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	<b>Director Liaison</b>		<b>Committee Vice Chair</b>
	<b>Committee Chair</b>		<b>Committee Recorder</b>

### Meeting Details

Meeting Date(s) and Location(s): *List dates of all meetings held in the past year. \*500 Character Limit*

### Executive Summary

*Information contained in this section provides an overall summary of the committee meeting including a judgment of the meeting's success compared to previous meetings. Photos or other additional documents that help convey the work of the committee in this past year should be noted in the text but added to the end of this document as an attachment to the Annual Report PDF.*

*\*3700 Character Limit*



**Director Information Items**

*Information in this section should highlight the committee's progress to goals and objectives identified in the Technical Working Committee Charter, identify challenges or risks (perceived or realized) and include any other updates from Midwest state's or relative business discussed. \*3600 Character Limit*



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**Committee Workgroups**

*Identify workgroups that are associated with this TWC. Provide a brief 2-3 sentence summary of work accomplished in the past year. A workgroup is a smaller team that supports the goals and objectives of the TWC and is necessary and needed to help accomplish the work. It may include additional members not in the TWC but must be lead by a member of the TWC.*

*\*650 Character Limit*

Workgroup Name (1)

States Member Lead

Workgroup Name (2)

States Member Lead

**Requests for Action**

*List below any accompanying documents attached to the annual report. Note: All formal requests for action by the MAFWA Board of Directors must complete the appropriate forms with approvals by MAFWA Executive Committee prior to the Annual Board Meeting. Ex. Committee Charter, Request and Risk Assessment. See page 12 of the TWC Guidelines Manual for timelines and details.*

*\*1300 Character Limit*

**Proposed Meeting Dates/Times/Location**

*Dates and times the TWC will meet in the upcoming year.*



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[illegible]



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## Annual Report

### Agenda

*Provide meeting information from the past year in the space below. If additional supporting documents are needed, please combine into a single PDF and use the space below to document what is attached. Before final submission to the MAFWA Executive Secretary. \*4000 Character Limit*



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**DNR**  
Indiana Department  
of Natural Resources

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## **MAFWA Public Lands, Private Lands, & Wildlife Diversity Working Groups Meeting**

*February 11-13, 2025*

*Monroe Convention Center & Affiliated Courtyard by Marriott, Bloomington, Indiana*

### **MONDAY 2/10/2025**

**TRAVEL TO BLOOMINGTON, IN**

**MEALS ON YOUR OWN & PROSPECTIVE INFORMAL SOCIAL AT CONFERENCE HOTEL**

### **TUESDAY 2/11/2025**

*Registration Open 7:00 – 9:00am*

**BREAKFAST AT CONVENTION CENTER** 7:30-9:00

**WELCOME** 9:00-9:10

**INDIANA DIVISION OF FISH & WILDLIFE HISTORY & OVERVIEW:** 9:10-10:00

*Amanda Wuestefeld, IN Division of Fish & Wildlife Director*

**BREAK WITH REFRESHMENTS** 10:00-10:15

**PUBLIC LANDS KEYNOTE PRESENTATION:** 10:15-11:00

*Kalli Dunn, Goose Pond FWA Overview & Kevin Shettle, Chinook Coal Fire*

**PRIVATE LANDS KEYNOTE PRESENTATION:** 11:00-11:45

*Trevor Laureys, Indiana Conservation Partnership & Indiana NRCS Program Highlights*

**WILDLIFE DIVERSITY KEYNOTE PRESENTATION: *Like Sands through the Hourglass*** 11:45-12:30  
**- A Conservation Journey at Kankakee Sands**

*Cassie Hauswald, The Nature Conservancy - Indiana*

**LUNCH AT CONVENTION CENTER** 12:30-1:20

**BREAKOUT TO WORKING GROUPS** 1:20-1:30

**WORKING GROUP BREAKOUTS** 1:30-4:30

*Informal Breaks with Refreshments*

**DINNER AT CONVENTION CENTER** 5:30-7:00

### **WEDNESDAY 2/12/2025**

**BREAKFAST AT CONVENTION CENTER** 7:30-9:00

**PUBLIC & PRIVATE LANDS TOURS & BIRDING OPPORTUNITY** 9:00-6:00

*Box Lunch and Refreshments Provided*

**DINNER AT CONVENTION CENTER** 6:00-7:00

### **THURSDAY 2/13/2025**

**BREAKFAST AT CONVENTION CENTER** 7:30-9:00

**PUBLIC LANDS, PRIVATE LANDS, & WILDLIFE DIVERSITY BREAKOUTS:** 9:00-12:00

**DEVELOP ACTION ITEMS FOR DIRECTORS' REPORT**

*Break with Refreshments* 10:15-10:45

**ADJOURN** 12:00



## MAFWA Board of Directors Action Request and Risk Assessment

**Issue or Opportunity** (state the problem your team needs to address in 1-2 sentences - *\*400 Character Limit*)

**List the goal/objectives of the Technical Working Committee this request supports:** *\*800 Character Limit*

**Provide a timeline for implementation:**

<b>Actions</b> What are the tasks that need to be done in order to accomplish the work.	<b>Current Status</b>	<b>*Est. Date Approval is needed by</b>	<b>Notes</b> <i>*150 Character Limit</i>

*\*What is the estimated date you need approval from MAFWA Board of Directors to keep the opportunity identified moving forward without significant delay.*



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Data and/or Information that supports the issue or opportunity - attach documents as needed. If this is a financial request, attach a 1-year and remaining Technical Working Committee tenure budget if funding needs are required beyond 1 fiscal year:

