

**MICHIGAN  
STATE REPORT**  
June 15, 2026

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**STAFFING**

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has approximately 1,400 permanent employees, 1,600 non-career/seasonal employees, and a \$543.2 million budget that supports programs and infrastructure for wildlife and fisheries management, state parks and recreation areas, trails, boating programs, conservation and law enforcement, forest management, state lands and minerals, and the historical museum and archives.

Scott Bowen currently serves as the Director of the DNR, Shannon Lott as the Natural Resources Deputy, and Kristin Phillips as the Administrative Deputy. Randy Claramunt serves as Chief of the Fisheries Division, and Sara Thompson serves as Chief of the Wildlife Division.

**FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026 BUDGET**

The DNR's fiscal year (FY) 2026 budget totals \$543.2 million, representing a subtle increase from the DNR's original enacted FY 2025 appropriations of \$534.6 million due primarily to the addition of spending authority from state restricted and federal fund sources. Specifically, the budget includes \$73 million of General Fund support which represents a 4% decrease from the DNR's original enacted FY 2025 budget. It was the second consecutive year that the department saw a reduction in ongoing and one-time General Fund as well as requests for major investments in natural resources not supported through the legislative budgeting process. Noteworthy investments excluded and reductions were:

- Nature Awaits: Removal of \$4,045,300 ongoing General Fund
- Invasive Species Prevention and Control: Removal of \$1,200,000 ongoing General Fund and amends the associated boilerplate (Sec. 251) to reduce the floor for grant funding from \$3,600,000 to \$2,400,000
- Capital Outlay – Wetland Restoration, Enhancement, and Acquisition: Removal of \$1,000,000 ongoing General Fund
- Mackinac Island State Park Commission: Removal of \$421,700 ongoing General Fund
- Michigan Conservation Corps (Summer Youth Employment Program): Removal of \$435,000 ongoing General Fund
- State Parks: Removal of \$200,000 ongoing General Fund

- Wildlife Management: Removal of \$200,000 ongoing General Fund
- Marketing and Outreach: Removal of \$200,000 ongoing General Fund
- General Law Enforcement: Removal of \$98,000 ongoing General Fund

Overall, the DNR's FY 2026 budget is comprised of state restricted funds (66%), federal funds (19%), General Fund (14%), and private funds (1%). Federal funding consists mainly of special purpose categorical grants from various federal agencies, such as the U.S. Department of the Interior, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Federal funds support programs for wildlife and fisheries habitat and management, forest management, recreation, and other natural resource programs. Uncertainty and instability at the federal level continues to be a challenge with ongoing impacts from presidential executive orders, the future of federal funding sources and grants remains an unknown and major concern.

Restricted funding is generated from sales of licenses, user fees, and other charges. These funds support wildlife and fisheries programs, operation of Michigan's 104 state parks, harbor and boating access site development, marine safety enforcement and education, snowmobile and off-road vehicle trail repair and development, and operation of nearly 140 state forest campgrounds.

The DNR also generates timber sales revenue from state lands, most of which is used for the protection and development of our state forests. In the spring of 2025 Michigan experienced a severe ice storm event that impacted 919,000 acres which represents approximately twenty percent of the state forest system. As a result, there is an increased fire threat, and reduction of revenue streams from timber sales that will last for decades. Fortunately, the department was successful in receiving \$16.2 million in one-time General Fund for reforestation efforts that are currently underway as well as \$2 million in one-time General Fund for additional wildfire protection services.

It has been over a decade since fishing and hunting licenses have increased in Michigan and inflation has taken a major toll on the effectiveness of budgets. Fisheries and Wildlife Division's two major sources of revenue – Game and Fish Fund (licenses) and Sport Fish Restoration Act (federal aid) – have been markedly flat since the 2014 license increase. Meanwhile, inflation continues to significantly reduce the buying power of that revenue. The Governor's proposed budget for fiscal year 2027 includes a restructuring/increase in the cost of hunting and fishing licenses and is supported by bi-partisan legislation in the Senate but faces political challenges in the House. The strategy and approach included seeking input from anglers and hunters on how restructure fishing and hunting licenses could improve Michigan's capacity for managing its natural resources.

## LEGISLATIVE AND LEGAL ACTIVITY

Several bills in several categories have been introduced over the past year. Here are a few major examples:

- License restructure bills for increased hunting and fishing fees, which also includes a new “Director’s Tag” via a lottery system.
- Decriminalization of parts of the natural resources and environmental protection act; reducing misdemeanors to civil infractions for over 70 DNR laws and regs.
- A bill to move the captive cervid industry licensing and inspections to the Dept of Agriculture and Rural Development.
- Bills to remove the baiting and feeding ban in the state.
- Bills to significantly expand commercial fishing in the Great Lakes.
- A bill to establish a wolf hunt in the Upper Peninsula even though wolves are still on the endangered species list in the Midwest.
- A bill to require all conservation officers to wear body cameras.

