

**MICHIGAN
STATE REPORT**
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STAFFING

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has approximately 1,600 full-time classified employees, 1,500 non-career/seasonal employees, and a \$534.6 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.

M. Scott Bowen currently serves as the Director of the DNR, Shannon Lott as the Natural Resources Deputy, and Kristin Phillips as the Administrative Deputy.

FISCAL YEAR 2024-2025 BUDGET

The DNR's fiscal year (FY) 2025 budget totals \$534.6 million, representing a subtle increase from the DNR's original enacted FY 2024 appropriations of \$530.2 million due primarily to the addition of one-time investments. Specifically, the budget includes \$76.1 million of General Fund support which represents a 13% decrease from the DNR's original enacted FY 2024 budget. Noteworthy investments for managing and protecting natural and cultural resources include:

- Nature Awaits: \$4 million ongoing General Fund to continue support for a program that was initiated in FY 2024 to provide fourth grade classes across the state the opportunity to visit a state park and participate in outdoor learning sessions facilitated by the DNR.
- Mass Timber Market Development: \$1 million one-time General Fund to aid the research and development of a mass timber market in Michigan.
- Communications Equipment Modernization: \$878,300 ongoing General Fund to support a radio lifecycle replacement plan for conservation officers and state firefighting staff.
- Law Enforcement Records Management System: \$700,000 ongoing General Fund to consolidate and improve DNR Law Enforcement Division's incident and records management system through the implementation of a new software solution.
- American Chestnut Restoration Initiative: \$500,000 one-time General Fund to study and implement American chestnut restoration and assisted migration of American chestnut or other species for the purpose of helping adapt the state's forests to climate change.
- Hunters Feeding Michigan Refrigeration Units: \$500,000 one-time General Fund to purchase refrigerated trailers that processors can use to store deer and processed venison donations received through the Hunters Feeding Michigan Program.

Overall, the DNR's FY 2025 budget is comprised of state restricted funds (67%), federal funds (18%), General Fund (14%), 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. With the change of administration at the federal level and ongoing impacts from presidential executive orders, the future of federal funding sources and grants remains an unknown and major concern.

Restricted funding is generated from sales of licenses, user fees, and other charges. These funds support wildlife and fisheries programs, operation of Michigan's 104 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 DNR also generates timber sales revenue from state lands, most of which is used for the protection and development of our state forests. In the spring of 2025 Michigan experienced a severe ice storm event that impacted 919,000 acres which represents approximately 20% of the state forest system, as well as 4,000 miles of forest roads and 3,000 miles of designated trails. Assessments are still being done to understand the short-term and long-term impacts to the resources, increased fire threat, and reduction of revenue streams from timber sales. Pursuit of recovery and restorative financial resources totaling over \$38 million through both the Federal Emergency Management Act and a State of Michigan General Fund requests are currently underway.

It has been a decade since fishing and hunting licenses have increased in Michigan and inflation has taken a major toll on the effectiveness of budgets. Fisheries and Wildlife Division's two major sources of revenue, Game and Fish Fund (licenses) and Sport Fish Restoration Act (federal aid), have been markedly flat since the 2014 license increase. Meanwhile, inflation has significantly reduced the buying power of that revenue.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

The Governor's proposed budget for FY 2026 includes a restructuring/increase in the cost of hunting and fishing licenses. The strategy and approach included seeking input from anglers and hunters on how restructuring fishing and hunting licenses could improve Michigan's capacity for managing its natural resources. Modifying the Recreation Passport program by making it "opt-out" instead of "opt-in" to generate more revenue for state parks is an additional legislative priority for FY 2026.

The DNR has been tracking a wide range of policy bills. The DNR supports a bill that would give clear guidelines to the posting of trespassing signs on private property. The DNR also supports a bill package that would allow for hunter safety courses to be taught in public schools for credit. In 2024, the Legislature passed a bill that would expand the Mentored Hunting Program to include adults or minors who had a developmental disability and could not complete hunter safety training.

