

*South Dakota*

# GAME, FISH AND PARKS

2017 ANNUAL REPORT





WE PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT OF OUR STATE'S PARKS, FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE BY FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS, CULTIVATING STEWARDSHIP AND SAFELY CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH THE OUTDOORS.







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KELLY HEPLER | Department Secretary

## EACH YEAR OUR STAFF SEEMS TO WORK HARDER AND SMARTER.

In 2017, our staff worked tirelessly to collaborate across department lines, with community and national partners and with private landowners. Through this they accomplished new priorities and tackled other challenges they never saw coming without hesitation or complaint. That's what I would call grit; which is an unwritten and understood value our staff reflects without having to display it on the wall, share it in an email or post it to the website.

Our values run deep at GFP – excellence, integrity, stewardship and compassion are more than words. They are our beliefs in how we do business. This annual report only scratches the surface of how our values play a key role in everything we do.

- **EXCELLENCE.** We believe in a culture of professionalism and accountability to meet the expectations of our customers and empower our staff to succeed in balancing those needs. We want to develop programs, projects, plans and opportunities to ensure our customers are able to easily connect with the outdoors for years to come.
- **INTEGRITY.** Transparency and honesty are second to none. We believe in doing what is right at all times; which takes courage and strength regardless of exterior pressures from social media posts, blogs or emails from those who may or may not agree with an action taken. Ensuring our customers can listen in to how changes are made each month during the livestream broadcast of our monthly Commission meetings is a testament to how much we strive to improve customer confidence in our department. The value of the trust others have in our department is far beyond anything that can be measured within our strategic plan. Success metrics will come and go, but integrity lasts forever.
- **STEWARDSHIP.** We believe in taking care of South Dakota. Biological and social sciences play a significant role in conserving and respectfully managing our state's outdoor resources now and into the future. Take a look at any of the articles written in this 2017 snapshot – stewardship is a top priority. Our staff are not doing this work because it is their job; they are doing it because it has meaning and purpose for what we are all passionate about – the great outdoors and preserving our home.
- **COMPASSION.** We believe in the dignity of each person and genuinely care for the people we serve. I could never motivate any of our department staff to be compassionate. They just are. Customer service is the foundation of our mission. Listening to our customers, making changes to accommodate their needs and the needs of others, being helpful, kind and courteous as well as keeping our outdoorsmen and women safe while recreating directly impacts our customer confidence.



# LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY

Our department is not only committed to these values and conservation, but to South Dakota's land legacy and landowner relationships. This year's drought conditions forced producers across the state to make some tough decisions regarding their bottom line.

The Legislature's special session on nonmeandered waters took center stage and provided a foundational compromise for open dialogue with landowners; primarily in northeastern South Dakota. Our department continues to work very hard with folks to allow public access to any and all nonmeandered waters across the state. South Dakota is a small place. We know each other here. Someone you consider a neighbor could live 40 miles away. We treat each other with respect in this state, and we need to make sure that those values carry over to hunting, fishing, trapping and all other recreational outdoor activities. I continue to enjoy forward-thinking discussions on access, habitat, recreation, respect and maximizing opportunities for both landowners and outdoorsmen and women.

Looking ahead, we remain focused and driven. The Legion Lake Fire, in Custer State Park, was shocking and devastating. It is a home to you, a home for wildlife to roam and a place to escape what life hands us from time to time. This iconic state park is loved by our friends, families and neighbors as well as the millions of visitors it has hosted throughout its history. Rebuilding Custer State Park is going to take power and strength, but it will be restored and it will return with new growth and a new love for why we all cherish it so much.

Sustaining outdoor recreational opportunities, improving all aspects of communication and customer service, cultivating stewardships, fostering public and private partnerships and ultimately connecting our friends, families and future generations to the great outdoors of South Dakota continues for 2018.



LEFT TO RIGHT | MIKE **JASPERS** (SECRETARY OF AG), GOVERNOR DENNIS **DAUGAARD**, HUNTER **ROBERTS** (GOVERNOR ADVISOR), JAY **ESPERANCE** (DIVISION OF WILDLAND FIRE) AND KELLY **HEPLER** (SECRETARY OF GFP).

# EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

OVER **6,000 YEARS** OF EXPERIENCE FROM  
**486 PERMANENT STAFF MEMBERS.**

**513 SEASONAL WORKERS.**

**174 SUMMER INTERNS.**

## NOT TO MENTION OUR WONDERFUL VOLUNTEERS

Volunteer service continues to rise, setting a record for the fourth year in a row. In 2017, over 450 individuals and 12 groups volunteered, contributing over 116,000 hours in our parks across the state. The Outdoor Campuses had almost 13,000 hours of volunteer work in 2017 from over 350 volunteers. Visitor experiences are greatly improved by volunteers, who contribute their time and talents in positions such as campground hosts, maintenance workers and special event helpers.

*AS PICTURED  
FROM LEFT TO RIGHT*

**TONY LEIF**  
Wildlife Director

**KELLY HEPLER**  
Department Secretary

**CHRIS PETERSEN**  
Administration Director

**KATIE CEROLL**  
Parks and Recreation Director





# COMMISSION INFORMATION

## 2017 COMMISSION MEMBERS



**BARRY JENSEN**  
CHAIRMAN - WHITE RIVER



**GARY JENSEN**  
VICE CHAIR - RAPID CITY

## 2018 MEETING DATES

JANUARY 11-12  
PIERRE, SD



**MARY ANNE BOYD**  
YANKTON



**PAUL DENNERT**  
COLUMBIA

MARCH 1-2  
PIERRE, SD



**RUSSELL OLSON**  
WENTWORTH



**KATHY PETERSON**  
SALEM

APRIL 5-6  
RAPID CITY, SD

MAY 3-4  
CUSTER, SD

JUNE 7-8  
ABERDEEN, SD

JULY 11  
PIERRE, SD

SEPTEMBER 6-7  
YANKTON, SD

OCTOBER 4-5  
DEADWOOD, SD

NOVEMBER 1-2  
SIOUX FALLS, SD

DECEMBER 6-7  
PIERRE, SD



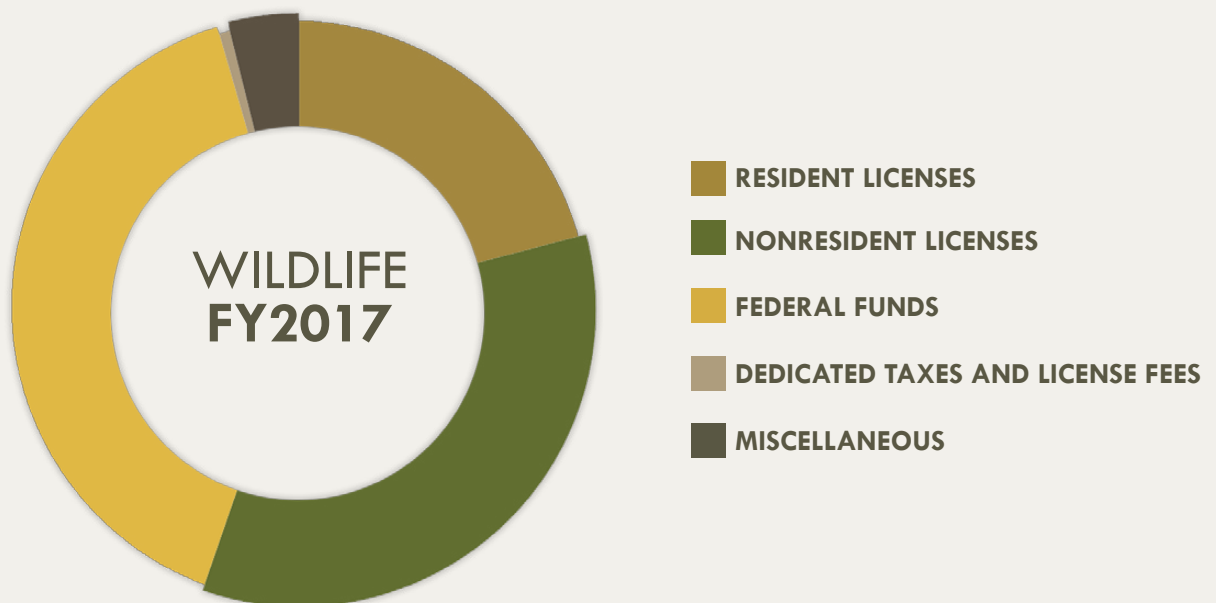
**SCOTT PHILLIPS**  
NEW UNDERWOOD



**DOUG SHARP**  
WATERTOWN

## DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2017%
Resident Licenses	\$ 10,001,932	\$ 10,951,758	\$ 11,198,637	20.9%
Nonresident Licenses	\$ 17,419,798	\$ 18,354,483	\$ 18,463,323	34.4%
Federal Funds	\$ 16,050,020	\$ 20,340,693	\$ 21,572,792	40.2%
Dedicated Taxes and License Fees	\$ 338,321	\$ 309,531	\$ 295,094	0.6%
Miscellaneous	\$ 2,137,364	\$ 2,700,117	\$ 2,117,441	3.9%
<b>Total Fund Sources: Division of Wildlife</b>	<b>\$ 45,947,435</b>	<b>\$ 52,656,582</b>	<b>\$ 53,647,287</b>	<b>100%</b>





## DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION

	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2017%
Parks Licenses and Camping	\$ 17,350,839	\$ 18,315,620	\$ 17,348,544	49.9%
General Funds	\$ 2,526,907	\$ 2,555,572	\$ 2,730,861	7.9%
Federal Funds	\$ 6,945,244	\$ 3,983,488	\$ 3,076,990	8.8%
Bond Payments	\$ 1,650,685	\$ 2,609,946	\$ 2,605,374	7.5%
Dedicated Taxes and License Fees	\$ 1,516,068	\$ 2,055,060	\$ *6,290,959	18.1%
Snowmobile Trails	\$ 841,381	\$ 939,586	\$ 842,690	2.4%
Miscellaneous	\$ 2,243,938	\$ 2,317,601	\$ 1,888,285	5.4%
<b>Total Fund Sources: Division of Parks and Recreation</b>	<b>\$ 33,075,061</b>	<b>\$ 32,776,873</b>	<b>\$ 34,783,703</b>	<b>100%</b>



\*In 2017, certain funds were relocated from Parks Licenses and Camping into Dedicated Taxes and License Fees.

