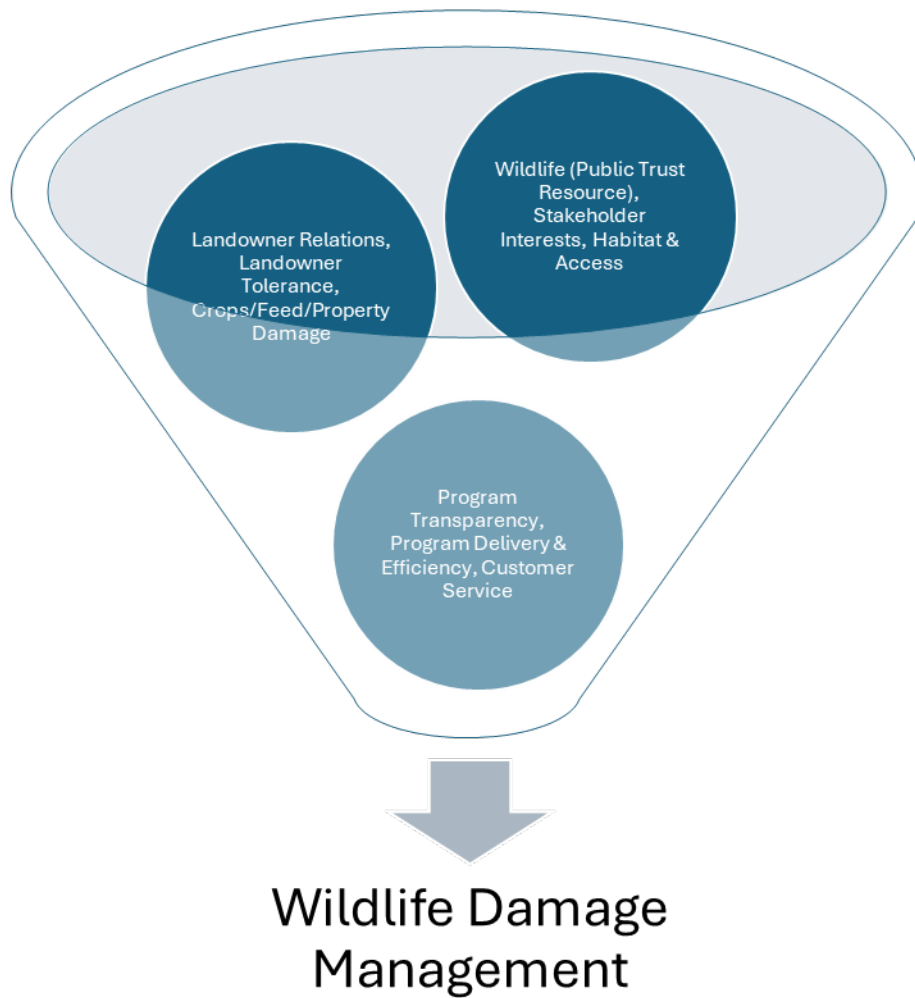


SOUTH DAKOTA

Wildlife Damage Management Action Plan

2026 – 2030



SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF GAME, FISH AND PARKS
PIERRE, SOUTH DAKOTA

WILDLIFE DIVISION REPORT 2026-01
March 2026

This document is for general, strategic guidance for the Division of Wildlife and serves to identify what we strive to accomplish related to Wildlife Damage Management. This process will emphasize working cooperatively with interested publics in both the planning process and program activities related to wildlife damage management in South Dakota.

This action plan will be used by Department staff on an annual basis and will be formally evaluated at least every five years. Plan updates and changes, however, may occur more frequently as needed.

All text and data contained within this document are subject to revision for corrections, updates, and data analyses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This action plan is a product of substantial discussion and input from many wildlife professionals. In addition, those comments and suggestions received from private landowners, hunters, and those who recognize the value of a successful wildlife damage management program were critical to the development of this action plan.

GFP Wildlife Damage Management Action Plan Team that assisted with plan writing, critical reviews, and edits to the South Dakota Wildlife Damage Management Action Plan, 2026 – 2030: Nathan Baker, Tyler Bartels, Brad Baumgartner, Randy Becker, Stacey Bork, Travis Chilson, Jacquie Ermer, Trenton Haffley, John Kanta, Mike Klosowski, Julie Lindstrom, Jacob Lorton, Mark Ohm, Tim Ray, Collin Rhine, Nick Rossman, Kip Rounds, Dan Sternhagen, and Chad Switzer.

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INTRODUCTION

The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Wildlife Damage Management Program (WDM) works directly with landowners and agricultural producers to reduce damage to livestock, crops, and property caused by wildlife. GFP employs 28 full-time Wildlife Damage Specialists (WDS), supported by seasonal staff and additional GFP personnel, and offers a variety of assistance tools and programs to help mitigate wildlife conflicts.

