



# **Accessibility of Wildlife Management Areas**

As required by Minnesota Session Law-2020, 1<sup>st</sup> Special Session, Chapter 4 Sec. 3  
June 23, 2021

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Report to the Minnesota Legislature

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Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Section 3.197, the estimated cost to produce this report is approximately \$16,000.00. This includes staff time for drafting and reviewing the report.

*Upon request, this material will be made available in an alternative format such as large print, Braille or audio recording.*

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## Executive Summary

[Minnesota Session Laws-2020, 1<sup>st</sup> Special Session Chapter 4—H.F. No. 37, Sec. 3](#) directed the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), in conjunction with the Minnesota Council on Disability (MCD), interested stakeholders, and the general public to formulate recommendations designed to reduce barriers and increase access to Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) for hunting and other natural-resource-based recreational opportunities for people with disabilities.

The DNR established an advisory team to develop a range of recommendations to increase access to state WMAs for people with disabilities. Knowledge of current services, DNR policies, accessibility standards, and a public input survey are the basis for the team's recommendations.

The recommendations contained herein are directed to the DNR's Fish and Wildlife Division, hereafter division. The team acknowledges the division's past work toward providing services to people with disabilities. These recommendations are meant to build upon past investments and when implemented, will improve and expand delivery of programs and services Minnesotans expect from state government.

This report is the first step to a more thoughtful, systematic expansion of accessible opportunities on WMAs. Each recommendation will require additional work in order to translate these concepts into actions and ultimately improved access. We expect one outcome will take the form of capital and operational funding requests in upcoming legislative sessions.

### Team Recommendations:

- **Develop a Strategic Approach** – Ensuring accessibility and increasing opportunities requires a conscious and deliberate effort. To begin the division will:
  - Explicitly support WMA accessibility as a priority in annual division work planning, and identify financial and staff resources needed to support the work
  - Incorporate accessibility considerations into “major unit” WMA management plans and WMA system plans
  - Create a Project Management Plan surrounding each recommendation, including estimated costs to implement.
  
- **Increase Knowledge and Awareness of Program Services** – The largest barrier the advisory team identified for accessing WMAs is a lack of awareness of available services and facilities. This one recommendation can have the largest impact on increasing participation by people with disabilities. The team recommends the following actions to improve awareness:
  - Develop quarterly communication products that highlight opportunities for users with disabilities on division-administered lands. Distribute messaging broadly across all communication channels.

- Provide accurate and complete accessibility information for WMAs that currently have facilities or programs designed for people with disabilities.
  - Review DNR’s process by which people obtain permits to use other power-driven mobility devices (OPDMDs) with the goal of streamlining and simplification.
  - Perform a “plain language review” and update the agency’s OPDMD device website to improve clarity.
  - Update and expand DNR website links to accessible recreation organizations.
  - Develop training on accessibility standards, reasonable accommodations, and procedures governing mobility devices for division staff.
- **Improve WMA Facilities** – Develop new facilities, including parking lots and gated trail accesses, using specifications that meet accessibility standards. Assess existing facilities for standards compliance and prioritize WMAs for upgrades. Working closely with our non-governmental partners, evaluate existing hunting blinds for accessibility, pursue temporary options (e.g., portable blinds), and invest in new permanent structures where warranted.
  - **Make Policy Changes** – Modify Minnesota Rule 6230.0250 Subps. 10 (2) and Minnesota Statute 97A.137 Subd. 3 by deleting language or rewriting to comply with federal law (i.e., change “hunter” to “person”). Expand Minnesota Statute 97A.137 Subd. 5 to allow people with disabilities to leave portable stands or blinds overnight on WMAs and Aquatic Management Areas (AMAs) during open hunting seasons.
  - **Rename Special Hunts** — Rename “special hunts” to “accessible hunts”. This change will help provide clarity on the nature of the opportunity and avoids a stigma the term “special” has within this community.
  - **Continue Motorized Travel Through the Use of OPDMD Permits** – Maintain the permit system that facilitates the use of OPDMDs on lands in Minnesota’s outdoor recreation system. A permit system allows the agency to track accommodation requests, and address resource, safety, and enforcement concerns. Investigate ways to enable users to acquire a permit in an efficient, timely manner.
  - **Use Federal Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas as Guidance** – Specific state regulations for outdoor accessibility are lacking, adopting federal standards may provide multiple long-term benefits.

## Introduction

[Minnesota Session Laws-2020, 1<sup>st</sup> Special Session Chapter 4—H.F. No. 37, Sec. 3](#) directed the DNR, in conjunction with the MCD, interested stakeholders, and the general public to formulate recommendations designed to reduce barriers and increase access to WMAs for hunting and other natural-resource-based recreational opportunities for people with disabilities.

