



2025 ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND 2026 INITIATIVES



OHIO DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

LETTER FROM THE CHIEF



The Ohio Division of Wildlife had a busy and productive year in 2025. The agency saw successes in new and ongoing initiatives through wildlife research, population recovery efforts, law enforcement, engagement with Ohioans, and much more.

Opening the Put-in-Bay Aquatic Visitor Center with a financial investment from Governor DeWine and the Ohio General Assembly was one of our proudest accomplishments. The center will introduce thousands of people to the history, management, fishing, and recreation on Lake Erie. We are grateful to preserve the area's history while providing education for the future.

This year, we rallied public help to complete a bald eagle nest census and documented 964 nesting pairs in our Buckeye State, a leap from previous estimates and the 2020 census that reported 707 nests. Exciting research on Ohio's growing black bear population took new strides and we're looking forward to sharing those results with you as we learn more.

We love helping Ohioans discover new ways to enjoy our wildlife resources. The updated Lake Erie Birding Trail guidebook and website were a great way to show off 90 birding hotspots on our north coast. Saugeye were stocked in Grand Lake St. Marys, giving western Ohio anglers a chance to catch this ever-popular sport fish in the near future. Those were among tens of millions of sport fish we have stocked in public waters this year.

Another exciting fish stocking was reintroducing lake sturgeon in the Cuyahoga, Sandusky, and Scioto rivers for the first time, and continuing restoration efforts in the Maumee River for this state-endangered species.

I'm proud of our amazing staff's accomplishments and deeply appreciate the support of Ohio's passionate sportsmen and women. It's rewarding to see our hard work pay off through the smiles on the faces of happy anglers, hunters, trappers, and birders and there were lots of those this year. The deer season concluded in February with the fourth-highest harvest total ever, 238,137; the spring turkey season saw 16,014 birds taken; and anglers in 2024 tallied 10,284 Fish Ohio awards.

Thank you to all who enjoy Ohio's wildlife and support our work. We move into the U.S. 250th anniversary celebration in 2026 knowing we can tackle any challenge because we're backed by Ohio's conservation community.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kendra J. Wecker".

– Kendra Wecker, Chief



The Ohio Division of Wildlife's mission is to conserve and improve fish and wildlife resources and their habitats for sustainable use and appreciation by all.

2025 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



PUT-IN-BAY AQUATIC VISITOR CENTER

CONSERVATION COMMITMENT

- **Wildlife Education:** Ohio Division of Wildlife staff showcased Project WILD and our other education materials at a dozen conferences, reaching almost 11,000 educators with programs, demonstrations, and distribution of materials. New this year was a course called Tick Trek Adventure that teaches students about tick-borne illnesses. This topic pairs with another activity that highlights mosquito-borne illnesses.
- **WILD School Sites:** Forty Wildlife Education grants, a total of \$20,000, were distributed to help more than 4,000 educators and students create habitat on their school grounds, include wildlife education materials in their classes, and take wildlife-related field trips throughout Ohio.
- **Visitor Centers:** The new Put-in-Bay Aquatic Visitor Center opened in August 2025 and hosted more than 10,000 visitors in its first two months. The renovation showcases Lake Erie ecology, fish management, local wildlife, and habitat. The center is open April to October to visitors. The Magee Marsh Visitor Center helped host the annual Biggest Week in American Birding festival and welcomed more than 75,000 visitors through its doors and to its world-famous boardwalk to observe the spring migration of more than 200 bird species.
- **Ohio Center for Wildlife Conservation:** The Columbus Zoo and Aquarium retrofitted a building that has become the Ohio Center for Wildlife Conservation through a partnership with the Ohio Division of Wildlife and funding provided by the USFWS. This facility houses amphibian, reptile, and invertebrate repatriation efforts and is part of the new North America Trek area at the zoo. It highlights Ohio Division of Wildlife conservation efforts for the 2 million people who visit the zoo annually. The facility was dedicated in June 2025.
- **4H Programs:** The division helped 4H programs certify 208 adult shooting sports instructors across the state, bringing shooting sports programming to new counties. Additionally, more than 240 children attended weeklong shooting sports trainings to prepare these youth for mentor roles within their 4H programs.
- **Wild Ohio Harvest:** Participation in recruitment, retention, and reactivation courses neared 1,000 in attendance at fishing, cooking, hunting, and processing classes. Surveys of attendees showed satisfaction rates of 87-98% rated excellent. Eighty-five percent of participants in these programs requested more information for future classes as well.
- **Conservation Clubs:** More than \$1.6 million in Conservation Club Partnership Grants were awarded to 164 Ohio organizations and agencies for conducting fishing, hunting, and shooting activities. These partnerships engaged nearly 22,000 youth and 14,000 adults in outdoor recreation events across the state.

