

**KENTUCKY
STATE REPORT**
May 2025

Rich Storm, Commissioner

Brian Clark & Gabe Jenkins, Deputy Commissioners

Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources (KDFWR)

#1 Sportsman's Lane, Frankfort, KY 40601

Wildlife Division – Ben Robinson, Director

The Wildlife Division has made significant progress in multiple areas, including prescribed fire management, turkey research, migratory bird conservation, and invasive species control.

In prescribed fire efforts, 7,130 acres were burned this winter and spring across 54 different units. The Kentucky Prescribed Fire Council has now trained 113 certified burn bosses and provided an 8-hour RX Burn course to 471 private landowners. Additionally, 22 "Learn & Burn" events have been conducted over the past three years, benefiting more than 130 private landowners and NRCS staff. Kentucky Prescribed Fire Council partners have successfully burned over 35,000 acres in the last two years.

Turkey research and conservation efforts have also been extensive. A total of 1,665 turkeys have been banded across 62 Kentucky counties, with numbers increasing significantly in recent years. A master's student is currently studying male turkey harvest and survival rates in collaboration with Tennessee Tech University and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. Additionally, a PhD student is investigating turkey reproductive ecology, with 224 turkeys equipped with GPS transmitters on both private and public lands in Muhlenberg County.

Migratory bird conservation efforts have resulted in the banding of 4,935 migratory game birds, including Canada geese, wood ducks, and mourning doves. Staff participated in banding projects in Canada, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The completion of the Heart of Big Rivers NAWCA project in December 2024 led to the construction of two new water control structures at Ballard WMA, improving water transfer efficiency. Additionally, the Ballard River Pump Project has been initiated, aiming to install a pump station capable of moving 35,000 gallons per minute from the Ohio River. For the 2024 dove season, 11 private land sites were secured, providing 411.5 acres of hunting opportunities. Wildlife staff also monitored the nesting success of 247 interior least tern nests along the Mississippi River.

Efforts to control invasive species remain a priority, with more than 1,700 acres treated with aerial herbicide applications to combat bush honeysuckle and autumn olive. These ongoing initiatives demonstrate the Wildlife Division's dedication to conservation, habitat management, and sustainable wildlife populations.

Law Enforcement Division – Col. Jeremy McQueary, Director

The Law Enforcement Division has continued to be a lead responder during natural disaster events in Kentucky. Most recently, they responded to and acted to save lives during the tragic 2025 flooding event in Eastern Kentucky. From countless water rescues to aerial search and recovery missions using our specialized drones, the men and women in green worked tirelessly to save lives and deliver life sustaining supplies to those in need.

The Law Enforcement Division is set to hire 30 Game Warden Recruits in the Fall of 2025, making this the largest law enforcement hiring effort in many years. The Division has restructured and re-directed its recruitment efforts and are seeing great benefits from our social media outlets and the extended applicant reach we are experiencing.

The Law Enforcement Division K-9 program is in its third year and our teams of three handlers and their Labrador Retrievers Cosmo, Gambit, and River are having a great impact on the Commonwealth. From public relations at school events and sportsman's clubs to resource protection and crime deterrence on the backroads, our K-9 teams are paving the way for future growth in the program.

The Law Enforcement Division has recently applied and been accepted to the North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation program. The Division is excited about the three-year journey and looking forward to the challenge.

The LE Special Investigations Unit (SIU) has broadened its scope and is churning up great cases throughout our state. With a focus on preventing crimes pertaining to commercialization of fish and wildlife resources, the team has made a great impact. The team is ever evolving their skills and tactics to increase the Department's footprint against high-value resource protection crimes.