Wildlife Damage Specialists play a vital role in addressing conflicts between people and wildlife across South Dakota's diverse landscapes. Working closely with landowners, farmers, ranchers and the public, WDS staff provide practical, on-the-ground solutions to problems involving coyotes, deer, elk, Canada geese, raccoons, beavers, prairie dogs, and other wildlife species. Some of their work includes trapping coyotes responsible for livestock losses, installing electric fencing to protect crops from Canada geese, assisting with deer and elk damage to stored feed, and helping implement habitat management and hunter access programs with landowners.

The WDM Program is funded in part through county assessments based on livestock numbers (cattle and sheep), with GFP matching these funds on a 2:1 ratio. Additional support comes from surcharges on most hunting licenses, contributions from the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and USDA APHIS Wildlife Services. With more than 80% of South Dakota in private ownership, WDS staff prioritize establishing and maintaining relationships with landowners to address wildlife damage as effectively and efficiently as possible. WDS staff also conduct public outreach, participate in community events, collaborate with partner agencies and stakeholder groups to ensure accountability, support coexistence with wildlife, and maintain a balance between conservation and agricultural productivity.

Management tools and programs used by GFP to assist landowners can be found at <https://gfp.sd.gov/landowner-programs/> under the Wildlife Damage Management section and the current WDM Annual Report can be found at <https://gfp.sd.gov/landowner-programs/> under "Related Documents".

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND ACTION ITEMS

GOAL 1: Support landowners in minimizing damage to livestock, crops, and property by delivering practical and responsive wildlife damage management services.

Objective: Build social tolerance for wildlife by providing timely and effective responses to request for services.

Strategy 1.1: Maintain proactive and aggressive coyote control efforts to reduce livestock losses using all available tools and resources.

Action 1.1.1: Continue using available tools such as thermal imaging, trapping/snaring, aerial predator control, and M-44 devices where applicable.

Action 1.1.2: Support aerial predator control methods:

- Ensure full deployment of USDA APHIS Wildlife Services planes and gunners throughout the state.
- Continue to work with Tribes to address request for service on private deeded property within Tribal lands.
- Collaborate with applicants to secure pilot permits and be available to assist landowners requesting service.
- Use contract pilots and gunners to maintain consistent aerial coverage during periods of limited USDA APHIS Wildlife Services plane availability.

Action 1.1.3: Increase the number of participating landowners and enrolled acres, and ensure all necessary permissions are in place for ground and aerial operations

- Create an online system to allow electronic submission of aerial permission forms.

Action 1.1.4: Wildlife damage specialists will prioritize predator control management activities:

- Emphasize predator control activities from February 1 - June 15.
- Prioritize addressing lamb-to-pasture and pup displacement occurring in September - October.

Strategy 1.2: While continuing to use proven and reliable methods, focus to develop and implement enhanced management tools and long-term strategies to effectively reduce wildlife-related damage caused by deer, elk, turkey, antelope, mountain lions, Canada geese, furbearers, and prairie dogs.

Action 1.2.1: Expand efforts to promote the statewide implementation of long-term solutions in collaboration with interested landowners, with a focus on addressing chronic wildlife damage to stored feed.

Action 1.2.2: Evaluate existing management tools and program services related to crop and property damage to identify effective and long-term solutions for ongoing wildlife conflicts and strengthen collaboration with landowners.

Action 1.2.3: Continue to use depredation pool hunts and kill permits as necessary to address wildlife damage when landowner tolerance levels are exceeded, and existing tools are no longer effective.

Action 1.2.4: Within established guidelines, implement direct control measures for prairie dogs that have encroached onto private lands from adjacent public properties.

Strategy 1.3: Identify ways to enhance efficiency in program service delivery, monitoring staff workload, and overall program accountability.

Action 1.3.1: Use seasonal staff, interns, and other department personnel as needed to support operations.

Action 1.3.2: Evaluate kill permit issuance and reporting processes to ensure efficient, timely, and accountable service for both producers and the Department (e.g., Canada goose take permits).

Action 1.3.3: Design and implement electronic storage of WDM agreements and landowner permissions within the WDM Database Hub.

GOAL 2: Promote strong landowner and stakeholder relations through effective communication.

Objective: Share program information and educate landowners and partners using targeted communication strategies.

Strategy 2.1: Improve communication with landowners and partners across multiple platforms.

Action 2.1.1: Use clear data, success stories, and producer testimonials in the annual report and other outreach materials.

Action 2.1.2: Engage key influencers, such as county commissions, predator control districts, and stakeholder groups, to help promote the program and its benefits.

