

## **Indiana State Report May 21, 2026**

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### **CMS**

Indiana celebrated its one-year anniversary with a new license system. With this updated system, customers experienced new features that made purchasing and obtaining licenses more efficient and convenient.

With the launch of activity packages, customers can now add all the required licenses to participate in species specific activities with a single click. Customers can also donate directly to an agency specific cause or purchase a gift card without creating an account. In addition, they now have the option to round up their purchase and donate directly to our Fish & Wildlife Fund.

Changing license systems can be a challenging transition for customers. We saw a very slight decrease in total license sales with a 0.44% decrease. Fishing licenses were up compared to 2024 by 1.68%. Deer licenses decreased by 1.35%, however revenue increased 1.36%, representing a continued trend of hunters purchasing the more expensive deer bundle license rather than single-privilege deer licenses. Turkey licenses saw a 0.71% increase in number of licenses sold compared to the previous year. Lastly, trapping licenses increased dramatically with the introduction of a bobcat trapping season. We sold 84.5% more trapping licenses in 2025 compared to 2024. This new opportunity generated \$132,730 in revenue, or a \$56,170 (73.4%) increase in revenue over the previous year.

### **Rule Changes**

The Natural Resources Commission gave final adoption (approval) to a new rule limiting the movement of fawns to individuals who hold wild animal rehabilitation permits in the CWD positive area, as well as restricting the area where an individual who holds a wild animal rehabilitation permit may release a deer. The intent of the change is to reduce human-assisted movement of CWD prions out of the infected area in potentially infected deer. The Natural Resources Commission also gave final adoption (approval) to a new rule that established a new bobcat trapping season, which started on November 8, 2025. Two public hearings were conducted, and thousands of comments were received during the rule-making process. Additional provisional administrative rule-making action was done to reduce the antlerless bag limits for deer in Jennings and Martin counties as the result of a severe epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) outbreak in Indiana last summer.

### **Inaugural bobcat season**

In March 2024, the Indiana General Assembly passed a law mandating a bobcat season be in place by fall 2025. The Division moved forward with rules regarding the season for fall 2025 implementation. Indiana's inaugural regulated bobcat season was limited to trapping only, had a bag limit of one bobcat per trapper and a season limit of 250. The season was open in 40 counties, primarily in southern Indiana. Limited trap types were allowed (footholds, cage traps,

cable devices). All bobcats caught had to be reported within 24 hours to the CheckIN Game system and then tagged in-person within 15 days after the month of harvest. In 2025, Indiana sold 1,642 bobcat licenses, which included 8 nonresidents. A total of 253 bobcats were harvested during the open season, which ran from November 8, 2025, until the quota was met on December 5, 2025.

### **R3 Efforts**

The Division advanced statewide R3 efforts in 2025 through strategic marketing, customer engagement initiatives, and the development of scalable educational resources designed to recruit, retain, and reactivate hunters and anglers.

To recruit and reactivate squirrel hunters, Indiana launched a geotargeted marketing campaign across the state's three primary urban centers. Advertisements directed users to landing pages featuring nearby public hunting access, resources, regulations, recipes, and license purchase links. The campaign resulted in a 51% increase in small game license sales compared to the same timeframe in the previous year and increased visitation at multiple featured public properties. Additionally, the campaign had more than 50,000 landing page views and attributed 5,071 license purchases generating more than \$320,000 in revenue.

The Division also developed an interactive Indianapolis-area fishing trip planner tool to reduce barriers to participation among women and families. Promoted through geotargeted advertising to lapsed and potential anglers, the tool generated more than 50,000 views, 452 attributed license purchases, and more than \$15,000 in revenue.

Additional customer engagement efforts included automated onboarding, abandoned cart, and season-specific marketing emails, which generated approximately \$80,000 in attributed revenue.

To support long-term R3 programming, the Division partnered with DJ Case & Associates to develop standardized, adult-focused hunting and fishing curriculum packages covering basic fishing, bass fishing, catfishing, squirrel hunting, deer hunting, and duck hunting. Initial evaluations showed 93% of participants reported increased confidence after attending an event. Courses will continue to expand statewide through staff and partner delivery in 2026.

