



LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES

2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT



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The charge of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is to protect, conserve and replenish the natural resources, wildlife and aquatic life of the state.



Administration as of February 2026

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LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

OFFICE OF SECRETARY

The Office of Secretary is administered by LDWF's chief administrative officer, who oversees all scientific operations as organized by the Office of Wildlife and the Office of Fisheries. The Secretary also has ultimate authority over the operation of LDWF's fiscal and business matters as administered by the Office of Management and Finance. Support operations of LDWF report directly to the Secretary. These include the Enforcement Division, LDWF's Legal Section, Internal Audit Section and Public Information.

➤ ENFORCEMENT DIVISION

The Law Enforcement Division is responsible for enforcing laws enacted by the Louisiana Legislature, rules and regulations adopted by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission, and federal laws relative to fish and wildlife resources, boating safety, waterways enforcement activities, search and rescue, and homeland security missions.

➤ LEGAL SECTION

The Legal Section represents the department and the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission in all legal matters involving promulgation, enforcement and administration of the state's fish and game laws and regulations, litigation involving department programs, daily advising and counsel, and drafting of contracts, legal documents and legislation.

➤ INTERNAL AUDIT SECTION

The Internal Audit Section provides independent, objective assurance and consulting services designed to add value and improve the departments' operations. Internal Audit assists the department in accomplishing its' objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to safeguard and protect the department's resources and assets.

➤ PUBLIC INFORMATION

The Public information section is responsible for media relations, all print publications (regulation brochures, "The Louisiana Conservationist" magazine, annual report, etc.), the agency website, social media, video production, photography, press conference organization, as well as speech writing and talking points as needed.

OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT & FINANCE

The Office of Management and Finance is directed by the Undersecretary. This unit is responsible for the following functions: human resources, accounting, budget forecasting and control, strategic and operational planning, procurement, property control and fleet management, boat registration, motor and boat titling, federal grant reporting, license and permit administration and issuing, fees, taxes and penalties collections.

➤ LICENSING

The Licensing Section administers the issuance of all licenses, harvest tags and most other permits, boat and motor titles and registrations, and is responsible for the collection and deposit of related fees.

➤ ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

The Administrative Services Section is responsible for LDWF's procurement contracts, movable property program, fleet management program, and managing property, marine, general liability, aviation and vehicle insurance claims, and shipping and receiving services.

➤ FISCAL

The Fiscal Section is responsible for all financial operations of LDWF.

➤ HUMAN RESOURCES

The Human Resources section administers and oversees a wide range of employee-related programs aimed at managing and supporting the workforce and the agency. These responsibilities are grouped into key program areas such as, recruitment and retention of staff, employee relations matters, training and development, performance management, compliance, benefits, and workplace culture.

➤ SOCIOECONOMIC RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

With assistance from the various program managers within the offices of LDWF, the Socioeconomic Research and Development Section prepares Fiscal and Economic Impact Statements that accompany the Notices of Intent for rules and regulations considered for adoption by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission.

OFFICE OF WILDLIFE

The Office of Wildlife consists of the Wildlife Division and the Restoration Program.

➤ WILDLIFE DIVISION

The Wildlife Division is responsible for the state's wildlife conservation program, gathering biological data to properly manage wildlife resources, and conservation of coastal wildlife species and their associated habitats, along with statewide responsibility for nongame and threatened and endangered species, mandatory hunter education and training, minerals management, and wetlands conservation through regulatory programs. This is addressed through major programs: Wildlife Research; Land Development and Management; Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge; White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area; Wildlife Diversity; Alligator and Furbearer; Hunter Education; Minerals Management; and Habitat Section.

➤ RESTORATION PROGRAM

The Restoration Program is responsible for informing and implementing habitat and species restoration projects throughout coastal Louisiana for the benefit of wildlife and fisheries.

OFFICE OF FISHERIES

The purpose of the Office of Fisheries is to manage aquatic resources and their habitat, to support the fishing industry, and to provide access, opportunity and understanding of the Louisiana aquatic resources to the state's citizens and other beneficiaries of these sustainable resources. The Office of Fisheries is comprised of two Divisions: the Fisheries Management Division and the Fisheries Research and Development Division. The Fisheries Management Division includes the Marine Fisheries, Inland Fisheries, and Oyster Lease sections. The Fisheries Research and Development Division includes Fisheries Extension, Fisheries Habitat, and Fisheries Research and Assessment sections.

➤ MARINE FISHERIES

The Marine Fisheries Section is responsible for the monitoring and management of the state's estuarine and nearshore marine fishery resources. This includes both fishery-dependent (recreational and commercial) and fishery-independent monitoring of fish and shellfish populations. Section personnel annually develop recommendations for seasons, harvest limits, and other management measures to ensure sustainable populations.

➤ INLAND FISHERIES

The Inland Fisheries Section is responsible for the monitoring and management of the state's freshwater resources. This includes sportfish population monitoring and management, providing boating access through aquatic vegetation control, as well as sportfish production and stocking through the hatchery system.

➤ OYSTER LEASE PROGRAM

The Oyster Lease Section is responsible for the administration of oyster lease agreements on state-owned water bottoms for the purpose of oyster cultivation and production by private entities. The section maintains historical lease records and manages lease boundary data in a Geographic Information System (GIS) electronic environment.

➤ FISHERIES EXTENSION

Fisheries Extension provides guidance and assistance to Louisiana's valuable commercial and recreational fishing sectors through assistance, education and outreach. The artificial reef program enhances the state's abundant marine resources by developing additional habitat utilizing clean, durable and stable materials.

➤ FISHERIES RESEARCH & ASSESSMENT

The Fisheries Research and Assessment Section is responsible for conducting research on the state's estuarine, marine and inland fishery resources. The section includes the Fisheries Development Group and the Fisheries Research Laboratory on Grand Isle, which, in addition to research, also conducts monitoring of offshore fishery stocks through cooperative sampling programs. The section also includes the Fisheries Stock Assessment Program, responsible for developing modern measures of the health of fish stocks statewide to ensure sustainable populations and estimate effects of regulatory changes, and the Fisheries Habitat/Permitting Group which interacts with all LDWF sections and divisions and state and federal entities in planning and implementation of restoration initiatives for fulfillment of resource recovery agreements from oil spill settlements, reviewing and commenting on regulatory and consistency permit applications, and efforts to conserve and restore fish and wildlife habitat. In addition, the section conducts aquatic nuisance species monitoring and outreach.

A Word from the Secretary

When Gov. Jeff Landry appointed me as Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in March of 2025, it was one of the highest honors in my professional life. It meant I would be able to continue the work started by the new executive staff in January of 2024 to elevate this department to new levels.

With the writing of this message for the previous fiscal year, I'm proud of the work we've done and the accomplishments by LDWF staff. Some of things we did, you may know about all ready. Others, not as much.

But whether seen in the media or not, we've made impressive strides in all areas of LDWF.

Our Enforcement Division was front and center on Jan. 1, 2025. That's when tragedy struck in the New Orleans French Quarter when a terrorist act took 14 lives and injured 57 others.

Our agents quickly went into action responding to the scene and began lending aid to the victims and securing the area. Ten of our agents were awarded the LDWF Medal of Merit for their bravery. The medal is given for conspicuous and intrepid gallantry at the risk of life with full awareness of that risk.

Certainly, this event took center stage. But our agents carry out precarious tasks each day that can put them in danger. Yet they continue to perform their jobs at a high level.

Another highlight for last fiscal year was our Louisiana black bear hunt, conducted in December of 2024. It was the first time in 37 years a season was conducted and was the result of much work to bring back this treasured species from the brink of extinction.

A total of 10 bears – eight males and two females - were harvested in the special season, which was administered by LDWF. The season, in which 11 hunting permits were distributed, included Bear Management Area 4, made up of Tensas, Madison, East Carroll and West Carroll parishes and portions of Richland, Franklin, and Catahoula parishes. To provide hunters in our state a chance at harvesting a bear for the first time this century

was a proud accomplishment for our department and our partners who assisted.

In April of 2025, LDWF's Nature and Science Center opened at Port Wonder in Lake Charles. The Nature and Science Center provides hands-on learning opportunities for visitors and features freshwater and saltwater aquariums and touch tanks. The new facility brought in more than 15,000 visitors in the first two and half months of opening, informing visitors of Louisiana's fisheries and programs supporting important sport fish.

Here are some of our other noteworthy accomplishments from fiscal year 2024-25.

ENFORCEMENT

The LDWF Enforcement Division conducted 241,104 patrol hours in 2024-25, including 174,667 on land and 66,437 on water. Agents made 581,059 contacts with the public, the majority of whom were in compliance with state and federal wildlife and fisheries regulations. LDWF Enforcement Division agents issued 10,031 criminal citations and 5,149 warnings during this period.

The LDWF Enforcement Division provided transportation for essential workers who were unable to travel to work due to unsafe driving conditions caused by icy and snowy roads in the northern part of the state. Agents transported 178 essential workers to and from work beginning on Jan. 15 and ending Jan. 17, 2025.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Communicating to and with the public is an important part of our mission. We're working to strengthen engagement with the public on our social media platforms. We've enhanced our audience base on these platforms. Facebook, with 167,643 followers, is our biggest platform. But we've also increased our Instagram audience with 15,468 followers.

The LDWF website, wlf.louisiana.gov, is the primary communication tool to the public for our news, research, publications, regulations and events. During the fiscal year, we had 7 million users to the site, 13.5 million events and 3.6 million sessions.

LICENSING

We have more than 1 million customers who operate businesses, fish commercially, recreationally fish and hunt, and use state lands for non-consumptive purposes who engage with our licensing division. The Licensing Section handles the issuance of all commercial licenses, boat and motor title and registration services, and various permits; and manages the statewide electronic licensing system providing recreational license availability at more than 700 locations statewide.

In the past fiscal year, licensing issued over 1.7 million recreational hunting, fishing, trapping and non-consumptive use licenses and permits sold to more than 800,000 customers, generating in excess of \$28 million in revenue. It maintained license records in excess of 100,000 lifetime licensees. A total of 46,000 commercial licenses were sold, representing 8,600 commercial fishermen, 3,500 business entities, 1,000 charter businesses, and various permits that generated in excess of \$7 million in revenue.

WILDLIFE

Deer hunting remains a popular sport in our state and keeping the white-tailed deer herd healthy is vitally important. Working to make sure Chronic Wasting Disease, first discovered in Louisiana in January of 2022, is in check has been the aim of our Deer Program. Unfortunately, a single CWD positive case was reported in Catahoula Parish in December of 2024, which meant the expansion of the CWD Control Area.

The effectiveness of mitigation efforts relies on early detection when disease prevalence is minimal and the LDWF White-Tailed Deer CWD Surveillance Program relies almost exclusively on volunteered hunter-harvested samples.

Since the inception of the surveillance program, the total number of wild white-tailed deer tested in Louisiana is 18,637, including the 2024-2025 sampling year.

Eighteen new CWD cases were discovered during the 2024-25 sampling year bring-



ing the total CWD positive cases to 40 since January 2022. All positive samples were collected from white-tailed deer harvested in Tensas Parish except the Catahoula case.

During the statewide 2024-2025 deer season, 213,500 deer hunters harvested an estimated 239,000 white-tailed deer. While the estimated number of deer harvested did decline, it was the second highest harvest in the past 10 seasons.

Turkey hunting in the state continues to improve thanks to moving the season back some to provide better recruitment. The most recent turkey hunter survey estimated 22,000 turkey hunters harvested approximately 8,400 wild turkeys during the spring of 2025. Estimated turkey hunter numbers decreased slightly from that of 2024, while the estimated turkey harvest increased 40% from that of 2024. Estimated hunters decreased approximately 1.3%.

Based on federal harvest estimates, 59,000 active duck hunters (up 7.2% from 55,000 in 2023) spent 507,000 days afield (up 21% from 419,000 in 2023), for an average of 8.6 days per hunter during the 2024-2025 season. Total duck harvest was 1,247,000 during the 2024-2025 season, an 18% increase from 1,097,000 during the 2023-2024 season.

Providing the best instruction and an easier way to deliver it, our Hunter Education program works to bring along the next generation of hunters. Classes are taught by Education Program staff and volunteer instructors. There are approximately 656 active volunteer hunter education instructors in Louisiana. In the fiscal year 2024-2025, volunteers contributed 34,836 hours of service time valued at approximately \$1.27 million.

Our education centers and shooting ranges are in high demand. A total of 1,337 education center and 27,225 shooting range user visits were recorded in fiscal year 2024-2025.

During the 2024 wild alligator hunting season, 33,363 alligators were harvested by 4,304 licensed alligator hunters. Alligators harvested averaged 7.7 feet in length, with an estimated value of nearly \$8.5 million. Adult-

sized alligators comprised the majority of the harvest. The 2024 wild harvest represents the highest harvest since 2016.

FISHERIES

Louisiana produces nearly one-quarter of the seafood in the continental U.S., coming in second only to Alaska in terms of commercial fishing production. In the Gulf of America, 78% of the seafood production comes from Louisiana shrimpers, crabbers, oyster harvesters and fishermen. There were 8,567 commercial fishermen and 6,479 seafood dealers/processors and brokers registered each year to provide the nation with fresh seafood.

LDWF utilizes the Trip Ticket Program to collect commercial seafood statistics. Through this program, commercial landings data is collected on a trip basis from wholesale/retail seafood dealers, crab sheddors and commercial fishermen holding fresh products licenses. There were 162,753 commercial fishing trips reported in fiscal year 2024-2025 producing in excess of 761 million pounds of seafood.

In fiscal year 2024-2025, total shrimp landings reached nearly 66 million pounds (all species combined/heads-on weight) and had a dockside value of approximately \$70.2 million.

Louisiana regularly leads the nation in commercially-harvested oyster landings. From 2005 through 2024, Louisiana accounted for 32.2% of the nation's oyster landings. In 2024, Louisiana produced 34.5% of annual landings by weight and 24.3% by value in the United States. Of the Gulf States, Louisiana accounted for 77.3% of the oyster meat production and 76.4% of the landings value in 2024.

Our highly successful LA Creel program has been the envy of other states. Alabama and Mississippi managers began consulting with LDWF staff on developing effort surveys based on the LA Creel design. Recently, both

states implemented LA Creel based effort surveys. Additional states, including those along the east coast, have contacted LDWF to learn more about LA Creel to gauge their abilities to run similar programs.

Through the LA Creel program, 9,835 recreational fishing trips, comprised of 26,164 individual anglers, were surveyed dockside during fiscal year 2024-2025. Sixty-two different interviewers completed 1,576 (97.5%) of the 1,616 assignments as drawn during the sample period.

There are currently 17 community fishing sites across Louisiana. Each site was stocked seasonally with channel catfish in the spring and fall and rainbow trout (winter), totaling 35,000 pounds of channel catfish and 6,100 pounds of rainbow trout. Beyond recreational use, Get Out & Fish! sites also serve as venues for educational and outreach programs, including Fishing 101 courses, LDWF's Fishing Course Series, and 4-H youth events.

In fiscal year 2024-2025, LDWF biologists released approximately 6.9 million fish into public Louisiana waterbodies. The released fish were comprised of eleven species and included various surplus hatchery fish as well as fish purchased by other state/local organizations through cooperative agreements.

The Aquatic Outreach and Education Program is designed to inform the public about programs and projects currently underway in the Office of Fisheries. Through outreach efforts including boat shows, school programs, community events and outdoor-related festivals, staff reached approximately 17,000 Louisiana citizens in 2024-2025.

This represents just a small part of what LDWF did and accomplished during the 2024-25 fiscal year. I invite you to get the full picture in the following pages of our annual report.

Tyler Bosworth, LDWF Secretary



Office of Secretary

ENFORCEMENT DIVISION



The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Law Enforcement Division is responsible for enforcing laws enacted by the Louisiana Legislature and federal laws relative to fish and wildlife resources, boating safety, waterways enforcement activities, search and rescue, and homeland security missions.

The LDWF Enforcement Division is a fully-commissioned statewide law enforcement agency with the primary mission of protecting Louisiana's natural resources and serving the people who utilize them. Beyond the traditional role of ensuring compliance with licensing and harvesting regulations, LDWF Enforcement Division also conducts search and rescue missions, enforces boating safety laws, investigates boating crash incidents and hunting accidents, and provides boater education classes for thousands of citizens each year.

The LDWF Enforcement Division is responsible for enforcing laws as provided for in the:

- Constitution of the State of Louisiana
- Louisiana Revised Statutes
- U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)/LDWF Enforcement Division- Cooperative Enforcement Agreement- Law Enforcement Services under:
 - Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
 - Endangered Species Act of 1973
 - Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972
 - Lacey Act
- U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)/LDWF Enforcement Division- Memorandum of Agreement- Law Enforcement:
 - Migratory Bird Treaty Act
 - Lacey Act; Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act
 - Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act
 - Airborne Hunting Act
 - National Wildlife Refuge System Administrative Act
 - Endangered Species Act
 - Marine Mammal Protection Act
 - Archeological Resources Protection Act

- African Elephant Conservation Act
- Antarctic Conservation Act
- Wild Bird Conservation Act and Recreation Act
- U.S. Coast Guard/LDWF Enforcement Division- Statement of Understanding- Boating Safety Regulations:
 - BWI
 - Public Education and Training
 - Boating Accident Investigations
 - Search and Rescue
 - Regattas and Marine Parades
- Louisiana Department of Health/LDWF Enforcement Division
 - Memorandum of Understanding- Louisiana Shellfish Sanitation Program
 - National Shellfish Sanitation Program

LDWF Enforcement Division conducted 241,104 patrol hours in FY 2024-2025: 174,667 on land and 66,437 on water. Agents made 581,059 contacts with the public, the majority of whom were in compliance with state and federal wildlife and fisheries regulations. LDWF Enforcement Division agents issued 10,031 criminal citations and 5,149 warnings during this period. The most common types of citations were fishing without a license, failure to comply with personal flotation device requirements, not abiding by rules and regulations on wildlife management areas, and failure to comply with deer tagging or harvest record regulations.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE & PERSONNEL

The LDWF Enforcement Division is organized in a paramilitary structure to assure the efficient use of resources, consistent statewide enforcement policy, and an effective, coordinated response to urgent needs. The LDWF Enforcement Division is commanded by one Colonel, the Superintendent of Wildlife and Fisheries Law Enforcement, who reports directly to LDWF's Secretary and oversees administration of the division. Reporting to the Colonel are two Lieutenant Colonels. One Lieutenant Colonel serves as assistant chief of administration while the other Lieutenant Colonel serves as assistant chief of patrol. The administration side includes budget, communications, emergency services, recreational boating safety and education, training, support, and public information. The patrol side includes all state regional field operations and the aviation section.

The LDWF Enforcement Division is currently headed by Col. Stephen Clark. Col. Clark was promoted to the rank of Colonel in June of 2024 after replacing Col. Rachel Zechenelly, who retired after 24 years of service. Col. Clark started his law enforcement career as a



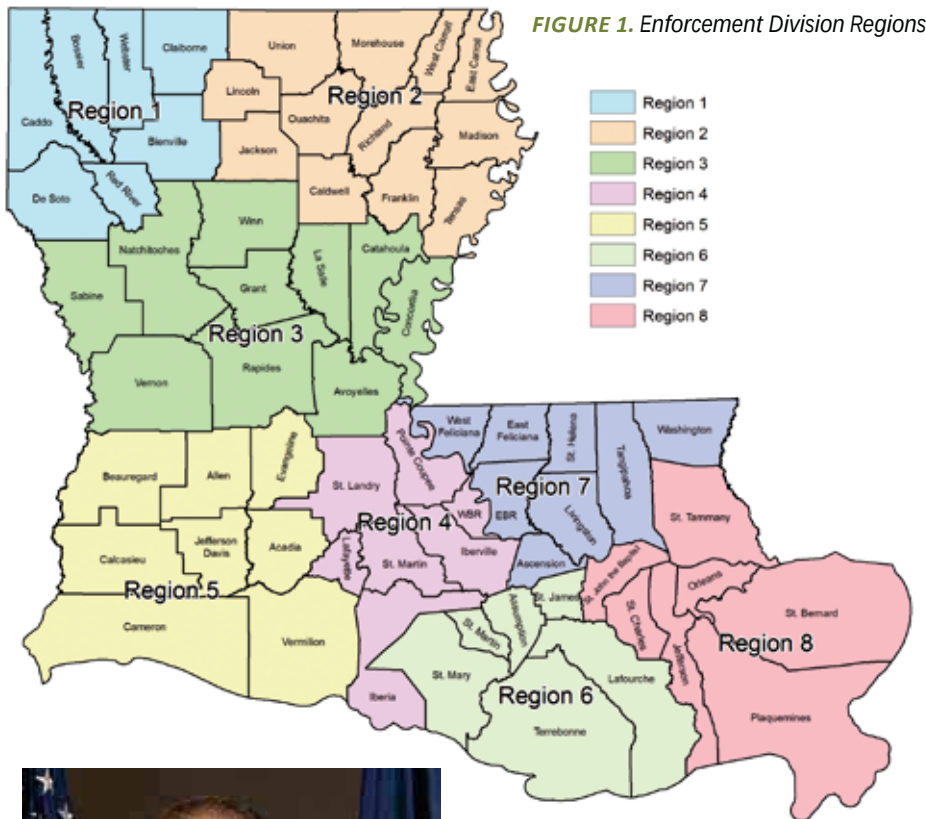


FIGURE 1. Enforcement Division Regions

REGIONAL ENFORCEMENT PROGRAMS

Most of the law enforcement activity performed by the LDWF Enforcement Division is conducted by regional agents. Regional agents work a schedule assigned by their supervisors to address seasonal needs, reported violations, weather conditions and predominant activities. Agents are on-call 24 hours per day and must be willing to change their work hours and locations as circumstances require. Schedules are often changed due to weather and reported violations, and agents are often called out to respond to violations in progress, boating and hunting accidents, and calls for search and rescue.

Agents use a variety of vehicles during land patrols, primarily four-wheel drive trucks and all-terrain vehicles. The primary patrol vessels used during water patrols are outboard bay boats and 19-to-40-foot marine patrol vessels. The LDWF Enforcement Division also deploys go-devils, airboats, surface river mudboats, bass boats and flatboats.

LDWF Enforcement Agents participated in maritime security zone enforcement and high capacity passenger vessel escorts in the Mississippi River during Mardi Gras, the French Quarter Festival, and the NFL Superbowl held in New Orleans in 2025.

SPECIALIZED UNITS

The LDWF Enforcement Division contains three specialized units with selected missions or purposes: the Maritime Special Response Team, the Special Operations Group and the Aviation Section. Agents in specialized units have developed specific skills, expertise and knowledge appropriate for their particular operational fields. Agents in specialized units operate in relatively broad geographic areas and may work alongside regional enforcement agents when appropriate.

MARITIME SPECIAL RESPONSE TEAM

The Maritime Special Response Team cooperative endeavor by the LDWF Enforcement Division and the Louisiana State Police SWAT team addresses maritime security threats within the state of Louisiana. The team provides a maritime tactical response capability



Col. Stephen Clark

"Game Warden" with LDWF in 1994. Col. Clark has also served in multiple positions for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), including Assistant Special Agent in Charge, Resident Agent in Charge, and Special Agent. He has over 30 years of natural resource conservation experience.

In addition to his duties as a Special Agent, he was an airplane pilot for the government, where he was assigned to pilot different USFWS airplanes on law enforcement operations across the country. Stephen served as a Special Agent in Charge with the USFWS Office of Law Enforcement. In this position, he was responsible for all U.S. Fish and Wildlife law enforcement operations for the southeastern United States. Stephen graduated from Southeastern

Louisiana University in 1993 with a bachelor's degree in economics and a minor in management. While attending college, he enlisted in the Louisiana Army National Guard where he served for six years. As a veteran who served in Operation Desert Storm, he was awarded the Army Service Ribbon, Army Lapel Button, the National Defense Service Medal, the Louisiana War Cross, and the Humanitarian Service Medal.

The Enforcement Division is divided into eight enforcement regions. Each numbered enforcement region is composed of two or three multi-parish districts. Each region is managed by a captain who supervises two or three district supervisors of the lieutenant rank. Regions have between 16-25 agents, depending on regional size, resident population and participant population. Current funding provides a field enforcement staff of two to four agents per parish, according to the nature of wildlife-based activities in the area, the number of people participating, the frequency of their participation and other factors.

Total division head count is 257 positions including 233 enforcement agents, 13 administrative staff, seven communications officers, two pilots, one grant reviewer and one public information officer. The actual number of filled positions (as of July 2025) is 250.

at the state level in order to effectively provide public safety, officer safety, Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High-yield Explosives prevention, and response and tactical support for LDWF's federal, state and local partners.

Emergency Support Function annual support plan for maritime and port security has been updated. LDWF Enforcement Division serves as the primary port and maritime security support partner.

The LDWF Maritime Special Response Team participated with Louisiana State Police SWAT as a quick response force in the French Quarter of New Orleans for the following events:

- Sugar Bowl
- Super Bowl LIX
- Mardi Gras

AVIATION SECTION

The Aviation Section contains two pilots and two Kodiak planes. The Aviation Section's aircraft provide a valuable platform for detecting illegal hunting and fishing activities and frequently play a vital life-saving role in search and rescue operations. The Aviation Section also contributes its services to other divisions for biological missions, such as waterfowl counts and the monitoring of commercial fisheries.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS GROUP

LDWF created the Special Operations Group, which plays a crucial role in supporting the

patrol section of the Enforcement Division. The Special Operations Group is integral in working special details either specific to LDWF or in partnership with Louisiana State Police and/or other agencies. Agents assigned to the group are called upon to work with regional agents on specific operations involving boating safety, game, and fish enforcement. The Special Operations Group is also utilized in any situation requiring additional resources. Agents assigned to the Special Operations Group attend a 50-hour course in which they must show weapon proficiency, physical fitness, and a heightened level of situational awareness.

LDWF Special Operations Group provided maritime security during the Governor's annual alligator hunt in the St. Martin area during September 2024 and for several LSU football games at Tiger Stadium.

LDWF Special Operations Group along with Louisiana State Police Mobile Field Force (MFF) provided strategic security in the French Quarter for the following events:

- Bayou Classic
- New Year's Eve
- Sugar Bowl
- Super Bowl LIX
- Mardi Gras

BOATING SAFETY PROGRAM

With 15,000 miles of tidal coastline, 5,000 miles of navigable waterways, three of the busiest ports in the country, a thriving shipping

industry, a large commercial fishing fleet, and over 317,000 registered boats, Louisiana contains many geographic, demographic and economic features that pose special challenges for boating safety enforcement.

LDWF Enforcement Division agents made 110,488 public contacts during the course of 40,943 patrol hours dedicated to boating enforcement, education and accident investigation in FY 2024-2025.

The adoption of "Rules of the Road" regulations for boaters has enhanced the enforcement of boating safety regulations and boating under the influence laws. These regulations provide the boating public with clear rules for the manner in which boats are operated and are an important tool in determining fault in boating accidents. The "Rules of the Road" also enhance the ability of agents to address reckless and careless operation of motorboats. In FY 2024-2025, LDWF Enforcement Division agents issued 68 citations for careless and reckless operation of a vessel and 113 citations for operating a vessel while intoxicated.

The statewide LDWF Enforcement Division boater education course teaches safe, legal and responsible boat operation and is approved by the National Association of Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA). This program provides a vital outreach to the community and has greatly improved the awareness of and compliance with boating safety practices and regulations in Louisiana.

Agents hold monthly classes in each region for anyone who wishes or is required by Louisiana law to take them. In FY 2024-2025, 11,165 citizens were certified in classroom and online classes. The LDWF Enforcement Division continues to recruit and train additional volunteer instructors to complement and enhance the efforts of its own agents. Since the inception of the boating safety education course in 2003, LDWF has certified 175,934 students.

The LDWF Enforcement Division remained committed in marketing and promotion of boating education courses by creating special events and activities for students attending courses.

LDWF participated in the NASBLA Operation Dry Water Weekend from July 4-6, 2024. During the Operation Dry Water weekend, LDWF agents were out in force patrolling





state waterways for impaired boat operators. During the weekend, LDWF agents arrested 25 people for DUI while operating a vessel.

LDWF participated in several national campaigns including "Wear your PFD to work Day" on May 16 and the "Safe Boating Week" in Louisiana from May 17-23. LDWF Enforcement Division agents were out in full force as always during the safe boating week to perform boating safety checks and driving or operating a vessel while intoxicated (DWI) patrols.

The LDWF Enforcement Division held their annual "Boating Education Lagniappe Day" on April 26, 2025. This was the 14th annual Lagniappe Day. LDWF certified 123 boaters at boating safety classes in eight different locations across the state and provided food and drinks, giveaways and door prizes.

LDWF released several boating safety informational videos, including those from the "Boat Safe Louisiana" campaign, which focuses on specific boating safety concerns that are not often discussed.

Media interviews, news release articles, public relation events and social media comments occurred throughout the state during all listed campaigns.

SEARCH & RESCUE OPERATIONS

The LDWF Enforcement Division is responsible for providing and coordinating search and rescue response and maritime security activities for the state. This activity supports the state's goal of hurricane recovery and emergency preparedness by planning, training and coordinating local, state and federal response for search and rescue associated with natural or

man-made disasters. Preparedness and efficient execution of search and rescue response events is essential to saving lives and swift recovery efforts. Providing maritime security on our state's waterways is essential to protection of critical infrastructure located in maritime environments throughout Louisiana.

During the FY 2024-2025, the LDWF Emergency Support Function Concept and Continuity of Operations has been updated and continually evaluated to provide the most efficient search and rescue capabilities. LDWF Enforcement Division serves as the primary state agency for search and rescue.

LDWF Enforcement implemented the use of "SARCOP" in emergency search and rescue operations to increase efficiency and to reduce redundancy. "SARCOP" is a software that allows for tracking of assets, assistance, and rescues during a wide-scale emergency event.

- LDWF Enforcement agents rescued four stranded boaters in Plaquemines Parish after their vessel drifted away while fishing on an island on July 19, 2024.
- LDWF Enforcement Agents rescued a stranded boater in St. Bernard Parish on July 19, 2024 after the vessel motor malfunctioned during inclement weather.
- LDWF Enforcement Agents successfully rescued a lost/missing hunter from the Thistlethwaite WMA on Oct. 10, 2024 in St. Landry Parish.
- LDWF Enforcement Agents successfully rescued a total of seven hunters during a winter snowstorm on Jan. 21-22, 2025.
- LDWF Enforcement Agents rescued two elderly stranded boaters in St. Bernard Parish on Feb. 3, 2025 after becoming stuck in the marsh.

AGENT TRAINING PROGRAM

ACADEMY

- LDWF hired cadets for their 37th Enforcement Academy that started in the spring of 2025 with a graduation slated for October 2025.
- LDWF sent three agents in the Command Presence FTO-CTE Certification Course.
- LDWF sent three agents to the Command Presence Transformational Trainer Course.
- LDWF sent 11 agents to Command Presence: Leading Extraordinary Organizations training.
- LDWF sent one agent to the FBI National Academy
- LDWF sent one agent to the Northwestern University School of Police Staff and Command
- LDWF sent one agent to Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC) and they successfully passed the Department of Homeland Security Leadership Academy.
- LDWF sent three agents to the first week of the FBI-LEEDA course.
- LDWF sent two agents to the FLETC Firearms Instructor Training Program.
- LDWF sent two agents to the FLETC Digital Forensics Investigator Course
- LDWF sent all field lieutenants to the VALOR Officer Resilience Training.
- LDWF sent two agents to the Drug Recognition Expert course. The agents successfully passed the course. LDWF Currently has 25 certified Drug Recognition Experts.
- LDWF sent four Drug Recognition Experts to the "Don't Fear the Darkside" training regarding courtroom testimony.

- LDWF sent 10 agents to participate in the Louisiana State Police Women's Conference.
- LDWF sent five agents to a Female Officer Survival Tactics Course.
- LDWF sent four agents to the Glock Armorer's School.
- LDWF sent 14 agents to an Aero-Precision AR-15 Armorer's Course.
- LDWF sent four agents to shotgun armorer's courses.
- LDWF sent two agents to the FLETC TacMed Instructor course.
- LDWF sent two agents to a Defense Technology Training Academy Patrol Rifle Instructor Course.
- LDWF sent one agent to the SigSauer Advanced Pistol Instructor Course.
- LDWF sent three agents to the ALERTT Exterior Response to Active Shooter Emergency Instructor course.
- LDWF sent three agents to the ALERTT Level 1 Train-the-Trainer course.
- LDWF sent two agents to the Louisiana State Police Basic Sniper Course.
- LDWF sent two agents to become International Hunter Education Association Hunting Incident Investigator Instructors.
- LDWF sent seven agents to become certified firearm instructors.
- LDWF sent two agents to become POST instructors.
- LDWF sent eleven agents to a Cellphone Investigation Techniques course.
- LDWF sent seven agents to the Five Stages of Interview & Interrogation course.
- LDWF sent two agents to become certified as SSGT Edged Weapons Instructors.
- LDWF completed one NASBLA Airboat Operator Courses and certified 10 agents as operators.
- LDWF sent one agent to Florida to serve as a NASBLA Tactical Operators Courses instructor.
- LDWF certified 20 agents in NASBLA Boating Incident Investigation Level 1.
- LDWF has five road Standardized Field Sobriety Tests instructors and have 10 agents whom are NASBLA credentialed trainers for the BUI seated Standardized Field Sobriety Tests course.
- LDWF has 25 NASBLA Officer Water Survival credentialed trainers.
- LDWF sent six agents who became certified as NASBLA Inland Boat Operator Trainers.
- LDWF certified 14 lifeguards bringing their total to 18 certified lifeguards.
- LDWF sent one agent to a Traffic Incident Management Instructor course.
- LDWF currently has 20 agents whom are licensed through the FAA as remote pilots for our unmanned aircraft system program.

- LDWF sent 16 agents to Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training.
- LDWF sent one agent to the FLETC Use of Force Instructor course.
- LDWF sent 18 agents, who are members of the Special Operations Group, to the Louisiana State Police Mobile Field Force training program.

IN SERVICE TRAINING PROGRAM

The LDWF Enforcement Division in-service training program is conducted in three phases and consists of "annual in-service," "spring firearms" and "fall firearms." The in-service training is necessary in order to meet federal and state training requirements and to advance individual officer capability.

Annual in-service is usually around 40 hours and consists of 10 training sessions conducted over a 10-month period. During these sessions, agents receive training in firearms, defensive tactics/use of force, officer survival, legal, first aid and electives. Spring and fall firearms training sessions focus on firearms qualification and training.

At the end of 2024, agents completed their annual and fall/spring firearms in-service training requirements, which consisted of the following:

SPRING/FALL: IN-SERVICE

- Firearms- Rifles, Shotguns and Pistols

ANNUAL: IN-SERVICE

- First Aid/CPR/AED
- Monadnock Defensive Tactics Systems Defensive Tactics/DT Scenarios
- Monadnock Expandable Baton Retrainer
- HIATT Tactical Handcuffing
- DWI Intox. 9000 Recertification
- Standardized Field Sobriety Testing

DWI

Two agents were certified as Drug Recognition Experts, bringing the LDWF Enforcement Division total to 25 Drug Recognition Experts.

MARINE LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING PROGRAM

At the end of 2024, all agents had completed their annual recertification as Boat Operators for Search and Rescue in NASBLA, Boat Operations and Training Program. Additionally,

LDWF is in the process of certifying multiple agents as NASBLA Instructors for Boat Crew Member, Boat Operator Search and Rescue, Tactical Operator Course and the Airboat Operator Course.

CRISIS INTERVENTION OR CRITICAL INCIDENT TRAINING

LDWF currently has 17 Crisis Intervention and Critical Incident members whom are part of the Agents Crisis Team and are trained in Crisis Intervention. The Agents Crisis Team consists of agents who are specially trained as skilled listeners. The objective of the Agents Crisis Team is to provide support for law enforcement personnel, and their immediate family, who have experienced a critical incident or traumatic event. A Critical Incident is defined as any incident, action, or event, which has the potential for producing significant emotional trauma that may adversely affect the psychological well-being of law enforcement personnel.

MARITIME SPECIAL RESPONSE TEAM

The LDWF Enforcement Division Maritime Special Response Team partners with the Louisiana State Police SWAT team to address maritime security threats within the state of Louisiana. The team provides a maritime tactical response capability at the state level in order to effectively provide public safety, officer safety, and tactical support for LDWF/LEDs federal, state and local partners.

During this period the LDWF Enforcement Division Maritime Special Response Team completed their annual training which consisted of:

- Close Quarter Battle Techniques
- Firearms Training
- Security Zone Enforcement Procedures
- Underway Training
- Hostage scenarios
- Large Vessel Training
- Rural Operations and Tactical Tracking
- Water Survival
- LDWF sent seven Agents to the St. John Sheriff's Office Basic SWAT Course
- LDWF sent 12 Agents to the Louisiana State Police Basic SWAT Course
- LDWF added 15 Agents to the Maritime Special Response Team
- LDWF sent 38 Agents from the Maritime Special Response Team and Special Operations Group to Swift Water Rescue Training

- LDWF has two Maritime Special Response Team Operators completing their Emergency Medical Technician Recertification
- LDWF sent seven Maritime Special Response Team Operators to the FLETC Digital Photography Class for Law Enforcement
- LDWF Enforcement Agents assisted the U.S. Coast Guard in the delivery of a NASBLA Tactical Operator's Course at Station New Orleans on June 2-6, 2025 to other Enforcement Agents, USCG members, and local area Law Enforcement partners.

At the end of 2024, Maritime Special Response Team members had completed their annual recertification of the Tactical Operators Course in the NASBLA Boat Operations and Training Program.

RECRUITING

In 2017, LDWF established a Recruiting Section consisting of one full-time recruiter with the mission of attracting and retaining the best, brightest, and most talented candidates to become LDWF agents. In 2021, the Enforcement Division added a second full-time recruiter and 16 regional agents tasked with the part-time duty of recruiting. The two full-time recruiters attended law enforcement recruiting courses from the Public Agency Training Council and Law Enforcement Seminars. These current best training practices were the foundation used to train region agents tasked with recruiting duties to maximize recruitment efforts and develop recruiting programs. Also in 2021, the recruiting section launched its Ride-Along Program. In 2022, the recruiting section launched its Enforcement Internship Program. Both of these programs are designed to give prospective applicants the awareness and exposure needed to pursue a career in conservation law enforcement. In addition, LDWF revamped its website and produced multiple enforcement videos intended to recruit, inform, and retain future agents.

JOINT ENFORCEMENT AGREEMENT

The LDWF Enforcement Division again entered into a Joint Enforcement Agreement with NOAA's Office for Enforcement. The LDWF Enforcement Division received approximately \$779,244 in FY 2024-2025 to patrol for compliance with federal commercial and recreational fisheries regulations, primarily in the Gulf of America.

OPERATION GAME THIEF

Louisiana Operation Game Thief, Inc. is a program which provides cash rewards to those providing information leading to the apprehension of wildlife violators. Violations can be reported anonymously by calling a 24-hour toll-free telephone number (1-800-442-2511) or by using LDWF's tip411 program. To use the tip411 program, citizens can text LADWF and their tip to 847411 or download the "LADWF Tips" iPhone or Android apps from the Apple App Store and Google Play free of charge. The hotline and the tip411 program are monitored 24 hours a day by the LDWF Communications Center. Reports are immediately referred to agents for action.

During 2024, OGT paid out \$19,050 in rewards. In 2024 year, the LOGT board reviewed 52 cases that led to 91 subjects getting cited or arrested and a total of 213 citations issued. From 1984 until the time of this report, the LOGT board has paid out a total of \$514,410 in reward money to informants.

HOMELAND SECURITY/ EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

The LDWF Enforcement Division is an active participant in Louisiana's Homeland Security Plan and represents the state in waterborne emergencies. Through the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, the LDWF Enforcement Division is the lead agency for search and rescue operations during natural disasters and maritime security of Louisiana's vital business and government interests along the coast and major rivers. As members of the Governor's Homeland Security Advisory Council and all major port security committees within the state, LDWF Enforcement Division agents frequently respond to requests to deploy LDWF marine resources for security concerns. The LDWF Enforcement Division's specialized training and equipment and its ability to operate throughout the state's vast maze of waterways and wild areas has complemented Louisiana's ability to respond to emergencies on land and water.

Emergency Support Function annual support plan for maritime and port security has been updated. The LDWF Enforcement Division serves as the primary port and maritime security support partner.

The LDWF Enforcement Division is a member of the First Responder Committee through the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness which was legislatively created. The LDWF Enforcement Division's maritime security role coincides as a multi-mission responsibility and further enhances the agency's core mission responsibilities to improve public safety services and protect natural resources and the supporting ecosystem while improving security in the state and nation.

ACQUISITIONS

EQUIPMENT:

- 64 Bullet Proof Vests
- 79 Ballistic Rifle Plates
- 1 MCU
- 16 Dodge RAM 2500 4x4 Trucks
- 6 Ford Expeditions
- 2 Ford transit Vans
- 34 Light bars
- 3 Polaris Rangers
- 2 Magic tilt Boat Trailer
- 7 Suzuki 150 HP Boat Motors
- 4 Suzuki 200 HP Boat Motors
- 9 Suzuki 300 HP Boat Motors
- 4 Suzuki 350 HP Boat Motors
- 2 40HP Pro Drives Motors
- 4 40 HP Gatortail Motors
- 1 25 HP Gatortail Motor
- 1 35 HP Gatortail Motor
- 1 Garmin GPS Unit
- 8 Lowrance GPS Units
- 8 Glock 43x Pistols

PUBLIC INFORMATION

The LDWF Enforcement Division Public Information section does various media and public information related tasks. The public information section handles public emails, Facebook questions, media requests including setting up interviews, and gathering enforcement related information. The public information section also provides footage and photos to media outlets both in-state and nationally.

The LDWF Enforcement Division issued 156 enforcement related press releases during FY 2024-2025. These press releases were issued to a media contact list via email both state and nationwide. They were also posted on the LDWF website. The press releases ranged from rewards for information on current cases, conviction results, announcements of event and upcoming cadet academies, highlighting important and unusual cases, enforce-

ment division and agent achievements and awards won, and boating safety information.

LDWF Enforcement Division public information also produces videos for both external and internal use. The videos range from public service announcements, cadet recruitment, hunting and boating safety and cadet training.

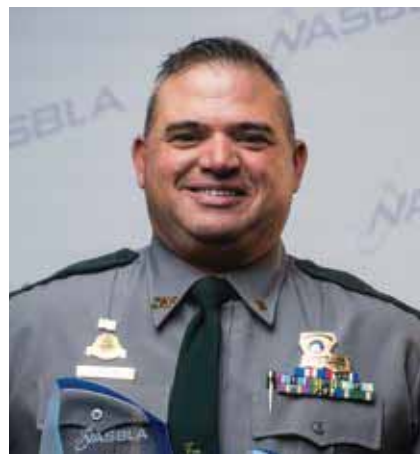
LDWF ENFORCEMENT NEWS

LDWF Names Capt. Jason Russo as Louisiana's New Boating Law Administrator

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) is proud to announce that Capt. Jason Russo has been named the state's new Boating Law Administrator. Capt. Russo will serve as Louisiana's primary liaison to NASBLA and will oversee the department's efforts to promote safe and responsible recreational boating across the state.

Capt. Russo, a 24-year veteran of the LDWF Enforcement Division, brings a wealth of experience and national recognition to his new role. On Dec. 5, 2024, he became the first LDWF agent to earn NASBLA's prestigious Certified Recreational Boating Professional certification- an advanced credential that recognizes professional knowledge, operational performance, and career achievement in recreational boating safety and enforcement.

In addition to his new duties as Boating Law Administrator, Capt. Russo continues to serve as LDWF's Emergency Services Manager and Accredited Agency Program Manager for NASBLA's Boat Operations and Training



(BOAT) program. He is also a national instructor for NASBLA's Level 1 and Level 2 Boating Incident Investigation and Analysis courses, and is LDWF's designated Officer Water Survival Instructor.

In 2023, Capt. Russo was recognized nationally when he received NASBLA's Butch Potts Boating Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award, honoring his outstanding contributions to boating safety and enforcement.

As Boating Law Administrator, Capt. Russo will coordinate with federal, state, and local partners to enhance boating education, accident investigation, enforcement, and training across Louisiana's waterways.

Sea Tow Foundation Life Jacket Loaner Stations Now at Three Locations in Louisiana

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Enforcement Division has been awarded three Sea Tow Foundation Life Jacket Loaner Program stations that are at three locations across the state.

The three stations are located at the following boat ramps:

- Cypress Bend Park
Many, La 71449
- 3636 W Prien Lake Rd.
Lake Charles, La 70605
- Hill Top Marina
Maurepas, La 70449

These three Sea Tow Foundation Life Jacket Loaner Program stations provide personal flotation devices (PFD) to boaters who are about to hit the water and realize they don't have enough PFDs for the amount of people they will have on board that day. When facing that situation, the boater can simply visit a life jacket loaner station and take the PFDs needed for his trip and then return them when the boater is done boating for the day all free of charge.

LDWF Enforcement Agents Receive Shikar-Safari Agents of the Year Awards at June Commission Meeting

Two Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) enforcement agents were honored at the June 3 Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission meeting held in Baton Rouge.

Shikar-Safari Club International presented their 2024 Conservation Officers of the Year award for Louisiana to LDWF Sgt. Cole Cupit and Agent Andrew Lemoine. The Shikar-Safari award recognizes agents from each state for outstanding efforts in conservation law enforcement.

Sgt. Cupit and Agent Lemoine earned this award for their investigative work on an illegally harvested Louisiana black bear this past hunting season on the Richard K. Yancey Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The agents' investigation led to the arrest of Christopher Buck, 30, of Lafayette, on Dec. 4, 2024 for illegal possession of a firearm by a convicted felon and taking a bear during a closed season.

After hearing the evidence that Sgt. Cupit and Agent Lemoine accumulated, Buck admitted to shooting the bear with a shotgun loaded with buckshot on Nov. 29, 2024 on the WMA. The agents then booked Buck into the Concordia Parish Correctional Facility.

Sgt. Cupit has been an agent for six years and Agent Lemoine two years with both patrolling the central Louisiana area. Sgt. Cupit past accolades include earning his region's 2022 Agent of the Year and the 2023 Waterfowl Officer of the Year. Agent Lemoine previously received the 2024 Statewide Waterfowl Officer of the Year.

LDWF Agents Honored for Responding to the January 1 New Orleans Terrorist Attack

At the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission meeting in Baton Rouge on April 3, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) honored 10 Enforcement Division agents for their bravery during the January 1 terrorist attack in New Orleans.

The 10 agents received the LDWF Medal of Merit for their response while working security during the mass casualty event in New Orleans.

The agents awarded the LDWF Medal of Merit are:

- Lt. Suni Nelson
- Sgt. James Bruce
- Sgt. James Smith
- Sgt. Carl Armstrong
- Sgt. Devin Bryant
- Corporal Tib Guillory
- Senior Agent Rebecca Bercegeay

- Senior Agent Mason Castello
- Senior Agent Christopher Pippin
- Senior Agent John Stansbury

These agents were on a security detail for New Year's Eve and Sugar Bowl events within the French Quarter in the early morning hours of Jan. 1 when a terrorist act occurred on Bourbon Street resulting in 14 fatalities and 57 injuries.

When the terrorist act occurred, these agents immediately responded to the scene while not knowing if the threat had yet been neutralized or about any bombs that were later found in the area. Once the threat was neutralized, agents immediately began helping render aid to victims and assisting in securing the area.

This is the first time that LDWF has awarded the Medal of Merit. The medal is granted for conspicuous and intrepid gallantry at the risk of life with full awareness of that risk.



LDWF Agents Transported 178 Essential Workers in Inclement Weather

The LDWF Enforcement Division provided transportation for essential workers who were unable to travel to work due to unsafe driving conditions caused by icy and snowy roads in the northern part of the state.

Agents transported 178 essential workers to and from work beginning on Jan. 15 and ending Jan. 17.

LDWF agents provided this service for The Oaks Nursing and Rehabilitation Home in Monroe, Northeast Veterans Home in Monroe, Northwest Veterans Home in Bossier City and the Willis-Knighton Medical Center in Shreveport.

LDWF Agent Graduates from the FBI National Academy

A Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) enforcement agent graduated from the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Virginia on Dec. 12.

LDWF then Major and now Lt. Col. Clay Marques was a part of a 257 member graduating class of the FBI National Academy, which included law enforcement officers from 27 countries, eight military organizations and five federal civilian organizations.

Internationally known for its academic excellence, the National Academy offers 11 weeks of advanced communication, leadership, and fitness training. Participants must have proven records as professionals within their agencies

to attend. On average, these officers have 21 years of law enforcement experience and usually return to their agencies to serve in executive-level positions.

Lt. Col. Marques is originally from Chalmette and joined the LDWF Enforcement Division in 2006. Lt. Col. Marques is currently in charge of the LDWF agents that primarily work in the coastal parishes of the state and serves as the state's boating law administrator.

FBI Academy instructors, special agents, and other staff with advanced degrees provide the training; many instructors are recognized internationally in their fields. Since 1972, National Academy students have been able to earn undergraduate and graduate credits from the University of Virginia, which accredits all the National Academy courses offered.

A total of 55,797 graduates have completed the FBI National Academy since it began in 1935. The National Academy is held at the FBI Training Academy in Quantico, the same facility where the FBI trains its new special agents and intelligence analysts.

LDWF Enforcement Division Receives NASBLA Award for Operation Dry Water Weekend Patrols and Outreach

The National Association of Safe Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) presented the Southern Region Law Enforcement Award to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Enforcement Division on Sept. 19.

The LDWF Enforcement Division received the award for their efforts during the 2024 Operation Dry Water Weekend from July 4-6 when they arrested 25 boaters statewide for driving or operating a vessel while impaired (DWI). LDWF also administered a public awareness campaign featuring press releases, interviews, and social media outreach to emphasize the dangers of boating under the influence.

NASBLA's Operation Dry Water Weekend is a national safe boating campaign that Louisiana participates in by emphasizing patrols for impaired boat operators during the weekend.



PUBLIC INFORMATION

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE & PERSONNEL

The LDWF Public Information Office is headed by the Communications Director, who reports directly to LDWF's Secretary and oversees administration of the section. Reporting to the Communications Director are three Public Information Directors. The Public Information Office handles the communication programs for LDWF. These programs cover a variety of communication outlets including publications and brochures, media relations, press releases, social media, audio-video productions, photography, and website development.

The LDWF Public Information Office is currently headed by Taylor Brazan. After graduating from Louisiana State University with a B. A. in Communication and as a Distinguished University Medalist, Taylor went on to work an internship in Digital Marketing at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana and later served as Marketing and Conference Coordinator at MasteryPrep. Following this, she joined the team at Community Coffee as their Corporate Communications Specialist, where she was responsible for shareholder relations, non-profit partnerships, and shaping, and maintaining the company's voice and reputation. Taylor served on the Board for the Salvation Army and volunteers as a mentor to 8-12th grade students through Junior Achievement.

SOCIAL MEDIA

LDWF continues to strengthen constituent engagement by leveraging and enhancing its social media platforms and execution. Our constituents are taking a more active role in social media conversations and storytelling today, making our social media outlets one of the key methods of distributing department information. As our Facebook page audience continues to grow, the agency has shifted some of its social media focus to Instagram, to begin building a stronger audience base on this platform. Instagram is a great tool to showcase behind-the-scenes work at the

agency that our constituents don't typically get to see. Facebook remains our strongest social channel, and thousands of questions are submitted annually through the messaging function, providing constituents another means of communicating with LDWF.

- Instagram Followers 15,468
- Facebook Followers 167,643
- X (Twitter) Followers 8,387
- YouTube Subscribers: 2,557
- LinkedIn Followers: 6,577

PUBLICATIONS

The Public Information staff is responsible for the production of specialized publications, all regulation pamphlets and the annual report. All pre-press functions, including graphic design and final printing approvals are handled by staff in this section.

Specialized publications include any publication not produced on a regular basis. These publications are used for educational, informational and promotional use for conservation management programs and special events.

LOUISIANA CONSERVATIONIST MAGAZINE

Louisiana's longest running outdoor magazine returned to print in the fall of 2016. The "Louisiana Conservationist" had been the long-standing outdoor publication for Louisiana's wildlife and fisheries enthusiasts.

The "Louisiana Conservationist" is a 101-year-old publication that began in 1917 when Lucy Powell Russell became the first female to serve as Secretary of the state's wildlife agency.

The long-term goal of the magazine is to serve as an educational outlet for anyone yearning to know more about Louisiana's outdoors, especially students. The print publication is a product of existing department staff, and available free of charge on a quarterly basis from LDWF field offices across the state. The current issue, and archived issues back to the magazine's inception in 1927 are available at www.wlf.la.gov/page/la-conservationist.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND AUDIO- VIDEO PRODUCTIONS

The Public Information Office is responsible for the production of specialized audio and video projects, video news releases, media footage requests, and audio recordings of various meetings. The audio and video library consists of more than 2,000 tapes of raw footage available for media and education purposes. Public Information staff is also responsible for department photography needs. Experienced photographers are on staff to help document the numerous department programs featured in LDWF news releases, brochures, posters and the "Louisiana Conservationist" magazine.

The Audio and Video Production staff assisted the department in promoting several programs throughout the year by producing educational videos and video news releases for media distribution and for viewing by the public on LDWF's website and across LDWF social media platforms. Public Information staff handle all video pre- and post-production in-house.

Public Information staff has implemented a digital storage and file sharing system for our large library of videos and photos. This searchable system archives tens of thousands of files, many of which are rare historic images from LDWF's past. Many of our videos are also shared publicly on our YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/user/LAWildlifeFish.

WEBSITE

The LDWF website, wlf.louisiana.gov, is the primary communication tool to the public for our news, research, publications, regulations, events, etc. Between July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025 we had 7 million users to the site, 13.5 million events, 3.6 million sessions and 2.1 users.

VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS



In February 2025, LDWF Public Information produced a short video highlighting the Wetland Education Teacher Workshop, or WETshop, a week-long coastal awareness workshop for formal and non-formal educators. Through WETshop, participants work with scientists to learn about Louisiana coastal wetlands, issues, and history.

In January 2025, LDWF Public Information produced a short video featuring four LDWF Law Enforcement Agents, who give their thoughts on being a game warden, why they chose the profession and what being a game warden means to them.



In October 2024, LDWF Public Information produced a short video highlighting progress at the 25,000 sq. ft., Port Wonder in Lake Charles, La. The LDWF Nature and Science Center within Port Wonder features interactive exhibits showing Louisiana habitats and marine conservation efforts.

PUBLICATION HIGHLIGHTS



Public Information produced a Louisiana Black Bear informational card (made to look like a postcard) to hand out.



LEFT: Public Information produced a rack card for the Dove Field Lease Program.
RIGHT: Public Information created a series of furbearer fact sheets.

SOCIAL MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Date posted: January 21, 2025
Facebook: Reach - 84,411; Interactions - 2,802
Instagram: Reach - 15,950; Interactions - 1,145
X: Impressions - 247; Engagements - 69



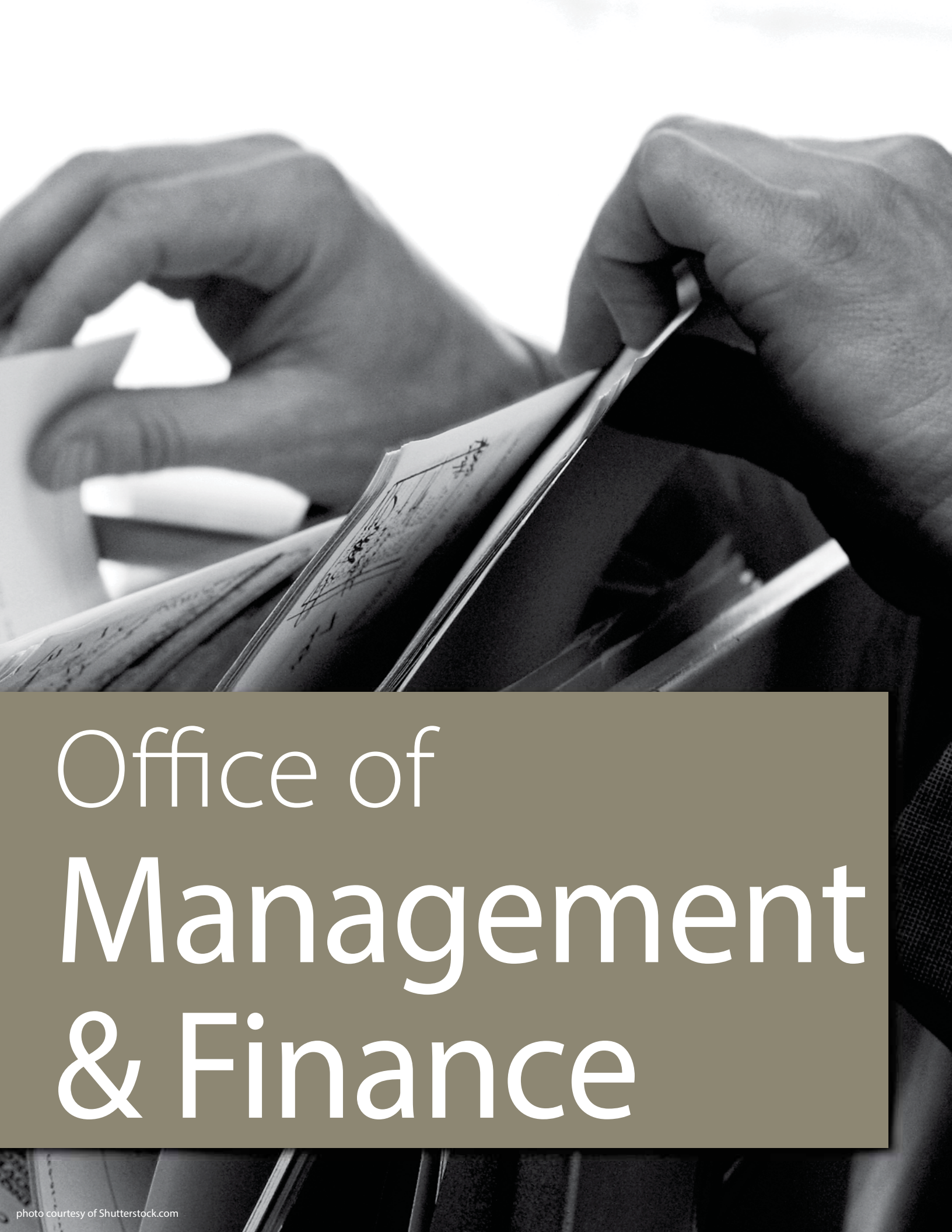
Date posted: May 9, 2025
Facebook: Reach - 672,187; Interactions - 7,352
Instagram: Reach - 5,656; Interactions - 460
X: Impressions - 541; Engagements - 96



Date posted: June 3, 2025
Facebook: Reach - 1,091,074; Interactions - 5,980
Instagram: Reach - 3,567; Interactions - 92
X: Impressions - 240; Engagements - 5



Public Information produced a series of "retro" posters representing LDWF's wildlife management areas.



Office of Management & Finance

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE & PERSONNEL

The LDWF Office of Management and Finance is headed by the Undersecretary, who reports directly to LDWF's Secretary and oversees administration of the section. Reporting to the Undersecretary are the Deputy Undersecretary and a Business Analytics Specialist. The Office of Management and Finance is responsible for the following functions: human resources, accounting, budget forecasting and control, strategic and operational planning, procurement, socioeconomics, overseeing Office of Technology functions, property control and fleet management, boat registration, motor and boat titling, federal grant reporting, license and permit administration and issuing, fees, taxes and penalties collections.

The Office of Management and Finance is currently headed by Cara Tyler. Cara has been with LDWF for 20 years, serving as Deputy Undersecretary for 10 years before her ap-

pointment to Undersecretary in January 2026. She oversees the Office of Management and Finance (OMF), which is responsible for fiscal and human resource management, licensing, socioeconomics, procurement and general administrative services. The OMF was awarded the Louisiana Performance Excellence award Level II in February 2026 and previously received award Level I in 2019, becoming the first state Agency to receive the honor. Tyler, previously served as a Biologist Director within the Fisheries Division. She holds a B.S. in Biology from Mary Washington College, and a Master's degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Resources from West Virginia University in Morgantown, WV.

The Office of Management & Finance structure is comprised of the following sections and programs:

- **Human Resources**- to oversee a wide range of employee-related programs aimed

at managing and supporting the workforce and the agency

- **Administrative Services**- to oversee LDWF's procurement, contracts, property, risk management insurance claims, fleet management programs, purchasing card program, fuel card program, construction projects, leases, mail services, printing, and shipping and receiving services.
- **Licensing**- to administer the issuance of all licenses, harvest tags and most other permits, boat and motor titles and registrations, and is responsible for the collection and deposit of related fees.
- **Fiscal**- to oversee all financial operations of LDWF.
- **Socioeconomic Research & Development** - to prepare Fiscal and Economic Impact Statements that accompany the Notices of Intent for rules and regulations.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The Human Resources section originates and leads human resources practices and objectives that provide an employee-oriented, high performance culture emphasizing empowerment, quality, high productivity and standards, goal attainment, and the recruitment and ongoing development of a superior workforce. The Human Resources section is actively involved in developing, organizing and carrying out programs, projects and operations to assist in furthering LDWF's mission and goals. The section works to ensure all programs are in compliance with the Louisiana State Civil Service (SCS) rules and LDWF policies and procedures as well as state and federal laws, regulations and guidelines.

The authorized number of funded positions for LDWF for FY 2024-2025 was 789. LDWF also employs students and other temporary employees throughout the state and has a total of 806 employees statewide.

The Human Resources program areas include:

ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT

- Maintaining and/or monitoring organizational areas, costing issues, and position authority in the LaGov Human Capital Management system.
- Working with agency administrators to develop and structure organizational units and position reporting relationships.
- Assuring appropriate documentation is maintained for all employees in compliance with record and retention policies.
- Managing the human resources section of the OnBase paperless scanning system.

CLASSIFICATION & COMPENSATION ADMINISTRATION

- Reviewing job specifications and position descriptions and making recommendations for classification and compensation issues.
- Managing the position description process.
- Advising managers and employees regarding the SCS system's classification and compensation, policies, rules and structure.
- Meeting with department heads and SCS staff to address and resolve allocation and/or salary issues.
- Preparing job studies for submission to SCS.

RECRUITING, SELECTION, PLACEMENT

- Advising agency personnel and clients on recruitment and staffing matters.
- Advising section heads, appointing authorities and managers on various appointment types and selection procedures in order to create and maintain a diverse workforce.
- Serving as the LDWF system administrator for the NeoGov (LaCareers) Online Hiring Center.
- Administering the onboarding program which aids new employees in acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills and behaviors to become effective organizational members.
- Facilitating pre-employment drug testing and criminal history checks for all LDWF new employees. Managing the random drug testing process for active employees.

EMPLOYEE ADMINISTRATION

- Managing the notification process for the attainment of permanent status by probational employees and attainment of career progression group eligibility for LDWF employees.
- Developing the LDWF workforce plan and collaborating with LDWF sections to create workforce plans tailored to address specific needs/issues.
- Developing LDWF succession planning procedures.
- Managing and advising requests for unclassified and classified authority. Monitoring appointment contract end dates and requesting extensions.
- Serving as a resource for layoff-related matters and for handling administrative aspects of the layoff process to maintain compliance with the SCS rules.

DISCIPLINE, GRIEVANCES

- Working with management to investigate and address performance and behavioral incidents, grievances, appeals and other personnel matters.
- Managing disciplinary actions, SCS appeals and litigation resulting from employment actions in accordance with SCS rules and federal and state law.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION SYSTEM

- Administering the Performance Evaluation System including reporting statistics to SCS. Training managers on the effective use of the Performance Evaluation System program and advising managers regarding performance management.

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION

- Reviewing special pay requests for individuals under SCS rules: Optional Pay Adjustments; Rewards and Recognition; and other available pay mechanisms.

NEW HIRE ORIENTATION, BENEFITS, RETIREMENT

- Developing course materials and providing orientation to all new employees for LDWF.
- Educating and advising managers, section heads and employees on available health and life insurance policies and other programs available.
- Managing all aspects of the Annual State-wide Charitable Contribution Campaign for the LDWF.
- Assisting all active and retired employees for LDWF on all matters relating to retirement benefits.

PAYROLL, TIME ADMINISTRATION

- Conducting time and attendance audits for all LDWF agencies and auxiliaries for compliance with policies and procedures established by LDWF and/or the Office of State Uniform Payroll.
- Serving as the lead time administrator over the other section time keepers. Answering all time entry questions and providing guidance.
- Entering all prior pay period adjustments.

EMPLOYMENT LAWS

- Americans with Disabilities Act, Affirmative Action, Equal Employment Opportunity, Fair Labor Standards Act
- Advising and training employees regarding the applicability and obligations of federal employment laws (Fair Labor Standard Act, Family Medical Leave Act, American's with Disabilities Act, and Title VII) and assisting in the interpretation and administration of those laws. Managing these programs for LDWF and our employees.
- Maintaining updates on federal and state labor law postings. Assisting LDWF sections in maintaining compliance with the Fair Labor Standards Act and other state/federal pay provisions.

FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE (FMLA)

- Managing FMLA requests including providing and reviewing the required forms, establishing eligibility, approving/denying requests and maintaining quotas

UNEMPLOYMENT

- Managing the claims made for unemployment by former employees of LDWF and clients.

POLICIES, PROCEDURES, ANNUAL REPORTING

- Developing, recommending, implementing, reviewing, interpreting and revising all LDWF personnel and compensation policies.
- Coordinating the Human Resources Strategic Plan.
- Processing all personnel/payroll actions and various other documents relating to employee status to ensure data integrity and quality assurance are maintained in accordance with SCS rules and regulations, departmental/agency policies and procedures, and federal and state laws.
- Facilitating the annual audits of human resources practices conducted by SCS, the Louisiana State Employee's Retirement System, the Teacher's Retirement System of Louisiana, the Louisiana Legislative Auditors, and the LDWF internal audit section.
- Managing public record requests specific to Human Resources.
- Managing all required human resources reporting (i.e., annual drug testing reporting to the Division of Administration, annual reporting to SCS, annual reporting to the Office of Statewide Reporting and Accounting Policy, annual Affirmative Action reporting, etc.).
- Drafting and maintaining departmental policies.
- Identifying and bringing to the attention of management employee trends which need to be addressed, current developments in labor and employment law which would impact the department, recommending implementation of best Human Resources practices in dealing with all employee matters.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

- Leading LDWF's safety program including, but not limited to, preparing Headquarters (non-Enforcement) for annual audits/

compliance reviews; preparing quarterly safety meetings, providing assistance to field offices, maintaining up-to-date Office of Risk Management training records and providing training reminders to employees, as necessary.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- Ensuring employee compliance with training required by law, departmental policies, SCS and Office of Risk Management.
- Monitoring compliance with Minimum Supervisory Training, training required by law and legislation such as Ethics and Sexual Harassment and required Office of Risk Management training such as defensive driving.
- Leading management development and supervisory training by providing training to supervisors and other management personnel beyond that required by the Comprehensive Public Training Program and ensuring that these employees are aware of required training and training resources.

WORKER'S COMPENSATION

- Advising employees and coordinating with Office of Risk Management/Sedgwick concerning all issues relating to Workers' Compensation.
- Administering LDWF's Return to Duty policy for employee's suffering on-the-job illness/injury.

The table below highlights of some of the actions that were processed by Human Resources staff in FY 2024-2025. This is not an all-inclusive list of every action processed.

ACTION PROCESSED	NUMBER
Position Description Reviewed and Processed	202
Applications Received and Reviewed	2,641
New Hires	111
Retirements	23
Separations	104
Career Progression Group Reallocations	79
Promotions	70
Market Adjustments	692
Miscellaneous Entries	393
Performance Evaluation System (PES) Documents Processed	1,410
Worker's Compensation Claims	42

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

The Administrative Services Section is responsible for managing and providing statewide regulatory oversight and assistance for LDWF's procurement, contracts, property, risk management insurance claims, fleet management programs, LaCarte Purchasing Card program, fuel card program, construction projects, leases, mail services, printing, and shipping and receiving services. The section has nine full-time employees and one student.

The administrative staff works closely with and supports the other divisions of LDWF. The staff insures compliance with all federal, state and department laws and regulations concerning the procurement process from acquisition to disposal.

During FY 2024-2025 this section accomplished the following:

PROCUREMENT & CONTRACTS

- Reviewed for compliance and approved 576 shopping carts
- Administered and maintained 137 Professional Service Contracts
- Served as Program Administrators for 522 Pcard accounts

- Served as Program Administrators for 2543 Fuel card accounts
- Administered and maintained 70 Leases including real estate, storage units, boat stalls, alligator egg and harvest, haying, timber sales and equipment
- Administered and maintained 26 construction projects

PROPERTY CONTROL PROGRAM

- Certified moveable property inventory, which consisted of 11,064 items for a total acquisition cost of \$90,489,294.90
- Annually, the program is responsible for ensuring that a physical inventory of moveable property is conducted at its locations throughout the state.
- Driver's authorization and annual certification for LDWF's approximate 776 employees is also a responsibility of the Property Control program. This process is accomplished in accordance with Office of Risk Management's loss prevention guidelines.

FLEET MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Recorded, approved and processed requests for personal assignment or home storage, daily vehicle usage, vehicle maintenance, and title, registrations and vehicle licenses for LDWF's approximately 612 fleet vehicles and 1,268 other licensed equipment.

RISK MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Filed insurance claims and recovering payment from the Office of Risk Management and third party insurance companies for property damage, automobile physical and liability damage, and wet marine, aviation, boiler and machinery damage. The section is also responsible for filing general liability insurance claims.

GENERAL SERVICES

General Services consists of one employee supporting all divisions of LDWF by maintaining the mail system, receiving all deliveries, and shipping all packages for the Baton Rouge office. Also, maintains all printing job requests, IT surplus, and a supply of paper and envelopes to be distributed to the Baton Rouge and various field offices.

