

Game and Fish Fund Budgetary Oversight Committee

Authorized under *Minnesota Statutes*, section 97A.055, subd. 4b

Citizen Oversight Report on Game and Fish Fund Expenditures Fiscal Year 2020

August 2021

Game and Fish Fund Budgetary Oversight Committee

☒Authorized under Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.055, subd. 4b☒

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Subject: Game and Fish Fund Budgetary Oversight Committee Report on FY2020

Commissioner, Senators, and Representatives:

I am pleased to present the Fiscal Year 2020 Report of the Game and Fish Fund Budgetary Oversight Committee (BOC), approved on 6/24/2021 subject to final edits and is now published. The BOC and its two subcommittees determined that FY2020 Game and Fish Fund expenditures complied with the overall requirements of the Game and Fish Fund. I'd like to thank all committee members for their time and efforts in their service as well as DNR staff for providing information, support, and updates to the committees.

The report begins with our top recommendations and we look forward to a timely written response from the DNR on those topics. The report also includes recommendations for consideration by the legislature. The detailed section of our report identifies account-specific concerns and recommendations that do not require a written response, and we ask fisheries and wildlife managers to follow up on these items in meetings and discussions with the Fisheries Oversight Committee (FOC) and Wildlife Oversight Committee. We look forward to our future meetings and are pleased to see the DNR taking steps towards creating a framework for more detailed work plans with objective targets and measurable outcomes going forward. In addition, I am pleased to see the DNR taking steps towards examining diversity, equity, and inclusion, both within the agency as well as across the state. I look forward to seeing more efforts in that realm and am excited for the new opportunities that could arise from expanding those horizons.

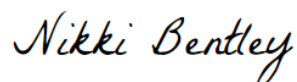
While the pandemic created difficult conditions for employees, we also know that the agency's projects and timelines experienced many challenges and interruptions. Staffing shortages, hiring freezes, strict COVID-19 safety protocols, and countless other challenges created difficult working conditions or halted projects entirely. Much needed research was postponed, and resources required constant shifting as the agency continually adapted to the changing conditions across the state. While it may be difficult to adapt and shift to the ever-changing situation in Minnesota's outdoors, it is my sincere hope that the DNR will continue to effectively adjust to capitalize on the increase in population of those recreating in the outdoors and work towards retaining those individuals for the future of Minnesota and the agency.

Furthermore, I want to reiterate the continued need for transparency, clarity, and more detail in the Game and Fish Fund Report. I really appreciate how the DNR solicited the BOC's feedback this year in regard to the Report as I appreciated the opportunity to provide staff with our perspectives and voice our needs for the future. There was a consensus that a more transparent narrative and increased detail in fund spending and accounting is needed for the BOC to properly assess whether or not the agency is in compliance with state statutes for the various accounts outlined in this BOC report, including those related to federal funding streams. While the average citizen may not understand or require a more thorough report, the BOC and supporting committees cannot function properly without being provided even a general accounting of how money is allocated within any given account. The agency's complex cost coding structure, the subjective nature in which tasks and work are classified, and the overall desire for flexibility in spending across the Fish and Wildlife Division accounts make it very difficult to discern where the money is going and what projects, work, maintenance, etc. the funds are being spent on. As such, the BOC is often forced to spend much time simply requesting this information in order to complete our analysis. I hope that future reports can provide more clarity so that more time can be allocated to discussing the most pertinent issues and conducting a thorough examination of the agency's compliance.

Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges for the DNR, and I'd like to commend DNR staff for all their efforts during this difficult year. The sacrifices employees made and the willingness and perseverance to adapt to the ever-changing situations and restrictions presented by the pandemic and civil unrest throughout the state deserves both recognition and thanks. Staff were tasked with managing the vastly increased numbers of citizens recreating in the outdoors and providing support in less-than-ideal conditions. In addition, conservation officers answered the call to provide back-up in many areas across the state during citizen protests, working longer hours and stretching their law enforcement coverage beyond enforcing our state's natural resources laws. All your efforts were much appreciated and taken into consideration in this year's BOC report. Lastly, my condolences go out to those employees who lost loved ones, friends, and colleagues this past year. I recognize that many lives were lost during this pandemic as well as those in the line of duty, and my heart goes out to all staff during these difficult days.

Thank you for your continued support of healthy, abundant fish and wildlife populations and habitats.

Yours truly,



Nikki Bentley, Chair, Game and Fish Fund Budgetary Oversight Committee

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TOP FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FUND SUSTAINABILITY

The solvency of the Game and Fish Fund (GFF) continues to be a major issue of concern for the BOC. Current projections show expenditures exceeding revenues beginning in FY2021 and continuing into future years, eventually driving the Operations Account balance below zero sometime during the budget horizon of FY2023. Between now and then, revenues are projected to initially remain relatively flat and then slightly decline, due in part to trends in federal funding from the Dingell-Johnson Fund and Pittman-Robertson Fund. In addition, expenditure levels, though projected to remain flat, are expected to exceed revenues by \$7 to \$10 million annually.

The BOC is encouraged by the multi-pronged approach the agency indicates it is pursuing to address this overriding issue. Beginning with scrutiny of ways to maximize the productivity of every dollar spent is commendable and must be part of the agency's strategy and, indeed, its mission. The BOC encourages the agency's efforts in pursuit of such objectives (e.g., Six-Sigma and Lean). However, constructing a strategy to accomplish greater efficiency and effectiveness requires a vigorous attention to not only *outcomes* (what is accomplished; the "what"), but also to *outputs* (what has been done to produce those accomplishments; the "how"); supported by links to how the GFF has been used to support those efforts. There needs to be well defined achievable outcomes, metrics reviewed, documented, and adjusted through well thought out business and project plans—not unlike any successful business. The BOC encourages adoption of a budget strategy based on these concepts and encourages possibly hiring business professionals within the department (DNR). The BOC also suggests that structuring the Annual GFF Report around *outcomes*, *outputs*, and a clear explanation of the *supporting role of GFF dollars* would greatly enhance its value. The agency's strategic planning initiative (*Conservation that Works*) holds promise of moving things in a positive direction and the BOC encourages the agency to further refine its work in that regard.

However, economizing on expenditures is not likely to be sufficient to completely address the problem; i.e., additional funding sources must also be explored. The BOC has consistently held that the traditional user-based funding model, though successfully relied on for many years, no longer adequately accounts for the way natural resources are used. The traditional user base, i.e., those who purchase fishing and hunting licenses and permits, is shrinking while the benefits from conservation efforts funded by those license sales accrue to society as a whole. Exploring how the design of user-based fees and their application could be improved must be part of the solution, and the BOC supports the initiative announced at the 2021 DNR Roundtable by Commissioner Strommen to explore new and alternative options. However, expanding the base must also be part of the strategy.

Although expanding the user base presents challenges, the BOC believes there are many opportunities to be assessed. A prime example is the recent experience fostered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which seems to have prompted renewed interest in outdoor activities. The DNR has responded well with finding creative ways to adapt to ever-changing conditions caused by the pandemic and health and safety restrictions. For example, the DNR successfully transitioned to virtual instruction during the pandemic to acquaint and inform individuals about outdoor activities. The BOC recommends that the

DNR capitalize on this momentum by finding ways to sustain the reinvigorated level of participation. For example, capturing the participants from the virtual classes and converting them to in-person classes for continuing education to keep these individuals engaged in outdoor activities as society transitions to a more normal pace. Also, perhaps targeted research into factors that have motivated the renewed level of participation may provide insight for future promotional efforts.

Another dimension of this issue involves the actual transaction of purchasing a license. The DNR needs to give high priority to its search and development of a new electronic licensing system (ELS). An upgraded ELS would allow the DNR to capture both first-time outdoor participants and lapsed participants who have self-reactivated. The current ELS does not provide a capture opportunity for participants who buy through License Agent Locations and falls far short of what is available in many other states. The BOC believes the current ELS limits the flexibility of the agency to effectively manage the all-important license sales function and contributes to disincentives to purchasing a license. Even something as basic as simplifying convoluted regulations would be a positive step.

ELECTRONIC LICENSING SYSTEM

Modernizing the DNR licensing system and license process has been a topic of conversation for several years. Having the oldest licensing system in the country does not fit the image the DNR is hoping to portray when recruiting new and younger audiences. With current or lapsed license holders, outdated technology leads to a poor user experience that impacts the DNR's ability to retain and reactivate.

The process itself has been a series of fits and starts in which the DNR has spent considerable resources (time and money) defining and redefining their needs. Recent efforts by the DNR to better understand customer expectations through user surveys and research into license practices, pricing, and revenue structure, will better inform the final decision. The hope is that the time spent on developing this latest Request for Proposal (RFP) will lead to a streamlined vetting process and partner selection. Though details of the forthcoming RFP were not known at the time this report was written, the BOC is hopeful that the DNR will find the right balance of priorities and cost.

Outreach, in particular, needs a better data partner in the ELS. Marketing efforts to increase license purchase and discourage lapsing have been successful but lack scalability without better customer data and better funding. Increasing online transactions and moving customers to paperless licensing and tags should be a priority if the DNR wants to stay relevant with new and younger users.

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) continues to be a serious and immediate problem affecting deer across areas of Minnesota. Although DNR measures have helped to control its spread, CWD continues to pose a threat to Minnesota's moose and elk populations as well. Continued vigilance is needed to control the threat that CWD poses to these populations as well as associated economic and social impacts.

Efforts to forestall CWD requires sustained and coordinated efforts by multiple entities: the DNR, the Board of Animal Health (BAH), the Department of Agriculture (DOA), all farmers, all hunters, and all wildlife enthusiasts. It is important to emphasize that CWD is not just a "hunter's issue" and, therefore, the considerable cost of controlling the disease should not fall strictly to the GFF. The BOC applauds the

legislative General Fund authorization in FY2020 to support the DNR's ongoing CWD mitigation efforts. Reasonable requests for continuing General Fund support should be approved.

Despite the significant measures already implemented as well as the additional funding support, effective management of this wildlife health issue in the 2020 hunting season was complicated by the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This experience highlights the need to continue to look for new and innovative ways to combat this issue; e.g., expanding the dumpster program. In addition, continued support for the DNR's surveillance activities is critical for understanding the spread and ultimate control of the disease. Although coordination with other entities has been productive, split enforcement authority continues to be an avoidable complication.

There are still many unknowns associated with CWD and methods to completely eradicate it have not yet been discovered. Therefore, it remains a serious threat to Minnesota's wildlife, its outdoor economy, and an important part of its social fabric.

FISH HATCHERIES

The needs of the state's fish hatcheries continue to be a top priority for the BOC. State-owned hatcheries are needed to ensure the genetic integrity of the state's native fish that contract hatcheries do not maintain. Significant repairs and improvements to buildings and pond infrastructure are necessary to operate the state's fish production system. While we applaud the DNR's efforts to prioritize needs through an updated Fish Production Plan, the BOC continues to express concern over the immediate need for hatchery bonding money as those funds allocated in the past five years have simply been insufficient for the ever-growing infrastructure needs.

Fisheries Management

OVERVIEW

Fish Management includes the following: population and habitat management, technical assistance and coordination with citizen efforts, stocking, education, outreach, rulemaking, and coordinating all aspects of fish management.

Account 2200 for fishery activities records those revenues and expenditures required to meet the requirements of the Federal Aid in Sports Fish Restoration Act, also known as the Dingell-Johnson Act.

While this section reflects the Game and Fish Account 2200, it is the backbone of the revenue and spending; however, fishery projects draw from many revenue sources to assure the work required by legislative action and Fisheries Section needs are met. Therefore, a summation of revenue and expenditures will be reflected in this section. Please see Fish Management under Operations to get a full accounting of expenditures for Fisheries.

