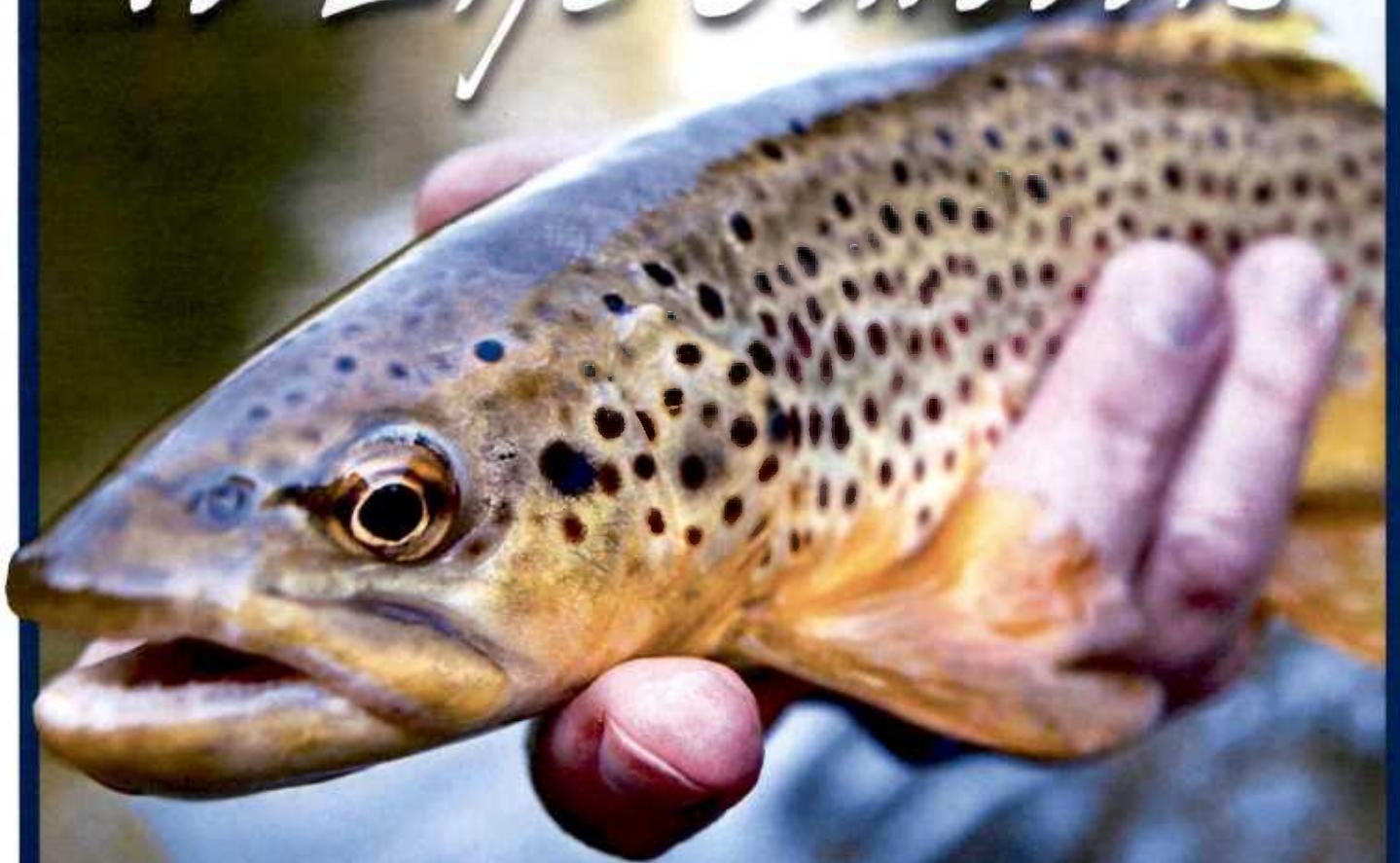




NEW HAMPSHIRE FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT

# Connecting You to Life Outdoors



## BIENNIAL REPORT

July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2023

Pursuant to RSA 206:9-a • Submitted October 1, 2023



*New Hampshire Fish and Game Department*  
**BIENNIAL REPORT**

Fiscal Years 2022-2023  
July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2023

Pursuant to RSA 206:9-a  
Submitted October 1, 2023

New Hampshire Fish and Game Department  
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**CHRISTOPHER T. SUNUNU**  
*Governor*

EXECUTIVE COUNCILORS

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*District 1*

Cinde Warmington  
*District 2*

Janet Stevens  
*District 3*

Theodore L. Gatsas  
*District 4*

David K. Wheeler  
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*As of 6/30/23*



# New Hampshire Fish and Game Department

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June 30, 2023

His Excellency, Governor Christopher T. Sununu  
And the Honorable Council  
State House, 25 Capital Street  
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Governor Sununu and Honorable Members of the Council:

In accordance with RSA 206:9-a, I am pleased to submit the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department's Biennial Report for July 1, 2021–June 30, 2023.

The Department takes the lead role in conserving fish, wildlife, marine resources, and their habitats—keeping the state's wildlife and fish populations in a healthy balance while conserving our wild places. These natural resources enrich our quality of life and support New Hampshire's economy, generating more than half a billion dollars each year in economic activity related to hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching.

While the work of the Fish and Game Department benefits all of New Hampshire's citizens and visitors, our core functions are still being primarily funded by people buying hunting and fishing licenses. Responsibilities of the agency continue to increase, and the cost of doing business continues to go up, but our revenue does not. The State Legislature in recent years has provided some supplemental general funds, helping us to fulfill our obligations. The increase in license sales due to COVID-19 has declined so we have now returned to pre-pandemic levels. All parties agree that a revised, long-term, and sustainable funding solution is needed for us to fulfill our mission into the future.

We continue to be committed to and passionate about our mandate of conserving and protecting New Hampshire's fish, wildlife, and marine resources for all residents and visitors to use and enjoy. There are new and increasing pressures on these resources, however, including disease, climate change, declining species populations, and development. We look forward to working with the Governor, the Legislature, and the public to ensure the sustainability of the NH Fish and Game Department and its essential work and the wildlife species that call the Granite State home.

We thank the Governor and Legislature for their support in working through these challenging times. Our dedicated staff will continue to work tirelessly to connect the public to the great outdoors.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott R. Mason  
Executive Director

# FEDERAL AID IN WILDLIFE AND SPORT FISH RESTORATION PROGRAM



*Together, the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs have transformed the landscape and immeasurably improved the conditions and prospects for New Hampshire's wildlife.*

## **KEEPING OUR WILDLIFE — AND OUR TRADITIONS — HEALTHY**

Purchases of fishing tackle, firearms, ammunition, archery equipment, and motorboat fuels, along with license sales, help fund sport fish and wildlife restoration in New Hampshire. This provides opportunities for hunting, fishing, and other wildlife-associated recreation.

## **NOT SO LONG AGO...**

In the middle of the 19th century in New Hampshire, numbers of many wildlife species were dwindling or gone altogether because of unregulated hunting and loss of habitat. Conservation efforts of the time were few—and frequently misguided or scientifically questionable—but leadership was beginning to understand that investing in wildlife and habitat pays great dividends.

## **A UNIQUE SOLUTION**

The Pittman–Robertson Act, or Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, was passed in 1937. It was designed to counteract the wildlife crisis by providing local funding for wildlife management research, the selection, restoration, rehabilitation, and improvement of wildlife habitat, and public use and benefit related to the same.

In 1950, the Dingle–Johnson Act, or Sport Fish Restoration Act, was created to provide similar management, conservation, and restoration improvements for fisheries. Together, the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs (WSFR) have transformed the landscape and immeasurably improved the conditions and prospects for New Hampshire's wildlife. In short, both acts encourage a scientific approach toward managing—and restoring—fish and wildlife.

## **USER-PAY, USER-BENEFIT**

"Every time an American hunter buys a gun or ammunition, he chips in to improve his sport," said the author of a 10-year report on federal wildlife restoration released in 1949. It's just as true today; WSFR programs are funded by revenues collected from the manufacturers of sporting arms, handguns, ammunition, archery equipment, fishing rods, reels, lures, and other fishing gear. Motorboat and small engine fuel taxes also help fund the system. The money is paid back to New Hampshire Fish and Game—and wildlife agencies in the other U.S. states and territories—through approved federal grants to support specific wildlife and sportfish restoration projects.

## **MEETING THE PUBLIC'S WILDLIFE NEEDS**

With the support of WSFR, deer, bear, wild turkeys, and countless other species are now prospering. New Hampshire Fish and Game's scientific research and management give species a solid chance to re-establish healthy populations, while at the same time improving habitats for wildlife and people. Along the way, WSFR helps Fish and Game meet the public's need for wildlife resources by improving boating access, providing aquatic education and outreach, maintaining a quality hunter education program, and funding myriad related projects. New Hampshire's hunters, anglers, and wildlife watchers—including visitors to the state—can thank WSFR's creators for starting a system that has protected our wildlife and our outdoor traditions through the decades.

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Department

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noted otherwise.

## ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTION

The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department was established on June 30, 1865, as the Fisheries Commission. It was organized in its current format in 1935 in accordance with R.L. 240:1 (RSA 206:1), which states that, "There shall be a Fish and Game Department under a Commission to be known as the Fish and Game Commission."

### NEW HAMPSHIRE FISH AND GAME COMMISSION

Commission members are appointed by the Governor and Executive Council. There are 11 members, one from each county in the state, plus one representing the seacoast area. No more than six commissioners can be members of the same political party. Commission members must be well informed on the subject of fish and wildlife. Their duty is to represent the citizens of New Hampshire and be the stewards of the fish, wildlife, and marine resources of the State of New Hampshire and to set general policy for: conservation of wildlife; development, funding, and implementation of a strategic plan for the operation of the Department; acquisition and development of public access to lands and waters for recreational use consistent with New Hampshire law; conservation education and building support for Department programs; and establishment of positions on proposed legislation that affects the Department and fish, wildlife, and marine resources.



*Scott R. Mason  
Executive Director*

### OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director has the responsibility of supervision of employees and all activities and functions of the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department and enforces all provisions of state laws relating to fish, wildlife, and marine resources. The Executive Director is nominated by the Commission and appointed by the Governor and Executive Council. Each candidate must be a competent administrator and have knowledge of, and experience in, the requirements for the protection, conservation, and restoration of the fish and wildlife resources of the state. The Executive Director serves a term of 4 years.

The Office of the Executive Director oversees budget development and oversight and coordination of federal aid, rules and legislation, environmental review, and personnel administration. The Environmental Review Coordinator serves in the Executive Director's Office and provides technical guidance to individuals, environmental consultants, federal and state agencies, municipalities, and non-governmental organizations to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate impacts to fish and wildlife resources and their habitats from proposed development projects. The types of projects reviewed include, but are not limited to: hydropower development and compliance, most Department of Transportation development projects, solar and wind energy projects, surface and ground water withdrawals, dam removals to facilitate fish passage, water quality and contaminant impacts, wetland impacts, aquatic herbicide treatments, large coastal dredge projects, and review of environmental regulations that affect fish and wildlife resources and their habitats. The Environmental Review Coordinator is the liaison with many statewide policy bodies, including the State Wetlands Council, Water Council, the New Hampshire Department of Transportation's Natural Resources Committee, Dredge Management Task Force, Pesticide Board, and the New Hampshire Department of Natural and Cultural

# ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTION

Resource's Open Project Selection Process Advisory Board.

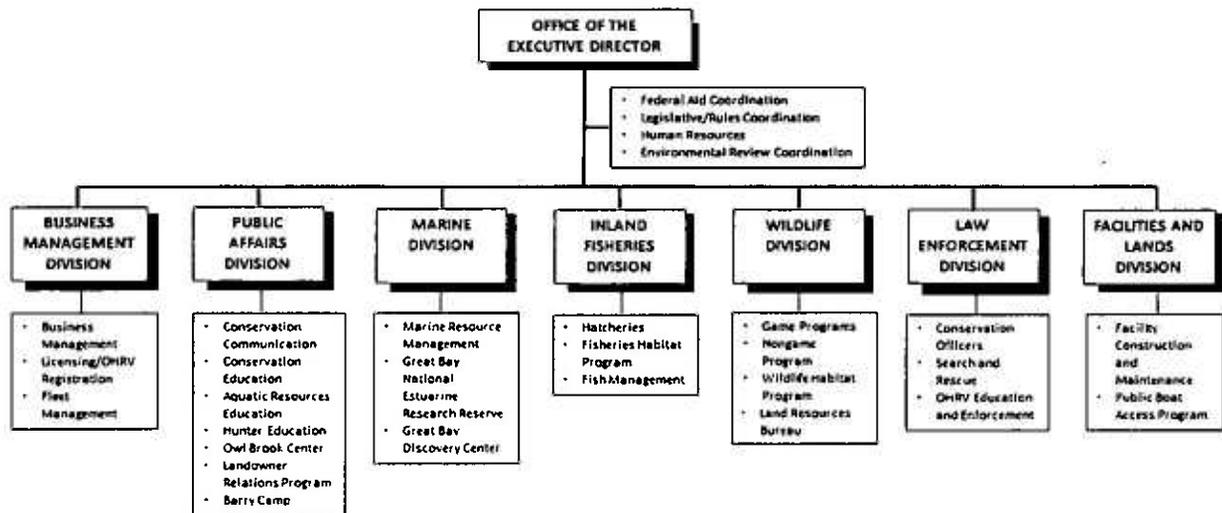
The Executive Director's Office also coordinates the Department's participation in various federal assistance programs. Activities include pre-award coordination and proposal review, application submission, post-award grant management and compliance, as well as supporting the Business Division with certain aspects of fiscal management, budgeting, and federal assistance audits. Federal revenue received as reimbursement for approved grant costs accounted for approximately one quarter of total Department revenue. Federal funds received through these programs are critical to accomplishing the Department's mission and help support a wide range of activities and accomplishments in all divisions of the Department.

