

# 2023 AMFGLEO Agency reports

Alberta  
Colorado  
Illinois  
Iowa  
Kansas  
Manitoba  
Michigan  
Minnesota  
Missouri  
Nebraska  
North Dakota  
Ohio  
Saskatchewan  
South Dakota  
Texas  
Wisconsin

**State/province: Alberta**  
**Submitted by: Deputy Chief Rob Lamont**

**Training issues: describe any new or innovative training programs or technique which have been recently developed, implemented or are now required.**

Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Services (FWES) continues assisting the RCMP (Provincial Police) with response to high priority emergencies in rural areas. (RAPID program). Select 'police' training courses that were identified and required based on a gap analysis respecting RAPID are complete for in-service Fish and Wildlife officers.

Alberta is once again hosting the 4-month Western Canada Law Enforcement Academy which is underway for summer 2023 at Lac La Biche, Alberta. Attending will be 19 recruits from Alberta, 15 from BC, 2 from Yukon, 10 from Saskatchewan and 9 from Manitoba.

**Funding and staffing issues: identify any recent developments in funding, staffing, and diversity in employment issues and describe what prompted these developments and how improvements in funding, staffing and diversity in employment were accomplished.**

With recent investment and budget increases for provincial law enforcement, planning is underway to fill current vacancies throughout FWES and the Sheriffs Branch and to address staffing shortages in identified areas. Plans are also underway to hire seasonal indigenous staff to support problem wildlife programs near indigenous communities.

**Major conservation law enforcement trends: identify any major cooperative, interstate, reciprocal or other cross-jurisdictional law enforcement trends (e.g. including community policing, operator under the influence (QUI) initiatives, or other issues which fall outside traditional fish and wildlife enforcement functions).**

As above, the branch is involved in all aspects of policing in rural Alberta when requested to assist the provincial police during high priority emergency calls. The intent is to increase response and response times based on a 'closest car' policy. Once the emergency is handled and the police are able to assume total control, fish and wildlife officers will revert to core mandated conservation enforcement duties.

FWES has taken a more prominent role and is the provincial lead agency with respect to serious problem wildlife incidents and human-wildlife conflict occurrences including major incidents of property damage, maulings and fatalities.

**Unique cross boundary or cooperative, enforcement efforts: describe any interagency, interstate, international, state/tribal, or other cross jurisdictional enforcement efforts (e.g. major Lacey Act investigations, progress with Wildlife Violator Compacts, improvements in interagency communication (WCIS), etc.).**

The Special Investigations Section of FWES is the designated liaison for the sharing of intelligence and the facilitation of wildlife and fisheries investigations that transcend provincial or international boundaries. To accomplish this function, the Major Investigations and Intelligence Unit (MIIU) has established formal information sharing agreements with over 30 state and federal resource law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and regularly participates in cooperative enforcement efforts with resource agencies in all provinces and territories in Canada. These interprovincial and international investigations present very unique challenges for evidence collection, the ability to compel individuals to respond to charges (accused and witnesses), and the coordination and presentation of evidence within court systems in multiple jurisdictions. Successful investigation and prosecution of investigations of this type often requires the formal invocation of procedures that are defined within Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties that exist between Canada and many other countries.

**New innovations in conservation law enforcement: describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.**

- The branch continues to utilize UAVs (drones) and has demonstrated success with officer safety issues and evidence gathering for prosecutions.
- Arising from the RAPID program, FWES officers are trained and carry CEWs when in uniform.
- Semi-auto .308 carbine rifles and load bearing vests with heavy armor have replaced previous equipment.
- The FWES forensic/DNA lab continues to operate under ISO accredited criteria.
- The FWES Records Management System has changed from Enfor to Niche along with computer-aided dispatch through SOCC (Sheriffs Operational Control Center).
- Transitions and pilot programs for e-ticketing using SmartSquad, as well as web-based e-licensing and e-tagging initiatives are underway.

**State, regional and national issues, legislation, legal challenges and court decisions impacting natural resources law enforcement: describe issues which impact or challenge law enforcement authority.**

Triaging of files by Crown Prosecutors remains an issue, as does their decision to no longer compensate crown witnesses for reasonable expenses incurred when responding to a subpoena. The Government of Alberta is in the process of hiring and deploying more prosecutors and FWES is exploring the potential of FWES dedicated Crown prosecutors to oversee prosecution files. In addition the government is working to streamline processes to reduce physical court time by staff and public.

**Cost savings initiatives: identify initiatives in any area which contributed to improvements in work effectiveness and fiscal efficiency.**

FWES has transitioned to become one of six directorates in the Alberta Sheriffs Branch. FWES continues to work through related challenges, as can be expected during major organizational change. Each directorate is led by a Deputy Chief. One such other directorate is Operational Support Services where cost savings have been achieved by all directorates sharing administrative functions and reporting to one chief (executive director) for the entire Sheriffs branch of about 1100 staff. In addition, FWES has gone from 4 regions to 3 resulting in various cost savings including a reduction of 1 superintendent.

As indicated under Training above, Alberta is once again hosting WCLEA, which is a cost saving initiative to train all recruits from western Canada in a single joint academy with instructors and other resources shared among the participating jurisdictions.

**State/province: Colorado**  
**Submitted by: Ty Peterburg**

**Training issues: describe any new or innovative training programs or technique which have been recently developed, implemented or are now required.**

Colorado has had great difficulty with declining applications for training academies and an increasing vacancy rate across the board. Application numbers have steadily declined since the mid 2000's. For the first time in 15 years, CPW applied for a residency waiver in 2022 to allow non-residents to apply for wildlife officer and park ranger positions in 2023- resulting in a 143% increase in applications. We hired the largest training class in our history to make up ground, hiring 18 new wildlife officers and 20 new park rangers for our 2023 academy- from six different states.

Additionally, Colorado is participating in a summit of WAFWA training managers in Texas in August 2023- in an attempt to collaborate across the western states on new training issues, trends and advancements.

**Funding and staffing issues: identify any recent developments in funding, staffing, and diversity in employment issues and describe what prompted these developments and how improvements in funding, staffing and diversity in employment were accomplished.**

Funding levels for CPW have been steady or increasing over the last several years due to several new initiatives including tying hunting license fees to consumer price index, starting in 2023- a parks pass tied to vehicle license plate renewals (funding available in 2024). However, staffing and pay are generally tied to a larger state strategy and is very difficult to handle on an agency specific basis.

However, recent changes are likely going to have a significant positive impact on employee pay and benefits. In the 2023 legislative session, Colorado is considering going back to a step and grade system with several across the board pay raises for employees. The result of this change could result in a 15 year veteran field officer having his or her pay bumped 15-20%. CPW officers are also looking at having a new retirement program, likely being included in Colorado State Patrol's retirement system with a potential 20 year retirement. Finally, the agency is considering providing some limited overtime pay for officers beginning in July 2023.

Long term, CPW may begin looking at state-funded housing to help with the burden of steadily increasing housing costs. Recent data shows the average single family home in Colorado costs over \$530,000. Other state agencies are using \$1000-\$2000/month housing stipends to support employees.

**Major conservation law enforcement trends: identify any major cooperative, interstate, reciprocal or other cross-jurisdictional law enforcement trends (e.g. including community policing, operator under the influence (QUI) initiatives, or other issues which fall outside traditional fish and wildlife enforcement functions).**

CPW is now handling the administrative function of Backcountry Search and Rescue in Colorado. This includes coordination and collaboration with the county sheriff's, Colorado Department of Public Safety, Homeland Security and the Emergency Operations Center.

In addition, CPW is continuing to work through legislation over the last few years to comply with new reporting requirements, body worn cameras, sentencing reform and criminal justice reform.

**Unique cross boundary or cooperative, enforcement efforts: describe any interagency, interstate, international, state/tribal, or other cross jurisdictional enforcement efforts (e.g.**

**major Lacey Act investigations, progress with Wildlife Violator Compacts, improvements in interagency communication (WCIS), etc.).**

Colorado has placed a criminal investigator into the USFWS Task Force Officer Program- in essence, giving the CPW investigator the full authority of USFWS Special Agents for the purposes of federal criminal investigations and procedures. To date- there are three states included in the program that are in MAFWA (Colorado, Oklahoma and Kansas). While there have been bumps as the program ramps up, numerous cases have come to bear, far more efficiently, with the advent of this program and cooperation. CPW's TFO has been instrumental in helping field officers with investigations in Tennessee, Florida, Texas and California in the first several months of the program, and we are anticipating the TFO running a major interstate take down in the spring of 2023 across as many as 8 or 9 states under a federal indictment, initiated by state undercover investigation.

**New innovations in conservation law enforcement: describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.**

CPW investigations continues to pursue more cutting edge technology related to digital forensics, geofence warrants, subscriber warrants and cyber-investigations. CPW has designated one investigator to primarily work on social media platforms and internet based investigations. Additionally, Colorado has invested significant funds to purchase licensing to the most up-to-date cell phone cracking technology (Gray Key). CPW is happy to assist with other fish and wildlife agencies as needed.

**State, regional and national issues, legislation, legal challenges and court decisions impacting natural resources law enforcement: describe issues which impact or challenge law enforcement authority.**

Things are quiet on this front in Colorado. There seems to be some swing back in favor of law enforcement, if only slightly. CPW officers are likely going to receive an increase in pay and retirement benefits, a few crimes that have been downgraded from a felony to misdemeanor in the last few years are being bumped back up to felony status, and there is now a former wildlife officer in the state senate who is attempting to bring relevance back to wildlife officers on the statewide platform.

**Other special law enforcement issues:**

There appears to be a significant coordinated push through the legislature to introduce comprehensive gun control measures- including a proposed "assault weapon" ban, increased red flag warning measures, longer wait times for purchases, a 21 year old minimum for firearms purchases, and restrictions on discharging firearms in more rural settings. Some of the bill language would impact our officer's ability to hold hunter education and youth hunting events, shooting competitions and other firearms related opportunities- if passed. Similar legislation has been introduced in other neighboring states.

**State/province: Illinois**  
**Submitted by: Director Jed Whitchurch**

**Training issues: describe any new or innovative training programs or technique which have been recently developed, implemented or are now required.**

The Illinois Conservation Police strive to conduct academy training that best prepares officers for solo patrol. Two classes totaling 26 officers graduated from the IDNR Academy this past year. Best practices were developed along with baseline skills to be learned and trained to assist instructors in preparing recruits for field training. Additional scenario-based training was also prioritized to give recruits more hands-on experience.

Agency 360 for FTO (now a part of Power DMS) is also utilized to assist with better field training documentation.

To develop boat operation skills, four officers attended one of the first "Inland Boat Operations" courses held by NASBLA, which was then used to train officers in our academy. We also continue attending additional NASBLA pieces of training in BUI training and working toward accreditation through NASBLA.

Much of our training is brought back to the whole by officers who have attended advanced pieces of training; we have therefore worked to develop officers as trainers for in-service and academy instruction to ensure our officers continue to receive adequate training. This includes instructor development training and train the trainer courses in specific areas.

The State of Illinois has mandated annual Crisis Intervention Training (CIT), but we took a proactive approach internally and mandated all officers receive a 40-hour CIT course over the last 18 months. The course was well received by officers and has been beneficial during our job duties several times.

**Funding and staffing issues: identify any recent developments in funding, staffing, and diversity in employment issues and describe what prompted these developments and how improvements in funding, staffing and diversity in employment were accomplished.**

The Illinois Conservation Police realize that over time, several developments have taken place in our staffing, funding, and diversity needs in employment to improve the effectiveness of our conservation law enforcement mission.

One of the factors that prompted these developments was the growing realization of the need for a more robust awareness of the enforcement of natural resource laws. As more people became aware of the damage caused by pollution, habitat destruction, illegal wildlife trade, and outdoor recreation accidents, there became increasing pressure on government units like ours to take action. In response, we began to receive additional funding to hire more staff.

Improvements in funding were achieved through various means, such as increasing government budgetary allocations to hiring more Conservation Police Officers. Over the past three years, the Illinois Conservation Police have hired 37 Officers and plan to add 25 Officers in 2023.

Staffing improvements were accomplished through increased recruitment efforts and training opportunities for the Department. We had dedicated Conservation Police Officers serve as full-time recruiters many months before the Conservation Police Officer Trainees' official applicant window. The Illinois Conservation Police have also seen an expansion of community-based conservation law enforcement initiatives, with a huge expansion of community outreach events to market the Department and recruit quality applicants.

Diversity in employment was also a crucial aspect of development in recruiting initiatives. Previously, the workforce was predominantly male and drawn from a few select backgrounds. To address this issue, the promotion of diversity and inclusion in recruitment and training has

been ongoing. Additionally, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, in totality, has launched awareness-raising campaigns to encourage people from diverse backgrounds to pursue careers at the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

In summary, improvements in staffing, funding, and diversity in employment were prompted by increasing a more inclusive strategic plan that enacts planning in a more balanced approach. These improvements were achieved through increased funding allocations, partnerships, specialized training, community-based initiatives, and strategies aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion.

**Major conservation law enforcement trends: identify any major cooperative, interstate, reciprocal or other cross-jurisdictional law enforcement trends (e.g. including community policing, operator under the influence (QUI) initiatives, or other issues which fall outside traditional fish and wildlife enforcement functions).**

The Illinois Conservation Police have seen trends that align with some major conservation law enforcement movements that are currently outside the scope of traditional fish and wildlife enforcement, such as impaired boating details, community policing, and community outreach.

The Illinois Conservation Police always stress the importance of enforcing operating under the influence laws. Impaired boating has become a significant safety issue on waterways across the State. The Illinois Conservation Police are increasingly focusing on conducting impaired operator details and checkpoints, where they identify and apprehend operators who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs while operating boats. The Illinois Conservation Police is also working with other agencies and outlets to educate the public on the dangers of impaired boating and to develop strategies to reduce the number of impaired boaters on the water.

The Illinois Conservation Police are increasing Community Policing initiatives. By adopting community policing strategies, which involve working closely with local communities to develop and implement solutions to problems related to wildlife conservation, hunting, and fishing, the Illinois Conservation Police are spreading the word on the importance of resource protection and outdoor recreational safety. This approach emphasizes the importance of building relationships with the public and promoting public trust in conservation law enforcement. Community policing strategies assist the Illinois Conservation Police in better understanding the needs and concerns of local communities and working collaboratively to address these issues.

Community Outreach has been identified as an increased area of time spent moving forward for the Illinois Conservation Police. Focusing on community outreach programs to educate the public about conservation laws and regulations and the importance of wildlife conservation has been a key strategy in the past year and will be ongoing. These programs may include outreach events, workshops, and educational resources such as brochures, videos, and online resources. By engaging with the public in this way, the Illinois Conservation Police can help build a sense of community ownership and responsibility for conserving natural resources.

Overall, the Illinois Conservation Police trends reflect a broader shift towards community-oriented law enforcement approaches, prioritizing building relationships with local communities and addressing issues of public concern collaboratively and proactively.

**Unique cross boundary or cooperative, enforcement efforts: describe any interagency, interstate, international, state/tribal, or other cross jurisdictional enforcement efforts (e.g. major Lacey Act investigations, progress with Wildlife Violator Compacts, improvements in interagency communication (WCIS), etc.).**

The Illinois Conservation Police have always worked collaboratively with our fellow State Agencies and Federal Agencies. Proof of these working relationships can be seen in the press release below:

A southern Illinois man who operates a "high-fence" shooting facility in Johnson County has pleaded guilty to poaching white-tailed deer.

