

Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers

2025 Agency Report

Colorado

Illinois

Kansas

Kentucky

Manitoba

Michigan

Missouri

Nebraska

North Dakota

Ohio

Saskatchewan

South Dakota

Texas

Wisconsin

**Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers
2025 Agency Report
Province/State: Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Submitted by: Ty Petersburg- Chief of Law Enforcement
Date: May 1, 2025**

- **Training Issues** - describe any new or innovative training programs or techniques which have been recently developed, implemented or are now required.
- CPW is or has implemented several major roll-outs in the last 6 months to enhance our officer safety, efficiency and transparency:
 - New Smith & Wesson M&P 9mm with miniature red dot sights; winter 24/25
 - Mandatory Axon Body Worn Cameras for all LE staff; May/June 2025
 - Updated Axon Taser10's for LE staff (summer/fall 2025)

The rapid transition in this equipment is proving difficult for officers that are 25+ years in the agency and has resulted in a number of retirements. With increased openings and additional FTE that have come through the legislature, CPW remains behind the 8 ball in hiring with approximately 30 openings for our 400+ sworn staff positions

- **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 larger "State" of Colorado is facing a \$1.4B shortfall in budgeting. Generally, CPW funds are secure. However, recent moves by the state legislature and shortages in other spillover funds that supplement CPW budgets have resulted in significant budget restrictions. Some of these budgeting issues include:

- Potential "refinancing" of specific funds that may be swept that would otherwise supplement CPW funding (mineral severance tax, etc.)
- Lack of spillover funds from the Colorado Lottery totaling >\$15 million in historical funding
- Additional grant agreement verbiage in federal funding grants that are not acceptable/proving difficult for state agreements (~\$2m in Coast Guard boating safety grant funding in question)

- Additional unfunded mandates from legislation (ex: \$1.5-\$2m for new gun legislation to hit CPW)

In total, CPW could potentially be looking at \$25-\$30m impact to agency funding.

- **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).
- **Wildlife Trafficking**: Increasing uptick in reptile trafficking associated with the general public and organized crime. Colorado passed a wildlife trafficking bill in the most recent legislative session to bolster language and provide additional resources to the agency to combat wildlife trafficking on a larger scale
- **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 employed a Task Force Officer, managed jointly between CPW and the USFWS over the last two years. The position has proven very worthwhile in cutting red tape and approvals to pursue investigations out of state. To date, all Colorado based cases that the TFO has pursued outside of Colorado have resulted in confessions and convictions (100% success rate). The impact of having a Colorado based investigator and field officer show up on a doorstep cannot be measured.
- **New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement** - describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.
- CPW K9 Program: In the 2023 Long Bill, the Governor requested funds for a unique K9 program from CPW. We have now hired 4 of the 6 FTE allocated for the program. Unlike traditional programs, the CPW K9s will be trained to haze conflict bears, similar to WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife's Karelian Bear Dogs in addition to traditional detection work for wildlife. The K9s will be dispersed throughout the state to assist with field staff on criminal investigations, conflict bear work, and assist with detection in Colorado airports.
- **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.
- **SB25-003**; This legislation was recently passed by the Colorado legislature and signed by the Governor. In short, it will prohibit the purchase of certain semiautomatic firearms that have detachable magazines, unless the purchaser

has undergone additional training and received an “eligibility card” from the local sheriff’s office. The Sheriff must complete a background check and mental health assessment on each applicant. The eligibility card will expire every 5 years, when a holder must renew and re-train to purchase more semiautomatic firearms with a detachable magazine. In addition, this legislation will NOT allow these firearms to be transferred between family members. Gun owners who already own these firearms will have the pre-existing firearms grandfathered in. Any new purchases will require this process. The program is set to go live in August 2026.

IMPACT TO CPW: This legislation requires CPW to build and maintain a database that will house the information of people that apply for and receive “firearms safety eligibility cards” from the sheriff’s office. The database must also contain verified hunter education information- which will determine the length of training a person must complete to purchase one of these firearms. If a person has successfully completed a verified hunter education class- they are required to take a 4-hour training class. If they have NOT taken hunter education, they must take a 12-hour training class. The eligibility card expires after 5 years.

In addition, CPW must create the training curriculum for private firearms instructors to teach, and provide an online interface for the exchange of information required by the bill for Sheriffs, private firearms instructors, and FFLs.

Finally, CPW must design the mental health assessment/questionnaire that will be administered by the Sheriff’s offices.

This will result in over \$1m in expenditures for CPW to design and build this database, and will likely require the agency to hire 3-4 FTEs dedicated to the program. Estimates are that CPW will need to allocate approximately \$1.5-\$2m in funds for this program.

The original bill language would have required the agency to hire up to an additional 60 FTE to complete mental health assessments for applicants in each of our offices to meet eligibility requires... Thankfully, that language was stricken from the bill- saving about \$20m in anticipated costs.

All parties involved fully expect a law suit to be filed in short challenging the constitutionality of SB25-003.

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

Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers
2025 Agency Report
Province/State: Illinois
Submitted by: Director of Law Enforcement Jed Whitchurch
Date:04/08/2025

- **Training Issues** - The Illinois Conservation Police continue to operate under the same goal-setting margins as in previous years, maintaining a commitment to advancing all operational training. The entire department remains focused on strategically improving these training programs over a planned period. The Illinois Conservation Police are continuously working to improve their recruit academy. They aim to create a strong, self-sustaining 16-week training program with dedicated staff. They have partnered with the Macon County Law Enforcement Training Center in Decatur, Illinois, which offers modern technology and top-notch facilities. The department also focuses on officers' mental well-being on and off duty. Efforts are being made to get academy courses accredited by the Illinois Training and Standards Board.

The Illinois Conservation Police holds National Association of Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) accreditation. This ensures officers are well-prepared for law enforcement and emergency response on Illinois waterways and can safely work with other states on joint missions. Through NASBLA, officers receive specialized training in boating under the influence (OUI), boat incident investigations, and water survival skills. Some officers are also accredited to provide this training in-house.

The department has developed and continues to improve its arrest and control tactics program to keep up with modern safety and use-of-force standards. This includes Gracie Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and a train-the-trainer course to strengthen their team of instructors, all certified by the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board (ILETSB). Firearms instructors also attend outside training programs to stay updated on best practices, ensuring the highest level of safety for both officers and the public.

The Illinois Safe-T Act sets minimum training requirements for all law enforcement officers in the state. These include Crisis Intervention Training, Emergency Response, Officer Wellness and Mental Health, Constitutional Law, Human Rights, Procedural Justice, and Use of Force. The Illinois Conservation Police aims to go beyond these requirements in every area.

- **Funding and Staffing Issues** - Over the past few years, the Illinois Conservation Police have experienced unprecedented funding, significantly enhancing their operational capabilities. Financial support from State Officials has played a pivotal role in this development, with the allocation of resources to hire 116 new Conservation Police Officers since 2019. This substantial increase in personnel has

bolstered the department's ability to enforce laws, protect natural resources, and ensure public safety. One of the driving forces behind this increased funding was the investment in specialized reporting and marketing efforts that effectively communicate the department's mission and goals. The visibility and awareness generated through these initiatives have underscored the critical importance of the Conservation Police's work to both state government officials and the general public.

In addition to the tangible benefits of increased staffing, the strategic promotion of the department's achievements has garnered widespread recognition and support. Showcasing the hard work and successful outcomes in public safety and natural resources protection has not only highlighted the dedication of the Conservation Police Officers but also reinforced the value of their contributions. As a result, there is a growing appreciation for the vital role that the Illinois Conservation Police play in maintaining the state's environmental integrity and safeguarding the public. This comprehensive approach to funding, reporting, and marketing has cemented the department's reputation as a cornerstone of public safety and natural resource stewardship in Illinois.

- **Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends** - Illinois has implemented several cooperative and cross-jurisdictional conservation initiatives, expanding beyond traditional fish and wildlife enforcement.

Technological advances in hunting equipment and accessories have changed enforcement techniques and equipment used in unlawful hunting activities: Crossbows, thermal imaging devices, night vision, and drones are being seized more frequently during night-hunting enforcement details. These advancements have replaced spotlights and high-powered rifles traditionally utilized in unlawful night-hunting activities. Crossbows provide a silent but accurate way to take game at night unlawfully. Using thermal imaging and night vision allows violators to locate game without easily being detected or drawing attention to their location. Evidence facilities within the Illinois Conservation Police Southern Zone are filled with crossbows, rifles with either night vision or thermal scopes, and wildlife that has been unlawfully taken at night with the newer devices. Aggressive patrol measures are necessary to apprehend these most intentional offenders. In addition to the uptick in unlawful night hunting activities, the Southern Zone suffers from inconsistent prosecution. One example: a hunter was found unlawfully using a drone to locate and hunt deer. The person was cited, and the drone was seized. The offender was prosecuted on two charges and significantly fined, and the drone was forfeited. This same hunter was caught two weeks later with a friend engaging in the same activity in an adjacent county. The hunter was charged, a minimal fine was assessed, and the drone was ordered to be returned. The inconsistency of prosecution is leading to decreased deterrence against poaching.

County Forest Preserves Law Enforcement: The Forest Preserves of Cook, Will, Lake, DuPage Counties and the McHenry County Conservation District maintain dedicated law enforcement departments focused on protecting natural lands and

visitors. Conservation Police Officers, Forest Preserve officers, and Conservation District Officers work side by side to enforce state and federal regulations effectively. There is a more collaborative effort to deter wildlife poaching within these forest preserves.

Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI): Illinois participates in the GLRI, collaborating with neighboring states to address environmental challenges affecting the Great Lakes. This initiative includes enforcing regulations related to aquatic invasive species (AIS), with Conservation Police Officers playing a crucial role in both state and federal AIS enforcement to prevent the spread of harmful non-native species.

"Operation Dry Water" Program: In partnership with other states, Illinois Conservation Police participate annually in this program, which focuses on heightened enforcement of operating under the influence (OUI) laws during the July 4th holiday period. The initiative aims to reduce alcohol-related accidents and fatalities on the water.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Enforcement: Illinois has developed a robust enforcement program for aquatic invasive species, which is essential due to the state's numerous waterways. In collaboration with other states (e.g., Indiana, Wisconsin), Illinois works to prevent the spread of AIS between state lines, such as zebra mussels and Asian carp, which threaten ecosystems and local economies. Conservation Police Officers enforce regulations requiring boaters to clean and disinfect their boats and equipment to prevent AIS spread.

- **Unique Cross-Boundary or Cooperative Enforcement Efforts** – The Illinois Conservation Police have shared strong partnerships with the Illinois Attorney General's Office and the United States Fish and Wildlife Services. The Illinois Conservation Police's Southern Zone/District 15 has worked well with the Illinois Attorney General's Office. Through this relationship, better prosecution of complex cases has resulted. Additionally, the Illinois Attorney General's Office (ILAG) has played an integral role in investigating a large-scale environmental crime involving an oil and gas company. Multiple search warrants have been executed jointly with the ILAG during this investigation. This case is pending charging and prosecution but is believed to be the most extensive investigation of this type in Illinois. The Illinois Conservation Police Districts 14 and 16 have worked two separate cases jointly with the United States Forest Service. The first case involved a trespass complaint that evolved into an arson investigation. USFS worked, and the Illinois Conservation Police worked together on multiple search warrants, resulting in numerous wildlife charges, and a criminal arrest for arson was made. A second case in which District 14 and District 16 worked with the USFS began as a simple case involving potentially illegal ginseng diggers. During the initial stages of investigating, Conservation Police Officers realized there were some ginseng violations, but they were also seeing clues of a large-scale marijuana grow operation. Multiple search warrants were granted, including tracking devices deployed on suspect vehicles by

the USFS. After hours of surveillance, Conservation Police Officers and USFS apprehended two subjects. They charged them with felony possession of firearms, possession of methamphetamines, cannabis charges, and unlawfully digging and possessing ginseng. This case is pending Federal prosecution due to most violations occurring on USFS properties.

