

2022 Annual Report





From the director

Nebraska Game and Parks had a tremendously rewarding 2022, celebrating the Aquatic Habitat Program, updating our recruitment, retention and reactivation plan, and providing access and support for outdoor recreation activities and education.

At the same time, we were focused on water — or rather the lack of it. Wildfire raged across portions of the state, and Game and Parks assisted other state and federal agencies in containing and preventing them. Wildfires affect people, communities and the natural resources we manage for the long term.

While the lack of rain dropped water levels in our lakes, it provided the opportunity to make improvements to our boat ramps across the state. We were able to repair some and extend others, which will improve and increase access and opportunity for years to come.

These improvements were partially paid for by the Nebraska Aquatic Habitat Program, which is funded entirely by anglers. The program enhances aquatic ecosystems by implementing restoration techniques in streams, lakes, reservoirs and the watersheds that feed them. In addition to improving aquatic habitat and water quality, the program improves boat and bank angler access.

When the program launched in 1997, it was the first of its kind in the nation. The program requires an Aquatic Habitat Stamp, which is included with each fishing permit sold. The program has generated more than \$90 million for priority improvements to 137 water bodies so far. To celebrate the program's success and milestones, we spent a Saturday in June at the recently renovated Conestoga Lake, our largest Aquatic Habitat Program project. Families and fishers came out and enjoyed many fun activities on the water.

These improvements and investments in our natural resources are possible thanks to many partners in conservation and our valued constituents. Outdoor enthusiasts, landowners and conservationists help shape our priority initiatives. In 2022, we completed our five-year R3 plan to grow and maintain participation in outdoor pursuits.

On-the-ground efforts also were in play. We introduced thousands of Nebraskans to outdoor skills at our parks, special events and outdoor expos. Workshops helped hundreds of people take their skills to the next level. We hosted our first conservation kayak clean-ups at water bodies in urban areas; expanded our community fishing nights; and more.

Being accessible and listening to our constituents remains a priority for the Commission. We involve the public in our decision-making process through public meetings and events and garner feedback through emails, surveys, meetings and phone calls. Fish and wildlife research and survey results that guide our management are shared by staff and are available online.

I am proud of the successes Game and Parks saw in 2022. It was only possible because of our dedicated and talented staff, who believe wholeheartedly in our stewardship of the state's fish, wildlife, park and outdoor recreation resources. Nebraskans and our visitors value their outdoor resources. We know the outdoors is important to our quality of life, mental health and well-being — and time outdoors truly is time well spent.

Sincerely,

Timothy McCoy
Director

By the numbers

Nebraska’s state park system is made up of 77 areas encompassing 105,344 acres. The state park system includes:

- 8 state parks, comprising 31,836 acres
- 57 state recreation areas, comprising 65,371 acres
- 10 state historical parks, comprising 2,497 acres
- 2 state recreation trails, comprising 4,144 acres and 324 miles

Additionally, wildlife management areas, as well as private lands enrolled in the Open Fields and Waters program, offer walk-in access for hunting, fishing and trapping.

- Lands enrolled in Open Fields and Waters: 372,000 land acres, 600 water or wetland acres, and 40 stream miles
- Wildlife management areas: 287 areas encompassing 184,423 acres

Economic impact

Outdoor recreation contributes greatly to our quality of life. In Nebraska, hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing and state park visitation support more than 24,000 jobs and has an economic impact of \$4.2 billion annually.

Because of their participation in outdoor recreation pursuits, Nebraskans and nonresidents themselves contributed tremendously to the economy. In 2022, there were:

- 185,000 certified hunters in Nebraska;
- 266,000 certified anglers;
- 508,000 park entry permits purchased by visitors;
- 126,000 shooting sports participants; and
- 80,000 registered boats.



Canada goose,
farm pond, Lancaster County

Nebraska Aquatic Habitat Program turns 25, continues improving fishing

Two great feats were celebrated by Nebraska Game and Parks in June at Conestoga State Recreation Area – the 25th anniversary of the Aquatic Habitat Program and the largest project ever completed in the program.

Since its inception in 1997, the Nebraska Aquatic Habitat Program has generated more than \$90 million for improvements to 137 water bodies. The program works to enhance aquatic ecosystems by implementing restoration techniques in-lake and in the watersheds that feed them. In addition to improving aquatic habitat and water quality, the program also works vigorously to improve boat and bank angler access at Nebraska water bodies.

Funding for this program is provided by anglers when they purchase the Aquatic Habitat Stamp, which is included in the price of a fishing license. Nebraska was the first state in the nation to require such a stamp, without which these projects bringing new life to aging waters wouldn't be possible.

To celebrate our success, on June 18 a special event, “Day at the Lake,” brought families to the recently renovated Conestoga Lake for fun, fishing, kayaking, paddleboarding and food. Guests could talk with biologists and consultants who designed the renovation and learn about new features and fish species in Conestoga Lake, the site of the largest Aquatic Habitat Program project in the program’s history.



The following is a list of other projects completed or nearly completed in 2022 using Aquatic Habitat Program, Sportfish Restoration and Nebraska Environmental Trust funding:

North Platte I-80 Lake – The south side of the lake received several upgrades. Five fishing piers were built, and Americans with Disabilities Act access was added to the boat ramp and one pier. Barriers to prevent overgrown vegetation also were installed near these fishing piers.

Valentine National Wildlife Refuge – Carp barriers — which prevent carp from moving into or out of a water body — often can clog with vegetation. Rotating screens were installed to prevent this problem in the outlet structures of Clear and Hackberry lakes.

Grable Pond North at Fort Robinson State Park – This pond was deepened along the perimeter. The outlet structure also was replaced and an ADA-access jetty was installed, with fish habitat features placed within casting distance.



Grable Pond North,
Fort Robinson SP

I-80 lakes – Russian olive and cedar trees were cleared around West Wood River Wildlife Management Area, Bufflehead WMA, West Brady WMA and East Sutherland WMA, opening areas for angler access.

Summit Lake – The sediment basins were excavated on the south and west ends to provide additional storage and prevent it from entering the main reservoir. Angler jetties and the boat ramp also were improved and stabilized, and a kayak launch was developed.

Bordeaux Creek – This Pine Ridge project was designed to reconnect the creek to the floodplain, ultimately improving bank stability and cool-water fish habitat. These changes will improve the trout fishery and angler access, which are an important recreation component to the stream.

Wagon Train Lake – This project restored the sediment basin to its original capacity and modified the design to improve sediment capture. A boat launch and angler access facilities were repaired, habitat shoals and vegetation barriers added to the reservoir basin, and undesirable fish were replaced with recreationally valuable ones.

Gracie Creek – Flooding from 2019 substantially reduced the capacity of the Gracie Creek Pond. This project developed a sediment dike to make it easier to remove sediment in the future. It also removed 30,000 yards of sediment from the pond. Habitat and angler access improvements also were made below the outlet to improve spring white bass fishing.

Victoria Springs SRA – A consulting firm was hired to identify nutrients in the lake causing considerable issues with aquatic vegetation and duckweed. These are leading to fish kills and inhibiting angler access.

Game and Parks fights fires to save lives, homes and habitats

Moderate- to severe-drought conditions across the state made Nebraska susceptible to wildfires in 2022. Over the course of the year, Nebraska Game and Parks staff assisted with the containment and extinguishing of wildfires as they popped up both in the west and the east.

Game and Parks did its part to try and prevent wildfires. In addition to continued cedar tree reduction, fuel reduction and timber thinning efforts statewide, fire bans were put into place at many Nebraska state recreation areas and some wildlife management areas beginning in April. When windy conditions persisted, additional bans were put in place.