PUBLIC OUTREACH & STAFF COMMITMENT

- **Responsive Deer Regulations:** The Ohio Wildlife Council held a special meeting in Athens to discuss an Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) outbreak in several southeast counties. An initial proposal was adjusted following public feedback. In response to the outbreak, the Ohio Wildlife Council approved reducing deer hunting bag limits in Athens, Meigs, Morgan, and Washington counties.
- **Hatchery Open Houses:** Open houses were held at the six Ohio Division of Wildlife fish hatcheries, featuring areas where coldwater, cool-water, and warmwater production facilities raise more than 40 million fish each year to stock statewide. Attendance was a combined 3,600 at these events, and continues to increase.
- **Lake Erie Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Certification:** Ohio and Ontario collaborated with their commercial fishing industries to complete the annual audit of MSC sustainability certification. This represents the ninth consecutive year of maintaining the MSC certification for sustainable management of Percid fisheries.
- **State Wildlife Action Plan:** Ohio completed an update of its State Wildlife Action Plan and submitted it for federal approval. This plan helps protect the state's most at-risk wildlife by identifying key threats and outlining conservation actions. Updated every 10 years with input from valued partners, it ensures Ohio remains eligible for federal funding to support wildlife conservation efforts.
- **Social Media:** The Ohio Division of Wildlife's Facebook page has more than 208,000 followers, our largest audience to date. Total followers across all four platforms, (Facebook, X, LinkedIn, and Instagram) average 235,000 annually. Posts reached more than 1.4 million viewers annually. Social media has also been a proven driver of attendees to our R3 and Wild Ohio Harvest programs, with 36% of attendees saying they found out about their event on social media.
- **Marketing:** More than 8.5 million emails were sent out for a variety of campaigns, including license or tag purchase reminders, lottery and controlled hunting or fishing opportunities, survey participation for fish and wildlife management goals, Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry program, and more. Revenue generated from these campaigns was \$2.6 million from 115,185 products.
- **GIS Dashboards Published:** Geographic Information Systems (GIS) were used to develop informational dashboards for the public to report and query location-specific information. These include the Woodland Trails Wildlife Area fish access permitting system, the bald eagle nest public reporting system and viewer, an Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) public reporting system and web viewer, various law enforcement trackers (AIS, Investigations, Pollution and Restitution), and an expansion of the daily waterfowl hunt draws to Tuesdays.