## NOTEWORTHY DIVISION ISSUES

### FISHERIES

Fisheries Division developed the aquatic-focused chapters of Michigan’s Wildlife Action Plan, which will help guide Michigan efforts for the next 10 years. Staff prioritized important habitats, focal species, actions to diminish threats, and ways to expand opportunities to improve and protect these critical natural resources.

Channel Island Reef in Saginaw Bay was constructed to diversify spawning habitat for native fishes such as lake whitefish, walleye, lake trout, burbot, and other species. This 2-acre reef used approximately 20,000 tons of locally sourced limestone cobble. Fisheries Division collaborated with Great Lakes Fishery Commission, Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, Michigan Sea Grant, and other partners on the design, permitting, construction and monitoring.

Fisheries Division completed an invasive red swamp crayfish structured decision-making process to help inform the development of Michigan’s 5-year red swamp crayfish response plan. This plan is an adaptive management framework that aims to maximize ecosystem improvements and resilience following response actions. The ultimate goals are to minimize the potential for red swamp crayfish re-invasion, increase community engagement in response and prevention efforts and exercise greater caution with actions such as chemical treatments.

Michigan’s House of Representatives introduced two fishing bills that would have major impacts on the management of Michigan’s fisheries. The first bill, House Bill 5093, would restructure fishing licenses including changing youth license fees, creating a hatchery stamp as well as a stakeholder oversight committee to have input on the use of fishing license fees. Another set of bills were introduced, HB 5801 and 5802, which would expand Great Lakes Commercial fishing, but those bills contain significant editorial, technical and enforcement errors which were outlined by the Department in their testimony against the bills to the House Natural Resource and Tourism Committee.

## WILDLIFE

The Natural Resources Commission voted in May 2026 to move Michigan to a one buck state. The deer combination license will now be one buck and one doe, similar to some other Midwest states. In addition, the commission voted to implement an Earn-a-Second-Buck pilot program in 5 counties (with 5 control counties). The program will last for 5 years then be evaluated to see if it changes hunter behavior – to encourage increased harvest of antlerless deer.

The baiting conversation heated up as well, but ultimately the commission did not vote to remove the baiting ban at this time. Baiting is still legal in the Upper Peninsula. The commission is waiting for the updated Deer Management Plan and revised CWD Plan before they make a decision on baiting.

The second year of collaring for the moose population research project occurred in February 2026. Over 40 moose now have collars and are being tracked daily. Drones are also being used to obtain pictures of the cows to determine how many calves they have this year and their survival rate.

Several hundred cameras have been deployed in the Upper Peninsula to help develop a new method to obtain a wolf population estimate. Other species are often recorded on these cameras as well – bobcat, fisher, martin, cougar, bear, coyote, etc. The division is utilizing A.I. software to sort through millions of photos and ID various species.

Tribal work has been heavy this year with two treaties needing review and revisions – the 1836 Inland Consent Decree and the 1819 Saginaw Chippewa Treaty. Wolves are a major topic in these discussions.

### **Hunters Feeding Michigan – Fiscal Year 2026 Update**

The Hunters Feeding Michigan program is currently on track to set a record for venison donations this fiscal year (FY).

- As of 2/1/2026, the program processed an additional 26,254.91 lbs. of venison during the 2025-2026 deer season compared to FY25 (10/1/2024-2/1/2025).
- The total pounds processed for FY26 (as of 2/1/2026) is 63,413.11 lbs. **Hunter harvested deer donations increased by over 70% this past deer season compared to the 2024-2025 deer season.**
- The program is currently receiving venison through various deer cull efforts and will receive additional venison through the summer HFM farmer trailer program in partnership with Wildlife Division.
- If funding is available, the program will surpass our record of 140,000 lbs. of venison set in FY25.
- In FY26, HFM program disease tested about 1,300 hunter-harvested deer for CWD and TB through processor sample submissions. Out of 1,300 deer tested, 24 deer were identified by the MSU Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory as being CWD suspects (venison discarded). A new county (Gladwin) was identified through HFM processor submissions.