In March, a wildfire burned nearly 1,000 acres of private land north and east of Wellfleet in Lincoln County. Helicopters filled water tanks from Lake Maloney. The next month, a fire started northeast of Arapahoe and stretched for 22 miles, burning approximately 35,000 acres. A few days later, volunteer firefighters and a neighbor with a farm disk assisted Game and Parks staff with lighting a backfire on Little Blue WMA in Thayer County to contain the fire at less than 200 acres.

In late July and early August, the Carter Canyon Fire burned across almost the entire 2,200 acres of Cedar Canyon Wildlife Management Area southwest of Gering, while a sizable portion of the 10,533-acre Carter Canyon Platte River Basin Environments property also was blackened. In total, that fire swept across 15,630 acres. The Chat Canyon Fire in Cherry County started Aug. 4 and burned approximately 875 acres with nearly 170 acres of Chat Canyon WMA burned. The fire was also on private lands and parts of McKelvie National Forest.

In September, a wildfire burned about 400 acres of Williams Gap WMA in the Wildcat Hills southeast of Gering. Wildfires ripped through Olive Creek State Recreation Area and Olive Creek Wildlife Management Area in southwestern Lancaster County on Oct. 23.

The Commission is grateful to all volunteers, agencies, landowners and everyone who worked together to combat these wildfires.



Wildfire at Buffalo Creek
WMA, Wildcat Hills

Service

Education programs reach new audiences

With creative programming, Nebraska Game and Parks was able to reach new audiences in person and virtually, expanding ecological education and engaging people in outdoor interests across the state.

These efforts included coordinated “Nature Nerd” Trivia Nights, which brought people together at five locations across the state for a fun challenge. From Lincoln to Scottsbluff, teams enjoyed evenings of camaraderie over their shared interest in nature.

Elsewhere, Nebraskans came together to help pick up litter on two urban lakes. These evenings were open to those who wished to participate but had never kayaked, as well as to the dedicated kayak community.

And in Omaha, we partnered with a nearly a dozen organizations to host Benson Park Community Nature Night — a night dedicated to exploring nature, enjoying outdoor recreation and celebrating community. We also worked closely with Girls, Inc., to provide nature-based exploration and education focused on the growth of girls into future leaders.

Each of these events help introduce people to Game and Parks — while helping grow or maintain support for our mission.



Kayaking at the Benson Park Family Nature Night in Omaha

Commission updates plan to engage outdoor recreationists

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission approved a five-year plan to recruit, retain and reactivate outdoor enthusiasts in 2022. This 2023-2027 Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation Plan provides goals, objectives and strategies to help Game and Parks engage participants in outdoor opportunities and maintain widespread support for conservation and recreation. The plan built on prior efforts in hunting and fishing, but expanded to include boating, parks and shooting sports for the first time — positioning Nebraska as one of the first states to do so.



Cornhusker Trap Shoot, Doniphan



Fishing Derby, Grable Ponds, Fort Robinson State Park

Conservation officers protect and serve

Nebraska Game and Parks conservation officers play an important part in protecting our state’s fish and wildlife for the future.

In addition to enforcing parks, wildlife and boating rules, conservation officers travel to every inch of the state to keep us safe. Our officers provide critical emergency response, such as to fires, floods, crisis situations or missing persons cases, and investigate major crimes. They also frequently support other enforcement agencies, particularly in rural areas where assistance can be limited.

In 2022, our team of conservation officers had nearly 250,000 contacts with Nebraskans and visitors to the state. This included more than 44,000 angler checks; nearly 70,650 parks responses; 20,600 boater checks; 23,000 hunter checks; and more than 150 search and rescue missions. Officers also assisted with nearly 2,000 outdoors programs.

Also in 2022, we hired seven new conservation officers to help fill the ever-increasing demand for enforcement personnel. Because whether it’s a state park, a wildlife management area or one of Nebraska’s many water bodies, we know it’s important to be there, working for the safety of Nebraskans and our wildlife.

Stahlecker honored for life-saving effort

Nebraska Game and Parks Conservation Officer Trevor Stahlecker was honored in 2022 for his role in a life-saving effort at Pawnee State Recreation Area the year prior. The award, an Agency Partner Certificate of Merit from the Lancaster County Sheriff’s Office, was given to Stahlecker and a Lancaster County Sheriff Terry Wagner for their quick response to a crisis situation at the lake. But for their quick actions, the person in crisis may not have survived. Stahlecker, a conservation officer since 2017, covers Lancaster and Saline counties.

Year-round programming boosts fishing participation

Enhanced by the partnerships of volunteers and organizations, the outreach to fishers helped get people fishing and growing skills in 2022.

- More than 200 Certified Youth Fishing Instructors and volunteers gave more than 6,000 hours to fishing education and outreach efforts in 2022. These volunteers make possible the 170 statewide fishing events that reached more than 10,000 anglers.
- Thirty-seven Community Fishing Events attracted 1,200 guests.
- Eight “Discover” programs taught advanced fly fishing, bow fishing and ice fishing techniques to an additional 236 participants thanks to the contribution of Youth Fishing Instructors, Cornhusker Fly Fishers, Bowfishers of Nebraska and the Nebraska Game and Fish Association.
- Project Healing Waters and Cornhusker Fly Fishers, with Game and Parks staff, also cosponsored fly rod building and fly tying classes.
- These partners, in addition to the Nebraska Walleye Association and Live Well Go Fish, also participated in the Day at the Lake at Conestoga State Recreation Area, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Aquatic Habitat Program.
- Take ‘em Fishing, a program that encourages anglers to take a beginner fishing, with chances to win prizes, continued in 2022 with 950 entries.



Family Fishing event,
Benson Park, Omaha



Family Fishing Night,
Holmes Lake, Lincoln

Encouraging people to go fishing

Keeping outdoor activities top-of-mind is crucial for engaging Nebraskans in the outdoors. To boost awareness of the activities offered by Nebraska’s state parks and fishing opportunities in the state’s water bodies, promotional spots highlighting these options appeared statewide in a variety of media channels. These efforts will continue in 2023.

Social media, video and digital ads were paired with traditional radio and television messages. New outreach strategies included keyword search responsive ads and digital ads in weather apps when conditions were favorable for outdoor pursuits.

Ornate Box Turtle named state reptile

Until 2022, Nebraska did not have a state reptile. But in October, during the annually celebrated Nebraska Reptile Month, Gov. Pete Ricketts proclaimed the Ornate Box Turtle as the State Reptile. It joins the state bird, state migratory bird, state fish and state mammal in highlighting the importance of Nebraska’s wildlife to our state. The box turtle is the state’s only land turtle and is found in short, mixed and tallgrass prairies; the turtle is most commonly found in the Sandhills. Other Nebraska reptiles include snakes and lizards.



Ornate box turtle,
Sandhills



Gov. Pete Ricketts and
Game and Parks educator
Monica Macoubrie



Wetland,
Wood Duck WMA

Collaboration boosts education and outreach on Nebraska wetlands

Nebraska Game and Parks collaborated with Platte Basin Timelapse over the past two years to create a series of integrated outreach and educational materials aimed at increasing awareness of the importance of Nebraska wetlands and the need for their conservation.

These materials, including an updated Guide to Nebraska’s Wetlands, a new publication for children, videos, and photo galleries, offer the opportunity to learn about Nebraska’s diverse wetland types: playas, sandhills, saline, riverine and urban.

This project was led by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and was funded by a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Partners on the project included Platte Basin Timelapse at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, and Ducks Unlimited.



Campsite, Louisville SRA

Growing our reach and relevancy

In an effort to better serve many people across the state, Nebraska Game and Parks sought input from its external advisory board to learn how we can improve and grow our relevancy efforts in meaningful ways. What we learned included:

- Outdoor recreation for expanded audiences includes activities such as picnicking, hiking, soccer and being outside with family — activities not always associated with Game and Parks offerings.
- Translating our website, print materials and signage in other languages; using inclusive imagery; and designing programs specifically for underserved audiences, as well as sharing diverse perspectives, is more inviting and meaningful to more people.
- Growing awareness of what opportunities or resources we already offer is important and likely would require dedicated funding to expand communications efforts.