The Department's Human Resources (HR) Unit, which is comprised of the Human Resources Administrator, Human Resources Coordinator, and Payroll Officer, administers all aspects of human resources and payroll operations for the Department. These functions include, but are not limited to: recruitment, onboarding, benefits and payroll, training and development, performance management, employee relations, regulatory compliance, position management, handling disciplinary needs, ensuring compliance with labor laws and regulations, overseeing training programs, and human resources analytics. The bi-weekly payroll process involves approximately 172 full-time and 49 part-time and seasonal employees. All leave administration, including Worker's Compensation and Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), is managed by the HR Unit, as well as the drug and alcohol screenings of the Department's Commercial Driver's License (CDL) holders, as required by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. In addition to managing all of the human resources operations for the Department, the HR Unit also assists members of the public with all human resources-related inquiries.

## ***Our Mission:***

*As the guardian of the state's fish, wildlife and marine resources, the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department works in partnership with the public to:*

- *Conserve, manage and protect these resources and their habitats;*
- *Inform and educate the public about these resources; and*
- *Provide the public with opportunities to use and appreciate these resources.*

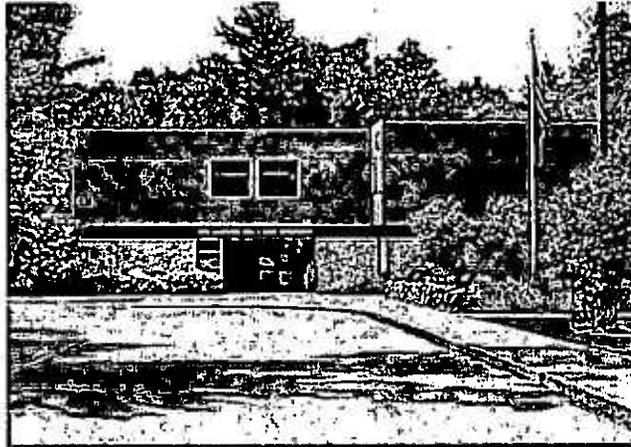


# ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTION

## MAJOR DIVISIONS

The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department carries out its mission through the work of seven divisions: Business, Facilities and Lands, Inland Fisheries, Law Enforcement, Marine Fisheries, Public Affairs, and Wildlife.

The **Business Division** facilitates all business functions for the Department. It is responsible for issuing and collecting the revenue from the sale of fishing and hunting licenses and associated permits, as well as the processing of all accounts payable, accounts receivable, cash management, federal and other grants, financial management, and inventory control. Division staff supervise the purchase of all equipment, materials, and supplies and coordinate all contracts. The Business Division also oversees the Department's fleet and manages the Off-Highway Recreational Vehicle (OHRV) Registration Program. Division staff interact daily with other state agencies and provide all shipping and receiving functions, mail, and courier duties for the Department.



*New Hampshire Fish and Game Headquarters in Concord*

The **Facilities and Lands Division** is responsible for the management and maintenance of all Fish and Game properties statewide, including over 160 buildings, 135 boat ramps, 130 dams, and 7 fish ladders. The Division also provides the design and construction of public boating access facilities and fabrication of information kiosks and sanitary facilities.

The **Inland Fisheries Division** is responsible for all freshwater fish within both state and interstate waters. Fisheries biologists work to protect and restore fish resources and aquatic habitat and to provide New Hampshire anglers with diverse fishing opportunities. Fish culturists are responsible for operating Fish and Game's six fish hatcheries, which during the biennium produced nearly one million fish each year to meet a variety of the Division's management program needs.

The **Law Enforcement Division** is responsible for enforcement of all laws and rules pertaining to fish, wildlife, and marine resources. The Division is responsible for marine species enforcement, not just along the New Hampshire coastline, but also in federal jurisdictional waters as Deputized Federal Officers. COs have the authority to enforce all state laws. The officers prosecute all of their own criminal and fish and game cases in the NH District Court System. Conservation Officers schedule and assist the Fisheries Division with stocking, work with the Wildlife Division on pheasant stocking, and monitor all activities related to hunting, fishing, and trapping. The officers respond to instances of reported rabid animals and all nuisance animal complaints across the state. The Division has a statutory mandate to coordinate all search and rescue operations occurring in the woodlands and inland waterways of New Hampshire, including searching for runaways, missing persons, and the elderly as well as all searches conducted within the White Mountains. Fish and Game Law Enforcement is the lead agency for search and rescue in New Hampshire's Emergency Operations Plan under NH Homeland Security and Emergency Management. The Division is also responsible for the enforcement of OHRV laws and rules and conducts the majority of accident response and investigations around snowmobile and OHRV use and coordinates all related safety education and training programs. Conservation Officers are also called upon to assist other law enforcement agencies within the state when their specialized skills or equipment is needed, such as K-9s, the Side-Scan Sonar Team, or the Dive Team.

## ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTION

The **Marine Fisheries Division** is responsible for managing, conserving, and protecting the rich natural resources of the state's coast, harbors, and estuaries. The Division manages and develops monitoring programs for important recreational and commercial fisheries and marine species and protects habitats. As part of the responsibilities for fisheries management of ocean species, the Division is a collaborative partner with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the New England Fisheries Management Council in making management decisions. To further the understanding of some important species, the Division conducts research collaboratively with partners. The Marine Division licenses and monitors aquaculture in partnership with the NH Department of Environmental Services and the NH Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health Services. It also oversees the Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (GBNERR). The research program at GBNERR focuses on understanding the structure and function of the Great Bay ecosystem and the effects of natural and human-induced changes. The Reserve's research and monitoring efforts focus on four themes: water quality, land use change, biological communities, and climate change. The Great Bay Discovery Center hosts a variety of educational programs throughout the year which are designed to teach visitors about the unique natural and cultural resources of the Great Bay Estuary.

The **Public Affairs Division** is responsible for all communication and education activities for the agency including preparation and submission of the biennial report. Division staff work to inform and educate, building public support for conservation and the Department's mission, and encourage participation in hunting, angling, and other outdoor activities. The Division provides information through its website and a wide variety of publications, including the *New Hampshire Wildlife Journal* magazine and law digests, as well as television and radio programs, videos, social media, advertising, exhibits, media relations, shows/events, merchandising, and marketing. Its educational programs include: hunter, bow-hunter, and trapper education; Let's Go Fishing and watershed education; wildlife education and teacher training; and a variety of workshops for the public, such as hunting and fishing talks, hands-on workshops for hunters and anglers, and the New Hampshire Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) Program.

The Division also manages the Owl Brook Hunter Education Center in Holderness, which provides educational programming, and the Barry Conservation Camp, which teaches children about conservation at its summer sessions every year.

Within the Public Affairs Division, the Landowner Relations Program works in partnership with hunters, anglers, and landowners to maintain access to private lands for hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation. This program identifies issues and concerns that landowners face in keeping their properties open and works proactively to address them. The Public Affairs Division also serves as the liaison to the nonprofit Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire.

The **Wildlife Division** manages, maintains, protects, and conserves the state's game and nongame wildlife resources and their habitats. Game populations are managed at healthy, sustainable levels consistent with available habitat and diverse public interests. Nongame species are managed to keep common species common and to secure the sustained presence and/or recovery of threatened and endangered species.

Habitat programs are designed to conserve, protect, restore, and manage diverse wildlife habitats, including critical habitats for game and nongame species. Habitat biologists also provide technical guidance to municipalities, industrial forest owners, and private landowners for conservation purposes.

Wildlife biologists conduct surveys and analyze data to assess and monitor populations and conduct research to better inform conservation and management decisions. Biologists promulgate harvest regulations for game and furbearer species to satisfy diverse public interests and to maintain healthy wildlife populations. They also provide technical assistance to local, regional, and statewide interests to protect and enhance wildlife populations and habitats and to minimize the impacts of development on wildlife species at risk. NH Fish and Game biologists work in partnership with the US Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services staff to prevent or mitigate wildlife damage to agricultural lands and private property and to ensure public safety. Biologists also respond to animal emergencies, monitor diseases, and manage state lands for the purpose of enhancing wildlife values and facilitating public use.

# ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTION

## PERSONNEL DATA

<u>Current Number of Employees</u>	<u>06/01/2023</u>	<u>06/01/2023</u>
Unclassified	1	1
Classified	172	172
Temporary*	<u>49</u>	<u>49</u>
Total	222	222

\*Permanent employees are those occupying positions permanently established by the Legislature, whereas temporary employees are those whose service is authorized for a limited or intermittent period (full-time temporary, part-time, and seasonal).

## PHYSICAL PLANT AND PROPERTY APPRAISAL

	<u>6/30/22</u>	<u>6/30/23</u>
Equipment	12,182,294	14,051,598
Physical Plant	120,706,243	120,871,000
Farm	0	0
Highway	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
TOTAL	\$132,888,537	\$134,922,598

### RECEIPTS

General Funds	590,227	686,328
Federal Funds	9,590,272	9,861,218
Agency Income	12,595,736	12,326,678
Fish And Game Funds	<u>12,103,162</u>	<u>13,544,477</u>
TOTAL	\$34,879,397	\$36,418,701

### EXPENDITURES

Permanent Personnel	10,401,054	10,784,671
Current Expenses	2,658,194	3,119,946
Heat, Electricity & Water	453,467	589,009
Transfers to OIT	867,907	916,585
Equipment New/Replacement	635,888	1,275,077
Land Acquisition	261,097	216,501
Transfers To Other Agencies	6,676,989	5,848,059
Other Personnel Services (Seas & Pt)	578,808	1,358,167
Benefits	6,810,827	7,296,281
Retirement, Pension & Health Insurance	578,808	605,303
In-State & Out-of State Travel	340,943	475,758
Grants-Federal & Non Federal	213,958	265,592
Contracts for Services	371,137	311,919
ARPA Expenses	386,969	1,193,387
Research and Habitat Management	898,211	866,845
Statewide Boat Access	833,654	0
Interagency Payments	<u>1,324,064</u>	<u>1,295,601</u>
TOTAL	\$34,879,397	\$36,418,701

# FINANCIAL STATUS OF FISH AND GAME

## Department Operations

The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department uses revenue from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, federal funds, off-highway recreational vehicle (OHRV) funds, donations, some general fund money, and other sources to accomplish its broad mission of conserving, managing, and protecting the state's fish, wildlife, and marine resources and their habitats; informing and educating the public about these resources; and providing the public with opportunities to use and appreciate them.

The increase in license sales seen during COVID-19 has declined, so we are back at pre-pandemic levels. The numbers have essentially been flat for hunting and slowly climbing for fishing in recent years, pandemic aside. Our staff work hard to build and retain these license sales, and it is a testament to our efforts that hunting numbers are holding steady since they are declining in many states. Our fishing license sales are increasing slightly, while they are flat across much of the United States (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service data, [www.fws.gov/story/2022-10/new-dashboards-make-decades-license-and-apportionment-data-more-accessible](http://www.fws.gov/story/2022-10/new-dashboards-make-decades-license-and-apportionment-data-more-accessible)). Further, the Department's responsibilities have increased and continue to do so, as have the expectations of the public, and expenses have risen steadily over the long term and sharply during this past biennium due to inflation, including the cost of fuel, vehicles, fish food, electricity, facilities maintenance, and healthcare.

## Budget Demands

The Fish and Game Department continues its efforts to meet all our obligations in spite of limited resources. The Department has met budget challenges in the past by belt tightening, layoffs, deferred maintenance, careful management, reducing our fleet, and efforts to increase revenue. In response to SB48 in 2018, the Commission formed to study the efficiency and effectiveness of Fish and Game Department operations failed to provide any solutions to our funding challenges. In 2022, HB1528 established a public boat access donation program, targeting operators of non-motorized boats; however, this is voluntary and earmarked for the Access Program.

The Department's technology is outdated and some software programs are no longer operational. This created an immediate problem for us with many of our databases. Working with the Department of Information Technology (DOIT), we received a GOFERR grant for over \$1 million to redesign our databases using Sales Force software. As with every state agency, the Department is becoming more dependent upon computer technology for efficiency reasons. Our Conservation Officers are now carrying computers in their cruisers, and our stocking trucks have tablets so staff can report stocking activities in real time. We also started an on-line turkey registration system 2 years ago. We are currently working with our licensing contractor to offer online OHRV registrations, both new and renewals. All of these activities require funding and personnel resources. Each budget cycle brings an increase to our line item expense for DOIT services, and in this biennial budget the amount is over \$1.2 million per year.

The Nongame Program has been very successful in generating donations from supporters to fund Nongame Program work. The NH Legislature has voted to match these donations with up to \$100,000 in general funds. The Nongame Program does not receive funding through license fees. In the past, these donations covered the state match to run our threatened and endangered species review program for wetlands, alteration of terrain (AOT), and shore lands protection permits issued by the NH Department of Environmental Services. Following the 2019 ruling of the NH Supreme Court, we had to increase the intensity of our reviews, although we did not have enough money to increase our staff. The system failed, but new legislation was passed that allowed us to write new rules. We received GOFERR funding to expand our Permit Review Team, and we have reduced the wait time to 35 days for NH Fish and Game to review permits, while maintaining a high level of protection for our most fragile wildlife species. At the end of the current budget, the GOFERR money will run out and we will need a new funding source for these positions.

As more people are venturing outside and engaging in wildlife-related activities, the demands on the Department continue to increase. We are continuing to serve the angling and hunting communities through our hatchery output and species management and are seeing record numbers of bear, deer, and turkey on the landscape due in no small part to our efforts. We see a consistent year-round need for search and rescue services by our Conservation Officers. If someone gets lost in the woods or waters of New Hampshire, it is the responsibility of Fish and Game to locate the person. Lost hikers are a frequent headline; however, we are also tasked with finding lost children and seniors.

## FINANCIAL STATUS OF FISH AND GAME

Many different police agencies rely upon our Dive Team and K-9 Teams to recover evidence for criminal cases. Our Conservation Officers and biologists assist citizens with animals they encounter, they work with farmers to reduce crop damage by wildlife, in addition to capturing moose, bear, and deer that wander into urban areas. Working with the NH Department of Health and Human Services on their public health mission, we collect animals and bats that have possibly exposed humans to rabies. Currently the bulk of the funding for all of these public services comes from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses.