Jerry Stafford, 58, of Vienna, who owns Samson's Whitetail Mountain, entered a negotiated plea on Jan. 6 to one count of unlawful take in connection with the illegal harvest of 8-point and 12-point wild white-tailed deer. He also pleaded guilty to one count of open dumping for improper disposal of animal carcasses. Both are Class A misdemeanors.

Stafford operates a "high-fence" shooting facility, where customers pay money to shoot raised or imported game mammals in a fenced area, which runs counter to the principles of fair-chase hunting. High-fence operators in Illinois are required to have a game breeder's license; outfitting or guiding is highly regulated and requires permits.

Illinois Conservation Police began investigating Stafford after learning he was advertising "low-fence hunts" in conjunction with Illinois' official deer hunting dates. Stafford's guides took clients outside the high-fence area to hunt deer in the wild. Investigators documented violations, including outfitting or guiding without a permit, uncased firearms in vehicles, hunting with the aid of a motor vehicle and the use of lights, hunting before legal shooting hours, hunting without permission, and violating tagging requirements.

During their investigation, police found an illegal dump site where wildlife killed on the property had been disposed of over a lengthy period. Runoff from the site flowed directly into a nearby creek, creating a risk of disease transmission.

In addition, investigators documented evidence of animal escape from the high-fence facility, including fallow deer, javelinas, and aoudad escapes. An animal feeder was found just outside one of the high-fence gates with white-tailed deer and elk tracks around it. A javelina is a wild animal similar to a pig, and an aoudad is a type of wild sheep.

The case was filed in Johnson County following a joint investigation between the Illinois Conservation Police and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, the Illinois Department of Revenue, and the Illinois State Police air operations assisted. The Illinois Attorney General's Office prosecuted the case.

Stafford received 24 months of court supervision. Court costs and fees were \$300. He was ordered to pay \$20,200 in restitution to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

"We appreciate the assistance of our partner agencies in bringing this case to justice, and I would encourage anyone who is aware of poaching crimes in Illinois to come forward with tips," said Jed Whitchurch, director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Office of Law Enforcement. "Conservation laws are in place to ensure wildlife resources are around for future generations to enjoy. People have a responsibility to understand these laws and follow them."

### **New innovations in conservation law enforcement: describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.**

The Illinois Conservation Police are increasingly adopting new technologies to improve their effectiveness in protecting natural resources and enforcing conservation laws. Three critical innovations in this area are Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems, body cameras, and updated policy software.

CAD systems are software tools that allow dispatchers to efficiently manage incoming calls and allocate resources to respond to incidents. Using a CAD system, the Illinois Conservation Police can quickly identify and dispatch the closest available officer to respond to a reported incident. This can save valuable time and increase the chances of successfully apprehending poachers or other violators.

The new CAD system utilized by the Department allows officers and telecommunicators to know their surroundings with real-time data. A few of the capabilities of the MACH CAD are



the intuitive interface to see and communicate with all MACH software users instantly, real-time mapping, custom mapping, custom markers, instant messaging, alerts, incidents, broadcast, cross-agency interoperability, NCIC/NLETS searches, and reception of driver license photos from the Illinois Secretary of State instantly.

Body cameras are another important technology that the Illinois Conservation Police are testing. These small cameras can be attached to an officer's uniform and record video and audio of their interactions with the public. Body cameras are a valuable tool in documenting incidents and providing evidence for prosecutions. They can also deter potential violators, as they know that their actions are being recorded.

The Illinois Conservation Police have also initiated a third-party agreement with a vendor to track policies and distribute policies. The product is a cloud-based policy and compliance management software that the Department can use to help streamline policy management processes. The software allows the Department to create, distribute, track, and manage policies, procedures, and field training materials from a single centralized platform.

Conservation law enforcement agencies face many challenges in managing policies and ensuring compliance with laws and regulations. This new source will help overcome these challenges by providing a simple and efficient way to manage policies and track compliance.

Overall, the use of CAD systems, body cameras, and policy systems are important innovations that can help the Illinois Conservation Police be more effective in protecting natural resources and enforcing conservation laws.

**State, regional and national issues, legislation, legal challenges and court decisions impacting natural resources law enforcement: describe issues which impact or challenge law enforcement authority.**

By far, the largest legislative impact on Illinois Conservation Police operations was the passage of SB3184, which was an initiative of the Department. This bill changed hiring standards from a bachelor's degree, with waivers for military service, to an associate's degree (or 60 credit hours) with an expanded list of waivers for military service. This bill also cleaned up multiple loopholes in hunting and fishing laws, prohibits the use of thermals and night vision in the same way spotlights from a vehicle are, and banned the use of drones for taking wildlife, including tracking.

Illinois also passed a law allowing single-shot rifles to be used for deer hunting. These newly allowed rifles are only legal in the same calibers previously allowed for single-shot pistols and revolvers, primarily .30 caliber or larger straight wall cartridges and a limited amount of bottleneck cartridges with a case length under 1.4 inches.

Another impactful change in the past year was lowering the retirement age of state law enforcement under the Tier 2 Alternative pension plan to 55 years old. Previously officers under Tier 2 couldn't collect full retirement until age 67, which was lowered to match Illinois State Police at 60. Now all state law enforcement can retire at age 55. Tier 2 Alternative retirement applies to all state law enforcement hired after 2011; under the previous Tier 1 plan, officers could retire at 50 years of age.

Multiple other bills passed in the past year that impacted Conservation Police enforcement, including several minor changes to commercial fishing and clarification of veteran license exemptions. Illinois also passed the SAFE-T Act, which among other things, mandates body-worn cameras for all law enforcement.

**Cost savings initiatives: identify initiatives in any area which contributed to improvements in work effectiveness and fiscal efficiency.**

Cost savings initiatives within the Illinois Conservation Police through technology, along with watchful spending, assist with reducing expenses while ensuring investment in technologies

that provide the most value. The Illinois Conservation Police have seen an increase in cost-saving initiatives in several ways.

The Illinois Conservation Police continually conduct needs assessments. Conducting thorough assessments is essential before investing in any technology. These assessments identify the specific challenges and threats the Department is facing and determine which technologies are best suited to address these challenges.

Evaluating the total cost of ownership is another cost-saving initiative utilized by the Illinois Conservation Police. The total cost of ownership includes the initial purchase price of the technology and the ongoing costs of maintenance, upgrades, and training. It's important to evaluate these costs to ensure that the technology is sustainable over the long term and in the Department's best interest.

To protect budgetary lines, the Illinois Conservation Police often leverage existing technology. The Department may already have technology that can be leveraged for new applications.

One of the most important cost savings measures the Illinois Conservation Police utilize is the Implementation of pilot programs and field-testing windows. Before investing in large-scale technology implementation, the Department utilizes these pilot programs and field-testing windows to test the technology in a controlled environment. This helps identify potential issues or challenges before committing to a larger investment.

#### **Other special law enforcement issues:**

Several modern-day conservation law enforcement issues affect how the Illinois Conservation Police strategically plan and operate. Some issues from the past and others are growing in concern with each passing day.

Poaching is a major threat to wildlife conservation, particularly in Illinois, with high-value animal products, such as deer, turkey, waterfowl, and many fish found within Illinois' expansive fisheries. The demand for these products drives poaching and can lead to detrimental populations of these protected species.

The Illegal Wildlife Trade is another Illinois issue facilitated by large urban areas within the State. This trade is a multi- million-dollar industry that involves the buying and selling of wild animals and their products. This trade threatens the survival of numerous species, and it often involves organized crime syndicates.

Illinois has also seen a rise in habitat destruction. This is a major threat to biodiversity and often results from human activities such as deforestation, urbanization, and mining. These activities can lead to the displacement or extinction of wildlife, and they can also have negative impacts on local communities.

Illinois is beginning to see the effects of climate change. This is a growing threat to biodiversity, as it alters many species' habitats and migration patterns. This can lead to declines in populations and the loss of biodiversity, and economic impacts on industries that rely on natural resources. This can also lead to the increasing unlawful taking of resources because of decreased populations of protected species.

The Illinois Conservation Police have also seen the technology trend affect law enforcement operations. Technology is both a blessing and a curse to conservation law enforcement. While technology can be used to track and monitor wildlife populations, it can also be used by poachers and illegal wildlife traders to evade detection.

The Illinois Conservation Police address these issues through legal frameworks, public awareness, and effective enforcement measures. The Illinois Conservation Police must continue working closely with governments at all levels and local communities to develop strategies that address these issues holistically.

**State/province: Iowa**  
**Submitted by: Craig Cutts**

In 2022 Iowa had 86 sworn Conservation Officers in the field. Two Conservation Officers and the Chief of the bureau retired. The Law Enforcement Bureau was able to hire on three conservation officers halfway through the year and promote a Chief from within. Currently there are two Conservation Officer and Assistant Chief's position open.

The TIP board (Turn in Poachers) has been a great supporter for the bureau. Their assistance has been instrumental, not only with enforcement cases, but also with securing needed equipment through donations. The board provided Tactacam cameras to many officers in each of the 6 districts. Included with the camera donations was Spy High mounting systems to easily place the cameras. The officers have been able to make several great cases using this equipment. Along with the cameras the board was able to provide some new wildlife decoys, and a new TIP trailer to be taken to events across the state.

A concerted effort has been made with updating training for the bureau. Conservation Officers have three mandatory use of force sessions throughout the year. Besides the required qualifications that are done within the districts, all officers meet for 1/3 states. 3 dates are provided where officers receive extra hands on training that range from positional shooting with handguns and long guns, tactical shooting around and in vehicles and scenario based defensive tactics training. After the 1/3 state training is completed a fall use of force meeting conducted on a smaller basis is held within the districts. Instructors work on adult learning techniques and reemphasize the lessons learned at 1/3 states. The bureau has identified training needs and for 2023 effort will be placed on officer safety on and in the water along with responding to mass shooting events.

Current challenges to department, as always is budget and total number of officers to handle the needs for the state. To address these challenges small groups have been created to look at needs for the public, collaborated work within all bureaus of the department, and identifying best work practices of enforcement bureaus. Other state departments have begun looking at efficiencies within state government and the department is currently identifying its strengths.

At this time an integration team is working on a plan to bring the Park Rangers from the Parks Bureau over and merging with the Law Enforcement Bureau. This team has been working for the past 5 months on how and when best to make this happen. Much consideration has been put into these discussions and decisions and we are nearing a final plan. This will bring the current 35 certified Park Rangers over to the Law Enforcement Bureau as Conservation Officers. The LE Bureau will then be responsible for law enforcement within the state parks. Although this plan is not set in stone yet it appears this will be our future at some point.

We are like all other agencies and budgets are a challenge and we are continuing to be asked to do more with less. Cost of radios meeting end of service life, computers needing updated and the continuing rise in cost for all we do has put a strain on the budget.

**State/province: Kansas**  
**Submitted by: Col. Greg Kyser**

**Training issues: describe any new or innovative training programs or technique which have been recently developed, implemented or are now required.**

The Law Enforcement Division graduated seven new Game Warden recruits from the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Academy in 2022-2023.

The Law Enforcement Division canceled the 2022 annual In-Service training scheduled due to Covid-19 concerns. Wardens completed online training during this time to achieve mandatory training hours required by the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center.

Annual In-Service returned in February 2023 at the Great Plains Nature Center in Wichita, KS. During the 3-day In-Service training, officers gained instruction on the following topics.

- Trends in Fentanyl and Narcotic Crime
- Non-Game Species, Trends for Enforcement
- Brant GoLaw Training and Feedback
- LE Forms and NTA Refresher
- Field Ballistics – University of Florida
- Using DNA to Investigate Wildlife Crime – Florida FWC/Univ. Florida
- MOCIC presentation
- New Officers Introductions/Boating Update
- Fort Riley Wildlife Enforcement Interaction
- Updates on Kansas Hunter Education
- USF&W update/TFO program
- Senior Command Staff Talk & Awards

**Funding and staffing issues: identify any recent developments in funding, staffing, and diversity in employment issues and describe what prompted these developments and how improvements in funding, staffing and diversity in employment were accomplished.**

KDWP has 13 openings for entry-level warden positions. Testing has changed multiple times per year to recruit more candidates. The hiring process for Game Warden evolved to allow applicants who know/have experience with the outdoors to test. While a bachelor's degree is preferred, it is no longer required.

Retirement plan – Kansas Police and Fire

The agency pursued legislative approval in 2023 to convert to the Kansas Police and Fire Retirement System for agency law enforcement officers of the Law Enforcement, Parks, and Public Lands Divisions. The initiative passed with officers slated to be moved to the new retirement system on July 1, 2023. This retirement system allows for officers to retire at age 50 with 25 years of service.

**Major conservation law enforcement trends: identify any major cooperative, interstate, reciprocal or other cross-jurisdictional law enforcement trends (e.g. including community policing, operator under the influence (QUI) initiatives, or other issues which fall outside traditional fish and wildlife enforcement functions).**

KDWP is in the 2nd year of a thermal coyote season which runs from January 1st to March 31st and requires a special permit. These permits are available to anyone and can be purchased online or over the counter. The law enforcement division has seen an uptick in coyote competitions occurring every weekend across the State. Thermal hunting has created concerns about the illegal take of other species, most notably bobcats, which is unlawful under the current regulations. Agency furbearer biologists will examine the method of taking and tagging numbers to monitor if bobcat numbers harvested have increased through predator calling.

KDWP started a reptile task force after significant casework revealed growing violations within the reptile community in Kansas. One case involved a large- scale illegal turtle operation from northeast Kansas, worked by the USFWS. Another case performed by USFWS and Indiana DNR showed wild snakes caught in Kansas and sold in other states throughout the Eastern United States. These cases established the involvement of illegally caught Kansas reptiles used in black market sales. Three main goals remain for the Reptile task force. The first goal is to amend current statutes and regulations to allow better detection of those illegally collecting reptiles, specifically for illegal sale. The second goal is to train the members and all field officers within the agency to handle contact with a potential individual collecting reptiles. The third goal is to apprehend individuals involved in the illegal commercialization of reptiles locally, nationally, or internationally. Since the start of the task force, ongoing cases related to reptiles have increased.

KDWP agreed in 2022 to be part of the new Taskforce officer program with the USFWS. This program assigns a KDWP officer to the USFWS, who then works cases with a federal nexus. Kansas is only the 3rd State to join the program, following Colorado and Oklahoma.

**Unique cross boundary or cooperative, enforcement efforts: describe any interagency, interstate, international, state/tribal, or other cross jurisdictional enforcement efforts (e.g. major Lacey Act investigations, progress with Wildlife Violator Compacts, improvements in interagency communication (WCIS), etc.).**

An investigation in northwest Kansas led to the conviction of Tracy Weeter, Tayton Weeter, Sean Winter, and six other individuals. Throughout the case, 25 deer, mostly mule deer, one antelope, eight turkeys, and other wildlife, were discovered to have been taken illegally with illegal equipment or without permits. Thirteen deer were scored and averaged 173 inches. KDWP filed approximately 140 charges in Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, and Logan Counties for nine individuals for violations between 2015 – 2019.

Tayton Weeter pled to 22 charges, was ordered to pay \$45,000 in fines and restitution, and received a 10-year hunting revocation.

Tracy Weeter pled to 12 charges, was ordered to pay \$750 in fines and \$1688 in court costs and received a 2-year hunting revocation.