NOTEWORTHY DIVISION ISSUES

In 2024, the Fisheries Division produced and stocked more than 15.7 million fish in 915 different water bodies. Staff spent 3,663 hours driving 112,394 miles to stock fish across Michigan, supporting healthy aquatic ecosystems and sustaining current fishing opportunities. There have also been increases in the co-management of tribal commercial and subsistence fisheries through the enhanced monitoring of commercial catches in Lake Superior and Lake Michigan with increased surveys of walleye populations in 1836 and 1842 treaty-ceded areas. Through a newly developed Tribal Co-Management Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee, we successfully engaged citizen advisors on shared fisheries resources and allocations with Tribal Governments. We also reintroduced the extirpated Arctic Grayling in spring of 2025 in cooperation with the tribes. The Grayling have been extirpated from Michigan waters for 100 years.

A Walleye and Yellow Perch Recreational Management Plan was completed for Saginaw Bay, which accounts for approximately 75% of the annual recreational fishing effort on Michigan waters of Lake Huron. Walleye and yellow perch are key angler target species in these waters, and this plan will ensure a continued and sustainable fishery and provide high quality angling opportunities. From 2019 to 2024, there was public engagement through a focused work group that drafted specific goals and objectives for the plan, input from citizen advisory committees, stakeholder workshops, and open public input opportunities.

In 2024 solar arrays were constructed at the Wolf Lake, Oden, Harietta, Platte River and Thompson State Fish Hatcheries, all of which are now producing supplemental power. With only six state-owned fish hatcheries in Michigan, fish production accounts for a small portion of DNR infrastructure, but raising fish is an energy-intensive process as it represents approximately 20% of the DNR's overall energy costs.

In July 2024, Michigan, along with Illinois, signed a Project Partner Agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to move into the construction phase for the Brandon Road Interbasin Project. Michigan remains fully committed and has appropriated over \$64 million as part of the nonfederal sponsorship, acceptance of remediation costs, if necessary, and full participation in the planning and construction processes. This support will leverage an additional \$226 million that was appropriated for construction through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Acquisition of bottomlands in the channel is required by the State of Illinois to move forward with preparation and installation of deterrents such as the acoustic barrier. The acquisition was scheduled for February and was delayed until May. A sense of urgency exists as silver carp are known to enter the approach channel to the Brandon Road Lock, two live invasive carp were found in Lake Calumet, four miles from Lake Michigan, and the population of invasive carp is increasing in the pool below Brandon Road.

Construction of the Brandon Road Interbasin Project is critical to protecting the Great Lakes from invasive carp. Bighead and silver carp are long lived, and even one or two fish a year could quickly build to the colonization level of ten pair of fish that scientists have determined would be all that is required to establish a population. If they become established, it will be impossible to eradicate these fish from the Great Lakes Basin and the costs to try and manage them

will be unprecedented. Financial and biological losses will occur with boating, tourism, and recreational fisheries on inland rivers and lakes as well as the Great Lakes.

In 2024, the Wildlife Division's surveillance for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) focused on the northern Lower Peninsula and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. This was the 4th year of the State's rotational approach to surveillance. The goal of the rotational approach is to systematically sample across the entire state, working on early disease detection in areas where CWD had not yet been detected. Increasing engagement with partners, such as taxidermists, helped increase the collection of valuable samples, (e.g., adult bucks). In 2024, 48 cooperators submitted 2,120 samples. A total of 5,756 deer were tested statewide with 41 deer testing positive for CWD. CWD was identified in five new townships within previously documented counties. In 2024, 11 additional counties completed baseline surveillance and overall, 72 of 83 counties completed baseline surveillance, with 67 accomplished in the last four years. Surveillance for CWD continues year-round through collection of deer found dead or acting ill, issuance of deer damage permits, and culling by sharpshooters around 'outlier' positive deer locations.