### **Land Acquisition**

The Division purchased a total of 376 acres of land in 2025, adding important landholdings to public lands in counties that are underserved. A 136-acre parcel in Knox County, White Oak Wildlife Management Areas, was transferred to the Division from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) program. The AML Program made substantial restoration efforts at this property to address coal mine issues. Acquisitions also included a 14-acre addition to Baseline Barrens Nature Preserve in Washington County, a 13.78-acre inholding at Big Walnut Nature Preserve in Putnam County, and a 15.08-acre donation to the Hoosier Prairie Nature Preserve in Lake County. The Division received a 39.28-acre donation in Franklin County from the Ulrich Family. This will be dedicated in 2026 and will be the first state dedicated nature preserve in Franklin County. The Division completed a 158-acre acquisition project in Harrison County, the Virginia Willow Sinkhole Swamp. Lastly seven conservation easements on land owned and managed by partners were purchased. Most of these easements were funded through the State's recent Next Level Conservation Fund where \$22 million dollars were directed to land conservation efforts.

### **Interagency One Health Model**

The Indiana One Health Steering Committee is an interdepartmental partnership across Indiana state agencies that is dedicated to tackling complex challenges at the intersection of human, animal, and environmental health. Membership currently includes key staff from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, the Indiana State Board of Animal Health, and the Indiana Department of Health. As One Health challenges span diverse jurisdictional boundaries, the committee also includes other partners, including the Management Performance Hub, Department of Environmental Management, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Together this committee prepares unified responses and communication strategies for issues such as highly pathogenic avian influenza, rabies, and chronic wasting disease. This increases capacity for all programs involved and increases public trust because the state is reducing the frequency of conflicting messages related to high profile zoonotic disease issues. The committee meets each quarter to align departmental goals, share data summaries, and to evaluate statewide health concerns. These include both in-person and virtual meetings. In addition, a smaller response team subcommittee meets virtually every other week. This frequent interaction ensures adaptive and rapid response capacities for addressing interjurisdictional issues, such as zoonotic disease outbreaks and vector-borne illnesses. The committee is currently developing a formal interagency agreement to help ensure the permanency of the partnership. This agreement will establish group responsibilities, define clear department roles, and clarify the overarching goals between member groups. By adopting this structured model, the agreement will ensure that Indiana's One Health committee remains resilient through changing administrations and responsive to emerging One Health challenges in the state.

### **Wildlife Considerations in Economic Development and Wildlife Passage**

The Division reviewed over 1,500 projects consisting of nearly 460 stream projects, over 130 lake projects, 52 mine reclamation projects, and 850 Environmental Reviews. These projects range from home renovations to warehouse developments, large piers, road projects, low head dam removals, and more. In 2025, Biologists approved 88 projects which saw fish and wildlife passage maintained or improved. Common recommendations for passage include constructed benches beneath bridges, improved stream substrates in culverts, amphibian and fish passageways, dam removals, and other wildlife crossing designs. The Environmental Unit has continued to actively partner with the Indiana Department of Transportation to provide input on the development of a GIS tool for identifying Wildlife Vehicle Collision (WVCs) hotspots and setting better standards of communication for more cost-effective wildlife outcomes in bridge reconstruction. Additionally, the Environmental Unit's ROaDS Indiana (Roadkill Observation and Data System), a Survey123 application, has seen around 5,500 records to date.

### **Big Rivers Catfish Monitoring**

The Big Rivers Fisheries Program completed the second year of a three-year effort to monitor catfish populations in the Wabash and White Rivers in Indiana. This collaborative effort with Ball State University and Eastern Illinois University is designed to provide a comprehensive assessment of Channel, Flathead and Blue Catfish populations in these rivers. The project is collecting key biological and population metrics, including length distributions, body condition, relative abundance, and age and growth information. Because these rivers support both sport and commercial fisheries with diverse angler groups, goals, and motivations, the resulting data will

give the Division an improved ability to evaluate current catfish management strategies and assess whether existing regulations remain appropriate for Indiana's larger river systems.

