

STATE OF
GAME
AND
FISH
DEPARTMENT
NORTH DAKOTA

BIENNIAL REPORT
JULY 1, 2021 – JUNE 30, 2023



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DIRECTOR

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Agency History

The creation, in 1930, of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department was a continuation of efforts to preserve fish and game species in the state. At its inception, the enforcement of game and fish laws was the Department's primary conservation tool. Over the years, the legislature has increased enforcement authority and assigned regulatory powers to the agency aiding its efforts to preserve fish and wildlife and their habitats.

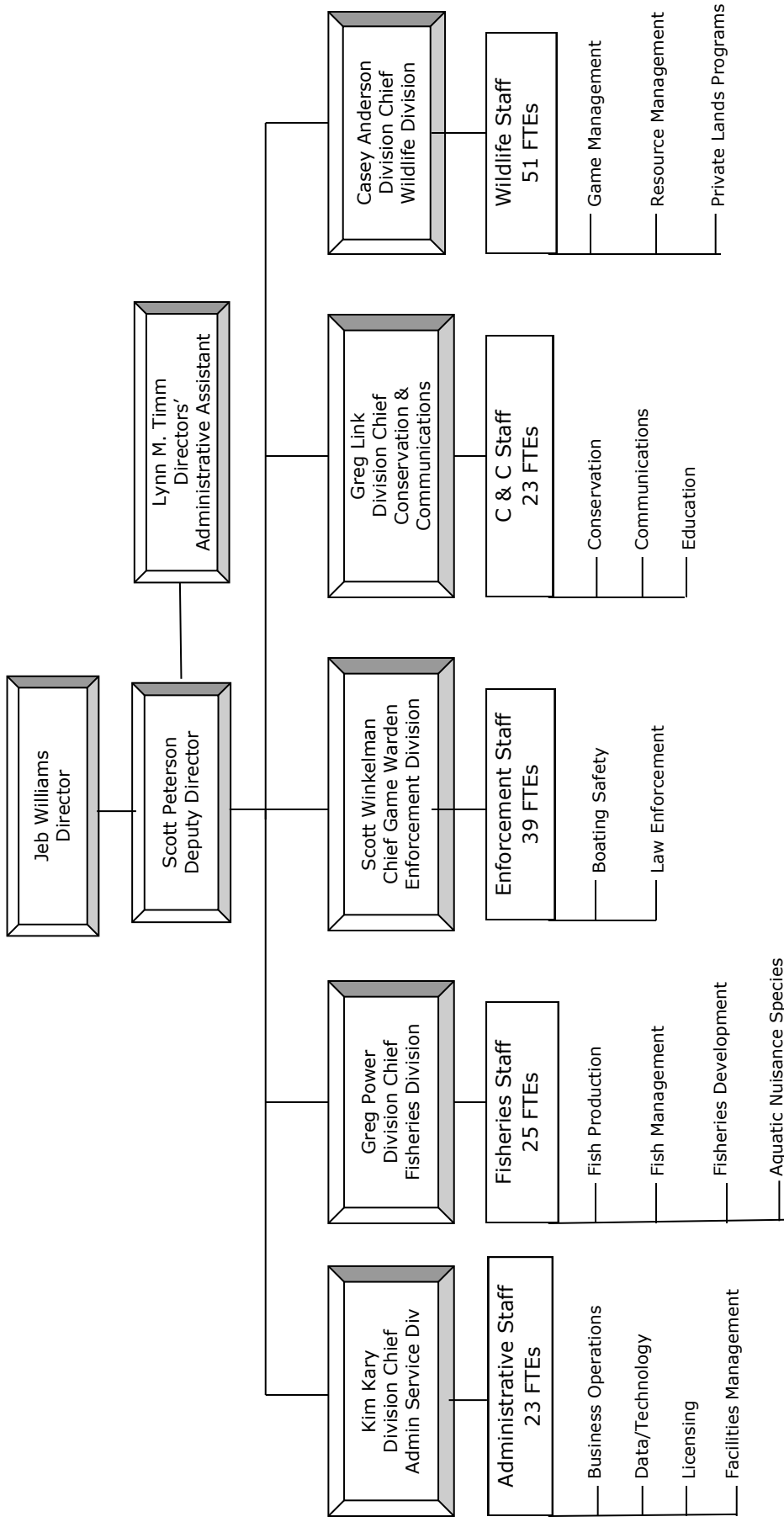
The availability of federal funds for wildlife management programs through the Pittman-Robertson Act (1937) enabled North Dakota and other states to begin scientific management of wildlife resources on a large scale. The Federal Aid in Fish Restoration Act, or the Dingell-Johnson Act (1950,) enabled fisheries restoration. In the 1980's, an amendment to the act expanded the tax to motor boat fuels and imported equipment, making more money available to states.

Since 1983, the Game and Fish Department has had regulatory powers over game, fish, and wildlife resources in North Dakota (S. L. 1983, Ch. 261). Specifically, under the direction of the Commissioner (Director), the Department has authority to promulgate rules and regulations governing management of game and fish resources; collaborate with the USFWS on the two federal hatcheries (Riverdale and Valley City) to produce fish to stock across the state's wildlife management areas; administer the state's habitat improvement program; survey and research fish and wildlife species; issue hunting and fishing licenses; enforce hunting and fishing laws; inform and educate the public on the Department's wildlife management programs; and publish the agency's magazine, North Dakota OUTDOORS (first issue published in 1930), and other informational publications as required by state law.

In 1991, the Commissioner was renamed the Director (S. L. 1991, Ch. 231). The Director was required to submit a proposed wildlife and fish restoration program and project plan and to update segments involving the proposed acquisition of area wetlands, water and land by purchase, lease, easement, or servitude. The Director was given authority to establish a statewide acquisition plan (S. L. 1991, Ch. 42). The Director was charged to appoint a deputy director, a chief state warden, biologists, and technicians all of whom were to enforce the rules and regulations of the Department. Under the supervision of the Director and the advisement of the State Game and Fish Advisory Board, the Department administers regulatory powers over game, fish, and wildlife resources in North Dakota.

The mission of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department is to protect, conserve, and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitat for sustained public consumptive and appreciative use. The Department is currently headquartered in Bismarck and consists of five major divisions: Administrative Services, Fisheries, Enforcement, Conservation and Communications, and Wildlife. There are seven district offices: Dickinson, Williston, Riverdale, Devils Lake, Lonetree, Jamestown, and the Bismarck Shop/Lab.

North Dakota Game And Fish Department



ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES DIVISION

The Administrative Services Division, through the Director, sets policy for the entire Department. It also provides organizational and administrative support for all other divisions of the Department. It consists of the director, deputy director, administrative staff, an accounting section, a licensing section, information technology section and facility management.

The licensing section handles hundreds of thousands of applications and licenses each year. Effective April 1, 2016, paper license booklets were eliminated, and transactions were made electronically through the Department's web-based system through a computer or mobile device. The Department phased out paper lottery applications over the next few years and lottery applications became 100% electronic in 2018. Watercraft registrations became 100% electronic in 2020. We had approximately 67,000 registered motorized watercraft in 2022.

Sales of resident general game licenses and resident small game licenses have slightly decreased in 2021 and 2022. After a steady increase in deer hunting licenses, there was a decrease in resident deer gun from 54,662 in 2021 to 50,960 in 2022. The number of pronghorn licenses sold for 2021 and 2022 was 1,715 and 1,960 respectively. Fishing licenses decreased to 141,094 in 2022 after an all-time high of 162,196 in 2020.

Nonresident small game hunting licenses slightly increased from 21,209 in 2021 to 21,996 in 2022. Nonresident waterfowl licenses increased from 23,062 in 2021 to 24,627 in 2022. Nonresident fishing licenses decreased to 57,339 in 2022 since reaching the all-time high of 67,586 in 2020.

Graphs showing license sales data are attached.

The Department made In Lieu of Tax payments of \$1,448,654 for 2021-23 for land owned or managed by the Department as required by law.

LEGISLATION:

Key Game and Fish related bills from the 2023 legislative session:

HB 1134 – Nonresident current North Dakota national guard members are eligible to receive resident licenses, except lottery permits.

HB 1224 – Allows a dog handler to carry a handgun in the recovery of a big game animal while in the presence of a dog. The dog handler cannot use the handgun to assist in the recovery of the animal and must have permission from the landowner or individual authorized by the landowner before entering private land for the recovery of a big game animal.

HB 1233 – Allows a 11, 12 and 13 year-old antlerless white-tailed deer youth hunter to also hunt during the regular deer gun season.

HB 1260 – Develops agreements to compensate private landowners for the development of habitat on private property for addressing fish and wildlife populations. In addition, allows the

Game and Fish director to issue special antlerless elk depredation management licenses to landowners upon payment of the fee required for a resident big game license. To be eligible for this license, a landowner cannot charge a fee for elk hunting and must allow reasonable public access as determined by the director.

HB 1366 – Allows an individual engaged in barefoot skiing or surfing to wear a wet suit. A life preserver must be on board the towing vessel for an individual barefoot skiing or surfing.

HB 1409 – A nonresident youth who is less than 16 years of age may purchase a resident general game hunting license and may hunt small game and waterfowl, except swans and wild turkeys, during the entire regular small game and waterfowl seasons. The accompanying adult family member or legal guardian does not have to be licensed.

HB 1538 – Relates to fishing. Established a \$50 entry fee for a fishing contest, an application fee of \$75 for all tournaments, a conservation fee of an amount to be determined between the tournament sponsor and a representative of the fishing tournament (except for nonprofits), post contest reporting requirements, Game and Fish establishes a fishery conservation fund, and a surcharge of \$5 on each nonresident fishing license. Effective April 1, 2024.

SB 2017 – Establishes an appropriation of \$107,611,466 to the Game and Fish Department for the biennium beginning July 1, 2023, and ending June 30, 2025.

SB 2097 – Requires a political subdivision to notify the Game and Fish director, among others, before engaging in meetings with federal agencies to have any water body in the state designated a wild, scenic or recreational river under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

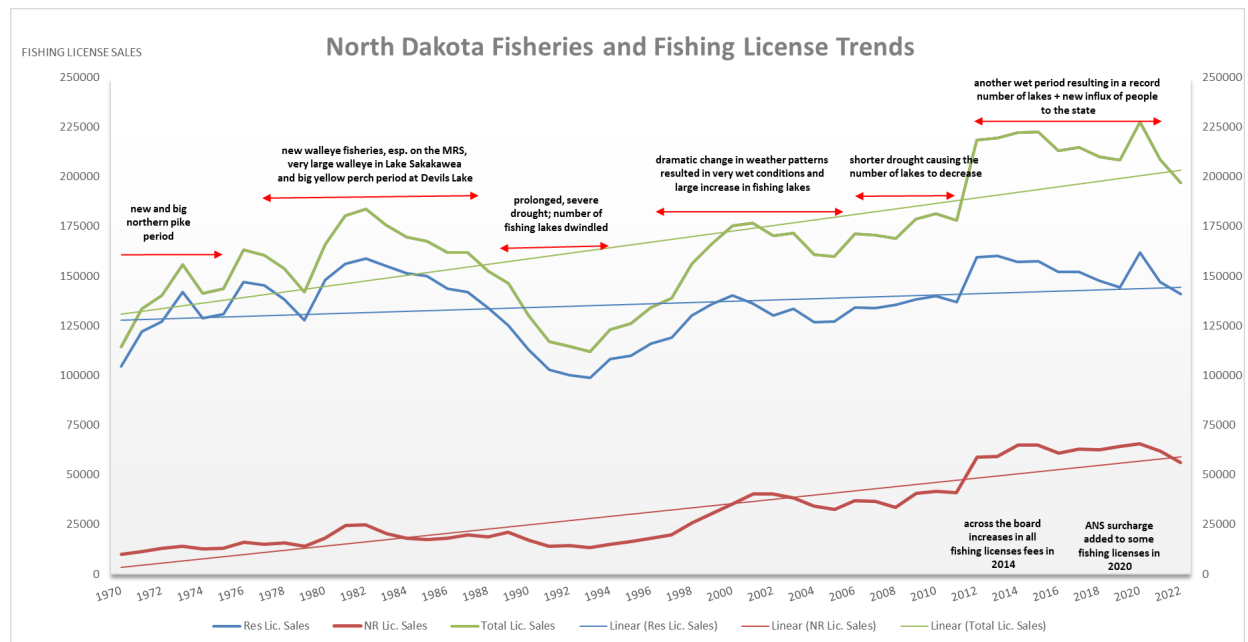
SB 2297 – Certified game and fish volunteer instructors who have maintained active status in the state for 30 years are eligible to receive complimentary fishing and certain hunting licenses. Emergency clause carried; effective immediately.

SB 2382 – Provides clarity to the motorboat numbering exemptions section of the North Dakota Century Code.

FISHERIES DIVISION

The Fisheries Division is responsible for managing fish populations in nearly 450 public waters scattered across the state. As such, “The mission of the Fisheries Division is to provide diverse and valued fishing opportunities for public enjoyment while safeguarding the fishery resource”.

Decades of relatively wet weather has caused a transformation of shallow wetlands into recreational lakes. The more than doubling of fishable waters caused by years of rising water, and an aggressive approach toward fish management in North Dakota, have helped produce high fishing license sales. According to the most recent information (2022-23 fishing season), nearly 208,000 fishing licenses were issued. During this period, about 165,000 anglers fished almost 1.3M days on North Dakota waters.



The Fisheries Division of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department includes several sections that protect, regulate, and enhance fishing opportunities throughout the state. These sections include administration, fisheries management, production (stocking, etc.), development (access, infrastructure), habitat and aquatic nuisance species (ANS). These different sections work together to ensure good fishing opportunities. In addition, the Fisheries Division has established strong working relationships with other Department divisions as well as various public and private entities, resulting in the creation and maintenance of some of the finest fishing that can be found anywhere. Specific section results can be found in the following narratives:

FISHERIES ADMINISTRATION

In 2021 and 2022, North Dakota had 205 and 193 licensed wholesale and retail bait vendors respectively. This decline from previous years was caused by an administrative rule change that requires only dealers who handle aquatic bait to be licensed. The number of licensed private fish hatcheries was only two in 2021 and three in 2022. The number of fishing tournaments remained

in the 130-140 range for both 2021 and 2022. Group home fishing licenses have remained stable with about 128 licensed organizations receiving approximately 1080 individual licenses. Cormorant predation on desirable fish stocks continues to be a problem in some waters across the state with a long-term solution remaining elusive. Intensive take of cormorants has been limited by the USFWS. There were a few administrative rule changes during the 2021-23 biennium dealing with ANS and bait vendors. Fishing proclamation changes were few and minor. Lastly, during the 2023 legislative session a new statute was passed/approved that changed the governance of fishing contests (tournaments). Implementation of this statute will not take place until the 2023-25 biennium.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SECTION

Water levels remained steady to declining across much of the state during 2021-2023, following very dry summers in 2020 and 2021. The winter of 2022-23 produced record to near-record snowfall across much of the state. However, conditions during the spring of 2023 produced little runoff from the exceptional snowpack. In 2022, Fisheries Division personnel conducted 262 standard adult population surveys, 138 reproduction surveys, 24 miscellaneous surveys, 15 trap and transport operations, one undesirable fish removal surveys, five spawning operations, and four tagging operations. In addition, other activities such as creel surveys, water quality monitoring, and fish kill investigations are conducted as needed. The heavy snow during the winter of 2022-23 produced harsh winterkill conditions in many lakes. During winter oxygen sampling, staff noted potential winterkill conditions on 93 lakes. Follow-up sampling and observations determined that 76 lakes suffered partial or total winterkill of fish. Most of the winterkill lakes have been restocked during 2023 with catchable adult fish or smaller fingerling fish from the hatchery. The losses from winterkill will result in temporary setbacks for some lakes. Overall though, the number of fishing waters across the state remains high, compared to past decades, and quality fishing opportunities have never been better for our state's anglers.

