



FY 2024
**ANNUAL
REPORT**



Points 100
This Card Must be Mailed Within 5 Days of Date of Kill.

Points 100
This Card Must be Mailed Within 5 Days of Date of Kill.

Points 152 lbs
Comments 32 Winchester
NOTICE: This Card Must be Mailed Within 5 Days of Date of Kill.

Tennessee Game & Fish Commission
1965 Deer Kill Report Card
Do Not Return Unless A Kill is Made On
County Where Killed Leake
Date Killed 11-20-65
Points 5
Signature Charles

Tennessee Game & Fish Commission
1965 Deer Kill Report Card
Do Not Return Unless A Kill is Made On
County Where Killed Tipton
Weight 100
Comments 1
NOTICE: This Card Must be Mailed Within 5 Days of Date of Kill.
No Postage Necessary
Signature Harold

Tennessee Game & Fish Commission
1965 Deer Kill Report Card
Do Not Return Unless A Kill is Made On
County Where Killed Leake
Weight 150
Comments
NOTICE: This Card Must be Mailed Within 5 Days of Date of Kill.
No Postage Necessary
Signature Ray

Tennessee Game & Fish Commission
1965 Deer Kill Report Card
Do Not Return Unless A Kill is Made On
County Where Killed Leake
Date Killed 11-20-65
Points 6

Tennessee Game & Fish Commission
1965 Deer Kill Report Card
Do Not Return Unless A Kill is Made On
County Where Killed Tipton
Weight 135
Comments No
NOTICE: This Card Must be Mailed Within 5 Days of Date of Kill.
No Postage Necessary
Signature Herbert

Tennessee Game & Fish Commission
1965 Deer Kill Report Card
Do Not Return Unless A Kill is Made On
County Where Killed Putnam
Weight 130 lbs
Comments
NOTICE: This Card Must be Mailed Within 5 Days of Date of Kill.
No Postage Necessary
Signature N

Tennessee Game & Fish Commission
1965 Deer Kill Report Card
Do Not Return Unless A Kill is Made On
County Where Killed Leake
Date Killed 11-20-65
Points 5
Signature R. D. Ball

Tennessee Game & Fish Commission
1965 Deer Kill Report Card
Do Not Return Unless A Kill is Made On
County Where Killed Tipton
Weight 130
Comments
NOTICE: This Card Must be Mailed Within 5 Days of Date of Kill.
No Postage Necessary
Signature R. D. Ball

Tennessee Game & Fish Commission
1965 Deer Kill Report Card
Do Not Return Unless A Kill is Made On
County Where Killed Leake
Weight 75 F
Comments
NOTICE: This Card Must be Mailed Within 5 Days of Date of Kill.
No Postage Necessary
Signature R. D. Ball

Tennessee Game & Fish Commission
1965 Deer Kill Report Card
Do Not Return Unless A Kill is Made On
County Where Killed Leake
Weight 134
Comments
NOTICE: This Card Must be Mailed Within 5 Days of Date of Kill.
No Postage Necessary
Signature R. D. Ball

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1965 Deer Kill Report Card
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Signature R. D. Ball

Photo: Deer harvest report cards from 1965

Annual Report

Table of Contents

- 02 Director's Message
- 04 75th Anniversary
- 06 TN Fish and Wildlife Commission
- 08 Law Enforcement & Boating
- 14 Biodiversity
- 18 Fisheries
- 24 Wildlife & Land Management
- 32 Outreach
- 38 Agency Funding
- 44 Business Support



Director's Message

As we reflect on the accomplishments of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency over the past fiscal year, I am proud to share this report detailing our achievements, challenges, and steadfast commitment to conserving Tennessee's natural resources for generations to come.

Throughout the year, TWRA has continued to prioritize science-driven management, public engagement, and strategic partnerships to ensure the sustainability of Tennessee's great outdoors.

This year, we have implemented critical conservation programs aimed at protecting our state's iconic game species and our most vulnerable non-game species. From habitat restoration projects to bolstering native fish populations in our rivers and streams, our dedicated staff have worked tirelessly to maintain the ecological balance that supports Tennessee's biodiversity. We are especially proud of our efforts to combat invasive species and promote healthy ecosystems.

Tennessee's outdoor spaces are an integral part of our identity and economy. Over the past year, we have made significant strides in improving access by supporting communities in developing new public boat ramps and maintaining more than 1,200 existing ones, expanding hunting and fishing opportunities, and enhancing wildlife management areas. These projects have all contributed to fostering outdoor recreation for Tennesseans and visitors alike. These investments not only benefit our state's economy but also encourage future generations to connect with our natural resources.

Education also remains a cornerstone of our mission. Through innovative outreach programs, including youth hunting and fishing initiatives, wildlife education in schools, and community workshops, we have engaged thousands of individuals in learning about the importance of conservation. These programs are vital for ensuring the conservation model of funding continues to work and that there will be countless generations of hunters, anglers, and conservationists in the years to come.

Our successes this year would not have been possible without the support of our partners. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to local communities, nonprofit organizations, private landowners, and other state and federal agencies who share our vision for a thriving Tennessee. Together, we have achieved milestones that would have been unattainable alone.

As we look to the future, the challenges of invasive species, increasing costs, and more demands on natural resources remain ever-present. However, with your continued support and the unwavering dedication of our staff, we are confident in our ability to navigate these challenges and seize opportunities to further our mission. On behalf of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, thank you for your partnership and trust. Together, we will continue to ensure that Tennessee's wildlife and wild places thrive for generations to come.

Sincerely,



TNWildlife.org



Jason Maxedon Executive Director

"I got my start with the agency as a wetlands forester in West Tennessee 24 years ago. Since then, I have seen a lot of things change, but one thing that never does is the passion TWRA staff have for wildlife conservation, habitat development, and high-quality hunting and fishing."

Economic Impact

Tennessee ranks 15th overall in the nation for value added GDP for outdoor recreation. Activities counted towards that total include boating, fishing, ATVing, hunting, shooting, trapping, equestrian pursuits, hiking, camping, and biking.

\$11.9B

Value Added GDP

109,657

Industry Jobs

\$4.9B

Compensation

Hunting

- Approximately 460,000 hunters provide an estimated impact of nearly \$3 billion to the Tennessee economy.
- Through TWRA purchases and visitor spending, TWRA Wildlife Management Areas provide an estimated economic impact of over \$1 billion to the Tennessee economy.

Fishing

- More than one million anglers directly spend \$742 million while fishing in Tennessee.
- Fishing produces a total economic output of \$1.2 billion and supports nearly 8,000 jobs.

Boating

- Recreational boating directly supports over 660 businesses in Tennessee.
- Through direct and indirect spending, boating contributes \$6.5 billion in annual economic impact.

Estimates based on data from:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2011 & 2016 National Survey of Fishing Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, and Esri, Inc.

National Marine Manufacturers Association 2023 Economic Impact Study.

National Marine Manufacturers Association 2021 Recreational Boating Statistical Abstract.

United States Coast Guard 2018 National Recreational Boating Safety Survey.

US Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis 2022 Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account.

University of Tennessee 2019 Tennessee Wildlife Management Area Visitor Report.

Sportsmans Alliance 2022 Economic Impacts of Hunting and Target Shooting Technical Report



75th Anniversary

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) is celebrating 75 years as wildlife's conservation partner. It has been a period of dramatic change to bring critical wildlife species back from the brink of disappearance and political revolution to establish regulations to protect Tennessee's natural resources. Prior to the creation of the TWRA and its predecessor, the Tennessee Game and Fish Commission (TGFC), there was a lack of legislation to protect wildlife or their habitats in the Volunteer State. Market hunting was rampant and quickly depleting populations of game species.

Tennessee received statehood in 1796, but it wasn't until 1825 that the first wildlife law was passed to authorize certain people to build fish traps in rivers. In the decades to follow, a hodgepodge of other wildlife laws were enacted, but were largely ineffective and hard to enforce. In 1895, deer populations were so low, the state put a five-year moratorium on hunting deer in Cumberland, Claiborne, Scott, Morgan, and Anderson counties to prevent their complete extinction. Later, quail hunting was banned for five years in 19 counties.



Huge strides for conservation were made in 1903, when Tennessee adopted Chapter 169, to protect wildlife resources on a statewide basis. The law declared wildlife to be property of the State, and it established the office of the State Game and Fish Warden. Tennessee Governor James B. Frazier appointed Colonel Joseph H. Acklen to a four-year term as the first official game warden. The year 1907 saw the establishment of the first resident hunting license for \$3, but payment was made optional. That would be about \$100 in today's economy. These first efforts to establish wildlife law and order faced constant reorganization and restructuring up until 1949 when Governor Gordon Browning signed into legislation the "Model Law" to create The Tennessee Game and Fish Commission.

This new Commission consisted of nine citizens, three from each of Tennessee's Grand Divisions, who were appointed by the governor from lists submitted by sportsmen's meetings across the state.

All expenses of the commission were to come out of the Game and Fish Fund that was created in the Game and Fish Act of 1937. Unspent money at the end of the year was carried over, and the commission was instructed to cooperate with the various divisions of the Department of Conservation. Fast forward to 1974, when TGFC was completely reorganized into the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. While the name has changed, the spirit remains the same: The passion and convictions that motivated our "founding fathers" to reform the governing of our natural treasures still inspires us today.

Governor Gordon Browning who signed into legislation the "Model Law" creating The Tennessee Game and Fish Commission in 1949.



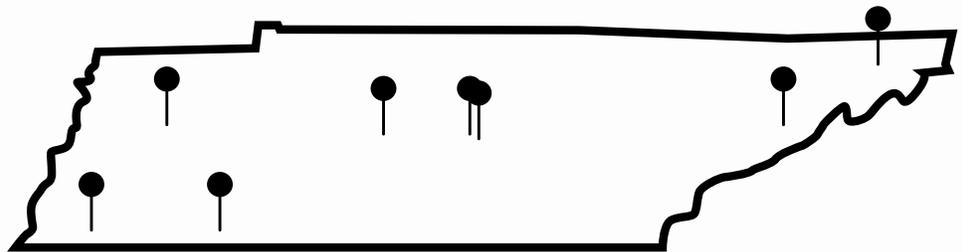
First nine-member Game and Fish Commission in 1949. Seated L to R: ex-officio member of the commission C.P. Swan, Ed Tayloe, Chairman Lucius E. Burch Jr., and Secretary James F. Asbury. Standing L to R: H.H. Meadors, John H. Webb, Dr. Hal A. Baker, LeRoy Rymer, Joe Curry, and M.L. Brickey. Missing is Vice Chair Edwin Crutcher.

TWRA now consists of more than 700 professionals dedicated to the mission to preserve, conserve, manage, protect, and enhance the fish and wildlife of the state and their habitats for the use, benefit, and enjoyment of the citizens of Tennessee and its visitors. The agency also fosters the safe use of the state's waters through a program of law enforcement, education, and access.

TWRA's governing body is the 13-member Tennessee Fish and Wildlife Commission. Members receive four or six-year appointments from the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Speaker of the House. The Governor, Commissioner of Agriculture, and Commissioner of Environment and Conservation also serve as ex-officio members. Commissioners are non-salaried public servants who spend countless hours corresponding with constituents and engaging on outdoor and wildlife public issues.