# GFP ECONOMIC IMPACT

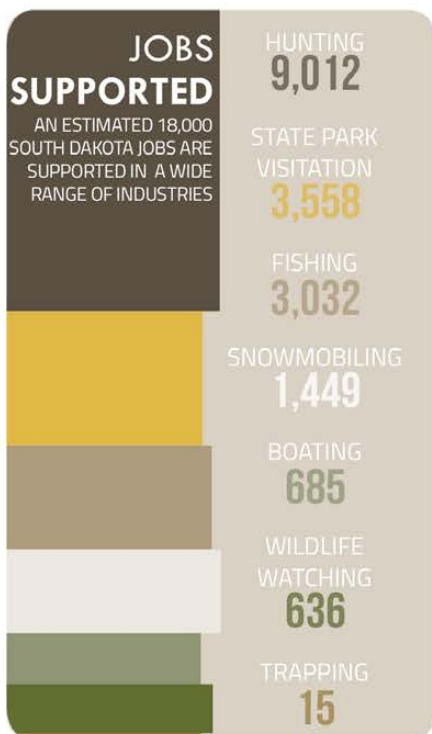
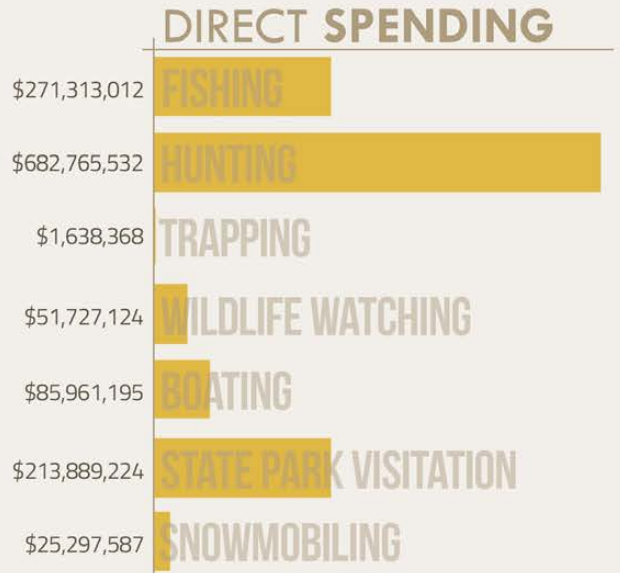
Large numbers of hunters, anglers, and outdoor recreationists spend many days enjoying South Dakota's diverse outdoor recreation opportunities. Recently, over

six million people visited state parks, fished, hunted, trapped, boated, or viewed wildlife in South Dakota. Participating in these activities typically involves

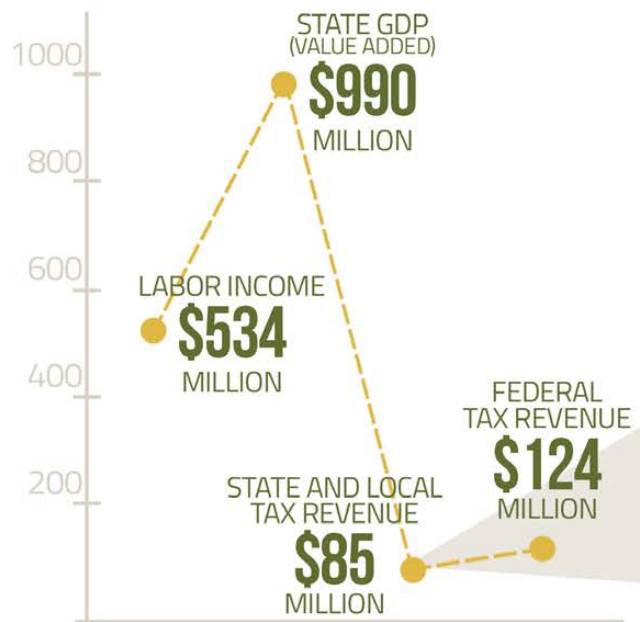
**7.5 MILLION**  
PEOPLE WERE SERVED



**\$1.33 BILLION**  
DOLLARS WERE SPENT BY PARTICIPANTS



## TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS



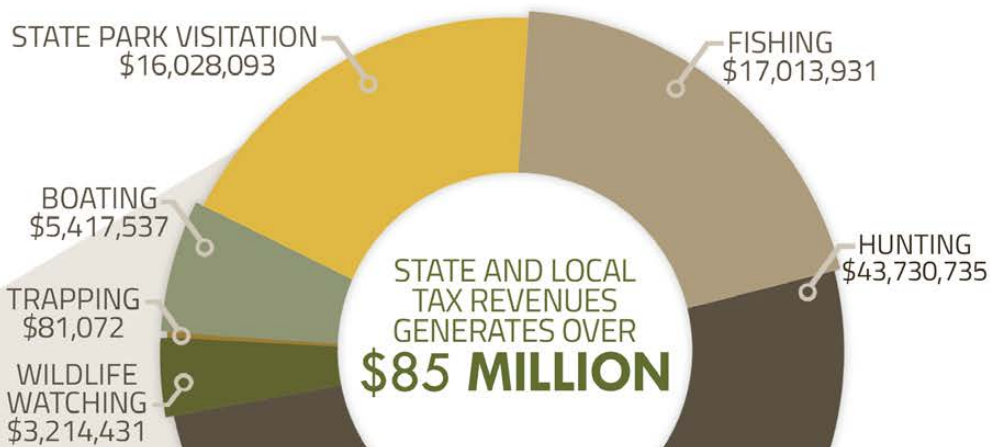
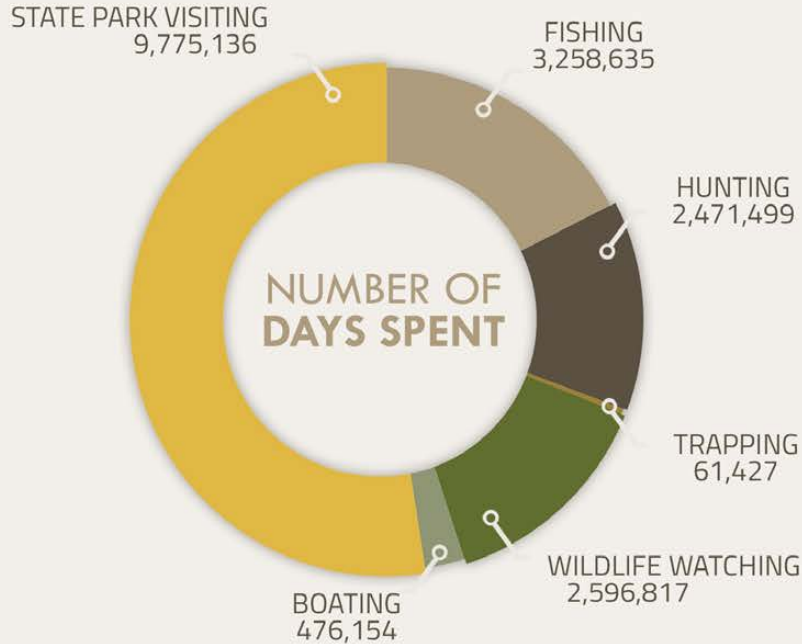


spending money on travel, supplies, and equipment, making the annual amount of these expenditures a significant contributor to the state's economy. Collectively

anglers, hunters, trappers, wildlife viewers, boaters, state park visitors, and snowmobilers spend \$1.3 billion in South Dakota annually in support of these activities.

## 18.6 MILLION DAYS

WERE SPENT USING GFP MANAGED LANDS, WATERS AND RESOURCES



STATE AND LOCAL TAX REVENUES BY HUNTING TYPE







# **A LOOK BACK.**

**2017 PROVED TO BE A YEAR OF PARTNERSHIPS, NOT ONLY WITHIN OUR DEPARTMENT, BUT ACROSS SOUTH DAKOTA. A COMMON GOAL OF PRESERVING OUR STATE'S OUTDOOR HERITAGE WAS THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THESE DECISIONS AND ACTIONS. A SIMPLE REFLECTION OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF GAME, FISH AND PARKS' STAFF THROUGHOUT THE PAST YEAR ARE OUTLINED IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES.**



# NOTEWORTHY EVENTS

## A DRY YEAR CHALLENGED WILDLIFE

Extreme dry conditions persisted across much of the state throughout the summer of 2017, creating stressed habitat conditions. These circumstances impact wildlife species at varying rates and can be location dependent. As the summer continued and drought conditions worsened, it became apparent that pheasants in particular were going to have a difficult year. Dry conditions also impacted water availability in wetlands for waterfowl and other bird species reliant on this important habitat type.

The pheasants per mile index as measured by August roadside surveys declined 45% from last year. Severe drought conditions, especially west of the James River Valley, is believed to be one of the primary causes based on where prominent pheasant number declines were most notable. The 2017 drought was particularly detrimental to pheasants because the timing completely overlapped the entire nesting and brood-rearing period. The hot and dry conditions stalled vegetation growth which could have made pheasant nests more susceptible to predation. Less concealment cover was available to broods that successfully hatched. Severe drought conditions can also reduce insect production, the main food source for pheasant chicks. The combination of these impacts resulted in poor production and recruitment to the pheasant population.

The drought of 2017 also had significant impacts on breeding ducks in South Dakota. Compared to 2016 duck breeding conditions throughout the state were rated as fair to poor.

**THE 2017 DUCK BREEDING POPULATION ESTIMATE WAS AROUND 2.5 MILLION BIRDS, DOWN 23% FROM 2016 AND 20% BELOW THE LONG TERM AVERAGE.**

South Dakota pond numbers were down 20% from 2016. Poor spring rains and little rain through mid-summer also created poor brood rearing conditions, likely affecting duck recruitment and local duck numbers. While Canada geese are not as dependent on temporary and seasonal water as ducks, breeding propensity and reproductive success were likely impacted by dry conditions.

One outcome of the 2017 drought conditions was that many wetland basins that had not experienced a drawdown in years went dry. These dry basins, once re-flooded, will be more attractive and productive to breeding waterfowl.





## VISITORS FLOCK TO STATE PARKS

South Dakota is blessed with abundant opportunities for outdoor recreation for citizens and visitors alike. Many of the state's exceptional outdoor spaces are preserved within the state park system and visitors are keen to explore them. Over 340,000 camping units were recorded in 2017, nearly 14,000 over 2016, continuing an upward trend that has been steadily growing for over a decade. In addition, more and more people are spending the day at a park, even if they don't stay overnight. Over 460,000 entrance licenses were purchased, up over 25,000 from last year. Several new facilities in the parks serve to enhance visitor day-use experiences, including the family-friendly Peter Norbeck Outdoor Education Center in Custer, new visitor centers at Good Earth and Custer, expansion of the trails system at Spearfish Falls and the 155-mile Jay Heath Canoe/Kayak Trail along the Big Sioux River.



## ➤ 40TH FT. SISSETON HISTORICAL FESTIVAL

The Fort Sisseton Historical Festival was created in 1978 to boost visitation at the state park. The first two years each saw approximately 5,000 attendees.

