

**MINNESOTA
STATE REPORT**
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Dedicated Funding Efforts

In 2008, Minnesota voters passed a constitutional amendment (56% majority) to raise the state sales tax by three-eighths of one percent to be used for habitat, clean water, parks and culture. The funding is not available for agency operational expenditures but rather for specific projects and initiatives. One third of the new funding is available to restore, preserve and enhance fish and wildlife habitat and other natural resources: a total of \$58.9 million for 2011. DNR received \$18.3 million for in FY2011 a variety of fish and wildlife programs, and the remaining funds went to other agencies and to NGO partners in the state. One unique feature of the new funding is the Conservation Partners Legacy Grant program, which awards small grants for habitat restoration, enhancement, and protection to local conservation organizations and agencies. Funds also went to the USFWS for land acquisition and restoration activities.

Hunting and Fishing Fees

The Game and Fish Fund is Minnesota's depository fund for the hunting and fishing fees, along with the state's WSFR reimbursements. Developing recommendations and implementing changes to license structures and fees are necessary to maintain the solvency of the Game and Fish Fund through 2020. A team has been tasked with developing recommendations while considering affordable and customer friendly options and pricing structure that reflects modern day participation in outdoor recreation and emphasizing opportunities to participate. Changes must also maintain the agency's capacity to deliver conservation programs that provide healthy fish and wildlife populations, excellent recreational opportunities, and support Minnesota's outdoor recreation and natural resource economies. The team will be working with the Budget Oversight Committee, a stakeholder based committee mandated by statute to review expenditures and provide oversight to the Fund, and other stakeholders to develop these recommendations by January 2011.

Legislature 2010/Veto

It is unprecedented in recent history for the annual Game and Fish Bill to be vetoed by the Governor. However, the 2010 Game and Fish Bill was vetoed by the Governor due to problematic policy and funding issues. The governor's veto message specifically cited four fishing-related items that would have established a harmful precedent for managing natural resources as well as undercutting public confidence in agency processes. These items as well as other actions would have accelerated the declining balance in the Game and Fish Fund. Between now and January 2011 when the Legislature convenes, DNR will be focusing on how to improve working relationships with key committees and legislators.

Though the Game and Bill was vetoed, key outcomes from the past legislative session include: (1) the bonding bill contained \$1 million for Wildlife Management Area and Aquatic Management Area acquisition and improvement and \$3 million for Reinvest In Minnesota critical habitat match, (2) the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) bill funded a number of agency proposals, including funding to assess shallow lake management, to connect youth to nature through a digital nature photography projects, and to initiate a pilot project with Department of Education initiating a pilot project to integrate environmental and outdoor education in grades 7-12. A new requirement was passed that anyone leaving waters of the state must drain livewells and bilges and leave plugs and valves open while transporting watercraft on public roads. A long-range analysis of budget needs for managing and expanding WMAs and AMAs will be completed by Nov. 15. Two studies are required related to school trust lands, including an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of a funding mechanism to compensate the permanent school fund for private and public use of school trust lands.

Long Range Organization Planning

FAW embarked on a long range organization planning process in 2008 to consider future organization functions and structures that may be appropriate in the next 10 – 50 years. During the past year, efforts have focused on efficiencies for walleye rearing and stocking and the cold water hatchery system, reorganizing Wildlife Management Section to better deliver conservation especially in regards to new dedicated funding, and addressing administrative process barriers.

WMA/AMA Acquisition

Aquatic Management Areas (AMAs) are established to protect, develop, and manage lakes, rivers, streams, and adjacent wetlands and lands that are critical for fish and other aquatic life, for water quality, and for their intrinsic biological value, public fishing, or other compatible outdoor recreational uses. Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) are established to protect lands and waters which have a high potential for wildlife production. These lands are managed for wildlife values and for public hunting, trapping, fishing and other compatible outdoor recreational uses. In FY10 the DNR purchased 3.05 miles of cold-water shoreline with a value of \$72,200/mile and 7.6 miles of warm-water shoreline with a value of \$699,000/mile for inclusion in the AMA program. Minnesota currently has approximately 1.3 million acres in 1,433 units in the WMA program. During 2010, 4,954 acres were purchased or donated at a cost of \$9.6 million.

Climate Change Planning

DNR formed an interdisciplinary Climate and Renewable Energy Steering Team to provide department wide coordination, guidance, and conflict resolution on natural resource based climate and renewable energy strategies. Three subteams have been formed to address adaptation, carbon sequestration, and biofuel issues.

Recruitment, Retention, and Education

Major mentored hunts, angling opportunities and events included the following:

- **2010 “I Can Fish”** pilot program in State Parks in collaboration with MinnAqua with open shore fishing (providing equipment and bait) sprinkled with education and hands-on skills activities at the 8 State Park once a week utilizing local experienced

