



SOUTH DAKOTA GAME, FISH AND PARKS COMMISSION MEETING AGENDA

MARCH 5-6 | PIERRE, SD
STATE LIBRARY COMMONS

MEETING INFO

This agenda is subject to change without prior notice.

Date and Time: March 5, 2026, from 1-5 pm CST and March 6, 2026, from 8 am-12 pm CST

Meeting Location: State Library Commons, 800 Governors Drive, Pierre, SD 57501

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

Call In: +17193594580,,91264176710# US

Video Conference ID: [91264176710@zoomcrc.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. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes available at <https://gfp.sd.gov/commission/archives>
3. Additional Commissioner Salary Days
4. Election of Vice Chair

Informational Items

5. Staff Introductions
6. Legislative Update

Public Hearing

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

Open Forum (2 pm CST / 1 pm MT)

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

Finalizations

7. Public Water Zoning and Iron Creek Lake Access Improvements
8. Lake Albert Waterfowl Refuge
9. Hunt for Habitat



SOUTH DAKOTA GAME, FISH AND PARKS COMMISSION MEETING AGENDA

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Proposals

10. Application for Licenses
11. Deer Hunting Seasons
12. Elk Hunting Seasons
13. Waterfowl Hunting Seasons
14. Bighorn Sheep Hunting Season

Division of Wildlife

Action Items

15. Canada Goose Action Plan
16. WDM Action Plan

Informational Items

17. Nest Predator Bounty Program
18. Elk Action Plan
19. Lake Sharpe Fishery Update
20. Habitat Stamp Projects and 2025 Accomplishments
21. License Sales Reports

Division of Parks and Recreation

Action Items

22. Custer State Park Resort Lease RFP

Informational Items

23. 2026 Park Outreach Programs
24. DOT Collector Funds Program
25. South Dakota Parks and Wildlife Fundraising Campaign
26. YTD Camping Unit 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 April 9-10, 2026 starting at 1 pm CST at the Matthews Training Center, in Pierre, SD.



Commission Meeting Minutes

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

523 E Capitol Avenue | Pierre, South Dakota 57501

January 8-9, 2026 | Ramkota Convention Center, Pierre, SD

Agenda Item #2

REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING

Call Meeting to Order

Chair Rissler called the meeting to order at 1 pm CST at the Ramkota Convention Center on January 8, 2026. Commissioners Stephanie Rissler, Jon Locken, and Travis Theel, Jim White, Julie Bartling, and Travis Bies were present. Commissioner Bruce Cull was present online. With seven commission members present or online, a quorum was established. The public and staff could listen via SDPB Livestream and participate via conference or in person, with approximately 110 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 December 2025 meeting. Minutes are available at <https://gfp.sd.gov/commission/archives/>.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY BIES TO APPROVE THE DECEMBER 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 Bies for one day.

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

4. License List Request [Action Item]

- a. A request was made by Mary Slattery for all permits issued to individual hunters for a particular parcel of property within Sioux Falls. Because only one name appeared on that list, and because SDCL 1-27-1.5(22) exempts from public disclosure records which would constitute an unreasonable release of personal information, the Department recommended to the Commission that it deny the request.
- b. A request was made by Rock'n Diamond Outdoors for all non-resident pheasant license holders. Because the stated purpose of the list was "for advertise new lodge built in 2025," and because ARSD 41:06:02:04 does not preclude disclosing a license list for that purpose, the Department did not object to the Commission approving the request.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO DENY THE LICENSE LIST REQUEST FROM MARY SLATTERY. The motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY LOCKEN, SECONDED BY THEEL TO APPROVE THE LICENSE LIST REQUEST FOR ROCK'N DIAMOND OUTDOORS. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Election of Officers [Action Item]

Chair Rissler opened the floor to nominations for the Commission Officer Positions.

MOTIONED BY LOCKEN, SECONDED BY THEEL TO NOMINATE BARTLING FOR VICE-CHAIR. The motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY WHITE TO NOMINATE RISSLER FOR CHAIR. The motion carried unanimously.



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6. 2026 Legislative Session

[Info Item]

Department Secretary Robling gave a brief update on the legislative items being brought during the 2026 legislative session.

7. New Staff Introductions

[Info Item]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, introduced one new employee: Chad Austin, Park Maintenance Technician at Farm Island in Pierre.

Director Kirschenmann introduced the three new employees to the Wildlife Division. They are Kelsi Craig, Sr. Secretary in the Licensing located in the Ft. Pierre office, Kody Elbert, Conservation Officer stationed in Vermillion, and Kaden Krutzfeldt, Habitat Conservation Technician located in Aberdeen.

Scott Simpson, Deputy Secretary, introduced one new employee: Callyn Fox, Assistant Finance Director, located in the Foss Building in Pierre.

Open Forum

Senior Staff Attorney, Nick Michels, opened the floor at 2:03 pm CST 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.

2:04 pm: Janet Moore of Rapid City, SD, testified virtually in opposition of the Nest Predator Bounty Program.

2:08 pm: Nancy Hilding of Black Hawk, SD representing Prairie Hills Audubon Society testified virtually in opposition of the nest predator bounty survey, the posting timeline of the meeting agenda, and commented on use of budget and grants.

Senior Staff Attorney Michels closed the open forum at 2:14 pm CST.

8. Public Water Zoning and Iron Creek Lake Access Improvements [Action Item: Proposal]

Sam Schelhaas and Trenton Haffley presented a proposal to establish Iron Creek Lake in Lawrence County as a no-wake zone. There has been significant work done with the locals around the lake over the last year, which included a survey of the property. Additionally, there were many dilapidated docks and other structures in and around the lake that were removed. This lake is 24 acres in size and is used primarily by kayaks and paddle boards.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY WHITE TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSAL WITH FINALIZATION IN MARCH. The motion carried unanimously.

9. Lake Albert Waterfowl Refuge

[Action Item: Proposal]

Jacquie Ermer, Regional Wildlife Supervisor, provided a brief background on Lake Albert Waterfowl Refuge located in Grant County. At the request of the eight landowners whose property is within the Lake Albert Waterfowl Refuge, a recommendation was presented to the Commission to remove the refuge status.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO APPROVE THE PROPOSAL WITH FINALIZATION IN MARCH. Motion carried unanimously.



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10. Hunt for Habitat

[Action Item: Proposal]

Chad Switzer, Wildlife Deputy Director, provided background on the codified law granting the Commission authority to promulgate rules for the Hunt for Habitat raffle. From 2019 through 2025, the Hunt for Habitat program generated more than \$2 million in revenue for habitat development and management on public lands. The Department recommended removing specific license packages from administrative rule and replacing them with a provision allowing “no more than ten big game licenses,” a change proposed by the Commission. Under this proposal, the Commission would have the authority to modify and finalize future raffle packages through administrative action. For 2026, the Hunt for Habitat raffle would include a total of ten licenses offered in the following packages: one Custer State Park Trophy Bison; one Custer State Park Trophy Bison and any white-tailed deer package; one any-deer license (statewide, excluding Custer State Park); and three any-deer (statewide, excluding Custer State Park) and elk packages.

11. Custer State Park Storm Damage Update

[Info Item: Parks]

Josh Schmaltz CEO of Ramkota Companies and Matt Snyder, Regional Park Supervisor, provided a power point showcasing the December 18, 2025, windstorm damage. Approximately 37 buildings were damaged due to fallen trees along with damage to picnic tables, electrical pedestals, and the boundary fence. Roads throughout the park were blocked due to downed trees. The entire park was without power for 6 days. Staff from across the state, as well as local DOT staff and the Department of Corrections, have come to the aid of Custer State Park to assist with the removal of fallen trees and overall storm cleanup.

The Mickelson Trail and State Snowmobile trails were also impacted. Staff were able to remove the fallen trees from the snowmobile trails within a matter of days. Two crews are still working on removing trees from the Mickelson Trail.

12. Custer State Park R&M Project Update 2025 and 2026 Plan

[Info Item: Parks]

Josh Schmaltz CEO of Ramkota Companies and Matt Snyder, Regional Park Supervisor, provided information on the 2025 Completed Repair and Maintenance projects as well as the proposed 2026 Repair and Maintenance projects for Custer State Park Resort Company. Josh also shared with the Commission a booklet highlighting the significant Repair and Maintenance projects Custer State Park Resort Company as performed over the past 19 years they have held the concession contract.

13. Adventure 250: Make Your History

[Info Item: Parks]

Heather Berg, Parks GIS Program Specialist, and Rachel Comes, Volunteer Coordinator, presented information about the 2026 Annual Park Theme called Adventure 250: Make Your History in South Dakota State Parks. Adventure 250 is a statewide summer challenge that celebrates America’s 250th birthday by inviting visitors to explore South Dakota State Parks through fun, achievable adventures. Running from Open House Weekend through Labor Day, participants earn points, enter weekly prize drawings, and make their own history across parks statewide. Prizes are being sponsored by Independent Insurance Agents of South Dakota.

14. 2025 Year End Revenue and Camping Reports

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, presented the December monthly and year-to-date report numbers for the Division of Parks & Recreation related to camping units and revenue. December camping units were up 1% for the month but remain down 5% YTD. The Parks Division revenue was down 16% overall for the month of December primarily due to poor weather but revenues remain strong with a 16% increase YTD. The standard graphs and charts were shared with the Commission to depict how park



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revenue has come in for the Division overall and the impact of the new nonresident park entrance license fees as compared to other entrance fees.

Additionally, annual visitation numbers were shared with the Commission indicating 8,976,000 park visitors for 2025. Over the past 10 years visitation at all state park system areas has increased by 19%. A list of 10 Parks Division accomplishments were summarized with the Commission.

15. CWD Action Plan

[Action Item: Wildlife]

Wildlife program administrator, Andrew Norton, provided a summary of the CWD Action Plan and comments received during the two-month comment period. There were a mix of comments desiring GFP do both more and less in regard to CWD monitoring and management. The GFP Commission voted to unanimously to adopt the CWD Action Plan, which was unchanged from the draft shared with the public in November.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE CWD ACTION PLAN. Motion carried unanimously.

16. Bighorn Sheep Auction License

[Action Item: Wildlife]

John Kanta, Terrestrial Section Chief, shared that beginning in 2013, GFP has made a bighorn sheep license available for auction by a non-profit organization. Administrative rule states that if three or more bighorn sheep licenses are offered by the commission, one of those licenses shall be made available for auction. The entity auctioning the license must agree to give 100% of the proceeds back to GFP. This year, GFP received two applications for the auction license. The commission selected IA FNAWS to auction the license.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY WHITE TO APPROVE THE BIGHORN SHEEP AUCTION LICENSE RECIPIENT. The motion carried unanimously.

17. Turkey Hunter Recruitment License

[Action Item: Wildlife]

Terrestrial Section Chief, John Kanta, shared that beginning in 2023, the commission adopted rules to offer the opportunity for non-profit organizations to sponsor youth turkey hunters on turkey hunts. The organizations can select up to two youth to sponsor on a mentor turkey hunt. The commission may issue no more than ten turkey recruitment licenses. This year, GFP received one application for turkey hunter recruitment licenses. The commission approved.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY THEEL TO APPROVE THE TURKEY HUNTER RECRUITMENT LICENSE RECIPIENT. The motion carried unanimously.

18. Chronic Wasting Disease and Hemorrhagic Disease

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Senior wildlife biologist, Byron Buckley, provided information regarding Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and Hemorrhagic Disease and the potential impacts on game populations in South Dakota. Additionally, information was provided on GFP's management strategies regarding these diseases to ensure deer and elk herds remain healthy and self-sustaining for future generations to enjoy our natural resources and hunting opportunities.

19. Limited Draw Returned License Policy

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Chad Switzer, Wildlife Deputy Director, and Dani Tobin, Licensing Program Administrator, presented background information and outlined proposed changes to returned licenses that will take effect in 2026. The changes include: (1) establishing deadlines for returning limited-draw licenses; (2) assessing a \$10 fee for residents and a \$30 fee for nonresidents; (3) allowing fee exceptions for unique circumstances; and (4) clarifying when fees would be assessed, how preference points would be handled, and eligibility for



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subsequent draws. The fees are intended to offset transaction and credit card processing costs. A communication plan was also presented to ensure transparency and timely information-sharing with customers.

20. Lake Oahe Fishery Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Dylan Gravenhof, Missouri River Fisheries Biologist, presented information gathered from various fisheries surveys on Lake Oahe from the 2025 season. Overall, the walleye population on Lake Oahe currently looks great, exemplified by another fantastic fishing season for South Dakota's anglers in 2025. Data from gill net surveys showed the highest walleye abundance on Lower Oahe (~5 fish/net) over the last 9 years. Similarly, walleye abundance on Upper Oahe (~3.5 fish/net) was the 2nd highest in 9 years. Walleye growth looks great with fish attaining 16.9 inches at age-3 on the lower end and 15 inches at age-3 on the upper end. Fish condition in both zones continues to be good. Approximately 3.5 million walleye fingerlings were stocked in Upper Oahe in spring 2025, with plans to stock a similar number on Lower Oahe in 2026. Additionally, GFP staff stocked 2,638 adult GZD across Lake Oahe in 2025 to bolster prey fish abundance. Surveys indexing cold water prey fish abundance show very strong numbers of Rainbow Smelt, but reduced numbers of Cisco. Lastly, angler surveys from 2025 estimated close to 28,000 boat trips on Lake Oahe between the months of May and July. This number of trips is right near the peak number observed during the fishing boom of COVID, highlighting the exceptional fishing currently found on Lake Oahe.

21. Elk Action Plan

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Andy Lindbloom, Senior Big Game Biologist, presented an overview of the draft revision of the South Dakota Elk Action Plan. The Elk Action Plan outlines priorities, objectives, and management strategies to focus GFP's efforts over the next 4 years. The current population objectives are 6,000 to 8,000 elk in the Black Hills hunting units and 500-600 in Custer State Park. Outside of the Black Hills, most units west of the Missouri River will be managed for low density, while units east of the River will be managed to prevent the establishment of elk populations. The current management strategies focus on elk habitat, managing for biologically and socially acceptable elk populations, and cooperatively working with private landowners to resolve elk depredation. The GFP Commission has asked the Department to further investigate the potential to increase the upper end of the population objective in the Black Hills.

22. Canada Goose Action Plan

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Rocco Murano, Senior Wildlife Biologist, presented information about the South Dakota Giant Canada Goose Action Plan Revision. The revised plan will span 2026-2030, at which time another revision will be completed. Minor changes to management options are meant to simplify and clarify options for field staff. The focus of the action plan is to provide objectives and strategies for hunting season recommendations based on biological survey information and optimize hunter access and opportunities while mitigating agricultural damage.

23. WDM Action Plan

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Chad Switzer, Wildlife Deputy Director, presented background on the Department's Wildlife Damage Management (WDM) Program and the revision of the WDM Action Plan. With 28 full-time wildlife damage specialists, the program offers a variety of assistance tools and programs to help mitigate wildlife conflicts. The draft action plan includes the following four goals: 1) Support landowners in minimizing damage to livestock, crops, and property by delivering practical and responsive wildlife damage management services; 2) Promote strong landowner and stakeholder relations through effective communication; 3) Deliver excellent customer service and maintain program transparency; and 4) Strengthen and expand partnerships with landowners to promote habitat enhancement and increase public hunting access on private lands. Each goal has respective objectives, strategies, and action



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items. The action plan will be made available for public comment, and the Commission will consider adoption at the March 2026 meeting.

24. License Sales Report

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Director Kirschenmann provided an overview of license sales for small game and fishing for the 2025 License Year. License sales were strong and trending in a positive trajectory. He also provided an update on Habitat Conservation License plate decal sales and memberships sold at the Pete Lien and Sons Shooting Sports Complex; both showing a high level of participation.

25. Adjourn

[Action Item]

A Regular Commission Meeting will be held on March 5-6 at the State Library Commons, 800 Governors Drive, Pierre, SD starting at 1 pm CST.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY BIES TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 10:00 AM CST ON JANUARY 9, 2026. Motion carried unanimously.

Submitted respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kevin Robling".

Kevin Robling, Department Secretary

GAME, FISH, AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION Finalization

Public Waters Chapter 41:04:02

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	January 8-9, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	March 5, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION

Recommended changes from last year:

1. Amend § 41:04:02:40 to restrict Iron Creek Lake in Lawrence County to a no-wake zone.

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Iron Creek Lake and the associated Water Access Area (WAA), located in western Lawrence County, have been publicly owned since the 1930s. The lake was created by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) under President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration. Originally owned by Lawrence County, the property was sold to the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) in 1969 for \$1, with the intent of preserving it as a WAA for future generations.

The WAA includes a 24-acre lake (within a 35-acre total area) that serves as a premier fishery for panfish and several trout species, which have been stocked by GFP fisheries staff since 1938. Iron Creek Lake is a small waterbody that attracts a wide range of recreational users, including anglers, paddleboarders, canoeists, and kayakers. Larger watercraft, such as pontoon and fishing boats, are also commonly used by Iron Creek cabin owners.

The owners of the Iron Creek campground and surrounding property (the Sleep family) have requested this regulation change. Their primary concerns are **safety** and **user conflict**. The lake is too small to safely accommodate jet skis or large boats operating at speeds above no-wake.

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:04:02:40. Lawrence County public water safety zones. ~~Repealed.~~ The waters of Iron Creek Lake are a "no wake zone."

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

1. **The Issue:** On a small 24-acre lake, shoreline erosion and user disturbance are concerns when boats exceed no-wake speeds. During the busy summer months, high-speed activities such as jet skiing or tubing can disrupt shore anglers and non-motorized users, leading to recreational conflicts.
2. **Historical Considerations:** Current cabin owners, who typically use fishing or pontoon boats, already respect the lake’s small size and are expected to support this rule change.
3. **Biological Considerations:** Reducing wake will help prevent shoreline erosion.
4. **Social Considerations:** The lake is heavily used in summer by a diverse group of recreators swimmers, paddleboarders, canoeists, kayakers, and anglers.

5. Financial Considerations: NA

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?
Opportunities should remain consistent. Other lakes in Region 1 support high-speed recreation such as tubing, skiing, and jet skiing.
3. How does the regulation impact the next generation of hunters, anglers, trappers, and outdoor recreationists? Iron Creek Lake will remain a destination in the Black Hills to enjoy a quiet hills water body full of a variety of recreational uses.
4. Does the regulation enhance the quality of life for current and future generations by getting families outdoors? This will maintain the current atmosphere of Iron Creek Lake for the future.

FISCAL IMPACT

None or minimal.

APPROVE _____ MODIFY _____ REJECT _____ NO ACTION _____

GAME, FISH AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION FINALIZATION

State Game Refuges Chapter 41:05:02

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	January 8-9, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	March 5, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre

COMMISSION PROPOSAL

Duration: Beginning during the 2026/2027 hunting season

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. "Waterfowl Refuge" means a refuge with a closed season for all migratory waterfowl.

Proposed changes from last year:

1. Modify § 41:05:02:25 to remove the Lake Albert State Waterfowl Refuge.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION

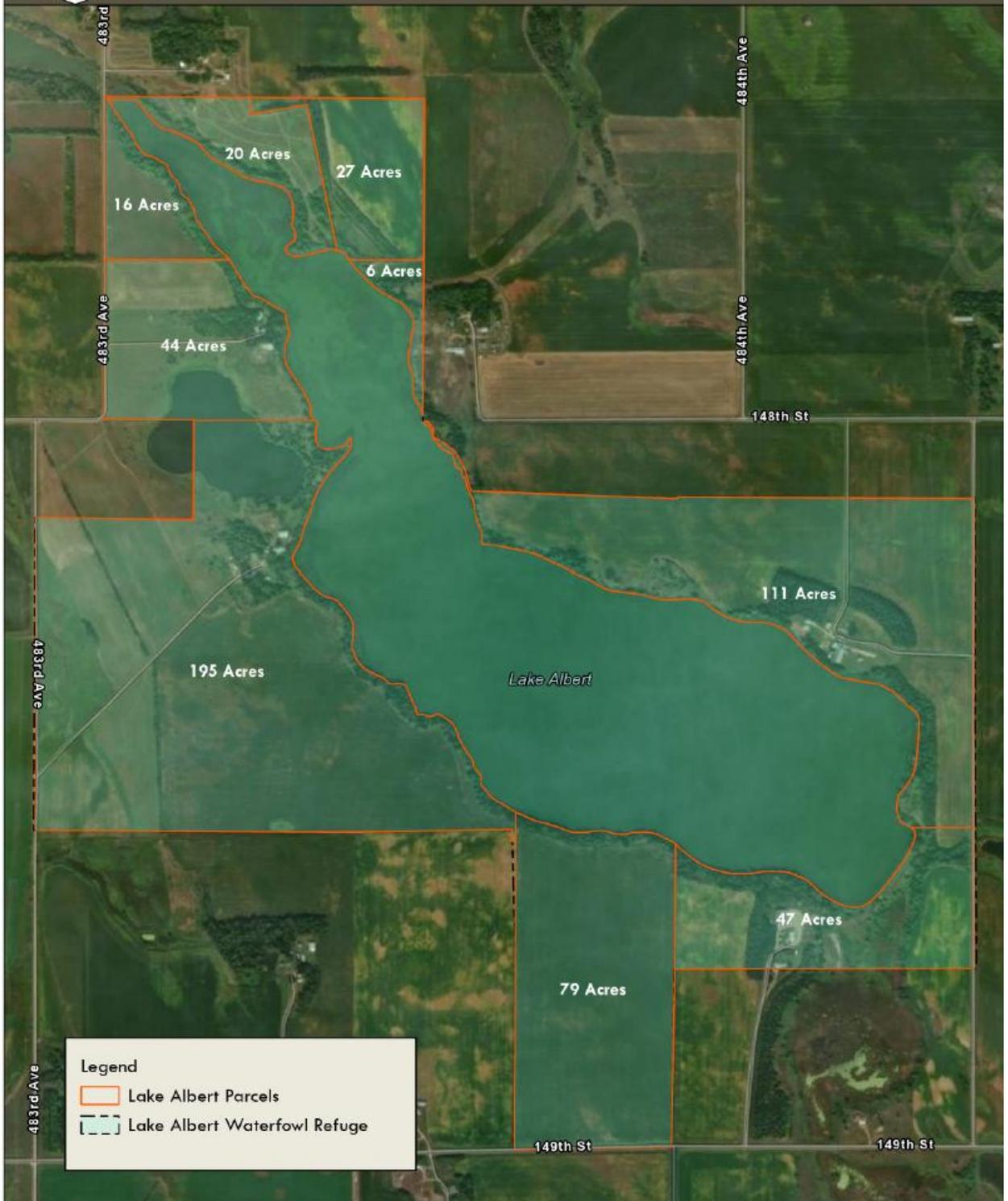
Recommended changes from proposal: None.

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Lake Albert Waterfowl Refuge is comprised of private property owned by eight landowners. The landowners formally requested that their property to be removed from the Waterfowl Refuge status and have provided signed consents to remove their property. By removing the refuge status, landowner control over hunting access on their property will be restored. Many of the landowners have faced goose depredation issues or had hunters asking to access their property, but due to the refuge status, they were unable to allow hunters to harvest waterfowl within the boundaries of the refuge. Most waterfowl in the area are actually taking refuge or using the Big Stone Power Plant Waterfowl Refuge as a resting stop, where water tends to stay open longer and is located just four miles north.



Lake Albert Waterfowl Refuge - Grant County



DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:05:02:25. Grant County refuges. Grant County refuges are as follows:

(1) Eye State Game Refuge comprises outlet one of government lot three in the southeast quarter of section nine, township 121 north, range 48 west of the fifth principal meridian; and

~~——(2) Lake Albert State Waterfowl Refuge comprises government lots one, two, four, and those portions of government lots three and five located in the southwest quarter of section 35, township 121 north, range 47 west of the fifth principal meridian; government lots one, other than the north 40 rods, two, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and the northeast quarter of the southeast quarter and the southeast quarter of the southeast quarter of section one, township 120 north, range 48 west; and the north half of the southwest quarter and all but the north 40 rods of the northwest quarter of section six, township 120 north, range 47 west; and~~

~~(3)~~ (2) Big Stone Power Plant Waterfowl Refuge comprises all of section 12, township 121 north, range 47 west except all land and water within the fence surrounding the cooling pond; the evaporation pond in section 7, township 121 north, range 46 west and a 100-yard-wide area adjacent to the evaporation pond fence including road rights-of-way; the south 660 feet of section 1, township 121 north, range 47 west; the south 660 feet of the southwest quarter of section 6, township 121 north, range 46 west; the south 660 feet of the southwest quarter of the southeast quarter in section 6, township 121 north, range 46 west; and that portion of land in section 11, township 121 north, range 47 west that is enclosed by the railroad track unloading loop and that is bounded on the west and north by the railroad track unloading loop.

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

1. The Issue – Lake Albert Waterfowl Refuge consists of Lake Albert and surrounding privately owned property. Landowners have recently desired to take their property out of refuge status so they can allow hunting access and control who waterfowl hunts on their property.
2. Historical Considerations – Starting in 1975 Lake Albert Refuge was started on a trial basis. In 1980, landowners surrounding Lake Albert signed consent agreements to officially put their land into waterfowl refuge status.
3. Biological Considerations – Waterfowl – primarily Canada geese had been using Lake Albert as a resting area for many years when there was less available water on the landscape. Within the last 10 years, geese and other waterfowl more often utilize Big Stone Powerplant Waterfowl Refuge (4 miles north), Lake Farley (6 miles west), and Big Stone Lake (5 miles northeast).
4. Social Considerations – In the early years of the refuge, large numbers of waterfowl hunters would line the refuge boundaries and pass shoot. This activity is almost non-existent currently and landowners would like to give permission to waterfowl hunt on their properties now.
5. Financial considerations – N/A

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

1. Does the proposed regulation inhibit a user’s ability to participate? No
2. Does the proposed regulation increase the opportunity for new and existing users? Yes, taking property out of refuge status will give the landowners the ability to allow permission for waterfowl hunting on their property.
3. How does the proposed regulation impact the next generation of hunters, anglers, trappers and outdoor recreationists? It will provide another location to waterfowl hunt with permission.
4. Does the proposed regulation enhance the quality of life for current and future generations by getting families outdoors? Yes, those landowners who own land within the waterfowl refuge have not been able to give permission to waterfowl hunters in the past. This will allow those landowners to give permission to waterfowl hunters, including family.

FISCAL IMPACT

None or minimal.

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

Hunt for Habitat Licenses Chapter 41:06:61

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal Public Hearing Finalization	January 8-9, 2026 March 5, 2026 March 5-6, 2026	Pierre Pierre Pierre
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COMMISSION PROPOSAL

Duration of Proposal: Beginning in 2026.

Licenses: Licenses issued may not exceed 10 big game animals annually.

Season dates and open units: Valid during any dates and open units permitted by the requirements and restrictions for each hunting season.

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. As authorized by SDCL 41-6-84, the Commission may provide for a special license that allows a person to hunt one or more game animals and shall promulgate rules, pursuant to Chapter 1-26, to establish the season and guidelines for the season, and to establish the fee provisions.
2. The Commission may establish a nonrefundable application fee, not to exceed ten dollars for any resident and not to exceed twenty dollars for any nonresident, to apply for the special license.
3. Any resident or nonresident who is eligible to hold a hunting license in this state may submit an unlimited number of applications for Hunt For Habitat licenses. Unsuccessful applicants will not accrue preference points for these drawings.
4. Successful applicants shall be selected by drawing.
5. Tags issued with a Hunt For Habitat hunting license are valid during any hunting season provided in Article 41:06 that allows the licensee to take any animal that is permitted if the licensee abides by the requirements and restrictions for the hunting season.
6. Each Hunt For Habitat license/tag shall be valid during the calendar year of drawing or subsequent calendar year.
7. Proceeds from the application fee collected shall be used for habitat programs.
8. The Commission shall, before the fourth Tuesday in January of each year, report to the Senate and House standing committees on agriculture and natural resources and on appropriations regarding the activities authorized by this section. The report shall include a description of the season established, the number of licenses issued, the amount of revenue generated, and the progress of the habitat programs funded under this section.

Proposed changes from last year: Modify ARSD 41:06:62:03 by removing the specific number and types of licenses available with no more than the maximum number of licenses authorized by the SDCL 41-6-84. GFP Commission would approve number and types of licenses available for the hunt for habitat raffle via administrative action.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION

Recommended changes from proposal: None.

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

The authority for the GFP Commission to create the Hunt for Habitat raffle was established by the South Dakota Legislature in 2019 to generate additional revenue for wildlife habitat.

Just over \$2 million has been generated from Hunt for Habitat raffle license application fees from 2019 to 2025.

Year	Revenue
2019	\$320,950
2020	\$392,210
2021	\$329,920
2022	\$194,580
2023	\$245,840
2024	\$268,310
2025	\$272,610

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:06:62:03. Number of licenses. ~~One "any bison" license, two "any deer" licenses, and three license packages with each having one "any deer" and one "any elk" tag may be issued. Both residents and nonresidents are eligible to receive the single "any deer" tag deer licenses, the license packages and the "any bison" license, provided no more than one license package may be issued to a nonresident.~~ No more than ten big game licenses may be issued for the hunt for habitat raffle. Both residents and nonresidents are eligible to receive a single license or license package containing more than one license type, provided no more than one same license package may be issued to a nonresident.

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, increases the number of licenses from nine to ten.
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

GFP anticipates approximately \$50,000 to \$100,000 of additional revenue in 2026.

APPROVE _____ **MODIFY** _____ **REJECT** _____ **NO ACTION** _____

GAME, FISH, AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION PROPOSAL

Application For Licenses – Antelope and Turkey Chapter 41:06:01 and 41:06:23

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

RECOMMENDED CHANGES

Duration: Beginning in 2026

Changes from last year:

- 1) Modify § 41:06:23:01 to allow an individual applying for the Special Antelope unit within the Antelope Season to select a 2nd choice in the 1st draw (Figure 1).
- 2) Modify § 41:06:01:09 to more accurately describe the antelope and turkey season draw structures (Figures 1 and 2).

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

The Special Antelope Unit is described in administrative rule as a unit within the Antelope Hunting Season. As such, this unit should be treated as a unit choice within the Antelope Hunting Season. Previously the Special Antelope unit lottery draw was run in an earlier, separate draw. The department recommendation will align the draw structure with the unit definition in administrative rule and allow hunters to select the Special Antelope Unit during the Antelope Hunting Season application. The recommended changes to § 41:06:01:09 will describe the draw structures for antelope and spring turkey. Previously, the 2nd draw for those seasons was not described.

Figure 1. Recommended Prairie Antelope draw structure. Custer State Park Antelope is a separate season, but the same draw structure applies per § 41:06:01:09.

Draw	Prairie and Custer State Park Antelope
Special Antelope	1 application. Applicant can't apply again until 2nd draw. Removed.
1 & 2	1 application per draw, each with two-unit choices. 1 license limit through 1 st two draws <u>Special antelope is a unit choice within each of these draws.</u>
3	<u>Unlimited applications. Resident and nonresident licenses pooled.</u>
4	Removed

Figure 2. Spring and Fall Turkey draw structure. No recommended change to draw structure, but recommendation to modify rule to specifically describe the second draw.

Draw	Spring and Fall Turkey
1 & 2	1 application per draw, each with two unit choices. Resident and nonresident licenses separate. 1 license limit through 1 st two draws
3	Resident and nonresident licenses pooled 1 application limit
4	Unlimited applications

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:06:01:09. Application for unsold big game licenses -- Future eligibility. In antelope and turkey season units, where resident and nonresident licenses are limited in number and licenses remain unsold after a ~~second~~ first lottery drawing, a person may apply for one leftover license in that season if the person does not possess a license for that season. After the ~~third~~ second lottery drawing, resident and nonresident licenses are pooled, and a person may apply for an unlimited number of leftover licenses on a first-come, first-served basis. Nonresidents are not eligible for East River spring turkey or East River fall turkey licenses except for licenses unsold after the second lottery drawing. The purchase of an antelope or turkey license under this section does not affect the eligibility of the applicant in future lottery drawings.

In turkey season units, where resident and nonresident licenses are limited in number and licenses remain unsold after a first lottery drawing, a person may apply for one leftover license in that season if the person does not possess a license for that season. After the second lottery drawing, resident and nonresident licenses are pooled and a person may apply for one leftover license in that season. After the third lottery drawing, a person may apply for an unlimited number of leftover licenses on a first-come, first-served basis. Nonresidents are not eligible for East River Spring Turkey or East River Fall Turkey licenses except for licenses unsold after the second lottery drawing. The purchase of a turkey license under this section does not affect the eligibility of the applicant in future lottery drawings.

41:06:23:01. Antelope hunting season established -- Number and type of licenses. The antelope hunting season is open from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset, for sixteen consecutive days, beginning on the Saturday closest to October first, unless prohibited in the unit descriptions in § 41:06:23:02. No more than eight thousand one-tag antelope licenses, no more than three thousand two-tag antelope licenses, and no more than fifty "special antelope" licenses may be issued to residents for the antelope hunting season. No more than fifty "special antelope" licenses may be issued to nonresidents for the antelope hunting season. ~~If a person applies for a "special antelope" license, the person may not apply for another antelope license until the second lottery drawing.~~ A successful "special antelope" applicant may not apply for a leftover "special antelope" license.

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

Application For Licenses - Deer Chapter 41:06:01

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

RECOMMENDED CHANGES

Duration: Beginning in 2026

Changes from last year:

- 1) Modify § 41:06:01:07 to remove the license tag type specifications for antelope, deer, and elk landowner-own-land in rule and use administrative action to designate tag types for those seasons.
- 2) Modify § 41:06:01:13 to strike the word "multiple" to make landowner free antlerless whitetail licenses available in East River and West River Deer Season units that offer single antlerless deer licenses.

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

The recommended change to § 41:06:01:07 will allow the GFP Commission to use administrative action to change license types for antelope, deer, and elk. This will provide more flexibility to change tag types and more effectively reduce female harvest, where desired, to increase abundance.

The recommended change to § 41:06:01:13 will follow the change made during the Deer Action Plan Revision in 2025 to more closely align antlerless harvest units open to archery, muzzleloader, and landowner-own-land free antlerless whitetail deer licenses.

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:06:01:07.03. Landowner own land license types. For the West River, East River, and Black Hills firearm deer hunting seasons, a qualifying landowner or owner-operator may purchase one ~~"any deer"~~ single-tag deer license or one two-tag ~~"any deer" and "any antlerless deer"~~ deer license. For the antelope firearm hunting season, a qualifying landowner or owner-operator may purchase one ~~"buck antelope"~~ single-tag antelope license. For the prairie elk hunting season units as described in subdivision 41:06:01:15(4), a qualifying landowner or lessee may purchase one single-tag elk ~~"antlerless elk"~~ license.

41:06:01:13. Designation of areas where free antlerless deer licenses can be used by farmers and ranchers. Antlerless licenses authorized by SDCL 41-6-19.8 may be issued to any qualifying farmer or rancher for use in the West River, East River, apprentice hunter, youth, archery, and muzzleloading deer hunting units. Antlerless whitetail deer licenses will be available to qualifying applicants in hunting units that offer a deer license with ~~multiple~~ tags for antlerless deer in the lottery drawing for the East River and West River deer seasons. The requirements and equipment restrictions for each deer season apply to any free antlerless license issued.

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

None.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

None.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

APPROVE _____ MODIFY _____ REJECT _____ NO ACTION _____

Unit #	Unit Name	Resident Licenses													License Totals				
		AnyD 01	AnyB 02	AtID 03	AtID 03P	AD+AtID 08	2 AtID 09P	AnyW 11	AtIW 13	AtIW 13P	3 AtIW 17P	AW+AtIW 18	2 AtIW 19	2 AtIW 19P	RES 1-tag	RES 2-tag	RES 3-tag	RES Licenses	RES Tags
01A	Minnehaha	300												300	0	0	300	300	
03A	Brown	600							300					900	0	0	900	900	
04A	Beadle							450						450	0	0	450	450	
05A	Codington	400							200					600	0	0	600	600	
06A	Brookings	400							100					500	0	0	500	500	
07A	Yankton		50											50	0	0	50	50	
07B	Yankton													0	0	0	0	0	
08A	Davison		50											50	0	0	50	50	
10A	Aurora							200						200	0	0	200	200	
12A	Bon Homme		50											50	0	0	50	50	
12B	Bon Homme													0	0	0	0	0	
13A	Brule	50						500						550	0	0	550	550	
13L	Brule	20												20	0	0	20	20	
14A	Buffalo	50						150						200	0	0	200	200	
16A	Campbell	30						350						380	0	0	380	380	
17A	Charles Mix							200						200	0	0	200	200	
18A	Clark	600							200					800	0	0	800	800	
19A	Clay		50											50	0	0	50	50	
22A	Day	600							300					900	0	0	900	900	
23A	Deuel	500							100					600	0	0	600	600	
25A	Douglas							150						150	0	0	150	150	
26A	Edmunds	500							200					700	0	0	700	700	
28A	Faulk	600							400					1,000	0	0	1,000	1000	
29A	Grant	400							100					500	0	0	500	500	
32A	Hamlin	600							100					700	0	0	700	700	
33A	Hand	10						300						310	0	0	310	310	
34A	Hanson		100											100	0	0	100	100	
36A	Hughes	150						250						400	0	0	400	400	
37A	Hutchinson		50											50	0	0	50	50	
38A	Hyde	10						300						310	0	0	310	310	
40A	Jerauld							200						200	0	0	200	200	
42A	Kingsbury	500							200					700	0	0	700	700	
43A	Lake	300							100					400	0	0	400	400	
44A	Lincoln		50											50	0	0	50	50	
46A	McCook	200												200	0	0	200	200	
47A	McPherson	500							400					900	0	0	900	900	
48A	Marshall	500							50					550	0	0	550	550	
51A	Miner	400							350					750	0	0	750	750	
52A	Moody	300							100					400	0	0	400	400	
54A	Potter	50						400						450	0	0	450	450	
55A	Roberts	500							50					550	0	0	550	550	
56A	Sanborn							150						150	0	0	150	150	
57A	Spink	700							200					900	0	0	900	900	
59A	Sully	100						75						175	0	0	175	175	
59B	Sully	20						75						95	0	0	95	95	
61A	Turner		50											50	0	0	50	50	
62A	Union		50											50	0	0	50	50	
63A	Walworth	50						400	100					550	0	0	550	550	
	TOTAL	9,940	500	0	0	0	0	4,150	3,550	0	0	0	0	18,140	0	0	18,140	18,140	

EAST RIVER DEER 2025 vs. 2026 Comparison

Unit #	Unit Name	2025 Resident Licenses	2026 Resident Licenses	# Change	% Change	2025 Resident Tags	2026 Resident Tags	# Change	% Change
01A	Minnehaha	400	300	-100	-25%	400	300	-100	-25%
03A	Brown	900	900	0	0%	900	900	0	0%
04A	Beadle	450	450	0	0%	450	450	0	0%
05A	Codington	600	600	0	0%	600	600	0	0%
06A	Brookings	500	500	0	0%	500	500	0	0%
07A	Yankton	100	50	-50	-50%	100	50	-50	-50%
07B	Yankton	0	0	0	NA	0	0	0	NA
08A	Davison	100	50	-50	-50%	100	50	-50	-50%
10A	Aurora	200	200	0	0%	200	200	0	0%
12A	Bon Homme	100	50	-50	-50%	100	50	-50	-50%
12B	Bon Homme	0	0	0	NA	0	0	0	NA
13A	Brule	550	550	0	0%	550	550	0	0%
13L	Brule	20	20	0	0%	20	20	0	0%
14A	Buffalo	200	200	0	0%	200	200	0	0%
16A	Campbell	380	380	0	0%	380	380	0	0%
17A	Charles Mix	200	200	0	0%	200	200	0	0%
18A	Clark	800	800	0	0%	800	800	0	0%
19A	Clay	100	50	-50	-50%	100	50	-50	-50%
22A	Day	900	900	0	0%	900	900	0	0%
23A	Deuel	600	600	0	0%	600	600	0	0%
25A	Douglas	150	150	0	0%	150	150	0	0%
26A	Edmunds	700	700	0	0%	700	700	0	0%
28A	Faulk	1,000	1,000	0	0%	1,000	1,000	0	0%
29A	Grant	500	500	0	0%	500	500	0	0%
32A	Hamlin	700	700	0	0%	700	700	0	0%
33A	Hand	310	310	0	0%	310	310	0	0%
34A	Hanson	150	100	-50	-33%	150	100	-50	-33%
36A	Hughes	400	400	0	0%	400	400	0	0%
37A	Hutchinson	100	50	-50	-50%	100	50	-50	-50%
38A	Hyde	310	310	0	0%	310	310	0	0%
40A	Jerauld	200	200	0	0%	200	200	0	0%
42A	Kingsbury	700	700	0	0%	700	700	0	0%
43A	Lake	400	400	0	0%	400	400	0	0%
44A	Lincoln	100	50	-50	-50%	100	50	-50	-50%
46A	McCook	250	200	-50	-20%	250	200	-50	-20%
47A	McPherson	900	900	0	0%	900	900	0	0%
48A	Marshall	550	550	0	0%	550	550	0	0%
51A	Miner	750	750	0	0%	750	750	0	0%
52A	Moody	400	400	0	0%	400	400	0	0%
54A	Potter	450	450	0	0%	450	450	0	0%
55A	Roberts	550	550	0	0%	550	550	0	0%
56A	Sanborn	250	150	-100	-40%	250	150	-100	-40%
57A	Spink	900	900	0	0%	900	900	0	0%
59A	Sully	175	175	0	0%	175	175	0	0%
59B	Sully	95	95	0	0%	95	95	0	0%
61A	Turner	100	50	-50	-50%	100	50	-50	-50%
62A	Union	100	50	-50	-50%	100	50	-50	-50%
63A	Walworth	550	550	0	0%	550	550	0	0%
TOTAL		18,840	18,140	-700	-4%	18,840	18,140	-700	-4%

APPROVE _____ MODIFY _____ REJECT _____ NO ACTION _____

GAME, FISH, AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION PROPOSAL

Application For Licenses - Elk Chapter 41:06:01

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

RECOMMENDED CHANGES

Duration: Beginning in 2026

Changes from last year:

- 1) Modify § 41:06:01:15 to add all open Prairie Elk Season units to Landowner-Own-Land resident-only antlerless elk licenses. New units where this would be available are PRE-15A, PRE-49A, and PRE-ERA (new proposed unit).

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Landowner-own-land resident only antlerless elk licenses have been available in select Prairie Elk Hunting Season units the past two hunting seasons. They are used to expand hunting opportunity for landowners wanting to harvest antlerless elk on their property to address potential depredation concerns. To align with Elk Action plan strategies the recommendation is to make landowner-own-land resident only antlerless elk licenses available in all Prairie Elk Hunting Season units.

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:06:01:15. Elk application requirements. The following requirements and restrictions apply to all license applications for elk seasons:

(4) A person is eligible for a landowner-on-own-land license, pursuant to SDCL 41-6-19.9, by owning or leasing a minimum of two hundred forty acres of land within any of the following open prairie elk hunting season units, as described in chapter 41:06:59: ~~PRE-09A, PRE-11D, PRE-11E, PRE-27A, PRE-35A, PRE-35B, and PRE-WRA~~. Any qualifying landowner's grandparent, parent, spouse, child, child's spouse, or grandchild who lives on the ranch unit or in the closest community and has an active role in the ranch operation also qualifies. Only one qualifying applicant per ranch unit per year may purchase the license. A qualifying applicant for a ranch unit may not purchase the license if any qualifying member of the ranch unit holds an elk license obtained using landowner-operator preference, as provided in subdivision (3), in the prairie elk hunting season. For purposes of this subdivision, a ranch unit means all private property owned or leased for agricultural purposes by written agreement by an individual qualifying landowner in the state. A ranch unit may not be subdivided for the purpose of qualifying for more than one landowner-on-own-land elk license. The elk may be harvested only on land that is owned or leased by the qualifying landowner within the designated open prairie elk hunting season unit.

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

None.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

None.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

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

Black Hills (Firearm) Elk Hunting Season Chapter 41:06:26

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

COMMISSION PROPOSAL

Duration of Proposal: 2026 and 2027 hunting seasons

Season Dates: See Figure 1 for map.

Black Hills Elk Units (BHE)	Season Dates
Any Elk: H1A, H2A, H3A, H4A, H5A, H7A, H9A	Oct 1 - 31
Antlerless Elk: H1B, H4B, H7B, and H9B	Oct 15 - 31 AND Dec 1 - 16
Antlerless Elk: H2B, H2E, H2H, H3B, and H3E	Oct 15 - 31
Antlerless Elk: H2C, H2F, H2I, H3C and H3F	Dec 1 - 16
Antlerless Elk: H2G, H2J, H3D, and H3G	Dec 17 - 31

Licenses: Last year there were 645 resident “Any Elk” licenses and 1,200 “Antlerless Elk” licenses.

Unit license recommendations included in administrative action document

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. No person may possess more than one (1) elk license of any type in a year.
2. No more than two persons may submit applications together.
3. Except for landowner/operator preference applicants, no person who receives a license in the first drawing for this season shall be eligible to apply for a Black Hills (firearm) elk license in first drawings for next nine years.
4. One-half of the licenses allocated in each unit are available for landowner/operator preference application. Only one member of each qualifying landowner/operator household may apply every year.
5. Any elk that is harvested must be inspected by a Department representative within 24 hours after kill.

Changes from last year:

None

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Figure 1. Map of Black Hills elk season hunting units for “any elk” license types (left panel) and units for “antlerless elk” license types (right panel).

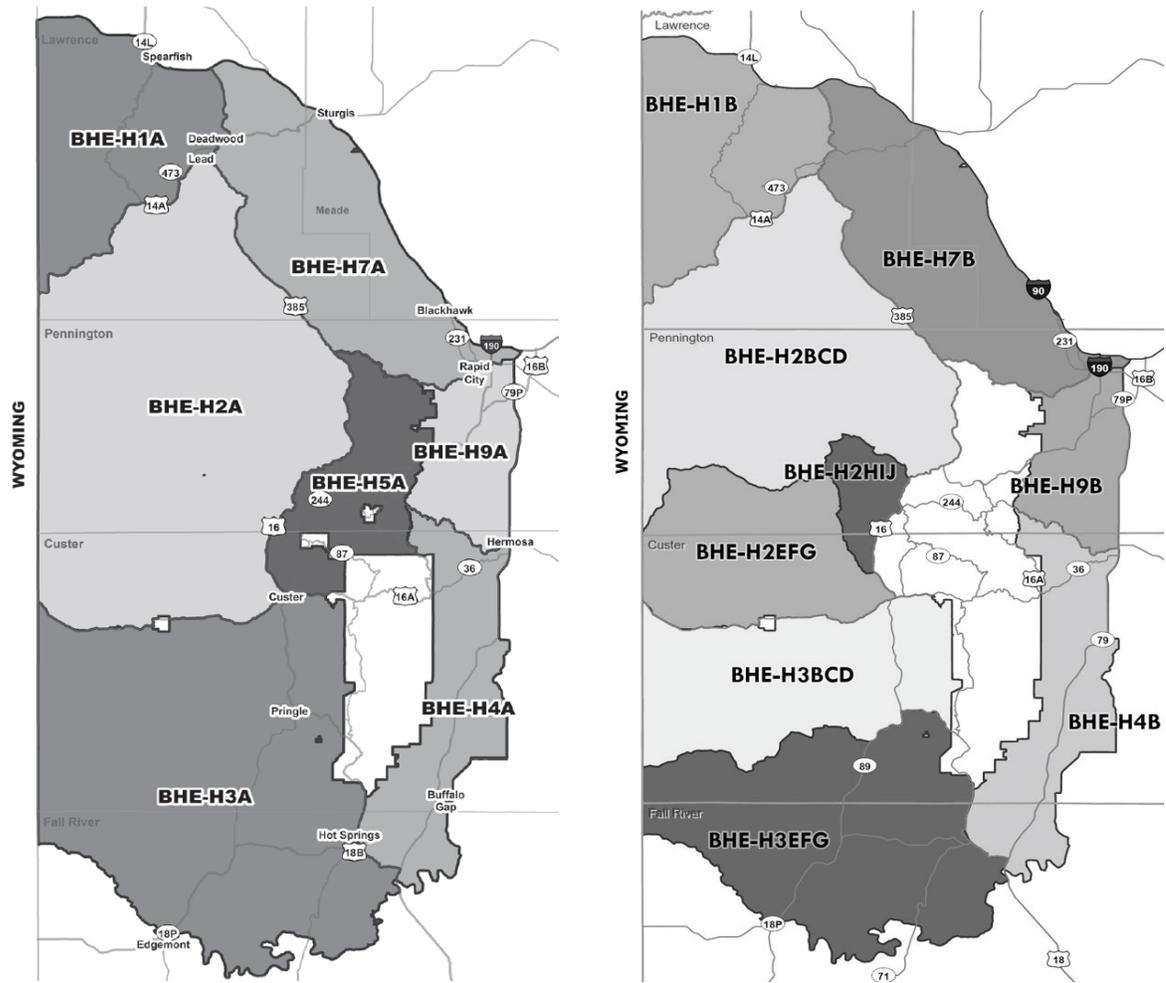


Table 1. Number of elk hunters, applicants, harvest success, and elk harvested by year during the Black Hills firearm elk season.

Year	Licensed Hunters	Applicants	Harvest Success Rate	Bulls Harvested	Cows Harvested
2014	664	11,461	71%	295	178
2015	922	12,126	71%	312	345
2016	1,745	12,692	62%	363	724
2017	1,581	12,201	66%	364	682
2018	1,124	11,871	64%	315	402
2019	1,108	12,396	62%	332	354
2020	926	13,198	63%	360	224
2021	954	12,656	65%	370	249
2022	1,265	13,447	64%	426	381
2023	1,232	12,999	63%	435	344
2024	1,290	13,742	61%	427	355
2025	1,865	13,471	62%	487	676

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

Archery (Black Hills) Elk Hunting Season

Chapter 41:06:43

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

COMMISSION PROPOSAL

Duration of Proposal: 2026 and 2027 hunting seasons

Season Dates: September 1 – 30.

Licenses: Last year there were 217 resident “Any Elk” licenses and 135 “Antlerless Elk” licenses.

Unit license and tag type recommendations included in administrative action document.

Open Areas: See Figure 1.

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. No person may possess more than one (1) elk license of any type in a year.
2. No more than two persons may submit applications together.
3. Except for landowner/operator preference applicants, no person who receives a license in the first drawing for this season shall be eligible to apply for a Black Hills archery elk hunting license in first drawings for next nine years.
4. One-half of the licenses allocated in each unit are available for landowner/operator preference application. Only one member of each qualifying landowner/operator household may apply every year.
5. Any elk that is harvested must be inspected by a Department representative within 24 hours after kill.

Changes from last year:

None

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Figure 1. Map of Archery Elk Season hunting units in the Black Hills.

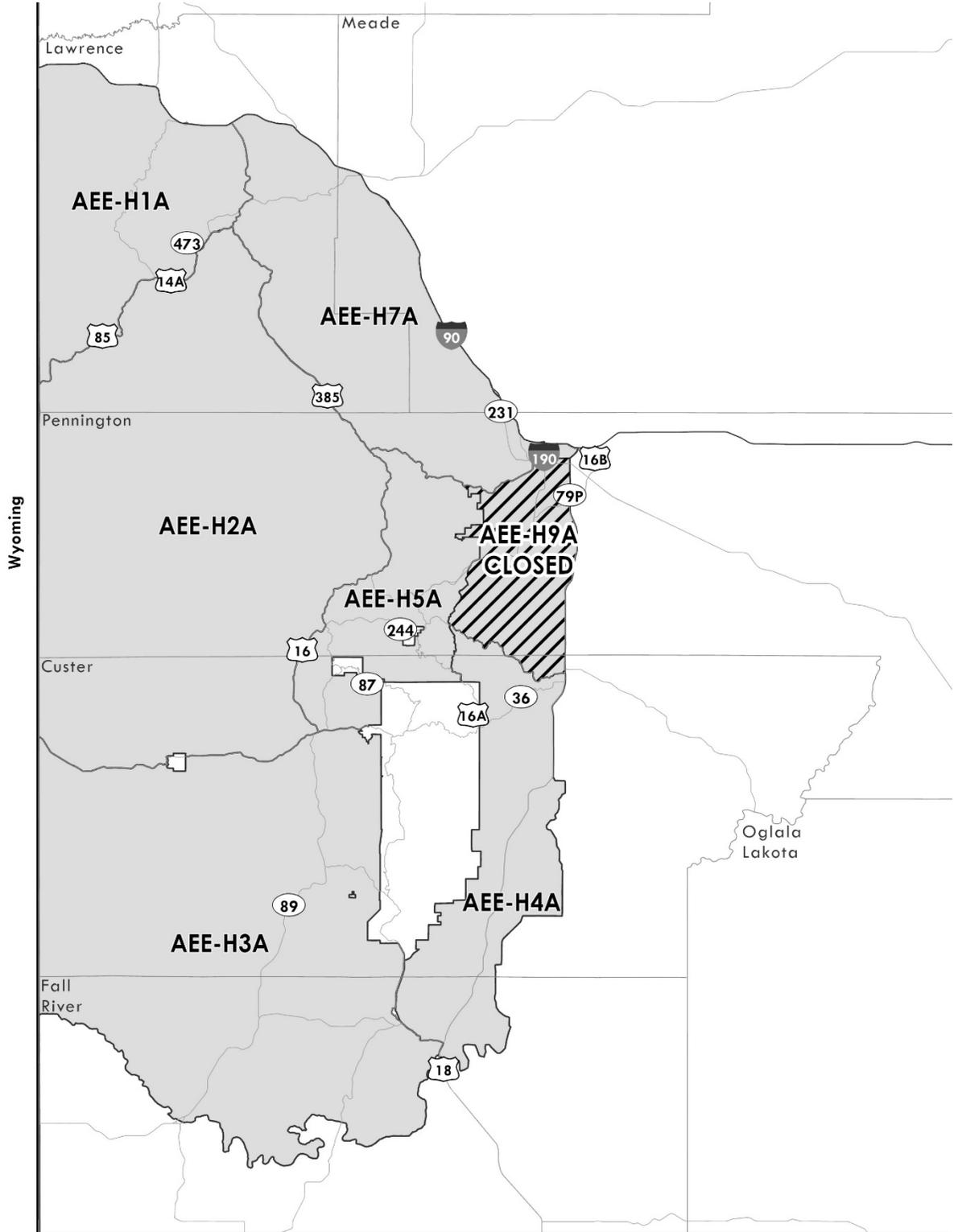


Table 1. Number of elk hunters, applicants, harvest success, and elk harvested by year during the Archery Elk Season in the Black Hills.