LICENSING

The Licensing Section serves as the information hub for more than 1 million customers who operate businesses, fish commercially, recreationally fish and hunt, and use state lands for non-consumptive purposes. The staff provides customers with state, federal and commission laws, rules and regulations that govern fishing, hunting and titling/registration of boats and motors in Louisiana. The Licensing Section handles the issuance of all commercial licenses, boat and motor title and registration services, and various permits; and manages the statewide electronic licensing system providing recreational license availability at more than 700 locations statewide. The Licensing Section continues to evaluate processes and streamline to improve availability and reduce processing time for licenses and boat titles and registrations.

License and boat and motor title/registration activities and related revenue collections are as follows:

- Issued over 1.7 million recreational hunting, fishing, trapping and non-consumptive use licenses and permits sold to 800,000+ customers, generating in excess of \$28 million in revenue. Maintained license records for in excess of 100,000 lifetime licensees.
- 46,000 commercial licenses sold, representing 8,600 commercial fishermen, 3,500 business entities, 1,000 charter businesses, and various permits that generated in excess of \$7 million in revenue.
- 317,000 boat registration/title transactions that generated in excess of \$5.4 million in revenue. Maintained boat data in excess of 1 million records- 315,000 of which are actively registered.
- Made available various types of game harvest tags to deer and turkey hunters and oyster tags to oyster fishermen and processors as required by federal and state law- in excess of 1.9 million.

FISCAL

The Fiscal Section staff consists of 15 employees who are responsible for the financial operations of LDWF. The main goals of the Fiscal Section are to achieve compliance with all applicable laws, rules, policies and regulations governing the functions managed, to provide guidance and support, and to provide accurate and timely financial reports, all with exceptional customer service to all interested parties. This section also develops and implements fiscal controls, monitors program spending and provides advice, assistance and training, and standardizes procedures for approximately 800 employees.

The functions include:

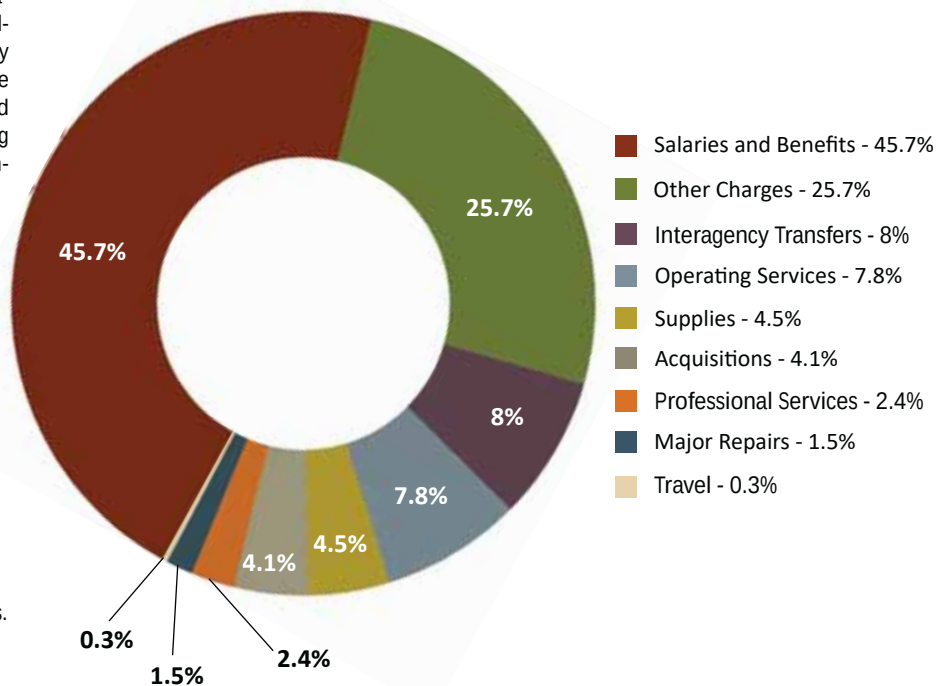
- Preparation of the annual operating and capital outlay budgets.
- Budget and expenditure control and monitoring.
- Federal grant tracking and reporting.
- Self-generated and interagency transfer agreement tracking and reporting.
- Preparation of annual financial report.
- Preparation of all required expenditure and fund financial reports.
- Reviewing and processing professional, consulting, Title 38/39 and Memorandum of Understanding contract payments.
- Processing of employee purchasing card transactions.
- Processing of employee travel reimbursements.
- Payment of all vendors.
- Receipt and classification of various sources of revenue.
- Fund management.
- Receipt of civil fines and restitution payments.
- Strategic and operational planning.
- Reviewing legislation and preparing fiscal notes.
- Consulting with internal and external auditors on all financial audits.
- Financial management of FEMA projects and other disasters.

During FY 2024-2025, the Fiscal Section staff:

- Controlled and monitored four agency budgets consisting of five programs totaling \$296 million.
- Monitored department capital outlay budget totaling \$244 million.
- Warranted funds and prepared periodic reports for 123 federal grants.
- Warranted funds and prepared periodic reports for seven self-generated agreements.
- Warranted funds and prepared periodic reports for seven interagency agreements.
- Audited and processed 6,417 contract invoices (purchase order invoices) with a total amount payable of \$75.8 million.
- Processed 3,369 vendor invoices (non-purchase order invoices) payments.
- Audited and processed 12,815 purchasing card transactions.
- Audited and processed 897 travel reimbursements.
- Processed 365 checks through QuickBooks.
- Deposited \$97,091,825 in receipts from various sources on 1,724 pay in vouchers.
- Licensing deposited \$39,721,147 million in receipts from various sources on 1,014 pay in vouchers.

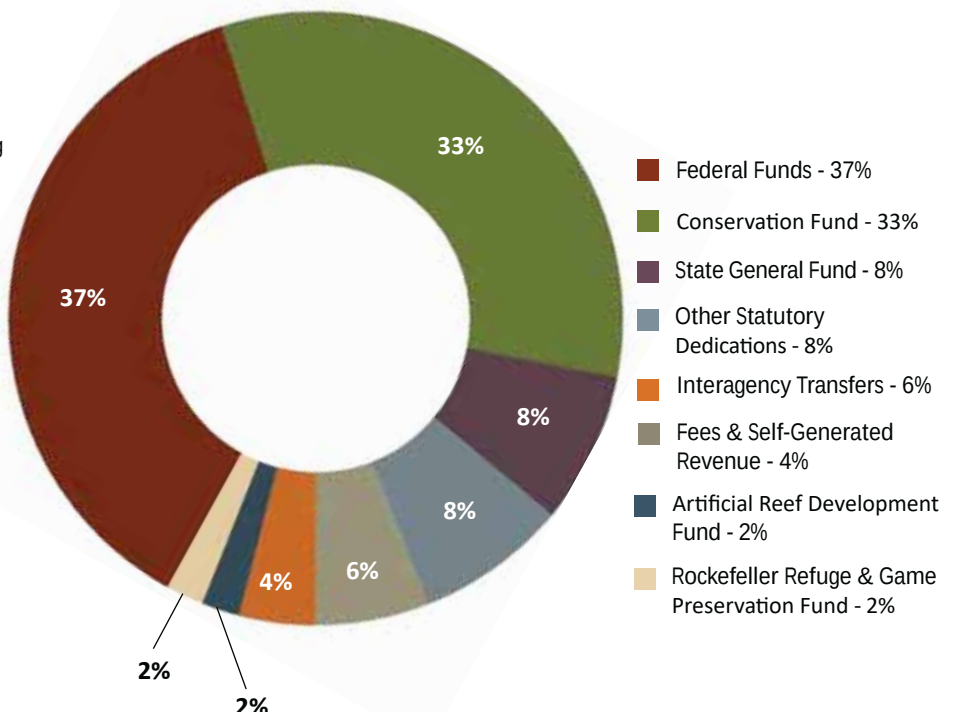
LDWF EXPENDITURES BY CATEGORY (FY 2024-2025)

Total Expenditures: \$188,661,509



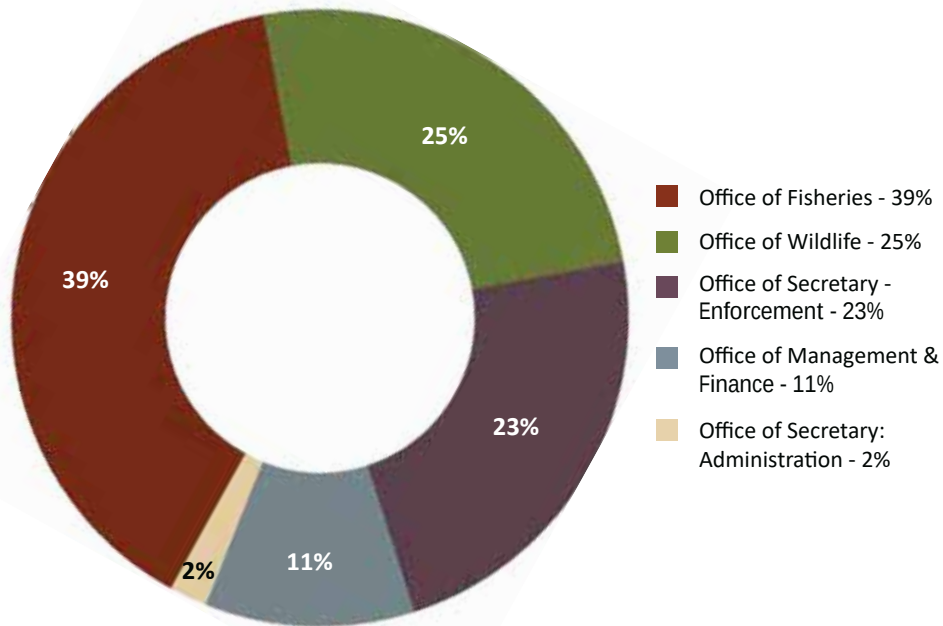
HOW EXPENDITURES WERE FUNDED (FY 2024-2025)

Total Expenditures: \$188,661,509



LDWF EXPENDITURES BY PROGRAM (FY 2024-2025)

Total Expenditures: \$188,661,509

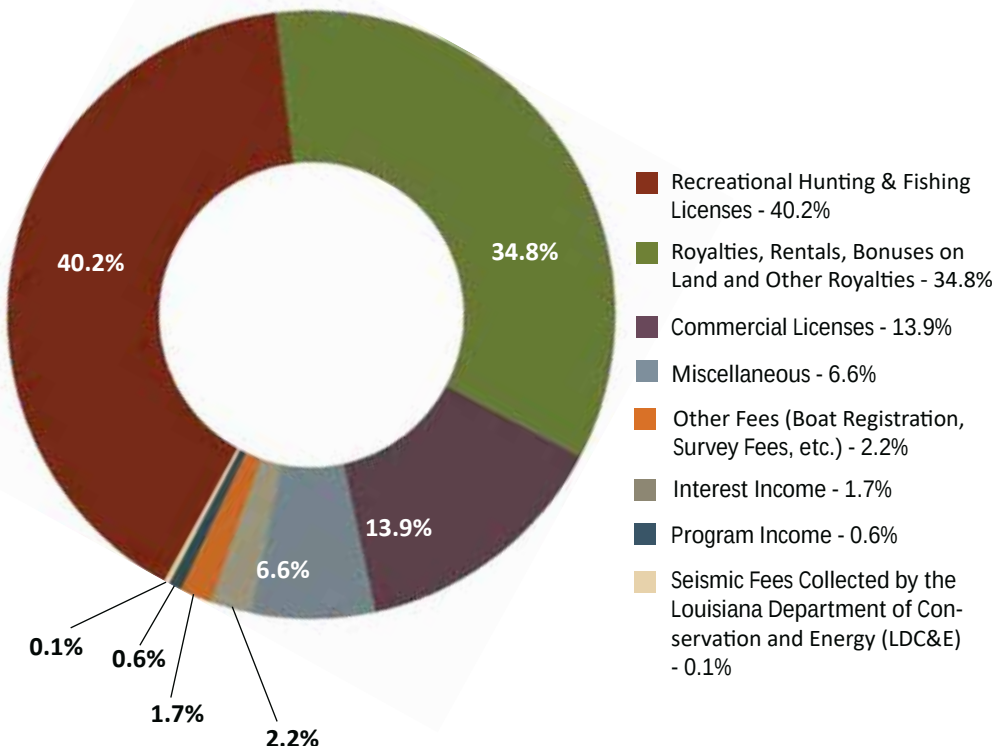


EXPENDITURES BY CATEGORY	
Salaries and Benefits	\$86,125,036
Other Charges	\$48,430,401
Interagency Transfers	\$15,122,136
Operating Services	\$14,723,709
Supplies	\$8,430,747
Acquisitions	\$7,713,157
Professional Services	\$4,606,443
Major Repairs	\$2,851,110
Travel	\$658,770
TOTAL	\$188,661,509

HOW EXPENDITURES WERE FUNDED	
Federal Funds	\$70,260,883
Conservation Fund	\$61,432,569
State General Fund	\$15,098,156
Other Statutory Dedications	\$14,535,253
Interagency Transfers	\$12,200,713
Fees & Self-Generated Revenue	\$7,501,751
Artificial Reef Development Fund	\$4,389,099
Rockefeller Refuge & Game Preservation Fund	\$3,243,085
TOTAL	\$188,661,509

SOURCES OF REVENUE TO THE CONSERVATION FUND (FY 2024-2025)

Total Revenue: \$47,414,624



EXPENDITURES BY PROGRAM	
Office of Fisheries	\$74,306,573
Office of Wildlife	\$47,319,583
Office of Secretary - Enforcement	\$43,468,429
Office of Management & Finance	\$20,477,332
Office of Secretary - Administration	\$3,089,592
TOTAL	\$188,661,509

SOURCES OF REVENUE TO THE CONSERVATION FUND	
Recreational Hunting & Fishing Licenses	\$19,045,192
Royalties, Rentals, Bonuses on Land, and Other Royalties	\$16,491,538
Commercial Licenses	\$6,576,503
Miscellaneous	\$3,113,550
Other Fees (Boat Registration, Survey Fees, etc.)	\$1,023,898
Interest Income	\$793,430
Program Income	\$302,548
Seismic Fees Collected by LDC&E	\$67,964
TOTAL	\$47,414,624

SOCIOECONOMIC RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

The Socioeconomic Research and Development Section was established in 1992 and resides in LDWF Office of Management & Finance. The duties and responsibilities of the section are:

- To recommend, conduct and coordinate economic research studies pertaining to wildlife and fisheries resources of Louisiana and the Gulf region.
- To present research findings at appropriate professional and scientific meetings, and publish results in departmental publications and peer-reviewed scientific journals.
- To provide information and support to other sections and divisions within LDWF, as well as agencies outside LDWF, assisting them in accomplishing research needs, management tasks and short- and long-term objectives.
- To represent LDWF and Louisiana on various study groups, task forces and committees established to study, manage and improve wildlife and fisheries resources at the local, state, regional and national levels.
- To administer and implement special programs.
- To perform other activities as directed by LDWF's appointing authorities.

With assistance from the various program managers within the offices of LDWF, the Socioeconomic Research and Development Section prepares Fiscal and Economic Impact Statements that accompany the Notices of Intent for rules and regulations considered for adoption by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission. During FY 2024-2025, 15 Fiscal and Economic Impact Statements were developed and published along with the Notices of Intent in the Louisiana Register.

SURVEYS

2024 NATIONAL HUNTING AND FISHING DAY SURVEY

The Socioeconomic Research and Development Section sent survey invitations to 282 participants at the Baton Rouge National Hunting and Fishing Day event at the Waddill Wildlife Education Center using e-mail addresses that they provided when entering. The survey revealed a high degree of satisfaction among attendees. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents rated their experiences at the event as "excellent" and 28% as "very good."

PUBLICATIONS, REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS

Isaacs, Jack C. "Shrimp Product Imports Presentation June 2024" Presentation Given to the Louisiana Shrimp Task Force, June 2024.

Isaacs, Jack C. The Results of a Survey of Louisiana Residents with Saltwater Fishing Privileges Regarding the use of Artificial Reefs in 2022, October 2024.

Isaacs, Jack C. "Summary of 2025 Atchafalaya Basin Anglers Survey," Presentation Given to the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission, May 15, 2025.

Isaacs, Jack C. An Examination of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Trip Ticket Data Regarding Commercial Fishers with Landings of Selected Seafood Types. June 2025.

Isaacs, Jack C. Louisiana Seafood Dealer License Holders. June 2025.

Isaacs, Jack C. U.S. Imports for Selected Types of Seafood of Interest to Louisiana Commercial Fisheries. June 2025.

REPRESENTATION ON TASK FORCES, STUDY GROUPS AND COMMITTEES

During FY 2024-2025, Socioeconomic Research and Development staff members represented LDWF on the following task forces, study groups and committees:

- Louisiana Blue Crab Task Force
- Louisiana Finfish Task Force
- Louisiana Gulf Hypoxia Working Group
- Louisiana Shrimp Task Force
- Socioeconomic Scientific and Statistical Committee of the Gulf Fishery Management Council



Office of Wildlife

WILDLIFE DIVISION

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE & PERSONNEL

LDWF's Office of Wildlife is headed by the Assistant Secretary, who reports directly to LDWF's Secretary and oversees administration of the office. Reporting to the Assistant Secretary are three Biologist Administrators, who oversee the Species Management, Habitat Stewardship and Operations/Outreach sections. The Office of Wildlife is responsible for the state's wildlife conservation programs, gathering biological data to properly manage wildlife resources, and conservation of coastal wildlife species and their associated habitats, along with statewide responsibility for nongame and threatened and endangered species, mandatory hunter education and training, minerals management, and wetlands conservation through regulatory programs.

The Office of Wildlife's administrative staff includes Tommy Tuma, Assistant Secretary, and 3 Biologist administrators Randy Myers, Scott Longman and David Breithaupt.

The Office of Wildlife structure is comprised of the following sections and programs:

- **Wildlife Research**- to maintain healthy productive populations of wildlife and provide wildlife-associated recreational opportunities.
- **Wildlife Diversity Program**- to manage conservation of Louisiana's rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species, all nongame birds, and natural communities.
- **Education Program**- to provide hunter education and general wildlife education/outdoor skill development.
- **Land Development & Management**- to improve forest and wildlife habitat on WMAs, deliver conservation priorities to Louisiana's landscape and provide an array of outdoor recreational opportunities to the public.
- **Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge**- to provide a refuge and preserve for all wildlife and fisheries species
- **White Lake WCA**- to manage and enhance the property for recreational hunting, fishing and non-consumptive opportunities and agricultural use
- **Furbearer Management**- to monitor the annual furbearer harvest, conduct research and provide educational opportunities
- **Alligator Management**- to research/ manage the wild alligator population and monitor statewide farm/ranch program.
- **Environmental/Minerals Program - Restoration Program**- To gather and compile data on fish and wildlife resources and determine requirements for conserving resources. To ensure that mineral activities on LDWF properties are compatible with the environment and that such activities do not prevent LDWF from meeting WMA/refuge goals and objectives.
- **Response & Restoration Program**- to implement habitat and species restoration projects throughout coastal Louisiana; to document statewide response to oil spills and their impacts.

WILDLIFE RESEARCH

A wide range of research and management work is conducted in order to maintain healthy productive populations of wildlife and to provide wildlife-associated recreational opportunities for citizens to enjoy. Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) staff biologists conduct research and surveys for use in formulating hunting regulations and for development and management of habitat. They present information to the public and develop workshops for LDWF personnel and other agencies. In addition, the staff represents LDWF on state, regional and national committees, providing input to a wide array of public agencies, non-governmental organizations and private industry. The species programs are White-tailed Deer, Webless Migratory Birds, Wild Turkey and Resident Small Game, Waterfowl, Large Carnivore and Wildlife Disease.

ANNUAL HUNTER HARVEST SURVEY

Big and small game harvest indices for the 2024-2025 hunting season were obtained through an online survey based on the purchases of basic resident hunting licenses or any other resident license that included the basic resident hunting privileges for 2024-2025. The 2024-2025 Game Harvest Survey was emailed to 17,748 (6% sample of email addresses) residents who had purchased the license for the current year's hunting season (or had a lifetime license). The survey questionnaires were completed and returned by 2,379 individuals before the cutoff date. The estimated harvest and hunter efforts for the 2024-2025 hunting seasons utilized 1,641 responses. The procedures used to calculate the 2024-2025 estimates were the same as those used for the 2023-2024 harvest estimates. The 2024-2025 harvest estimates were extrapolated based on the current year's license sales



of 293,667. Hunter numbers reflect those that hunted a species even if they did not harvest an animal. No attempt was made to adjust the statistics to compensate for the lack of residents under 16 years old who are not required to purchase a basic license.

WHITE-TAILED DEER

During the statewide 2024-2025 deer season, 213,500 deer hunters (-3.5%) harvested an estimated 239,000 white-tailed deer (-9%). While the estimated number of deer harvested did decline, it was the 2nd highest harvest in the past 10 seasons. The sex ratio of deer harvested was 56% male and 44% female. The estimated number of deer harvested and hunters was derived from the annual online hunter survey. While the annual mail survey has been used since 1970, 2025 marked the sixth year that all surveys were conducted online. Both mail and online surveys were used to estimate harvest trends for the 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 hunting seasons in order to determine compatibility between the two methods.

LDWF managed wildlife management areas (WMAs) provide abundant opportunities for public land deer hunters. LDWF staff collects biological data from deer harvested during the WMA-managed deer hunts through mandatory deer checks at designated weigh stations on pre-determined days. While not all deer are checked throughout the season, the mandatory checks serve to collect an adequate sample size of known age deer harvest data for the purpose of monitoring the health and productivity of the deer herd. WMA hunters harvested 1,768 deer during the WMA-managed deer hunts. While deer harvest on WMA-managed deer hunts has been trending down over the past 10 seasons, harvest per effort has been better over that same period. Fewer hunters participating in the hunts has contributed to the lower harvest but the percentage of hunters bagging a deer has increased. The harvest per effort over the past three years of WMA managed hunts include the best ratio of success ever recorded. It is taking fewer efforts to harvest a deer than ever before. Where supported by data, WMA seasons have been lengthened to provide more opportunity for deer hunters. This provides more possible days afield while meeting harvest objectives at a time in which WMA deer hunter numbers are declining. A combination of harvest, habitat and user data is utilized to adjust the number of available deer hunting days and hunting allowances. Collection of the user data is achieved through the use of self-clearing permits with both digital and paper options.

Habitat monitoring and management is part of an extensive forest management plan as well as browse surveys which serve to measure the relationship between deer and available forage. This balance is important for ecosystem health and the health of all species that depend on the habitat provided by the WMA. Each WMA is managed independently for deer based on data collected for that particular site.

Mandatory tagging and reporting of deer entered the 17th year in 2024. The reported deer harvest last season was the highest reported harvest since mandatory reporting began. While the estimated number of deer and reported deer harvest numbers do not match, they are both following comparable trends. Mandatory deer tagging and reporting data is used by LDWF biologists and managers to assess deer population parameters by parish and deer area. The percentage of bucks and does, number of deer reported by hunter, and harvest trends derived from the reporting system are recorded and assessed at the parish and deer area level.

The Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) provides detailed statewide harvest information while providing the largest known age sample of physical deer data. The cooperative between properties enrolled in DMAP and LDWF allows the agency to provide technical assistance for enrolled properties while those same properties collect known age harvest data for LDWF. The DMAP harvest last season was 14,411. More than 1.6 million acres were enrolled in DMAP. Since the 804 participating properties are located in every major habitat type in the state, the data collected provides valuable insight into deer condition across Louisiana. DMAP harvest rates were one deer per 116 acres, which is near the 10-year average. In addition to known age measurements of harvested deer, habitat data is also collected in the form of browse surveys. Browse availability and utilization is recorded and assessed utilizing a browse transect survey. These indices provide managers an in depth analysis between available browse resources and utilization by deer on the landscape. DMAP co-operators continue to harvest a high percentage (75%) of 3.5-year-old and older age bucks. That number was good enough to be third best in the nation as reported in the 2025 National Deer Association Whitetail Report.

Utilizing deer harvest data from the previously mentioned programs allows managers to assess deer health and harvest at the parish, WMA, deer management area and statewide level. Deer regulations are influenced by these evaluations.

LDWF continues to maintain an active Louisiana records program for deer and turkey. Minimum qualifications have been established by weapon type for deer. A total of 11 bucks meeting the minimum qualification for the recognition program were reported by hunters in 2024-25. In addition, 6 of the 11 bucks meeting the recognition program minimum also qualified for the all-time Louisiana Big-Game Records. Of note, two of the 11 new records were harvested on LDWF WMAs. Also, the 3rd largest non-typical on record was harvested in Catahoula Parish last deer season. The Louisiana Big Game Records Recognition Program and State Records List is available on the LDWF website. All entries are officially measured and there is no charge for participation in the records program.

WEBLESS MIGRATORY BIRDS

DOVE

Dove hunting regulations for Louisiana in 2024-2025 were set at 90 days with a bag limit of 15 birds. A survey of resident license holders indicates that approximately 30,600 Louisiana hunters harvested approximately 478,100 doves during the 2024-2025 hunting season. Additionally, an estimated 15,200 Eurasian collared doves and 51,800 white-winged doves were also taken.

In addition to dove fields on 12 WMAs, LDWF leases property from one private landowner for public hunting. This land is leased for public hunting on opening day only. In 2023-2024, two fields totaling 850 acres were leased. During the opening day hunt, 263 hunters participated, bagging 154 doves.

In the spring of 2003, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) adopted a National Mourning Dove Harvest Management Plan. Determining current harvest rate in each management unit was identified as a key component of the plan. Wildlife Division personnel banded 1,625 doves during July through August 2024 as part of a national effort to provide information needed to develop harvest rate estimates for mourning doves. Another aspect of this study has been the development of production indices from mourning dove wings collected from hunters. A Wildlife Division biologist participated in the annual Mourning Dove Wing Bee in Missouri. Biologists at the wingbee aged doves by feather molt. State and federal biologists from across the country aged more than 8,130 wings.



WOODCOCK

LDWF bands woodcock annually in order to determine impacts of hunting on woodcock populations in the state via direct recoveries. As part of this project, 341 woodcock were banded. This project is ongoing.

Biologists from the Central and Eastern Woodcock Management Units met in Zimmerman, Minnesota, for the annual Woodcock Wing-bee. Hunters sent in 6,120 usable woodcock wings that biologists were able to age and sex woodcock based on wing patterns. LDWF had two biologists participate in this Wing Bee. Data derived from aging and sexing these wings were used to develop trend data on woodcock production and hunter success. These data, in combination with breeding bird surveys, are used to develop management strategies for woodcock. Although many people in Louisiana consider woodcock an under-utilized species, Louisiana's harvest of woodcock at one time ranked among the nation's highest. However, the number of woodcock hunters has decreased by over 90% since their peak in the early 1980s. Nonetheless, Louisiana still consistently ranks fourth in the nation for woodcock harvest. A survey of resident license holders indicates that approximately 4,300 Louisiana hunters harvested 25,500 woodcock during the 2024-2025 season.

WILD TURKEY & RESIDENT SMALL GAME

WILD TURKEY

The most recent turkey hunter survey estimated 22,000 turkey hunters harvested approximately 8,400 wild turkeys during the spring of 2025. Estimated turkey hunter numbers decreased slightly from that of 2024, while the estimated turkey harvest increased 40% from

that of 2024. Estimated hunters decreased approximately 1.3%. The number of recreational days spent turkey hunting (147,600) increased approximately 11.6% compared to 2024 (132,300).

A poult production survey was initiated in 1994 to assess annual brood rearing success and monitor long-term production trends. The 2024 Summer Wild Turkey Survey indicates an increase in average poult production for the North Mississippi Delta region over last year's index while the Northwest Loblolly/Shortleaf/Hardwood and Atchafalaya and South Mississippi Delta regions declined. Long-term (30-year) declines have been occurring in turkey poult production for four of five habitat regions; these regions are producing fewer poult production each year. The only habitat region not experiencing a long-term decline in poult production is the Southeast Loblolly Pine region which is experiencing a long term increase in poult production.

LDWF is involved in several wild turkey research projects. In 2015, a research project was initiated on Fort Polk WMA and Kisatchie National Forest to study female wild turkey movements and production in relation to habitat improvements. This work is being done in conjunction with LSU and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and is scheduled for completion in 2026. LDWF is also engaged in banding gobblers on the Kisatchie National Forest. Banding and subsequent reporting by hunters of banded gobblers provides information needed to estimate wild turkey harvest rates. In addition, a wild turkey restocking project was initiated for a portion of Rapides Parish in 2023 and concluded in 2025. Collectively 109 wild turkeys were captured and tagged as part all of these research projects in 2025.

SMALL GAME

Squirrels and Rabbits

Small game populations and harvests are highly dependent on year-to-year habitat conditions. As a result, it is common to see more variation in populations and harvests of small game species when compared to other species from one year to the next. The 2024-2025 harvest survey results indicate that there were approximately 49,200 squirrel hunters in Louisiana, which is a decrease of 11.5% from 2023-2024. Total harvest estimates increased 2.0% to 725,400 squirrels for 2024-2025. The number of rabbit hunters was estimated at 19,300, which is a 7.2% decrease from the previous year. In addition, estimated rabbit harvests decreased 17% from the previous year to 137,600.

To expand small game hunting opportunity, LDWF has established Small Game Emphasis Areas on the following WMAs: Big Colewa Bayou, Bayou Macon, Bayou Pierre, Boeuf, Dewey Wills, Pomme de Terre, Richard K. Yancey, Russell Sage, Sandy Hollow, Sherburne, Tunica Hills and Walnut Hill WMAs. Within these WMAs on that portion designated as the Small Game Emphasis Area, small game hunting and training with dogs is allowed for extended periods of time throughout the season and year. Specific dates vary as hunting regulations indicate each year.

Quail

Statewide fall whistling counts were conducted on 19 randomly located routes and an additional five routes on LDWF WMAs and the Kisatchie National Forest. All regions continue to exhibit significant long-term (1983-2024) declines in calls per stop. Spring bobwhite surveys were also conducted on the Sandy Hollow WMA and Kisatchie National Forest. Inferences about population status and habitat conditions were developed based on the results of these surveys during the breeding season.

A survey of resident license holders indicates that approximately 500 Louisiana hunters harvested 0 wild quail during the 2024-2025 season. Hunters were also asked about their harvest of pen-raised quail. About 1,600 hunters harvested an estimated 25,300 pen-raised quail.

LDWF continues to work with its partners to address the decline in bobwhite populations. Habitat development efforts using U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm

Bill programs and the State Wildlife Grants Program have been implemented to promote management practices such as prescribed burning.

The Louisiana Bobwhite Recovery Plan which details basic quail biology, reasons for decline, and solutions that are needed for statewide population recovery was also completed and made available in 2023 at the following link: www.wlf.louisiana.gov/assets/Resources/Publications/Quail/Louisiana-Bobwhite-Recovery-Plan.pdf.

WATERFOWL

Louisiana has approximately 3.5 million acres of coastal marsh that winter large and diverse waterfowl populations. Aerial waterfowl inventories of the entire coastal marsh, as well as associated agricultural lands and managed wetlands in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley and northwest Louisiana are conducted each winter.

The estimate of 0.510 million ducks estimated for the November 2024 aerial waterfowl survey, consisting of 27 coastal transects and the Little River Basin, was a 13% decrease from the estimated of 584,000 ducks in November 2023 and for the third straight year set a record as the lowest November estimate since the survey began in 1968. It was 37% lower than the most recent five-year (809,000) and 58% lower than the most recent 10-year (1.2 million) averages. Seventy-two percent of the coastal estimate of ducks was observed in southwest Louisiana. Waterfowl abundance in the southeast marshes was mostly confined to the eastern margin of the state, as usual, and found at the mouth of the Mississippi River. Survey results showed marked improvement from November to December, increasing 206% to 1,561,000, which was also a 83% increase from the previous December (0.85 million). Ducks increased in January 2025 to 2.25 million, and represented a 53% increase from the previous January (2024). The January 2025 survey was 16% and 7% higher than the most recent five-year and 10-year averages respectively, but 24% lower than the long-term average (1969-2025). The January 2025 duck estimate for the Little River Basin (formerly Catahoula Lake) was 36,000 representing a 620% increase from the previous January. Substantial fluctuations in survey estimates are not uncommon as Litter River Basin is surveyed during the open hunting season in January and can experience significant disturbance. The mottled duck estimate in coastal Louisiana decreased to a record low in January 2025 (15,000), 75% below the long-term average of 60,000 for the species. Only green-

winged teal, northern shoveler, and ring-necked ducks were above their January long-term average by 26%, 18%, and 212% respectively.

The special scaup survey, flown on lakes Maurepas, Pontchartrain and Borgne showed increases from previous years in both December and January. The December scaup estimate (186,000) on the Lakes north of New Orleans increased 1,532% from 2023 (11,000) and the January 2025 estimate (30,000) was 13% higher than the previous January (26,000).

MID-WINTER WATERFOWL INVENTORY

The mid-winter waterfowl inventory is a formerly USFWS, but current Mississippi Flyway coordinated effort including other states that winter waterfowl. The Louisiana effort includes the January coastal, Little River Basin and scaup survey with the addition of all other major waterfowl habitats throughout the state. The 2025 mid-winter total included 2.96 million ducks and 269,000 geese. Mid-winter duck estimates increased by 35% and the goose estimate decreased 45% from 2024. Species composition of the goose estimate included 234,000 light geese (snow geese & Ross' geese) and 35,000 greater white-fronted geese. The white-fronted goose estimate decreased 54% from the 76,000 counted in 2024 and was 55% below the most recent 10-year average (78,000).

HARVEST ESTIMATES

Use of the federal harvest data over LDWF's Big and Small Game Harvest Survey is necessary because federal data 1) are collected the same way in every state allowing for comparison over states and times which likely index changes in distribution and local abundance, 2) are species specific, and 3) include age-ratios in the harvest which are the most important large-scale index to reproductive success on the breeding grounds.

Based on federal harvest estimates, 59,000 active duck hunters (up 7.2% from 55,000 in 2023) spent 507,000 days afield (up 21% from 419,000 in 2023), for an average of 8.6 days per hunter during the 2024-2025 season. Total duck harvest was 1,247,000 during the 2024-2025 season, an 18% increase from 1,097,000 during the 2023-2024 season. Seasonal duck harvest per hunter also increased to 21.2 from 19.8 the previous year. Blue-winged teal were harvested in the greatest numbers (296,000) followed by green-winged teal (263,000), wood duck (205,000), gadwall (181,000), and mallard (59,000).

The goose hunter estimate decreased from 12,000 to 11,000 during the 2024-2025 hunting season. Goose hunters spent 75,000 days afield, for an average of 6.8 days afield per goose hunter. Total goose harvest increased to 56,000 (up 13% from an estimated 50,000 in 2023) for an average seasonal harvest of 5.3 geese per hunter. Greater white-fronted goose harvest (52,000) made up 93% of the harvest, light geese 7% and Canada/Cackling goose 0% of total goose harvest in Louisiana.

NORTH AMERICAN WATERFOWL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Louisiana continues to play an important role in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan as LDWF maintains ongoing projects and other activities associated with the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. In addition to the continued maintenance and management of existing wetland infrastructure, North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) funds have played a vital role in achieving new conserved wetland acres in Louisiana since its inception in 1991. In FY 2024-2025 the development and submission of new projects in both coastal and north Louisiana continued. Selected for funding in 2023, construction began in late summer 2024 on the Russell Sage and Bodcau WMA Wetland Enhancement project. This project replaces two water control structure/bridges on Bodcau Duck Dam road, enhancing public opportunity for fishing, hunting, and non-consumptive use of the WMA and its 1,000 green tree reservoir. This project was set to complete construction in the fall of 2025. Construction on the Waterfowl Refuge area of Russell Sage WMA is slated to begin in late fall 2025 and wrap up later that winter. That portion of the project will replace a relief pump on Bayou LaFourche, replace water control structures and repair levees on 350 acres of waterfowl refuge.

The Louisiana Waterfowl Project, a private land conservation partnership between LDWF, Ducks Unlimited, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), USFWS and private landowners completed one project totaling 1,995 acres and there are three projects currently under construction totaling 2,023 acres. An additional nine projects being designed or surveyed for future work totaling 4,061 acres. There are currently 76,239 acres under wetland development agreements as a result of past completed projects. The Louisiana Waterfowl Project has now enhanced a cumulative total of



129,603 acres of wetlands statewide since its inception in 1992.

The Louisiana Mottled Duck Project, also a partnership with Ducks Unlimited, incentivizes landowners to manage vegetation and hold water on coastal properties during spring and summer months for mottled duck brood habitat. During FY 2024-2025, eleven projects totaling 1,593 acres were enrolled in the Louisiana Mottled Duck Project, including 559 acres enrolled in a water pumping practice, 242 enrolled in water holding, and 539 acres underwent vegetation management to improve mottled duck brood habitat.

The Coastal Grasslands Restoration Incentive Program, a Gulf Coast Joint Venture partnership, provides technical and financial assistance to reclaim and enhance working coastal lands to provide grassland cover for a suite of birds of conservation concern, including nesting mottled ducks. This year there were seven projects funded encompassing 2,531 acres, unfortunately, one landowner failed to conduct management practices prescribed in the agreement. Due to this, only 2,131 acres were funded. Total acreage enhanced through two years of this project is 3,591.

DUCK BANDING

From July, 2024 through June, 2025 2,584 wood ducks were banded, a 21% decrease from the 3,264 banded the previous year. Pre-season rocket-netting and night-lighting accounted for 2,323 of the total bandings, and 261 hens were captured in nesting boxes. 51 hens banded in nest boxes included individuals fitted with auxiliary markers for a university research project. During the same time, 1,995 black-bellied whistling ducks were banded. This is a substantial increase from the 1,021 banded the previous year. 101 of these black-belly bandings occurred in artificial cavities as part of a university research project. The im-

portance of banding this species has been elevated as Louisiana pursues additional demographic data that would support the potential expansion of harvest opportunity. Continued training of junior-level regional employees in trapping, sexing and banding of this species continues and has led to both increased effort and success. Plans still include increasing the distribution of banding sites throughout the state to build a more representative database that may have to depend on recaptures rather than hunter-recoveries to obtain information on movement and survival of these birds and support future harvest management decisions. Future years will also include the evaluation of success in pre-season (July through September) banding of black-bellies to better evaluate harvest related mortality as only 108 black-bellies were banded during the pre-season period during 2024-2025.

The wood duck nest-box program completed its 36th year in 2025. LDWF personnel maintained 1,722 and monitored 1,679 of those boxes in spring 2025. That is an 8% decrease in maintenance from last year and still below the annual goal of 2,000 boxes. Replacement of deteriorating boxes and those lost to flooding, as well as relocating both unused boxes and those with high rates of dump-nesting to more suitable habitat continues to be a focus of this program.

LARGE CARNIVORE PROGRAM

LARGE CARNIVORE RESEARCH

Of the 16 American black bear subspecies, the Louisiana black bear is the only to have received formal protection under the United States Endangered Species Act; listed as threatened in 1992. Recovery and delisting of the bear occurred in April 2016. Therefore, LDWF's current bear research efforts are mostly targeted at long-term monitoring to collect the critical demographic, genetic and spatial information required to effectively monitor population health. This information will also be used to sustainably manage bear populations into the future.

2024-2025 Bear Research

1. Reproductive Vital Rates-

To collect information on reproductive vital rates, we attempted to conduct den visits across all four bear subpopulations during February and March 2025 to count and mark cubs-of-the-year, and to count yearlings. Den

visits and cub counts were attempted on 39 collared females. Eleven cubs of the year and five yearlings were observed during den visits. During cub counts five cubs were observed.

2. Survival and Mortality-

To monitor survival and cause-specific mortality, we maintained bears outfitted with VHF or VHF-GPS radio-collars. Using monthly aerial telemetry, we monitored radio-collared bears from all four subpopulations during 2024-2025. We documented mortalities during FY 2024-2025, most known mortalities are from roadkills. This year there were 21 road kills, two illegal kills, nine euthanasias, one fatality of unknown cause (likely roadkills), one hog snare fatality and 10 hunter harvested bears (eight males and two females) were documented during 2024-2025.

3. Abundance, Density and Growth-

To estimate abundance and density and monitor temporal changes in population growth in the Lower Atchafalaya River Basin area, St. Mary and Iberia parishes we conducted spatially explicit hair snare work during the summer of 2025; 118 hair snares were monitored for six weeks. Hair snare traps allowed us to collect hair samples. All collected samples will be sent to Mississippi State University for microsatellite genotyping at eight to 21 markers, depending on study objectives.

BEAR MANAGEMENT

LDWF personnel responded to 92 human-bear conflict calls from the public and other government agencies. LDWF personnel also responds to approximately 300 calls a year that are related to seeing bears at deer feeders, on hiking trails, or encountering bears during other outdoor activities. These are not considered conflicts but technical assistance and education are provided to the caller. Response varied from technical assistance being provided over the phone to site visits with recommendations provided to reduce conflict and trapping. During FY 2024-2025, we captured 12 bears to address human-bear conflict issues reported to LDWF. For the first time in 37 years a lottery hunt for black bears was held in Tensas River Basin (Bear Area 4) for 16 days in December 2024. Ten lottery tags and one Secretary's tag were available. Ten bears were harvested, eight males and two females. Large carnivore staff sampled all hunter harvested bears for research purposes and submitted 40 blood samples from captured research bears and hunter harvested bears to Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study for disease screening.

Work continued with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to improve the BearTrak database, and USGS is working to update and add additional features to the online database.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

The Large Carnivore Program Manager and Large Carnivore Biologist attended the Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Large Carnivore Working Group meeting. The BearWise program is now being taken nationally to be included under the umbrella of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

In continuation of our black bear outreach, the majority of efforts conducted in FY 2024-2025 centered on exhibition and presentation of information and displays to schools and other interested groups around the state.

Bear Safety in Mind (St. Mary Parish Program)

Accomplishments during 2024-2025 include:

- Maintained close communications with biologists to assist specific call areas by working with caller reporting the nuisance bear behavior to ensure all bear proofing efforts were being implemented in the area with the nuisance bear problems.
- Daily monitoring of bear proof cans to assist the homeowner or small business with questions, damages and procedures to further bear proof their property and facilities.
- Work closely with Weeks Island on nuisance bear issues.
- Work closely with Pelican Waste to monitor bear proof garbage cans and bear proof dumpsters concerning residential and small business compliance with waste hauler and new procedures for services.
- Besides assisting residents of St. Mary Parish with repairs and replacements of damaged bear resistant garbage cans, time is provided for additional education in home/property bear proofing measures through written, internet and verbal communications with assessments of nuisance bear activities during and after any implementations of shared measures.
- Provided door to door outreach opportunities through door knob bag distribution campaigns sharing bear proofing informational flyers as well as open conversations with concerned homeowners of these outreach areas.
- The City of Franklin is working with Pelican Waste & Debris to expand the use of bear proof garbage cans in areas with nuisance bear activities.

- Worked closely with the Public Works Director for St. Mary Parish, Parish Council Member, Rodney Olander and Cypremort Point residents to improve services at the Louisa Road/Cypremort Point Bridge dump site.
- Assisted residents with repairs, lost and stolen bear proof cans throughout St. Mary Parish and the municipalities of Berwick and Patterson. We make a site visit to each location with a broken or "lost" garbage can to assess the condition of the can and/or the property to make further suggestions for bear proofing. We also monitor the area to make sure Pelican Waste and Debris repairs or replaces the bear can in a timely fashion.
- Working with St. Mary Parish to change and implement more bear proof dumpsters at parks and public sites like Elizabeth Davis Park in the Four Corners area, Sorrell Park, Burns Point and Verdunville Boat Launch.
- Working with residents in the Ashton/Four Corners/Sorrel area with nuisance bear activities.
- Working with Pelican to help provide additional hardware for better locking capabilities of bear resistant cans for use in the high bear activities areas throughout St. Mary and Iberia Parish.

WILDLIFE HEALTH

The statewide Wildlife Health and Disease Monitoring Program is administered by the LDWF State Wildlife Veterinarian, the Assistant State Wildlife Veterinarian and the Wildlife Disease Biologist.

The first case of chronic wasting disease (CWD) was documented in a white-tailed deer harvested in Tensas Parish in January 2022. As part of the LDWF White-Tailed Deer Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance Program, 2,711 samples were collected statewide during the 2024-2025 sampling period for CWD surveillance testing. Samples were submitted to and analyzed by the Louisiana Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory, located at the Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine. Since the inception of the surveillance program, the total number of wild White-tailed deer tested in Louisiana is 18,637, including the 2024-2025 sampling year. For the current in-progress sampling year, as of Dec. 2, 2025, 1,649 samples have been collected statewide and submitted to Louisiana Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory for CWD analysis. Eighteen new CWD cases were discovered during the 24-25 sampling year bringing the total CWD Positive cases to 40 since January 2022. All positive samples were collected from

White-tailed deer harvested in Tensas Parish except one case, which originated from Catahoula Parish in December 2024. To date, 70% of CWD positive samples have originated from male and female White-tailed deer 3.5 years of age or older. 87.5% of CWD positive samples originated from male and female White-tailed deer 3.5 years of age or older. 20% of all CWD positive samples originated from animals that presented with clinical signs consistent with end stage CWD (six animals) or exhibiting early clinical signs and subsequently found dead (two animals).

The singular CWD positive case originating from Catahoula Parish, expansion of the LDWF CWD Control Area was necessary following the 2024-2025 hunting season. To manage CWD within the Control Area, LDWF employs management techniques in an effort to mitigate the effects of CWD on the White-tailed deer herd. CWD management techniques consist of feeding/baiting restrictions, carcass movement restrictions, natural deer products import/use restrictions and CWD public outreach/education. The effectiveness of mitigation efforts rely on early detection when disease prevalence is minimal and the LDWF White-Tailed Deer Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance Program relies almost exclusively on volunteered hunter-harvested samples. CWD testing of harvested White-tailed deer is provided to the hunting public free of charge when submitted through the LDWF CWD Surveillance Program. To increase hunter participation, LDWF maintains 16 CWD sample drop-off coolers at locations in and around the LDWF CWD Control Area (Locations are listed on the LDWF website) as well as providing sample pick-up at taxidermists and processors. Hunters wishing to have their harvested deer tested for CWD are encouraged to visit the LDWF website at www.wlf.la.gov/page/cwd-testing and follow the steps outlined, or call the nearest LDWF Field Office for assistance. More on CWD and current CWD Control Area regulations is available at www.wlf.la.gov/page/cwd.

In addition to CWD, the Wildlife Health and Disease Monitoring Program routinely collects samples from a variety of wildlife to be analyzed for animal as well as zoonotic diseases, including but not limited to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, Brucellosis, Hemorrhagic Disease of white-tailed deer, and many toxicoeses.

LOUISIANA WILDLIFE DIVERSITY PROGRAM

The Louisiana Wildlife Diversity Program (WDP) is charged with the conservation of Louisiana's rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species, all nongame birds, and natural communities. WDP staff conducts, guides, funds, and facilitates research, monitoring, and inventory of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and their associated habitats as identified in LDWF's State Wildlife Action Plan. In addition, WDP staff directs and provides on-the-ground management to maximize habitat restoration to benefit at-risk species. The WDP also maintains a geospatial database of all at-risk elements. These data are vital for determining potential adverse impacts to the environment from proposed construction and development projects and for providing guidance to prevent, minimize, or mitigate such impacts. Data are also frequently requested by researchers and other conservation professionals to inform scientific studies or restoration. The WDP is composed of subject matter experts who focus on botany, community ecology, zoology, State Wildlife Grants and the Louisiana State Wildlife Action Plan, and database management.

WDP OUTREACH AND PUBLIC EVENTS

In addition to WDP staff regularly interacting with the public during field work, staff participated in many outreach presentations and public events throughout Louisiana in FY 2024-2025 including:

- Louisiana Master Naturalist Program spring and fall workshops and statewide meeting
- Guest speakers and field leaders for university courses and birding and gardening clubs
- Tree climbing demonstration and presentation on red-cockaded woodpecker at Kehoe-France Northshore school in Covington
- National Hunting and Fishing Day
- Louisiana Amphibian and Reptile Enthusiasts 2024 Fall Field Trip which included a field lecture at Sandy Hollow WMA on gopher tortoise biology and conservation efforts, longleaf pine ecosystem and restoration efforts, and salamander SGCN in a small stream forest

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND COLLECTING PERMITS

Review and issuance of Scientific Research and Collecting Permits for all rare, threatened and endangered species and all terrestrial species, including insects and plants, are in the purview of the WDP. Scientific Research and Collecting Permits are utilized by many researchers from bird banders to mussel surveyors. During FY 2024-2025, 111 Scientific Research and Collecting Permits were issued to academic institutions, museums, consultants, private individuals, and others. These permits are issued at no-cost. Permit holders are mandated to submit reports at the expiration of their permits; occurrence data of rare, threatened, and endangered species provided in these reports assist the WDP in supporting its mandate to conserve at-risk species.

WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN AND STATE WILDLIFE GRANTS PROGRAM

In November 2001, the U.S. Congress created the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants (State Wildlife Grants) Program "for the development and implementation of programs for the benefit of wildlife and their habitat, including species that are not hunted or fished." The inclusion of species that are not hunted or fished (i.e. nongame species) is a crucial aspect of the State Wildlife Grants Program, as many of these at-risk species previously had no existing source of funding. The State Wildlife Grants Program is now the primary funding source for nongame conservation nationwide, with the stated goal of preventing species from being federally listed as threatened or endangered.

STATE WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN AND REVISIONS

In order to participate in the State Wildlife Grants Program, Congress mandated that states develop a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, now known as the State Wildlife Action Plan. These plans are required to undergo a comprehensive revision every 10 years to ensure that they remain a relevant and effective tool for conservation planning and implementation. In response, LDWF developed the Louisiana State Wildlife Action Plan to establish conservation needs and guide the

use of State Wildlife Grants funds for the next 10 years. A crucial aspect of the State Wildlife Action Plan is the identification of SGCN, those species most in need of conservation action as identified by each state. Coauthored by WDP staff and peer-reviewed by a diverse group of colleagues from state and federal agencies, academia, non-governmental groups, citizen scientists, and others, the State Wildlife Action Plan is truly a collaborative effort by subject-matter experts best positioned to positively affect conservation and restoration actions in our state. The first edition of the State Wildlife Action Plan was submitted to the USFWS National Advisory Acceptance Team for approval and was subsequently approved in December 2005. The State Wildlife Action Plan is the roadmap for nongame conservation in Louisiana and is a proactive document meant to identify actions needed to conserve wildlife and their habitats before species become too rare and restoration efforts too costly.

The first comprehensive revision of the Louisiana State Wildlife Action Plan was completed and submitted to the USFWS in 2015. In 2020, work began on the second comprehensive revision due in October 2025. Members from nine different taxa teams have contributed over 7,000 hours since the start of the 2025 revision. Taxa teams have been reviewing the SGCN lists and adding/removing species as necessary, filling out action tables for the most commonly needed conservation actions, listing species-specific and general action items not covered by action tables, revising the introductions and threats sections, writing the monitoring chapter, and placing representative obligate animal SGCN in their corresponding natural communities, among many other tasks. Members of the invasive species team reviewed the list of species and placed them in tiers, revised the tier definitions, and revised the management actions. The editors worked with partners from the USFWS, the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy, and the Southeast Climate Adaptation Science Center to revise the boundaries of the Conservation Opportunity Areas and develop new chapters on regional conservation and threats.

The Louisiana State Wildlife Action Plan (2015) is available via the LDWF website: www.wlf.la.gov/assets/Resources/Publications/Wildlife_Action_Plans/Wildlife_Action_Plan_2015.pdf.

GRANT MANAGEMENT
ACTIVITIES AND STATE
WILDLIFE GRANTS FUNDING
CYCLE OF FY 2024-2025

The State Wildlife Grants Program is funded by annual congressional appropriations. USFWS apportions these funds to state fish and wildlife agencies based on the land area and population of each state. Since the inception of the State Wildlife Grants Program, the State of Louisiana has received approximately \$18 million in federal State Wildlife Grants funding, with an apportionment of approximately \$800,000 in FY 2024-2025. Louisiana has funded over 200 projects through the State Wildlife Grants Program to date; funded projects have included biological inventories, monitoring, research projects, habitat management, and the development and maintenance of databases. A wide range of SGCN has benefited from State Wildlife Grants funding in Louisiana, including freshwater mussels, alligator snapping turtle, reddish egret, whooping crane, swallow-tailed kite, Neotropical migratory landbirds, Louisiana black bear, and many more.

State Wildlife Grants proposals are accepted by the WDP on an annual basis and include projects developed by LDWF personnel, non-governmental organizations, universities, and others. State Wildlife Grants proposals are reviewed by LDWF's State Wildlife Grants Committee, consisting of nine biologists of varying expertise from the Office of Fisheries and the Office of Wildlife.

During FY 2024-2025, two new project proposals were submitted to USFWS for approval (Table 1). At the end of the state fiscal year, 24 State Wildlife Grants-funded projects remained ongoing (Table 2).

Five State Wildlife Grants were closed in FY 2024-2025 (Table 3). Copies of final reports for all closed State Wildlife Grants are available to interested parties upon request. LDWF submitted 30 grant reports to USFWS during FY 2024-2025. A total of 19 formal grant amendments, including an amendment to add a research project to an existing grant, were submitted to and approved by USFWS. Since the inception of the State Wildlife Grants Program in Louisiana, research funded through these grants has produced over 70 peer-reviewed publications, adding greatly to the body of knowledge of Louisiana's fish and wildlife and their habitats.

TABLE 1.

New Louisiana State Wildlife Grants Opened During FY 2024-2025
Assessment of the Status of the Louisiana Pearlshell Mussel (<i>Margaritifera hembeli</i>)
Detailed Analysis of Floristic Community Response to Rangeland and Marsh Fringing Coastal Prairie Restoration

TABLE 2.

Ongoing Louisiana State Wildlife Grants During FY 2024-2025
Movement Patterns of Diamondback Terrapin (<i>Malaclemys terrapin</i>) within Barataria Bay
Herpetofaunal Species of Greatest Conservation Need 2022
Using Environmental DNA to Survey for Amphibians and Reptiles of Greatest Conservation Need in Two Established Priority Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Areas
Benefits of Native Seed Mixes for Wild Pollinators in Longleaf Pine Habitats
Parameterizing a Matrix Population Model to Inform Management of Razor-backed Musk Turtles in Louisiana
Natural Communities of Louisiana 2022
Estimating the Distribution of Unionids and the Western Sand Darter in the Sabine and Calcasieu Rivers Using eDNA
Invertebrate, Mammal, and Aquatic SGCN 2022
Louisiana State Wildlife Action Plan Comprehensive Revision 2025
Life History of the SGCN Pontchartrain Painted Crayfish (<i>Faxonius hobbsi</i>) in Louisiana
Habitat associations of Chuck-will's-widow (<i>Antrastomus carolinensis</i>) and Greater Roadrunner (<i>Geococcyx californianus</i>) in managed pine forest: a pilot study using autonomous recording units
State Wildlife Grant Program Coordination and Administration 2022
Detection of Species of Greatest Conservation Need using Camera Traps, with an Emphasis on Eastern Diamond-backed Rattlesnakes, Harlequin Coralsnakes, and Black Pinesnakes
SGCN Database and Environmental Review 2023
Surveys at Non-historic Locations for Crayfish Species of Greatest Conservation Need and Their Assemblages in Louisiana and Southwestern Arkansas
Investigating the Life History and Distribution of the Southern Snaketail (<i>Ophiogomphus australis</i>)
Diversity and Distribution of Aquatic Snails in the Louisiana Section of Bayou Bartholomew Drainage with a Focus on Species of Greatest Conservation Need
Long-tailed Weasel Camera-Trap Surveys on Vernon Unit of Kisatchie National Forest
An Update on the Distribution, Abundance, and Diversity of Freshwater Mussels in the Ouachita and Tensas River Basins, and the Identification and Monitoring of Mussel Hot Spots in Bayou Bartholomew
Improving Restoration and Management Recommendations for Black Rails and Yellow Rails in High Marsh Habitats
Assessing Seasonal Survival, Habitat Use, and Movements of Brown Pelicans and Reddish Egrets on Barrier and Coastal Islands in Louisiana
Assessing Habitat Connectivity in the Bayou Pierre Watershed with Emphasis on Freshwater Mussel Assemblage Structure
Distribution and Habitat Assessment of Crayfish, with Emphasis on Species of Greatest Conservation Need, in the Pearl River Basin in Louisiana
Natural Communities 2025

TABLE 3.

Louisiana State Wildlife Grants Closed During FY 2024-2025
Completion of the SPDOR VHF Network to Inform Conservation of SGCN: Phase II Extension
Coastal Prairie Conservation Opportunity Area Corridor Evaluation and Survey
Occurrence of Western Chicken Turtle
Assessing the Conservation Status of the Western Sand Darter Using Both Field and eDNA Approaches
Turtle Species of Greatest Conservation Need

TABLE 4. Wildlife Diversity Program database updates in FY 2024-2025.

CATEGORY	# TYPES OF ELEMENTS ¹	SOURCE FEATURES		ELEMENT OCCURRENCES	
		New	Updated	New	Updated
Mollusks	25	141	264	38	80
Crustaceans	9	183	134	75	85
Non-Crustacean Arthropods ²	6	4	4	3	6
Fishes	26	156	239	87	189
Amphibians	5	7	12	1	8
Reptiles	14	48	59	18	37
Birds	2	11	12	9	12
Mammals	6	21	20	11	19
Plants	10	9	10	8	11
Natural Communities	3	1	1	1	3
Total	106	581	755	251	450

1. Number of animal or plant species or natural communities
2. Includes arachnids and insects

DATA SECTION

The WDP procures and compiles occurrences and associated data of rare, threatened, and endangered animal and plant species and natural communities. Constantly updated data are integral in determining the status and state conservation rankings of these at-risk elements. These data drive the direction of nongame species' projects and conservation in Louisiana. The information is stored in a secure, centralized, geospatial database known as Biotics, developed by NatureServe, with whom the WDP collaborates. Biotics currently houses over 12,000 records of Louisiana's Element Occurrences, carefully vetted data on SGCN and their associated habitats collected by staff biologists or conservation partners.

The Biotics database is used daily by WDP staff to review proposed construction activities and development projects planned by government, industry, and other private entities throughout the state in order to determine potential impacts of the projects on SGCN and natural communities. Proposed projects range from small-scale construction such as cell phone towers, residential, commercial and industrial development, and dredging activities to large-scale construction such as pipeline projects and interstate development. Clients may also request digital data for proposed project siting or for scientific studies; data may be queried by the species of interest, the client-supplied project footprint, the footprint plus a buffer, or by 7.5-minute U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) quadrangle (quad) boundaries. Because persistence of native species is constantly threatened by loss and alteration of habitat, an up-to-date database of known Element Occurrences is crucial for informing decisions on countering such threats – minimizing, mitigating, or eliminating the threats altogether.

Since April 2023, the Data Section has utilized State Wildlife Grants to fund the "Species of Greatest Conservation Need Database and Environmental Review" project, which provides the WDP with additional latitude in project reviews and data requests. This allows additional maintenance of the database and further ensures that new and updated records are available to inform construction, development, conservation, and restoration projects in Louisiana.

DATABASE MAINTENANCE

During FY 2024-2025, more than 750 Source Features, the building blocks of Element Occurrence Records, were added or updated in Biotics along with the associated information such as geographic location, habitat condition, emerging threats, and population status (Table 4). These Source Features resulted in more than 250 new Element Occurrence Records. Newly added Element Occurrence Records included 70 animal and plant SGCN and natural communities - mussels (16 species), crayfish (7), insects (3), fishes (22), salamanders (1), turtles (4), snakes (2), lizards (1), birds (1), bats (3), weasel (1), manatee (1), plants (7), and natural communities (1). Additions and updates resulted from actual new detections from field surveys of staff or contractors but also from museum records.

PROJECT REVIEWS

For practical purposes, project reviews are subdivided into three types. One subset of project reviews, referred to as private consultant projects, are submitted by consulting firms on behalf of government and private entities. The requesting organization submits a description of the proposed project as well as a detailed map to the WDP, and a query of the WDP database determines the SGCN and



The eastern tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*) occurs in western Louisiana. It can usually only be seen in ephemeral wetlands during the winter after heavy rains.

natural communities within 1 mile of the project area. A comment letter identifying potential impacts to SGCN, communities, and critical habitats is submitted to the requesting organization. The letter also indicates the presence of scenic rivers and state and federal parks, wildlife refuges, and WMAs occurring within 0.25 miles of the project area.

WDP also receives Coastal Use Permit applications submitted to LDWF by Louisiana Department of Conservation and Energy. Coastal Use Permits are required for commercial, residential, and oil and gas projects occurring within Louisiana's Coastal Zone. The Louisiana Department of Conservation and Energy houses an abridged version of the WDP database, allowing the Louisiana Department of Conservation and Energy to flag Coastal Use Permit projects that occur near at-risk elements. These flagged permit applications are forwarded to WDP biologists for further review. As with private consultant reviews, comments are generated for potential impacts to SGCN, critical habitats, and natural communities. The presence of scenic rivers and state and federal parks, wildlife refuges, and WMAs within the project area are also included in the comment letter. The WDP's comments, along with comments from other programs within LDWF, are compiled, and an agency-wide letter is submitted to the Louisiana Department of Conservation and Energy.

In addition, WDP reviews U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) permit applications as well as applications from other regulatory agencies. These reviews are collectively referred to as internal project reviews due to the fact they are received by WDP from other programs within LDWF.

In FY 2024-2025, the WDP Assistant Data Manager conducted 1,262 project reviews, which included 305 private consultant project reviews, 835 new or modified Coastal Use Permits, and 122 internal project reviews.

DATA REQUESTS

To receive data, a requesting organization submits a description of the proposed project to WDP, and a query of the WDP database shows the SGCN and natural communities within a predetermined distance stated in the client's project request. A response letter identifying potential impacts to SGCN, natural communities, and critical habitats, along with point and/or polygon data and associated species and habitat information are provided to the requesting organization. The information provided by the WDP is applied to land use decisions, environmental impact assessments, resource management, conservation planning, threatened and endangered species reviews, species status assessments, research, and education. In FY 2024-2025, the WDP Data Manager processed 84 digital data requests from state (2) and federal (2) agencies, private consultants (57), timber companies (7), non-governmental organizations (9), and universities (7). Five (6%) of the 84 requests were used to advance research projects. Twenty-three requests (27%) were utilized for conservation planning. Fifty-six requests (67%) related to environmental compliance of industry including oil/gas facilities, pipelines, renewable energy, and timber. Of these 56 requests, 13 were used to inform timber management. As in the previous fiscal year, renewable energy projects continued to comprise a significant portion of requests (9 of the 56 industry requests in FY 2024-2025). However, pipeline construction/abandonment projects comprised the largest portion of industry requests (20 of the 56) this period.

BOTANY & COMMUNITY ECOLOGY SECTION

The main responsibilities of the Botany and Community Ecology Section include:

- Actively monitoring all at-risk (rare, threatened and endangered) or otherwise sensitive plant species and natural communities in Louisiana to ensure conservation and management actions benefit those elements
- Promoting proactive measures to preclude the need for federal listing of plant species as threatened or endangered and working to improve the status of those plants that are already listed as such
- Conducting botanical inventories and ecological assessments on all types of land ownership
- Interacting with landowners and managers to promote conservation of native plants and natural communities to benefit wildlife and improve ecological services rendered
- Administering the Natural Areas Registry Program
- Implementing habitat stewardship practices on LDWF-owned properties and private lands to benefit wildlife and enhance ecological services
- Providing plant identification services to LDWF staff, natural resources professionals with other state and federal agencies or private entities, and the public
- Contributing expert knowledge on Louisiana's natural community ecology and flora to support conservation decision making processes, including environmental impact reviews, conservation planning, and habitat management

BOTANY & COMMUNITY ECOLOGY SECTION ACTIVITIES

Most of the work of the Botany and Community Ecology Section is grant project-based. Currently, all projects are being carried out successfully using external grant support:

- Natural Areas Registry Program (State Wildlife Grants)
- Botanical and Ecological Surveys on Kisatchie National Forest (USDA Good Neighbor Agreement)
- Longleaf Pine Flatwoods Savanna Restoration and Management Plan for Kisatchie National Forest (USDA Good Neighbor Agreement)
- Coastal Prairie Conservation Opportunity Area Corridor Evaluation and Survey (State Wildlife Grants)
- Natural Communities of Louisiana (State Wildlife Grants)
- Benefits of Native Seed Mixes for Wild Pollinators in Longleaf Pine Habitats Study (State Wildlife Grants)

Natural Areas Registry Program

Almost 90% of Louisiana's 43,566-square mile area is privately owned. Therefore, private landowners hold the key to conservation of Louisiana's native habitats and the animal and plant species they support. Motivated by this fact, the Louisiana Natural Areas Registry (also known as Registry) was created by an act of the Louisiana State Legislature (Acts 1987, No. 324, §1, effective July 6, 1987) to establish a program through which landowners of all types may voluntarily agree to protect the natural integrity of their properties, thereby safeguarding the best remaining examples of the state's natural heritage. Enrollment of properties in the registry involves a voluntary, non-binding agreement between landowners and LDWF. The Natural Areas Registry Program is coordinated by the WDP Botany Section. To date, more than 120

properties are enrolled in the registry, capturing more than 52,000 acres distributed across 41 of Louisiana's 64 parishes.

Responsibilities of the Natural Areas Registry Program include:

- Assessing habitats on existing Natural Areas and providing information to landowners
- Evaluating properties for potential inclusion in the Natural Areas Registry
- Enrolling new properties in the Natural Areas Registry
- Providing technical assistance regarding species and habitat ecology and management to landowners
- Directing landowners to outside funding opportunities to implement habitat stewardship as well as providing direct financial assistance for beneficial management practices on-site
- Implementing appropriate habitat management
- Advocating for protection of Natural Areas
- Modifying agreements and deactivating Natural Areas when appropriate (e.g., ownership changes)
- Distributing a regular newsletter, Blue-stem, to registry participants and others interested in Natural Areas

Funding for the Natural Areas Registry Program is provided in the Natural Communities project, supported by the State Wildlife Grants Program. This funding allows for the operation of the program through 2027. The Natural Areas Registry has the ability to directly assist landowners with habitat stewardship practices on Natural Areas. For example, Sugar Creek Farm Natural Area received funding for prairie and pollinator enhancement plantings; Sugar Creek Farm Natural Area was planted in winter 2020, and the planted area received its first prescribed burn in winter 2021-2022. Site visits to monitor the progress of restoration at Sugar Creek Farm Natural Area continued through this reporting period. In addition, since January 2023, WDP staff have served on a committee composed of partners from The Nature Conservancy and the USFS to provide input on stewardship activities on the Keiffer-Tancock Natural Area. LDWF botanists conducted five site visits to existing Registry properties for ecological checkups or landowner assistance and consultation. Four site visits were made to assess potential Registry properties; three of the four sites are being processed for inclusion in the Registry. The State Botanist also served as a board member for the Briarwood Nature Preserve.

Botanical and Ecological Surveys on Kisatchie National Forest

Cost-sharing positions between LDWF and USFS were created under the authority of a USDA Good Neighbor Agreement to support two botanists to perform botanical and ecological surveys on Kisatchie National Forest. Surveys target rare, threatened, and endangered species, nonnative invasive species, and natural community assessments. These surveys aim to document new elements and to update previously detected elements within focal project areas slated for timber harvests, restoration projects, and other habitat management activities. Deliverables include compartment-level or stand-level status update reports within each project area and georeferenced detections of at-risk plant species, sensitive habitats, and invasive plants. Through these efforts, a new calcareous prairie remnant was discovered on the Winn Ranger District. In addition to these responsibilities, WDP staff have continued to work on a 7,000-acre longleaf pine flatwoods savanna management, monitoring, and restoration project on the Vernon Unit of Kisatchie National Forest.

Coastal Prairie Conservation Opportunity Area Corridor Evaluation & Survey

Historically, coastal prairie occupied approximately 2.2 million acres in southwest Louisiana. Because of modern agricultural practices, approximately 0.18% (approximately 4,000 acres) remains intact in Louisiana. This study addresses the urgent need for coastal prairie conservation in southwest Louisiana by identifying and prioritizing potential habitat corridors and buffers within portions of three parishes (Calcasieu, Cameron, and Jefferson Davis) that encompass more than 75% (approximately 3,122 acres) of the remaining coastal prairie natural community acreage. The integration of spatial analysis of remotely sensed data and field surveys is used in this project to evaluate and rank parcels for their potential to enhance coastal prairie habitat connectivity for SGCN across a project area totaling 768,051.76 acres.

The findings provide a practical framework to utilize multiple databases of remotely sensed data, in conjunction with field surveys, to identify and refine Conservation Opportunity Areas and better guide on-the-ground conservation planning. Through this work, the Conservation Opportunity Area acreage was refined from 256,387.59 acres to 104,652.76 acres. The approach utilized in this project may be used as a model for similar conservation efforts in other fragmented grassland ecosystems.

In addition to refining the coastal prairie Conservation Opportunity Area, this study produced several promising findings for coastal prairie conservation in Louisiana. It identified the eastern cluster of coastal prairie remnants as the highest priority area for preservation and led to the discovery of six previously unknown remnants, totaling 634.81 acres. These new remnants are highly degraded and in need of prescribed fire and invasive species control measures. Surveys determined that three coastal prairie remnants likely have been extirpated. This project identified the USFWS' Southwest Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex and compensatory mitigation banking as the primary conservation lands in the area. The Southwest Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex owns 7,395.11 acres of land within the project area that were once coastal prairie, and the USACE New Orleans District has permitted 8,569.43 acres for compensatory wetland mitigation within the project area. Of the 8,569.43 acres for compensatory wetland mitigation, 99.59% resides on coastal prairie soils; unfortunately, the permitted mitigation types do not reflect this acreage. Only 22.60% (1,936.54 acres) of the mitigation bank acreage in the project area is of a coastal prairie plant community, and only 573.22 acres is succeeding as coastal prairie mitigation. Additionally, this study identified that the majority of mitigation efforts in this project area yielded bottomland hardwood forest mitigation bank credits (5,773.31 acres) on coastal prairie soils, with only 0.11 acres of bottomland hardwood mitigation actually located on an alluvial bottomland hardwood soil type. Combined, two federal agencies – the USACE through proper mitigation permitting and enhancing mitigation standards and the USFWS through proactive management actions – could restore more than 16,000 acres of coastal prairie within the project area. This unrealized restoration potential would be almost four times the amount of coastal prairie that remains in Louisiana.

