

WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



SOUTH DAKOTA GAME, FISH AND PARKS

INTRODUCTION



Hello! It is with great pleasure that we present the Wildlife Damage Management Program Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2023—a year that provided challenges and created partnerships for wildlife damage management in our great state. As we delve into the details of our endeavors, we extend our gratitude to the landowners, partners, and dedicated staff who have played a crucial role in our collective efforts.

First and foremost, we express our sincere appreciation to the landowners and sportsmen and women who have demonstrated support for our mission. Your cooperation and commitment to sustainable wildlife management practices are vital to the success of our programs. Without your partnership, our initiatives would not be as effective or impactful.

To our partners, ranging from local conservation organizations to governmental agencies, your collaboration has been instrumental in navigating the unique challenges presented this past year. The severe winter conditions and the resulting congregated wildlife posed unprecedented challenges, and your support has been pivotal in formulating and executing effective solutions.

Our dedicated staff deserves special recognition for their resilience and hard work in the face of these challenges. Their passion for wildlife management and commitment to helping others are the cornerstones of preserving South Dakota's natural resources and way of life. We owe much of our accomplishments to their expertise and dedication.

In this annual report, you will find detailed insights into the various programs we provided, the valuable partnerships we forged, and the funding that sustains our initiatives. We encourage you to review the report thoroughly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the strides we have made and the impact of our collective endeavors.

As we look to the future, your continued support remains essential. Together, we can navigate the complexities of wildlife management, address emerging challenges, and uphold our commitment to preserving the unique outdoor heritage of South Dakota.

Once again, thank you for your invaluable contributions to the South Dakota Wildlife Damage Management Program. We appreciate your ongoing support and look forward to another year of collaborative success.

Sincerely,

Kevin Robling

Department Secretary, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

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The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks serves and connects people and families to the outdoors through effective management of our state's parks, fisheries, and wildlife resources.

NEW IN 2023

- » Governor Noem signed a bill passed by the 2023 Legislature to provide an additional \$325,000 from DANR (Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources) to support an additional airplane, pilot, and gunner with our partners USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services. Wildlife Services is recruiting a pilot and gunner for the additional plane which will likely be stationed in the Pierre area. This additional plane and pilot will increase aerial hunting efforts to reduce livestock loss and damage caused by coyotes.
- » GFP welcomed several new staff to the Wildlife Damage Management team. Kip Rounds took over the regional wildlife supervisor position in the southeast and is based out of Sioux Falls. Two field staff vacancies were also filled. Wildlife damage specialist Jacob Lorton now serves Day and Marshall counties, and Travis Chilson now serves Corson and Dewey counties.
- » The online “Canada Goose Depredation Hub” that allows landowners to apply for a Canada goose kill sub permit as well as request assistance with goose damage underwent additional improvements in 2023 to make it easier and more efficient for producers and staff. A similar hub is being developed for deer depredation services.

WILDLIFE DAMAGE SPECIALIST OF THE YEAR

SPENCER LYNCH

South Dakota's wildlife damage specialists (WDS) had another busy year helping South Dakota's producers. Most of the requests for service, especially in western South Dakota, came from producers experiencing livestock depredation on sheep and calves from coyotes.

In 2020, Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) created a Wildlife Damage Management (WDM) strategic plan, a first for our WDM program. One of the three primary goals for the plan is to "mitigate livestock loss through effective delivery of wildlife damage program services." WDM staff across the state help with this, but it's most apparent in sheep country. Numerous times staff have heard from producers, "if it wasn't for GFP staff helping with predator control, I would be out of business."

To recognize staff who truly rise above the call of duty, GFP staff from around the state nominate a WDS who stands out, not only with their ability to assist producers with livestock and property loss, but also their communication skills, leadership, and ability to do a job that many people simply don't have the skillset to do. All nominations are reviewed and judged by previous recipients who themselves are wildlife damage specialists working in the field and see the everyday challenges faced by their peers. After careful consideration, Spencer Lynch was chosen for the 2022 Wildlife Damage Specialist of the Year.

Before landing in his current district, Spencer was the WDS in Faith from 2013-2017. In 2020, Spencer moved to his current location serving producers in eastern Butte and western Meade counties. This area consists of some of the largest sheep ranches in operation in South Dakota. Spencer's wife and three kids have made the community of Belle Fourche their home. Spencer spends his free time with family and friends. He also enjoys hunting, fishing, and trapping when time allows.

Noted by his peers, Spencer routinely goes out of his way to help newly hired wildlife damage specialists not only with developing their trapping skills and



(L-R) Regional Terrestrial Resources Supervisor Trenton Haffley, Regional Program Manager Jack Alexander, Wildlife Damage Specialist Spencer Lynch, Regional Wildlife Supervisor Mike Klosowski, and Deputy Director Chad Switzer.

equipment setup, but he also shows new staff how to utilize department software programs that help track and manage information related to each request for service from producers as well as accomplishments for the wildlife damage program. Spencer is also an accomplished decoy dog handler. Oftentimes, Spencer's dogs accompany him on his requests for service enabling him to resolve predator control requests quickly and efficiently.

Notably, Spencer assists with the ETHICS SD program which is a comprehensive furbearer education program that is a collaboration between GFP, 4-H, the South Dakota Trappers Association, and the South Dakota Western Fur Harvesters.

In addition, Spencer also demonstrates the utmost level of professionalism with landowners and has learned how to quickly and effectively assist landowners who are experiencing livestock loss. To truly be efficient at assisting landowners with livestock loss, wildlife damage specialists must accept that it's not a 9-to-5 job. Wildlife don't operate on a schedule. This level of effort takes dedication and a passion; Spencer exemplifies what we do at GFP.

Please help Team GFP recognize Spencer Lynch as the 2022 Wildlife Damage Specialist of the Year!

TIMELINE OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND FUNDING



1939

Animal Damage Control (ADC) mandated by state law in cooperation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to control predators, beaver, prairie dogs, and nuisance animals.

1974

South Dakota Legislature transferred the ADC program from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to GFP. GFP must match county-General Fund dollars on a 1:1 basis using department funds. Due to impending ADC program budget shortfalls, the GFP match was eventually increased to a 2:1 rate where hunters now provide two dollars for every one dollar in county General Funds directed into the ADC fund.

1999

Five-dollar surcharge added to most hunting licenses sold in South Dakota to provide more funding to deliver landowner game animal depredation assistance programs caused by game birds and animals. One-half of the money provides private land hunter access programs, with payments going to South Dakota farmers and ranchers who allow hunting access to their properties. The other half supports programs and services to reduce damage caused by game animals as part of a broader “Wildlife Damage Management (WDM) Program.”

2001

As a condition to receive assistance with game animal damage, landowners/producers must agree to allow reasonable free hunting access to people who obtain proper permission (for the species they are requesting assistance with).

2003

“Special Buck” license revenues help support WDM program services.

2009

ADC and WDM programs were formally consolidated into the comprehensive WDM program that GFP operates today.

GFP entered into a cooperative agreement with USDA-Wildlife Services (USDA-WS) for their assistance with aerial predator control in South Dakota.

2013

An additional one-dollar surcharge to most hunting licenses is added due to program budget shortages. GFP added three new field staff positions.

2016

A second aircraft was added for aerial predator control.

2017

Transaction fee from the sale of hunting licenses purchased online increased to help support both WDM and ADC program services.

