Fish and Wildlife Advisory Committee 2026 Annual Report

Authorized under Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.055, subd. 4b

09/15/2026

Fish and Wildlife Advisory Committee

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September 15, 2026

Subject: 2026 Fish and Wildlife Advisory Committee Report

Commissioner, Senators and Representatives:

I am pleased to present the 2026 report of the Fish and Wildlife Advisory Committee (FWAC). This report fulfills Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.055, subdivision 4b(c), directing the committee in even-numbered years to focus on budget outcomes achieved through Game and Fish Fund expenditures.

In its second year, FWAC examined the overall health of multiple accounts housed within the Game and Fish Fund. Members assembled into small groups and were guided by the following line of questioning:

1- Is the account "healthy" for the current fiscal year *and* three-year outlook?
2- If yes- are the funds being spent in a way that adds value & improves the experience for all outdoor utilizers in the state of Minnesota?
   a. How are the key areas of investment being measured by the department?
3- If no- what are the key factors for lack of revenue or outsized expenditures?
   a. How may we mitigate these factors to increase revenue or right-size expenditures?

Committee members consulted with Department of Natural Resources staff and reviewed six unique areas: 1-aquatic plant management, 2-fishing licenses, 3-waterfowl and habitat, 4-shore-fishing accessibility, 5-recruitment and retention of hunters and anglers, and 6-wild turkey population research.

We identified opportunities that could improve fiscal sustainability, transparency and outcomes. Our recommendations emphasize aligning fees with program costs, strengthening accountability between expenditures and results, securing sustainable funding, modernization and investing existing funds in credible wildlife research.

Our most important request is for a clear response from the department. We ask for a detailed action plan for any recommendation the DNR intends to pursue. For recommendations it does not intend to pursue, a brief explanation would help the committee understand the rationale and improve the committee's function. This feedback is essential for accountability and will allow FWAC to evaluate progress rather than revisit the same questions across each year.

The Game and Fish Fund is supported primarily by hunters, anglers and federal reimbursements connected to their participation. Maintaining public trust requires the state to clearly demonstrate how these dollars are used and what they accomplish.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the DNR staff who shared their expertise and the FWAC members who contributed their time and perspectives. We respectfully submit this report and its recommendations for consideration.

Sincerely,

Eli Mansfield
Chair
Fish and Wildlife Advisory Committee

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Aquatic Plant Management Program

Contributors

Group members:
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- Glenn Lyden
- Kirk Duholm
- John Young
- Karl Anderson
- Jeffrey Somers

Individuals Consulted:
- Shannon Fisher (Populations & Regulations Manager)
- Shane McBride (Aquatic Plant Management Consultant)

1. Program/Account Overview

The purpose of the DNR's Aquatic Plant Management Program (APM) is to balance native plant conservation with the desires of lakeshore residents to recreate and access their property. State law establishes what property owners can do to control aquatic plants. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) fisheries APM staff administer those controls via a permitting system. The primary goal of the permitting system is to help ensure that landowners are adhering to aquatic plant treatment requirements.

2. Funding Sources

The total number of APM permits issued in 2023 was 7,089, in 2024 it was 5,530, and in 2025 it was 6,951. In 2023, there were 3,607 acres treated. The DNR has not yet received total acres treated for 2024 and 2025. The Minnesota DNR expended $698,495 in fiscal year 2023, $706,772 in fiscal year 2024, and $768,303 by fiscal year 2025. Total program costs are increasing annually. The program is largely paid for from the Water Recreation Account. However, Minnesota Statutes § 103G.615, subd. 2(a) (2025) directed the DNR to charge fees for APM permit applications to recover the cost of administering the program. Increasing program fees would alleviate funding concerns.

According to DNR staff, the costs covered by the permit fees continue to decrease. The permit cost $20-30 in 2003. There was an increase in 2009 to $35 but there have been no other increases for the last seventeen years. Adjusted for inflation, $35 in 2009 is $52 today, meaning the real value of the fee has fallen by roughly a third. A citation for not having a permit starts at $250

3. Recommendations

The fees should increase to the extent that it covers expenditures. This could be implemented over time. A 50% increase would be $52. The committee suggests

- A fee increase of 100% by 2028 to $75 and:
- A fee increase of 200% by 2030 to $100:

- All base permit fees are the same amount per property regardless of lake size or application method. Exceptions would be for offshore control (pesticide or mechanical), where the base fee (currently $35) plus a dollar amount per additional acre.

Context: The Minnesota legislature passed an increase to watercraft registration fees and added language that the APM program should be funded from this increase. These fee increases were specifically requested by anglers to improve boat accesses and concerns have been raised about diverting these funds away from that purpose to pay for the APM program. In essence, the legislature indicated that the APM program should be self-sustaining by covering costs with collected fees. However, APM permit fees generate approximately 30% of the revenue needed to pay for the annual costs of the program. Therefore, to capture sufficient revenue for the APM program to pay for itself, the FWAC is recommending the fee increases listed above.

4. References

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. (2024, April 26). *Aquatic plant management program*. https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/apm/index.html

Minn. Stat. § 103G.615 (2025). https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/103G.615

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. (2025). *Game and Fish Fund annual report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025*. https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/gamefishoversight/final-game-&-fish-fund-report-fy25.pdf

Annual Fishing License

Contributors:

Group members:

- Brad Gausman (Group Lead)
- John Young
- Glenn Lyden

1. Program/Account Overview

Key Questions: An annual fishing license in Minnesota is currently valid until the end of the last day of February. Would a new model wherein licenses are valid for one year from the date of purchase result in an increase in license sales thereby benefiting the game and fish fund?

Other annual licenses that may be covered in this review include: 3-year fishing licenses, fish house, and dark house licenses. All these types are defined in state statute 97A.411

This group will examine how other states structure annual fishing license sales to determine if a “365” license model would be beneficial for Minnesota.

What is the purpose of the program/account?