**NOW, 40 YEARS LATER, WE WERE ABLE TO WELCOME OVER 11,600 VISITORS.**

The festival has had its share eventful moments, from Senator McGovern arriving in a stage coach, a buffalo breaking through a freshly built corral panel, to the rediscovery, conservation and display of the last flag ever flown over the active fort. Several new events and returning favorites took place this year, including the melodrama, ranch rodeo, chuck wagon cook-off, and Lakota hoop dancing, along with lots of food and music.

The 40th anniversary of this northeast South Dakota tradition was commemorated on June 2-4. An almost overwhelmingly pleasant weekend weather-wise contributed greatly to a very successful event. The public response and comments received were glowing. Gate staff, grounds crew, visitor center staff, volunteers, contractors and several other groups that helped to put on the event all received multiple direct compliments from our guests.

Secretary Hepler, Director Ceroll, Assistant Director Schneider, and several others were present to help celebrate and honor many of the staff members from the last 40 years that have put their stamp on this park and this event. Listening to their stories and hearing the different things that each of them remembered about their time with the department was a wonderful reminder of the depth and reach of our efforts in this department.



# THE OUTDOOR CAMPUS CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF EDUCATION



## • 1997

The Outdoor Campus East came to life. There were 52 volunteers and 14,874 people who attended classes in the first year.

Twenty years ago this past summer, a new idea from South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) rose from the empty south side of Sioux Falls. In the middle of a cornfield with a shiny new city playground next to it, GFP built its first building dedicated to the outdoors and preserving our outdoor heritage.

## • 2007

Staff created a nature playscape in back of the building, featuring large logs, a tree tunnel, forts and places to dig and play outdoors.



Some 20 years later, everyday day we look up at a place that made outdoor education history. This building wasn't just a nature center like many other states had – it was a place where people could learn how to do hands-on outdoor activities, just like their parents and grandparents did as early Dakotans.



## • 2011

The Outdoor Campus West opened in Rapid City, adding a new outdoor skills learning education facility to the west side of the state.

Outdoor University became the largest event of the year, reaching over 4,000 people who love the outdoors.

After our doors opened, something great happened, people came! We had visitors young and old all with the curiosity to explore and attempt new challenges. Students arrived by the bus load and our volunteer list grew and grew. The first few years at the Outdoor Campus yielded results that excited everyone. After 11 years of “perfecting” the operation, we were ready to expand. Our west river counterpart came to life in 2011 in Rapid City, offering similar educational and environmental opportunities tailored to their landscape.

## • 2012

Museum changed from reading rails, displays and photos to interactive play area featuring hunting and camping for small children. A giant largemouth bass now greets visitors to the area.



Today, the Outdoor Campuses in Sioux Falls and Rapid City continue to focus on getting people outside and exploring the world around them. Each location emphasizes the “try-it” mentality and makes activities accessible to anyone who may be interested.



## • TODAY

New GFP Strategic Plan makes fishing, hunting and camping programming our priority, along with creating long-lasting partnerships for continuous participation in the outdoors.



## TWENTY YEARS OF THE TREK AND THE MICKELSON TRAIL FUTURE

The Trail Trek started in 1997 following the George S. Mickelson Trail's completion as a way to thank volunteers and communities for their support. In the last 20 years, the three-day bike ride has grown from 50 participants to filling at 600 each of the last four years. In all, over 10,000 participants have taken part, coming from every state in the nation, as well as international riders from countries such as Australia, Austria, Canada, New Zealand and Scotland.

**THIS YEAR'S RIDE WAS HELD ON SEPTEMBER 15-17, AND HOSTED 600 PARTICIPANTS FROM 23 STATES.**

In 2013, new vision came to life when the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks applied for a Special Use Permit to construct, operate, and maintain an approximately 15-17 mile non-motorized trail across National Forest

System lands managed by the Black Hills National Forest Service. The trail would connect the Mickelson Trail near Hill City, South Dakota to the Mount Rushmore National Memorial. This proposed trail would provide a scenic, historic, and educational recreation opportunity in the Black Hills. A Feasibility Study, completed in 2012, provided for preliminary analysis and extensive public input. It was the basis for the proposed route. The Forest Service, in coordination with the National Park Service has begun analyzing the project under an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Project scoping got underway in 2016, and in 2017, the US Forest Service (USFS), as the lead federal agency responsible for preparing the EIS, requested that GFP provide alternatives for trail route options in addition to the originally proposed Rushmore-Mickelson Connector

Trail route. USFS requested that GFP engage stakeholders/interest groups that provided comments during the EIS scoping process, in the development of the route options. In response to the request for options, GFP formed a working group comprised of representatives of groups that provided substantive comments during the scoping process relative to the Peter Norbeck Wildlife Preserve. Through this collaborative process, the overall objective of the working group is to arrive at one or two additional trail route options for USFS to consider in developing the EIS. These routes and supporting documentation were presented to the USFS by a memo on November 16, 2017. Expectations are that the environmental analysis will be resumed by the USFS in the coming months and the EIS will be completed in 2019.

**THE TRAIL IS 109 MILES LONG AND CONTAINS MORE THAN 100 CONVERTED RAILROAD BRIDGES AND 4 ROCK TUNNELS.**







**FOUR ADULT AND 15 YOUNG** CAPTIVE-REARED FERRETS WERE SET FREE ON A RESTORED BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG COMPLEX ON THE BAD RIVER (RANCH) SOUTHWEST OF FORT PIERRE.



## BLACK-FOOTED FERRET RELEASE

The black-footed ferret, (*Mustela nigripes*; ferret) is one of the rarest and one of the most recognized species in the country. It was once thought extinct until a Wyoming ranch dog brought a ferret back to his owner in 1981. Eventually, the 18 remaining individuals taken from that population were the beginning of the species' long and winding road towards recovery. On September 27 of this year, just as the sun was putting a close to the day, that journey took an exciting turn down a ranch road in central South Dakota. Four adult and 15 young captive-reared ferrets were set free on a restored black-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*; prairie dog) complex on the Bad River (Ranch) southwest of Fort Pierre.

This complex of colonies, called the Ash Creek Restoration Area, has been the focus of ferret recovery for the Turner Endangered Species Fund (TESF) and Ranch staff for almost 20 years. Work began in 2000 to restore and enlarge prairie dog colonies and manage them to prevent or address unwanted prairie dog movements. Dependent upon prairie dogs for food and shelter, the fate of the ferret is closely tied to this keystone species.

Work on the Ash Creek site has been focused on developing ferret habitat to support 30 individuals. This will help to meet the range-wide down-listing criteria set by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). These criteria include having a total of 1,500 ferrets in 10 populations across six states with each population having at least 30 breeding individuals. As part of these ferret recovery efforts, Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) also works towards meeting those federally designated down-listing and delisting goals detailed in the USFWS's recovery plan for the ferret.

Although this is the seventh reintroduction site in South Dakota, it is the first on privately-owned land. Similarly, most of the existing ferret reintroduction sites in North America are located on public or tribal lands. To encourage and assist private landowners to become willing participants in ferret reintroductions on their property, the USFWS established a Programmatic Black-footed Ferret Safe Harbor Agreement (SHA) in 2013. This agreement provides participating landowners as well as non-participating neighboring landowners assurances that they will not be subject to additional future regulatory restrictions or commitments and can return to a baseline level when ferrets were not present. The reintroduction at the Bad River Ranch was made possible by landowner enrollment in the SHA. The Ranch is owned by Turner Enterprises, Inc.

As part of its responsibility for rare species conservation, GFP has conducted a review of state endangered and threatened species, including the ferret. The draft status reviews are available at [gfp.sd.gov](http://gfp.sd.gov).

## MONARCH AND POLLINATOR SUMMIT

As part of an effort to avoid federal listing of the monarch butterfly, South Dakota is participating in conservation planning spearheaded by the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA). Designed as an alternative to federal listing, each MAFWA member state is preparing a state plan to meet the needs of monarchs in particular and native pollinators in general. Nearly all MAFWA states have used a stakeholder gathering to aid their state planning effort by inviting representatives of groups that can influence opinion in their respective areas and help deliver pollinator practices on the ground.

South Dakota's Monarch Summit was held on October 18-19 in Mitchell. Priority was given to crafting an invitation list that represented important stakeholders, with an emphasis on agricultural representation. The meeting was designed as a facilitated brainstorming event rather than a more typical public meeting with communication moving primarily one way. Significant time was spent drafting an invitation list to include a cross-section of publics representing agriculture, wildlife, public and private land management, garden and beautification, and educators. Fifty-seven individuals participated in one or both days of the summit, which resulted in a list and description of many current pollinator practices, ideas for imagining success, sector-derived suggestions for increasing pollinator accomplishments in the state and suggestions for successful implementation of the state's future plan for native pollinators. Individual participants also shared their specific interest in future participation and made suggestions for additional groups that should be included in this effort.

# NEW IN 2017

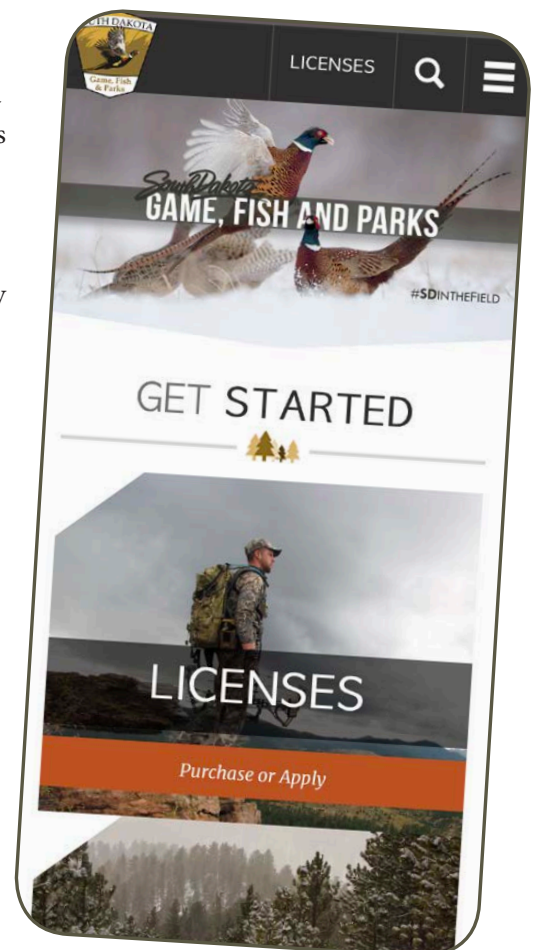
## GFP.SD.GOV AND SD OUTDOORS APP UPDATED FOR AN EVER-CHANGING AUDIENCE

At the beginning of 2017, our agency embarked on the redevelopment of *gfp.sd.gov*; which hadn't been done in over nine years. We also restructured our outdoor mobile app for both iOS and Android phones during the last half of 2017. As part of the department's strategic plan to enhance citizen awareness of the GFP mission, services and programs, the project objective was to connect hunters, anglers, campers and other outdoor recreationalists with their next outdoor experience and to ensure they have the most accurate digital content to do so.

