



QUAIL AND UPLAND WILDLIFE FEDERATION

THE HABITAT GUIDE

VOLUME 17 ISSUE 1 • FEBRUARY 2026



Notes from the Dashboard:

No ticks - Trail cleaning time!

By Craig Alderman — After many decades of maintaining trails (creating untold brush piles), creek crossings, border lines, there is no better time than early spring late winter to get back out there. Of course, you can go from -12 to 74 degrees, from snow to heavy rain in a heartbeat, but still, **no ticks.**

Using the **WoodMaxx 8600 PTO Chipper**, we developed a process for miles of great trail clearing and its fun. We will shortly have several videos on our suggested process on YouTube with QUWF and WoodMaxx. This American-made chipper has an auto feed system making it even easier to use. No more pushing the branches in. We chose the 8600 as it can chip up to a 6-inch diameter branch, and it does it quickly.

Our trails have oaks of all variations, cedars everywhere, hickory, honey locust (we do not chip them to prevent tire puncture) and more. Anything drooping over the trails, extending into the trails, on the sides of trails like blackberry or windfalls from the winter storms is targeted for removal.

This series of PTO chippers can handle much larger diameters (requires more PTO horsepower) but for our farm and local conservation use, this size is perfect.

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Say thanks to landowners who offer hunting access

Editor's Note: Thanking a landowner should be done in many ways. Did you offer to help with his land projects like fixing fencing, repairing crossings? This time of year is the perfect time to mark boundaries (bring signs with you), clear access and egress trails of downed trees, repair gates and fencing, drooping limbs, and maybe offer to plant the trails in clovers or wheat. Clearing shooting lanes should be your responsibility not his, always with permission of course.

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Continued from Page 1 — Another positive trail use is for ATV/UTV/Side by Side riding parks and their trails. No more burn piles, shoving them off the side or unsightly piles that exist for years and it makes the trails more stable offering a natural cover that does help with erosion and mud control.

As we learned the best process by field use, examining the trails first, planning, clearing and cutting, then going back with the chipper a process emerged. When it came to the chipper use, another tool made its appearance. Enter the Milwaukee 18V, 8-inch chain saw. You will find you need a small chain saw to cut limbs that are at 90 degrees to the branch trunk so it feeds easily and not jam. Regular chain saws are start / stop or leave running. This electric saw is perfect, the battery lasts forever, I'm still on the first battery, months later, and it works so well we carry it all the time in the Kubota Sidekick SxS for hanging limbs from new storms when we are riding. We are working with WoodMaxx to design a small holder for the electric saw so it is always within arm's length when feeding the chipper. The process;

So, **Step 1: ride the trails and determine what is required to clear them**, such as trim chain saws (smaller trees and limbs), larger chain saws (clearing full size blow downs) or needed work with a small dozer. If you find Honey Locust, mark them for basil spraying, then removal. Carry Tordon RTU to apply to any unwanted stumps. You don't need to use it on cedar, once cut, they do not grow back from the stump. Mark those dozer areas with flagging. Plan where to drop the trees and limbs allowing easy access by the tractor and chipper and where you will place the chips on the trail. Carry a notepad on a clip board with internal storage in case the weather turns bad. Label and number all your trails on your notepad. While you are out there, plan potential new trails, border roads and mark them with flagging. 2 Flags on a tree is the right side of a new trail, 1 flag, left side. Keep the size of new trails double the width of your bush hog plus 10%. So an 8-foot bush hog would mean an 18-foot-wide trail, rounding up. **About every 50 to 100 yards, plan an equipment turn around area. Make it large enough for a trailer or wagon with the tractor.**

Step 2: Plan the access route approaches and exits to use with the tractor and chipper and where to park it to operate (it must be solidly on the ground, not in anyway off the ground) and where to place the chute to blow, chips. Uphill most often should be avoided, downhill not as bad. Rocky hills create hard footing as you are feeding branches, try to use it on level ground at the bottom or tops of hills.

Step 3: Put on the WoodMaxx chipper, grease and service it, checking all bolts and controls. We wax ours in the fall with heavy duty floor wax, everything cleans faster and better. Check the hydraulic oil for the feed system. Check the Milwaukee 18V chain saw for battery charge, oil and sharpness, grab the trim saw just in case.



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Continued from Page 2 — Take the appropriate regular chain saws and supplies. Follow your approach plan. Best always to have two people if you can, the second person driving the side by side with other supplies, water and power bars and have the GMRS radio working.

Step 4: Park the chipper in the preplanned areas, make sure it is on the ground, footing clear for you moving around it. Restart the tractor not being in the seat so you can activate the PTO. Have your Milwaukee or chosen electric saw within reach, set the chipper chute in the direction you want and start feeding the limbs in slowly. Once grabbed they will feed at the right speed. Watch for limbs 90 degrees to the trunk. Cut off the limb with the E chain saw, feed it in too. Finally, if you see critters take pictures and record what you saw, mark wildlife trail crossings.

Step 5: The chipper works fast so be ready to move on down the trail and repeat the set up.

This entire process is enjoyable, and you get lots of exposure to the land we all love to maintain. Look around, stop often and listen, nature is there for you. Catch you on the chipper trail.



Craig Alderman is the Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation founder and executive director. Reach him at admin@quwf.net.



Say thanks to landowners who offer hunting access

Editor's Note: Thanking a landowner should be done in many ways. Did you offer to help with his land projects like fixing fencing, repairing crossings? This time of year, late winter or early spring is the perfect time to mark boundaries (bring signs with you), clear access and egress trails of downed trees, repair gates and fencing, drooping limbs, and maybe offer to plant the trails in clovers or wheat? Clearing shooting lanes should be your responsibility not his, always with permission of course.

Using a WoodMaxx PTO chipper allows the chips to stay on trails, dramatically helping with mud and erosion problems and no burning required. It also reduces homes for coyotes and other varmints under brush piles.

With the beginning of the new license year on March 1, hunters have until Feb. 28 to use the [Thank a Landowner](#) web portal to express gratitude to landowners who allowed hunting access on their land this season.

FWP collects these submissions and mails the letters and photos to all landowners who were identified.

So far, nearly 400 hunters have submitted a thank you note to private landowners through the portal.

The portal is part of the [It's Up To Us](#) campaign to promote ethical hunting and help improve relationships between hunters and landowners. This campaign is an annual effort with FWP and several partner organizations to encourage hunters to take the initiative to promote good hunter ethics and behavior, particularly on private lands.

The [It's Up To Us](#) webpage also features tips on ethical hunting and links to informative video content and the [Thank a Landowner](#) portal.

The page also features access to the [Hunter Landowner Stewardship Project](#) and links to campaign partners.





Ask Alexa to play 101.3 Real Country or AM 560 in the Morning, or go online and download the **free app**.

Ohio's final 2025-26 deer hunting report

Ohio hunters checked 232,142 white-tailed deer during the 2025-26 season that concluded on Sunday, Feb. 1, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Wildlife. [The season total](#) includes all deer taken during archery, gun, muzzleloader, and youth seasons since Sept. 13, 2025. This is the seventh highest total on record, topping 200,000 for the fourth consecutive season.

In 2024-25, deer hunters checked 238,137 deer. The three-year average (2022, 2023, and 2024) is 221,013.

Since the deer season opened, Ohio hunters added approximately 11 million pounds of venison to dinner tables and freezers. A deer can yield 50 pounds of nutritious meat for hunters to share with friends and families or donate to food banks around Ohio.

The Division of Wildlife has increased its efforts to help hunters donate their harvested deer to food pantries through Deer Donation Days. The Division of Wildlife partnered with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction's (ODRC) Ohio Penal Industries' (OPI) meat processing facility at the Pickaway Correctional Institution to process donated deer. Hunters donated 136 deer through the Deer Donation Days, producing 5,328 pounds of processed venison.

The Division of Wildlife is also partnering with Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry (FHFH) to support local food banks with donated venison. Visit wildohio.gov or feedingthehungry.org for more information.

