

PROJECT Report



PENNSYLVANIA GAME COMMISSION

PROJECT Report

PRESENTED BY THE
PENNSYLVANIA GAME COMMISSION



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE
01

SHOOTING RANGES

PAGE
05

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

PAGE
07

WILDLIFE RESEARCH PROJECTS

PAGE
11

EXPANDED ACCESS & OPPORTUNITY

PAGE
15

HABITAT MANAGEMENT

PAGE
19

INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATES

PENNSYLVANIA HUNTERS, TRAPPERS, AND WILDLIFE ENTHUSIASTS:



On behalf of the Pennsylvania Game Commission, I would like to thank you for your continued interest and support of wildlife conservation across our state. I also extend my personal gratitude for your continued support and trust in our agency. As a lifelong Pennsylvania hunter, I'm honored to lead the agency charged with managing and protecting wildlife and their habitats while promoting hunting and trapping for current and future generations.

As we share this report, we express our commitment to building a sustainable financial path forward, not only now, but well into the future. When it comes to the Game Commission's financial priorities, we are embracing transparency in our operations to ensure consistent communication between the agency and our constituents, employees, partners, and stakeholders.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission receives no state tax dollars and is primarily funded in two ways: hunting and trapping license revenue and funds from the federal Pittman-Robertson Act. Under the Pittman-Robertson Act, federal excise tax dollars generated from the sale of firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment directly support the work of our agency. Due to nearly a million hunting license buyers in Pennsylvania, our agency receives a significant amount of federal funds annually.

As of December 2024, the Game Commission proudly manages 312 state game lands in 66 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties. These game lands, which span more than 1.5 million acres, were largely purchased with revenue from hunting license dollars and/or federal funds. The Game Commission is fortunate to own mineral rights on many game lands, and natural resources extracting (oil and gas drilling as well as timbering) has provided the agency with an abundance of revenue in recent years, when prices for oil and gas were high.

As a result, the agency had a high amount in reserves and focused on spending with structured and sustainable growth for the future. In this report, you will see some of the ways the agency is prioritizing strengthened operations, sustainable growth, and optimized efficiency. Along with current and future financial snapshots, you will also find details on capital improvement projects, examples of enhanced infrastructure and opportunity, and advancements in wildlife research and habitats.

Our decisions moving forward will be guided by the mission and core values of the agency. Again, I thank you for your support and trust as our agency takes a critical step forward in establishing financial transparency and stability. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions, concerns, or ideas about anything you read here. Thank you, again, for your continued support for the great work of the Game Commission.

Sincerely,

Stephen P. Smith
Executive Director
Pennsylvania Game Commission



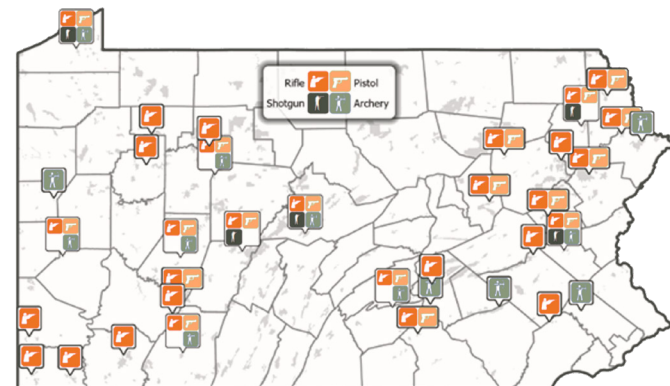
A ribbon cutting ceremony was held at the new archery shooting range on State Game Lands 248, Indiana County. Senate Majority Leader Joe Pittman and Rep. Jim Struzzi joined the Game Commission at the ribbon cutting ceremony held in late August 2024. The Game Commission builds and maintains public shooting ranges across the state for hunters and recreational shooters to practice.



