



STRATEGIC PLAN

2023-2026



You need not drive a Jeep to imagine one. The name alone conjures visions of a rugged-looking vehicle full of smiling adventurers rollicking through rough country.

That's brand recognition. Successful companies, nonprofits, and even people have it.

Another trait they share is their goods and services become needs rather than mere wants. Power brakes and steering, microwaves, and cellphones were considered luxuries once. Today, not so much.

That's relevance. Having it means being a priority.

How does all that concern wildlife?

Now, and especially going forward, if the Pennsylvania Game Commission is going to achieve its mission of managing and protecting wildlife and its habitats while promoting hunting and trapping for current and future generations, it must be recognizable and relevant to all 13 million-plus residents of the Commonwealth.

We've got great history. The Game Commission has, with help from many conservation partners, accomplished a lot. White-tailed deer, black bears, peregrine falcons, bald eagles, ospreys, beavers, and bobcats, among others, either disappeared from our state entirely or nearly did so prior to the agency's founding in 1895. Their returns since are wildlife success stories. Pennsylvania continues to be a national leader in hunting license sales, too, even as the pandemic-fueled surge fades and traditional paths to recruitment narrow.

A lot of people – not only hunters and trappers – know and are a part of those triumphs and for that we're grateful. We will always work hard to maintain those critical relationships.

But what of the suburban retiree looking out her window to enjoy the birds that daily come to her feeder? What of the tourist driving through Pennsylvania's elk range to see some of the world's most magnificent bulls? What of the citizen concerned with endangered species, the hiker lost on State Game Lands, and the homeowner with a raccoon under the porch? Is the Game Commission top of mind for them?

Maybe. Maybe not. That's the challenge and that's the opportunity before us.

Managing wildlife and wildlife habitats isn't getting easier. There are new and emerging wildlife diseases. Invasive species, too. Urban sprawl is eliminating or splintering open space. Cultural shifts are making it harder to recruit and retain the hunters and trappers who carry out management on the ground. Funding, while good now, ebbs and flows.

This strategic plan outlines not only the many ways we plan to address those issues and others, but how we plan to share word of that with all Commonwealth citizens, too. We need to do our work and tell our tale.

And we will. Pennsylvania has long been known as the "Keystone State" for its essential role in the nation's founding. Now, the Game Commission is taking on its own "Keystone" role, linking together all Pennsylvanians concerned about wildlife, wildlife habitat, and the perpetuation of our hunting and trapping heritage.

That's a big job, to be sure. But imagine what a force for conservation we can be at 13 million strong!

Let's get started.



OUR MISSION

To manage and protect wildlife and their habitats while promoting hunting and trapping for current and future generations.

Our Mission summarizes the reason we exist as an agency and guides the decisions we make.



↓ GOAL 1

Proactively Manage Wildlife

↓ **Outcome 1** | *Wildlife is, and will continue to be, proactively managed by basing management decisions on scientific research to provide for regulated hunting and trapping, other forms of wildlife recreation, and sustainable populations and habitats.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Coordinate recovery programs for the most rapidly declining species in our forests, grasslands, and wetlands to prevent species loss from the Commonwealth.
- B. Coordinate population recovery programs for the most rapidly declining cavity nesting species to prevent species loss from the Commonwealth.
- C. Enhance credibility and responsiveness of wildlife management programs.

↓ **Outcome 2** | *Wildlife management plans will be kept current, science-based, incorporating social values, and focused on the agency mission.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Identify statewide species conservation priorities, threats, challenges, and opportunities.
- B. Continue to solicit public input into wildlife management plans.

↓ **Outcome 3** | *Wildlife response to management will be monitored to improve management techniques and outcomes.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Lead species monitoring efforts to assess conservation status of species of concern.
- B. Assess long-term changes in statewide bird and mammal distribution and abundance.
- C. Monitor target species response to management on State Game Lands projects where focused wildlife habitat improvement is the primary objective.