This study also identified approximately 95,653 acres, on private and public lands, with intact topography in the project area. This finding is particularly significant, as intact topography and functional hydro-geomorphology is thought to represent areas with the highest potential for restoring coastal prairie grasslands. These areas also offer substantial opportunities for the ecological enhancement of surrounding habitats and for supporting grassland-dependent SGCN. This suggests a strong potential for additional coastal prairie remnants to be discovered and restored.

Natural Communities of Louisiana

Natural community identification and management are crucial to the conservation of Louisiana's native animal and plant species. Through this grant, LDWF works with organizations and individuals to achieve conservation goals identified in Louisiana's State Wildlife Action Plan. Objectives of this grant are to perform:

1. technical assistance,
2. research, surveys, data collection and analyses,
3. outreach activities, and
4. direct habitat and species management that will benefit the natural communities of Louisiana and ensure conservation actions are implemented.

Through funding from the State Wildlife Grants Program, WDP botanists were able to perform research on Louisiana natural communities and provide technical guidance to public, non-governmental organizations, private businesses, and all levels of government agencies. During FY 2024-2025, WDP botanists provided technical assistance to over 550 entities (individuals, committees, and organizations). WDP botanists conducted natural community surveys on private and public lands, exceeding 4,000 acres. This grant also supported natural community surveys and the development of natural community conservation benchmarks for Clean Water Act Section 404 Wetland Mitigation Banks. These surveys included communities such as coastal prairies, flatwoods ponds, longleaf pine flatwoods savannas, shortleaf pine/oak-hickory woodlands, calcareous prairies, and cypress-tupelo swamps, aiding in further development of assessment tools and habitat restoration techniques. Spring and fall vegetation surveys were completed on a 1,000-acre prairie remnant for an ongoing coastal prairie management study seeking to identify best management practices to restore coastal prairie on actively grazed rangeland. Staff also continued to evaluate results from a pilot study to reestablish prairie grasses that are highly palatable to domestic cattle on rangeland prairies. Survey work on additional sites owned by these ranching families is ongoing.

In addition to this research, WDP botanists also participated in outreach and education events by supporting and teaching Louisiana Master Naturalist classes. Funding from this grant supports outreach and education for maintaining and creating wildlife habitats in the LDWF native gardens, collaborative work with Quail Forever, LDWF Private Lands biologists, the Piney Hills Prescribed Burn Association, and private landowners.



LEFT: Narrowleaf sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*) blooming in a high-quality, successfully restored longleaf pine savanna at Marsh Bayou WMA. **CENTER:** Oklahoma grass-pink (*Calopogon oklahomensis*), a critically imperiled SGCN, in a longleaf pine savanna on The Nature Conservancy's property in Allen Parish. **RIGHT:** The prairie blazingstar (*Liatris pycnostachya*) is a spectacular native plant found in open pine forests.

Benefits of Native Seed Mixes for Wild Pollinators in Longleaf Pine Habitats

Historically, the longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) ecosystem encompassed over 90 million acres in the southeastern United States. Only 3-5% remains today. Conversion to agriculture and intensively managed pine plantations, the introduction of invasive species, and fire suppression are the greatest threats to these habitats. Longleaf pine natural communities are of great conservation interest, because they contain high rates of species endemism and support a richness of floral species unmatched outside of the equatorial tropics. Knowledge gaps exist in restoring longleaf pine ecosystems in Louisiana compared to more extensively studied eastern ecosystems, where the dominant understory plants greatly differ. Additionally, prescribed fire is crucial for restoration of longleaf pine communities, but little is known about how it affects invertebrate communities.

As part of a collaboration with the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, LDWF botanists assisted in setting up a two-year-long project to study the use of native seed mixes to restore the understory of longleaf pine ecosystems after prescribed fire and to survey for the variable cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus variabilis*), a very rare bee species considered for listing under the Endangered Species Act. In early spring 2024, six 24 m x 12 m plots were set up in the flatwoods section of the Western Gulf Coastal Plain ecoregion, with half of the area seeded using a curated seed mix of native ecotypes and the other half left unseeded as a control. Beginning in fall 2024, LDWF botanists conducted surveys collecting information on plant species richness as well as abundance and biomass of invasive species within these plots. This project aims to achieve a more informed understanding of management for longleaf

pine ecosystems in Louisiana and to provide the data needed to guide the status and management of the variable cuckoo bumble bee.

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED PLANT SPECIES

Of the more than 300 species of at-risk plants included in Louisiana's State Wildlife Action Plan, four species are federally listed as threatened or endangered:

- earth-fruit (*Geocarpon minimum*)-threatened
- American chaffseed (*Schwalbea americana*)-endangered
- Louisiana quillwort (*Isoetes louisianensis*)-endangered
- pondberry (*Lindera melissifolia*)-endangered

During FY 2024-2025, WDP botanists focused on quillwort survey methodology and two additional species under federal review for inclusion in Endangered Species Act protections – bog spicebush (*Lindera subcoriacea*) and the Texas trillium (*Trillium texanum*). Currently, all projects are being carried out successfully using external grant support:

- Louisiana Quillwort Surveys Using eDNA Techniques (USFWS Section 6)
- Bog Spicebush (*Lindera subcoriacea*) Status Assessment (USFWS Section 6)
- Pollinator Diversity of Texas Trillium (*Trillium texanum*) Populations in Northwest Louisiana (USFWS Section 6)

Texas Trillium Surveys in Northwest Louisiana

Texas trillium is a spring ephemeral, perennial herb known from less than 30 locations in East Texas and Northwest Louisiana. This species is currently under review by USFWS for possible listing under the Endangered Species Act. The range and habitat preferences for Texas

trillium are relatively well documented, but studies focused on the life history and biology of the species are lacking, specifically as it relates to pollinators.

Staff deployed time-lapse cameras at two sites to determine pollinator community assemblages at Texas trillium flowers. Personnel deployed two cameras at the naturally occurring population of Texas trillium at the Gray Beard Woods site in Caddo Parish. Staff deployed one camera at the newly introduced population on The Nature Conservancy's Caddo Black Bayou Preserve, also in Caddo Parish, but subsequently moved it to Gray Beard Woods to alleviate the need for more regular camera maintenance. In total, cameras were active for 802.15 hours (202 hours at Caddo Black Bayou Preserve and 600.15 hours at Gray Beard Woods) and captured 51,362 photographs. Staff created a database and began analysis of photographs during this reporting period. Analysis will be completed in FY 2025-2026.

Louisiana Quillwort Surveys Using eDNA Techniques

Louisiana quillwort is a federally endangered, emergent aquatic plant restricted to only three southeastern states. In Louisiana, only nine records for this species exist in the Biotics database. These records are located in Washington and St. Tammany parishes, representing the only known populations outside of Mississippi and Alabama. Because these parishes are experiencing some of the highest rates of economic expansion and population growth in the state, Louisiana quillwort is especially vulnerable to extirpation, leading to an overall loss of genetic diversity of the species. Before 2025, only two Louisiana quillwort occurrences had been resurveyed in the past 15 years. Given the significant threats of

urbanization and development, it is important to monitor these populations and develop new survey techniques that can maximize the efficacy of quillwort surveys.

In spring 2025, WDP botany staff began surveying known locations of Louisiana quillwort to update the database with population size, health, and potential threats. New GPS coordinates were recorded at each site to ensure locations in the database remain current. To determine if this rare plant can be detected via environmental DNA (eDNA), WDP staff also collected eDNA samples at three of the sites with a confirmed presence of Louisiana quillwort. Environmental DNA results from organisms shedding cells into their environment; advanced genetic techniques can allow scientists to determine the presence of species by this shed DNA. For this project, samples were collected at three different distances from a quillwort plant using a specialized water pump and filter designed to collect eDNA, and samples were collected throughout the year to determine if eDNA detection of quillwort is affected by seasonality. Because eDNA analysis is an emerging technique, one goal of this project is to determine the efficacy of utilizing eDNA for the detection of Louisiana quillwort. Additional field surveys and collection of eDNA will continue into 2026, and genetic analyses of the eDNA samples should be completed soon thereafter.

ZOOLOGY SECTION: Zoology Program (Invertebrates and Mammals), Reptile & Amphibian Program, and Nongame Bird Program

The main responsibilities of the Zoology Section include:

- Actively monitoring all at-risk (rare, threatened, and endangered) or otherwise sensitive animal species in Louisiana to ensure conservation and management actions benefit those elements
- Promoting proactive measures to preclude the need for federal listing of animal species as threatened or endangered and working to improve the status of those animals that are already listed as such
- Conducting inventories, surveys, and research on at-risk animal species and their habitats

- Interacting with landowners and managers to promote conservation of native wildlife and improve ecological services rendered
- Implementing habitat stewardship practices on LDWF-owned properties and private lands to benefit wildlife and improve ecological services rendered
- Providing animal identification services to LDWF staff, natural resources professionals with other state and federal agencies or private entities, and the public

ZOOLOGY PROGRAM (INVERTEBRATES AND MAMMALS) ACTIVITIES

The WDP administers federal aid grants for SGCN through the Endangered Species Act Section 6 Program, Multi-state State Wildlife Grants, and Louisiana's State Wildlife Grants Program. In FY 2024-2025, Section 6 funds allowed staff to participate on technical committees as subject matter experts providing technical input on species management decisions, regional habitat and research projects, and participation on multi-state technical committees and in regional and national meetings as a State Representative for the:

- Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies working groups and associated committee meetings including the Wildlife Diversity Committee, which addresses at-risk species in the southeastern United States
- Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies working groups and associated committee meetings including the Wildlife Diversity Program Managers Meeting
- Mississippi Longleaf Implementation Team Steering Committee
- USFWS Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Federal Aid Coordinators' Region 4 Meeting
- Arkansas-Louisiana West Gulf Coastal Plain Conservation Delivery Network
- Southeastern Bat Diversity Network Meeting
- White-nose Syndrome State Working Group
- Long-tailed Weasel Working Group
- Eastern Spotted Skunk Working Group
- Louisiana Pearlshell Working Group
- West Indian Manatee Stranding Coordination Team

Section 6 grant actions also included professional services, instruction, guidance, consultation, and technical input delivered as subject matter experts to partners, organizations, and individuals. This included participation on

USFWS Species Status Assessments, USFWS species five-year reviews, and USFWS recovery plans. In FY 2024-2025, staff represented LDWF on Species Status Assessments for slenderwrist burrowing crayfish (*Fallicambarus petilicarpus*), western chicken turtle (*Deirochelys reticularia miaria*), and western alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys temminckii*), and on recovery plans for inflated heelsplitter (*Potamilus inflatus*) and red wolf (*Canis rufus*).

Other Zoology Program projects that are being carried out successfully using external grant support include:

- Invertebrate, Mammal, and Aquatic SGCN (State Wildlife Grants)
- Southern Unstriped Scorpion Surveys (State Wildlife Grants)
- Long-tailed Weasel Camera Trap Surveys on Vernon Unit of Kisatchie National Forest (State Wildlife Grants)

Southern Unstriped Scorpion Surveys

In Louisiana, the imperiled (S2) southern unstriped scorpion (*Vaejovis carolinianus*) is only known from Tunica Hills. The Tunica Hills region is the southernmost extent of the Mississippi Blufflands, a 10 to 25 mile wide tract of land that borders the eastern escarpment of the Mississippi River Alluvial Valley. Southern Mesophytic Hardwood Forest, an imperiled (S2) natural community, is the primary natural habitat type in Tunica Hills, with much of its acreage protected by the Tunica Hills Wildlife Management Area (6,503 acres); in fact, this WMA protects the largest remaining tract of this forest type in the state. Like many invertebrates, addressing significant gaps in baseline data is the primary need for this species.



Like other scorpions, the Southern Unstriped Scorpion (*Vaejovis carolinianus*) fluoresces under longwave ultraviolet light, aiding in the species' detection during nighttime surveys.



The long-tailed weasel (Neogale frenata) is a small mammal that occurs throughout Louisiana. This species has a voracious appetite and can eat up to four rodents per night.

Staff surveyed the Tunica Hills region approximately 30 minutes after sunset on nights when air temperature was above 68°F. Because scorpions fluoresce bluish green under ultraviolet light, staff surveyed using ultraviolet flashlights; when used as the sole light source, these glowing scorpions were exceptionally easy to detect. During this reporting period, staff observed 288 southern unstriped scorpions over 15:59 person-hours, resulting in a catch-per-unit-effort of approximately 18 scorpions per person-hour. This brings the total number of scorpions detected over the course of the project to 495. Prior to this project, there were only a handful of confirmed records of the species in the state, emphasizing that acquiring basic baseline data can go a long way towards gathering valuable information on a species. Due to these efforts, the species was downlisted in the state from S1 (critically imperiled) to S2 (imperiled).

Long-tailed Weasel Camera Trap Surveys on Vernon Unit of Kisatchie National Forest

The status and distribution of the imperiled (S2) long-tailed weasel (*Neogale frenata*) in Louisiana are poorly known, and there have been few contemporary records of the species in the state. Most of these records came as incidental captures from work conducted by LDWF and its partners. Because the species can occupy a wide range of habitat types, it can be difficult to ascertain where long-tailed weasels are likely to occur. Researchers have successfully detected the species using baited camera traps; however, there is variability in detection rates throughout the species' range and in the efficacy of different attractants.

Staff deployed baited and unbaited camera traps across seven sites on the Vernon Unit of Kisatchie National Forest to determine how

bait types may influence detection of long-tailed weasels. Five baits/treatments were used during this reporting period: (1) raw chicken and Lenon's All Call, (2) rabbit urine, (3) Locklear's Liquid Mice, (4) salmon oil, and (5) no bait (i.e. an unbaited camera). During this reporting period, cameras captured 1,651 detections of various species over 6,687 trap-nights. When including detections of all species, rabbit urine had the highest catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE; detections/trap-nights) of all baits at 0.2786, while unbaited cameras had the lowest at 0.1835. For Locklear's Liquid Mice, salmon oil, and raw chicken and Lenon's All Call, CPUE was 0.2356, 0.2624, and 0.2673, respectively. Long-tailed weasels were only detected on two occasions, one individual on Aug. 7, 2024 at Locklear's Liquid Mice and one individual on May 31, 2025 at salmon oil.

West Indian Manatee

The West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) is a transient species in Louisiana, occasionally traveling from Florida during the summer months when water temperatures are warm. Manatees typically return to Florida by October when water temperatures begin to decrease in Louisiana. WDP staff coordinated with USGS, USFWS, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Alabama Department of Natural Resources, Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Audubon Nature Institute, and Texas Parks and Wildlife staff and exchanged information on manatee sightings across their range. WDP staff documented sightings reported by LDWF staff and the public and used this information to update the WDP database. In FY 2024-2025, LDWF received nine live manatee reports, all of which were in Southeast Louisiana. A single dead manatee was reported via social media; Audubon Nature Institute attempted to find this carcass but was unsuccessful.

REPTILE AND AMPHIBIAN PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Over 50% of Louisiana's native reptile and amphibian species are imperiled and have experienced population declines. Due to the specific life history traits; specialized habitat needs; and susceptibility to various threats including habitat loss, unsustainable and illegal harvest, disease, and pollution within these taxa groups; it is crucial to monitor, conserve, and restore populations of reptiles and amphibians and their associated habitats in the state. These efforts are needed to ensure the long-term persistence of these species in the wild in Louisiana. Through the State Wildlife Grants Program and other federal grants, the WDP has been able to implement conservation actions that directly benefit reptile and amphibian SGCN and their habitats. These actions include research, surveys, data collection and analysis, technical assistance, habitat restoration, land acquisition, and outreach activities. The WDP has worked with agencies and organizations to achieve conservation goals, provide current information on reptile and amphibian SGCN, and increase public awareness of threats to reptiles and amphibians and their habitats as well as ways to reduce or mitigate threats. The WDP State Herpetologist has participated on various technical committees regarding threatened, endangered, and other at-risk herpetofaunal species including serving as an expert member of the reptile and amphibian taxa team for the 2025 revision of the Louisiana State Wildlife Action Plan. In addition, LDWF staff spent a considerable amount of time during the fiscal year working through the regulatory process to update to the state's reptile and amphibian regulations in order to more effectively conserve and manage native herpetofaunal populations.

The following activities were conducted during FY 2024-2025:

- Responded to almost 700 public inquiries, constituent requests, technical assistance requests, and reported sightings of snakes, lizards, salamanders, turtles, frogs, and toads
- Participated on the Southeast Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (SEPARC) Steering Committee as the Louisiana State Representative and attended the annual SEPARC meeting at Lake Guntersville State Park in Alabama
 - Participated on SEPARC's Gopher Frog/Crawfish Frog Task Team



*Field meeting at Desoto National Forest in Mississippi with LDWF and various state, federal, and NGO partners to discuss dusky gopher frog (*Lithobates sevosus*) reintroduction and habitat restoration efforts in Mississippi and Louisiana. The pond depicted here is a naturally occurring ephemeral pond that contains one of the few remaining populations of the species.*

- Participated on the Gopher Tortoise Council Executive Committee as the Louisiana State Representative and attended the annual Gopher Tortoise Council meeting at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida
 - Attended two informal, virtual Gopher Tortoise Council Executive Committee meetings
- Participated in an invited, inaugural workshop at the Tennessee Aquarium in Chattanooga, Tennessee, to collaborate with partners on reintroduction/translocation efforts of Southeastern freshwater aquatic species
- Participated, as an invited guest, in a special symposium titled "Challenges with Regulating International Trade in Live Reptiles and Amphibians" and in four stakeholder break-out sessions (Confiscations and Repatriations, Demand, Laws and Regulations/Laundering through Legal Trade, and Next Steps) at the 10th World Congress of Herpetology Conference in Kuching, Sarawak, Borneo
 - The State Herpetologist provided a presentation on the status of Louisiana's reptile and amphibian regulations during the Laws and Regulations break-out session and participated as a speaker on a panel discussion regarding unsustainable and illegal reptile and amphibian trade.
 - The State Herpetologist had the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues from various countries including Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Thailand, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vietnam.
- Collaborated with USFWS, The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Nature Institute, and USGS for a Louisiana reintroduction plan for the dusky gopher frog (*Lithobates sevosus*). The last record of the species in Louisiana was in 1967, and there is an estimated 250 individuals remaining in the wild in Mississippi.
 - The State Herpetologist attended two field meetings with partners at The Nature Conservancy Talisheek Preserve in St. Tammany, Louisiana, and De Soto National Forest, Mississippi, to evaluate potential reintroduction sites and to inspect the few remaining active dusky gopher frog ponds in Mississippi.
- Collaborated with the Trust for Public Land for land acquisition needs, including securing funding, in Washington Parish (Bogue Chitto WMA) for conservation and recovery of federally listed species (ringed map turtle, Pearl River map turtle, gopher tortoise, Louisiana quillwort) and other SGCN
- Provided information on wild turtle harvest to USFWS Division of Scientific Authority for CITES Appendix II export permit applications
- Facilitated and processed Restricted Snake Permits
- Facilitated and processed Reptile and Amphibian Broodstock Collection Permits for Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry licensed turtle farmers per LDWF's updated herpetofaunal regulations

Reptile and Amphibian Regulatory Updates

LDWF staff completed the regulatory process for implementing necessary revisions to LDWF's reptile and amphibian regulations. In September 2024, the State Herpetologist

presented a Notice of Intent on Potpourri Amendments during the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission (LWFC) meeting. The following month, LDWF held a public meeting to receive comments on Potpourri Amendments, as well as an in-person meeting with turtle farmers (licensed through Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry) to discuss LDWF's newly developed Broodstock Collection Permit. The State Herpetologist presented the final Notice of Intent and a summary of public comments during LWFC's November 2024 meeting at which time the LWFC approved the final Notice of Intent. The Final Rule was published in the Jan. 20, 2025 State Register.

The key amendments addressed commercial and recreational collection of native turtles as well as permitting and reporting for LDWF-owned and managed lands; reporting requirements for commercial licenses (Reptile/Amphibian Collector's License and Reptile/Amphibian Wholesale/Retail Dealer's License); and restrictions for nonnative reptile/amphibian species and Restricted Snakes. A grace period of 180 days (until July 19, 2025) was provided for persons registering native turtles over the new recreational limits. A grace period of 365 days (until Jan. 20, 2026) was provided for persons registering nonnative reptile and amphibian species now listed as prohibited and restricted in the Final Rule. LDWF staff created application packages to facilitate the permitting and registration process for native turtles and nonnative reptile and amphibian species. The Final Rule can be accessed via the following link: [Reptiles-and-Amphibians-Rule-State-Register-Jan-2025.pdf](#).

Louisiana Turtle Conservation Plan

Thirty-two species and subspecies of native turtles occur in Louisiana. Several of these species are in need of immediate conservation action to maintain or improve populations to avoid additional species' listings. Currently, 22 turtle species are considered SGCN by LDWF with eight of those species listed as state and federally threatened or endangered. Successful conservation requires plans of action to assess species status and to ensure long-term viability of populations. To address these needs, LDWF convened a conservation planning working group to draft the Louisiana Turtle Conservation Plan. The primary objective of the plan is to offer a strategic approach to the restoration and conservation of Louisiana's native turtle species by providing the necessary information to facilitate these actions. This document provides information on the following:

- Life history
- Regulations
- Threats
- Inventory and monitoring
- Habitat management and restoration
- Conservation planning

In addition to detailing the topics above, the document includes fact sheets for all species covered by this plan (sea turtles and gopher tortoise are not included in this plan, as they are covered at length in various other documents) as well as the cultural significance of turtles in Louisiana and the history of turtle harvest and farming. LDWF recognizes that the implementation of the strategies outlined in this plan will be contingent upon budgetary constraints. The purpose of this plan is to identify conservation goals, strategies, and actions to help guide management decisions that will contribute to the long-term recovery and sustainability of viable native turtle populations in Louisiana. LDWF completed the draft document and submitted the draft to 67 colleagues from regional and national organizations and agencies for partner review, with feedback provided by 10 external partners (federal and state agencies, universities, and non-governmental organizations). During FY 2024-2025, WDP staff continued reviewing and incorporating partners' suggested revisions into the draft document. The final document is expected to be published in early 2026.

Nesting Habitat Restoration and Nest Protection Measures for the Ringed Map Turtle and Pearl River Map Turtle on the Lower East Pearl River

The Pearl River is home to the federally threatened ringed map turtle (*Graptemys oculifera*) and the federally threatened Pearl River map turtle (*G. pearlensis*). Quality nesting habitat for these species is typically composed of an open tree canopy with elevated sandbar deposits, usually found on the inside of river bends.



Head-started ringed map turtle (Graptemys oculifera) ready to return to the lower East Pearl River; head-started turtles were reared in captivity for eight months to reach a more predator-proof size prior to release.

Nesting habitat is generally absent along the lower portions of the Pearl River due to river alterations, with only one naturally occurring sandbar on the lower East Pearl River. Invasive tree species, primarily Chinese tallow (*Triadica sebifera*) and river birch (*Betula nigra*), have colonized this open sandbar and reduced suitable conditions for turtle nesting. Additionally, previously installed wildlife cameras detected nearly 100% turtle nest depredation, primarily by crows (*Corvus* sp.) and raccoons (*Procyon lotor*). Therefore, there is a significant need to increase nesting area, nest success, and hatchling recruitment for these two map turtles as well as other freshwater turtle species that utilize this sandbar for nesting along the East Pearl River. Project methods and deliverables (i.e. sandbar restoration and nest protection measures) will be applicable to other areas within the Pearl River system and, potentially, other river systems within the Southeast.

Nest enclosures, which provide nest protection via a wooden frame with wire mesh and electrical fencing, were constructed the previous fiscal year in an effort to increase turtle nesting success by minimizing predation from crows and raccoons. Each enclosure consists of six compartments linked together to form one nesting area. Several strands of galvanized steel electric fence wire were placed along the front opening of the nesting area to further deter entry and subsequent predation by raccoons. Hardware cloth was also installed along the upper front slope of the sandbar leading up to the entrance of the nest enclosures in an attempt to prevent turtles from nesting on the front slope of the sandbar where eggs are openly exposed to predators. Twelve wildlife cameras were installed to monitor both turtle nesting activity and presence/behavior of potential nest predators. Since turtles are often the same temperature as their surrounding substrate and fail to trigger infrared detectors, wildlife cameras were programmed to take pictures every 15 minutes regardless of movement detection. When set to trigger every 15 minutes, cameras are more likely to capture turtles constructing nests. The cameras also record motion-triggered events such as raccoons or crows moving through the frame. Habitat management was successful at minimizing the encroachment of woody vegetation on the sandbar.

Full post-season nest evaluations to assess the effectiveness of the nest protection measures were conducted on Sept. 24, 2024. WDP staff and partners (Buhlmann Ecological Consulting, Stennis Space Center, Audubon Nature Institute, USFWS, USGS, and Nicholls State University) conducted nest evaluations by carefully

and thoroughly inspecting each nesting enclosure. Eggshell fragments (consistent with successful hatching) from 30 different nests (28 inside enclosure boxes; two in front of enclosure boxes under electric wires) were discovered. It was estimated that 90 to 120 eggs successfully hatched. Most or potentially all of these hatches were likely from ringed map turtle nests; however, data analysis is currently in progress to verify turtle species. A total of 84 live ringed map turtle hatchlings were detected within nests. On average, clutch size was three eggs per nest (range 2 to 4) with the exception of one nest that contained five eggs and one nest that contained seven eggs. Of the 84 ringed map turtle hatchlings, LDWF staff and partners released 70 hatchlings within downed woody debris near the nesting sandbar, and 14 hatchlings were retained for one year of head-starting.

Nesting success was substantially greater during the 2024 nesting season compared to the 2022 and 2023 nesting seasons (zero and 13 successful nests, respectively). These results confirm that the modified design including reinforced electrical wire, additional solar fence charger, and the installation of a drift fence, is achieving the project objective to protect turtle nests from predation by raccoons and crows. The hardware cloth on the sandbar slope appears to be useful for guiding turtles to the nesting area, thereby reducing the number of nests initiated outside of the nest enclosures. Analysis of wildlife camera photographs is in progress.

Gopher Tortoise

The gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) can be found in Tangipahoa, Washington, and St. Tammany parishes and is listed as state and federally threatened in Louisiana. Gopher tortoises dig extensive subterranean burrows that have been documented to provide shelter to over 360 other species. WDP staff continue to collaborate with state, federal, and non-governmental partners to work towards species recovery by prioritizing and implementing action items and assessing threats to the species. WDP staff also reviewed various development projects in Tangipahoa, Washington, and St. Tammany parishes to assess potential impacts to gopher tortoises and provided consultations on preventative measures, as necessary. Additionally, coordination with USFWS and other state and federal partners was initiated to address the increasing impacts from solar energy development.

WDP staff continue to coordinate with LDWF WMA staff to prioritize and implement habi-

tat restoration on Sandy Hollow WMA in order to provide optimal habitat for gopher tortoise, northern bobwhite, and wild turkey. During FY 2024-2025, the State Herpetologist continued working with private landowners and timber companies to implement habitat restoration in an effort to increase the amount of quality habitat for tortoises. Land acquisition for gopher tortoise conservation remains a goal of this program and, coupled with habitat restoration, is critical to create a long-term viable population in Louisiana.

The following activities were conducted during FY 2024-2025:

- Collaborated with USFWS Lafayette Ecological Services office and advised on impact avoidance measures for gopher tortoises within a proposed solar development project in Washington Parish
- Provided husbandry care for two, head-start juvenile gopher tortoises that were found on a food plot on a privately-owned (but severely degraded) upland pine forest in St. Tammany Parish
 - LDWF is working with the landowner for habitat improvements and longleaf pine restoration
- Collaborated with Weyerhaeuser and University of New Orleans (UNO) colleagues for gopher tortoise nest/hatchling/predation research on Ben's Creek and Sandy Hollow WMA
- LDWF continued to partner with UNO, Weyerhaeuser, and Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery for a second year of Louisiana's gopher tortoise head-start program
 - In total, three nests were collected from Sandy Hollow WMA (Tangipahoa Parish), Ben's Creek (Washington Parish), and non-industrial, private land (St. Tammany Parish).
 - Three nests provided a total of 16 eggs, which produced 14 hatchlings; no hatchling deformities were observed.
 - Burrow camera data revealed that these nests were laid by different females than in the previous nesting season, but the same adult males (two or three individuals) at each site are attempting to mate with females.
 - Future work will focus on continuing nest surveys and head-starting efforts, genetic analysis, and evaluating strategies, such as consolidation, to increase genetic diversity and work toward creating primary support populations (50-250 adults) with a minimum of 50 adults.
- Collaborated with Audubon Nature Institute staff for gopher tortoise conservation and recovery opportunities

- Coordinated reports, transport, and care of "waif" gopher tortoises with private citizens, LSU Veterinary School, and University of Florida (UF)- Mycoplasma Diagnostic and Research Laboratory

Louisiana Pinesnake

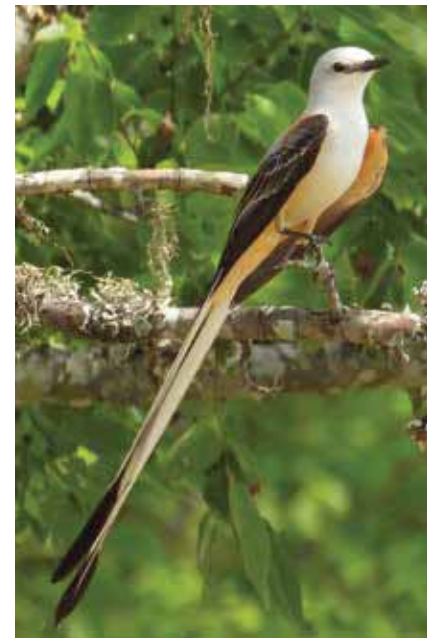
USFWS listed the Louisiana pinesnake (*Pituophis ruthveni*) as a federally threatened species on April 6, 2018. Prior to listing, LDWF signed the "Programmatic Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances for the Louisiana Pinesnake" to promote forest management practices that increase suitable habitat for the species and protect private landowners from future regulations. Since the creation of the agreement, private landowners have voluntarily enrolled approximately 4,317 acres for management of the Louisiana pinesnake, with 1,422 of those acres intensively managed for the species. WDP staff continue working with federal and non-governmental partners to conserve the species and assisted USFWS with providing a response to the Louisiana Pinesnake Conservation Benefit Agreement and Section 106 Review. WDP staff attended a meeting with stakeholders to discuss the Louisiana Pinesnake Population Management Plan and Species Survival Plan. WDP staff also attended meetings with stakeholders to determine sites for the planned July 2025 Louisiana pinesnake releases, with the Vernon Unit of Kisatchie National Forest site being the leading candidate.

During FY 2024-2025, WDP staff continued to monitor several Louisiana pinesnake populations using trap-arrays. Personnel detected two male Louisiana pinesnakes over 1,115 box-trap-nights. One individual was a recapture from previous years, while the other was a new individual. In addition to box-trap-arrays, which require frequent checks, WDP staff continued to

utilize camera-trap-arrays to detect Louisiana pinesnake. Cameras detected seven identifiable Louisiana pinesnakes over 5,100 camera trap-nights. Two of the detected snakes were new individuals, while the other five detections were recaptures from previous trapping efforts.

NONGAME BIRD PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Louisiana's avifauna is diverse, encompassing more than 490 species, over 400 of which are nongame species that fall under the responsibility of the WDP. The WDP is responsible for facilitating and directing research, monitoring, and conservation actions for all nongame birds in the state as well as providing peer-review for scientific and layperson



The scissor-tailed flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*) breeds in central to northern Louisiana in open terrain.



The solitary sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*) is a small shorebird that migrates through Louisiana and is an uncommon winter resident; however, this individual was observed in December during a Christmas Bird Count.

products. The bulk of the responsibilities involve coordinating or participating in scaled-down monitoring that feeds into regional, national, or international datasets. During FY 2024-2025, the WDP Nongame Ornithologist (hereafter, ornithologist) maintained the role of coordinating Louisiana's efforts for the North American Breeding Bird Survey (coordinated nationally by USGS), maintaining route assignments and recruiting qualified volunteers, including WDP staff, to ensure adequate coverage of the state's 67 survey routes and timely data submission. The ornithologist and WDP staff conducted and submitted data for 16 Breeding Bird Survey routes distributed statewide, an important contribution to the program's success in Louisiana where willing and qualified surveyors are few. Breeding Bird Survey data represent the primary dataset by which landbird population trends are monitored continentally and at the state level, allowing WDP to evaluate bird SGCN and their conservation needs for the State Wildlife Action Plan. The ornithologist also spearheaded an effort to initiate nocturnal bird surveys using the Nightjar Survey Network protocol, conducting five nightjar surveys (focusing on chuck-will's-widow [*Antrostomus carolinensis*]) and coordinating an additional 12 surveys conducted by LDWF staff and volunteers. Similar to the Breeding Bird Survey, the Nightjar Survey Network is a large-scale monitoring program dependent on volunteers, state agencies, and non-governmental organizations for data collection. These geographically expansive and long-term bird projects, including the Statewide Passive Detection for Organismal Research (SPDOR) VHF Network, are crucial for the conservation and management of bird SGCN. All of these programs have benefitted greatly from LDWF's financial commitment

to nongame birds and have been matched by generous support from ConocoPhillips, the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation, the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, and through federal grant opportunities such as Section 6 and the State Wildlife Grants Program. In fact, State Wildlife Grants have contributed, in part, to the majority of the projects previously mentioned. In FY 2024-2025, the ornithologist continued passive acoustic monitoring, initially funded by a State Wildlife Grant, using autonomous recording units to examine habitat associations and phenology of two poorly known SGCN – chuck-will's-widow and eastern whip-poor-will (*Antrostomus vociferus*). In FY 2024-2025, WDP biologists documented many rare and noteworthy birds, which were submitted for verification and inclusion into state and national datasets, including eBird, thereby contributing to the ever-evolving understanding of bird status, distribution, and trends in Louisiana. The ornithologist continued to track limpkin (*Aramus guarauna*) range expansion in the state, which is associated with its primary prey, the invasive giant apple snail (*Pomacea maculata*), thus potentially important for biocontrol, and of great interest to the public. The ornithologist continued efforts in FY 2024-2025 to monitor a recently discovered and continentally important Hudsonian whimbrel (*Numenius hudsonicus*) roost at Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge by conducting 10 flight-line surveys in spring 2025, recording a maximum count of over 6,700 whimbrels utilizing the Rockefeller roost. In tandem, the ornithologist facilitated and assisted Manomet's efforts to capture and equip four whimbrels with GPS/GSM transmitters. The ornithologist also assisted the Office of Wildlife (Coastal Division staff and Restoration Program staff)

to document bird response to management of coastal WMA and refuge properties by conducting bird surveys at Atchafalaya Delta WMA and the Isles Dernieres Barrier Island Refuge. The ornithologist coordinated and compiled data for three Christmas Bird Count surveys in southwestern Louisiana, including LDWF's White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area Christmas Bird Count, the Lacassine National Wildlife Refuge - Thornwell Christmas Bird Count, and the Sweet Lake - Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Christmas Bird Count. WDP biologists alone tallied more than 156,000 individual birds of 153 species on LDWF-coordinated Christmas Bird Counts and documented a number of significant bird records, including Eurasian wigeon (*Mareca penelope*), solitary sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*), Wilson's phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*), Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii*), Harris's sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*), prairie warbler (*Setophaga discolor*), and others. Twenty surveyors, including WDP biologists, contributed to the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area Christmas Bird Count, tallying more than 116,000 birds of 148 species. Results from these and other Christmas Bird Counts in the region continue to highlight the critical need of preserving rice cultivation and culture for the benefit of both the human and bird communities of the region.

In addition to the collaborative field work outlined above, the ornithologist spent a significant portion of time representing LDWF on standing committees and working groups and at meetings and workshops. The ornithologist continued representing Louisiana as a co-chair on the Gulf Coast Joint Venture's Bird Nesting Island Cooperative working group, and, in that role, assisted in organizing



LEFT: Chuck-will's-widow (*Antrostomus carolinensis*) is a little-known nocturnal insectivore and the subject of a newly established Wildlife Diversity Program monitoring effort. **CENTER:** This immature Harris's sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*) was discovered on the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area Christmas Bird Count. This species is rare in Louisiana and is typically found in the south-central Great Plains during the winter. **RIGHT:** The vast majority of prairie warblers (*Setophaga discolor*) migrate to and spend the winter in southern Florida and the Caribbean. This lingering individual was photographed during the Sweet Lake - Cameron Prairie NWR Christmas Bird Count in late December.

and executing the cooperative's annual meeting (February 2025), including presenting an update on the status of Louisiana's colonial waterbirds and coastal restoration efforts. The ornithologist also served on the Gulf Coast Joint Venture's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research Team's Landbird working group, performing various tasks throughout the year. In addition, the ornithologist continued serving on the Gulf Avian Monitoring Network Coordination Committee, whose rapidly expanding Community of Practice includes more than 100 individuals representing more than 30 state and federal agencies, universities, nonprofit organizations, and others. The ornithologist also served on LDWF's State Wildlife Grants Committee in FY 2024-2025 and on the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program's Biological Resources Action Plan Team. Finally, the ornithologist represented Louisiana on the Nongame Bird Technical Section of the Mississippi Flyway Council and served as Secretary for the section. The Nongame Bird Technical Section serves to represent the Mississippi Flyway and to provide guidance to the Mississippi Flyway Council on important issues affecting nongame birds in the Flyway (e.g., proposed changes to the federal permitting processes) and to facilitate critical nongame bird research and monitoring.

The ornithologist fulfilled numerous requests for print, audio, and video media interviews, including contributing information on brown pelicans and Queen Bess Island restoration efforts to a book titled "A Place for Pelicans: the incredible story of Queen Bess Island," published by the University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, and to an article on limpkins that was the fall 2024 cover story for Audubon magazine. The ornithologist contributed to other outreach and education efforts on numerous occasions, including giving lectures to public groups (e.g., Baton Rouge Audubon Society, Louisiana Ornithological Society, Gulf Coast Bird Club) on Louisiana nightjar monitoring, to the Southeastern Louisiana University's Department of Biological Sciences on the statewide (SPDOR) VHF network, and to the Louisiana Master Naturalists of Greater Baton Rouge for their biannual bird biology workshops. The ornithologist also responded to general information requests from the public on issues including bird identification, injured birds, nuisance birds, guidelines on avoiding disturbance to birds, and many other topics; in FY 2024-2025, the ornithologist replied, either by phone or email, to a total of 176 such general information requests.

The ornithologist provided significant technical guidance (approximately 165 instances) within LDWF and to partners, other agencies, non-governmental organizations, consultants, contractors, and industry on a myriad of bird-related issues. Internally, technical guidance typically involves drafting or reviewing comment letters on behalf of LDWF to federal partners or agencies (e.g., proposed changes to federal rules), drafting written or providing oral comments on bird-related issues for LDWF administrative staff, reviewing scientific research and collecting permit applications, and providing technical input on bird ecology and life history for bird island restoration project development. The ornithologist spent a significant amount of time and effort in FY 2024-2025 representing LDWF in initial discussions regarding offshore wind energy development in state waters. These efforts involved providing technical guidance to LDWF upper administration and giving oral presentations reflecting LDWF's concerns about offshore wind energy development to partners with state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, offshore wind energy operators, and the general public. The ornithologist also frequently replied to requests from partners, consultants, contractors, and private industry for technical advice and comments on best management practices, abatement, and other measures to avoid negatively impacting birds associated with coastal restoration activities (e.g., construction buffer reduction requests), industrial work in the vicinity of bald eagle nests or colonial waterbird rookeries, and survey planning in advance of proposed invasive activities. The ornithologist was a core member of the bird taxa team and coauthored all bird-related content for the 2025 revision of Louisiana's State Wildlife Action Plan.

Restoration-Related Bird Activities

The ornithologist continued to play an important role in restoration planning and monitoring efforts to benefit Louisiana's coastal birds, including many SGCN, by participating in technical discussions on restoration projects coordinated by the Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group, the LDWF Restoration Program, and the Coastal Protection And Restoration Authority (CPRA), and funded by the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill Natural Resources Damage Assessment settlement. During FY 2024-2025, the ornithologist contributed guidance on bird island restoration and monitoring priorities for state and region-wide funding opportunities and on island restoration design (e.g., Raccoon Island, New Harbor Island) and other restoration projects (e.g., Atchafalaya WMA replanting project). The ornithologist

also provided technical guidance on restoration monitoring efforts, including updates to the Avian Data Monitoring Portal and the Avian Guidance Document (<https://thewaterinstitute.org/projects/avian-monitoring>).

Statewide Passive Detection for Organismal Research (SPDOR) VHF Network

Funded by ConocoPhillips, the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation, Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, the State Wildlife Grants Program, and LDWF's Rockefeller Trust, the SPDOR VHF Network entered its seventh year. This passive network facilitates radio tracking of hundreds of organisms simultaneously, provided those organisms are first fitted with nanotags (tiny coded radio tags) and then move through the approximately 9-mile detection radius of at least one receiver station. The potential for such a network of stations to contribute to our current knowledge level of SGCN is substantial and is identified as a strategy for full annual cycle conservation of migratory birds in Louisiana's State Wildlife Action Plan. In addition, this network contributes to the projects of many other scientists currently utilizing the Motus Wildlife Tracking System, an international collaborative network of scientists that is coordinated and maintained by Birds Canada, and thus provides invaluable migratory connectivity data that may inform full annual cycle conservation efforts. As of June 2025, the WDP's network of receiver stations had logged more than 1,800 detections of approximately 460 individual research birds of 33 species, primarily shorebirds (13 species, including the federally threatened red knot) and songbirds (13 species), but also one to two species each representing nightjars, rails, seabirds, herons, and falcons. This work has almost limitless potential for collaborating with other agencies, industry, non-governmental organizations, academia, and others from across the Western Hemisphere. Activities in FY 2024-2025 included upgrading one station to dual-listening (i.e., adding the 434 MHz frequency to the standard 166 MHz frequency that all Louisiana stations monitor), downloading of data from receiver stations, uploading these data to the Motus network, repairing damaged stations, and coordinating memorandums of understanding with partners for station establishment and maintenance.

Red-cockaded Woodpecker

WDP personnel continued to implement the Louisiana Statewide Red-cockaded Woodpecker (*Leuconotopicus borealis*) Safe Harbor

Program to benefit the federally and state-listed threatened species. Over the life of the program, LDWF has entered into 15 Safe Harbor Management Agreements with non-federal landowners. A total of 493,861 acres are currently enrolled in the Red-cockaded Woodpecker Safe Harbor Program with 103 baseline red-cockaded woodpecker family groups and nine above baseline red-cockaded woodpecker family groups. The Red-cockaded Woodpecker Safe Harbor Program Coordinator conducted annual site visits to 12 Safe Harbor Program properties. During these site visits, staff confirmed compliance of voluntary red-cockaded woodpecker management activities implemented by landowners on their properties, and staff provided technical assistance regarding red-cockaded woodpecker management. WDP staff continued to promote the Safe Harbor Program via press releases, presentations at public forums, and the LDWF website.

WDP personnel continued to perform red-cockaded woodpecker demographic monitoring and management for 12 red-cockaded woodpecker family groups at Alexander State Forest WMA located in Woodworth. These activities include, but are not limited to:

- annual activity status checks of 200+ cavity trees,
- capture and color banding of adults,
- nest checks and nestling color banding,
- fledgling checks to determine survivorship,
- artificial cavity installation and maintenance,
- midstory control in 14 red-cockaded woodpecker cluster sites, and
- technical assistance to Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry staff regarding beneficial timber management practices for the species.

WDP staff monitored 51 red-cockaded woodpecker breeding groups for nesting activity at the Evangeline Unit of Kisatchie National Forest. Biologists performed nest checks every seven to 10 days. Once a nest hatched all of the red-cockaded woodpecker nestlings were color banded and a day 20 survivorship check was performed to determine the sex of the nestlings. This work was performed under the Good Neighbor Agreement between LDWF and the U.S. Forest Service.

In addition to conducting field work, the Red-cockaded Woodpecker Safe Harbor Program Coordinator hosted two professional meetings: the Red-cockaded Woodpecker Safe Harbor Co-operators Meeting in Longleaf, Louisiana, and

the annual Red-cockaded Woodpecker Translocation Co-op Meeting in Nacogdoches, TX.

WDP SCIENTIFIC PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

Battaglia, C. D. 2025. Conservation and Research of the Louisiana Pinesnake, *Pituophis ruthveni*, by LDWF. LDWF Symposium. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Oral.

Battaglia, C. D. 2025. Conservation of the Louisiana Pinesnake, *Pituophis ruthveni*, on Private Lands in Louisiana. Southeast Partners for Amphibian and Reptile Conservation. Lake Guntersville State Park, Alabama. Oral.

Battaglia, C. D. 2024. LDWF Louisiana Pinesnake Monitoring Update. Louisiana Pinesnake Stakeholder's Meeting. New Orleans, Louisiana. Oral.

Battaglia, C. D and M.A. Seymour*. 2025. Southern Unstriped Scorpion (*Vaejovis carolinianus*) Inventory. LDWF Symposium. Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Oral.

Early, B.S., C.S. Reid, C.L. Mathey, and C. Doffitt. 2024. Louisiana Coastal Prairie Vascular Flora Checklist with Coefficients of Conservatism for Floristic Quality Assessments. J. Bot. Res. Inst. Texas 18(2):389-430.

Lejeune, K.L. 2024. Challenges with Louisiana's Reptile and Amphibian Regulations. 10th World Congress of Herpetology Conference, Special Symposium titled "Challenges with Regulating International Trade in Live Reptiles and Amphibians." 5-9 August 2024, Kuching, Sarawak, Borneo. Oral.

Lejeune, K.L. 2024. The Status of Louisiana's Reptile and Amphibian Regulations: Successes and Lessons Learned. 10th World Congress of Herpetology Conference, Special Symposium titled "Challenges with Regulating International Trade in Live Reptiles and Amphibians." 5-9 August 2024, Kuching, Sarawak, Borneo. Oral.

Lejeune, K.L. 2024. Solar Development in Louisiana: status, potential impacts, and minimization measures. Louisiana Association of Professional Biologists Annual Meeting. 4 October 2024, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Lafayette, Louisiana. Oral.

Lejeune, K.L. 2024. Louisiana's Gopher Tortoise Conservation Update. 46th Annual Gopher Tortoise Council Meeting. 14 November 2024, St. Petersburg, Florida. Oral.

Lejeune, K.L. 2024. The Status of Louisiana's Reptile and Amphibian Regulations with an Emphasis on Native Turtles. Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles (CCITT) December 2024 Virtual Meeting. 20 December 2024. Oral.

Lejeune, K.L.* and K.A. Buhlmann. 2025. Nesting Habitat Restoration and Nest Protection Measures for Freshwater Turtles, particularly the Ringed Map Turtle (*Graptemys oculifera*) and Pearl River Map Turtle (*Graptemys pearlensis*), on the East Pearl River in Louisiana. 26th Annual Southeast Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Conference. 15 March 2025, Lake Guntersville State Park, Alabama. Oral.
* denotes presenter

Lejeune, K.L. 2025. The Status of Louisiana's Reptile and Amphibian Regulations. 26th Annual Southeast Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Conference. 15 March 2025, Lake Guntersville State Park, Alabama. Oral.

Lejeune, K.L. 2025. Solar Development in Louisiana: status, potential impacts, and minimization measures. Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Conservation Roundtable. 3 April 2025, Crowne Plaza, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Oral.

Lejeune, K.L. 2025. The Status of Louisiana's Native Turtle Regulations. Diamondback Terrapin Working Group, 2025 Gulf States Virtual Meeting. 29 May 2025. Oral.

EDUCATION PROGRAM

Conservation education is a vital part of the LDWF mission. The Education Program focuses on two main areas: Hunter Education and General Wildlife Education/Outdoor Skill Development.

Staffing for the Education Program consists of nine biologist educators, four supervisors who have field responsibility in addition to their supervisory duties, two education biologist managers, and one education program manager. Three full time technicians staff LDWF-operated shooting ranges.

HUNTER EDUCATION

Hunter and bow-hunter education classes cover firearm safety and operation, hunting ethics, principles of wildlife management, outdoor survival, and tree-stand safety. Hunter education certification is mandatory for hunters born on or after Sept. 1, 1969. There are exceptions to the hunter education requirement that allow persons to hunt without hunter education certification if they are directly supervised by someone 18 or older with hunter education certification or by a licensed hunter born prior to Sept. 1, 1969. An exemption is also provided for persons with a current POST certification or military experience, and a hunter education exemption card is issued to those who qualify. Most states have mandatory hunter education requirements, and these exemptions, including the POST/military exemption, apply only in Louisiana. The regular Louisiana hunter education certification card is honored in all 50 states.

Students have three options for taking a hunter education class. The classroom course consists of 10 hours of instruction, usually spread over one, two or three days. The blended format

consists of an internet course that the student can complete at home and is followed by a mandatory three-to-five-hour field day event. The field day reinforces the lessons learned in the online course and provides an opportunity for hands-on learning. The third option allows students 16 and above to obtain their hunter education certification solely through the internet course. Both the classroom course and the online/field day include a live-fire or firearm handling exercise where students must demonstrate that they can safely handle and/or discharge a firearm. The online-only option does not have any in-person or live-fire requirements. The online-only option is open to both residents and non-residents.

Hunter education classes are taught by Education Program staff and a network of volunteer instructors. There are approximately 656 active volunteer hunter education instructors in Louisiana. Volunteer instructors complete an instructor training course and background check prior to being certified. Education Program staff coordinate the delivery of classes with volunteers, recruit and train volunteer instructors and keep volunteer instructors supplied with materials to teach classes. In all, 231 new volunteer hunter education, basic archery, and range safety instructors were trained through 25 instructor courses. The annual volunteer instructor workshop was held at Camp Grant Walker with 68 instructors attending. The time volunteered by hunter education instructors, volunteer range officers, and Archery in Louisiana Schools coaches to deliver hunter education classes, shooting range operation and to train archers is used as in-kind match for the hunter education federal grant. In FY 2024-2025, volunteers contributed 34,836 hours of service time valued at approximately \$1.27 million.



Hunter Education class instruction

STUDENT CERTIFICATION

Total hunter education certifications increased slightly from last fiscal year (10,561 in FY 2023-2024 versus 10,845 in FY 2024-2025). This was a slight increase in overall numbers. In-person certification fell a little, while online certification increased. Traditional in-person classroom courses saw a significant percentage of total student attendance (42.3%). The online-only option for those 16 and above remained incredibly popular and represented 57.7% of total certifications.

Hunter Education

LA Hunter Education Courses FY 2024-2025			
Course Type	No. of Courses	No. of Students	Percentile
Classroom Course	172	3960	36.5%
Home Study/Field Day	44	633	5.8%
Online-Only	N/A	6252	57.7%
Total	216	10,845	

HUNTING INCIDENTS

During FY 2024-25, there were nine reported hunting incidents involving injury or death. Two of the nine incidents resulted in fatality. One incident involved falling from an elevated stand and the other incident involved a firearm. All incidents were compiled and entered into the International Hunter Education Incident Database. Information on these incidents were provided to Hunter Education Instructors and regional staff. Education Program staff and volunteer instructors are placing additional emphasis on tree-stand safety in their hunter education classes and field days, with all Education staff receiving Tree-Stand Safety instructor training. Additionally, per legislative request, LDWF developed and disseminated tree-stand safety materials through print, website and social media again this year.

Primary causes for these incidents are shown below.

Hunting Incidents (FY 2024-2025)	
Type	No. of Incidents
Failure to Identify Target	5
Fall from Stand	4
Total Incidents	9

SHOOTING RANGE/ TRAINING FACILITIES

Two education centers and four shooting ranges are available to the public and managed by the LDWF Education Program. A total of 1,337 education center and 27,225 shooting range user visits were recorded in FY 2024-2025.

BODCAU SHOOTING RANGE

The Bodcau range is located in Bossier Parish on the Bodcau WMA. Accommodations for public use include a rifle range, handgun range, a five-stand shotgun range, an archery range including elevated archery tower, and a 3-D archery trail. The range is open to the public three days a week and recorded 5,377 user visits in FY 2024-2025.

WOODWORTH EDUCATION CENTER

The Woodworth Education Center located in Rapides Parish contains a classroom, lodging facilities, and a public shooting range. Education facilities are used for LDWF events and available for public/conservation group use by reservation only. These facilities recorded 552 visits in FY 2024-2025.

Range facilities consist of a rifle range, handgun range, a five-stand shotgun range, an archery range, and 3-D archery trail. The range is open for public access four days a week, and recorded 5,262 user visits in FY 2024-2025.



LEFT: Sherburne Rifle Range

SHERBURNE SHOOTING RANGE

Located in Pointe Coupee Parish on the Sherburne WMA, the Sherburne range consists of two shotgun ranges, one archery range including elevated archery tower, one handgun range, and one rifle range. It is open to the public six days per week and recorded 56,446 user visits in FY 2024-2025.

WADDILL OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTER AND REFUGE

The Waddill Outdoor Education Center and Refuge in East Baton Rouge Parish provides an outdoor education environment in an urban setting. A classroom and shotgun range are used for LDWF events and hunter education instruction, and an archery range with elevated archery tower, two 3-D archery trails, and an air rifle range are available for recreational shooting opportunities. The facility also offers public access to two stocked fishing ponds and a nature trail system. Waddill Refuge recorded a total of 785 user visits in FY 2024-2025, of which 151 were range users.

HONEY ISLAND SHOOTING RANGE

The Honey Island Shooting range is located on the Pearl River WMA in St. Tammany Parish. The range is managed under an agreement with Southeast Louisiana Firearms Safety, Inc (SELS). SELFS is a non-profit organization staffed by volunteers that maintains and operates the range for public use. Shotgun, rifle, handgun, and archery shooting opportunities are available to the public. The range is open to the public three days per week. There is a \$10 per day fee to use the range that is collected by SELFS to fund operation and maintenance of the range. This range recorded 10,789 user visits in FY 2024-2025.



LEFT: Bodcau Shooting Range RIGHT: Waddill Archery Range

GENERAL WILDLIFE EDUCATION AND OUTDOOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Education Program staff are involved in a variety of hunter education related activities. Staff provide information and make presentations on topics of interest to civic organizations, school groups and other affiliations. Outdoor skill development programs and efforts have increased in recent years. Demand is high for programs that teach beginners about getting started in hunting and shooting sports. In recognition that funding and support for conservation are directly linked to hunters and shooters, the LDWF Education Program has expanded its efforts to recruit and teach skills to new outdoor enthusiasts.

NON-CONSUMPTIVE PROGRAM

The Non-Consumptive program was created to encourage more interaction with non-hunters and anglers. The program looks to identify, promote, and improve non-consumptive activities throughout Louisiana, such as hiking, kayaking, canoeing, and bird watching. This comes after the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries were given special priority to engage outdoor users who may not take part in hunting and fishing.

NATIONAL HUNTING AND FISHING DAY

The general public is invited to join LDWF and other conservation partners in an open house atmosphere that involves hands-on activities and information about conservation. National Hunting and Fishing Days were implemented in four locations statewide resulting in an estimated 6731 user contacts for FY 2024-2025.





2024 National Hunting and Fishing Day



BECOMING AN OUTDOORS WOMAN (BOW)

BOW is a popular program with women interested in learning about outdoor recreation. During the BOW weekend workshop, education staff and volunteers conduct classes on a variety of outdoor skills, including shooting, fishing, canoeing, hunting, orienteering, camping and wildlife appreciation. The Hunter Education section held one Becoming and Outdoors Woman (BOW) workshop, and one Beyond BOW Deer Hunt, reaching a total of 144 participants for FY 2024-2025.



Becoming and Outdoors Woman

FAMILIES UNDERSTANDING NATURE (FUN) CAMP

Families Understanding Nature provides both fun and education to a parent and youth(s) through a weekend of staff-led outdoor activities. Family members are introduced to archery, rifle and shotgun shooting, kayaking and camping. Two FUN Camps; Mother/Child and Father/Child were implemented at Woodworth Education Center reaching 21 families in FY 2024-2025.



Becoming and Outdoors Woman

HUNTING 101 WORKSHOPS

Hunting Introductory (101) workshops are being developed and implemented by Education staff to give beginning hunters the knowledge and confidence to begin hunting on their own. Two hunting 101 workshops have been developed and implemented; Bow-Hunting 101 and Tree Stand Safety. In FY 2024-2025 15 students were instructed at Woodworth Education Center.



LEFT and RIGHT: Families Understanding Nature (FUN) Camp



Archery in Louisiana Schools (ALAS) Program

ARCHERY IN LOUISIANA SCHOOLS (ALAS)

ALAS is Louisiana's version of the National Archery in the Schools Program. ALAS promotes international style target archery as part of the physical education curriculum for grades 4-12. At the end of FY 2024-2025, 230 active schools were participating in the program, impacting approximately 20,000 students. LDWF hosted two regional tournaments, a state 3D, and a state bullseye tournament. A total of 4,100 archers participated in regional and state tournament competitions.

TARGET RANGE ENHANCEMENT GRANT PROGRAM

LDWF designed and implemented a Target Range grant program in cooperation with Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration staff to sub-award wildlife restoration funds to third party entities to build, expand, and improve public shooting ranges. In FY 2024-2025, one planning and development project and one construction project were successfully completed. Three planning and development and three construction sub-awards were issued, however one planning and development Sponsor ultimately withdrew from the program.



Apocalypse Sports Shooting Range grand opening



LAND DEVELOPMENT & MANAGEMENT

FORESTRY PROGRAM

The mission of the Forest Management Program is to improve forest and wildlife habitat on WMAs through sound forest management, reforestation practices, and active forest/wildlife research activities. To demonstrate wise stewardship of LDWF's forests, 545,695 acres of forestland is certified through the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Program. LDWF completed its recertification audit and was found to be in accordance with the requirements of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Standard. This marks the LDWF's eighth year under Sustainable Forestry Initiative forest certification.

General forest inventories and habitat evaluations were conducted to facilitate the development of management prescriptions and to evaluate the effectiveness of prescribed treatments on Boeuf, Bogue Chitto, Dewey Wills, Floy McElroy, Loggy Bayou, Pearl River, Richard K. Yancey, Russell Sage, Sandy Hollow, and Sherburne WMAs.

Timber harvest preparations including forest inventory, regeneration evaluations, timber marking, GIS map development, timber sale proposal preparations, timber sale development, contract development, and timber contract amendments were conducted on Boeuf, Dewey Wills, Floy McElroy, Little River, Loggy Bayou, Richard K. Yancey, Russell Sage, and Sandy Hollow WMAs. Timber harvests to improve wildlife habitat were initiated and/or completed on Bayou Macon, Little River, Russell Sage, and Sandy Hollow WMAs.

Chemical treatments of invasive/non-native species, primarily Chinese tallow tree, cogon grass, and trifoliate orange were carried out on Dewey Wills, Pomme de Terre, Sandy Hollow, and Spring Bayou WMAs.

Prescribed burning treatments were conducted on Alexander State Forest, Lake Ramsay Savannah, Little River, Marsh Bayou, and Sandy Hollow WMAs to promote and improve habitat conditions for fire dependent wildlife and plants.

The annual statewide WMA mast survey was conducted to estimate annual mast production. The survey is used as an indicator of mast availability for wildlife as well as a predictor of small mammal populations. The mast survey is also used to map local abundance which aids in seed collection efforts.

Our reforestation program inventoried and evaluated hardwood plantations on LDWF-owned WMAs as well as private properties. Habitat evaluations and management plans were developed for nine bottomland hardwood restoration sites on properties enrolled in the NRCS Wetland Reserve Program. Restoration evaluations of state-owned properties include Boeuf, Buckhorn, Little River, Richard K. Yancey, and Russell Sage WMAs. Our reforestation program planting 52 acres on Russell Sage WMA.

Our GIS program continues to update timber sale data, forest inventory, boundaries, prescribed burning, roads, and streams data input relative to our WMA forest management activities. The forestry GIS allows us to monitor, analyze, and evaluate for performance and outcomes of the entire forestry program.

Growth Monitoring Plots were reevaluated on Alexander State Forest, J.C. Sonny Gilbert, Pomme de Terre, and Bayou Pierre WMAs. These permanent plots aid in monitoring habitat conditions and effects of our forest management program on the habitat components represented on the WMAs.

Research continued on several ongoing studies investigating seedling survival, sapling development, tree growth, wildlife response to various silvicultural treatments, and hydrological changes across our WMA properties. Forestry Section staff hosted several training and outreach workshops to share research results and management experiences. Continuing education for the Forestry Section staff was practiced through participation at various symposiums, workshops, seminars, research meetings and conferences throughout the year.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

The Wildlife Division of LDWF currently manages over 1.3 million acres in its WMA Program. These areas are distributed across the state and are comprised of a vast array of habitat types. The WMA Program's mission is to deliver conservation priorities to Louisiana's landscape, as well as provide an array of outdoor recreational opportunities to the public. The lands in the program serve to protect, conserve, replenish and manage the wildlife resources occurring on those areas. Habitats within these lands harbor and help conserve a multitude of

endangered species such as the red-cockaded woodpecker and gopher tortoise. The majority of these lands are available for the public to utilize in recreational pursuits. Recreational opportunities range from a variety of hunting and fishing, to canoeing, hiking, ATV riding and berry picking. Habitats range from upland pine-hardwood, to cypress tupelo, pine savanna, bottomland hardwood, fresh to brackish marshes, with many globally rare habitat types and plant communities as well. For administrative and management purposes, the WMAs are grouped by region - Hammond, Lafayette, Lake Charles, Pineville, Monroe and Minden regions.

HAMMOND

Wildlife Management Areas (Total Acres - 255,186 acres)

- Biloxi
- Bogue Chitto
- Hutchinson Creek
- Joyce
- Lake Ramsay Savannah
- Manchac
- Maurepas Swamp
- Pearl River
- Sandy Hollow
- Tangipahoa Parish School Board
- Tunica Hills

Habitat types on these WMAs include marshes and swamps, natural longleaf and plantation loblolly pine stands, bottomland hardwoods, and rugged loess bluff uplands. The WMAs are managed to provide outdoor recreational opportunities for all user groups. Most of the areas are accessible via extensive road and trail systems that are maintained by LDWF staff, while other areas are accessible mainly by boat.

A total of 43,854 user days were reported for Hammond WMAs during FY 2024-2025 through the Self-Clearing Permit process. This is a 13% decrease in reported user days from FY 2023-2024.

Alligator hunting opportunities were available to the public on Joyce, Manchac, Maurepas Swamp and Pearl River WMAs. Alligator Tags are offered in two separate forms. The first opportunity is in the form of a Commercial Alligator Slot. Seventeen slots are offered for a three-year period, the slots are open to



LEFT: Sandy Hollow WMA prescribed burning **RIGHT:** Nuisance black bear relocation (Hammond region)



*Private Lands Browse Surveys
(Hammond region)*

public bid, with hunters bidding on the percentage of value to be returned to LDWF, with a minimum of 40%. The number of tags for each slot is based on the WMA and habitat types, and range from 36 to 83 tags per hunter with a total tag allocation of 1,297 tags. 2024 was the third year of the current three-year contract. 220 recreational slots were offered through a general lottery system. Successful lottery applicants were issued three tags for \$40 per tag plus license fees. Lastly, contracts are awarded for the collection of alligator eggs on Joyce, Pearl River, Manchac, and Maurepas

Swamp WMAs. Staff monitor and coordinate collections to ensure activities are compliant with other users and do not impact habitats. Nathan Wall was appointed to the Commission and therefore removed himself from the egg contract for Manchac, Pearl River, and Joyce. As a result, LDWF rebid those properties for a two-year contract, but no bids were received. It is assumed that LDWF will attempt to bid those egg contracts again this year for a one-year term, since one year remains on the Maurepas Swamp contract.

Deer hunting on the WMAs of the region continues to be the most popular hunting activity (32% of all hunting activities). There were 8,612 efforts across the region, which was down 7% from the previous year. Hunters reported a harvest of 673 (+24%) deer for a 13 efforts/deer average. Staff also conducted a managed hunt on Maurepas Swamp WMA the Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving. The managed hunt had 346 efforts, 44 deer harvested for a 7.9 efforts/deer average.

After deer hunting, waterfowl hunting is second in efforts at 6,407 across the region. This year's efforts are consistent with last season. Hunters reported harvesting 7,790 waterfowl for a 1.2 ducks/effort average. Of the WMAs in the region, Pearl River WMA had the most waterfowl hunting efforts.

LDWF personnel issued Special Use Permits for a variety of activities on the WMAs of the region. These activities include oil and gas, public utility maintenance, restoration, research and

monitoring, etc. LDWF WMA staff work diligently to ensure that business of state interest continues, but that impacts to both habitat and users of the WMA are minimized.

At Sandy Hollow WMA, staff prescribed burned 100 acres and treated invasive cogon grass on another three within longleaf pine stands. The 2023 drought slowed the growth of native warm season grasses.

Hammond personnel maintained 65 wood duck boxes. Personnel also participated in the statewide mourning dove banding program, responded to numerous deer and nuisance animal complaints, provided technical assistance to the public, conducted public meetings, and collected 333 white-tailed deer brain and lymph node samples across the region for chronic wasting disease testing.

Feral hogs have remain a serious nuisance and ecological threat throughout the state. Aggressive control methods have been used on certain WMAs, such as Pearl River and Tunica Hills, to reduce their numbers. Each year, feral hog blood samples are collected and tested for a variety of diseases.

The Hammond Region Operations program offers assistance to the public in 17 parishes on a variety of wildlife related topics and programs. Biologists conducted data collection for research programs, disease monitoring-including over 340 chronic wasting disease samples collected throughout the region-, habitat evaluations, Wetland Reserve Ease-



Wood duck nest box monitoring (Hammond region)

ment monitoring, drafted habitat management plans for private landowners, conducted public outreach, and offered technical assistance regarding wildlife and nuisance animal issues. The Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) program was delivered to 172 cooperators on more than 298,140 acres. In addition, staff participated in several bird banding programs for black-bellied whistling ducks (843 banded), wood ducks (411 banded), and woodcock (112 banded).

LAFAYETTE

Wildlife Management Areas (Total Acres - 191,178 acres)

- Acadiana Conservation Corridor
- Attakapas
- Elm Hall
- Grassy Lake
- Pomme de Terre
- Richard K. Yancey
- Sherburne
- Spring Bayou
- Thistlethwaite

Habitat types range from backwater bottomland hardwoods interspersed with agricultural lands, and cypress-tupelo swamps to open-water areas. One USFWS refuge (Atchafalaya National Wildlife Refuge) and two USACE properties (Bayou des Ourses and Shatters Bayou) are managed within the Lafayette region.

Lafayette WMA personnel administer and manage a variety of wildlife-oriented activities. These personnel work in conjunction with

and provide technical advice to many different agencies, including USFWS, USACE, Louisiana Department of Conservation and Energy (LDC&E), Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, USDA and local parish entities. Lafayette WMA personnel helped deliver alligator and nuisance animal programs and assisted with program projects such as dove and wood duck banding, as well as deer, woodcock, turkey, black bear and nongame research projects.

The WMAs are maintained and managed to provide outdoor recreation opportunities for all user groups, including both consumptive and non-consumptive. WMA personnel performed a variety of development and maintenance functions such as boundary marking, building maintenance, self-clearing station maintenance, sign replacement, road and trail maintenance, culvert replacement, water control structure operation, moist soil management, feral hog and other nuisance animal control, equipment maintenance, public user data collection, vegetation control, maintenance of wildlife openings, reforestation, and conducting managed hunts.

A total of 93,076 user days were reported on Lafayette WMAs during FY 2024-2025.

White-tailed deer is the most popular game animal hunted on the Lafayette WMAs. Either-sex deer hunts, with mandatory deer checks were held on the WMAs, with 3,198 user-days recorded and 417 deer harvested. An additional 950 deer were harvested during other either-sex, bucks-only, youth/handicapped, archery and primitive weapons hunts, where self-clearing permits were utilized. Deer hunters totaled over 20,000 efforts for the 2024-2025 season. Turkey hunts were held on two WMAs, but no turkeys were harvested by an

estimated 17 users. This includes eight youth hunters who were selected for the Spring Bayou and Pomme de Terre WMA youth lottery hunts. Squirrel and rabbit hunting is also very popular on the ecoregion's bottomland hardwood WMAs, accounting for over 11,400 user days. Waterfowl hunting is popular as well on Lafayette WMAs in moist soil impoundments, green tree reservoirs, swamps, and flooded bottoms. Waterfowl user days totaled over 6,700 for this period. In addition, dove fields are maintained, along with many acres of wildlife openings.

Youth lottery deer and duck hunts were also held on Lafayette WMAs, with great success on these hunts. Fifteen youth waterfowl lottery hunters harvested 70 ducks, for an average of 4.7 ducks per youth hunter. A disabled veteran's waterfowl hunt was held where one disabled veteran participated and harvested six ducks. Forty youth deer lottery hunters harvested six deer on nine hunts. Youth hunt-



Sherburne South Farm Observation Tower



Sherburne South Farm WCS replacement



LEFT: Richard K. Yancey WMA Routen Camp culvert replacement **RIGHT:** Richard K. Yancey WMA Warren Trail culvert replacement

ers observed many deer on these hunts. The hunts are held in refuge areas set aside for youth, where these youth hunters have a quality hunt and learn about hunting in a safe environment. Four different wheelchair-bound Physically Challenged Hunter Permittees went on 28 hunts utilizing wheelchair-bound waterfowl and deer blinds.

Biologists and technicians maintain and monitor approximately 488 wood duck boxes, conduct pre-season wood duck banding, and collect samples for chronic wasting disease, avian influenza and other disease testing. They also assisted with numerous complaints regarding black bears, sick wildlife and various nuisance animals. Biologists assisted researchers with ongoing research projects.

Lottery alligator hunter applications were reviewed and 585 tags were issued to 195 lottery hunters. This lottery is conducted with an on-line application process, with each hunter selected receiving three alligator tags. This gives the public an opportunity to participate in the alligator harvest on WMAs and public lakes.

There were also four contract alligator hunters that were issued 188 tags for the Lafayette Region WMAs.

Major projects being initiated, worked on, or completed included:

- Completed construction of the Sherburne South Farm Observation Tower
- Renovated the Attakapas Island WMA headquarters building.
- Replaced the water control structures on various moist soil units on Sherburne WMA.