The popularity of the Hike Safe card continues to grow; however, we are still subsidizing the cost of search and rescue efforts with money from the Fish and Game Fund. In an effort to help close this gap, the Department collaborated with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (SPNHF), and the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) over the previous biennium, working hard to get the message out to more hikers about the benefits of the Hike Safe card.

The federal excise tax on guns, ammunition, bows, and archery equipment that generates the Pitman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act (PR) funding for wildlife has seen steady increases over the years, which has resulted in more PR funds available for NH Fish and Game. In the last couple of years alone, we have seen a 60% increase in these dollars. We are reaching the limits of our state funds available for the required match to qualify for these monies, however. In years past, we have been able to leverage land that we owned as state match to purchase more land. At this point, we have run out of this "land bank" money, and without an increase in state funding, we will not be able to accept all of the PR funds that we are eligible to receive and could be forced to return it.

The biggest expense we are currently facing is the need to modernize our hatchery system. During the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) permitting process for our Powder Mill Fish Hatchery, the Conservation Law Foundation sued the Fish and Game Department over the discharge of phosphorus into the Merrymeeting River in Alton. EPA has issued the Department a new permit, implementing a reduced limit of 12 parts per billion of phosphorus in the water we discharge from our hatchery. This is the lowest discharge permit limit set by the EPA anywhere in the country. The work needed to meet this new requirement is a huge expense in and of itself; however, the hatchery facilities are also aging and suffering from deferred maintenance. The newest of the six hatcheries is in Milford, built in 1972, and the oldest is in Warren, which came online in 1915.

### Looking to the Future

We have been working hard to come up with creative solutions and new funding sources. We are continuing to build connections with non-traditional constituents who benefit from Fish and Game programs but who have not had a direct avenue for contributing to the cost of operations of the Department in the past. In addition, we are also working to broaden our constituency and support through outreach, education, and training. The success of the Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) program is a good example. This popular education program involves hundreds of women each year in learning skills related to outdoor recreation, and they are some of our most enthusiastic supporters who often go on to buy licenses or volunteer for Fish and Game.

We have received \$56 million in GOFERR grants to look for a sound solution to reducing the phosphorus output of our hatcheries and to update them so they can continue to serve New Hampshire's anglers and tourists into the future. We have been working on a feasibility study and will soon seek approval for a design contract, with the goal of beginning construction by 2025. We have also received loan authority from the Capital Budget for an additional \$4.6 million in funding for this work. Beyond this, we are going to have to look to the true cost of running our hatcheries and make sure our budget reflects these costs. We can no longer afford to delay maintenance or forgo technological upgrades that protect the New Hampshire environment.

We are currently looking at enhancing our R3 program efforts, which stands for recruitment, retention, and reactivation, to encourage both hunters and anglers to purchase licenses, as well as engage wildlife watchers and other outdoor enthusiasts with the goal of having them ultimately contribute to funding for the Department. This process sounds simple, however it means working across the different divisions within the Department to set goals and develop strategies to implement those programs and evaluate their success as well as engaging a vast array of partners. This will also require that we work more proactively with our federal and state partners.

## FINANCIAL STATUS OF FISH AND GAME

The demands on the Department are only going to increase in the future. With a growing number of species in decline, from birds and moose to whales and insects, pressures on wildlife species are unprecedented. Climate change is presenting a whole array of issues, including increasing temperatures, warming waters, more frequent drought, stronger storms, new animal and plant diseases, shifting wildlife ranges, increased flooding, and shifting food production seasons, all of which impact wildlife.

The Fish and Game Department may be a small agency in terms of employees, but we are responsible for a wide array of services that impact all of the citizens and visitors of the Granite State. Our mission is to help people appreciate and experience the natural beauty and sporting traditions of New Hampshire, as well as manage and conserve these valuable resources. We look forward to continuing to work with the Legislature, the Governor's Office, our partners, and the public to fulfill this mandate into the future and hope to find a new source of stable, dedicated funding to assist us on behalf of Granite State residents, visitors, and wildlife.

# FINANCIAL STATUS OF FISH AND GAME

<b>COMPARISON OF INDIVIDUALS HOLDING PAID LICENSES TO HUNT AND FISH</b> (From Data Collected For USFWS License Certifications)						
<b>HUNTING</b>						
YEAR	RESIDENT HUNTING	NUMBER CHANGE	PERCENT CHANGE	NON-RES. HUNTING	NUMBER CHANGE	PERCENT CHANGE
2002	55,117	-	-	12,469	-	-
2003	51,875	(3,242)	-5.9%	12,100	(369)	-3.0%
2004	50,777	(1,098)	-2.1%	11,810	(290)	-2.4%
2005	49,165	(1,612)	-3.2%	11,572	(238)	-2.0%
2006	49,415	250	0.5%	11,661	89	0.8%
2007	48,786	(629)	-1.3%	10,982	(679)	-5.8%
2008	48,553	(233)	-0.5%	10,601	(381)	-3.5%
2009	48,947	394	0.8%	10,473	(128)	-1.2%
2010	48,486	(461)	-0.9%	10,815	342	3.3%
2011	46,506	(1,980)	-4.1%	9,905	(910)	-8.4%
2012	48,506	2,000	4.3%	10,562	657	6.6%
2013	50,294	1,788	3.7%	11,262	700	6.6%
2014	48,789	(1,505)	-3.0%	10,529	(733)	-6.5%
2015	47,599	(1,190)	-2.4%	10,500	(29)	-0.3%
2016	47,073	(526)	-1.1%	10,599	99	0.9%
2017	45,893	(1,180)	-2.5%	10,108	(491)	-4.6%
2018	45,590	(303)	-0.7%	9,972	(136)	-1.3%
2019	45,664	74	0.2%	10,631	659	6.6%
2020	49,742	4,078	8.9%	10,887	256	2.4%
2021 *	48,895	(847)	-1.7%	11,428	541	5.0%
2022 *	50,599	1,704	3.5%	11,529	101	0.9%
<b>FISHING</b>						
YEAR	RESIDENT FISHING	NUMBER CHANGE	PERCENT CHANGE	NON-RES. FISHING	NUMBER CHANGE	PERCENT CHANGE
2002	100,483	-	-	48,048	-	-
2003	95,911	(4,572)	-4.6%	45,150	(2,898)	-6.0%
2004	97,947	2,036	2.1%	45,888	738	1.6%
2005	95,923	(2,024)	-2.1%	44,672	(1,216)	-2.6%
2006	96,854	931	1.0%	43,970	(702)	-1.6%
2007	99,878	3,024	3.1%	46,631	2,661	6.1%
2008	99,833	(45)	0.0%	45,160	(1,471)	-3.2%
2009	103,657	3,824	3.8%	46,313	1,153	2.6%
2010	100,941	(2,716)	-2.6%	45,502	(811)	-1.8%
2011	105,055	4,114	4.1%	46,086	584	1.3%
2012	107,843	2,788	2.7%	47,331	1,245	2.7%
2013	109,444	1,601	1.5%	47,234	(97)	-0.2%
2014	111,871	2,427	2.2%	48,661	1,427	3.0%
2015	111,013	(858)	-0.8%	49,566	905	1.9%
2016	106,910	(4,103)	-3.7%	49,657	91	0.2%
2017	105,872	(1,038)	-1.0%	50,128	471	0.9%
2018	106,242	370	0.3%	50,239	111	0.2%
2019	108,060	1,818	1.7%	51,639	1,400	2.8%
2020	135,521	27,461	25.4%	55,513	3,874	7.5%
2021 *	123,719	(11,802)	-8.7%	56,685	1,172	2.1%
2022 *	119,597	(4,122)	-3.3%	53,154	(3,531)	-6.2%

\* Final certification to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is still pending for these years.

## MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

BUSINESS DIVISION  
FEDERAL ASSISTANCE  
HUMAN RESOURCES UNIT

### Business Division

- No major accomplishments to report.

### Federal Assistance Programs

- During the biennium, NH Fish and Game administered 58 separate federal assistance grants, cooperative agreements, and sub-awards totaling nearly \$18 million in federal assistance to the Department. The primary sources of federal grant dollars to the NH Fish and Game Department are the Department of the Interior through the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Commerce through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Ten different assistance programs under these agencies awarded funds to the Department. Mandatory, formula-based apportionments from the US Fish and Wildlife Service under the Wildlife Restoration and Sport Fish Restoration Acts provided about three-quarters of all federal revenue received by the Department.
- Federal funds received during the biennium helped NH Fish and Game accomplish a wide range of program functions, such as fish and wildlife inventories, marine and coastal programs, fish hatchery operation, construction and maintenance of boat access facilities, hunter and aquatic education programs, wildlife disease monitoring, habitat improvement and management, land acquisition and protection, and certain qualifying law enforcement activities.

### Human Resources Unit

- Maintained full support to the Department, as well as the public.
- Continuous process improvement to streamline procedures for efficiency to assist leadership, supervisors, employees, as well as the HR Unit.
- Updated forms and created new forms for ease of use and process flow.
- 100% compliance in Agency training.
- Invested in career opportunities, work-life balance, employee recognition, employee relations, culture, and status to reward employees.
- Worked on cultivating a workplace that enables workers to stay active and productive.



*Pond at NHFG  
headquarters*

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## FACILITIES AND LANDS DIVISION



*Building two at NHFG  
headquarters*

### Facilities and Lands Division

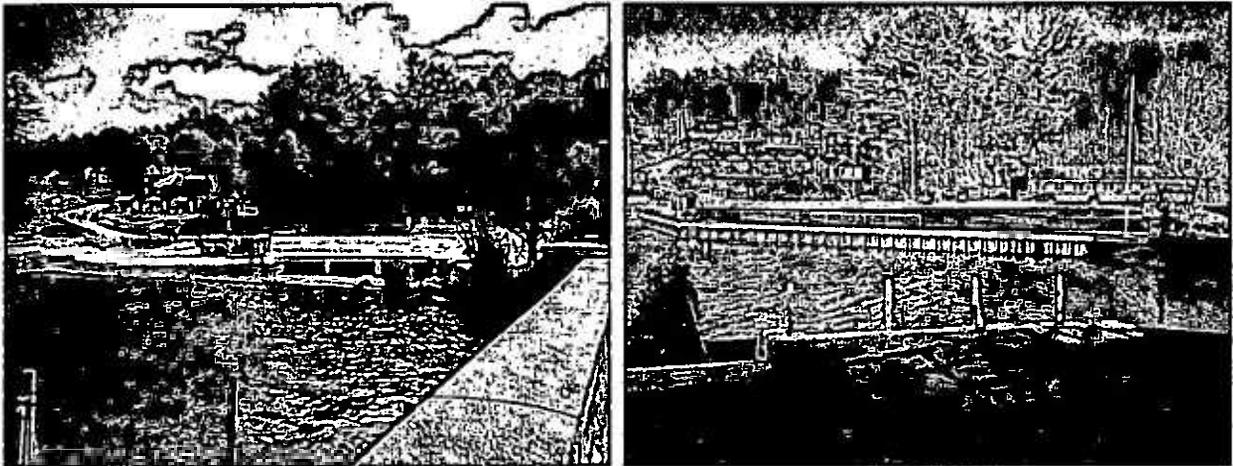
The Facilities and Lands Division has three distinct missions: boat access construction and maintenance, building improvements and maintenance, and energy use management and conservation.

- During this biennium, the agency continued to focus on energy-saving measures for the Department's building inventory.
- The Facilities and Lands Division collaborated with the Energy Division of the NH Office of Strategic Initiatives and the NH Fish and Game Fisheries Division to upgrade incandescent lights at the Berlin and Twin Mountain Hatcheries with LED lights.
- Facilities and Lands staff replaced the domestic water system at the Berlin Hatchery including drilling new artesian wells, installing waterline piping, and constructing a new pump house.
- The facilities crew repaired and re-shingled the kayak shed roof at the Great Bay Discovery Center in Greenland after it was damaged by a severe winter storm in December 2022.
- The facilities crew performed regular maintenance on the boat launch area at the Discovery Center in Greenland, NH. This included filling potholes and doing some minor grading to ensure access to the high-tide-only launch area.
- Facilities and Lands Division staff made repairs to the Fish and Game Law Enforcement Division dock at the US Coast Guard–Portsmouth Station in New Castle on three separate occasions to provide necessary maintenance to "keep it afloat." This 25-year-old dock is currently in the design, permitting, and planning stages to be replaced.
- Facilities and Lands Division staff constructed internal baffles for the Marine Division's fish ladders, which monitor anadromous fish runs to New Hampshire's coastal rivers.
- Facilities and Lands Division staff installed new carpet throughout the Region 2 Office in New Hampton. Staff also pulled stumps, planted shrubs, and re-loamed and seeded in front of the facility including adding a new sign. Staff also responded to repair a frozen pipe, which caused extensive water damage.
- The Facilities and Lands Division continued to manage multiple facility-inspection and maintenance contracts for fire suppression, security systems, elevator systems, and HVAC systems.
- Staff performed regular and emergency maintenance of the Region 3 Office building. Projects included: plumbing; exterior and interior building painting and repair; and replacing windows, door, and access locking mechanisms. Staff provided guidance on projects needed to properly maintain Region 3's properties.

## MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### FACILITIES AND LANDS DIVISION

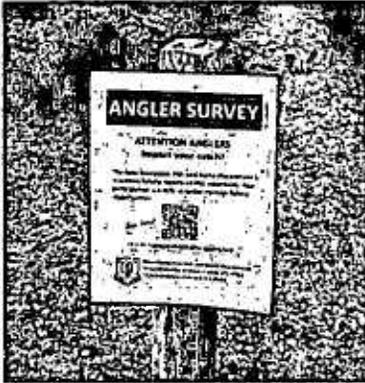
- Facilities and Lands Division manages the administration, maintenance, and operation of 135 public boat access areas controlled by the Department through the Statewide Public Boat Access Program (RSA 233-A).
- Under the auspices of the Statewide Public Boat Access Program through a competitively bid contract, the Facilities and Lands Division completed the total rebuild and upgrade of the Downing's Landing Boat Access Area in Alton. The facility is the first public boat ramp established under RSA 233-A on Lake Winnepesaukee.
- During this biennium, the Facilities and Lands Division continued to support the transformation of the Glenn Cove property in Greenland into student and visiting researcher housing and a public education facility. The site is historically known for access to the Great Bay smelt fishery. Activities included advising the Great Bay Discovery Center staff during their interaction with a private-sector engineering design firm's effort to prepare development and design specifications and plans for a competitively bid contract to complete the transformation.
- Facilities and Lands Division staff deployed and removed the seasonal courtesy boarding piers at the Downing's Landing (Alton), Merrymeeting Lake (Durham), Newfound Lake (Bristol), and Androscoggin River (Errol) Boat Access Areas.



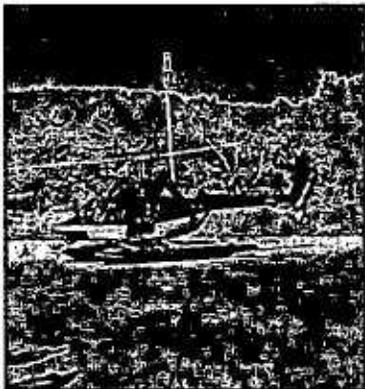
*Downing's Landing August 2019 (left) and December 2021 (right).*

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## INLAND FISHERIES DIVISION



*Fisheries biologists use survey data from anglers to help manage stocking*



*Remote pond stocking*

### Inland Fisheries Division

The Inland Fisheries Division is responsible for all freshwater fish within both state and interstate waters. Fisheries biologists work to protect and restore fish resources and aquatic habitat and to provide New Hampshire anglers with diverse fishing opportunities. Fish culturists are responsible for operating Fish and Game's six fish hatcheries, which during the biennium produced nearly one million fish each year to meet a variety of the Division's management program needs.

#### COLDWATER FISHERIES PROGRAM

- Aerially stocked brook trout fingerlings into nearly 50 remote ponds each year.
- As a partner in a 15-state project to implement the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture's conservation action plan, 180 stream sites were surveyed in New Hampshire; 84% of these sites were found to have self-sustaining populations of brook trout.
- To increase wild brook trout production, stocking locations were removed in small headwater habitats (stream orders 1 and 2) and in streams that received fewer than 200 brook trout each year. Trout were reallocated to other existing stocking locations.
- Assessed the trout population in Lime Pond in Columbia during the fall of 2021.
- Developed and introduced the Stocked Trout Anger Survey in spring 2023. This self-reporting tool gives fisheries staff important information on catch rates and angler use of stocked waterbodies. A total of 90 responses were received across 52 waterbodies from April to June 2023.

#### WARMWATER PROGRAM

- Warmwater fish population assessments were completed for Long Pond (Croydon), Rockybound Pond (Croydon), French Pond (Henniker), and Crescent Lake (Acworth). Assessments included determining species abundance, size and condition statistics, and age and growth parameters. Sampling is conducted using an electrofishing boat.
- Spring black crappie fyke net surveys were conducted on Highland Lake (Washington/Stoddard) and Pool Pond (Rindge).
- Surveys to evaluate young-of-the-year black bass were completed on the Connecticut River (Hinsdale and Claremont), Big Squam Lake, Forest Lake (Whitefield), Spofford Lake (Chesterfield), and Lake Winnepesaukee.
- The black bass tournament database and warmwater fish database were updated and verified.

#### LARGE LAKES PROGRAM

- Conducted annual fall trap-netting surveys to monitor landlocked salmon size and age-class characteristics at Big Squam, Sunapee, and Winnepesaukee Lakes.

## MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### INLAND FISHERIES DIVISION

- Sustained statewide landlocked salmon management by capturing and spawning sufficient quantities of feral brood stock at Big Squam Lake each year of the biennium.
- Performed hydroacoustic and trawl netting surveys to monitor pelagic forage fish (primarily rainbow smelt) size characteristics, spatial distribution, and density at Big Squam, Merrymeeting, Newfound, Sunapee, Winnepesaukee, and Winnisquam Lakes.
- Evaluated lake trout spawning stock body condition and length-category distributions via trap netting on Lake Winnepesaukee in fall 2021.
- Worked in partnership with the Nashua National Fish Hatchery to improve yearling landlocked salmon stock quality, with particular emphasis on bolstering the Lake Winnepesaukee fishery.

#### FISH CONSERVATION PROGRAM

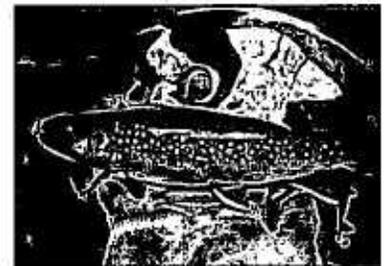
- Collected data from sites throughout New Hampshire to monitor the status of American eel populations statewide.
- Finalized and implemented the Bridle Shiner Species Recovery Plan.
- Stocked over 66,000 river herring into suitable spawning habitat upstream of impassable dams as part of diadromous fish restoration in the Merrimack River and coastal watersheds.
- Mapped the distribution of a previously undocumented population of the state endangered American Brook Lamprey in the Johnson Creek watershed.
- Participated in dam relicensing negotiations to improve fish passage at hydroelectric projects throughout New Hampshire.

#### FISHERIES HABITAT PROGRAM

- Removed an undersized, perched culvert on Ryan Brook and replaced it with a 30-foot span bridge along Perch Pond Road in Campton using funding from the NH Department of Environmental Services Aquatic Resource Mitigation Fund. This project occurred in the early fall of 2021 and is part of a larger project to restore connectivity for wild brook trout in the Beebe River watershed. The number of wild brook trout upstream of this crossing increased from 12 individuals before the culvert was replaced to 72 individuals the first year after the bridge was installed.
- Worked with project partners to conserve 6,372 acres abutting the White Mountain National Forest within the Beebe River watershed in Campton and Sandwich. The conservation easements were put in place in April 2022, protecting several wild brook trout streams and fishing and hunting opportunities on this property.
- Participated in three riparian buffer revegetation projects along wild brook trout streams in the Warner River and Beebe River watersheds.
- Provided assistance to the Merrimack River Watershed Council to develop engineering designs for two stream-crossing replacement projects on wild brook trout streams in the Warner River watershed.



*Ryan Brook bridge project in Campton*



*Brook trout*

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## INLAND FISHERIES DIVISION



*Wood helps create deeper pools where fish can survive increased summer temperatures*

- Developed volunteer teams in the towns of Warner and Bradford to monitor water quality trends along wild brook trout streams.
- Provided technical assistance to other state agencies, federal agencies, and municipalities and non-governmental organizations on fish habitat restoration and conservation.
- Continued research on wild brook trout habitat use and the effects from our large-scale habitat restoration work at Nash Stream Forest and elsewhere with our partners.
- Stream crossing assessments were conducted in specific focus watersheds. During the biennium, 342 crossings were assessed primarily in the Saco River, Merrimack River, and Connecticut River watersheds. The New Hampshire Stream Crossing Initiative, a multi-agency team, has developed protocols and data analysis tools to ensure that data collection and model outputs are accurate. These data, in conjunction with fish survey information, will continue to be used to identify and prioritize restoration work throughout the state. Stream crossing assessments continue to be conducted by the Department and our partners.

### FISH CULTURE

- The six Fish and Game hatchery facilities produced and distributed fish for trout and salmon stocking programs throughout the state to meet a variety of the Division's management needs. The hatcheries distributed 255,468 pounds of fish in FY22 and 302,682 pounds in FY23.

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION

### Law Enforcement Division

- During the biennium, Conservation Officers responded to over 21,100 calls for service for law enforcement-related complaints. Officers issued over 4,030 summonses and warnings for wildlife and fisheries violations. These included but were not limited to illegal night hunting, over limits of fish/wildlife, fishing/hunting without a license, illegal possession of exotic wildlife, taking wildlife during the closed season, and commercial fishing violations. In addition to enforcement work, Conservation Officers responded to over 16,000 calls to service for nuisance and injured or sick wildlife throughout the state.
- During the FY22-23 biennium, the Law Enforcement Division updated a variety of necessary equipment. These upgrades included onboard computers and cruiser stands so the officers can utilize these computers while working in the field. We are transitioning over to new updated handguns and sighting systems to replace the handguns we have carried for the past 20 years. We have taken possession of a new airboat, a state-of-the-art safeboat to be used along our coastline, an unmanned aircraft system (UAS or drone), additional updated side-scan sonar equipment, and upgraded safety equipment for the Dive Team, Advanced Search and Rescue Team, and K-9 Teams.
- All of these equipment upgrades and purchases were funded through private donations, ARPA federal funding, and Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire grants. These private and federal funding sources allowed us to maintain a tight state budget during these challenging financial times in state government.

### OFF-HIGHWAY RECREATION

- OHRV (wheeled vehicle) registration numbers continued to climb each year. In the biennium, the state continued to see an historic high of over 86,000 registered vehicles. Conservation Officers responded to and investigated a total of 186 OHRV accidents during this past biennium.
- Snowmobile registrations, which typically reflect our winter severity, have been consistent during the biennium with over 83,700 machines registered in FY22. Conservation Officers responded to 210 snowmobile accidents during the two years.
- Conservation Officers continued to support the New Hampshire Snowmobile Association and Easter Seals's "Camp Sno-Mo" fundraising efforts, which help to ensure summer camp opportunities for children with a variety of life challenges.
- The number of students in our OHRV and Snowmobile Safety Training courses continues to increase each year. The OHRV safety program certified over 3,700 students in safe OHRV operation during FY22 and FY23.
- During the biennium, Conservation Officers issued over 2,600 summonses and warnings for OHRV violations and over 2,100 summonses and warnings for snowmobile violations. Conservation Officers utilize ATVs, trail bikes, UTVs, and snowmobiles while on patrol. Over the biennium, officers operated these machines over 66,000 miles and committed a total of 31,992 hours while enforcing OHRV and snowmobile regulations.



*Conservation Officers are responsible for enforcing OHRV regulations*



*Camp Sno-Mo*

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION



*A search and rescue mission*



*K-9 Team*



*K-9 Winni*

### ADVANCED SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAM

- During the biennium, Conservation Officers coordinated over 330 search and rescue missions involving hikers, climbers, snowmobilers, children, and elderly persons. These missions involve searching for missing or lost people, responding to injured hikers, and assisting other agencies with wilderness incidents or crimes. This total also includes the recovery of victims who died while recreating on New Hampshire's trails and within the state's wilderness areas and waters.
- Over the past biennium, we experienced some of our most challenging missions to date, and the Division had multiple missions and recoveries that were recognized and reported on by national news agencies.

### DIVE TEAM

- The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department Dive Team conducted a total of 31 drowning recoveries and evidence search missions during the past biennium. This team continues to be a resource for New Hampshire State Police and municipal agencies in evidence recovery missions during major crime investigations.
- With the assistance of private donations, a number of improvements were made to safety diving equipment. These updates included new and improved dive masks and suits for each diver and an improved underwater communication system to be used to communicate with and control divers during an underwater mission.

### K-9 TEAMS

- During the biennium, the Law Enforcement Division had five certified Conservation Officer K-9 Teams capable of assisting with search and rescue operations, evidence recovery for criminal investigations, and tracking suspects or lost victims. These teams train weekly to maintain the standards required to become certified in search and rescue, tracking, evidence detection to include firearms, and wildlife species detection. During FY22-23, these teams responded to over 200 calls for service from multiple police agencies including New Hampshire Fish and Game, New Hampshire State Police, and multiple local municipalities.
- These K-9 Teams continue to be a valuable asset to the state, and they are funded almost solely through private donations working with the Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire. Over the biennium, Officer James Benvenuti and his K-9 partner Cora were awarded the Vermont Police Canine Association Game Warden Team of the Year for 2021, and they were selected to receive the award for Fish and Game K-9 Team of the Year for 2022. In 2022, Officer Ken St. Pierre was selected to receive the Evidence Detection Team of the Year award. These teams continue to receive awards of excellence for their K-9 work and accomplishments each year.
- The K-9 Team had a retirement in 2022. Lieutenant Bob Mancini and his K-9 partner Ruger retired as a New Hampshire Fish and Game K-9 Team after 10

## MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION

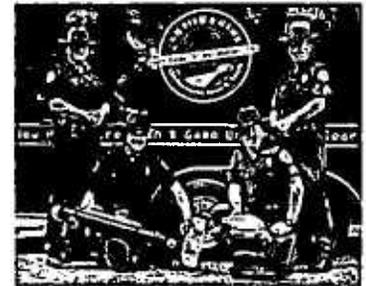
years of outstanding service to the state. We wish Ruger a long and healthy retirement and want to thank them for their years of dedicated service.

#### AIRBOAT TEAM

- The benefits of the Law Enforcement Division's Airboat Team continue to be seen across the state. Undoubtedly, this team's contribution to search and rescue efforts is where it stands out as most valuable. In some instances, the deployment of the airboat and its trained operators has been critical to the success of search and rescue missions, especially in swift water and thin-ice conditions. This was evident most recently during recovery operations where the airboat was used not only to transport Dive Team and Underwater Search Team personnel across unsafe ice conditions, but also to provide them with a safe platform to work from in such conditions.
- Over the last couple years, the Airboat Team has also proven to be an excellent resource to deploy for fish stocking. The airboat's ability to navigate shallow, swift water has allowed for Conservation Officers, fisheries biologists, and hatchery personnel to jointly stock fish throughout sections of the Connecticut River and Androscoggin River in Coos County. This effort to stock trout thoroughly across miles of these rivers has been very well received by the fishing public, specifically with it providing ample opportunities in these areas for both shore and drift anglers alike.
- In 2022, the Airboat Team received a second new airboat through a grant from the New Hampshire Port Authority. This airboat has a larger work platform and is a faster and better designed airboat than we have had in the past. The team has decided to maintain both airboats as deployment statewide would be more efficient using two boats.