↓ **Outcome 4** | *The Wildlife Health Program will address threats to wildlife population health and sustainability to help achieve the agency mission.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Evaluate wildlife health surveillance activities with a focus on effectiveness and efficiency.
- B. Conduct wildlife health surveillance; develop and institute preventive strategies to mitigate negative population-level impacts.
- C. Assess infrastructure and programmatic needs for advancing wildlife health diagnostics, training, research capacity, and data/information sharing.
- D. Use the most current science to develop or revise existing wildlife disease response plans and inform species management plans.

▼ **Outcome 5** | *Critical information gaps on species ecology and occurrences that impact the agency's ability to manage wildlife populations will be identified and addressed.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Provide opportunities for volunteers to assist in collecting data on species occurrence, abundance, and population health at data-deficient sites.
- B. Improve data collection at Game Commission-owned hawk watches and other wildlife viewing locations where occurrence data is needed to inform management.
- C. Establish a Conservation Cooperator program to engage hunter/viewer volunteers in collecting data necessary for managing species of concern.

▼ **Outcome 6** | *Partners will continue to be integral allies in the sustainable conservation of birds and mammals.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Strengthen relationships with non-traditional partners who share in the values of the Game Commission's mission.
- B. Provide technical expertise to local governments and high priority private landowners regarding species management needs, threats, and implementing priority conservation actions of mutual interest.



Protect
Wildlife




GOAL 2

Conserve Wildlife Habitats Through Sound Management, Monitoring, Restoration, and Scientific Research

 **Outcome 1** | *Habitat management on State Game Lands will be guided by effective and interactive Comprehensive Management Plans.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Use State Game Lands Comprehensive Management Plans to guide overall habitat planning and funding for the next decade.
- B. Use new tools to identify best opportunities to manage habitats that support species of greatest conservation need, game species, and other priority wildlife communities.
- C. Develop and apply GIS tools to drive management implementation in priority landscapes.
- D. Partner with an independent entity to audit our Comprehensive Management Plan system to ensure no opportunities are overlooked.

 **Outcome 2** | *Wildlife habitats will be managed using the latest science for long-term health, sustainability, and resilience.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Use Pittman-Robertson funding focused on critical habitats, including shrublands, barrens, forests, grasslands, woodlands, moist-soil, other wetlands, talus, rock surface communities, and subterranean habitats.
- B. Use prescribed fire to meet targeted acreage and outcome objectives as outlined in Comprehensive Management Plans.
- C. Guided by the “Forestry for Wildlife” approach, continue to develop and use innovative silvicultural techniques to increase habitat complexity and diversification, particularly in young stands and late successional forest communities.
- D. Continue to develop wetland management infrastructure and active/effective moist-soils habitat management.
- E. Explore innovative techniques and programmatic methodologies to control invasive species.
- F. Improve methods for assessing forest regeneration and deer impact at the Wildlife Management Unit level.
- G. Ensure secondary recreational uses of State Game Lands/Wildlife Management Areas do not conflict with primary goals of healthy wildlife habitats connected across the landscape.
- H. Ensure resource and energy development activities on State Game Lands/Wildlife Management Areas are aligned with primary goals of healthy wildlife habitats connected across the landscape.
- I. Initiate pilot projects engaging private and public conservation partners to establish landscape level, ecosystem-wide collaborative management across land ownerships.
- J. Ensure continued compliance with the State Lands Bat Habitat Conservation Plan.



 **Outcome 3** | *Vegetation and habitat response will be monitored to improve management techniques into the future.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Institute a more effective habitat monitoring framework/process that ensures lessons learned are integrated into future management decisions and activities.
- B. Develop a better identification of forest and non-forest habitat needs based on wildlife usage/response.
- C. Monitor and evaluate the impacts to habitat health from invasive species and other pests and pathogens.
- D. Develop and implement a reporting system to track and evaluate the cost per treatment for all habitat improvements in forested stands.
- E. Incorporate emerging GIS technologies to streamline monitoring, documenting, and reporting habitat management outcomes.

 **Outcome 4** | *Partners will be supported as critical allies in habitat management activities.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Identify priority partners to help accomplish our habitat management objectives on private lands.
- B. Enhance the Private Lands Program to advance initiatives that improve wildlife habitat and conservation on Pennsylvania's private lands.
- C. Identify locations with opportunities to engage the public and wildlife enthusiasts in understanding the benefits of wildlife habitat management.

