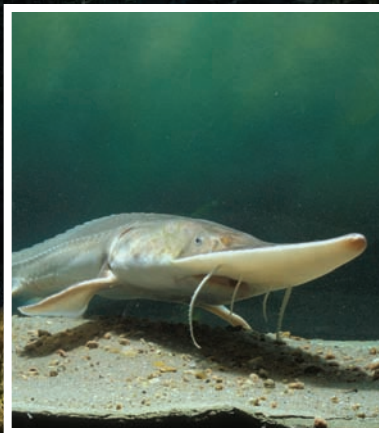


NEBRASKA



See You Out There



2009 Annual Report

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission



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Mick Jensen, Blair

For Further Information...

This report represents the highlights of activities and events of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission during the calendar year 2009. Complete division reports with further information and details are available by contacting these administrators (402 area code):

Rex Amack, Director, 471-5539

Kirk Nelson, Assistant Director,
Fish and Wildlife, 471-5539

Roger Kuhn, Assistant Director,
Parks, 471-5512

Sam Sidner, Assistant Director,
Marketing, 471-5539

Budget and Fiscal — Patrick Cole,
471-5523

Engineering — Jim Sheffield, 471-5557

Fisheries — Don Gabelhouse, 471-5515

Information and Education —
Doug Bauch, 471-4591

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Troy Kroeger, 471-5646

Law Enforcement — Ted Blume, 471-4010

Operations and Construction —
Earl Johnson, 471-5525

Parks — Roger Kuhn, 471-5512

Personnel — Angela Janda-Craig, 471-5453

Realty and Environmental Services —
Frank Albrecht, 471-5422

Wildlife — Jim Douglas, 471-5411

Dear Governor Heineman and Members of the Legislature:

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is pleased to present its 2009 Annual Report. The pages of this report will show that the Game and Parks Commission's stewardship of our state's wildlife and parkland resources performed well in 2009 and is strongly committed to the delivery of services to Nebraska's resources far into the future.

The Game and Parks Commission is dedicated to providing more outdoor opportunities to Nebraskans and visitors alike. Our commitment to recruit, develop and retain hunters and anglers is solid, and our resolve is strong.

Access to private lands is absolutely essential for Nebraskans to control and manage our wildlife resources, especially our white-tailed deer herd. Our new Open Fields and Waters program was implemented in 2009 and opened thousands of acres of land to walk-in hunters and anglers. The program is popular with landowners and our hunting and fishing public. The inaugural program was especially popular with hunters and landowners during the November firearm deer season.

Another way we make hunting more accessible is by offering some reduced-price youth permits, which we adopted in 2009. This commitment to our youth shows our resolve to usher in future generations of Nebraskans who will be stewards of our resources. Expos, skills camps, family workshops, and mentored hunts all work toward bringing more people outdoors, where they may enjoy the good life Nebraska has to offer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rex Amack". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

*Rex Amack
Director*

See You Out There

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Mission:

Stewardship of the state's fish, wildlife, parks and outdoor recreation resources in the best long-term interests of the people and those resources.

To accomplish that purpose, the Commission strives to plan and implement its policies and programs efficiently and objectively; maintain a rich and diverse environment in Nebraska's lands and waters; provide outdoor recreation opportunities; manage wildlife resources for the maximum benefit of the people, and strive to help Nebraskans appreciate their roles in the natural world.



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COVER PHOTOS: (background) The Niobrara River draws thousands of paddlers each summer, relatively few are there in the fall to see the colorful display put on by cottonwood, birch, aspen, oak, and ash trees. (left to right) Snow geese populations have more than doubled in the past 20 years; pallid sturgeon research is being conducted to help prevent them from becoming extinct; Haydon's penstemon, also known as blowout penstemon, is an endangered plant that is found in the loose soil of the Sandhills.

Offices

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Under federal and/or state law, discrimination is prohibited on the basis of race, color, religion, age, gender, marital status, national origin, disability or political affiliation. If you think you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility or want more information, contact the Affirmative Action Officer, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Lincoln, NE, 402-471-0641; the Equal Opportunity Commission, Lincoln, NE, 402-471-2024, TTY / TDD 402-471-4693. USFWS, Division of Bird Habitat and Conservation, Civil Rights Coordinator, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, MBSP 4020, Arlington, Virginia 22203.

Financial Report

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission predominately is self-funded, receiving approximately 17 percent of its total 2009 funding from the State General Fund. Eleven additional cash/federal funds have been established for agency use.

The 11 cash/federal funds are: Game Fund, Park Fund, federal funds, Habitat Fund, Nebraska Outdoor Recreational Development Act (NORDA) Fund, Recreational Trails Federal Fund, Aquatic Habitat Fund, Trail Development Assistance Fund, Wildlife Conservation Fund, Cowboy Trail Fund, and Nebraska Snowmobile Trail Fund. While most of the fund names are self-descriptive, a few of the more critical warrant further explanation.

General Fund – This is supported by money collected by the State Department of Revenue, deposited with the State Treasurer and appropriated by the Legislature. General Fund money 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 that are general in nature, applicable to the entire agency and difficult to prorate among the various other funding sources; and activities that extend beyond the statutory use of the various cash funds.

Game Fund – This derives its revenues from a variety of sources, including hunting and fishing permit sales, Federal Aid

reimbursements and interest earnings. This fund is the largest source of funding for the agency and serves as the primary funding source for fish and wildlife activities.

Park Fund – This is the second largest source of funding to the agency. It is used to improve, maintain and operate areas within the state park system. Major revenue sources include camping and lodging fees, park entry permit sales, restaurant and food services, and other park facility use fees.

Federal Grants – These are the third largest “cash” funding sources for the agency. They include reimbursable and direct grants.

Habitat Funds – These include two types of funds, terrestrial and aquatic. They are supported primarily from the sale of the stamps tied to hunting and fishing activities, respectively.

Nebraska Outdoor Recreational Development Act Fund – This is restricted to the development, operation and maintenance of areas of the state park system. The primary source of revenue is 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 critical to the development and maintenance of the state park buildings and amenities infrastructure.