Fishing license sales are a primary source of revenue for the Game and Fish fund. Second only to federal Pittman Roberson funds, fishing license sales provided over 30 million dollars of funding in 2025. Revenue raised through the sale of fishing licenses is deposited in the Game and Fish operations account and is utilized primarily for game and fish management as well as enforcement operation.

What outcomes should it achieve?

Increased funding generated for the Game and Fish Fund would result in increased capacity for the Fish and Wildlife division to manage Minnesota's natural resources.

What major initiatives are underway?

The MN DNR is currently engaged in a license modernization effort which could dovetail nicely with this work. Continued development and utilization of an Electronic Licensing System may also benefit from a review of the annual license structure. Opportunities resulting from a modern ELS system may include features such as auto renewal that would further benefit license buyers as they relieve maximum time spent fishing during an annual license purchase.

2. Funding Sources

Revenues raised through the sale of annual, multi-year, and short-term fishing licenses are deposited into the Game and Fish Operations account. In FY25 Fishing license revenues totaled $30,544,324

According to the 2025 Game and Fish Fund report: Fishing license revenue in FY25 increased by approximately $3.5 million compared to FY24. The increase was due to good fishing conditions throughout the year. Fishing license revenue is projected to decrease by 9 percent in FY26 and then 1.5 percent yearly through FY29. The larger 9 percent decrease in FY26 is due to projected revenues retreating back to more historic levels after the favorable conditions in FY25 caused higher than expected revenues.

3. Fiscal Challenges or Risks

Although fishing license sales remain relatively stable and can fluctuate depending on fishing conditions the MN DNR predicts a 9% decrease in revenue in FY26 followed by a 1.5% decrease annually through FY 2029.

Declining participation in fishing over time coupled with increasing costs to provide expected services presents a long-term problem that requires the development of new funding sources, an increase in the cost of licenses, or a novel reimagining of how Minnesotans fund the Game and Fish operations account.

4. Opportunities for Improvement

One area for possible improvement to the annual fishing license sold by the MN DNR is moving to a “365 model” wherein an annual fishing license is valid for one year from the date of purchase. This model would give a license buyer more value and may result in more people purchasing annual licenses instead of short-term licenses as the calendar nears the end of an annual angling year.

Other license offerings that may be considered for a 365 model are:

- Resident 3-year fishing license
- Resident annual spearing license and 3-year spearing license
- Resident Annual dark house/shelter permit and 3-year dark house/shelter permit

5. Recommendations

After looking into how other states structure their fishing season and annual license sales it seems like there may not be a benefit to a 365-day license model. Although the license does provide more value for the customer by giving them a fixed benefit for the dollars they invest in a license, this model does not necessarily benefit the Game and Fish fund through generating additional revenue.

In fact, a 365-day model can result in a decrease in revenue. When a license buyer waits a month or two to renew their license that delay results in unrealized revenue. Over time those weeks and months can add up, resulting in the potential loss of years of fishing license revenue over the course of a lifetime. That reality, along with other issues such as the increased cost of enforcement and public education, present a case where even if a change to a 365 model were to increase revenue for the Game and Fish fund it would take years to reach a break-even point on implementation and increase sales beyond the expected decrease through FY29 predicted by the agency.

Recommendation: Continue to work with the public, other states, and elected officials to examine the potential for a move to a 365-license model.

Other states have experience transitioning to this model and communication with other states could be key to determining if the 365 model is appropriate for Minnesota.

In the 2025 legislative session Representative Shultz (10B) offered an amendment in the House Environment Committee that would have moved Minnesota to a 365 model. A good conversation was had that included Assistant DNR Commissioner Bob Meier indicating that the agency is interested in looking into the issue more and engaging with the public.

Our group is excited to see the conversation develop between engaged stakeholders.

Recommendation: Integrate Auto Renewal into the new Electronic License Software if a 365 model is adopted.

If it is determined that a 365 model is appropriate and has the potential to bring increased revenue to the Game and Fish Fund it should be done in tandem with adding an auto renewal feature to the ELS software now available for the public. Without auto renewal many licenses will expire without the knowledge of the license holder creating lost opportunities for the DNR. This can be accomplished as an “opt in” model if desired.

Recommendation: Increase education to license agents and make license expiration confirmation part of the purchasing process

Much of the confusion and at times frustration from the license buying public comes from a perceived value of receiving a yearslong fishing experience when purchasing an “annual” license. Through providing license agents with increased knowledge of license details more customers will understand how long their license is valid for and will renew at the appropriate time. Adding a prompt during the checkout process that confirms with the customer the date their license expires could also help increase understanding and compliance with license buyers.

6. Data or Information Needs

We have already communicated with DNR staff to receive information about annual licenses and the license modernization effort. Thank you!

One piece of information that would be valuable would be a breakdown of annual and short-term licenses sold over a year. Are more short-term licenses sold the closer we get to the end of a license “year”?

7. References

Minnesota Statutes § 97A.411 (2013).

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. (2025). *Game and Fish Fund annual report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025*. https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/gamefishoversight/final-game-&-fish-fund-report-fy25.pdf

Waterfowl and Waterfowl Habitat

Contributors

Groub members:

- Patrick Kuefler
- Kaitlyn Rutledge
- Kevin Maki
- Scott Schoper
- Susan Colvin (Group Lead)

Individuals Consulted:

- Ricky Lien (Wetland habitat team supervisor),
- Josh Kavanagh (NR Specialist Senior Wildlife),
- Nicole Hansel-Welch (Shallow Lakes Program Supervisor)

1. Program/Account Overview

The original focus of this group was to investigate the status of duck populations and duck habitat funding in the State of Minnesota. We were able to view two excellent presentations on the Shallow Lakes Program and The Wetland Program by Nicole Hansel-Welch and Josh Kavanagh (respectively). Additionally, we reviewed three reports: Duck Action Plan 2025-2030, Long Range Duck Recovery Plan, and the Shallow Lakes Program Plan. While the Duck Action Plan mentions that many waterfowl efforts are funded by the Outdoor Heritage Fund, there is not a direct pathway to follow funds to goals in each plan. As the linkages between funds, expenditures, and outcomes are not readily apparent our group decided to focus on goals and outcomes.