2019

South Dakota Office of the Governor initiated an external review of GFP’s WDM and ADC programs which resulted in hiring additional staff, increasing aerial predator control, new equipment, a shift of focus to prioritize on-going problems, opportunities for producer input, and a WDM strategic plan.

2020

Two new field staff positions were created in western South Dakota.

2023

South Dakota Legislature approved \$350,000 to be transferred from DANR to GFP annually for an additional plane and pilot for aerial predator control.

SINCE 2000

GFP has spent close to \$31 million on resolving game species depredation (primarily deer, elk, and Canada geese) on private land and over \$32 million on ADC program services.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING PARTNERS FOR SOUTH DAKOTA WDM PROGRAM

South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR)

USDA APHIS Wildlife Services (USDA-WS)

WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM SERVICE GOALS

Wildlife damage specialists (WDS) play an important role within Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) and provide the people of South Dakota with many valuable services. Wildlife damage specialists may trap coyotes that have killed livestock; construct electric fence to protect growing crops from Canada goose damage; or provide assistance regarding deer damage to stored-feed supplies.

PRIMARY PURPOSE

With more than 80 percent of South Dakota in private ownership, private landowners play a pivotal role in wildlife management and providing hunter and angler access across the state. Landowners and agricultural producers provide critical habitats that wildlife need to live and prosper on private lands, but they also provide outdoor recreational access for the state's hunters, anglers, trappers, and others. Wildlife damage specialists cooperatively work with landowners and producers to alleviate or reduce all types of wildlife damage to private property. This includes, but is not limited to:

- » Alleviating livestock loss caused by coyotes and fox;
- » Reducing damage to stored-feed supplies from deer, elk, and turkeys;
- » Reducing damage to growing crops from Canada geese and elk;
- » Reducing damage to commercial melon growers from raccoons and deer;
- » Controlling prairie dogs on lands adjacent to public land; and
- » Reducing damage to crops, dams, trees, roads and other property from beaver.

Wildlife damage specialists assist landowners with a diversity of other human-wildlife conflicts such as pronghorn antelope and pheasant depredation as well as hawk and owl control to protect poultry flocks.

There are also certain situations where wildlife damage staff assists with public safety such as the protection of levees and dikes from wildlife-

caused damage, wildlife threats on or near airports, human-wildlife conflicts with aggressive wildlife species, and other situations that arise. Some staff members also train and supervise many seasonal employees and interns who provide the primary workforce for many Wildlife Damage Management (WDM) activities.

Wildlife damage specialists interact with thousands of landowners and producers each year. GFP relies on these staff members to foster relationships and facilitate communications with the citizens of South Dakota they serve at the grass-roots level.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Wildlife damage specialists assist with many different wildlife surveys and disease monitoring efforts that GFP conducts throughout the year while promoting WDM efforts. They assist biologists with deer, elk, and pronghorn surveys. They also help with duck and goose banding, bobcat tagging, and walleye spawning when time allows.

Wildlife damage specialists are called upon to work with other GFP staff on disease monitoring efforts such as chronic wasting disease, epizootic hemorrhagic disease, avian influenza, and bovine tuberculosis sampling in wildlife. They assist with wildlife research projects when projects demand certain skills or personnel, and play a vital role in the success of many projects. Wildlife damage specialists also provide input on recommendations for the many different seasons and licenses that South Dakota administers.

PUBLIC OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

Another important role that wildlife damage specialists play is to provide educational seminars and demonstrations to sportsmen groups, schools, and other interested groups to promote hunting and trapping of furbearers. Wildlife damage staff participates in events throughout South Dakota such as ETHICS SD (Ecology, Trapping, History, Identification, Conservation, and Stewardship), different types of 101 classes for beginning recreationists, and other GFP-sponsored public outreach events.

Wildlife damage specialists present information regarding the WDM program to county commissions, predator control districts, and appear at numerous other public meetings throughout the year. Administrators routinely interact with stakeholder groups such as the WDM Working Group, Animal Damage Control Policy Advisory Committee, South Dakota Stockgrowers, predator district boards, South

Dakota Sheep Growers, South Dakota Cattlemen, South Dakota Ag Unity, GFP Commission, and other organizations, policymakers, and groups. They also coordinate management activities and operations with other partners such as USDA-Wildlife Services, USDA Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, South Dakota Office of School and Public Lands, and other state and federal agencies, as well as cooperate on wildlife damage research with universities and USDA National Wildlife Research Center.

Program accountability is an important element for GFP, and it's critical that our constituents' needs are being met by our programs and services as well as providing accountability to the sportsmen and women who provide funding for these important programs. Over the past five years, GFP has made a considerable effort to demonstrate accountability and transparency through enhanced public communication efforts.



Portable panels protecting hay bales from deer.



Wildlife Damage Specialist Greg Wolbrink removed beaver causing tree damage in Lake County.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Feedback received on deer depredation services after a severe winter¹

The severe winter of 2022-2023 was challenging for all South Dakota residents, including the wildlife. While many of us would like to forget the conditions from this past winter, GFP staff from around the state got together to debrief on deer depredation services and tools provided to producers. The team discussed challenges that were faced, clarified direction, and brainstormed possible changes needed to the program. With a heavy deer depredation workload this past winter (staff assisted more than 550 cooperators), the department faced challenges with realigning staff, fiscal, and equipment resources. Available supplies and materials that could be loaned out, such as panels to protect stored feed piles as well as alfalfa bales used for short-stopping, were in limited supply. Ideas were gathered for future needs and increasing supply inventory within budget constraints while

responsibly using monies received through license sales. Staff also met with members of sportsman's clubs to gather input about deer populations and depredation challenges. Through communication and collaboration, GFP staff used this challenging winter experience as an opportunity to prepare for future severe conditions.

Increased communication and understanding²

WDM program tools and services were communicated extensively one-on-one to landowners this past winter especially with respect to deer depredation. GFP staff, including private lands habitat biologists, reached out to producers to talk about alternatives including long-term strategies to improve or enhance habitat and food plots on their properties which could in turn reduce deer damaging their stored feed. Additionally, informative articles on WDM program tools, services, and expenses were shared with various audiences including in the GFP's *Landowners Matter* newsletter.

Enhancing coyote control services³

The 2023 legislature approved \$350,000 to be provided by South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) to GFP to support the aerial predator control program. The funds will help support an additional plane, pilot, and gunner with our partner USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services. This additional plane will likely be located in Pierre. This third aerial crew will allow for more aggressive, preventative aerial hunting of coyotes and fox to reduce livestock loss and damage.

Mitigating Damage from Canada Geese and Deer through Habitat and Access⁴

Canada goose depredation assistance continued to be steady over last few years. Deer depredation, typically more dependent upon winter severity, was high this past year. Habitat and access are main priorities for GFP and both tie into minimizing goose and deer depredation. GFP staff strive to offer longer-term solutions to help reduce wildlife damage, especially in areas with chronic challenges.

This past year, seven permanent buffer strip contracts with cooperative landowners, including one abatement buffer strip, were signed to reduce damage caused by geese to growing crops. Connecting hunters with landowners is equally as important. As part of the contract, landowners are required to allow some free and reasonable access when asked. Staff



Regional Wildlife Manager, Nick Rossman, assisting a cooperater with secure covers to protect his stored feed from deer.

worked with landowners to sign up harvested fields (over 2,300 acres) in northeastern South Dakota into a temporary Canada goose hunter access program which is open only for goose hunting during the August Management Take and Early Fall Goose hunting seasons. Staff also worked with several landowners to provide hunting blinds on their properties for youth and beginner hunters to have the opportunity to harvest a deer while also helping a landowner by reducing the number of deer causing crop damage.

