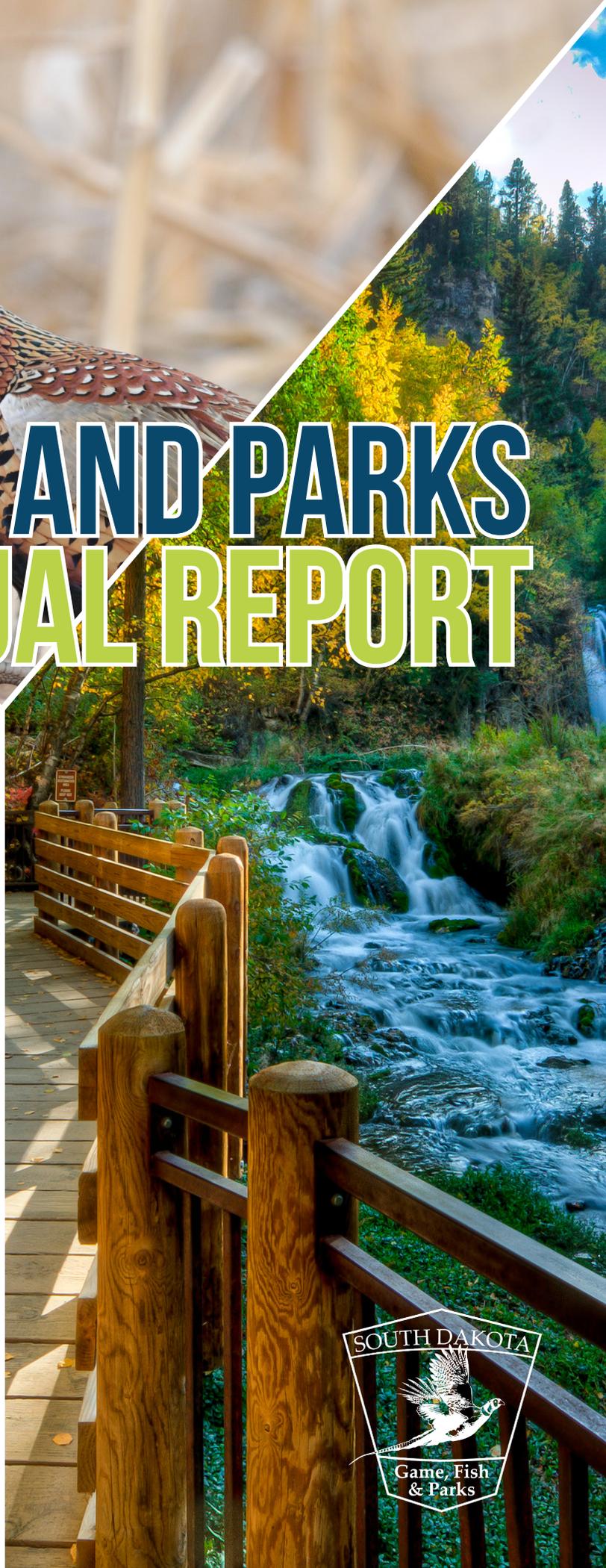




South Dakota

GAME, FISH AND PARKS 2015 ANNUAL REPORT





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@birddydog



#SDintheField

SHARING THE STORIES OF OUR CUSTOMERS



@hashoreoutdoors



@derekbaune



@samsoholt



@ericanthonyanderson

SOUTH DAKOTA GAME, FISH AND PARKS 2015 ANNUAL REPORT

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2015 COMMISSION MEMBERS

JOHN COOPER — CHAIR
CATHY PETERSON — VICE CHAIR

PAUL DENNERT
BARRY JENSEN
GARY JENSEN
SCOTT PHILLIPS
DUANE SATHER
JIM SPIES



2016 COMMISSION MEETINGS

JANUARY 14-15, 2016
REDROSSA CONVENTION CENTER, PIERRE

FEBRUARY 2016
NO MEETING

MARCH 3-4, 2016
REDROSSA CONVENTION CENTER, PIERRE

APRIL 7-8, 2016
MCCORY GARDENS, BROOKINGS

MAY 5-6, 2016
BLUE BELL LODGE, CUSTER STATE PARK

JUNE 2-3, 2016
WATERTOWN CONVENTION CENTER, WATERTOWN

JULY 7-8, 2016
REDROSSA CONVENTION CENTER, PIERRE

AUGUST 4-5, 2016
REDROSSA CONVENTION CENTER, PIERRE

SEPTEMBER 2016
NO MEETING

OCTOBER 6-7, 2016
OUTDOOR CAMPUS WEST, RAPID CITY

NOVEMBER 3-4, 2016
HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS, BRANDON

DECEMBER 15-16, 2016
REDROSSA CONVENTION CENTER, PIERRE



A LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY

Since joining South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) as Department Secretary, I have been reminded again and again that the hunting, fishing, camping and other outdoor recreational opportunities are almost limitless in this state.

More importantly, the passion, dedication and engagement of our staff and South Dakota's sportsmen and women are unmatched.

Our agency's mission is to perpetuate, conserve, manage, protect and enhance South Dakota's wildlife resources, parks, and outdoor recreational

opportunities for the use, benefit, and enjoyment of the people of this state and its visitors. Customer service is a large part of this mission and continues to be at the forefront of who we are as an agency. Listening to our customers, making changes to accommodate their needs and the needs of others, being helpful, courteous, transparent and reliable are all ways we build lasting relationships with our customers. If staff members question the way something is being done, it is likely our customers are questioning it, too. Customer service is the foundation of our business and we plan to continue to make it a high priority in 2016.

A GFP strategic plan will be new as we move into 2016. This plan is meant to be fluid as we grow and change together. I am committed to crafting a straightforward and meaningful strategic plan and look forward to working with our team to provide deliverables that are attainable by all staff. We will make mistakes along the way, and that is okay. We all need to ask questions about the plan and help to enforce it. It is a concrete way of providing growth and direction for any successful business.

In the pages ahead, we showcase many proverbial "irons in the fire." This annual report is a snapshot of GFP's management, research, services, public relations, education and initiatives from the past year.

I am energized by what lies ahead and look forward to continuing to work with my staff and the public to preserve South Dakota's natural resources and expand opportunities.

Kelly Hepler



HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2015



HABITAT

▶ Launched the Habitat Pays public relations campaign and website in October as a result of eight recommendations written by the Governor's 2014 workgroup to improve wildlife habitat conditions throughout the state.

AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES

- ▶ The GFP Commission adopted new regulations in the spring prohibiting the transport of boats with drain plugs in place and the transport of aquatic bait in lake or river water.
- ▶ Overhauled the SD Least Wanted public relations campaign as a result of the aforementioned regulation. The campaign included improved targeted messaging to anglers and boaters and a newly-designed website (sdleastwanted.com) documenting information as it relates to aquatic invasive species in South Dakota.

FISH STOCKING

- ▶ Stocked 43.7 million fish throughout the state.
- ▶ Introduced lake trout to Deerfield Lake in the Black Hills and began stocking Lake Sharpe with young paddlefish to reestablish the population.

MANAGEMENT PLANS

- ▶ Completed and implemented management plans for Black Hills lakes and streams.
- ▶ Completed the first-ever elk management plan in April 2015, which was developed to provide management direction for the next five years. The plan outlines population objectives and required extensive discussions with grazing permit holders. The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA), honored the Department with a Special Achievement Award for its efforts on the plan.
- ▶ Began efforts toward a statewide deer management plan. Currently there are four wildlife management plans in progress; revisions for the existing pheasant, turkey, resident Canada goose plans and now the development of the new deer management plan.
- ▶ Received approval for South Dakota's revised wildlife action plan in May 2015. This plan focuses on habitats that positively impact multiple species to maximize limited resources. An interactive website also compliments the plan for a more in-depth user experience.
- ▶ Updated the Custer State Park Resource Management Plan. The plan is currently out for public review and, when finalized, will provide a 10-year strategic guide for the integrated management of forest, fire, range, wildlife and bison in the park.

LANDOWNERS AND WILDLIFE DAMAGE

- ▶ Responded to more than 2,500 wildlife damage reports and provided assistance to 1,900 landowners and producers throughout the state.
- ▶ Leased more than 1.22 million acres of private land for public hunting access through the Walk-In Area program.
- ▶ Provided landowners with cost-share and incentive payments exceeding \$1.24 million for establishing wildlife habitat.





PARKS AND RECREATION

- ▶ Increased visitation at State Park and Recreation Areas by four percent more than 2014, totaling 7.5 million visitors.
- ▶ Hosted a record of 21,500 visitors to commemorate the 50th Annual Buffalo Roundup at Custer State Park.
- ▶ Initiated the Go Fourth program, distributing free park passes to 12,500 fourth graders, promoting active lifestyles and South Dakota State Park and Recreation Areas.
- ▶ Hosted more than 315,000 camper units in State Park and Recreation Areas.
- ▶ Initiated the Environmental Impact Study for the Mount Rushmore National Memorial Connector Trail, linking the existing George S. Mickelson Trail from south of Hill City to Mount Rushmore National Memorial.
- ▶ Started construction on a new visitor center at Custer State Park and broke ground for a visitor center at Good Earth State Park at Blood Run.
- ▶ Awarded bids for the first phase of improvements at Custer State Park Resorts, including the replacement of the Legion Lake Store, the replacement of 14 cabins, the Game Lodge Motel unit renovation and three new reunion cabins.
- ▶ After an intense 10 year effort, less than 6,000 trees infested with mountain pine beetles were found in Custer State Park in 2015, down from 25,000 trees last year and a high of 100,000 in 2012.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

- ▶ Updated the licensing system so hunters, anglers and trappers can now carry licenses on their smartphone devices in lieu of traditional paper copies.
- ▶ Provided funding (in addition to all criminal fines already remitted) to local school districts in South Dakota through fines assessed for the illegal take of trophy wildlife. More than \$33,000 in liquidated civil damage payments have been remitted to school districts from the illegal taking of wildlife since legislation was revised in 2010.
- ▶ Conducted an interstate road check in conjunction with the opener of the west river deer season. Inspected 1,253 hunters and anglers and documented 147 violations.
- ▶ Collaborated with South Dakota State University to form a new degree program: natural resource law enforcement. This degree will focus on environmental policy, natural resource management, criminal justice and conservation biology.
- ▶ Investigated 213 reports of illegal hunting, fishing or trapping activity via citizen reports on the Turn In Poachers Hotline (1-888-OVERBAG), resulting in 126 arrests.



Photo © Dean Pearson

Photo © SD Tourism

Photo © SD Tourism

Photo © Chad Coppes

2015 FINANCE INFORMATION

wildlife

GAME AND FISH FUND REVENUE

YEAR	LICENSES, PERMITS, FEES	OTHER REVENUE	TOTAL REVENUE
PROJECTED FOR 2016	\$29,500,000	\$1,630,000	\$31,130,000
2015	\$28,607,909	\$1,674,291	\$30,282,200
2014	\$27,791,476	\$2,361,868	\$30,153,345

WILDLIFE DAMAGE CONTROL FUND REVENUE

YEAR	LICENSES, PERMITS, FEES	OTHER REVENUE	GAME AND FISH FUND	TOTAL REVENUE
PROJECTED FOR 2016	\$305,000	\$31,750	\$915,000	\$1,251,750
2015	\$305,192	\$33,129	\$910,551	\$1,248,872
2014	\$295,629	\$5,949	\$902,856	\$1,204,434

WILDLIFE TOTAL BUDGET

YEAR	BUDGET
2016	\$48,369,618
2015	\$45,796,735
2014	\$46,176,912

PARKS AND RECREATION REVOLVING FUND REVENUE

parks and recreation

YEAR	LICENSES, PERMITS, FEES	TAXES	OTHER REVENUE	TOTAL REVENUE
PROJECTED FOR 2016	\$18,509,291	\$2,055,000	\$1,849,000	\$22,413,291
2015	\$17,350,839	\$1,516,068	\$13,952,279*	\$32,819,186
2014	\$16,634,293	\$1,498,081	\$3,266,836	\$21,399,211

*Includes \$11.5 million bonding for Custer State Park resort upgrades.

SNOWMOBILE TRAILS FUND REVENUE

YEAR	LICENSES, PERMITS, FEES	TAXES	OTHER REVENUE	TOTAL REVENUE
PROJECTED FOR 2016	\$543,041	\$433,440	\$48,000	\$1,024,481
2015	\$449,757	\$363,935	\$27,689	\$841,381
2014	\$474,943	\$401,198	\$46,128	\$922,269

PARKS AND RECREATION TOTAL BUDGET

YEAR	BUDGET
2016	\$31,857,040
2015	\$29,514,377
2014	\$27,668,424

TOTAL GAME, FISH AND PARKS REVENUE

YEAR	BUDGET
PROJECTED FOR 2016	\$74,211,951
2015	\$71,546,098
2014	\$70,368,507

2015 GFP EMPLOYEES

435 PERMANENT STAFF MEMBERS.

IN ADDITION, GFP HAD 600 SEASONALS AND 150 INTERNS DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS.

GFP EMPLOYEES HAVE A TOTAL OF
5,897 YEARS OF SERVICE.



Photo © Casey Archibald



Photo © Sam Stukel



Have we mentioned our irreplaceable volunteers?

In addition to more than 500 paid staff, seasonals and interns, the Parks and Recreation Division also enjoyed a record year of volunteer service in 2015, with 418 individuals and 18 groups contributing 113,622 volunteer hours in parks across the state. The number of individual and group volunteers held steady, but the total hours contributed is up more than 6 percent (6,768 hours) compared to 2014, which was also a record year. Volunteers provide a variety of services that make visitors' stays more enjoyable, from visitor interaction to light maintenance. The HuntSAFE program as well as the Outdoor Campuses had more than 19,000 hours of volunteer work from 900 volunteers.

HABITAT PAYS

In December 2013, Governor Dugaard hosted a Pheasant Habitat Summit. More than 400 stakeholders gathered in Huron to learn more about the condition of South Dakota's habitat through presentations and discussions from key leaders throughout the state. Following the summit, Governor Dugaard formed a habitat work group comprised of sportsmen and women, landowners, leading conservation and agriculture academics, legislators and government officials. He charged members with developing recommendations focused on practical solutions for maintaining and improving pheasant habitat compatible with agriculture production. The 13-member group reviewed survey results, scientific data, letters and suggestions, and released a report in September 2014. This report is available at habitat.sd.gov.

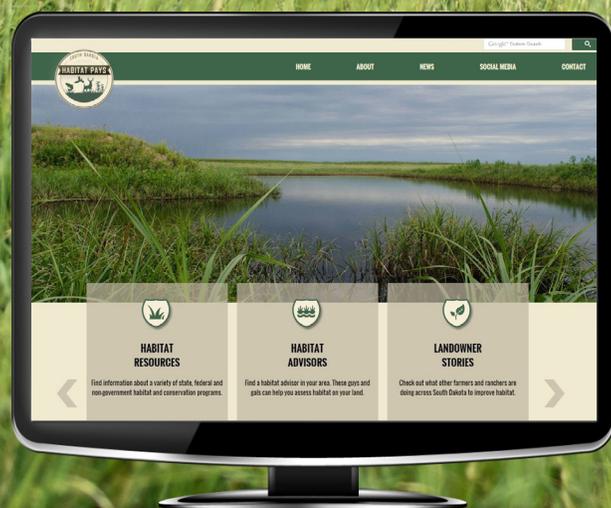
One of the group's recommendations was to create an awareness campaign

to connect landowners with the many resources available for establishing habitat on their land. Another recommendation was to implement a website specific to habitat management with information on federal, state, local and non-government programs for landowners to learn about habitat and hunter access programs. Together these recommendations became Habitat Pays.

The Habitat Pays initiative is a collaborative effort between the South Dakota Departments of Game, Fish and Parks and South Dakota Department of Agriculture. The two departments have been working together to meet with agribusinesses, commodity organizations, cooperatives and producers to discuss ways to foster collaboration, improve communication and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

The newly developed Habitat Pays website (habitat.sd.gov) is a great

resource for the farmers and ranchers of South Dakota. Videos on the site feature stories of landowners in various parts of the state who have taken advantage of programs to maintain or establish habitat. The site also includes a comprehensive list of resources, along with a list of habitat advisors who are experts in conservation programs and habitat planning. These advisors possess the knowledge of federal, state and local programs to assist landowners in finding the right program or programs to meet their personal habitat and land use goals. Habitat advisors are available to assist landowners in designing, developing and funding habitat improvements on private lands. Background information, images and contact information for each of the habitat advisors is available on the website so landowners can put a name and a face together.



AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES (AIS)



Photos © Sam Stukel

The Department significantly increased efforts to effectively manage and slow the spread of AIS throughout 2015. Evidence of zebra and quagga mussels was discovered for the first time in South Dakota in Angostura Reservoir and Lewis and Clark Lake in the fall of 2014.

These discoveries were the catalyst for modifications to the South Dakota AIS program. New regulations were adopted by the GFP Commission in the spring of 2015 that prohibited the transport of boats with drain plugs in place and the transport of aquatic bait in lake or river water. The primary goal of these regulations is to eliminate or drastically reduce the amount of water moved from lake to lake. The SD Least Wanted public relations campaign was overhauled as a result of the aforementioned regulation which improved targeted messaging to anglers and boaters as well as a newly designed website documenting all information as it relates to aquatic invasive species in South Dakota (sdleastwanted.com). The site is mobile friendly, easy to navigate, provides an interactive map and serves as the home for the social media hashtag campaign, #sdleastwanted.

Sampling efforts were a priority at Angostura Reservoir and Lewis and Clark Lake in 2015. Analysis of all water samples taken from Angostura Reservoir by GFP and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation were negative for veligers (larval mussels); therefore Angostura Reservoir remains listed as “suspect” for two more years. Unfortunately, zebra mussels were found to be successfully reproducing and were wide-spread in Lewis and Clark Lake, which elevated the status of the lake to an “infested” waterbody.

Outreach, education and enforcement efforts were increased at Lewis and Clark Lake following the discovery in August, in an attempt to limit the possibility of adult and larval mussels “hitchhiking” away from the lake via trailered watercraft. A large interstate work group consisting of multiple municipal, state, federal and non-governmental organizations was created and will be working throughout the winter months to manage and mitigate the effects of the infestation in 2016.