Major Expenditure Details

PARKS, ENGINEERING AND CONSTRUCTION DIVISIONS:

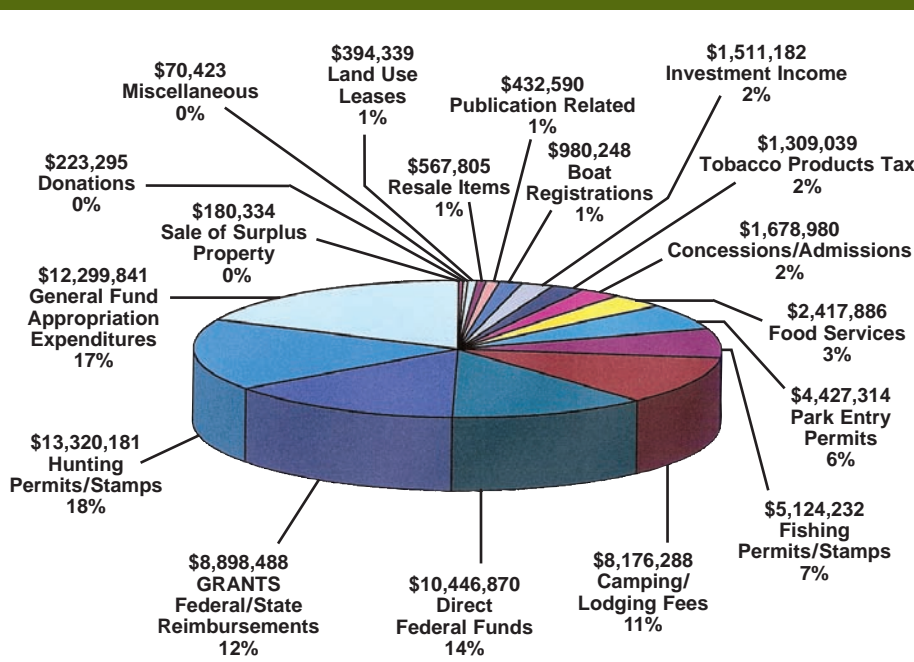
Includes administration and operations of state parks, state recreation areas, state historical parks, state recreation trails, and related engineering and construction services.

Funding sources include:

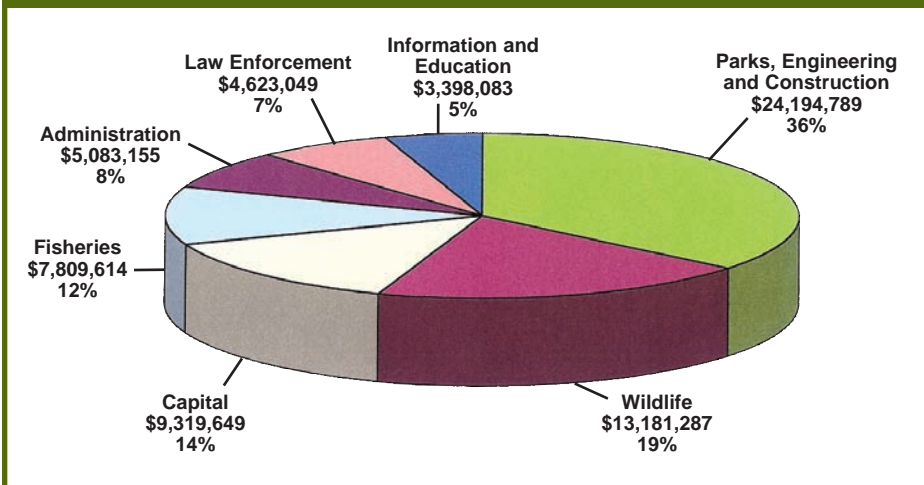
Park Cash Fund, \$14,215,170.12 (59

Major Revenue Sources • Calendar Year 2009

\$72,459,335



Major Expenditure Sources • Calendar Year 2009
\$67,609,625



percent); General Fund, \$9,766,957.19 (40); NORDA, \$165,692.21 (1); and Direct Federal, \$46,969.07 (<1).

WILDLIFE DIVISION:

Includes administration and operations of wildlife management areas, private lands habitat work, game and nongame species activities, and associated engineering services.

Funding sources include:

Game Cash Fund, \$5,189,234.25 (39 percent); Habitat Fund, \$4,304,212.52 (33); Direct Federal, \$2,355,878.12 (18); Wildlife Conservation Fund, \$750,084.48 (6); and General Fund, \$581,877.30 (4).

FISHERIES DIVISION:

Includes administration and operations of fish hatcheries, Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium, public and private waters fisheries resource management, and associated engineering services.

Funding sources include:

Game Cash Fund, \$5,142,094.91 (66 percent); Direct Federal, \$2,437,916.13 (31); Aquatic Habitat

Fund, \$117,968.91 (2); and General Fund, \$111,634.12 (1).

LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION:

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

Funding sources include:

Game Cash Fund, \$3,032,726.19 (66 percent); General Fund, \$950,357.74 (21); Park Cash Fund, \$622,761.15 (13); and Direct Federal \$17,203.44 (<1).

ADMINISTRATION DIVISION:

Includes administrative activities associated with the director's office, Personnel, Realty and Environmental Services, Budget and Fiscal, Information Technology, district offices, Federal Aid, board of commissioners, and credit card processing, as well as associated engineering services.

Funding sources include:

Game Cash Fund, \$2,706,197.52 (53 percent); Park Cash Fund, \$1,413,548.86 (28); General

Fund, \$842,702.16 (17); Habitat Fund, \$69,728.33 (1); Direct Federal, \$50,961.76 (1); and Aquatic Habitat Fund, \$16.66 (<1).

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION DIVISION:

Includes administration and operations of NEBRASKAland magazine productions, agency printing and mailing needs, multimedia news releases, and brochure production, as well as boating administration, boating law enforcement, boating education, hunter education, and range development activities.

Funding sources include:

Game Cash Fund, \$2,871,823.10 (85 percent); Park Cash Fund, \$453,848.16 (13); Direct Federal, \$72,224.93 (2); and Habitat Fund, \$186.39 (<1).

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 wildlife management area or park purposes, as well as some grant pass through for community trails and Land and Water Conservation Fund program projects.

Funding sources include:

Direct Federal, \$5,581,883.08 (60 percent); NORDA, \$1,726,271.94 (19); Aquatic Habitat Fund, \$1,395,507.17 (15); Game Cash Fund, \$439,463.10 (5); Park Cash Fund, \$99,961.51 (1); Trail Development Assistance, \$50,000.00 (1); Habitat Fund, \$23,062.47 (<1); and Cowboy Trail Fund, \$3,500.00 (<1).