**Sec. 3. ACCESSIBILITY OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS.** *The commissioner of natural resources, in conjunction with the Council on Disability, other interested stakeholders, and the general public, must develop recommendations and draft legislative language designed to increase access to wildlife management areas for hunting and other natural-resource-based recreational opportunities. The recommendations must focus on reducing the barriers to accessing wildlife management areas, including increasing opportunities for persons with disabilities to use motorized vehicles or other mobility aids, improving infrastructure, and publicizing and communicating access opportunities. By February 15, 2021, the commissioner must submit the recommendations to the chairs and ranking minority members of the house of representatives and senate committees and divisions with jurisdiction over environment and natural resources and the outdoor heritage fund. The commissioner of natural resources, in conjunction with the Council on Disability, must pilot accessibility projects on at least one wildlife management area by October 1, 2020. The pilot projects must focus on reducing the barriers to accessing wildlife management areas.*

This report uses the term “facilities” to define features on WMA lands that were built for the purpose of providing and managing access to recreation opportunities. Examples include parking lots, gates, roads and trails, and hunting blinds. The term facility is not used in this report to refer to DNR buildings. This report focused mostly on increasing access to WMA lands for those with mobility disabilities.

## Advisory Team and Public Engagement

The advisory team, hereafter team, consisted of a diverse group of 14 individuals with experience and interest in serving people with disabilities. Members of the team included:

- Margot Cross, MCD
- Dean Petersen, Capable Partners Inc.
- Randy Sorensen, Options Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living
- John Carson, Disabled American Veterans of Minnesota
- Todd Kemery, Paralyzed Veterans of American, MN Chapter
- David Trauba, DNR project manager
- Rob Baden, DNR area wildlife manager, Region 1
- Christine Reisz, DNR area wildlife manager, Region 2
- Jim LaBarre, DNR wildlife area manager, Region 3
- Judy Markl, DNR assistant area wildlife manager, Region 4
- Bruce Anderson, Wildlife – Minnesota IT Services (MNIT)
- Laurinda Brown, DNR Fish and Wildlife policy and planning

- David Schueller, DNR Fish and Wildlife outreach
- Cathy Forstner, DNR administrative support, Region 4

The team developed these goals to judge long-term success:

1. Robust recommendations —supported internally and externally — that genuinely increase WMA accessibility for people with disabilities.
2. Recommendations that are integrated into DNR policy work plans and procedures and annually conveyed to staff and external stakeholders.
3. Future funding requests that are supported by the legislature.

The team created an on-line public input survey to elicit a broad range of ideas from the general public on how the DNR can better serve people with disabilities. The survey was available for input for 26 days. DNR news releases, media interviews, and direct outreach from external partners to their memberships were used to encourage participation. In total, 314 individuals responded. Appendix A contains the full survey report.

*“Human movement affords us such amazing access to every nook and cranny of our world. The slightest physical Impediment removes some aspect of our physical opportunity. All we need is a sliver in our hand to realize what we cannot do until the sliver is removed. Imagine losing our legs or arms and knowing how much of the world we will never experience. We, who are able bodied, see the few resources provided as significant and those who confront limited access every day see how much more needs to be done. Ironically, we who are able bodied and who do so little to promote access, fail to realize that in an instant, one misstep, and we can be forever linked with those whose needs we have ignored.”*

-Anonymous survey respondent

## Wildlife Management Area System

WMAs are a unit of the outdoor recreation system established in accordance with Minnesota Statute [86A.05](#), Subdivision 8. The statute in part reads, “WMAs shall be established to protect those lands and waters which have a high potential for wildlife production and to develop and manage these lands and waters for the production of wildlife, for public hunting, fishing, and trapping, and for other compatible outdoor recreational uses. Physical developments may provide access to the area, but shall be so developed as to minimize intrusion on the natural environment.” Minnesota Rule [6230.0250](#) outlines the general provisions for the use of WMAs. In general, motorized travel, developed trails, and permanent stands or blinds are not authorized on WMAs, but exceptions are authorized for users with disabilities.

DNR manages more than 1,500 WMAs covering nearly 1.3 million acres of land. Most services available for people with disabilities occur on the division’s eight largest WMAs, called major units. These units have large consolidated land bases, which typically means higher staffing levels and equipment that enables the administration of accessible hunts and maintenance of user facilities.

## Current Services

### Facilities

Seventy-five facilities on WMA lands have been built for the express purpose of providing hunting or wildlife viewing opportunities for people with disabilities. Accessibility partners noted that most of these facilities are considered partially accessible. Sixty-four facilities are hunting blinds for deer, turkey and, to a lesser extent, goose or duck hunting; the remaining 11 facilities are wildlife viewing structures, boat docks, trails, or accessible parking lots.

Existing facilities were made possible by the strong connection and partnership between area office staff and the DNR’s non-profit partners. In nearly all cases, funding was acquired by soliciting donations from local clubs, civic organizations, or directly from our non-profit partners. Two facilities were Eagle Scout projects.

### Accessible hunts

The DNR, municipalities, and organizations across Minnesota offer hunts at times and in areas that might regularly be closed to hunting. Participation in these hunts is limited, often requiring an application and a sponsoring organization. Such hunts are permitted under Minnesota Statute [97B.111](#), and held for deer hunters, youth hunters, and people with disabilities. The DNR administered 16 hunts for hunters with disabilities in 2020, including seven on WMA lands.



2020 accessible hunt sponsoring organizations included Capable Partners, Access North, Middle River Veterans, Veterans Outdoors, Midwest Outdoors Unlimited and other sponsoring organizations. Sponsoring organizations coordinate hunters, mentors, and volunteers. The DNR also relies on partner organizations to help publicize these opportunities.