WILDLIFE



Photo © Casey Archibald



Photo © Sam Stukel

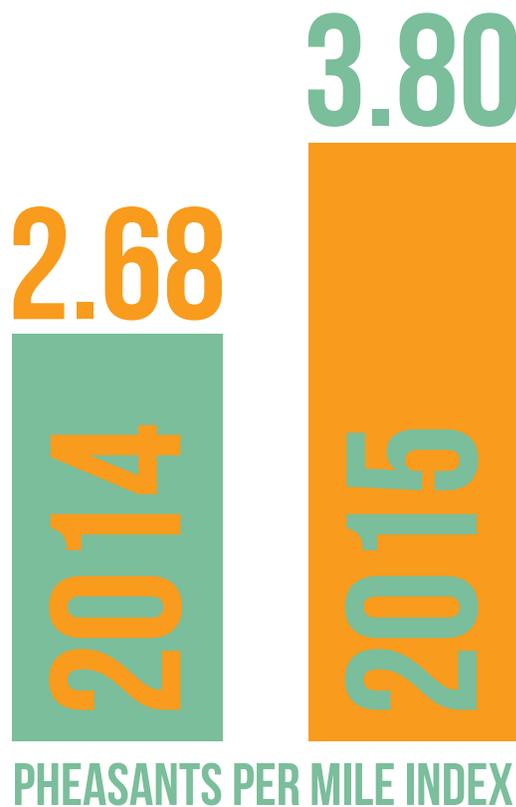


terrestrial

PHEASANT POPULATION IMPROVES FROM 2014, DOUBLES SINCE 2013

The Department conducts pheasant brood surveys each summer to evaluate the status of pheasant populations and predict population levels relative to previous years. In 2015, survey indices were derived from 109 30-mile pheasant brood routes distributed throughout South Dakota where pheasants are found in sufficient number for surveying. Routes are surveyed from July 25 to August 15 each year using standardized methods on mornings when weather conditions are optimal for observing pheasants. Pheasant brood numbers are also opportunistically counted throughout the survey period to estimate an average number of young per brood. Pheasants per mile (PPM) estimates are calculated by adding the product of mean brood sizes and broods observed with numbers of cocks and hens observed on each route. PPM estimates for 2014 and the average of the previous 10 years are compared with the 2015 survey results.

Pheasant abundance has declined since 2008 as a result of habitat loss, particularly in Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) grasslands, in combination with a series of unfavorable weather events. However, the 2015 PPM index of 3.80 was 42 percent higher than the 2014 index of 2.68, 153 percent higher than 2013, yet 30 percent lower than the 10-year average. Below average winter snowfall likely resulted in good over-winter survival of hen pheasants during the past two winters. Near normal precipitation and temperatures were recorded during the nesting and brood-rearing season, which likely contributed to strong reproductive success where adequate habitat remains. More details of the 2015 pheasant brood count can be found online at:
gfp.sd.gov/hunting/small-game/pheasants.aspx.



BUILDING HABITAT WITH LANDOWNER COOPERATORS

More than 80 percent of South Dakota is privately owned, making private landowners the most influential over wildlife habitat in the state. Since the 1970s, GFP has offered voluntary private land habitat programs to landowners. The Department works with numerous private landowners to cost-share projects every year. Projects include providing winter cover and food, developing nesting habitat, and protecting vital areas for wildlife benefit.

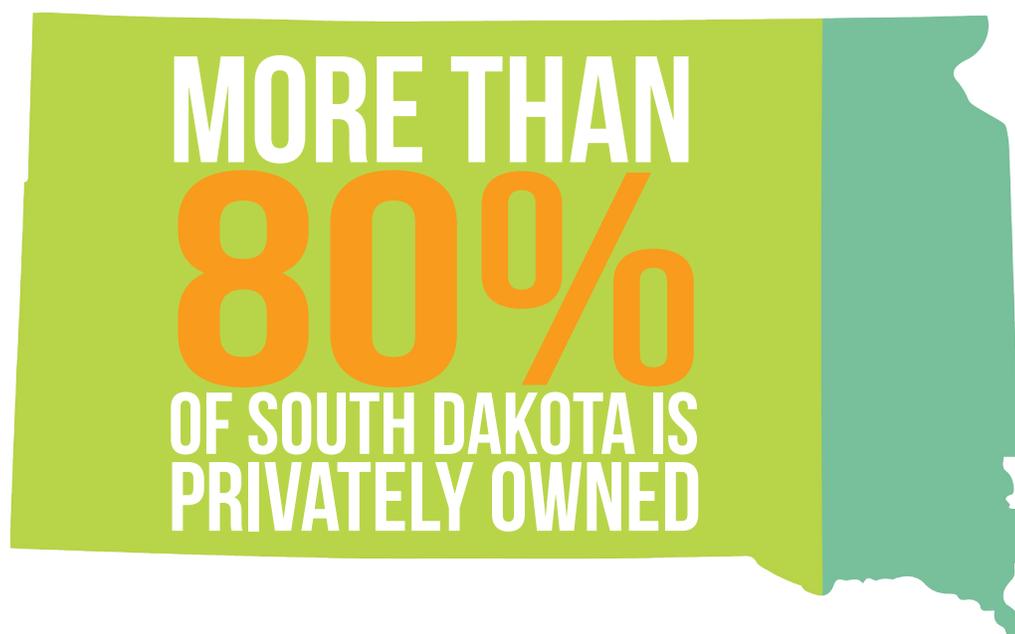
Every year, the wildlife food plot program is the most utilized habitat program offered by GFP in South Dakota. It provides supplemental food sources for wildlife during times when food is otherwise scarce. New in 2015, GFP expanded the food plot program offerings to include an annual mix of flowering plants (including radish, buckwheat, sunflower, flax, canola, etc.) to provide habitat for pollinating insects, which in turn provide foraging opportunities for young birds, especially pheasants. In 2015, 10,127 acres of food plots were enrolled in the GFP food plot program and payments to the 896 landowner partners totaled approximately \$207,954.

Severe winters in South Dakota play a major role in wildlife survival rates. Ground-level cover can often help increase wildlife survival during storms and throughout the cold months. In 2015, GFP established partnerships with 31 private landowners to create roughly 115 new acres of woody habitat at a cost-share of \$217,099.

Without question, undisturbed nesting cover is the most vital piece of habitat for most South Dakota wildlife, especially when it comes to ground nesting birds such as pheasants, grouse and waterfowl. Through the Wildlife Partners Program, GFP worked with 14 landowner partners to establish more than 249.6 acres of new nesting cover so far, at a cost-share of \$30,760.

Whether habitat consists of grass, trees or wetlands it is important to protect habitat from destruction by cattle or other agricultural uses. Through the Wildlife Partners Program, GFP funded eight habitat fencing agreements with private landowners to protect more than 58 acres of land, at a cost of \$18,546.

The Wetland and Grassland Program specializes in working with landowners interested in developing or restoring wetland and associated uplands for waterfowl, upland game birds and other wildlife. In most cases, it also enhances livestock and grazing land management. In 2015, 184 projects were completed with 141 cooperating landowners through this program, affecting a total of 35,334 acres. Thirty-seven wetland projects restored, enhanced or created 228 acres of wetland habitat and 147 upland projects restored or enhanced 35,106 acres of grassland and riparian areas. The total cost of the projects was \$1,550,645 with a cost-share of \$774,187 provided to landowners by GFP. Landowner partners contributed \$772,058 and other conservation partners provided \$4,400 toward the projects.



PUBLIC HUNTING ACCESS PROGRAMS PROVIDE HUNTER OPPORTUNITIES

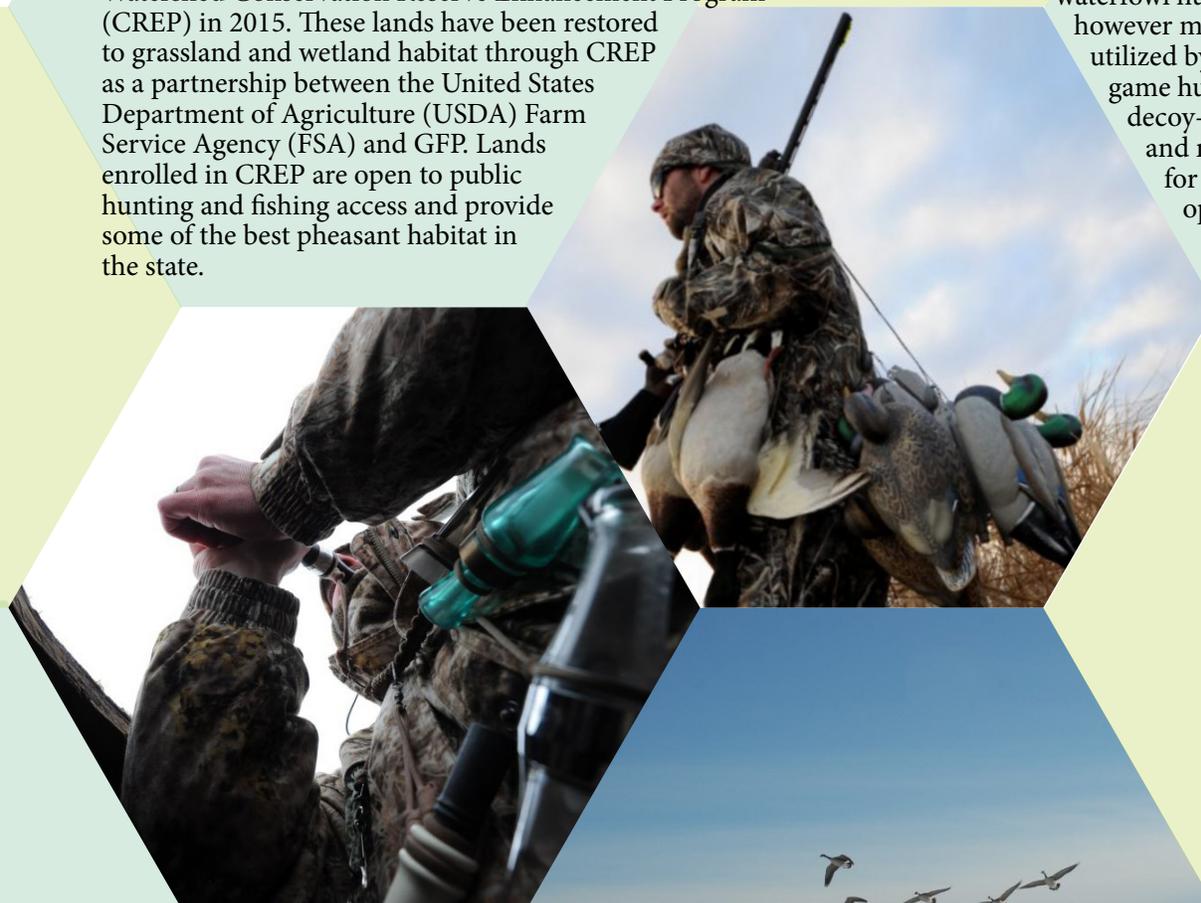
Providing public access to private land continues to be a high priority. The Department leased 1.22 million acres of private land under the Walk-In Area program in 2015 at an expenditure of just over \$2 million. GFP added almost 1,000 acres to the Special Access Areas (SAA) component of the Walk-In Area program in Brown, Day, Marshall and Roberts counties totaling 46,315 acres. These are working farmlands enrolled for public hunting of all wildlife species, with an emphasis on waterfowl field hunting opportunities. SAA are typically a mixture of farm fields, wetlands, occasional tree belts and CRP.

Private landowners received \$3 million from GFP for having more than 81,000 acres enrolled in the James River Watershed Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in 2015. These lands have been restored to grassland and wetland habitat through CREP as a partnership between the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) and GFP. Lands enrolled in CREP are open to public hunting and fishing access and provide some of the best pheasant habitat in the state.

Seventeen cooperators enrolled 20,822 acres in the Controlled Hunting Access Program (CHAP). These acres are private land leased for public hunting opportunities, primarily big game, where landowners are compensated based on the number of hunters who use their land. Hunters are required to complete a check-in form. There are seven new CHAP areas in 2015, which has provided Canada goose field hunting opportunities around Sioux Falls.

The Lower Oahe Waterfowl Access Hunting Program (LOWAA) included 41,434 acres from six cooperating landowners in the central part of the state, near the Missouri River. These lands are leased primarily to provide waterfowl hunting opportunities, however much of the land is also utilized by upland game and big game hunters. There are 40 decoy-only registration fields and numerous pits available for pass-shooting hunting opportunities.

GFP LEASED
1.22
MILLION
ACRES OF PRIVATE LAND
UNDER THE WALK-IN AREA PROGRAM
IN 2015



Photos © Jim Thompson Jr.

WORKING WITH LANDOWNERS TO ALLEVIATE WILDLIFE DAMAGE

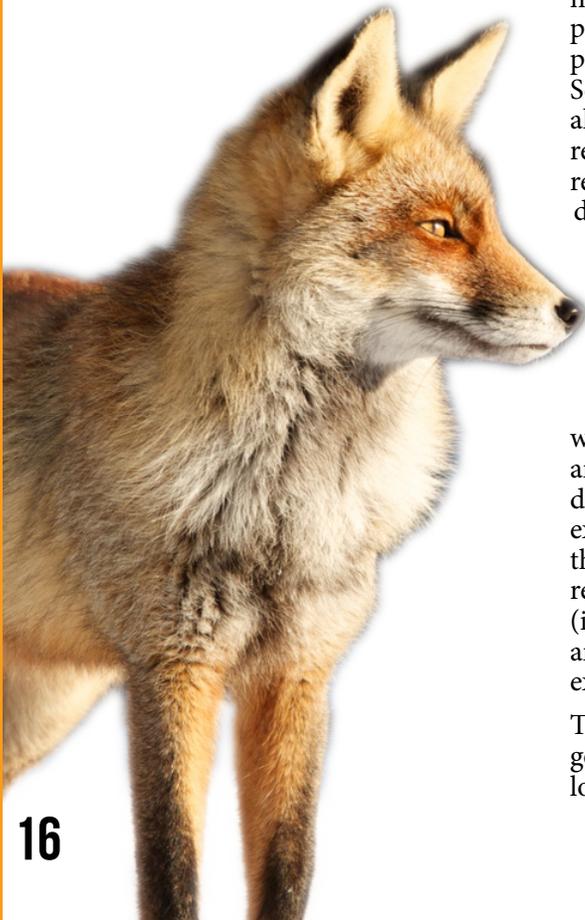
The Department recognizes private landowners and producers as essential partners in wildlife management and could not successfully manage wildlife resources without them. The majority of wildlife is produced on privately-owned lands. Sportsmen and women rely on private lands for hunting opportunities and access. It is because of these important considerations that GFP operates the comprehensive Wildlife Damage Management (WDM) program. The WDM program is designed to work directly with landowners and producers to reduce wildlife damage to crops, stored-feed supplies, livestock loss and other types of damage. GFP spends between \$2.3 million and \$3 million annually to operate the WDM program. In 2015, wildlife damage specialists and assisting staff responded to more than 2,500 requests for service or assistance which directly impacted nearly 1,900 landowners and producers.

High coyote populations and favorable livestock prices produced a significant demand for GFP's predator control services and resulted in a heavy workload to address these requests. Wildlife damage specialists responded to more than 1,300 requests for assistance regarding livestock loss from coyotes and fox. More than \$730,000 was expended responding to these requests for service, including staff time, mileage and supplies. GFP recently partnered with USDA-Wildlife Services to fund a second aircraft for increased aerial predator control in eastern and central South Dakota, which will become operational in 2016. This addition will allow for more effective predator control and will increase efficiencies when responding to livestock loss events and livestock protection requests.

Sylvatic plague (a wildlife disease) throughout most of western South Dakota, excellent range conditions and previous control efforts have substantially reduced the number of prairie dog encroachment issues compared to five years ago. GFP treated more than 3,000 acres of prairie dog colonies on private land in western South Dakota. GFP also responded to 430 requests for assistance regarding beaver damage and 97 nuisance animal complaints.

Wildlife damage staff worked more than 25,000 hours to assist livestock producers with livestock loss and other wildlife damage concerns. Total expenditures to address these requests for service regarding these species (i.e. coyote, fox, beaver and nuisance animals) exceeded \$1.1 million.

The resident Canada goose population was lower this past year



and the demand for damage abatement services decreased as well. Staff worked with 426 landowners to address more than 600 requests for service regarding Canada goose damage to growing crops in the eastern part of the state. To respond to these landowner requests, staff drove 63,000 miles and worked more than 9,400 hours. Total expenditures to address Canada goose depredation was \$384,000, substantially less than the record levels experienced in 2012, which cost around \$720,000.

GFP is currently managing an increase of the elk population in most western hunting units. In an effort to increase landowner tolerance for higher elk numbers, GFP initiated several enhanced elk damage abatement programs this past year. GFP spent \$226,000 to address 66 landowner concerns regarding elk damage to stored-feed supplies and to growing crops. These efforts included cost-share assistance with the construction of protective stackyards and fencing materials and food plots for elk usage and hazing efforts.

South Dakota's deer population continues to be at or below management objectives in most areas. Due to these low numbers and little snow accumulation in most areas, the demand for deer depredation assistance was minimal compared to several years ago. GFP worked with 55 landowners to address deer depredation concerns. This work included providing cost-share assistance for the construction of stackyards and protective fencing projects, installation of livestock panels to protect stored hay and feed supplies, and supplemental food sources. GFP staff drove a total of 32,000 miles and worked more than 4,000 hours to provide assistance to landowners experiencing deer, antelope and turkey depredation. GFP spent more than \$314,000 assisting landowners with these issues. Statewide, GFP expenditures exceeded \$1.2 million for game species (i.e. elk, deer, Canada goose, turkey depredation assistance in 2015.

WILDLIFE DAMAGE SPECIALISTS RESPONDED TO MORE THAN

1,300 REQUESTS

FOR ASSISTANCE REGARDING LIVESTOCK LOSS FROM

COYOTES AND FOX.