Recreation

Providing Nebraskans an array of recreational opportunities is the core business of the Game and Parks Commission.

For example:



Ponca State Park mini-lodge

Ponca SP Mini-Lodges

Construction began on five mini-lodges at Ponca State Park. These year-round, two story, four-bedroom units feature a large great room, wood-burning fireplace, wireless Internet, cable television, two bathrooms, and many other amenities. The mini-lodges complement the Resource and Education Center and groups wanting to use the park for multi-day reunions, meetings and retreats. Added visitation also will enhance the park's outdoor education program, seasonal events and recreational features. Construction of seven additional mini-lodges will begin in spring 2010.

Repairs Continue at Visitor Center

Fire repairs continued at Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area's Water Interpretive Visitor Center. Since the fire at the Center, staff has been working on partnerships to help fund the replacement of displays there.

The Commission entered into a contract with Split Rock Company to install the signature map display that was lost in the fire.

Request for Proposal

A Request for Proposal (RFP) was developed and advertised for the purpose of privatizing the food service operation at Eugene T. Mahoney, Platte River and Fort Robinson state parks. The RFP was advertised for bid in late 2009, and the process will continue into 2010.

Mahoney SP Deer Hunt

Deer hunting was opened for the first time at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park in an effort to reduce the deer population. The special season was for archery and muzzleloaders only and resulted in limited success because of the two snowstorms that occurred during the special season.

Keeping Nebraska's Fish Healthy

The Fish Production Section monitors wild fish populations, private aquaculture facilities and state fish hatcheries for prohibited pathogens, including viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus (VHSV) and whirling disease. As a result of a \$45,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, additional sampling for VHSV was conducted from May 2008 through June 2009. During this period, 8,680 fish were tested for VHSV, with no positive findings for any of the listed prohibited pathogens being found. Monitoring for aquatic invasive species such as zebra mussels and New Zealand mud snails also was conducted during fish health inspections.

Aquatic Habitat Rehabilitations

An aquatic habitat rehabilitation project was finished at Glenn Cunningham Reservoir, with the completion of the Pawnee wetland weir and the Papio D-4 sediment basin. A new water supply system was built at Bowling Lake, filling the lake in October. A sediment basin renewal project was completed at Summit Lake State Recreation Area. A Humphrey City Pond rehabilitation project was completed and an enhancement project at Tecumseh's city pond got underway.

The success of an early aquatic habitat rehabilitation project at Cottonmill Lake, using biological survey and creel survey data, was published in a scientific journal and submitted to a national effort that will quantify the economic benefits of restoration projects to fishing tackle manufacturers.

Another Record Elk Harvest

Nebraska's elk herd continues to grow, providing more hunting opportunities than ever. A record 138 elk were harvested in 2009, including 66 bulls. The quality of bulls remains the envy of most states, with nearly 90 percent of harvested bulls having six or more points on a side. As long as landowner attitudes toward elk remain positive, the Commission expects continued expansion of the herd.

New Reservoir Construction

Construction was completed at Lake Wanahoo dam and wetland near Wahoo and the impoundment began filling in 2009. Construction also was completed at Lawrence Youngsmen Lake (Papio Site No. 13). The project included construction of

an access road to the boat launch facility, a boat ramp, dock, fishing pier, and parking area. Construction of the Leigh Dam motorboat access project neared completion. Engineering design and planning continued for a Pigeon/Jones Creek project near Hubbard and a Duck Creek No. 12 project near Peru.



Turkey hunting opportunities are expanding.

Turkey Season Liberalized

To take advantage of the state's expanding wild turkey population, the spring hunting season was extended to the end of May and the fall season was open throughout the firearm deer season for the first time. A record spring harvest of more than 22,000 toms was achieved, and fall permit sales rose 12 percent from 2008.

Telecheck System Debuts

For the first time, hunters in certain deer seasons were allowed to check in their harvested deer via telephone or Internet instead of presenting the animal at a physical check station. Hunters were given a verification number after they provided all their harvest information through the Telecheck system. More than 12,600 deer were checked under the new system. November firearm hunters still were required to visit physical check stations so biological data could be collected.

2009 Permits and Stamps Sold

Permit or Stamp	2008	2009	% Change
Resident fishing	108,853	118,271	9
Resident hunting	36,883	34,189	-7
Resident hunt/fish	36,918	36,991	0
Resident hunt/fish, veteran	2,374	3,090	30
Resident hunt/fish, senior	4,166	5,863	41
Resident 1-day fishing	10,511	12,889	23
Nonresident 1-day fishing	13,733	17,087	24
Nonresident 2-day hunting	1,729	1,587	-8
Nonresident fishing	5,978	6,798	14
Nonresident hunting	14,265	13,646	-4
Resident 3-day fishing	1,227	1,096	-11
Nonresident 3-day fishing	8,131	8,648	6
Aquatic stamp	161,107	171,804	7
Migratory waterfowl stamp	35,833	34,739	-3
Resident fur harvest	6,839	5,632	-18
Habitat stamp	136,697	134,082	-2
Annual park	131,109	140,317	7
Daily park	223,821	244,912	9
Duplicate park	48,655	55,451	14
Nonresident youth hunt	749	716	-4
TOTAL	989,578	1,047,808	6
Lifetime hunt, fish, stamp	4,229	2,859	-32
Total big game	178,175	180,765	1
Total paddlefish	1,875	1,875	0
TOTAL lifetime, big game, paddlefish	184,279	185,499	1
TOTAL permits, stamps	1,173,857	1,233,307	5

Recreation (continued)

Deer Exchange Usage Up

The Deer Exchange, an Internet meeting place created by the Commission in 2008 where people who want to donate or receive deer meat can contact each other, gained in popularity. Nearly 1,900 people registered with the site this year, up from 1,300 last year. The site is one of several strategies designed to encourage the harvest of overabundant deer.



The antlerless deer season is expected to be expanded again for October 2010.

New October Deer Season

To help reduce the deer population in eastern Nebraska, a three-day October firearm season for antlerless deer was

opened for the first time. The season was popular with hunters, and nearly 1,000 deer were harvested. An expanded October season is planned for 2010.

