

OHIO DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

2021 ACCOMPLISHMENTS
AND 2022 INITIATIVES





“ This is an exciting time to be involved with conservation in Ohio. We feature top highlights in this publication as a reminder that we have accomplished much during the previous year. The Division of Wildlife remains a national leader in providing new and innovative ways for people to access and learn about hunting, fishing, trapping, birding, and more.

For example, last year we worked with Governor DeWine’s H2Ohio program to successfully connect nearly 1,000 acres of wetlands with Lake Erie. Those wetlands will in turn filter nutrients drawing from 40,000 acres of agricultural lands in northwest Ohio, improving water quality and wildlife habitat.

Another good example is the newly launched Conservation Education program from our partners at the Sportsmen’s Alliance. Together, we are working with Ohio school districts to provide innovative curriculum to students. Thousands of young people will be learning about the value of conservation in Ohio through this program.

For these accomplishments, and many more, we can all be proud. We thrive on the challenges defined by our mission to conserve wildlife, improve habitat, and serve people. Thank you for your daily commitment to Ohio’s wildlife and sharing our important conservation message. ”

– Kendra Wecker, Chief

The Ohio Division of Wildlife’s mission is to conserve and improve fish and wildlife resources and their habitats for sustainable use and appreciation by all.



STEWARDSHIP

2021 FEATURED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **H2Ohio Projects.** Launched the H2Ohio Water Quality Incentive Program (WQIP) on 2,300 acres of new wetlands and forested buffers. This will improve water quality in Lake Erie as part of Governor DeWine’s H2Ohio initiative to reduce nutrient runoff in Lake Erie and Ohio’s waterways. Further H2Ohio projects were initiated at Mallard Club Wildlife Area, Tipp City, Grand Lake St. Marys, Rust Wetland, and Mercer Wildlife Area. These projects will restore 167 acres of important wetland habitat and help to redirect flow through wetlands to help filter and improve water quality to meet H2Ohio program goals.



- **Added Public Lands.** Acquired 182 acres at Funk Bottoms Wildlife Area and 5,840 acres at Appalachian Hills Wildlife Area. We also entered a management agreement with Pheasants Forever which provides 415 acres of new public access at Big Island Wildlife Area.
- **Deer Regulations Success.** In the three years of harvest restrictions on public land, antlerless harvest was reduced by an average of 38%. According to camera surveys conducted on 17 public areas, deer populations have increased in response to the significant reduction in antlerless harvest. We found population increases of 60 to 70% in some areas.
- **Piping Plovers.** Division of Wildlife staff assisted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Black Swamp Bird Observatory to protect and monitor a nesting pair of federally and state endangered Great Lakes piping plovers at Maumee Bay State Park. This is the first known nesting attempt by a pair of piping plovers in Ohio in 83 years.
- **Hellbenders Released.** An additional 416 captive-reared hellbenders were released in three watersheds, bringing the total number of released animals to 1,524 in 10 watersheds in central and south-eastern Ohio. We continued restoration for this unique species to enhance aquatic diversity in suitable, high-quality habitats.

- **American Burying Beetles.** Cohorts of beetles, including 64 pairs and 13 unpaired males, were reared at The Wilds and Cincinnati Zoo and then released at The Wilds. Beetles were detected to have overwintered at The Wilds for the third consecutive year.
- **Bat Hibernacula Discovered.** New hibernacula for northern long-eared, tricolored, little brown, and silver-haired bats were discovered in southern and eastern Ohio. State policies regarding tree clearing near hibernacula and bat exclusion from man-made structures were created and updated to reduce impacts to hibernating and roosting bats throughout Ohio.
- **Lake Sturgeon Stocking Resumed in the Maumee River.** Partnered with Toledo Zoo and Aquarium, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Geological Survey to stock more than 3,000 lake sturgeon in the Maumee River to restore their population.
- **Yellow Perch Management Plan Completed.** Our biologists joined members of the Lake Erie Committee of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission to complete the five-year Yellow Perch Management Plan. This plan guides science-based management and evaluation in cooperation with inter-jurisdictional and inter-agency partners. The plan will facilitate recovery of central basin stocks through agreed-upon rules that promote safe harvest levels and protect spawning stocks.
- **Native bee survey.** The most comprehensive statewide (90% of Ohio counties) survey of all potential species of bees in Ohio was completed. We included a combination of active and passive collection methods, as well as combing through photographs posted to iNaturalist. This community science project will provide baseline information on important pollinator species and help to conserve Ohio’s native bees.
- **Litter Enforcement.** Under Governor DeWine’s anti-litter initiative, “A Little Litter, a Big Problem,” wildlife officers targeted litterbugs, filing 214 charges. Enforcement efforts are concentrated on protecting state waters and public lands.