Game and Parks recognized for excellence in communications

Nebraska Game and Parks earned 11 awards of excellence at the 2022 Association for Conservation Information annual conference.

The agency received four first-, four second- and three third-place awards in the national peer-critique contest. The first-place awards were for an informational campaign about camping reservations being required at lakes McConaughy and Ogallala during the peak season; for a marketing campaign for the Nebraska state parks centennial celebration in 2021; for Trail Tales Magazine, a publication for fourth-graders across Nebraska; and for a Nebraskaland Magazine duck hunting photo.

ACI is a nonprofit organization of natural resources communicators representing conservation, parks and natural resource agencies across the United States.



Winning photo, waterfowl hunt, Platte River

Recreation

Capital Maintenance Fund helps improve 35 park areas across the state

In 2014, the Nebraska Legislature established the Capital Maintenance Fund to preserve Nebraska’s public outdoor recreation facilities and statewide park system. This is a network of 77 park venues and trails managed by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for the people of the state and beyond. In 2021, the Legislature extended this funding through 2027.

This investment from the Legislature has enabled Game and Parks to launch an aggressive, much-needed capital maintenance plan for state parks and facilities. This will ensure these spaces are maintained into the future, improving safety and functionality of core infrastructure and meeting the growing demand for new experiences by all.

In 2022, more than \$6.3 million in Capital Maintenance Fund dollars was spent on nearly 70 park improvement projects at 35 parks across the state. These improvements were aimed at bringing aging infrastructure up-to-date — and up to code — and increasing accessibility to meet Americans with Disabilities Act standards at facilities statewide. More than 85 additional improvement projects are currently underway. These accomplishments to date have produced numerous positive outcomes and comments.

Other funding sources used for these projects included the agency’s Park Cash Fund and state and federal funding sources.



Caboose lodging,
Two Rivers SRA



1887 Officer's Quarters,
Fort Robinson SP

Learning about our state park visitors

In 2021, Nebraska Game and Parks, in collaboration with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, conducted the first survey of its kind of park visitors so we could better understand how they recreate and how we can better serve them in Nebraska’s state parks.

More than 4,000 park guests completed the survey about their experiences over the course of the year, and in 2022, we were able to dive into the data collected. Among a plethora of other information, we discovered:

- 97% of respondents come to a state park, state recreation area or state historical park with family or friends.
- 54% stay overnight, of those 56% stayed for three or more nights. Of those who stay, half use recreational vehicle campsites, 18% stay in cabins and 14% utilize tent campsites.
- Day users typically stay about 3.5 hours.
- Top activities include viewing wildlife and scenery, camping, hiking and swimming.
- 92% had purchased a park permit before, and four out of five reported being satisfied with the value of annual and daily park permit fees.
- Four out of five were satisfied with their park experience and the cleanliness and upkeep of park facilities.
- Though 81% of the respondents were Nebraska residents, people from 45 states took the survey.

We look forward to continuing to examine and utilize the data to improve guests’ park experiences.

International Dark Sky Park designation earned

Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area, renowned for its Sandhills location providing spectacular astronomical views, was certified in 2022 as an International Dark Sky Park. Merritt has hosted the annual Nebraska Star Party each summer for 29 years, when professional and amateur astronomers converge to take advantage of a sky free of light pollution. Merritt is the first Nebraska site certified by the International Dark-Sky Association.

International Dark Sky Parks are parks that are publicly- or privately-owned spaces protected for natural conservation that implement good outdoor lighting and provide dark sky programs for visitors. Merritt, a 9,000-acre park southwest of Valentine in Cherry County, already is known for its excellent fishing, boating and camping opportunities.

The designation was earned in partnership with the Nebraska Tourism Commission.



Groundwork laid for STAR WARS projects

In 2022, a Nebraska Legislative special committee, the Statewide Tourism and Recreational Water Access and Resource Sustainability (STAR WARS), released its initiative to increase access to water resources, outdoor recreational opportunities and enhance tourism.

This initiative was supported by the Nebraska Legislature and Gov. Pete Ricketts, which gave Nebraska Game and Parks a one-time transfer of \$100 million for three state park areas.

These Water Recreation Enhancement Fund dollars will enhance recreational opportunities for Nebraskans and visitors with strategic investments and planning at three state park areas.

Proposed plans include:

- A new marina and site improvements at Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area. This project will expand the existing Weigand Marina from 119 slips to 500-600 slips. It also includes a marina store and small restaurant, park headquarters, boat ramps, breakwaters, and other features and amenities. A project design team was hired in late 2022.

- The creation of a mid-sized lodge and Missouri River access at Niobrara State Park. Part of this project includes planning and development to improve and enhance Niobrara SP as a year-round tourist destination.

- Marina development at Lake McConaughy SRA. The location, size and scope of this project will be determined through a feasibility study set to be completed in 2023. A steering committee consisting of local and regional partners also has been established.

Funding for these projects became available in mid-July 2022. Planning and development of these STAR WARS projects will continue in 2023 and beyond.

Indian Cave opens accessible boardwalk

Indian Cave State Park’s iconic cave, home to prehistoric Native American petroglyphs, became accessible to the public again in late summer 2022 with the completed construction of a new boardwalk and viewing deck. The old boardwalk was unusable after a historic bomb cyclone in March 2019 caused a landslide.

While the southeast Nebraska park’s old boardwalk was a series of steps and platforms, the new one has a ramp compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act and an 8-foot-wide viewing deck. In addition to the ramp, a 5-foot-wide staircase accesses the boardwalk. The total length of the boardwalk is 420 feet, but from the top of the staircase, the boardwalk extends 160 feet into the canyon. The Missouri River also can be seen from the boardwalk.

Interpretive panels are being created to inform visitors of the cultural aspects of the area and tell the story of the petroglyphs. The \$800,000 project was paid for by the Capital Maintenance Fund.



American Legion donates to new all-terrain wheelchair program

The Nebraska American Legion donated \$16,055 to Nebraska Game and Parks in the fall for the purchase of an all-terrain wheelchair for state park visitors. Game and Parks currently has two of the tracked wheelchairs at Ponca State Park. The chairs provide people the freedom of mobility to fish, view nature and enjoy the outdoors in all types of terrain. Game and Parks will continue fundraising efforts for the program, with the goal of having eight track chairs available for use at state parks across the state. They will be used at park events, mentored hunts, shooting ranges and education programs.



All-terrain wheelchair for outdoor recreation



Beach camp, Lake McConaughy SRA

Lake McConaughy: A safer, family-friendly destination

In 2021, Game and Parks and partners in the Keith County area created a safer, family-friendly environment at lakes McConaughy and Ogallala when it required reservations for camping during peak season. The new system, largely implemented to combat problems of overcrowding, marked a monumental shift from prior years.

The new strategy meant visitors could choose from Game and Parks’ 1,500 designated sites — 500 of which are in nine campgrounds, and another 1,000 spots at 17 beach areas along Lake McConaughy’s shoreline. The parks attract hundreds of thousands of visitors each year for its large, open water and excellent fishery. Since implementation, requests for emergency services has declined rapidly and visitor satisfaction has improved. Lodging and sales tax receipts for Keith County increased as well.

In 2022, the agency continued its “Know Before You Go” campaign to spread the message about the reservations system. Potential visitors also are referred to a website with frequently asked questions, and links to other privately-owned lodging options available. Messaging included news media outlets in Wyoming, Nebraska and Colorado.