Sean Winter pled to 6 charges, was ordered to pay \$5800 in fines and restitution, received a 12-month hunting revocation, and forfeited a firearm.

KDWP would like to thank local law enforcement agencies, County Attorneys, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for their assistance throughout the case.

In Rawlins County, Kansas, an investigation over the take of antlered mule deer during the whitetail antlerless-only season led to the conviction of two Colorado residents. The

investigation resulted in the discovery of 10 deer taken illegally over the past five years. It resulted in license and permit violations, taking deer during a closed season, and illegally possessing the wildlife.

Terry Michel and Mike Rehfeldt pled to five counts of hunting deer with invalid permits, \$7500 in fines plus court costs, and received a 5-year hunting revocation. KDWP would like to thank the Rawlins County Attorney's Office, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for their assistance throughout the investigation.

**New innovations in conservation law enforcement: describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.**

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks is implementing a new RMS system for law enforcement and public land & park divisions. KDWP has started data file migration to SmartCOP, with test users beginning to evaluate the new system. SmartCOP allows for digital ticketing, boat inspections, violator reports meeting NIBRs compliancy rules, and many additional features.

The agency received a new body-worn camera through a Department of Justice grant. Digital Alley was the body camera vendor selected, allowing for cloud-based storage of videos, evidence tracking of videos, and GPS location of officers in the field.

A program to replace law enforcement radios occurred in 2022. The agency picked Motorola to provide new mobile and portable radios for the Law Enforcement Division. This project will allow Wardens better communication throughout the State of Kansas.

The Law Enforcement Division made the switch back to green uniforms. Employees and the public we serve have embraced the switch to the iconic green worn by Kansas Game Wardens.

The law enforcement division decided to replace the current Stag 15 patrol rifle. Selected as the replacement was the Sig Sauer M400 with an SL Series suppressor. Transition training occurred in March 2023.

**State, regional and national issues, legislation, legal challenges and court decisions impacting natural resources law enforcement: describe issues which impact or challenge law enforcement authority.**

The Law Enforcement Division faced a legislative challenge in 2021 with HB- 2025. It would have taken away State Game Wardens' abilities to conduct physical or electronic surveillance on private property without obtaining a search warrant. Colonel Kyser testified in opposition to this bill which failed on March 29th, 2021.

In 2022, Legislators re-introduced the bill in February 2022 as SB-395 Colonel Kyser testified in opposition to SB-395 on February 2nd, 2022. This latest version passed by the legislature will require Kansas Wildlife & Parks law enforcement employees to obtain a court order before installing electronic surveillance equipment on private property without the landowner's permission. Wardens will still be able to conduct compliance checks on private property.

**Cost savings initiatives: identify initiatives in any area which contributed to improvements in work effectiveness and fiscal efficiency.**

The Law Enforcement Division could not acquire trucks from Chevrolet, which are currently on state contract. In researching our options, we ordered 13 trucks from RAM, which still offers a government discount, resulting in significant savings for the agency.

**State/province: Manitoba**

**Submitted by: Chief Conservation Officer Earl W. Simmons**

**Training issues: describe any new or innovative training programs or technique which have been recently developed, implemented or are now required.**

The department accepts recruits trained in varied outside agencies and academies. Last year one new recruit trained through the Western Conservation Law Enforcement Academy (WCLEA) in Candle Lake, Saskatchewan. We are currently in the process of sending 9 new recruits to this year's WCLEA academy being held in Lac La Biche, Alberta.

Defensive tactics / officer safety training was held February to March 2023 during our annual centralized training for Conservation Officers.

Standard firearms qualifications were conducted by in-house Basic Firearms Instructors. New training for carbine rifle and spike belt deployment will be implemented this year for all COs.

**Funding and staffing issues: identify any recent developments in funding, staffing, and diversity in employment issues and describe what prompted these developments and how improvements in funding, staffing and diversity in employment were accomplished.**

Although we were able to hire 9 new Conservation Officers, recruitment and retention continues to be a challenge. Wages continue to be one of the primary factors affecting recruitment and retention.

The service currently has 82 field officers and 12 staff supporting them out of Headquarters.

**Major conservation law enforcement trends: identify any major cooperative, interstate, reciprocal or other cross-jurisdictional law enforcement trends (e.g. including community policing, operator under the influence (QUI) initiatives, or other issues which fall outside traditional fish and wildlife enforcement functions).**

Night hunting by rights based harvesters continues to receive public interest and night hunting patrols remain one of the top priorities of the Conservation Officer Service (COS). Night hunting regulations remain in effect which ban night hunting in southern Manitoba unless done under the authority of a permit and in a pre-approved crown land area.

**Unique cross boundary or cooperative, enforcement efforts: describe any interagency, interstate, international, state/tribal, or other cross jurisdictional enforcement efforts (e.g. major Lacey Act investigations, progress with Wildlife Violator Compacts, improvements in interagency communication (WCIS), etc.).**

In September 2019 a joint investigation between the Manitoba Conservation Officer Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife and Environment and Climate Change Canada Enforcement was initiated after a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service inspector conducted an inspection of a hunter from Iowa in possession of two raw black bear hides. This discovery led to cross border interviews and records inspection of two outfitting businesses, which concluded with multiple individual being charged. In August 2020, the American client of the outfitter was convicted of a violation under the Lacey Act (U.S.) for importing an illegally killed black bear. The two black bears were forfeited. He received a \$7,500 fine and one year of unsupervised probation. In January 2022, an American client of the outfitter was convicted under the Lacey Act for obtaining a second license under a false name and exporting a bear to the U.S. He abandoned the second bear and received a \$5,000 fine and one year of unsupervised probation. In April 2022, a Canadian taxidermist was convicted under the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act (WAPPRITA) for providing a false and misleading statement. He received a \$730 fine. In August 2022, the owner of Royal Elk Outfitting was convicted under WAPPRITA for furnishing false or misleading information



related to the CITES permit. He received a \$5,000 fine and forfeited a harvested black bear. In December 2022, the owner of Royal Elk Outfitting plead guilty to 15 counts of violating the Wildlife Act and received a \$10,000 fine. On the same day, the owner of South Park Outfitters pleaded guilty to 11 counts of violating the Wildlife Act and received a \$2,000 fine. Following the conclusion of the court cases, Manitoba Department of Natural Resources and Northern Development cancelled the Resource Tourism Operators license for Royal Elk Outfitting and South Park Outfitters.

**New innovations in conservation law enforcement: describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.**

The Conservation Officer Service continues to improve officer safety and effectiveness in the field with the introduction of new and improved equipment. This year every officer will be equipped with a new carbine rifle to complement existing sidearms and shotguns. Tactical armour vests will now be standard issue, and to help apprehend fleeing illegal hunters, spike belts will be available in every patrol truck.

**State, regional and national issues, legislation, legal challenges and court decisions impacting natural resources law enforcement: describe issues which impact or challenge law enforcement authority.**

A First Nation in Manitoba launched a lawsuit last year against the provincial government alleging amendments to the Wildlife Act concerning night hunting infringed on its members' treaty right to hunt. The case remains on-going.

**Cost savings initiatives: identify initiatives in any area which contributed to improvements in work effectiveness and fiscal efficiency.**

A \$34,916.19 grant obtained through the Criminal Property Forfeiture Fund disbursement process enabled the department to purchase a stress vest training system and provide specialized law enforcement training to the Special Investigations Unit.

**Other special law enforcement issues:**

A call centre for the Conservation Officer Service has been approved and is moving quickly towards implementation. Once operational, the call centre will greatly enhance Conservation Officer safety and create peace of mind for their families, especially when officers are on patrol alone and/or in remote areas.

The COS continues efforts against dangerous hunting, illegal hunting in moose conservation closure areas, and illegal night hunting. To this end, increased resources, including a new dedicated helicopter contract for the COS, further enhance officer's ability to conduct aerial surveillance and apprehend those who hunt illegally. Increased check-stops during the hunting season ensured harvester compliance to hunt legally and ethically in order to protect our shared natural heritage. Maintaining healthy wildlife populations and creating a safe and sustainable hunting environment for all Manitobans is of paramount importance.

**State/province: Michigan**  
**Submitted by: Chief David Shaw**

**Training issues: describe any new or innovative training programs or technique which have been recently developed, implemented or are now required.**

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) Law Enforcement Division (LED) continues to focus training opportunities on leadership skills and professional development with both in-person training and virtual options. In the area of leadership training LED sent numerous staff to the Converge Symposium put on by Command Presence that focused on the themes of "Leading Without Rank-Stuck in the Middle-Not by Chance : the Intentional Senior Leader." Feedback from officers of all rank was extremely positive.

The LED sent one of our Executive Administrative Assistants to the weeklong, in-person, Conservation Leaders for Tomorrow workshop held in Utah. This unique training focused on the North American Model of Wildlife Management and provided excellent foundational knowledge and skills.

Mandatory trainings included highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza for field safety awareness as well as, per Governor Executive Directive, Tribal/State Relations training for all positions interacting with tribal governments.

The LED had three field Sergeants attend the National Association of Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs training titled Introduction to Conservation Leadership at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia.

The LED transitioned from a hybrid virtual/in-person training regimen during the height of the pandemic to return to mostly in-person trainings. LED's Training Section kept busy offering week-long training sessions in Basic Marine Enforcement, Advanced Marine Enforcement, Basic Search and Rescue, Tactical Tracking, Trapping Enforcement School, and Waterfowl Enforcement School.

The LED made an intentional effort to add new instructors to the corps of these specialty training schools thus bringing new knowledge and experiences as well as building our bench of future instructors.

To continually provide the best training possible to our officers, LED sponsored the attendance of training staff to Axon's TASER Energy Weapon Master Instructor Certification School (MIS) which is a 5-day program that certifies attendees for 24 months from the date of school completion. This MIS provides instructor development and training on Energy Weapon best practices, weapon handling, de-escalation, scenario-based training, and TASER program management. LED also implemented Axon VR (virtual reality) into our training programs, providing immersive scenarios and dynamic experiences to enhance officers' performance, critical thinking, and de-escalation skills.

**Funding and staffing issues: identify any recent developments in funding, staffing, and diversity in employment issues and describe what prompted these developments and how improvements in funding, staffing and diversity in employment were accomplished.**

The LED conducted our own Recruit School #11 utilizing the Michigan State Police Training Academy starting with 15 Recruits in July, running 23 weeks with a December graduation of 12 Probationary Conservation Officers. At the same time LED also hired three pre-certified officers who entered an 8-week training school focusing on the MDNR-LED specific skills required of a Michigan conservation officer.

Funding challenges were encountered due to both the price of fleet patrol vehicles and the fuel to run them increased sharply. These fleet increases were not budgeted and affected budgets MDNR wide. Along with increase in costs, actual patrol vehicles were extremely difficult to obtain during 2022.

The supply chain issues extended to numerous other equipment and supplies required by a natural resource law enforcement agency. These delays put off several large equipment purchases as well as some larger projects.

**Major conservation law enforcement trends: identify any major cooperative, interstate, reciprocal or other cross-jurisdictional law enforcement trends (e.g. including community policing, operator under the influence (QUI) initiatives, or other issues which fall outside traditional fish and wildlife enforcement functions).**

Difficulties recruiting potential new hires continued into 2022 with increased social media recruiting and a robust LED-wide recruiting effort providing just enough candidates to field a Recruit School with very little margin. Urban wildlife conflict continues to consume officer time, as does dealing with wildlife disease issues.

**Unique cross boundary or cooperative, enforcement efforts: describe any interagency, interstate, international, state/tribal, or other cross jurisdictional enforcement efforts (e.g. major Lacey Act investigations, progress with Wildlife Violator Compacts, improvements in interagency communication (WCIS), etc.).**

Interstate cooperation is an effective force multiplier when it comes to apprehending poachers. Conservation officers were able to successfully assist several other states in ensuring that violators were brought to justice. The following are a few examples that reinforce the importance of building and maintaining cross boundary relations:

- Assisted Wisconsin conservation wardens with an investigation, involving hunters from several states, who had illegally taken deer in Florence County Wisconsin in 2020. The Michigan suspect was interviewed by the local officer and when presented with the evidence against him, the suspect admitted to illegally taking a deer in Florence County in 2020. The information was turned over to the Wisconsin wardens for prosecution.
- Information was received that a Wisconsin resident was using his mother's address in Michigan to obtain Michigan resident hunting licenses. The local officer and a Wisconsin conservation warden interviewed the subject, who admitted to committing license fraud for approximately 20 years. Charges have been requested through the prosecutor's office.
- Michigan officers assisted Kansas Game wardens with an illegal whitetail deer case. The deer was shot in Kansas but tagged with a North Dakota kill-tag. The COs assisted the Kansas game wardens with interviewing the suspect who lived in Michigan.
- An officer was contacted by the Arizona Department of Fish and Game to assist with a suspect who fled Arizona to Michigan. The officer searched, using a couple different avenues for a current address for the individual, without luck. After nearly a month and a half of searching for the suspect, a break in the case came forward. A meeting was set up with the offender and he was advised of five new charges from the state of Arizona. Contact information was left with who to contact with from the Arizona Fish and Game Department.
- Officers assisted Ohio game wardens in an illegal deer investigation involving a local subject. The COs located the subject and after an interview, it was determined the suspect had shot a deer in Ohio this past fall without a license. A report was completed and turned over to the Ohio game wardens for their investigation.

**New innovations in conservation law enforcement: describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.**

LED has worked with the MDNR's Resource Assessment Section (RAS) to develop unique mapping tools specific to conservation officers using ESRI's ArcGIS Enterprise Software. This data is stored on a state operated encrypted server making it secure for law enforcement use. Maps were uniquely created to show state specific data including forest roads, trails, rivers, and streams signified by specific regulations, property ownership and civil township information. This information is available for officers on their mobile devices as well as on

their in-car laptops. A point-based data set was created to collect hunting, fishing and land use data which is visible by all officers. This creates data that can be filtered and displayed on a map to highlight patrol targets during specific times of the year based on data inputted during initial collection. Similar data is being collected by the Great Lakes Enforcement Unit to map commercial net locations across the Great Lakes.

Additionally, this software provides the ability to digitize paper forms so they can be completed quickly on a mobile device and tie a geographic location to that form. Once the form is completed it is instantly synchronized with a map allowing officers to see that information in a geographic sense. One example of this involves the collection of deceased priority species (Elk, Moose, Wolf, Eagles) and the investigative data collected at each site. Once that data is collected it loads into a map, showing point specific locations. This data then can be filtered to remove certain causes of death or other factors to highlight areas of suspicion for possible investigation. This has the potential to greatly cut down investigative time of an officer manually reviewing paper reports to look for possible connections to a crime.

DNR LED continues to use various aspects of data collected by cell phones, cell phone providers, and Google to attempt to identify suspects in poaching cases. One detective has been sent to training and has been named a subject matter expert from one of the biggest and most recognized companies in that arena. Trends that we're seeing are that more officers (particularly new and younger officers) are relying more on this technology as a first step, rather than traditional investigative methods, and using these as a last resort. We are trying to remind officers that these tools are best used as a tool after all other avenues of investigation have been exhausted. Additionally, judges and prosecutors are becoming less likely to blindly sign warrants for these types of searches and are either denying them or restricting the scope of the search.