FINDINGS

Revenue FY2020 for the Fisheries totaled approximately \$1.2 million of which GFF are:

- \$33,940,000 from fishing license sales (not including Sportsman License) an increase of approximately \$5,161,000 from 2019. Which accounts for 26.7% of the Game and Fish Fund (GFF) total revenue. The revenue surpasses the requirements of the Dingell Johnson Act.
- \$13,270,000 obtained in 2020 from the federal government by DNR Fisheries, an approximate increase of \$984,000 from 2019.
- Other revenue resources for the balance are noted in the rest of the report. Account 2200 is the general operations account and, as such, provides support to a wide variety of fisheries-related activities.

Total FY2020 Fisheries expenditures of approximately \$31.6 million were less than revenue generated allowing funds to be transferred to FY2021 revenue.

It should be noted that approximately 37% of the costs by fisheries was for indirect overheads, mainly from DNR Administration and Minnesota Information Technologies (MNIT). Expenditures by fisheries management activity were as follows, based on additional data provided by Fisheries staff:

Account 2200 and Other Accounts for Fish Before Overheads; Overheads (OH) Noted Separately

Account 2200 and other Fishery Accounts	Total	2200	2200 %	Other Accounts
Habitat Improvement	\$3,246,042	\$2,093,246	6.8 %	\$1,152,796
Population Management I	5,830,987	5,829,026	18.9%	
Fish Culture & Stocking	1,849,543	1,849,543	6.0%	
Education & Outreach	\$924,946	885,815	2.9%	39,131
Planning & Coordinating	3,765,735	3,741,985	12.0%	23,750
Division Support	1,940,460	1,940,460	9.9%	
Department Services	3,072,615	3,072,615	6.2%	
Total Expenditures Before Overheads (OH)	\$20,630,327	\$19,412,686	62.7%	\$1,217,641
OH Applied Except to Division Support and Dept. Services				
General Training	\$776,023	\$776,023		
Fleet Minimums	768,835	766,750		
Gen Admin & Agency Direct	3,228,452	3,228,387		
Equipment & Supplies	605, 424	605,359		
Headquarters/Facilities Operation.	1,425,909	1,415,362		
Leave	4,688,854	4,884,411		
Relocation & Insurance, layoffs	65,864	65,864		
Total	\$10,953,937	\$11,741,156	37.3%	

The oversight committee has reviewed the major activities related to fisheries that are funded by Account 2200 and other accounts required to perform Fisheries' activities. The primary areas of concern for Fisheries discussed in this report include financial support for hatcheries infrastructure, habitat

improvements, support to bolster declining revenue sources, and development of best management practices to better utilize funds.

Updated Walleye Stocking Program

Studies continue to show the impact on catchable biomass resulting from walleye stocking efforts in various water bodies around the state. The research demonstrates the use of best management practices using fry stocking while reducing fingerling stocking in some lakes is a more viable and less expensive economic option. The BOC supports this science-based effort to manage walleye populations and believe this to be a wise use of the GFF.

Trout and Salmon Program

Trout and salmon fisheries, aided by funding from required stamp sales and GFF, continue (at this time) to pay for stream development and easements as well as stocking efforts. In FY2020, a total of \$5,472,412 was invested in stream habitat development, trout fishing access easements, and trout production and stocking. Of that total, \$4,573,293 came from the GFF (including the Trout and Salmon Account and Outdoor Heritage Account). The balance of the funding included \$543,914 from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF), \$354,941 in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reimbursements for Section of Fisheries labor contributions during flood disaster events, and \$264 from a gift fund.

Hatchery and Purchased Stocking

The DNR Fisheries Section continues to ensure state hatcheries and vendor supplied stock meet best management standards and genetic integrity while ensuring invasive aquatic species and viruses, like Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS), are not introduced through stocking.

However, due to the age of the state’s hatcheries and rising costs to maintain and operate these facilities, the BOC finds the need from the state bonding fund to build, upgrade, and repair hatcheries. Currently, the GFF and General Funds, which are declining, cannot meet hatchery infrastructure needs.

Approximately \$50,974,300 in capital improvements are needed for Minnesota fish hatcheries to ensure asset preservation and enhancements. Coldwater hatcheries makeup \$24,541,371 of those needs and coolwater hatcheries make \$26,432,900. The DNR proposed bonding to cover much of the costs in the 2020 Legislative Session Capital Expenditures Budget, but the bonding funds received in no way provided the funds needed to cover the millions in deferred maintenance and recapitalization needs at all of the hatcheries at this time. Those costs are under consideration in the 2022 bonding bill.

Needs of specific hatcheries:

Location	2020 Amount	2021 Amount
Waterville coolwater hatchery	\$12,373,000	16,084,900
Most critical priority	6,205,000	8,066,500
Medium need priority	5,988,000	7,784,400
Not as critical, yet needed	180,000	234,000
Lanesboro coldwater hatchery	\$217,978	283,371
Crystal Springs coldwater hatchery	\$11,730,000	15,249,000
Most critical priority	6,764,000	8,793,200

Location	2020 Amount	2021 Amount
Medium need priority	3,826,000	4,973,800
Not as critical, yet needed	1,140,000	1,482,000

Licenses and License Center

The Licensing Center for Game and Fish licenses continues to refine their system to assure Minnesota’s citizens and visitors from out of state can secure licenses easily. Fishing license sales in FY2020 exceeded expectations due to new anglers needing activities that fell within social distancing requirements. The License Center, specifically the “E-licensing,” has seen an increase in FY2020 in their sales having coordinated with Outreach by reminding specific purchasers to buy their licenses. The effect is an upswing in license purchases, reversing a downward trend. It is the understanding of the BOC that the DNR is researching a better online system to meet the needs of hunters and anglers and will have a request for purchase (RFP) being issued in the near future. However, expenditures from the GFF to contract a state licensing vendor through the Department of Administration Office of Procurements failed to secure a workable system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The DNR staff is very helpful in providing information beyond what is contained in the Game and Fish Fund Report. The DNR often must fund programs and projects drawing from various funds due to legislative direction and statutory requirements.

However, the Game and Fish Fund Report would better benefit the public if it included detailed financial accounting of specific projects and programs and identified the multiple funding sources and departments utilizing the funds. While the existing Report is useful and we see no conflicts with statutory requirements or misuse of funds, details of specific programs are often difficult to identify.

- Continue using marketing strategies to increase license sales and encourage more Minnesotans and visitors to fish. Not only does it increase revenues that support the various needs of the fisheries accounts but it brings additional revenues to the state’s economy and sales tax income to heritage and legacy accounts.
- Modernize the Electronic Licensing System (ELS) so not only can an angler purchase licenses and stamps easily at a vendor selling sporting goods, but purchase all license needs online, print out their license and stamps at home, or download them to their smartphones.
- Develop best management practices that meet long-range, strategic goals through budget and financial plans to assure expenditures make the best use of the limited available funds of both the GFF and other accounts.

Wildlife Management

OVERVIEW

Wildlife Management includes several overarching areas of activity: population management; habitat management; technical guidance, planning, and coordination; education and outreach. While a variety of dedicated funds support various aspects of these activities, the vast majority of funding for wildlife management activities comes from the Operations Account (2200). [See separate narrative for wildlife management under Account 2200.]

FINDINGS

- Total Expenditures for Wildlife Section activities for FY2020 were \$42,644,495, which was a 5% increase over FY2019.
- The Game and Fish Operations Account (Fund 2200) provides support to a wide variety of wildlife-related activities. For FY2020, 45% of expenditures for the Wildlife Section were recorded to this account.
- Other major sources of funding for Wildlife Section activities include the Deer Management Account (Fund 2202; 18%), Outdoor Heritage Fund (Fund 2300; 14%), and the Heritage Enhancement Account (Fund 2209; 7%).
- Division-wide expenditures by major wildlife management activity were as follows:
 - Habitat Management - \$20,523,869 (48%)
 - Population Management - \$12,455,831 (29%)
 - Planning and Coordination - \$2,518,406 (6%)
 - Education and Outreach - \$1,943,711 (5%)
 - The remaining 12% of the FY2020 expenditures went for Department Services (8%), Division Support (3%), and Walk-In Access (WIA) (1%).
- There was a 6% reduction in expenditures for wildlife Habitat Management in FY2020 compared to FY2019, and a 32% increase in expenditures for wildlife Population Management.
- The reduction for wildlife Habitat Management stemmed mainly from lower expenditures recorded to the Game and Fish Operations Account (Fund 2200); \$4.8 million in FY2020 compared to \$12.4 million in FY2019 - a reduction of \$7.6 million. However, \$7.1 million of that difference reflects a legislatively authorized shift from the Deer Management Account (Fund 2202) to address the Chronic Wasting Disease situation. The remainder of the reduction is related to the fact that expenditures are typically lower in the first year of a biennium, like FY2020, as well as the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on staff activities. See the comments on Fund 2200 for further details.
- The increase for Population Management stemmed from increased expenditures from the Deer Management Account (Fund 2202); i.e., \$1,368,394 compared to \$347,576 in FY2019. This increase primarily reflects activities related to the CWD situation. In addition, expenditures from the Operation Account (Fund 2200) increased from \$6.4 million in FY2019 to \$7.7 million in FY2020. This increase reflects the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on staff activities.
- A major wildlife management issue for FY2020 continued to be the existence of CWD in Minnesota's White-tailed Deer population. The BOC has reviewed the work of the DNR in FY2020 to manage this issue. (See Findings and recommendations for Accounts 2201 and 2202)

- Overall sustainability of the funding needed for effective wildlife management through the Game and Fish Fund continues to be a major concern looking into the future.
- There is concern that an out-of-date licensing process also continues to be a hindrance for achieving funding objectives needed for effective wildlife management activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue efforts to obtain the funding needed to provide for science-based, sustainable management of CWD in Minnesota. Funding requirements need to be based on scientific evidence and appropriated to the state agency or agencies that can most effectively provide for sustainable management of the disease.
- Continue planning efforts to identify long-term funding alternatives for the GFF, including innovative recruitment methods.
- Give high priority to updating the licensing process to provide easier access for license buyers, including allowing greater use of online options.
- As noted in comments in *Top Findings* regarding *Fund Sustainability*, the BOC encourages the agency to refine and implement a budgeting strategy that establishes clear outcomes, identifies clear outputs, and provides a clear explanation of the role of the GFF in carrying out those efforts. These components should be part of the budgeting process for each dedicated fund in the GFF.
- The BOC's other specific recommendations regarding wildlife management are incorporated in the following sections of this report dealing with the wildlife-related dedicated accounts.

FUNCTIONS

Outreach

OVERVIEW

This section provides education, information, and engagement with the public and stakeholder groups to enable them to provide fishing and hunting skills programs, education, and outreach to organizations and emerging populations. It also coordinates media dissemination, various marketing efforts, and communication activities, including web content, press releases, programs, publications, and campaigns.

ISSUES AND TRENDS

Data Tracking

Outreach tracks many metrics related to programming, including both program outputs (number of events, participants, and expenditures) and outcomes (qualitative assessments), but it does not track actual license sales, specifically those resulting from program efforts. Being able to show a direct correlation between classes and license sales would give Outreach valuable information to make informed programming choices, investing time and funding into the most successful activities.

FINDINGS

Fish and Wildlife Outreach Section expenditures totaled \$2,045,450 in FY2020. Funds in the amount of \$1,310,495 originated from Game and Fish Operations Account (Fund 2200) and \$521,109 came from Heritage Enhancement Account (Fund 2209). Outreach also receives funds from the General Fund (Fund 1000) and the Special Accounts Fund (Fund 2001) totaling \$213,845.