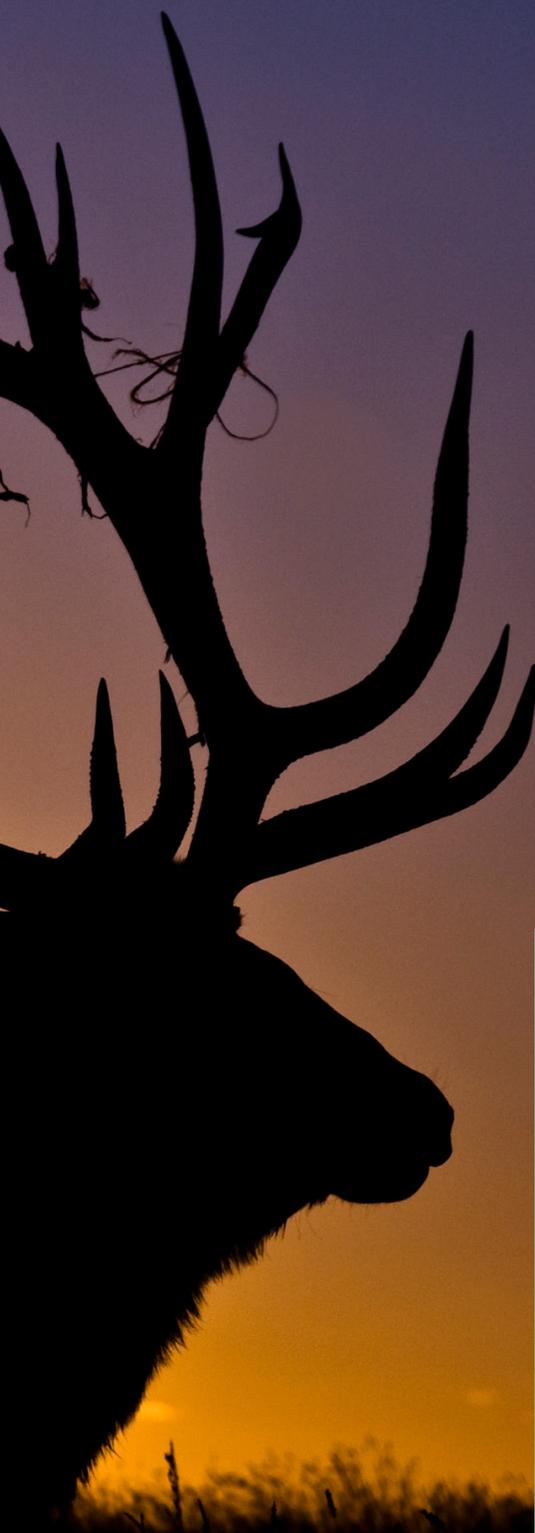


PROGRESS OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PLANS

One of the key recommendations provided to the Department as a result of the 2013 big game review was the need for detailed management plans. Since the release of that report, crafting management plans has been a priority. Several new management plans were completed in late 2014 and early 2015. The first-ever elk management plan was completed in April 2015 which specifically outlined population objectives and required extensive discussions with a diverse group of stakeholders. Currently, there are four management plans in progress. These plans include revising the existing pheasant, turkey and resident Canada goose plans and writing a statewide deer management plan. Similar to completed plans, these four will include public input and the formal adoption of each by the GFP Commission.

A silhouette of an elk head with large, branching antlers is shown against a bright, orange and yellow sunset sky. The elk's head is in the lower right, and its antlers extend upwards and to the left. The background is a gradient of colors from dark purple at the top to bright yellow at the bottom, where a line of grass is visible.

APPROXIMATELY 20 STAFF MEMBERS WERE INVOLVED IN DRAFTING A ROBUST ELK MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR SOUTH DAKOTA.



ELK MANAGEMENT PLAN RECEIVES SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

At the 2015 summer meeting of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA), the Department of Game, Fish and Parks received a Special Achievement Award for its newly completed elk management plan.

The development of the plan started with a public opinion survey that reached 2,000 hunters and more than 2,000 landowners. Next, a stakeholder group was formed, consisting of 17 members and was used as a venue to discuss new ideas and concerns related to managing elk within the Black Hills.

Group members consisted of representatives from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, South Dakota Wildlife Federation, Black Hills Sportsmen Club, South Dakota Bowhunters, South Dakota Stockgrowers Association, South Dakota Cattlemen's Association, Spearfish Grazing Association, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, South Dakota Department of Agriculture, six members from the GFP Regional Advisory Panels and one GFP commissioner. The work consisted of four meetings with department staff discussing and recommending direction on population objective, forage allocations, depredation issues, license allocations and habitat projects benefitting both wildlife and livestock.

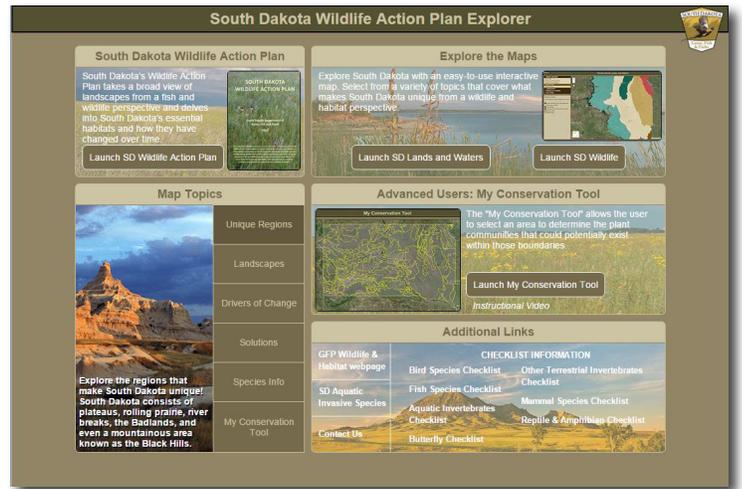
The drafted plan was then open to the public to provide input and comments for an extended period of time.



Photos © Casey Archibald

SOUTH DAKOTA WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN

South Dakota's first wildlife action plan was approved in 2006 and a revised plan was approved in May 2015. South Dakota's plan uses a habitat approach, with different methods used for terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Such an approach provides for the needs of species known to rely on a particular habitat or landscape type. More importantly, this method accommodates other species, both plant and animal, that may not be on our radar. This plan focuses on habitats that positively impact multiple species to maximize limited resources.



The Department unveiled a new website called the South Dakota Wildlife Action Plan Explorer: arcgis.sd.gov/server/gfp/wap/Default.aspx.

The "Launch SD Wildlife Action Plan" tab links to the Wildlife Action Plan in full or by individual chapters.

"Explore the Maps" by selecting the tab for South Dakota Lands and Waters or South Dakota Wildlife. Within the "South Dakota Lands and Waters" theme, you can explore major regions of the state, learn about the terrestrial and aquatic landscapes that provided the planning frameworks, investigate conservation challenges faced by species and habitats and see examples of possible solutions to these challenges.

Also within South Dakota Lands and Waters are descriptions and depictions of known habitat challenges, including land conversion, habitat fragmentation, extreme weather, climate change and invasive species.

Users can select a species of greatest conservation need through the "Launch SD Wildlife" and learn about its life history. The project icons link to more information resulting from the project. Featured projects were funded with state wildlife grant dollars. More projects will be added in the future, including efforts from funding sources besides state wildlife grants.



Photo © Casey Archibald

STATEWIDE DEER COLLARING EFFORTS EXPAND KNOWLEDGE

Understanding population dynamics of white-tailed and mule deer and determining annual rates of change requires knowledge of both fawn and adult survival rates. Annual rates of change within a deer population are influenced primarily by adult survival and the number of fawns that reach one year of age. Thus, the primary objective of these efforts is to estimate annual survival rates of white-tailed and mule deer adults and fawns occupying agricultural, prairie and forested landscapes throughout South Dakota. This provides critical information in determining if a deer population is increasing, decreasing or remaining constant, which directly influences deer license numbers and harvest strategies.

From January 15 to March 15, 2015, 137 female and 72 male, adult or yearling white-tailed deer were captured and collared via helicopter net gun and netted cage traps in southeastern (Lake and McCook Counties) northeastern (Brown County) and the Black Hills of South Dakota. Capture and collaring efforts also occurred on 141 adult female mule deer in west-central (Pennington and Custer Counties; Badlands study area), central (Sully County; Missouri River study area) and western (Black Hills study area) South Dakota.

In addition, monitoring continued on 89 mule deer and 182 white-tailed fawns that were captured and collared in five study areas throughout South Dakota. Annual survival rates ranged from 29 percent to 57 percent for both white-tailed and mule deer fawns during 2014. Between May 21 and June 19, 2015, 241 white-tailed and 148 mule deer fawns were captured and collared in six study areas across South Dakota through daytime ground searches and opportunistic visual observations.

The above information was used to model deer populations and rates of change, and ultimately assisted GFP staff and the Commission in developing the 2015 deer season structure.

Mule deer research plans for 2016 include capturing and collaring approximately 200 adult does, 90 juveniles and 150 fawns in three study areas: Missouri River Breaks, Badlands and the Black Hills. White-tailed deer research plans include capturing approximately 190 adult does, 55 adult bucks, 90 juveniles and 150 fawns in three study areas throughout South Dakota: Lake/McCook Counties, Brown County and the Black Hills. These deer will be monitored bimonthly to determine survival rates. In addition, collared deer still alive from previous captures and study areas will continue to be monitored where sample sizes are sufficient.



PADDLEFISH GET A NEW START IN LAKE SHARPE

Through the efforts of GFP and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), a project is underway to learn more about paddlefish movements in Lake Sharpe and to increase the abundance of the resident population. The USFWS stocked 11,000 eight-to-ten inch paddlefish in Lake Sharpe in September.

Transmitters were implanted into some of these fish to help identify locational hotspots for smaller paddlefish, which should lead to improved stocking strategies in the future. Depending on availability of young paddlefish from Gavin's Point National Fish Hatchery, paddlefish will be stocked annually into Lake Sharpe.

To learn what areas of the reservoir will be utilized by adult paddlefish, 23 adults, implanted with radio transmitters, were released into Lake Sharpe in May 2015. The fish will be monitored for three years, which is the life of the transmitter batteries. Biologists hope to identify likely congregation points for paddlefish to help answer questions surrounding the feasibility of a fishery in the future.

Along with bolstering the abundance of this unique fish, another possible benefit of stockings could be the development of a recreational fishery. Downstream Lake Francis Case has been stocked with paddlefish for decades to maintain a healthy brood stock for spawning purposes. In 2012, GFP had the first paddlefish snagging season at that lake in more than 20 years. With paddlefish being an extremely long-lived species, anglers will have to wait a while, but part of this project will be the evaluation of snagging opportunities for Lake Sharpe anglers in the future.

**23 ADULT
PADDLEFISH
WERE IMPLANTED WITH
RADIO
TRANSMITTERS
AND WERE RELEASED
INTO LAKE SHARPE IN MAY.**



Photo © Sam Stukel

Underwater Paddlefish Photos © Carter Warden

11,000
PADDFISH
WERE RELEASED INTO
LAKE SHARPE
IN SEPTEMBER.

STOCKING ADULT LAKE TROUT IN DEERFIELD RESERVOIR

Thanks to a cooperative effort between GFP and the USFWS, Deerfield Reservoir was recently stocked with lake trout for the first time, in 2015. Prior to this stocking, Pactola Reservoir was the only water supporting a lake trout fishery within the Black Hills.

Lake trout fisheries are generally slow to develop. These fish are long-lived but slow growing, often taking years for stocked juvenile fish to reach a mature, harvestable size. However, by utilizing lake trout from the Federal Hatchery Broodstock Program, GFP obtained more than 800 large (approximately six pounds) fish for the reservoir. Due to the size of these fish, they are expected to immediately create a recreational fishery and provide the possibility for natural reproduction to occur. An additional 97 of these big fish were stocked into Pactola Reservoir to supplement that popular fishery. An angler use survey will be conducted at Deerfield Reservoir to determine the use of this new fishery. The lake trout fishery in Pactola Reservoir has proved to be a popular draw for anglers and the hope is that the establishment of a lake trout fishery in Deerfield Reservoir will create the same excitement.



STANDARDIZED DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Department is currently contracting with Esri, an environmental technology company in California, to create a data management system that will provide data storage, analysis and reporting capabilities. The goal of this new system is to improve the maintenance and management of fisheries information.

During the 2016 field season, digital data entry devices will be tested. Real time data will be entered and analyzed with system modifications made during the testing phase. Esri will be utilizing a series of applications to drive this data management system. Throughout the process, GFP staff will learn how to modify and update the system. The structure in which they create the system and its reliance on existing, regularly updated applications means there will not be a need for major revamps to the system over time. This data management system will not become “out-of-date” like a free-standing system would.

Along with this database initiative, aquatics staff will be capitalizing on the opportunity to standardize methods for gill net and trap net surveys. Adoption of newly devised American Fisheries Society standard survey methods by GFP will allow for increased ability to compare survey results with other state natural resource agencies utilizing the same methods. Planning is currently under way to purchase necessary nets and implement these new survey methods along with the testing phase of the data management system that will take place during the 2016 field season.



FISHERIES RESEARCH HELPS MANAGEMENT EFFORTS

Management-driven fisheries research was a major part of GFP's fisheries program in 2015. Federal aid within the Sportfish Restoration program and state wildlife grant funds helped support the management of a variety of game and nongame fish species.

To better evaluate muskellunge populations, GFP compared musky catches in two different trap net designs: first, large trap nets (five by six foot frames, five foot diameter hoops, double throated, single five by 100 foot lead and 0.75 inch knotless mesh) and second, small trap nets (three by five foot frames, three foot diameter hoops, single throat, single three by fifty foot lead and 0.75 knotted mesh). Muskellunge abundance (less than 24 inches in total length) was also estimated in three eastern South Dakota lakes. More muskellunge were collected in the large, rather than the than small trap nets, at all three lakes. Mean total lengths of muskellunge did not differ significantly between the large and small trap nets. As expected, musky population abundance is low (population range =0.06 fish/acre to 0.19 fish/acre) in these populations. Sampling with large trap nets during the spring, combined with population estimates, will improve GFP's ability to monitor and manage musky when compared to sampling with small trap nets.

Survey work for a statewide freshwater native mussel survey is now complete. Evidence of mussel occurrence was observed from 59 percent of east river sites and 23 percent of west river sites, which had not been previously sampled. Using cumulative survey information from all river basins east of the Missouri River, current survey efforts have observed a 57 percent decline in species richness (35 species historically to 15 species from current survey efforts). Current populations have shifted to be dominated by a few generalist species.

To learn more about Hipple Lake, a backwater on Lake Sharpe, and its importance to gizzard shad production and over-winter survival, fisheries staff are tracking shad movements and locations. After the 2011 flood on the Missouri River, the connection between Hipple Lake and Lake Sharpe was at risk of silting in. With only anecdotal evidence of gizzard shad use of Hipple Lake, 40 shad have been tagged and tracked with ultrasonic telemetry equipment over the past two years. While it appears there is significant use of Hipple Lake by gizzard shad, GFP will continue tracking their movement in Lake Sharpe for at least another two and a half years to learn more about shad movements and locations so decisions can be made on removal of silt from the mouth of Hipple Lake.

(Continued on page 27)

Research at Cleghorn Springs State Fish Hatchery examined how changes in tank spray-bar design may influence trout rearing performance. Additionally, a study documenting airborne formalin levels resulting from a variety of egg treatment scenarios involving multiple tray incubation stacks was conducted. Results from this project provide the basis for procedures to maximize occupational health.



At McNenny State Fish Hatchery, new research initiated in 2015 examined Chinook salmon spawning methods, alternative salmonid egg incubation techniques, the efficacy of iodine disinfection on salmonid eggs and environmental enrichment during trout rearing. Hatchery staff published nine manuscripts in 2015 on topics including alternative protein sources in salmonid diets, salmon kidney bacteria, environmental enrichment, water velocities during tank rearing, occupational health and spawning.



Multiple research projects are currently in the early stages of fieldwork. Ongoing projects include estimation of the economics of Missouri River reservoir fisheries, factors related to angler satisfaction and implications for fisheries management on reservoirs and utilization of hydroacoustic equipment to learn more about fish communities in Pactola Reservoir, an important cold and cool water fishery for Black Hills anglers.



(Continued from page 26)

Radio telemetry tracking of rainbow trout stocked in Oahe marina on Lake Sharpe is being conducted to determine the persistence and dispersal of spring and fall catchable rainbow trout and increase availability of trout in the Oahe Marina and tailrace. The ultimate goal is to determine a stocking strategy that will maximize use of stocked trout by anglers. In 2015, 20 spring-stocked and 20 fall-stocked fish were surgically implanted with transmitters and stocked in Oahe Marina. Preliminary results indicate trout stocked on April 1 and 8 stayed in Oahe Marina an average of 12.9 and 6.4 days. From April 16 to 19, 12 of the remaining 17 fish exited Oahe Marina, indicating stocking trout earlier would likely increase availability to anglers. Movements of fall-stocked fish are being analyzed. This study will be replicated in 2016.

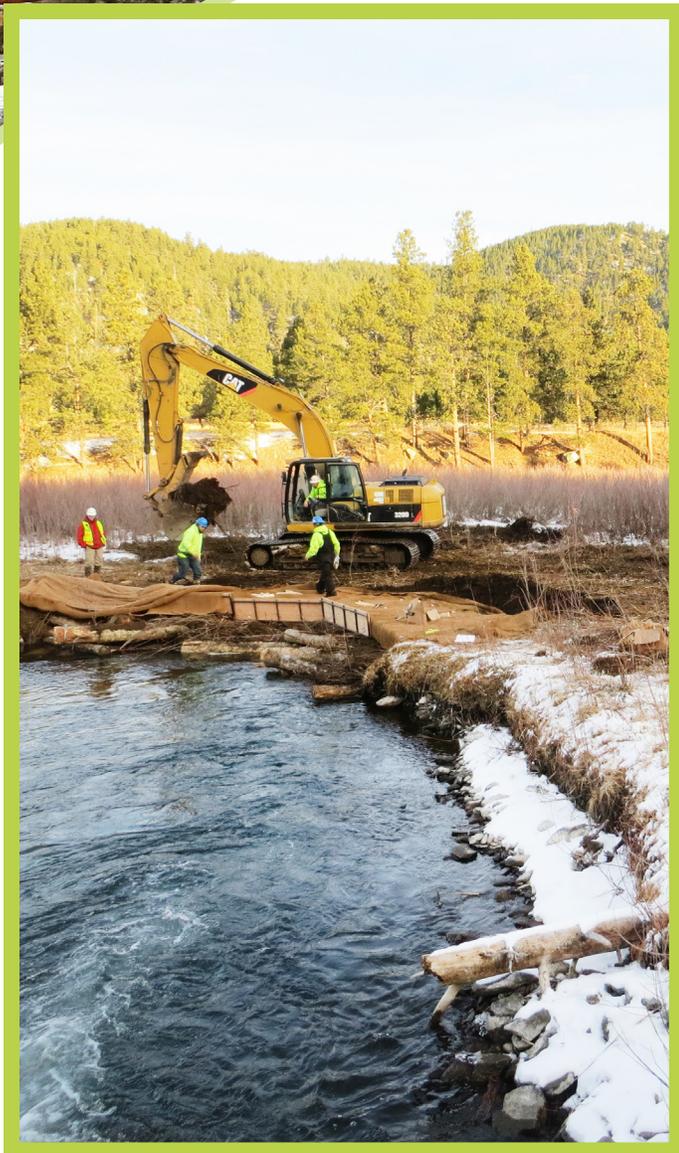




RAPID CREEK HABITAT RESTORATION

Rapid Creek below Pactola Dam is one of four catch-and-release areas with the special regulation extending two miles below the dam. Although these two miles of stream represent less than 0.5 percent of the perennial coldwater stream habitat in the Black Hills, it is the largest tailwater fishery and a popular destination for fly fishing anglers.

