



# **ASSOCIATION OF MIDWEST FISH & GAME LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS**

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**ANNUAL AGENCY REPORTS 2022**

# Association of Midwest Fish & Game Law Enforcement Officers 2022 Annual Report

## Contents

[Colorado](#)

[Iowa](#)

[Kansas](#)

[Manitoba](#)

[Michigan](#)

[Minnesota](#)

[Missouri](#)

[Nebraska](#)

[North Dakota](#)

[Ohio](#)

[Saskatchewan](#)

[South Dakota](#)

[Texas](#)

[Wisconsin](#)

# Colorado

## Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)

Submitted by: Ty Petersburg- Asst. Chief of Law Enforcement

Like most states across the country, Colorado is continuing to work through the lasting effects of the COVID pandemic and Social Justice movement that has taken hold of the country. Colorado continues to see record numbers of hunting license applications, fishing license sales, and visitors to state wildlife areas and state parks. While staff have held up admirably well, morale of veteran officers and the hiring/retention of new officers is showing strain.

The State is recognizing the need to add to the overall numbers of officers throughout Colorado to handle the uptick of public in the woods- authorizing additional FTEs in the field for the first time in over 20 years. Colorado Parks and Wildlife is authorized to hire an additional 10-15 officers to add to the roles over the next two years- bringing the statewide number of wildlife officers to about 250.

Additionally, the CPW investigations unit is making significant changes to be better positioned to pursue today's poachers and wildlife traffickers. The unit is dedicating one investigator to full time cyber-investigations and social media. This is a first for Colorado to reallocate a person for this ever-growing criminal area. CPW is also teaming with the USFWS and several states across the country by entering into the Service's Task Force Officer Program in the coming year- focusing on state crime with a federal nexus and Lacey Act violations originating out of Colorado.

Colorado is preparing for the reintroduction of gray wolves as a result of a citizen initiative that passed the ballot in 2020. Planning across the state in conjunction with the Service, local governments, and most importantly- Colorado's citizens is happening in earnest. Complicating the project is the recent decision by the Federal government to re-list the gray wolf in Colorado. Wolves are due to hit the ground in 2023.

In 2022, legislation was introduced to move the administration of Backcountry Search and Rescue operations to Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The bill is widely expected to pass. This legislation will work hand-in-hand with the 2021 Keeping Colorado Wild Act which offers a discounted annual parks pass with vehicle registrations- pumping over \$30 million annually into CPW's operations and adding \$2.5 million into Backcountry Search and Rescue operations.

Finally- Colorado Parks and Wildlife is celebrating its 125th anniversary in 2022. Beginning as the "Department of Forestry, Game and Fish" in 1897, the department evolved to "Game and Fish", "Game, Fish and Parks" (the first merge with parks), the "Division of Wildlife", and finally- Colorado Parks and Wildlife- after the 2012 merge with Colorado State Parks.



## Iowa

### Iowa Department of Natural Resources – Law Enforcement Bureau

Submitted by: Colonel Trace Kendig

#### Training Issues

The Iowa DNR LE Bureau continues to develop and expand realistic use of force training. This includes integration of all use of force methods in a dynamic training environment. This training includes mandatory de-escalation integration as well. Firearms instructors were sent to new low light combat training and vehicle CQB training.

#### Funding and Staffing Issues

In 2021, 3 open Conservation Officer position were hired. This brought the sworn staff up to 86. There was also 1 full time investigator position added. This will be the beginning of building a full time investigative unit. A second investigator position is planned for 2022. There was also a civilian criminal intelligence analyst hired in 2021. This position supports investigators and field staff.

#### Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

The hiring of the analyst position brought about an opportunity with the Iowa Department of Public Safety. The Iowa DPS offered the DNR analyst a work station at the Iowa DPS Fusion Center. This has been a very effective partnership.

#### Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts

There were not any individual cases, but the LE Bureau continues to work hand in hand with neighboring states. There has also been ongoing work with the US Fish and

Wildlife staff.

#### New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

The hiring of the analyst position was the biggest innovation to the LE Bureau in 2021. This capability has proven to be a force multiplier for officers in the field. The capabilities of the analyst saves field staff valuable time. Also in 2021, two Life Proof patrol boats. These are purpose built LE boats. They bring better navigation enforcement capabilities than traditional boats that have been used.

#### State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement

In 2021 Iowa became a constitutional carry state. This change conflicts with the Manner of Conveyance code in Iowa. Iowa DNR staff have been working with legislators to de-conflict this issue. It is imperative that the aspects of fair chase are protected.

## Kansas

### Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks – Law Enforcement Division

Submitted by: Colonel Greg Kyser

#### Training Issues

The Law Enforcement Division graduated six new Game Warden recruits from the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Academy in 2021.

The Law Enforcement Division cancelled the 2021 annual In-Service training scheduled February due to Covid-19 concerns. On-line training was completed through the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center to achieve mandatory training hours outside of regional firearms training. Currently, training is resuming due reduction of COVID cases in the State of Kansas.

Supervisors were offered professional development through the FBI LEEDA. Leadership Institute, Command Leadership Institute and Executive Leadership Institute were offered to depending on their rank within the agency.

Professional development classes through the Kansas Leadership Center are now available to Wardens who are interested in a supervisory career path.

#### Funding and Staffing Issues

KDWP has eight openings for entry level warden positions. Testing has been changed to multiple times per year in an effort to recruit more candidates. Additionally, the hiring process for Game Warden was changed to allow applicants who have knowledge / experience with the outdoors to test. While a bachelor's degree is preferred it is no longer required.

#### Retirement Plan – Kansas Police and Fire

The agency pursued legislative approval to

convert to Kansas Police and Fire Retirement System for agency law enforcement officer of the Law Enforcement, Parks, and Public Lands Divisions. No action was taken again during the 2021 & 2022 legislative sessions. This retirement systems would allow for greater benefits including retirement at age 50 with 25 years of service. Currently the Kansas Highway Patrol, Kansas Bureau of Investigation and many other state, county and local law enforcement agencies are on this retirement plan.

- In May 2021, Secretary Brad Loveless named Greg Kyser the Colonel for the Law Enforcement Division.
- David Simonetti was selected to serve as the Major of Field Operations. Major Simonetti had previously served with the Maryland-National Capital Park Police.
- Captain Jason Sawyers was promoted Major of Support Services.
- Captain Eric Deneault has been named the State Boating Law Administrator.
- Lieutenant Jeff Sutton was promoted to the rank of Captain. He assumed command of Region 1 located in Dodge City.
- Lieutenant Jeff Cakin was promoted to the rank of Captain. He assumed command of Region 2 located in Topeka.
- Game Warden Vince Wonderlich was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant located in Kansas City.
- Game Warden Amanda Alexander was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant located in Clay Center.
- Game Warden Kelly Lazar was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant located in Dodge City.



- Game Warden Zerick Kuecker was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant. He assumed supervisory duties over the Special Investigation Unit.

### Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

We continue to have a strong program of boating safety, education, and enforcement. Our wardens participated in the NASBLA “Operation Dry Water” event during June, as they do every year. Boating under the influence enforcement remains a priority for us throughout the summer boating season.



The Law Enforcement Division became more involved with International Wildlife Crime Stoppers and won a grant to outfit an “wall of shame” education trailer in 2021. In addition, we started work on revising our Operation Game Thief Program, which will remain in process during 2022.

### Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative Enforcement Efforts

The Law Enforcement Division worked closely with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), Fort Riley Military Game Wardens and local agencies throughout the year.

- An investigation led to the conviction of John Blick Jr. of Sharon, KS for numerous violations in which 60 whitetail and mule deer were illegally taken in Barber and Harper Counties. Blick Jr. was sentenced to

14 months in prison, fined \$15,000 and ordered to pay the State of Kansas pay \$310,234.68 in restitution to KDWP for the value of the deer to the State. Blick Jr. hunting privileges have been forfeited and he will be unable to hunt for the next five-years in 45 states due to his crimes.



- Kansas Game Wardens assisted Fort Riley Game Wardens and the USFWS in successfully charging three men who illegally killed deer in an off-limits area of Fort Riley which occurred in 2018 and 2019. The investigation led to the three pleading guilty to poaching and violating the federal Lacey Act by trespassing on Fort Riley. The men from Watertown, New York were forced to pay \$12,000 in fines and \$10,500 restitution to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Lacey Act reward fund. All three had their hunting and fishing privileges suspended for three years and given three years’ probation. They also had to forfeit all trophy mounts and wildlife parts gathered during the investigation.



## New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

Supplemental funding was submitted to the Kansas legislature for acquisition of a new record management system for KDWP law enforcement which includes the LE Division, Public Lands and Parks Divisions. The current system has become antiquated and will soon be replaced by SmartCOP. This system will finally bring KDWP the ability for digital ticketing, digital boat inspections, violator databases which is more updated than the current system which is being phased out.

The Department of Justice awarded the Division a grant for new body worn cameras. This 3-year grant provides cameras, storage, and IT support for not only the LE Division but also the Parks and Public Land law enforcement sections.

NARCAN was obtained for field wardens to carry. This was obtained by a community organization, DCCCA.org, which distributes a grant to law enforcement to combat opioid overdoses.

New Motorola mobile and portable radio were ordered for the Law Enforcement Division in 2021. This project will allow Wardens better communication throughout the State of Kansas.

The LE Division has been approved to switch back to green uniforms. In 2011, a switch to tan and black uniforms was completed for the Law Enforcement, Parks, and Public Land Division. The LE Division recognized the wardens needed their own identity in which the public could recognize. The iconic green worn by Game Wardens across the county was a driving force in pushing this change with the current administration.

## State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement

The Law Enforcement Division faced a legislative challenge in 2021 with HB-2025. As written, it would have taken away State Game Wardens abilities to conduct physical or electronic surveillance on private property without first obtaining a search warrant. Colonel Kyser testified in opposition to this bill which was defeated on March 29, 2021.

SB-395 a version of HB-2025 has been re-introduced in February 2022. Colonel Kyser testified in opposition to SB-395 on February 2, 2022. SB-395 worked its way through the legislature and was ultimately combined during conference committee with HB2299. This latest version which has passed the legislature will require Kansas Wildlife & Parks law enforcement employees to obtain a court order prior to installing electronic surveillance equipment on private property without the landowner permission. Wardens will still be able to conduct compliance checks on private property.

## Cost Savings Initiatives

The Law Enforcement Division has a new contract which allows for the build of new patrol trucks. The process will allow for a quicker delivery of trucks to Wardens while saving the agency 10 to 15% on each truck build.

LE Division has entered into an agreement with Kansas Department of Transportation to utilize the KDOT fuel system. Wardens were issued fuel fobs which allows access to Kansas Department of Transportation fuel facilities 24/7 at a reduced cost to the agency.



Manitoba  
Dept. of Natural Resources & Northern Development – Resource  
Management & Protection Division  
Submitted by: Chief Conservation Officer Earl W. Simmons

### Training Issues

In the past two years, 10 new recruits were trained in-house utilizing Manitoba Conservation Officer certified trainers. The recruits additionally completed 4-6 months of on-the-job training with mentoring officers. An Investigative Interviewing course and Sig Sauer armorer course conducted for all Basic Firearms Instructors, as well as the training of four new Basic Firearms Instructors. Standard First Aid and CPR recertification and Stop the Bleed Courses delivered to all officers as well. With COVID restrictions easing, the department hopes to resume all regular re-certifications in Defensive Tactics, Emergency Vehicle Operators Course, and Firearms.