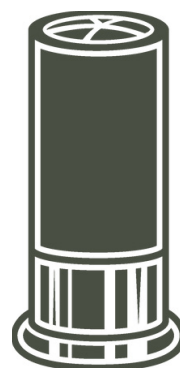
SHOOTING RANGES

The shooting sports are critical to wildlife conservation in Pennsylvania. Under the Pittman-Robertson Act, federal excise tax dollars generated from the sale of firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment directly support the Pennsylvania Game Commission's mission.

In turn, the agency continues to invest in shooting ranges to facilitate the millions of recreational shooters in the Keystone State and ensure the future of wildlife conservation.



As of June 2024, the Pennsylvania Game Commission provides recreation opportunity at 66 public shooting ranges on 40 separate game lands across the state.



- 30 RIFLE RANGES
- 19 HANDGUN RANGES
- 12 ARCHERY RANGES
- 5 SHOTGUN RANGES

LEARN MORE & FIND A SHOOTING RANGE NEAR YOU



RANGE RENOVATIONS & CONSTRUCTION

From 2022-24, the Pennsylvania Game Commission constructed 17 new ranges and renovated existing ranges on 11 state game lands. Upgrades included covered shooting lanes, handicapped accessible benches, shotgun patterning areas, 10-yard pistol targets, and new shooting benches. **\$1.6 million**

Fiscal year 2025-26 will bring the construction of 5 more archery ranges and the agency's first 500-yard range on State Game Lands 176 in Centre County. **\$1.3 million**

The agency is also conducting focus groups to gauge interest in the development of a shooting sports facility within the Commonwealth.



SHOOTING RANGE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The Pennsylvania Game Commission launched the Shooting Range Improvement Program in July 2024 to provide funding to increase opportunity, access, and safety at sportsmen's clubs throughout the state.

Eligible projects for the grant program span all shooting disciplines and include development and renovation of facilities, construction of backstops and safety berms, addition of permanent target systems, creation of shooting stations and covers, lead remediation, and more. This initiative could also provide the ability to host Hunter-Trapper Education classes and workshops in more locations.



**FISCAL YEAR 2024-25
WILL SERVE AS A PILOT
FOR THE PROGRAM**

\$350,000
allocated to sportsmen's clubs
throughout Pennsylvania

2 PROJECTS
selected per region for
a total of 12





CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

The Pennsylvania Game Commission continuously makes repairs, replacements, and upgrades to its buildings throughout the Commonwealth to maintain efficiency and effectively serve the public. The agency also invests in new constructions when existing facilities are beyond their useful life cycle or expanding operations demand additional resources.

BUILT FROM 2022-24:

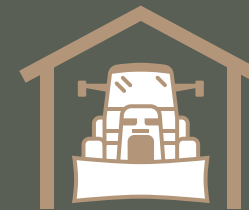
6 EQUIPMENT STORAGE BUILDINGS
\$1.7 million

1 REGIONAL OFFICE
\$6.4 million

4 HABITAT CREW BUILDINGS
\$1.8 million

MIDDLE CREEK VISITOR'S CENTER ADDITION
\$653,000

PLANNED FOR 2024-29:



20

EQUIPMENT STORAGE BUILDINGS

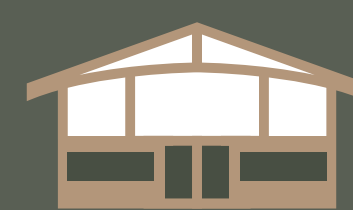
\$6.9 million



15

HABITAT CREW BUILDINGS

\$7.8 million



2

REGIONAL OFFICES

\$41 million



1

HARRISBURG HEADQUARTERS ADDITION

\$12.8 million

REGIONAL OFFICES

The heartbeat of the agency, regional offices provide support for field staff, facilities to offer services to the public, and opportunities to showcase conservation efforts. But outdated technology, limited space, and the continuous need for repairs have left aging buildings unsuitable as long-term options. By 2029, the Pennsylvania Game Commission will have completed several building projects to ensure all regional offices are more energy efficient and equipped to support operations.

