



SOUTH DAKOTA GAME, FISH AND PARKS COMMISSION MEETING AGENDA

JUNE 5-6, 2025 | ABERDEEN, SD | DAKOTA EVENT CENTER

MEETING INFO

This agenda is subject to change without prior notice.

Date and Time: June 5, 2025, from 1-5 pm CST | June 6, 2025, from 8 am-12 pm CST

Meeting Location: Dakota Event Center, 720 Lamont Street South, Aberdeen, SD 57401

Webinar Info: We will be using Zoom Webinar® for this meeting. As a participant, you will not have audio or video capabilities by default. During the open forum and public hearing, if you'd like to testify, please 'Raise Your Hand' using the button at the bottom of the screen, or by pressing *9 on your phone. To lower your hand via phone, press *9 again. When it's your turn to speak, the meeting host will unmute you, allowing you to have audio but no video. If your phone is muted when called upon, press *6 to unmute.

- *9 to 'Raise Your Hand' or 'Lower Your Hand.'
- *6 to Unmute or Mute

Please inform Gail Buus at gail.buus@state.sd.us by 1 pm CST if you plan to speak during the meeting. This helps us to accurately identify and call on speakers during the session. Thank you for your cooperation!

Zoom Webinar: [Click here to join the meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 912 6417 6710

Passcode: 970458

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Video Conference ID: [91264176710@zoomcra.com](https://zoom.us/j/91264176710)

AGENDA

Call Meeting to Order (1 pm CST / 12 pm MT)

Division of Administration

Action Items

1. Conflict of Interest Disclosure
2. Executive Session
3. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes available at <https://gfp.sd.gov/commission/archives>
4. Additional Commissioner Salary Days
5. Budget Discussion

Informational Items

6. Staff Introductions

Public Hearing (2pm CST / 1pm MT)

The portion of the meeting is designated for public comment finalizations.

Open Forum – following the conclusion of the Public Hearing

The portion of the meeting is designated for public comment on petitions, proposals, and other items of interest not on the agenda.

Petitions

7. #242 Application for Unsold Big Game Licenses

Finalizations

8. Purple Heart Rules (PEL & Camping)
9. Furbearer Hunting and Trapping
 - a. Beaver Hunting and Trapping Season
 - b. Mink, Weasel and Muskrat Hunting and Trapping Season
10. River Otter Season and Action Plan
11. Eliminate Closed Area on Lake Francis Case



SOUTH DAKOTA GAME, FISH AND PARKS COMMISSION MEETING AGENDA

JUNE 5-6, 2025 | ABERDEEN, SD | DAKOTA EVENT CENTER

Proposals

- 12. Custer State Park Antelope and Status Update
- 13. Sage Grouse Season and Status Update
- 14. Shooting Sports Complex Fee Schedule and Status Update

Division of Wildlife

Action Items

Informational Items

- 15. Aquatic Access Public Comment Recorder
- 16. Fencing Options to Protect New Tree Plantings on GPA's
- 17. Pheasant Preserve End-of-Year Summary
- 18. Upland Game Bird Harvest and Fall Forecast
- 19. Lake Alvin Spillway Construction
- 20. License Sales

Division of Parks and Recreation

Action Items

- 21. Bridge City Marina Concession Lease Extension Amendment

Informational Items

- 22. CSP Resort Concession Lease Extension
- 23. Marketing Update - Make A Splash Promotion, Tagged Fish Promotion, Camping & Day-Use
- 24. Fort Sisseton State Park Update and New Visitor Center Concept
- 25. Spring Creek Golf Course
- 26. May Camping Units and Revenue Reports

Solicitation of Agenda Items

Now is the time to submit agenda items for the Commission to consider at a following commission meeting.

Adjourn

The next Regular Commission Meeting will be held on July 10-11, 2025, starting at 1 pm CST at the NFAA Easton Yankton Archery Center, in Yankton, SD.



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May 8-9, 2025 | Custer State Park Event Barn | Custer, SD

REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING

Call Meeting to Order

Chair Rissler called the meeting to order at 1 pm MT at the Custer State Park Event Barn, in Custer, SD on May 8, 2025. Commissioners Stephanie Rissler, Bruce Cull, Jon Locken, Travis Theel, Jim White, and Julie Bartling were in attendance. With six commission members present, a quorum was established. The public and staff could listen via SDPB Livestream and participate via conference or in person, with approximately 91 total participants attending via Zoom or in person.

1. Conflict of Interest Disclosure

[Action Item]

Chair Rissler requested the disclosure of any potential conflicts of interest, but none were brought forward.

2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

[Action Item]

Chair Rissler called for any additions or corrections to the regular minutes of the April 2025 meeting. Minutes are available at <https://gfp.sd.gov/commission/archives/>.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE APRIL 2025 REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Additional Salary Days

[Action Item]

Chair Rissler called for additional salary days from the Commissioners. Additional days were submitted for approval for Commissioner Cull for one day.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY WHITE TO APPROVE THE ADDITIONAL COMMISSIONER SALARY DAYS. The motion carried unanimously.

4. New Staff Introductions

[Info Item]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, introduced two new employees:

1. Jaden Jenkins, Assistant Park Manager, Richmond Lake
2. Shad Stromer, Park Manager, Spring and Cow Creek Recreation Area

Tom Kirschenmann, Director of Wildlife, introduced four new employees:

1. Jennifer Evans, Senior Secretary, Ft. Pierre Licensing Office Ft Pierre
2. Michael Peyton, Private Lands Habitat Biologist, Outdoor Campus West
3. Alec Baker, Resource Biologist, Outdoor Campus West
4. Cody Neumann, GIS Program Specialist, Outdoor Campus West

Public Hearing

Senior Staff Attorney Nick Michels opened the floor at 2:05 pm MT for discussion from those in attendance in matters of importance to them that are listed on the agenda as finalization. After hearing comments on finalization items the Public Hearing was closed at 2:12 pm MT.

Agenda Item #8: E-Tagging

No Testimony Provided

Agenda #9: Mentored Hunter

No Testimony Provided



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Agenda #10: Deer Hunting Seasons

2:07 pm: Ernest Getty of Rapid City, SD testified in person requesting the ability to apply for all deer license types at one time, concern of deer depredation especially in East Rapid Valley, requested a reduction in various park and hunting fees for veterans, and thanked John Kanta for his work on the shooting complex and Brian Meyers for his years of service.

Agenda #11: Black Hills and Custer State Park Elk Hunting Seasons

2:10 pm: Ron Kolbeck of Salem, SD representing South Dakota Bowhunters Association testified in person in opposition of antlerless elk license increase in the Black Hills and Custer State Park.

Senior Staff Attorney Michels closed the public hearing closed at 2:12 pm MT.

Before the Open Forum began, Josh Schmaltz, from Regency Hotel Management, welcomed and thanked commissioners and Game, Fish and Parks staff for the opportunity to host staff and provide Game, Fish and Parks with concession services. He gave updates on projects including the Mickelson Chapel and renovations of the six lodging rooms in the State Game Lodge.

Open Forum

Senior Staff Attorney Nick Michels opened the floor at 2:17 pm MT for discussion from those in attendance in matters of importance to them that are listed on the agenda, not as a finalization or may not be on the agenda.

2:18 pm: Nancy Hilding of Black Hawk, SD representing Prairie Hills Audubon Society testified virtually in opposition of beaver trapping and the river otter proposal.

2:23 pm: Julie Anderson of Rapid City, SD representing Signs of Hope testified virtually in support of the beaver hunting and trapping season petitions.

2:24 pm: Cliff Stone of Chamberlain, SD testified virtually in opposition of eliminating the closed area on Lake Francis Case.

2:28 pm: Todd Craig of Rapid City, SD testified virtually in opposition of deer tag allocation recommendations in southeast South Dakota.

2:29 pm: Bill Young of Rapid City, SD testified in person in support of the beaver hunting and trapping moratorium for atleast three years. He is the Habitat Chair for Pheasants Forever and at Pheasant Fest they received an award for habitat in South Dakota. He spoke in support of beaver habitat and the Prairie Audobon Society's work on beaver habitat.

2:33 pm: Jim Ashmore and John Stahl of Custer, SD spoke in person to offer their thanks for the support from Game, Fish and Parks of the West Dam Project in Custer, SD. They explained the project and the history of the dam.

2:38 pm: Ron Kolbeck of Salem, SD representing South Dakota Bowhunters Association testified in person in opposition of deer license allocation and discussed recommendations the association came up with regarding deer population and licensing issues.

2:42 pm: Mike Jarding of Hot Springs, SD testified in person in requesting reduction of licenses for mule deer in Unit 27 A and B and Unit 21 A and B. He also voiced support in hunting mountain lions with hounds to help with deer population increase for that area.



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2:44 pm: Eric Sharpe representing the Mule Deer Foundation testified in person to propose for two statewide Any Deer tags in support of South Dakota conservation projects.

2:48 pm: Jeff Anderson of Rapid City, SD testified in person in support of beaver hunting and trapping moratorium in the Black Hills Fire Protection District for three years. He also spoke on limiting west river beaver trapping to five months.

Senior Staff Attorney Michels closed the open forum at 2:49 pm MT.

5. #239 Purple Heart Recipient Rule

[Action Item: Petition]

Al Nedved, Deputy Director of Parks and Recreation introduced Connie Stone, who is the Veterans Affairs Coordinator for South Dakota State University. Ms. Stone submitted a petition to include recipients of the Purple Heart to be included as eligible applicants for the resident lifetime disable veterans park entrance license, and discounted camping fees for campsites, electricity, and camping cabins. This benefit is currently allowable for South Dakota residents who are 100% disabled veterans and prisoners of war. The intent of the petition was to illustrate the similarities between the total disability, prison of war, and Purple Heart designations and the overlap and confusion about their eligibility. The Department recommended that this petition could help clarify eligibility, respect and honor Purple Heart recipients, and would have no fiscal impact due to the low number of Purple Heart recipients in South Dakota.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO ACCEPT THE PETITION AND MOVE TO JUNE FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

6. #240 Beaver Hunting and Trapping Season

[Action Item: Petition]

Director Kirschenmann introduced a petition submitted by Nancy Hilding to the commission. This petition asked the commission to close the take of beaver in the Black Hills Fire Protection District. Ms. Hilding's petition also asked the commission to change the statewide beaver season to 5 months instead of year-round. Kirschenmann shared the Department's recommendation to deny the petition for the following reasons: 1) the department had already recommended a proposal to the commission to close the beaver season in the Black Hills Fire Protection District which the commission accepted, 2) each year the department receives numerous Request for Service from landowners across the state dealing with beaver damage or destruction of property and thus desire to retain a year-round season; and 3) a year-round season outside the Black Hills allows landowners address or allow others to address issues.

MOTIONED BY WHITE, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO DENY PETITION #240. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO ADOPT RESOLUTION 25-07 DENYING PETITION #240.

RESOLUTION 25-07

WHEREAS, Nancy Hilding of Black Hawk, South Dakota, submitted a Petition to the Game, Fish and Parks Commission (Commission) dated May 2, 2025, requesting that the Game, Fish and Parks Commission amend the beaver trapping and hunting season rule; and

WHEREAS, all members of the Commission have been furnished with and have reviewed a copy of the Petition; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has been advised that a copy of the Petition has been served on all members of the Interim Rules Review Committee and Director of the Legislative Research Council as required by SDCL § 1-26-13; and



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WHEREAS, the Commission has been advised that SDCL § 1-26-13 requires that within thirty (30) days of submission of a Petition, the Commission shall either “deny the petition in writing (stating its reasons for the denials) or shall initiate rule-making proceedings in accordance with SDCL 1-26-4.”; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has been advised and is of the opinion that a hearing on the Petition is neither statutorily required nor necessary; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has reviewed and carefully considered the requirements and procedures set out in SDCL §1-26-13 and the contents of the Petition, including the reasons advanced by Petitioner to amend the beaver trapping and hunting season dates and unit description; and

WHEREAS, the Department has recommended a proposal to the Commission to close the beaver trapping and hunting season in the Black Hills Fire Protection; and

WHEREAS, trends in the rate of beaver trapped or harvested over the past 10 years do not suggest a decline in beaver abundance; and

WHEREAS, the majority of South Dakota is privately owned land and maintaining a year-round season allows landowners to address beaver damage through recreational trapping; and

WHEREAS, the department spends considerable time and resources addressing beaver requests for service; and

WHEREAS, trapping rates are influenced by access to private land, beaver availability, and beaver fur prices more than season length.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Commission does hereby deny the Petition for the reasons hereinabove stated in this Resolution, which said Resolution as adopted by the Commission shall constitute the Commission’s written denial of the Petition and its reasons therefore.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Petition, a record of the Commission’s discussions concerning same, and this Resolution be made a part of the Minutes of the Commission meeting at which this Resolution is adopted, and further, that the Department is hereby authorized and directed in compliance with SDCL §1-26-13 to serve a copy of an extract of that portion of the Commission minutes which pertain to the Commission’s discussion of the Petition and its adoption of this Resolution, including a copy of the Resolution, on all members of the Interim Rules Review Committee and Director of the Legislative Research Council with

7. #241 Beaver Hunting and Trapping Season

[Action Item: Petition]

Director Kirschenmann introduced a second petition submitted by Christine Sandvik to the commission. This petition asked the commission to close the take of beaver in the Black Hills Fire Protection District. Ms. Sandvik’s petition also asked the commission to convert the beaver season in the western part of the state to change from year-round to 5 months, however leaving it year-round in eastern SD. Kirschenmann shared the Department’s recommendation to deny the petition for the following reasons: 1) the department had already recommended a proposal to the commission to close the beaver season in the Black Hills Fire Protection District which the commission accepted, 2) each year the department receives numerous Request for Service from landowners across the state dealing with beaver damage or destruction of property and thus desire to retain a year-round season; and 3) a year-round season outside the Black Hills allows landowners address or allow others to address issues.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY WHITE TO DENY PETITION #241. Motion carried unanimously.



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MOTIONED BY WHITE, SECONDED BY THEEL TO ADOPT RESOLUTION 25-08 DENYING PETITION #241.

RESOLUTION 25-08

WHEREAS, Christine Sandvik of Rapid City, South Dakota, submitted a Petition to the Game, Fish and Parks Commission (Commission) dated May 2, 2025, requesting that the Game, Fish and Parks Commission amend the beaver trapping and hunting season rule; and

WHEREAS, all members of the Commission have been furnished with and have reviewed a copy of the Petition; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has been advised that a copy of the Petition has been served on all members of the Interim Rules Review Committee and Director of the Legislative Research Council as required by SDCL § 1-26-13; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has been advised that SDCL § 1-26-13 requires that within thirty (30) days of submission of a Petition, the Commission shall either “deny the petition in writing (stating its reasons for the denials) or shall initiate rule-making proceedings in accordance with SDCL 1-26-4.”; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has been advised and is of the opinion that a hearing on the Petition is neither statutorily required nor necessary; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has reviewed and carefully considered the requirements and procedures set out in SDCL §1-26-13 and the contents of the Petition, including the reasons advanced by Petitioner to amend the beaver trapping and hunting season dates and unit description; and

WHEREAS, the Department has recommended a proposal to the Commission to close the beaver trapping and hunting season in the Black Hills Fire Protection; and

WHEREAS, trends in the rate of beaver trapped or harvested over the past 10 years do not suggest a decline in beaver abundance; and

WHEREAS, the majority of South Dakota is privately owned land and maintaining a year-round season allows landowners to address beaver damage through recreational trapping; and

WHEREAS, the department spends considerable time and resources addressing beaver requests for service; and

WHEREAS, trapping rates are influenced by access to private land, beaver availability, and beaver fur prices more than season length.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Commission does hereby deny the Petition for the reasons hereinabove stated in this Resolution, which said Resolution as adopted by the Commission shall constitute the Commission’s written denial of the Petition and its reasons therefore.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Petition, a record of the Commission’s discussions concerning same, and this Resolution be made a part of the Minutes of the Commission meeting at which this Resolution is adopted, and further, that the Department is hereby authorized and directed in compliance with SDCL §1-26-13 to serve a copy of an extract of that portion of the Commission minutes which pertain to the Commission’s discussion of the Petition and its adoption of this Resolution, including a copy of the Resolution, on all members of the Interim Rules Review Committee and Director of the Legislative Research Council with copies also to be provided to the Petitioner, Christine Sandvik of Rapid City, South Dakota.



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8. E-Tagging

[Action Item: Finalization]

Chad Switzer, Wildlife Deputy Director, reviewed the proposal for changes to the tagging and transportation rules for the implementation of an e-tag system. With these changes and upon successful comprehensive testing of the e-tag system, the current locking seal tagging requirement and allow for e-tagging will be a legal method and operate concurrently until e-tagging is implemented for all hunting seasons (big game and tundra swan) that require tagging.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY THEEL TO ADOPT CHANGES TO E-TAGGING FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY WHITE TO APPROVE THE E-TAGGING FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

9. Mentored Hunter

[Action Item: Finalization]

Chad Switzer, Wildlife Deputy Director, reviewed the proposal that addresses Senate Bill 41 from the 2025 Legislative Session. The proposed changes will streamline the mentored hunting program by the following: 1) the mentored hunter, or mentee, would be issued their respective license and be the holder of their license (previously, the license was issued to the mentor); 2) there would be no group size restriction for mentoring hunting; 3) consent for mentored hunting would now be verbal or written (previously, written consent was required); and 4) the proposed change would allow the GFP Commission to establish criteria and conditions for other mentored hunting season.

MOTIONED BY LOCKEN, SECONDED BY THEEL TO APPROVE THE MENTORED HUNTER FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

10. Deer Hunting Seasons

[Action Item: Finalization]

The commission took action to finalize the Apprentice, Archery, Muzzleloading, and Black Hills Deer Seasons. Most changes were administrative rule clean-ups and substantive changes were to expand the municipal hunting unit to extend beyond the city limits of Sioux Falls and to create a municipal hunting unit for the city of Hot Springs, although no licenses were allocated specifically to archery hunt in Hot Springs.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE APPRENTICE HUNTER DEER SEASON FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY THEEL TO APPROVE THE ARCHERY DEER SEASON FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY WHITE, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO APPROVE THE GENERAL MUZZLELOADER SEASON FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE BLACK HILLS DEER SEASON FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

11. Black Hills and Custer State Park Elk Hunting Seasons

[Action Item: Finalization]

Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator, reviewed information regarding Black Hills and Custer State Park Elk hunting seasons. No changes were made to the elk seasons in administrative rule.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN ON THE FINALIZATION FOR BLACK HILLS AND CUSTER STATE PARK ELK HUNTING SEASONS DUE TO NO CHANGE IN THE SEASONS.



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12. Furbearer Trapping

[Action Item: Proposal]

John Kanta, Terrestrial Section Chief presented changes including to modify the unit description for the Black Hills beaver and muskrat seasons to match the Black Hills Fire Protection District, as defined in SDCL. Changes included closing the beaver trapping and hunting season in the Black Hills Fire Protection District.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY WHITE TO ADOPT THE BEAVER HUNTING AND TRAPPING PROPOSAL FOR JUNE FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN ON THE SKUNK, OPOSSUM, FOX, RACCOON AND BADGER SEASON PROPOSAL. THE FINALIZED VERSION WILL BE BROUGHT BEFORE COMMISSION IN JUNE 2025.

MOTIONED BY LOCKEN, SECONDED BY CULL TO ADOPT THE MINK, WEASEL AND MUSKRAT HUNTING AND TRAPPING SEASON PROPOSAL FOR JUNE FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

13. River Otter Proposal and Status Update

[Action Item: Proposal]

John Kanta, Terrestrial Section Chief presented changes including to increase the harvest limit for the river otter season from twenty to thirty river otters.

Alex Solem, Senior Wildlife Biologist, presented information on how river otter populations are monitored in eastern South Dakota. River otter populations need multiple methods for monitoring due to their secretive nature. In South Dakota, GFP used verified reports, information collected from necropsies, harvest surveys, and latrine surveys to guide management decisions. Recent monitoring efforts have indicated river otter populations are doing well and expanding into suitable habitat.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO APPROVE THE RIVER OTTER PROPOSAL. THE FINALIZATION WILL BE BROUGHT BEFORE THE COMMISSION IN JUNE 2025. The motion carried unanimously.

14. Eliminate Closed Area on Lake Francis Case

[Action Item: Proposal]

Jake Davis, Fisheries Program Administrator, reviewed a commission proposal that would allow for year-round angling in the area commonly known as the "dredge-hole" on Lake Francis Case. This was originally brought as a petition at the April Commission Meeting and was accepted by the Commission. No recommended changes were made to the proposal.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN ON THE PROPOSAL ELIMINATING THE CLOSED AREA ON LAKE FRANCIS CASE. THE FINALIZED VERSION WILL BE BROUGHT BEFORE COMMISSION IN JUNE 2025.

15. Spring Creek Recreation Area Restaurant Prospectus Update

[Action Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation and Al Nedved, Deputy Director of Parks & Recreation presented to the Commission the status of the prospectus advertisement for a concession agreement for restaurant services at Spring Creek Recreation Area. The most recent prospectus expired on April 15, 2025 and no proposals were received. GFP requested the issuance of a new RFP with the same 5-year option that requires a 4% franchise fee or direct reimbursement of GFP for utility expenses. The RFP will include a negotiable start date, but not later than May 1, 2026. The RFP will advertise for a minimum of 30 days, or up to 60 days if no valid proposal is received prior to the 30-day period. If no proposal is received from this advertisement, GFP will request readvertisement again this fall.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO APPROVE THE ISSUANCE OF A NEW SPRING CREEK RESTAURANT RFP. The motion carried unanimously.



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16. CSP Concession Lease

[Info Item: Parks]

Al Nedved, Deputy Director of Parks & Recreation and Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation provided an update on the status of the Custer State Park Concession. This lease was entered into February 1, 2007, and was extended twice in response to investments in facilities and infrastructure for a total of 20 years. The amended lease is set to expire on January 31, 2027. Under the lease with Regency CSP Ventures, many extensive improvements have been made to facilities, services, and infrastructure. Revenue, franchise fees, and repair programs have expanded greatly. Two options exist under administrative rule 41:13. One is to go through a competitive bidding process or the Commission has the option to extend the concession contract within 18 month of expiration. The Department will explore the lease extension option with the current concessionaire until the window to do so closes on July 31, 2025. The Department will consider potential investments, services, or related terms that will support a lease extension, and if a favorable agreement can be reached, the Department will provide it to the Commission no later than the July meeting.

17. Bridge City Concession Lease

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation and Al Nedved, Deputy Director of Parks & Recreation provided an update on the status of the Bridge City Concession lease located within Indian Creek Recreation Area. This lease was entered into January 3, 2012, and was extended five years in response to investments in facilities for a total of 15 years. The amended lease is set to expire on December 31, 2026. Bridge City Marina has done an excellent job serving the park and the local community. Two options exist under administrative rule 41:13. One is to go through a competitive bidding process or the Commission has the option to extend the concession contract within 18 month of expiration. The Department will explore the lease extension option with the current concessionaire until the window to do so closes on June 30, 2025. The Department will consider potential investments, services, or related terms that will support a lease extension, and if a favorable agreement can be reached, the Department will provide it to the Commission no later than the June meeting.

18. CSP Bison Research

[Info Item: Parks]

Jason Gooder, Division Staff Specialist, presented information on CSP Bison Research. Currently the park is working with South Dakota State University Center of Excellence to understand range utilization of bison within CSP. The study will help determine seasonal movements and home range of bison. This will allow staff to better determine the impacts bison may have across the range land in the park and help develop future strategies of range management including the use of prescribed fire and setting carry capacity objectives. The current method had deployed 25 lab made collars on cows that are 6 years and older. The study will also determine the overall functionality of the collars.

18. CSP Interpretive Programming

[Info Item: Parks]

Aaron Douglas, Program Specialist gave a presentation that focused on Interpretive Programs in Custer State Park and focused on the variety of programs offered by park staff ranging from skills-based programs to interpretive programs. The park provides up to twelve programs per day during the summer season. Staff continuously evaluates these programs to ensure they attract guests and maintain high quality. Additionally, a variety of programs are offered during the off-season.

19. April Park Camping Unit and Revenue Report

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, presented the April monthly and year-to-date report numbers for the Division of Parks & Recreation related to camping units and revenue. In spite of the cooler weather in April camping units were up 6% for the month and 2% YTD which is on pace with the Divisions annual goal for 2025. The Parks Division revenue is up 11% YTD with entrance license sales remaining strong and camping revenue starting to pick up. Various graphs and charts were shared with the



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Commission to depict how park revenue has come in for the Division overall and the impact of the new non-resident park entrance license fees as compared to other entrance fees.

20. Deer Hunting Licenses Administrative Action

[Action Item: Wildlife]

The commission also took administrative action to finalize unit specific license types and allocations for: Archery, Muzzleloading, Black Hills, Custer State Park, Refuge, West River, and East River Deer seasons. License allocations and open areas to hunt for all but Custer State Park were reduced and they focused on decreasing female deer harvest to increase population across much of the state.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO ADOPT THE LICENSE TYPES AND ALLOCATIONS. The motion carried unanimously.