This time next year we will be midway through the Duck Action Plan. We see value in inquiring on status for the goals stated in the plan. *More specifically we would like to see the generation of a dashboard page on these items (Figure 1):*

1. Number of ducks graphed by species and total
2. Percentage of harvest in the flyway
3. Number of hunters
4. Changes in habitat

We believe this dashboard will allow DNR to highlight their successes regarding the actions in items in various plans (such as the Duck and Pheasant Action Plan). Further, it would enhance communication and engagement similar to other species (Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Dee reports and Statistics) us your successes regarding these items. Show us trends in these items.

Additionally, on the ‘dashboard page’ the duck hunting and wildlife watching public may be interested in some of the following items:

Program goals: Are there overall goals for the Wildlife Management Areas (WMA's) if so how to are these integrated with individual species management plans or multispecies management objectives?

Habitat topics: Where should wild rice be to provide for ducks? What is good habitat for each species of ducks and how is this achieved? What funds directly contribute to habitat improvement projects? Does habitat improvement in one WMA or region reduce ducks in another region? Does waterfowl management come at the expense of other organisms or ecological goals?

2. Recommendations

1. Evaluate nonresident hunting and fishing license/stamp/access fee increases as a potential source of increased revenue with funds directed to enhancement and maintenance of waterfowl lands while dually supporting other program goals consistent with statutory requirements.

2. Leverage invasive species funding as a source of restoration project funding from using Outdoor Heritage Funds, Environment and Natural Resource Trust Fund and invasive species research centers. Presentations viewed during FWAC meetings indicated that much of the restoration projects were directed at controlling invasive plants. While several significant invasive plants are not listed in Minnesota Rule 6216,0250, DNR should consider updating the rule to include significant nonnative species and to ensure that remediation or control projects for listed plants does not prohibit addressing nonlisted invasive plants within the project area. The goal would be to collaborate under different funding sources to allow for one cohesive project on the same property.

3. Finalize the cost effectiveness study of invasive plant controls and implement the cost-effective methods into maintenance plans and core work for each WMA.

4. Evaluate the development of in-house thermal drone operators and expertise to conduct, support, or enhance a broad range of wildlife surveys including waterfowl. Use of thermal drones could provide enhanced accuracy and sample size at a reduced cost, particularly if multiple species survey protocols could be synchronized. The development of in-house expertise and resources may provide long-term sustaining benefit providing DNR more control, nimbleness, and flexibility and an opportunity to broadly train DNR field staff to identify opportunities to use the technology to support programs beyond wildlife surveys or compliance monitoring. The Minnesota DNR recently enacted new drone guidance for how these tools can be used, we would encourage the use of the new drone tools by existing staff.

5. Evaluate hiring in-house design engineers embedded in the Wetland Habitat Program to develop restoration projects of state waterfowl lands. This could result in cost saving of design phases of restoration projects and would develop in-house expertise to support project managers conducting oversight during construction phases. The DNR Wetland Habitat Team has had internal discussion about the benefits of having an engineer embedded into the program who would solely work on waterfowl habitat projects, this committee sees the value to such a position and the strategic long-term effects of such a position.

6. Create and sell merchandise with the duck stamp to support waterfowl conservation and habitat.

Overall, we seek to understand: What is being spent, where, why, and what is the return? Consolidating this information may make it easier to assess progress towards program goals.

3. References

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. (2006). *Long range duck recovery plan*. https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/recreation/hunting/waterfowl/duckplan_042106.pdf

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. (2010). *Managing Minnesota's shallow lakes for waterfowl and wildlife: Shallow Lakes Program Plan*. Division of Fish and Wildlife, Wildlife Management Section. https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/recreation/hunting/waterfowl/shallowlakesplan.pdf

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. (2024). *Duck action plan 2025–2030*. https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/wildlife/waterfowl/duck_action_plan.pdf

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. (2026, April 21). *Deer reports & statistics*. https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/mammals/deer/management/statistics.html

Figure 1. Example duck management dashboard

Shore fishing Accessibility

Contributors

Group members:

- Kirk Duholm (Lead)
- John Young

Individuals Consulted:

- Jim Levitt (Shore Fishing Program Coordinator)

1. Funding Source

The Game and Fish Operating Account (2200) supports this program area. In FY25, approximately 74 percent of Game and Fish Fund revenue flowed through this account, which funds game and fish activities and related work. Within the account, dollars support shore fishing site infrastructure, administration of the shore fishing program, and accessibility improvements at shore fishing sites and boat launches.

In addition, the Legislature appropriated $5 million in General Fund dollars three years ago for a shore fishing initiative under Get Out MORE (Modernize Outdoor Recreation Experiences). These funds must be expended by June 30, 2027.

Funding for shore fishing accesses flows through the Game and Fish Fund operating account. Infrastructure costs are supported primarily by grants, such as awards from the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR), or by one-time General Fund appropriations such as Get Out MORE. Salary to administer currently available funds is paid directly from the Game and Fish Fund and supports one staff position from the East Metro Fisheries office.

2. Major Expenditures

Thus far approximately $3.5 million of the $5 million Get Out MORE appropriation has been encumbered. The Department evaluated more than 175 potential shore fishing infrastructure sites and identified 75 with high potential to provide shore fishing access. Of those, 38 sites have been completed or are currently under construction.

Delivering these projects has required coordination with more than 29 local government units, including cities, townships, and counties. These partners typically assume responsibility for ongoing maintenance of the completed access sites.

3. Fiscal Challenges and Risks

The principal challenge is securing consistent funding to continue expanding shore fishing opportunities with appropriate accessibility. Funding beyond FY27 is uncertain. Grant requests have been submitted to support continued program administration and additional infrastructure, but no sustained funding source has been identified.

4. Opportunities for Improvement

- Install docks and boarding equipment that assist anglers with limited mobility in entering and exiting boats.
- Develop shore fishing sites designed and equipped to support night fishing.