A user-centric approach drove this project; both with the website and mobile app redesigns. Research conducted was extensive and included a variety of surveys and one on one conversations with customers, in addition to a thorough review of the current site's analytics. GFP surveyed approximately 250 customers, completed an onsite nonresident hunter survey at Pheasant Fest in Minneapolis, distributed an online survey to millennial outdoor enthusiasts and completed five focus groups with one on one conversations with 69 of our customers. The focus groups are the foundation and heart of this project.

The newly designed website streamlines content and navigation as well as features an enhanced Events Calendar with state park events, season dates, application openings, fishing tournaments, open house meetings and more; a complete list of online forms and permits replacing a majority of the previous paper versions; a central location for all maps; specific visitor feedback from each park; and frequently asked questions. The mobile app features a digital backpack so users can customize it with favorite maps, licenses and handbooks. A key feature discussed during the research phase, was the ability to view the maps offline in the event where the user is in an area with little to no cell phone service. In addition, the app now has the ability to alert users when a season application is opening or closing and the when a hunting season starts and ends. Users can sign up to get key date alerts directly to their phone from our mobile app.

GFP customers are gearing up for their next outdoor adventure, right now. They are seeking advice, comparing brands and making purchase decisions. It is very important for the department to showcase the digital tools needed for these adventures from the beginning stages of research to the final stage of purchasing a hunting or fishing license and/or making a camping reservation in one of our parks. It's not enough to just build a website or mobile app and expect customers to end up there. Through the user-centric approach that helped to build the new website and mobile app; GFP was able to tap into what customers want most—to connect with a brand that fulfills their need to be outdoors.





## PARK MANAGEMENT EDUCATION REACHES A NEW DEGREE AT SDSU

This past spring, Game Fish and Parks partnered with SDSU to design and create a new Conservation Planning and Park Management major for the fall of 2017. The new undergraduate major was approved at the June 2017 South Dakota Board of Regents meeting. This Bachelor of Science degree also includes a specialization in park administration and management. Students will learn skills including marketing, public relations, program development, conservation, landscape planning and natural resource management. The field is predicted to have strong job growth in the future, both nationally and in South Dakota. There is a seven percent projected job growth nationally in conservation fields. SDSU expects to attract 10-12 new students per year in the conservation management program, with an estimated five graduates per year after full implementation. The program will help equip graduates with the skills and knowledge to enter positions within the Department such as park managers, naturalists, biologists, conservation technicians and outdoor recreation planners.

## ➤ JAY HEATH CANOE AND KAYAK TRAIL TAKES LAUNCH IN SOUTHEAST SOUTH DAKOTA

This water trail on the Big Sioux River was dedicated on the banks of the Big Sioux River at Big Sioux Recreation Area in memory of local paddling enthusiast Jay Heath on June 13, 2017. Approximately 60 individuals were on-hand to commemorate the event, including members of Jay Heath's family. This public event was held to properly thank the Jay Heath family for the contribution Jay made to paddling sports and to recognize the efforts of the SDCKA board and membership for their efforts to make the water trail rejuvenation a reality. State Parks Director Katie Ceroll and District Park Manager Travis Theilen spoke of the benefits of partnerships and how this unique recreational water trail will provide access for those who enjoying the growing popularity of kayaking. A ribbon-cutting celebration took place at the Big Sioux Recreation Area north launch site west of Brandon with approximately one dozen kayaks taking the first official cruise on the newly designated trail.

**THE JAY HEATH CANOE AND KAYAK TRAIL ORIGINATES IN SIOUX FALLS, SD AT LIEN PARK. FROM THERE, IT WINDS 155 MILES DOWNSTREAM TO SIOUX CITY, IA.**

Detailed information about this route can be found at [gfp.sd.gov](http://gfp.sd.gov). The digital map allows users to interact by providing directions to the access sites, information on the miles to the next site and photos of what the access sites look like. Along this route, there are 18 access sites, along with overnight accommodations at South Dakota state parks, Iowa county parks and city parks.

PHOTO © SD TOURISM

## PARK PRESCRIPTION PROGRAM

Many adults and children fall short of the recommended physical activity levels in South Dakota. To encourage more physical activity in South Dakota adults and children, the South Dakota Departments of Health and Game, Fish and Parks are partnering to encourage healthcare providers to provide their patients with a prescription for physical activity in any South Dakota state park.

Park Prescriptions aims to connect the healthcare industry with physical activity assessment and prescription. Healthcare providers are now prescribing a free one-day pass to any South Dakota state park or recreation area to engage in physical activity, making the park the patient's outdoor gym! This one-day pass can also be turned in for a discounted annual pass, to further encourage continued physical activity engagement in South Dakota state parks.

This is a great way for the healthcare community to help educate South Dakotans on the overall health benefits of exercise and to promote increased physical activity. And, it's a fantastic motivator for anyone looking for another reason to get out and be more active while enjoying all that South Dakota's state parks have to offer!

## GOOD EARTH VISITOR CENTER OPENS DOORS AND WINS AWARD

South Dakota's newest state park, Good Earth at Blood Run, is also home to the state's newest visitor center. The visitor center is designed to tell the area's story to visitors, from individuals to families to school groups, through interpretive exhibits, classrooms and a theater featuring a short film about this site's Native American history.

The visitor center was dedicated by Gov. Dennis Daugaard during a ceremony on May 19, where he credited the partnerships responsible for making this dream a reality. In the near future, the park will boast an outdoor amphitheater, interpretive signs along the vast network of hiking trails and the restoration of native prairie across the landscape.

**IN 2017, THE PARK WELCOMED OVER 80,000 PEOPLE - MANY OF THEM SCHOOL CHILDREN - WHO CAME TO EXPERIENCE THE CULTURALLY AND HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT SITE FIRST-HAND.**

In August, Good Earth State Park received the Ney Landrum Park History Award from the National Association of State Park Directors. The award is given to an individual, team, academic institution or organization that has displayed outstanding efforts in original research and presentation of state park history that results in a tangible work product. Good Earth was selected for their work and collaboration with tribal peoples to tell the site's story through the new visitor center, as well as for preserving a portion of historically and culturally significant site as a state park - the largest known Oneota habitation.





## ADAMS HOMESTEAD AND NATURE PRESERVE'S COTTONWOOD PLAYGROUND

The Cottonwood Playground is the latest addition to Adams Homestead and Nature Preserve, in North Sioux City. This one of a kind playground represents the cottonwood forest and its diverse ecosystem that make Adams Homestead and Nature Preserve unique. The 4,000 square feet playground is ADA accessible and provides opportunities for kids of all skills and abilities to explore nature, use their creativity, obtain “green” exercise and start an adventure.

The staff at Adams Homestead and Nature Preserve dreamt about giving children another opportunity to engage with nature and fulfill their need to spend time outdoors. Studies have shown that in the last 20 years, childhood playtime has moved indoors. The average child spends only 30 minutes a day in unstructured outdoor play and more than seven hours a day in front of some form of technology. The shift

of moving activity inside seems to impact the wellness of kids. Outdoor play increases fitness levels, lowers stress levels and enhances positive social interactions. The Cottonwood Playground does not only help the mind, body and spirit of kids who visit Adams Homestead and Nature Preserve, but has also opened the door to a future outdoor experience in our state parks.

The community support began with a Cottonwood Playground fundraising campaign in 2016 with a challenge grant of \$50,000 from the South Dakota Parks and Wildlife Foundation. In August 2016, the fundraising received an incredible boost when a \$75,000 Matching Asset to Community Health (MATCH) grant from The Wellmark Foundation was awarded to the project. The City of North Sioux City donated \$25,000 and other businesses and individuals continued their generosity.

**BY THE BEGINNING OF 2017 OVER \$200,000 WAS RAISED FOR THE COTTONWOOD PLAYGROUND.**

With the donation of dirt work and concrete from Brad and Jean Mollet and the creativity of GameTime, the playground broke ground the summer of 2017 and was ready for all kids to explore on Saturday, August 12.

Community involvement is the key to a successful implementation of a project. The park listened to the community's needs and in response, the community supported this project wholeheartedly. Together, we have helped create future generations of happy and healthy young outdoor enthusiasts who will leave a positive footprint in society for years to come.







THE GRAND RE-OPENING  
OF THE PETER NORBECK  
OUTDOOR EDUCATION  
CENTER WAS HELD  
**SEPTEMBER 27, 2017.**

## ➤ PETER NORBECK EDUCATION CENTER

The Peter Norbeck Visitor Center first opened its doors in 1934 as the park's museum. Built by the Civilian Conservation Corps from Camp Pine Creek, the building is a historic landmark. It has seen several renovations over the years, the first in 1970 when it was designated a visitor center, again in 1995, 2000, and most recently in 2017.

The latest reincarnation of the building is designed to honor the historic structure and the educational foundation. In planning meetings, park staff debated potential themes for the new center and ultimately settled on the idea of younger visitors learning about and exploring Custer State Park. Over the course of the meetings they realized that many of the new generation did not actually get out into the park; it appeared too wild and scary for many kids (and some parents). With this in mind the theme "Discovering How to Explore" was born. The goal of the building is to show kids how to explore, how to get outside and get dirty, and how to use their imagination in a world that may seem a bit big and frightening.

GFP met with Nature Explore/Dimensions Inc. in January to discuss the potential of an outdoor classroom. After receiving the initial plans from Nature Explore, the maintenance and grounds crews set about turning the vision into a reality. The asphalt driveway around the rear of the building was removed and stamped; decorative concrete was laid to delineate the main pathway that also functions as access for emergency vehicles as well as some of the pods within the outdoor classroom. As part of the outdoor classroom a small "mine" shaft was created utilizing a culvert and rock work treatment. In that area are also the building, art, digging, and water pods. The messy materials area has been incredibly popular with several elaborate fort structures being built, remodeled and demolished. As part of the Outdoor Classroom certification process, park naturalists Laci Prucinsky and Julie Brazell attended the Nature Explore & Outdoor Classroom Project Leadership Institute.

The naturalist staff also worked closely with Split Rock Studios to create the interior exhibits. The exhibits were designed with three things in mind; encouraging kids and families to explore, creating hands-on, interactive exhibits, and teaching about the connections within the park's ecosystem. Exhibits include a climb-thru prairie dog mound, touch and feel tables, a food-web focused puzzle, several interactive floor mats, and a bird ID touchscreen.

The grand re-opening of the Peter Norbeck Outdoor Education Center was held September 27, 2017. It remained open through the park's Halloween Night Hike on October 27 and 28 and then closed for the season.