Year	Licensed Hunters	Applicants	Harvest Success Rate	Bulls Harvested	Cows Harvested
2014	106	4,256	40%	38	4
2015	196	4,761	34%	55	12
2016	280	4,965	29%	57	25
2017	269	4,892	26%	50	20
2018	219	5,006	38%	65	19
2019	216	5,382	42%	77	14
2020	204	5,884	45%	80	12
2021	219	5,966	44%	82	14
2022	269	6,319	40%	89	18
2023	258	6,375	44%	103	10
2024	278	6,855	34%	77	17
2025	352	6,682	38%	100	26

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

Custer State Park (Firearm) Elk Hunting Season Chapter 41:06:27

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

COMMISSION PROPOSAL

Duration of Proposal: 2026 and 2027 hunting seasons

Season Dates: October 1 – 31.

Licenses: Last year there were 25 resident “Any Elk” licenses and 1 Raffle “Any Elk” license.

Unit license recommendations included in administrative action document

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. The unit is open within the boundaries of Custer State Park.
2. No person may possess more than one (1) elk license of any type in a year.
3. No more than two persons may submit applications together.
4. There is no landowner preference for this season.
5. A person who receives a license in the first drawing for this season may not apply for that license again.
6. Any elk that is harvested must be inspected by a Department representative within 24 hours after kill.

Changes from last year:

None

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Table 1. Number of elk hunters, applicants, harvest success, and elk harvested by year during the Custer State Park firearm elk season.

Year	Licensed Hunters	Applicants	Harvest Success Rate	Bulls Harvested	Cows Harvested
2014	4	8,084	100%	4	0
2015	8	9,136	100%	8	0
2016	9	8,958	89%	8	0
2017	9	8,828	88%	8	0
2018	9	8,670	86%	8	0
2019	9	8,949	89%	8	0
2020	9	9,385	89%	8	0
2021	9	9,215	89%	8	0
2022	11	9,672	100%	11	0
2023	11	9,725	100%	11	0
2024	15	10,456	100%	15	0
2025	25	10,386	89%	22	0

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

Custer State Park Early (Archery) Elk Hunting Season Chapter 41:06:28

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

COMMISSION PROPOSAL

Duration of Proposal: 2026 and 2027 hunting seasons

Season Dates: September 1 – 30.

Licenses: Last year there were 10 resident “Any Elk” licenses.

Unit license recommendations included in administrative action document

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. The unit is open within the boundaries of Custer State Park.
2. No person may possess more than one (1) elk license of any type in a year.
3. No more than two persons may submit applications together.
4. There is no landowner preference for this season.
5. A person who receives a license in the first drawing for this season may not apply for that license again.
6. Any elk that is harvested must be inspected by a Department representative within 24 hours after kill.

Changes from last year:

None

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Table 1. Number of elk hunters, applicants, harvest success, and elk harvested by year during the Custer State Park Early Archery Elk season.

Year	Licensed Hunters	Applicants	Harvest Success Rate	Bulls Harvested	Cows Harvested
2014	4	3,023	100%	4	0
2015	4	3,600	75%	3	0
2016	3	3,707	33%	1	0
2017	3	3,704	33%	1	0
2018	3	3,772	67%	2	0
2019	3	4,055	100%	3	0
2020	3	4,353	33%	1	0
2021	3	4,456	33%	1	0
2022	4	4,904	50%	2	0
2023	4	5,028	50%	2	0
2024	5	5,498	50%	3	0
2025	10	5,402	88%	9	0

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

Special Custer State Park Antlerless Elk Hunting Season Chapter 41:06:47

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

SEASON INFORMATION

Duration of Proposal: 2026 and 2027 hunting seasons

Season Dates: Oct. 15 – 31 and Dec. 1 – 16, 2026
Oct. 15 – 31 and Dec. 1 – 16, 2027

Licenses: Last year there were 0 “Antlerless Elk” licenses.

Unit license and tag type recommendations included in administrative action document.

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. The unit is open within the boundaries of Custer State Park.
2. No person may possess more than one (1) elk license of any type in a year.
3. No more than two persons may submit applications together.
4. There is no landowner preference for this season.
5. No person who receives a license in the first drawing for this season shall be eligible to apply for a Special Custer State Park antlerless elk license in first drawings for next nine years.
6. Any elk that is harvested must be inspected by a Department representative within 24 hours after kill.

Changes from last year:

1. Modify § 41:06:47 to specify unit boundary, season dates, application eligibility, and the option to provide up to one hundred “antlerless elk” licenses during the Custer State Park Special Antlerless Season. Actual license number recommendations for the next two years will be finalized during the April commission meeting.

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

The elk population in Custer State Park was estimated at 765 during the 2025 winter helicopter survey which is above the population objective of 500-600 elk. Antlerless harvest is necessary in Custer State Park to move the population towards objective.

The proposed maximum number of elk licenses is established in administrative rule and the GFP Commission may propose and finalize the specific number of licenses and tag types and allocations amongst hunting units via administrative action.

License number and tag type recommendations for the next two years will be provided in subsequent action sheets and finalized during the April Commission meeting.

Table 1. Hunters, applicants, and harvest by year during the Special CSP antlerless elk season.

Year	Hunters	Applicants	Harvest Success	Bull Harvest	Cow Harvest
2014-2015	Season Closed				
2016	20	3,138	90%	0	18
2017	29	3,436	86%	1	24
2018	23	3,175	19%	0	4
2019-2025	Season Closed				

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:06:47:01. Special Custer State Park antlerless elk hunting season established -- Number and type of licenses available -- Season dates. The special Custer State Park "antlerless elk" hunting season is open from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset each day of the season and is restricted by chapter 41:06:07. No more than ~~twenty one hundred~~ "antlerless elk" licenses may be issued for the special Custer State Park "antlerless elk" hunting season. The Custer State Park antlerless elk hunting season for Unit CAE-CU1 is open from October fifteenth through October thirty-first and December first through December sixteen.

41:06:47:02. Open units. ~~Units CAE-CU1 and CAE-CU2 are established for the special Custer State Park antlerless elk hunting season.~~ The unit open to elk hunting under this chapter is Unit CAE-CU1 which includes areas within the boundaries of Custer State Park.

41:06:47:06. ~~Special antlerless elk population management licenses. The Game, Fish, and Parks Commission may, by resolution, authorize Unit 557-CUC and the number of "antlerless elk" licenses that may be issued. Unit 557-CUC licenses shall be valid for nine consecutive days beginning on the first Saturday following January 1. Repealed.~~

41:06:47:07. ~~Licensee selection process -- Payment of fee. The department may select an alternate pool of licensees for the special antlerless elk population management license by lottery during the drawing for licenses established in § 41:06:47:02. After determining the number of additional licenses required, the department shall call the hunters in their order on the list until the required number of hunters agree to participate in the hunt. The department shall provide the hunter with the license, tag, map, and elk check in procedures. The license fee as provided in § 41:06:02:03 shall be paid to the department before the issuance of the license and tag. Repealed.~~

41:06:47:08. ~~Eligibility of license holders for future elk seasons affected. Issuance to a person of an elk license under § 41:06:47:03 affects the person's future eligibility for other elk licenses available under this chapter. The licensee is considered to have received a first-choice unit antlerless elk license through the regular Custer State Park antlerless elk season for the year. Repealed.~~

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
3. How does the regulation impact the next generation of hunters, anglers, trappers, and outdoor recreationists? More hunting opportunity
4. Does the regulation enhance the quality of life for current and future generations by getting families outdoors? Yes

FISCAL IMPACT

Additional revenue from Custer State Park special antlerless license sales at \$200 each.

APPROVE _____ MODIFY _____ REJECT _____ NO ACTION _____

GAME, FISH, AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION PROPOSAL

Prairie Elk Hunting Season

Chapter 41:06:59

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

SEASON INFORMATION

Duration of Proposal: 2026 and 2027 hunting seasons

Season Dates: See Figure 1 and 2 for maps.

Prairie Units (PRE)	License Types	Season Dates
09A, 11B*, 15A, 27A, 35A*, 35B*, 49A*, ERA*, WRA	Both	Sept 1 - Dec 31

* See recommended changes.

Licenses: Last year there were 136 resident “Any Elk” licenses and 280 “Antlerless Elk” licenses.

Unit license and tag type recommendations included in administrative action document.

Open Areas: See Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. No person may possess more than one (1) elk license of any type in a year.
2. No more than two persons may submit applications together.
3. Except for landowner/operator preference applicants, no person who receives a license in the 1st drawing for this season or uses preference for to obtain a license in the 2nd drawing shall be eligible to apply for a Prairie elk license in first drawings for the next nine years.
4. One-half of the licenses allocated in each unit are available for landowner/operator preference application lottery drawings. Only one member of each qualifying landowner/operator household may apply every year.
5. Any elk that is harvested must be inspected by a Department representative within 24 hours after kill.

Changes from last year:

1. Modify § 41:06:59:01 to expand season dates and license types for:
 - a. PRE-11B from Sep. 1 to Oct. 15 to Sep. 1 to Dec. 31 and include antlerless elk licenses in this season (currently only includes any elk).
 - b. PRE-35A and PRE-35B from Sep. 15 to Dec. 31 to Sep. 1 to Dec. 31.
 - c. PRE-49A from Sep. 15 to Oct. 31 and Dec. 1 to 31 to Sep. 1 to Dec. 31 (currently includes both any elk and antlerless elk license types)
2. Modify § 41:06:59:02 to create a new unit for elk hunting east of the Missouri River (PRE-ERA).
3. Modify § 41:06:59:01 to allow unlimited any elk licenses for unit PRE-ERA and specify season dates for from Sep. 1 to Dec. 31 for this new unit.

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Through natural dispersal, elk occasionally are observed east of the Missouri River. Recommended changes to objectives in the Elk Action Plan Revision for 2026, are to manage for no established elk populations in this area. Because there is more privately owned land and more row crop agriculture, elk are likely to cause unacceptable levels of agricultural depredation east of the Missouri River. The department recommendation is to address potential elk depredation by providing an unlimited number of elk licenses east of the Missouri River.

To more effectively address potential agricultural depredation, the department recommends to expand season dates in PRE-15A and PRE-49A and to include those units in the landowner-own-land prairie elk hunting unit. A final recommendation to increase hunting opportunity is to expand the season dates in Harding County units PRE-35A and PRE-35B to include the first two weeks in September.

License number and tag type recommendations for the next two years will be shared on the following administrative action sheet.

Figure 1. Map of 2025 Prairie elk season hunting units.

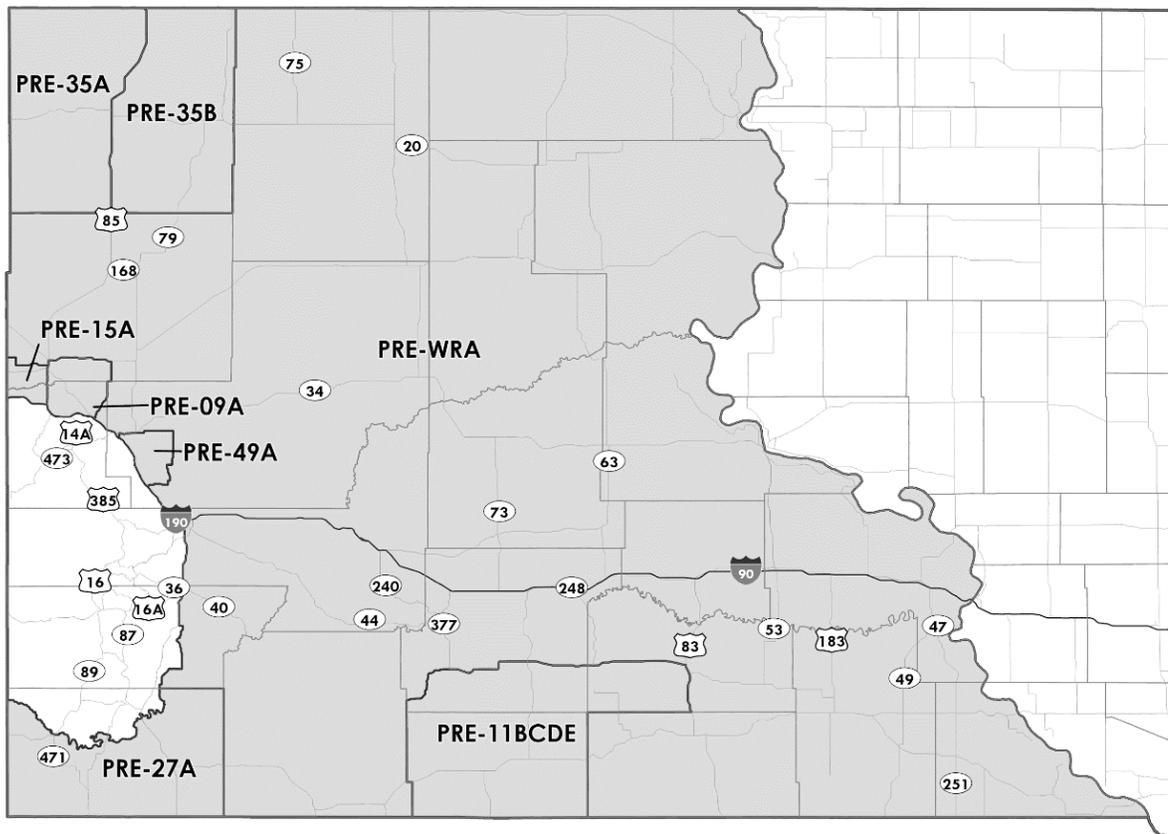


Figure 2. Map of recommendation for Prairie elk season hunting units.

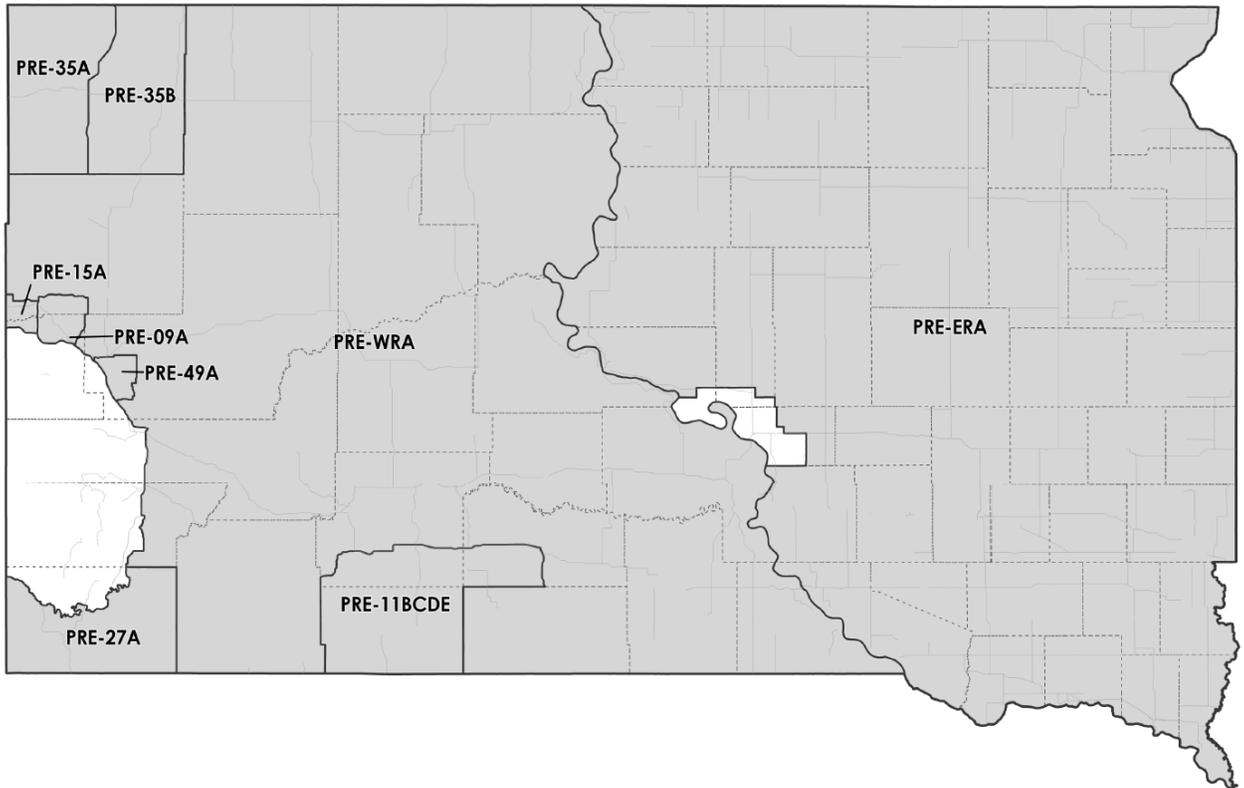


Table 1. Recommended changes to season dates and license types available.

Units	License Types	Season Dates
PRE-09A	Both	Sept 1 - Dec 31
PRE-11B	Any Elk <u>Both</u>	Sept 1 - Oct 31 <u>Sept 1 - Dec 31</u>
PRE-11D	Antlerless Elk	Sept 1 - Oct 31
PRE-11E	Antlerless Elk	Nov 1 - Dec 31
PRE-15A	Both	Sept 1 - Dec 31
PRE-27A	Both	Sept 1 - Dec 31
PRE-35A	Both	Sept 15 - Dec 31 <u>Sept 1 - Dec 31</u>
PRE-35B	Both	Sept 15 - Dec 31 <u>Sept 1 - Dec 31</u>
PRE-49A	Both	Sept 15 - Oct 31 AND Dec 1 - 31 <u>Sept 1 - Dec 31</u>
<u>PRE-ERA</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Sept 1 - Dec 31</u>
PRE-WRA	Both	Sept 1 - Dec 31

Table 2. Prairie elk hunters, applicants, harvest success, and harvest by year.

Year	Licensed Hunters	Applicants	Harvest Success Rate	Bulls Harvested	Cows Harvested
2014	92	1,725	64%	33	25
2015	98	2,119	55%	29	25
2016	148	2,272	40%	32	27
2017	149	2,249	50%	41	34
2018	139	3,080	79%	59	51
2019	140	3,831	65%	41	50
2020	251	4,532	57%	56	87
2021	257	4,912	50%	57	71
2022	270	5,037	48%	74	55
2023	258	5,438	51%	78	53
2024	334	6,212	49%	91	73
2025	405	6,437	45%	101	83

Table 3. Prairie landowner-own-land resident antlerless elk hunters, applicants, harvest success, and harvest by year.

Year	Licensed Hunters	Harvest Success Rate	Bulls Harvested	Cows Harvested
2024	114	32%	0	36
2025	187	37%	0	69

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:06:59:01. Prairie elk hunting season established -- Number and type of licenses available -- Season dates. The prairie elk hunting season is open from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset each day of the season. For the prairie season, no more than two hundred "any elk" licenses and no more than four hundred "antlerless elk" licenses may be issued west of the Missouri River for the prairie elk hunting season and the number of licenses east of the Missouri River is unlimited. The prairie elk hunting seasons are as follows:

- (3) Unit PRE-11B is open from September first through ~~October fifteenth~~ December thirty-first;
- (11) Unit PRE-35A is open from September ~~fifteenth~~ first through December thirty-first;
- (12) Unit PRE-35B is open from September ~~fifteenth~~ first through December thirty-first;
- (17) Unit PRE-49A is open from September ~~fifteenth~~ first through ~~October thirty-first~~ and from ~~December first~~ through December thirty-first; and
- (18) Unit PRE-WRA is open from September first through December thirty-first; and
- (19) Unit PRE-ERA is open from September first through December thirty-first.

41:06:59:02. Open units. The open units for the prairie elk hunting season are as follows:

(13) Unit PRE-49A: the portion of Meade County within a line beginning at the junction of Interstate 90 and Elk Creek Road, then east on Elk Creek Road to Ricard Road, then north on Ricard Road to Tilford Road, then east on Tilford Road to Middle Alkalai Road, then north on Middle Alkalai Road to Alkalai Road, then west on Alkalai Road to SD Highway 34, then west on SD Highway 34 to Interstate 90, then south on Interstate 90 to the point of beginning; ~~and~~

(14) Unit PRE-WRA: the portion of the state west of the Missouri River not associated with another prairie elk unit, Custer State Park, or any Black Hills elk unit described in chapter 41:06:26-; and

(15) Unit PRE-ERA: the portion of the state east of the Missouri River, excluding the interior boundary of the Crow Creek Sioux Indian Reservation.

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

None.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

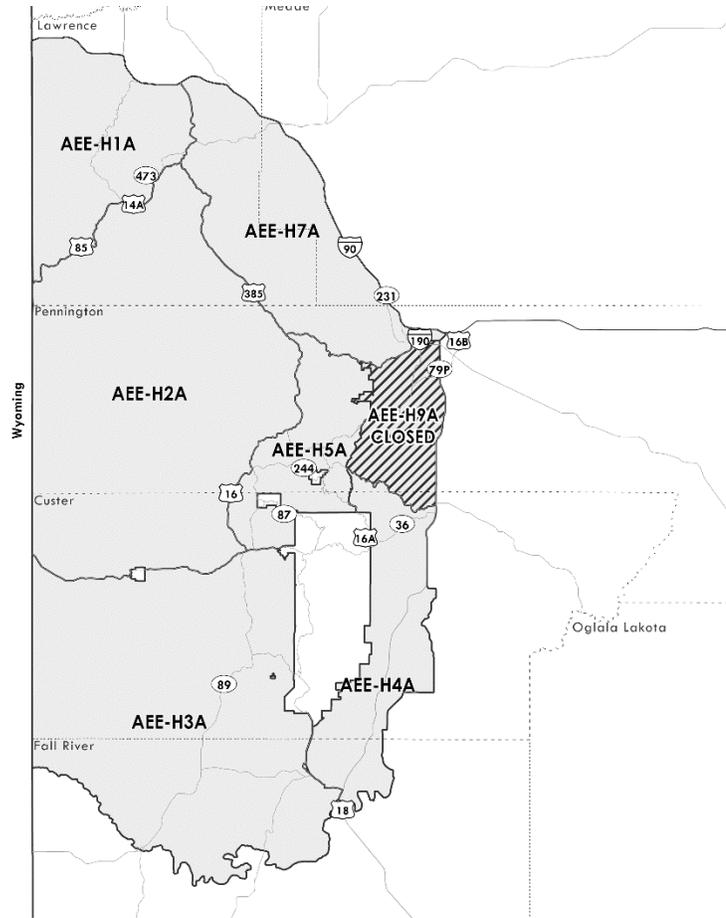
1. Does the regulation or fee inhibit a user's ability to participate? No.
2. Does the regulation increase the opportunity for new and existing users? Yes, elk hunting opportunity will be expanded.
3. How does the regulation impact the next generation of hunters, anglers, trappers, and outdoor recreationists? They will have additional hunting opportunity.
4. Does the regulation enhance the quality of life for current and future generations by getting families outdoors? Yes by providing more opportunity.

FISCAL IMPACT

Additional elk licenses may be sold, but the financial impact is expected to be minimal based on the very low numbers of elk east of the Missouri River.

APPROVE _____ MODIFY _____ REJECT _____ NO ACTION _____

Figure 2. Map of Archery Elk Season hunting units in the Black Hills.



COMMISSION ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

Duration of Proposal: 2026 and 2027 hunting seasons

Licenses: Final license recommendations for the 2026 and 2027 elk hunting seasons will be provided at the April Commission meeting. Preliminary recommendations are to reduce licenses by 375 (17% decrease). Antlerless elk licenses would be decreased by 520 for all Black Hills seasons, and 50 antlerless elk licenses would be added in Custer State Park. Any elk licenses would be increased by 80 for all Black Hills seasons and 15 for all Custer State Park seasons.

2025

Black Hills (Firearm) Elk			
Unit	Resident Licenses		
	Any Elk 21	Atl Elk 23	
H1A	80		
H1B		100	
H2A	350		
H2B		100	
H2C		100	
H2D		50	
H2E		125	
H2F		125	
H2G		125	
H2H		10	
H2I		10	
H2J		10	
H3A	120		
H3B		45	
H3C		45	
H3D		45	
H3E		60	
H3F		60	
H3G		60	
H4A	40		
H4B		40	
H5A	5		
H7A	35		
H7B		50	
H9A	15		
H9B		40	
TOTAL	645	1,200	1,845

2026 and 2027

Black Hills (Firearm) Elk			
Unit	Resident Licenses		
	Any Elk 21	Atl Elk 23	
H1A	100		
H1B		75	
H2A	425		
H2B		75	
H2C		75	
H2D			
H2E		25	
H2F		10	
H2G		10	
H2H		5	
H2I		5	
H2J		5	
H3A	100		
H3B		45	
H3C		45	
H3D		45	
H3E		60	
H3F		60	
H3G		60	
H4A	40		
H4B		40	
H5A	5		
H7A	20		
H7B		50	
H9A	15		
H9B		40	
TOTAL	705	730	1,435

2025

Archery (Black Hills) Elk			
Unit	Resident Licenses		
	Any Elk 21	Atl Elk 23	
H1A	30	15	
H2A	125	70	
H3A	40	30	
H4A	10	10	
H5A	2		
H7A	10	10	
TOTAL	217	135	352

2026 and 2027

Archery (Black Hills) Elk			
Unit	Resident Licenses		
	Any Elk 21	Atl Elk 23	
H1A	30	5	
H2A	160	30	
H3A	30	30	
H4A	10	10	
H5A	2		
H7A	5	10	
TOTAL	237	85	322

2025

CSP Early (Archery) Elk		
Season	Resident Licenses	
	Any Elk	Atl Elk
	21	23
CEE-CU1	10	

2026 and 2027

CSP Early (Archery) Elk		
Season	Resident Licenses	
	Any Elk	Atl Elk
	21	23
CEE-CU1	15	

2025

CSP (Firearm) Elk		
Season	Resident Licenses	
	Any Elk	Atl Elk
	21	23
CUE-CU1	25	
RAFFLE	1	

2026 and 2027

CSP (Firearm) Elk		
Season	Resident Licenses	
	Any Elk	Atl Elk
	21	23
CUE-CU1	35	
RAFFLE	1	

2025

CSP Special (Antlerless) Elk		
Season	Resident Licenses	
		Atl Elk
		23
CAE-CU1		

2026 and 2027

CSP Special (Antlerless) Elk		
Season	Resident Licenses	
		Atl Elk
		23
CAE-CU1		50

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

Duck Hunting Season Chapter 41:06:16

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

SEASON INFORMATION

Duration: 2026/2027 hunting season

Season Dates and Open Areas (see Figure 1 for map):

High Plains Zone:	October 10, 2026 – January 14, 2027
Low Plains North & Low Plains Middle Zone:	September 26, 2026 – December 8, 2026
Low Plains South Zone:	October 24, 2026 – January 5, 2027

Daily Bag Limits (possession limit is three times the daily bag limits):

Tier 1 Option (Traditional Daily Bag Limit)

Ducks: 6 Including mergansers, comprised of no more than: 5 mallards (no more than 2 hens),
3 wood ducks, 2 redheads, 2 canvasbacks, 3 pintails, and 1 scaup.

2 Bonus blue-winged teal (first 9 days of the season only)

Coots: 15

Tier 2 Option (3-Splash Daily Bag Limit)

Ducks: 3 Any species or gender, including mergansers.

Coots: 15

Licenses: Unlimited resident, limited nonresident.

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. Residents: Annual Small Game or Combination license, and
 - a. State Migratory Bird Certificate and Federal Waterfowl Stamp.
2. Nonresidents: Nonresident Waterfowl license, and
 - a. State Migratory Bird Certificate and Federal Waterfowl Stamp.
3. Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

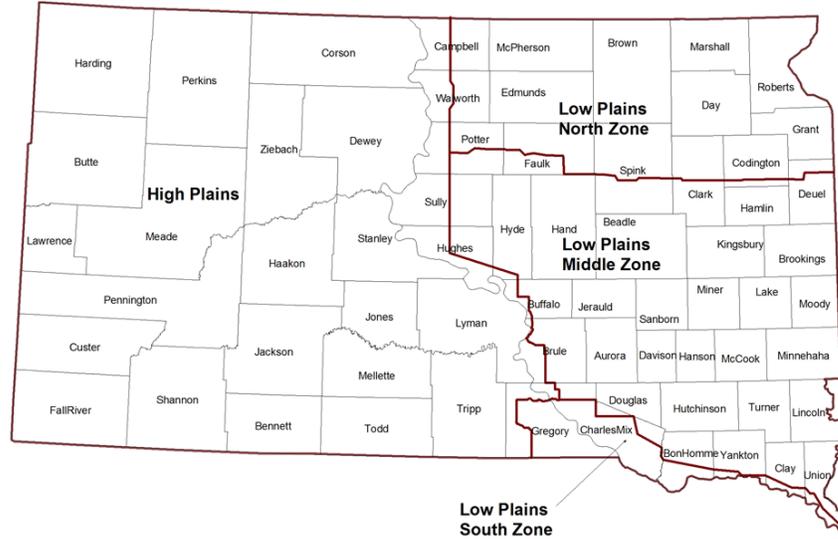
Changes from last year:

None

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks works cooperatively with US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to establish waterfowl hunting season structures. The FWS develops an annual Federal Register that imposes regulatory oversight. Within the Federal Register structure, GFP can impose more conservative hunting seasons, but cannot make hunting seasons more liberal. Some regulations are duck and goose unit boundaries, days that species can be hunted, and bag limits. These rules are established by input from cooperative groups called Flyways. South Dakota is included in the Central Flyway with GFP representation.

Figure 1. Duck season zones.



Comparison of the 2018 - 2024 duck season statistics

Year	Resident Hunters					Nonresident Hunters				
	Number Hunters	Harvest	Ave Day Hunted	Ave Bag	Satisfaction	Number Hunters	Harvest	Ave Day Hunted	Ave Bag	Satisfaction
2018	10,271	134,307	6.88	13.08	4.99	4,051	41,515	4.31	10.25	5.11
2019	11,295	176,885	7.30	15.66	5.17	4,423	52,225	4.47	11.81	5.38
2020	12,285	190,515	7.75	15.51	5.15	4,274	51,169	4.36	11.97	5.38
2021	10,634	151,207	7.37	14.22	5.10	4,442	47,802	4.28	10.76	5.18
2022	10,417	158,173	7.40	15.18	5.10	4,267	52,082	4.34	12.21	5.40
2023	11,726	189,983	7.40	16.20	5.07	4,594	59,912	4.40	13.04	5.51
2024	11,227	176,323	7.45	15.70	4.85	4,681	54,802	4.30	11.71	5.18

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

August Management Take Chapters 41:06:16

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

SEASON INFORMATION

Duration of Recommendation: 2026 hunting season

Season Dates: August 15 - 31

Open Area: Meade County south of South Dakota Highway 34, Pennington County west of the Cheyenne River, and the counties of Clark, Codington, Day, Deuel, Hamlin, Grant, Marshall, and Roberts.*
** Recommendation to remove Brown, Edmunds, Faulk, McPherson, and Spink.*

Daily Bag Limit: 8* Canada geese (no possession limit)
** Recommendation to reduce the daily bag limit of 15 to 8.*

Licenses: Unlimited, resident only.

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. Annual Small Game or Combination license, and
 - a. State Migratory Bird Certificate.
 - b. Federal Waterfowl Stamp is not required.
2. Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.
3. All other restrictions are the same as during the Early Fall and Regular Canada Goose Season.

Changes from last year:

- 1) Modify § 41:06:16:07 to remove Brown, Edmunds, Faulk, McPherson, and Spink counties from the August Management Take unit.
- 2) Modify § 41:06:16:09 to reduce the August Management Take daily bag limit from fifteen to eight. There is no possession limit.

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

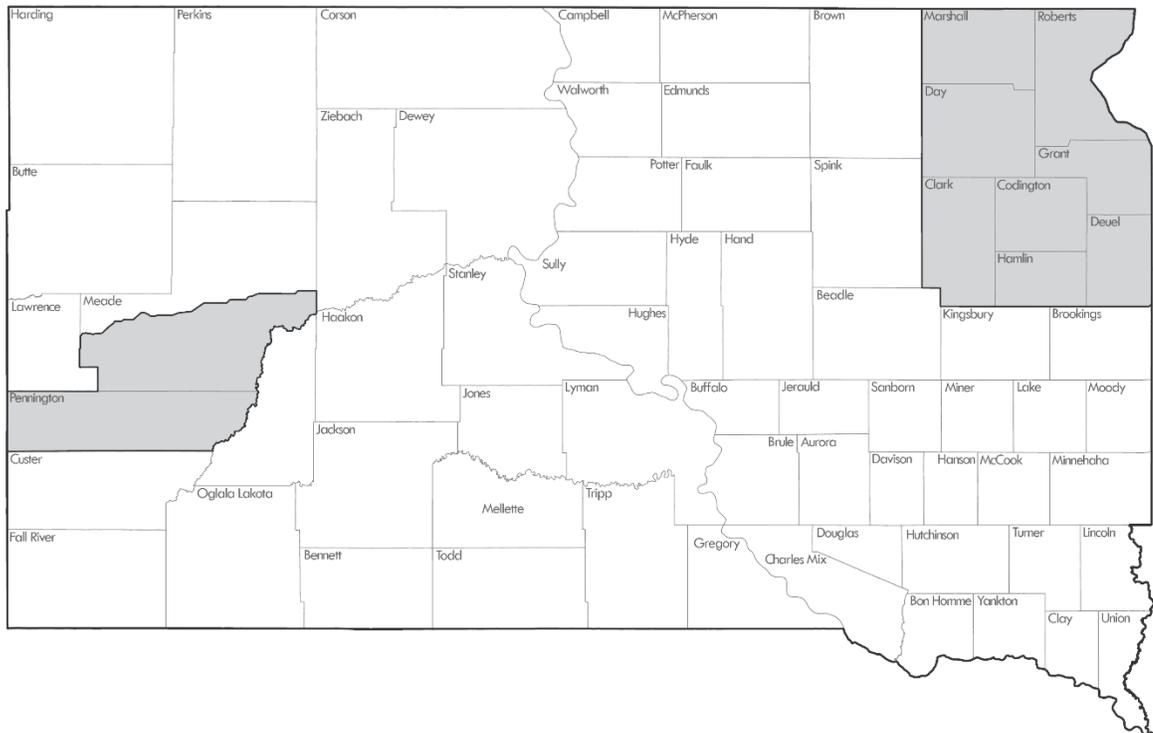
Based on the Giant Canada Goose Action Plan, the current 3-year average spring giant Canada goose population index in South Dakota of 155,594 is within the objective range of 115,000-165,000 (Figure 2). A daily bag of eight and possession limit of twenty-four geese is recommended in the Action Plan management decision table (Table 1). In addition, Canada goose depredation has been manageable in five counties in northeast South Dakota and no longer will need the added harvest pressure from the August Management Take. The Department recommendation is to remove McPherson, Edmunds, Faulk, Brown, and Spink counties from the August Management Take.

Table 1. Summary comparison of the 2012-25 August Management Take Canada goose seasons.

Year	Hunters	Harvest	Average Days Hunted	Average Season Bag
2012	3,581	36,757	3.08	10.26
2013	2,345	18,592	3.42	7.93
2014	2,302	20,671	3.24	8.98
2015	1,686	10,221	3.03	6.06
2016-20*	Unk	Unk	Unk	Unk
2021	2,463	24,942	2.33	10.13
2022	1,603	14,094	2.47	8.79
2023	1,263	11,035	2.50	8.74
2024	985	11,350	2.58	11.52
2025	774	7,356	2.55	9.50

*The 2016-20 seasons were open only in Pennington County west of the Cheyenne River.

Figure 1. Recommended areas open to hunting (gray shaded areas) for the Canada Goose August Management Take. Brown, Edmunds, Faulk, McPherson, and Spink counties are recommended to be removed based on the 3-year spring Canada Goose population index.



DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:06:16:07. Goose hunting season, conservation order, and August management take established -- Shooting hours -- Exceptions -- Open units -- Closed areas. The light goose hunting season is open statewide for one hundred and five consecutive days beginning on the last Saturday of September. A conservation order is open statewide from the day after Unit 2 dark goose season ends to May fifteenth. Only light geese, as defined in § 41:06:16:06.01, may be taken during a conservation order.

As used in this article, a conservation order is as described in 50 C.F.R. § 21.180 (February 7, 2022).

Additionally, an August Management Take for Canada geese is open to South Dakota residents beginning on the third Saturday of August through August thirty-first in Meade County south of South Dakota Highway 34, Pennington County west of the Cheyenne River, and the counties of ~~Brown,~~ Clark, Codington, Day, Deuel, ~~Edmunds, Faulk,~~ Hamlin, Grant, Marshall, ~~McPherson,~~ and Roberts, and ~~Spink.~~

41:06:16:09. Bag and possession limits on geese. The daily bag limit in Unit 1 during the goose hunting season may include no more than fifty light geese, eight geese that may be a combination of Canada geese and black brant, and three white-fronted geese. The daily bag limit in Unit 2 during the goose hunting season may include no more than fifty light geese, four geese that may be a combination of Canada geese and black brant, and three white-fronted geese. The possession limit is three times the daily bag limit, except there is no possession limit for light geese.

There is no daily bag or possession limit for light geese taken during a conservation order.

During the August Management Take, the daily bag limit is ~~fifteen~~ eight Canada geese. There is no possession limit for Canada geese during the August Management Take.

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

Early Fall Canada Goose Chapters 41:06:50

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

SEASON INFORMATION

Duration: 2026 hunting season

Season Dates: September 1 - 30 **Open Area:** Unit 1 (see Figure 1)

Daily Limit: 8* Canada Geese **Possession Limit:** 24* Canada Geese

** Recommendation to reduce the daily bag limit of 15 to 8. The possession limit is three times the daily bag limit.*

Licenses: Unlimited resident, limited nonresident.

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. Residents: Annual Small Game or Combination license, and
 - a. State Migratory Bird Certificate and Federal Waterfowl Stamp.
2. Nonresidents: Nonresident Waterfowl license, and
 - a. State Migratory Bird Certificate and Federal Waterfowl Stamp.
3. Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

Changes from last year:

- 1) Modify § 41:06:50:03 to reduce the daily bag limit from fifteen to eight. The possession limit is three times the daily bag limit.

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Based on the Giant Canada Goose Action Plan, the current 3-year average spring giant Canada Goose population index in South Dakota of 155,594 is within the objective range of 115,000-165,000 (Figure 2). A daily bag of eight and possession limit of twenty-four geese is recommended in the Action Plan management decision table (Table 1).

Figure 1. Goose Units.

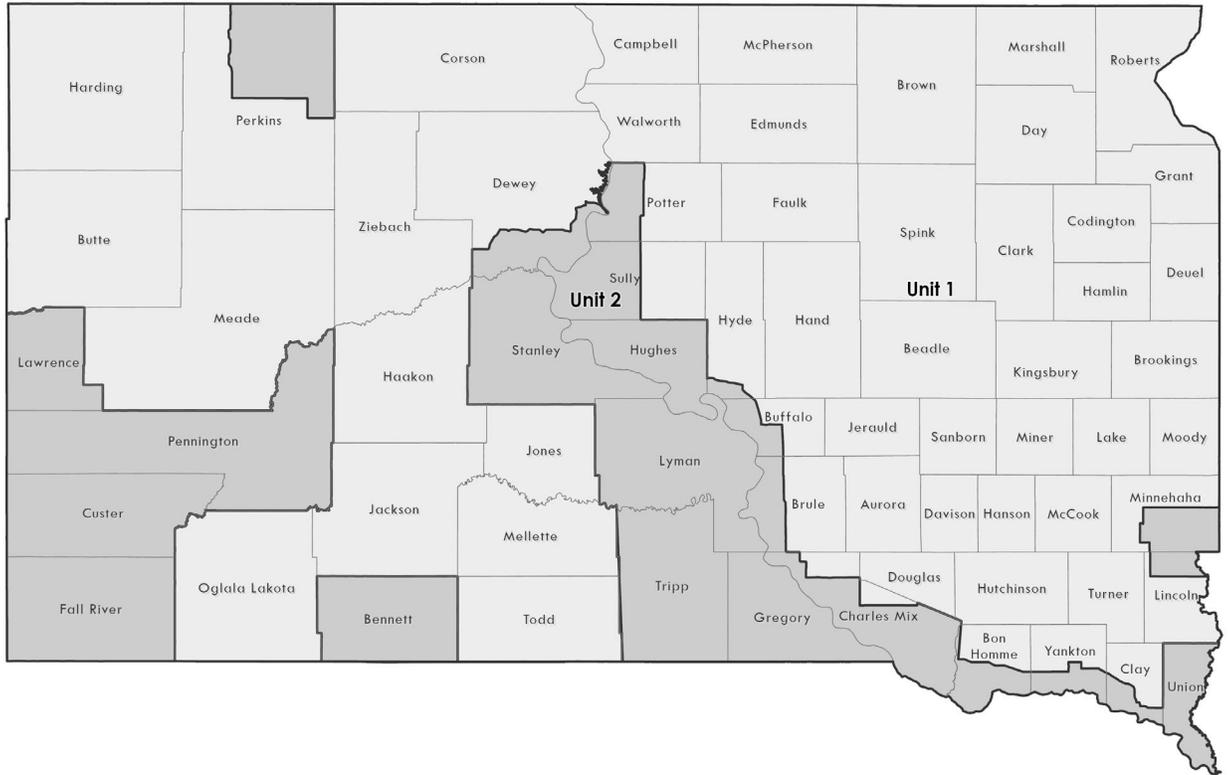


Figure 2. South Dakota Giant Canada Goose spring population index 3-year average from 1998 to 2025.

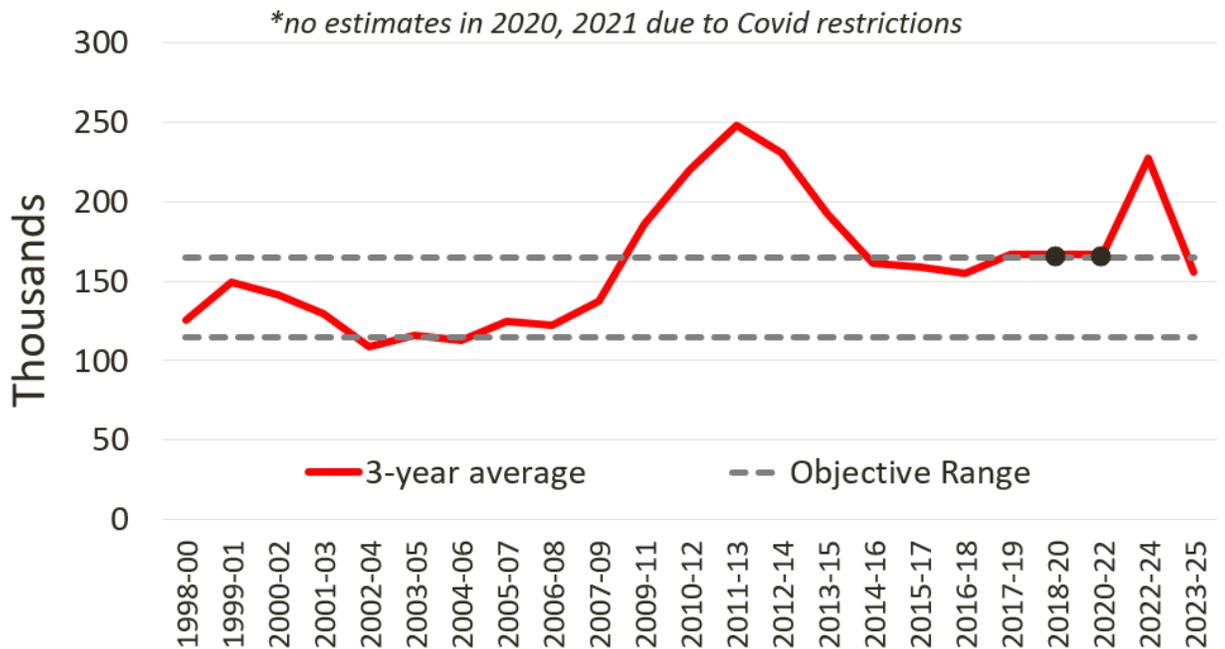


Table 1. Management decision table from the Giant Canada Goose Action Plan 2026-2030.

"MANAGEMENT TOOLS"	RESTRICTIVE MANAGEMENT	MODERATE MANAGEMENT	LIBERAL MANAGEMENT
	<i>Increase Population</i>	<i>Maintain Population</i>	<i>Decrease Population</i>
Justification	<p>Canada goose population below objective based on available biological data. Also consider hunter survey comments, landowner comments public comments, and field staff observations.</p> <p>Goose depredation on row crops is expected to be limited and should be adequately addressed through the wildlife damage management program.</p> <p>Non-lethal tools will primarily be used, including the promotion of alternative vegetation near wetlands; however, unique situations may be addressed using nest work or kill permits.</p>	<p>Canada goose population at objective based on available biological data. Also consider hunter survey comments, landowner comments, public comments, and field staff observations.</p> <p>Manageable Canada goose depredation on row crops is expected and should be adequately addressed through wildlife damage management program.</p> <p>Non-lethal tools will primarily be used, including the promotion of alternative vegetation near wetlands; but chronic depredation issues may be addressed using nest work or kill permits.</p>	<p>Canada goose population above objective based on available biological data. Also consider hunter survey comments, landowner comments, public comments, and field staff observations.</p> <p>Goose depredation on row crops is expected to be above desired levels. The wildlife damage management program has difficulty addressing requests in a timely manner. Non-lethal tools will be used, including the promotion of alternative vegetation near wetlands; but nest work and kill permits may be used more frequently to row crop damage.</p> <p>Indicators for this category would be moderate to overabundant populations causing moderate to major depredation issues.</p>
Spring Population Index (3-Year Average)	Below 115,000	115,000-165,000	Above 165,000
Regular Season Days	Full Framework	Full Framework	Full Framework
Regular Season Daily Bag	Daily Bag: Unit 1: 4 Units 2: 4	Daily Bag: Unit 1: 8 Units 2: 4	Daily Bag: Unit 1: 8 Units 2: 4
Early Fall Season (Unit 1)	Yes (Evaluate Season Length) Daily Bag: 4	Yes Daily Bag: 8	Yes Daily Bag: 15
August Management Take	Available only for human safety concerns.	Available in areas with unacceptable levels of crop depredation or human safety concerns. Daily Bag: 8	Available in areas with unacceptable levels of crop depredation or human safety concerns. Daily Bag: 15

Table 2. Comparison of the 2015 - 2024 Early Fall Canada goose harvest statistics

Year	Number Hunters	Harvest	Average Season Bag
2015	3,883	20,735	5.34
2016	3,366	27,660	8.22
2017	3,226	25,808	8.00
2018	2,716	17,904	6.59
2019	3,000	21,054	7.02
2020	3,857	33,769	8.76
2021	3,671	33,179	9.04
2022	3,034	28,547	9.41
2023	3,008	25,764	8.57
2024	2,664	22,025	8.27

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

41:06:50:03. Daily and possession limits. The daily limit is ~~45~~ eight Canada geese. A person may have in possession no more than three times the daily limit of Canada geese taken according to the daily limit.

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

None

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

1. Does the regulation or fee inhibit a user's ability to participate? Waterfowl hunters will have a lower bag and possession limit during this season.
2. Does the regulation increase the opportunity for new and existing users? No, but the recommendation is designed to conserve goose populations.
3. How does the regulation impact the next generation of hunters, anglers, trappers and outdoor recreationists? The recommendation will allow sustainable goose hunting opportunity.
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	_____
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GAME, FISH AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION PROPOSAL

Goose Hunting Season

Chapter 41:06:16:07

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

SEASON INFORMATION

Duration: 2026/2027 waterfowl hunting seasons

Season Dates:

Canada Geese (and Brant)

Unit 1: October 1 – December 16, 2026

Unit 2: November 2, 2026 – February 14, 2027

Light Geese

Statewide: September 26, 2026 – January 8, 2027

White-fronted Geese

Statewide: September 26 - December 8, 2026

Daily Limits:

Canada geese

Unit 1: 8

Unit 2: 4

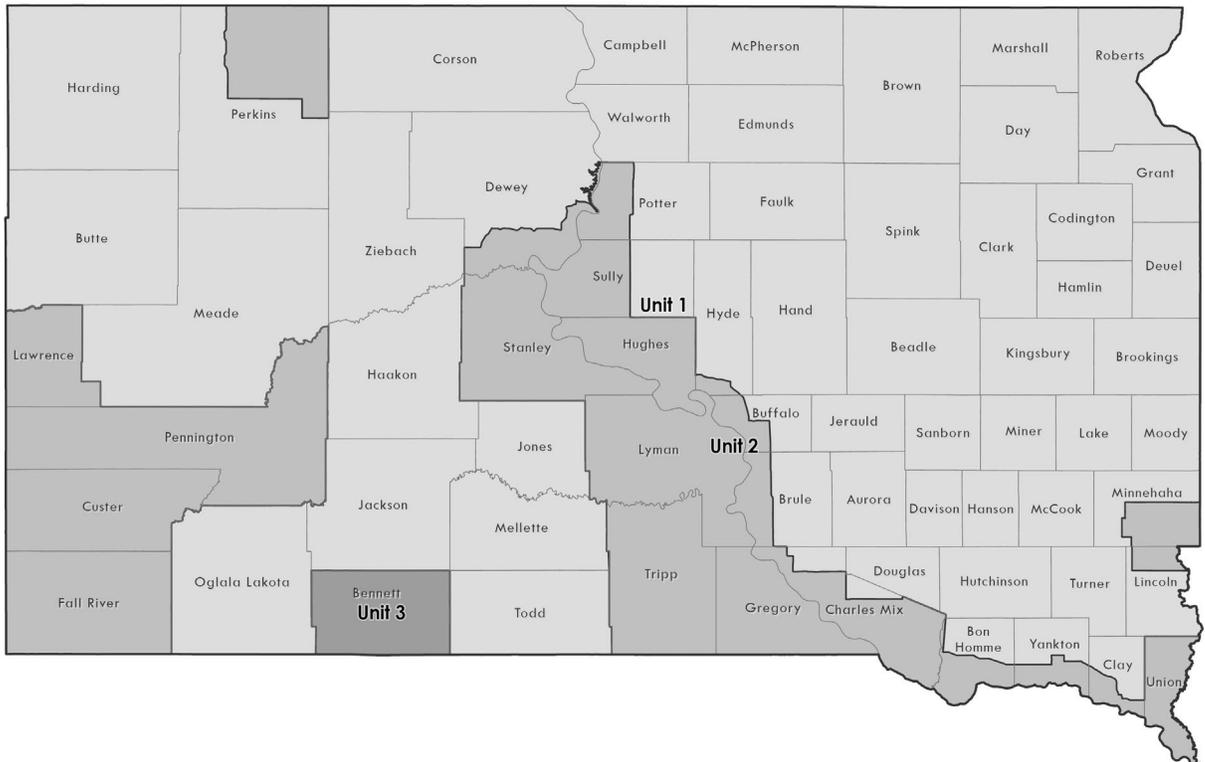
Possession Limits:

Light geese: Unlimited

All other geese: Three times the daily limit

Light geese: 50

White-fronted goose: 3



Licenses: Unlimited resident, limited nonresident.

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. Residents: Annual Small Game or Combination license, and
 - a. State Migratory Bird Certificate and Federal Waterfowl Stamp.
2. Nonresidents: Nonresident Waterfowl license, and
 - a. State Migratory Bird Certificate and Federal Waterfowl Stamp.
3. Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

Changes from last year:

None

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Comparison of the 2015 - 2024 Canada goose harvest statistics

Year	Resident Hunters					Nonresident Hunters				
	Number Hunters	Harvest	Ave Days Hunted	Ave Bag	Satisfaction	Number Hunters	Harvest	Ave Days Hunted	Ave Bag	Satisfaction
2015	10,228	73,471	7.00	7.18	4.78	2,104	5,482	4.30	2.70	4.98
2016	9,964	85,809	6.98	8.61	4.87	2,046	5,485	4.51	2.77	4.86
2017	9,762	76,827	6.95	7.87	5.06	2,428	6,601	4.19	2.74	5.18
2018	8,633	63,848	6.67	7.40	4.93	2,289	5,638	4.17	2.52	5.11
2019	9,264	78,143	6.85	8.44	5.09	2,209	5,995	4.05	2.82	5.41
2020	10,356	93,682	6.96	9.05	5.07	2,199	6,924	3.96	3.15	5.38
2021	9,997	104,693	7.20	10.47	5.14	2,357	6,736	4.14	2.89	5.27
2022	8,973	90,680	6.96	10.11	5.07	2,327	8,209	4.11	3.55	5.51
2023	9,361	78,633	6.70	8.40	4.97	2,295	5,925	4.02	2.59	5.48
2024	7,865	65,542	7.05	8.33	4.71	2,201	5,261	4.12	2.41	5.10

Comparison of the 2015 - 2024 regular season light goose harvests

Year	Residents					Nonresidents				
	Number Hunters	Harvest	Ave Day Hunted	Ave Bag	Satisfaction	Number Hunters	Harvest	Ave Day Hunted	Ave Bag	Satisfaction
2015	3,096	37,266	5.66	12.04	4.78	519	3,492	4.71	6.72	4.83
2016	3,206	39,841	5.41	12.43	4.85	515	5,263	5.40	10.22	4.77
2017	4,159	70,772	6.05	17.02	5.09	1,013	13,972	4.27	13.80	5.22
2018	3,099	39,624	5.40	12.79	4.93	883	6,644	4.39	7.53	4.85
2019	3,060	41,524	4.85	13.57	5.18	774	5,714	4.61	7.38	5.55
2020	3,415	43,499	5.61	12.74	5.17	761	5,473	3.92	7.20	5.27
2021	2,799	50,282	5.51	17.97	5.26	788	8,980	4.15	11.40	5.38
2022	3,182	72,756	5.83	22.87	5.06	852	10,267	4.01	12.05	5.64
2023	3,781	74,048	5.64	19.58	5.13	1,224	18,692	3.97	15.27	5.58
2024	2,558	57,514	6.35	22.60	4.79	844	10,556	4.05	12.51	5.11

Comparison of the 2015 - 2024 white-fronted goose harvests

Year	<i>Residents</i>				<i>Nonresidents</i>			
	<i>Number Hunters</i>	<i>Harvest</i>	<i>Ave Days Hunted</i>	<i>Ave Bag, Season</i>	<i>Number Hunters</i>	<i>Harvest</i>	<i>Ave Days Hunted</i>	<i>Ave Bag, Season</i>
2015	1,097	1,618	5.93	1.47	275	201	5.20	0.73
2016	992	1,707	6.43	1.72	295	176	5.52	0.60
2017	1,185	2,286	6.30	1.93	354	292	5.00	0.83
2018	1,262	2,428	5.67	1.92	426	293	4.83	0.69
2019	1,015	2,176	4.60	2.14	358	601	4.78	1.68
2020	1,256	2,804	7.05	2.23	283	359	4.26	1.27
2021	1,358	3,748	5.61	2.76	466	1,071	4.33	2.30
2022	1,494	3,939	6.64	2.64	470	935	3.88	1.99
2023	2,117	6,392	5.92	3.02	642	1,484	4.14	2.31
2024	1,662	4,687	6.00	2.82	608	1,134	3.75	1.87

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

Spring Light Goose Hunting Seasons Chapter 41:06:16

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

SEASON INFORMATION

Duration of Recommendation: 2027 hunting season

Season Dates: February 15 – May 15

Open Area: Statewide

Daily Limit: None

Possession Limit: None

Licenses: Unlimited resident and nonresident.