Detail of Outreach Expenditures for Fiscal Year 2020

Outreach Fund Accounts	1000	2001	2200	2209	Grand Total	% of Total
Grants	\$177,029		\$364,214	\$263,330	\$804,573	39.3%
R3 Fishing			373,820	12	373,832	18.3%
R3 Hunting		\$32,816	149,103	188,638	370,557	18.1%
Communications			279,280		279,280	13.7%
Marketing		4,000	142,646	69,130	215,776	10.5%
Division Expenses			1,432		1,432	0.1%
Total	\$177,029	\$36,816	\$1,310,495	\$521,109	\$2,045,450	

Virtual Classes

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Outreach staff quickly and effectively switched to all virtual classes, which allowed them to reach people across the state and beyond. A ten-class series on “Learning to Hunt Deer” attracted more than 300 participants. In addition, a weekly webinar series during April and

May attracted 600 participants. Due to overwhelming success, Outreach plans on expanding virtual Learn to Hunt and Fish content and hopes to develop a statewide mentor network.

Hunter and Angler Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3)

In 2000, 14% of the Minnesota population hunted and 31% fished. In 2017, 11% of the population hunted and 26% fished. From 2000-2018, there has been a 10% decline in women anglers and a 7% overall decline. There was an increase in license sales during the pandemic, but it is expected to be a short-term increase and long-term projections indicate a decline in hunting and angling. The decline in participation directly affects the long-term sustainability of the GFF. To reverse these trends, Outreach is using an Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model entitled R3. Urban Ventures, the YMCA, National Archery in Schools, 4-H shooting sports programs, and R3 Grants are all avenues for engaging younger audiences. Adults are also the focus of many R3 programs since they are more likely to have the time and resources needed to invest in new hobbies. Becoming an Outdoors Woman programs, virtual classes, and Latino and Karen Outreach programs all strive to teach participants the skills they need to be successful while hunting and fishing.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for Lifetime Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund Account appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Use a creative method to track data of license sales resulting from Outreach/R3 programs.
- Simplify accessibility to classes by making tabs for educational classes online with titles such as For Women, Adults, Under 16, and Latino or Karen Outreach. This could also help with the anticipated decrease in license sales.
- Continue building online content. While in-person classes with hands-on instruction are ideal, video tutorials also serve the purpose of engaging adults by providing foundational knowledge that will build participant's confidence and increase the likelihood of continued interest.

License Center

OVERVIEW

Hunting and fishing licenses are an important part of revenue for Minnesota to pay for fish and wildlife management, public land infrastructure maintenance, and habitat management across the state. The License Center Operations includes the following major functions: the Electronic Licensing System (ELS), handling hunting/angling license sales, stamps and harvest registration, commercial licenses, license agent management services, and management of license certification data. The DNR contracts with a third-party vendor, Aspira, to handle the day-to-day operation of the ELS with additional support provided by the DNR License Center. With the unexpected challenges from the pandemic, the License Center staff persevered and have been working onsite to make sure they are providing quality customer service to Minnesotans and visitors who are purchasing licenses.

ISSUES AND TRENDS

- With the increase of licenses purchased this year, the online system has been complimentary to providing a safe option for purchasing a license. With concerns related to the pandemic, people are able to follow safety guidelines and limit contact from a traditional in-person purchase.
- Trends based on staffing levels will help the License Center to come up with innovative solutions to lessen wait times for the large amount of phone calls received daily.

FINDINGS

- For FY2020, receipts for Fishing Licenses totaled \$32,769,460, Hunting Licenses were \$13,715,932, and Sports and Super-Sports Licenses receipts totaled \$5,887,432.
- In FY2020, there was a total revenue of \$3.7 million and \$2.85 million were game and fish related transactions.
- Monthly averages \$310,000 for costs related to the License Center with a total cost estimated around \$250,000 per year for materials.
- In FY2020, ELS sales agents handled 79% of all license transactions with 20 percent conducted via online and mobile methods and 1% sold at the DNR License Center in Saint Paul.
- The License Center handles permits, stamps, passes, and license validation transactions.
 - Fishing license sales (all license types combined) increased by 89,943 (11.4%).
Noteworthy license sales increases:
 - Resident Individual Angling (19%)
 - Non-Resident Individual Angling (16%)
 - Resident Youth 16-17 years old (34%)
- The current vendor contract remains a pay-per-transaction fee with Game and Fish licenses at \$0.91, which is about 77% of sales, and recreational vehicles at \$1.62 that concludes the other 23% of sales.
- The ELS contractor and ELS sales agents are still allowed to charge up to a 3% credit card service (convenience) fee to cover their expenses. This fee is not included in the GFF Report because it is not DNR revenue.
- Currently, the DNR is working to better define their needs and the needs of their customers, to be incorporated into an FY2021 Request for Proposal (RFP) for a more modern licensing system. They anticipate greater use of the mobile/online system for non-tag-related licenses.
- The BOC feels that their goals and objectives to increase online license transactions would be a benefit to sales and provide alternate accessibility. In FY2020, only 20% of transactions were handled online, but that was a 6% increase from FY2019.
- The license center successfully adapted in FY2020 in response to the restrictions and obstacles presented by the pandemic on staff and personnel.
- The license center call volume was close to 2,000 calls a day and sometimes the wait time was up to an hour long. The License Center is aware of this issue and has worked hard to try and manage what they can each day.
- The [License Sales Data website](#) is a useful and informative addition for internal and external users, including the public, to see data that is specific to the License Center.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for Fish and Wildlife License Center appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The BOC applauds the recent efforts by the DNR to understand better the customer needs and expectations for modern licensing. It is the hope of the BOC that the continuation of marketing towards the online system will help to increase new customers and provide a convenient option for returning and existing customers.
- Given the Game and Fish Fund's dependency on licensing revenue, data collection through the ELS must continue to be a top priority. If not already within the scope of the current RFP regarding Fish and Wildlife License Pricing and Design, the BOC would recommend adding this point as a requirement.
- Establish annual program objectives for the License Center functions, including anticipated expenditure levels, and report on the success in achieving those objectives in the annual Game and Fish Fund Report.
- Collaborate on providing a more user-friendly landing page for hunting licenses with some descriptions of the most common licenses at the top, similar to the fishing license page. Possibly add some headings for the types of game with a drop-down or something similar to simplify the information since it is very overwhelming with all of the licenses being listed on the site.

Ecological and Water Resources

OVERVIEW

The Division of Ecological and Water Resources (EWR) is organized into four sections: Ecosystem Management and Protection; Conservation Assistance and Regulation; Inventory, Monitoring, and Analysis; and Strategic Information Systems. The EWR vision is to ensure healthy lands and waters throughout the state. They receive funding through the Game and Fish Fund (GFF) and the Heritage Enhancement Fund for work they do for traditional fish and wildlife activities. They also promote various programs and support DNR activities designed to conserve and enhance aquatic and upland habitats.

FINDINGS

EWR in FY2020 had expenditures from the GFF of \$5,208,578, a decrease of \$286,255 from FY2019. The expenditures from the GFF are divided nearly evenly between wildlife and fish activities per needed studies. Fish related expenditures are slightly higher than wildlife according to the DNR's report on allocations. The DNR projects 14% expenditure increases by the EWR in FY2021. This would be expected as work required by the EWR for projects start the first year of a biennium.

Ecological and Water Resources Expenditures for Fish and Wildlife by Account Fiscal Year 2020

Account	Description	Amount	Percent
2118	Wildlife Land Acquisition	\$60,522.75	4.5%
2200	Game Fish Operations	501,433.25	38.0
2202	Cervidae Health Management	54,501.00	4.1
2203	Waterfowl Habitat	15,900.75	1.2
2204	Trout and Salmon	7,131.75	0.5
2205	Pheasant Habitat	21,788.25	1.6
2207	Wildlife Acquisition	39,705.75	3.0
2208	Wild Turkey Management	5,799.75	0.4
2209	Heritage Enhancement	4,939.50	0.4
2300	Outdoor Heritage	238,039.50	18.0
2401	RIM Critical Habitat	369,297.00	27.9
2403	Gifts	1,609.50	0.1
Total		\$1,320,668.75	

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for ecological and water resources activities appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The BOC recommendations for the EWR use of Game and Fish Funds remain essentially the same as those identified in FY2018 and FY2019 in order to ensure better clarity to the complexity of how funds are allocated, appropriated, and shifted between accounts. There needs to be a better explanation in the Game and Fish Fund Report, or detailed information available to the BOC, identifying any pass-through grant applications, use of GFF funds, and how the EWR work is determined to use the GFF. Also, use of specific cost codes in projects needs to be adhered to by staff. The inability to clarify use of the Game and Fish funding sources might be explained by the Fish and Wildlife Division not having an updated strategic business plan with an accounting system that follows the revenue and expenditures. It would allow divisions like EWR to better account the flow of their work.

The recommendations are nearly the same as last year—requiring better clarity in expenditure use.

When significant long-range management goals are changed, the BOC recommends that those initiatives be summarized in the narrative as well. An example is making a paradigm shift from a primarily utilitarian approach to forestry (wood product) to an integrated approach where forestry collaborates increasingly with multiple divisions (EWR, FAW, etc.). Understandably, this new management approach results in an increase in expenditures appearing on fund statements outside of Forestry (staffing, modeling, etc.), which will continue for the foreseeable future. Providing context will no doubt help reviews in the upcoming fiscal years.

The BOC supports increased use of agencies with scientific specialties, collaboration, and data-sharing between the EWR, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (PCA), Department of Agriculture, and other state agencies to reduce duplicate sampling, study, and review for projects or initiatives that fall under the purview of both agencies.

Finally, as recommended last year, EWR in conjunction with DNR and PCA management, need to better identify when and why GFF dollars are being utilized by the EWR and how they specifically support fish and wildlife activities, which are supposed to be supported by that fund.

Enforcement

OVERVIEW

Purpose

The Division of Enforcement's purpose is to enforce regulations regarding game and fish, protect natural resources, and preserve natural habitat against aquatic invasive species. The division is also tasked with providing education and training to the public through outreach and classes.

Revenue

The total expenditures from FY2020 were \$25,973,528 and forecasted to increase by 8.9% by FY2025. The division provided 85,000 hours towards fishing enforcement, 84,000 hours towards wildlife enforcement, 6,000 hours towards undercover work, 1,200 hours towards survey work, and 12,000 hours towards Aquatic Invasive Species work.

ISSUES/TRENDS

Fines, Forfeits, and Restitution

Revenue from fines, forfeits, and restitution generated by the division have been in decline since FY2017 and have declined by 48.3%. FY2017 generated a total of \$597,720, while FY2020 only generated \$308,962.

Staffing

There is expected to be a significant increase in conservation officer (CO) vacancies in the coming years due to retirement overturn. There are usually about 190 CO's, with a goal of about 210 to ensure dispersed coverage across the state. In the next year, 3-4 CO's will be eligible for retirement. For the following couple years, about 8-10 per year will be eligible for retirement. It takes about 1 year to complete the hiring process for a new CO.

FINDINGS

Use of Technology and Media

The Enforcement Division is the only division that does not have its own social media accounts. However, they do use the main DNR accounts to make posts regarding safety, education, and the promotion of natural resource conservation. They also have an online presence with their Safety Education Programs, which are very effective. They also do weekly conservation officer reports through the *Outdoor News* publication.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for enforcement activities appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The BOC recommends the DNR:

- Acknowledges that conservation officers are often seen as the face of the DNR. Creating social media accounts would allow the Enforcement Division to connect on another platform with the public to encourage safety, education, and conservation. This would also align with the Enforcement 10-year strategic plan, Goal 4, by using technology to optimize the division's business processes.
- Provide weekly conservation officer posts on social media regarding reports, what they enjoy about being an officer, personal stories, and Turn In Poachers (TIP) updates. These posts will provide a more personable connection between officers and the public, which is especially important following the recent civil unrest, in order to build relationships and trust between officers and the public.
- Continue to offer online courses to the public. These courses are an important tool in reaching individuals who may not feel comfortable attending in person, and reflect the goals of recruiting, retaining, and reactivating residents regarding game and fish activities.
- Seek opportunities for media presence, such as TV interviews, podcasts, and news articles so that conservation officers can connect with the public and build relationships.