Staffing shortages affect hours of operation

Nebraska Game and Parks annually hires nearly 900 workers across the state to assist with state park operations during the summer. In 2022, at some larger state park areas, there only were about half the needed staff to operate some activities. The result: Some parks were forced to adjust their activity hours heading into the summer because of a limited workforce.

Positions that were most in need included lifeguards, shooting range staff, housekeepers and concession workers. This shortage occurred even though Game and Parks had raised the pay rates for seasonal staff by more than 33% and offered training and certification for new employees. We proactively sought candidates to fill open positions recruiting a number of places, including job fairs and through colleges, and marketing online with a “If you are happiest outdoors ... work where you play” message.



Aquatic Center pool,
E.T. Mahoney SP



Tipi unit,
Platte River SP (1982)

Platte River State Park’s 40th anniversary celebration

Platte River State Park celebrated its 40th anniversary in August 2022 with a daylong event that featured food, games, history and music.

Guests enjoyed a fun run, educational activities, and campground and water games, as well as live classic country music. Visitors had the opportunity to learn about the history of the Plains Indians, the early settlement in Otoe County. Bison stew and Dutch-oven desserts topped off the festivities.

The park, nestled halfway between Lincoln and Omaha, used to be the site of two separate camps – Harriet Harding Campfire Girls Camp and Camp Esther K. Newman – and a tract of woodlands. Today, the park boasts a plethora of opportunities for outdoor recreation, as well as unique overnight stay accommodations.



Boat ramp,
Merritt Reservoir SRA

Finding opportunity among low-water challenges

Access to water bodies is necessary for many anglers and recreational boaters. Nebraska Game and Parks maintains 185 boat launch facilities and park and wildlife management areas. Ramps must be maintained, replaced, repaired or expanded because of increased use, environmental factors and age.

Funding for new projects and repairs is made possible through the Aquatic Habitat Program, Capital Maintenance Funds and Sportfish Restoration Motorboat Access Funds.

Because of the drought and lowering water levels, staff worked to extend boat ramps where possible in 2022. In some cases, they used the low water level to reveal damage to ramps that needed repair.

Anglers recognized for state records and Master Angler awards

Nebraska anglers had a great year of fishing during 2022, with one new bowfishing state record for a bigmouth buffalo, and three new rod-and-reel state records for shorthead redhorse, yellow bass and creek chub certified.

More than 1,200 Master Angler certificates also were issued for 48 fish species caught in more than 160 water bodies. Awards for channel catfish topped the list, followed closely by largemouth bass, hybrid striped/white bass and walleye.



Shannon and Tim
Vanderheiden,
Platte River SP

Memorial run has \$40K impact for Nebraska state park trail

The Tyler Vanderheiden Memorial Run, an annual race aimed at raising awareness and understanding of mental health, raised more than \$8,000 for Nebraska Game and Parks state park trails in 2022. That donation triggered access of up to \$32,000 in matching federal Recreation Trails Program funds. The funds are being used to support the construction and upgrade of the Platte River State Park trail that leads to Stone Creek Falls. The \$1 million in improvements are aimed at making the trail Americans with Disabilities Act accessible.

Runners from every state in the nation — and one person in London and another in Puerto Rico — participated either virtually or in-person in the May 14 race. Participants used the hashtags #PreventSuicide and #Run4TJV when they shared their race stories, memories of Tyler and their connection to the outdoors.

Proceeds from the annual race will continue to be donated to the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation for the creation, maintenance or upgrade of trails at the 76 state park areas.



Serenity Garden at Schramm Park SRA

Venture Parks developments continue thanks to generous donors

Development in Nebraska’s Venture Parks continued with the start of three construction projects in 2022. Venture Parks, an innovative public-private partnership to improve Nebraska’s four state parks and recreation areas along the Platte River — Eugene T. Mahoney State Park, Platte River SP, Schramm Park State Recreation Area and Louisville SRA — are where unique experiences and enhanced camping opportunities have been created in response to demand.

The Schramm Treehouse Classroom at Schramm Park SRA is scheduled for completion in 2023. The approximately 2,800-square-foot, two-story facility will have a covered patio and deck. The classroom will bring added opportunities for educational programming and field trips.

A new feature of the Bounce Village — the Kangaroo Jumper, a 30-by-75-foot inflated pillow — has been installed at Louisville SRA. Construction of the Bounce Village continues, including of the King of the Hill grass hill play feature, with an expected opening of the village in 2023.

The James Family Conservatory addition at Mahoney SP is expected to be completed in summer 2023. The Nature Center and Outdoor Education Classroom will be the park’s new center for outdoor education activities.

Expanding public/private partnerships

Tentrr, a provider of ready-to-go camping accommodations, announced a new partnership with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission in August. Tentrr has 27 campsites available to book at Louisville State Recreation Area, Ponca State Park and Sherman Reservoir SRA. Additional sites are being considered at other state park areas.

Tentrr’s campsites include a canvas wall tent, memory foam mattress, Adirondack chairs and a fire pit. Other amenities include a propane heater and a table with benches. Tentrr’s single sites can accommodate six campers — with two in the safari tent and up to four additional campers in the included pop-up tent.

In the fall, Tentrr launched the annual Tentrr Pass, which gives purchasers the chance to camp at Tentrr sites with no overnight fees for the year. This includes access to Tentrr’s 200-plus state park locations across the nation.



Tentrr site, Louisville SRA

Management

Combating depredation with landowners

Nebraska Game and Parks continued to work with landowners in 2022 to reduce wildlife damage issues to agricultural property while respecting their needs and that of science-backed wildlife management. Technical assistance for damage associated with game species was given in a timely manner to more than 500 people across Nebraska. Nine big game meetings, six landowner elk meetings, and multimedia outreach through the agency's website, radio shows,

emails and news releases help keep the public informed about tools and resources available to prevent depredation. Because hunting is the preferred management tool in big game depredation situations, the Commission continued aggressive big game permitting to control populations in areas of greatest damage concern and authorized a special depredation season for elk in southwest Nebraska.



Bull elk, Sandhills

Special elk depredation season a success

Eight elk were harvested during Nebraska’s first special elk depredation season in July 2022. Five bulls and three cows were taken during the season on private land in parts of Lincoln, Perkins, Keith, Deuel and Garden counties. Game and Parks considered the season a success as it achieved its intended goals.

This one-month season was designed to allow for as many potential hunters as possible in the geographic area — roughly 873 square miles. The season drew 178 hunters, 152 residents of Nebraska and 26 nonresidents. They purchased 208 permits, usable once they gained landowner access to private property.

Game and Parks has worked with landowners in this area for several years to lower elk herds to reduce damage to the cropland, including trampling, wallowing and consumption of crops. The small herds that cause damage stay through harvest, then disperse, making it difficult for hunters to take elk during the general season. Generally, only five or six elk are harvested in the unit that comprises this geographic area each season.



Plain pocketbook mussel research

Stocking fish, mussels enhance aquatic resources

One of Nebraska’s strengths is its diversity of sportfishing. It serves anglers well by producing a variety of species of fish. Nebraska Game and Parks in 2022 stocked more than 65 million fish into 275 waters in 71 counties. These stockings consisted of 20 species of fish, including hybrids.

The spring and fall stocking of trout in water bodies across the state, including at Trout Lake at Two Rivers State Recreation Area, continues to be popular with anglers of all ages. Trout also are supplied for the waters hosting community fishing events. In 2022, more than 260,000 trout were stocked at dozens of water bodies.

Staff also continue to make strides propagating freshwater mussels, which have been in decline naturally over time in the state’s streams and rivers. Since 2014, Game and Parks has propagated and stocked threatened mussels in select areas to successfully establish populations.



Weigand Marina at Lewis and Clark Lake SRA

Protecting our waters from invasive species

Nebraska Game and Parks is proactively battling any introduction or spread of aquatic invasive species to prevent the harmful environmental impacts they would have on our water bodies.