5. Recommendations

1. **Prioritize continuation of the shore fishing initiative** through a combination of grant funding and Game and Fish Fund dollars and identify a sustainable funding source for the program beyond FY27.
2. **Retain program administration capacity.** The committee recommends continuity in the administrator position so that the site knowledge, project management experience, and local government relationships developed under the initiative are not lost.
3. **Incorporate accessible design at existing and future access sites wherever feasible**, including ADA-compliant parking and facilities, designated Hero Parking for veterans, and night fishing locations.
4. **Evaluate consolidating administration of the shore fishing program with Parks and Trails**, which administers public water access. The two programs share substantial operational overlap, and consolidation would shift administrative costs outside the Game and Fish Fund.

6. References

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. (2025). *Game and Fish Fund annual report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025*. https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/gamefishoversight/final-game-&-fish-fund-report-fy25.pdf

R3 (The Recruit, Reactivate, Retain Program)

Contributors

Group Members:

- Chris Herndon (Lead)
- Sue Colvin
- Tina Elliot

Individuals consulted:

- Paul Vang (Fish & Wildlife Outdoor Skills Unit Supervisor)
- Jermey Boley (FAW Outreach Section Manager)
- Steven Yang (Recruit, Retain, Reactivate (R3) Partnership Coordinator)

Resources
The Fish and Wildlife resources behind this report:

Documents

- R3 Update for FWAC (04022026)
- Hunter and Angler Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation (R3) Implementation Guide, 2026-2031 (04072026)
- 2026-2031 Hunter and Angler Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation (R3) Action Plan (date unknown)
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. (2025). *Game and Fish Fund annual report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025*. https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/gamefishoversight/final-game-&-fish-fund-report-fy25.pdf

1. Program Overview

National Context
R3 (Recruit, Reactivate, Retain) is a national movement to increase the number of hunters and anglers. Efforts first emerged after a decline in hunting participation in the 1980s threatened the core funding base for wildlife conservation nationwide. Since 2009, the Council to Advance Hunting and Shooting Sports coordinates the movement nationally with at least 35 state agencies participating.

Purpose
R3 aims for the sustainability of hunting and fishing participation across Minnesota because license sales and federal reimbursements are a primary Game and Fish Fund (GFF) revenue source. Thus, R3's role is not just in conservation and recreation, but a program critical to the financial health of the agency.

What Works?
There is a general lack of adequate assessment for R3 program outcomes. However, a study by the Wildlife Management Institute (WMI) indicated that across the 8 states R3 programs studied, the R3

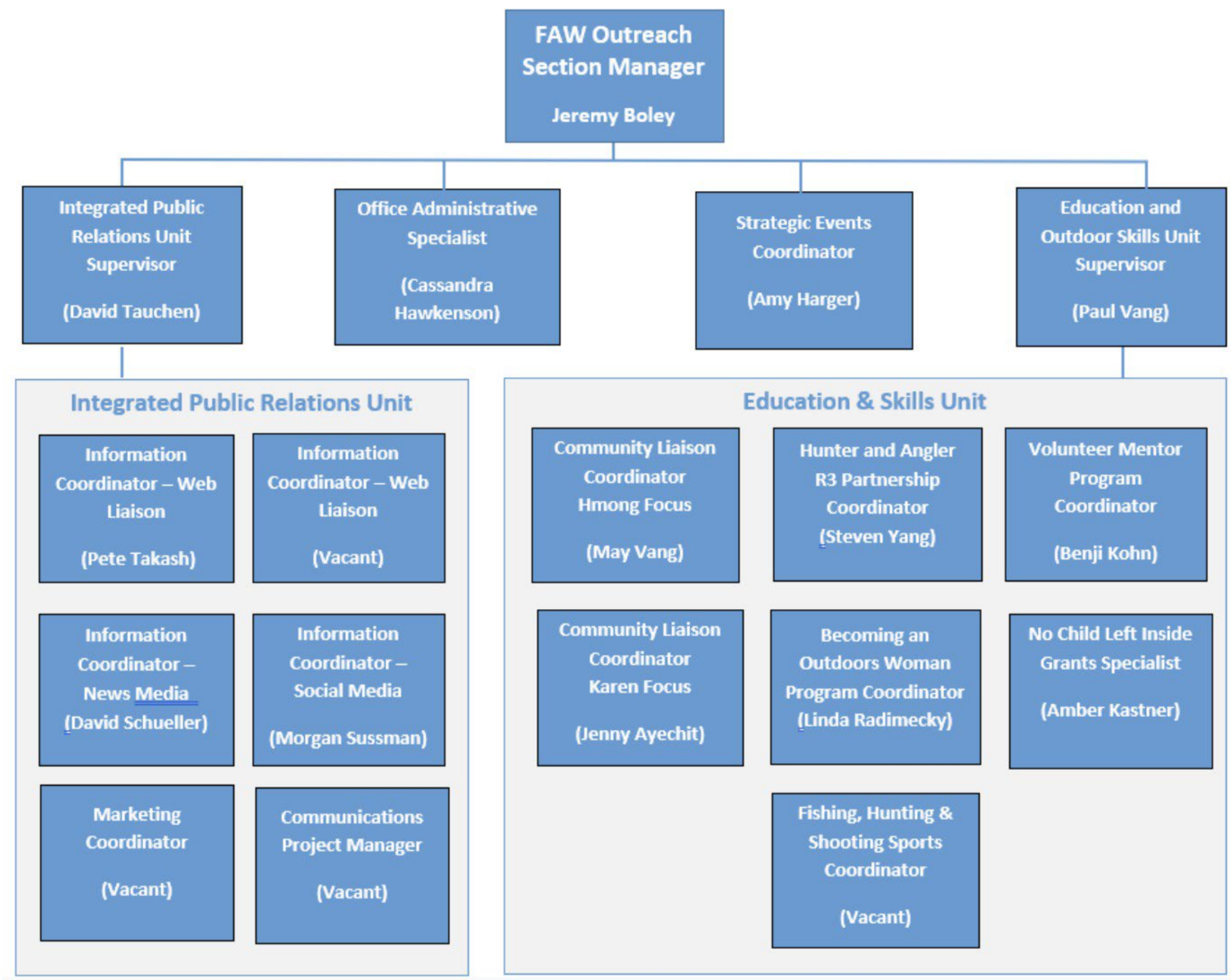
activities designed for youth had the least noticeable immediate benefit (though it typically takes years to build spending capacity, returns on these programs may be delayed). Programs aimed at reactivating & retaining hunters or expanding the repertoire of those participants had greater success (Wildlife Management Institute 2022).