21. Elk Hunting Licenses Administrative Action

[Action Item: Wildlife]

The commission took administrative action to finalize license types and allocations for the Black Hills and Custer State Park Elk Hunting Seasons. Based on recently completed helicopter population survey data, licenses were increased for both seasons to increase hunting opportunity and maintain the elk population at the current population.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY WHITE TO ADOPT THE ELK HUNTING LICENSE TYPES AND ALLOCATIONS. The motion carried unanimously.

22. Youth Bounty Program Participation

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Chad Switzer, Wildlife Division Deputy Director, provided information regarding youth participation during the month of March for the Nest Predator Bounty Program. The month of March is open only for resident youth under the age of 18 to participate in the program. A few more youth submitted tails in March 2025 (n= 140) as compared to 131 youth in 2024. A total of 1,969 tails were submitted during March 2025 as compared to 1,684 in March 2024. This year all youth will be given a National Trappers Association Trapping Handbook and will be entered into the Benton Howe Weekly Giveaway Drawing for a chance to win a raccoon trapping starter kit.

23. Beaver Action Plan

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Alex Solem, Senior Wildlife Biologist, presented information on the Black Hills Beaver Action Plan. Details of this plan include objectives and strategies to manage beaver populations. A harvest matrix was outlined to guide season setting recommendations based on distribution rates throughout the Black Hills.

24. AIS Field Operations Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Davis, Fisheries Program Administrator, presented to the Commission an overview of 2025 Aquatic Invasive Species efforts by GFP. A 2025 AIS communications plan has been developed and implemented and will again focus on the message of "Clean, Drain, Dry". An AIS Awareness Week is planned leading up to Memorial Day weekend and will feature AIS content daily. The 2025 AIS Operational Plan outlines field activities by staff, such as detection and monitoring. Across the state, watercraft inspection/decontamination stations will also be operated starting prior to Memorial Day weekend.

25. Spawning and Stocking Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Jake Davis, Fisheries Program Administrator, presented to the Commission an update on current walleye spawning and fish stockings efforts by Aquatics staff. Walleye egg collections met the desired goal of approximately 80 million. Additional eggs were secured from neighboring states to ensure that enough eggs are hatched to meet stocking requests. Staff have also been busy transferring fish from hatcheries and one state water to another and have stocked fish into dozens of waterbodies within the state with additional stockings planned for the year.



Commission Meeting Minutes

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

523 E Capitol Avenue | Pierre, South Dakota 57501

May 8-9, 2025 | Custer State Park Event Barn | Custer, SD

26. State Wildlife Action Plan

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Game, Fish and Parks has completed a draft revision of the South Dakota Wildlife Action Plan, which is now available for review. This strategic plan assesses the health of South Dakota's fish and wildlife and associated habitats, evaluates the problems they face, and outlines actions to help conserve them for the future. South Dakota's plan encourages voluntary partnerships among governmental entities, tribes, organizations, and private citizens to help prevent species from becoming endangered and to provide for the full array of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat diversity for future use and enjoyment by South Dakota's residents and visitors. An important tool is the identification of species of greatest conservation need, against which conservation actions are measured to assess the plan's effectiveness. The 2025 revision includes 245 plant and animal species, as well descriptions of their conservation challenges and suggested actions. The 2025 revision is the third major revision for South Dakota. All states must review their plans at least every 10 years and revise them to reflect new challenges and to build on known conservation strategies. Public involvement involving agencies, tribes, and the public is an important and required step in completing these regular plan updates.

27. License Sales

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Director Kirschenmann provided a summary of license sales through April 30. Overall, Kirschenmann shared with the commission that hunting and fishing license sales remain strong; well above last year's numbers and the 3-year average. Most notable are fishing license sales with small game hunting licenses having low activity but will pick up in August and September.

28. Adjourn

[Action Item]

A Regular Commission Meeting will be held on June 5-6, 2025, at the Dakota Event Center, in Aberdeen, SD starting at 1 pm CST.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 10:05 AM MT ON May 9, 2025. Motion carried unanimously.

Submitted respectfully,

Kevin Robling, Department Secretary

Rolling Budget Summary Report

FY 2026

Center 06 GAME, FISH, AND PARKS								
	Actual	Actual	Budgeted	Inflation	Exp/Red	Request	Recommended	Rec. Inc/Dec
	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY26	FY26	FY26	FY26
Personal Services								
EMPLOYEE SALARIES	31,415,630	35,214,454	36,898,484	0	483,514	36,898,484	37,381,998	483,514
EMPLOYEE BENEFITS	9,066,628	10,057,053	10,601,281	0	333,699	10,601,281	10,934,980	333,699
FTE	573.9	576.8	583.9		0.0	583.9	0.0	
Funding Types								
GENERAL	3,459,962	4,038,780	4,208,824	0	-439,266	3,708,824	3,769,558	-439,266
FEDERAL	6,831,284	9,959,424	10,295,611	0	180,104	10,295,611	10,475,715	180,104
OTHER	30,191,011	31,273,303	32,995,330	0	1,076,375	33,495,330	34,071,705	1,076,375
Total PS	40,482,258	45,271,507	47,499,765	0	817,213	47,499,765	48,316,978	817,213
Operating Expenses								
TRAVEL	5,028,528	4,898,228	5,180,359	0	0	5,180,359	5,180,359	0
CONTRACTUAL SERVICES	36,868,424	37,260,310	37,561,207	0	-528,701	36,765,197	37,032,506	-528,701
SUPPLIES & MATERIALS	9,172,561	8,327,578	8,404,854	0	0	8,404,854	8,404,854	0
GRANTS AND SUBSIDIES	1,991,922	1,556,502	2,506,600	0	0	2,506,600	2,506,600	0
CAPITAL OUTLAY	29,845,147	25,030,088	27,464,330	0	630,500	28,094,830	28,094,830	630,500
OTHER	1,059,139	1,641,435	687,000	0	0	687,000	687,000	0
Funding Types								
GENERAL	3,282,897	3,279,384	3,272,197	0	-796,002	2,476,187	2,476,195	-796,002
FEDERAL	21,518,483	22,742,313	28,006,674	0	-159,432	27,842,174	27,847,242	-159,432
OTHER	59,164,341	52,692,444	50,525,479	0	1,057,233	51,320,479	51,582,712	1,057,233
Total OE	83,965,720	78,714,140	81,804,350	0	101,799	81,638,840	81,906,149	101,799
TOTAL FOR 06								
Funding Types								
GENERAL	6,742,859	7,318,163	7,481,021	0	(1,235,268)	6,185,011	6,245,753	(1,235,268)
FEDERAL	28,349,767	32,701,737	38,302,285	0	20,672	38,137,785	38,322,957	20,672
OTHER	89,355,352	83,965,747	83,520,809	0	2,133,608	84,815,809	85,654,417	2,133,608
Total	124,447,978	123,985,647	129,304,115	0	919,012	129,138,605	130,223,127	919,012

Rolling Budget Summary Report

FY 2026

Center 0601 Administration		Actual	Actual	Budgeted	Inflation	Exp/Red	Request	Recommended	Rec. Inc/Dec
		FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY26	FY26	FY26	FY26
Personal Services									
EMPLOYEE SALARIES		1,638,611	1,629,124	1,797,939	0	23,457	1,797,939	1,821,396	23,457
EMPLOYEE BENEFITS		449,978	476,307	618,550	0	18,583	618,550	637,133	18,583
FTE		22.3	21.7	23.3		0.0	23.3	0.0	
Funding Types									
GENERAL		168,591	189,444	196,539	0	3,372	196,539	199,911	3,372
FEDERAL		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OTHER		1,919,998	1,915,986	2,219,950	0	38,668	2,219,950	2,258,618	38,668
Total PS		2,088,589	2,105,431	2,416,489	0	42,040	2,416,489	2,458,529	42,040
Operating Expenses									
TRAVEL		120,401	151,937	208,065	0	0	208,065	208,065	0
CONTRACTUAL SERVICES		1,647,792	1,788,624	2,061,489	0	-746,128	2,061,109	1,315,361	-746,128
SUPPLIES & MATERIALS		287,282	345,086	350,065	0	0	350,065	350,065	0
CAPITAL OUTLAY		55,367	40,765	24,215	0	0	24,215	24,215	0
OTHER		0	0	2,000	0	0	2,000	2,000	0
Funding Types									
GENERAL		822,982	825,842	824,086	0	-794,027	823,706	30,059	-794,027
FEDERAL		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OTHER		1,287,859	1,500,569	1,821,748	0	47,899	1,821,748	1,869,647	47,899
Total OE		2,110,841	2,326,411	2,645,834	0	-746,128	2,645,454	1,899,706	-746,128
TOTAL FOR 0601									
Funding Types									
GENERAL		991,573	1,015,287	1,020,625	0	(790,655)	1,020,245	229,970	(790,655)
FEDERAL		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OTHER		3,207,858	3,416,555	4,041,698	0	86,567	4,041,698	4,128,265	86,567
Total		4,199,431	4,431,842	5,062,323	0	(704,088)	5,061,943	4,358,235	(704,088)

Rolling Budget Summary Report

FY 2026

Center 0620		State Parks and Recreation						
	Actual	Actual	Budgeted	Inflation	Exp/Red	Request	Recommended	Rec. Inc/Dec
	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY26	FY26	FY26	FY26
Personal Services								
EMPLOYEE SALARIES	11,407,186	12,903,734	13,105,837	0	171,035	13,105,837	13,276,872	171,035
EMPLOYEE BENEFITS	2,992,717	3,368,078	3,484,447	0	105,824	3,484,447	3,590,271	105,824
FTE	253.0	259.7	254.0		0.0	254.0	0.0	
Funding Types								
GENERAL	3,291,371	3,849,335	4,012,285	0	-442,638	3,512,285	3,569,647	-442,638
FEDERAL	1,131,844	1,547,443	1,700,513	0	26,809	1,700,513	1,727,322	26,809
OTHER	9,976,688	10,875,033	10,877,486	0	692,688	11,377,486	11,570,174	692,688
Total PS	14,399,903	16,271,811	16,590,284	0	276,859	16,590,284	16,867,143	276,859
Operating Expenses								
TRAVEL	1,453,091	1,379,971	1,581,068	0	0	1,581,068	1,581,068	0
CONTRACTUAL SERVICES	8,936,583	9,273,510	9,927,729	0	36,446	9,132,099	9,964,175	36,446
SUPPLIES & MATERIALS	3,471,103	3,613,909	3,777,269	0	0	3,777,269	3,777,269	0
GRANTS AND SUBSIDIES	885,528	701,047	935,000	0	0	935,000	935,000	0
CAPITAL OUTLAY	1,952,651	1,188,366	891,612	0	0	891,612	891,612	0
OTHER	896,074	812,825	685,000	0	0	685,000	685,000	0
Funding Types								
GENERAL	2,459,915	2,453,542	2,448,111	0	-1,975	1,652,481	2,446,136	-1,975
FEDERAL	2,933,262	2,686,539	2,040,166	0	2,099	2,040,166	2,042,265	2,099
OTHER	12,201,852	11,829,547	13,309,401	0	36,322	13,309,401	13,345,723	36,322
Total OE	17,595,029	16,969,627	17,797,678	0	36,446	17,002,048	17,834,124	36,446
TOTAL FOR 0620								
Funding Types								
GENERAL	5,751,286	6,302,877	6,460,396	0	(444,613)	5,164,766	6,015,783	(444,613)
FEDERAL	4,065,107	4,233,982	3,740,679	0	28,908	3,740,679	3,769,587	28,908
OTHER	22,178,540	22,704,580	24,186,887	0	729,010	24,686,887	24,915,897	729,010
Total	31,994,932	33,241,438	34,387,962	0	313,305	33,592,332	34,701,267	313,305

Rolling Budget Summary Report

FY 2026

Center 0621 State Parks and Recreation - Dev/Imp								
	Actual	Actual	Budgeted	Inflation	Exp/Red	Request	Recommended	Rec. Inc/Dec
	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY26	FY26	FY26	FY26
Personal Services								
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FTE	0.0	0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0	0.0	
Operating Expenses								
CONTRACTUAL SERVICES	1,570,142	260,592	0	0	0	0	0	0
CAPITAL OUTLAY	20,047,303	15,555,408	12,714,500	0	630,500	13,345,000	13,345,000	630,500
Funding Types								
GENERAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FEDERAL	4,364,446	5,009,000	3,914,500	0	-164,500	3,750,000	3,750,000	-164,500
OTHER	17,253,000	10,807,000	8,800,000	0	795,000	9,595,000	9,595,000	795,000
Total OE	21,617,445	15,816,000	12,714,500	0	630,500	13,345,000	13,345,000	630,500
TOTAL FOR 0621								
Funding Types								
GENERAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FEDERAL	4,364,446	5,009,000	3,914,500	0	(164,500)	3,750,000	3,750,000	-164,500
OTHER	17,253,000	10,807,000	8,800,000	0	795,000	9,595,000	9,595,000	795,000
Total	21,617,445	15,816,000	12,714,500	0	630,500	13,345,000	13,345,000	630,500

Rolling Budget Summary Report

FY 2026

Center 0610 Wildlife - Info		Actual	Actual	Budgeted	Inflation	Exp/Red	Request	Recommended	Rec. Inc/Dec
		FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY26	FY26	FY26	FY26
Personal Services									
EMPLOYEE SALARIES		18,019,629	20,499,555	21,579,266	0	283,595	21,579,266	21,862,861	283,595
EMPLOYEE BENEFITS		5,536,871	6,153,208	6,399,131	0	206,814	6,399,131	6,605,945	206,814
FTE		290.9	291.3	297.5		0.0	297.5	0.0	
Funding Types									
GENERAL		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FEDERAL		5,699,440	8,411,981	8,595,098	0	153,295	8,595,098	8,748,393	153,295
OTHER		17,857,060	18,240,781	19,383,299	0	337,114	19,383,299	19,720,413	337,114
Total PS		23,556,500	26,652,762	27,978,397	0	490,409	27,978,397	28,468,806	490,409
Operating Expenses									
TRAVEL		3,407,720	3,333,561	3,326,867	0	0	3,326,867	3,326,867	0
CONTRACTUAL SERVICES		24,212,779	25,080,121	25,425,630	0	179,031	25,425,630	25,604,661	179,031
SUPPLIES & MATERIALS		5,098,114	4,242,159	4,092,770	0	0	4,092,770	4,092,770	0
GRANTS AND SUBSIDIES		875,273	689,011	1,259,100	0	0	1,259,100	1,259,100	0
CAPITAL OUTLAY		3,259,625	1,423,448	2,395,003	0	0	2,395,003	2,395,003	0
OTHER		160,092	828,611	0	0	0	0	0	0
Funding Types									
GENERAL		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FEDERAL		12,663,099	14,348,899	15,339,508	0	2,969	15,339,508	15,342,477	2,969
OTHER		24,350,504	21,248,012	21,159,862	0	176,062	21,159,862	21,335,924	176,062
Total OE		37,013,603	35,596,912	36,499,370	0	179,031	36,499,370	36,678,401	179,031
TOTAL FOR 0610									
Funding Types									
GENERAL		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FEDERAL		18,362,539	22,760,880	23,934,606	0	156,264	23,934,606	24,090,870	156,264
OTHER		42,207,564	39,488,794	40,543,161	0	513,176	40,543,161	41,056,337	513,176
Total		60,570,103	62,249,674	64,477,767	0	669,440	64,477,767	65,147,207	669,440

Rolling Budget Summary Report

FY 2026

Center 0612		Wildlife -Development/Improvement - Info						
	Actual	Actual	Budgeted	Inflation	Exp/Red	Request	Recommended	Rec. Inc/Dec
	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY26	FY26	FY26	FY26
Personal Services								
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FTE	0.0	0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0	0.0	
Operating Expenses								
CONTRACTUAL SERVICES	375,227	757,685	0	0	0	0	0	0
GRANTS AND SUBSIDIES	61,907		0	0	0	0	0	0
CAPITAL OUTLAY	4,357,266	6,605,190	11,175,000	0	0	11,175,000	11,175,000	0
Funding Types								
GENERAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FEDERAL	1,557,675	697,875	6,712,500	0	0	6,712,500	6,712,500	0
OTHER	3,236,725	6,665,000	4,462,500	0	0	4,462,500	4,462,500	0
Total OE	4,794,400	7,362,875	11,175,000	0	0	11,175,000	11,175,000	0
TOTAL FOR 0612								
Funding Types								
GENERAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FEDERAL	1,557,675	697,875	6,712,500	0	0	6,712,500	6,712,500	0
OTHER	3,236,725	6,665,000	4,462,500	0	0	4,462,500	4,462,500	0
Total	4,794,400	7,362,875	11,175,000	0	0	11,175,000	11,175,000	0

Rolling Budget Summary Report

FY 2026

Center 0622		Snowmobile Trails - Info						
	Actual	Actual	Budgeted	Inflation	Exp/Red	Request	Recommended	Rec. Inc/Dec
	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY26	FY26	FY26	FY26
Personal Services								
EMPLOYEE SALARIES	350,203	182,042	415,442	0	5,427	415,442	420,869	5,427
EMPLOYEE BENEFITS	87,062	59,461	99,153	0	2,478	99,153	101,631	2,478
FTE	7.8	4.0	9.1		0.0	9.1	0.0	
Funding Types								
GENERAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FEDERAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OTHER	437,265	241,503	514,595	0	7,905	514,595	522,500	7,905
Total PS	437,265	241,503	514,595	0	7,905	514,595	522,500	7,905
Operating Expenses								
TRAVEL	47,316	32,759	64,359	0	0	64,359	64,359	0
CONTRACTUAL SERVICES	125,900	99,779	146,359	0	1,950	146,359	148,309	1,950
SUPPLIES & MATERIALS	316,062	126,423	184,750	0	0	184,750	184,750	0
GRANTS AND SUBSIDIES	169,214	166,444	312,500	0	0	312,500	312,500	0
CAPITAL OUTLAY	172,936	216,912	264,000	0	0	264,000	264,000	0
OTHER	2,973		0	0	0	0	0	0
Funding Types								
GENERAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FEDERAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OTHER	834,401	642,316	971,968	0	1,950	971,968	973,918	1,950
Total OE	834,401	642,316	971,968	0	1,950	971,968	973,918	1,950
TOTAL FOR 0622								
Funding Types								
GENERAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FEDERAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OTHER	1,271,666	883,819	1,486,563	0	9,855	1,486,563	1,496,418	9,855
Total	1,271,666	883,819	1,486,563	0	9,855	1,486,563	1,496,418	9,855

South Dakota - Game, Fish, and Parks

Petition for Rule Change

A new form was just submitted from the <http://gfp.sd.gov/> website with the following information:

ID:	242
Petitioner Name:	Brett Waibel
Address:	27619 Herman Ranch Place Draper, SD 57531
Email:	info@badriverhunts.com
Phone:	605-530-4810
Rule Identification:	41:06:01:09 Application for unsold big game licenses
Describe Change:	Seeking to change Draw 3 to up to 2 applications rather than only 1
Reason for Change:	I feel this change would allow more people to obtain the licenses they want and it would also reduce the chaos of trying to get a tag in the leftover pool. The majority of these tags are getting sold so why do that with leftovers where 1 person can end up with 10 plus tags.

GAME, FISH, AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION FINALIZATION

Park entrance license fees Chapter 41:03:03

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	May 9-10, 2025	Custer State Park
	Public Hearing	June 5, 2025	Aberdeen
	Finalization	June 5, 2025	Aberdeen

INFORMATION

As authorized by S.D.C.L. 41-17-13.4, the Division of Parks and Recreation provides a free lifetime park entrance license to South Dakota Residents that have received a Veteran's "K" award or letter from the Veteran's Administration indicating that veteran received an allotment for total disability or that the veteran was held as a prisoner of war. Purple Heart recipients, or those service members that were wounded in the line of service, are not eligible for this license, unless they meet the requirements of the total disability.

COMMISSION PROPOSAL

This proposal would extend eligibility of the disabled veteran lifetime state park entrance license to recipients of the Purple Heart.

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

There are no known official statistics of South Dakota residents who have been awarded the Purple Heart. Currently there are approximately 150 registered Purple Heart Recipients. This proposal would clear up confusion about duplicate service-related disability and Purple Heart recipients. It would also include a sector of veterans that was perhaps intended to be included in the original service-related disability fee exception offered to 100% disabled veterans and prisoners of war.

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:03:03:03.01. Park entrance license ~~exemptions~~ fee exceptions. Park entrance license ~~exemptions~~ fee exceptions are as follows:

(1) A person who enters a state park or state recreation area in volunteer service to the park or as a volunteer worker with an assigned role at an event requiring a special permit pursuant to § 41:03:01:04 is exempt from payment of the daily park entrance license fee, if the person has received a special free park entrance license from the secretary;

(2) A park entrance license is not required at Custer State Park on the day of the fall buffalo roundup or on the day of the annual buffalo auction;

(3) A recreational motorhome towing one other vehicle is considered one unit and requires only one park entrance license. The second vehicle must be issued a free park entrance license that is dated to expire on the last day of the visitor's stay;

(4) Enrolled Crow Creek tribal members and their families are not required to purchase a park entrance license to enter the West Bend Recreational Area;

(5) Enrolled Yankton Sioux tribal members and their families are not required to purchase a park entrance license to enter the North Point Recreation Area, the Fort Randall South Shore Recreation Area, the Randall Creek Recreation Area, or the Fort Randall Spillway Lakeside Use Area;

(6) A resident nonprofit youth group that enters a state park or state recreation area is not required to purchase a park entrance license, if the group obtains an approved nonprofit youth group permit from the park manager before entering the park. The park manager shall issue a special free park entrance license for any vehicle used by the youth group. The nonprofit youth group shall obtain the permit at least five days prior to entering the park;

(7) Members and guests of a South Dakota veterans organization or group, members of the South Dakota National Guard or a military reserve unit and their guests, and patients currently admitted to a veterans hospital in this state and their attendants, who enter a state park or state recreation area for a non-competitive special event that is hosted by the organization, group, unit, or hospital, are not required to purchase a park entrance license, if an approved special event permit has been obtained from the park manager at least five days before the special event. The park manager shall issue a special free park entrance license for any vehicle used by a participant of the approved non-competitive special event; and

(8) A park entrance license is not required at any state park, recreation area, or lakeside use area from 6:00 a.m. on Friday through 11:00 p.m. on Sunday of the weekend in May preceding Memorial Day weekend.

A resident of this state who is entitled to a free lifetime park entrance license as provided in SDCL 41-17-13.4 shall fill out a form provided by the Division of Parks and Recreation and mail it to the Pierre office with a photocopy of the veteran's "K" award or a letter from the Veteran's Administration indicating that the veteran receives an allotment for total disability, which is deemed a service-connected injury, or that the veteran was held as a prisoner of war.

A resident of this state who is a recipient of the Purple Heart is also entitled to a free lifetime park entrance license. The resident shall fill out a form provided by the Division of Parks and Recreation and mail it to the Pierre office with a photocopy of the Purple Heart citation or award certificate.

_____ The lifetime park entrance license allows the licensee and any passenger accompanying the licensee in the vehicle to enter any South Dakota state park, state recreation area, or lakeside use area, which requires a park entrance license.

Source: 11 SDR 22, effective August 9, 1984; 17 SDR 188, effective June 13, 1991, and July 1, 1991; 18 SDR 223, effective July 13, 1992; 19 SDR 128, effective March 9, 1993; 19 SDR 190, effective June 15, 1993; 20 SDR 150, effective March 23, 1994; 21 SDR 207, effective June 5, 1995; 23 SDR 87, effective December 3, 1996; 24 SDR 99, effective February 2, 1998; 27 SDR 13, effective August 27, 2000; 28 SDR 24, effective August 28, 2001; 28 SDR 103, effective January 30, 2002; 29 SDR 107, effective February 3, 2003; 31 SDR 39, effective September 23, 2004; 31 SDR 89, effective December 27, 2004; 31 SDR 191, effective June, 7, 2005; 32 SDR 183, effective May 9, 2006; 32 SDR 225, effective July 3, 2006; 33 SDR 225, effective June 25, 2007; 36 SDR 39, effective September 23, 2009; 40 SDR 14, effective July 29,

2013; 43 SDR 131, effective April 19, 2017; 45 SDR 155, effective June 24, 2019; 46 SDR 74, effective December 2, 2019; 47 SDR 27, effective September 15, 2020; 50 SDR 62, effective November 27, 2023.

General Authority: SDCL 41-17-1.1(2)(10), 41-17-13, 41-17-13.4.

Law Implemented: SDCL 41-17-1.1, 41-17-13, 41-17-13.2, 41-17-13.4.

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

1. The Issue – NA
2. Historical Considerations – NA
3. Biological Considerations – NA
4. Social Considerations – NA
5. Financial considerations – NA

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

1. Does the regulation or fee inhibit a user's ability to participate? NA
2. Does the regulation increase the opportunity for new and existing users? NA
3. How does the regulation impact the next generation of hunters, anglers, trappers, and outdoor recreationists? NA
4. Does the regulation enhance the quality of life for current and future generations by getting families outdoors? NA

FISCAL IMPACT

Based upon numbers and available data of South Dakota resident Purple Heart recipients, it is expected that the fiscal impact to be less than \$3,000 annually.