### Funding and Staffing Issues

Recruitment and retention of full time Conservation Officers continues to be a challenge. Increased vacancies attributed to resignations and retirements. The continued lack of applicants further hampers recruitment efforts.

Department currently has 79 field officers and 9 staff supporting them out of Headquarters.

### Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

Night hunting by rights-based harvester's remains under public scrutiny and night hunting patrols remain one of the top priority of the Conservation Officer Service

(COS). Night hunting regulations implemented in which, night hunting in southern Manitoba banned unless done under the authority of a permit and in a pre-approved crown land area.

### Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts

Manitoba COS worked with Missouri Wildlife Agents and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Agents on an investigation into a Manitoba Outfitter who had provided illegal outfitting to three American hunters in pursuit of white tailed deer and wolf. The hunters were interviewed by U.S. officials and officers seized two deer heads and one wolf mount in connection to the investigation. In December 2021, the Manitoba outfitter pled guilty to outfitting without a license. U.S. Fish and Wildlife agent's & Missouri Wildlife agent's investigations are ongoing.

### New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

The TraCS database program was implemented to improve data management and mobile offices were installed into the enforcement vehicle fleet to improve officer effectiveness in the field. Work is ongoing to continue to add the remaining enforcement forms into the database. The province has also moved into e-licensing system, resource users are now able to purchase a variety of hunting, fishing, forestry and park licenses and permits online. Officers currently have a mobile application that allows them to check hunting and fishing licenses.



**State, Regional and National Issues,  
Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court  
Decisions Impacting Natural Resources  
Law Enforcement**

A First Nation band in Manitoba has launched a lawsuit against the provincial government alleging that amendments to the Wildlife Act concerning night hunting infringe on its members' treaty right to hunt.

**Cost Savings Initiatives**

A \$49,985.00 grant obtained through the Criminal Property Forfeiture Fund disbursement process that enabled the department to purchase an outreach trailer. The trailer will promote the COS at schools and resource events around the province.

**Other Special Law Enforcement Issues**

A new inter provincial agency radio system has been implemented and work is still being completed to facilitate a call center for the Conservation Officer Service.

Michigan  
Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – Law Enforcement Division  
Submitted by: Chief David Shaw

Training Issues

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Law Enforcement Division (LED) has been sending LED leadership to various Staff & Command trainings for several years. During 2021, three Lieutenants successfully completed the Michigan State University School of Police Staff & Command. The training received by the Lieutenants improved their ability to work safely, think critically, and adopt problem-solving as a daily part of their job.

The LED continues to send interested supervisors to a Shield Leadership course. Four sergeants completed this basic supervisor training in 2021.

The LED sent one sergeant to the National Association of Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs Virtual Introduction to Conservation Leadership Course.

The LED encouraged interested employees at all levels to attend a Fit Leader Program training. This 32-hour course enhanced the skills needed to be a strong leader. Through this program, employees had the opportunity to build skills by focusing on the critical leadership dimensions of people, quality, and organizational growth.

The LED has expanded virtual training opportunities to all officers. Additional classes in supervision, firearms, legal issues, and medical response have been added. A benefit to developing and providing virtual learning is that an officer can engage in training at a time convenient to them, there is little to no extra costs,

and employees have a vast library of topics available to choose from.

The LED has expanded and enhanced our Employee Engagement and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs and educational opportunities for all staff.

The LED has implemented programs and improved processes to automate training records and management in an effort to increase efficiency, accuracy, and accessibility of training data.

In August 2021, the LED hosted a Boat Accident Investigation course and a Boating Under the Influence course. Both courses were made available through the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators. There were 29 participants at the Boat Accident Investigation course, including officers from LED and 8 county sheriff offices and two investigators from the New York Fire Department. 24 LED conservation officers and one deputy sheriff attended the Boating Under the Influence course.

Funding and Staffing Issues

The LED sponsored two training academies in 2021. The first academy was for prior licensed law enforcement officers. Nine new conservation officers graduated after successfully completing the 10-week training. The second academy was held at Kirtland Community College's regional police academy. 19 new conservation officers graduated from the 19-week basic police academy.

## Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

The pandemic posed significant challenges during LED's 2021 hiring cycle. When it became apparent that we would be unable to run an 11th consecutive LED sponsored recruit school ourselves, we partnered with Kirkland Community College's regional police academy. It ultimately allowed us to hire, train, and add 19 additional conservation officers to LED's ranks.

## Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative Enforcement Efforts

LED's Special Investigative Unit (SIU) continues to handle multiple requests for interviews of Michigan suspects that have committed wildlife crimes in other states. Two notable cases included interviews of a suspect who illegally killed a bear in Colorado. SIU detectives obtained a confession and seized the bear hide. In another incident SIU was contacted about a trophy deer that was suspected to have been killed while trespassing in Kansas. Interviews with the suspect revealed that the deer was in fact killed on property that the hunter did not have permission to be on. The investigation also revealed that the hunter was falsely told by the guide that it was ok to hunt on the piece of property in question. No charges are planned for the client hunter, but the deer was seized, and the guide is facing charges in Kansas.

LED's Great Lakes Enforcement Unit (GLEU) participated in joint patrols with the Michigan State Police (MSP) Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Division (CVED) from Sept 8th – 10th, 2021, in Monroe County along the I-75 northbound corridor. The patrols incorporated GLEU officers, District 9 conservation officers, MSP CVED officers, and the local National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) law enforcement officer.



The intent of this joint operation was to identify commercial motor vehicles hauling possible aquatic invasive species (AIS) into Michigan, and to inspect minnow dealers in the patrol areas. Several commercial motor vehicles hauling live and dead fish were inspected, along with multiple minnow dealers. Fish inspected on commercial motor vehicles included live buffalo, live largemouth bass, dead (eviscerated) bighead and grass carp, dead farm raised salmon, and dead silver bass. All fish that were inspected were in accordance with regulations and had the proper paperwork associated. Inspections were also conducted on a few pet supply companies, and they were in accordance with regulation as well.

Helpful intelligence, including pertinent information for future patrols, was collected by interviewing the drivers during each inspection. The patrol served as a good exercise to enhance multi-agency collaboration and to help further efforts in identifying how AIS are being transported into Michigan and by what means.

## New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

The health benefits of wearing load bearing equipment (LBE) vests versus traditional duty belts has been covered in different law enforcement articles and medical journals. In an effort to increase comfort and flexibility in how equipment is carried, conservation officers were issued load bearing vests in 2019 and given the ability to wear them during specified patrols. While the LBE fulfilled a very specific purpose (i.e., wearing chest waders or riding on a snowmobile, etc.), it became apparent that additional options needed to be pursued. The LBE has a tactical appearance and the fitment for everyday general patrol wear is somewhat prohibitive.



In an effort to improve upon the concept of reducing weight carried on the duty belt, the LED is currently evaluating two types of custom-made external vest carriers. The goal is to provide officers a more comfortable option while maintaining a professional image. The external vest carriers will accept any brand of body armor and are tailor made to each individual officer.

The transfer of duty gear from an officer's belt to their chest can have several benefits. It allows for a more evenly distributed load, which increases maneuverability and reduces the strain on an officer's hips and lower back. The external vest carriers have a more traditional uniform appearance, with chest pockets like a uniform shirt, but have MOLLE webbing across the abdomen to allow an officer to customize their gear's location based on personal preference and specific patrols. A hybrid uniform shirt is worn underneath the external carrier that maximizes fit. The shirt's sleeves and collar have the same appearance of our field uniforms but have a breathable fabric on the chest and torso to increase officer comfort.



Hopefully, officers will experience less lower back pain and higher levels of comfort when testing and evaluating the external vest carrier.

## State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement

The LED continues to face challenges to our enforcement efforts, equipment procurement, and training. Several legislative bills have been enrolled, which attempt to limit conservation officers' enforcement abilities, decriminalizes certain violations, and mandates additional training and equipment at significant costs to LED.

The pandemic in 2020 and part of 2021 restricted in-person learning for our recreational safety programs



(hunter education, snowmobile, ORV, and marine safety). In mid-2021, many of the restrictions and protocols were lifted and in-person training resumed. Several of our dedicated hunter education volunteers stepped up to the plate and offered classes and field days during the summer months when classes are typically not offered. This helped to address the backlog of persons needing a field day after taking advantage of the temporary Hunter Education Safety Certificate process offered during the pandemic restrictions

### **Cost Savings Initiatives**

The LED developed an equipment life-cycle standard that identifies what equipment needs to be replaced, and how much it will cost to replace it. A yearly review is conducted and planning for new equipment purchases is easily and efficiently calculated. In addition, an LED approve list of standard equipment was developed that allows for bulk purchases of equipment at a large cost

and time savings.

The LED also researches new technology and equipment to purchase that will assist officers to work safer and more efficiently. E-Citation (electronic tickets), in-car printers, mobile connectivity upgrades, and load bearing vests are just a few of the examples within the past year that has increased effectiveness and efficiency.

Michigan joined with over 20 other states with implementing Kalkomey Enterprises, LLC's Event Manager and Volunteer Manager system. In August the LED implemented a new online event registration and tracking system for all recreational safety education programs. It allows for students to search and register for recreational safety classes online as well as for instructors to submit class records online. The system allows staff to monitor a class or event from the time it is posted on the website until the class is submitted for completion approval. Instructor efforts are also tracked in this system. Not only is the new system paperless, but it will also save time and expedite the certification process for students.

Minnesota  
Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – Law Enforcement Division  
Submitted by: Col. Rodmen Smith

**Training Issues**

Our primary new training has been in the area of body worn cameras and Tasers. Specific to body worn cameras, we instituted a policy and held trainings on their use. The policy is designed to be continuously improved as we learn more about how body worn cameras fit into the unique nature of our work (working in extreme cold outside for extended periods of time, for example).

**Funding and Staffing Issues**

Conservation officers spent a large amount of time during 2021 on work outside of our normal mission – primarily in response to potential civil unrest surrounding construction of the Line 3 pipeline through northern Minnesota. This required training we wouldn't otherwise have completed and equipment we wouldn't otherwise have needed. However, we were able to get reimbursement for those items through an escrow account created when the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission approved the route permit for the pipeline. In terms of staffing, in 2021 we hired 12 people to take part in our CO Prep program, which is the largest number to date.

**Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends**

One of the main trends in Minnesota has been an increase in civil unrest. Conservation officers have been deployed in those instances to work alongside our allied law enforcement agencies on a mission that's far outside our normal game and fish-related work. In addition, chronic

wasting disease continues to be found in deer in Minnesota (at captive facilities and in the wild), which requires more involvement from conservation officers. Finally, there have been recent law changes revolving around driving while intoxicated (bringing penalties for impaired operation of boats and recreational vehicles in line with those for impaired operation of motor vehicles), and we are devoting increasing amounts of time to that type of enforcement as the number of people using our trails and waterways rises.

**Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts**

The Minnesota Legislature last year provided the DNR and the Minnesota Board of Animal Health with co-authority over the state's captive deer farms in an effort to combat the spread of chronic wasting disease. The two agencies spent much of 2021 conducting joint inspections of deer farms and working on a report to the Legislature that outlines current deer farm management and what it might look like in the future.

**New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement**

All conservation officers in Minnesota now wear body worn cameras. Social media continues to be an avenue for making cases, and it is becoming more routine for officers to follow up on complaints received as a result of social media. Finally, we now have two conservation officers who have been trained in electronic forensics.

**State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement**

In light of some of the situations involving law

enforcement in Minnesota – and the resulting court decisions – law enforcement has been under the microscope even more by the media, members of the public and the state Legislature.

### **Cost Savings Initiatives**

We remain committed to fiscal responsibility, but with everything else going on in Minnesota in the past year finding cost savings has not been a priority.

### **Other Special Law Enforcement Issues**

We continue to work on tribal issues and the way state regulations intersect with the treaty rights afforded Native American hunters and anglers. In 2021, Minnesota offered an early teal season, and several Bands closed the wild rice lakes on their reservations to overwater hunting during the early teal and early Canada goose seasons, citing safety concerns.

# Missouri

## Department of Conservation – Protection Branch

### Submitted by: Chief Randy Doman

#### Training Issues

##### Conservation Agent Training Academy

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) Agent Training Academy started on March 16, 2022. The six-month (approximately 1200 hour) academy consists of 19 Agent Trainees (13 males and 6 females) with graduation set for early October. With 20 current vacancies, we will be seeking to hold Training Academies in three consecutive years with classes in 2021, 2022, and 2023. The Academy is Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) certified and consists of training in legal studies (constitutional law, conservation law, etc.), criminal investigations, defensive tactics, emergency vehicle operations, boating operations, firearms training, first aid/responder, CPR, land management practices, trapping, hunting incident investigations, fish kills, communications, conducting educational programs, and fish, forest, and wildlife management.

As MDC worked through COVID-19 adjustments to our training procedures, we are now returning to a more routine in-service training schedule. Protection Branch conducts defensive tactics training, firearms training, and first responder/medical training on a regular basis. We pride ourselves on conducting more training than what is mandated by the Missouri POST Commission. With numerous retirements on the horizon, we have also made a concerted effort to backfill certified instructors for a variety of subjects. The Protection Branch is proactively allowing younger, qualified field agents to take the lead in areas they are passionate about and have the knowledge, temperament, and expertise to effectively train. Traditionally,

these instructor roles have been reserved for supervisor positions, whether they have an interest in training or not. With the appropriate supervision, there are many benefits to certifying less seasoned instructors, including new perspectives, new enthusiasm, and leadership development for the future leadership pipeline.



*Missouri Conservation Agent Training Academy - Class of 2022*

#### Funding and Staffing Issues

##### Funding

The Fiscal Year operating budget for MDC represents less than one percent of the total state budget and receives no state general revenue. The primary sources of revenue are the one-eighth of one percent Conservation Sales Tax at about \$133 million, permit sales at about \$41 million, and federal reimbursements at about \$31 million. Total receipts for FY 2021 were \$218.5 million.

MDC has a priority-based budgeting program specifically tied to the Department's Strategic Plan: Design for the Future. This plan identifies three goals to direct the efforts associated with specific FY22-23 Department priorities.

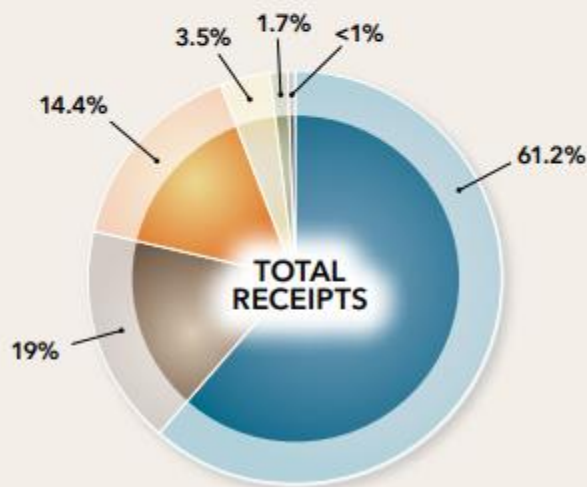
- MDC Takes Care of Nature
- MDC Connects People with Nature
- MDC Maintains Public Trust



## MDC Receipts

MDC gets the majority of its funding through the **conservation sales tax**. For every \$8 spent on taxable items, one penny goes to conservation.

Conservation Sales Tax.....	\$133,764,427
Permit Sales.....	\$41,501,740
Federal Reimbursements.....	\$31,356,723
Sales and Rentals.....	\$7,715,213
Interest.....	\$3,660,830
Other Sources.....	\$501,707



## MDC Disbursements

Funds are distributed throughout MDC to accomplish the **state's top conservation priorities**.

Habitat Management .....	\$45,151,049
Fish & Wildlife Management.....	\$41,110,406
Recreation Management .....	\$21,142,189
Education & Communication .....	\$22,805,857
Conservation Business Services.....	\$31,550,743
Staff Development & Benefits.....	\$6,749,588
Capital Improvements .....	\$17,479,400
Land Conservation & Partnerships .....	\$3,074,615
County Assistance Payments .....	\$1,668,919

### Staffing and Employment Diversity

Like most agencies, staffing continues to be an area of concern. Around 25% of our current staff will be eligible to retire within the next four years. Protection Branch has 181 full-time employees, which is currently down 20 positions due to retirements, resignations, and other separations from service. MDC and Protection continue our focus on recruiting and retaining staff who

more closely represent the demographics of Missouri. Protection led these efforts by creating a Conservation Agent Preparatory/Internship program. The internship is designed to help recruit and develop well qualified, non-traditional candidates who may not have the practical experience and life opportunities to excel in the interview and application process. The 6-month internship includes ride-alongs, training, experience with educational programs, mentorship, and other real-world practical experience with conservation agents to provide opportunities that some candidates may not be exposed to otherwise. Interns were able to draw from these experiences during the application and interview process for the 2022 Conservation Agent Training Academy. Focused recruitment efforts have had a measurable effect thus far. The 2022 academy class more closely represents the statewide demographics of Missouri, with three of those candidates coming from the Protection Internship program.

### MDC Reorganization

MDC's reorganization took effect July 1, 2020, and since that time, all branches are updating governance processes, and clarifying roles and responsibilities across the agency. The new Strategic and Operational Planning process includes developing regional work plans and individual goals and objectives tied to the MDC Strategic Plan. Other focus areas include new positions dedicated to conservation relevancy, recreational use, planning, citizen engagement, hunter and angler recruitment, wetland/aquatic systems, inclusion and diversity, and customer experience.

### Conservation Commission

In July of 2021, The Missouri Conservation Commission and the Missouri Department of Conservation welcomed Margaret "Margy" F. Eckelkamp of Washington, MO, as the newest member of the four-person Conservation Commission. Commissioner Eckelkamp was appointed by Missouri Governor Mike Parson July 30, 2021, to serve a six-year term expiring June 30, 2027. The Missouri Conservation Commission consists of four members appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. Commissioners serve six-year terms with no salary or other compensation with

not more than two allowed from the same political party. Their responsibilities include appointing the MDC director, serving as MDC policy makers, approving regulations of the Wildlife Code of Missouri, strategic planning, and budget development and major expenditure decisions.



*Commissioner Eckelkamp*

Throughout 2021 and the beginning of 2022, the Conservation Commission approved several improvements to the total compensation package received by MDC employees. Individual increases were based off the following: market-based salary adjustments, years of service with MDC, performance pay based on set performance measures, increased insurance premium contribution by the commission, and other scheduled pay adjustments. MDC employees enjoyed anywhere from an 8% - 15% increase in salary and “take home” pay. These improvements have directly impacted the ability to recruit and retain high performing candidates and employees and bodes well for future efforts in those areas as well.



*FMDC's newest commissioner, Margy Eckelkamp provides MDC's newest K-9, Waylon his Missouri commission.*

## Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

### Cross Jurisdictional Law Enforcement

A growing trend nationally and within Missouri is the renewed interest in commercial trade and trafficking of native wildlife and wildlife parts. This is also an international issue. For years, we have been combatting the illegal trafficking and commercialization of paddlefish roe and have seen great success in those efforts. Additionally, Missouri's illegal trafficking also includes the illegal transportation of captive cervids. This includes cervids already in Missouri and those being imported from out of state. To combat the spread of diseases like CWD, we are actively working with the captive cervid industry to increase communication, develop effective regulations, and increase compliance with those regulations. We are also seeing additional demand for Missouri's native turtles and snakes in both the international pet trade and food markets.

MDC created a Commercial Wildlife Unit in 2014 to help ensure firm, fair, and consistent enforcement of confined wildlife regulations statewide, and to work with our Special Investigations Unit as necessary to address unlawful trafficking issues. We are also working with our newly commissioned K-9 unit to assist in future trafficking investigations as well. Protection continues our work with Science Branch and other partners to take a proactive approach to unlawful trafficking through training, education, and enforcement efforts. To help track movement of wildlife, the Commercial Wildlife Unit also developed the Confined Wildlife Information System (CWIS), a web-based information system utilized by commercial and confined wildlife permit holders. This allows the unit to monitor real-time inventory and movement of confined/commercial wildlife rather than relying on hard copy inventory sheets that were previously used.

### Timber Theft

Timber theft continued to be an issue in Missouri in 2021 and into 2022. Several timber theft incidents occurred across the state. The most recent occurred during the drafting of this report - April 21, 2022, on Settles Ford Conservation Area in the Kansas City Region. One stolen log was discovered on a nearby



trailer. The trailer was abandoned and registered to a deceased individual. Agents also found several cut logs and trees on property of neighboring landowners. At the time of this report, conservation agents have a vehicle description to work from and are checking with local sawmills to follow up. This is just one of many examples in Missouri. Later this year Missouri will be hosting the Mid-State Timber Enforcement Conference in conjunction with U.S. Fish and Wildlife service to help discuss and combat some of these issues in Missouri and surrounding states.



*Cut tree, log, and trailer from the Settles Ford Timber Theft April 21, 2022*

kids caught practicing responsible nature behavior, such as wearing their life jacket, fishing, or hunting with their family, or for keeping nature clean. The citation can be turned in to any participating Sonic Drive-In to claim a free ice cream cone for the responsible outdoor enthusiast.

Conservation agents have a booklet of citations and are on the lookout for young adventurers enjoying time in nature. The program not only encourages kids to enjoy the outdoors responsibly, but also helps conservation agents connect with the community and build lasting relationships. Since the program was implemented in July of 2021 a total of 1,886 Sonic Citations have been issued.



*Conservation Agent with recipients of ice cream citations*

## Community Policing

The Protection Branch has a rich history of community policing efforts and takes pride in being known for those efforts. In July of 2021, we implemented one of our newest initiatives with the “Sonic Citation Program.”