## Other Power-Driven Mobility Device Permits

People with disabilities have the right to request an accommodation to use OPDMDs on public lands under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The internal procedures to comply with federal law are outlined by a Commissioner's Order signed in 2017. The public-facing guidelines and procedures are found on the DNR website, [Other Power-Driven Mobility Devices on DNR lands and facilities](#). Permits are provided to the user for motorized travel on all outdoor recreation system land units with a few exceptions. In FY2020 (July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020) the DNR issued 33 permits for OPDMDs for all land units. Twenty-two permits were issued for 16 individual WMAs. Almost all permits were issued for firearm deer hunting. No permits were denied over safety or resource concerns.

## Website

The DNR maintains a number of webpages dedicated to accessible opportunities on DNR-administered lands. The main portal is on the first page titled, [Accessible Outdoors](#). Multiple links direct users to learn more about camping, hunting, fishing, state parks, state forests, WMAs, OPDMDs, and other DNR and nonprofit services. The WMA link takes users to an [interactive map](#) where they can query for WMA facilities that are wheelchair accessible. Clicking on the WMA name provides additional detail about the WMA including any accessible features. A subset of WMAs have an [Accessibility Sheet](#) which provides greater detail on the services and facilities for people with disabilities including photos and maps

## Team Recommendations

The recommendations of this report are directed to the division. These recommendations are also applicable to AMAs, also managed by the division.

The team drew on its knowledge of current services, DNR procedures and policies, applicable accessibility standards such as the ADA, and the public input survey in formulating its recommendations.

## Develop Strategic Approach

The division will benefit from a strategic approach on delivering programs and facilities for people with disabilities. Past efforts, with few exceptions, have been locally driven, working with external partners. Implementing the team recommendations will require a very deliberate effort with ongoing support from division leadership.

To begin the division will:

- Explicitly support WMA accessibility as a priority in annual division work planning, and identify financial and staff resources needed to support the work
- Incorporate accessibility considerations into “major unit” WMA management plans and WMA system plans
- Create a Project Management Plan surrounding each recommendation including estimated costs to implement.

Most facilities that provide opportunities for people with disabilities are located on relatively few WMAs. The division has allocated funds in the fiscal year beginning July 2021 to begin *Comprehensive Accessibility Assessments* for one or more WMAs in calendar year 2021, as was recently done for two state parks. Assessments should start with Sand Prairie, Becklin-Homestead, Carlos Avery, or Mille Lacs WMA as these WMAs have facilities and a history of providing accessible experiences. The assessments will illuminate existing accessibility deficiencies to prioritize future investments. Fiscal year 2021 funds have been identified to begin to address deficiencies at these WMAs. Improving access beyond these initial WMAs will be an iterative process of working with partners to identify the WMAs and facilities to invest in. The division will develop a future funding request for engineering assistance, new construction, and long-term maintenance.

## Increase Knowledge and Awareness of Program Services

The largest barrier identified by the team for accessing WMAs is a lack of knowledge of available programs and services. Of the 314 survey respondents, 31% of respondents were not aware the division had programs or facilities for people with disabilities on WMA lands. Providing information to users may have the largest impact on increasing participation by people with disabilities. The team also identified a need for division staff to be trained on accessibility standards.

### Internal Training

- The division should develop and require training on accessibility standards and reasonable accommodations under the ADA. DNR’s Parks and Trails Division has training modules that could be adapted for the division’s use. Accessibility partners have expressed interest in hosting training opportunities as well.

- The division should send out an annual reminder to all staff on our responsibilities and procedures involved in issuing special use permits for OPDMDs.

### External Outreach and Communication

- Develop quarterly communication products that highlight opportunities for users with disabilities on division lands. Emphasize the ability to obtain OPDMD permits. Distribute messaging broadly across digital communication channels. Integrate communications about these opportunities into annual communication schedules.
- Partner with the MCD on a consistent, long-term print media outreach strategy. Coordinate accessibility messaging with other DNR divisions.

### Website Improvements

- The DNR should update the multidivisional webpage titled *Other Power-Driven Mobility Devices on DNR Lands and Facilities*, and complete a “plain language” review to focus content to what is really important (i.e., how to obtain a permit). External partners should be included in this review. This one recommendation can have the greatest influence on increasing opportunities for motorized travel by people with disabilities across all department land units.
- The division should complete and/or revise Accessibility Sheets for WMAs that have facilities and/or accessible hunts for people with disabilities. Consistent format, detailed content, and high quality photography are critical components. Consider changing the term “Accessibility Sheets” to something more descriptive, e.g., “Know Before You Go”.
- The DNR should strengthen, update, and expand the webpage that links to [accessible recreation organizations](#). Formalize the cross-sharing of information and opportunities between the DNR and independent organizations.

### WMA Facilities

#### Parking Facilities

The division should develop parking lot and gated trail access specifications that meet state and federal accessibility standards. These designs would then be used by DNR staff or contractors when constructing parking lots and gated accesses on newly acquired lands when terrain permits. A systematic and targeted process working with partners will be required to improve existing facilities. The WMA system has more than 2,500 parking lots in its inventory as of 2019.