APPROVE _____ MODIFY _____ REJECT _____ NO ACTION _____

GAME, FISH, AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION FINALIZATION

Camping Permit Fees Chapter 41:03:04:03

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	May 8, 2025	Custer State Park
	Public Hearing	June 5, 2025	Aberdeen
	Finalization	June 5, 2025	Aberdeen

INFORMATION

As authorized by S.D.C.L. 41-17-13.4, the Division of Parks and Recreation provides a free lifetime park entrance license to South Dakota Residents that have received a Veteran's "K" award or letter from the Veteran's Administration indicating that veteran received an allotment for total disability or that the veteran was held as a prisoner of war. This lifetime license also entitles eligible recipients a 50% discount on camping fees. Purple Heart recipients, or those service members that were wounded in the line of service, are not eligible for this discount, unless they meet the requirements of the total disability.

COMMISSION PROPOSAL

This proposal would extend eligibility of the disabled veteran lifetime state park entrance license and associated discounted camping fees to include recipients of the Purple Heart.

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

There are no known official statistics of South Dakota residents who have been awarded the Purple Heart. Currently there are approximately 150 registered Purple Heart Recipients. This proposal would clear up confusion about duplicate service-related disability and Purple Heart recipients. It would also include a sector of veterans that was perhaps intended to be included in the original service-related disability discount offered to 100% disabled veterans and prisoners of war.

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:03:04:03. Camping permit fees. The daily fee for the use of a campground site by one camper unit is as follows:

(1) Custer State Park modern campground fee, twenty-seven dollars, at ~~State Game Lodge, Sylvan Lake, Grace Coolidge, Legion Lake, Stockade North, Stockade South, and Blue Bell;~~

(a) Blue Bell;

(b) Grace Coolidge;

(c) Legion Lake;

(d) State Game Lodge;

(e) Stockade North;

(f) Stockade South; and

(g) Sylvan Lake;

(2) Modern campground fee, twenty-three dollars, at ~~Platte Creek; Swan Creek; West Whitlock; Indian Creek; Okobojo Point; Cow Creek; West Pollock; Fisher Grove; Buryanek; Oahe Downstream; Springfield; West Bend; Lewis and Clark; Chief White Crane; Angostura, including Sheps Canyon; Palisades; Big Sioux; Lake Vermillion; Rocky Point; Mina Lake; Lake Herman; North Point; Walker's Point; Lake Poinsett; South Pelican; Shadehill Ketterlings Point; Pickerel Lake; Lake Cochrane; Sandy Shore; Pierson Ranch; Richmond Lake; Pease Creek; Lake Thompson; Farm Island; Snake Creek; Lake Louise; Randall Creek; Center Lake Campground at Custer State Park; Hartford Beach; Newton Hills; Oakwood Lakes; Palisades; Roy Lake; Union Grove; and Fort Sisseton, except during the Fort Sisseton Festival in accordance with subdivision (5);~~

(a) Angostura, including Sheps Canyon;

(b) Big Sioux;

(c) Buryanek;

(d) Center Lake Campground at Custer State Park;

(e) Chief White Crane;

(f) Cow Creek;

(g) Farm Island;

(h) Fisher Grove;

(i) Fort Sisseton, except during the Fort Sisseton Festival in accordance with subdivision (5);

(j) Hartford Beach;

(k) Indian Creek;

(l) Lake Cochrane;

(m) Lak Herman;

(n) Lake Louise;

(o) Lake Poinsett;

(p) Lake Thompson;

(q) Lake Vermillion;

(r) Lewis and Clark;

(s) Mina Lake;

(t) Newton Hills;

(u) North Point;

(v) Oahe Downstream;

(w) Oakwood Lakes;

(x) Okobojo Point;

(y) Palisades;

(z) Pease Creek;

(aa) Pickerel Lake;

(ab) Pierson Ranch;

(ac) Platte Creek;

(ad) Randall Creek;

(ae) Richmond Lake;

(af) Rocky Point;

(ag) Roy Lake;

(ah) Sandy Shore;

(ai) Shadehill Ketterlings Point;

(aj) Snake Creek;

(ak) South Pelican;

(al) Springfield;

(am) Swan Creek;

(an) Union Grove;

(ao) Walker's Point;

(ap) West Bend;

(aq) West Pollock;

(ar) West Whitlock;

(3) Basic campground fee, sixteen dollars, at ~~Burke Lake Recreation Area, Shadehill-Llewellyn Johns Memorial Recreation Area, Bear Butte Lakeside Use Area, Lake Hiddenwood Recreation Area, Sand Creek Lakeside Use Area, East Whitlock Lakeside Use Area, Tabor Lakeside Use Area, North Wheeler Recreation Area, Lake Carthage Lakeside Use Area, South Shore Lakeside Use Area, Whetstone Bay Lakeside Use Area, Star Valley Lakeside Use Area, White Swan Lakeside Use Area, Walth Bay Lakeside Use Area, Dude Ranch Lakeside Use Area, Sica Hollow State Park, Elm Creek Lakeside Use Area, Sheps Canyon Lakeside Use Area, Amsden Dam Lakeside Use Area, Bailey's Lakeside Use Area, Hugh Glass Lakeside Use Area, Minneconjou Lakeside Use Area, Little Bend Lakeside Use Area, Little Moreau Recreation Area, and Twin Lakes Lakeside Use Area;~~

(a) Amsden Dam Lakeside Use Area;

(b) Bailey's Lakeside Use Area;

(c) Bear Butte Lakeside Use Area;

- (d) Burke Lake Recreation Area;
- (e) Dude Ranch Lakeside Use Area
- (f) East Whitlock Lakeside Use Area;
- (g) Elm Creek Lakeside Use Area;
- (h) Hugh Glass Lakeside Use Area;
- (i) Lake Carthage Lakeside Use Area;
- (j) Lake Hiddenwood Recreation Area;
- (k) Little Bend Lakeside Use Area;
- (l) Little Moreau Recreation Area;
- (m) Minneconjou Lakeside Use Area;
- (n) North Wheeler Recreation Area;
- (o) Sand Creek Lakeside Use Area
- (p) Shadehill-Llewellyn Johns Memorial Recreation Area;
- (q) Sheps Canyon Lakeside Use Area
- (r) Sica Hollow State Park;
- (s) South Shore Lakeside Use Area;
- (t) Star Valley Lakeside Use Area;
- (u) Tabor Lakeside Use Area;
- (v) Twin Lakes Lakeside Use Area;
- (w) Walth Bay Lakeside Use Area;
- (x) Whetstone Bay Lakeside Use Area;
- (y) White Swan Lakeside Use Area;

(4) Custer State Park French Creek natural area, eight dollars per person;

(5) Use of a campground site at Fort Sisseton during the annual Fort Sisseton Festival, twenty-five dollars, provided that participants and festival campers are exempt from paying the camping fee;

(6) Custer State Park, French Creek Horse Camp fee, thirty-seven dollars; and

(7) Campsites designated for tent camping only, regardless of campground designation, sixteen dollars.

An additional charge of seven dollars per unit applies to all campground sites with electricity.

A resident of this state who may purchase a camping permit ~~and~~, campsite electrical service, and camping cabin permit for one-half price pursuant to SDCL 41-17-13.4 shall ~~submit~~ provide written verification of that status from the United States Veterans Administration. The resident shall fill out a form provided by the Division of Parks and Recreation and mail it to the licensing office of the department in Pierre. The licensing office shall send the resident a billfold-size card to use as proof of eligibility for half-price camping fees.

A resident of this state who is a recipient of the Purple Heart is also entitled to purchase a camping permit, campsite electrical service, and camping cabin permit for one-half price upon completion of a form provided by the Division of Parks and Recreation accompanied by a photocopy of the Purple Heart citation or award certificate. These discounts are for the use of the recipient only, and are not transferable.

The nonprofit youth group camping fee is fifty cents per person or six dollars, whichever is greater.

The Custer State Park group camping area fee is eight dollars per person for overnight use, with a minimum fee of one hundred forty dollars.

Source: SL 1975, ch 16, § 1; 1 SDR 30, effective October 13, 1974; 2 SDR 90, effective July 11, 1976; 3 SDR 73, effective April 25, 1977; 6 SDR 96, effective April 1, 1980; 7 SDR 69, effective January 25, 1981; 8 SDR 170, effective June 20, 1982; 9 SDR 147, effective May 22, 1983; 10 SDR 73, effective January 17, 1984; 10 SDR 76, 10 SDR 102, effective July 1, 1984; 11 SDR 156, effective May 27, 1985; 13 SDR 128, effective March 22, 1987; 13 SDR 192, effective June 22, 1987; 14 SDR 14, effective August 6, 1987; 14 SDR 81, effective December 10, 1987; 14 SDR 114, effective March 9, 1988; 14 SDR 164, effective June 16, 1988; 15 SDR 139, effective March 20, 1989; 16 SDR 114, effective January 18, 1990; 16 SDR 135, effective February 18, 1990; 17 SDR 12, effective July 31, 1990; 17 SDR 139, effective March 21, 1991; 17 SDR 170, effective May 14, 1991; 17 SDR 188, effective June 13, 1991, and July 1, 1991; 18 SDR 98, effective December 12, 1991; 18 SDR 144, effective March 15, 1992; 19 SDR 82, effective December 7, 1992; 19 SDR 190, effective June 15, 1993; 20 SDR 150, effective March 23, 1994; 21 SDR 86, effective November 10, 1994; 21 SDR 148, effective March 6, 1995; 22 SDR 82, effective December 10, 1995; 22 SDR 89, effective December 26, 1995; 23 SDR 87, effective December 3, 1996; 23 SDR 197, effective May 27, 1997; 24 SDR 99, effective February 2, 1998; 24 SDR 107, effective February 26, 1998; 24 SDR 156, effective May 17, 1998; 25 SDR 108, effective February 28, 1999; 25 SDR 141, effective May 27, 1999; 26 SDR 41, effective September 28, 1999; 26 SDR 85, effective December 26, 1999; 26 SDR 117, effective March 16, 2000; 26 SDR 162, effective June 14, 2000; 27 SDR 49, effective November 16, 2000; 27 SDR 85, effective February 26, 2001; 28 SDR 103, effective January 30, 2002; 29 SDR 80, effective December 10, 2002; 30 SDR 99, effective December 22, 2003; 30 SDR 171, effective May 11, 2004; 31 SDR 62, effective November 4, 2004; 32 SDR 109, effective December 27, 2005; 32 SDR 128, effective January 31, 2006; 33 SDR 107, effective December 27, 2006; 33 SDR 180, effective May 7, 2007; 33 SDR 225, effective June 25, 2007; 34 SDR 179, effective December 24, 2007; 36 SDR 112,

effective January 11, 2010; 37 SDR 112, effective December 8, 2010; 38 SDR 101, effective December 5, 2011; 39 SDR 32, effective September 5, 2012; 39 SDR 100, effective December 3, 2012; 39 SDR 204, effective June 11, 2013; 40 SDR 113, effective December 16, 2013; 41 SDR 93, effective December 3, 2014; 44 SDR 93, effective December 4, 2017; 45 SDR 89, effective December 31, 2018; 46 SDR 74, effective December 2, 2019; 47 SDR 68, effective December 9, 2020; 48 SDR 60, effective December 8, 2021; 51 SDR 53, effective November 11, 2024.

General Authority: SDCL 41-17-1.1(7), 41-17-13.4.

Law Implemented: SDCL 41-2-24, 41-17-1.1(7), 41-17-13.4.

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

1. The Issue – NA
2. Historical Considerations – NA
3. Biological Considerations – NA
4. Social Considerations – NA
5. Financial considerations – NA

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

1. Does the regulation or fee inhibit a user's ability to participate? NA
2. Does the regulation increase the opportunity for new and existing users? NA
3. How does the regulation impact the next generation of hunters, anglers, trappers, and outdoor recreationists? NA
4. Does the regulation enhance the quality of life for current and future generations by getting families outdoors? NA

FISCAL IMPACT

Based upon numbers and available data of South Dakota resident Purple Heart recipients, it is expected that the fiscal impact to be less than \$3,000 annually.

APPROVE _____ MODIFY _____ REJECT _____ NO ACTION _____

GAME, FISH, AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION FINALIZATION

Beaver Hunting and Trapping Season Chapter 41:08:01

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	May 8-9, 2025	Custer State Park Aberdeen Aberdeen
	Public Hearing	June 5, 2025	
	Finalization	June 5-6, 2025	

PROPOSED CHANGES

Duration: 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 hunting and trapping seasons

Season Dates and Open Areas:

Year-round: Statewide, except that portion of the Black Hills Fire Protection District*.

** Proposal is to close season in Black Hills Fire Protection District.*

Nonresidents may not take any beaver from March 16 - November 30.

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. A person must have a permit issued by the park manager to trap in any area within the state park system during established furbearer seasons. Permits may only be issued for the period of November 1 - March 31 of the following year and are free. No permit may be issued for trapping in Beaver Creek Nature Area, Adams Homestead and Nature Preserve, or Custer State Park or on any privately owned lands within those areas.
2. The following restrictions apply to the use of body grip traps, commonly known as conibears:
 - a. No person may set or operate above the water's edge of a stream, river, or other body of water a body grip trap with a jaw spread greater than eight inches; and
 - b. On all public lands and public road right-of-way statewide, no person may set or operate a body grip trap used in conjunction with any bait, lure, or scent with a jaw spread greater than six and three-quarter inches unless:
 - i. The trap is recessed in a plastic, wood, or metal cubby a minimum of seven inches from the front edge of the cubby to the trigger of the trap; or
 - ii. The trap is set below the water's edge of a stream, river, or other body of water.
3. No person may place any trap whether set or unset, stake, cable, chain, wire, or other device used for the purpose of attaching a trap, or otherwise attempt to claim or mark a trap site on any public road right-of-way or public land or water open to trapping within 30 feet of water from October 1 - 31.
4. No person may disturb any beaver house for the purpose of capturing any of these animals. No person may use poison, gas, or smokers of any kind to kill, take, or capture beavers.

Proposed changes from last year:

1. Modify § 41:08:01:07 to close the beaver trapping and hunting season in the Black Hills and reference SDCL 34-35-15 for the definition of the Black Hills Fire Protection District.

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Based on survey responses indicating at least one day of hunting or trapping furbearers, there were a projected 1,888 resident and 5 nonresident active hunters/trappers that held a furbearer license during the 2023-24 seasons. An estimated 4,142 beaver were harvested during the 2023-24 season by furbearer license holders. Of furbearer licenses holders, one individual reported trapping a beaver in the Black Hills.

Comparison of the 2014-2023 Beaver seasons

Year	Furbearer Licenses		Active Hunters/Trappers		Harvest		Satisfaction	
	Resident	Nonresident	Resident	Nonresident	Trapping	Hunting	Resident	Nonres
2014	4,227	12	2,304	10	2,445	343	4.89	5.00
2015	3,940	14	2,065	14	3,806	864	4.93	4.40
2016	3,620	11	1,804	5	1,773	326	4.95	5.00
2017	3,915	17	2,120	15	1,835	603	5.05	5.63
2018	4,154	14	2,168	12	1,201	143	4.97	5.44
2019	4,334	17	2,237	13	2,063	350	5.09	4.43
2020	4,689	15	2,295	15	2,582	274	5.22	5.50
2021	4,726	13	2,200	0	3,395	266	5.21	NA
2022	4,024	4	1,826	0	2,515	750	5.16	NA
2023	4,007	6	1,888	5	3,681	461	5.09	6.00

Historically, monitoring beaver in the Black Hills Fire Protection District (BHFPD) has been done via helicopter cache surveys. Beaver monitoring within the BHFPD occurred in 2007, 2012, and 2023 (Table 1). The number of caches observed between the 2012 and 2023 surveys suggested a decrease in abundance and distribution.

Table 1. Beaver abundance and distribution from 2007, 2012, and 2023 within the Black Hills Fire Protection District.

Monitoring Indices	Year		
	2007	2012	2023
Number of caches observed	38	60	16
Abundance (cache/km)	0.020	0.038	0.009
Distribution (% of watersheds occupied)	42.3%	51.9%	23.1%

Restoration efforts have begun in several riparian systems within the BHFPD to attempt to restore highly degraded riparian waterways. In places, beaver and their associated activity is paramount to the success of these restoration efforts. Beaver numbers have declined over time, likely due to habitat degradation. Predation and disease could also be contributing to declines in abundance. Harvest is not the cause for the widespread decline throughout the Black Hills. However, with ongoing restoration efforts, it is prudent to protect beavers so they may recolonize degraded habitats and restore functioning riparian waterways.

Figure 1. The gray shaded area below represents the area that would be open to beaver trapping year-round. In 2024 and 2025, the hashed region of the Black Hills Fire Protection District was open from November 1 to April 30, except U.S. Forest Service Lands where the season was open from January 1 to March 31.



DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:08:01:07. Beaver trapping and hunting season established. The season to catch, trap, or hunt beaver is open statewide and year-round, except as provided in this section. ~~The season is open from sunrise on November 1 through sunset on April 30 to catch, trap, or hunt beaver within the Black Hills Fire Protection District south of Interstate 90 and west of State Highway 79, except U. S. Forest Service lands where the beaver season is open from January 1 through March 31 in the Black Hills Fire Protection District, as described in SDCL 34-35-15.~~

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

None.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

1. Does the regulation or fee inhibit a user's ability to participate? Very few recreational trappers attempt to trap beaver in the Black Hills. However, the change would limit the ability to trap beaver in the Black Hills.
2. Does the regulation increase the opportunity for new and existing users? This would remove opportunity for an individual wanting to trap in the Black Hills.
3. How does the regulation impact the next generation of hunters, anglers, trappers and outdoor recreationists? It is unknown how much the closure of the season will affect beaver recolonization.
4. Does the regulation enhance the quality of life for current and future generations by getting families outdoors? NA.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

APPROVE _____ MODIFY _____ REJECT _____ NO ACTION _____

GAME, FISH, AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION FINALIZATION

Mink, Weasel and Muskrat Hunting and Trapping Season Chapter 41:08:01

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	May 8-9, 2025	Custer State Park Aberdeen Aberdeen
	Public Hearing	June 5, 2025	
	Finalization	June 5-6, 2025	

PROPOSED CHANGES

Duration: 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 hunting and trapping seasons

Season Dates and Open Areas:

Mink and Weasel Hunting and Trapping
November 1 – January 31: Statewide.

Nonresidents may not take any mink or weasel from February 1 – November 30.

Muskrat Trapping
Year-round: West of the Missouri River, except that portion of the Black Hills Fire Protection District*.

November 1 – April 30: East of the Missouri River and portions of the Black Hills Fire Protection District*.

** Proposal is to reference Black Hills Fire Protection District Boundary described in state statute.*

Muskrat Hunting
April 1 – August 31: Open to landowners and lessees, including School and Public Lands surface lease holders, on land they own or operate. State, county, or township highway officials are allowed to take muskrats from within public road rights-of-way during the season. Non-toxic shot is required for shotguns.

Nonresidents may not take any muskrat from March 16 - November 30.

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. A person must have a permit issued by the park manager to trap in any area within the state park system during established furbearer seasons. Permits may only be issued for the period of November 1 - March 31 of the following year and are free. No permit may be issued for trapping in Beaver Creek Nature Area, Adams Homestead and Nature Preserve, or Custer State Park or on any privately owned lands within those areas.
2. The following restrictions apply to the use of body grip traps, commonly known as conibears:
 - a. No person may set or operate above the water's edge of a stream, river, or other body of water a body grip trap with a jaw spread greater than eight inches; and
 - b. On all public lands and public road right-of-way statewide, no person may set or operate a body grip trap used in conjunction with any bait, lure, or scent with a jaw spread greater than six and three-quarter inches unless:
 - i. The trap is recessed in a plastic, wood, or metal cubby a minimum of seven inches from the front edge of the cubby to the trigger of the trap; or
 - ii. The trap is set below the water's edge of a stream, river, or other body of water.

3. No person may flag, mark, or otherwise attempt to claim a muskrat house on public land or waters before sunrise on November 1. No person may flag or mark any muskrat house during the muskrat season, except those houses containing an operational trap set.
4. No person may disturb, injure, or destroy any muskrat house, except in the open season for the taking, catching, or killing of muskrats. However, muskrat houses may, for the purpose of placing traps therein, be opened in such manner as will not destroy, damage, or injure them as a place of habitation for muskrats.
5. Trapping in or on any muskrat house is prohibited east of the Missouri River from Mar. 16 – Apr. 30.
6. No person may place any trap whether set or unset, stake, cable, chain, wire, or other device used for the purpose of attaching a trap, or otherwise attempt to claim or mark a trap site on any public road right-of-way or public land or water open to trapping within 30 ft. of water from Oct. 1 - 31.
7. The size of colony traps used for muskrats may not exceed 36 inches in overall length. If using a round colony trap, the diameter may not exceed 12 inches. If using a box colony trap, the height may not exceed 12 inches, and the width may not exceed 12 inches.
8. Muskrats may be hunted by shooting with rimfire cartridges of .22 caliber or smaller, muzzleloaders of .45 caliber or smaller, shotguns, or legal archery equipment.
9. No person may hunt any mink or muskrat with the aid of any dog, or dig or disturb any mink den for the purpose of capturing any of these animals. No person may use poison, gas, or smokers of any kind to kill, take, or capture mink or muskrats.

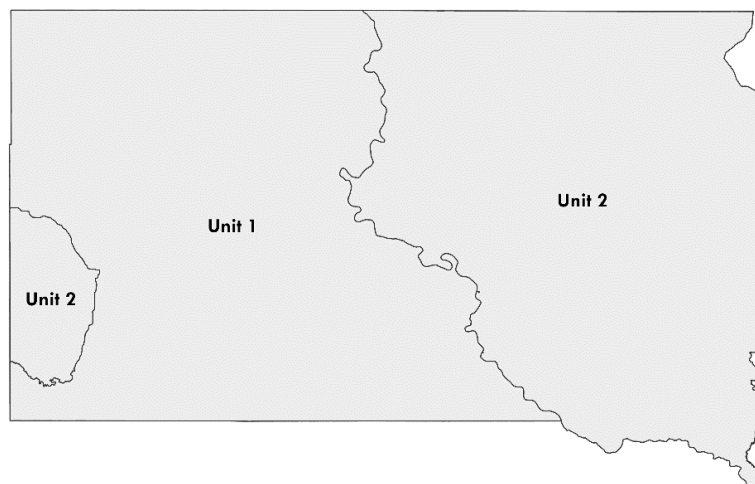
Proposed changes from last year:

1. Modify § 41:08:01:02 muskrat unit description to match the Black Hills Fire Protection District, as defined in SDCL 34-35-15.

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Based on survey responses indicating at least one day of hunting or trapping furbearers, there were a projected 1,888 resident and 5 nonresident active hunters/trappers that held a furbearer license during the 2023-24 seasons.

Figure 1. Two units describing the season dates for muskrat trapping. The area represented by Unit 1 is open year-round and the area represented by Unit 2 is open from November 1 - April 30.



Comparison of the 2014-2023 Muskrat seasons

Year	Furbearer Licenses		Active Hunters/Trappers		Harvest		Satisfaction	
	Resident	Nonresident	Resident	Nonresident	Trapping	Hunting	Resident	Nonres
2014	4,227	12	2,304	10	24,137	452	4.89	5.00
2015	3,940	14	2,065	14	25,256	1,198	4.93	4.40
2016	3,620	11	1,804	5	18,717	255	4.95	5.00
2017	3,915	17	2,120	15	14,382	545	5.05	5.63
2018	4,154	14	2,168	12	20,678	319	4.97	5.44
2019	4,334	17	2,237	13	61,923	318	5.09	4.43
2020	4,689	15	2,295	15	92,477	307	5.22	5.50
2021	4,726	13	2,200	0	25,101	238	5.21	NA
2022	4,024	4	1,826	0	5,344	252	5.16	NA
2023	4,007	6	1,888	5	8,223	220	5.09	6.00

Comparison of the 2014-2023 Weasel seasons

Year	Furbearer Licenses		Active Hunters/Trappers		Harvest		Satisfaction	
	Resident	Nonresident	Resident	Nonresident	Trapping	Hunting	Resident	Nonres
2014	4,227	12	2,304	10	265	12	4.89	5.00
2015	3,940	14	2,065	14	161	0	4.93	4.40
2016	3,620	11	1,804	5	42	7	4.95	5.00
2017	3,915	17	2,120	15	65	2	5.05	5.63
2018	4,154	14	2,168	12	40	0	4.97	5.44
2019	4,334	17	2,237	13	47	0	5.09	4.43
2020	4,689	15	2,295	15	95	0	5.22	5.50
2021	4,726	13	2,200	0	48	4	5.21	NA
2022	4,024	4	1,826	0	52	19	5.16	NA
2023	4,007	6	1,888	5	24	0	5.09	6.00

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:08:01:02. Muskrat trapping season established. The ~~West River~~ muskrat trapping season is open year-round to trap muskrat in all counties west of the Missouri River, except in the portion of the Black Hills Fire Protection District south of Interstate 90, as described in SDCL 34-35-15.

The ~~Black Hills~~ muskrat trapping season is open from sunrise on November 4 first through sunset on April 30, to trap muskrats thirtieth in the portion of the Black Hills Fire Protection District south of Interstate 90 and west of State Highway 79. The season is open year-round to trap muskrats in the portion of the Black Hills Fire Protection District north of Interstate 90 and all counties east of the Missouri River.

The ~~East River~~ muskrat trapping season is open from sunrise on November 1 through sunset on April 30, to trap muskrats in the portion of the state lying east of the Missouri River.