This partnership with Sonic Drive-In rewards Missouri youth for good outdoor behavior. Conservation agents are now issuing ice cream “citations” for

Missouri Department of Conservation  
**OFFICIAL CITATION**  
for being a RESPONSIBLE OUTDOOR ENTHUSIAST

Reason for citation:

- ☐ Wearing your life jacket
- ☐ Fishing or hunting with your favorite relative
- ☐ Keeping our great outdoors clean
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Conservation Agent: \_\_\_\_\_  
Badge #: \_\_\_\_\_

**ENJOY A FREE VANILLA CONE**  
Redeemable at your local Missouri SONIC DRIVE-IN.

Missouri Department of Conservation thanks you for respecting the great outdoors.

**SONIC**

Offer good for one free Vanilla Cone. May not be used with any other offers and is not valid with delivery or Order Ahead. Valid at participating Missouri SONIC Drive-In locations. TM & © 2022, American's Drive-In Brand Properties, LLC

## Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts

MDC is part of a productive network of federal, state, and private agencies (i.e., Missouri Department of Agriculture, US Department of Agriculture, Missouri Farm Bureau, United States Army (Fort Leonard Wood), Missouri Corn Growers Association, National Wild Turkey Federation, Missouri Agribusiness Association, and countless others) called the Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership.

The Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership is comprised of over 15 federal and state agencies, and ag and conservation NGOs collaborating under the common goal of eliminating feral hogs from public and private lands throughout Missouri. During 2021, the Partnership removed 9,857 hogs from the landscape, assisted 1,308 landowners, and scouted 3,286,133 acres. Over the last two years the

partnership has removed over 21,000 feral hogs off Missouri's landscape.

In FY 21, MDC hired six new full-time feral hog trappers. The department was also successful in securing federal Farm Bill grant funding for feral hog elimination. In May 2021, agreements were finalized that will provide MDC \$1.5 million from these grants for the next three years. Funds will be used to hire four feral hog outreach specialists in partnership with University of Missouri Extension. These specialists will develop additional landowner relationships, publish a quarterly landowner newsletter, communicate with county commissions, and collect damage information. Funding will also be used to purchase equipment for feral hog elimination efforts and to purchase equipment to aid landowners in repairing feral hog damage. In 2021, the General Assembly passed, and Governor Parson signed into law House Bill 369. This bill strengthens the penalties for possessing and releasing feral hogs in Missouri and clarifies the definition of feral hogs.

Conservation Agents remain actively involved in trapping efforts on private and public property as well as law enforcement patrols on U.S. Forest Service land and Missouri Conservation Areas throughout southern Missouri.

Missouri's Special Investigations Unit (SIU) continues to aid in interagency investigations when appropriate and remains active as a contributing member of the multi-state Aquatic Resources Task Force comprised of their counterpart investigators from Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Tennessee.

### [New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement](#)

#### [Technology](#)

The Protection Branch has undergone

several equipment and technology improvements over the last year. We began outfitting patrol vehicles with mobile workstations and CradlePoint Wi-Fi routers to maximize connectivity throughout the state. Conservation agents can now create incident reports, arrest reports, and document daily activity throughout their districts in real time. This allows our agents the ability to complete all their paperwork and reports while in their vehicle at whatever location they see fit, often while parked at a boat ramp or waiting on a road-hunter. This gives conservation agents the ability to work as efficiently as possible and allows them to prioritize their time at home with their families, instead of working on reports. We have found that the CradlePoint routers have much better connectivity than department issued cell phones and provide internet connection in areas of the state where cell phone service is unheard of.

#### [Body Cameras](#)

The Protection Branch has completed the testing and purchase process for the Axon Body 3 body worn camera. The cameras are scheduled for delivery in June of this year. We underwent an extensive testing process with a handful of conservation agents around the state and landed on the Axon Body 3 as the best fit for our needs. With an ever-changing landscape in law enforcement, and efforts to be more transparent, professional, and maintain the trust of Missouri citizens, Protection leadership began the process of testing and selection for implementation this fall. We were also looking for a platform compatible with our in-car CradlePoint systems, that would not create additional infrastructure and data storage burdens to our IT staff. This allows us to be more effective and efficient, providing the ability to upload electronic evidence to the online management system directly from the vehicle, and without the need of a docking station.

#### [Peer Defense](#)

Conservation agents respond to and deal with a variety of critical incidents on a regular basis including body recoveries, suicides, deadly force assaults, drownings, fatal crashes, hunting incidents and more. Protection Branch leadership recognized

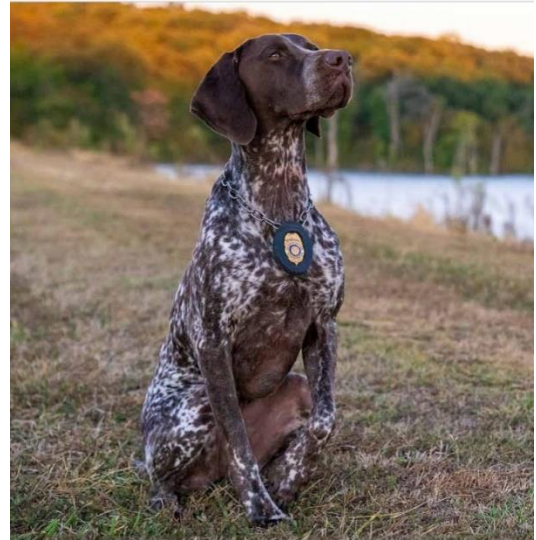


that these incidents often have a physical, mental, and emotional toll on the responding agents. Along with critical incidents, Protection Branch also realizes that there are plenty of stressors from the every-day life of being a resource law enforcement officer. These stressors and incidents are sometimes best handled at a peer-to-peer level. Protection Branch now has seven conservation agents across the state trained as certified peer counselors to help when issues arise. The program is still young but has been well received by staff thus far. For critical incidents requiring a more focused approach, MDC has contracted with a psychologist that specializes in law enforcement critical incidents, and actively promotes the Departments Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Protection is dedicated to ensuring our conservation agents have all the resources they need to maintain a healthy frame of mind.

#### K-9 Unit

Protection Branch also launched its new K-9 unit in the summer of 2021. The new unit, consisting of five (5) dogs and their conservation agent-handlers, are stationed around the state, and used as necessary throughout Missouri. The capabilities of MDC canines are extensive in conservation related work, but common uses include tracking, evidence recovery, search and rescue, wildlife detection, and public outreach programs. Another rapidly growing use of canines is in the field of endangered and invasive species. The launch of the MDC canine unit is supported through a partnership with both Diamond Pet Foods and Purina, which sponsored the canine team and is providing dog food. In the future, Protection Branch would like to extend the K-9 unit to have at least one canine in all eight regions. The K-9 unit has proved to be an invaluable asset not only in enforcement efforts of evidence recovery, tracking, wildlife detection and search and

rescue, but in public outreach as well. Since start of the K-9 unit in June 2021, they have conducted over 180 public programs and reached over 10,000 program participants.



*K-9 Waylon, Handler: CPL Caleb Pryor*



*From Top Left: K-9 Astro, Handler: CPL Susan Swem, K-9 Korra, Handler: CPL Justin Pyburn, K-9 Tex, Handler: CPL Alan Lamb, K-9 Penny, Handler: CPL Don Clever*

## State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement

Private property rights continue to be a point of emphasis for the General Assembly in Missouri. During the 2021 legislative session, legislation was introduced to remove the authority of conservation agents to enter private property without landowner consent or a search warrant. The driving force behind the legislation appeared to be concerns about the placement of game cameras on private property to monitor hunting activities.

The introduced legislation was ultimately modified to prohibit all law enforcement officers from placing unmanned surveillance cameras on private property without landowner consent, a search warrant, or permission from the agency's chief law enforcement officer to conduct surveillance of public locations adjacent to the private property the camera is placed on. The law became effective in August of 2021 and has resulted in little or no impact on the enforcement efforts of conservation agents.

Despite the law passing last year, the issue remains on the minds of elected officials. Legislation is currently being considered in the current legislative session to remove the chief law enforcement officer exception from the newly enacted statute.

### Cost Savings Initiatives

The Protection Branch is constantly looking for and implementing ways to make our conservation agent's time on duty as effective and efficient as possible. As mentioned previously, over the last year we have installed CradlePoint Wi-Fi routers and developed a system for e-filing tickets to our prosecuting attorneys. We also maintain online applications for Incident reporting, arrest reporting, and daily

accomplishment reporting. Most of these applications and reports can be started from department issued cell phones and completed in the patrol vehicle through CradlePoint connectivity. This allows conservation agents the opportunity to complete their reports without ever having to step foot into an office, and the ability to be as efficient with their time as possible.

The Protection Branch continues to utilize a very active and successful Protection Volunteer Program consisting of approximately 100 volunteers spread across the state. In 2021, they contributed around 3,000 hours of volunteer work to MDC. These volunteers assist Conservation Agents and other MDC staff with projects including enforcement patrols, outreach and education programs, training scenarios and wildlife surveys. The volunteer program has also proven to be a valuable recruitment tool.

### Other Special Law Enforcement Issues

#### Inaugural Bear Season

Missouri hunters harvested 12 black bears during the state's inaugural bear-hunting season, which ran October 18–27, 2021. More than 6,330 hunters applied for 400 permits for the season with the maximum total harvest for the season being 40 bears. Missouri's first bear season was a highly regulated season and new to many Missouri hunters. With the conservative approach MDC took to developing bear season regulations, harvesting 12 bears with the odds against them is truly considered a success.

Missouri's highly regulated season included a maximum harvest of 40 bears statewide, which is around 5% of the total bear population. The use of bait and dogs is prohibited, and the season is restricted to a 10-day period.

Bear hunting in Missouri is limited to Missouri residents and restricted to three (3) designated areas of southern Missouri called Bear Management Zones (BMZ). Each permit issued is for a specific BMZ and hunting is limited to public

or private property within the BMZ. Permit and harvest quotas for the 2021 bear season were:

- BMZ 1: Permit quota of 200 with a harvest quota of 20 bears.
- BMZ 2: Permit quota of 150 with a harvest quota of 15 bears.
- BMZ 3: Permit quota of 50 with a harvest quota of 5 bears.

The more than 6,330 hunters who applied during May to hunt a specific BMZ paid a \$10 application fee. The 400 hunters selected for permits through a random drawing of all applicants then paid a permit fee of \$25.

Among those selected for permits, Kelsie Wikoff (pictured) of Hume, harvested a 268-pound boar (male bear) in Zone 1. She said she had spent 48 hours in a tree stand over three days since the season began Oct. 18 and harvested the bear Oct. 21.

According to the Wildlife Code of Missouri, the harvest limit is one (1) bear per permit. Only lone black bears may be taken. Hunters may not take bears that are known to be in the presence of others bears, including female black bears with cubs. Bears may not be disturbed, pushed, harassed, or taken from a den. Bear hunters must wear hunter orange, make reasonable efforts to retrieve shot bears, and may not leave or abandon commonly edible portions.

Black bears were historically abundant throughout the forested areas of Missouri prior to European settlement but were nearly eliminated by unregulated killing in the late 1800s, as well as from habitat loss when Ozark forests were logged. Over the last 50 years, bear numbers and range in Missouri have grown to around 800 black

bears with most found south of the Missouri River and primarily south of Interstate 44. Missouri bear range is expanding. Bear numbers in Missouri are increasing each year by approximately 9% and are expected to double in less than 10 years. As bear numbers continue to increase, MDC will use a highly regulated hunting season as an essential part of population management. MDC's 2020-2030 Black Bear Management Plan will guide bear management in Missouri for the next decade.