Parks and Trails

OVERVIEW

The vision of the Division of Parks and Trails (PAT) is “to create unforgettable park, trail, and water recreation experiences that inspire people to pass along the love for the outdoors to current and future generations.” PAT ensures convenient, safe access to public waters and for activities such as boating, canoeing, kayaking, and angling, with a focus on improving existing facilities for accessibility, safety, aquatic invasive species prevention, and stormwater management, often in partnership with local government units.

PAT currently maintains approximately 370 fishing piers and shore fishing areas. Additionally, PAT partners with local volunteer clubs to maintain 22,000 miles of snowmobile trails, 2,700 miles of off-highway vehicle trails, and 1,100 miles of cross-country ski trails. 66 state parks, nine state recreation areas, nine state waysides, 62 state forest recreation areas, and 25 state trails also fall under the oversight of PAT.

PAT's total expenditures from the GFF in FY2020 were \$1,128,947. The total expenditures are projected to increase to \$3,463,053 in FY2021.

FINDINGS

The PAT total expenditures could continue to rise with increased scope of responsibilities. Between FY2020 and FY2021, expenditures are projected to rise by approximately \$2,334,106, tripling FY2020 expenditures. Expenditures in FY2020, however, were significantly less than FY2019, which the COVID-19 pandemic stalled development in some areas.

PAT is continuing to address ramp degradation and repairing those in the most need of repair first.

The state trail system faces significant maintenance and rehabilitation needs and the costs for resurfacing, culvert repairs, and bridge repairs continue to grow.

In FY2020, PAT:

- Reached 50,000 customers in large population and metro areas with targeted emails regarding DNR piers and shore fishing sites in order to promote fishing close to home.
- Contracted with the Minnesota Historical Society for archeological surveys and reports (cultural resources reviews) at 13 public water access sites for compliance with state and federal laws.
- Completed engineering, design, and permitting work for two future development projects.
- Developed (expanded or improved) six existing boating access sites and one new site using universal design principles and best management practices.
- Purchased replacement parts and performed general maintenance and repairs to fishing piers and developed shore-fishing areas statewide.
- Completed major repair and rehabilitation work on three fishing piers.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures for the PAT from Game and Fish Fund appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The BOC recommends Parks and Trails should:

- Continue using GFF by continuing to develop new water accesses, fishing piers, and shoreline fishing opportunities across the state, specifically in condensed population areas where fishing areas such as piers are overcrowded.
- Partner with state and regional media resources to encourage the use of water access points through direct advertising, specifically targeting underutilized resources.

- Ensure that facilities are designed, developed, rehabilitated, and managed to meet the American with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines to encourage use by people with all abilities.
- Focus on replacing and repairing aging and damaged facilities.
- Continue to work with the Department of Corrections to fabricate docks and piers.
- Invest in “Destination” state parks and state recreation areas (those with high levels of overnight visitation and revenue) at a high level.
- Advertise “Rustic” and “Core” state parks and state recreation areas (those with low to moderate levels of overnight visit) toward local communities, but also towards greater Minnesota as the destination locations are filling up at an extremely high rate very far in advance. Some of the patrons of these locations may not be familiar with the rustic and core locations.
- Invest in and rehabilitate the trail systems.

Lands and Minerals

OVERVIEW

REAL ESTATE SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE LANDS AND MINERALS (LAM) DIVISION TO LAND-MANAGING DIVISIONS THROUGH SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE RATES. GAME AND FISH FUNDS ARE USED BY LAND-MANAGING DIVISIONS TO PAY FOR REAL ESTATE SERVICES FOR ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE PURPOSE OF THE FUND. FINDINGS

- LAM performed real estate services under Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with other divisions within the DNR. Total cost from the Game and Fish Fund for real estate services was \$1,172,000.
- LAM conducts surveys of parcel boundaries and land management by billing hourly professional services. Total costs from the Game and Fish Fund for surveys was \$342,435 in FY2020.
- LAM performs all real estate professional services for DNR land acquisitions. However, in FY2020 there were no Game and Fish Fund dollars spent for land acquisition projects. Please refer to the *Wildlife Acquisition Account (Fund 2207)* in the following report for more details.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for real estate services appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The BOC recommends that LAM continue purchasing lands that benefit Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) and Aquatic Management Areas (AMA). This can include expansion of current WMAs and AMAs and creating new WMAs and AMAs.
- The BOC recommends that measures be taken to recognize the fact that users who benefit from these acquisitions include both those who do not purchase licenses that support the GFF as well

as those who do purchase GFF licenses. There should be proportionate sharing of funding responsibility for these acquisitions among those who benefit.

Operations Support

OVERVIEW

Operations Support is a major category of expenditures. It consists of services that affect all aspects of the DNR's operation that are administered on a centralized basis and are provided across all department programs.

FINDINGS

- Department budgets for operations support, like other administrative expenses, are set internally and then billed back to divisions for services rendered, using fees based on cost accounting principles. There is no specific appropriation from any fund for Operations Support.
- The agency uses varying terminology in describing agency-wide support activities (e.g., operation support, operation services, department services, division services). This is confusing and makes it difficult to track these types of expenditures.
 - The FY2020 Game and Fish Fund Report indicates that \$9.5 million was spent out of the Game and Fish Fund on "Department Services." This level of expenditure constitutes approximately 8 percent of the total FY2020 expenditures from the GFF. It is not clear how Department Services relates to Operations Support or Operations Services.
- The categories of expenditures for Department Services in FY2020 were as follows: Shared Services (56%); MNIT Common Services (16%); Facilities (13%); Leadership (10%); MNIT Admin Fee (3%); Mailroom (<1%) and Badges (<1%).
- Billings for Department Services were made to the following dedicated GFF accounts: Operations (2200); Deer & Bear (2201); Deer Management (2202); Small Game Surcharge (2207); Heritage Enhancement (2209).
- Billings designated as specifically for Operations Services totaled \$2,424,189, a 1 percent increase over FY2019.
- Three broad categories are used to report department-wide billing transactions for Operations Support: i.e., Services; Utilities; and Site-Specific Costs.
- The top five sub-categories for Operations Support in terms of billing totals for FY2020 were as follows: Services/DNR/Rent (31%), Utilities/Fleet(14%), Utilities/Fleet/CEF (13%), Utilities/MNIT/Telecom (6%), and Site-Specific/Central Direct/Copier + Building Needs (3%). These five categories accounted for approximately two-thirds of total billings for Operations Support in FY2020.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for operations support appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The BOC recommends that the annual Game and Fish Fund Report develop a more consistent definition of what is meant by these billings for agency-wide support activities. The array of terms currently used is confusing.
- The BOC recommends that the annual Game and Fish Fund Report include a brief explanation of the process used for determining fees for all shared services; in particular, what measures were taken to ensure against over-collection of administrative costs from the GFF.

Forestry

OVERVIEW

The Division of Forestry (Forestry) is responsible for administering the 5 million acres of state forest lands in order to create economic, social, and environmental benefits for the state.

ISSUES AND TRENDS

- Timber Harvesting on WMA/AMA has been an ongoing debate of whether or not timber harvesting on WMA or AMA lands is in the interest of wildlife and aquatic resources.
- Communication to WMA/AMA managers about timber management occurring in their management zones continues to be an issue. It is important to give opportunities for local DNR staff to provide feedback and offer local guidance. This is especially important due to these staff having intimate knowledge about the WMA/AMA land they work on.
- Clear habitat objectives have not been known for timber harvesting on WMA or AMA. This makes it difficult for not only the public but for WMA/AMA Managers to know if habitat objectives are being met.

FINDINGS

- The BOC received an update from the Fish & Wildlife Director on March 3, 2021 pertaining to BOC concerns on Game and Fish Funds used to support forestry projects on WMAs and AMAs. It was assured that the DNR would work to create management plans and audits to create checks and balances.
- Timber Sales Receipts: \$438,737 were deposited into the Game and Fish Fund from timber harvested on WMA and AMA lands.
- Forest Management Investment Fund (FIMA, 2113): \$331,969 was transferred from the Game and Fish Fund into this account.
- Forestry Expenditures: \$1,266,178 were transferred from the Game and Fish Fund Heritage Enhancement Account (2209) to cover forestry expenses on WMA and AMA lands.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for forest management activities appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that timber harvesting on WMAs/AMAs is done in the best interest of wildlife and aquatic resources. The purpose of WMAs is to preserve wildlife in the interest of Minnesotans (per Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.05, subd. 8) and timber harvesting in WMAs should be done as a tool to benefit wildlife habitat.
- It is important that WMA Managers and staff are included in forestry activities on WMAs. The partnership between the Division of Forestry and the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife should extend to the timber harvesting process. Communicating habitat needs that scientifically help meet the needs of wildlife, while creating cash flow.
- The BOC feels communication about plans and objectives is not what it could be. The BOC sees evidence that WMAs are managed for wildlife but not everyone in the field always agrees. The modeling seems strong, but the communication is not always the best. This appears to be an ongoing problem and should be addressed by higher-level management.

ACCOUNTS

Game and Fish Operations Account (Fund 2200)

Fish Management

OVERVIEW

The consolidated Game and Fish Fund had a balance forward from FY2019 to FY2020 of \$55.2 million, approximately the same as the prior year. The balance forward from FY2020 to FY2021 is \$70.5 million—an increase of 27 percent from 2020. However, Expenditures for FY2020 of \$112.7 million were approximately \$8 million less than FY2019. While one might expect the reduction of work due to COVID 19 restrictions would have a greater reduction in expenditures, salaries and other set costs were only slightly reduced. It nevertheless increases funds available in FY2021.

This bears out in Account 2200 Game and Fish (Operations) (GFO). Account 2200 records those revenues and expenditures that meet the requirements of the Federal Aid in Sports Fish Restoration Act known as the Dingell-Johnson Act and Wildlife Restorations Act. The two acts bring in grants totaling approximately \$34 million each year. FY2020 grants of nearly \$36 million.

While this section reflects that the Game and Fish Fund Account 2200 is the backbone of the revenue and spending, projects draw from many revenue sources to ensure the work required by legislative action and Fish and Wildlife needs are met. Therefore, a summation of revenue and expenditures for Account 2200 only will be reflected in this section. Please see Fish Management and Wildlife Management under Functions to get a full accounting of expenditures for Fisheries.

FINDINGS

Account 2200 For Fish and Wildlife Total Minn. Stat. § 97A.055.Subd. 1

Account 2200 Game and Fish (Operations) revenues for FY2020 exceed expenditures by \$10.4 million. Revenues FY2020 (including general fund for police state aid) of \$96.9 million were only slightly less than FY2019's \$97.5 million, a decrease of less than one percent. A much better outcome than anticipated due to the pandemic. More people utilized Minnesota's resources and purchased more licenses than before.

Expenditures for FY2020 were \$87.1 million compared to \$100.5 million in FY2019; a decrease of 13 percent. This is due to some of the normal field activities not being completed due to COVID-19 protocols. However, the change in activities did allow projects normally left undone to be completed.