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

None.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

None.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

APPROVE _____ MODIFY _____ REJECT _____ NO ACTION _____

GAME, FISH, AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION FINALIZATION

River Otter Trapping and Hunting Season

Chapter 41:08:01

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	May 8-9, 2025	Custer State Park Aberdeen Aberdeen
	Public Hearing	June 5, 2025	
	Finalization	June 5-6, 2025	

PROPOSED CHANGES

Duration: 2025 and 2026 hunting and trapping seasons

Season Dates: November 1 - December 31 or until 30* river otters have been harvested, whichever occurs first.

** Proposal is to increase the harvest limit from 20 to 30 river otters.*

Open unit: Aurora, Beadle, Bon Homme, Brookings, Brown, Charles Mix, Clark, Clay, Codington, Davison, Day, Deuel, Douglas, Grant, Hamlin, Hanson, Hutchinson, Jerauld, Kingsbury, Lake, Lincoln, Marshall, McCook, Miner, Minnehaha, Moody, Roberts, Sanborn, Spink, Turner, Union, and Yankton Counties.

Season limit: One river otter per season per individual.

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. Open to residents only with furbearer license.
2. River otter shall be reported to the Department within 24 hours of harvest. At time of reporting, arrangements will be made to check-in carcass and detached pelt at a GFP office or designated location for registration and tagging of the pelt within 5 days of harvest. Additionally, once the season has closed (last day of season or harvest limit reached), a person has 24 hours to notify the Department of a harvested river otter.
3. The pelt shall be removed from the carcass and the carcass shall be surrendered to the Department. After the pelt has been tagged, it shall be returned to the trapper. Upon request, the carcass may be returned to the trapper after the carcass has been inspected and biological data collected.
4. Any river otter harvested after the 24-hour period following the close of the season, will be considered incidental take and shall be surrendered to the Department.
5. A person may only possess, purchase, or sell raw river otter pelts that are tagged through the eyeholes by the department, or, if harvested from another jurisdiction, properly and securely tagged with a tag supplied by the governmental entity issuing the license.
6. A person must have a permit issued by the park manager to trap in any area within the state park system during established furbearer seasons. Permits may only be issued for the period of November 1 - March 31 of the following year and are free. No permit may be issued for trapping in Beaver Creek Nature Area, Adams Homestead and Nature Preserve, or Custer State Park or on any privately owned lands within those areas.
7. The following restrictions apply to the use of body grip traps, commonly known as conibears:
 - a. No person may set or operate above the water's edge of a stream, river, or other body of water a body grip trap with a jaw spread greater than eight inches; and
 - b. On all public lands and public road right-of-way statewide, no person may set or operate a body grip trap used in conjunction with any bait, lure, or scent with a jaw spread greater than six and three-quarter inches unless:
 - i. The trap is recessed in a plastic, wood, or metal cubby a minimum of seven inches from the front edge of the cubby to the trigger of the trap; or
 - ii. The trap is set below the water's edge of a stream, river, or other body of water.

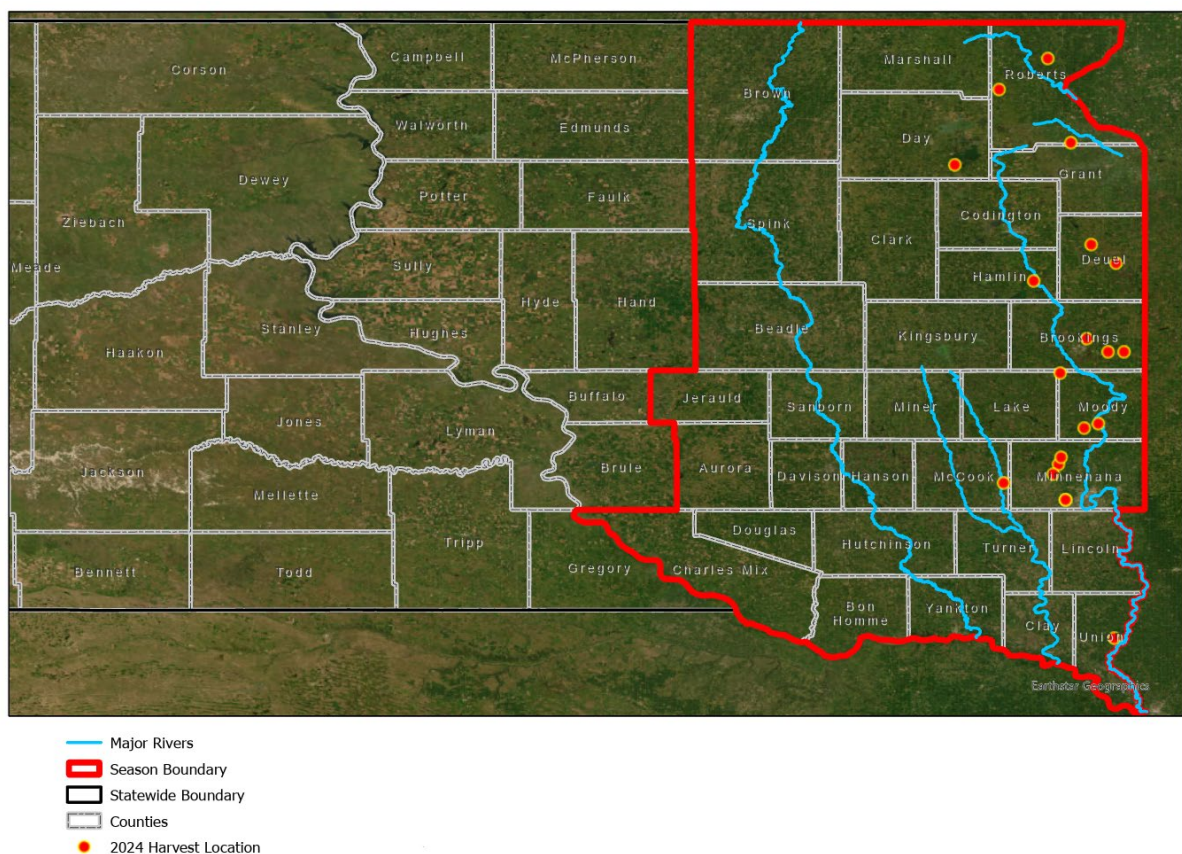
8. No person may place any trap whether set or unset, stake, cable, chain, wire, or other device used for the purpose of attaching a trap, or otherwise attempt to claim or mark a trap site on any public road right-of-way or public land or water open to trapping within 30 feet of water from October 1 - 31.

Proposed changes from last year:

1. Modify § 41:08:01:08.05 to increase the harvest limit from twenty to thirty river otters.

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

The 2024 river otter hunting/trapping season began November 1 with a harvest limit of 20 river otters. This harvest limit was reached on November 12 and the season officially closed November 13 with a total of 20 river otters harvested. River otters were harvested in Brookings (3), Day (1), Deuel (2), Hamlin (1), McCook (1), Minnehaha (5), Moody (3), Roberts (3), and Union (1) counties within the designated open season boundary. Over the previous four seasons, it has taken trappers an average of 13.5 days to reach the harvest limit of 20 river otter to end the season.



GFP monitors river otter populations through the collection of river otter, harvest surveys, necropsies, and latrine surveys. Data from these population assessments show the river otter population is stable and can support an increase in harvest. Verified reports of river otter and their sign have steadily increased in the last 5 years (Figure 1). Reports of river otters have also increased in areas within the current season boundary where they were not previously documented. This trend indicates the westward expansion of river otter into locations of suitable habitat. In addition, the number of incidental catches of river otter has increased in the last 5 years to 27.8 river otters trapped per year (Figure 2).

Landowner concerns in southeastern South Dakota are increasing due to river otter-related issues, suggesting the need for more harvest opportunities.

Figure 1. Historic river otter reports including reports of river otter, sign, sightings, and incidental harvests.

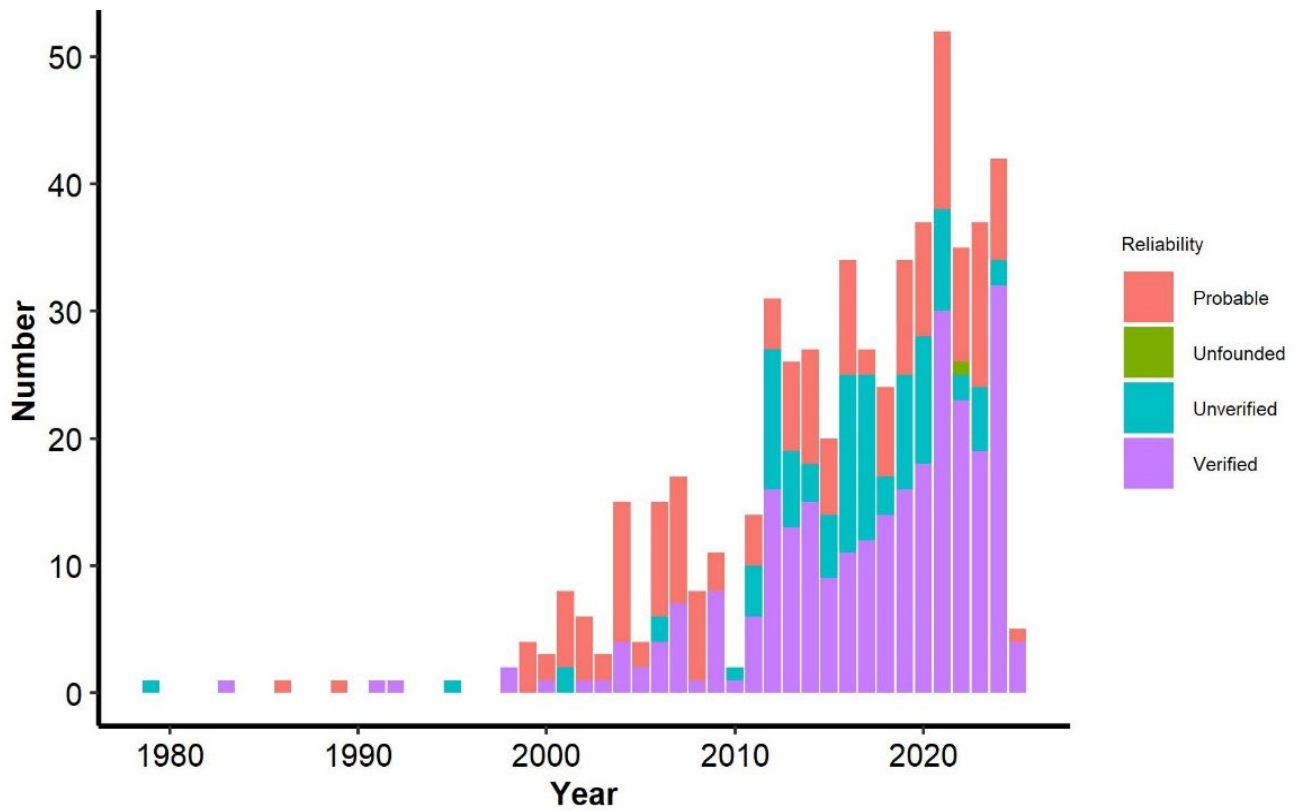
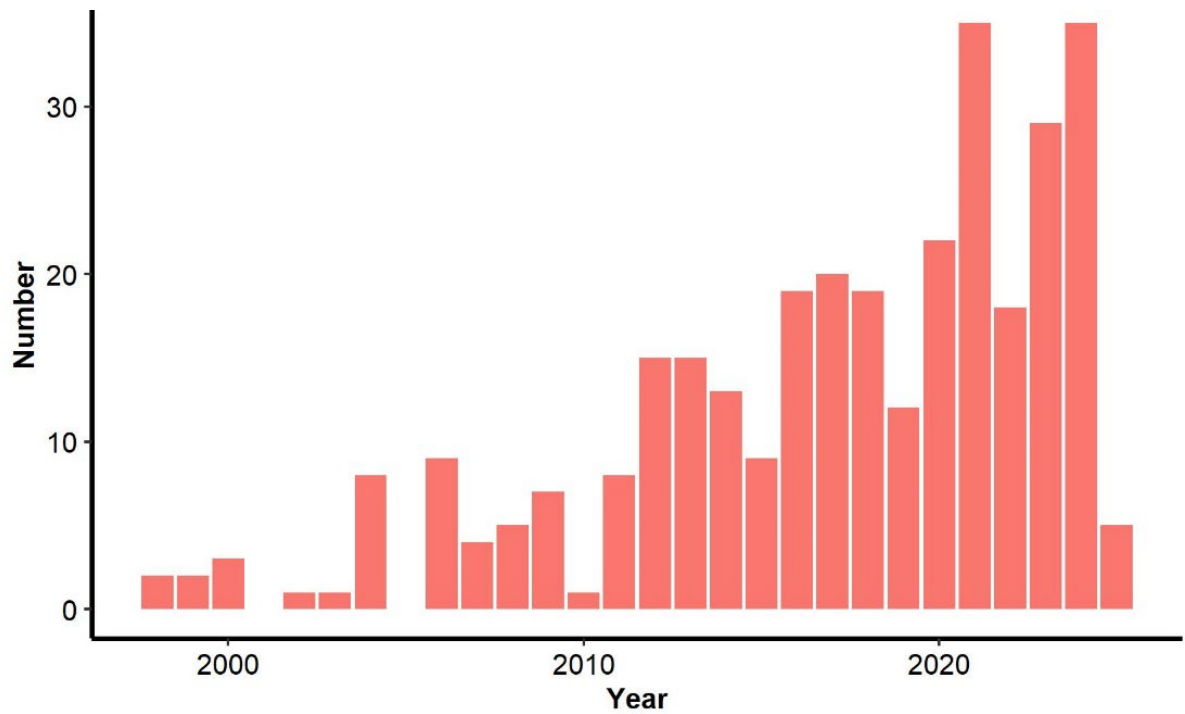


Figure 2. Historic incidental river otter trapping events.



DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:08:01:08.05. River otter trapping and hunting season established -- Harvest limit -- Tagging requirements. The river otter hunting and trapping season is open to residents in Aurora, Beadle, Bon Homme, Brookings, Brown, Charles Mix, Clark, Clay, Codington, Davison, Day, Deuel, Douglas, Grant, Hamlin, Hanson, Hutchinson, Jerauld, Kingsbury, Lake, Lincoln, Marshall, McCook, Miner, Minnehaha, Moody, Roberts, Sanborn, Spink, Turner, Union, and Yankton Counties. The season ~~is from~~ begins at sunrise on November ~~1 through first, and lasts until~~ sunset on December ~~31 thirty-first~~ or until ~~20 thirty~~ river otters have been harvested, whichever occurs first. A person is limited to one river otter per season.

Any person harvesting a river otter during the season shall notify the department within ~~24~~ twenty-four hours of harvest. The entire carcass, along with the detached pelt, must be submitted to the department representative within five days of harvest. Once the season has closed, a person has ~~24~~ twenty-four hours to notify a department representative of any untagged river otter harvested during the season. The tagged pelt must be returned. The carcass must be surrendered to the department and may be returned upon request. A person may only possess, purchase, or sell raw river otter pelts that are tagged through the eyeholes by the department; or, if harvested from another jurisdiction, properly and securely tagged with a tag supplied by the governmental entity issuing the license. If the governmental entity issuing the license does not issue a tag, other proof that the river otter has been lawfully harvested is required. Any river otter harvested ~~24 more than~~ twenty-four hours after the close of the season ~~will be~~ is considered an incidental harvest and must be surrendered to the department.

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

None.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

1. Does the regulation or fee inhibit a user's ability to participate? No.
2. Does the regulation increase the opportunity for new and existing users? Yes, trapping opportunity will be expanded.
3. How does the regulation impact the next generation of hunters, anglers, trappers and outdoor recreationists? More individuals will be able to trap river otter.
4. Does the regulation enhance the quality of life for current and future generations by getting families outdoors? Yes, this change increases sustainable trapping opportunity.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

APPROVE _____ MODIFY _____ REJECT _____ NO ACTION _____

North American River Otter Action Plan, 2025–2029



SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF GAME, FISH AND
PARKS PIERRE, SOUTH DAKOTA
WILDLIFE DIVISION REPORT 2025-03

June 2025



This action plan will be used by South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks 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.

A supportive document to this action plan, the “North American River Otter Management in South Dakota,” provides a historical background, research, surveys, population monitoring efforts and issues, challenges and opportunities which can be found at <https://gfp.sd.gov/management-plans/>.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Action Plan Coordinator – Alex Solem, South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks

Action Plan Team – Nathan Baker, Julie Lindstrom, Dan Sternhagen, Trenton Haffley, Jacob Wolfe, Rachel Gardner, Nick Markl, Nick Rossman, Brad Baumgartner, and Andrew Norton.

Cover photo by Wayne Melquist. All text and data contained within this document are subject to revision from corrections, updates, and data analysis.

Recommended citation:

South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks, Division of Wildlife. 2025. North American river otter action plan, 2025–2029. Wildlife Division Report Number 2025-03. South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks, Pierre, USA.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A draft of the “North American River Otter Action Plan” was available for public comment from April 3 – May 23, 2025.

INTRODUCTION

North American River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*, [hereafter; river otter]) were considered common in many riparian areas and permanent bodies of water in the Northern Great Plains. Overexploitation, habitat degradation and water pollution extirpated the species from much of its range by the mid-twentieth century, including South Dakota (Anderson 1977, Jones et al. 1983, Jones et al. 1985, Kiesow 2003). Successful reintroduction efforts occurred by the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe in 1998 and 1999 to re-establish a river otter population in eastern South Dakota (GFP 2020). Historical reports of river otter sightings and sign occurred prior to re-establishment. However, only until recently have these reports become more common indicating their distribution has steadily expanded into other river systems in eastern South Dakota (GFP 2020). These reports could be a direct result of dispersal of individuals following restoration efforts in surrounding states or reestablished populations in South Dakota (Kiesow 2003).

Due to their limited distribution and population, river otter were listed as a state threatened species in South Dakota and given a protected status (South Dakota Administrative Rule 41:19:02:04; GFP 2012). In December of 2010, a group of South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) staff began developing a plan for the conservation and management of river otter and produced the South Dakota River Otter Management Plan (GFP 2012). That 5-year plan provided general, strategic guidance to GFP and potential partners for the recovery and sustained management of river otter in South Dakota. Using verified reports of sightings, sign, and incidental trapping events from staff and members of the public, GFP developed recovery criteria to remove river otter from the state threatened species list. In 2020, delisting criteria were met, river otter were removed from the state threatened species list, and a structured season was established. During this process, GFP outlined the need for a monitoring effort of the recently delisted species, an aspect critical for successful otter management (Melquist et al. 2003, Gallant et al. 2008), to ensure delisting criteria is continually being met and the population is sustainable.

This is an action plan for all constituents interested in the conservation of river otter in South Dakota. Wildlife managers are challenged to use the available tools for the benefit and well-being of river otter. With careful coordination among all stakeholders, South Dakota's trapping and outdoor heritage will be preserved for future generations. As such, GFP will manage river otter populations with data and techniques to encourage the occupation of suitable available habitats and to provide sustainable use and enjoyment within the social tolerance level for this species.

HARVEST STRUCTURE

Management options include total protection; adjusting opportunities to harvest animals by season length and harvest period; establishing harvest limits, management zones, and closed areas; limiting harvest by individual trappers; and restricting the size, type, and number of traps allowed (Melquist and Dronkert 1987). Melquist et al. (2003) described Canada's long-term use of registered traplines, which helps reduce competition among trappers, particularly during times of high fur prices.

River otter are vulnerable to overharvest because of their low fecundity rate, the long interval between generations, their ability to travel extensively, and, when restricted to riparian corridors, their limited travel routes (Toweill and Tabor 1982, Melquist et al. 2003). This has led some states to regulate river otter harvest by allowing only one animal per individual per season (Toweill and Tabor 1982). In addition, Hill (1978), as cited in Melquist and Dronkert (1987), analyzed river otter and beaver trapping in the southeastern U.S. and found that one river otter

was taken for every 6-10 beavers, but most incidentally trapped otters are caught by a few trappers.

In May of 2020, GFP staff recommended an annual river otter trapping/hunting season. The GFP Commission approved this season beginning at sunrise on 1 November and running through 31 December or until a harvest limit of 15 river otters was reached, whichever came first. In 2021, the harvest limit was increased to 20 river otters. The river otter season was restricted to the eastern portion of South Dakota (Figure 1). Participation was limited to residents of South Dakota, and trappers/hunters were limited to a harvest of one river otter per individual per season. During the open season, trappers/hunters are required to report any river otter within 24 hours of harvest to GFP staff. The trapper/hunter is required to check-in the carcass and detached pelt at a designated GFP office for registration. Upon check-in, the hunter/trapper is issued a Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) tag for the pelt, and the carcass is obtained by GFP to collect biological samples.

POPULATION MONITORING

The river otter is a difficult species to monitor, making the development of a meaningful and feasible monitoring program a continuing challenge. As with any species, clear objectives must be paired with suitable survey and monitoring tools. A monitoring program must help ensure the species status remains at least stable to demonstrate that delisting remains justified. A monitoring program can provide additional population status information, in addition to harvest or trapper effort data that are collected. Survey and monitoring tools must also be adapted to South Dakota's climate and landscape. A combination of methods best suited to South Dakota are needed, with consideration given to limited funding and staff availability, and dynamic weather and habitat conditions.

Reports of Sign, Sightings, and Mortalities

Reports of river otter are categorized based on the primary method used to identify the animal as a river otter: sighting, sign, incidental trap, and vehicle kill. Sightings are based upon the actual observation of a river otter. Reports of sign are based on tracks, slides, runs, scat, latrines, and/or natal dens. Incidental trap reports are of river otter that were incidentally caught while targeting other species. Vehicle kills are reports of river otter found dead on the road or hit by a vehicle. A report can be of an individual animal or a group of animals.

Certain criteria are used to determine the reliability of each report:

- A **verified report** is one of a carcass or live-captured individual(s) or where evidence exists that proves the report was a river otter. Photos where the animal can clearly be identified as a river otter may also be considered verified. Tracks associated with sliding marks in the snow, if confirmed by knowledgeable reviewers can also be considered a verified sighting. Knowledgeable reviewers may include agency staff familiar with river otter or other river otter experts.
- A **probable report** is a sighting not accompanied by a photo but is observed by someone with river otter experience and knowledge. Tracks and scats not in snow are considered probable reports in part because of the difficulty of correctly identifying them. Photos are evaluated by knowledgeable reviewers.
- An **unverified report** is a report with no evidence to support or reject the report.

Necropsy Information

Since 2003, GFP conducts necropsies on all available opportunistically obtained carcasses. Most carcasses are collected from two watersheds: Big Sioux and Minnesota. A vast majority of necropsied carcasses are obtained from Moody, Roberts, and Grant counties, with many of them obtained during the months of April and November. Incidental trapping is the primary cause of death for necropsied river otter.

When an incidentally killed river otter is reported to GFP, a river otter report form is filled out and includes date, time, county, location, GFP representative and reporting party. For those animals incidentally trapped, the trap type, species targeted, and whether the animal was found dead is recorded. Whole carcass weight, total length, and tail length is measured (Diggs 2013) prior to the initiation of the necropsy. Sex of the river otter is confirmed at necropsy. Samples are taken of the lower jaw or skull, reproductive organs (ovaries and/or uterus), and the tongue or a sample of hind quarter muscle tissue. Removal of lower canines from skulls/lower jaws is completed according to Matson's Wildlife Aging Lab protocols (Matson's Laboratory 2024). Reproduction status is determined by presence of corpora lutea (Diggs 2013). In addition, the uterine horn is examined for blastocysts, and if swollen, the uterus is examined for embryos (Diggs 2013). The caudal lobe of liver and spleen may be collected to test for the presence of heavy metals such as selenium and mercury and the presence of pesticides. Presence of wrist worms and any obvious injuries are also recorded.

Latrine Survey

River otter are secretive animals occurring at relatively low densities in hard-to-reach places, making the use of traditional monitoring efforts difficult (Blundell et al. 1999, Melquist et al. 2003, Helon 2006, Serfass et al. 1996, Gallant et al. 2008, Bieber et al. 2018). Non-invasive genetic sampling (NGS) can be an effective tool for management and conservation (Sollmann et al. 2013, Hansen et al. 2008, Bonesi et al. 2013), especially for elusive, secretive, and hard to trap species, such as river otter (Brzeski et al. 2013, Cox and Murphy 2019). NGS provides biologists an alternative sampling technique by relying on DNA from scat, hair, or urine (Waits and Paetkau 2005, Brzeski et al. 2013, Ferreira et al. 2018). River otter regularly deposit scat and anal jellies (intestinal mucus) at communal latrine sites. These genetic samples give biologists the ability to identify the unique individuals and their sex (Bonesi et al. 2013, Brzeski et al. 2013, Johnson et al. 2013, Klutsch and Thomas 2018, Cox and Murphy 2019).

GFP began a river otter monitoring program of surveying otter latrines in 2021. Twenty-three transects along the Big Sioux River ranging from 2.5 to 7 km are surveyed once by kayak in September and October annually. River otter latrines are a social hub and located in relatively predictable locations along a waterway. These locations include fallen trees, raised banks, sand bars, and near beaver lodges. Once a latrine is located, its location, the level of confidence it is a river otter latrine, number of scats sampled, and the scat's freshness are recorded. Fecal swabs are rubbed on the outside of the scat of anal jelly, and then stored in an individually marked vial containing a DNA/RNA shield. DNA is extracted from fecal swabs using DNeasy Blood and Tissue Kit (Qiagen, Inc.). Samples are genotyped to identify individual river otter (see North American River Otter Management in South Dakota for more detailed protocol).