### Operation Game Thief

Operation Game Thief (OGT) is a hotline sponsored by MDC and the Conservation Federation of Missouri. In 2021, Missouri's OGT program received 959 violation reports, which resulted in 138 arrests and \$4,550 in rewards paid in resulting from those arrests. The OGT Exhibit trailer was used several times during 2021 for public outreach and education of Missouri's conservation regulations and OGT program. The Protection Branch actively promotes the OGT program through a variety of media outlets, including our department's social media page. These efforts resulted in many quality cases being made in 2021.

### Conservation Agents

The backbone of Protection Branch is our conservation agents. In Missouri we maintain one or two agents per county to officially represent the Department. Agents make thousands of citizen contacts, thousands of great cases, and demonstrate excellent examples of community policing every day. It is impossible to quantify the true effect conservation agents have on their communities and the difference they make in protecting Missouri's fish, forests, and wildlife; however, we have put some measures in place to help us get a glimpse of their impact.

- **2021 Law Enforcement Contacts** .....187,248
- **2021 Non-LE Contacts**.....180,648
- **2021 Resource Violations**.....17,891
- **2021 Non-Resource Violations**.....6,475
- **FY21 Public Programs**.....5,872
- **FY21 Public Program Participants**.....45,408





*MDC agents assist with an adult pheasant hunt at Busch Conservation Area*

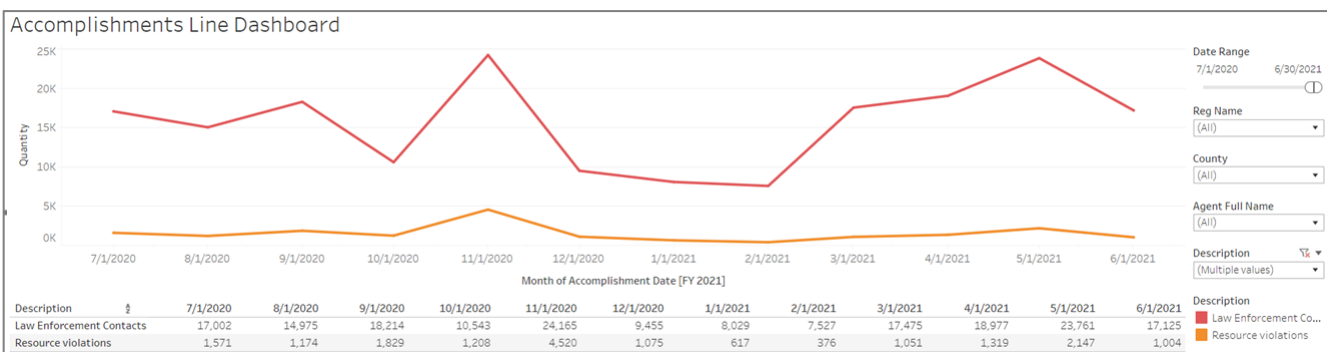
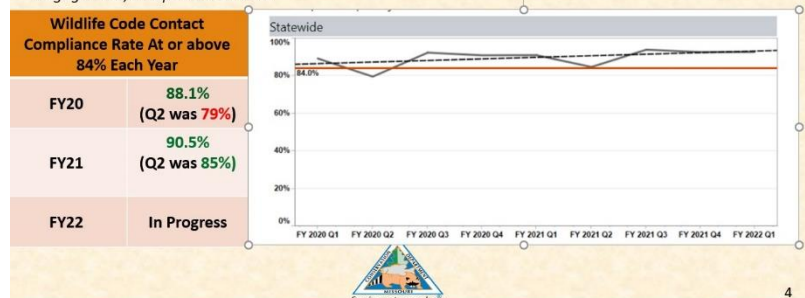
In Missouri, our focus is on increasing voluntary compliance with the Wildlife Code, and we have put a renewed emphasis on providing a strong law enforcement presence while using all the tools in our tool belt to address violations; sometimes that involves a citation, sometimes a warning, and other times it is just an opportunity for education. We recently developed a dashboard to help determine resource contact compliance rates and conviction rates across the state. This helps us analyze data to drive decision-making and help measure our efforts at citizen engagement, education, and community policing. They also help ensure we are proactively working to maintain good relationships with prosecutors and judges and are turning in good cases (with good reports). The short of it -- low violation rates correlate to people understanding the rules and regulations and having little problem following them. High conviction rates mean good relationships with the courts, citizen support for conservation, and helps ensure that quality cases are being filed and adjudicated. We have also added a new

measure, based on a quarterly conservation monitor survey, which measures public perception towards Protection's community policing efforts. Specifically, a survey question which asks the level of agreement with the question, "Is MDC doing a good job enforcing fish and wildlife laws?" Together, these three measures help drive decision-making and help quantify our community policing efforts towards increasing voluntary compliance with the Wildlife Code of Missouri (see graph at bottom of page).

In Fiscal Year 2021 the statewide resource contact compliance rate was at 90.5%, meaning that for every 100 law enforcement contacts made, there were an average of 10 violations discovered.

#### Protection Branch Management Performance Measures

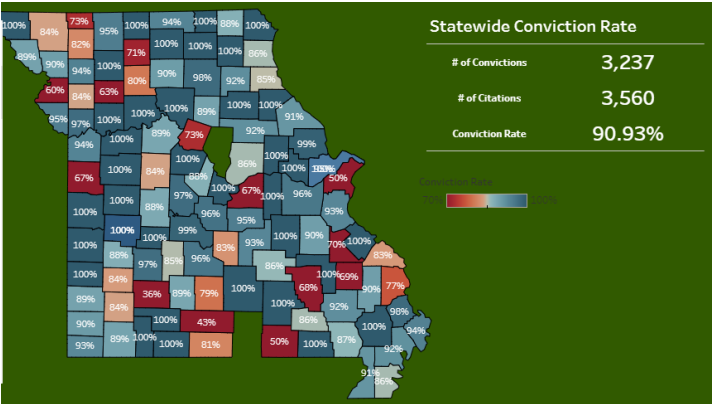
- Outcome Strategy: 1.2.3 - Increase voluntary compliance with the Wildlife Code of Missouri through a community policing approach to resource law enforcement, science-based regulation development, public engagement, and public outreach



*Above: dashboard to compare the number of law enforcement contacts to the number of resource violations encountered per month*



Equally as important is our statewide conviction rate. Below is the map that shows a statewide conviction rate of over 90%. The map breaks the numbers down by county to show where we are doing well and the counties that need additional focus between local agents, prosecutors, and judges.



SOURCE: MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION ANNUAL REVIEW, MISSOURI CONSERVATIONIST  
SOURCE: MISSOURI FERAL HOG REPORT 2021  
SOURCE: MDC NEWS RELEASE: MISSOURI HUNTERS TOOK 12 BLACK BEARS DURING FIRST SEASON, OCTOBER 28, 2021  
SOURCE: MDC PROTECTION BRANCH, TABLEAU DASHBOARD

Nebraska  
Game & Parks Commission – Law Enforcement  
Submitted by: Craig Stover

**Training Issues**

Newly hired employees are assigned a senior officer who serves as a mentor throughout their training. Mentors are assigned based on similar interests and backgrounds.

Recent legislation expanded mandatory annual training for all certified officers from 20 hours to thirty-two hours beginning in January of 2023. Minimum mandatory annual training topics include de-escalation, mental health, substance abuse, anti-bias and implicit bias training, firearms, officer wellness, legal update to include legislative changes along with First and Fourth Amendment issues and lastly vehicular pursuits.

We would recommend Caliber Press presenters on de-escalation, use of force and implicit bias as well as Breach Point (Officer wellness).

Purchased an online training option through Police One. In addition to their ‘canned’ online training we periodically role out customized training via this interface.

**Funding and Staffing Issues**

Currently we are in the final stages of adding a pay classification for Sergeant positions to be distributed across the State (10 positions). During the last bargaining session, we successfully convinced both sides of the table to implement a ‘lead worker’ position that would serve in an ‘at-will’ capacity for minimal additional pay. Successful implementation of this program helped set the stage for adding Sergeant positions to the Division.

We are planning to backfill the positions previously held by these newly promoted Sergeants by adding ten (10) new field Conservation Officers beginning in July of 2023 all of which is pending sufficient funding in the next legislative session. First year costs will be roughly 1.6 million and 870k in subsequent years.

Five new CO positions and one full-time investigator position were added in July of 2021 as part of a deficit request through our legislature. While we have recently been able to grow the number of Conservation Officers, we still lag far behind our surrounding states with a total of 68 enforcement positions. Recent support to add personnel has taken years of promotion with our Commission who has recently been very supportive of our expansion.

When it comes to filling vacancies, the number of qualified applicants who can pass a background investigation is rapidly dwindling. Many enforcement agencies across the State have increased their wages and are offering hiring bonuses. In response we have overhauled candidate selection and have gone to a perpetual application process. The jury is still out on our recommended salary and retirement changes.

**Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends**

Two individuals are still awaiting trial in federal court from the Hidden Hills Outfitter case.

Federal prosecution of another significant case involving a ‘frequent flyer’ guide has yet to be initiated. We anticipate movement on this case now that the USFWS Special Agent has returned from a 1+ year deployment with the National Guard.

Unchanged for the past several years, cases generated from face-book posts continue to escalate beyond our ability to keep up. Follow up on violations are prioritized due to the volume.

As part of the quasi-new state-wide radio system, our Officers find themselves being dispatched more frequently by our State Patrol to handle issues outside of the traditional fish and game arena (traffic accidents, domestic assaults, medical emergencies, etc.)

Virtually all citations are now issued electronically with vehicles being equipped with computers, printers, and tracking.

### **Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts**

In 2017 Nebraska became the 47th State to become a member of the Wildlife Violator Compact.

State generated Lacey Act cases remains a priority as does cooperation and information exchange with other States.

### **New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement**

Budgetarily, we have been able to keep up with purchases of the latest and greatest side scan sonar. Monies and bi-annual training time have been well spent as this tool has dramatically reduced victim recovery time and has been used to recover everything from stolen vehicles and ATVs to aiding in solving cold case files.

We upgraded to a high-tech drone which is primarily utilized for search and rescue and some wildlife related issues. Caution has been used when considering deployment in routine enforcement issues.

We also upgraded the quality of our remote surveillance cameras but continue to build our own systems. The setup and use of remote live camera video feeds continues to grow. We are fortunate to have some very talented individuals when it comes to building and deploying these systems.

Ballistic shell carriers are offered to all Officers who want them. These carriers encourage the use of protective vests and help to distribute the load for those who have back issues.

By the time this is published, we would have transitioned from 40 caliber to 9mm Glock handguns.

### **State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement**

Legislation expanding issuance of limited permits to landowners to include a special landowner deer season.

Legislative sessions have been more 'involved' in providing input on how the agency should handle wildlife damage, population numbers, and elk. Not all the input has been constructive. It appears that this fad may be losing some steam with the retirement of our previous Director in November of last year.

### **Cost Savings Initiatives**

Remote cameras have increased the prosecution and reduced staff surveillance time significantly.

As mentioned, monies spent on the training and purchase of high-tech sonar has dramatically reduced staff time during a recovery.