2025 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Deer Donation Program Initiative:** Ohio's new Deer Donation Program, launched in fall 2025, gives hunters a chance to help families in need by donating harvested deer to local food banks. This effort supports deer population management goals while providing healthy, high-protein venison to fight food insecurity. The program is a partnership between the Ohio Division of Wildlife and Ohio Penal Industries (OPI). Donated deer are processed in OPI's facility at Pickaway Correctional Institution, where offenders gain valuable training in meat processing. The venison is then safely packaged and distributed through Ohio's food bank network.
- **Wildlife Protection Successes:** Multiple high-profile cases were resolved, including an illegal taxidermy business. The offenders had collected and sold animal parts without proper permits, including species protected under state and international laws. Both were found guilty of multiple wildlife violations and ordered to pay more than \$38,000 in restitution.
- **Podcast and YouTube Channel:** Launched the WildOhio.gov YouTube channel to highlight wildlife stories, conservation efforts, and informational content. Content on the channel includes the WildOhio Podcast, WildOhio video series, and Species Spotlights. More than 35 videos have been posted since its inception in January 2025, and the channel has grown to nearly 350 subscribers. The WildOhio podcast was launched in February 2025 as another avenue for constituents to hear from experts across Ohio about fish management, wildlife management, outdoor recreation, and conservation programs. The podcast has almost 5,000 downloads with listeners from 14 countries and 37 states plus Washington, D.C.
- **A Guide to Ohio Streams:** A Guide to Ohio Streams (2001) was updated and will be distributed through a partnership with the Ohio Chapter of the American Fisheries Society. Revision of this popular book was led by the original author (Randy Sanders) and illustrator (Ronald Zimmerman). Funding for this publication was made possible through Monsanto Settlement Funds.
- **Small Trees and Shrubs Field Guide:** Working with the Division of Forestry, the Ohio Division of Wildlife published a new field guide on the small trees and shrubs of Ohio and their benefits to wildlife. The new field guide debuted at the Wildlife Diversity Conference in March. Twenty-five thousand copies were printed, and the guide can also be found online at wildohio.gov.
- **ACI Awards:** The Ohio Division of Wildlife earned national honors this year from the Association for Conservation Information. Wild Ohio Magazine was awarded first place as the best magazine; an article in Wild Ohio 2024 Issue 2, "Form and Function: Ohio's Various Bird Nests," won first place in the wildlife article category; the 2024 Ohio Wildlife Legacy Stamp won first place in the one-time publication category; Ohio's World of Wildlife K-2 Identification Guide earned second place in the education category, Wild Ohio's calendar took third place in the calendar category; and the Warblers of Ohio field guide received third place as a book/report.

UPGRADED FACILITIES & EQUIPMENT

- **Alum Creek Boat Access:** The Ohio Division of Wildlife and Division of Parks and Watercraft completed renovations of the Cheshire Road and park campground boating access facilities at Alum Creek Lake. New concrete ramps, ADA floating docks, and additional parking spaces were included.
- **Expanding and Replacing Fishing Piers:** New and replaced, ADA-certified fishing piers were installed at Knox Lake, Oxbow Lake, Mogadore Reservoir, Tycoon Lake, and Cowan Lake to increase public access. Several of these installations were facilitated by partners in the Division of Parks and Watercraft heavy equipment operators.

- **London Fish Hatchery Improvement Project:** Water supply piping and pumps throughout the hatchery were replaced. This project will consolidate and modernize water supply lines throughout the hatchery to secure and improve fish production. Also, a modernized fish display pool was constructed at the front of the hatchery for public to view fish.
- **Shreve Lake Dam Rehabilitation:** The Shreve Dam rehabilitation project will bring Shreve Lake back for improved fishing and public benefit. The project included removal and replacement of the principal spillway, discharge conduit, stilling basin, toe drain, and slope protection. Parking lot improvements and installation of a new fishing pier and kayak launch were also completed.

