

PENNSYLVANIA GAME COMMISSION



# STRATEGIC PLAN

2015-2020



[www.pgc.state.pa.us](http://www.pgc.state.pa.us)



**Our Mission:**

Manage Pennsylvania's wild birds, wild mammals, and their habitats for current and future generations

**Our Vision:**

Champion all wildlife resources and Pennsylvania's hunting and trapping heritage



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# EXECUTIVE LETTER

June 1, 2015

Dear Fellow Wildlife Conservationists,

The Pennsylvania Game Commission exists to manage the Commonwealth's wild birds, wild mammals, and their habitats for current and future generations, a mission we have followed faithfully since 1895. Although our focus has remained static since the agency was created, the suite of challenges and opportunities facing the agency are fluid and dynamic.

## CORE GOALS 2015-2020

1. Put Wildlife First
2. Improve Wildlife Habitat
3. Follow Sound Business Practices
4. Serve the Pennsylvania Public
5. Improve Support for Hunting/Trapping

This *Strategic Plan 2015-2020* is a roadmap for our agency to adjust and adapt to an ever-changing working environment that directly impacts the 480 species of wild birds and mammals that roam Penn's woods. We are extremely proud of our past successes in restoring species such as the bald eagle, wild turkey, elk, fisher, and otter. The Pennsylvania Game Commission has assembled a team of Wildlife Conservation Officers that are the best-trained wildlife law enforcement force in the country. Our team of highly skilled wildlife biologists has positioned the Commonwealth as the leader in wildlife management. Our land management staff, foresters, and our food and cover crews maintain almost 1.5 million acres of State Game Lands, which serve as prime examples of cutting-edge wildlife management. But we are also highly focused on the work ahead – adapting to challenges we face in managing our wild birds and mammals as well as changes to the demographics of Pennsylvania citizens who interact with them and their habitat.

This *Strategic Plan* identifies specific, measurable goals to help us define and maintain our focus on our core mission goals while avoiding the ever-present threat to any organization or agency, i.e., mission creep. Our new strategic plan leverages our collective resources to maximize our efficiency and efficacy. Among other things, we can incorporate many of the plan's stated goals directly into our business operations; increase collaboration across agencies and with our numerous partners; and expand our use of/better deploy our volunteer ranks and full-time staff. And of equal importance, this *Strategic Plan* further expands our transparency as a Commonwealth agency and holds us accountable for our progress in achieving our mission goals. As an agency, our focus is always on delivering tangible results that further our mission. All of these efforts are completed with a foundation of using sound and proven business practices, including fiscal accountability; using innovation to take the agency to new levels; and accomplishing our work in the most efficient manner possible.

These are exciting times for the Pennsylvania Game Commission, and I am excited to lead such a dedicated group of individuals in protecting and promoting wildlife in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

Matt Hough, Executive Director  
Pennsylvania Game Commission

# INTRODUCTION

The Pennsylvania Constitution defines natural resources as a basic right and requires the Commonwealth to conserve and maintain them for all citizens.<sup>1</sup> Wildlife is one of these natural resources, and Title 34 of Pennsylvania's *Consolidated Statutes* assigns its trust and control to the Pennsylvania Game Commission<sup>2</sup> and defines the Pennsylvania Game Commission's role as follows:<sup>3</sup>

*It shall be the duty of the Commission to protect, propagate, manage and preserve the game or wildlife of this Commonwealth and to enforce, by proper actions or proceedings, the laws of this Commonwealth relating thereto.*

The Pennsylvania Game Commission is also responsible for executing relevant rules and regulations in Title 58 of the Pennsylvania Code. We are proud to be entrusted with managing the state's game and wildlife and strive to not only achieve this mission, but to achieve it with excellence. The Game Commission has established itself as a national leader in wildlife management with its many success stories. From reintroducing elk, otters, and fishers to Pennsylvania to saving the bald eagle from a precipitous population decline of 5 nesting pairs to more than 300 nesting pairs today, we continue to utilize the best available science and technologies to manage Pennsylvania's wildlife. Many of our ground-breaking programs are emulated by other states.