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. With the exception of items 2-6, requirements and restrictions for the Spring Light Goose Conservation Order are the same as Fall Waterfowl hunting seasons.
2. Residents: Annual Small Game or Combination license, and
 - a. State Migratory Bird Certificate.
 - b. Federal Waterfowl Stamp is not required.
 - c. Resident landowners do not need a state license to hunt their own land.
3. Nonresidents: Nonresident Waterfowl license, and
 - a. State Migratory Bird Certificate.
 - b. Federal Waterfowl Stamp is not required.
4. Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset.
5. The use of electronic calls is allowed.
6. Shotguns may be capable of holding more than three shells.

Changes from last year:

None

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Comparison of the 2016 - 2025 Conservation Order light goose statistics

Year	Residents			Nonresidents		
	Number Hunters	Harvest	Total Days Hunted	Number Hunters	Harvest	Total Days Hunted
2016	1,866	36,572	9,485	3,843	89,627	15,076
2017	2,672	56,683	16,068	4,448	124,777	17,559
2018	2,736	51,260	14,029	4,643	114,819	18,548
2019	1,413	31,475	6,976	2,700	49,219	9,490
2020	2,078	31,164	11,197	2,830	65,682	11,498
2021	1,755	32,553	9,144	4,446	95,776	17,870
2022	2,101	51,071	10,856	4,329	118,576	17,610
2023	3,537	61,751	14,497	3,688	102,820	13,856
2024	3,673	106,853	24,316	4,229	121,692	18,401
2025	3,127	53,884	16,602	3,823	91,497	14,537

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

None

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

None

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

None

FISCAL IMPACT

None

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

Sandhill Crane Hunting Season Chapter 41:06:18

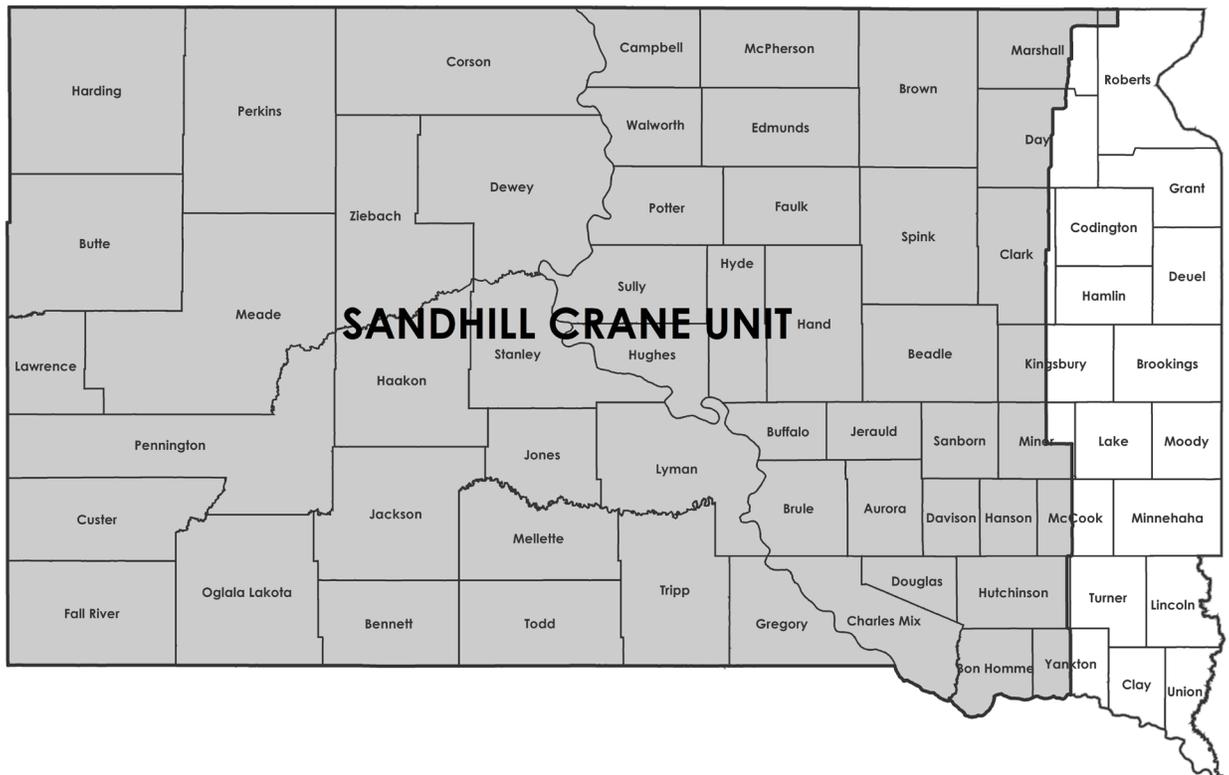
Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

SEASON INFORMATION

Duration of Recommendation: 2026 hunting season

Season Dates: September 26 – November 22

Open Area: That portion of the state lying west of a line beginning at the South Dakota-North Dakota border and State Highway 25, south on State Highway 25 to its junction with State Highway 34, east on State Highway 34 to its junction with U.S. Highway 81, then south on U.S. Highway 81 to the South Dakota-Nebraska border.



Daily Limit: 3 Sandhill Cranes

Possession Limit: 9 Sandhill Cranes

Licenses: Unlimited resident and nonresident.

Requirements and Restrictions:

- Residents: Annual Small Game or Combination license, and
 - State Migratory Bird Certificate.
 - Federal Waterfowl Stamp is not required.

2. Nonresidents: Nonresident Small Game or Nonresident Waterfowl license, and
 - a. State Migratory Bird Certificate.
 - b. Federal Waterfowl Stamp is not required.
3. Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.
4. Non-toxic shot rules apply to sandhill crane hunting.

Changes from last year:

None

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

None

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

Tundra Swan Hunting Season Chapter 41:06:16

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

SEASON INFORMATION

Duration of Recommendation: 2026/2027 hunting season

Season Dates: October 3, 2026 – January 8, 2027

Open Area: All counties east of the Missouri River except, for Bon Homme, Charles Mix, Clay, Douglas, Hutchinson, Lincoln, Turner, Union, and Yankton counties.

Licenses: 1,100 resident and 200 nonresident single tag licenses

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. Residents: Tundra Swan Permit, and
 - a. State Migratory Bird Certificate and Federal Waterfowl Stamp.
2. Nonresidents: Tundra Swan Permit and Nonresident Waterfowl license, and
 - a. State Migratory Bird Certificate and Federal Waterfowl Stamp.
3. Each resident and nonresident hunter may apply for and receive only one permit from the respective resident and nonresident permit pools in the first drawing. Nonresident permits are issued only in conjunction with a prerequisite nonresident waterfowl license and must be applied for at the same time.
4. For the second drawing, if permits remain unsold, only those residents and nonresidents who do not have a permit may submit one application for a permit remaining in the respective resident and nonresident pools.
5. For the third drawing, if any resident or nonresident permits remain unsold, any resident or nonresident may apply for a first or second permit but, in total, may only have up to two permits.
6. One tag will be issued with each permit and each swan must be tagged immediately upon retrieval.

Changes from last year:

None

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Comparison of the 2015-2024 Tundra Swan Seasons.

Year	Licenses Sold			Harvest (w/o cripples)	Avg Days Hunted	Percent Success	Average Satisfaction
	Resident	Nonres	Total				
2015	1,088	211	1,299	229	3.07	18%	5.09
2016	938	145	1,083	82	2.96	8%	4.81
2017	888	180	1,068	232	5.17	22%	5.10
2018	973	216	1,189	179	4.71	15%	4.85
2019	972	213	1,185	214	4.18	18%	5.11
2020	919	247	1,166	189	4.76	16%	4.76
2021	982	215	1,197	86	4.49	7%	4.49
2022	958	307	1,265	142	4.68	11%	4.72
2023	1,022	276	1,298	294	4.64	23%	5.11
2024	1,000	300	1,300	232	3.20	18%	5.00
2025	1,052	243	1,295	235	3.01	18%	4.86

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

Youth Waterfowl Hunting Season Chapter 41:06:49

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

SEASON INFORMATION

Duration of Recommendation: 2026 hunting season

Season Dates: September 12 - 13

Open Area: Statewide

Daily and Possession Limit: Same as regular duck and goose seasons

Licenses: Unlimited resident, 100 nonresident.

Requirements and Restrictions:

1. Residents: Youth Small Game or Small Game Mentored license, and
 - a. State Migratory Bird Certificate and Federal Waterfowl Stamp, if 16 and older.
 - b. May hunt the entire waterfowl season, in addition to the early 2-day youth season.
2. Nonresidents: Nonresident Youth Waterfowl or Nonresident Waterfowl Mentored license, and
 - a. State Migratory Bird Certificate and Federal Waterfowl Stamp, if 16 and older.
 - b. May only hunt the early 2-day youth season.
3. Residents and nonresidents who have not reached the age of 18 by the first day of the season may hunt in the youth waterfowl hunting season.
4. Each youth hunter under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult while hunting.
5. The youth hunter must be properly licensed to hunt waterfowl in the state, unless participating under a Mentored Hunt scenario as described in "Mentored Youth Hunting".
6. All other hunting restrictions will be the same as during the regular waterfowl seasons.

Changes from last year:

None

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

None

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

Nonresident Waterfowl Hunting Seasons Chapter 41:06:16:11

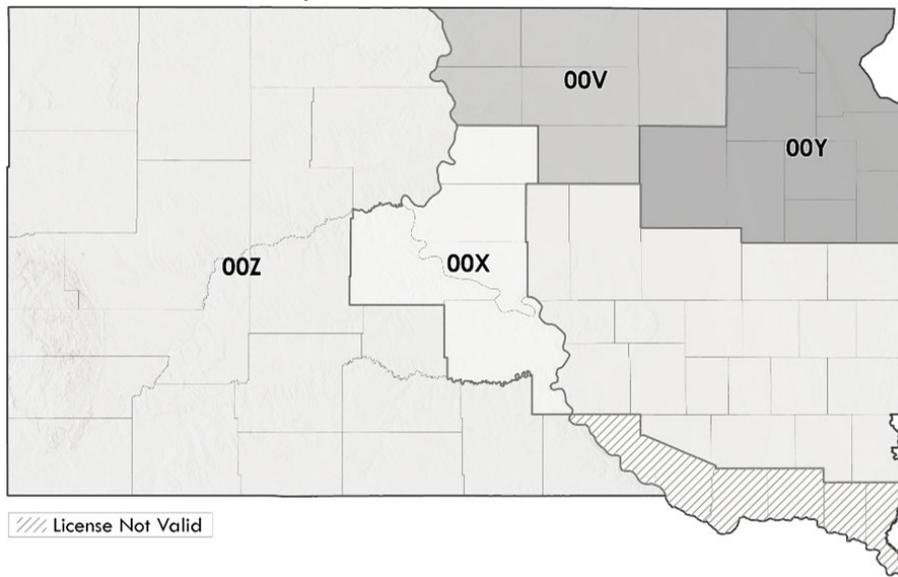
Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

SEASON INFORMATION

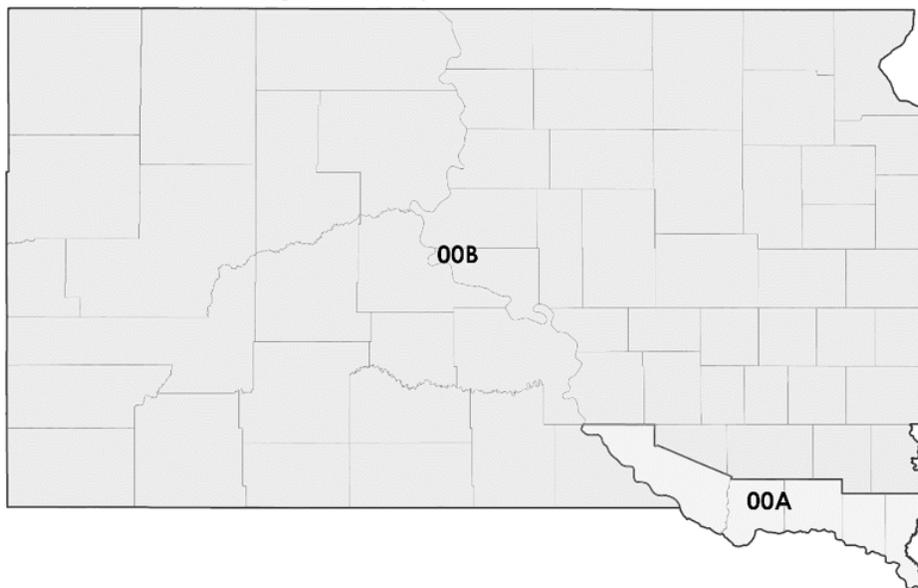
Duration: 2026/2027 waterfowl hunting seasons

Licenses: Nonresident: Limited in all units and seasons. 6,300 licenses.

3-day Nonresident Waterfowl Units



Season long and 10-day Nonresident Waterfowl Units



Changes from last year:

None

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Nonresident Waterfowl Seasons, Units, and Licenses

Season/Unit	Private/Public	Length	Description	2025 Licenses	Recommended 2026 Licenses
NRW-00A	Public and Private	Season long	Bon Homme, Charles Mix, Clay, Union, and Yankton counties	250	250
NRW-00B	Public and Private	Two 5-day periods	Statewide except 00A	3,950	3,950
NRW-00V	Private	3-day	Brown, Campbell, Edmunds, Faulk, McPherson, and Walworth counties	550	550
NRW-00X	Private	3-day	Hughes, Lyman, Potter, Stanley, and Sully counties	750	750
NRW-00Y	Public and Private	3-day	Clark, Codington, Day, Duel, Grant, Hamlin, Marshall, Roberts, and Spink counties	500	500
NRW-00Z	Private	3-day	Statewide except Unit 00A, 00X, 00V, and 00Y.	300	300
Total				6,300*	6,300*

** Does not include Nonresident Youth and Mentored licenses. See Youth Waterfowl Hunting Season.*

Based on Codified Law § 41-6-17 and § 41-6-18.1, the season length for nonresident waterfowl licenses may not exceed two periods of five consecutive days, excluding NRW-00B. The season length for NRW-00V, NRW-00X, NRW-00Y, and NRW-00Z is restricted to 3-days in Administrative Rule § 41:06:16:11.

The maximum number of nonresident licenses are specified in Administrative Rule § 41:06:16:11. The GFP commission may not increase the number of temporary nonresident waterfowl licenses by more than five percent the number of licenses allocated for the same license type in the previous year based on Codified Law § 41-6-18.4.

DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

None

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

None

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

None

FISCAL IMPACT

None

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

Bighorn Sheep Hunting Season

Chapter 41:06:01; 41:06:07; 41:06:56

Commission Meeting Dates:	Proposal	March 5-6, 2026	Pierre
	Public Hearing	April 9, 2026	Pierre
	Finalization	April 9-10, 2026	Pierre

COMMISSION PROPOSAL

Duration of Proposal: 2026 and 2027 hunting seasons

Season Dates: September 1 – December 31

Open unit: Units 2, 4, and Custer State Park. See Figure 1 for boundaries.

Licenses: License recommendations included in administrative action document

One of the licenses shall be an auction “ram bighorn sheep” license if a minimum of three total bighorn sheep licenses are allocated.

Requirements and Restrictions:

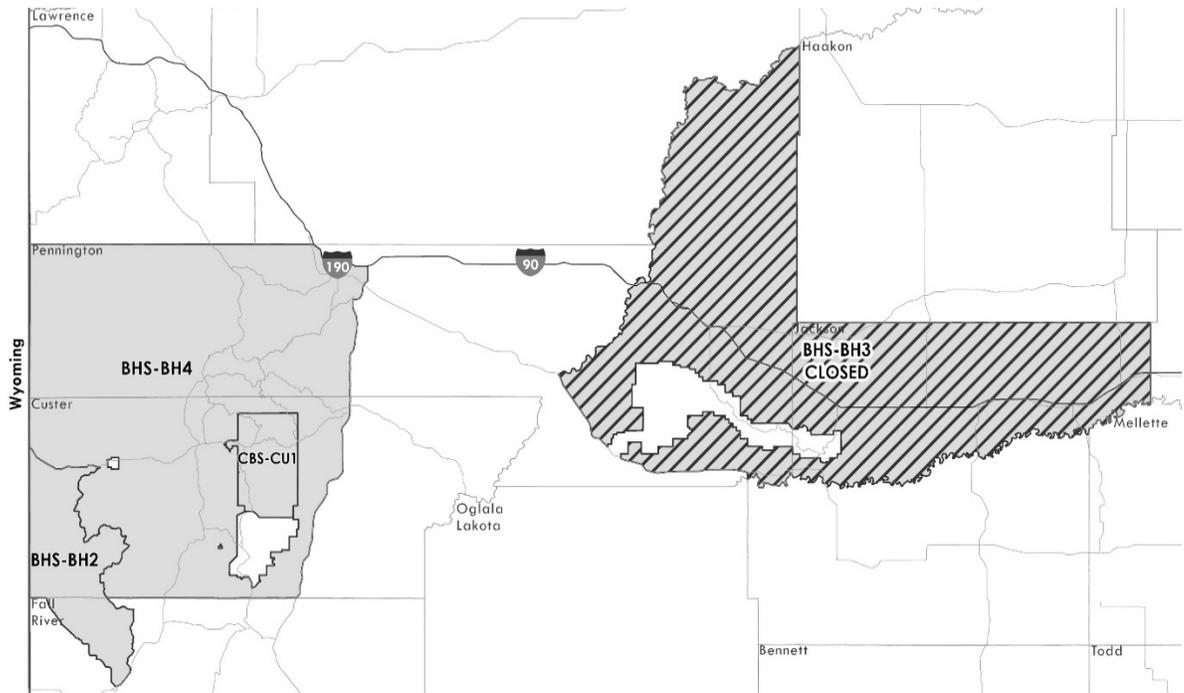
1. Except for the auction license, application for a license may be made by any resident hunter who has not been previously issued a bighorn sheep license in South Dakota.
2. Landowner - operator preference is not applicable to these licenses.
3. All licensees are required to attend an orientation meeting prior to the first day of hunting by the license holder at the regional office in Rapid City.
4. One bighorn sheep license may be allocated as an auction license if a minimum of three bighorn licenses are approved by the Commission. The Commission shall determine in which unit or units the auction license is valid.
5. All successful hunters must submit their bighorn sheep to a designated department representative for inspection and marking within 24 hours after the kill.

Changes from last year:

None

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION

Figure 1. Custer State Park (CBS-CU1) and Black Hills bighorn sheep units (BHS-BH2, BHS-BH3, BHS-BH4).



DRAFT ADMINISTRATIVE RULE CHANGES

None

RESIDENT/NONRESIDENT CRITERIA

None

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION (R3) CRITERIA

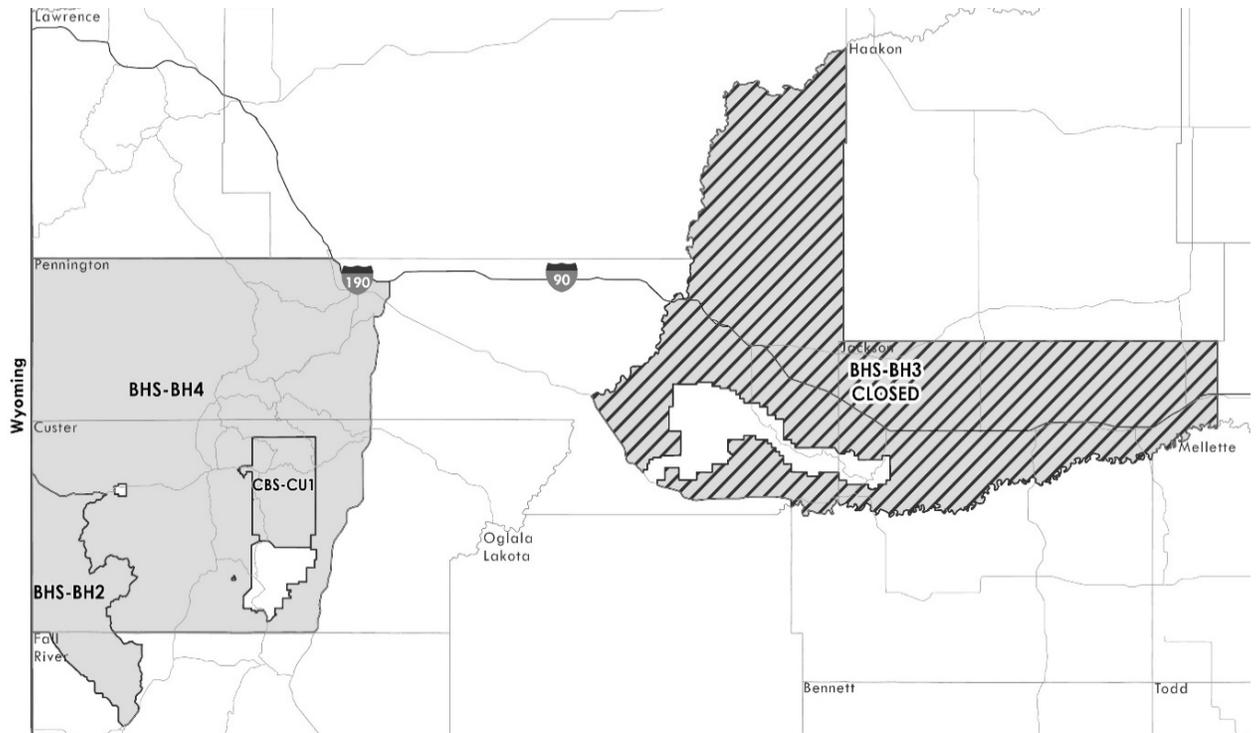
None

FISCAL IMPACT

None

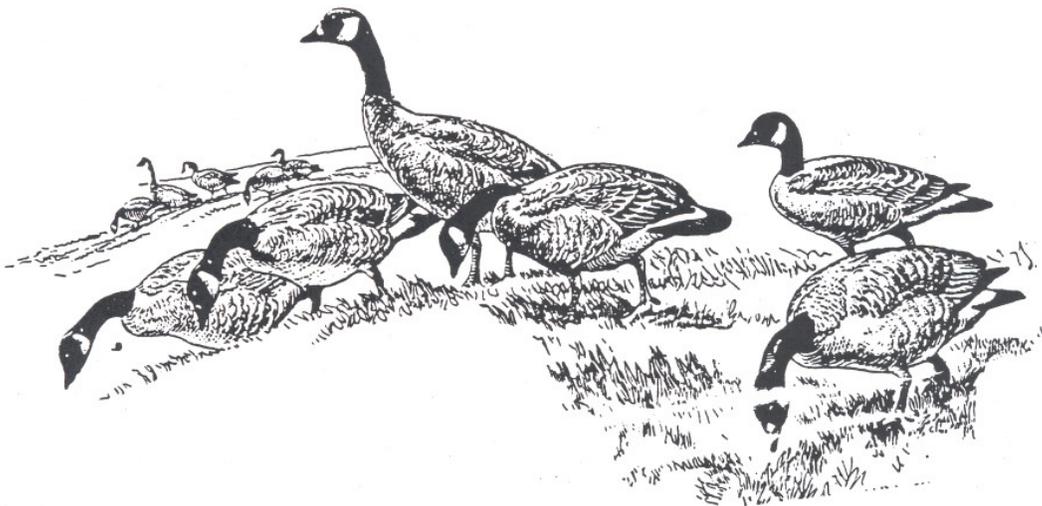
APPROVE	<input type="checkbox"/>	MODIFY	<input type="checkbox"/>	REJECT	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO ACTION	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Figure 1. Custer State Park (CBS-CU1) and Black Hills bighorn sheep units (BHS-BH2, BHS-BH3, BHS-BH4).



APPROVE MODIFY REJECT NO ACTION

SOUTH DAKOTA GIANT CANADA GOOSE ACTION PLAN 2026-2030



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

WILDLIFE DIVISION REPORT 2026-XX

March 2026

This action plan will be used by South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) 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 “Management of Giant Canada Geese in South Dakota”, provides a historical background, research, management surveys and monitoring, challenges and opportunities, and citizen involvement related to giant Canada geese and can be found at <https://gfp.sd.gov/management-plans/>.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This action plan is a product of substantial discussion, evaluation and input from many wildlife professionals, hunters, viewers, and other constituents. In addition, those comments and suggestions received from private landowners, hunters and those who recognize the value of giant Canada geese and their associated habitats were also considered.

Action Plan Coordinator – Rocco Murano, Senior Waterfowl Biologist, South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks.

GFP staff that provided data, reviews, and/or edits to the South Dakota Giant Canada Goose Management Plan –Andrew Norton, John Kanta, Nathan Baker, Julie Lindstrom, Dan Sternhagen, Mark Grovijahn, Mark Norton, and Trenton Haffley.

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

Recommended Citation:

South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks. 2026. South Dakota Giant Canada Goose Action Plan. Completion Report 2026-30. South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks, Pierre, South Dakota, USA.

INTRODUCTION

Giant Canada geese (*Branta canadensis maxima*) historically nested across the Midwest United States and northern Great Plains of North America. European settlers took Canada geese year-round and gathered their eggs in spring. Giant Canada geese were nearly extirpated from South Dakota by early-1900 and many believed the giant Canada goose was extinct by the 1950’s. However, flocks of the birds remained in the Fort Sisseton and Waubay National Wildlife Refuge areas of northeast South Dakota. Hanson (1965), in his book “The Giant

Canada Goose”, considered the birds in the Waubay area to be the "gold standard" of remaining wild giant Canada geese. Restoration efforts across its former range proved successful and efforts are now directed to manage this population. Giant Canada geese provide a valuable resource, highly sought after by hunters and viewers alike.

The goal for giant Canada goose populations in South Dakota is to manage for maximum recreational opportunity consistent with the welfare of the population, habitat constraints, and social tolerance. The South Dakota giant Canada goose population (three-year average spring index) objective range is 115,000-165,000 geese. The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks (GFP) will adjust season structure and daily bag limits to best maintain the goose population within the objective range. This population range was developed based on an analysis of past goose population data, private land depredation issues, and substantial input from a variety of stakeholders interested in goose management in South Dakota.

Population and harvest surveys for South Dakota’s giant Canada geese include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) May Waterfowl Breeding Habitat and Population Survey, the USFWS Parts Collection Survey, the federal Hunter Information Program survey, as well as GFP harvest surveys. Management direction for giant Canada geese will be based on a three-year average spring survey index number and other relevant biological and social data.

GFP manage wildlife and their associated habitats for their sustained and equitable use, and for the benefit, welfare, and enjoyment of the people of South Dakota and its visitors. This action plan is intended to guide wildlife managers and biologists and aid the decision-making process of the GFP Commission to ensure giant Canada goose populations and their habitats are managed appropriately, addressing both biological and social considerations. It also serves to inform sportsmen and women, landowners, and all others interested in giant Canada goose management in South Dakota.

Population Status and Monitoring

Since restoration efforts ended in the mid-1990’s, spring population estimates have varied from a low of 112,416 from 2004-2006 to a high of 248,135 from 2011-2013 (Figure 1). Because giant Canada geese are highly dependent on wetlands for all phases of their life cycle, populations rise and fall in response to regional wetland conditions. The average annual spring population index of giant Canada geese in South Dakota for the 3-year period 2021-2024 was 227,137 and the most recent annual estimate is 133,818 geese, according to data from the USFWS May Breeding Habitat and Population Survey (Figure 1). Three-year averages are used for management triggers to mitigate against spurious estimates due to extreme weather or other extenuating circumstances. A statewide spring population index management range of 115,000-165,000 Canada geese should provide ample hunting opportunities and manageable agricultural conflicts, considering an operational GFP wildlife damage management program is in place to cooperatively work with private landowners.

Beginning in the summer of 2016, North Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma along with South Dakota began operational goose banding in the Central Flyway. As part of the banding assessment, it was determined that an annual quota of 1,500 geese, targeting family groups, would be the goal for South Dakota. GFP has been a strong contributor to this program, banding over 22,000 Canada geese since 2012 and documenting over 3,300 direct recoveries from hunters (Table 1). Harvest rate (recovery rate/reporting rate) analysis indicates harvest rates for banded giant Canada geese in South Dakota ranging from 14-22% during 2012-2024 hunting seasons (Table 1). This harvest rate is similar to what was observed in past research and highlights how populations have expanded under increasingly liberal regulations while hunter participation has declined. In addition, modeled survival rates for the 3 age-classes of Canada geese indicate low survival for a goose population, in large part due to observed high harvest rates (Figure 2). Further monitoring and analysis of band recoveries will aid wildlife managers and inform population dynamics of giant Canada geese in the Central Flyway. This long-term commitment will allow wildlife managers to better monitor vital rates of giant Canada geese into the future. Operational goose banding will be maintained and is a cost-effective method to obtain harvest information, movement data, and population vital rates for South Dakota’s Canada goose population.

Figure 1. South Dakota Canada goose 3-year average spring population index, 1998-2025.

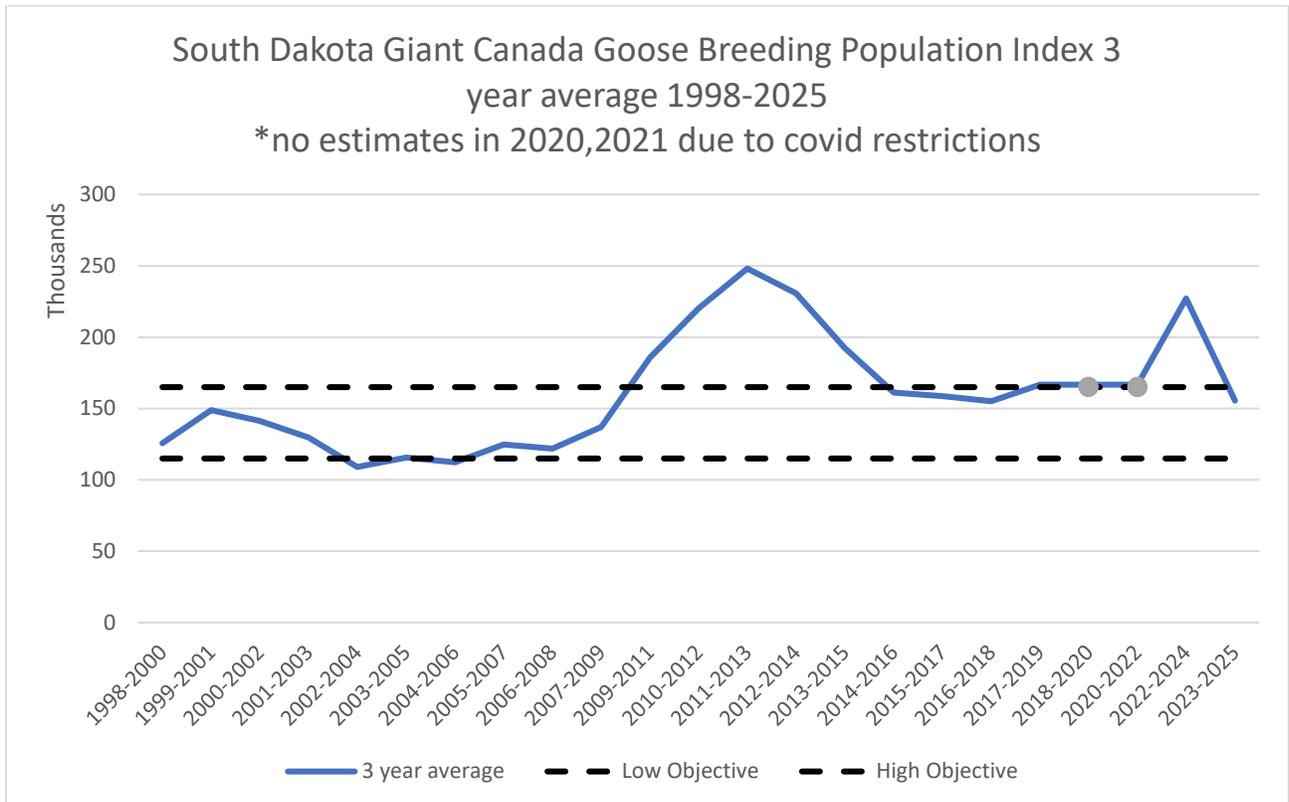
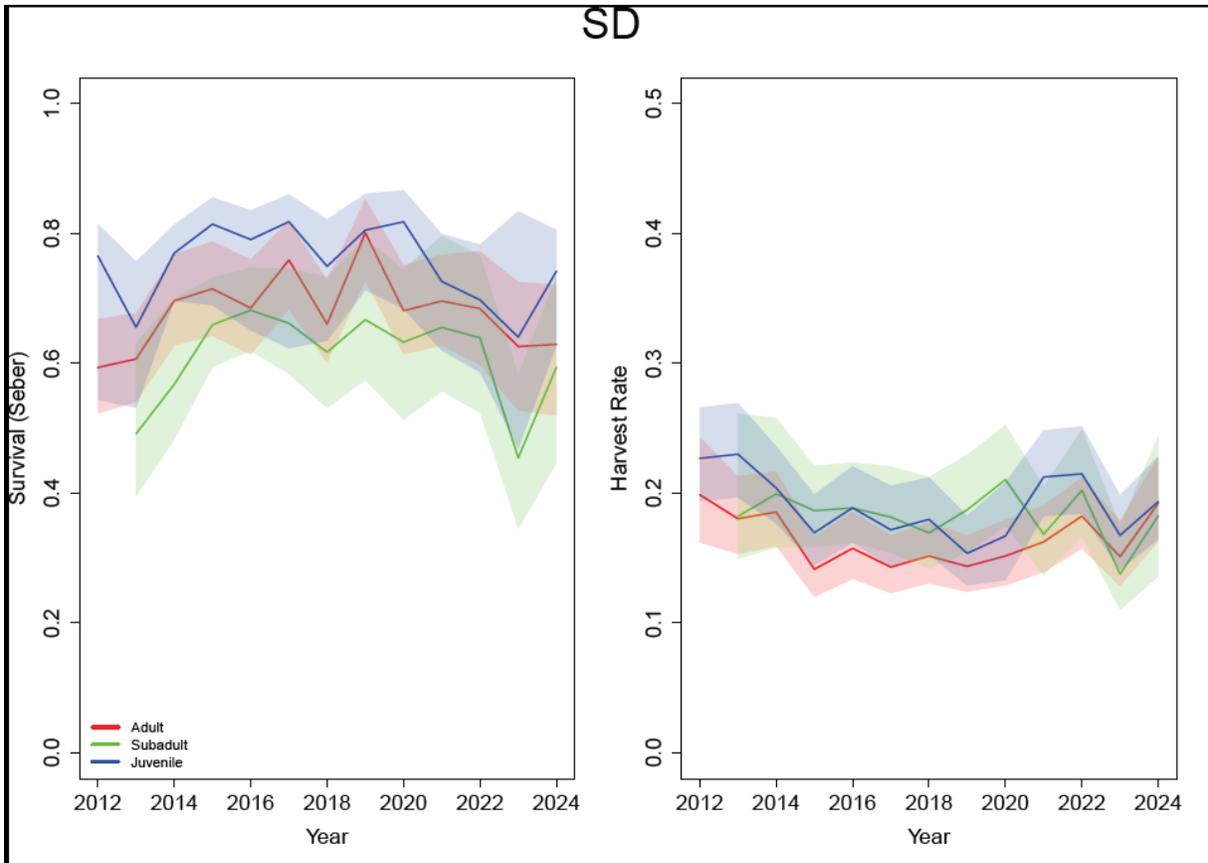


Table 1. South Dakota banded Canada geese, direct recoveries, recovery rate, and harvest rate, 2012-2024.

Year	# Banded	# Direct Recoveries	Recovery Rate	Harvest Rate (Recovery Rate/.84)
2012	1,824	307	17%	20%
2013	1,872	313	17%	20%
2014	2,503	404	16%	19%
2015	2,179	259	12%	14%
2016	1,938	311	16%	19%
2017	1,529	203	13%	16%
2018	1,625	252	15%	18%
2019	1,475	178	12%	14%
2020	584	90	15%	18%
2021	1,510	289	19%	22%
2022	1,716	283	17%	20%
2023	1,684	206	12%	15%
2024	1,657	275	17%	20%
2025	1,521	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
Combined	22,096 (total)	3,370 (total)	15% (mean)	18% (mean)

Figure 2. Canada goose survival and harvest rates for three age classes, 2012-2024.



Hunting Season Structure

The primary mortality factor for Canada goose populations in South Dakota is hunter harvest. Areas included in Unit 1 (September 1-December 16) are primarily managed for locally breeding geese while Unit 2 (Monday closest to November 1 through the Sunday closest to February 15) primarily targets staging dark geese later in the season. When populations exceed objective levels, GFP will follow a liberal harvest strategy, using all available days and daily bag allowed by the federal framework during Early Fall (September 1-30) and regular Canada goose hunting seasons in Unit 1 (October 1- December 16; Table 3, Figure 3). The maximum number of days allowed for hunting Canada geese is 107 days per the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. When populations are within the objective range of 115,000-165,000 a moderate harvest strategy will be recommended, using the full framework during the regular Canada goose hunting season in

Unit 1. Adjusting bag limits and season lengths during the August Management Take (currently the third Saturday in August through the end of the month) and Early Fall season may be warranted. If populations fall below objective levels, a restrictive harvest strategy will be followed (Table 3).

Like trends seen in other hunter groups, goose hunter participation has declined in recent years. Not only is hunter participation critical for the population management of Canada geese, but it is also an important funding source that benefits wetland conservation. GFP encourages hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3) efforts of waterfowl hunters in various ways including free hunting equipment rental, aligning state and federal waterfowl hunting regulations, removing unnecessary barriers to participation such as overly complex regulations, public hunting access, and providing targeted outreach opportunities to recruit and reactivate hunters. Operational goose banding will be maintained and is a cost-effective method to obtain harvest information, movement data, and population vital rates for South Dakota’s Canada goose population.

Table 2. 2025-2026 Canada goose season structure.

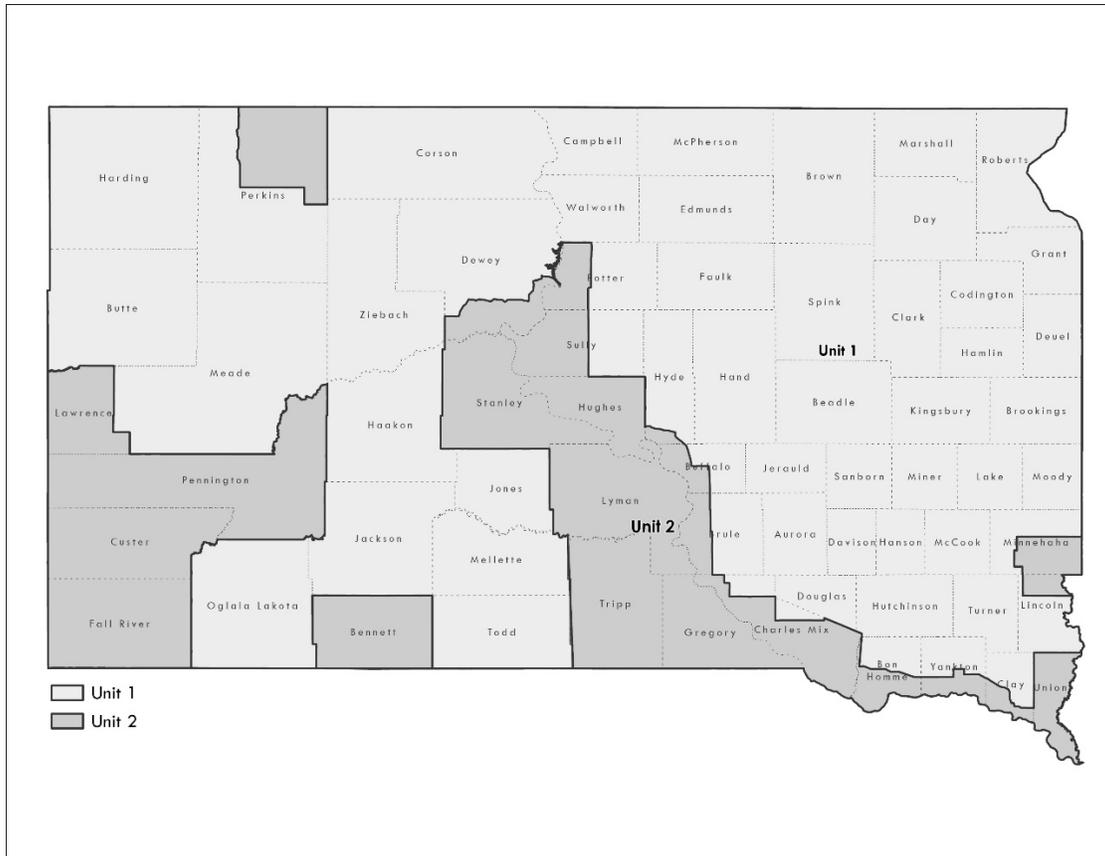
Season	Open Area	Dates	Residents	Nonresidents
August Management Take	2 counties WR; 13 counties ER	Aug 16 – 31	Unlimited	Not Available
Early Fall	Unit 1	Sep 1 - 30	Unlimited	Limited Draw
Regular	Unit 1	Oct 1 - Dec 16	Unlimited	Limited Draw
Regular	Unit 2	Nov 3 - Feb 15	Unlimited	Limited Draw

*WR=West River
ER=East River

Table 3. Canada goose management decision table.

"MANAGEMENT TOOLS"	RESTRICTIVE MANAGEMENT	MODERATE MANAGEMENT	LIBERAL MANAGEMENT
	<i>Increase Population</i>	<i>Maintain Population</i>	<i>Decrease Population</i>
Justification	<p>Canada goose population below objective based on available biological data. Also consider hunter survey comments, landowner comments public comments, and field staff observations.</p> <p>Goose depredation on row crops is expected to be limited and should be adequately addressed through the wildlife damage management program.</p> <p>Non-lethal tools will primarily be used, including the promotion of alternative vegetation near wetlands; however, unique situations may be addressed using nest work or kill permits.</p>	<p>Canada goose population at objective based on available biological data. Also consider hunter survey comments, landowner comments, public comments, and field staff observations.</p> <p>Manageable Canada goose depredation on row crops is expected and should be adequately addressed through wildlife damage management program.</p> <p>Non-lethal tools will primarily be used, including the promotion of alternative vegetation near wetlands; but chronic depredation issues may be addressed using nest work or kill permits.</p>	<p>Canada goose population above objective based on available biological data. Also consider hunter survey comments, landowner comments, public comments, and field staff observations.</p> <p>Goose depredation on row crops is expected to be above desired levels. The wildlife damage management program has difficulty addressing requests in a timely manner. Non-lethal tools will be used, including the promotion of alternative vegetation near wetlands; but nest work and kill permits may be used more frequently to row crop damage.</p> <p>Indicators for this category would be moderate to overabundant populations causing moderate to major depredation issues.</p>
Spring Population Index (3-Year Average)	Below 115,000	115,000-165,000	Above 165,000
Regular Season Days	Full Framework	Full Framework	Full Framework
Regular Season Daily Bag	Daily Bag: Unit 1: 4 Units 2: 4	Daily Bag: Unit 1: 8 Units 2: 4	Daily Bag: Unit 1: 8 Units 2: 4
Early Fall Season (Unit 1)	Yes (Evaluate Season Length) Daily Bag: 4	Yes Daily Bag: 8	Yes Daily Bag: 15
August Management Take	Available only for human safety concerns.	Available in areas with unacceptable levels of crop depredation or human safety concerns. Daily Bag: 8	Available in areas with unacceptable levels of crop depredation or human safety concerns. Daily Bag: 15

Figure 3. Current Canada goose unit boundaries.



Canada Goose Damage Management

GFP’s Canada goose depredation abatement program and services are multi-faceted and designed to prevent or reduce crop damage caused by Canada geese. GFP’s non-lethal abatement techniques include permanent fence, temporary electric fence, temporary and permanent vegetative barriers (i.e. wheat or grass buffer strips), food plots, and various hazing techniques (i.e. propane cannons, cracker-shells, kites and flagging, coyote decoys, and harassment). GFP also utilizes Special State Canada Goose Permit. Canada goose take permit, obtained from the USFWS, which allows GFP and its sub-permittees to conduct resident Canada

goose population management and control activities through egg addling, trapping, and lethal take of Canada geese. These population control activities take into consideration human health and safety, and protection of personal or public property, in accordance with all conditions specified in 50 CFR 21.26. This permit allows GFP the annual take of up to 9,000 Canada geese and 2,500 nests. Use of this permit varies due to the number of local birds, overall population levels, effectiveness of non-lethal techniques, severity of crop damage, and the history of crop damage at certain locations.

Canada Goose Habitat and Access Management

GFP will support wetland and grassland habitat conservation efforts across South Dakota by providing technical, financial, and program delivery support to landowners through various programs and practices designed to meet habitat goals and objectives outlined in the South Dakota State Tactical Plan – a state specific stepped down wetland and grassland habitat conservation plan component of the 2017 Prairie Pothole Joint Venture Implementation plan. GFP will also play a critical role in the enhancement, restoration, and protection of wetlands and grasslands through its advocacy efforts and contributions to shaping Farm Bill conservation program opportunities that provide ecosystem services beneficial to South Dakota, the Prairie Pothole region, and the Northern Great Plains.

GFP owns approximately 725 Game Production Areas (GPAs) in fee title with over 286,000 acres in South Dakota. The USFWS owns 1,000 Waterfowl Production Areas in South Dakota totaling nearly 150,000 acres. Beginning in 2009, GFP began a groundbreaking habitat and access program in partnership with USDA called the James River Watershed Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). As of the fall of 2025, over 86,000 acres were enrolled into this highly successful habitat and access program. In 2022, a second CREP was launched by GFP and USDA in the Big Sioux River Watershed creating more targeted habitat and public access in South Dakota. As of the fall of 2025 this CREP has over 4,500 acres enrolled. South Dakota GFP leases roughly 1.4 million acres as part of its Walk-In Area (WIA) program, including 121,000 waterfowl COOP acres that allow field hunting opportunity prime Canada goose hunting areas. GFP also currently leases over 25,000 acres of private land in Hughes and Sully Counties as part of the Lower Oahe Waterfowl Access Program. This unique mixture of decoy and pass shooting opportunities provides public access to late-season Canada goose hunting on private land adjacent to Lake Oahe.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Objective 1: Provide a Comprehensive Wildlife Damage Management (WDM) Program

Strategies:

- A. Respond to all Canada goose depredation concerns on private land in a timely manner.
- B. Annually evaluate effectiveness of GFP WDM staff depredation techniques and services such as: non-lethal abatement techniques including permanent fence, temporary electric fence, feeding sites, vegetative buffers, and various hazing techniques (i.e. propane cannons, crackers shells, flags, coyote decoys, and harassment).
- C. Continue to obtain and utilize the USFWS Special State Canada Goose Permit to address Canada goose depredation issues in areas deemed appropriate.
- D. Continue to work with municipalities and other entities to address human safety and health concerns regarding Canada geese.
- E. Continue to use hunting opportunities where and when possible, to address Canada goose depredation and other human conflicts.
- F. Continue to refine and investigate techniques that can minimize agricultural damage to private property.

Objective 2: Promote the Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation (R3) Efforts of Goose Hunters in South Dakota

Strategies:

- A. Continue to reduce regulatory barriers to goose hunting participation by simplifying regulations where possible.
- B. Provide the maximum, sustainable goose hunting opportunity consistent with federal frameworks and population status.
- C. Continue to provide educational and mentorship opportunities through programs like Outdoor Campus hunting classes, Becoming an Outdoor Women, and youth/novice hunting events.
- D. Continue to provide waterfowl hunting equipment loaner trailers to hunters across the state.

Objective 3: Continue to Provide Access Opportunities for Hunter Access in South Dakota

Strategies:

- A. Continue to promote, utilize, and target enrollment in GFP's private lands hunting access programs, specifically for Canada goose hunting opportunities.
 - a. Annually enroll an additional 500 acres in the Co-op Walk in Area program to increase waterfowl field hunting opportunities.
 - b. Enroll new lands and renew existing expiring contracts in the James River Watershed CREP (100,000 acre cap).
 - c. Enroll new lands in the Big Sioux Watershed CREP (25,000 acre cap).
- B. Continue to provide up-to-date private land hunting access and public hunting land maps and other materials.
- C. Continue to develop, improve, and maintain waterfowl access trails and ramps on Game Production Areas to improve access to the water with boats, decoys, and hunting equipment.
- D. Promote the use of the online Waterfowl Hunting Access map to locate waterfowl access trails, primitive boat ramps, and decoy drop points on public lands.
- E. Continue to utilize social media and other effective communications methods to promote and encourage hunters to ask permission to hunt private lands.

Objective 4: Cooperatively Monitor Canada Goose Breeding Population and Harvest

Strategies:

- A. Continue to use and support operational monitoring programs including the Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey, federal parts collection survey, Harvest Information Program, and GFP harvest surveys.
 - a. Assist where possible at the annual Wing Bee where waterfowl parts are sexed, aged and identified.

- b. Continue GFP staff representation on the Central Flyway Council and Technical Committee. These meetings facilitate the exchange of information between member states and USFWS on survey techniques and provide a venue to advocate for federal operational monitoring programs.
- B. Continue to conduct annual harvest surveys for August Management Take, Early Fall, and the Regular Canada goose seasons.
 - a. Use harvest data, hunter effort information, and hunter satisfaction data to inform potential regulation adjustments.

Objective 5: Use Operational Goose Banding to Monitor Harvest Rates and Survival

Strategies:

- A. Band a minimum of 1,500 Canada geese annually across eastern South Dakota as part of the Central Flyway cooperative banding program.
 - a. Use Canada goose recoveries for harvest rate and survival analysis to inform season structure and bag limits.

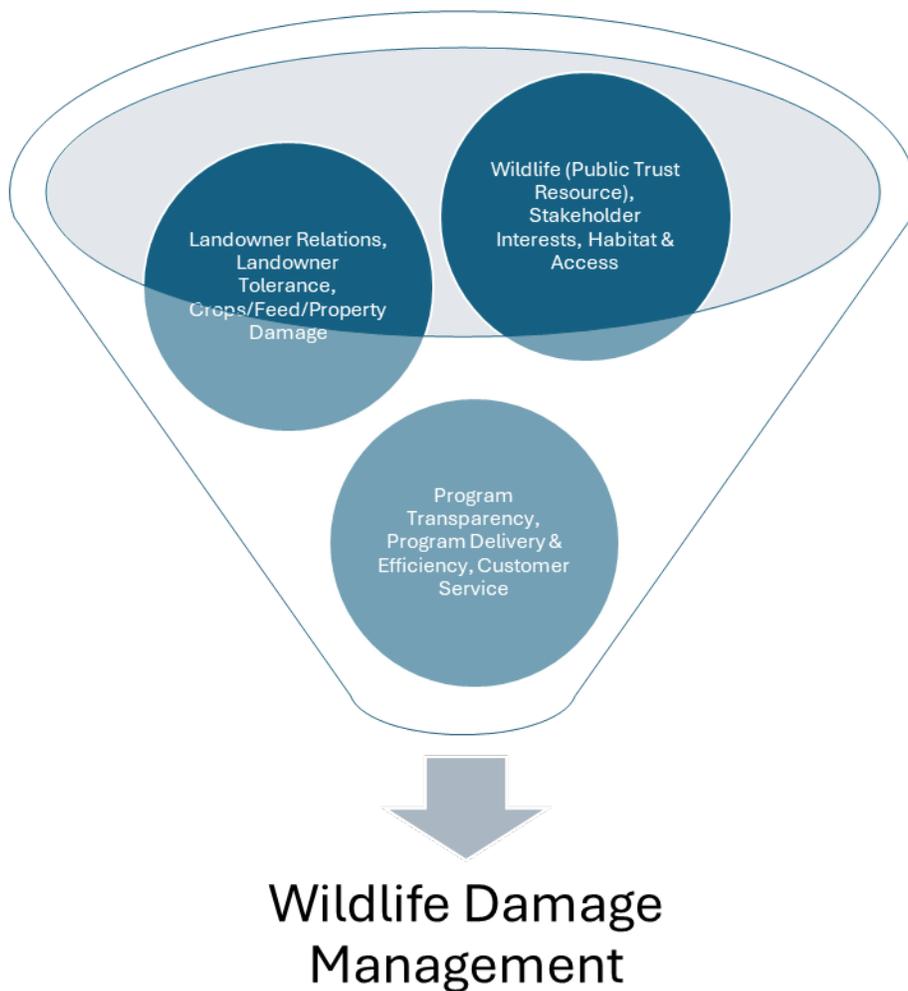
Objective 6: Promote the establishment, restoration, and enhancement of Canada goose habitat on public and private lands

Strategies:

- A. Continue active involvement in the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture (PPJV) through participation on both the management board and technical committee.
 - a. Continue to support and implement PPJV wetland restoration, enhancement, and protection through the PPJV state tactical plan.
 - b. Continue to restore and enhance wetland and grassland habitat on private lands through GFP's private lands habitat and access program.
 - c. Continue to provide technical assistance on private lands that support Canada goose populations.

