have increase funding for land acquisitions. Two Wildlife Divisions acquisitions closed in 2021: Crystal Waters SGA (680.16 acres, \$3,675,000) and Maple River SGA Miller (40 acres, \$140,000). In addition, two 2021 grant applications were approved for 900 acres and \$5 million.

MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING
May 3, 2022
(MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION)
(Joel Porath-Wildlife Section Chief)

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges

- Urban, suburban, and exurban, sprawl and development putting pressure on conservation lands. Areas that used to be in rural space are not anymore. Habitat and wildlife are feeling the heat and we are seeing encroachment issues with negative impact.
- Invasive species ruining/taking over wildlife habitats. This is next biggest issue we face as public land managers. Aquatic and terrestrial invasives will dominate our time and resources on public land if we allow it. But if we do not address this issue, it will impede and prevent most other management, and it will negate the ecological benefits those lands provide for wildlife and people. Most impacted areas are in and near urban centers, and it grows outward exponentially, impacting our highest quality natural communities. While feral hogs in Missouri are the most prominent invasive species at present (FYI: We have made incredible progress towards the goal of eliminating feral hogs), the list of invasives are at a paradigm-shifting and exponentially growth-increasing level.
- Pollution of public waters and stream management challenges that hurt aquatic and terrestrial species. Collaboration with professionals tasked with protection of clean water for human population is critical. Clean water will be the issue of the future, and it affects everyone. Our public lands can act as a buffer against pollution, and the pressure is building but public lands cannot handle it all. Eventually the pressure will build to the point when the system breaks. It already has in many places.
- Protecting Wildlife Population Health (primarily disease control). Great need to train more wildlife professionals in wildlife disease surveillance and control. Collaboration with agricultural professionals in protection also of domestic livestock is critical.
- Competing & increasing public use. Lots of people with lots of differing expectations on the same land. We are seeing right now that a big challenge is finding consensus among professionals about how public lands should be managed for public use. One of the biggest barriers to entry for hunting is access/opportunity, but it is not just enough to have a place to go. We need *quality* opportunities. The higher the non-traditional uses and “pressure” from increased public use, hypothetically the lower the quality. It is hard to retain new and/or young hunters constantly discouraged by lack of success and/or bad encounters. It is a difficult balance.
- Deficient number of potential resource management professionals. The number of qualified individuals (relevant degree/adequate experience) pursuing professional careers in this field has been declining for years, leading to some new staff which are unprepared to do the job. It is not their fault but in some cases their staff, the public, and the resource may suffer. Improving staff

retention will help with this problem, but getting more kids interested in this field early seems essential.

- The timely reporting of land management activities and accomplishments.

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities

- RAWA!!!!
- Outreach to and engaging the public in wildlife viewing, hunting, fishing, and experiencing wildlife in the wild. People will only defend what they hold personal value in.
- Focusing efforts on retaining institutional knowledge given the well experienced workforce who are nearing retirement.
- Using technology creatively as a teaching/gaming/exploration tool to bring people outside to better understand, identify, appreciate wildlife.
- Sustainable farming and crops with less use of poisonous pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizer in order to better support the ecosystem and balance needs.
- Opening the rivers and letting the floodplain be the floodplain supporting wildlife habitats (reduce the number of levees).
- Protection or reintroducing of species of conversation concern on restored/managed terrestrial and aquatic habitats.
- Ability to collect public engagement is available now more than ever to create informed decisions and better reach all Missourians. Focus efforts on public engagement and partnerships.
- Work team restructuring to get habitat work accomplished.

MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING
May 3, 2022
(Nebraska Game and Parks Commission)
(Presented by Pat Molini, Wildlife Assistant Division Administrator)

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges

- Shrinking applicant pool for position openings with fewer and fewer experienced/qualified applicants. Lower interest from existing staff to take on leadership positions. Competitive wages for permanent and temporary staff.
- Increase demand on public wildlife areas for activities outside the traditional uses of habitat/hunting/fishing/trapping.
- Drought/Wildfire (insert rain dance)

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities

- Prioritizing the surplus of areas with high management costs and input often with little or no public access. Will free up time and funds to apply to other more important areas.
- With increase interest in using wildlife areas for hiking/biking/kayaking/canoeing/etc. there may be opportunities to understand and manage these uses and limit potential negative impacts and/or conflicts.
- Recovering America's Wildlife Act (will come with many challenges also)

MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING
May 3, 2022
North Dakota Game and Fish Department
Presented by Kent Luttschwager Wildlife Resource Section Leader