CONSERVING HABITAT

- **Habitat Improvement Projects:** Wildlife staff coordinated the completion of 4,800 acres of timber stand improvement, 6,000 acres of aerial herbicide spraying, 2,255 acres of grassland maintenance, and 180 acres of heavy brush clearing. These habitat improvement projects encouraged new growth of beneficial plants and increased space for wildlife. Staff also actively managed 9,420 acres of wetlands to improve water quality and promote native wildlife species.
- **H2Ohio Habitat Projects:** Across Ohio, H2Ohio projects are making a difference for water quality and wildlife, thanks to strong partnerships with local conservation groups. Current efforts include the Croatian Lodge dam removal; Phase 2 of the Hocking River Shelly Lakes Wetland Project with Appalachia Ohio Alliance; Lower Killbuck Creek Projects at Crane Swamp Preserve and Bowfin Bottoms with the Killbuck Watershed Land Trust; and the Aukerman Creek Stream Restoration with the Preble County Historical Society. Staff also provided technical guidance for restoring 870 acres of wetlands on private property and oversaw the completion of six wetland restoration projects.
- **Habitat Acquisition:** Added 1,686 acres of forest and grassland habitat to Tri-Valley Wildlife Area in Muskingum and Coshocton counties. Accepted 122 acres from The Nature Conservancy, nearly doubling the area and protecting riparian habitat at Fish Creek Wildlife area in Williams County, and 20 acres from Lucas County Commissioners that included a fishing access ramp at the Cooley Canal. Finally, AEP donated their former maintenance facility to provide workspace for staff and equipment at Appalachian Hills Wildlife Area.
- **OLHAP Enrollment:** Ohio Landowner-Hunter Access Program (OLHAP) recently signed up 115 properties in 30 counties for 19,730 acres. Deer gun hunting was incorporated into the OLHAP program with approximately 75% of landowners electing to allow this activity. A total of 11,163 daily hunting permits were issued on these properties.
- **Libben Farms Wetland Restoration:** This project connects 134 acres of agricultural land and nearby residential storm water to 13 acres of newly restored and managed wetlands. Water is collected from the surrounding area and pumped into the newly restored wetland for treatment before release directly to the Portage River, 5 miles upstream of Lake Erie.
- **Lee Wehner Wetland Restoration and Water Quality Project:** This project diverts 402 acres of agricultural drainage into an existing 23-acre CREP wetland. A new pump basin diverts water from a nearby drainage ditch into the wetland.
- **Tallman Wetland and Water Quality Project:** Water from the surrounding 179 acres of agricultural drainage now flows into a new 5-acre emergent wetland restored through Lake Erie CREP. The scope included the installation of a pump basin and water channel to divert the agricultural drainage into the new wetland.

2025 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



LAKE STURGEON

- **Mallard Club Wildlife Area East:** A 43-acre managed coastal marsh in the Mallard Club Wildlife Area was restored for nutrient and sediment reduction. A pump was installed to divert agricultural runoff into the wetland before the water is returned to Lake Erie. A second water control structure increases water quality.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