Building and Improving

The following 2009 projects included Parks, Engineering, and Operations and Construction divisions:

Louisville State Recreation Area – A large picnic shelter was built, thanks to a nice donation to the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation.

Fremont State Recreation Area – A new office and meeting facility, surplus from the University of Nebraska, was relocated to the park in 2008. It was remodeled in 2009 and parking lots and access roads were built. The office will provide visitor services and house the park superintendent's office.

Swimming pools – Required by federal law in 2009, drain covers were installed in the parks' swimming pools. The covers eliminate the possibility of a swimmer being trapped by drain suction. Also, the filter was replaced at the pool at Platte River State Park and the roof was replaced on the bathhouse and pool at Fort Robinson State Park.

Goose Lake Wildlife Management Area – A fish barrier, which restricts the entry of rough fish into Goose Lake from adjacent ponds and marshes not controlled by the Commission, was completed in the spring.

Sacramento-Wilcox Wildlife Management Area – The Holdrege Archery Club, with the help of a Nebraska Environmental Trust grant, established an archery range that includes a 15-foot elevated shooting platform and six ground targets.

Ponca State Park – Two environmentally friendly cabins were built and dedicated. The cabins give guests an opportunity to learn about energy efficiency, recycling and sustainable living. Also, a geosynthetic liner was installed in the fishing pond.

Lake Renovations

The fish communities in Hedgefield Lake, Oxford City Lake, Lake Ogallala, Lake Wanahoo, and the Sac-Wilcox Wildlife Management Area West Pond were renovated with rotenone to eliminate undesirable species and make way for stocking more desirable fish, including trout in Lake Ogallala. An Offutt Base Lake zebra mussel eradication project was completed.

Bighorn Sheep Hunters Successful

The two holders of 2009 bighorn sheep permits had successful hunts in December. The hunters were guided by several members of the Wildlife Division's District I staff, and both took mature full-curl rams. Nearly \$700,000 has been raised for bighorn conservation in Nebraska through the sale of auction and lottery permits since 1998.

Land Acquisitions

The agency acquired 340 acres in 2009. The sites, which will increase public access for hunting, fishing and recreation, are: 120-acre addition to Hickory Ridge Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Johnson County and a 220-acre addition to Little Salt Creek WMA in Lancaster County.

Fishing Access to Private Waters

A Nine Mile Creek Habitat Restoration Project, in Scotts Bluff County has 13 landowners that enrolled about 260 stream-side acres in this program that creates buffer strips, removes livestock, and controls invasive plant species. These changes are being evaluated and ground work has begun to improve stream habitat by stabilizing eroding banks, restoring

meanders, and placing spur logs and rock vortex structures. Three of the landowners allow unlimited public fishing on 1¼ miles of this trout stream.

Public Access Through Management Agreements

The Commission owns many acres of land that provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation access to the general public. Many other agencies and entities own land with the potential for public access, but no means to provide it to the public because the infrastructure or resources to provide this resource are not available. To take advantage of these lands, the Commission has agreements with agencies such as the Bureau of Reclamation, Corps of Engineers and Natural Resource Districts.

These agreements allow these areas to be managed in much the same way as the Commission manages its wildlife management areas. Agreements with the Bureau of Reclamation provide 57,000 acres of public access land and Corps of Engineers land provides 18,000 acres of access land. The Platte River Basins Environments is a private organization focused on conserving land in the Wildcat Hills. It has partnered with the Commission to open 11,000 acres.

Fish Stocking

The Commission's five fish hatcheries produced and stocked approximately 35.6 million fish (17 species) into 256 public bodies of water. Included were 31.4 million walleye fry and 2.15 million walleye fingerlings; 235,331 largemouth bass; 229,682 (10- inch) rainbow trout; 219,963 (10-inch) channel catfish; and 147,540 sauger fingerlings.

Lakes at Fremont, Louisville and Two Rivers state recreation areas were stocked with 5,300 catchable black bullheads. Hybrid triploid crappies were stocked into Baright, Kea and East Gothenburg lakes during 2006 and 2008. This experimental stocking is indicating good hybrid vigor during the first two years of growth. These fish grew to larger sizes than typically observed for either white or black crappie in similar types of bodies of water. They will be produced again in 2010. The Fish Production Section also is experimenting with culturing plains topminnows at the Rock Creek Hatchery.

Boater/Angler Access Improvements

The Nebraska Legislature passed a bill in 2009 that increased the cost of the Aquatic Habitat Stamp by \$2.50 and authorized use of a portion of stamp revenues to fund the Nebraska Angler Access Program. This program will enhance



bank angler access on public waters by building fishing piers; constructing jetties and hard points and surfacing them with to create safer footing; grading shorelines to provide a relatively flat walking surface next to deep water or fish attractors; building trails; making road and parking improvements; using vegetation barriers to impede growth of submerged and emergent aquatic vegetation; removing terrestrial vegetation along shorelines; and leasing private property to gain access to public waters.

- Access to Crescent Lake (a meandered

lake owned by the State on Nebraska) was acquired through a lease of 87 acres of BELF property. A motorboat access development project will begin in 2010.

- The handicap-accessible fishing pier at Wildwood Lake was improved in preparation for Family Fishing Night activities; shoreline trees, shrubs, and grasses were cut and trails were opened at a dozen locations to improve bank angler access.
- A new boat ramp was constructed at Cheyenne State Recreation Area.

OPEN FIELDS AND WATERS

More places to hunt and fish.

Open Fields and Waters

One of the top agency priority missions in 2009 was the new Open Fields and Waters pilot program for expanding walk-in access to private lands for hunting and fishing. Conservation officers spent considerable time and effort attempting to promote the new program with excellent success. The Commission was able to get 59 contracts signed, thereby increasing some excellent hunting opportunities for the public. One cooperator said he had hunters from seven states using the property.

Public fishing access to 34 ponds and lakes, amounting to 371 acres, along with about 20 miles of warm-water streams and about 8 miles of cold-water streams was acquired through the Open Fields and Waters program. These waters were leased for two years, at a cost of \$37,000.