The construction and placement of 11 large, woody debris structures and boulder placements was originally scheduled for the winter of 2013. Heavy snow fall and high flows delayed the project for two years. The structures were designed to increase summer and winter cover for trout, protect banks prone to erosion and increase plant abundance. The ultimate goal to increase quantities of all sizes of trout in this stretch of Rapid Creek. Approximately 2,500 feet of stream will be improved, providing suitable holding areas for trout and greater opportunities for anglers. Construction began in the first week of December 2015 and should be completed by the end of January 2016, with some finishing work to completed in the Spring. This is a cooperative project with the Black Hills Fly Fishers, USDA Forest Service, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the City of Rapid City.



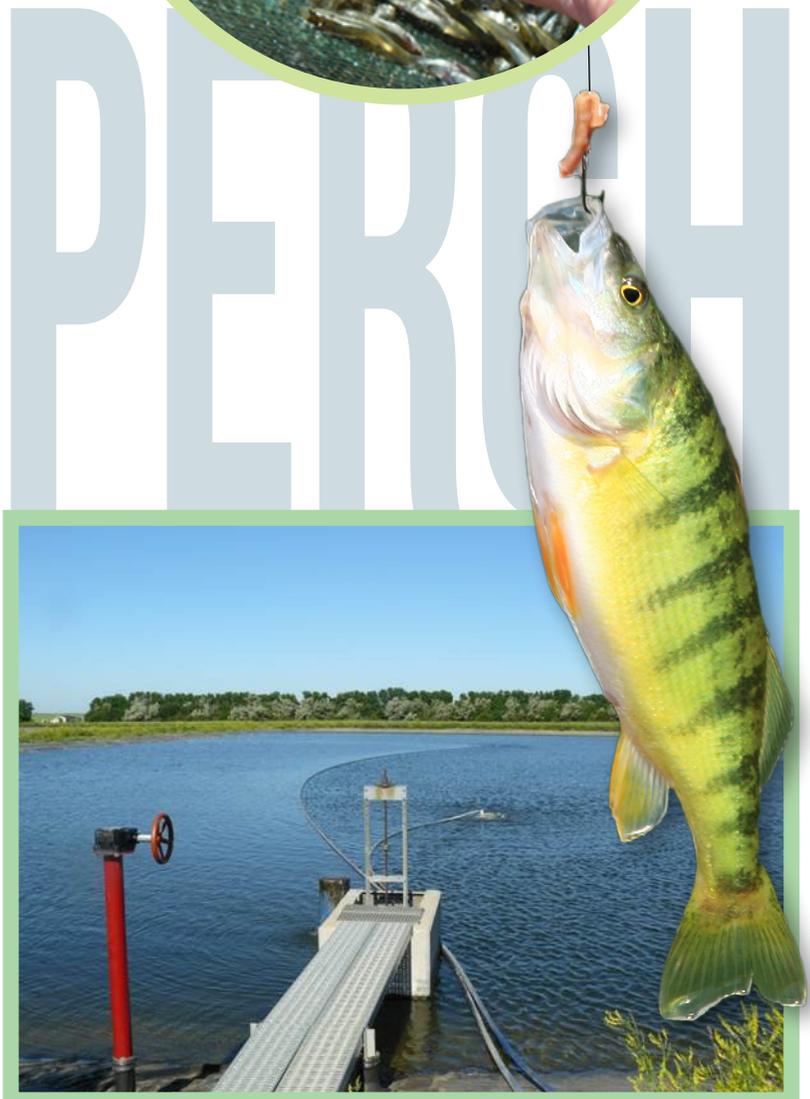


YELLOW PERCH PRODUCTION AT BLUE DOG HATCHERY

Yellow perch are the second most popular fish with South Dakota anglers. Perch are being hatchery-raised and stocked into lakes to improve fishing in situations where natural production has not been high enough for development of a quality fishery that anglers are seeking.

Techniques to maximize perch production in the hatchery are being evaluated to establish standard rearing protocols. Eyed eggs, newly-hatched fry, small fingerlings (one to two inches) and large fingerlings (three to four inches) have been produced for stocking into lakes and hatchery ponds. Large fingerling yellow perch are also being trained to eat hatchery food in preparation for over-winter production on warm water with a goal of producing seven-inch perch for spring stocking. Pond production of small fingerling perch has been variable with most returns being lower than anticipated. In 2015, ponds stocked with eyed eggs placed on vegetation produced higher returns than other stocking techniques. Fry production was largely unsuccessful during 2015 and will likely be abandoned.

Preliminary results indicate that stocking small fingerlings (one to two inches) yellow perch can increase overall abundance in smaller lakes (1,000 acres or less), especially during low or normal water periods. However, natural production during periods of high water typically exceeds what can be accomplished through fingerling stocking.



ASIAN CARP COOKOUTS

To the surprise of most anglers, Asian carp are quite edible. The prime portions of their fillets are firm, white and neutral in taste, very similar to many food-fish popular in local areas. By cooking and serving Asian carp at local events, GFP staff opened communication about eating these fish while educating the public on their use as a food source.

The Yankton fisheries crew conducted six cookouts throughout 2015. They cleaned and served more than 250 silver, bighead and grass carp during the process. More than 300 people have had the chance to give these fish a try and the results are almost always the same. "I can't believe that's carp!" is the most common reply; often coming while the person reaches for another handful of deep-fried nuggets.



"I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT'S CARP!"

law enforcement

HUNTERS, ANGLERS AND TRAPPERS CAN NOW CARRY LICENSES ON THEIR SMARTPHONE DEVICES

Hunters, anglers and trappers in South Dakota will notice when they login to their account through the GFP online licensing system their small game, fishing or trapping license has a QR code in the upper right hand corner. This code allows GFP conservation officers to electronically scan the license on smartphone devices while in the field, in lieu of a paper copy. Customers can log into their GFP account on their device to view their small game, fishing or trapping license and take a picture or screenshot of it.

Electronic versions are now an acceptable method of carrying a small game, fishing or trapping license. If customers choose to print and carry a paper copy of their small game, fishing or trapping license, that continues to be an allowed practice. This does not apply to federal waterfowl stamps, tags and licenses mailed from the GFP licensing office. As technology evolves, GFP is committed to actively engaging with customers throughout the state to provide them with the digital services that make it easier to do business with us.

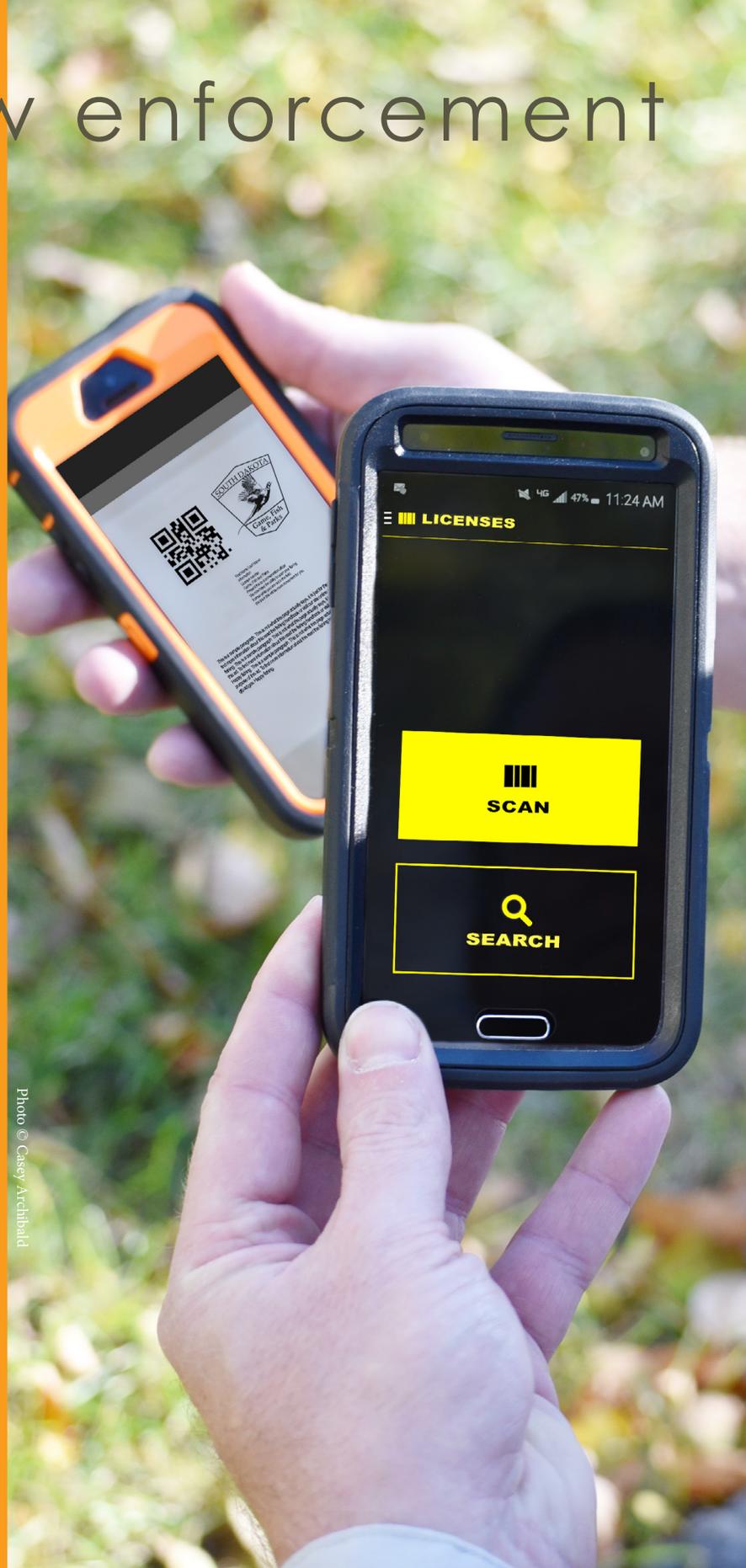
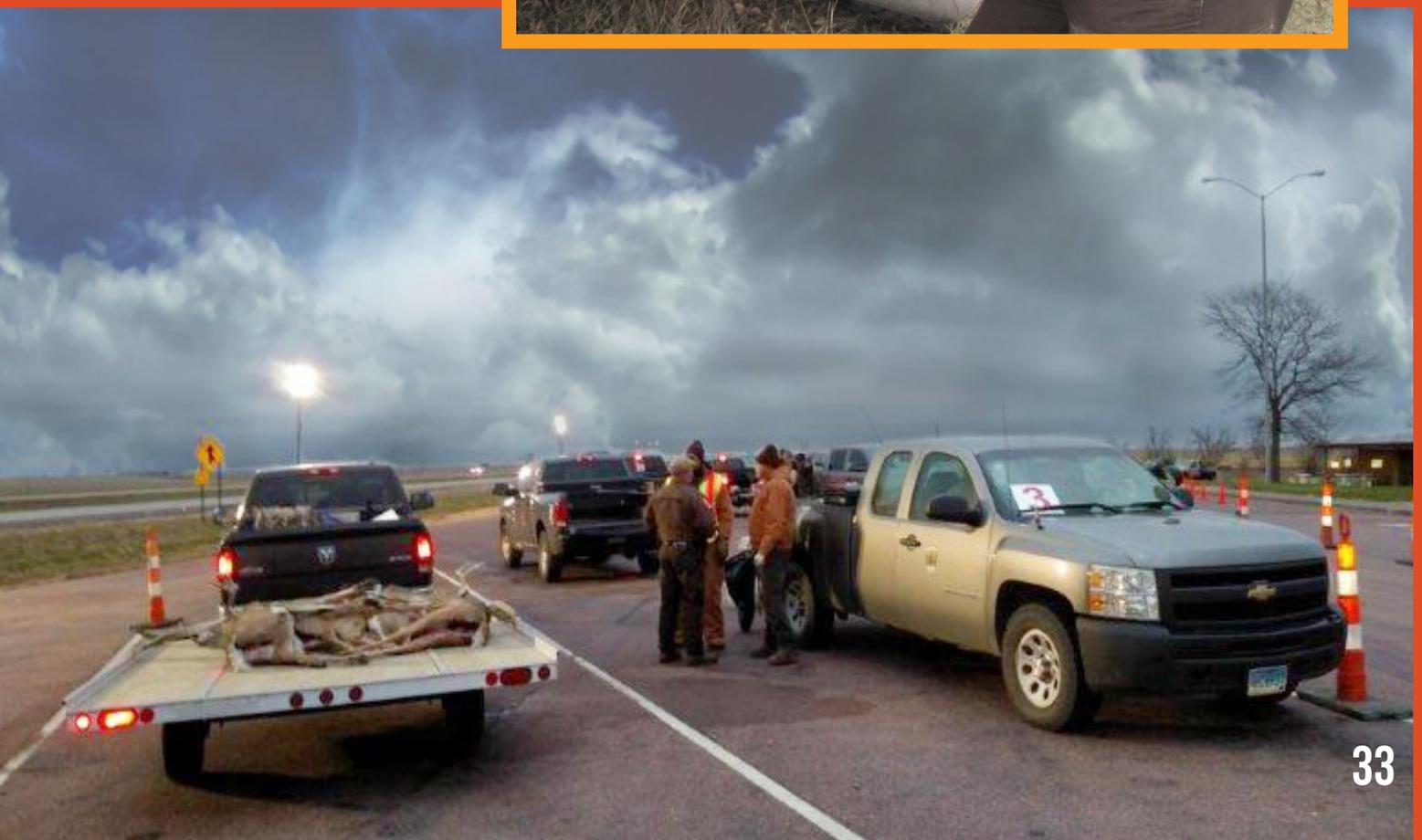
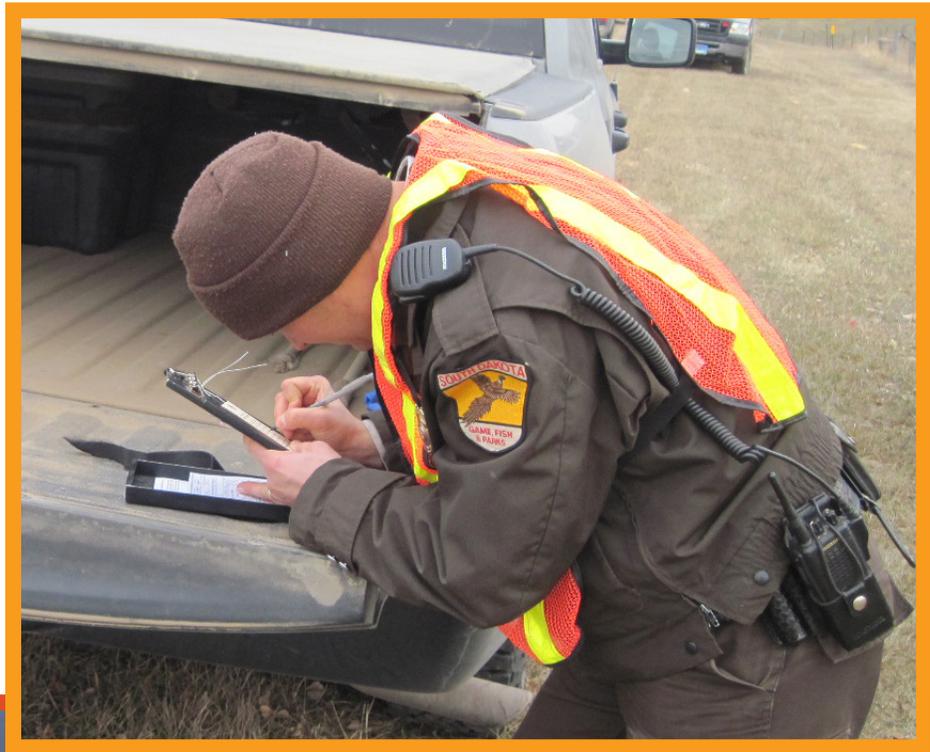


Photo © Casey Archibald



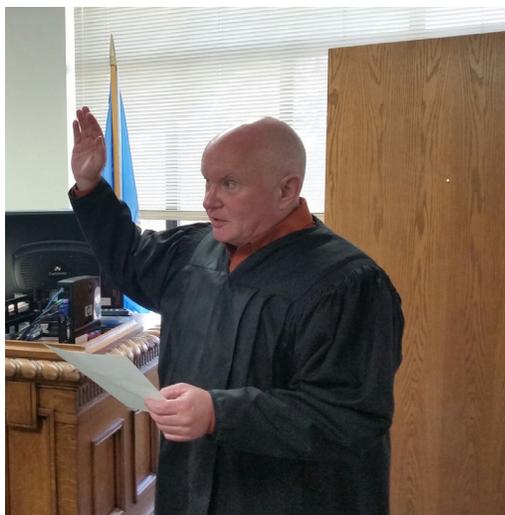
CONSERVATION OFFICERS CONDUCT INTERSTATE ROAD CHECK

During the opening weekend of the west river deer hunting season in November, a road check was held near White Lake, along Interstate 90. The check also occurred during a time when other adjacent western states held big game hunting seasons. South Dakota pheasant and waterfowl seasons were also in full swing at the time. GFP provided the bulk of personnel, using conservation officers and non-law enforcement employees. Representatives from other wildlife law enforcement agencies included state officers from Wyoming and Montana and federal officers (special agents and refuge officers) from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Members of the South Dakota Highway Patrol and the Aurora County Sheriff's Office were also present. The check began at 2:00 p.m. on November 15 and concluded at 2:00 p.m. on November 16. More than 3,300 vehicles passed through the checkpoint, with approximately 20 percent of them having game or fish on board. From those vehicles checked for compliance, 147 violations were detected.



