



Department of Game, Fish & Parks

2011 Annual Report



Serving People, Managing Wildlife



INTRODUCTION

The Wildlife Division of the Department of Game, Fish and Parks works diligently to protect and enhance the natural resources of South Dakota and provide for outdoor recreation. You will find highlights of these activities of the past year in this report. In addition to these noteworthy accomplishments, many additional goals and objectives were met in the course of striving to meet our mission, Serving People, Manage Wildlife.

While the resource management responsibilities of the Division of Wildlife originate in statute, it is the obligation of service to the citizens of South Dakota and its visitors that motivates our actions. At the same time we are a science-based agency and our actions are guided by the science of wildlife management. Maintaining and enhancing the rich wild resources come foremost in management decisions and policies. The wants and desires of people that enjoy these rich resources figures a very close second.

Each year of success brings with it a new set of challenges. The accomplishments of 2011 provide the motivation for us to move forward in 2012. We are committed to working with the people we serve to help us identify goals and will diligently pursue those goals in 2012 and beyond.

We feel fortunate to have wildlife management responsibilities in a state with rich natural resources where outdoor recreational opportunities abound and we take pride in telling you of our accomplishments.



Tony Leif
Wildlife Division Director

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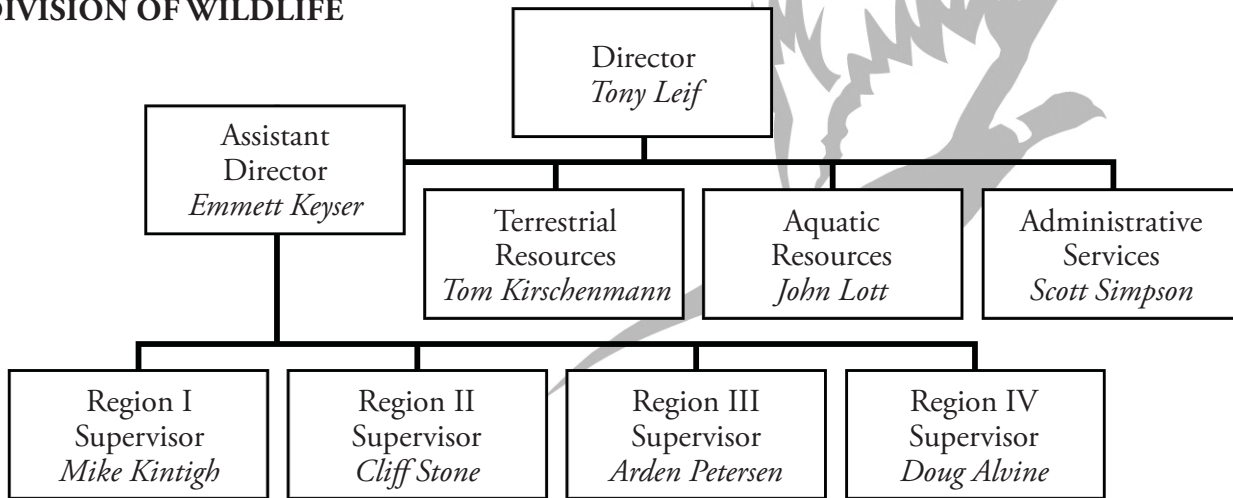
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WHO WE ARE

DEPARTMENT OF GAME, FISH & PARKS

Jeff Vonk, Department Secretary

DIVISION OF WILDLIFE



The Division of Wildlife is staffed by 280 employees organized in the following sections:

The Operations section includes conservation officers, law enforcement specialists and trainers, conservation technicians, wildlife damage specialists, and support staff.

Administrative Services includes the Federal Aid, Human Dimensions, Surveys, and Communications programs.

Aquatic Resources includes management of both recreational and non-game fish species, fish hatchery production, fish habitat development, fishing access development, aquatic nuisance species, and environmental review.

Terrestrial Resources includes management of wildlife for hunting, management of fur-bearing animals, management of non-game wildlife, habitat development on both private and public lands, and development of hunting access.

GFP COMMISSION

The Division of Wildlife works under the guidance of an 8-member citizen board. Board members are appointed by the Governor. Current members of the Game, Fish and Parks Commission are:

Jeff Olson, Rapid City - Chair

Susie Knippling, Gann Valley - Vice Chair

Jim McMahon, Canton

Mike Authier, Vivian

John Cooper, Pierre

Jim Spies, Watertown

Barry Jensen, White River

Cathy Peterson, Salem

AT A GLANCE

- Division recorded nearly 24,000 hours to flood relief effort and GFP totaled over 40,000 hours as an agency
- 55,000 acres in James River Watershed enrolled in CREP
- 1.3 million acres of private land leased for public hunting through Walk-In Area Program at cost of \$2.2 million
- Research projects being conducted on Canada goose management, pheasant reproduction in winter wheat areas of central S.D., elk in the Black Hills, and the effect of lead shot on pheasants
- Private landowner partnerships for 175 acres of woody habitat; 10,920 acres of winter food plots; 250 acres of nesting cover; 1,067 acres of habitat protected through fencing projects; 10,216 acres of wetland and grassland projects
- \$1.15 million approved by GFP Commission for land management improvements to public hunting Game Production Areas
- Responded to over 3,000 requests for assistance to private landowners on Wildlife Damage Management issues; \$236,000 for stackyards and livestock panels, \$89,000 for food plots, \$37,000 in contract payments to facilitate elk hunters and provide growing season food plots
- Wildlife Damage Management staff drove 359,000 miles and worked 22,500 hours to provide assistance to landowners with big game damage problems with expenditure of over \$800,000
- Fisheries staff is carefully monitoring the affects of high runoff from the 2011 flood event on fish populations in the mainstem reservoirs
- Working in Glacial Lakes area on shoreline improvement program that will restore natural vegetation and reduce both erosion and nutrient release into these waters
- Collected 84 million fish eggs, stocked 53 million fish
- Fisheries research projects included studying the use of South Dakota products for hatchery feed; perch genetics as it relates to lack of larger fish; the spread and impact of Asian carp species; recovery of the endangered pallid sturgeon
- Added a fishing access area at the Rollings Game Production Area for another fishing opportunity in southeastern South Dakota
- Outreach to maintain and grow the number of hunters and anglers in South Dakota includes social media, “20 Minute Angler” videos, interactive maps, Step Outside programs, staff presentations, education programs, and e-mail outreach to license buyers as well as those who purchased a license in 2010 but not 2011
- Handled over 35,000 phone calls and 5,000 e-mail requests for information
- Educated 3,750 students in the HuntSAFE program and 1,500 in Bowhunter Education
- Over 200 South Dakota schools now participate in the National Archery in the Schools Program with an average of 100 students per school
- 1 million unique visitors to the GFP website
- Turn In Poachers program has recorded 109 arrests with 1,230 jail days (1,215 suspended), \$18,752 in fines and \$16,244 in civil damages (for cases finalized; not all cases finalized at the time of this report)

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

WILDLIFE DIVISION CONTRIBUTES TO FLOOD FIGHT

Wildlife Division conservation officers, biologists, technicians and many other staff were called upon to help with a variety of state and local emergency response efforts that provided flood response aid to several communities along the Missouri River in South Dakota.