The Southcentral Regional Office was completed in 2023 and now provides additional support for CWD testing, a bear check station, license retailing, and a centralized location for tools and equipment.

Construction of the Northcentral Regional Office is slated to begin in 2025. While the current office is in a remote area, the new site is centrally located to all other regional offices near population centers and primary travel routes. The highly visible office will allow for better accessibility, increased visitation, and improved customer service. The central location will also provide opportunities for education, conservation, and recreation enhancements on the surrounding game lands. Potential additions to augment the visitor experience include a public archery range, habitat demonstration area/trails, and existing access road improvements.

The Southwest Regional Office will be the final outdated building to be replaced in the near future.

WILDLIFE RESEARCH PROJECTS

The Pennsylvania Game Commission remains on the cutting edge of wildlife research with dozens of active projects aimed at preserving the 480 species of wild birds and mammals in the Commonwealth.



BLACK BEAR SURVIVAL

\$4.1 million

In 2024, the Game Commission launched a 5-year statewide study to determine how sex, age, habitat, and other variables affect black bear survival in Pennsylvania from year to year. Biologists will collect GPS collar data on hundreds of bears to estimate population and harvest rates, steer hunting season and management decisions, and lay the groundwork for future research.

The collars are timed to fall off 1 year from when they're placed on the bear, and a new group of 160 bears will be captured and collared to continue the study each year:

- **50 ADULT MALES**
- **50 ADULT FEMALES**
- **30 YEARLING MALES**
- **30 YEARLING FEMALES**

THE GPS DATA WILL PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO:

- Survival estimates for bears in the specific study areas across all regions for each age and sex
- The types of habitats bears use regularly
- Home range size for different age groups in each study area
- Preferred denning areas by age and sex

WILD TURKEYS

\$4.2 million over 4 years

After annual turkey monitoring showed a long-term population decline in some Wildlife Management Units (WMUs), the Game Commission launched three research projects to determine causes and identify solutions.

In collaboration with regional partners, Pennsylvania's largest-ever wild turkey study will examine population and movement dynamics to help direct management strategies into the future. Each year through 2025, hens across four Pennsylvania WMUs representing different habitat types will be trapped and released on site with radio transmitters to provide data on survival, reproduction, movement, and habitat use.



A second research project assessing the effects of new diseases in North American wild turkeys on hen survival and reproduction, how these diseases differ across habitats, and their relationship to other diseases will run from 2022-25.

The final project, running from 2023-25, will estimate spring crippling loss, which occurs when a turkey is injured but not harvested by a hunter and dies from the injuries later. GPS backpacks deployed on male turkeys and hunter surveys will combine to provide a data set.



FROM JANUARY 2022 TO AUGUST 2024:

405
HENS

EQUIPPED
WITH RADIO
TRANSMITTERS

2.8
MILLION

GPS
LOCATIONS
COLLECTED

58
MILLION

ACCELEROMETER
RECORDS
REPORTED



WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME BAT RECOVERY

\$1.9 million from 2022-24

Historically the most abundant mammal in Pennsylvania, bats suffered a 99.9% population decline by 2011 due to white-nose syndrome (WNS), a fungal disease that grows during hibernation.

In response, the Game Commission helped develop a safe technique for detecting WNS using UV light and a non-toxic spray to increase bat survival, which resulted in a 2-year average infection decline of 66% at a treatment site.

After discovering that bats surviving WNS seek out cold winter roost

temperatures to conserve energy, the Game Commission modified the airflow at one site to create ideal conditions for survivors in 2015. Within 8 years, the population at this site grew by 11,157% and is now the largest in the state for the endangered tri-colored bat.

The agency has also started tracking adult female little brown bats to their new summer colonies where they raise their young together. In the past 2 years, biologists have located 40 maternity colonies with over 2,000 breeding females to protect and monitor.