Partnership with Native American Tribes for Fish and Wildlife Enforcement: CPOs work with several Native American tribes in Illinois, such as the Peoria Tribe and the Shawnee Tribe, to ensure that hunting, fishing, and wildlife conservation efforts are upheld on tribal lands. Tribal sovereignty requires a delicate balance in law enforcement. Conservation Police Officers collaborate with tribal authorities to address violations on lands where both state and tribal laws may apply. These partnerships are significant for species management and enforcing sustainable practices on tribal lands.

International Wildlife Protection Efforts: Conservation Police Officers have engaged in international efforts to combat illegal wildlife trafficking, particularly in the context of species protected by international treaties such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Conservation Police Officers collaborate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and international law enforcement agencies like Interpol to combat wildlife smuggling. This includes the monitoring and seizing illegally traded species, such as exotic birds, reptiles, and ivory, which may pass through Illinois as part of illegal trade routes.

Wildlife Crime Investigations and National Database Integration: Illinois Conservation Police Officers work closely with the National Fish and Wildlife Forensic Laboratory and Interagency Communication Platforms like the Wildlife Crime Information System (WCIS) to track and investigate wildlife crimes, including poaching and trafficking. The WCIS is an interagency communication tool that helps law enforcement agencies share information and resources related to wildlife crime. Illinois CPOs contribute data to this database and, in turn, have access to critical intelligence that may help solve interstate or international wildlife crime cases.

Environment Crimes Working Group: Illinois Conservation Police Officers continue to build partnerships with other state and federal agencies to deter better, investigate, and enforce environmental crimes that often affect large regions and infrastructure.

Illinois Conservation Police, US CGIS, and CBP Task Force: The Illinois Conservation Police have partnered with the U.S. Coast Guard Investigative Service and U.S. Customs and Border Protection to stem the tide of illegal contraband being transported into the state. These efforts are focused on the U.S. Customs Port areas, including airports, train hubs, and sea/lake ports. This effort has resulted in charges for the illegal importation of contraband and violations of the Jones Act.

Coordination with regional Police and Fire Departments: The Illinois Conservation Police have increased their coordination with regional fire departments along Illinois'

coast of Lake Michigan. This has resulted in better planning and communication between agencies during critical incidents, water rescues, and Search and Rescue or Recovery operations. It will also allow stakeholder agencies to conduct joint training and patrol operations more efficiently.

- **New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement** – The Illinois Conservation Police endured a lengthy procurement process to purchase state-mandated body-worn cameras. The Illinois Conservation Police successfully integrated body-worn cameras into operations in December 2024. The body-worn cameras have become an essential tool in conservation law enforcement, and state laws have played a significant role in driving innovation in their use statewide. These cameras help Conservation Police Officers enforce laws related to their duties.

One major innovation is the integration of advanced recording technology. Many states now require law enforcement officers, including natural resource-based officers, to wear body cameras to make sure there is transparency and accountability. This has improved camera quality, including high-definition video, night vision capabilities, and integration with in-car cameras. These are particularly useful for officers working in remote areas or during nighttime patrols. These features allow officers to document interactions with the public, record evidence of illegal activities like poaching, and provide crucial footage for investigations.

Another innovation is the development of cloud-based storage and data management systems. With state laws mandating body-worn cameras, the Illinois Conservation Police had to find an efficient way to store and manage large amounts of video footage since there is no centralized hub that the Conservation Police Officers use, seeing that they are spread out statewide. The Illinois Conservation Police secured a cloud storage solution that allows Conservation Police Officers to upload footage instantly, guaranteeing that evidence is preserved and easily accessible for legal proceedings. The system also includes ease of tagging and categorization, making it easier to retrieve specific recordings when needed.

Additionally, real-time connectivity, GPS tracking, and interoperability with in-car camera systems allow the monitoring of Illinois Conservation Police Officers' locations and activities in real-time. This is particularly useful for patrolling remote areas, enabling faster emergency response times.

State laws have also influenced policy changes and training programs for Conservation Police Officers. With the widespread adoption of body-worn cameras, departments like the Office of Law Enforcement have developed new protocols for handling and reviewing footage, ensuring that officers use the technology effectively, ethically, and within the confines of state law. The Illinois Conservation Police's body-worn camera training emphasizes proper camera usage, legal considerations, and best practices for interacting with the public while being recorded.

State laws in Illinois requiring body-worn cameras have led to technological advancements in conservation law enforcement. These innovations improve transparency and accountability and enhance officers' ability to protect natural resources while ensuring public safety.

- **State, Regional, and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges, and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement** – In 2024, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Office of Law Enforcement addressed several key issues impacting natural resources law enforcement through legislative and judicial decisions.

Bills affecting the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) included updating wildlife management policies, revising hunting regulations, and expanding authority concerning nuisance wildlife control and meat donation programs. Public Act 103-0990 amended the Wildlife Code by removing the requirement for meat processors to be members of the Illinois Sportsmen Against Hunger program to donate processed deer meat. The amendment allows licensed meat processors to give away or donate deer meat to a charitable organization or community food bank if the owner fails to claim the meat or wishes to donate it. It mandates that meat processors maintain written records of all deer received.

Public Act 103-0662 further amended the Wildlife Code by making it unlawful to take wild turkey except by bow and arrow or a shotgun no larger than 10 gauge and no smaller than .410 bore. This regulation replaced the previous regulation that allowed shotguns no smaller than 20 gauge with shot size no larger than No. 4. The amendment grants the IDNR the authority to regulate shot size, material, or density through an administrative rule.

The IDNR has continued to oppose various drone-related bills that could impact wildlife and natural resources management. Proposed legislation, including two bills introduced in the spring of 2024 and again in 2025, raises concerns about drones disrupting conservation efforts and wildlife habitats. Drones could disturb sensitive ecosystems, especially during breeding seasons or in protected areas, if not adequately regulated. The Office of Law Enforcement is actively advocating for the prohibition of drones in these contexts. Illinois is not alone in prohibiting drones for hunting, as approximately 43 states currently have laws against using drones for hunting purposes. Allowing drones would require extensive changes to multiple codes and could lead to unintended consequences, such as trespassing, illegal wildlife management, or hunters using drones under false pretenses. Effectively regulating and enforcing drone use in wildlife areas would be a significant challenge.

Judicial decisions also significantly influenced natural resource law enforcement in Illinois. In *Rice v. Marathon Petroleum Corp.* (May 23, 2024), the Illinois Supreme Court ruled that there is no express private right of action under the Leaking Underground Storage Tank Program provisions of the Illinois Environmental Protection Act. The Court concluded that implying such a right was unnecessary to

ensure adequate remedies for statute violations. Additionally, in *People v. Molina*, the Illinois Supreme Court ruled that the odor of raw cannabis, standing alone, does not provide police with probable cause to search a vehicle without a warrant. This decision aligns Illinois with other states requiring additional evidence to justify warrantless searches based on the smell of cannabis.

Regulatory actions have played a key role in addressing environmental concerns. Governor JB Pritzker delayed a \$1.2 billion project to prevent invasive carp from reaching the Great Lakes, citing worries about securing federal funding commitments. In another area, Governor Pritzker endorsed legislation to regulate the hemp industry in response to concerns over unregulated, intoxicating hemp-derived products being marketed to minors. The proposed regulations aim to limit THC content and impose marketing restrictions to protect consumers, particularly minors. These actions reflect Illinois' continued efforts to address challenges with natural resources law enforcement, balancing environmental protection with public safety and regulatory oversight.

- **Cost Savings Initiatives** – The Illinois Conservation Police has developed innovative methods to streamline the procurement of uniforms and specific pieces of equipment through a comprehensive and accessible master contract. This approach simplifies purchasing by establishing an overarching agreement with vendors. As a result, the department can execute transactions more efficiently, saving both time and resources. Additionally, using a master contract ensures consistency in terms and conditions across multiple purchases, reducing misunderstandings and disputes.

One of the key advantages of a master contract is its ability to provide significant time and cost savings. By eliminating the need to negotiate terms for each purchase, the contract allows subsequent transactions to proceed quickly. Moreover, the clarity and consistency provided by a master contract ensure that all parties are on the same page, minimizing the potential for receiving the wrong products. This efficient procurement resource management allows the Illinois Conservation Police to focus on their core mission, ensuring they have the necessary uniforms and equipment in a timely and cost-effective manner.

Implementing a 9-hour shift scheduling program has improved the officers' work/life balance and slightly reduced overtime hours. By optimizing shift scheduling, the Illinois Conservation Police have covered all necessary duties without overburdening staff, leading to a more balanced workload and reducing the need for overtime. This shift structure ensures officers have adequate rest and recovery periods, promoting better performance and job satisfaction.

In addition, collective bargaining with the sergeants and lieutenants agreed to include a standard annual "ready pay" stipend in their contracts. This stipend compensates supervisors for being responsive during their off-hours, ensuring they are available to respond to emergencies and critical situations when necessary. By

incorporating this ready pay into the compensation package, the Illinois Conservation Police have successfully reduced the overtime pay submitted annually by supervisors.

Other Special Law Enforcement Issues - One ongoing challenge with the Illinois Conservation Police, and likely in different states, is retaining institutional knowledge in highly populated urban areas. Due to seniority-based placement, younger officers often start their careers in urban settings where they develop familiarity with local conservation enforcement needs and methods. However, once they gain experience, many transfer to other parts of the state. This results in a continuous cycle of officer turnover, requiring frequent training of new personnel and making it difficult to maintain consistent enforcement practices in urban environments.

The high rate of transfers affects efficiency, as departments must repeatedly invest time and resources into training new officers, often before they fully adapt to the complexities of urban conservation issues. Additionally, the loss of experienced officers in these areas hinders continuity in community engagement and enforcement strategies.

Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers

2025 Agency Report
Province/State: Iowa
Submitted by: Chief Craig Cutts
Date: 03/12/25

In 2024 the Iowa DNR Law Enforcement Bureau was granted approximately \$1.6 million dollars from Governor Kim Reynolds to replace our aging portable & mobile police radios for conservation officers and park rangers. With the recent completion of the state's new statewide P-25 trunking radio platform, ISICS, (the Iowa Statewide Interoperable Communications System), the DNR's Law Enforcement Bureau worked to outfit our officers with state-of-the-art technology to enhance communication & collaboration with other state, county & local agencies. Working closely with our local Motorola radio representatives, 120 Motorola APX 8500 mobile radios, 95 APX 8000 portable radios & 25 APX NEXT radios were acquired, with the intent of deploying the NEXT portables (both radio & cellular capable) to areas lacking adequate radio coverage. The next step involved working with 10 of our conservation officer radio programmers to develop a standardized statewide radio program to push out to all 240 radios. Over several months these officers worked closely with local counties to acquire & renew MOUs for talk group/frequency sharing between agencies. Lastly, 5 locations & 14 dates were secured across the state where Motorola Radio Technicians in conjunction with DNR Radio Programmers upfitted & replaced all officer's mobile & portable radios. This group's next project will be working with the Iowa Department of Public Safety to implement & train officers on a newly acquired state-level computer aided dispatch (CAD) & records management system (RMS) in 2025.

Long overdue, the DNR Law Enforcement Bureau also researched & implemented the foundations of a peer-support program. Eleven volunteers were selected to attend the Peer Support Foundation's three-day Basic Peer Support training, and were tasked on researching and developing a proposed policy/SOP for the program. These volunteer officers worked hard to connect with representatives from other states' conservation agencies' peer-support/officer wellness programs to help create a model to build from. The team has also worked with the Iowa Department of Public Safety's Wellness Bureau on use of the Cordico Wellness App and is looking toward implementation statewide. Several traumatic events over the summer & fall forced the team into action, following up & checking on officers after a triple-drowning, fatal car crash at the end of a pursuit, and other traumatic events. These officers formally utilized their skills for the first time and did an excellent job jumping into action without even being asked. The team is looking forward to attending several upcoming training events in 2025 to enhance their skills and role as a resource to fellow officers.