FISHERIES ACCOUNT 2200

Account 2200 for fishery activities records those revenues and expenditures that meet the requirements of the Federal Aid in Sports Fish Restoration Act known as the Dingell-Johnson Act (D-J). Grants to this account from the D-J for FY2020 were \$13,269,808.

Revenue specific to the Fisheries section of Account 2200 GFF are:

- \$32,769,460 from fishing license sales account for 33.8 percent of GFF’s total revenue, an increase of 43 percent from 2019
- \$13,269,808 obtained in FY2020 from the federal government Dingell-Johnson Act, an increase of \$944,180 from FY2019

Other revenue resources for Fisheries account for the balance are noted in the rest of the report.

- Account 2200 is the general operations account and, as such, provides support to a wide variety of fisheries-related activities.
- The table below shows direct costs to Fisheries activities prior to overhead costs being applied. Expenditures directly to work on activities make up approximately 63 percent of costs, with overheads adding about 37 percent to total costs. Information is from additional information supplied by DNR support staff.

Account 2200 and Other Accounts for Fish Before Overheads; Overheads (OH) Noted Separately

	Total	2200	Total as % of 2200	Other Accounts
Habitat Improvement				
Aquatic Plant Management	\$663,048	\$41,309		\$621,739
Exotic Species Management	318,531	168,525		150,006
Environmental Review	198,574	193,896		4,678
Acquisition	502,757	502,591		166
Stream	941,522	586,690		354,832
Lakes	534,323	512,848		21,475
Others (includes credit)	87,287	87,387		-100
Total	\$3,246,042	2,093,246	6.8 %	1,152,796
Population Management				
Lake Surveys	\$2,840,930	\$2,840,930		
Stream Surveys	482,266	482,266		
Creel Surveys	741,897	741,897		
Application Unit	1,375,079	1,375,079		
Others	390,815	388,854		
Total	\$5,830,987	5,829,026	18.9%	
Fish Culture & Stocking				
Walleye	483,262	483,262		
Muskellunge	172,576	172,576		
Northern Pike	9,257	9,257		
Trout and Salmon	950,059	950,059		
Fish Health	187,456	187,456		
Others	46,933	46,933		
Total	\$1,849,543	\$1,849,543	6.0%	
Education & Outreach				
Aquatic Education	136,855	136,855		

	Total	2200	Total as % of 2200	Other Accounts
Public Info & Rule Making	788,090	748,959		39,131
Total	\$924,946	\$885,815	2.9%	39,131
Planning & Coordinating				
Dept/Agency Coordination	2,640,365	2,616,615		23,750
Treaty Coordination	127,729	127,729		
Operational Planning	168,344	168,344		
Individual Lake Management	736,491	736,491		
Other	92,806	92,806		
Total	3,765,735	3,741,985	12.0%	23,750
Division Support				
Workers Comp & Unemployment	310,342	310,342		
Information Systems	1,055,249	1,055,249		
Non-Project Adm. HR & Bud	574,869	574,869		
Total	1,940,460	1,940,460	9.9%	
Department Services				
Department Services	\$3,072,615	\$3,072,615		
Total	\$3,072,615	\$3,072,615	6.2%	
Total Expenditures Before OH	20,630,327	19,412,686	62.7%	1,217,641
OH to All Categories Applied to Above, Except Div. Support and Dept. Services				
General Training	776,023	776,023		
Fleet Minimums	768,835	766,750		
Gen Admin & Agency Direct	3,228,452	3,228,387		
Equipment & Supplies	605,424	605,359		
Headquarters/Facilities Operation.	1,425,909	1,415,362		
Leave	4,688,854	4,884,411		
Relocation & Insurance, layoffs	65,864	65,864		
Total	10,953,937	11,741,156	37.3%	

Wildlife Management

OVERVIEW

The Operations account (2200) is the general operations account and, as such, provides support to a wide variety of wildlife-related activities and constitutes the largest share of division expenditures of any

dedicated account. The primary activities related to wildlife funded by the Operations account focus on habitat management and population management. Other activities include general planning and coordination of wildlife management activities, education and outreach, and support services for the Wildlife Section and the DNR.

ISSUES AND TRENDS

- The Operations Fund balance is expected to decline over time and is projected to become negative in FY2024 based on current projections.
- Statutory changes reduced license revenues designated for the Operations Fund in FY2020. A portion of deer hunting license revenues was shifted to the Deer Management Account (2202). Likewise, appropriation dollars for the Operations Fund in FY2020 were redirected to the Deer Management Account.

FINDINGS

- Total Expenditures from the Operations account for wildlife management activities for FY2020 were \$19,156,637. That constitutes 45% of the total FY2020 expenditures made by the Wildlife Section, which was down from 66% from FY2019.
- FY2020 expenditures from the Operations account by major wildlife management activity were as follows:
 - Habitat Management - \$4,817,975 (25%)
 - Population Management - \$7,473,503 (39%)
 - Planning and Coordination - \$2,387,460 (12%)
 - Education and Outreach - \$1,768,465 (9%)
 - The remaining 14% of the FY2020 expenditures went for Division Support (3%) Department Services (11%)
- Habitat Management's share of wildlife-related expenditures for the Operations account in FY2020 compared to FY2019 were lower (25% compared to 47% in FY2019) and Population Management's share was larger (39% to 24% for FY2019). The percentages for the remaining expenditure categories in the Operations account for FY2020 were consistent with FY2019.
- Total Expenditures from the Account in FY2020 were approximately \$7.4 million less than for FY2019. Several factors affected this change. First, expenditures are typically lower during the first year of a biennium, like FY2020. Projects typically take time to ramp up and carry-forward into the second year. Second, expenditures were also affected by the COVID-19 virus due to a stoppage and/or reduction of activities in the spring of 2020. Also, there was a legislative adjustment to the amount budgeted to Wildlife stemming from the Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) situation. Specifically, \$7.1 million was moved from Account 2200 to Account 2202, Deer Habitat Improvement.
- There was a noteworthy shift in Account 2200 expenditures from habitat and to population management for FY2020. Increased population management expenditures were attributable to factors such as the following: University of Minnesota surveys; rulemaking; forest waterfowl studies; and deer hunter surveys. Decreased habitat expenditures were attributable to factors such as the following: redirection to CWD program and shifts to the Deer Management Account (Fund 2202).. A major contributing factor to these changes was also caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Agency employees largely worked from home starting in March 2020, which resulted in a reduction in some habitat field work (e.g., no prescribed burns).

- CWD continues to be a major wildlife factor affecting viability of the Operations account. The costs to the DNR of effectively managing this disease are better understood than a year ago but are still unacceptably uncertain. This contributes to the uncertainties surrounding the sustainability of the GFF generally. Split jurisdiction with other agencies adds to this uncertainty.

The BOC has reviewed the major activities related to wildlife that are funded by Account 2200. Committee activities of the FY2019 Game and Fish Fund Report are explained in more detail in the report that follows.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for enforcement activities appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- As noted with regard to the function of Wildlife Management, overall sustainability of the funding needed for effective wildlife management through the Game and Fish Fund continues to be a major concern for the future. Since the Operations Account is the primary source of funding for the activities related to wildlife, developing stable and sustainable funding sources should be a major priority for the DNR.
- DNR funding requirements for sustainable management of CWD in Minnesota should remain a major budgetary priority for wildlife. These requirements need to be based on scientific evidence and appropriated to the state agency or agencies that can most effectively provide for sustainable management of the disease.
- The BOC's other specific recommendations regarding wildlife management are incorporated in the following sections of this report dealing with the wildlife-related dedicated accounts.

The BOC has reviewed the major activities related to fisheries that are funded by Account 2200 and other accounts required to perform Fisheries' activities. Committee activities of the FY2020 Game and Fish Fund Report are explained in more detail in the report that follows. The primary areas of concern for fisheries discussed in this report include financial support for hatcheries infrastructure, habitat improvements, and support to bolster declining revenue sources.

Deer and Bear Management Account (Fund 2201)

OVERVIEW

Fund account 2201 is funded by annual deer, bear, and life-time license sales for the purpose of deer and bear management. One dollar from each license purchased is credited to the deer and bear management account in accordance with the 2020 Minnesota Statutes 97A.075; 97A.4742; and 97A.473, subdivision 4. These funds are to be appropriated to the Commissioner for deer and bear management programs, including a computerized licensing system.

ISSUES AND TRENDS

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) continues to be a serious and immediate problem affecting deer across areas of Minnesota.

FINDINGS

- In FY2020, total expenditures from Fund 2201 were \$1,039,740. Revenues continue to trend slightly higher than the previous year for the past five consecutive years as expenditures continue to increase.
- \$189,045 was spent on Habitat Management which consisted of Facility Management, Forest Habitat, Grassland Habitat, Habitat Assessment, Private Land Habitat, and Technical Guidance.
- \$180,122 was spent on the Northwestern and Northeastern regions and \$8,923 was spent on the Central and Statewide.
- \$737,917 was spent on Population Management which consisted of Animal Disease Management, Nuisance Animal Management, Research, and Season Management.
 - \$643,531 was spent Statewide. \$82,805 was spent in the Northeastern Region, \$9,458 was spent in the Northwestern Region, and \$1,697 was spent in the Central Region of the state.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for deer and bear management appear to be in compliance with the statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase the non-resident big game license fees to increase revenue. Minnesota sold 16,124 non-resident big game licenses in 2020. Minnesota currently charges \$185 for a non-resident deer license. Surrounding states charge anywhere from \$165.00 to \$644.00 for the same license. Another option would be to require the purchase of a general hunting (small game) license as a prerequisite for purchasing a big game license for out of state hunters.
- Continue to seek diverse input and support the DNR's deer goal setting process.
- Research and monitor the moose population and improve understanding of stabilization that has been observed in recent years.
- Manage deer population goals in the moose range at levels consistent with the Minnesota Moose Research and Management Plan as stated in the 2019-2028 Deer Plan. Continue the efforts of the 2016-2020 Elk Management Plan as well as assess any new information that would contribute to a plan beyond 2020.
- Evaluate combining Account 2201 (R296023 and R296213) with 2202 to allow more flexibility to better address priority issues.

Emergency Deer Feeding and Wild Cervidae Health Management

Account 2201/Appropriation R296213

OVERVIEW

Funds in this account are only to be used for emergency feeding and wild cervidae health management.

ISSUES AND TRENDS

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) continues to be a serious and immediate problem affecting deer across areas of Minnesota posing a threat to moose and elk populations.