This past year was also the second year for a new pilot, cost-share program in the northeast where winter cover crops consisting mainly of clover, turnip, radish, and oats were planted by landowners to hold deer and allow them

to browse in cover crops rather than in a producer's stored feed pile. Four plots totaling 170 acres were planted.

Improvements to Online Sign Up⁵

This past year producers were able to fully utilize the online system to request assistance with Canada goose damage. Using suggestions and feedback from staff and customers, the online system was improved going into the 2023 soybean growing season. The online request system allowed staff to promptly respond to the affected area based on location and information entered by the landowner. Over 700 requests were received. A similar online system is being developed for deer depredation assistance requests with an anticipated completion date of early 2024.

¹WDM Strategic Plan Goal 1, Strategies 1, 3, 7. Conduct statewide WDM staff meeting to provide program changes/direction, answer questions and define program success. Host forums for public and partner input. Increase understanding of leadership priorities, policies, and goals.

²WDM Strategic Plan. Goal 2. Strategies 1, 2, 3. Increase communications with landowners, producers, stakeholders, and staff.

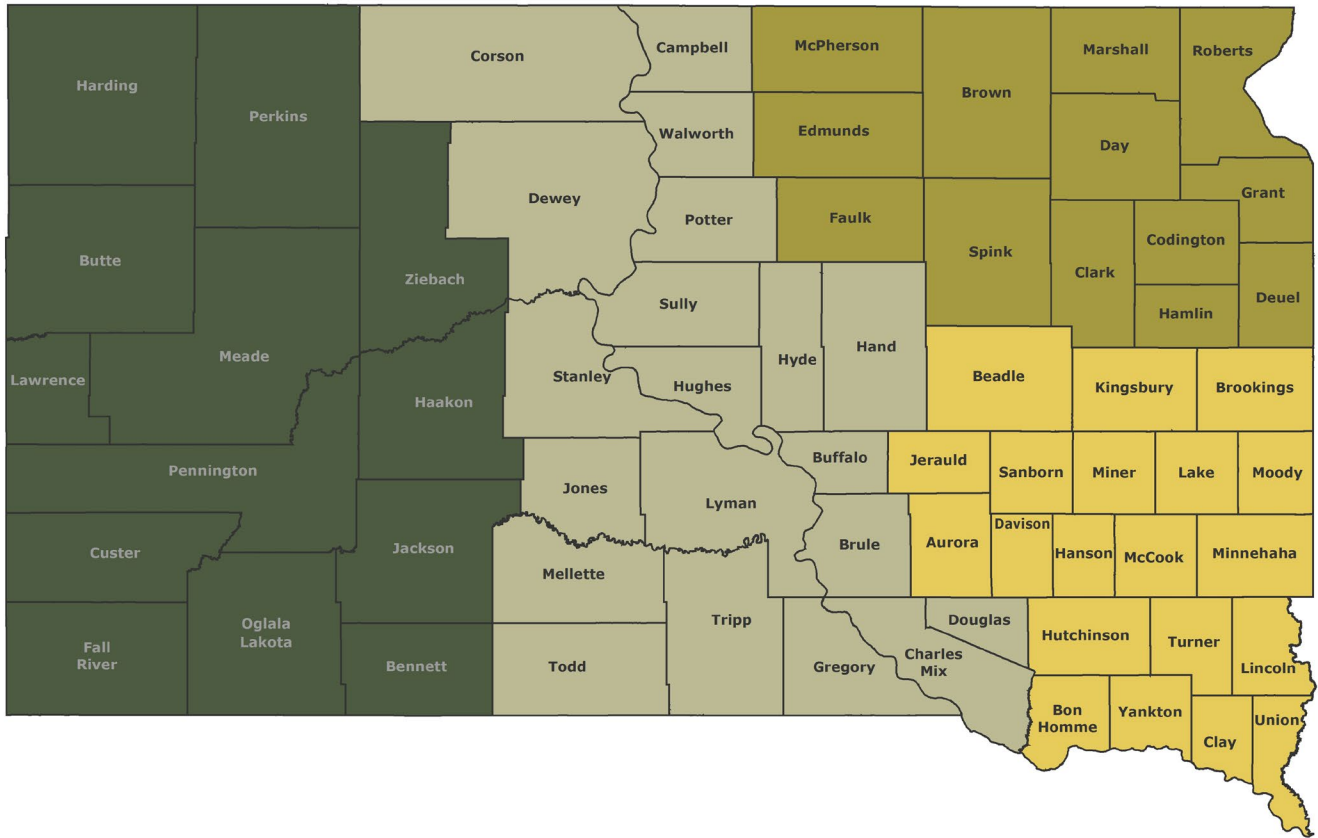
³WDM Strategic Plan. Goal 3, Strategies 2, 3. Enhance predator control services by obtaining permission. Provide ongoing aggressive and preventative coyote removal.

⁴WDM Strategic Plan. Goal 3, Strategy 5. Improve habitat and food plot options to mitigate wildlife damage from deer, elk and Canada geese in specific areas.

⁵WDM Strategic Plan. Goal 3, Strategy 6. Identify opportunities to improve efficiencies in the delivery of program services, tracking of work and accountability.

DIVISION OF WILDLIFE ADMINISTRATIVE REGIONS

The Division of Wildlife’s Operations Section is divided into four administrative regions. Each region works under the supervision of a regional supervisor along with other assistant supervisory staff. Each region has field staff who conduct the “on-the-ground” work and services to the citizens of South Dakota.



REGION 1 (WEST)

Bennett, Butte, Custer, Fall River, Haakon, Harding, Jackson, Lawrence, Meade, Pennington, Perkins, Oglala Lakota, and Ziebach.

REGION 2 (CENTRAL)

Brule, Buffalo, Campbell, Charles Mix, Corson, Dewey, Douglas, Gregory, Hand, Hughes, Hyde, Jones, Lyman, Mellette, Potter, Stanley, Sully, Todd, Tripp, and Walworth.

REGION 3 (SOUTHEAST)

Aurora, Beadle, Bon Homme, Brookings, Clay, Davison, Hanson, Hutchinson, Jerald, Kingsbury, Lake, Lincoln, McCook, Miner, Minnehaha, Moody, Sanborn, Turner, Union, and Yankton.

REGION 4 (NORTHEAST)

Brown, Clark, Codrington, Day, Deuel, Edmonds, Faulk, Grant, Hamlin, Marshall, McPherson, Roberts, and Spink.