- d. Advocate for wetland friendly policies on a state and national level through the PPJV Policy Committee, Natural Resources Conservation Service Technical Committee, and other venues.

SOUTH DAKOTA Wildlife Damage Management Action Plan 2026 – 2030



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

**WILDLIFE DIVISION REPORT 2026-01
March 2026**

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

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

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

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

Recommended Citation:

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INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND ACTION ITEMS

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

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

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

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

Action 1.1.2: Support aerial predator control methods:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

2026-2028

Habitat Stamp Strategic Approach



SOUTH DAKOTA GAME, FISH AND PARKS
HABITAT STAMP

**THIS IS A HABITAT
STAMP PROJECT**

Learn about how the habitat stamp
benefits South Dakota by scanning the QR Code
below or visiting gfp.sd.gov.



Special thanks to our project partners



Agency Mission

We serve and connect people and families to the outdoors through effective management of our state's parks, fisheries, and wildlife resources.

Agency Vision

We will conserve our state's outdoor heritage to enhance the quality of life for current and future generations.

Executive Summary

The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) is charged with managing South Dakota's public lands and natural resources for current and future generations. South Dakota is home to abundant wildlife and recreational opportunities and one of the primary goals of GFP is to optimize the quantity and quality of sustainable hunting, fishing, camping, trapping and other outdoor recreational opportunities. As such, one of the highest priorities for GFP is habitat and access. To meet fish and wildlife resource stewardship responsibilities and provide opportunities for the public to use and enjoy these resources, GFP strives to continually improve habitat and access management of public and private lands. This is accomplished by expanding and creating new partnerships with landowners and conservation groups and remaining focused on improving existing aquatic and terrestrial habitat on private and public lands while seeking additional habitat acres. Furthermore, it is enhanced by providing additional public access to privately owned lands while continuously improving access to existing public lands. With the establishment of the Habitat Stamp, a new revenue source was created to help accomplish this. This strategic approach is meant to guide actions for the next three years as to how those funds are expended to accomplish projects that benefit both the wildlife and users of South Dakota.

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Introduction:

During the 2020 South Dakota Legislative Session, Senate Bill 75 was passed to create a Habitat Stamp that would add an annual fee to all South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) license buyers to be used solely for terrestrial and aquatic habitat and access projects in South Dakota (SDCL 41-6-85; Appendix A). As of July 1, 2020, a Habitat Stamp is required for anyone 18 years of age or older when purchasing or applying for a hunting, fishing or furbearer license in South Dakota. The annual fee for the Habitat Stamp is \$10 for residents and \$25 for nonresidents. However, a purchase of the Habitat Stamp is not required for the one-day hunting or fishing license, youth hunting license, private shooting preserve license, hunt for habitat application fee, or landowner hunting license. Habitat Stamp funds associated with fishing license sales will fund aquatic habitat projects on public waters across South Dakota. Habitat stamp funds associated with hunting and furbearer license sales will fund wildlife habitat developments and public access improvements on GFP lands across South Dakota. If someone purchases a combination license, funds will be split evenly between terrestrial and aquatic habitat. The Habitat Stamp purchase is associated with the first license purchased by an individual and is not necessary for subsequent license purchases.

Approximately, \$5 million are generated annually from the sales of Habitat Stamps. While it may vary interannually, the split between aquatic and terrestrial has been around 50/50. The use of these funds is limited to projects that directly benefit habitat and access and cannot be used for purchase of property and equipment. A detailed report of expenditures is provided annually to the Government Operations and Audit Committee (Appendix B).

Aquatic Habitat Stamp funds are estimated to be approximately \$2.5 million annually. These will be used for projects in three categories:

1. Large-scale projects– Projects of this nature can come in many forms and a “one size fits all” approach by staff is unrealistic. When determining what is considered “large scale”, considerations of cost, staff time, partners involved, etc., will be taken into account. As such, no set thresholds exist to determine what qualifies; however, a clear separation would be evident when comparing all projects accomplished within the program annually. In certain cases, GFP may be the lead agency (e.g., renovation of the Lower Booth Dam on the Ft. Pierre National Grasslands) or simply a partner with another entity acting as the lead (e.g., West Dam in Custer, SD).
2. Small-scale habitat and access projects– Designed to improve water quality, access, fish habitat, etc. These projects are smaller in nature and can include activities such as dredging, aeration, stream restoration, artificial structure placement and access development/leases (e.g., shore fishing, urban and community fisheries).
3. Dam infrastructure improvements– On an annual basis, all GFP-owned dams are inspected for maintenance needs by internal staff. If additional information or an in-depth inspection is needed, a private engineering firm will be hired. The associated inspection form allows for “smaller scale” needs to be address annually. Larger repair needs will be worked into a priority schedule based on dam hazard classification (low, significant, or high) as well as

dam priority. The dam priority is based on a rating system considering the reservoir characteristics, land quality, and dam characteristics.

Terrestrial Habitat Stamp funds are estimated to be approximately \$2.5 to \$3 million annually. These will be used for projects in the following categories:

1. Habitat improvements on GFP owned property – Projects on land owned by GFP and includes native grass seedings, pollinator plantings, tree plantings, food plots, grass and forest enhancement, and grazing infrastructure.
2. Access improvements for GFP owned property – Projects will provide new or improve access for users on GFP owned property. Projects of this nature include waterfowl access trails, road and trail improvement on and to get to these lands, primitive waterfowl boat launches, handicap access trails and access points, additional parking areas and other various access projects.
3. Opening private property up for public hunting and fishing access – Consist of private lands being enrolled in public access programs for hunting and fishing while promoting sound habitat management. Programs will include the James River Watershed and Big Sioux River Watershed Conservation Reserve Enhancement Programs (CREP), which open lands up for hunting and fishing. The Walk-In Area (WIA) program will also be part of this category and opens private land up for public hunting.

Habitat and access staffing:

Having staff dedicated to habitat and access is nothing new to GFP. However, with the addition of these funds, an increased emphasis was made by the Wildlife Division to staff the program at a level where revenue from the sale of Habitat Stamps could be efficiently and effectively translated into projects across the state that benefited wildlife habitat and user access.

Aquatics:

A total of six Aquatic Habitat and Access Biologists (AHABs) are located across the state. To provide local support, an AHAB is located in each of the four administrative regions. Due to the large and diverse area that the western administrative region of GFP encompasses, two AHABs are located in this region. Additionally, to assist with the large number of aquatic resources found in northeast administrative region, a Wildlife Resource Biologist is located in Watertown.

Terrestrial:

Each of the four administrative regions across the state have public lands habitat staff that are comprised of a program manager, resource biologists, conservation foreman, and conservation technicians. Annually, regions will also hire seasonal staff along with interns to assist with projects through the spring, summer and fall. These employees implement the development and management of habitat on Game Production Areas (GPAs). Historically, there have been few

changes in the number of full-time employees for habitat management on GPAs. However, approximately a decade ago GFP developed an agreement with Habitat Forever to begin establishing Habitat Specialist Teams. Habitat Forever is a subsidiary of Pheasants Forever who provide for hire full-service habitat assistance teams to private landowners and state agencies in several states across the country. These teams are made up of one full-time staff and one seasonal staff that are employees of Habitat Forever. In South Dakota their primary duty is to work directly with regional GFP habitat staff to develop, improve, and manage habitat and access on GPAs. These teams were originally stationed around the state with one in each region. This has since evolved over the years so that each of the four regions now have two teams working on GPAs. These eight teams are funded with GFP dollars. The addition of these teams has significantly increased the number of habitat projects that can be completed annually.

Outside of management of publicly owned lands GFP increased the number of habitat biologists working with private landowners from four to twelve during 2020. Each region has three Private Lands Habitat Biologists who work on habitat projects on private land but also spend a great deal of time working on hunting access. These staff deliver GFP's private lands habitat and access programs, promote the James River Watershed and Big Sioux River Watershed CREP, promote and enroll land into the Walk-In Area and Controlled Hunting Access Program, promote USDA conservation programs such as Conservation Reserve Program, and work closely with other conservation partners. These additional staff will continue to enroll private land into public hunting access across the state creating more opportunities for hunters.

Partner biologists:

GFP has partnered with several non-government organizations (NGOs) to support biologists within their organizations to work on private land habitat and access programs in South Dakota. Some of these include Pheasants Forever, National Wild Turkey Federation, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, American Bird Conservancy, along with others. In most of these cases, GFP is providing match dollars that the organization uses to acquire additional federal grant dollars to support the position. These positions collaborate with GFP staff to meet with landowners and enroll new lands in habitat and access programs across the state.

Staff salary, travel and per diem:

Expenses by GFP staff for salary, travel and per diem, directly connected to new habitat stamp project development and implementation, will be covered by Habitat Stamp funds. New time and expense codes have been created to accurately track these expenses. There are development and implementation codes for both aquatic and terrestrial staff to use to keep these expenses separated.

Development coding will be used for activities related to the planning/design of an approved terrestrial habitat stamp project such as meetings, scheduling and coordination. Coding of staff is generally related to office hours; however, it can include travel and per diem for site visits associated with planning.

Implementation coding will be used for activities related to the implementation/construction of an approved terrestrial habitat stamp project. This can include travel and per diem for picking up supplies and materials, onsite installation, site preparation, planting, construction, or assembly and general field work required for completion of a project.

In addition to development and implementation codes a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) code has been developed for terrestrial staff. This coding will be used for activities such as reviewing, approving, and sign maintenance on new or previously enrolled Big Sioux River Watershed CREP contracts.

These codes will only be used when working on projects that will be funded with the Habitat Stamp.

Habitat and access project types:

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks owned property:

Projects terrestrial in nature will take place on or as part of access to GPAs, Water Access Areas (WAA), and State Parks and Recreation Areas. These properties are owned, operated, and managed by the GFP and are located across the state (Figure 1). Although smaller in size, GPAs and WAAs are more abundant east of the Missouri River creating opportunities for a greater number of projects in that part of the state. Projects will be considered on United States Forest Service property, School and Public Lands, Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs), and other publicly accessible properties across the state where public hunting is allowed and when the jurisdictional agency and GFP mutually agree on a project.

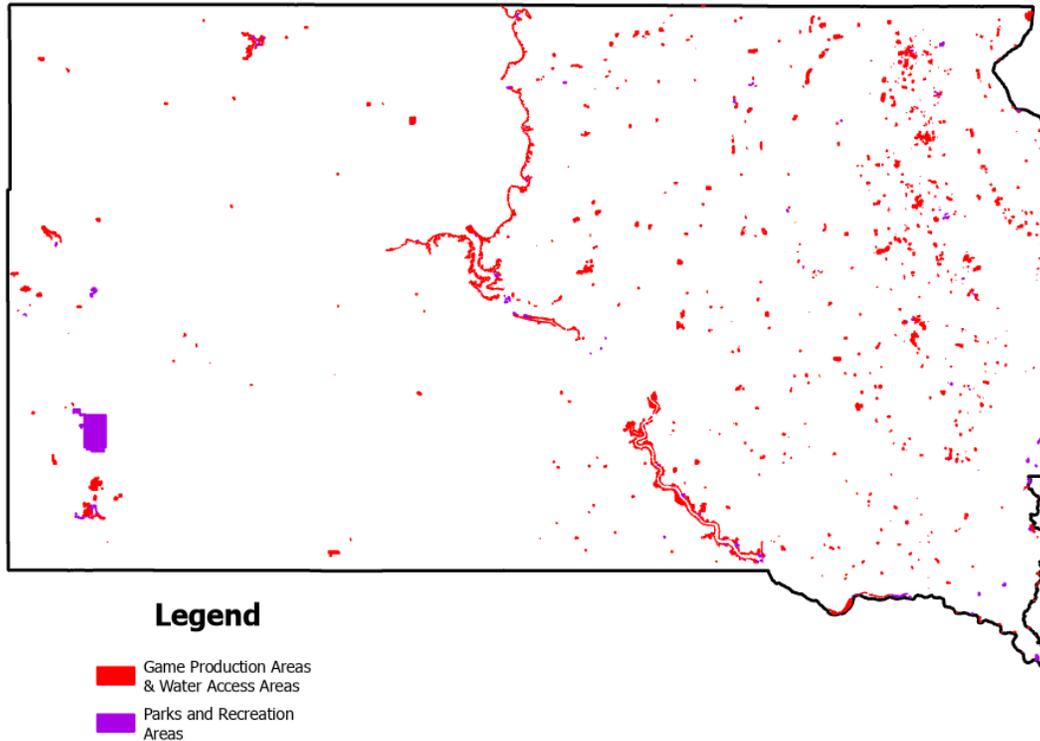


Figure 1. Distribution of South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks owned property.

Private property:

Access to private owned property for hunting and fishing will take place through GFP access programs. These programs include the James River Watershed CREP, Big Sioux Watershed CREP, Aquatic Access Leases, and WIA program. These properties remain owned and operated by the landowner and Habitat Stamp funds will simply be used as payment to lease these properties for public hunting and fishing access. All these programs are voluntary in nature with cooperating landowners.

Public waters:

Impoundments (man-made lakes):

Impoundments throughout South Dakota are reaching or have already surpassed their useful life expectancy. Most of these structures were constructed during the Federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) programs during the 1920's through the 1940's. South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks owns 77 impoundments and has an interest in approximately 82 additional that are owned by South Dakota School and Public Lands. Several of these impoundments are suffering from failing infrastructure such as control structures, spillways or the dam itself. These impoundments have high levels of sediment loading and in turn excessive nutrient loading that leads to algae blooms and low

dissolved oxygen levels, during both summer and winter. Studies have also shown that small impoundments play a significant role in people's quality of life, even in remote locations. Many of these impoundments are "aging-out" and are no longer considered productive. In situations like this, steps to mitigate reservoir aging can include dredging, aeration and placement of fish habitat structures.

Natural lakes:

Most of the natural lakes within South Dakota are in the eastern half of the state. Many of the larger natural lakes in the area are highly developed. These are destination lakes for many people, both residents and non-residents. Due to development, many of these lakes have lost their functioning shoreline habitat through conversion of native plant materials to highly manicured and landscaped yards. Examples of natural lakes with high percentages of development would include Lake Kampeska, Lake Poinsett, Pickerel Lake, and Lake Madison; to a lesser degree: Enemy Swim Lake, Roy Lake, Blue Dog Lake and Pelican Lake. With many of the larger natural lakes having limited land available for future development, development is trending to smaller, more marginal bodies of water. Shoreline development expedites the degradation of the water quality through erosion and excessive nutrients. To mitigate these factors, shoreline stabilization projects and planting of native vegetation are useful tools.

Rivers and streams:

Rivers and streams in South Dakota are very diverse. Most of the current work on rivers and streams in South Dakota has been focused in the Black Hills area. The Black Hills area is defined by numerous narrow valleys, high plateaus, and well-defined drainages. A lot of the streams in the Black Hills are highly modified with the construction of numerous small dams by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's and 1940's. They still provide excellent fisheries but are now faced with sediment, vegetation, structure, and stream warming issues downstream of the dams. Other issues facing streams is pollution, excessive nutrient loading, and loss of habitat (especially around urban areas).

Western South Dakota rivers make up 7 main drainages that are tributaries for the Missouri River from the west. These tributaries and the small rivers, streams, and intermittent streams that carve out the rugged terrain of the high plains are the basis for most of the aquatic habitat in western South Dakota.

Central South Dakota is dominated by the Missouri River, which is the longest river system in North America. The Missouri River is the most altered aquatic management area in South Dakota consisting of four major dams that have severely altered the form and function of the river and the associated aquatic species assemblages. Stretches of free-flowing river only exist below Fort Randall Dam and Gavin's Point Dam.

Eastern South Dakota rivers are defined by the most recent glacial event which left rolling plains and potholes. Three major aquatic ecosystems are the James, Vermillion, and Big Sioux River

drainages with their associated tributary creeks make up the bulk of the aquatic habitat found in eastern South Dakota.

Terrestrial projects on publicly owned property:

There are several types of terrestrial projects that will be funded with Habitat Stamp revenue. However, the vast majority can be grouped into the following categories.

Native grass and pollinator plantings

Grassland habitats are a critical on the landscape in South Dakota for many wildlife species. This habitat provides nesting cover important for the reproduction of pheasants, grouse, waterfowl, turkeys, and many other upland nesting bird species. These projects can have one of the greatest impacts on production of wildlife as well as providing quality cover for users to hunt and harvest game.

In general, these projects will consist of seeding down existing cropland to diverse stands of native grass and forbs or by converting unproductive old Smooth brome and Kentucky bluegrass fields into diverse stands of native grasses and forbs. Projects of this nature usually required one to three years of site preparation time and one to two years for establishment once seed is planted. Seed mixes in most cases will be a diverse mixture of 40 or more species of native grasses and forbs. In some locations pollinator plantings will be completed that contain relatively few grass species and are dominated by flowering forbs that will bloom throughout the growing season. These pollinator plots serve as brood rearing habitat for species, such as pheasants, who's young require an abundance of insects as a food source. These projects will be completed by GFP staff, and through contracts with conservation districts and private land management contractors.

Woody habitat plantings

Woody cover and shelterbelts play an important role in South Dakota for wildlife, especially during severe winters. Like grassland, woody cover provides habitat for a broad range of species. This habitat provides wildlife cover, food, bedding and fawning area and travel corridors among other things. These projects involve a year of site preparation followed by planting. Once trees are planted establishment takes approximately three to five years before the planting can be selfsustained. Establishment methods include weed barrier fabric, tillage, mowing, and spraying in-between rows and trees to minimize competition. These plantings are a minimum of eight rows wide, and many times ten or more. A diverse mix of tree and shrub species will be used with consideration given to those that produce fruit, seeds, and nuts valuable to wildlife. Species with short maximum height will be placed on the outside rows with gradual increases in species height to the center of the shelterbelt. This design provides the best cover and protection for wildlife species.

These projects will be completed by GFP staff, and through contracts with conservation districts and private land management contractors.

Food plots

Food sources for wildlife can have an impact on overall body condition and reproduction. Although there are many food sources found on the landscape, supplementing with food plots in strategic places can be beneficial. Food plots are typically located in protected areas near shelterbelts and other good cover. This setup reduces risks to wildlife and the travel distance between food and cover.

Food plots funded with Habitat Stamp revenue will include corn, sorghum, soybeans, sunflowers, small grain, and many other upland game and deer mixes. These plots will vary in size from as small as 1 acre up to 10 or more acres depending on the location and other factors. Beyond the benefit to wildlife many hunters seek out food plots as they tend to concentrate game and increase hunter success. These plantings are annual in nature and are replanted year after year. Using Habitat Stamp funds for this type of project will be primarily done under a contract with a local agricultural producer or private land management company.

Grassland and forest enhancement (i.e., undesirable woody species removal)

Undesirable woody species have a significant impact on grassland and forest ecosystems. In grassland habitats, species such as Eastern Red Cedar, Green Ash, Elm species, and Buckthorn to list a few will self-seed and invade. As woody species continue to grow the grassland habitat availability required for upland nesting birds is degraded thus reducing their reproduction. Some grassland bird species will avoid grasslands with visual obstructions woody species create. Habitat stamp funding will be used to hire contractors to remove woody species from grasslands. Retaining these diverse upland grassland habitats will greatly benefit wildlife species and game species available to hunters.

Forests can be enhanced by removing undesirable and invasive woody species that tend to dominate and become monocultures. Examples of this may include removing invasive buckthorn from an understory allowing other native shrub and tree species to grow and regenerate. Another example would be the removal of pines or cedars from a forest understory to reduce competition for a regenerating young oak or aspen stands. These young, desired tree species will be the forest of the future that wildlife is dependent upon. Additionally, a diverse understory provides browse important for ungulates and other species.

This type of project will usually involve a cut, stack, and burn or a grind-mulch in place method. In most cases it will require forestry equipment, however some handwork may also be done. Herbicide treatments may also be required to keep undesirables from growing back. These projects will be completed by hiring a contractor with required equipment to complete the work.

Access roads and trail improvement

With over 720 GPAs scattered across the state and various other publicly owned property retaining good access routes to all areas is important to users. Some roads and trails are requiring improvements to open them back up for vehicle access to these public areas. Funds will be used for culverts, reshaping, and graveling roads and trails. In some instances, a new

road or trail will be created where no road or trail historically existed. In these cases, this new road or trail will create access to a property the public previously maybe had no or limited access. With both a road improvement or development, GFP will work with and complete an authorized agreement with the jurisdictional owner (State, County, Township) of the road. This however will be unnecessary if the road or trail is located on property owned by GFP.

These projects will usually require up to a year of preparation to meet with local entities, engineers, and contractors to develop a final project scope and plan. Most of these projects will be completed by local contractors and coordinated by GFP staff.

Waterfowl access trails and ramps

Waterfowl hunting can include a fair amount of equipment such as decoys, small boats, etc. The effort to get these items out onto a small wetland or a body of water can be demanding. Habitat stamp funding will be used to install trails and small rock boat ramps to improve and increase opportunities to get on the water with waterfowl hunting gear. These trails will allow vehicles to drive out onto the GPA to drop decoys off near water or launch small boats. In some cases, it will involve improving a trail that already exists or adding a rock ramp at the end of a vehicle trail for launching boats.

These projects can vary in size and can be completed by GFP staff or local contractors. Waterfowl access project are generally multi-use projects as they often benefit other types of aquatic related activities. South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks will partner to install these types of projects on federal WPAs and other property open to the public that is not owned by GFP when opportunities exist.

Grassland management infrastructure

Healthy grasslands are more productive for wildlife and improve opportunities for hunters to harvest game. Managing grasslands to keep them healthy, diverse, and productive can be completed in several ways however grazing is one of the best tools for managers. Grazing is commonly used on GFP property with a prescription that will achieve desired goals and objectives. These typically include reducing invasive cool season grasses, rejuvenating plant vigor, reducing duff, recycling nutrients, promoting native species, diversifying plant community and many others. Grazing infrastructure is needed to complete this management practice. Habitat stamp funding will provide livestock watering resources and cross fencing to develop paddocks to concentrate livestock in desired locations. Watering structures will also provide water resources for wildlife. Installing this infrastructure will allow managers to develop a management plan for rotating livestock around in future years to enhance all grassland on the property.

GFP staff will work with contractors to install this infrastructure and then with local landowners to implement a grazing plan to improve habitat.

Access projects on private land for public hunting and fishing access:

James River Watershed CREP

The South Dakota James River Watershed CREP Project began October 23, 2009. The project is a partnership between the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency and GFP. This voluntary program allows landowners within the watershed to enroll in the program under a 10 or 15-year agreement. Following enrollment land is seeded down primarily to native grasses and forbs. The landowner will receive annual payments from the USDA on a soil based rental rate and other practice incentives. In addition to these annual payments, GFP provides the landowner annual payments that are equal to 31% of the base soil rental rate. This GFP incentive payment opens the property for public hunting and fishing. The acre cap for this CREP project is 100,000 acres. Habitat Stamp dollars will be used to provide the GFP 31% on the approximately 25,000 acres that remain to be enrolled to reach the acreage cap. This watershed project is located in east central South Dakota and includes Aurora, Beadle, Bon Homme, Brown, Clark, Davison, Day, Douglas, Edmunds, Faulk, Hand, Hanson, Hutchinson, Hyde, Jerauld, Kingsbury, McCook, McPherson, Marshall, Miner, Potter, Roberts, Sanborn, Spink, and Yankton counties. At full enrollment this project creates 100,000 acres of perennial habitat open to the public for hunting and fishing. It also improves water quality, reduces soil erosion, enhances wildlife habitat, creates nesting habitat for pheasants and ducks, as well supports big game, pollinators, songbirds, and other non-game species.

Big Sioux River Watershed CREP

The South Dakota Big Sioux River Watershed CREP Project got underway in November 2022. Modeled after the James River Watershed CREP the guidelines remain the same; however, GFP will provide annual incentive payments of 34% of the base soil rental rate. This cost will be funded by habitat stamp dollars. This watershed CREP has a cap of 25,000 acres located in eastern South Dakota. The watershed includes all or parts of Brookings, Clark, Clay, Codington, Day, Deuel, Grant, Hamlin, Kingsbury, Lake, Lincoln, Marshall, McCook, Minnehaha, Moody, Roberts, Turner, and Union counties. Habitat Stamp funds used to assist in enrolling acres into this program will create 25,000 acres of perennial habitat. These acres will be open to the public for hunting and fishing. This CREP watershed is in a portion of the state that is densely populated and in need of more public places for users to recreate. As with the James River Watershed CREP, this watershed project will also have abundant positive environmental impacts on the landscape and waters in the area.

Walk-in Area program

The WIA program was initiated in 1988 and has been a very successful program ever since. This voluntary program allows landowners to enroll their lands with quality habitat and hunting opportunities into the program. Enrollment into this program opens the land to public hunting in exchange for an annual lease payment provided by GFP to the landowner. Annual lease payments range from \$1 to \$15 per acre. In 2025 over 1.4 million acres were enrolled in the program and open to public hunting. GFP will continue to seek out new enrollments into this

program to add more acres of public hunting access. Annual payments for new contracts may be funded with Habitat Stamp funds. In an effort to enroll tracts for multiple years, GFP has been providing a signing bonus. This bonus can be up to \$10 per acre per the number of years of the contract and is paid upfront. In the southwestern part of South Dakota this bonus payment can be up to \$5/acre/year enrolled. Bonus money is only eligible on multiyear contracts meaning two or more and only on permanent habitat that is undisturbed (not hayed, grazed, burned, etc.) or lands that offer priority big game hunting opportunity. If the cooperator backs out of the contract prior to its expiration, they must repay the entire signing bonus to GFP.

Historically, GFP has sought out the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program Grant (VPA-HIP) and used awarded funds to cover the cost of signing bonuses made on WIA contracts. South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks will continue to seek out these federal grant funds in the future. When grant dollars are not available GFP will use Habitat Stamp funds to cover the cost of WIA contract signing bonuses. This will allow GFP to offer consistent program options to all interested landowners regardless of availability of grant dollars.

Aquatic projects on public waters:

Infrastructure improvements

Maintenance and improvement of infrastructure, such as dams, spillways and boat ramps, is an important component of the Aquatic Habitat and Access Program. Many of the dam and spillway structures are over 80 years old and work is needed to keep them in an operating condition to ensure that fisheries can exist. Maintenance and improvements of structures, typically done by contractors, can vary in scale from small crack sealing to complete replacement.

In-stream habitat diversification

Many rivers and streams across the state have been modified in some shape or fashion, which has decreased the amount of habitat diversification. Some modifications like dams have changed the species composition of drainages. Efforts have been made to provide more habitat diversification back into rivers and streams. Much of the existing work has taken place in the Black Hills management area for the benefit of trout species. The modifications have not only changed the number of different habitats present but also the hydrology of the stream and average water temperature is higher. The primary objectives are to create deep water, remove sediment by flushing, add cover for fish, or add woody structure and food for other organisms. Techniques include channel blocks, boulders, cover logs, root wads, bank cribs, wing deflectors, channel constrictors, revetments, and wedge dams.

Aeration

Aeration is a technique used in lake management to increase the amount of dissolved oxygen content of the water. Aeration is accomplished by several different types of systems for either injecting air, mechanically mixing or agitating the water, or even injecting pure oxygen. By increasing the amount of dissolved oxygen, lakes can see an increase in fish and other aquatic animal habitat, prevent fish kills, improve the quality of domestic and industrial water supplies, and decrease industrial treatment costs. In some cases, aeration has also been observed to reduce nuisance algal blooms and/or have a shift to less objectionable algae species. However, when not used properly, aeration can cause more harm than good. It is important to understand the limitations of aeration and use appropriately.

Fish Habitat Structures – Natural and Artificial

Lakes and impoundments across the state are aging and most are lacking in-lake habitat. Deploying either artificial or natural structures has occurred throughout South Dakota. Natural structures include gravel beds, rock piles/reefs, and submerged/felled trees. Conifers have been submerged by anchoring with cable or cement to create spawning structure for yellow perch and as fish attractants around fishing piers. Other types of trees have been submerged as well, but hardwoods and cedars persist longer. This is a cost-effective technique, as trees can be collected from multiple sources. Some waterbodies have ample shoreline woody habitat, while other waters are lacking nearshore structure.

Gravel bed and rock piles/reefs are more costly but equally effective and much longer lasting. The best time for deployment is during maintenance or drawdowns, with heavy machinery. If this option is not available, they can be deployed off boat/barges equipped to handle the weight. These are also used as offshore habitat as well as fish attractors near shore or fishing piers.

Artificial structures can be commercially built or constructed by staff/groups. Constructed fish habitat can vary in shape and size and can be made from several different materials like plastic pipe or fencing, pallets, or wood. Some examples of more popular artificial structure designs include Pennsylvania porcupine crib and crib Jr., Pennsylvania post clusters, Georgia cube, Pennsylvania black bass nesting structures, Mossback™ fish cities, modified spider blocks, Porcupine Ball™, or Honey Hole™.

Aquatic Access Improvements

Numerous management actions can be taken to improve access to fisheries located on public property. To improve shore fishing opportunities, emergent vegetation has reduced shoreline accessibility, requiring removal of this vegetation to restore shore fishing opportunities. Additionally, the placement of fishing piers and nodes can improve access, including that which meets Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

To improve access to fisheries by watercraft, improvement or installation of boat ramps is the primary approach. Ramps can vary in size from a multi-lane concrete ramp to a primitive

gravel ramp. Location and potential use are primary drivers used in determining the proper size boat ramp for a fishery.

Fisheries renovations

In certain cases, a renovation of a fishery is needed for restoration. This may include a chemical renovation where a piscicide (e.g., rotenone) is used to eliminate the current fish community and then desired species are stocked to re-establish the fishery. Draining of the waterbody is also another approach for a renovation. Many times, dredging of sediments is often associated with the draining as material may be accessed more easily when the system is dry. Regardless of the kind of renovation, this process usually requires a substantial amount of planning and permitting. However, many systems are in need of this effort as reservoir aging and sedimentation have created scenarios where other management actions (e.g., in-lake habitat placement) are not likely to have desired results.

Aquatic projects on private lands:

Shoreline restorations

The Aquatic Shoreline Restoration Program allows private landowners to partner with GFP to restore sections of shoreline to native plants. In many cases, shoreline property is manicured, and the vegetation component lacks complexity (e.g., Kentucky bluegrass). Restoring to native vegetation allows for increased filtering of above ground run-off and bank stabilization.

Access agreements

In many cases access to public waters can be created or improved by working with private landowners. Multiple different options exist to provide public access on private property to public surface waters of the state. One way is through the Fisheries Management Agreement. This program would allow a landowner to receive fisheries management advice and activities by GFP. Additionally, stockings of fish may occur on the waterbody. A financial component also exists and would allow the landowner to be compensated annually. In return, open public access is allowed to the fishery. Another example would be a Aquatic Access Lease where GFP would lease a portion of property that would allow for users to access a waterbody. When available, the addition of a Voluntary Public Access component may allow for certain financial incentives, such as a signing bonus.

Project Identification and Resource Planning:

Terrestrial

In 2018 and 2023 GFP habitat staff completed a statewide GPA assessment. These assessments included evaluating and ranking every GPA and WAA on a scale of 1 to 10 for habitat quality and public use. During this process staff identified potential projects that would improve these areas to bring them to their full potential. Once the Habitat Stamp was enacted staff started and continue to work through each area making improvements. These improvements may include

projects identified during this 2018 or 2023 assessment or any that have been identified since that exercise. Habitat Stamp funds will be used to improve habitat quality and access to these areas above and beyond normal management and projects that would typically be completed. Outside of these assessments experienced habitat staff, along with others throughout GFP, have been identifying opportunities for improvement on these areas for wildlife and users.

Aquatics

Annually aquatic staff, along with staff in GFP, have been meeting regionally to identify aquatic habitat and access projects. This process was something that took place prior to the Habitat Stamp. This process allows input from a broad spectrum of staff including the parks division. Lists of projects continue to be developed and prioritized. Many larger aquatic projects take substantial engineering and preparation before work can begin and be completed. Staff will continue to meet and identify projects to improve habitat and access on public waters.

Resources and partnerships

Projects involve a broad range of people and entities. Beyond GFP staff, these include private contractors, conservation districts, land management companies, engineers, NGO's, federal and state partners, counties, townships, municipalities, landowners, and many others. GFP staff will seek out and work with all entities and partners to provide the best quality project for both users and wildlife. This may be a complex process to navigate, but in the end, it creates a project everyone who's involved with it can support.

Habitat and Access Project Reporting:

Online

The GFP website has a section identified as "Where the Money Goes": <https://gfp.sd.gov/where-the-money-goes/>. A Habitat Stamp dashboard has been set up through this section so the public can view a map showing locations of Habitat Stamp projects, with many projects containing photos. They can also view an itemized list of projects along with their cost. This public reporting method provides clear transparency on how Habitat Stamp dollars are being spent. The map will be updated throughout the year as projects are completed.

Government Operations and Audit Committee (GOAC)

Annually, GFP staff will develop and present a report to GOAC following the end of a fiscal year. This report will include a general overview of the number of various types of projects completed, a detailed itemized project list including cost, and a map of project locations across the state (Figure 3).

Aquatic, Terrestrial, and Private Lands Hunting Access Habitat Stamp Project Locations

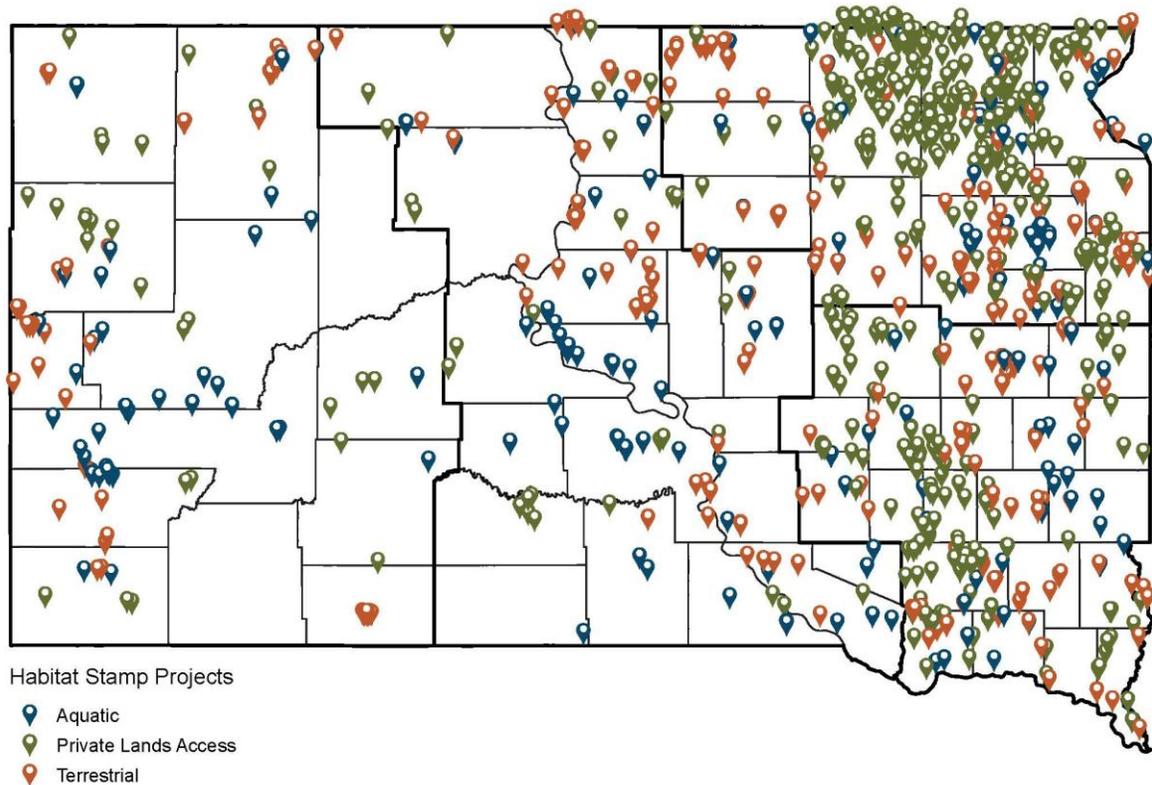


Figure 3. Locations of completed project across South Dakota using Habitat Stamp funds through July of 2025.

Social media platforms

The GFP communications team will also share Habitat Stamp funded projects, photos, information, and success stories across various platforms. This effort will continue to share with the public how this money is positively impacting public land and waters and ultimately their experience hunting, fishing, and trapping.

Signage

Signs have been developed for the field as another way for users to identify Habitat Stamp projects. Signs 12” wide by 18” tall will be installed on metal posts next to completed Habitat Stamp funded projects where applicable (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Signage posted at locations of completed projects using completed Habitat Stamp funds.

Challenges:

Terrestrial:

Site preparation

Various projects that will be funded with Habitat Stamp dollars require site preparation. These projects will include, but are not limited, to native grass seedings, woody habitat plantings, and food plots. These types of projects require soil bed preparation for up to three years in advance. This can create a challenge in the ability for staff to implement projects quickly forcing projects to sit in the planning phase until sites are ready. Staff will diligently plan and start this preparation phase of these types of projects as soon as they are identified. Staff will also consider the overarching volume of projects scheduled and funding available to ensure project success.

Weather

Weather conditions will play an enormous role in the volume of projects that can be completed and the success of those projects. Some projects that include planting or seeding require soil conditions conducive for implements and equipment to function. Other projects such as road and trail improvements will also be highly impacted. Unfavorable conditions like flooding, drought, cold, snow, or prolonged rainy seasons will delay projects weeks, months or even until the next year.

Contractors

Habitat Stamp projects are above and beyond the very aggressive workload staff are normally scheduled to complete and maintain. This requires staff to heavily rely on outside contractors to

complete most of the Habitat Stamp projects planned. Many times, contractors have a very full schedule and are unable to fit this work in, so staff are forced to delay the project. Staff's available time to manage contracts and contractors' availability will determine how long it may take to get some of these projects completed.

Permitting and agreements

All federal and state policies and permitting procedures will be followed. Prior to any work being completed by GFP or assigned contractors on property under the authority of another entity such as a township, county, etc. an agreement authorizing work will be completed. Other permitting and clearances such as cultural, State Historic Preservation Office, and those required by the Clean Water Act require additional time to be approved before some projects can begin.

Opportunities

In the world of habitat and access things are always changing and plans need to remain fluid. As plans are developed and site preparations begin to take place opportunities may arise that were unforeseen during the initial planning phase. Staff will take advantage of these when they present themselves. It's best to take this approach even if it adds to the overall time to complete the project. An example could be improving an access road and then determining there is an opportunity to add in a waterfowl access point or small boat ramp by expanding the trail further or altering its path.

Establishment phase

Many of the projects that involve planting require an establishment phase. Projects such as native grass, trees, and pollinator plantings require multiple years to establish. Once established they will provide their full potential to the wildlife and users of the area. Unpredictable weather such as drought and flooding can extend this process. Users' expectations of projects in the establishment phase should be less than fully established seedings.

Aquatics:

Aging infrastructure

South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks owns roughly 77 dams around the state. Most of these dams were built by the Civilian Conservation Corporation (CCC) in the 1930's and 40's. Deferred maintenance in many cases resulted in aging infrastructure that saw little to no maintenance during its lifetime.

Sedimentation

Erosion is a common problem in most waters in South Dakota. Erosion is not only a source of sedimentation and turbidity but also reduces suitability of riparian habitat for vegetation and wildlife. Riparian zones may provide suitable habitat for aquatic vegetation growth, but wave energy and currents severely limit density, diversity, and distribution on unprotected shorelines.

Nutrient loading

Shallow basins, combined with surface water run-off associated with land-use practices has resulted in many systems in South Dakota to be eutrophic and hyper-eutrophic. This can complicate fisheries and habitat management. In many cases, few options exist other than to try and reduce the amount of nutrients entering system or that are currently bound within it. Numerous water quality issues associated with aspects such as dissolved oxygen levels or temperature can result.

Contractors

Securing reliable and affordable contractors has proven to be a challenge in certain instances. Many of the habitat and access projects occur in remote areas of the state, which can increase costs of certain aspects of a project, such as mobilization.

Permitting

Depending on the scope of work, multiple layers of permitting may be required prior to initiating a project to ensure that all approvals have been secure. Permitting occurs at multiple levels and can include additional effort and in some cases, specific engineering to ensure that clearances are given.

Engineering

Professional engineering is often necessary for projects to secure necessary clearances and permitting. While engineering may be done internally, high volumes of workload often limit the number of Aquatic projects that can be evaluated. Utilizing outside contracts to accomplish additional engineering requirements has increased the number of projects that can be accomplished.

Water levels

While often outside of staffs control, water levels often impact the ability of staff to accomplish habitat and access work. In some cases, low water facilitates easier working conditions but may complicate fisheries management. Conversely, high water can create increased angling opportunity but may reduce access and complicate scheduled projects.

Identifying partners (e.g., municipalities)

In most cases, any aquatic habitat and access project will involve more than GFP staff. Depending on the scope of the project, these partners may be participating from a regulatory (i.e., permitting) standpoint or they share a common goal for the project. At times, identifying these external partners can be difficult. Additionally, other partners and interested parties may exist, but no line of communication has been established.

Ownership

Similar to identifying partners, land ownership around surface waters of the state can complicate aquatic habitat and access.

Priorities, Goals and Strategies:

Priority # 1: Increase and improve terrestrial and aquatic habitat to sustain healthy populations of fish and wildlife species for current and future generations.

Priority #2: Increase user opportunity and experience through enhancement of habitat and access, both terrestrial and aquatic, on and to public lands and waters, and by providing additional public access to private lands.

Terrestrial:

Goal 1: Annually seed 400 acres of native grass and pollinator plots.

Strategy 1.1: Identify non-native grasslands dominated by smooth brome and Kentucky bluegrass and implement site preparations and reseeding plans.

Strategy 1.2: Identify acres of cropland not needed for food sources and reseed to native grasses and forbs.

Strategy 1.3: Identify mixed medium quality grass stands that would benefit from inter-seeding additional species of grasses and forbs.

Strategy 1.4: Identify areas lacking early succession, brood rearing, and pollinator habitat to install pollinator plots.

Goal 2: Annually plant 15 acres (approximately 7,000 trees and shrubs) of woody habitat.

Strategy 2.1: Identify areas lacking adequate winter cover to install shelterbelts

Strategy 2.2: Identify marginal shelterbelts for replacement or enhancement with additional rows of woody habitat.

Goal 3: Annually plant 250 acres of annual or perennial food plots.

Strategy 3.1: Recognize areas lacking food sources to establish food plots.

Goal 4: Enhance 300 acres of grassland and forest annually.

Strategy 4.1: Remove invading woody species from key grassland habitats found on GPAs.

Strategy 4.2: Evaluate forest habitats for opportunities to promote, with management, critical woody species stand regeneration including removal of invasive undesirables while keeping forest diversity in mind.

Goal 5: Each year improve or develop road and trail access to six GPAs or other publicly owned property.

Strategy 5.1: Identify GPAs lacking vehicle access that would increase opportunity for users while maintaining user experience.

Strategy 5.2: Work with and develop agreements with the jurisdictional owner of the road if not located on state property.

Goal 6: Annually improve or develop five waterfowl access sites.

Strategy 6.1: Determine GPAs with wetlands or bodies of water conducive to waterfowl hunting.

Strategy 6.2: Of those GPAs evaluate how additional trails, primitive rock boat ramps, or decoy drop locations might increase opportunity, use, and user experience.

Strategy 6.3: Evaluate existing waterfowl access sites for ongoing upgrade and maintenance needs to ensure quality access for the public.

Goal 7: Annually improve or develop grassland management infrastructure on eight Game Production Areas.

Strategy 7.1: Inventory tracts of grassland to identify those that may be improved by grazing management where other management methods (e.g. fire, haying) are not possible.

Strategy 7.2: Identify infrastructure needed to accomplish grazing management.

Strategy 7.3: Partner with neighboring or local producers with livestock to develop a long-term grazing management plan that would enhance or improve these tracts of grassland habitat.

Goal 8: Promote and enroll land into the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Programs in the James River Watershed to reach 100,000 acres and in the Big Sioux River Watershed to reach 25,000 Acres.

Strategy 8.1: Direct GFP Private Lands Habitat Biologists to promote access programs.

Strategy 8.2: Continue to support partner positions with organizations that will promote enrollment.

Strategy 8.3: Engage all GFP staff in conversations with landowners about access programs.

Strategy 8.4: Increase outreach via all methods to share access program opportunities.

Goal 9: Annually secure multi-year Walk-in Area contracts on 20,000 acres of undisturbed habitat or priority big game hunting property.

Strategy 9.1: Direct GFP Private Lands Habitat Biologists to promote the access programs.

Strategy 9.2: Continue to support partner positions with organizations that will promote enrollment.

Strategy 9.3: Engage all GFP staff in conversations with landowners about access programs.

Strategy 9.4: Increase outreach via all methods to share access program opportunities.

Aquatics:

Goal 1: Annually, improve access or habitat at a minimum of three urban/community fisheries.

Strategy 1.1: Identify urban/community fishing opportunities with the state.

Strategy 1.2: Identify specific actions to be taken to improve habitat or access.

Strategy 1.3: Engage potential stakeholders associated with management actions.

Strategy 1.4: Secure funding/resources to accomplish management actions.

Strategy 1.5: Evaluate impacts of work on both fish populations and users, when possible.

Goal 2: Annually, improve access to a minimum of ten fisheries.

Strategy 2.1: Communicate with internal staff to identify waters in need of access improvements.

Strategy 2.2: Communicate with internal staff to identify what actions are needed to improve access.

Strategy 2.3: Engage all interested parties and stakeholders.

Strategy 2.4: Identify if work can be completed internally or externally.

Strategy 2.5: Implement and complete identified actions.

Goal 3: Annually, improve aquatic habitat in a minimum of five standing water fisheries.

Strategy 3.1: Communicate with internal staff to identify waters where habitat work is needed.

Strategy 3.2: Engage all interested stakeholders.

Strategy 3.3: Identify actions needed for improvements.

Strategy 3.4: Implement and complete identified actions.

Strategy 3.5: Evaluate impacts of work on both fish populations and users, when possible.

Goal 4: Improve instream habitat at a minimum of three locations by 2028.

Strategy 4.1: Communicate with internal staff and external partner to identify location where in-stream habitat improvement could benefit either cold or warm/cool water fishes.

Strategy 4.2: Communicate with staff to engage external partners and identify funding sources for project(s).

Strategy 4.3: Identify what actions are needed to achieve desired improvements.

Strategy 4.4: Complete all necessary clearances and permitting required for identified project(s).

Strategy 4.5: Implement and complete identified work.

Strategy 4.6: Evaluate impacts of work on both fish populations and users, when possible.

Goal 5: Annually, conduct one large-scale project.

Strategy 5.1: Identify fishery where renovation work is required on either the infrastructure and/or fish community.

Strategy 5.2: Engage all interested stakeholders and potential funding sources.

Strategy 5.3: Identify work needed for desired improvements.

Strategy 5.4: Complete all necessary clearances and permitting required for identified project/actions.

Strategy 5.5: Implement and complete identified project.

Strategy 5.6: Evaluate impacts of work on both fish populations and users.

Goal 6: Annually, improve infrastructure at impoundments to address state-owned dam inspection report findings.

Strategy 6.1: Utilize dam inspection reports conducted by engineering firm.

Strategy 6.2: Engage internal engineering staff to determine regional groupings of dams for discussions with staff.

Strategy 6.3: Coordinate meetings with regional staff to discuss cost estimates and priorities, based on work needed and current/potential use by public, within groupings.

Strategy 6.4: Select locations and timelines for infrastructure improvements.

Strategy 6.5: Utilize the updated internal dam inspection and work request form to annual address small and inhouse type maintenance/improvements.

Appendix A. South Dakota Codified Law 41-6-85.

41-6-85. Habitat stamp--Fee--Requirements--Promulgation of rules--Violation as misdemeanor.

Except as provided in § 41-6-10.2, a person eighteen years of age or older shall purchase a habitat stamp when applying for or purchasing a hunting or fishing license. The fee for the habitat stamp shall be ten dollars for residents and twenty-five dollars for nonresidents. A person is not required to purchase more than one habitat stamp within a license period as provided by the applicable license and rules promulgated by the commission under chapter 1-26. Any person required to possess a hunting or fishing license may not fish and hunt, or trap without a stamp validation. A purchase of the habitat stamp is not required for the one-day hunting or fishing license, youth hunting license, private shooting preserve license, hunt for habitat application fee, or landowner hunting license. A violation of this section is a Class 2 misdemeanor.

Appendix B. Projects completed in fiscal year 2021 through 2025 using Habitat Stamp funds reported to the Government Operations and Audit Committee.

Terrestrial:

2021:

Grassland and pollinator plantings: 1,345 acres | 30 GPAs

Food plots: 128 acres | 10 GPAs

Woody habitat plantings: 123 acres | 20 sites

Grassland and forest enhancement: 1,092 acres | 9 GPAs

Access roads and trail improvement: 8 miles | 9 GPAs

Grassland management infrastructure: 11 GPAs

2022:

Grassland and pollinator plantings: 1,628 acres | 31 GPAs

Food plots: 220 acres | 10 GPAs

Woody habitat plantings: 28 acres | 10 GPAs

Grassland and forest enhancement: 1,521 acres | 11 GPAs

Access roads and trail improvement: 22.4 miles | 26 GPAs

Waterfowl access trails and ramps: 11 sites | 10 GPAs

Grassland management infrastructure: 18 GPAs

2023:

Grassland and pollinator plantings: 1,492 acres | 34 GPAs

Food plots: 584 acres | 29 GPAs

Woody habitat plantings: 140 acres | 21 GPAs & replants at 6 GPAs

Grassland and forest enhancement: 397 acres | 9 GPAs & 1 State Park

Access roads and trail improvement: 6.75 miles | 10 GPAs

Waterfowl Access Trails and Ramps: 3 sites | 3 GPAs

Grassland management infrastructure: 8 GPAs

2024:

Access roads and trail improvement: 5.8 miles | 7 GPAs

Grassland and pollinator plantings: 25 acres | 1 State Park

* Majority of terrestrial funds put toward CREP payments this year.