The Lafayette Region Private Lands Biologists offer assistance to the public in 12 parishes on a variety of wildlife related topics and programs. Biologists conducted data collection for research programs, disease monitoring, habitat evaluations, Wetland Reserve Easement monitoring, public outreach, and offered technical assistance regarding wildlife and nuisance animal issues. The DMAP program was delivered to 282 cooperators on more than 607,486 acres. Private Lands Biologists assisted the Large Carnivore Program with black bear den visits, cub counts, research collaring, and the hair snare project in the Upper Atchafalaya River Basin. Region biologists conducted 75 Wetland Reserve Easement site visits offering technical assistance to landowners regarding wildlife and habitat management for 121,088 acres. In addition, Biologists collected 359 chronic wasting disease samples in the region.

COASTAL LAFAYETTE

Wildlife Management Areas (Total Acres - 321,503 acres)

- Atchafalaya Delta
- Lake Boeuf
- Pass-a-Loutre
- Pointe-aux-Chenes
- Salvador
- Timken

Refuges (Total Acres - 93,274 acres)

- Marsh Island
- State Wildlife
- St. Tammany
- Isle Dernieres Barrier Islands
- Queen Bess

Habitats on these WMAs/refuges are primarily fresh, intermediate and brackish marshes with some agriculture lands, bottomland hardwoods and cypress-tupelo swamp. Most of the WMAs/refuges in this region are only accessible by boat, and these coastal properties include two active deltas and three barrier islands. The majority of the Coastal Lafayette WMAs/refuges are owned by LDWF with the remaining acreage under lease. St. Tammany Refuge is managed in cooperation with the USFWS along with Big Branch National Wildlife Refuge.

The Coastal Lafayette Region WMAs/refuges are maintained and managed to ensure optimum habitat conditions as well as provide outdoor recreational opportunities for all user groups. Approximately 28,000 user days were estimated for Coastal Lafayette WMAs and refuges during FY 2024-2025. Fishing, crabbing and shrimping make up the majority of the activities on some WMAs/refuges in this region. The most popular consumptive activities include hunting, fishing, crabbing and cast-netting for shrimp. Non-consumptive uses include boating, camping, bird watching and nature photography. To facilitate public use, Coastal Lafayette staff maintained parking lots, docks, bridges, boat ramps and campgrounds as well as posted boundaries and provided public assistance (including emergency assistance to boaters).

Marsh Management, Restoration & Habitat Enhancement

Wetland management, enhancement, restoration and protection activities are high priorities on the Coastal Lafayette WMAs/refuges. Staff strive to manage all wetlands on these

areas when and where feasible. In general, Coastal Lafayette WMA/refuge wetlands are managed to provide appropriate water levels and conditions (salinity, turbidity, flow) to optimize wetland health and wintering waterfowl conditions, establish/increase desired wetland vegetation and ensure proper habitat conditions for fisheries and other wildlife. Annual wetland management and enhancement activities included water level and salinity management, prescribed burning, species management, vegetative plantings, dredging/beneficial use, etc. There are 12 active management units on three of these WMAs/refuges (Pointe-aux-Chenes WMA, Marsh Island Refuge and State Wildlife Refuge). These management units total approximately 45,000 acres and are managed via 25 water control structures. Staff routinely monitor water quality and conditions and adjust water control structures appropriately to ensure proper management. Staff continue to maintain and repair all water control structures, levees, etc. to ensure these management units function properly. During FY 2024-2025 several projects designed to improve wildlife habitat quality were either implemented, completed, or moved forward in the process to be implemented. LDWF worked with Ducks Unlimited to complete agreements and began discussing general design, timelines, etc. related to repairs of levee breaches in the West Impoundment and replacement of the East Impoundment water control structure on Marsh Island Refuge. Construction is expected to begin in mid FY 2025-2026 for both of these projects. Ducks Unlimited obtained NAWCA funding (FY 2023-2024) for replacement of the Southeast Unit water control structure on Marsh Island Refuge, with design likely to begin in FY 2025-2026. Ducks Unlimited also obtained NAWCA funding (FY 2023-2024) for replacement of

the Hog Bayou water control structure on State Wildlife Refuge, with design likely to begin in FY 2025-2026. The Mississippi River Delta Crevasses Phase II Project on Pass-a-Loutre WMA and Delta National Wildlife Refuge was completed in August 2024. Ducks Unlimited received NAWCA funding for this project and, with oversight provided by LDWF, performed all engineering, design and construction management. The Atchafalaya Delta Crevasse Phase III Project consisted of the construction of two new crevasses and the extension of two existing crevasses on Atchafalaya Delta WMA. This project was completed in September 2024 and was funded through Ducks Unlimited.

Coastal Lafayette staff continued to identify needs and search for funding opportunities to address habitat related work (including coastal restoration) on these WMAs/refuges. Staff worked with federal, state and local government agencies (e.g., NRCS, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, USACE, USFWS, CPRA Terrebonne Levee and Conservation District, Lafourche Parish Government), non-governmental organizations (e.g., Ducks Unlimited, Restore the Earth), universities and private landowners for assistance with possible projects, partnerships, and funding opportunities to address habitat issues. Staff routinely worked closely with the USACE for maintenance dredging of the lower Mississippi and Atchafalaya rivers and associated beneficial use of dredge material. Staff continued to work with Restore the Earth on ongoing efforts to restore cypress swamp on Salvador and Timken WMAs. Restore the Earth contractors planted nearly 2.5 million cypress tree seedlings totaling 12,500 acres on these WMAs during FY 2023-2024. Although feral hogs damaged many of the cypress trees in areas, overall,

the project was a success. Restore the Earth continued their efforts in cypress restoration on Salvador and Timken WMAs. Their contractors planted approximately 400,000 cypress saplings on 2,400 acres during FY 2024-2025. CPRA contracted with Royal Engineering and Consultants, LLC. (Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act funding) to provide engineering and design services for the Marsh Island Wildlife Refuge Restoration Project (TV-104 / Marsh Island Barrier Marsh Creation). LDWF staff worked with Royal Engineering on preliminary assessments, issues, possible features and designs, etc. during FY 2024-2025. CPRA received \$1 million of state surplus funding last fiscal year to engineer and design the State Wildlife Refuge Marsh Creation and Shoreline Protection Project (TV-100). CPRA conducted geotechnical surveys and began engineering and designing features during FY 2024-2025. Completion of project engineering and design is expected in FY 2025-2026. LDWF and CPRA continue to search for funding for project construction. LDWF staff continued to work closely with NOAA and other agencies on the Raccoon Island Restoration Project (TE-163). This project will restore a large portion of Raccoon Island, which is part of LDWF's Isle Dernieres Barrier Islands Refuge. Staff routinely provided input and comments on the Morganza to the Gulf Project as it related to water control structures, levees and management unit capabilities on Pointe-aux-Chenes WMA. LDWF worked with and provided input to CPRA on the (Mississippi River) Delta Wide Crevasses (MR-09) and Birdsfoot Hydrologic Restoration (MR-173) projects, as these projects will impact Pass-a-Loutre WMA.

Consumptive Activities & Invasive Species Control

Waterfowl are the most popular animal hunted on the Coastal Lafayette WMAs. Coastal Lafayette staff manage wetlands on WMAs/refuges to provide optimum wintering waterfowl habitat conditions. The 2024-2025 waterfowl season was from Nov. 9, 2024- Jan. 31, 2025 (closed Dec. 9-20 and Jan. 6-17) on coastal WMAs. Self-Clearing permits submitted by hunters indicated that 5,419 hunters hunted on the coastal WMAs harvesting 14,053 waterfowl for a success of 2.59 birds per hunter effort. The 2024-2025 teal season was from Sept. 14-29, 2024. Self-Clearing permits submitted by hunters indicated that 667 teal hunters hunted on the Coastal Lafayette WMAs this year during the September teal season. These hunters harvested an estimated 1,080 teal for a success of 1.62 teal per hunter effort.



Lafayette Coastal Log Island Pass Crevasse

Deer are the second most popular game animal hunted on Coastal Lafayette WMAs. Self-clearing permits revealed that 1,266 deer hunter efforts yielded 108 deer harvested during the 2024-2025 hunting season on Coastal Lafayette WMAs. This equates to a success of one deer for every 11.72 efforts. The majority of the deer hunter user days and deer harvested on coastal WMAs were on Atchafalaya Delta WMA.

Approximately 70 acres of dove fields were maintained on Pointe-aux-Chenes WMA and many acres of wildlife openings maintained on all WMAs.

Personnel regulated and monitored alligator and furbearer harvest activities on the Coastal Lafayette WMAs/refuges. A total of 1,636 alligator tags were issued on the Coastal Lafayette WMAs/refuges for the 2024 alligator season; 306 tags to lottery alligator hunters and 1,330 tags to contracted alligator hunters. The vast majority of the alligator tags were filled and 10,027 nutria were harvested (Coastwide Nutria Control Program) on these WMAs/refuges for FY 2024-2025.

Feral hogs were identified on Marsh Island Refuge for the first time in FY 2023-2024. Monitoring and trapping efforts in this same time period resulted in the removal of 105 hogs from the refuge. The USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services program removed 306 hogs from Salvador and Timken WMAs (FY 2023-2024) in an effort to reduce further damages to trees and wetlands. Efforts continued to remove feral hogs at Marsh Island Refuge since their discovery the previous year. Staff removed 22 additional hogs during FY 2024-2025, and continue to monitor for their presence. USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services flew multiple Coastal areas in ongoing efforts to reduce hog numbers and subsequent damages. They were able to remove 209 hogs at Pass-a-Loutre WMA, 316 at State Wildlife Refuge, and 13 at Salvador/Timken WMAs in FY 2024-2025.

Research & Species Management

Coastal Lafayette personnel assisted with project field trips and inspections, data collection and research as needed. Staff continued to assist LSU AgCenter researchers collect data on the Roseau cane scale on Pass-a-Loutre WMA. Assistance provided included vessel support and lodging to aid researchers in data collection throughout the WMA.

Coastal Lafayette staff continue to conduct species management related activities as well as provide assistance as needed to species management programs including assistance with research projects, habitat assessments and updates, surveys, harvest data collection, species updates, waterfowl banding efforts (mottled ducks, black-bellied whistling ducks and gallinules), etc.

Mineral Management

Personnel also reviewed, commented on proposed oil and gas production activities and monitored ongoing oil and gas production activities, facilities and spills as well as and other easement related activities on all Coastal Lafayette WMAs/refuges.

Maintenance of Facilities & Equipment

Six major hurricanes have caused significant damages to equipment and infrastructure in this region since FY 2019-2020. Most recently, Hurricane Francine made landfall in September 2024 and caused substantial damages to water control structures and levees on Pointe-aux-Chenes WMA. Coastal Lafayette Region staff continued to address all hurricane damages and develop appropriate paths forward.

Routine maintenance activities on the Coastal Lafayette region areas also included road maintenance, sign replacement, self-clearing permit kiosk maintenance, vegetation control, public use data collection, equipment maintenance, facility/building maintenance, etc.

LAKE CHARLES

Wildlife Management Areas (Total Acres - 305,397 acres)

- Clear Creek
- Fort Polk-Vernon
- Fort Polk North
- Marsh Bayou
- Sabine Island
- Walnut Hill
- West Bay

Habitat on these WMAs is mostly upland, with pine plantations and natural pine stands covering the majority of the acreage, but also includes areas of bottomland hardwoods, upland hardwoods, cypress-tupelo swamps, and mixed pine-hardwoods.



Longleaf planting on Marsh Bayou WMA



Wood duck box maintenance on Sabine Island WMA



LEFT: Turkey on West Bay WMA **RIGHT:** Marsh Bayou WMA outreach event



Fort Polk-Vernon WMA managed hunt

There were a total of 42,790 user days for Lake Charles Region WMAs during FY 2024-2025. In addition to hunting and fishing opportunities, the areas provide many types of non-consumptive outdoor activities including camping, hiking, bird watching, boating, and more. These WMAs are generally easy to access, making them very popular with the public.

Deer hunting continues to be the most popular activity on the region's WMAs, with 23,379 deer hunting efforts and 1,706 deer harvested during the 2024-2025 season. Either-sex managed deer hunts conducted on Clear Creek, Fort Polk-Vernon, Fort Polk North, and West Bay WMAs allow biologists to collect biological data and samples, which provide information on herd health and hunter success rates. These managed deer hunts resulted in 5,376 hunter efforts and 591 deer harvested on region WMAs.

Lake Charles Region WMAs also provide special opportunities for youth and physically challenged deer hunters. Clear Creek WMA's youth only weekend had 124 participants harvesting eight deer. West Bay WMA's youth/physically challenged hunt resulted in 174 efforts with 32 deer harvested. Additionally, 10 specialized hunting stands are available by reservation to wheelchair-bound hunters in the region, including four each at Clear Creek and Fort Polk-Vernon, and two at West Bay.

Other special hunting opportunities on Lake Charles Region WMAs include youth-only lottery turkey hunts held on Clear Creek, Fort Polk-Vernon/Fort Polk North, and West Bay WMAs, with 63 participants harvesting two gobblers. The Fort Polk-Vernon/Fort Polk North youth lottery turkey hunt paired youth participants with experienced volunteer guides, providing a unique experience and quality hunt for young hunters who might not otherwise have the opportunity to hunt turkeys.

Most of the region's WMAs were leased to LDWF from private and government entities (Manulife Investment Management, Roy O. Martin, U.S. Army, USFS, Agvictus Capital Management, Calcasieu Parish School Board, Rayonier, and the State of Louisiana) for public use from the landowners. WMA landowners do not receive direct payments for the leases. Instead, the owners are compensated through a combination of tax exemptions, road and infrastructure maintenance, mowing, prescribed burning contracts, reduced theft and vandalism (due to regular presence of LDWF staff), as well as public goodwill. Each year, LDWF personnel meet with landowner representatives to negotiate annual agreements for leased acreages. The leases help the landowners with property

maintenance and wildlife management, and allow LDWF to make these properties available to the public for recreation.

Area infrastructure work conducted as part of the "In-Kind Service" agreements during FY 2024-2025 included 179 miles of WMA roadway grading and reconstruction, 286 miles of roads and trails bush hogged, 43 miles of boundary marked, and 4 miles of fire breaks installed. Region staff also planted 70 acres of agricultural forage to create wildlife habitat, food plots, and dove fields. Additionally, 32 acres of wildlife openings were maintained using chemical control or were manipulated by fallow disking and mowing to maintain native grasses and forbs in early successional stages. Several WMA agreements also require the removal of nuisance wildlife, with emphasis on feral hogs and beavers. This was accomplished through trapping operations and opportunistic shooting.

In April 2025, LDWF acquired a 426-acre tract of land in Allen Parish through a partnership with the Trust for Public Land, a national non-profit. The property contains several unique habitats including mature longleaf pine savanna and largely intact flatwood ponds, as well as acreage that may be suitable for future longleaf reforestation. LDWF was able to secure funding for the purchase, in part, from the Louisiana Outdoors Forever Fund, a program created by the Louisiana Legislature to provide support for outdoor conservation projects in the state. On July 8, 2025, the LDWF Commission adopted a resolution to incorporate the tract into the WMA system, establishing Flatwoods Savanna WMA.



Woodcock and chick on West Bay WMA



Woodcock banding

Lake Charles Region WMA personnel participated in a variety of Wildlife Division activities, including environmental assessments, technical assistance, research, planning, development, species management, and alligator and nuisance animal programs. WMA staff assisted with a joint (USFS, U.S. Army and LDWF) turkey project on Fort Polk WMAs and Kisatchie National Forest. A total of 88 turkeys were trapped, banded, and fitted with transmitters. The project will continue into the next fiscal year as part of an on-going research program. WMA staff also assisted with the maintenance and monitoring of 30 wood duck nest boxes on Sabine Island WMA.

Prescribed burning was conducted on Marsh Bayou WMA with a total of 36 acres burned and 12 miles of firebreaks maintained. This burning is part of an effort to reduce competition in a longleaf pine planting, and has improved habitat for a variety of wildlife species including songbirds, turkey, deer, reptiles, amphibians and small mammals. The planting area is also the subject of ongoing research in partnership with the US Forest Service and Southern University to assess understory plant diversity and pollinator diversity and abundance in response to prescribed burning and herbicide treatments targeting Chinese tallowtree invasion.

Personnel also reviewed and monitored oil and gas production activities and interstate pipeline installations on several Lake Charles WMAs.

Private Lands Program

During FY 2024-2025, Lake Charles Region biologists conducted 37 individual land site visits on private lands, and provided technical assistance and recommendations for 22,521 acres. They produced seven comprehensive habitat management plans, 62 written assists by mail and email, and provided technical information to an additional 106 callers and visitors to the Lake Charles field office. Biologists also assisted 185 callers with nuisance and injured wildlife complaints and responded in person to 30 incidents. Additionally, they fielded 260 requests for general information from the public. Lake Charles biologists also performed outreach to the public by conducting three interviews for the media and giving 13 presentations at various workshops and meetings.

Lake Charles biologists were responsible for delivery of the DMAP program in the region. They conducted seven browse surveys on DMAP lands and provided habitat recommendations, data analysis, and harvest recommendations to 35 clubs on 84,720 acres. Biologists

also collected 65 samples for chronic wasting disease testing as well as multiple other samples submitted for disease testing.

Region biologists participated in banding operations for multiple species, capturing and collecting biological data from 155 wood ducks, 1,003 black-bellied whistling ducks, 12 mottled ducks, 58 doves, and 63 woodcock. They conducted six quail survey routes through private lands region WMAs, and Kisatchie National Forest. Region biologists also conducted four alligator surveys, with two each on Anacoco Lake and Lake Chicot.

Private lands biologists inspected 12 Wetland Reserve Easement properties and provided written assessment reports, and conducted monitoring activities on properties enrolled in the Coastal Grassland Restoration Initiative Program (C-GRIP). Biologists also leased 500 acres of private land and hosted a public dove hunt on the opening day of dove season, issued alligator licenses and tags, and conducted alligator hide inspections.

PINEVILLE

Wildlife Management Areas (Total Acres - 98,128 acres)

- Alexander State Forest
- Camp Beauregard (formerly Esler Field WMA)
- Dewey W. Wills
- Elbow Slough
- Little River
- Sabine

The Pineville region is arguably the most ecologically diverse region in the state. If you were to visit all six of the WMAs, you could experience cypress swamps and sloughs, riparian habitat, mature hardwood bottomlands, mixed hardwood and pine uplands, natural and commercial pine timberland, as well as managed and mature longleaf pine habitat. In the Pineville region, a WMA user could hunt alligators and pick mayhaws in our swamps and bottomlands and, later in the season, hunt woodcocks or observe the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker in mature longleaf pine habitat. These WMAs are readily accessible and very popular with the public, documenting 34,614 user days. Along with public hunting and fishing opportunities, these areas are also utilized for many types of non-consumptive outdoor opportunities such as scouting, boating, camping, hiking, birding and nature photography.

In FY 2024-2025, the most popular activities performed within Pineville region's WMAs in descending order were deer hunting, scouting, fishing, waterfowl hunting, and squirrel hunting. White-tailed deer hunting was the most popular activity, documenting 7,450 user days and 480 harvested deer. Scouting was the second most popular activity documenting 7,276 user days. Freshwater fishing (recreational) accounted for 5,775 user days. Waterfowl contributed with 4,307 user days and 6,050 ducks harvested. Lastly, squirrels contributed with 2,480 user days and 3,723 squirrels harvested.

The most popular non-consumptive activity was sightseeing with 1,670 user days. The next two popular activities were boating 927 user days and camping 595 user days. WMA staff has been working with the newly formed non-consumptive program to develop plans to highlight and promote opportunities for non-consumptive activities such as bird watching and canoeing/kayaking on the WMAs within the region.

There are a regulated number of days when WMA users can utilize a primitive or modern firearm for deer hunting. During these dates, 4,565 hunters utilized Pineville region's WMAs and harvested 370 deer. Three of the WMAs (Alexander State Forest, Camp Beau-regard and Dewey W. Wills) require mandatory deer checks of harvested animals. During these mandatory deer check dates, Pineville regional biologists collected data such as sex, lactation rate, body weight, antler measurements and also extracted chronic wasting disease samples. Any diseased or abnormal physiological characteristics observed during these checks are evaluated and, when necessary, are submitted to Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study for testing and diagnosis. All of this information is utilized to track and evaluate deer herd health, population structure, and breeding success.

Alexander State Forest WMA offers very specific hunting opportunities for youth lottery winners as well as wheelchair-bound, visually impaired, and upper body amputee hunters. These hunters are able to hunt multiple weekends for deer from modified ground blind adjacent to food plots. These blinds are all located within restricted use areas increasing the odds of seeing or harvesting deer.

Four weekend lottery youth deer hunts occur on Dewey Wills WMA. This hunt is very popular and many youth enjoy the opportunity to

harvest their first deer. LDWF staff provide overnight bunking, permanent deer stands overlooking food plots, game retrieval, and assistance with deer processing.

Another unique opportunity for the youth at Dewey Wills WMA is the chance to be guided on a rabbit hunt with dogs. This hunt is always highly enjoyed by the participants and the staff really appreciate the volunteer dog handlers/guides that make it possible.

While a few of the WMAs in the Pineville region are owned by LDWF, some of the WMAs are leased to LDWF for public use from private landowners (Manulife Investment Management, Martin Timberlands, Red Oak Timber Company, Weyerhaeuser, Louisiana National Guard, Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, USACE, and LaSalle Parish School Board). Landowners do not receive direct payments for the leases. Instead the owners are compensated through a combination of tax exemptions, road maintenance, mowing, prescribed burning contracts, reduced theft and vandalism (due to regular presence of LDWF staff), as well as public goodwill. To continue these lease areas, LDWF personnel are required to negotiate and meet annual agreements with the landowners. The leases help the landowners and LDWF to properly manage and maintain these properties for wildlife and public recreation.

LDWF staff burned approximately 125 forested acres on the Sabine WMA, 155 acres on Little River WMA, and 1,500 acres on Camp Beau-regard WMA. These burning prescriptions are steadily improving this upland habitat for a variety of wildlife species such as songbirds, turkey, deer, quail, and small mammals. The burns are helping to control high density sweetgums and yaupons that are dominating the understory and reducing plant diversity. Presently, after many planned fire rotations, we are seeing an increase in native bunchgrasses, wildflower and forb abundance, and wildlife usage.

Biological and habitat management work done on the WMAs include dove trapping and banding, wood duck box monitoring and maintenance, wood duck trapping and banding, mowing of road sides and timber openings, timber health checks, prescribed burning, green tree impoundment flooding, moist soil unit manipulation and flooding, feral hog trapping and removal, wildlife disease sampling, food plot planting, timber stand improvement, and invasive species control.



Pineville wood duck box trapping



Pineville wood duck box monitoring



Little River WMA prescribed burning



Pineville dove field prescribed burning

Private Lands Program

Wildlife biologists in the Pineville Region diligently collected 338 samples from white-tailed deer to be tested for chronic wasting disease. Chronic wasting disease was detected from one sample that was collected from a deer in northern Catahoula Parish. Due to the detection, the Chronic Wasting Disease Control Zone has been expanded in order to help control the spread of chronic wasting disease and additional surveillance is being conducted within the Pineville Region. In addition to these samples, numerous other samples from wildlife species were submitted because of unusual behaviors or poor body condition. All diagnoses were reported to Dr. Rusty Berry, assistant state veterinarian, for evaluation. This is yet another way our agency is on the front lines when it comes to wildlife and human health disease concerns and interactions.

Pineville regional biologists participated in a wide variety of other Wildlife Division activities. These include habitat assessments, pub-

lic presentations, technical assistance, species research, Wetland Reserve Easement monitoring, species banding and monitoring, and habitat management. LDWF personnel were also actively involved in disease monitoring, managed and lottery deer hunts, waterfowl bag checks, black bear population research, nuisance animal response, and alligator licenses and tag allotment.

Within the Pineville region, private lands biologists provided general and technical assistance to 903 citizens owning 97,980 acres. Providing requested habitat management guidance on such a large amount of acreage has a significant impact on our region's natural resources and ecosystems. Regional biologists work with many animal species - deer, bear, turkey, waterfowl, woodcock, songbirds, etc. Pineville biologist monitored 538 wood duck boxes and banded 462 wood ducks. They also captured and banded 526 doves across central Louisiana.

MONROE

Wildlife Management Areas (Total Acres - 138,558 acres)

- Bayou Macon
- Ben Lilly
- Big Colewa Bayou
- Big Lake
- Boeuf
- Buckhorn
- Bussey Brake
- Floy Ward McElroy
- Russell Sage
- J.C. Sonny Gilbert

The primary habitat type found on Monroe Region WMAs is the Mississippi River Alluvial Valley bottomland hardwood forest, with the exception of J.C. Sonny Gilbert, which provides a unique mixed pine upland hardwoods habitat on the fringe of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley. Several of the WMAs feature reclaimed agricultural lands, which have been reforested with bottomland hardwood forest species. Moist soil management units and green-tree reservoirs are managed to provide habitat for waterfowl and other wetland birds.

Monroe WMA biologists and technicians conducted a wide range of activities including research and surveys involving species, mourning doves, wood ducks, wild turkey, shorebirds and white-tailed deer. These included collecting harvest records of white-tailed deer through managed WMA bag checks, disease investigation such as chronic wasting disease and avian influenza testing, as well as habitat evaluations through vegetation surveys and timber cruising. Biologists and area personnel assisted the large carnivore program with bear management activi-



LEFT: Russell Sage WMA forestry mulcher **RIGHT:** Monroe deer capture study



Monroe Private Lands bear den visit



Monroe dove banding

ties, including trapping/collaring, den visits, and handled numerous nuisance complaints. Additional effort was expended conducting public meetings, interacting with various constituents to collect concerns and interests about our management activities.

Biologists and technicians maintained and monitored 54 wood duck boxes, conduct pre-season wood duck banding, and collect samples for avian influenza and other disease testing. Biologists participated in LDWF's woodcock/ turkey monitoring efforts where they were able to capture, band, and attach GPS backpack units to monitor birds. They also assisted with numerous nuisance animal complaints, illegal captive deer and sick deer complaints.

White-tailed deer is the most popular game animal hunted on the Monroe WMAs; 15,505 deer hunter user-days were recorded harvesting 1,306 total deer in the Monroe Region. Wild turkey hunts were held on four WMAs, where 551 hunter user-days harvested 27 turkeys. Squirrel and rabbit hunting is also very popular on the ecoregion's bottomland hardwood WMAs, accounting for over 4,291 user days. Waterfowl hunting is very popular as well on Monroe WMAs in moist soil impoundments, green-tree reservoirs, swamps and flooded bottoms. Waterfowl user days were above average, a total of 6,403 hunters harvested 10,709 total waterfowl.

Alligator harvest applications were accepted, and licenses and tags were issued to 205 WMA lottery hunters & helpers who received 615 tags. This lottery hunt is done through an application process, with each hunter selected receiving three tags. This gives the public an opportunity to participate in the alligator harvest program.

Routine maintenance activities on Monroe region areas included road grading, culvert replacement, road and trail repairs, drainage improvements, nuisance animal control, boundary maintenance, sign replacement, self-clearing station maintenance, vegetation control, equipment maintenance, and facility upkeep. Repairs on all WMA roads and trails were made as funding allocations allowed.

Private Lands Program

During FY 2024-2025, Private Lands Program biologists conducted 77 site visits and they fielded 1,093 requests for information from the public.

Private Lands Program biologists are also responsible for carrying out activities such as migratory and resident bird surveys and banding, collection of biological data for research, habitat evaluations, disease investigations including over 1,079 chronic wasting disease samples throughout the region, nuisance animal response, and administration of the alligator program to 115 license holders, delivery of deer management assistance to 195 DMAP cooperators, biologists and area personnel assisted the large carnivore program with bear management activities, including trapping/collaring of 16 bears, 12 den visits, responding to 49 nuisance complaints, as well as over 7 black bear education and outreach contacts. Biologists banded 791 wood ducks, 113 mourning doves and 118 black-bellied whistling ducks. Regional private land biologists are able to use outreach workshops and media outlets to spread information on wildlife and its habitat to the public.

MINDEN

Wildlife Management Areas (Total Acres - 49,071 acres)

- Bayou Pierre
- Bodcau
- John Franks
- Loggy Bayou
- Soda Lake

Minden Office personnel are responsible for administering all wildlife division activities in northwest Louisiana. The following parishes are covered: Bossier, Bienville, Caddo, Claiborne, DeSoto, Jackson, Lincoln, Red River and Webster. Historically, the area's predominant habitat type was shortleaf pine-hickory with large areas of bottomland hardwoods along major drainages. Over the last 80 years, there have been major changes in land use in upland areas. Shortleaf pine-hickory habitat has been almost completely replaced by commercial loblolly pine stands with some areas retaining hardwood components in streamside zones. Improved pastures have replaced scattered areas of cropland. As a result, there is currently much less habitat diversity in the current landscape. Acreages that were once longleaf pine have experienced a similar conversion to commercial pine stands. Large tracts of bottomland hardwoods originally found throughout the Red River drainage are non-existent, having been converted to agricultural use over the last 200 years. Scattered remnant stands of hardwood are still found in small acreages mostly in very low-lying terrain. The Red River provides primary drainage for the area with the Sabine River draining the western most portion of the region. Numerous bayous and lakes are located throughout northwest Louisiana, which provide additional habitat to a variety of wildlife species. Biologists and technicians assigned to the Minden office are assigned to either the WMA or Private Lands sections. However, they all work on a regular basis in cooperation on projects within both sections.

Habitat on the WMAs includes bottomland hardwoods, upland hardwood bottoms, pine plantations, natural pine stands, and mixed pine-hardwoods.

A total of 31,415 user days were estimated for Minden WMAs during FY 2024-2025. These areas are readily accessible and very popular with the public. Along with public hunting and fishing opportunities, these areas provide many types of non-consumptive outdoor activities. Managed deer hunts conducted on Bodcau and Loggy Bayou WMAs collected ac-



Soda Lake WMA Egan Lake impoundment



Bayou Pierre WMA woody removal



Bodcau WMA NAWCA duck dam



John Franks WMA impoundment

curate information on herd health and hunter success rates. Collectively, managed deer hunts on Minden WMAs resulted in 506 hunter efforts accounting for 127 deer harvested.

Most of the Minden WMA acreage is owned by other governmental agencies. LDWF is the sole owner of Bayou Pierre WMA and owns 66% of Loggy Bayou WMA. USACE, Red River Waterway Commission and Caddo Parish Levee Board all provide acreage to the Minden WMA program. At present, landowners do not receive direct payments for the leases, but instead are compensated through a combination of road maintenance, mowing, prescribed burning projects, reduced theft and vandalism (due to regular presence of LDWF staff), as well as public goodwill. To continue these lease areas, LDWF personnel are required to meet with and negotiate lease agreements with the landowners. The leases help the landowners and LDWF to properly manage and maintain these properties for wildlife and public recreation.

Prescribed burns conducted on Bodcau WMA improved upland habitat for a variety of wildlife species including songbirds, turkey, deer, reptiles, amphibians and small mammals. Routine trapping and banding of wood ducks and woodcock were conducted on WMAs. Dove fields were planted and maintained on Bodcau and John Franks WMAs. All Minden WMAs have at least one waterfowl impoundment with a total of 10 actively managed. Management activities include regulation of water levels, control of nuisance vegetation, mowing and disking to promote desirable vegetation, maintaining nest boxes, and monitoring of waterfowl activity.

Feral hog control operations continued by shooting and trapping on all WMAs, and contract aerial shooting on Bayou Pierre WMA. Trapping activities resulted in the removal of 360 hogs. An additional 95 feral hogs were killed on/or on property immediately adjacent to Bayou Pierre WMA by the USDA- Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service aerial shooting. Nuisance animal control activities also included the removal of beavers and coyotes.

Minden WMA personnel participated in a variety of Wildlife Division activities. These include environmental assessments, technical assistance, research, planning, development, management, and alligator and nuisance animal programs. Sixty-four wood duck nesting boxes were maintained and monitored by Minden WMA personnel.

Personnel also reviewed and monitored oil and gas production activities and pipeline maintenance activities on Minden WMAs.

Private Lands Program

The Private Lands Program assists landowners, land managers, hunting clubs and others who desire to improve habitat and/or manage wildlife on their property. Assistance can vary from answering simple questions to a comprehensive written management plan. Assistance is not only available for traditional game species such as deer, ducks and turkey, but includes all wildlife and their habitats.

Many landowners are already working with a natural resource professional, such as a consulting forester, or are enrolled in state or federal programs such as DMAP, Forest Stewardship, and/or NRCS programs such as the

Wetland Reserve Easements, Conservation Reserve Program or Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Minden Private Lands biologists cooperate with other natural resource professionals to achieve the landowner's objectives. Most importantly, landowners are encouraged to develop a cooperative relationship with LDWF Private Lands biologists and other natural resource professionals. Wildlife habitat is dynamic, and with the assistance of knowledgeable wildlife professionals, landowners can provide productive habitat for wildlife while meeting other goals they may have, such as income generation and optimizing recreational opportunity.

During FY 2024-2025, Minden Private Lands biologists conducted four site visits. They fielded 1,950 requests for information from the public. Under an agreement with NRCS, Private Lands biologists conducted six inspections of Wetland Reserve Easement properties to assess conditions and make recommendations for management. Minden biologists and technicians monitored and maintained 55 wood duck boxes on USFS property.

Minden Private Lands biologists are also responsible for carrying out activities such as migratory and resident bird surveys and banding, collection of biological data for research, habitat evaluations, disease investigations, nuisance animal response, as well as administration of the alligator program to 191 license holders, delivery of the DMAP program to 59 cooperators, and public outreach via workshops and media outlets.

FARM BILL/GRANTS PROGRAM

FARM BILL

The Farm Bill Program provides support for species management programs and the Private Lands Program within LDWF. A primary function of the program is to provide input on conservation and other programs contained within the Farm Bill at the national, state and local levels to enhance wildlife habitat. During FY 2024-2025, the program provided direct input on many conservation programs, such as the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Regional Conservation Partnership Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and Working Lands for Wildlife Program that were included in the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018. In addition, the program provided training for Private Lands Program staff and de-



LEFT: RCPP Landowner field day **RIGHT:** Recently burned longleaf seedlings

veloped recommendations on individual properties to facilitate enrollment into Farm Bill conservation programs. The Farm Bill Program continued implementation of agreements with the NRCS to provide technical assistance and restoration activities for the Wetland Reserve Program and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. This agreement provides funding to develop wildlife habitat management recommendations in response to Compatible Use Authorization requests on Wetland Reserve Program/Agricultural Conservation Easement Program easements in Louisiana, which currently total over 300,000 acres. The program also implemented habitat enhancements on several of those properties through our Wetland Reserve Easement Restoration Agreement. Over 50 projects are at some level of development to deliver timber stand improvements and enhancements to shallow water habitat for migratory birds. Additional accomplishments in FY 2024-2025 included continued implementation of a Regional Conservation Partnership Program Project in conjunction with NRCS, American Bird Conservancy and many other public and private conservation partners. The project is focused on managing open pine habitats in northwest Louisiana through timber stand improvement and implementation of prescribed fire. Upon completion, over \$7 million will be delivered to improve forest health and wildlife habitat in this landscape. Assistance was provided in planning for an expanded Regional Conservation Partnership Program project increasing from 8 to 20 parishes in LA and with over \$21 million to be implemented starting in FY 2025-2026. Program staff continue to work with Louisiana landowners to provide technical assistance and connect them with Farm Bill funding to implement habitat projects across the state. We continue to be active, along with partners from across the country, in providing information to policy makers to ensure Louisiana's interest are represented in the next Farm Bill, likely to be produced in 2026.

GRANTS

During FY 2024-2025, work was completed implementing a grant project aimed at developing markets for fiber produced from restored bottomland hardwood stands on Wetland Reserve Easements. These forest thinning projects were completed with funds from a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant, coordinated through the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation. Habitat enhancements were achieved on 100 acres through public/private partnerships facilitated by LDWF staff. We continued to work with the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation to deliver funding to update and revise the document that guides how bottomland hardwood forests are managed in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley. This effort will facilitate training private landowners, as well as professionals, to actively manage these forests while providing desired habitat conditions for multiple species of at risk wildlife. This document will be complete and go to print in FY 2025-2026. The Louisiana Outdoors Forever (LOF) program funded 4,856 acres of prescribed burning in FY 2024-2025, with another 1,500+ acres contracted for FY 2025-2026. This program is operated through a part-

nership between the AR-LA Conservation Delivery Network and the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation (LWFF). This multi-year project aims to enhance properties through prescribed fire within an eight-parish focal area in north central Louisiana. These prescribed burns are implemented on highest ranking private lands to restore open-pine forests, to benefit priority wildlife, and to reduce wildfire risk.



Pitcher plants in a longleaf flatwood



Wetland Reserve Program easement restoration

ROCKEFELLER WILDLIFE REFUGE

Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge (RWR), located in coastal Cameron and Vermilion parishes, was created in 1920 through a land donation developed by E.A. McIlhenny. He later persuaded the Rockefeller Foundation to deed the land to the State of Louisiana. Along with serving as a refuge for wildlife and fisheries species, RWR is also considered an "outdoor laboratory," with the property serving as a site for marsh-related research pursued by RWR staff, collaborators as well as governmental and academic researchers. RWR staff also provides professional expertise regarding the sustainable use of alligators, management of coastal wetlands, and other important wildlife and fisheries resources. Further, management expertise, technical assistance and guidance is provided by RWR staff to local landowners for the wise use of their marshland. Lastly, RWR serves as a recreational outlet for the local populace, as well as a destination for regional tourists.

Based on the original deed of donation, the primary goal of RWR is to provide a refuge and preserve for all wildlife and fisheries species. Therefore, management activities are used to promote appropriate habitat and conditions for waterfowl species (the original intent of E.A. McIlhenny for the property), establish/maintain historic flora and fauna of RWR, and maintain the hydrology of the Mermentau River Basin. In many cases, refuge management activities positively benefit other marsh inhabitants including shorebirds, wading birds, alligators, furbearers and estuarine organisms (i.e., fish, shrimp and crabs).

Another main goal is the study of wildlife, fisheries and wetlands in order to address pertinent ecological research questions and to disseminate findings to local, state, national and international audiences. Since 1955, RWR staff has published 350+ peer-reviewed manuscripts, while also preparing technical reports and contributed papers to professional conferences. Secondary goals include providing technical assistance and public outreach and providing a popular destination for recreational activity, primarily through the use of abundant fisheries resources (i.e., fishing, shrimping, crabbing) and the diversity of watchable wildlife (i.e., birdwatching); it should be noted that these two activities never supersede the main goals of RWR.

CONSTRUCTION & HURRICANE REPAIRS

Hurricanes Rita, Ike, and Laura caused a tremendous amount of damage to Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge. RWR personnel and administrators continue to work with Louisiana Facility Planning and Control (FP&C) on various hurricane recovery projects exceeding \$250,000.

The Phase III Levee Repair project from Hurricane Rita (2005) consists of approximately 21 miles of levee to be rebuilt to an elevation of 9.5 feet. FP&C originally awarded the project at a cost of \$3,179,999 in 2015; however, project construction was unexpectedly interrupted due to a contract dispute. The FEMA claim has been extended while the project awaits a resolution. The remaining portions of incomplete work will be rebid, and a new contract should be awarded in the coming fiscal year.

RWR's maintenance and construction staff continue to maintain the levees that protect and provide for management of critical wildlife and fisheries habitat. The refuge's levee system extends more than 200 miles, and regular upkeep is essential to maintaining its integrity. Ongoing erosion-control work includes adding additional riprap to the base of levees damaged by wave action near the Gulf of America. These improvements will help lower long-term maintenance costs for these levee sections.

The partnership with Ducks Unlimited and the Louisiana Waterfowl Working Group donated \$356,621.46 for the purchase of a hydraulic pump and materials that RWR installed to manage water levels in Unit 3. Unit 3 is approximately 3,800 acres of brackish to intermediate coastal marsh managed for migratory waterfowl. The pump installation was completed in May of 2025. Ducks Unlimited has also raised over \$1 million to construct terraces in Price Lake to help protect the levee infrastructure. Construction for that project is expected to begin FY 2025-2026.

More than 85 miles of levees within RWR were impacted by storm surge from Hurricane Laura. Approximately 27 of those miles protect the Mermentau River Basin from saltwater intrusion, making this section vital for maintaining native flora and fauna. The protection levee was reconstructed in 2018 to a finished elevation of 9.5 feet above sea level following damages from Hurricane Rita. However, Hurricane Laura caused severe erosion in several locations along this critical reach, reducing portions of the levee back to marsh level. RWR has provided \$500,000 to Facility Planning and Control (FP&C) to initiate necessary repairs. Surveys have been completed, and FP&C is awaiting approval from ORM to proceed with project bidding in FY 2025-2026. All project costs are expected to be reimbursed by FEMA at a rate of 90%.



Unit 3 pump installation



New Rockefeller office

Following Hurricane Audrey (1957), RWR constructed the onsite offices, which were completed in 1959. In FY 2018-2019 a contract was awarded by Facility Planning and Control to Angelle Architects to design a new office complex, replacing the damaged structure. The current design plans are to construct the new office just west of the existing office. Contractors broke ground on the new office beginning construction in FY 2021-2022 and construction continued throughout FY 2024-2025. Refuge staff have continued to work out of the Research Laboratory until the new office is complete.

Hurricane Laura impacted and damaged 43 water control structures throughout RWR. FP&C selected two engineering firms in FY 2023-2024 to begin design and oversee repairs. Fenstermaker was selected for the eastern portion of water control structures and GIS Engineering was selected for the western portion of water control structures. Additional damage assessments were conducted by both firms and modifications to the original plans have been submitted to FEMA for necessary approvals.

FP&C awarded the West End Dorm backup generator project to Ernest P. Breaux Electrical, L.L.C. in August 2023. The project provides a backup power source to address frequent power outages, and it will power the facility during future storms and outages, where electricity may be lost for extended periods. The contract amount was \$527,000.00, and the project was completed in January 2025.

RWR staff and equipment also assisted the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area with levee maintenance, ditch maintenance, pump repair, and with the construction of the new guillotine gate in FY 2024-2025.

MERMENTAU BASIN INUNDATION RELIEF PROJECT

RWR is located within the Chenier Sub-basin of the Mermentau Basin, which encompasses over 700,000 acres and historically functioned as a floodplain during high rainfall events. LA Hwy 82, which was constructed in the 1950s, restricts drainage of local communities and marshes north of the highway to outlets located on RWR. That restriction can result in prolonged periods of inundation during high rainfalls and flooding events. A modified system including the East End Lock structure along with constructing additional structures will aid with the increase volume flow to the eight outlets at the Gulf of America.

The goals of this project are to reduce prolonged periods of inundation to relieve flooding stress and restore function, value, and sustainability to thousands of acres of marsh. The proposed project will also allow RWR to accommodate additional water flow during flooding events to relieve flooding of local communities. The project will create marsh and divert water into marsh areas that will benefit from the freshwater, nutrients and sediment.

The proposed project will construct four additional drain structures to increase water flow from the upper basin. The current lock system is more than 60 years old, in serious need of repair, and cannot adequately reduce flooding across much of the Mermentau Basin. In addition to new locks and outflow structures, improvements along Highway 82, - including cleaning drainage laterals and connecting flow-through outlets to main canals, - will enhance performance and help create or nourish 105 acres of marsh. Reduced marsh inundation is expected to increase productivity across approximately 35,000 acres.

The project was funded in FY 2020–2021 through the Louisiana Watershed Initiative using Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant funds provided in response to the Great Floods of 2016. In FY 2021–2022, an Environmental Review Record was completed and accepted in January 2024.

In FY 2023–2024, the Cameron Parish Police Jury awarded M&C Oilfield Services contracts for Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Mermentau Basin Inundation Relief Project. Phase 1 (East End Locks Rehabilitation) was awarded at \$10.2 million, and Phase 2 (adding three and replacing one water control structure within RWR) was awarded at \$9.4 million. A notice to proceed for both phases was issued in June 2024, and construction continued through FY 2024-2025.

MINERAL MANAGEMENT

Hilcorp Oil Company continues active oil production on the refuge. The program manager and staff continue to work with Hilcorp regarding maintenance and safe operations on RWR. Two tracts on RWR were submitted to the Louisiana Mineral Board for leasing. Bids were awarded to Magnetar Exploration for both tracts, and drilling plans are being developed for implementation in FY 2025-2026.

MARSH, WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

MARSH MANAGEMENT

RWR staff maintain more than 200 miles of levees and 55 water control structures that support the conservation of approximately

71,000 wetland acres within the refuge. This infrastructure also provides significant protection and benefits to roughly 100,000 acres of private lands in the Mermentau River Basin. While specific maintenance and operational strategies vary by management unit, overall goals include sustaining marsh health, promoting conditions favorable for waterfowl forage, and incorporating multi-species management whenever possible. The biological staff carry out the approved RWR management plan, which guides all research and management activities on the property.

Staff have also applied for wetland permits through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources' Coastal Management Division to support levee restoration and maintenance efforts. These ongoing activities have improved hydrologic restoration and unit management. In addition to water management work, staff routinely conduct vegetation control using herbicide applications by airboat and through contracted aerial treatments. In FY 2024-2025, approximately 508 acres of invasive and undesirable vegetation were treated by aerial application.

In February 2024, RWR received a Marsh Master amphibious machine from the Louisiana Wildlife Foundation. Funds donated to the foundation for the purchase of the machine were provided by Cameron LNG, Sempra LNG, and Cheniere Energy. RWR management staff used the Marsh Master in the spring and summer of 2025 to control unwanted vegetation within marsh units and moist soil units. Approximately 500 acres of unwanted vegetation was either mowed or buffaloeed using the machine in FY 2024-2025. Control of unwanted vegetation with this machine has directly increased waterfowl usage in targeted areas of RWR. Future management of these areas will allow more annual moist soil plant and submerged aquatic vegetation growth that will provide optimal forage for wintering and resident waterfowl.

Prescribed burns are conducted during specific times of the year reduce fuel loads in marshes, prevent catastrophic fires during periods of extreme summer dryness, and promote new stem growth for migratory waterfowl. Generally, one-third of the refuge is burned each year. During FY 2024-2025, staff conducted prescribed burns on approximately 7,298 acres.

Refuge staff continue to monitor feral hog population and property damage caused by the species. USDA/APHIS/Wildlife Services removed 51 hogs via helicopter from an area between Rollover canal and Superior canal. Future control efforts will be initiated by Rockefeller staff as population and problems arise.

MARSH CREATION AND HABITAT ENHANCEMENT WITH BENEFICIAL USE OF DREDGE MATERIAL

LDWF entered into an agreement with USACE and other regulatory agencies to construct the Rockefeller Mitigation Bank to offset wetland losses caused by adverse impacts in Louisiana's Coastal Zone. The main objective of the mitigation bank is to compensate for impacts occurring on RWR; however, the project may also provide compensation for impacts outside the refuge (provided there are no other approved mitigation projects available).

LDWF originally permitted three areas on RWR as potential wetland mitigation sites in the year 2000 (totaling 177.7 acres). Staff continues to monitor these sites annually, with very successful grass plantings observed at the 4.7- and 66-acre sites. Consequently, these marsh creation projects have attracted fisheries species, a diversity of birds, and even muskrats.

RWR received the final credit release for Site B. The total credits for each site consist of Site A = 2.7 acres, Site B = 92.4 acres, and Site C = 21.2 acres, totaling 116.3 acres. A total of 9.7 credits were sold in FY 2024-2025. In the past 10 years, 63 acres/credits have been sold. In FY 2024-2025 the credit value was increased from \$80,000 to \$100,000 per credit. There is a focus on new prospects to develop an additional site in the Deep Lake area on RWR.

SHORELINE PROTECTION AND STABILIZATION

The rate of erosion along RWR's 26 miles of gulf shoreline has steadily increased in recent decades with rates of approximately 30-50 feet per year. In an exceptional case, surveys conducted in 2016 indicated the shoreline along the Price Lake Unit eroded inland 233 feet in nine months. Time is very critical during the search for funding; staff work to secure funding to complete as much of this shoreline protection as possible.

In FY 2015-2016 RWR was awarded \$33 million from the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act to complete a shoreline protection project in the form of segmented breakwaters along a portion of RWR coastline. The project was designed and awarded to the lowest bidder, Leblanc Marine, in FY 2016-2017. Construction began in August 2018 with other future phases planned as funding becomes available.

Another funding source dedicated to shoreline protection along RWR is the CPRA RESTORE Local Match Program funds awarded to the Cameron Parish Police Jury in the amount of \$6,671,531. The Cameron Parish Police Jury also used \$2 million of Cameron Parish RESTORE funds, \$2,116,894.60 in Calcasieu Parish Restore funds, and LDC&E Beneficial Use of Dredged Material funds at \$2,300,000.00, totaling \$13,088,425.60. This portion of construction funds for ME-35 project was awarded to Rigid Constructors, LLC (Rigid). Construction began November 2023 and a total of 3,414 feet was constructed within the FY 2023-2024. Shipment and placement of remaining material was completed in FY 2024-2025. A total of 5.25 miles have been constructed thus far.



Shoreline protection

The Southwest Coastal Louisiana Storm Risk Management and Ecosystem Restoration Project begin design documents to extend the RWR Shoreline Protection Project in FY 2024-2025. Approximately \$31 million in funds are being appropriated for the project which aims to be under construction in FY 2025-2026.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Alligator Nuisance Harvest

A nuisance alligator harvest, usually in September, has been conducted annually on RWR since the year 2000. This harvest is carried out by approved alligator hunters with a prior trapping history on RWR, and the successful completion of an enforcement background check. In September 2024, four trappers were issued 250 alligator harvest tags each. Hunting areas were distributed throughout RWR with the intent of taking alligators from areas with high public use, thus reducing the chance of negative interactions between alligators and humans. The nuisance alligator harvest occurred Sept. 4, 2024 and ended Sept. 7, 2024. Hunters harvested 1,000 alligators of the 1,000 tags issued. The average size of alligators harvested was of 7.31 feet. Sex ratio data were available for all alligators, of which 70% were males and 30% were females. The average price per foot was \$13.33 with a total sale value of \$97,438.83. Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge's share at 40% was \$44,147.96.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

RWR continued an active approach with the operation of water control structures across the refuge to facilitate the ingress and egress of estuarine marine organisms without negatively impacting established habitats on RWR and adjacent lands.

In FY 2024-2025, RWR staff continued the stocking of Florida-strain largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*) in an ongoing effort to augment the species population within the refuge, improve recreational opportunities for the species, and restore stocks decimated by Hurricane Laura. In the spring of 2025, the rearing ponds at RWR were stocked with 205,200 fry. Staff seined the ponds after 55 and 61 days, resulting in approximately 105,751 fingerlings (50.78% survival rate). The Florida-strain largemouth bass fingerlings were released on RWR in June 2025. Normally a portion of the fingerlings are dispersed in other various locations within the state by the LDWF Inland Fisheries Division, but the additional fingerlings were not needed elsewhere this year. RWR hopes to continue the cooperative

effort to assist Inland Fisheries with their target stocking goals in future years.

WATERFOWL/ MIGRATORY GAME BIRD PROGRAM

In 1994, RWR began a long-term mottled duck (*Anas fulvigula*) banding program to monitor annual survival rates and analyze distribution along the Gulf Coast between Texas and Louisiana. Recent studies and mid-winter aerial survey data indicate the Gulf Coast mottled duck population is experiencing declines. Anthropogenic changes, including loss and degradation of coastal wetlands and adjacent prairies are likely responsible for historical recent declines in mottled duck populations. RWR supports research to help scientists and managers better understand mottled duck ecology and population dynamics. Since 1994, LDWF staff at RWR have banded 55,767 mottled ducks, primarily in the coastal marshes of southwestern Louisiana. The banding effort is now a cooperative endeavor among various state and federal agencies in Texas and Louisiana. In FY 2024-2025, RWR staff banded 1,509 mottled ducks.

In FY 2024-2025 RWR staff banded 2,601 black-bellied whistling ducks. This is a substantial increase from the previous year and is due to additional effort and resources directed towards this species.

Winter aerial waterfowl surveys are conducted annually over coastal WMAs and refuges in south Louisiana on a monthly basis from November through January. Transects are flown in each management unit and the unmanaged marsh area, and thereafter, extrapolated to yield an estimate of waterfowl abundance on the area. Survey methodology for the Coastal WMA/Refuge waterfowl survey was changed for the 2022-2023 season. All "cruise" style surveys were eliminated and new transects were established on RWR, State Wildlife Refuge, Marsh Island, White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area, Biloxi WMA, and Atchafalaya Delta WMA. The 2022 December survey was the first survey utilizing this new methodology. The waterfowl survey estimate on RWR during 2024-2025 totaled 11,537 in November 2024, 28,518 in December 2024, and 31,811 in January 2025.

WHOOPING CRANES

The maximum size of the Louisiana non-migratory population at the end of the report period was 77 individuals (37 males, 33 females, seven unknown) with 73 birds located in Louisiana, two in Texas, and two of unknown status. This total does not include two wild-hatched juveniles that fledged after the end of the report period. Based on location data generated via remote transmitters, we documented cranes in 24 parishes throughout Louisiana. Six cranes were documented in 14 counties in Texas and three counties in Mississippi during the report period. Except for one pair who moved into Texas in late May and remained past the end of the reporting period, most out-of-state visits were short, with cranes either flying through or spending only a few days in most locations.

One 25-year-old male whooping crane from the discontinued Florida non-migratory population was transferred to Louisiana in March 2025, making him the sixth crane to be relocated since 2019. He began consistently associating with a wild-hatched yearling female several months after his release. One additional translocated FL male, who had been discovered with a severe, but non-fatal, leg injury in February 2024, died during the report period. Additionally, a 27-year-old female went missing; she was removed from the population totals after the end of the report period. In addition to the newly transferred male, one female, transferred from the Florida population in 2019, also remains alive and paired in Louisiana.

Five costume reared juvenile whooping cranes (two males, three females) were received in early November 2024 from the Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center in New Orleans. They were transported to the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area in Vermilion Parish on Nov. 7, banded, and placed in the top-netted section of the release pen. Unfortunately, one male was found dead in the pen two days later from apparent trauma, likely due to hitting and/or becoming caught in the fencing. The remaining four were released on Nov. 15, and had left the area around the pen by the end of the month. Two females quickly joined and remained with an unbanded wild-hatched individual and the remaining male and female began using fields just to the north of the WLWCA marsh where the male died after he apparently hit a powerline while flying after sunset. Two females remain



LEFT: Pair of whooping cranes with chick and turtles **RIGHT:** Whooping crane capture in Vermilion Parish.

alive at the end of the reporting period and both are regularly associating with other cranes. The final female went missing in the spring and is presumed dead, but has not yet been removed from the population total.

During the 2025 breeding season, 21 pairs initiated 38 nests in seven different parishes in Louisiana, producing 14 wild-hatched chicks; seven pairs hatched one chick, one pair hatched two, one pair hatched two from two separate nesting attempts and one pair hatched three from two separate nesting efforts. All chicks hatched to their biological parents. Three chicks were confirmed fledged by the end of the report period and two others remained alive (and later fledged). Four pairs with chicks have successfully fledged chicks together in the past, and one pair consisted of individuals with no previous rearing experience.

Although some pairs continue to be successful at hatching and rearing chicks in the wild, embryo mortality remains high. We planned and initiated a third year of egg, eggshell, and embryo sample collection, as well as a small number of samples from breeding females specifically to examine potential bacterial causes of embryo death. However, federal budget and staffing cuts affected our collaborators at the USGS Alaska Science Center and sample analyses has temporarily been put on hold.

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES RESEARCH

RWR places high priority on wildlife, fisheries and marsh management research. Throughout the year, staff biologists conducted independent and collaborative research, while also presenting research findings at regional,

national, and international meetings. Several notes or manuscripts describing research results or observations were also accepted for publication in peer-reviewed journals.

Outside researchers made multiple research requests and all were approved to use RWR as a study site. Projects included:

- Monitoring nesting productivity of beach nesting birds (Audubon Louisiana).
- Evaluating the mottled duck nest predator community in southwestern Louisiana using artificial nests.
- Identifying night roosts of whimbrel throughout the flyway to be used as an index site for monitoring population trends (Manomet).
- Testing the capabilities of thermal drone imagery to identify whimbrel night roosts.
- Roseau cane habitat monitoring and health assessment based on drone sensors.

STAFF RESEARCH AT RWR

Nesting Ecology and Habitat Use of Reddish Egrets

The field component of this project was concluded in 2018, but telemetry data from active satellite transmitters on three adult reddish egrets were downloaded and archived in FY 2024-2025. The telemetry data collected can be used to document novel foraging sites and breeding locations in coastal Louisiana that were previously unknown. In addition, these data can be used to update Element Occurrence records for this Species of Greatest Conservation Need, which is maintained by the Louisiana Wildlife Diversity Program. Data from this study were also used to produce a research article documenting the effects of tropical cyclones and other severe weather events on reddish egret populations in the

Journal of Coastal Research. DOI: 10.2112/JCOASTRES-D-22-00119.1. Staff and collaborators continue to work on additional analyses of these data. Additionally, in spring 2025, RWR research biologists began a State Wildlife Grants project to study finer-scale reddish egret and brown pelican ecology.

Assessing Seasonal Survival, Habitat Use, and Movements of Brown Pelicans and Reddish Egrets on Barrier and Coastal Islands in Louisiana

In spring 2025, RWR research biologists began a multi-year State Wildlife Grants project to examine movement ecology, habitat use, and seasonal survival of brown pelicans and reddish egrets throughout their annual cycles. Researchers are deploying GPS/GSM transmitters on individuals of both species at key nesting colonies across coastal Louisiana to identify important foraging areas, document movement corridors, and evaluate habitat selection throughout the year. The project focuses on restored and unrestored barrier islands where colonial waterbirds regularly nest and roost, allowing biologists to assess how post-restoration habitat conditions influence nest-site selection and fidelity, improve understanding of how large-scale coastal restoration activities impact avian species, and guide future habitat management decisions. Initial work in FY 2024-2025 focused on logistics planning, field site assessments, capture efforts, and transmitter deployments, which will continue through 2027.



Banding pelicans

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH AT ROCKEFELLER WILDLIFE REFUGE

During FY 2024-2025, RWR biologists collaborated on a number of marsh management, wildlife and fisheries research projects on the refuge, across the region and state, and beyond. These projects include:

- **Monitoring beach-nesting birds in southwestern Louisiana.**
K. Barnes, R. Temple, and P. Vasseur
- **Seasonal Survival and Habitat Use of King Rail.**
R. Temple, P. Link, A. Fournier, K. Rowe, and B. Shirkey
- **Estimating Apparent Survival Probabilities of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks in Louisiana.**
P. Link, P. Garrettson, and J. Dooley
- **Interpreting Greater White-fronted Goose habitat use in a changing landscape.**
P. Link, B. Beatty, L. Webb, and B. Leach
- **Development of full annual cycle models for Greater White-fronted Geese for holistic conservation planning.**
P. Link, M. Weegman, B. Ballard, J. VonBank, T. Bidrowski, L. Naylor, and B. Leach
- **Survey of coronaviruses in free-ranging waterfowl and co-occurring wildlife in Louisiana.**
A. Vestal-Laborde, A. Long, and P. Link
- **Avian influenza in the Mississippi Flyway: providing a risk perspective.**
R. Poulson, D. Carter, D. Stallknecht, and P. Link

- **Non-breeding Habitat Selection of Blue-winged Teal throughout the Central and Mississippi Flyways.**

B. Leach, L. Webb, and P. Link

- **Investigating environmental factors influencing blue-winged teal movements, habitat selection, and survival during the non-breeding season.**

J. Edwards, L. Webb, B. Leach, and P. Link

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Swift, R., Link, P., Arnold, T., Carter, D., Poulson, R., Stallknecht, D., and Pearse, A. 2024. Sampling for disease surveillance: assessing effects on blue-winged teal survival and recovery. *Journal of Wildlife Management* e22708. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jwmg.22708>.

Stallknecht, D., Carter, D., Link, P., Ferraro, E., McCarty, C., Davis, B., Knutsen, L., Graham, J., Poulson, R. 2024. Highly pathogenic H5N1 influenza A virus (IAV) in blue-winged teal in the Mississippi flyway is following the historic seasonal pattern of low pathogenic IAV in ducks. *Pathogens* 13(11), 1017; DOI: 10.3390/pathogens13111017.

Masto, N., Blake-Bradshaw, A., Highway, C., Keever, A., Feddersen, J., Link, P., Hagy, H., Osborne, D., and Cohen, B. 2024. Mallard pre-breeding migration strategies necessitate individual time-energy trade-offs despite wintering origins or migratory destinations. *Ornithology* ukae044, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ornithology/ukae044>.

Blake-Bradshaw, A., Masto, N., Highway, C., Keever, A., Link, P., Feddersen, J., Hagy, H., Osborne, D. and Cohen, B. 2024. Caught out in the cold: Impact of an extreme climatic event on survival of a generalist waterfowl species. *Ornithological Applications* 126: 1–9. <http://doi.org/10.1093/ornithapp/duae025>.

Szyszkoski, E. K., S. E. Zimorski, and H. L. Thompson. 2025. Thirteen-year status of the Louisiana nonmigratory whooping crane reintroduction. *Proceedings of the North American Crane Workshop* 16:133-145.

VonBank, J., Link, P., Kraai, K., Collins, D., Weegman, M., Cao, L., and Ballard, B. Evidence of Longitudinal Differences in Spring Migration Strategies of an Arctic-nesting Goose. *Ecology and Evolution*. In Review.

Beatty, W., Link, P., Leach, B., Houdek, S., and Webb, E. Greater White-fronted Goose habitat use in Louisiana provides insights into a large-scale winter range shift. *Journal of Wildlife Management*. In review.

W. Harrington, A. Signore, L. Kercher, A. Kandeel, C. Ahlstrom, S. Bevins, T. Bollinger, E. Buck, D. Carter, B. Cohen, B. Crossley, T. Fabrizio, J. Feddersen, J. Franks, J. Giacinti, D. Goldsmith, C. Highway, C. Himsworth, L. Holmes, C. Jardine, M. Jawad, T. Jeevan, J. Leno, P. Link, L. Miller, N. Nemeth, J. Nolting, M. Owsiany, M. Pybus, D. Rejmanek, L. Scott, C. Sharp, L. Smith, D. Stallknecht, N. Steelman, B. Stevens, K. Woodard, Y. Berhane, M. Torchetti, A. Ramey, R. Poulson, R. Webby. The rapid expansion of genotype D1.1 A(H5N1) influenza viruses in wild birds across North America during the 2024 migratory season. *Nature Medicine*. In review.

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Link, P., Garrettson, P., and Dooley, J. Estimating Apparent Survival Probabilities of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks in Louisiana. In prep.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, OUTREACH & EDUCATION

Understanding the ecology of coastal marshes in southwestern Louisiana is essential to recognizing the vital role RWR plays within the Chenier Plain. RWR places strong emphasis on education and outreach, ensuring that educational programs are offered at the refuge and that the landscape itself serves as an outdoor classroom.

The Women's Fishing 102 Workshops were held at Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge during FY 2024–2025. Participants received advanced bank and boat fishing instruction, learned fish cleaning and boat trailering, and practiced harvesting and preparing crabs for consumption.

Professional groups specializing in marsh ecology also use RWR as an "outdoor laboratory" and frequently visit from other coastal regions of the United States. The refuge's overnight facilities allow these groups to spend extended time in the field without needing to commute to nearby municipalities for lodging. The West End Dorms can accommodate most groups with 17 beds, a full kitchen, dining space, and living quarters. With recent repairs completed, the facility is now fully operational and hosting college student workers, university classes, and other special-interest groups in FY 2024-2025. RWR staff also continue to collaborate with adjacent landowners and with state and federal agencies.

Examples of technical assistance provided by RWR staff include:

- Completing mourning dove banding for the statewide dove monitoring program.
- Assisting private landowners in assessing marsh conditions and management for waterfowl.
- Conducting peer-review and editorial duties for scientific journals; reviewing graduate student theses and dissertations.
- Presenting lectures to visiting college and university students on wetlands ecology, wetlands management, and waterfowl ecology and conservation research.
- Presented habitat management practices, coastal restoration projects, and flood relief projects at the annual meeting of the Master Naturalists Organization.
- Reviewing research and grant proposals for university students and faculty.
- Assist with CWPERRA and CPRA projects.

- Hosting a week-long waterfowl capture, banding, and data analyses workshop for 17 graduate and post-doc students.
- Assisting with Women's Fishing Workshop to introduce beginning anglers into equipment, tactics, and tips.

RWR staff also participated in guided tours for a number of organizations and groups relating to management and coastal restoration projects like the Louisiana Wildlife Foundation, Southwest Industry Alliance, local schools, La. Festival organizations, Ducks Unlimited and Delta Waterfowl.

RECREATIONAL USE

Marsh management units - and particularly their associated water control structures - continue to be popular destinations for sport fishermen. All portions of RWR were open to public access from March through November. From December through February, selected areas were seasonally closed to minimize disturbance to wintering migratory birds. In FY 2024-2025, RWR received approximately 106,097 visitors.

WHITE LAKE WETLANDS CONSERVATION AREA

LOCATION

The White Lake Property (as referred to in Act 613, 2004 Louisiana Legislature) or White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area (WLWCA) (as referred to by LDWF) is located in Vermilion Parish. The contiguous unit is 71,905 acres, located along the western boundary of Vermilion Parish; it is bounded on the south by White Lake, and the northern boundary is 7.4 miles south of Gueydan at the south end of Hwy. 91. Lafayette is approximately 32 miles northeast, and Lake Charles is approximately 40 miles northwest. The southern boundary of WLWCA is 17.5 miles north of the Gulf of America. The property averages approximately 12 miles from east to west and 9 miles from north to south.

HISTORY OF OWNERSHIP

BP America Production White Lake properties have a long history of company ownership and management. Note that Stanolind Oil and Gas Company (Stanolind) preceded Amoco Production Company (Amoco) which preceded BP America Production Company (BP). Stanolind acquired the 70,965-acre property from Wright Morrow by Act of Sale on July 31, 1935. This sale included all of the property acquired by Yount-Lee Oil Company from P. L. Lawrence, et. ux., by Act of Sale dated March 7, 1931, and a portion of the property acquired by M.F. Yount from Elizabeth M. Watkins by Act of Sale dated Nov. 5, 1929. BP owned and managed the BP American Production White Lake Property until July 8, 2002, when BP donated the property to the state of Louisiana. On July 8, 2002, a Cooperative Endeavor agreement between the state and White Lake Preservation Inc. (a 501(c) 3 corporation) for management of the property was executed. On Jan. 1, 2005, Act 613 of the 2004 Regular Legislative Session became effective. This act established:

- Transfer of property management from White Lake Preservation Inc. to LDWF;
- The White Lake Property Advisory Board;
- LDWF and the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission powers and duties relative to the management of the White Lake Property;
- A special account within the Conservation Fund for the White Lake Property.

On Dec. 17, 2004, the state, BP and White Lake Preservation Inc. signed a Transition Agreement for the management of the property by White Lake Preservation Inc. until July 1, 2005, at which time LDWF took total control.

A land swap agreement between LDWF and the Vermilion Parish School Board increased the overall acreage of WLWCA from 70,965 to 71,905 acres in 2014.

SURFACE LEASES

AGRICULTURAL AND HUNTING

There are currently 37,841 acres of property leased out in eight separate tracts. The property is leased to seven separate tenants for the purpose of farming, raising cattle, crawfish farming and hunting. There is a rice base of approximately 4,500 acres on this property. There were approximately 2,210 acres of rice planted in 2024. There were approximately 1,064 acres of crawfish ponds on the property in 2024. Approximately 2,260 acres were plowed in the spring of 2025 in compliance with the approved conservation practices, and approximately 1,370 acres were grazed.

There are over 100 miles of levees, canals and roads on WLWCA agricultural lands that are maintained by our agricultural tenants. They also own and operate the pumping systems that are needed to manage water levels on this impounded agricultural land. All of the farmland on WLWCA was at one time freshwater marsh that was impounded in the late 1940s when agricultural activities first began on the property.

ALLIGATOR TRAPPING AND EGG COLLECTION

There were 364 alligators harvested in the 2024 alligator trapping season. The average length of the alligators trapped was 6.92 feet, with an average live length value of \$8.20 per foot.

There was a contract negotiated for the collection of alligator eggs from the WLWCA property in 2023 for a three-year period. In 2024, WLWCA received a payment of \$15.50 per egg. A total of 5,299 eggs out of the 12,000 egg quota were collected. An administrative decision was made which allowed the contractor to pick up fewer eggs than required by contract.

OTHER SURFACE LEASES

There are three oil and gas valve site leases on the property. In addition, there is one oil & gas surface use agreement with an associated road servitude agreement.

LOTTERY ACTIVITIES

FISHING LOTTERY

2024 - One-hundred fishing permits were issued at a cost of \$40 per permit. Permittees and their guests were allowed to fish the Florence Canal Area and specified well location canals that flow into the Florence Canal. The area was open from sunrise to sunset from March 15- Aug. 15, 2023.

2025 - One-hundred fishing permits were issued at a cost of \$40 per permit. Permittees and their guests were allowed to fish the Florence Canal Area and specified well location canals that flow into the Florence Canal. The area was open from sunrise to sunset from March 15- Aug. 15, 2024.

WATERFOWL LOTTERY

Waterfowl Hunting (2024-2025 Season)		
	Total Hunts	Participants
Teal Lottery Hunts	9	82
Marsh Lottery Hunts	30	278
Youth Hunts	2	10
Rice Field Lottery Hunts	29	228

Waterfowl Hunting Results (2024-2025 season)		
	Marsh	Rice Field
Total Ducks Harvested	1,490	499
Average Kill/Hunter (ducks)	5.36	2.19
Total Geese Harvested	40	57
Average Kill/Hunter (geese)	0.14	0.25

NON-CONSUMPTIVE ACTIVITIES

BIRDING TRAIL

The WLWCA birding and nature trail, with accompanying kiosk, was completed in April 2012. The trail is on approximately 30 acres located on the northern boundary of the property where LA-91 ends. Birding paths, a parking area, access bridges, a birding tower and a picnic pavilion are open to the public.