Deer harvest totals are lower than average in Athens, Meigs, Morgan, and Washington counties as a result of an unprecedented outbreak of Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) over the summer. The combined total of those four counties for the 2025-26 season is 4,289 deer checked. Last season, that number was 15,659.

Historic deer hunting totals

The number of deer bagged in 2025-26 is Ohio's seventh largest total

Most popular hunting implements

- Straight-walled cartridge rifle: 78,395 (34%)
- Crossbow: 77,938 (33%)
- Vertical bow: 29,845 (13%)
- Shotgun: 29,800 (13%)
- Muzzleloader: 15,602 (6%)
- Handgun: 562 (less than 1%)

License sales

Hunters from all 50 U.S. states purchased nonresident hunting licenses for use during the 2025-26 seasons, many of them for deer. States with the highest nonresident license sales:

- Pennsylvania (6,768)
- Michigan (4,426)
- North Carolina (2,999)
- New York (2,839)
- West Virginia (2,750)

From deer donations to gloves, hunters help

The DNR's Hunters Feeding Michigan program is already making inroads into efforts to feed needy families through hunters' donations of harvested deer. Recently, the program yielded another deer-related benefit: Early last week, five dozen pairs of insulated deerskin gloves were delivered to the [Shelter of Flint](#) (a provider of emergency shelter and transitional housing in Flint, Michigan) to share with its clients.

"We are grateful for the support, and the gloves are integral to helping those without a home in this brutal, cold weather," said Shelly Hoffman, Shelter of Flint vice president and chief operating officer.

The idea started with a conversation. Joe Presgrove, Hunters Feeding Michigan program specialist, approached Grand Rapids Hide Co. after learning the company worked with a number of participating HFM processors: "I just facilitated the conversation," he said, "and they took it from there and agreed to work together to get the gloves.

"While deer processors typically will sell hides from hunter-harvested deer to companies like Grand Rapids Hide, in this case a few deer processors decided to get donated gloves instead of money for the hides."

[Grand Rapids Hide Co.](#) is a locally owned and operated Michigan business and a trusted name in the hide industry since the late 1800s. It receives donated deer hides from HFM processors throughout the deer season.

"We wanted to partner with the Hunters Feeding Michigan program by providing warm gloves to distribute to our neighbors in need," said Grand Rapids Hide Co. owner David Hendrix. "We can make a positive impact at our shelters and warming centers."

The palms of the gloves are made of a deerskin suede, and the insides are insulated with a Thinsulate material. All white-tail hides used in the gloves come from HFM-donated deer and other U.S. sources.

"Michigan hunters know well the uncomfortable feeling of having cold hands in the deer stand or blind, and how much a good pair of warm gloves can make a difference," Presgrove said. "This initiative wouldn't be possible without the generosity of hunters, program processors and Grand Rapids Hide Co."

The DNR received 12 dozen pairs of gloves. Presgrove said the remaining seven dozen will go to shelters in other areas of the state, yet to be determined.

Since 2007, [Hunters Feeding Michigan](#) has contributed more than 3.4 million servings of ground venison to those in need throughout the state. Each deer donated (at no cost to the hunter) will provide an estimated 160 high-protein, nutritious meals.

Questions? Contact [Joe Presgrove](#) at 517-643-3809.



Observations from TX wild turkey nesting research

One hen attempts to nest, and another doesn't. Why is that so? This hen nests successfully consistently while another never does. What are the differences? These and many more are questions that TFT-funded research is looking to address. Read on for an overview of some important takeaways.

About the Research

This project, partially funded by TFT, was initiated as a pilot study in February 2025. It involved the capturing of 15 Rio Grande hens and backpack tracking them. The property was and continues to be managed extensively for predators.

Furthermore, this project has been largely overseen by Dr. Nicholas Bakner with the University of Delaware. (When it started, he was a post-doctoral research associate at Tennessee Tech University, working in unison with TFT, LSU, and TPWD.)

"We have GPS locations on these birds within 15 meters of error," Bakner said. "We're within 15 meters of that bird with each data point. Now, we can have more accuracy with nesting locations.

"As it looks from the GPS points, they became concentrated, and whenever those points become concentrated, they stick into an area," Bakner continued. "This is very easy to identify as nesting."

Observation No. 1: Spring Hen Dispersal Mimics a Shotgun Pattern

Each year, hens disperse from winter flocks and establish nesting areas. While habitat structures can impact how and where this occurs, more times than not, it looks a consistent and specific way.

"Around mid-March, you started seeing these birds disperse away from their flocks in a shotgun blast pattern," Bakner said. "This is pretty typical with Rios and eastern wild turkeys. Hens are more or less dominant, and they just want to get away from everybody and nest."

Observation No. 2: Most Hens Didn't Nest Successfully

According to Bakner, around the beginning of April, hens began initiating nests. Of the 15 hens, five of these initiated and successfully nested. Bakner says several other hens appeared to attempt nests but failed. The remaining hens didn't seem to attempt to nest at all.

Observation No. 3: Some Hens Didn't Even Attempt to Nest

A portion of the tracked hens did not seem to nest at all. Bakner believes these were most likely juvenile females.

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Continued from Page 8 — “Juvenile females typically don't nest the first year,” Bakner said. “If they do, it's later in the year.”

Observation No. 4: Hens Can Re-Nest Multiple Times (If Needed)

While the re-nesting data with the Texas research is still being analyzed, other research efforts sing a steady tune.

“Oftentimes, wild turkeys can nest multiple times (if needed),” Bakner said. “We had birds in Louisiana nest up to four times.”

Observation No. 5: Predator Management, Human Presence Seem to Impact Location

It's highly logical that predator management of nest predators and larger animals that consume wild turkeys positively impacts nesting success. However, while traditionally viewed as a negative, it seems that human presence might also have desired impacts on nesting location selection and overall production.

“These birds aren't nesting far from roadways (trails, four-wheeler paths, gravel roads, etc.),” Bakner said. “They're sticking to the roads. This could be indicative of the predator management program being conducted on the property.”

Bakner also points to a different possible correlation. “We found that, with grouse and other species on fracking sites in North Dakota, more human activity deters predators,” Bakner said. “Maybe these areas are places that birds are inhabiting because of the human activity. It's weird to think that human activity could actually buffer predators, but it's possible.”

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Continued from Page 9 — Bakner also mentions his brother's work in Rhode Island, who is working with and tracking birds in suburban areas. These turkeys are living daily in close proximity to people.

"These suburban turkeys are doing wonderful," he said. "It's the ones in the forests and on the WMAs that are getting killed."

Observation No. 6: Hens Take Incubation Breaks

There were revelations in feeding breaks in relation to incubation behavior. This helped sustain them for the long durations associated with nesting and brooding.

"They were traveling a good ways off of the nest," Bakner said. "A host of my papers have found that incubation recesses are important to these females."

"They'll take incubation breaks to go forage," he continued. "They travel off the nest, oftentimes using some of the management technique strips that were mowed, which provided the disturbed habitat needed to go in, get insects, forbs, and other food sources on the ground."

Observation No. 7: Hens Choosing Feeding Area Further from Nesting Sites More Successful

According to Bakner, his research and published papers have shown that it's better for hens to move greater distances between food sources and nesting areas. Those that feed further from the nest tend to experience greater nest success.

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QUWF welcomes All veterans. All the time.

The Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation was formed to focus on and help veteran landowners, veteran sportsmen, and all veterans who are interested in the great outdoors.

QUWF staff will help all veterans find and get benefit assistance through the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) or other resources.

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Continued from Page 10 — "If hens move further off of the nest, they're actually taking those predation cues away from the nesting site," he said. "Most of your predators are olfactory-driven. You don't want all your smells at the nest. So, you want that opportunity to go out there and forage.

"From what I'm seeing with the GPS data, and knowing a little bit about the area, that's what the management practices on this property are supporting," he continued. "Plus, there are water sources, and everything that birds need to survive there."

Observation No. 8: Juvenile Hens Might Observe Nesting Behavior of Older Hens

Finally, it seems plausible that juvenile hens might observe nesting behaviors of older birds.