Conservation

Preserving Nebraska's natural resources is one of the Commission's most important responsibilities. Many programs are dedicated to managing the state's fish and wildlife populations and land and water habitats. For example:

Wind and Nebraska's Wildlife

In the spring, the Commission released a wildlife risk map that may be used by wind energy developers as a planning tool (ngpc.state.ne.us/wildlife/windwildlife.asp). The map has been well received. It has resulted in improved communication between wind project developers, the Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and provided improved opportunities to minimize and avoid undesirable wildlife impacts as projects are being designed and planned. During development of the map, the Nebraska Wind and Wildlife Working Group was formed. The group works to develop a shared, consistent approach to addressing wildlife concerns as wind energy expands in the state.

Langdon Bend Wetland Development Completed

Construction of three wetland units was completed at the Langdon Bend Wildlife Management Area, near Nemaha, in November. The units allow for year-round management of up to 220 acres of wetland habitats for migratory birds and recreational purposes. This cooperative project with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is part of the Missouri River Mitigation Project, replacing habitats lost when the Missouri River was channelized. This project will provide reliable spring and fall migration habitats.

Tuberculosis Control in Knox County

Wildlife Division biologists assisted the Nebraska Department of Agriculture and

the U.S. Department of Agriculture with the containment of bovine tuberculosis at a captive elk farm in Knox County. This disease can pose a serious threat to wild deer and livestock, so a swift and well-coordinated response was essential. Biologists helped depopulate the captive herd and collected samples from 42 wild deer living nearby, none of which tested positive. Wildlife and agricultural interests will need to remain vigilant in responding to TB and other diseases.

Assessing Fish Populations and Angling Success

Fisheries management staff sampled fish populations in 112 lakes and reservoirs, 14 cold-water streams, and the Niobrara River. The information collected is used to evaluate management strategies and is shared with anglers to help them plan fishing trips. Fish were sampled from the Niobrara as part of an effort to determine flows needed for recreation, fish and wildlife.

Angler creel surveys were conducted by the University of Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit on 30 lakes and reservoirs, Gracie Creek Pond, the North Platte River below Lake Ogallala, and the Sutherland Supply Canal. These surveys measure fishing pressure, catch rates, harvest, angler choices on fishing locations, and are used to evaluate management practices, including the effectiveness of fishing regulations and aquatic habitat rehabilitation projects.

Private Waters Assistance

Fisheries management personnel responded to 659 requests for assistance from owners of private waters, including



Langdon Bend Wildlife Management Area improvements will provide wetland habitat.

440 telephone calls, 39 e-mails, 59 site visits, 65 walk-ins, 53 lake/pond/stream samplings, and three letters. Of these, 90 percent were handled by the private waters specialist, including sampling fish populations in 32 lakes, pits and ponds. The private waters specialist also issued private waterbody management authorizations for five fish renovations, 14 selective fish removals and 11 for fish sampling by consultants.

There were 53 ponds considered for stocking with fish provided by the agency; 42 were approved. These ponds, amounting to 286 acres, received 142,950 bluegills, 28,590 largemouth bass and 2,975 rainbow trout. There have been 2,373 copies of the Nebraska Pond Management provided through 2009. The guide also is available online and was viewed 508 times in 2009.



Early Successional Management will provide improved habitat for pheasants.

Wetland Restoration Work Continues

Conditions on several wildlife management areas improved enough in 2009 that contractors were able to complete three, and nearly complete two other Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) projects enrolled under 10-Year Restoration Cost-Share Agreements with Natural Resource Conservation Service. The restoration agreements were signed in 2007, but wet conditions prevented contractors from accomplishing the work until 2009. In July and August, the wetlands on Hidden Marsh Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and Kirkpatrick Basin South WMA in York County and Pintail WMA in Hamilton County were restored. In December, two more WRP projects were nearly completed before snowstorms halted work.

Illegal Permits Investigated

In February, two District I conservation officers were assigned to a long-term investigation. It identified people who have had their hunting privileges revoked and have falsified applications to obtain permits. Initial investigations have identified 18 people from seven states that have obtained permits illegally. About 80 illegal permits have been identified and numerous search warrants have been served.

CRP-State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement

In August, Nebraska had enrolled the 22,900 acres the Commission was allocated for Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)-State Acres For wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) projects. There were 11,450 acres enrolled in Nebraska's

tallgrass prairie region for greater prairie-chickens, and 11,450 enrolled across the state for upland game birds.

These projects created customized habitat planting recommendations to ensure habitat needs, including nesting, brood rearing, winter roosting and escape cover, were provided on or adjacent to enrolled lands. The Commission is working with other states and partners to get additional acres in the national and state allocations for SAFE in order to build on the success of this new continuous CRP practice that is focused on wildlife habitat.

Focusing on the Future

In 2009, staff began updating the Focusing on the Future document, the agency's long-range plan that began in 1996. Since then, Focusing on the Future

Conservation (continued)



Water catchments funnel rainfall into a tank, that is then used by a variety of wildlife species. Members of Scout Troop 201 out of Chadron replace parts of a catchment on Metcalf Wildlife Management Area located 12 miles north of Hay Springs.

has served as a management blueprint for Commission activities. One change to note for this update is that detailed tactics will be added to the strategies outlined in the document. This will make the plan more operational and serve as a great planning tool. The document should be updated by the early fall of 2010.

Early Successional Management

Biologists managing wildlife management areas (WMA) are focusing on Early Successional Management, which is the practice of disturbing habitat to promote the growth of weeds, forbs and legumes. These plants provide valuable nesting, feeding, loafing, and roosting habitat for a number of species, especially for pheasants and quail.

Recycling Programs

Ponca State Park received a \$9,058 grant from Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality to enhance and expand an existing recycling program and begin composting as an educational feature near the Resource and Education Center.



The Information and Education Division received grants totaling more than \$13,000 for recycling and litter public education programs.

Less Gas, More Pedal Power

District VI conservation officers drove 186,893 miles in 2009, compared with 205,837 the year before. Bicycle patrol by two officers also was a productive way to conserve fuel dollars and patrol park

areas, while maintaining a close working relationship with park users. Bicycle patrol in recreation areas generated positive comments from the public.

Water Catchments Used in Panhandle

Water catchments are designed to catch and funnel rainfall into stock tanks that flow into smaller ground-level tanks. This water then may be used by a variety of wildlife species. The Commission recently installed such a structure on Metcalf Wildlife Management Area (WMA), in addition to many other catchments located on Pine Ridge and Wildcat Hills WMAs.