FY24 Tennessee Fish and Wildlife Commission Meetings

In FY24, the Tennessee Fish and Wildlife Commission held eight meetings across the state. Priority policy issues included setting hunting and trapping regulations, fishing regulations, approving the agency operation budget, and addressing public safety and other management concerns for Tennesseans.



Current 13 members of the TFWC in 2024. Seated L to R: Tommy Woods, Chairman Jimmy Granbery, Vice Chair Chris Devaney, and Dr. Hank Wright. Standing L to R: Chip Saltsman, Bill Cox, Brad Box, Monte Belew, Rhonda Moody, Stan Butt, Ford Little, and Wally Childress. Missing is Secretary Greg Davenport.

Chairman's Message

As the governing body tasked with setting rules and regulations, overseeing the agency's budget, and supervising its executive leadership, the commission remains committed to ensuring a thriving future for Tennessee's wildlife and outdoor traditions.

The commission's decisions this year have been guided by a deep commitment to science-based policy and public input. From adjusting hunting and fishing regulations to prioritizing funding for critical conservation projects, we have worked diligently to balance the needs of wildlife with the requests of Tennesseans. Notably, the agency introduced a new adaptive harvest management tool to inform the hunting season setting process. Commissioners spent many hours learning about the new process from staff and participating in public meetings to better understand the goals of hunters. All of this was put into action for the FY24 season setting vote. We also continued to build on the great fisheries success we enjoy here in the state. The commission has proudly supported the implementation of the Bill Dance Signature Lakes program, which is investing in both fisheries success and infrastructure at the lakes. This program will be a boon to Tennessee tourism and make Tennessee an iconic fishing destination.

The year certainly was not without its challenges for the commission. We took a hard look at the regulations governing the use and possession of raptors, and we considered a high volume of public input when voting for new off-highway vehicle permits and regulations. I was proud of agency staff for their attention to these critical issues, and of the entire commission for their thoughtful review of the proposals.

Like many businesses across the country, the agency has also faced sharp inflation in expenses since the Covid-19 pandemic. To address this, the commission took an important step to ensure a well-funded agency now and in the future. As stewards of public trust, the commission takes its responsibility seriously to oversee the agency's budget and operations. This year, we have prioritized fiscal responsibility and transparency, ensuring that every dollar spent aligns with the mission to preserve and enhance Tennessee's natural resources. After dedicating months to reviewing agency finances and potential solutions, the commission voted for the first fee increase in a decade.

Tennessee hunters and anglers are the true conservationists and fund the majority of the wildlife conservation work in the state through the purchase of their hunting and fishing licenses. Their input is a critical part of the regulatory process, and we invite all our stakeholders to be involved. As always, members of the public are invited to attend commission meetings held across the state throughout the year. The schedule and agenda for commission meetings may be found on the agency's website, along with opportunities for public comment.

On behalf of the entire commission, thank you for the opportunity to serve and offer our guidance on hunting, fishing, outdoor recreation, and conservation for Tennessee.

Sincerely,



TNWildlife.org



Jimmy Granbery
Commission Chair

"It has been a pleasure serving on the commission for the past six years. During that time, we have worked diligently to advance science-based regulations that support wildlife populations and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities."

TFWC VOTES --- 7

FY24 commission meetings included the following policy votes as well as numerous presentations from staff and external stakeholders on programs and research. Current financial reports were presented at most meeting.

RESOLUTIONS OF THE COMMISSION

- Resolution honoring Rhedona Rose, Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation
- Resolution honoring outdoor journalist Larry Rea

AUGUST 2023 - PICKWICK LANDING

- **Boating & Law Enforcement Committee:**
 - Proc. 23-10 Temporary Suspension of the No Wake Zone, Marion County Park - Nickajack Lake
- **Budget Committee:**
 - Agency FY25 Budget Vote
- **Rules:**
 - Chapter 1660-01-18 Rules and Regulations of Live Wildlife
 - Chapter 1660-01-37 Rules and Regulations Governing the Possession and Use of Raptors

SEPTEMBER 2023 - WAVERLY

- **Fisheries Committee:**
 - Proc. 23-11 Commercial Take of Fish and Turtles
 - Proc. 23-12 Sportfishing

DECEMBER 2023 - GATLINBURG

- **Budget Expansion Requests FY24:**
 - \$32,000 - Continuing Project Chuck Swan WMA
 - \$722,390 - Invasive Carp Management
 - \$650,000 - New Carp Harvest Incentive Program
- **Budget Expansion Request FY25:**
 - \$1,500,000 - Ongoing Carp Harvest Incentive Program
- **Rules:**
 - Rule 1660-01-32 Threatened and Endangered Species

FEBRUARY 2024 - NASHVILLE

- **Retention, Recruitment & Reactivation Committee:**
 - Tennessee Fish & Wildlife Commission Legacy Award Winner – Anthony Landreth
- **Wildlife Committee:**
 - Proc. 24-01 Repealing Proc. 90-06 Alvin C. York Wildlife Management Area
- **Fisheries Committee:**
 - Proc. 24-02 Commercial Take of Fish and Turtles Amendment
 - Proc. 24-03 Sportfishing Amendment
- **Rules:**
 - Rulemaking Hearing 1660-02-07.34, No Wake Zone Sunset Marina, Dale Hollow Lake
 - Temporary Emergency No Wake Zone Ft. Loudon Marina

MARCH 2024 - WAVERLY

- **Budget Expansion Requests FY25/26:**
 - \$5,745,100 - Wildlife Fund
 - \$1,100,000 - Boating Fund

APRIL 2024 - JOHNSON CITY

- **Wildlife Committee:**
 - Proc. 24-07 Statewide Furbearer Hunting and Trapping Seasons and Bag Limits
 - Proc. 24-11 Manner and Means of Hunting, Taking and Trapping
 - Proc. 24-12 Repeal Arnold Hollow WMA
 - Proc. 24-04 Establish Holly Fork Creek Refuge
 - Proc. 24-05 Establish Catoosa Ridge Refuge
 - Proc. 24-06 WMA, Refuge and Public Hunting Area Seasons and Bag Limits
 - Proc. 24-08 Taking of Raptors for Falconry
 - Proc. 24-09 Migratory Gamebird Hunting Seasons and Regulations
 - Proc. 24-10 Statewide Big Game Hunting Seasons and Bag Limits
- **Audit Committee:**
 - Revised Audit Committee Charter



Archived recordings of TFWC meetings are available on the TWRA YouTube page.

Law Enforcement



The first Conservation Officers appointed by the Game and Fish Commission in 1949 who were dubbed the original “Forty-niners”.

When TWRA was founded 75 years ago, the Commission appointed 95 officers to enforce wildlife and fisheries laws. They were provided uniforms but were required to drive their own vehicles and were paid six cents per mile. Officers were required to have a high school diploma.

Today, there are around 250 full and part-time TWRA officers who are tasked with protecting the natural resources of Tennessee and ensuring public safety in the field and on the water. Every officer is required to have a Bachelor of Science in wildlife biology or another related degree field. After a rigorous interview process, selected candidates must complete the 23-week Tennessee Wildlife Officer Training Academy, which includes basic law enforcement training, legal training, physical conditioning, and special wildlife training.

Officers must also complete 40 hours of annual in-service training, as mandated by Police Officer Standards and Training Association. In FY24, training consisted of eight days across the state for Narcan, O.C. spray, strikes, and baton training; eight days across the state for Boating Under the Influence (BUI) refresher training; Spring and Fall firearms training across the state; and V-Academy training.

Wildlife officers are also better equipped than ever before. In FY24, the agency issued every officer a body-worn camera to support transparency, legitimacy, and procedural justice for Tennesseans and TWRA officers. A grant from the Department of Justice for \$340,000 covered roughly half of the initial three-year startup costs of implementing the program.



Col. Dale Grandstaff
Boating & Law Enforcement Chief

“The TWRA’s Boating and Law Enforcement Division plays a vital role in promoting outdoor activities while ensuring safety and compliance with regulations. Our commitment to education and outreach is essential for fostering a positive relationship with the community,” said Col. Dale Grandstaff. “The dedication of both field officers and administrative staff is commendable, as they work tirelessly to enhance the experiences of sportsmen and boaters across diverse backgrounds. Often called “The Face of the Agency”, wildlife officers take pride in their professionalism and are always eager to work and assist all sportsmen, sportswomen, and boaters.”

Even though wildlife officers are primarily dedicated to enforcing hunting, fishing, and boating laws, they serve their community in many ways. This includes conducting search and rescue missions during natural disasters, supporting local law enforcement with manhunts, search warrants, and medical calls, plus providing honor guard representation for fallen officers or at community events.

250

Game Wardens

employed by TWRA for boating and wildlife law enforcement.

19

Cadets Graduated

from the Tennessee Wildlife Officer Training Academy this year.

21,000+

Hours of Training

and certifications logged by TWRA officers in FY24.

9,292

Citations & Warnings

issued in FY24 for hunting, fishing, boating, and other violations.

2,476

Wildlife Poachers

caught by TWRA officers since 2019.

16,000+

Hours of Outreach

through events, education, and public relations activities this year.

Got Fined?

Enforcement efforts are local investments to prevent poaching and protect public safety. The majority of money from fines goes towards court costs. TWRA receives less than 10% of fines and puts it to use funding law enforcement and wildlife management.





Photo: Officer Riley Melton and Sgt. Kip Kite on patrol

Boating

245,449

Registered Vessels

down 9,292 from 2022.

117,313

Law Enforcement Hours

spent on the water and dedicated to boating law enforcement.

27

Boating Fatalities

including six personal watercraft fatalities and two paddlecraft fatalities.

58

Injury Incidents

The leading contributing cause of injury incidents were lack of proper lookout, operator inexperience, and equipment and/or machinery failure.

\$2,334,075

Monetary Damages

from 163 total incidents.

21-25

Leading Age Group

of operators to be involved in an incident.

129

BUI arrests

were made during 2023. Across all violations, 1,920 citations were issued.

9,180

Boating Exams

were successfully completed, bringing the total number of people who have completed the exam since 2005 to 111,210.

2024 NASBLA Southern Region Officer of the Year - Montana Michelson



Throughout the year, Officer Michelson showcased unwavering commitment to boating safety and enforcement, embodying a contagious work ethic and becoming an essential asset to District 21's boating enforcement efforts. His remarkable dedication and expertise have significantly contributed to enhancing boater safety in Tennessee.

Officer Michelson's involvement in boating safety extended beyond enforcement as he participated in various educational initiatives. He conducted over six boating education events and spoke to school classes about TWRA officer duties and careers.

Paddlesports

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency conducted a survey of individuals participating in paddling on 37 rivers and 41 lakes in Tennessee to gather information about their recreational characteristics. TWRA's boating officers interviewed paddlers at access points while they were putting in or taking boats out of the water. The on-site interviews were conducted between May and September 2024.