Game Commission efforts to increase survival have been critical in helping this keystone species begin to recover.

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

\$1.4 million over 4 years

First discovered in free-ranging Pennsylvania white-tailed deer in 2012, chronic wasting disease (CWD) continues to threaten deer and elk in the Commonwealth.



MORE THAN
11,000 DEER TESTED
IN 2023-24

MORE THAN
450 DEER WITH
CWD DETECTED

In addition to measures such as ongoing surveillance and extended hunting seasons, the Game Commission is conducting a multi-year research project to better understand the effect of CWD on white-tailed deer behavior and mortality.

Research is focused on Bedford and Fulton counties, where nearly 1 in 2 hunter-harvested adult deer tests positive.

Deer used for this study will be equipped with a GPS collar and ear tags, allowing biologists to compare movements and survival between infected and uninfected animals.

2023-24 PROJECT STATS:

 **25** LANDOWNERS
PARTICIPATED

 **134** DEER
CAPTURED

 **117** COLLARS
DEPLOYED



EXPANDED ACCESS & OPPORTUNITY

The Pennsylvania Game Commission is committed to promoting hunting and trapping for current and future generations. As participation numbers trend downward on a national scale, the agency is expanding access and opportunity to preserve Pennsylvania’s hunting heritage.

STATE GAME LANDS SYSTEM

Over 1.5 million acres of state game lands in 66 of 67 counties provide not only quality habitat for 480 wildlife species but also hunting and trapping opportunities for Pennsylvanians.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission has continued to expand the state game lands system with new properties in close proximity to large population centers and additional access points for existing game lands.

The agency carefully weighs strategic habitat conservation, community support, fiscal considerations, potential liabilities, and legal issues before acquiring new properties to enhance the state game lands system.

BETWEEN JANUARY 2022 AND AUGUST 2024: **\$20.7 MILLION**

20,800

NEW STATE GAME LANDS ACRES THROUGH MORE THAN 80 SEPARATE CONTRACTS

3

NEW STATE GAME LANDS



HUNTER ACCESS PROGRAM

\$657,850 total investment from 2022-24

The Pennsylvania Game Commission’s Hunter Access Program provides public access to private land while helping landowners manage game populations on their properties.

MORE THAN **10,000** PARCELS ENROLLED

ENCOMPASSING **1.68** MILLION ACRES

The Game Commission is in the process of improving the program for both hunters and landowners with a modern mapping and reservation system — scheduled to launch July 2025 — to provide more detailed information on property boundaries and access availability.



Sen. Kristin Phillips-Hill assisted the Pennsylvania Game Commission in releasing pheasants on State Game Lands 181, York County, in advance of the 2024 junior pheasant season in October 2024. The season provides a special opportunity for all junior hunters (and mentored hunters of any age) to gain hunting experience.

PHEASANT PROPAGATION

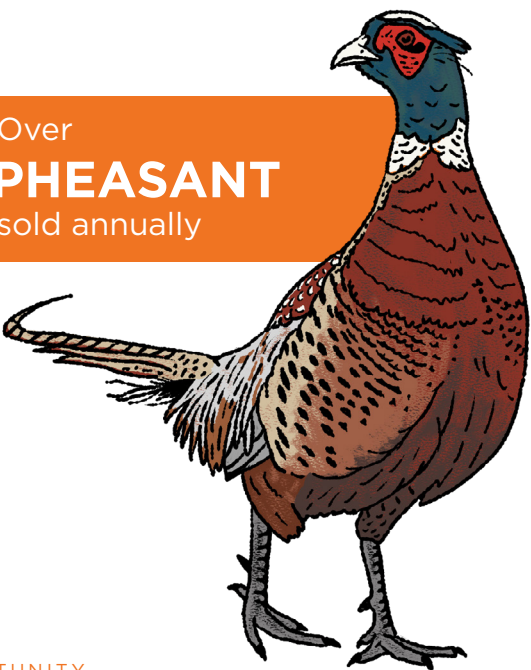
The Pennsylvania Game Commission's pheasant stocking program provides additional small game hunting opportunities and contributes to new hunter recruitment.