- anglers as mentors/volunteers. The program utilizes all the critical factors of recruitment/retention – a positive experience, access to: resources, gear and mentor, multiple opportunities and education.
- **2010 Take a Kid Ice Fishing** with Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Boy Scouts for 125 youths. There was a drop in numbers due to cancelation of an event because of poor ice conditions (2009 was 170).
 - **2010 Mentored Youth Turkey Hunts** with National Wild Turkey Federation with 305 mentored participants in 30 different areas across the state. This was down from 348 in 2009 (due to new 17 and under regulation).
 - First of its kind **2009 Take a Kid Fishing Event** with 200 participants learning hands-on angling skills, plus a fishing experience on Lake Phalen. Sponsors include MN DNR, Outdoor Knowledge, Big Woods Club and Capital Sportsman's Club.
 - **2009 had 13 Special Youth Deer Hunts** (6 of them in State Parks) with over 500 participants (2008 was 405). 2010 will have up to 19 Special Youth Deer Hunts (10 of which will be in State Parks) with estimated participation at over 600.
 - **2009 Mentored Youth Pheasant Hunts** with Pheasant Forever had 130 youths matched with Pheasants Forever expert volunteers (PF is using template in other states). 2010 will utilize Ringnecks and their social media skills with a goal of over 200.
 - **2009 Mentored Youth Waterfowl Hunt** at Hamden Slough for 25 youths, 25 mentors and 25 additional volunteers from DU, NWR, MN Waterfowl Association and MN DNR. 2010 to include several other sites and more opportunities.
 - **2009 Governor's Deer Opener** for 225 youths providing hands-on outdoors skills activity in cooperation with MDHA, EMT, TRF and DNR. 2010 to be similar in scope utilizing Camp Ripley and Rice Creek Hunting and Recreation
 - **Discover Your Outdoors Flier** of youth outdoors opportunities – 4000+ distributed at State Fair, Game Fair, Sportshows, outdoor events and mentoring organizations
 - 2010 will concentrate on building **DNR Certified Mentor Training Program** (working with Big Brother Big Sisters and Team Great Outdoors) training mentors and matching inexperienced youths and adults in outdoors skills and opportunities.
 - The Becoming an Outdoors Woman/Family Program launched **"I Can Hunt"** programs for men, women and youth for deer and upland birds. Family outdoor skill weekend programs are also expanding to three new environmental learning centers.
 - The Shooting Sports Program recruited 320 schools to the **National Archery in the Schools Program** introducing 108,000 youth to recreational and target archery.

A major effort was also initiated to prepare recommendations to simplify youth regulations. A citizen advisory committee comprised of NGOs involved with youth participation, firearm safety instructors, and DNR staff from Enforcement and Wildlife Management developed recommendations which were brought forward to the state legislature for consideration. Despite support from stakeholder groups, the initiative did not pass.

A youth turkey hunting change was implemented in 2010 eliminating the need for those 17 years and younger to participate in the lottery which resulted in an increase of 30% for youth turkey licenses over previous years. Public input was solicited in winter 2010 regarding the use of crossbows for persons age 55 years and older as a retention tool. In addition a four day youth

deer season over Minnesota Educators Association annual four day (K – 12) “weekend” in October was proposed as a retention tool.

Partnership Highlights

The Annual Roundtable was held in January 2010. Three stakeholder planning committees worked with Division of Ecological Resources, Fisheries, and Wildlife staff to develop agendas, processes, and identify speakers for the public participation event attended by 350 conservation leaders. Keynote speaker Randy Stark, Wisconsin DNR, presented on the history of conservation in North America. Breakout sessions highlighted ways to enhance local decision making to support healthy watersheds; walleye, northern pike, and muskie management; and waterfowl population and habitats.

Electronic Licensing System

A new licensing system was implemented in 2010 that includes touch-screen terminals, an improved internet-based licensing option with reduced fees, and significant cost-savings to the department.

Sandhill Crane Season

A proposal for a limited sandhill crane hunting season in the northwestern part of the state was approved by the various flyways, and is planned to be implemented this fall. The proposed season was met with very little public controversy, and will be the first crane season authorized in modern times in the state.

Moist Soil Management

In January, the DNR announced a major new initiative focused on moist soil management that is intended to improve waterfowl use in spring and fall and improve waterfowl hunting in the state. Several areas have been developed on state lands, and planning is underway to determine scope the location and extent of these areas in the state, and to identify potential project locations. It is expected that the constitutionally dedicated funding will be a major source of funds for this initiative.

New Fisheries Chief

Longtime Fisheries Chief Ron Payer retired in November, 2009, and has been replaced by Dirk Peterson. Dirk is a career employee with the DNR, and has served in various research and management capacities. He brings a strong focus on fisheries habitat issues to the position.

Walleye, Muskie Stocking

New walleye stocking guidelines have been developed to help guide the state’s very aggressive fingerling program (160,000 pounds/year). The guidelines were developed in collaboration with a citizen advisory committee. Also, muskellunge stocking has been proposed for five new lake systems, and public input on the proposals is currently being gathered. The proposals are controversial with some anglers, and several groups have been formed to help fight the efforts. The stocking proposals are based on the muskie and northern pike management plan that was adopted by DNR in 2009.

Walk-in Hunter Access Program

There continues to be interest in creating a hunter walk-in access program similar to programs in the Dakotas and other western states. A work group has recommended that a pilot project be implemented to determine the potential landowner interest and “price-point” for a program in the state, and efforts are underway to identify potential sources of funding for the program.

Wolf Management

After several failed efforts by USFWS to de-list wolves in the western Great Lakes states, Minnesota submitted a petition in March asking that the “Minnesota Grey Wolf” species that was the basis for listing of wolves as Endangered in Minnesota be de-listed. Although the 90-day period for response has expired, the Service has not yet provided a response. The department is also participating the USFWS “Structured Decision Making” process to examine wolf species, sub-species, and Distinct Population Segments across the lower 48 states and recommend listing strategies comprehensively across all of those populations.

Wildlife Disease Efforts

CWD was confirmed on a large elk ranch in southeastern Minnesota in 2009, and intensive surveillance of hunter-killed deer last fall failed to detect the disease in wild deer. Work also continued to conduct surveillance of bovine TB in wild deer in the northwest in response to a TB outbreak in cattle that spilled over to wild deer.