Information & Education Division and Marketing Division – Kevin Kelly, Director

Kentucky Fish and Wildlife helps to educate thousands of school children each year on a range of topics. Campers who attend any of the three summer conservation camps operated by the agency receive instruction in the safe pursuit of outdoor activities and skills related to or dependent upon the responsible use of natural resources. More than 3,500 children in grades 4-6 attended a conservation camp in 2024. As a direct result of the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Foundation's support, 433 children attended conservation camp this past summer. The Foundation's contribution of more than \$102,485 represents its largest contribution toward camp scholarships. The Salato Wildlife Education Center in Frankfort welcomed more than 42,000 visitors including more than 11,000 with school groups. A new exhibit "Healthy Hunting Grounds" opened as a new interpretive space to highlight the positive benefits that hunting contributes to health and wellness, conservation, and society at large.

A new administrative regulation to allow for mentored events on conservation camp properties received final legislative approval. The regulation ([301 KAR 3:130](#)) establishes procedures to allow individuals meeting defined criteria for mentored events to boat, fish, hunt, shoot or trap as part of a department-approved activity or program, prohibits certain actions inconsistent with the intended purpose of conservation camp properties, establishes requirements for other uses, and stipulates the guidelines for participation in events. Under the new regulation, the I&E Division hosted four mentored events (youth waterfowl hunt, youth fishing trip, youth dove hunt, mentor deer hunt and mentor squirrel hunt) on camp properties.

Several staff members from the Information & Education Division were honored in state and national competitions for outstanding work in communications. In October, Kentucky Fish and Wildlife earned the highest recognition in the Kentucky Association of Government Communicators competition — 2024 Communications Office of the Year. Kentucky Afield TV scored one first-place award and two second-place awards in the Association for Conservation Information's 2023 awards contest. Winners of that contest were announced in July. In the past year (June 2023-June 2024), Kentucky issued 10,343

Hunter Education: A total of 7,255 students were certified through 383 courses, with an additional 3,088 students completing the course at Conservation Camp. Advanced education events reached 989 participants at 13 events, including Becoming an Outdoors Woman and Field to Fork. Among the 7,255 students, 178 were certified in 10 bowhunter education courses. The state boasts 280 active volunteer instructors, with 1,098 total in the database. This year saw the training of 114 new instructors across 22 classes.

The National Archery in Schools Program (NASP) incorporated archery into the curriculum of 854 Kentucky schools, engaging 123,744 students during school hours and 30,605 in after-school programs from June 2023-June 2024. The program added 55 new schools and reactivated 24. In tournaments, 643 schools registered 17,924 archers, with the 2024 State Bullseye Tournament featuring 8,493 archers from 416 schools, and the KyNASP/IBO 3D Challenge Tournament hosting 2,608 archers from 181 schools.

In the previous year (June 2023-June 2024), the Aquatic Education Branch maintained 48 equipment loaner stations at state parks, libraries, and extension offices across the state. A total of 89 events were facilitated with over 3,000 participants. During this time, KDFWR filled a vacant Aquatic Education Conservation Educator position. In partnership with Fisheries Division staff, the Aquatic Education Branch developed program curriculum on invasive Carp and held two events highlighting such. During these two events 136 participants learned about invasive carp history, biology and KDFWR's efforts as well as the opportunity for tasting samples.

Marketing efforts for the department continued on a variety of fronts. A few are highlighted below:

Influencer partnerships & major campaigns:

- Partnered with NIL influencer to expand brand reach.
- Launched mobile marketing unit for sales of licenses and merchandise at events.
- Expanded advertising at sporting events, including digital ads, in-venue signage, trivia features and mascot spotlights.

New advertising channels & vendors:

- Utilized new media partners for targeted campaigns:
 - Premium targeted OTT campaigns, Pinterest, Facebook/Instagram video ads, Google ads, and digital streaming.
- Designed portable media kiosks for use at events.

Event performance, Kentucky Wild membership growth & sponsorships:

- Kentucky Wild membership: 4,157 members.
- Added new sponsor and retained key existing sponsors
- Participated in 21 community events and hosted 6 Kentucky Wild member experiences.