The Michigan Dept. Of Natural Resources Great Lakes Enforcement Unit (GLEU) has gone from recording commercial fishing net inspections on paper to recording net locations on the departments ArcGIS "Net Collector" application. This allows for officers to inspect a net staff buoy and mark it's location on their department issued cellular device utilizing the "Net Collector" app. Numerous features in this application allow for the user to include any violations, identifiers and description. Different layers on the mapping system also show fishing grids, treaty areas as well as known ship wreck locations. Once the data point is entered, it is immediately accessible via the dashboard and can be viewed by other users within the GLEU.

The Great Lakes Enforcement Unit also uses ArcGIS coupled with Survey123 to track all of it's wholesale, organism in trade, bait dealer and commercial fish inspections. When officers perform an inspection they enter the data into Survey123 on their mobile device. The data is then stored and the location is loaded on to a GIS map. Officers can then go to a dashboard where they can look at previous inspections and where they occurred.

### **Other special law enforcement issues:**

LED celebrated its 135th Year Anniversary on March 15, 2022. It all started with the appointment of William Alden Smith on March 15, 1887, as the State of Michigan's first salaried game warden, cementing Michigan's history as one of the 1st states in the nation to hire and pay for a game and fish warden. Smith was not only the 1st Michigan game warden, but later in his life Smith went onto a successful career in politics by becoming a United States Senator. He served for 20 years in Washington, where his claim to fame was chairing the hearings into the sinking of the Titanic.

**State/province: Minnesota**  
**Submitted by: Col. Rodmen Smith**

**Training issues: describe any new or innovative training programs or technique which have been recently developed, implemented or are now required.**

- The University of Minnesota provided automated external defibrillators (AED), and training on how to use them, to all DNR conservation officers. The first time a CO used one of the AEDs was several weeks later, and it was instrumental in saving the life of an individual experiencing a cardiac event.
- We continue civil unrest-response training within the DNR and as part of the statewide fabric of law enforcement.
- Our COs routinely provide training/refresher courses on water-related topics such as officer water survival and boat and water safety enforcement to our allied agencies. While this takes many forms, including training to sheriff's offices and new candidates in the State Patrol Academy, we're also in the midst of creating a Marine Unit that will provide standardized statewide water-related training.
- We have become heavily involved in animal health/game farm enforcement, particularly in the realm of white-tailed deer as we as a state seek to stop/slow the spread of chronic wasting disease. As such, we have trained COs to inspect white-tailed deer farms.

**Funding and staffing issues: identify any recent developments in funding, staffing, and diversity in employment issues and describe what prompted these developments and how improvements in funding, staffing and diversity in employment were accomplished.**

- We recently completed our CO Prep application process, which is for people who have a minimum of a two-year degree but not a background in law enforcement. Our primary strategies to reach potential recruits were traditional media, social media, word of mouth, and advertisements in diverse community newspapers. As a result, we had more than 660 applicants for the program, which is far more than we've had in recent years.
- We are coming into a period with many people eligible for retirement, particularly among our supervisory ranks. We created a streamlined process to identify and initially train individuals who are interested in a promotion to supervisor.
- We created the aforementioned statewide Marine Unit in response to large increases in the number of boaters on our lakes and rivers, and the desire among our partner agencies (particularly county sheriff's offices) for conservation officers to provide formal boat and water training on a larger scale than what we're currently able to provide. Initially, Marine Unit staff will be based on areas with a large concentration of heavily utilized waterbodies. We anticipate we will expand the Marine Unit to other parts of the state in the future.

**Major conservation law enforcement trends: identify any major cooperative, interstate, reciprocal or other cross-jurisdictional law enforcement trends (e.g. including community policing, operator under the influence (QUI) initiatives, or other issues which fall outside traditional fish and wildlife enforcement functions).**

- We continue to devote more and more time to recreational vehicle enforcement, in response to increasing numbers of people riding off-highway vehicles throughout Minnesota. In past weeks, three children have died in OHV crashes in the state, which is a number on par with entire recent seasons.
- Our environment-related enforcement, particularly in the realm of wetlands, continues to be a priority. While we have a variety of vacancies, we have prioritized ensuring all of our water resources enforcement officer positions are filled throughout the state.

- Our efforts surrounding white-tailed deer farms, feral hogs, and avian influenza have increased. While we don't have sole enforcement responsibility in these realms at this time (that likely will change relative to deer farms during the current legislative session), we routinely respond to calls in these regards.

- Our civil unrest training and preparation efforts continue. This is a fairly new responsibility that was not part of our operational planning and training just a few years ago.

**Unique cross boundary or cooperative, enforcement efforts: describe any interagency, interstate, international, state/tribal, or other cross jurisdictional enforcement efforts (e.g. major Lacey Act investigations, progress with Wildlife Violator Compacts, improvements in interagency communication (WCIS), etc.).**

- Our conservation officers who work on the Wisconsin, Iowa, and South and North Dakota borders routinely meet with and work with officers from neighboring states to discuss current trends and coordinate enforcement action on border public waters.

- We recently concluded a large-scale sturgeon-poaching case that involved officers from Minnesota and Wisconsin and involved people operating on border waters.

- Our Special Investigations Unit continues to partner with state and federal natural resources law enforcement agencies on complex investigations that have cross-border impacts.

**New innovations in conservation law enforcement: describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.**

- Our officers continue efforts to incorporate social media into their investigations, whether beginning an investigation based upon social media and gathering additional evidence from social media.

- We are working to modernize and right-size our Aviation Unit. The end result likely will be fewer aircraft, but the ones we have will be safer for our pilots and include up-to-date cameras and other technologies that will assist us in a variety of efforts, including fire detection/suppression and search and rescue.

- We continue work on a department-wide effort to shift to a mobile-based license-purchase and harvest-registration system that will make our officers' field work more efficient and effective.

**State, regional and national issues, legislation, legal challenges and court decisions impacting natural resources law enforcement: describe issues which impact or challenge law enforcement authority.**

- There are a number of treaty areas in Minnesota. With an increase in tribal harvest and management-oversight assertion in treaty areas, the chances of conflict with non-tribal individuals continues to increase.

- The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives recently made changes to classifications of "pistols" with stabilizing braces. (Court challenges are pending.) New and old ATF interpretation related to such braces has created ongoing confusion for some Minnesota hunters who hunt in our shotgun deer zone, where legal pistols also are allowed.

**Cost savings initiatives: identify initiatives in any area which contributed to improvements in work effectiveness and fiscal efficiency.**

- We currently are working to modernize and right-size our watercraft fleet to streamline and ensure efficiencies within the fleet.

**State/province: Missouri**  
**Submitted by: Chief Randy Doman**

## Training Issues

### Conservation Agent Training Academy

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) Agent Training Academy started on March 16, 2023. The six-month (approximately 1200 hour) academy consists of sixteen (16) Agent Trainees (11 males and 5 females) with graduation set for early October. With fourteen (14) current vacancies, this is the third consecutive class, with classes in 2021, 2022, and 2023.

One challenge our academy faces is training the non-traditional candidates that we have been attracting over the last several years. By non-traditional, we mean candidates that have the right education, demeanor, communication skills, and passion for the outdoors to be successful in this career but may not have had the traditional consumptive resource use experience that this career typically attracts. During the academy we have started to take advantage of every opportunity possible to get trainees hands on training and experience in practical application/enforcement of the traditional consumptive resource regulations. We have entire training days blocked off for experience in paddlefish snagging, furbearer trapping, and turkey season enforcement. In addition, they attend shorter workshops on turkey hunting basics, deer hunting basics, bear hunting basics, fishing, native plants, pond management, and much more.



*Missouri Conservation Agent Training Academy - Class of 2023.*

## Funding and Staffing Issues

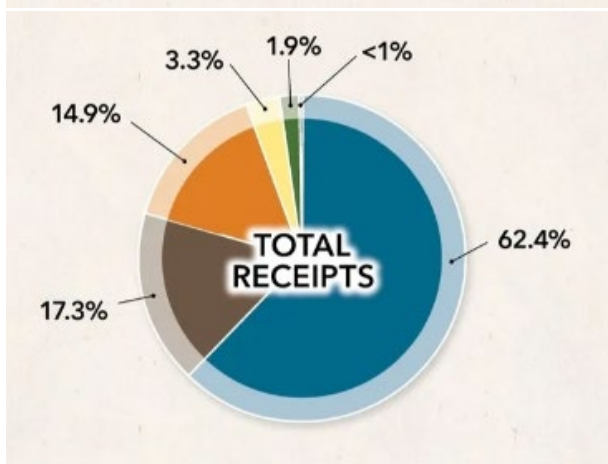
### Funding

The operating budget for MDC represents less than one (1) percent of the total state budget and receives no state general revenue. The primary sources of revenue are the one-eighth of one percent Conservation Sales Tax at about \$148 million, permit sales at about \$41 million, and federal reimbursements at about \$35 million. Total receipts for FY 2022 were \$237.8 million.

### MDC FY22 Actual Receipts

MDC gets the majority of its funding through the **conservation sales tax**. For every \$8 spent on taxable items, one penny goes to conservation.

|                             |               |
|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Conservation Sales Tax..... | \$148,432,999 |
| Permit Sales.....           | \$41,185,759  |
| Federal Reimbursements..... | \$35,330,861  |
| Sales and Rentals.....      | \$7,896,832   |
| Other Sources.....          | \$4,437,503   |
| Interest.....               | \$521,710     |



MDC has a priority-based budgeting program specifically tied to the Department's Strategic Plan: *Design for the Future*. This plan identifies three goals to direct the efforts associated with specific FY22-24 Department priorities.

- MDC Takes Care of Nature
- MDC Connects People with Nature
- MDC Maintains Public Trust

### MDC FY22 Actual Disbursements

Funds are distributed throughout MDC to accomplish the **state's top conservation priorities**.

|                                          |              |
|------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Habitat Management .....                 | \$44,298,434 |
| Conservation Business Services.....      | \$43,299,232 |
| Fish and Wildlife Management.....        | \$40,904,071 |
| Recreation Management .....              | \$22,850,521 |
| Education and Communication .....        | \$22,637,724 |
| Capital Improvements .....               | \$12,208,679 |
| Staff Development and Benefits .....     | \$6,999,488  |
| County Assistance Payments .....         | \$5,747,850  |
| Land Conservation and Partnerships ..... | \$2,365,170  |

### Staffing and Employment Diversity

Protection Branch currently has 14 vacancies out of 181 full-time employees. MDC and Protection continue to focus on recruiting and retaining staff who more closely represent the demographics of Missouri. Protection Branch leads these efforts by progressing into year two of the Conservation Preparation Internship Program that is designed to help recruit and develop well qualified, non-traditional candidates. The paid internship provides these candidates experiences and opportunities to help them be more competitive and successful in the application and interview process for the Conservation Agent Training Academy. As a result, the 2022 and 2023 academy classes more closely represent the statewide demographics with four (4) out of ten (10) interns, all non-traditional, making it into the academy. Three (3) more of those ten (10) are looking to apply to future academy classes or be hired elsewhere in the Department.

Recruiting efforts have also been supplemented significantly from the efforts of our administration and the Conservation Commission. Throughout 2022 and the beginning of 2023, the Conservation Commission approved several improvements to the total compensation package received by MDC employees. Individual increases were based off the following: market-based salary adjustments, years of service with MDC, performance pay based on set performance measures, increased insurance premium contribution by the Commission, and other scheduled pay adjustments including a recent 8.7% cost of living increase. MDC employees enjoyed anywhere from a 10% - 20% increase in salary and "take home" pay. These improvements have directly impacted the ability to recruit and retain high performing candidates and employees. The starting salary for a Conservation Agent Trainee, while they are in the academy, is now \$48,744.00 which bodes well for future recruiting efforts.



Missouri's Commercial Wildlife and Special Investigations Unit continue to combat the issues that arise from increased interest in commercial trade and trafficking of native wildlife and wildlife parts. We are continuing to see additional demand for Missouri's native turtles, snakes, and herps in both the international pet trade and food markets, as well as an increased demand in wildlife and wildlife parts being sold at "Oddities & Curiosities" (O&C) Expos and markets.

Missouri conservation agents from across the state assisted with the Special Investigations Unit's efforts at the 2022 Oddities and Curiosities Expo in Kansas City, Missouri, on June 25, 2022. One hundred sixteen (116) vendors had booths at the Expo. Covert teams attending the Expo sent vendor names, locations, and photographs of illegal wildlife for sale to uniformed agents staged outside the Expo. Both covert and uniformed teams were provided guidance for processing and documenting wildlife violations during the contacts.

## Community Policing

Historically, conservation agents frequently interacted with citizens at their local coffee shops, diners, cafes, etc. This practice has significantly declined over the past twenty (20) years due to changes in meal

reimbursement policies and increasing demands on agents' limited time. To help reverse this trend and increase public contacts outside of the traditional enforcement contact, this program was implemented to encourage and incentivize agents to spend time with constituents in their local food establishments. These interactions are intended to facilitate individual and group discussion with citizens on various conservation issues, to answer questions, and to proactively communicate Department programs and services with the citizens they serve. Agents are expected to conduct at least three (3) COMs meals per month during the breakfast and lunch hours in their communities, using their state purchasing card to pay for their meals, and are required to sit with or nearby members of the public to help facilitate these conversations. We have found that this approach works well in both rural and urban settings, and in communities that we have not traditionally been able to reach with typical programs or conservation enforcement. Since full implementation of the program, conservation agents have conducted over 4,300 community outreach meals, and have reached over 26,000 Missouri citizens.

## Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative Enforcement Efforts

MDC is a part of the Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership, which is comprised of over fifteen (15) federal and state agencies, as well as agriculture and conservation NGOs. The Partnership operates under the common goal of eliminating feral hogs from public and private lands throughout Missouri. During 2022, the Partnership removed 6,289 hogs from the landscape. Over the last three years the Partnership has removed over 28,781 feral hogs off Missouri's landscape.

Conservation agents remain actively involved in trapping efforts on private and public property as well as law enforcement patrols on U.S. Forest Service land and Missouri Conservation Areas throughout southern Missouri.

Missouri's Special Investigations Unit (SIU) continues to aid in interagency investigations when appropriate and remains active as a contributing member of the multi-state Aquatic Resources Task Force comprised of their counterpart investigators from Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Tennessee.

## New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

### Body Cameras

The Protection Branch has completed the rollout of its Body Worn Camera (BWC) Program with the final policy approved, and 180 cameras being assigned and deployed across the state as of February 28, 2023. With an ever-changing landscape in law enforcement, and efforts to be more transparent, professional, and maintain the trust of Missouri citizens, Protection leadership felt it was time to develop its program as soon as possible, but also wanted to make sure they were deliberate in selecting the right BWC platform (Axon Body 3) and crafting the policy specifically for a resource law enforcement roll. They were also



Axon Body 3 recording during the 2022 Firearms deer

looking for a platform compatible with our in-car CradlePoint systems, that would not create additional infrastructure and data storage burdens to IT staff. This allows agents to be more effective and efficient, providing the ability to upload electronic evidence to the online management system directly from the vehicle's Wi-Fi signal, and without the need of a docking station. Since full implementation of the program at the end of

February, conservation agents have recorded over 9,000 interactions with the public.