2025:

Grassland and pollinator plantings: 120 acres | 5 GPAs

Food plots: 190 acres | 1 GPA & 1 State Park

Woody habitat plantings: 14.7 acres | 3 GPAs

Grassland and forest enhancement: 90 acres | 3 GPAs

Access roads and trail improvement: 2.16 miles | 4 GPAs

Access parking lots: 3 miles | 3 GPAs

Fence removal: 3.66 miles | 4 GPAs

Grassland management infrastructure: 6 GPAs

Access:

2022:

James River CREP: 8 contracts | 584 acres

2023:

James River CREP: 78 contracts | 6,318 acres

Walk-In Area Signing Bonuses: 188 contracts | 82,183 acres

2024:

James River CREP: 51 contracts | 6550 acres

Big Sioux River CREP: 7 contracts | 733 acres

Walk-In Area Signing Bonuses: 25 contracts | 14,693 acres

2025:

James River CREP: 98 contracts | 9,847 acres

Big Sioux River CREP: 32 contracts | 2,189 acres

Walk-In Area Signing Bonuses: 48 contracts | 55,855 acres

Aquatics:

2021:

Dam infrastructure improvements: 3 dams | 3 counties

Trail/access improvements: 3 miles | 5 trails

Shoreline plantings: 1 project

Boat ramp development: Long Lake – Codington County

2022:

Dam infrastructure improvements: 9 dams | 7 counties

Docks/piers: 4 docks | 4 piers | 8 waters

Access roads and trails: 2.45 miles | 3 waters

Access improvements/engineering: 26 projects | 16 counties

Boat ramps: 5 projects

Habitat structures: 13 projects | 12 counties

Habitat improvements: 2 aeration | 1 dredging

2023:

Dam infrastructure improvements: 19 dams | 10 counties

Habitat structures: 7 projects | 6 counties

Docks/piers: 9 docks | 3 piers | 10 Counties

Boat ramps: 4 projects

Access Improvements/engineering: 25 projects | 2.9 miles | 14 counties

Habitat improvements: 1 dredge | 1 aeration | 1 fencing

2024:

Dam infrastructure improvements: 2 dams | 2 counties

Habitat structures: 7 projects | 6 counties

Boat ramps: 9 projects

Access improvements/engineering: 21 projects | 6.85 miles | 12 counties

Aquatic access leases: 121 acres to open 8,345 acres of water and 80 river miles

Habitat improvements: 2 aeration | 1 permitting | 1 dam rebuild

2025:

Dam infrastructure improvements: 3 dams | 2 counties

Habitat structures: 13 projects | 11 counties

Boat ramps: 13 projects

Access improvements/engineering: 17 projects | 1.25 miles | 13 counties

Docks/piers: 5 docks | 6 piers | 10 counties

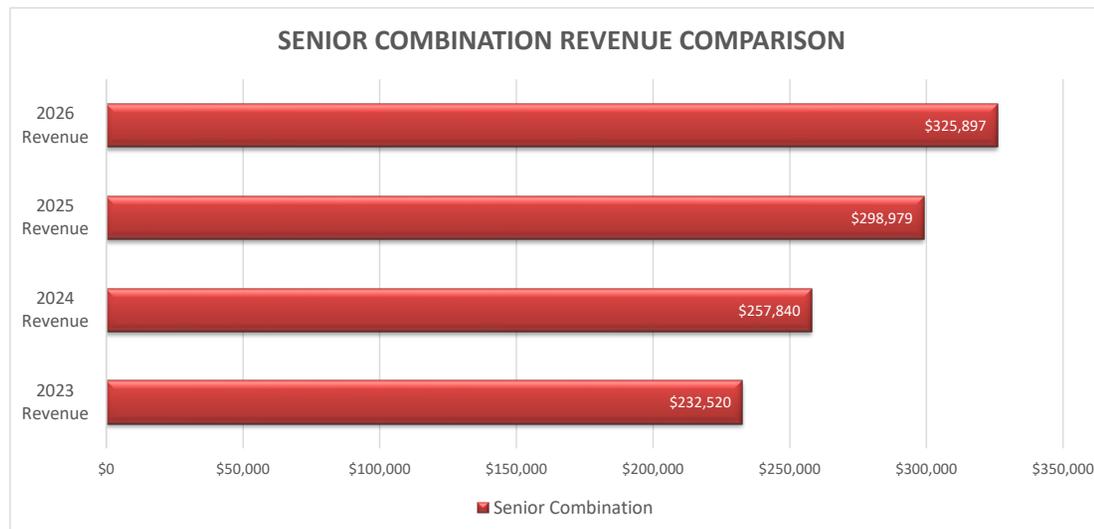
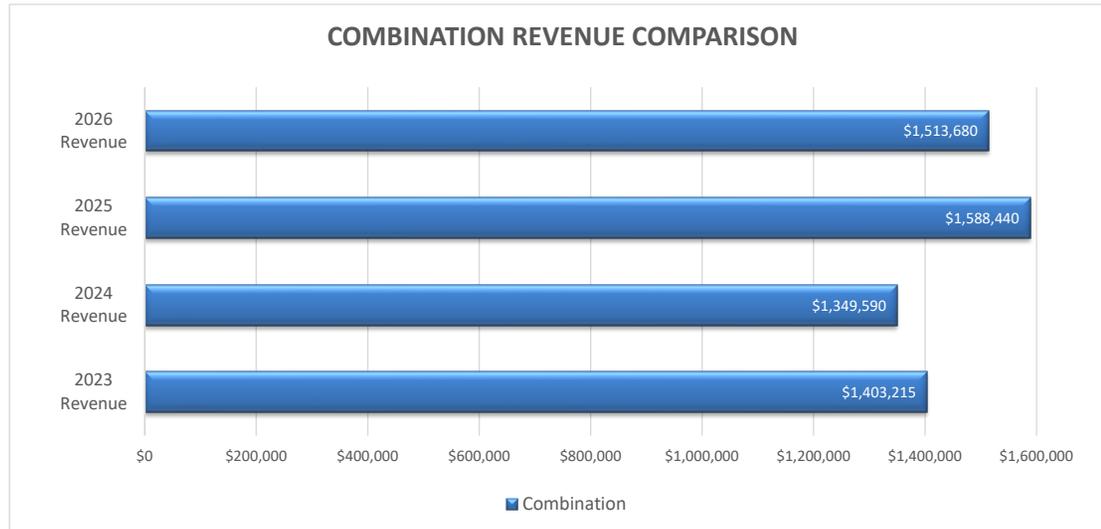
Habitat improvements: 5 engineering/permitting | 2 restorations | 2 dredging | 1 outlet | 1 native planting

Aquatic access leases: 3 contracts | 11.75 acres to open 1,215 acres of water

COMBINATION LICENSES

December 15 - February 28

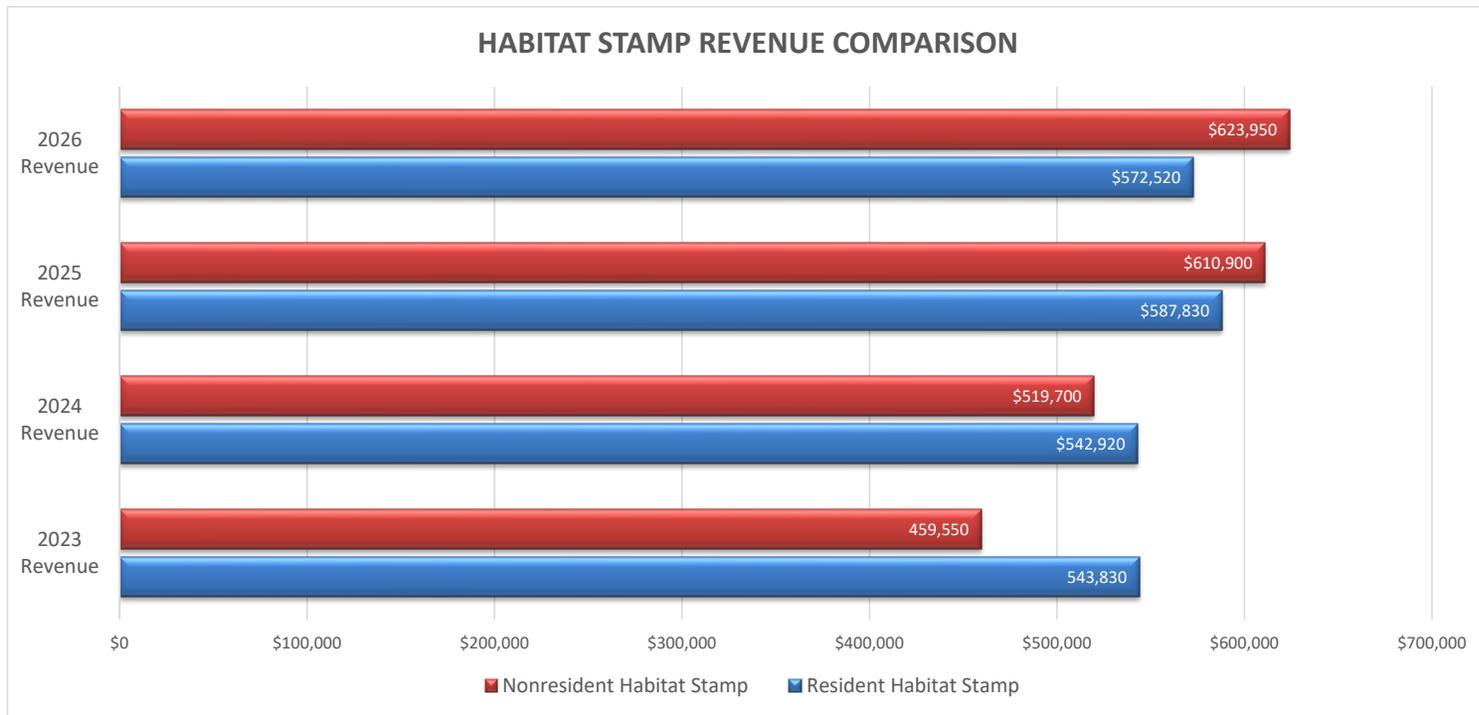
License Type	2023	2024	2025	3-yr Avg	2026	2026 Revenue	+/- Licenses		+/- Revenue		% Change from 3 Yr. Avg
							2025 vs 2026	3 Yr. Avg vs 2026	2025 vs 2026	3 Yr. Avg vs 2026	
Combination	25,513	24,538	26,474	25,508	25,228	\$1,513,680	(1,246)	(280)	(\$74,760)	\$66,598	-1%
Senior Combination	5,813	6,446	6,953	6,404	7,579	\$325,897	626	1,175	\$26,918	\$62,784	18%
Combination License Totals	31,326	30,984	33,427	31,912	32,807	\$1,839,577	(620)	895	(\$47,842)	\$129,382	17%



HABITAT STAMP

December 15 - February 28

License Type						+/- Licenses		+/- Revenue		% Change from 3 Yr. Avg	
	2023	2024	2025	3-yr Avg	2026	2026 Revenue	2025 vs 2026	3 Yr. Avg vs 2026	2025 vs 2026		3 Yr. Avg vs 2026
Resident Habitat Stamp	54,383	54,292	58,783	55,819	57,252	\$572,520	(1,531)	1,433	(\$84,205)	\$42,470	3%
Nonresident Habitat Stamp	18,382	20,788	24,436	21,202	24,958	\$623,950	522	3,756	\$20,880	\$65,757	18%
Habitat Stamp Totals	72,765	75,080	83,219	77,021	82,210	\$1,196,470	(1,009)	5,189	(\$63,325)	\$108,227	7%

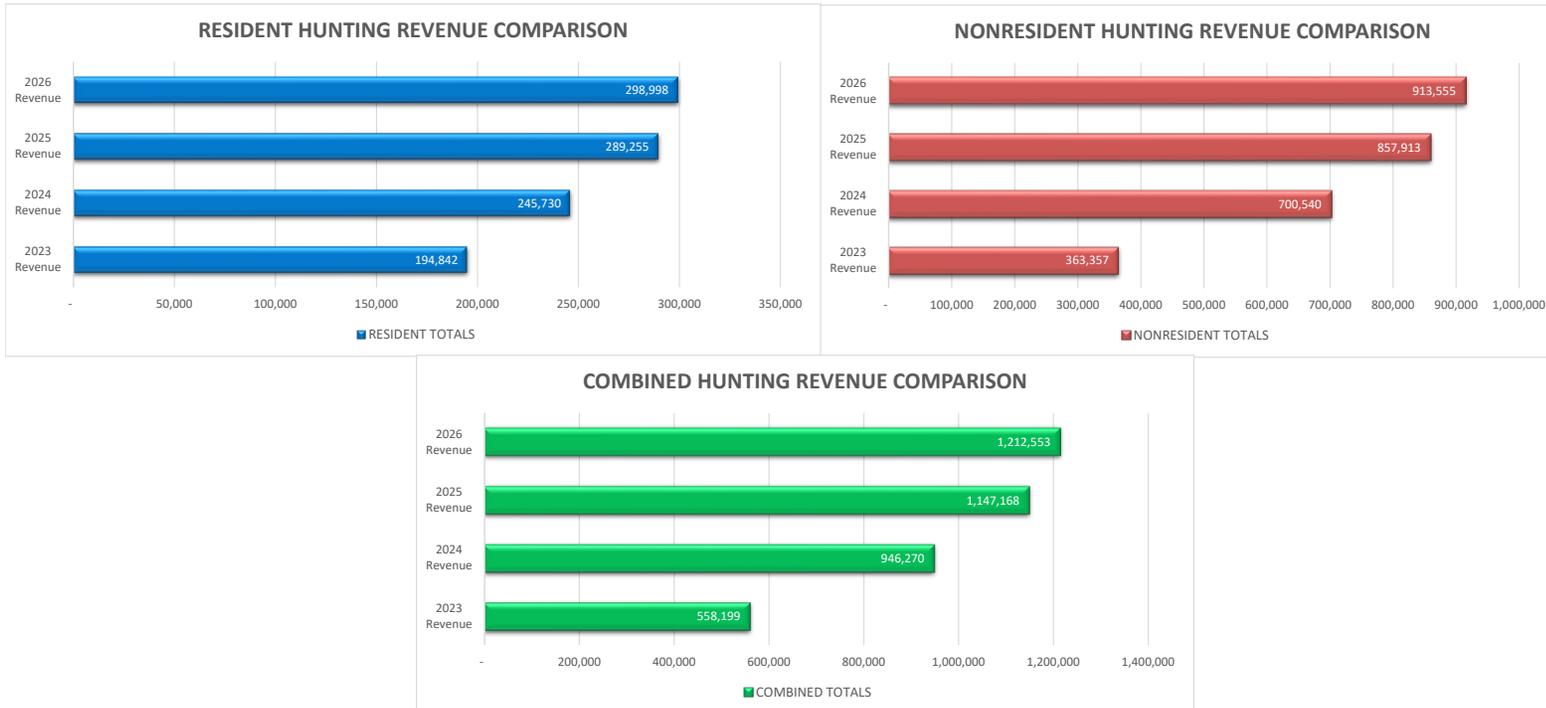


SMALL GAME LICENSES

December 15 - February 28

License Type						+/- Licenses	+/- Revenue			% Change	
	2023	2024	2025	3-yr Avg	2026	2026 Revenue	2025 vs 2026	3 Yr. Avg vs 2026	2025 vs 2026	3 Yr. Avg vs 2026	from 3 Yr. Avg
Small Game	3,363	4,627	5,270	4,420	5,436	\$195,696	166	1,016	\$5,976	\$44,566	23%
1-Day Small Game	79	187	179	148	220	\$3,300	41	72	\$615	\$1,341	48%
Youth Small Game	524	678	575	592	654	\$3,270	79	62	\$395	\$308	10%
Mentor Small Game	n/a	n/a	0	n/a	93	\$465	93	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Furbearer	2,300	2,507	2,694	2,500	2,791	\$86,521	97	291	\$3,007	\$10,613	12%
Predator/Varmint	1,029	824	571	808	626	\$3,756	55	(182)	\$330	(\$474)	-23%
Migratory Bird Certificate: 3-Duck	122	96	60	93	52	\$260	(8)	(41)	(\$40)	(\$203)	-44%
Migratory Bird Certificate: Traditional	1,108	1,519	1,347	1,325	1,146	\$5,730	(201)	(179)	(\$1,005)	(\$893)	-13%
RESIDENT TOTALS	8,525	10,438	10,696	9,886	11,018	\$298,998	322	1,079	\$9,278	\$55,257	10.92%
Small Game	2,325	4,603	5,010	3,979	5,294	\$751,748	284	1,315	\$40,328	\$270,249	33%
Youth Small Game	145	294	312	250	273	\$2,730	(39)	23	(\$390)	\$227	9%
Mentor Small Game	n/a	n/a	0	n/a	66	\$660	66	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Shooting Preserve 1-Day Nonresident	72	131	150	118	152	\$7,600	2	34	\$100	\$2,187	29%
Shooting Preserve 5-Day Nonresident	452	658	792	634	843	\$80,928	51	209	\$4,896	\$32,744	33%
Shooting Preserve Annual Nonresident	44	42	48	45	64	\$9,344	16	19	(\$1,022)	\$3,939	43%
Furbearer	0	4	1	2	3	\$975	2	1	\$650	\$517	0%
Predator/Varmint	641	753	809	734	842	\$38,732	33	108	\$1,518	\$9,359	15%
Migratory Bird Certificate: 3-Duck	8	13	18	13	16	\$80	(2)	3	(\$10)	\$15	23%
Migratory Bird Certificate: Traditional	56	886	345	429	415	\$2,075	70	(14)	\$350	(\$70)	-3%
Spring Light Goose	228	834	286	449	351	\$21,411	65	(98)	\$8,541	(\$579)	-22%
Youth Spring Light Goose	9	81	29	40	30	\$630	1	(10)	\$21	(\$203)	-24%
NONRESIDENT TOTALS	3,980	8,299	7,800	6,204	8,349	\$916,913	549	1,698	\$54,982	\$319,166	27.37%
COMBINED TOTALS	12,505	18,737	18,496	16,090	19,367	\$1,215,911	871	3,277	\$64,260	\$374,424	20.36%

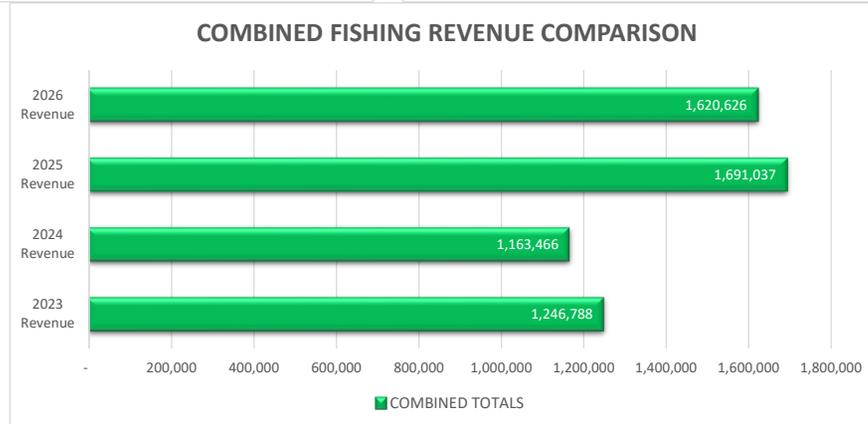
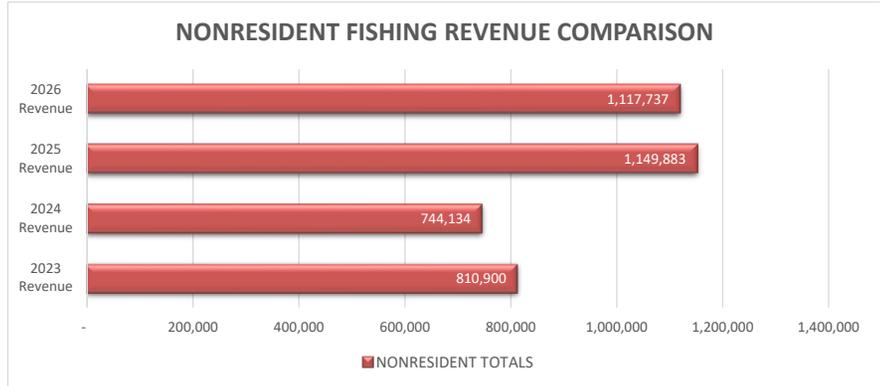
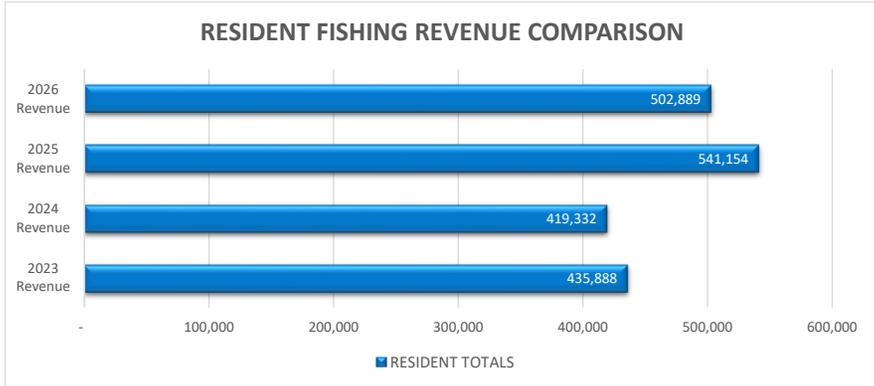
*Spring Light Goose decreased by \$5 when the migratory bird certificate was no longer included.



FISHING LICENSES

December 15 - February 28

License Type	2023	2024	2025	3-yr Avg	2026	2026 Revenue	+/- Licenses		+/- Revenue		% Change from 3 Yr. Avg
							2025 vs 2026	3 Yr. Avg vs 2026	2025 vs 2026	3 Yr. Avg vs 2026	
1-Day Fishing	570	387	652	536	445	\$4,450	(207)	(91)	(\$2,070)	(\$275)	-17%
Annual Fishing	14,070	13,279	15,124	14,158	14,031	\$434,961	(1,093)	(127)	(\$33,883)	\$23,422	-1%
Senior Fishing	3,114	3,702	3,870	3,562	3,734	\$63,478	(136)	172	(\$2,312)	\$14,284	5%
RESIDENT TOTALS	17,754	17,368	19,646	18,256	18,210	502,889	(1,436)	-46	(\$38,265)	\$37,431	-0.25%
1-Day Fishing	3,375	2,823	2,643	2,947	2,317	\$60,242	(326)	(630)	(\$8,476)	\$4,280	-21%
3-Day Fishing	2,977	1,978	3,617	2,857	3,363	\$151,335	(254)	506	(\$11,430)	\$35,968	18%
Annual Fishing	9,653	9,340	11,480	10,158	11,327	\$906,160	(153)	1,169	(\$12,240)	\$175,850	12%
NONRESIDENT TOTALS	16,005	14,141	17,740	15,962	17,007	\$1,117,737	(733)	1,045	(\$32,146)	\$216,098	6.55%
COMBINED TOTALS	33,759	31,509	37,386	34,218	35,217	\$1,620,626	(2,169)	999	(\$70,411)	\$253,529	2.92%



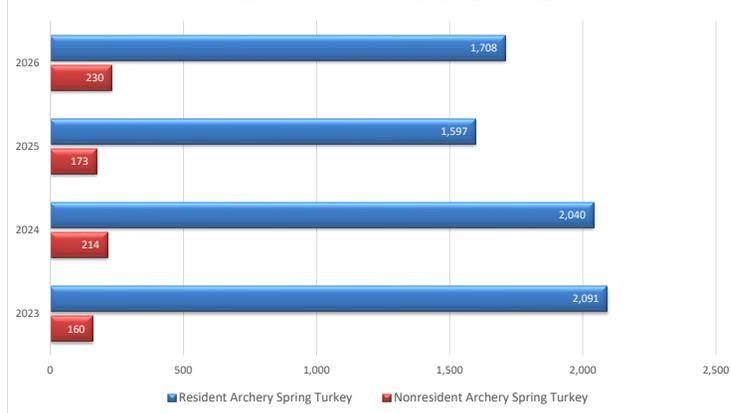
2026 BIG GAME LICENSES

License Type	2023	2024	2025	3-yr Avg	2026	2026 Revenue	+/- Licenses		+/- Revenue		% Change from 3 Yr. Avg
							2025 vs 2026	3 Yr. Avg vs 2026	2025 vs 2026	3 Yr. Avg vs 2026	
Mountain Lion	2,370	2,568	2,617	2,518	2,658	\$ 79,740	41	140	\$6,464	\$9,227	6%
Resident Archery Spring Turkey	2,091	2,040	1,597	1,909	1,708	\$ 47,824	111	(201)	\$7,899	\$91	-11%
Nonresident Archery Spring Turkey	160	214	173	182	230	\$ 27,830	57	48	\$10,530	\$9,597	26%
Resident Black Hills Spring Turkey	1,185	1,311	1,197	1,231	1,322	\$ 37,016	125	91	\$7,091	\$6,241	7%
Nonresident Black Hills Spring Turkey	n/a	n/a	2,200	n/a	2,223	\$ 268,983	23	n/a	\$48,983	n/a	n/a
Resident Mentored Spring Turkey	607	680	568	618	480	\$ 2,400	(88)	(138)	(\$440)	(\$692)	-22%
Nonresident Mentored Spring Turkey	12	32	32	25	39	\$ 390	7	14	\$70	\$137	54%
Lake Francis Case Paddlefish Snagging	350	500	500	450	500	\$ 15,000	0	50	\$2,500	\$3,750	11%
Custer Spring Turkey	100	100	100	100	100	\$ 2,500	0	0	\$0	\$0	0%
Resident Prairie Spring Turkey	4,405	4,246	4,261	4,304	4,488	\$ 128,364	227	184	\$ 6,608	\$ 14,207	4%
Nonresident Prairie Spring Turkey	316	317	317	317	316	\$ 40,036	(1)	(1)	\$ (121)	\$ 4,634	0%

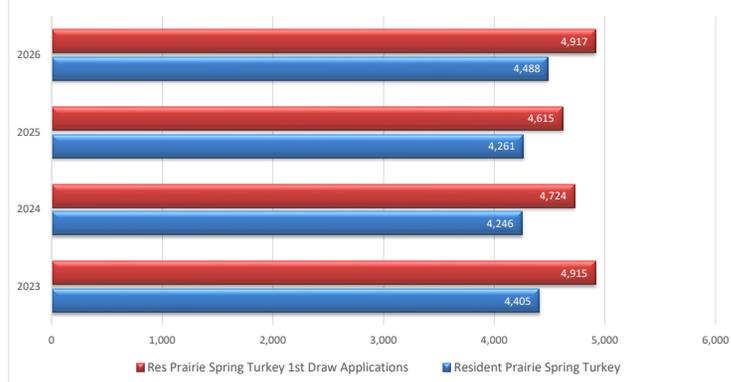
Applications Submitted

Res Prairie Spring Turkey 1st Draw Applications	4,915	4,724	4,615	4,751	4,917	n/a	302	166	n/a	n/a	3%
NR Prairie Spring Turkey 1st Draw Applications	1,117	1,277	1,368	1,254	1,457	n/a	89	203	n/a	n/a	16%
Lake Francis Case Paddlefish Snagging Applications	2,510	1,914	1,676	2,033	1,544	n/a	(132)	(489)	n/a	n/a	-24%
Custer Spring Turkey Applications	703	608	617	643	695	n/a	78	52	n/a	n/a	8%
Nonresident Black Hills Spring Turkey Applications	n/a	n/a	2,658	n/a	3,303	n/a	645	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

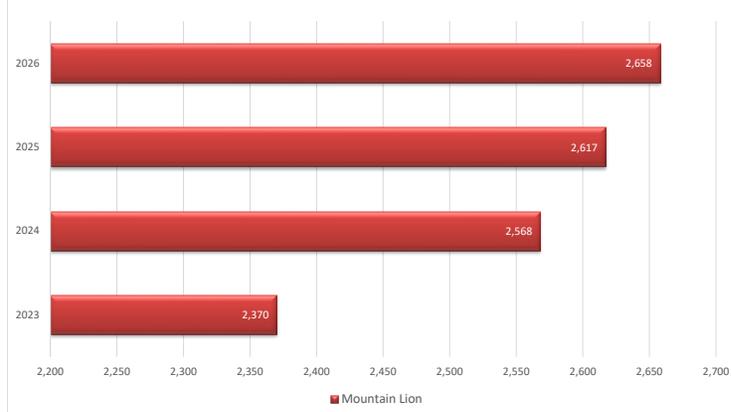
ARCHERY SPRING TURKEY LICENSES ISSUED



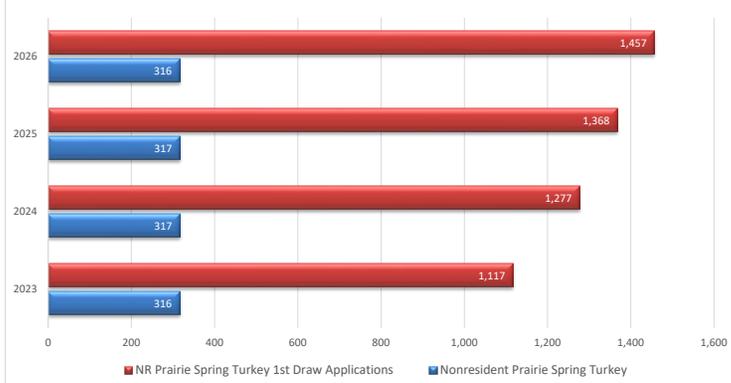
RESIDENT PRAIRIE SPRING TURKEY APPLICATIONS RECEIVED & LICENSES ISSUED



MOUNTAIN LION TAGS PURCHASED



NONRESIDENT PRAIRIE SPRING TURKEY APPLICATIONS RECEIVED & LICENSES ISSUED

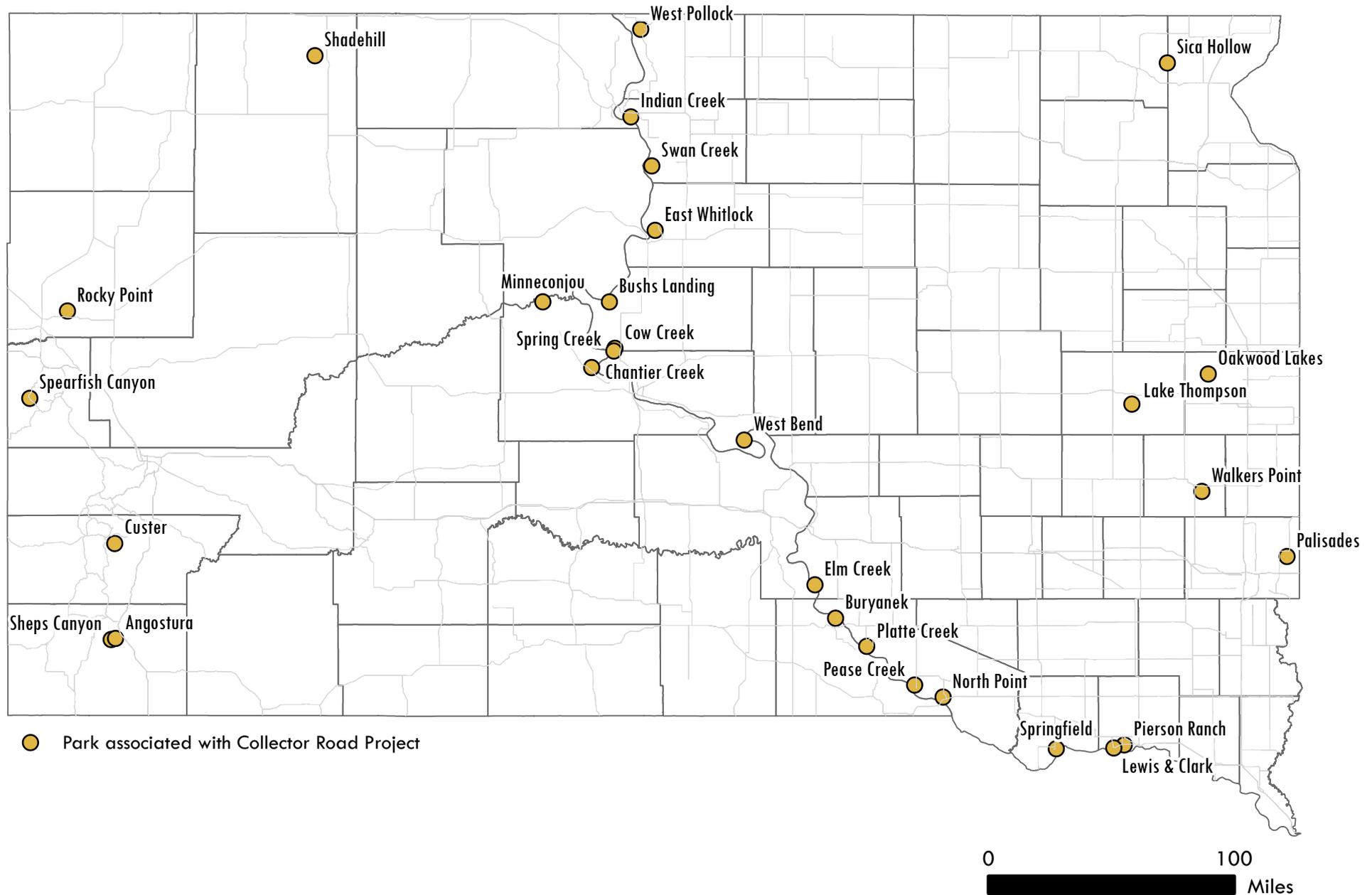


*MTL has historically opened for sale mid-November. In 2023, these were not available until 12/15.

Attachment A		
FY26 DOT Collector Road Funding Projects		
Project	Expenses	County, Township, Park
Bush's Landing Lakeside Use Area Mag Chloride	\$18,925.06	Sully County
Custer State Park Playhouse Road AST & Repairs	\$161,744.96	Custer State Park
Custer County Mag Chloride	\$58,000.00	Custer County
North Point Recreation Area 381st Ave Design	\$4,195.00	White Swan Township
Palisades 256th Street AST & Repairs	\$14,825.53	Palisades Township
Roy Lake Collector Road FDR and Hard Surface	\$874,489.71	Marshall County
Roy Lake Collector Road Culvert Replacement and Patching	\$47,210.00	Marshall County
Shadehill Recreation Area Interior Collector Road AST & Repair	\$116,317.79	Shadehill Recreation Area
Shep's Canyon Mag Chloride	\$24,938.90	Fall River County
Roughlock Falls Gravel Lift & Mag Chloride	\$93,472.37	Lawrence County
Swan Creek Recreation Area Collector Road Asphalt Repairs	\$68,561.73	Walworth County
Lewis & Clark Recreation Area Interior Collector Road Striping	\$3,252.48	Lewis & Clark Recreation Area
North Point Recreation Area 297th Street Overlay Design & Construction	\$422,454.70	North Point Recreation Area
Angostura Recreation Area Collector Road Crack Seal	\$15,609.60	Fall River County
Palisades State Park Collector Road Striping	\$2,001.88	Palisades Township
Pete Lein Shooting Complex Collector Road Improvements	\$400,000.00	Meade County
Custer State Park Interior Collector Road Gravel Lift	\$200,000.00	Custer State Park
Indian Creek Recreation Area Collector Road Chip & Crack Seal	\$37,500.00	Walworth County
Spring Creek Recreation Area Interior Collector Road Testing/Design	\$38,000.00	Spring Creek Recreation Area
Buryanek Recreation Area Mag Chloride and Gravel Improvements	\$10,000.00	Gregory County
Custer State Park Bridge Replacement Design, Bridge 17-292-105	\$60,000.00	Custer State Park
Lake Thompson Recreation Area FDR and Rebuild Design	\$40,000.00	Baker & Desmet Townships
Sica Hollow State Park Collector Road Bridge Replacement	\$88,500.29	Roberts County
	\$2,800,000.00	
Reimbursement requests submitted through February 19th, 2026- \$1,925,999.71. Remaining \$874,000.29 will be requested for reimbursement prior to June 1st, 2026		
FY27 DOT Collector Road Projected Funding		
	Estimate	County, Township, Park
Buryanek Recreation Area Collector Road Gravel and Mag Chloride	\$15,000.00	Gregor County
Bush's Landing Lakeside Use Area Collector Road Mag Chloride	\$45,000.00	Sully County
Custer State Park Interior Collector Road Gravel Lift	\$50,000.00	Custer State Park
Custer State Park Collector Road Mag Chloride	\$70,000.00	Custer County
Fort Sisseton State Park Co Hwy 5 Collector Road Improvements	\$500,000.00	Marshall County
Lake Thompson Recreation Area Collector Road FDR and Hard Surface	\$1,487,000.00	DeSmet & Baker Townships
Lewis & Clark Recreation Area Interior Collector Gavins Point Road AST & Repair	\$48,000.00	Lewis & Clark Recreation Area
North Point Recreation Area Interior Collector Road AST & Repair	\$120,000.00	North Point Recreation Area
Pease Creek Recreation Area Interior Collector Road Rebuild	\$220,000.00	Pease Creek Recreation Area
Shadehill Recreation Area Collector Road AST & Repair	\$50,000.00	Perkins County
Shep's Canyon Recreation Area Collector Road Mag Chloride	\$26,000.00	Fall River County
Spearfish Canyon Natura Area Collector Road Mag Chloride	\$10,000.00	Lawrence County
Spring Creek Recreation Area Interior Collector Road AST & Repair	\$104,000.00	Spring Creek Recreation Area
Springfield Recreation Area Interior Collector Road AST & Repair	\$55,000.00	Springfield Recreation Area
	\$2,800,000.00	
FY27 Alternate Projects		
Walkers Point Recreation Area Collector Road AST & Repair	\$20,000.00	Lakeview Township
Indian Creek Recreation Area Collector Road AST & Repair	\$25,000.00	Walworth County
Randall Creek Recreation Area Interior Collector Road AST & Repair	\$50,000.00	Randall Creek Recreation Area
Pete Lein Shooting Complex Collector Road Improvements	\$200,000.00	Meade County
Custer State Park Bridge 17-292-105 Replacement	\$500,000.00	Custer State Park
Spring Creek Recreation Area Interior Collector Road Rebuild	\$650,000.00	Spring Creek Recreation Area
West Pollock Recreation Area Collector Road Improvements	\$375,000.00	Campbell County
North Point Recreation Area Collector Road 381st Ave Hard Surface	\$180,000.00	White Swan Township
Lake Thompson Recreation Area Collector Road Gravel Lift	\$60,000.00	DeSmet Township
Sica Hollow State Park Collector Road Bridge Replacement	\$75,000.00	Roberts County



DOT Collector Road Program



State Park Fundraising Ideas 2025-26

Tier 1 Project (Division level – large dollar amount with multiple givers/grants)

- Package Level of Park Division Initiatives - \$4.7M
 - Custer State Park, Welcome Center West - \$1M
 - Mickelson Trail, Kaubisch and Other Bridge Repairs - \$1M
 - Palisades State Park, Split Rock Creek Bridge - \$600K
 - Palisades State Park, Amphitheater - \$400K
 - Good Earth State Park, Inclusive Playground - \$325K
 - Fort Sisseton State Park, Interpretive Updates and Displays at Officers Quarters - \$300K
 - Fort Sisseton State Park, Playground – \$250K
 - Oakwood Lakes Education Center - \$200K
 - Lake Herman Education Center - \$200K
 - Hartford Beach State Park, Indoor Fish Cleaning Station - \$200K
 - Lake Poinsett Recreation Area, Indoor Fish Cleaning Station - \$200K
- Good Earth Bridge to Iowa - \$750K-1M (*SD portion with Iowa funding the other half*)
- Ft. Sisseton State Park, Visitor Center - \$4-5M (*Fort Sisseton Commission lead*)

Tier 2 Projects (Park Specific by Region)

NE Region

- Fort Sisseton State Park, Amphitheater/Event Stage - \$150K
- Lake Thompson Recreation Area, Picnic Shelter - \$60K
- Walkers Point Recreation Area, Picnic Shelter - \$45K
- Pickerel Lake Recreation Area, Picnic Shelter – \$40K

SE Region

- Big Sioux Recreation Area, Picnic Shelter – \$175K
- Adams Homestead, Playground Additions - \$150K
- Big Sioux Recreation Area, Amphitheater – \$80K
- Lewis and Clark Recreation Area, Midway Playground – \$60K
- Springfield Recreation Area, Land Acquisition 1 – 5 acres - \$40K
- Wall Lake Lakeside Use Area, Island Access Bridge – \$30K
- Good Earth State Park, Observation Deck – \$20K
- Newton Hills State Park, Sargent Creek Overlook Platform – \$15K

Central Region

- Cow Creek Recreation Area, Playground – \$60K

West Region

- Custer State Park, Visitor Center ADA Access, and ADA Amphitheater – \$60K
- George Mickelson Trail, Interpretive Signage - \$50K

Yellow = Project ready with goal to complete by end of CY '26.

Green = Start clearance/planning process with goal to complete by end of CY '27.



February Camping

2/1/2025 - 2/28/2025	2/1/2026 - 2/28/2026
Camping Units	Camping Units
345	596

District	Facility Name	Camping Units	Camping Units	%
1	Twin Lake Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Fort Sisseton State Park	2	5	150%
	Pickrel Lake Recreation Area	8	10	25%
	Sica Hollow State Park	0	0	NA
	Roy Lake State Park	42	62	48%
	Lake Louise Recreation Area	0	1	NA
	Amdsen Dam Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Fisher Grove State Park	0	0	NA
	Mina Lake Recreation Area	2	8	300%
	Richmond Lake Recreation Area	0	52	NA
2	Hartford Beach State Park	5	4	-20%
	Lake Cochrane Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	Pelican Lake Recreation Area	4	5	25%
	Sandy Shore Recreation Area	1	0	-100%
3	Lake Poinsett Recreation Area	2	2	0%
	Oakwood Lakes State Park	6	8	33%
4	Lake Herman State Park	3	46	1433%
	Lake Carthage Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Lake Thompson Recreation Area	18	13	-28%
	Walkers Point Recreation Area	28	0	-100%
	Buryanek Recreation Area	1	9	800%
5	Dude Ranch Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Platte Creek Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	Burke Lake Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	Snake Creek Recreation Area	2	3	50%
6	Big Sioux State Recreation Area	3	19	533%
	Lake Vermillion Recreation Area	6	15	150%
	Palisades State Park	35	45	29%
7	Newton Hills State Park	18	46	156%
	Union Grove State Park	3	0	-100%
8	Lewis and Clark Recreation Area	11	41	273%
	Tabor Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Springfield Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	Pierson Ranch Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	Sand Creek Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Clay County Park	0	0	NA
	Chief White Crane Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	North Point Recreation Area	1	0	-100%
	Star Valley Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	South Shore Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
9	Randall Creek Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	White Swan Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Pease Creek Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	North Wheeler Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	Whetstone Bay Lakeside Use Area	2	0	-100%
	Farm Island Recreation Area	3	7	133%
	West Bend Recreation Area	2	3	50%
	Oahe Downstream Recreation Area	43	51	19%
	Cow Creek Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	Okobojo Point Recreation Area	0	0	NA
10	Spring Creek Recreation Area	0	38	NA
	Swan Creek Recreation Area	2	2	0%
	Little Bend Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Walth Bay Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Lake Hiddenwood Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	East Whitlock Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Indian Creek Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	West Pollock Recreation Area	0	2	NA
	West Whitlock Recreation Area	0	4	NA
	Bear Butte State Park	0	0	NA
11	Rocky Point Recreation Area	13	5	-62%
	Shadehill Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	Hugh Glass Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Llewellyn Johns Recreation Area	0	0	NA
12	Custer State Park	66	58	-12%
	Angostura Recreation Area	9	9	0%
13	Sheps Canyon Recreation Area	4	0	-100%
	Total:	345	596	73%



February YTD Camping

1/1/2025 - 2/28/2025	1/1/2026 - 2/28/2026
Camping Units	Camping Units
757	1040

District	Facility Name	Camping Units	Camping Units	%
1	Fort Sisseton State Park	4	7	75%
	Twin Lake Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Sica Hollow State Park	0	0	NA
	Pickereel Lake Recreation Area	17	17	0%
	Roy Lake State Park	94	115	22%
	Fisher Grove State Park	0	4	NA
2	Amsden Dam Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Lake Louise Recreation Area	12	9	-25%
	Mina Lake Recreation Area	14	22	57%
	Richmond Lake Recreation Area	0	83	NA
3	Hartford Beach State Park	14	6	-57%
	Lake Cochrane Recreation Area	1	2	100%
	Pelican Lake Recreation Area	11	11	0%
4	Sandy Shore Recreation Area	1	0	-100%
	Lake Poinsett Recreation Area	11	4	-64%
5	Oakwood Lakes State Park	8	10	25%
	Lake Herman State Park	3	84	2700%
	Lake Carthage Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Lake Thompson Recreation Area	46	37	-20%
	Walkers Point Recreation Area	53	4	-92%
6	Buryanek Recreation Area	1	11	1000%
	Dude Ranch Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Burke Lake Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	Platte Creek Recreation Area	0	0	NA
7	Snake Creek Recreation Area	9	3	-67%
	Big Sioux State Recreation Area	18	32	78%
	Lake Vermillion Recreation Area	15	19	27%
8	Palisades State Park	61	71	16%
	Newton Hills State Park	43	69	60%
9	Union Grove State Park	4	0	-100%
	Lewis and Clark Recreation Area	18	65	261%
	Sand Creek Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Clay County Park	0	0	NA
	Springfield Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	Chief White Crane Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	Pierson Ranch Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	Tabor Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	North Point Recreation Area	1	3	200%
	South Shore Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
10	Randall Creek Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	White Swan Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	North Wheeler Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	Star Valley Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Pease Creek Recreation Area	0	1	NA
	Whetstone Bay Lakeside Use Area	2	0	-100%
	Farm Island Recreation Area	9	12	33%
	West Bend Recreation Area	7	16	129%
	Oahe Downstream Recreation Area	87	76	-13%
	Cow Creek Recreation Area	0	0	NA
12	Okobojo Point Recreation Area	0	0	NA
	Spring Creek Recreation Area	5	80	1500%
	Indian Creek Recreation Area	10	12	20%
	Little Bend Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	East Whitlock Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Walth Bay Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Lake Hiddenwood Recreation Area	3	0	-100%
	Swan Creek Recreation Area	2	2	0%
13	West Pollock Recreation Area	3	15	400%
	West Whitlock Recreation Area	0	6	NA
14	Bear Butte State Park	7	5	-29%
	Llewellyn Johns Recreation Area	2	0	-100%
	Hugh Glass Lakeside Use Area	0	0	NA
	Rocky Point Recreation Area	22	5	-77%
15	Shadehill Recreation Area	9	21	133%
	Custer State Park	112	83	-26%
16	Angostura Recreation Area	14	15	7%
	Sheps Canyon Recreation Area	4	3	-25%
	Total:	757	1040	37%

Annual Licenses					
February YTD 2026 Revenue by Item					
	2025		2026		%
	Number	Dollar	Number	Dollar	Change
Resident Annual	1,845	\$ 72,160	1,851	\$ 70,740	
Non-Resident Annual	617	\$ 35,375	641	\$ 37,210	
Resident Double	3,054	\$ 181,990	3,590	\$ 208,350	
Non-Resident Double	369	\$ 32,940	438	\$ 38,518	
Transferable	255	\$ 22,770	291	\$ 25,700	
GSM Annual Trail Pass	312	\$ 6,045	373	\$ 7,220	
Annual Licenses	6,452	\$ 351,280	7,184	\$ 387,738	10%
Resident Daily License	681	\$ 6,802	895	\$ 8,870	
Non-Resident Daily License	550	\$ 8,235	559	\$ 7,995	
Unattended Vehicle Daily	35	\$ 670	13	\$ 260	
GSM Daily Trail Pass	260	\$ 1,163	175	\$ 875	
Motorcoach Permit	93	\$ 281	3	\$ 12	
CSP 7 Day Pass	1,223	\$ 30,105	1,150	\$ 28,350	
CSP 7 Day Bike Band	-	\$ -	19	\$ 380	
Rally Bike Band	-	\$ -	-	\$ -	
One-Day Special Event	4	\$ 400	-	\$ -	
Festival Daily	-	\$ -	-	\$ -	
Daily Licenses	2,846	\$ 47,656	2,814	\$ 46,742	-2%
Licenses	9,298	\$ 398,936	9,998	\$ 434,480	9%
Camping Services		\$ 1,185,368		\$ 1,198,859	1%
Pet Fees	140	\$ 1,400	230	\$ 2,219	59%
LODGING		\$ 1,186,768		\$ 1,201,078	1%
Picnic Shelter		\$ 650		\$ 1,515	133%
Boat Rentals		\$ 216		\$ -	
Firewood	35	\$ 235	62	\$ 417	77%
Gift Card	33	\$ 3,489	24	\$ 2,200	-37%
Spring Creek Boat Slips		\$ -		\$ 9,455	NA
Recreational Equipment Rentals		\$ 175		\$ -	
Retail		\$ 1,933		\$ 1,554	-20%
Call Center Fee	829	\$ 4,940	733	\$ 4,284	-13%
Cabin/Trailer Lease Permits		\$ 207,546		\$ 219,019	6%
MISCELLANEOUS		\$ 219,184		\$ 238,444	9%
TOTAL		\$ 1,804,889		\$ 1,874,002	4%

Public Comments

Canada Goose Action Plan

Leo Flynn

Rapid City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Been goose hunting SD since 1982, seen the rise and fall. In my experience the opportunity to harvest geese for the regular sd hunter has decreased tremendously. Far fewer local geese to go around and far more intense local pressure. I was not able to harvest a goose in 2024 and 2025 which broke my record of over 30 years. Bird numbers are far lower than the past, pressure is way higher. Number of geese seen hunting historically popular areas has plummeted. Would like to see less wholesale killing of these birds and more opportunities to hunt them in regular season. I guess stop the egg oiling, landowner slaughter, august "take" season and restrict early season somewhat. This liberal killing was unheard of in my youth and has led to a culture of kill them all.

Jack Otta

Volga SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

The past years Canada goose management actions have devastated the population of geese in the Lake Sinai and Twin Lake areas. The August Management Take is conducted when there are very few fields available for field decoy hunting as crops are still in the field. Any wheat field that has been harvested generally is attracting large numbers of geese. The hunters that have permission to hunt these few fields slaughter large numbers of geese with the 15 goose limit! Most hunters will not get to participate in this season because of field availability!

The geese not killed learn to move to areas that are not available to be hunted so when the regular season opens there tends to be no geese in the area to hunt! No wonder hunter participation is down! The regulations basically give most of the Canada goose kills to a few lucky hunters that have access to the few fields available that harbor feeding geese. Nest work (shaking eggs to reduce hatching) and spring kill permits to farmers have been hugely successful in elimination the goose populations around Lake Sinai and Twin Lake.

I am aware of at least 5 farmers in the Lake Sinai area who each have permits to kill 15 geese during the spring nesting season! Many of these kills are geese sitting on the nests laying eggs or incubating eggs so the nests are destroyed. This adds up to a huge number of geese eliminated! How many bands are received from spring kills? I suspect very few or none. The result of these management practices in past years is that the population of geese in the Lake Sinai area is almost nonexistent and the the hunting opportunities in the area in 2025 were extremely limited to none!

Farmers complain about crop destruction but many plant crops as close as possible to waters edge of lakes and sloughs so geese can walk right into fields and feed easily while they are flightless. A solution to this problem is to enter these areas into the CRP filter-strip program which would provide a 100 foot grass strip between water and crop areas.

How about having just the regular open season that is listed for Canada geese and eliminate the August Management and spring nest actions and kill permits if you really want to help recruit hunter numbers! Current management plans will continue to help discourage involvement of current and new hunters into the hunting of Canada geese.

Brian Frybarger

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

Encourage geese to leave ponds and lakes in municipalities and move to wetlands by reminding the public not to feed wildlife and mild hazing of excessive numbers on the above.

Elk Management Action Plan

Derrick Houdek

Aberdeen SD

Position: support

Comment:

I fully support increasing the elk population for the Black Hills.

Kyler Simmons

Custer SD

Position: support

Comment:

I am all for increasing the Elk population in South Dakota.

Jeremy Van Well

Sioux Falls SD

Position: support

Comment:

I had an H2 rifle tag 2 years ago and it was great. There were a lot of elk in my area. My friend his H2 tag this year and we hunted the same area and it was also great. I think things are really turning around and the future looks great.

William Busse

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I think raising the elk herd to 9,000 is a conservative amount. I fully support this increase and think there is habit to justify more than 9,000.

Jacob Hubbs

Yankton SD

Position: support

Comment:

I hunted H2 last year for 10 days and never got a chance or seen a 5x5 or bigger. I would say increase population and lower tags.

Jon Olson

Madison SD

Position: support

Comment:

Yes. The black hills can support more elk.

Bruce Ulmer

Yankton SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

The people with 15+ preferences should pull a tag Easier than a person with 10 or fewer points, they shouldn't be allowed to be able to pull a tag.

Tyson Allen

Harrisburg SD

Position: other

Comment:

I would support increasing late season cow elk opportunities. Seems like a lot of cow elk, especially in H2. I wouldn't touch bull tags. Only going to make quality go down in terms of mature bulls with more tags. It would be a lot less desirable for people who have been waiting 20-25+ years for a bull tag only to have more hunters in the field. Also, as years go on, quality is only going to go down. Look at other states that have done this with bull tags, same result.

Mark Malone

Pierre SD

Position: support

Comment:

Would greatly appreciate an increase in the elk population to increase hunter opportunity. Would even further love to see the GFP purchase some cattle grazing rights on USFS ground to decrease the cattle numbers and increase the forage availability for elk and deer. At a couple bucks per calf/cow pair per month, a few extra tag sales would more than pay for itself.

Tyler Ladd

Mitchell SD

Position: support

Comment:

Increasing the elk herd would be very beneficial to allow more licenses. I believe we have plenty of good elk habitat throughout the western side of the state. Landowners that have depredation issues can allow access for extra cow hunts if needed.

Todd Andrews

Brookings SD

Position: support

Comment:

To the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed updates to the Elk Management Plan and the discussion regarding adjusting the Black Hills elk population objective.

I support GFP's consideration of increasing the upper end of the population objective from 8,000 to 9,000 when habitat and range conditions allow. Demand for elk licenses continues to exceed availability, and a modest increase in the population objective could provide additional opportunity for hunters while still maintaining a healthy, sustainable elk herd.

My support is based on the expectation that any increase will be guided by ongoing habitat monitoring, range assessments, and science-based management. Ensuring that forage availability, winter range capacity, and overall ecosystem health remain strong is essential. If those conditions are met, raising the objective appears reasonable and beneficial to both wildlife and the public.

I appreciate GFP's willingness to involve stakeholders in this process and encourage continued transparency as the Elk Management Action Plan is developed.

Thank you for considering my input.

Trae Umstead

Sioux Falls SD

Position: support

Comment:

Anything to increase hunting opportunities would be welcome. Most will be old men before an elk tag is drawn.

Andrew Schuman

Geddes SD

Position: support

Comment:

I would support raising the upper end of the herd numbers. I also support controlling the population through increased cow tags instead of increasing bull tags. Increasing the bull tags seems to be lowering the quality of bull elk in South Dakota.

Mike Cole

Hermosa SD

Position: support

Comment:

It took me 18 years in order to get an elk license if available to add extra tags I think we really should especially with landowner permissions and opportunities to hunt this great animal

Mike Medley

Hermosa SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Absolutely not!! No more tags allowed period! We have the best Elk hunting in the country when it comes to 300 class Bulls. This has been managed to get it this way and it needs to stay this way! If they want a tag every year then go to Colorado. I knew this day was coming with all the people moving here and I dread it! With today's technology, cameras, app's etc. there are more big bulls harvested now than ever before already! Do not up the tag limit, it took me 27 years to draw and I probably will never get another one and I'm ok with that, let the people bitch all they want, this one's not negotiable!

Thank you!

Gunnar Ensz

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Zachary Pawlowski

Alcester SD

Position: support

Comment:

I support increasing the elk population objective. I believe the availability and quality habitat should be the top factor in population goals.

Randy Hardie

Canton SD

Position: other

Comment:

Maybe have people over 65 to get there elk tags before people in there 20's, 30's etc. my uncle passed away before he ever got a elk tag

William Schwarz

Pierre SD

Position: support

Comment:

Not sure if it is something that has been considered by the dept., but I would like to see those that draw a 1st choice antlerless elk tag not have to sit out the draw in following nine years after successfully drawing the 1st choice tag antlerless tag.

I think that it could encourage folks to use their preference points more frequently for antlerless tags if they knew they could start accumulating points ASAP after the successful draw. I believe that folks would be very receptive to the opportunity to hunt more frequently for antlerless elk, henceforth reducing the number of applicants towards the Type 21 (any elk) or Type 22 (bull elk) tags and increasing draw probabilities for those tags.

If not removing the wait period completely, perhaps shortening the period to a year or two instead of nine years. Nine years is an absurdly long time to sit out for drawing an antlerless tag.

We've already got a fair number of antlerless tags that go to the second draw anyways, so there obviously is a "surplus" of tags compared to those who prioritize those tags. Why not utilize them in a way that also positively affects the draw probability for Any Elk/Bull Elk tags?

Other options better than the current system are also completely randomizing the Antlerless tags in a separate draw and/or create a point based separate draw for antlerless tags.