- The program continued metal fragment scanning efforts of hunter-harvested deer and worked with partners to promote the usage of non-toxic ammunition. Currently, both USDA-Wildlife Services is using non-lead ammunition for HFM associated deer cull efforts.
- Each year we spend \$50,000 x-raying our venison for metal fragments primarily lead. In the first year, we discarded 1 out of every 3 venison burger packages.
- The HFM program has 17 participating processors across the state.
- Marketing at our participating processors and through media channels (example, SNAP Benefit reductions) increased both program awareness and hunter participation.
- The HFM program continues to pursue private/business/corporate donations to help fund the program. In FY26, around \$30,000 has been raised through this effort in addition to the MICO donations. Donors include the NWTF, Farm Bureau, Superior Steel Supply, and Jays Sporting Goods.
- The donated venison was distributed through the Feeding America distribution network in Michigan.
- The HFM program continues to be a national leader when it comes to quantity and quality of donated venison.

## **FORESTRY**

In March 2025, a catastrophic ice storm impacted 13 counties in the northern lower and upper peninsula. Almost 1million acres of the State Forest were in the footprint of the storm. Timber salvage efforts occurred on the most heavily damaged areas, totaling roughly 20,000 acres of red pine, jack pine, aspen, and mixed hardwood. One-time budget appropriations for reforestation (\$16.2M) and enhanced wildfire suppression (\$2M) were received for FY26. Reforestation efforts are now underway, with some of the earliest salvage contracts ending. The wildfire suppression funds allowed a first-ever exclusive use contract for two single-engine air tanker scoopers. These were used numerous times in the spring of '26 to suppress fires that had significant fuel loads resulting from the storm.

**Out-of-State/Interagency Incident Dispatches:** In 2025, 121 assignments spanning 14 different states and provinces occurred. In 2026, we have already had 15 assignments spanning 5 different states.

### **Prescribed Fire:**

- 2024: 100 burns totaling 10,799 acres.
- 2025: 44 burns totaling 3,166 acres (no spring burns due to ice storm response)
- 2026: 75 burns over more than 6,400 acres (YTD)

### **Forest Management:**

The 2025 ice storm set back efforts to complete our State Forest Management Planning that year. We now anticipate finalizing our State Forest Plan revision by the end of 2026. Timber and forest product markets continue to have challenges. Supply chains are challenged by a lack of logging capacity, high fuel prices, and uncertainties from tariffs. Salvage efforts on private and public land following the ice storm have increased the supply of timber on the market, while forest product demand is stagnant, causing stumpage prices to stay flat or decrease.

### **Incident Management:**

A Michigan IMT responded to the northern Michigan Ice Storm in April 2025. Their objectives included the coordination of National Guard and DNR debris removal resources, establishing and maintaining access to emergency communications infrastructure and re-opening main travel routes for first responders and utility companies. In the weeks and months that followed, DNR used an IMT structure to coordinate our internal efforts focused on restoring access to the forest, trails, parks, and roads that were impacted by the storm (over 4,000 miles).

A late-March 2026 spring blizzard and rapid warm-up and rains brought massive flooding to many parts of northern Michigan. Numerous areas experienced significant damage to roads and bridges, and extraordinary measures were taken to prevent dam failures. A DNR incident management team was in place for several weeks in April and May to coordinate operations at the Cheboygan Lock and Dam and several upstream dams, preserving the integrity of the city, State, and private infrastructure, and mitigating further damage from the flooding. We utilized conservation officers and their boats to rescue people from their homes as floodwaters rose.

### **PARKS**

Parks and Recreation Division is actively implementing the fifth year of numerous state park infrastructure projects funded by \$250 million American Rescue Plan Act funds appropriated by the legislature. Of the \$250 million, \$30.2 million was allocated to fund the establishment of the 104th state park adjacent to downtown Flint along the Flint River with construction scheduled to open in late 2026.

### **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

The Law Enforcement Division has placed a higher focus on technology advancements to try and streamline processes for staff efficiency. The division strengthened their support staff in this realm, creating the Information Technology and Communications Section (ITCS), combining our 24/7 dispatch staff with our technology experts. Axon body worn cameras have been rolled out statewide with little to no major hurdles. The division is also transitioning to Axon Records to replace their current records management system that has seen numerous struggles in the past few years. Policies, patrol manuals, and other procedural processes housed in numerous databases or completed by a paper process have been merged together in technology programs such as Power Ready, Power Policy, and Power Vetted.

The Division still faces negative media attention by the Michigan Legislature and other groups focused on a push to eliminate conservation officers' ability to utilize the Open Fields Doctrine. Despite the efforts to limit authority in this realm, no proposed bills have completely passed the legislature and lawsuits by private citizens have been won by the Department. A proposed cut to the Law Enforcement Division's general fund dollars is the other noteworthy struggle we are facing.



Hunters Feeding Michigan refrigerated trailers for use by farmers in the summer.