FINDINGS

- The BOC met with DNR biologists on February 3, 2021, regarding the status of CWD in Minnesota.
- \$.50 from each deer and super-sports license is credited to this account.
- This account was initially created to provide funds for emergency feeding of deer due to severe winter conditions. However, today these funds are primarily utilized to provide funding for managing CWD outbreaks across our state.
- Generally, \$1 million is reserved to ensure the ability to meet an emergency cervid disease outbreak; however, since FY2017 efforts to reduce CWD has resulted in increased expenses.
- Emergency deer feeding and wild cervidae health management funds are available until expended. When the unencumbered balance in the appropriation of emergency deer feeding and wild cervidae management exceeds \$2,500,000 at the end of a fiscal year, the unencumbered balance in excess of \$2,500,000 is cancelled and made available for deer and bear management programs and computerized licensing.
- In FY2020, total expenditures from Fund 2201 were \$689,928 for CWD management. The Legislature also appropriated \$1,575,000 from the General Fund for CWD Management for FY2020. Another \$275,000 from the General Fund has been allocated for FY2021.
- Overall spending in FY2020: \$2,777,626 on CWD related expenses:
 - DNR staffing \$1,006,710
 - Sample collection efforts \$798,303
 - CWD diagnostic testing \$335,179
 - Agency Culling with USDA \$295,209
 - Adopt a Dumpster Program \$185,791
 - In FY2019, 200 tons of deer parts were properly disposed of in landfills.
 - In FY2020, 201 tons of deer parts were properly disposed of in landfills.
 - CWD related research projects \$156,434
- In FY2020 of the 7,167 deer tested, 22 were positive for CWD.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for Emergency Deer Feeding and Wild Cervidae Health Management account appear to be in compliance with the statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop plans for long term funding to control CWD in a way that equitably shares the burden, including greater general revenue funds, other state funding, and federal funding.
- Continue to evaluate and, where appropriate, pursue possible legislative measures, including: reconcile split authority for the disease with the Board of Animal Health; ensure financial responsibility is related to the source of the outbreak; moratorium on licenses for new captive cervid operations; voluntary buy-out for captive cervid operations.
- Refine strategy to engage all relevant stakeholders: e.g., other state natural resource agencies, other relevant Minnesota state agencies; affected stakeholders among the general public (wildlife organizations; agricultural interests; outdoor organizations; hunters).
- Evaluate and, where appropriate, implement action initiatives, including: expanding hunting seasons in CWD zones (e.g., early muzzleloader); state-wide ban on deer feeding, use of mineral attractants and scent lures made with deer urine and other body parts; development of rapid vivo field test.
- Implement fund management changes such as combining Account 2201 (R296023 and R296213) and seeking authority to remove the \$2.5 million unencumbered cap that would require the excess funds be returned to the Deer and Bear Management Account.

Deer Management Account (Fund 2202)

OVERVIEW

The purpose of the deer management account is deer habitat improvement and deer management programs. It is governed by Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.075, subd. 1b.

FINDINGS

- Under statute, \$16 from each adult annual deer and super-sports license and \$2 from each youth annual license is dedicated to the deer management account (Fund 2202). In addition, \$16 from each adult annual license and \$2 from each youth annual license from the Lifetime Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund is credited to Fund 2202.
- The funding formula changed for the Deer Management Account in FY2020, effectively shifting monies from the Game and Fish Operations Account (Fund 2200) to the Deer Management Account. This change in funding allows the DNR to demonstrate more clearly the work it is doing for deer management, as described below and in the Game and Fish Fund Report. It does not, however, represent a substantial change in the amount of work done for deer management.
- In FY2020, total expenditures from Fund 2202 were \$7,863,857; total receipts and transfers were \$8,143,928; the remaining balance is \$1,648,898.
- The BOC received a briefing from the Wildlife Health Program. The briefing concerned deer herd management with a focus on Chronic Wasting Disease. The committee also reviewed various financial reports and plans, including a regional expense report. Many committee members attended the DNR Annual Roundtable and participated in sessions related to deer habitat and management issues.
- The budgeting process determines need on a wide basis and then determines funding sources based on the nature of statewide needs as well as the statutory requirements of each relevant

account. The remaining funds are distributed to DNR administrative regions according to an allocation model, based on forestry management and deer harvest data, and are used for project priorities within each region.

- Expenditures from the Deer Management Account in FY2020 went for habitat management (67%), population management (18%), and planning and general operations support (16%).
- For habitat management, the major categories of expenditures focused on facility management, grassland habitat, and technical guidance.
- For population management, the major categories of expenditures focused on research, animal disease management, and season management.
- The regional distribution of expenditures from the Deer Management Account is as follows: Region 1 – Northwest (3.25%); Region 2 – Northeast (1.70%); Region 3 - Central (3.63%); Region 4 – Southwest (6.71%); and statewide (84.53%).

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for deer management activities appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue efforts to accurately record DNR activities related to forest work, hunter access work, technical guidance and nuisance animal control, and other deer habitat program activities to ensure that the DNR can clearly demonstrate that Fund 2202 funds are devoted to habitat improvement that primarily benefits deer.
- Continue active engagement in the Deer Plan activities and other public engagement in order to obtain broad and diverse public opinions when considering deer management changes.
- Evaluate combining Fund 2201 (R296023 and R296213) with Fund 2202 to allow more flexibility to better address priority issues.

Waterfowl Habitat Improvement Account (2203)

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this account is for the improvement of waterfowl habitat, and is governed by various statutes, including Minnesota Statutes, sections 97A.075, subd. 2, and 97A.475, subd. 5.

FINDINGS

- The BOC requested and received a briefing on proposed regulation changes, as well as an overview of the changing state of waterfowling and the resource in general.
- In FY2020, total expenditures from Fund 2203 were \$558,448; total receipts were \$557,666; remaining balance is \$958,102 for a net change of (\$9,447).
- Distribution of expenditures by Region was as follows: Region 1 – Northwest (11.1%); Region 2 – Northeast (3.1%); Region 3 – Central (5.2%); Region 4 – Southwest (7%); and statewide (73.6%)
- Funds in this account were used to implement the Duck Action Plan. Additionally, the department conducted waterfowl population surveys to inform wildlife enthusiasts and hunting

season frameworks for the coming year, as well as surveys during the fall migration, with results reported on the DNR website.

- The DNR continued research to evaluate mallard movement and nest cavity availability for forest waterfowl and evaluated amphipod stocking/abundance.
- GFF funds were also used to provide maintenance on 162,284.5 acres of wetland habitat on 541 basins to enhance wetland habitat.
- Funds from this account were also used to create 1,481 nest structures maintained on 346 basins to provide nesting habitat for wetland wildlife. Funds were used to improve wetlands in following manner:
 - 151 acres of wetland were restored to provide new habitat for wetland dependent wildlife.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for waterfowl habitat improvement activities appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support the proposed regulations changes, including the proposed changes in splits for various regions, uniform limit for Canada geese, extension of shooting hours until sunset, and allowing motorized decoys.
- Continue the waterfowl youth opener for recruitment of the next generation of duck and goose hunters.
- Refrain from adopting any additional special or early teal seasons. With the expansion of opportunities for harvesting Canada geese, snow geese, and an earlier start to the regular season, we find no need for such changes to the teal season. Concerns are potential interference with Youth Waterfowl Day, concerns over hunter-bird identification for a teal only season and potential decrease in Pittman-Robertson dollars from non-hunters, and the costs associated with monitoring and enforcing the bag limits.

Trout and Salmon Management Account (2204)

OVERVIEW

The Trout and Salmon stamp was established by the legislature to increase revenue available to further improve streams and lakes. Interest in trout and salmon angling has been consistently growing and took a big jump last year during the pandemic. This increased revenue source is expected by Trout and Salmon anglers to be used along with other funds to maintain and improve their angling opportunities.

In FY2020, the four components of the fund's expenditures of \$942,000 were as follows:

- Acquisitions: \$124,000 (13%)
- Habitat Improvement: \$167,000 (18%)
- Population Management: \$196,000 (21%)
- Fish Culture and Stocking: \$455,000 (48%)

These components of the Trout and Salmon Fund expenditures supplement other funding sources used to improve Trout and salmon streams and lakes. They contribute the following shares to the total expenditures for these purposes:

- Acquisitions: 19%
- Habitat Improvement: 13%
- Population Management: 2%
- Fish Culture and Stocking: 17%

ISSUES AND TRENDS

Interest in trout and salmon fishing continues to grow as evidenced by increasing stamp sales. Over the last 10 years stamp sales have increased by 37,846 or 39 percent. In FY2020, stamp sales increased by 18,636 (16%).

The fund balance has continued to grow due to revenues exceeding expenditures and is currently at an all-time high of \$1,269,334. A portion of this higher balance has been budgeted for a half dozen easements totaling 1.3 miles that were pending at FY2020.

FINDINGS

The 2013 Fisheries Habitat Plan based on strategic priorities is now guiding the acquisition and habitat improvement activities rather than the outdated Minnesota's Aquatic Management Area Acquisition Plan 2008-2033. A new acquisition plan will need to be developed upon completion of the anticipated Fish and Wildlife (FAW) realignment in order for the plan to consider staff and available fiscal resources dedicated to FAW.

The Trout and Salmon Fund is a smaller but a significant portion of total Trout and Salmon expenditures. Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) and Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) provide the most significant portion of funding.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for the Trout and Salmon Account Fund 2204 appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The fund should continue to be used to supplement not supplant other funding sources to improve trout and salmon streams and lakes. With the growing interest in trout and salmon fishing resources should be allocated to maintain and to improve the angling opportunities for trout and salmon.
- Fund balances need to be fully utilized while maintaining a minimum fund balance.

Pheasant Habitat Improvement Account (2205)

OVERVIEW

This account is dedicated to the improvement of pheasant habitat and is governed by Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.075, subd. 5.

ISSUES AND TRENDS

The DNR is exploring the concept of expanding services at select WMA's as "gateway" to be more accessible to the general population and utilization for non-hunting activities throughout the year. Concepts include accessibility for handicap hunters, viewing stations/blinds for birdwatchers, more robust parking facilities, and signage.

FINDINGS

- In FY2020, total expenditures from Account 2205 were \$344,084, total receipts were \$478,097; remaining balance was \$399,270, with a net change of \$139,738.
- Pheasant harvest goal of 600,000: Expenditures from the account contribute to the development, restoration, and maintenance of suitable habitat on public and private lands, which will help pheasant populations and contribute to increased harvests.
- Land acquisition programs: As indicated below, \$24,916 was spent on acquisition programs.
- Land access programs: The Walk-In Access program is the hunting access program in Minnesota. That program is supported through user fees and federal grants, and not the Pheasant Habitat Improvement Account. Although, account dollars are used to support the Farm Bill Partnership, Farm Bill biologists may direct interested landowners to the Walk-In Access program among other programs. The amount to support the Farm bill Partnership was \$100,000 and cannot be attached to a geographic location since the DNR contributes to the overall partnership and individual dollars cannot be tracked geographically.
- Land enhancement programs: The primary expenditures here are for habitat enhancement on WMAs. As budgets tighten, The DNR first takes care of WMA lands for which there are no other responsible entities. Roadsides and private lands, while worthy places to enhance wildlife habitat, have other responsible entities to do management where WMAs do not. This amount was \$243,337 on WMAs and \$100,747 on private lands.
- Farm Bill Biologist and Prairie Habitat Assessment Biologist: As noted above, \$56,482 went to the Farm Bill Partnership that supports multiple farm bill biologists in multiple counties.
- Distribution of expenditures by Region was as follows: Region 1 – Northwest (2.6%); Regional 2 – Northeast (0%); Regional 3 – Central (15.4%); Regional 4 – Southwest (45.7%); statewide (36.3%)

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for pheasant habitat improvement activities appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue the programs and initiatives currently funded related to land acquisition, access, and enhancement.
- Increase the price of the pheasant stamp that has not been increased in 15 years.
- Support legislation related to roadside habitat; walk-in access; Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Farm Bill; and wildlife land acquisition.
- Increase marketing and education of hunters and the public to generate purchase of Walk-In Access (WIA) validation and more utilization of this program.
- Continue to support the governor's Strategic Pheasant Action Plan and revisions, and implementation of the Prairie Plan.
- With the increase in outdoor activity associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, continue to find ways to maintain and increase pheasant stamp purchase with small game licenses.

Wild Rice Management Account (Fund 2206)

OVERVIEW

The Wild Rice Account (2206) is used by the Shallow Water Program to manage water levels for the benefit of wild rice (Psisj/manoomin).

ISSUES AND TRENDS

- The DNR has done a survey of wild rice lakes in 2007, and is continuing to monitor wild rice stands in Minnesota lakes and streams
- Water level control is done by clearing obstruction to outlet streams and/or by contracting USDA Wildlife Service or private trappers to remove problematic beavers as needed. The DNR will only use USDA Wildlife Services starting in 2021 to trap beavers.
- Wild rice licenses sales are decreasing by about 5 percent every 3 years. DNR believes this may be due to lack of available rice stands.