FAST facts

Conservation Officer Contacts

Conservation officers made nearly 386,000 contacts with citizens in 2009, including 158,400 park users, 53,514 anglers, 24,938 hunters, and 23,573 boaters.

Farm Bill by the Numbers

- 8** – The number of farm bill wildlife biologists in Nebraska
- 3** – The number of Commission partners (Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited and Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory) with biologists
- 374** – The number of projects worked on by biologists
- 35,016.3** – The number of acres impacted

Education outreach includes many publications and multimedia news and information programs. The Information and Education Division's efforts are complemented by education programs in the Parks, Fisheries, Wildlife, and Law Enforcement divisions. For example:

RDR Plan

The Commission began in 2008 a 20-year plan to recruit, develop and retain hunters and anglers to get more people involved in the outdoors. Some of the programs being implemented in 2009 and 2010 include:

Hunting and Fishing Family Camps –

These programs teach families how to participate in the outdoors through a series of two-day camps.

Scholastic Outdoor Skills Program –

In partnership with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the Commission provides equipment, curriculum and training for the development of after-school outdoor clubs in which youth learn outdoor skills.

Outdoor University – This largely Web-based outreach effort is geared toward developing current hunters and anglers and lapsed ones by providing benchmarks for outdoor participation, methods to track their efforts, awards for achievement, and educational workshops.

STEP OUTSIDE for Staff – This is an effort to help gain more hunting, shooting and angling participation by Commission staff by providing educational programs.

'Replace Yourself' Marketing Campaign – This program is for mentors who also support new participants until they become solid outdoor enthusiasts.

Family Fishing Nights – Rods and reels, bait and fishing instruction were provided at 19 events held at Lincoln

and Omaha-area lakes, including Carp-O-Rama at Pawnee Lake.

Angler Development and Retention –

More than 2,000 requests from the public for information on fish, fisheries management, and fishing were received and answered. In 2009, 22 workshops and seminars were presented, 14 radio interviews were provided, several radio segments for Outdoor Nebraska weekly radio program were recorded, an ice-fishing segment was filmed, and Carp-O-Rama was promoted on television.

Outdoor Heritage Program

The Commission, in partnership with the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation, began developing several new educational elements at Platte River State Park that will support family involvement in hunting,

shooting sports and fishing. Immediate plans call for a 50-yard small bore range, 50-yard archery range and indoor air rifle plinking range.

This program will be part of a larger effort to garner more family and school participation in these activities. The Commission hopes the program will reach 30,000 participants annually. Events at the park will include outdoor family camps, hunter education programs, Explore Outdoors field trips, outdoor expos, youth summer camps, and scouting merit badge clinics.

Outdoor Expos

The Commission added two new scholastic outdoor expos in 2009, reaching nearly 5,000 youths through their schools as well as more than

NEBRASKA OUTDOOR EXPO



The Nebraska Outdoor Expos are great events to expose children and adults to outdoor activities they may have been interested in, but didn't have an opportunity to try. Expos provide a nonthreatening atmosphere where visitors feel comfortable trying something new with the guidance of skilled volunteers and NGPC staff.

Education (continued)

50,000 public attendees who participated in a variety of outdoor activities. The new expos were at Platte River State Park (SP) and Scottsbluff. Those two complemented the Missouri River Outdoor Expo at Ponca SP and the Nebraska Outdoor Expo at Fort Kearny State Recreation Area. Commission staff from all divisions, as well as other volunteers, contribute to the expos' success. Nearly 45,000 visitors enjoyed the Ponca expo, including 489 students from 16 schools. That expo continues to draw the largest support.

Hunter Education

There were 8,006 students certified in hunter education in 2009 (6,375 firearm and 1,631 bow hunter). There were 67 field days offered for the certification of 345 students who used the independent study option. Staff trained 88 firearm instructors, 55 of which became certified, and 40 bowhunter instructors, of which 34 became certified.

FAST facts

Conservation officers presented or assisted with 1,999 programs. Many were related to the agency's Recruitment, Development and Retention program.

Boater Education/ Law Enforcement

There were 1,340 students certified in boater education in 2009. There were 35 boating accidents reported, an increase of seven from the previous year. There were six boating-related fatalities reported, up four from the previous year.



Project WILD workshops get students actively involved with activities as they learn about wildlife and the outdoors.

Project WILD

The Project WILD program conducted 134 workshops that reached 7,941 educators, adults and youth. Of these workshops, 29 were specifically Project WILD workshops, which certified 475 educators. Three advanced WILD workshops took place, which included a WILD About Herpetology workshop, a Schoolyard Enhanced Learning workshop and a Flying WILD workshop.

Aquatic Education

A total of 197 fishing clinics were held, attended by 13,864 youth and taught by 1,060 volunteers who contributed 5,393.25 hours. Additional volunteers were trained to teach fishing clinics at 12 youth fishing instructor certification workshops held statewide.



Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium

A total of 184 groups, 18,102 children and 7,324 adults visited the Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium. Workshops were held for the public on Nebraska snakes, bluebirds, bird banding, fly tying, hunter education, camping, turkey hunting, live animal demonstrations, and outdoor photography. Waterworks, a water festival, was attended by about 1,600 Omaha-area fifth graders.

History Comes Alive at Parks

Historical parks conducted living history demonstrations through the season with volunteers portraying life at an early military fort. Cannon firings, living history interpretations, blacksmithing, wood carving, and basket weaving were among the activities. Volunteers helped make these events successful.

Project BEAK

Project BEAK (Bird Education and Awareness for Kids) is an interactive,

Web-based curriculum for students in grades 5 through 8 that contains scientifically accurate information about bird conservation, adaptations, Nebraska's birds and those that are threatened and endangered.

Panhandle Eco-Extravaganza about Prairies

The Panhandle Eco-Extravaganza about Prairies program reached 575 students in the fall. It uses a variety of hands-on, inquiry-based activities that teach ecological principles using Panhandle-area examples. One teacher wrote on her evaluation, "Thank You! This is one of the very best presentations, field trips and experiences that my students have had in several years. Your effort and expertise is wonderful!"



Growing Up WILD is the new early development nature-based workshop that focuses on children 3-7 years old.

Growing Up WILD

Project WILD recently has launched its new early childhood education guide, Growing Up WILD, which focuses on ages 3-7. The guide features 27 hands-on

nature-based activities written especially for early childhood educators. In 2009, 70 preschool students did a test run for a few of the activities. Several Growing Up WILD training workshops have been scheduled for 2010.