In 2024 we officially started aligning law enforcement efforts in DNR to enhance operational efficiencies, ensuring that the structure and use of resources are managed to create the best possible future for protecting our natural resources and the citizens of Iowa. The first 7 park Rangers have been reassigned to the law enforcement bureau. The

remaining 25 will transfer over in phase two through attrition involving conservation officer retirements as well as park ranger retirements. Remarkably this process should be completed in the next 18 to 24 months due to the large number of retirements expected at the end of 2025 and 2026. This plan will further streamline law enforcement efforts on all public and private lands in Iowa. Conservation officers will be responsible for all their current roles and duties as well as state park law enforcement thus streamlining efficiencies.

The Turn in Poachers (TIP) board has again proved to be a great supporter for the bureau. Their assistance has been instrumental, not only with enforcement cases, but also with securing needed equipment through donations. A total of \$21,400 dollars was paid out in rewards by the TIP board through the TIP program to citizens taking the time to get involved. The board purchased thermal camera systems for each officer that can be attached to their phone for finding evidence and search and rescue for \$30,000. TIP continues to be a great partner with assisting in protecting Iowa's great natural resources.

2024 brought with its multiple weather-related tragedies and challenges for the officers who responded to assist. Many times, saving Iowans in need and securing the safety of property all while many officer's homes themselves were being impacted and lost. This is a true sign of their dedication to the people and resources in Iowa.

On the afternoon of May 21, 2024, a violent tornado tracked across southwestern Iowa, devastating the city of Greenfield in Adair County. The tornado would claim 4 lives that day. Dozens of law enforcement officers, along with 8 Conservation Officers and a Park Ranger responded to the town to provide aid. Those officers helped secure the city to prevent looting and directed first responders to the command center. They remained available well into the night and offered assistance in the coming days.

In the evening and overnight hours of June 21, 2024, 19 inches of rain fell in Northwest Iowa and Southwest Minnesota creating a 500-year flood. At 3:15 AM on June 22 Conservation Officers were contacted, their assistance was needed to rescue individuals from communities in the path of the flood. By 3:45 AM 13 Conservation Officers from Northwest District were in route with boats and another 15 Officers from neighboring Law Enforcement Districts were being contacted and mobilized. During this event Iowa Conservation Officers effected over 250 water-based rescues. After the immediate threat had passed Conservation Officers shifted roles and began helping utilities with reaching substations to turn off power and rerouting efforts. This event lasted 4 days with Iowa Conservation Officers helping with evacuations and staging efforts.

Iowa's conservation Officers continue to provide the very best protection for Iowa's natural resources as well as protecting our citizens of the state.

**Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers
2025 Agency Report
Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks – Law Enforcement Division
Submitted by: Colonel Greg Kyser**

Training Issues

The most recent in-service training was scheduled but canceled at the last minute due to a winter storm that created blizzard conditions across the state. Wardens will be getting their mandatory 40 hrs. of KS-CPOST training regionally.

Funding and Staffing Issues

The Law Enforcement Division hired seven new Game Warden recruits in 2024. Four of them were already certified officers: three from the State of Kansas and one from Nevada.

Currently there are nine openings for entry-level warden positions. Although multiple tests are offered throughout the year, the number of candidates remains significantly below expectations. Recently, the Kansas Highway Patrol and the Kansas Bureau of Investigation secured substantial pay increases for their certified officers. Pay parity has become a pressing issue, affecting both recruitment and retention of wardens. Recently, two wardens left the agency to join the Kansas Highway Patrol and the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, respectively.

Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Task Force Officer Program

Beginning in summer 2022, the Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks (KDWP) partnered with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to appoint a KDWP officer as a Task Force Officer (TFO). This designation allows the officer to perform in management systems, covering both KDWP and USFWS investigations. The TFO's involvement significantly improved the management of three state-led investigations, enhancing coordination of travel, interviews, and the handling of seizures and abandonments in jurisdictions beyond Kansas.

As a direct result of the TFO position, KDWP officers conducted interviews and seizures in several states, including Tennessee, Missouri, Alabama, Georgia, and Texas throughout 2024.

Additionally, the TFO participated in advanced training on Interviewing and Interrogation at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC) and completed the USFWS Use of Force Training in Georgia, which replaced the previously scheduled USFWS Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) in-service training for 2024.

License / Permit Fraud

The law enforcement division continues to work permit fraud investigations involving deer, turkey and more recently elk permits on Fort Riley. The majority involve tenant permits which require the individual be actively involved in an agricultural operation on 80 or more acres of land, have a substantial financial investment, or be a bona fide manager with oversight responsibilities.

The Law Enforcement Division has observed a significant rise in lifetime license applications. However, it is important to note that many of these applications are being denied because the individuals do not meet the eligibility requirements for the license.

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

Kansas Senate Bill #80 - The Kansas Farm Bureau introduced legislation to require tenant farmers be restricted to Kansas residents or individuals living in the adjoining counties of Colorado, Oklahoma, Nebraska or Missouri. This bill did not pass out of committee and is currently dead.

Kansas House Bill #213 – Would regulate non-resident waterfowl hunters utilizing state and federal properties to hunting on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. This bill was merged with House Bill #2028 which dealt with child lifetime license sales and passed out of the legislature. It was later vetoed by Governor Kelly.

Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts

As part of an active investigation of a Kansas outfitter, TV host of “The Game”, Matt Jennings, was believed to have hunted with an outfitter in Unit 14 in 2019 while possessing a Kansas deer permit valid for DMU’s 16 and 17. Following an interview, JENNINGS was issued a federal citation by USFWS related to the “unlawful purchase of guiding/outfitting services for the purpose of the illegal taking of wildlife in violation of state law”. JENNINGS paid his fine of \$4,000 in December 2024.

As part of an unrelated USFWS/KDWP investigation, additional charges for have been filed with the Wichita AUSA relating to 2022 Kansas hunts involving underlying State violations of the take of deer in the wrong DMU, creating a false label by tagging a Kansas deer with an Oklahoma deer permit, and exceeding the bag limit when shooting a second Kansas buck.

New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

The law enforcement division has successfully acquired two additional Blue Link underwater remote-operated vehicles (ROVs) using agency funds and matching contributions from the Coast Guard. This enhancement ensures that all four regions are now equipped with a unit specifically designated to handle body recovery from drowning

incidents and to recover crucial evidence from the depths of lakes and ponds. With the addition of these two ROVs in 2024, each region will have a dedicated unit ready to respond effectively to recovery efforts.

Axon Taser 10 has been acquired for all members of the law enforcement division. Additionally, Axon Virtual Reality tactical training has been acquired. This will aid in training from de-escalation to tactical decision-making and weapons proficiency.

The law enforcement division has acquired Guardian Alliance Technologies for new hire background investigations. This cloud-based system allows KDWP to cross-check other state agencies using the system which allows for faster and more accurate background investigations.

TransUnion TLOxp has been acquired for the special investigations' unit, strengthening our investigative capabilities. This powerful system transforms fragmented data into reliable information, enabling us to advance criminal cases with greater efficiency and urgency.

Cost Savings Initiatives

The Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks has undergone leadership changes, now led by Secretary Christopher Kennedy. Consequently, the budgeting process has adopted a new approach called zero-based budgeting. Additionally, the capital improvement process has been revamped, resulting in enhanced oversight of projects. This includes a focus on agency needs and funding sources, along with obtaining early approval from the engineering section.

The Department of Administration successfully awarded additional uniform contracts to four vendors. This step enhances the law enforcement division's ability to solicit more bids for uniforms, ultimately leading to increased savings and improved value for the department.

Other Special Law Enforcement Issues

Thermal imaging – KDWP has applied for funding to equip wardens with handheld thermal imaging devices to help combat the illegal take of wildlife during the Kansas thermal coyote season which runs from January 1 to March 31st.



Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers

2025 Agency Report

Kentucky

Captain Jason Ice

April 15, 2025

Training Issues

The Law Enforcement Division has recently transitioned statewide to a new pistol system. The division transitioned from the Glock 17 to the Glock 47 with a Holosun Optic. Implementing a Modular Optic System has noticeably enhanced the speed and accuracy of Game Wardens throughout the Commonwealth. The training section has also developed a comprehensive field workbook for migratory bird enforcement. This resource enables wardens to document field observations and summarize enforcement guidelines to help them during their field operations.

Funding and Staffing Issues

Recently, the Law Enforcement Division started recruiting 30 new Game Warden Recruits to start in late summer 2025. In an effort to enhance recruitment outreach, the division has increased its utilization of social media platforms, specifically Facebook and Instagram. The implementation of advertisements incorporating QR codes has successfully facilitated candidates' enrollment in a notification list, thereby improving the dissemination of information regarding the application process. Prior to the official opening of applications, nearly 1,100 individuals had registered for these notifications. Furthermore, the Law Enforcement Division is actively investigating alternative funding mechanisms, including the establishment of a grant committee focused on acquiring essential equipment such as drones and other critical resources.

Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

The Law Enforcement Division is committed to conserving and enhancing Kentucky natural resources; however, wardens work around the clock to enforce all laws of the Commonwealth to ensure public safety. Wardens participated in an enforcement effort named "Don't be the U in BUI & DUI". This campaign was a collaborative effort with Kentucky Game Wardens, NASBLA, Louisville Metro Police Department, Army Corps of Engineers, Kentucky State Police, Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, and the United States Coast Guard.

Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative Enforcement Efforts

The Law Enforcement Division has recently focused on regulations related to commercial fishing in both western and northern Kentucky. Wardens from the special investigations unit have collaborated with field personnel and agencies from Ohio, Indiana and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to investigate illegal commercial activity along the Ohio River and within various reservoirs in western Kentucky.

New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

The Law Enforcement Division training section has introduced a necropsy and ballistics training course designed to help wardens understand the impact of munitions on carcasses, thereby facilitating more effective prosecutions. Wardens are also learning to utilize drones for search and rescue operations and enforcement.

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

The Law Enforcement Division continues to monitor case law within Kentucky and around the United States. The training section sends multiple legal updates throughout the year to ensure wardens are performing their duties within the law. Updates include Fourth Amendment issues of search and seizure and when wardens can enter upon lands to conduct compliance checks and investigate wildlife crimes without a warrant.

Cost Saving Initiatives

The Law Enforcement Division has started taking emergency equipment out of old patrol vehicles, such as radios and repeaters, to utilize these in new vehicles. Utilizing radios from turned-in vehicles helps lower the overall cost of new cars issued to wardens in the field.

Other Special Law Enforcement Issues

The Law Enforcement Division has applied for the North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation Program. The approximate three-year journey will continue to increase the Division's professionalism and accountability.

Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers
2025 Agency Report
State/Province: Manitoba
Submitted by: Chief Conservation Officer Corey Meadows
Date: May 7, 2025

Training Issues

Last year (2024) the Manitoba Conservation Officer Service sent six (6) recruits for training through the Western Canadian Law Enforcement Academy (WCLEA) in Lake La Biche, Alberta and all are now full time Conservation Officers working throughout the province.

Seven (7) new CO recruits hired in March 2025 started on the job training with the COS in April. These individuals once fully trained Conservation Officers are tentatively scheduled to be posted throughout Manitoba in Gypsumville, Lundar, Wabowden, Thompson (3), and Snow Lake. We are sending the recruits to this year's WCLEA academy being held in Lac La Biche, Alberta beginning May 5, 2025.

Standard defensive tactics / officer safety training was again held during annual centralized training for Department. Training by a team of 4 officers who attended a Predator Attack Response Training course put on by the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service also occurred. New recruits were trained in Ice Rescue and spike belt courses.

Firearms qualifications were again conducted by in-house Basic Firearms Instructors with the addition of 2 days of dynamic firearms training, focusing on movement, use of barricades, and flashlights.

Additional Training included Vehicle Close Quarter Battles through Centrifuge for firearms and use of force instructors. Pistol Mounted Optics (PMO) instructor Course for firearms instructors with the pursuit of PMO implementation. Department is actively considering a new platform Glock17 with PMO and weapon mounted lights to replace Sig Sauer P226.

Funding and Staffing Issues

Although we were able to hire six (6) new Conservation Officers last year and seven (7) new candidates referenced earlier are scheduled for training, recruitment and retention of full-time Conservation Officers continues to be a challenge. Wage increases have occurred, and higher government prioritization has been moving forward towards alleviating some of these pressures.