FISHERIES PRODUCTION SECTION

A strong demand for hatchery production with all the new fishing waters across the state continues to push for maximum production output. During the 2021-2023 biennium, over 21 million 1.5" fish, representing ten species, were stocked into nearly 263 North Dakota waters. Most of the stockings were walleye and most of the brood fish needed for spawning originated from Lake Sakakawea and Lake Oahe. In addition, approximately 1M adult fish (generally panfish) were trapped from various waters across the state where surplus existed and transported/stocked into water bodies (often community fisheries) in need. A total of 69,643 pounds of fish were stocked into new water bodies. Five ponds at our East Unit Rearing Unit at Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery were lined to reduce leakage and increase production output as well as a significant sediment removal around water intake to this unit. At both the Garrison and the Valley City National Fish Hatchery, spot graveling was completed to keep roadway surfaces safe for travel during wet weather.

FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT SECTION

Once again, precipitation conditions varied greatly during the 2021-2023 biennium period. During the first quarter of the biennium, North Dakota experienced some of the hottest and driest conditions on record and the entire state was suffering from moderate to severe drought conditions. As water levels throughout the state declined, boat ramps, docks and piers were affected with many requiring silt removal, extension work, and repairs or total relocation. By the spring of 2022 and for the remainder of the biennium, the majority of the state experienced normal to above normal precipitation and lake levels and access returned to normal. With more than 3,500 facilities at nearly 455 fishing lakes, the Department is continuously challenged and focuses efforts on upgrading, replacing, and modernizing many of those facilities which have outlived their useful life. Nearly 100 new development projects were completed during this time along with 300+ individual maintenance activities. Thirty boat ramps were constructed, upgraded, or extended during this period and more than three dozen new courtesy docks were built and installed. Five new precast vault toilets were installed, and several large road/parking area projects were also undertaken and completed. The Department continued its efforts to strategically upgrade and improve all fish stations by installing new Barracuda grinder/table units at twelve additional stations. These new units have proven to be more reliable and dependable, quieter, and use less water. They provide a quality top notch facility for anglers to process and dispose of their catch before heading home while at the same time enabling anglers to comply with mandatory state ANS rules and regulations.

FISHERIES HABITAT PROJECTS

The Department's "Save Our Lakes Program" (SOL) program was restructured and reorganized during this last biennium. The watershed and grassland easement portion is now being administered through the Department's PLI program. The in-lake portion of the program continues as is/was. Four community ponds were created in the 2021-23 biennium. Also there were small projects that dealt with earthen piers, shoreline improvements, alternative water projects, and limited tree plantings. Moving forward, limited funding will still be available for community pond development and shoreline access improvements and opportunities.

AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES PROGRAM

One of the biggest threats to North Dakota's aquatic ecosystems is the establishment of ANS. In the 2021-23 biennium, the Department continued to focus on the key elements of its ANS program, prevention, monitoring, education, and enforcement. In addition, a comprehensive effort was made to recruit new and grow existing partnerships in the fight against ANS. During the biennium, the Department inspected 12,795 watercraft and funded the establishment of several ANS prevention devices, including CD3s, ILDS, and wash stations, to promote good habits and compliance with ANS regulations. The Department worked closely with partners to inspect high-risk commercial equipment and found zebra mussels on more than a dozen pieces of equipment (e.g., barges and tugboats). ANS monitoring efforts continued, including the utilization of several specialized techniques, plankton tow netting, snorkeling, and eDNA. In 2021, new zebra mussel populations were confirmed at Lake Elise (Richland Co) and Twin Lake (LaMoure Co). Young of the year silver carp and adult grass carp were documented in the lower

James River for the first time in the fall of 2021. Flowering rush was found in isolated patches on both the James and Sheyenne rivers. There have been no new detections of ANS since 2021. Finally, the Department expanded its education and outreach efforts during the biennium through digital marketing, traditional media, and personal contacts. In 2022, these efforts resulted in over 36 thousand clicks to the Department's ANS homepage.

CONSERVATION AND COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION

The Conservation and Communications Division is comprised of three sections; communications, conservation, and education. The Communications Section functions as the Department's liaison to the general public, providing the most up-to-date, department-wide information through all media formats and marketing tools. The Conservation Section reviews development related projects and offers recommendations to both private and government for minimizing impacts to our state's wildlife and their habitats. This Section's focus also includes management of nongame wildlife and species-of-conservation-priority. The Education Section is responsible for all facets of educating the public, e.g. hunter education, fishing, archery, fur harvester education, boating and water safety, etc., offering state-wide, hands-on conservation and skills learning opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts of all ages.

COMMUNICATIONS SECTION

The Communications Section includes production of North Dakota OUTDOORS magazine, weekly television broadcast news feature, weekly online webcast and other video products, weekly news release, website (internet), internal website (intranet), social media, including Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, the Department's R3 initiative, marketing efforts, hunting and fishing regulations/guides, the annual PLOTS guide and other publication development, handling of phone and email inquiries from the public, media relations and public information projects.

Telephone and Written Correspondence

The Communications Section is responsible for handling telephone information calls, answering and/or distributing emails that come into the Department's main email account, and responding to written inquiries. Section staff handle several hundred calls per week, depending on the season, and thousands of emails and requests annually. The section also maintains fisheries Whopper and Catch and Release files.

Publications

The Game and Fish Department produces a four-color magazine, North Dakota OUTDOORS, published 10 times per year and ranging from 24 – 40 pages. OUTDOORS had a mailing list of about 30,000 in August 2023. About 22,000 subscriptions were paid.

Media/Public Information

The Communications Section is responsible for weekly and special news releases distributed to about 170 media outlets, and another 35,000-plus individuals and organizations signed up to receive regular and news alerts; and an online legislative newsletter compiled and updated daily during the biennial legislative session. Section staff answer hundreds of phone calls and emails weekly, and are also responsible for developing the various hunting and fishing regulation guides.

Photography

Section personnel take thousands of photographs each biennium for illustrating articles in North Dakota OUTDOORS, and for use on the agency website, social media channels and use by all staff for slide shows, power point presentations, newspapers, media and other private and public publications.

Videography

North Dakota OUTDOORS, a weekly television news feature, maintained its appearance on major North Dakota stations with a weekly audience of approximately 100,000 viewers. The weekly online news webcast also has consistent broadcasts on cable access channels in most major cities. The webcast attracts several thousand viewers per week. These programs are also valuable content shared on agency social media platforms on a consistent basis.

Game and Fish Website

The website includes most of the basic Game and Fish Department information such as season regulations, lake and species information, the Department's magazine and video features, and a variety of other topics. It attracts between 5,000 and 10,000 individual visits per day, and also handles a great majority of license sales in the state. Game and Fish's website editor also manages an internal intranet website for staff.

Social Media

Section staff manage and contribute to the agency's social media presence on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. The Facebook page has more than 31,000 followers, Instagram 11,500 followers, and our YouTube channel has more than 2.2 million views.

R3

Game and Fish administration identified hunter and angler recruitment, retention and reactivation as one of the agency's top priorities. In fall 2020, the Department hired an R3 coordinator, and the communications section is tasked with leading this initiative.

Marketing

Section staff create and implement innovative marketing campaigns to help the agency reach goals centered around its major initiatives and priorities.

CONSERVATION SECTION

Coordination, Technical Assistance, and Special Projects:

Conservation section staff continued their primary task of reviewing development related projects and offering recommendations intended to lessen the severity of such projects on fish and wildlife resources. During the 2021-2023 biennium, staff reviewed and commented on roughly 637 proposed development-related projects. These projects range from construction of roads, oil wells, wind turbines and transmission lines, to drainage projects, dams, and changes in land use practices. In addition to written requests, staff receive and respond to numerous informal inquiries via phone, email, and walk-in traffic.

A continued area of emphasis this past biennium has been the review of proposed 'wind farms' around the state. As wind projects become more and more numerous, the Department decided to take a more active stance in reviewing and assessing their impacts on fish and wildlife resources. This includes consultation with companies proposing wind projects, the general public, environmental groups and permitting authorities. It's worth noting that the process the Department started using to assess wildlife related impacts from wind turbines is being used by both the PSC and wind prospectors. The Department has strived to provide an unbiased assessment of potential projects impact on fish and wildlife resources. In some instances, developers are now providing voluntary offsets as a means of mitigating their impacts. Recent legislation has created a mitigation fund managed by the ND Department of Agriculture to develop and implement off-set acres from energy conversion projects.

A second major area of emphasis for staff has been the effort to quell the spread of aquatic nuisance species. As several new species have been documented in the state, staff work with project sponsors and regulatory agencies to minimize the opportunity for aquatic nuisance species to spread to non-infested waters. As highway maintenance projects use water from rivers, lakes and ponds for dust control, the Department provides recommendations on source water and techniques to minimize the spread of invasive species via water tankers. Additionally, fishery and conservation section staff inspect equipment coming into the state to assure they are free of aquatic nuisance species.

Staff spent a considerable amount of time this past biennium dealing with issues impacting public lands in North Dakota. The majority of the efforts involved lands administered by the US Forest Service (USFS) and the US Bureau of Land Management, which total about 1.3 million acres. These lands are located primarily in western North Dakota. The primary purpose of the Department's involvement is to ensure adequate consideration of natural resources and the interests of state sportsmen and women in public land management policies and actions. Examples of conservation section involvement includes the review of oil well placement, road and pipeline alignments, wildlife transplants such as bighorn sheep, land trades and divestitures, grazing issues, unique or rare species, access and natural resource protection and proposed closures of lands to hunters. During the past biennium, staff also continued to provide input on issues related to the Forest Plan for USFS managed lands. This includes review and comment on various pasture allotments throughout the grasslands.

Flooding and water management has been a major issue during the past biennium. Department personnel have worked diligently with the Corps of Engineers and communities of Fargo and West Fargo on the Fargo Moorhead Diversion Project. The diversion has numerous environmental challenges including the crossing of five tributaries, loss of river channel and riparian forest, construction of two in-channel control structures and numerous fish by-pass structures. Additional efforts have and will be expended working on Missouri and Souris River flood related projects (i.e. high-water diversion channels, stabilization measures). A byproduct of the flood control measures are voluntary buyouts of chronically flood prone properties. Audubon Dakota has agreed to manage these properties for nature trails, limited hunting opportunities and other suitable recreational pursuits. The Department continues to partner with Audubon Dakota by providing cost-share to reestablish native woodlands and prairies in select areas of the buyouts. Ongoing efforts have included the near completion of the Diversion inlet structure and

the Wild Rice Structure. Construction on the Red River structure, the diversion outlet structure and the diversion channel have also been initiated.

Considerable staff time was also spent on integrating ‘wildlife crossings’ in the design of various highway projects across the state. Although relatively new to our state, incorporating passageways that allow wildlife the opportunity to cross major highways have been used in other states for quite some time. Staff provided valuable technical assistance in the development of where to place proposed sites and the type of design. The wildlife crossing on Highway 85 near the Little Missouri River is completed and use is being documented. Additionally, the wildlife crossing on Highway 85 in the Missouri River bottoms near Williston which was completed several years ago has seen considerable use by moose, deer, and a host of smaller mammals. The next phase north of the Long X bridge has started with the planning of fencing completed but not yet constructed.

The Department has continued its efforts to ensure that mitigation commitments associated with development projects are carried forth and maintained. These efforts have focused on three major areas: roadside mitigation along major highways for Department of Transportation commitments, mitigation for Corps of Engineers Section 404 permits and State Engineer Sovereign Land permits.

Nongame and Species of Conservation Priority:

In North Dakota, nongame wildlife represents more than 80 percent of the state’s vertebrate fauna, with more than 300 bird species, roughly 80 mammal species, 75 fish species, 15 reptile species and 11 amphibian species. Freshwater mussels, insects and many other small organisms are also considered nongame. Oftentimes, they are the rarer and/or less studied species. Many of these species serve as biological indicators, reflecting the general health of our environment.

In order to focus its management of nongame species, the Department developed a strategic planning document called the Wildlife Action Plan in 2005. North Dakota’s Wildlife Action Plan focuses on those species of fish and wildlife considered to be species of conservation priority or the most at risk in terms of extirpation from the state. The plan includes information relating to the distribution, abundance, habitat requirements, threats, conservation actions, and monitoring techniques for species of conservation priority. Section staff completed a 2-year revision process of the Plan and submitted a copy of it to the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s regional office in July of 2015. A revision of the State Wildlife Action Plan needs to be completed by October of 2025. Preliminary work including a State Wildlife Action Plan Use Survey was completed in 2022 and an internal review of potential species was initiated in the fall of 2023.

Prior to 2001, funding to manage nongame species was limited. Since that time, however, federal funding has been made available to states with approved Wildlife Action Plans through the State Wildlife Grant (SWG) program. The SWG program is a matching grants program, meaning all federal dollars awarded must be matched with nonfederal dollars. All projects require at least 35 percent nonfederal match. The Department receives an annual federal apportionment of approximately \$500,000. The knowledge gained from projects funded with SWG has proved invaluable in revising the State Wildlife Action Plan.

Currently 11 species of animals are listed as federally threatened or endangered in North Dakota with an additional three species being 'petitioned' for listing. One species was recently removed from the list (i.e. Interior Least Tern) and five more were found to 'not warrant' listing.

In order to help reduce the likelihood of species being federally listed, a great deal of the emphasis of the SWG program has been gathering baseline information on species of conservation priority (those species that are rare and/or are in decline) to get a better understanding of their status, distribution and relative abundance and problems contributing to their decline. During the past decade, studies have been initiated on grassland nesting passerines, prairie dogs, fringe mammals, bats, raptors, snapping turtles and leopard frogs. Considerable effort has also been made to implement projects to conserve or enhance habitat. For example, over the past 2-3 years, approximately 2000 acres of privately owned riparian areas were voluntarily reseeded to native grass/trees thereby providing valuable habitat to numerous species of fish and wildlife. Additional emphasis and work has been placed on determining the effectiveness of conservation actions as they are implemented, such as monitoring grassland bird use of prairie restoration sites funded through SWG.

Staff spent considerable time attending meetings, networking with conservation and regulatory interests to provide information and feedback on federal listing actions that may affect North Dakota. Recent examples include Monarch butterfly, northwestern moose, Black-tailed prairie dog and Black-footed ferret.

Section staff also spend considerable time handling phone calls, emails and walk-ins from the public regarding nongame and/or rare wildlife. Staff conduct field surveys such as monitoring bald eagle nests, shorebird counts, studying grassland bird use of PLOTS, and monitoring key habitat.

EDUCATION SECTION

Conservation and Outdoor Skills Park (State Fair Area)

For nearly 20 years, the Game and Fish Department has partnered with the North Dakota State Fair (NDSF) to showcase the outdoor opportunities and skills training during the nine days of the fair. Activities include fishing, hunting, trapping, archery, and a chance to visit with Department staff. During the nine-day event, the Department has roughly 30 staff members on hand, and nearly 50 volunteers who assist with this effort. The Conservation and Outdoor Skills Park averages 30,000 visitors.

In addition to the areas use during the fair, it is also a big hit locally from year around as an urban fishery with local school and other groups and the general angling public. The area has become a great spot for youth and women's pre-hunt meetings. Many of the local wildlife clubs and Boy Scouts use the area for meetings and other outdoor activities. The area is approximately 5 acres, which includes a fishing pond, several cabins, a large meeting area, and plenty of grass and trees. Following the 2011 flood, fair officials offered the Department more land and an additional building that was refurbished, which the Department heats and cools. It is a very popular site for wildlife club meetings and various other outdoor events year-round.

The area is also the site the youth outdoor festival for over 15 years over a dozen local wildlife clubs and camps and nearly 500 participants gather early in the fall to showcase what they do for youth and promote several of the events that they will be holding for the youth hunting seasons. This event is a hands-on event with two pellet gun stations, furbearer exhibit, archery, fishing and much more.

