

**MICHIGAN
STATE REPORT**
May 10, 2024

Scott Bowen, Director
Michigan Department of Natural Resources
P.O. Box 30028
Lansing, Michigan 48909

STAFFING

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has approximately 1,400 permanent employees, 1,600 non-career/seasonal employees, and a \$530.2 million budget that supports programs and infrastructure for wildlife and fisheries management, state parks and recreation areas, trails, boating programs, conservation and law enforcement, forest management, state lands and minerals, and the historical museum and archives.

Scott Bowen currently serves as the Director of the DNR, Shannon Lott as the Natural Resources Deputy, and Kristin Phillips as the Administrative Deputy. Randy Claramunt now serves as Chief of the Fisheries Division, and Sara Thompson now serves as Chief of the Wildlife Division.

FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024 BUDGET

The DNR's fiscal year (FY) 2024 budget totals \$530.2 million, representing a less than 1% decrease from the DNR's original enacted FY 2023 appropriations due primarily to the reduction of one-time investments. Specifically, the budget includes \$71.1 million of General Fund support which represents a 45% increase from the DNR's original enacted FY 2023 budget. Noteworthy investments for managing and protecting natural and cultural resources include:

- Invasive Species Prevention and Control: \$4 million total General Fund increase, including \$2 million ongoing to support invasive species response teams and \$2 million one-time for a \$1.5 million deposit in the Invasive Species Fund to support invasive species immediate response actions and \$500,000 for equipment purchases.
- Emergency Response and Fire Management: \$3.7 million ongoing General Fund investment to add and equip wildland fire staff to better support wildfire prevention and suppression efforts and facilitate expanded participation in emergency management responses.
- Broadening Access to the Outdoors: \$1.5 million ongoing investment (\$780,900 General Fund) to promote participation and engagement in outdoor recreation and foster knowledge of natural resource conservation among traditionally underserved populations.
- Nature Awaits Program: \$8 million General Fund (provides two years of funding at \$4 million annually) to support a new program that will provide fourth grade classes across the state the opportunity to visit a state park and participate in outdoor learning sessions facilitated by the DNR.

- State Forest Carbon Projects: \$1.5 million ongoing investment (restricted funds) backed by revenue generated from the sale of carbon credits on state forest land to support the work of the DNR's Office of Public Lands, as well as forest management, wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, and climate-resilient infrastructure projects.

Overall, the DNR's FY 2024 budget is comprised of state restricted funds (66%), federal funds (19%), General Fund (14%), and private funds (1%). Federal funding consists mainly of special purpose categorical grants from various federal agencies, such as the U.S. Department of the Interior, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Federal funds support programs for wildlife and fisheries habitat and management, forest management, recreation, and other natural resource programs. Restricted funding is generated from sales of licenses, user fees, and other charges. These funds support wildlife and fisheries programs, operation of Michigan's 104 state parks, harbor and boating access site development, marine safety enforcement and education, snowmobile and off-road vehicle trail repair and development, and operation of nearly 140 state forest campgrounds. The DNR also generates timber sales revenue from state lands, most of which is used for the protection and development of our state forests.

A decade has passed since fishing and hunting licenses were increased in Michigan and inflationary costs have reduced the effectiveness of budgets. Fisheries and Wildlife Division's two major sources of revenue – Game and Fish Fund (licenses) and Sport Fish Restoration Act (federal aid) – have been markedly flat since the 2014 license increase with a small blip in 2020. Meanwhile, inflation has significantly reduced the buying power of that revenue. Michigan is working on a strategy to pursue a fee increase through the restructuring hunting and fishing licenses. The approach includes seeking input from anglers and hunters on approaches to restructuring fishing and hunting licenses to improve Michigan's capacity for managing its natural resources and retain stakeholder satisfaction.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

Work on the FY 2025 budget is expected to culminate in the next month as negotiations begin with the administration and legislature. The top priority for this year's budget cycle is updating the Recreation Passport program by making it "opt-out" instead of "opt-in" to generate more revenue for state parks.

The DNR has been tracking a wide range of policy bills. The DNR supports expanding the current youth mentored hunting program to include individuals, both minors and adults, with cognitive disabilities. The DNR also supports a bill package that would allow for hunter safety courses to be taught in public schools for credit.

In 2023, the Legislature passed bills to allow for conservations officers to petition individuals to receive a mental health evaluation, create a hunting and fishing guide regulatory framework, and commercial fishing reporting reform to align with the Department's Decree agreement with the 1836 Tribes.