STEWARDSHIP

2022 FOCUSED INITIATIVES

- **Crayfishes of Ohio.** The Ohio Division of Wildlife, Midwest Biodiversity Institute, and the Ohio Biological Survey partnered to complete a three-year statewide survey of Ohio's crayfish. This effort will culminate in the publication entitled *The Crayfishes of Ohio*, available in the spring of 2022.
- **Wildlife Trade.** The commercial sale of wildlife is big business and can have a negative impact when invasive species, like marbled crayfish, are sold and potentially released to the wild. With partners throughout the U.S., we are increasing surveillance to ensure high risk species are not offered for sale. Wildlife officers and investigators will focus efforts to educate the public about their invasive attributes and the laws against possession in Ohio.
- **Wetland Repairs.** Wetlands provide stopover areas for migrating birds and waterfowl hunting opportunities. Routinely, the earthen embankments need repairs and water control structures must be replaced to ensure functionality of these facilities. An assessment of more than 4 miles of embankments will be completed and used to develop designs at Killdeer Plains Wildlife Area. Final designs for the Magee Marsh lakefront barrier will be completed and two embankments at Indian Creek Wildlife Area are planned for construction.
- **Expand Spring Sandhill Crane Survey.** With the success of the pilot survey in five northeastern Ohio counties, expansion of the survey into additional areas will further our ability to track changes in sandhill crane populations, which remain on Ohio's state threatened species list.
- **Deer Monitoring.** Peak harvest of deer has shifted away from the seven-day gun season and into the early portion of the archery season. Therefore, staff will collect animal statistics and CWD samples at meat processing facilities during the first two November weekends during the next three years. This information will be used to better understand if hunter selectivity varies during different hunting seasons.
- **Ohio River Trophy Catfish.** The popularity of fishing for trophy catfish and associated tournaments on the Ohio River continues to increase. Tagging studies are providing new insights into the movement of large blue catfish and flathead catfish and shed light on angler catch rates and harvest. Ohio River border states that cooperatively manage these fisheries are re-evaluating current regulations.
- **Conserve Habitat and Provide Opportunities.** We seek to preserve public access at Appalachian Hills Wildlife Area with the remaining transfer of 16,300 acres, resolve a 30-acre inholding at Eagle Creek Wildlife Area, conserve 30 acres of wet woods habitat at Funk Bottoms Wildlife Area, and expand opportunities at Woodland Trails Wildlife Area to acquire 477 acres.
- **Replace Major Equipment.** Both the research boat used in Lake Erie's central basin and the helicopter have served the Ohio Division of Wildlife well with more than 50 years of management hours. Replacement vehicles will be used to survey and monitor wildlife populations which help to guide our management decisions.



OPPORTUNITIES

2021 FEATURED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Fish Stocking.** More than 40 million fish, including saugeye, wall-eye, yellow perch, trout, catfish, bass, bluegill, and muskellunge were produced and stocked during 2021 to expand fishing opportunities in Ohio lakes, reservoirs, and rivers.
- **Ohio Hunter Access Program.** The Ohio Hunter Access Program began taking reservations in September 2021. Currently the program has allowed for 463 hunters to reserve public access in 28 counties. There are 59 properties available with an average parcel size of 140 acres, for a total of 8,300 acres of private lands open to hunters who participate in the program.
- **Controlled Hunts.** The number of customers has continued to grow as they have adapted to applying for controlled hunts online. The number of lotteries offered by the agency increased to 122 different hunts and 114 different trapping opportunities.
- **Spring Valley and Delaware Shooting Ranges.** Construction was completed and both ranges were opened to rave reviews. Delaware went from six shooting positions to 91. New features of both ranges include fixed trap throwers for shotgun, archery targets, and visitor amenities such as restrooms. More than 36,000 shooters visited these new ranges the first year.
- **Knox Lake Dam and Access Area Improvements.** Spillway and dam repairs amounting to \$4.6 million were completed to meet safety requirements and secure fishing opportunities in one of Ohio's finest bass fisheries. Improvements to the adjacent boat launch and parking area were also completed.