EDUCATION, OUTREACH AND RESEARCH

MARSH MANEUVERS

On Dec. 13, 2024, WLWCA hosted a group of 16 teenage 4-H students for a Marsh Maneuvers camp. The camp was designed to educate the students on the importance of coastal erosion, restoration, conservation and ecology. They were able to attend a morning marsh tour, and students were taught waterfowl identification techniques. They also participated in a sporting clay shoot where they were instructed on gun safety and the proper use of a shotgun.

COASTAL PRAIRIE

There is approximately 200 acres of coastal prairie on the WLWCA property located south of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway and west of the Florence Canal. For the past couple of years, the LDWF Wildlife Diversity Program has been conducting research on various plant species located on this prairie. To date, approximately 95 different native prairie species have been identified. WLWCA staff conduct routine prescribed burns to reduce woody encroachment.

WHOOPING CRANE REINTRODUCTION PROGRAM

WLWCA assisted the Whooping Crane Reintroduction Program by providing office space, staff and vessel support. WLWCA staff maintained the 700-acre impoundment water levels around the whooping crane pen and associated release site. WLWCA staff assisted with whooping crane captures and releases as needed.

DUCK & DOVE BANDING PROJECTS

WLWCA continued banding birds to complement various LDWF statewide programs. In FY 2024-2025, 254 wood ducks were banded and 25 were recorded as recaptures. Ten mottled ducks were banded, and 18 black-bellied whistling-ducks were banded with two being recorded as recaptures. Fourteen mourning doves were banded, and three were recorded as recaptures.

NESTING BOX PROJECTS

WLWCA continued maintaining and monitoring wood duck nesting boxes to complement the LDWF statewide program. In the 2024 nesting season, 100 nesting boxes were monitored and maintained. These boxes produced 969 wood duck eggs laid and 348 hatchlings. Black-bellied whistling-ducks used the same nesting boxes to produce 432 eggs laid and 64 hatchlings. Eastern screech owls also utilized the boxes with 18 successful nests recorded.

AVIAN NEST PREDATION TRAPPING

WLWCA staff continued predator trapping on agricultural leases to aid ground nesting species, such as mottled ducks, in nesting success. A combination of foothold and bodygrip traps were used to trap coyote, bobcat, otter, raccoon, and opossum.

MARSH MANAGEMENT RESTORATION, HABITAT ENHANCEMENT, AGRICULTURAL MANAGEMENT, AND MINERAL MANAGEMENT

MARSH MANAGEMENT

The WLWCA property consists of approximately 52,000 acres of fresh water marsh. The marsh is comprised of five separate management units. Within these marsh areas there are over 100 miles of trenasses, 10 water control structures, including three pumping stations, and over 40 miles of levees, most of which are operated, managed and maintained by WLWCA personnel. Additionally, a new guillotine gate water control structure was installed in Unit 1 to enhance the hydrologic management of the unit. Objectives of maintenance and manipulation of the conservation area's system of levees and water control structures vary somewhat by management unit, but generally goals are to maintain marsh health, provide conditions favorable for production of waterfowl habitat, and incorporate multi-species management when possible. Additionally, WLWCA staff conducted prescribed burns and large-scale herbicide treatments for habitat improvement. These practices allowed for greater plant biodiversity, created open flats and ponds, and ultimately provided higher quality habitat for the wetland species inhabitants. WLWCA also



LEFT: Capturing wood ducks **RIGHT:** Banding wood ducks



conducted prescribed burns in FY 2024-2025; overall, approximately 800 acres of marsh were burned and 600 acres were sprayed.

AGRICULTURAL MANAGEMENT

Although WLWCA is comprised mostly of marsh, the property also contains approximately 19,000 acres of agricultural land. The agricultural land is separated into seven tracts that are leased out to the highest bidder. Each leaseholder follows a LDWF lease agreement that directs the leaseholder to complete a number of habitat management practices each year. These practices maintain the property in farmable condition, while also providing valuable habitat for wildlife. The benefits to the leaseholder include the ability to farm, graze and hunt the property.

MINERAL MANAGEMENT

There are three producing oil and gas fields on the WLWCA property that were once operated by Amoco Production Company: the West White Lake Field (1,500 ac), the Florence Field (1,920 ac), and the South Kaplan Field (800 ac). Texas Petroleum Investment Company is the current oil and gas operator producing at both the West White Lake Field and Florence Field locations. Magnum Producing secured a mineral lease from BP to drill an exploratory well in the South Kaplan Field and is currently producing at this location. The State of Louisiana owns the surface of the property that comprises these three production areas. LDWF monitors surface activities and helps enforce the conservation terms of the agreements that were executed by and between Amoco

Production Company, BP, and the three owners/operators mentioned. LDWF granted both Texas Petroleum Investment Company and Magnum Producing surface leases including road servitude and P/L right-of-way agreements to conduct their oil and gas operations. Additionally, and as part of the agreements both operators have responsibilities for maintenance of roads, levees, canals, bridges, etc.

MAINTENANCE OF FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

There are approximately 55 acres of property associated with the WLWCA office, dorm, lodge facility, sporting clay course, skeet range, birding trail, and Florence Canal Landing area. This acreage was maintained throughout the year by WLWCA personnel. Routine maintenance on the WLWCA buildings and equipment was conducted throughout the year. The Foreman House facility on the WLWCA Island underwent a full renovation, with the complete replacement of all plumbing and electrical, as well as structural and interior updates. Additionally, new roofs were installed on all the island facilities, as well as the structures all being re-painted. Routine maintenance was performed on our fleet of more than 25 boats.

2024-2025 FINANCIAL REPORT

Totals	
Beginning Fund Balance 2024-2025	\$4,405,661
Total Revenue	\$1,324,283
Total Expenditures	\$1,070,318
Ending Fund Balance 2024-2025	\$4,659,626

Expenditures	
Salaries	\$330,894
Wages	\$46,519
Related Benefits	\$150,612
Travel	\$1,770
Operating Services	\$51,600
Supplies	\$104,104
Professional Services	\$25,742
Other Charges	\$113,954
Acquisitions	\$5,776
Major Repairs	\$239,079
Interagency Transfers (insurance)	\$268
Total	\$1,070,318

Revenue	
Group Hunt Trip Fees	-
Group Hunt Charitable Contributions	-
Agricultural Leases	\$580,130
Hunting Leases	\$411,000
Alligator Egg Collection	-
Lottery Hunt Fees	\$90,359
Alligator Hides/Harvest	\$10,505
Interest Income	\$78,612
Land Rental	-
Surface Leases	\$38,158
Surplus Property	\$288
FEMA Reimbursements	-
Oil and Gas Royalty	-
Non-Consumptive Trips	\$300
Fishing Lottery	\$4,775
Prior Year Revenue Adjustments	-
Fund Transfer from Facility Planning	-
Insurance Proceeds	\$110,156
Total	\$1,324,283



White Lake staff banding mottled ducks



FURBEARER MANAGEMENT

MONITORING FUR HARVEST

The 2024-2025 furbearer harvest was monitored by compiling distribution and total harvest data. Each year, fur buyers and dealers are required to submit reports providing information on pelts purchased by species and parish of harvest. Annual audits of all fur dealers provide a record of total pelts by species shipped from Louisiana. Individual trappers are also required to submit records of pelts harvested that they shipped out of state. River otter and bobcat possession tags provide data on timing and location of all bobcat and otter harvested in the state. These tags are necessary to ensure that Louisiana otter and bobcat are tagged with federal export tags (a federal requirement for out-of-country shipment). Additionally, a trapper harvest survey was emailed to every trapper with an email address saved in the Louisiana Outdoors database (approximately 70% of licensed trappers) to gather data on furbearers harvested for reasons other than the fur industry.

Records indicate 2,555 trapping licenses were sold during the 2024-2025 trapping season. Of these, 2,495 were adult resident licenses (18 and older) and 60 were adult non-resident trapping licenses. Youth (under 18) no longer need a separate trapping license, instead, trapping privileges are included with their youth hunting license.

According to shipping records, a total of 5,951 animals were harvested and sold for fur (all species), which was a decrease from the previous season's total of 6,297. The total value of the 2024-2025 fur harvest to the state's trappers was estimated at \$66,142.97. This total value was a decrease from the previous season's total of \$143,150.69.

The 2025 trapper harvest survey had a response rate of 21.1%. A total of 100,010 (all species) are estimated from survey responses to have been harvested by trappers during the 2024-2025 season. The most common reason for why trappers participated in the industry was for nuisance control (29%), followed by participation in the Coast-wide Nutria Control Program (17%). People that trap for recreational and/or commercial purposes followed at 14%. Most trappers reported trapping only land (36%).

TABLE 5.

ESTIMATED HARVEST AND 10-YEAR AVERAGE VALUE FOR EACH SPECIES					
Species	Trapper harvest survey estimated harvest	Total Harvest for the 2024-2025 Fur Market (shipping data)	10-year Average Harvest (shipping data)	Average Price Paid Per Pelt (includes cost of green fur as well as dried fur)	10-year Average Value for each species (2015-2025)
River Otter	1,700	813	794	\$27.19	\$20,666.18
Raccoon	22,200	1,634	1,447	\$1.49	\$3,229.81
Bobcat	1,000	271	201	\$43.70	\$7,883.60
Nutria	53,200	40	244	\$3.00	\$500.39
Beaver	5,800	2,885	1,550	\$9.61	\$17,025.96
Mink	1,500	190	332	\$7.16	\$1,844.25
Gray Fox	1,400	89	86	\$5.49	\$612.40
Muskrat	160	8	39	\$0.50	\$69.31
Red Fox	340	7	11	\$6.36	\$91.04
Coyote	4,300	9	39	\$1.67	\$367.21
Opossum	8,100	5	35	\$0.61	\$25.93
Total	100,010	5,951	4,778	-	\$52,316.07

The nutria harvest (357,015) remained high for the 2024-2025 season. . The average nutria pelt price paid to trappers during this past season was \$3. An additional \$6 was paid for all nutria taken during the Coast-wide Nutria Control Program by registered participants.

Cameras were removed in November 2025. This project is focused on detecting long-tailed weasels but will also gather data on other mesocarnivore species such as bobcat, coyote, and raccoon. Analysis is pending completion of the project.

FURBEARER RESEARCH

State Wildlife Grant F23AF01649 Long-Tailed Weasel Camera-Trap Surveys on Vernon Unit of Kisatchie National Forest

This grant originally provided funding for a one-year study to assess the distribution and the best means of detecting long-tailed weasel (*Neogale frenata*) and other SGCN on the Vernon Unit of the Kisatchie National Forest. Surveys consisted of baited camera-traps that LDWF deployed on USFS property.

Cameras for this project were installed in winter of 2023 and are checked every two weeks. A total of seven stations were deployed with three cameras at each station. The three cameras at each station are baited with one of three different lures; liquid mouse, salmon oil, or rabbit urine. At the end of 2024, it was decided to extend the project another year. Additionally, chicken replaced rabbit urine as a bait, an unbaited camera was added to the arrangement, and four of the sites were moved from Fort Polk property to USFS property.

COAST-WIDE NUTRIA CONTROL PROGRAM

The Coast-wide Nutria Control Program is funded by the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act. The objective is to decrease nutria-induced damage to coastal vegetation by increasing the incentive for harvest. During the 2024-2025 season, a total of 357,015 nutria tails, worth \$2,142,090 in incentive payments, were collected from 225 participants. This showed a decrease in participation from the previous year's 258. The fewest number of tails turned in by a single participant was five and the greatest number of tails by a single participant was 63,118. Approximately 33% of active participants turned in 800 or more tails. Of the 75 participants who turned in 800 or more tails, 18% turned in more than 4,000 tails.

TOTAL NUMBER OF NUTRIA HARVESTED BY METHOD OF TAKE IN 2024-2025

Twenty parishes were represented in the 2024-2025 program season with harvests ranging from 292 to 104,219 nutria per par-



Long-tailed weasel captured at Site 3A (liquid mouse).

ish. The greatest number of tails (104,219) were collected from Plaquemines Parish, followed by St. Tammany (48,169) and St. Mary Parish (42,355).

The predominant method of take was by rifle (53%), followed by shotgun (34%) and by trapping (13%).

March was the most active month for harvesting nutria (109,002 tails) while November was the least active month (7,819 tails).

VEGETATIVE DAMAGE CAUSED BY NUTRIA

As a monitoring requirement of the Coast-wide Nutria Control Program, a coast-wide aerial survey was conducted in April 2025 covering the coastal parishes of Louisiana. Twenty-two sites were visited in 2025, 21 of which were identified as having nutria damage in 2024. No sites were identified as recovered and one new damage site was identified during the 2025 survey.

The 22 nutria-damaged sites observed along transects during the 2025 survey had a total of 1,028 acres impacted by nutria feeding activity (3,854 extrapolated). This is approximately a 30% decrease in acres impacted by nutria since the 2024 survey (1,479 acres, extrapolated to 5,547 acres coast-wide). The Coast-wide Nutria Control Program continues to be a successful means of controlling the nutria population with an average of over 300,000 animals harvested annually. Despite the fluctuating harvest from year to year, the program has been successful in achieving its goal and the number of nutria-impacted acres in Louisiana's coastal marsh has decreased significantly over the 23 seasons of the program.

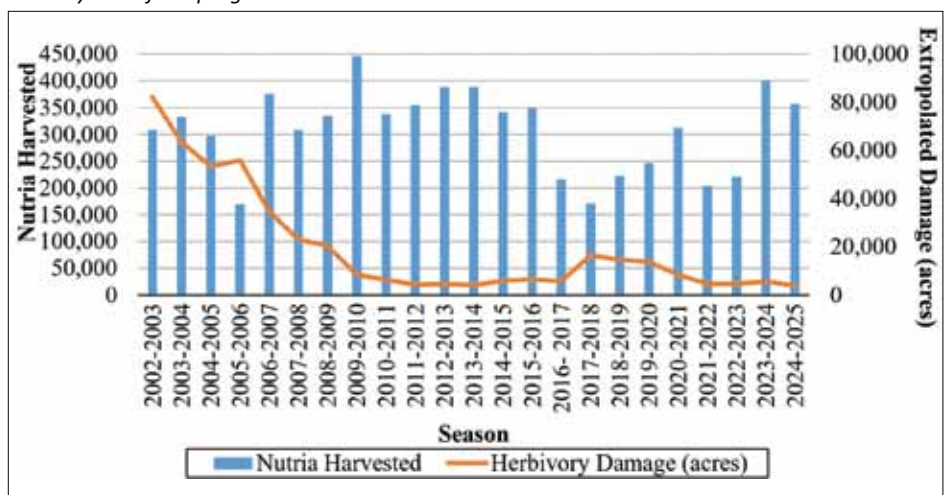
FUR PROGRAM OUTREACH

Because of the fur program's role as liaison to the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Furbearer Working Group, which is instrumental in defining the Best Management Practices for trapping, the fur program has taken an active role in developing the curriculum for the statewide trapper education program. This ensures that the methods taught follow the standards for humane treatment set forth by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The fur program has worked closely with the Fur and Alligator Outreach Coordinator to provide guidance, support and staff as needed to assist with the workshops.

For the past nine years, the Fur and Alligator Outreach Coordinator has worked closely with the Louisiana Trappers and Alligator Hunters Association, the Louisiana Fur Advisory Council, and the LDWF Hunter Education program to educate more than 1,000 new trappers in the state of Louisiana. The Louisiana Fur Advisory Council with the Fur Education and Marketing Funds and the Hunter Education Program with the Pittman-Robertson Act provided financing for this project. The funding allows for the purchase of trapping equipment and other supplies for the workshops. The purpose of the program is to preserve trapping as a management tool, a recreational activity, and an economic benefit to Louisiana citizens as well as to preserve the cultural role that trapping holds in Louisiana's history. Over the first six years of the program, trapping license sales increased and interest in the classes has stayed strong.

Nine hands-on trapper workshops, which educated about 200 members of the general public, federal employees, forestry students, and prospective enforcement agents were scheduled and hosted at a wide variety of locations around the state. Approximately forty of these students also attended one of the two intensive, three-day trapper schools hosted at Woodworth Outdoor Education Center and the Louisiana Ecological Forestry Center. For those that can't attend an in-person class or wish to further their study, LDWF has worked with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to construct an online trapper education course and see it advertised across LDWF platforms and on local trapper websites (AfwaTrapping.outdooreln.org).

FIGURE 1. Nutria harvest and estimated damaged acres due to nutria herbivory over the 23 years of the program.



ALLIGATOR PROGRAM

Louisiana's Alligator Management Program consists of two complex segments: research/management of the wild population and a statewide farm/ranch program. The program is funded by alligator industry generated revenues (alligator hide tag fees, shipping label fees, alligator hunting license fees, and other alligator related fees).

WILD ALLIGATOR PROGRAM

Inventory methods, harvest regulations, tagging and reporting requirements, and a complex computer program are continually upgraded to regulate and monitor a sustainable-use alligator management program in Louisiana. Annual coast-wide alligator nest surveys are conducted to index alligator populations and to establish harvest quotas in coastal Louisiana. During the summer of 2024, we estimated that 52,420 alligator nests were present in the coastal marsh habitats; a 3% increase from the previous year, and still relatively high compared to historic surveys.

Wild alligator harvest quotas are established to correlate harvest with alligator population density and distribution. Alligator harvest tags are allocated to individuals who either own or lease land that is considered alligator habitat. Digital landowner and survey information are combined with the latest aerial photography images to allow for an accurate assessment/classification of each participant's property. The majority of the lands enrolled in the wild alligator harvest program have been entered in the GIS system for property ownership and habitat assessment.

Each year the alligator program staff works closely with landowners and alligator hunters to provide assistance regarding alligator management on their respective properties. We have provided numerous habitat base maps to landowners for their use in participation of both the wild and alligator egg harvest programs. Harvest reports summarizing average lengths and size class frequency distribution of harvested alligators are available upon request.

Under this sustained use alligator program, over 1.2 million wild alligators have been harvested since 1972. The annual harvest takes place in September and October to specifi-

FIGURE 2. LOUISIANA COASTAL MARSH ALLIGATOR NEST PRODUCTION (1970-2024)

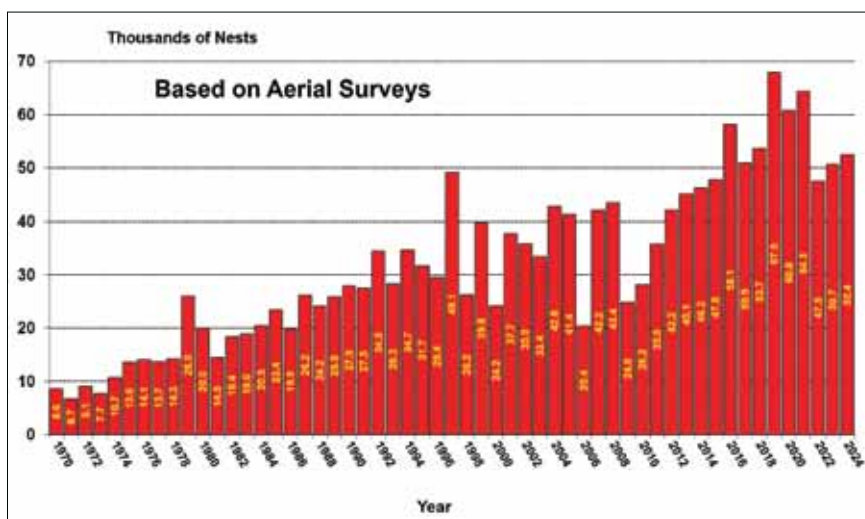
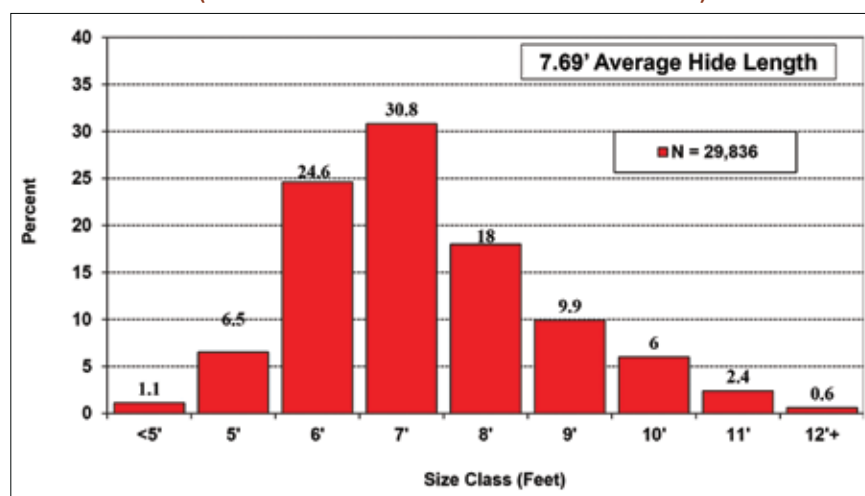


FIGURE 3. LOUISIANA WILD ALLIGATORS HARVESTED (2024 REGULAR HARVEST SKIN LENGTHS)



cally target the adult males and immature segments of the alligator population. Adult females, which typically inhabit interior marshes in September, would be more susceptible to harvest if the season was scheduled during the spring or summer. During the 2024 wild season, 33,363 alligators were harvested by 4,304 licensed alligator hunters. Alligators harvested averaged 7.7 feet in length, with an estimated value of nearly \$8.5 million. Adult-sized alligators (those 6 feet and larger) comprised the majority of the harvest. The 2024 wild harvest represents the highest harvest since 2016.

LDWF provided additional alligator harvest opportunities for the general public by continuing its lottery alligator harvest program. In 2024, the lottery alligator harvest program provided opportunities for 902 alligator hunters to harvest 2,706 alligators. Lottery alligator harvests were conducted on 51 public areas (WMAs and public lakes) throughout the state.

FARM ALLIGATOR PROGRAM

The January 2025 statewide farm/ranch inventory totaled 523,776 alligators, down from 623,598 alligators in January 2024. Nest production increased from the level observed in 2023, but there was a decrease in egg demand in 2024. Since late 2016, alligator farm inventories have remained above those observed prior to the worldwide economic recession of 2009. Although slightly reduced from the levels seen a few years ago, market demand for farm hides remains substantial, but low demand for wild hides continues to be an issue.

During the 2024 tag year (January through December 2024) an estimated 300,935 farm-raised alligators were harvested, averaging 28.82 cm belly width. The total estimated value of these alligators was \$62.7 million.

TABLE 6.

WILD ALLIGATOR EGG COLLECTIONS BY ALLIGATOR FARMERS (2018-2024)		
Year	Wild Alligator Eggs Collected	Hatchlings Yielded
2018	587,776	536,361
2019	650,878	579,008
2020	303,883	260,192
2021	462,537	406,208
2022	473,417	414,041
2023	453,827	380,057
2024	300,482	262,586

Farmers participating in the wild alligator egg collection program are required to return a percentage of the eggs hatched as 4-foot alligators, which compensates the wild alligator population for the collection of eggs. This return rate percentage was 5% for the 2024-year egg permits. The remaining animals can be sold by the farmer. During 2024, a total of 15,994 farm-raised alligators were released to the wild. All released alligators were measured, marked, tagged and sexed. Survival of farm-released alligators appears to be similar to wild alligators. Re-trapped alligators were harvested in September 2024, and data on size class and sex ratio collected. Data evaluation continues on survival rates of the farm-released alligators.

Program staff members routinely communicate with various alligator industry participants including trappers, farmers, landowners and dealers. Information is provided regarding wild alligator and alligator egg harvests, harvest statistics and management recommendations (Table 6). Staff routinely visit alligator farms providing recommendations on alligator husbandry and culture. Numerous requests for information are handled each year.

NUISANCE ALLIGATOR PROGRAM

LDWF manages a statewide nuisance alligator control program. The nuisance program is designed to remove problem alligators in order to avoid potential human/alligator conflicts. Through the process of nuisance alligator hunter appointments and annual renewals, LDWF maintains a statewide network of qualified nuisance alligator hunters. Nuisance alligator complaints are phoned into various

LDWF offices, where complaints are recorded and then forwarded to a nuisance alligator hunter in the vicinity of the complaint. Nuisance hunters respond promptly and catch and remove the alligator as deemed necessary. Hunters are allowed to harvest the nuisance alligator and to process the meat and skin of the alligator for commercial sale. This process provides for immediate response to problem alligators and for payment to the nuisance alligator hunter, thereby minimizing the program operating costs to the department. Beginning in 2018, LDWF authorized incentive payments per complaint resulting in the removal of an alligator to participating nuisance hunters to help alleviate challenges presented by low hide prices.

During FY 2024-2025, approximately 58 nuisance alligator hunters were enrolled in the program; annually nuisance hunters respond to several thousand complaints and harvest more than 1,000 alligators.

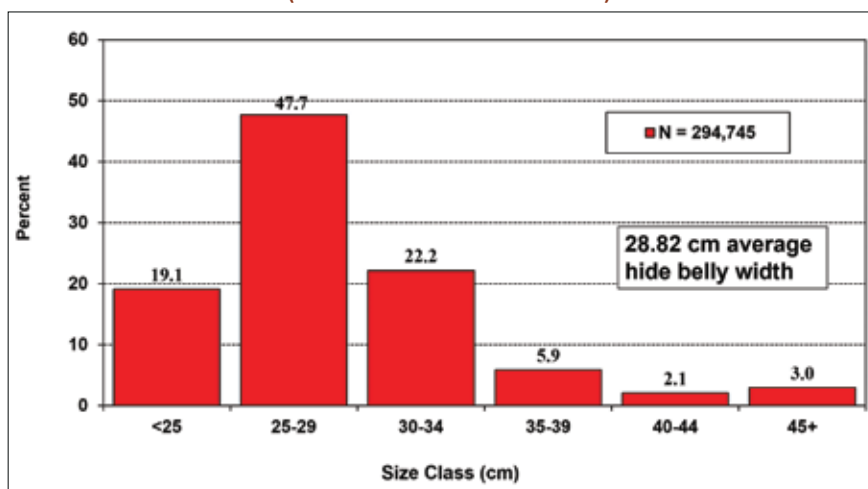
RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The following list provides a summary of the various research and monitoring projects that the alligator program staff conducted and/or participated in during FY 2024-2025.

MONITORING

1. Evaluation of Survival, Growth and Reproduction in Farm-Released Alligators: This activity involves numerous projects related to survival analysis, growth, and reproductive success (farm-released vs. native wild). Information on size class frequency distribution of wild alligator

FIGURE 4. LOUISIANA FARM ALLIGATORS HARVESTED (2024 SKIN BELLY WIDTHS)



populations and susceptibility to harvest is provided annually to enhance survival estimates. We now have "re-traps" that were captured over 21 years since release, and this is undoubtedly one of the largest mark-recapture projects currently in progress. Following the survival, growth and dispersal of farm-released alligators is a key component to our management, monitoring and research programs that will continue for many years to come.

2. Coast-Wide Nest Survey: The annual coastal nesting survey is essential for monitoring our alligator population, and is used annually to determine wild alligator and wild alligator egg harvest quotas (for the adult harvest each September as well as egg ranching quotas). This is an integral part of our required "finding of no detriment" needed to achieve export authorization by the USFWS.

3. Evaluation of Statewide Harvest Program: We continue to analyze size class frequency distribution, average size, sex ratios, etc. for alligators harvested each year. This project, coupled with the coast wide nest survey provides critical information regarding the status of the wild alligator population. Data generated from these projects provides the basis for evaluating the impact of our current harvest strategies and for establishment of annual wild harvest quotas.

4. Evaluation of Alligator Nest Density: LDWF biologists work with cooperating alligator farmers to gain access to their GPS data from annual egg collections. This data will facilitate comparisons between our coast-wide nest survey and estimates of nest density as recorded by the farmer during egg collections. Some farmers have advised staff of notable changes in nest production on selected wetlands; close review of this nesting production data will allow us to evaluate nest distribution and density changes over time.

5. Alligator Disease Monitoring: LDWF, LDWF, in conjunction with LSU School of Veterinary Medicine (LSUSVM), continues to monitor the occurrence of West Nile Virus on alligator farms in Louisiana. Initial mortality related to West Nile Virus occurred in fall/winter 2003. Aggressive mosquito control on farms has reduced on-farm mosquito populations and seems to have reduced the incidence of West Nile Virus in recent years. During FY 2023-2024, LDWF was able to secure a \$500,000 APHIS grant to monitor West Nile Virus and other infectious diseases to alligators. A research program was developed to monitor

the transfer of West Nile Virus antibodies from adult breeding females directly to their eggs and newly hatched offspring. Another aspect of the grant was used to identify Chlamydia sp. strains that are prevalent in alligator farms in Louisiana. Approximately 3,000 liver samples were collected from harvested alligators at various farms across the state. The LSUSVM pre-screened each sample for the presence of Chlamydia sp. and all positive samples were shipped to the University of Georgia (UGA) for additional DNA sequencing. A new unidentified strain of Chlamydia has been discovered as a result of the DNA sequencing.

An additional \$500,000 grant was secured from APHIS during FY 2024-2025. The funds from this grant are being used to fund two separate alligator disease projects in the state of Louisiana. One research project is being conducted by the LSUSVM to study the longevity of West Nile Virus antibodies of hatchling alligators vaccinated with the West Nile Virus vaccine and also collect data to determine the extent and prevalence of naturally occurring West Nile Virus antibodies in wild alligators.

The second project is being conducted by Murray Biological Solutions to study the prevalence of other alligator diseases in the wild alligator and to determine if farming and ranching activities have any impacts on distribution of alligator diseases.

We continued to have expertise from staff at LSUSVM available if needed to collect samples from farm alligators to monitor for any health concerns, provide diagnostics as needed, and assist with other health surveillance parameters.

6. Best Management Practices: LDWF and LSUSVM, in conjunction with the Louisiana Alligator Farmers and Ranchers Association, developed a document entitled "Best Management Practices for Louisiana Alligator Farming." The document was first distributed in June 2011 and details recommended practices to ensure animal welfare of captive-reared alligators in Louisiana, including egg collection, hatching, rearing, release to the wild and euthanasia. This document continues being updated (most recently in January 2022) as new information pertinent to alligator farming becomes available. The intent of this document is to ensure that licensed alligator farms/ranches are employing humane methods of working with alligators. Through industry contributions, Dr. Javier Nevarez at LSUSVM has continued to work with LDWF staff to update Best Management Practices as needed. This

has been even more important recently with international recognition of animal welfare concerns on crocodilian farms worldwide.

7. Night Count Surveys: Due to increasing public demand for alligator harvest opportunities, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Alligator Management Program has been tasked with developing and implementing more intensive alligator population survey methodologies outside of the state's coastal zone. Prior research has shown that habitats in Louisiana's riparian zones support fewer alligators than coastal marsh habitats. Since July 2023, LDWF staff have been developing a modern nightlight survey protocol to begin collecting better population data in central and north Louisiana. May 15- June 30, 2025, LDWF staff ran 20 survey routes across the state's riparian zone. These surveys were conducted on private and public waterbodies throughout the area of interest. The information gathered from these surveys will enhance the Department's understanding of alligator population dynamics outside of coastal marsh habitats and therefore assist in developing management goals and objectives.

CONTRACTS

1. Diagnostic Services (LSU School of Veterinary Medicine - Dr. Javier Nevarez): Dr. Javier Nevarez is contracted to provide diagnostic services as needed for the alligator industry. Farmers may consult with Dr. Nevarez at any time for assistance with any alligator husbandry or disease issue. Our staff often assists with logistics and transport of alligators/samples to LSUSVM in Baton Rouge for evaluation. Periodic health surveillance of farm released alligators is conducted to monitor health status of farm alligators released to the wild. Dr. Nevarez and colleagues continued working with LDWF to evaluate possible culture of Chlamydia and Mycoplasma from wild and captive (farm-releases) alligators in 2024-2025.

2. Health Monitoring (LSU School of Veterinary Medicine - Dr. Javier Nevarez): Dr. Javier Nevarez has been instrumental in providing guidance in evaluating concerns over possible disease introduction from alligators (predominantly hatchlings) imported from other southeastern states. Concerns are focused on Mycoplasma and Chlamydia. In 2024-2025, we contracted with him to collect and analyze samples from imported hatchlings and additional wild alligators to survey for prevalence of these microorganisms, if present.

OTHER RESEARCH

In addition to LDWF research studies, we continued to support and collaborate with graduate students, post-doctoral research associates, and university faculty with their research studies on numerous projects. Associates from several universities were hosted at Rockefeller in 2024-2025 to collect data on alligator behavior, eggs, or alligator specimens for several studies.



ALLIGATOR ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Alligator Advisory Council is responsible for reviewing and approving recommended marketing, research and educational programs funded through the Alligator Resource Fund. The Alligator Advisory Council monitors and addresses numerous issues affecting the alligator industry at local, national and international levels. The council supports husbandry and disease research through LSU AgCenter, addresses public concerns regarding animal welfare through media and education, engages in international conservation and trade issues, carefully monitors local and national legislation that may impact wildlife management, and communicates with designers and manufacturers to promote the use of sustainable Louisiana products.

LDWF administrative and biological staff participated along with Monarch Marketing in several international conservation groups including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Crocodile Specialist Group, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The department and council's participation in these groups continues to provide a strong foundation for sustainable international trade.

The Alligator Advisory Council has continued to interface with the public through local events such as Ocean Commotion, Louisiana Envirothon, National Hunting and Fishing Day events, 4-H events, and school and library presentations. The council engaged in multiple K-12 science focused events such as Recipe for Rural STEM and a number of summer educational camps. Department staff also presented at school-wide events with Louisiana themes. The council website carried the educational story to a much broader audience (www.louisianaalligators.com).

The following list provides a summary of the various issues and projects the Alligator Advisory Council supported with the use of contractors to address during FY 2024-2025.

CONTRACTS

MONARCH MARKETING

LDWF contracted with Monarch Marketing to assist with technical representation at national and international meetings involving wildlife trade issues. LDWF staff and Monarch Marketing grew alliances within CITES, Crocodile Specialist Group and International Union for Conservation of Nature. Ms. Gilmore played a supportive role at both international and domestic conferences focused on wildlife conservation and policy.

She also continued serving on the board of the International Crocodilian Farmers Association and maintained strong relationships with influential wildlife and conservation organizations such as The Origins Foundation, where Gilmore is Chair of the Board, Safari Club International, Dallas Safari Club, and the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation. A major focus throughout the year was direct engagement with the global fashion, leather, and Western lifestyle sectors. Gilmore attended key events such as Lineapelle in Milan, Italy and Boot and Saddle Makers Roundup in Wichita Falls, Texas.

WORLD CONSERVATION AND MONITORING CENTER

LDWF contracted with the World Conservation and Monitoring Center to develop the International Alligator and Crocodile Trade Study report. This report has been funded since 1988 to monitor world trade in all crocodilians and to increase accountability of sustainable management practices.

GLENN R. DELANEY

LDWF contracted with Glenn Delaney to monitor legislation in Washington D.C. that may impact Louisiana's furbearer management program. Mr. Delaney works closely with the Louisiana delegation to educate them on issues important to LDWF and the Fur Advisory Council.

He continued to monitor and provide analyses of legislation advanced by animal rights groups on Capitol Hill so that they could be addressed in a timely and effective manner. He also continued to focus on legislative and Congressional oversight activities regarding the Endangered Species Act, the Lacey Act, and advancing legislation to extend the Nutria Eradication and Control Reauthorization Act.

With letters of support from the AAC, he also continued to successfully pursue the LA Congressional Delegation for the funding of research on infectious diseases affecting Louisiana's alligator farms in both the FY 2024 and FY 2025 appropriations cycles. Thanks to the efforts of Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Rep. Garret Graves (R-LA) and Rep. Julia Letlow (R-LA) who championed this request, the USDA APHIS provided a second tranche of \$500,000 for this research in FY 2024 adding to the \$500,000 in funding that Mr. Delaney was able to help secure in the FY 2023 appropriations cycle.

ENVIRONMENTAL/MINERALS PROGRAM - RESTORATION PROGRAM

HABITAT

The objectives of the Habitat Section are to gather and compile data on fish and wildlife resources, determine the requirements for conserving the resources, and provide information to governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations and the public. Data are also gathered on the potential impacts of human activities on the resources. These data and technical assistance are provided to regulators, planners and decision-makers in advance of execution of projects in order to avoid, minimize and/or mitigate any adverse environmental impacts. The Habitat Section is comprised of the five following programs: Statewide Environmental Investigations, Louisiana Natural and Scenic Rivers Program, Response and Restoration Program, Permits Coordination, and Seismic Section.

STATEWIDE ENVIRONMENTAL INVESTIGATIONS

Permit Review and Comment - LDC&E and USACE

Statewide Environmental Investigations is authorized under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act and is partially funded by a USFWS grant. Staff is responsible for reviewing and providing comments and mitigation recommendations on all permits sought from state and federal environmental regulatory agencies, primarily LDC&E and USACE. Staff members reviewed and provided comments to 1,090 state and federal permit applications during FY 2024-2025 (Figure 5). Written comments and recommendations aimed at avoiding, minimizing and/or mitigating adverse impacts were issued by LDWF for all state and federal permit applications received.

Staff continued to receive a number of USACE Section 10 permit applications for the withdrawal of surface water classified as waters of the United States. These water withdrawal requests were primarily for hydraulic fracturing of shale formations. LDWF responded to all such permit requests with recommendations on how to conduct these substantial water withdrawals while also avoiding adverse impacts to fish and wildlife resources. A total of approximately 35 such permits were issued during FY 2024-2025.

In addition to permit review, staff participated in permit site inspections and habitat evaluations, provided technical assistance to the

public on wetland issues, and worked with private developers and consultants involved in the regulatory process. During FY 2024-2025, staff conducted several on-site field inspections and participated in multiple meetings and conference calls with applicants, agents and regulatory agency personnel.

Staff members also represented the agency on two Mitigation Bank Interagency Review Teams chaired separately by the USACE Vicksburg and New Orleans Districts. The purpose of the Interagency Review Teams is to provide regulatory review, approval and oversight of wetlands mitigation banks. During FY 2024-2025, staff evaluated, inspected and provided technical comments and recommendations on dozens of wetlands mitigation banking proposals, mitigation banking instruments and mitigation banking monitoring plans. Three new wetland mitigation banks were approved and authorized in Louisiana during FY 2024-2025. Staff attended all Interagency Review Team meetings, including forty site investigations. Staff continued to provide technical assistance to USACE related to several large- and small-scale maintenance dredging projects, beneficial use projects, flood control projects, and navigation projects being undertaken by the New Orleans and Vicksburg Districts.

Statewide Environmental Investigations also assisted in protecting all lessees of private oyster grounds by reviewing and approving, sometimes with modification, water bottom assessments submitted by project applicants prior to the initiation of activities affecting state water bottoms under lease to private parties for oyster production. Coastal Use Permit applicants can be required at the request of Statewide Environmental Investigations staff to modify the activity if the proposed project unneces-

sarily impacts oyster resources. There were 35 water bottom assessments reviewed and approved by staff during FY 2024-2025.

Projects of Other Agencies and the Private Sector

LDWF worked with numerous governmental agencies in conducting environmental investigations including:

- USFWS
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- USACE: Fort Worth, Galveston, New Orleans, and Vicksburg Districts
- USFS
- USDA
- Federal Highway Administration
- Federal Aviation Administration
- U.S. Coast Guard
- Department of Energy
- Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
- Department of Defense
- National Park Service
- Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development
- Louisiana Department of Conservation and Energy
- Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality
- Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism
- Louisiana National Guard
- Louisiana Division of Administration-Office of Community Development

LOUISIANA NATURAL AND SCENIC RIVERS PROGRAM

The Scenic Rivers Program is charged with the administration of the Louisiana Natural and Scenic Rivers Act. The act requires that LDWF, through the Scenic Rivers Coordinator, admin-

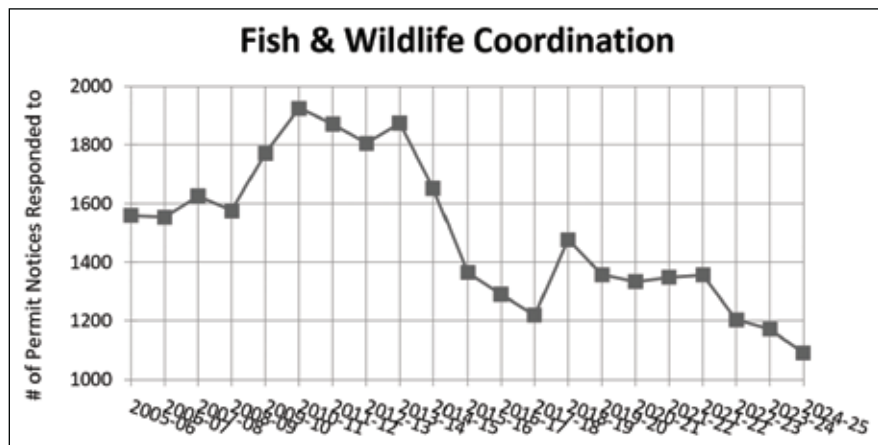


FIGURE 5. Number of permit notices responded to from 2005-2025.

ister a permitting system for activities that have potential for significant ecological impact to designated Natural and Scenic Rivers, as well as a system of monitoring, surveillance, investigation and enforcement for the purpose of ensuring compliance with the act. The act, and the rules and regulations promulgated under its authority, provide for the development of management plans, stream surveys and enforcement. There are currently approximately 80 streams and/or stream segments in the system constituting an estimated 3,100 linear miles of Louisiana's streams, rivers and bayous.

Ten enforcement actions were initiated in FY 2024-2025. This consisted of six Compliance Orders being served and four citation requests sent to LDWF's Enforcement Division for a violation of the Scenic Rivers Act. The coordinator and staff, through routine surveillance, project inspections and response to complaints, ensured compliance with permit conditions, utilization of adequate best management practices, and appropriate cleanup and restoration of permitted project sites. Staff continued to monitor numerous sand and gravel operations as to insure that previous water management plans and riparian buffers aimed at minimizing impacts to Scenic Rivers were implemented. Scenic River's staff also coordinated closely with the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, to address some of the construction site stormwater and sanitary issues impacting several system streams.

Staff made 61 site investigations and surveyed over 363 miles of streams. During surveys, Scenic River staff noted potential violations and compliance issues.

A total of 48 Scenic River Permits were issued during FY 2024-2025. In addition to considering permits, the Scenic Rivers staff made 19 determinations of "no permit required" for activities undertaken near Scenic Rivers but with no potential to significantly degrade the ecological integrity of a Scenic River. Staff held several meetings and conference calls with applicants and agents, specific to Scenic River issues. The coordinator and staff maintained regular contact with both state and federal agencies to ensure that designated Scenic Rivers were considered in all levels of planning and permitting, which required working closely with city planners, police juries, mayors and local interest groups and organizations throughout the state.

RESPONSE AND RESTORATION PROGRAM

Biologist Supervisor/Agency Oil Spill

Coordinator - Laura Carver

WAE Administrative Assistant- Mary Pellerin

Overview

The Response and Restoration Program is responsible for overseeing LDWF's state-wide oil spill planning, emergency response and Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) activities that fall under the jurisdiction of the Oil Pollution Act. LDWF is statutorily mandated through multiple regulations to participate in oil spill response and NRDA activities. This includes the following documents as well as many others: Louisiana Oil Spill Prevention and Response Act, Oil Pollution Act, National Contingency Plan, as well as the Governor's ESF-10: For Oil and Hazardous Materials.

Within the context of an oil spill, LDWF is responsible for the protection, rescue and rehabilitation of impacted wildlife, including developing plans that "provide for coordinated, immediate and effective protection, rescue and rehabilitation of, and minimization of risk of injury to fish, and wildlife resources and the habitat on which they depend."

In order to meet those obligations LDWF receives upfront funding (WOSA Budget) each fiscal year from LOSCO via the state Oil Spill Liability Trust fund. This funding is used to cover the costs of all oil spill response and NRDA case related activities (except for BP activities). This funding is also utilized to cover all expenses, salary, related benefits, supplies and equipment utilized by the Oil Spill Program Staff.

The Response and Restoration Program activities are divided into three main categories: Oil Spill Planning, Emergency Response, and NRDA.

Oil Spill Planning

Agency Oil Coordinator works with state and federal agencies, oil and gas companies (RPs), and oil spill response organizations to develop oil spill response protocols and procedures to be used in the event of an actual oil spill. This includes identifying resources at risk, establishing protocols and procedures for the protection and rescue of wildlife and fisheries in the event of an incident, and documentation and evidence collection procedures for impacted wildlife and fisheries. Primary projects for FY 2024-2025 include:

- Continued development of Louisiana Oiled Wildlife Response Plan, which outlines LDWF's roles and responsibilities in relation to oil spills, as well as protocols for implementing oil spill response surveys,

data collection, evidence collection, and rehabilitation requirements.

- Serve as the LDWF representative for the Regional Response Team (RRT-6), Area Committees, and State-wide Oil Spill Committee.
- Work with Committees to update and refine Area Contingency Plans, and Regional Response plans, including the development of the RRP-6 Fish Wildlife and Sensitive Environments Plan and Wildlife Response Plan for the Regional Contingency Plan.
- Participate in large-scale oil spill response drills and serve as the Wildlife Branch Director.
- Oversee Oil Spill Response Training and HAZWOPER certification for Office of Wildlife personnel.

Oiled Wildlife Response

LDWF is mandated to provide immediate response in the event of an oil spill for the protection, rescue and rehabilitation of impacted wildlife and fisheries resources. In order to facilitate LDWF's response involvement, personnel monitor all incident reports and notifications submitted via the Louisiana State Police Hazmat (LSP) and the USCG National Response Center (NRC). During FY 2024-2025 staff received a total of 7,199 reports (2,345 USCG National Response Center and 4,854 Louisiana State Police Hazmat). All spill reports are evaluated using established screening criteria to determine if a significant oil spill has occurred or an incident poses a threat to wildlife, and if additional information is required.

Once an incident has occurred LDWF will work with State and Federal Agencies, as well as Responsible Parties and Oil Spill Removal Organizations as part of Unified Command. LDWF oil spill response responsibilities include:

- Identify resources at risk, and develop protection methods and response protocols to minimize the impact to wildlife and fisheries resources.
- Conduct systematic wildlife response surveys to document the extent of oiling, identify and document any wildlife or fisheries impacts utilizing established survey and documentation protocols. Conduct wildlife rescue, field triage and carcass collection activities as warranted.
- Serve as the Wildlife Branch Director within the Incident Command System.
- Oversee Oiled Wildlife Rehabilitation Center; operations, documentation, evidence protocols and rehabilitated wildlife release.
- Coordinate LDWF response field teams, and resources.

- Serve as evidence custodian for all original field documentation, chain of custody forms for all live and dead wildlife and fisheries collected.

Oiled Spill Response

During FY 2024-2025 staff received and evaluated a total of 7,199 National Response Centers and Louisiana State Police Reports, only a portion of the reports (95) received were oil spill related and/or posed a threat to wildlife, and required additional response actions. Out of the 95 incidents that required additional actions, LDWF, responded to and/or coordinated with State and Federal Agencies on 53 of those incidents, listed in *Table 7*.

Additional information on three of our more significant oil spill incidents from FY 2024-2025, that required substantial time, personnel resources, and required the establishment of a wildlife rehabilitation center is provided below.

Significant Incidents

NRC#1406083/Bayou Lafourche/Crescent Midstream (7/27/2024)

- 820 bbls of crude oil released at a pumping station, when a frac tank on site for maintenance overflowed. Material released into secondary containment, into a drainage ditch and out into Bayou Lafourche.
- Approximately 7 miles of Bayou Lafourche was impacted.
- LDWF Office of Wildlife personnel, conducted response operations from July 27 - Sept. 19, 2024
 - Laura Carver
 - Phillip Pritchett
 - Thomas Garcia
 - Kacie Rome
 - Mitchell Hukins
 - Travis Dufour
 - Seth Miller
 - Matthew Weigel
 - Forest Burks



Photos from NRC#1406083 oil spill

- LDWF Office of Enforcement, had personnel staged at the Mill St. Bridge (spill start) and Lockport Bayouside Park to restrict vessel traffic in the impacted area, at the direction of Unified Command.
- LDWF Office of Fisheries-Inland Fisheries conducted a fish kill investigation on 07/29/2024, in Contraband Bayou. It was determined that the fish kill was not associated with the oil spill.
- Wildlife Collected Live and Dead For this incident
 - 13 Amphiuma
 - 1 Gallinule
 - 4 American Alligators
 - 2 Mallard Ducks
 - 1 Anhinga
 - 1 Muscovy Ducks
 - 1 Common Snapping Turtle
 - 19 Red-Eared Sliders
 - 1 Eastern River Cooter

NRC#1418001/Bayou LaButte/Entergy(12/05/20224)

- 238bbls of mineral oil released from a blown transformer at a power station.
- Material was released inside the facility to gravel, and traveled through a drain to a road side ditch.
- Total estimated area impacted 12 miles 2 miles of ditch, 10 miles of Bayou LaButte



- LDWF oil spill personnel participated in oil spill response/wildlife response operations from Dec. 5-30, 2024.
- Wildlife Collected (live and dead) for this incident:
 - 12 American Alligators
 - 1 Glossy Crayfish Snake
 - 4 Anhinga
 - 6 Mississippi Green Watersnakes
 - 1 Barred Owl
 - 16 Red-Eared Sliders
 - 1 Belted Kingfisher
 - 1 Spiny Softshell Turtle
 - 3 Easter River Cooters
 - 11 Wood Ducks
 - 1 Great Blue Heron

NRC#1429542/Garden Island Bay Well#59/Spectrum Energy(04/26/2025)

- An uncontrolled well blowout at the Garden Island Bay lease 214, Well #59 began on April 26, 2025 at 1600. This well was originally drilled in 1942, and was reworked in 1989 & 1994. The well was shut-in in 2015.
- The well continued to release a combination of crude oil, natural gas and produced water uncontrolled for nine days.
- On May 4, 2025 a capping stack was successfully installed, in order to gain control of the well.

TABLE 7. Representative Spills for FY 2024-2025

SPILL START DATE	NRC# OR LSP#	SPILL NAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	MATERIAL	AMT. RELEASED (BBLS)
7/2/2024	LSP#24-02344	Grand Cane	Diversified Energy	Crude Oil	10
7/13/2024	LSP#24-02482	Bayou D' Inde	TPIC	Saltwater/Crude Oil	395
7/14/2024	NRC#1404728	Blind Bay	BP	Cude Oil	15
7/21/2024	LSP#24-02585	Roseland	Smitty Supply	Waste Oil	64.8
7/23/2024	NRC#1406611	Vermillion Bay	Panther Operating	unk. Oil	6.4
7/26/2024	NRC#1405956	Port Fourchon	John W. Stone	Diesel	12
7/27/2024	NRC#1406083	Bayou Lafourche	Crescent Midstream	Crude Oil	820
7/29/2024	NRC#1406235	Bayou Des Allemands	TPIC	Crude Oil	5
7/31/2024	NRC#1406487	Dubach	Energy Transfer	Condensate	70
8/1/2024	NRC#1406608	South Pass #10	Whitney	Crude Oil	20-30
8/3/2024	NRC#1406769	Burrwood	Hilcorp Energy	Crude Oil	10
8/13/2024	NRC#1407843	Delta Duck #2	TPIC	Crude Oil	3
8/17/2024	NRC#1408261	Garden Island Bay#214	Whitney		
8/31/2024	NRC#1409584	Westlake	Phillips 66	Crude Oil	850
9/9/2024	<i>HURRICANE FRANCINE PRE AND POST STORM RESPONSE COORDINATION</i>				
9/13/2024	NRC#1410956	Lake Barre	Hilcorp Energy	unknown	
9/15/2024	NRC#1410900	Salvador	AMEC	Crude Oil	unknown
9/17/2024	NRC#1411137	Bayou Petit Caillou	Terrebonne Parish	Diesel	41
9/18/2024	NRC#1411196	Charenton	George D. Hartfield	Crude Oil	unknown
11/3/2024	NRC#1415449	Main Pass #461	LOBO Operating	Condensate	unknown
11/6/2024	NRC#1415714	South Pass #10	Whitney	Crude Oil	10
11/13/2024	NRC#1416461	St. James	Shell Pipeline	Crude Oil	430
11/18/2024	NRC#1616733	St. James	Energy Transfer	Crude Oil	40
11/22/2024	NRC#1417071	South Marsh Island #214	Hilcorp Energy	Crude Oil	30-50
12/5/2024	NRC#1418001	Bayou LaButte	Entergy	Mineral Oil	238
12/11/2024	LSP#24-04626	Jonesville	Llanada Operating	Crude Oil	15
12/28/2024	NRC#1419992	Lake Dautrive	BCF Resources	Crude Oil	unknown
1/22/2025	NRC#1421643	Lake Washington	Hilcorp Energy	Crude Oil	4
1/24/2025	NRC#14218001	Bayou Sale	TPIC	Crude Oil	20
1/25/2025	NRC#1421886	Lake Hatch	Whitney	Crude Oil	4
1/26/2025	NRC#1421912	Black Lake	TPIC	Crude Oil	190
1/27/2025	LSP#25-00290	Iota	Unknown	Diesel	358
1/28/2025	NRC#1422130	Crowley	Camex	unknown	40
2/20/2025	NRC#1424058	Bull Bayou	Fite O&G	Crude Oil	15
2/24/2025	NRC#1424266	Houma 1514	Shell Pipeline	Crude Oil	270
2/25/2025	NRC#1424419	Bayou Sale #24	TPIC	Crude Oil	4
3/2/2025	NC#1424828	Weeks Island	TPIC	Crude Oil	20
3/8/2025	NRC#1425362	Lake Hatch	Whitney	Crude Oil	3
3/19/2025	LSP#25-00942	Venice	TPIC	Crude Oil	5
3/20/2025	NRC#1426406	Golden Meadow#7	TPIC	Crude Oil	2
3/21/2025	NRC#1426457	Romere Pass #2	TPIC	Crude Oil	3
3/23/2025	NRC#1426708	Hackberry	Perdido Energy	Crude Oil	2
4/10/2025	NRC#1428214	Betty's Lake	Little Pecan Hunting Club	Diesel	2
4/10/2025	NRC#1428278	Main Pass #35	TPIC	Crude Oil	5
4/14/2025	NRC#1428502	Schooner Bayou	Unknown	Unknown Oil	70
4/15/2025	NRC#1428610	Delta Farms	TPIC	Crude Oil	50
4/26/2025	NRC#1429542	Garden Island Bay Well#59	Spectrum Energy	Crude Oil	unknown
5/13/2025	NRC#1430993	Lake Hatch	Whitney	Crude Oil	2
5/20/2025	NRC#1431602	Lookout Point	LOBO Operating	Crude Oil	10
5/23/2025	NRC#1431924	Buras Bayou	TPIC	Crude Oil	140
5/30/2025	NRC#1432621	Eloi Bay	Cox Operating	Unknown Oil	unknown
6/26/2025	NRC#1435177	St. James	Marathon Pipeline	Crude Oil	1400
6/27/2025	NRC#1435335	Lake Borne	Hilcorp Energy	Crude Oil	20



Photos from NRC#1418001 oil spill: oiled barred owl in the field prior to collection (left); oiled barred owl in temporary triage housing (center); barred owl in conditioning/flight pen (right)



Photos from NRC#1429542 oil spill: Overflights on April 27, 2025 (top), April 28, 2025 (middle), and May 3, 2025 (bottom)

- Well Plug and Abandonment operations were completed on June 24, 2025.
- LDWF response operations began on April 26, 2025 and lasted until final clean-up was completed on July 10, 2025.
- LDWF Office of Wildlife Personnel involved in response:
 - Laura Carver
 - Mike Perot
 - Randy Myers
 - Sidney Clements
 - James Donovan
 - Trebor Victoriano
 - Stephen Bourque
 - Forest Burks
 - Brandon Stafford
 - Alyssa Broussard
 - Arthur Hebert
 - Todd Credeur
 - Mitchell Hukins
 - Shane Granier
 - Paul Link
 - Jose Olivares
 - Cliff Daily
 - Hunter Bertrand
 - Kori Legleu
 - Zachary Bell
 - Thomas Bergeaux
 - Ian Bourgeois
 - Thomas Brown
 - Amelia Wolf
- Wildlife Collected (live or dead) for this incident:
 - 4 American Alligators
 - 1 Least Bittern
 - 1 Sandpiper (sp)
 - 1 Gallinule
 - 3 Red-winged Blackbirds

Natural Resource Damage Assessment Activities

Within FY 2024-2025, LDWF's Restoration Program continues to make concerted efforts involving new and ongoing NRDA case management. Program personnel spent time and effort engaging with state and federal trustees on 28 NRDA case activities (*Table 8*). Much of these activities involved detailed data review (e.g., response and pre-assessment information) and technical resource analyses (e.g., Habitat Equivalency and Resource Equivalency Analyses) to quantify resource injury extent, as well as scale representative restoration.

TABLE 8. Natural Resource Damage Assessment Case Summary

RESTORATION IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES	INJURY ASSESSMENT	RESTORATION PLANNING
ACL Gretna-MS River / DM-932 <i>Status:</i> Woodlands Conservancy Land Acquisition & Conservation Servitude, Crevasse Splay and Recreational Project Identification	Hilcorp Bay St. Elaine <i>Status:</i> Settlement Discussions	ExxonMobil Torbert <i>Status:</i> Settlement Discussions
Citgo Calcasieu River <i>Status:</i> Long Point Bayou Marsh Creation Project , Oyster Cultch and Recreational Project Identification	Hilcorp Rattlesnake Bayou & Hilcorp Bay Long <i>Status:</i> Injury Assessment	Whitney Oil & Gas Garden Island Bay Area of Concern <i>Status:</i> Remediation Planning and Permitting
LWMIWCB Exxon Mobil (Lake Washington, Mendicant Island, West Champagne Bay) <i>Status:</i> Lost Lake Marsh Creation NRDA Increment: South Pass Crevasse Cleanout and spur.	Collins Pipeline Mississippi River Gulf Outlet <i>Status:</i> Injury Assessment	Mississippi Canyon-20 Taylor Energy <i>Status:</i> Settled Project TBD
Shell Green Canyon <i>Status:</i> Bird Island Restoration, Living Shoreline in Calcasieu Lake, Pantropical Spotted Dolphin Genetic Stock Assessment	MV Pac Antares Gallagher Marine <i>Status:</i> Injury Assessment	Raphael Pass Gulf Production <i>Status:</i> Settled Project TBD
Sunoco Logistics Mooringsport <i>Status:</i> Alligator Snapping Turtle Head Start Program and Habitat Conservation / Management	Bayou Lafourche Crescent Midstream <i>Status:</i> Injury Assessment	Lake Grand Ecaille/Lake Washington Hilcorp
Green Canyon 248 Shell Pipeline <i>Status:</i> Calcasieu Lake and Sabine National Wildlife Refuge living shoreline; Genetic stock assessment of Pantropical Spotted Dolphins; South Pass Bird Island	MPOG 11015 Third Coast Midstream <i>Status:</i> Injury Assessment	Grand Bay LOBO Operating <i>Status:</i> Settled Project TBD
Breton Island Hess Corporation <i>Status:</i> Breton Island Brown Pelican Habitat Creation (Additional increments)	Terrebonne Bay Hilcorp Energy <i>Status:</i> Injury Assessment	

PERMITS COORDINATION

The purpose of the Permits Coordination Program is to ensure that LDWF receives, reviews and responds to and distributes comments and mitigation recommendations on all permit notices received from state and federal environmental regulatory agencies in an efficient and timely manner (i.e. prior to public notice comment period deadlines). LDWF's written comments are in-turn used by the regulatory agencies to make final determinations on how to best avoid, minimize and/or mitigate adverse impacts to fish and wildlife resources.

In order to accomplish this task, the LDWF permits coordinator serves as the primary liaison and "single point of contact" for all regulatory agencies, primarily LDC&E and USACE. It is the responsibility of the permits coordinator to ensure that the LDWF biologist with the appropriate authority and expertise is included in the formulation of written comments and mitigation recommendations. The permits coordinator also ensures that there is adequate LDWF representation at all LDC&E Geologic Review and pre-application meetings.

The permits coordinator also utilizes, maintains and populates a comprehensive searchable database for all permit notices. This database is of critical importance to ensure a timely response from LDWF. The database also archives LDWF's formal response to all permit notices dating back to 2006. During FY 2024-2025, the permits coordinator received, processed, tracked and disseminated 1,095 permit notices. Please

see Figure 5 for a depiction over time that staff have responded to notices.

SEISMIC SECTION

The LDWF Seismic Section was created in 1939 specifically to protect fish, oysters, shrimp, wildlife and other areas of concern from the effects of seismic exploration. Seismic exploration uses energy waves to generate a profile of sub-surface reflective layers that help define potential oil and gas traps. The energy waves can be produced by explosives detonated below the ground, by air guns that emit a burst of air at the surface of water bodies, by large vibrating pads placed on the surface, or other means. These projects can occur in sensitive wetlands, water bodies and other habitats.

LDWF performs a Natural Heritage Review on each individual seismic job to determine the presence of rare, threatened and endangered species and other areas of conservation concern. The Wildlife Diversity Review includes specific conditions that the applicant must adhere to for the protection of such resources. LDWF Seismic agents also monitor geophysical activities to protect Louisiana's fish and wildlife resources by ensuring compliance with LDWF seismic rules and regulations.

Some of the Seismic Section's Accomplishments for FY 2024-2025 are:

- Staff issued two seismic permits throughout the state
- Staff closely interacted with seismic companies to ensure compliance with the rules and regulations of the Seismic Section.

Staff continued to field questions on conceptual proposals and past projects

- Staff continued to ensure protection of threatened and endangered species and other areas of concern. One Natural Heritage Review was completed by staff.

MINERALS MANAGEMENT

The Minerals Management Program, hereafter called Mineral Program, is responsible for ensuring that mineral activities on all LDWF properties are compatible with the environment and that such activities do not prevent LDWF from meeting WMA/refuge goals and objectives. In FY 2024-2025 Mineral Program staff reviewed, evaluated and authorized 40 well locations, pipeline projects and other mineral exploration related activities on LDWF properties. During FY 2024-2025, the program also issued 26 rights-of-way, surface leases and servitudes for oil and gas activities occurring on LDWF properties. All of these projects are reviewed and coordinated with field personnel to ensure that they are compatible with LDWF management area programs.

In FY 2024-2025 the Mineral Program continued to generate significant revenues for LDWF, which includes mineral royalties, rights-of-way, surface leases and seismic fees. The Mineral Program represented LDWF at each monthly meeting of the State Mineral and Energy Board. Mineral Program staff continues to work closely with other programs

within LDWF and the LDC&E Office of Coastal Management in an ongoing effort to streamline the Coastal Use Permitting process.

WETLAND MITIGATION BANKING

The Mineral Program continued to ensure regulatory compliance and coordinate credit sales for LDWF's wetland mitigation bank located on Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge in Cameron Parish. These restored wetland ecosystems, totaling more than 160 acres, functionally compensate unavoidable habitat impacts, such as those associated with oil and gas exploration and production, occurring within LDWF's WMA and refuge system.

DREDGE FILL PROGRAM

In addition to the above-mentioned duties, the Mineral Program has continued to administer LDWF's Dredge Fill Program. This program issued 51 licenses in FY 2024-2025 for the dredging and severing of state water bottoms. This program also collects approximately \$1.26 million in annual severance royalties associated with dredging and severing state water bottoms. In FY 2024-2025 commercial dredge fill pits were inspected to ensure operator compliance with program regulations and LDWF also actively investigated unlicensed commercial pit operators.

PERMIT ACQUISITION

The Mineral Program applied for and received six USACE permits and five LDC&E Consistency Determinations that authorized LDWF to undertake management actions on LDWF properties statewide. All permit requests must also be coordinated with and approved by federal resource agencies (i.e., USFWS, Environmental Protection Agency and NOAA- National Marine Fisheries Service).

WATER RESOURCES

Minerals Management staff did not serve on the Louisiana Water Resources Commission this past year. Matt Weigel is the new representative.

RESTORATION PROGRAM (DEEPWATER HORIZON RESTORATION)

Program Manager - Jon J. Wiebe

During the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, approximately 134 million barrels of oil and other substances were released into the Gulf of America. Many of Louisiana's coastal resources were significantly impacted. As such, Louisiana factors prominently (\$5 billion) in its ability to restore for these injured resources as outlined by the Trustee Council's Final Programmatic Restoration Plan.

Within FY 2024-2025, our program's activities encompassed all project phases (engineering and design, construction, operation and maintenance and monitoring and adaptive management) in support of restoring the state's historic colonial waterbird colonies, large-scale marsh creation projects and coastwide recreational-use projects.

RESTORATION PROJECTS: COMPLETED

LOUISIANA TRUSTEE IMPLEMENTATION GROUP

Queen Bess Island (2020)

Queen Bess Island has a rich and diverse history. LDWF utilized the island as one of its principal reintroduction localities for brown pelican, a species that was once extirpated from the

state. Today, the island ranks as the third most productive breeding colony for the species, as well as providing critical historic nesting habitat for over 60 bird species. Following the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, Queen Bess Island was prioritized for restoration by LDWF within the Deepwater Horizon Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group Restoration Plan #1: Restoration of Wetlands, Coastal and Nearshore Habitats; Habitat Projects on Federally Managed Lands; and Birds (October 2016). Island construction was completed in February 2020, with 30 acres of shrub-nesting bird habitat and 7 acres of ground-nesting bird habitat.

For 2024-2025 nesting season, Queen Bess Island generated 21,397 nests from targeted species impacted by the Spill. Brown pelican nests comprised 3,987 of this total.

Rabbit Island (2021)

Rabbit Island is the only brown pelican colony in southwest Louisiana, and has historically provided essential nesting habitats for a number of species that were impacted by the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. According to LDWF's Wildlife Action Plan, the island also provides critical nesting habitat for 12 SGCN, including the reddish egret (*Egretta rufescens*). Following the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, Rabbit Island was prioritized for restoration by LDWF within the Deepwater Horizon Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group Restoration Plan #1: Restoration of Wetlands, Coastal, and

Nearshore Habitats; Habitat Projects on Federally Managed Lands; and Birds (October 2016). Island construction was completed in February 2021, with 87 acres of shrub-nesting and ground-nesting bird habitats along with several hundred acres of marsh-nesting bird habitat.

For 2024-2025 nesting season, Rabbit Island generated 23,432 nests from targeted species impacted by the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. Brown pelican nests comprised 1,424 of this total.



Rabbit Island



LEFT: Queen Bess Island **RIGHT:** North Breton Island

North Breton Island (2023)

North Breton Island, located near the southern end of the Chandeleur Island chain in Louisiana, is part of the Breton National Wildlife Refuge established in 1904 by Theodore Roosevelt. Restoration focused on enhancing habitat for nesting brown pelicans, terns, skimmers and gulls. From the period of 2020 to 2022, the island was expanded from 290 acres to 426 acres of constructed barrier island habitat, including beaches, dunes, and back-barrier marsh through the placement of approximately 6.59 million cubic yards of fill. During construction in 2023, approximately 14,700 linear feet of sand fencing and 66,400 native plants were installed to facilitate development of nesting habitat. An additional vegetation planting is planned to begin in 2025 or 2026.

For 2024-2025 nesting season, North Breton Island generated 54,796 nests from targeted species impacted by the Spill. Brown pelican nests comprised 9,724 of this total.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management Plan

Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group developed Monitoring and Adaptive Management Plans for Queen Bess (BA-202), Rabbit (CS-0080) and North Breton (Louisiana Outer Coast Restoration Project) Island Restoration Projects. Each plan aims to identify activities that can be implemented to manage, evaluate and document restoration project effectiveness or need for corrective actions. Examples of designated activities includes colonial waterbird aerial nest surveys and nest dotting analyses, vegetation surveys, vegetation species removal, invasive vegetation species removal, predator control, anthropogenic disturbance funds, and artificial nesting structures. A detailed Monitoring and Adaptive Management activity is provided.

Invasive Vegetation Species Removal

Adaptive management remains a central element towards extending nesting habitat benefits for target colonial waterbird species. Within FY 2024-2025, the project team (LDWF (Restoration, White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area

and Coastal Operations), CPRA (Thibodaux Office) and Resource Environmental Services implemented targeted herbicide applications followed by prescribed burns on Queen Bess and Rabbit Islands. Collectively, these actions significantly increased available nesting areas for a host of species prioritized within the State's Wildlife Action Plan.

RESTORATION PROJECTS: CONSTRUCTION

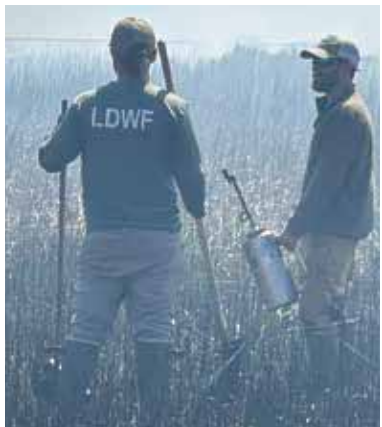
LOUISIANA TRUSTEE IMPLEMENTATION GROUP: RESTORATION PLAN #7.1 / CONSTRUCTION

Terrebonne Bay Houma Navigation Canal Island

Terrebonne Bay Houma Navigation Canal represents one of the state's remaining historic brown pelican colonies. Located in Terre-



Invasive vegetation removal





Terrebonne Bay Houma Navigation Canal Island



Bird's Foot Delta Hydrologic Restoration

bonne Parish, the island is currently 32 acres, however, only less than 10 acres serve as suitable nesting habitat for brown pelican, roseate spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*), royal tern (*Thalasseus maximus*), tricolored heron (*Egretta tricolor*), laughing gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) and various other species. As such, restoration of Terrebonne Bay Houma Navigation Canal was prioritized by LDWF within Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment #7: Wetlands, Coastal, and Nearshore Habitats and Birds (October 2020).

For the 2024-25 nesting season, Terrebonne Bay Houma Navigation Canal Island generated 1,448 nests from targeted species impacted by the Spill. Brown pelican nests comprised 820 of this total.

For 2024-2025 project implementation, Contractor installed new rock containment dyke and refurbished existing rock containment dyke. These actions will serve two primary purposes: First, contain future deposited sediment and second, provide erosion protection from wind driven wave energy.