In 2021, the agency increased the number of chicks purchased annually by more than 12% and added 2 new releases after Christmas to expand opportunity without impacting fall seasons.

Approximately
237,000 PHEASANTS
released on more than 220 properties
across 62 counties annually

Over
75,000 PHEASANT
permits sold annually

To reduce the risk of disease and preserve the program for the future, the Pennsylvania Game Commission is replacing outdated brooder houses at the Southwest Game Farm with larger, more efficient facilities. This will also allow for further increases in stocking numbers and reduce labor intensity required to care for chicks. **\$2 Million**



HABITAT MANAGEMENT

The Pennsylvania Game Commission helps ensure the future of wildlife by conserving habitats throughout the Commonwealth.



FORESTRY FOR WILDLIFE

The agency uses timber harvest, selective herbicide treatments, and other forest improvements on over 30,000 acres each year to promote healthy habitat that provides food and cover for wildlife.

FROM 2022-24

8,000 ACRES TREATED WITH HERBICIDE ANNUALLY
\$3 MILLION INVESTMENT

16,000 ACRES OF NON-TIMBER SALE FOREST HABITAT IMPROVEMENTS ANNUALLY
\$6.1 MILLION INVESTMENT

17,000 ACRES OF TIMBER SALE HARVEST TOTAL
\$19.3 MILLION REVENUE



PRESCRIBED FIRE

\$6.1 million

The Pennsylvania Game Commission strategically uses prescribed fire to rejuvenate habitat for the long-term benefit of wildlife.

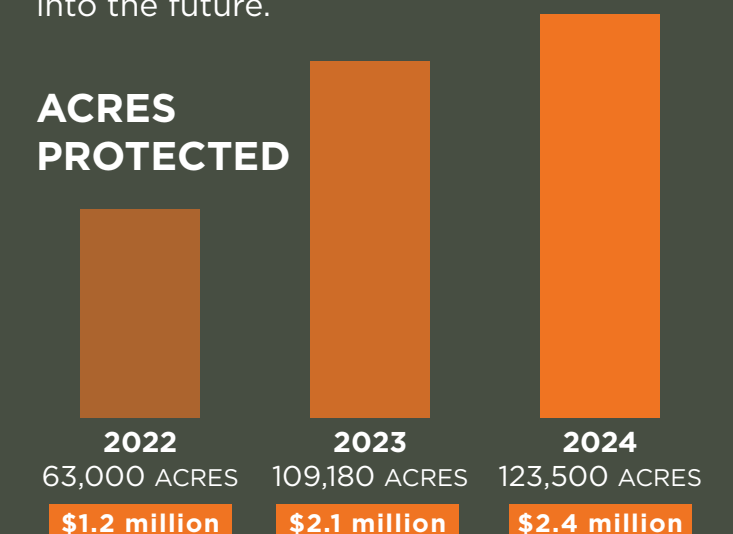
In fiscal year 2023-24, the agency managed 30% more habitat with prescribed fire and boosted burn day efficiency by more than 30%.

- **50 BURN DAYS ACROSS 324 UNITS**
- **11,578 ACRES**
 - 62.5% forest
 - 37.5% grassland

SPONGY MOTH SPRAY PROGRAM

Each spring, the agency treats state game lands with a targeted spray to suppress the devastating effects of spongy moths on Pennsylvania forests. The program protects oak habitats, allowing for more regular acorn crops into the future.

ACRES PROTECTED





PENNSYLVANIA WETLANDS HABITAT INITIATIVE

\$454,000 in 2023

\$4 million planned for 2024-25

A collaborative effort between the Pennsylvania Game Commission and Ducks Unlimited, the Pennsylvania Wetlands Habitat Initiative is replacing water control structures to restore wetland vegetation for waterfowl and other wildlife.