SOUTH DAKOTA GAME, FISH AND PARKS ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

KEVIN ROBLING, Department Secretary

TOM KIRSCHENMANN, Wildlife Division Director

CHAD SWITZER, Wildlife Division Deputy Director

JOHN KANTA, Terrestrial Section Chief

MIKE KLOSOWSKI, Regional Wildlife Supervisor | Region 1 (West)

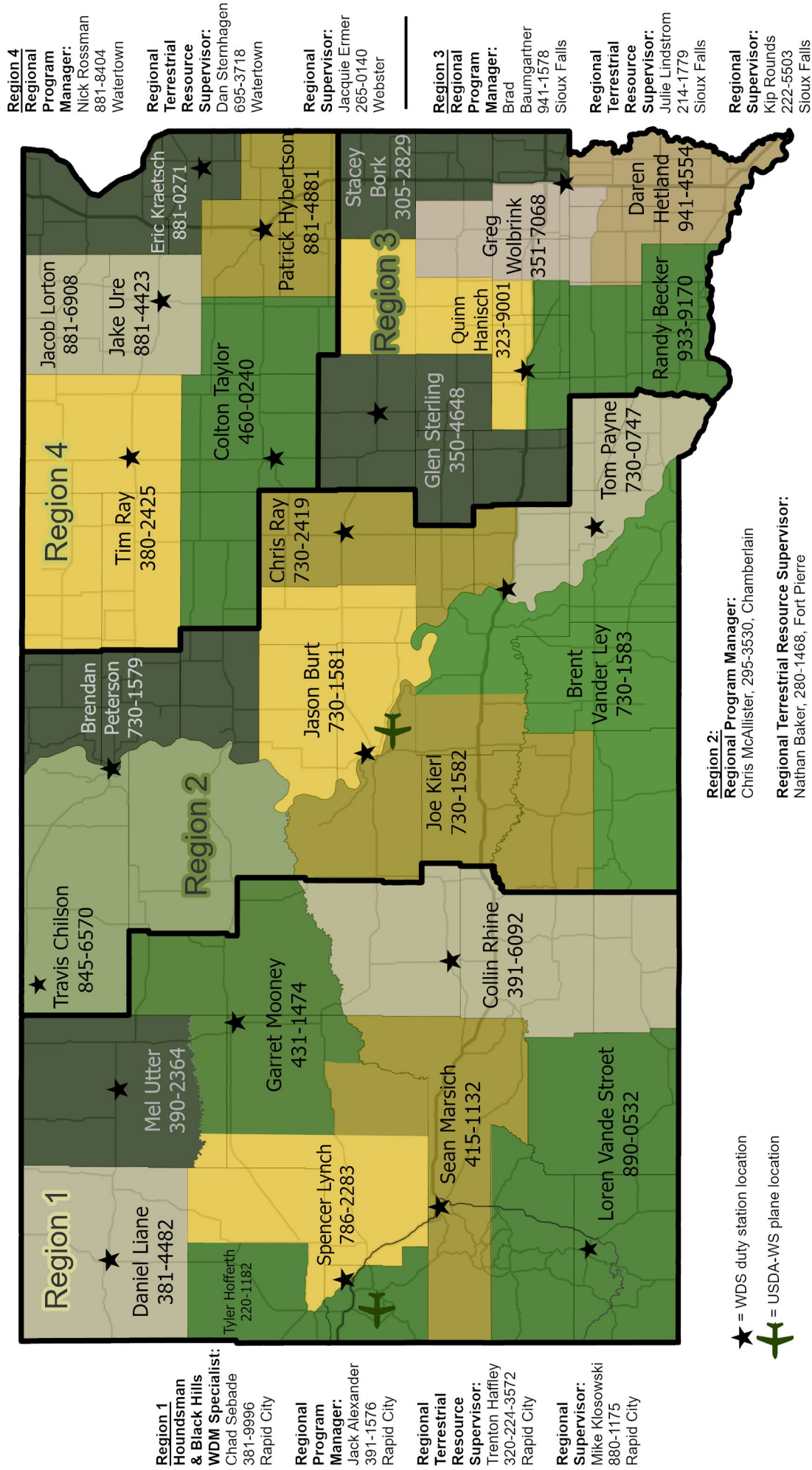
MARK OHM, Regional Wildlife Supervisor | Region 2 (Central)

KIP ROUNDS, Regional Wildlife Supervisor | Region 3 (Southeast)

JACQUIE ERMER Regional Wildlife Supervisor | Region 4 (Northeast)



South Dakota GFP Wildlife Damage Management Program



STATEWIDE PROGRAM REPORT AND SUMMARY

The state of South Dakota consists of 66 counties and has a diverse landscape from east to west as well as from north to south. This diverse landscape includes croplands, grasslands, wetlands and lakes, rugged river drainages, badlands, and the Black Hills. These varying landscapes also present their own unique set of challenges due to the wildlife species that are present, weather conditions, and population acceptance levels. South Dakota has an abundance of wildlife species and includes populations of white-tailed deer, mule deer, upland game birds, waterfowl, pronghorn, elk, furbearers, turkeys, and mountain lions.

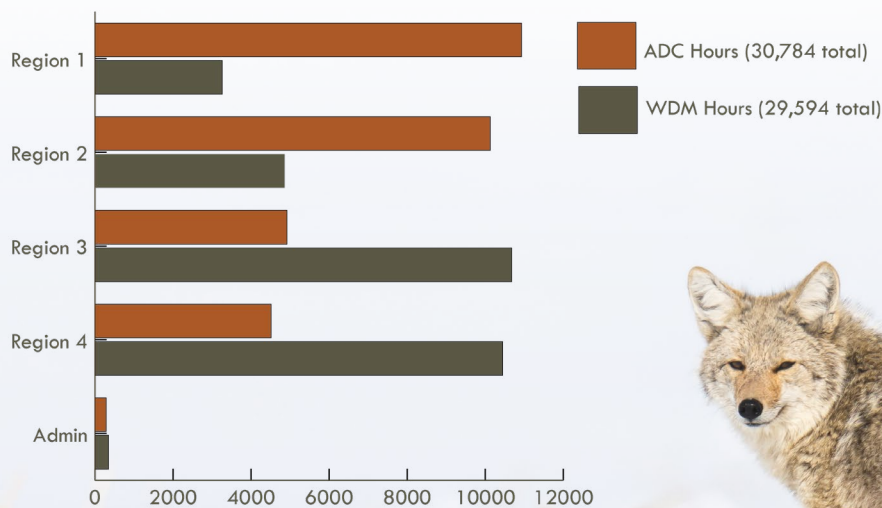
Twenty-eight full-time wildlife damage specialists, numerous seasonal employees, and other Game, Fish, and Parks (GFP) staff, provide the “boots-on-the-ground”

delivery of the important Wildlife Damage Management (WDM) programs and services. These programs provide direct assistance to South Dakota producers and landowners when wildlife damage concerns arise. GFP provides depredation assistance with beaver, Canada geese, coyote, deer, elk, fox, mountain lion, nuisance animals, pheasant, prairie dog, pronghorn, turkey, as well as other wildlife species.

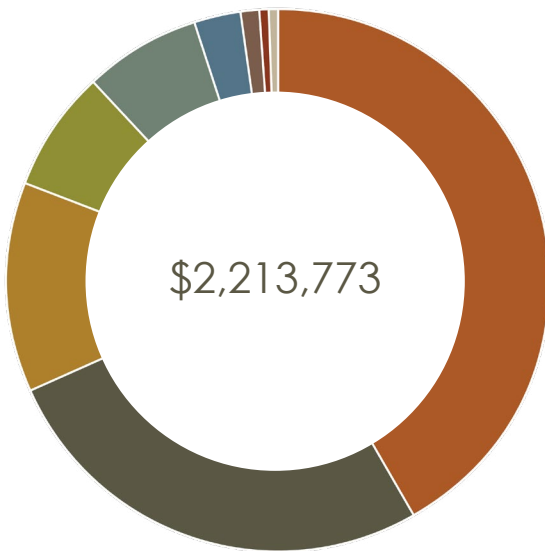
The following graphs and maps show statewide expenditures as well as county breakdown of services provided by the WDM program.