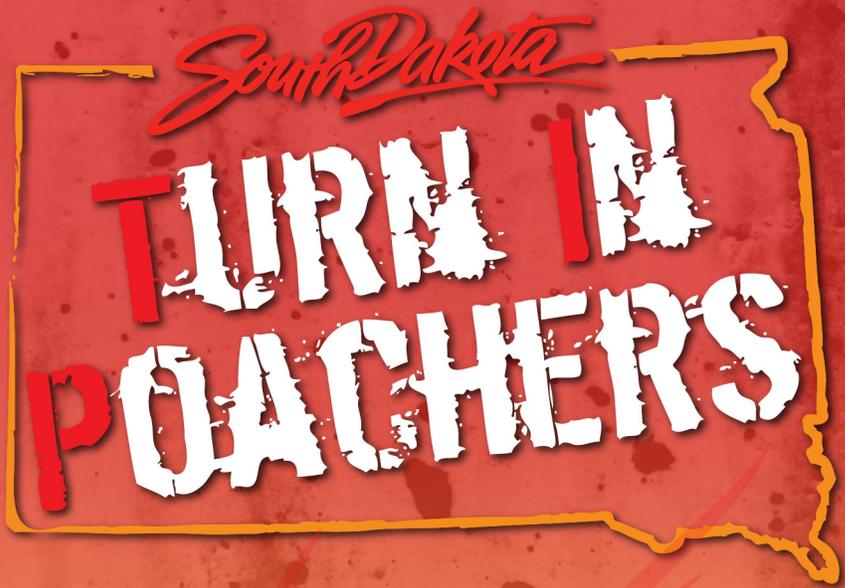
SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY IMPLEMENTS NATURAL RESOURCE LAW ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM

During August 2015, the South Dakota Board of Regents approved a new degree program for South Dakota State University (SDSU): Natural Resource Law Enforcement, which is only offered in four institutions nationwide. This degree program will build a firm foundation for students in environmental policy, natural resource management, criminal justice and conservation biology. GFP collaborated with SDSU and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for approximately two years to form the program. There is a need for qualified candidates in the conservation law enforcement field and for these students to have natural resources, law and sociology coursework. Twenty-five incoming freshmen enrolled in the program for fall of 2015, and increasing numbers are expected to follow in successive years. This degree will aid state and federal agencies with the recruitment of prospective conservation officers or game wardens, park rangers, federal enforcement agents and refuge manager candidates.



TURN IN POACHERS PROGRAM BENEFITS WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES RESOURCES

The South Dakota Turn in Poachers (TIPs) program continues to be operational and callers who have knowledge of illegal hunting and fishing activity could be eligible for rewards. The program provides an important avenue for citizens to report hunting and fishing law violations and in the process, prevents the loss of wildlife that can result from illegal actions. In the annual reporting period from July 1, 2014, through June 30, 2015, the TIPs program reported 213 investigations initiated through citizen reports, leading to 126 arrests, \$18,558 in fines and \$30,100 in civil penalties. Callers can remain anonymous and are eligible for rewards in cases that lead to an arrest. Rewards may be as much as \$300 for big game and \$100 for small game or fishing violations. Higher rewards may be offered in extreme cases. Last year, more than \$5,000 in rewards were given.



**1-888-OVERBAG
683-7224**



TIPS.SD.GOV

This number is for reporting wildlife law violations only. Operators are not equipped to handle information requests or to transfer calls.

PARKS AND RECREATION



visitation and operations

WELCOME EVERYONE FROM EVERYWHERE

With several record events, including a great year of camping, visitation is on the rise with 2015 system-wide visitation at more than 7.5 million. The 2015 vehicle survey counted cars from every state, with the exception of Hawaii and Rhode Island. This all equates to solid revenue production, which is critical for a park system that covers more than 50 percent of its operating costs from direct user fees. Solid customer service, great weather and stable water levels on lakes and reservoirs played significant roles in 2015, making it a record year. Long-running annual events also saw record attendance numbers and growing interest in new park events continues to draw additional visitors to parks and recreation areas.



SOUTH DAKOTANS MAKE UP ROUGHLY 71 PERCENT OF THE VISITORS TO OUR STATE PARK FACILITIES WITH THE REST COMING FROM OTHER STATES AND COUNTRIES.



**States in blue are the top 10 visitors to South Dakota parks.*

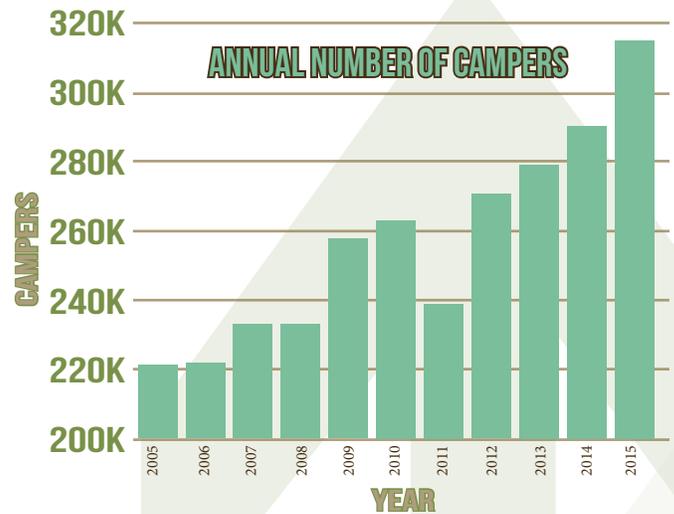
CAMPING RECORDS SOAR FOR A FOURTH CONSECUTIVE YEAR

For the fourth year in a row, campers in South Dakota State Parks have broken another record, setting the bar even higher for 2016. With a record number of camper units in 2015, the 2014 record was surpassed by nine percent, continuing the 30 percent growth spurt trend over the past five years. South Dakota Parks saw a significant increase in shoulder season use in 2015, especially in the fall; while those parks that had available weekend occupancy in previous years saw a big jump in use this year. More visitors also chose to camp on weekdays and ventured into some of our lesser used parks.

One might think such a rapid increase could lead to growing pains within South Dakota state park campgrounds, but independent reviews by *GuestRated.com* state otherwise.

GuestRated.com, in cooperation with the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds, provides an online review process for campers to rate their camping experiences and provide feedback to park owners. Registered campers are invited to submit ratings of their experiences at any one of the nearly 4,000 member parks. Campers rate services, facilities, campground, restrooms and overall satisfaction.

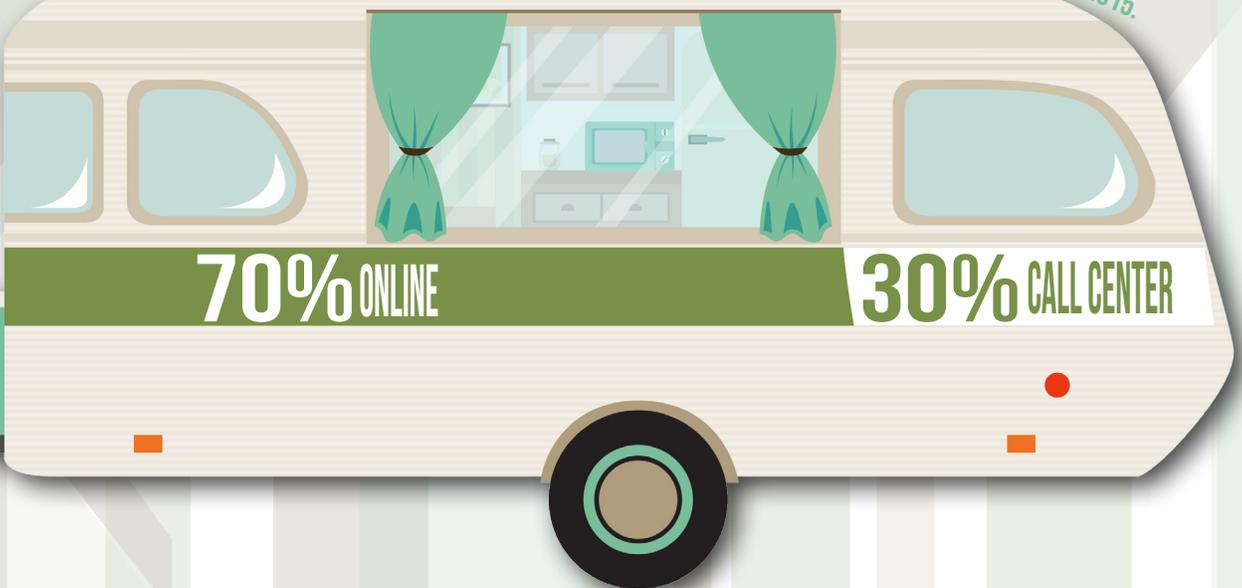
Six South Dakota state park campgrounds were among only 34 parks nationwide to earn the highest score from *GuestRated.com* for the 2014 season. Out of more than 4,000 campgrounds, RV parks and resorts in the nation, Custer State Park, Lake Vermillion Recreation Area, Hartford Beach State Park, Lewis and Clark Recreation Area, Newton Hills State Park and West Whitlock Recreation Area all earned 'A' ratings on overall experience.



*During the Missouri River Flood of 2011, many of the campgrounds were closed for extended periods of time, resulting in reduced camping opportunities.

SOUTH DAKOTA RANKS SECOND IN THE NATION FOR A-RATED CAMPGROUNDS.

OF 122,554 RESERVATIONS, 85,788 WERE MADE ONLINE VS. 36,766 MADE THROUGH THE CALL CENTER IN 2015.

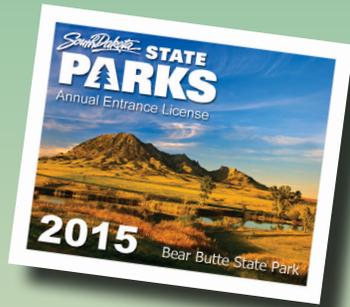


RECORD REVENUES

Direct user revenue in the Division of Parks and Recreation comes from **TWO** primary sources:

PERMITS

INCLUDES ANNUAL PARK PERMITS, DAILY PARK PERMITS, MICKELSON TRAIL PERMITS, 7-DAY CUSTER STATE PARK PERMITS AND OTHER PARK-RELATED PERMITS.



LODGING

INCLUDES CAMPING, LODGES AND CAMPING CABIN FEES.



With 2015 park user revenue at more than \$15 million, total revenue for the year surpasses 2014 by more than 10 percent. This increased revenue results in our park system maintaining a higher level of self sufficiency, with park users paying a higher percentage of operating costs than ever before. These dollars are reinvested in the park and recreation system to maintain facilities and support the increased costs that come with an increased number of visitors.

HOW DOES SOUTH DAKOTA COMPARE?

The following information comes from the 2012 and 2014 American Camper reports and is produced by Coleman Company and the Outdoor Foundation. This is the most current camping data available on a national level.

- ▶ After a 2.6 million increase in camper participation from 2010 to 2011, camping began to show a downward trend on a national level. Nationally, **CAMPING LOST 423,955** participants from 2012 to 2013, which was seen as an improvement from the 4.2 million participant loss from 2011 to 2012.
- ▶ **HOWEVER**, during the same timeframe, from 2010 through 2013, while the nation lost 2 million camping participants, camping in **SOUTH DAKOTA'S** State Parks **INCREASED** by more than 16,000 camping units, equating to more than a **6 PERCENT** increase.
- ▶ **85 percent** of campers took their **FIRST TRIP** between birth and age 15.
- ▶ Of current campers ages 18 and older, **64 PERCENT** participated in **OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES** when they were between the ages of 13 to 17, compared to just 28 percent of non-campers. **OUTDOOR PARTICIPATION** during childhood had nearly the same effect.



Photos © SDTourism

AN EVENT FOR EVERYONE

From First Day Hikes in parks throughout the state to the Honey Bee workshop at Newton Hills; and from the Trolley on the (George S. Mickelson) Trail to the Fort Sisseton Frontier Christmas; South Dakota's parks and recreation areas were 'a buzz' with more than 240 scheduled events in 2015. With events at more than 30 sites and numerous statewide events, both South Dakota residents and visitors to the state had the opportunity to learn, participate and enjoy an event in either their home park or a new park across the state. With events ranging from individual to family-oriented, from novice to experienced, from history to nature and from cooking to calorie-burning activities, there was something for everyone on the event schedule this year.

SNOWSHOE STOMP • KOOL KIDS FISHING DERBY • EAGLES AND BAGELS • ICE BOWL DISC GOLF • OPEN HOUSE WEEKEND • FAMILY ICE FISHING
 EARTH DAY BLUEBIRD BOX WORKSHOP • LIGHT MY FIRE • KIDS TO PARKS DAY • GIVE PIE A TRY • MYSTERY NATURE HIKE
 5K RUN AND WALK • NATURE OLYMPICS • WALK THE FORT • SURVIVAL • NATIONAL TRAILS DAY
 GEOCACHING 101 • PIONEER DAY • BECOMING AN OUTDOOR FAMILY • ARCHERY
 LEWIS AND CLARK FUN CAMP • GOOD EARTH CHALLENGE
 FORT SISSETON HISTORIC FESTIVAL
 HUGA TREE • CRAFTS



GO FOURTH – PROMOTING THE STATE PARK EXPERIENCE TO KIDS

Throughout May 2015 and prior to the end of the school year, every public and private school fourth-grader in South Dakota received a free one-day pass into a South Dakota State Park. Certificates were given to about 12,500 fourth-graders as part of the new Go Fourth program and provided the fourth-grader and their family entrance into a state park area of their choice. The project is designed to get kids active and outdoors and to get them and their families excited about state parks and what the parks have to offer. The program aims to give every student exposure to local natural resources and a chance to start a lifetime of healthy habits.

The pass was good until December 31, 2015 and included a free hour of kayak, canoe or paddleboat rental, where available. At the end of their day's adventure in the park, families could turn in the day pass for a discount on an annual park entrance license.

Go Fourth partners include the South Dakota Departments of Health and Education, the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program in South Dakota, the American Heart Association in South Dakota and the South Dakota Parks and Recreation Association.

By the end of 2015, 1,019 fourth graders used their pass. The redeemed daily passes will be paid for through a grant from the Department of Health. GFP is applying for a grant from North Face, which will further enhance the project and if approved, the grant dollars would help purchase more rental items such as canoes, kayaks and paddleboards to be placed in the parks.



Photo © SD Tourism

**12,000
PASSES
WERE DISTRIBUTED
TO SOUTH DAKOTA
FOURTH
GRADERS IN 2015.**



Photo © Chris Hill

50TH ANNUAL BUFFALO ROUNDUP

Two herds were on hand to commemorate the 50th Annual Buffalo Roundup at Custer State Park: the usual herd of 1,300 buffalo and a much larger herd of 21,500 visitors—a 50 percent jump since 2014. Adding to the excitement, the American Bus Association listed the Buffalo Roundup as their top event this year, proven by an increase in motor coaches from 29 in 2014 to 35 in 2015.

Even with a 50 percent jump in attendance, with our expert car, bus and spectator ‘wranglers’ on hand, this year’s Roundup provided another phenomenal visitor experience. State Park Director, Doug Hofer said managing that large of crowd while moving 1,300 buffalo is no easy task and that he is proud of Custer State Park staff and volunteers for making the 50th Annual Buffalo Roundup the “best ever.”

Custer State Park also hosted its three-day arts festival in conjunction with the Buffalo Roundup. Picture-perfect weather brought good crowds to view collections from 115 exhibitors. Non-stop entertainment and on-going educational programs provided a great line-up for guests.

Governor’s Office of Economic Development Commissioner Pat Costello commented on the Roundup’s additional impacts: “In terms of economic impact, any event that draws in 21,000 tourists is a win. This past year, the Governor’s Office of Economic Development and Department of Tourism helped Governor Daugaard host 58 businesses and journalists from 13 different states and seven different countries. The uniquely South Dakota event, made possible through our partnership with the Department of Game, Fish and Parks, gives our guests an opportunity to witness firsthand our state’s diverse landscape and wildlife, all the while meeting key statewide business and government leaders in a relaxed environment to talk tourism and business.”





Photo © SDTourism

The annual event also serves as a management tool for Custer State Park to help regulate the park's buffalo herd. For the past 50 years, the park has made its surplus bison available for sale to the private sector. More than 200 buffalo, including 24 cows, 56 bulls and over a hundred calves, were sold at the 2015 Fall Classic Bison Auction held at the Custer State Park Buffalo Corrals and simulcast online. This is the end of an era for the live auction, however, as next year's auction will only be an online, video auction. The online auction will allow bidders to join in from around the country, but will also significantly reduce the stress on the animals, as they will not need to be moved around as much. Revenue from the bison sale is reinvested into the continued operations of the state park system.



INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR ROAD ACCESS FOR STATE PARKS

In 2015, GFP was faced with the funding challenges of interior park roads and connector roads (those managed by other agencies) which bring people to our parks. Nationally, South Dakota's state park system and boating access sites are recognized as being well-developed and well-maintained. Quality road infrastructure is a major factor in the popularity and national recognition that South Dakota's major fishing access sites and state park areas receive from residents and nonresidents alike. However, as the state park system and the positive economic impact of these sites grow, funding for road maintenance and road upgrades has greatly diminished.

There are 132 areas within South Dakota's state park system, which include state parks, recreation areas, nature areas and lakeside use areas. These areas annually serve millions of visitors, more than 300,000 overnight camping units and provide the majority of South Dakota's boating access to visitors. Within the vast boundaries of these areas, GFP is responsible for the following:

- ▶ 377 miles of road (201 paved, 176 gravel). Most of the paved roads were constructed over 30 to 40 years ago and, with ongoing maintenance, these original surfaces are still being used today.
- ▶ 22 bridges.
- ▶ 55.5 miles of campsites (4,190 campsites x an average 70-foot camp pad).

The county and township roads that connect state parks and boat ramps to the state highway system are just as important to the public as roads within the parks. Historically, GFP and the Department of Transportation (DOT) partnered with local government to improve and maintain key connector roads, including 77 miles of oil surface roads and 51 miles of gravel roads leading to popular parks and lakeside use areas.



TECHNOLOGY-BASED VEGETATIVE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

The South Dakota State Park System consists of more than 102,000 acres of diverse, natural and man-made habitat. The proper management of this environmental resource is a fundamental aspect of “preserving the resources with which we are entrusted for future generations” as charged by the GFP mission statement. However, tracking 102,000 acres of habitat is no easy task.

In order to better equip park managers to be more effective and efficient in this area of responsibility, GFP developed an internet-based, ArcGIS online Vegetative Management System this year. This system incorporates the powerful combination of maps and aerial photos with database information to provide a tool for making management and design decisions. Using such common tools as a smart phone or other data collection tools, park managers can use the Vegetative Management System easily in their parks for some of the following tasks:

- ▶ To designate existing ground surfaces such as food plots, mowed areas, native and non-native grass stands, tree belts, natural forest and other types of vegetation.
- ▶ To designate land that managers would like to transition to other habitat types, such as food plots, native grass stands or other types of remedial work.
- ▶ To design tree belt plantings and create an inventory of individual specimen trees.
- ▶ To locate and delineate the acreage for areas within a park to be leased for haying, grazing, farming or logging purposes and generate lease maps to supplement the actual written leases.
- ▶ To utilize links to Soil Survey Data, National Wetlands Inventory, photos and digital files of lease agreements, contracts and other documents entered into the system.
- ▶ To easily measure and quantify large and irregular parcels of land to determine such information as how much seed is needed for a new native grass planting or how much herbicide is needed to spray invasive species.
- ▶ To collect additional features in the field with an Esri Collector Application.