Hunter Education

State law requires those born after December 31, 1961, to successfully complete an approved hunter education course before buying or applying for a North Dakota hunting license. Our department courses are offered through a network of more than 600 active volunteer instructors. We provide a traditional in person hunter education course or a home study course for individuals to choose from. Our traditional course is 14-hours in length and is taught entirely in the classroom with students who turn 11 in the calendar year. Our home study offering is a 14-hour course that is split between the classroom and online learning. Students must turn 12 within the calendar year to complete the home study course. The home study course is increasing in popularity with the public and the Department sees this as a proactive means to address student's increasingly busy schedules while maintaining educational standards. The Department requires all students take and pass the same in-person certification exam that includes our state written and "hands-on" practical exam.

In 2023, our department began offering an all-online bow hunter education course. North Dakota law does not require bow hunter education, but occasionally we have residents who travel to a state that has a law requiring certification (Alaska/Colorado). We continue to offer the in-person offering of the class, however the majority of people requesting the course were people who are lifelong bow hunters traveling out of state.

Throughout the 2021-2023 biennium, approximately 10,337 students completed hunter education and 438 completed bow hunter education. To date, 248,151 North Dakotan's have become hunter education certified and an additional 2,924 have completed bow hunter education.

Several times a year the hunter education program partners with our Department's Communication Staff to produce webcasts on the hunter education program.

In 2022, we resumed hosting our Department's Annual Volunteer Training Event located in Mandan, Regional Workshops in the eight major cities and Instructor Academies in Bismarck. In the 2021-2023 biennium, we had 285 instructors attend an Annual Training Event, 165 attend a Regional Instructor Workshop and 23 new instructors complete the Instructor Academy.

Shooting Ranges

The department provides \$240,000 in shooting range grants every biennium. In addition, the department started a plan to build all-inclusive shooting sports venues in locations throughout the state. The first one was built outside of Velva, ND in conjunction with the Velva Sportsmen's Club. This facility has a meeting room, an indoor archery building, a 100-yard rifle and pistol

range, 3 trap fields, and an indoor archery building. Work was also started on a similar project in Watford City with the McKenzie County Sportsmen's group. The entire project was completed by June 30, 2021. This biennium we are planning another facility in Hankinson, ND. Land has been acquired for an outdoor rifle range and is currently going through an environmental assessment. Trap shooting fields, archery, and club house will be built on adjoining land in the following year. The Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation has also started working with the department to build two ranges, a sporting clays course on the edge of Medora, and a rifle range a distance out of town. There is continued interest from other clubs around the state to build facilities.

Boating and Water Safety

In 1985, a state law was passed that required individuals between 12-15 years of age who would like to operate watercraft with a motor greater than 10 horsepower to complete a state-approved boater education course. The Department provides an in-classroom, online and home study option for students to take the Department's boater education course. Since the North Dakota boater education was developed, over 20,000 students have successfully completed the course with roughly 1,000-1,200 annually. North Dakota is at an all-time high with over 67,000 boats registered in the state.

Several radio advertisements, news interviews and web casts were developed to promote and remind boaters of the navigation rules and safety issues. Staff continue to work with the Department's Communication Section to promote safe boating messages statewide.

North Dakota Hooked on Fishing

Department instructors teach about the basics of fishing including bait and tackle, fish biology, aquatic habitats, and where to find a variety of North Dakota fish species. Classes are often taught near a body of water for hands-on opportunities. On average 2000 hours are donated annually by aquatic volunteer instructors who participate in a wide variety of fishing events around the state to include small community events sponsored by groups such as Lure Em' For Life, and the North Dakota State Fair.

In addition to dozens of smaller community fishing events, four major fishing events were conducted throughout the state utilizing a variety of partnerships. Three kids fish camps; one in the spring, conducted in partnership with the ND National Guard specifically for the kids of our soldiers, and two open enrollment camps, one in the spring and one in the summer were conducted. The Department supported the fourth event called Warriors on the Water, an annual event where active and retired military members are taken fishing.

Family Fishing Days program was discontinued during the 2021-2023 biennium. Participation was declining year over year, and we observed a high number of repeat customers. Another perhaps more important factor was a decline in volunteers and not wanting to burn out the volunteer base we rely upon for other projects.

Several libraries in the state are still operating a rod check out program.

During the 2017-2019 biennium, a pilot program was initiated called Trout in the Classroom. The program is run nationally by Trout Unlimited but delivered and coordinated locally by state natural resource agencies and local chapters of Trout Unlimited. As the name implies trout are raised from eggs to fingerling size in the classroom, then in the spring stocked into approved waters. Kids learn about watersheds, water quality, aquatic nuisance species and of course fish ecology. Career opportunities in fisheries management, fish production and aquaculture may also be incorporated. Equipment and eggs are provided by the Department and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Volunteers from local Trout Unlimited chapters are often relied upon to help with egg delivery and to be present for the stocking efforts. Unfortunately, there are no Trout Unlimited chapters in North Dakota, which will limit full expansion of the program. The 2021-2023 began with a total of 15 established TIC schools adding one in 2020 bringing the number to 16. The number actually operating the program from year to year fluctuates but averages 10 as teachers are constantly moving sometimes leaving the program to a teacher that is not interested or familiar enough with the program to commit to it their first year. The 2022/2023 school year was the first year we requested participant data and 355 students were part of the program.

Fur Harvester Education

Game and Fish furbearer hunting and trapping instructors teach the history of furbearer hunting and trapping and their role in future wildlife management, ethical hunting and trapping, use of trapping equipment, techniques of hunting and trapping, and proper preparation and marketing of furs.

During the 2021-2023 reporting period, 12 volunteer instructors taught 32 courses to 1906 students for a total of 667 volunteer hours. This represents all fur harvester classes and presentations including the full 16-hour certification workshop. Students who successfully complete the course are certified in trapper education and receive a unique number. This number is recognized by all states that require completion of a trapper education course before trapping, using certain types of equipment or trapping certain species. North Dakota does not require this certification to trap, snare or hunt furbearers. The demand for the certification course varies widely depending on fur prices.

National Archery in the Schools

NASP is a widely popular, in-school archery program operating in 47 states, Australia, Canada, Mexico, and Africa. NASP is a two-week introductory archery program designed to be taught by physical education teachers in grades 4–12, coordinated on a state level in most cases by state wildlife conservation agencies.

In 2008, the Department became the coordinating agency for NASP in North Dakota. To date, one staff member is trained as an Archery Instructor Trainer Specialist, five staff members have

been trained as Basic Archery Instructor Trainers and 10 staff members are certified as Basic Archery Instructors.

The program has been implemented in 208 schools North Dakota. During the 2021-2023 biennium an average of 10,500 participated in NASP in North Dakota Schools. With a goal of implementing the project in 50 percent of North Dakota schools, the grant program continued with \$80,000 available to schools and other archery organizations to purchase equipment and expand the program during the 2021-2023 biennium.

The tournament series continues to grow in popularity and is a major factor driving participation both after-school and during school and attracts new schools. The newest addition to NASP is the NASP IBO 3-D program and its popularity is growing faster than the original Bullseye program. Each year more schools are hosting tournaments to the point there is at least one, if not two or three, local tournaments every weekend from January to Mid-March when the state tournament is held. The state tournament now attracts 900 kids for Bullseye and 668 in 3-D. Each year around 100 students from several North Dakota schools travel to the National Tournaments to represent North Dakota, an event that now attracts more than 18,000 students from 37 states.

During 2015-2017 biennium, a non-profit organization called the North Dakota Youth Archery Advisory Council formed. Its mission is to assist the Department with the growth of the NASP program in North Dakota. Hundreds of volunteer hours were reported from the members of this organization for the reporting period. Since their inception, they have raised over \$80,000 in college scholarships which are awarded to the top five boys and girls at the state tournament.

In 2019, the Department was the first state to pilot a project called Varsity Archery. This program was conceived here in North Dakota but caught the attention of two nationwide archery organizations. These organizations helped design the program, train instructors, helped operate the first ever tournament and provided \$11,000 in grants to place equipment in the first 11 schools. The program was designed to dovetail seamlessly into the NASP program, the intent of which is to keep the older students, those in high school interested and engaged in their school archery program by offering them more advanced equipment and shooting techniques. The school count for Varsity Archery grew to 18 during the 2021-2023 biennium. Schools are now starting to offer Varsity Archery as an option within their local NASP tournaments and there were 30 participants and 59 at the 2022 and 2023 Varsity Archery State 3-D Tournaments and 47 shooting in the bullseye category which was newly added in 2023. It has spread to 13 other states with three more committed for the 24-25 school year and several other states are interested.

Habitats of North Dakota

The Habitats of North Dakota program continues to be an important component in the fourth-grade studies curriculum and life science curriculum for kindergarten through 12th grade. The program that was initiated in 2008 has grown to encompass topics such as habitats, wildlife of North Dakota, elementary science resources provided by the Department, preschool methods of

teaching life science, integration of the visual arts into life science curriculum, and graduate credit courses offered through the University of North Dakota (UND), North Dakota State University (NDSU), Valley City State University (VCSU), Minot State University (MSU), and Dickinson State University (DSU).

Habitats of North Dakota workshops are provided at the University of Mary, Valley City State University, Minot State University, North Dakota State University, Dickinson State University (both Bismarck and Dickinson campuses), and Mayville State University for all pre-service elementary education majors. Additional graduate credit workshops are offered for licensed teachers in Fargo, Mayville, Minot, Bismarck, Valley City, Devils Lake, Bottineau, Williston, and Dickinson.

Continuing education in-service workshops are offered statewide, and presentations are made at the North Dakota Science Teachers Conference each year. Approximately 140 teachers received graduate credit for completing in Habitats of North Dakota related workshops. Additionally, approximately 300 more receive information through shorter training opportunities. In addition to Face-to-Face workshops, The Habitats of North Dakota program is now offered online through regional teaching universities and North Dakota State University. This online format, while not as interactive as face-to-face training is more flexible for participant's schedules and is providing additional teacher professional development opportunities.

Habitat presentation requests throughout the state continue for classrooms, scout groups, and pre-service teachers. Classroom presentations reach 844 students throughout the State. Habitats of North Dakota is also part of the annual Earth Day celebration in April, reaching approximately 150 students. The Habitats program participated in the Marketplace for Kids presenting on the program and what a wildlife biologist does. In one day, we reached 150 students.

The updated Habitats Activity guide has been published. It provides ready to use lesson plans for teachers that are standards based. The new guide has been well received among teachers.

Urban Pollinator Program (UPP) has been launched and educator workshops and classroom presentations have been launched. The UPP has been well received. Teachers are readily signing up for professional development using the UPP curriculum guide as well as requests for classroom visits. So far, graduate level workshops for the UPP have been offered in Bottineau, Bismarck, Dickinson, Grand Forks, and Valley City.

Additional duties of the Education Section include judging local and regional science fairs, curriculum development, and working with the Hunter Safety Education program to ensure the presentations are educationally sound, which includes how to effectively teach to your audience.

Outreach Biologists

In 2021, Game and Fish administration reassigned the outreach biologists, stationed in Fargo, Grand Forks, and Minot, from the Communications Section to the Education Section, to even out

workload between section leaders within the division. The outreach biologists are vital, local experts for interacting with wildlife clubs, local leaders, local media, and assisting other Department divisions with local issues.

The outreach biologists all have weekly radio programs on major local stations, produce a weekly agency audio news release, and a weekly newspaper column that is widely distributed and used.

WILDLIFE DIVISION

Our Wildlife Division functions within three sections. Our Game Management Section is responsible for population monitoring and harvest management of wildlife species that are hunted and trapped in the state. Our primary surveys consist of ground and aerial observations, and harvest surveys completed by hunters and trappers. Our Wildlife Resource Management Section is responsible for the management of approximately 220,400 acres of wildlife management areas for wildlife production and public hunting opportunities. These areas offer a wide variety of public hunting opportunity across North Dakota. Our Private Lands Section is responsible for the Private Lands Open to Sportsmen program working directly with private landowners who are willing to open their property to public walk-in hunting. The landowner is compensated for hunting access along with habitat improvements on their property.

GAME MANAGEMENT SECTION

Our Game Management Section is responsible for population monitoring and harvest management of wildlife species that are hunted and trapped in the state. The overall goal of our section is to maximize sustainable hunting and trapping opportunities, while minimizing human-wildlife conflicts. Our work is accomplished through a series of surveys, censuses, and inventories to monitor population status and harvest of these important resources. Research studies also provide us new information to better understand the ecology of species and their habitats, as well as improve monitoring techniques. The information and knowledge gained from these activities are used to guide management decisions, to make hunting and trapping season recommendations to our Director and the Governor, and to provide information to the public and other agencies and organizations.

Our section staff includes four big game biologists, two upland game biologists, two migratory game bird biologists, one furbearer biologist (which also serves as the section leader), one wildlife veterinarian, one wildlife health biologist, one harvest survey coordinator, one pilot, and one game management technician. Throughout the year, temporary/seasonal employees assist with portions of our workload. Because of this minimal staffing, our section staff work cooperatively with each other whenever possible, and other Department personnel provide much needed assistance.

During the 2021-2023 biennium, we saw good and bad effects of weather, habitat, and disease on various game species. Moose and elk “once in a lifetime” licenses were at all-time highs in recent years and provided opportunities for hundreds of hunters each year. Bighorn sheep populations were holding steady, despite the presence of pneumonia. Special seasons (spring light geese and resident Canada geese) continued to provide abundant opportunity while we tried to bring populations back down to management objectives. And furbearer harvesting opportunities were outstanding. On the other hand, winter weather severely impacted deer and pronghorn. Reductions in the acreage of CRP continued to negatively impact grassland dependent species such as deer, pheasants, grouse, and ducks. And Chronic Wasting Disease and Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease in deer continued to be major concerns. But despite statewide

blizzards in spring of 2022 and a long winter with record breaking snowfall in 2023, spring precipitation and high insect numbers seemed to bode well for upland game population rebounds.

Summaries of activities by program area follow:

Big Game

Our overall goal for the big game management program in North Dakota is to maximize hunting opportunities, while maintaining populations within landowner tolerance levels and the carrying capacity of the land. To achieve this goal, we have both short-term and long-term objectives. Our long-term objective is to develop predictive models for managing each of our big game species through adaptive harvest management techniques (i.e., process of continually updating and evaluating new survey and harvest data and incorporating the results into updated models). To achieve our long-term goals, our short-term goal is to evaluate historical databases for each of the species. This analysis allows us to decipher which variables provide the greatest predictive value of future changes in big game populations.

On a national basis, we have contributed tissue samples for several genetic, pesticide, parasite, and disease research projects. In recent years, we have worked cooperatively on research and projects with other agencies in Alberta, Georgia, Iowa, Manitoba, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Oregon, South Dakota, Saskatchewan, and Wyoming. And, our big game staff has been actively involved with a number of professional regional workshops including the Annual Midwest Deer and Turkey Workshop (hosting in 2023), Biennial Pronghorn Workshop, Biennial Northern Wild Sheep and Goat Symposium, North American Moose Conference and Workshop, Elk and Mule Deer Working Group, North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society, Central Mountains and Plains Section of The Wildlife Society, International Association of Natural Resource Pilots, and other professional meetings and symposiums as they are available.

During the 2022-2023 biennium, we presented professional papers and published articles on big game species found in North Dakota. During this biennium peer-reviewed papers and book chapters have been published on bighorn sheep (Wildlife Society Bulletin 2023), moose (Springer Press, In Press), mule deer (CRC Press 2023, Ecology and Evolution 2023), white-tailed deer (Journal of Wildlife Diseases 2023), and big game management (Prairie Naturalist 2023). For the general reader and wildlife enthusiast, we have produced a brochure on how to improve and develop wildlife habitat on private land and have recently completed the first draft of a book on the ecology and management of white-tailed deer on the northern Great Plains. As always, we routinely provide big game population and hunting information to the public and media.