## HARVEST SD ENGAGES A NEW AUDIENCE

Many members of the younger generation didn't grow up hunting and fishing. The curiosity is there, making creative recruitment efforts essential to reach these folks. Currently, there is a disconnect between our young people and a land ethic that will help support future conservation of wild spaces through the purchase of hunting and fishing licenses. If our retiring baby-boomer population of hunters and anglers are going to pass on that beautiful heritage of stewardship, there has to be someone there to carry the torch. People in this audience believe in the intrinsic value of nature, appreciate sustainability, support the ethical treatment of wildlife, have a relationship with nature, strong ties to food and a sense of community.

The creation of a new curriculum, Harvest SD, required hours of effort through the planning, communication awareness and implementation processes. The course includes:

- Become confident with shooting, shot placement, hunting regulations and firearm safety.
- Learn how to apply and/or purchase a hunting or fishing license.
- Provide helpful and respectful tips on how to speak to and approach landowners.
- Experience scouting and hunting for wild game.
- Hands-on lessons in processing and cooking wild game.

Harvest SD is more than a class series that teaches this new audience how to hunt, fish and care for game. We are creating the next generation of sportsmen and women by appealing to the interests of these individuals

who are not currently participating in hunting and fishing activities. We also are focused on creating partnerships with members of our community and connecting our students with those people. Harvest SD offers an open non-threatening environment where students can learn together and support each other in their new favorite pastime.

### HARVEST SD RECRUITED 11 INDIVIDUALS IN THESE INITIAL CLASSES, EIGHT FEMALE AND THREE MALE PARTICIPANTS.

Students attended an intense two week, five class series. Three out of the five classes were held in a classroom setting. Subjects explored included hunter ethics, hunting techniques, shot placement, fire arms theory, conservation law, wildlife management, sustainability and public land access.

Additionally, students participated in hands-on field days, engaging in lessons about scouting and habitat and spent an afternoon at the shooting range. Students also took part in hands-on pheasant cleaning, field dressing white tailed deer and big game processing.

All but one had been introduced to firearms and hunting in some form but lacked the skills and confidence to independently participate. Initial evaluation shows students gained the necessary information and confidence to pursue these activities independently. The final component to Harvest SD will be assisting students on supported hunts followed by re-engaging past students as mentors for future students.

## NEW TOOL FOR SOUTH DAKOTA BIRDS

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks premiered a new interactive website in 2017 featuring the results of a five-year field project about breeding birds. South Dakota's second Breeding Bird Atlas took place from 2008-2012 and involved searching and documenting birds across the state. Field work began exactly 20 years after the first state breeding bird atlas started, allowing us to see how the state's bird life has changed during those two decades. Results of this updated view illustrate which bird species nest in the state, where they can be found and what habitats they need during the breeding season. Atlas highlights include a total of 252 species recorded during the project, of which 239 species were recorded breeding. Atlasers found thirteen new species in the second atlas not confirmed during the first atlas. The interactive website can be found on [gfp.sd.gov](http://gfp.sd.gov).

Users can explore the results by species or by blocks. A species page displays the nine square-mile blocks where the species was found, life history information, including state-specific information, photos, habitat graphs and printable species accounts. Website users can select blocks from a state map or from a drop-down county list. The website offers several report options, both within the species pages and the block pages.

GFP oversaw and funded this project, using State Wildlife Grant funds, agency dollars and a contribution from the South Dakota Izaak Walton League. The Bird Conservancy of the Rockies coordinated the effort and assisted with oversight. The project's success was due to the involvement of volunteer birders, access permission by landowners, participation by many agency and university staff, and data contributions from many sources.

# GFP LAW ENFORCEMENT IMPLEMENT BODY CAMERAS <

Video cameras have been used in law enforcement work for decades. Early dash cameras or in-car video was being experimented with as early as the 1950s and 60s, but became widespread and common place in the 1980s and early 90s. The footage provided by video cameras has proven very effective for law enforcement work and has been used in countless cases as evidence while also providing insight into the work done by officers on a daily basis.

Game, Fish and Park (GFP) officers have long experimented with video camera technology. In the late 90s and early 2000s, some GFP officers were outfitted with dash cameras. However, after a number of years of operation those cameras were discontinued and the idea of outfitting GFP officers with them no longer seemed viable. The primary reason dash cameras were never implemented revolved around the limited use and benefit they provided most GFP officers. Simply put, the cost-benefit analysis didn't add up as most of the work GFP officers conduct is done outside or away from a patrol vehicle where a dash camera

would be unable to provide any sort of value.

Video camera technology has rapidly advanced over the decades. Alongside of advancements in dash mounted cameras, the introduction of officer worn or body cameras have also come on to the scene in recent years. In 2013, GFP started researching the idea of outfitting officers with body worn cameras. By that time, numerous manufactures of body worn cameras started showing up on the market so it was decided the GFP would conduct field trials of several different units. Field trials consisted of outfitting two GFP officers with several different cameras from several different companies. The selected officers deployed those cameras into the field for a set time-frame and then reported all their findings at the end of trials. During the field trials, both strict body cameras (chest mounted) and "point of view" (head mounted) body cameras were tested. Based on a number benefits provided by the "point of view" type body camera, it was recommended that those would be the style of body cameras deployed by GFP officers.

Over the course of 2014-2016, additional research was conducted alongside of policy development and final ordering of cameras. The body camera ultimately selected for GFP officers was the Axon Flex 2. This style of camera is designed to be worn from the shoulders up and when worn on a pair of sunglasses or hat provides officers with "point-of-view" video recording. Through our field testing we determined that "point-of-view" recordings provided much better video evidence than that which is record by a strict chest mounted body camera.

In March, body cameras arrived and officers statewide were trained and started deploying cameras.

GFP officers now have the ability to record and capture video from anywhere. The benefits of this new technology include: case evidence, officer training, complaint mitigation and firsthand officer perspectives. The overall goal behind outfitting GFP officers with body worn cameras is to ultimately make their jobs easier and the work they do safe and more efficient.





IN MARCH, BODY CAMERAS ARRIVED AND OFFICERS STATEWIDE WERE TRAINED AND STARTED DEPLOYING CAMERAS.



## NEW POSITIONS PROMOTE INTER-DEPARTMENT PARTNERSHIPS

The department created three new shared law enforcement positions in 2017. The three positions work as both conservation officers and park rangers. Two positions are park rangers who spend most of their time working in the parks, but also work on wildlife and fisheries law enforcement – primarily during the fall hunting seasons. The third position is a conservation officer who spends most of his time working on wildlife and fisheries law enforcement, but also works on parks law enforcement – primarily during the busy summer park season.

The two shared park ranger positions are stationed in Charles Mix County and at Palisades State Park in Minnehaha County. The shared conservation officer position is stationed in Sioux Falls. All three positions have spent time working on law enforcement for both the Parks and Wildlife Divisions. Park rangers and conservation officers have worked and trained together for years, but the department has placed an emphasis on ensuring all officers work even closer together and share responsibilities. These three new positions embody that vision of cohesiveness. Band working together to ensure our officers are familiar with policy, work direction and standard operating procedures.

The two divisions have had different field training programs for several years, since the Wildlife Division switched from the San Jose Model to the Reno Model. The San Jose Model is a task-oriented training program, while the Reno Model is more problem-based and utilizes community policing concepts. The Parks Division is now moving to the Reno Model and is currently building their program. This will be beneficial as all department officers will now be trained in similar programs and field training officers will be able to share in the training across division lines when necessary.

## #BEHIND THE BADGE

Through the GFP social media platforms, we introduced our conservation officers and park rangers to our followers. Each conservation officer or park ranger explained what they enjoyed about their job and their favorite activities to get individuals and families involved with.

THE OVERALL REACH FOR THE CAMPAIGN WAS MORE THAN **680,000 PEOPLE**.



# DEPARTMENT ADVANCEMENTS

## ON-GOING SCIENTIFIC ADVANCEMENTS

Due to the ever changing landscapes, scientific and technological advancements are inevitable in the world of wildlife and fisheries management. The department continues to be a science based decision making agency and as a result is always looking for ways to improve and enhance scientific discoveries. Following are examples of those scientific advancements that occurred within the department during 2017.

GFP annually conducts survival monitoring surveys to estimate survival and mortality rates of adult, juvenile, and fawn white-tailed deer and mule deer across the state using very high frequency (VHF) radio collars. In 2017, 983 deer were captured and radio-collared; 357 were mule deer and 626 were white-tailed deer. All of the data is collected using Survey123, which is a data storage mobile device application. Because of Survey123, data can now be collected on smart phones or tablets in the field and uploaded real time to a web-based server where it is used in Bayesian population models on a website called PopR. The website allows users to analyze and summarize data and model results are used to formulate abundance estimates and determine whether deer populations are increasing, decreasing or stable.

**IN 2017, 983 DEER  
WERE CAPTURED AND  
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357 WERE MULE DEER  
AND 626 WERE WHITE-  
TAILED DEER.**





The Peregrine Falcon is a state endangered species in South Dakota, with the last confirmed nesting record in the 1960's. Aerial surveys were conducted to identify and prioritize suitable nest sites, inventory occupancy and production, and to provide recommendations for future management and monitoring efforts. Twenty-eight potential cliff sites were identified during aerial surveys conducted in early April, a portion of which were then surveyed from the ground to document the presence or absence of Peregrine Falcons. Survey efforts resulted in documenting two confirmed adult breeding pairs at separate sites that both successfully fledged three young. A third pair of adults was observed at a separate location; however no nest was located at the time.

Department biologists continue to investigate ways to increase pheasant population performance and increase chick survival. Ideal brood habitat contains bare ground to facilitate chick movement, overhead concealment to provide shade and concealment from predators and abundant arthropods for food. In a recent study, some food plots were idled for a second growing season to encourage the growth of annual broad-leafed plants while other food plots were

planted to a mix of flowering annual broad-leafed plants (i.e. "brood plot mix"). Vegetation and arthropods were sampled within these two habitat types and were compared to adjacent late successional grasslands where upland game would likely nest. There was mild evidence of higher arthropod abundance in idled food plots and brood plots, but this pattern was not consistent. However, idled food plots and brood plots did have significantly more bare ground and overhead canopy cover, providing ideal brood rearing habitat.

GFP began implementation of American Fisheries Society (AFS) standard netting protocols for fish sampling during 2017. This was a major task for staff with all gill and frame net sizes and mesh sizes needing to be standardized with the new protocols. Netting locations for standard surveys were also changed with random locations chosen annually becoming the new standard. Staff have prepared for this change in recent years by developing correction factors to allow for a more seamless transition from data previously collected with data collected after the standardization. The implementation of AFS standards will allow for better comparisons and analysis of fisheries data which

will allow fisheries staff to better manage South Dakota's fisheries.