Surveillance for bovine tuberculosis (bTB) continued. Over 7,400 deer were tested for bTB in 2024, 4,536 were tested in deer management unit 452 and the five-county area surrounding it, and 2,719 in the remainder of the state, resulting in 21 new positive deer. To date, 1,044 bTB-positive deer have been identified in the state, however no significant increases or decreases have been noted over the last five years. The bTB surveillance year 2024 was a historic year, as it was the DNR's 30th year of bTB surveillance efforts in white-tailed deer. Michigan has the world's longest contiguous dataset for bTB surveillance in wildlife, which is an immense resource.

In response to waterfowl mortalities, Wildlife Division staff have been working extensively on providing information on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in wildlife species. The Wildlife Division had numerous media and public contacts and issued a press release directed at waterfowl hunters. Additional documentation has been developed or updated including general HPAI talking points, occupational safety and equipment guidelines, and best management practices for wildlife rehabilitators.

Management of white-tailed deer continues to be a polarizing and challenging endeavor in Michigan. Parts of the state, like the agriculture dominated southern Lower Peninsula, is experiencing increasing trends in urban deer complaints and agricultural damage. The number of damage permits issued in the southern Lower Peninsula alone has increased 176% in the past five years. With Michigan having lost over 200,000 deer hunters over the past 20 years, the ability to manage the population to curb growth of the deer herd has been reduced. With over 20% of Michigan deer hunters over the age of 65, this trend is likely to continue. While the southern Lower Peninsula is experiencing challenges with managing growth, the Upper Peninsula has experienced a depressed population for over ten years. Increased frequency of severe winters, coupled with declining quality of winter habitat, has limited the landscape capacity for deer throughout much of the high and mid snowfall regions of the Upper Peninsula. The DNR has experimented with different regulations in recent years to attempt to address both scenarios and has recently begun discussions with stakeholder representatives in both peninsulas comprising advisory teams. In addition, the DNR is currently working with researchers at Michigan State University on ways to effectively manage white-tailed deer into the future.

Michigan's Canada Goose Program gives private landowners (including lake associations, businesses and other commercial entities) options to address goose-human conflicts on their sites. Beginning this year, nest and egg destruction permits will be available statewide and will no longer have geographic restrictions. In addition, Canada goose round up and relocation will no longer be allowed. Previously, most program participants hired a licensed nuisance animal control company to remove the birds and geese that were rounded up by relocating them to suitable sites such as State Game Areas. However, moving geese increases the risk of transmission and spread of diseases such as HPAI and there is a lack of suitable release sites because relocating geese risks moving the conflict from one location to another. Now, all birds permitted for capture will be euthanized. 2025 will be a pilot year for the program with very limited capture and euthanasia permits allowed. This is to allow Wildlife Division time to assess logistics, costs, capacity, and interest in the program.

Within the Forest Resources Division, the typical spring fire season in 2024 was slower than normal due to frequent rainfall keeping fire dangers more moderate with the regular moisture. Even with frequent moisture it was a very productive year for prescribed burning with fire suppression and standby not as demanding in the spring, 97 prescribed burns were completed on 10,014 acres.

The fall fire season however was a different story. With the warmer and dryer end of summer it led to elevated drought conditions across the entire state. There were more fires in the month of October than in the spring season altogether. There was not any one fire that posed a significant issue more than another but just the sheer number of incidents, with the elevated drought conditions, suppression commitments were heavy with many of the fires burning deep into the ground requiring prolonged suppression efforts. A good portion of those fires were remote in nature having been sparked by lightning storms, also creating access challenges and adding to the overall demand on resources. By the time late season moisture arrived, putting an end to a very abnormal fall fire season there had been responses to 408 fires for 1,550,000 acres in 2024.