THE WRATH OF MOTHER NATURE

Many who work for GFP have chosen their respective careers and employer based on a love for the outdoors, their commitment to stewardship and conservation and their fascination with the flora and fauna Mother Nature bestowed on South Dakota. But when the phone rang on June 22, 2015, one regional supervisor knew he was going to see Mother Nature's angry side before his feet hit the floor. As it would turn out, the wind and rain that hit the Farm Island and West Bend Recreation Areas near Pierre, about five minutes after the warning call came in, would be one for the record books.

When staff emerged from sheltering their own families, the devastation in the 3:00 a.m. darkness was proof of what winds well over 80 mph and torrential rains can do to a campground. In the aftermath of the storm, six campers remained flipped over in the debris and a motorcyclist lay trapped in his tent, as flashlights punched holes of light in the pitch black left behind when the electricity went out. One visitor sustained minor cuts and bruises from his 'ride' in a rolled over camper.

With Fourth of July weekend less than two weeks away, GFP staff, volunteers and Department of Corrections inmates

worked tirelessly filling three dump trucks (on loan from the Department of Transportation) over and over again, removing the severely damaged trees and remnants of the flooding. Although Farm Island was temporarily closed and no new campers were allowed through the gates, those 25 to 30 campers who were on site during the storm remained. Electricity was restored by 3:00 p.m. on Monday; followed by the reinstatement of internet service on Wednesday. Through sheer hard work, long days and dedication, staff proudly reopened all areas of the park before the busy holiday weekend, allowing guests to safely enjoy the weekend with family and friends.

As the business of the summer died down and winter settled in at Farm Island, the crews returned to trimming trees, grinding stumps and ordering replacement trees for planting next spring. No strangers to adversity, the Farm Island team has been through this before; as the carnage of the 2011 flood trained them well for this year's disaster. Like their colleagues at Angostura, Lake Louise, West Bend, Snake Creek, Buryanek, North Point and Randall Creek Recreation Areas and Palisades State Park, also hit by severe storms this year, this troop is a testament to the phenomenal, dedicated staff and volunteers working system-wide for GFP.

planning and development

GOVERNOR DAUGAARD OUTDOOR HERITAGE PROJECTS

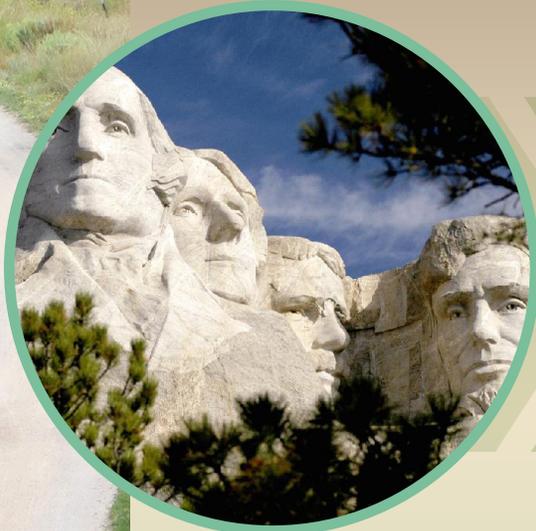
In January 2013, Governor Dennis Daugaard proposed three Outdoor Heritage Projects to the South Dakota Legislature.

Photos in circles © SDTourism

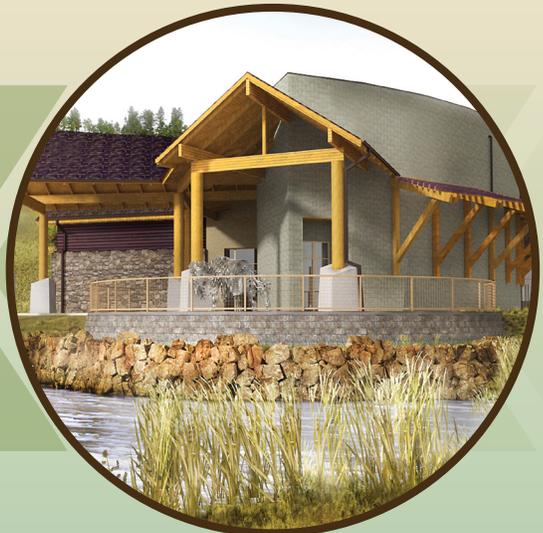
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SOUTH DAKOTA'S 13TH STATE PARK, GOOD EARTH STATE PARK AT BLOOD RUN, ESTABLISHED, 2013.



AN EXTENSION FROM THE GEORGE S. MICKELSON TRAIL TO CONNECT TO MOUNT RUSHMORE NATIONAL MONUMENT. THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STUDY BEGAN IN 2015.



A NEW VISITOR CENTER AT CUSTER STATE PARK. GFP BROKE GROUND IN 2015.



The 88th South Dakota Legislature approved the Governor's request for a one-time expenditure from the General Fund with spending authority for these projects. With that, the South Dakota Parks and Wildlife Foundation introduced a wide reaching fundraising campaign to raise the private contributions needed to match the South Dakota General and GFP funds. Already highly successful, the fundraising continues today.

GEORGE S. MICKELSON TRAIL - MOUNT RUSHMORE NATIONAL MEMORIAL CONNECTOR TRAIL

The highly-anticipated project to create a connector trail from the existing George S. Mickelson Trail to Mount Rushmore National Memorial took a leap forward this year.

The existing Mickelson Trail runs 114 miles through the heart of the Black Hills, connecting visitors from Edgemont to Deadwood, featuring 14 trailheads, bridges, rock tunnels, views of Crazy Horse Memorial and a spur trail into Custer State Park. The proposed 15-mile connector trail would build upon the success of the existing Mickelson Trail and provide a connection, packed with scenery and wildlife viewing opportunities, from the trail south of Hill City to the state's most significant tourism destination, the Mount Rushmore National Memorial. The start of this project is the result of a vision more than eight years in the making and shared by many.

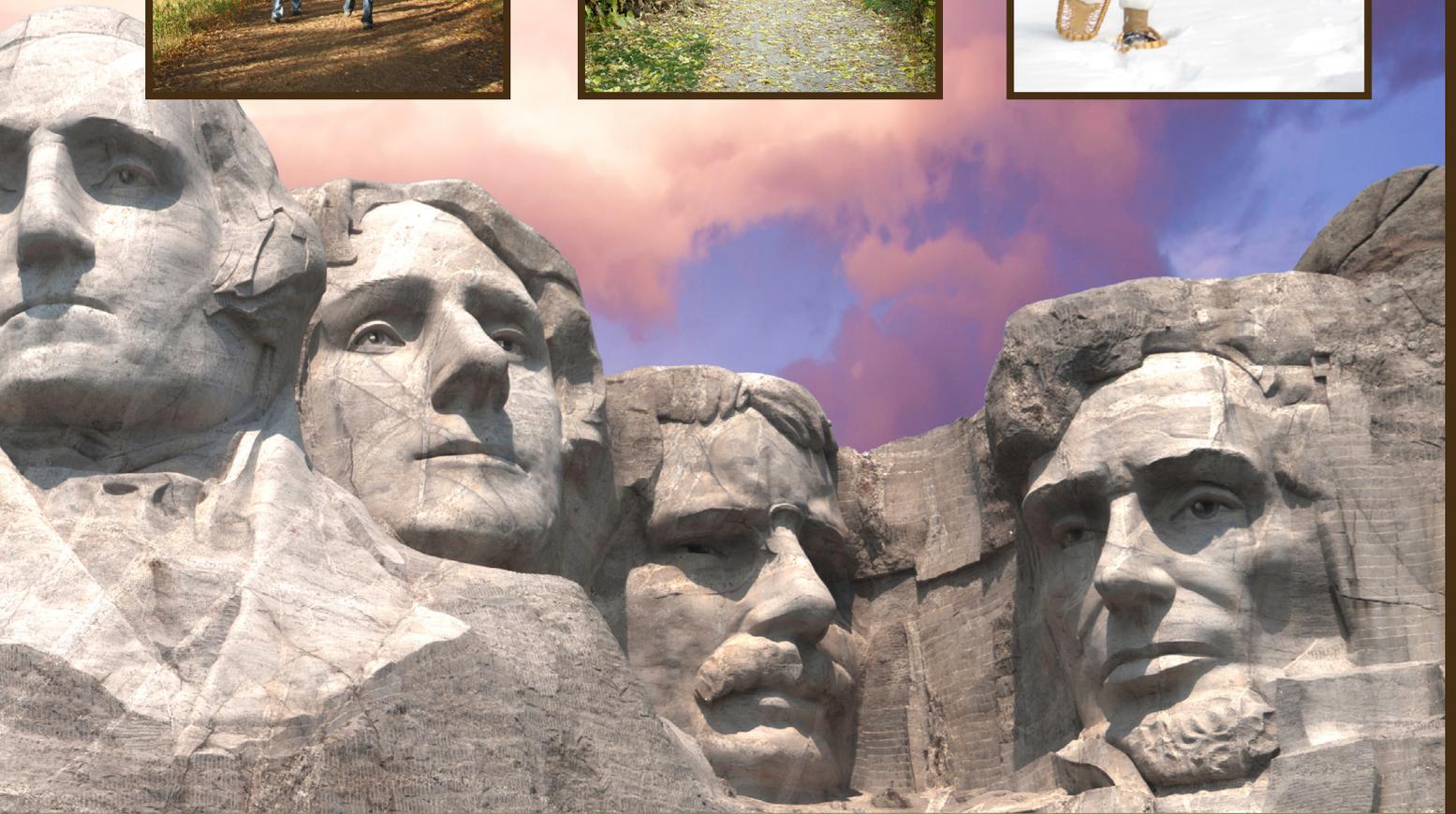
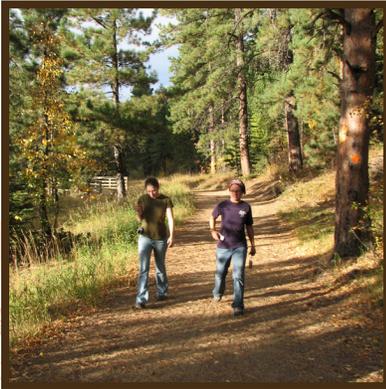
This fall, project partners commissioned an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) for the project to solicit public involvement and assess any potential impacts the proposed route may have on the environment. The EIS is the first



official step towards the project becoming a reality and will hopefully clear the way to construct the connector trail in the near future. The EIS is estimated to take 18 to 24 months to complete.

Funding partners for the study are the South Dakota Parks and Wildlife Foundation and the Mount Rushmore Society. The U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service contribute to the project as land management partners. The majority of the funding for the EIS is provided as one of the Heritage Projects proposed by Gov. Daugaard and approved by the 2013 Legislature.

Last year trail users purchased nearly 20,000 annual and daily passes to bike and walk the Mickelson Trail. A connector trail to Mount Rushmore National Memorial, the state's biggest tourist attraction, will undoubtedly add to the popularity of the trail.



In the past year alone, the George S. Mickelson Trail has received national and global recognition and is included on the following lists:

- ▶ Fox News' World's Top 10 Bike Rides
- ▶ *Bicycling Magazine's* 10 Best Car-Free Bike Paths in the U.S.A.
- ▶ *TrailRunner Magazine's* Top 10 Vacation Spots the Whole Family Will Love
- ▶ Cadillac Jack's Best Rails-to-Trails in the West
- ▶ *BikingBis.com's* 10 Longest Rails-to-Trails for Bicycling in the U.S.
- ▶ *Active.com's* Seven Multi-Day Bike Tours

GOOD EARTH STATE PARK

Good Earth State Park at Blood Run is one of three Heritage Projects proposed by Governor Dugaard and approved by the SD Legislature. It became South Dakota's newest state park in July 2013; the first in more than 40 years.

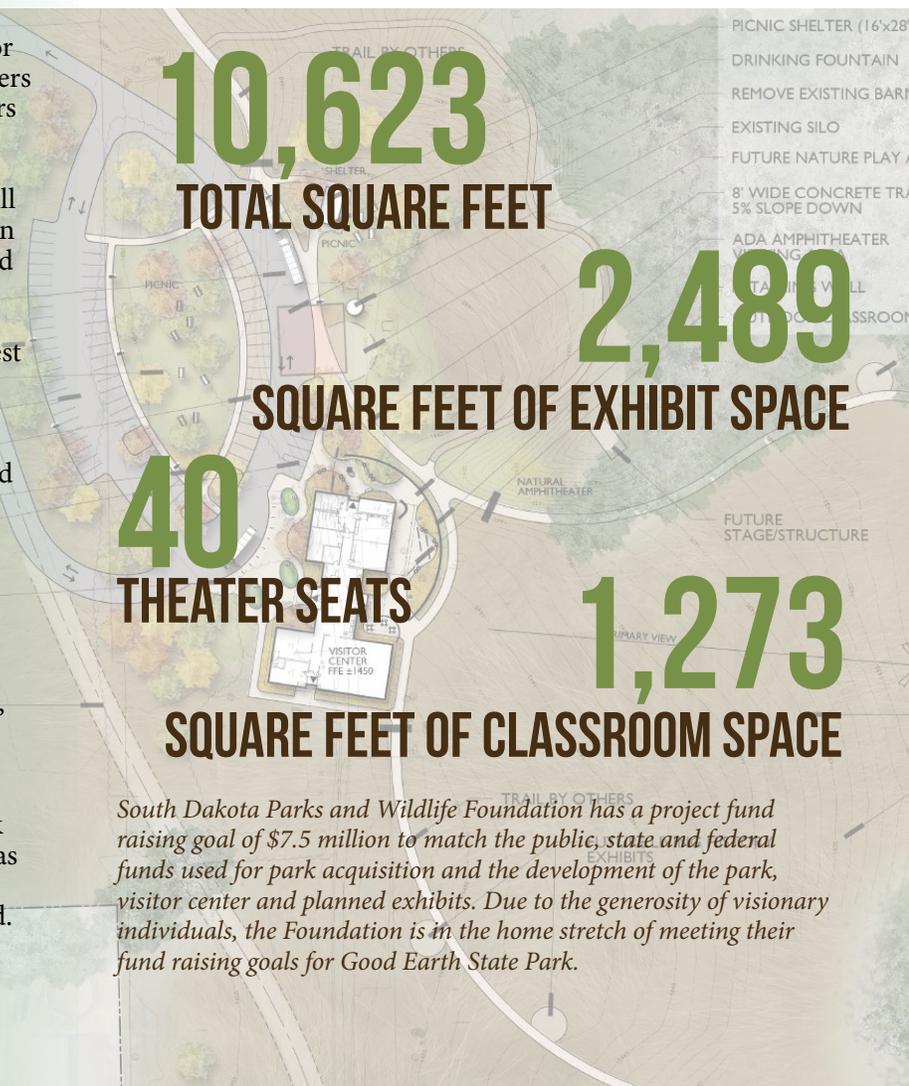
Centuries ago, this area was the peaceful home of descendants of modern day Omaha/Ponca and the Ioway/Oto tribes. These people shared a traditional culture—called “Oneota” by archaeologists—with neighboring tribes: the Missouri, Osage, Kansa and Winnebago. The site, called Blood Run in modern times, is by far the largest Oneota site known, with village units and mound groups extending for more than three miles on each side of the Big Sioux River. It was an important ceremonial center and vital in the exchange network that linked the Plains with the Midwest. The Cheyenne and the Arikara, who lived there occasionally, visited the village regularly. Though primary occupation by these tribes occurred between 1500 and 1700, the rich history of the Sioux tribes that followed this period continues Good Earth's story to the modern day.

Since the park's dedication, trails have been established and native vegetation restoration is well underway. In October 2015, the first phase of significant construction began at Good Earth. This phase includes all the site work for the visitor center that aims to connect members of regional tribes, South Dakotans and visitors from far and wide to the rich cultural and natural history of Good Earth State Park at Blood Run. The interpretive spaces within will serve a variety of audience groups. In addition to family audiences, the visitor center at Good Earth State Park will serve as a premier field trip destination for local school groups, trail users and regional tourists – from the Midwest and beyond—with school-age children. Additionally, the exhibit space will include educational opportunities for adult learners (bus tours, university students, etc.) interested in topics such as cultural history, regional archaeology and natural history.

In addition to the visitor center, this year's projects include the construction of parking lot facilities, a 1.5-mile entrance road and utility work to support the Visitor Center. Bids for the construction of the visitor center, slated to open in the spring of 2017, were opened in December 2015. The State of Iowa is also developing plans for preservation and interpretive efforts. The vision of a state park spanning parts of South Dakota and Iowa, was set forth by South Dakota Governor Dennis Dugaard and Iowa Governor Terry Branstad.



GOOD EARTH STATE PARK VISITOR CENTER



South Dakota Parks and Wildlife Foundation has a project fund raising goal of \$7.5 million to match the public, state and federal funds used for park acquisition and the development of the park, visitor center and planned exhibits. Due to the generosity of visionary individuals, the Foundation is in the home stretch of meeting their fund raising goals for Good Earth State Park.

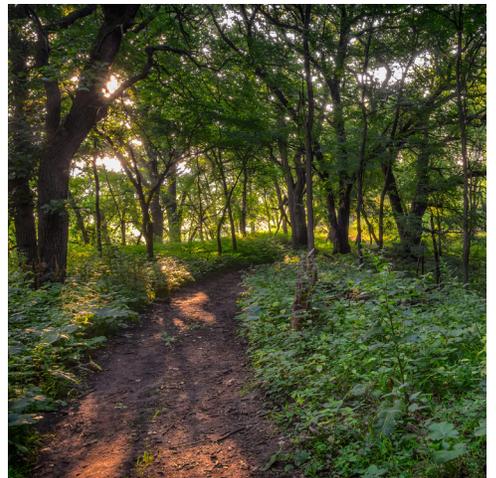
SECURING OUR HERITAGE

In addition to the ground breaking for the Good Earth State Park Visitor Center, giant strides were also taken toward preservation of the property and view shed surrounding the park.

Spring Creek Country Club (SCCC) borders the south side of Good Earth State Park. The east portion of the golf course property, overlooking the Sioux River, is within the Blood Run National Historical Landmark. When the SCCC proposed rezoning this portion of the golf course into residential building sites, concerns surfaced over the impacts housing development may have on the park's view shed and the preservation of park and historic resources.

In response to these concerns, the South Dakota Parks and Wildlife Foundation (PWF) approached the SCCC about the opportunity to acquire the property. In June 2015, the two parties reached an agreement, which includes a 10-year contract for deed that will preclude residential or commercial development of the golf course. The PWF will lease the golf course back to the SCCC for \$1 until the end of the contract, at which time the 194-acre golf course will close. Following the closure, the PWF intends to donate the property to the State of South Dakota as an addition to Good Earth State Park. While protecting the site's cultural, historical and natural resources, the additional property will also provide a critical link to established public lands and facilities.