Proposed Timeline

Construction activities were halted (February 2025) in relation to the established colonial waterbird nesting window (Feb. 15 to Sept. 15). Construction activities were re-initiated in September 2025 with a proposed project completion date of December 2025.

RESTORATION PROJECTS: IN DEVELOPMENT

LOUISIANA TRUSTEE IMPLEMENTATION GROUP: RESTORATION PLAN #7 / ENGINEERING & DESIGN

Bird's Foot Delta Hydrologic Restoration

The Mississippi River Bird's Foot Delta remains one of North America's most unique and vibrant wetland habitats. Nowhere else does a shallow fresh riverine system mix with the deep saline waters of the continental shelf. The area maintains a unique assemblage of wildlife and fisheries species including freshwater and marine fisheries, migratory and resident birds, a unique blend of marine and freshwater reptiles, and marine mammals among others. Collectively, the Delta (approximately 165,000 acres) is managed by USFWS and LDWF. These agencies are charged with the implementation of wildlife conservation measures while ensuring the public access and opportunities to enjoy those same natural resources year-round.

The Mississippi River Bird's Foot Delta received another designation: the closest land-mass to the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. As such, the delta experienced some of the most pervasive and repeated oiling events that caused extensive damage throughout these unique habitats that affected a host of wildlife species that rely on its services. Due to the size and scale of this specific injury, Trustees asserted that landscape-scale restoration was the most appropriate and effective means to address 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill impacts to the delta. This project entails hydrologic restoration of the Mississippi River Bird's Foot Delta by dredging select passes (Pass-a-Loutre, South Pass and Southeast Pass). In doing so, the Mississippi River will be reconnected to the Bird's Foot Delta's eastern and central marsh complexes.

The project seeks to accomplish four principal goals:

- Restore riverine processes to enhance natural marsh accretion via existing small sediment diversions (crevasses)- creating approximately 750 acres of tidal wetlands.
- Build and enhance over 1,500 acres of subtidal mudflats and submerged aquatic vegetation beds.

- Use dredged sediment beneficially to create over 1,000 acres of fresh and brackish marsh.
- Use dredged sediment to create approximately 20 acres of beach habitat for colonial nesting waterbirds such as terns, black skimmers and solitary shorebirds.

The project will initially yield measurable benefits by building new wetlands from the dredged sediment; however, the primary long-term project benefits will result from restoring the hydrology of the Bird's Foot Delta. With flow increased through the passes proposed for dredging, the Mississippi River will be able to disperse its sediment laden freshwater payload (land building) and lower salinities within to the marshes and bayous of the delta (approximately 100,000 acres). This project is truly a total ecosystem restoration project, as it would have a positive influence on land manager's ability to implement wildlife conservation measures, which have a direct nexus to enhancing the public's recreational opportunities (fishing, hunting, boating, camping, and several other non-consumptive activities) within the Bird's Foot Delta.

Proposed Timeline

Engineering and design activities are ongoing. Construction is tentatively scheduled for 2027.

LOUISIANA TRUSTEE IMPLEMENTATION GROUP: RESTORATION PLAN #8 / ENGINEERING & DESIGN

Raccoon Island

Raccoon Island provides geomorphic function including frontline storm protection for Terrebonne Parish and ecosystem functions supporting unique transitional terrestrial and aquatic habitats between the marine and estuarine

environments. Raccoon Island has environmental significance given that it is the western most limit of LDWF's Isle Dernieres Barrier Island Refuge and supports valuable avian nesting and fish habitat. It is one of the most productive avian nesting areas in the northern Gulf of America and provides nesting habitat for target shrub and select ground-nesting bird species. For the 2024-25 nesting season, Raccoon Island generated 25,238 nests from targeted species impacted by the Spill. Brown pelican nests comprised 6,643 of this total.

The project would design enhancements to Raccoon Island that would provide geomorphic form and ecologic function and restore diversity of barrier island habitats. Design enhancements of project features will include the creation and/or enhancement of beach, dune, supratidal, intertidal, and subtidal habitats through seaward and landward sand fill placement and shoreline protection.

Proposed Timeline

Engineering and Design was initiated in late 2023. Project alternative selection and acceptance of 30% design are scheduled to occur in December 2025. Construction is tentatively scheduled for 2028.

Map of the Chandeleur islands "Phase 1" (including New Harbor Island, one of the state's historic brown pelican colonies)

CHANDELEUR ISLANDS

Restoration for significant portions of the Chandeleur islands (including New Harbor Island, one of the state's historic brown pelican colonies) is being facilitated through Deepwater Horizon (Louisiana, Regionwide and Open Ocean Technical Implementation Groups), RESTORE and additional funding opportunities. Related activities are summarized within the following restoration plans:

- [Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Regionwide Trustee Implementation Group Final Restoration Plan / Environmental Assessment 1: Birds, Marine Mammals, Oysters, and Sea Turtles \(Regionwide RP/EA #1\)](#) supported project engineering and design activities.



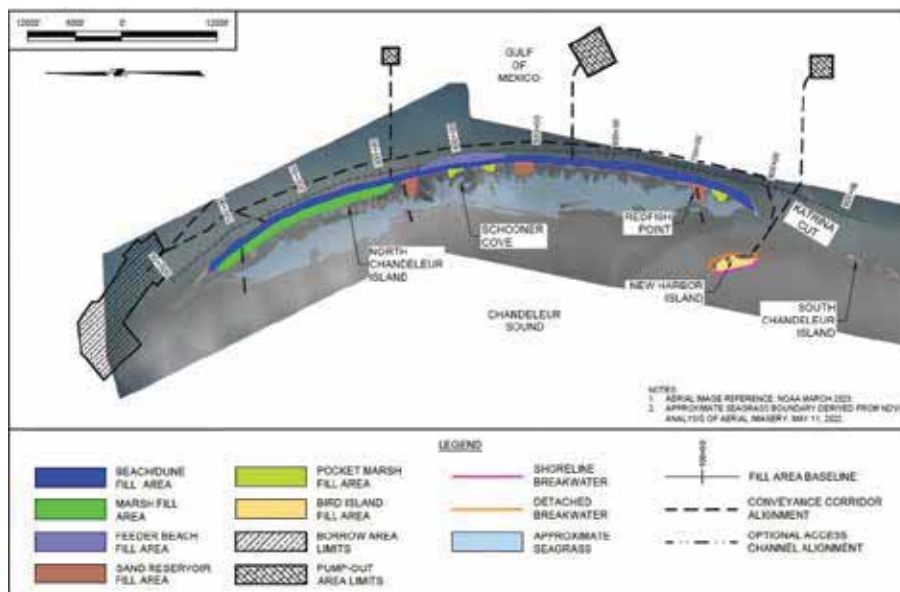
Raccoon Island



Turtlegrass



Sea Turtle



Chandealeur Alternative 5 (Preferred Alternative) Chandealeur Alternative 5 (Preferred Alternative)



Red Knot



Black Skimmer



Royal Terns

- [Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Louisiana and Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Final Joint Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment #1](#) (Joint RP/EA #1) supported alternatives analysis evaluations as well as implementation of the preferred alternatives.

Region-Wide Trustee Implementation Group: Regionwide Rp/Ea #1/ Engineering & Design

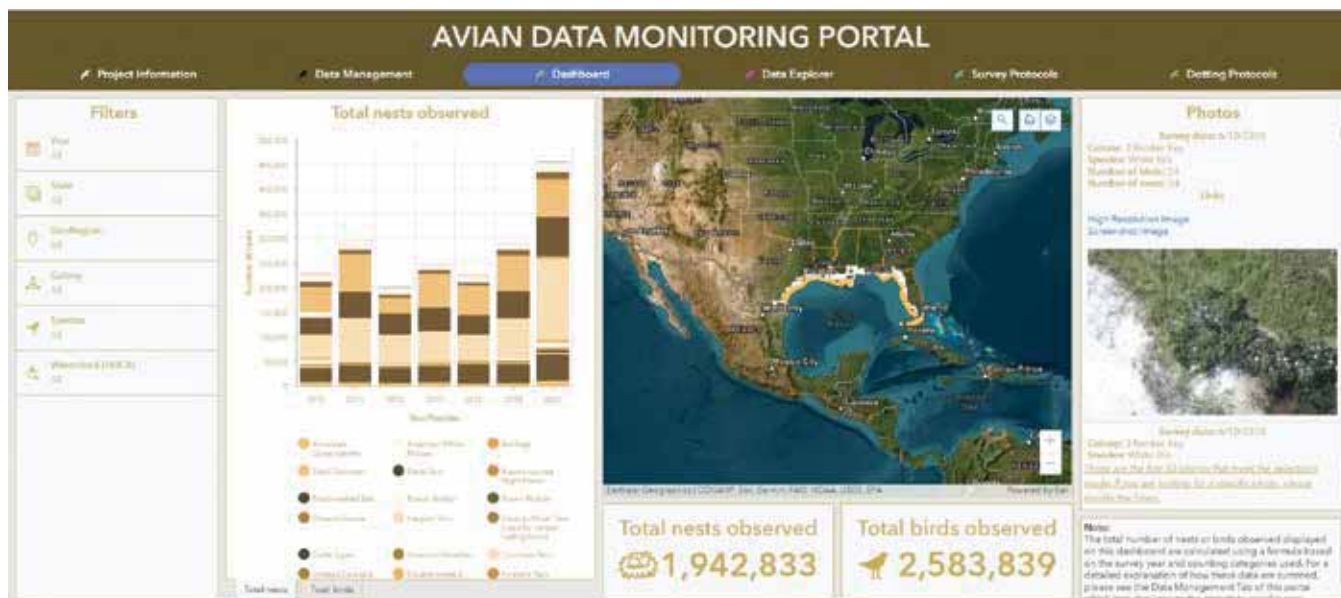
This "Phase 1" component completed engineering and design for a restoration project benefiting the Chandealeur Islands and the many species that use the islands, with a particular focus on birds. The Chandealeur Islands chain is a series of barrier islands in eastern St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes in Southeast Louisiana, located between the Gulf of America and Chandealeur Sound. This engineering and design project focuses on the initial planning phase of restoration of two of the islands: Chandealeur and New Harbor. The islands and seagrass beds that will be the focus of this engineering and design project are state and federally owned, and collectively managed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) via a memorandum of agreement with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) as part the Breton National Wildlife Refuge.

For the 2024-2025 nesting season, Chandealeurs generated 17,589 nests (North [9,771 nests] and South [7,818 nests]).

Louisiana And Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group: Joint Rp/Ea #1/ Environmental Assessment

This "Phase 2" component directly builds off project engineering and design work developed within Regionwide RP/EA #1. Joint RP/EA #1 screens proposed project alternatives concluding with the selection of the preferred alternatives. Of those, two preferred projects were selected for implementation on and around the Chandealeur Islands, using funds made available in the Deepwater Horizon Consent Decree.

[Chandealeur Islands Habitat Restoration](#) (Construct Alternative 5), which would implement island restoration features, including



Avian Data Monitoring Portal

beach and dune fill, marsh fill, rock breakwaters and revetment, sand reservoirs, pocket marshes, and feeder beaches.

Why? Alternative 5 was determined to be the most beneficial design alternative (e.g., greater amounts of habitat creation, including habitats supporting targeted living and marine resources). Targeted benefits generated by Alternate 5 versus others evaluated include:

- More initially constructed beach/dune and marsh habitat combined;
- More nesting habitat for birds and sea turtles immediately following construction;
- Most protection to existing seagrass beds sheltered west of North Chandeleur Island.
- Over a 20-year analysis, period, as coastal processes continue to shape the Chandeleur Islands; preferred alternative would provide the greatest sustained gains in beach/dune and marsh habitat acreage.

Proposed Timeline

Related planning and construction is tentatively scheduled for 2026.



MONITORING AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT PROJECTS

LOUISIANA TRUSTEE IMPLEMENTATION GROUP

Coastwide Colonial Waterbird Aerial Photographic Nest Surveys and Nest Dotting Analyses, Louisiana

Multi-year project (2024-2029) supported by targeted investments by the Louisiana and Regionwide Trustee Implementation Groups. Investment is intended to address long-standing priorities: address significant informational needs (e.g. relative abundance, diversity, distribution trends and breeding status). In so doing, Monitoring and Adaptive Management activity will facilitate Trustees' ability to evaluate restoration effectiveness, address potential uncertainties related to restoration planning and implementation, and provide feedback to inform

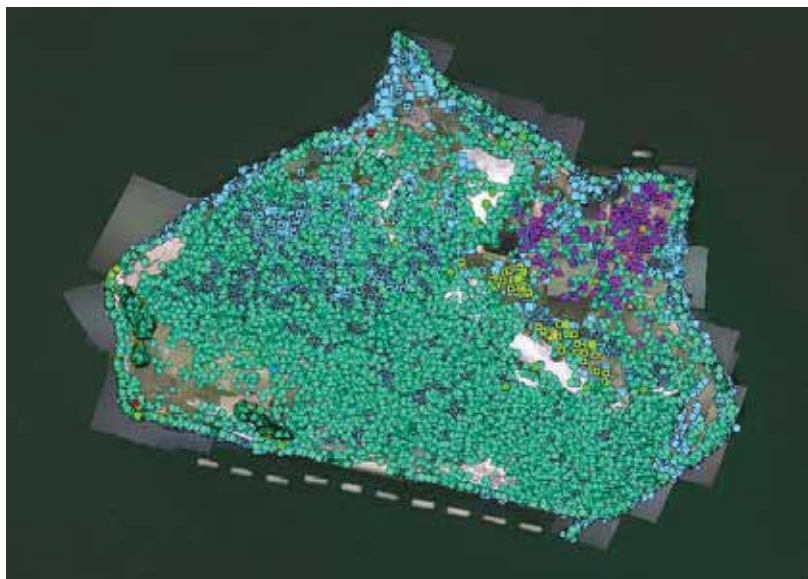
future colonial waterbird restoration decisions. Located at <https://avianmonitoring.com>.

Secretive Marshbird Population Modeling

- Given geographically expansive Deepwater Horizon oiling throughout Louisiana's coastal marshes, trustees assert that significant injury occurred to secretive marshbirds; a highly site-fidelic bird group.
- Implementation of representative restoration for this bird guild will require addressing significant information gaps including:
 - Determine Population Estimates for Breeding Secretive Marshbirds.
 - Characterize Multi-Scale Habitat Relationships
 - Determine Benefits Provided by
 - Select Coastal restoration Projects
 - Identify Key Features for
 - Future Secretive Marshbird Restoration and Adaptive Management
- To inform future restoration, LDWF and the trustees implemented a multi-year (2021-2024) within four coastal basins.



Coastwide Colonial waterbird Aerial Photographic Nest Surveys and Nest Dotting Analyses
LEFT: Camera man **CENTER:** Individual pelican on the ground **RIGHT:** Nests from the air



These activities were accomplished by integrating in-field sampling (callback and habitat surveys) in tandem with geographically expansive remote sensing analyses.

Because of this significant investment, robust predictive models were developed that will greatly assist trustees' ability to characterize, implement and manage representative habitats that directly benefit this bird group.

Proposed Timeline

Project was completed in June 2025. Contractor is providing assistance towards incorporating project information into the Avian Guidance Document Marsh-nesting bird update.

Avian Guidance Document

- Following the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, Trustees were charged with the development, implementation and management of representative restoration for targeted avian species.
- To facilitate these efforts, long-standing informational needs identified by restoration practitioners needed to be addressed.
- In 2023, subject matter experts across diverse scientific disciplines completed the Avian Guidance Document.

While drafting the original Avian Guidance Document (2023), subject matter experts highlighted the lack of available Marsh-nesting bird information.

Information generated from the Secretive Marshbird Population Modeling project identified to address many of this bird group's informational gaps.

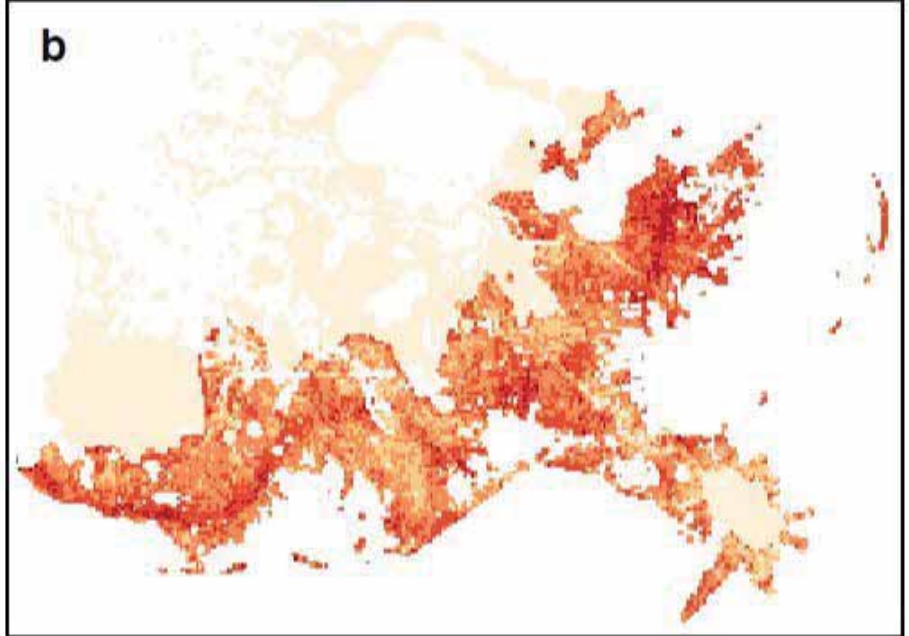
The project generated two graduate degrees, and with assistance from diverse resource stakeholders. Targeted information from these collective efforts is being incorporated within the *new* Avian Guidance Document Marsh-nesting bird update that is tentatively scheduled for completion in mid-2026.



Coastwide Colonial waterbird Aerial Photographic Nest Surveys and Nest Dotting Analyses
TOP: Queen Bess (nests identified by dots) **CENTER:** Chandeleurs Nest Dotting **BOTTOM:** Rabbit Island Adaptive Management



Secretive Marshbird Population Modeling
FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: Common moorhen and chicks, clapper rail with chicks, clapper rail in marsh, purple gallinule with chick, least bittern with eggs



Secretive Marshbird Population Modeling: Species Distribution Model



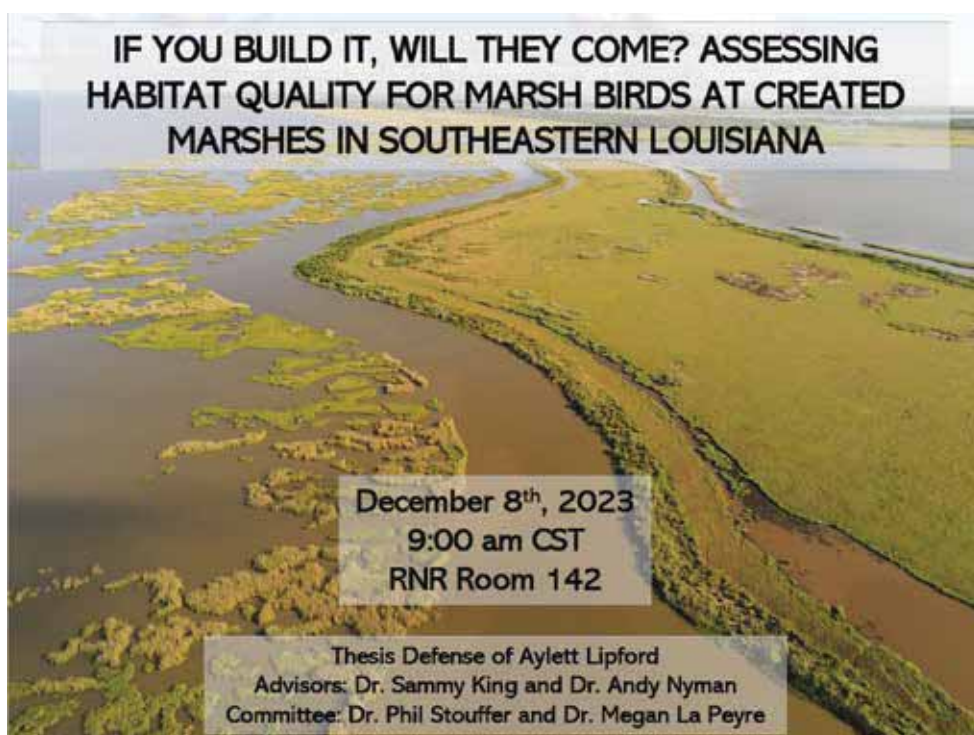
Callback surveys



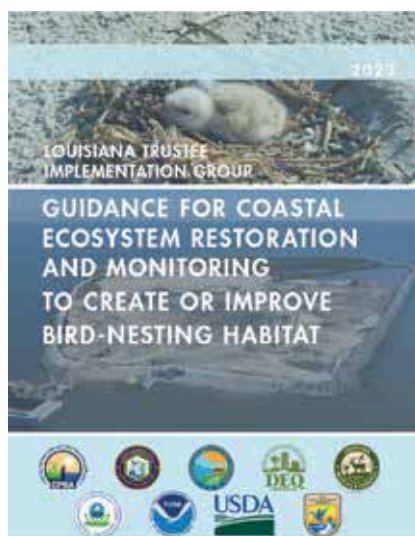
Purple gallinule telemetry



Leah Moran PhD defense



Aylett Lipford MS defense



LEFT: Avian Guidance Document informing future avian restoration, management and monitoring activities. **RIGHT:** Clapper rail in marsh



Office of Fisheries

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE & PERSONNEL

The purpose of the Office of Fisheries is to manage aquatic resources and their habitat, to support the fishing industry, and to provide access, opportunity and understanding of the Louisiana aquatic resources to the state's citizens and other beneficiaries of these sustainable resources.

LDWF's Office of Fisheries is headed by the Assistant Secretary of Fisheries, who reports directly to LDWF's Secretary and oversees administration of the office. Reporting to the Assistant Secretary are the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Fisheries and two Biologist Administrators.

The LDWF Office of Fisheries is currently headed by Ryan Montegut. After graduating with a B.S. in Zoology from Louisiana State University and a J.D. from Loyola University New Orleans College of Law, Ryan began his career managing wetlands restoration projects along the Louisiana coast, while pursuing post-graduate studies in wetlands ecology and environmental biology at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Ryan then served as General Counsel for the Iberia Parish Sheriff's Department, maintained a private law practice for approximately 15 years, and most recently served as an assistant attorney general in the Lands, Environmental, and Natural Resources section in the Civil Division of the Louisiana Department of Justice.

The Office of Fisheries structure is comprised of the following sections and programs:

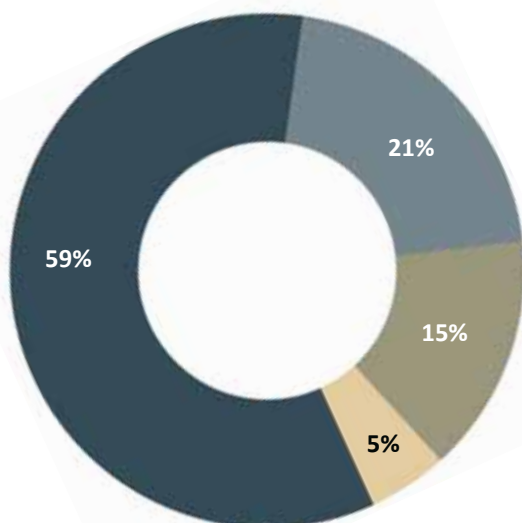
- **Marine Fisheries**- to manage the marine (saltwater) fisheries resources of the state.
- **Inland Fisheries**- to manage the inland (freshwater) fisheries resources of the state.
- **Oyster Lease**- to manage oyster lease agreements.
- **Fisheries Research and Assessment**- to provide technical and scientific research in support of fisheries management.
- **Fisheries Extension**- to provide guidance and assistance to Louisiana's valuable commercial fishing industries, and to provide fishery management information to the recreational sector through improved fishing and boating access, aquatic outreach and volunteer activities.

OBJECTIVES

- To provide high-quality fishery management information through effective data collection, analysis and information sharing.
- To be an effective, efficient steward of our renewable aquatic resources.
- To provide and enhance the recreational fishing experience through improved access, opportunity and public awareness.
- To maintain a sustainable and economically viable fisheries environment.
- To create a work environment in which all Fisheries staff are enabled and empowered to achieve the office's goals and objectives.

FISHERIES FUNDING

FISHERIES FUNDING SOURCES
(APPROPRIATED FUNDING)
Total: \$137,790,226



Federal Funds	- \$81,813,533
Statutory Dedications	- \$29,403,697
Interagency Transfers	- \$21,032,021
Self-Generated Funds	- \$5,540,975

The Statutory Dedications utilized by the Office of Fisheries are primarily from the Conservation Fund and the Artificial Reef Trust Fund. The Conservation Fund is funded primarily by license revenue and oil and gas revenue from Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) property. The Conservation Fund is a general funding source used to fund marine commercial fisheries monitoring, permitting, and general office operations. The Artificial Reef Trust Fund is funded through donations from oil and gas companies. Oil and gas companies donate one half of the realized savings over a traditional onshore removal of obsolete oil and gas offshore structures. The Artificial Reef Trust Fund is used to fund the building and monitoring of inshore, nearshore and offshore artificial reefs, and operations of the Artificial Reef Program.

Federal funds used by LDWF come from various federal entities, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. Funds from USFWS are primarily from federal assistance through the Sport Fish Restoration Program. These funds are dedicated to marine and freshwater monitoring, research, manage-

ment and boating access, aquatic education, and aquatic outreach. The funds from NOAA represent various grants that are utilized to collect offshore fisheries independent data and commercial fisheries dependent data. The funds from Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission represent various grants that are utilized to collect recreational and commercial fisheries dependent data.

Interagency transfer funds are provided by other state agencies and used to fund various projects. These projects include fisheries monitoring associated with the state coastal master plan, oil spill response and damage assessment, and oil spill restoration projects.

Self-generated funds are generated by the Department or provided by other non-governmental entities and are used to fund various projects. These funds include boat registration fees that are used to manage nuisance aquatic vegetation through the Aquatic Plant Control Fund and funds that are provided through commercial oyster fees used to monitor oyster sanitation parameters. Activities also include participation in Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Council and collaborations with various universities.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Louisiana's fisheries resources benefit all constituent groups in Louisiana, across the Gulf Coast and throughout the nation. The Louisiana Constitution of 1974 provides the framework to protect and enhance habitat and to ensure sustainable commercial and recreational fisheries. Fisheries biologists collect the basic ecological data needed to efficiently and effectively manage fisheries resources to benefit all constituent groups.

LDWF is responsible for managing Louisiana's fisheries and maintaining healthy fish populations and habitat for the benefit of Louisiana's residents and visitors of both today and tomorrow. Responsible fisheries management starts with sound, scientific information about fish populations and the ecosystems in which they live, as well as the fisheries that harvest them. LDWF biologists use a variety of methods to gather this information, including examining fishermen's catch (fishery dependent data) and conducting scientific studies (fishery independent data).

MONITORING

Monitoring fisheries, both fresh and saltwater, is a crucial component of resource management. Important biological data is collected specific to each type of sampling. In addition, hydrological data (conductivity, turbidity, dissolved oxygen, salinity and water temperature) are collected with each biological sample, as are air temperature and unusual or other significant conditions. The information gathered during monitoring efforts, such as fisheries independent sampling, gives biologists and administrators the information essential to manage each fishery appropriately; openings, closures, limits and emergency actions are based upon monitoring data.

SHRIMP SAMPLING

The long-term objectives of the shrimp fishery research program are to assess and monitor shrimp stocks and to evaluate shrimp fishery impacts on other fisheries and protected species. Each species requires an assessment of the condition of the stock, the fishery and sectors of the economy that are impacted by changes in either. The assessments are also needed so that LDWF can determine whether or not a stock is overfished.

Inshore and offshore shrimp sampling continued during FY 2024-2025. In inshore waters, 327 6-foot and 1,712 16-foot trawl samples



Shrimp sampling - 16ft Trawl Retrieval

were collected. In state offshore territorial waters and the Exclusive Economic Zone, 240 20-foot trawl samples were collected. During FY 2024-2025, these sampling procedures were used to collect information crucial to setting the opening and closing dates of the 2025 spring inshore shrimp season, setting the opening and closing dates of the 2024 fall inshore shrimp season, and monitoring the open season in state territorial waters for potential closure.

OYSTER SAMPLING

Management of the public oyster grounds and reservations relies heavily upon data gathered through a comprehensive biological monitoring program. State biologists use four gear types (24-inch hand dredge, 24-inch mesh bag dredge, quarter-meter frame, and square-meter frame) when sampling the public reef areas, and analyze the data collected to determine overall health of the oyster resource. For annual stock assessments, LDWF biologists collect field samples in July from each coastal study area across Louisiana to perform a quantitative evaluation of the oyster stock on the state's public oyster areas. Biologists SCUBA dive on designated sampling stations within each coastal study area. At each sampling station, an aluminum square-meter frame (quadrat/m²) is randomly placed on the oyster reef, and all live and dead oysters, reef-associated organisms, and exposed reef material are collected by hand from the upper portion of the substrate within the quadrat. Square-meter frames are used to access natural reefs and quarter-meter

frames are used to sample cultch plants due to the increase in reef density. Square-meter frame sampling is the primary method used to assess oyster populations on the state's public oyster areas. At each station, five replicate samples were collected and data were combined to produce average density of spat, seed, and sack oysters per square-meter. Oyster density was multiplied by the associated reef acreage to obtain an estimate of total oyster population size. Data is also collected on fouling organisms and oyster predator densities if present on the reef. Water temperature, dissolved oxygen, and salinity data are collected in conjunction with the m² samples. Cultch material types are identified, weighed, and assessed using the sustainable oyster shellstock model. Sampling conducted as part of the annual oyster stock assessment plays a valuable role in making biological recommendations for the upcoming oyster season, which can open as early as mid-September and run through the end of April of the following year. However, the season may be closed or delayed if biological concerns or enforcement problems are encountered. LDWF uses the annual oyster stock assessment information to make recommendations regarding setting the oyster season to the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission (LWFC).

Oyster seasons are driven by data from the annual Oyster Stock Assessment square-meter sampling event. In July 2024, 470 square-meter samples were collected from 94 sample stations (not including Sabine Lake, Lake Felicity, and Lake Chien, which are sampled biennially) coast-wide for the Oyster Stock Assessment. Seventy-five square-meter samples were collected at the same time from 25 sample stations in the Barataria Basin as per the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) Coastwide Fish and Shellfish Monitoring Program Agreement, for the System Wide Assessment and Monitoring Program (SWAMP). In the fall of 2024, 234 square-meter samples were collected from 78 stations in the Barataria and Pontchartrain basins for this agreement, and this additional sampling was repeated in spring 2025 for the agreement. In total, 1,013 square-meter replicates were collected in FY 2024-2025.

In addition, the Sustainable Oyster Shellstock Model is being utilized to provide harvest thresholds for the public oyster areas of Louisiana. This model will help maintain reef material over time and was created in partnership



Oyster dredge sampling



with Dr. Thomas Soniat at The University of New Orleans. This computerized model guides fisheries management to conserve the oyster reef base. Oyster stock assessment sampling provides model input data such as estimates of reef mass (grams per m²) and size-frequency of oysters. Utilizing additional data on oyster growth, mortality, salinity, and estimated commercial harvest rates, the model estimates the amount of oyster harvest allowed on each reef while preserving sufficient reef mass to keep the reef viable. The model outputs harvest rates based on three different conditions- low, medium and high salinity patterns for each basin. At this time, the Sustainable Oyster Shell-stock Model is applied to all reefs in the state. The model harvesting thresholds are used by the oyster program manager to facilitate oyster season recommendations and can be used to close over-harvested reefs during the commercial public oyster season.

Dredge data is used to monitor the overall health of the oyster resource during the year and to assess the recruitment of new age classes of oysters into the population. Two replicates were taken per station per month, except July, to monitor size frequency, recruitment, mortality, and the presence and/or absence of resource, predators, and reef fouling organisms. July is reserved for (square-meter) stock assessment sampling mentioned above. For FY 2024-2025, 1,640 dredge samples were collected. Included in this annual sample tally are three (monthly) SWAMP stations in the Barataria Basin, as well as cultch plant monitoring. There were nine sample stations sampled quarterly as opposed to monthly, including six in Sabine Lake and three in Terrebonne Parish.

Field biologists also gather hydrological data when conducting square-meter and dredge sampling. During oyster seasons, field staff conduct boarding report surveys of oyster

boats harvesting from public oyster areas. Boarding survey data allows them to develop harvest and fishing effort estimates for their respective region. During bedding season, in which commercial fishers collect live oysters from the public oyster areas and transport them to their private leases, field biologists sample bedding loads to determine that the portion of non-living reef material does not exceed a set maximum benchmark value. For the 2024-2025 oyster season, 15% non-living material was the maximum allowance in bedding loads. Biologists work with Enforcement agents in monitoring oyster bedding vessels for the duration of oyster bedding seasons. During the 2024-2025 oyster season, LDWF instituted a daily reporting requirement for vessels harvesting on the public oyster areas. Vessels were required to provide the following information via an e-Reporting smartphone application by Shellcatch: Captain's name, oyster harvester number, vessel number, total number of sacks or total amount of seed resource harvested that day, and the public oyster area fished. The 2024-2025 oyster season had an estimated 80.6% compliance in harvest reporting across the state's public oyster areas, with 104 vessels reporting.

Annual Oyster Stock Survey

The statewide public oyster stock size in 2024 increased from 2023 levels, where approximately 1,028,994 barrels (one barrel = two sacks) of oysters increased to 1,230,551 barrels on the public oyster areas of Louisiana (excluding Sabine Lake). The 2024 stock estimate represents an increase of 19.6% compared to 2023. Table 1 illustrates that most reef areas across the state saw an increase in oyster resource. Similar to recent years, most of the live oyster stock is in Calcasieu Lake (Coastal Study Area 7), which holds 61.2% of the 2024 estimated availability (Table 1, Figure 1). Statewide, seed oysters increased by 7.6%, while

market-size oysters increased by 31.0%, compared to 2023. Significant increases were observed in Sister Lake, east of Mississippi River (north of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet), and Calcasieu Lake, which pushed the 2024 total oyster resource 20.9% above its 20-year long-term average (Figure 2).

LDWF has monitored oyster populations in Sabine Lake using established monitoring stations and conducting annual oyster stock assessments. However, in the 2018 regular legislative session, Act 159 was passed, placing a permanent moratorium on the harvest of oysters in Sabine Lake. Due to this moratorium, LDWF currently conducts population stock assessments in Sabine Lake every other year, and Sabine Lake oyster stock availabilities are not included in statewide estimates. Sabine Lake was not assessed in FY 2024-2025.

Spat-on-Shell Monitoring

The Michael C. Voisin Oyster Hatchery located in Grand Isle, LA, is operated cooperatively by both LDWF and Louisiana Sea Grant, and it produces oysters set on recycled oyster shells. Many collaborations were made to construct, set, and deploy hatchery-produced spat-on-shell. LDWF collaborated with the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana's oyster shell recycling program, which began in FY 2013-2014. The Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana collects and stockpiles oyster shell from Louisiana restaurants and has provided some of this shell to LDWF for restoration projects in the past. The hatchery produces diploid oyster larvae for setting on shell (spat-on-shell). To prepare for setting on shell, mesh bags (approximately 3 feet long) are filled with recycled oyster shell and placed in holding tanks where oyster larvae are then added. The hatchery can also set larvae on macro-cultch to hold in the facility for later deployment as larger seed (juvenile) oysters.

TABLE 1. Estimated oyster stock (in bbl.) on Louisiana's public oyster areas by basin for 2024. Percentages are change from previous year.

CSA	BASIN	SEED	SEED % CHANGE	MARKET-SIZED	MARKET-SIZED % CHANGE	TOTAL STOCK	TOTAL % CHANGE
1N	Lake Borgne/MS Sound	259,737.3	+156.5%	135,390.3	+445.0%	395,127.6	+213.3%
1S	East of MS River, South of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet	0.0	-100.0%	4,557.1	-78.7%	4,557.1	-88.6%
3	Hackberry Bay	14,568.7	+146.9%	12,163.1	+801.6%	26,731.8	+268.7%
5E	Lake Chien/Felicity	0.0	N/A	0.0	N/A	0.0	N/A
5W	Bay Junop/ Lake Mechant	3,742.8	+98.2%	1,382.9	+3,476.2%	5,125.7	+166.0%
5W	Sister Lake	17,809.8	-89.3%	27,529.7	-84.3%	45,339.5	-86.8%
7	Calcasieu - East Side	34,610.5	+30.6%	50,903.1	+254.7%	85,513.6	+109.3%
7	Calcasieu - West Cove	209,818.5	+15.8%	458,337.5	+58.4%	668,156.0	+42.0%
Statewide Totals		540,287.6	+7.6%	690,263.7	+31.0%	1,230,551.3	+19.6%

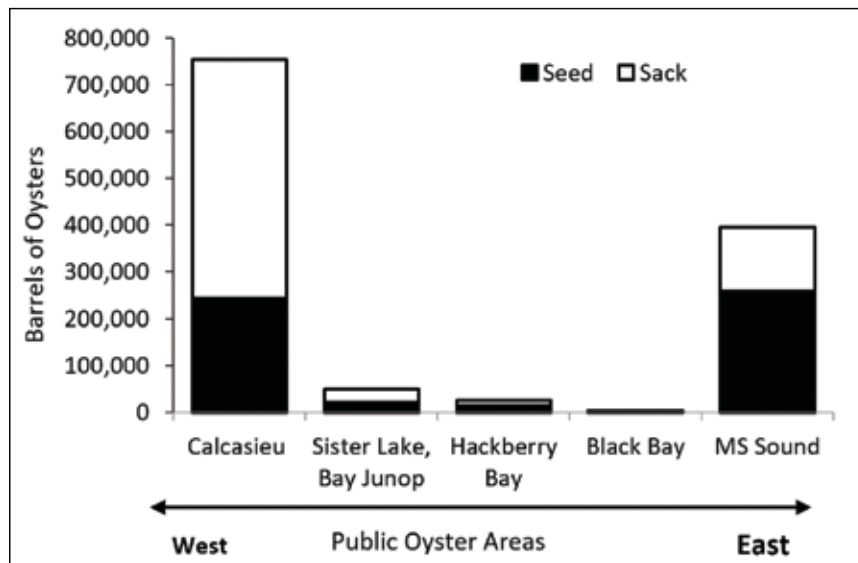


FIGURE 1. 2024 Oyster stock distribution in Louisiana's public oyster areas by basin.

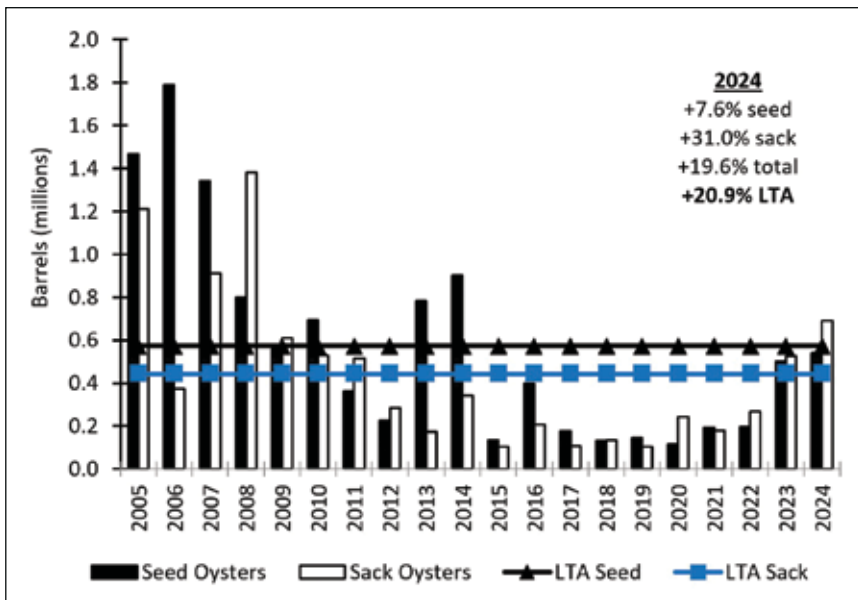


FIGURE 2. Seed and market-size oyster stock availability in Louisiana's public oyster areas. Long-term average denotes the long-term average from 2005 through 2024. Percentages indicate change from 2023. Yearly data excludes Sabine Lake stock assessments.

In this reporting period, there were several restoration deployments throughout the state's public oyster areas. An estimated 25,040,000 larvae were set and deployed as spat-on-shell to the Lake Machias Broodstock Reef in July 2024, producing an estimated 697,604 oyster spat. An estimated 7,500,000 larvae were set and deployed as spat-on-shell to the West Karako Artificial Reef in July 2024, producing an estimated 539,226 oyster spat. On Oct. 9, 2024, an estimated 484,000 seed oysters on microcultch were deployed to the Hotel Sid Artificial Reef near East Champagne Bay. In May and June 2025, an estimated 4,827,400 oyster larvae were directly deployed to the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana living shoreline in Leeville, LA. Lastly, an estimated 11,160,000 oyster larvae were directly deployed to restoration areas around the Grand Isle Fishing Pier in June 2025.

Oyster Kill Monitoring

In June 2022, LDWF Office of Fisheries created and distributed an Oyster Kill Response Plan, similar in design to the Fish Kill Response plan, but modified to meet the needs of the Oyster Fishery. During FY 2024-2025, no oyster kills were reported to LDWF Marine Fisheries personnel. LDWF did investigate the impacts of Hurricane Francine. Hurricane Francine made landfall as a Category 2 hurricane on Sept. 11, 2024 in Terrebonne Parish, LA. LDWF monitoring indicated elevated mortalities of spat and seed-size oyster resource on some public reefs in the Barataria Basin and Calcasieu Basin.

Michael C. Voisin Oyster Hatchery Operation Overview

The Michael C. Voisin Oyster Hatchery is operated cooperatively by both LDWF and Louisiana Sea Grant. Louisiana Sea Grant is contracted to operate the facility and to provide recommendations to LDWF for hatchery operations. Louisiana Sea Grant hatchery staff work to produce oyster larvae and algae. Phycologists grow marine microalgae, which is used to feed oyster larvae and supplement broodstock holding systems. The Louisiana Sea Grant staff

includes a director, an operations manager, and four research associates. All research associates are responsible for the overall production of algae and oyster larvae and must be up-to-date in hatchery operations. The research associates do have some specialized tasks focusing on phycology, broodstock conditioning, larval production, and farm and nursery operations. Louisiana Sea Grant provides additional staff support through workforce development with undergraduate student workers. In addition, Louisiana Sea Grant hatchery staff provide extension services for people interested in topics such as growing oysters, producing larvae and operating seed nursery systems. Louisiana Sea Grant staff work to produce diploid, triploid, and tetraploid larvae and seed for orders, restoration, and research.

Louisiana Sea Grant manages several lines of wild, diploid broodstock and the Louisiana tetraploid oyster. Diploid and tetraploid refers to the number of chromosome sets an organism contains (diploid being two sets and tetraploid four sets). Tetraploid oyster sperm is used to fertilize diploid oyster eggs, which reliably produces 100% triploid (three chromosome sets) oysters. 4Cs Breeding Technologies, Inc., has intellectual property rights for these tetraploids. 4Cs licenses the use of these tetraploid oysters to LDWF.

Historically, LDWF focused on producing diploid larvae and spat for restoration, but that mission changed in 2018 when LDWF was tasked with directing larval and seed sales. Prior sales had been processed by the Louisiana Oyster Dealers and Growers Association overseen by the hatchery director, since the hatchery opened in 2015. Thus, throughout the hatchery season, which goes from March through November, LDWF distributes both diploid and triploid larvae and seed, produced by Louisiana Sea Grant, to fulfill customer sales orders and complete restoration projects.

2024 Fall Production

2024 Total Fall Production

Production in the fall of 2024 was concentrated in July due to favorable hydrological conditions at that time. Total fall diploid production was an estimated at 296,530,000 oyster eggs, used to produce 70,572,000 oyster larvae for hatchery goals (Tables 2 & 3). Michael C. Voisin Oyster Hatchery production during the late summer months had several low egg hatch rates. In late summer, the oyster larvae were experiencing high mortality at the hatchery. Through testing, it was concluded that several strains of *Vibrio* that are patho-

TABLE 2. 2024 Michael C. Voisin Oyster Hatchery fall production of oyster larvae and seed used by Louisiana Sea Grant and LDWF for restoration, sales, and research.

CATEGORY	PURPOSE	DIPLOID
Total Eggs Fertilized	Hatchery Production	296,530,000
Total Pediveligers	Hatchery Production	70,572,000
Total Pediveligers	LDWF Sales	42,000
Total Pediveligers Set on Microcultch	Produce Seed for LDWF Sales	0
Total Seed	LDWF Sales	0
Total Pediveligers Direct Set	LDWF Restoration	0
Total Pediveligers Set on Microcultch	LDWF Restoration	37,990,000
Total Pediveligers Set on Shell	LDWF Restoration	32,540,000
Total Seed	LDWF Restoration	484,000

TABLE 3. 2024 Michael C. Voisin Oyster Hatchery fall production of diploid, triploid, and tetraploid pediveligers and seed used by Louisiana Sea Grant and LDWF for sales, restoration, and research.

PLOIDY	STAGE	SALES TOTAL	RESTORATION TOTAL	RESEARCH TOTAL
Diploid	D-Stage	0	0	0
	Veliger	0	0	0
	Pediveliger	0	32,540,000	42,000
	Seed	0	484,000	0
Triploid	D-Stage	0	0	0
	Veliger	0	0	0
	Pediveliger	0	0	0
	Seed	0	0	0
Tetraploid	D-Stage	0	0	0
	Veliger	0	0	0
	Pediveliger	0	0	0
	Seed	0	0	0
Larval Totals		0	32,540,000	42,000
Seed Totals		0	484,000	0

TABLE 4. 2024 Michael C. Voisin Oyster Hatchery fall facilitated restoration deployments.

LOCATION	TOTAL # OF PEDIVELIGERS SET	EST. TOTAL # OF SPAT	DEPLOYMENT DATE
Lake Machias Broodstock Reef	25,040,000	697,604	July 11, 2024
West Karako Artificial Reef	7,500,000	539,226	July 23, 2024
Hotel Sid Artificial Reef	37,990,000	484,000	Oct. 9, 2024

genic to oyster larvae had contaminated the larval holding tanks. The hatchery will be adding UV light to the water holding tanks and the broodstock holding tanks over the offseason to combat this. The hatchery will also implement cleaning of the hatchery seawater lines monthly with bleach or peroxide in an attempt to eliminate the buildup of biofilms that coat the plumbing and may harbor *Vibrio* spp.

Fall Restoration Deployments

There were three fall 2024 deployments (Table 4). A spat-on-shell deployment to the Lake Machias Broodstock Reef in July 2024, a spat-on-shell deployment to the West Karako Artificial Reef in July 2024, and a microcultch seed deployment to the Hotel Sid Artificial Reef near East Champagne Bay on Oct. 9, 2024.

2025 Spring Production

Algal Production

Algal stock production began early in March for the spring 2025 production season and continued throughout the year.

Larval Production

The 2025 spring larval production began in March with diploid spawn attempts. Several spawning attempts were made in March and April without success, likely due to colder water temperatures at the time. Starting last season, the estimation of eggs fertilized to produce oyster larvae were quantified by the hatchery. Total spring diploid production was estimated at 611,133,333 oyster eggs, used to produce 66,087,732 oyster larvae for

TABLE 5. 2025 Michael C. Voisin Oyster Hatchery spring production of diploid pediveligers and seed used by Louisiana Sea Grant and LDWF for restoration, sales, and research.

CATEGORY	PURPOSE	DIPLOID	TETRAPLOID
Total Eggs Fertilized	Hatchery Production	611,133,333	2,325,000
Total Pediveligers	Hatchery Production	66,087,732	30,400
Total Pediveligers	LDWF Sales	2,000	
Total Pediveligers Set on Microcultch	Produce Seed for LDWF Sales	2,920,000	
Total Seed	LDWF Sales	27,000	
Total Pediveligers Direct Set	LDWF Restoration	43,215,732	
Total Pediveligers Set on Microcultch	LDWF Restoration	9,030,000	
Total Pediveligers Set on Shell	LDWF Restoration	10,920,000	
Total Seed	LDWF Restoration	0	

TABLE 6. 2025 Michael C. Voisin Oyster Hatchery spring production of diploid, triploid, and tetraploid pediveligers and seed used by Louisiana Sea Grant and LDWF for restoration, sales, and research.

PLOIDY	STAGE	SALES TOTAL	RESTORATION TOTAL	RESEARCH TOTAL
Diploid	D-Stage	0	0	0
	Veliger	0	0	0
	Pediveliger	0	63,165,732	2,000
	Seed	27,000	0	0
Triploid	D-Stage	0	0	0
	Veliger	0	0	0
	Pediveliger	0	0	0
	Seed	0	0	0
Tetraploid	D-Stage	0	0	0
	Veliger	0	0	0
	Pediveliger	30,400	0	0
	Seed	0	0	0
Larval Totals		30,400	63,165,732	2,000
Seed Totals		27,000	0	0

TABLE 7. 2025 Michael C. Voisin Oyster Hatchery spring facilitated restoration deployments.

LOCATION	TOTAL # OF PEDIVELIGERS SET	EST. TOTAL # OF SPAT	DEPLOYMENT DATE
Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana Living Shoreline reef Leesville, LA	4,827,400	N/A	May & June 2025
Grand Isle Fishing Pier	11,160,000	N/A	June 2025

hatchery goals (Tables 5 & 6). One tetraploid spawn was attempted, producing 30,400 larvae, but triploid seed production was unsuccessful.

Seed Production

A portion of the 2025 diploid larval production was set aside for seed sales. Two oyster farmers purchased 27,000 seed; the unpurchased seed was used for restoration efforts.

Spring Restoration Deployments

The LDWF Michael C. Voisin Oyster Hatchery produces diploid oyster larvae for several spring 2025 deployments (Table 7). Due to heavy larval production in the early summer 2025 and deployment constraints, the hatch-

ery staff made several trips in May and June for direct-set of oyster larvae on a Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana living shoreline reef in Leesville and to several reef areas around Grand Isle Fishing Pier.

MARINE FINFISH SAMPLING

The primary objective of the Finfish Program is to make recommendations for the management of coastal finfish stocks based on a database of scientific information. The information in the database is collected through fishery independent and dependent sampling. The fishery independent monitoring program is an ongoing collection of data by fisheries biologists in the field conducting surveys designed to sample coastal waters in an objective manner.

The surveys collect information based on geographic ranges independent of commercial or recreational fishing operations.

Three gear types are used coast-wide to sample various year classes of estuarine-dependent fish:

1. A bag seine is used to sample young-of-the-year and provide information on growth and movement. More significantly, these samples provide information on the forage species and ecological components of marsh-edge and shoreline habitats throughout the coastal zone. Seine samples are taken monthly.
2. A gill net is used to sample juvenile, sub-adult and adult fish. It provides information on relative abundance, year class strength, movement, and gonad condition. Gill net samples are collected semi-monthly from April through September, and monthly from October through March, using a strike net technique.
3. A trammel net is used to sample juvenile and sub-adult fish. It provides information on relative abundance, standing crop and movement. Trammel net samples are taken monthly from October through March.

During FY 2024-2025, the fishery-independent finfish sampling program collected 972 of 972 gill net samples (100%), 1,278 of 1,280 seine samples (99%), and 269 of 270 trammel net samples (99%), for a 99% overall completion rate statewide.

FRESHWATER FINFISH SAMPLING AND MANAGEMENT

LDWF annually samples a subset of rivers, streams, lakes and reservoirs based on their importance to the fishing public, size, productivity and, in the case of reservoirs, drawdown capability. Other considerations



LEFT: Marine Finfish Sampling - trammel net retrieval **RIGHT:** Marine Finfish Sampling - seine net sample

include existing and potential management needs that are specific to the waterbody. Waterbody sampling schedules are developed each year and monitoring and management results are reported in LDWF Waterbody Management Plan updates, which can be accessed on the LDWF website.

Freshwater fisheries resources are monitored and managed through various sampling methods. In FY 2024-2025, biologists estimated relative abundance, age, growth and mortality, size class structure, species composition and genetic composition of sportfish populations in addition to physiochemical characteristics of the water on 118 lakes, rivers and streams. Sampling sites on inland lakes, reservoirs and rivers are predetermined and selected to represent available aquatic habitats within the various water bodies. Sampling protocol is standardized to the extent possible to allow for comparison of data over time and includes electrofishing, lead net, seine net, hoop net, and gill net gear types. Lotic sampling methodology follows lake methodology closely, with the addition of habitat type and river stage parameters. LDWF Inland Fisheries biologists have developed standard operating procedures for sampling rivers and Wadeable streams for biomonitoring of fish and mussel communities.

Electrofishing samples are collected in both spring and fall to provide an estimation of population trends including abundance, size, distribution, age structure and genetic composition. A total of 738 electrofishing samples were taken for 151 hours of timed electrofishing during FY 2024-2025.

Seine samples are taken in many water bodies to determine fish community relative abundance and young-of-the-year recruitment of popular sport fishes that might be underrepresented with electrofishing gear. These samples occur from June to August each year. Eighty-seven seine hauls were made during the FY 2024-2025.

Entanglement and trap net webbing are also used during standardized sampling throughout the year to collect crappie, catfish and sunfish species as well as nongame commercial species. A total of 165 gill net samples were taken on various lakes and rivers, and 290 lead net and hoop net samples were fished during FY 2024-2025.

With increased public demand for evaluation of freshwater fish harvest regulations, three-year population assessments of largemouth bass and crappie to investigate age, growth, and mortality in select waterbodies began in 2009. Inland Fisheries staff collected age, growth, and mortality samples of largemouth bass and crappie in two waterbodies in FY 2024-2025. The extensive age, growth and mortality data collected for these assessments are used to inform and evaluate future management decisions. More information can be found in the Stock Assessment section of this report.

Water quality data is collected each time a fisheries sample is collected on a waterbody. In FY 2024-2025, water quality samples were taken for physical and chemical criteria including temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH, salinity

and conductivity coinciding with each biological sampling event, and to monitor conditions following events such as tropical storms, droughts, and drawdowns.

Stocking data for LDWF waterbodies can be found in the Freshwater Fish Hatchery Program section of this report

RIVER AND STREAM SAMPLING

Understanding river basin biotic assemblages is an important aspect of fisheries management. Changes in community structure of aquatic biota in river and tributary systems within a watershed are indicators of anthropogenic and natural disturbances. Fish and mussel communities are sensitive to a wide array of direct and indirect stresses, including the effects of point source and non-point source pollution, sedimentation and changes in substrate deposition, habitat loss, riparian zone disruption, physicochemical changes in water chemistry, and flow modification. Fish and mussels occupy positions throughout the aquatic food web and share a unique relationship. The larval mussel stage, or glochidia, is attached and parasitic on the host fish's gills or fins. After a period of time, the larval mussel drops off the fish and settles to the stream bottom. All Inland Fisheries districts performed sampling on flowing waters to analyze species composition of fish, sport fish populations, crawfish, freshwater mussels, and to conduct habitat assessments. Thirty-eight sections of rivers, streams, bayous, and canal systems were sampled during FY 2024-2025.

FISH KILL MONITORING

Investigating fish and/or mussel kills is a high priority that requires the immediate attention of Fisheries personnel. LDWF is responsible for responding to fish kills in a timely manner because the cause and effects of fish kills are typically unknown at the time of initial notification. In addition, fish kills are highly visible to the public and often prompt related questions that must be addressed, and they may serve as a symptom of more significant problems in an area. When responding to a fish and/or mussel kill, LDWF biologist managers refer to the American Fisheries Society Special Publication #30 Investigation and Monetary Values of Fish and Freshwater Mussel Kills for protocol. The selection of the most appropriate method for estimating fish kill numbers and species composition is dependent on the type of habitats involved. In some cases, strand line counts may be used, while in other cases, transects, segments or other methods are often necessary.

During FY 2024-2025, LDWF Office of Fisheries, Fisheries staff investigated 45 non-hurricane fish kills throughout the state. Twenty-nine

were attributed to naturally occurring low oxygen conditions in the rivers, lakes, and marshes. Additionally, 11 fish kills were related to the freeze in January 2025, one was due to an oil spill, and four were of indeterminate origin.

Hurricane Francine made landfall on Sept. 11, 2024, and 90 fish kills were reported by the public and LDWF staff from Sept. 13-27. Water quality readings were taken during that time period and combined with fish kill reports to determine that fish kills occurred over approximately two million acres (Figure 3). Even though much of Francine's impact area overlapped with the path of 2021's Hurricane Ida, the magnitude of Francine's fish kills was smaller.

OYSTER LEASE PROGRAM

The leasing and permitting of state water bottoms for cultivating oysters is administered by the Office of Fisheries. The Oyster Lease Program is responsible for maintaining records, collecting revenue and issuing lease agree-

ments for this purpose. In April 2020, the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission approved a notice of intent lifting an 18-year moratorium on new oyster lease agreements. We are in the process of finalizing Phase Zero of the Oyster Lease Moratorium Lifting process, as outlined in Acts 570 and 595 of the 2016 Regular Legislative Session and cancelling the remaining oyster lease applications that cannot be processed further into full leases. As such, we will refund the application fees paid by the applicants. These oyster lease applications, and fees, were submitted to LDWF at various times in the early 2000s prior to the oyster lease moratorium taking effect in March 2002.

> Phase 0: Pre-Moratorium Lease Applications.

- Of the 35 applications issued between 1998-2001, 7 new leases were granted, 15 were not granted due to the waterbottoms requested not being located on state-claimed property, 13 were protested as dual claimed and not granted. The completion of these refunds will conclude Phase 0.

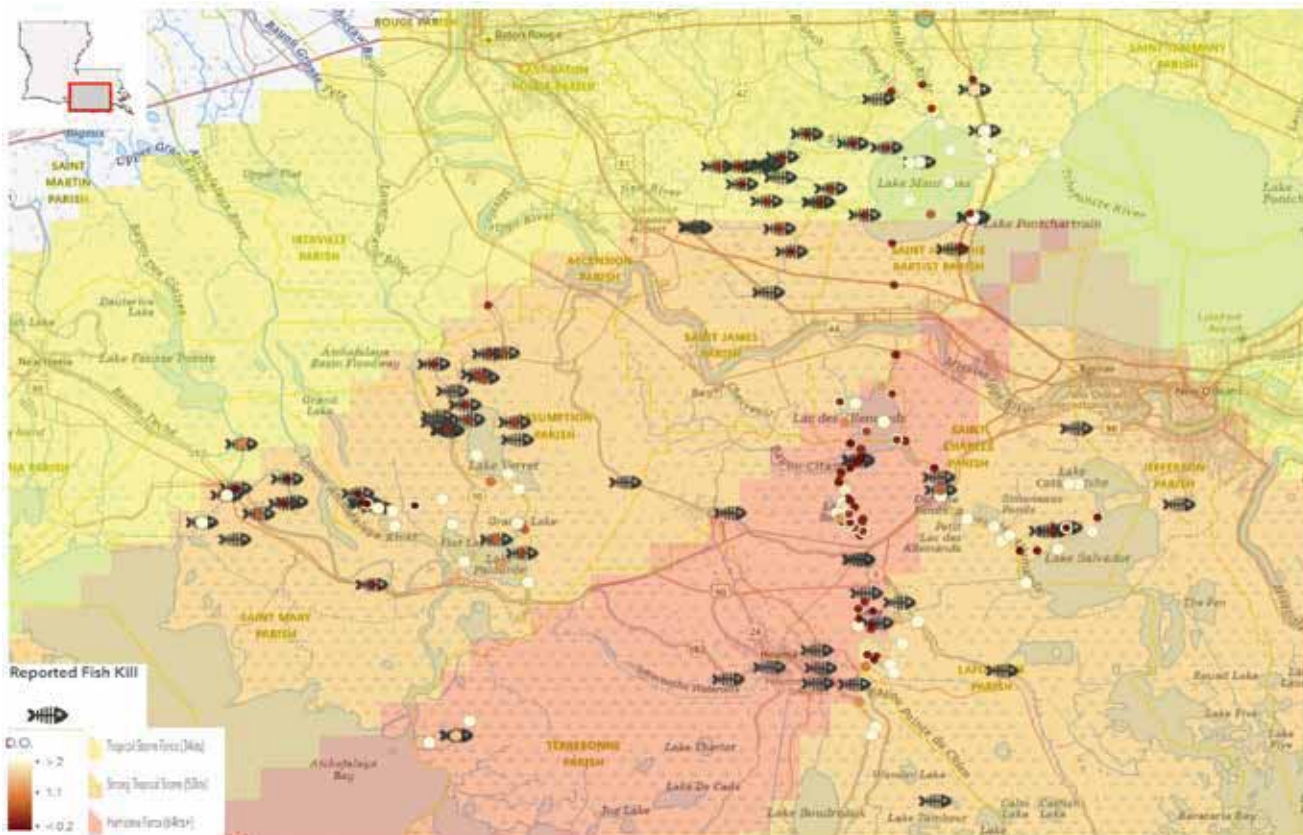


FIGURE 3. Combined fish kill observations and water quality readings following Hurricane Francine. Fish kills denoted by skeletons, hypoxic (< 2 mg/L) readings are red dots, and white dots represent oxygen levels > 2 mg/L. Areas where the surface was oxygenated, but the bottom was hypoxic are denoted by red dots surrounded by white rings. Red, orange, and yellow background denotes hurricane, strong tropical storm, and weak tropical storm force winds, respectively.

- **Phase 1:** Right of First Refusal for Non-Renewed Avenal Leases.
- **Phase 2:** Incorporation of Adjacent Water Bottoms.
- **Phase 3:** Right of First Refusal for Leases under Private Lease.
- **Phase 4:** First Lottery Phase.

At this time, there are 7,881 leases covering 397,662 acres of water bottom. These leases account for over \$1.2 million in annual rental revenue. This revenue is specifically deposited into the Public Oyster Seed Ground Development Account for the enhancement of the state's public oyster resource. During FY 2024-2025, the Oyster Lease Program renewed 494 leases. There is a \$30 renewal fee for each application, totaling \$14,820. The Oyster Lease Program transferred and documented the exchange of 80 leases sold in FY 2024-2025. There is a \$10 fee for each lease transfer, totaling \$800. Printed copies of leases maps and documents were provided for \$5 each totaling \$4,985.

The Oyster Lease Program maintains a Geographical Information Systems interactive map website to view oyster lease related data and provides the user advanced tools to measure distances and calculate the acreage for areas of interest. The GIS group also publishes a Mobile App, which allows both LDWF Enforcement Agents and the public to use the GPS function of their personal mobile devices to locate themselves in relation to oyster leases, public seed grounds and Department of Health closure areas. The oyster lease GIS dataset download is available to the public free of charge. The Oyster Lease GIS group worked with CPRA to modify nine lease boundaries to accommodate coastal restoration projects in FY 2024-2025 and assisted the LDWF Enforcement Division by publishing 74 maps to be used in court cases across the state.

ALTERNATIVE OYSTER CULTURE PERMITTING PROGRAM

Beginning in 2013, the Office of Fisheries was tasked with issuing Alternative Oyster Culture Permits. These permits offer the public an opportunity to cultivate oysters using methods, other than traditional on-bottom, on state leases or on privately owned water bottoms. Currently, 10 sites are permitted, which is two more than the previous fiscal year. The 10 permits cover approximately 168 acres of water bottom. Out of the 10 Alternative Oyster Culture permits, eight are issued on privately owned water bottoms.

COMMERCIAL HARVEST

Louisiana produces nearly one-quarter of the seafood in the continental United States. Louisiana comes in second only to Alaska in terms of commercial fishing production and is home to three of the top six commercial fishing ports in the country. In the Gulf of America, 78% of the seafood production comes from Louisiana shrimpers, crabbers, oyster harvesters and fishermen. There were 8,567 commercial fishermen and 6,479 seafood dealers/processors and brokers register each year to provide the nation with fresh seafood.

LDWF utilizes the Trip Ticket Program to collect commercial seafood statistics. Through this program, commercial landings data are collected on a trip basis from wholesale/retail seafood dealers, crab sheddors and commercial fishermen holding fresh products licenses. There were 162,753 commercial fishing trips reported in FY 2024-2025 producing in excess of 761 million pounds of seafood. Seafood landings reported now include menhaden, which explains the large increase from the last reported landings.

Beginning in May 2000, a computerized electronic trip ticket program was developed and made available to dealers. To date, 116 dealers use the computerized program to submit their trip ticket data. Trip ticket information has been used:

- to enhance the accuracy of stock assessments conducted by state and federal fishery management agencies.
- to extend certain inshore shrimp seasons providing additional economic opportunity to fishermen.

- to develop a crop insurance program for oyster growers.
- to estimate damages from hurricanes, 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, CARES Act, and floods.

Along with the collection of commercial landings data, LDWF also conducts trip interviews of commercial fishermen to gather detailed information about a specific fishing trip. The federally funded program focuses on species of greatest state and federal interest.

Historically, shrimp are the state's most valuable fishery, but dockside value in FY 2024-2025 remains low compared to long-term averages (FY 2000-2025). In FY 2024-2025, total shrimp landings totaled nearly 66 million pounds (all species combined/heads-on weight) and had a dockside value of approximately \$70.2 million. Brown shrimp landings in FY 2024-2025 totaled 14.5 million pounds (heads-on weight) with a dockside value of \$12.2 million, while white shrimp landings in FY 2024-2025 totaled 51.5 million pounds (heads-on weight) with a dockside value of \$58 million (*Figure 4*). Brown shrimp landings in FY 2024-2025 were fourth lowest since the inception of the state trip ticket program in 1999, but were higher than the two previous years. Brown shrimp price per pound in FY 2024-2025 averaged \$0.84, which is \$0.16 higher than the previous FY 2023-2024 and \$0.21 below the long-term average (FY 2000-2025). White shrimp dockside value rebounded slightly compared to FY 2023-2024, but a decline in landings was observed. Similar price per pound trends were observed in white shrimp when compared to brown shrimp. The average price per pound

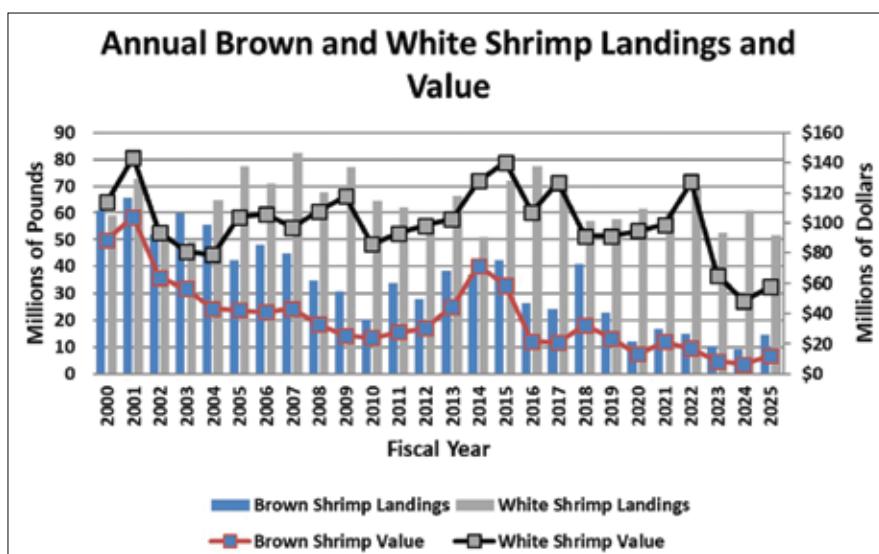


FIGURE 4. Annual white and brown shrimp dockside landings and value (Source: LDWF trip ticket data).

for white shrimp in FY 2024-2025 was \$1.13, which is \$0.33 higher than FY 2023-2024 and \$0.44 below the long-term average (FY 2000-2025). Landings for brown shrimp were directly affected by price and effort. Due to the lower demand for shrimp by processors because of reduced sales and an abundance of surplus inventory, the number of fishers participating in the fishery and the number of trips per year have declined, directly impacting annual shrimp landings.

Louisiana commercial blue crab landings for FY 2024-2025 totaled 42.6 million pounds and had a dockside value of \$71.5 million (Figure 5). Blue crab landings in FY 2024-2025 were 2 million pounds below the long-term average (FY 2000-2025), increasing by 5.8 million pounds from the FY 2023-2024 landings. While blue crab landings increased from FY 2023-2024, total dockside value was similar. The price per pound in FY 2024-2025 was \$1.68, which was \$0.25 below FY 2023-2024, but \$0.55 higher than the long-term average (FY 2000-2025).

Louisiana regularly leads the nation in commercially-harvested oyster landings. From 2005 through 2024, Louisiana accounted for 32.2% of the nation's oyster landings. In 2024, Louisiana produced 34.5% of annual landings by weight (Figure 6) and 24.3% by value (Figure 7) in the United States. Of the Gulf States, Louisiana accounted for 77.3% of the oyster meat production and 76.4% of the landings value in 2024. Of that production, approximately 8.8% came from public oyster reefs, while private oyster reef landings were 91.2%. Louisiana's total landings in 2024 were reported at approximately 6,709,876 pounds of meat (Figure 6), which led the nation for Eastern oyster annual production. In Louisiana, there are approximately 397,662 acres of state oyster leases. The public oyster areas also yield a supply of market-size oysters (greater than or equal to 3 inches in length), which may be taken directly to market during oyster seasons. Louisiana leads the nation in oyster production primarily due to this public/private oyster production system. Louisiana's annual dockside sales have reached as much as \$85 million as recently as 2017. The value of Louisiana's 2024 production was \$50,808,932 (Figure 7). Louisiana's public oyster reef landings have greatly diminished over the last decade. In 2020, the landings from public grounds totaled approximately 34,000 pounds of meat, while private oyster reef landings totaled approximately 3.5 million pounds of meat (99%) of all oyster landings in the state. Total 2020

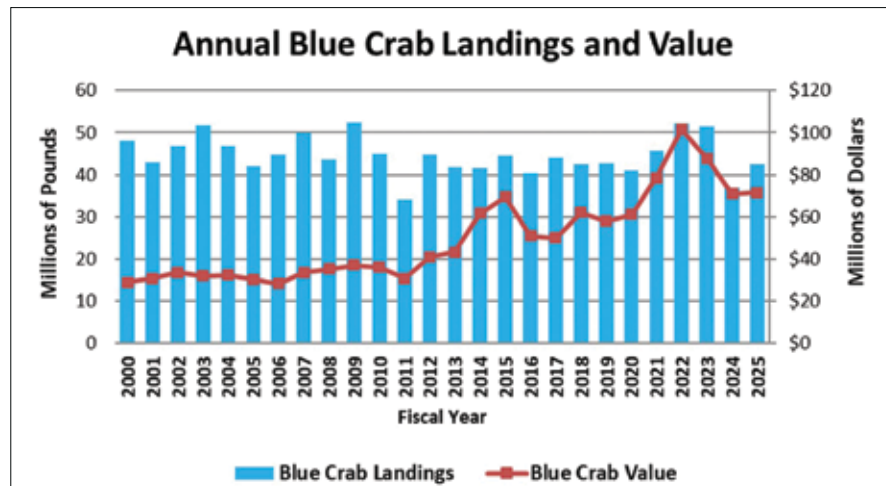


FIGURE 5. Annual blue crab dockside landings and values (Source: LDWF trip ticket data).