*\*2000 Character Limit*



**MAFWA Board of Directors Action  
Request and Risk Assessment**

**Impact/Risk Assessment**

<b>Need/Request in order to accomplish critical work</b>  <i>*200 Character Limit</i>	<b>Impact</b>  <i>Provide 1-2 sentences on the overall impact this request/need would have.</i>  <i>*200 Character Limit</i>	<b>Risk</b>  <i>If need/request is not secured - Rating 1-10</i>  <i>1= little to no risk 10= significant risk</i>	<b>Alternatives/options to accomplish the work if MAFWA funding or resources are not allocated</b>  <i>*300 Character Limit</i>



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**MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING**  
**February 11-13, 2025**  
**Missouri Department of Conservation**  
**Matt Bowyer**

**Top State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges:**

- **Invasive Species**
  - It's becoming nearly impossible to maintain pace with the constant barrage of invasive species.
- **Keeping up with growing needs of habitat management while balancing staff time of numerous agency priorities.**
  - Not just on public lands, but across the state in general, the collective conservation community and private landowners/citizens are challenged with keeping up with succession and putting enough habitat management on the ground each year to keep up with it.
  - Management of natural communities surrounded by threats (invasive species, development) and burdened by restrictions that can inhibit efficient management make it hard for staff to conduct basic habitat manipulations in some cases.
  - Growing priorities such as CWD targeted removal efforts take up critical staff time that in the past was important for habitat management prep projects in late winter.
- **Ensuring we are meeting and balancing the public use and recreation needs of diverse user expectations**
  - Providing management that supports multiple user interests, including consumptive and nonconsumptive
  - Implications for R3, relevancy, etc.
  - Growing concerns and questions about the impacts of nonresident hunters crowding public land decreasing opportunities for resident hunters.
- **Aging infrastructure demands and costs of maintenance and repair and just area maintenance standards and expectations in general**
  - Wetland infrastructure is most obvious, in this case aging wells, levees, or in general, wetland pools designed without consideration for resiliency create an ongoing need for costly replacement of critical infrastructure.
  - Staff busy with other agency priorities have less time for public land area maintenance.
- **Public land aquatic resources**
  - Concerns about real-time data sharing (internal and external), etc. This applies to fisheries sampling data, fish kills, invasive species, etc. on public water bodies
  - Impact of new technologies (live-scan SONAR in particular) on recreational fisheries.
  - Reduced water quality, increased heavy metals, decreased angler access, and decreased sport fish populations due to ageing impoundments.

### **Top State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities:**

- **Focused collaborative work in key landscapes first**
  - We simply can't do everything everywhere. We must prioritize and pool resources toward landscapes and watersheds offering the highest return on investment first and ensure better connectivity within these landscapes.
  - Our public lands management has to work in tandem with focused private and partner lands to create larger patch sizes and connectivity.
- **Employ the increased use and coverage of natural community/habitat strike teams in a prioritized approach**
  - Add lift to current workforce to keep up with invasive species and succession, affecting more habitat each year – challenge is sustainable, long-term funding for teams
- **Employ more and larger units of prescribed fire in fire-dependent/tolerant communities**
  - In Missouri, we need more fire at larger scales. Nearly all Missouri natural communities are fire-dependent or tolerant (to some degree) and we simply aren't putting enough fire on the landscape each year to keep up
- **Increased partnership and cross-jurisdiction collaboration, which is aided by the above three opportunities and increases our collective abilities to deliver**
  - Have we truly explored the full potential of things like cross-jurisdictional timber sales or joint forest, woodland, glade, wetland, grassland, karst, stream complexes managed as a whole vs individual and independent parcels

### **Other Topics for report:**

**MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING**  
**Feb 11-13, 2025**  
**North Dakota Game and Fish Department**  
**Kent Luttschwager – Wildlife Resource Section Leader**

**Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges:**

- 1) Continued year-round demand for other uses such as hiking trails, biking trails, camping, partying.
- 2) Significant amount of hunting pressure due to limited amount of public land (94% privately owned, 6% public)
- 3) Degraded old planted grassland habitat
- 4) Game cameras and what to do about them

**Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities:**

- 1) Developed goal and identified old degraded grassland plantings to reseed (using several methods). Goal to renovate 10,000 acres in 5 years.
- 2) Coordinating with US Fish and Wildlife Service to gather baseline native prairie grassland vegetation condition and developed monitoring protocols for long term evaluation of grazing systems.
- 3) Cost of doing business has significantly increased for seed, chemical, equipment, materials, labor. Proposed increase in license fees introduced to legislation.

**Other Topics for report:**

**CWD**

Private land continues to suffer from serious habitat degradation. Went from 3.5 million acres of CRP to less than a million. Wetland drainage and tile draining has increased significantly with little or no wetland protection in place. Native prairie being converted to cropping at alarming rates.

**MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING**  
**Feb 11-13, 2025**  
**(MN DNR, Fish and Wildlife Division)**  
**(Jamie Gangaware, Wildlife Operations Manager)**

**Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges:**

1. **Development, fragmenting habitats and increasing wildland/urban interface issues:** Both urban development/expansion and rural (solar, wind) have increased complexity of traditional management and traditional uses of our Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). Expectations from new neighbors are heightened with regards to increased use options, lower tolerance for things like foot or vehicle traffic, and less understanding from neighbors about WMA purpose/ management strategies are leading to negative interactions with the public and DNR staff/ traditional users. Wind/ solar energy farms are buying rights faster than MN can develop policies to protect current lands or future acquisitions. The increased development also has increased non-traditional users/ pressures on WMAs, for activities such as birding, foraging, maple syrup tapping, kayaking, fat biking, as well as inquiries for commercial harvest opportunities. Managing these pressures has become an increased time sink for our reduced staffing contingent across the state.
2. **Funding security:** Fast cost increases have cut our available budgets significantly in the past 3 years. Union contracts, fleet increases, facility costs, and meeting federal requirements like BABA have steadily decreased available funding from operating budget. Having a secure source of funding with periodic increases, separate from having to rely on license fee increases. MN relies on license sales for almost all of the annual operating budget for Fisheries and Wildlife; the strain on our Game and Fish Fund cannot support this level of commitment, while license fee increases continue to be a discussion that is pushed off year after year. Seeking stable funding from General Fund would alleviate these pressures while supporting the work that we do as an Agency that benefits non-license buyers.
3. **Staying up with technology** (OnX, drones, ebikes, etc.): Staying relevant while still staying true to the purpose of our public WMAs is hard. There is always something new being rolled out to the public and while those opportunities to utilize public lands seem as though they would be a compatible use, they are usually not. Or not at the level the public would like to use them at. Rule/ statute changes lag significantly behind, so use and negative interactions increase. This makes things harder to shut down when we can enact policy. And the speed at which OnX has access to land ownership changes is astounding. There are times where our staff are made aware of acquisition closings by members of the public that have been stalking OnX and notify us when the changes are posted.

**Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities:**

1. **Increased use:** while it is easy to focus on the negative impacts of increased use, these can create additional opportunities. Being nimble enough to capture as an opportunity before creating enforcement or compliance issues will forever

remain a challenge. But creating space at the table to have discussions with non-traditional user groups and have the willingness to be inclusive and change traditional management strategies could open doors for relationships and funding. Foraging, winter sports, etc. could keep WMAs relevant and supported into the next generations if done thoughtfully with WMA missions in mind.

2. **Acquisitions, habitat development work:** Continuing to work alongside partners to identify additional opportunities will be the most meaningful and impactful benefit to our Agency and users. There are many funding opportunities available to our partners and hiring contractors to complete work on WMAs supports our mission, our users and the wildlife in the state. MN has a long history of partnerships, and the funding that is available specific to acquisition and habitat work has allowed for many opportunities to continue these partnerships. These existing relationships can serve as a model to develop new relationships with new user groups and new partners, leading MN into the future.
3. **Landscape level development:** MN has been working to take planning from the land unit level to a landscape/ complex level. The work has been slow going but is including various ownerships within the planning. This work has not been done in the state for WMAs before and will lead to a more thoughtful and higher quality network of public lands within the state. This planning will impact acquisition as well as habitat work, public and private ownership considerations and will have a lengthy public input process. Partners and staff are excited for the end result.

**Other Topics for report:** Funding strategies, new policy development sharing. Could there be a newsletter or other communication strategy amongst agencies within MAFWA to share work completed that could be beneficial to other states?

# **MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING**

**Feb 11-13, 2025**

**IL DNR**

**Mitch Hess**

## **Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges:**

Higher materials and construction costs means that our stamp dollars don't go as far on waterfowl projects.

Lower balances in our Wildlife and Fish Fund (primarily from licenses and stamps) means less match available.

Retirements and Vacancies.

## **Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities:**

Increase in bobcat tags- More opportunity on public land.

We closed on Orient Bottoms - 1728.48 acres of high-quality flatwood woodland in the bottoms of the Big Muddy River and 187 acres of predominantly dry-mesic upland forest adjacent to Copperhead Hollow.

W-76-D has gone to a (33) fully funded sites and heavy equipment is starting to be delivered.

## **Other Topics for report:**

**MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING**  
**February 11 - 13, 2025**  
**Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources**  
**Wes Little**

**Top State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges:**

- Replacing aging infrastructure and equipment typically only occurs on a limited basis due to available funds. Wildlife Division's FY25 budget only included \$225,000 for machinery and implements for use on WMAs, nearly half of the FY24 budget. There were no trucks purchased in FY25, and very little equipment. KDFWR owns, leases, or manages more than 102 WMAs for public use. Although the department owns only 169,000 acres, lease agreements and cooperative partnerships and other state and federal public lands afford the public with more than 1.7 million acres for recreational access. Staffing also continues to be an issue. We continue to see a low level of interest in our posted vacancies. The majority of applicants applying for jobs do not meet minimum qualifications and/or experience. Currently we have 130 full time Wildlife Division Staff. Kentucky continues to rank among the lowest paid wildlife staff and is one of the top two underfunded pension systems in the nation. During the 2024 legislative session, members voted to approve a 3% raise for employees on July 1, 2024, and an additional 3% in 2025. During the 2023 legislative session, members voted to approve a 6% raise for employees, and during the 2022 Regular Session, the General Assembly approved an 8% across the board raise for state employees. The financial impact to the agency will further change the landscape of our agency in the very near future if alternative forms of income is not identified soon. At the current rate approximately 73% of our Wildlife division budget is consumed by personnel salaries and benefits, not including the 3% raises occurring in 2024 and 2025.
- Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) sampling efforts continue to strain budgets and staff time. In 2021 a wild detection of CWD in TN and near the KY border enacted the Kentucky CWD Response Plan and established a Surveillance Zone in 5 counties in western KY. In 2023 the first wild detection of CWD within the state of KY occurred when a deer harvested on private land in Ballard County tested positive. This added three additional counties to the CWD Surveillance Zone. A new CWD positive detection in a high-fence deer farm located in Breckinridge County near Louisville enacted another CWD surveillance zone in October 2024. The CWD Response Plan calls for voluntary sample collection in every county in KY each year, and mandatory hunter check stations during the modern firearms season in the western KY Surveillance Zone. The number of samples required to detect prevalence in the state increases every year, and significantly near the new positive detections. Nearly every staff member in the wildlife division is called on to work long days, additional weekends, and travel as far as five hours away from home to help meet these goals. Staff work multiple weekends during the deer firearms season as well. The overtime accrued is yet another budget hurdle, and the time staff are required to spend away from home and family is degrading attitudes and willingness to go above and beyond to help.