## Hunter Blinds

The division has 64 permanent, fixed-structure hunting blinds to support hunting opportunities for people with disabilities. The division must take a strategic look at the existing blinds and evaluate new construction proposals. Most of the existing hunting blinds do not meet accessibility standards and some receive little use (i.e., goose hunting blinds). New construction must meet applicable standards. Maintaining permanent facilities requires a long-term commitment. The team recommends the division pursue temporary options (e.g., portable blinds) first and invest in permanent structures where there is an identified priority need (e.g., accessible hunts for people with disabilities that involve long-standing partnerships and commitments).

## Proposed Policy Changes

The advisory team focused its review of state laws, rules, and policies regarding accessibility specific to WMAs. The team recommends two changes necessary to match federal law and a modification to 97A.137 to explicitly state that users with disabilities are allowed to leave a portable blind overnight on WMAs and AMAs. Formalizing this accommodation in statute will bring increased awareness and transparency on this opportunity and eliminate the need for staff to issue a special use permit on an individual basis.

### Minnesota Rule 6230.0250 GENERAL PROVISIONS FOR USE OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

**Modify Subp. 10. General restrictions on vehicles** by changing a portion of A (2) to align with federal law and internal DNR policy (Commissioner's Order) that authorize OPDMDs on state lands and facilities for the purpose of implementing the ADA (see [84.027](#) POWERS AND DUTIES Subd. 19. Federal law compliance).

- A.** A person may not operate an all-terrain vehicle, hang glider, air boat, hover craft, or personal watercraft defined in Minnesota Statutes, section [86B.005](#), within the boundaries of a wildlife management area. Exceptions for all-terrain vehicle use include:
- (1) use during deer seasons as provided in part [6232.0300](#), subpart 7, item B;
  - (2) use by a ~~hunter~~person with a disability who has a permit approved by the area wildlife manager under Minnesota Statutes, section [97A.137](#), subdivision 3;
  - (3) use for ice fishing as provided in item C; and
  - (4) use on designated trails as provided in Minnesota Statutes, section [97A.133](#), subdivision 3.

## Minnesota Statute 97A.137 HUNTING, FISHING, AND TRESPASSING IN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

### Subd. 3. Use of motorized vehicles by disabled hunters

The commissioner may provide an accommodation by issuing ~~issue~~ a special permit, without a fee, authorizing a hunter person with a ~~permanent physical~~ disability to use an “other power-driven mobility device” ~~snowmobile, highway-licensed vehicle, all-terrain vehicle, or motor boat~~ in wildlife management areas.

To qualify for a permit under this subdivision, the ~~disabled~~ person must ~~possess;~~ provide credible assurance to a DNR employee that the device is used because of a disability.

~~(1) the required hunting licenses; and~~

~~(2) a permit to shoot from a stationary vehicle under section 97B.055, subdivision 3.~~

**Modify Subd. 5. Portable Stands** to allow people with disabilities to leave portable blinds or stands overnight on WMAs and AMAs during open hunting seasons.

Subd. 5. Portable stands.

(a) Prior to the Saturday on or nearest September 16, a portable stand may be left overnight in a wildlife management area by a person with a valid bear license who is hunting within 100 yards of a bear bait site that is legally tagged and registered as prescribed under section 97B.425. The commissioner may issue a special permit, without a fee, authorizing a hunter with a disability to leave a portable stand or blind overnight in a wildlife management area or aquatic management area open to hunting. Any person leaving a portable stand overnight under this subdivision must affix a tag with: (1) the person's name and address; (2) the licensee's driver's license number; or (3) the "MDNR#" license identification number issued to the licensee. The tag must be affixed to the stand in a manner that it can be read from the ground.

## Use the terminology “Accessible Hunts” rather than “Special Hunts”

The DNR should use the term “Special Hunts” to describe unique hunt opportunities provided to the general public. The DNR should use the term “Accessible Hunts” to note opportunities provided to hunters with disabilities. This will help clarify the different opportunities and avoid a stigma the term “special” has within this community.

## Motorized Travel – OPDMDs

People with disabilities have the right to accommodation in order to use OPDMDs on state lands. Currently, procedures governing use are formalized in a Commissioner’s Order applicable to all land units in the outdoor recreation system. The team recommends keeping a permit system and supports recommendations to streamline the program, allow users more spontaneity in outdoor recreation (without requiring significant advanced planning), and provide greater outreach. Such

improvements could include the use of on-site information, internet permit delivery, and better contact information for resource managers. A permit system remains an important mechanism to address resource, safety, and enforcement concerns.

### **Use Federal Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas as Guidance**

The Accessibility Chapter of the Minnesota Building Codes contains many of the physical accessibility requirements for buildings and parking lots. For outdoor developed areas, the regulations covering state governments has not been developed as of this report. The team recommends that the federal regulations for Outdoor Developed Areas be used as guidance until state rules are implemented. Since the state regulations will be modeled after the federal rules Minnesota's WMAs will be better positioned to be in compliance with future standards.