Missouri River fisheries staff wrapped up efforts on a Lake Oahe walleye tagging project and began tagging efforts on Lake Sharpe. Both efforts will be integral in gaining a clearer picture of the dynamics of walleye populations in two of South Dakota's most popular walleye fisheries. These projects will also lead to better information on angler harvest and exploitation of walleye and their movement throughout the lakes. Once finished, these projects will allow fisheries managers to better manage these walleye populations and find the best suited walleye regulations to achieve management goals.

Fisheries staff located in Webster continued work in 2017 on walleye mortality associated with walleye spawning efforts. Male and female walleye are collected each spring with milt and eggs harvested to provide fertilized eggs to Blue Dog Hatchery. These eggs will end up back in many South Dakota waters as either walleye fry or fingerlings. Evaluations determined survival of spawned walleye that are released back into area lakes after eggs and milt have been removed is over 93%, showing minimal impact of spawning efforts on walleye populations.

## FEE INCREASE TO AID IN DEPREDATION AND PREDATOR CONTROL EFFORTS

New in 2017, the South Dakota Legislature approved an increase to the transaction fee when people purchase a hunting license at convenience stores or on [gfp.sd.gov](http://gfp.sd.gov).

**THE AMOUNT OF ANTICIPATED REVENUE WILL BE APPROXIMATELY \$400,000 BASED ON LICENSE SALES EACH YEAR.**

The legislature allocated these new monies to be split equally between deer depredation services and predator control efforts. GFP assembled a stakeholder group consisting of landowners, sportsmen and women, legislators, GFP commissioners and several organized stakeholder associations to discuss ideas regarding methods to enhance deer depredation services. Through facilitated discussions, this work group developed recommendations for GFP to consider regarding enhancements to deer depredation programs and services.

As a result from the work group, GFP has increased contract amounts from \$5,000 up to \$10,000 for landowners needing protective stackyards or panels to reduce deer damage to stored-feed supplies and to protect shelter-belts and tree plantings. GFP will be using higher quality hay when implementing intercept-feeding or will use the affected landowner's hay and reimbursing the cost. Another recommendation that GFP implemented was utilizing antlerless deer hunters via kill permits during the month of August to reduce damage to growing crops in Butte and Meade counties. GFP also held six open houses across the state, made over 200 additional individual landowner contacts and provided information in news releases, Landowners Matter newsletter, and numerous radio shows on the services GFP offers to landowners that deal with deer damage.

## WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT PROGRESS

Since 2015, after discussions with stakeholders and a survey of South Dakota livestock producers, GFP has been providing funding to USDA-Wildlife Services to operate a second aircraft for enhanced levels of aerial predator control. These operations have been functioning well and providing high levels of aerial predator control across the state.

**IN 2017, THESE TWO AIRCRAFT FLEW NEARLY 1,000 HOURS AND REMOVED 2,396 COYOTES, STATEWIDE.**

GFP's comprehensive predator control program in cooperation with USDA-Wildlife Services removed a total of over 6,900 coyotes and red fox which directly impacted over 900 producers. Moving forward, GFP has committed a full-time employee to perform gunning duties in the aircraft located in Pierre. Safety is always the primary consideration with aerial operations and having a designated employee to conduct these duties will allow for increased response time to livestock producers' requests for assistance; enhancing predator control efforts overall in South Dakota.





GFP'S COMPREHENSIVE PREDATOR CONTROL PROGRAM IN COOPERATION WITH USDA-WILDLIFE SERVICES REMOVED A **TOTAL OF OVER 6,900 COYOTES** AND RED FOX WHICH DIRECTLY IMPACTED OVER 900 PRODUCERS.

## WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PLANS

Built upon the latest scientific information and public input, wildlife management plans provide South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks the necessary framework and direction to successfully manage our wildlife resources and their habitats. All wildlife management plans can be found on [gfp.sd.gov](http://gfp.sd.gov). Implementation of existing management plans is an on-going process and involves numerous Department staff, conservation partners and private landowners. In 2017, the department completed the following related to wildlife management plans:

- Finalized new statewide whitetail and mule deer management plan
- Revised existing prairie grouse management plan
- Began process of revising existing bighorn sheep management plan
- Began process of revising existing mountain lion management plan
- Began development of a new mountain goat management plan
- Developed status reviews and delisting criteria for state-listed threatened and endangered species

Of greatest significance was the development and adoption of the statewide whitetail and mule deer management plan. The plan focuses on several key elements to the manage deer across the state such as habitat, population monitoring and objectives, research, depredation, and public desires and interests. One key topic derived during the planning process was social management considerations such as license drawing structures, season dates, and license allocations. These social considerations are now being assessed and alternatives being crafted that will go through specific public input steps to provide the GFP Commission and Department insight on what adjustments are necessary to these areas of interest.

PHOTO © SD TOURISM

# SHOOTING RANGE DEVELOPMENT GRANT PROGRAM PROVIDES FUNDING FOR ARCHERS

The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) created the Shooting Range Development Grant Program in 1971 to encourage the new development and improvement of existing shooting ranges by offering financial assistance to third party cooperators and providing assistance to the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP).

Through the program, it encourages hunters to become more proficient with firearms, promotes safe hunting and shooting practices, along with providing South Dakota residents with safe place to shoot. Shooting includes archery, archery ranges and archery programs.

GFP strives to provide the necessary administrative, operational and equipment support for the South Dakota National Archery in the Schools Program in order to grow and maintain the existing 281 South Dakota NASP schools who will teach approximately 21,075 students archery skills in the grant year. This year the department also provided the necessary administrative, operational and equipment support for the South Dakota NASP/IBO 3-D Archery Challenge program in order to implement the program in 15 new schools and provide 1,500 students an opportunity to learn and enhance their previously obtained archery skills learned through their participation in NASP.

**NASP BEGAN AS A PILOT PROGRAM WITH 12 SCHOOLS PARTICIPATING. THE FIRST TRAINING FOR THESE SCHOOLS WAS HELD IN FEBRUARY OF 2007. AS OF MAY 2016, 293 SCHOOLS ARE PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAM WITH A TOTAL OF 20,000 STUDENTS ENGAGED IN ARCHERY SHOOTING AS AN IN-SCHOOL ACTIVITY.**

During this grant period, 12 new additional schools were trained and added to the NASP program in South Dakota. Ten additional schools were supplied with full sets of NASP 3D archery targets. Each new partnering school was provided a free archery kit to conduct target archery programming in their school. The schools signed agreements for the equipment to be used a minimum of five years with their students.

Recreational target shooting is fun, it is affordable, and it is one of the safer activities available. Recreational shooting can also be a lifetime pursuit that families can enjoy together. As an education tool, it teaches the fundamental marksmanship skills required for hunting and provides multiple avenues for families to get involved in hunting or other outdoor pursuits.





## EDUCATION PLANNING AND UNVEILING OF LONG TERM EFFORTS

In October, the education strategic planning process was facilitated on behalf of the entire department. Goals, objectives, and strategies were developed during a two day retreat to assist in the direction of future education programming. The completed plan was presented to the GFP Commission in December; highlighting the four major components of the plan:

1. Target community members who do not fully engage with GFP educational and recreational opportunities.
2. Assess the effectiveness of educational programming.
3. Standardize core classes to ensure consistent content and messaging.
4. Increase community partnerships to extend the reach of educational efforts.



PHOTO © KAY BUNKERS

## DIVISION OF PARKS BEGINS FIVE YEAR PLAN

In the fall of 2017, the Division of Parks and Recreation initiated a five year planning process with a call for capital development projects proposed for the next half decade. Projects are submitted by park field staff through a collaborative process and are rated on the park, district and region levels, before being evaluated on a statewide basis. The Division's Capital Development Budget is broken into three activities: Waterbased Recreation, New Development and Preventative Maintenance. The Division's five year plan is intended to establish a working list of projects to be placed across all three categories in respective fiscal years. Any given project's placement in a future year is dependent on the expected need for the project, its level of project development, available funding and other related projects. Annually, the division budget will be reviewed and eventually submitted for Legislative approval. A new guiding instrument, the park profile, was also used this

year for project identification and prioritization. Park profiles are short planning documents that have been developed to identify the park's unique features, needs, partnerships, assets and special challenges. The five year plan is also guided by the Department's Strategic Plan and Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, both of which receive public input across Game, Fish and Parks. Goals of the five year plan are to provide a mechanism for progressive project scoping and fiscal needs projections beyond the current fiscal year. It is also designed to bring projects into the department's budget after they have been properly vetted to assure their feasibility, cost and schedule for implementation. Once fully implemented, the five year plan will result in better projects, better schedules and more effective use of the capital development budget.



## NEW PICNIC SHELTER AT GOOD EARTH STATE PARK



### ENGINEERING UPDATE

- Implemented an asset management program, provided by Cartegraph. A pilot program is underway which will include Farm Island Recreation Area, Outdoor Campus East, and at least one other facility in the northeast region. The program will assist in identifying facility needs as part of a five-year plan, giving guidance on preparing maintenance and repair budgets, and providing statistics on what assets we have, where they are, and their condition.
- Completed new welcome centers at Shadehill Recreation Area and Snake Creek Recreation area.
- New comfort stations completed or nearly completed at Lake Poinsett, Lewis and Clark Marina, Sandy Shores, Clay County, Oakwood Lakes, Hartford Beach, Farm Island and Cow Creek.
- The Good Earth State Park Visitor's Center grand opening was held in May, and work continues on additional projects there, including an access road and shop, volunteer campsites, a large picnic shelter, and amphitheater.
- Performed multiple asphalt surface treatment (AST) projects across the state, including Lake Vermillion, Palisades State Park, Wall Lake, Little Moreau, and in Custer State Park and surrounding areas in the Black Hills.
- The Coxes-Mirror Lakes Bridge at the McNenny State Fish Hatchery was advertised for replacement, and final inspection of the completed project took place in December. The new bridge will provide improved vehicle and pedestrian access to game production and fishing areas in the area.

### GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM (GIS) UPDATE

- Added a new GIS database manager position to manage the department's survey data, report generation, data migration and archiving. This position has streamlined many of our internal processes and made staff more efficient.
- The Comprehensive Aquatic Database (CAD) is almost complete and contains over 30 years worth of compiled data while also automating the reporting process saving staff large amounts of time and effort normally spent compiling this information. In addition, the public facing portion of the site is set to launch in January 2018 and will have all the aquatic survey information directly tied to the lake on an interactive mapping system.
- Created a weed spray data collection and reporting system for each of the regions to format and track all the work done on our Game Production Areas.
- Created a Hunt Planner mapping application that allows the user to interactively look at hunting units, draw statistics and view public lands to help plan their hunt in one mapping application.
- Migrated wildlife surveys over to a new mobile application and archived the previous years' data into a centralized location.