Results:

TN Resident
89%



Non-Resident
11%



11

Average number of days paddled per year



49% Support an annual fee and are willing to pay:

\$10-19

Average group size: 4 paddlers



Paddlers per household: 3 paddlers



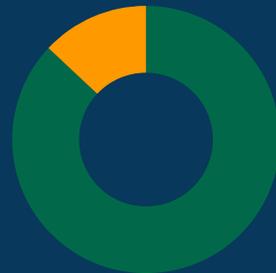
No License or Reg.
36%



Registered Boat
17%

Hunt/Fish License
47%

Commercial outfit
13%



Private paddler
87%

Unified Dive Team

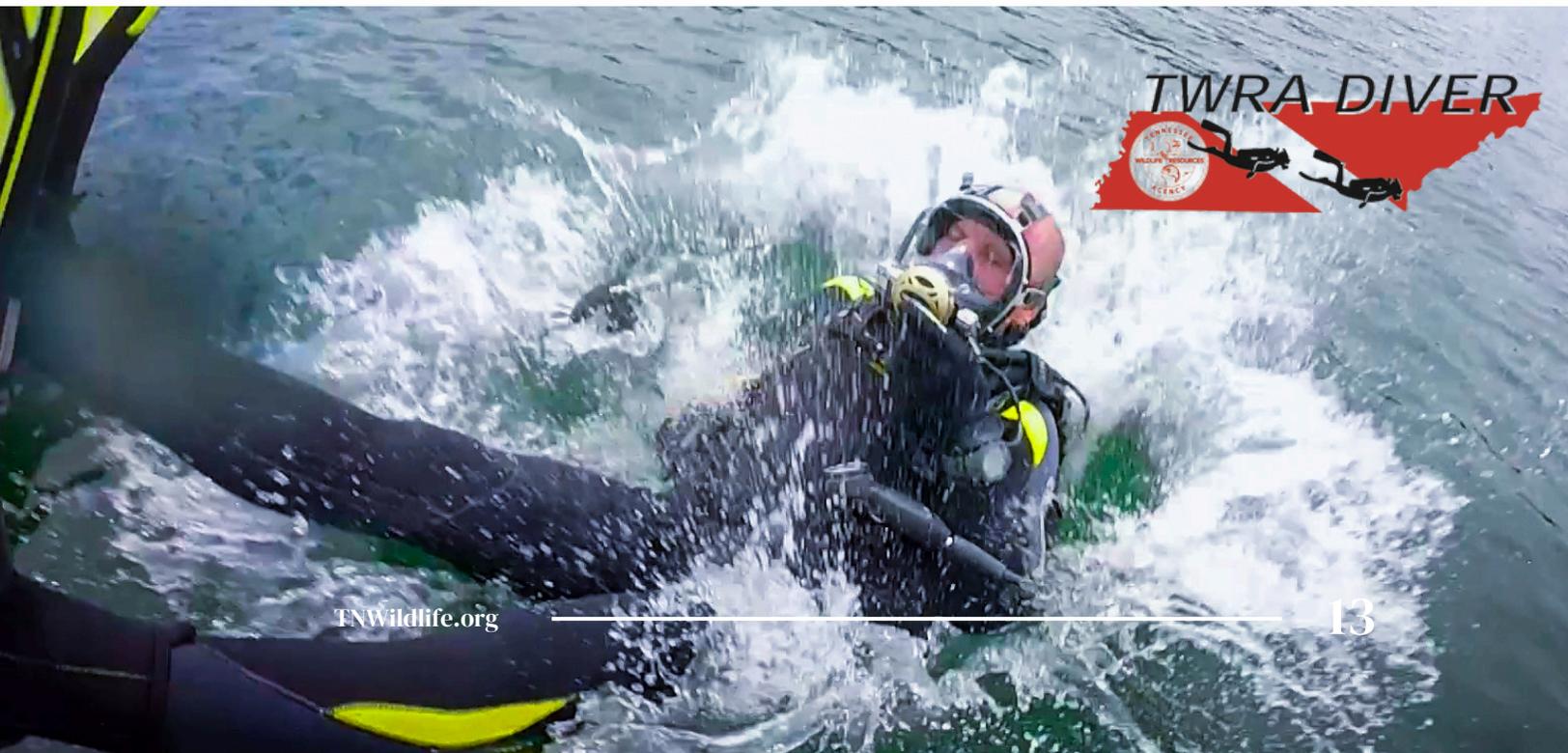
The TWRA Unified Dive Team is a unique collection of highly trained officers and biologists who provide assistance to multiple divisions within the agency for data collection, scientific surveys, infrastructure issues, and investigations in deep water environments. These services extend outside of the agency as the team is often called upon to assist state and local law enforcement agencies with evidence recovery associated with ongoing criminal investigations.

The program started in the early 90s as a small team created to evaluate the impacts of commercial mussel harvest. It began to grow as several officers joined the team to utilize diving techniques to collect evidence that was otherwise unrecoverable in the water. From there, the agency developed a scientific diver program based on the Environmental Protection Agency's standards. Both officers and biologists are trained to the same standards to ensure a level of experience and skill to support the safety and success of the program and its divers.

During training, divers gain as much real-world experience as possible. During many searches, sediment and low light conditions limit visibility, forcing divers to rely on tactile searches rather than visual skills. In other scenarios, the team learns to work with partners like the Tennessee State Trooper Special Operations Dive Unit, and how to use specialized equipment like remote operated underwater vehicles. The team also practices simulated boating accidents so that when real accidents occur, TWRA can respond swiftly and effectively to assist with missing persons or recovery of evidence.

To become a fully credentialed TWRA diver, personnel must obtain and maintain numerous certifications including scientific diving certification, open water SCUBA certification, full face mask certification, public safety certification, and multiple medical certifications. Some staff have additional certifications allowing them to coordinate and train agency staff and perform repair to dive equipment including AGA, Guardian, and Stealth full face-mask certifications, SCUBA oxygen tanks, and dive regulators.

Today, the team consists of 16 divers. In FY24, the TWRA Dive Team conducted numerous, big river dredge site mussel surveys, collected freshwater mussel broodstock for propagation of threatened and endangered mussel species, assisted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with Bio-acoustical Fish Fence maintenance at Barkley Dam, recovered underwater sensors for agencies collecting fish movement data on the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers, assisted the Environmental Protection Agency with 2024 diver training, and supported law enforcement with numerous search and recovery efforts.





“Tennessee is one of the most biodiverse states in the country and specifically, Tennessee ranks second and fourth nationally in diversity of fishes and amphibians respectively. The Duck River, which is entirely contained within the state boundaries, is the most biodiverse river in all of North America and contains the most significant mussel beds in the entire world. More than 36 percent of all wildlife species in the state have conservation designations from federally endangered to species of greatest conservation need, indicating the challenges in preserving Tennessee’s diversity and ensuring its persistence into the future for all citizens to enjoy. The Biodiversity Division is tasked with implementing conservation and recovery efforts to preserve more than 1,600 wildlife species in the state.”

Josh Campbell
Biodiversity Chief

Duck River Mussel Monitoring

Tennessee historically harbored 140 known species, with at least 72 species known from the Duck River watershed. However, the Duck River, like many North American river basins, has undergone substantial declines in its molluscan fauna with four species presumed extinct and nine species presumed extirpated. At least 16 of the historically known species from the Duck River watershed have been listed as endangered or threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and six additional species have been petitioned for listing or have been found to warrant listing. However, the Duck River continues to maintain high diversity of freshwater mussels.

Conservation and recovery of listed mussel species is greatly enhanced through the propagation and release/reintroduction of individual species. These efforts require collection of broodstock and host fish from rivers and streams to allow propagation to occur under controlled settings. Once propagated mussels obtain the desired size, they are transported and released/reintroduced into previously determined streams. TWRA biologists perform monitoring of these mussels to ensure growth and survivorship are within the established goals and to ascertain if efforts are successful.

In FY24, biologists completed the third year of a capture-mark-recapture study on the Duck River. The goal is to have valuable data for the mussels in the river that can be used to predict trends and monitor survival, recruitment, and rate of population growth. Staff gear up in wet suits and snorkels to manually crawl the riverbed to find mussels. Identified individuals are then tagged with a unique number so they can be tracked. This year, staff tagged 35 species of mussels at the Lillard’s Mill survey site, 18 species at Hooper Island, and 15 species at the Venable Springs site. The number of tagged individuals was lower at Venable Springs this year due to drought conditions.



Photo: Tagged mussels from the Duck River

Total Tagged Individual Mussels

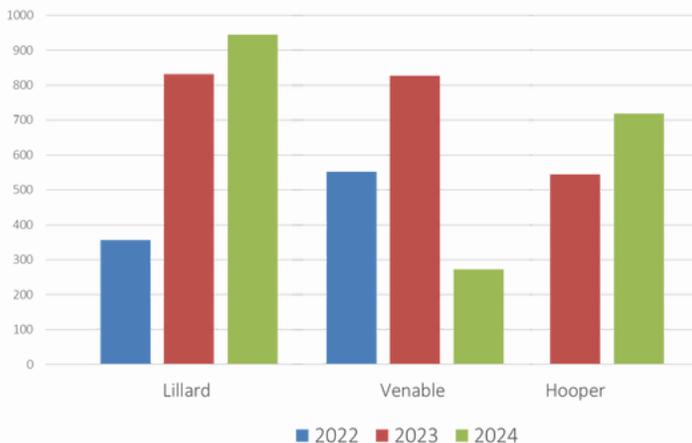




Photo: TWRA malacologist Brittany Bajo-Walker with mussels from the Duck River. Scan the QR code for more on TWRA's mussel work.

Winter Bat Cave Monitoring

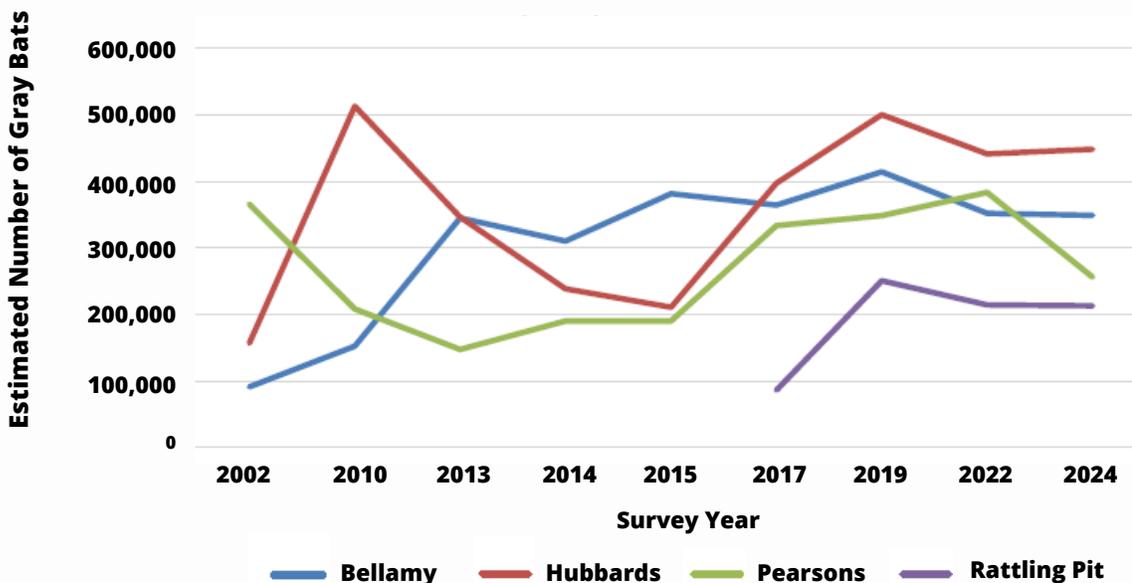


Photo: Virginia big-eared bat

The Tennessee landscape features more than 12,000 caves, where 10 species of bats make their home. Of those species, four are federally endangered, one is proposed federally endangered, and 10 are species of greatest conservation need (including those with federal status). TWRA conducts bat surveys to assess winter bat populations, the geographic extent of white-nose syndrome, and the impacts of the fungal pathogen to bat populations of the state. In FY24, TWRA staff and other partners performed bat winter colony count surveys at 40 sites across Tennessee. Surveys of the four priority sites for gray bat (federally endangered) resulted in an estimation of 1.2 million individual bats. Since 2009-2010, TWRA and partners have performed over 1,300 winter cave surveys at 528 sites. It is likely that multiple bat species in Tennessee will be listed as threatened or endangered in coming years, making winter colony counts vital datasets.