### **Fanshell Augmentation**

The Division has partnered with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management and the US Fish & Wildlife Service to identify priority conservation projects for federally endangered mussels in Indiana. Building on this collaborative effort the team worked with the Kentucky Center for Mollusk Conservation to translocate 100 adult Fanshell mussels from the Licking River in Kentucky to the East Fork White River in Indiana, as pilot individuals for future species recovery efforts. Twelve of the translocated mussels were PIT-tagged to allow long-term monitoring of survival and growth. If the initial translocation proves successful, propagation efforts will be initiated with the species, and additional adults will be translocated in the future.

### **Patoka Lake Fish Habitat Enhancement Project Summary**

Since 2019 a total of 499 artificial fish habitat structures and over 350 shoreline trees have been added to Patoka Lake to enhance fish habitat. The addition of these structures aims to further improve the lake's fishery and the fishing experience for anglers. Most recently in January of this year, DNR staff and Indiana BASS Nation built MossBack fish habitat structures at Patoka Lake. The structures were then placed in the lake in late February. The structures were purchased through the AFTCO x BASS Nation Conservation Grant Program. The American Fishing Tackle Company (AFTCO) awarded the grant to Indiana's chapter of BASS Nation. MossBack matched the grant-funded purchase and donated additional fish structures to the cause. Indiana DNR was also able to contribute additional structures, resulting in 83 total MossBacks. The structures purchased with the grant and those donated from Mossback were a part of their new Tournament Recovery Zone package. Patoka Lake's enhancement project has been in the works since 2019 and would not be possible without our many partners and volunteers who have contributed to this effort. The placed structures' locations are now viewable on Indiana DNR's Reservoir Habitat Enhancement Program webpage.

### **Tri-Lakes Bass Population Improvement Project**

The Division is now in the third year of a five-year management project designed to improve the size structure and overall balance of the Largemouth Bass population at Tri-Lakes (Big Cedar, Little Cedar, and Round Lakes) in Whitley County. Historical surveys, along with feedback from local anglers, indicated that the bass population had become stunted and was showing below-average growth rates. To address this, biologists are removing Largemouth Bass through targeted electrofishing efforts. The management goal is to remove approximately 1,000 bass per year over five years and monitor the biological response of the population. A total of 2,000 bass have been removed. All removed bass are being relocated to J.E. Roush Reservoir. Before transport, each fish receives a jaw tag so anglers can easily identify them and report future catches back to biologists. These angler reports help track survival, movement, and growth after relocation. Continued removals through 2028 will allow biologists to evaluate biological changes in the Tri-Lakes bass population and determine whether the management strategy is effectively improving growth rates, size structure, and overall population balance.

### **Deer, Coyote, Turkey Density Project**

The Division's multiyear collaboration with Purdue University is developing spatially explicit density maps for deer, coyotes, and turkeys, while also examining how disease dynamics—particularly Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) and bovine tuberculosis (Btb)—affect wildlife populations across Indiana. Using extensive infrared and RGB surveys from crewed aircraft and drones, combined with ground-based camera deployments and environmental modeling, the project is creating the state's most comprehensive dataset on species densities and post disease population recovery. Early progress includes more than 1,700 aircraft transects, over 400 drone surveys, widespread camera deployment, and initial susceptible–exposed–infectious (SEI) disease transmission modeling. Hardware upgrades, semiautomated image processing workflows, and generalized linear mixed model (GLMM) validation efforts are underway to reduce bottlenecks and improve predictive accuracy. Ultimately, the project will equip the DNR with high resolution density maps, enhanced disease surveillance tools, and robust modeling frameworks to guide harvest decisions, support recovery following disease outbreaks, and assess cross species disease transmission risks.

### **Wildlife Conservation Efforts and Hunting Access on Private Lands**

The Division has connected hunters with access to 32,789 acres of private property under the Indiana Private Lands Access Program (IPLA) since the program's inception. This program continues to be extremely popular, offering financial incentives to landowners who allow controlled public hunting access for gamebirds, turkey, deer, waterfowl, and small game. Surveys show 82% of participating hunters and 100% of participating landowners are either happy or extremely happy with the IPLA program.