1,600 ACRES OF WETLAND HABITAT ON 61 STATE GAME LANDS THROUGHOUT ALL 6 REGIONS

Updates to one of the project's sites, a 12-acre managed wetland at Ned's Pond on State Game Lands 95, were completed in August 2024, including replacement of a damaged water control structure, placement of riprap, removal of woody vegetation, and repair work to restore embankment integrity.

Initial planning, engineering, and permitting kicked off in 2022, and 2025 will mark the first full year of construction for the project.





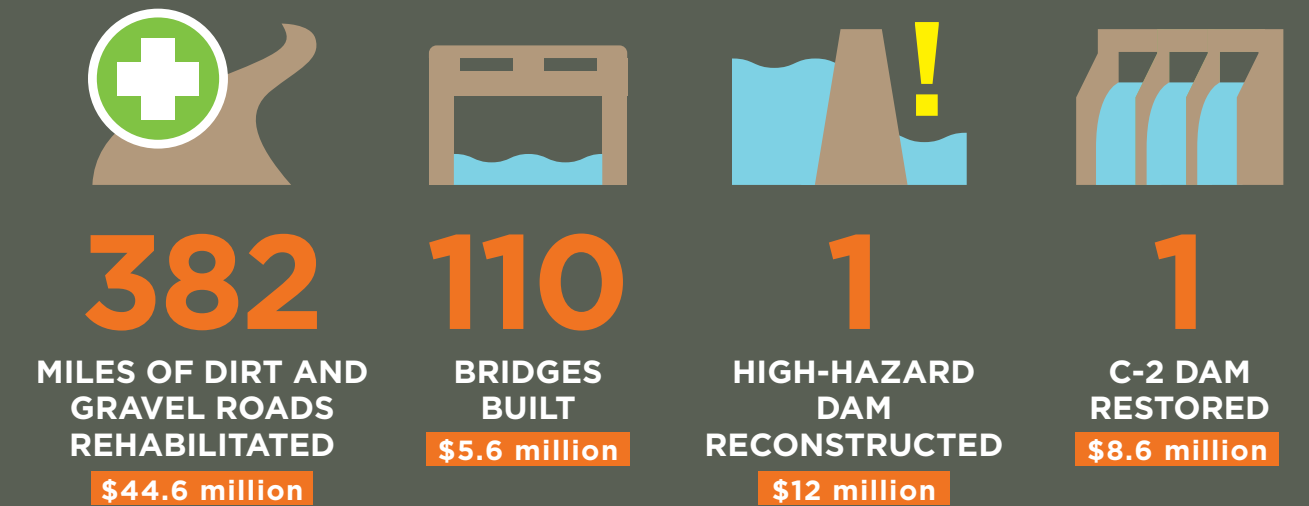
INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATES

The Pennsylvania Game Commission continues to invest in a variety of infrastructure updates to increase opportunity and access to state game lands for all Pennsylvanians.

COMPLETED FROM 2022-24:



PLANNED FOR 2024-29:



Additionally, the Game Commission will install or replace numerous culverts on state game lands throughout the Commonwealth and begin lead remediation efforts on public shooting ranges.



WILDLIFE VIEWING PLATFORMS

\$712,000 for 4 projects

The Game Commission continues to enhance state game lands that offer unique opportunities to spot waterfowl, bald eagles, and many other bird and mammal species among carefully managed habitat through the addition of wildlife viewing platforms.



Construction of a walking path and 1,000 square foot viewing platform on State Game Lands 290, Haldeman Island, in Dauphin County wrapped up in 2023. The addition, which overlooks several impoundments that benefit wildlife, features educational kiosks that highlight the history of conservation on the island.

The agency also recently constructed a wildlife viewing platform on State Game Lands 180, Shohola Lake, in Pike County, with plans to build similar viewing areas on State Game Lands 46, Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area, and State Game Lands 230, Waggoner's Gap Hawk Watch.



OUR MISSION

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