During winter surveys this year, biologists made the significant and exciting discovery of the federally endangered Virginia big-eared bat over-wintering in an East Tennessee cave. The bats were known to use a small portion of the state during the summer for foraging and roosting, but the documentation of the species in the winter indicates this species uses Tennessee throughout the year, something that was not previously known. These bats are also limited to only a few known locations in Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina.

Winter Trends of Priority Gray Bat Hibernacula in Tennessee



Hibernacula: are shelters occupied in the winter by a hibernating animal. For bats, these are often caves, so biologists conduct surveys at cave sites to count populations.

Population trends of *Myotis grisescens* at the four Priority 1 hibernacula in Tennessee based on estimates from biennial winter colony counts.

TWRA works with many partners to collect data and support restoration of species of greatest conservation need. Some examples of FY24 grant contracts for biodiversity programs include:

Winter Bat Cave Monitoring - The Nature Conservancy of Tennessee

The Nature Conservancy of Tennessee (TNC) was contracted to support bat population monitoring goals. TNC's first land purchase in Tennessee contained a significant cave, and they have been cave stewards for the past 40 years. TNC has maintained an active cave and karst program with full time staff for approximately 20 years.

Head-start Program - Nashville Zoo and Tennessee State University

Streamside Salamanders:

The Nashville Zoo currently holds 39 individual Streamside Salamanders collected as eggs or larvae from the upper Mill Creek watershed in Williamson County dating back to 2016. These salamanders were salvaged from four sites in the Nashville area where rapid development threatened habitat.

Eastern Hellbenders:

The Nashville Zoo, in collaboration with TWRA, initiated the Head-start program with grant funding in 2015 by collecting part of a nest of hellbender eggs. The project was the first to use eDNA, and the first Eastern Hellbenders ever produced with artificial fertilization with cryopreserved sperm. Since then, 192 hellbenders have been raised from eggs collected from four nests.

During the past quarter, 34 hellbenders from the Head-start program were released and are being monitored by a Tennessee State University graduate student from the Sutton lab. All hellbenders released were implanted with a radio-transmitter and a PIT tag for tracking and identification. Half of the animals also had Terbinafine implanted as an anti-fungal to help against Chytrid fungus. This project is ongoing and will continue through FY25.

Tangerine Darter Propagation - Tennessee Aquarium Conservation Institute

Tangerine Darters propagated at Tennessee Aquarium Conservation Institute were transferred to TWRA's Cumberland River Aquatic Center (CRAC) in September 2023 for grow-out. They were successfully cultured at CRAC, reached the appropriate size, and were used as hosts for propagating juvenile mussels of cracking pearly mussels in 2024.

Tennessee Amphibian Monitoring Program - Middle Tennessee State University

The Tennessee Amphibian Monitoring Program (TAMP) is a joint venture between TWRA and Middle Tennessee State University. Volunteers drive an assigned route, stopping at ten ordered stops along the way and recording the species heard at each stop. Volunteers conduct their survey four times per year to provide valuable data on amphibian populations.

In-vitro Mussel Propagation - Middle Tennessee State University

Propagation of rare mussels is difficult due to lack of information on host species for some mussels, and low success rate with mussel larvae. This project features an experimental technique using a medium of various nutrients and blood to allow the mussel larvae (glochidia) to mature without the need for a host fish. Initial tests are showing promise for this technique with Tennessee freshwater mussels.

Biodiversity Internships - University of Tennessee

A total of nine Biodiversity interns were hired for 12 weeks this summer. The interns assisted Biodiversity staff in the regions, assisted Fisheries staff with data collection, and worked at Cumberland River Aquatic Center. These experiences provide high-quality resume builders for students pursuing careers in wildlife and fisheries conservation.

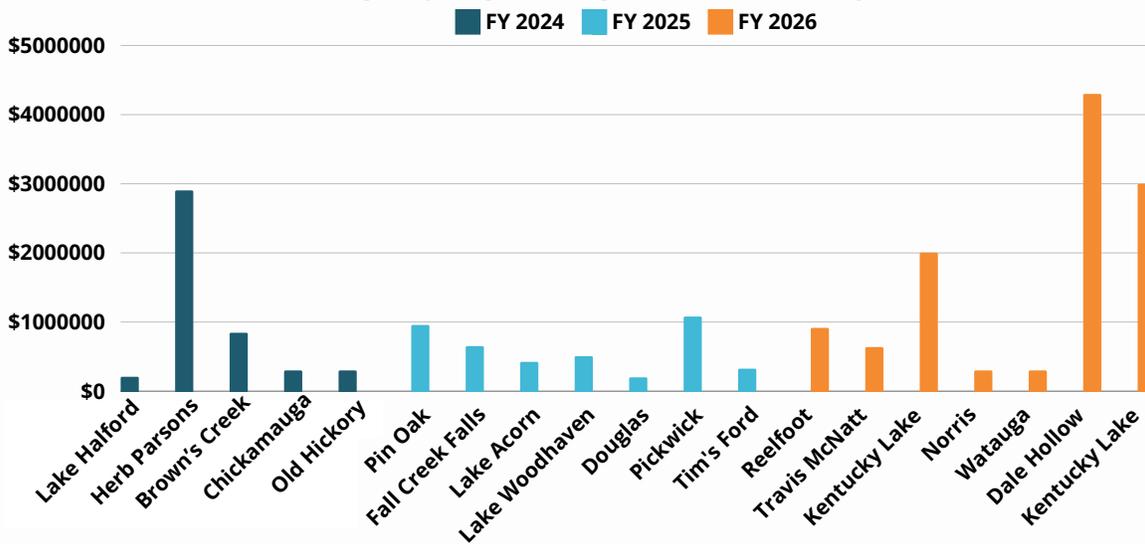
Bill Dance Signature Lakes – 18

The Bill Dance Signature Lake (BDSL) program is a collaborative effort of Bill Dance Outdoors, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), and Tennessee Department of Tourist Development to provide high-quality fishing experiences for anglers of all ages worthy of the fishing legend's endorsement.

Collaborative work to implement BDSL continued in FY24. Team members sampled all signature lakes for water quality and fish population information to support the development of improvement plans. In addition, TWRA staff installed fish feeders, artificial habitat, and stocked forage fish in seven lakes.

Despite a sharp inflation in expenses, infrastructure work also made progress during FY24. TWRA and TDEC are working both independently and jointly on infrastructure projects to install or upgrade boat ramps, courtesy docks, fishing docks, parking, restrooms, signage, picnic tables, fish cleaning stations, and more. TWRA engineering crews were able to provide new fishing piers, courtesy docks, and a handicapped accessible walkway at Lake Halford. New fishing piers, courtesy docks, and a boat ramp were also completed at Browns Creek. At Herb Parsons Lake a new boat ramp, courtesy dock, and fishing pier were also provided.

Joint Agency Engineering Work - 3 Year Projection



Bill Dance
SIGNATURE LAKES

Anglers

The Fisheries Division employs dedicated creel clerks who survey anglers on the water. Their results provide the agency with valuable insight on the economic impact of fishing in Tennessee, angler satisfaction, catch and harvest rates, and hours spent fishing for their favorite sportfish.

3,513,929

Angler Hours

spent fishing in Tennessee.

4,924,370

Fish Caught

statewide. Of the total caught, 1,374,993 fish were harvested.

\$19,296,930

Trip Expenditure

made by anglers who took an estimated 642,456 fishing trips.

Angler Effort by Species

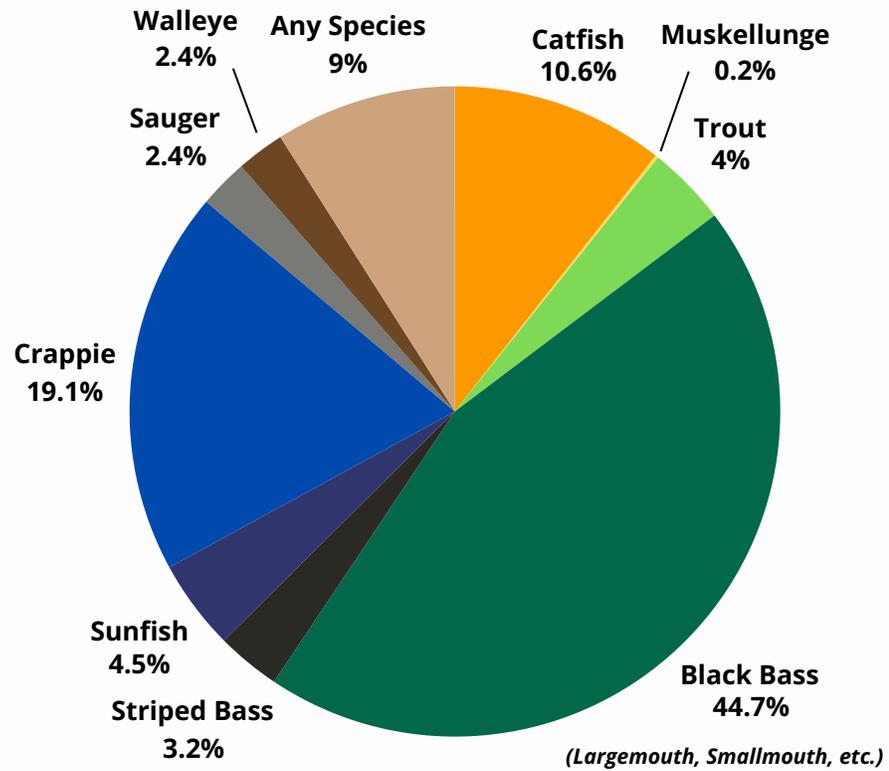


Photo: TWRA Creel Clerk Alfonse Bartolotto III



Photo: Ashley Garrison on Center Hill Reservoir



Photo: Phillip Parsley sampling on the Buffalo River



Photo: Fisheries Asst. Chief Travis Scott with sturgeon

Tennessee is home to 32 large reservoirs, three major river systems, thousands of miles of tributary rivers and streams, and dozens of smaller family fishing lakes managed by TWRA. As a state with a diversity of habitats, stretching from the cold mountain streams in the east, to the Mississippi River, Tennessee has become known for trophy bass, trout, catfish, muskellunge, striped bass, and more. To guide management decisions, the agency actively participates in research and data collection projects.