Adding Sergeant positions at a lower pay grade saves monies when compared to adding Lieutenants to maintain a reasonable span of control.

### **Other Special Law Enforcement Issues**

The agency is in the process of converting their electronic permitting system over to a private vendor (Tera Technology Group).

Nebraska CO's hold full police powers throughout the State and serve to enforce not only fish and game but park laws and all state statutes.

Limitations have been placed on the number of personnel from any one agency that can attend our State Policy Academy at one time (2). This limitation has forced us to delay some hires or, hire personnel who are already certified peace officers.

State law enforcement certification standards have changed for those officers' seeking employment from other States. This reduced training (4 weeks) is only being offered twice a year.



North Dakota  
Game & Fish Department – Law Enforcement  
Submitted by: Scott Winkelman

### Training Issues

We have resumed a more conventional training schedule, with more in person and less virtual/online training. We have increased our vehicle operations training to include both emergency vehicle operations and daily vehicle operations. The daily operations course includes backing, parking, passing, etc. All officers are being trained on new AED devices that were procured through a grant received by the Department of Health. Ammunition availability is currently limiting some of our weapons training.

### Funding and Staffing Issues

We continue to see a dramatic decrease in the number of applicants for open positions. We changed our minimum qualifications from a four-year degree to either four year degree or a two year degree with two years of work experience in either wildlife/fisheries or law enforcement. This matches the qualifications for most other LE agencies in the state, including the Highway Patrol. This has increased our number of applicants. Funding continues to be strong, but the increase in our motor vehicle expenses (fuel) will need to be addressed.

### Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

The effort to restrict law enforcement entry onto private property under the Open Fields doctrine has not gone away. We have successfully defeated legislation regarding this issue the last two legislative sessions but anticipate that it will come up again in 2023.

### Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts

Numerous investigations have been conducted involving officers from other states and have been quite successful. Our cooperative partnerships with local agencies for boat safety patrols continue to work well.

### New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

The state is in the process of transitioning to a new radio system. We are currently installing new dual band radios that are compatible with the new system in all our vehicles and boats. The new system will allow clear communication with all agencies across the state.

### State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement

We did not have a legislative session in 2022. We are currently reviewing potential legislation for 2023 and are most concerned right now with the continued push to end the Open Fields doctrine.

### Cost Savings Initiatives

Grants for new AED's and boat safety continue to be used for cost savings for our division.

### Other Special Law Enforcement Issues

Our Game Wardens have dramatically increased the number of community outreach events that have been participating in, along with weekly blogs and social media posts. Wardens have been active in Halloween trunk or treats, law enforcement Easter egg hunts, first responder Christmas toy and food drives, sports shows, and the State Fair. The

enforcement division blogs, and social media posts are very popular and consistently receive high view numbers, comments, and likes.

# Ohio

## Ohio Department of Natural Resources – Division of Wildlife

Submitted by: Ken Fitz

### Training Issues

COVID-19 continued to impact training over the last year. Training had to be adjusted or canceled to protect officers from exposure and the MILO Range Simulator was used to reduce the number of officers gathered in one location.

The Ohio Division of Wildlife developed in-house training on chemical-assisted suicides and their risk to responding officers. After awareness training, all officers were exposed to a mock chemical-assisted suicide during scenario training.

De-escalation and duty-to-intervene have been incorporated into the scenario and force-on-force training. The MILO Range Simulator (situational/reaction training) is being used for the second year with scenarios specific to wildlife officers' situations.

Department-level policies and procedures were migrated to Lexipol. Following the Lexipol framework, officers are required to complete a series of daily training bulletins each month. Training bulletins use short scenarios to quiz the officers' knowledge of policy and procedure. Ohio Division of Wildlife policies, procedures, and operational directives were reviewed and reformatted for ease of understanding and compliance.

### Funding and Staffing Issues

The Ohio Division of Wildlife has shifted from structured interviews that test technical knowledge to behavior and judgment-based interviews for law

enforcement supervisory and leadership positions. While technical skills can be taught, decision-making and problem-solving can be harder to train. Interview panels are more diverse and incorporate different backgrounds and perspectives that determine hiring preferences.

Female officers formed a working group, the Women of Wildlife, that provides recommendations to management to be more attuned to a diverse workforce. These ideas have led to changes in messaging and equipment.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a surge in outdoor recreation, and license sales followed this nationwide trend. During the past year, license sales have returned to pre-pandemic levels.

### Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

"Community Policing" is at the heart of our enforcement and outreach strategies. In addition to working closely with constituent groups, the Ohio Division of Wildlife tasked a working group to review regulations. The goal of the working group was to identify laws that were barriers to participation and visitation. We are currently reviewing and implementing their recommendations.

The use of thermal optics and new technologies in hunting, including new crossbow configurations have caused us to look at our rules and see if there are areas that should be changed to allow these technologies or limit them.

Due to recent court cases in other states, direction was implemented regarding the use of trail cameras on private property. Although rarely done in Ohio, Officers may not put a trail camera on private property without the permission of the landowner or a search warrant.

Recent issues with invasive species have caused us to look at the pet trade. There is a thriving trade in aquatic invasive species online, with transactions taking place across jurisdictional lines. There is also a strong trend toward the commercialization of other wild animals online, particularly reptiles.

### Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts

The Ohio Division of Wildlife participates in several cross-jurisdictional teams, including regional environmental crimes task force groups, NACLEC, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission Law Enforcement Committee, and the 13-Party Agreement (Great Lakes states and provinces), and the Ohio River Task Force.

After receiving information from Wisconsin about marbled crayfish that were sold to Ohio residents, Ohio investigators uncovered additional online sales originating from Ohio. One seller from Ohio had distributed marbled crayfish to 36 states and the Virgin Islands. In August 2021, each of these jurisdictions was notified and the recipient's contact information was shared. As of February 2022, 25 jurisdictions had replied, of these seven reported that it is not illegal to possess marbled crayfish in their jurisdictions. Five of those seven indicated our information prompted discussions of a law change. Some jurisdictions used the information as probable cause for search warrants. Five jurisdictions reported seizures. One individual who was contacted had other illegal species in possession. Dozens of contacts were made where people were educated on the dangers of invasive species and warnings were handed out. No jurisdictions responded with any reports of criminal charges filed. Marbled crayfish are parthenogenetic breeders, where one individual female can "clone"

herself. They are popular among aquarium enthusiasts.

### New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

A new enforcement vessel was purchased for use on Lake Erie. A 21'-22' fiberglass pilothouse style boat was sought and Defiance Boats of Bremerton, WA won the bid process with their 220 Admiral powered by a single Honda 225HP outboard. At around 24' in total length and just under 5,000 lbs., this boat is towable with our current fleet of ½ ton trucks and is usable year-round. It offers crew protection from the elements, has the latest in electronics from Garmin, has restroom facilities, and offers true seating for 3 plus the operator. A second operating station was installed on the aft panel of the pilothouse. This offers clear vision while approaching vessels/docks on the starboard side and allows the operator to fend off collisions without having to quickly run from the main helm out the back door. Emergency lighting was kept subtle, so the new vessel blends in with other sportfishing vessels from a distance. Two boats were traded in toward the purchase of this one, reducing our fleet by one. This 4-cycle powered boat is better for water quality than the two 2-cycle powered vessels it replaces.

The Ohio Division of Wildlife maintains a smartphone app, HuntFish OH. This app allows our constituents to purchase and carry licenses electronically and register harvests from the field. We have started to tailor our laws around mobile technology to allow game-check without physical tags or printed licenses.

Ohio has a long deer hunting season of several months and a one buck per year regulation. Looking at harvest trends, it was noticed that an unusually high number of bucks were reported as being harvested on the last day of the season compared to the weeks prior. Based on this information, 63 hunters who checked a buck on the last day of the season were contacted. As a result, 21 arrests were made, including 16 for providing false information at game check, 2 for failure to game check, 1 for no



deer permit, 1 for possession of untagged deer parts, and 1 for hunting without permission. It was also discovered that some deer that were checked in were found dead, and in some cases, no deer were killed, but the hunter wanted a game check number to apply to a deer they may kill in the future.

The Ohio Division of Wildlife has expanded our investment in cellular-based surveillance cameras. These cameras are used to monitor violations (criminal damaging, injuring state property, driving vehicles outside of designated areas, dumping sites) in public hunting areas. This technology reduces manhours of surveillance and provides excellent evidence for court. Cellular-based cameras have the advantage of real-time pictures and limit the number of times officers must check the cameras.

### State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement

Recent legal challenges have come up challenging our ability to enter private property and our inspection authority. Both challenges are the result of enforcement action, and neither case is settled in court as of the time of this report. One of the cases

involves the inspection of taxidermists and deer processors, neither of which are considered highly regulated activities.

### Cost Savings Initiatives

District Law Enforcement Operations Managers and Central Office Law Enforcement Staff (other than the Executive Administrator) are being reassigned to work out of their homes. This will allow a quicker response time in case of a major emergency by having senior staff spread out across the state instead of concentrated at the headquarters. In addition, it will result in fuel savings, as all commissioned officers have take-home vehicles for emergency response purposes. District Operations Managers will also be in uniform and marked vehicles now, previously this position was a plainclothes/unmarked vehicle detail. This will provide for higher visibility of the agency.

### Other Special Law Enforcement Issues

After discovering CWD in two deer from the wild in 2020, surveillance efforts were increased in 2021 and several additional CWD positive deer were discovered. This has resulted in three counties being declared as disease surveillance areas and puts several restrictions in place including the elimination of baiting in the area and movement of high-risk parts from the area. Wildlife officers were busy working with the wildlife management and research staff on the collection of data, enforcing the regulations, and educating the public.



Saskatchewan  
Ministry of Environment – Enforcement & Investigations Section  
Submitted by: Darren Henry, Intelligence Officer

### Training Issues

All Conservation Officers will be receiving training to support the Protection and Response Team (PRT) initiative including Perimeter/Containment, Building Clearing and Rapid Deployment. Select Conservation Officers across the province will be offered surveillance training and will be utilized if and when required.

### Funding and Staffing Issues

Over the past year, Saskatchewan has trained and hired 31 new Permanent Field Conservation Officers through training at the Western Conservation Law Enforcement Academy. Five new positions were created in 2021 which included 3 new Sergeant positions, 2 new K9 positions and an Inspector position within the Intelligence Management Unit.

### Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

On April 1, 2022, Conservation Officers were moved over to the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety along with Highway Patrol Officers, Safer Communities and Neighborhoods (SCAN) Officers and Community Safety Officers. All Officers are now united under a single organizational structure called the Provincial Protective Services Branch. The new structure brings the various departments together to work as unified department to enhance public safety. Saskatchewan has created a unlawful outfitting task force. This new task force has been created to address ongoing concerns of unlawful outfitting practices throughout Saskatchewan.

### Unique Cross-Boundary or Cooperative Enforcement Efforts

Saskatchewan and Alberta Investigation Units are jointly investigating individuals who have been obtaining residency license's in both provinces in the same year. Some individuals are illegally claiming residency in both provinces in order to purchase lower costing licenses or apply for and enter draws when they are not eligible. This enforcement effort will continue to be a ongoing investigations each year.