#### SIDE-SCAN SONAR TEAM AND ROV TEAM

- The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department Side-Scan Sonar and Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV or Drone) Team utilizes the most advanced underwater search technology available today to carry out our search missions. This technology is operated by four highly trained officers and utilizes sonar and video to search water bodies, thereby reducing the use of divers and minimizing the risk to human life. Over the past 2 years, this search capability has been key in the recovery of numerous drowning victims, the recovery of evidence, and the closure of several cases.
- Through close collaboration with other agencies, this technology has been a huge asset in assisting them to fulfill their missions as well, including the New Hampshire State Police, County Sheriff's Departments, and local police and fire departments.
- In 2022, New Hampshire Fish and Game acquired a new Unmanned Aircraft System through a grant received from the Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire. We now have an officer trained and licensed as a remote pilot who is certified to fly this aircraft during search missions. This drone can be flown beyond the visual line of sight. This team has become a subdivision of our Side-Scan Sonar Team and will be creating policies and operational plans



*Side-Scan Sonar Team*

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION

to work together. All Unmanned Aircraft Systems (drones) will be flown in strict compliance with all FAA regulations. Requests for future missions will only include public safety missions (search and rescue), wildlife management and monitoring, trainings, or demonstrations.

- This equipment has already helped to locate an individual who previously had been recorded as missing in the woodlands in the southern part of the state this past spring. This successful mission utilizing this latest technology and equipment brought much needed closure for a search effort and for the family of the victim.

### OPERATION GAME THIEF PROGRAM

- The Division's Operation Game Thief Program (OGT) continues to experience significant growth including new public relations and outreach initiatives to increase awareness and encourage citizens to report wildlife crimes. A grant from the Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire funded the purchase of a trailer to be used as an interactive display at shows and events to promote OGT. This past year, a new 411 anonymous tip line was opened. This allows people to download an OGT app on their cell phone to use when reporting suspected fish and game violations, which has increased our success in investigating and prosecuting these reported violations.



# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## MARINE FISHERIES DIVISION

### Marine Fisheries Division

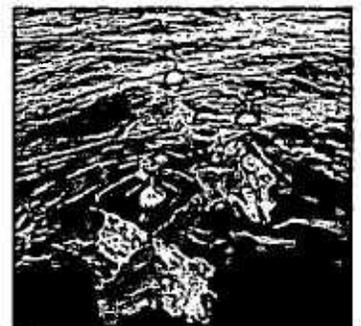
- Worked with federal and state partners via the New England Fishery Management Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to manage 62 marine species. This included participation in stock assessments and the creation and modifications to fisheries management plans for species such as striped bass, American lobster, American eel, Atlantic herring, groundfish; Atlantic menhaden, and their habitats.
- Operated fish ladders and monitored fish passage on six coastal rivers. Also operated American eel fish passage ramps on two coastal rivers to provide access to freshwater spawning habitat for more than 800,000 diadromous fish over the biennium.
- NH Fish and Game is leading a research project in collaboration with Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, the University of New Hampshire, and St. Joseph's College to understand the influence temperature has on catch in the regional lobster trap surveys, as well as developing a specialized trap that targets smaller juvenile lobsters that are not retained in current trap surveys.
- In collaboration with NH Fish and Game, Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, the University of New Hampshire, and St. Joseph's College conducted research on the temperature preferences of egg-bearing female lobsters and how warming waters in the Gulf of Maine may change lobster distribution. Also investigated how these changes may influence larval dispersal and recruitment dynamics in the region through the use of drifters, or free-floating buoys.
- Continued annual fisheries-independent monitoring programs that collect abundance and biological data on over 100 different marine species residing in or migrating through New Hampshire's marine waters. The programs include: juvenile finfish seine survey of estuaries; cooperative Maine/New Hampshire in-shore trawl survey of nearshore coastal waters from New Hampshire to the Maine/Canada border; population monitoring of juvenile American eels in certain New Hampshire coastal rivers; rainbow smelt spawning survey in Great Bay tributaries; and a survey of oysters in the Great Bay Estuary for annual growth, seeding, disease, and predation. Much of this information is used in stock assessments and fisheries management plans for some of these species.
- Monitored the catch and harvest of New Hampshire's commercial fisheries in coastal waters. New Hampshire's commercial fishing ports have averaged 12 million pounds of seafood brought in by commercial harvesters annually during the biennium. A diverse range of species is represented in the state's commercial landings, which included 31 species of fish and invertebrates, valued at approximately \$37 million in 2022.
- Additional fisheries-dependent monitoring occurring in New Hampshire coastal and estuarine waters include catch and effort reports from permitted coastal harvesters, rainbow smelt winter angler fishery survey, and a volunteer striped bass angler survey.
- NH Fish and Game worked collaboratively with the University of New



*Measuring juvenile lobster carapace length*



*Juvenile lobster monitoring*



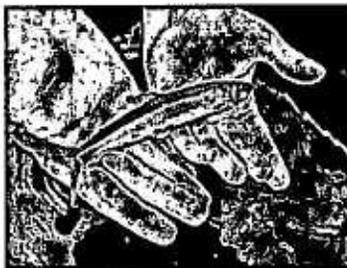
*Ocean drift buoys used to research where lobster larvae may disperse as passive plankton in the Gulf of Maine region*

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## MARINE FISHERIES DIVISION



*Lee and Lauren Staples pulling fyke net during rainbow smelt spawning monitoring survey*



*Saltwater rainbow smelt*



*Annual Fishing Gear Cleanup Event, April 2023*



*Kids in GBNERR program "Exploring the Outdoors" in Great Bay*

Hampshire Fish Movement Ecology Lab to PIT (passive integrated transponder) tag rainbow smelt in order to identify spawning site fidelity and seasonal migratory movement.

- Coordinated the removal of derelict commercial fishing gear with cooperation from fishing industry members, volunteers, and New Hampshire State Parks through organized trap clean ups funded by the Fishing for Energy Program. This effort resulted in the removal of about 7 tons of gear from New Hampshire's coastline in FY22 and about 5 tons in early FY23.
- Monitored aquaculture sites in New Hampshire, primarily oyster farming, with 86 acres licensed in 2021. The total harvested from aquaculture sites were 830,933 oysters in 2021 and 821,157 oysters in FY22.
- Performed 473 survey assignments and 54 at-sea sampling trips, in cooperation with National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, to gather data on catch and effort for saltwater recreational fisheries. During the biennium, Marine Division staff interviewed over 2,000 anglers each year. In 2021, an estimated 715,094 recreational saltwater fishing trips occurred in New Hampshire and another 942,137 trips in 2022. Atlantic mackerel was the most harvested fish in 2021 and 2022, with over 1 million fish each year by recreational harvesters.
- Worked with the seafood industry to continue to distribute direct payments and funds for programs totaling approximately \$3 million in 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act funds and CARES Act funding to eligible New Hampshire seafood industry businesses/individuals.
- Distributed direct payments totaling nearly \$600,000 in disaster funding to eligible Atlantic herring fishery participants.
- Distributed \$400,000 in direct payments to eligible lobster and crab trap fishery harvesters to compensate for mandatory modifications to endlines required by the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan.

### **GREAT BAY NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE (GBNERR)**

- Over 8,000 visitors came to the exhibit room at the Great Bay Discovery Center in FY22 and FY23.
- Education programs hosted at GBNERR to interpret the natural and cultural history of Great Bay resulted in over 20,000 contact hours with students and young children over the biennium. The programming includes school field trips, summer day camps, and programs for young children with stories, outdoor exploration, and crafts.
- Hosted over 7,000 hours of volunteer time dedicated to education, research, and land stewardship.
- Conducted three Teacher on the Estuary (TOTE) workshops to give over 30 New Hampshire high school teachers hands-on science and technology curriculum training through estuarine experiential learning related to climate adaptation principles and the natural history of Great Bay.
- Conducted 25 technical assistance workshops and meetings to bring techni-

## MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### MARINE FISHERIES DIVISION

cal information to community planners and local officials in the Great Bay watershed focused on conservation planning, living shorelines, and storm water management.

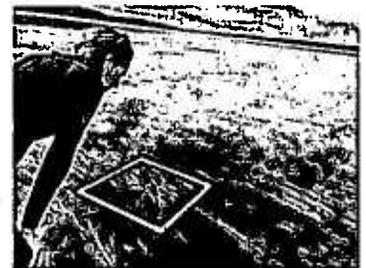
- Completed a demonstration garden for how to create a wildlife-friendly backyard. This demonstration site serves as a small area for the public to enjoy and learn. Volunteer work days, garden tours, and pollinator workshops were held over the biennium.
- Created an online tool for evaluating the resiliency of saltmarshes nationally and locally, and incorporated this information into New Hampshire land protection and restoration plans.
- Represented NH Fish and Game on the Atlantic Joint Coast Venture to develop a state and regional plan for conserving the saltmarsh sparrow.
- Installed new exhibits to interpret eelgrass in Great Bay, oysters and clamming in Great Bay, and osprey in the Great Bay Discovery Center.
- A "living wall" was installed to demonstrate the importance of pollinators.
- Installed an osprey platform with a live camera on site at the Discovery Center. This platform successfully attracted a mating pair, and the public has been able to watch them for 2 years through a live feed. The footage is streamed into the visitor center, and osprey-related programming has been developed to interpret the importance of predatory birds and their recovery from population declines that occurred due to DDT use, an insecticide that is now banned in the United States.
- Secured close to \$3 million from federal and private funding sources to improve the Glenn Cove Wildlife Management Area in Greenland. Detailed historical and archeological reviews were conducted on site, engineering and architectural plans were completed, and a bid package was prepared to implement the project. The goal of the development project is to re-open the area to public access and create visiting researcher housing.
- Worked with partners in the region to conduct research on eelgrass health, water quality, climate impacts to saltmarshes, living shorelines, invasive crab distribution, and conservation prioritization.
- Implemented monitoring indicators useful to assessing and tracking the health of Great Bay, including:
  - Saltmarsh vegetation surveys
  - A macro-algae survey
  - Invasive crabs
  - Environmental DNA



*Demonstration pollinator garden*



*Grace McCulloch researching saltmarsh sparrow and habitat in New Hampshire*



*Researching eelgrass in Great Bay*

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS DIVISION



*Classroom inside Owl Brook  
Hunter Education center in  
Holderness*



*Barry Conservation Camp*

### Public Affairs Division

#### EDUCATION UNIT

- The S3 Event Manager Registration System development continued with the addition of online registration for events that cover multiple days and have concurrent sessions for certain events. This continues to provide greater opportunity for public access to Department education programs.

#### Conservation Education

- The Urban Wildlife Education Program continued in partnership with New Hampshire Audubon Society and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The Urban Wildlife Education Program provided wildlife education to Manchester School District third graders during the biennium on the topics of habitats, reptiles and amphibians, birds, and mammals. The goal of the program is to introduce children to wildlife, connect them to nature, and spark their curiosity and interest in conservation as they explore these topics.
- Seven Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire Durant grants were awarded, securing funds to support the Schoolyard Wildlife Action Grants, Project WILD, expansion of the Nature Back Pack Program in Manchester, the *Wild Times for Kids* educational magazine publication, expanding Curriculum Kits for educators to borrow, and a new education activity kit for Barry Conservation Camp.
- Wildlife Stewards provided 86 presentations on bears, bobcats, moose, and brook trout to the public, reaching 610 people. The presentations highlight NH Fish and Game's successful wildlife management efforts funded through the Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Acts. The moose presentation is a new addition to the Wildlife Stewards Program as of the FY22-23 biennium.
- Schoolyard Wildlife Action Grants Program provided \$21,500 in partnership with the Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the NH Audubon Society, and Project Learning Tree to help support 20 schools with schoolyard projects connecting students to nature and learning in outdoor spaces. These projects included establishing pollinator gardens for native pollinators and Monarch butterflies, integrated wildlife education spaces in the schoolyard, curriculum support, and wildlife watching stations.
- Twenty-four workshops provided training for 298 teachers on the use of the Project WILD curriculum supplement that helps teachers integrate wildlife education into their K-12 classrooms. This is a train-the-trainer program, so one teacher trained provides wildlife education to students for many years to come.
- Fifteen schools and 270 students participated in the Winter Severity data collection program to learn how snow depth and temperature affect deer populations in the state.

#### Hunter Education

- During the biennium, the Hunter Education Program provided 294 classes

## MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### PUBLIC AFFAIRS DIVISION

certifying 4,434 new hunters. In addition, Trapper Education certified 240 new trappers through 16 Trapper Education courses.

- Two weeks of Hunter Education were held at Barry Conservation Camp in the summer of 2022.
- Fourteen new instructor trainings were held, adding 75 Hunter Education volunteer instructors to the volunteer corps of 450 instructors.
- Three volunteer instructors reached a 60-year milestone of teaching Hunter Education for the Department. Each instructor has had a granite bench dedicated in their name on the Owl Brook Hunter Education Center property.

#### ***Owl Brook Hunter Education Center***

- Improvements at Owl Brook included moving the practice archery range to the same area as the woodland archery range and revamping the archery targets using etho-foam strips for longer-lasting targets that are easier to maintain.
- Owl Brook hosted many educational opportunities including multiple shooting sports activities, youth hunting skills days, Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) workshops, Learn to Hunt workshops, Hunter Education field days, and a winter archery league.
- Approximately 3,000 people attended hands-on outreach and education events at Owl Brook, such as classes, workshops, and use of the woodland archery range, each year of the biennium.

#### ***Let's Go Fishing***

- The Let's Go Fishing (LGF) Program offered 109 free courses for the public and schools during the biennium with instruction on Fly Fishing, Basic Fishing, Ice Fishing, Kayak Fishing, and Fly Tying.
- LGF instructors and staff provided 2 weeks of instruction at Barry Conservation Fishing Camp.
- The program supported 12 outreach events including the NHIAA Bass Fishing Seminars and Discover Wild NH Days. The Let's Go Fishing Program engaged with approximately 4,500 people during the biennium.