## Pilot Project

Session law directed the DNR to undertake a pilot study: *The commissioner of natural resources, in conjunction with the Council on Disability, must pilot accessibility projects on at least one wildlife management area by October 1, 2020. The pilot projects must focus on reducing the barriers to accessing wildlife management areas.*

Session law became effective when signed by the Governor on June 18, 2020. For much of the summer, division staff were working remotely to minimize potential exposure of staff and the public to COVID-19. Due to these circumstances, DNR was unable to implement the pilot project in 2020. The division will be completing one or more accessibility pilot projects on WMA lands during the fall of 2021. The division is working with staff to identify potential projects, and plans to discuss options with accessibility partners. Projects that are larger than can be completed due to time or budget constraints will be considered for future funding requests

## Other Fall 2020 Actions

After consultation with the MCD, the DNR and MCD identified the largest single barrier to increased participation as knowledge and awareness, internally and externally, of available programs and services. This conclusion was confirmed from the public input survey completed during the fall of 2020.

The division and partners took the following actions to increase knowledge and awareness:

- MCD prepared and issued a news release posted on their website by deadline; joint effort.
- MCD news release was provided to division outreach staff for consistency/awareness when developing DNR news release on accessible opportunities.
- Reinforcing DNR news release issued mid-October.
- All-wildlife staff message was sent on October 1, 2020 on obligations under ADA law and procedure for issuing and tracking other power-driven mobility permits; follow-up communication by regional managers.
- All-wildlife staff message shared with Melinda Anderson, DNR ADA coordinator, for sharing with other divisions.
- MCD news release and all-wildlife staff message sent to DNR Information Center for awareness.

The DNR and the division view this report as a first step toward meaningful accessibility improvements to recreation opportunities in the WMA system. Increased awareness is a valuable step, but needs to be followed by improved facility design, construction and maintenance.

# Appendix A

## WMA Accessibility Public Input Survey

Summarized Results  
12/28/20 to 1/22/21

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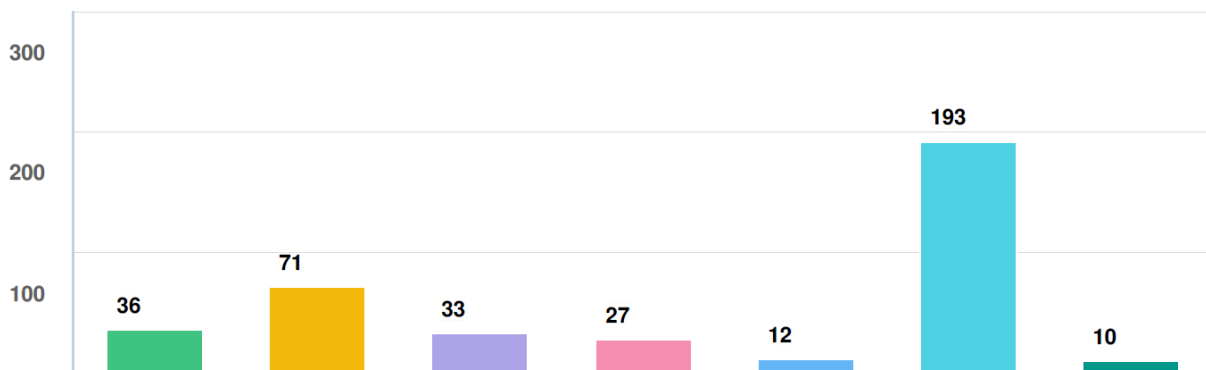


## Public Input Survey

The advisory team created an on-line public input survey to elicit a broad range of ideas from the general public on how the DNR can better serve people with disabilities. The survey was available for input for 26 days. DNR news releases, media interviews, and direct outreach from external partners to their memberships were used to encourage participation. In total, 314 individuals responded. The survey results are below.

### Question 1

Which of the following accessible opportunities have you or a family member ever used? (select all that apply)



#### Question options

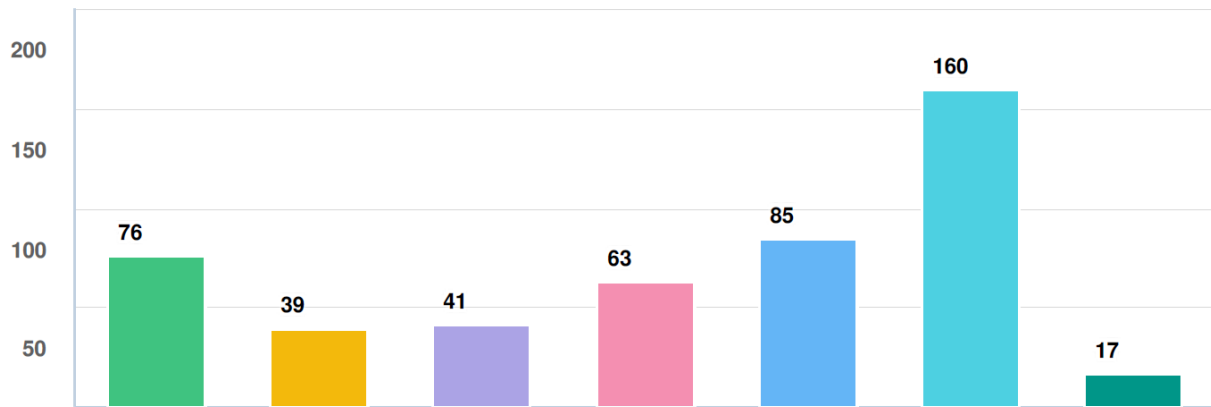
- Other (please specify)
- None of the Above
- Permit to Operate Other Power-Driven Mobility Device (OPDMD) on WMA
- Special/Accessible Hunt (Not on a WMA)
- WMA Special/Accessible Hunt
- WMA Wildlife Viewing Platform
- WMA Accessible Hunting Stand