Honestly, anything would be better than the current draw procedure for antlerless elk tags.

Matthew Pavek

Ivanhoe MN

Position: support

Comment:

Being an out of state resident i would love to see a few tags given out for nonresidents. Just the chance to draw another state for many nonresidents would be huge. The money the state could make off the nonresident points could be put back into the elk habitat to reach the goal of elk population

Matthew Pavek

Ivanhoe MN

Position: support

Comment:

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Bob Lee

Sisseton SD

Position: support

Comment:

To maintain More feed for the Elk let's start by not leasing out the forest service land to ranchers for there livestock. Probably put in some food plots, thank you. Bob Lee 11755 lake road Bryant TWP SD. 605-880-4167.

Chris Brubaker

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I believe that the Black Hills should have an elk population between 10000-12000 in number. This will allow more chances for people to draw a tag. Grazing by cattle should be very limited if not stopped to allow the elk numbers to grow.

Gary Kilian

Custer SD

Position: support

Comment:

There seems, from what I saw during my season west of Custer that there are alot of elk out there. We probably saw over 1000 head during the 5 days I hunted. My big issue is that people that have applying year after year, and with 15-20 or more points should be given a license before they can't go anymore because of age. I know several people out here that fit into that bunch. Kind of a money hungry thing to deni them some enjoyment there last years. Thanks for your time.

Gordon Doyle

Madison SD

Position: other

Comment:

As long as the state don't over sell and demoralize our elk quality and population. And by giving tags to those with the most points

James Scull

Hill City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I live amongst the elk and as a landowner, running cattle in the hills on BH Forest leases, I'm in elk country a lot. I see no problem with increasing elk numbers thereby giving more opportunity to elk hunters. It's a great idea!

Dan Conrad

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

to many tags this last year , the elk were pushed out. and the quality of the hunt was not favorable for many of those who had a tag.

Jamie Mcvay

Sturgis SD

Position: other

Comment:

Land owners should only get cow tags. And not be able to hunt the whole unit. Land tags are for their land only!

Damon Brueggeman

Miller SD

Position: support

Comment:

I have had only two tags in the Black Hills, 2005 I think was my H2 archery tag and then this year I had a Custer Archery tag. so, I haven't hunted elk a lot, as it takes time to get tags, I have 28 years PP in H2 rifle and 29 PP Custer Rifle. I understand it takes years to get, but it's worth it for the Quality that the Hills provides at an affordable price for us. When hunting the park this fall, I come across multiple coyote's, I know we can't hunt them, but that needs attention in a big way as they have to be taking young calves out. I am trying to go elk hunting in WY and its areal pain just to apply, and expensive. I know everything costs more nowadays, even for your departments, in my opinion, I would say a 10-20% increase in SD resident Elk tag prices, would not defer very many people to apply as they know, they have 10-30 years to save up for the hunt. Love the black hills and would like to live there someday myself, all surrounding states are jealous of us for the elk habitat and opportunities we have to get a quality elk. we just need to keep it that way as long as we can

Gavin Dehaai

Sioux Falls SD

Position: support

Comment:

if you could just do it slowly so people still have the opportunity to hunt them, my only thought,

B. Y.

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

Yes! Raise the number of Elk in the Black Hills.

Jeremy Maier

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I agree with increasing the objective for more Elk in the Black Hills

Clint Barber

Castlewood SD

Position: support

Comment:

It'd be wonderful to have additional elk and elk tags available if the state feels it can sustain more animals as suggested. Also, it appears that the elk range has expanded further east and wonder if this has been taken into account for more tag opportunities; or if this is more regarding general herd size for the hills, vs. the state in general. Maybe this plan is looking at both? Additionally it appears there could be a "special bull" type opportunity for more state revenue. Charge more for a special bull license but still make them zone specific tags, not just the entire elk zone etc. (Wyoming has a similar setup.) With point creep and the tags being so affordable in the general draw, most applicants will still have a hard time drawing an any elk permit in any of the elk draws more than once in their lifetime. If the special tag was added it could pull some people from the general draw for more opportunities there as well. Although this topic is specific to elk, it would be nice to have a "special Bighorn Ram tag" for more state revenue as well. Thank you for listening and your consideration!

Luis Del Valle

Hill City SD

Position: other

Comment:

I support increasing the herd size but not at the reduction of hunting permits. The BH habitat can be improved by prescribed burning/thinning that would increase herd size.

Chad Newell

Brandon SD

Position: support

Comment:

I believe that the elk numbers need to increase. I know people that have been putting in for 30 plus years and still haven't pulled a tag. I also know people that have pulled their tag for in the park and out of the park back to back. If the habitat can provide enough land for increased numbers I fully support this.

What I don't support is that people who pull a tag in a couple of years. Also pulling back to back tags in the park or out of the park.

I also think that minors should not be able to apply to age of 16. With that being said that would give the old guys who have been putting in for 20 plus years a better opportunity

David Whittington

Tea SD

Position: support

Comment:

In 2025 I had the opportunity to hunt elk for the 8th time, 4 with my sons, since 1997. This year I encountered elk 14 out of 15 days of hunting. Years past we encountered fewer in an entire season than what we did last year in a day. This is a testament of SDGFP's management. I trust their ability to manage the food resource and other factors, such as predation hunts, to optimize increased numbers.

Kirk Byrd

Sioux Falls SD

Position: support

Comment:

Proposal to reduce preference point holders while increasing hunter satisfaction for short term and long term.

Open a 2-year period allowing preference point holders to move all points from one elk hunt to another elk hunt. Once preference points are moved from one hunt choice to another they cannot be moved again. The typical waiting period applies to the hunt the points were removed from.

Example: A hunter moves 20 years preference from Custer State Park rifle and 10 years Praire Elk to Blacks Hills firearm elk, which had 20 years preference prior to the points transfer. The hunter is no longer eligible to apply for Custer State Park rifle elk, and the 8 year waiting period begins before being eligible to apply for Praire elk again. The individual's 50 points are now locked in Black Hills rifle elk. The only available option for moving points in year 2 would be to move BH archery elk and Custer archery elk in a manner that does not involve the hunts in which points were removed.

This would allow high point holders to throw all of their eggs in a single basket. Potentially significantly increasing their odds for a single tag, before age or health issues becomes a significant limitation.

It also would allow for the removal of large chunks of preference points from the system with the selection of a single elk tag.

In the short term this would allow for individuals to prioritize what hunts are the most important and attempt to increase their odds at those hunts. While also clearing out large portions of preference points for those that chose to stick with the traditional route. It is likely hunters have different levels of priority for these tags.

Some hunts may now have hunters applying with astronomically high preference points, while others may be largely vacated of high point holders.

Nathan Scherer

Custer SD

Position: support

Comment:

We need more elk in the Black Hills. One way to increase the elk population and get more hunters elk tags is to reduce the number of landowner tags issued or change landowner Any elk tags to "own land" tags. I am tired of seeing almost every landowner elk tag holder hunting on the forest service.

Ernest Getty

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I would urge improved odds of drawing an Elk Tag for Seniors over a certain age such as 70-75 yrs. old. This recommendation would be particularly appreciated by those of us with mounting physical challenges.

Thank you for your consideration.

John Jarding

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

After hurting in SD for over 60 years, I must note that seeing an elk is a rare occurrence. SD has the habitat to support increasing the state's elk population. The frustration for most big game hunters is having to wait between 10 and 30 years to draw an elk tag.

Kirk Robbins

Rapid City SD

Position: other

Comment:

Late season cow tags should have a special draw for anyone 65 and older. Have a set number of licenses and allow those 65 plus only hunters to apply every year. This would give that age group a must better first draw opportunity on getting a tag. These 65 plus resident hunters have spent a lot of money over the years supporting the GF&P. Wyoming and Montana offer a lot of benefits to their senior sportsman and i think South Dakota GF&P should consider a senior program for the elk hunters and show your appreciation for all those who have supported the GF&P for decades...

Aaron Rogers

Huron SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

The current amount of bull tags provides an enjoyable hunt. Without overcrowding and issues with more hunters in the field. Increased bull tags would hinder and take away from that experience.

Added cow tags outside of the September/October any elk seasons would be ok.

Allowing the cow tags in that manner if population increased would also help increase the bull/cow ratio and trophy quality in most units.

Arthur Koscielski

Rapid City SD

Position: other

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Arthur Koscielski

Rapid City SD

Position: other

Comment:

You want to increase the herd to 9000 animals but the only way to do that is give out less licenses for elk until that objective is reached. I am 66 years old and I will be dead before I draw another elk tag in South Dakota. The preference point system we have in place now is broken because the amount of points means nothing. I know people with 15 to 20 years of preference who still dont draw a tag. I am all for harvesting more elk in the Black Hills. From my experience there are plenty of them out there and they are not that hard to find. I am all for more opportunities to harvest elk. But not if it means reducing the number of elk tags until you reach the target population objective. You need to fix the preference point system so that people with preference.... get preference.

Ken Stach

Letcher SD

Position: support

Comment:

Kill more MOUNTAIN LIONS!!!!

Paul Svenkeson

Hot Springs SD

Position: support

Comment:

When range conditions improve to support more elk, then a population increase would be welcome.

Derek Nelson

Rapid City SD

Position: other

Comment:

I realize the prairie elk units are a challenge, but please considering options to gain access to private lands in those areas. Every year I hear various difficulties with access even when planning was done well in advance. I hesitate to apply as gaining access does not seem worth the stress.

Frank Regas

Sioux Falls SD

Position: support

Comment:

I'm 63 and have been applying for elk tags since my 30s when if a person missed a preference point purchase year you lost all your points. And that happen to me having to start all over again (unfair). At this point it seems IMPOSSIBLE to draw a tag after years of buying preference points. The cost just doesn't add up anymore. I support the increased numbers but still don't have the confidence in the current system that will provide a successful draw before I'm unable to get out there boots on the ground. Any positive change is good!

Jess Pekarski

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Raymond Oyen

Lead SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Seems be a good elk population the deer is not so good

Ron Miller

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I drew my rifle elk tag this year and will now have to wait to even apply. I did not harvest an animal due to the lack of numbers and trophies .The elk population was devastated by the archery hunting population this year. If the population is raised, the amount of tags needs to stay where it is or lowered.

Richard Holso

Deadwood SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Christopher Hannah

Hill City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I support raising the population to the highest level that the habitat can provide to a healthy population.

David Bader

Brandon SD

Position: support

Comment:

Being an elk hunter in SD is frustrating. When I scout for Elk I see so many. However I apply for a minimum of 4 elk tags per year and have not had a tag for over 10 years. Yet I talk to other hunters who receive a tag every few years. (Without landowner preference). It seems that, with the success rate of archery hunters, more tags could be offered without a major decrease in population.

Leroy Madsen

Pierre SD

Position: other

Comment:

As a S.D. resident and avid hunter, in my opinion I believe GF&P needs to change and make fair elk lic. Drawings. Some 1st time applicants get drawn.. 1st time, then there are some with 20 plus yrs applying. Maybe have so many tags able to get drawn between 1-5yrs...5-10yrs...10-15 yrs...15-20 yrs...20-25 yrs. This would be a FAIR CHANCE for... ALL.... So. Dak. To apply n get drawn! Still with the understanding if you get drawn.. (weather u get a elk or not) that individual has to wait 10yrs to apply again.

Dana Rogers

Hill City SD

Position: support

Comment:

The Black Hills can absolutely support more than 8,000 elk. 9,000 is ok, but changing it to 10,000 would be even better. The habitat can definitely support it. The majority is USFS public land. Please consider the wishes of the 850K residents, 220,000 sportsmen and 40,000 elk applicants in deference to the 350 public land grazing lease holders.

Ryan Biel

Britton SD

Position: support

Comment:

I support raising the ceiling to 9000.
It will be a fantastic thing for the residence of South Dakota and the hunters in it.

Mark Landguth

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Kris Wynia

Belle Fourche SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Leland Shoup

Soearfish SD

Position: support

Comment:

With the number of applicants at over 10 years preference points the process of tag allocations should be revisited and tags dedicated to applicant pools with less than 10 points eliminated.

Clint Barber

Castlewood SD

Position: support

Comment:

To clarify my "special tag" comment regarding bighorn and elk from earlier today, it'd make sense to be a higher priced, state revenue drawing tag for residents only, but valid on public and private ground, and still zone specific.

Brandon Walter

Lake Preston SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

No comment text provided.

John Wrede

Rapid City SD

Position: other

Comment:

I can only support an increase in Black Hills Elk Population densities if an intraspecies specific competition study that determines the increases will have no impact on habitat quality, aspen regeneration and clone expansion nor limit the growth and distribution of both deer species. There needs to be a minimum 3 year study done to detail intraspecies competition along with the impacts cattle have on population densities of all big game wildlife in the Black Hills. Any management enhancements without that data is purely a political experiment and that's unacceptable.

Greg Stuebner

Webster SD

Position: support

Comment:

I would be in favor of potential increasing of BH elk pop. to allow additional Lic, as long as hunter crowding is not an issue, I would guess in central hills due to land ownership. I also would not want significant additional Depredation issues. Thank you for posing the question.

Dick Keranen

Hermosa SD

Position: other

Comment:

It should be easier to get a elk tags in the hills especially cow tags there's to many out there per acre

Dawn Kellogg

Hot Springs SD

Position: support

Comment:

Would love a better chance of getting an elk tag since they house on my property during the year but I own 160 acres and not the required amount for land owner.

Judy Carroll

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I think 9,000 to 10,000 should be our objective for the elk population and stop grazing cattle in the black hills so they don't over graze and destroy water holes. This would improve the habitat for the elk and also the mule deer population and whitetail as well. Us hunters pay to better the wildlife habitat and water supply. You could start by stopping cattle grazing on our public lands and destroying water sources for wildlife.

Rocky Ruzicka

Belle Fourche SD

Position: support

Comment:

Please put an emphasis on increased numbers but also increased quality of age classes. An elk hunt in the hills has turned into close to a once in a lifetime hunt due to the draw odds. Let's make it a hunt worthy of waiting for. Also there more a large amount of older hunters will lots of preference points that may never draw this tag. Let's lesson the amount of tags given to the sub 10 preference point pool and get some of these guys/gals on their once in a lifetime hunt before its too late. Along with this is we nwed to eliminate the possibly for non resident college students to apply for these limited tags as residents. Its terrible unfair to all residents who will wait that "lifetime" for one of these tags!

Ryan Hlavka

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

Would like to see more tags go out for elk tried multiple years in a row and still have not drawn. Almost getting easier to go out of state to hunt and I've been hunting South Dakota as a resident for 20 plus years

Troy Kuxhaus

Martin SD

Position: other

Comment:

I don't support landowner/ operators having to purchase a license to take over populated cow elk off their own land. The tags should be free like they use to be.

Colton Benson

Montrose SD

Position: other

Comment:

I am not opposed to harvest permit increase as long as the public lands are not being used to graze cattle and that is part of the overgrazing issue natural resources, and interest of the state taxpayer should come first for non-invasive native species
Ensuring that a healthy plentiful, herd of elk is able to feed themselves all year

After the landowner has been issued his tags his land must be open to walk in only For the public to receive any money from the state if he has a elk problem that shouldn't be an issue

I think private landowners are taking advantage of the state system and selling high price tags for migrating elk while the rest of us wait on a list for 30 years needs to be equal opportunity for a migrating natural resource for all of the state not just land owners if they want state money, our tax money they need to be willing to play ball and if they don't want to, they just don't get our tax money

I'm not against cattle grazing land owners in General but it needs to be somewhat square they already get a tag a year, no matter what and panels and fences

Terry Deuter

Kadoka SD

Position: support

Comment:

I think there should be more residents elk permits put out annually. My wife and daughter have twenty plus years of applying and have not gotten their preference or second choice.

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Position: support

Comment:

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Bruce Dedic

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

Goals to increase elk {or deer} populations in the Black Hills will likely prove fruitless if predation by coyotes and mountain lions is not reduced.

Dan Essink

Deadwood SD

Position: other

Comment:

I have been following and observing the different elk herds in the northern half of unit 2 and southern half of unit 1 since 1994. I won't say I'm an expert by any means but I do know more than most when it comes to the elk in these areas. I've seen a huge increase in calf crops the last 4 years with populations moving into more and more areas every year. This is a great thing in my opinion. I truly believe to manage this dispersion better you may want to look at splitting unit 1 into 3-4 different units and unit 2 into 4-6 different units. It would be easier to control populations and also allow you to put more tags out. There are so many areas that aren't being hunted because people are hunting the same areas year after year. Just my opinion. Thank you.

Brian Parsons

Harrisburg SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Nature does a pretty good job of managing all by herself

John Gerberding

Sturgis SD

Position: support

Comment:

an upper end adjustment, in my opinion, will not adversely affect the plan. Environmental factors, predators, and recreational use of the Hills are more likely to adversely affect elk numbers than a higher population goal. I have been involved a number of hunts recently, including my own, and I believe there is plenty of room for more elk.

Carter Ractliffe

Harrisburg SD

Position: support

Comment:

I believe shooting to raise the elk population would benefit in many ways. Including more hunter opportunity for those who are lucky enough to draw a tag with a high success rate, as well as being able to offer more tag's which would be able to bring in more profits for the state as well as getting more hunters interested as having such a low chance of drawing pushes hunters away from trying. Finally for recreational personal it would give them higher potential in possibly seeing such a magnificent animals that are so hard to find alone in South Dakota.

A Kuehl

Valley Springs SD

Position: other

Comment:

as long as it doesn't reduce elk tag limits per year due to it taking so long to get drawn, where it is almost a once in lifetime hunt.

Giles F Sweeter

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I have 27 years preference points I'm 72 years old the clock is ticking

Doug Barnes

Sioux Falls SD

Position: other

Comment:

It would be nice if one did not have to wait so long to apply for elk again--especially when he is looking for a cow license.

Chris Freeman

Sioux Falls SD

Position: support

Comment:

My dad had a tag in h2 this last year and after being out there with him then umber of rifle tags was way to high tho should be split into 2, 15 day seasons, and also you should add a muzzloader season in the that would be more revenue! Maybe shorten rifle deer and add muzzleloader between rifle and archery (cause deer numbers are terrible) for 15 days . The the 2 rifle seasons, with the first being bulls only.

Otto Qualm

Platte SD

Position: support

Comment:

I think that more animals on the land scape is always the right answer.

Mike Leberknight

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I support increasing the elk population base across the Black Hills and the surrounding areas.

Adam Golay

Sioux Falls SD

Position: support

Comment:

I am fully in favor of increasing the elk population in the black hills to 9,000 or even more.

Cody Mohacsi

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Earl Weisenburger

Aberdeen SD

Position: other

Comment:

something needs to change on the draw for Elk. I have 18 pref points and now am at the age that I'm not sure I'm capable of doing an Elk hunt. There has to be a better way to make the draw better. One shouldn't have to have that many pref pts to get drawn.

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Position: other

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Stephen Turner

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

The more elk the better if the habitat is available.

Adam Boomgarden

Hurley SD

Position: support

Comment:

I'm in support of raising the herd size provided that the overall health of the heard isn't escalated due to diseases such as CWD. If we can get more in state applicants a chance at drawing a tag and ensure that ALL TAGS ONLY GO TO RESIDENTS all the better. Landowners in the affected areas must also be able to sustain the herd as well as their land. If depredation hunts need to occur, the state needs to be proactive in addressing this instead of reactive. Personal property damage needs to be protected more than the greed of the revenue from the tags as well as the "revenue " from the drawings.

Adam Scofield

Hill City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I oppose increasing the objective population, which will in turn increase elk tag numbers. I understand that people want more opportunity for elk hunting in the Black Hills, however, it is absolutely packed with people already! Since it's such a coveted tag, typically each tag holder has 5-10 people along on the hunt, driving roads and scouting for their tag holder. I think looking over multiple elk is what makes the hills hunt so special.

If you increase the herd objective and ultimately increase the tag numbers, you are going to put 100's of more people on those roads! Everyone I know that has had the Hills tag complained about how over crowded it was. Adding more people to the hills will only make this hunt more frustrating!

If you guys want more opportunity, look at how Colorado does it. Archery (you can even divide it into early and season), muzzleloader, 1st, 2nd,3rd,4th rifle. Make applicants pick and choose one or two of those choices. Some seasons will be harder to draw and some easier.

I don't think increasing tag numbers for our small geographic area is going to Benefit anyone, other than revenue from tags.

Patrick O'Connell

Valley Spgs SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Nathan Keck

Spearfish SD

Position: support

Comment:

I support increasing our elk herd numbers here in South Dakota. I also suggest that we reduce cattle grazing days on national forest property to allow for sufficient feed and reduced habitat damage for other wildlife. Additionally, we should reevaluate the landowner elk licensing system especially as we are seeing the average number of preference points for non-landowner continue to increase each year. I would propose that we continue with the annual antlerless landowner on own land tag that is in place today. However, when it comes to the any elk licenses landowners should have to wait the standard 9 years just as any other South Dakota resident has wait before reapplying for another any elk license. Overtime this would help to reduce the number of preference points non-land owners would need to draw an any elk license in this state and it would offer greater elk hunting opportunities for the residents of South Dakota.

Connor Brockhouse

Keystone SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Patrick Lokken

Harrisburg SD

Position: support

Comment:

I believe the only risk of increasing population objectives would be potential increase in private property damage. With that said, I also believe that if this became a problem, populations could quickly be reduced again to manageable numbers through increased hunting.

Allen Zent

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

Yes— please raise the elk population size. Good Lord, let's double it. Why on earth are we keeping it so low? As a hunter, I would love to have a much larger population in the Hills. Please, do whatever it takes to increase the Elk heard.

Matt Schmidt

Volga SD

Position: support

Comment:

Need to have a better chance of drawing tags for in residents before non residents!

Drue Schroeder

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I'd love to see elk numbers increase throughout the Black Hills. Just seeing elk is an amazing feeling. Some areas that I feel that will need to be addressed to do this are as follows:

- National Forest and State Land needs to be a focus of improvement (feed and water sources)
 - Predators need to be much higher priority - predator populations need to be lowered (mountain lions, but also Coyotes - deer numbers are awful due to coyote pressure everywhere)
-

Kurt Kruger

Sioux Falls SD

Position: support

Comment:

Do you offer Disabled Veteran elk hunts

Devin Stephens

St. Onge SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

As the human population grows there is less opportunity for population growth in the wildlife. The private property surrounding the Black Hills will be the recipient of the added numbers and at the current population they are not being managed as needed.

Nicholas Cain

Sioux Falls SD

Position: support

Comment:

Moving to South Dakota from Oregon took quite an adjustment. Coming from a state that over the counter tags were relatively easy to get. Moving here, I figured the hunting scene would be abundant. I'm interested to see how many out of state tags are issued annually. I know that the point creep is substantial and feel like it will take decades to draw an elk tag. Perhaps a win/win situation would be to have out of state residents who apply for an elk tag should count as half points, then use the resident points as a raffle for more desired hunting units. I think that resident elk tags should be a bit easier to get considering the higher % of private land.

Nicholas Cain
605-305-0071
715 S 1st Ave
Sioux Falls, SD 57104

Brad Trudeau

Centerville SD

Position: support

Comment:

Still to many lions.

Trevor Norenberg

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I believe this is a great direction to be going as the desire for hunting opportunities in SD and ALL surrounding states is at an all time high! We should be doing all we can to give the residents of SD as many opportunities to hunt and fish locally as we can!

Barry Seyer

Pierre SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Hunted deer in 24 in the hills, saw nothing but elk. Hunted elk with a buddy of mine this year and can tell you there is no shortage of elk.

Bryce Hemiller

Watertown SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I see more and more hunters and the quality of our bulls continue to go down in size. Also more hunters make the challenge and pressure higher on the elk therefore only thing that benefits is the money coming into the state from sales.

Mike Powell

Hartford SD

Position: support

Comment:

More is better in my opinion as long as there is sufficient habitat for them. Also would be awesome to be able to have the older folks have a little better chance of drawing a tag when you get to 20+ preference points

Chase Weddle

Spearfish SD

Position: support

Comment:

As a lifelong hunter who values both conservation and opportunity, I appreciate the Commission's willingness to revisit the elk population objectives in the Black Hills. Exploring an increase in the upper end of the objective to 9,000—when habitat and range conditions allow—seems like a reasonable, science-based way to balance herd health with growing interest in elk hunting. Carefully managed population growth could provide more chances for hunters like myself to draw a license, while still respecting the land, the animals, and other stakeholders. I support the department's effort to seek broad input and look forward to long-term sustainability.

I am aware of situations, in which a hunter of nearly 30 preference points still cannot seem to draw a tag. While I still have some waiting to do, it seems some additional hunting opportunities would be welcomed by many residents.

John Lee

Buffalo SD

Position: support

Comment:

I am a ranch owner in Harding County. We own the southern portion of wets short pine hills. I think the ranch are helpful and beautiful to have on the land

Dylan Cavanaugh

Aberdeen SD

Position: other

Comment:

I don't necessarily oppose or support increasing the management objective. I do have questions and concerns related to it though. Would the Black Hill's habitat be able to support an additional 1,000 Elk while still maintaining a healthy herd and the mature bulls everyone is used to? Is further increasing animal density really the best move with CWD still a question looming in some people's minds? To reach the additional 1,000 Elk objective I imagine we'd have to cut back on cow tags for many years, what about the opportunity that's lost there? Is losing that opportunity somehow less important than increasing herd size to gain more bull tags down the road? I don't have the answers to my questions, but I do know that 1,000 Elk don't just materialize onto the landscape and once they're here, they will have an impact on habitat. What do the state Biologists and Ecologists think about increasing management objective?

Andy Reimer

Huron SD

Position:

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Andy Reimer

Huron SD

Position: support

Comment:

If habitat can support the increase in population, I fully support managing it as such.

Marcus Dangel

Hartford SD

Position: support

Comment:

As a person who has hunted elk in other states outside of South Dakota and some who has had the opportunity to hunt in South Dakota!! I feel you guys are doing an awesome job managing the elk heard and I think we should leave it alone and keep trying to grow the bear. And leave the tag numbers alone!! We wait all of these to get are tag and the hunting is unbelievably great. No other hunt do you get to see as many elk as you do in South Dakota in a single day of hunting also, we wait all of these years and the hunting pressure is little out there which just makes the experience that much better if you look at other states, it takes a lot of years of preference to get the same style hunt as what South Dakota has so we're really no different than any other state.

Scott Comer

Spearfish SD

Position: support

Comment:

Highly support increasing the population to the upper end when habitat and range conditions allow.

Tyson Herbold

North Sioux City SD

Position: support

Comment:

Due to the point creep we are experiencing with Black Hills elk tags, I fully support raising the upper objective numbers of the Black Hills Elk population. Due to the way South Dakota issues elk licenses to land owners first, the amount of licenses issued to land owners, allowing land owners to draw an any sex tag every year (no waiting period unlike a non-land owner) and the rules applying to these land owners (not having to only hunt on their own land), non-land owner applicates are being greatly taken advantage of. This increase in the upper end of the objective is the only way to sustain a healthy elk herd in the Black Hills while increasing the opportunity for a non-land owner to draw a Black Hills elk tag. Thank you for your time.

Reid Herbold

North Sioux City SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Garrett Wobst

Aberdeen SD

Position: support

Comment:

Increasing the elk heard out west can only benefit the state. In addition to increased hunting opportunities are increase tourism, sight seeing, and others. if there is no environmental or biological down side, then the decision to increase is a no brainer.

Ruth Krause

Becker Township SD

Position: support

Comment:

My husband and I both had the opportunity to hunt elk in the Black Hills. We enjoyed the split season which enabled us both to harvest an elk, go home hang one and come back to hunt again. We had a wonderful time

Ruth Krause

Becker Township SD

Position: support

Comment:

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Ruth Krause

Becker Township SD

Position: support

Comment:

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Doug Ford

Mellette SD

Position: support

Comment:

I agree there should be a larger and closely managed elk herd in South Dakota. I think it should stay a draw system giving everyone that's a resident of South Dakota better and more opportunities to hunt in our beautiful state. It should be closely monitored and never be promoted for commercial gains.

Jeff Blankenfeld

Aurora SD

Position: support

Comment:

Increasing herd size would be in hunters best interest. Assume to accomplish reduction of cow numbers would have to be carefully monitored. Ranchers with grazing allotment would probably for the most part not be in favor of this type of plan. My suggestions for consideration follow:

1. Continue mountain lion control efforts
2. Work aggressively with Forest Service on controlled burns
3. Provide cow elk tags for earlier calendar year harvest - October, November.
4. With Forest Service support habitat development by closing trails and some roads to vehicles and support water development in suitable areas with release of Beaver in streams and creeks.

Thank you
Jeff

Nicholas Hendrickson

Bryant SD

Position: support

Comment:

I think we should increase the elk herd by 10 times or more. I would like to see enough tags that a resident could hunt every 4-6 years. Also I would like to be another destination for non resident hunters.

Wyoming is selling non resident elk tags for \$2,000. This could be a great source of revenue for the state and could help the small communities and land owners west river

Jeff Olson

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I support raising the population objective to 9000 elk. There has been good data and public support for this for many years. There are good programs in place to handle any increase in depredation. Thanks for you support of SD sportsmen Jeff Olson

Eric Porisch

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Jeffrey Albrecht

Brookings SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

After hunting elk this fall I would not make any changes to elk management plan. I hunted for six days. We saw more elk than deer. After growing up in Lead and hunting the same area years ago I could not believe the number of elk this year.

I get real concerned when GFP discusses change to a season such as the proposal. GFP could do a better job of communicating kill reporting process. We ended up going to Outdoor Campus in Rapid City. The lady there was more than helpful explaining this to me. Easy process just needed an explanation.

Landowner where I did some hunting was disappointed in GFP as he meets the acreage requirement for a landowner tag but the local CO says he doesn't qualify???. Not sure why this is a decision of the CO. Landowner was very gracious about hospitality and access. I was amazed at the help people showed up when someone pulled the trigger. People came out of the woods to help.

Anyway leave things as they are.

Gary A Larson

Deadwood SD

Position: support

Comment:

I live in the H7 unit and have been happy to see Elk calf population doing very good. This year more than others there were later calves or very small into September. With more clear-cutting timber sales there should be more feed as long as not in a drought period.

Grant Anderson

Box Elder SD

Position: support

Comment:

I support growing out elk population if and only if the habitat can support the increase in animals.

Eric Rice

Harrisburg SD

Position: other

Comment:

I don't think anything drastic should be done to the elk management plan. The Black Hills is second to none with respect to the quality of the hunt.

One thing that I have noticed over the years is that there is significant pressure, especially during October. I think something to think about would be to separate the rifle season into two 15 day seasons during October. This would still give hunters the same amount of opportunity, but spread out the hunting pressure.

Brad Phillips

Custer SD

Position: other

Comment:

I suspect the elk numbers across the Forest are at the proposed 9,000 already and SDGFP just wants to have that number on the books. I could easily support the elk increase if you could get the public land livestock numbers to come down by 1,000 (fat chance of that). Key areas, especially around water sources are already being over-grazed from the cow/elk combination and the vegetation will continue to suffer. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Scott Hintz

Yale SD

Position: support

Comment:

Does this include the prairie elk units.

Ronald Erion

Spearfish SD

Position: support

Comment:

I am all for raising the number of Elk in the management plan to 9,000 from a pure love of seeing elk and possibly more hunter opportunity. With that said, I am not privy to the amount of depredation to private habitat or what the forest will handle so I will defer to the experts (foresters and game and fish employees).

I realize this is not very helpful.

Ron Erion

Doug Johnson

Tea SD

Position: support

Comment:

Takes way to many years to draw a tag

Marc Murren

Sioux Falls SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Andrew Kopman

Lake Norden SD

Position: support

Comment:

I attached a word document with my comments.

Chuck Kuemmerle

Rapid City SD

Position: other

Comment:

While I think everyone with the exception of landowners would like to see more elk I'm confused as to how that will happen. As I see it the population is controlled by weather, habitat, predators, disease, and hunting. We can't control the weather, you and the RMEF are doing everything possible for habitat, we're harvesting as many lions as possible, not much can be done that isn't being done about disease. That leaves hunting. Is the goal is to increase the herd or increase hunt opportunities as the two would seem to be mutually exclusive.

Dale Singer

Spearfish SD

Position: support

Comment:

I just hunted elk this year in the Black Hills, I saw and heard lots of elk. It was a great hunting season. I am worried though that it may be my only chance to ever draw a tag. Please consider ways to let people draw tags more frequently. thanks,

Cheryl Jarding

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

We want the elk in the Black Hills. It must be managed and protected. We don't see the elk like we have in the past. This is their land and we must do everything we can to make sure this population continues to grow.

Steven Eddy

Spearfish SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I have tried to and had responded GFP warden and land management. They showed up and are good guys but seams to have personal agenda not Chad. Lead me to believe some personal agenda going on with land owner elk permits. I can't keep feeling 1000s of elk and keep running cattle pairs without a tag and some gruti. Mom owns the place 90 years old and been in charge since 2001 .gust trying to keep it in the family rather than a cabin paster

James Cantalope

Pollock SD

Position: support

Comment:

Those who take cow elk tags should only wait 2years to apply for a cow take but still 10 for bull tag , thus removing some from the bull pool

Lew Culberson

Nisland SD

Position: support

Comment:

Considering a person may go Their entire lives without drawing an elk tag for the Black Hills, conservation Failure!! Making Any citizen wait 20 years to draw a tag is totally unacceptable!
It's totally time to make more elk tags available to the public!

Lew Culberson

Nisland SD

Position: support

Comment:

Considering a person may go Their entire lives without drawing an elk tag for the Black Hills, conservation Failure!! Making Any citizen wait 20 years to draw a tag is totally unacceptable!
It's totally time to make more elk tags available to the public!

Steven Eddy

Spearfish SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I have tried to and had responded GFP warden and land management. They showed up and are good guys but seams to have personal agenda not Chad. Lead me to believe some personal agenda going on with land owner elk permits. I can't keep feeling 1000s of elk and keep running cattle pairs without a tag and some gruti. Mom owns the place 90 years old and been in charge since 2001 .gust trying to keep it in the family rather than a cabin paster

Marion Culberson

Nisland SD

Position: support

Comment:

Considering it takes up to 20 years to draw an elk tag in the Black Hills, one has to support more tags. Frankly taking up to 20 years to draw any tag is a Conservation Failure.

Steve Matheny

Hermosa SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Kenley Ulmer

Custer SD

Position: support

Comment:

55 yoa. Taxidermist and hunter. Low deer numbers. Plenty of habitat and room for more elk. Stop finding ways to kill more cows. Let the population grow. Only people opposed are the few ranchers with cows.

Johnnie Pauly

Martin SD

Position: support

Comment:

How are u going to get the Hurd of elk in bennett county under control now we have them in town we need more tags for local hunters out of area hunters don't show up and don't ask to hunt till they draw a tag bunch of bull thanks jr

Kevin Roark

Pierre SD

Position: support

Comment:

I would love to see more elk hunting opportunity in the Black Hills. I'm 43 years old and drew my archery tag 2 years ago. It was a great hunt as far as being able to find elk and the terrain is much nicer than other elk states. The side by side ATV traffic was ridiculous however. I'd love to see some of those roads closed after labor day. As it stands right now a Black Hills elk hunt is a once in a lifetime opportunity. I have 22 years preference for rifle. Suppose I drew this year, with the 9 year wait and another 25-30 years preference, I'll be in my 80s before I draw the 2nd tag of life. I think we all know the habitat could support more elk. If the private landowners are opposed to more elk on their land, perhaps they could let some people hunt.

Mike Jarding

Hot Springs SD

Position: support

Comment:

I support the GF&P Elk Management Action Plan to increase the population to 9000. I believe this the plan should be a minimum of 8000 and a maximum of 10000. 6000 to 9000 is too big of margin. I don't want to see the big swing of population like we did in the past.

Steven Gisi

Ipswich SD

Position: other

Comment:

I have seen and been to several of these "forums" that the GFP has put on. IMO, It really makes no difference what the public says, the GFP already have a plan they are going to go with. I saw this when they planned to change the draw system for deer. I specifically asked the question if they were going to actually listen to the public, or if they had a plan regardless of what the public said. The reps looked everyone straight in the eye and said they would listen to the public. That IMO turned out to be a flat out lie. So I guess really it does not matter what the public says or comments on. GFP will do what their plan is anyway. One thing that I think is so stupid regarding elk draws is given that it takes anywhere from 16 to 22 years or longer for an individual to actually draw an any elk tag, why do we have to wait 9 years before even being eligible to put in for a draw. We already have to wait 16 to 22, sometimes even longer to draw. It is basically a once in a lifetime draw as it is.

Mark Anderson

Brandon SD

Position: support

Comment:

I AM IN FULL SUPPORT OF INCREASING THE AMOUNT OF ELK IN THE HILLS: EVEN IF IT INVOLVES LOWER OR NO COW ELK PERMITS.

Mark Anderson

Brandon SD

Position: support

Comment:

I AM IN FULL SUPPORT OF INCREASING THE AMOUNT OF ELK IN THE HILLS: EVEN IF IT INVOLVES LOWER OR NO COW ELK PERMITS.

Terrence Packman

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I would love to see an increase in the herds. Short term it may hurt hunting opportunities but long term it would help. The only problem I see is that the Hills are becoming over crowded and there is less habitat for the animals. GFP is doing a great job managing what we have to provide hunting and viewing opportunities to our future generations. Thanks for all you do!

Mark Peterson

Rapid City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I hunted 4 days in the 6 mile moon area last fall with a cow permit. Never saw a elk or any sign. Seems to me the gfp sells most licenses than their are elk. We were very disappointed. Plus lost 13 years preference points. Decided to go with a cow permit as im getting to old to walk much.

John Rankin

Rapid City, Sd SD

Position: support

Comment:

I believe that by increasing the number of elk in SD the number of hunting opportunities should increase, not to mention greater tourism gains through options to see and hear elk in SD.

Nick Semmler

Rapid City SD

Position: other

Comment:

Worthless absolutely worthless.

Ken Thompson

Wall SD

Position: other

Comment:

The point system is a joke. You have 15 individuals in H1A21 with that have not drawing a tag that have been applying for 20 years to 24 years. These individuals should automatically get a tag, no questions asked. Then you have 16 tags available for the 0 to 2 year individuals. They should not even be able to draw a tag till they reach 10 years. The ten years plus group only can get 55 tags, you have 382 individuals who have been sending you \$10.00 for each application = \$3,970.00 you have milked out of them. If you took the tags from the 0 to 9 year bracket, added them to the 10 year plus bracket that would be 71 tags available to those that have been applying at \$10.00 a crack and have paid for that Elk tag in application fees. Just quit the bs of giving out tags to those under 10 years of applying. Start reducing the number of individuals, who year after year keep applying that are in the 10 year plus group, with a hope of getting a tag. While people under 10 years get a tag. It is just pain wrong! Think and do the right thing by reducing the individuals that have 10 plus years of applying.

Steven Paleck

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

no out of state Elk tags, coyote bounty be good idea way to many around, fawn killers!

Karter Moody

Groton SD

Position: other

Comment:

Maybe instead of proposing these "management plans" to stuff your pockets even more, we should possibly look into how individuals are drawing tags multiple times within five years. Absolutely no land ownership, just general limited draw tags. Stop taking bribes for the wealthy to get whatever tag they wish, and do your job of keeping the outdoors fair and eliminating pay to play. The amount of bullshit this department does is unbelievable; frankly the state of the department is just a logo that only gives a care about out of state money. Maybe cater to your in state outdoorsmen before catering to those out of state, there's a reason the number of new outdoorsmen is declining and it starts with the agency tasked with enriching our outdoors. Leave the money making to the Treasurer's office and do your actual job, it's pathetic how much the opportunity in this state has declined in the last ten years.

Austin Soukup

Lake Andes SD

Position: other

Comment:

Have a spike hunt for youth. Get them out doors. Keep the tags limited to the general public on any elk tags to preserve the trophy bulls for people that have been waiting 10-15-20-25 years. If the number of elk is to high raise the cow tag numbers. And if the cow numbers are in line and there's to many bulls then offer a spike hunt or like a four point or less. for adults that doesn't use your preference points.

Brent Kastner

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I fully support increasing our elk population in hopes of being able to increase tags in the future. However, with that I want to be clear that I do not support increasing the elk population for land owners to receive the majority of additional tags. My stance has always been that if a rancher has issues with elk but is unwilling to allow hunters onto their property to harvest elk or charge an outrageous trophy fee they should not be rewarded for it with additional tags or financial assistance.

Rhonda Baker

Mt Vernon SD

Position: support

Comment:

Support increasing the elk herd - however - a rest period between the archery season and rifle season is a must. That way you don't have rifle hunters scouting and setting up camp when archery hunters are still trying to fill their tags.

Alan Mielke

Hermosa SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

AsalandownerIopposeIincreasingelknumberslesswoodbetter

Anthony Auch

Brandon SD

Position: support

Comment:

In full support of providing more tags for black hills elk. I am more curious on the management of the prairie elk herds and units. I always wondered why we can't have a hunt-able elk population up and down both sides of the Missouri River. I suspect it's mostly due to the objection of farmers and ranchers instead of lack of suitable habitat. Are there measures the state could take to minimize the impact of elk on agriculture/livestock while still maintaining an opportunity for the public to have more options for elk in the state? I am currently a rangeland ecology & management major at SDSU and would like to hear more about this topic. Thank you!

Rob Powell

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Brywn Ractliffe

Chancellor SD

Position: support

Comment:

I support raising elk numbers only if tags are not increase. South Dakota elk herds are quality over quantity and that is how we would like it to stay.

Dana Rogers

Hill City SD

Position: support

Comment:

South Dakota Wildlife Federation official comments on Elk Management Plan. Attached

Thad Grimsrud

Brookings SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Maybe I'm missing something? I don't understand how increasing the Population Objective will increase opportunity? In order to meet that population Objective tags would have to be reduced for a period of year/years to meet that growth objective? during that time there would be less opportunity. Also if the Black Hills experienced dryer years where it would not hold those numbers than the numbers could actually decrease.

I have been out in the hills chasing elk either as a tag holder or to accompany a friend for the last 9 years. I believe the opportunities are plenty and the management objectives are right in line with opportunity and habitat. I see no need to chase this rainbow.

Thank you

Jordan Johnson

Canton SD

Position: support

Comment:

I support increasing the upper limit of the elk population objective to 9,000. I would like to see more elk on the landscape in the Black Hills. I would also like the hunting opportunity to increase, if the success rates would remain stable. I do not want the hunting opportunity to increase if it would be a detriment to the elk herd or the success rate. The only way to achieve that would be to increase elk numbers.

William Miles

Colman SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Keep as is

Sean Mooney

Custer SD

Position: support

Comment:

I am in favor of a general increase in the number of Elk in the Black Hills for several reasons.

First and foremost is my understanding that large native herbivores such as Elk do much to improve the overall health and wellbeing of the entire ecosystem.

An increase in the Elk population would also result in other benefits.

Greater opportunities to view Elk would increase enjoyment for those who call the Black Hills home and potentially have economic benefits as well by being an added attraction for tourists coming to the area.

Greater opportunities for Elk hunting may also become available which would no doubt be welcomed by many hunters including myself.

Andreau-Joseph Miller

Mitchell SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

To Whom It May Concern,

I am submitting a public comment on the Draft South Dakota Elk Action Plan 2026–2030, focused on the Elk Hunter Access Program, or EHAP.

The draft plan points to increased EHAP acreage as a sign of success, but it does not address how the program is working in real conditions for hunters or landowners. In many prairie and West River units, access through EHAP is inconsistent and often unreliable. The real issue is not how many acres are enrolled, it is whether a tag holder can realistically secure permission and whether participating landowners can handle the volume of requests they receive.

Many EHAP landowners are older, extremely busy, or not set up to manage repeated calls and messages. A large portion never respond at all. The few who do respond often get overwhelmed and repeatedly contacted by hunters because they are among the only reachable participants. That concentrates pressure on a small number of ranchers and creates frustration on both sides. Most working landowners do not have the time to act as schedulers or access coordinators during hunting season.

The Elk Action Plan is detailed and measurable when it comes to herd objectives, harvest structure, and survey methods. EHAP, by comparison, is described only at a high level. There are no performance measures tied to access reliability, actual hunter use, or landowner burden. Because the draft plan puts more emphasis on landowner-driven elk management in prairie units and depends on private land harvest to meet depredation and density goals, this is a meaningful gap.

Rather than only expanding acreage, I would encourage GFP to strengthen how EHAP functions operationally. Other states use simple reservation and permission systems that reduce repeated hunter-to-landowner cold calls and move the scheduling burden off the landowner. GFP would not need to build a system from scratch. This could likely be added as a module to the existing license vendor platform hunters already use.

Some practical options worth considering include:

1. A centralized online reservation calendar where landowners set available hunter days and property rules once, and hunters book open slots instead of repeatedly calling.
2. State or vendor managed scheduling where access slots are assigned based on tag type, unit, and season dates.
3. Automatic digital permission slips generated after booking, so hunters have clear proof of access without extra coordination.
4. Standardized contact rules for EHAP parcels so requests go through one channel instead of scattered phone outreach.
5. Per parcel hunter caps and date limits to prevent overload and repeated pressure on the same landowners.
6. A low tech participation option where GFP staff enter availability and rules on behalf of landowners who do not want to use online tools.

If EHAP is going to remain a primary access tool within elk management strategy, it would also help to track a few operational metrics, for example:

1. The percentage of enrolled parcels that are actually hunted each season.
2. Landowner response reliability.
3. Hunter use rates per parcel.

4. Harvest success tied to EHAP properties.

5. Landowner renewal and satisfaction rates.

Those measures would show whether the program is functioning as intended, not just how many acres are listed.

Addressing these operational problems would not only improve hunter success and reduce frustration, it would likely increase landowner participation as well. A system that limits repeated calls, removes scheduling burden, sets clear expectations, and gives landowners predictable and controlled hunter traffic is easier to say yes to. Improving the structure of access is likely to grow enrollment and retention more effectively than outreach alone.

Because the draft plan increases reliance on private land harvest, especially in prairie units, access mechanics matter. Increasing tag numbers alone will not achieve management goals if hunters cannot realistically get onto the ground where elk are present.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments and for your continued work on elk management in South Dakota.

Respectfully,
AJ Miller
Mitchell, SD

Joseph Hall

Rapid City SD

Position: other

Comment:

The carrying capacity of the land must be adhered to and left to professional range managers for the maintenance of a "healthy elk population. Resistance to politics and misinformed public outcry for more licenses when not warranted must be voiced. Particular attention must be on the removal of apex predators as a tool to increase the population of elk to satisfy the public notion that their removal is the primary solution to increasing herd size and thus increase license availability.

Chris Dvorak

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

As a Land Owner in H3, I support growing the elk population. Elk are a great resource for South Dakota. I would like more long term hunting opportunities for my family and friends, and think growing the elk population long term is a great start.

Wade Jutila

Hermosa SD

Position: support

Comment:

I would support a higher population if more archery tags will be available. It is ridiculous that more rifle tags are allocated than archery when archery has a much lower success rate. More opportunity for hunting could be available if the tag allocation percentages for archery increased. INCREASE THE PERCENTAGE OF ARCHERY TAGS AVAILABLE!!!

Chris Duklet

Watertown SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

George Dehantle

Aberdeen SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Commissioners,

Increasing elk populations by 1,000 will only make a miniscule difference in bull licenses available. Why don't you reduce the percent of elk licenses that go to landowners. There are landowners that have hunted elk in H2, EVERY YEAR for the past 20-25 years!!!! Most South Dakotans have never had the opportunity to hunt elk and they are carrying over 20 years of preference points! It's obvious this is extremely unfair and something needs to change. If landowners only received an elk tag every 5 years, they would still be hunting 4 to 5 times more than the normal hunter. This is a change that needs to happen and it's about time that GFP starts supporting hunters a bit more than landowners. Most landowners in the Hills have very little private land, yet draw tags every year and then get to hunt the entire unit. This is a long, long-overdue change that needs to occur. Please float that change to the public and see what the public comment is, a change would easily be supported!

Keith Haiar

Spearfish SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Again increasing the elk population increases the risk of rangeland damage. Please hold the elk population steady by increasing the number of elk tags. A win/win for everyone.

Bryan Harvey

Custer SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Dean Cape

Hot Springs SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

As a fulltime rancher in unit H3, I think you are playing with fire if you try to increase the total number of elk in the Black Hills. The majority of ranchers enjoy having some elk around, when you have two to three hundred in a bunch that spend a lot of time on private property, that is not a good situation. Please try to have some meetings in each elk unit in the hills before you act on this proposal.

Joey Evans

Custer SD

Position: support

Comment:

I would support the population objective being as high as the black hills would allow the animals to thrive. If doing so means that overall tag allocations were cut in the short term, then that is what should happen.

Its my opinion that we should not be issuing depredation tags at all, and that we should adjust how many Landowner tags are allocated overall, and how often a Landowner can draw a tag. Why is it fair that I can maybe be lucky enough to draw 2-3 tags in my lifetime, and a Landowner can get one every year? Landowners already have several privileges that non landowners do not have when it comes to elk hunting/access. If we were to have to cut tag allocations to help the overall population thrive, it is not fair that the public be the only one to lose access to tags.

The overall population and health of the heard is what matters most, and I believe we should do any and everything that we can to protect them.

James Macdougall

Aberdeen SD

Position: other

Comment:

I am a landowner in unit H3 and own approximately 2000 acres. I qualify for a land owner elk tag and most years have applied for an archery tag. I work to enhance my property as habitat, including adding a water system with multiple tanks at significant expense. I as soon as I asked support any measures that GFP would consider to boost the elk population in the Black Hills, including the southern Black Hills. At times, we have an abundance of elk and other times Noel at all, depending on their movements. Overall, however, I would say that I would prefer a larger elk population. Since I became a landowner in that unit approximately 10 years ago, I have allowed multiple people to hunt cow elk on my property and a few bull hunters as well. I plan to continue this practice if the elk population will sustain this.

Please count me as strongly in favor of increasing the elf population, and therefore more EI counting opportunities for the public.

James MacDougall

Leo Stroup

Watertown SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Griffin Keever

Watertown SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Spencer Sargent

Pierre SD

Position: other

Comment:

I think that more licenses should be given to South Dakota residents. I also believe that the ATV and UTV trails need to be managed way more strictly. I have listened to so many elk hunters say that they were hunting when ATV's and stuff came driving right through the middle of their hunt and scaring away all of the elk and then they have to walk all the way back to the pickup truck after applying for a license for 20 some years

Alayna Bauernfeind

Lead SD

Position: support

Comment:

The effect of increased elk population on habitat needs to be monitored extremely closely. With the combination of grazing livestock and elk within the Black Hills there is a chance of extreme damages to ecosystems and private lands. In addition, CWD rates are increasing in the area. Keeping cases well monitored and adjusting the population based off of disease spread would be in the best interest. In terms of population control through recreation, I like that there could be the possibility of more opportunities for residents to hunt elk.

Todd Craig

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Denise Mooney

Custer SD

Position: support

Comment:

I believe more Elk in the Black Hills National Forest can only be a good thing. Elk are a keystone species in the Black Hills, they play a crucial role in maintaining a healthy and diverse ecosystem by helping to sustain biodiversity. The potential opportunity to obtain an elk tag more than once every 10 years could also be an added bonus for local hunters, bringing further economic benefits to Black Hills communities.

Bryce Wilen

Belle Fourche SD

Position: support

Comment:

Just wanted to say, I think you're doing well! Strong elk numbers, quality bulls in the northern units at least. I'm consistently in elk year round and lots of them. My only complaint is all the side by side hunters who just spend the day driving around "hunting." It's ridiculous and an embarrassment!

Harvey Freeman

Garretson SD

Position: support

Comment:

More elk equals more elk hunting chances. I had my Black Hills rifle any elk tag in 2025. There so many hunters where I started hunting that I went to another area to hunt. Less elk where I went, but much more enjoyable. I think something needs to change to break up unit size and maybe split seasons. Another idea for hunting would be a season to hunt elk with muzzleloader. A muzzleloader season would also bring in money from preference point sales.

Mark Johnson

Crooks SD

Position: support

Comment:

Preference points should be able to be passed down when someone passes away. My dad had 24-25 preference points in Custer State Park, any elk when he passed away at 88 yrs old. Those points should be passed down to a descendent.

Matthew Neisen

Spearfish SD

Position: support

Comment:

I am mostly familiar with Black Hills Elk unit 1 so my comments reflect what I have seen in that unit. My first time chasing elk in H1 was in 2000. Since then I have spent a minimum of 5 days every year, most years 2-3x that many days chasing elk in September and October. I also spend many days later in season deer hunting and also lots of time in the summer. The elk numbers and quality of bulls is terrible to what it was in the early to mid 2000's. The amount of any elk tags that are currently being given out size of the herd is pure insanity. I had my rifle elk tag this year after 24 years of applying. I couldn't be much more disappointed in my experience. Herds of cows without any bulls and small 5 points with 15 cows at the end of September is not a sign of a healthy herd. I spent 39 days between the end of Aug, Sept and Oct and I only saw 1 herd that had more than 1 bull in it. All the rest of the herds had either 1 bull or bulls at all--this is during the peak of the rut. Of those 39 days chasing elk there was only two days that I didn't see any elk. The north half of unit only has a fraction of the elk that it used to have before the slaughter of '06, elk have never rebounded on north end to anywhere close to the numbers they had in the early 2000s. If you have to wait 20+ years to draw a tag you should be able to have a hunt of a lifetime. There used to be numerous 340+ mature herd bulls out there and a 300+ bull for every hunter with a tag and a little effort. I never saw a bull over 320" this year--and with knowledge of other locals of their 20+ cameras there weren't any pictures of bull over 320" either. Elk numbers in the south end of the unit are much better but the hunting pressure is terrible. 1 camp had 8 guys in it for 1 tag. They would split in groups of 2 with the 3 groups without the hunter blocking access for hunters that actually have a tag, saving the spot for their hunter. Cell trail cams are out of control. Many other states have outlawed or restricted cell cameras to animals a fighting chance. Close seasons for cell cameras, restrictions on the number of cameras an individual can run or just going back to regular non-cell cameras on public land are all options.