"An interesting point in science that we're looking at — do these juveniles watch the adult females and then go to prospected areas that were successful in nesting?" Bakner said.

In short, do they learn from their mothers, or other adult females in the flock? That's something that Bakner hopes to confirm or debunk in future chapters of this research effort.

How does intensive predator management impact nesting success?

Once data is completely assessed, this research effort will compare data sets produced on two different properties — one that's intensively managed for predators, and one that isn't managed at all.



Florida takes step back with fishing licenses

Anglers who want to get in a day of bass fishing on a Florida trip will now have to physically visit tax collector's offices or other fishing license sales locations for a short term fishing license. (Humminbird)

If you're planning a Florida fishing trip this spring or summer—whether for bass and crappies in freshwater or snook, reds and trout on salt, there's a licensing change you need to know about before you arrive.

In late 2025, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission quietly eliminated online and phone sales of short-term non-resident fishing licenses. The 3-day and 7-day licenses once favored by visiting anglers can no longer be purchased through GoOutdoorsFlorida.com or the Fish|Hunt FL app. Instead, out-of-state anglers must buy those licenses in person at a county tax collector's office or an authorized license agent before fishing.

Annual non-resident licenses remain available online. But for anglers in Florida for only a few days, the change adds a layer of friction that didn't exist before—and it's already being felt on the water.

It's important to note one major exception: this change does not affect most saltwater charter fishing. Florida's for-hire saltwater vessels operate under a "blanket" license that covers anglers on board, resident or non-resident. Anyone booking a guided offshore or inshore saltwater trip is typically unaffected. The impact falls primarily on do-it-yourself anglers and freshwater guides, where individual licenses are still required.

Balancing wildlife and ag at outdoor show

Editor's Note: Kudos to PA for the cross communication of the Commission, landowners and hunters. Too often the Commissions are intentionally isolated by the very agencies they are to manage from the very public they are charged with.

In continuing joint efforts to provide solutions surrounding wildlife crop damage, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Pennsylvania Game Commission, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, and Hunters Sharing the Harvest held their third town hall meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2026, at the Great American Outdoor Show in Harrisburg to share updates, including more opportunities for hunters, landowners, and farmers to work together.

The panel featured Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding, Pennsylvania Game Commission Deputy Executive Director Dave Gustafson and Landowner Engagement and Hunting Access Manager Tyler Strohecker, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau President Chris Hoffman, and Hunters Sharing the Harvest Executive Director Randy Ferguson.

This was the third public meeting between this group of stakeholders, the previous two were held in 2025 in response to urgent concerns and reports of increased deer pressure on agriculture crops across the state. Farmers and landowners in many cases depend on hunters to manage deer on their properties and limit crop losses, in turn providing opportunities to hunt and fill tags.

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Continued from Page 12 — "Wildlife belongs to all residents of the Commonwealth," said Game Commission Deputy Executive Director Dave Gustafson. "Due to the work and support of this group, the Game Commission has been able to implement creative and successful pathways to address wildlife crop damage, while keeping hunters on the front lines of managing healthy wildlife populations. From expanding Sunday Hunting opportunities, to working to expand more statewide opportunities for our Certified Hunter Program and Agricultural Deer Control Program, we've accomplished a lot in a little more than a year's time."



Act 36 of 2025 repealed the ban on Sunday hunting in Pennsylvania and gave the Game Commission full authorization to provide Sunday hunting opportunities. In the 2025-26 hunting season, 13 Sundays were open to deer hunters to fill tags. With many farmers relying on hunters to help manage deer on their properties, the additional hunting opportunities are mutually beneficial.

"When wildlife pressures threaten farm viability, collaboration is the solution," said Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding. "From updating Pennsylvania's Sunday hunting law to investing additional funding to get venison into our food banks, the Shapiro administration is partnering with the PGC to deliver real, commonsense solutions that support farmers, expand opportunities for hunters, and help feed Pennsylvanians in need. By bringing farmers, landowners, hunters, and conservation partners to the same table, we're protecting crops, strengthening our agricultural economy, and ensuring working farms remain viable for generations to come."

The Game Commission is continuing its work to expand programs to help farmers and landowners better meet their deer management goals. At its meeting on Jan. 24, 2026, the Pennsylvania Board of Game Commissioners voted to preliminarily approve regulations to guide the agency's Certified Hunter Program, which connects hunters and landowners as a means of addressing crop-damage concerns. The program launched last year in the Southwest Region and is expected to expand statewide in 2026.

The board also preliminarily voted at its January meeting to expand the Agricultural Deer Control Program, commonly known as the Ag Tag program. The program enables landowners to enlist the aid of hunters in removing antlerless deer from agricultural lands. If approved, hunters would be able to use any devices authorized for hunting deer in the regular firearms season during the Ag Tag season.

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Continued from Page 13 — Additionally, the limit was removed on the number of Ag Tags a hunter can receive. The preliminarily approved regulations for both the expansion of the Certified Hunter Program and the Ag Tag Program will be brought back up to the board's April meeting for a final vote.

"Pennsylvania Farm Bureau is thankful for the opportunity to continue working alongside the Pennsylvania Game Commission to find equitable solutions to mitigate crop damage, and to have more tools and resources available to our farmers to improve their operations," said Pennsylvania Farm Bureau President Chris Hoffman. "We greatly appreciate the collaborative efforts that led to legislation that was signed into law last year to help farmers combat crop damage. We are also elated to be able to continue to collaborate with the Pennsylvania Game Commission on the development of the Certified Hunter Program. These discussions are vital to finding adequate solutions to wildlife issues that our farmers face every day. We are excited to continue to partner with industry stakeholders to drive meaningful change to allow our farmers to thrive."

Due, in part, to the increased opportunities for hunters to fill tags, Hunters Sharing the Harvest has continued to see record breaking numbers of venison being donated through cooperating processors across the state. During the 2024-25 season, hunters set an all-time high venison donation record with 283,789 pounds donated from 7,855 deer. That equates to approximately 1.1 million servings of lean, nutritious venison being shared with food-insecure Pennsylvanians.

In fiscal year 2025/26, the Game Commission has provided a total of \$250,000 to Hunters Sharing the Harvest, including \$150,000 in new funds to support an increased need for deer processing for deer harvested through the Agricultural Deer Control Program and organizational capacity building.

Governor Josh Shapiro's bipartisan 2025-26 budget invested \$500,000 to support the program through the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Food Assistance. These funds support the processing and transport of donated venison to food banks, food pantries, and other charitable feeding organizations throughout the Commonwealth. This funding comes at a critical time, as food prices remain high, and food banks across Pennsylvania continue to report increased demand, and federal funding has significantly decreased. The Shapiro administration has responded swiftly to protect food access and security in the Commonwealth, ranging from legal actions protecting farmers to issuing a disaster declaration, directing \$5 million for the immediate purchase of food through the PASS program to support food banks serving all 67 counties.

"Hunters Sharing the Harvest exists at the intersection of wildlife management and food security," said Hunters Sharing the Harvest Executive Director Randy Ferguson. "When hunters help farmers manage deer populations, they're not only protecting crops, they are providing millions of servings of nutritious venison to Pennsylvanians in need. This partnership ensures conservation, agriculture, and community all benefit."

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Training course offered for new hunter ed instructors

Editor's Note: No matter what state you live in, becoming a Hunter Training Instructor invests in the traditional heritage of our country and guides the next generation to enjoy the outdoors. In every state I lived in, both in the military and civilian side, I became a Hunter Instructor and when my kids took the courses, I always took the course with them.

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is offering a New Instructor Training Course for people interested in volunteering to teach Hunter Education courses in Vermont.

The training will take place Saturday, April 11, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Randolph Fish and Game Club, 549 Lefebvre Road, Randolph, VT 05060.

Registration for the course is available online at [Event – New Instructor Training – April 11, 2026](#).