Organizational Structure

R3 sits within the Fish and Wildlife Division's Outreach Section. You'll see that a team of seven sits under him as the Education and Outdoor Skills Unit Supervisor, Paul Vang (who provided Table 1).

Four of the positions are new to the team so in many ways it's a fresh start. As of 07/15/2026, the Fishing, Hunting and Shooting Sports Coordinator position is vacant. It will take time for R3 leadership and staff to find their flow because there's a lot to take in - institutional knowledge, new colleagues, new responsibilities, new guide and action plan, new processes, how decisions are made, how they resolve conflict and so on.

Table 1: Fish and Wildlife Outreach Organizational Chart



Objectives, Outcomes and Priorities

R3's two main objectives are as follows:

Objective 1: Increase participation

Recruit, retain, reactivate, reach underrepresented communities, improve access, reduce policy barriers.

Objective 2: Build statewide infrastructure

Partnerships, statewide systems, data evaluation, and budget integration.

Outcomes

At a high level, R3 is holding themselves accountable to the following outcomes:

- Delivering and coordinating programming
- Strengthening partnerships
- Modernizing communication and access
- Reducing barriers across the full recruit, retain, reactivate pathway

Each program has a myriad of short-term (1-2 years), intermediate (3-4 years) and long-term (5+ years) items they'll be tracking progress against.

Priorities

The following are the priorities that R3 is focused on as part of the 2026 - 2031 Action Plan (Table 2).

Table 2: R3's Priorities

Name	Type	Summary
Hmong and Karen Hunting and Angling	Programs	Statutorily required (Minnesota Laws Section 129: DNR must staff ≥ 3.5 FTE, Hmong and / or Karen-fluent, explicitly for Southeast Asian community outreach.
Volunteer Mentor Infrastructure	Program	A statewide, certified volunteer mentor network cultivated for scalability, cost-efficiency and as a pathway to reactivate lapsed hunters / anglers.
Becoming an Outdoors Women (BOW)	Program	Primarily for women and secondarily for families to develop a variety of outdoor skills. In Minnesota, the DNR runs the program to ensure consistent safety standards and equitable statewide access. This, compared to other states where BOW is facilitated by nonprofits, delivering inconsistent programming and outcomes.

Shooting Sport and Angling	Programs	Examples of these include: National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP), Learn to Hunt / Fish, MinnAqua and firearms safety.
R3 Coordination	Initiatives	*Internally*, cross-division alignment, communications and evaluation. *Externally*, TBD

The Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model (ORAM)

While ORAM is by no means the end all be all, it's widely referred to as the field's standard theoretical framework for R3 evaluation (Byrne & Dunfee, 2018), mapping the path an individual takes from never having tried an activity to becoming a lifelong, independent participant, all under a social-support network of family, friends, and peers (Table 3).

Table 3: ORAM stages

Recruitment			**Retention**			**Reactivation**	
Awareness	Interest	Trial	Decision to Continue	Continuation with Support	Continuation without Support	Lapse	Reactive

**Click above ORAM link to view definitions of each stage*

Several states (e.g. Texas) formally map their R3 programs against ORAM stages to identify gaps, where programming clusters (often Awareness and Trial stages) and where it's thin (often Continuation without Support and Reactivation). Current research being done on "The Hole in the ORAM" targets the model's weakest, least-understood point, the "decision to continue" - studying how participants' self-identity forms and can be accelerated, since that decision point determines whether someone becomes an independent, lifelong hunter / angler rather than a one-time participant.

We were unable to find definitions for Recruit, Retain and Reactivate on MN DNRs materials, but ORAM defines them as such:

Retention efforts focus on those individuals who have experienced a trial, made the decision to continue pursuing the activity and / or may have been participating in the activity for some time. Thus, they have been "recruited". These individuals have likely begun or completed forming a self-identity that embraces the activity and may or may not face multiple challenges to continued participation.

Reactivation describes the process in which the individual lapses in their participation for a period of time due to a variety of reasons. Reactivation efforts focus on providing a targeted suite of support and resources designed to help reactivate and retain an individual in a particular activity.

This model also speaks to the importance of a **social support network** that encourages ongoing participation.

ORAM does not address race, ethnicity, culture, geography, regulations, costs or a variety of other factors that could include the model, but it's useful nonetheless as an intentional framework to utilize for planning R3 efforts.

Limits of Authority

Table 4: What R3 Can and Cannot Do

What R3 *Can* Do	What R3 *Cannot* Do
● Run or coordinate DNR hunting and angling education programs ● Develop and run mentorship opportunities ● Influence and recommend regulation simplification ● Lead communications and marketing tactics related to R3 ● Develop evaluation frameworks and annual reports ● Coordinate cross-division R3 initiatives	● Does not set wildlife regulations (can only recommend simplification) ● Cannot unilaterally change division priorities or budgets ● Cannot mandate partner participation ● Cannot directly access or track all individual participant data due to privacy laws ● Cannot solve structural barriers alone (e.g. lack of public shooting ranges)

2. Funding Sources

R3 has no dedicated funding line, rather it is a budget line item within the Outreach Section's operations, funded by the following Game and Fish Fund (GFF) accounts:

1. **Game and Fish Operations Account (2200)**: *"Revenues include licenses and permits issued, all income from state lands acquired by purchase or gift for game or fish purposes, fines and forfeited bail, sales from contraband, wild animals and other property under the control of the division, fees from advanced educations courses for hunters and trappers, reimbursements of expenditures by the account, contributions to the account and federal aid reimbursements."* (Minnesota Statute 97A.055)

2. **Heritage Enhancement Account (2209)**: *"Revenues include lottery payments in lieu of sales tax on lottery tickets."* Normally, when you buy something in Minnesota, you pay sales tax. However, for lottery tickets, instead of sales tax, the state constitution dedicates a share of lottery ticket revenue to environmental and natural resource purposes.