The genetic information gathered provides a conservative count of river otter within a defined sampling unit and provides an index of abundance (river otter/sampling unit). This index helps establish a baseline distribution of river otter in South Dakota and provides

inferences to traditional abundance estimates (i.e., mark-recapture approaches) which can be monitored through time and establish population trends. An assessment will occur as needed to determine the feasibility of expanding monitoring efforts outside of the Big Sioux River to other river systems.

Population Backdating

Population backdating utilizes the known age of individuals to calculate the number of individuals back to their projected birth year (Downing 1980). These individuals are combined into age specific cohorts and contribute to the cumulative number of known-aged individuals for the years they are alive. For example, an individual estimated at five years old at death would have been a member of the population for the previous five years. Each necropsied river otter contributes to the cumulative number of known-aged river otter for the years they are alive. GFP biologists use this analysis to determine historical trends in abundance and produce a population trajectory to a certain point in time.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

South Dakota will manage river otter populations with data and techniques to encourage occupation of suitable available habitats and to provide sustainable use and enjoyment within the social tolerance level for this species.

Objective 1: Determine the status of river otter populations.

Strategies:

- 1.1** Annually collect and summarize river otter reports to improve knowledge of distribution and document expansion; refine reporting process as needed.
- 1.2** Annually collect information on age structure, sex ratio, and reproduction by conducting necropsies on all available carcasses.
 - 1.2.1** Use age structure data collected from cementum annuli to complete a population backdating analysis.
- 1.3** Annually implement latrine surveys within the Big Sioux River.
 - 1.3.1** Determine results of the latrine stream survey to evaluate occupancy and determine if the data can support a reliable population estimate.

Objective 2: Manage populations using harvest strategies that maximize sustainable recreational opportunity.

Strategies:

- 2.1** Biannually review and analyze existing data to inform harvest season structure and harvest limit recommendations.
 - 2.1.1** By 2029, develop a harvest limit decision support tool to help guide harvest strategies for increasing, maintaining, or decreasing harvest limits and adjusting season structure.

- 2.2 Comply with necessary state and federal requirements for harvest implementation and reporting, while coordinating with these conservation partners.
- 2.3 Annually collect trapper/hunter information from harvested river otter to determine harvest metrics, such as, age and sex ratios, harvest locations, and harvest effort.

Objective 3: Inform and educate the public on river otter ecology and management.

Strategies:

- 3.1 Annually provide information on ways to reduce incidental river otter catches.
- 3.2 Respond to all requests for service and use those opportunities to educate on river otter ecology and management.

Objective 4: Coordinate with private landowners and conservation partners to promote the restoration of wetlands, streams, and riparian habitat.

Strategies:

- 4.1 Provide financial commitment to the project goal of 25,000 acres to be enrolled in the Big Sioux River Watershed CREP.
- 4.2 Provide financial commitment to the 82,000 acres enrolled in the James River Watershed CREP and use funding sources as they become available to enroll the project goal of 100,000 acres.
- 4.3 Support the implementation of the Riparian Buffer Initiative implemented by South Dakota's Department of Agricultural and Natural Resources.
- 4.4 Provide financial and technical support to interested landowners through department private lands cost-share programs, and partner programs to create or improve existing wetland and riparian habitat through restoration projects, range management projects and grazing stewardship practices.

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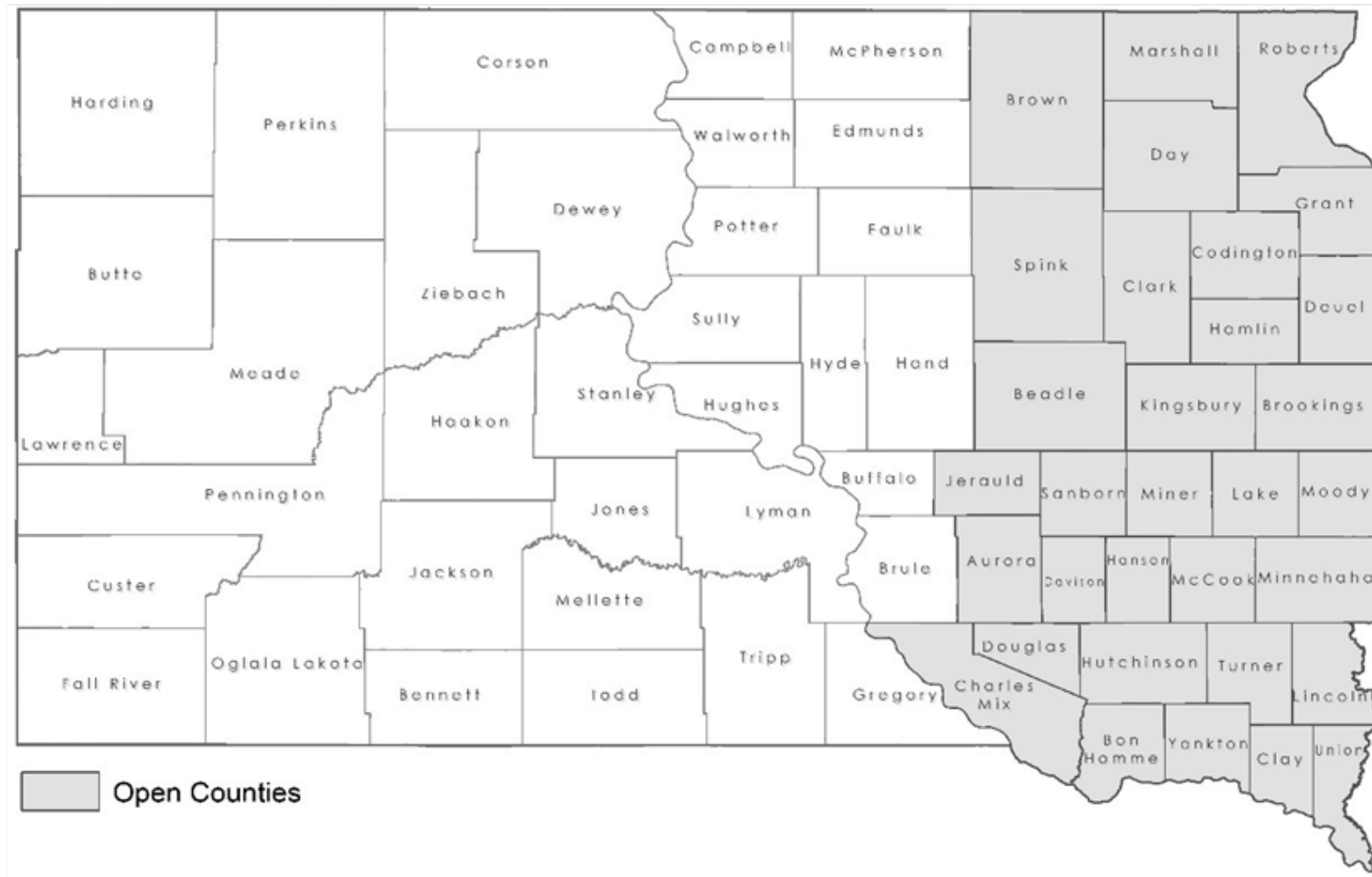


Figure 1. Counties in eastern South Dakota open to the harvest of river otters through trapping and hunting (grey). Hunters/trappers are limited to one river otter per trapper/hunter per season.

GAME, FISH AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION Finalization

FISHING SEASONS

Chapter 41:07:02

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	April 3,2025	Pierre
	Public Hearing	June 5,2025	Aberdeen
	Finalization	June 5-6,2025	Aberdeen

COMMISSION PROPOSAL

Proposed changes:

1. Allow year-round fishing in the dredge-hole area of Lake Francis Case between the railroad bridge and the Interstate 90 bridge and causeway in Brule and Lyman Counties.

Department recommended changes to proposal:

None

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

1. Currently, the waters of Lake Francis Case, between the railroad bridge and the Interstate 90 bridge and causeway in Brule and Lyman Counties, are closed to fishing from December 1 through April 30, except that shore fishing from the Brule County side of this area remains open year-round.
2. By removing the December 1 through April 30 fishing closure for the dredge-hole area of Lake Francis Case, the Department believes angling opportunity will be increased and fishing regulations will be simplified with no detrimental impacts to the fish population.
3. The dredge-hole fishing closure is a very specific, local regulation and many non-residents and non-locals may not be aware it exists, causing them to unintentionally violate the law.

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

The following are proposed draft changes that are intended to incorporate the changes recommended for Commission proposal.

41:07:02:01. Inland waters. Unless prohibited by § 41:07:01:05, all species of fish, other than those listed in §§ 41:10:02:05 and 41:10:02:06, may be fished by hook and line year-round within inland waters.

The following restrictions apply to inland waters:

~~—(1) The waters of Lake Francis Case, between the railroad bridge and the Interstate 90 bridge and causeway in Brule and Lyman Counties are open to fishing from May 1 through November 30, except that shore fishing from the Brule County side of this area remains open year-round;~~

(21) In Clark County the waters of Indian Springs and Antelope Lake west of a line from 42750 174th Street to 42750 177th Street to 424th Avenue are closed to fishing from a boat from October 20 through December 31; and

(32) Baitfish may be taken year-round by licensed bait dealers and legal anglers in these waters except as provided in § 41:09:04:03.

APPROVE _____	MODIFY _____	REJECT _____	NO ACTION _____
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RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

1. The Issue – NA
2. Historical Considerations – NA
3. Biological Considerations – NA
4. Social Considerations – NA
5. Financial considerations – NA

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

1. Does the regulation or fee inhibit a user's ability to participate? NA
2. Does the regulation increase the opportunity for new and existing users? Yes, by allowing users to fish year-round in the dredge-hole area.
3. How does the regulation impact the next generation of hunters, anglers, trappers and outdoor recreationists? NA
4. Does the regulation enhance the quality of life for current and future generations by getting families outdoors? NA

FISCAL IMPACT

Not applicable

APPROVE _____	MODIFY _____	REJECT _____	NO ACTION _____
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GAME, FISH, AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION PROPOSAL

Custer State Park Antelope Hunting Season

Chapter 41:06:07 and 41:06:10

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	June 5-6, 2025	Aberdeen
	Public Hearing	July 10, 2025	Yankton
	Finalization	July 10-11, 2025	Yankton

PROPOSED CHANGES

Duration: 2025 hunting season

Season Dates: October 4 – 19, 2025 *
** Recommendation to open the season in 2025 for a sixteen-day season beginning on the 1st Saturday in October.*

Open Area: Custer State Park

Licenses: Last year, there were no antelope licenses.

The Department's recommendation for resident-only licenses by tag type for the 2025 hunting season is included in the following administrative action item.

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. Resident only.
2. A person who received a Custer State Park "any antelope" license in any of the preceding nine years may not apply for a license or purchase preference points for that season. *
** Recommendation to change "any antelope" to "antelope".*
3. No person may hunt any big game species or coyotes within 200 yards of any public access road or building in Custer State Park.

Proposed changes from last year:

1. Modify § 41:06:25:01 to open the Custer State Park antelope hunting season from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset, for sixteen consecutive days, beginning on the first Saturday in October and allow for a maximum of 10 single-tag antelope licenses, with actual license number and type specified through administrative action.
2. Repeal § 41:06:25:02. Season date and license limit information. This will be described in § 41:06:25:01.
3. Modify § 41:06:07:02 to specify a person that receives an antelope license in CSP may not apply for that season for 9 years. The current rule is specific to "any antelope" license types and the Department is recommending "buck antelope" license types in 2025.

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Based on annual ground survey data, the Custer State Park antelope population can provide some buck hunting opportunity. The count in 2025 was 123 total animals (Table 1), the highest since 2016. The Custer State Park hunting season has been closed since 2017 (Figure 1).

Table 1. Antelope ground count survey data from 2014 to 2025.

Year	Count	Method
2014	138	ground
2015	138	ground
2016	153	ground
2017	110	ground
2018	81	ground
2019	86	ground
2020	NA	no survey
2021	82	ground
2022	90	ground
2023	80	ground
2024	84	ground
2025	123	ground

Figure 1. License sales and hunter harvest information for the Custer State Park Antelope Hunting Season from 2011 to 2017. The season has been closed since 2017.

Year	Apps	Licenses	Harvest			Success	Avg. Days Hunted	Average Satisfaction
			Bucks	Does	Total			
2011	1,170	3	3	0	3	100%	1.3	NA
2012	916	3	3	0	3	100%	1.3	NA
2013	995	3	3	0	3	100%	1.0	NA
2014	1,086	3	3	0	3	100%	2.0	6.00
2015	1,223	3	3	0	3	100%	1.7	6.67
2016	1,243	3	3	0	3	100%	1.3	7.00
2017	Season Closed							

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:06:25:01. Custer State Park antelope hunting season established – Number and type of licenses. The Custer State Park antelope hunting season in unit CUA-CU1 is closed open in Custer State Park from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset, for sixteen consecutive days, beginning on the first Saturday in October. No more than ten one-tag antelope licenses may be issued to residents for the antelope hunting season.

41:06:25:02. Number of licenses – Type – Dates. The Custer State Park antelope hunting season includes Unit CUA-CU1 where a maximum of 3 "any antelope" licenses may be issued. Antelope may be taken by any legal means from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset each day beginning the Tuesday following Native American Day for nine consecutive days. Repealed.

41:06:07:02. Eligibility of past licensees. A person who received a Custer State Park elk license or Custer State Park early archery elk license in any previous year may not apply for that license again. A person who received a Custer State Park bighorn sheep license or Black Hills bighorn sheep license in any previous year may not apply for a Custer State Park bighorn sheep license. A person who previously received a Custer State Park elk license is eligible to receive a Custer State Park elk license awarded through a special fundraising raffle. A person who received a first-choice unit license for the special antlerless elk season in any of the preceding nine years may not apply for a license in that season. A person who received a Custer State Park "any deer" license, "any whitetail deer," or "any whitetail deer plus antlerless whitetail deer" license in any of the preceding nine years may not apply for a unit license for the Custer State Park "any deer," "any whitetail deer," or "any whitetail deer plus antlerless whitetail deer" in that season. A person who received a Custer State Park ~~"any antelope"~~ antelope license in any of the preceding nine years may not apply for a license in that season. Receiving a license for the special antlerless elk season does not affect a person's future eligibility for the Custer State Park elk license, nor does receiving the Custer State Park elk license affect future eligibility for the special antlerless elk license.

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

None.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

1. Does the regulation or fee inhibit a user's ability to participate? No.
2. Does the regulation increase the opportunity for new and existing users? Yes, hunting opportunity will be expanded.
3. How does the regulation impact the next generation of hunters, anglers, trappers and outdoor recreationists? More individuals will be able to hunt antelope with minimal impact to population numbers.
4. Does the regulation enhance the quality of life for current and future generations by getting families outdoors? Yes, this change increases sustainable hunting opportunity.

FISCAL IMPACT

Up to ten single-tag antelope licenses may be sold and many individuals are expected to purchase preference points for this season. The license number recommendation is included on the following administrative action item.

APPROVE	_____	MODIFY	_____	REJECT	_____	NO ACTION	_____
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GAME, FISH, AND PARKS COMMISSION ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

Custer State Park Antelope Hunting Season Licenses

Chapter 41:06:10

Commission Meeting Dates:	Public Hearing	July 10-11, 2025	Yankton
	Finalization	July 10-11, 2025	Yankton

COMMISSION ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

2025 Custer State Park Antelope Hunting Season Licenses

Season	Unit	Buck Antelope
Custer State Park (CUA)	CU1	5

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

The Custer State Park hunting season has been closed since 2017 (Figure 1). Based on the 2025 ground count, there are approximately 40 bucks in the population and a harvest of 5 bucks would result in a 13% harvest rate. This would represent the lower end of the harvest rate range compared to Prairie antelope hunting units (8 - 62%). The average harvest rate among all antelope hunting units was 27% and West River hunting units ranged 25 - 45%.

Figure 1. License sales and hunter harvest information for the Custer State Park Antelope Hunting Season from 2011 to 2017. The season has been closed since 2017.

Year	Apps	Licenses	Harvest			Success	Avg. Days Hunted	Average Satisfaction
			Bucks	Does	Total			
2011	1,170	3	3	0	3	100%	1.3	NA
2012	916	3	3	0	3	100%	1.3	NA
2013	995	3	3	0	3	100%	1.0	NA
2014	1,086	3	3	0	3	100%	2.0	6.00
2015	1,223	3	3	0	3	100%	1.7	6.67
2016	1,243	3	3	0	3	100%	1.3	7.00
2017	Season Closed							

APPROVE _____ MODIFY _____ REJECT _____ NO ACTION _____

GAME, FISH, AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION PROPOSAL

Sage Grouse Hunting Season Chapter 41:06:10

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	June 5-6, 2025	Aberdeen
	Public Hearing	July 10, 2025	Yankton
	Finalization	July 10-11, 2025	Yankton

PROPOSED CHANGES

Duration: 2025 and 2026 hunting seasons

Season Dates: Closed

Open unit: Butte County west of U.S. Highway 85 and Harding County.
* Only public land and private land leased for public hunting is included within this unit.

Season limit: The season limit is one sage grouse. Random drawing for up to 40 access permits.

Proposed changes from last year:

None.

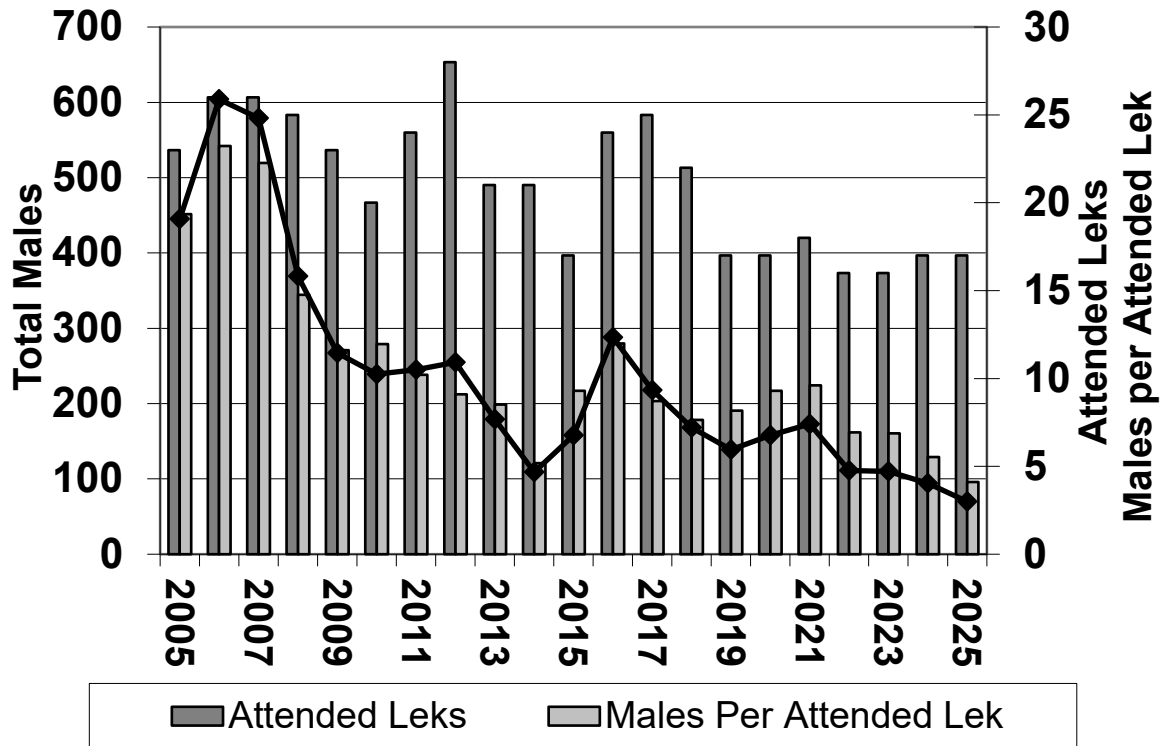
SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

The Department does not recommend opening the Sage Grouse Season based on the guidelines found within the “South Dakota Greater Sage Grouse Action Plan, 2022-2026” (Table 1). Preliminary results from the 2025 spring lek surveys indicated 70 males counted on all leks in Harding and Butte Counties, compared to 94 males counted in 2024 (Figure 1).

Table 1. Sage-grouse hunting season recommendation guidelines for South Dakota 2022–2026.

Population Index	Hunting Season Recommendation
≥ 300 males counted on all leks in Butte and Harding counties for 2 consecutive years	Option for short (~2-4 day) hunting season in Harding County and Butte County west of US HWY 85, limit 1 sage-grouse per hunter per season. Random drawing for up to 40 access permits
< 300 males counted on all leks in Butte and Harding counties OR ≥ 300 males counted on all leks in Butte and Harding counties for only 1 year	No Hunting Season

Figure 1. Historical sage-grouse lek survey data.



DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

None.

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

None.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

None.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

APPROVE _____ MODIFY _____ REJECT _____ NO ACTION _____

GAME, FISH, AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION PROPOSAL

Pete Lien & Sons Shooting Sports Complex Fees Chapter 41:03:07

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	June 5-6, 2025	Aberdeen
	Public Hearing	July 10, 2025	Yankton
	Finalization	July 10-11, 2025	Yankton

PROPOSED CHANGES

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION

1. Create rule to establish day pass, annual pass and event fees for the Pete Lien & Sons Shooting Sports Complex.

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

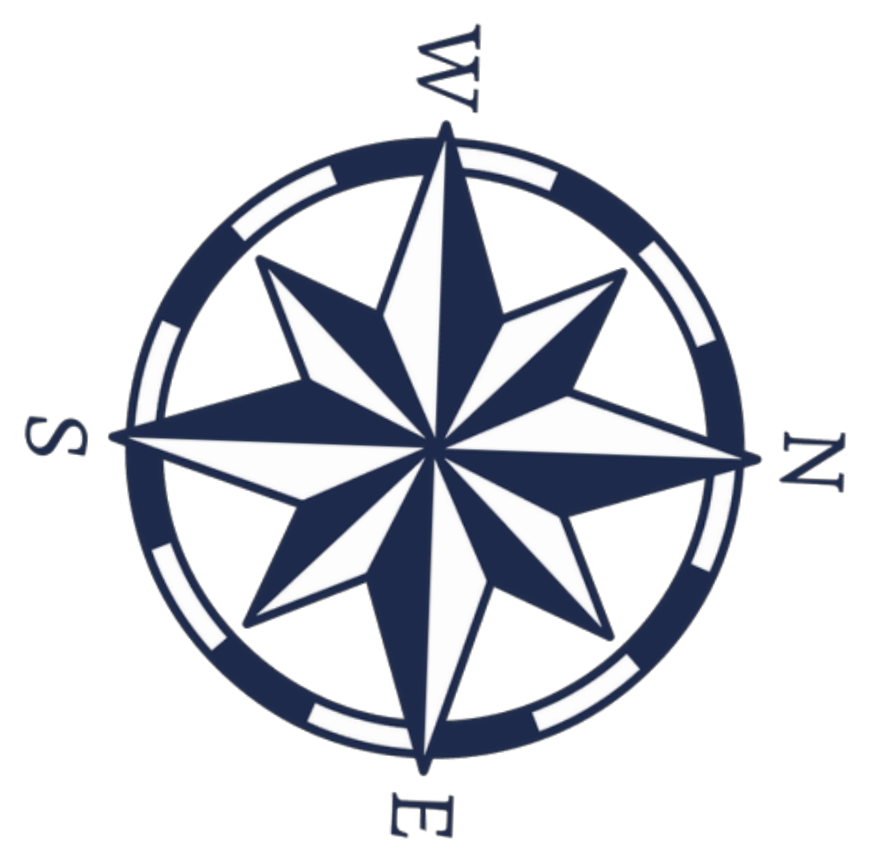
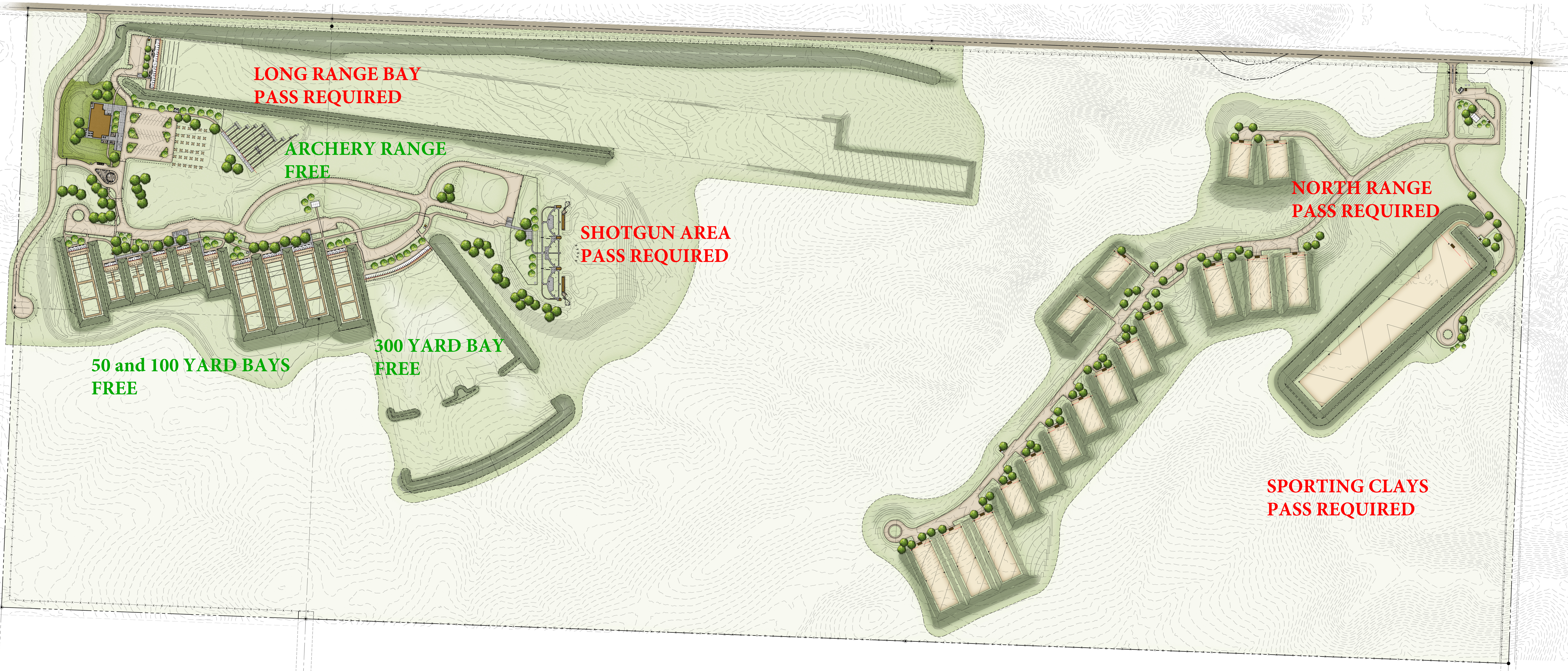
To help offset maintenance and operation costs of the GFP Pete Lien & Sons Shooting Sports Complex the Department is recommending modest fees to generate revenue that can be used to leverage federal funding to use for maintenance and operation of the complex. Revenue generated will help offset the costs for materials such as clay targets that will be offered at the complex.

