

**MICHIGAN
STATE REPORT**
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STAFFING

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (Department) has approximately 1,400 permanent employees, 1,600 non-career/seasonal employees, and a \$535.5 million budget that supports programs and infrastructure for wildlife and fisheries management, state parks and recreation areas, trails, boating programs, conservation and law enforcement, forest management, state lands and minerals, and the historical museum and archives.

Shannon Lott currently serves as the Acting Director of the Department, Scott Whitcomb as the Acting Natural Resources Deputy, Kristin Phillips as the Administrative Deputy, Randy Claramunt as Chief of the Fisheries Division, and Sara Thompson as Acting Chief of the Wildlife Division.

FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023 BUDGET

The Department's fiscal year (FY) 2023 budget totals \$535.5 million (including \$94.4 million General Fund), representing a 15% increase from the Department's original enacted FY 2022 appropriations due primarily to the addition of one-time investments in improving infrastructure and modernizing equipment. Specifically, the budget includes \$46.9 million (\$45.4 million General Fund) for various one-time investments, such as fish hatchery infrastructure improvements (\$30M), natural resources equipment modernization (\$11.5M), a new Great Lakes Research Vessel (\$4M), and \$500,000 for chronic wasting disease (CWD) testing. Ongoing General Fund investments were provided for emergency response and wildfire suppression (\$751,900), tribal relations and fisheries co-management (\$652,800), and body cameras for conservation officers (\$600,000). Ongoing restricted funds were added for state park operations (\$13.6M), state trail operations (\$3.1M), and other infrastructure improvements (\$6.9M) in state parks, recreational boating facilities, state game areas, and Department of Natural Resources-managed wetlands.

Overall, the Department's FY 2023 budget is comprised of state restricted funds (64%), federal funds (17%), General Fund (18%), and private funds (1%). Federal funding consists mainly of special purpose categorical grants from various federal agencies, such as the U.S. Department of the Interior, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Federal funds support programs for wildlife and fisheries habitat and management, forest management, recreation, and other natural resource programs. Restricted funding is generated from sales of licenses, user fees, and other charges. These funds support wildlife and fisheries programs, operation of Michigan's 103 state parks, harbor and boating access site

development, marine safety enforcement and education, snowmobile and off-road vehicle trail repair and development, and operation of nearly 140 state forest campgrounds. The Department also generates timber sales revenue from state lands, most of which is used for the protection and development of our state forests.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

Work on the FY 2024 budget is progressing with the legislature as the state again sees a surplus in its coffers.

The Department has been tracking a wide range of policy bills. The Department supports a bill that decriminalizes failure to report a deer harvest. Other bills that the Department supports include updating the definition of a peace officer in the Michigan Mental Health Code and off-road vehicle (ORV) enforcement for seasonal sheriff's deputies. The Department also supports a bill package that would professionalize the hunting and fishing guiding industry in the state.

This session, the Department is also hopeful to address some changes to the recreation passport program, mentored hunting program and adoption of the state land strategy.

NOTEWORTHY DIVISION ISSUES

The Department tested approximately 10,400 animals during the past year for CWD. In 2021, the Department started a systematic approach to test all areas of the state in the next five years. The second phase of this approach included the counties in the middle of the Lower Peninsula along with sample collection in known CWD-positive counties. Positive detections continue in Michigan's deer herd in specific areas of the central lower portion of the state. No additional positives were detected this year in the Upper Peninsula (UP). The Natural Resources Commission and the Department continue to work to address this disease. The Department and Michigan State University (MSU) continue to work together on addressing research gaps to help manage this disease.

A new digital deer harvest reporting system was developed and was notably successful, recording about 303,000 hunter harvests. Slight modifications will be made to the system to further increase user-friendliness based on feedback from hunters and Department staff. The Department responded to about 33,000 calls and 7,000 emails related to wildlife from the public. Numerous wildlife habitat projects were conducted in collaboration with federal, state, local, and tribal governments, as well as non-profit organizations. More information on wildlife-related activities can be found in the Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Division [annual report](#).

The Building Michigan Together Plan, signed into law in March 2022, included \$250 million in federal relief program funding to help tackle the backlog of critical infrastructure needs in our state parks system. This historic investment puts in motion a targeted effort to repair, replace or modernize the core components of state parks and trails.

Michigan continues to support Illinois in its nonfederal sponsorship for the Planning, Engineering, and Design phase of the Brandon Road Interbasin Project to protect the Great Lakes

from invasive carp. Michigan and Illinois created a States and Provinces Forum, facilitated by the Great Lakes Commission, to provide an opportunity for review and input of the design process with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) at key milestones. Significant engineering discussions combined with flow and channel modeling of the barrier elements have been completed in preparation of construction for Increment IA. Approximately \$226 million was appropriated for planning and construction in FY 2023 through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. In December 2022, Congress passed the Water Resource Development Act, changing the required cost share for construction to 90% federal, 10% non-federal. In March, USACE released a new total project cost estimate for \$1.146 billion with a 52% contingency factor. Michigan currently has requested \$64 million in an FY 2023 budget request to support the nonfederal cost share for project construction and a legislative decision on these funds is pending. Illinois currently has a \$50 million FY 2024 budget request under consideration. Combined, the two states could provide the required match for the project. Illinois and USACE will need to sign a Project Partner Agreement (PPA) before construction activities can begin. Significant progress has been made toward protecting the Great Lakes from invasive carp.