Governor Dennis Daugaard affirmed, "South Dakota's top priority for conservation and resource protection is the Blood Run National Historic Landmark. The cultural, educational and recreational value of this site is of immeasurable significance to our state and the nation. I urge continued private and public support of the South Dakota Parks and Wildlife Foundation's fundraising campaign to enhance Good Earth State Park at Blood Run and preserve forever this unique historic site."



Photos © SD Tourism

CUSTER STATE PARK VISITOR CENTER ON SCHEDULE FOR SPRING 2016 OPENING

With an estimated 1.8 million annual visitors, Custer State Park is not only the most visited state park in South Dakota, but also one of its largest attractions. Custer State Park's Peter Norbeck Visitor Center, a structure built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in 1934, hosts educational programs and features permanent exhibits about wildlife and natural history. This building is not designed to introduce and orient so many visitors, the exhibits are now almost 15 years old and they are becoming outdated.

In response to aging facilities, the park broke ground in 2015 on the third of Governor Dugaard's Outdoor Heritage projects, the new Custer State Park Visitor Center. More than \$3 million was raised in private donations to supplement the 2013 \$1.5 million general fund appropriation and \$500,000 in funding from Game, Fish and Parks. This modern, expanded facility, located near the Wildlife Loop, will not only increase visitors' exposure to and understanding of the park's facilities and history, but will also open doors to the recreational opportunities of South Dakota's Black Hills region.

The goals of the new visitor center include reaching more visitors and updating the park's offerings. New exhibits will provide visitors a chance to learn and become motivated to visit the park and other sites in the Black Hills, with the hopes they will stay longer and explore the area on a deeper level. A variety of exhibits will tell the story and include:

- ▶ A large topographic map outlining the four scenic drives, natural features, resorts and other features where park staff will welcome, meet and engage visitors.
- ▶ A "Join the Herd" exhibit where visitors will focus on the park's main attraction: buffalo.
- ▶ A "Nature's Cathedral, Nature's Playground" exhibit where visitors will find a replica of the Needles Eye they can walk through and test their climbing skills on a small-scale climbing wall.
- ▶ The experience centerpiece will be a world-class film which will immerse visitors in scene and sound and inspire them to explore the 71,000-acre park.

Construction of similar facilities elsewhere have increased length of visitors' stay and spending, broadened sales tax and tourism income for the state and encouraged word-of-mouth promotion. GFP looks forward to this first-class facility creating an even better first impression of Custer State Park.

When the new visitor center is complete, the existing Peter Norbeck Visitor Center will be repurposed into an outdoor education center. The center will be aimed largely toward families, school groups and visitors coming to the park to take part in interpretive programs and activities. The center will offer hands-on, self-guided and open-ended activities (i.e. arts and crafts) and will also give visitors a place to congregate during inclement weather. The new Custer State Park Visitor Center will have a grand opening in the spring of 2016.



Photos © Sam Stukel and SD Tourism



CUSTER STATE PARK RESORT IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Following the guidance of the Custer State Park Resort Master Plan, a construction package is underway to provide approximately \$11 million in renovations and improvements to concessionaire-operated facilities at Custer State Park. The following list includes the primary projects and facts about each:

- ▶ Renovation of motel wing rooms and the historic façade of the State Game Lodge: The first State Game Lodge was built in 1921 and burned down shortly thereafter. The existing lodge was completed in 1922. The motel wings, while not part of the original State Game Lodge construction, require updating to allow them to better reflect the facility's architecture and serve the public.
- ▶ Replacement of 14 cabins and renovation of 59 cabins: These were constructed in the 1930s and 1940s. The log cabins, which are being renovated, were originally built by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The lap-sided cabins, which are being replaced, were originally built by park staff and have exceeded their expected lifespan.
- ▶ Replacement of the Legion Lake Lodge building: This structure was built in the early 1940s and is old and tired. Unfortunately, due to the age of the structure and the way it was built (with logs laid on the ground as the foundation) the building began to rot away from the inside out. The new lodge will offer enhanced views of Legion Lake.
- ▶ Sewer, water and electrical infrastructure upgrades: These utilities are estimated to date back to the 1940s and are in need of upgrades to better serve the public.
- ▶ Construction of three new reunion cabins and one honeymoon cabin at the State Game Lodge, Blue Bell Resort and Sylvan Lake Resort: Hopefully, in years to come, park visitors will look back and remember the great times they shared at these cabins.

The project is being funded with Legislature-approved revenue bonds which will be retired with revenue generated from increased franchise fees paid by the resort operator.

All revenue-producing facilities are scheduled to be completed by June 2016, with all remaining projects to be completed during the spring of 2017.

Guest Starring: Custer State Park



Custer State Park's new visitor center is set to open this spring, and with it will come an exciting new film. Aperture Films, was selected over 67 other proposals from companies worldwide. Aperture worked closely with parks staff and began filming in mid-May to capture the spring season and buffalo calves. Filming continued at points during the summer and fall, culminating with the Buffalo Roundup. Additional scenes will be shot in early 2016. The film will introduce visitors to the wonders of Custer State Park and inspire them to spend more time there and in the Black Hills region.



EXISTING GAME LODGE WEST WING



FUTURE GAME LODGE WEST WING

snowmobile program

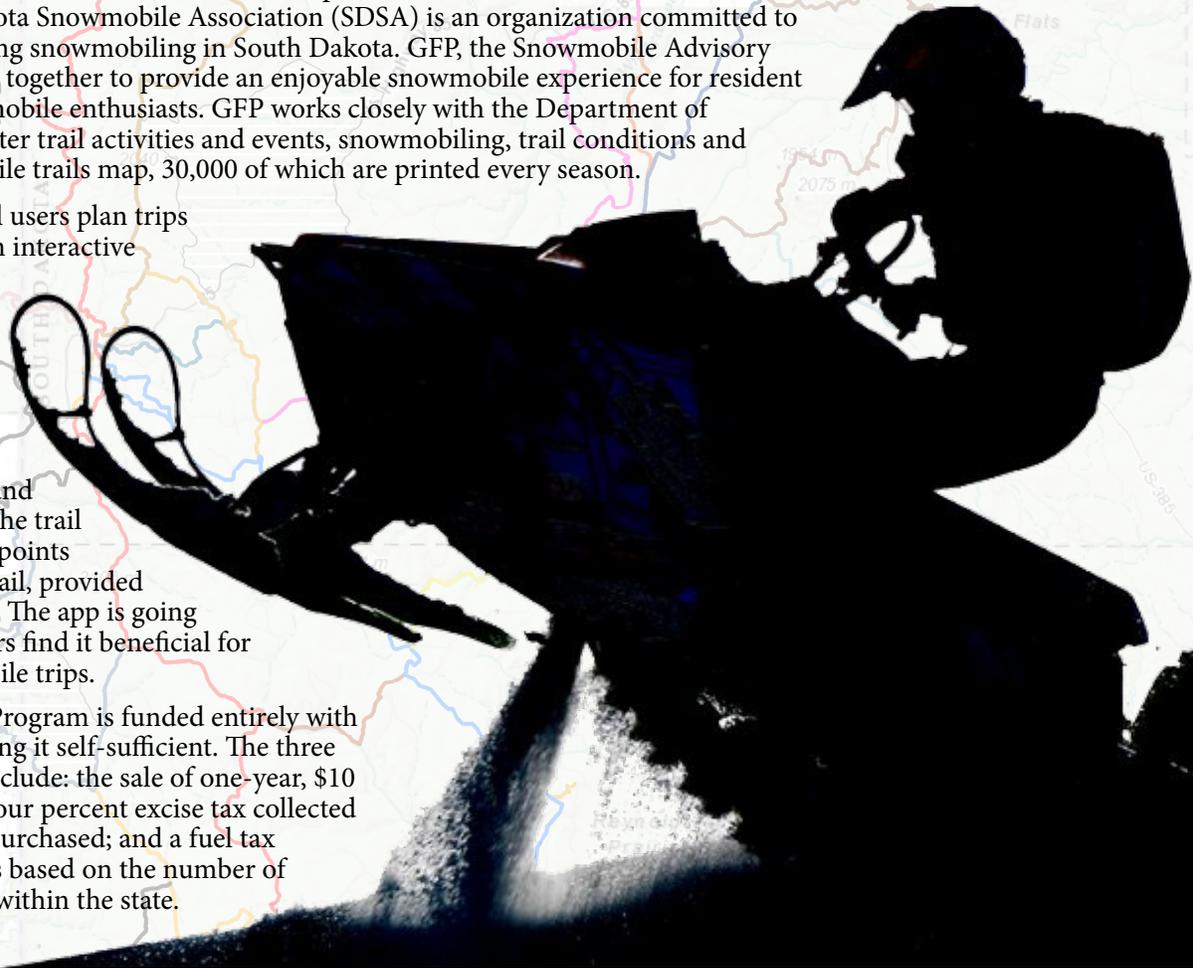
SOUTH DAKOTA: A SNOWMOBILING PARADISE

One of the biggest advantages of living in or visiting South Dakota is the diversity of the four seasons and the wide range of activities throughout the year. Some might say our greatest wintertime activity is snowmobiling, thanks to Mother Nature and the South Dakota Snowmobile Program. Due to an excellent mix of GFP full time and seasonal staff, (including education and emergency services from law enforcement rangers) snowmobile clubs and volunteers, 350 miles of regularly groomed trails in the Black Hills and 1,235 miles in eastern South Dakota are available for use by those who love to sled through the snow and cold.

In addition to the time and effort of staff, clubs and volunteers, the Snowmobile Advisory Council is a citizen advisory group for the state's Snowmobile Trails Program. The Governor-appointed council is a useful forum to ensure snowmobilers' best interests are considered in the expenditure of dedicated snowmobile funds. In addition, the South Dakota Snowmobile Association (SDSA) is an organization committed to developing and promoting snowmobiling in South Dakota. GFP, the Snowmobile Advisory Council and SDSA work together to provide an enjoyable snowmobile experience for resident and non-resident snowmobile enthusiasts. GFP works closely with the Department of Tourism to promote winter trail activities and events, snowmobiling, trail conditions and updates of the snowmobile trails map, 30,000 of which are printed every season.

To help snowmobile trail users plan trips and travel on the trail, an interactive South Dakota trail map can be downloaded at Google Play or the App Store. This app enables users to gather current trail conditions and locate businesses, restrooms, parking lots and warming shelters along the trail system. The app also pinpoints users' locations on the trail, provided cell coverage is available. The app is going on its third year and users find it beneficial for planning their snowmobile trips.

The Snowmobile Trails Program is funded entirely with dedicated revenue, making it self-sufficient. The three main sources of funds include: the sale of one-year, \$10 snowmobile licenses; a four percent excise tax collected when snowmobiles are purchased; and a fuel tax reimbursement, which is based on the number of registered snowmobiles within the state.



In the winter of 1996-97, SnoWest Magazine introduced their first Top 15 Trails of the West as part of their Western Guide to Snowmobiling.

SnoWest has produced annual lists for the past 19 years by surveying snowmobilers and ranking trails in a variety of categories, including popularity, scenery, grooming, signage, trail map and services.

The Black Hills trail system has appeared in the top 15 list 15 times, four of which were in the top 10. In 2014, the Western Guide listed the Black Hills as #11 on their Best of All Time list. Rankings have remained consistent throughout the years, with high rankings in a variety of categories, such as #1 rankings in 2004 for the maps, signing and grooming category.

BLACK HILLS = TOP SNOWMOBILING DESTINATION



How much does Snowmobiling generate for South Dakota?

In January of 2012 the Department of Game, Fish and Parks contracted with the University of South Dakota Beacom School Of Business to perform an economic impact study on the snowmobile industry in South Dakota. The study found that snowmobiling in South Dakota generates approximately \$131.6 million in annual economic impact, proving the snowmobile trails are a valuable state resource. The snowmobiling industry generates:

- ▶ More than \$15 million in lodging, restaurants, gaming and other trip related spending.
- ▶ More than \$58 million in revenue for South Dakota snowmobile retailers and distributors.
- ▶ Direct and indirect support of over 1,400 full-time jobs.
- ▶ A resident (76 percent) and non-resident (84 percent) rating of snowmobiling in the Black Hills more highly than alternate destinations.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES



SOUTH DAKOTA NATIONAL ARCHERY IN THE SCHOOLS PROGRAM

The South Dakota National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) began in February of 2007 with a three day training in Yankton, SD. At this training, 12 pilot schools were trained in the program and received archery equipment to begin the program in their own schools.

As of November 2015, there are 274 schools that have been trained and equipped to participate in the NASP program because of the investment made through Game, Fish and Parks. With an average of 75 students per school, more than 20,000 students will shoot archery at their own schools in South Dakota this year. During the 2016 calendar year, nine trainings will take place for new schools to enter the program as well as to train new teachers at existing schools. These trainings also include the newly introduced NASP 3D program. By the end of 2016, 26 NASP schools will also have been trained and equipped for the new NASP program.

Both regular target NASP and 3D NASP tournaments were held in 2015. The regular target tournament was held in Rapid City with a total of 350 students participating. The 3D target tournament was held in Brookings with 60 student archers participating. In 2016, a west and east river tournament will be held for both target and 3D archery to expand opportunities for students to participate.



OUTDOOR UNIVERSITY – SIOUX FALLS, THE OUTDOOR CAMPUS-EAST

Outdoor University is a large scale event where families are invited to try absolutely everything outdoors in safe environment. This year was its fifth anniversary. More than 200 volunteers and staff helped attendees try kayaking, fishing, fly fishing, target shooting, fish and game cleaning, outdoor cooking, canoeing, archery and more. In addition, visitors met Conservation Officers and kids were encouraged to climb in their trucks and boats. Decoy deer used in law enforcement and the Turn In Poachers trailer were available on site. Visitors also met fisheries staff who set up touch ponds. They also wildlife biologists who showed them how they live trap game for studies. got to learn about the importance of pollinators and made pollinator take home and plant. All kids had the chance to color T-shirts with our aquatic invasive species message on it. Outdoor organizations also attended the event, including Pheasants Forever, Walleyes Unlimited, area sportsmen's clubs, the Sioux Falls Herpetology club and the South Dakota Canoe and Kayak Association. The event is free and open to the public. The first event in 2011 attracted 1,800 people. In 2015, 4,251 people attended.

OUTDOOR UNIVERSITY- RAPID CITY, THE OUTDOOR CAMPUS-WEST

July 2015 saw the biggest attendance to Outdoor University-West yet, at 819 people, with it being the fourth year to host the event. Each year, department staff provides hands-on experiences for participants. Staff and volunteers teach canoeing and kayaking, pellet gun shooting, archery, fishing, fly fishing and more. Regional GFP management staff provides hands-on experiences for participants to learn about the work that each program does to manage South Dakota's natural resources. Additionally, many area partners provide hands-on experiences. Some of these partners include Black Hills State University, Badlands National Park, the National Wild Turkey Federation, the City of Rapid City and Scheels. One of the highlights of this year's event was a special presentation by Emilie Graslíe, a Rapid City native and host of The Brain Scoop series on YouTube. Graslíe is an employee of The Field Museum in Chicago and her presentation was sponsored by South Dakota Public Broadcasting.



FISHING CLINICS

The Department conducted 462 fishing clinics statewide with more than 12,206 participants in 2015. Sioux Falls, Rapid City and Custer State park once again held scheduled, weekly fishing classes. Clinics included both shore fishing and ice fishing classes. Some classes include lessons in cleaning and cooking. The loaner fishing equipment was used 37 times by staff and the general public with 1,611 participants using the equipment to fish with, or to teach people to fish with. GFP purchased 33 rod reel combos for educational programs, which were distributed to schools throughout the state.



BECOMING AN OUTDOOR FAMILY

Three successful Becoming an Outdoor Family events were held in 2015. Two weekday programs were held this year, making it easier for GFP staff to teach sessions and keeping the programs off of the already busy weekends. A total of 55 families, with 151 children and adults, participated in the program this summer. Classes included archery, shooting sports, kayaking, canoeing, Dutch oven, outdoor cooking, GPS, Geocaching, history hike, birding, outdoor photography, wildlife, endangered species and skins, skulls and tracks. Several of the families attending the weekday programs enjoyed the programs and campgrounds so much they extended their camping stays into the weekend.

BECOMING AN OUTDOORS WOMAN (BOW)

This year's Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) event was held September 18 to 20 for approximately 80 women at Lake Poinsett near Arlington. Classes included fly fishing, shore fishing, boat fishing and bow fishing as well as shooting sports classes such as shotgun, handgun and rifle shooting. Archery was also offered and is always popular and well-attended.