Fisheries Division – Dave Dreves, Director

Fish Habitat: The Fisheries Habitat Branch has been expanded to a total of 3 full-time employees and a third habitat barge was acquired for use in reservoir projects. With staff and equipment now strategically stationed across eastern, central, and western Kentucky, the division has increased its capacity to complete fish habitat projects more efficiently statewide. In 2024, 4,810 used Christmas trees were recycled and repurposed for fish habitat structures. A major volunteer effort also took place at Lake Barkley's Cravens Bay, where nearly 100 volunteers helped plant 1,350 Bald Cypress trees along the shoreline over the winter. In just one weekend, 675 trees were planted in a matter of hours thanks to support from groups such as Boy Scout Troop 200, Calloway County Master Gardeners, various Murray State University student

organizations, The LBL Sportsmen's Club, Master Naturalists, The Riverlands Alliance, and Kentucky Bass Nation. This effort was funded by two \$5,000 grants awarded to KY Bass Nation by the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame and The American Fishing Tackle Company (AFCTO). Over the past three years, these collaborative efforts have resulted in more than 4,000 Bald Cypress trees being planted in the drawdown zone of Lake Barkley. Additionally, a new large-scale fish habitat project was launched at Lake Cumberland in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in fall 2024. As part of this initiative, more than 463 cedar trees were removed from a nearby Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and repurposed as fish habitat structures in the lake, improving both upland wildlife habitat and aquatic habitat. This project is expected to continue over the next few years.

Fisheries Management: Fisheries staff collaborated with the Engineering and IT Division to develop the Commercial Guide Online Reporting System, a streamlined platform designed to enhance data collection and compliance monitoring. A new regulation now requires Commercial Guides to report their fishing activity, providing critical data needed to support science-based management of Kentucky's fisheries. The online system includes automated email reminders prompting guides to enter trip data and submit any outstanding monthly reports. Upon submission, users receive a confirmation email for their records. In addition, IT implemented automated email processes for courtesy notices, warnings, and suspension letters for late or non-reporting. These enhancements have significantly reduced the administrative burden on Law Enforcement and Fisheries staff by automating much of the compliance oversight and follow-up, while improving data quality and timeliness for effective fisheries management.

The Trophy Fish and Master Angler Program was revamped to better recognize and engage Kentucky's anglers. After a long hiatus, the Master Angler Program is once again active, with exciting new updates to how awards are distributed. Anglers now receive custom patches and stickers featuring artwork by renowned KDFWR wildlife artist Rick Hill, depicting the species they submitted. These items replace the pins that were previously mailed just once a year. Now, anglers receive their awards upon submission, rather than waiting until year's end. In addition, participants can conveniently print their own certificates directly through their My Profile accounts, streamlining the process and providing instant recognition for their achievements.

Wetland and Stream Mitigation Program: The department made significant strides in conservation through land protection and mitigation efforts this year. Easements and properties were acquired in three counties, securing over 985 acres to support and protect stream and wetland habitat restoration projects. In addition, \$16 million in mitigation fund receipts were recorded to offset habitat losses affecting more than 3 miles of streams and 9 acres of wetlands. Of those funds, \$6 million from the Kentucky Wetland and Stream Mitigation program was directly invested into on-the-ground stream and wetland restoration efforts, reinforcing the state's commitment to long-term habitat improvement.

Aquatic Nuisance Species: The Critical Species Branch continued a statewide effort on combatting the influx of invasive carp in Kentucky waterways through multi-state and federal partnerships. KDFWR is active in both the Tennessee-Cumberland River Basin and the Ohio River Basin. In 2024, over 15 million pounds of invasive carp were harvested in Kentucky through the Invasive Carp Harvest Program that provides a per pound subsidy to commercial fishers. Since 2013, over 74 million pounds of invasive carp have been harvested by commercial fishers in Kentucky. In addition to invasive carp harvest, KDFWR works on early life stage projects, occupancy sampling, community assessments, age and growth, and telemetry. Project

accomplishments are linked to national and subbasin priorities. KDFWR continues to facilitate the commercial fishing industry targeting invasive carp by enacting special regulations and agreements.