Largemouth Bass Genetics:

TWRA provided grant funding to the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Foundation to conduct genetic testing of largemouth bass to determine the success of TWRA's Florida largemouth bass stocking program. The project also tested spotted and smallmouth bass to evaluate the effects of introduced Alabama spotted bass and created a baseline inventory of black bass stocks in Tennessee. In total, 296 fish tissue samples collected from large reservoirs and agency lakes were analyzed using the single nucleotide polymorphisms method.

Research at Tennessee Tech University:

TWRA provided grant funding to Tennessee Tech University to research and evaluate the effects of invasive Alabama bass on black bass populations in reservoir and river systems across the state. These studies will help TWRA assess current distribution of this invasive species and help to determine their impacts on smallmouth bass fisheries in the future. Investigators are also developing a project to look at the impacts and movements of striped bass populations in the Caney Fork River.

Statewide River Projects:

TWRA staff coordinated with partner agencies on lake sturgeon re-introductions, monitoring, and evaluation in the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers. This included efforts to evaluate catch & release mortality of lake sturgeon below hydropeaking facilities. Staff evaluated tag retention of acoustic tags on juvenile alligator gar with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the University of Tennessee.

Boating and Fishing Access:

TWRA's Engineering Division works diligently to maintain more than 1,200 fishing and boating access points across the state. They help field requests for new ramps and provide technical assistance to local governments looking to build their own ramps. In FY24, heavy equipment crews completed:

- Garrison Branch boat ramp and rebuilt the Spring City ramp in Rhea County.
- Polecat boat ramp and parking area in Loudon County.
- Garrett Lake boat ramp in Jackson.
- Maintenance of more than 50 sites throughout the state.

Native Brook Trout:

In East Tennessee, TWRA staff are implementing a strategic plan to revive Tennessee's native brook trout. In FY24, they partnered with Great Smoky Mountains National Park, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Forest Service to translocate 301 native brook trout into Little Paint Creek. The partnership stocked 78 fingerling native brook trout in Right Prong Rock Creek, propagated at the Tennessee Aquarium Conservation Institute. This work, in addition to rainbow trout removal projects, will add 6.3 miles of native brook trout distribution to the state and help meet the objective of 13-15 miles of new distribution by 2027 as specified in TWRA's native brook trout management plan.

Fish Habitat Improvements:

Across the state, Fisheries staff deploy habitat structures to improve fishing. These projects often involve the support of volunteers who show up to support their local fishery. Examples of projects in FY24 include:

- 305 habitat structures in Maples Creek Lake.
- 200 gas pipe structures in Cordell Hull Reservoir.
- 50 Shelbyville cubes, 75 gas pipe structures, and 200 stake bucket structures in Watts Bar Lake.
- 40 stake bucket structures and 60 Shelbyville cubes in Nickajack Lake.
- 300 stake buckets, 12 Shelbyville cubes, and 16 gas pipe trees in Parksville Lake.
- 100 habitat structures in Fall Creek Falls State Park Lake.



Photo: Engineering work at Lake Halford



Photo: Left Prong Hampton Creek trout work



Photo: Nicole Hulsey supporting fishing outreach

Hatcheries

Agency Fisheries staff manage some fisheries by stocking from hatcheries. Nearly eight million fish are stocked each year - from fry to fingerlings, brood fish and trophies - including several species of game and non-game fish. This effort is led by TWRA biologists who monitor fish populations, angler success, and habitats to maintain the state's fisheries.

Humbolt

 1,343,824

Walleye, Florida largemouth bass, black crappie, blue catfish, channel catfish, bluegill, and redear sunfish

Eagle Bend

 1,190,209

Walleye, sauger, Florida largemouth bass, striped bass, black crappie, bluegill, and redear sunfish

Springfield

 891,816

Walleye, sauger, Florida largemouth bass, striped bass, hybrid striped bass, bluegill, and redear sunfish

Hiwassee

 818,922

Walleye, Florida largemouth bass, striped bass, black crappie, and blacknose black crappie

Normandy

 1,849,900

Walleye, Florida largemouth bass, striped bass, hybrid striped bass, black crappie, and blacknose black crappie

Sugar Creek

 454,057

Black crappie

Erwin

 109,129

Rainbow trout

Tellico

 140,612

Brown and rainbow trout

Buffalo Springs

 155,732

Rainbow trout

Flintville

 170,181

Brook and rainbow trout

Public Land

National surveys consistently show the lack of access to land is the biggest barrier for people to get involved in hunting. TWRA actively pursues available land for purchase that offers benefits for wildlife habitat, hunting, and fishing access. The agency owns **558,666 acres** and manages a total of **1.6 million acres** of public land. The agency also has more than **1,200 access areas** for boaters and paddlecraft users to enjoy the water.

From 2015-2024, TWRA purchased 51,144 acres for public access. Another 54,483 acres were secured through conservation easements for a total of 105,600 acres added to public access for Tennesseans over the last decade.

The following land acquisitions occurred in FY24:

Wolf River WMA	92.44 ac. of wetlands in Fayette Co.
Lick Creek WMA	78 ac. of wetlands in Greene Co.
Spring Creek WMA	60 ac. of wetlands in Madison Co.
CWD Workbase	5 ac. for CWD Workbase in Madison Co.
Mt. Roosevelt WMA	17.5 ac. of uplands in Cumberland Co.
Laurel Hill WMA	45 ac. of uplands in Lawrence Co.
Clinch River Access	4.8 ac. of river access in Hancock Co.

Private Land — 24

In Tennessee, 90 percent of land is privately owned. To advance wildlife habitat and conservation goals, TWRA actively partners with other government and non-profit organizations to provide support to private land owners.

Private Lands Program

The Private Lands Program began in 2007 with just three biologists. Today, the program has doubled to six team members. The program connects landowners with habitat managers to help write management plans, provide education and outreach, assist with habitat management such as prescribed fire, and assist U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA NRCS) field offices with conservation planning.

FY24 accomplishments:

- 527 field visits with landowners.
- 178 Farm Bill program contracts or applications on 5,092 acres.
- 149 management plans written for 5,750 acres.
- 980 acres of prescribed burning.
- 8 educational workshops.

Habitat Specialist Program

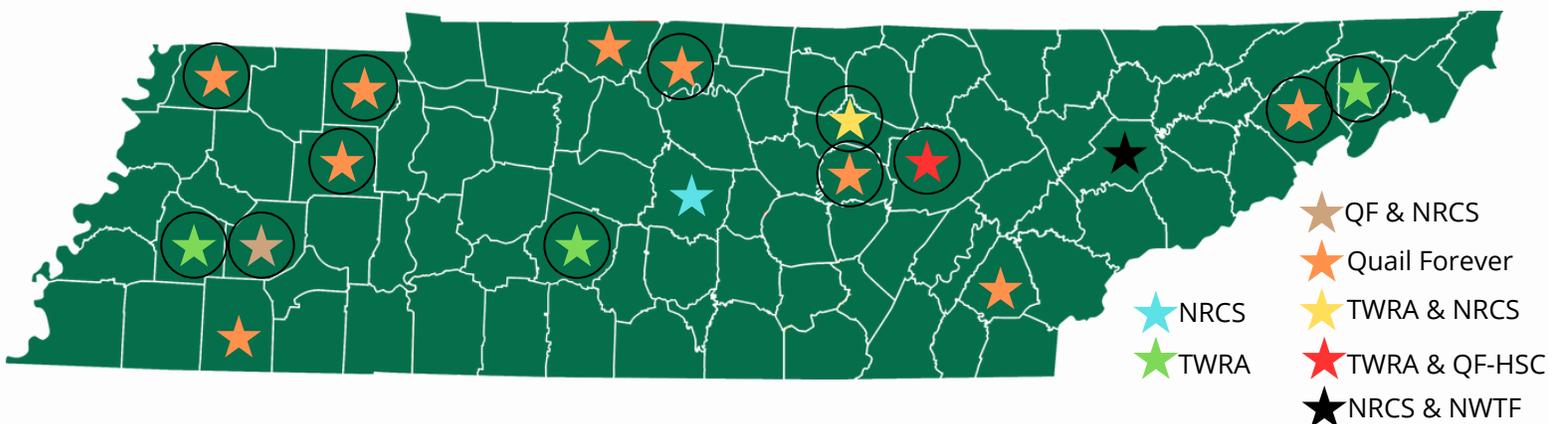
The Habitat Specialist Program is a collaborative effort between TWRA, Quail Forever (QF), and the Southeastern Grasslands Institute. The two-year project was funded by a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant and is primarily focused on habitat work on public and private land in the Cumberland Plateau region of the state. Habitat management assistance is based on the goals of the landowner and can include prescribed fire, firebreak establishment, invasive species control, forest stand improvement, and more.

FY24 accomplishments:

- 3,280 acres impacted by habitat projects.
- 6.8 miles of firebreaks installed.
- 214 acres of invasive species control.
- 188 acres of forest stand improvement work.

TWRA Private Lands and Partner Staff Positions

Circles indicate TWRA funded or co-funded position





Joe Benedict
Wildlife & Forestry Chief

“ The Wildlife & Forestry Division staff manage over 100 wildlife management areas and refuges, most with long hunting seasons and generous bag limits, providing broad opportunity for sportsmen and women to go afield and harvest wild game.

Landowners in Tennessee have the opportunity through our Private Land Program, to invite agency staff to visit their property to discuss their wildlife goals and best management practices and also learn about federal cost share programs for wildlife habitat management.

In setting hunting seasons, we have recently built upon our foundation of biological data by adding significant efforts to collect social science data (public opinions and desires) and increased transparency in our decision-making process.

”

Share Crop Lease Program

Across the state, there are roughly 24,000 acres of crop ground on wildlife management areas. The Share Crop Lease Program is an opportunity for agricultural producers to lease ground on WMAs, making farmers our partners in managing public land. Leases are available up to five years and producers have the option to renew prior to expiration. There are two types of lease options in the program:

1. **Service Leases** require a percentage of the crop to be left unharvested for wildlife.
2. **Cash Leases** require cash payment to the agency to farm the acreage or service in lieu of cash. Services often include road grading, levee repair, planting additional fields, heavy machinery operation, etc.

15,908 WMA Acres included in 96 share crop leases during the 2023 production year.

\$ 1.5M Value of Crop Leases from the value of cash lease income and services in lieu of cash.