#### K-9 Unit

Protection Branch added four (4) new canines to the K-9 unit in 2022, bringing the unit up to a total of nine (9). The four (4) new handlers and their K-9s recently wrapped up their initial training in Ohio and will receive their commissions at the Conservation Commission meeting in May. The capabilities of MDC canines are extensive in conservation related work, but common uses include tracking, evidence recovery, search and rescue, wildlife detection, and public outreach programs. With the new additions, Protection Branch has a K-9 unit in seven (7) of the eight (8) regions across the state. The K-9 unit has proved to be an invaluable asset not only in enforcement efforts of evidence recovery, tracking, wildlife detection and search and rescue, but in public outreach as well. In 2022 the K-9 unit conducted 229 public programs, reached over 15,000 program participants, and had over 2,000 deployments.



*K-9 Waylon helps make the case on a turkey poacher.*

## State, Regional, and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement

In Missouri we are anxiously awaiting the decision from the Supreme Court of Missouri in ***Conservation Commission and Missouri Department of Conservation v. Eric Schmitt and Sarah Steelman***.

In summary, this case challenges the Missouri model of Conservation and discusses the Conservation Commissions constitutional authority in general, but more specially relates to land acquisition and appropriation of funding.

According to Supreme Court case summaries, the main question this case presents is whether the Commission has exclusive authority over the conservation fund. Related issues include whether the Missouri Constitution requires an act of appropriation by the general assembly before conservation funds can be withdrawn from the state treasury; whether the plain language of the constitutional provisions pertaining to the Commission mean the conservation fund automatically stands appropriated or require mandatory appropriation for land acquisitions; and whether the Commission's authority to control and manage wildlife resources extends to expenditures from the conservation fund.

## Cost Savings Initiatives

The Protection Branch continues to utilize a very active and successful Protection Volunteer Program consisting of approximately 100 volunteers spread across the state. In 2022, they contributed around 3,500 hours of volunteer work to MDC. These volunteers assist conservation agents and other MDC staff with projects including enforcement patrols, outreach and education programs, training scenarios and wildlife surveys. The volunteer program has also proven to be a valuable recruitment tool.

## Other Special Law Enforcement Issues

### Conservation Agents

The backbone of Protection Branch is the conservation agents. In Missouri there is one (1) or two (2) agents per county to officially represent the Department.

The main focus is on increasing voluntary compliance with the *Wildlife Code*. Protection Branch has put an emphasis on providing a strong law enforcement presence while using all the tools in an agent's tool belt to address violations. Last year the branch developed a dashboard to help determine resource contact compliance rates and conviction rates across the state. This helps analyze data to drive decision-making and helps measure efforts in citizen engagement, education, and community policing which should all correlate to a high contact compliance rate.

Protection Branch has an annual goal to maintain an 84% contact compliance rate. This data also helps ensure we are proactively working to maintain good relationships with prosecutors and judges and



*Conservation Agent Mark Henry issues a Sonic Citation for free ice cream.*

- 2022 Law Enforcement Contacts ..... 204,578
- 2022 Non-LE Contacts.....338,668
- 2022 Resource Violations.....16,270
- 2022 Non-Resource Violations.....5,102
- 2022 Public Programs.....7,298
- 2022 Public Program Participants.....125,126

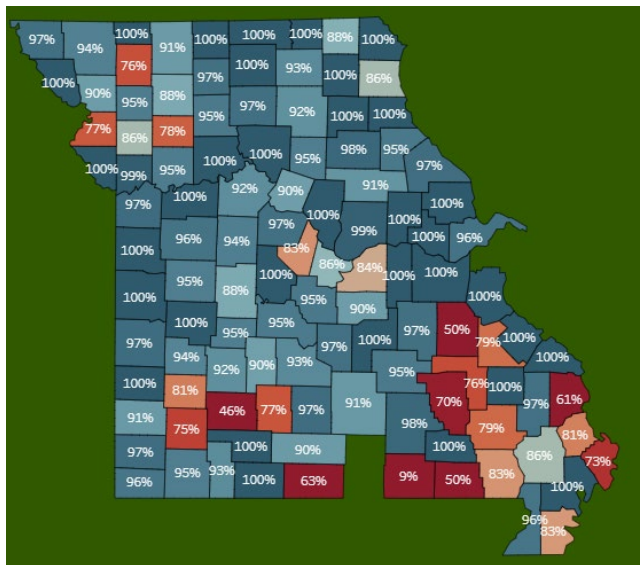
*Conservation Agent's yearly accomplishments*



In FY22, the statewide resource contact compliance rate was at 93.7%, meaning that for every 100 law enforcement contacts made, there were an average of 6.3 violations discovered.

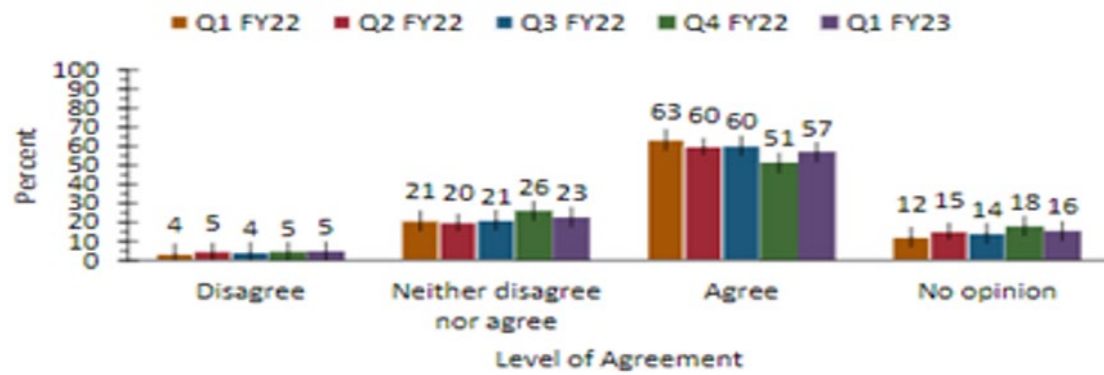


| Statewide Conviction Rate |        |
|---------------------------|--------|
| # of Convictions          | 3,773  |
| # of Citations            | 4,111  |
| Conviction Rate           | 91.78% |



Below is a graph that depicts the survey question to Missouri citizens: “Do you think the Missouri Department of Conservation is doing a good job of enforcing the fish and wildlife laws?” As you can see there is only a small percentage of Missourians that disagree, but we do have a lot of room to reach more Missourians that are indifferent or have no opinion.

The Missouri Department of Conservation is doing a good job of enforcing fish and wildlife laws.



**State/province: Nebraska**  
**Submitted by: Craig Stover**

**Training issues: describe any new or innovative training programs or technique which have been recently developed, implemented or are now required.**

- Field Training Officers have had an Officer in training (OIT) for nearly 2 years straight, which is starting to have some burnout repercussions. Over 50% of workforce has less than 5 years' experience as a Conservation Officer.
- We have started to augment our defensive tactics training by introducing Gracie Systems. This accompanies Human Force Factors and Krav Maga.
- We are in the infancy stages of establishing a Peer Support / Critical Incident Stress Management group for officers. During the initial planning phase, we are looking at training opportunities for this group to get it started.
- Minimum mandatory annual training is now at 32 hours. Annual weeklong in-service training has allowed us to knock out the majority of the required pre-requisites. Dolan Consulting and Calibre Press speakers have provided quality presentations.
- We have completed our transition to the Glock 9mm with weapon mounted light. So far all has gone well as it appears the overall accuracy has improved.

**Funding and staffing issues: identify any recent developments in funding, staffing, and diversity in employment issues and describe what prompted these developments and how improvements in funding, staffing and diversity in employment were accomplished.**

- Last year we reported that we were in the final stages of securing a Sergeant pay classification that would add 10 Conservation Officer Sergeants. That still hasn't happened and after considerable lip-service that it will soon go forward I am no longer holding my breath. Until then we will continue to function with 'at-will lead workers' to perform some of these duties. Welcome to State government.
- We received authorization through our Commission to add an additional 10 Conservation Officer positions with the intent to backfill spots previously held by those who become sergeants. Only five (5) of those positions were supported in the recent Governor's budget absent of funding any operating expenses. Since our legislature is currently in session, we will have to wait another month until we know the actual results of this effort.
- Back in 2021 we added five new CO positions and one full-time investigator position. While we still lag the staffing numbers of CO's in comparison to surrounding States there continues to be increasing support to rectify this issue. The full time-investigator has been a GREAT addition in supporting our overall efforts.
- As reported last year, when it comes to filling vacancies, the number of qualified applicants who can pass a background investigation is rapidly dwindling. Many enforcement agencies across the State have increased their wages and are offering hiring bonuses. In response we have overhauled candidate selection and have gone to a perpetual application process. Our State Patrol recently received a twenty-two and a half percent (22.5%) pay increase while our CO's in the same bargaining unit will receive a maximum increase of eight-point five percent (8.5%).
- New legislation passed last year reduces a retired officers adjusted gross income for State tax purposes by the amount paid out in health care. A second bill will provide Officers with a fifteen-hundred-dollar (\$1,500) retention bonus on July 1st of this year. There is still a little unresolved controversy whether our CO's will qualify for this bump.
- The turnover issue continues to escalate with both newly hired and long-time veteran personnel. The primary contributing factors are a combination of monetary compensation and our efforts to maintain a 24/7 on call status.

**Major conservation law enforcement trends: identify any major cooperative, interstate, reciprocal or other cross-jurisdictional law enforcement trends (e.g. including community policing, operator under the influence (QUI) initiatives, or other issues which fall outside traditional fish and wildlife enforcement functions).**

- Thanks to the efforts of our Investigator and all those Officers who support our long-term investigative efforts, we have been able to finally close out the Hidden Hills Outfitter case. New similar cases are in various stages of either investigation or prosecution.
- Federal prosecution of another significant case involving a 'frequent flyer' guide has been initiated.
- Face-book and social media posts continue to generate prosecutable cases along with unresolvable mickey mouse complaints. Due to the sheer volume our response to these reports has to be prioritized.
- Summers have always been a challenge for our CO's who also cover all park related activities. As is the trend across the country, we are not immune to the hypersensitive scrutiny and hostility exhibited in other jurisdictions. While we are called Conservation Officers, standard traditional police work throughout the summer has become the norm.

**Unique cross boundary or cooperative, enforcement efforts: describe any interagency, interstate, international, state/tribal, or other cross jurisdictional enforcement efforts (e.g. major Lacey Act investigations, progress with Wildlife Violator Compacts, improvements in interagency communication (WCIS), etc.).**

- State generated Lacey Act cases remain a priority especially when money is involved (guides, outfitters, sale, or purchase of wildlife) as does cooperation and the information exchange process with other States.

**New innovations in conservation law enforcement: describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.**

- Ongoing and continued upgrading of our sonar in support of our recovery efforts has been and will continue to be money well spent.
- Continued purchase and expansion of drones along with our remote surveillance camera setups has led to us formulating a technical team. Their add-on duties cover the installation, use and troubleshooting of this equipment. While we refrain from using this equipment in a willy-nilly manner, especially as it relates to private property, we see this equipment as the foundation of our future enforcement efforts.

**State, regional and national issues, legislation, legal challenges and court decisions impacting natural resources law enforcement: describe issues which impact or challenge law enforcement authority.**

- Our State Legislature couldn't pass the catsup as they are bogged down in debating social issues. This is good news as there have been several bills proposed that would be difficult to comply with. Examples include bounty payments for predators, unmanageable payments for wildlife damage, moving the Agency headquarters out of the capital to the western part of the State and a host of new requirements impacting all law enforcement agencies.
- While there has been no official legislation, court decisions or cases impacting our enforcement efforts, there are some subversive efforts that would curtail enforcement on private areas.

**Cost savings initiatives: identify initiatives in any area which contributed to improvements in work effectiveness and fiscal efficiency.**

- Remote cameras have increased the prosecution and reduced staff surveillance time significantly. We have a talented crew who build our own cameras resulting in a sizable reduction in costs for these units.
- As mentioned, monies spent on the training and purchase of high-tech sonar has significantly reduced staff time during a recovery.



- Adding Sergeant positions at a lower pay grade saves monies when compared to adding Lieutenants to maintain a reasonable span of control.

**Other special law enforcement issues:**

- A newly purchased permitting system started off this year (Tera Technology Group). As somewhat anticipated, this has led to several challenges. Currently several promised applications that would support our law enforcement efforts have yet to be developed.
- E-permitting systems have led to a significant number of cases related to people who take wildlife and then purchase a permit (shot-it then bought-it).

**State/province: North Dakota**  
**Submitted by: Scott Winkelman**

**Training issues: describe any new or innovative training programs or technique which have been recently developed, implemented or are now required.**

We continue to look for new and unique trainings for social media investigations. We have started giving a temporary salary increase to wardens who take on additional training duties. In the past, wardens volunteered to take on the extra duties and were not compensated for it. This has improved participation and morale amongst the training officers. The state law enforcement training center is under a major remodel project so we have been forced to move our annual in-service and other trainings to various locations at a much increased cost.

**Funding and staffing issues: identify any recent developments in funding, staffing, and diversity in employment issues and describe what prompted these developments and how improvements in funding, staffing and diversity in employment were accomplished.**

While our funding continues to be strong, and we are fully staffed, we are still working hard to increase the number of applicants when we do hire. The legislature has tried to address workforce issues by addressing numerous items including pay, equity raises, retirement and health benefits. After years of trying, our wardens will be moved from the regular Public Employees Retirement plan to the Public Safety plan. We also were given a new FTE and will be hiring an investigator.

**Major conservation law enforcement trends: identify any major cooperative, interstate, reciprocal or other cross-jurisdictional law enforcement trends (e.g. including community policing, operator under the influence (QUI) initiatives, or other issues which fall outside traditional fish and wildlife enforcement functions).**

Warden recruitment continues to be an issue and we are in a constant state of looking for ways to increase our number of applicants. This legislative session was the first time in the last 4 years we did not have legislation that would have eliminated open fields for law enforcement in the state.

**Unique cross boundary or cooperative, enforcement efforts: describe any interagency, interstate, international, state/tribal, or other cross jurisdictional enforcement efforts (e.g. major Lacey Act investigations, progress with Wildlife Violator Compacts, improvements in interagency communication (WCIS), etc.).**

Numerous investigations have been conducted involving officers from other states and have been quite successful. Our cooperative partnerships with local agencies for boat safety patrols continue to work well. We recently renewed our contract with Wyoming for lab services.

**New innovations in conservation law enforcement: describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.**

We will be upgrading our in-car video systems and adding body cameras that link to the cloud through the in-car system. We also added a FLIR unit to one of our patrol boats used on the Missouri River.

**State, regional and national issues, legislation, legal challenges and court decisions impacting natural resources law enforcement: describe issues which impact or challenge law enforcement authority.**

Our legislative session is nearly complete, and it was a very successful one for our division and all law enforcement in general. New legislation will move our wardens from the regular Public Employees Retirement plan to the Public Safety plan, lowering the retirement age from 60 to 55. We also were given a new FTE and will be hiring an investigator. Bills that would have eliminated the Department's ability to ban baiting big game and create a study to move us under a commission were defeated.

**Cost savings initiatives: identify initiatives in any area which contributed to improvements in work effectiveness and fiscal efficiency.**

We have purchased all our replacement radios for our patrol vehicles, boats, and portables in advance of the new state radio system being fully implemented, with the belief that costs were going to increase. Current costs are 30% higher than when we purchased our radios.

**Other special law enforcement issues:**

We recently replaced our .308 patrol rifles with 5.56 rifles. The feedback from the wardens has all been positive. Shooting has improved, ammunition is cheaper, and the rifles are much more reliable.