Included in those maps are producers that were assisted by staff with permanent stackyard, secure cover, and protective fencing contracts for deer; food plot, hay land, stackyard, and cable contracts for elk; and buffer strip and permanent fence contracts for Canada geese.

2023 GFP STAFF HOURS 60,378 TOTAL HOURS

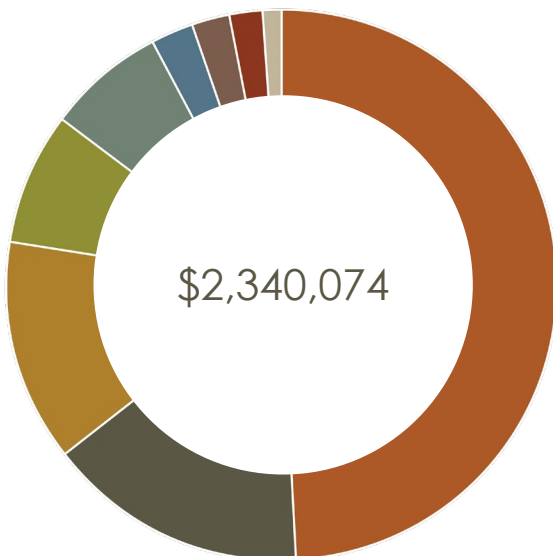


ANIMAL DAMAGE CONTROL EXPENDITURES - FY2023



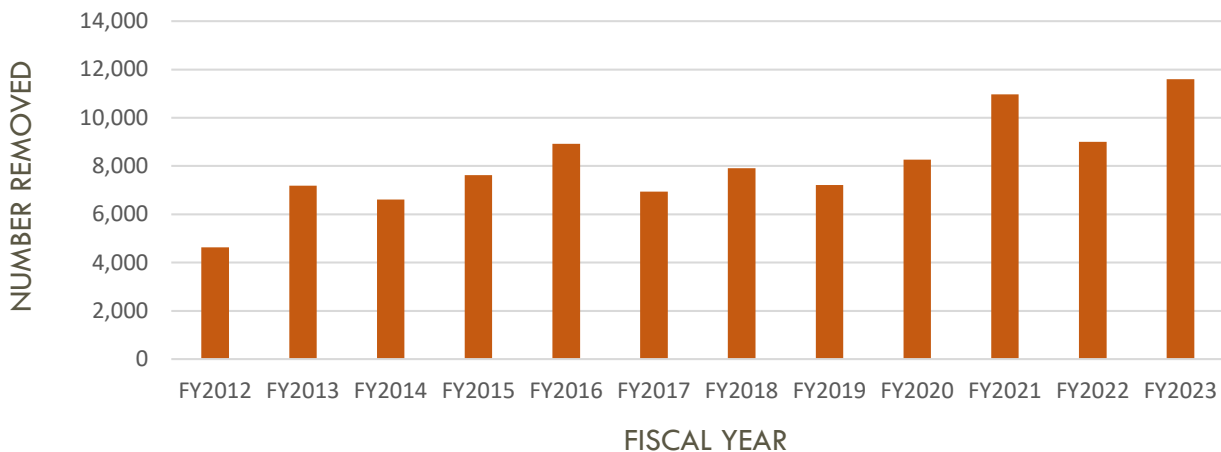
\$925,704 42%	Coyote
\$587,718 27%	Aerial Hunting
\$277,768 13%	Prairie Dog
\$160,525 7%	Equipment Maintenance
\$156,502 7%	Administration
\$59,711 3%	Reports/Training/Meetings
\$26,198 1%	Nuisance/Rodent
\$12,367 <1%	Public Relations/Extension
\$7,280 <1%	Fox

WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT EXPENDITURES - FY2023

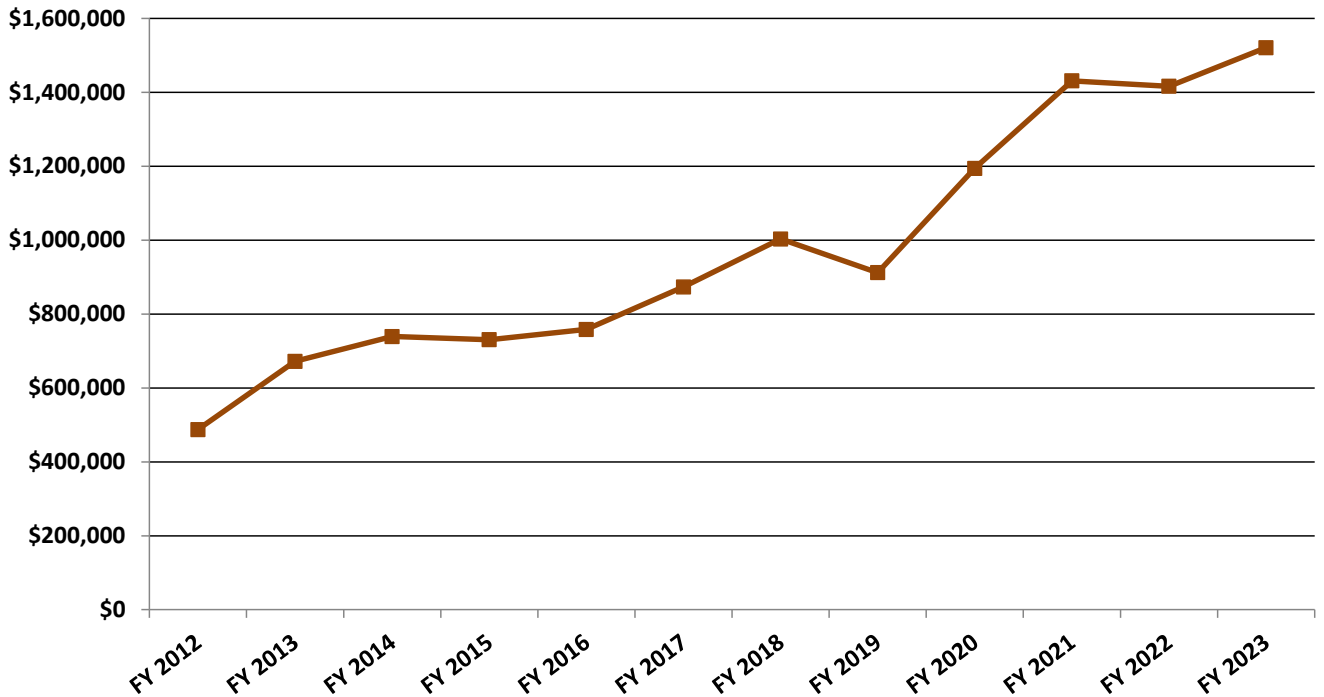


\$1,152,214 49%	Deer
\$358,562 15%	Elk
\$304,251 13%	Beaver
\$181,762 8%	Administration
\$166,979 7%	Canada Geese
\$54,704 2%	Other Wildlife
\$51,084 2%	Reports/Training/Meetings
\$46,015 2%	Mountain Lion
\$24,503 1%	Turkey