The flood event began over the course of a very few days in late May as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers re-evaluated and adjusted water release rates from mainstem reservoirs to record levels. Agency staff quickly became immersed in the State Emergency Operations Center, helping to direct flood assistance manpower, equipment and other resources to various communities that would be impacted by flood waters.

Throughout the first few weeks of the flood event, staff coordinated the closure of river reaches immediately above and below the main stem reservoirs with the Governor's Office, the US Army Corp of Engineers and local community officials.

As the flood situation progressed, Missouri River water levels would eventually rise to historic levels due to record mountain snow pack and widespread, heavy spring rains across the northern Great Plains.

Beginning first in the communities of Pierre and Ft. Pierre, our conservation officers were called upon to help the S.D. National Guard members and local law enforcement direct traffic to help expedite the flow of haul trucks and other heavy equipment engaged in levee construction in both communities. Local law enforcement and fire rescue agencies then requested help from the division to establish on-the-water search and rescue operations that may be required to rescue levee construction workers or evacuate residents living within areas that could be flooded should levees fail. In addition, staff served a critical role in hauling sandbags and other critical emergency response supplies from various locations around the state to central South Dakota. Division staff also assisted the Parks Division as they prepared for rising water at Farm Island Recreation Area and Oahe Downstream Campground.

As water levels on Lake Francis Case and river areas downstream began to rise in early June, division staff provided important assistance to the communities of Chamberlain and Oacoma where the protection of critical water, sewer and electrical infrastructure was a high priority. At the same time, the communities along the lower Missouri River began their flood fighting efforts. The community of North Sioux City, SD, was one of the most impacted. Our staff was engaged in the construction of a large system of levees that helped protect portions of the community and several housing developments adjacent to the Missouri River. Working in concert with a second Emergency Operations Center staged in that community, staff helped direct traffic, haul supplies and equipment and help sandbag infrastructure facilities located in low lying areas that would be impacted. Conservation officers and fisheries technicians and biologists teamed up with the Swift Water Rescue Squad from the Sioux Falls Fire Department to staff emergency search and rescue operations at Dakota Dunes, where they would remain throughout the summer months providing assistance with levee inspections and protection efforts.





Staff worked 12-hour shifts and individual employees working in excess of 80 hours some weeks. Crews endured muggy weather, clouds of biting insects, thunderstorms, and all sorts of dangerous boating conditions while responding to this prolonged flood event.

The Wildlife Division recorded 23,760 hours of work time to the flood effort. As a Department, GFP coded over 40,000 hours.

In addition to these emergency response efforts, division staff were quick to provide help to friends, relatives, co-workers and neighbors as neighborhoods and entire communities banded together to battle rising flood waters.

THE OUTDOOR CAMPUS-WEST

The Division of Wildlife opened its doors to The Outdoor Campus-West in Rapid City in late summer and culminated that with a ribbon cutting on Sept. 29. The Outdoor Campus-West is modeled after the GFP outdoor learning center in Sioux Falls, The Outdoor Campus-East.

The campuses have been developed as an outreach and education tool for citizens in South Dakota's two primary urban areas. Our goal is to encourage and influence future generations of South Dakotans to be active in outdoor recreation and knowledgeable about natural resource management. A focus at both campuses has been on recruitment and retention of hunters and anglers.

Funding for The Outdoor Campus, both West and East, came through hunters and anglers. License sales provide the bulk of the Division of Wildlife budget that paid for construction and operation, and many of the grant monies were directly associated with hunters and anglers. In addition, private donors passionate about South Dakota's outdoors have been an integral part of these education facilities.

The Outdoor Campus-West has had an average over 250 people per day at the new facility. From the open of classes in August through November, there had been over 1,700 people attend the 97 programs that had been presented. In addition, The Outdoor Campus is the site of meetings for sportsmen's groups, conservation groups, Scout groups, and other organizations.



GFP RECOGNIZED BY ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

The Ernest Thompson Seton Award is given to the state, provincial, or federal agency which has best promoted a public awareness of the need to support the science and practice of wildlife management. A companion award is also presented to the individual deemed by the agency as the one most responsible for its successful and award-winning program.

The Game, Fish, and Parks Department and Wildlife Program Manager, John Kanta, received the Ernest Thompson Seton Award for leadership in scientific wildlife management in recognition of the public engagement strategy for GFP's Mountain Lion Management Plan. Since 2003, Kanta has steered more than 30 public meetings to present biological information about mountain lions and seek input on the state's management plan, which includes a hunting season.

By embodying the GFP's willingness and desire to engage the state's citizens, Kanta turned contentious discussions into productive ones and demonstrated that public involvement is an important component of scientific wildlife management.



GFP CONTINUES TO CONNECT WITH PUBLIC

Without question, advances in technology have created a public that demands information at their fingertips. With the increase in availability and popularity of products such as smart phones, iPads, iPods, notebooks, WiFi and 4G networks, we have embraced the opportunity to use this technology to better inform the people we serve. We are ever mindful, however, that this technology is not the preferred form of delivery for some people, and continue use traditional forms of communication that best serve these individuals.

In an effort to better serve our website customers, the GFP website underwent a major facelift and reorganization. While work continues to improve content and navigation for the site, it has already received national recognition. The Association for Conservation Information, a national group of game and fish agency communication and education people, honored the GFP website with third place honors under the Website Category for their 2011 awards competition. The GFP website was judged against game and fish websites from states like Texas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Georgia and many more.