**State/province: Ohio**  
**Submitted by: Ken Fitz**

**Training issues: describe any new or innovative training programs or technique which have been recently developed, implemented or are now required.**

The Ohio Peace Officer Training Council has implemented mandatory Continuing Professional Training. (CPT) These CPT hours are assigned to specified topics, and failure to complete the training will result in the loss of peace officer certification. Much of this coursework is online, but some may be accomplished through our normal annual training as long as the Council approves the lesson plans.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources utilizes Lexipol for the development of policies and procedures. Online Daily Training Bulletins are issued and must be completed to ensure officers maintain their knowledge of policies. These bulletins consist of a brief written scenario followed by questions.

Recent officer hirings have indicated a passion for the outdoors but little experience in hunting or fishing in our candidates. As part of the training academy, several days of R3 training were scheduled to teach the basics of hunting and fishing and the equipment involved.

**Funding and staffing issues: identify any recent developments in funding, staffing, and diversity in employment issues and describe what prompted these developments and how improvements in funding, staffing and diversity in employment were accomplished.**

Due to several retirements, there were several vacancies in our law enforcement ranks. Two very large classes of cadets were hired in the early to mid-1990s, and those officers are now reaching retirement. A cadet class was hired in 2022, which graduated in March 2023; right after graduation, another hiring cycle was started for a 2023/2024 class. For both hirings, we increased the number and diversity of candidates by changing our education requirements to expanded degrees and reaching more candidates through social media. In addition, we pushed a message to our customer engagement (licensing) app on cell phones, which resulted in an uptick in the number of applicants. Our most recent hiring process had 993 applicants for 15 positions.

**Major conservation law enforcement trends: identify any major cooperative, interstate, reciprocal or other cross-jurisdictional law enforcement trends (e.g. including community policing, operator under the influence (QUI) initiatives, or other issues which fall outside traditional fish and wildlife enforcement functions).**

The hunting guide industry is not licensed or regulated by the Division of Wildlife in Ohio. However, guide services are prevalent and popular due to the quality of deer hunting in Ohio. Unfortunately, some of these operations are not legitimate and involve acts of fraud and unauthorized use of property. Hunters and traditional law enforcement agencies assume that these operations are regulated by the Division of Wildlife, even though many violations are normally outside our jurisdiction. Through the collaborative work between our officers and prosecutors, we have been able to bring several of these violators to justice. Violations include unauthorized use of property and "typical" hunting violations. In addition, one case involved wire fraud, as the "guide" was selling hunts over the internet on land he had no permission to hunt on. Nonresident hunters would show up after paying to hunt but were not permitted to be where they were. Approximately 30 hunters were scammed by this individual.

**Unique cross boundary or cooperative, enforcement efforts: describe any interagency, interstate, international, state/tribal, or other cross jurisdictional enforcement efforts (e.g.**

**major Lacey Act investigations, progress with Wildlife Violator Compacts, improvements in interagency communication (WCIS), etc.).**

Our officers worked with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commissions to execute a search warrant in Pennsylvania in connection with the Lake Erie Walleye Trail cheating investigation. During the execution of the search warrant, a fishing boat was seized and transported back to Ohio. The suspects in the case have pleaded guilty, and the boat has been forfeited to the Division of Wildlife.

*United States v. Tony Lee Coffman*, On March 9, 2023, Tony Lee Coffman pleaded guilty to violating the Lacey Act for illegally transporting and selling wild American ginseng, a protected species, and falsifying records.

Coffman was a West Virginia-licensed wild American ginseng dealer. On September 7, 2017, and September 15, 2017, Coffman purchased approximately 28 pounds of American ginseng roots that others illegally transported from Ohio. Ginseng dealer reports he submitted in October 2017 claimed the ginseng purchased on September 7 originated in West Virginia. Coffman also omitted to mention roots purchased on September 15. Coffman also submitted falsified records claiming ginseng illegally harvested in Ohio between November 2018 and September 2020 came from West Virginia. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources conducted the investigation.

In conjunction with the ODNR Division of Parks and Watercraft, wildlife officers assisted with a Canine Academy, training one dog and handler for the Ohio State Parks and Watercraft Division and four dogs and handlers for the Missouri Department of Conservation.

As a Great Lake State, our agency is heavily involved in cross-jurisdictional concerns of the entire Great Lakes region. Lake Erie fisheries management decisions affecting regulations include everyone at the table with an interest. Aquatic organisms in trade and the often-associated aquatic invasive species are at the forefront of concerns for Great Lakes states. It is recognized that when invasives enter one of the Great Lakes, there is an effect on the entire system. Our enforcement officers are increasing their monitoring efforts by identifying and engaging people who are selling aquatic organisms and bringing them into compliance through education and enforcement action when needed. One recent investigation involved an individual selling marbled crayfish online and shipping them to 37 states. These highly invasive crayfish are self-cloning.

**New innovations in conservation law enforcement: describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.**

Under the direction of Governor Mike DeWine, all state law enforcement agencies are, or have, implemented body-worn cameras. This new technology brings transparency to the actions of officers and has proven, in a short time, to be a valuable tool for documenting interactions with the public. Recorded video has documented and provided evidence as well as protection against false accusations against officers.

**State, regional and national issues, legislation, legal challenges and court decisions impacting natural resources law enforcement: describe issues which impact or challenge law enforcement authority.**

The authority to conduct an inspection of a meat processor or taxidermist was challenged following a case in which the processor/taxidermist was charged for not allowing an inspection of their facilities and records. Because neither of these activities is "highly regulated" under Ohio law (no license required, just record-keeping requirements), the Attorney General's office advised the Division to settle. In addition, our administrative code was changed to reflect that the owner or person in charge can refuse an inspection unless the officer obtains a warrant. Inspections of highly regulated industries, like commercial fishing, may still take place.

Ohio Senate Bill 9 became law in June 2022. Agencies that make administrative rules are required to reduce their regulatory restrictions (the words shall, must, require, shall not, may not, and prohibit) by a minimum of 10% each year and 30 % after three years. In addition, for each new restriction, the agency must remove two existing restrictions. The law includes additional requirements for rule-making. We are currently evaluating rules and reducing regulatory restrictions during our normal rule-making process to stay compliant.

**Cost savings initiatives: identify initiatives in any area which contributed to improvements in work effectiveness and fiscal efficiency.**

We reviewed the way in which overtime was assigned. Supervisors collaborated with field officers to determine the best way to assign overtime based on identified things like unique work unit geography, demands from the public, complaints, public use areas, and officer coverage. Previously overtime was assigned based on season dates and similar factors (opening day, tradition, etc.) and was uniformly assigned across the state.

Wildlife officers have been issued four-wheeled drive pickup trucks for several years. This year, the only truck available on the contract was \$63,000. At the same time, a police package, four-wheel drive full-size SUV was available for \$46,000. While this will impact the ability to haul evidence like whole deer, and some equipment, these vehicles come at substantial savings.

We combined our time-keeping systems into a single system that eliminates the use of multiple location codes and, at the same time, dramatically reduced the number of time-reporting codes. These changes reduce duplication and administrative time to complete timecards and process payroll.

**Other special law enforcement issues:**

We continue to see issues with timber theft off of public land. Often these thefts are of a relatively small number of high-value logs and occur quickly. Many of these timber thefts are tied to funding a drug use habit by the offender.

Pollution events, particularly those that result in wild animal kills, involve multiple agencies with overlapping jurisdiction. Often, the cause or source of the pollution determines which agency will take the lead. At the same time, Governor Mike DeWine has advanced clean water initiatives under H2Ohio and a litter enforcement initiative, "A Little Litter, It's a Big Problem." When applicable, we seek criminal charges for litter and pollution statutes violations. When the Division of Wildlife does not seek criminal charges, we seek reimbursement for damage to wildlife and for staff costs.

**State/province: Saskatchewan**  
**Submitted by: Steve Dobko, Chief Superintendent**

**Training issues: describe any new or innovative training programs or technique which have been recently developed, implemented or are now required.**

In 2021 and 2022 Saskatchewan trained and hired 31 new Permanent Field Conservation Officers through the Western Conservation Law Enforcement Academy. In 2023 we will be sending 10 more recruits to the academy. Staffing remains fluid due to current retirements and effects of organizational restructuring that occurred in 2022. Current officers will be attending all their use of force recertifications with officers from other organizations within the newly formed Provincial Protective Services Branch i.e., Highway Patrol Officers and Court Sheriffs. Conservation officer instructors will also be responsible for training officers from these other groups as well. The Training Unit has expanded from 4 full-time trainers to six to assist with this increased commitment. The NSIT undercover course which Saskatchewan is involved with was scheduled for June 2023 and has been postponed to May 2024 in hopes we can get a few more candidates from Canadian agencies.

**Funding and staffing issues: identify any recent developments in funding, staffing, and diversity in employment issues and describe what prompted these developments and how improvements in funding, staffing and diversity in employment were accomplished.**

Funding has improved with the move to the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety. Various areas of improvement include capital equipment purchases, operational expenses, and overtime allotments.

**Major conservation law enforcement trends: identify any major cooperative, interstate, reciprocal or other cross-jurisdictional law enforcement trends (e.g. including community policing, operator under the influence (QUI) initiatives, or other issues which fall outside traditional fish and wildlife enforcement functions).**

On April 1, 2022, Conservation Officers were moved over to the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety along with Highway Patrol Officers, Safer Communities and Neighborhoods (SCAN) Officers and Community Safety Officers. All Officers are now united under a single organizational structure called the Provincial Protective Services Branch. The new structure brings the various departments together to work as unified branch to enhance public safety. In 2022 Saskatchewan created an unlawful outfitting task force. This task force focused enforcement efforts towards unlawful outfitting practices throughout Saskatchewan leading to unlawful export of wildlife through the northern and Midwest states. Officers performed increased inspection at the Saskatoon International Airport and all US land border crossings through the fall and winter of 2022.

**Unique cross boundary or cooperative, enforcement efforts: describe any interagency, interstate, international, state/tribal, or other cross jurisdictional enforcement efforts (e.g. major Lacey Act investigations, progress with Wildlife Violator Compacts, improvements in interagency communication (WCIS), etc.).**

Saskatchewan, BC, Manitoba and Alberta Investigation Units are jointly investigating individuals who have been obtaining residency licenses in both provinces in the same year. Some individuals are illegally claiming residency in both provinces in order to purchase lower costing licenses or apply for and enter draws when they are not eligible. This enforcement effort will continue to be an ongoing investigation each year. The 2022/23 enforcement efforts that will be focused on unlawful outfitting in Saskatchewan will involve our US partners and agencies such as CBSA, USFWS, and the US Border Homeland Security Agency and other Canadian provinces.

**New innovations in conservation law enforcement: describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.**

With the various departments joining the new Provincial Protective Services branch, this will allow better utilization of equipment and resources for special enforcement projects as well as provide better public safety for the residents of Saskatchewan through unified enforcement efforts. Along with being part of the Provincial Protection and Response Team, select Conservation Officer vehicles have been equipped with Automatic License Plate Readers (ALPR). These units are designed to read vehicle license plates as they pass by and inform the officer if the vehicle is registered, expired or if the vehicle is associated to a suspended driver. In addition, the ALPR, Saskatchewan is moving towards installation mobile workstations and E-ticketing in all officer patrol vehicles. Highway Patrol Officers have been given Fish & Wildlife appointments to allow for response for calls for service for animal dispatch on highways or apprehension of suspected AIS watercraft on highways.

**State, regional and national issues, legislation, legal challenges and court decisions impacting natural resources law enforcement: describe issues which impact or challenge law enforcement authority.**

The Migratory Birds Regulations, 2022. The new regulations came into force on July 30, 2022. Some of the more notable changes related to migratory game bird hunting include a change in possession, the new concept of preservation introduced i.e., Preserved birds no longer count towards possession limits (except for murrelets). New provision allowing retention of either a fully feathered wing or fully feathered head attached. New prohibition on the abandonment of harvested migratory game birds. Twenty-eight changes in total.

**Provincial-** Amendments to The Trespass to Property Act came into force on January 1, 2022. These amendments will require individuals seeking access to private property to obtain the consent of the landowner or occupier prior to entry. The Trespass to Property Act seeks to balance the reasonable expectations of landowners and those who want access to privately owned property for a variety of legitimate reasons. On January 1, 2023, The Police (Serious Incident Response Team) Amendment Act, 2021 came into force, which formally establishes a serious incident response team (SIRT) in Saskatchewan. These changes will allow the SIRT to engage in any serious incident involving police, from initiating a full investigation to reviewing, overseeing, assisting, or delegating. SIRT members will investigate matters where serious injury or death may have occurred while in the custody of police, as a result of the actions of a police officer, or where sexual assault or interpersonal violence involving police are alleged.

**Cost savings initiatives: identify initiatives in any area which contributed to improvements in work effectiveness and fiscal efficiency.**

2023 business case underway to develop dedicated data entry positions. If approved the branch will use this three-year plan to implement civilian data entry staff to enter tickets, warnings, and CVSA inspections into the Versaterm records management system. Once fully implemented would reduce the amount of time Saskatchewan Highway Patrol Officers and Conservation COs and SHP officers spend completing these administrative tasks. Having officers in the field patrolling and available for immediate calls for service rather than in an office.

**Other special law enforcement issues:**

In November 2022 the Saskatchewan Government announced the province will be developing a new Saskatchewan Marshals Service (SMS) and expanding the Crime Reduction Team (CRT) and Warrant Enforcement and Suppression Team (WEST). The Saskatchewan Marshals Service will consist of approximately 70 officers. The Service will provide an additional law enforcement presence across Saskatchewan, conduct proactive investigations and support RCMP and municipal police operations. Their duties will include responding to areas with high crime rates, apprehending offenders with outstanding arrest warrants and investigating farming-related offenses like theft and trespassing. The SMS is expected to be operational by



mid-to-late 2026, at an annual cost of approximately \$20 million. The Service will have police authority throughout the province, and support RCMP and municipal police operations where appropriate. The RCMP will remain the provincial police service of jurisdiction.

**State/province: South Dakota**

**Submitted by: Sam Schelhaas**

**Training issues: describe any new or innovative training programs or technique which have been recently developed, implemented or are now required.**

- With the amplified efforts to recruit new officers, we have increased the amount of time and commitment our training cadre must put forth to get our new officers through the wildlife training officer program. Our training officers have risen to the occasion and continue to put forth their best efforts.
- Critical incident and stress management (CISM) support is an area that our agency has been lacking for some time. Within the past year we have paved the way to get a CISM and peer support team implemented, and steps are being taken to get these programs up and running. There has been a lot of positive feedback from our officers.

**Funding and staffing issues: identify any recent developments in funding, staffing, and diversity in employment issues and describe what prompted these developments and how improvements in funding, staffing and diversity in employment were accomplished.**

2022 was a big year for South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks as we put a lot of effort and commitment into recruiting new officers. We were able to increase the starting pay for a new officer along with increasing pay for our current officers and supervisors which was a tremendous help in the recruiting effort. Along with that we really increased our presence on social media and began searching for the type of candidate that we wanted instead of waiting for them to come to us. All of these efforts paid off and we were able to hire a record number of officers.