2022 FOCUSED INITIATIVES

- **Lake Erie Fish Cleaning Stations.** Construct state-of-the-art fish cleaning stations along the Lake Erie shoreline in cooperation with local partners. These facilities will provide tables, water service, and grinders for fish waste disposal. Installation of these fish cleaning stations serving all anglers is particularly well-timed given strength of the walleye population and exceptional walleye fishing that is anticipated to continue through the next decade.
- **Fish Stocking.** Continue to produce and stock more than 40 million sport fish of 11 different species in Ohio's public waters.
- **Senecaville State Fish Hatchery Capital Improvement Project.** Initiate a \$1.6 million project at the Senecaville State Fish Hatchery to improve operations. Project construction begins in 2022 and completion is anticipated by March 2023, immediately prior to the season for raising walleye and saugeye. The Senecaville Hatchery produces walleye, saugeye, hybrid-striped bass, and channel catfish for stocking statewide.
- **Fishing Piers.** Purchase two new ADA compliant fishing piers to replace old structures at Tycoon and Fox Lakes.
- **Update Seven Boat Access Facilities and Repair Six Dams.** Projects are scheduled for the Killbuck-Walshonding ramp, as well as Griggs Reservoir and Monroe Lake access improvements. Dam repairs are scheduled for Spencer Lake, Shreve Lake, Wingfoot Lake, Highlandtown Lake, Clark Lake, and Lake Rupert. The Division of Wildlife has entered into a partnership with the Lake County Port Authority for a project that will improve the Fairport Harbor Marina with construction anticipated to begin in 2022.
- **Shooting Ranges.** Construct and open the Tranquility and Indian Creek shooting ranges. Expand the hands-on shooting opportunities and trainings at Delaware and Spring Valley education centers. Initiate improvements at the Woodbury range and develop plans for the Grand River range.
- **Review Ohio Hunter Access Program.** Analyze survey results measuring satisfaction levels of hunters and landowners participating in the Ohio Hunter Access Program.



EXCELLENCE

2021 FEATURED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Commercial Fish Catch Reporting.** The ODNR Office of Information Technology and Division of Wildlife partnered to develop an online commercial catch reporting application to track commercial harvest. This application is used in combination with a vessel monitoring system to manage the commercial fishery.
- **Law Enforcement Reorganization.** The law enforcement program structure was reorganized to gain efficiencies for an increased uniform presence in the field.
- **Specialty Permits.** Staff processed nearly 5,000 specialty permits required by Ohio law. These permits help provide additional protection for Ohio's wildlife.
- **Conservation Adventures.** Division of Wildlife staff along with the Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation launched an initiative aimed at increasing wildlife conservation education programs. Called Conservation Adventures, the program fundamentally shifts the way we educate high school students about the value and importance of conservation. Conservation Science is the first course of its kind offered to high schools.

2022 FOCUSED INITIATIVES

- **Hatchery Improvements.** Initiate repairs identified in the comprehensive hatchery assessment report needed to optimize production capacity at all state fish hatcheries.
- **Wildlife Officers.** We will hire 20 new wildlife officer cadets. The new cadet class will fill anticipated vacancies due to retirements. Wildlife officers combine law enforcement and wildlife conservation with public service.
- **Shooting Range Check-in Process.** Develop a shooting range check-in process within our current license system. The check-in system will allow users to scan their shooting range permits for entrance and make check-out more efficient.
- **Update Statewide Fisheries Database.** Upgrade and enhance the database that houses fisheries survey data collected from Ohio's inland lakes, the Ohio River, and Lake Erie. The revision will improve angler access to information.