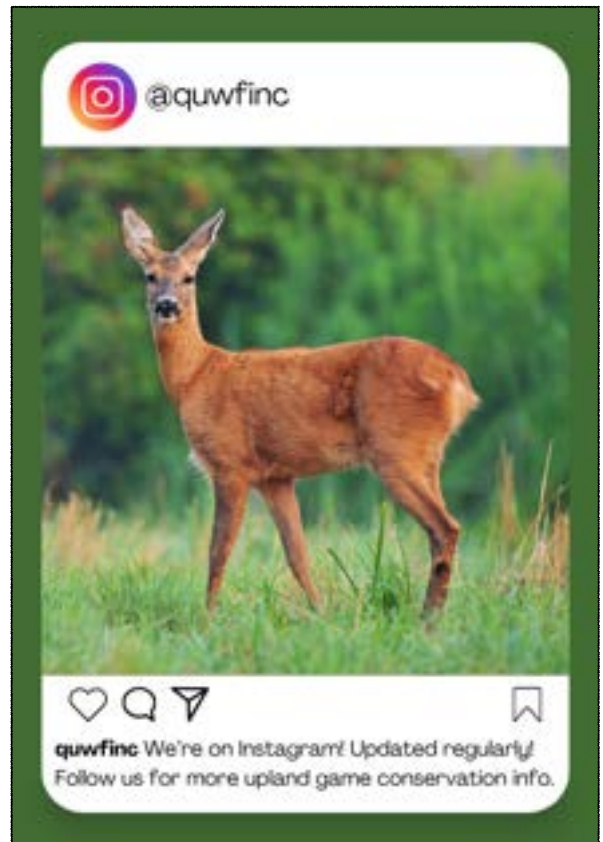
All applicants must complete their instructor paperwork and online homework before attending the course. Instructor application paperwork can be found in the [Hunter Education section](#) of Vermont Fish and Wildlife's [website](#), or call 802-828-1193 prior to the course date.

Policies and procedures, field techniques and teaching methods will be covered to give instructors the tools to teach future hunters how to have a safe and enjoyable experience. Lunch will be provided. Be prepared to be outside for at least part of the day.

Applicants are required to pass a background check with a Vermont State Game Warden and apprentice-teach with a chief instructor before they will receive their full State of Vermont Hunter Education Instructor certification.

"Our hunter education instructors are all volunteers, donating their time to pass on a cherished Vermont tradition," said Hunter Education Training Coordinator Nathan Lafont. "The hours our instructors put in will leverage federal dollars that enable the Hunter Education Program to function."

Reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities are available for free upon request. Requests should be made as early as possible. Please call the office staff at 802-828-1193 (voice) or 1-800-253-0191 (TTY).



For all your chapter needs, please call Leslie Casanova [direct](#) at Sportsman Insurance Agency at 1-800-925-7767. In most cases, Leslie can have your insurance the same day!

Give old decoys new life with AGFC

Editor's Note: What a great program! Kudos to Arkansas for the idea and involving the youth to "rehab" old decoys. Another idea, old or new decoys can be great salable centerpiece's at banquets and fundraisers. Trim the bottom off and it sits flat on a prepared board with Faus grass and milk weed stalks, or buy itself.

LITTLE ROCK — As February closes the door on another Arkansas duck season, all that's left for many hunters is to pack up the decoys they've hunted over all season and sort out the ones that will stay in next season's spread. The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission is asking all hunters to consider donating the faded, shot-up or otherwise mistreated duck and goose lures to its decoy adoption program, saving some landfill space while inspiring the next generation of conservationists.

The program, now in its sixth year, has recycled more than 8,000 plastic decoys. All you have to do is contact Eric Maynard, assistant chief of Education for the AGFC, at eric.maynard@agfc.ar.gov and arrange for the drop-off.

"Most of the decoys we collect are cleaned up, patched and given a gray primer before being stored at an AGFC nature center," Maynard said. "We use them in decoy-painting classes to help teach people about the variety of different waterfowl species you'll find in Arkansas and, hopefully, spark an interest in duck hunting or conservation."

Maynard says decoys that are still in usable condition are cleaned up and sorted to another pile, this one destined to be used again in the wetlands of The Natural State.



"We have a lot of decoys donated that are practically new, and a few have come to us in an unopened box," Maynard said. "Some hunters are upgrading to the latest, greatest decoys or bought a bunch somewhere on clearance and no longer have the extra space for them. Those decoys are matched up and rigged, then we work with different groups like Future Farmers of America or 4-H to find young men and women who want to get into duck hunting but lack the resources for a full spread."

Maynard says the program doesn't just take duck decoys, either.

"I have had people give us goose socks, decoy bags, calls and other equipment that we rehome," Maynard said. "The AGFC hosts many mentored hunts throughout the season and these items are used in those, then leave with the participants so they can branch out on their own. If you don't want it anymore, just give me an email. I'll bet we can find a use for it."



Late January duck estimate falls short

LITTLE ROCK — Arkansas Game and Fish Commission biologists beat the winter storm for as much surveying as possible in the final January aerial waterfowl survey of the season. The four fliers were able to cover the Arkansas Delta, the Arkansas River Valley and most of southwest Arkansas before the snow-and-ice storm began arriving Jan. 23.

Conducting randomly selected, transect-based survey flights in the Delta, biologists estimated 337,479 mallards and 694,286 total ducks in the last weeks of January, while duck population estimates in the Arkansas River Valley totaled 25,542 ducks, including 12,075 mallards. Staff performing cruise surveys in southwest Arkansas reported an estimated 19,365 ducks, with 8,030 of those being mallards.

Arctic goose population estimates totaled 1,478,989 light (lesser snow and Ross's) geese and 246,472 greater white-fronted geese in the Delta in late January.

Brett Leach, the AGFC's waterfowl program coordinator, said, "This duck season was characterized by dry conditions, ranking from the third driest on record in northeast Arkansas to the 22nd driest in the southeast portion of the state. January continued to see dry conditions and was classified as in even further drought, with 99 percent of the state in moderate to exceptional drought."

Continued on Page 18

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Continued from Page 17 — With limited habitat most of the season because of the drought, the 2026 late-January Delta mallard population estimate was 121,205 mallards below the 2025 late-January estimate, and 343,221 mallards below the late-January long-term average (2010-2025). Total duck population estimates in the Delta were 99,456 birds below last year's late-January count and 503,937 birds below the long-term average. Mallards typically account for about 55 percent of all ducks in the Delta during the late-January survey; however, this survey period showed mallards made up 49 percent of the total duck estimate.

During this period, biologists saw most mallards covering four Delta survey zones: the Bayou Meto-Lower Arkansas River, the Black River-Upper White, the L'Anguille River, and the Lower St. Francis River. Estimates were more than 50,000 mallards in each of the four survey zones. Total duck estimates also were greatest in those four survey zones, while Big Creek in east Arkansas accounted for just over 90,000 total ducks estimated.

"Hot spot maps indicate several key duck concentration areas in the northern half of the Delta and fairly evenly distributed throughout the central portion of the Delta," Leach noted in his report.

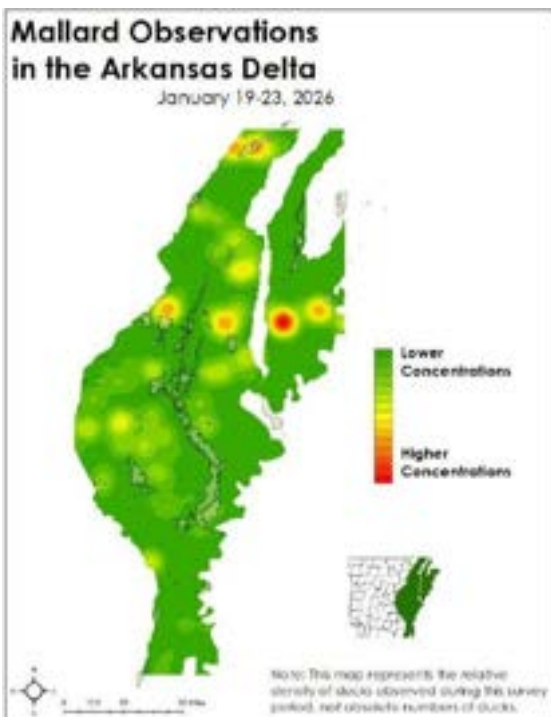
Mallard estimates in the Arkansas River Valley, he added, were 68 percent below the late-January long-term average, while total duck estimates were 54 percent below the long-term average.