- **Lake Sturgeon Restoration in Lake Erie:** Large scale young-of-year lake sturgeon restoration stocking was implemented in the Cuyahoga (2,000 fish) and Sandusky (750 fish) rivers for the first time, along with continuation of annual Maumee River (3,000 fish) stocking that began in 2018. Lake sturgeon recaptures by Ohio trap net fishers and agency surveys have become frequent from Toledo to Lorain, with the largest fish now surpassing 40 inches. The restoration plans were informed by Habitat Suitability Indices that assessed the expectation of success, and partnerships with federal agencies, universities, and local community partners allowed the capacity to commit to 25-year strategies. Ongoing research will allow evaluation of survival and eventual characterization of adult return rates to program rivers.
- **Hellbender Repatriation:** The number of human-raised 3-year-old eastern hellbenders surpassed 2,000 through a partnership with the Columbus Zoo, Toledo Zoo, PENTA Career Center, and the Wilds. Indian Creek High School in Jefferson County was added as a partner and is raising 20 eastern hellbenders for release in 2026. A significant milestone was reached when several human-raised male eastern hellbenders were observed guarding nests where previously released.
- **Muskellunge Research Helps Protect Trophy Fishery:** After 10 years of research, biologists found that dam design and rainfall can impact muskie escapement through dam outflows. The study looked at four reservoirs to understand how dam design, operation, and rainfall affect fish loss. Results showed that fish are more likely to escape from unregulated dams, especially during wet years, which can impact the quality of fishing. In contrast, dams with more controlled outflows helped keep stocked fish in the reservoir. This research will help guide future stocking strategies and inform dam management decisions to better protect Ohio's trophy muskellunge fisheries.
- **Wildlife Research to Protect Native Species:** The Ohio Division of Wildlife continues to lead innovative research to better understand and protect native species. In 2024 and 2025, biologists captured and leg-banded 219 wild turkeys and fitted 97 hens with GPS transmitters to study survival and reproduction. Research teams also placed GPS collars on 19 gray foxes to gather data on habitat use and survival. In the state's eastern regions, staff captured and marked four black bears as part of a new study on colonization. Additionally, a statewide small mammal survey led to the first confirmed sighting of the state-threatened eastern harvest mouse in more than 20 years, an exciting milestone for species monitoring and conservation.
- **Ohio's Native Bees:** The Ohio Division of Wildlife partnered with The Ohio State University to undertake a comprehensive survey of Ohio's bee species. A database has been created documenting more than 450 bee species from Ohio. However, 70 of these species were not documented in the recent survey, indicating they may be extirpated from the state. Working with other midwestern states, 17 species are considered to be of conservation concern because of nesting habitat loss, impacts from insecticides, and overall rarity. The most species were found in the forests of the Allegheny Plateau in eastern and southeastern Ohio.
- **Allegheny Woodrat Propagation:** The Ohio Division of Wildlife celebrated the birth of the state's first captive-bred Allegheny woodrats through a propagation program with the Toledo Zoo and Aquarium that supports genetic augmentation of Ohio's wild population. Field teams conducted comprehensive disease surveillance at four home sites in Adams County during May 2025, with laboratory analysis revealing no evidence of raccoon roundworm. These combined efforts in captive breeding and parasite monitoring represent critical progress toward recovery of this endangered species in Ohio.
- **Ohio River Sauger Spawning Characteristics:** Two new research projects began in 2025 to better understand variation in spawning success of Ohio River sauger. One project focused on changes in reproductive physiology before, during, and after the spawning period (early March–early April) and the other project identified local-scale movement and habitat use of adult sauger during the main fishing season (late fall–early spring) and spawning period. Results will inform sauger management in the Ohio River and future hatchery production of sauger for Lake Erie reintroduction which will be initiated in 2026.
- **Copperbelly Watersnake Habitat Restoration:** Lake La Su An Wildlife Area in northwestern Ohio received 16 acres of native tree seedlings to enhance habitat for the endangered copperbelly water snake. This rare snake prefers wooded wetlands to hunt for fish, frogs, and other small animals. This project is part of a larger effort to protect this species and stabilize the population. In a new partnership with the Toledo Zoo and Aquarium and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, several copperbelly watersnakes were collected from the wildlife area to establish a captive breeding colony.



METZGER MARSH WILDLIFE AREA

PUBLIC OUTREACH & STAFF COMMITMENT

- **America 250:** As part of the America 250-Ohio Celebration, the Ohio Division of Wildlife will celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 2026 with scheduled events at select public locations. Ohio's public lands have a deep, rich history, and special celebrations are a chance to share that with visitors in the Buckeye State.
- **Podcast Improvements:** In January 2026, the podcast will be video recorded in the new studio. The studio features a brick-look wall, a WildOhio Podcast neon sign, and a live-edge wooden table. Adding video to the podcast will give YouTube viewers a more immersive experience through props and graphics, while still allowing listeners on other platforms to enjoy the audio version.
- **Wildlife Officer Cadets:** The hiring process was initiated to add wildlife officer cadets in 2026. This will maintain the Ohio Division of Wildlife's goal to keep one wildlife officer in all 88 Ohio counties.
- **Outfitter Accreditation:** A voluntary outfitter accreditation program was launched in April 2025. Additional messaging and outreach efforts are in the works to gain interest and advertise the program benefits to hunters planning trips from out of state. The program aims to improve consumer confidence when selecting an outfitter based on their accreditation status, strengthen the reputation of the outfitting industry in Ohio, and enhance communication with stakeholders.
- **Licensing System Upgrades:** The new Ohio Wildlife Licensing System (OWLS) will modernize the sales interface and provide customers with an intuitive e-commerce experience. OWLS will also launch a new HuntFish OH mobile app for the public to keep track of their licenses and harvests. For the agency, the enhanced event management features will allow the public to register for all Ohio Division of Wildlife classes and workshops in a single interface. This will create a better journey for the customers and allow the agency to more fully engage with customers.
- **Backyards for Wildlife:** The Ohio Division of Wildlife will re-launch the Backyards for Wildlife program. First established in the 1990s, this program helps property owners establish and maintain habitat for all manner of native Ohio wildlife. The program will provide up-to-date information on quality habitat projects such as bird feeding stations, pollinator gardens, nesting structures and more. Participants can find information on our website starting in Spring 2026 and can also apply to be a certified Ohio Backyard for Wildlife. This free program will provide a certificate and a sign to be posted on the property.