Our big game staff recently worked with the Three Affiliated Tribes to establish two new bighorn sheep herds on tribal lands, the first free-ranging bighorn sheep on Fort Berthold in more than 150 years. We also developed a contact list for landowners wanting deer harvested on their land and continued to work with landowners to focus harvest in areas with high densities of big game on private land. These efforts are intended to focus hunting pressure on areas with chronic depredation problems and disease concerns. Going forward, we are continuing to evaluate the use of Infrared imagery to monitor elk and moose, use of genetic testing of white-tailed deer and

mule deer to assess their vulnerability to hemorrhagic disease and the spread of CWD and refine survey methods for elk on the Little Missouri National Grasslands.

White-tailed deer:

In general, population indices for white-tailed deer suggest stable to decreasing numbers in the eastern and stable numbers in the western part of the state. Habitat loss continues to reduce the carrying capacity of the land. Due to the unseasonably warm fall of 2021, white-tailed deer along the Missouri River corridor and on the Slope region south and west of the Missouri River suffered a severe die-off from epizootic hemorrhagic disease. This was followed by the winter of 2022-2023, one of the snowiest and coldest winters in decades resulting in big game die-offs, particularly white-tailed deer. As a result, regular deer-gun license numbers were reduced 11% in 2022 and 17% in 2023.

We continued to use aerial surveys to monitor big game population trends throughout the state, evaluate the use of hunter observation questionnaires as a means of providing population indices (deer sighted per hour of effort, and buck/doe/fawn ratios), and listen to field staff and landowners about tolerance levels to big game populations.

Highlights to the 2023 deer hunting season are as follows:

- 53,400 licenses are available for the 2023 regular season, a decrease of 10,800 licenses from 2022.
 - Any Antlered licenses decreased by 3,650.
 - Any Antlerless licenses decreased by 3,050.
 - Antlered white-tailed deer licenses decreased by 300.
 - Antlerless white-tailed deer licenses decreased by 300.
 - Antlered mule deer licenses decreased by 1,450.
 - Antlerless mule deer licenses decreased by 2,050.
- A total of 1,022 muzzleloader licenses were available in 2023, comprised of 511 antlered white-tailed deer and 511 antlerless white-tailed deer licenses; this was a decrease of 145 muzzleloader licenses from 2022.
- In 2023, there was 160 “I” licenses available for the youth deer hunting season, which was a decrease of 145 from 2022. “I” licenses were limited in number for units 3B1, 3B2, and 4A-4F, and were valid for any deer. There were unlimited “H” youth deer hunting licenses that were valid for any deer statewide except antlered mule deer in the above restricted units.
- A total of 862 nonresident any deer archery licenses were available in 2023; this was an increase of 52 from 2022.
- Residents ages 11, 12 and 13 who held a statewide antlerless white-tailed deer license were no longer restricted to the Youth Deer season. This license is now valid during the Deer Gun season as well.
- The city of Portland is now participating in the Special Deer-Bow Herd Reduction.

Mule deer:

Mule deer abundance in the badlands decreased by 29% following the extreme winter of 2022-2023. Consequently, mule deer gun licenses were reduced by 58% in the badlands. Mule deer numbers in secondary range remain stable to increasing.

Our mule deer population in the western badlands is monitored by annually conducting a fall production survey and spring population index. We flew 24 study areas covering 306 square miles during the fall production survey and the spring population index. The 2023 spring index was 29% lower than 2022 index, and 5% below the long-term average. This was the lowest spring index since 2014.

- Mule deer fawn production declined due to drought conditions in 2020 and 2021. The 2022 fawn-to-doe ratio was 69 fawns per 100 does which was higher than 2021 (60 fawns per 100 does), but below the long-term average of 87 fawns per 100 does. The 2022 buck-to-doe ratio was 40 bucks per 100 does, which was similar to 2021 (38 bucks per 100 does) and long-term average (43 bucks per 100 does).
- A total of 5,750 mule deer licenses were made available in 2022 and 2,250 were available in 2023 via lottery application.
- Randomly sampled license holders were mailed a questionnaire to determine harvest statistics.

Pronghorn:

Pronghorn numbers declined by 40% following the extreme winter of 2022-2023. Consequently, hunting licenses were reduced by 1,550 and nine hunting units were closed in 2023.

- We determine pronghorn abundance, distribution, reproduction, and sex ratios by aerially surveying selected survey units (from a total of 51 survey units) covering 30,142 square miles of pronghorn habitat in July. The annual aerial survey consists of approximately 25 survey units covering 15,000 square miles. The 2023 statewide pronghorn survey indicated a population of 6,097, with a buck-to-doe ratio of 30 bucks per 100 does and a fawn-to-doe ratio 43 fawns per 100 does.
- A total of 1,970 licenses were made available in 2022, and 420 were available in 2023 via lottery application.
- All license holders were mailed a questionnaire to determine harvest statistics.

Moose:

Our moose population is stable to decreasing in the northwest and north central portions of the state in units M8, M9, M10 and M11 and stable in units M5 and M6 in the southeast and northeast portions of the state. Numbers continued to remain low in what was once considered traditional habitat in the Pembina Hills, Turtle Mountains, and Red River Valley region. Moose hunting units M1C (Pembina Hills) and hunting unit M4 (Turtle Mountains) remain closed due to low observed numbers.

- A total of 470 moose licenses were made available in 2021, and 400 were available in 2022 via lottery application.
- We conducted aerial surveys annually on 400 square miles of primary moose range as well as 2,700 square miles of secondary moose range when snow conditions were adequate.
- All moose license holders were contacted after the annual hunting season for harvest statistics.

Elk:

We are managing elk populations at stable to decreasing numbers because of depredation concerns and low landowner tolerance. Our population of elk in unit E1W are stable to increasing and units E1E and E2 continue to remain stable. Elk numbers in unit E3 and E4 appear to be stable to increasing as herds have expanded outside Teddy Roosevelt National Park. The elk population in elk unit E6 also appears to be stable.

- A total of 519 licenses were made available in 2021, and 559 were available in 2022 via lottery application.
- We conducted annual aerial surveys on 500 square miles of primary elk range as permitted by weather conditions.
- All elk license holders were contacted annually for harvest success.
- Mobile check stations are conducted annually on opening weekends of the elk seasons.

Bighorn sheep:

The state's bighorn sheep population has been increasing the last several years, and a record 347 bighorns were counted during the 2022 population survey. An all-age pneumonia-related die-off occurred during summer 2014 that has persisted in some lambs through 2023, albeit to a much lesser degree. Approximately 15% of our adult population was lost during 2014-2016; however, the rate of mortality has declined substantially since 2014 and most northern herds are showing great improvement in adult and lamb survival. We continued to document and assess the impacts of the die-off and persistence of *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* in the population during the 2021-2023 biennium.

We had a record number of applications submitted for bighorn sheep hunting licenses the past two years with 19,423 in 2022 and 20,290 in 2023. Four adult rams were harvested in 2021 (80% success) and five in 2022 (100% success). Six licenses were issued in 2023. All hunter-harvested bighorn sheep were horn-plugged and biological samples and measurements were collected.

The Department also provide one bighorn sheep license for auction annually by the Wild Sheep Foundation – Midwest Chapter, with a record \$165,000 raised in 2022 and 2023. All proceeds were directed to bighorn sheep management projects in North Dakota.

We continued to collect and analyze location data from radio-collared bighorn sheep to gather data pertaining to home range, lambing areas, adult survivability, and providing empirical data to land management agencies.

During February 2020, we collaborated with the Three Affiliated Tribes Fish & Wildlife Division to translocate 30 bighorn sheep from Rocky Boy's Reservation, Montana to Fort Berthold Reservation, ND. In exchange for three hunting licenses, the Department agreed to fully conduct the capture and translocation and co-manage the bighorns for two years post-release. The introduced bighorns have been closely monitored thus far and are doing very well, as the population increased from 30 to 78 in just three years.

Upland Game

Our upland game program is responsible for collecting and maintaining population trend data for 16 species of upland and small game. Population trend data are gathered through use of long-term established surveys conducted in winter, spring and summer and hunter-submitted samples in fall. These surveys form the basis of population trend estimates that are used to establish annual hunting seasons and provide hunter forecasts. Upland game hunters are one of the largest contingents of hunters in North Dakota. During the period 2021-2023, resident small game or combination license sales were roughly 65,000-75,000 licenses and non-resident small game license sales were roughly 21,000 both years.

Ring-necked pheasants:

Ring-necked pheasant numbers in North Dakota are up from 2022. The drought conditions of spring/summer of 2017 and 2021 resulted in lower numbers of pheasants over much of the primary pheasant range in North Dakota, but recent snowfall and summer precipitation improved nesting habitat that led to the increase in 2023. Recent short-term fluctuations are normal due to climatic conditions. However, changes in land-use due to high commodity prices and removal of grassland acres from the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) continues to occur, so without habitat programs to replenish vanishing CRP, we expect to see deeper troughs and lower peaks in the long-term pheasant population trend. Additionally, new research suggests that increased application of agricultural insecticides can negatively affect upland game bird survival and may compound negative influences on long-term population trends.

During 2023, we conducted 282 late-summer roadside counts for pheasants on 100 census routes in North Dakota. Statewide, there was a 61% increase in total number of pheasants observed per 100 miles, 70% increase in the number of pheasant broods observed per 100 miles, 26% increase in age ratio (Young/Adult), and average brood size remained unchanged from 2022.

Hunter harvest questionnaires are mailed out annually to estimate number of hunters, hunting trips, and harvest. Pheasant harvest for the 2022 hunting season showed 51,270 hunters (an increase of 10% from 2021) harvested 286,970 roosters (an increase of 9% from 2021). Youth harvest in 2022 was estimated at 168 roosters, compared to 222 in 2021.

The number of hunting trips over the same period as well as pheasants harvested per hunter has slowly decreased. But as pheasant numbers declined, so did hunting activity. As the number of non-resident hunters increased during the mid-2000s, the Department began sampling those hunters on an annual basis, rather than every 3-5 years.

Sharp-tailed grouse:

Sharp-tailed grouse are the most widely distributed and abundant grouse species in North Dakota. We used data from spring lek counts, late summer roadside counts and hunter surveys to evaluate the population trends of sharp-tailed grouse. During spring lek counts, biologists census over 700 square miles to get counts of all males displaying on leks within a census block. Late summer roadside routes (150 routes, 4,700 miles) are run in July and August to count adults and juveniles to gauge annual reproductive success. Hunter questionnaires (sample size 9,000 resident questionnaires; 4,500 non-resident questionnaires) are used to estimate number of

hunters, hunting trips, and harvest. We use data on hunter-harvested wing, tail and head feathers to estimate sex ratios, age ratios and peak hatch dates. Envelopes are mailed each year to approximately 1,600 hunters (8,000 envelopes) and hunters can request additional envelopes online or at any NDGF office.

We counted 3,139 male sharp-tailed grouse on all blocks in 2023 compared to 3,298 in 2022. These numbers have rebounded from the near 20-year lows observed in 2018 and 2019 (~2,700 males counted). The spring of 2019 was the first spring since the 2017 drought with abundant nesting cover, and the population trend is beginning to rebound. Areas east of the Missouri River remain above the 10-year average. However, majority of our sharp-tailed grouse have always been counted in the southwest part of the state, so our statewide estimate is still below the 20-year average.

In 2022, 20,461 hunters harvested an estimated 62,640 sharp-tailed grouse as compared to 2021 where 15,762 hunters harvested 45,732 sharp-tailed grouse (rebounding from a low of 34,375 in 2019). Hunter numbers, effort, access and sharp-tailed grouse densities all affect the harvest estimates.

Sage-grouse:

We conduct annual spring counts at all known active sage-grouse strutting grounds (leks) in North Dakota and re-visit historical grounds periodically to check for resumed activity. Active leks are counted at least two separate mornings at least a week apart to try to capture the peak in strutting activity. Our sage-grouse population has been decimated from the record high documented in 1980 when biologists counted 380 males on 23 leks. The trend over the past 50 years followed a slow, steady decline. After a West Nile virus outbreak in 2007-2008, the population plummeted. Beginning in 2008, we closed the sage-grouse hunting season due to lek counts below management objectives (250 males observed on leks). In 2017, we counted the fewest sage-grouse ever counted in North Dakota, only six males from all known leks.

North Dakota is on the fringe of the sage-grouse range in North America, and small changes to our fringe habitat components have had negative effects on sage-grouse in our state. We wrote a sage-grouse management plan in 2005 to identify threats to sage-grouse habitat and revised the plan in 2014. The plan is available on our website.

In 2020 and 2021, after four years of translocations, we counted 27 and 22 male sage-grouse, respectively, and the majority of the males counted were near our release sites. Despite the bump from our 2017 low, our sage-grouse populations have failed to make substantial rebounds. In 2022 we only found two active sage-grouse leks with 25 total sage-grouse males (10% of our target objective).

We and our collaborators published five papers on our sage-grouse translocation experiment. The main finding was that, although effective, the scale would have to be 10-fold in individuals translocated and in years to get us back near our goal. We would need to continue translocations of 100-200 sage-grouse (males and hens with broods) annually for 10-15 years to expect a significant response, which the Department does not believe is practical. We are unconvinced that even after such efforts, the population would sustain itself without constant translocations.

Gray partridge:

We used several surveys to determine population trends of gray partridge in North Dakota. In addition to brood surveys (350 routes, 8,800 miles), hunter questionnaires (9,000 resident questionnaires, 4,400 non-resident questionnaires) and a wing survey (8,000 envelopes mailed to 1,600 hunters), we also used rural mail carriers to estimate the spring breeding population. Cooperating carriers cover 15,000-20,000 miles during a three-day survey period in mid-April. These data indicated a statewide increase of 119% from 2022 to 2023. In 2023, we conducted roadside brood counts on 7,632 miles of roadsides and we used the roadside survey data to evaluate production. The number of partridges observed per 100 miles increased 201% from 2022 to 2023. The number of broods observed per 100 miles also increased by over 100% (more than doubling). Our current 2023 partridge densities are near all-time highs recorded on our Late Summer Roadside Count surveys, tied with 1991. Longer term, populations continue to fluctuate with winter weather and availability of suitable habitat (crop edges with forbs and diversity of plant species for food and cover). Perhaps concerning is that partridge were more abundant than sharp-tailed grouse for the first time ever. Since partridge prefer crop edge and fragmented landscapes and sharp-tailed grouse prefer native prairies with intermingled crops, this hints toward the continued loss of native prairie or pasture on the North Dakota landscape.

Ruffed grouse:

Twelve drumming routes are run annually in two districts to determine the breeding population of ruffed grouse in North Dakota (routes are no longer run in McHenry County because ruffed grouse have not been documented in that county since 2006). The ruffed grouse population in North Dakota used to be considered cyclical with a peak approximately every 10 years. However, since we dropped below an average of 0.5 drums heard per stop (in 2013), we have not seen another peak in the population. During the 20-year period from 1980 to 2000 our average drums heard per stop was ≥ 1.5 for 11 years. In the past 20 years, we have only recorded ≥ 1.5 drums per stop in 1999. Survey results indicated 0.81 drums heard per stop in 2023, up from 0.62 in 2022 (Note: prolonged snow cover in 2023 made counts impossible in the Pembina Hills, and those routes had been trending upward. It's likely the statewide average would have been higher if those had been completed in 2022).

We monitored ruffed grouse harvest via our small game hunting questionnaire, the same survey used for other upland game bird species. Ruffed grouse harvest was estimated at 193 birds (probably an all-time low) in 2002, jumped to 2,163 birds in 2008 and has remained around 1,000 birds through 2016 (exception was 2015 when only 306 birds were harvested). In 2019, we developed an automated logistical model to estimate harvest for upland game species. The model produced higher harvest estimates but revealed high variability in the number of ruffed grouse harvested by the few hunters who reported hunting for ruffed grouse. We are exploring new ways to estimate ruffed grouse harvest, but with the new method we estimated 2,564 and 5,083 ruffed grouse were harvested in 2021 and 2022, respectively.