**Major conservation law enforcement trends: identify any major cooperative, interstate, reciprocal or other cross-jurisdictional law enforcement trends (e.g. including community policing, operator under the influence (QUI) initiatives, or other issues which fall outside traditional fish and wildlife enforcement functions).**

- With changes to open fields in 2021, South Dakota conservation officers have had to adapt to a new set of rules in the performance of their duties. We have seen an increase in the use of technology and an enhancement in investigative techniques. Our officers are more proficient at filing and conducting search warrants, utilizing all available technology such as smart cameras and in general are making improvements in the investigation and prosecution of significant cases.
- Personal mailboxes (PMBs) are nothing new to the state of South Dakota, but they have become more and more popular over the last few years. PMBs are essentially a mail forwarding facility. South Dakota is generally considered a cost-efficient place to live, and many folks will come here, get a South Dakota drivers license, register their vehicles in South Dakota and then live somewhere else. The PMBs will then make sure their mail gets forwarded to the right location. This creates some unique and challenging circumstances as the residency requirements for hunting, fishing, and trapping are different than the requirements for financial purposes. Steps are being taken to correct the problems but the challenges for the resource users and our officers are considerable.

**New innovations in conservation law enforcement: describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.**

One of the newest pieces of equipment that we are excited to deploy are cameras with specialized equipment to capture license plates. Officers have worked with the software provider to get these cameras set up for use at our boat ramps in the hopes of catching "double dippers" and essentially reducing the man hours required to effectively enforce these violations.

**State, regional and national issues, legislation, legal challenges and court decisions impacting natural resources law enforcement: describe issues which impact or challenge law enforcement authority.**

It was a quiet year for the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks in the 98th Legislative Session for the State. There were a few bills brought forth by the agency that received overwhelming support. One interesting bill from a State Senator would have required the Department to provide 24-hour dispatch, fire, ambulance, dispatch and search and rescue services in all state parks. This bill did not make it out of committee.

**State/province: Texas**  
**Submitted by: Luis A. Sosa**

**Training issues: describe any new or innovative training programs or technique which have been recently developed, implemented or are now required.**

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Law Enforcement Division (TPWD-LE) continues to develop and adopt training as needed to ensure Game Wardens and State Park Police Officers are prepared to meet the demands of their job. Through the assistance of the Division's Texas Game Warden Training Center Staff:

- The 65th Texas Game Warden Cadet class of 24 Game Wardens and 10 State Park Police Officers is scheduled to graduate on June 2, 2023. (The class began with 26 Game Wardens and 22 State Park Police Officers)
- Texas Game Wardens have done a thorough evaluation and test of pistol mounted optics. TPWD-LE has made the decision to move forward with pistol mounted optics for every TPWD commissioned peace officer with plans to roll out a train-the-trainer program during the 2023 calendar year.

**Funding and staffing issues: identify any recent developments in funding, staffing, and diversity in employment issues and describe what prompted these developments and how improvements in funding, staffing and diversity in employment were accomplished.**

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Law Enforcement Division (TPWD-LE) understands that its most valuable assets are its people, and that each person is unique and capable of bringing different important contributions to the workplace. TPWD-LE continues to strive towards maintaining a balanced workforce that is diverse and inclusive to ensure we provide high-quality outdoor recreational experiences and that we execute the most effective conservation initiatives for our state's lands, waters, fish, and wildlife by:

- Goal 1: Recruit from a diverse, highly skilled group of potential applicants to secure a high performing workforce drawn from all segments of American society.
- Goal 2: Cultivate a culture that encourages accountability, collaboration, flexibility, and fairness to enable individuals to contribute to their full potential.
- Goal 3: Create awareness and develop educational structures and strategies to institutionalize a culture of inclusion for current and future employees.

A recent Survey of Employment Engagement (SEE) revealed that TPWD-LE's areas of:

- Strength were Strategic, Supervision and Workplace.
- Concern were Pay, Internal Communication, and Benefits.

### Regarding areas of strength:

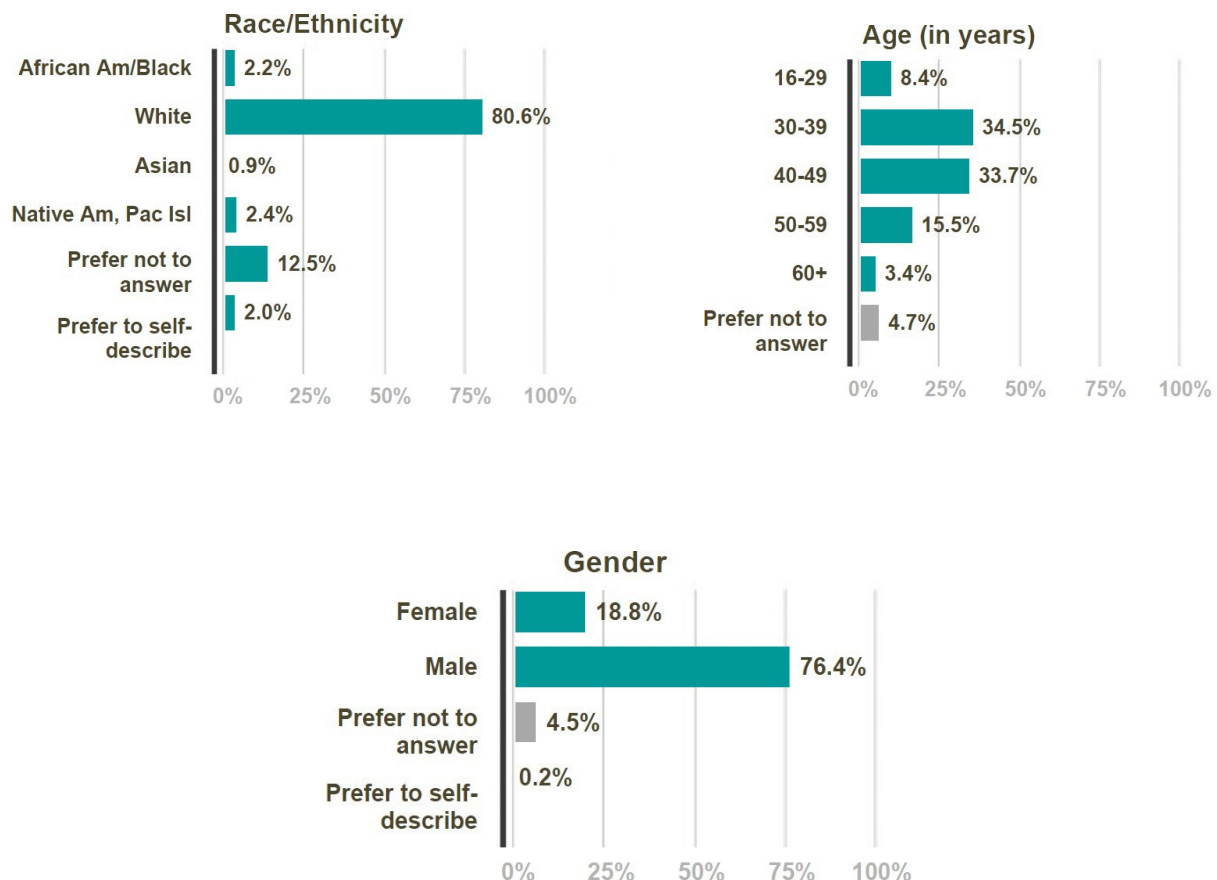
- The strategic construct captures employee's perception of their role in the organization and the organization's mission, vision, and strategic plan. The identification of strategic as a strength suggests that employees understand their role in the organization and consider the organization's reputation to be positive.
- The supervision construct captures employee's perception of the nature of supervisory relationships within the organization. The identification of a supervision strength suggests that employees view their supervisors as fair, helpful, and critical to the flow of work.
- The workplace construct captures employee's perception of the total work atmosphere, the degree to which they consider it safe, and the overall feel. The identification of a workplace strength suggests that employees see the setting as satisfactory, safe and that adequate tools and resources are available.

### Regarding areas of concern:

- The pay construct captures employee's perception about how well the compensation package offered by the organization holds up when compared to similar jobs in other organizations. The identification of pay as an area of concern suggests that pay is a central concern or reason for discontent and is not comparable to similar organization.
  - **Plan of Action:** There is current legislation related to salaries for state employees and that is supported by both the House and Senate that would increase salaries for staff by 10% over the next biennium.
- The internal communication construct captures employee's perception whether communication in the organization is reasonable, candid and helpful. The identification of internal communication as an area of concern suggests that employees feel information does not arrive in a timely fashion and is difficult to find.
  - **Plan of Action:** The TPWD-LE Director has implemented an action plan that will actively seek out more feedback from field staff through regional meetings, encourage field staff participation in additional HR related outreach, reinstate official notetaking at senior staff meetings for the purpose of dissemination among the Division, create a consistent timeline for the internal newsletter, and proactively work with program outreach and communications to explore new modes of communications between staff and senior leadership.
- The benefits construct captures employee's perception about how the benefits package compares to packages at similar organizations and how flexible it is. The identification of benefits as an area of concern suggests that employees

perceive benefits as less than needed or unfair in comparison to similar jobs in the community.

Additionally, the Survey of Employment Engagement (SEE) revealed that TPWD-LE's demographics are as follows:



## Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Law Enforcement Division (TPWD-LE) continues to work closely with TPWD biologist from the Coastal Fisheries Division and Wildlife Division to ensure conservations measures are being adhered to in response to recent negative impacts to certain natural resources.

- Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) – CWD continues to be a threat within the State of Texas. TPWD-LE continues to be a representative within the State's CWD Taskforce made up of biologist, industry partners, and wildlife non-profit organizations for the purpose of finding solutions to contain the spread of CWD while supporting the needs of those engaged in deer breeding practices.

- Wild-Oysters – TPWD-LE continues being a member of a Texas Taskforce, made up of biologist, industry partners, and fisheries non-profit organizations, for the purpose of identifying options for the commercial harvesting of oysters, while, maintaining sustainable natural oyster beds in Texas.

## New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Law Enforcement Division (TPWD-LE) continues to explore technological opportunities to provide its law enforcement officers with the tools necessary for the safe, effective, and efficient enforcement of water safety and conservations laws.

- TPWD-LE is in the process of migrating its record management system from Caliber to Versaterm Public Safety. Through research and testing, it was determine that Versaterm Public Safety was the solution for the agency, allowing it the explore the technological advancement in other areas of need. TPWD-LE currently operates without a computer added dispatch where officers still write paper citations. With that said, Versaterm Public Safety, as a “one stop shop” offers an RMS that integrates with a computer aided dispatch and an E-ticking option.

## State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Law Enforcement Division (TPWD-LE) is currently navigating through the 88<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislative Session that is set to end in May 2023. TPWD-LE staff have supported several priorities as agency resources that are being considered by the Legislature. These priorities include but are not limited to:

- Changes to TPWD statutes related to:
  - Shark fin prosecutions
  - BWI with a child passenger
  - PFD requirements for towed watersports
- Funding requests for:
  - 10% salary increase for non-commissioned staff
  - \$23.6 million over the next biennium for two fixed-wing aircrafts
  - \$8 million over the next biennium for 80 patrol vessels

**State/province: Wisconsin**  
**Submitted by: Casey Krueger**

**Training Issues** - describe any new or innovative training programs or techniques which have been recently developed, implemented, or are now required.

- 2022 was the first year of the division's Community Service Officer (CSO) program. The goal of the program is to provide hands-on learning and internship opportunities to individuals who are interested in learning more about the work of conservation wardens. CSOs receive valuable training and experience by assisting with public safety and resource protection functions not requiring sworn officers.

In 2022, CSOs assisted the division by facilitating community outreach at special events, educating the public on DNR rules and regulations, assisting with crime prevention efforts, providing general office assistance, and more. The division believes this program will have a positive impact not only in recruiting knowledgeable individuals to the field, but also in providing better public education on DNR law enforcement related topic areas. In total, 14 individuals participated in the 2022 CSO Program, and one of those individuals was later hired as a full-time DNR conservation warden.



*Warden Audrey Royce and CSO Matt Kozloski responded to a trumpeter swan stuck in a foothold trap. The swan was not harmed by the trap and was released back to the wild. After his summer as a CSO, Matt joined our warden force – welcome Warden Kozloski!*

- The Environmental Enforcement Team developed 13 virtual modules to provide field wardens and all regulatory staff basic environmental enforcement training.

Topics Include: Environmental Enforcement 101, Primary Enforcement Techniques, Proofs and Evidence, Report Writing and Documentation, Environmental Request Form, Trespassing and Safety for Inspectors, Sampling and Lab Services, Sampling-Labslips and Chain of Custody, Waterways Case Study, Interviewing, Citations Start to Finish, Special Inspection Warrants, and Notice of Claim.



- The division launched the 2022 hiring process, and as a result received about 750 applications for 9 conservation warden positions. All new credentialed staff began either the 720-hour law enforcement academy or the abbreviated academy and will continue their training into 2023. In addition to hiring new wardens, we also ensured the skill set of our credentialed staff remained high quality and current on certifications by providing training in firearms, public records, emergency vehicle operation and taser operation.
- In 2022, our division was able to move back towards in-person training opportunities as COVID-19 precautions were lifted. Where applicable, virtual or hybrid training opportunities were still provided to staff.

**Funding and Staffing Issues** - identify any recent developments in funding, staffing, and diversity in employment issues and describe what prompted these developments and how improvements in funding, staffing and diversity in employment were accomplished.

- Much of the division's funding is used for funding its largest and most valued assets - it's personnel. Much of the division's spending on supplies and materials are used to outfit conservation wardens, including vehicles, uniforms, safety equipment, and office space. Every year, a considerable amount of the budget is spent on mileage as conservation wardens are responsible for patrolling large administrative areas.
- The division continues to face funding challenges as much of its equipment is specialized and expensive, yet still needs to be updated or purchased as a function of the lifesaving tools they provide the public. Many costs are rising faster than inflation, such as recreational vehicles for patrolling. Despite these challenges, staff in our Business Section continue to work hard to find ways to leverage new budgetary opportunities and effectively manage and prioritize the division's varied needs.
- One major area of concern for our division are the discrepancies in compensation that our staff see in comparison to other law enforcement agencies. The division's Compensation Committee, in conjunction with the Division of Personnel Management (DPM), is constantly striving to keep our employees equitably compensated in the competitive law enforcement job market. Competitive pay plays a significant role in not only recruiting the most qualified applicants, but also retaining them throughout their career.

Through the committee's work, significant progress has been made in relation to employee compensation. However, these pay increases have not kept pace with inflation or counterpart law enforcement agencies and the situation has become more dire. Currently, our conservation wardens rank at the bottom of the compensation market amongst other Midwest state law enforcement agencies. Additionally, employee retention rates for our wardens are significantly lower when compared to these same agencies.

The division believes that improved, well-timed compensation incentives and better benefit packages are strong motivators for recruitment and retention, and the best way to remain strategically competitive in attracting a broad and diverse population of qualified candidates. DPSRP worked closely with staff at DPM to draft a compensation initiative for the FY23-25 State Compensation Plan that will put our wardens back into a competitive pay range amongst in-state and adjacent state employers.

- We are continually evaluating ways in which we can improve our recruitment and retention efforts to not only better serve our staff, but to cultivate a culture of inclusivity, trust, and engagement. We believe that a diversity in staff is important to serving a diverse public.

**Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends** - identify any major cooperative, interstate,



*2022 Graduating Warden Recruit Class*

reciprocal or other cross jurisdictional law enforcement trends (e.g. including community policing, operator under the influence (QUI) initiatives, or other issues which fall outside traditional fish and wildlife enforcement functions).