FINDINGS

- \$38,000 is used from the Wild Rice Stamp Account annually. This is used to maintain water levels, removing problematic beavers, and surveying wild rice lakes.
- Ducks Unlimited donated \$25,000 to support waterfowl habitat.
- The Duck Stamp deposited \$55,000 for Waterfowl Habitat Improvement
- Wetland Mitigation Funding deposited \$30,000 was a one-time event to offset potential impacts of Wild Rice lakes in Northern Minnesota.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for the Wild Rice Management Account appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to work with tribes to help protect this as a sacred food source. Listen and support tribes when concerns for wild rice occur in order to create partnerships and work together to protect wild rice.
- Protect wild rice lakes and streams, especially for the benefit of waterfowl, tribal sovereignty, and the cultural importance it has to all Minnesotans.
- Due to increased precipitation events from climate change, it will become more difficult to maintain water levels in wild rice lakes and streams. It will be imperative that the DNR find long-term solutions to protect wild rice stands from the effects of climate change.

Wildlife Acquisition Account (Fund 2207)

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this account is land acquisition for the benefit of wildlife. Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.071, specifies how money from this account may be used:

1. At least 50 percent of the receipts must be spent on actual land costs and the remainder may only be used for other land costs, development, and maintenance of wildlife lands and associated activities.
2. These expenditures also include development, preservation, restoration, and maintenance of waterfowl breeding grounds in Canada.

FINDINGS

- Source of funding: The Wildlife Acquisition Account is funded by a surcharge of \$6.50 to each annual adult small game license and \$6.50 annually from the Lifetime Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund for each license issued (Minnesota Statute sections 97A.473, subd. 3 and 5; 97A.474, subd. 3; and 97A.071, Subd 4.).
- In FY2020, total expenditures from Fund 2207 were \$1,145,065; total receipts were \$1,464,715 and the remaining fund balance was \$2,732,696. This remaining balance is in alignment with the DNR's strategy to keep a significant balance in this account for future opportunities.
- In FY2020, the DNR provided \$358,840 toward the acquisitions. Total program expenditures included \$69,021 in acquisition support and \$717,204 in wildlife expenditures.
- Wildlife habitat expenditures include \$123,902.32 that is leveraged with Ducks Unlimited and US Fish and Wildlife and is used to support Duck Breeding grounds in the Saskatchewan River Delta.
- Currently the DNR is spending of the allotted amount (\$1,500,000 for FY2019) and the half identified for land acquisition to be retained until spent while the unspent portion of the other half, used for management, is canceled back to the fund at the end of the biennium. That way, over the long term, a large percentage of the annual allotment is spent based on the allotted amount with a small percentage canceling back. Therefore, the percentage spent on land costs is always at least 50 percent in accordance with statutory guidelines.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for wildlife acquisition activities appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to establish annual program objectives for Account 2207, including anticipated expenditure levels, and report on the success in achieving those objectives in the annual Game and Fish Fund Report.
- Maintain the DNR goal of keeping a significant balance in this account for future opportunities.
- Continue the DNR's support of the Ducks Unlimited Canada Flyway Projects and acquisition of wetlands that support and improve duck breeding grounds along with monitoring efforts in Saskatchewan River Delta.
- Continue to make provision for large acquisition opportunities in order to be prepared when they become available.

Wild Turkey Management Account (2208)

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this account is for turkey habitat management and is governed by Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.075, subd 5. Revenue includes \$4.50 from each turkey license sold except youth licenses.

ISSUES AND TRENDS

- Financial review of wild turkey funds has been consistent.
- There was a jump in Turkey licenses in 2020, but this was due to the drop of lottery purchase and open license purchase.
- Harvest participation is consistent for 20 plus years.
- Wild turkeys are continuing to expand beyond historical boundaries.
- Urban Turkey management needs support.

FINDINGS

- In FY2020, total expenditures from Fund 2208 were \$116,143 and total receipts were \$242,695. Net change for FY2020 was \$126,583
- Top expenditure areas were for Grassland management (\$75,139) down \$22,423, Forest management (\$28,337) down \$32,962, and Land acquisition support costs (\$5,800) down \$2,873. Down as compared to FY2019.
- Distribution of expenditures for habitat management by Region was as follows: Region 1 – Northwest (9.5%); Regional 2 – Northeast (1.03%); Regional 3 – Central (64.38%); Regional 4 – Southwest (19.75%); statewide (5.3%)
- Research spending was \$6,867.
- The DNR will continue to partner with the Nature Conservancy, National Wild Turkey Federation and Pheasants Forever to improve wild turkey habitat across the state.

- License sales were up in FY2020 as compared to previous years.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for wildlife acquisition activities appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to prioritize updating the Wild Turkey Management Plan. The current plan was published in 2007, and was recommended for update in FY2019. Wild turkeys have continued to expand each year since the initial plan was written.
- Proceed with updating the plan. As noted, past recommendation was to update in 2019.
- Continue partnering with other outside organizations to maximize habitat improvement
- Explore ways to increase revenue by expanding turkey hunting base, working with partner organizations or the recruitment, retention and reactivation (R3) Coordinator or R3 Citizen Counsel.
- Discover ways to expand and grow youth hunt numbers.
- Need to hire and train an urban wildlife specialist as the DNR has now gone three years without one.

Heritage Enhancement Account (Fund 2209)

OVERVIEW

The Heritage Enhancement Account (HEA) was created in 2000 for the enhancement and protection of fish and wildlife resources. Revenues in the HEA are derived from in-lieu-of-sales taxes relating to the sale of lottery tickets. 72.43 percent of the total in-lieu-of-sales taxes collected are deposited to accounts for environmental and natural resource purposes, of which 50 percent is directed to the HEA for spending on activities that improve, enhance or protect fish and wildlife resources, including conservation, restoration, and the enhancement of land, water and other natural resources. (Minn. Stat. § 297A.94)

Total revenues deposited into the account amounted to \$15,443,310 for fiscal year 2020. According to the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center February 2021 newsletter, monies appropriated by the Minnesota legislature from the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund through the DNR Heritage Enhancement account to the University of Minnesota, provided funding to the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC) for research into and reliable methods to eliminate or control Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) within the lakes and rivers of Minnesota.

Within the DNR Fish and Wildlife (FAW) organization, multiple field work efforts applied systematic expertise in areas such as Lake and Stream Habitat and Population Improvement, warm and cool water culture and stocking (trout as well as native fishes), as well as providing grants to local responsible agencies under the Aquatic Invasive Species Aquatic invasive species grants.

ISSUES AND TRENDS

Lottery revenues during the fiscal year 2020 period that ended on June 30 increased by 5 percent over 2019. Considered an anomaly, mitigation measures for the COVID-19 pandemic in Minnesota were seen as a factor in driving sales despite people staying home and record levels of unemployment. In fact, the Minnesota lottery had a record-setting year, despite the financial hardships and difficult conditions caused by the pandemic (Brownell, Andy. "Another Record Year for Minnesota Lottery." KROC News, September 23, 2020. <https://krocnews.com/another-record-year-for-minnesota-lottery/>). Lottery revenues were projected to remain flat through FY2023 with expenditures expected to exceed revenues. This projection appears to be conservative given actual lottery revenues increased 6% in each of the previous two years and 5% in 2020.

FINDINGS

In addition to the information in the 2020 Game and Fish Fund Report, various DNR staff provided more detail on the HEA fund expenditures. In 2020, the first of two \$510,000 grants were made to the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center at the University of Minnesota for the purposes of preventing the spread, and control, of invasive species.

Statute requires that 87% of revenues in this account be used for field operations on a biennium basis. DNR staff provided a detailed report for the 2018/2019 previous biennium showing that 88.5% was used for field operations thus exceeding the 87% requirement. (By statute, the 2020/2021 reporting will not be completed until the end of FY 2021.)

COMPLIANCE

Based on the Game and Fish Fund Report for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2020 and information supplied by the Fish and Wildlife Division, it appears that all expenditures are in compliance with appropriate statutes. All expenditures were used for enhancement and protection of fish and wildlife resources and met the additional requirement of at least 87 percent of the revenue being used for field services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The BOC recommends that HEA continue to be used as intended by which the statute was written to supplement – and not supplant – expenditures for enhancement and protection of fish and wildlife resources.

Lifetime Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund (Fund 2210)

OVERVIEW

Purpose

In 2000, The Lifetime Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund (2210) account was established as a fund in the State Treasury by the Minnesota State Legislature (Minnesota Statutes, sections 97A.4742). All money

received from the issuance of lifetime fishing, small game hunting, firearm deer hunting, sporting licenses, and earnings on the fund is credited to the Lifetime Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund.

Revenues

Total Revenue in sales for this account was \$1,912,397 in FY2020. The funds are held in Trust at the State Treasury and managed by the State Investment Board where the money is invested until licenses are activated. Returns on investment are also deposited into the Trust Fund. Licenses must be activated annually. Once activated, funds are available to the Game and Fish Fund (GFF). During FY2020, \$865,000 was transferred to the GFF and deposited into accounts related to the licenses.

ISSUES AND TRENDS

Data Collection on Lifetime License Holders

To better understand the Lifetime Trust Fund balance and potential issues it will face in the future, the DNR should evaluate licenses that have been purchased but never activated. While these funds must be held in Trust and remain invested, they will also keep the Trust Fund solvent for longer as license sales decline.

Trapping Licenses

There is no separate Lifetime License for Sports Trapping, Small Game Trapping, or Sports plus Sparring and Trapping. However, trapping is included in the Lifetime License Sports and Small Game licenses. Consequently, the DNR needs to track the number of trapping activations by license type, including those for Small Game and Sports licenses.

FINDINGS

Lifetime License Activations

Persons holding a lifetime license may annually request activation of their license for each new season. For the total number of activations for the license year, number of activations multiplied by current license prices, a deposit correction is made. Funds are transferred from the Lifetime Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund to the fund and revenue accounts related to those licenses.

Type of License

Type of License	Lifetime (LT) Licenses Sold in 2020	Receipts from sale - LT Licenses in 2020	Number of LT License activations in 2020
Angling	1,416	\$580,494	10,147
NR Angling	19	\$16,347	118
Firearm Deer	789	\$476,426	6,906
Archery Deer	143	\$89,375	1,270
Small Game	83	\$28,679	696
NR Small Game	3	\$3,249	15

Type of License	Lifetime (LT) Licenses Sold in 2020	Receipts from sale - LT Licenses in 2020	Number of LT License activations in 2020
Sports	994	\$609,297	8,186
Sports Trapping			405
Spearing	6	\$507	53
Spearing and Angling	27	\$14,453	151
Spearing and Sports	125	\$93,570	457
SM Trapping			40
Sports and Spearing Trap			28
Total	3,605	\$1,912,397	28,472

**License information provided by MNIT@DNR License Center. The help is gratefully acknowledged.

Maintaining Lifetime License Sales

The balance of the Lifetime Trust Fund account will continue to grow as long as net sales, license sales less activation transfers-out, are positive. Once transfers-out due to activations exceed the amount of new licenses sold, the balance will begin to diminish. Starting in FY23, net sales are projected to decrease.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for Lifetime Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund Account appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The BOC recommends marketing Lifetime Licenses to those that purchase annual or daily licenses and to families with young children that would receive the greatest cost savings. This also provides the longest investment horizon to continue to grow the balance in the Trust Fund.