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges

- Continued requests to turn Wildlife Management Areas into recreation areas by the public. Covid has led to a surge in increased outdoor use and the public continues to request (or just do on their own) more and more uses that are not consistent with proper wildlife management objectives. Includes requests for weddings, ATV trails, bike trails, archery targets, hiking trails, trail cameras, primitive camping, off road traveling, beer drinking and partying. Although some activities could be considered compatible use – the excessive amount can become problematic on some WMA's. Compounding this is the ND Game and Fish Department's new R3 program which encourages people to get outside.
- Antler shed hunting has exploded in popularity. In North Dakota, winters can be severe and the Department annually plants food plots on WMA's. However, shed hunters are starting in December and walk food plots and high-quality habitat on nearly a daily basis. Shed hunting is occurring on a minority of the WMA's but is nearly continuous throughout even the harshest winters. Western states have actual shed hunting seasons on winter ranges or Wildlife Management Areas that are closed until late spring. The ND Game and Fish Dept is concerned and at this point is working on an educational aspect, prior to making any rule or regulations changes.

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities

- How to spend increased PR funds

MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING
May 3, 2022
South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks
Paul Coughlin, Habitat Program Administrator

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges

- Expanded public use on Game Production Areas - Public use of GPAs in the last two years has increased both in number of users and diversity of uses. While most public uses on GPAs remain consistent with or do not interfere with the purposes for which the areas were acquired, a broader diversity of users and uses can result in incompatible uses occurring to the detriment of wildlife habitat and hunting and fishing access.
- Habitat management staffing - Maintaining fully staffed regional habitat teams remains a challenge for GFP regional habitat managers. This is particularly challenging with regards to obtaining team members with skills and abilities necessary to meet job expectations (e.g. equipment operators, CDLs). The situation is currently compounded given a very competitive labor market.
- Annually adjusting to climatic conditions - GFP habitat managers put a great deal of time and resources into annual habitat management planning for GPAs. Making timely adjustments to plans in response to extremes in weather (e.g. drought, flooding, seasonal temperatures) prove challenging for proper management planning and budgeting.

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities

- Funding - With an increase in PR apportionments and a recently implemented Habitat Stamp, GFP habitat managers are taking advantage of financial opportunities to expand habitat developments on more GPAs and secure much needed equipment upgrades to accomplish on-the-ground habitat developments and conducted necessary management practices.
- Expanded public use on GPAs - While this remains a challenge, expanded public use also presents an opportunity to expand public lands advocacy across a broader population. Finding the appropriate balance between compatible and incompatible uses on GPAs will remain a center point of this situation.

MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING
May 3, 2022
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Anne Reis-Boyle, Public Lands Specialist

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges

- During the pandemic, we had many vacancies within our Wildlife Biologist and Wildlife Technician classes, as well as vacancies in other supporting programs like Real Estate and Engineering. This negatively impacted the quantity of work we were able to complete.
- Rx fire continues to be managed by another Division which impacts the total # of burns and burn acreage on a yearly basis. Many Wildlife Management staff no longer have fire credentials so that we are reliant on the other Division to staff burns.
- There were many vacancies and turnover in the supervisor classes in our districts and central office. There continue to be 3 supervisor vacancies at our Central Office.
- Dog training and trialing proponents are continuing to request the DNR to expand training opportunities, including lifting leash restrictions.
- We continue to need millions of dollars to manage our wetland infrastructure. There are many sources, but the backlog of projects and timing of funding makes it difficult to fund and complete projects before funding expires.
- We continue to explore opportunities to increase relevancy among the public and recreational customers that do not frequent Wildlife Areas.

Top State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities

- We recently hired 20 new staff; 13 new Wildlife Biologists and 7 new technicians, with a 3 more technicians and 2 more biologists scheduled to be hired within the next 2 months. These staff are going through a year-long training.
- There is an increase in Pittman-Robertson allotment, with a \$4 million surplus that has yet to be allocated this year.
- We are purchasing two large tracts in southern Wisconsin to expand two Wildlife Areas, representing over 2,300 acres.
- Covid-19 avoidance measures have largely been lifted; we are able to hold in-person meetings and interact with the public.
- Our Central Office sections (statewide specialists for grasslands, wetlands, game species) are shifting so that all game species specialists will be in one section and all private and public lands staff are in other section. Our wildlife health section remains the same. This will occur in the next fiscal year.
- We've recently reviewed and created a scoring system for all wetland infrastructure (over 1000 impoundments & structures) to help us prioritize maintenance, abandonment, and upgrades.
- A \$5 increase (from \$7 to \$12) in our waterfowl stamp fee will help us conduct more habitat work in the coming years.
- We have 56 grazing projects covering approximately 6000 acres on Wildlife Areas, State Parks and State Natural Areas currently.

- We are hopeful that Recovering Americas Wildlife Act (RAWA), Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI), and the infrastructure bill will provide much needed funding for habitat and road/dam infrastructure projects on public lands.