- **New Field Guides:** Two new booklets in the educational field guide series will be produced and printed. Mushrooms of Ohio will highlight nearly 70 common mushroom species. Summer Wildflowers of Ohio, created in collaboration with the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves, will be a companion piece to the popular Spring Wildflowers of Ohio field guide.

CONSERVING HABITAT

- **H2Ohio Wetland Restorations:** Several H2Ohio-funded wetland restoration projects will begin in 2026, including the installation of a new pump at Tower Marsh in Erie County, which is the site of a larger Wildlife Aid in Restoration-funded project across Tower and Dinky marshes. In addition, construction of the Sandford ditch treatment train project will begin, including a 680-linear-foot conservation ditch and 2.5-acre wetland in Erie County. Finally, renovation of 3,300 linear feet of dikes will take place on the green-tree reservoir at Pickerel Creek Wildlife Area in Sandusky County.
- **Wildlife Habitat Initiative Launch:** A new conservation program, the Wildlife Habitat Initiative, offers incentive payments to farmers and landowners who implement conservation practices to improve wildlife habitat. The program focuses on supporting habitat for grassland birds, pollinators, and other native wildlife. Implementing the Wildlife Habitat Initiative in partnership with the National Bobwhite & Grassland Initiative Foundation will provide \$9 million of USDA funding to restore and manage grassland and other wildlife habitats on private lands.
- **Treat Wetland Invasive Vegetation:** A drone will treat 6,500 acres of Ohio Division of Wildlife-owned wetlands in the Lake Erie watershed as part of a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant. This project is a collaboration with the divisions of Parks and Natural Areas to treat a larger area of adjacent properties to improve eradication efforts.
- **Mallard Club Wildlife Area:** This project will enhance 261 acres of managed coastal marsh in the Mallard Club Wildlife Area for nutrient and sediment reduction. New equipment will provide a water source for the management of the coastal wetlands. Phosphorous and nitrogen will be removed through natural processes before the water flows to Lake Erie. Approximately 10,000 feet of degraded embankments will be renovated by bringing them to a uniform height.
- **Pickerel Creek Wildlife Area Wetland Enhancement:** Invasive vegetation on 135 acres at Pickerel Creek Wildlife Area will be treated to allow for better water level control. Water control structures will be replaced and an existing pump station will be modified.