#### ***Discovery Room***

- Thanks to generous donations from the New Hampshire Trout Unlimited and the Meredith Rotary Club, the chiller in the coldwater fish tank was replaced bringing the tank back online for members of the public visiting the Discovery Room. Other improvements to this Fish and Game public facility are planned with the remainder of the funds.

#### ***Watershed Education***

- The Watershed Education Program provided training and support to over 100 schools, 150 teachers, and 5,000 students.
- The Department hired a new Watershed Education Specialist in FY23 to replace a staff person who retired.
- A total of 150 people were trained from K-12 teachers to homeschool



# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS DIVISION



*Becoming an Outdoors Woman  
fall weekend 2022*



*New Hampshire Wildlife  
Journal cover*

educators and volunteers. A 4-day Watershed Ecology Institute for teachers was held as part of the trainings offered.

- Ten teacher trainings were held on the topics of macroinvertebrate monitoring and reporting, ArcGIS, Simulating a New Hampshire River System, and Trout in the Classroom.
- Direct field trip support and presentations were provided to 17 schools. These consisted of activities such as electrofishing, macroinvertebrate/water quality sampling, presenting watershed activities with groups, trout release days, and talks given to students. Over 400 students were reached directly through these activities.
- Eight outreach events were supported by the Watershed Education Program such as the NH Envirothon High School Competition and Discover Wild New Hampshire Day.

### ***Becoming an Outdoors Woman Program***

- The Department's Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) Program is co-sponsored by the New Hampshire Wildlife Federation, which continued to help support this important initiative which targets women age 18 or older for workshops teaching outdoor skills usually associated with hunting and fishing, but useful for many outdoor pursuits.
- During the biennium, 361 women attended Fall, Winter and Beyond BOW workshops on such topics as deep sea fishing, ice fishing, wildlife tracking, field dressing big game, archery, kayaking, and outdoor cooking.
- A grant awarded in FY23 by the Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire provided two full scholarships for the 2023 Fall BOW Weekend totaling \$640.
- A new BOW Coordinator was hired in the fall of 2022.
- The annual BOW fall weekend was held in 2022 at a new venue for the first time in 25 years, Geneva Point Conference Center on Lake Winnepesaukee, as it offers expanded opportunities in a more flexible facility at a lower cost.

### **INFORMATION UNIT**

#### ***Website, Publications, News, and Merchandise***

- The NH Fish and Game Department's mobile-friendly website saw 2,366,830 unique visits over the biennium, which represents an increase in visitors each year. The website boasts over 750 pages of informational and educational content, images, and videos, which will be showcased in an updated and refreshed website in the fall of 2023 to better serve our constituents.
- In FY22, 373 news releases were issued by Public Affairs and 377 were issued in FY23 in various formats, communicating the Department's messages to media outlets across New Hampshire and in Massachusetts, and to approximately 3,200 followers. This represents an approximately 10% increase each year and a big jump in the number of followers from the

## MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### PUBLIC AFFAIRS DIVISION

previous biennium. These totals also include support of the Law Enforcement Division's search and rescue press releases.

- Public Affairs Division staff coordinated the Department's social media outreach and increased our following on all platforms. We now have over 103,000 followers on Facebook (a 34% increase), 4,024 on Twitter (a 24% increase), and 40,000 on Instagram (an almost 20% increase over the biennium).
- The Division sold 1,785 units of merchandise in 2021 equaling \$53,194.10 in sales and 10,812 units totaling \$39,695.70 in 2022.
- The Public Affairs Division sold 5,630 copies of the 2022 New Hampshire Wildlife Calendar and 5,832 copies of the 2023 version. We had an increase in sales over the biennium due to online sales and both wholesale and retail promotion. These two publications raised \$39,761 in FY22 and \$43,268 in FY23 for the agency, which was a record.
- Our 2022 calendar also won first place in the calendar category at the Association for Conservation Information annual awards ceremony.
- Our bimonthly *New Hampshire Wildlife Journal* magazine continues to have approximately 5,800 subscribers per year.
- We published our four law digests, the *Wild Times for Kids* paper, four issues of *Wildlines* for the Nongame Program, edited four issues of *Great Bay Matters*, and numerous ancillary materials such as fishing brochures each year of the biennium.

#### **Broadcast Media**

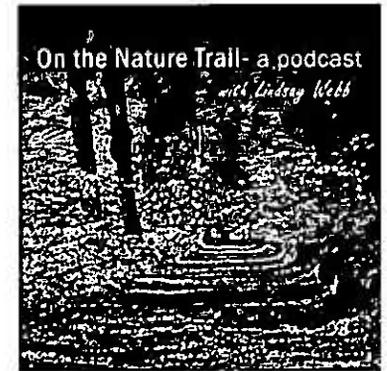
- The *NH Wildside* TV program has been phased out in favor of individual segments as viewing habits have changed. The Video Unit and staff produced 60 original content videos resulting in the growth of over 1,000 subscribers to the Department's YouTube channel over the biennium. Over 13,000 hours of content was viewed during the biennium.
- On Facebook over 183,000 hours of video content was viewed.
- Our show *Outdoor Almanac* is still running on radio stations through New Hampshire.
- We posted 37 "On the Nature Trail" podcasts, with each new podcast averaging over 100 listens per month.

#### **Advertising and Promotion**

- Two hunting marketing campaigns ran for 4 months in the biennium. The 2021 hunting theme was the "Locavore Movement," encouraging people to eat local including locally sourced meats. The 2022 theme was "Fall Preparation." Traditional outreach washthrough radio statewide, print, and social media.
- These were years two and three of the enhanced email collection from license buyers. These emails will become a vital component of future retention and reactivation efforts.
- Fishing marketing campaigns ran for 4 months in each year of the biennium. The 2022 theme was the "Spring Line Up," a baseball analogy. The 2023 theme



2023 NH Wildlife Calendar



On the Nature Trail podcast

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS DIVISION



Operation Land Share brochure



WILDLIFE HERITAGE  
FOUNDATION of NH  
MAKING THE PAST, IMPROVE THE FUTURE.

was "Quality Family Time." Both campaigns included a traditional radio component and targeted social media ads.

- Adventure talks returned to both in person and streaming. Two ice-fishing talks were offered. The attendance was not as robust as pre-pandemic levels.
- The return of public events officially kicked off with the return of Discover Wild New Hampshire Day in April of 2022. Discover Wild New Hampshire Day in 2023 was very successful as well, with approximately 8,200 visitors.
- Over the biennium, the Department hosted 46 public events drawing over 20,000 attendees. Also during the biennium the Department attended 16 fairs, sporting shows, and other outdoor recreation-associated events.
- The Division held Shop WILD Saturday events in December 2021 and 2022, offering people a chance to purchase Fish and Game merchandise as gifts, which was very successful. This is now an annual event.

### Barry Conservation Camp

- Public Affairs Division staff managed the Barry Conservation Camp facility, including spring clean-up, building maintenance, and facilitation of contract work on water system upgrades.
- Due to staffing shortages, camp was not held in 2021. Camp returned in 2022 with 180 campers. New water source and filtration installation will address any future supply and quality concerns.

### LANDOWNER RELATIONS PROGRAM

- The Landowner Relations Program actively recruited landowners for the Operation Land Share Program, bringing the total number of private land acres enrolled in the program and open for public access to over 436,969 acres. These lands are generously left open and unposted by private landowners for hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching.
- Private landowners who keep their land open for public access were provided with free signage and assistance with related mitigating issues through the Landowner Relations Program. Landowners were made aware of opportunities to partner with the Department and other organizations to improve habitat management and public access to their lands.

### WILDLIFE HERITAGE FOUNDATION OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

- The Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire, the non-profit partner of the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, continued to deliver significant private support to the Department over the biennium by providing grants to 22 Fish and Game projects totaling \$166,815.38.

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## WILDLIFE DIVISION

### Wildlife Division

#### GAME PROGRAM

- The Department's Game Management Team used current harvest and biological data, in addition to management goals and objectives established in the 2016–2025 Game Management Plan, to review the population status and physical condition of New Hampshire game species.
- The Department's Game Management Team used current harvest and biological data, in addition to management goals and objectives established in the 2016–2025 NH Fish and Game Department Game Management Plan, to review the population status and physical condition of New Hampshire game species.
- The Wildlife Division completed the Department's biennial season-setting process during winter 2022 and spring 2023. Season frameworks for all game species were evaluated, and recommended changes were implemented through this process. Final rules resulted in increased hunting opportunities in many parts of the state for deer, bear, and turkey. Hunting seasons for moose, small game, waterfowl, and pheasants, as well as trapping seasons for furbearers, were modified slightly but remained largely unchanged from previous levels, thereby maintaining a similar level of opportunity and desired harvest impact.

#### *Population and Harvest Levels by Species*

- The 2022 total deer harvest was 14,082 and represented the state's third highest harvest on record going back to 1922. Deer numbers throughout New Hampshire continue to be strong, with the majority of wildlife management units (WMUs) being at or above population objectives set in the Game Management Plan. This has resulted in increased opportunity for harvesting antlerless deer in recent years as we work to reduce or maintain populations at current objectives.
- Moose population abundance indices varied throughout the state with a generally stable population in the Ct. Lakes and North Regions and a slowly decreasing population in the White Mountains, Central, Southwest, and Southeast Regions. Winter ticks, brainworm, lack of young forest, and development are the primary factors limiting the population. In accordance with the 2016–2025 Game Management Plan, conservative hunting opportunity is offered in management regions that are above the moose density cut-off level. For 2023, moose hunting permits will be issued in the Ct. Lakes, North, and Southeast Regions with a total of 35 either-sex permits.
- Increased bear hunting opportunity has continued throughout the biennium as the Department works to meet population objectives in the Game Management Plan. The 2022 bear harvest represented the second highest (1,156 bears taken statewide) in the state's history. For the 2023 season, season length has again been extended in the southeast part of the state. Also in 2023, there will be increased options for hunters to report harvested bears, including at select Department hatcheries and sporting goods stores.
- Spring 2023 marked the fifth consecutive year that the spring turkey



*White-tailed deer*

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## WILDLIFE DIVISION

harvest exceeded 5,000 birds. Since implementing the two gobbler spring season bag limit in designated WMUs, the spring harvest has increased with a new record high of 5,725 birds harvested in spring 2022. Consecutive warm, dry spring weather during the period of nesting and brood rearing has contributed significantly to this harvest increase.

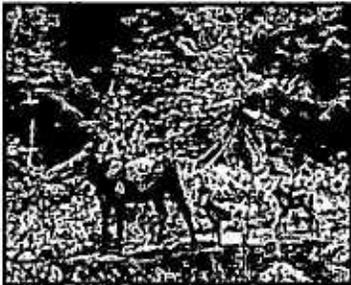
- During this biennium, 10,000 pheasants were stocked at 63 sites in 43 towns resulting in approximately 158 birds released at each site. Some variation existed in the numbers of birds stocked per site as flood-control areas received more birds.

### **Online Registration**

- During the previous biennium (2020), the Department initiated an online registration system for hunters to self-register their harvested turkeys during the COVID-19 pandemic. This system proved very popular and was adopted as an official registration method. During the 2023 spring turkey season, 54% of hunters registering their birds online.
- Hunters will also have the ability to register their harvested deer online during the 2023 hunting season for the first time. The Wildlife Division is working with S3, the company that developed online turkey registration to create the new deer registration system. Registering deer in person at physical registration stations will remain an option for hunters and will be the required registration method for 5 days (first 2 days of muzzleloader season, first 3 days of firearms season) every year to facilitate collection of biological data.

### **Research**

- An important moose research project with the University of New Hampshire was initiated in summer 2022 and will run through summer 2025. Drones equipped with color and thermal sensors as well as trail cameras will be used to measure moose abundance. The drone surveys will be conducted in northern New Hampshire. Trail cameras will collect data statewide by integrating with ongoing furbearer research. Trail camera layout is the same for both of these projects, so "moose" cameras in northern New Hampshire and "furbearer" cameras in southern New Hampshire provide statewide data. This research is needed because the current method for monitoring moose abundance, the deer hunter survey, was developed in 2000 and needs periodic comparison with more intensive abundance surveys to validate its accuracy.
- Beginning in the winter of 2022, the Wildlife Division began a 4-year, multi-state collaborative research project to determine the cause of the long-term decline of the mallard subpopulation in the northeastern United States. Staff will attach a total of 40 GPS/GSM backpacks to hen mallards over the course of the project.
- Through a contract with the University of New Hampshire, a statewide furbearer monitoring effort using remote cameras is ongoing. This research spans the period 2022–2025 and will provide managers information on the distribution and density of select furbearers in New Hampshire. Effort is also underway to launch research to measure survival and cause-specific



*A cow moose with calves*

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## WILDLIFE DIVISION

mortality of fisher in New Hampshire. In addition to survival and mortality, this research will quantify space use, habitat association, patterns of dispersal, and health parameters of this species.

### **Wildlife Health Monitoring**

- Cases of avian pox and Lymphoproliferative Disease Virus (LPDV) in turkeys have continued to remain low. A total of 13 and 23 reports were received during the 2022 Summer Brood Survey and the 2023 Winter Flock Survey, respectively. While the viruses have been widespread, relatively few turkeys seem to have been seriously affected.
- The Wildlife Division, working in partnership with US Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services, collected a total of 490 samples from captured ducks during the biennium to aid nationwide avian influenza surveillance efforts.
- The Department continued to test for chronic wasting disease (CWD) in deer, with 8,187 deer sampled since 2002. To date, no deer in New Hampshire have tested positive.