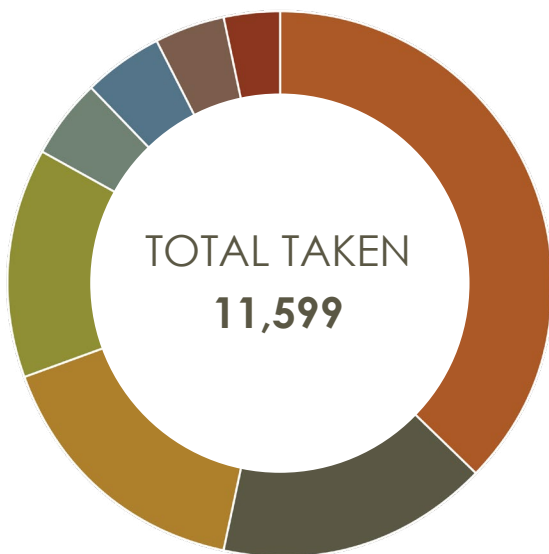
COYOTE/FOX REMOVED



COYOTE/FOX CONTROL EXPENDITURES



COYOTES/FOX TAKEN BY METHOD - FISCAL YEAR 2023

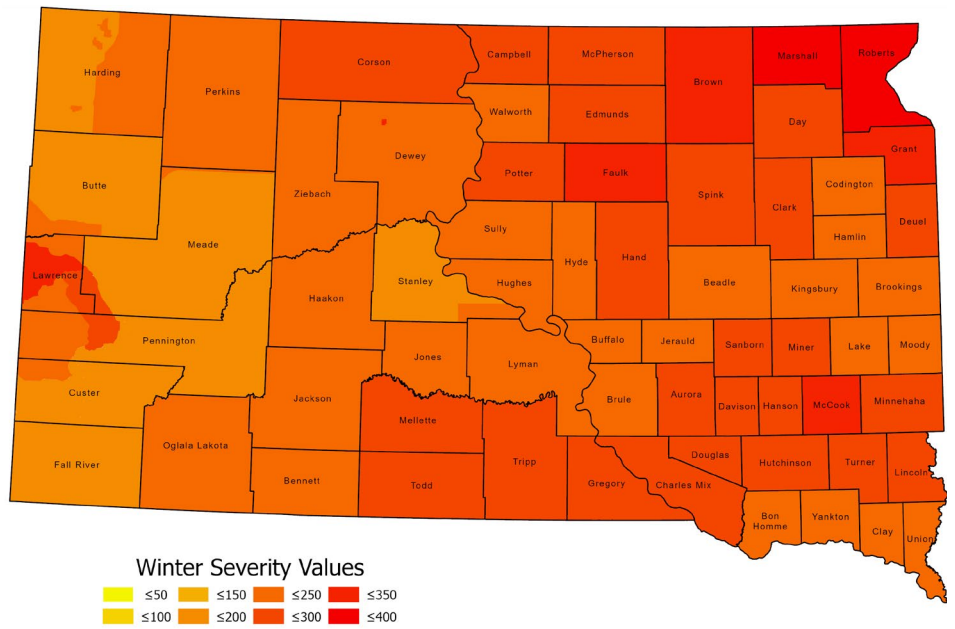


4,322 37%	Aerial Gunned - Wildlife Services
1,879 16%	Aerial Gunned - Predator District
1,878 16%	Trap/Snare/M-44
1,558 13%	Aerial Gunned - Contract
567 5%	Aerial Gunned - Permitted Pilot
535 5%	Calling/Shooting
489 4%	Thermal/Night Vision
371 3%	Dens

Total requests for service
1,385

2023 WINTER SEVERITY INDEX

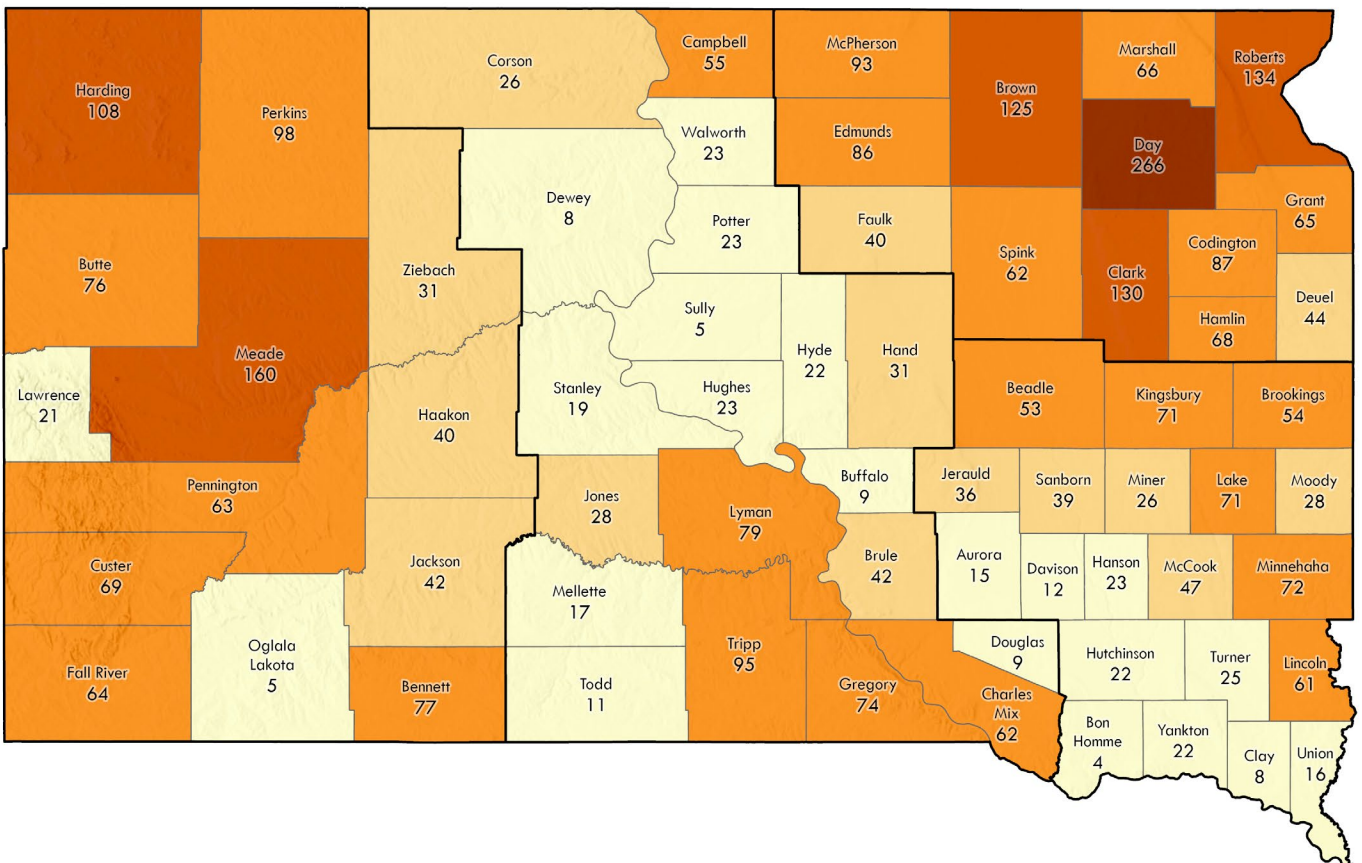
Weather conditions certainly play a role in the number of requests for service that GFP receives for wildlife causing damage to growing crops or stored feed supplies. Drought conditions fluctuated throughout summer and fall, ranging from normal to extreme drought conditions depending on location. Overall, the winter of 2023 was severe in the entire state compared to long-term averages with the northeast once again taking the brunt. Winter Severity Indices were calculated for November 2022 – April 2023. As depicted, values are above long term average (142) for severity. Extremely severe winters can have values over 400; averages for winter 2023 for most of the state were 244, but were as high as 357 in some areas.