 **Outcome 5** | *Lands will be conserved to increase public access to hunting, trapping, and wildlife watching, and to preserve priority habitats.*

Strategic Priorities:

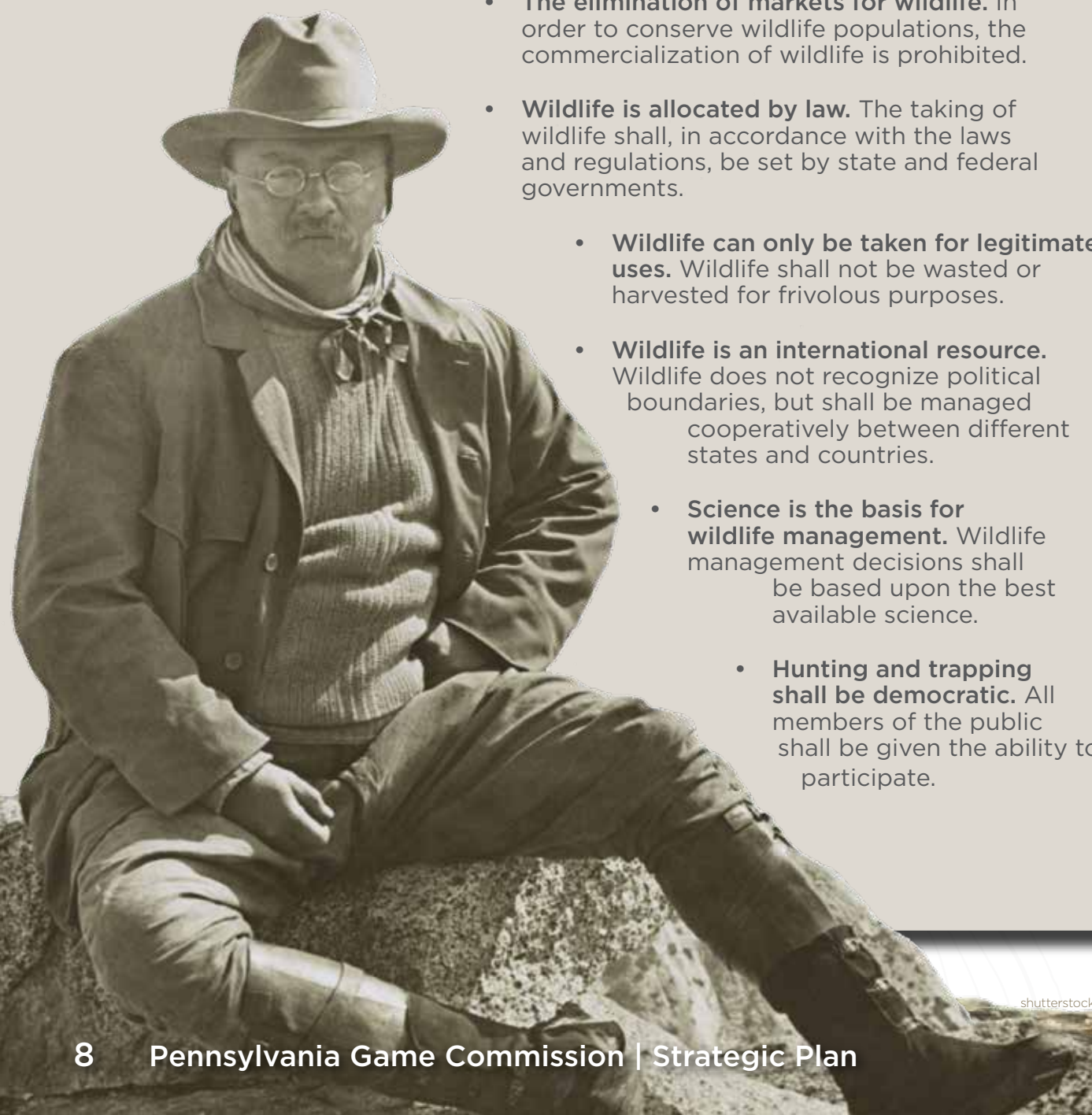
- A. Use GIS technology to create a new land acquisition prioritization model.
- B. Work with partners to develop a program to conserve lands by means other than acquisition, such as easements or other long-term agreements.
- C. Protect the integrity of State Game Lands by identifying, marking, and resolving encroachments.