Email continues to be a preferred way of communication in today's world, and the Division of Wildlife has capitalized on e-mailing as a primary source of outreach to our stakeholders. In 2011 we sent approximately 150 messages that touched on over 1 million e-mail accounts. Some of our broader messages (time to purchase new license, application deadline, season openings) may reach 30,000 or more accounts with one e-mail message. Not only is the system economical, but we have found our messages have a very high open rate (usually over 20 percent), and the unsubscribe rate to our messages has been about 0.1 percent.

Hunters and anglers often choose to contact us by email, and we have responded to over 5,000 email requests over the last year.

Technology isn't for everyone, however, and some issues need to be resolved by personal contacts. The Division of Wildlife provides this opportunity in many different ways. One of the more simple, but effective, tools is our phone bank. A crew of 1 full time and two permanent part time individuals responded to over 35,000 phone calls and mailed out over 10,000 information packets.

Another opportunity for input with a more local focus is the Regional Advisory Panels (RAP) created in 2008. The primary purpose of these panels is to achieve an elevated level of outreach and feedback on Division programs, initiatives and policies. Each panel is comprised of 8-9 citizens who reside within one of the four administrative regions. They meet 3-4 times per year.

RAP members represent a cross-section of outdoor, conservation and landowner interests and help division program administrators develop ideas and solutions to address the challenges and opportunities that the Wildlife Division is facing and will face in the future. They provide yet another link between the Division field staff, administrators, GFP Commissioners and the wide variety of people the division serves. The panels also help promote greater public awareness and understanding of fish and wildlife management challenges.

Although each panel has reviewed and generated discussion on a rather diverse list of issues, the common thread to all of the groups has been a strong desire to identify ways to recruit young hunters and anglers into the group of users that enjoy the abundant outdoor recreational opportunities available in the state. Other issues discussed by the panels over the past 3 years include: wildlife damage management programs, Canada goose management, mountain lion management, landowner-sportsman relations, youth hunting opportunities, hunting and fishing access programs, fisheries management, private land habitat development opportunities, public land management, hunter ethics and behavior, conservation law enforcement, deer management, invasive species management, shoreline restoration, and many others.

The Division of Wildlife also hosts a multitude of "Open Houses" throughout the year. This past year, 3-5 open houses were held at various locations in each of the four administrative regions of the state. In some instances, meetings were held to gather citizen input on specific issues while in other situations, staff hosted public input meetings to share information and more importantly, listen to the public's concerns about agency fish and wildlife management issues, regulations, policies, public access concerns and other topics of interest.

INCREASING HUNTING/FISHING OPPORTUNITIES

PUBLIC ACCESS PROGRAMS REMAIN POPULAR

Whether pursuing small game, waterfowl, or big game, it is important that hunters have access to places that provide opportunities to harvest game. Access has the additional benefit of helping retain and recruit hunters. Partnerships with cooperating landowners continue at a high level which will help maintain the hunting heritage of South Dakota.

The Walk-In Area program (private land leased for public hunting opportunity) continued to grow with 1.3 million acres of private land leased for public hunting access at a cost just over \$2.2 million.

GFP received a \$1 million grant from USDA Farm Service Agency's Voluntary Public Access & Habitat Incentive Program to increase the amount of private land open to public hunting this year. This grant allowed the Division of Wildlife to offer upfront signing bonuses, worth \$618,000, to secure multiyear WIA contracts on 26,436 acres of land enrolled in Conservation Reserve Program or the Wetland Reserves Program. Southeast South Dakota was a focus area in an attempt to provide additional public hunting opportunities in a section of the state where public land is limited but demand is high due to the population base.

We enrolled 22,826 acres in Day County, 16,534 acres in Marshall County, and 4,000 acres in Roberts County in the Special Access Areas program. These are working farmlands that are enrolled for public hunting of all wildlife species, with emphasis on waterfowl (Canada goose) field hunting opportunities. Special Access lands are typically a mixture of farm fields, wetlands, occasional tree belts, and CRP.

Twelve cooperators enrolled 18,137 acres in Controlled Hunting Access Program. These acres are also private land leased for public hunting opportunity, primarily big game, where landowners are paid based on the number of hunters who use their land. Hunters are required to complete a check-in form.

The Lower Oahe Waterfowl Access Hunting Program included approximately 37,000 acres from nine cooperating landowners in the Pierre area. These lands are leased primarily to provide waterfowl hunting opportunities, however much of the lands are also utilized by upland game and big game hunters. There are 43 decoy-only registration fields and 74 pits available for pass-shooting hunts.

CREP PROGRAM PROVIDES HABITAT AND ACCESS

The James River Watershed Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a partnership between South Dakota and the Department of Agriculture. Through this partnership program, landowners voluntarily enroll crop land for 10-15 years, with the state's contribution comprising about 20% of associated payments and expenditures. All enrolled lands are seeded to grassland, and any wetlands are restored. The public benefits include flood prevention, increased water quality by reducing soil erosion, chemical and nutrient runoff, increased wildlife habitat, and increased public hunting and fishing access. All properties



enrolled in CREP are enrolled in the Walk-in Area access program, creating hunting and fishing opportunities in areas of the state where public access is in high demand.

After two years of signup, South Dakota producers have enrolled over 55,000 acres into CREP. Of the 25 counties that make up the James River Watershed, all but five have land enrolled. At full implementation, 100,000 acres of new wildlife habitat and public hunting and fishing access will be added to the state. Producer interest has been high and there continues to be new applications completed weekly.

ROLLINGS GAME PRODUCTION AREA FISHING ACCESS PROJECT COMPLETED

The Rollings Game Production Area is located on the northeast edge of Hudson in Lincoln County. The site contained an abandoned gravel pit, with several small ponds. In order to improve the fishery, the Division of Wildlife connected and deepened three existing ponds to create one 7.5 acre pond, purchased two handicapped-accessible floating fishing piers (to be installed spring 2012) and installed concrete, handicapped-accessible parking for each fishing pier.

In addition, there is a boat launch site, concrete vault toilet, compacted gravel walking trail system with two wooden bridges, 14 shore fishing access points with large flat rocks to sit or stand on, and a large gravel parking lot. The current fish population primarily consists of largemouth bass, bluegill, sunfish, and northern pike. Catchable-size rainbow trout will be stocked each spring and fall along with other game fish.

The total cost of the project was \$340,000. This area will provide a much needed fishery in southeast South Dakota, and is easily accessed by residents of Sioux Falls and surrounding communities.