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE

41:03:07. Pete Lien & Sons Shooting Sports Complex Fees. Fees associated with the use of the Pete Lien & Sons Shooting Sports Complex are as follows:

- (1) Individual day pass, twenty dollars;
- (2) Individual annual pass, one hundred dollars;
- (3) Family annual pass, one hundred and fifty dollars;
- (4) Annual club pass, five hundred dollars;
- (5) Competitive event pass, twenty dollars per competitor; and
- (6) Non-competitive event cost, five hundred dollars per shooting bay for two days and two hundred dollars for each additional day.

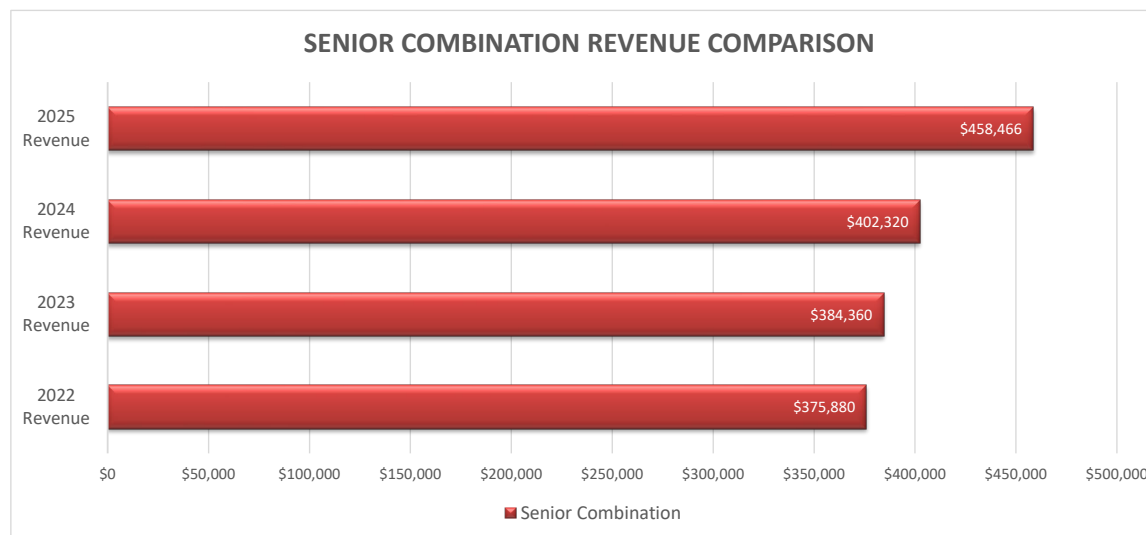
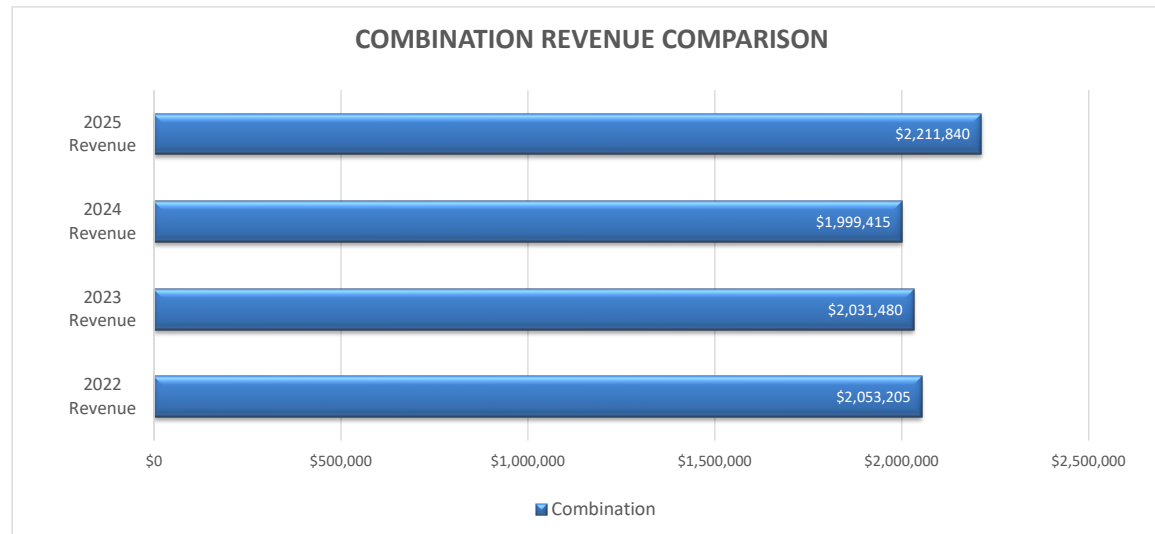
APPROVE _____	MODIFY _____	REJECT _____	NO ACTION _____
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COMBINATION LICENSES

December 15 - May 31

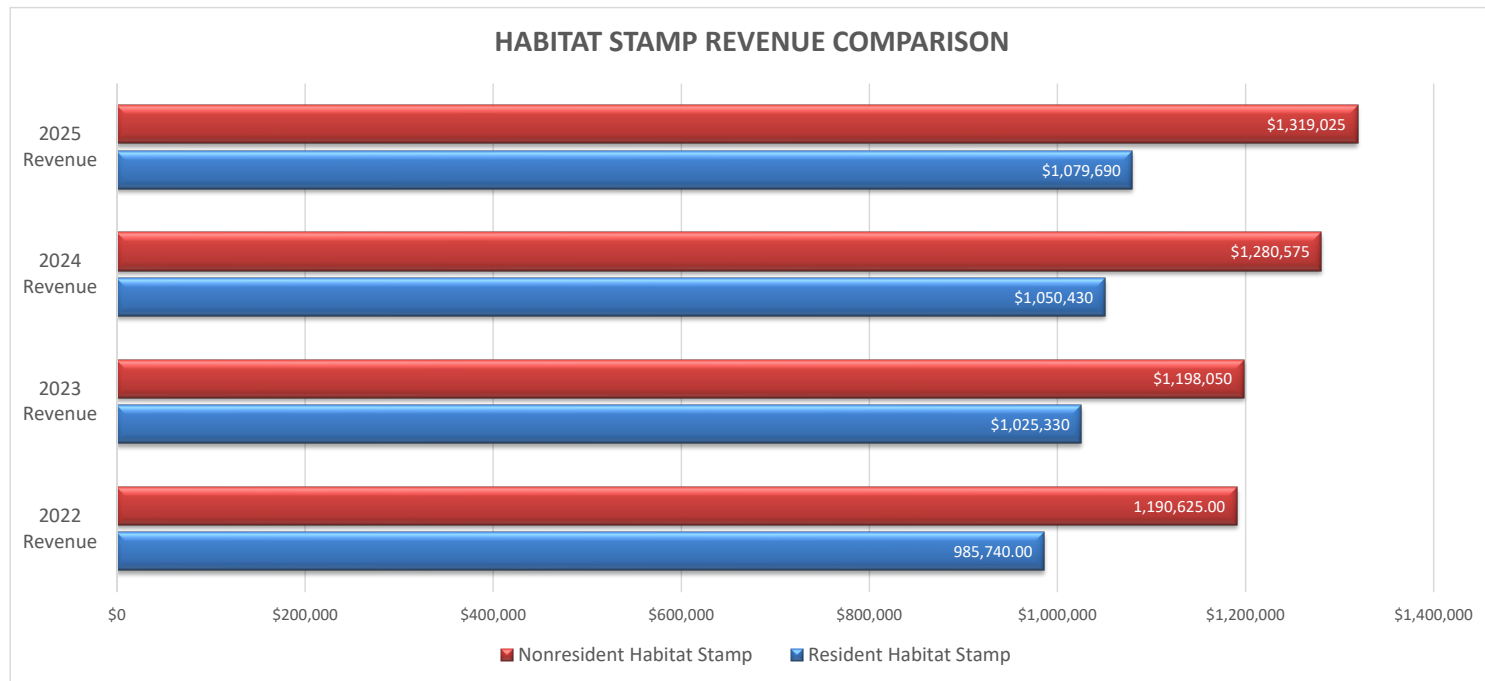
License Type	2022	2023	2024	3-yr Avg	2025	2025 Revenue	+/- Licenses		+/- Revenue		% Change from 3 Yr. Avg
							2024 vs 2025	3 Yr. Avg vs 2025	2024 vs 2025	3 Yr. Avg vs 2025	
Combination	37,331	36,936	36,353	36,873	36,864	\$2,211,840	511	(9)	\$212,425	\$183,807	0%
Senior Combination	9,397	9,609	10,058	9,688	10,662	\$458,466	604	974	\$56,146	\$70,946	10%
Combination License Totals	46,728	46,545	46,411	46,561	47,526	\$2,670,306	1,115	965	\$268,571	\$254,753	2%



HABITAT STAMP

December 15 - May 31

License Type	2022	2023	2024	3-yr Avg	2025	2025 Revenue	+/- Licenses		+/- Revenue		% Change from 3 Yr. Avg
							2024 vs 2025	3 Yr. Avg vs 2025	2024 vs 2025	3 Yr. Avg vs 2025	
Resident Habitat Stamp	98,574	102,533	105,043	102,050	107,969	\$1,079,690	2,926	5,919	\$160,930	\$325,545	6%
Nonresident Habitat Stamp	47,625	47,922	51,223	48,923	52,761	\$1,319,025	1,538	3,838	\$61,520	\$153,507	8%
Habitat Stamp Totals	146,199	150,455	156,266	150,973	160,730	\$2,398,715	4,464	9,757	\$222,450	\$479,052	6%

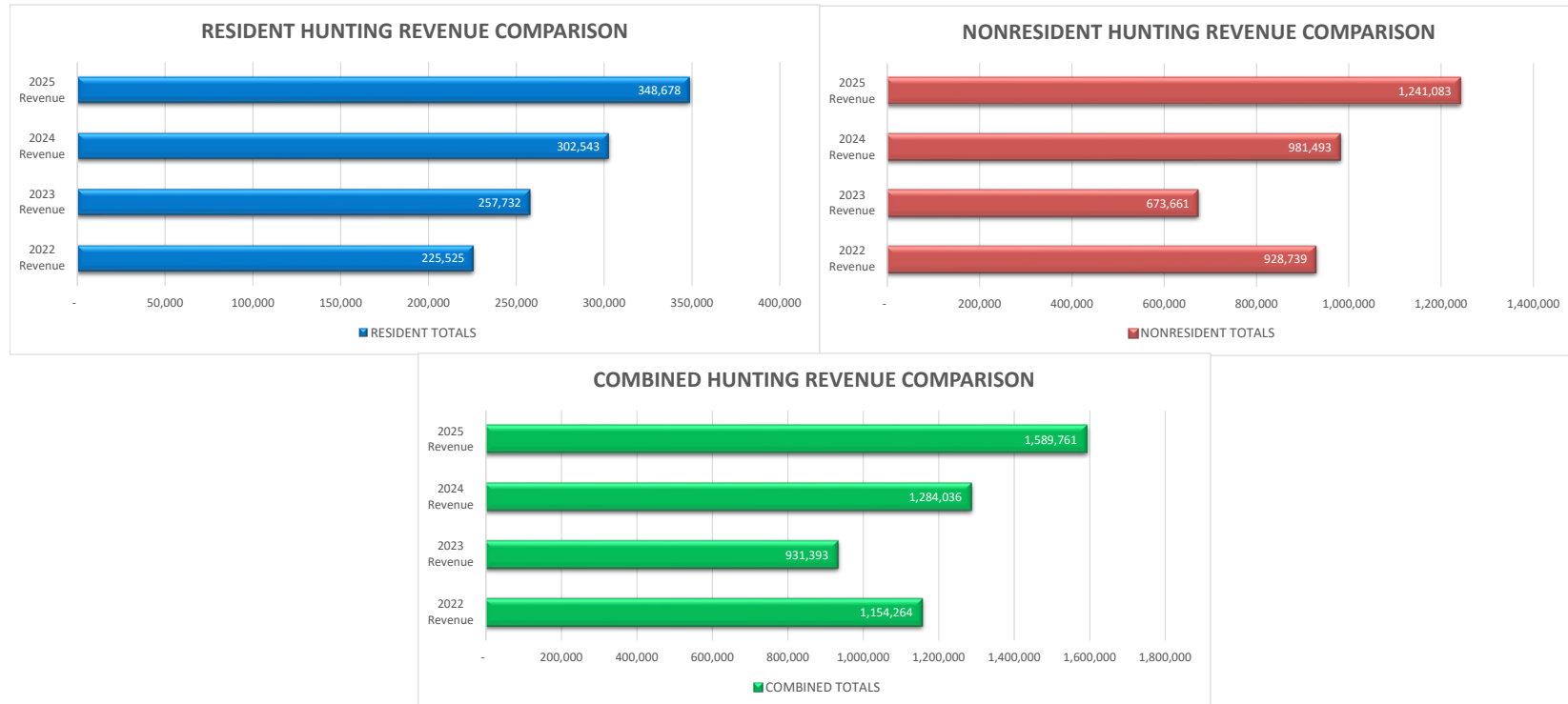


SMALL GAME LICENSES

December 15 - May 31

License Type						+/- Licenses		+/- Revenue		% Change	
	2022	2023	2024	3-yr Avg	2025	2025 Revenue	2024 vs 2025	3 Yr. Avg vs 2025	2024 vs 2025	3 Yr. Avg vs 2025	from 3 Yr. Avg
Small Game	2,613	4,427	5,576	4,205	6,272	\$225,792	696	2,067	\$41,784	\$87,016	49%
1-Day Small Game	153	98	205	152	199	\$2,985	(6)	47	\$525	\$1,161	31%
Youth Small Game	1,251	1,118	1,220	1,196	1,098	\$5,490	(122)	(98)	(\$610)	(\$1,180)	-8%
Furbearer	2,909	2,757	2,931	2,866	3,105	\$96,255	174	239	\$8,325	\$10,285	8%
Predator/Varmint	1,478	1,353	1,153	1,328	941	\$5,646	(212)	(387)	(\$119)	(\$994)	-29%
Migratory Bird Certificate: 3-Duck	233	242	200	225	115	\$575	(85)	(110)	(\$425)	(\$550)	-49%
Migratory Bird Certificate: Traditional	7,076	2,838	3,056	4,323	2,387	\$11,935	(669)	(1,936)	(\$3,345)	(\$9,682)	-45%
RESIDENT TOTALS	15,713	12,833	14,341	14,296	14,117	\$348,678	-224	-69	\$46,135	\$86,056	-0.48%
Small Game	4,328	2,582	4,877	3,929	5,283	\$750,186	406	1,354	\$160,069	\$274,777	34%
Youth Small Game	298	171	327	265	340	\$3,400	13	75	\$130	\$747	28%
Shooting Preserve 1-Day Nonresident	198	102	169	156	192	\$9,600	23	36	\$1,826	\$2,409	23%
Shooting Preserve 5-Day Nonresident	1,183	802	993	993	1,204	\$115,584	211	211	\$40,116	\$40,141	21%
Shooting Preserve Annual Nonresident	96	63	60	73	65	\$9,490	5	(8)	\$2,230	\$657	-11%
Furbearer	3	1	5	3	1	\$325	(4)	(2)	(\$1,050)	(\$500)	-67%
Predator/Varmint	1,715	1,986	2,163	1,955	2,247	\$103,362	84	292	\$16,842	\$25,175	15%
Migratory Bird Certificate: 3-Duck	3	30	32	22	113	\$565	81	91	\$405	\$457	422%
Migratory Bird Certificate: Traditional	225	3,371	4,222	2,606	3,740	\$18,700	(482)	1,134	(\$2,410)	\$5,670	44%
Spring Light Goose	4,249	3,626	4,034	3,970	3,662	\$223,382	(372)	(308)	(\$20,460)	\$31,622	-8%
Youth Spring Light Goose	324	317	329	323	309	\$6,489	(20)	(14)	(\$420)	(\$1,369)	-4%
NONRESIDENT TOTALS	12,622	13,051	17,211	14,295	17,156	\$1,241,083	(55)	2,861	\$197,278	\$379,785	20.02%
COMBINED TOTALS	28,335	25,884	31,552	28,590	31,273	\$1,589,761	(279)	2,683	\$243,413	\$465,842	9.38%

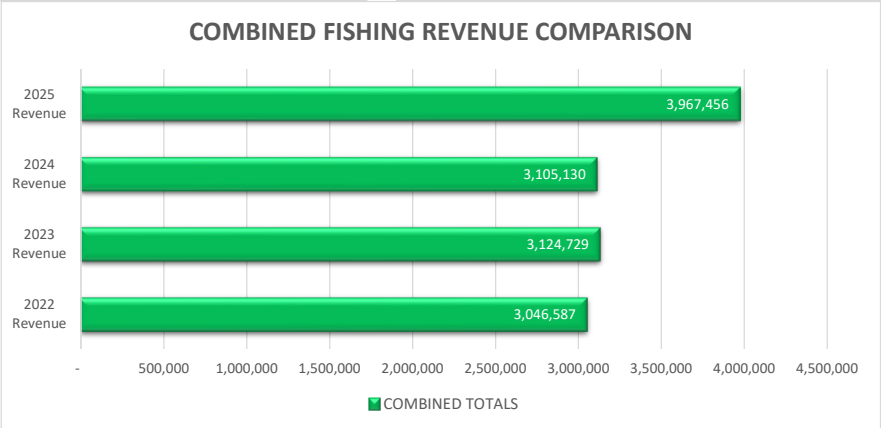
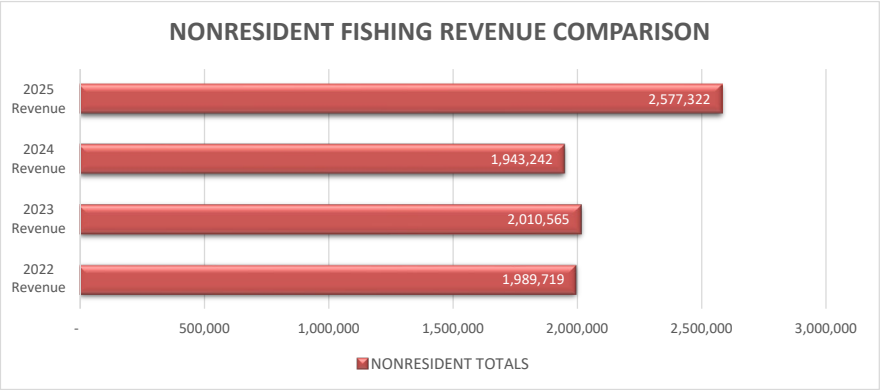
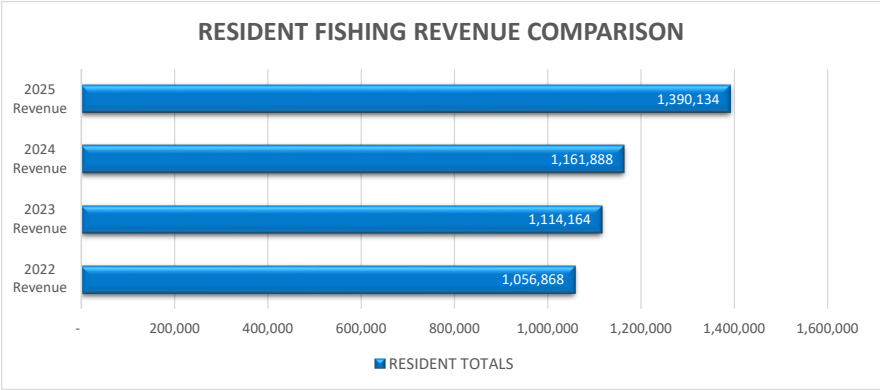
*Spring Light Goose decreased by \$5 when the migratory bird certificate was no longer included.