TOTAL WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM REQUESTS FOR SERVICE

(INCLUDES ALL SPECIES, PRIMARILY COYOTES, DEER, ELK, CANADA GEESE, BEAVER, AND PRAIRIE DOG)

STATEWIDE TOTAL: 3,486

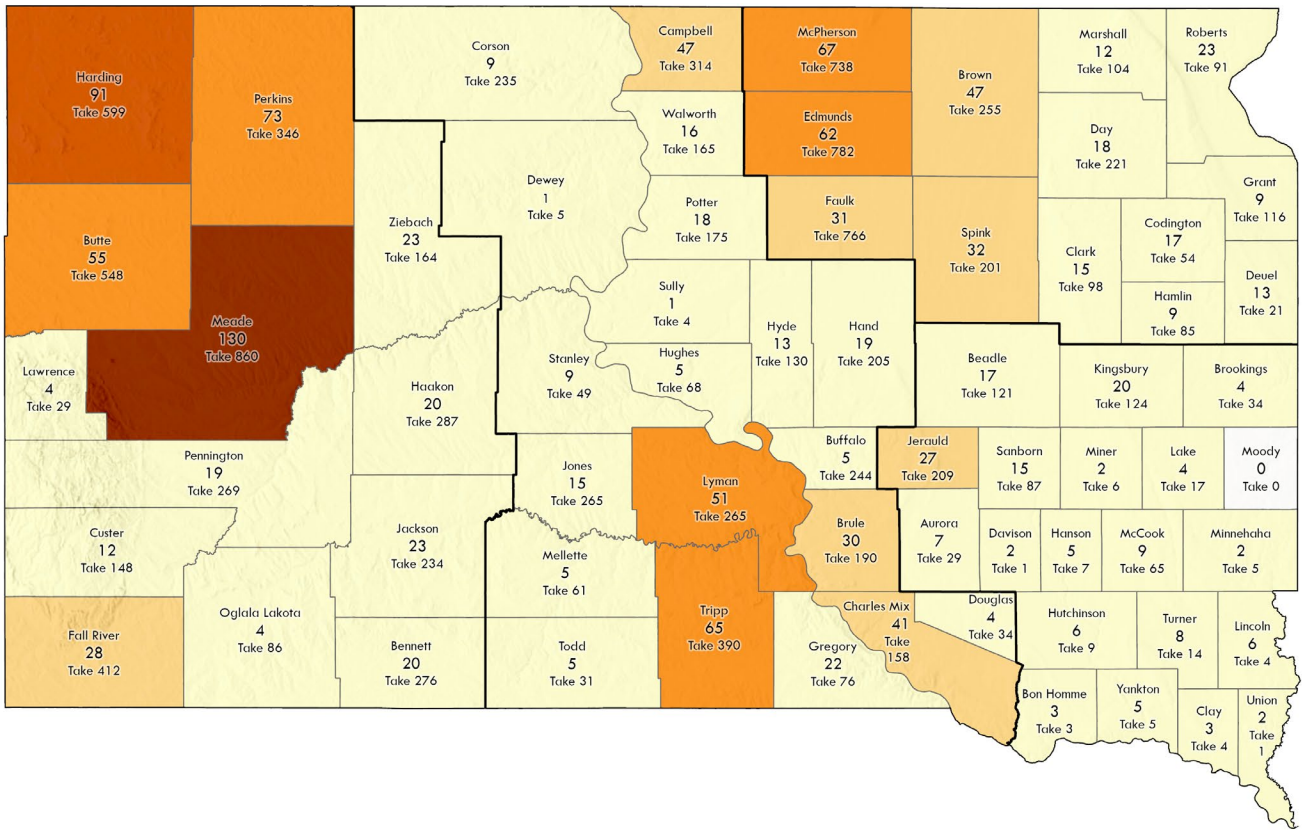


TOTAL REQUESTS FOR SERVICE AND TAKE BY COUNTY

(COYOTES AND FOX ONLY)