## Background

The Game Commission manages 480 species of wild birds and mammals, including 20 endangered species and 7 threatened species, with 714 personnel working in 6 regions across Pennsylvania. No species of wildlife has gone extinct or been extirpated from the Commonwealth due to regulated hunting since the establishment of the agency.

The agency owns and manages almost 1.5 million acres of State Game Lands (SGLs) in more than 300 tracts in 65 of the 67 counties in Pennsylvania. This provides opportunities for wildlife-related recreation, most especially licensed hunting and trapping, to virtually every citizen of the Commonwealth within a reasonable drive of their residence. In addition to managing the State Game Lands, the Game Commission also works with private landowners who own and control 2.5 million acres to provide free access to their land for hunting and trapping. This occurs via the Hunter Access Program, first established in 1936.



*We grow more than 2 million seedlings per year for wildlife habitat and for ground cover.*

In addition, tens of thousands of acres of habitat are created or maintained through active management on State Game Lands each year, benefiting a wide array of species. The Game Commission's Howard Nursery annually grows more than 2 million seedlings that

are planted throughout the Commonwealth and provide additional wildlife habitat. The nursery also builds almost 20,000 nesting structures for a variety of species of birds and mammals. The Game Commission is a recognized leader in the field of wildlife research.

<sup>1</sup> Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Article I, §27. Natural resources and the public estate.

<sup>2</sup> Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, Title 34 (34 Pa.C.S.) §103, Ownership, jurisdiction and control of game and wildlife.

<sup>3</sup> 34 Pa.C.S. §322, Powers and duties of commission.



# Pennsylvania has a rich hunting heritage

Pennsylvania has a rich hunting heritage. Two million Pennsylvania residents identify themselves as hunters and trappers. We sell almost 1 million hunting licenses each year and consistently rank in the top three states in the nation for numbers of licensed hunters. Sales of junior hunting licenses are increasing annually, indicating that our recruitment efforts are having an impact. The economic impact of hunting in

Pennsylvania is almost \$2 billion, and Pennsylvania has remained a top deer-hunting state since the 1990s. In addition, the Game Commission’s game farms annually produce more than 200,000 pheasants. These are stocked on properties open for public hunting to provide hunting opportunity and help maintain our heritage of pheasant hunting.

Pennsylvania has a demonstrated track record in wildlife management. The Game Commission has successfully restored the bald eagle, elk, wild turkey, river otter, and fisher in our state; Pennsylvania is the number one turkey-hunting state, with more turkeys harvested in Pennsylvania than in any other state.



*Hunting is a \$2 billion business in Pennsylvania.*



Each year, our 350 Deputies and 200 full-time Wildlife Conservation Officers (WCOs) make 200,000 enforcement contacts and intercept 20,000 violations of the game and wildlife code. Twenty-nine percent of all agency employees are graduates of the Ross Leffler School of Conservation, the school which trains our WCOs. Unlawful taking of game or wildlife is consistently our number one violation, demonstrating our enforcement focus is on the wildlife crimes with the most negative impact to the resource.

The Game Commission field operations are executed from 6 regional offices: Franklin (Northwest Regional Office), Bolivar (Southwest Regional Office), Jersey Shore (North Central Regional Office), Huntingdon (South Central Regional Office), Dallas (Northeast Regional Office), and Reading (Southeast Regional Office). Our headquarters in Harrisburg comprises six bureaus: Wildlife Protection, Wildlife Habitat Management, Wildlife Management, Automated Technology, Administration, and Information and Education. The role of the agency’s bureaus is to develop and oversee program development; our regions are responsible for implementing the core activities of the agency.



## History

By the end of the 19th century, Pennsylvania’s wildlife was severely depleted as the Commonwealth transformed from a wilderness to an agricultural and industrial state; the last eastern woodland bison was killed in 1792, the last mountain lion in 1863, and the last native elk in 1867. Beavers were no longer present in the state by 1884, and the last wolf was killed by 1890. Unregulated commercialization of wildlife and habitat loss resulted in more than seven tons of passenger pigeons per day being shipped by railroad

from Pennsylvania to New York and Chicago markets, leading to the extinction of the species. In 1895, the General Assembly thus created a state agency to manage and protect what wildlife was left. The fledgling agency faced many challenges, but through wildlife protection efforts, developing wildlife refuges, restocking multiple species that had been extirpated from the state, and promoting natural reforestation in vast areas, it fostered an environment where the wildlife population began to recover and eventually thrive.