FISHING LICENSES

December 15 - May 31

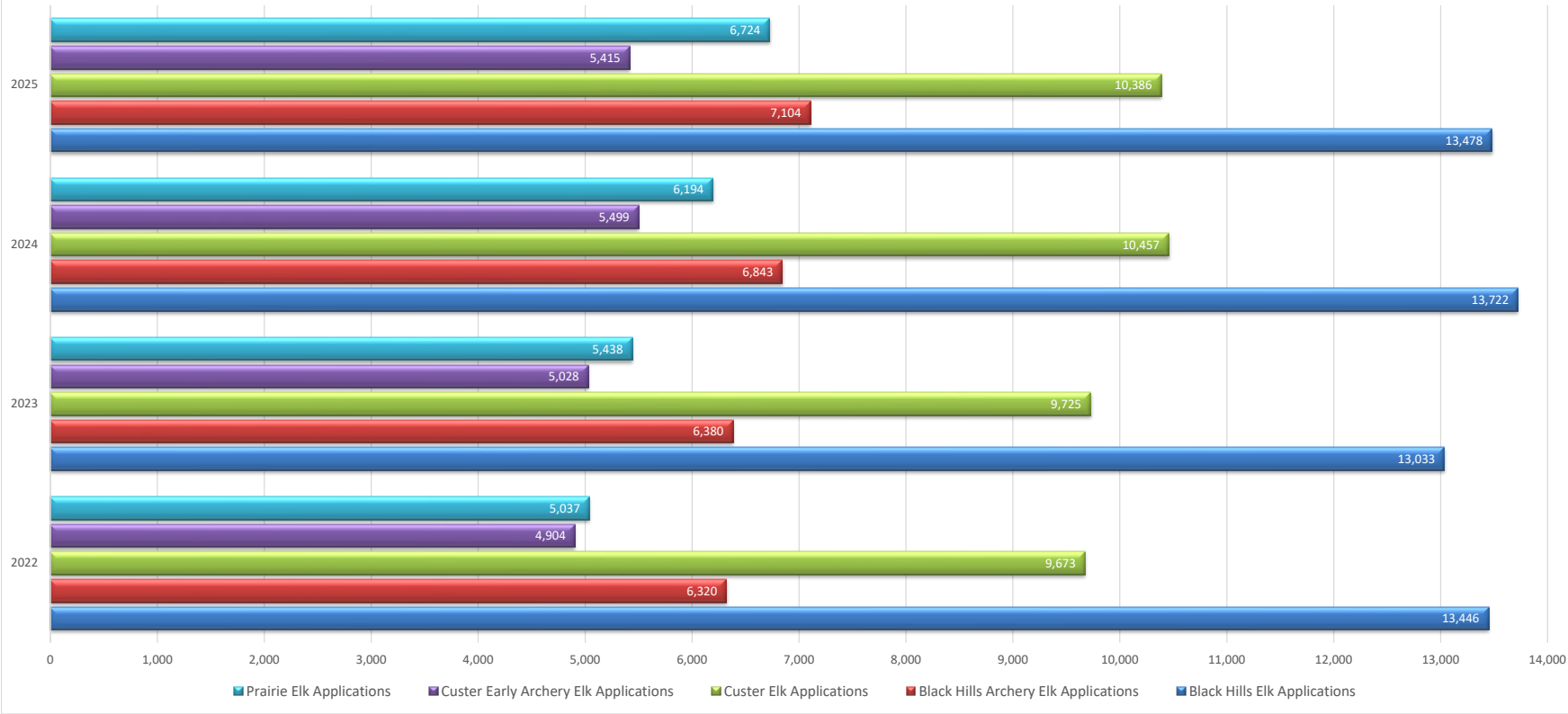
License Type	2022	2023	2024	3-yr Avg	2025	2025 Revenue	+/- Licenses		+/- Revenue		% Change
							2024 vs 2025	3 Yr. Avg vs 2025	2024 vs 2025	3 Yr. Avg vs 2025	
1-Day Fishing	1,481	1,844	2,039	1,788	2,291	\$22,910	252	503	\$6,598	\$8,606	28%
Annual Fishing	33,366	35,099	36,509	34,991	38,443	\$1,191,733	1,934	3,452	\$169,481	\$211,976	10%
Senior Fishing	9,231	9,720	10,277	9,743	10,323	\$175,491	46	580	\$52,167	\$58,579	6%
RESIDENT TOTALS	44,078	46,663	48,825	46,522	51,057	\$1,390,134	2,232	4,535	\$228,246	\$279,161	9.75%
1-Day Fishing	10,284	9,917	10,082	10,094	8,032	\$208,832	(2,050)	(2,062)	\$47,520	\$47,323	-20%
3-Day Fishing	6,507	6,876	6,106	6,496	7,730	\$347,850	1,624	1,234	\$121,928	\$107,486	19%
Annual Fishing	23,648	23,843	23,224	23,572	25,258	\$2,020,640	2,034	1,686	\$464,632	\$441,338	7%
NONRESIDENT TOTALS	40,439	40,636	39,412	40,162	41,020	\$2,577,322	1,608	858	\$634,080	\$596,147	2.14%
COMBINED TOTALS	84,517	87,299	88,237	86,684	92,077	\$3,967,456	3,840	5,393	\$862,326	\$875,307	6.22%



2025 BIG GAME LICENSES

License Type	2022	2023	2024	3-yr Avg	2025	2025 Revenue	+/- Licenses		+/- Revenue		% Change from 3 Yr. Avg
							2024 vs 2025	3 Yr. Avg vs 2025	2024 vs 2025	3 Yr. Avg vs 2025	
Resident Mentored Spring Turkey Licenses	1,570	1,631	1,739	1,601	1,777	\$44,425	38	177	\$190	\$883	11%
NR Mentored Spring Turkey Licenses	66	66	106	66	118	\$2,950	12	52	\$120	\$260	79%
Resident Archery Spring Turkey Licenses	4,179	4,277	4,399	4,228	4,013	\$112,364	(386)	(215)	\$2,389	\$5,239	-5%
NR Archery Spring Turkey Licenses	572	675	700	624	755	\$91,355	55	132	\$21,355	\$26,455	21%
Resident Black Hills Spring Turkey Licenses	2,785	2,652	2,824	2,719	2,883	\$80,724	59	165	\$10,124	\$11,882	6%
Black Hills Elk	926	934	980	930	1,289	\$195,078	309	359	\$94,834	\$75,442	39%
Black Hills Archery Elk	243	237	257	240	302	\$51,787	45	62	\$12,337	\$13,893	26%
Custer Elk	11	11	15	11	25	\$7,650	10	14	\$3,060	\$4,284	127%
Custer Early Archery Elk	4	4	5	4	10	\$3,060	5	6	\$1,530	\$1,836	150%
Prairie Elk	256	283	325	270	397	\$43,498	72	128	\$3,428	\$12,590	47%
Black Hills Bighorn Sheep	7	7	5	7	4	\$1,200	(1)	(3)	(\$280)	(\$573)	-43%
Custer Bighorn Sheep	3	3	4	3	2	\$600	(2)	(1)	(\$520)	(\$333)	-33%
1st Draw Applications Submitted											
Black Hills Elk Applications	13,446	13,033	13,722	13,400	13,478		(244)	78			1%
Black Hills Archery Elk Applications	6,320	6,380	6,843	6,514	7,104		261	590			9%
Custer Elk Applications	9,673	9,725	10,457	9,952	10,386		(71)	434			4%
Custer Early Archery Elk Applications	4,904	5,028	5,499	5,144	5,415		(84)	271			5%
Prairie Elk Applications	5,037	5,438	6,194	5,556	6,724		530	1,168			21%
Black Hills Bighorn Sheep Applications	5,180	5,525	6,242	5,649	6,299		57	650			12%
Custer Bighorn Sheep Applications	4,110	4,590	5,271	4,657	5,324		53	667			14%

ELK APPLICATIONS RECEIVED



Public Comments

Black Hills and Custer State Park Elk Hunting Seasons

Justin Broughton

Sioux Falls SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I strongly oppose the recommendation of the department to increase antlerless elk licenses by 63%. The current population estimated presented by the department is "At objective" which means the overwinter population estimate is between the 6k-8k animals outlined in the Elk Management Plan. The department's desire to issue more tags to is not supported by science or their own elk management plan. Please reduce the number of antlerless elk tags made available for the 2025 elk season to fall in line with the elk management plan. We already have no antelope, we now have no deer, and the department is now taking the first step to making sure we have no elk. The grazers, producers, and insurance lobby will be pleased while South Dakota's sportsmen again take a backseat to commercial interests.

Black Hills Beaver Action Plan

Richard Fitch

Yankton SD

Position: support

Comment:

I have watched alot of Beaver Restoration projects on youtube... Blackhills is in need of the Beaver it will be amazing!!!

Gfp Sucks

Rapid City SD

Position: other

Comment:

The beaver numbers should have never got this low trappers have been stating issues to biologists and Co's for years and nothing was done till it was to late. We want a gfp staff who does there job and we no longer receive that you should be ashamed as this will be a big loss for our watersheds

Jeffrey Olson

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Kevin Hansen

Zell SD

Position: support

Comment:

I fully support the Black Hills beaver action plan. In addition I would support a similar plan across the entire state of SD. Restoring healthy beaver populations to the waterways of SD would revitalize our land and wildlife habitat.

I highly recommend the book "Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter" by Ben Goldfarb. I recently finished reading this, and it completely changed my attitude towards beavers.

In closing, thanks for moving to take action with the Black Hills beaver populations.

Brady Howe

Phillips WI

Position: support

Comment:

The plan looks pretty balanced, working to improve beaver populations in areas where they are limited but allowing for trapping in areas where there is an abundance. Beavers play a critical role in creating diverse and resilient forests and this plan recognizes that and works to support the benefits beavers provide while recognizing that over abundance can lead to issues such as road and trail damage.

Mark Lindvall

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

Here are a few suggestions that might improve the plan.

1. include harvest levels in recent years. This might clarify the role of trapping in the decline.
2. I am confused by what constitutes an abundance and distribution watershed. Definitions would be helpful to readers of the plan.
3. Page 7 gives a 60% distribution rate for modified trapping levels. This does not agree with the 50 % listed in the table.
4. Adding to Strategies the initiation of a graduate school level study of the reasons for the decline of beaver in the Black Hills.

Thanks for the opportunity to comment.

Daniel Amen

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I have helped with the BDA's the last 2 years in Silver Creek and will continue to help all this projects in the Black Hills and western SD.

For all the numerous reasons for Conservation & Habitat, we need the help of the beavers.

I'm a Life Member of BH Fly Fisher, Pheasants & Quail Forever, RMEF and many other groups supporting conservation & habitat.

Thank You !

Dan

Dennis Anderson

Deadwood SD

Position: support

Comment:

I live on Elk Creek just East of Brownsville. I would love to be a part of any and all projects to restore Beaver to the Black Hills. The problem is that not many aspen thickets are on flowing water. An artificial supply of aspen trees and branches would have to be supplied by human sources. I have a 1/2 mile of Elk Creek on my property, the total length in an open meadow/ pasture land. The land has excellent access but is somewhat removed from human harassment. I have always loved beavers and would love to participate in any project designed to restore them to the Black Hills. My property is 10 miles South of Deadwood on 385 and 1/2 mile East on the Nemo Road. I would love to discuss any possibilities with Project Managers. Any projects of this nature would be right up my alley. All of the creeks in the Black Hills use to have beavers in abundance. The restoring of them would be an excellent improvement to the environment. Thank you for the opportunity to offer my thoughts on the subject and look forward to discussing future possibilities. Dennis Anderson
21554 Buffalo Lane, Deadwood, SD, 57732
605-578-2524 or 605-920-8858.

When I heard 2 years ago, that man made beaver dams were being built on Silver Creek and around Mystic my thoughts were totally supportive of the idea. Now to add beavers to the picture , it is even more exciting. Let's go for it. The more the better.

Jeff Gulbransen

Keystone SD

Position: support

Comment:

Every colony I know of is eradicated following the trapping season. Think it's time to let them repopulate.

Frank Stehly

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Norbeck Society

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

Dear Commissioners,

The Norbeck Society was founded in 2005 by friends & neighbors wanting a unified voice in public lands issues and projects. We advocate for stewardship, restoration, and enjoyment of public lands. We work to ensure a conservation legacy for future generations through educational programs, volunteering, and community engagement & participation. And we support the full use of the best available science.

We'd like you to know that we strongly endorse a 3-year moratorium on Beaver trapping and hunting on the Black Hills National Forest.

Beavers are important in the recovery and maintenance of healthy riparian ecology throughout the Black Hills region. However, in the past couple decades, their numbers have been reduced dramatically and the services they provide are being lost.

We believe that a moratorium for a few years would give biologists a chance to gauge the ability of beaver to return to their native habitats and allow their impacts on riparian vegetation, and surface and ground waters to begin to be assessed.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration on this issue.

Mary Zimmerman, President
On Behalf of the Norbeck Society

Deer Proposal and Population Status Update

Mark Miller

Black Hawk SD

Position: other

Comment:

I would like to see a 3 year closure on mule deer hunting for all hunters to give them a chance to come back in areas where they are low

Eliminate Closed Area on Lake Francis Case

Clifton Stone

Chamberlain SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

It is important to understand that the Dredge Hole closure regulation is not a "stand-alone" regulation, but an important part of the overall package of regulations that has successfully managed the LFC walleye fishery. Other regulations in the LFC walleye regulation package include the daily limit and the partial year minimum length limit. With a few modifications, this regulation package has stood the test of time, successfully managing

this fishery for over 30 years. As the saying goes "if its not broke don't fix it". Please reject this proposal and not begin the break-down of the LFC walleye regulation management package. Thank you.

Furbearer Hunting and Trapping Seasons

Nancy Hilding

Black Hawk SD

Position: other

Comment:

Nancy Hilding
President
Prairie Hills Audubon Society,
Black Hawk, SD 57718
June 1st, 10:30 pm MT

Attached find our formal comment letter on the beaver hunting and trapping rule change proposal. The formal letters end up at the end of the public comment section.

We thank SDGFP for proposing a beaver hunting/trapping moratorium in the Black Hills and for using a better geographical description of the Black Hills Fire Protection District.

We request a 5 month beaver trapping season outside of the Black Hills and for GFP to work to improve beaver habitat on other public lands in SD.

We ask for GFP to consider the wildlife watching/nature study values that beaver provide and to recognise that fur trapping is a primarily a commercial not a recreational activity

Nancy Hilding

Black Hawk SD

Position: other

Comment:

Nancy Hilding
President
Prairie Hills Audubon Society
Black Hawk, SD 57718

We thank SDGFP for using a new and accurate description of the Black Hills Fire Protection district in their Muskrat, Weasel and Mink Furbearer rule change proposal

Nancy Hilding

Black Hawk, SD

Position: other

Comment:

Nancy Hilding
Black Hawk, SD 57718

Thanks to SDGFP for proposing a moratorium on beaver trapping/hunting in the Black Hills National Forest and for using a correct description of that area.

I wish for greater protection of beavers in western SD, especially in the drainages that river otter reintroduction becomes planned.

I wish for that reintroduction and otters are strongly associated with beaver and managing them in coordination during reintroduction will be important.

North American River Otter Action Plan

Breanna Clark

Sioux Falls SD

Position: other

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Nancy Hilding

Black Hawk SD

Position: other

Comment:

Prairie Hills Audubon Society
P.O. Box 788
Black Hawk, SD 57718
phas.wsd@rapidnet.com,

We submit a formal letter, in which we ask for a goal of reintroduction of river otter to western SD during the 4 years of the Action Plan.

Gary Placco

Custer SD

Position: other

Comment:

Please consider inserting River Otter into Western South Dakota.

Jeff Anderson

Rapid City SD

Position: other

Comment:

Please reintroduce northern river otter into the Black Hills.

Janet Moore

Rapid City SD

Position: other

Comment:

Please plan to reintroduce northern river otters to western SD. The 12-month beaver hunting season has been repeatedly identified as a hindrance to otter recovery in west river, as otters are strongly associated with beaver and are killed in beaver traps. This season should be reduced to 5 months during winter. In addition to reintroduction, river otter harvest should be substantially reduced in east river, in order to support a natural migration of the species into west river. Whether reintroduction happens naturally or by human hands, improving riparian habitat, increasing beaver dam analogs or beaver density in the drainage basin, and reducing length of beaver trapping season, are all steps that should be taken before and during reintroduction.

Other

Eric Storms

Chamberlain SD

Position: support

Comment:

I would love to see the dredge hole open so my family and friends can fish it anytime of the year. Thank you GFP!

Trevor Herman

Winner SD

Position: support

Comment:

I would like to see the dredge hole opened up so I can enjoy it with my family and friends!!!

Will Yule

Springfield SD

Position: support

Comment:

I am in favor and support opening the dredge hole

Brandon Jensen

Chamberlain SD

Position: support

Comment:

I support the idea to open up the closed area on Lake Francis Case.

Jordan Christensen

Winner SD

Position: support

Comment:

I would like to see the dredge hole between the bridges opened up for fishing year round. The fact that this short section of the river is closed makes absolutely no sense and likely as zero effect on anything at all. This area should be available for use just as every other portion of the river.

Mark Smedsrud

Hartford SD

Position: support

Comment:

I have enjoyed otter trapping since the harvest season opened. From my observations, there is a decent population in Eastern South Dakota. I know of ponds where litters are raised every year. I support a continued harvest season. One positive change that can be made is to discontinue the spring bounty program. This is a waste of sportsman's license dollars. It has also increased the non-target harvest of otters in the spring of the year which is a total waste. Thank you, Mark Smedsrud.

Laural Bidwell

Rapid City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

The nest predator program needs to be discontinued. We're teaching our children to have no respect for wildlife, and cruelty to native animals. Seriously trapping and maiming an animal for its tail. What is that teaching them about respect for the natural world?

Robert Bercel

Richmond MI

Position: other

Comment:

Did I miss the waterfowl application for 2035 or has it not yet been posted.
Thank You;Bob

Kent Hanson

Hot Springs SD

Position: other

Comment:

While there are many donate fields to click on when finalizing license purchase, given the increases in popullation and the development in the Black Hills, a fund and field for "TURN IN TRESPASSERS" is needed. Tresspassing is becoming epidemic. Loss of property, poaching, spooked wildlife, etc.

Alexey Egorov

Brookings SD

Position: support

Comment:

Please plan to reintroduce northern river otter to western SD.

Dave Lindblolm

Rapid City, SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

You have sold out the citizens of this state! When GF&P gave the naming rights for the shooting complex in Mead County for 2 million dollars they have completely disregarded, snubbed, minimized, insulted the people of South Dakota who have forfeited \$13 million. It is time that GF&P be mindful of the people of South Dakota.

River Otter Season

Nancy Hilding

Black Hawk SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Nancy Hilding
President
Prairie Hills Audubon Society
Black Hawk, SD 57718

We are attaching our formal comment letter. It will end up attached towards the end of the public comments.

We oppose increasing the river otter harvest cap and request instead that it be lowered.

We want enough extra river otters to live trap at least 30 of them to supply a west River reintroduction effort. We see the monitoring data to have contradictory results, some data shows decrease of otters, other data increase of otters. We want GFP to insure that all trappers/hunters/fishers are aware they need to report incidental take of river otters.

We want the value of otters as a wildlife watching resource recognized and also the fact that trapping for resale of fur is primarily a commercial activity not recreation and that killing and removing otters for commercial ends removes them as a wildlife watching resource

Nancy Hilding

Black Hawk SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Please don't increase the river otter hunting/trapping season.
Instead reduce the harvest limit cap.

Increase population to support relocating at least 30 of them to west River.

Wildlife Action Plan

Eileen Dowd Stukel

Pierre SD

Position: other

Comment:

test message

Nancy Hilding
President
Prairie Hills Audubon Society
P.O. Box 788
Black Hawk, SD 57718
605-787-2806
phas.wsd@rapidnet.com,
June 1st, 2025

SD Game, Fish and Parks
523 East Capitol Ave
Pierre, SD 57501

RE: Northern River Otter Rule Change Proposal

Dear SDGFP Commission,

We object to the increase in the harvest limit for river otter hunting/trapping and request that it instead be dropped to 10 otters per year.

Enough Otters For Reintroduction

We want a river otter reintroduction west River. The Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe released 35 river otters (17 in May 1998 and 18 in May 1999) in the Big Sioux River near Flandreau, SD; the animals were purchased from a private source in Louisiana. We want there to be enough excess river otters in eastern SD to allow for 30 to be live trapped for relocation to west River.

SDGFP has no plans to reintroduce river otter west river. There is no plan offered in the otter's 2025 Draft Action Plan. Your 2024 "North American River Otter Management in South Dakota" report says at page 19:

Melquist (2015) suspected there is not an adequate supply of otter East River to augment and establish a viable population west of the Missouri River and purchasing river otter from an outside source would be required. Purchasing a source population would add to the reintroduction expense. The trap and transfer of in-state river otter for reintroductions in western South Dakota would require a large time and financial commitment from SDGFP and is not a current SDGFP priority. (Emphasis added).

It seems biased that you are using 10 years' old population estimates to justify not doing a reintroduction. You don't offer an actual cost estimate. We read of it costing \$1,000 dollars per otter in Taos, New Mexico - you can't afford that?

But it seems with your anti-reintroduction bias that the northern river otter must colonize western SD themselves or once again, one of SD tribes, needs to volunteer to do it. Lowering the otter harvest cap will make more otters alive for human relocation &/or help to make a natural re-colonization happen faster.

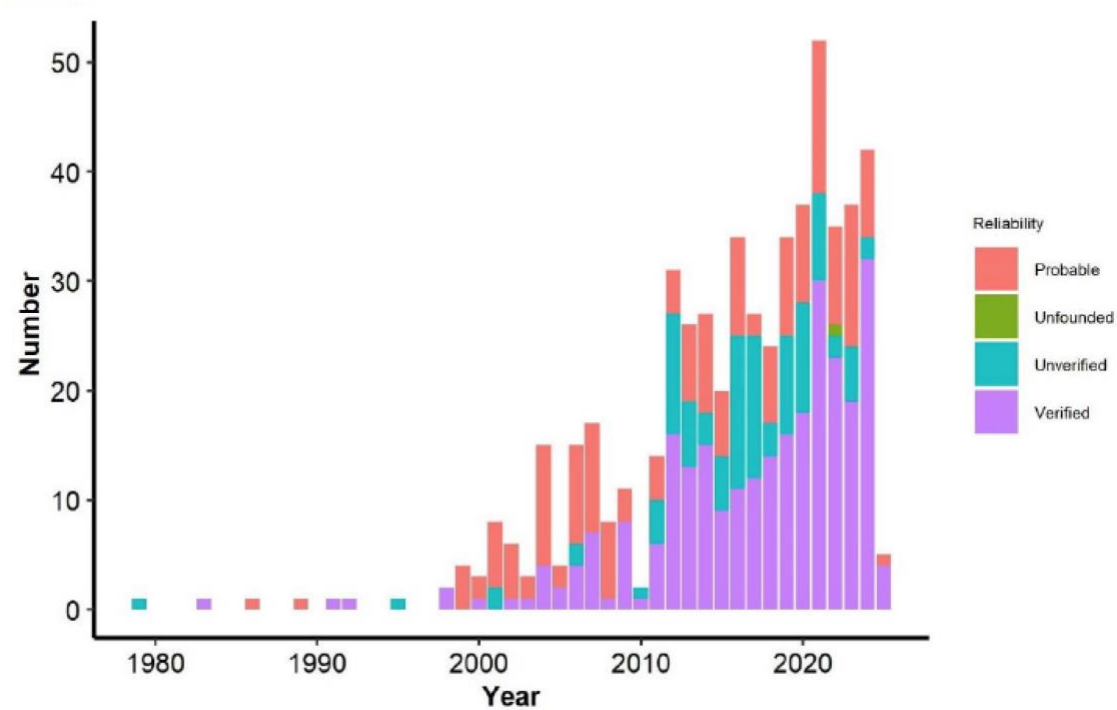
East River Otter Monitoring

The GFP's otter monitoring data shows conflicting or contrary results. The sightings data showing

increased sighting. However, it now takes longer to meet harvest limits of 20 otter and the number of discreet individuals at latrine sites is down.

1. SDGFP's chart of otter sightings

Figure 1. Historic river otter reports including reports of river otter, sign, sightings, and incidental harvests.



2. A SDGFP data chart shows individual otters seen at latrine sites on the Big Sioux are going down (In 2021 there were 31 otters, in 2022 there were 26 and in 2023 there were 16 otters)

Table 2. Summary of transect data for river otter latrine surveys on the Big Sioux River using non-invasive genetic sampling, South Dakota, USA, 2021-2024.

Year	Transects with a latrine	Total latrines found	Total samples collected	Total unique river otter determined	Total stream length surveyed (km)	Index of abundance (river otter/km surveyed)
2021	14	36	101	31	107.52	0.29
2022	14	43	172	26	107.52	0.24
2023	13	52	186	16	107.52	0.24
2024	15	46	124	TBD	107.52	TBD

3. A SDGFP chart shows the number of days it takes to meet the otter harvest limit is going up. At first it was 6 days, then 10, then 13, then 18 and then 13 days. The number of nights that trapping needed to occur has also gone up from at 27 nights, then 17.5, then 40.3, then 53.5 nights.

Table 1. River otter harvest statistics for South Dakota, USA, 2020-2024.

Year	Harvest Limit	Season Length (days)	Male	Female	Adult* (>2)	Sub-Adult* (1)	Juvenile* (<1)	Total Trapped	Traps ^d set	Trap nights ^e	CPUE ^f	Targeted Otters ^g
2020	15	6	9	6	5	5	5	15	9.60	27.1	0.0	11
2021	20	10	9	12	8	6	7	21	7.31	17.5	0.1	13
2022	20	13	11	10	7	6	8	21	7.63	40.3	0.1	14
2023	20	18	14	4	11	8	1	20	8.09	53.5	0.1	11
2024	20	13	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	20	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD

* River otter greater than 2 years of age at harvest determined through analysis of cementum annuli

* River otter 1 year of age at harvest determined through analysis of cementum annuli

* River otter less than 1 year of age at harvest determined through analysis of cementum annuli

* Average number of traps set per trapper with the intent of catch river otter

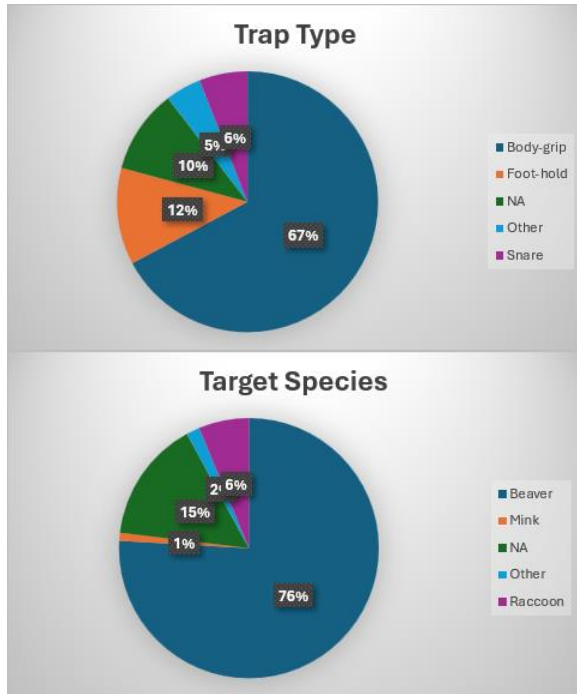
* Average number of trap nights (traps*nights) for trappers targeting river otter

* Average catch per unit effort of trappers targeting river otter

* Number of river otter harvested which were targeted by hunter/trappers

The data is contradictory but it may indicate that otter numbers have been decreasing since the otter season was enacted and the beaver hunting season was increased from 6 to 12 months. With a longer beaver hunting season you will likely see more incidental take of otters.

The inserted JPEG, is data on the last 10 years of incidentally trapped river otter



SDGFP's Draft 2020-2029 SD River Otter Management Plan July Version at page 3 says

"Target species was known for 146 of the 216 (67.5%) incidentally trapped river otter (Table 5). Of these, 116 (53.7%) were caught in traps targeting beaver, 19 while targeting raccoon (8.8%), 5 in fish nets or traps (2.3%), and 3 in sets targeting mink (1.4%). "

Reduction in beaver trapping/hunting to five months, especially stopping hunting when otter pups are born, would be useful to increasing otter population east river. This means more otter will be available for GFP to live trap in order to relocate some to western SD.

Accurate reports of incidental take of river otters.