The Bio-Acoustic Fish Fence at Barkley lock is being operated in a constant state. This type of deterrent uses sound, bubble curtain, and lights to create an environment invasive carp avoid. KDFWR is working with partners to secure funding to maintain that system into the future. The initial study period has demonstrated this system deters silver carp crossings by at least 50%. This is helping reduce the number of invasive carp from immigrating into the reservoirs.

Substantial effort and funding are being directed to mass removal of invasive carp in the Tennessee and Cumberland River systems. A better understanding of exploitation is critical to informing our current, primary management tool for invasive carp. KDFWR, together with Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and other partners, will implement a high-reward tagging study in Kentucky and Barkley reservoirs to obtain estimates of exploitation and better evaluate current removal efforts. KDFWR staff assisted with tagging 1,000 silver carp in the Kentucky and Barkley reservoirs in 2024.

Telemetry results continue to clarify our understanding of invasive carp movements in the relation to harvest, invasive carp behavior, and deterrent efficacy. KDFWR and partners continue to monitor carp movements with over 170 receivers and over 1,000 tagged invasive carp in the Ohio River. The majority of silver carp detections have shown the use of tributaries as compared to mainstem habitats. Estimated mean pool-to-pool transition probabilities were generally low, suggesting that most of these Ohio River fish remain within the pool in which they were tagged. Peak movement tends to take place from May through July, with less movement from January through March. KDFWR staff serve as the project's data manager by gathering receiver data from all partners and organizing the data in a SQL database.

KDFWR is working with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region 3 (USFWS) to sample invasive carp using eDNA. Taylorsville and Cave Run Lakes were sampled in October 2024. Taylorsville and Cave Run lakes are in the Ohio River Basin and connected to known invasive carp populations by the Salt and Licking rivers, respectively. Less than 2% of water samples collected tested positive for invasive carp genetic material at both lakes. This is part of KDFWR Early Detection Rapid Response (EDRR) efforts to address threats to high priority inland fisheries and develop response plans. The first surveys are focused on invasive carp with future surveys including additional aquatic invasive species. Green River Lake and Rough River Lake will be sampled in 2025 to further our understanding of potential invasive carp expansion.

Engineering, Infrastructure, & Technology Division – Kevin Rexroat, Director

The Engineering, Infrastructure, and Technology Division completed and initiated multiple projects in the last year. Completed projects include a new well-pump constructed on Sloughs WMA, boat ramps on the Salt River and Hinkston Creek, a new courtesy dock on the Little Sandy River, multiple other courtesy docks were also refurbished. A new wastewater treatment plant was constructed serving the Robert C. Webb Conservation Camp and other infrastructure upgrades were completed serving the animal health facility utilized by agency veterinarian, and multiple other biological field offices including the Pfeiffer Fish Hatchery's office renovation.

Construction began on a large public shooting range on Veterans Memorial WMA along with initial phase construction of the Ballard WMA Pump serving expansive acreage for prime waterfowl habitat.

The Information Technology section continued support for online license sales, quota hunts, and camp registrations. Improved internal tracking systems for firearm inventory. Rebuilt and launched an improved harvest data system, modernized data management systems, access databases were merged to online systems. The IT group also enhanced license sales reports for use by field officers and initiated comprehensive server upgrades.

Administrative Services Division – Melissa Trent, Director

The Administrative Services Division, comprised of the Accounting, Grants, and Purchasing branches, continues to play a vital role in supporting the department's operations. The Purchasing Branch has taken on a significantly expanded role, streamlining procurement processes and ensuring compliance with all applicable regulations while securing the best value for the department. The Grants Branch continues to oversee funding allocations, ensuring proper stewardship of resources to maximize program effectiveness. Meanwhile, the Accounting Branch remains dedicated to maintaining fiscal responsibility through accurate financial reporting and budget management.

As the division adapts to these changes, staff remain committed to excellence in service delivery, financial stewardship, and operational efficiency, which supports the department's overall objectives.