THE NORTH AMERICAN MODEL OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Throughout its more than 125-year history, the Pennsylvania Game Commission has been guided by the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. This model consists of the following principles:

- **Wildlife is public property.** Wildlife belongs to everyone and is managed by the Game Commission for current and future generations.
- **The elimination of markets for wildlife.** In order to conserve wildlife populations, the commercialization of wildlife is prohibited.
- **Wildlife is allocated by law.** The taking of wildlife shall, in accordance with the laws and regulations, be set by state and federal governments.
 - **Wildlife can only be taken for legitimate uses.** Wildlife shall not be wasted or harvested for frivolous purposes.
 - **Wildlife is an international resource.** Wildlife does not recognize political boundaries, but shall be managed cooperatively between different states and countries.
 - **Science is the basis for wildlife management.** Wildlife management decisions shall be based upon the best available science.
 - **Hunting and trapping shall be democratic.** All members of the public shall be given the ability to participate.



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OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We shall:

- Place wildlife and their habitats first using science-based principles.
- Embrace our role as a public service agency and provide the best customer service possible.
- Support ongoing development of staff to ensure the leaders of tomorrow are prepared to carry on the agency's mission.
- Recruit, Retain, and Reactivate (R3) hunters and trappers and consider the impacts of regulations on R3.
- Espouse the "One Team. One Voice. One Purpose" philosophy to establish and foster one consistent agency culture.
- Communicate and broaden Pennsylvania Game Commission's relevancy and leadership position in wildlife management and public safety.
- Evaluate and adapt to environmental, social, and political impacts on wildlife and habitats.
- Assess and implement business practices that are efficient and cost-effective.

Protect Habitat

Our **Guiding Principles** influence our actions.
They cause us to evaluate our decisions
against our mission and vision.



GOAL 3

Support Pennsylvania's Hunting, Trapping, and Conservation Heritage



Outcome 1 | *Land acquisitions will be optimized to provide increased opportunities for hunting, wildlife habitat management, and wildlife viewing.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Address barriers to land acquisition.
- B. Pursue innovative partnerships that facilitate land acquisition.
- C. Identify acquisition opportunities meeting the prioritization model to enhance the State Game Lands system.
- D. Improve the Hunter Access Program to better serve the needs of both hunters and participating landowners.



Outcome 2 | *Resources and support will be provided for new and existing hunters and trappers.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Expand and grow partnerships with non-governmental organizations to conduct more programs and reach more diverse audiences.
- B. Expand outreach programs to engage hunting and trapping license buyers.
- C. Create training webinars and videos to help new hunters increase their likelihood of being successful.
- D. Provide mentorship opportunities for new hunters.
- E. Increase communications and develop a multi-year campaign on the importance of trapping to garner support for, and increase participation in, trapping among hunters and the general public.
- F. Update and increase opportunities to engage all Commonwealth citizens.



Outcome 3 | *Recreational shooting opportunities will be expanded.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Evaluate the feasibility of future shooting sports opportunities.
- B. Attract new shooters through targeted messaging and campaigns.
- C. Strategically increase shooting range opportunities and services on State Game Lands.

Outcome 4 | *Wildlife enthusiasts will have more locations available for engaging in bird and mammal conservation.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Develop partnerships and increase support from wildlife enthusiasts through identifying State Game Lands with unique wildlife viewing opportunities.
- B. Identify partnership opportunities with other public land agencies and conservancies to grow awareness of wildlife viewing and engage in conservation education.

Outcome 5 | *Public awareness of the Game Commission's mission will be increased.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Provide wildlife conservation education programs for the public.
- B. Engage the public through offering opportunities and resources to participate in wildlife viewing.
- C. Educate the public on the importance of wildlife, their habitats, and the role of regulated hunting and trapping.
- D. Establish the Pymatuning Wildlife Visitor Center as a premier wildlife conservation and education destination.