Conservation Officers continue to work closely with their neighboring provinces to investigate individuals crossing borders and unlawfully hunting. Manitoba and Saskatchewan Conservation Officers are currently jointly working on a file involving Manitoba residence's unlawfully hunting in Saskatchewan. Numerous offences were committed under both Saskatchewan's and Manitoba's Wildlife Acts as well as WAPPRITA.

### New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

With the various departments joining the new Provincial Protective Services branch, this will allow better utilization of equipment and resources for special enforcement projects as well as provide better public safety for the residents of Saskatchewan through unified enforcement efforts. Along with being part of the Provincial Protection and Response Team, select Conservation Officer vehicles have been equipped with Automatic License Plate Readers. These units are designed to read vehicle license plates as they pass by and inform the Officer if the vehicle is registered, expired or if the vehicle is associated to a suspended driver.

## State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement

On June 1, 2021, the new changes to The Captive Wildlife Regulations became in effect. These regulations regulate the import and captivity of native and exotic wildlife to address public safety concerns, disease issues, invasiveness and potential adverse impacts to native wildlife species. Recent changes include establishing an Allowed list of 632 exotic species that are legal to import, hold, breed or sell without a license, implementing a Restricted list of species, adopting Canadian Accredited Zoos and Aquariums and International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council standards for zoos and wildlife rehabilitators, prohibiting native wildlife species from being held for personal possession and enhancing license requirements for holding dangerous wildlife.

In July 2019, in R. v. Green, The Saskatchewan Provincial Court released a decision confirming that all “Indians” regardless of their province of residence, have a right to hunt for food on non-occupied crown lands in Saskatchewan. This case considered whether “Indians” could rely on section 12 of the Natural Resource Transfer Agreement to assert their right to hunt for food on unoccupied crown land in Saskatchewan although they were from Ontario. The Crown appealed this decision to the Saskatchewan Court of Queen’s Bench. The decision was overturned and found that the two members of an Ontario First Nation did not have the right to hunt in Saskatchewan without a license.

South Dakota  
South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP)  
Submitted by: Sam Schelhaas, Law Enforcement Section Chief

### Training Issues

Like many states, South Dakota has had many changes and new requirements in the last several years in the “Use of Force” standards and training. Some of the changes have been mandated on a Federal level and some of these changes have been made at the State level. The South Dakota Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board recently implemented new requirements pertaining to the hiring and training of law enforcement officers in South Dakota. These changes had very little impact on the SDGFP as they were already being done.

### Equipment

The past year has certainly been challenging in procuring equipment. Whether it is ordering new boats and motors to much smaller equipment such as duty gear or ammo.

### Funding and Staffing Issues

Funding is holding steady. We operate on an “user-pay” system and receive no funds from the state general fund. With the resurgence in outdoor activities funding has been solid and we are anticipating another good year.

Staffing has been an ongoing issue in the SDGFP for many years now and we have an increasing number of officers creeping up on retirement age. We have put more effort into our recruiting than ever before. We have been working closely with our communications team to put forth a targeted message that really tells the story of what a Conservation Officer does along with utilizing social media to announce

opening and applications as well. The SDGFP has a robust seasonal and internship program, and we are making sure that every seasonal employee or intern that works for the Department is getting the opportunity to ride along with a conservation officer. We are targeting Technical Schools that are graduating certified law enforcement officers. Hopefully these efforts will get things trending in the right direction.

### Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

We are seeing an increased interest in night hunting in South Dakota. With the advancement in night vision/thermal technology there are more and more hunters venturing out after dark. There have always been a few hunters that would use ambient light on a snow-covered field to hunt predators, but the popularity has skyrocketed. Regulating these activities has presented some challenges. In the past, a rifle shot at 12 AM typically led to an illegal take of wildlife and a spotlight in a field. With the increase in legitimate activity our investigative procedures are changing.

The trend in hunting to take photos and store them on your phone is not a new one at all. We have relied on other agencies to recover the data in the past. Recently we have acquired the necessary training and equipment to complete this task ourselves. We are also working with Dakota State University, a national leader in cyber technology, to expand our knowledge and expertise in this arena. We are utilizing geofences, cell phone mapping programs and we continue to expand in the ever-changing tech world.



## Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts

There were several trainings hosted in South Dakota that were brought in for the primary benefit of our officers but included officers from neighboring states. The NASBLA boat accident class was held in SD along with the Jeff Baile Forensic Interview and Interrogation class. Networking with officers from other states is always a great investment and along those lines our border states meetings are starting to pick up once again. These are great opportunities to learn about trends and tactics in wildlife law enforcement.

Several years ago, South Dakota started a Water Enforcement Patrol Officers Course (WEPOC) for new officers with the goal of providing an opportunity to gain experience and confidence in boat handling and patrolling on the water. We have started incorporating other law enforcement agencies into this training with the hopes of strengthening partnerships with Sheriff's Offices and City Police Departments.

## New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

It is always challenging to stay on pace with the ever changing and always updated technology. We are utilizing new camera systems, cell phone data gathering and mapping platforms, social media monitoring resources. We have begun working with and developing relationships with one of our universities that is a worldwide leader cyber technology.

South Dakota Go Outdoors is a new licensing platform that was launched in December of 2021 with the goal of being operational in time for the 2022 purchase of licenses. Along with that came a new law enforcement specific app called Go Law South Dakota. This app will allow the on-line and off-line look up of licenses, allow for the scan of a QR code and provide other specific information on the license holder.

## State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement

As reported a year ago, the 2021 Legislative session led to some significant changes for our Conservation Officers with the passage of an open fields bill. The law went into effect in July of 2021. There were some challenges associated with understanding and applying the parameters associated with this new law.

This past session (2022) was a busy one for the Department but did not lead to a lot of new laws on the books. Most of the bills concerning the Game, Fish and Parks were centralized around one-time funding options. Below are a few bills that will require some adjustments.

- SB 73: Provide for the use of artificial light and night-vision equipment while hunting coyotes and other predators-this law makes an allowance for the use of night-vision equipment on public lands.
- HB 1131: Provide for a revocation of hunting, trapping, or fishing privileges-This bill puts language into the trespass law that states a court can revoke privileges for an unknowing trespass.
- HB1162: Remove the definition of a loaded firearm-This bill consolidated multiple definitions of a loaded firearm throughout codified law into one definition for all chapters.

Texas  
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) –  
Law Enforcement Division  
Submitted by: Lieutenant Hendrik Volschenk

### Training Updates

The 64th cadet class graduated in June 2021. The class faced many issues with regards to schedule changes, constant adaptations due to COVID.

Updated handcuffing: A new handcuffing method was adopted by the Texas Game Warden Training Center with the focus on safety, practicality, and efficient control.

Jiu-jitsu and physical fitness have been combined to formulate a fitness program for the cadets. This type of fitness program would be conducive to practical application and preparedness for real life situations in the field.

The 65th cadet class will commence Oct 1st, 2022, with a maximum number 55 cadets comprising of Game Warden and State Park Police cadets. The academy is set to be 32 weeks in length.

Target solutions was a training platform that was introduced to disseminate internal and external training throughout the department.

New PRT tests were implemented for applicants to become Texas Game Wardens: Row test, swim test, handgun stability test.

Recruitment: 57% were diverse in 1006 total applicants.

### Funding and Staffing Updates

Texas Parks and Wildlife LE Division continue to follow continue the path of Diversity and Inclusion by adopting the

following goals:

- **Goal 1:** Recruit from a diverse, highly skilled group of potential applicants to secure a high performing workforce drawn from all segments of American society.
- **Goal 2:** Cultivate a culture that encourages accountability, collaboration, flexibility, and fairness to enable individuals to contribute to their full potential.
- **Goal 3:** Create awareness and develop educational structures and strategies to institutionalize a culture of inclusion for current and future employees.

Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) updated its policy and adopted a new plan for teleworking. The adoption of this new plan has created some opportunities for its current employees and improved TPWD's position as a competitive employer in a hiring sphere.

Game Wardens received a raise to maintain the same level of pay scale with other state law enforcement agencies.

TPWD is currently in the middle of a hiring process for game wardens and park police officers. Game Wardens recruiters are utilizing a newly acquired Instagram account @texasgamewardenrecruiting to reach new audiences.

### Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

Due to the effects of the freeze and winter storms in Texas, emergency rules were adopted and enacted in regard to the reduction in bag and size limits for spotted seatrout.

CWD: Texas Parks and Wildlife continue to deal with the challenges of CWD across the state.

Texas Parks and Wildlife LE continue to work alongside Border Patrol and DPS along the Texas Mexico border.

Texas Parks and Wildlife LE continue to work alongside Border Patrol and DPS along the Texas Mexico border.

The Game Warden Training Center has mandated their officers to complete a minimum 16 hours of use of force and firearms training every calendar year. TPWD Game Wardens and State Park Police Officers came together in training that helped foster their relationships within the Department. Examples of merging these two TPWD Law Enforcement entities in training are found in a standardized background investigation software called Guardian Alliance and in a standardized Field Training Officer Program.

### Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts

Texas Game Wardens continue to execute operations along the Texas-Mexico border to preserve and protect the natural fish and wildlife resources of the state.

- **Lanchas observed** – 26
- **Longline gear recovered** – 5/ over 5 miles
- **Gill net** – approximately 10 miles
- **Pounds of fish** – approximately 6,560 pounds



### New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

In 2021 TPWD – LE- UAS Program expanded its footprint and capabilities by adding a multiple new aircraft. These new Autel Evo 2s are a small backpackable quadcopter with both daylight and thermal capable cameras. This new addition enhanced TPWDs primary mission sets of Search and Rescue, Fugitive Search, Disaster Response and Homeland Security.



Texas Parks and Wildlife Dive Team acquired a new dive boat:

- Lake Assault Landing Craft w 250hp outboard motor
- Hull mounted Ray Marine side-scan sonar system
- Bow door for diver egress and ingress



Texas Game Wardens are currently working on testing and evaluating pistol mounted optics. The GWTC is currently evaluating two types of PMO's on their duty issued Glock pistols.

**State, Regional and National Issues,**  
**Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court**  
**Decisions Impacting Natural Resources**  
**Law Enforcement**

SB 675 – relating to special open season hunting of certain migratory game birds by

veterans and members of the United States armed forces on active duty.

SB 599 – relating to the removal and disposal of abandoned fishing devices and the seizure and disposition of unlawful fishing devices.

HB 1699 – relating to the taking of un-banded pen-reared pheasants and quail by certain landowners.

HB 1927 – relating to provisions governing the carrying of a firearm by a person who is 21 years of age or older and not otherwise prohibited by state or federal law from possessing the firearm and to other provisions related to the carrying, possessing, transporting, or storing of a firearm or other weapon; creating a criminal offense.

HB 2326 – relating to the possession and transportation of certain nonindigenous snakes; increasing a criminal penalty.

HB 3081 – relating to the issuance of digital tags for the taking of certain animals.

HB 4436 – relating to the operation of aircraft in or on protected freshwater areas.





Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) –  
Division of Public Safety and Resource Protection  
Submitted by: Chief Casey Krueger

Training Issues

Due to COVID-19 precautions, training again consisted of hands-off, socially distant and/or virtual training sessions.