These species include the zebra mussel, a highly invasive species that forms dense colonies and filters large quantities of plankton from water, decreasing the food supply for native species. In addition, these mussels pollute swimming areas with sharp shells and clog water intake pipes. The Missouri River has an existing zebra mussel population along its entire length downstream of Gavins Point Dam. Lewis and Clark Lake, Lake Yankton and the Offutt Base Lake are the only other confirmed Nebraska waters that have established zebra mussel populations.

As part of our prevention plan, in 2022, the agency inspected a record 6,627 watercraft, more than 4,000 more than the previous year. This rapid increase in efficiency comes only the second year into the Aquatic Invasive Species Program being fully staffed. This efficiency will remain important to our fight against aquatic invasive species threats that continue to surround the state.

We sampled more than 40 water bodies monthly in 2022 for zebra mussel larvae, and we surveyed 39 water bodies across the state for invasive aquatic plants, resulting in seven new detections of Eurasian Watermilfoil and one new detection of Brittle Naiad.

A new outreach campaign, “Protect our Waters,” is helping build awareness of aquatic invasive species. The goal is to inform boaters of their role in preventing AIS through thoroughly cleaning, draining and drying their watercraft before leaving a water body.

Flock of wild turkey toms,
Lincoln County



Hunting regulation changes affect nonresident hunters

Changes to some wildlife regulations and orders in 2022 were designed to restrict nonresident deer and turkey hunters to enhance the experience of residents. One change allows Nebraska hunters to buy deer and antelope permits in non-draw management units before nonresidents by creating additional purchase periods for big game permits. The result gives residents preference over nonresidents.

In another instance, in part to maintain resident access to hunting permits, Game and Parks established a sales cap on nonresident either-sex or buck-only deer permits for all permits except landowner and youth. Nonresident antelope archery also was added to the list of draw permits, meaning it no longer is unlimited in quantity.

In preparation for 2023, some changes were made affecting turkey hunting. The quota of spring season permits available to nonresidents is 10,000, no longer unlimited. Several other changes affected all turkey hunters, including reduced personal limits and fall bag limits, and a shortened fall season.

Free-earned Landowner Elk Permit Program

2022 was the first year of the Free-earned Landowner Elk Permit Program. Created during the 2021 Legislation Session, this program allows a person who owns or leases at least 80 acres of farm- or ranchland for agricultural purposes to qualify for an either-sex elk permit following 10 verified general antlerless elk harvests. The goal of this program is to increase hunting access opportunities and antlerless elk harvest, while benefitting landowners who regularly have elk on their property but can't draw a landowner permit.



Ring-necked pheasant,
Washington County

Plan to manage pheasants, improve hunting updated

Pheasant hunting is a favorite past-time of many Nebraskans. Partnerships, thoughtful planning and habitat conservation are critical to provide the habitat pheasants need to thrive.

In January, the Nebraska Game and Parks board of commissioners approved Nebraska's updated plan to improve pheasant hunting. The Berggren Plan 2.0 aims to provide the best pheasant hunting experiences possible, build upon past successes, expand partnerships, and direct management activities in the most cost-effective ways.

The plan is dedicated to the memory of Commissioner Lynn Berggren, whose passion, energy and enthusiasm for pheasants and pheasant hunting inspired all who helped create it. The plan will guide Game and Parks' pheasant management over the next five years.

State’s first regulated harvest of river otters a success

The recovery of river otters is a prime example of conservation success in Nebraska. Once extirpated from the state, caused by over-harvest and habitat loss, wildlife biologists and conservationists reintroduced river otters into Nebraska from 1986 to 1991. River otters now can be found nearly statewide with populations in most major river systems.

Game and Parks’ goal is to manage and maintain healthy, thriving populations for the long term. The pilot season provided data about statewide river otter distribution, while continuing to allow the population to expand.

A total of 78 river otters were tagged during Nebraska’s first regulated harvest season. The season opened on Nov. 1, 2021, and closed on Jan. 10, 2022, three days after the season close trigger of 75 river otters was met. Otters were allowed to be harvested by trapping only.



Inviting public input on fishing

Angler satisfaction is important to the Commission. This year, the agency met with many partners and anglers from across the state to exchange ideas and information on challenges, opportunities and the science of maintaining great fisheries.

The Commission held virtual public meetings for each district in the spring. Staff shared area improvements, fish stockings, and the fishing forecast for area lakes. More than 320 people participated in the meetings.

The agency also met with anglers and concessionaires at Lake McConaughy to talk about the walleye plan for the lake. In 2022, this included surveying nighttime anglers along the Kingsley Dam, stocking more than 23 million walleye, and beginning a research project on walleye survival.

Anglers are excited and looking forward to a great year of fishing in 2023.

Conservation

Funding will help restore Sandhills grassland and wetland habitat

Nebraska Game and Parks and its partners received a \$4 million grant through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to restore grassland and wetland habitat for at-risk species.

A four-year project starting in 2023 will take place in the Sandhills and adjacent areas, where wetlands and streams face alteration and channelization and where eastern red cedar is encroaching on native grasslands. Eastern red cedar can reduce available forage for livestock, increase wildfire risk, reduce stream flow, and degrade wildlife habitat.

A voluntary, incentive-based approach will be used to improve habitat, while sustaining resilient ranching communities. The goals are to build capacity, restore wetlands and streams,

and remove trees using mechanical tree removal and prescribed fire.

These efforts will benefit the following at-risk species in Nebraska: the greater prairie-chicken, long-billed curlew, American burying beetle, regal fritillary, plains topminnow and western prairie fringed orchid.

Project partners include Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever, Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition, Northern Prairies Land Trust, Rainwater Basin Joint Venture, Sandhills Task Force, Santee Sioux Nation and The Nature Conservancy. The project includes several areas of the state connecting to grasslands of South Dakota, Colorado, Kansas and the Santee Sioux Reservation.



Long-billed curlew,
Oglala National Grassland

Mountain lion collaring
at Ponderosa WMA



A collection of
GPS points in
close proximity
received from a
mountain lion
tracking collar

How tracking collars help decision making

Since the 1990s, Nebraska Game and Parks has placed tracking collars on a variety of species — including big horn sheep, mountain lions, elk and mule deer — to help us better understand and manage them.

GPS tracking collars collect valuable information about an animal's location, habitat use, movements, and its death. It allows us to see what other populations they share resources with and how populations in one area may influence another. In the past year, we have seen elk and antelope move 70-100 miles in a short span of time and observed a mountain lion travel 600 miles from northern Nebraska to central Illinois. These collars give us a snapshot into the lives of species that otherwise would remain unknown.

In 2023, we plan to expand the use of this important technology to our wild turkey population in northwest and southwest Nebraska.

Mountain lion research update

While Nebraska Game and Parks has known mountain lions can travel hundreds of miles and to any portion of Nebraska for decades, our research program didn't know just how far they move across the landscape. That changed in 2022 with the dispersal of one male mountain lion on the search for a mate or a home range of his own.

In July, a video showed of a GPS-collared mountain lion at the western edge of Lincoln; that lion had been trapped and collared in the Niobrara River Valley near Valentine in 2021. This lion kept moving, first to Iowa and then to Illinois, providing data regarding its movement patterns and use of habitat the entire way. It made it as far as Springfield, where Illinois wildlife officials immobilized it and moved it to a big cat sanctuary in Indiana. This was one of the furthest documented dispersals for a GPS-collared mountain lion.

Staff will continue to collar young mountain lions to continue learning more about their dispersal and movements.



Bighorn sheep capture
at Cedar Canyon WMA

New collars boost bighorn sheep monitoring efforts

Nebraska Game and Parks is better able to monitor the health, movements and distribution of bighorn sheep in the Wildcat Hills thanks to a research project completed in September. With the help of a helicopter capture crew, Game and Parks — assisted by partners and volunteers — placed tracking collars and identification tags on 27 sheep and also collected tissue samples.