**From its humble beginnings, the Pennsylvania Game Commission has served the citizens of the Commonwealth for 120 years and achieved many wildlife success stories.** While today's agency faces new challenges, our mission remains the same, and we continue to champion wildlife and address modern challenges in wildlife management.



# Values

- ▼ *Place wildlife first in all decision-making*
- ▼ *Respect the views of our various stakeholders and citizens of the Commonwealth*
- ▼ *Be open, honest, forthright, and ethical in all matters*
- ▼ *Provide quality service both internally and externally*
- ▼ *Carry out responsibilities in a polite, professional, and considerate manner*
- ▼ *Encourage the professional development of all employees*
- ▼ *Recognize the value of a diverse staff to accomplish the wildlife management mission*
- ▼ *Recognize the value of the North American model of wildlife management*
- ▼ *Have pride in our management heritage*
- ▼ *Reflect on our success and lead for the future*

## North American Model of Wildlife Conservation<sup>1</sup>

Wildlife management in North America differs dramatically from models used in other countries. This dates from the era of Colonial America and the Westward Movement, when many species were brought to the brink of extinction due to market shooting. By the middle of the 1800s, hunters and anglers had come to realize that limits on game harvest were needed to protect the very wildlife they enjoyed pursuing.

The model is based on two basic principles: our fish and wildlife belong to all Americans, and they need to be managed in a sustainable manner for future generations. These two basic principles are further elaborated as follows:

- 1. Wildlife is held in the Public Trust.** Wildlife belongs to the people and is managed in trust for the people by government agencies. In Pennsylvania, this is the Pennsylvania Game Commission.
- 2. Elimination of Markets for Game.** Historically, the unregulated and unsustainable exploitation of game animals and migratory birds for the market led to federal, provincial, and state laws that greatly restricted the sale of meat and parts of these animals. These restrictions proved very successful in restoring many species of wildlife.

**3. Allocation of Wildlife by Law.** As a trustee, government manages wildlife in the interest of the beneficiaries – present and future generations of the public. Access and use of wildlife is therefore regulated through the public law or rule-making process.

**4. Kill only for legitimate purpose.** Killing wildlife for frivolous reasons has long been deemed unacceptable. In North America, hunters are permitted to harvest wildlife under guidelines for food and fur, self-defense, and property protection.

**5. Wildlife as an international resource.** Because some wildlife species migrate across borders, a nation's management of policies – or lack thereof – can have consequences for wildlife living in neighboring countries.

**6. Science-based wildlife policy.** Science as a basis for informed decision-making in wildlife management is has been recognized as critical to wildlife conservation. Integration of biological and social sciences is necessary to meet the conservation challenges.

**7. Democracy of hunting.** Theodore Roosevelt believed that society would benefit if all people had access to hunting opportunities. Access to these opportunities are so intrinsically important that their free availability marks a society as one of the citizens rather than serfs.

<sup>1</sup> Organ, J.F., S.P. Mahoney, V. Geist. 2010. "Born in the Hands of Hunters: the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation." The Wildlife Professional, The Wildlife Society. Bethesda, MD, USA.



# CHALLENGES

The Pennsylvania Game Commission is at a strategic turning point. Like all public service organizations, it is tasked with increasing its efficiency with fewer physical, technical, financial, and human resources. Like all wildlife agencies across the U.S., state wildlife agencies face an ongoing decline in hunting and trapping as an avocation as our society becomes increasingly urbanized. Revenue from license fees has remained flat for more than a decade and a half in Pennsylvania; changes in the fee structure require legislative approval.

## Changes in Our Community

These challenges pertain to the people and groups served by the Game Commission.

### *Whom do we serve?*

Who is our customer and how do we serve them? This question lies at the heart of our mission statement, i.e., the “current and future generations” for which we manage Pennsylvania’s wild birds, wild mammals, and their habitats. Game Commission policy focuses most directly on people who purchase hunting licenses and directly interact with Pennsylvania wildlife. We will continue serving this population effectively as we have in the past; they provide more than 50 percent of the funding used to manage wildlife.