The following 2024 - 2026 Outreach Budget vs. Actual table was provided showing funds flowing from both GFF accounts to all of Fish and Wildlife Outreach activities.

Table 5: 2024 - 2026 Fish and Wildlife Outreach Budget vs. Actual

Game and Fish (2200)	2024	2025	2026
Original Budget	1,636,200	1,772,123	1,861,446
Roll Forward		171,000	120,000
Total Budget	**1,636,200**	**1,943,123**	**1,981,446**
% of Budget	*75%*	*78%*	*79%*
Program Expenses			
Communications/Marketing	773,788	764,531	577,994
Gen'l Admin	63,151	79,353	76,042
Grant Admin	210,321	328,538	148,511
Leave/Time off	223,649	374,666	248,335
R3	193,406	195,802	146,062
State Fair	8,144	8,947	7,106
Total Expenses	**1,472,459**	**1,751,839**	**1,204,050**
Remaining Balance	**163,741**	**191,284**	**777,396**

Heritage (2209)	2024	2025	2026
Original Budget	535,500	535,500	485,000
Roll Forward			40,000
Total Budget	**535,500**	**535,500**	**525,000**
	25%	*22%*	*21%*
Program Expenses			
Communications/Marketing	2,394	836	484
Gen'l Admin			274
Grant Admin	127		
Leave/Time off	12,225		
R3	204,086	315,334	227,303
State Fair			
Total Expenses	**218,832**	**316,171**	**228,061**
Remaining Balance	**316,668**	**219,329**	**296,939**

Our current understanding is that all R3 funding flows through the GFF accounts. R3 has no independent outside funding stream, though R3-adjacent activities (hunter / angler education, mentoring) can draw federal reimbursement under two formula grant programs feeding the GFF: Wildlife Restoration Act and Sport Fish Restoration Act (WSFR), each reimbursing 75% of allowable expenses up to Minnesota's annual apportionment. Per the DNR R3 team directly, “the important thing to remember is that WSFR is directly tied to participation. The more hunters and anglers we have, the more equipment gets purchased, and the more WSFR revenue flows back to Minnesota directly strengthening the DNR’s ability to manage fish, wildlife, and habitat.

Wildlife Restoration act is formerly the Pittman-Robertson Act while Sport Fish Restoration Act is formally the Dinglell-Johnson Act. New funding mechanisms for these programs were considered in congress in 2025, though not in 2026. It is unlikely these programs will be updated in the next few years in response to changing demographics (decline in hunting and angling licenses). We cannot expect a ‘fix’ at this level at this time.

Revenue Outlook
In the GFF overall analysis section of the GFF Report, here’s what impacts accounts relevant to R3:

1. **Game and Fish Operations Account (2200)**:
    - *“Hunting license revenues in 2025 were comparable to 2024. Hunting participation has remained steady since 2022, but we are projecting an average annual decline of 2 percent in hunting license revenues each year through 2029.”*
    - *“Fishing License revenue in 2025 increased by approximately $3.5 million compared to 2024. The increase was due to good fishing conditions throughout the year. Fishing license revenue is projected to decrease by 9 percent in 2026 and then 1.5 percent yearly through 2029. The larger 9 percent decrease in 2026 is due to projected revenue retreating back to more historic levels after the favorable conditions of 2025 caused higher than expected revenues.”*
    - *“2025 federal reimbursement for the Wildlife Restoration Act increased by $2.9 million due to a higher federal apportionment and increased spending on eligible activities.*

However, projections show an average year over year decrease of 7 percent through 2029."

- *"Sport Fishing Restoration Act federal reimbursement revenues increased by $1.7 million in 2025 but are projected to decrease by 10 percent in 2026 and then remain steady through 2029."*

2. **Heritage Enhancement - Account 2209**:

   - *"Lottery-in-lieu revenue deposited…decreased by $2.7 million in part due to a portion of the annual revenues being dedicated for the Lawns to Legumes project beginning in 2025. Trends through 2029 show a 4 percent increase in revenues to the fund in 2026 and then remaining steady.*

External Funding

At this time, we are not aware of any non-GFF funding flowing directly into R3's budget. However, CAHSS (the national R3 coordinating body) maintains an active list of grant sources built specifically for R3 work, meaning funding options exist whether or not our R3 program is currently drawing on them. Several of these sources are structured to fund partner organizations delivering programming, not state agencies directly, which is relevant to Objective 2, specifically efforts to support external partners.

3. Major Expenditures

R3 is a personnel and programming driven budget line rather than a capital or infrastructure one.

Referring back to Table 4, we are unable to distinguish the R3 activities from the larger outreach budget, but we can highlight the following:

- Staff time is the largest expense
- It does not appear that any long-term capital investments are being made

4. Fiscal Challenges or Risks

Revenue: R3's funding base faces mild downward pressure on license revenue and a flattening Heritage account, while the federal reimbursement is expected to soften. In many ways, R3 is accountable, but the path is not always direct. If they are able to accomplish their stated objectives and outcomes, we assume a positive correlation with revenues.

Expenditures: R3 spending rose from 2024 to 2025, but is on track to decrease in 2026 — not because of a deliberate pullback, but because the program isn't operating at full staffing capacity. At the same time, revenues feeding both the Game and Fish Operations Account and the Heritage Enhancement Account are trending downward. That combination puts pressure on both accounts to make changes in the near term, and R3 which is funded entirely through those two accounts, will feel the effects of whatever those changes turn out to be.