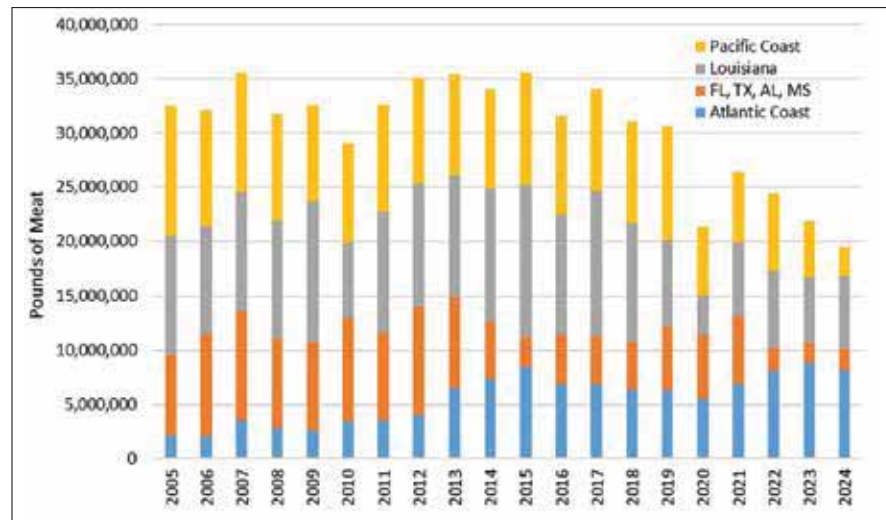


FIGURE 6. Annual commercial oyster landings (all species) in pounds of meat. Data provided by NOAA Fisheries.

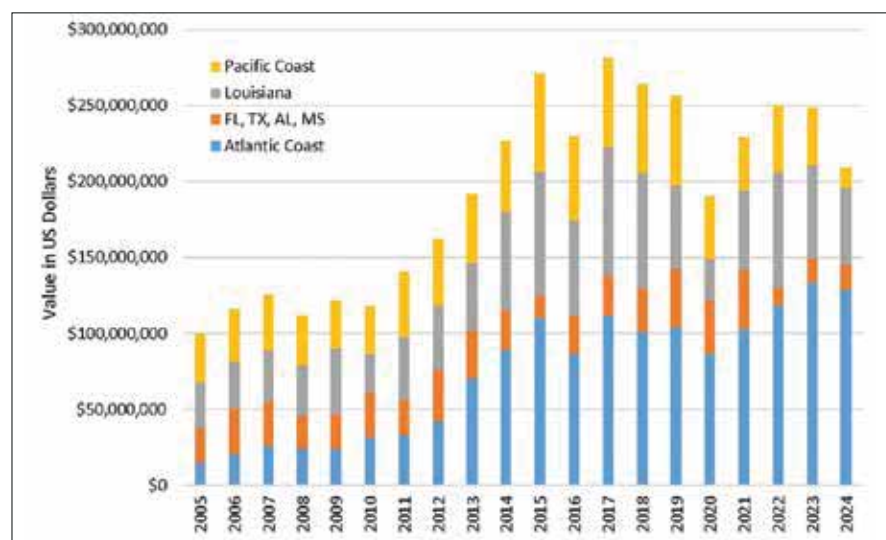


FIGURE 7. Annual commercial oyster landings (all species) in dockside value. Data provided by NOAA Fisheries.

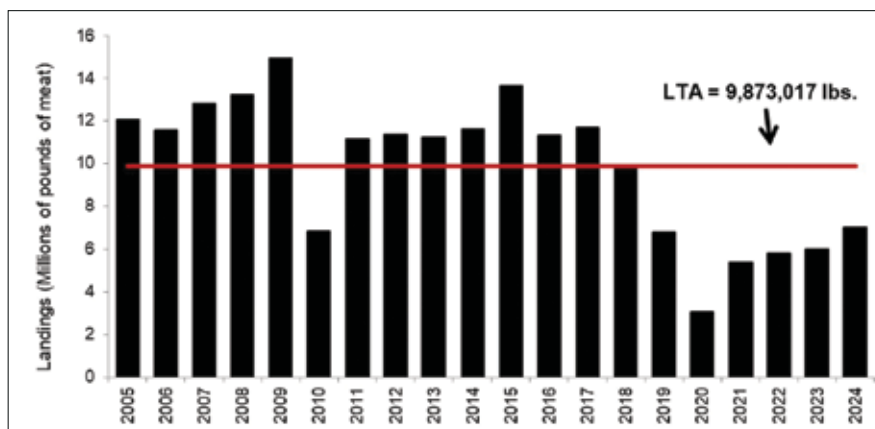


FIGURE 8. Louisiana oyster landings for public oyster areas and private oyster leases, 2005-2024 (LDWF and NOAA Fisheries data). Long-term average is 20 years from 2005-2024.

landings were the lowest ever recorded, a reflection of the unprecedented extreme 2019 floods that impacted the oyster reefs across the state (Figure 8). Currently, 2024 combined landings of seven million pounds of meat indicate a continued recovery. Louisiana's oyster landings are showing an upward trend from 2020; however, the landings have not returned to the 20-year long-term average of approximately 9.8 million pounds of meat (Figure 8).

Louisiana commercial freshwater finfish landings for FY 2024-2025 totaled approximately 12.3 million pounds and included common species such as alligator gar, blue catfish, channel catfish, flathead catfish, freshwater drum, buffalo, bowfin, carp and gizzard shad. Total dockside value of these species was approximately \$5.7 million. Wild caught crawfish landings in Louisiana for FY 2024-2025 was approximately 7.6 million pounds with a dockside value of \$10.7 million.

COMMERCIAL CONVERSION FACTORS

With the exception of oysters, commercial landings are reported as whole weight of the animal in pounds. To achieve this, landings that are not reported as whole weight must be converted from their reported conditions into whole weight. This process utilizes conversion factors specific to the individual species and their reported units and conditions. The Department, in collaboration with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) and its member states (Texas, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida), have been working to update the conversion factors used to translate non-whole reported landings into whole weight landings values. To date, this partnership has resulted in the calculation of new factors for

shrimp (white, brown, pink, royal reds), black drum, snapper (red, vermilion, grey, lane), grouper (yellowedge, black, gag, snowy, red, scamp), blueline tilefish, Atlantic sharpnose shark, and blue catfish. Further work on new conversion factors will be completed as funding allows.

COMMERCIAL LICENSE QR CODE PROJECT WITH LA WALLET

One of the most time consuming Quality Assurance/Quality Control processes, whether the source is paper or electronic reporting, is the verification of license data on each trip ticket, specifically vessel and fisher licenses. Errors are common and are a product of scanning errors and transcription errors at the point of transaction. LDWF partnered with Louisiana Office of Technical Services, LA Wallet (GoValidate) and Bluefindata, LLC to create a system allowing for the quick transfer of verified and up-to-date license data directly into an electronic trip ticket. The resulting process is the creation of a Quick Response (QR) code that sends fisher and vessel license information to the trip ticket. The license data is provided in real time, meaning that license status changes (ie expirations/suspensions/revocations) are present. The achieves our goal of capturing the cleanest, most accurate trip ticket license data while simultaneously providing Louisiana dealers with the ability to verify the license status as required by law. The QR product will be integrated into the next iteration of Louisiana's electronic trip ticket program

In June 2019, the Gulf States began a collaborative process to recalculate conversion factors for select species. The species included brown shrimp (*F. aztecus*), white shrimp (*L. setiferus*), pink shrimp (*F. duorarum*) and royal red

shrimp (*P. robustus*). The new factors were accepted for use after review and have been implemented retroactively to 1999.

In August 2022, Louisiana selected red snapper (*L. campechanus*) and black drum (*P. cro-mis*) as its target species for update. Work was completed in October 2023 and the new conversion factors have been accepted for use. The new factors were accepted for use after review and will be implemented retroactively to 1999.

In January 2024, Louisiana selected blue catfish (*I. furcatus*) and alligator gar (*A. spatula*) as its target species for update. Alligator gar samples have been difficult to obtain and a decision was made to terminate efforts due to a lack of time remaining. Work on creating the new conversion factor will begin when the current sampling period ends.

RECREATIONAL HARVEST

LDWF monitors recreational fisheries through the LA Creel Program and inland creel surveys.

LA CREEL PROGRAM

The LA Creel Program uses dockside interviews of recreational anglers to determine catch and a telephone/email survey to determine fishing effort.

LA Creel Background

Before LA Creel, LDWF participated in the federal creel Marine Recreational Information Program. One of the glaring issues with the Marine Recreational Information Program is its inability to reliably estimate landings at a basin or sub-state level. Another significant problem is the frequency of reporting, which is every two months. LA Creel provides landings estimates by week within seven to 10 days of the end of the sample week. In addition, estimates are generate at basin-level. Other concerns with the Marine Recreational Information Program include insufficient sample size (catch per unit effort, size frequency, age data, etc.), estimates of angler participation (effort) exceeding the number of recreational licenses, and imprecise landings estimates for many species, in particular offshore species. LDWF made several attempts to work with federal authorities to enhance the Marine Recreational Information Program to make it more useful for state fisheries managers, but no progress was made, which led to the development of its own creel program, LA Creel.

TABLE 8. Dockside assignment distribution per sample week.

BASIN	WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTION		
	Weekdays	Weekends	Total
Lake Pontchartrain	2	4	6
Upper Barataria-Mississippi River	2	2	4
Lower Barataria-Mississippi River	2	4	6
Terrebonne-Timbalier	2	3	5
Vermillion-Teche-Mermentau	2	2	4
Sabine-Calcasieu	2	4	6
Total			31

TABLE 9. Top five species as counted by LDWF LA Creel staff.

Species	Amount Counted by Staff
Spotted Seatrout	45,400
Red Drum	11,860
Red Snapper	8,700
Sand Seatrout	5,381
Sheepshead	4,940

TABLE 10. Top five species by catch per angler as observed by LDWF LA Creel staff.

Species	Mean Catch/Angler
Spotted Seatrout	4.8
Red Snapper	2.6
Red Drum	2.2
Sheepshead	1.6
Black Drum	1.0
Southern Flounder	0.8

TABLE 11. Discard observations as reported by anglers.

Species	3: Undersize	3: Other	Grand Total
Spotted Seatrout	55,990	2,116	58,106
Red Drum	29,223	8,735	37,958
Black Drum	3,027	1,261	4,288
Red Snapper	4,606	418	5,024
Sheepshead	173	1,223	1,396
Southern Flounder	72	411	483
Largemouth Bass	66	141	207
Grey Snapper	40	28	68
Greater Amberjack	27	79	106
Gray Triggerfish	2	8	10
Spanish Mackerel	7	23	30

The LA Creel program has attracted the attention of other state fisheries managers who are interested in improving their own creel programs. Alabama and Mississippi managers began consulting with LDWF staff on developing effort surveys based on the LA Creel design. Recently, both states implemented LA Creel-based effort surveys. Additional states, including those along the east coast, have contacted LDWF to learn more about LA Creel to gauge their abilities to run similar programs.

LA Creel Performance

Through the LA Creel program, 9,835 recreational fishing trips (-5.9% vs. previous FY), comprised of 26,164 individual anglers (-5.1% vs. previous FY), were surveyed dockside during FY 2024-2025. Sixty-two different interviewers completed 1,576 (97.5%) of the 1,616 assignments as drawn during the sample period. Thirty-four assignments were canceled because of weather-related state office closures. Four assignments were not worked due

to scheduling mistakes made by staff. One assignment was missed due to a personal emergency, and one assignment was missed due to a truck maintenance issue.

The number of assignments per basin per month was determined based on the diversity of fishing activities within each basin as well as the number of sites that experience fishing pressure. Since greater fishing activity occurs on the weekends, assignments for each basin are divided so that weekends are drawn more often than weekdays with the exception of the Vermilion basin which has limited recreational activity compared to other basins (Table 8).

Fish kept by anglers and allowed to be viewed by interviewers are called observation Type 1 fish. Fish in the angler's possession at the time of survey but not seen by the interviewer are classified as observation Type 2 fish. Although shellfish is counted whenever present, LA Creel is concerned with finfish. For that rea-

son, observation figures pertain to finfish only. For FY 2024-2025, 90,702 Type 1 fish (+10.5% vs. previous FY), equaling 83.2% of all fish in possession of the angler at the time of survey, were identified and counted by staff, and 18,317 Type 2 observations were made (-6.8% vs. previous FY).

Ninety-eight species were represented among Type 1 fish. Table 9 shows the top five most commonly encountered Type 1 fish.

Table 10 shows the top five species by CPUE (Catch Per Unit Effort) or catch per angler.

Certain species returned to the water or caught and used for bait are also recorded. Those species are:

- > Black Drum
- > Gray Snapper
- > Gray Triggerfish
- > Greater Amberjack
- > King Mackerel
- > Largemouth Bass
- > Red Drum
- > Red Snapper
- > Sheepshead
- > Southern Flounder
- > Spanish Mackerel
- > Spotted Seatrout

Fish thrown back because they were under the legal minimum length are coded as Type 3. Fish caught and used as bait during the trip are coded as Type 4. Fish thrown back or given away before being surveyed for any reason not covered by codes 3 and 4, such as too big, not wanted, etc., are coded as Type 5. Discard data is collected as per LDWF's contract with GSMFC. During the same period as provided above, staff recorded 92,843 Type 3 fish, 0 Type 4 fish, and 14,443 Type 5 fish (Table 11).

LA Creel Effort Surveys and the ROLP

In addition to the dockside survey, angler effort must be determined to generate harvest estimates. LA Creel uses two separate surveys to determine angler effort. One survey targets charter captains in which 10% of approximately 860 charter license holders and 30% of the roughly 130 charter license holders with a Recreational Offshore Landing Permit (ROLP) are drawn randomly each sample week. The ROLP is a no-fee permit required to possess tunas, billfish, swordfish, amberjacks, groupers, snappers, hinds, cobia, wahoo, dolphinfish, and gray triggerfish in Louisiana waters. The purpose of the ROLP is to increase the chances of drawing anglers who fish offshore for effort surveys. During the reporting period, there were approximately



LA Creel survey

18,500 active Private ROLP's and approximately 150 active Charter ROLP's. One-hundred percent of ROLP-holding charter captains are drawn during state and federal red snapper seasons. Department staff attempt to contact drawn captains to ask about the number of charter trips taken during the sample week, how many paying customers were on each trip, and what basin the trip occurred in. During FY 2024-2025, 881 unique captains were drawn 6,291 times. Of those 6,291 draws, 3,721 (59.1%) received responses.

The other effort survey pertains exclusively to private anglers. Each sample week, not including weeks within red snapper seasons, 1,600 Louisiana recreational saltwater fishing license holders are drawn randomly for participation in the effort survey. Twelve hundred of the 1,600 are derived by drawing 300 licensed anglers from each of LA Creel's four regions to generate landings estimates. A separate random selection of 400 is made from ROLP holders. During red snapper seasons, the number of private ROLP anglers drawn for the effort survey increases from 400 to 800. A service contracted by LDWF is tasked with contacting drawn license holders to ask questions, such as basin fished in, number of trips taken, and any saltwater fishing trips they may have taken during the sample week. During FY 2024-2025, 45,495 contacts were made with Louisiana recreational saltwater fishing license holders to collect private saltwater fishing effort. That means 48.2% of the 94,400 private effort draws were contacted. The number of trips taken during the reporting period is in Table 12.

Bowfishing Permit

A no-fee Bowfishing Permit is required for private anglers aged 18 years and older taking or attempting to take saltwater recreational fish with bowfishing gear or engaging in bowfishing activity south of the designated saltwater line. The permit is not required for spearfish-

ing activities. Charter captains, including those fishing from vessels with a valid federal charter/headboat permit, are required to have a valid Charter Bowfishing Permit to take clients on bowfishing trips. A Charter Bowfishing Permit covers all paying anglers on a charter trip. A Charter Bowfishing Permit is also valid for the captain on any private, recreational bowfishing trips he may take. Like the ROLP, Bowfishing Permits are available online only. Charter clients are not required to possess a Bowfishing Permit. The Bowfishing Permit is used to gauge the prevalence of this method of taking fish.

Efforts were initiated to incorporate the ROLP and Bowfishing Permit into the LA Wallet app. The permits will be displayed under the LDWF license tab.

LA Creel Customer Service

A single phone number and email address were created for ROLP customer service during the reporting period. The arrangement replaced the three phone numbers and email addresses used previously.

TABLE 12. Number of saltwater fishing trips taken, after effort expansion.

Activity	Total
Charter - Inshore	135,911
Charter - Offshore	17,232
Private - Inshore	1,440,795
Private - Offshore	55,578
	1,804,616

TABLE 13. Louisiana Freshwater Creel Surveys of bass and crappie anglers for calendar year 2024.

2024 CALENDAR YEAR					
Angler Type	Interviews	Anglers	Average Trip Length (Hours)	Average Catch Per Trip	Average Harvest Per Trip
Largemouth Bass	85	133	5.08	2.27	0.84
Crappie	422	616	4.47	8.50	6.02
Total	507	749	4.58	7.38	5.01

LA Creel Annual Meeting

Once a year, LA Creel staff come together to discuss the previous year's data, upcoming changes, and issues. The meeting for this reporting period was held on March 20, 2025 in the LA Room at LDWF Headquarters in Baton Rouge.

Inland Creel Surveys

The Inland creel survey procedures were developed in order to increase the number of completed freshwater angler interviews, facilitate consistent methodology across all Inland waterbodies, and enable more accurate characterization of angler activities within a waterbody. If a survey is being conducted on a waterbody in a given year, a survey sample schedule is generated for each waterbody for all 12 months.

Creel surveys put the fisheries biologists in direct contact with the anglers. Information collected includes species sought and species caught, distance traveled, time fished, number caught and released, and length and weight measurements of all black bass and crappie harvested. Inland creel surveys are generally conducted over a calendar year. Three recreational creel surveys were conducted on inland waters in 2024. The waterbodies surveyed include the Atchafalaya basin, Poverty Point Reservoir, and D'Arbonne Lake (special survey during a drawdown). Inland creel surveys are used to determine average angler preferences, catch rates, and harvest rates in inland waters, which influence regulations when combined with biological data. Combined statistics for calendar year 2024 are reported in Table 13.

ASSESSMENT

Fisheries management involves sampling, analysis and development of recommendations to renovate and enhance fish populations. Information collected is used to evaluate the status of the fisheries through stock assessments, monitoring trends and evaluating the benefits of regulations.

STOCK ASSESSMENT

Marine

LDWF completed transitioning finfish stock assessments for Black Drum, Sheephead, Southern Flounder, and Striped Mullet from the Age Structured Assessment Program into the age and length-structured Stock Synthesis 3 Model during the fall/winter of 2024. Stock Synthesis is an integrated stock assessment analysis model that allows data to be input with minimal preprocessing and incorporates the critical stock processes (growth, mortality, selectivity, etc.) that operate together to produce observed fishery and survey catches along with the corresponding size/age compositions. Time-series of environmental data can also be included in the Stock Synthesis 3 Model. Time-series of fishery catches, fishery-independent relative abundance indices, and the corresponding size/age compositions are the primary model inputs for these assessments.

LA Creel

The Stock Assessment Section continues to provide weekly marine recreational landings estimates from the LA Creel Survey to marine fishery managers.

Inland

Fishery-independent and fishery-dependent surveys are being conducted on Louisiana waterbodies with important largemouth bass

and crappie fisheries to provide information to inland fishery managers to make science-based management decisions (Table 14). Fishery-independent surveys are conducted for three consecutive years on each waterbody to provide population-specific information. A creel survey is conducted one of these years to provide fishery-specific information.

Inland assessment analyses include estimation of important population and fishery metrics (growth, mortality, harvest and catch rates) and the use of population models to simulate each fishery's response to size regulations. Results provide information to inland fishery managers to better understand the effects of current harvest regulations on their fisheries, while also providing a baseline to compare future regulation changes against. Final project reports are available for waterbodies with completed sampling, describing the status of each waterbody's largemouth bass (or crappie) population and fishery, as well as a comparison of population and fishery characteristics among all waterbodies included in this project.

Publications

West, J., E. Lang, X. Zhang, T. Allgood, and J. Adriance. 2025. Assessment of Black Drum in Louisiana waters. 2025 Report of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. 144 pp.

West, J., E. Lang, X. Zhang, T. Allgood, and J. Adriance. 2025. Assessment of Sheephead in Louisiana waters. 2025 Report of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. 121 pp.

West, J., E. Lang, X. Zhang, T. Allgood, and J. Adriance. 2025. Assessment of in Louisiana waters. 2025 Report of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. 129 pp.

West, J., E. Lang, X. Zhang, and J. Adriance. 2025. Assessment of Striped Mullet in Louisiana waters. 2025 Report of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. 118 pp.

MANAGEMENT PLANS

INLAND WATERBODY MANAGEMENT PLANS

Inland Waterbody Management Plans provide a detailed compilation of lake description, history, authorities, synopsis of fisheries and vegetation sampling data, analyses, corrective measures needed, and recommended actions. During FY 2024-2025, the following six management plans were updated and approved. A total of 80 management plans are now available to the public on the LDWF website.

Waterbody management plan updates completed during FY 2024-2025 and available to the public on the LDWF website:

TABLE 14. Schedules of Louisiana Largemouth Bass and Crappie Stock Assessments - 34 waterbodies.

Waterbody	Largemouth Bass Assessment	Crappie Assessment	Waterbody	Largemouth Bass Assessment	Crappie Assessment
Atchafalaya Basin	2009 - 2011 2017 - 2019 2025 - 2027	2025 - 2027	Lacassine Pool National Wildlife Refuge	2017 - 2019	
Black-Clear Lakes	2010 - 2012 2021 - 2023	2021-2023	Lake Bistineau	2016 - 2018	2016 - 2018
Blind River Complex	2018 - 2020		Lake Bruin	2013 - 2015	2013 - 2015
Bundick Lake	2015 - 2017	2012 - 2014	Lake Cataouatche	2010 - 2012	
Caddo Lake	2011 - 2013	2010 - 2012	Lake Claiborne	2024 - 2026	
Calcasieu River	2012 - 2014		Lake Concordia	2010 - 2012	
Cane River	2015 - 2017		Lake Fausse Point		2013 - 2015
Caney Creek Reservoir	2014 - 2016	2014 - 2016	Lakes Grassy, Verret, Palourde	2015 - 2017	
Chicot Lake	2010 - 2012 2020 - 2022	2025 - 2027	Larto-Saline Lakes	2015 - 2017	2009 - 2012 2020 - 2022
Cross Lake	2010 - 2012 2019 - 2021	2010 - 2012	Poverty Point Reservoir	2010 - 2012 2023 - 2025	2010 - 2012 2022 - 2024
D'Arbonne Lake	2010 - 2012	2010 - 2012 2019 - 2021	Raccourci	2015 - 2017	2009 - 2013
False River	2010 - 2012		Red River (Pool 5)		2013 - 2015
Grand Bayou Reservoir	2015 - 2017	2015 - 2017	Red River (Pools 1-5)	2013 - 2015	
Henderson Lake	2017 - 2019	2022 - 2024	Sibley Lake		2015 - 2017
Iatt Lake	2013 - 2015		Spring Bayou	2018 - 2020	2016 - 2018
Indian Creek Lake	2020 - 2022	2020 - 2022	Toledo Bend Reservoir	2010 - 2012 2018 - 2020	2009 - 2011
			Turkey Creek Lake	2016 - 2018	2016 - 2018
			Vernon Lake	2010 - 2012 2024-2026	2009 - 2011 2024-2026-2028

- Atchafalaya Basin
- Caddo Lake
- Caney Creek Reservoir
- Cocodrie Lake
- Cross Lake
- Grand Bayou Reservoir

INLAND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PLANS

Inland Vegetation Management Plans provide a detailed compilation of lake description, vegetation history and status, management limitations, implemented plant control measures, and recommended actions. During FY 2024-2025, 17 vegetation management plans were completed and/or updated, approved, and posted on our website.

MARINE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLANS

LDWF has been developing new and updating existing fishery management plans to provide a mechanism to strategically implement science-based management recommendations for proactively responding to and resolving fisheries issues. The goal of these plans is to ensure long-term conservation and sustainable use of these fisheries resources for the maximum environmental, social, and economic benefit to the state and its citizens and visitors.

- LDWF created a document to guide the development of future fishery management plans to ensure they are consistent with federal fisheries conservation and management practices and international best management practices, mainly applicable principles and standards of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.
- Using the guidance document referenced before, LDWF previously completed new fishery management plans for black drum, spotted seatrout, red drum, and southern flounder. Staff review new research and monitoring information for these species every year, document progress toward fishery management goals, and will fully review and revise management plans every five years, or sooner if necessary. Currently, the shrimp fisheries management plan, the striped mullet, and the sheepshead fisheries management plans are being updated. The red drum fisheries management plan was updated and published in 2024. LDWF will prioritize development of additional new fishery management plans for other species based on commercial, recreational, and ecological significance and management needs.

- These fishery management plans are also complemented by United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization-based self-assessments to document consistency with best management practices and identify any potential gaps in information or management to address in future plan updates.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Through utilization of the previously mentioned recreational and commercial sampling techniques, fisheries managers then analyze the resulting data to develop recommendations to manage and enhance fish populations. The information collected is used to produce recommendations for setting seasons and harvest limits and to monitor the species found in an area over time.

SHRIMP MANAGEMENT

Greater flexibility in managing the shrimp resource is now provided through the use of a basin type management approach, as opposed to the historical zone approach. Louisiana's major estuarine basins include the Pontchartrain Basin, Mississippi River Basin, Barataria Basin, Terrebonne Basin, Atchafalaya River Basin, Vermilion-Teche River Basin, Mermentau River Basin, Calcasieu Basin and Sabine River Basin.

Based on analysis of historical data, as well as data generated from biological sampling conducted by fisheries biologists, the following shrimp management recommendations

were made to the Secretary of LDWF and the LWFC. These measures were implemented during FY 2024-2025 (*Figures 9 and 10*).

Lake Pontchartrain Basin and Portions of Mississippi River Basins

2024 - Fall Inshore Shrimp Season

Opened at 6:00 a.m. Aug. 5, 2024, from the MS/LA state line westward to the eastern shore of South Pass of the Mississippi River, except in the following area, which opened at 6:00 a.m. Aug. 12, 2024:

- The portion of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin known as the Biloxi Marsh.

Closed at official sunset Dec. 16, 2024, from the MS/LA state line westward to eastern shore of South Pass of the Mississippi River, except for the following waters:

- Lake Pontchartrain, Chef Menteur and Rigollets Passes, Lake Borgne, Biloxi Marsh, Mississippi Sound, Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, a section of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway in Orleans parish from the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway East Closure Sector Gate westward to the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway intersection with the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal, and the open waters of Breton and Chandeleur Sounds as bounded by the double-rig line described in R.S. 56:495.1(A)2.

Closed at official sunset Jan. 24, 2025, in the remaining inside waters open to shrimp harvest from the Mississippi/Louisiana state line westward to the eastern shore of South Pass of the Mississippi River, except for the following areas:



FIGURE 9. 2024 Fall Inshore Shrimp Season Opening Map.



FIGURE 10. 2025 Spring Inshore Shrimp Season Opening Map.

- The open waters of Breton and Chandeleur Sounds as bounded by the double-rig line described in R.S. 56:495.1(A)2.

2025 - Spring Inshore Shrimp Season

Opened at 6:00 a.m. May 19, 2025, from the MS/LA state line westward to the eastern shore of South Pass of the Mississippi River.

Closed at official sunset June 30, 2025, from the MS/LA state line westward to the eastern shore of South Pass of the Mississippi River, except for the following areas:

- The open waters of Breton and Chandeleur Sounds as bounded by the double-rig line described in R.S. 56:495.1(A)2.

Western Mississippi River, Barataria, Terrebonne, Atchafalaya River and Vermilion-Teche River Basins

2024 - Fall Inshore Shrimp Season

Opened at 6:00 p.m. Aug. 5, 2024, from the eastern shore of South Pass of the Mississippi River westward to the Atchafalaya River Ship Channel Buoy Line.

Opened at 6:00 a.m. Aug. 5, 2024, from the Atchafalaya River Ship Channel Buoy Line westward to the western shore of Freshwater Bayou Canal.

Closed at official sunset Dec. 16, 2024, from the eastern shore of South Pass of the Mississippi River westward to the western shore of Freshwater Bayou Canal.

2025 - Spring Inshore Shrimp Season

Opened at 6:00 a.m. May 8, 2025, from the eastern shore of South Pass of the Mississippi River westward to the western shore of Freshwater Bayou Canal.

Closed at official sunset June 30, 2025, from the eastern shore of South Pass of the Mississippi River westward to the western shore of Freshwater Bayou Canal.

Mermentau, Calcasieu and Sabine River Basins

2024 - Fall Inshore Shrimp Season

Opened at 6:00 a.m. Aug. 12, 2024, from the western shore of Freshwater Bayou Canal westward to the LA/TX state line.

Closed at official sunset Dec. 16, 2024, from the western shore of Freshwater Bayou Canal to the LA/TX state line.

2025 - Spring Inshore Shrimp Season

Opened at 6:00 a.m. May 22, 2025, from the western shore of Freshwater Bayou Canal westward to the LA/TX state line.

Closed at official sunset June 30, 2025, from the western shore of Freshwater Bayou Canal westward to the LA/TX state line.

Offshore Shrimp Seasons

Opened at 6:00 p.m. April 4, 2024, in the following waters:

- The portion of state outside waters between Caillou Boca and Mound Point on Marsh Island. The eastern boundary line originates on the northwest shore of Caillou Boca at 29 degrees 02 minutes 46.00 seconds north latitude, -90 degrees 50 minutes 27.00 seconds west longitude and ends at a point on the 3-mile line as described in R.S. 56:495(A) at 28 degrees 59 minutes 30.00 seconds north latitude, -90 degrees 51 minutes 57.00 seconds west longitude. The western boundary line originates on the inside/outside line at the southernmost point of Mound Point on Marsh Island at 29 degrees 28 minutes 28.30 seconds north latitude, -91 degrees 49 minutes 19.00 seconds west longitude and ends at a point on the 3-mile line as described in R.S. 56:495(A) at 29 degrees 22 minutes 01.67 seconds north latitude, -91 degrees 49 minutes 19.00 seconds west longitude.

Opened at 6:00 a.m. April 15, 2024, in the following waters:

- The portion of state outside waters between Mound Point on Marsh Island and Freshwater Bayou Canal. The eastern boundary line originates on the inside/outside line at the southernmost point of Mound Point on Marsh Island at 29 degrees 28 minutes 28.30 seconds north latitude, -91 degrees 49 minutes 19.00 seconds west longitude and ends at a point on the three-mile line as described in R.S. 56:495(A) at 29 degrees 22 minutes 01.67 seconds north latitude, -91 degrees 49 minutes 19.00 seconds west longitude. The western boundary line originates on the western shore of Freshwater Bayou Canal at 29 degrees 32 minutes 03.00 seconds north latitude, -92 degrees 18 minutes 33.00 seconds west longitude and ends at a point on the 3-mile line as described in R.S. 56:495(A) at 29 degrees 29 minutes 02.00 seconds north latitude, -92 degrees 19 minutes 34.00 seconds west longitude.

Closed N/A (Offshore shrimp season remained open for the entirety of FY 2024-2025).

BLUE CRAB MANAGEMENT

The Louisiana blue crab fishery is the largest blue crab fishery in the United States and accounts for more than three quarters of the total blue crab harvest in the Gulf. Landings of blue crab in Louisiana averaged 45.7 million pounds annually (fiscal year) from 2001-2025. The dockside value of the harvest over that same time period averaged approximately \$82 million annually (prices not adjusted for inflation).

Management of the blue crab fishery strives for the maintenance of the stock while providing for long-term benefits to the fishery. Key objectives of management include:

- Conservation, restoration and enhancement of habitat essential to blue crabs.
- Reductions in juvenile blue crab incidental mortality, wasteful harvesting practices within the fishery, and conflicts among crab fishermen and other user groups.
- Enhancement of social and economic benefits derived from resource use.
- The assessment of biological, social and economic impacts of existing and proposed fisheries management regulations affecting the fishery.

These objectives are met via licensing, record keeping and reporting requirements, minimum size limit, time, gear, and area restrictions.

Blue Crab Stock Assessment

The most recent stock assessment for blue crab was in early 2025. Model estimates in

2025 confirmed that the Louisiana blue crab stock is currently not overfished or experiencing overfishing. Official publication of the stock assessment is expected in August 2025.

Blue Crab Stock Legislation

No legislative actions impacting the blue crab fishery took place in FY 2024-2025.

Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program

The removal of derelict crab traps from fishing grounds reduces navigational risks to boaters and threats to public safety while reducing mortality of incidental species captured in traps, potentially increasing the number of crabs available for harvest by preventing crab mortalities in abandoned, out-of-use traps.

In 2024, the LWFC promulgated a rule defining five distinct derelict crab trap closure areas for 2025. The closure areas and dates were as follows:

- Pontchartrain Basin: Feb. 1-14, 2025
- Barataria Basin: Feb. 8-21, 2025
- Terrebonne Basin: Feb. 15-28, 2025
- Vermilion-Teche Basin: Feb. 1-14, 2025
- Calcasieu Basin: Feb. 17-26, 2025.

LDWF staff removed a total of 1,102 derelict crab traps from Louisiana's coastal waters in FY 2024-2025.

Since the inception of the program in 2004, LDWF and volunteers have removed over 58,000 derelict or abandoned crab traps from state waters (*Table 15*). The largest numbers of traps removed from state waters came during the program's first two years. From 2006-2016 the number of closure areas was reduced to focus on one area at a time, which resulted in fewer traps being removed annually. Since 2017, the abandoned crab trap program has expanded with more closure areas annually and the amount of traps removed has greatly increased (*Table 16*). During the 11-year period (2006-2016), the annual derelict crab traps removed averaged over 1,400, while more recent years indicate an average of nearly 3,500.

OYSTER MANAGEMENT

Oysters provide both important economic and ecological benefits to Louisiana. They act as indicators for the overall health of the ecosystem, providing forage and shelter habitat for a variety of fish and invertebrate species. Oysters improve water quality through filter-feeding activities, affect estuarine current patterns and may provide shoreline stabilization. Due to their economic and ecological importance, wise management of the public oyster resource is critically important to ensure that

this valuable species continues to thrive in Louisiana's coastal areas.

The Office of Fisheries Mollusk Program is responsible for the oyster resource on nearly 1.7 million acres of Public Oyster Seed Reservations, Public Oyster Seed Grounds and Public Oyster Areas. Seed grounds are designated by the LWFC and include a large continuous area east of the Mississippi River as well a portion of the Vermilion/Cote Blanche/Atchafalaya Bay system. Seed Reservations and the Public Oyster Areas of Calcasieu and Sabine lakes are designated by the legislature. LDWF manages four seed reservations, including one east of the Mississippi River (Bay Gardene), one in the Barataria Bay system (Hackberry Bay) and two in Terrebonne Parish (Sister Lake and Bay Junop).

State laws allow LDWF to open the oyster season on Louisiana public seed grounds on the first Wednesday following Labor Day of each year and close areas no later than April 30 of the following year. However, the LWFC is authorized to extend the season beyond April 30, provided sufficient stocks are available for harvest. The Secretary of LDWF may close seasons or areas as needed, based on biological data or enforcement related issues. The Secretary of LDWF is also authorized to take emergency action to reopen areas previously closed if the threat to the resource has ended and areas have substantial oyster resources remaining; and can delay openings or close areas showing significant spawning events. Management practices often use rotational openings of the four Public Oyster Seed Reservations in alternating years. The Public Oyster Seed Grounds may be opened to the harvest of seed oysters for bedding purposes between the first Wednesday following Labor Day and the second Monday in October; after which the public grounds may be opened to harvest of market-size oysters.

Figure 11 shows the locations across the state that were opened during the 2024-2025 oyster season. The Bay Junop Public Oyster Seed Reservation, Hackberry Bay Public Oyster Seed Reservation, Little Lake Public Oyster Seed Grounds, Lake Mechant Public Oyster Seed Grounds, Vermilion/East and West Cote Blanche Bay/Atchafalaya Bay Public Oyster Seed Grounds, and public oyster seed grounds east of Mississippi River within Louisiana Department of Health Shellfish Harvest Areas 1 and 2, opened for bedding purposes at one half-hour before sunrise on Monday, Sept. 23, 2024, and closed one half-hour after sunset on Wednesday, Sept. 25, 2024; except for Ver-

TABLE 15. Number of crab trap closures and numbers of traps removed annually.

YEAR	AREA(S)	TRAPS
2004	2	6,894
2005	4	4,623
2006	1	2,935
2007	2	1,495
2008	1	1,234
2009	1	788
2010	1	477
2011	1	1,100
2012	2	2,798
2013	2	969
2014	1	1,051
2015	1	422
2016	3	2,580
2017	6	5,674
2018	5	4,061
2019	5	4,041
2020	6	4,188
2021	4	5,163
2022	4	815
2023	4	3,974
2024	6	2,142
2025	5	1,102
Total	67	58,526

TABLE 16. Average annual number of traps removed.

YEAR	AREA(S)	AVG. TRAPS
2004-2005	6	5,758
2006-2016	16	1,441
2017-2025	45	3,462



FIGURE 11. 2024-2025 Oyster season on public oyster areas.

million/East and West Cote Blanche Bay/Atchafalaya Bay Public Oyster Seed Grounds which closed on Friday, May 30, 2025. Vermilion/East and West Cote Blanche Bay/Atchafalaya Bay Public Oyster Seed Grounds opened for sacking of market oysters for direct sale at one-half hour before sunrise on Monday, Oct. 14, 2024, and closed to the harvest of market oysters at one-half hour after sunset on Friday, May 30, 2025. The Little Lake Public Oyster Seed Grounds as described in LAC 76:VII.521 opened for sacking of market oysters for direct sale at one-half hour before sunrise on Monday, Oct. 14, 2024, and closed to the harvest of market oysters at one-half hour after sunset on Friday, May 30, 2025. The Calcasieu Lake Public Oyster Area was open solely for sacking of market size oysters. The West Cove area opened one-half hour before sunrise on Tuesday, Oct. 15, 2024, and the East Side opened one-half hour before sunrise on Wednesday, Jan. 1, 2025, with both areas closing on April 30, 2025. The Bay Junop Public Oyster Seed Reservation and Lake Mechant Public Oyster Seed Grounds as described in R.S. 56:434 and LAC 76:VII.517, opened for sacking of market oysters for direct sale at one-half hour before sunrise on Monday, Oct. 21, 2024, and closed to the harvest of market oysters at one-half hour after sunset on Friday, Oct. 25, 2024. Hackberry Bay Public Oyster Seed Reservation, including all areas east of Mississippi River, Louisiana Department of Health Shellfish Harvest Areas 1, 2, 3, 4, opened for sacking of market-size oysters only one half-hour before sunrise on Friday, Nov. 1, 2024, and closed at one-half hour after sunset

on Wednesday, April 30, 2025. During the 2024-2025 oyster season, the reefs in the Drum Bay area of the public oyster seed grounds in the Mississippi Sound closed on Sunday, Dec. 22, 2024, due to concentrated harvest pressure and a localized mortality event.

The goals for the 2024-2025 oyster season were to allow for sustainable market oyster harvest while minimizing overharvest and/or reef degradation, allow the oyster industry access to an ephemeral resource located in the Vermilion/East and West Cote Blanche Bay/Atchafalaya Bay Public Oyster Seed Grounds, check the compliance of the electronic e-Reporting application used for the daily reporting requirement, and determine if electronic reporting provides accurate harvest estimates. The 2024-2025 Oyster Season opened on Sept. 23, 2024, and closed on May 30, 2025 (Table 17).

The estimated commercial harvest totaled 89,955 sacks of oyster resource for all public oyster areas. This was a 6.0% decrease from the 2023-2024 oyster season, which recorded 95,738 sacks harvested. Over the past 10 years, heavy localized harvest, high mortality events, strong tropical events, environmental changes, and lack of recruitment have contributed to an ongoing downturn in the oyster resource on the public oyster areas. However, the 2024 OSA showed a 19.6% increase in oyster resource availability from the previous year, which resulted in opened seasons in CSA 1 North, CSA 3, CSA 5, CSA 6 and CSA 7.

For the 2024-2025 oyster season, a daily reporting stipulation was again put in place by the LWFC for oyster harvesters to provide their harvest data to LDWF if collecting from the state's public oyster areas. Vessels were required to provide the following information: Captain's name, oyster harvester number, vessel number, total number of sacks harvested that day, and the public oyster area fished. The electronic reporting was the only reporting option for this season. Electronic reporting was done through the e-Reporting application via smart phone, supported by both iOS and Android. Fishers had to download the app from either the Apple Store or Google Play Store, then create an account using an email. The registration page required a name, commercial fishing license number, and type of license to register. Once the account was created, the fisher added their vessels. This daily reporting did not substitute for trip ticket reporting. The daily reporting requirement was evaluated by the total amount of reported harvest compared to the boarding run harvest reports produced by LDWF CSA biologists. For the 2024-2025 bedding season, harvesters e-Reported 33.7% (3,730 bbl) of bedding loads compared to observed loads by LDWF biologists (11,063 bbl). For the 2024-2025 market season, harvesters e-Reported 74.2% of harvest (50,311 sacks) compared to observed harvest estimates by LDWF biologists (67,829 sacks). For the 2024-2025 oyster season, total vessel participation compliance was 80.6%. This percentage is the total number of vessels observed during the season compared to total vessels reporting.

The Leveraging Opportunities and Strategic Partnerships to Advance Tolerant Oysters for Restoration (LO-SPAT) project is a collaboration among three public universities, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)/LSU Agricultural Center, and the University of Maryland Horn Point Laboratory. LDWF is managing the LO-SPAT contract and the Oyster Program is monitoring the progress and goals for this endeavor. The LO-SPAT project goal is to contribute to the Louisiana Coastal Master Plan by facilitating the long-term restoration of oyster reefs with a population of oysters capable of surviving the low-salinity conditions along the LA coast. The collaboration is building upon past research that phenotypic evidence suggests variation in tolerance to lower salinities in Louisiana estuaries and that this low salinity tolerance is heritable. Tools for the effective genotyping of oysters to enable genomic selection have recently been developed, which will allow oyster production to advance with

TABLE 17. 2024-2025 Public oyster area season dates and estimated harvest based on biologists' surveys of oyster boats and dealer calls.

2024-2025 LDWF OYSTER SEASON SUMMARY								
CSA	Area	Season Opening	Season Closure	Season/Type	Days Open	Harvest (Sacks)	2023 OSA Available (sacks)	% Harvested
1	POSG East of Mississippi River and North of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet	Sept. 23	Sept. 25	Bedding season	3	10,250 bbl	519,474.6	3.9%
		Nov. 1	April 30	Market harvest	181	58,256 sacks	270,780.6	21.5%
	POSG East of Mississippi River and South of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet	CLOSED						
3	Little Lake/ Hackberry Bay	Sept. 23	Sept. 25	Bedding season	3	152.5 bbl	29,137.4	1.0%
	Hackberry Bay	Nov. 1	April 30	Market harvest	181	381 sacks	24,326.2	2.0%
	Little Lake	Oct. 14	April 30	Market harvest	199	100 sacks	N/A	N/A
	Barataria Bay	CLOSED						
5	Sister Lake, Deep Lake, Lake Chien, Lake Felicity and Lake Tambour	CLOSED						
	Lake Mechant/ Bay Junop	Sept. 23	Sept. 25	Bedding season	3	660 bbl	7,485.6	17.6%
		Oct. 21	Oct. 25	Market harvest	5	1,704 sacks	2,765.8	61.6%
6	Vermilion/East and West Cote Blanche Bay/ Atchafalaya Bay	Sept. 23	May 30	Bedding season	268	0	N/A	N/A
		Oct. 14	May 30	Market harvest	229	0	N/A	N/A
7	Calcasieu Lake	Jan 1	April 30	East Side: Market Harvest	120	6,417 sacks	101,806.2	6.3%
		Oct. 15	April 30	West Cove: Market Harvest	198	971 sacks	1,336,312.0	0.1%

modern approaches to selective breeding. During this reporting period, the LO-SPAT collaboration, using a genomic selection model, have spawned 633,287 oysters that were deployed to Karako Bay Broodstock Reef. Monitoring of the deployed reef was conducted at the six month interval, where a density of 61.0 oysters per m² was observed. A lab-based, low salinity validation testing (at salinity 2 ppt and 28°C) was conducted on genomically-selected oysters with controls. The testing ran 89 days with 79% overall mortality among all tested groups. The survivorship of the genomically-selected oysters during the low salinity challenge exceeded the length of time during the initial testing done on random control oysters from Louisiana. More information on the project can be found at www.lospat.org.

Oyster Cultch Plant and Brood Reef Projects

The following project is funded through Deep-water Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) settlement dollars, to help restore for injuries that occurred as a result of various oyster population impacts. The Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group (LA TIG) approved 26 million dollars in oyster projects, including enhancing oyster recovery using broodstock reefs, cultch-plant oyster restoration, and hatchery-based oyster restoration. The LA TIG has funded a three-year oyster metapopulation modeling project that started in the spring of 2023. The project is titled Modeling to Inform Sustainable Oyster

Populations in Louisiana Estuaries, and will enable LDWF to evaluate locations for oyster cultch plants and broodstock reefs to identify particularly productive or otherwise sensitive estuarine areas where restoration will have the highest impact. Generally, the model will enable managers to assess the impacts of enhanced or restored reef location on recruitment to other existing or proposed reefs; larval survival; growth of oysters on existing and proposed reefs; and reef connectivity. This model will enable management of oysters to move from individual reef level to assessment of a network, or meta-population, of reefs under current and future predicted conditions.

During FY 2024-2025, LDWF did not have any oyster reef construction projects.

MARINE FINFISH MANAGEMENT

The primary objective of the finfish program is to make rational recommendations for the management of coastal finfish stocks based on a database of scientific information. The information in the database is collected through fishery-independent and fishery-dependent sampling.

The following management recommendations were made to the Secretary of LDWF and the LWFC and implemented during FY 2024-2025:

July 2024

- Commercial king mackerel season opened on July 1 at 12:01 a.m., concurrent with a federal opening of the 2024-2025 harvest season.
- Louisiana waters closed to the recreational and commercial harvest of gray triggerfish from June 1- July 31, 2024, concurrent with a closure in federal waters.
- Louisiana waters closed to the recreational harvest of greater amberjack from Jan. 1- Aug. 31, 2024, concurrent with a closure in federal waters.
- Louisiana closed to the private recreational and state charter harvest of Red Snapper from July 7-11, 2024, and then reopened on July 12 as a weekends (Friday-Sunday) only season.

August 2024

- Louisiana waters opened to the harvest of Pompano with strike nets from Aug. 1, 2024, through Oct. 31, 2024.
- Louisiana modified the season for the private recreational and state charter harvest of red snapper to be a seven days a week season on Aug. 19, 2024.

September 2024

- At its regular September 2024 meeting, the LWFC adopted a Notice of Intent to eliminate recreational bag and size limits for bull and blacktip sharks and prohibit the retention of shortfin mako sharks. A modification from 45 to 55 sharks of the

allowable daily trip limit of commercially-harvested Large Coastal Sharks was also included in the Notice of Intent. Public comment was taken through Nov. 7, 2024.

October 2024

- The recreational season for the private recreational and state charter harvest of red snapper closed on Oct. 6, 2024.
- Louisiana waters closed to the commercial and recreational harvest of southern flounder from Oct. 15- Nov. 30, 2024.
- New regulations regarding the marking of recreational yo-yos, trigger devices, limb lines, jugs, and all other passive fishing devices containing a hook or hooks went into effect on Oct. 20, 2024.
- Louisiana waters opened to the commercial harvest of striped mullet with a mullet strike net on Oct. 21, 2024.
- Louisiana waters closed to the harvest of pompano with strike nets on Oct. 31, 2024.

November 2024

- Louisiana waters closed to the commercial harvest of gulf menhaden on Nov. 1, 2024.
- Louisiana waters closed to the recreational harvest of greater amberjack on Nov. 1, 2024, concurrent with a closure in federal waters.
- Louisiana waters opened to the commercial harvest of menhaden for bait on Nov. 2, 2024.

December 2024

- Louisiana waters closed to the commercial harvest of menhaden for bait on Dec. 1, 2024.
- Louisiana waters closed to the recreational and commercial harvest of lane snapper on Dec. 2, 2024, concurrent with a closure in federal waters.
- Louisiana waters closed for the commercial harvest of large and small coastal sharks on Dec. 31, 2024, concurrent with a closure in federal waters.
- Louisiana waters closed for the commercial harvest of spotted seatrout on Dec. 31, 2024.

January 2025

- Louisiana waters opened to the commercial harvest of small and large coastal sharks on Jan. 1, 2025, concurrent with an opening in federal waters.
- Louisiana waters opened to the commercial and recreational harvest of lane snapper on Jan. 1, 2025, concurrent with an opening in federal waters.

- Louisiana waters opened to the commercial harvest of spotted seatrout on Jan. 2, 2025.
- Louisiana waters closed to the commercial harvest of striped mullet with a mullet strike net on Jan. 20, 2025.

February 2025

- Louisiana waters closed to the recreational harvest of scamp and black, red, yellowfin, and yellowmouth groupers from Feb. 1- March 31, 2025, in waters seaward of 120 feet, concurrent with a seasonal closure in federal waters.

March 2025

- Louisiana waters opened to the recreational harvest of gray triggerfish on March 1, 2025, concurrent with an opening in federal waters.
- Louisiana waters closed to the commercial harvest of greater amberjack on March 1, 2025, concurrent with a closure in federal waters.
- At its regular March 2025 meeting, the LWFC approved a Notice of Intent to establish a five fish bag and possession limit for recreationally-harvested Wahoo. Public comment was taken through May 1, 2025.

April 2025

- Louisiana waters opened to the commercial harvest of gulf menhaden for bait on April 1, 2025.
- Louisiana waters opened to the commercial harvest of gulf menhaden for reduction on April 21, 2025.

May 2025

- Louisiana waters and Federal waters off of Louisiana opened to the private recreational and state charter harvest of Red Snapper on May 1, 2025, with a four fish per person bag and possession limit.

June 2025

- Louisiana waters closed for the recreational and commercial harvest of gray triggerfish on June 1, 2025, concurrent with a seasonal closure in federal waters.
- Final regulations establishing a five fish per person bag and possession limit for Wahoo became effective on June 20, 2025.

FISHERIES RESEARCH

GRAND ISLE LABORATORY

The Fisheries Research Lab is located in Grand Isle on the shore of Barataria Bay, one of the richest estuarine complexes in the Gulf of

America. While fisheries research and monitoring is conducted throughout the state, the Fisheries Research Lab is the base for much of this work within the Office of Fisheries. This ideal location allows for the research and monitoring of many of Louisiana's key recreational and commercial marine species, including estuarine and offshore species. The Fisheries Research Lab provides fisheries biologists with the resources to develop and conduct additional research projects, collecting vital information for the management of Louisiana's marine resources. Along with being a home-base for fisheries research projects, the lab also serves as a place that public, state and federal partners can utilize, as well as other entities engaged in fisheries research, management, enforcement, coastal restoration and marine education.

Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP)

SEAMAP is a cooperative state, federal and university program designed for the collection, management and dissemination of fishery-independent biological and environmental data of the coastal waters (state and Exclusive Economic Zone) off the southeastern United States, Caribbean and northern Gulf of America. Since 1981, SEAMAP has collected data on fish stocks that are managed by either state or federal governments. Louisiana takes part in four components of the SEAMAP program: shrimp/groundfish, ichthyoplankton, reef fish, and bottom longline. These surveys are conducted by teams of three to nine fisheries biologists who collect, process and enter data. All surveys also collect a suite of environmental parameters including a water column profile. Data collected by LDWF and SEAMAP cooperative partners Gulf-wide are incorporated into federal stock assessments to inform management for a variety of species targeted in Louisiana's territorial waters including reef fish and elasmobranchs.

SEAMAP Shrimp/Groundfish Survey

The SEAMAP Shrimp/Groundfish Survey collects information to characterize shrimp and groundfish assemblages using a SEAMAP standardized 42-foot trawl in waters adjacent to the Louisiana coast. Shrimp/Groundfish Surveys are conducted during the summer and fall, and stations are selected from the SEAMAP randomized sampling grid. At least seven trawl stations are sampled daily by LDWF for each survey and additional stations are added as feasible. Species are identified, counted, measured, weighed and recorded;

data on pink, brown, and white shrimp are submitted to the SEAMAP data management system and are transmitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service for publicly available real-time reporting and monitoring of summer shrimp stocks. From July 2024 through June 2025, a total of 71 trawl surveys were conducted by LDWF personnel in depths ranging from 10.0-60.2 meters between longitudes-89.6-93.1.

SEAMAP Ichthyoplankton Survey

The SEAMAP Ichthyoplankton Survey is conducted annually to provide information on the occurrence, abundance and geographical distribution of the eggs and larvae of fall spawning fish, particularly king and Spanish mackerel, for inclusion on stock assessments. LDWF participates in the fall ichthyoplankton survey and stations are selected from the National Marine Fisheries Service ichthyoplankton grids. Sampling is conducted by towing 60-cm bongo nets and 1x2 m neuston nets through the entire depth of the water column. Ichthyoplankton samples collected in these nets are field processed, preserved and transferred to the National Marine Fisheries Service Pascagoula Laboratory for transshipment to the Polish Sorting and Identification Center. Seven ichthyoplankton stations were completed during the reporting period.

SEAMAP Reef Fish Survey

LDWF is implementing new survey methodologies off the Louisiana coast in order to collect information on the spatial and temporal distribution of commercial and recreational reef fish species. In particular, LDWF is utilizing a stereo-camera survey to monitor managed reef fish species such as snappers and groupers on artificial reefs and standing petroleum platforms. The sampling universe encompasses sites from the South Pass of the Mississippi River to the TX/LA border (-89.00° -94.00°). Sampling is conducted by deploying a stereo-camera at each station and rotating through methodologies including constant speed vertical profiles and prolonged camera deployment at set depths to record video of reef fish. Species observed on video are identified, enumerated, and their lengths measured using specialized software. From June 2024 to July 2025, LDWF completed 56 stereo-camera transects on standing petroleum platforms. Data collected during these surveys will be further analyzed and used to identify the best methods to expand ongoing reef fish video surveys to habitats off Louisiana's coastal waters and the western Gulf of America.

SEAMAP Bottom Longline Survey

The SEAMAP Bottom Longline Survey collects information on the abundance and distribution of sharks and fishes of commercial/recreational importance to Louisiana using standard 1 nautical mile longline sets. Data are utilized in Gulf of America stock assessments to establish harvest limits for commercial and recreational harvest of elasmobranchs. Additionally, this survey contributes data on the size at age of offshore red drum for inclusion in LDWF stock assessment of the species. Stations are generated by Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, and are proportionally allocated by longitude and depth from 3 to 10 meters. Stations are divided with the intent of sampling the entire Louisiana coast once per season (spring, summer and fall) during the months of April through September. All species are recorded, counted and measured for length(s), weight, and sex (sharks).

LDWF completed 37 longline sets in Louisiana's territorial waters between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025. Longline efforts resulted in 581 captures, of which elasmobranchs comprised 30.1% of the catch. The most frequently captured sharks included blacktip shark (52.0% of total shark catch) followed by bull shark (16.6%) and spinner shark (9.7%) (Figure 12). Otoliths (n=11) and gonads (n=2) from red drum were retained to contribute to LDWF red drum life history research.

Publications

Hendon JM, Hoffmayer ER, Pollack AG, Mareska J, Martinez-Andrade F, Rester J, Switzer TS and Zuckerman ZC. 2025. Impacts of survey design on a Gulf of Mexico bottom longline survey and the transition to a unified, stratified - random design. *Front. Mar. Sci.* 11:1426756. doi: 10.3389/fmars.2024.1426756.

Pollack AG, Hoffmayer ER, Switzer TS, Hani-sko DS, Hendon JM, Mareska J, Martinez-Andrade F, Rester J, Zuckerman ZC, and Pellegrin G. 2025. Assessing survey design changes of long-term fishery independent ground-fish trawl surveys in the Gulf of Mexico. *Front. Mar. Sci.* 12:1425362. doi: 10.3389/fmars.2025.1425362.

National Coastal Condition Assessment (NCCA)

The NCCA is multi-agency effort coordinated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to assess the health of the Nation's coastal habitats across all coasts, including the Great Lakes. The survey is conducted every five years with the goal of identifying the condition of the Nation's coastal waters in terms of water quality, ecological health, and recreational potential, and to identify primary stressors to these habitats (e.g., nutrients and contaminants) at a local and regional scale. Standardized sampling methodologies are im-



FIGURE 12. A bull shark is landed in a weighing sling outside of Marsh Island Wildlife Management Area.

plemented by partners to collect data on four indices of condition - biological (e.g., benthic macroinvertebrates and fish tissue contaminants), chemical/toxicity (e.g., water quality parameters, sediment contaminants), physical (water clarity), and recreational/human health (e.g., fish tissue contaminants of concern for human consumption, harmful bacteria).

National Coastal Condition Assessment sampling is conducted by multiple teams operating out of the LDWF's Fisheries Research Lab and Fisheries Habitat Program. Eighty-one sites were identified from Sabine Lake to Lake Pontchartrain, and sampling occurred in every basin along Louisiana's coast including Lake Borgne and Chandeleur Sound. At each site, water quality data was recorded using handheld sondes, sediment samples were collected from which macroinvertebrates and chemicals will be identified, water samples were collected, and tissue samples were collected from fishes of recreational importance to test for contaminants and advise fish consumption warnings. Within the reporting period, LDWF completed 32 assigned station with the remaining 49 stations scheduled to be completed by the end of October 2025. Data recorded at each site, along with water, sediment, and tissue samples, are submitted to NCCA for subsequent analysis.

Fisheries Research Projects

Life History of Louisiana Sport Fish

Collecting life history and reproductive metrics (age, growth, fecundity) for Louisiana's state-managed sport fishes is critical for informing sound management decisions. To supplement data collected from fish harvested in Louisiana's commercial and recreational fisheries, LDWF biologists conduct fisheries-independent sampling using standardized gears targeting species of interest during spawning periods. Target species for life history studies rotate annually between red drum, black drum, sheepshead, and spotted sea trout, with efforts focused on spotted sea trout during the reporting period.

Samples collected for life history studies include otoliths from all individuals and ovaries from females. Ovaries are fixed in buffered formalin and processed for histological analysis at the Fisheries Research Lab. Spawning markers are identified under stereoscope, and spawning metrics including spawning frequency and fecundity are recorded. Metrics such as age, growth, spawning fraction, spawning frequency and fecundity can be used both as inputs for stock assessment and as proxies for the health of the spawning stock.

Sheepshead were sampled from nearshore spawning aggregations from April-March using hook-and-line gear. A total of 228 individuals were captured, of which 49.5% were female. Histological analysis and fecundity accounts are pending for all 113 females encountered.

Spotted seatrout were collected in FY2025 using gill nets and rod and reel sampling. A total of 320 spotted seatrout were captured, all of which have been aged. Of these, 215 were identified as female. Histological analysis and fecundity assessments were completed in the current reporting period for 25 remaining individuals.

Spawning black drum were targeted in passes using bottom long line sets during FY 2024-2025. 238 fish were sampled, of which 75 were female. Ages were estimated for all 238 fish, and fecundity reads were completed in the current reporting period for 18 fish that were in spawning condition at the time of capture.

Red drum were opportunistically sampled during the SEAMAP Bottom Longline Survey to supplement a growing sample size of larger, mature fish. Targeted sampling of red drum in passes and nearshore habitats were also conducted in September and October 2024. No actively spawning females were collected during their spawning season. During the reporting period, 33 individuals were captured during bottom longline sampling. With age estimated for all individuals (Figure 13).

Otoliths were collected from 930 southern flounder under the Southern Flounder Abundance Study (below), and gonads were macro-staged to determine maturity. Two female southern flounder were captured in spawning condition, and fecundity counts are pending.

Southern Flounder Abundance

Southern flounder stocks are declining from the Gulf of America to the Atlantic coast. Because southern flounder do not recruit to standardized sampling gears such as gill nets and trammel nets, they are rarely encountered in Louisiana's fishery-independent surveys. Identifying effective gears and locations for sampling Southern flounder outside of typical harvest seasons and during the spawn can increase data availability to improve stock assessments and LDWF's ability to monitor the southern flounder population. To better monitor Louisiana's southern flounder stock, LDWF biologists have established an experimental study to assess the effectiveness of modified fyke nets as a standardized passive fishing gear for sampling southern flounder from Louisiana's coastal waters.

Seven sampling sites were located on the main passes of Barataria bay which were fished September through April, weather permitting. In addition to identifying a successful standardized fisheries-independent survey method, otoliths were collected and ovaries were macro-staged from southern flounder to determine maturity to supplement stock assessments. In the September 2024 to April

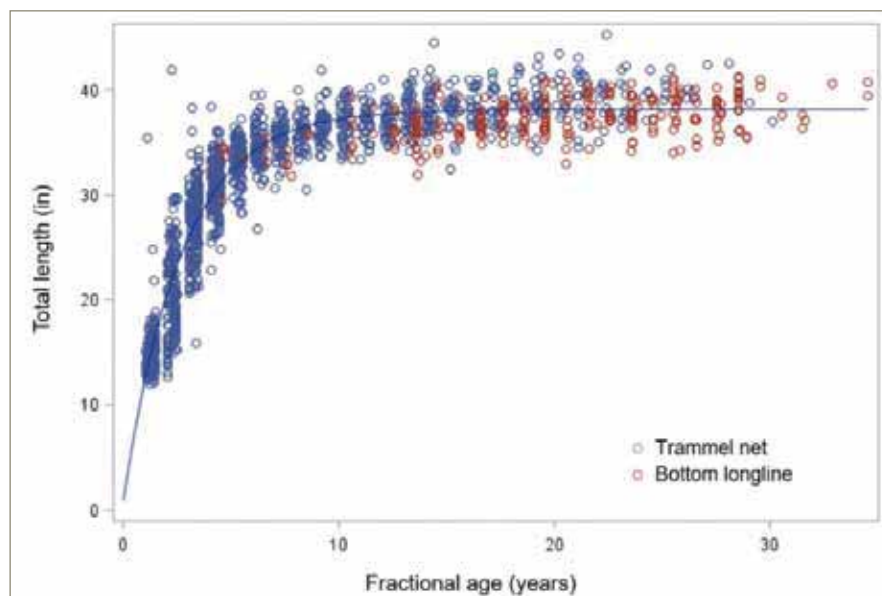


FIGURE 13. Size at age curve demonstrating the contribution of red drum sampled from nearshore bottom longline surveys (red circles) to the upper end of the growth curve. Data represented are cumulative across the duration of the study period.

2025 sampling season, 161 net days yielded 930 southern flounder, with their otoliths also collected. The nets obtained a 75% positive catch day with a collective catch per unit effort (fish/net day) of 5.8, demonstrating the effectiveness of the survey for encountering adult southern flounder (Figure 14).

Minimizing Impacts of Barotrauma to Fish

Barotrauma is a common injury that occurs to fish that are captured at depth and are rapidly brought to the surface, resulting in gas expansion from the swim bladder causing a bloated appearance distended eyes and sometimes everted stomachs. This injury can cause the fish to become an easy prey item if released at the surface due to its impact on swimming

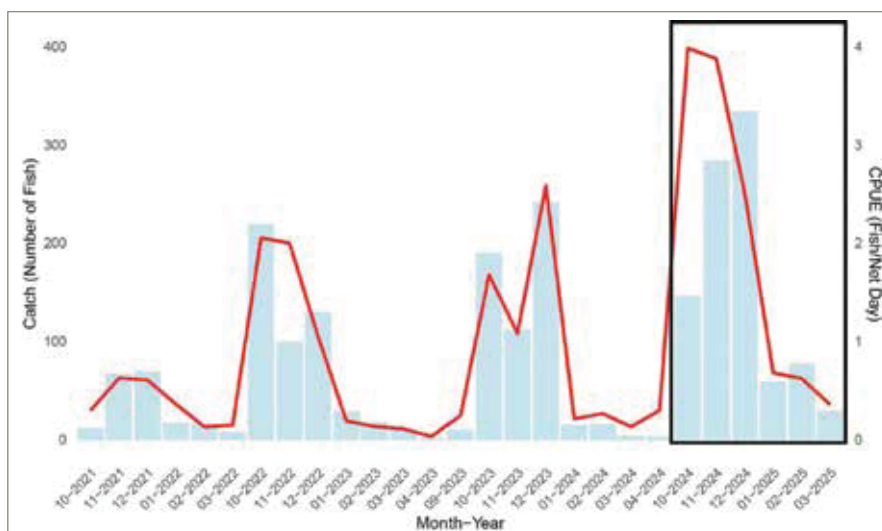


FIGURE 14. Number of southern flounder encountered (bars) and catch per unit effort (line) for the duration of the study. The current reporting period is indicated by the black box. Only months when southern flounder were targeted are shown.



FIGURE 15. Red snapper exhibiting an inverted stomach as a sign of barotrauma injury prior to being released using an inverted hook (left) and a lip-grip style (right) fish descending device. Federal regulations require any angler targeting reef fish in the Gulf of America to carry a rigged-and-ready fish descending device or venting tool, and the device demonstrated here are both easy-to-use and commercially available.

and predator evasion. A way to reverse the effects of barotrauma is to release the fish at depth via a controlled descent. For this study, fish are captured via traditional rod and reel methods, biological data are collected and fish are returned to capture depth using one of three types of fish descender devices: Seaqualizer lip grip, See Ya Later inverted hook, or a weighted net known as a fish elevator (Figure 15). Cameras are affixed to the line to observe the condition of the fish upon release and any interactions the fish may have with a predator (e.g., sharks) when returning to depth.

To date, a total of 735 fish were sampled (449 red snapper, 151 amberjack and 135 grey triggerfish) yielding 398 videos in which the fate of the released fish was observed. Despite predators (e.g., sharks or dolphins) being present for 53% of observed releases, depredation occurred for only 2% of all fish released from a descending device, demonstrating the utility of these devices for minimizing post-release predation of reef fish released at depth.

Publications

Ellis KM, Lang ET, Zuckerman ZC. 2025. Research in support of state managed species. Poster presentation. 45th Annual Meeting of the Louisiana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society. May 29-30, Baton Rouge, LA.

Lang ET and Zuckerman ZC. 2024. Depredation Rates and Release Mortality of Red Snapper, Gray Triggerfish, and Greater Amberjack Released Using Fish Descending Devices. Oral presentation. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission 75th Annual Meeting, Oct 14-17, Gulf Shores, AL.

Schreckengost SNF, Lang ET, Zuckerman ZC, Fischer AJ. 2025. Do descender devices reduce or increase discard mortality in Greater Amberjack, Grey Triggerfish, and Red Snapper? Oral presentation. 45th Annual Meeting of the Louisiana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society. May 29-30, Baton Rouge, LA.

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AGE & GROWTH LABORATORY

The collection of age, growth and reproductive information used to develop age-structured stock assessments is coordinated through the LDWF Age and Growth Laboratory in Baton Rouge. The Age and Growth Lab monitors 17 species of fish. Monitoring is done through the collection of otoliths and spines (gray triggerfish) for aging purposes. Coastal study area biologists record length, weight, gender and location when fish are collected in the field. The 17 fish species consist of 13 saltwater and four freshwater species. The freshwater species are black crappie, white crappie, largemouth bass and striped bass. The saltwater species are black drum, cobia, gray snapper, greater amberjack, gray triggerfish (spines), king mackerel, red drum, red snapper, sheepshead, southern flounder, spotted seatrout, striped mullet and vermilion snapper. Yellowfin tuna and wahoo are sampled by Fisheries Research biologists and considered fishery research species. Since 2015, LDWF Fisheries Research staff have been Gulf of America-wide leaders in yellowfin tuna processing protocol and aging. Opportunistic samples of wahoo have led to age and growth model estimations and a maturity ogive. As of January 2019, saltwater otoliths/spines are obtained by fisheries independent sampling in addition to fisheries dependent sampling. Dependent sampling requires field marine biologists to collect the otolith or spine when they interview a recreational angler, and also includes interviewing commercial fishermen at commercial fishing docks. Independent sampling, requires field biologists to target a particular species. Freshwater otoliths are obtained through indepen-

dent sampling. The lab receives otoliths (and spines) throughout each month of the year.

During FY 2024-2025, the Age and Growth Lab in Baton Rouge received 11,352 marine and freshwater otoliths or spines, of which 11,160 have been aged. Within that total, 1,643 otoliths were saltwater fisheries independent, of which 1,633 were aged. Five hundred and twenty four freshwater otoliths were aged. Spotted seatrout was the most collected species out of any marine or inland species because quotas for spotted seatrout are the highest and it is very popular among anglers. The totals for each species are listed in *Table 18*.

The season for striped mullet and black and white crappie collection is typically during the fall. Largemouth bass sampling is mostly done during the spring and early summer months.

The 2024 otolith sampling quotas were maintained through FY 2024-2025. The number of marine otoliths decreased slightly, approximately 7.5%, when compared to last year's numbers, primarily due to reduced harvest of spotted seatrout and red drum. All otoliths received during this time period have been processed, meaning they were cataloged, sectioned, first and second read and data was entered into DMS.