AGE	Fishing	Small Game	Sports	Firearms deer	Archery deer	Spearing only	Spearing angling	Sports spearing
3 and under	766	8	632	269	33	1	10	65
4 to 15	249	27	129	106	8	0	2	10
16 to 50	249	36	146	330	73	2	10	32
51 and over	171	15	87	84	29	3	5	18
Total	1,435	86	994	789	143	6	27	125

- Track the number of trapping activations by license type, including those for Small Game and Sports licenses.
- Collect information on the number of Lifetime License holders that are inactive and make efforts to re-engage customers.

Walleye Stamp Account (Fund 2211)

OVERVIEW

Purpose

The Walleye Stamp Account is funded via the voluntary purchases of walleye stamps (\$5.00 each). Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.075, subd. 6, revenue from walleye stamps must be credited to the Walleye Stamp Account (2211) and is appropriated to the Commissioner only for stocking walleyes purchased from the private sector in waters of the state.

Revenues

The account continues to experience an increase in total resources available. FY2020 surpassed FY2019, with a total of \$151,135. This is noted as a greater than 50% increase in revenue in FY2020.

Use of Funds

FY2020 Expenditures for the account totaled \$90,000. All funds used for purchase of walleye for stocking purposes throughout the state. These activities are in accordance with the statute.

ISSUES AND TRENDS

The narrow confines of this account's purpose of "stocking walleyes purchased from the private sector in waters of the state" makes the fund bound to strict statutory requirements. The BOC expresses continued concern with the limited number of private sector vendors available as well as the associated costs with purchasing from the private sector that make the rigidity of the Walleye Stamp Account even more complex. The BOC also finds that sales agent education related to Walleye Stamp sales can be improved.

FINDINGS

In order to better understand the use of the funds, the BOC requested more information pertaining to the walleye stocking program. The Fisheries Populations and Regulations Manager for the DNR provided more details regarding the number of walleyes, water bodies stocked, as well as price per pound in FY2020 walleye stocking activities.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for Walleye Stamp Account appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The BOC continues to express concerns with the limited number of private sector vendors available. The BOC continues to deem it unnecessary to increase walleye stamp marketing efforts for sales. The stamp is being successfully promoted through low or no-cost marketing, such as press releases, social media to

the general public. While sales have increased, the BOC notes an opportunity to improve education and communication about the Walleye Stamp with sales agents. Potential revenues may be increased if sales agents are better equipped to inform customers and answer questions related to the purpose of the non-compulsory Walleye Stamp.

Peace Officer Training Account (Fund 2212)

OVERVIEW

Purpose

The Peace Officer Training Account was statutorily created in the Game and Fish Fund in the state treasury to be used by the commissioner for peace officer training for employees of the DNR to enforce game and fish laws. (Minn. Stat. § 97A.052) This account helps facilitate the mandated and supplemental training required for conservation officers to maintain licensing and augment skills needed to remain effective in detecting and apprehending game and fish violators.

Revenue

Revenues continue to stay in decline since inception of the account. Total revenue for FY2020 was \$93,662 and is not forecasted to increase in coming years. Expenditures were \$88,300 in FY2020.

ISSUES/TRENDS

Revenue

There is continued concern about the decline of revenue with this account. This account must also be supplemented by other accounts to keep it from going negative. This account does not receive any money from game and fish license sales and receives 1 percent of fees collected from revenue from surcharges assessed to criminal and traffic offenders are deposited into the account and may only be spent towards peace officer training for conservation officers of the DNR. The BOC has recommended in the past couple reports an opposition to any legislation to reduce funding to the Peace Officer Training account as well as an increase from the 1 percent.

FINDINGS

Training Center

The Peace Officer Training Academy Headquarters has been moved to the Emergency Management Training Center, which also doubles as a backup St. Paul Emergency Center. It is a very affordable facility and is shared with the Minnesota State Patrol. There are plans to combine the State Patrol and Peace Officers for the Crisis Intervention Training to save on costs. The new training center is a great fit and is expected to be a sustainable location.

Diversity

The Academy has a capacity of 18 students due to rigorous scenario training. Due to the limited capacity, diversity should be strongly considered. The division has been invested in working towards recruiting and retaining a diverse pool of Officers, and this goal aligns with the Enforcement 10-year strategic plan through Goal 4. The division has also utilized social media to encourage individuals from diverse backgrounds to apply to the Academy.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for peace officer training activities appear to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The BOC recommends that the DNR:

- Combine State Patrol and Peace Officer Training for Crisis Intervention Training in order to decrease costs.
- Continue to search for a diverse pool of applicants by utilizing social media, TV interviews, newspapers, and other public outreach.
- Legislature should consider that there is an increase from the 1 percent of funds the account receives from fees collected to ensure that Peace Officers are provided with adequate education and training, which will provide them the tools necessary to properly perform their duties.

Wolf Management and Monitoring Account (Fund 2213)

OVERVIEW

The Wolf Management and Monitoring Account (Fund 2213) is used for wolf -management, research, damage control, enforcement, and education. (Minn. Stat. § 97A.075, subd.7b)

ISSUES AND TRENDS

- State and tribal authorities now manage wolves effective January 4, 2021, due to the US Fish and Wildlife Service reaching a decision to delist on October 29, 2020. Funding for wolf management and livestock compensation claims will be done using state funds.
- The Wolf Management plan is currently being updated with the help of a wolf plan advisory committee.
- State and Tribal authorities can now discuss whether to use trapping and hunting as a management tool for wolves. Historically (Prior to 1970s), trapping was common for wolf fur. 2012 to 2014 was the first period a regulated hunting and trapping season was ever conducted in the state.

FINDINGS

- BOC was given a briefing on the attitudes of Minnesotans on wolves and a wolf hunt on February 17, 2021 by the Wildlife Section's Human Dimensions Scientist. The findings were that Minnesotans have a diverse attitude on wolves, but overall value wolves in the state.
- \$123,946 for research on current population trends within the gray wolf "core" range, which is primarily in the Northeastern third of the state.
- \$120,732 was used for research on the future season on the gray wolf and to track Minnesotan attitudes towards future hunting and trapping for management.
- The previous hunting seasons (2012-2014) used a lottery to administer hunting and trapping licenses. According to the Minnesota Wolf Season reports, harvest targets were never met during this three-year period.
- During the three-year period of hunting and trapping funds from licenses sales and the Wolf Allocation (\$.0.50 from deer license and super-sports) were more than adequate to meet objectives.
- The Wolf Allocation from deer license will be removed effective July 1, 2021. This is due to a 2017 law (Chapter 93, article 2, section 70). This will impact the stability of this account moving forward.

COMPLIANCE

The FY2020 expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund for Wolf Management and Monitoring Account appears to be in compliance with statutory requirements and sound management practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The BOC recommends that the DNR continue to explore options for managing wolves that best represent the science. The BOC supports hunting and/or trapping. However, it is strongly encouraged that the DNR find additional resources to fund this account.
- The BOC recommends strong support for building public trust that the DNR will manage wolves in the best interest of Minnesotans.
- The BOC is concerned whether there is an adequate funding strategy to assume full management authority over the state's gray wolf population once they are delisted. Revenue from hunting and trapping, if allowed, will not be sufficient to fund the necessary programs and activities outlined in the Wolf Management Plan.
- Damage expenses due to wolves may need to be looked at in conjunction with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture for possible sustainable funding. This may need to be addressed at the legislature.

EMERGING ISSUES

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

The DNR's expressed interest to pursue greater diversity, equity and inclusion must contribute to broader initiatives addressing social justice inequities. In the DNR's realm, this means striving to ensure there are no barriers that discourage under-represented communities from participating in a full range of outdoor activities and opportunities. The agency must devise ways to create positive incentives for such communities so they feel welcome in those pursuits. Moreover, this means more than simply encouraging the enjoyment of Minnesota's natural resources by all communities. It also includes fostering opportunities for meaningful careers in natural resources and ensuring that enforcement practices are even-handed. The DNR's expressed intent to enhance the Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3) program can also play a critical role as part of a broader strategy if it has the proper focus and leadership.

NEONICOTINOIDS

Neonicotinoids are a growing concern for Minnesota's natural resources. This particular type of insecticide is widely used in crop production for corn and soybeans. It works as a coating on the seeds that are later incorporated into the crops system to prevent pests. Currently, neonicotinoids are linked to native bee population decline, increased mortality to non-target insects, and found to have adverse effects on birds. The BOC received an update regarding a new study the DNR is conducting to see if deer are being adversely affected by neonicotinoids. Currently, they were able to detect low levels of this insecticide in deer across the state. However, there is no known threat this could have on hunters and consumers of game meat. Other states, such as South Dakota have reported abnormalities in deer, possibly linked to neonicotinoids. Turkeys and other birds are adversely impacted by neonicotinoids. Due to the adverse effects of neonicotinoids on Minnesota wildlife, the BOC feels that this issue will require further investigation.

CLIMATE CHANGE

There is abundant and growing evidence that climate change is having a profound effect on Minnesota natural resources. Projected trends indicate increases in precipitation, invasive species, and disease, all of which could pose dangerous and irrevocable consequences on Minnesota's environment, wildlife, and fisheries. The DNR continues to evaluate the impact of the changing climate and has taken steps to address some of its effects on Minnesota natural resources. The BOC endorses those efforts and encourages the agency to build upon them. The agency's involvement in the Governor's Climate Change Subcabinet, created by Executive Order 19-37, is a positive step in that regard. It is imperative that the DNR pursue all informed practices and capitalize on its unique agency profile on this issue to provide leadership in the management of both public and state lands to mitigate the impact of climate change. The agency's CLIMATE (**CL**imate **Mit**igation and **Ad**aptation **TE**am) Team initiative appears to advance that cause and the BOC endorses it. Focused and coordinated efforts like this are needed to "move the needle." It is essential that the DNR continue its efforts to lead, educate, and advise fellow natural resource organizations and the general public on the best methods to create resilient ecosystems in the face of climate change.

WOLF DELISTING

Gray wolves were delisted from the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on October 29, 2020. This returned the management authority to the states and tribes, effective January 4, 2021. The DNR is currently the largest responsible party in Minnesota for funding research, population management, public relations, and reimbursements for wolf damages.

The BOC is concerned whether there is an adequate funding strategy to assume this responsibility. Revenue from hunting and trapping, if allowed, will not be sufficient to fund all programs and activities outlined in the Wolf Management Plan, especially the public relations, public information, or public education campaigns that the BOC feels will be critical for a successful implementation.

The BOC fully supports the formation of the Wolf Plan Advisory Committee to help update the 2001 Wolf Management Plan. The DNR should consider a more permanent partnership for tribes, citizens, hunters/trappers, and other stakeholders to contribute to an ongoing wolf management discussion. Given the strong feelings that wolves evoke in Minnesotans, the DNR must prioritize their management of people.

ELK MANAGEMENT IN NE MINNESOTA

The Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa continue to pursue the reintroduction of elk in northeastern Minnesota. Recent feasibility studies indicate the area is capable of supporting elk densities exceeding the current elk population in northwestern Minnesota. The restoration of elk would have biological impacts for the region and present the DNR with additional fiscal and administrative challenges. Annual briefings for the BOC on the consequences of elk reintroduction are warranted.

FISHING REGULATIONS

While the DNR's use of scientific information to manage individual bodies of water is important, the fishing regulations are extremely complex to follow for anglers. This is difficult for experienced and novice anglers; it is keeping new anglers from purchasing licenses for fear of breaking game laws.

INFORMATION ON SHARED NATURAL RESOURCES

As Minnesota's tribes practice their treaty rights for harvesting game and fish, perceptions of the effect on the state's resources can cause a rift between native and non-native citizens when there is no information, or misinformation. The tribes and the DNR need to continue to coordinate scientific studies and reviews of natural resources. Findings of the studies need to be coordinated through a joint public relations effort to assure the general public has a better understanding—and assure shared natural resources are protected for future generations.