FISH HABITAT AND FISHING ACCESS PROJECTS COMPLETED

Maintaining and enhancing fish habitat and fishing access are crucial to sustaining quality fisheries and are a continuing challenge for fisheries staff. Accelerated aging of waters due to nutrient and sediment loading reduces the ability of waters to provide fisheries. Increasing fishing access, especially in urban areas and for anglers with limited mobility, is important as population geographic and age distributions change.

A new program using Division of Wildlife and Division of Parks staff and private contractors helped keep 57 lake access areas usable for ice fishing access. Access areas were cleared of snow prior to each weekend during the ice fishing season.

Fisheries staff worked with the Pennington County Resource Advisory Council (RAC) to secure funds to improve shore fishing access along Highway 385 on Sheridan Lake and to improve the boat ramp at



Dutchman's Cove on Deerfield Reservoir for construction in 2012. Access along Highway 385 on Sheridan Lake receives a lot of use by shoreline anglers, ice fisherman, and is a scenic rest spot for many tourists visiting the Black Hills. A concrete path will be constructed to allow easier access to new floating fishing piers and will allow for better ADA access.

The Wildlife Division partnered with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to renovate Dalton Lake in the Black Hills,

including an extensive sediment removal project. This effort will allow the lake to again be managed as a fishery.

The Wildlife Division also partnered with the USFS when exceptionally high rain amounts in May and June in central South Dakota put Richland and Sheriff Dams on the Fort Pierre National Grasslands dangerously close to breaching. GFP engineers generated plans and hired contractors to conduct emergency repairs to both these dams to prevent their failure and the loss of these important fisheries for the central part of the State.

Work continued on rebuilding Rosehill Dam, south of Miller during 2011. An engineering firm is under contract for the project design and plans are for reconstruction to occur early in the spring of 2012.

Improvements to boat ramps and docks or fishing piers were made at Oak Lake, East Oakwood Lake, Brakke Dam, Lake Byron, Cavour Lake and Snake Creek on Lake Francis Case during 2011. In addition, boat access between North and South Twin Lakes (Minnehaha Co.) was established by building a canal between these waters.

GFP INCREASES OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Over the past several years, the Division of Wildlife has developed several sites across that state that provide improved access opportunities for disabled hunters on GFP-owned lands. In some situations, designated roads and trails on Game Production Areas have been enhanced to permit access by all-terrain and other type vehicles. Special allowances have also been made to allow disabled hunters to retrieve downed game on these areas.

We have several hunting areas that provide enhanced access opportunities for people with disabilities. Our Game Production Areas have limited travel, but more road access is afforded in selected GPA's to provide a variety of hunting experiences.

In addition to these access opportunities, Division conservation officers and other staff have also provided logistical support and equipment to a number of special events held specifically for disabled hunters. Each year events are sponsored by the National Wild Turkey Federation, the North American Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans Association and many other local entities.

We follow the same course with enhanced fishing access areas. These typically include access to specially designed fishing docks and piers. New fishing access opportunities for disabled anglers were constructed this past year on Lake Kampeska, Eureka Lake, and at ponds located on the Rollings Game Production Area near Hudson.

MANAGING WILDLIFE RESOURCES

GFP ENHANCES HABITAT WITH LANDOWNER COOPERATORS

Because over 80% of South Dakota lies in private ownership, one of the Division's highest priorities is to work with landowners to build, enhance, and maintain wildlife habitat that will provide the appropriate seasonal requirements of both resident and migratory species. The Division worked with numerous private landowners this past year on projects such as looking at the needs to provide winter cover and food to help wildlife survive winters such as the one we experienced in 2010-2011, or to provide the nesting or critical habitats in the spring and summer.

We partnered with 76 private landowners to establish 175 acres of woody habitat at a cost-share level of \$176,345.00.

The past two winters have demonstrated the need of the winter food plot program. In 2011, 10,920 acres of winter food plots were enrolled in the program. Cost share payments to the 952 landowner partners exceeded \$232,000 and provided additional food sources during difficult winter conditions that helped several wildlife species survive.

No habitat is more critical than undisturbed nesting cover, in particular for ground nesting species such as pheasants, grouse, many other bird species and several waterfowl species. Through the year, we worked with 15 landowner partners to establish over 250 acres of nesting cover at a cost share level of \$19,000.

Other valuable habitats were protected by developing 12 habitat fencing agreements with landowner partners. These agreements included a contribution level of \$13,435 which helped protect and manage 1,067 acres.

Our Wetland/Grassland Program specializes in working with landowners interested in developing or restoring wetland and associated uplands for waterfowl and in many situations enhancing livestock management. In 2011, 50 projects were completed through this program affecting a total of 10,216 acres. Thirty-two wetland projects restored, enhanced or created 267 acres of wetland habitat; and 18 upland projects restored or enhanced 9,949 acres of grassland and riparian areas. Total cost of all projects was \$572,360 with a cost share of \$341,989 provided to landowners by GFP. Landowner partners contributed \$145,117 and others – primarily the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture – provided \$85,254 toward the projects.

WORKING WITH LANDOWNERS TO ALLEVIATE DAMAGE

The Wildlife Damage Management program is designed for our staff to work directly with landowners and producers to reduce wildlife damage to crops, stored feed, livestock loss, and other types of wildlife damage. Wildlife damage specialists and assisting staff responded to over 3,300 requests for service or assistance which directly impacted more than 3,000 landowners/producers. Heavy snowfall inundated the eastern half of South Dakota for most of the winter, which caused deer to enter farmyards for protection and food. Consequently, another harsh winter was largely responsible for a near-record year for the program.

Wildlife damage specialists and conservation officers worked with 124 landowners to pay for the construction of stackyards and the installation of livestock panels to protect stored hay and feed supplies at a cost of \$236,600. Our staff also worked with another 44 landowners to provide food plots to assist with the reduction of damage to growing crops and hay caused by elk and deer at a cost of \$88,857. In the southern Black Hills, our staff worked with nine landowners and provided \$36,706 in contract payments to facilitate elk

hunter access and provide growing season food plots to assist with the reduction of elk damage to private lands. In addition to these contract expenditures, our staff drove a total of 197,000 miles and worked 13,989 hours to provide assistance to landowners with big game damage problems. Overall, we spent over \$1.2 million assisting landowners with big game depredation issues.