Regarding forest health information, oak wilt was detected in Marquette County in the Upper Peninsula for the first time in 2024, which brings additional prevention measures in land management activities in and around confirmed detections to reduce the impact to oak trees. Hemlock Woolly Adelgid was confirmed in 11 counties in Michigan. Less than 1% of the state's hemlock resource is infested with the tree killing insect and there were no detections in the Upper Peninsula where most of the hemlock resource exists. Efforts to delimit Balsam Woolly Adelgid in Michigan continued in 2024 in two counties in the Lower Peninsula and plans to respond are being evaluated. Partnerships continue with 22 Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs) to address invasive species across jurisdictional boundaries.

In addition to solar arrays at the six state-owned fish hatcheries, the DNR continues to incorporate renewable energy in strategic locations throughout the state. Progress continues for two utility-scale solar energy developments upon state forest land located in Dickinson and Roscommon Counties. 264 acres of former Groveland Mine tailings basins have been leased to Circle Power Renewables (a contracted solar developer) who have secured approval of a power purchase agreement for the project and may begin construction at the end of 2026. An additional

land option on nearly 1,000 acres has been acted upon by Circle Power Renewables for development of a second project centered around the DNR's conservation airport near the Forest Fire Experiment Station and the I-75 highway exchange in Roscommon County.

A final noteworthy accomplishment in the realm of forestry was with the construction of a mass timber Customer Service Center in Newberry. The project featured building products using red pine sourced from Michigan and was completed with staff move-in scheduled in January 2025.

The Parks and Recreation Division continues to manage the \$273 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) appropriated funding successfully meeting the obligation required date of December 31, 2024. 57 projects are complete, 69 are under construction and 55 are completing design. Increased bid pricing and construction cost overruns have plagued this program as the construction market faces labor shortages, increased demand for materials, and impacts of other world events. Due to these impacts, thirty-eight projects valued at approximately \$60 million have been paused. The Parks and Recreation Division is searching for creative and unique solutions to this funding shortage and have looked at grants, private foundations, supplemental, and revenue bonding.

One of the more unique investments with the ARPA funding has been the creation of the Flint State Park. Overall, there is \$52.2 million for the construction of the park, \$30.2 million in ARPA funding and \$22 million from additional state, federal, and local grants. In addition, an \$18 million donation from the C.S. Mott Foundation combined with \$22 million in General Funds is establishing an operational endowment with the Community Foundation of Greater Flint that will ensure the ongoing maintenance of the park by Genesee County.

A \$4 million General Fund ongoing investment to expand outdoor education programming was initiated through the Marketing and Outreach Division. This funding created the Nature Awaits program, which offers every fourth-grade student in Michigan an opportunity to participate in a field trip to a state park. In its inaugural year, nearly 20,000 students visited 29 state parks and participated in hands-on activities guided by trained DNR educators. The student-centered activities were aligned with fourth grade learning standards and covered a wide range of academic subjects. Transportation fees were reimbursed for public schools, and each participating student received a one-time voucher that allowed them to return with their families to any state park. Statewide, over 90,000 kindergarten through twelfth grade students participated in educational natural resource DNR programs in 2024.

The DNR gained nearly 200,000 followers on social media networks in 2024, to a total of 1.2 million accounts. A large portion of this growth was through Instagram and a shift in strategy to engage more younger and nontraditional audiences. The flagship DNR Instagram account alone grew from 60,000 followers to 102,000 during the year. This was fueled by a content strategy developed to engage and interest non-followers who had less initial awareness of natural resources and outdoor opportunities.

New shooting ranges were constructed in the Upper Peninsula near Marquette and Ontonagon. Marquette's Erickson-Skogland was the first to open in fall of 2023 and is named after two Michigan Conservation Officers who lost their lives in the line of duty in Marquette

County. The new Ontonagon indoor range will be operated through a partnership with Lake Superior Sportsman's Club. Additional range development projects are underway with partners in Roscommon and Crawford Counties.



Award-winning mass timber Newberry Customer Service Center – Grand Opening April 2025