The department currently has eighty-one (81) field officers and twelve (12) staff supporting them out of Headquarters. Several seasonal Patrol Officers were again

extended into the fall and winter, with assignments to Headquarters, Western, Eastern, and Northern Regions.

A Northern Allowance was recently approved for the Conservation Officer Service. This initiative provides a moderate increase in pay for those officers who are working in northern and remote communities. It is hoped these additional monies will help both with the recruitment and retention of Officers in these areas.

Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends

Public safety remains a priority of the Conservation Officer Service. During the summer, public safety is enhanced with seasonal Patrol Officers and approximately 74 young officers are trained and deployed each year across Manitoba to assist Conservation Officers in keeping Provincial Parks safe natural places to enjoy the outdoors. Night hunting remains a priority and hunting regulations continue in which night hunting in southern Manitoba is banned unless in pre-approved crown land areas.

Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts

Recently the Conservation Officer Service was brought on board to help with patrol efforts along the Canada-United States border. Conservation Officers' primary focus remains on ensuring the protection of our shared natural resources, environment, and public safety. At the same time, Conservation Officers are peace officers that bring valuable skills to an integrated border security response. These efforts include working in cooperation with other enforcement entities, the Canada Border Services Agency as well as the RCMP. Use of the Conservation Officer Service contracted helicopter and of infrared technology are valuable additions to enhance in these new patrol efforts.

New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement

New set fines were recently introduced to serve as an enhanced deterrent to law breakers and to increase revenues that can be used for various conservation initiatives. Barbed hooked fines, as an example, have increased approximately five-fold from about \$50 to \$250 per offence.

Monies from the Criminal Forfeiture Fund to purchase new and improved drones and drone technology is being actively pursued. Drones equipped with infrared night vision technology will be used during night hunting patrols in areas where the use of helicopter is either not possible or the helicopter is already deployed in other higher priority areas.

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

A First Nation in Manitoba lawsuit continues against the provincial government respecting amendments to the Wildlife Act and purported infringement of treaty rights to night hunt.

Conservation Officers across the province are actively increasing efforts to meet with First Nations and Metis peoples towards a mutually beneficial working relationship and enhancing communications.

PHOTOS



2024 Graduating Class – pictured Chief Conservation Officer Corey Meadows, Sergeant Blake Patterson, CO Kade Campbell, CO Karsh Borys, CO Colin Fraser, CO Brenden Windsor, CO Dylan Edwards, CO William (Scott) Laidlaw, and Staff Sergeant Ben Baranowski



Staff Sergeant Evan Jones on boat patrol Lake Winnipeg.



Sergeant Geoff Avery releasing rehabilitated Snowy Owl.

Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers

2025 Agency Report

Province/State: Michigan

Submitted by: Jason Haines, Chief

Date: May 1, 2024

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

Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Law Enforcement Division (LED) established a search and rescue (SAR) committee with the intent to provide SAR training to future conservation officers and establish LED SAR teams around the state. The vision is that the SAR team members could operate as one group or individually lead other agencies or volunteer SAR groups. The committee has been meeting monthly and has provided statewide training to other divisions of the DNR. In October, the committee met and established a land navigational course and mock-training



scenario that will include a very basic incident command, communication and field work.

LED also helped coordinate a multi-agency SAR training in the Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park. Local, state and federal agencies went through a mock scenario to share tactics on a multi-agency approach and using tools such as new mapping apps, cellphone and radio communication, K9 units, rope rescues, drone flying and operations from land, water and air.

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.

LED developed a Legal Resources Section, consisting of five new civilian positions to provide much-needed capacities within the division. Primary responsibilities of this section will include all FOIA activities (particularly with the body worn cameras that have been recently deployed statewide), other records and retention issues, as well as legal research and guiding the division on legal issues.

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).

There has been an increase in timber theft activity in several areas of the state. Conservation officers received a disposition on a felony case involving illegal timber harvest, stemming from a March 2023 investigation in Clare County's Freeman Township. The suspect, a habitual offender, pleaded guilty in 2024 and was sentenced to 72 months to 15 years in prison on one count of damage to trees, totaling more than \$25,000 and was ordered to pay \$25,956.12 in restitution to the State of Michigan.

Over the past two camping seasons, state park personnel discovered that several of the remote state forest campgrounds in Luce County, located in the Upper Peninsula were coming up several thousands of dollars short on campsite fees. District 2 conservation officers along with Special Investigations Unit (SIU) detectives began working surveillance. Ultimately, the surveillance along with the assistance of Michigan State Police and the Mackinac Bridge Authority identified a suspect. Surveillance continued into the fall. On Oct. 19-20 the suspect breached several of the campground pay pipes and was apprehended with a large amount of stolen cash, a burglary tool and other evidence of the crimes. The suspect confessed to the crimes and was lodged on unrelated, outstanding warrants. The case was submitted to the Michigan Attorney General's office and is currently in process. The success of this case was the result of great teamwork by everyone involved. Many hours went into the surveillance with officers from across the entire district and several SIU detectives working together to close the case.



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.)



Over the years, multiple sheriff departments and local municipalities have inquired about how we train our conservation officers. Due to the lack of training opportunities for those agencies, the increase in off-road vehicle activity, and the signing of Public Act 210 in 2024, the Recreational Safety, Education, and Enforcement Section developed two law enforcement training courses to offer to agencies that conduct

snowmobile and ORV enforcement.

The snowmobile and ORV courses, each 40-hours, provides recreational deputies the accreditation they need to enforce the laws.

The snowmobile training was first offered in January 2024 but was cancelled due to the lack of snow that year. In January 2025, the first training was held in the central Upper Peninsula. There were 18 students from 12 departments who successfully completed the training. In May 2024, 12 students completed the ORV training.

The students received training on the following:

- Operation, functions and maintenance.
- Laws and regulations, including crash investigations, alcohol and drug enforcement, and (snowmobile) sound enforcement.
- Conducting safe stops.
- Snowmobile backcountry/off-trail riding.
- ORV braking, acceleration, turning and weight shifting.
- Operating in reduced visibility and night patrols.
- Grooming and DNR trail maintenance operations/funding.

The snowmobile training consisted of approximately 27 hours of snowmobile operation in both the field and at a training range, along with 13 hours of classroom lecture.

Each student is now better equipped to provide enforcement opportunities to their local communities. Training officers from local agencies with our department standards will ensure consistency in statewide operations. This training also fulfills a Michigan legal requirement that allows specific deputies or reserve officers to enforce the snowmobile and/or ORV regulations.

The LED once again conducted joint training initiatives with the Quebec Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs (MFFP), this time including the MSP. Representatives from both MFFP and MSP attended advanced marine enforcement and operations training hosted by LED. The LED also developed and administered ORV enforcement training for local jurisdictions, which will increase the footprint for enforcement of ORV regulations on the trails.

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

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.

In 2021, the Michigan DNR began investigating several timber theft rings in the southern portion of the state and crossing state lines into adjacent states. Timber, specifically black walnut, was being removed from both private and public lands. The ill-gotten timber was then sold to a small number of mills for processing. Early estimates of the value of the stolen timber are in excess of \$325,000. Along with usual investigation

methods, the DNR investigators obtained search warrants for some of the suspects' cell phone data. The cell phone data helped investigators locate the cell phone towers being used to connect cell phone calls and/or text messages. Having this information assisted investigators in tracking the suspects' movements and align those movements with where timber was being stolen, transported, and milled. The DNR is working with the State Attorney General's Office to prosecute the individuals and is hopeful that the prosecutions will lead to successful criminal convictions as well as restitution for the stolen timber.

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

Other Special Law Enforcement Issues

Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers

2025 Agency Report

Province/State: Minnesota

Submitted by: Lt. Col. Robert Gorecki

Date: April 29, 2025

- **Training Issues:**

- In Minnesota, all law enforcement officers need to adhere to MN POST Board requirements regarding continuing education training on an annual basis. Many new topics/areas have been added to these requirements to include crisis intervention, autism, recognizing and valuing community diversity, crimes motivated by bias, etc. It has become challenging to find time to include these areas and hours in our annual training plan, but we are doing a good job of thinking outside the box with technology advancements and areas where we can increase efficiency.
- As our existing work force ages out with retirements and we are hiring new/younger officers, many of them are bringing different value systems, cultural experiences, and professional expectations to our agency. We are working hard to adapt to these new changes by continually evaluating our hiring process, CO Academy experience, and officer training programs to identify areas where we can leverage connection to both the people and the resources we protect and serve, as well as provide fulfillment and personal/professional longevity to our staff.

- **Funding and Staffing Issues:**

- We currently are holding a CO Academy that includes seven individuals with previous law enforcement experience, and seven without. That latter seven came through our CO Prep program, which has been around for more than a decade and is an integral part of helping us create a workforce that more closely resembles the communities we serve. Our CO Prep candidates need a minimum of a two-year degree to be hired. They receive law enforcement training and POST licensure before beginning at the CO Academy.
- We currently are at a near-full complement of conservation officers (including those at our CO Academy) and as a result will not be holding an Academy in 2026. Due to retirements, Academies have been held nearly annually in the recent past.
- The Minnesota Legislature is working to finalize the state budget, but we are in a current and projected deficit situation that may affect the Enforcement Division. In addition, uncertainty regarding federal grants is likely to have impacts on our own efforts surrounding boat and water safety, as well as the counties that receive pass-through grants from the Minnesota DNR.

- **Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends:**

- We continue to be a strong partner with our allied law enforcement agencies throughout Minnesota as their requests to us for conservation officer assistance continues to increase. Notably, in the past year conservation officers were involved in more than a dozen life-saving incidents in which they were the initial or primary responders.
- Highly trained canines continue to be an effective force multiplier for the Enforcement Division. We currently have four dog/handler teams in training and going through the certification process to join our K9 Unit. Once all teams are certified, we will have eight dog/handler teams located throughout the state. These teams often are called upon to assist in game and fish investigations, but also in search and rescue missions and traditional law enforcement requests, such as locating firearms as part of search warrants.
- We have expanded our Special Investigations Unit by three officers. We now have four overt wildlife investigators who will work on complex wildlife crimes, commercial, and interstate wildlife crimes, and assisting conservation officers throughout the state with search warrants, digital evidence, and forensics and technology tools. For much of this calendar year, these investigators will undergo extensive training to become proficient in collecting, processing, and analyzing digital evidence related to mobile devices, cellular call detail records, and social media, in addition to supporting surveillance operations.

- **Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts:**

- We continue conducting training alongside Wisconsin officers on airboat operations. Airboats have become increasingly important in recent years for rescue operations and angler and hunter checks in areas that are difficult to access or where ice conditions make other means unsafe.
- DNR conservation officers who work on the North and South Dakota border routinely meet and work with their state and federal partners who work border lands and waters.

- **New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement**

- As part of an effort to modernize its aviation fleet, the Enforcement Division recently acquired a Cessna 206 with a highly advanced camera system that will make our efforts around fire detection, fish and game surveys, search and rescue, etc., more effective and efficient.
- Our statewide Marine Unit now is using specialized equipment, including remotely operated vehicles, that enhance our abilities in the areas of search,

recovery, and rescue. This past winter, for example, one of our ROVs located the body of an individual who drowned after his ATV broke through thin ice.

- **State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement:**
 - Proposed legislation in Minnesota would place conservation officers under the authority of county sheriffs. Another proposal would limit our statutory authority surrounding searches and seizure.
- **Cost Savings Initiatives:**
 - We continue our efforts to ensure our planned mileage for patrol vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, and snowmobiles is in line with the number of miles driven. We pay for a certain amount, so if we overestimate, we pay for unused miles and if we underestimate, we pay a premium on miles driven.

Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers
2025 Agency Report
Province/State: Missouri
Submitted by: Travis McLain
Date: May 6, 2025

- **Training Issues** - The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) Agent Training Academy began on March 16th. The six-month (1000+ hour) academy consists of 20 Agent Trainees, with a graduation date set for Late September 2025. With 21 vacancies within the Protection Branch, we will be seeking to hold back-to-back Training Academies in 2025 and 2026. The Academy is Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) certified and consists of training in a variety of law enforcement, resource management, conservation education, and communications/community engagement topics. We continue to attract exceptional candidates to serve as conservation agents; however, while passionate about the outdoors, many don't have as much outdoor experience as applicants of the past. An emergent and continuing challenge is preparing/training our new generation of agents to recognize and speak the lingo of more traditional consumptive users, while proactively applying what was learned in the academy to connect all citizens with conservation.