In addition to the assistance our staff provided to landowners regarding big game depredation, we also provided Canada goose crop damage abatement assistance to 479 landowners on 843 individual complaint sites. To respond to these landowner complaints, staff drove 123,392 miles, worked 13,222 hours, and spent \$269,028 on equipment and supplies. We also provided \$107,822 to 87 landowners who installed permanent fence, temporary and permanent buffer strips, or food plots on their property to reduce crop damage caused by Canada geese. The total expenditure for this component of the Wildlife Damage Management Program was \$456,732.

Wildlife damage specialists responded to 949 individual coyote and fox complaints regarding livestock loss. Sheep numbers within South Dakota significantly increased this past year due to high prices and droughts throughout other areas of the United States, when coupled with rebounding coyote populations caused a significant workload with this portion of the program. We spent nearly \$400,000 responding to these requests for service which included: staff time, mileage, and supplies. Adequate spring moisture and the spread of plague significantly reduced the number of prairie dog complaints that were received. As a result, we treated over 1,100 acres of prairie dog colonies on private land in western South Dakota. Our staff also responded to 615 beaver complaints and 502 nuisance animal complaints. Wildlife damage staff drove a total of 358,979 miles at a cost of \$179,490, worked 22,547 hours at a cost of \$530,982 and spent \$290,397 on equipment and supplies to assist livestock producers and other citizens with the reduction of livestock loss and other wildlife damage problems.

GFP IMPROVES HABITAT ON GAME PRODUCTION AREAS

In January 2011, the GFP Commission approved a special allocation of Wildlife Division funds to address a backlog of habitat development and access improvement projects on Department owned Game Production Areas throughout the state. This initiative set in motion a well-funded and well-coordinated effort to reinvest hunting license revenues back into State owned public hunting areas, ensuring these lands remain premier wildlife habitat and public hunting destinations for residents and visitors. The \$1.15 million in development and improvement projects approved by the Commission is significant in addressing the \$2.5 million in proposed projects identified by Wildlife Division land management staff. Practices topping the list of approved projects in both cost and number include habitat restoration practices (e.g. native grass seeding, grazing management improvements, and tree planting) and public access improvements (e.g. road and trail repair and development, and fishing and boating access developments). To date over 13 miles of road and trail improvements have been made (including a new handicap hunter access trail at the Byre GPA in Lyman

County); 520 acres grassland restoration plantings made; 50 acres of woody habitat established; 15 small dams repaired; and 16 miles of fence constructed.

STATE WILDLIFE GRANTS

A decade ago, a new federal funding source opened up opportunities for state, tribal and territorial wildlife agencies to address the needs of natural areas and wildlife species. State Wildlife Grants funding has been an extremely important tool that helps the Division of Wildlife address the needs of the broad array of fish and wildlife species that spend all or part of their lives in the state. This annual appropriation by Congress has helped meet the challenge of planning for the needs of all wildlife species and their habitats. In particular, state wildlife grant funds play a significant role in assisting states with the process of de-listing threatened and endangered species.

Two examples of such work are demonstrated with a peregrine falcon reintroduction and river otter evaluations. The peregrine falcon once nested in western South Dakota and is a state endangered species. In this project, peregrine falcon chicks are acclimated to a release site in downtown Rapid City and released to the wild, with the anticipation that some birds will survive to breeding age and return to the Black Hills to nest. The river otter is a state threatened species in South Dakota that is increasing in abundance and distribution. In this project, an expert is helping the Department determine where river otters currently occur and what areas might be important for future expansion. This information will assist with a river otter management plan that is now in development, and help determine when this species should be managed as a furbearer rather than a protected species.

RESEARCH PROJECTS IMPROVE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

The Division of Wildlife participates in numerous research projects to obtain information that provides management recommendations and refines our ability to manage wildlife and their associated habitats. Research helps us stay in touch with the wants and needs of hunters, and factors such as development and diseases. Most wildlife research projects are contracted out to South Dakota State University while others are conducted internally by Division biologists.

Research projects completed in 2011 include evaluations of: 1) the types of habitat and landscapes used by ruffed grouse populations in the Black Hills; 2) movement patterns, survival, and sightability of white-tailed deer in eastern South Dakota; 3) effect of intensity and season of harvest on wildlife and biomass production; 4) development of a sightability model for Rocky Mountain elk in the Black Hills of South Dakota; 5) effects of harvest on mountain lions in the Black Hills of South Dakota; and 6) seasonal movements of elk relative to management unit boundaries in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

Several projects were initiated in 2011 that will provide better understanding and techniques to manage waterfowl, upland, and big game species. These projects will evaluate: 1) management techniques for Canada geese in agricultural areas with possible application to urban areas; 2) pheasant reproductive ecology in winter wheat dominated landscapes of central South Dakota; 3) elk movement, nutritional condition, pregnancy rates, and calf survival in the southern Black Hills of South Dakota; and 4) lead shot availability, distribution, and ingestion by wild ring-necked pheasants on areas with high shooting activity in South Dakota.

MANAGING FISHERIES RESOURCES

FISHERIES QUICK STATS

- Approximately 84 million fish eggs were taken by fisheries and hatchery staff in 2011
- 53 million fish were stocked in 2011
- 114 lake and 7 stream surveys for fish were conducted
- An estimated 2.7 million days were spent fishing in SD in 2010
- An estimated 1.4 million walleyes were harvested in 2010



DOCUMENTING IMPACTS OF FLOOD ON FISH

Based on the impacts of the flood of 1997 on recreational fisheries in the Missouri River system in South Dakota, the Division of Wildlife anticipated major effects to fisheries from the high flow rates in the Missouri River associated with the flood of 2011. The Division worked with the Governor's office to get approval to conduct sampling below the dams and implemented several surveys to document effects of record water releases on fish populations. Surveys were implemented to document flow of prey (food) fish through Oahe, Big Bend, and Fort Randall dams; prey fish monitoring using hydro-acoustic sonar in Lake Oahe; analysis of adult salmon movements downstream from Lake Oahe through the dams and outlet works; monitoring of walleye condition in Lake Oahe; indexing primary productivity in the Missouri River impoundments; and monitoring larval fish production and growth in Lakes Oahe and Sharpe.