Mandatory Question (314 response(s))

Question type: Checkbox Question

## Question 2

Which activities have you or a family member ever participated in while using an accessible facility at a WMA? (select all that apply)



### Question options

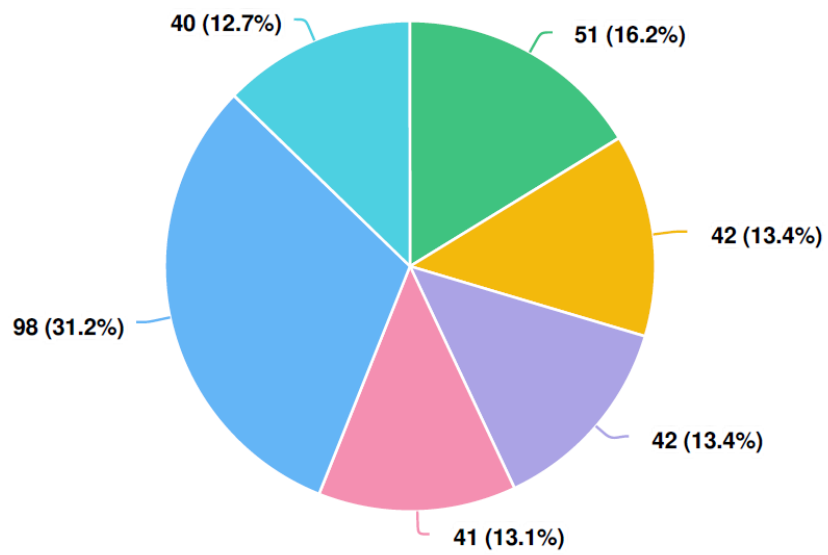
- Other (please specify)
- None of the Above
- Wildlife Viewing
- Duck Hunting
- Goose Hunting
- Turkey Hunting
- Deer Hunting

Mandatory Question (314 response(s))

Question type: Checkbox Question

### Question 3

How did you first learn about accessible opportunities at WMAs?

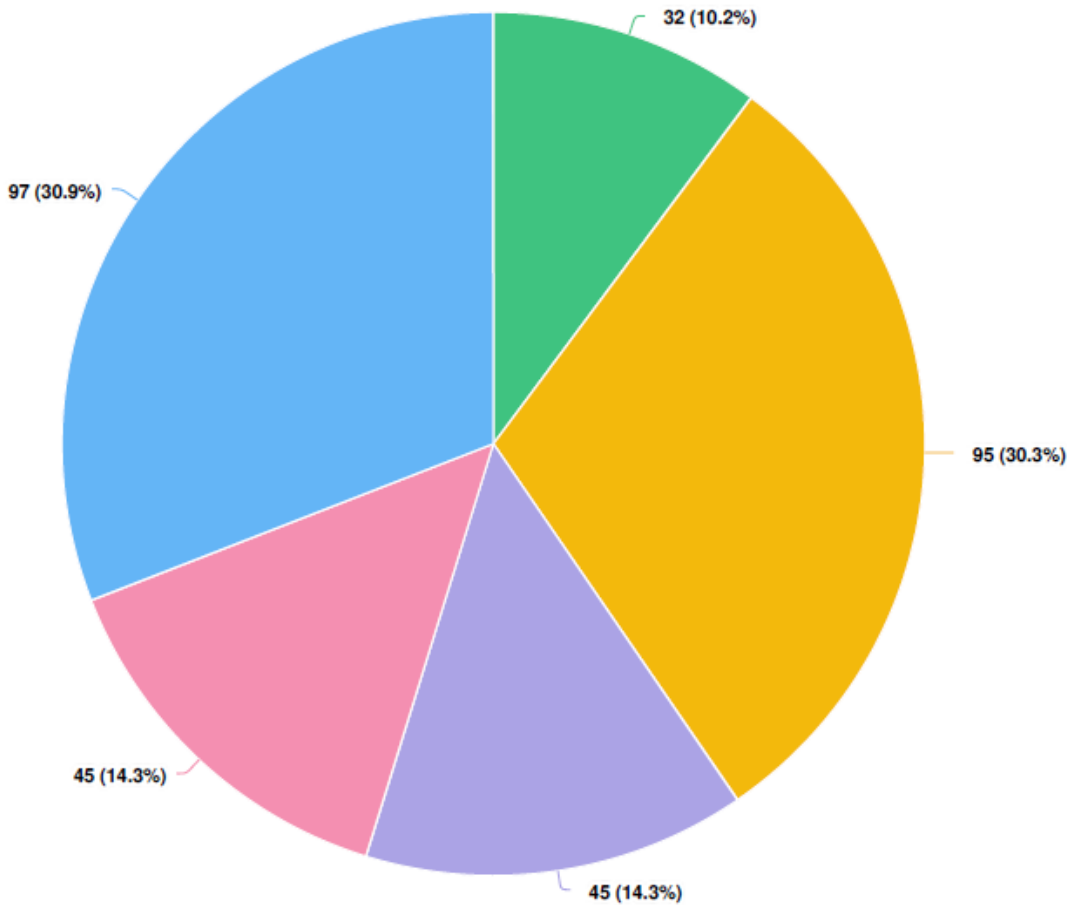


#### Question options

- Other (please specify)
- I did not know accessible opportunities existed at WMAs
- Family Member
- Nonprofit Organization Outreach
- DNR News Release
- DNR Website