FY24 Habitat Management

REGION	TWRA LAND	ACTIVELY MANAGED LAND	ACTIVELY MANAGED GRASSLAND	ACTIVELY MANAGED FORESTLAND	ACTIVELY MANAGED WETLAND
1	206,203	38,001	9,064	252	28,685
2	140,916	4,884	4,042	569	273
3	545,121	13,706	10,603	2,432	671
4	439,805	3,719	2,426	961	332
TOTAL	1,332,045	60,310	26,135	4,214	29,961

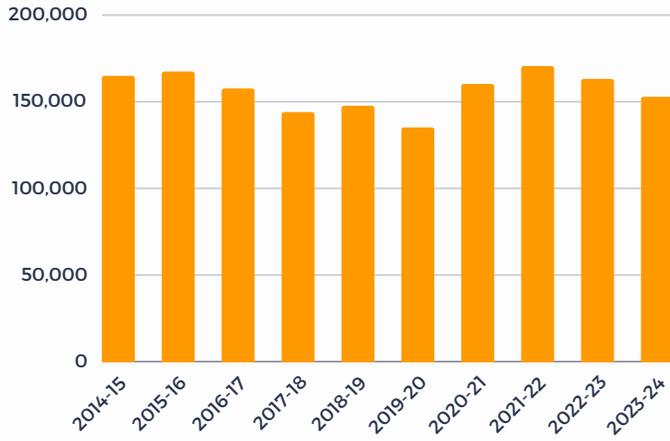
Actively managed land: Land physically affected by habitat management efforts during the 2024 fiscal year.



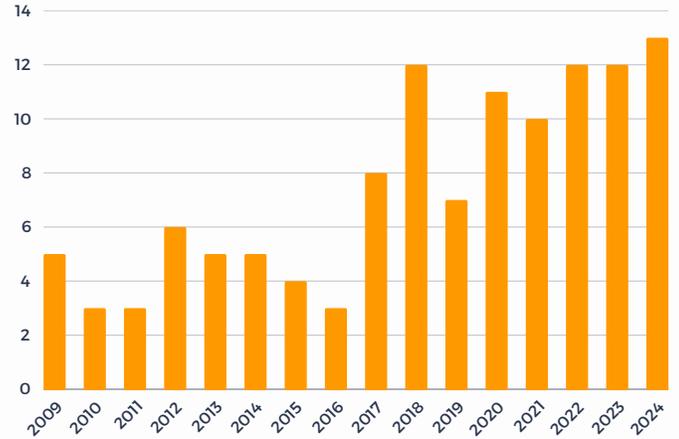
Photo: Participants of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Foundation First Time Fowlers ladies hunt

STATEWIDE ANNUAL GAME HARVEST

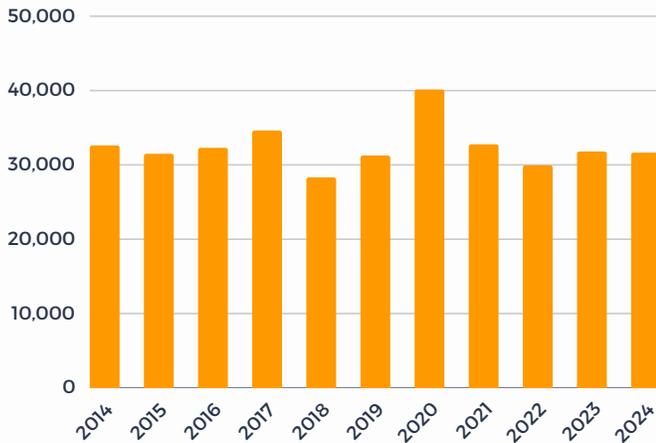
DEER HARVEST



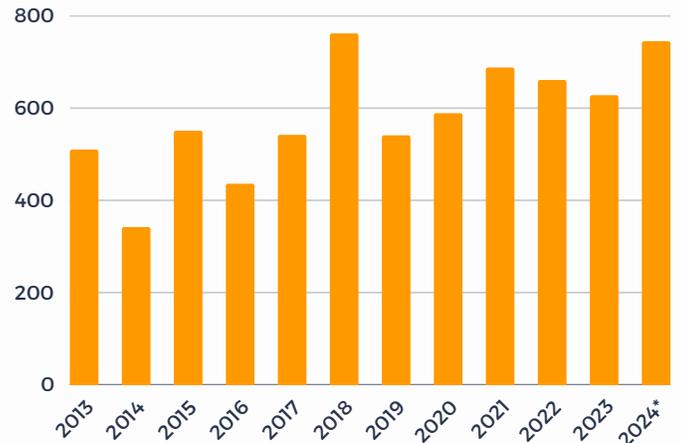
BULL ELK HARVEST



SPRING TURKEY HARVEST

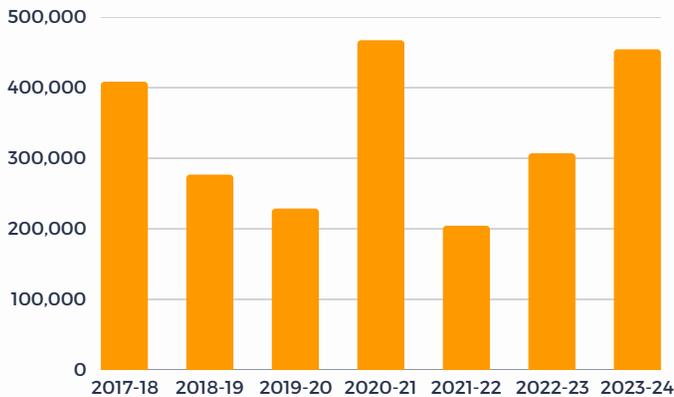


BLACK BEAR HARVEST

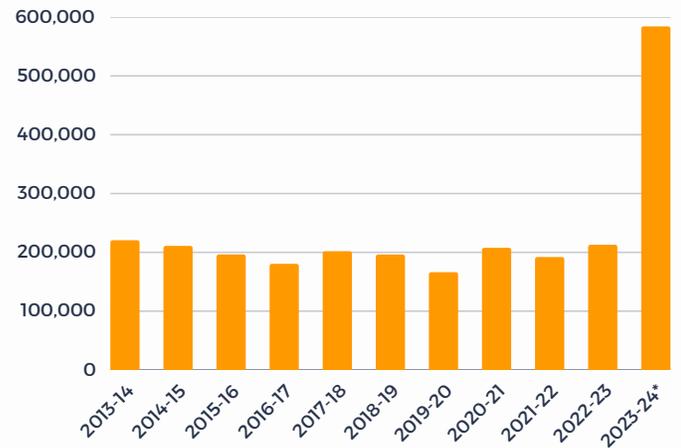


*Harvest at time of publication in December. Season is still open.

DOVE HARVEST



DUCK HARVEST



*Migratory bird (ducks and dove) harvest is reported through the federal Harvest Information Program (HIP) survey. In FY24, a new survey method was implemented, which produced a large increase in the number of harvested ducks reported for the 2023-2024 season.

Quota Hunts

In some areas of Tennessee, the number of hunters needs to be restricted to reduce impacts on the resource. In these areas, the agency utilizes a quota hunt system for species including bear, deer, elk, sandhill crane, turkey, and waterfowl. New in 2024, the agency was able to offer four very limited Bobwhite Quail quota hunts on Bridgestone Firestone Centennial WMA.



For each of the four quail hunts, the successfully drawn hunter was allowed to bring two additional hunters. One of the parties featured a three-generation family from Elizabethton, Tennessee. Mr. Hyder, the grandfather, grew up hunting quail and grouse and spoke to TWRA staff with fondness of those memories. He was able to introduce his family to quail hunting during the Bridgestone quota hunt. The trio moved three coveys of quail with their German short-haired pointers and ended the day with smiles on their faces.

The Wildlife and Forestry Division establishes quota hunts, dates, and bag limits as part of the season setting process. The application, drawings, and permitting process are then implemented by the agency's Licensing Division.

FY24 Quota Hunt	Applicants	Hunters Drawn	Percent of Applicants Drawn
Spring Turkey	5,551	2,819	51%
Youth Spring Turkey	198	39	20%
WMA Deer Hunts	17,889	13,281	74%
Youth WMA Deer Hunts	804	564	70%
Elk	9,577	17	0.002%
Youth Elk	393	1	0.003%
Cherokee NF	1,090	878	81%
Season Long Waterfowl	18,140	2,450	14%
Sandhill Crane	3,887	1,250	32%

Black Bears — 29

With more than 6,000 black bears calling Tennessee home, the agency must actively manage the population and an increasing number of human-bear conflicts. To do this, the agency partners with the City of Gatlinburg, the National Park Service, and other organizations to respond to conflict calls and provide extensive technical assistance, education, and outreach to the public.

Results from a FY24 public opinion survey showed 93 percent of the public enjoys that bears exist and value their importance to the ecosystem. It also showed that 88 percent of survey respondents were aware that bears take advantage of unconventional food sources, 76 percent believe preventative action is needed, 69 percent approve of laws and ordinances, and 88 percent approve of laws prohibiting intentional feeding which has been shown to contribute to nuisance bear issues.

2024 Wildlife Biologist of the Year - Janelle Musser

Janelle Musser serves as the TWRA Assistant Bear Program Coordinator. Her performance in the field exemplifies dedication and strategic thinking. Residents throughout East Tennessee have benefited from her extensive work to educate communities on living with bears. In her daily work, she faces countless challenges with human-bear conflicts and has been a leader in education and management for long-term solutions. Her focus on the welfare of bears also underscores her compassionate approach when trapping and relocation is required.



Great Smoky Mountain National Park Cooperative Black Bear Management

Over the years, TWRA has partnered with biologists at the Great Smoky National Park (GSMNP) on wildlife management including wild hogs, deer, elk, black bears, and non-game species such as bats, owls, and falcons. The Cooperative Black Bear Management Agreement has been in place for decades and was instrumental in helping restore black bear populations in Tennessee. Research work has been another defining feature of the partnership. From 2015-2023, GSMNP and TWRA supported a University of Tennessee research team including graduate student Kristin Botzet to better understand what happens to bears that have been relocated. Unfortunately, the results found that nearly 70 percent of bears that have been moved to another part of Tennessee die within four months, indicating that relocation of bears is not a long-term solution for managing human-bear conflicts.



Photo: Black bear by April Swatzell

Wild Turkey Research

Funded by the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, the Tennessee Cooperative Wild Turkey Project started in 2017 in response to concerns over declining harvest in several counties of south-middle Tennessee. University of Tennessee researchers monitored turkey reproduction, survival, and habitat use of 432 hens from 2017-2022. Results of the study were published in FY24.

MOWING destroyed 12% of all nests in the study. Waiting to bushog till late June can improve success.

Top Causes of Turkey Declines:

1. Poor Nest Success
2. Poor 28-day Poult Survival
3. Poor Annual Hen Survival



Predation of hens, nests, and poults was the dominant cause of poor success. Improved habitat management with some level of predator control is required to increase turkey numbers on most properties.

Importance of Habitat:

Land-use patterns likely are contributing to the population decline. For example, only 7 percent of the study area was early successional habitat, but 46 percent of the nests occurred in those habitats. Nest success in early successional habitat was greater than any other type.

This year, TWRA completed habitat management work on more than 60,000 acres of public grasslands, forest land, and wetlands to support wildlife populations.

TWRA also partners with Quail Forever and USDA NRCS to co-fund private land biologists. These biologists supported conservation work on 5,750 private acres last year.



Source:

Buehler, D.A. and C.A. Harper. 2024. Tennessee Cooperative Wild Turkey Project: Summary of Key Results and Recommendations.

University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture Extension Publication, W 1250. tiny.utk.edu/W1250.

Hunter Education

All hunters born on or after January 1, 1969, must possess proof that they have successfully completed a Hunter Education course. TWRA continues to offer the traditional in-person education course as well as online certification programs which have grown in popularity in recent years.