The bighorn sheep of Nebraska, which were reintroduced to the Pine Ridge in the 1980s and later the Wildcat Hills, have long suffered disease losses stemming from mycoplasma bacteria, just as they have in other states. The bacteria causes severe illnesses and die-offs among herds. Collaring efforts allow monitoring of the animals that provide vital data that can be used to find solutions to the issue.

Conservation partners, including the Wild Sheep Foundation, Iowa Foundation of North American Wild Sheep, Nebraska Big Game Society and Platte River Basin Environments fund, the majority of this project research.

Ranchers partner on survey to find Ute ladies'-tresses

In the summer of 2022, Nebraska Game and Parks and the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies had the chance to reassess Nebraska's population of the federally threatened Ute ladies'-tresses orchid. Their surveys took place in the Niobrara River valley in Sioux County, where the orchids grow in moist, alkaline meadows.

While on site, a rancher mentioned his meadow was home to Ute ladies'-tresses. His shared enthusiasm for the plant and for its conservation resulted in the rancher voluntarily moving his cattle off the meadow in early summer so surveys could be conducted for the late-blooming orchid. Biologists ultimately found 898 blooming orchids at the two adjacent ranch sites and recorded GPS points for each. Though the total number of flowering Ute ladies'-tresses found in 2022 is a steep decline from the thousands recorded in 1997, one of the ranches showed an increase in the number of orchids since 2010.

Threats to the orchid include conversion of meadows to cropland, reduced stream flows and groundwater levels, timing of grazing or haying, and invasion of nonnative grasses. The survival of the Ute ladies'-tresses will depend, in large part, on finding common ground between the needs of the species and the needs of producers. Game and Parks' goal is to continue to work with the ranchers whose properties contain the orchid to find management practices that benefit the rare plant without hurting the ranchers' bottom line.



Ute ladies'-tresses

Studying southern flying squirrels

Nebraska has a new population of southern flying squirrels in Lincoln, and Nebraska Game and Parks is working to find out more about them and where they came from. The southern flying squirrel is a state-threatened species with a range within Nebraska previously limited to wooded areas in the extreme southeast. A population at Indian Cave State Park has been monitored for years.

Together with Nebraska Wildlife Rehabilitation, Game and Parks, the University of Nebraska-Omaha, and Southeast Community College's Career Academy launched an education program for high school students to study southern flying squirrels. So far, students have learned the basic biology and behaviors of flying squirrels and have built more than 20 nest boxes to replace older ones at Indian Cave State Park. Data collected from this work will be used to advance our understanding of flying squirrels in the state.



Checking flying squirrel nest boxes, Indian Cave SP

Wetlands planning and pumping benefits wildlife

With drought across much the state in late summer and fall, Nebraska Game and Parks needed to pump water into 25 wetland areas across the state for the benefit of wildlife, wildlife watchers and hunters.

The ability to deliver water into these wetlands takes a lot of planning, funding and collaboration, including to secure land, restore and manage wetlands, and provide pumping infrastructure. Over the past 15 years, restoration projects have been completed on more than 22 wildlife management areas, and we have added pumps, wells or water pipelines to 21 wildlife and park areas. Additional projects are being planned.

Evidence of success from these efforts was seen in October when a pair of endangered whooping cranes spent 26 days at the Kissinger Wildlife Management Area in Clay County. This was a record-long fall stopover in Nebraska involving adult whooping cranes. The length of their stay suggests the habitat at Kissinger WMA was favorable. The area has undergone extensive restoration and habitat management to improve its value to migratory birds and other wildlife including pumping, grazing and prescribed fire.



Whooping cranes



Green-winged teal join in a courtship flight at Eckhardt Waterfowl Production Area

Resources

Financials

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is funded mainly by user pay, which includes revenue from the sale of hunting and fishing permits and stamps, sale of state park entry permits, and fees for camping, lodging and activities in Nebraska’s state parks and recreation areas. In 2022, approximately 89% of the agency revenues were generated through user pay and federal reimbursement, and approximately 11% came from the State General Fund.

Aside from the General Fund, 16 specific funds have been established for agency use. All funds are subject to budgetary authority provided by the Legislature and the governor. These funds include: Game Cash Fund, Park Cash Fund, Habitat Cash Fund, Federal Funds, Fort Atkinson National Park Service Federal Fund, Nebraska Outdoor Recreational Development Act Fund, Recreational Trails Federal Fund, Aquatic Habitat Fund, Wildlife Conservation Fund, Game Law Investigation Fund, Cowboy Trail Fund, Wildlife Education Fund, Hunters Helping the Hungry Fund, Nebraska Snowmobile Trail Fund, State Park Improvement and Maintenance Fund, and Game and Parks Capital Maintenance Fund. Many of these funds are restricted,

meaning their revenues may be spent only for uses designated under state law and may not be transferred to the general fund.

We also acquired two new funds in 2022: the Water Recreation Enhancement Fund and the Trail Development and Maintenance Fund. These new funds bring in \$100 million and \$8 million, respectively. The water recreation projects currently authorized will be administered at Lewis and Clark and Lake McConaughy state recreation areas and Niobrara State Park. The trail development project funds will be used to complete the MoPac Trail.

The agency’s major funds, their revenue sources and what they are used for are described in greater detail below:

GENERAL FUND: Supported by money collected by the State Department of Revenue, deposited with the State Treasurer and appropriated by the Legislature. General Fund money