Mallards typically make up 61 percent of the total duck estimate in the River Valley in late January, but were 47 percent of this count. Two-thirds of the mallards estimated for the region were seen in the Point Remove-Plumerville survey zone, and total duck estimates also were strongest there.

Leach reported that southwest Arkansas's duck numbers saw an uptick in bird numbers in this survey period compared to the two previous surveys for 2025-26. Mallard counts were 4 percent below the late-January long-term average, while total duck populations were 21 percent below average. Of the mallards recorded, the majority (75 percent) were concentrated along the Red River between U.S. Highway 82 and the Sulphur River.

Leach and AGFC Wildlife Management Division employees Tristan Bulice, William Guy and Derek Furr conducted the last aerial survey. See this current survey and information charges as well as this past December's and the midwinter surveys at <https://www.agfc.com/education/waterfowl-surveys-and-reports/>.



Electronic posting system for private land available

Editor's Note: This is an interesting approach and one I'm sure will expand. I think ONX Hunting should provide this feature selection on the app used by many hunters, BUT you must properly post your land boundaries, electronic posting would not hold up in court I presume. Also make sure you understand the privacy issues in your state.

Landowners [interested in posting private land electronically](#) for the 2026-27 hunting season can [log into My Account](#) on the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov.

New this year, landowners have the option to electronically post their land from Aug. 1-July 31 (entire season); Aug. 1-Nov. 22 (through deer gun season); or only during deer gun season (Nov. 6-22).

Landowners who have a profile on the Game and Fish Department's mobile application have the option to communicate with hunters using their cellphone app. A link will be available for hunters to send a request to the individual posting the land. The deadline to digitally post land is July 1, which enables Game and Fish to produce print material and digital content prior to hunting seasons that begin in August.

Landowners who enrolled land electronically last year can renew, add or modify posting designations during the enrollment period. Others posting for the first time might need to create a profile. To post land, proceed to the "Land Parcels/Electronic Posting" section at the bottom of the page and click "Search/Renew Land parcels." The electronic posting system is linked to land descriptions based on county tax parcel information.



VT F&W asks mountain lion advocates to slow down

Editor's Note: Introduction of type A predators, the top of the food chain, is not an advisable course. There is a reason they have not existed since the 1800's. Now, with increased populations in every portion of wildlife habitat, the human contact is going to be obvious. That contact will lead to certain issues of a food chain crisis, these are killers of anything that moves, which includes, children, pets, hikers or just walking.

A campaign is underway to bring mountain lions to Vermont, led by the nonprofit Mighty Earth. As the state agency that would be responsible for these cats if Mighty Earth succeeds, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is asking mountain lion advocates to slow down.

We are biologists, game wardens and environmental educators who have dedicated our lives to conservation. We love Vermont's wildlife and wild places, and we can appreciate why some are excited to bring back a native large carnivore. We share the dream of a wilder Vermont, but even so, we need Vermonters to understand that reintroducing mountain lions would be much more complicated than it might appear.

Mountain lions are top predators that have not had a breeding population here since the 1800s. Mighty Earth recently told the Washington Post they wanted to have "paws on the ground in four years." That is, to put it mildly, unrealistic.

Continued on Page 21

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Continued from Page 20 — We do not know enough about how mountain lions would do in today's Vermont, or how Vermonters would do with mountain lions, to support rushing into this. Early research on habitat and public attitudes in the Eastern United States suggests mountain lion reintroduction might be possible. And yet these studies raise as many questions as they answer. Just how far, and how fast, could the mountain lions spread? What are the likely impacts to farmers, pet owners, hikers and other trail users? What would the return of this large carnivore mean for Vermont's deer and other prey species? What changes to our roads and highways would be needed to accommodate these far-roaming cats, and, at the risk of being blunt, how many will still end up as roadkill?

The list of unknowns goes on. Many of these research gaps are substantial enough to warrant standalone, peer-reviewed treatment in a scientific journal. But Mighty Earth is prematurely pushing for a broad-brush feasibility study.

That is putting the cart before the horse; the kind of comprehensive research initiative needed to arrive at answers that stand up to peer review will take time. It needs to be complete before we can honestly assess the feasibility of this proposal. And it needs to be complete before we can responsibly grapple with deeper questions like whether bringing mountain lions here is the right thing to do, both for our communities and for the cats themselves.

Beyond the scientific and moral questions, there are also stark realities Vermont will have to face if we are serious about living alongside mountain lions.

Who will be held accountable when a cat kills livestock on private land? What happens when one becomes too comfortable around people and dens near a home or a school?

States with mountain lions have dedicated agency staff and significant, long-term funds specifically to meet the responsibilities of coexisting with these powerful animals. Vermont would be starting from scratch, and rushing will not set us or the mountain lions up for success.

Rushing will, however, jeopardize Vermont's ability to earn the consent and collaboration of our neighboring state, provincial and tribal governments. Other wildlife agencies in the Northeast have already expressed unease about the prospect of Vermont moving forward alone. Mountain lions released in Vermont are virtually certain to cross our borders into Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York and Quebec.

Without our region's complete buy-in, reintroduction will not end well for us, our neighbors or the mountain lions.

So, for the sake of the cats, we are imploring mountain lion advocates to pump the brakes.

This commentary is by Jason Batchelder, commissioner of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department; Andrea Shortsleeve, chief of operations; John Austin, director of the Wildlife Division; Alison Thomas, director of the Outreach Division; and Justin Stedman, director of the Game Warden Service.



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Do you have any questions concerning banquets and/or vendor programs? If so, please call the QUWF National Office at (417) 345-5960.

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Find us online: www.QUWF.net

SD governor signs suppressor deregulation into law

Sioux Falls, South Dakota – Silencer Central, America's leader in suppressor sales and advocacy for suppressor ownership, is proud to announce that South Dakota Governor Rhoden signed SD 2 into law at Silencer Central's Sioux Falls headquarters on February 10, 2026. Alongside the governor were the bill's primary sponsors, Senator Casey Crabtree and Representative Drew Peterson. Also in attendance was South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley and Moriah Day, National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) Director of Government Relations – State Affairs.

"It was an honor to stand alongside the Governor and the rest of our guests for the signing of this important bill," said Brandon Maddox, Silencer Central Founder and CEO. "Not only does it signal that South Dakota is a proudly gun- and suppressor-friendly state; it provides a template that other states can follow to remove overly complex and redundant suppressor regulation." Maddox continued, "We fully support the deregulation of suppressors, and we hope the work we are doing in the states will help build momentum toward achieving that goal at the federal level."



The South Dakota law removed suppressors from the state's definition for "controlled weapons" and eliminates the requirement for a Federal Stamp should their NFA designation or the transfer process continue to change. Silencer Central continues to work with the NSSF to develop and support similar legislation in the 15 other states with similar, redundant regulations.

Forest service plans to hire summer seasonal employees

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service announced plans to hire up to 2,000 seasonal positions for the upcoming summer recreation season, helping to support active management work and improve access and experiences on national forests and grasslands.

"Under President Trump's leadership, USDA is restoring fiscal responsibility, efficiency and accountability so that Americans can count on services that endure," said Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins. "We have addressed millions of dollars in salary deficits inherited from the previous administration. The Forest Service is now on a path to fiscal solvency and able to fill these critical seasonal positions to improve services for visitors this summer."

"Hiring these seasonal positions is essential to delivering the services visitors rely on," said Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz. "Our seasonal employees are active members of the communities they serve. They keep forests open and accessible, campgrounds and other facilities clean, and neighboring towns thriving. It's a direct investment in the people who make our national forests and grasslands special."

Now that the Forest Service has streamlined its hiring process and shortened hiring timeframes, seasonal employees can begin work earlier — opening more opportunities for people in rural communities to compete for jobs close to home.