Raising the population objective to 9,000 elk or more would be a wonderful thing for the Black Hills. But managing the current elk population that is there should take priority. 80 any elk tags in a unit as small as H1 is unsustainable and numbers and quality of bulls in H1 is proving this. H1 used to have more elk, they were spread out so hunters were spread out, and the quality of bulls was much better--back when there were only 40 any elk tags. Bull to cow ratios are totally messed up right now. I am not even bringing in the additional archery any elk tags. Archery hunters are killing more elk than ever before--killing(maybe not harvesting)--taking long shots to just get an arrow into something isn't hunting. Bring back the once required archery hunter safety course to try to get some hunter ethics back. One hunter said he had got arrows into 3 bulls but wasn't able to recover any of them--he was still out hunting, try to shoot a 4th.

Cell cameras and unrestricted side by side use have to be accounted for in harvest statistics and tag allocations.

Move all cow tags to December, All of them. Do some late season archery and rifle bull tags to spread the hunters out more and to run more hunters through the system.

Dave Lindblom

Rapid City, SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Absolutely not. As I review your Wildlife Damage Management plan and apply it to my ranch and the needs caused by elk damage you are not following your own plan. Increasing the elk population is increasing a burden on the ranchers in the Black Hills as it is unavoidable that at times all elk are on these ranches.

I have had damage to my stored feed each winter. When I call, sometimes GF&P will do limited mitigation efforts but nothing substantial. No effort to communicate with me, no effort to build a working relationship with me, no solutions.

Your current hunting season is less than successful on this ranch as the elk typically move in after season. You have flaws in your stack yard program. Your hunting season conflicts with our busy fall time cow work. We are in a mostly private land unit and my policy is to grant hunting privileges to those who ask before they apply.

I do not need more hunters on this ranch, I do not need more feed loss due to more elk. Currently my attitude is leaning toward why do I even let any elk hunters in. So absolutely no more elk!

Dave Lindblom

Robert Appel

Becker Twp SD

Position: other

Comment:

I recently got a cow Elk in BH Unit 3 private land she was 21 years old, those ranchers don't want you hunting only family & freinds then they turn the land over to Outfitters which one is on your commission board,charge 7000 for guided cow hunt,where guides don't need Gi Licence thats wrong then give that rancher deperadation tag,your not running your Elk Deal fair do it like Mont pay the Ranchers when they let hunters on. I've got 32 Pts. for Park Licence also thats not right clean up the old ones. 21 year old cow WoW figure it out why. Hunt Bow or Rifle not both, We don,t need Guides in SD.

Brent Albrecht

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I am writing in support of Kurt and Jeri Rantapaa request for landowner elk tag. It is my understanding that they were denied landowner tags because the game warden stated they did not have a hardship. If a law is implemented for land owners then everyone that meets the criteria should be granted a license. It should not be at the discretion of a game warden or anyone else. I have brought family to hunt on Kurt and Jeri's property and have harvested elk on their property. I also know several others that have ask to hunt and never been denied as long as it didn't affect someone elses hunt.

This is frustrating to me as the GFP puts laws in place, often whith public and land owner comments. The GFP must uphold these laws but should not pick and choose who gets a tag or who does not get a tag. Glve the Rantapa's a landowner that that are entitled to get.

I have hunted this property and see the destruction the elk can do, tearing up creeks and streams, mowing down fences to the point cable fencing has to be used to keep the livestock in the pastures. Once again if should not be the game wardens decision to deny a landowner who meets the criteria a landowner tag. These are good people who spend a great portoin of their lives on constervation. The elk populations are where they are at because of conservationist like Kurt, Jeri and other landowners in the Black Hlls. One of these days I will draw an elk tag after putting in for 17 years and I will guarantee you they will let me hunt on their property,

Sincerely,

Thank You, Brent

Dutch Deick

Pierre SD

Position: support

Comment:

Land owner elk tags could open opportunities for both the hunters and the landowners. As difficult as it is to draw a tag. It would open opportunities to those of us that are getting old.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Respectfully,

Dutch Deick

Robert Appel

Becker Twp SD

Position: other

Comment:

I do not like it that you guys voted down Guiedes need licence be it fishing or hunting,lots of the fees are cash, I've been there.I don't understand why. Also one of the commissioners is a giude, to me thats a conflickt of interest. Why don't SnowBears need to have Licence there guieds also in most of them they are ruining our fishing in Glacial Lakes. come on wake up. This letter probably is off subject but think it over.

Alex Permann

Chamberlain SD

Position: support

Comment:

I support increasing the upper end of the Black Hills elk population objective from 8,000 to 9,000 elk.

South Dakota's elk restoration has been a success, and demand for elk hunting and viewing continues to grow. A higher upper objective provides flexibility during favorable forage years and can translate into increased hunting opportunities. More elk generally means more opportunity — which benefits hunters, local economies, and overall public engagement in wildlife conservation.

However, any increase in the population objective must be paired with continued strong partnerships with private landowners. Landowner tolerance is essential to long-term elk management success. If population objectives increase, it will be important to:

Maintain and strengthen depredation response programs

Continue expanding access opportunities where appropriate

Provide timely assistance when conflicts arise

Ensure that landowners feel heard and supported

The success of this proposal will depend as much on relationships as it does on biological capacity.

In addition, while elk are currently concentrated in the Black Hills as are hunters, we are beginning to see movement into prairie units, particularly along the Missouri River corridor. Rather than viewing that solely as a management challenge, I believe it presents an opportunity. It would be beneficial to proactively engage landowners in those areas to determine whether limited, well-managed elk expansion could be cultivated in places where social tolerance exists.

If handled carefully and collaboratively, developing small, sustainable populations in select prairie units could:

Distribute hunting opportunity more broadly across the state

Reduce pressure and concentration within the Black Hills

Provide flexibility in long-term population management

Other states with predominantly private land bases have successfully grown elk herds by pairing herd expansion with strong landowner engagement and incentive-based programs. While South Dakota's situation is unique, there may be lessons worth evaluating.

Overall, I support increasing the upper objective to 9,000 elk provided that:

Adaptive management remains tied to forage conditions and drought

Landowner partnerships remain central

Depredation programs stay strong and responsive

Prairie expansion, where appropriate, is explored collaboratively and cautiously

A thoughtful increase in objective, combined with proactive planning outside the Black Hills, can position South Dakota for long-term success.

Leonard Spomer

Pierre SD

Position: support

Comment:

Having served on the first Elk Working Group in 2014-15, I know the challenges and demand for elk licenses is extremely high.

I have had the opportunity to either hunt elk or accompany another elk hunter in 2023, 2024 and 2025 in both the south and north ends of Unit 2.

There was ample forage available for livestock grazing and an additional 1000 elk without any issues, despite the drought of 2024.

I am firmly in favor of increasing the elk ceiling limit to 9000.

Sincerely

Susan Paulton

Edgemont SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

The present quota of elk is MORE than enough. They overgraze our pastures, eat our soil health plants to the dirt and destroy our hay crops. They continually tear down our fences. We provide the water they drink, our cattle minerals and salt. We are not against a reasonable number of elk but over population is devastating to the land. We produce beef that feeds America. Please do not make our currently bad elk problems worse. Thank you.

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Jeri Perrett

Deadwood SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Please read my letter allowed during the meeting, thank you.

Mark Rantapaa

Deadwood SD

Position: other

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Mark Rantapaa

Deadwood SD

Position: other

Comment:

To whom it may concern at GFP and the commission.

My name is Mark Rantapaa and my wife Casandra and I live approximately 13 miles south of Deadwood, on the Roubaix Lake Road located off highway 385 on the Middle Box Elder. I'm writing to comment on the Elk Management Action Plan.

My family owns 160 acres of agriculture land and we lease another 170 acres – all in Lawrence county and all prime elk habitat. These acres are primarily hay pasture, but include a significant amount of timber as well. The property is primarily open meadows, with streams surrounded by Forest Service timber – and is heavily used by large elk herds throughout the year. In a typical winter, in the field in front of my house at 12001 Roubaix Lake Road, we will see herds of 100 to 200 head (sometimes more) of elk on perhaps 10 to 20 days at a minimum. This is only a small portion of the property we own and the elk days at other locations of our property are certainly higher than in front of my house.

My family has run cattle on these properties for over 100 years, but currently we only put up hay, so the hay crop is the only source of income the properties are currently generating. With the large herds of elk feeding on our pasture land, the hay crop is significantly smaller than what we have seen in the past, and the fences require significantly higher maintenance. We do receive a hay check from the GFP which helps but certainly does not cover our losses and added expenses.

With respect to the Elk Management Action Plan and raising the elk numbers, we are a family of hunters and support the idea of having a healthy and stable herd of elk in the Black Hills. We are happy to allow other hunters access to our properties, and only ask that they ask for permission, so we know who is on our properties.

We have always had a good relationship with GFP and have allowed the GFP to use our properties to collar elk from the ground or from the air. We are willing to work with the GFP and other hunters and intend to continue a positive relationship

What we are asking for is fair consideration of being eligible for a landowner tag – as far as I understand, we meet the requirement for Ag property and we certainly have a very high number of elk days on our property – which, I believe, is the more important metric when it comes to land owner tags.

Sincerely

Mark and Cassie Rantapaa (mrantapaa@dakotagoldcorp.com)

775-397-8451

Casey Miller

Spearfish SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Elk heard should not be raised to 9000 head in the black hills. That number is not sustainable for the forage resource on public or private ground. As a land owner in the unit two I do not want to see more elk pressure on my ground. As a grazing permittee we have the capability to adapt to forage conditions in a timely manner, the game fish and parks do not so that is why elk number need to be at a manageable number between the 8000 to 6500 head that GF and P staff and elk stakeholders have agreed to.

The elk stakeholders group was commissioned again this summer and had several meetings to discuss a topic like this but was never presented to them. Why ask the group to get together if the commission is not going to use their time? That is the perfect time to get some feed back from the people that will be affected by the high population of elk.

In the early 2000s elk population in the hills was high and drought was very common. This forced elk out of the hills and that is when prairie units north of I 90 started. Raising the elk population to those levels will again just create more headaches for those of us in the foothills.

Thanks you for your time

Donald Hausle

Spearfish SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

My family owns Ag land in Lawrence Co. on the N Fork of Boxelder Creek. This property has been in our family over 100 years. We are opposed to the increase in Elk #'s to the 9,000 hd since there are too many Elk now. A handwritten letter was sent on Feb. 13th on this subject with more detail.

Jerry Schroeder

Hot Springs SD

Position: support

Comment:

Yes I would like to have more opportunities to hunt elk in South Dakota. In the areas that I hunt, I'm seeing higher elk numbers in recent years.

It would be great to have more opportunities to hunt elk within our state.

Nolan Schroeder

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

I strongly support increasing license availability should the habitat and range conditions warrant it.

Kevin Reindl

Custer SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Brian Frybarger

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

The plan appears to be well researched and developed. I went with my son on his 2025 antlerless hunt and saw heavy elk sign in the Jasper Burn area in the Black Hills.

I would like the time span from eligibility for first draw to be reduced to eight years. Ten years is a long time between periods of eligibility. Keep on with the generous antlerless draws and follow-up draws.

Pamela Hughes

Custer SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

It is absurd that the GFP would even suggest increasing the elk numbers when we are in a drought situation. It is extreme where I live, and what area would you use to determine whether there was sufficient rainfall and range to increase the population? Already the GFP does not respect the importance the private landowner plays in supporting the elk, and often overlooks their input.

Kurt Rantapaa

Deadwood SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I oppose increasing the elk numbers and also oppose increasing the number of required acres for landowners tags. Please call me to discuss. 605-641-2418. Thank you.

Karie Decker

Missoula MT

Position: other

Comment:

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation appreciates the opportunity to submit the attached comments regarding consideration of an increase in South Dakota's elk population objective in the Elk Management Action Plan.

Jonathan Hanson

Aberdeen SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Ben Schaeffer

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

Being 25 and staring down the barrel of hunting elk in my home state only once or twice in my life is disappointing. When the day does come, its hard to say what condition my body will be in. I see far too many social media posts about guys who finally draw their tag in their 70's and really struggle with the physical side of elk hunting.

With point creep happening and so many new applicants, I feel like increasing herd size is a necessity. If the landscape supports it, it's hard to see a downside to increasing herd size.

David Lewton

Rapid City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Stop giving half the any elk tags to landowners!!!!!!

Other

Deon Entringer

Colman SD

Position: other

Comment:

Good afternoon,

I have visited with the commission on previous whitetail deer issues in the past and look forward to any conversation going forward. I am a public/private land hunter and also farm in Moody county. I had a long discussion with our local game warden about different deer seasons, especially for Eastern SD.

While I think drastic changes need to be addressed long term for flourishing of the resource, the Conservation officer and I discussed some lower impact decisions that I think would greatly impact our herd and the general public's overall hunting experience.

Doe populations. In our county and many others from visiting with landowners, our population is incredibly out of balance. By the time late season hits for muzzleloader season most deer have been pushed onto private property, including ours, from being chased around by pheasant, duck, and early deer season hunters which makes it almost impossible for people to go out, especially the youth over Christmas break, to harvest a doe. I've taken many kids out personally but also have a hesitation because we like to manage for the few bucks we have and don't want to pressure our property. It's a balancing act. The CO said muzzleloader season is the "clean up season for does". I disagreed and he saw my point that it's so challenging because deer group up so quickly after Thanksgiving and no one has a chance on public, and or 95% of private ground. I'm proposing two small changes to be made for controlling for populations.

1. Introduce an early antlerless muzzleloader season from September 7-17th for those who want to hunt for a doe before the duck and pheasant openers. This allows people to have a better chance, especially on public to harvest a doe before late season group ups.
2. Stop all any deer seasons Dec. 20th and allow youth hunters to take advantage of that time during Christmas break. It gives landowners the confidence to take youth out to harvest more does off their property without risking chasing the few bucks off the ground they manage. The any deer tags for those that are left after Dec. 20th automatically turn into a doe tag for the remaining days through January 1st.

I know many landowners who would be more willing to take people doe hunting but the thought of chasing bucks off their ground when it's still any deer season hinders that.

The lack of people controlling doe populations is not anyone's fault. When you hold an any deer tag most everyone will hold out for the Hail Mary ending that never comes and then regret not shooting anything. It's a perpetual cycle. This gives people the opportunity for the last week of season to pursue doe management aggressively, without game and fish having to intervene with unnecessary "clean ups" when we could just give confidence to the hunters to do it. Hopefully it's successful enough that things can remain as they are years down the road but I live this stuff and have boots on the ground daily. We need action.

Thanks and always appreciate a conversation.

Deon

Janet Moore

Rapid City, Sd SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Karsten Houdek

Dell Rapids SD

Position: support

Comment:

raise elk numbers to achieve more elk tags and hunting opportunity.

Richard Midkiff

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

Mt Lion season in Black hills be same as Rest of SD.

Bruce Johnson

Britton SD

Position: other

Comment:

Hope the Game Fish and Parks can figure out a good way to manage wild life. The east river deer population is dwindling ever year, and you continue to dwell on your non resident moneys. Enough is enough cut back!!!

Dave Junge

North Sioux City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

It's ridiculous that a resident can only get archery tags for deer & antelope. What a rip off and a crime for outdoorsmen, paying taxes in a state that is very low populated and poor. It's should be a crime!

Peggy Mann

Aberdeen SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

There is no evidence that the NPBP has improved pheasant numbers in our state. Yet the program has already spent at least \$5 million dollars, money that could have leveraged \$10-20 million in federal matching funds for habitat improvements that actually support wildlife.

conservation programs should focus on science, habitat restoration & responsible stewardship of wildlife - not financial incentives for children to kill animals that play important roles in healthy ecosystems. South Dakota's kids deserve conservation programs that inspire respect for wildlife & the outdoors.

Please ask the Commission to end the Nest Predator Bounty Program & redirect these funds toward habitat improvement. Public wildlife belongs to all South Dakotans & the public deserves a voice in how it is managed.

????????????? ?? ?????????????? ?????????????? ????:????????? ??? ??????????????, ?????????? ??:

1?? Go to gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions & enter your info.

2?? Under "Position Comment," select "Other".

3?? Choose "Oppose".

4?? In the comments, clearly state your opposition to the Nest Predator Bounty Program.

Please share this post to help spread awareness. Feel free to message SDFACT with any questions, thank you for speaking up for South Dakota's wildlife!

#NestPredatorBountyProgram #SouthDakotaWildlife #WildlifeConservation #SoDakFACT

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#NestPredatorBountyProgram #SouthDakotaWildlife #WildlifeConservation #SoDakFACT

Connie White

Spearfish SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I OPPOSE The Nest Predator Bounty Program. There is no evidence that 340,00 Fox, Skunk, Badger, Raccoon, + Opossum deaths increased Pheasant numbers. A \$ Killing program for hunters killing birds for MONEY ??

Shelby Jepperson

Sioux Falls SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

The Nest Predator Bounty Program (NPBP) is cruel & wasteful. There is no evidence that the NPBP has improved pheasant numbers in our state. Yet the program has already spent at least \$5 million dollars, money that could have leveraged federal matching funds for habitat improvements that actually support wildlife. Conservation programs should focus on science, habitat restoration & responsible stewardship of wildlife - not financial incentives for children to kill animals that play important roles in healthy ecosystems. South Dakota's kids deserve conservation programs that inspire respect for wildlife & the outdoors.

Carolyn Larson

Sioux Falls SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

OPPOSE Nest Predator Bounty Program

There is no evidence that the NPBP has improved pheasant numbers in our state. Yet the program has already spent at least \$5 million dollars, money that could have leveraged \$10-20 million in federal matching funds for habitat improvements that actually support wildlife.

I am concerned about proposals to shift this program toward youth participation, encouraging children to trap animals for bounty payments

Conservation programs should focus on science, habitat restoration & responsible stewardship of wildlife - not financial incentives for children to kill animals that play important roles in healthy ecosystems. South Dakota's kids deserve conservation programs that inspire respect for wildlife & the outdoors.

Please end the Nest Predator Bounty Program & redirect these funds toward habitat improvement. Public wildlife belongs to all South Dakotans & the public deserves a voice in how it is managed.

Carolyn Larson

Sioux Falls SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

OPPOSE Nest Predator Bounty Program

There is no evidence that the NPBP has improved pheasant numbers in our state. Yet the program has already spent at least \$5 million dollars, money that could have leveraged \$10-20 million in federal matching funds for habitat improvements that actually support wildlife.

I am concerned about proposals to shift this program toward youth participation, encouraging children to trap animals for bounty payments

Conservation programs should focus on science, habitat restoration & responsible stewardship of wildlife - not financial incentives for children to kill animals that play important roles in healthy ecosystems. South Dakota's kids deserve conservation programs that inspire respect for wildlife & the outdoors.

Please end the Nest Predator Bounty Program & redirect these funds toward habitat improvement. Public wildlife belongs to all South Dakotans & the public deserves a voice in how it is managed.

Dale Virchow

Lake Preston SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I oppose the nest predators bounty program this is a cruel punishment for the other animals of South Dakota

Brandy Ainslie

Fedora SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Its cruel to kill animals because some think one animal is more important then the next. Its even more cruel to let the babies die a horrid sad death because mom never came back. To offer \$10 just to take a life for no reason, is bad character. If your a hunter thats different, its a way of life. They use what they hunt. Mostly .

Mick Zerr

Sioux Falls SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Folks, I have been a hunter for many years, and have witnessed all the critters the Nest Predator program targets. Studies have and will show the major food of all these species are usually undesirable elements to people, Mostly rodents , insects, and plants. If you remove the coyotes and foxes, the rodent population will explode. Pheasants will reneat if their nest is destroyed, likely by the rodents that the fox and coyote eat. You have seen the studies and they mostly show the program is a waste of money and promotes cruelty for children. I trapped for a time years ago, and was sickened by the suffering and cruelty of it. Hunting is one thing, but teaching kids trapping? Is all this so some folks can have enough pheasants to shoot? Use the money for habitat control and acquisition, and the results will be fantastic compared to needless messing with the natural food chain of nature. Please do not ignore the science nor the real experts. I remember when I was a child and went with my dad to visit a farm. On the way, we saw, for my first time, a fox with four kits. I said "what a beautiful dog", and was told it was a wild fox. What if my dad had said," Let's shoot it and cut its butt off and throw the body in the ditch so we can collect a few dollars."

Rebecca Caselli-Smith

Rapid City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I am strongly against the predator killing program.

Amy Poole

Custer SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I oppose the nest bounty program.
Trapping fur bearing animals in the spring and summer?
It is unethical, and a waste of money.

Amy Poole

Custer SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I oppose the nest bounty program.
Trapping fur bearing animals in the spring and summer?
It is unethical, and a waste of money.

Jill Fritz

Apple Valley MN

Position: oppose

Comment:

In the attached comments to be entered into the public record for the March 5-6, 2026 Game, Fish and Parks Commission meeting, Humane World for Animals requests an immediate end to the cruel and wasteful Nest Predator Bounty Program. Thank you.

Adrian Forrette

Rapid City SD

Position: other

Comment:

The Nest Predator Bounty Program teaches children how to torture animals - stepping stone to a generation of young "psychopaths." Instead, let's teach children how to heal the environment; how to become stewards of the land.

Thank you!

Julie Anderson

Rapid City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

The Nest Predator Bounty Program proposal to make it a youth program should be scrapped. A program based on killing animals for fun and recreation, and teaching kids that there are good animals and vermin is not acceptable. This is not the truth of an ecosystem. The only goal of this program is to promote the trapping and killing of predatory animals so that people can kill more pheasants. It is not ethical and gives children a false view of nature, which will have negative ramifications on the natural world for generations to come. This program should be terminated.

George (Les) Heiserman

Spearfish SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I oppose the Nest Predator Bounty Program. Please stop authorizing & funding it. It's cruel and ineffective. We should be protecting and saving our native wildlife.

Maggie Lindner

Sioux Falls SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I am opposed to the Nest Predator Bounty Program. There is no evidence this program positively affects pheasant populations in the state and there has not been nearly enough investigation into the ecological effects of systematically killing and removing predators from the environment.

Dale Virchow

Lake Preston SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Steve Andrews

Sioux Falls SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

No, no and no. There's no data to support the cause. Everything doesn't need our intervention.

Amanda Johnson

Yankton SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I strongly oppose the Nest Predator Bounty Program. Why wasn't this program put out to a vote? There is a large majority that opposes this program yet year after year we see it back in place. The cruelty of trapping is inexcusable. If people want to trap on their land, that's their prerogative but our state funding this and promoting this, is not what the majority of South Dakotans want.

Jenna Thu

Sioux Falls SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I am appalled by the cruel and unnecessary trapping of predatory animals in the state of Sd. I and many others want a healthy ecosystem and to see a variety of animals native to our great state. The trapping rules are broad with out many humane guidelines. This kills many mothers in the spring who should be able to protect their babies. Please care for all animals as many want to enjoy them.

Dean Parker

Sioux Falls SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I'm writing in opposition of the Nest Predator Bounty Program. Please use this money for habitat instead of wildlife trapping.

Jamie Al-Haj

Zebulon NC

Position: oppose

Comment:

It is beyond time to end the horrific Nest Predator Bounty Program. You cannot continue to kill SD native species in the numbers you have over the past 7 years, without having a profound negative effect on the ecosystem. History shows us that trapping native wildlife to such a degree, triggers critical ecological imbalances, with reduced biodiversity, disruption of food webs, overabundance of parasites, and increase in the spread of diseases. No misconceived benefit could ever be great enough to justify the Nest Predator Bounty Program! Oh, what a tangled web you are weaving!!

Sara Parker

Sioux Falls SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I'm writing in opposition of the Nest Predator Bounty Program.

There is no evidence that the NPBP has improved pheasant numbers in our state. Yet the program has already spent about \$5 million dollars, money that could have leveraged \$10-20 million in federal matching funds for habitat improvements that actually support wildlife.

I urge you to end the Nest Predator Bounty Program and redirect these funds toward habitat improvement.

Cherlyn Leach Valades

Spearfish SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I'm writing in regards to the Nest Predator Bounty Program. Trapping and killing predator animals is not an educational program for children. This program is barbaric. Children should be taught about respecting ecosystems and the "cycle of life" which includes predators. In addition, this program is a huge waste of taxpayers money.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

Paula Semrau

Hartford SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Please end the Nest Predator Bounty Program. It is cruel and unsupported with viable data. It has resulted in illegally placed traps on our land and dumped, improperly disposed animal carcasses on our property.

Alexey Egorov

Brookings SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Rebecca Cooper

Summerset SD

Position: other

Comment:

Please, stop authorizing & funding the Nest Predator Bounty Program! Thank you!

Melissa Renshaw

Sioux Falls SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Please end the Nest Predator Bounty Program & redirect these funds toward habitat improvement.

Nancy Hilding

Black Hawk, SD

Position: other

Comment:

Nancy Hilding
President
Prairie Hills Audubon Society (PHAS)
P.O. Box 788
Black Hawk, SD 57718

PHAS opposes the Nest Predator Bounty Program. We may testify against it on March 5th..I may reference a letter a letter from Larry Fredrickson (former Pheasant Research Biologist and State Furbearer Biologist (1960-1996)) that explains, with history of predator control efforts in SD, why the Nest Predator program won't work. Here is a URL to down load that letter - ps://phas-wsd.org/wp-content/uploads/Fredrickson.2.16.2020_LettersNPBP-Public_Comments_2020.pdf . I attach a page from the GFP Ring Neck Pheasant Management plan adopted in 2016. It is page 11 on Predator Control. I may also reference this page in testimony

Nancy Hilding

Black Hawk SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Nancy Hilding
6300 West Elm
Black Hawk, SD.

I oppose the Nest Predator Bounty Program... please stop funding and authorizing it.

Wildlife Damage Management Plan

Jack Behrens

Hermosa SD

Position: support

Comment:

I wonder why the prairie dog control program was ended. It was a successful program that was starting to achieve real results. I would guess the dollar amount of damage from prairie dogs far exceeds that of coyotes. I have contacted your representatives but have not really gotten a good explanation for the termination of the program .

Brian Frybarger

Rapid City SD

Position: support

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Julie Anderson

Rapid City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

There needs to be more designation of wildlife habitat near problem areas with natural food sources to discourage wildlife from predation and destruction on farms and ranches. Also, more call for the accountability of ranchers and farmers to protect their property and livestock, as sheep are easy targets if they are not monitored and protected. Non-lethal solutions address the main reasons for rancher and farmer conflicts: lack of habitat, food and easy access to livestock. Killing coyotes has been proven time and time again to trigger an increase in their population and only adds to the conflict. It's time we start to live with wildlife.

Dean Parker

Sioux Falls SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I oppose the use of "proactive and aggressive" in Strategy 1.1 and the suggestion to continue using trapping/snaring, aerial predator control and M-44 devices.

Alexey Egorov

Brookings SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I am strictly against what is proposed Wildlife Damage Management Action Plan.

When will the GFP understand that we do not live in the 2nd century and the time of conquest and destruction of nature is far behind us? What is now - the time of preservation and restoration. Are you doing anything for peaceful coexistence with native wildlife? Or do you not have enough education for anything other than killing everything that moves?

Teresa Hicks

Rapid City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

If you REALLY want to reduce damage and increase coexistence with South Dakota's native wildlife, you need to end the use of these cruel and ineffective practices. And they should require greater accountability of ranchers and farmers to their property and livestock, as sheep and other farm animals are easy targets if they are not monitored and protected.

Non-lethal solutions address the main reasons for rancher and farmer conflicts, which are lack of habitat, food and easy access to livestock. Time and again, science shows that the random and mass killing of coyotes triggers compensatory reproduction - increasing their population & worsening the conflict.

It's time we start to live with our wildlife - they are important to our ecosystem, and they belong in South Dakota.

Melissa Mccombs

Sioux City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Cindy Siebrecht

Redfield SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

There are more effective, less cruel actions that can be taken. With proper management, balance can be achieved and we can learn to co-exist with the wonderful diversity of South Dakota's wildlife.

Ann Weaver

Rapid City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I'm shocked that the GFP would even consider these methods of wildlife management sporting. There's so many other ways to have the same results with less cruelty. It seems like a way for incompetent hunters to get their prey. How sportsman like is that? come on GFP - be the organization you're meant to be not supporting inhumane means of wildlife management.

Val Dziwulski

Rapid City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

M-44 devices (cyanide bombs), trapping and snaring kill indiscriminately and animals can take hours or days to die. Aerial gunning results in fewer "clean kills" than traditional hunting, leading to prolonged suffering for the animal. PLEASE DON'T LET THIS CONTINUE! PLEASE!

If you TRULY want to reduce damage and increase coexistence with South Dakota's native wildlife, you need to end the use of these cruel and ineffective practices. And you should require greater accountability of ranchers and farmers to their property and livestock, as sheep and other farm animals are easy targets if they are not monitored and protected.

Non-lethal solutions address the main reasons for rancher and farmer conflicts, which are lack of habitat, food and easy access to livestock. Time and again, science shows that the random and mass killing of coyotes triggers compensatory reproduction - increasing their population & worsening the conflict.

It's time we start to live with our wildlife - they are important to our ecosystem, and they belong in South Dakota.

PLEASE DO WHAT'S RIGHT! PLEASE!

Darlene Finberg

Redfield SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

common sense says loss of habitat adversely affects wildlife. think of it as a the only store in your town. if it is taken away you would have to go somewhere else for groceries. animals just want to survive. just let nature take care of things. she is perfectly capable without our "help".

Beth Morey

Belle Fourche SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

What is wrong with people that whenever they see something beautiful they want to kill it or destroy it? Live and let live as nature intended, for God's sake!

George (Les) Heiserman

Spearfish SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Stop the 5 year plan. It's cruel and doesn't work.

Sara Parker

Sioux Falls SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I am a lifelong South Dakota resident commenting on the draft Wildlife Damage Management Action Plan (2026–2030).

I oppose the inclusion of trapping/snaring, aerial predator control and M-44 devices in Action 1.1.1 M-44 devices (cyanide bombs), trapping and snaring kill indiscriminately and animals can take hours, even days to die. Aerial gunning results in fewer "clean kills" than traditional hunting, leading to prolonged suffering for the animal.

I also oppose the plan's use of "proactive and aggressive " in Strategy 1.1 regarding coyote control efforts. Research consistently shows that random or mass coyote killing triggers compensatory reproduction - increasing litter sizes, earlier breeding and population rebound - ultimately worsening conflicts.

To truly reduce damage and promote coexistence with South Dakota's native wildlife, I urge revisions to the plan to prioritize and require non-lethal prevention methods (such as exclusion fencing, livestock guardian animals, and improved monitoring) as first-line strategies before any lethal intervention.

John Fitzgerald

Hot Springs SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Do not allow this to happen. Very much opposed.

Diana Holden

Parkston SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

No comment text provided.

Suzan Nolan

Rapid City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I heartily and enthusiastically oppose the Nest Predator Bounty program. It's inhumane, senseless and does nothing to increase pheasant habitat. Senseless killing of pheasant predators upsets the natural balance of nature. It encourages youth to kill for sport and it should be stopped.

Julie Anderson

Rapid City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

No evaluation and development of a plan based on the needs of wildlife are at the heart of this management plan, only cyanide, snares and traps. Killing animals is not a plan, only a fix for people who demand it and the problem is never addressed. Aerial shooting of coyotes and their pups is a prime example of this. Science and models of successful programs need to be the basis of this plan.

Nancy Hilding

Black Hawk, SD

Position: other

Comment:

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

We attach our comments on the Wildlife Damage Management Plans as PDF file...It is a 14 page comment letter...It will end up at the bottom of the public comments, if SDGFP structures it's public comments as it normally does

Debbie Goebel

Omaha NE

Position: oppose

Comment:

I OPPOSE the Nest Predator Bounty Program.

This is an unnecessary overreach of humans into ecosystems that will balance on their own. The number of animals killed at the behest of a bounty is staggering, and quite frankly, disgusting. Even more alarming, children are recruited to partake in the slaughter.

Encouraging our youth to participate is outright wrong and sends a terrible message - that Wildlife is to be dominated, abused, and sold for a profit. Trapping in particular is animal cruelty and an antiquated practice that has no place in our enlightened, modern society. Children need to learn that animals are sentient beings, just like us. Our world is in the midst of a Sixth Mass Extinction, and this needless, excessive, bounty-driven killing contributes. Please evolve, and abandon this atrocious policy, the Nest Predator Bounty Program. Mahatma Ghandi once said, "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress may be judged by the way its animals are treated." Be that nation, South Dakota.

Dr. Alexey Egorov
1734 3rd Str
Brookings SD 57006
alexey.egorov.jr@gmail.com
605-736-3929

Mr. Kirschenmann and
South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission
523 East Capitol Ave Pierre, SD 57501
WildInfo@state.sd.us
605-223-7660

Subject: Request to defund the Nest Predator Bounty Program.

Mr. Kirschenmann and Members of GFP Commission,

My name is Alexey Egorov. I am a scientist (PhD biologist) and a constituent of South Dakota, Legislative District 7.

Seven years have passed since the implementation of the Nest Predator Bounty Program. At least \$4.5 million in public funds have been wasted solely for bounty payments without public mandate, without a scientific basis, without evidence that the program has reduced nest predator abundance in the field at neither the local nor the statewide level, without data demonstrating an increase in pheasant populations in South Dakota, without demonstrated cost-effectiveness, and without clear support from hunters, wildlife professionals, or the general public. Since 2019, GFP has wasted \$17.9 million in total, including funds that would have been matched through the PR fund if this money had been directed toward habitat improvement projects.

During the hearings on HB1262 (Legislative Session 2025) and SB148 (2026), GFP demonstrated a lack of understanding of fundamental principles of natural resource management and consistently disregarded recommendations from wildlife professionals, scientists, conservationists, hunters, and members of the public. In the Appendix below, I provide a brief overview of these concerns.

On February 12 2026 GFP received a recommendation from the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee to reduce funding for the Nest Predator Bounty Program by half: <https://sdpb.sd.gov/sdpbpodcast/2026/sag21.mp3#t=2758> . Accordingly, I request direct responses to the following:

1. Does GFP intend to implement the Senate's recommendation to reduce NPBP funding by 50 percent?
2. If so, please provide a specific implementation plan, including defined milestones and deadlines, indicating when and how this funding reduction will occur.

Sincerely,

Dr. Alexey Egorov, biologist, constituent of South Dakota.



03/01/2026

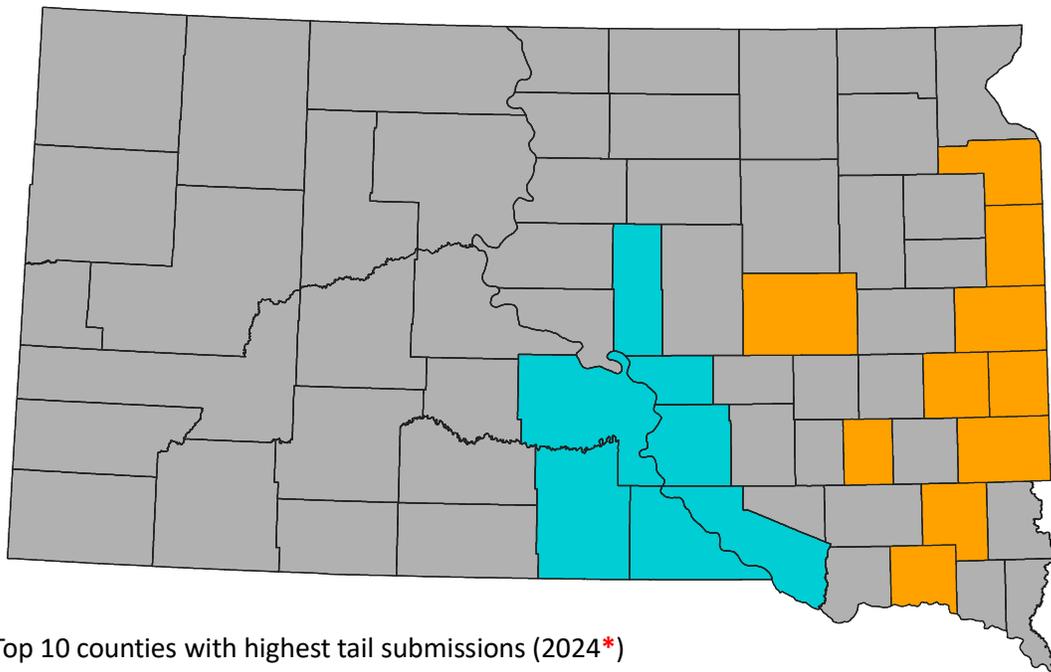
Appendix 1. GFP's misunderstanding of fundamental principles of natural resources management.

- 1. Trapping in South Dakota did not originate as a recreational activity.** It developed primarily for the harvest and utilization of marketable pelts and robes, whether for subsistence or trade. What is often described today as a “trapping tradition” was, in fact, a tradition of fur harvest and economic use. There is no historical record of a tradition centered on killing wildlife as an end in itself. The formal promotion by state authorities of wildlife killing during gestation and nursing seasons as a youth recreational activity began in South Dakota in 2019, has no historical precedent in the state’s trapping traditions, and is inconsistent with established furbearer harvest principles centered on utilization.
- 2. The fur industry has lost its former economic significance.** Fur was essential for warmth in the Stone Age and Medieval times, but modern materials have largely replaced it for that purpose. Not only does the current program fail to require full processing or tanning of pelts in accordance with established fur harvest traditions, but it also wastes public funds without proven conservation benefits or a clear public mandate.
- 3. The bounty program represents prejudice-based, costly expenditures.** Beyond anecdotal impressions, there is no scientific evidence, at either the local or the statewide level, that the bounty program increases bird populations. Available data from surveyed local areas contradict these impressions. Estimates from local farmers indicate that nest predator populations at the local level have not declined but remains comparable to, or even higher (Q9), in previous years. There is no data, demonstrating that the program has increased pheasant population. Peer-reviewed studies demonstrate that predator removal has resulted in either no statistically meaningful effect or only marginal, localized changes in nest success even in localized small-scale experimental studies, without translating into sustained population growth (1, 2, 3, ...). Substantial public expenditures are being made based on subjective perceptions, myths, prejudices, and the biased opinions of those who directly benefit from the program. Beliefs and assumptions are not sufficient to justify multi-million-dollar expenditures.
- 4. A conflict of interest** is a situation in which a party has a financial interest in a matter while simultaneously participating in its evaluation, oversight, or advocacy. The opinions of NPBP participants, who receive direct financial benefit from the program, constitute a clear conflict of interest, are inherently biased, and cannot serve as justification for its continuation.
- 5. The expenditures supporting the bounty program are derived from public funds.** Although license revenue used to fund the program does not come from the State General Fund, it is not private discretionary money of the GFP Commission. These are public funds collected from citizens for wildlife management and held in trust by the GFP. Their use must be supported by evidence, transparency, demonstrable benefit, and clear public mandate. Such mandate has not been established.
- 6. The NPBP is implemented statewide, with most program activity occurring outside core pheasant strongholds (Chamberlain local area).** As a result, animals are being killed haphazardly, primarily near urban areas along the I-29 corridor (see attached map), leading to inefficient use of public funds where measurable population-level benefit is unlikely. If the stated objective is to increase pheasant production, predator management should be focused in high-density brood areas, not statewide. Attempting to protect nests where they are rare is unlikely to produce measurable benefits, as predators in such areas primarily rely on alternative food sources.
- 7. By limiting participation to youth, the program will miseducate children by portraying the activity as conservation.** Encouraging minors to kill indigenous wildlife as a form of outdoor recreation during the peak of gestation and nursing seasons raises serious ethical and educational concerns. The bounty program does not constitute conservation or education. It is a chaotic killing for sake of killing.

8. The bounty program is not supported by a majority of South Dakotans and has been rejected in neighboring Northern Prairie states. Recent data indicate that only 26% of South Dakotans support the program. Bounty systems have also been rejected by legislatures and governments across the Northern Plains. Minnesota ended state bounty programs in 1965 ([SF2016](#)); North Dakota terminated state-funded bounties in 1961 (HB610); a similar nest-predator bounty proposal was rejected in Nebraska in 2023 ([LB400](#)); and a raccoon bounty bill was defeated in Iowa in 2024 ([HF2665](#)). These precedents suggest that such programs are increasingly viewed as outdated and ineffective public policy.

9. The “habitat programs” referenced by Mr. Kirschenmann are primarily habitat access programs. Habitat access is not habitat improvement and does not address the needs of ground-nesting birds. Infrastructure projects such as roads, trails, beach development, lake access, and related facilities do not improve nest success. Instead of allocating recurring funds to an ineffective bounty program, one-time investments in true habitat improvement, such as restoration of native grasslands and shelterbelts, would provide durable, measurable benefits for ground-nesting birds and other wildlife. Current “habitat access” expenditures do not adequately prioritize such habitat improvements.

Animals Killed Where Pheasants Aren't



Orange Top 10 counties with highest tail submissions (2024*)

Cyan Chamberlain pheasant stronghold ~3x higher PPM than all other areas combined (2019**)

* In 2025, GFP removed county-level tail data; values restored from archived records.

** GFP discontinued the annual pheasant roadside survey after 2019, following a 17% drop in the Pheasants-Per-Mile (PPM) index in the first year of the Nest Predator Bounty Program.

SD Nest Predator Bounty Program "Tail Tracker" Dashboard: <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/e7bbbd6fa93b48c6a31985aa7c57c5ff>
 Pheasant brood survey report 2019: https://gfp.sd.gov/userdocs/docs/PBR_2019FINAL.pdf



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

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

March 1, 2026

To the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission:

On behalf of our South Dakota members and supporters, Humane World for Animals respectfully requests that you take immediate action to end the Nest Predator Bounty Program for the following reasons:

This bounty inflicts a cruel and pointless death on hundreds of thousands of South Dakota's vital native wildlife species.

Since 2019, and over the consistently vehement objections of wildlife scientists, sportsmen's groups, wildlife advocates, state residents and major newspapers, South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks continues to administer its cruel and wasteful "Nest Predator Bounty Program" in which a bounty is paid for each tail of a red fox, raccoon, opossum, badger, or skunk killed by state residents.¹ But even though the agency has to date paid millions of dollars for the killings, an official has admitted to not knowing if the program has actually increased pheasant numbers.²

There is simply no scientific justification for the random killing of South Dakota's native species, each of whom plays a unique and important role in the state's ecosystem. Opossums are a tremendous benefit to any area they inhabit, helping to control unwanted, harmful garden pests. Their diet includes snails, mice, rats, and insects such as cockroaches, crickets, beetles, and—in large numbers—disease-carrying ticks. Foxes also help to control disease transmission by keeping rodent populations in check, which curtails tick-borne diseases like Lyme.³ And raccoons serve as an essential clean-up crew, consuming animal carcasses and prey often viewed as pests in human communities.

Lessons from other states show that bounties are ineffective, wasteful and costly.

The Izaak Walton League of America says in its Conservation Policies, "The League recognizes the intrinsic value of predatory species and their important ecological roles. ... There is no justification for widespread destruction of animals classified as predators ... The League opposes payment of bounties on predators or varmints."⁴

The Michigan Natural Resources Commission (NRC) states, "The NRC is opposed to the payment of bounties on predatory animals because there is no cause and effect relationship for predators versus prey when using a bounty system. In addition, bounty systems are costly and inefficient."⁵

Pennsylvania Game Commission biologists have reminded the state's hunters, "During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Game Commission focused much of its energy and resources into predator control efforts. During this period, we did not understand the relationship between predators and prey. After decades of using predator control (such as paying bounties) with no

effect, and the emergency of wildlife management as a science, the agency finally accepted the reality that predator control does not work.”⁶

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission notes that bounties and harvest incentive programs are prone to corruption, expensive, do not increase harvest, and do not target problem animals.⁷ The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency concurs when saying, “In general, bounties have proven to be totally ineffective.”⁸ A South Carolina Department of Natural Resources biologist has added, “If you look at the history of bounties, there is no evidence they have ever worked.”⁹

Bounties may encourage deceptive behavior.

South Dakota’s Habitat Work Group said in a report to the state’s governor, “...bounty systems in other states have been ineffective because the origin of the predators cannot be verified. Predators from other states could easily be imported for a bounty, which would be counterproductive.”¹⁰ Bounty hunters will shop around for forums that pay the highest dollar amount, and counties or states that pay bounties may not know the origin of the animal. And Stanley P. Young, a senior biologist for the Canadian Biological Survey, has said, “Since 1947 at least, we know that paying out bounties encourages fraudulent behaviors by participants.”¹¹

For the reasons stated here, Humane World for Animals asks the South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks Commission to immediately halt the Nest Predator Bounty Program.

Jill Fritz
Senior Managing Director, Wildlife Protection
Humane World for Animals
jfritz@humaneworld.org

¹ Editorial: “State dollars shouldn’t be used on predator bounties.” *Capital Journal*, Sept. 24, 2019
https://www.capjournal.com/opinions/editorial/state-dollars-shouldn-t-be-used-on-predator-bounties/article_f999ddda-1941-11e9-97b2-afc846d80c64.html

² Haiar, Joshua. (January 16, 2024). “State lacks data to prove trapping program increases the pheasant population, official says.” *South Dakota Searchlight*, <https://southdakotasearchlight.com/2024/01/16/state-lacks-data-to-prove-trapping-program-increases-the-pheasant-population-official-says/>

³ Hofmeester TR, Jansen PA, Wijnen HJ, Coipan EC, Fonville M, Prins HHT, Sprong H, van Wieren SE. 2017 Cascading effects of predator activity on tick-borne disease risk. *Proc. R. Soc. B* 284: 20170453.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2017.0453>

⁴ The Izaak Walton League of America: “Conservation Policies 2024,” pg. 54 <https://iwla.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024-policy-book.pdf>

⁵ Michigan Natural Resources Commission, “Policy 4104 – Bounties,” revised 9/12/2013 at https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/NRC_4104_471574_7.pdf.

⁶ Frye, Bob. (July 25, 2016). “Habitat, not predators, seen as key to wildlife populations,” *Trib Live*, <https://archive.triblive.com/sports/outdoors/habitat-not-predators-seen-as-key-to-wildlife-populations/>

⁷ North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, “Coyote Management Plan,” March 1, 2018
https://www.ncwildlife.org/Portals/0/Learning/documents/Species/Coyote%20Management%20Plan_FINAL_030118.pdf

⁸ Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency: “Controlling Coyotes in Tennessee” at <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/twra/documents/mammals/coyotecontrol.pdf>

⁹ David Hart: “Cash for Coyotes: Do Bounties Work?” Grand View Outdoors at <https://www.grandviewoutdoors.com/coyote/cash-for-coyotes-do-bounties-work>

¹⁰ “South Dakota Governor’s Habitat Work Group 2014: Report to Governor Dugard,” pg. 20, September 2014.
<https://habitat.sd.gov/resources/habitatsummitinfo/docs/PHWG%20Final%20Report.pdf>

¹¹ Stanley P. Young, “The Case against the Bounty System,” *Northwest Sportsman: Official Publication, Affiliated Fish and Game Association of British Columbia* Stanley P. Young Manuscript Collection, Denver Public Library, File folder 22. (1947).

from 219,869 in 2001 to 420,074 released in 2014, with the harvest ratio of pen-raised and wild pheasants remaining steady (Appendix Figure 7). It should be noted that no licensed shooting preserve statistics are used in the statewide population or harvest estimates.

In summary, pheasant management in South Dakota primarily involves working with cooperating agencies and landowners to develop and manage quality pheasant habitat, monitoring populations, and finally, developing season structures that allow harvest of surplus roosters and maximum hunter participation.

PREDATOR CONTROL

Predator control is often suggested as a management tool to increase pheasant survival and increase nest success, both of which can increase population growth. Generally, mammalian predation is the primary cause of nest failure and pheasant mortality during the breeding season (Reviewed in Riley and Schulz 2001). Avian predation has been found to be the primary cause of mortality during the winter (Leif 2003, Leif 2004).

Several studies on mammalian predator control efforts have shown an increase in nesting success or found higher pheasant abundance when compared to non-removal sites (Reviewed in Riley and Schulz 2001, Frey et al. 2003). However, the most recent predator removal study in SD found minimal impact on pheasant nest success (Docken 2011). In order to achieve measureable significant improvements in nest success, predator control efforts must be very intense which makes the process expensive and logistically difficult to implement at a large scale. Because new predators fill the void left by removed animals, the impact of predator control is short-lived. Predator control can also have unintended consequences. For instance, intense coyote removal can lead to increased abundance of mesopredators such as red fox and striped skunks which are disproportionately more detrimental to nesting pheasants. Additionally, all raptors are federally-protected under the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and eagles are further protected under the 1940 Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Raptor control is not possible under current federal regulatory framework. Habitat management actions such as removing tall trees which could serve as perch or nest sites should be considered to reduce raptor predation. Food plots also provide a secure feeding location for pheasants during winter when raptor mortalities are most common.

Pheasant populations have risen and fallen in response to habitat availability, mostly grassland nesting habitat, in the absence of targeted predator control. For instance, the pheasant population reached extremely high levels in the mid and late-2000s when favorable weather conditions occurred and abundant CRP grassland habitat was available, and targeted predator control was not used. We recommend that habitat management be used as the primary tool to encourage pheasant population growth (see pheasant habitat best management practices section of this plan). Predation likely has an exaggerated impact on pheasant populations where sub-optimal habitat exists. Where predator control may be considered as a management option, managers should be aware that cost, logistics, and lack of effectiveness often limit success when compared to habitat management.



**ROCKY MOUNTAIN
ELK FOUNDATION**

February 17, 2026

South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks
523 E. Capitol Ave.
Pierre, SD 57501

RE: SDGFP Seeking Public Comment on Elk Population Objective Increase

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) appreciates the opportunity to comment on South Dakota's Game, Fish & Parks (SDGFP) consideration of increasing the elk population objective to 9,000 animals in the Elk Management Action Plan.

RMEF's mission is to ensure the future of elk, other wildlife, their habitat, and our hunting heritage. RMEF's membership and supporters include hunters, anglers, farmers, ranchers, guides and outfitters, business owners, wildlife enthusiasts, and conservationists. Since its creation in 1984, RMEF has conserved or enhanced more than 9.1 million acres of North America's most vital habitat for elk and other wildlife. That's about one square mile per day. In South Dakota, RMEF and its partners have conserved or enhanced over 130,000 acres of habitat and opened or improved access to more than 11,500 acres. Additionally, RMEF has been a seasoned financial supporter of SDGFP's Elk Hunter Access Program.

RMEF supports science-based wildlife management and recognizes that elk are a highly valued public resource in South Dakota, providing ecological, recreational, and economic benefits to the state. Specifically, the opportunity for South Dakota residents to hunt elk is a highly coveted and competitive experience, often a truly once-in-a-lifetime experience. An increased elk population could lead to increased opportunity.

RMEF encourages careful consideration of biological data, habitat capacity, and social tolerance when assessing the capacity for South Dakota's landscape to support an increased herd. As SDGFP considers increasing population objectives, we respectfully encourage the following principles to guide implementation:

Habitat-first management:

Elk numbers should be aligned with available and suitable habitat, including secure winter range and seasonal migration corridors. RMEF strongly supports continued investment in habitat conservation, forest health projects, and cooperative efforts on both public and private lands to ensure any increased elk numbers remain sustainable.

Adaptive, science-based approach:

Any population increases should be incremental and paired with robust monitoring of herd health, distribution, and impacts. Adaptive management will allow SDGFP to respond quickly if conditions change or localized conflicts arise.

Balanced hunting opportunity:

Regulated hunting remains an essential management tool and a cornerstone of elk conservation. As elk populations grow, hunting opportunities should be adjusted accordingly to maintain population objectives, support conservation funding, and provide high-quality hunting experiences.

Landowner partnerships:

We recognize and respect the concerns of agricultural producers affected by elk presence. Continued collaboration and damage prevention efforts are essential to maintaining social tolerance and long-term support for elk management.

RMEF appreciates SDGFP's commitment to responsible elk management and its willingness to consider adaptive strategies that reflect current conditions. We look forward to continued collaboration with SDGFP to conserve habitat, sustain healthy elk herds, and ensure future generations can enjoy these iconic animals.

Thank you for the opportunity to engage in planning for South Dakota's elk herds. RMEF looks forward to a continued and robust partnership to achieve mutual goals of Conserving America's Big Game.

Respectfully,



Karie Decker
Director of Habitat Programs

To Whom It May Concern,

I am submitting a public comment on the Draft South Dakota Elk Action Plan 2026–2030, focused on the Elk Hunter Access Program, or EHAP.

The draft plan points to increased EHAP acreage as a sign of success, but it does not address how the program is working in real conditions for hunters or landowners. In many prairie and West River units, access through EHAP is inconsistent and often unreliable. The real issue is not how many acres are enrolled, it is whether a tag holder can realistically secure permission and whether participating landowners can handle the volume of requests they receive.

Many EHAP landowners are older, extremely busy, or not set up to manage repeated calls and messages. A large portion never respond at all. The few who do respond often get overwhelmed and repeatedly contacted by hunters because they are among the only reachable participants. That concentrates pressure on a small number of ranchers and creates frustration on both sides. Most working landowners do not have the time to act as schedulers or access coordinators during hunting season.

The Elk Action Plan is detailed and measurable when it comes to herd objectives, harvest structure, and survey methods. EHAP, by comparison, is described only at a high level. There are no performance measures tied to access reliability, actual hunter use, or landowner burden. Because the draft plan puts more emphasis on landowner-driven elk management in prairie units and depends on private land harvest to meet depredation and density goals, this is a meaningful gap.

Rather than only expanding acreage, I would encourage GFP to strengthen how EHAP functions operationally. Other states use simple reservation and permission systems that reduce repeated hunter-to-landowner cold calls and move the scheduling burden off the landowner. GFP would not need to build a system from scratch. This could likely be added as a module to the existing license vendor platform hunters already use.

Some practical options worth considering include:

1. A centralized online reservation calendar where landowners set available hunter days and property rules once, and hunters book open slots instead of repeatedly calling.