Missouri Conservation Agent Training Class 2025

- **Funding and Staffing Issues** - The operating budget for MDC represents less than 1 percent (0.4%) of the total state budget and the Department receives no state general revenue. MDC gets a substantial part of its funding through the conservation sales tax. For every \$8 spent on taxable items, one penny goes to conservation. For FY24 the conservation sales tax equated to \$172 million, federal reimbursements \$50 million, permit sales \$43 million, with sales/rentals/other sources and interest \$18.5 million. Total receipts for FY24 came to \$266 million.

With 21 vacancies and several pending retirements, the Branch is facing the loss of considerable institutional knowledge in the next 3-5 years. Approximately 80% of our Protection Management Team (PMT) is eligible to retire during this time. Back-to-back training academy classes are certainly keeping staffing levels at an acceptable level and offer opportunities to develop the next generation of branch leadership.

through a mentoring program, instructor certifications, and becoming field trainers. The Protection Branch is also utilizing a variety of leadership training opportunities through NACLEC and partnerships with other state fish and wildlife agencies, MDC LEADS (leadership academy), the State of Missouri Leadership Academy, and unlimited access to online training through Police One and LinkedIn to help prepare staff to fill supervisory vacancies in the future.

The 2024 report included information on the pending retirements of Director Sara Parker Pauley, and Protection Branch Chief Randy Doman during 2024. Jason Summers was selected as the tenth Director in MDC's 87-year history, and Travis McLain was selected to succeed Randy Doman as the twelfth chief of Protection Branch.

- **Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends** – Requests for increased opportunities to utilize drones and thermal imaging equipment to take or recover wildlife has been a hot and polarizing topic. In 2021 MDC implemented regulations to allow the use of night vision, thermal imagery, infra-red, and artificial light to take coyotes from February 1st to March 31st. The popularity of these technologies has increased as the equipment has become more affordable, and hunters are asking for increased opportunities to utilize this equipment. Consequently, the Conservation Commission is considering regulations that would expand the opportunity to use of this equipment to hunt coyotes, while minimizing the potential for user/landowner conflicts and the opportunistic/intentional take of non-target species. More to come on this issue.

The use of drones equipped with night vision, thermal imagery, or infra-red equipment to recover hunter wounded turkeys, deer, elk, and black bears was approved in 2024. Overall, the first deer season of authorized use for recovery purposes was well-received by the public and presented minimal enforcement challenges. However, the use of drones to locate and/or recover wildlife with an artificial light (not authorized by the new regulations) has caused several problems



for staff statewide. In November 2024, Pike County Conservation Agent Dirk Otterstein responded to a landowner complaint on a drone flying over their property while shining a powerful spotlight. Agent Otterstein observed the drone fly over multiple properties with the spotlight activated before contacting a hunter and drone operator attempting to locate a wounded buck. A citation was issued to the drone operator for illegal use of artificial light to locate/purse wildlife.

Technology is changing our future!

Illegal use of drone/spotlight – Pike County

- **Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts** – Twelve Conservation Agents assisted with the security detail at Governor Mike Kehoe's inauguration in January of 2025. This was a unique opportunity for our agents, and we were proud to serve alongside state troopers, capital police, and other law enforcement officers during this event. Since its inception in 2021 the MDC canine program has responded to requests from other agencies to assist with everything from search and rescue to article searches. In 2024 MDC canine handlers

responded to requests from multiple agencies across Missouri for 25 article searches, including searches for weapons used in violent crimes. To date, our officers have responded to requests for 75 article searches and 13 tracks for suspects or search and rescue from their neighboring agencies.

- **New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement** – Statewide issuance of red dot sights (RDS) on the Glock 45 platform took place in summer 2024. Agents completed an 8-hour transition and orientation training prior to completing qualifications. Many agents have expressed increased confidence in their ability to shoot their duty weapons, especially at longer ranges since completing the transition. The current training class is the first to receive their initial firearms training with a RDS equipped handgun and the positive impact on new shooters is obvious from the first range session.
- **State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement** –

The Missouri legislative session overall was positive for the Missouri Department of Conservation. Bills to challenge our authority to regulate wildlife, open fields, and change the landowner permit requirements were introduced. These bills gained very little traction and were not a major cause of concern this year.

- **Other Special Law Enforcement Issues**

The backbone of Protection Branch is its conservation agents. In Missouri there are one (1) or two (2) agents per county to officially represent the Department. The primary focus is on increasing voluntary compliance with the *Wildlife Code of Missouri* through a strong law enforcement presence and community engagement strategies. In 2022 the branch developed a dashboard to help determine resource contact compliance rates and conviction rates across the state. Visualizations of this data drives decisions by measuring the impact of our work on citizen engagement, education, and community policing. It also helps with accountability for maintaining good relationships with prosecutors and judges, and with submitting quality cases (with good reports), which ultimately correlates to a high conviction rate. In FY24, the statewide resource contact compliance rate was at 91.7% with agents documenting approximately 8 violations per 100 contacts. MDC agents also achieved a 93% conviction rate during the year. Agents take pride in the relationships built with local prosecutors and the members of their respective communities to achieve these high compliance and conviction rates.

• 2024 Law Enforcement Contacts	191,504
• 2024 Non-LE Contacts.....	353,136
• 2024 Resource Violations.....	15,853
• 2024 Non-Resource Violations.....	3,616
• 2024 Public Programs.....	6,380

Conservation Agent yearly accomplishments

Missouri has also been an integral member of the SEAFWA states in establishing and implementing the North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation (NAWLEA) program. A systematic review of branch guidelines and Department

policies has started as Missouri prepares to enter into an accreditation agreement with NAWLEA during 2025.

Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers
2024 Agency Report
Province/State: Nebraska
Submitted by: J. Clauson
Date: May 1, 2024

- **Training Issues**

- Attended the 2nd Annual Trainer's Summit—an excellent event for networking and idea sharing.
- Provided investigative staff training on CellHawk and Cellebrite tools.

- **Funding and Staffing Issues**

- This year has brought significant changes, including a complete turnover in command staff:
 - **Mike Thome** – Administrative Major
 - **Stacey Lewton** – Special Projects/Training Major
 - **Travis Shepler** – Field Major
- We've hired 15 new officers since 2023—substantial growth for a 72-officer agency. However, budget constraints are being felt, as no operational funding was provided with our last five officer positions. This has impacted our equipment budget.
- A new budget request includes:
 - 5 additional field officers
 - Associated operating funds
 - Operating funds omitted from the previous biennium
- Early indications suggest this request may be approved, though it will not include general fund dollars.
- We also restructured the division, reducing from five to four districts, and created an investigations team consisting of a supervisor and two investigators.

- **Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends**

- No significant changes. Unlike some states, we've not seen interest in eliminating the open fields doctrine.

- **Cross-Boundary or Cooperative Enforcement Efforts**
 - Previously reported that **Operation No Trace** had concluded—this was incorrect. The trial for primary defendant **Dustin Noble** is set for June. Noble guided clients who knowingly violated wildlife laws, primarily targeting trophy mule deer using thermal optics in August.
 - Other species taken included white-tailed deer and antelope, but the focus was on large mule deer.
 - Coordinated a joint **Operation Dry Water** effort on the Missouri River with South Dakota and Iowa. Unfortunately, it was cancelled due to the weather. Plans are underway to conduct **Operation Border to Border** over Independence Day weekend with South Dakota, Iowa, and Nebraska.

- **Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement**
 - Our Wildlife Crimestoppers board is funding a second educational trailer due to high public demand and limited availability of the existing one.
 - Continued deployment of the **TraCS RMS system**, selected for its integration with our electronic citation program and low cost under our current software agreement.
 - Collaborating with the court system to automate case disposition tracking by updating our arrest database.

- **Legal, Legislative, and National Issues**
 - No recent state legislation has directly impacted enforcement. However, inquiries about our authority to enter private property are increasing—we are closely monitoring national trends.
 - Proposed bills concerning drone use and country of manufacture could affect our drone fleet and significantly raise per-unit costs if passed.
 - Part of our appropriation bill is for 5 more officers to completely backfill our sergeant positions and it appears that has a good chance of passing.

- **Cost-Saving Initiatives**
 - Vehicle and radio procurement remain major budget constraints due to cost and long lead times, which can delay onboarding new officers.

- We've redirected **RBS reimbursement funding** to our division (previously returned to the general Game Cash Fund), helping offset some operational shortfalls.
- Much of our software and database management is now handled internally, offering savings but stretching our limited IT resources.
- **Special Law Enforcement Issues**
 - Due to a shortage of state troopers, officers in rural and western areas are increasingly assisting with general law enforcement duties, including:
 - Traffic incidents
 - Domestic violence responses
 - Backup for local officers

Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers

2025 Agency Report

Province/State: North Dakota

Submitted by: Scott Winkelman

Date: April 30, 2025

- **Training Issues** – We are transitioning from in-car video to body worn cameras, and also to optics on our sidearms. New training will be required for both projects, including train the trainer courses. While still being used to some degree, the amount of online training we are completing is decreased significantly. This is a welcome change and leads to better, more productive training.
- **Funding and Staffing Issues** – We continue to have adequate funding for our division. The Department did ask for a license fee increase in 2025, which was approved. This will help stabilize our budget going into the future. We also received new funding and will be hiring seasonal employees in the enforcement division. These positions will be non-sworn but will assist the division in numerous tasks, as well as be a useful recruitment tool.
- **Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends** – The open fields doctrine continues to be a talker in the state. Numerous meetings with landowner groups have been successful so far, with no legislation introduced this year. It will continue to be a topic of discussion though.
- **Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts** – MOUs with several states continue to be renewed, as well as an agreement with Wyoming for lab testing. The Missouri River Task Force, which includes the Game and Fish Department, and four area sheriff's departments and city police continues to provide increased law enforcement presence on the Missouri River in the Bismarck area.
- **New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement** – The Department recently removed our in-car video systems and started using Getac body cameras along with Peplink routers. The addition of these should be much more user friendly, with videos automatically uploaded to the cloud.
- **State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement** - The 2025 legislative session changed numerous hunting related laws. The most significant thing is the Department may no longer ban or prohibit baiting for big game. Previously the Department banned baiting in units where CWD has been detected. Baiting will now be legal statewide on private property. Other changes include big game hunters now being able to operate a motor vehicle off an established trail while hunting and boats no longer need to be anchored while hunting waterfowl.
- **Cost Savings Initiatives** – Our budget has continued to be strong, and luckily, we have not had to look for any major cost saving initiatives. We have decided, partly for funding reasons, not to replace our in-car video systems while switching to body worn cameras.

- **Other Special Law Enforcement Issues** – Aquatic nuisance species management and enforcement, especially with commercial construction equipment, has become more involved. Numerous large commercial projects on the Missouri River are bringing in equipment from out of state. A large number of equipment items have been found to be infested with zebra mussels. The Department has been active in trying to enforce current laws and enact new rules to deal with the issues presented.

Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers
2025 Agency Report
Province/State: Ohio
Submitted by: Kandy J. Klosterman, Colonel
Date: 5/01/2025

- **Training Issues** - describe any new or innovative training programs or techniques which have been recently developed, implemented or are now required.
 - Continuing professional training (CPT) is mandated for all law enforcement officers in Ohio. A minimum of 24 training hours must be completed annually on prescribed topics. The agency can be reimbursed for the mandatory training hours, plus 16 optional hours, for a total of 40 hours reimbursed per officer. The topics for CPT include use of force, ethics law, legal updates, arrest, search and seizure, officer trauma and wellness, domestic violence, vehicle dynamics, report writing, and leadership. The 16 optional hours can include any law enforcement topic or training.
 - All officers will receive Exterior Response to Active Shooter Events (ERASE) training. This course is designed to prepare first responders for an open-air active shooter encounter. During our annual in-service training last fall, officers were trained on ERASE extraction techniques.
 - Officers were provided with training on “Legal Updates and Direction” during our annual in-service training. This training included topics on how our authority is derived, entering private property and recent cases, internal direction, rule changes, and adult use cannabis, which was legalized in Ohio.
- **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.
 - Our agency now leases mineral and gas rights for fracking under eligible wildlife properties. The leases do not allow surface impacts, and royalty payments will be returned to the agency. These funds can be used for land acquisition and management.
 - The agency has begun planning for the next hiring and wildlife officer academy based on anticipated retirements and vacancies. The hiring announcement will be posted in December 2025 or January 2026. Orientation and basic training will begin for newly hired cadets in August 2026. We have had strong applicant numbers during recent hiring cycles, which we attribute to continuous recruitment efforts and events,

including maintaining contact with potential candidates and keeping them informed of upcoming position postings.

- **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).
 - Ohio has experienced more hunters using thermal, night vision, and aerial drone technologies for hunting and deer recovery. We recently updated our laws for the use of aerial drones on our properties and clarified the rules for deer recovery. To better inform the public, we will develop a Law Enforcement Information Note (LEIN) sheet and a webpage to provide consistent information and address the most common questions from the public. Since the new rules were implemented, we have received several inquiries for photography and deer recovery on public hunting areas. We are currently considering what best serves our constituents in determining whether to permit these activities.
 - Ohio provides a hunting license exemption for nonresident landowners to hunt on the property they own in Ohio without a license, provided their home state allows Ohio residents the same exemption in that state. Following the 2023-2024 hunting season, the agency sent letters that explain the criteria to the nonresident hunters who successfully harvested a white-tailed deer or turkey and claimed a landowner exemption. We also developed a LEIN to provide a quick-reference guide for hunting license exemptions that will be available to the public. To date, we are only aware of nonresident landowners from Indiana, North Carolina, and Virginia qualifying for this exemption.
 - Non-traditional taxidermy and the “curiosity and oddities” market is a continued concern for the potential commercial exploitation of wildlife, often through online sales or auction sites. We have initiated several investigations into the illicit sales of wildlife and preserved specimens, working with our law enforcement partners, including local police agencies, prosecutors’ offices, probation departments, humane agents, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. To better inform the public, we published a reference sheet for native wildlife sales that is available online. This publication is revised whenever there is a rule change or an area that needs more clarification.
- **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 Ohio Division of Wildlife has been a part of the Ohio Environmental Crimes Task Force for more than 20 years. The task force uses a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach to investigate and prosecute the most egregious environmental crimes. This task force is comprised of the U.S. Attorney's Office, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, the Ohio Attorney General's Office, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Ohio Department of Agriculture.
- The Ohio Division of Wildlife participates on the Great Lakes Fishery Commission Law Enforcement Committee to assist Great Lakes jurisdictions with enforcement issues unique to the region. The committee is comprised of federal, provincial, state and tribal entities. Through policy recommendations and cooperative efforts, the committee works to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species and reduce the exploitation of species in trade.
- While not a cooperative effort with outside enforcement agencies, the Ohio Division of Wildlife has launched Hunt ProOH, a voluntary accreditation program developed as a partnership between the Division of Wildlife and outfitters operating within the state. The program aims to improve consumer confidence when selecting an outfitter based on their accreditation status, strengthen the reputation of the outfitting industry in Ohio, and enhance communication with stakeholders.
- **New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement** - describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.
 - Since 2015, 79 Ohio wildlife officers have completed tracking skills training. In August 2023, we began developing a formalized search, rescue, and tracking team (SRTT) with advanced training. The team will incorporate every district (region) in the state and bring together three allied disciplines, each with unique skills and abilities: tracking team members, canine units, and aerial drone operators. Team members completed Level I Tracking training in 2024 and have trained with local law enforcement, sheriff's offices, and the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections. As part of this unified team, Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) operators were selected, and we acquired three DJI Matrice 30T quadcopters. Level II Tracking training is scheduled for August 2025.
 - The Ohio Division of Wildlife is developing an outreach and education project to provide information and partner with the aquarium and pet trade to reduce risk for the introduction of injurious aquatic invasive species. This project will require partnering with fisheries biologists to develop the project and corresponding materials.

- The Ohio Division of Wildlife has purchased its first rigid-hull inflatable boat (RHIB), which should be delivered in late summer. The new RHIB will be used for patrol on Lake Erie, replacing a 30-year-old Boston Whaler. The design of this new patrol vessel will make it easier for officers to conduct vessel-to-vessel contacts.
- **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.
 - In response to the current trends where legislation has been introduced to limit officers' authority to enter private property and this authority is being challenged through litigation, the Ohio Division of Wildlife has established a directive to provide guidance to our wildlife officers that limits entering private property for enforcement purposes. The directive addresses probable cause, curtilage, supervisor oversight, and documentation. While much of the content reflects our current operations, the directive formalizes this information and offers transparency for the public.
- **Cost Savings Initiatives** - Identify initiatives in any area which contributed to improvements in work effectiveness and fiscal efficiency.
 - The agency is currently deploying new Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs) to replace the outdated models previously issued to officers. The new MDTs have licensed software that provides endpoint-to-network access security while using various networks, including cellular and Wi-Fi networks outside the agency network. This allows wildlife officers to use unsecured networks to access and transmit criminal justice and law enforcement sensitive information. While this is not a cost savings, it should allow officers to operate more efficiently since they will not be restricted to an air card with a single service provider.
- **Other Special Law Enforcement Issues**
 - After compiling information for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources fallen officer memorial, we discovered that eighteen Ohio wildlife officers have died in the line of duty. Of those, only four are included on the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial (NLEOM) wall, and only nine are currently on the Officer Down Memorial Page (ODMP). We intend to request that all our fallen officers be appropriately memorialized on the ODMP, NLEOM wall, the North American Wildlife Enforcement Officers Association (NAWEOA) memorial, and the State of Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission Memorial.
 - In recognition for the service that they provide to their local communities and Ohio, the Ohio Division of Wildlife presented 48 game processors with

certificates of recognition from the chief. Wildlife officers and agency staff hand-delivered the framed certificates during the hunting season to express our appreciation for providing their valuable services to the hunting community. This recognition was well received.

- The Ohio Division of Wildlife is working to obtain law enforcement accreditation from the Commission of Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). We are also certified by the Ohio Collaborative, which incorporates best practices for law enforcement agencies and community policing standards. As part of this process, wildlife officers were issued body-worn cameras in December 2022. Wildlife officers must activate their body-worn cameras during law enforcement contacts with the public.

Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers
2025 Agency Report
State/Province: Saskatchewan
Submitted by Steve Dobko, Chief Superintendent
Date: April 22,2025

- **Training Issues** – In 2024 Saskatchewan Provincial Protective Services (PPS) hired eight new field conservation officers who successfully graduated from the Western Conservation Law Enforcement Academy in Lac La Biche Alberta. In 2025 we will be hiring 12 officer recruits who will be attending WCLEA and joining the ranks after graduation in September. Saskatchewan is developing a Field Training Program to give new recruits directly supervised time in the field after their recruitment training. This will provide new officers with more experience and confidence should they be posted to a more remote location with less support from colleagues and supervisors. Once they graduate from the academy the new recruits will work in a 3-month field training position. This is a new program for the Conservation Officer Service. The Provincial Protective Services branch, which includes conservation officers, has moved to a regional use of force recertification model, each member will complete their annual recertifications locally rather than at a central location. In 2024 the ministry training program will utilize approx. 50 field and training officers to complete use of force recertifications for approx. 390 officers. Saskatchewan completed another surveillance course, and 12 field officers were certified. This brings Saskatchewan's total of officers trained in surveillance to 33 with officers stationed across the province.
- **Funding and Staffing Issues** – Staffing actions and transfers have been at an all-time high in 2024. Funding has remained steady, however staffing challenges related to retention of officers are dynamic. The Provincial Protective Services (PPS) Conservation Officer (CO) Service is challenged to recruit and retain staff in several locations across the province. Increasingly, northern and remote communities are becoming hard to staff. At present, 21 of the ministry's 147 conservation officer positions are stationed in these seven northern locations. Each of the ministry's seven northern posts is anywhere from four to 19 hours by road from major cities. In 2024 a class plan renewal process tied to union bargaining resulted in a reduction of the salary supplement for all PPS staff. This reduction included the complete removal of the supplement for the sergeant level supervisors is causing considerable concern by sergeants leading to retention challenges.
- **Major Conservation Law Enforcement Trends** –In 2024 the Saskatchewan Unlawful Outfitting Task Force (OTF) continued to focus on enforcement efforts towards unlawful outfitting practices throughout Saskatchewan leading to unlawful export of wildlife through the northern and midwest states. In 2024 conservation officers conducted 33 operations and inspections at airport and land border

crossings. 2,393 hunters and 972 anglers were checked for compliance resulting in 130 charges and 140 warnings issued.

- **Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts**

Enforcement investigations and intelligence sharing continue with several Canadian and USA agencies and US States including British Columbia, Manitoba, Alberta, CBSA, USFWS, US Homeland Security Agency and the Environment and Climate Change Canada Wildlife Directorate.

Unlawful Outfitting and unlawful export of wildlife has one of Saskatchewan key priorities in 2024. The Saskatchewan Investigations UC section has recently concluded 5 trafficking in fish and wildlife investigations and 4 unlawful outfitting investigations. Operation Area 51 trafficking file recently concluded. Details in the operation confirmed intelligence previously received that individuals involved in the Islamic faith have been purchasing wild game in the province. Video evidence was obtained during the file that showed a white-tail deer that had been shot at night and the accused recited the Halal prayer over the deer once it was killed. This video was then given to the buyer to complete the transaction and to prove that the animal was taken under Halal means. Saskatchewan currently has two joint undercover files with other provinces involving trafficking and unlawful outfitting.

- **New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement** – All patrol vehicles have been equipped with mobile office technology and eticketing will be coming in 2025. Thirty-Eight 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 with a suspended driver. 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. Conservation officers continue to assist RCMP and other municipal police agencies with calls for service related to public emergencies. In 2024 officers were dispatched to 25 calls. Conservation officers provided support to RCMP during Carbon Tax Protests and the Legislative District Security Unit during Palestine protests at the legislature. Officers continue to enforce alcohol and drug impairment through the course of their duties.

- **State, Regional and National Issues, Legislation, Legal Challenges and Court Decisions Impacting Natural Resources Law Enforcement Federal- *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. Saskatchewan has not to date changed provincial legislation regarding possession or preservation requirements to mirror this new

federal amendment. R. v. McNeil now applies to conservation officers. McNeil disclosure obligations have been introduced in the wake of R. v. McNeil. and apply to police officers and peace officers involved in criminal investigations. PPS members are defined as peace officers through their Appointment of Special Constable. McNeil disclosure obligations require that internal law enforcement discipline records, when pertinent to the case, be provided to the Crown prosecutor for potential disclosure to the defense and/or accused person.

- **Provincial-** 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 conservation officers or police, as a result of the actions of an officer, or where sexual assault or interpersonal violence involving police are alleged.
- **Cost Savings Initiatives** – It has been identified that the current ¾ ton-2500 Series patrol trucks utilized by the Conservation Officer Service (CO Service) are not always required in all locations. Although this heavier class of vehicles was traditionally viewed as a more robust unit in the conditions that the CO Service operates, advances in vehicle design and capacities offer several new options. A cost savings could be realized through the addition of more fuel efficient ½ ton-1500 Series patrol vehicles used by the CO Service. Through the replacement process significant cost saving of up to 200K could be recognized through downsizing some of the CO Service fleet to the 1500 Series patrol vehicles.
- **Other Special Law Enforcement Issues** – In 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 Marshall service (SMS) began recruiting officers in late 2024 and the first SMS troop will graduate in June 2025, and when completed 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 RCMP will remain the provincial police service of jurisdiction. In some locations Saskatchewan Marshalls will work out of the same offices as conservation officers.

Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers
2025 Agency Report
Province/State: South Dakota
Submitted by: Sam Schelhaas
Date: April, 2025

- **Training Issues –**

- Our Training Supervisor attended the training coordinator meeting in Texas this last August. This gave our department valuable insight regarding what some agencies have identified as problems in their training programs and what they have done to address these issues. More importantly we were able to network with training staff across the country and look forward to attending these meetings in the future to continue to learn how other states are addressing the challenges and concerns associated with the hiring, recruiting and training of the next generation of conservation officers.

- **Funding and Staffing Issues -**

- Conservation officer staffing levels have continued to improve with vacancies at the lowest levels they have been in recent years. However, numerous officers are retirement eligible and we fully anticipate some retirements to start this year. Hiring will continue to be a high priority for our agency.
- This past fall saw the implementation and selection of a third fulltime wildlife investigator position. This was a significant accomplishment for our law enforcement section as we had been operating with only two wildlife investigators for several decades.
- Our commission approved a fee package increase for the first time in over 10 years! Like many wildlife agencies, we do not receive general funds and are operate on a user pay basis. Almost every license type was increased with some of our non-resident big game tags seeing the largest increase.

- **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).

- **Unique Cross Boundary or Cooperative, Enforcement Efforts -**

- SD GFP currently has JPA's (Joint Powers Agreements) or Mutual Aid Agreements with four neighboring states. These agreements allow for the sharing of personnel as well as equipment for specific purposes between the states. Recently, SD GFP has seen a significant increase and benefit in the sharing of technical equipment and specialized software programs between states. Some of these programs that are now essential for modern day wildlife investigations require costly equipment and costly yearly subscription fees. SD GFP and the agreement states have "shared" these programs when and where possible in order to reduce costs. Additionally, technology is constantly changing and many of these programs require an individual to be highly trained and highly invested in the program to stay up to date on current best

practices. The JPA's and Mutual Aid Agreements have the added benefit of providing access to an expert in each program that is just a phone call away instead of having one individual that is constantly having to attend costly training courses for the multitude of programs needed.

- **New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement** - describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.
 - Our investigations unit recently held their first training for new officers. This training was designed for officers with less than 5 years in wildlife law enforcement. The group size was limited so that officers would feel comfortable asking questions seeking help. The selected officers had to submit two case files. One file of a case they were proud of and one file of a case that had stalled out. These cases were reviewed, and the officers worked on these cases as a group. The leaders of this training tailored their training to address the specific cases that were submitted from the field. The feedback was great and the second class is being planned.
- **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.
 - This year marked the 100 year of the South Dakota Legislative Session and like most years there were some controversial bills aimed at GFP. While most of those bills were defeated, there were 2 bills signed into law that will be good for the people of South Dakota.
 - An act to establish certain criminal offenses for boat operators and to provide penalties therefore. The passage of this bill strengthens our states boating laws, provides assurances for the victims and families of victims of boat accidents, and protects our boating public. Prior to the passage of this law there were not manslaughter laws relating to boats and boat accidents and often times the individual responsible for killing or injuring another person in a boat accident would receive misdemeanor charges. The laws now mirror the laws that apply to motor vehicles. It is now a class 3 felony to operate a boat under the influence and kill someone. It is a class 4 felony to operate a boat under the influence and injure someone. Lastly, it is a class 6 felony to flee the scene of a boat accident when someone was seriously injured or killed. This is great news, but unfortunately it took a tragic event to bring these inadequate laws to light.
 - An act to clarify the minimum age requirements for a hunting license. This bill simply modernized our mentor hunting program and gave more allowances to the GFP Commission to make adjustments as needed. The goal of getting kids into the sport of hunting remains the same. It should just be easier to make changes in the future.
- **Cost Savings Initiatives** - Identify initiatives in any area which contributed to improvements in work effectiveness and fiscal efficiency.
 - In addition to the support our agency provides to South Dakota State University's Natural Resources Law Enforcement Program, we will now be embarking on a similar effort with one of our State's Technical Colleges.

Lake Area Technical College is one of three technical colleges in South Dakota that offers two-year students the ability to complete law enforcement certification without having to attend the State's Law Enforcement Training Academy. Starting this summer, second year law enforcement students will have an option of 8 additional weeks of schooling focused strictly on natural resources and natural resource law enforcement. Students will go through some hands-on training with some of our officers as part of their course work. We are hopeful that the current pool of students will start looking closer at conservation officer work and that we will be able to hire some certified graduates right out of college and place them directly into our Wildlife Officer Training Program.

- **Other Special Law Enforcement Issues**

Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers
2025 Agency Report
Province/State: Texas
Submitted by: Stormy King
Date: 05/01/2025

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

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Law Enforcement (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 LE Division's Texas Game Warden Training Center (GWTC) Staff:

- The 67th Texas Game Warden Cadet class of 26 Game Wardens and 7 State Park Police Officers is scheduled to graduate on May 30, 2025. (The class began on October 1, 2024, with 36 Game Wardens and 10 State Park Police Officers)
- TPWD-LE transition from Glock 17-9mm pistols to a Glock 45-9mm pistol with ACRO-P2 red dot sight has been completed by all Game Wardens and State Park Police Officers.
- GWTC and field-based trainers have completed mandated 16-hour Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) LEVEL I training statewide.
- Training Center recruiting staff conducted various onsite open house and travelling recruiting events.
- **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 continues to be a challenge based on inflation related to capital equipment, office and boat storage leases and general operational needs in addition to replacement cost of critical equipment.
 - Funding solutions are being moved through the 89th legislative session which ends June 2nd of 2025.
 - Staffing Issues – We've seen some improvement in relation to staffing issues with very specific positions within the Law Enforcement Division to include Police Communication Officers (Dispatchers) and Aircraft Pilots. Yet to be determined are the potential impacts of mandates to end remote or "teleworking" practices in place for other non-commissioned staff.

- Solutions have included adding position classifications to increase potential salary and exploring options identifying alternate work locations.
- Progress is being made on an internal program to train pilots.
- Legislative action is pending that would appropriate funds to sustain a scheduled 50-hour work week for Game Wardens. This will help significantly in addressing personnel shortages statewide until more permanent positions can be filled and/or created.
- Game Warden applicant numbers have stayed consistent over the past three hiring processes between 700-800 applicants. Innovation in recruiting quality applicants continues to be a priority.
- **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 TPWD LE Division continues to be involved full time in Operation Lone Star which is a Governor requested border operation since January 6th of 2022.
 - Adaptive patrol strategies have enabled us to periodically reduce personnel and equipment footprint to facilitate more effective coverage of normal duties to address peak statewide needs.
 - Partner agencies include multiple state federal and local partners to include Game Wardens from other states.
- **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.)
 - TPWD LE continues to conduct year-round Port of Entry (POE) operations from El Paso to Brownsville to interdict the illegal import/export of aquatic products and other wildlife resources. These operations include close coordination and cooperation with USFWS Inspectors and U.S. Customs.

- Our Wildlife Enforcement Program has developed processes to greatly increase our rate of submission of cases related to non-resident violators to the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact.
- **New Innovations in Conservation Law Enforcement** - describe any innovations in equipment, enforcement techniques, forensics, etc.
 - Current projects related to technological advancement include projects the implementation of in-car CAD technology and electronic ticketing.
 - New rotary and fixed wing aircraft acquired and/or in the pipeline will facilitate increased capabilities both in conservation enforcement and general LE/emergency response.
 - LE Region 1 staff have developed and conducted a wildlife forensic investigation course for cadet trainees. The course includes instruction in the use of readily available tools to facilitate better investigation and documentation of evidence in poaching related crimes. The course has also been completed by current game wardens for dissemination to more field personnel.
- **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.

Pending Legislation with potential impacts

- HB 676 Relating to the use of an unmanned aircraft to locate and retrieve wounded or killed wildlife. This bill would legalize the use of UAV to pursue/recover wildlife wounded as part of sport hunting.
 - HB 1379 Relating to the authority of a game warden or other peace officer commissioned by the Parks and Wildlife Department to enter private property. This bill proposes to require a probable cause threshold to be met by Game Wardens to enter onto private property.
 - HB 41 Relating to the acquisition or use of certain foreign equipment or services by a governmental entity. This bill would effectively end our UAV program in its current state.
- **Cost Savings Initiatives** - Identify initiatives in any area which contributed to improvements in work effectiveness and fiscal efficiency.
 - Concerted efforts are being made agency wide to reduce costs and increase accessibility of information by phasing out various paper publications and replacing them with digital versions.

- Another initiative has been to, when and where appropriate and feasible, procure or construct office and other facility spaces that will be shared across divisional lines (Wildlife, State Parks, Fisheries, etc.) **Other Special Law Enforcement Issues**

- TPWD continues to seek solutions for cloud-based storage system for BWCs. Issues are cost and internet connectivity.
- Expungements: The Division continues to receive a comparatively higher volume of expunction orders and has created a more streamlined process, in conjunction with agency Legal Division, to ease demands on field/HQ personnel while tightening the timeframe for completion.
- TPWD-LE has created and filled an HQ based position responsible for, among other duties, the review/updating of division policies and has made the move to the PowerDMS system for policy editing and approval. Trends in legislative action indicate a likely need to develop and/or update enforcement related policies almost continuously.

**Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers
2025 Agency Report**

**Province/State: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources,
Division of Public Safety & Resource Protection**

Submitted by: Casey Krueger, Chief Conservation Warden

Date: 3/26/25

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

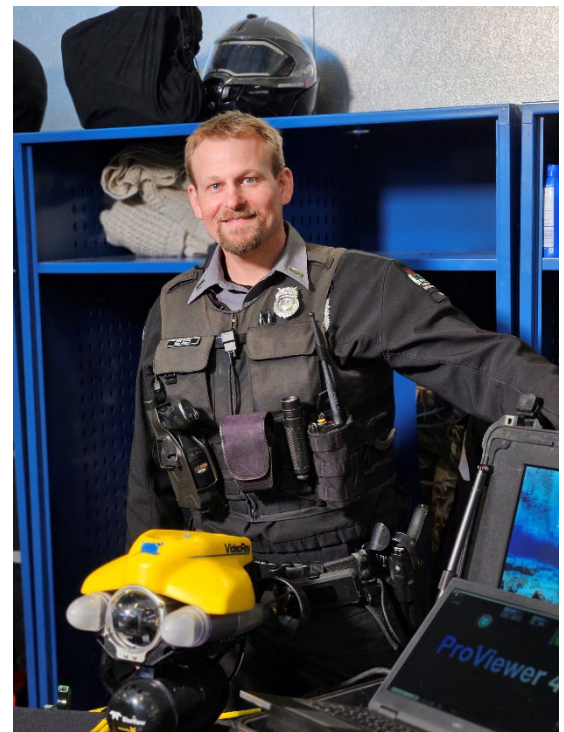
- The division's Training Bureau had a landmark year, achieving significant milestones that underscore the division's dedication to developing highly skilled conservation wardens and staff.
 - One of the most notable accomplishments was the graduation of our largest full-time conservation warden class in 20 years. Selected from a highly competitive pool of 467 applicants, 90% of the new wardens successfully completed their training program. Their positive feedback about the rigorous training program exemplifies the Training Bureau's commitment to fostering a learning culture that requires professionalism, integrity and personal growth.
 - The bureau continued the Community Service Officer (CSO) program, now in its third year, providing aspiring conservation professionals with hands-on experience and opportunities for career advancement. PSRP will be hiring a class of 12 CSOs for the 2025 summer season.
 - The bureau trained 20 instructors through two instructor development classes. These instructors play a vital role in maintaining high training standards and ensuring there are enough in-house instructors to provide training at all recertification sessions and the academy.
 - By coordinating two law enforcement academies that cater to prior experience levels, 10 specialized training weeks, and 20 weeks of field training, the bureau ensures all new recruits receive comprehensive preparation for their responsibilities. Additionally, the bureau conducts multiple law enforcement recertification trainings throughout the year, ensuring



Wardens receiving training

all credentialed staff remain at the forefront of best practices and emerging trends in conservation law enforcement.