"This year, we're focusing our recruitment within the communities we serve," added Chief Schultz. "Local residents bring invaluable knowledge, pride, and a strong connection to the places we care for. We are excited to offer more opportunities for people who want to work close to home."

These positions are in addition to seasonal fire hiring already underway. If you enjoy being in the outdoors and are interested in seasonal employment with the Forest Service, please check for opportunities and hiring events in your area.

Winter Wonderland: Wildlife make adaptations to survive

HELENA – This hasn't been a typical winter, but when the temperatures dip and the snow falls, it reminds us how amazing it is that animals survive the winter months. You could spend a whole winter just learning about the intricacy and variety of adaptations that Montana's wildlife have developed.

Some animals leave for warmer places, some sleep through it and others stay active by utilizing blankets of fur, underground hide-outs or a kind of internal antifreeze to survive this cold season.

Looking at the sky lately, it's hard not to notice the sporadic V formations of geese migrating to find warmer locales closer to the equator. But not all migrations are cross-country; deer, elk and antelope may move a short distance to lower elevations or open fields to feed.

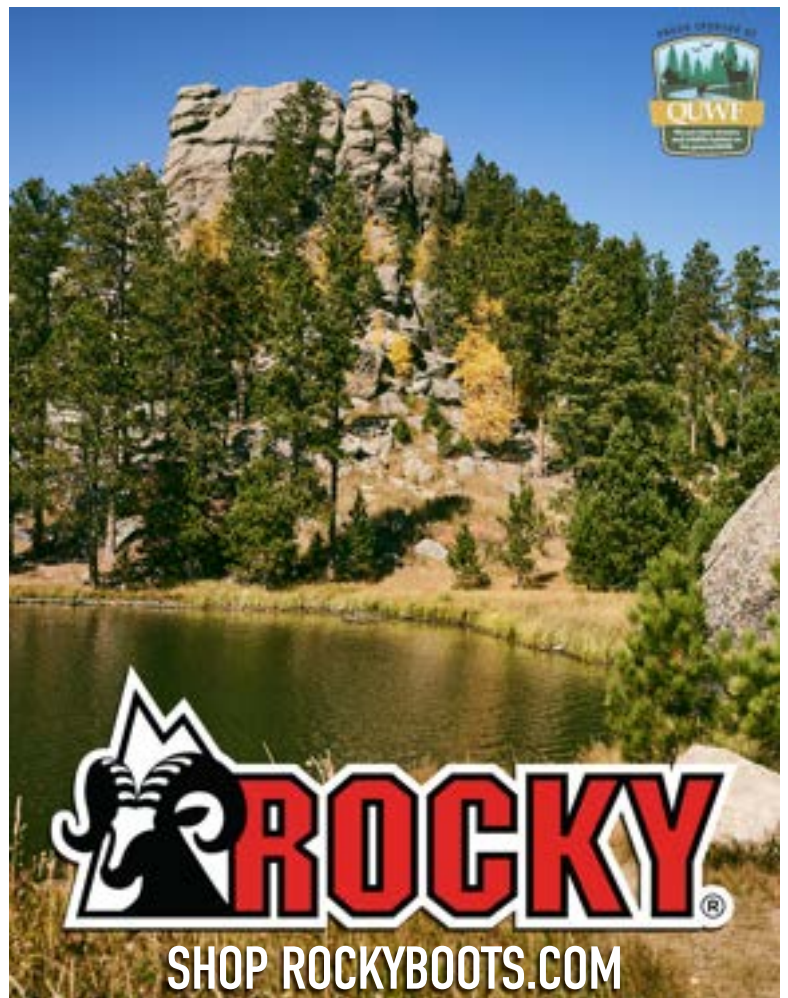
Many animals hibernate, slowing their activities so they use less energy. Bears are well-known hibernators, getting stocked up on body fat to survive while they den. They breed in spring, but the fertilized eggs don't implant until after denning, once a female has adequate fat stores to support cubs. Once in the den, bears lower their heart rates, body temperatures, breathing and metabolism to save energy for the long, cold months. In yet another amazing

adaptation, their bodies absorb their waste while they sleep, and they birth and suckle their cubs while in the den. Bats hibernate, too, hanging around until it's warm enough for their tasty insect prey to hatch again.

In reptiles and amphibians, they call this dormant state brumation. Frogs rely on a kind of biological antifreeze that keeps the cold from destroying their cells. They may freeze nearly solid, with no heart rate or breathing, then revive when the weather warms. Some insects have similar protections, or they over-winter as eggs, larvae or pupae. Fish slow their metabolism way down and stay in deeper, unfrozen water where temperatures are more stable.

Birds like the common poorwill, chickadee and hummingbird enter a lighter state of dormancy called torpor, which is similar to hibernation but usually lasts hours to days. This is to conserve energy during cold snaps or overnight when food is scarce. Smaller mammals like mice, chipmunks and squirrels also experience torpor. Air pockets in birds' feathers create warmth, and some species cluster for warmth.

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Continued from Page 23 — Ruffed grouse dive under snow for insulation. Many species of wildlife know all too well that dens, burrows, tree cavities, lodges and thick forests also provide protection from wind, snow and extreme cold.

Some animals master the art of camouflage by changing color in winter. Snowshoe hares turn white to blend easily into snow. Short-tailed weasels (ermine) and white-tailed ptarmigans do the same. This helps them blend into Montana's snowy forests, mountains and grasslands, which reduces the chance of being spotted by predators like lynxes, foxes, owls and coyotes. The weasel is a predator in its own right, and turning white improves its hunting success by allowing it to approach prey unnoticed.

These color changes are paired with thicker winter coats that provide insulation against Montana's cold temperatures and strong winds. The snowshoe hare, common in western forests, also has large, fur-covered feet that act like snowshoes. The ptarmigan grows feathers on its feet in winter for added warmth and traction. Shorter periods of daylight, rather than temperature, trigger these seasonal color shifts.

Animals also shift their food sources or store food to tide them over until spring. Elk and deer change their diets to twigs and woody plants and live off fat stores when all the good green stuff goes away. Squirrels, chickadees and beavers accumulate caches of food and hide it away.

A lot of small animals survive in what's called the subnivean zone – the insulated space between the ground and the snowpack. This hidden layer stays surprisingly warmer than the air above, giving mice, voles and other small critters a place to travel, hide and find food all winter.

Winter may look quiet on the surface, but underneath the snow and ice it's full of strategy, survival and adaptation. Nature never stops working.

Black-tailed prairie dogs make good neighbors

Black-tailed prairie dogs make good neighbors. They create friendly habitat, build shelters for future occupation by other species and provide an alarm system for the presence of predators. They also serve as the favorite meal for many predators, including the black-footed ferret, a species on the endangered species list.

"The long and short of it is that they are ecosystem engineers that are integral to a number of environmental processes and ecosystem health," said Amanda Hall, a nongame wildlife biologist with FWP. "They are the only way we can potentially get ferrets back on landscapes."

Black-tailed prairie dogs are found across much of the central and eastern parts of Montana. Typically, they prefer open grasslands and shrub with low, sparse vegetation. Their habitats are most frequently dominated by western wheatgrass, blue grama and big sagebrush.

Although black-tailed prairie dogs do not migrate, young males disperse from the burrow in which they were born in May or June. The males also disperse from their breeding territory every two years, most likely to avoid inbreeding with their offspring. Most dispersal will occur within the colony, but individuals are known to move up to 6 miles away.

Black-footed ferrets and other predators are not their only challenge. Colonies are also threatened by sylvatic plague, human-wildlife conflict and recreational shooting.

FWP is working with partners on conservation efforts. In southeast Montana, they've worked with landowners on a conservation contract. The goal of this 10-year contract is to preserve prairie dog habitat suitable for potential black-footed ferret reintroduction.

OK commissioners hear update on license sales

Revenue from recreational annual license sales was up 9% in the first half of this fiscal year versus the same period in the previous fiscal year, according to a presentation made to the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission during its regular meeting Feb. 9 in Oklahoma City.