Preliminary analysis of information revealed striking downstream movement of many fishes, including rainbow smelt, Chinook salmon, and lake herring. Monitoring the condition of Lake Oahe walleye revealed normal growth through the summer months. Further interpretation of this material is being conducted and information gained from the additional monitoring programs this summer will be used to direct future management actions involving recreational fishes along the Missouri River.

SDSU AND GFP PARTNER ON FISH HEALTH

The Division of Wildlife is now having all fish health sample testing performed by outside laboratories, creating efficiencies in South Dakota's fish health management program. Division staff had performed testing for bacteria and other labs tested for viruses. We still administers the fish health program and fish importation permit process but the certified fish health laboratory at Washington State University and the Animal Disease Research and Diagnostic Lab (ADRDL) at South Dakota State University now conduct all the testing. Veterinarians within South Dakota are now being used to collect samples from private aquaculture businesses, contributing to local economies throughout the state.

SDSU began work to improve their fish health testing capabilities, with the goal of ultimately doing all of the coldwater fish health work for South Dakota in 2012. The Division encouraged this effort by funding travel for lab technicians from SDSU to Washington State University for training.

Collaboration continued with Dr. Regg Neiger at SDSU on Bacterial Coldwater Disease issues at both

McNenny and Cleghorn state fish hatcheries. Research was initiated to determine the timing of infection in rainbow trout at both hatcheries, and additional collaborators were identified to assist with the genetic typing of the disease to determine strain similarities or differences between the hatcheries.

FISH STOCKING PROVIDES FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

One of the basic tools of fisheries management is stocking fish produced in hatcheries or acquired by trapping fish and transferring them to other waters. Our staff worked together to schedule hatchery production and to evaluate effectiveness of stockings of hatchery fish.

This was a productive year with over 61 million walleyes eggs collected from eastern South Dakota lakes and Lake Oahe. This effort, and eggs received from North Dakota, allowed us to stock 44 million walleyes in 2011. In addition to walleye stocking, 232,000 rainbow trout and 229,000 Chinook salmon were stocked in South Dakota waters.

More than 3 million walleye and yellow perch fingerlings were stocked in nearly 50 lakes. Typically Blue Dog stocks about 2 million fingerlings a year. Yellow perch production techniques have greatly improved in the last three years due to research and adjustments in pond stocking techniques. Survival of perch in 2011 averaged 85% compared to 20% in 2008. Over 50 million walleye and perch fry were also stocked in 46 lakes. Anglers will benefit from these stockings for many years.

HATCHERY IMPROVEMENTS ENSURE PRODUCTION IN FUTURE YEARS

As with any production facility, updates and maintenance are routinely required to ensure efficient and reliable operation of state fish hatcheries. Significant updates and infrastructure work occurred at Blue Dog State Fish Hatchery in 2011.

A new water heating system capable of heating 800 gallons per minute of water to 75 degrees has been installed. It replaces a unit from 1982 which was inefficient, had numerous mechanical issues, and repair parts were no longer available. Heated water is necessary for successfully incubating and hatching walleye and perch eggs and also allows for the production of largemouth bass and channel catfish. Past stocking of largemouth bass has often been unsuccessful and research in collaboration with SDSU has shown spring stocking of larger fish may be more beneficial. Catfish and largemouth bass will play an important role in enhancing and developing urban fisheries, kids fishing ponds, and fisheries in small lakes throughout South Dakota, while also decreasing time and manpower investments in fish products and reducing the risk of spreading aquatic nuisance species through trap and transfer operations.

Water levels in the Waubay area continue to rise, including Blue Dog Lake. Several projects were undertaken in 2011 to prevent major flood damage to infrastructure as lake levels increase. All three well houses were raised above projected high water levels, protected by berms, and power supplies restored. Two of the three production wells and the power supplies were inundated in spring 2011. The pumps in the lake water pumping station were also below the lake level in 2011, requiring continuous pumping to prevent flooding of the turbine pumps and electrical service which would cause catastrophic equipment damage and extreme electrical hazard. Plans are to have all equipment raised above projected high water levels by spring 2012.

FISHERIES RESEARCH AIDS IN FUTURE MANAGEMENT

Adaptively managing the fisheries resources of South Dakota requires answering pertinent questions through management driven research. This process has been a part of the Aquatics Section of the Wildlife Division for over three decades. Through research accomplished in conjunction with South Dakota State University and other entities, our staff has been able to simplify fishing regulations, more efficiently stock our waters utilizing fewer resources, and identify species in need of additional conservation measures.

Research to continually improve South Dakota's walleye fisheries continues to be a top priority. In 2011, this included assessment of length limits on Reetz Lake, influence of reservoir productivity on stocking success in two South Dakota impoundments, and production of young walleye in eastern South Dakota lakes.

Interest in yellow perch fisheries throughout the state remains high. Interactions between yellow perch and smallmouth bass in glacial lakes are being studied in cooperation with SDSU. Aquatics staff are also looking at yellow perch genetics statewide as a possible reason for a lack of larger fish in some populations.

The spread and impact of Asian carp species such as silver and bighead carp in the James, Big Sioux and Vermillion Rivers has become an important issue to our statewide fisheries resources. We

continued a cooperative project with SDSU looking at the distribution, reproduction and potential impacts of these populations. In addition to Asian carp work, common carp populations are also being researched to aid in the management of nuisance populations.

We continued work to recover the endangered pallid sturgeon through research and monitoring efforts up and down the Missouri River. In addition to standard duties as part of the basin-wide pallid sturgeon recovery team, our aquatics staff working on the pallid sturgeon crew in South Dakota also has been addressing hook and line vulnerability of pallid sturgeon for sampling purposes as well as stress levels in pallid and shovelnose sturgeon captured in various sampling gears.

Answering some of the important questions dealing with populations of sport fish, aquatic nuisance species and endangered or threatened species is critical to managing the aquatic resources of South Dakota. In cooperation with various partners, aquatics research helps provide both residents and non-residents alike a wide variety of angling opportunities throughout the State of South Dakota.



HATCHERY RESEARCH IMPROVES PRODUCTION

South Dakota's three State fish hatcheries support fisheries management efforts by producing quality fish to meet statewide stocking needs. Research is essential to efficiently produce a high quality fish that performs well in the wild and ends up on the end of someone's fishing line.