NOTEWORTHY DIVISION ISSUES AND PROJECTS

Fisheries Division will stock Arctic Grayling eggs in selected streams in 2025. Three-year classes of broodstock were obtained from the Chena River in Alaska. A recent surplus in broodstock resulted in stocking nearly 2,000 Arctic Grayling into three lakes in fall of 2023 to provide catch and release angling opportunities. Habitat suitability work continues by state and tribal agencies to prioritize streams to receive the first eggs for stocking into remote site incubators. The Michigan Arctic Grayling Initiative steering committee will decide on streams for stocking based on the habitat suitability work, water temperature regime and existing fish populations. Continued research on the survival of stocked Arctic Grayling and their interactions with Brook Trout will be conducted at the DNR Hunt Creek Research Station.

A management plan is near completion for the Walleye and Yellow Perch recreational fishery on Saginaw Bay, Lake Huron, a popular destination for Michigan anglers. The walleye population collapsed in the 1950's and achieved recovery targets in 2009 after a series of food web changes in Lake Huron favored increased reproductive success. Walleye production has remained elevated and is presumed to be a primary causative factor in recent declines of Yellow Perch recruitment via predation. Recent bag limit adjustments to both species have promoted historically high observations in recreational walleye harvest but have failed to enhance Yellow Perch abundance. The new plan was developed in consultation with stakeholders to describe past management efforts, reflect current fishery status, and guide future management decisions.

A \$30 million investment across all fish production facilities is underway, primarily focusing on aging infrastructure and prioritizing energy efficiency and biosecurity. With facilities ranging from 20 to nearly 50 years old, upgrades are essential, especially with original components still in use. Highlights include a new cool-water rearing building and a new brood isolation building, housing future Arctic Grayling brood lots. The investments aim towards rearing healthier, more robust fish for stocking in public waters. The need for future investment is crucial for embracing modern fish rearing techniques, efficiencies, and practices. Lastly, Fisheries Division's outreach and education unit has been busy planning to use the fishing trailer awarded to Michigan from the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation. The fishing trailer will be deployed in the Detroit area for outreach efforts to urban audiences and in partnerships with several nonprofit organizations that are teaching families how to fish.

In 2023, Wildlife Division's surveillance for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) focused on the northwestern portion of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan. This was the 3rd year of the State's rotational approach to surveillance. The goal of the rotational approach is to systematically sample across the entire state, working on early disease detection in areas where CWD had not yet been detected. More than 4,000 deer were tested in 2023, and the first free-ranging white-tailed deer with CWD in Midland and Ogemaw counties were discovered. Surveillance goals for CWD in 2024 will finish up some additional work in the northwest and northeast Lower Peninsula, while also getting an early start on surveillance in the Upper Peninsula. Despite the option for hunters to submit directly to the diagnostic laboratories there is still some demand for hunter service testing. The DNR plans to continue encouraging use of self-submission to diagnostic laboratories to alleviate demand, allowing us to focus on disease surveillance objectives. Surveillance for CWD

continues year-round through collection of roadkill deer, issuance of deer damage permits, and culling by sharpshooters around ‘outlier’ positive deer locations.

To aid in eradication of bovine tuberculosis (*Mycobacterium bovis*; bTB) in free-ranging white-tailed deer, the State of Michigan began a small field trial this Spring examining the feasibility of vaccinating free-ranging deer against bTB. This study is in cooperation with USDA-Wildlife Services and the National Wildlife Research Center in Colorado. Vaccine delivery units (VDUs) made primarily of alfalfa shaped into small cubes, are being used to house an alginate sphere containing the liquid BCG vaccination. VDUs were placed in a grid like fashion for two-days and consumption rate was documented. Cameras around the sampling captured deer activity and numbers. This portion of the trial study was complete after deer at 16 sites were successfully vaccinated. Next steps will be to harvest deer at and around these sites, 8-weeks post vaccination, collect a blood sample to test for immune response, and collect cranial lymph nodes for bTB testing. These results and the follow-up data analyses will shed light on vaccine coverage of deer and the potential for future use as a new tool at a larger scale.

Monitoring of mortality events of the highly pathogenic avian influenza virus (HPAI) continued in 2023 after the 2022 detection in Michigan in two captive non-native swans. Sampling of hunter-harvested and live-trapped waterfowl was also conducted by the National Wildlife Disease Program, USDA. In total, 104 samples were positive for HPAI. These positive samples included 18 different species of wildlife. Mortality monitoring and sampling of harvest and live-trapped birds will continue in 2024.

The Michigan list of threatened and endangered plants and animals was updated this year and now includes 407 species. Experts from universities, the Michigan Natural Features Inventory, other conservation organizations and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources recommended changes to the list based on recent data.

- 36 species were removed from the list. For instance, trumpeter swans were removed because their populations have grown as a result of significant conservation efforts by many partners over decades.
- 58 species were added to the list as either threatened or endangered. Three bat species – little brown, northern long-eared and tri-colored – were listed as threatened due to significant population declines in the state from white-nose syndrome. Rusty-patched bumblebees and American bumblebees were added to the endangered species list because, like many pollinator species, their populations are experiencing large declines.

