



STATE FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

Mission and Responsibilities

MISSION OF STATE FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

State wildlife agencies are responsible for conserving all fish and wildlife for the benefit of all people and have specific authority for wildlife conservation and management within their borders. They have co-authority with federal agencies to manage migratory and federally-listed threatened and endangered species.

Originally established in the late 1800s and early 1900s to address serious declines of game species, the agencies have built a long and successful legacy of conserving, restoring, and managing wildlife with a focus on those species valuable for hunting and angling. Because of this history, people sometimes think that agencies are only responsible for conserving game species. However, they have always been responsible for conserving **all** wildlife. Agencies today are striving to fulfill their missions to conserve the full spectrum of wildlife and provide opportunities for all people to enjoy nature in many ways.

STATE WILDLIFE AGENCY MISSION STATEMENTS: ALL WILDLIFE/ALL PEOPLE

Below is a sampling of mission statements of state wildlife agencies. They vary depending on the scope of the agency, yet most reference conserving wildlife for the people. State fish and wildlife agencies recognize their role in conserving **all** fish and wildlife for **all** citizens. However, their missions are broader than most existing funding sources and current programming, limiting their ability to fully execute these missions.

Specific [agency mission statements](#) vary in scope:

- [Arkansas Game and Fish Commission](#): To wisely manage all the fish & wildlife resources of Arkansas while providing maximum enjoyment for the people.
- [Missouri Department of Conservation](#): To protect & manage the forest, fish & wildlife resources of the state; to facilitate & provide opportunity for all citizens to use, enjoy & learn about these resources.
- [Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife](#): To preserve, protect and perpetuate fish, wildlife and ecosystems, while providing sustainable fish and wildlife recreational and commercial opportunities.
- [Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife](#): To conserve and enhance fish and wildlife resources and provide opportunity for hunting, fishing, trapping, boating, and other wildlife related activities.
- [Missouri Department of Fish and Game](#): To protect and manage the forest, fish and wildlife resources of the state; to facilitate and provide opportunity for all citizens to use, enjoy and learn about these resources.
- [North Dakota Game and Fish](#): To protect, conserve, and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitat for sustained public consumptive and non-consumptive use.

WHAT DO STATE WILDLIFE AGENCIES DO?

Collectively, state fish and wildlife agencies employ about 11,000 professional biologists (including ornithologists (birds), ichthyologists (fish), deer and other ungulates, waterfowl, furbearer specialists, herpetologists (amphibians and reptiles), and botanists and entomologists (insects)), and more than 10,000 law enforcement officers and communications staff to help provide information and education to the public.

An overview of responsibilities:

- Manage, restore, and conserve thousands of acres of land and water as fish and wildlife habitat. Includes both public lands they might own and working with private landowners.
- Re-introduce native wildlife to their former ranges (e.g. bald eagles, wild turkeys, freshwater mussels, New England cottontail rabbits).
- Recover and restore federal and state endangered species.
- Survey and track wildlife to determine their location and population status.
- Research wildlife and their habitats and the threats facing them to determine steps to conserve them.
- Work with private landowners on voluntary habitat improvement on working lands (e.g. farms, ranches, forests).
- Conduct environmental reviews to determine if certain projects have negative impacts on wildlife and their habitats and recommend mitigation actions.
- Manage, eradicate, and help prevent the spread of invasive species through law enforcement, habitat management, and education and outreach.
- Research and address diseases that can decimate wildlife populations or harm people and domestic animals.
- Offer fish and wildlife programs and curricula for students at all levels of education, and provide information and activities for the broader public. Most state agencies publish a magazine and maintain a website and social media presence.
- Provide access and skills training for outdoor enthusiasts (birders, hunter, anglers, paddlers, hikers, etc.) to state-owned wildlife management areas as well as public waterways. Includes trails, blinds, observation platforms, etc.
- Set hunting and fishing season regulations, issue licenses, permits, and run game check stations.
- Provide required hunter safety education necessary to obtain a hunting license.
- Handle boat registration, build boat ramps for public access, and manage check points for aquatic invasive species.
- Enforce laws through conservation officers (game wardens) related to hunting, fishing, boating, endangered species, and the illegal collection of wildlife species.
- Manage and help mitigate human and wildlife conflicts.

For more information see statewildlifetoolkit.nwf.org/