The DNR Division of Public Safety and Resource Protection (DPSRP) developed and implemented a new Community Service Officer (CSO) program. This program aids in recruitment efforts and gives interested individuals an opportunity to first experience the job without fully investing the resources to become a credentialed officer. This innovative program hires interested candidates on a part time basis and allows them to learn both more about our law enforcement division and the agency while gaining firsthand experience by providing lower-level educational public contacts. We believe that this approach serves to better help candidates make long term career choices. In our inaugural application period, we had over 200 people apply for these limited positions.

Our division completed a “Professional Development Series” virtual training library. This training allowed leaders and specialized staff members to present on topics within their expertise with an aim at preparation and recruitment of internal candidates for promotional opportunities. This effort was well received by staff, with topics including: Applying for Positions, Work-Life Balance, Mentoring, Effective Time/Case Management, Interview Skills, Preparing to Become a Supervisor, and more.

Funding and Staffing Issues

Our division completed and published a two-year strategic plan to help instill the mission of the division to all staff while enhancing relationships with internal partners, external partners, and the public. This strategic plan provides a roadmap to our customers and legislators regarding enforcement trends, equipment, and staffing issues to better prepare our division for long term success.

We continue to push forward on a wage package for field staff using the state mandated process known as a compensation plan. Although the package has not yet successfully made it through the legislative process, we were able to obtain some discretionary equity/retention adjustments (internal process) to bring a handful of employee wages into line with counterpart staff. As we continue to fall behind our law enforcement counterparts in median wages, we recognize that it will be increasingly difficult to continue our recruitment of highly qualified candidates. Due to this, we continue to seek pay increases using every tool available.

We have made a concerted and deliberate effort to recruit diversity into the division. The recruitment committee made hundreds of contacts with various organizations, schools, clubs, and community leaders to educate diverse groups on our role in conservation law enforcement. Due to COVID-19, this proved to be difficult as contacts and career fairs were held virtually. A highlighted effort includes conducting a virtual session for the Urban League of Greater Madison Science, Tech., Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM) Camp. Staff on the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) team conducted an interactive search and rescue presentation for kids in the camp. While the results of these contacts are not immediate, we are confident that we have sowed seeds of interest in future candidates to the hiring processes.

## Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

Focused efforts on OWI related issues have increased in motor vehicle stops throughout our state parks. These concerted OWI stops have also resulted in several narcotics cases being uncovered. Conservation wardens have full police power while conducting work on state owned properties; however, outside of those lands the enforcement authority decreases for certain law enforcement related issues. Wardens must first request “expanded authority” from the local jurisdictional agency in order to handle these issues. This creates safety concerns with prolonged contacts.

Wardens continue to assist with apprehending major crime related suspects (felony fleeing, homicide, narcotic trafficking, etc.), traffic pursuits, providing first aid to accident victims, missing adults and children calls, suicides, recreational boat, snowmobile, and ATV/UTV fatal crashes, boating rescues, armed robberies, bomb threat/acts of violence at a high schools, and active shooter events. These primarily occur in our major urban environments and have led to training considerations for our staff.

Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3) “Hunt for Food” Events: In April 2021, Hunter R3 staff piloted a virtual “Turkey Hunt for Food” course for 13 people as an opportunity to continue engaging members of the public interested in learning how to hunt. When in-person programs resumed in August, staff and partners led five in-person “Hunt for Food” events for 46 individual participants (with some participating in multiple classes). Local organizations led 23 “Learn to Hunt” events for deer, waterfowl, pheasants, bears, and turkeys for 234 participants.

Angler R3 Mobile First Catch Center, AKA Fishmobile: In collaboration with the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF), we obtained a Mobile First Catch Center (MFCC), and we dubbed our trailer the “Fishmobile.” We began Fishmobile programming by quietly testing the waters with partners in July 2021, who serve underrepresented neighborhoods. Among our partners was Grow Academy, a Department of Corrections youth program. In all, we held 14 Fishmobile events that served 212 people, plus thousands more at two large-scale events – the Wisconsin State Fair and Harbor Fest, both in Milwaukee.

Angler R3 Virtual Programming: As a result of the pandemic, we implemented two multi-night virtual instructor training workshops where we certified 37 adults as angler education (R3) instructors. We also hosted a hybrid “Fishing for Dinner” class for 11 adults with the classroom component being held on Zoom followed by an ice fishing outing

Wisconsin Hunter Education: Leading into the 2021 fall hunting season, the Hunter Education Program established a strategic roadmap to provide continued in-person and online certification services to our customers while balancing the status of COVID-19, its variants, and vaccination processes. The program extended the temporary all online certification for those under the age of 18 through December 31, 2021, to mirror the adult all online certification option. Overall, student participation in hunter education increased by over 11%. A review of hunter education certifications completed in 2021 depicts that we are adequately meeting the needs of our customers, with total certifications reaching 28,243 (an increase from 25,425 certifications in 2020). Hunter safety education continues to be a large part of making Wisconsin a safe place to hunt.

Second Annual Think Smart Before You Start Campaign: During the weekend of January 21, 2022, the DNR Division of Public Safety and Resource Protection partnered with local county Sheriff’s Departments for the second annual “Think Smart Before You Start” snowmobile campaign. The combined effort included over 2,000 miles of trails

patrolled and over 1,600 snowmobilers contacted. There were zero fatal snowmobile crashes over the weekend. The campaign coincided with snowmobile safety messaging on multiple platforms including radio, news releases, and social media. Conservation wardens and sheriff's deputies patrolled over 100 frozen waterbodies and made four OWI arrests over the weekend. The second year of the "Think Smart Before You Start" campaign was a success, and an ATV/UTV campaign is being planned for the summer months.

**ATV/UTV Crash Trends:** The 2021 ATV/UTV season saw an increase in both miles of riding opportunities and the number of registered vehicles. There are over 450,000 registered ATV/UTVs in Wisconsin. Unfortunately, the number of fatal crash victims also rose with 47 total victims. The division continues to focus on public education and awareness regarding high-speed operation, alcohol use, and careless operation which continue to be top contributing factors in both fatal and non-fatal crashes. The use of safety equipment also remains in strong focus. In 2021, less than 10% of fatal crash victims were wearing a helmet at the time of the crash and only 31% of UTV crash victims wore seatbelts. There were nearly 500 citations issued for helmet and seatbelt violations in 2021. The priority to educate the public and deter risky behavior through law enforcement presence remains high for the division.

**Operation Dry Water:** During the 2021 "Operation Dry Water" campaign, 111 Wisconsin Conservation Wardens participated, contacting 10,572 boaters in 3,468 boats. As a result of these efforts, 273 boating related citations were issued with 41 intoxicated boat operators being arrested and an additional 2 arrests being made for drug impaired operation of a motorboat.

This was nearly two times more intoxicated operators removed from Wisconsin's waterways than during the 2020 campaign. The highest alcohol concentration recorded was a 0.237, almost three times the legal limit. An additional 449 non-boating violations were encountered and dealt with either through the issuance of warnings or citations. Wisconsin's efforts received national recognition from the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) with Wisconsin receiving the Operation Dry Water Top Law Enforcement Agency Award in the large agency division. The large agency division includes law enforcement agencies with more than 100 sworn officers.

### **Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts**

Wardens finalized a multi-year investigation into the annual sturgeon spearing event held on the Lake Winnebago system. The investigation focused on caviar taken from the female sturgeon which suspects then used for bartering and selling. This investigation was jointly conducted by investigators, several warden teams, and US Fish and Wildlife agents.

Staff in the Chippewa Band of Native Americans treaty rights ceded territory continue to work cooperatively with Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) and the Ojibwe Tribes on prioritizing safety during the spring tribal spearing season by hosting training for local law enforcement regarding jurisdiction, treaty rights, and clarification on harassment laws. This outreach was completed as a result of increased scrutiny from the non-tribal public on the off-reservation spring tribal spear fishing harvest.

Our division has continued to work cooperatively with Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) to increase collaboration on captive deer farm issues. Significant progress was made this past year when DPSRP and DATCP worked a case involving the intentional release of multiple deer from a deer farm onto the open landscape. A stipulation agreement was reached for \$17,995.20.

Division staff have continued partnerships with multiple state and local agencies to include National Guard as it relates to civil unrest and our active involvement with local resource and Capitol protection during these times. Our warden staff found themselves on the front lines in many of these protests and demonstrations.

Our division partnered with PGA Golf and numerous law enforcement agencies to provide protection for the Ryder Cup golf event. We provided protection to golfers in the competition with our DNR Dignitary Protection and Tactical Teams, as well as on-water protection with our Tactical Boat team.

We are seeing an increase in ice fishing angler rescues around the Green Bay area of Lake Michigan. High winds and freighter shipping activity may be the cause of the ice destabilization, which will break off and float away, stranding anglers. Staff utilize air boats and work with several local fire departments and the USCG to rescue these fishermen, but in many cases their equipment must be abandoned on the ice.

### **New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement**

The division reviewed the existing Marine Enforcement Unit (MEU) and revamped its membership to include wardens along the entire bay of Green Bay, Lake Michigan, and Lake Superior where they will focus their core duties on the marine environment. The team's primary responsibilities include recreational boating, commercial and sport fishing, guides and sport troller, wholesale fish, waterfowl, underwater archeological, and coastal environmental enforcement.

Due to recent staff changes (retirements, promotions, etc.), the division also refreshed its Mission Ready -Tactical Boat Team to include increased membership to

cover high profile boating related events throughout the state and refocus on mission sets while planning for upcoming training on proficiency in boat operation skills and tactics.

Due largely to the efforts of our commercial fishing investigator, we had the state's first successful criminal prosecution of a wholesale fish dealer bringing Asian carp into the state for distribution. The suspect was found guilty of two misdemeanors and 17 forfeiture violations following a plea deal, with fine amounts over \$13,000. We are currently investigating an out of state company for the illegal importing of swampy red crayfish into the state, which has been popular for crayfish feeds.

We continue to support a statewide unmanned aerial surveillance (UAS) drone team which has been used to map environmental degradation areas, recreational crash and hunting incident scenes, as well as missing persons searches and body recoveries.

### **State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement**

Surprisingly, Wisconsin still recognizes a first offense for operating while intoxicated as a civil forfeiture violation (non-criminal). Currently, first offense OWI processing has been challenged in reference to how it may be used as cause for 2nd and subsequent criminal charges. There is a current court case in the Wisconsin Supreme Court awaiting an opinion.

Compensation continues to be an issue for all our staff. While many state, county, and municipal law enforcement officers have found success through collective bargaining and use of ARPA funds, wardens were not successful in our bid to increase the grid. This setback has put us further behind our counterparts entering the next state budget review cycle and will likely cause recruitment and retention problems in the future.

Our division is currently understaffed and underfunded for the increasing workload associated with recreational vehicle (UTV and ATV)

enforcement. While the popularity of these machines has exploded in the past few years, our operational budget has remained stagnant. This has resulted in staff having to move to a “response only” model for several months of the year. We are currently working with external partners to move forward a legislative budget proposal which will increase both positions and budget allocations moving forward.

### Cost Savings Initiatives

The division conducted a cost analysis effort into office hard lines and the removal of home office expenses due to increased technology on cellular and MiFi devices for staff. This work uncovered several areas where spending was duplicated and will save several thousands of dollars in the coming years.