The DNR worked with the Minnesota and Wisconsin DNRs to develop the Lake States Forest Management Bat Habitat Conservation Plan to address the potential for forest management activities to cause harm to federally endangered bat species. This plan allows for forest management activities such as timber harvesting, tree planting and prescribed burning to take place and identifies conservation measures to implement for bats. The DNR has also developed a Bat Habitat Conservation Plan Landowner Enrollment Program to both support forest management activities on private lands and conservation of bats.

American Rescue Plan Act funds (\$10 million) were appropriated to restore wetlands in Michigan's Lake Erie and Saginaw Bay watersheds to reduce phosphorus, nitrogen, and sediment levels entering the waters of Lake Erie and Saginaw Bay. Projects are focused on acquiring and restoring former wetlands, protecting existing high-quality wetlands, and strategically removing marginal farmland. Funds will be allocated by the DNR for priority wetland acquisition and restoration projects, while grants will be awarded to communities and partners for interagency wetland restoration projects and targeted wetland restoration efforts. The DNR plans to spend \$3 million on acquiring restorable wetlands in specific areas and ~\$300,000 for a wetland restoration demonstration project. Ducks Unlimited, through a program grant agreement with the DNR, will issue grants for wetland restoration projects and oversee the distribution of \$4 million to eligible projects through a competitive selection process.

Significant fires in 2023 included the 2,442-acre Wilderness Trail Fire (June 3rd), 212-acre Four Corners (July 10th), 136-acre Fife Lake Outlet (May 28th) and the 303-acre Bravo Fire (April 12th). An Incident Management Team was assigned to the Wilderness Trail Fire. The warmer and dryer spring conditions of 2023 resulted in early season drought conditions and an extended spring fire season across the Upper Peninsula, as well as the 378-acre Colfax Fire and 130-acre Miller Drop Zone Fire, both in the Northern Lower Peninsula. Staff also responded and filled 56 interagency assignments in 2023, of which 105 were out of state and 63 were in Michigan.

In the realm of renewable energy, the DNR has leased two former predominantly metallic and mineral mining sites located in Dickinson, Crawford, and Roscommon Counties for the development of two utility-scale solar energy facilities. State Park and Recreation Area also continue to explore solar array installations, while not utility-scale, the goal to transform 4 locations into 100% energy independent parks. The DNR also piloted two carbon sequestration projects, both of which have been listed with the American Carbon Registry (ACR).. The carbon project developer (Anew Climate) is currently seeking a buyer for the carbon credits of the most recent project.

Parks and Recreation Division is actively implementing numerous state park infrastructure projects funded by \$250 million American Rescue Plan Act funds appropriated by the legislature. Of the \$250 million, \$30.2 million was allocated to fund the establishment of the 104th state park adjacent to downtown Flint along the Flint River. Construction is scheduled to begin in June 2024.

The DNR's mobile application, "Michigan DNR Hunt Fish", initially launched in the summer of 2022, has now gained over 334,500 downloads and accounts for 11% of Michigan's on-line license sales. The DNR will use the app to make digital harvest tags available for the first time in agency history for participating hunters during the 2024 Fall turkey season.

Law Enforcement Division hired 12 new conservation officers in 2023. This hiring consisted of experienced previous law enforcement officers (pre-certified) which allowed for a condensed academy that focused on conservation law enforcement issues. With these officers' previous training and experience, there was no need for them to complete the basic training that is normally required when hiring new officers. The division has been facing the same hiring challenges as many agencies. This approach helped the division address a number of vacancies in an efficient manner with well-qualified applicants.

Michigan continues to support Illinois with its nonfederal sponsorship for the Planning, Engineering, and Design phase of the Brandon Road Interbasin Project to protect the Great Lakes from invasive carp. As a partner, Michigan contributed \$8 million required for \$10.2 nonfederal cost share. The States and Provinces Forum (all 8 states and 2 provinces), facilitated by the Great Lakes Commission, has met several times with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to provide an opportunity for review of the design process. Engineering is complete for Increment IA and USACE is beginning design on Increment IB. Construction of both increments at the same time will allow for significant cost savings and a reduction in construction time. In FY23, \$226 million was appropriated for construction through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Construction will require a 90:10 federal/nonfederal cost share for the project that is estimated to cost a total of \$1.146 billion. Michigan and Illinois have appropriated the nonfederal cost share amount (\$64 and \$50 million respectively) for construction. A Project Partner Agreement (PPA) will need to be signed before construction can begin and Michigan has fully committed to that partnership. A sense of urgency exists as silver carp are known to enter the approach channel to the lock, two live invasive carp were found in Lake Calumet, and the population of invasive carp is increasing in the pool below Brandon Road. Construction of the Brandon Road Interbasin project will be important for protecting the Great Lakes from invasive carp.