5. Opportunities for Improvement

1. Elevate R3 agency-wide. This requires champions within executive leadership across all divisions, not just Fish and Wildlife. Without it, every other item on this list stays confined to Outreach's existing budget and staff.

2. Map the participant lifecycle using ORAM. Map both R3, DNR and external partner-run programs against the ORAM stages statewide, not just R3's own efforts. This should be an illuminating exercise. Track whether each program achieves the intended outcome for its stage, then realign based on what you learn - doing more of what works and less of what doesn't. As a general rule, 20% of effort produces 80% of results (the Pareto Principle), so focus programming on the stages most positively correlated with license purchases. Share these findings with external partners so they understand what changes could improve their own results.

3. Research what other R3 programs are doing, specifically North Dakota. Connect and build relationships. North Dakota Game and Fish runs a dedicated R3 program, including a small-grant model that funds ~40 club and organization events per year (avg. $1,550 each) rather than running events itself. A national study found some states' R3 events were mostly reaching people who already had licenses — North Dakota performed better on this measure than most, suggesting real, transferable lessons. Building a direct relationship with their R3 coordinator would let Minnesota borrow proven tactics instead of starting from scratch.

4. Adopt a customer-centric approach to program development. This turns R3 from a program-delivery function into a strategic, marketing-style function - understanding who the customers are and what they need, then building programs around that. It starts with better use of existing data and a few open questions worth answering: What do demographic surveys tell us about who's participating today, and who isn't? Are there existing surveys on what people actually want out of an outdoor experience in Minnesota? And critically, what's the track record - for a given dollar spent, what result did it produce, both quantitatively (participation, license sales) and qualitatively (satisfaction, likelihood to continue)? It is critical for R3 to answer "what happened because of this program" with confidence.

5. Use customer data (via ELS) to guide communications. This is how #3 gets carried out in practice - sending license holders messages tailored to what the R3 already knows about them. There's real revenue potential here, but it requires a system that isn't fully built. Part of building it out would include tracking what actually drove a purchase at the point of sale, along with demographic data like disposable income, compared to age, compared to ORAM stage - so communications can be targeted not just by who someone is, but by what's likely to move them to purchase a license and when.

6. Further collaboration with external partners. This frees R3 to focus on strategy, funding, and coordination rather than running every available or redundant program itself. Collaboration extends program reach, builds capacity, brings in talent DNR doesn't have in-house, and allows for faster, more flexible program changes than a state agency can typically make alone. Partners also bring direct insight into what their own stakeholders actually want.

Minneopa Field Day is a good working example: a partnership between DNR staff (Tony Sindt and Hannah Anema), Minnesota State Park staff, MPCA, Mankato area high schools, Minnesota State University Mankato, and MSU's Water Resources Center. Funded through EPA outreach grants and other sources, it brings roughly 500 high school students to Minneopa State Park each fall for a day of outdoor activities, including fisheries programming (Mankato Free Press; KEYC News).

7. Secure more funding. Apply for grants listed on the CAHSS website which are geared toward external partners, not R3 directly - as well as state and federal funds (e.g., LCCMR and EPA grants) in partnership with external organizations where appropriate. Also looking internally for funding from other DNR divisions, not just sources outside the agency, should be part of this conversation. This comes after the leadership from #1.

8. Balance investment between adults and youth. Adults buy licenses and gear now, producing revenue results today while youth programs pay off later, if at all. Mapping ORAM and working with external partners should help the agency identify which core groups would benefit most from focused investment which needs to be tracked over time.. Many of the most successful R3 programs actually target reactivation - for example, encouraging hunters who've lapsed in one activity to try a different type of hunting. USFWS data also shows a large and growing population of wildlife watchers; programming built around non-consumptive outdoor activities could bring in new park pass purchases and spending in local communities, even without directly increasing hunting or fishing license sales.

9. Design programming around whole-family experiences, not just kids' activities. Kids more often than not, don't buy licenses or gear - parents do. And kids are far more likely to hunt or fish long-term if it's something their parents already do and value (or are learning to do and starting to prioritize), not just something they were dropped off at. That means the highest-leverage family programming isn't a standalone kids' event, but an experience the whole family wants to attend together. A useful model: a weekend retreat pairing yoga and fly fishing, with catered meals so parents aren't stuck cooking, plus hiking, kids' activities, and scavenger hunts layered in. Different activities appeal to different family members, but everyone's there together — which is what actually builds a household habit, not just a one-off kid's outing (put on by Boreal Bliss Yoga Retreats).

10. Use shooting sports as a way into hunting and angling. Half of target shooters also fish, and 38% also hunt (Target Shooting in the United States). Hunters who also shoot targets keep hunting at a much higher rate - 52%, compared to 21% for hunters who don't shoot (Fishing and Hunting R3 in the US). That makes shooting sports a good entry point, but it's one specific tactic rather than a broader strategy. Introducing existing hunters to other types of hunting — for example, showing a deer hunter other species or methods to pursue — is another way to apply the same idea.

11. Serve a wider range of groups and programs — disabilities, elderly, minority groups, families. Minnesota already has a statutory mandate for Hmong and Karen outreach, but that's one piece of a larger opportunity. Intentional program design for people with disabilities, older adults, and families widens the participant pool at a time when the traditional base is shrinking. Every underserved group is also a group of potential license buyers R3 isn't reaching — accessibility should be a design requirement, not an afterthought.

12. Quantify R3 "ripple effects" — the broader economic impact of hunting and fishing on local economies. National research (Southwick Associates, via AFWA-backed studies) puts combined hunting and shooting sports' economic impact at $133 billion nationally in 2022, supporting 1.3 million jobs — with state and local breakdowns available. Quantifying Minnesota-specific numbers would give

R3 a stronger case to the Legislature and other divisions: this isn't just a conservation program, it drives real local economic activity, and that's worth communicating explicitly.