Original and innovative hatchery techniques to effectively manage

Bacterial Coldwater Disease were developed and implemented at McNenny State Fish Hatchery. These techniques reduced stress and crowding, and decreased mortality to levels that did not require antibiotic treatment. Collaborative research with SDSU and USDA-ARS evaluating alternative plant proteins in fish feed continued, with a fermented soy product produced by a relatively new South Dakota company showing great promise. Research into the use of hops as a fish egg fungicide continued as well, with progress made toward the goal of providing a safer, natural, and locally-grown alternative to formalin. Chinook salmon spawning and egg incubation research continued to produce results leading to improved egg survival and rearing efficiencies.

Work on coldwater disease also continues at Cleghorn State Fish Hatchery. A coldwater-disease resistant strain of rainbow trout is being studied, as is adding krill to the diets of young trout in hopes of increasing resistance to the disease.

Blue Dog State Fish Hatchery is evaluating alternatives to organic fertilizers for hatchery ponds to provide increased walleye production. Maximizing production when pond space is limited is critical in providing the number of young walleye necessary to meet management requests. Blue Dog Hatchery is working on modifying largemouth bass rearing techniques to increase the average size of bass stocked into South Dakota waters. Efforts by hatchery staff to increase the size of bass stocked has been shown to increase the number of bass available to anglers.

FISHERIES TEAM INVOLVES THE PUBLIC

One of the most valuable fisheries management tools is providing and receiving information from an informed public. Public knowledge of current resource status and issues and the feedback received from the public are essential in the fisheries management decision-making process. Our staff made over 80 presentations to various public groups, in a number of venues in 2011 and contacted over 2,800 people in the process. Over 300 hatchery or fish spawning station tours were given to audiences of all sizes and over 12,000 people visited hatcheries and spawning stations during 2011. Sharing what we do and how and why we do it, from fish production to setting of harvest regulations, is instrumental in building and maintaining public support for management efforts.



AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES REGULATIONS IMPLEMENTED

The GFP Commission approved the first regulations in the State aimed at preventing the spread of Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS). This included creating a list of ANS species that may not be possessed, transported, sold, purchased, or propagated without proper permitting by the Department. Another rule approved prohibits the launching of watercraft with ANS attached, and gives GFP personnel authority to inspect watercraft and require decontamination prior to launching if ANS are found attached. A related rule approved by the Commission prohibits baitfish capture, both commercially and by private individuals, on the James, Big Sioux and Vermillion Rivers, as well as the Missouri River below Gavin's Point Dam. Two ANS fish species – silver and bighead carp – are present in these waters and this rule will slow the spread of these fish to other water where recreational fisheries may be impacted.

Implementation of these rules represents a major step toward preventing the spread of ANS species within South Dakota, and was vital in the ongoing fight to keep new species from entering South Dakota from other areas of the country.



SHORELINE RESTORATION DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS COMPLETED

In partnership with the Midwest Glacial Lakes Fish Habitat Partnership, the Division of Wildlife completed four shoreline restoration projects on private land on lakes in northeastern South Dakota. These projects use funds from the Glacial Lakes Partnership and Division of Wildlife staff time to remove existing vegetation and establish a natural vegetation buffer along shorelines that effectively traps nutrients in runoff



and stabilizes the shoreline from erosion. Lake Associations and County Conservation Districts have been contacted as part of the recruitment process for new projects. As the number of demonstration projects increase and vegetation matures, it is expected that “lake-friendly” landscaping will become more common on South Dakota lakes, helping reduce nutrient loading and sedimentation of waters to help meet water quality standards. Two projects on Lake Pelican and two on Pickerel Lake were completed this year.

VHS GRANT BENEFITS BUSINESSES AND FISH HEALTH PROGRAM

A project funded by a grant from USDA-APHIS focusing on testing aquaculture and bait industry fish for Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS) was completed this year. VHS is a disease responsible for major fish kills in the Great Lakes region. States close to this region have been conducting monitoring to track the spread of the disease.

The grant benefited 12 private aquaculture businesses and bait dealers, covering approximately \$24,000 in expenses for lab fees for fish testing. Testing for VHS is often a requirement for fish shipped out of state, so this was a substantial cost savings for the industry. Grant funds were also used to pay for disease testing for South Dakota's three fish hatcheries. During this study and a previous APHIS grant study where fish from wild populations in lakes and streams were tested, no evidence of VHS was detected supporting the fact that fish products from South Dakota are of high quality and VHS free.



CONNECTING WITH THOSE WE SERVE

GFP WORKS TO INCREASE HUNTING/ FISHING PARTICIPATION

The Division of Wildlife has been actively involved in maintaining and growing our base of anglers and hunters in South Dakota for many years. This past year we sought to formalize the process by adding a full-time staff personal to help concentrate our efforts. An early stage of the process was to identify the programs that were in place and adding value to recruitment or retention of anglers. Approximately 50 programs were identified as part of this list. We are now



working to prioritize our efforts and tie together the programs we have in place for a broader approach to recruitment and retention. This includes hunter and angler resource tools for interactive maps and smart phones, education programs through The Outdoor Campus system and programs that target women and youth, “20-Minute Angler” video features on our website that tout easy and accessible fishing adventures for South Dakotans, and loaner equipment to help those who may not have appropriate equipment for hunting and angling. We have completed an internal survey of all GFP staff to gather input from staff and at the same time highlight GFP efforts in recruitment and retention. We are embarking on a partnership with the national Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation to cost-share information to identify anglers who have not purchased a fishing license in the past 2-3 years and invite them to purchase a 2012 license, as well as identify appropriate messages to these individuals. Finally we look to identify and form partnerships with groups and businesses whose core users are hunters and anglers and enlist their services to help reach out to all outdoor users and keep them active as license buyers, club members, shoppers, as well as other service connections.

THE OUTDOOR CAMPUS-EAST

Our outdoor learning center in Sioux Falls continues to be a key connection between our agency and the populous urban area in Southeastern South Dakota.

Through November, over 1,300 programs were offered at The Outdoor Campus-East with nearly 24,000 people in attendance. It has been estimated that TOC-East attracts around 100,000 visitors per year, make it one of the more popular attractions in Sioux Falls. It is regularly featured in magazine articles and news stories as a prime factor in quality of life for those living in the Sioux Falls community.

Some of the major educational events hosted by TOC-East this past year included a Women’s Try It Day to introduce women to a variety of outdoor adventures, and a broader Outdoor University geared at introducing entire families to a host of activities.