Ruffed grouse habitat (mixed-aged aspen forests) continues to decline in the three areas in the state where we have ruffed grouse. Aspen are cleared for residential, recreational and agricultural development. Further, fire and floods are more controlled in the remaining aspen stands, resulting in older, even-aged stands that do not provide the diversity of mixed-age stands. More

recently, studies in Minnesota have revealed that ruffed grouse populations are susceptible to West Nile virus.

Prairie chickens:

We conduct annual counts at over 200 historic and active leks in the prairie chicken range in North Dakota. Both prairie chicken booming grounds and sharp-tailed grouse dancing grounds are included in the survey, and some breeding grounds include both species. The two main populations are on the Sheyenne National Grasslands and a smaller re-introduced population west of Grand Forks.

From 1992-1998, we invested in a prairie chicken restoration project in Grand Forks County. We translocated 414 wild-trapped prairie chickens to this area. Initially these transplants helped the population increase to a level capable of supporting a hunting season (opened in 2004). This was the first hunting season on prairie chickens in North Dakota since 1945. However, severe winters and wet springs have resulted in a dramatic decline in North Dakota's prairie chicken population since 2006 (particularly during the winters of 2009-2011). We closed the hunting season in 2010.

We started new contracts with the University of North Dakota and a retired Minnesota DNR biologist to complete prairie chicken counts starting in 2019. Initial counts were low with the new observers, and we hoped it was due to observer familiarity, but after four years, we continue to see significant declines in their numbers. In 2021, we spent time collecting photographs and video of remaining greater prairie-chickens in the Grand Forks population and discovered that many of the "prairie chickens" were hybridized with sharp-tailed grouse. We expected rare hybrids but counted more hybrids (eight) than pure greater prairie-chickens (one) on two of the larger booming grounds. We entered into a collaboration with Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to collect hybrids for genetic research in 2023 but were unable to find enough hybrids for collections. UND crews were only able to find five male prairie chickens remaining in the Grand Forks population. The population around Sheyenne National Grasslands is slightly better, although only 42 total males were documented in 2023.

Wild turkeys:

Three subspecies of wild turkeys have been introduced into North Dakota (Merriam's, Eastern, Rio Grande) and are managed as a single species. Season recommendations are based upon population trend data gathered on summer brood surveys. Two hunting seasons are held each year; a spring 'gobbler only' season and a fall season where any turkey is legal. Prior to the fall 2005 turkey season, only North Dakota residents were eligible to apply for licenses for both hunting seasons. The 2005 Legislature amended the N.D. Century Code, and it now allows nonresident licenses to be available after the resident lottery is held. In 2015, the Legislature allotted up to two turkey licenses for the Outdoor Adventure Foundation for youth diagnosed with cancer or a life-threatening illness. In 2017, the Legislature passed a bill making available a total of three spring wild turkey license to the National Wild Turkey Federation for raffle or auction.

Hunter harvest questionnaires were sent to a sample of hunters after the close of each season to estimate hunter activity and harvest. Turkey numbers steadily increased from 2021 to 2023. During the fall of 2022, there were 3,975 permits available and 4,031 were issued (285 gratis and

3,746 general permits). From the wild turkey questionnaire, we determined that 2,512 license holders hunted during the fall and harvested an estimated 1,240 wild turkeys (success rate of 50%).

During the 2023 spring gobbler hunting season, a total of 7,887 regular season licenses were available. Gratis and youth licenses were not included in the regular season license allocation. From our post-season harvest survey, we determined 5,932 hunters harvested an estimated 2,358 turkeys (success rate of 40%) in 2023. Additionally, feather samples from the 2023 season resulted in 398 adults compared to 164 juveniles.

Tree squirrels (gray, fox, red):

The rural mail carrier survey is used to determine population trends for tree squirrels. Rural mail carriers record population data for squirrels four times throughout the year (April, July, October, and January). Cooperators and mileage are similar during each survey period. They observed the same number of tree squirrels in July 2022 (1.24 squirrels/mile) as in July 2021 (1.24); fewer in October 2022 (1.20) than in October 2021 (1.75); fewer squirrels in January 2023 (1.38) than in January 2022 (1.95); and more in April 2023 survey (1.73) than in April 2022 (1.38).

The small game harvest questionnaire used to estimate hunter activity for grouse, partridge and pheasant is also used to estimate tree squirrel harvest. In addition, known squirrel hunters are sent a harvest survey card at the end of the hunting season which asks about their squirrel hunting activity, success, and harvest by species. In 2023, we determined 3,084 hunters harvested an estimated 4,723 tree squirrels.

Rabbits and hares (snowshoe, cottontail, and jackrabbit):

Population surveys to determine trends of cottontail rabbits are similar to those used for tree squirrels. Rural mail carriers census cottontails during four periods of the year (January, April, July, and October). They observed more cottontails during the July 2021 survey (0.44 cottontails/100 miles) than in July 2022 (0.40); fewer cottontails during October 2021 (0.27) than that in October 2022 (0.28); fewer cottontails during the January 2023 survey (0.27) than January 2022 (0.84); and more cottontails during the April 2023 survey (0.37) compared to the April 2022 count (0.34).

Information from the 2021-2022 small game hunter questionnaire indicated that 2,415 hunters harvested an estimated 6,049 cottontail rabbits in North Dakota during the 2022 hunting season.

Migratory Game Birds

Migratory game birds in North Dakota include ducks (18+ species), geese (five species), tundra swans, coots, sandhill cranes, mourning doves, snipe, and woodcock. Because these game birds are migratory, they are protected by international treaties and their management is shared by the states, provinces, and countries throughout their range. Thus, migratory game bird program activities encompass a great deal of coordination and cooperative work with government and non-government organizations, officials, and biologists throughout North America. In most cases, their harvest and/or population management are guided by multi-jurisdictional management plans. Overall duck harvest management is delivered using adaptive harvest

management and is an exemplary case study of cooperative, sustainable, objective-driven harvest management. In addition, the migratory game bird staff handles all endangered whooping crane coordination because of the close associations between whooping crane management and migratory game bird management.

The migratory game bird staff conducted 11 regular surveys to measure the population status and harvest of more than 29 species of migratory game birds. These surveys along with other annual monitoring efforts are part of the cooperative continent-wide management of migratory game birds. This year, 2023, marked the 76th year of our statewide breeding duck survey. To our knowledge, this is the longest running, systematic breeding waterfowl survey in the world.

In addition to these regular surveys and projects, migratory game bird staff worked on and contributed to a number of research and management projects including monitoring efforts to justify ultra-liberal hunting regulations for Giant Canada goose population management, the operational Central Flyway preseason duck banding program, two studies using GPS transmitter implants to examine movements and habitat use by mallards and pintails, a study examining redhead duck recruitment, long-term changes in duck nesting success, Arctic nesting light goose research, Arctic nesting Canada goose research, the national waterfowl parts collection harvest survey, Adaptive Harvest Management, updating the national pintail harvest management strategy, and other work on harvest strategies for waterfowl, sandhill crane surveys, a pilot study to examine methods for collecting age-specific sandhill crane harvest data, a pilot effort with international funding to determine alternative methods to collect age-specific goose harvest data, national mourning dove banding program, national mourning dove harvest management strategy, waterfowl rest area establishment, hunting proclamations and guides, informational presentations and work with media, wildlife, university, and school groups and citizens throughout North America, peer review and publication of professional literature and presentations, and work on various other committees and projects within the Department and with other agencies and organizations.

During the past biennium, the migratory game bird section has published a peer-reviewed paper relating late-summer dove abundance to regional weather patterns and land use (*Wildlife Society Bulletin* 2022). We also submitted a manuscript for peer-reviewed publication regarding fall/winter movements and distributions of hatch-year mallards. The section has several other manuscripts that are being prepared for peer-review publication.

A high priority for the migratory bird staff is cooperative work with all governmental and non-governmental agencies and organizations that are stakeholders in migratory bird resources. We have significant responsibilities with the Central Flyway Council, the Central Flyway Waterfowl Technical Committee (including 15 subcommittees), the Central Flyway Webless Migratory Game Bird Technical Committee (including four subcommittees), the Central Management Unit Dove Technical Committee, the Bird Banding Lab ad-hoc group, the pintail harvest management strategy working group, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (including the Waterfowl Working Group, the Harvest Management Working Group, the Federal Duck Stamp Task Group), and the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture. Work with these entities is vital to continued successful management of migratory game birds and associated hunting opportunities in North Dakota.

Migratory game bird staff administer a wide variety of hunting opportunities in the state: three special waterfowl hunting seasons (Youth Waterfowl, Veteran and Active Military Waterfowl, and September Canada goose), five regular waterfowl seasons, (Duck and Coot, Canada goose, White-fronted goose, Light geese, and Tundra swans), five webless migratory bird seasons (Dove, Sandhill crane, Snipe, Woodcock, and Crow), one Spring Conservation Order (light geese), and one August Management Take (Canada geese).

During 1995-2016, duck numbers reached record highs in North Dakota, peaking in 2002. Abundant CRP, which provided nesting cover, and excellent wetland conditions ushered in a new era for waterfowl hunting opportunity in the state, not seen since before WWII. However, recent losses of wetland and grassland habitats have resulted in breeding duck numbers in North Dakota dropping to their lowest level in more than two decades. In 2017, breeding duck numbers in the state dropped below 3 million for the first time since 1994. Since then, wet and dry conditions have swung wildly between years. During the 2021 survey, breeding mallard and pintail indices were their lowest since 1993 and 1991, respectively. Beginning in 2017, we have averaged 3.3 million breeding ducks, despite having wetland conditions that would have attracted 4 - 4.75 million ducks prior to 2016. Statewide, we have less than 1/3 the CRP acres that once covered the landscape in 2007. Without secure nesting cover in the form of perennial grasses, it will be difficult for duck numbers to rebound in any sustained manner.

Since 1998, numbers of nonresident waterfowl hunter numbers have been quite high, often rivaling or exceeding numbers of resident waterfowl hunter numbers, especially in recent years. The attraction was reflective of record breeding duck populations in the early-2000s, abundant habitat, and easily attainable access for places to hunt. However, declining habitat conditions, decreased amounts of private lands accessible to hunting, and declining populations of ducks have resulted in increased conflict amongst hunters and increased numbers of complaints, despite decreasing numbers of resident hunters. During 1994-1998, there was an average of 14,200 nonresident waterfowl hunters and an average of 37,600 resident waterfowl hunters. During the past five years, there was an average of 22,600 nonresident waterfowl hunters and an average of 18,800 resident waterfowl hunters. Numbers of residents hunting waterfowl hit an all-time low in 2019 with only 16,421 participants. In 2022, there were 17,719 resident waterfowl hunters and 24,627 nonresident waterfowl hunters.

Locally breeding Canada goose numbers remained at near-record levels and are well above the population objective. We expended considerable effort managing a permit program (landowners are sub-permitted under a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Special State Canada Goose Permit that is issued to the Department) that allowed agricultural producers and other entities to take adult and gosling Canada geese, and their nests and eggs to manage crop depredations. We also worked with our Director's office to issue other permits to address human health and safety issues and nuisance concerns caused by locally breeding Canada geese. Urban Canada goose issues are consuming more time each year with each situation requiring a different set of solutions. Canada goose population control efforts are done in conjunction with ultra-liberal hunting opportunities and regulations that require considerable monitoring efforts to ensure their viability. Hunting effort and harvest during the August Management Take and Early September Hunting Season remain strong. Over the past five years, an average of 5,000 hunters have

harvested an average of 52,000 Canada geese per year during special early Canada goose hunting opportunities.

Sandhill crane numbers remain abundant and mourning dove numbers appear to be slightly declining in the Central Management Unit. Populations of migrant Canada geese, snow geese and Ross's geese are all above objective levels. During the last 5 years, participation in the Spring Light Goose Conservation Order has remained strong. Roughly 2,800 hunters have participated, on average, and harvested an average of 54,000 light geese per year in the spring.

Furbearer Management

Our furbearer management program is responsible for estimating species distributions, population trends, numbers of commercially important fur species that are sold, and harvest of furbearers statewide. Common furbearing species include badger, bobcat, beaver, coyote, mink, muskrat, raccoon, red fox, striped skunk, and weasel. Furbearing species that are less common include American marten, black bear, grey and swift fox, gray wolf, fisher, mountain lion, river otter, and spotted skunk. To meet our annual objectives during the 2021-2023 biennium, we used a combination of statewide surveys, population modeling, and individual investigations.

During the 2021-2023 biennium, we conducted three statewide surveys for furbearers. First, the April rural mail carrier survey was used to obtain population trends by physiographic region. We have been cooperating annually with rural mail carriers for this survey since 1970. Second, state law required fur buyers to turn in their fur buying records to be eligible to purchase a fur buying permit the following year. We have been collecting and compiling these annual fur buyers' reports since 1937. And third, we mailed furbearer harvest questionnaires in April of each year to a random sample of hunters and trappers who bought a resident furbearer, resident combination, nonresident coyote/fox hunting, or nonresident reciprocal trapping license during the previous year. We have been surveying fur harvesters annually since 1971.

For those furbearers that were difficult to monitor using the above methods, including bobcats, mountain lions, fishers, and river otters we required mandatory tagging and carcass collection of harvested animals. We then used age and reproductive information from those carcasses to model population trends.

Additionally, we investigated reports of less common furbearer occurrences (e.g., sightings, incidental captures, road kills, etc.) to monitor changes in distribution and abundance. Furbearer carcasses that were collected through incidental trapping, automobile collisions, depredation removals, etc. were also examined and necropsied to monitor population health and reproduction. As such, we routinely necropsied American marten, bobcats, fishers, mountain lions, river otters, and swift fox, as well as the occasional black bear or gray wolf.

We communicated with many organizations and agencies when gathering and interpreting information on furbearers in North Dakota, including USDA-Wildlife Services, USGS-Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, Theodore Roosevelt National Park, Three Affiliated Tribes, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, Fur Takers of North Dakota, North Dakota Fur Hunters and

Trappers Association, North Dakota Houndsmen Association, Delta Waterfowl, state Universities, Midwest Furbearer Workgroup, and Swift Fox Conservation Team.

We sold an average of 6,499 resident furbearer, 62,845 resident combination, 2,663 nonresident coyote/fox hunting, and 14 nonresident reciprocal trapping licenses annually during 2021 and 2022. The rural mail carrier survey indicated fluctuating (up and down) trends during the past two years for all furbearers in all regions, both years. Fur buyers' reports indicated that during the past two years, coyotes were the most commonly purchased furbearer. Number of pelts bought during the 2021-2022 season was 12,533. Prices paid per pelt were highest among bobcat and coyote. Coyote pelts were the highest income generator to the state annually. Results from questionnaires indicated that coyotes, muskrats, and raccoons were the most commonly harvested furbearers. Bobcat harvest during the past two seasons (58 in 2020-2021, 56 in 2021-2022) was similar to the long-term average. Fishers and river otters had limited (i.e. short season length and/or small season limits) regulated trapping seasons. Additionally, there was a limited hunting season on mountain lions each year and model trends indicate the population has been relatively stable the past several years.

Wildlife Health

Our Wildlife Health program is responsible for monitoring and managing disease status and trends. Disease related projects and work during the 2021-2023 biennium concentrated heavily on chronic wasting disease (CWD), epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD), highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), rabies and other disease outbreaks as they occurred.

Since 2002, we have conducted CWD surveillance in North Dakota using 2 methods. *Targeted surveillance* was conducted statewide and year-round. It was used for early-detection of disease in the state or new areas of the state. Targeted animals include free-ranging deer, elk, and moose that show signs consistent with CWD, died of unknown causes, or were killed by vehicle collision; and free-ranging cervids removed from farmed facilities. *Hunter-harvested surveillance* was used to estimate prevalence over time and space. It was conducted annually in areas where CWD was previously detected, and in rotating, three-year cycles in the remainder of the state.