During FY 2024-2025, the Age and Growth Lab received the reference sets for black drum, gray snapper, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, gulf menhaden, king mackerel, red drum, sheepshead, spotted seatrout and striped mullet. The reference sets are used to help sharpen Age and Growth biologists' otolith aging skills and control bias over time. The sets are also used to ensure all labs base their ages on the correct criteria.

AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES MONITORING

The "State Management Plan for Aquatic Invasive species in Louisiana" was written in 2005 and includes five objectives to help in the coordination and management of aquatic nuisance and invasive species within Louisiana. Briefly, the five objectives are to:

- Coordinate all aquatic invasive species management activities and programs within Louisiana and collaborate with other aquatic invasive species programs.
- Prevent and control non-indigenous invasive species through education.
- Eliminate locally established invasive species.

- Control the spread of established invasive species.
- Prevent the introduction of non-native species, or the spread of existing ones, through legislation and regulation.

The LDWF Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Coordinator and LDWF biologists conducted the following activities during FY 2024-2025:

- Received approximately 500 calls and emails related to invasive species inquiries. The majority of these calls are related to apple snails sightings in existing areas.
- LDWF AIS Coordinator helped administer ongoing contracted studies:
 - distribution of carp larval stages
 - gear testing by commercial fishermen for invasive carp harvest
 - telemetry studies to help understand the movement and migration patterns of invasive carp
 - impact study on native fish and zooplankton
 - use of carp as crawfish bait including the formulation of a shelf stable bait
 - use of AI to identify carp larvae
 - dietary analysis of carp to infer competition with natives
- The AIS coordinator represented LDWF on the following panels and committees:
 - Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association(MICRA): served as the Chairman for AIS committee-4 meetings
 - National Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force- served as MICRA representative to this committee
- Mississippi River Basin Panel- One meeting and six Executive Officers meetings, 4 workgroup meetings
 - Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species- Spring and Fall meetings.
 - Invasive Carp Advisory Committee- AIS Coordinator represented the Lower MS River basin.
 - South East Regional Invasive species and Changing Conditions(SERISCC):- AIS coordinator served on the advisory panel for the group.
 - Lower Mississippi River Invasive Carp Cooperative- group that funds invasive carp grants.

The LDWF Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator compiled records and locations of aquatic invasive species within Louisiana waters and added those new occurrences to the USGS Non-indigenous Aquatic Spe-

TABLE 18. Saltwater and freshwater fish otoliths collected and aged

SPECIES	COLLECTED	AGED
Black Crappie	117	116
Black Drum	1841	1841
Cobia	7	5
Gray Snapper	87	86
Gray Triggerfish	12	9
Greater Amberjack	9	9
King Mackerel	1	0
Largemouth Bass	324	229
Red Drum	2233	2218
Red Snapper	1125	1103
Sheepshead	1052	1011
Southern Flounder	492	489
Spotted Seatrout	3735	3716
Striped Mullet	106	103
Vermilion Snapper	46	46
White Crappie	160	160

cies Program center database. Below is an update to some of aquatic invasive species monitored and logged occurrences for FY 2024-2025:

- **Apple Snail:** Existing locations of Apple snails made up the majority of the reports. A new location in Shreveport is being monitored.
- **Invasive Carp (bighead, black, grass, silver):** no new locations and most of reports came during the telemetry project
- **Chinese Mitten Crabs:** reported off the coast of the MS River Delta. These crabs have been seen over 10 years ago so it is unclear if this is the same population of a new invasion.
- **No new species were reported**

INLAND RESEARCH

Many issues that Inland Fisheries biologists face require laboratory and field research to validate current techniques, investigate new methods of resource management and prioritize management actions across Louisiana's freshwater ecosystem.

Florida Bass Genetics

LDWF Inland Fisheries monitors the genetic composition of largemouth bass populations across Louisiana. This data is used to manage hatchery stocks, evaluate the relative mortality of native largemouth bass, Florida bass and their hybrids, and assess the introgression of Florida bass genes into Louisiana bass popu-

lations resulting from ongoing LDWF stocking efforts. Between July 2024 and June 2025, 1,449 fin clip samples were analyzed for sub-species identification. Fish with ≥98.5% largemouth bass or Florida bass genetics were classified as pure, while all others were classified as hybrids. Samples were collected from Lake Claiborne, Grand Bayou Reservoir, Cane River, Millers Lake, Lake Martin, Turkey Creek, Poverty Point Reservoir, Toledo Bend Reservoir, Vernon Lake, Lake Concordia, D'Arbonne Lake, Lake Cotile, Atchafalaya Basin, Sibley Lake, Crooked Creek, and Black River Lake (Table 19). Genetic analyses were performed using either microsatellite markers or single nucleotide polymorphisms, depending on the laboratory conducting the tests.

Native Vegetation Establishment in Toledo Bend Reservoir and Other Waterbodies

Toledo Bend Reservoir historically contained large quantities of submersed aquatic vegetation that contributed to healthy bass and crappie populations. Following the record flooding experienced in March 2016 and September 2017, aquatic vegetation coverage in the lake was minimal. Decreasing amounts of fishery habitat throughout the reservoir prompted LDWF biologists to stock native aquatic plant species. Over the past several years, species including eelgrass, coontail, American pondweed and spatterdock have been added to several protected areas across the reservoir.

During 2025, biologist continued to transfer coontail in to the Pirates Cove area of Toledo Bend with limited, but observable success in enhancing fish habitat.

Inland Fisheries staff continued beneficial aquatic vegetation plantings for spawning habitat enhancement in several other waterbodies. Vegetation plantings were initiated in Crooked Creek during August 2024. Coontail was planted in enclosures throughout the lake, and establishment has been successful. Plantings of California Bulrush seedlings were planted at locations in Poverty Point reservoir in an effort to establish shoreline vegetation and promote sport fish reproductive success. Seedlings were set deep into the substrate, and some were enclosed for protection from predation. Biologists observed surviving and expanding plantings of bulrush in Poverty Point.

Louisiana Aquatic Connectivity Team (LA-ACT)

The Louisiana Aquatic Connectivity Team (LA-ACT), established in 2023, aims to restore connectivity, habitat, and ecological functions to flowing waters in the state by identifying and removing barriers to aquatic species movement (e.g. fish passage). The LA-ACT held two meetings, one in-person December 2024 and one virtual in 2025, where aquatic habitat experts and water resource managers from across the state gathered to share

TABLE 19. Largemouth bass tested for sub-species identification in FY 2024-2025.

WATERBODY	NUMBER OF SAMPLES	% FLORIDA INFLUENCE IN POPULATION	% PURE NORTHERN	% HYBRID	% PURE FLORIDA	YEAR SAMPLED	DISTRICT
Lake Claiborne	60	33.3	8.3	91.7	0	2024	1
Grand Bayou Reservoir	120	65.29	0	98.3	1.7	2023	10
Cane River	60	15.85	16.7	83.3	0	2024	10
Millers Lake	60	9.48	58.3	41.7	0	2024	6
Lake Martin	60	12.45	31.7	68.3	0	2024	6
Turkey Creek	60	8.97	65	35	0	2024	2
Poverty Point Reservoir	52	67.39	0	82.7	17.3	2024	2
Toledo Bend Reservoir	60	39.77	6.7	86.6	6.7	2024	10
Vernon Lake	57	67.27	0	93	7	2024	5
Lake Concordia	62	66.2	3.2	96.8	0	2024	3
D'Arbonne Lake	7	68.54	0	71.4	28.6	2024	2
Lake Cotile	1	0.16	100	0	0	2024	3
Atchafalaya Basin	97	2.23	67	33	0	2024	9
Grand Bayou Reservoir	50	57.9	0	98	2	2025	10
Sibley Lake	117	14.92	0.8	99.2	0	2025	10
Poverty Point Reservoir	122	66.43	0	81.1	18.9	2025	2
Crooked Creek	115	44.36	0	96.5	3.5	2025	6
Vernon Lake	171	53.33	0.6	93	6.4	2025	5
Black River Lake	118	5.92	72	28	0	2025	3
TOTAL	1449						

updates on the team's strategic Working Plan. The LA-ACT also hosted a free barrier-assessment training event during the annual Louisiana American Fisheries Society meeting to grow the number of people certified to assess these structures. Assessment training using standardized methods ensures that fish passage barriers such as culverts and low-head weirs are assessed in a scientific and equitable way, and that the information gathered is of high quality and is used to direct effort and funding to impactful fish passage projects in Louisiana. Louisiana had 21 assessed barriers in 2024. As of December 2025, our state has 367 assessed/surveyed barriers due to the success of this team. In the coming years, the focus of this team will shift to barrier prioritization and removal to improve fish and aquatic organism habitat connectivity.

Advisory Group Membership

- Alligator Gar Committee of the Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society
- American Eel Subcommittee of the Warm Water Streams Committee of the Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society
- Atchafalaya Basin Master Plan Working Group
- Bayou Vermillion Preservation Association
- Catfish Management Technical Committee of the Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society
- False River Watershed Council (chair)
- Gulf Sturgeon Recovery Team
- ICES Working Group on American Eel
- Instream Flow Council
- Louisiana Aquatic Connectivity Team (co-chair and members)
- Lake Providence Watershed Council (chair)
- Louisiana Fish Contaminants Advisory Group
- Louisiana Vegetation Managers Association
- Louisiana Watershed Initiative (working groups)
- Lower Basin Pallid Sturgeon Workgroup
- Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee- Secretary/Treasurer
- Mid-South Aquatic Plant Management Society
- Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association- State Delegate
- Pallid Sturgeon Recovery Team
- Pollution Committee of the Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society
- Reservoir Committee of the Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society
- Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership
- Southeast Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies- state representative
- Toledo Bend Power Project Relicensing

Project (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission/ Sabine River Authority)- Aquatic Resources Working Group

- Warm Water Streams Committee of the Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society

Presentations and Posters

Banks, Patrick. Freshwater Fisheries Management. LDWF Conservation Roundtable, Baton Rouge, LA. Oral Presentation. April 3, 2025.

Butler, Kristi. Florida Bass Stocking. LDWF Conservation Roundtable, Baton Rouge, LA. Oral Presentation. April 3, 2025.

Daniel, Ryan. Bussey Brake Trophy Bass Fishery. Arkansas/Louisiana/Mississippi Joint Border State Fisheries Meeting, Delhi, LA. Oral Presentation. May 7, 2025.

Duplessis, Matthew. Louisiana Gulf Striped Bass. LDWF Conservation Roundtable, Baton Rouge, LA. Oral Presentation. April 3, 2025.

Duplessis, Matthew, J. Winslow, G. Vitrano. Status Survey for Frecklebelly Madtom (*Noturus munitus*) in the Pearl River Drainage of Louisiana. LDWF Conservation Roundtable, Baton Rouge, LA. Poster. April 3, 2025

Duplessis, Matthew and Jonathan Winslow. Pontchartrain/Pearl Basin, Louisiana, Gulf Striped Bass Project. Arkansas/Louisiana/Mississippi Joint Border State Fisheries Meeting, Delhi, LA. Oral Presentation. May 7, 2025.

Faria, V, R. Maxwell, S. Kinney, and A. Hale. 2024. Characterizing Sex Ratios of American Eels (*Anguilla rostrata*) in Louisiana. micro-Publication Biology. 10.17912/micropub.biology.001256.

Heiman, Brian. Fisheries Response to Watershed and Lake Improvements in False River, LA. Arkansas/Louisiana/Mississippi Border State Fisheries Meeting, Delhi, LA. Oral Presentation. May 7, 2025.

Maxwell, Robby. Fish Passage and Aquatic Connectivity Teams. Louisiana Watershed Initiative Regional Funding Workshop, online. October 23, 2024.

Maxwell, Robby. Tracking inland fish kills in Louisiana following Hurricane Francine. BTNEP Quarterly Meeting, Houma, LA. November 14, 2024.

Maxwell, Robby. Tracking inland fish kills in Louisiana following Hurricane Francine. Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society, Pollution Technical Committee, SDAFS annual meeting, Asheville, NC. February 18, 2025.

Maxwell, Robby. A Career in Inland Fisheries. McNeese State University, Lake Charles, LA. Oral Presentation April 4, 2025.

Maxwell, Robby. Tracking inland fish kills in Louisiana following Hurricane Francine. Louisiana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society Conference, Baton Rouge, LA. May 29, 2025.

Maxwell, Robby. Tracking inland fish kills in Louisiana following Hurricane Francine. 155th Annual American Fisheries Society Conference, San Antonio, TX. May 29, 2025.

Quade AH, Ferrara A, Fontenot Q, Harlan R, Boyle KW, Rieucan G. Mississippi River-flood-plain connectivity level mediates fish assemblage dynamics. *Journal of Limnology* 2025; 84:2213.

Richard, Shelby, J. West, R. Harlan, R. Maxwell. Batture Habitat Restoration of the Blackhawk Scar Lakes on the Richard K. Yancy Wildlife Management Area. LDWF Conservation Roundtable, Baton Rouge, LA. Poster. April 3, 2025

Richard, Shelby. Blackhawk Scar Lakes Project. Arkansas/Louisiana/Mississippi Border State Fisheries Meeting, Delhi, LA. Oral Presentation. May 7, 2025.

Salyers, Brac. A long-term look at the Large-mouth Bass fishery in the Atchafalaya River Basin. 2025 State of the Coast Conference, New Orleans, LA. Oral Presentation. May 21, 2025.

Sibley, Jeff, K. Butler, K. Houston, H. Poole. LDWF Inland Fisheries Lake Drawdowns: Extending Lake Life, Stimulating Sportfish Production/Growth, and Improving Access. LDWF Conservation Roundtable, Baton Rouge, LA. Poster. April 3, 2025.

Winslow, Jonathan, M. Duplessis, G. Vitrano. At-Risk Freshwater Mussel Survey of the Bogue-Chitto National Wildlife Refuge. LDWF Conservation Roundtable, Baton Rouge, LA. Poster. April 3, 2025.

FISHING ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY

Louisiana is nationally recognized by anglers and fisheries professionals as a premier sport fishing destination. The Office of Fisheries strives to create, enhance and restore our state's inventory of public boating and fishing access sites. Access sites, including marinas, boat launches and fishing piers, serve as doorways to our state's natural resources.

ACCESS

In a cooperative effort, LDWF provides financial assistance to local government entities through a competitive process to construct, improve and repair boating and fishing access facilities. Improvements and repairs are also made to boating and fishing access facilities owned by LDWF. This program is funded through the Sport Fish Restoration Program and includes both freshwater and saltwater projects. Projects may include the construction of boat ramps, parking areas, docks, bulk heading and fishing piers. The Clean Vessel Act Program provides funding for pump out systems for recreational boaters to dispose of sewage in an effort to keep Louisiana's waters clean.

BOATING ACCESS FACILITIES PLANNED OR UNDER CONSTRUCTION

- **Bucktown Harbor Marina and Dock Renovation:** Project includes the construction of mooring docks and related amenities for transient boaters in Bucktown Harbor Marina in Jefferson Parish.
- **Larose Boat Launch Renovations:** Project includes the renovation of the existing boat ramp, mooring docks, bulkhead and parking lot to accommodate recreational boaters in Lafourche Parish.

FISHING ACCESS FACILITIES PLANNED OR UNDER CONSTRUCTION

- **City of Lafayette Beaver Park Fishing Pier:** This project includes the renovation of an existing fishing pier on a community lake in Lafayette.

CLEAN VESSEL ACT PROGRAM PROJECTS PLANNED OR UNDER CONSTRUCTION

- **Bucktown Harbor Marina Pumpout Facility:** Project includes the installation of a pumpout system at the marina facility in Jefferson Parish.

- **Orleans Marina Pump Out System:** This project includes the replacement of an existing pump out system at Orleans Marina in New Orleans.
- **South Shore Harbor Marina Pump Out System:** This project includes the replacement of an existing pump out system at South Shore Harbor Marina in New Orleans.

NUISANCE AQUATIC VEGETATION

Control of nuisance aquatic plant species is necessary to provide access to many public waterways. Aquatic vegetation management efforts are designed to ensure that the natural environment and human interests are mutually protected.

Our natural resources are constantly under attack from invasive species posing a threat to healthy habitats and access opportunities for the public. The flagship of these initiatives is our Aquatic Plant Control Program, which strives to provide the public with safe and usable fishing and boating access. Left unchecked, invasive plants have the potential to completely inundate the state's abundant freshwater lakes, making them inaccessible and threatening the natural habitat of our valuable aquatic resources. Treatment of affected waters continued in FY 2024-2025 in an ongoing effort to restore and improve the aquatic habitat and the natural balance of plants and fish.

The Aquatic Vegetation Management Plan format was created for lakes that do not have an approved LDWF Waterbody Management Plan to provide a lake description, basic information, a listing of lake authorities, historical vegetation control information, current aquatic plant status, and recommendations for control. These documents are used as a guide for aquatic plant control and as a source of recommendations

and information to provide to the lake authorities and the public. In FY 2024-2025, the Aquatic Plant Control Program completed 17 standalone Vegetation Management Plans for Louisiana public waterbodies that do not currently have a Waterbody Management Plan.

In FY 2024-2025, herbicides were applied to 28,020 acres of nuisance aquatic vegetation using EPA-approved herbicides. Control efforts primarily targeted giant salvinia in north Louisiana and water hyacinth in the south, but Cuban bulrush is expanding its footprint statewide.

Another method used for control of aquatic vegetation includes water level fluctuations. Natural water systems benefit from high springtime water levels and lower water levels in the fall. Benefits include aquatic vegetation control and a healthier fish population. For impounded waters, partial dewatering (typically called drawdowns) are often conducted to induce similar benefits. These drawdowns also provide the opportunity for improvements to shoreline properties. Drawdowns were conducted on eight inland reservoirs in FY 2024-2025 (*Table 20*).

In recent years, aquatic plant control biologists have shifted efforts towards identifying and utilizing all effective plant control methods available. Integrated pest management involves combining the effects of chemical, mechanical and biological control methods to manage nuisance species more effectively and efficiently. Biological control using giant salvinia weevils remains effective, particularly in coastal Louisiana, where established populations in select areas have reduced the need for herbicide applications. In north Louisiana, overwintering weevil populations at Iatt Lake, Black-Clear Lake, and Indian Creek Reservoir are being mass-reared by the LSU AgCenter to improve cold tolerance and expand their

TABLE 20. Drawdowns conducted in FY 2024-2025.

LAKE NAME	DRAWDOWN DATES	PURPOSE OF DRAWDOWN
Lake Bistineau	July 29 - Sept. 15, 2024	Giant salvinia control, bottom oxidation
D'Arbonne Lake	Sept. 3 - Dec. 15, 2024	Aquatic vegetation control, fisheries production
Lake Lafourche	Sept. 16 - Nov. 30, 2024	Boat launch construction
Iatt Lake	July 15 - Oct. 14, 2024	Vegetation control, bottom oxidation
Lake Louis	Sept. 23, 2024 - February 2025	Bottom oxidation
False River	Sept. 3, 2024 - January 2025	Bottom oxidation/sediment consolidation
Henderson Lake	Aug. 5 - Nov. 1, 2024	Vegetation control, bottom oxidation
Saline Lake	June 17 - Nov. 7, 2024	Vegetation control, bottom oxidation Replace Drawdown Gate



LEFT: Get Out & Fish! Youth Fishing Rodeo - Zemurray Park **RIGHT:** Fish Stocking - Forts Randolph/Buhlow

range. The presence of high weevil numbers in these lakes is resulting in thinner mats, less biomass, and less overall coverage of giant salvinia in some cases. The long-term benefits and cost efficiency provided by the integrated pest management strategy allows LDWF to more effectively manage the aquatic vegetation infestations throughout Louisiana's public waterbodies.

Evaluation of Giant Salvinia Control Methods

Since 2006, giant salvinia has spread to waters throughout much of Louisiana. As a result, identifying and implementing all efficient and effective control methods for this invasive aquatic weed has been a priority for the Aquatic Plant Control Program. Introduction and establishment of giant salvinia weevils, a species-specific biological control, has been one focus of the program since that time. Most recently, salvinia weevil research has centered on finding or selecting for a cold tolerant weevil ecotype in order to ensure overwintering in the northern part of the state. Herbicide applications remain as the most utilized part of the salvinia control efforts, the Aquatic Plant Control Program continues to search for more effective and cost efficient chemicals available for use in aquatic systems. Since 2012, LDWF has worked closely with USACE and LSU Agricultural Center weed scientists to explore the effectiveness of new herbicides, and to test the potential of mixtures of herbicides and the effects of different surfactants. This research includes controlled, replicated experiments, as well as field evaluations of mixtures that show potential for more cost-efficient control. It has been proven that either of the herbicides Clipper (flumioxazin) or Stingray (carfentrazone) can be used as an alternative to diquat dibromide to act as an indicator and to initiate plant damage when combined with glyphosate for salvinia control.

Experiments continued throughout FY 2024-2025, focusing on the effectiveness of alternative herbicides both alone and in combination with other herbicides.

Presentations

Coulon, Michael. LDWF Aquatic Plant Control. Presented at 2024 St. Tammany Parish Town Hall Meeting, Covington, LA. October 23, 2024.

Finkbeiner, William Invasive Aquatic Plant Management in Louisiana. 2025 AR-LA-MS Border State Meeting, Delhi, LA. May 07, 2025.

FISHING OPPORTUNITY

Louisiana's fishery resources, including habitat, benefit all of Louisiana's constituent groups within the state and across the Gulf Coast. Habitat stewardship and resource management provide opportunities for the public to access these natural resources.

COMMUNITY FISHING PROGRAM

The "Get Out & Fish!" community fishing program was initiated in November 2014. The goal of the program is to work with local

TABLE 21. 2024-2025 Get Out & Fish! Stocking Schedule: Number of Fish in Pounds

SITE NAME	CATFISH				TROUT
	September	November/December	Early April	Late May	January
Joe Brown Park	500	900	500	750	750
BREC	200	400	400	400	400
Zemurray Park	300	300	300	300	300
Sidney Hutchinson	200	400	200	400	400
Bogue Chitto State Park	400	800	400	750	750
Bayou Country Sports Complex	500	800	500	750	750
Girard Park	200	100	200	100	100
Southside Regional Park	200	400	200	400	400
Purple Heart Memorial Park	300	600	300	600	600
I-10 Park	500	900	500	750	750
William T. Polk	200	400	200	400	400
Forts Randolph/Buhlow	500	900	500	750	750
Elmore D. Mayfield Park	500	900	500	750	750
Turner's Pond	500	900	500	750	750
Grambling	200	400	200	400	400
Parc Natchitoches	300	600	300	600	600
Kiroli	300	600	400	600	600
Total Pounds Per Month	5,800	10,300	6,100	9,450	9,450

community organizations and governments to provide easily accessible, high-quality fishing opportunities to everyone in Louisiana. The program intends to recruit new anglers to the sport of fishing and promote outdoor activities for future generations. In order to accomplish this mission, public water bodies that met the required specifications were chosen by LDWF biologists to begin stocking fish on a regular basis.

Get Out & Fish! Sites

There are currently 17 community fishing sites across Louisiana. Each site was stocked seasonally with Channel Catfish (spring and fall) and Rainbow Trout (winter), totaling 35,000 pounds of Channel Catfish and 6,100 pounds of Rainbow Trout (*Table 21*) Beyond recreational use, Get Out & Fish! sites also serve as venues for educational and outreach programs, including Fishing 101 courses, LDWF's Fishing Course Series, and 4-H youth events.

ARTIFICIAL REEFS

The Louisiana Artificial Reef Program was created by Act 100 of the 1986 Louisiana Legislature within LDWF. Act 100 also required the formation of the Artificial Reef Development Council, development of an Artificial Reef Plan, and establishment of the Artificial Reef Trust Fund.

The Artificial Reef Development Council is comprised of the Secretary of LDWF, the Dean of LSU's College of the Coast and the Environment, and the Executive Director of Louisiana Sea Grant, or their designees. The council is charged with providing guidance on policy, procedural matters, site selection and allocation of funds to the program. The Office of Fisheries administers and manages the program in accordance with the National Artificial Reef Plan, Louisiana Artificial Reef Development Plan, pertinent regulations, laws and budget allocation.

The Louisiana Artificial Reef Plan was developed and implemented in November 1987. The plan outlines the siting, permitting and monitoring requirements. The plan centers on nine artificial reef planning areas and the conversion of oil and gas platforms into permanent marine hard-bottom habitat. The program also includes special artificial reef sites, deepwater reefs, nearshore reefs and inshore reefs. The program works closely with stakeholders, public and private conservation groups, and appropriate regulatory agencies when developing, maintaining and monitoring Louisiana's artificial reefs.

In FY 2024-2025, the program enhanced six offshore reefs with 17 oil and gas platforms and received \$6.4 million in donations from oil company participation. It also completed one new Special Artificial Reef Site, South Pass 37 and two new deepwater reefs, South Timbalier 291 and Green Canyon 52. The program also created five new nearshore reefs - West Delta 79, South Timbalier 63 W & E, and South Timbalier 86 W & C.

In FY 2021-2022, through funds provided by the Louisiana Restoration Area Trustee Implementation Group, LDWF continued the monitoring of all completed inshore and nearshore artificial reef enhancement sites. This is part of a five-year plan to assess the success of artificial reefs enhanced in an effort to mitigate for recreational use opportunities lost during the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. Monitoring efforts include the study of the aquatic organisms utilizing the reef enhancement sites via the use of gillnetting, rod and reel sampling, and benthic tray observations, as well as observations of recreational users. Together, those efforts are intended to provide insight into the overall biological health of the reef enhancement sites as well as insight into whether those sites are providing enhanced recreational opportunities to the public.

an Interactive GIS-based map:
ldwf.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=4c4a4d9526c248c080c3eaa4808b9bea

Important Figures for FY 2024-2025

- 87 total established offshore artificial reef sites
 - 49 planning area reefs
 - 20 special artificial reef sites
 - 18 deepwater reefs
- Offshore structures converted to permanent habitat
 - 478 platform jackets
 - 8 drill rig legs
 - 17 oil and gas structures deployed
- 29 established nearshore reefs
- 35 inshore reefs sites

FRESHWATER ARTIFICIAL REEF PROGRAM

Freshwater artificial reefs are used to accomplish multiple Inland Fisheries objectives, but the primary objective for this program is to increase angler success. For many anglers, finding fish in a waterbody, especially one that is new to them, is a major obstacle to a successful fishing trip. Artificial reefs concentrate fish, and identifying the structures on maps and with buoys makes them available to all anglers. A secondary objective is



Duncan
Artificial Reef



Raising Cane's
Hotel Sid
Artificial Reef

increased fisheries habitat. As lakes age, flooded timber decomposes and water bottoms may accumulate silt and organic debris. This progression can lead to a reduction in fisheries productivity. If sufficient artificial cover or substrate is added, fisheries productivity can be maintained.

LDWF facilitates this program by partnering with sponsor groups to construct artificial reef projects and/or to deploy natural reef structures. LDWF's role in this program is that of an administrator and/or consultant. As such, the department makes final decisions relative to project design, material selection, and placement for all approved projects. The U.S. Coast Guard is consulted if artificial structures are proposed to be placed in navigable waterways. LDWF's Inland Fisheries biologist managers serve as points of contact for proposed projects and must grant prior approval for proposed projects to ensure compliance with project guidelines.

Important Figures for FY 2024-2025

- 10 new artificial reef structures in three waterbodies
 - Lake Concordia- 3
 - Kincaid Lake- 4
 - Saline Larto Complex- 3
- 275 artificial reefs across 29 waterbodies under LDWF Inland Fisheries management
- In addition to deploying these reefs, staff monitored the structures using forward facing sonar to document use by sportfish species including but not limited to Largemouth Bass, Bluegill, Redear Sunfish, White Crappie and Black Crappie.

In addition to the formal reefs installed in the lakes mentioned above, LDWF Inland Fisheries districts continue to place donated Christmas trees into waterbodies that are in need of cover and woody debris. These reef locations can be accessed by the public through the LDWF Outdoor Explorer map on the internet:

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/8c8c131a3e8e42728a0658159e79efd4/page/Get-on-the-Water>

FRESHWATER FISH HATCHERY PROGRAM

The Freshwater Hatchery Program partners with local, state and federal agencies to produce or purchase freshwater fish to enhance statewide sport fisheries, and in some instances to hasten the recovery of fisheries affected by natural or man-made disasters. Fish are requested annually by Inland Fisheries

staff based on the department's 'Resource Enhancement through Stocking' guidelines. The program also provides support services for LDWF's outreach, education and aquatic plant control programs.

FISH STOCKING

In FY 2024-2025, LDWF biologists released approximately 6.9 million fish into public Louisiana waterbodies. The released fish were comprised of eleven species and included various surplus hatchery fish as well as fish purchased by other state/local organizations through cooperative agreements. Ranging in size from fry to adults, the fish were planted into 80 Louisiana waterbodies (over 447,700 acres) for the purposes of rough fish control, sportfish enhancement, aquatic plant control, or improved fishing opportunities. *Table 22* details fish stockings by the LDWF Freshwater hatchery program and partners over the 2024-2025 reporting year.

HAZARD ANALYSIS CRITICAL CONTROL POINT PLANNING

Nuisance aquatic species are harmful and expensive to control. The best way to avoid or reduce problems involving these species is prevention. In FY 2024-2025, hatchery biologists continued their work to implement Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point plans. Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point plans identify, assess, and minimize risks of spreading nuisance aquatic species from Booker Fowler Fish Hatchery to stocking sites across the state and vice versa. The plans mitigate the risks of spreading nuisance aquatic species in Louisiana waters.

Nuisance invasive aquatic species occurrence maps and at-risk basins were updated based on actual nuisance aquatic species sightings by state Fisheries biologists in 2024-2025. Hatchery staff reference these maps prior to using hatchery equipment at any particular stocking site to understand the potential risks at each site, and to understand what particular disinfection efforts are required for each site.

HATCHERY AND FISHERIES OUTREACH/EDUCATION

Inland Fisheries Hatchery staff led an educational American Paddlefish spawning event in support of LDWF's Fisheries Outreach Native Fish in the Classroom Program. Students and teachers participating in the Native Fish in the Classroom Program attended the 2025 event to learn about spawning techniques used to produce Paddlefish, calculate the age and growth rate of fish, and all procedures used

for largemouth bass production. Students and teachers from across the state have an opportunity, annually, to participate in the spawning event and spend the day at Booker Fowler. Students are challenged to take the fertilized Paddlefish eggs back to their classrooms to hatch, grow and release back into the waters of the state.

FRESHWATER FISH DISEASE DIAGNOSTICS LABORATORY

Biologists at the Booker Fowler Fish Hatchery continue to collect, incubate and identify diseases in-house by utilizing the diagnostic laboratory. Currently, LDWF Inland Fisheries biologists are capable of performing bacterial cultures, blood histology, and the identification of parasites as well as fungal infections using microscopy at our Booker Fowler facility, which allows the hatchery to diagnose and treat sportfish much faster than in the past.

INVESTIGATIONAL NEW ANIMAL DRUG PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

LDWF hatcheries continued to participate in the USFWS National Investigational New Animal Drug Program. This program provides a safe and legal way for fish culturists to procure and use experimental drugs and allows LDWF to contribute safety and efficacy data to the USFWS for helping with the approval process. This year, the hatchery participated by using LHRHa, a synthetic hormone that causes spermiation and ovulation, for spawning Paddlefish.

ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERSHIP

- Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society Aquaculture Technical Committee

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIPS

- Louisiana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society
- Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society
- American Fisheries Society
- Fish Culture Section of the American Fisheries Society

TABLE 22. FISH STOCKING BY WATERBODY (7/1/2024 - 6/30/2025)

BODY OF WATER	SPECIES	SIZE	NUMBER STOCKED	BODY OF WATER	SPECIES	SIZE	NUMBER STOCKED
Alligator Lake	Triploid Grass Carp (stocking only)	Adults	150	Henderson Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	50,300
Bayou Bartholomew	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	16,200	Holbrook Park Pond	Channel Catfish	1 Year Old	350
Bayou D'Arbonne Lake	Largemouth Bass	Phase II Fingerlings	250		Florida Bass	Fingerlings	250
		Fingerlings	300,400	Iatt Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	71,000
Bayou Huffpower	Channel Catfish	Fingerlings	100	Indian Creek and Indian Creek Reservoir	Triploid Grass Carp (STOCKING ONLY)	Adults	56
Bayou St. John	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	3,200	Ivan Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	10,000
Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	2,000	Kepler Creek Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	24,600
Black Bayou and Black Bayou Reservoir	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	11,500	Kincaid Lake	Channel Catfish	Fingerlings	3,900
Black Bayou Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	84,200		Florida Bass	Fingerlings	38,000
Black Lake and Clear Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	105,400	Lacassine Pool	Bluegill	Fingerlings	338,000
Black River Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	33,000		Redear Sunfish	Fingerlings	236,300
Breaux Bridge Swamp (Cypriere Perdue Swamp)	Redear Sunfish	Fingerlings	500		Florida Bass	Fingerlings	180,400
	Channel Catfish	Fingerlings	50	Lafreineire Park	Bluegill	Fingerlings	8,600
BREC - Central Community Park	Channel Catfish	1 Year Old	500		Channel Catfish	Fingerlings	3,600
	Black Crappie	Fingerlings	7,800	Lake Bistineau	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	229,900
Bussey Brake	White Crappie	Fingerlings	5,300		Florida Bass	Fingerlings	20,000
	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	40,100	Lake Bruin	Hybrid Striped Bass	Fingerlings	26,000
Caddo Lake and James Bayou	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	176,900		Channel Catfish	Adults	228
						Fingerlings	3,000
Calcasieu River	Hybrid Striped Bass	Fingerlings	109,700	Lake Buhlow	Florida Bass	Adults	77
Cameron Prairie	Bluegill	Fingerlings	1,300			Fingerlings	5,300
	Redear Sunfish	Fingerlings	1,400		Florida Bass	Fingerlings	143,800
	Florida Bass	Phase II Fingerlings	100	Lake Claiborne	F1 Hybrid Largemouth Bass (FL x North. LMB)	Fingerlings	80,000
Caney Creek	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	114,200		Hybrid Striped Bass	Fingerlings	5,600
Chatham Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	3,100	Lake Concordia	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	22,000
Cheniere Brake Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	63,400		Hybrid Striped Bass	Fingerlings	10,000
Chicot Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	32,900	Lake Fausse Point and Dauterive Lake	Florida Bass	Fry	2,080,500
Clear Lake and Smithport Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	15,100			Fingerlings	100,300
Corney Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	14,600	Lake LaFourche	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	25,900
Cotile Lake	Channel Catfish	Fingerlings	25,200		Black Crappie	Fingerlings	105,000
	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	26,200	Lake Maurepas	Largemouth Bass	Fingerlings	105,000
Crooked Creek Lake	Bluegill	Fingerlings	111,400	Lake Providence	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	44,300
	Redear Sunfish	Fingerlings	101,200	Lake St. John	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	50,600
Cross Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	114,100	Lake Verret and Grassy Lake	Northern Largemouth Bass	Fingerlings	125,000
Drainage Canals, Jefferson and Orleans Parishes	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	600	Lamar Dixon 11 acre Pond	Channel Catfish	1 Year Old	1,300
Eunice City Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	1,200	Lamar Dixon 4 acre Pond	Channel Catfish	1 Year Old	400
False River	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	6,000	Larto Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	80,500
Fullerton Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	570	Little Alabama Bayou	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	4,000
Grand Bayou Reservoir	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	36,000			Fry	15,200
	Bluegill	Fingerlings	3,900	Mermentau River	Paddlefish	Fingerlings	14,700
Gretna City Pond	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	300	Mill Creek Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	6,800
	Bluegill	Fingerlings	150	Millers Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	32,100
Gula Miller Pond	Redear Sunfish	Fingerlings	150	Nantachie Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	36,400
Haynesville City Park	Channel Catfish	Fingerlings	2,600	Oil and Gas Park	Triploid Grass Carp (STOCKING ONLY)	Adults	10

TABLE 22 (cont.). FISH STOCKING BY WATERBODY (7/1/2024 - 6/30/2025)

BODY OF WATER	SPECIES	SIZE	NUMBER STOCKED
Parc Natchitoches Pond	Triploid Grass Carp (STOCKING ONLY)	Adults	10
Pearl River Navigation Canal	Florida Bass	Phase II Fingerlings	3,200
Perez Park Pond	Bluegill	Fingerlings	1,000
	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	300
Pinecrest Hospital	Bluegill	Fingerlings	100
	Redear Sunfish	Fingerlings	100
Poverty Point Reservoir	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	20,100
	Hybrid Striped Bass	Fingerlings	4,800
Red River (Dam 2 to Dam 1)	F1 Hybrid Largemouth Bass (FL x North. LMB)	Phase II Fingerlings	1,800
	Florida Bass	Phase II Fingerlings	7,300
	Hybrid Striped Bass	Fingerlings	9,200
Red River (Dam 3 to Dam 2)	F1 Hybrid Largemouth Bass (FL x North. LMB)	Phase II Fingerlings	1,800
	Florida Bass	Phase II Fingerlings	7,200
Red River (Dam 4 to Dam 3)	F1 Hybrid Largemouth Bass (FL x North. LMB)	Phase II Fingerlings	3,600
	Florida Bass	Phase II Fingerlings	14,400
Red River (Dam 5 to Dam 4)	F1 Hybrid Largemouth Bass (FL x North. LMB)	Phase II Fingerlings	4,600
	Florida Bass	Phase II Fingerlings	18,100

BODY OF WATER	SPECIES	SIZE	NUMBER STOCKED
Red River (Shreveport To Dam 5)	F1 Hybrid Largemouth Bass (FL x North. LMB)	Phase II Fingerlings	6,400
	Florida Bass	Phase II Fingerlings	25,300
Rockefeller Refuge	Redear Sunfish	Adults	87
	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	105,800
Ruston Sports Complex	Bluegill	Fingerlings	1,000
	Channel Catfish	Fingerlings	500
Sibley Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	21,000
Spanish Lake	White Crappie	Fingerlings	5,500
	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	26,600
Spring Bayou	Channel Catfish	Fingerlings	28,000
Toledo Bend Reservoir	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	499,400
		Fingerlings	50,000
Valentine Lake	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	1,100
Vernon Lake	Channel Catfish	1 Year Old	6,550
		Fingerlings	3,800
	Florida Bass	Fingerlings	84,000
Waddill Ponds	Channel Catfish	1 Year Old	350
TOTAL			6,935,188

FISHERIES OUTREACH AND EDUCATION PROJECTS

OUTREACH

The Aquatic Outreach and Education Program is designed to inform the public about programs and projects currently underway in the Office of Fisheries. Through outreach efforts including boat shows, school programs, community events and outdoor-related festivals, staff reached approximately 17,000 Louisiana citizens in FY 2024-2025.

During the year, LDWF staff and volunteer instructors made approximately 170 public appearances at community events, clinics, and other outdoor-related events. At each of these events, LDWF staff were able to inform Louisiana citizens of the importance of the Sport Fish Restoration Program and LDWF's role in the program's associated projects. In addition, the new Nature and Science Center at Port Wonder located in Lake Charles, LA attracted over 15,000 visitors in the first two and half months of opening, informing visitors of Louisiana's fisheries and programs supporting important sport fish.

This year, LDWF staff hosted seven Volunteer Instructor Program workshops throughout the state and trained approximately 41 volunteers. Those volunteers completed a training course, where they learned how to train others on fishing techniques, fish identification, fish biology, age and growth, and other fishing related topics. The course certified them as an official LDWF Aquatic Education volunteer. These volunteers are given a training manual with access to brochures, informational sheets, lesson plans on each fishing activity, and have access to borrow materials they need through LDWF's loaner kit program. They can volunteer to teach these activities at events that LDWF host or participates in across the state.

In the last year, over 100 LDWF active volunteer instructors spent over 3,500 hours assisting with events throughout the state of Louisiana at 165 events.

Our fisheries biologists also worked collaboratively with communications personnel to create promotional and educational material detailing research and fieldwork on a variety

of topics relating to the conservation and management of fish, hatchery production, non-indigenous aquatic nuisance species and other aquatic resources.

During FY 2024-2025, staff utilized several educational resources including a casting inflatable, mobile touch tank and LDWF's mascot Robbie the Redfish.

AQUATIC EDUCATION

LDWF's Education Program introduces people to the sport of fishing and promotes awareness of Louisiana's aquatic resources. This is accomplished through fishing clinics, camps, teacher workshops and distribution of publications. Education Program staff and volunteers deliver aquatic education programs.

FISHING COURSE SERIES

The "Fishing Course Series," consists of a variety of courses throughout the state designed to meet the needs of anglers of all skill levels. Courses are limited to 10 participants and



LEFT: LDWF Nature & Science Center at Port Wonder **RIGHT:** Beginner Rainbow Trout Course - Fort Randolph

begin with instruction of core fishing skills including simple, but versatile rigging, bait, and gear selection, followed by an hour of fishing with LDWF biologists.

Courses this fiscal year included 37 courses statewide for anglers of all skill levels. Courses, limited to 10 participants, included topics such as: Intro to Fishing, Beginner Catfishing, Beginner Bass Fishing, Rainbow Trout Fishing, Saltwater Fishing, Ultralight Fishing, Fly Casting, and Fishing Secrets Explained. Many courses are held at the department's Get Out & Fish! sites and allow for easy, accessible fishing for participants to return to in the future.

A total of 392 anglers participated in Fishing Course Series in FY 2024-2025. Participants included both adults and children with approximately 70% adults. Of the new participants, 24% of the adults purchased a fishing license within 30 days of attending the course.

WOMEN'S FISHING WORKSHOPS

LDWF hosted five Women's Fishing 101 Workshops, reaching 54 women. Most were held in Baton Rouge, with one session in Grambling. Two Women's Fishing 102 Workshops took place in Grand Isle and Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge, offering advanced bank and boat fishing instruction, fish cleaning, boat trailering and more.

Participants received donated rods and reels (courtesy of CCA Louisiana), tackle boxes with gear, and other fishing tools to encourage continued participation.

FISHING CLINICS

Classroom aquatic education plays a big role during the spring months of the school year reaching over 3,000 students each year. Teach-

ers and Librarians around the state have access to three aquatic education guidebooks: *Finnie the Fingerling*; *Let's Go Fishing*; *Fishing for Fun*. The guidebooks are used in the classroom or library and typically followed with a field or hands-on component. Aquatic Clinics held this year in Sabine, Grant, and Terrebonne Parishes brought over 1,000 5th graders through stations educating them about a variety of fisheries related topics and aquatic education.

TEACHER WORKSHOPS

Teacher workshops were conducted to provide training in aquatic education that can be brought back to the classroom. The following workshops were conducted:

Native Fish in the Classroom

Native Fish in the Classroom is a multidisciplinary, classroom-based aquaculture stewardship project for middle to high school students. The goal of the Native Fish in the Classroom project is to develop a positive attitude of natural resource stewardship and to create a constructive, active learning situation in which students can explore strategies for sustaining aquatic ecosystems. Students obtain hands-on, science-based knowledge of the state's aquatic resources. Teachers attended several workshops and meetings to ensure successful preparation for receiving paddlefish eggs. In the spring semester, 220 students from 16 schools attended the paddlefish spawn and engaged in a meaningful field trip experience by actively assisting biologists with the egg fertilization process as well as learning about fisheries management through several other educational stations during the day. Students rear the paddlefish from eggs to fingerlings then released 66 paddlefish fingerlings in the Mermentau River - the highest release in the 23 year history of Native Fish in the Classroom.

Wetland Education Teacher Workshop (WETSHOP)

WETSHOP is a coastal awareness, teacher stewardship project held at the Grand Isle Fisheries Research Laboratory. The goals of WETSHOP are: 1) to provide teachers with a comprehensive look at wetland issues related to history, fisheries management, wetland habitats, wetland ecosystems, coastal land loss and restoration, water quality and oil and gas exploration; and 2) to educate a large population of Louisiana's citizenry about the serious issues that Louisiana is facing due to coastal land loss. Throughout the week, participants are provided with a combination of field and in-class lessons to bring back to their classroom. This year, WETSHOP introduced 15 educators to Louisiana's coastal wetlands. Each participant earned 50+ professional development hours. Four educators implemented student wetland projects during the academic year, providing 50 instructional hours to 240 students statewide.

THE NATURE & SCIENCE CENTER AT PORT WONDER

The Nature and Science Center at Port Wonder is the newest outreach and education facility located in Lake Charles, LA. With over 15,000 gallons of fresh and saltwater aquarium displays, the Nature and Science Center offers a fun, educational, and family-friendly experience. Neighboring the Children's Museum of Southwest Louisiana, it features aquariums showcasing Louisiana's native aquatic species, along with interactive educational exhibits. In addition, an ADA-compliant fishing pier is accessible along the City of Lake Charles boardwalk, providing visitors an opportunity to fish for some of the species featured inside. During the first two and a half months of opening, the staff at the Nature and Science Center interacted with over 15,000 visitors.

COMMERCIAL SEAFOOD PROGRAMS

One of the main objectives of the Office of Fisheries is to maintain the viability of Louisiana's fishing industries through programs that protect native resources and provide technical assistance to the industry, including recovery from natural and man-made disasters.

In addition, the Office of Fisheries is overseeing several initiatives for Louisiana's commercial fishing industry including a seafood certification program and a professionalization program that aims to create a more informed and efficient industry. These programs were also implemented to address market trends which showed a decline within Louisiana's commercial fishing industry.

SEAFOOD CERTIFICATION

In 2009, LDWF reprogrammed grant money from a NOAA grant to fund certification programs for Louisiana's seafood industry. The overarching plan for a broad certification program included five key components: seafood origin/quality certification; seafood sustainability certification; industry professionalization; electronic traceability; and seafood marketing.

The goal of the Louisiana Wild Seafood Certification Program is to increase demand for wild-caught Louisiana seafood. By creating an origin-based brand, LDWF, in cooperation with the Louisiana Department of Health and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, has the ability to communicate to the consumers that the seafood they are consuming is caught by a licensed Louisiana fisherman, landed in Louisiana and processed by a Louisiana processor through the entire supply chain. The ability to create a national brand that can be sought out by chefs, consumers, distributors and retail chains will increase the demand and thereby prices for the Louisiana seafood fishery.

Several changes and developments to the program were implemented during FY 2013-2014 including the transition to an online application process as well as supply chain verification through invoice validation. Also introduced was a product registration requirement - retail packages possessing the program's logo must register with LDWF. In FY 2014-2015, the online renewal process was simplified, allowing participants to easily renew their permit instead of reapplying. Before applying, applicants must also complete a 45-minute training video available through the program's website. Once permitted, participants are given access to a participant portal where they may

access program logo files and verify participation of their supply chain in the Louisiana Wild Seafood Certification Program.

The program's first three years focused on building program interest among seafood dealers and processors within Louisiana. During FY 2014-2015, implementation was focused on the retailer and consumer aspects of the program, with an emphasis on creating demand for products bearing the Louisiana Wild Seafood Certification Program logo. The program has launched additional marketing campaigns including the use of social media. Within FYs 2015-2017 the focus was to build the interest of the program amongst the public to demand Louisiana seafood. With the refocused program vision, LDWF incorporated additional supply chain verification and product registration program components aimed at increasing consumer confidence and strengthening seafood traceability. The required applicant training video was amended to include guidance for brand owners to meet invoice submission requirements.

As of FY 2024-2025 there are a total of 15 permitted seafood businesses participating in the program and several "certified" labeled seafood retail packages are being sold in grocery markets across the state.

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES AND SEAFOOD

The goal of the sustainability program is to manage Louisiana fisheries in a way that provides for today's needs without damaging the ability of the species to reproduce. Many seafood purveyors worldwide are under pressure to demonstrate the seafood they are sourcing is from sustainable and responsibly managed fisheries. LDWF is meeting these challenges with multiple approaches.

LDWF has explored mainstream sustainability certifications for major fisheries, such as those offered by the Marine Stewardship Council. In March 2012, Louisiana's blue crab fishery became the first blue crab fishery in the world to receive Marine Stewardship Council sustainability certification. This certification was scheduled to expire in March 2017, but it was extended to March 2018 as LDWF participated in a new pilot re-certification process. Re-certification to the Marine Stewardship Council standard was awarded in July 2018. The Marine Stewardship Council announced the fourth surveillance audit for the Louisiana commercial crab trap fishery in November 2022. Information for the fourth surveillance audit of the Louisiana blue crab commercial trap fishery

against the Marine Stewardship Council fisheries standards was gathered by Global Trust during the Dec. 5, 2022, on-site visit. The Marine Stewardship Council final audit report recommended continued certification with no new conditions being issued. The Marine Stewardship Council announced the reassessment of the Louisiana commercial crab trap fishery in Spring 2023. Information for the reassessment of the Louisiana blue crab commercial trap fishery against the Marine Stewardship Council fisheries standards was gathered by Global Trust during the July 11, 2023, on-site visit. The Marine Stewardship Council final report, published in March 2024, recommended continued certification with two new conditions being issued. Both new conditions were related to Diamondback terrapin status and management. An Action Plan was drafted and submitted in October 2023, detailing annual milestones in the attempt to provide evidence that the Louisiana crab trap fishery was not hindering Diamondback terrapin status. The first surveillance audit for the current certification is scheduled for the fall of 2025.

In 2010, a comprehensive Fishery Improvement Project for the Louisiana shrimp fishery was announced. Years of work went into achieving the environmental objectives recognized in the Fishery Improvement Project and the Louisiana Shrimp Fishery Improvement Project was fully completed in January 2023. The American Shrimp Processors Association decided in Fall 2022 that it would fund and enter into a sustainability assessment from the Certified Seafood Collaborative Responsible Fisheries Management Certification for the entire Gulf shrimp fishery. The Certified Seafood Collaborative announced on July 15, 2024, that the Gulf shrimp fishery achieved certification, becoming the first shrimp fishery certified to the Responsible Fisheries Management Standard. The first surveillance audit for this certification is scheduled to begin in July of 2025.

COMMERCIAL SEAFOOD INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALIZATION

The primary goal of Louisiana Fisheries Forward, the voluntary industry professionalization program, is to create a better-informed and more efficient commercial fishing industry that helps ensure the economic sustainability of the state's commercial fishing industry. The program provides ongoing educational opportunities for fishermen and industry participants while also allowing them

to receive the most relevant and up-to-date information pertaining to their industry.

Louisiana Fisheries Forward - Advancing Our Seafood Industry is an LDWF Office of Fisheries collaborative effort with Louisiana Sea Grant and the LSU AgCenter. Louisiana Fisheries Forward is a professionalism program for all sectors of the state's commercial fishing industry, including fishermen, dock owners, processors and distributors. This program is providing the education and training essential for the continued success of the industry and is focusing on a number of important topics through videos with corresponding fact sheets, the Louisiana Fisheries Forward Summit, hands-on workshops, and the Louisiana Fisheries Forward website.

Louisiana Sea Grant continued to maintain the Louisiana Fisheries Forward website (lafisheriesforward.org) which houses the production of numerous education materials (referred to as fast fact sheets). In the fall of 2024 and the spring of 2025, Louisiana Sea Grant hosted its second Fisheries & Seafood Leadership Program with a goal to assist with the enhancement of leadership within the Louisiana Commercial Fishing and Seafood Industry. The program offers industry participants a chance to engage in lectures and hands-on learning focusing on effective communication, marketing trends, leadership skill building, and a number of other industry related issues.

- Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) Basics
- Key Requirements for Wholesale Seafood Sales
- Strategies for Producing Top Quality Finfish
- Best Practices for Brine Freezing Shrimp

During FY 2024-2025, legislatively mandated industry professionalism programs remained active for Commercial Crab Trap Gear Requirements (www.wlf.la.gov/page/mandatory-crab-trap-license-training) and the Oyster Harvester Training Requirements (www.wlf.la.gov/page/mandatory-oyster-harvester-training).

Legislation was passed during the 2014 regular session that required the LWFC to establish a program to increase and elevate professionalism in the commercial crab industry.

Throughout the fall of 2014, LDWF developed the Louisiana Fisheries Forward Commercial Crab Gear Requirement. The Commercial Crab Gear Requirement consists of basic training and field training requirements that focus on education such as proper fishing techniques necessary for the health and sustainability of crabs; proper techniques for the best capture and presentation of the crabs for marketability; and proper placement, tending and maintenance of crab traps to reduce potential conflicts with other user groups. Beginning Nov. 15, 2014, any person who wishes to obtain a commercial crab trap gear license must first complete this program unless the following exception applies (possessed a valid crab trap gear license any two of the license years, 2011, 2012, 2013 or 2014). During FY 2024-2025 there were 79 participants who completed program requirements, applied for the program, or were activity participating in the program (Table 23).

LDWF's intention is to give our seafood industry access and training to the latest trends, requirements, and technology in their profession. The seafood industry should have as much opportunity for training as any other industry in our state - we believe it will yield higher quality products and give our seafood community a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Since the launch of Louisiana Fisheries Forward - Advancing Our Seafood Industry, this one-of-a-kind professionalism program for Louisiana's commercial fishing industry has received inquiry, acknowledgement and recognition throughout many facets of local, regional, and national fishing industries.

The Oyster Harvester Training Requirements, which were passed by legislation in 2016, requires that all oyster harvester complete an education program before applying for their oyster harvester license. The training program requires harvesters to score a minimum of 80% on the in-depth training video. Harvesters are also required to complete the training once every three years. From July 2024 to June 25, approximately 530 oyster harvester trainings were completed.

TABLE 23. Louisiana Fisheries Forward Commercial Crab Gear Requirement.

PROGRAM STATUS	APPRENTICESHIP	SPONSORSHIP	GRAND TOTAL
Ineligible	2	5	7
Approved	5	35	40
Program Completed	9	23	32
Grand Total	14	63	79

TASK FORCES

The Office of Fisheries has four active task forces: Shrimp, Oyster, Crab and Finfish. The task forces memberships are currently housed under LDWF, and cooperation between the task forces and the Office of Fisheries is essential as we move forward with the continued management of Louisiana's natural resources.

SHRIMP TASK FORCE

During FY 2024-2025, the Shrimp Task Force met on July 10, 2024; July 31, 2024; Oct. 9, 2024; Dec. 18, 2024; March 18, 2024; March 12, 2025 and April 30, 2025.

Agenda items discussed include:

- Equipment Modernization Grant Program
- Shrimp Legislative Update
- Re-opening of White Shrimp Season
- STF representation at BOEM Offshore Wind Development Meetings
- Task Force Meeting Training
- STF Shrimp Report Format
- Enforcement of Setting Date for 2024 Fall Inshore Shrimp Season
- Protect American Fisheries Act
- Save Our Shrimpers Act
- Re-Appropriating STF Funding for Shrimp Testing
- Funding and Discussions for STF Trip to Washington, D.C.
- East Cameron 346 Special Artificial Reef Site
- Consider Writing a Letter of Support for a Grant Proposal, "Enhancing Louisiana Shrimp Market Demand: A Sustainable Approach to Premium Quality with Natural Solutions"
- Updates on Update on the and Next Steps
- Appointing a LSTF Representative to Approve SeaD Consulting Contract and Payments
- Special Bait Dealer Permit Amendments
- Funding for Billboard Advertisements in Conjunction with the Department of Agriculture and Forestry
- Department of Health Update on the Shrimp Labeling Bill
- LDAF's Shrimp Sampling Contract
- Gulf Hypoxia
- Congressional Legislative Effort and Fair Trade Update
- Executive Order, "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness"
- Shrimp Data Trends and the 2025 Inshore Spring Shrimp Season Recommendation
- State Shrimp: Voluntary Effort Monitoring Program Setting Dates for 2024 Fall Offshore Shrimp Season
- Shrimp Legislative Updates
- Task Force Representation BOEM Offshore Wind Development Meetings

- LDH Nutritional Labeling Regulations
- New Seafood Safety Laws
- Funding for Shrimp Testing
- East Cameron Special Artificial Reef Site
- SeaD Consulting's Shrimp Testing
- International Trade Commission's Proceedings
- Amendments to the Special Bait Dealers Permit Regulations
- Department of Health Shrimp Labeling Bill
- Chinese Seafood Warning Label Program
- Update on Gulf Hypoxia
- Funding for 2026 LA Alive
- Update on Congressional Legislative Effort and Fair Trade
- Executive Order 13921, "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness"
- Setting Dates for 2025 Shrimp Inshore Shrimp Season
- Updates for Fisheries Disaster Funding
- Updated for SCPDC Restore Program

CRAB TASK FORCE

During FY 2024-2025, the Crab Task Force met on Aug. 8, 2024; Aug. 20, 2024 and April 8, 2025.

Agenda items discussed include:

- Restore Louisiana Small Business Loan Program- South Central Planning and Development Commission
- A LA Department of Ag and Forestry's Crab Documentary
- Equipment Grant Program and Hurricane Disaster Funding
- Implementing a Requirement that would Mandate Crab Grading on Vessels to Minimize Bycatch
- LDWF's License QR Project
- State of the Crab Industry
- Consider Crab Regulation, Habitual Offenders, and Enforcement Action
- Presentation on the LA Department of Ag and Forestry's Crab Documentary
- Updates for Fisheries Disaster Funding
- Funding for the 2025 MSC Surveillance Audit
- Presentation on LDWF's License QR Project
- Discuss on the State of the Crab Industry
- Increasing the Minimum Size Limit for Commercially Harvested Crabs
- Crab Regulations for Habitual Offenders and Enforcement Action
- 2025 Proposed Derelict Crab Trap Closure Areas
- Updates for SCPDC Restore Program
- Continued Work on Hypoxia in the Gulf

FINFISH TASK FORCE

During FY 2024-2025, the Finfish Task Force met on July 24, 2024, Nov. 13, 2024, Feb. 12, 2025, and May 13, 2025.

Agenda items discussed included:

- Presentation on Lake Boeuf, Bayou Des Allemands, and Lake Cataouatche
- Effects of the Redfish Regulation Changes
- Effects of the Trout Regulation Changes
- Effects of the New Buffer for Menhaden Fishery
- Menhaden Bycatch Study
- Amending the Finfish Task Force Bylaws to Reflect New Seat Changes
- New Redfish Regulations
- Updates for SCPDC Restore Program
- Presentation on the Barataria Basin Post Hurricane Ida Fisheries Assessment
- Red Snapper Quota
- Recommendations on Bag Limit and Season Structure for Upcoming Recreational Red Snapper Season
- Recommendations on Potential New Wahoo Regulations
- Fisheries Stocks After the Snow Storm Event
- Southern Flounder
- Presentation on Special Bait Dealer Permit Regulations
- Executive Order 13921, "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness"
- Passive Saltwater Gear Tending and Marking Requirements
- LDWF Letter to Seek Relief from the Regulations Governing Wild-Caught Catfish
- Updates for Fisheries Disaster Funding

OYSTER TASK FORCE

During FY 2024-2025, the Oyster Task Force met on July 23, 2024; Aug. 28, 2024; Oct. 1, 2024; Nov. 19, 2024; Jan. 8, 2025; Feb. 18, 2025; March 19, 2025; May 6, 2025 and June 10, 2025.

Agenda items discussed include:

- Oyster Day on the Bay Event
- Opening Public Areas Surrounding Marsh Island
- WWLTV Marketing Proposal
- Presentation and Funding for a Marketing Opportunity with Fox 8
- Funding for Possible Participation in 2025 Super Bowl Events
- Final Report on the 2021-2023 Alternative Oyster Culture Grant Program
- Updates on the Certified Louisiana Program
- 2024 Oyster Stock Assessment and Oyster Season Recommendations
- Funding for a Marketing Campaign with WWLTV/Tegna

- Proposal for Changing Oyster Harvest Time-Temperature Recording Requirements on Vessels and for Dealers
- Resolution to Support the Continued Work on Hypoxia in the Gulf
- Funding for a 2024/2025 Beuerman Miller Fitzgerald PR Contract
- Funding to the 2025 Let the World Be Your Oyster Event
- Presentation on LDAF's Oyster Documentary
- Presentation on a Federal Crop Insurance Program for LA Off-Bottom Oyster Growers
- Update on Oyster Season
- Presentation and Funding for a Marketing Opportunity with Gulf Coast Sports and Entertainment
- Funding to Participate in the LA Oyster Trail Campaign
- Oyster Harvesters License and Required Training
- Funding to Hire a Legislative Representative
- Update on the Oyster Lease Moratorium Lifting
- Pollution Line and Oyster Mapping
- Streamlining the LDWF Licensing Process and Possibility of an Electronic System
- Possible Bonnet Carre Spillway Operations
- Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion
- Oyster Relay Application Process
- Update of National Sea Grant Office and Louisiana Sea Grant in the Proposed 2026 Federal Budget Draft
- Weights and Measures Enforcement of Oyster Gallon Containers
- Terminating Funding for Research on a Low Salinity Oyster
- Proposal Permitting Oyster Harvesters to Switch from White to Green Tags in Emergency Circumstances
- Funding for the 2026 Louisiana Alive Event
- Update for Fisheries Disaster Funding

The Oyster Task Force also continued their marketing efforts including the Task Force's annual trip to Washington, D.C., where they sponsor the "Let the World Be Your Oyster" event, which draws members of the congressional delegation, staff and media, and provides an excellent platform to educate others on the importance of the Louisiana oyster industry. Additional Oyster Task Force Subcommittees met to discuss specific oyster topics.

ONGOING 2010 DEEPWATER HORIZON OIL SPILL ACTIVITIES

DEEPWATER HORIZON NATURAL RESOURCE DAMAGE ASSESSMENT RESTORATION ACTIVITIES

RECREATIONAL USE

The Consent Decree was finalized on April 4, 2016, which resolved \$14.9 billion in claims against the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill responsible parties and set the stage for the next phase of restoration activities. Louisiana is set to receive a total of \$5 billion for Natural Resource Damage Assessment Restoration funding out of the \$8.8 billion to be distributed Gulf-wide. Of Louisiana's portion, \$60 million has been earmarked to provide and enhance recreational opportunities. In July 2018, two recreational use plans were finalized:

1. Recreational Use Restoration Plan/Environmental Assessment (RP/EA) #2: Provide and Enhance Recreational Opportunities, which reallocated the original \$22 million in early restoration funds towards other proposed alternative projects that would restore for lost recreational use in Louisiana, with specific focus on enhancing recreational fishing opportunities.
 - Elmer's Island Access Project
 - All recreational enhancements, including road improvements, kayak launch installation, culvert installation, and bird observation tower installation were completed in FY 2021-2022.
 - The shuttle service contract and trash contract are ongoing.
 - Post-construction monitoring underway, public use information now documented by WMA Access Permits.
 - Statewide Artificial Reefs
 - Construction phase of the Statewide Artificial Reef Project completed.
 - Biological monitoring on 10 coastal reef sites enhanced is ongoing.

- Louisiana Nature & Science Center at Port Wonder (Lake Charles, LA)
 - Opened to the public April 2025 (Grand opening was April 21, 2025)
 - Contains multiple aquariums and a touch tank, interactive exhibits, outdoor play areas and walking trails, a covered fishing pier, and access to fishing along the City of Lake Charles' boardwalk.
 - Port Wonder facility also houses the Children's Museum of Southwest Louisiana.
- 2. RP/EA #4: Nutrient Reduction (Nonpoint Source) and Recreational Use, which approved projects by Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group to improve water quality by reducing nutrients from nonpoint sources and to compensate for recreational use services lost as a result from the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. LDWF Office of Fisheries was not the implementing agency on any RP/EA #4 projects, but provided assistance and oversight during planning and implementation processes.

LIVING COASTAL AND MARINE RESOURCES - OYSTERS

Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group selected three projects to restore for injuries to oysters in its Final RP/EA #5, Living Coastal and Marine Resources: Marine Mammals and Oysters. One project will fund 10 years of operations, and monitoring of products, for Michael C. Voisin Oyster hatchery (see Michael C. Voisin Oyster Hatchery Operation Overview within OYSTER SAMPLING section above, for production numbers) along with programmatic projects for creation/enhancement of brood reefs and cultch

plants, representing Louisiana's full \$26 million allocation of oyster restoration dollars.

1. Enhancing Oyster Recovery Using Brood Reefs Project

- This programmatic project has a total budget of \$9,701,447, will be used for the construction of multiple reefs and to conduct programmatic activities (e.g., modeling, data collection, conducting bottom surveys, etc.) which can help inform crucial locations for siting additional brood reefs to maximize benefits.
- Four specific locations approved in RP/EA#5 have undergone construction, monitoring initiated:
 - Lake Machias- Nov. 19, 2021
 - Mozambique Point- Nov. 21, 2021
 - Karako Bay- Dec. 3, 2021
 - Petit Pass- Dec. 3, 2021

2. Cultch Plant Oyster Restoration Project

- This programmatic project has a total budget of \$10,070,000, and will be used to construct multiple reefs in support of LDWF Oyster Strategic Plan.
- Two specific locations have undergone construction and are actively being monitored (see results in Oyster Cultch Plant and Brood Reef Projects within OYSTER MANAGEMENT section, above):
 - Sister (Caillou) Lake- September 2021 (Terrebonne Basin)
 - Drum Bay- June 2022 (North Pontchartrain Basin)

Information on all Deepwater Horizon NRDA restoration activities/projects being undertaken in Louisiana can be found on Gulf Spill Restoration site here: www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/restoration-areas/louisiana.

GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, a compact among the five Gulf states, is charged with promoting better utilization of the marine fisheries including finfish, shellfish and anadromous species through the development of programs for the promotion and protection of these fisheries while preventing any waste of these resources.

Fisheries biologists and economists participate in a number of Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission programs and initiatives including Aquatic Invasive Species, Interjurisdictional Fisheries, Fisheries Information Network, and economics programs, as well as providing their expertise in the development of management recommendations. In addition, Fisheries biologists serve on a number of Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Technical Coordinating Sub-Committees including Data, SEAMAP, Habitat, Artificial Reef, Outreach, and species-specific committees and working groups. Fisheries' biologists were present at meetings and discussions pertaining to the various SEAMAP programs. LDWF biologists participated in the creation of various fishery management plans for Gulf species.

GULF FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

The Gulf Fishery Management Council is responsible for the management of commercial, recreational and for hire fishing activities in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), Gulf of America waters from the state territorial sea out to 200 miles offshore. The Council prepares Fishery Management Plans and amendments to these plans. Methods of regulation include quotas, size limits, bag limits, seasons, trip limits and other tools fisheries managers employ to control both recreational and commercial harvests.

The head of each state's fisheries division has a seat on the council along with representatives from the fishing industry. Louisiana's seat is assigned to Assistant Secretary Ryan Montegut. His designee on the Council is Chris Schieble, who is delegated to act on his behalf. In addition to the council seat, Office of Fisheries employees participate in advisory roles on various panels and committees: Outreach, Data Collection; Habitat Protection; and Scientific and Statistical Committees for Red Drum, mackerel, reef fish, shrimp, and socioeconomics. LDWF biologists are also part of the SEDAR pool, a panel assigned to producing the council's stock assessments.

A list of the Council's Fisheries Management Plans includes: Reef Fish, Coastal Migratory Pelagic, Red Drum, Shrimp, Lobster, Stone Crab, Coral, Aquaculture and Essential Fish Habitat. The council meets five times a year to work on amendments regarding these Fisheries Management Plans. Louisiana is considered a leader in the council's fishery management process with creative and out-of-the-box methodologies.

The Council began work on recreational Red Snapper accountability measures towards developing a draft document that aims to increase flexibility for red snapper state management of private anglers. The council took final action on a Framework Action to modify the vessel position data collection program for the federal shrimp fishery in the Gulf of America. The council selected a program that uses cellular electronic logbooks for the Gulf shrimp fishery that archives position data and automatically transmits it to National Marine Fisheries Service via cellular service. The council took final action on a Framework Action to increase the commercial and recreational Lane Snapper minimum size limit to 10 inches total length. The council initiated work on the development of a document with options for regional and state management of Greater Amberjack for the recreational sector. The council began developing a document that considers potential modification of recreational red snapper management by delegating management authority for the federal for-hire component to the Gulf states, but including an allowance for each State to opt out of managing the federal for-hire component, which would allow that component to remain under federal management. The council took final action to modify Spanish mackerel catch limits and accountability measures, deciding to reduce catch limits based on results of the most recent stock assessment. The council took final action on a framework action to modify the catch limit and recreational season for the shallow-water grouper complex which is comprised of scamp, yellowmouth grouper, black grouper, and yellowfin grouper, selecting the least conservative alternative to reduce the shallow-water grouper complex catch limit by 54.7%. The council also decided to open the recreational season on July 1 through Dec. 31. The Council took final action on a Framework Action that considers opening the federal for-hire red snapper season earlier in the year, electing to open the federal for-hire Red Snapper season on the Friday before Memorial Day each year. The council took final action on Reef Fish Amendment 58B which considers deep-water grouper status determination criteria, catch limits, sector allocations, and recreational accountability measures modifying the criteria used to define the stock status for the complex and establishing catch limits for the complex that represent approximately a 50% reduction in allowable harvest to end overfishing of yellowedge grouper and chose to establish sector allocations and sector-specific annual catch limits. The council took final action on Shrimp Amendment 19, to extend the moratorium on the issuance of new federal Gulf commercial shrimp permits until Oct. 26, 2036. The council took final action to require commercial and recreational fishermen to possess a venting tool or descending device that is rigged and ready for use when fishing for reef fish in the federal waters of the Gulf of America. These requirements will replace regulations required by the DESCEND Act, which is scheduled to expire in January 2026.

Louisiana continued with the ability to manage the private recreational red snapper fishery in both state and federal waters during the 2024 private recreational red snapper season. This allowed Louisiana anglers to have the second longest season with a record 200 days of access to the fishery.

Further information can be located at gulfcouncil.org.

REPORT ACRONYMS

CITES - Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

CPRA - Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority

DMAP - Deer Management Assistance Program

FY - Fiscal Year

LDC&E - Louisiana Department of Conservation and Energy

LDWF - Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

LSU - Louisiana State University

NASBLA - National Association of State Boating Law Administrators

NOAA - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

NRDA - Natural Resource Damage Assessment

RWR - Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge

SCS - State Civil Service

SEAMAP - Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program

SGCN - Species of Greatest Conservation Need

USACE - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

USDA - U.S. Department of Agriculture

NRCS - USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

USFS - U.S. Forest Service

USFWS - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

USGS - U.S. Geological Survey

WDP - Wildlife Diversity Program

WLWCA - White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area

WMA - Wildlife Management Area