National Archery in the Schools Program

National Archery in the Schools Program reaches 20,000 youths annually in school through a two-week archery curriculum. In Nebraska, nearly 140 schools and many other community recreation centers and archery clubs participate. The state tournament has grown to include 315 archers.

Youth Outdoor Skills Camps

The Commission, with the help of Nebraska 4-H, added a third youth outdoor skills camp, providing a weeklong education in hunting, fishing and shooting sports for nearly 200 youths. Shooting camps offer a more in-depth hunting/shooting sports experience, allotting more time to disciplines such as rifle, shotgun, archery, and muzzleloaders.

Becoming an Outdoors-Woman

While the Commission continued supporting Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW), recruiting and/or retaining 120 women in various outdoor pursuits, the Beyond BOW effort flourished in 2009. Several new programs were added to serve as the next step for Beyond BOW

participants, including mentored deer hunts, turkey hunts, shooting programs, and boating and fishing workshops.

Shooting Range Development

The Commission oversees a Shooting Range Grant Program that provides federal funding to local ranges to improve range safety, hunter safety and shooting sports access. The agency is working with three partners to develop a Shooting Park in Lincoln, and new archery ranges have been developed in Kearney and McCook.

Organized Youth Shooting Events

Some of the organized youth shooting programs the Commission supports have state tournaments. The High School Trap program has nearly 1,800 participants at its state tournament. The Nebraska High School Small Bore Metallic Silhouette Championship is the culminating event for nearly 75 youth rifle shooters, and the State 3-D Archery Tournament supports the growth of bow hunting.



Social Media

The Commission is reaching constituents in new ways, taking advantage of social media. People are keeping up with the agency as Facebook fans and Twitter followers. The agency also unveiled the following blogs: Daryl Bauer's Barbs and Backlashes, In the Wild With Greg Wagner and Lock, Stock and Bedlam with Jeff Rawlinson and Aaron Hershberger.

Research

Management of Nebraska's natural resources involves a constant quest for knowledge. Research is a key component via in-house studies and testing, cooperative programs with other agencies, and outsourcing. For example:



Piping Plover

Tern and Plovers on Lower Platte

In 2009, research focused on interior least tern and piping plover reproduction on the Lower Platte River. The tern is state and federally listed as endangered and the plover is state and federally listed as threatened. Both species nest on river sandbars and similar human-created habitats such as sand and gravel mine spoil piles. A key finding is that least tern chicks were five times more likely to reach flight stage on river sandbars than on off-river sites. These results show that a dynamic river is critically important in recovering these species on the river.

Niobrara River Instream Flows

In May 2006, the Nebraska Game and Parks Board of Commissioners directed staff to prepare instream flow

recommendations for Niobrara River recreation (canoeing, kayaking and tubing), fish, and wildlife. With recreation research completed, Fisheries Division staff began evaluating study findings to develop recommendations for flows needed to provide quality floating in the primary recreation reaches of the river near Valentine. Three new studies were initiated in 2009, to evaluate groundwater base flows of the river; compare the economic value of water for irrigation to recreation; and determine flows needed by fish and wildlife.



American Burying Beetle

American Burying Beetle and Prairie Grouse Monitoring Efforts

In the three years of beetle trapping to date, there have been 333 initial captures of individual American burying beetles and 17 recaptures. A total of 37 greater prairie-chicken leks within and adjacent to the Loess Canyons Biologically Unique Landscape have been documented with many others reported by local landowners. These surveys will be used as base and

trend information as project work continues to change and improve the habitat in this biologically unique landscape.

Pallid Sturgeon Recovery and Research

In 2009, Missouri River Program personnel organized a pallid sturgeon brood stock collection effort that used the assistance of more than 70 volunteers. Over a 15-day period, 160 pallid sturgeon were captured, with 23 adults transported to the Blind Pony State Fish Hatchery in Missouri to produce offspring that will be stocked in the Missouri River.

In 2009, the first documented aggregation of reproductively-active pallid sturgeon was found in the channelized Missouri River. On May 7, research crews tracking a female sturgeon tagged with an acoustic transmitter documented that she was joined, 12 miles north of Blair, by three reproductively-active males that had been tagged previously. Two days later the female moved downriver 10 miles and was once again found in the presence of two of the males. This confirms for the first time that pallid sturgeon can indeed locate each other in the channelized Missouri River.

Plains Topminnow Recovery and Research

The plains topminnow, a species found only in the central Great Plains, with its distribution center in Nebraska, has been negatively impacted by habitat loss and competition from non-native fish. A pond to produce plains topminnows was constructed at the Sacramento-Wilcox Wildlife Management Area with funds from a State Wildlife Grant. Brood stock was introduced and produced young that were stocked into streams once occupied by

plains topminnow. The current distribution of plains topminnow across its historical range also is being assessed, funded by a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

UNL Fisheries Research

A project was initiated with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to evaluate the status of shovelnose sturgeon in the Lower Platte River and its potential hybridization with pallid sturgeon. UNL also began a project to relate river flow needs to habitat availability and needs of fish and bird communities on the Niobrara River, in support of instream flow efforts.



Walleye

UNK Fisheries Research

Cooperative studies are being conducted with the University of Nebraska-Kearney to assess walleye spawning structures at Sherman Reservoir, limnology of Harlan County Reservoir and the distribution of the plains pocketbook mussel in Nebraska.

Patch-Burn Grazing

Given that most grasslands in the state are privately owned, there is a need to identify grassland management practices that preserve biodiversity and are profitable for landowners. This study will evaluate the effects of a patch-burn grazing system on biodiversity and livestock production in eastern Nebraska. This project will provide a scientifically sound approach

to defining the biodiversity benefits of patch-burn grazing.

Information gained will help conservation practitioners provide the best possible advice to private landowners regarding the benefits of patch-burn grazing compared to other grazing systems. Also, this information will aid land managers from the Commission, other public agencies and conservation organizations who manage prairie lands in eastern Nebraska.