The combined totals of targeted and hunter harvested animals sampled and tested for CWD in 2021 and 2022 were 2,799 white-tailed deer, 1,885 mule deer, 85 elk, and 158 moose. During this time, CWD was detected in 50 deer harvested in 12 hunting units. In unit 3F2, encompassing Grant and Sioux Counties, where CWD was first detected in 2009, approximately 4.9 % of mule deer and 0.9% of white-tailed deer are infected with the fatal disease. In unit 3A1, in the far northwest part of North Dakota, CWD was first detected in 2018, and infection rate estimates have climbed to 9.8% in mule deer.

Carcass transportation guidelines and baiting bans were updated and signed by Governor's Proclamation. Newly identified units within North Dakota, as well as all areas outside of North Dakota were added to the list of areas where CWD restrictions are in place.

Beginning March 17th, 2022, the Department began receiving numerous reports of sick and dead birds. Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) was confirmed in snow-geese shortly afterwards. As the spring migration progressed, HPAI was confirmed in additional species. Morbidity and mortality reports decreased substantially by late May 2022. Scattered reports continued through December 2022 with only an occasional mortality reported in 2023. Through the outbreak, HPAI was confirmed in over 300 animals, represented by at least 29 species.

Additionally, investigations of die-offs and numerous necropsies have been performed on various species including waterfowl, upland game birds, nongame birds and mammals, big game, and furbearers. Causes of death and illness were identified. Assistance was provided to the Law Enforcement Division to determine the cause of death in potential criminal investigations. Serology has been performed on various species to determine the level of exposure of wildlife to certain disease agents.

Our Wildlife Health program works with a variety of state and federal wildlife and livestock related agencies. All meetings of the ND Board of Animal Health were attended, and we continued to work with their non-traditional livestock committee on farmed cervid issues and toward the elimination of contact between free-ranging and farmed cervids. We are also a part of the feral swine eradication working group. Updates on wildlife disease in ND were given to various groups, including the Midwest Fish and Wildlife Health Committee.

PRIVATE LANDS SECTION

Overview

The Department's Private Land Initiative (PLI) includes two components as part of the game and fish department private land habitat and access improvement fund: the Private Land Open To Sportsmen (PLOTS) program and big game depredation assistance. The Department's line-item budget for the PLI in 2021-2023 was \$19,980,597.00. Per NDCC 20.1-02-05(17h), the Department is authorized to carryover any unexpended funds, up to \$2M to future biennium's, for big game depredation. In 2021-2023, \$2,000,000.00 was carried over, bringing the total budget to \$21,980,597.00.

Approximately \$15,468,124.08 in program payments were made to private landowners during the 2021-2023 biennium to improve wildlife habitat and provide hunting access on private land through the PLOTS program. \$1,538,388.00 was spent to alleviate big game depredation problems on private livestock feed supplies. \$500,000 was directed towards the Save Our Lakes program through the Fisheries Division to address water quality issues on private lands surrounding managed fisheries. Approximately \$3,501,799.97 was used for staff salaries, indirect, travel, motor pool and expenses. Additional funds were used on additional PLI efforts such as various grant agreements and other programs noted at the end of this document.

Big Game Depredation Assistance

The Department spent \$1,538,388.00 during the biennium on big game depredation. Of this amount, \$700,458.59 was spent to cost-share with landowners for the construction of deer-proof hay yards. Another \$265,228.33 used on materials for deer-proof hay yards including gates and

panels. \$22,687.72 was used on depredation food plots, The balance, \$550,013.74, includes salaries, indirect costs, travel, and motor pool expenses for Department personnel when working on depredation activities.

Private Land Open To Sportsmen (PLOTS)

The Habitat Plot Program provides rental payments for nesting, wintering and other key wildlife habitat. The habitat can be newly established habitat, existing habitat, or a combination of both. During the 2021-2023 biennium, \$1,862,957.16 in annual rental payments and \$1,095,292.85 in upfront rental payments were made to private landowners. 61,512 acres are currently enrolled in this program. Note: In 2019 efforts began to transition this program to the Working Lands program. Existing legacy agreements will remain until they expire but no new Habitat Plot agreements will be written any longer.

The Private Forest Conservation Program provides rental payments for maintaining and protecting native woodland habitat on private land. During the 2021-2023 biennium, \$52,511.97 in annual rental payments were made to private landowners. There are currently 150 acres enrolled in this program. Note: In 2019, efforts began to transition this program to the Working Lands program. Existing legacy agreements will remain until they expire but no new Private Forest agreements will be written any longer.

The Working Lands Program provides rental payments for maintaining conservation practices, habitat features, and management activities that have a positive impact on wildlife habitat. During the 2021-2023 biennium, \$5,066,861.14 in annual rental payments were made to private landowners and \$333,742.46 was paid for grass seed, grass establishment payments, habitat incentives and management. \$8,817.00 was paid for neonicotinoid-free (untreated, insecticide free) wildlife food plot seed. 2,600 acres of new habitat were established during the 2021-2023 biennium. 511,267 acres are currently enrolled in this program.

The CRP Access Program provides assistance to landowners establishing or maintaining USDA Conservation Reserve Program acres in exchange for public access. Landowners are paid a one-time PLOTS payment for the term of their USDA CRP contract. During the 2021-2023 biennium, \$4,426,190.93 in payments were made to private landowners. 171,498 acres are currently enrolled in this program. At its highest level in 2007, there were approximately 3.3M acres of CRP in the state. At that time, the Department had nearly 400,000 acres of CRP enrolled in PLOTS. As statewide CRP acres continue to decrease, there are less opportunities for the Department to enroll CRP into PLOTS.

The Wetland Reserve Easement Incentive provides incentive payments on USDA Wetland Reserve Easements acres in exchange for public access. Landowners are paid a one-time, upfront payment for up to term of their USDA WRE contract. During the 2021-2023 biennium, \$792,887.47 in payments were made to private landowners. 36,589 acres are currently enrolled in this program.

CREP is a partnership between the State of North Dakota and USDA to enroll 20,000 acres of land into CRP under a special riparian project. The Department provides incentives and cost share to develop habitat and allow public access and USDA provides annual rental payments,

incentives, and cost share to establish habitat. During the 2021-2023 biennium, \$86,362.10 in annual rental payments were made to private landowners. 2,444 acres are currently enrolled in this program. Struggles to implement this program with USDA have resulted in fewer opportunities to enroll land into the program; the Department is considering dissolving this program.

Other PLI efforts

The Department continued to support an agreement with Pheasants Forever to deliver Best Management Practices (BMPs) through a Precision Ag Program to improve water quality, reduce soil erosion, and enhance habitat for wildlife on private lands. During the 2021-2023 biennium, \$114,000 was reimbursed to Pheasants Forever through this grant.

The Department has played an active role in assisting the ND Forest Service with the development of a Landscape Forest Stewardship Plan. Various aspen management activities are occurring on ND Forest Service lands and Department Wildlife Management areas as well as on private lands enrolled in PLOTS. Approximately 11 acres was managed on PLOTS in 2021, while hundreds of acres were managed on public lands.

The Department continued its support for the Meadowlark Initiative Coordinator position with ND Natural Resources Trust. \$17,668.80 was reimbursed to the Trust for planning, coordination, and management of the Meadowlark Initiative.

The Department provided neonicotinoid-free (untreated, insecticide free) wildlife food plot seed to landowners interested in developing habitat and food sources for deer, turkeys, and pheasants. During the 2021-2023 biennium, \$57,874.10 was paid for food plot seed and made available to 250 landowners, totaling approximately 1,040 acres.

Two PLOTS Guide publications, totaling \$81,820.26, were made available to hunters. Approximately 40,000 guides were printed annually. Into the future, less guides will be printed, and the PLOTS guide will be made available electronically.

The Department initiated an effort to provide incentives for select Continuous CRP practices in Adams, Barnes, Grand Forks, Nelson and Sargent counties through PLOTS and other partners including ND Natural Resources Trust, Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever.

The Department continued its partnership with seven soil conservation districts in the Red River Valley and the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality on an Outdoor Heritage grant. The grant provides cost share and rental payments for select practices that benefit wildlife and water quality. \$34,427.50 was reimbursed to SCDs for practices this biennium.

The Department entered into two grant agreements with South McLean and North McHenry Soil Conservation Districts to cost share on native grass drills to assist with protecting, conserving, and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat on private lands through Grassland Habitat Partnership grass plantings. During the 2021-2023 biennium the Department provided \$14,050.00 in cost share funds.

The Department continued an interagency agreement with NDSU to perform prescribed burn services on select PLOTS tracts in southwest North Dakota. During the 2021-2023 biennium, \$8,976.00 was paid for burn services.

WILDLIFE RESOURCE SECTION

The Wildlife Resource Section's primary responsibility is to manage approximately 220,453.96 acres of habitat contained within 237 of the state's Wildlife Management Area (WMA) system. These lands are incredibly diverse in terms of habitat type and provide extensive hunting and other compatible recreational and educational opportunities. WMA's in unique places such as the Killdeer Mountains, Turtle Mountains, Pembina Hills, Missouri River, and the prairie coteau, offer the public the chance to experience the variety of North Dakota's wildlife habitats.

The Wildlife Resource Section includes a total staff of 20 with nine Technicians, five Biologists, and six Resource Supervisors (one which also serves as Section Leader). The staff are located at the seven district offices. Staff also provide a significant amount of other services including conducting numerous wildlife surveys, responding to wildlife depredation and complaints, disease monitoring, and provide public information and assistance.

WMA's are owned in fee title by the Department or managed through cooperative agreements. Cooperative agreements with other entities include the Bureau of Reclamation, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and State Department of Trust lands and Department of Transportation - which grants authority and responsibility to manage those lands for fish and wildlife management purposes. The Department also has cooperative agreements with local entities to provide services – specifically area fishing lakes and campgrounds. The agreements are with local water boards and park boards for maintenance items at boat ramps, vault toilets, camping areas, mowing, garbage removal, etc.

Resource Section staff complete work items on WMA's to provide public access, manage boundaries, and enhance and maintain habitat. Projects include working on buildings, road and trails, public access sites, site renovation, fences, signs and boundary markers, water level management, bridges, herbaceous grass seeding, tree and shrub plantings, vegetation and forest management, noxious weed treatment, and custodial functions. In addition, the Department operates four public rifle ranges on WMA's.

A major challenge continues to be the control of noxious weeds. The Department spends approximately \$750,000 per biennium on chemical, biological, and mechanical weed control efforts. The Department is also a member of the North Dakota Weed Control Association and cooperates with private landowners and other state and federal agencies to find innovative and effective methods of controlling noxious weeds.

The Department's management objectives for specific WMA's are met by conducting various management techniques on these WMA's. Management techniques are based on sound biological practices and may include prescribed burning, rotational haying, grazing, and wildlife food plots.

Prescribed burning is conducted on grasslands primarily for the purposes of controlling the spread of invasive species, controlling noxious weeds, or removing dead or decadent herbaceous growth to stimulate new and more vigorous growth. Prescribed burns are completed by a qualified contractor or by Department staff. All personnel involved in prescribed burning have met the Department's prescribed fire training needs. Prescribed burning is a great management tool but presents logistical challenges including availability of staff, training requirements, planning, smoke management, fire break preparation, and ability to complete during a small window of time to accomplish habitat management objectives. Due to repeated Red Flag warnings and drought in the spring of 2021, no prescribed burns were completed in 2021. Approximately 140 acres were burned in the spring of 2022, and 85 acres in spring of 2023.

Rotational haying is generally conducted on tame grass stands or dense nesting cover plantings on certain WMA's. This practice is done to remove old growth so that these fields can be opened up to stimulate new growth. Haying practices are generally not conducted on the same planting in consecutive years. Haying was conducted on approximately 5,595 acres annually by local cooperators.

Grazing is generally conducted on native grass stands to control invasion by non-native species, to prevent a build-up of decadent grass, and to remove old growth so that these native stands can be opened up to stimulate new growth of native grasses. Grazing practices are generally not conducted on the same stands in consecutive years and grazing dates, stocking rates and rotations are set up to accomplish habitat management objectives. Grazing prescriptions vary for each WMA depending on soils, existing vegetation, and goals. Grazing was conducted on approximately 15,546 acres annually by local cooperators. Water availability for livestock has been a limiting factor for grazing on some WMA's, and the Department is addressing this by drilling wells or accessing water supply lines. Due to the drought in 2021, the Department had numerous requests for additional grazing and was able to accommodate several requests. In some cases, livestock permittees had to haul water or graze in areas they were not interested in grazing in past years. The Department was able to take advantage of the drought to get grazing management in areas that had not been grazed in several years.

Wildlife food plots are established to help sustain local wildlife populations through the winter months, help alleviate wildlife depredation problems to adjacent private landowners, and enhance hunting opportunities on WMA's. Wildlife food plots are established by Department staff, contracted, or through crop share agreements with local cooperators each year. Local cooperators farm on a WMA with a 70:30 crop share agreement, in which the Department's 30% is generally left standing unharvested as a food plot. Farming was conducted on approximately 6,075 acres annually.

Neonicotinoids are a common prophylactic seed treatment that provide systemic insect control to the crops. However, research has indicated mortality to critical insects utilized by passerine and upland game birds as well as numerous species of pollinators. Therefore, the Department has begun phasing out the use of seeds treated with neonicotinoids on WMA's. By 2021, no treated seed was planted by Department personnel, however cooperators were still able to use treated

seed – which will be discontinued in the future. In addition, some western counties suffered from extensive grasshopper impacts, but insecticides are not allowed or used on WMA's.

ENFORCEMENT DIVISION

History and Current Status:

In 1875, 14 years before North Dakota was to become a state, the people of the territory concerned by the low populations of wildlife and the continued downward trend of many species, enacted the first laws for the taking of game. These were followed quickly in 1877 with restrictions on the commercial sale of wildlife, and in 1881 by a wanton waste law. These laws necessitated the need for enforcement, and in 1897 George E. Bowers became the first North Dakota Game Warden. Six years later the state was divided into two Game Enforcement districts with a Chief Game Warden for each. In 1930, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department was created and the Game and Fish Department Enforcement Division was established as we now know it. The Enforcement Division consisted of a Chief Game Warden and 12 Deputy Game Wardens. Hunting, trapping, and fishing were the main recreational activities the wardens dealt with and at a level of participation quite different than today. According to the 1933 annual report the following number and type of licenses sold: 16,152 resident and 14 nonresident fishing, 34,223 resident and 57 nonresident hunting, 3,112 resident big game (these were for deer as that was the only big game season), and 2,267 resident and one nonresident trapping. The seasons and lengths were also quite different. In addition to fishing, the seasons were only a nine and one-half day pheasant in central and southeast North Dakota, a five and one-half day ruffed grouse in four counties, a 22 and one-half day sharp-tailed grouse, a four day deer season, and seasons for waterfowl and trapping. License sales graphs for the biennium can be found in this report. Seasons have become longer and more diverse. The first hunting season opens in mid-August for elk and the last one, spring turkey, closes in May. Fishing and furbearer seasons are open year-round. Today the Enforcement Division includes the Chief Game Warden, Commercial/Investigations Supervisor, Wildlife Investigator, Operations Supervisor, Game Warden Pilot, Administrative Assistant, four District Warden Supervisors, and 30 District Game Wardens.

Importance of the Program:

The passage of laws to protect and regulate the use of wildlife resources, along with the funding necessary to accomplish this, created the foundation for ensuring sustainable populations of wildlife species allowing for both consumptive and non-consumptive public use. Laws without enforcement become merely suggestions and the foundation this provides wildlife crumbles. The Enforcement Division is tasked with the enforcement of Title 20.1 of the North Dakota Century Code, the Governor's proclamations, and Department regulations to assure an orderly and controlled harvest of wildlife populations and to protect the wildlife resources and the rights of all citizens. Additional tasks such as boat safety, education and outreach, working with other divisions within Game and Fish to accomplish their goals, providing for the public safety, and assisting other law enforcement agencies when requested, are also important functions of the Enforcement Program.