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation License Supervisor Mike Chrisman presented on trends in license sales for the first half of Fiscal Year 2026, with a focus on impacts of the License Modernization Act, which took effect July 1, 2024.

The Act reduced the number of license types and was the first major license fee adjustment since 2003. In the first half of FY 2026, resident hunting license sales saw the following increases over the same time the previous year:

- Annual combo: 6%
- Annual hunting: 8%
- Deer archery: 7%
- Deer muzzleloader: 8%
- Deer gun: 3%

During the same time period, nonresident hunting license sales decreased by 2% compared to the first half of FY 2025. However, nonresident deer archery license sales increased 25%, regaining 33% of the losses in FY 2025. Nonresident deer muzzleloader sales increased 6% and nonresident gun sales increased by 16% compared to the previous year.

Chrisman also said annual fishing license sales increased in the first half of FY 2026 by 13% for residents and 7% for nonresidents.

In other business, Commissioners:

- Heard results of the FY 2025 Annual Financial Audit. It was a clean audit with no findings to report.
- Received a presentation of the December 2025 Financial Report and approved miscellaneous donations.
- Discussed upcoming calendar items including Rack Madness to be held March 4 at the Wildlife Department's headquarters.
- Received updates from Director Wade Free on various activities within ODWC's five divisions.
- Received an update from Assistant Director Nels Rodefeld on the current legislative session.
- Recognized Wildlife Lands and Minerals Coordinator Kristen Gillman for her 25 years of service.

The [Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission](#) is the eight-member governing board of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. The Commission establishes state hunting and fishing regulations, sets policy for the Wildlife Department, and indirectly oversees all state fish and wildlife conservation activities. Commission members are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Oklahoma Senate.



**OKLAHOMA
DEPARTMENT OF
WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION**

Registration open for Greatest American Cleanup

Editor's Note: This is an excellent program that any conservation organization, chapter or group should get behind in all states. Further, helping private landowners clean up trash and debris along access and egress roads and trails just may provide benefits of access in the future.

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. - Registration is now open for the Greatest American Cleanup in Arkansas, a statewide effort inviting communities, organizations and individuals to help clean and beautify The Natural State from March through May.

Led by Keep Arkansas Beautiful, the Greatest American Cleanup in Arkansas is part of a national initiative focused on litter prevention, waste reduction and community pride. This year's cleanup season also aligns with the celebration of America's 250th birthday, offering Arkansans a meaningful way to honor the nation's history by caring for the places that shape its future.



As communities across Arkansas prepare for America 250 commemorations, the Greatest American Cleanup encourages residents to take action close to home, improving public spaces, parks, roadways and waterways that reflect local heritage and shared responsibility.

"Caring for our communities is a timeless American tradition," said McKenzie McMath McCoronel. "As we look ahead to America's 250th birthday, this cleanup is a chance for Arkansans to celebrate by leaving our state cleaner, healthier and stronger for the next 250 years."

Cleanup events may be held anytime between March and May. Registration is free and open to

schools, civic groups, businesses, nonprofits and individuals. Participants can register cleanup events, track volunteer impact, and access resources to support local efforts. Supplies and support materials may be available while quantities last.

To register a cleanup or learn more about the Greatest American Cleanup in Arkansas, visit <https://keeparkansasbeautiful.com/get-involved/event-registration/>

Keep Arkansas Beautiful

The Keep Arkansas Beautiful Commission (KAB) is a part of Arkansas State Parks, a division of the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism and is one of four state agencies that share proceeds from the Amendment 75 1/8-cent Conservation Tax. KAB is a certified state affiliate of Keep America Beautiful Inc. and inspires and educates individuals to reduce litter, recycle and keep Arkansas beautiful. For more information, visit KeepArkansasBeautiful.com. Stay in the know by following Keep Arkansas Beautiful on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube and texting VOLUNTEER to (501) 287-3596.

Arkansas State Parks

Arkansas State Parks is a division of the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism. Arkansas state parks and museums cover 55,006 acres of forest, wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation facilities, and unique historic and cultural resources.

Latest Avian Flu outbreak impacting UT wild birds

Multiple waves of highly pathogenic avian influenza have affected Utah's wild bird populations since the first case of the latest outbreak [was confirmed in April 2022](#). Now, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources has confirmed that the virus has again been detected in wild birds around the Great Salt Lake and in several other counties throughout Utah, in the latest uptick of the ongoing outbreak.

The current outbreak of [highly pathogenic avian influenza](#) has been ongoing in the U.S. since 2022, but the disease typically spreads more during the spring and fall bird migrations.

"We saw a lull in new avian flu cases in wild birds from March 2025 to September 2025, but in the last few months, we have seen another uptick in new cases across Utah," DWR Veterinarian Ginger Stout said.

Since October, 49 wild bird carcasses collected from across Utah have been submitted for disease testing and tested positive for avian influenza.



Continued on Page 27

An advertisement for RXM. The background is a dark, textured grey. On the left, the text "THIS ONE SETS ITSELF APART" is written in large, white, distressed, all-caps font. In the center, a man wearing a black cap with "RUGER" on it, large black earplugs, and sunglasses is shown in profile, holding a handgun with both hands in a ready position. In the bottom right corner, there is a logo consisting of a stylized bird or animal head inside a circle with the letter "R" below it, followed by the text "RXM™" and "LEARN MORE" below that.

Continued from Page 27 — The birds most impacted by the latest influx of avian flu cases are:

- Eared grebes in Box Elder, Davis, Salt Lake, Tooele and Weber counties
- California gulls in Salt Lake County
- Canada geese in Box Elder, Cache, Davis, Iron, Sevier, Salt Lake, Summit, Utah, Washington and Weber counties
- Ducks in Box Elder and Davis counties
- Great horned owls in Box Elder, Davis, Summit and Weber counties
- Hawks in Box Elder, Davis and Weber Counties
- Swans in Cache and Salt Lake counties
- Turkey vultures in Box Elder and Weber counties

DWR biologists estimate that roughly 50,000 eared grebes and 250 California gulls have died along the south arm of the Great Salt Lake during this latest influx of avian influenza (although only a few carcasses were disease tested).

"Roughly 4 million eared grebes migrate through the Great Salt Lake each year, so the birds lost to avian influenza in this recent wave should not have a significant impact on the overall population," DWR Great Salt Lake Ecosystem Program Wildlife Biologist John Neill said. "Eared grebes typically use the Great Salt Lake as a rest area during their winter migrations to eat brine shrimp, fatten up and molt before they continue their southern migration. Although we occasionally see eared grebes remaining on the lake into January, the many thousands that are still here is somewhat unusual. The warmer lake temperatures are helping brine shrimp persist longer into the winter, and because they're the primary food source for eared grebes, that's likely why the birds are still here. Dead birds may continue to wash ashore in the coming months."

Since 2022, 242 wild birds, one mountain lion, some skunks and [three red foxes](#) have tested positive for avian flu in Utah. The virus has been confirmed in 19 counties in Utah since 2022.

[Highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses](#) are very contagious among wild birds and can cause rapid and high mortality in domestic birds, such as chickens, turkeys and domestic ducks. Typically, these viruses only occasionally kill wild birds, but this strain is more pathogenic and has been killing more wild birds.

The most common wild birds impacted by the virus are typically waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors and scavengers (which include birds like hawks, owls, and vultures). There are usually few symptoms in waterfowl and shorebirds, but the virus can kill raptors and scavengers quickly. The virus is spread among birds through nasal and oral discharge, as well as fecal droppings. It can be spread to backyard poultry and domestic birds through contaminated shoes or vehicles.

Songbirds are not typically affected by avian flu, due to low risk of contact with infected birds. People shouldn't have to remove their bird feeders unless they also have backyard chickens, domestic ducks or wild waterfowl on their property. However, if you have a bird feeder or birdbath, you should clean it regularly.