6. Recommendation

The Minnesota DNR's mission is to partner with residents to conserve natural resources, provide outdoor recreation, and support resource-based economies. R3 sits squarely inside all three where it sustains the hunters and anglers who fund conservation work, it *is* a form of outdoor recreation, and per the "ripple-effects" research - it drives real economic activity in the communities where people hunt and fish. Given that, R3 has the potential to be scoped as a DNR-wide tool for advancing the agency's full mission, which is why the recommendations below are framed at that level.

Long-term: Explore greater strategic alignment across divisions

R3 currently sits inside the Outreach team, within the Fish and Wildlife Division - a smaller box than the mission actually calls for. Every division that touches habitat, water, forestry, parks, or enforcement has a stake in more people hunting, fishing, and engaging with the outdoors - it's shared revenue, shared recreation access, and shared economic impact for the communities the DNR serves. So it's worth asking why only one team seems to be accountable for it.

We recommend the agency explore whether R3 should be a shared responsibility across divisions rather than Outreach's alone. Some of that groundwork can start now, without waiting on anyone's sign-off. However, real accountability and follow-through will require cross-divisional leadership. Done well, this is a genuine example of the DNR breaking down internal silos on something concrete - long-term fiscal footing, recreation access, and conservation funding, all at once.

Near-term: Map the participant lifecycle using ORAM, and learn from peer states

While that larger conversation plays out, there's work the team can begin right away. Mapping current programs against ORAM and studying what states like North Dakota are already doing well - doesn't require new funding or new leadership, just time from the people already in these roles. The goal is to understand which programs are actually moving people from curiosity to lifelong participation, and which aren't, so effort and resources go where they'll matter most.

This is the right move regardless of how larger cross-divisional conversations unfold. Instead of asking for support on faith, the team can show up with evidence — what's working, what isn't, what to change — a case that holds up regardless of who's leading the agency or a given division. It also sets up several other opportunities listed above: a customer-centric approach (#3), smarter use of ELS data (#4), sharper partner collaboration (#5), and better-targeted investment across adults, youth, and families (#7 - 9) all depend on knowing where the biggest opportunities actually are first.

7. References

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA). 2024. No One is an Island: Quantifying the R3 "Ripple Effect". https://www.fishwildlife.org/mscgp/grant_detail/F24AP00238

Wildlife Management Institute (WMI). 2022. Measuring the Efficacy of State R3 Efforts: A Quantitative Approach 76:6. https://wildlifemanagement.institute/outdoor-news-bulletin/june-2022/measuring-efficacy-state-r3-efforts-quantitative-approach

Wild Turkey Population Monitoring and Research

Contributors

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1. Program/Account Overview

According to biologists within the Department of Fish & Wildlife of the Minnesota Department of natural resources, Minnesota's wild turkey population is generally believed to be stable or increasing statewide. However, the agency does not currently have a reliable method for estimating the total population, and the available information is largely based on harvest data, limited surveys and anecdotal observations from hunters and wildlife staff. As a result, we do not know the size or trajectory of Minnesota's turkey population with a high degree of confidence.

The information available also indicates that Minnesota does not have one uniform turkey population. Distinct population dynamics are occurring across 4 loosely defined regions:

- Southern populations may be experiencing localized declines and are not at the levels observed 10 to 15 years ago.

- Western agricultural areas appear to have lower but relatively stable populations, reflecting the limitations of large-scale agricultural habitat.

- Central Minnesota—from the I-94 and Highway 10 corridors north toward Brainerd and Highway 2—appears to support a high and stable population.

- Northern Minnesota continues to experience population growth and geographic expansion, including areas once thought unlikely to support significant numbers of turkeys. It remains unclear where those populations will eventually stabilize.

These regional differences are important. Without stronger monitoring, the state cannot confidently determine whether current turkey management zones accurately reflect population conditions, whether regional trends are improving or declining, or whether additional harvest opportunity can be supported. This is particularly relevant to discussions about allowing a second spring turkey license. Some areas may eventually support additional opportunities for harvest. However, the current health of the Wild Turkey Management Account does not create a financial need to expand harvest, and the available population information does not support a high-confidence statewide decision. <u>There is significant</u>

concern among the FWAC regarding any discussions about increasing take, without a defined regional understanding of population trends.

2. Funding Sources

The Wild Turkey Management Account (Fund 2208) in the Game and Fish Fund is currently healthy and well positioned to support a focused investment in population research. Since 2019, the account has doubled in funds attributed. This account *can* be used for evaluation of turkey population, but not for permanent staffing & hiring of personnel. Over the course of the last few years, the MN DNR has not had a permanent turkey biologist to work towards achieving the goals of the account.

The account should not be viewed simply as a balance that needs to be spent down. It should be treated as an opportunity to answer the foundational questions necessary for responsible, long-term turkey management.

3. Recommendations

- Establish a scientifically credible method for estimating and monitoring Minnesota's turkey population.
- Better define the state's distinct turkey regions and determine whether existing management zones remain appropriate.
- Establish reliable regional population trends and identify areas of concern or continued expansion.
- Evaluate the appropriate number and distribution of turkey licenses.
- Identify where future hunting opportunities could be responsibly expanded.

The committee would recommend the quickest opportunity to actualize the return of the funds in this account through a temporarily funded & dedicated wild turkey biologist through a trusted conservation nonprofit, university or other qualified partner. The position should have a defined scope and duration, with funding scheduled to expire upon completion of the statewide assessment, regional population framework and final presentation of findings and recommendations. This approach would add focused capacity without creating an indefinite personnel obligation.

The work should include evaluation of a statewide camera-based monitoring system similar to approaches used in neighboring states. If designed collaboratively, this may also support monitoring of deer, bear, furbearers and other species, allowing costs and benefits to be shared across multiple programs.

Minnesota DNR has an opportunity to replace assumptions with evidence. A targeted investment now would give the DNR, hunters and policymakers the information needed to make strong, transparent and sustainable wild turkey management decisions promptly.

4. References

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. (2025). *Game and Fish Fund annual report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025*. https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/gamefishoversight/final-game-&-fish-fund-report-fy25.pdf