But these hunters and trappers represent just 10 percent of the population, and we serve all citizens. We therefore need to more effectively address education and outreach to non-hunting constituencies, which represent 90 percent of the population of Pennsylvania. This includes residents impacted by encroaching wildlife, members of the legislature who receive input from their constituents and set public policy, and individuals who enjoy viewing wildlife. Agency staff now must deal with an ever-changing society. For example, in addition to “wildlife conservation,” our WCOs and other field staff must deal with issues such as methamphetamine labs on State Game Lands, increased expansion of the non-hunting public into rural regions, and an increasing number of citizens who lack an understanding of our appreciation for our wildlife resources.



**Challenge:** Improve service to current **and** future customers and expand communications and cooperation with legislature.

### *Public Relations (PR), Marketing, and Communications*

Marketing and public relations are a critical task for any public entity, especially one that directly or indirectly “sells” more than \$34 million annually in licenses/permits. For a science-based organization, however, marketing and PR are relatively challenging tasks; it is difficult to see/perceive their results and measure their effectiveness. Clearly articulating a marketing strategy and implementing it on a daily basis can enable agency staff to more effectively interact with current and future customers.



Many citizens and conservation groups feel the Pennsylvania Game Commission is doing a good job at managing wildlife. When the Game Commission receives negative feedback/criticism, it most often is related to deer and other wildlife management decisions. Sometimes, citizens are simply unaware of the larger wildlife-management issues that drive our decision making. This preconceived opinion can carry forward to other topics, e.g., land acquisition, employee interactions, and professional credibility.



Challenge: Use marketing to better sell our agency and our mission.

The primary expertise of Game Commission staff lies in policy and procedures related to wildlife and game lands, not marketing. However, we can do a better job educating the public on our mission.



Tools and techniques of communication are changing rapidly, and the Pennsylvania Game Commission can incorporate them more effectively in addressing our constituents. In recent years, we have begun leveraging new technologies, such as the eagle camera and social media, and integrating them into agency operations. Expanding this trend to include a more interactive website with highly visual information about our work and our mission

would potentially streamline customer interaction. This might include using a customer identification number, providing government-to-business (G2B) integration with other sites, and introducing automated surveys to obtain valuable feedback from the public.

Providing more learning opportunities will foster both public relations and return visits to the web sites, our Facebook page, and other points of contact. For example, this might entail offering short courses on habitat development, hunting techniques, animal track identification, and songbird identification and feeding, with links to various social media. Providing this type of content may lead to higher customer satisfaction, reduced costs for the agency to process informational requests, and additional data to measure customer awareness and satisfaction.



Challenge: Communicate more clearly using all available media.

## Understand our Mission

“Wildlife” is the object of our mission statement, and wildlife itself entails more than just game animals. Certainly our largest number of current customers perceives the Pennsylvania Game Commission as the “game” commission, but our mission encompasses all wildlife, not just hunted wildlife.

Our challenge is to maintain a current emphasis on game species while also (1) addressing threatened and endangered species and species of greatest conservation need, (2) fulfilling other functions related to our mission, including habitat management and data collection. Ideally, we will better inform the public so that they in turn can partner with us in game and non-game wildlife management.



Challenge: Articulate and publicize our mission and its scope.



The Game Commission is the official source of record for statistics related to state wildlife. These metrics enable us to function as an agency; a science-based approach to wildlife management is necessary for the Game Commission to meet our mission. This requires that we make adequate investments in monitoring and research; use the most advanced technology to support law enforcement; deploy new and evolving communication opportunities in our information and education activities; and manage wildlife habitats in the most efficient and effective manner to benefit all wildlife.



Challenge: Articulate our mission-critical role in science-based wildlife management.

## Finance

These are financial challenges faced by the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

### *Stagnant License Revenue*

The current fee structure for licenses has been in effect since 1999. In addition, (1) the volume of sales remains relatively flat and (2) Pennsylvania fees are among the lowest in the nation. Absent a change in fee structure, the Game Commission faces significant constraints in its ability to execute current programs funded by the license fees.