Request for service: 1,385

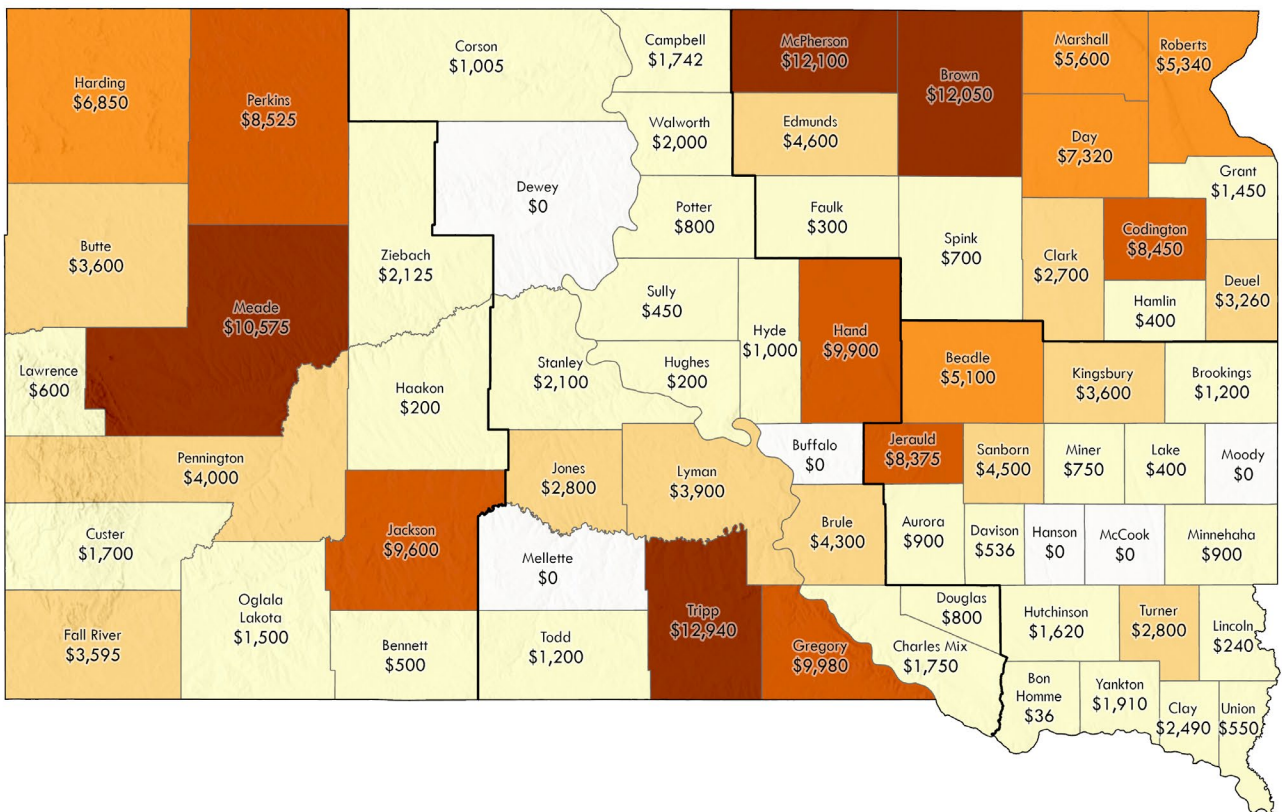
Total take: 11,599



ESTIMATED MONETARY DAMAGES BY COUNTY

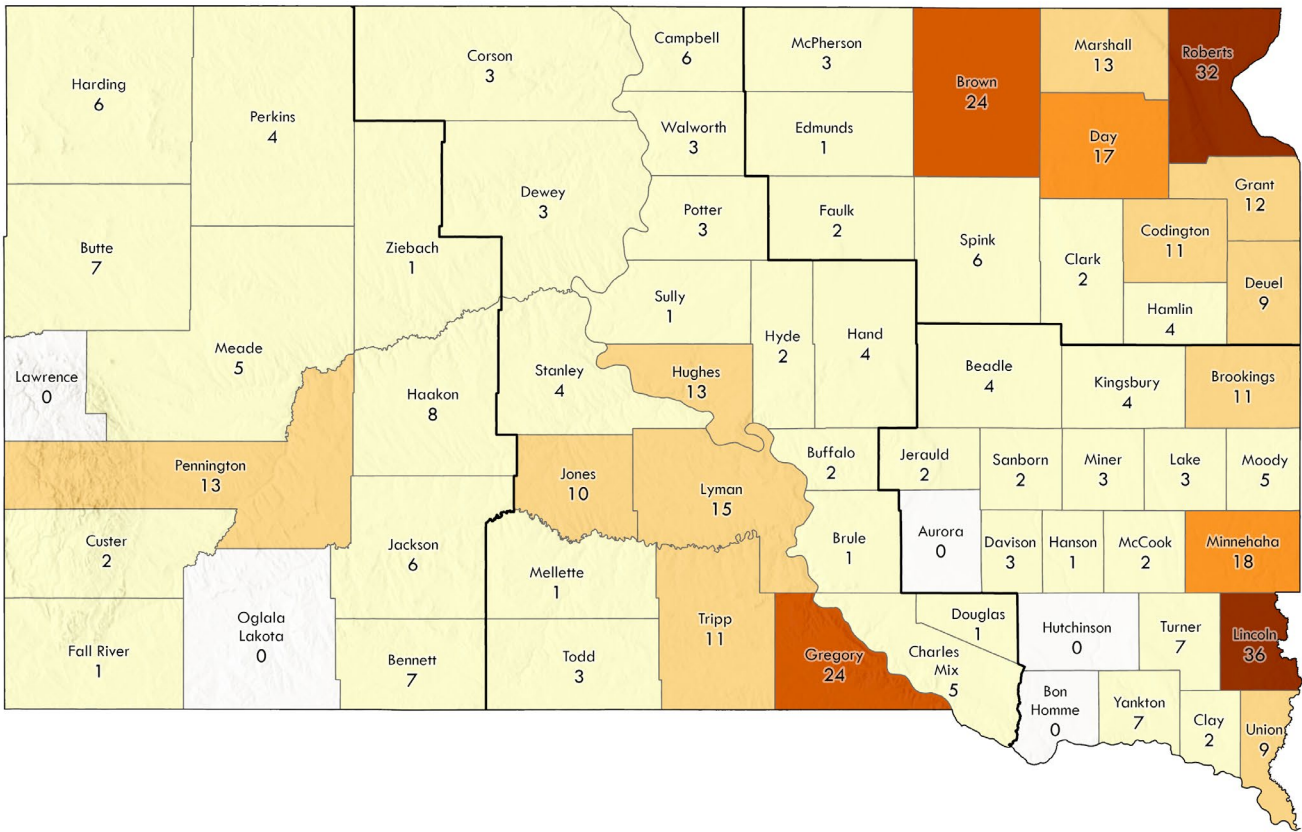
based on request for service

(COYOTES AND FOX ONLY) \$210,414



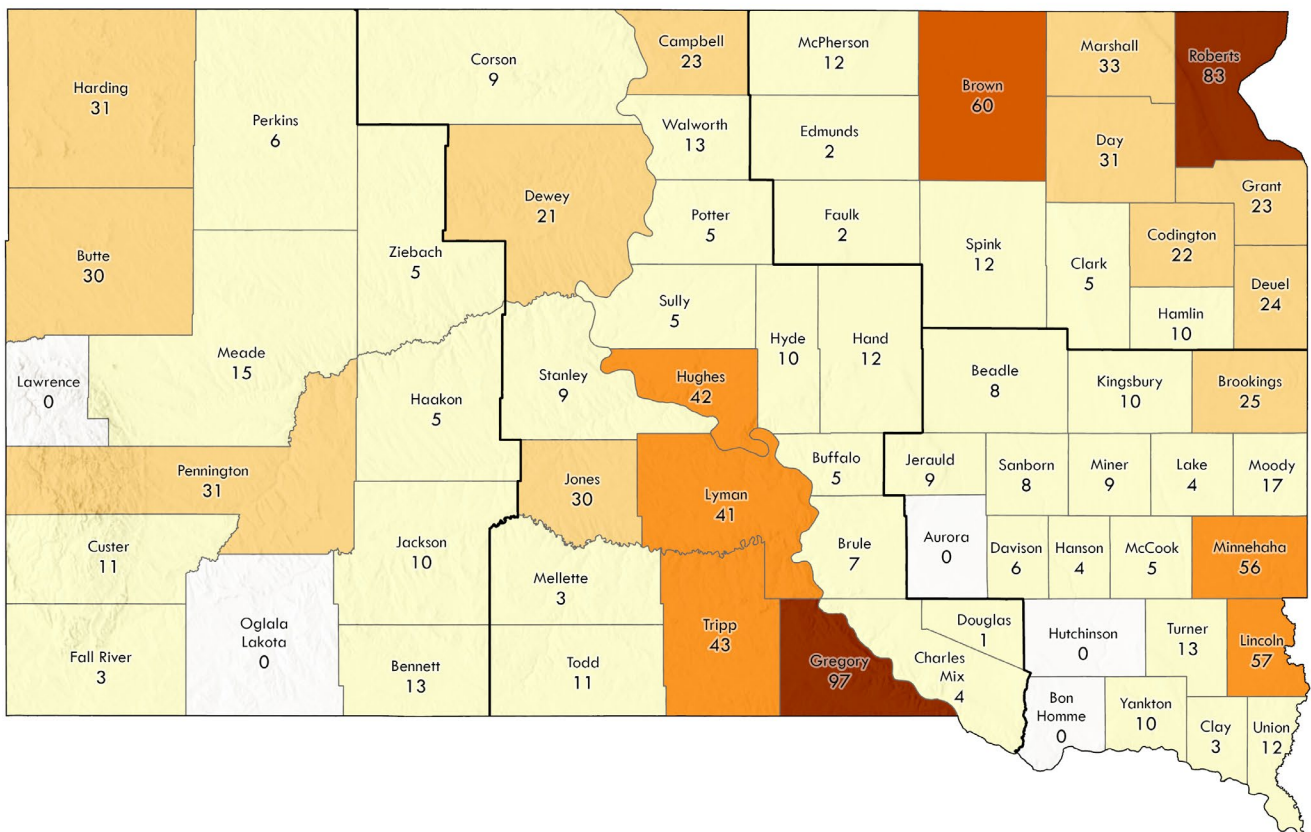
BEAVER REQUESTS FOR SERVICE

STATEWIDE TOTAL: 430



NUMBER OF BEAVER TAKEN

STATEWIDE TOTAL: 1,126





GFP.SD.GOV