Action 2.1.3: Strengthen communication with partner agencies, including the Governor's Office, SD Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services, and others.

Strategy 2.2: Maintain strong relationships with landowners, county commissioners, legislators, and stakeholders to build public awareness of the WDM Program.

Action 2.2.1: Continue sharing updates through platforms like the South Dakota Conservation Digest, Landowners Matter newsletter, podcasts, and similar media.

Action 2.2.2: Continue producing the annual WDM report, publish it on the GFP website, and provide printed copies upon request.

Action 2.2.3: Participate in conventions (e.g., Stockgrowers, Sheep Growers) and other stakeholder events when invited to share program updates and build partnerships.

Action 2.2.4: Develop a simple feedback system to gather input from participants and improve the WDM Program.

Action 2.2.5: Periodically conduct a public input survey and share results with department staff and relevant stakeholders.

Strategy 2.3: Ensure continued accountability and collaboration with county commissions and predator control districts.

Action 2.3.1: Local WDS staff will distribute the WDM Annual Report and offer to attend a minimum of one county commission meeting per year to present program updates, share results from the previous year, answer questions, and gather feedback.

GOAL 3: Deliver excellent customer service and maintain program transparency.

Objective: Strengthen program accountability through collaboration with department staff and external partners.

Strategy 3.1: Provide staff with internal and external training opportunities.

Action 3.1.1: New staff will attend the GFP's Serve, Connect, Manage Training given by Department Leadership.

Action 3.1.2: Ensure effective onboarding of new WDM staff by providing appropriate equipment, fostering collaboration with experienced team members for knowledge transfer, and emphasize understanding of program guidelines and policies.

Action 3.1.3: Offer training opportunities at GFP's annual WDM meeting and explore additional external training options to enhance staff development.

Strategy 3.2: Enhance field staff understanding of departmental priorities, policies, goals, and objectives, while establishing a clear mechanism for gathering and incorporating staff feedback.

Action 3.2.1: Department administrators and supervisors will hold monthly meetings to share updates, address questions and suggestions, and determine key information to communicate with WDM staff.

Action 3.2.2: The Wildlife Division Deputy Director, Terrestrial Section Chief, and Regional Supervisors will engage with their respective regional WDM teams to share updates, address challenges and opportunities, and solicit feedback.

Strategy 3.3: Annually engage the ADC Policy Advisory Committee, along with other relevant stakeholders, to discuss challenges, opportunities, and review program updates.

Action 3.3.1: Ensure opportunities for participation by providing both in-person and virtual attendance options for all interested stakeholders.

Action 3.3.2: Facilitate ongoing communication between annual meetings to provide timely updates and share pertinent information.

Strategy 3.4: Conduct a comprehensive review and revision of the WDM Program action plan every five years to ensure alignment with evolving program needs and delivery strategies.

Action 3.4.1: Gather staff and public input on key decisions and outcomes to support transparency and use feedback to update the WDM Program action plan.

Action 3.4.2: Make the WDM Program action plan accessible through the GFP website, social media platforms, and targeted email outreach.

Action 3.4.3: Share the final WDM Program action plan with GFP Commission and staff, the Governor's Office, South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, ADC Advisory Board, county commissions, predator control districts, and others as needed.

GOAL 4: Strengthen and expand partnerships with landowners to promote habitat enhancement and increase public hunting access on private lands.

Objective: By working with willing landowners, enroll additional private acres into habitat improvement and public access programs to measurably increase public hunting opportunities and habitat quality.

Strategy 4.1: WDS staff will provide landowners with information about GFP's Private Lands Habitat Programs, including contact information for the appropriate private land habitat biologists.

Strategy 4.2: Prioritize habitat management actions that improve winter food resources, expand woody and thermal cover, and establish perennial vegetation on marginal cropland adjacent to wetlands, in partnership with willing landowners, to reduce wildlife-related damage.

Action 4.2.1: Leverage data from the WDM Hub to enable WDS staff and private lands habitat biologists to jointly evaluate chronic service requests and present long-term management alternatives to affected landowners.

Action 4.2.2: WDS staff will collaborate with public land managers to identify and implement habitat enhancements on Game Production Areas that support efforts to mitigate chronic depredation issues affecting adjacent private lands.

Action 4.2.3: Promote conservation programs that offer cost-share opportunities and annual payments to help address chronic wildlife depredation issues.

Strategy 4.3: WDS staff will provide landowners with information about GFP's Public Hunting Access Programs, including contact information for the appropriate private land habitat biologists.

Action 4.3.1: Ensure all hunter access options are discussed and clearly communicated to help manage local wildlife populations within landowner tolerance, with unique situations elevated to the regional review team for consideration.