- The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources recognizes that approximately 94 percent of Kentucky's land and water area is in private ownership. Additionally, state surveys consistently report that "lack of access" is the number one constraint to hunters going afield. Because of these two factors, the department has continued to focus our efforts on providing public access for all sportsmen, but especially hunters in Kentucky. Our department and commission system have long held the belief that every hunter, angler and sportsmen should have a place to go participate in their outdoor activity within thirty minutes of their home. WMA land acquisitions continue to increase as mentioned in the opportunities section below. This highlights challenges that we continue to face on our WMAs. Increasing incidences of illegal use and trespass by UTV's, timber theft, homeless encampments, boundary encroachments, access and road maintenance are the most challenging tasks to complete each year. As we find ways to increase access, we rely on existing staff to carry the workload. The 55,000-acre Cumberland Forest WMA has a staff of 1, and that one staff member already had a heavy workload prior to the acquisition. Budget issues that limit the pay scale and filling positions with qualified applicants willing to work for our current salaries will continue to be a major challenge for the KDFWR's WMAs.

### **Top State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities:**

- Land acquisition – We continue to explore nontraditional means of securing public hunting access to private land. Last year's report included the announcement the largest conservation easement in Kentucky history and created the nearly 55,000-acre Cumberland Forest Wildlife Management Area in Bell, Knox and Leslie counties. This year the Department has secured more public hunting access using WMA Access Agreements. Over 60,000 acres of public hunting access were secured in eastern KY, creating the new Pocahontas WMA which spans across parts of Martin, Pike, Harlan, Johnson and Floyd counties. Likewise, the Department partnered with the University of the Cumberlands to provide public access for hunting, fishing and related outdoor recreation on over 10,000 acres of university-owned land in Whitley and McCreary counties. The new University of the Cumberlands WMA is located just outside of Williamsburg, KY near the Tennessee border and within the Jellico Mountain range which is in close proximity to the Daniel Boone National Forest. New lands owned by KDFWR and added to public access include the new 1,114 acre Little Sextons Creek WMA acquired using the Fees In Lieu Of mitigation program (FILO), 1,068 acres added to Obion Creek WMA through a land trade involving nuclear energy at Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant, allowing KDFWR to trade 665 acres of West KY WMA for 1,068 acres in Fulton Co, and the 640 acre Horse Mill Branch WMA acquired using FILO and land donation.
- Public lands managers and the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Information Systems (KFWIS) Team have been working to change the way information about individual Wildlife Management Areas is delivered to hunters. WMA story maps, which identify for the public the various habitat types found on an area, and how management practices and habitat improvement projects are being implemented. These maps allow managers to track efforts and visualize future goals, while providing hunters with more tools to scout and plan activities on our WMA's. Clay WMA in eastern Kentucky is wrapping up the pilot project to be released in 2025, and two central Kentucky WMA's (Taylorsville Lake and Green River Lake WMAs) are underway. This effort will be implemented statewide in 2026. These story maps provide management practices through time, and also allow

hunters to customize maps for their own various interests, instead of relying on an all-encompassing overview map that only provides boundaries and infrastructure. Another branch of the KFWIS effort was our new Dove123 app, which uses Survey123 to digitize public dove fields and apply cropping and management information as the year progresses. The app documents successes and failures, and allows users to upload pictures of fields, both successful and unsuccessful crops, to help hunters make decisions about where to hunt. The Dove123 app will feed the WMA Story Map, giving the hunter more features to pick and chose from to create the hunt specific map they can use to plan a hunt.

- The East Kentucky Habitat initiative is centered around KY's elk restoration zone, which encompasses 16 counties in the Cumberland Plateau in eastern KY. One of the goals set forth in the KDFWR Elk Management Plan is to improve habitat in the elk zone. The decrease in surface mine activity in the elk zone has led to the loss of early successional habitat and the increase of non-native species. A total of 8,992 acres have been burned since 2018, including over 3,300 acres in 2024. In 2021, KDFWR identified the elk management zone as an area of special interest and started the Eastern KY habitat initiative with the goal of burning 2000 acres each year. That goal was raised to 4000 acres/year in 2025. KDFWR continues to identify new properties to work on and have outlined some key hurdles to address moving forward. As a Wildlife Division priority, Elk Program staff have enlisted other certified prescribed burn bosses and burn crews from across the state to meet this goal in the future. A grant through the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation provided the opportunity to aerial spray a total of 4277 acres on Boone Forest, Elk Forest, and Cumberland Forest Wildlife Management Areas and Asher Hunter Access Area since Fall of 2023. Herbicide treatments were applied via helicopter to control Autumn Olive and Sericea Lespedeza to promote better elk forage. These areas were followed with prescribed fire in 2024 as a secondary treatment to improve habitat conditions.

#### **Other Topics for report:**

- Since 2022, KDFWR has treated nearly 8,000 acres using aerial herbicide application. Most applications are in grassland or wetland situations that cannot be accessed using traditional spray equipment. Also, many acres of forestland have been treated for invasives as well. These aerial applications allow large blocks of timber to be sprayed after native species have reached winter dormancy. This method is an extremely cost-effective method of removing invasives and undesirables in difficult terrain.

**MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING**  
**Feb 11-13, 2025**  
**Bloomington, IN**  
**Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Wildlife Division**  
**Pat Molini, Division Assistant Administrator**

**Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges:**

Multi-year Drought/Wildfires.

Invasive Species.

Aging buildings (office/shop/storage complexes on public areas)

**Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities:**

Added a position to public lands section.

Partner land opportunities.

Grants for public lands and surrounding private land for invasive tree removal.

**Other Topics for report:**

Deer numbers are low in many parts of the state.

**MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING**  
**Feb 11-13, 2025**  
**Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division**  
**Earl Flegler**

**Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges:**

Competition for Land Between Renewable Resources/Solar and Conservation Lands

Increase in Demand for Utility Easements for Fiber/High Speed Internet Installations-  
Nearly 2 Billion of Federal Grant Funds Available to Utility Companies In Michigan

Interest to Expand Trail Use by Bikes/E-Bike/Snowmobiles/Horses

**Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities:**

Fund and Parcels Are Available for Land Acquisition But Value of Land Exceeds  
Available Funds

Dams: Executive and Legislative Interest in Addressing Dam Removal and  
Maintenance

License Increase Proposal

**Other Topics for report:**

Building Demolition

Disposal of Public Land to Local Government with a Reverter If Not Used for Public  
Recreation

## **MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING**

**Feb 11-13, 2025**

**Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources**

**Anne Reis, Public Lands Specialist**

### **Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges:**

- The DNR Fish & Wildlife Account continues to have a structural deficit (more spending authority than revenue) due to decreasing participation in hunting and trapping as well as stagnant license fees (there hasn't been an increase in in-state license fees for over a decade). Last biennium, money was transferred from the Forestry revenue account (timber sales) to the Fish & Wildlife account to prevent lapses in operations. We await the next budget cycle for legislative solutions. Cuts to operations budgets and LTE support are projected without a
- Adopt-a-Fish or Wildlife Area Program continues to increase (over 40 groups have adopted a property), but the program is only supported by one ½ time LTE. The work of building community with volunteers requires a dedicated employee with little to no turnover year after year. Friends Groups also require consistency and need to feel trust in the relationship with the program.
- Freeze on issuance of federal grant funding (e.g. NAWCA and PR) for projects that were already selected and planned. Some projects that were planned for implementation/spending money this year are in a holding pattern with a lot of uncertainty. This affects staffing for organizations, agencies and contractors and for other budget sources that are contributing toward the same projects on public lands (Jason Fleener).

### **Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities:**

- The 2025-2029 Wildlife Management Recreational Relevancy Implementation Plan will help statewide specialists and property managers to initiate projects in infrastructure, programming and partnerships for non-traditional audiences. This requires Division agreement among individual programs (Parks & Rec) and supporting programs (social science) to ensure success.
- An 1800-wetland restoration is underway at a State Wildlife Area (Princes Point) halfway between Madison and Milwaukee. This is a partnership between NRCS (WRE/P), DNR and DU (engineering). When finished in 2026, the addition to the property will allow for a wide range of recreational activities, including hunting, wildlife observation and hiking.
- A new state statute is being implemented by the Forestry, Fisheries, Natural Heritage Conservation, Parks, and Wildlife. State Statute 23.0925, "The department shall prepare a biennial work plan that coincides with the biennial state budget process. The plan shall establish priorities and goals for habitat work on lands managed by the department and measure progress on established priorities and goals. The department shall annually report its progress on habitat work plan goals to the natural resources board, the joint committee on finance,

and the relevant standing committees of the legislature.” The first report is scheduled to be released July 1, 2025 (Krista Lutzke, Habitat Strategist).

**Other Topics for report:**

- With limited staffing capacity in DNR, we are finding creative ways to contract out/partner with other organizations to help us deliver our core work. For example, our contracted partnerships with DU and Wisconsin Waterfowl Association to help us deliver wetland engineering and wetland restoration projects on DNR lands. Those organizations specialize in these areas of expertise that local DNR staff do not (Jason Fleener, Wetland Specialist).
- Wildlife worked with Forestry and the Natural Heritage Conservation programs to develop habitat prioritization to focus efforts. Prioritization includes some of the most widespread and resource-intensive cover types the DNR manages. Priorities ensure efficient use of available resources based on impact, cost/benefit analysis, long-term and large-scale goals, and management needs. Current habitat priorities for WM are Barrens, Surrogate Grasslands, Oak Forests, Wetlands, Bottomland Hardwoods, and Young Forests. Prioritization levels are based on a Low, Medium, and High ranking system with staff efforts focused on high-quality habitat. While intended for use by Wildlife on state-owned lands, these habitat priorities include all land ownerships statewide. Priorities can also inform work outside work, such as the Deer Management Assistance Program, habitat work utilizing DNR funded grants, and Farm Bill Biologist priorities (Krista Lutzke, Habitat Strategist).
- The Wisconsin Natural Resources Magazine (2024 summer addition) featured as the cover story “Wisconsin’s Vital Grasslands” which shone a spotlight on the DNR Wildlife Management’s efforts to increase conservation grazing as a habitat management tool and the partner livestock producers who are part of this effort. Conservation Grazing continues to grow in usage as a management tool which has seen beneficial effects on public lands as well as on private lands. Private land usage of conservation grazing can play a critical role in getting many more acres into perennial living cover which a variety of wildlife species, game and nongame utilize for all or parts of their life cycles (Mary C Anderson, Grassland & Conservation Ag Specialist).
- Farming Agreements continue to be a successful way to pause habitat creation, control invasive species, partner with cooperators and provide time for habitat managers to determine the best habitat type for the particular landscape. Biologists are guided by the SBGW’s ranking system and scores for priority habitat management on savannas, barrens, grasslands, and wetlands. In calendar year 2024, approximately 14,900 acres of row crop, hay, and grazing acres as recorded and queried in the Land Management System (LMS). Commodity Crop acres such as corn and soybean acres have remained relatively stable in 2023 and 2024, with a significant increase in grazing acres from 1912 acres in 2023 to 4605 acres in 2024 (Mary C Anderson, Grassland & Conservation Ag Specialist).

**MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING**  
**Feb 11-13, 2025**  
**(Ohio Division of Wildlife)**  
**(Presented by Gary L. Comer, Jr.)**

**Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges:**

**Changing agency culture along with a lack of long-term direction:** Quickly expanding workload while shifting our process for conducting work away from staff and moving towards contractors. Change is hard and growing pains can be hard to manage. (I.E. Statewide contracts) Some things change quickly, others not fast enough: old buildings and old equipment need replaced yet direction of what the future workload and staff levels looks like to determine equipment and building needs isn't there. Leads to depleted morale.

**Managing for wildlife habitat and the public's expectations:** Managing habitat requires disturbance which is generally taken negatively by the public. Balancing management with recreational use- How we manage our public properties while maintaining positive public opinion. Shifting funding and resources to habitat mgt. often takes away from traditional recreational management. Staff are forced to try and do both sometimes unsuccessfully, do less of everything, or educate the public of the "why".

**Public land boundary defense:** Often we find boundary discrepancies that result in encroachment from neighbors. This ultimately takes away from the habitat and the sportsmen who paid for the land. This is a result of staff not being able to mark boundary correctly, or not being able to get to it at an interval that allows us to prevent encroachment. Solving encroachments are very costly therefore we desire to prevent them rather than fix them after they've occurred. Quickly expanding land mass along with depleting staff over time are part to blame along with not having the tools necessary to establish correct boundary lines (not having surveys or survey equipment to mark the line accurately). Effort is improving as we move towards using contractors for boundary marking.

**Habitat management:** Getting vital successional habitat controlled with increased restrictive management windows while keeping up with the increasing number of new invasive herbaceous species.

**Funding-** Having ample funding for wildlife and recreational management.

**Education:** Communicate is key but it is challenging even internally. The nature of staff being geographically distributed around the state makes it a challenge with our own employees about what we are doing and why we are doing it, couple that with educating the public creates a significant hurdle to overcome. Improvement in this area would go a long way for internal and external customers.

### **Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities:**

**Increase of human Capital:** Recently (32) staff were hired in the Wildlife Management section, which will represent about 1/3 of our staff in new roles or as new hires. An ambitious cohort probationary training program is currently underway to assist new hires to gain skills to be successful in their new roles. Training courses include Commercial Driver's License, Pesticide Applicators Licensing, Chain Saw Operation, Technical Writing, State Procurement Process, Non-Commissioned Firearms Training, Boundary Maintenance, Dove Field Planting and Manipulation, Forest Habitat Management, Policy and Procedures, UTV and Vehicle Policy, and others still in development.

**Statewide contracts:** Contracts for various management activities on wildlife areas (trail mowing, invasive species management, road maintenance, etc.). These are a great opportunity to get more work done on our wildlife areas. Using this tool to implement management that we as staff could not have accomplished, "because of amount or size of project(s)".

**Land acquisition/ access:** The Division continues to expand our current wildlife areas and add new ones, increasing the amount of acreage that will be permanently available for public access. Along with OLHAP which is growing quickly.

### **Other Topics for report:**

Operations/Management: Continue to pursue large multi-year statewide procurement contracts with our Department of Administrative Services to reduce administrative hurdles with purchasing for both habitat and recreational management. Recently completed contracts for seed, herbicide, adult rooster pheasants, brush clearing, and refuse dump removal. Currently pursuing contracts for forest invasive species and mid-story treatment, road grading, and bush hogging. Scoping roughly 15 additional contracts for future bidding.



**MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING**  
**February 11-13, 2025**  
**Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife**  
**Dan Eckstein**

**Top State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges:**

- Legislation- Recent legislation has removed the ability for posted regulations on all Indiana DNR lands to be unenforceable unless they are state code. This leaves many of our property specific regulations unenforceable by law enforcement officers. We are in the process of codifying our registered signs, but this is multi-year process. There is other legislation in the works that could potentially change deer regulations on public and private land as well as the potential for reintroducing captive deer in the native herd to negate the effects of CWD.
- Competing interest for public use- On a limited amount of public land, there has been an increase in the number of nontraditional and traditional users wanting to utilize public land, creating challenges on how land should be managed.
- Funding Challenges- The operation of our public land has seen a dramatic increase in operational costs. These stem from the increase in salaries for full-time employees as well as the continuing high price for maintenance and basic operations.

**Top State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities:**

- Acquisition of new land- We had one of the largest acquisitions in DNR history occur over the winter. Busseron Creek Fish and Wildlife, located in Sullivan County, is approximately 4,000 acres in size. We were able to acquire the parcel through a partnership with the Conservation Fund and the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape.
- New Equipment- We were able to amend our FWA grant approximately 3 million dollars and purchased a variety of much needed tractors, fecons, and other equipment.
- New Customer Management System- Indiana DNR has recently switched license vendors (Brandt). This new vendor should help our customers more conveniently buy licenses. The new system should also help us improve our reserve draw system.



**MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING**  
**Feb 11-13, 2025**  
**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
**Curt Kemmerer**

**Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges:**

Staffing: Staffing our public lands teams remains a challenge. We currently have 15 FTE vacancies in the Wildlife Bureau, which is 2 more than the last time this report was shared. Retirements have continued to be the major force behind vacancies, but we have seen a few transfers to other segments of the Department or resignations, both of which have traditionally been rare. We continue to utilize contract positions working through partner NGOs to fill some of the gaps where most needed, but even these positions seem to be tougher to fill with quality candidates than in the past. As such, recruitment of candidates into these, and subsequently the FTE positions has been more of a concern. Our efforts to engage potential future employees earlier in their careers has continued, and includes efforts such as recruitment at career fairs, advertising summer positions earlier than other DNR Bureaus or other conservation organizations and direct communication with university faculty.