The 1-day Outdoor University event attracted 1,700 visitors to try activities that included hunting, fishing, kayaking, dog handling, archery, wildlife identification, and many more. A variety of sportsmen’s clubs, businesses and volunteers helped make the event a success that will be built upon in coming years.

INTEREST GROWS IN GPS MAPS

The popular series of online resource maps for hunters and anglers was expanded this past year to include applications for smart phones. The map resources include information on fishing and hunting access with updated fishing and hunting reports, waterfowl migration maps to assist hunters on locating waterfowl, and big game application maps. As a measure of success, visits to the web pages with these maps indicate 150,000 page views



for the East River Deer application map, 126,000 for West River Deer, 71,000 for the waterfowl migration map, and 60,000 each for the Canada Goose unit map and the Duck zones map. We look to expand our smart phone applications and seek more innovative ways to connect information to users.

AQUATIC EDUCATION GRANTS EXPAND FISHING OPPORTUNITIES

The Division of Wildlife utilizes federal match funds (25% state funds to 75% federal funds) to enhance education programs throughout the state. The grants total over \$100,000 and include programs and projects at both The Outdoor Campus East and West, fishing equipment to state parks and other groups, state fish hatcheries, events like local water festivals and Becoming an Outdoors Woman, and educating the public about aquatic nuisance species.

HUNTER EDUCATION PARTICIPANTS REMAIN STEADY

This past year 5, 250 students successfully completed some form of hunter education in South Dakota. This included 3,750 graduates of the HuntSAFE program and 1,500 graduates of the Bowhunter Education program. The number of HuntSAFE graduates has remained steady for the past 5 years. Bowhunter Education graduates have increased by 8% during the same time period.

NATIONAL ARCHERY IN THE SCHOOLS PROGRAM EXPANDS

The National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) has experience steady growth during the 2011 calendar year. Just over 200 schools are now participating, compared to 153 schools that were active at this time last year. With an average of 100 participants per school, 20,000 Elementary, Middle and High School students will be participating in an archery class as part of their in-school curriculum. Research has shown that 70% of these participants will shoot a bow and arrow for the first time because of this program.

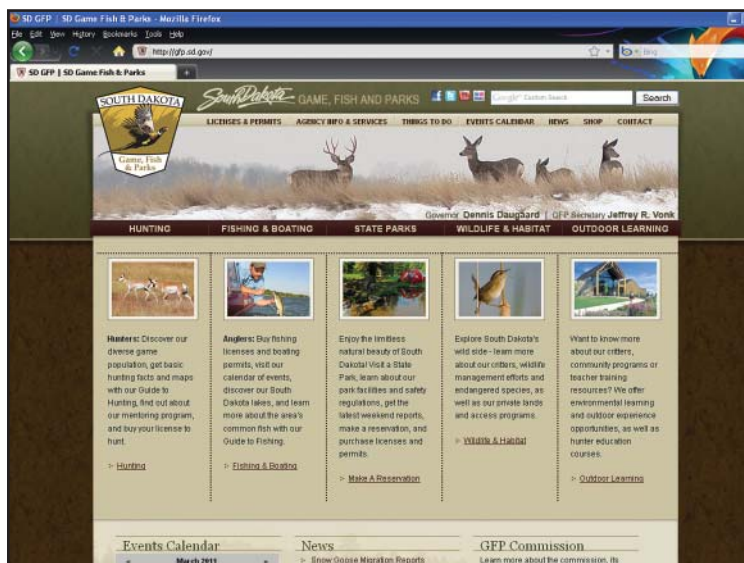
GFP SHOOTING SPORTS MINI GRANTS ENHANCES SHOOTING SPORTS

The Division of Wildlife has promoted the shooting sports by providing grants to non-profit organization in communities across South Dakota. Diverse groups such as schools, sportsmen's clubs/organizations and 4-H have all taken advantage of this grant in the past. The grant provides up to 75% of the cost of shooting sports related items to these groups. In 2011, grants were awarded totaling \$18,300.

GFP WEBSITE EARNS NATIONAL HONOR

The GFP website underwent a major facelift and reorganization in 2010. While work continues to improve content and navigation for the site, it has already received national recognition.

The Association for Conservation Information, a national group of game and fish agency communication and education people, honored the GFP website with third place honors under the Website Category for their 2010 awards competition. The GFP website was judged against game and fish websites from states like Texas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Georgia and many more.



The website contains information and business applications vital to the functioning of this agency. This includes business applications for purchasing hunting and fishing licenses, applying for big game licenses, and making park reservations.

Through November, the GFP website attracted over 2.1 million website visits (nearly 1 million unique visitors) checking out over five pages per visit with an average of four minutes per visit.

IMPROVING SHOOTING SKILLS WORKSHOPS CONDUCTED

An important component of wildlife management is to provide places to hunt and allocate the appropriate number of licenses for sportsmen and women to have enjoyable hunting adventures. The Division of Wildlife is seeking to advance and improve the success of those hunting opportunities and at the same time reduce the wounding loss of birds by incorporating shooting clinics to our outreach efforts. We hosted four Improving Shooting Skills/Reducing Wounding Loss workshops in four different locations. In one location the participants consisted of HuntSAFE instructors from across the state. The workshops consist of a lecture portion and field exercises. The lecture portion addresses methods to reduce wounding losses, ammunition characteristics, and hunter trends. The field exercise consists of participant's pattern testing their shotgun to find suitable loads, looking at decoys to estimate distance and firing at clay targets to improve shooting skills. Most workshops have 12-15 attendees and participants leave as an improved shooter with a better understanding of wounding loss.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW ESSENTIAL FOR RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

There are many instances where proposed development projects or land use programs have the potential to impact fish and wildlife habitats and the Division of Wildlife becomes engaged by providing environmental review assessments to help minimize negative impacts and promote habitat enhancement when opportunities exist. Projects reviewed range from a very small scale (site specific) to others which have a multi-state impact. During 2011, approximately 90 searches of the Natural Heritage Database were requested looking for data on rare, threatened, or endangered species and dozens of Corps of Engineers 404-program permits requests for impacts of proposed wetland or other water projects. On a larger scale, intervention occurred on the Norbeck Wildlife Project to help continue efforts to remove timber in the battle against mountain pine beetles, and Division staff worked with Keystone XL Pipeline representatives to reduce impacts of the proposed Trans-Canada Keystone XL pipeline to greater sage-grouse in northwestern South Dakota. Staff also contributed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's annual review of the greater sage-grouse's candidate status.