## TRIBAL PARTNERSHIPS REMAIN STRONG

In partnership with the state's tribal governments, the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) has worked to improve management, protection and conservation of shared tribal-state natural resources throughout 2017. To provide guidance and partnership on shared natural resources across the state, the state has engaged in Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with four tribes to date. They include Rosebud, Lower Brule, Oglala and Flandreau, with Oglala and Flandreau both signing in 2017. With land base encompassing approximately six million acres, it is very important to continue partnerships with the nine tribal governments to foster improved habitat and quality hunting and fishing opportunities for future generations.

The purpose of the MOU's is to formalize cooperative efforts with

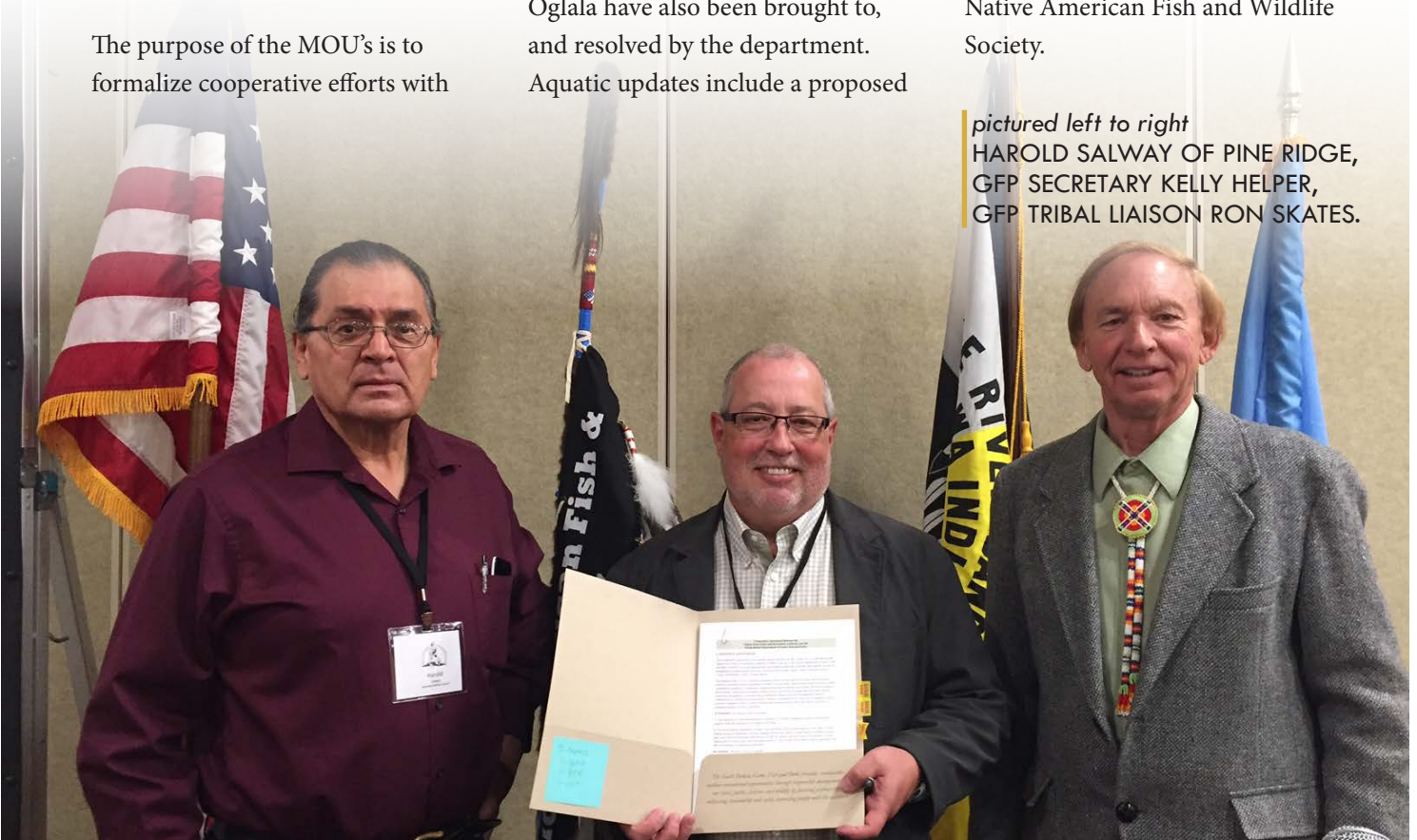
the tribes regarding the management of vital natural resources, where we have mutual interests. Collaborative operations between the parties may include; sharing wildlife surveys, big/small game harvest information, developing season recommendations, fishery resource management, predator control and law enforcement assistance when requested.

The department's burgeoning work with the tribes has seen recent successes. Two beneficial projects include wild turkey transplants from the Black Hills area to the Rosebud Sioux Reservation and the establishment of food plots on Rosebud in the Iron Shell Flats area to reduce depredation of elk on nearby private lands. Coyote depredation issues and illegal hunting cases on Oglala have also been brought to, and resolved by the department. Aquatic updates include a proposed

boat landing in the South Iron Nation area of Lower Brule and a fishery evaluation on Flandreau Pond, and establishing a fishing derby for the youth. The department also partnered with the Yankton Fish and Wildlife Department on revising their wildlife code and working on issues that include conducting fish surveys on several ponds and stocking fish where appropriate. GFP also hosted trainings in boating safety and trapping training.

The department assisted with the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society National conference this past May, in the Black Hills. During this event, the department provided two conservation officers to assist with qualification and certification of new tribal conservation officers for the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society.

*pictured left to right*  
 HAROLD SALWAY OF PINE RIDGE,  
 GFP SECRETARY KELLY HELPER,  
 GFP TRIBAL LIAISON RON SKATES.





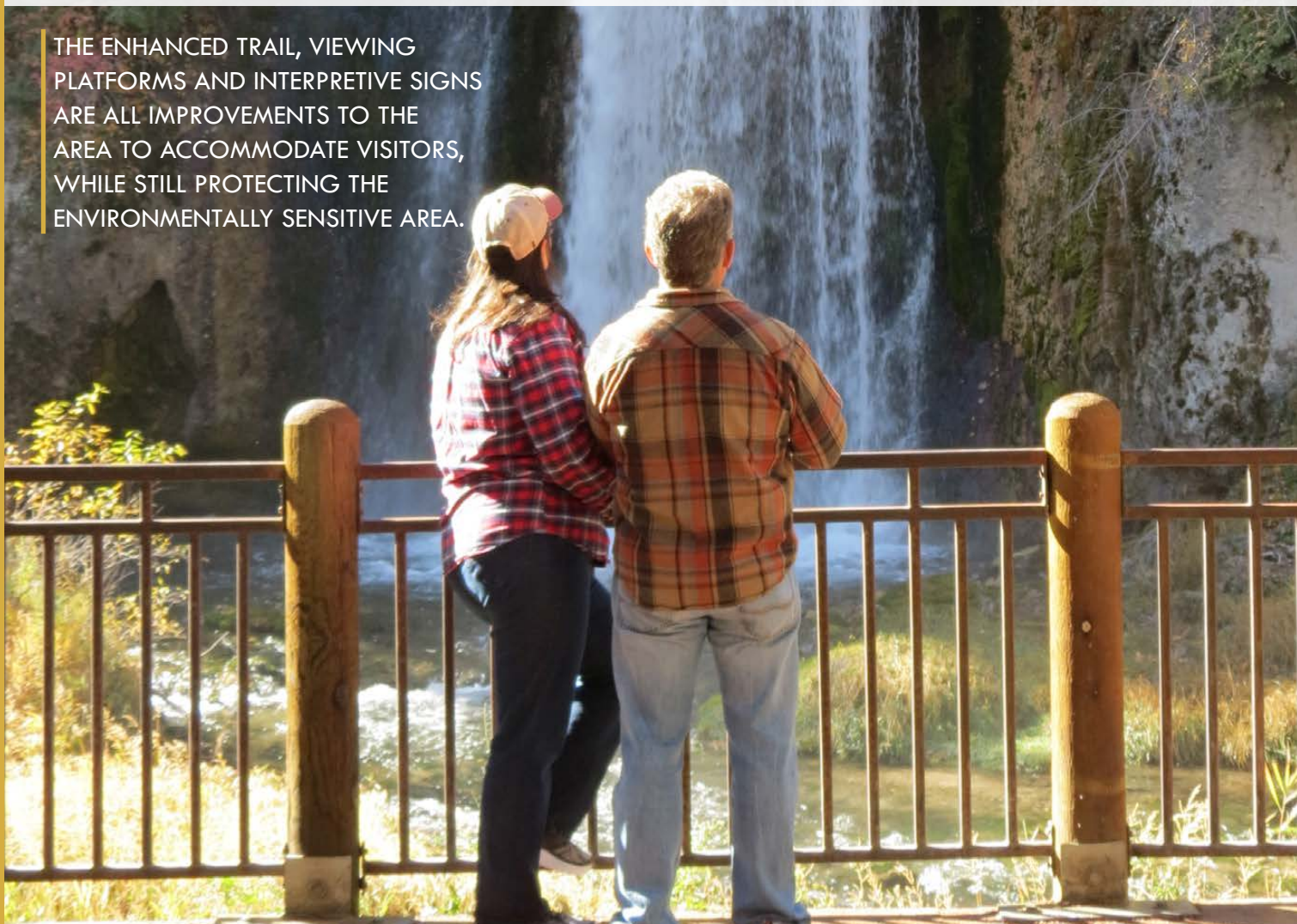
# SPEARFISH FALLS ENHANCEMENTS

Visitors to Spearfish Falls gained a new perspective on the iconic falls this year, as an upper viewing platform above the falls opened to the public. The accessible, cantilevered platform is a stunning addition to the Spearfish Falls area, as it allows year around visitors, who can't make the hike to the base of the falls, the opportunity to enjoy the sights, sounds and, on some days, even the mist of the spectacular falls. Nestled beside the falls, the platform is placed as to not intrude on the scenic views of the falls from below so hikers, who chose to take

the previously completed trail to the falls, can still enjoy the scenery and capture unobstructed photographs and memories with the upper platform out of view. Other new additions to the area's trail network include a series of interpretive signs and maps to engage and inform visitors. Although often drawn to the area by the natural beauty, visitors will have the opportunity to learn more about the history of the area and its unique plants, animals and habitat. The enhanced trail, viewing platforms and interpretive signs are all improvements to the area to

accommodate visitors, while still protecting the environmentally sensitive area. Next year's visitors to the Spearfish and Roughlock Falls area can look forward to a more connected trail network, as GFP began construction this summer on trail improvements to unite Savoy Pond, Spearfish Falls and Roughlock Falls. The additional trail sections, combined with the upgraded trail maps, will provide safe and sustainable trail connectivity, access and viewing to these popular areas.