There were 153 classroom courses conducted in FY24, an increase from 129 classes conducted in FY23. Currently there are 755 certified volunteer hunter education instructors in Tennessee's Hunter Education Program, as well as 237 agency employees who are certified instructors.

3,579

Students certified at in-person courses.

9,951

Students certified through online courses.

828,963

Total students certified since 1972.



TWRA Wildlife Officer Justin Pinkston received the Shikar-Safari Club International 2023 Tennessee Wildlife Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award. Pinkston is among a distinguished group of officers to receive the honor from among all 50 states and 10 Canadian provinces. Along with his duties as a wildlife officer, Pinkston is very active in his community, representing the agency at events and by teaching and assisting in educational programs. His work in Boater and Hunter Education courses resulted in more than 300 students graduating in 2023.

TWRA's Buffalo Ridge Refuge Outreach Center has touched the lives of thousands of Tennesseans through outreach events. Purchased in 2016 from the Beasley family, the property is now comprised of approximately 3,000 acres which include hunting areas, fishing spots, meeting venues, and rifle, shotgun, and archery ranges. Agency staff offer a variety of educational opportunities to teach new hunters, anglers, and target shooters the skills they need to be successful.

The property also houses the Tennessee Wildlife Officer Training Academy (TWOTA). In FY24, 19 wildlife officer cadets lived and learned at TWOTA. In addition to classroom material, cadets practice tactical skills, search and rescue, wildlife management, and target shooting.



60

Events per Year

2,000

Event Participants

400-500

Hunters per Year

Nationwide, participation in hunting and fishing is seeing very limited growth. To ensure the next generation of outdoor enthusiasts have the skills they need, TWRA engages in a wide range of outreach programs to share conservation, hunting, fishing, shooting, and outdoor recreation with Tennesseans of all ages. In FY24, the agency and its partners provided outreach events for nearly 17,000 attendees.

National Archery in the Schools

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency hosted a three-day National Archery in the Schools state tournament which featured close to 1,900 participants representing 99 schools. This was the largest event since the program was established.

Central Magnet High School, Stewarts Creek Middle School, and Christiana Elementary School won titles in their respective divisions. Each student shot 30 arrows, 15 from 10 meters and 15 from 15 meters with a maximum score of 300.

Scholastic Clay Target Program

TWRA provides grant funding to the Tennessee Wildlife Federation (TWF) to administer the Scholastic Clay Target Program. The program has served thousands of students since its inception, and teaches responsibility, firearm safety, and sportsmanship. TWF hosts regional shoots during the season and culminates with a statewide competition. In FY24 the program had 1,701 participants, up from 1,615 the previous year.

2024 First Time Fowlers Ladies Hunt



With support from a TWRA R3 grant, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Foundation hosted the first annual First Time Fowlers ladies duck hunt in January 2024. The two-day event gave 50 women the opportunity to experience duck hunting for the first time. Participants begin with an in-depth hunter safety training course before heading out to the range to practice clay shooting. Throughout the workshop, they practice on teams with a mentor, allowing them the opportunity to build friendships and ask questions before the hunt. The next morning, 12 private blind owners welcomed the ladies into their blinds and assisted with duck calling, hunting, and cleaning harvested birds. In addition to the blind owners, the event was supported by the following corporate partners:





Photo: Students compete at NASP state tournament

Tennessee FFA Association

TWRA was well represented at the 2024 Tennessee FFA Convention. The agency sponsored the fifth general session which included an opportunity for Director Maxedon to speak and to show the new “Take Me Back to Tennessee” 75th anniversary theme song.

Staff biologists and game wardens hosted a Careers in Natural Resources workshop. More than 60 students and teachers attended with standing room only. Staff also provided an inflatable archery station and an information booth in the convention expo.

This year, the 96th Tennessee FFA State Convention had a record attendance of nearly 5,700 students, teachers, and family members. Tennessee FFA strives to make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education.



Photo: Executive Director Jason Maxedon speaks at FFA Convention.

Tennessee Extension & 4-H

In FY24, TWRA continued to grow our partnership with the University of Tennessee Extension program and 4-H to better equip youth to be responsible hunters, and educate them about hunting, shooting, fishing, and other outdoor activities. The agency co-funds an Outdoor Recreation Specialist position within the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture's School of Natural Resources to focus on statewide education and engagement initiatives. In addition to several 4-H events, staff supported planning for a series of quarterly hunting and fishing programs with UT's student chapter of The Wildlife Society.

Looking ahead, plans include further development of educational programs, increased collaboration with extension agents statewide, and the continuation of key partnerships with TWRA and other conservation organizations. Additionally, ongoing efforts to secure funding and expand outreach will ensure sustained growth and impact for outdoor recreation programs across Tennessee.



Photo: Outdoor Recreation Specialist Ronnie Cowan teaching Alvin C. York high school students about archery.



TUNE IN TO TENNESSEE WILDCAST



The TWRA podcast Tennessee WildCast is a weekly show featuring TWRA biologists, officers, partner organizations, and members of the public who share the latest research, agency work, and advice for Tennesseans and visitors to get excited about wildlife conservation. Hosted by TWRA Communications Manager, Jason Harmon, each episode aims to entertain and educate listeners.

The show continues to grow in listeners and viewers. This year, WildCast surpassed 102,500 plays, over 380,000 views, had a 46 percent increase in followers on Spotify, and listeners tuned in from 17 different countries. The podcast also boasts a stellar 5-star rating.

On the radio, listeners can catch WildCast on more than 30 radio station partners from Bristol to Memphis. In FY24, WildCast was heard by an estimated 343,900 unique radio listeners, delivering over 5.57 million impressions and establishing itself as a Saturday morning favorite.

Staff devoted additional time to improving the visual quality of WildCast and racked up more than 77,000 views on YouTube. The improved visuals also helped the agency secure placement on CarbonTV, the #1 streaming video platform for the outdoors. Community TV stations, including Wilson County TV, Smyrna TV, and Grundy County TV run WildCast each week. TrueBlue TV includes six additional local channels viewers can tune into WildCast.



LISTEN ON THE RADIO, ONLINE OR YOUR FAVORITE PODCASTING APP

Communication

Executive Director Jason Maxedon joins Don King and Jason Harmon for an episode of WildCast.



The TWRA Communication and Marketing Division is committed to providing the public with the information they need. Staff published more than 100 press releases, responded to even more press requests, managed social media platforms, and assisted with the production of agency reports and publications. The division also hosted or supported the implementation of hundreds of outreach events including school career days, county fairs, conventions, and educational classes.

Publications:

The Tennessee Wildlife Magazine is the official publication of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency with more than 175,000 subscribers. Published quarterly, it provides stories about all species of wildlife in our state, hunting and fishing opportunities, wild game recipes, and personal stories that warm the heart. The agency also hosts an annual wildlife photography contest to produce the Tennessee Wildlife Calendar. Due to budget constraints, this year the agency shifted to a one per household limit on all complimentary magazine subscriptions included with Lifetime and Sportsman licenses.

Another publication change in FY24 was a shift from producing separate hunting and fishing guides to one combination guide. This year, TWRA distributed more than half a million copies of the Tennessee Fishing, Hunting & Trapping Guide to ensure Tennesseans have the rules and regulations of hunting, fishing, and trapping.

Social Media:

The Communications team is active on social media platforms to reach constituents wherever they are. Staff produced hundreds of videos, reels, infographics, and posts to educate, inform, and even entertain.

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

YOUTUBE
@tnwildlife



FACEBOOK
@tnwildlife



INSTAGRAM
@tnwildliferesourcesagency



Emily Buck
Communication & Marketing
Director

“It really is an honor to have the opportunity to highlight and share the work the agency does to advance wildlife conservation. The staff biologists and officers are truly some of the most passionate people I’ve ever met, and it always comes through when we interview them for stories,” said TWRA Director of Communication and Marketing Emily Buck. “This past year we had the opportunity to look back on 75 years of agency achievements. We’ve come so far, and my team is looking forward to what 2025 holds for us, and the many stories and events we will share with Tennesseans.”

Website:

The agency website is one of the most important sources of information for members of the public. The website consists of more than 900 individual pages of content about licenses, hunting and fishing regulations, WMAs, wildlife species, law enforcement, and other resources. In FY24, the webpage had 4.7 million unique visitors and a total of 11.6 million page views.

110+

Press Releases

issued during FY24 on agency events, issues, and regulations.

52

WildCast Episodes

produced on hunting and fishing opportunities, agency work, and more.

175,000

Magazine Subscribers

receiving the Tennessee Wildlife magazine quarterly

49,800

Instagram Followers

292,000

Facebook Followers

1.5M

Youtube Views



CELEBRATION

In honor of the agency’s 75th anniversary, the Communication and Marketing team worked hard to make the year special for staff and the public. A limited-edition logo was developed based on the original Game and Fish Commission logo. Merchandise featuring the anniversary logo was available for a donation to the agency.

The team also partnered with local music artist Chris Hennessee to record a special theme song called “Take Me Back to Tennessee,” which was featured in numerous agency video productions. Additional outreach events were also held throughout the state to celebrate 75 years of wildlife education and outreach.

Agency Funding

Revenue Sources

General Fund: 0.4%

Services: 3%

**Inter-Departmental:
12.6%**

**Reserve Funds:
15%**

**Federal Grants:
29%**

**Licenses and
Registrations:
40%**

Expenses by Project

Ranges: 5%

Biodiversity: 6%

Business Operations: 10%

Comms & Outreach: 10%

**Wildlife Management
Areas (WMAs): 13%**

**Wildlife Management:
12%**

Law Enforcement: 20%

**Fisheries & Hatcheries:
24%**

Federal Funds — 39

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is the main source of federal grant funding for TWRA. This funding is generated by excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, archery equipment, fishing equipment, boat motors, and a portion of the federal gasoline tax. Federal funds are distributed to states based on the number of state licenses sold and land/water area. TWRA's FY24 Comprehensive Grant was proposed and funded by USFWS for approximately \$36 million.



Wildlife Restoration Program:

- Wildlife Research
- Public Hunting Access
- Wildlife Management



Sport Fish Restoration Program:

- Fish Research
- Public Fishing Access
- Sport Fish Management

To help build relationships with manufacturers and showcase how these excise taxes are put to work, TWRA participates in "Partner with a Payer" events. This nationwide initiative connects wildlife agencies with manufacturers to discuss how conservation and outdoor recreation benefits the industry.



Photo: Col. Dale Grandstaff visiting Beretta USA in Gallatin



Photo: Smith & Wesson staff showcasing manufacturing.



Photo: Officer Blake Conrad and Sgt. Nathan Karch visiting Troy Firearms in Clarksville.