Effects of CRP on Pheasant and Grouse Production

Since 2005, research funded by the Commission has investigated the effects of disking and interseeding established Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields on habitat use and production of ring-necked pheasants and greater prairie-chickens in eastern Nebraska. Pheasant hens nested in the disked and interseeded CRP fields more and nests within these preferred nest sites had a higher survival rate than nests in other grassland types. Similarly, prairie chicken hens selected

disked and interseeded CRP fields more often than other grassland types, and increases in forb cover resulted in increased survival of nests and broods.

The results of both studies indicate the importance of CRP for upland game birds, as well as the need for proper management of CRP fields to realize continuing benefits.

Otter Project

The Commission and the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit collaborated on a project to collect home range and habitat use information on river otters along the Platte River using radio telemetry. This project began in the fall of 2006 and the field work was completed in December 2009. Transmitters were implanted into 18 river otters and more than 900 locations were collected for these animals. Data collected will help close existing information gaps and contribute to the creation of the Nebraska River Otter Management Plan and the Statewide Comprehensive Conservation Plan.



River Otter

Partnerships

The Commission and other agencies and groups work well together on the federal, state and local levels. These partnerships include agency-wide projects that serve the common Commission cause. For example:

Great Park Pursuit

The Commission continued its partnership with the Nebraska Recreation and Park Association to offer the Great Park Pursuit program again in 2009. The program's goal is to encourage a healthier lifestyle for participants while increasing awareness of Nebraska's rich outdoor recreation opportunities. The program involves the challenge to visit parks throughout Nebraska. Participants follow clues to collect nature-based impressions from posts hidden in each of the selected parks. Prizes and entry into drawings are based on the number of tracings collected.



adaptive management approaches to the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project.

Master Naturalist Program

Nebraska is initiating a Master Naturalist Program, which provides training to excited and engaged volunteers so they can contribute to conservation in a more meaningful way, and help the Commission achieve many goals. The program is made possible by a Nebraska Environmental Trust grant and support from the Commission. Over the last year, a coordinator has been hired, outreach content was developed, and more than 200 individuals have contacted the coordinator. Volunteer training is expected to begin in the summer of 2010.

Nebraska Nature and Visitor Center

A new partnership with the Nebraska Nature and Visitor Center focuses on reconnecting people with nature. The center, located south of Alda off Interstate 80, promises to inform and educate people about habitat, surface and ground water, air quality, and soil management. The center soon will create an education room dedicated to Nebraska's Natural Legacy Project.

Grassland Improvement Program

This is a unique partnership with the Nebraska Bird Partnership, the Commission, Nebraska Environmental

Trust, Quail Forever, Pheasants Forever, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service in the south-central Nebraska. The program offers landowners a \$30-per-acre incentive to defer grazing on grasslands for one calendar year. The grazing deferment period has been identified as the missing link to many of the grassland management practices that landowners are interested in applying to the land. There have been 3,291 acres applied for the program and 497 acres scheduled for a prescribed burn in the spring of 2010.

Mentored Youth Hunting Programs

Partnerships with Pheasants Forever, National Wild Turkey Federation, Nebraska Bowhunters Association, Whitetails Unlimited, and others result in more than 1,200 people annually participating in a mentored hunt. For example, the mentored youth archery program results in youths having an entire archery season and 25-40 outings with their mentor. Also, the Pheasants Forever youth mentoring program has youths taking hunter education principles to the next level, learning about game care, shooting, landowner relations, and hunting.

New RDR Partnership

The Commission and Pheasants Forever have teamed up to create the Family Days Trailers. These trailers provide all the necessary ingredients for a turnkey outdoor event. Activities such as hunting, fishing, shooting, animal identification, and lessons on habitat are all part of the trailers, which will be available for check out from certain Pheasants Forever chapters.

New Unit Scientist Hired

Commission staff was involved in selecting Dr. Joseph Fontaine as the new assistant unit leader at the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. Unit scientists conduct research on topics of mutual interest to the Commission, the U.S. Geological Survey – Biological Resources Division, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Wildlife Management Institute. He is preparing to partner with the Commission on pheasant research and incorporating



Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. Unit scientists conduct research on topics of mutual interest to the Commission, the U.S.

Playa Lakes Joint Venture

The Playa Lakes Joint Venture provided seed money to create a farm bill wildlife biologist position at Imperial through a partnership with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, the Commission and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. This new position focuses on a wider variety of conservation activities, yet still spends a portion of the time on playa wetland conservation.

Law Enforcement Partnerships

Conservation officers often team up with other entities to enforce the law and monitor activities. The following are three examples from 2009:

- A special waterfowl enforcement detail was conducted in October with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to monitor hunting activity on the Missouri River near Santee. Officers checked 62 hunters in duck blinds hunting the river.
- Conservation officers assisted the Nebraska State Patrol with a road check on Interstate 80 near Brady in October. More than 4,000 vehicles were checked in 12 hours, including 914 big game hunters and anglers from western states. Five court citations and 114 warnings were issued for fish and game violations. Positive remarks were received from most of the hunters.
- Operation Dry Water, a joint effort with the Nebraska State Patrol, was held in June at Calamus Reservoir as part of a national boating safety effort to make people aware of the dangers of boating while under the influence. Fifty boaters were checked.



Fifty boaters were checked during the Operation Dry Water held last June at Calamus SRA.

Missouri River Partnerships

Agency employees participate with several groups concerning Missouri River management, research and politics. The Missouri River Recovery Program (MRRP), administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, purchases high-risk flood-prone land from willing sellers in the floodplain for fish and wildlife habitat and public access, constructs habitat for native and endangered species, implements a spring pulse from Gavins Point Dam to benefit riverine fish and wildlife species, supports fish hatcheries that spawn and raise pallid sturgeon, and funds research and monitoring activities.

- The Missouri River Ecosystem Recovery Plan (MRERP) develops and implements a comprehensive and integrated ecosystem plan to guide implementation of mitigation, recovery and restoration activities on the river.

- The Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee is a citizen advisory group that interacts with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on matters pertaining to the MRERP. States, tribes, stakeholders, and federal agencies with responsibilities that affect the river are represented.
- The Missouri River Association of States and Tribes was formed by the Missouri River Basin governors (except Missouri) and the Mni Sose Intertribal Water Rights Coalition to promote the river as a valuable national and regional resource of biological, economic and cultural significance.
- Partnerships with FUTURES and the Izaak Walton League are benefitting fish and wildlife habitat on the river by making landowners and community leaders aware of available local, state and federal funding programs.



Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

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