**A 1999 fee structure is a major constraint on PGC income**

Establishing/improving our relationship with stakeholders and the General Assembly will be critical toward addressing low, inadequate license fees.

As the economy continues to recover from the recession, we believe an increase in fees is both necessary and practical. Most of the costs associated with generating and issuing licenses are fixed, but we can evaluate potential means of lowering them to positively impact net income.



Challenge: Increase net income from licensing.



Challenge: Retain current license buyers and recruit new license buyers.

### *Variable Asset-Based Revenue*

The Pennsylvania Game Commission generates significant revenue directly from the lands under its stewardship, such as timber sales, mineral rights, and oil/gas leases. Timber sales generate nearly \$7 million per year. However, the priority of the agency's timber management program is to restore and develop quality wildlife habitats, and timber sale revenue is funneled back into wildlife habitat improvement at nearly a 1:1 ratio. Activities such as invasive plant control and rectifying past harvest mismanagement have proved costly. To compound the issue, the market value for





timber is dramatically depressed compared to 2006 levels. More significantly, revenue from oil and gas leasing has grown from \$7.4 million (2008-10) to \$23.3 million (2014) – a threefold increase. This is indirect revenue and subject to economic forces beyond Game Commission control. Most available acreage has already been leased. Moreover, royalties are set at a percentage of the revenues from subsequent oil and gas leases; the price of oil and gas has been substantially depressed recently and may remain depressed for several years.

Nonetheless, stewardship of state game lands is a core function

within the Game Commission and will continue to play a key role in generating revenue. Our challenge is to balance appropriate land management, including both conservation and acquisitions, with prudent business practices for revenue generation.

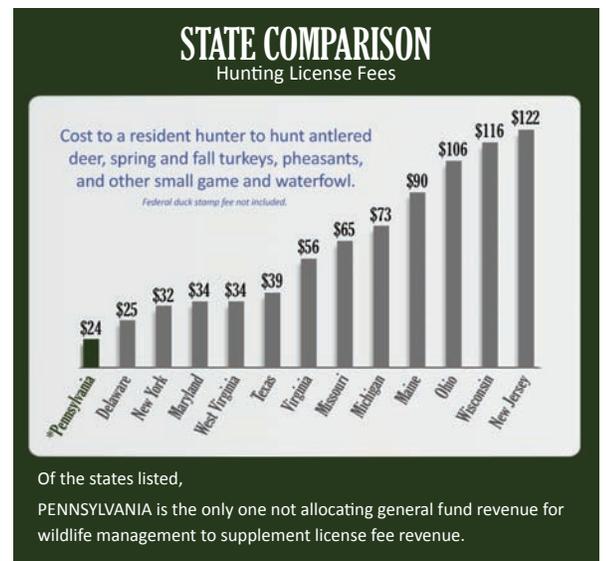


Challenge: Leverage asset-based revenue without becoming overly dependent on it.

### Unsustainable Cost of Labor/Benefits

Salaries, wages, and fringe benefits represent the largest component of the Pennsylvania Game Commission budget. From fiscal year 2009-10 through 2013-14, salaries for full time equivalent and wage positions grew 12.28%, with an expected increase of 7.19% during FY 2014-15. Fringe benefits increased 35.2% over the same time period, with an additional 12.37% increase expected during FY 14-15. Using current projections, the agency cannot continue to operate at its current level without additional revenue sources.

During FY 1997-98, the agency employed 731 full time employees at a personnel cost of \$40.4 million. In comparison, FY 2015-16 projects 714 full-time employees with a personnel cost of \$82.1 million, including benefits. Essentially, our personnel costs have doubled since 1997 with a slight decrease in the number of full-time staff employed by the agency.