- As part of the division's ongoing Saving Lives Campaign, wardens on the Recreation Warden (RW) Team dedicated efforts to training other wardens and external partners on best practices for recreational vehicle and hunting incident investigations. These dedicated wardens become subject-matter experts so they can lend their knowledge to assist others with complex crash investigations (ATV/UTV, snowmobile, boating) and hunting incidents.
 - This past year, RWs implemented a training push to advance internal and external staff knowledge on operating while being intoxicated (OWI) and/or drug impaired. The National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) advanced seated field sobriety class was utilized to refresh skills and teach officers new skills to identify impairment from other intoxicating substances.
- 2024 was the first year Wisconsin utilized the new International Hunter Education Association (IHEA) "train the trainer" model. This model allows us to send one or two instructors to be trained on the IHEA-approved material surrounding hunting incident investigations. In turn, we then can recreate the training for field wardens and incorporate Wisconsin-specific policy/procedures, regulations, and equipment. In 2025, we are expecting one of our largest classes, totaling 23 students. With this training, we can ensure our field wardens are up to date with the latest investigation tools and techniques, how to recreate/preserve a scene, and how to work with partners both internally and externally to ensure our common goals are met. The Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) program coordinated ATV EVOC training for new wardens. Due to the large recruit class, the training occurred over two weeks in June 2024. The training involved building on techniques to get all new wardens to a high level of operational expertise. This included tactical mounting and dismounting, braking, serpentine, slide stops, difficult terrain, water crossing, loading and unloading, basic maintenance, OHV crash investigation, officer OHV stops, and finally a 25-mile trail ride through Fort McCoy.
- During the 2024 boating season, our staff instructed training in GPS Forensics, Boat Crash Investigations, Alcohol and Drug Impaired Field Sobriety Testing, Airboat Operation, and Tactical Boat Operation. In addition to training our



Warden with uROV

conservation wardens, all these training sessions were available to our external law enforcement partners.

- The division's Underwater Remotely Operated Vehicle (uROV) team continues to train as a large group twice a year to enhance skills. The focus of our team trainings this year included operation in water currents from elevated platforms to perform searches, and practicing underwater scene mapping and deep-water boat anchoring 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.

- As experienced in many industries, we've seen operational costs are rising faster than inflation. Additionally, the department's Fish and Wildlife Account remains challenged by a structural deficit. This account funds about 20% of the DNR's authorized positions and is a primary source of funding for the division. There is a structural deficit in the account because fewer people are buying licenses, prices for several license products have not increased in several years and staffing and supply costs continue to go up. The deficit has affected our ability to fill vacancies and complete long-term projects, and supply budgets have been tighter. To counter these fiscal strains, additional efforts to manage spending across all areas of the division have been high priority. Continued fiscal fidelity to division appropriations and budgets has directed the work of the division. This said, we continue to provide the best services we can with our existing financial resources. Our department has been engaging stakeholders, Gov. Tony Evers and the Wisconsin Legislature to explore options to rebalance the account in the 2025-27 biennial budget through proposed budget initiatives.
- Budgetary challenges have limited the ability of the division to hire adequate staff to support the current workload. The division is frequently faced with the dilemma of welcoming a recruit class or non-sworn staff member while also budgeting for retirements. Many of the staff who have retired in recent years have ended their career with more than six months of sabbatical accrued, making it difficult to hire in an appropriate number of staff to replace outgoing team members. Delays in the hiring process have resulted in extended vacancies



Warden Observing in the Field

and a significant loss of institutional knowledge due to limited opportunities for knowledge transfer to new staff. The division also faces challenges to offer promotional opportunities to all staff areas due to the limited availability of higher-level positions within the division.

- Considering the funding and staffing challenges outlined above, workload management has been a high priority for the division. Thoughtful planning surrounding fleet management, supply management, overtime management, and more have been critical in managing operational costs. Despite these challenges, our staff continue to work hard to find ways to leverage new budgetary opportunities and effectively manage and prioritize the division's varied needs.

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 increased registration numbers and fatal incidents occurring with recreational vehicles, wardens continue to work on new approaches of enforcement and educational efforts across the state. Forty people lost their lives due to (primarily) speed, alcohol, inexperience and not wearing helmets or seatbelts. Focused efforts have included saturated patrols, media releases, partnering with local agencies and increasing education on normal patrol duties. Wardens continue to focus on "Think Smart Before You Start" efforts to prevent avoidable incidents.
- Wardens spent significant time responding to motor vehicles and recreational vehicle enthusiasts who fell through the ice this past winter. With warmer temperatures, strong winds and open water, there was an increase in emergency responses, some of which were fatal. With the larger size of UTVs, staff reminded owners to be increasingly aware of ice conditions and weight of UTVs. Wardens took a proactive approach on public outreach by teaming up with local media outlets to relay important ice safety messages prior to planned events. Wardens on the Marine Enforcement Team continued to work with our partners in the Bureau of Fisheries Management to fully implement electronic reporting requirements for the Fishing Guide, Sport Trolling (Charter Fishing) and Commercial Fishing industries. The team has continued to work with local partners on ice rescues for stranded anglers as well as many search and rescue calls for stranded boaters. The team has continued to see a focus on intentional illegal harvest of roe bearing species of fish, which is



Warden on Marine Patrol

concerning and believed to be associated with the high value for caviar and potential commercialization of these precious resources.

- In 2024, there were 14 boating fatalities. In 2023, there were 28 boating fatalities, 27 of which involved a victim not wearing a life jacket. Operator inexperience, inattention, recklessness and speeding are the four leading causes of tragic watercraft crashes, and the leading cause of death is drowning. Life jackets save lives and it's essential to operate watercraft sober. We continue to emphasize boat safety and life jacket wear through law enforcement efforts, education and outreach (Boat Safety Welcome Centers and Loaner Life Jacket Program).
- This year, the Bureau of Investigations & Environmental Enforcement focused efforts in three main areas:
 - *Ensuring water quality, clean drinking water* - Suspended sediment or particulate matter in river water plays a major role in the movement of contaminants in our rivers and streams. We investigated causers of direct point source discharge of contaminants and sought enforcement action on several significant runoffs from illegal land use practices. This year, approximately 101 cases were closed due to achieving compliance in this category. At least 28 consent orders were issued to facilities that needed to correct drinking water or contaminant level violations in their systems. Seven cases involving permittees found out of compliance with their WPDES permits were referred to the DOJ for civil remedies.
 - *Protecting air quality* - There are federal and state standards for six common air pollutants; hundreds of other air toxics are regulated through permits. The investigative team referred one criminal case to the U.S. EPA for investigative follow up of an asbestos abatement company that removed and stockpiled asbestos illegally in a warehouse. In addition, about 19 cases were closed due to achieving compliance while four permitted facilities were referred to the DOJ for civil litigation.
 - *Prevent shipments of harmful invasive species* - Wardens continue their efforts in the education and enforcement of illegal sale, transportation or possession of aquatic invasives species. Public outreach continues to suppliers in the live food, pet, and biological supply trades to educate companies about which species are prohibited in Wisconsin, along with helping them identify alternative species to sell.
- The Angler Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3) program collaborated with community leaders and conservation organizations to deliver fishing opportunities. Its emphasis on the train-the-trainer model extends the program's reach statewide to a wide range of audiences. From classrooms to clubhouses to our lakeshores and streambanks, the Angler Education program engages people of all ages and skill levels to be part of the community of anglers and find joy, no matter the season.
- The Hunter R3 program offers hands-on opportunities for the public to learn outdoor skills and engage with the hunting community in Wisconsin. The R3 team works with volunteers to coordinate educational outdoor skills events, including shooting, scouting, processing and cooking workshops. The team onboarded four Partner Hunter R3 Coordinator staff in 2023 with Pheasants Forever, the National Deer Association, Raised at Full Draw and Pass It On –

Outdoor Mentors. With the help of our contracted partners, the R3 team facilitated 140 hunting programs in 2024.

- *Hunter Education*: In conjunction with partner groups and through efforts to increase participation and volunteers, the Hunter Education program has seen a reduction in hunting incidents and continues to trend downward. In 2024, there were 11 hunting incidents with zero fatalities which brings the 10-year average of hunting incidents down to 15.8 from a 10-year average of 26 in 2015. The number of fatal hunting incidents has seen a significant reduction in the past 10 years, with the last two years being fatality free.
- *Shooting Ranges*: In February 2024, the division hired the state's first Shooting Range Program Specialist. The responsibilities of the position include oversight of the 11 state-owned shooting ranges and implementation of facility improvement projects and programs to provide safe, quality shooting experiences. The DNR continued to support private shooting ranges that provide public access by allocating \$800,000 in federal funding to support range improvement projects through the DNR shooting range grant program. The DNR also continues to support shooting sports by coordinating the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) with 321 schools in Wisconsin. The DNR coordinates the state NASP tournament with more than 1,600 archers participating in bullseye and 3D competitions during the 2-day event.

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 remain active statewide on recreational properties. We continue to work with our partners in the Bureau of Parks and Recreation to ensure proper law enforcement staffing and response on DNR properties.
- 2024 was an extremely busy year relating to presidential and vice-presidential candidates visiting our state during the campaign season. Wardens across the state were frequently asked by the U.S. Secret Service and local law enforcement agencies to assist with securing waterways, bridges and more.
- We also had 28 wardens deployed to the Republican National Convention (RNC) for approximately one week in 2024. Our main duty was to enforce maritime security zones in partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard and Milwaukee Police Department. Included in this effort were six wardens from our Joint Tactical Team associated with Wisconsin Department of Justice and Division of Criminal Investigation. Everyone worked long hours each day. In addition to those deployed at RNC, we had 20 wardens on standby posed to respond to the State Capitol in case of protests, large gatherings, or other public safety needs.
- The division's Emergency Management Program is responsible for managing personnel and resources to assist in the planning, preparation, response, recovery and mitigation throughout the disaster or incident response process. This includes all critical statewide disasters (i.e., severe weather events, dam failures, large-scale spills and fires, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (bird flu) responses, nuclear power generating emergencies and more). The division works closely with Wisconsin Emergency Management and other partner stakeholders to coordinate personnel, resources and information during times of disaster. We also sit on the Governor's Homeland Security Council to advise the Gov. Evers on homeland security issues, coordinate state and local threat prevention and response efforts, and produce periodic reports on homeland security in Wisconsin.

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

- AEDs have been fully deployed to all conservation and recreation wardens. Within months of deployment, this equipment was instrumental in at least two life-saving events in the field. These vital pieces of life-saving equipment, along with continued first aid training, continue to be assets to our field staff in their mission to protect and service the public.
- Another critical safety investment for calendar year 2024 was the upgrade and deployment of the tasers carried by our wardens. The division supported the deployment of the new Taser 10 model, which boasts increased accuracy and more reliable deployment over previous models.
- Two of our regions were equipped with body worn cameras (BWCs) in calendar year '23, which have been an enormous benefit to our staff. These BWCs have resulted in a feeling of confidence and security for the wardens as well as the public that they serve. In calendar year '24, the division was able to easily mitigate at least eight instances of unfounded complaints against wardens, provide documentation for at least two instances of use of force during warden contacts, and provide firsthand evidence of contacts and investigative incidents to our partner agencies.
- The WI DNR's uROV team received a new VideoRay Defender underwater remotely operated vehicle in 2024 and trained a total of 6 team members on how to use the new unit. The unit provides an upgrade to our capabilities for the team by having enhanced sonar, cameras and an auto pilot system that aids for more user control in challenging environments.
- The division has also accepted delivery of three Contender boats. These large boats will ensure the ability of the division to provide exceptional safety and enforcement presence on the Great Lakes and provide support to our partners in the US Coast Guard and other enforcement agencies.



Warden with AED

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

- Staff in the Bureau of Business Services have continued efforts to complete the development and implementation of a new Records Management System (RMS). This RMS, currently being developed through a contract with ProPhoenix, is anticipated to streamline the process of records retention and the open records

request process for all staff members and provide additional tools for all staff members to appropriately manage records. Deployment of this new RMS is expected to reduce administrative costs (budget and staff time) by allowing staff to track data in one place instead of having to maintain multiple databases. For reference, our division records staff responded to over 800 individual records requests throughout calendar year '24.