Increasing Use: It remains somewhat hard to believe that licensed hunting and trapping are on a long-term decline, when viewed through the lens of our public land use. We anecdotally see increased pressure throughout the year on many of our WMAs, and we hear that sentiment from many hunters. Additional uses that challenge the traditional compatible uses are a growing part of this equation as well. A prime example is the use of e-bikes, which is on the rise in some locations. Running a network of cellular cameras, the use of drones, UTVs, snowmobiles, etc. “Competition” for public lands is very high, and it often leads to specific interests being brought up legislatively.

Enhancements on EWP/WRE easements: There have been challenges in working through the processes and standards in place within some USDA easement programs, with regard to implementing wildlife habitat enhancements. The concern is that prohibitive standards or policies limit potentially viable management practices and developments on WMAs that local managers understand will be beneficial to the site and to wildlife. Despite outside funding and long-term commitment by DNR, several recent projects have stalled. This seems to be in contradiction to where these programs were at in the past, so we’re unclear on where this might end up or what it will take to get there.

**Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities:**

Forest Management: We continue to grow our Forest Wildlife Stewardship Initiative, which supports active forest management on WMAs. New forest wildlife stewardship plans are being completed each year as we strive to get all forested acres under a long-term stewardship plan. Roughly 1/3 of our ~400,000 WMA acres in the state are forested. WMAs with a forest plan are eligible for forest stewardship funding. Projects

have spent an average of ~\$300,000 annually the last two years. In addition, we're also spending upwards of \$200,000 in outside grants (primarily tree planting).

Working with State Parks: The Wildlife Bureau has been increasingly active in partnering with the Parks Bureau to manage wildlife habitat in State Parks and Rec Areas. Some parks, and all rec areas, have a public hunting component. Increased management on those acres is a mutual benefit and has become more of a priority in recent years. Some larger rec areas have agricultural leases, similar to many of our WMAs. In some cases, the local wildlife management team is taking over the management of the lease due to our experience and capacity, in order to shift the focus to restoration and improved wildlife habitat.

AMAs: We are looking at launching a new program within our Wildlife Management Area authority that will be titled Aquatic Management Areas. These areas will be focused on the aquatic aspect, with protection of water resources and connecting the public to those water resources as primary considerations. This will include both fee title acquisition and easements. This program may blend well with other initiatives in the state that focus on watershed protection, nutrient reduction and other water quality aspects, therefore potentially bringing us together with new partners.

### **Other Topics for report:**

Utilities on Public Land: While not a widespread issue, there are a few instances every year of a proposed utility ROW or other development on public lands. It seems that we have to fight similar battles over and over.

Land Values: Land values of all types have risen sharply in recent years, and even if/when agricultural land values plateau (or if they ever saw a drop), the recreational land values are more likely to hold strong. We're seeing increases in parcellation, absentee ownership, leasing of hunting rights, etc. Demand for smaller recreational properties is very high, so even "poor" ground in Iowa is very expensive these days. This is one of many reasons that expansion of public lands is more challenging than ever.

## **MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING**

**February 11-13, 2025**

**Kansas Wildlife and Parks**

**Dustin Mengarelli**

### **For Discussion**

#### ***Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges***

- Nonresident waterfowl hunting pressure, cameras and night vision coyote hunting.
- Coordination for managing federal partners properties.
- Employee Recruitment as interests and societal norms change.

#### ***Top 3 State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities***

- Increase exposure/education/promotion of who, what, how and why PL staff are and do.
- Partnerships with NGOs, COE/BOR, Local Fire Districts, KFS, BHA
- Comparable salary adjustment.

### **Wildland fire assistance**

Previous years flooding of Reservoir systems and recent droughts have led to increased fire danger and volatility. Standing dead timber from 2019 flood mixed with large quantities of light ladder fuels then compounded with a dry late winter and early spring lead to explosive wildfires. Local volunteer fire districts, neighboring landowners, Kansas Forese Service, Kansas Department of Emergency Management, and Kansas Wildlife and Parks joint actions minimized damages in extreme fire danger areas. Continued efforts will be coordinated to diminish fire danger in the Reservoir flood plains on both private and public areas. Blame game and financial reimbursements continue to be expressed.

### **State Report Information**

#### **Budget**

- FY 25 Salaries and O&M – \$4,631,844 Wildlife Fee Fund, \$1.8 million Federal Ag Funds and \$700,000 State Ag Funds
- Temp Salaries – \$443,500 Ag fund and \$302,000 Wildlife Fee Fund
- PR Grant O&M – FY24 \$9 million split 50/50
- Sport Fish Grant – \$750,000 split 75/25
- FY25 Ag Fund Revenues – Fed: \$3,000,000; State \$950,000, will be going up significantly with new bids.

#### **Land Acquisitions**

- Push Back for Legislature/KFB/KLA for purchasing any land.

#### **Legislation**

- Law Enforcement has been moved into Kansas Police and Fire Retirement from KPERS.
- Land Acquisition obstacles.
- Proposed legislation for interest groups instead of the resource.

#### **Operations/Management**

- Agricultural Production – approximately 195 permits are issued to farm more than 44955 acres. In addition, 8653 acres are planted by Public Lands staff.
- Grazing – 26,850 acres are under grazing management plans in 37 contracts.

- Haying – 1788 acres were hayed on 29 contracts.
- All agricultural/grazing/haying income exceeds \$2.75 million. Current Ag fund balances exceeds \$6.5 million.
- Noxious Weed Control – 50,000 acres
- Prescribed burns – 27,000 acres
- Food plots – 5,000 acres
- Invasive species control - > 12,800 acres
- Water level (pumped) – 15,639 acre feet
- Managed Dove Fields – 1357 acres most require non-toxic shot.
- Bison Management – Three herds comprising 288 head on 8058 acres
- Law enforcement – 38 certified PL LEO's completed 9,000 license checks
- Cabin program- Public Land Section operates three cabins on State Fishing Lakes and Wildlife areas. Reduced from seven a couple years ago.