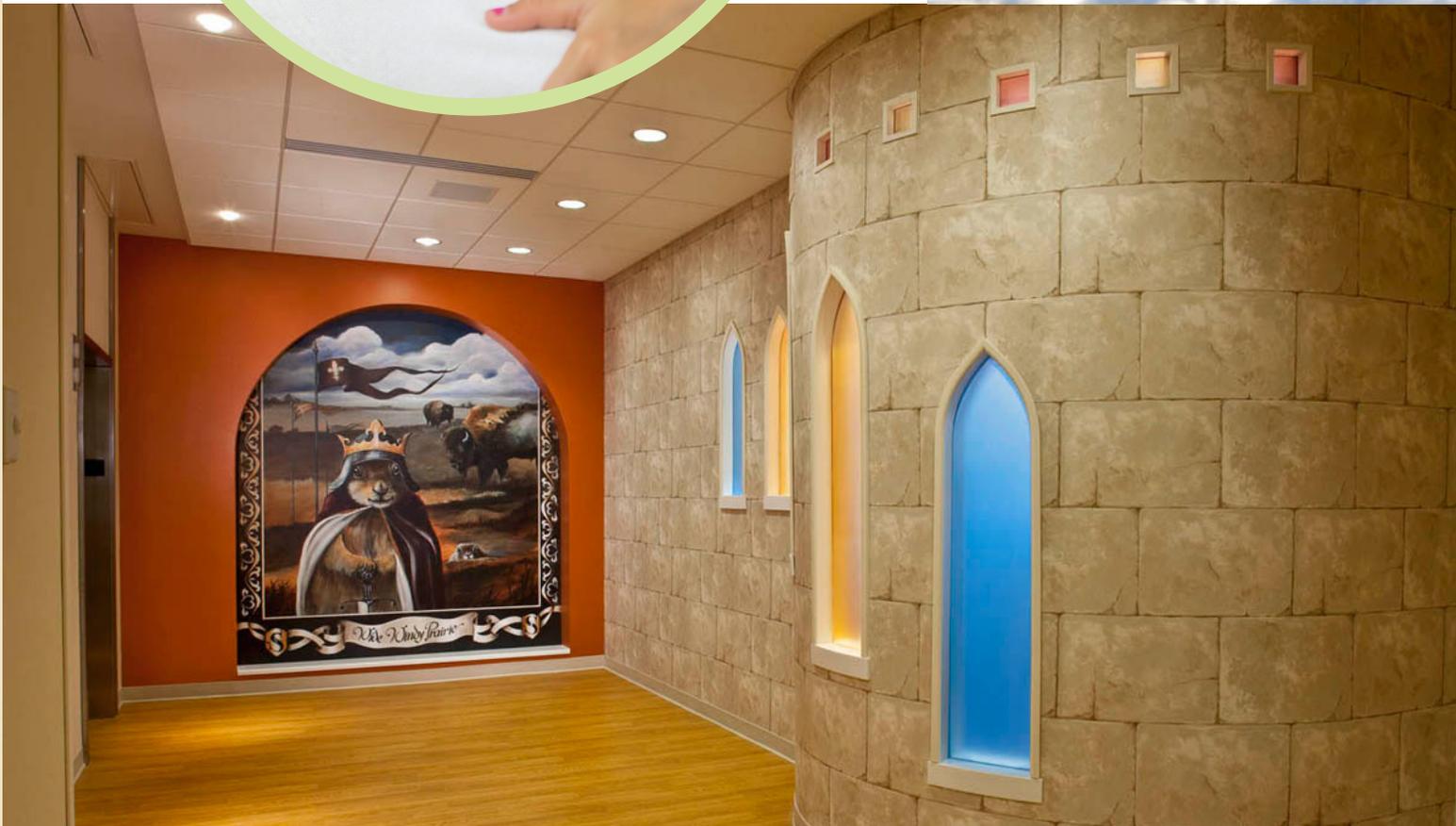


BRINGING THE OUTSIDE INSIDE WITH SANFORD CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

Each week, the Department put on a program at Sanford Children's Hospital in Sioux Falls. The children who attend these programs are receiving treatment or have siblings who are hospitalized. Programs consist of fishing, snowshoeing, track identification, tree identification, touching animal furs and more. Each program is tailored to fit a small group or an individual child in a hospital room. With a tough, yet tender audience, the idea behind these activities is to take children's minds off being sick and give them something fun to focus on. No words can describe the feeling GFP staff members get when they bring smiles, laughter and learning to children who really need it.



Photos © SDTourism



YOUTH CONSERVATION CAMP

In partnership with the South Dakota Wildlife Federation, GFP hosted the 2015 Youth Conservation Camp, which was attended by 108 high school students. Classes were taught by GFP staff and volunteer instructors through partnership organizations such as the National Wild Turkey Federation, Cabela's, Black Hills Anglers and Walleyes Unlimited club. Class offerings included lake survey, stream ecology, fly fishing, reservoir fishing, shore fishing, shotgun, handgun, rifle, muzzleloader and archery. In addition, hunting classes included turkey hunting, waterfowl hunting, deer hunting and trapping.



STEP OUTSIDE EVENTS

The Step Outside program is a free, one-day, event, where each participant has the opportunity to try something different in the outdoors. The program offers archery, BB gun shooting, trap shooting, .22 shooting, fishing, GPS, fur identification and more. GFP staff run the stations with partners from wildlife clubs, who usually host the events. In 2015, GFP provided approximately 34 Step Outside events and other community shooting sports programs for 3,000 participants. Research indicates that positive initial exposure to hunting, fishing and shooting activities are essential for the development of young hunters, anglers and shooters.

REGION 1 (WESTERN)- 7 EVENTS: 258 PARTICIPANTS
REGION 2 (CENTRAL)- 2 EVENTS: 115 PARTICIPANTS
REGION 3 (SOUTHEAST)- 16 EVENTS: 2,100 PARTICIPANTS
REGION 4 (NORTHEAST)- 9 EVENTS: 540 PARTICIPANTS



HUNTER SAFETY AND FIREARMS EDUCATION (HUNTSAFE) AND BOWHUNTER EDUCATION

In 2015, GFP made a concerted effort to incorporate more opportunities for students to receive their certification. While the traditional, in-person courses are still offered, free of charge, many students seek alternative options to meet their schedules and needs for hunter safety training.

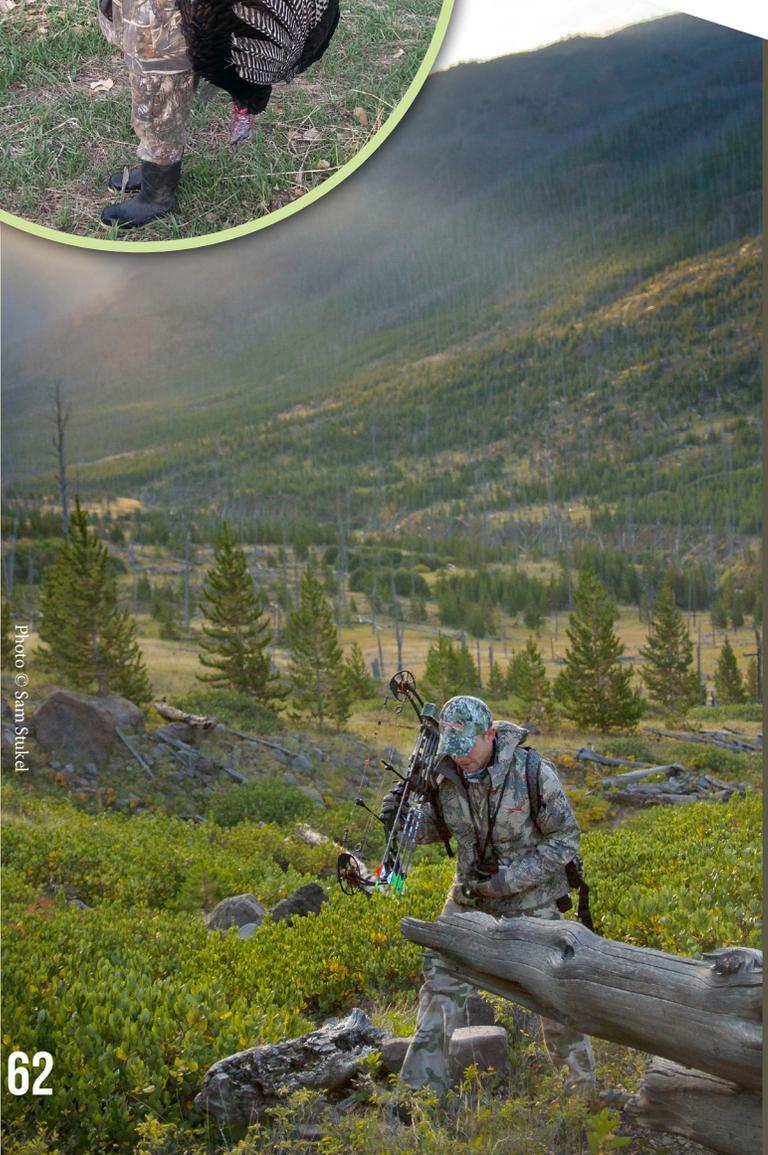
In the third year of an all-online bowhunter education course, GFP saw continued high participation for online course certification. 2015 was the first year when non-residents were able to take the South Dakota online course. By the end of 2015, 1,849 people took the all-online bowhunter course. These 1,849 students are in addition to the 362 students that were certified with the 26, in-person classes. In total, 2,211 students were certified, representing an 18 percent increase from 2014.

The Department continued the independent study online option (with a field day) for hunter safety and firearms education. 2015 was the first year utilizing a vendor for the student course and 269 people completed their online course and an in-person field day to receive certification. In 2015, 21 field days were offered throughout the state with a field day offered in each GFP region in September, October and November. In 2014, only 19 field days were offered and only two were offered in October and November.

In addition to the 269 people completing their certification through the independent study hunter safety course, three schools offered hunter education in their school system and another 143 in-person, traditional HuntSAFE classes were conducted throughout the state certifying approximately 3,062 students. In total, 3,331 students received Hunter Safety and Firearms Education certification through 164 classes. The total number of students certified represents a five percent decline in the total number of students certified from 2014, even though the total number of class offerings increased by six in 2015.



Photo © Sam Stuckel



HUNTING 101

Hunting 101 programs continued to grow in 2015. This year saw the expansion of the mentoring component, which utilized students from 2014 as recruiters and mentors of new students in 2015. The current class is composed of eight new students, plus two returning as mentors. In addition to the basic study of the North American Model of Wildlife Management, HuntSAFE testing, wildlife biology and conservation management, new students and their mentors had two opportunities for hands-on big game processing workshops, which taught them the basics of skinning, quartering, boning and packaging big game. We overcame one of the obstacles faced by beginning hunters this year, with donations of hunting and outdoor gear from Cabela's Outdoor Fund (\$2,000 worth of hunting clothing and gear), Cabela's Rapid City store (\$1,000 worth of cold weather or waterfowl clothing), a grant from the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (for purchase of \$2,000 worth of materials needed for the program), a grant from the National Wild Turkey Federation (for purchase of \$1,000 worth of turkey hunting equipment) and donations of gently used hunting gear for student use from members of the Black Hills Sportsmen's Club.



human dimension

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Effective decision-making by public agencies necessitates the need to consider public perceptions, opinions and responses toward management policies. Along with hunter harvest and biological data collected, public involvement is an important component in developing and implementing wildlife and fisheries management goals and objectives. Successful public participation is a continuous process, consisting of a series of activities and actions to inform the public and stakeholders, as well as obtain input regarding decisions that affect them. GFP employs multiple avenues for public involvement using a combination of techniques ranging from regional open houses to the GFP Commission process. The variety of techniques used is designed to involve the public at various stages in the decision-making process and ensure accessibility to all citizens. Public opinion surveys and stakeholder groups are just two examples of involvement opportunities used by GFP.

STAKEHOLDERS

A stakeholder for this purpose is defined as a person, group, or organization with an interest in the management of wildlife. Because wildlife are greatly prized by many South Dakota residents, it is important to have a diverse representation of stakeholders to provide input for future management of wildlife and their habitats. South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks has been, and is currently using the input from stakeholder groups in the revision and development of both existing and new management plans. In 2015, stakeholder groups were used to finalize an elk management plan and revise the wild turkey and giant Canada goose management plans. In addition, a large stakeholder group has been developed to help guide GFP in writing a statewide deer management plan in 2016 and 2017.

5 HUMAN DIMENSIONS PROJECTS COMPLETED IN 2015

1 BLACK HILLS FISHERIES MANAGEMENT ANGLER OPINION PROJECT

Anglers expressed a desire for management that provides quality warm/cool and cold water species of panfish in Black Hills reservoirs. In addition, they would like management to promote wild trout and improve habitat quality in Black Hills streams.

2 ALLOCATION OF SOUTH DAKOTA DEER HUNTING LICENSES

Based on these findings, more than half of deer license applicants believe the current allocation is fair. 71 percent of applicants support the implementation of a process that would increase resident hunters' chances of getting at least one buck license per year, but most did not support the proposed alternatives. More than half of these applicants believe the current preference point system should be modified so greater weight is placed on applicants who have more preference points, increasing their chances of drawing a license.

3 EVALUATION OF THE LOWER OAHE WATERFOWL HUNTING ACCESS AREA

Satisfaction has been relatively high for the last 11 years. Groups who hunted in early November had the highest average harvests with approximately 18.5 waterfowl per group.

4 EVALUATION OF THE 2015 BLACK HILLS MOUNTAIN LION SEASON

More than half of licensed mountain lion hunters participated in the 2015 Black Hills mountain lion season and spent an average of seven days hunting mountain lions. The percentage of hunters wanting the population to stay the same has grown nine percent in 2015, while hunters wanting to see the population increase has grown by six percent since 2013.

5 WILDLIFE DAMAGE CONTROL SERVICES CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

80 percent of producers were satisfied with the services they received, 91 percent of which received direct assistance from a GFP wildlife damage specialist.

HUMAN DIMENSIONS PROJECTS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY

- ▶ Survey measuring deer license applicants preferences for deer management.
- ▶ Survey measuring private landowners' deer management preferences.
- ▶ 2015 Hunter Evaluation of Walk-In Areas in South Dakota.

HUNTER HARVEST SURVEYS

GFP has used surveys to estimate harvest data since 1948. Harvest surveys are the most efficient and cost-effective method of estimating game harvest. Hunter harvest is a substantial source of mortality of big game populations in South Dakota and a way to estimate this harvest is to ask hunters to complete an online or report card survey each year. When hunters voluntarily complete harvest surveys, GFP staff are better equipped to issue the proper number of hunting licenses specific to that big game population and hunting unit. Harvest surveys are an important part of wildlife management in South Dakota. Surveys are sent within a few days of the close of each season and data are collected through multiple mailings over the next two months. The information is compiled into separate reports for big game, small game/waterfowl and furbearer seasons. These data are used by biologists to prepare proposals for license numbers, bag limits and season dates. The information obtained from completed harvest surveys is the link between what happened during the hunting season this year and how next year's hunting season will be determined. The 2015-2016 season surveys run through May 2016. Harvest reports are available online at gfp.sd.gov/hunting/harvest.

In 2015, GFP updated the online response system.

2014-2015 Seasons

- ▶ 35 different hunter harvest surveys.
- ▶ 91,300 surveys were sent out and 67,300 responses were received with an overall response rate of 74 percent.
- ▶ Survey response rates ranged from 53 percent to 93 percent.
- ▶ 63 percent of all survey responses were received online.

COMMUNICATIONS CONSOLIDATION

Communicating with producers, sportsmen and women, special interest groups, legislators, our staff and anyone with a vested interest in South Dakota's natural resources is critical. Open, transparent and consistent two-way communication is primary to all that unfolds within the GFP communications team.

As of June 9, 2015, all GFP communications activities were consolidated to one team within the Office of the Secretary/ Division of Administration. By doing so, GFP has been able to formulate one brand, one voice and centralized messaging strategies for all agency programs. Previously, communications activities were conducted within the Division of Wildlife as well as within the Division of Parks and Recreation. This newly developed team continues to manage and direct the internal and external communications activities; including brand and reputation management, media and public relations, targeted emails, oversight of editorial content creation (print and digital), relationship marketing, website maintenance and management, social media, graphic design, target market research, strategic communications outreach, photography and videography and other special projects for the entire agency.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

As mentioned throughout this report, customer service is the foundation of how we conduct business at GFP; whether it is in person, on the phone, online or through our social channels. One aspect of this is through our licensing and information phone bank. In 2015, the phone bank received 18,366 calls and a total of 7,522 emails through two main email accounts; sdgfpinfo@state.sd.us and wildinfo@state.sd.us.

Calls

Calls received range in topic from details about the upcoming hunting and fishing seasons to events, regulation changes to seasons, available licenses or tags, understanding the licensing draw system, how to apply for a license, help with the online system, username and password information and more.

Emails

GFP uses email addresses, gathered during the licensing buying process and via online registration, to inform customers on topics such as: hunting season dates and regulation changes, application deadlines, commission meetings and agenda items, news and reminders, state parks activities and events and more all related to the outdoor opportunities provided in this state. In 2015, GFP sent 233 emails to hunters, anglers and park goers. These 233 emails went out to a total of 5.58 million email inboxes.

ONLINE USAGE

The GFP website serves as the "front door" to our agency where customers can gather information and proactively stay updated on what is happening as it relates to the natural resources of South Dakota. The main calls to action of the site continue to be purchasing a hunting or fishing license and reserving a campsite. The site is host to a variety of news and information from wildlife management plans, parks activities, outdoor learning opportunities, commission and budget information, annual reports, season dates and license costs, boat ramp access, fishing tournaments, habitat resources, private lands and hunting access and so much more. The website is a valuable online resource for our customers and in 2015, the site was viewed nearly 12 million times by 3.5 million active users. We continue to strive to deliver current, relevant and useful information in an easily navigable platform at gfp.sd.gov.

Also in 2015, SDLeastWanted.com was developed as part of a larger public relations and marketing campaign to educate and inform boaters and anglers, residents and non-residents, about the prevention, management and control of aquatic invasive species or AIS in South Dakota. The site has been viewed over 76,000 times since its launch on April 1, 2015.

On October 2, 2015, habitat.sd.gov launched as part of the Habitat Pays public relations campaign to connect farmers and ranchers to the appropriate habitat resources and help them implement wildlife habitat where it makes the most sense. The website and campaign are designed to provide more information and education to assist landowners in designing, developing and funding habitat on their land; working directly with habitat advisors who possess the knowledge of federal, state and local programs. Since its launch, the site has been visited over 5,500 times.

ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

With over 24,000 page likes on Facebook, over 4,000 followers on Twitter, an active blog and a new Instagram account in 2015, GFP engages our customers in two-way communication on a daily basis; multiple times a day. #SDintheField, #SDLeastWanted and #HabitatPays continue to successfully spark conversations, photos, videos and information sharing with our customers as well. It is a priority to reach our customers in the most effective way possible and to understand where and how they receive their information and then deliver it to them through those online engagement platforms.



@bashoreoutdoors

@mcnaughtmichael

@mprasek12

@jfrease22

@ericanthonyanderson

@Gilby_10

MOBILE APPS

According to recent metrics, 43 percent of our customers continue to expect online services and information to be available from a handheld or tablet device. Smartphones and apps go hand in hand. Apps provide service features and activities as well as brief "how to" information and updates. Apps allow users to have immediate access to our information at the touch of a button.

Hunting and Fishing App allows users to view hunting and fishing regulations, view maps of public hunting and fishing opportunities, access the sunrise/sunset table and more. The maps use GPS to show the user where they are on public land. The regulations are divided into sections to make it easier to access the specific information being searched.

Approximately 5,000 iOS downloads and 17,000 Android downloads to date.

State Parks Pocket Ranger App allows users access to park information, upcoming events, news, weather conditions and geographic landmarks before and during trips to the park grounds.

Approximately 16,083 iOS downloads and 6,225 Android downloads to date.

SOUTH DAKOTA CONSERVATION DIGEST

The South Dakota Conservation Digest is a bi-monthly, internally produced magazine, with an additional two issues dedicated to just kids. At the end of 2015, the publication had 7,247 subscribers primarily from the Midwestern states and is also delivered to customers in Canada and Chile. The magazine is also available online.

LANDOWNERS MATTER

Landowners Matter is a bi-yearly newsletter targeted and sent to landowners across South Dakota. It includes updates on habitat programs, resources for landowners, information about wildlife damage management and much more. This publication is also available online.





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