The Department has negotiated with the affected tribes to replace the 2000 Great Lakes Consent Decree and a new proposed agreement has been submitted to the Federal Court.

The Department continues to make progress with its Arctic Grayling Initiative. A third year of broodstock that was procured from the Chena River, Alaska in May 2022, will be transferred out of the isolation facility in 2023. Multiple watersheds have been inventoried for future stocking, and additional habitat suitability work will be conducted prior to selection of streams for reintroduction. Research on competition between Grayling and non-native trout species has been completed. The Department's goal is to stock eggs in selected receiving waters in 2025.

Michigan rivers are currently experiencing a suite of stressors including impacts from invasive species, fragmentation by dams and other barriers, degradation from activities in watersheds, and changes in our climate. To address potential management actions that deal with these stressors, the Department has teamed up with a multitude of stakeholders as part of a structured decision-making (SDM) working group. The goal of this effort is to develop a process that can be used to assess and ultimately enhance the resilience and sustainability of Michigan's rivers and fisheries beginning with the Au Sable River. The SDM framework will (1) identify the scope of the problem related to ecological resilience of the Au Sable River, (2) identify a suite of objectives that should be achieved including a set of management actions that could be taken, and (3) predict the consequences of each action on each of the objectives, as well as account for key uncertainties in the system.

Fisheries Division finalized a walleye management plan for inland waters with an aim toward maximizing both ecological benefits and angler satisfaction associated with the state's walleye fisheries. Although walleye reside in the Great Lakes, rivers and inland lakes, the plan focuses on inland waters – mostly inland lakes – because walleye management in Great Lakes waters is primarily addressed in various other Department-approved management or rehabilitation plans. The new walleye management plan for inland waters provides an overview on the status of the walleye in Michigan under previous management efforts, the biology and ecology of inland

walleye populations, and angler perceptions about walleye management and fishing opportunities under the new plan.

Law Enforcement Division's Great Lakes Enforcement Unit was recently awarded the 2023 Governor's Award for Historic Preservation for the documentation and recovery of the Lake Huron Red Tail aircraft in lower Lake Huron.

The most significant fire from the past year was the 2,516-acre Blue Lakes Fire in the northeastern Lower Peninsula. Staff also responded and filled 69 interagency assignments in Michigan and nine other states during 2022. A Department Incident Management Team (IMT) was dispatched to assist with a hazardous materials fire at the Resolute Forest Products paper mill in Menominee in October.

The Department has invested in several new shooting sport facilities around the state. A new, state of the art, indoor shooting range and meeting facility will open in July 2023 at the Porcupine Mountain Wilderness State Park near Ontonagon. We will also open new outdoor ranges in Marquette County and at the Barry State Game Area South of Grand Rapids in August 2023.

The Department has launched a new mobile application, *Michigan DNR Hunt Fish*, which is available in the Google Play Store for Android and the App Store for iPhone. Since its launch in summer 2022 the app has gained over 147,000 downloads and has sold more than 113,070 licenses. The primary reason for developing a mobile app was due to roughly 75% of hits to the Department's main website, Michigan.gov/DNR, originating from a smartphone.

The Department developed multiple policies this year to address climate change and support the Governor's commitment to achieve economy-wide carbon neutrality by 2050. The first is a climate mitigation and adaptation policy, and the second, a policy that prioritizes the purchase of electric vehicles over traditional vehicles for department use. In addition, the Department was the first state to pioneer selling carbon credits from our state forests and investing the revenue from those credits into more adaptation and mitigation initiatives; the Big Wild Forest Carbon Project has been listed and verified with the American Carbon Registry (ACR), and the Wolverine-Copper Country Forest Carbon Project is still in progress.

The Department continues to incorporate renewable energy sources in strategic locations throughout the state. The Department is performing energy audits of facilities to provide facility managers with recommendations for improved energy efficiency and opportunities for cost-effective reduced greenhouse gas emissions. The Department will be installing six solar arrays at five state fish hatcheries, which will be owned by the department and outside of the power purchase agreement. Additionally, the Department is partnering with corporate sponsors to deploy electric vehicle (EV) charging stations at state parks along Lake Michigan as the first phase of a multi-phased approach to bring EV charging to where visitors travel, as well at Department offices to move toward electrifying the Department fleet.

Final design of the mass timber customer service center in Newberry is complete. The building plans were submitted on March 1 to LARA for plan review. Walbridge has been awarded

the construction contract. Groundbreaking for the new facility will commence in spring 2023. Estimated completion of the mass timber office space is expected to be in summer 2024. Design of the storage building is underway and is expected to be completed within the next three months.

The Department recently completed eight all-employee meetings that were conducted at various locations throughout the state to connect with staff, discuss key department priorities, highlight important department updates, and share success stories of recent projects.