### Question 4

How satisfied are you with the number of accessible opportunities currently available at WMAs?



**Question options**

- No Opinion
- Very Unsatisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied

Mandatory Question (314 response(s))

Question type: Radio Button Question

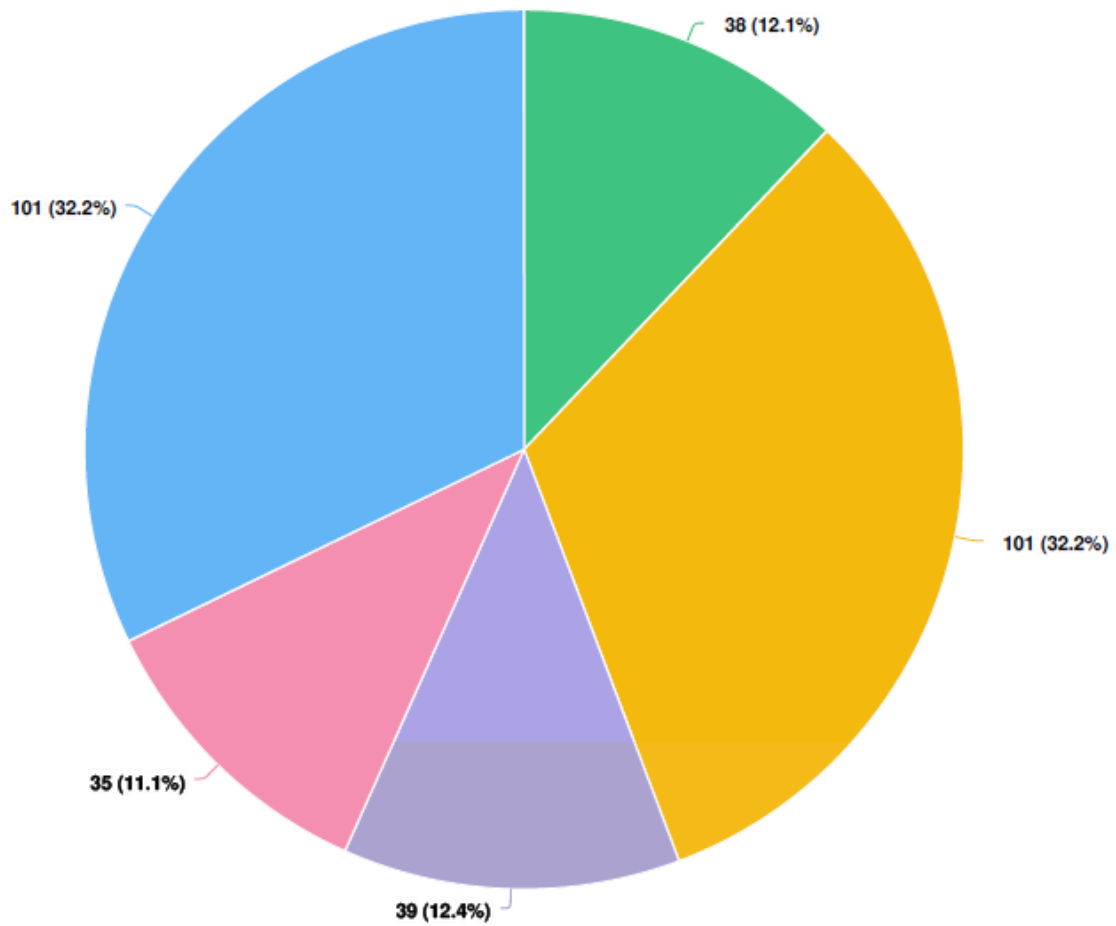
## ***Question 5***

Please enter any comments you have regarding the number of accessible opportunities currently available at WMAs.

The majority of comments received regarding the number of accessible opportunities currently available at WMAs indicated that many respondents were satisfied with the current number of opportunities, but many would like to see additional accessible opportunities, particularly in the southern part of the state, including closer to the metro area. Some comments specifically requested additional permanent duck blinds, hunting platforms, and quality hunting areas designated specifically for those with disabilities.

## Question 6

How satisfied are you with the quality of existing accessible opportunities at WMAs?



### Question options

No Opinion    Very Unsatisfied    Unsatisfied    Satisfied    Very Satisfied

Mandatory Question (314 response(s))

Question type: Radio Button Question

## **Question 7**

Please enter any comments you have regarding the quality of existing accessibility opportunities at WMAs.