The Division guides the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) and Grasslands for Gamebirds & Songbirds Initiative (GGS) habitat development efforts in Indiana. The SAFE initiative, within the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), provides financial and technical assistance to landowners needed to achieve species-specific wildlife habitat goals on their property. SAFE is the largest portion of CRP in Indiana, making up 54,768 acres, or 31%+ of the program statewide. The Division holds a contribution agreement with USDA-NRCS to provide management plans, burn plans, workshops, status reviews, and practice certifications on SAFE and other wildlife practices through CRP. GGS is a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) in its second iteration after seeing outstanding success in the program's first round of funding. GGS 2.0 expanded the program geographically and brought in over \$2.6 million dollars and 23 partners together to enhance wildlife habitat on private land across Indiana. To date, 5,918 acres of habitat have been developed in partnership with 561 landowners with a goal of over 6,370 acres of grassland and pollinator habitat by project end in 2027.

### **Lake and River Enhancement (LARE) Program**

The Division's Lake and River Enhancement (LARE) Program supports the long term health of the state's lakes and streams through cost-share grants targeting restoration and management projects. Funded through a dedicated fee collected from boat registrations, the program provides matching grants for efforts such as sediment and logjam removal, aquatic invasive species control, shoreline and streambank stabilization, engineering design, and watershed planning. Its primary purpose is to improve water quality, protect aquatic habitats, and maintain safe, accessible waterways for public use.

Over \$2.4 million dollars in cost-share grants were awarded in 2025 with awards totaling over \$1.2 million for Biological and Engineering (diagnostic and feasibility studies, engineering designs, construction, and dam removal) projects, more than \$600,000 for sediment removal and planning, over \$473,000 for aquatic invasive species management, \$57,000 for watershed land treatment projects, and \$35,000 for logjam removal.

Significant 2025 projects included completion of the Williams Dam Feasibility Study, which evaluated full or partial removal of the DNR owned dam on the East Fork of the White River downstream of Bedford, Indiana. The study provides a comprehensive, science-based assessment addressing project costs and affordability, public safety, ecological health, water resources, and community input, and will guide the Department's future actions at the site.

In addition, LARE completed several major bank stabilization projects, including work along the Wabash River, where more than 1,700 feet of streambank was stabilized along an outer bend adjacent to agricultural property. This reach had lost nearly two acres of land since 2011, contributing over 52,000 tons of sediment to the river. Restoration work included re-sloping the near vertical bank along the entire project reach, stabilizing the toe with root wads and stone, and installing native trees, brush, and seed.

### **Video Highlights 2025: Removing Barriers**

In 2025, the Division focused on informational materials that sought to remove barriers for our customers and partners. Several highlights include a CWD video series for hunters and partners designed to improve the quality and quantity of samples by sharing best practices related to head drop coolers and sample collection. To assist customers using the new license system for the first time, the team created a series of instructional videos. Leveraging existing R3 research and known knowledge gaps among our customers, the team collaborated with our R3 program to create the following videos: an overview of Indiana hunter orange requirements, introductions to our Where to Hunt and Where to Fish databases, an explanation of regulations related to apprentice licenses, an overview of our Sport License Finder and a recorded webinar that explained new deer regulations. These resources are practical, relevant, and evergreen – providing our customers the tools and information they need to more easily plan, access and enjoy their adventures in the field.

### **Indiana State Fairgrounds Landscaping Project**

The Division's Stewardship program led a multi-year project to overhaul the landscaped areas at the DNR complex at the Indiana State Fairgrounds, to include the creation of related education materials and programming. One of the primary goals is to develop a cadre of repeat and self-managing volunteers to maintain the plantings over time. The project team established a schedule for annual routine maintenance, a group of dedicated and skilled volunteers solidified over the year, and we hosted the first-ever volunteer recognition event to wrap up the season. In addition to the benefits of engaging new audiences, the division is able to build capacity by leveraging these volunteers. In 2025, 42 volunteers donated 202 hours on the project, yielding \$4,671.82 in match.