- Similar to previous years, in 2022, the division's Recreational Safety and Outdoor Skills (RSOS) team emphasized the importance of intervention before incident. Through education, community involvement, and enforcement, we work towards keeping all who utilize trails and waterways throughout the state safe. There were fewer incidents in all recreational vehicle categories in 2022, with the exception of Off-Highway Motorcycles (OHMs).

|                        | Boat | ATV | UTV | OHM | Snowmobile | Totals |
|------------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|------------|--------|
| <b>Non-fatal</b>       | 92   | 116 | 95  | 11  | 100        | 414    |
| <b>Fatal</b>           | 20   | 13  | 8   | 0   | 16         | 55     |
| <b>Total Incidents</b> | 112  | 127 | 103 | 11  | 116        | 469    |

- There were over 19 million visitors to WI state properties in 2022. With sustained use of state properties comes frequent calls for service and need for emergency response, thus need for ready and available law enforcement presence.

Through partnership with staff in the Bureau of Parks and Recreation Management, it is our goal to provide a balanced enforcement approach that allows all who enjoy Wisconsin's state properties a memorable and safe experience. At properties that experience highest-use, dedicated wardens are assigned to ensure efficient response time for incidents and overall public safety support.

At Devil's Lake, Wisconsin's most popular state park with an annual visitation rate of over 2 million people, wardens are faced with unique challenges. Wardens have contact with visitors for a variety of alcohol related issues including disorderly conduct, OWI/open intoxicants, and campground noise violations. Wardens have also observed an increase in mental health related calls during recent park seasons.

In 2022, wardens worked with the Department of Health and Human Services Crisis Management Staff on multiple suicide related calls to get visitors appropriate treatment.

Conservation Wardens at Devil's Lake State Park also responded to 92 medical related emergency calls in 2022, including multiple rescue calls from falls on the bluffs, water rescues, heart attacks, bee sting reactions, seizures, heat stroke/exhaustion, sprains/strains, car accidents, and drug overdoses.

- Increases were seen in crossbow, upgrade archer, patron, bear and fall turkey licenses purchased in 2022. Most other categories of hunting and fishing licenses showed slight decreases or close to equivalent levels of licenses purchased in 2021.

As seen through both increased calls for service received and citations issued during Wisconsin's hunting and fishing seasons, the need for wardens' service to the public during their hunting and fishing pursuits is critical to ensuring a successful, safe, and fair recreation environment for all.

- For many years, the rate of calls for service received annually has increased steadily – 2022 was no exception. Wardens received 11% more calls for service in 2022 than in 2021. This data is greatly important in evaluating best ways for our division to provide efficient and effective response to emergency and enforcement matters across the state. The division routinely evaluates strategic opportunities for ensuring best coverage and improved response time wherever possible to better serve the public.
- Although we experienced higher numbers of calls for service in 2022, the division simultaneously saw a 12% decrease in overall citations issued. Most violations issued in 2022 were in relation to incidents at state parks or fishing and hunting related violations. Wardens continue to utilize problem-based policing to gain compliance with the public we serve.

Considering this data, we stand confident in warden's effective response to critical situations and their ability to encourage safe and responsible behavior within our state. The division's multiple public outreach campaigns (i.e., Deer Season Safety Campaign, Learn to Hunt Program, Welcome Centers, Fishmobile, Think Smart Before You Start, etc.) regarding public safety and best practices may have also positively impacted this data set, in addition to using stepped enforcement approaches where applicable.



*To reduce the trend in boating related fatalities, the division committed resources to hosting Boating Safety Welcome Centers in 2022, where DNR staff promoted lifejacket wearing, responsible boating practices and water safety marketing to members of the public.*

*In the program's first season, we were present at 22 different venues, contacting approximately 1000 members of the public and providing over 100 safety demonstrations. We plan to continue to expand this program statewide in 2023.*

- In total, over 67,000 people received a WI safety certification in 2022. The public obtained their safety certificates in a variety of formats, including in-person, virtual and internet field day opportunities.

In addition to formal instruction, the division worked hard to engage the public via radio, podcasts, social media, digital media, and news releases, with the goal of enrollment in safety courses and reducing avoidable incidents.

For example, the division's Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3) staff, in collaboration with external partners, worked to provide 85 Learn to Hunt opportunities and multiple in-person and virtual workshops in 2022.



*Wardens Mary Bisch and Zachary Seitz participate in a local radio show at Mill's Fleet Farm the Friday before the gun deer season opener to provide public outreach and answer questions from callers and customers at the store. Wardens also participate in a monthly radio show to highlight any upcoming seasons, events, and provide their expertise to the vast number of listeners.*



**Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts** - describe any Interagency, interstate, international, state/tribal, or other cross jurisdictional enforcement efforts (e.g. major Lacey Act investigations, progress with Wildlife Violator Compacts, improvements in interagency communication (WCIS), etc.)

- Wardens “way up north” in Wisconsin have the privilege of patrolling and co-managing the activities of a variety of users on Lake Superior. Pleasure cruisers, fishermen (commercial and sport), and numerous others are drawn to the beauty and opportunity of this body of water. Wardens regularly work and train with partner agencies to ensure all are up to speed on tactics for rescues, enforcement, or anything else they may be called out for on the lake.



*Warden Phil Brown and other wardens training with the United States Coast Guard (USCG) out of Bayfield, specifically focusing on boarding and towing vessels.*

- The investigative team, local wardens, Hazardous Waste and Asbestos Program staff, the City of Port Washington, and the Wisconsin Department of Justice (WIDJ) completed a criminal investigation and settlement agreements with several individuals who operated an illegal battery dismantling operation in the City of Port Washington, WI.

This case came to light due to sludge at the City of Port Washington Wastewater Treatment Plant showing up contaminated with high levels of lead, which was tracked back to the facility where the environmental contamination originated. The investigation identified that lead was not only released to the wastewater treatment plant, but also released to a nearby stream via the City of Port Washington stormwater system, and asbestos was being stored on site after it was removed from various locations within the same facility.

The investigation identified asbestos removal and disposal violations, along with various hazardous waste law violations. The pollutants sent to the wastewater treatment plant cost the City of Port Washington at least \$320,000 to collect, test, treat, store, and properly dispose of the hazardous waste caused by the defendants in this case.

Defendant 1 reached an agreement to pay the City of Port Washington restitution totaling \$250,000-plus interest. Defendant 2 in this case reached an agreement to pay the City of Port Washington restitution totaling \$15,000.

- Investigations team wardens worked with regional wardens and MN and IL DNR to apprehend a group of serial violators involved in catching and keeping fish over the bag limit, and fishing by illegal snagging methods of vulnerable spawning Lake Whitefish on the WI/MI border waters of the Menominee River.

Twenty-nine citations were issued, with 91 whitefish seized and confiscated by the court, which also ordered a total of 24 years of rights revocation. The citations included exceeding the daily bag limit of whitefish, intentionally snagging fish and failing to release foul-hooked fish.

- In 2022, WI DNR, WI State Patrol, and WI Department of Transportation partnered to host the *Drive Sober, Hunt Sober Campaign*. This campaign focused on reminding hunters and drivers to be safe, responsible, and sober while on the roads and in the woods.

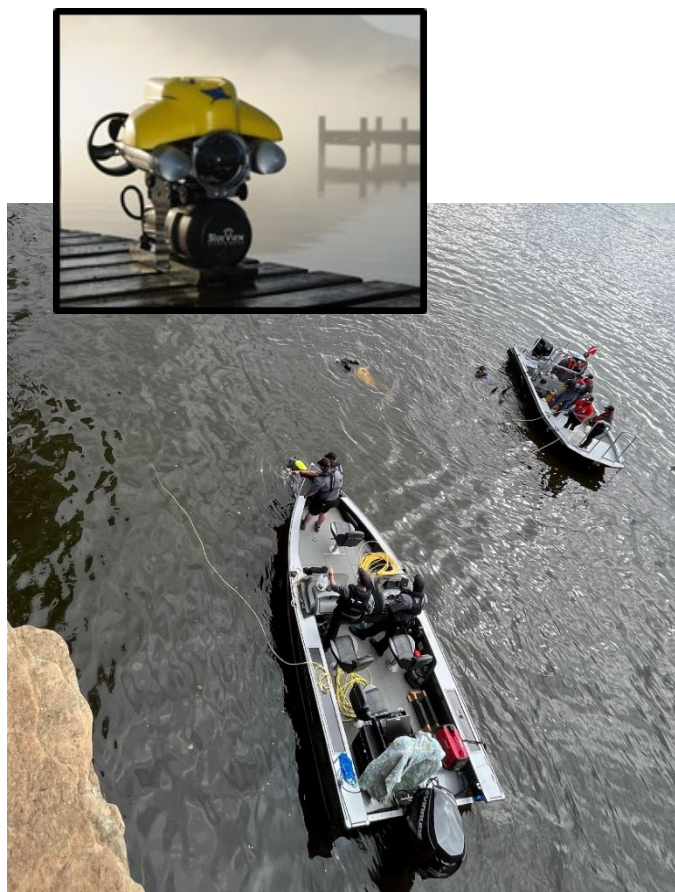


2022 Drive Sober Hunt Sober Campaign

- The division employs a Homeland Security Administrator who works with department leadership and staff to provide guidance, training and investigative resources to all department employees related to staff security and safety. This position holds National Security Clearance to discuss sensitive information with partner agencies and serves as lead liaison to all federal, state, and local law enforcement and intelligence agencies seeking cooperative missions and investigations (i.e., FBI, Secret Service, US Coast Guard, US Capitol Police, WI State Capitol Police, WI State Patrol, WI Dept. of Justice).
- In 2022, the Emergency Management program continued work on developing and implementing of a comprehensive department-wide Emergency Response Plan (ERP) encompassing training, planning, operations, and logistics for all emergency management resources and personnel. They also made progress in transitioning the Duty Officer (DO) Program towards a consolidated, multi-agency, 'State Watch Desk' facilitated by the Department of Military Affairs (DMA). This will allow for better interconnectedness throughout the state during emergency situations.
- Partners such as the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC), local tribes and other agencies ensure we honor our oath to protect all including Ojibwe members practicing their off-reservation treaty rights within the Ceded Territory. We have seen success through fostering relationships, education/training and looking for ways to make the participants feel safe. The division and GLIFWC work tirelessly to ensure safety throughout the year during the various hunting, fishing, and trapping seasons to include tribal ceremonial harvests.

**New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement** - describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.

- Our division worked across programs to implement a sharps disposal system for all state parks. The installation of this safety disposal unit is one way to provide visitors and staff with medical needs a way to care for their health and enjoy their park experience.
- The Recreation Warden team continues to train and expand its specialization with Total Station systems deployed across the state. These units allow the team to document crash and crime scenes in a highly accurate and reproducible manner. The entire team has been trained in the use of the Total Station equipment and several partnerships with outside agencies have been created to allow access to even more specialized Total Station equipment to improve crash investigation and reconstruction.
- In 2022, the Underwater Remotely Operated Vehicles (uROV) team provided great assistance to external partners through investigating boating incidents, locating underwater evidence, assisting with cold cases, and supporting port security in harbors. Without uROV equipment and its dedicated personnel, many recoveries would not be as likely. Accessories like sonar, positioning systems, and real time video enhancement help uROV pilots navigate search areas more quickly, safely, and often more successfully than human divers who are limited by the depths, temperature and visibility of the waters they are searching with the unaided eye. The mobility of the uROV allows for easy transport and use in many conditions with minimal support equipment.



*DNR wardens using uROV technology in a search and recovery effort.*

- The Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) team operates the division's Unmanned Aircraft Systems, aka drones. The team of 6-8 wardens are FAA certified and cooperatively train with Wisconsin Drone Network, Wisconsin State Patrol, State Capitol Police and Wisconsin Department of Justice. The team's mission focus is to preserve life safety, property, and



provide incident stabilization, and to assist with crash and accident scene reconstruction during investigations.

**State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement** - describe issues which impact or challenge law enforcement authority.

- The election year found wardens assisting other agencies, such as the State Capitol Police, Wisconsin State Patrol, DOJ Division of Criminal Investigation, Secret Service, United States Coast Guard, and other agencies charged with providing security and safety for dignitary visits.

Within the Statewide Joint Tactical Team, DNR wardens joined tactical operators from DCI and State Patrol to train and operate as a statewide team, equipped and organized for cost-efficient deployment of personnel and equipment. This team also provides support for Natural Resources Board meetings, as well as other events involving dignitary or employee protection.

- Conservation wardens have full police power while conducting work on state owned properties; however, outside of those lands the enforcement authority decreases for certain law enforcement related issues. Wardens must first request “expanded authority” from the local jurisdictional agency in order to handle these issues. This can create safety concerns with prolonged contacts.

**Cost Savings Initiatives** - Identify initiatives in any area which contributed to improvements in work effectiveness and fiscal efficiency.

- In 2022, the RSOS Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) program worked in conjunction with the Business Section to strategically evaluate our division’s OHV enforcement needs (i.e., ATV and snowmobile patrols) and brainstormed sustainable models for ensuring those needs could both be physically and financially met each fiscal year.

OHVs are critical to our division’s enforcement models, but it was recognized that the OHV fleet was not being utilized to its full potential, with increasing concerns of cost to maintain an aging fleet. Most of the fleet was upwards 17 or more years old at the beginning of 2022. After much evaluation, it was determined the prior fleet was not sustainable for the division’s future.

An OHV replacement plan was approved and implemented, allowing ATVs and snowmobiles to be scheduled for replacement on a 13-year cycle. Machines will no longer be issued to individual field wardens or stations, but to teams for use as needed. By creating a team approach model, this allows for a reduction to the overall statewide fleet size while maintaining adequate coverage. As a result, the overall fleet was reduced in numbers, allowing the division to increase the overall quality, reliability, and uniform marking to include emergency lights and sirens on new ATVs and snowmobiles.

Almost 150 OHVs were coordinated to be picked up from all corners of the state in a short amount of time, which required a lot of planning and coordination from our dedicated staff. The equipment was then sold at auction, at a time when machines and equipment were projected to sell for top dollar based on demand. The auction funds received from this are a necessary component of the funding to support equipment needs in the coming years while maintaining the 13-year replacement cycle.





- Ensuring the division has adequate funding to maintain vital business and enforcement functions can come at a cost to other programs that, unfortunately, may not be as high in priority for public safety or overall enforcement needs. An example can be seen with the sunset of the voluntary warden K9 Program in 2022.

As of September 1, 2022, the Division placed a sunset on the K9 Program as the public had grown to know it. For years, wardens had the ability to utilize their personally owned canines to supplement their enforcement and educational duties such as investigative cases, public relations events, media contacts, assistance to other agencies, search and rescues, therapy, and more.

Unfortunately, due to potential liability for our staff, dogs, and the division as a whole, with all of the trained canines being the handlers' personal property and not authorized police dogs, the only practical option looking ahead was to move towards a professionalized K9 program staffed with full-time handlers and state-owned dogs. After much deliberation, the division determined that, with current available funding, it could not sustainably support a transition to four to six full time staff positions for K9-specific handlers annually.

Division staff were saddened to see the program come to a close, and it is fair to say that the public likely shared some of those feelings. We would like to thank all of the knowledgeable and professional handlers for their years of dedicated service to the citizens of Wisconsin. Perhaps in the future, with heightened public support and the potential for new budget initiatives along with ongoing sustainable funding, this is a program our division will be able to properly reinstate for our public.