### **Partnerships**

- North American Wetlands Conservation grants (NAWCA) working in cooperation with Ducks Unlimited continues to add new projects.
- Pheasants Forever – Agreement renewed in 2023 for habitat specialist positions on public lands. 13 Positions with 3 currently Vacant. Agreement expires June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025.
- Missouri River mitigation work continues in northeast Kansas, including land acquisition, restoration, and public access in 5 properties totaling 6094 acres. Land Acquisition is coming back onto the table.
- SSWA partnered with Friends of Sandsage Bison Range and Wildlife Area to provide 111 bison tours to 949 guests.
- Special Hunts (Public & Private Land): Special hunts continue to be successful as there are more and more opportunities each year. System went to one draw for all fall hunts, not well received.

### **Personnel (retention/recruitment)**

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

### **Public Land Use**

- Brandt is our new license and electronic access company. Electronic Access continues on 30 properties. Proposal to go statewide by Fall of 2024 was put on hold. This has been pushed back to allow more time for bugs to be worked out and other priorities for the Brandt System. Quite a few bugs in the system but basic function is working most of the time on the Checkin/checkout side.

# **MAFWA PUBLIC LANDS WORKING GROUP MEETING**

**Feb 11-13, 2025**

**South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks**

**Ryan Wendinger, Habitat Program Administrator**

## **Top State Wildlife Public Lands Challenges**

- Development and Encroachment – With around 725 different Game Production Areas (GPAs) across the state and many with shared boundaries with adjacent private property, encroachment issues continue to be challenging. GFP works to correct any of these as soon as possible through survey work and discussions with adjoining landowners. While these typically get resolved, they do take up a lot of staff time and associated cost with fencing to protect future encroachment. With a lot of land being bought and sold, land development, and many new people moving to our state it amplifies the effort needed dealing with these challenges. With many GPAs purchased or acquired 50+ years ago there are usually many pieces to put together to identify accurate boundaries through surveys.
- Drought – Drought as we know ebbs and flows over time. This continues to pose challenges for habitat development and management on our GPAs in South Dakota. An example of this would be with prescribed fire. On state owned GPAs in South Dakota, policy is that no prescribed fire can take place when the area is in D1 drought (Moderate Drought) or higher. Coming into 2024 much of the state was free of any drought and in fact once fire season got going some regions received too much rain to allow for any burning to take place, some being extreme with over 11" of rain in a few weeks. As of recent our state has taken a drastic swing and as of January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025, the entire state of South Dakota is in D1 drought level or higher with a good portion of it in D2 (Severe Drought). With very little or no snowpack on the ground conditions for prescribed fire in the spring of 2025 is not looking very optimistic. These drought conditions are hard on all habitats including those newly planted trees or grass plantings that are in early development and establishment.
- Easement Requests – Request for easements on state GPAs in 2024 continued to be amplified. A large majority of these requests as expected are for utility type easements such as rural water, electric transmission, or expanding road right of ways for road development. These requests have posed challenges, especially on our federally encumbered GPAs. Additionally, the disturbance to the GPAs can have an impact on planned management such as prescribed grazing. While these easements pose challenges GFP continues to work with utility companies as we recognize that these services are critical to the public and our rural communities.

## **Top State Wildlife Public Lands Opportunities**

- Pittman-Robertson (PR) and State Habitat Stamp - PR apportionments remain high and Habitat Stamp funds continue to be generated at a very respectable rate. The state Habitat stamp alone generated over \$5.5 million in revenue over the past year that can be used towards terrestrial and aquatic habitat projects and to create public hunting and fishing access on private land. These two funding sources along with some funds through an IRA grant allowed staff to plant over 1,600 acres of new grass and forbs on GPAs. Additionally on GPAs, almost 5,000 acres of food plots were planted, 40 acres of new tree and shrub plantings completed, over 11,000 acres of noxious weed control, and around 55,000 acres of grass was managed through prescribed fire and grazing management. These funding sources at the current level have created opportunity to advance our projects to improve state GPAs.
- Private Land in Public Hunting Access Programs – In 2023, over 1.5 million acres of private land was enrolled in one of GFPs public hunting access programs, which was a record. We broke that record again in 2024 with over 1.61 million acres of private land leased for public hunting access. It was our goal to reach this by 2026 but achieved it earlier with a strong commitment from all GFP staff. With over 80% of South Dakota being private land, we commonly hear hunters don't have a place to go or areas are crowded. As more acres are enrolled, crowding can be reduced on some of the state Game Production Areas as well as other private land leased for public hunting, thus improving users' experiences. Improving user experiences and reducing barriers for places to hunt is an important component in recruiting new users, retaining existing users, and reactivating some of those users we may have lost. Revenue that is generated from these users in the form of license sales in South Dakota is critically important to allow us to continue to manage our existing lands as well as improve habitat on private lands.
- Partnerships and Collaboration – While GFP has always held strong partnerships with many individuals and NGOs, partnerships in South Dakota continue to grow around conservation. In 2024, the Pheasant Country Chapter of Pheasants Forever in Mitchell South Dakota reached out to GFP. Their chapter was gracious enough to offer up funding to help improve some GPAs in their local area. Following discussions and after identifying a GPA with needs, they funded and provided manpower to prep the site and plant 8 acres of new trees. Additionally, they helped improve the parking lot, cleaned up the area, and contributed to a food plot on the GPA. These projects were recognized and a meeting between the CEO of Pheasants Forever, Marilyn Vetter, and GFP Secretary Kevin Robling took place to celebrate the partnership. Several projects are already under way for 2025 with this chapter. There are many NGO's and partners that GFP works with, but this was a great example of a project and partnership that took place in 2024.

## **Other Topics for report:**