### **Trend Data**

- Department biologists captured and leg-banded 1,050 ducks and 446 resident Canada geese throughout the state as part of ongoing Atlantic Flyway waterfowl monitoring.
- Biologists and select, dedicated volunteers monitored ruffed grouse and turkeys via 45 survey routes throughout New Hampshire during spring 2023. Additionally, woodcock surveys were conducted during the same time period on 33 routes, including 9 routes in cooperation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Data collected annually from these surveys serve as an index to abundance and allow managers to monitor population trends of these species over time.
- Since 1997, biologists have conducted annual mast surveys to monitor the distribution and abundance of important foods consumed by wildlife (e.g., acorns, beechnuts, apples, various soft fruits). During 2022, biologists submitted 221 mast observations. Mast survey data are used to interpret harvest results, predict harvest impacts, explain wildlife-human conflict levels, and better understand the overall species ecology. This long-term data set is extremely popular with the public, both hunters and non-hunters, managers, as well as researchers from various groups and universities.
- In an effort to assess bobcat population dynamics in New Hampshire, bobcat carcasses continue to be collected. These are necropsied and provide information on sex, age, weight, and productivity.
- Biologists have instituted mandatory tooth collection from harvested fisher to measure sex and age class distribution to increase the understanding of the population dynamics of this furbearer.
- Public attitudes towards wild turkeys have remained high during the biennium. Results from the Online Winter Flock and Summer Brood Surveys indicated that most respondents (93% and 94%, respectively) liked or strongly liked seeing wild turkeys on the landscape in New Hampshire.



*Eastern wild turkey*

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## WILDLIFE DIVISION

### **Animal Damage Control**

- The Animal Damage Control Program is a cooperative initiative entering its 37th year between the NH Fish and Game Department and the US Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services. This unique mitigation program combines state and federal expertise, resources, and personnel to resolve wildlife conflicts in the Granite State.
- The Animal Damage Control Program responded to more than 2,900 requests for assistance during this biennium, including 283 site visits and the distribution of over 3,200 educational leaflets. Nearly 45% of all requests for assistance involved human–bear conflicts. Both agencies have expanded outreach to poultry producers, municipalities, and campgrounds in order to help reduce conflicts with bears. Assistance is provided through recommendations, evaluations, educational materials, site visits, formal damage assessments, loan of wildlife mitigation equipment, direct control, the distribution of information leaflets, information on the Department website, social media, videos, door hangers, and when applicable, wildlife depredation permits and compensation for bear damage to commercial agriculture. The popularity of backyard poultry and bee keeping operations in recent years has increased the need for technical and operational response by this program, particularly when bear damage is involved.
- Since it was initiated in 1986, the program has responded to over 52,000 requests for assistance. Staff also participated in monitoring for disease concerns such as chronic wasting disease, avian influenza, tularemia, SARS-CoV-2, and LPDV (turkey pox virus) by gathering biological samples for testing.
- Additionally, staff assisted with state and federal recovery efforts for threatened and endangered species, such as piping plovers and upland sandpipers



### **NONGAME AND ENDANGERED WILDLIFE PROGRAM**

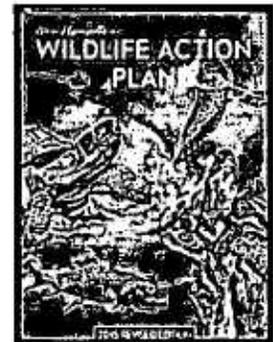
- Nongame celebrated the Program's 35th anniversary through a series of publications and social media.
- The Program successfully raised more than \$100,000 in private donations each year of the biennium through a series of funding campaigns. As a result, the Nongame Program exceeded the requirement necessary to receive \$100,000 in matching state general funds.
- Published eight issues of the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program's nationally recognized *Wildlines* newsletter. Each newsletter was distributed to over 3,000 individuals. The *Wildlines* distribution list includes individuals from 35 states, highlighting the national reach of the Nongame Program's work. *Wildlines* issues are also posted on the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department website and advertised via social media following the release of each issue, further enhancing the publication's reach.
- Provided technical assistance to partners and the public regarding the NH Wildlife Action Plan and associated habitat maps. Maps include both

## MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### WILDLIFE DIVISION

comprehensive statewide land cover and habitats ranked by ecological condition. Wildlife Action Plan maps are used extensively by communities, land trusts, and other conservation partners as an important tool in guiding land-use decisions.

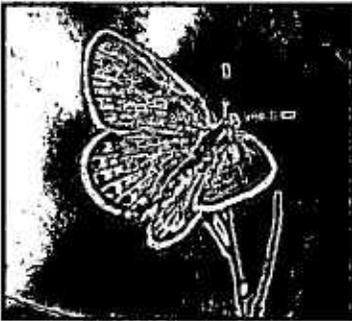
- Recovery efforts for the New England cottontail continued. Surveys were conducted to determine the presence of the species in suitable habitat. A captive breeding facility at the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge was managed to enhance cottontail productivity. A rabbit reporting website was maintained to gather information on the distribution of rabbits in New Hampshire, and hundreds of reports were received.
- Nongame Program biologists continued to monitor and successfully manage piping plover and least tern populations on New Hampshire's sandy beaches. Biologists documented a record 14 nesting pairs of piping plovers (state endangered, federally threatened) and a colony of 20 nesting pairs of least terns (state endangered).
- In partnership with NH Audubon, peregrine falcon (state threatened) and bald eagle (state species of special concern) monitoring and management continued. Monitoring of bald eagles found that the population recovery continued post-delisting (removed from state threatened list during 2017) with 92 territorial nesting eagle pairs documented and 84 young eagles fledged during 2022 alone.
- In partnership with NH Audubon, a new study of state-endangered northern harriers was completed. Biologists documented at least 10 active territories in Coos County during surveys from 2020 through 2022.
- In partnership with the Shoals Marine Laboratory and the NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR), biologists continued to monitor and successfully manage a seabird restoration program on the Isles of Shoals. During 2022, common terns (state threatened) had a successful nesting season with 3,136 nesting pairs and roseate terns (state and federally endangered) had a historic New Hampshire record of 147 nesting pairs.
- New Hampshire Fish and Game biologists continued to collaborate with NH Audubon and a private contractor from Massachusetts on cliff swallow (state threatened) monitoring and conservation in the state. During 2022, 15 artificial clay-fired nests were installed at three nesting colony locations to enhance cliff swallow nesting. NH Fish and Game also developed an outreach video about this project and placed an article in the Department magazine, the *New Hampshire Wildlife Journal*.
- Biologists surveyed Blanding's (state endangered), spotted (state threatened), wood (special concern), and box turtles (state endangered) in New Hampshire to determine the spatial extent and health of populations. Two separate nationally competitive federal grant awards were implemented for turtle conservation in New Hampshire, one to conduct priority conservation actions for Blanding's turtles and the other for wood turtles. Nongame biologists also partnered with the US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Services to implement a Working Lands for Wildlife Program for turtles, a program where landowners can receive financial as-



*Wildlife Action Plan*

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## WILDLIFE DIVISION



*Karner blue butterfly*

sistance to voluntarily assist with the implementation of priority turtle actions.

- Biologists continued restoration and recovery efforts for Karner blue butterflies (federally and state endangered) including raising and releasing butterflies in a captive rearing laboratory and performing habitat management annually.
- The Nongame Program continued a partnership with the White Mountain Observatory to evaluate the habitat needs of the White Mountain fritillary (state endangered) and the White Mountain arctic (state threatened), species of butterflies only known to occur on Mount Washington.
- Launched the newly formed New Hampshire Butterfly Monitoring Network and provided trainings to the numerous volunteer participants.
- The Taking Action for Wildlife Team, consisting of members from the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, and the Association of Conservation Commissions, provided technical assistance via workshops and meetings on conservation planning, wildlife and wildlife habitats, and community engagement with a focus on implementing the NH Wildlife Action Plan. The Taking Action for Wildlife team also planned, organized, and implemented an advanced technical assistance training program for nine communities entitled the Community Conservation Cohort Training. A new Department brochure was published that focused on wildlife corridors in New Hampshire that will be used to convey the importance of wildlife corridors to private landowners, communities, and conservation organizations.
- Education staff at NH Audubon in partnership with the Department's Public Affairs Division completed popular Urban Wildlife programs in multiple Manchester elementary schools.
- Biologists reviewed and provided technical assistance on projects seeking state permits from the NH Department of Environmental Services and provided input in selecting mitigation projects. Reviews focused on potential impacts to endangered and threatened wildlife. During the biennium, a total of 7,708 projects were checked for the presence of rare species using the NH Natural Heritage Bureau's data check tool. Those having potential impacts to protected wildlife were reviewed by NH Fish and Game.
- Following a stakeholder and public input process, new environmental review permitting procedural rules (Fis 1002-1005) went into effect in February 2022 and were implemented for the remainder of the biennium. The new review procedures set timelines for NH Fish and Game's review process and the required procedures for applicants.
- Biologists represented NH Fish and Game on the NH Aquatic Resources Mitigation Fund Project Selection Committee administered by the NH Department of Environmental Services.

### Wildlife Habitat Program

- Because native wildlife and their habitats are vital to the health of New Hampshire's landscape and character, the Wildlife Habitat Program con-

## MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### WILDLIFE DIVISION

serves and improves wildlife habitats on public and privately owned lands. It also ensures that the public has access to these lands so they can enjoy them. The Wildlife Habitat Program manages over 90,000 acres of wildlife management areas (WMAs) and conservation easement areas, and provides technical and financial assistance on tens of thousands of acres of private lands to help those landowners improve habitats on their property.

- Provided nearly \$90,000 in financial assistance to 49 landowners in 27 towns. Over 1,500 acres of habitat were improved including maintaining young forest and field habitat, creating or maintaining wildlife openings, releasing apple trees, and developing wildlife-focused management plans.
- Provided wildlife habitat advice to 186 landowners or their managers, impacting nearly 65,000 acres.
- Provided over 200 hours of service to the state Land and Community Heritage Investment Program and the State Conservation Committee. Department staff reviewed 67 projects that applied for funding, mostly associated with land conservation. Fifty-seven projects were awarded, resulting in over 11,000 acres being conserved. Staff worked to ensure that awarded projects conserved significant wildlife habitats and are open for public access including hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching.
- The Wildlife Habitat Program conserves healthy wild landscapes that sustain our fish and wildlife and are a vital component of New Hampshire's character and way of life. Over the last 2 years, the Program acquired six properties in fee or conservation easement totaling 1,180 acres, which were added to our statewide Wildlife Management Area system. Funds for acquisitions were obtained through Federal Aid in Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) grants, donations, mitigation, or other sources of funding. Properties included:
  - **Low Plains Natural Area, New London (30 acres)** – The town donated a conservation easement on 30 acres, increasing the size of the Department-held conservation easement to 189 acres. This property contains an extensive marsh system that benefits a variety of wildlife from waterfowl to furbearers to wetland birds such as American bittern. The additional 30 acres will be a nice addition to help conserve the water and habitat quality of the marsh.
  - **Mascoma and HL Webster WMA addition, Canaan (47 acres)** – This property is sandwiched in between and connects these two WMAs, creating a complete 256-acre property. It is almost entirely comprised of high-quality wetlands including floodplain forest, marsh, wet meadow, and shrub swamp that provides habitat for wetland birds, waterfowl, furbearers, woodcock, snowshoe hare, and other wildlife.
  - **Little Mountain Forest, Salisbury (579 acres)** – The Department partnered with The Forest Society to permanently protect this property through a co-held conservation easement. The easement adds to an existing area of conservation land of nearly 10,000 acres in and around Mount Kearsarge and will enhance connectivity with the 3,600-acre Blackwater River Flood Control Area. The property is dominated by



*The Wildlife Habitat Program conserves and improves wildlife habitats*

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## WILDLIFE DIVISION

- well managed oak that will provide an excellent source of mast (acorns) for wildlife for decades to come among other habitat values.
- **Pearly Lake WMA addition, Fitzwilliam (113 acres)** – With this addition, the Pearly Lake WMA is now 785 acres. This property contains high-quality habitat features including a 32-acre emergent marsh/bog system and pine-oak-maple woodlands.
  - **Hinman Pond III Conservation Easement, Hooksett (400 acres)** – This donated conservation easement is located between two existing Fish and Game easements, Hinman I and Hinman II, and is part of a 24,000-acre unfragmented block of lands. This area is a biodiversity hotspot. The property contains a mix of oak-pine and hemlock-hardwood-pine forest with 40 acres of wetlands that includes complex beaver impoundments, basin swamps, marshes, perennial and intermittent streams, plus 50 potential vernal pools.
  - **Garland Pond WMA Addition, Ossipee (11 acres)** – This addition increases the size of the WMA to 122 acres. It helps preserve an undeveloped buffer to the marsh to maintain habitat and water quality. This WMA was established as a waterfowl management area and is home to Canada geese, mallard, black duck, wood duck, hooded merganser, ring-necked duck, and at least 18 species of greatest conservation need including sora and whip-poor-will.
- Wildlife habitat was enhanced on WMAs through various means to support a diversity of wildlife from bees to birds to bears:
    - Twelve forest management projects were completed to enhance young forest habitat, increase acorn production, or otherwise improve wildlife food and cover. In addition to the habitat benefits, over \$750,000 in revenue was generated.
    - Fields were mowed on 22 state properties to maintain 185 acres of habitat for wild turkey, deer, grassland birds, and other wildlife.
    - Staff promoted shrubland and young forest habitat to benefit American woodcock, ruffed grouse, and several species of songbirds on six properties encompassing over 68.5 acres.
  - Maintaining roads, parking areas, gates, signs, and other property infrastructure is imperative for a good visitor experience and to maintain wildlife habitat. To that end, the Wildlife Habitat Program restored nearly 6 miles of woods road at the Kimball Hill WMA and 2 miles of woods road at Pearly Lake WMA, repaired the access roads at Carpenters Marsh WMA and Cascade Marsh WMA, brushed back 10 miles of road at the CLNA and Greenough Ponds WMA, replaced a bridge at the Farrar Marsh WMA, and refurbished and installed 16 WMA signs.
  - Maintenance was completed on 62.5 miles of Wildlife Management Area boundaries using contractors and in-house staff. Boundaries need to be maintained every 10–15 years to ensure visitors to the properties and our abutters know the extent of our ownerships, and to ensure habitat management projects stay within our bounds.

# MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## WILDLIFE DIVISION

- Through a contract with the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, the Program helped fund the training of 39 New Hampshire Coverts Project volunteers over the biennium; they join another 457 coverts volunteers active in the state, who together contributed over 45,682 hours of service on behalf of wildlife habitat in their communities (valued at over \$1,254,000) over the 2 years.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT	# ACRES MANAGED
RESOURCE INVENTORY	7,826 ACRES
GRASSLANDS/OLD FIELDS MANAGEMENT	2,785 ACRES
WETLAND ENHANCEMENT	1,236 ACRES
TIMBER STAND IMPROVEMENT	1,439 ACRES
EARLY SUCCESSIONAL MANAGEMENT	513 ACRES
HARDWOOD MANAGEMENT	531 ACRES
SOFTWOOD MANAGEMENT	287 ACRES
<b>LAND CONSERVATION</b>	<b>10,388 ACRES</b>

## MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS



**WILDLIFE HERITAGE  
FOUNDATION of NH**  
SHARING THE PAST. SHAPING THE FUTURE.



*The Forever Locked moose display*

### **Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire**

#### ***Fish and Game's Nonprofit Partner***

As an official nonprofit partner of the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, the Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire, an independent 501(c)(3) charitable organization, continues to have a significant positive impact on Department programs, services, and activities.

The Foundation was established in 2006 and has awarded 96 grants to NHFG over the years. The Foundation focuses on investing in wild places and wild things, supporting critical Fish and Game Department needs that go under- and unfunded, and for programs impacting future generations. The Foundation helps fund the essential education, conservation, wildlife, fisheries, and law enforcement programs of the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department.

During this biennium, the Foundation awarded \$166,815.38 in grants for 22 critical Fish and Game programs. Grant-funded projects included anti-predation netting and fencing at the Berlin, Warren, and New Hampton hatcheries, scholarships for the Department's popular Becoming an Outdoors Woman fall event, primary sponsorship of Discover WILD New Hampshire Day, and support for a wild brook trout migration assessment project in northern New Hampshire.

The Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire continues to support the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department's Law Enforcement Division Canine Program by providing financial assistance for training, medical care, and equipment needs. During the biennium, Foundation board member Wesley Reed generously donated one new dog, Moxie, to join the canine unit.

The Foundation's Forever Locked moose display is a critical public education asset that is used around New Hampshire and the New England region to promote New Hampshire's great outdoors. The Foundation also continues its strong commitment to support the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department's educational programs, and the Durant Educational Fund provided financial support to a variety of Department education projects. The Durant Fund was established to support educational programs for at least 10 years; the first grants were awarded in March of 2018 and continue to be awarded to the Department.

The Foundation generates contributed income through fundraising campaigns, grant proposals, and individual major giving requests to directly support Fish and Game projects and programs, agency partners, and the Foundation's own public education program that is delivered through Forever Locked.

Funding for the Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire's grant program comes from individual and corporate donors, memorial gifts, donations from the Foundation's Board of Directors, the Foundation's Friends Program, special events, and the annual Moose Permit Auction. The Foundation accepts general and targeted cash donations and welcomes annuities and endowments. In most cases, donations are tax deductible. For more information or to donate, visit [www.nhwildlifeheritage.org](http://www.nhwildlifeheritage.org).

## 2022 Session

The following bills of interest to Fish and Game were enacted into law for the 2022 Legislative session:

- **HB 241 – Title: Repealing the definition of brook trout.** Removes the definition of brook trout from statute, since brook trout is not a single species but is a collective term that includes several species. Chapter 48; Effective Date 7/19/22.
- **HB 571 – Title: Repealing the prohibition against OHRV travel on Hoyt Road Marsh.** Removes the restrictions that prevent OHRVs from traveling on Hoyt Road Marsh when it is iced over. Chapter 30; Effective Date 7/2/22.
- **HB 1109 – Title: Relative to the authority of a city or town to limit the use or operation of an OHRV on certain ways.** Allows a city or town to close or limit use of a road or way. Chapter 294; Effective Date 8/30/22.
- **HB 1188 – Title: Establishing a commission to study OHRV use in the state and clarifying certain towing statutes.** Mandates a commission to study and report annually on the use and effects of OHRVs in the state. Fish and Game has a representative on this commission. Chapter 301; Effective Date 7/1/22.
- **HB 1230-FN – Title: Permitting online presentation of deer for registration.** Mandates the development of an online deer registration system by September 1, 2023. Chapter 135; Effective Date 8/6/22.
- **HB 1299 – Title: Relative to the process for the importation of wildlife and creating an appeal process for denials of permits.** Allows for appealing denials of a permit to import wildlife to the Fish and Game Director and then to the Fish and Game Commission. Chapter 303; Effective Date 7/1/22.
- **HB 1323 – Title: Relative to Hike Safe cards.** Removes the fees for Hike Safe cards from statute and authorizes their establishment in rules. Chapter 38; Effective Date 7/2/22.
- **HB 1528 – Title: Establishing a public boat access donation program for operators of non-motorized boats.** Encourages donations from all users of the public boat access areas. Chapter 79; Effective Date 6/19/22.
- **HB 1554-FN – Title: Relative to online payment of fees relating to the operation of off highway recreational vehicles and snowmobiles, and relative to grants administered by the bureau of trails for OHRV trail development and maintenance.** Mandates the development of an online OHRV and snowmobile registration system by September 1, 2025. Chapter 206; Effective Date 8/16/22.
- **HB 1636 – Title: Relative to prohibitions on carrying a loaded firearm on an OHRV or snowmobile.** Allows for the carrying of unloaded revolvers as well as pistols on OHRVs and snowmobiles. Chapter 210; Effective Date 6/17/22.

## 2023 Session

The following bills of interest to the Fish and Game Department were enacted into law for the 2023 Legislative session:

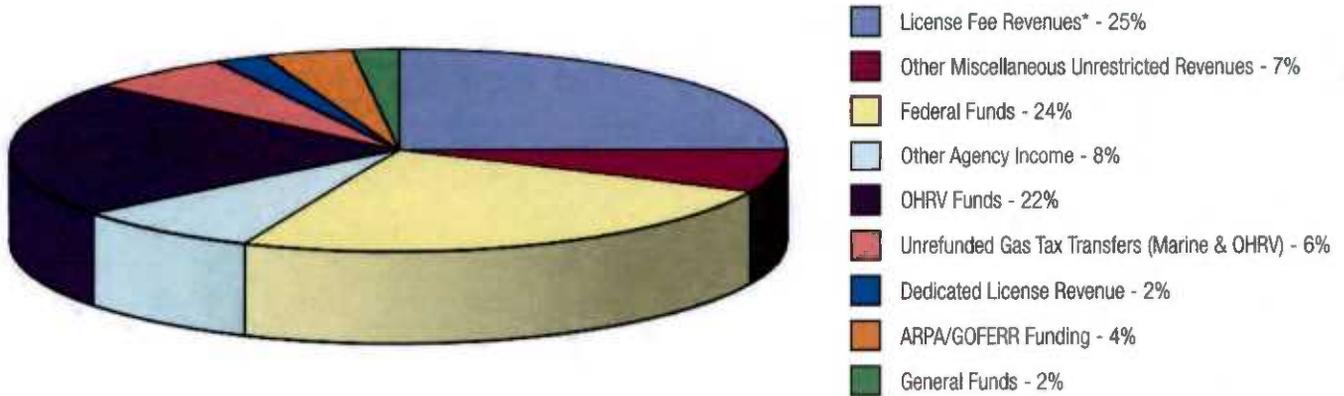
- **HB 221 – Title: Relative to the acquisition of agricultural land development rights and relative to the use of game cameras.** Provides a definition of game cameras and establishes requirements for their use. The game cameras portion was requested by the Department. Effective Date 1/1/24.
- **HB 442-FN – Title: Relative to the removal of derelict fishing gear.** Mandates minimum of 3 yearly derelict gear clean-up operations. Chapter 195; Effective Date 7/1/23.
- **SB 12 – Title: Relative to the leasing of seasonal camp lots by the fish and game department.** Extends the renewal of camp land leases to every 5 years. This bill was requested by the Department. Chapter 48; Effective Date 7/1/23.
- **SB 15-FN – Title: Relative to the use of tree stands and observation blinds.** Establishes dates and requirements for the use of trees stands and observation blinds. This bill was requested by the Department. Chapter 201; Effective Date 1/1/24.
- **SB 17 – Title: Establishing a gifts and donations account within the fish and game fund.** Allows for the acceptance of donations to the non-game account without the approval of the Fish and Game Commission or the Governor and Council. This bill was requested by the Department. Chapter 49; Effective Date 7/31/23.
- **SB 18 – Title: Relative to the purchase of duck stamps and the suspension or revocation of a license issued by the fish and game commission.** Allows for the electronic receipt to serve as proof of purchase until a hunter receives the actual duck stamp and allows for the suspension of a department-issued license for discharging a firearm in a compact urban area. This bill was requested by the Department. Chapter 50; Effective Date 7/31/23.
- **SB 160-FN – Title: Relative to the use of OHRVs on designated trails.** Prohibits the use of OHRVs registered as street-legal vehicles from use on recreational trails. This bill was requested by the Department. Chapter 217; Effective Date 10/2/2023.
- **SB 228-FN – Title: Relative to the Hilton Park boat ramp.** Directs Pease Development Authority, Department of Transportation, and Fish and Game Department to study repairing the Hilton Park boat ramp and building a new dock facility. Chapter 229; Effective Date 8/4/23.

# A COMPLEX FUNDING PICTURE

The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department uses revenue from fishing and hunting license fees, federal funds, state general funds, and other sources to accomplish its broad mission to serve the people and wildlife of New Hampshire.

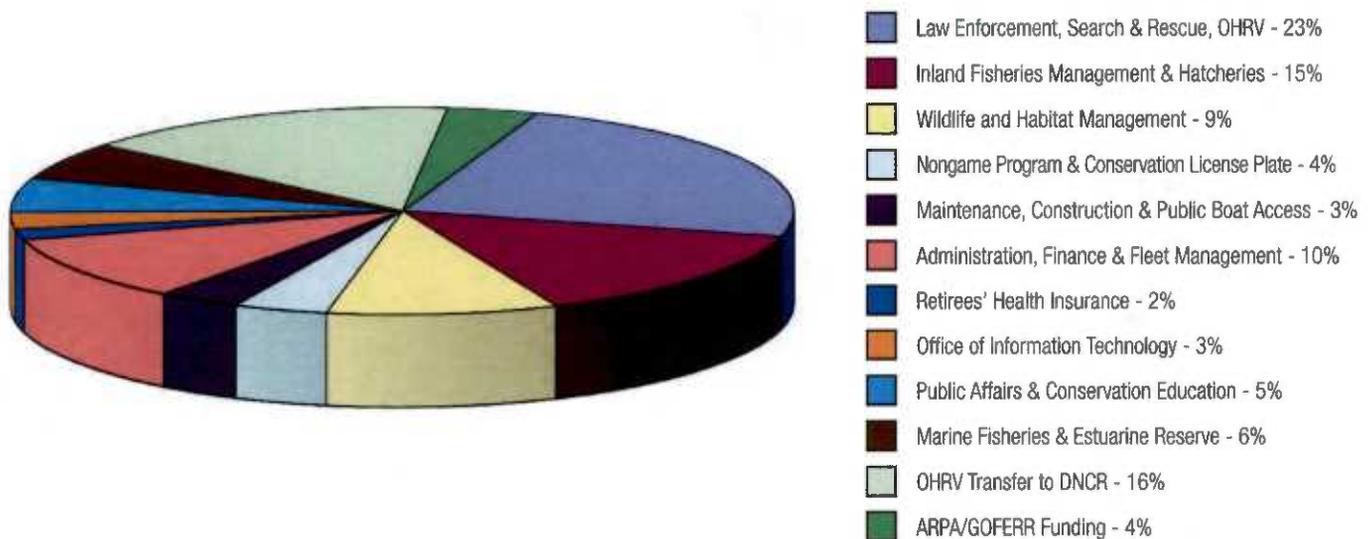
## WHERE THE MONEY COMES FROM...

TOTAL REVENUES\* (FY 2023): \$35,556,414



## WHERE THE MONEY GOES...

TOTAL EXPENDITURES (FY 2023): \$35,556,414



**\*License Fee Revenues:** Includes all resident and nonresident fishing and hunting licenses received for Fiscal Year 2023. The actual amount of license revenue received for the fiscal year was \$10,252,592.

**Other Miscellaneous Unrestricted Revenues:** Includes court and license agent fines and penalties, sales of surplus property and vehicles, miscellaneous sales and interest earnings.

**Total Expenditures of the Fish and Game fund for Fiscal Year 2023** per year-end Monthly Statement of Appropriation by Office is \$36,446,862. Included within this amount is \$890,448 of inter-fund expenditure reimbursements. Net result of expenditures for fiscal year 2023 is \$35,556,414.

**Other Agency Income:** \$5 Boat surcharge - \$370,289; \$1 Search and Rescue surcharge on boat, OHRV, and snowmobile registrations and the Hike Safe Card - \$581,774; Nongame donations and Conservation License Plate Funds - \$519,797; Wildlife Heritage Foundation Grant Funds - \$73,221; Other Donations \$47,880; Timber sales revenue \$483,120; Interest Earnings on Dedicated Funds - \$166,874; other miscellaneous income - \$562,105.

**Federal Funds:** Sport Fish Restoration Act (Dingell-Johnson and the Wallop-Breaux Amendment) for Inland fisheries management, boat access, and aquatic resources education - \$3,293,133; Wildlife Restoration Act (Pittman-Robertson) for wildlife management and hunter education - \$3,105,652; State Wildlife Grants - \$622,588; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for marine fisheries management, the Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve program, and marine law enforcement - \$1,411,033; other miscellaneous federal revenues - \$235,425.

