

Division of Fish, Wildlife and Parks

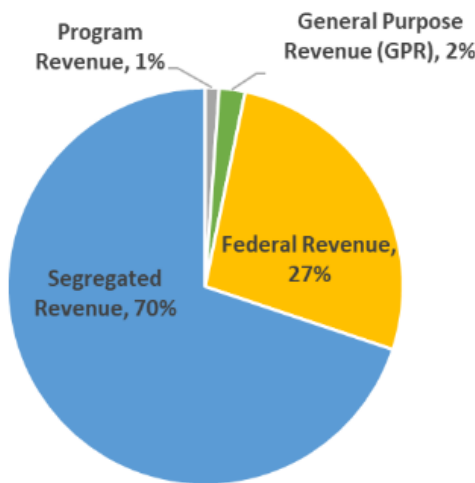
The Division of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) plans and directs activities to protect, manage, conserve and wisely use the state's lands, plants, wildlife, fisheries, and recreational resources. This division's goals are accomplished by establishing objectives which include developing and maintaining game and nongame fish and wildlife populations; coordinating long-range programs of management and protection for natural heritage conservation; and providing necessary access, opportunities, development, and operations for statewide recreational and conservation activities within state parks, state forests, wildlife and fisheries lands, public waterbodies, and state natural areas.



FWP Goals At A Glance

- Everyone feels invited and welcome to explore state lands, get involved in outdoor recreation opportunities, and invest in conservation.
- Use sound science and research, along with advisory committee recommendations and public input, to ensure sustainable and responsible management of Wisconsin's resources.
- Maintain a professionally and culturally supported workforce through various belonging and engagement initiatives
- Ensure financial security and manage impacts to work priorities by exploring alternative funding sources and creatively promoting existing funding sources.

FWP Funding Sources



FWP Budget

Funding Source	FTE Positions Authorized
Segregated Revenue	484.86
Federal Revenue	115.59
Program Revenue	8
General Purpose Revenue	2.5
Grand Total	610.95

Division Administrator: Eric Lobner
 Deputy Division Administrators: Phil Rynish and Dave Boyarski (acting)
 Bureau Directors: Justine Hasz (Fisheries Management), Scott Hull (Office of Applied Science), Pam Biersach (Office of Business Services), Drew Feldkirchner (Natural Heritage Conservation), Steve Schmelzer (Parks and Recreation Management), Scott Walter Wildlife Management)



Fisheries Management

Inland Trout

From July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, fisheries management staff completed 55 trout stream habitat improvement projects on 51 streams totaling 40.3 miles. Of the projects completed, 1.8% restored aquatic connectivity, 29.1% were intensive instream habitat projects, and 69.1% were vegetation management projects along the riparian corridor. Staff also completed trout habitat work on 1 spring pond totaling 0.75 acres. Many of these habitat projects are completed with assistance from volunteers and external partnerships.

Staff also conducted 399 rotational trout surveys on 174 streams and 464 trout trend surveys on 170 streams to assess Wisconsin's inland trout populations.

PFAS

The detection of PFOS (perfluorooctane sulfonate), one of many per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), is one of the driving forces behind establishing fish consumption advisories. New fish consumption guidelines for PFOS developed by the Great Lakes Consortium for Fish Consumption Advisories were implemented in 2025 resulting in stricter consumption advice for some locations.

Currently there are over 20 locations in Wisconsin with site-specific consumption advisories due to PFOS contamination.

Advisories are issued jointly with the Department of Health Services when data suggest more restrictive consumption advisories are warranted.
<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Fishing/consumption>

Ceded Territory Fisheries

Fisheries works collaboratively through the Voigt Taskforce, stipulations and the Technical Working Group (TWG) to sustainably manage fisheries resources in the Ceded Territory.

Fisheries works closely with GLIFWC and Ojibwe Tribal Nations on safe harvest limits for walleye and muskellunge.

Tribal harvest declarations are received by the DNR on March 15 annually. Secretary discussion is required for declarations that do not meet the designated criteria prior to the harvest season.
<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Fishing/ceded>

Brook Trout Reserves

This program, launched in November 2024, aims to protect Wisconsin's native brook trout populations in the face of climate change. There are 54 identified reserves spread across 204 subwatersheds, that are most likely to persist as global temperatures rise and weather events become more extreme.

In 2025, the fisheries program welcomed a project coordinator to spearhead the fish passage prioritization team focused on Brook Trout Reserve 41 in the headwaters of the Peshtigo and Oconto Rivers. This team is comprised of a wide variety of partners, including the Forest County Potawatomi, USFS, and USFWS, and their work will culminate in a 10-year action plan for the reserve area.

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/1d5dc22ef07e4da7bbd92718206faf23>

Fisheries Strategic Plan

The Bureau of Fisheries Management is drafting a strategic plan to provide direction in how it manages and sustains Wisconsin's fisheries resources. The goal of the strategic plan is to keep the Fisheries Management program looking forward and in the same, unified direction to benefit fisheries, their ecosystems and all the people who interact with them. This plan will aim to provide direction on how Wisconsin's fisheries resources are managed and sustained over the next 10 years. The updated Fisheries Management Strategic Plan will outline management objectives and strategies to achieve our fundamental goals. The Bureau will seek staff, partner and public input to incorporate into the Strategic Plan.