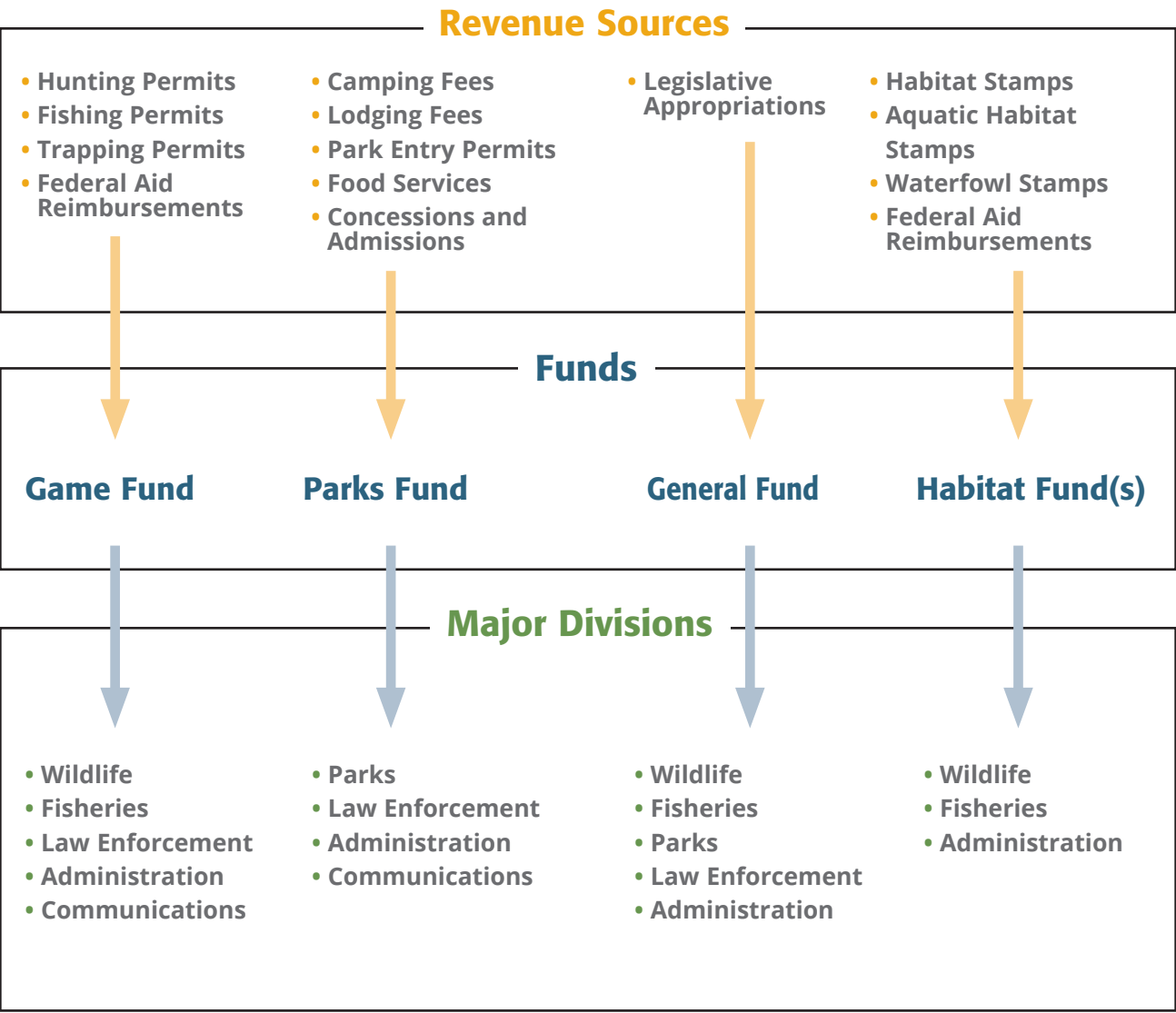


Campfire on a sandbar near the Platte River

Revenue details

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is predominately funded by user pay, which includes revenue from the sale of hunting and fishing stamps and permits, sale of state park entry permits, and fees for camping, lodging and activities in Nebraska’s state parks and recreation areas.

In 2022, approximately 89% of the agency revenues were generated through user pay and federal reimbursement, and approximately 11% came from the State General Fund. Revenues from permit sales, federal grants and other sources are placed into several funds, including Game Cash Fund, Park Cash Fund, General Fund and Habitat Fund. Money in these funds then is used to pay for specific programs, as illustrated in the diagram below:



is appropriated to the Commission for those operating activities that are not self-supporting, primarily operations of the state park system and nongame and endangered species activities; administrative activities general in nature, applicable to the entire agency and difficult to prorate among the various other funding sources; and activities extending beyond the statutory use of the various cash funds.

GAME CASH FUND: Derives its revenues from user fees for various resident and nonresident permits, including big game hunting, small game hunting, fishing, and lifetime permits. This fund was the agency’s second largest source of funding in 2022 and is the primary funding source for fish and wildlife activities. This fund is restricted to funding only those activities related to the support of fish and game, the provision of boating facilities, administration and enforcement of the State Boat Act, production of publications, administration, construction, operation and maintenance of fish hatcheries and for the distribution of fish. Transfers from this fund to the General Fund are not authorized under existing law.

PARK CASH FUND: Revenue derived from user fees for park entry permits, lodging, camping, activities, equipment rentals and facility use rentals. This was the agency’s largest source of funding in 2022. This fund is dedicated to the administration, improvement, maintenance and operation of the state park system comprised of state parks, recreation areas, trails and historical parks. Transfers from this fund to the General Fund are not authorized under existing law.

HABITAT CASH FUNDS: Generated through user fees from habitat and migratory waterfowl stamps, primarily from the sale of the stamps tied to hunting and fishing activities.

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FUND: This receives money via the state income tax checkoff program and from gifts and donations. The fund only can be used to pay for collection costs and to carry out the provisions of the Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act. Transfers from this fund to the General Fund are not authorized under existing law.

WILDLIFE EDUCATION FUND: Money received through the issuance and renewal of the Mountain Lion Conservation Plates. This fund supports youth education programs relating to wildlife conservation practices. Transfers from this fund to the General Fund are not authorized under existing law.

FEDERAL GRANTS: They include reimbursable and direct grants. Federal grant awards are received from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, Bureau of Reclamation, and other Federal agencies. The awards define what the funding is to be used for and typically are reimbursable awards. Grant monies may reimburse a cash fund or be spent as direct federal funding. Federal grants were the agency’s third largest cash funding source in 2022.

NEBRASKA OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACT FUND: Revenue primarily derived from the Nebraska Tobacco Products Tax; the portion of the tax earmarked for NORDA is the equivalent of one cent on a conventional package of cigarettes. This fund is restricted to the development, operation and maintenance of areas of the state park system. This fund is critical to the development and maintenance of the state park buildings and amenities infrastructure.

GAME AND PARKS CAPITAL MAINTENANCE FUND: Revenue derived from sales tax on nonfarm all-terrain vehicles and motorboats. This fund is to be used to build, repair, rehabilitate, modify, or improve any infrastructure within the statutory authority and administration of the Commission.

2022 calendar year revenue sources

Source	Amount	% of Total
Camping and Lodging Fees	\$16.85 M	15%
Hunting Permits and Stamps	\$16.55 M	15%
Federal and State Grant Reimbursements	\$15.4 M	14%
General Fund Appropriation Expended	\$12.47 M	11%
Direct Federal Funds	\$11.6 M	11%
Park Entry Permits	\$8.68 M	8%
Motorboat, ATV and UTV sales tax	\$7.35 M	7%
Fishing Permits and Stamps	\$5.96 M	5%
Miscellaneous	\$5.94 M	5%
Concessions and Admissions	\$2.71 M	3%
Investment Income	\$2.6 M	2%
Hunt/Fish Combination Permits	\$1.74 M	2%
Tobacco Products Tax	\$1.31 M	1%
Boating Registration	\$1.16 M	1%
Existing Fund Revenues	\$110.34 M	100%
One-time funds transferred in	\$108M	
Total Revenue Sources	\$218.34 M	



2022 calendar year expenditures

Source	Amount	% of Total
Parks	\$33.6 M	29%
Capital	\$27.7 M	24%
Wildlife	\$20.6 M	18%
Law Enforcement	\$9.4 M	8%
Fisheries	\$8.1 M	7%
Administration	\$6.9 M	6%
Communications	\$4.9 M	4%
Planning, Engineering and Construction	\$4.6 M	4%
Fish and Wildlife Education	\$0.8 M	<1%
Total Expenditures	\$116.6 M	100%

Expenditure details

Parks
Includes administration and operations of state parks, state recreation areas, state historical parks and state recreation trails.
Funding sources:
Park Cash Fund..... 77%
General Fund..... 22%
Direct Federal <1%
NORDA..... <1%

Wildlife
Includes administration and operations of wildlife management areas, private lands habitat work, game, and nongame species activities.
Funding sources:
Habitat Fund..... 35%
Game Cash Fund..... 32%
Direct Federal 30%
General Fund..... 2%
Wildlife Conservation Fund 1%
Hunters Helping the Hungry..... <1%

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Fisheries

Includes administration and operations of fish hatcheries and public and private waters fisheries resource management.

Funding sources:

Game Cash Fund.....	85%
Direct Federal	12%
Aquatic Habitat Fund	3%
General Fund.....	<1%

Law enforcement

Includes fish, wildlife, park and boating law enforcement activities, as well as public educational programs associated with hunter education and resource utilization.

Funding sources:

Game Cash Fund.....	68%
General Fund.....	16%
Park Cash Fund.....	16%

Administration

Includes administrative activities associated with the Director’s office, Personnel, Budget and Fiscal, Information Technology, district offices, Board of Commissioners, and credit card processing.