"The outbreak is still ongoing, so we are still advising anyone who finds a group of five or more dead waterfowl or shorebirds — or any individual dead scavengers or raptors — to report it to the nearest DWR office. Make sure you don't touch the birds or pick them up," Stout said.

"Report it to us, and we will come collect them for testing. We are continuing to monitor this virus in wild bird populations. This particular strain is affecting more wild birds and is more widespread than the last outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza in the U.S."

Continued on Page 29

Continued from Page 28 — The previous outbreak of avian flu in the U.S. occurred in 2014–15, when highly pathogenic strains of avian influenza were detected in wild birds of the Pacific, Central and Mississippi flyways. During that outbreak, the virus was only detected in two healthy ducks in Utah.

For more information about the current avian flu outbreak in wild birds, [visit the DWR website](#). You can also [view all the latest cases of avian flu](#) in wild animals on the DWR website.

To report any symptoms of avian flu in domestic birds, contact [the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food](#). For information about possible human health impacts, visit [the Utah Department of Human Services website](#).

NSSF celebrates \$1.3 billion for wildlife conservation

Editor's Note: The release of these funds is a fundamental driver of conservation for those states without internal state funding, like Missouri. *BE PRO-ACTIVE*, find out what the funding is being used for in your state. It may surprise you, the uses are not supporting conservation but other funding drains of the agency.

NSSF®, The Firearm Industry Trade Association, celebrates the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) [announcement](#) that nearly \$1.3 billion is being delivered to state conservation and wildlife access programs. The distribution of funds is derived from Pittman-Robertson excise taxes paid by firearm and ammunition manufacturers and Dingell-Johnson excise taxes paid by the angling industry.

A total of \$804,790,385 of the nearly \$1.3 billion of those funds are directly sourced from firearm and ammunition excise taxes paid by manufacturers. Since 1937, more than \$31 billion has been distributed through annual apportionments to states for managing wildlife resources. These funds directly contribute to wildlife conservation through the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act and provide funding for conservation programs, increased access to public lands and hunter education.

"The firearm industry is tremendously proud of the contributions we make to conserving our wildlife and the habitats wildlife need to thrive for generations to come," said NSSF President and CEO Joe Bartozzi. "Our industry is at the forefront of wildlife conservation. Each time a recreational shooter or hunter purchases a firearm or ammunition, they are helping to support wildlife conservation through the excise taxes paid by our industry on the sale of those products. The American model of conservation funding is the gold standard throughout the world for sustainable conservation and wildlife management."

The excise tax is set at 11 percent of the wholesale price for long guns and ammunition and 10 percent of the wholesale price for handguns. The excise tax, paid by manufacturers and importers, applies to all firearms and ammunition imported or sold domestically to the commercial market and federal law enforcement sales, whether the purpose is for recreational shooting, hunting or personal defense. The tax is administered by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) of the Department of the Treasury, which turns the funds over to the USFWS.

USFWS deposits the Pittman-Robertson excise tax revenues into a special account called the Wildlife Restoration Trust Fund administered by the USFWS. These funds are made available to states and territories the year following their collection based on a statutory formula. These excise tax dollars collected since 1937 under the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act are specifically designated to be used by state wildlife agencies.

Board approves FWP habitat conservation leases

The Montana Land Board approved four Habitat Conservation Leases (HCL) proposed by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks protecting more than 27,000 acres of rangeland habitats and providing public access for both recreation and hunting.

The four HCLs were approved by the Fish and Wildlife Commission at their regular meetings in August and December. The Montana Land Board approval was the final step before finalizing the agreements.

"These leases are proactive tools to help landowners, maintain or improve wildlife habitat and provide public access," said FWP Director Christy Clark. "We're grateful for the support of the Land Board and are working hard on more projects like these."

All four HCLs are located in eastern Montana. The Dunbar HCL is in Philips County and is 4,049 acres. The IOU Ranch HCL is 9,444 acres and located in Garfield County. The Lone Tree Land & Livestock Ranch HCL is 8,557 acres and located in Garfield County. The Rock Barn Ranch HCL is 5,091 acres and located in McCone County.

The four easements together will provide a minimum of 312 hunter days and 936 recreation days. They cost of the four easements was about \$3.1 million. All four are 40 year leases.

HCLs are voluntary, incentive-based agreement with private landowners conserving high-priority prairie habitats while providing for traditional agriculture operations. **They are typically 30- or 40-year leases. They also include an agreement for public access.**



Ruger expands upgraded 10/22 line with new models

Sturm, Ruger & Company, Inc. (NYSE: RGR) is excited to announce the introduction of 10 new models of its recently upgraded 10/22® rifle. Each new model builds on the proven performance of the 10/22, enhancing a platform celebrated for its rugged reliability, adaptability and iconic status in the rimfire world.

With this expansion, the upgraded features previously available only in select versions are now offered in a broader range of configurations. All new models include a BX-Trigger®, a match bolt release and – for non-takedown models – a receiver with an integrated rear cleaning port for simplified maintenance.

These new models offer versatility to match a wide range of shooter preferences to fit almost any need. Consumers can choose from threaded or non-threaded barrels of various lengths, takedown or traditional models and stock options ranging from Magpul® and Hogue® to Ruger polymer, modular and wood.

For more information about the iconic 10/22 rifle and these upgraded models, or to learn more about the extensive line of award-winning Ruger firearms, visit Ruger.com, [Facebook.com/Ruger](https://www.facebook.com/Ruger) or [Instagram.com/Rugersofficial](https://www.instagram.com/Rugersofficial)



NSSF salutes VA secretary for protecting rights

NSSF®, The Firearm Industry Trade Association, salutes Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Doug Collins for protecting veterans' Second Amendment rights by [eliminating the policy](#) of reporting veterans who require a fiduciary to assist in financial affairs to the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) to be included as a prohibited person for purchasing or possessing a firearm.

Rolling back this three-decade-old policy has been a longstanding NSSF priority that unduly robbed veterans of their Second Amendment rights to keep and bear arms. Needing assistance organizing financial matters is not a prohibiting factor to deny any individual the ability to legally purchase or possess a firearm. No one — much less a law-abiding veteran — should have their ability to lawfully acquire a firearm at retail denied without due process.

"This is another example of the Trump administration upholding its promise to protect Second Amendment rights and the industry that makes those rights possible," said Lawrence G. Keane, NSSF Senior Vice President & General Counsel. "This action taken by Secretary Collins to not only end the practice but restore those rights to veterans who were wrongfully reported to NICS as 'prohibited' reflects his commitment to veterans and the rule of law. NSSF is tremendously grateful to Secretary Collins for his leadership."

Secretary Collins, working in consultation with U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi and Department of Justice (DOJ) officials, rescinded the extrajudicial practice that denied veterans their Second Amendment rights through bureaucratic fiat.

They both agreed, and NSSF concurs, that the practice of VA bureaucrats reporting veterans' names as "prohibited persons" to FBI NICS violates the Gun Control Act (GCA) and the Second Amendment rights of those veterans who served and fought to protect those rights for all Americans.

NSSF continues to support and urges Congress to pass the Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act in the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate. U.S. Rep. Mike Bost (R-Ill.), Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, along with Rep. Morgan Luttrell (R-Texas), introduced [H.R. 1041](#), and Sen. John Kennedy (R-La.), along with Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, introduced [S. 478](#).

The two pieces of legislation would ensure that a future administration cannot strip a veteran with a fiduciary of their rights to keep and bear arms without a judge or court ruling first that the veteran is a danger to themselves or their community.



North Dakota releases 2025 CWD test results

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department tested 1,224 animals for chronic wasting disease during the 2025 sampling season. Game and Fish confirmed 16 deer tested positive for CWD, all of which were taken by hunters.

Deer that tested positive for CWD came from the following units:

- 3A1 (five mule deer, one whitetail)
- 3D2 (two mule deer)
- 3E1 (one mule deer and one whitetail)
- 3E2 (one mule deer)
- 3F1 (one whitetail)
- 3F2 (two mule deer and one whitetail)
- 2B (one whitetail)

CWD was not previously detected in units 2B and 3D2.



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