THE ENHANCED TRAIL, VIEWING PLATFORMS AND INTERPRETIVE SIGNS ARE ALL IMPROVEMENTS TO THE AREA TO ACCOMMODATE VISITORS, WHILE STILL PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREA.





## WALLEYES STOCKED: SHERIDAN AND STOCKADE LAKES

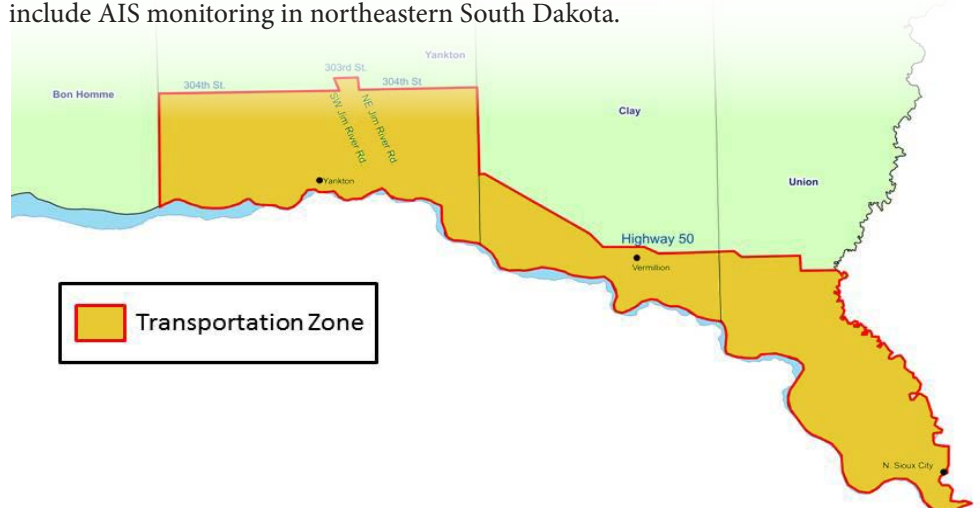
GFP responded to a request from Black Hills anglers to increase fishing opportunities within the Black Hills Fish Management Area. Through state-wide angler surveys, public meetings, and input gathered using YouTube, it was determined that there was indeed support from anglers for GFP to attempt to establish walleye fisheries in the Black Hills.

After considering all factors, Sheridan Lake in Pennington County and Stockade Lake in Custer County were identified as the most suitable lakes for walleye introductions. In both cases, there were established prey species and the addition of walleye would have no impact on current cold-water (trout) management. In early October, 14,000 and 9,500 advanced fingerling (~5 ") walleye were stocked into Sheridan and Stockade lakes, respectively. In an effort to establish fisheries, both lakes will be stocked with walleye for a period of 5 years. Fish populations will be sampled yearly to evaluate the effectiveness of stockings and the status of the fish community and angler use and harvest surveys will be used to estimate angler satisfaction and harvest of walleye.

## AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES: SUCCESS STORIES

Major successes to note in Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) management in South Dakota include the establishment of a Local Boat Registry (LBR) to allow boaters using the zebra mussel containment waters of Lewis and Clark Lake, the Missouri River below Gavins Point Dam and McCook Lake to more easily comply with regulations. If a boat is enrolled in the LBR and remains within the transportation zone (yellow area on attached map), the boat does not need to be decontaminated every time a boater leaves the water. Rather, they may use their boat as usual within the transportation zone and if the boat is found outside the boundaries, the owner is required to show proof that it was decontaminated prior to leaving the zone.

Additionally, the department was able to dedicate more staff time to AIS duties. A fisheries biologist was added in Sioux Falls by reallocating existing resources. This position's duties are primarily focused on AIS management, particularly AIS infested waters in Southeast South Dakota, while also assisting with fisheries management activities. Blue Dog State Fish Hatchery biologists' duties have also been modified to include AIS monitoring in northeastern South Dakota.



## KEEPING CUSTOMERS CONNECTED

**269**  
EMAILS TO  
**8.6 MILLION**  
RECIPIENTS

OVER  
**37,500**  
LIKES ON  
FACEBOOK

OVER  
**7,100**  
FOLLOWERS ON  
TWITTER

OVER  
**1,300**  
FOLLOWERS ON  
INSTAGRAM

## QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE TAKES A PARTNER

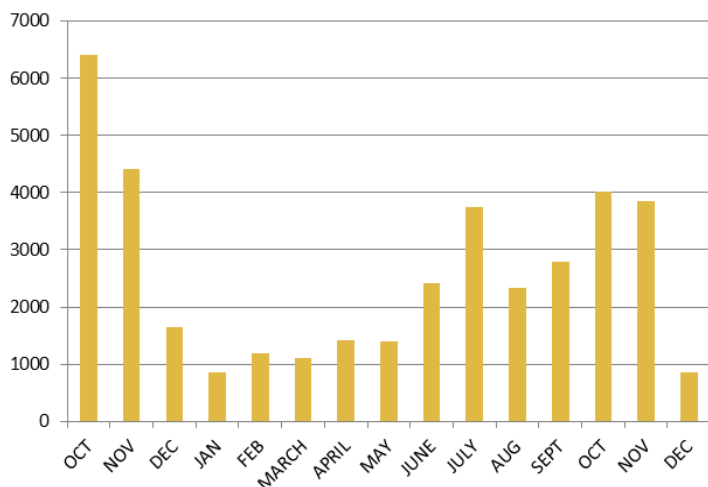
Focus groups, stakeholder meetings, solicitation of feedback on management plans, online engagement, livestreaming, traditional open house meetings, enhancements to the public involvement process along with a new website and mobile app to provide up to date alerts on season openings and closings and applications deadlines are all ways of providing customer service and improving customer confidence in who we are as a public-servicing agency.

In addition, maintaining online customer security through the purchase of a hunting and fishing license or camping reservation is also a top customer service priority. Customers need to know that upon entering their personally identifiable information into our e-commerce systems, that they are protected.

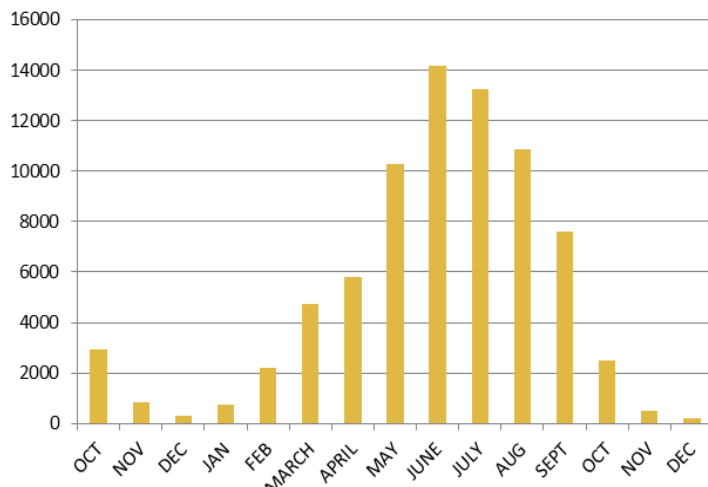
One thing yet to mention is how we have enhanced services for those who still want to pick up the phone and talk to someone. Five Star Call Centers out of Sioux Falls has remained a key partner in how we do business via the phone for the past several years. They assist us with store-front agents who help to sell small game hunting and fishing licenses; they make all the camping reservations for those calling in to reserve a weekend in the state parks; and as of late 2016, they assist with the high call volume of customers seeking information about licensing, applications and other general department information. Through this consistent partnership, there is a more stable and knowledgeable workforce on the other end of the phone line providing experienced answers. Due to the longevity of the partnership, less training is required over time on our department programs and services. Without Five Star Call Centers and our internal two-person phone bank managing day to day licensing, application and general inquiry calls, hundreds of customer contacts would be missed each month.

With the latest contract assisting with the management of our phone bank operations, trends are still new and continue to be evaluated. Success metrics show that calls are answered within 60 seconds and we achieve this 80 percent of the time. The quality goal of the calls is at 90 percent; and in the past six months we were between 93.8 and 97.08 percent.

**LICENSING AND GENERAL INFORMATION**



**STATE PARK CAMPING RESERVATIONS**





## SURVEY LEADS TO CONSERVATION DIGEST CHANGE

The South Dakota Conservation Digest has been a staple publication of the Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) for over 80 years. Throughout that time, GFP has informed its readers on the trending topics of outdoor recreational opportunities and the management of our state's parks, fisheries and wildlife.

At the beginning of 2017 GFP asked readers to fill out a quick survey to help us better understand the audience and reveal what wanted to be seen in the future. The results were informative and clearly revealed what we always expected was true – our subscribers are passionate about the outdoors and want a magazine that highlights those items.

The survey also revealed interesting insights on the demographics of our readers. The vast majority of our subscribers are long-time readers.

**IN FACT, LESS THAN 10 PERCENT OF OUR READERS HAVE SUBSCRIBED IN THE LAST THREE YEARS AND LESS THAN TWO PERCENT OF OUR READERS ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 40.**

While we are glad to have loyal readers, the continued vitality of the Digest depends on drawing in new readership. Because of this, we adapted a refresh for the Digest. Beginning in December 2017, the Conservation Digest became a seasonal magazine, with four scheduled issues per year. This helped us tailor the content to better fit the needs of our readers and produce more timely information. Moving forward there will be four longer issues, and included with each issue, is an eight-page insert for kids.

We at GFP believe this change will help update the Digest, attract new readers and continue the magazine's legacy for another 80 years.



## GFP COMMISSION GOES “LIVE”

The Game, Fish and Parks Department and Commission are continually looking for ways to allow our customers to become more involved in the Commission and rules setting process. This year, after months of research, a partnership with South Dakota Public Broadcasting (SDPB) to livestream audio of monthly commission meetings began.

The GFP Commission holds 10 meetings a year, six of which are held outside of Pierre. The remote meetings were a concern due to internet capabilities in places like Custer State Park and other rural areas. As part of the agreement, SDPB handles all of these issues pre-meeting and their remote equipment is high quality and has proven up to the task.

Meetings can be accessed live through SDPB's website, SD.net or their South Dakota Network mobile app. Customers can also find archived meetings at SDPB or at [gfp.sd.gov](http://gfp.sd.gov). Monthly emails go out to over 140,000 of our customers, reminding them they can listen live. Reminders are also sent via our social media platforms.

This pilot project is scheduled to run for six months, after which, the Department and Commission will revisit the process and decide if the livestreaming process is something to continue. We have already heard from customers and media that the service is appreciated. It was an easy decision to begin the livestream process, and for the department, it fits in perfectly within the accomplishments of the strategic plan.



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