Program Objectives:

1. Maintain and guide an adequate number of well trained, educated and motivated game wardens throughout the state to achieve compliance.
The division hired six Game Wardens during the biennium and completed 7,319 hours of Peace Officer Standards and Training certified training. Recruitment and retention efforts have increased with new advertising and social media marketing being utilized.
2. Maintain an effective and visible boat safety enforcement program.
Boat safety continues to be a priority and the division participated in Operation Dry Water, which is a national boat safety enforcement initiative. We also continue to partner with other local law enforcement agencies on a Missouri river Task Force in the Bismarck/Mandan area.
3. Develop an enforcement program to address the commercialization of wildlife.
The commercial investigations section worked on a new electronic version of the guide and outfitter examination. Inspections were completed of all bait vendors and falconers in the state.
4. Provide for the appropriate response to requests for assistance from citizens.
The division responded to 296 landowner complaints and thousands of other calls.
5. Maintain and provide enforcement responses for requests from other law enforcement entities to provide for the public safety.
New automatic external defibrillators were acquired for all wardens to provide important medical response when required.
6. Educate the public and promote the Enforcement Division and its activities.
The division participated in numerous events including sports shows, toy drives, back to school events, school programs and the State Fair. Behind the Badge, a new blog with articles written by game wardens, was started and continues to be extremely popular with the public.
7. Develop a strategy to meet the needs for enforcement from other divisions within the department.
The division assists other divisions in the department including education, completing wildlife and fisheries surveys, and collecting samples for Chronic Wasting Disease sampling efforts.

Biennium Statistics:

Citations:	4,977
Written Warnings:	417
Resident Field Contacts:	72,293
Nonresident Field Contacts:	25,390
Boat Accident Investigations:	29
Hunting Accident Investigations:	8
Landowner/Tenant Complaints:	296
Assist Other Agencies:	31
Medical:	13
Search and Rescue:	6

The Enforcement Division annual report is printed in the North Dakota OUTDOORS magazine. The most recent publication was February 2023. It can be found on our website at:
<https://gf.nd.gov/magazine/2023/feb/2022-enforcement-division-review>

ND GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
DEPARTMENT REVENUE REPORT
JULY 1, 2021 THRU JUNE 30 2023

		21-23
ACCOUNT NAME		NET AMOUNT
420130	Easements-Test Holes-Right of	72,277.64
421025	Game & Fish-Fishing Licenses	8,076,922.00
421030	Game & Fish-Hunting Licenses	18,605,750.20
421040	Game & Fish-Other Licenses	4,348,360.03
421050	Motorboat License Fees	1,947,687.00
421065	Wildlife Habitat Stamp	2,791,404.00
421070	PLI Sportsmen Habitat Stamp	3,531,738.00
430040	Revenue From Fed Government	39,176,717.53
431005	Revenue from Counties	22,334.21
432005	Reimbursement from Other State	3,542.40
441015	Fines-Forfeitures-Escheat	35,029.92
442025	Interest Income	108,424.10
442040	Interest On Investment	509,506.15
443005	Donations	1,127,022.24
443015	Non-Game Contributions	985.65
462115	Postage	479.00
462135	Resale-Special Orders	5,454.16
462145	Sale Of Agriculture Products	64,893.68
463021	Misc Sales and Service	4,448.00
463029	Sale Of Publications	199,240.50
472010	Lease-Rental Of Land	312,345.80
472015	Lease-Rental of Rooms-Bldgs	3,120.00
472020	Mineral Lease Royalties	608,280.00
472025	Mineral Royalties	208,019.95
473025	Misc Refunds	94,121.78
473030	Misc General Revenue	708,446.28
473035	Other Reimb. - Jury Pay, Etc.	11,199.78
473120	Refund Of Prior Bienn Expen	2,652.21
473135	Void Warrant - Prior Biennium	451.39
474045	Misc. Unclassified Revenue	724.63
482006	Sale Of Noncapital Asset-Surpl	24,483.71
482008	Sale Of Salvage & Scrap	2,737.21
490002	Tsfr Fm Federal Fund	212,573.00
490294	Tsfr Fm ND Outdoor Heritage Fund	162,751.25
490305	Tsfr Fm Indust. Comm. Fund	1,241.14
490400	Tsfr Fm Highway Tax Dist. Fund	323,520.00
490485	Tsfr Fm Environmental Qlty Opr	9,044.55
	TOTAL REVENUES	\$83,317,929.09

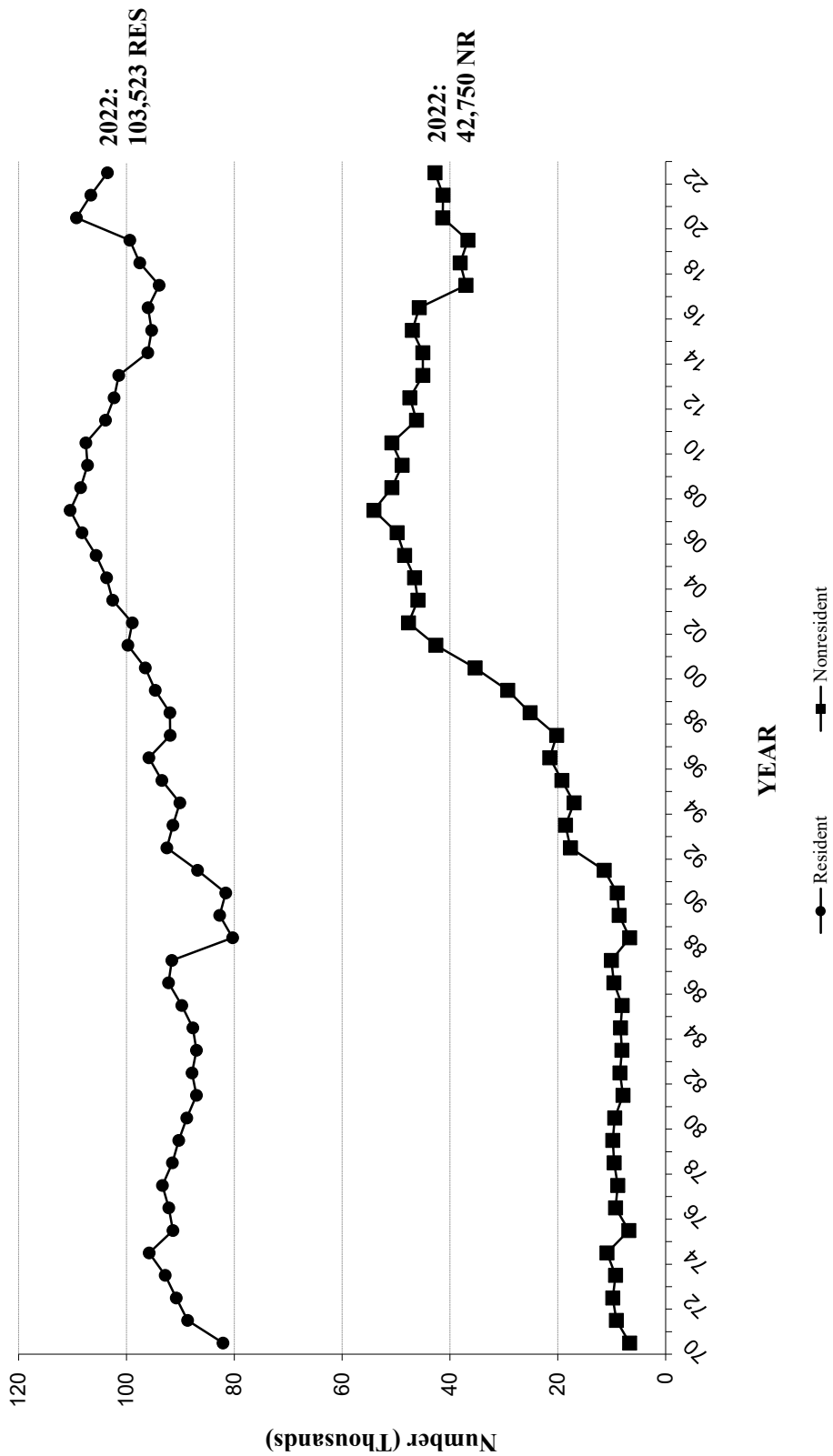
NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
DEPARTMENT APPROPRIATION REPORT
JULY 1, 2021 THRU JUNE 30, 2023

	ORIGINAL 2021-23 APPROPRIATION	ADJUSTED 2021-23 APPROPRIATION	BIENNIUM EXPENDITURES	UNEXPENDED BALANCE
Salaries & Wages	33,741,592.00	33,748,084.00	33,012,718.89	735,365.11
Operating Expenses	16,276,782.00	16,276,782.00	15,563,228.83	713,553.17
Capital Assets	7,576,270.00	9,659,788.00	5,643,543.62	4,016,244.38
Construction Carryover	0.00	982,796.00	982,772.00	24.00
Grants-Game And Fish	8,923,343.00	7,052,398.00	5,297,459.07	1,754,938.93
Shooting Sports Grant Program	250,000.00	250,000.00	222,113.53	27,886.47
Habitat & Deer Depredation	19,980,597.00	21,980,597.00	19,335,611.52	2,644,985.48
Noxious Weed Control	725,000.00	725,000.00	711,878.88	13,121.12
Missouri River Enforcement	296,999.00	296,999.00	279,818.41	17,180.59
Grant-Gift-Donation	670,133.00	670,133.00	457,128.86	213,004.14
Nongame Wildlife	100,000.00	100,000.00	55,423.51	44,576.49
Aquatic Nuisance Species Prog.	1,509,009.00	1,509,009.00	1,496,162.42	12,846.58
Lonetree Reservoir	1,818,409.00	1,818,409.00	1,655,087.78	163,321.22
Wildlife Services	500,000.00	500,000.00	500,000.00	0.00
Total Expenditures	\$92,368,134.00	\$95,569,995.00	\$85,212,947.32	\$10,357,047.68

NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
 EXPENDITURES BY PROGRAM
 JULY 1, 2021 THRU JUNE 30, 2023

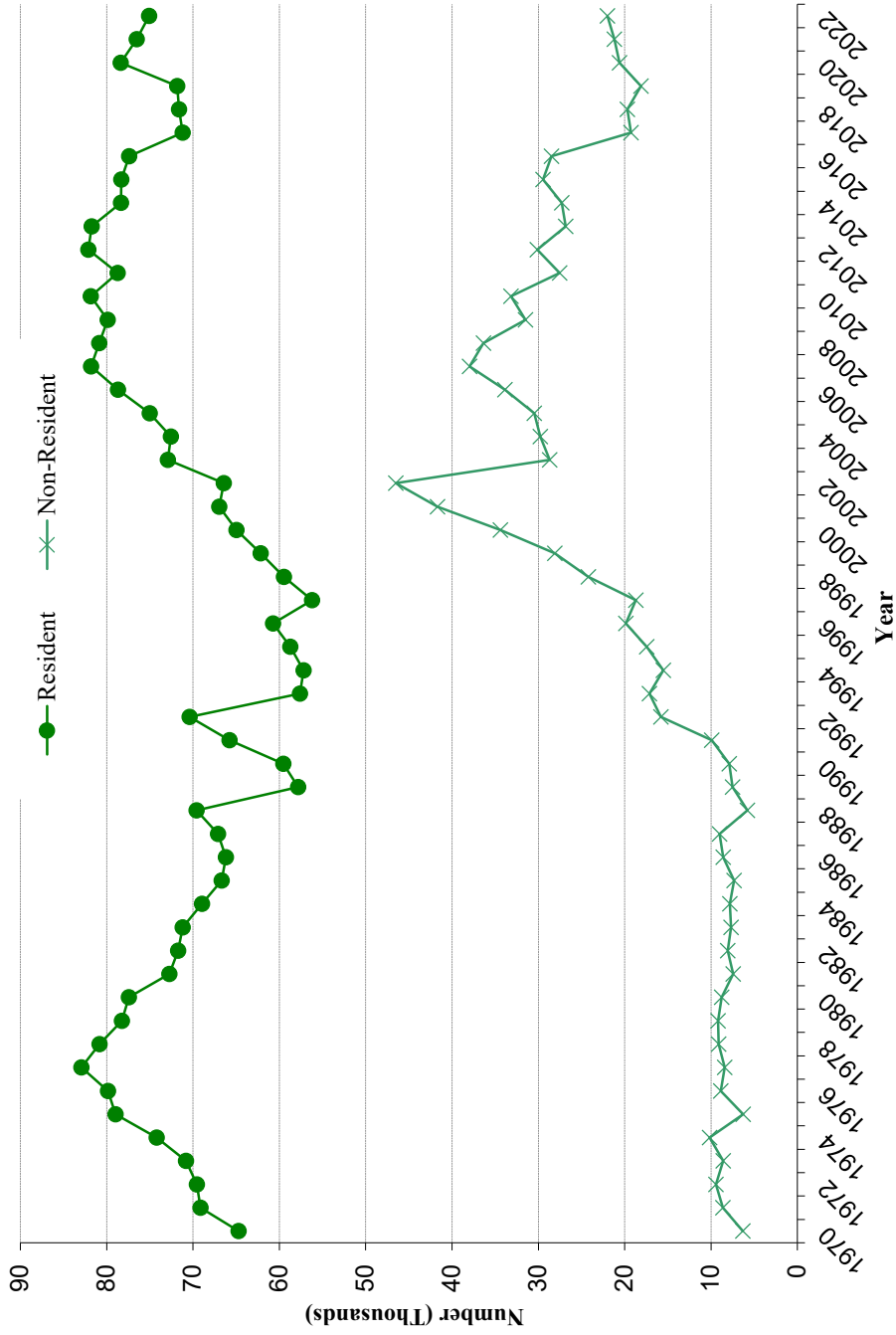
	DEPARTMENT TOTALS	ADMINISTRATION	FISHERIES	ENFORCEMENT	CONSERVATION & COMMUNICATION	WILDLIFE	DIFFERENCE
Salaries & Wages	33,012,718.89	10,821,686.86	4,607,237.50	7,302,699.57	4,337,524.15	5,943,570.81	0.00
Operating Expenses	15,563,228.83	4,791,018.88	3,482,527.26	2,021,030.76	1,423,660.00	3,844,991.93	0.00
Capital Assets	5,643,543.62	2,237,679.07	961,736.74	1,181,946.37	55,166.79	1,207,014.65	0.00
Construction Carryover	982,772.00	0.00	982,772.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Grants-Game And Fish	5,297,459.07	206,364.78	2,086,560.84	35,840.09	1,607,480.59	1,361,212.77	0.00
Shooting Sports Program	222,113.53	0.00	0.00	0.00	222,113.53	0.00	0.00
Habitat & Deer Depredation	19,335,611.52	0.00	499,045.69	0.00	0.00	18,836,565.83	0.00
Noxious Weed Control	711,878.88	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	711,878.88	0.00
Missouri River Enforcement	279,818.41	0.00	0.00	279,818.41	0.00	0.00	0.00
Grant-Gift-Donation	457,128.86	288,160.11	0.00	0.00	0.00	168,968.75	0.00
Nongame Wildlife	55,423.51	0.00	0.00	0.00	55,423.51	0.00	0.00
Aquatic Nuisance Species Fund	1,496,162.42	0.00	1,496,162.42	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Lonetree Reservoir	1,655,087.78	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,655,087.78	0.00
Wildlife Services	500,000.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	500,000.00	0.00
TOTAL	\$85,212,947.32	\$18,344,909.70	\$14,116,042.45	\$10,821,335.20	\$7,701,368.57	\$34,229,291.40	0.00