Funding sources:

Game Cash Fund.....	69%
Park Cash Fund.....	16%
General Fund.....	16%
Habitat Fund.....	<1%

Communications

Includes public outreach, marketing, advertising, public relations and outdoor skills, as well as hunter education and range development.

Funding sources:

Game Cash Fund.....	66%
Park Cash Fund.....	20%
Direct Federal	14%

Capital construction

Includes capital construction activities on state parks, state recreation areas, state trails, state historical parks, wildlife management areas, state fish hatcheries and acquisition of lands for WMA or park purposes, as well as some grant pass-through for community trails and Land and Water Conservation Fund program projects.

Funding sources:

Capital Maintenance Fund	24%
Aquatic Habitat Fund	23%
Direct Federal	16%
Park Cash Fund.....	13%
ARPA	10%
NORDA.....	8%
State Park Improvement and Maintenance Fund	4%
Game Cash Fund.....	2%
Habitat Fund.....	1%
Cowboy Trail Fund.....	<1%

Planning, engineering, and construction

Includes administration and operations of planning, engineering and construction services.

Funding sources:

General Fund.....	46%
Park Cash Fund.....	30%
Game Cash Fund.....	13%
NORDA.....	7%
Direct Federal	3%
Habitat Fund.....	2%
Cowboy Trail Fund.....	<1%

Fish and wildlife education

Includes administration and operations of education activities and events.

Funding sources:

Wildlife Education	55%
Game Cash Fund.....	42%
Park Cash Fund.....	2%

A closer look at permits in 2022

In review of the net changes in permit sales from 2021 to 2022, the data indicate a decrease across the board of big game hunting, small game hunting, fishing permits and park permits. Permit sales often fluctuate from year to year, often due to factors such as weather and economic changes. High inflation rates in 2022 likely caused consumers to restrict recreational spending. Inflation was at its highest peak in June 2022, a historically busy sales month for Nebraska Game and Parks.

Big Game Permits

Big game permits saw a decrease across the board. However, there was a 35% increase in the purchase of Preference and Bonus points, which could have affected permit sales since these are purchased in lieu of a permit. 2022 saw the second year for the Special Landowner permit, which even at a decrease in number from 2021, might still pull sales away from standard season permits. There was a slight increase in elk landowner permits, both resident and nonresident.

Small Game Permits

This type of permit (for small game and waterfowl) saw a decrease in total sales. There was a slight increase in resident senior permits in 2022, which could explain a slight portion of the decrease in annual hunt permits. The Commission was unable to release pheasants in the fall. This could have affected youth permit numbers.

Fish Permits

Fish permit sales were down across the board except for 1-day and 3-day permits, which saw a slight increase. This could be attributed to the economic fall in 2022, leading consumers to purchase shorter term, less expensive permits.

Park Entry Permits

Park entry permits were down across the board. Again, high inflation and high fuel prices could have had an impact on these sales. The summer saw very high fuel prices and may have persuaded consumers to forgo travel plans.

2022 permits and stamps sold

Permit or stamp	2021	2022
Big game	208,893	192,135
Lifetime hunting, fishing stamps	4,019	3,240
Fishing		
Resident annual fishing	101,802	94,205
Resident 1-day fishing	12,733	13,266
Resident 3-day fishing	717	752
Resident Special fishing	532	467
Resident 3-year fishing	2,671	2,567
Resident 5-year fishing	2,137	2,092
Nonresident annual fishing	7,796	6,863
Nonresident 1-day fishing	19,926	16,998
Nonresident 3-day fishing	10,030	8,706
Nonresident 3-year fishing	60	59
Nonresident 5-year fishing	46	43
Hunting		
Resident annual hunting	15,593	14,367
Resident 3-year hunting	328	282
Resident 5-year hunting	164	155
Nonresident annual hunting	11,280	9,745
Nonresident 2-day hunting	3,677	3,607
Nonresident 3-year hunting	86	65
Nonresident 5-year hunting	35	28
Nonresident youth hunting	624	520
Combination		
Resident annual hunting/fishing	24,783	22,383
Resident 3-year hunting/fishing	1,007	954
Resident 5-year hunting/fishing	773	773
Resident hunting/fishing, senior	18,591	18,742
Resident hunting/fishing, veteran	6,129	5,587
Nonresident annual hunting/fishing	1,010	907
Nonresident 3-year hunting/fishing	27	22
Nonresident 5-year hunting/fishing	13	19

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2022 permits and stamps sold (Continued from previous page)

Permit or stamp	2021	2022
Others		
Paddlefish	1,877	1,875
Preference/Bonus Points	1,294	1,741
Resident fur harvest	5,151	4,891
Stamps		
Aquatic stamp	146,145	131,996
Aquatic stamp 3-year	3,765	3,602
Aquatic stamp 5-year	2,969	2,928
Habitat stamp	113,890	104,044
Habitat stamp 3-year	1,448	1,323
Habitat stamp 5-year	985	976
Migratory waterfowl stamp	28,372	26,938
Migratory waterfowl stamp 3-year	1,099	1,030
Migratory waterfowl stamp 5-year	739	741
Total game and habitat	804,839	763,216
Park		
Nebraska annual	148,040	135,849
Nebraska daily	180,219	169,735
Nebraska duplicate	75,850	70,273
Resident Disabled Veteran	3,709	1,696
Non-Nebraska annual	13,369	11,541
Non-Nebraska daily	158,237	108,839
Non-Nebraska duplicate	4,309	4,460
Total park	583,733	502,393
Total permits and stamps sold	1,339,756	1,204,027

The 2022 Commission

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White-tailed deer near
Nine Mile Creek

Photo credits

Cover: *The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission completed the largest Aquatic Habitat Program and Angler Access Program project to improve water quality, fishing and fishing access at Conestoga SRA.* Photo by Eric Fowler.

Page 3: *Director Tim McCoy.* Photo by Eric Fowler.

Pages 4-5: *A Canada goose on a farm pond in Lancaster County.* Photo by Eric Fowler.

Page 6: *A Day at the Lake celebration at Conestoga SRA.* Photo by Eric Fowler.

Pages 6-7: *Aquatic Habitat Program cool-water stream project on Big Bordeaux Creek WMA.* Photo by Justin Haag.

Page 8: *Sunrise at Grable Pond North at Fort Robinson State Park.* Photo by Justin Haag.

Page 9: *Buffalo Creek Fire at Buffalo Creek WMA in the Wildcat Hills.* Photo by Justin Haag.

Pages 10-11: *Kayaking at the Benson Park Family Nature Night in Omaha.* Photo by Eric Fowler.

Page 12: *Cornhusker Trap Shoot at Doniphan.* Photo by Jerry Kane.

Page 13: *A conservation officer checks in fish at the Fishing Derby at Fort Robinson SP.* Photo by Justin Haag.

Page 14: *Instructor helping at Family Fishing event, Benson Park, Omaha.* Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

Pages 14-15: *Family Fishing Night at Holmes Lake in Lincoln.*

Page 16 top: *Ornate box turtle.* Photo by Jon Farrar.

Page 16 bottom: *Gov. Pete Ricketts and NGPC educator Monica Macoubrie.* Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

Page 17: *Elkhorn River oxbow wetland at Wood Duck WMA.* Photo by Ted LaGrange.

Pages 18-19: *Campsite at Louisville SRA.* Photo by Eric Fowler.

Page 19: *Waterfowl hunt on the Platte River.* Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

Pages 20-21: *Two Rivers SRA improved its caboose lodging using the Capital Maintenance Fund. One caboose was made compliant with the Americans With Disabilities Act.* Photo by Eric Fowler.

Pages 22-23: *1887 Officers Quarters at Fort Robinson SP.* Photo by Justin Haag.

Page 24-25: *Nebraska Star Party at Merritt Reservoir SRA.* Photo by Justin Haag.

Pages 24-25: *New boardwalk at Indian Cave SP.* Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

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