Comments regarding the quality of existing accessible opportunities at WMAs indicated that many respondents would like to see accessible opportunities in locations with better quality experiences. Many felt the existing opportunities were in lower quality areas. Other comments expressed the need for better access, better maintained trails, larger parking areas, and improved viewing platforms.

## **Question 8**

What ideas do you have to improve opportunities for those with disabilities to access our wildlife management areas? What barriers currently exist?

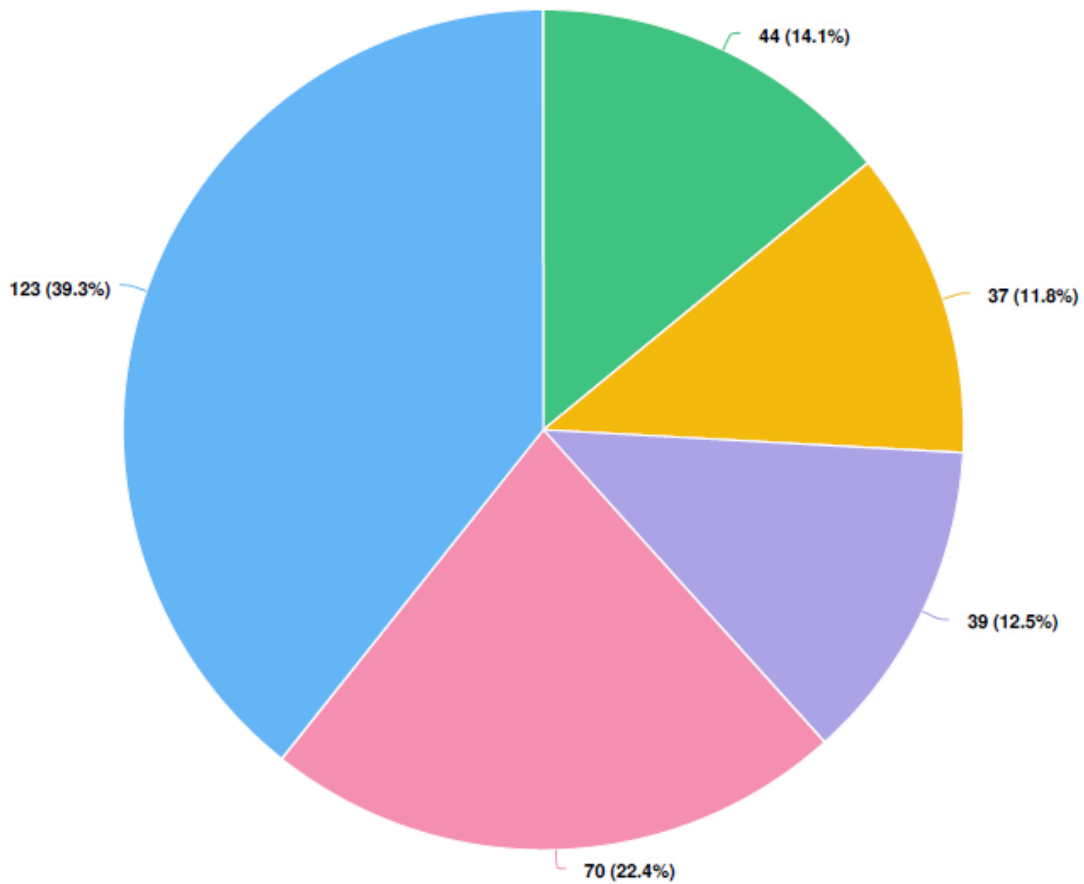
Access and awareness were the two most common themes that emerged in comments received regarding ideas to improve opportunities. Many comments about access requested the use of motorized vehicles on WMAs. Other comments focused on adding and improving boardwalks, accessible trails, larger parking areas, benches for resting, and boat launch areas. Specific comments requested the use of trolling motors on lakes within WMAs, allowing hunting stands to remain overnight, and providing opportunities to rent out OPDMDs onsite. Many respondents commented that they were not aware of the existing opportunities and would like to know more. Suggestions were made for improving communication and updating the website to make the information better publicized and more readily accessible. Specific comments indicated a need for maps that show parking areas, terrain, trails, and general information on what to expect. Several respondents suggested creating a volunteer mentorship program to encourage able-bodied hunters to accompany disabled hunters during their hunts. One respondent suggested specific opportunities to support women veterans.

When asked about existing barriers, respondents pointed out that the current process for obtaining permits for OPDMDs was inconvenient and complicated. Many users would like to see a permit system that is fast and easy where the permit can be obtained instantaneously onsite. Others expressed interest in reducing or waiving license fees for veterans with disabilities and/or seniors over the age of 75. One respondent requested the use of recorded duck calls.

Finally, some respondents expressed concern for balancing the need for accessible opportunities with ensuring the WMAs stay as undeveloped and natural as possible. Funding concerns were also mentioned.

## Question 9

What is your age group?



### Question options

Over 65 56-65 46-55 36-45 18-35

Optional question (313 response(s), 1 skipped)

Question type: Radio Button Question

## Question 10

What is your zip code?

Respondents listed over 200 unique zip codes that represented many different geographic areas of the state.