North Dakota General Game License Sales



SMALL GAME LICENSE SALES

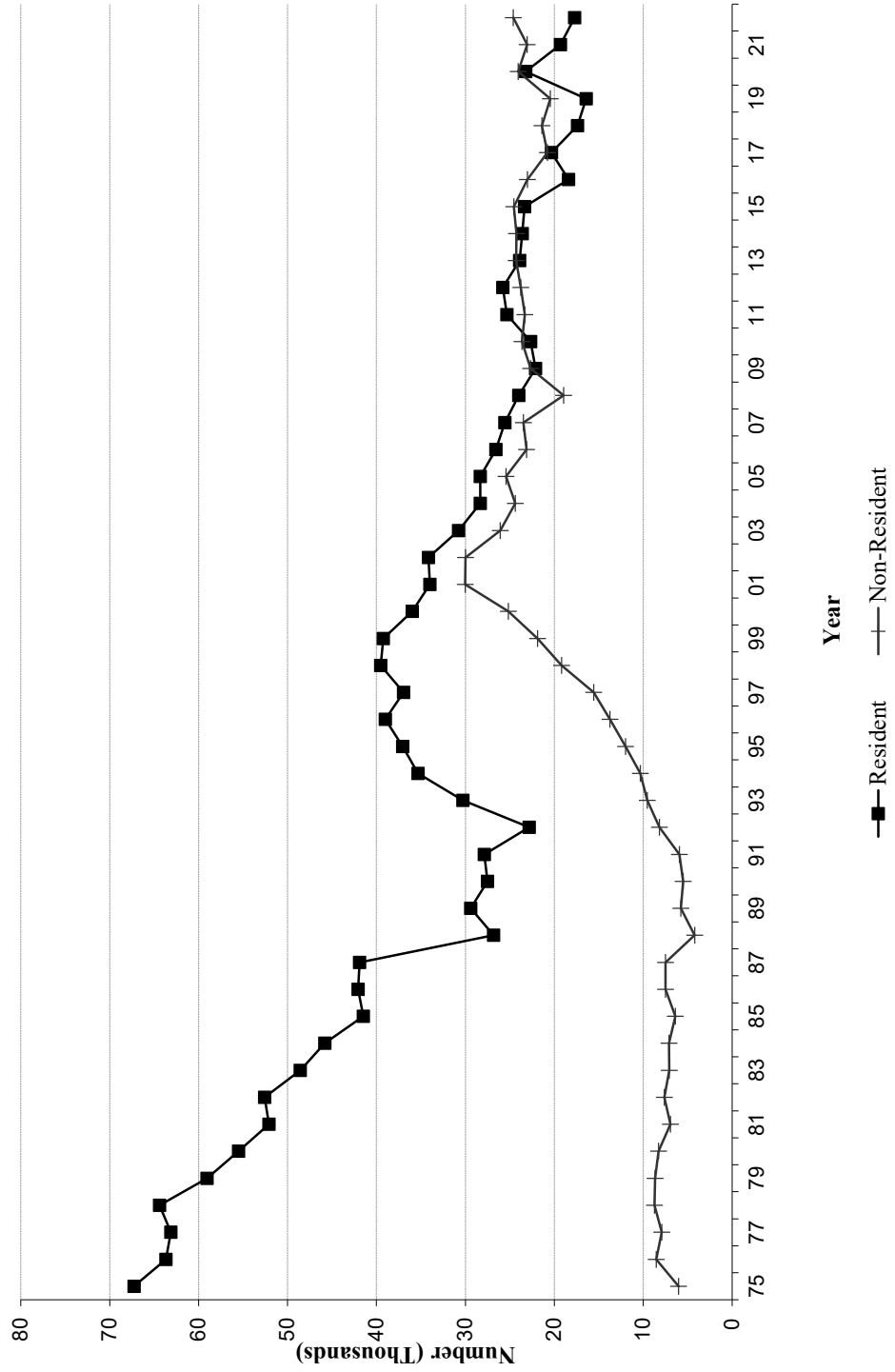
North Dakota



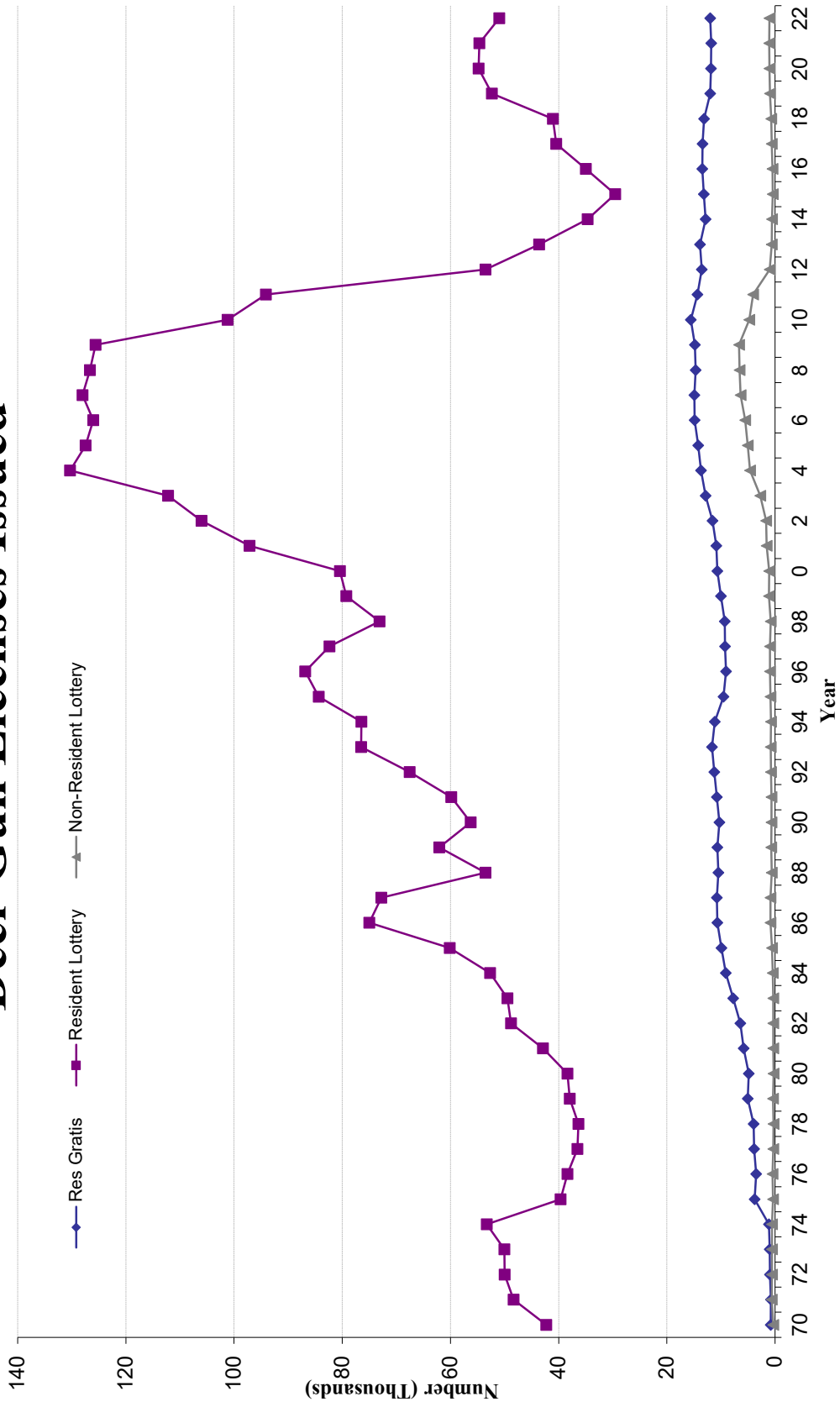
There was a major non-resident license system change in 2003.

Waterfowl Hunters

North Dakota

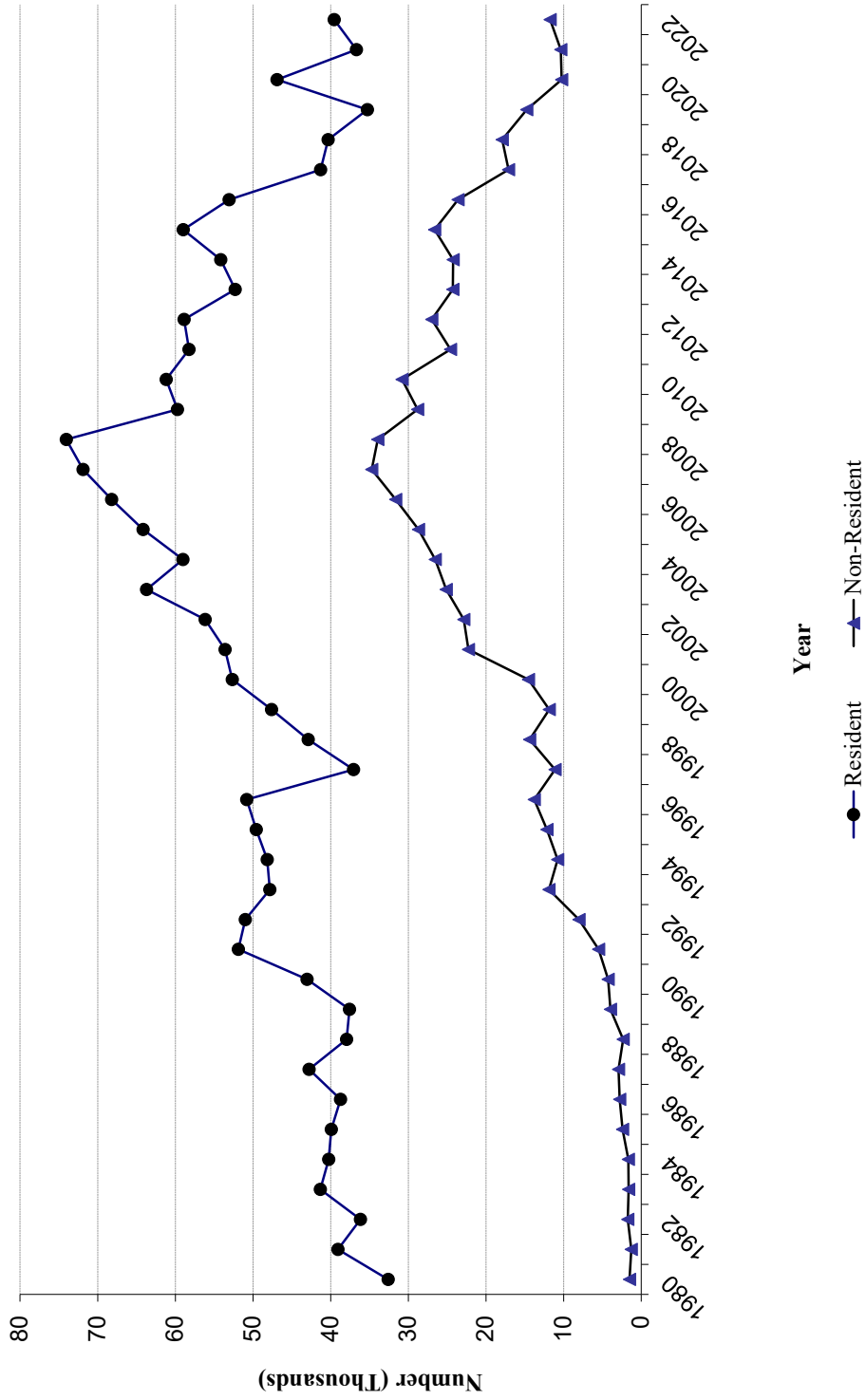


North Dakota Deer Gun Licenses Issued

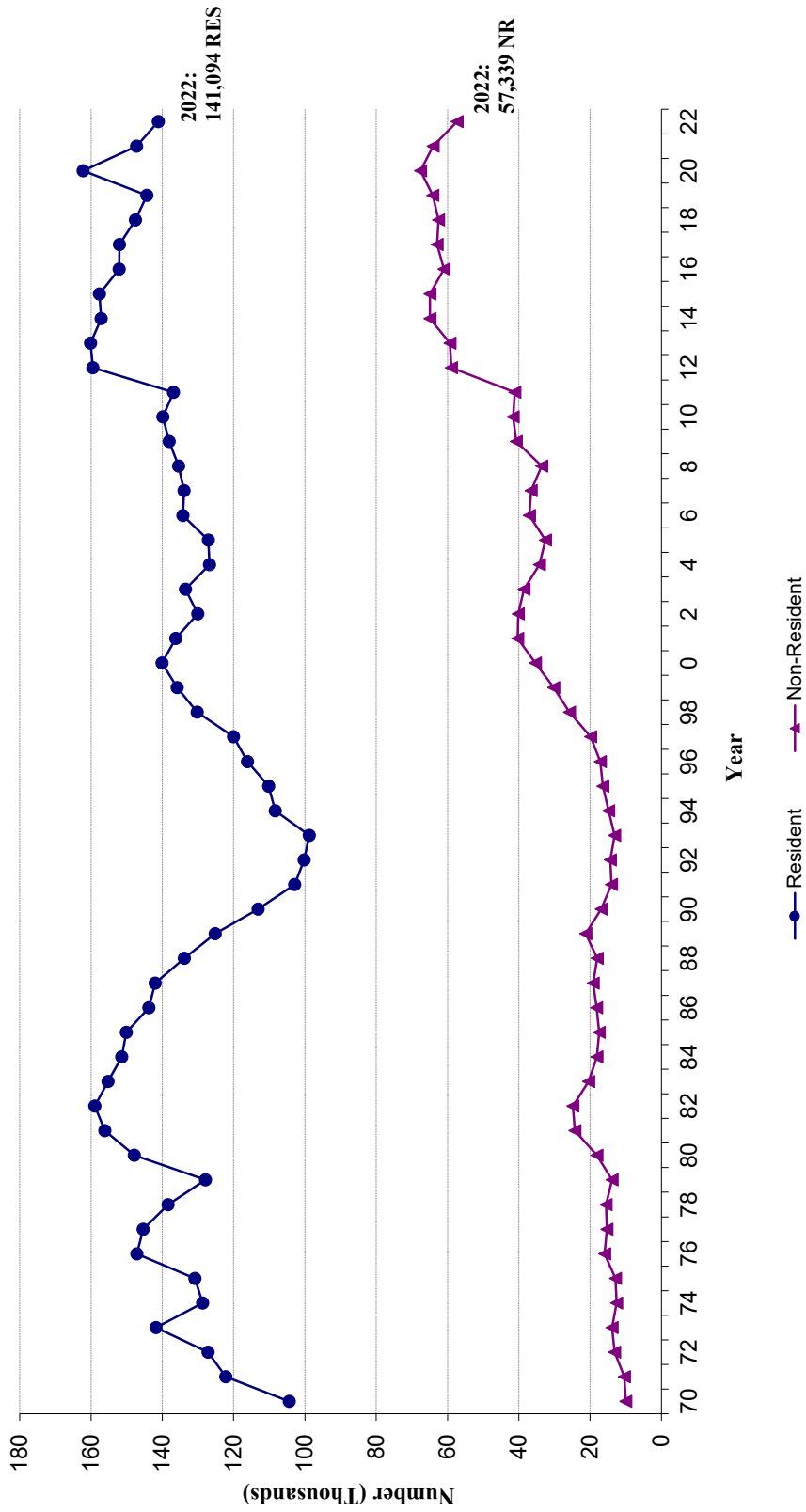


Licensed Pheasant Hunters

North Dakota



North Dakota Fishing License Sales



RESOURCES AVAILABLE FROM THE DEPARTMENT

Copies of the minutes from meetings conducted by the Department are available at the Game and Fish Department's Bismarck office. Requests should be sent to: Director, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095.

Wildlife survey results and fish and wildlife status reports are published annually. Single copies of these reports (Progress or Job Completion) are available at the Bismarck office.

The Department publishes a magazine, North Dakota OUTDOORS, available at the address listed above. Single copies of the magazine are available at \$2 per copy, except for the annual calendar for \$3. The yearly subscription rate (10 issues) is \$10. The three-year subscription rate is \$20.

A variety of pamphlets, brochures and booklets pertaining to fish, wildlife, lakes, wildlife habitat, and other topics are available for free distribution at the Bismarck office. The Department's web page is: <http://gf.nd.gov>. The Department's email address is ndgf@nd.gov.