WILD TURKEY HEN WITH POULTS

FACILITY UPGRADES

- **Lake Erie Research Vessel Delivery:** The R/V Walleye, a new fisheries research vessel that will replace the R/V Explorer at the Sandusky Fisheries Research Station, is scheduled to be completed and delivered in 2026. The 55-foot vessel will be used to conduct fisheries surveys in the western basin. Data collected onboard this vessel will support interagency management of the Ohio Lake Erie sport fishery, which contributes \$1 billion to the economy each year.
- **Reservoir Access Improvements:** The Ohio Division of Wildlife is partnering with the City of Columbus to improve the Walnut Street boat launch at Hoover Reservoir. A new concrete boat ramp with improved grooving and floating docks will be installed and parking lot improvements and shoreline stabilization will be added. A partnership project with the Division of Parks and Watercraft will support renovations at the boat launch near Deer Creek Marina. The project includes construction of a new concrete ramp, installation of wider floating docks and fabric rock channel protection, improvements to parking with replacement of asphalt, re-stripping, and the addition of lighting.
- **Hebron Fish Hatchery Improvement Project:** Hebron State Fish Hatchery renovations will replace the water supply and filtration infrastructure at the hatchery and make several improvements to the ponds including addition of electricity, new supply and drain lines, and new fish catch boxes. This project will result in much higher water quality and enhance and secure annual fish production upon completion.
- **Shooting Range Improvements:** The Grand River Range will be opening early spring of 2026 with additional opportunities, improved accessibility, and enhanced safety. The renovated range will include more shooting positions and electronic targets to provide instant and accurate feedback. The facility will also include an outdoor education center, a range master building, a shotgun range, an elevated ADA platform, and a walking archery course. The outdoor education building at the Delaware Range will be expanded to create an outdoor education classroom. A maintenance building will be added to store equipment along with lighting, a PA system, and security camera upgrades. Additionally, the archery walking course will be improved for better accessibility and management of drainage. At the Deer Creek Range, amenities will promote user safety and comfort. Facilities will be upgraded for improved accessibility, and the range will be shifted to meet required floodplain guidelines.
- **Wildlife Area Visitor Centers and Trails:** The visitor center at Appalachian Hills is opening in the spring of 2026. The visitor center will include a bison enclosure, animal shelter, and surrounding trail. Trails are completed that will connect to the larger Buckeye Trail. Two shelter houses are planned in the state to house education programming

and encourage public events. One will be located at Appalachian Hills and the other at Magee Marsh Wildlife Area. The Magee Marsh facility was made possible by support from the Friends of Magee Marsh and will include access to the fishing pier for angling programming at the nearby pond.

- **New Airplane Arriving:** Scheduled to arrive in 2026, the Ohio Division of Wildlife's new P68C airplane will replace two aging aircraft. The aircraft will be used to assist law enforcement staff in monitoring Lake Erie commercial fishing as well as illegal deer hunting activity. The airplane can also assist wildlife management staff with research efforts for deer, wild turkeys, and waterfowl.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

- **Sauger Returning to Lake Erie Tributaries:** In partnership with University of Toledo, the Ohio Division of Wildlife has completed a habitat suitability index for sauger spawning in the Maumee and Sandusky rivers. These rivers once supported natural sauger reproduction before the species was extirpated from the region. The study found suitable habitat for sauger as well as walleye. With this promising data in hand, 2026 will mark the launch of Ohio's Sauger Restoration Plan. Long-term plans include maximizing fingerling production and using excess fry for annual stockings in both rivers.
- **The Naturalist's Guide to the Freshwater Mussels of Ohio:** The Ohio Division of Wildlife and the Ohio Biological Survey will unveil the publication entitled A Naturalist's Guide to the Freshwater Mussels of Ohio, by Michael Hoggarth, Otterbein University, at the Wildlife Diversity Conference in 2026.
- **Plains Gartersnake:** Killdeer Plains Wildlife Area provides habitat for the easternmost population of the plains gartersnake in the U.S. This wildlife area has been routinely surveyed for snakes since 1999. During these surveys, staff searched for head-started plains gartersnakes that were raised and released by the Columbus and Cleveland zoos over the last decade. Ten individuals were captured at Killdeer Plains in 2025. Of the 10, five were transported to the Columbus Zoo to support their captive breeding program and future releases at Killdeer Plains Wildlife Area.
- **Wild Turkey Study:** The multi-year telemetry study into wild turkey nesting behavior and the survival of hens and poults, conducted in collaboration with The Ohio State University, will conclude in 2026, with monitoring continuing into 2027. Results from this study will inform wild turkey management.
- **Black Bear Research:** The Ohio Bear Project will continue to shed light on the status of black bears in the state in coordination with the University of Dayton. Researchers aim to trap and GPS collar female black bears and collect data through trail cameras and public reports.