Great Lakes Commercial Fishing

Fisheries works closely with the Lake Michigan and Lake Superior Commercial Fishing Boards.

Lake Michigan topics:

- Green Bay yellow perch quotas
- <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Fishing/lakemichigan/CommercialFishingBoard>

Lake Superior topics:

- Lake trout and cisco quota regulation updates, Lake Superior Fishing Agreement, collaborative agreement with Tribal Nations on fish harvest management and allocations.
- <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Fishing/lakesuperior>

Musky-Pike Interactions

In the first project of its kind, track real-time movements of and interaction between muskellunge and northern pike in a northern Wisconsin lake chain. Mapping individual fish behavior will clarify how the two predators coexist and may inform management decisions where the musky population is declining.



Changing Deer Hunter Demographics

Examine patterns behind long-term declines in deer hunter participation and project future trends, which could have a direct impact on deer management strategies. Explore participation rates at a county level to identify areas where changes may be more severe.



Effects of Forward-Facing Sonar

Determine the influence of this increasingly popular but controversial technology on angler behavior and catch rates through both historical data analysis and a series of controlled experiments on northern Wisconsin lakes.



Susceptibility of Ruffed Grouse to Changing Wisconsin Winter

Using historical data, field surveys and future climate projections, investigate the vulnerability of ruffed grouse and their aspen and early-successional forest habitats to increasing temperatures and enhanced risk of extreme weather events.



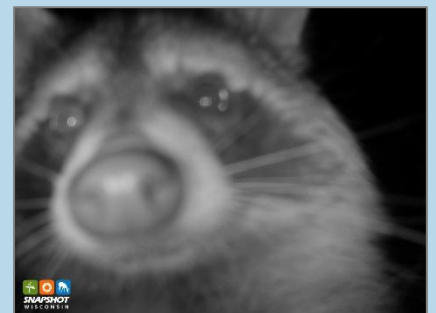
Impacts of Geese and Swan Herbivory on Wild Rice

Understand the impacts of grazing by increasing Canada goose and trumpeter swan populations on the growth, seed production and overall resilience of northern wild rice, a culturally, economically and ecologically important native plant species.



Northern Highland Fishery Research Area and Snapshot Wisconsin

Since 1946, the NHFRA has served as proving grounds for inland fisheries research and management not just in Wisconsin but globally. Snapshot Wisconsin, another long-running initiative, recently celebrated its 100-millionth image collected by the statewide volunteer wildlife monitoring network's trail cameras.



Wildlife Management

Biennial Habitat Management Plan

In 2023 the Wisconsin state legislature enacted a law requiring the DNR to prepare biennial habitat work plans that establish priorities and goals for habitat work on lands managed by the DNR and measure progress on established priorities and goals. In response to this WI DNR completed our first biennial habitat workplan by compiling plans from all DNR habitat programs. This process cultivates cross-program communication regarding habitat goals and ensures agency accountability for our role in providing quality wildlife habitat on Wisconsin's landscape.

Wisconsin's Elk Herd is Growing!

Wisconsin reintroduced elk to the northern part of the state in 1994, and in central Wisconsin in 2015. The first modern-day elk hunting season was held in the Northern Elk Zone in 2018 and expanded to the Central Elk Zone in 2024- where the first antlerless harvest was held in 2025. Hunter success has remained high as has interest, with over 25,000 hunters applying for a permit each year. The agency continues to work to balance the ecological and recreational benefits of having elk back on our landscape with the needs to mitigate conflict with agricultural producers.



First Sharp-Tailed Grouse Season in 8 Years!

2025 marked Wisconsin's first sharp-tailed grouse season since 2018. Grouse numbers have been increasing in recent years due to intensive landscape-scale barrens management. Spring survey and other monitoring data inform annual decisions regarding whether or not to hold a harvest season.



CWD Update

CWD monitoring continued throughout the state in 2025. Hunter-service samples were accepted from any location and priority sampling areas were designated to communicate areas that were high priority from a surveillance standpoint. Over 18,300 deer were tested, and 2040 CWD-positive deer were confirmed from 41 counties. A human dimensions survey was also conducted in the fall of 2025 to explore hunter preference for CWD management actions and perception of efficacy of a suite of management activities. Results are available upon request.



PFAS Consumption Advisory

The state's first waterfowl consumption guidance as a result of PFAS levels was issued within Green Bay waters in September of 2025. This included a "do not eat" advisory for mallards in the far lower bay and limits for mallards and wood ducks from Marinette to Sturgeon Bay and south to Longtail Point. Additionally, within 5-miles of the Town of Stella town hall a white-tailed deer consumption advisory was released. This guidance recommends avoiding consumption of deer liver and limiting consumption of deer muscle (venison) to one-meal-per month.