2. State or vendor managed scheduling where access slots are assigned based on tag type, unit, and season dates.
3. Automatic digital permission slips generated after booking, so hunters have clear proof of access without extra coordination.
4. Standardized contact rules for EHAP parcels so requests go through one channel instead of scattered phone outreach.
5. Per parcel hunter caps and date limits to prevent overload and repeated pressure on the same landowners.
6. A low tech participation option where GFP staff enter availability and rules on behalf of landowners who do not want to use online tools.

If EHAP is going to remain a primary access tool within elk management strategy, it would also help to track a few operational metrics, for example:

1. The percentage of enrolled parcels that are actually hunted each season.
2. Landowner response reliability.
3. Hunter use rates per parcel.
4. Harvest success tied to EHAP properties.
5. Landowner renewal and satisfaction rates.

Those measures would show whether the program is functioning as intended, not just how many acres are listed.

Addressing these operational problems would not only improve hunter success and reduce frustration, it would likely increase landowner participation as well. A system that limits repeated calls, removes scheduling burden, sets clear expectations, and gives landowners predictable and controlled hunter traffic is easier to say yes to. Improving the structure of access is likely to grow enrollment and retention more effectively than outreach alone.

Because the draft plan increases reliance on private land harvest, especially in prairie units, access mechanics matter. Increasing tag numbers alone will not achieve management goals if hunters cannot realistically get onto the ground where elk are present.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments and for your continued work on elk management in South Dakota.

Respectfully,
AJ Miller
Mitchell, SD

Mister Kirshenman and Members of GFP Commission.

My name is Alexey. I am a permanent resident and constituent of South Dakota.

Seven years have passed since the implementation of the Nest Predator Bounty Program. At least \$4.5 million in public funds have been wasted without public mandate, without a scientific basis, without evidence that the program has reduced nest predator abundance in the field, without any data that this has increased the pheasant population in South Dakota since 2019, without demonstrated cost-effectiveness, and without support from hunters, wildlife professionals, or the general public.

On February 12 2026, GFP received a recommendation from the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee to reduce funding for the Nest Predator Bounty Program by half.

Accordingly, I request direct responses to the following:

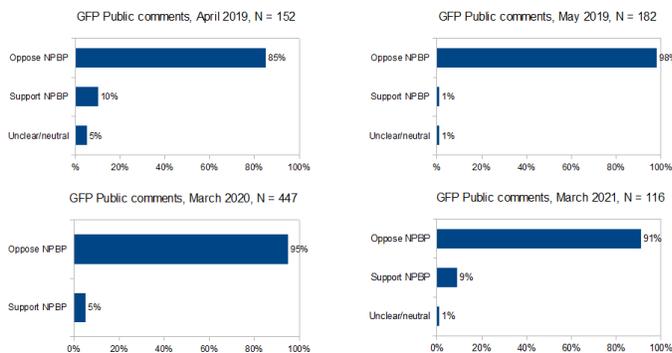
1. Does GFP intend to implement the Senate’s recommendation to reduce NPBP funding by 50 percent?
2. If so, please provide a specific implementation plan, including defined milestones and deadlines, stating when and how this funding reduction will occur.

Should GFP implement the Senate’s recommendation, I am willing to provide scientific assistance in developing evidence-based conservation strategies better aligned with measurable ecological outcomes.

NB: A conflict of interest is a situation in which a party has a financial interest in a matter while simultaneously participating in its evaluation, oversight, or advocacy. The opinions of NPBP participants, who receive direct financial benefit from the program, constitute a clear conflict of interest, are inherently biased, and cannot serve as justification for its continuation.

Level of “support” of NPBP by residents. Public comments.

In 2019-2020, the GFP received hundreds of public comments, over 90% of which opposed the NPBP. These comments are publicly available on the GFP website.



2019.04:https://gfp.sd.gov/UserDocs/nav/Commission_Minutes_4.2019_with_Comments_.pdf
2019.05:https://gfp.sd.gov/userdocs/meetings/PublicCommissionComments_-_Revised.pdf
2020.03:https://gfp.sd.gov/userdocs/meetings/Public_Comments_1.pdf, https://gfp.sd.gov/userdocs/meetings/Public_Comments_2.pdf, https://gfp.sd.gov/userdocs/meetings/Public_Comments_3.pdf
2021.03:https://gfp.sd.gov/userdocs/meetings/publiccommissioncomments1_-3-.pdf, https://gfp.sd.gov/userdocs/meetings/publiccommissioncomments2_-2-.pdf

?But I see, there's birds all over. That means the program is working?

Discussion for the 2025 NBPB season

Jack Roberts
Alexey Egorov so, just because there is no "data", you just assume the program isn't working. I don't care either way. I don't hunt pheasants. I do however hunt varmints like raccoons and coyotes. I don't need a scientist to tell me the program is working in my area. There are still many raccoons in this area but far less than have been in years. Coyotes are the same situation as stated above. Pheasant, grouse and turkey population has exploded here. I'm in it every day. I see the proof.... How's that for "learning".

Jack Roberts
Alexey Egorov get off your screen and go drive around. Pheasant population has been minimal at best in my area. Now, there's birds all over. Don't need some scientists to tell me the program is working. The proof is in the pudding.

Jamie Mertins
Nest predatory program works!



Correlation ≠ causation
Two events, which co-occur cotermporally are not always cause and effect.

A stopped clock shows the correct time twice a day. This doesn't mean that the clock is working. Periodically, bird populations rise and fall, which are natural fluctuations in their population dynamics. When we see an increase in bird numbers, it is driven by natural processes and CRP habitat restoration projects. The bounty program has nothing to do with it. Chaotic trapping has about as much effect on pheasant numbers as dancing with a tambourine has on rainfall.

<https://www.facebook.com/sdjgfp/posts/pfbid0zYMPnmA4NHnqjH3VjWcs8L3DDssL878KNtoTKMsDD3mWvYf25eRtt4rR14yKl>

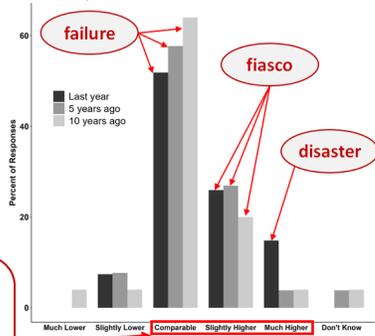
No evidence shows that the bounty program reduces predator populations

<https://gfp.sd.gov/bounty-program/>

The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks is focused on reducing localized populations of nest predators as a way to enhance pheasant and duck nest success, ...

In 2025, GFP completed a landowner survey to gather local information on factors affecting sage-grouse abundance. This is not a science-based field population survey, but it is the only predator abundance estimation GFP is able to produce.

According to GFP's own data >70% of respondents reported that mammalian predator abundance in 2024, excluding red fox and coyote (e.g., raccoon, striped skunk, etc.), was **comparable to or higher than in previous years.**



This outcome may be consistent with a reproductive compensation backfire, where chaotic killing increases population rebound, turning a multi-million-dollar management program into a mechanism that amplifies the problem it claims to solve and intensifies pressure on ground-nesting birds.

Q9. How would you describe the abundance of mammalian predators in 2024 other than red fox or coyote (e.g., raccoon, striped skunk, etc.) compared to each of the following time frames?

The Nest Predator Bounty Program. Program Details: <https://gfp.sd.gov/bounty-program/2024>
Greater Sage-Grouse Landowner/Producer Survey Results: https://gfp.sd.gov/userdocs/docs/slandownersurvey_2024summary.pdf

In neighboring Minnesota, the DNR reported a 81% average increase in pheasant numbers in 2025 compared to 2024, within prairie-dominated southern regions of Minnesota — a key pheasant stronghold.

NB: Minnesota does not implement a bounty program. Bird abundance is driven by far more powerful natural factors — namely, weather conditions.



2025 Minnesota August Roadside Survey

Steven Woodley, Upland Game Research Scientist (acting)
Farmland Wildlife Populations and Research Group
Madelia, MN
2 September 2025

Highlights

- Survey-wide pheasant numbers are up nearly 50% from 2024, thanks to a mild winter and more favorable spring conditions.
- Pheasant indices increased in every region, and were greatest in the Southwest, South Central, West Central, and Central regions. Hunters will have good opportunities in these regions.

Minnesota August 2025 Roadside Survey: https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/recreation/hunting/pheasant/roadside_survey.pdf

Dr. Alexey V. Egorov
PhD Biologist
Constituent of South Dakota

Black Hills Sportsmen Club

PO box 9161

Rapid City SD 57709

Dear South Dakota Game Fish and Parks Commission

The BHSC is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the possible increase in the elk population objective. We would like to see that number go up to an 8000 to 10,000 range. (from the current 6000 to 8000). The elk are doing very well right now with very good range conditions. There are very good processes in place to take care of the elk if these things change. It is easy to reduce the herd but very hard to grow it. We have a very good example of that in the Black Hills when in the early 2000's when the herd was drastically reduced. It has taken a long time to get where we are today and there is room for more growth.

We have had members sit on the many elk working groups over the last 20 years. We are informed on this issue. Any increase would be appreciated. We thank the department and the commission for bringing this forward

Thanks for your time

Cody Hodson

Pres. Black Hills Sportsmen Club

Elk Comments 2026

There are two items I'd like to see the GFP address regarding elk hunting in South Dakota:

1. Please do more to decrease the mountain lion population in the Black Hills. Not just for the elk, but for the deer.
2. The elk draw process needs to be changed. I understand you want everyone to have a chance to draw, but those of us with 20+ preference points are losing tags to people with 5 or less points. I understand the process is weighted, but in my case I should have statistically drawn a tag twice in the last 5 years.

When I look at who is drawing (by preference points) a lot of the high preference points holders are being passed over. This caused the odds of drawing for us high point holders to remain statistically the same year after year. I'd think you would want us higher point holders to get out of the pool, taking all our chances out of the process and increasing everyone's odds. Plus, most of us are not getting any younger.

My suggestion is not to go back to a straight preference point system like we had, but to a hybrid draw. Give half the tags to the higher preference point holders and then do the random, weighted draw with everyone else. This would be fair to those of us who have waited a long time.

Thank you,

Chris Duklet
Watertown, SD

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for requesting landowner input about increasing the elk numbers, acreage requirements and issues in the Black Hills. We also want to express our deepest condolences for the recent loss of Travis. He was an avid rancher, hunter, landowner and a wise reasonable voice. He will be missed locally as well as statewide.

We live just off 385 just south of Deadwood and have over 330 acres that our family owns and leases. Our land is all Ag status. We hay, pasture cattle and mitigate timber, which is a never-ending battle.

The land has been in the family for over 100 years and the amount of time, energy and expense it takes to keep the land that has been in the family is a full-time job that requires outside jobs to keep us afloat. We have worked hard to try to keep the generations that continue with the land in a natural state as we love our Black Hills, the wildlife and the beauty of each season. We hope the future for our children and grandchildren with the original homesteads can continue beyond our imagination. But we do need your help. As time tricks on it is a never-ending battle of funds, labor, pressure, that until one really walks in one's shoes, they truly cannot understand. We do understand that the non-landowners' voices outnumber the landowners. With that said we would like to mention that our close neighbors/landowners that are unable to have a voice as the requirement to do so includes internet, a computer and ability to navigate and respond, share this same sentiment. We would be happy to put you in contact with them. They gave us permission to share their name and numbers.

1. (Elk Days) Our properties literally have 1000's of elk days. We would be happy to include or forward-time stamped photos for your review. The elk herds are healthy and abundant. We have meadows and streams which are some of the prime and only places that settlers were allowed to homestead as the property had to be productive for cattle. They homesteaded 160 acres back in the day is what we understand. Now if we had sold out and developed the best of the land would not be conducive to wildlife and our areas would not be aiding in the support of the elk herds. They are on our ranch year-round. They are also some of the best habitats for the cows and calves, where they spend all spring and summer. We are supportive of our elk in our fields to our backyard but raising the number of elk tags will be more detrimental to that balance.

2. (Loss of Hay) 2024 pasture hay check. \$668.00 for the north ranch. That is correct. \$668.00 was our share. There is no whitewashing how much the elk eats daily. It does not support both cattle and elk. There is nothing left of the prime grass that is the highest in vitamins and minerals for the overall health. The loss of forage for cattle is costing us over

\$7-5000.00 a year. It will not sustain both and the landowners are taking it in the shorts. We cannot continue down this path without great pain and hardship.

3. (Fence labor and loss) We are getting older and fence repairs are a full-time job and in the Black Hills to fully understand getting posts back in the ground is a young man's full-time job. We understand that we do get hay depredation checks but the labor costs of hiring that out don't even dent the true costs of today labor and materials.

4. (Elk Retrieval) During spring and fall collaring and tagging. Every year, for the last 35 years Game Fish and Parks have asked permission to use our fields to collar and tag elk. We have never denied access to do so. If you would like a follow-up letter confirmation from GFP please feel free to ask us for that. We meet GFP more than halfway always and to be denied an elk tag year after year is making the landowners feel like denying access to the fields. We have been denied on the interpretation of "HARDSHIP"

5. (Elk tag denial) The law SDCL-41-6-21 clearly states the qualifications and requirements. We provide all the requirements requested and have been denied an elk tag. To increase the number of acres above 240 is a kick in the head to the Black Hills Landowners. The homesteaders were not even allowed to homestead over 160. This is neither fair nor balanced.

6. (Non-Landowners) Furthermore, that voices of non-landowners are not weighing, hearing the voices of the landowners and the contributions that we give them. This could be addressed in educating and informing them with the facts. We have had several referrals to us and neighbors of elk hunters that are handicapped and want an easier elk hunt when they have drawn. We have never said no to any request or door knock with that permission, especially when it comes to Game Fish and Parks. We believe this is a partnership. We would be happy to pass those contacts on for verification. The elk hunters sit on our fence lines and line cameras up, pointing into our fields and elk wallows. At times it feels extreme and demanding of our time to manage the field if we have a friend or family that has drawn. At times unnerving. Respect the landowners and at least knock on the door and let us know if you're going to sit on our corner fence so you don't get shot at when sitting 25 yards off a wallow in our field. This occurs annually.

We get people talk and can pin a wallow and now record and share on our newest and best technology, but we have recorded too many hunters setting up shop in every direction. 2024 elk season we had over 12 trespassers recorded on our properties. They don't even care to check the online maps. They know better and they don't care and you're allowing those voices to be louder. We are clearly outnumbered.

Every time an elk hunter calls our village, we have been there to assist or help in more ways than the commission can imagine. The elk hunters often have no idea what to do when they get an elk down let alone get it out of the woods and not waste the harvest. We understand that it takes 20-30 years sometimes to get an elk tag. We are there supporting them and helping those non-landowners out, which is typically a drop everything you are doing and go and help the hunter and the elk.

We have communicated several times to options that we as landowners would like to see as a change.

1. Actual elk numbers with proof and data. 500 elk days.
2. Lower the number of acreages back down to 160.
3. Ag Status remains the same.
4. Remove the “field call” of the agent assigned. The facts are the facts. Period. This is just a poor decision from the commission in even allowing it. PERIOD. This has the human factor in it and the facts and laws should be just that.
5. Hardship should not be interpreted from a field agent. Like it was for us this past year.
6. Allow landowners to auction off an elk tag if they would like. They do in other states. This would compensate landowners for fence repairs to get it all done and completed. This is every year and financially robbing any profits from hay and cattle. I would be happy to forward a bid from the fencing companies that do this for a living. This is not sustainable for landowners. The labor shortage is another issue, and you cannot find the labor at the current reimbursement that is allowed. They would hunt the land that the elk tag comes from.

Partnerships, respect for both sides is what provides a good working relationship for GFP, landowners, elk hunters, wildlife viewers, photographers, and the public. Let's work together on I like coming out a solution that is a win- win for all. Thank you for your time and consideration. We will strive to always meet you halfway, please throw us a lifeline to continue your good work.

PS. Don't get me started on the UTV issues that are occurring. If anyone needs assistance in gathering signatures that something needs to change, please contact us and we will do our best to contribute to the cause. We are unable to access some of our fields from the damage this is creating and what it is doing to the calf elk in early spring. The stress it creates on them specifically is horrific. I understand this was one of Travis's latest “this seriously needs addressing” and we will continue to support that as we did discuss this issue with him personally over the last few years. If someone is taking that cause up, please

pass on my personal contact to assist with gathering any information, signatures and or boots on the groundwork.

Thank you for listening and your consideration.

Jeri Jo Perrett Rantapaa

21902 US Hwy 385

Deadwood SD 57732

605-381-8033

To: S.D. Game, Fish, + Parks Commission
523 E. Capitol Ave.
Pierre, S.D. 57501

Re: Elk Management Plan Update with
an objective to be 9,000 hd. on the
upper end "when habitat and range
conditions allow"

The land referred to in this letter
is owned by Salmon's Inc., a family
corporation, and has been in the family
for over 100 yrs. (since the early 1900's). The
property has little to no development and
been in ~~and~~ ^{Ag} Use until present day.
Our property is on the North Fork of
Boydler Creek about 12-13 miles South of
Deadwood and we are inundated with elk.

The Department's requirements for
landowner tags ^{is} very unfair to landowners
~~who~~ host a lot of elk but do not
have ~~240~~ 240 acres. Elk use days should be
the key factor, not the 240 acre
requirement. Loss of forage for livestock
is significant as well as damage to
fences. Forage on private land is owned by
the landowner, not the general public.

Hayland contracts are appreciated, but fall short when large numbers of elk are involved, & estimate the forage loss on the Salmon Ranch to be approximately 36 tons of forage (3,600 elk use days). This represents $\$7,200$ for ^{per year} hay at $\$200$ / ton delivered. Compare this to $\$1,300$ for the hayland contract.

Some hunters may assume they can hunt on property with hayland contracts without permission. The landowner should have total control over their private property and the Dept. of G, F, + P should make this clear.

Landowners ~~and~~ the Black Hills that have A₃ property (41 acre minimum in Lawrence Co.) have slowed or prevented subdivisions from replacing habitat for wildlife as well as keeping viewsheds intact.

We have tried to cooperate with G, F, + P by allowing hunters on our property and access to our meadows for helicopters for elk collaring operations, but this proposal puts those in jeopardy.

Landowners in western states are treated much better than we are in the Black Hills. How about lowering the acreage requirement to the county's agricultural requirement where the land is located? Of course, this would be based on elk use days for a landowner tag. Another idea would be to allow tags to be transferred so landowners could recover forage losses + fencing costs. (I am aware of the policy for fencing, but labor reimbursement is way too low).

I would also like to see a lot more deer and a lot less elk.

On another note, I haven't heard the US Forest Service say anything about forage for another 500 AUM'S per month on Federal Land which is equal to about 1,000 head of ELK.

Thanks for your consideration of these comments.

Don Hausle, Vice President + Manager Salmon's Inc,
810 S. 31st St.
Spearfish, S.D. 57283
605-391-4726

Public Comment in Support of Increasing the Elk Population Objective in the Black Hills

I am writing in support of increasing the elk population objective in the Black Hills, and more broadly across South Dakota, when habitat and range conditions allow. I strongly support the department's consideration of increasing the upper population objective from 8,000 to 9,000 elk as a way to improve hunting opportunity while maintaining a healthy and sustainable herd.

I am an avid elk hunter and have been applying for a South Dakota bull elk license for more than a decade without success. While I trust the integrity and fairness of the current draw system, the reality is that draw odds have not meaningfully improved for me and others over time. This is not a problem with the draw system itself, but rather a classic supply and demand issue. If South Dakota wants to provide more opportunity for hunters, the total number of available bull elk licenses must increase, and that ultimately requires a larger elk population.

Any discussion of increasing elk numbers must start with private land impacts. Landowners are central to elk management success, particularly regarding crop damage, fence damage, and general tolerance of elk on the landscape. I believe it is important to acknowledge those concerns and move away from the unproductive "landowner versus public hunter" narrative that often shows up in online discussions. A successful elk plan must actively incentivize landowners to tolerate and even support larger elk populations.

Other states offer useful models. Kentucky, for example, provides a fully transferable either sex elk tag to landowners based on public hunter elk harvest on their property. New Mexico's Eplus system allocates transferable elk tags based on documented elk use days, with unit wide landowner elk tags requiring ranchers to open their ranch up to the public. A similar approach in South Dakota where landowners receive transferable elk tags tied to elk use, tolerance of a larger herd, and public harvest access, could create a true win win situation. Landowners would be compensated and incentivized, public hunters would benefit from increased overall tag numbers, and the state would be better positioned to manage a larger elk herd responsibly.

In addition to population objectives, season structure also affects opportunity. Currently, having a single archery season and a single rifle season centered around the elk rut creates a bottleneck in opportunity. While this structure provides a premier experience for those who draw, it concentrates pressure and limits overall participation.

I would encourage consideration of splitting seasons while maintaining similar overall harvest objectives. For example:

- Archery: September 1–15 and September 15–30
- Rifle: October 1–15 and October 15–31
- Consideration of adding a December bull rifle season

This approach would preserve high-quality, high-demand opportunities during peak periods while creating additional licenses for less desirable dates with lower success rates. Hunters willing to accept more challenging conditions could try the later rifle hunts, preference points

would be used more efficiently, and overall, Bull tag #'s could increase, and draw odds would improve without sacrificing herd health or trophy potential.

Finally, I believe limited nonresident elk licenses on the order of five to ten total should be considered. These licenses would generate substantial revenue through nonresident application fees and bonus point purchases while having a negligible impact on resident opportunity. Revenue from nonresident participation could be directed toward fence repair, crop damage mitigation, and other landowner compensation programs tied directly to elk impacts. Additionally, this would allow former South Dakota residents who have moved out of state for work or education to continue participating in the system they've already invested in.

In summary, I strongly encourage the Commission to think big-picture when updating the Elk Management Action Plan. Increasing the elk population objective to the maximum level that habitat, forest conditions, and landowner tolerance can support will create a larger opportunity base for everyone. With thoughtful incentives, flexible season structures, and responsible population management, South Dakota can provide more elk hunting opportunity while maintaining a healthy herd and positive landowner relationships.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Andrew Kopman

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South Dakota Legislature
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Subject: Request an end to the ineffective and wasteful Nest Predator Bounty Program

Dear South Dakota Legislator,

I am writing to respectfully request your consideration to end the Nest Predator Bounty Program by supporting legislation to do that.

In 2019, at the direction of Gov. Noem, the South Dakota Game, Fish, & Parks (GFP) agency created the Nest Predator Bounty Program (NPBP), in hopes of boosting pheasant and duck populations by paying bounties to the general public for killing native animals that eat eggs and hatchlings, namely 5 native species: red fox, badger, striped skunk, opossum and racoon. I oppose the NPBP because bounty programs have been shown by wildlife biologists not to work. The GFP acknowledges that there is no data showing that NPBP has increased the pheasant population. Research shows that predator control programs lack efficacy, and money would be better spent on habitat conservation.

There are many reasons why predator bounty programs do not improve nesting success. Common sense might tell you that killing predators leads to less predators. However, when their numbers dip, predators have more babies. **Compensatory reproduction** is a biological phenomenon where a population increases its birth rate (by lowering the breeding age, or allowing more individuals to breed due to reduced competition for food/territory), increases litter size, or increases offspring survival in response to population decline (often from predation or human removal) to offset losses, effectively making population control efforts ineffective or even counterproductive

Ground nesting birds and nest predators co-evolved together over eons. These predators are an important part of the ecosystem. They also eat insects, grubs, and rodents, and are meant to be on the landscape keeping everything in balance. When mesopredators are removed, the ecological niche is very often filled by a feral cat or a bird from the Corvid (crow) family, predators not targeted by the NPBP.

Research shows that areas of higher predator activity correlate to lower incidents of tick-borne disease such as Lyme disease in humans^{1,2}. The lower prevalence of predators on the landscape is attributed to the higher incidents these diseases on the east coast versus the western US, because **tick-borne diseases go up when rodent predator numbers go down**. Predators can

indeed lower the number of ticks feeding on disease-prone rodent hosts, and changes in predator abundance has cascading effects on human health that I don't believe GFP has considered.

Non-target species are trapped, such as the Plains Spotted Skunk and Swift Fox, which are priority conservation species at the state level. According to a former GFP staff I know, there was no way to tell if the rotting tails he processed were from one of these priority conservation species or one of the 5 eligible species.

The public has never been given a full audit of the cost of this program. We know that **at least \$4.5 million has been spent on implementing the program and paying bounties** (\$1.7 million in 2019 includes live trap give aways³ and \$2.3 million in bounty payments⁴) but this doesn't include staff time. The former GFP staff that I talked to said NPBP staff time is considerable and very unpleasant (having to go through bags of rotting maggoty tails). They informed me that ample GFP staff hours have been spent driving up and down the highways to spray paint the tails of road kill, so bounties could not be collected on them, rather than performing the conservation duties that GFP staff have trained for.

The reason why bounty systems fail is because their impact is haphazard and too diffuse to work. Predator removal *can* have a small, short-term positive effect on nesting success only under specific conditions: when it is carried out at small nesting sites (not statewide), conducted by a dedicated team (not the general public), and when all nest-predator species are removed including feral cats and corvids, not just these 5 native species. This is entirely different from what the NPBP does. A cost-effective alternative is habitat improvement projects, which have proven to be effective in increasing ground nesting bird populations, and can leverage an influx of substantial federal dollars into the state.

I work in grassland ecology and understand that grassland birds face steep population declines. Creating and preserving connected habitat is the scientifically sound action that yields results. These birds need tall native grassland to hide from all predators (not just these 5), for winter grains, and a diversity of forbs. Ranchers are increasingly learning to defer grazing on more land each year, which provides bird habitat, while creating a stockpile of forage that can be utilized outside the nesting season, increases plant species diversity, and overall increases the forage production per acre. In fact, one of the highest indicators of nesting success currently is the proximity to Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land. Many studies show that nesting success is not a function of predator abundance, but rather the availability of protective habitat^{5, 6, 7}.

If the \$4.5 million+, that has been essentially wasted on the NPBP, were instead spent on habitat restoration, the state would have qualified for a 75% reimbursement through the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act (PR Act), administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for state wildlife conservation projects. If the \$4.5 million+ were leveraged to pay for 25% of conservation projects, and the other 75% were paid by the federal PR Act, this would have meant \$13.5 million in federal monies invested in developing healthy ecosystems in South Dakota.

The NPBP is unduly cruel because it corresponds to the breeding and brooding season for these native mammals (April-July). When nursing mothers are taken, their babies die from cold and starvation. **Traditional (purposeful) trapping is done in the winter, when fur is prime, and young are independent, to do so otherwise is unethical.** Fur and skins are magnificent materials created by God. They are what allowed our ancestors to migrate north out of Africa and should not be wasted. However, the submission of tails and program season is antithetical to preserving a pelt. Why is GFP encouraging this senseless waste?

In the 1960's sixteen states had fox bounty programs. In **no state** did the bounty program reduce fox populations, and in North Dakota the bounties had the opposite effect and actually increased fox numbers.

Bounty systems are not supported by legislators in other Great Plains states: 1) state bounty programs ended in Minnesota in 1965 (SF2016); 2) North Dakota Legislature discontinued state-funded bounty programs in 1961 (HB610); 3) a similar nest-predator bounty program was rejected in legislative session 2023 (LB400) in Nebraska; 4) raccoon bounty program was effectively defeated in Iowa's state legislature in 2024 (HF2665).

This bounty program is not accepted by South Dakotans. In 2019-2020, the GFP received hundreds of public comments from hunters, scientists, wildlife professionals, NGOs, sportsmen clubs and local residents, over 90% of which opposed the NPBP. The 2019 survey that SDGFP paid for⁸, conducted by Responsive Management, has scandalous methodology. Few respondents knew anything about the NPBP at the start and their opinions were shaped by the survey itself. Furthermore, 92% of the respondents were men. I hope GFP knows that the state of South Dakota is comprised of more than 8% women, and that they are charged with serving all residents. A detailed analysis of the Responsive Management survey is listed below⁹. A much larger and more representative survey was conducted by the Remington Research Group in 2020 and shows that a vast majority of South Dakotans do not support this program¹⁰. Their research methodology can be found here¹¹.

Your support would emphasize the importance of funding strategies that produce measurable outcomes, rather than continuing to spend well over \$500,000 annually on a program that has shown no evidence of success.

Sincerely,

Janet Moore

P.S. I'm a free-range chicken enthusiast. I've always locked my chickens up every evening in their coop, and so have never had a problem with any of the 5 NPBP species. The only predator that has ever gotten one of my chickens was a magnificent hawk!

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2. Richard S. Ostfeld, disease ecologist, various publications
<https://www.caryinstitute.org/science/our-scientists/dr-richard-s-ostfeld?page=11>
3. Second Century Initiative Live Trap Give Away Program:
https://gfp.sd.gov/userdocs/docs/2020_Bounty_Information_-_Fisk_and_Robling.pdf
4. SD Nest Predator Bounty Program "Tail Tracker" Dashboard:
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5. Sargeant, A. B., Sovada, M. A., & Shaffer, T. L., 1995. Seasonal predator removal relative to hatch rate of duck nests in waterfowl production areas. *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, 507-513.
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7. Intensive Seasonal Predator Removal Had Little Effect on Duck Nest Success in Waterfowl Production Areas <https://npshistory.com/publications/wildlife/nbs-rib/94-80.pdf>
8. 2019 Survey by Responsive Management
https://gfp.sd.gov/UserDocs/nav/2019_Nest_Predator_Bouny_Program_Survey_Report.pdf
9. Analysis of 2019 Responsive Management survey <https://phas-wsd.org/wp-content/uploads/03SocialSurveyAnalysisNPBP.Alexey.pdf>
10. 2020 Survey by the Remington Research Group
<https://www.humaneworld.org/sites/default/files/docs/South-Dakota-General-Election-Survey.pdf>
11. Remington Research Group methodologies <https://remingtonresearchgroup.com/about/>

South Dakota Wildlife Federation
PO BOX 7075
Pierre, SD 57501



Dear Game, Fish and Parks Commissioners,

We would like to thank both the department and the commission for requesting public comments on the new Elk Management Action Plan. Listening to the commission discussion during the January meeting, we were heartened to hear commissioners discuss the possibility of increasing the management objective from 6,000 to 8,000 elk and increasing the herd population objective in the Black Hills.

As you may already know, South Dakota's resident population is now over 935,000. We also lead the nation with 24% of our citizens holding a hunting and fishing license. With approximately 224,000 licensed resident sportsmen supporting the department's conservation efforts, we hope that you will strongly consider our recommendation. Drawing an elk permit is a huge deal for the resident hunters in our state as you already know, given an estimated 40,000 plus applicants attempt to draw a license every year!

Having personally sat on past GFP Elk Stakeholders' groups, I understand and appreciate the dialogue and information discussed in those meetings. The South Dakota Wildlife Federation has also had other Directors and members in attendance at those stakeholders group meetings for years. As an organization, we firmly believe our Black Hills can easily hold a much higher elk carrying capacity based upon proper range conditions and forage availability.

The South Dakota Wildlife Federation therefore formally requests that you consider increasing the elk population management objectives from 6,000 to 8,000 to 8,000 to 10,000 elk. Given all of the stakeholders involved in this discussion, however, if you decide to stand with the current thought of increasing to 9,000 elk in our Black Hills, that's certainly a goal that we wholeheartedly support as well.

We sincerely appreciate the work of our Game, Fish and Parks commission, staff, especially our big game biologists, on this complex issue and we thank you and other department leaders for their continued efforts to improve hunting and fishing opportunities here in our state.

Thanks for your attention in this matter.

Dana R. Rogers

Dana R. Rogers
Executive Director,
South Dakota Wildlife Federation

COMMENTS ON SOUTH DAKOTA WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN 2026-2030

Nancy Hilding
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March 1st, 2026

RE: South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks Wildlife Damage Management Action Plan, 2026-2030 (Wildlife Division Report 2026-01, March 2026)

The Prairie Hills Audubon Society appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed Wildlife Damage Management Action Plan. While we recognize the challenges faced by agricultural producers, we have significant concerns regarding the Plan's heavy reliance on lethal control methods, particularly for coyotes and beavers, when peer-reviewed scientific research demonstrates that non-lethal alternatives are more effective, more cost-efficient, and more sustainable.

I. COYOTE CONTROL: SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE SHOWS LETHAL CONTROL IS COUNTERPRODUCTIVE

The Plan's Strategy 1.1 emphasizes "proactive and aggressive coyote control efforts" and prioritizes lethal methods including aerial gunning, trapping/snaring, thermal imaging, and M-44 cyanide devices. This approach is not supported by the best available science and may actually exacerbate the problems it seeks to solve.

A. Compensatory Reproduction Makes Lethal Control Self-Defeating

Multiple peer-reviewed studies demonstrate that culling coyotes as a form of population control is often unsuccessful and frequently results in the opposite effect (Minnie et al., 2016; Newsome et al., 2017). Coyotes exhibit two well-documented compensatory responses to population reduction:

1. **Compensatory Reproduction:** When coyote populations are reduced through lethal control, the remaining females demonstrate higher reproductive output through earlier breeding age and larger litter sizes (Sacks, 2005). Studies show that killing 75% of a coyote population every year for 50 years would still not exterminate the population due to this compensatory response.
2. **Compensatory Immigration:** As soon as an area is cleared of coyotes, it is almost immediately reoccupied by neighboring individuals (Minnie et al., 2016; Newsome et al., 2017). Vacant territories are quickly filled by "floater" individuals or nearby packs.

Research demonstrates that to achieve any population reduction, a minimum of 70% of the coyote population must be killed on a sustained basis—a threshold that is almost never achieved and cannot be maintained (Connolly & Longhurst, 1975). Even the frequently-cited 1975 Connolly & Longhurst study, which USDA Wildlife Services has relied upon for decades to justify large-scale coyote eradication, actually concluded that lethal management of coyotes is NOT an effective method for population control.

B. Disruption of Social Structure Increases Livestock Depredation

Indiscriminate lethal control disrupts coyote pack social structure in ways that can actually increase conflicts with livestock:

- Exploited coyote populations have younger, less experienced coyotes that haven't been taught appropriate hunting behaviors, making them more likely to prey on livestock and pets (Project Coyote, 2020).
- Orphaned young coyotes must fend for themselves and in desperation will prey upon livestock and become livestock killers, whereas they would not have done so if their pack structure remained intact.
- Stable coyote packs with established territories are less likely to prey on livestock than disrupted populations with numerous yearlings reproducing.
- Most livestock depredation is caused by alpha/breeding coyotes, which are the most resistant to non-selective removal techniques.

C. The Scientific Consensus Opposes Indiscriminate Lethal Control

Over 70 prominent conservation scientists have condemned indiscriminate coyote killing as counterproductive and a threat to healthy ecosystems. There is no credible evidence that indiscriminate killing of coyotes effectively serves any beneficial wildlife management purpose.

In 2017, 17 conservation organizations joined a formal complaint under the Information Quality Act challenging USDA's reliance on flawed science to justify coyote eradication programs. The complaint, supported by Dr. Jane Goodall and numerous top North American canid researchers, argued that USDA continues to ignore a growing body of scientific literature on the effectiveness of non-lethal means of preventing coyote predation and the biological necessity of carnivore populations in stabilizing regional ecosystems.

D. Non-Lethal Alternatives Are More Effective

Research shows that non-lethal livestock protection methods are more effective than lethal control:

- Livestock guardian animals (dogs, llamas, donkeys)
- Electric fencing designed for predator exclusion
- Range riding and increased human presence
- Fladry (flagging) and other visual deterrents
- Carcass removal (eliminating attractants)
- Improved animal husbandry practices

- Targeted hazing and frightening devices

Studies demonstrate that integrated non-lethal approaches provide superior long-term protection compared to lethal control. A 2017 seven-year case study comparing areas with lethal control to those protected by range riders, turboladry, guardian dogs and other non-lethal methods showed significantly better outcomes with non-lethal approaches (Stone, 2017).

E. Recommendations for Coyote Management

We urge SDGFP to:

3. Revise Strategy 1.1 to prioritize non-lethal livestock protection methods over lethal control.
4. Eliminate or severely restrict indiscriminate lethal methods (aerial gunning, M-44 devices, non-selective trapping) that disrupt coyote social ecology.
5. If lethal control is deemed necessary, limit it to confirmed problem individuals using selective methods, not broad population reduction.
6. Provide technical and financial assistance to producers for implementing proven non-lethal methods.
7. Conduct and publish data comparing the effectiveness of lethal vs. non-lethal approaches in South Dakota.
8. Acknowledge in the Plan the scientific evidence showing that indiscriminate lethal control is counterproductive.

II. BEAVER MANAGEMENT: NON-LETHAL METHODS ARE MORE EFFECTIVE AND ECONOMICAL

The Plan mentions beavers only in passing and provides no detail about beaver management strategies. Given that beavers are listed as one of the species WDS staff work with, and "furbearers" are mentioned in Strategy 1.2, the Plan should include specific provisions for beaver management with emphasis on non-lethal methods.

A. Flow Devices Provide Permanent, Cost-Effective Solutions

Non-lethal beaver management through flow devices (pond levelers, culvert protection systems, beaver deceivers) has been proven effective since at least the 1920s and has evolved into highly reliable technology:

- Properly designed and installed flow devices create a permanent leak in beaver dams that beavers cannot stop, maintaining water levels while preventing flooding.
- Flow devices protect culverts from being blocked by excluding beavers from the immediate area through fencing systems.
- These devices, when properly installed and maintained, are the most cost-effective and longest-lasting beaver management methods.

B. Lethal Control Is Expensive and Temporary

Killing beavers and destroying their dams is rarely a permanent solution:

- A 2006 survey found that trapping as a solution to beaver problems had a 79% failure rate within two years due to resettlement by new beavers.
- Any good beaver territory will be claimed by new beavers, resulting in a continual cycle of flooding, infrastructure damage, repairs, and repeated annual killing.
- Removing beavers eliminates the valuable ecosystem services they provide (water storage, wetland creation, biodiversity enhancement, flood mitigation, drought resilience, wildfire breaks).

C. Documented Cost Savings with Non-Lethal Management

Multiple long-term studies demonstrate the economic superiority of non-lethal beaver management:

Billerica, Massachusetts (20-year study, 2000-2019):

- 55 beaver conflict sites studied
- Sites managed with non-lethal flow devices cost \$229/year per site
- Sites managed with lethal trapping cost \$409/year per site
- Annual savings: \$7,740 with non-lethal management
- Number of beavers killed dropped more than fivefold
- Sites provided millions of dollars of ecological services that would have been lost with beaver removal

Alberta, Canada and Other Studies:

- Flow devices have proven effective across diverse landscapes
- Properly installed devices continue to function with minimal maintenance
- Economic benefits increase over time as devices remain functional while trapping must be repeated annually

D. Beavers as a Climate Resilience Asset

Beavers are increasingly recognized as a valuable tool for climate adaptation:

- Beaver wetlands slow snowmelt and runoff, reducing flood damage
- Beaver ponds store and cool water underground, providing drought resilience
- Beaver complexes serve as firebreaks in wildfire-prone areas
- Beaver wetlands remove sediment and pollutants, improving water quality
- Beaver habitat supports biodiversity including fish, birds, and other wildlife

Given South Dakota's vulnerability to both floods, droughts and perhaps inadequate ground water supplies for growing populations West River, maintaining beaver populations where appropriate and managing conflicts through non-lethal means serves multiple public interests.

E. Recommendations for Beaver Management

We urge SDGFP to:

9. Add a specific strategy under Goal 1 addressing beaver management with priority given to non-lethal methods.
10. Develop expertise among WDS staff in designing, installing, and maintaining flow devices.
11. Provide technical assistance and cost-share programs for landowners to install flow devices rather than defaulting to lethal removal.
12. Partner with organizations like The Beaver Institute, Beaver Solutions, and state agencies that have successfully implemented non-lethal beaver management programs.
13. Conduct demonstration projects showing the effectiveness and cost savings of flow devices.
14. Acknowledge in the Plan the ecosystem services beavers provide and the economic advantages of non-lethal management.
15. Reserve lethal removal for only those situations where flow devices are not feasible and document why non-lethal methods were rejected.

III. NEED FOR SCIENCE-BASED MANAGEMENT

The Plan states it will "emphasize working cooperatively with interested publics" and support "coexistence with wildlife." However, the heavy emphasis on lethal control, particularly the "proactive and aggressive" approach to coyotes, contradicts these stated values.

True coexistence requires:

- Reliance on best available peer-reviewed science
- Prioritization of non-lethal methods
- Lethal control only as a last resort for confirmed problem individuals
- Transparent reporting of methods used and their effectiveness
- Evaluation of whether lethal programs achieve their stated goals

We recommend that Strategy 1.2's language about "proven and reliable methods" be amended to specify "scientifically-proven" methods and that the Plan commit to regular evaluation of whether its approaches are achieving the desired outcomes or whether, as the science suggests, they may be counterproductive.

IV. TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

SDGFP publishes an annual Wildlife Damage Management report, most recently the Fiscal Year 2024 WDM Annual Report. We acknowledge this as a positive step toward public accountability. The report covers program funding history, staffing, and a statewide summary of activities involving coyote and predator control, deer and elk depredation, Canada goose damage, beaver management, prairie dog control, and other wildlife conflicts including hawk and owl control to protect poultry. We appreciate that this report exists and is publicly available.

However, we note that the annual report, as currently structured, has significant gaps that limit meaningful public oversight. We request that SDGFP expand the annual WDM report and the five-year Action Plan to address the following:

16. Report specific numbers of animals killed by species and method. The current annual report describes program activities in general terms but does not publish species-by-species kill totals or a breakdown by lethal versus non-lethal methods. Taxpayers and the public have a right to know how many animals of each species are killed annually through publicly-funded WDM activities.
17. Report costs of lethal versus non-lethal approaches by species. The annual report notes total program expenditures but does not break down costs by management approach. This information is necessary to evaluate whether the program is investing appropriately in non-lethal alternatives.
18. Report effectiveness metrics. Did problems recur after intervention? How quickly? Were non-lethal approaches attempted before lethal ones? Without outcome data, the annual report cannot demonstrate whether the program is achieving its stated goal of building “social tolerance for wildlife.”
19. Clarify the relationship between the WDM annual report and the Nest Predator Bounty Program. The FY2024 WDM Annual Report contains no mention of the Nest Predator Bounty Program, despite the NPBP spending approximately five million dollars in public funds since 2019 on bounties for five native mesopredator species. If the NPBP is a separate program not governed by this Action Plan, SDGFP should clearly state that and identify where it is reported and evaluated. If it is within the WDM program’s scope, it should be included in the annual report.
20. Provide opportunities for public comment on significant changes to methods or priorities between five-year plan revisions.
21. Include conservation and wildlife advocacy organizations in the stakeholder engagement process. The annual report lists the WDM Working Group, ADC Policy Advisory Committee, South Dakota Stockgrowers, predator district boards, SD Sheep Growers, SD Cattlemen, and SD Ag Unity as primary stakeholders. We request that conservation organizations representing the broader public interest in native wildlife be included in these engagement processes on an equal footing.

V. NEST PREDATOR BOUNTY PROGRAM: QUESTIONS ABOUT SCOPE AND TRANSPARENCY

The Prairie Hills Audubon Society requests clarification regarding the relationship between the Wildlife Damage Management Action Plan and the South Dakota Nest Predator Bounty Program (NPBP). The NPBP has operated since 2019 and has expended approximately five million dollars in public funds over seven years offering bounties for the killing of five mesopredator species: raccoons, grey fox, badgers, opossums, and striped skunks. The program was created under the premise that reducing populations of these species increases ground-nesting bird nesting success. The WDM Action Plan contains no discussion of the NPBP whatsoever.

We request that SDGFP clarify the following questions, which we raise in a spirit of genuine inquiry rather than accusation:

A. Why Is the Nest Predator Bounty Program Not Addressed in This Action Plan?

The WDM Action Plan describes itself as guiding how SDGFP manages conflicts between wildlife and human interests, including livestock, crops, and property. The NPBP involves the organized, publicly-funded killing of native wildlife species at statewide scale. We ask: is the NPBP excluded from this Action Plan because it is classified as a wildlife-on-wildlife management issue rather than a wildlife damage to human livestock or property management issue? If so, we request that SDGFP clearly articulate where and how the NPBP is governed, evaluated, and held accountable within the Department's planning framework. There is likely also black-bird killing and cormorant killing for crops and human raised fish.

B. Does the WDM Action Plan Cover Predator Killing Intended to Maximize Prey Available to Human Hunters?

The NPBP raises a broader question about the scope of this Action Plan that we ask SDGFP to address directly. The WDM Program, as described, exists to reduce damage to livestock, crops, and property caused by wildlife. However, the NPBP targets predators not because they damage property, but because they compete with human hunters for popular game species — particularly ground-nesting birds such as pheasants and waterfowl. We ask: does this Action Plan govern, or is it intended to govern, the killing of predator species for the purpose of maximizing prey populations available to sport hunters? This question applies not only to the NPBP but potentially to coyote control as well, given that coyotes prey on deer, elk, pheasants, and other species valued by hunters and that coyote control is the centerpiece of this Action Plan's Strategy 1.1.

We are asking that SDGFP be transparent about whether that is a purpose of this Plan, because the scientific justification, appropriate methods, and public accountability standards differ substantially between predator control to prevent agricultural damage and predator control to shift predator-prey dynamics in favor of species hunted for recreation.

C. Does the WDM Action Plan Apply to Farm-Raised and Hatchery-Released Wildlife?

South Dakota has a significant industry of privately operated game farms and pheasant hatcheries that raise birds for release during hunting season. We ask SDGFP to clarify whether wildlife damage management activities — including predator control — conducted to protect farm-raised or hatchery-released birds fall within the scope of this Action Plan. If predator control is being carried out on behalf of commercial pheasant operations or to protect stocked birds prior to release, we believe this represents a qualitatively different use of the WDM Program than protecting livestock from native predators, and that it warrants separate and transparent accounting.

D. Request for Clarification

We respectfully request that SDGFP address these questions in its response to public comments on the WDM Action Plan, and that the next revision of this plan clearly define its scope with respect to: (1) wildlife-on-wildlife predator management programs such as the NPBP; (2) predator control conducted to benefit sport hunting interests rather than to prevent agricultural damage; and (3) management activities related to commercially raised or hatchery-stocked wildlife. Clarity on these questions is essential to meaningful public oversight of a program that expends significant public funds and has substantial impacts on native wildlife populations.

VI. PRAIRIE DOG MANAGEMENT: SOUTH DAKOTA MUST HONOR ITS COMMITMENTS

The 2026–2030 Wildlife Damage Management Action Plan addresses prairie dogs only in passing — listing them among species WDS staff work with and calling for “direct control measures for prairie dogs that have encroached onto private lands from adjacent public properties” (Action 1.2.4). This minimal treatment ignores a substantial and unmet set of obligations that South Dakota made — in writing, to the federal government and to ten other states — as the explicit basis for keeping management authority over the black-tailed prairie dog in state hands rather than triggering federal Endangered Species Act protection.

A. A Multi-State Agreement — Not Just a South Dakota Plan

South Dakota’s 2005 Black-tailed Prairie Dog Conservation and Management Plan (Cooper and Gabriel 2005) was not developed in isolation. It was one of eleven coordinated state management plans developed under a formal multi-state framework specifically designed to prevent federal listing of the black-tailed prairie dog. The state’s own executive summary is explicit about this purpose: “The State of South Dakota has been participating in interstate prairie dog discussions and planning efforts since late 1998 in a coordinated attempt to avoid any present or future need for threatened species listing under the authority of the federal Endangered Species Act and thereby protect property rights.”

The multi-state framework was built around two foundational documents. The first was the “Black-tailed Prairie Dog Conservation Assessment and Strategy” (Van Pelt 1999), under which eleven states committed “to manage, maintain, and enhance habitat and populations of black-tailed prairie dogs across its historic range and reduce the number of threats impacting their viability.” The second was the “Multi-State Conservation Plan for the Black-tailed Prairie Dog in the United States” (Luce 2003), which stated plainly that “the goal of the CA&S, the MSCP, and eleven state management plans is to remove enough threats to the black-tailed prairie dog that long-term conservation of the species is assured.”

The multi-state plan established specific, measurable national objectives, including increasing total occupied black-tailed prairie dog acreage in the United States to at least 1,693,695 acres by 2011, maintaining at least two prairie dog complexes greater than 5,000 acres in South Dakota (including the Conata Basin/Buffalo Gap complex), and developing nine additional complexes greater than 5,000 acres nationally. South Dakota’s share of the national acreage commitment was 199,472 total acres, with 166,958 of those acres on non-tribal lands (Cooper and Gabriel 2005).

B. These Commitments Are Why the Prairie Dog Was Not Listed as Threatened

On August 18, 2004, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed the black-tailed prairie dog from its list of federal candidate species, announcing that the species “is not likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future.” The USFWS cited specifically that states had made substantial progress including completing population surveys, drafting management plans, enacting laws changing the species’ status from pest to a managed designation, establishing shooting

regulations, and “setting future goals for occupied habitat that will address population management needs for disease and other threats.”

In other words, the federal government stepped back from protecting the black-tailed prairie dog because states — including South Dakota — promised to do it themselves. Those promises included specific monitoring schedules, specific acreage goals, and specific management actions tied to population thresholds. South Dakota has not fulfilled those promises.

C. The Monitoring Commitment Has Not Been Honored

Central to South Dakota’s 2005 plan was a commitment to monitor statewide prairie dog acreage at three-year intervals, and to take specific management actions depending on what those surveys found. The plan established binding action triggers based on non-tribal acreage estimates:

- Above 160,000 non-tribal acres: Continue standard management; conduct surveys every three years.
- Between 125,000 and 160,000 non-tribal acres: Limit state-financed control to encroachment from federal lands only; implement multi-state plague monitoring; increase incentive payments to landowners.
- Below 125,000 non-tribal acres: Implement shooting restrictions on ALL public lands in South Dakota by GFP Commission rule; expand incentive payments statewide.
- If total statewide estimate falls below 145,000 acres: Sales of prairie dog toxicants in South Dakota shall cease except by special permit and only in specific instances (Cooper and Gabriel 2005, Strategy 1.4c).

SDGFP conducted one monitoring survey after the 2005 plan was finalized: the 2006 black-tailed prairie dog colony acreage and distribution survey (Kempema 2007), which found 303,237 non-tribal acres and concluded no management changes were required. Subsequent monitoring has been inconsistent and, at times, well behind the three-year schedule the plan requires. Prairie Dog monitoring reports have not always been conducted on time or made publicly available in a timely manner. South Dakota therefore cannot reliably demonstrate whether it is currently meeting its acreage goals, whether any of the management action thresholds have been crossed, or whether the conditions that justified the federal government’s decision not to list the prairie dog as threatened still exist. This is not a minor administrative shortfall — it is a failure to honor the specific commitments on which federal protection was withheld.

D. Changed Circumstances Require a Full Plan Revision

The 2005 plan was written when sylvatic plague was essentially absent from South Dakota. At the time of finalization, plague had been confirmed in only a single prairie dog in extreme western Fall River County — the first case ever documented in the state — just weeks before the plan was published. The plan’s disease monitoring section was prospective and precautionary. By the time the 2006 monitoring survey was conducted, however, plague had already moved into the state significantly. SDGFP’s own 2006 report documented that approximately 27,000 acres of prairie dog colonies in Shannon County alone had gone inactive after epizootic plague outbreaks, with additional impacts in Fall River and Custer Counties (Kempema 2007).

In the nearly twenty years since, plague has become endemic across much of western South Dakota, periodically devastating colonies across large areas. The multi-state management framework the 2005 plan was built on explicitly acknowledged plague as one of the primary threats justifying federal candidate species consideration. Yet the very plan that was supposed to address plague threats has never been updated to reflect plague's actual establishment in the state.

In addition, the black-footed ferret recovery picture has changed substantially since 2005. Ferret reintroduction sites have expanded beyond the original Conata Basin/Badlands complex to include Wind Cave National Park, Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and maybe Rosebud Sioux Tribe. The black-footed ferret is both a federal and state endangered species, and SDCL 34A-8-6 requires SDGFP to take all actions necessary for its conservation and recovery. Prairie dog management — including WDM prairie dog control activities — must be coordinated with ferret recovery managers to avoid federal ESA conflicts. The WDM Plan's Action 1.2.4 contains no such requirement.

E. Recommendations for Prairie Dog Management

We urge SDGFP to:

- Commit to conducting statewide prairie dog acreage monitoring on the three-year schedule required by the 2005 management plan, and publish results in a timely and publicly accessible manner. The monitoring program with its specific acreage thresholds and required management responses was a core commitment to the federal government and ten partner states. Consistent, on-schedule monitoring is essential to demonstrate that South Dakota continues to honor the obligations on which federal ESA listing was deferred.
- Commit in this WDM Action Plan to a full revision of the 2005 Black-tailed Prairie Dog Conservation and Management Plan. The 2005 plan must be updated to reflect current prairie dog population status, the reality of endemic sylvatic plague, current conditions at black-footed ferret reintroduction sites, and revised action thresholds and management strategies appropriate to present circumstances.
- Require that prairie dog control activities under Action 1.2.4 be coordinated with USFWS black-footed ferret recovery managers prior to implementation in any area within or adjacent to active ferret reintroduction zones, to ensure compliance with state and federal ESA obligations.
- Publish annual data on prairie dog control activities — including acres treated, methods used, and geographic proximity to ferret reintroduction sites — as part of the annual WDM report, as the 2005 plan required of an annual summary report to the legislature.

VII. CONCLUSION

The Prairie Hills Audubon Society supports assisting landowners with wildlife conflicts. However, we cannot support an action plan that emphasizes lethal control methods that peer-reviewed science has shown to be ineffective and often counterproductive.

We urge SDGFP to revise this Plan to:

- Prioritize non-lethal methods for coyote management
- Include specific provisions for non-lethal beaver management using flow devices
- Commit to science-based decision-making
- Provide transparent reporting on methods and outcomes
- Honor the monitoring and management commitments made to the federal government and ten other states in the 2005 Black-tailed Prairie Dog Conservation and Management Plan, update that plan for current conditions, and resume statewide acreage surveys every three years as promised
- Clarify the relationship between this Action Plan and the Nest Predator Bounty Program, and address the questions raised in Section V regarding predator control for hunter benefit and management of hatchery-raised wildlife

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns with SDGFP staff and to assist in identifying resources and expertise for implementing effective non-lethal wildlife damage management.

Respectfully submitted,

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