You are supposed to be monitoring river otter populations. Part of that monitoring should be keeping track of incidental take of river otters and the first part of keeping track of incidental take is letting hunter/trappers know they have to report incidental otter take. We want SDGFP to evaluate all the public education on incidental take and especially the notice it provides to hunters of beaver, raccoon & mink and users of fish nets.

We wish for all the otter who are accidentally taken, outside of the otter season, in beaver traps or in raccoon traps to actually be reported to GFP. This is required in the northern river otter

hunting/trapping season's rule, but we are not sure all the folks trapping beaver, raccoons or using fish nets have read the river otter hunting/trapping rule. Before 2020 it was a state threatened species, so hunter/fishers may have been more aware of the need to report take of a threatened species or more devoted to report such incidental take.

In the last 10 years 76% of the otter incidental take was from beaver traps, 6% from raccoon traps, 1% from mink and 15% from an unknown trap/net. I have heard suggested many of the reports of incidental take in beaver traps were from GFP's trappers, who we assume are better informed on SDGFP laws.

Between 1976 and 2019, (back when otter were state listed) 219 river otter were incidentally trapped/netted. Target species was known for 146 of the 216 otters incidentally trapped--that would be 67.5% of the incidentally trapped river otter. Of these, 116 (53.7%) were caught in traps targeting beaver, 19 while targeting raccoon (8.8%), 5 in fish nets or traps (2.3%), and 3 in sets targeting mink (1.4%).

In 2019 you all started the Nest Predator Bounty Program (NPBP). In the last 6 years, participants trapped or shot 229,593 raccoons. In the 2015 Furbearer Annual Report, Resident/Non-Resident trappers/hunters got 1,580 raccoons. 6 years at that rate is a cumulative take of 9,480 raccoons. In the last 6 years, South Dakotans are trapping/hunting 96% more raccoons, but the incidental take of river otters in raccoon traps is alleged to have dropped.

In 2020 you offered \$5/tail instead of \$10/tail and trapped 21,401 raccoons, In other years, the NPBP kill ranged from 40,499 to 43,779 raccoons. In 2023 the Furbearer annual report shows 3,681 raccoons taken. However, the Nest Predator Bounty Program killed 42,333 raccoons that year. This 2023 Furbearer report could be off by 38,652 raccoons.

People following the Nest Predator Bounty Program incentives, may not be the traditional furbearer trappers and may never have read the river otter hunting season rule and have no clue they are supposed to report incidental take of river otters. Incidental take of otters in raccoon traps dropped from 8.8% before delisting to 6% after you increased the raccoon killing by 96%.

Most of the Nest Predator Bounty Program's raccoon killing overlaps where the otter exist. It is quite possible people participating in the Nest Predator Bounty Program are unaware they are supposed to report incidental take of river otters and that there is thus a significant unreported, incidental take of river otters during Nest Predator Bounty Program's war on raccoons. Please work on fixing this.

Discussion of Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation (R#) Criteria.

Here is your discussion of these issues

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

1. Does the regulation or fee inhibit a user's ability to participate? No.
2. Does the regulation increase the opportunity for new and existing users? Yes, trapping opportunity will be expanded.
3. How does the regulation impact the next generation of hunters, anglers, trappers and outdoor recreationists? More individuals will be able to trap river otter.
4. Does the regulation enhance the quality of life for current and future generations by getting families outdoors? Yes, this change increases sustainable trapping opportunity.

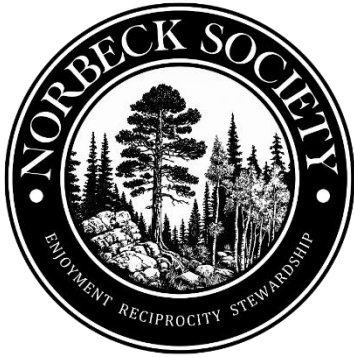
This section once again treats trapping/hunting for resale of fur as a recreational activity and not a commercial activity. Fur trapping is done to create furs that are sold for financial gain.

It once again fails to consider wildlife watching and nature study as other outdoor recreation. It fails to consider that killing river otter removes them as a wildlife watching/nature study resource. River otter are very much fun to watch. There is generally conflict between activities that kill wildlife and people wanting to see wildlife populations expand and recolonize new areas for increased distribution of the wildlife watching opportunity.

Thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy Hilding", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nancy Hilding
President
Prairie Hills Audubon Society



Norbeck Society
P. O. Box 9730
Rapid City, SD 57709

Game, Fish and Parks Commission
Joe Foss Building
523 East Capitol
Pierre, SD 57501

April 25, 2025

Via online submissions: [Submit Public Comment | South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks](#)

Dear Commissioners,

The Norbeck Society was founded in 2005 by friends & neighbors wanting a unified voice in public lands issues and projects. We advocate for stewardship, restoration, and enjoyment of public lands. We work to ensure a conservation legacy for future generations through educational programs, volunteering, and community engagement & participation. And we support the full use of the best available science.

We'd like you to know that we strongly endorse a 3-year moratorium on Beaver trapping and hunting on the Black Hills National Forest.

Beavers are important in the recovery and maintenance of healthy riparian ecology throughout the Black Hills region. However, in the past couple decades, their numbers have been reduced dramatically and the services they provide are being lost.

We believe that a moratorium for a few years would give biologists a chance to gauge the ability of beaver to return to their native habitats and allow their impacts on riparian vegetation, and surface and ground waters to begin to be assessed.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration on this issue.

Mary Zimmerman, President
On Behalf of the Norbeck Society

05/26/2025

Frank Stehly
Rapid City, SD 57702

Re: Black Hills Beaver Action Plan

Greetings,

Generally speaking, I would agree with and support the proposed action plan. Of particular importance the suspension of hunting & trapping of beaver when less than 50% of watersheds and watershed areas have no evidence of beaver.

I generally support beaver reintroduction efforts, and I have participated in some of these activities. In particular; the building of BDA's with the Black Hills Fly Fishers.

I support the organizations and their initiatives supporting beaver populations in the Black Hills region:

- South Dakota Dept. of GF&P.
- The Nature Conservancy.
- Black Hills National Forest.
- Black Hills Fly Fishers.

I also support the idea that beaver activity promotes a natural and healthy environment for the Black Hills and surrounding area.

- Restore & maintain riparian zones.
- Improve water quality.
- Regulate water flow.
- Help retain water in the ecosystem.
- Create moist areas resistant to fire & drought.
- Create habitats for many other species including river otters.

Thanks for your consideration!

Nancy Hilding
President
Prairie Hills Audubon Society
P.O. Box 788
Black Hawk, SD 57718
605-787-2806 (cell)\
phas.wsd-rapidnet.com
June 1st, 2025

SDGFP Commission
523 East Capitol Ave
Pierre, SD 57501

RE: Comments on Beaver Hunting Trapping Season Rule Change Proposal

Dear Commission

Thanks

Thanks to staff for proposing a moratorium on beaver hunting/trapping in the Black Hills Fire Protection District. We have long supported this moratorium and it is much needed. Thanks for correcting the description of the Black Hills Fire Protection District in the beaver season rule.

Beaver on public lands

We hope in the future you will work to recover beaver on other public lands in SD (especially western SD) - such as the Custer Gallatin National Forest, the units of the Nebraska National Grasslands and Dakota Prairie Grasslands in SD and BLM lands and accompany such recovery efforts with temporary moratoriums on or reductions to beaver hunting/trapping.

All our public lands should have beaver available for wildlife watching and for the great habitat values and water retention, that they provide with their dam construction. Western SD has concerns with water supply, so the beaver's water storage functions are most needed here.

5-month Trapping Season

We also support a 5-month trapping season in areas of the state outside the Black Hills, (Nov 1st-March 31st). This is in order to increase the number of beaver in SD, especially in western SD. This gets us the habitat and water storage benefits from their dam construction. This is also to protect beaver moms and kittens as beaver give birth in May and to protect otter moms and pups, as otters give birth in April and otters are incidental take in beaver traps.

We hope if any otters naturally migrate to western SD, you will provide a moratorium on beaver trapping//hunting in the county(s) containing the drainage they inhabit and/or provide a 5-month trapping season in that drainage. We hope the same reduction and/or moratorium, would be used during any planned human reintroduction.

Beaver Wildlife Watching Ignored

We are tired of seeing beaver trapping lauded as recreation and beaver wildlife watching ignored. Back when the GFP Secretary was still Hepler, you adopted a policy of reviewing 3Rs effects of your

rule-making, but that policy included also reviewing, at the same time, the effects on other outdoor recreation, in addition to the 3 Rs. Reducing wildlife populations beyond compensatory take, will ironically adversely affect wildlife watching and also sometimes reduce valued habitat if you are killing some of the keystone species, who create habitat. Wildlife watching and hunting/fishing/trapping can exist in a contrary tension that may need to be discussed, in rule reviews.

We include as an insert the section of the rule change proposal with discussion of Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation (R#) Criteria.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

1. Does the regulation or fee inhibit a user's ability to participate? Very few recreational trappers attempt to trap beaver in the Black Hills. However, the change would limit the ability to trap beaver in the Black Hills.
2. Does the regulation increase the opportunity for new and existing users? This would remove opportunity for an individual wanting to trap in the Black Hills.
3. How does the regulation impact the next generation of hunters, anglers, trappers and outdoor recreationists? It is unknown how much the closure of the season will affect beaver recolonization.
4. Does the regulation enhance the quality of life for current and future generations by getting families outdoors? NA.

QUESTION 2: "Does the regulation increase the opportunity for new and existing users? This would remove opportunity for an individual wanting to trap in the Black Hills." (Emphasis added)

Your answer to question #2 ignores the positive effect of no beaver hunting/trapping will have on wildlife watchers and nature studiers -- positive impacts for those who enjoy looking at beaver, beaver dams and associated plants, animals and landforms. You need to say that loss to trappers will be more than compensated by increased wildlife and nature watching by folks who don't have to kill wildlife to enjoy the outdoors.

QUESTION 3: "How does the regulation impact the next generation of hunters, anglers, trappers and outdoor recreationists? It is unknown how much the closure of the season will affect beaver recolonization." (Emphasis added)

Your answer to question # 3 is a non-answer, in essence GFP is avoiding the question by claiming the moratorium could have no effect on beaver population and distribution.

QUESTION 4: "Does the regulation enhance the quality of life for current and future generations by getting families outdoors? NA" (Emphasis added)

Your answer to question # 4 of NA is ridiculous. If the moratorium has any impact on beaver population and distribution, which is quite likely, it will create all sort of wonderful wetlands and pond habitat in the Black Hills that will attract outdoor users, including those who DO NOT HUNT OR TRAP BEAVER.

Furbearer trapping/hunting as commercial activity

Trapping/hunting of beaver for fur is a commercial activity, that you constantly claim as recreation. This was made blatant when in 2020 the SDGFP reduced the Nest Predator Bounty Program's bounty from \$10 to \$5 dollars per tail and then in 2021 returned the bounty to \$10/tail. In 2019 the tails submitted were 54,471 tails, in 2020 there were 26,390 tails submitted and again in 2021 53,741 tails. That low figure in 2020 is 48.4% and 49.1 % respectively of tails that were submitted when the bounty was twice as high -- indicating a reduction in bounty by half, reduced the tails submitted by about half. As trapping is alleged to be "recreation", what difference does the size of the bounty fee matter – trappers should be trapping FOR FUN - not 5 more dollars. How can you honestly claim this is recreation & not a commercial activity?

North American Model of Wildlife Conservation

One of the seven pillars or tenants of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (NAMWC) is – *"Elimination of Markets for Game, Commercial hunting and the sale of wildlife are prohibited to ensure the sustainability of wildlife populations."* or

"Prohibition on Commerce of Dead Wildlife: Commercial hunting and the sale of wildlife is prohibited to ensure the sustainability of wildlife populations."


So, do we all have to pretend that furbearers are not "game" or "dead wildlife" or trapping/hunting for fur is not commercial hunting, so we can pretend to follow all the pillars of the NAMWC?

Tourism and beaver

The Black Hills is impacted substantially by tourism and that tourism is important revenue for local communities. Beavers let you watch them, often without running and hiding, as the water around their dens protects them from humans. Beavers are fun to watch. They create beautiful moist places full of water and neat vegetation and marshes. Their habitat is rich with other animals to watch such as fish, amphibians & birds/bats.

The value of beaver for wildlife watching or nature study & as creators of beautiful habitat is a recreational draw and will also contribute to tourism revenue, thus eclipsing the commercial or "recreational" exercise of trapping/hunting of furbearers for revenue from the sale of their fur.

Sincerely,



Nancy Hilding
President
Prairie Hills Audubon Society



Formerly called the Humane
Society of the United States and
Humane Society International

May 23, 2025

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks
523 East Capitol Ave
Pierre, SD 57501

Submitted via online form: <https://gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions/>.

RE: Comments regarding the draft North American River Otter Action Plan, 2025-2029

To South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks:

On behalf of Humane World for Animals and our South Dakota supporters, we strongly urge you to **adopt the management option of total protection for river otters in its draft North American River Otter Action Plan, 2025-2029**, to end all recreational trapping of this species.

Scientists continue to warn that river otters are particularly vulnerable to “overharvest.”¹ Additionally, river otters are highly elusive, and it is difficult to calculate a population estimate.² Recreational trapping inflicts a needless and damaging additive mortality at a time when the species faces significant challenges from loss of habitat and connectivity. Because of this, we advise **the removal of “Objective 2: Manage populations using harvest strategies that maximize sustainable recreational opportunity” from the Action Plan**, so that it may better focus on the species’ continued recovery in South Dakota. Accordingly, we also recommend **changing the title HARVEST STRUCTURE on page 3 to MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE**.

We offer these recommendations for the following reasons:

Trapping inflicts unimaginable suffering on target and non-target wildlife and pets

Trapping is inhumane and indiscriminate. In addition to the injuries caused by the trap itself, animals can languish and die slowly from shock, dehydration, blood loss, starvation, predation or exposure to the elements. Trapped animals can chew or twist off their feet or limbs, or otherwise mutilate themselves, in a desperate attempt to escape from the trap. Trappers typically kill the animals by drowning, chest compression, or strangulation – violent means used to avoid damaging the pelt.

Body-crushing traps, also called body-gripping or Conibear traps, consist of two metal rectangles that are hinged together to quickly shut once triggered. While the device is designed to deliver an instantly lethal strike to the head, neck, or spinal region, many styles fail even the most basic humane standards. And some of these traps fail to deliver adequate force to kill quickly, leaving the animal with disfiguring injuries and prolonged suffering. Even for those traps that pass the time to unconsciousness standard, misstrikes still occur and animals can escape from the trap with horrific injuries. In fact, Serfass (2022) warns that

¹ Bricker, E. A., Serfass, T. L., Hanley, Z. L., Stevens, S. S., Pearce, K. J., & Bohrman, J. A. (2022). Conservation status of the North American river otter in the United States and Canada: Assessing management practices and public perceptions. In E. Do Linh San, J. Sato, J. Belant, & M. Somers (Eds.), *Small carnivores: Evolution, ecology, behaviour and conservation*, (pp. 509-535). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

² *Id.*

river otters are often the victims of misstrikes or prolonged suffering in body gripping traps.³ Due to their fast swimming ability and slender body, river otters often suffer a nonlethal strike to the torso.⁴ Additionally, river otters have highly muscular necks that reduce the likelihood of a quick kill, even if they are struck in the neck.⁵ Colorado, Arizona, California, Florida, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, and Washington have enacted laws mostly or completely banning the use of body-crushing traps.

Even box, or cage, traps can cause significant injury. In a 2020 study examining the functionality of Comstock traps (a relatively new box trap design), over half of river otters assessed were injured. The most common injuries included claw loss, tooth fracture, and lacerations.⁶ Additionally, 5 of the 36 river otters captured died due to hypothermia, drowning, or as a result of traumatic injuries sustained during capture.⁷ During that study, they also captured 13 nontarget individuals, 8 of whom died.

Trapping is an unacceptable and widely unpopular exploitation of a public trust resource

The trapping of river otters in South Dakota is not for food, subsistence, or management reasons, but instead merely to provide a “recreational opportunity” for trappers to sell their pelts for private profit. This is an unacceptable exploitation of a public resource that will benefit only the small percentage of residents who hold a trapping license.⁸ As stated by Serfass et al. (2022):

The river otter is well liked by the general public (Serfass et al, 2014), and conservation groups outside the framework of state wildlife agencies are recognizing other values of river otters (e.g. Chesapeake Bay Otter Watch [n.d.]; Elizabeth River Project’s Otter Spotter program [n.d.]; River Otter Ecology Project [n.d.]) in educating the public about aquatic conservation and ecology and promote clean-water initiatives. Given the nonconsumptive purposes demonstrated by these projects and the overall popularity of river otters (Serfass et al., 2014), we discerned no overriding public interest or support for the recreational killing of river otters to explain motivation for expansion of trapping seasons.⁹

Decisions on hunting and trapping in South Dakota should be based on sound science and the public’s values – not on fur market prices. Wildlife in the United States is held by state and federal agencies in the public trust, meaning that all citizens have reasonable and legitimate claims concerning its protection and conservation. The blatant commercialization of this beloved species enables private profiteering from the public’s wildlife and deprives a far larger public that is repelled by their treatment as exploitable commodities.

Serfass and Proulx (2024) argue that trapping goes against the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (NAM) using examples related to river otter conservation. They “suggest that actions by some state wildlife agencies would have violated the underlying principles of NAM through the way that new river otter trapping seasons were initiated, justified, and implemented, particularly pertaining to the Public Trust Doctrine and the application of science-based decision-making.”¹⁰ Serfass (2017) further

³ Serfass, T. L. (2022). Animal welfare issues pertaining to the trapping of Northern river otters: A review of the adequacy of the river otter BMP. In G. Proulx (Ed.), *Mammal trapping: Wildlife management, animal welfare & international standards* (pp. 23-48). Alpha Wildlife Publications.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Rutter, A. U., Hanrahan, A. T., Nielsen, C. K., & Schaubert, E. M. (2020). Functionality of a new live-capture device for river otters. *Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management*, 11(1), 238-244.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ During the 2022-2023 season, the Department of Natural Resources sold 3,622 annual trapping licenses and there were 334 active lifetime trapping licenses.

⁹ Serfass, T. L., Bricker, E. A., & Hanley, Z. L. (2022). Addendum to conservation status of the North American river otter in the United States and Canada: Assessing management practices and public perceptions. In E. Do Linh San, J. Sato, J. Belant, & M. Somers (Eds.), *Small carnivores: Evolution, ecology, behaviour and conservation*, (p. 530). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

¹⁰ Serfass & Proulx, 2024, Page 119.

states, "Trapping for fur is a large, international, commercial enterprise of which trade in furbearers captured in the USA is a prominent part, an obvious contradiction to the primary element of NAM opposing commercialization of wildlife."¹¹

While still often minimized by agencies and organizations supportive of the consumptive use of wildlife, recent landmark research by Colorado State University titled the "America's Wildlife Values Project" found that animal welfare has become an increasingly important concern for the general public, and those who value wildlife as "part of their extended social network," have grown.¹² That survey also found that a majority of South Dakota residents agreed that they should strive for environmental protection over economic growth in their state.

The concerns and interests of the general public, as well as agencies and organizations dedicated to animal welfare, protection and conservation must be heard and weighed.

The demand for fur is disappearing

Recent data demonstrate an enormous drop in demand for fur. Federal data show that U.S. fur product imports have dropped 42% in just the last five years.¹³ International markets are similarly crashing. This is largely due to the growing awareness about the inherent cruelties of the fur industry, including trapping. Increasingly, fashion designers and prominent apparel companies are turning away from fur in favor of humane alternatives, including Prada, Armani, Versace, Michael Kors, Jimmy Choo, DKNY, Burberry, Chanel, Alexander McQueen and Balenciaga.

Furthermore, trappers contribute little to the state's economy. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, in 2023 hunting and trapping *combined* accounted for only 1.65% of value added to South Dakota's economy from all outdoor recreation activities.¹⁴

Conclusion

For the reasons stated above, we ask that the commission establish a policy of total protection for river otters and end their recreational trapping to allow their continued recovery. The following is a summary of our recommendations:

1. Adopt the management option of total protection for river otters in the draft North American River Otter Action Plan, 2025-2029, to end all recreational trapping of this species.
2. Remove "Objective 2: Manage populations using harvest strategies that maximize sustainable recreational opportunity" from the Action Plan,
3. Change the title HARVEST STRUCTURE on page 3 to MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE.

Please contact wildlife@humaneworld.org with any questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Breanna Clark
Humane World for Animals Policy Volunteer
Sioux Falls, South Dakota

¹¹ Serfass, 2017, page 564.

¹² Manfredo, M.J., Sullivan, L., Don Carlos, A.W., Dietsch, A.M., Teel, T.L., Bright, A.D., & Bruskotter, J. (2018). *America's Wildlife Values: The Social Context of Wildlife Management in the U.S.* National report from the research project entitled "America's Wildlife Values." Fort Collins, CO: Colorado State University, Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources.

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau: Economic Indicators Division USA Trade Online. 2024. Source: U.S. Import and Export Merchandise trade statistics.

¹⁴ U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, "[SAOACTVA Outdoor recreation satellite account activities - value added](#) ¹" (accessed Wednesday, May 21, 2025).

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May 23rd, 2025

SD Game, Fish and Parks
523 E Capitol Ave.
Pierre, SD 57501

RE: Northern River Otter Action Plan

Dear GFP Staff,

Northern River Otter Reintroduction West River

We hope your goals will include working towards reintroduction of otter and reintroducing otter to at least one drainage in western South Dakota within the 4 years of the Action Plan. Improving riparian habitat, increasing beaver dam analogs or beaver's density in the drainage basin, reducing length of beaver trapping season, could be work conducted before and during reintroduction, whether the reintroduction happens naturally or by human hands.

Plan to Limit Beaver Trapping/Hunting Season's

We suggest a limit on the hunting/trapping season for beaver to 5 months (Nov. 1st to March 31st) in the counties in which you would be reintroducing the otter, or that they are naturally recolonizing. This would stop trapping/killing when otter moms giving birth. The 12-month beaver hunting season has been repeatedly identified as a hindrance to otter recovery west river, as otter are strongly associated with beaver and are incidental take in beaver traps.

SD 2018 Endangered and Threatened Species Status Review says at page 124:

"Of 117 reported river otters killed in South Dakota from 1979 through 2016, 73% were killed incidental to legal trapping activities....."

"A year-round beaver trapping season west of the Missouri River and a focus on non-native trout management in Black Hills streams will impair statewide recovery of river otters."

Melquist in his 2015 "FINAL REPORT, Determination of river otter (*Lontra canadensis*) distribution and evaluation of potential sites for population expansion in South Dakota , 1 October 2011 - 30 January 2015," he writes on page 71:

"I do not believe current regulations for harvesting and controlling beaver populations in South Dakota are conducive to the expansion of otters in West River and could hinder the rate of growth in East River. In South Dakota, female otters give birth on approximately 1 April. Any lactating female otter trapped and killed will result in the loss of her offspring. To reduce the possibility of trapping female otters with dependent young, beaver trapping seasons should not extend beyond 31 March. The unrestricted 31 March take of beaver that is currently allowed in West River should be replaced with a harvest season not to extend beyond 31 March if SDGFP plans to try and recover otters in that region of the State. Unregulated shooting of beaver should be discouraged or prohibited to avoid accidentally shooting an otter"

Species of Greatest Conservation Need

We also suggest an evaluation of any listed endangered or threatened species or other species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) in the target drainage(s) for reintroduction. While, otter existed historically in the drainage, would the return of another aquatic predator, on top of all the non-native introduced fish predators in the waters, or on top of other habitat stresses, create a tipping point for any SGCN species? If there are concerns for any SGCN, we suggest you evaluate and work on changes to improve the outlook for SGCN in that or other drainages, if otters would add an additional & significant stressor.

Effect of Hunting on Natural Migration

If you continue to plan only for natural migration of otters to west river, you need to reduce the hunting harvest east river to increase otter numbers and facilitate migration.

Provide for Wildlife Watching of Otters

We hope you identify - watching river otters - as an outdoor recreation you wish to provide the SD public. They are fun to watch. People in eastern SD can watch them, but not yet those of us in western SD.

Please identify the conflict between providing commercial activity (profit from fur sales) of otter trapping/hunting with the recreation activity of otter wildlife watching. Otter hunting harvest reduces the number of otters available for emigration or reintroduction to new areas & decreases the numbers we can watch in populated drainages. You provide for this otter related commercial activity east river, but not the otter related recreational activity west river.

Thanks,



Nancy Hilding
President,
Prairie Hills Audubon Society

Citatiions

SD Department of Game, Fish and Parks, STATE T&E SPECIES STATUS REVIEWS
APPROVED BY SDGFP COMMISSION, 5 APRIL 2018

Wayne E. Melquist, Ph.D., FINAL REPORT, Determination of river otter (*Lontra canadensis*) distribution and evaluation of potential sites for population expansion in South Dakota , 1 October 2011 - 30 January 2015, Prepared for: Wildlife Diversity Program South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks , May 2015

[https://gfp.sd.gov/images/WebMaps/Viewer/WAP/Website/SWGSummaries/FINAL REPORT](https://gfp.sd.gov/images/WebMaps/Viewer/WAP/Website/SWGSummaries/FINAL%20REPORT)