Promote Hunting & Trapping





GOAL 4

Expand Agency Relevancy and Sustainability

 **Outcome 1** | *Employees and constituents will have access to emerging technology and real-time data.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Leverage GIS technologies to enhance business processes, increase spatial data quality and completeness, and provide the public with quality print and web maps.
- B. Provide solutions to increase data insight, improve business processes, and enable data-driven decisions.
- C. Implement responsive and innovative IT services that meet business needs and enhance the end-user experience.
- D. Strengthen the agency's on-line presence.
- E. Develop tools and processes to support internal and external communication, awareness, and promotion of upcoming events.

 **Outcome 2** | *Public awareness and satisfaction will increase in response to high-quality service.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Make the best use of dispatch technology to enhance efficiencies in responding to calls for service.
- B. Reduce response time for public calls for assistance.
- C. Expand the agency search and rescue training program.

 **Outcome 3** | *Human dimensions research will be used to inform the decision-making process.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs through surveying stakeholders and participants.
- B. Conduct surveys on existing and proposed regulations to provide social science data that assists the Board of Commissioners' rulemaking process.
- C. Conduct surveys and focus groups to better understand the motivations and experiences of new license buyers to improve recruitment programs.



Our **Values** are the house rules and govern our behaviors every day. They enable us to work well together to fulfill our mission.

OUR VALUES

Professionalism: Exhibit a positive attitude | Be courteous | Be honest and ethical | Advocate for the mission | Be accountable and transparent | Provide a quality experience in all customer interactions

Teamwork: Communicate effectively | Support a positive environment | Share knowledge | Be adaptable | Advocate for and support the team | Communicate with respect and trust | Discuss differences and resolve conflicts | Trust and be trustworthy

Excellence: Be creative and innovative | Learn from mistakes | Balance quality with efficiency | Own your job and lead | Keep your promises and follow through | Seek knowledge | Perform the full scope of your job responsibilities



GOAL 5

Recruit, Develop, Retain, and Support the Game Commission's Greatest Asset—Our Staff



Outcome 1 | *The agency's mission benefits from a culture of leadership, teamwork, and high performance.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Create a training program for aspiring leaders.
- B. Develop a recruitment plan and expand outreach efforts.
- C. Establish a comprehensive statewide Deputy Recruitment Plan to increase participation and revitalize the program.



Outcome 2 | *Staff is more informed and engaged through consistent, relevant, agency-related communications.*

Strategic Priorities:

- A. Set internal communication goals and create a menu of tools and outlets available for staff.
- B. Improve the agency intranet site to serve as an employee portal.
- C. Create internal programs to provide staff development opportunities and promote learning within the agency.

THE GAME COMMISSION—TRUSTEE OF WILDLIFE

Article 1, Section 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution grants both current and future generations of Pennsylvanians the right to the preservation of the natural environment. It also places a duty on the Commonwealth to conserve and maintain these vital natural resources “for the benefit of all people.”

This legal principle, known as the Public Trust Doctrine, recognizes Pennsylvania’s wildlife—all 481 bird and mammal species—as a public resource and imposes on the Game Commission the responsibility, as a trustee, to ensure that wildlife is protected and managed for the public’s well-being.

Every day, the Game Commission relies on this framework to guide its decisions—from researching and monitoring the state’s wild birds and mammals, to establishing wildlife habitats on nearly 1.6 million acres of game lands, to educating the public about the significance of wildlife conservation. With a legacy of over 125 years, the Game Commission has been steadfast in its mission to safeguard wildlife and their habitats, thus fulfilling its role as the trustee of Pennsylvania’s wildlife.

A photograph showing three people in a forest setting. Two people are kneeling in the foreground, looking into a large, dark metal pipe that has been partially buried in the ground. A third person is visible inside the pipe, smiling. In the background, a green sign with the words "PA GAME COMMISSION" cut out in large letters is mounted on a tree. The scene is outdoors with sunlight filtering through the trees.

PA GAME COMMISSION

Our Vision is what we hope to be. We are passionate about being a voice for Pennsylvania wildlife and inspired by the natural world in which we live.

OUR VISION

Recognized and respected as the leader in innovative and proactive stewardship of wildlife and their habitats.

Pennsylvania Game Commission
www.pgc.pa.gov
1-833-PGC-HUNT | 1-833-PGC-WILD