CONNECTIONS

2021 FEATURED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Fish Stocking Records Available Online.** Innovate Ohio and the Division of Wildlife launched an application through the DataOhio Portal to provide online access to all Division of Wildlife fish stocking records from 1970 to present through a filterable database. More than 1 billion fish have been stocked by the Division of Wildlife since 1970.
- **Statewide Urban Bird Conservation Program.** Wildlife staff are working with city building officials to reduce mortality of migratory birds. Through this program, building managers in Ohio's cities commit to maintain lights out during certain hours.
- **Private Lands Habitat Improvement.** Wildlife management consultants provided 5,313 hours of technical assistance and quality customer service to landowners, conservation organizations, and agencies for wildlife habitat development and improvement throughout Ohio.
- **Statewide Attitude Survey.** The Division of Wildlife contracted with Responsive Management to conduct a statewide study of Ohio residents to measure opinions on issues related to nature and wildlife. The results of this study will be used to assist our agency in better serving the interests of and communicating with Ohio residents.
- **Implemented Digital Marketing Tools.** In partnership with Sovereign Sportsman Solutions (S3), we implemented the use of marketing automation and a customer relationship management platform. Digital marketing campaigns promoting products, opportunities, experiences, and information were launched to engage target audiences and strengthen the agency's brand. These tools help us to strengthen our service and connections to hunters, anglers, and wildlife conservation supporters.

2022 FOCUSED INITIATIVES

- **Lake Erie Charter Boat Captain Certification Program.** The Division of Wildlife is partnering with Ohio Sea Grant and Lake Erie charter boat captains to develop a Charter Boat Captain Certification Program. The program will help promote tourism, sport fishing, and the charter boat industry through module-based training, program recognition, and social media.
- **Private Lands Outreach.** Staff plan to support statewide habitat improvement initiatives such as the Hocking Plateau Shared Stewardship Project, Working Lands for Wildlife, and H2Ohio. Develop partnerships with National Wild Turkey Federation and Ruffed Grouse Society for private land development of young forest habitat projects.
- **Customer Relationship Management System.** Staff will evaluate the current license sales system and establish desired capabilities and functions for a more comprehensive customer relationship management system. The request for proposals will outline deliverables including a license sale module, a mobile app, online learning resources and other tools to help customers interact more readily with the Division of Wildlife.
- **Renovate the Migratory Birding Center at Magee Marsh Wildlife Area.** Create a state-of-the-art welcome center with interactive displays to launch a better overall experience at the wildlife area. Upgrades will include modern displays, upgraded amenities, and a more accessible floor plan with a lift to the upper level.



ENGAGEMENT

2021 FEATURED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Virtual Workshops.** Developed and provided outreach opportunities in the digital learning environment.
- **Ohio Birding Academy.** Birding experts within the Division of Wildlife launched a virtual training on birding behaviors and identification to provide staff with knowledge and confidence to engage members of the birding community and new partner organizations.
- **Wild Ohio Magazine.** The award-winning magazine, which features engaging content and phenomenal imagery has more than 40,000 subscribers and continues to grow.
- **Wildlife Area Use Improvement.** Staff developed recommendations for seven wildlife areas (Delaware, Pipe Creek, Andreoff, Appalachian Hills, Beaver Creek, Eagle Creek, Beach City) to appeal to a new and broader constituency of resource users. Improvements include new signs and informational kiosks, and providing paddling access at Pipe Creek and Appalachian Hills wildlife areas.
- **HuntFish OH App.** Added new features to the Division of Wildlife's mobile application to provide Ohio's hunters, anglers, and shooters with license purchasing options, game check, and other resources from their phones. Nearly 200,000 customers have downloaded the app.
- **Wild Ohio Harvest Community Website.** Launched educational content and media on the new Wild Ohio Harvest Community website that equips the public with the knowledge and confidence to pursue wildlife recreation. Additional resources will promote opportunities to gain hands-on experience in a professionally led class, course, or experience.

2022 FOCUSED INITIATIVES

- **Wild Ohio Harvest Community Expansion.** Work with partner organizations to create connections between programs, experiences, and information offered to provide a network of opportunities for the public to choose their own path to learning new skills and exploring their personal connection to wildlife conservation.
- **Appalachian Hills Kayak Trail.** Install a kayak locker to provide users with the ability to rent one of six kayaks to enjoy the various ponds and two paddle trails. Kiosks will be placed at the parking areas associated with kayak trail access points, 4.1-mile trail at Meigs Creek, and another 1.5-mile trail that will provide access to five ponds in the same valley.
- **Citizen Science Participation.** Continue to encourage use of the Ohio Herp Atlas (atlas.ohparc.org) as a way for citizen scientists to contribute their observations of amphibians and reptiles. Verified records will be incorporated into the Ohio Wildlife Diversity Database.