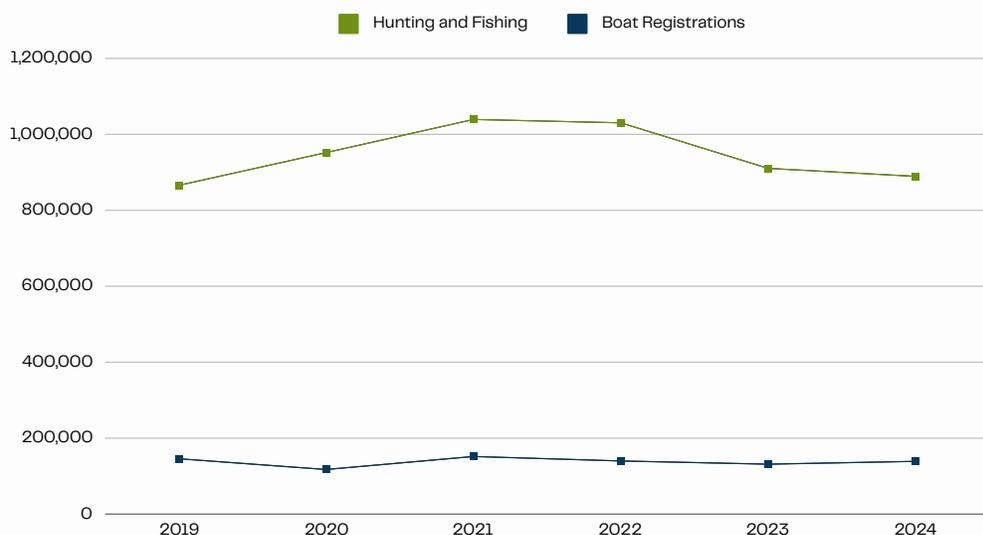


Photo: Lt. Col. Matt Majors visiting Caymas Boats in Ashland City.

A hunting or fishing license is more than just a ticket to a great day on the water or in the field. It is the primary source of funding for more than one million acres of public hunting and fishing access, wildlife habitat and conservation work, and outreach and education efforts to share outdoor recreation with the next generation of hunters and anglers. In Tennessee, nearly one million license buyers fund conservation work with their license purchases. In addition to license sales, state funding also includes a portion of the marine fuel tax, which is dedicated to boating infrastructure, and a portion of the real estate transfer tax, which can be used for the purchase of wetland properties and land maintenance.

To support strong license sales, TWRA has an R3 initiative to Recruit, Retain, and Reactivate hunters and anglers. This includes events and workshops to teach new skills and marketing campaigns to motivate Tennesseans to go outdoors.

License Sales:



Susie Crist
Licensing Chief

- 
TOTAL SYSTEM REVENUE:
\$54,442,779.92
- 
BOAT REGISTRATIONS:
42,243
- 
HARD CARDS SOLD:
218,630
- 
DONATIONS:
\$186,893.88

FY24 Transactions

“Our License Division had a fabulous year decreasing the wait time for both mailed and online applications, released quota hunt results well ahead of required deadlines, improved relationships with our license agents, and handled thousands of customer service calls among so many other accomplishments, all while giving the best customer service possible,” said TWRA Licensing Chief Susie Crist. “I am very proud of the improvements in processes and communication that we have made as a team and look forward to what next year has in store as we continue to bring in the revenue that the agency depends on to operate. Our team is always bringing ideas forward to improve what we do in our division and in collaboration with other divisions to ensure the best results for our stakeholders and colleagues.”

LICENSE PRICES THROUGH HISTORY

1903	Tennessee adopted Chapter 169 to protect wildlife resources on a statewide basis. The law declared wildlife to be property of the State, and it established the office of the State Game and Fish Warden.	Fines Only
1907	First resident hunting license created by the Tennessee General Assembly to fund wildlife conservation and Game Warden salaries.	Hunting \$3
1913	Governor Ben Hooper appointed W.D. Howser as the state game warden. The statewide hunting fee was increased, and non-resident hunting was \$15.	Hunting \$5
1931	The Game and Fish Act of 1931 established a Game and Fish Fund to collect license fees, fines, forfeitures, and other penalties to pay for expenses of the Game and Fish Division. The statewide hunting license was expanded to include fishing, but women, as well as children under age 16, were exempt.	Hunt/Fish \$2
1949	Governor Gordon Browning signed the "Model Law," creating The Tennessee Game and Fish Commission. Browning appointed nine citizens from lists submitted by sportsmen's meetings across the state.	Hunt/Fish \$2
1974	The Game and Fish Commission was reorganized to create the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency with oversight from a 13-member Tennessee Fish and Wildlife Commission (TFWC).	Hunt/Fish \$5.25
1990	The General Assembly increased license prices.	Hunt/Fish \$15.50
2004	The General Assembly gave the TFWC authority to set license prices and to establish new licenses. Lawmakers required that the increase could not exceed the increase of the consumer price index.	Hunt/Fish \$21
2014	Prices were once again increased to account for growing expenses. The TFWC set the resident combo hunting and fishing license at \$33, the Sportsman License at \$165, and a nonresident all game hunting license at \$305. The increase took effect in 2015.	Hunt/Fish \$33
2024	Due to a 31.6% increase in inflation since 2015, the TFWC voted to increase boating registration fees by 22%. Hunting and fishing license prices were increased 28% on average. Sportsman and Lifetime license fees were increased by 12%.	Hunt/Fish \$42

FY24 Budget

FY24 Expenditures	Wildlife Fund	Boating Fund	Total Agency
Employee Costs	\$70,267,800	\$9,353,700	\$79,621,500
Travel	\$935,700	\$236,600	\$1,172,300
Utilities	\$1,045,200	\$18,200	\$1,063,400
Maintenance/Repairs	\$2,058,800	\$150,600	\$2,209,400
Professional Services	\$7,672,100	\$440,900	\$8,113,300
Supplies	\$14,958,500	\$1,727,900	\$16,686,400
Printing/Comms.	\$1,087,400	\$7,800	\$1,087,400
Motor Vehicles	\$993,000	\$314,600	\$1,307,600
Grants	\$14,664,100	\$3,559,400	\$18,223,500
Equipment	\$4,054,100	\$1,330,000	\$5,384,000
Land	\$2,415,400	\$0	\$2,415,400
Buildings/Construction	\$11,801,600	\$0	\$11,801,600
State Services	\$11,489,500	\$2,331,100	\$13,820,600
Other	\$1,497,110	\$232,500	\$1,739,600
Total Expenditures	\$144,950,200	\$19,703,300	\$164,653,500

*Budget includes carry forward projects from FY23.



Ken Tarkington
Budget & Procurement Chief

“A budget doesn’t limit your goal; it provides a path to achieve it.”

TWRA’s Budget and Procurement team plays a vital role behind the scenes to ensure field operations run smoothly and the agency operates in accordance with state policies for purchases and expenses. In FY24, procurement officers facilitated nearly 4,000 purchase orders which were executed through a bid process.

One of the major procurement projects for the year was the Bill Dance Signature Lakes initiative. This included securing Central Procurement Office, Comptroller, and Fiscal review Committee approvals for a \$3,000,000, five-year sole source contract for the purchase of courtesy docks and fishing piers as well as underwater fish habitat, forage, sport fish stocking, boat ramps and the reclamation of the Green Cove Lake. Another major project for the Law Enforcement Division consisted of new procurement contracts for body armor, body-worn cameras, and the purchase of law enforcement shotguns.

In addition to procurements, the budget team also assists agency leadership with the development of annual operating budgets and oversees expense reporting throughout the year.

FY24 Funding	Wildlife Fund	Boating Fund	Total Agency
State General Fund	\$533,500	\$0	\$533,500
License Sales/Boat Registrations	\$43,480,600	\$9,213,600	\$52,694,200
Federal Revenue	\$51,412,800	\$4,765,000	\$56,177,800
Current Services	\$3,747,900	\$7,000	\$3,754,900
Inter-Departmental	\$24,001,500	\$0	\$24,001,500
Reserve	\$21,773,900	\$5,717,700	\$27,491,600
Total Funding	\$144,950,200	\$19,703,300	\$164,653,500

Business Support — 44

Information Technology

The IT Project Management teams (Procurement and Development) have significantly enhanced the efficiency of ordering and tracking essential technology assets. Through streamlined processes and improved communication channels, procurement orders are now tracked with increased accuracy and delivered consistently across the organization. This advancement has been essential in maintaining a steady and reliable flow of technology resources, directly supporting our operational needs. Notably, the IT Budgeting and Financials System, has seen substantial improvements which have brought greater transparency and accuracy to budget management, strengthening our ability to plan and allocate resources effectively. Additionally, the Licensing Dashboard project stands out as a model of operational excellence. For the past eight months, this dashboard has been delivering near real-time data to the Licensing Division, empowering informed decision-making and providing actionable insights. Both projects exemplify our commitment to excellence in IT service delivery and underscore the value of collaborative, cross-functional teamwork in achieving impactful results.

The Development team has successfully completed several projects and deployed them to "Live" status in the Production environment for FY24. The Animal Damage Control, Boating Safety Exam, and Boater Education systems have been rebuilt with enhanced features. TSAS Age & Growth (WinFin Replacement) has been implemented. We have also begun rebuilding several more projects with updated technology resources, including TSAS Reservoirs & Lakes, TSAS Statewide Fish Stocking, Wild Hogs 2.0, Scientific Collection 2.0, and TWRA Financial Phase IV. Single Sign-On (SSO) has been implemented in many new projects, including TSAS R&L, TSAS SFS, and Wild Hog 2.0, allowing seamless integration with the existing TWRA Application Portal and TSAS Crayfish systems.

The TWRA IT Helpdesk supports staff around the clock, assisting with everything from computer repairs to application use. In FY24, they deployed over 250 Toughbook's and FirstNet phones to officers. IT Printing and Data Entry team members play a critical role in ensuring daily operations run smoothly. This year the team delivered same-day printing, and mailing services, averaging 350 items a day, including boat decals and various sport licenses.

The TWRA Networking Team works collaboratively to roll out the new hardware during non-business hours, minimizing the impact on our users' daily tasks. A new camera system was implemented at all the regional offices to ensure the security of staff and office visitors.

"Our IT Division is dedicated to empowering the agency to better serve both the public and our state's natural habitats. Each day, our team upholds a commitment to innovation, reliability, and service that not only supports our agency's mission but also strengthens Tennessee's conservation efforts," said IT Chief Scott Denton. "Our IT staff is exceptional, they bring skill, dedication, and a problem-solving mindset to every project. Their hard work and commitment ensure that we're constantly improving and adapting to meet the needs of those we serve. This year has been a testament to our team's talent and perseverance, as we rolled out new technology solutions that improve public access to resources and make data more actionable. The most fulfilling part of our work is knowing that each system we enhance, or support helps our agency serve the people of Tennessee more effectively."



Scott Denton
IT Chief

Human Resources

The Human Resources (HR) Division provides strategic planning and support services to Agency employees for management & employee performance consultation, payroll, attendance and leave, affirmative action, employee relations, retirement and insurance benefits, occupational safety and health, and more.

Team members maintain personnel files for 747 Agency positions, of which 694 are full-time and 49 are part-time. In FY24, the agency had an 11 percent turnover of staff through retirements and separations. To support training initiatives, the HR team coordinated the Administrative Assistants Conference, developed and deployed a Supervisor Refresher Training, and conducted 12 new employee orientation sessions which included representation from divisions across the agency.

STATE OF
TENNESSEE
WARDEN
75 YEARS
WILDLIFE RESOURCES AGENCY

TENNESSEE WILDLIFE RESOURCES AGENCY

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Agency Information



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