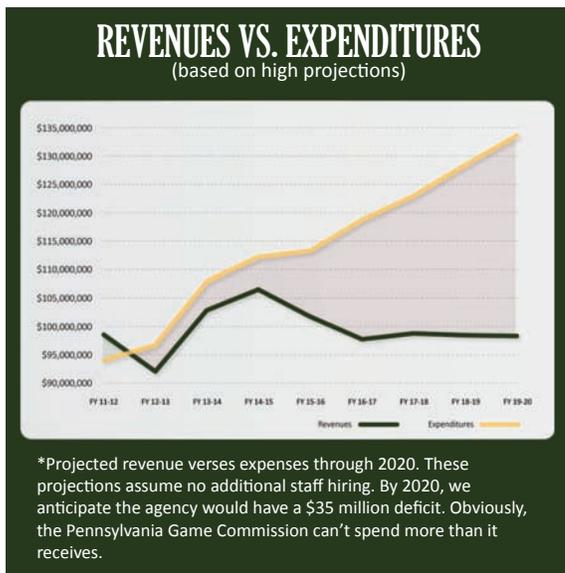
Challenge: Realign fully loaded labor costs based on strategic requirements.

### Define and Leverage Performance Metrics

The Pennsylvania Game Commission needs to collect and utilize metrics as key performance indicators (KPIs) for its mission. This will enable all staff to see how their labor and Game Commission dollars are impacting the mission of the organization. With data points immediately available, staff can make informed decisions more efficiently. This will dramatically improve program quality and inform decision-making. In addition, the KPIs will allow the Game Commission to develop more strategic SMART goals in the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan.



Challenge: Collect and use performance metrics in decision-making.



# Organization

Organizational change is difficult for any organization. The Pennsylvania Game Commission faces a number of challenges in this area. The most significant include changes in staffing requirements as our mission adapts to a constituency beyond its traditional hunter/trapper community and as we identify potential new sources of income; anticipated retirement of key personnel over the next five years; and changes in science and technology that impact the land and wildlife we manage. These are our organizational challenges.



## *Comprehensive Organizational Change*

In order to expand our customer base, develop new sources of income, and new resources within our team, we need to reevaluate the organization. This is the 21st century, and we need to adapt to it – with a comprehensive commitment to quality, integrity, and empowerment across the organization.

Change needs to start at – and be supported by – senior management, including the Board of Commissioners. Empowerment will enable all staff to focus on multiple roles, confident in their position in the Game Commission and their impact on our success. We believe strategic organizational change will lead to increased morale, efficiency, and performance by all; improved customer satisfaction; better use of data to inform strategic decision-making; and increased knowledge-sharing across program areas, bureaus, and regions.



Challenge: Embrace the future work model.

Business work models for any agency or organization are always evolving, or at least they should be. The Game Commission must continue to advance our work model with a focus on productivity, efficiency, transparency, inclusiveness, and using technology as a driver to support our goals.

## A comprehensive commitment to quality and empowerment



## *Staff/Leadership Turnover*

Over the planning horizon, we will see a substantial change in senior leadership and staffing as baby boomers continue to retire. This will occur at all levels of the organization. We need to implement succession planning, focused on the quality and performance initiatives of this strategic plan. Effective succession planning and execution will ensure that our workforce retains trust in Game Commission leadership.

This directly impacts the incremental steps toward sustained improvement and overall agency performance. We need to remain committed to retaining institutional knowledge during the transition and to

executing restructuring and improvements identified in this plan.



Challenge: Plan for and execute staff transition.



## *Human Capital*

With planned transitions, we need to develop innovative ways to recruit both full-time and part-time staff to fill vacancies. We also need to develop innovative ways to deploy our staff as fully engaged partners in executing the mission of the Pennsylvania Game Commission. People need to know how they fit and why they matter. By including and engaging them in planning and in continuous improvement, we directly engage them in our mission.

Empowerment comes in many forms, but it starts with knowledge. This may involve more computer-based training, expanding our current training school to provide for agency-wide learning, and/or creating more formal standardized courses to accelerate training for all staff. This includes enabling the curriculum to adapt to science-driven changes that emerge in the field of wildlife/habitat management. We can change the current annual training curriculum into a new learning environment.



Challenge: Invest in, empower, and enlighten the workforce.

## *Leveraging the Volunteer Workforce*

Pennsylvania has a sizable population of stakeholders interested in helping the Game Commission accomplish its mission. This includes volunteers who help with hunter/trapper education and biological field work. It

also includes a sizable group of Deputy Wildlife Conservation Officers.

The Game Commission must leverage the time and talents of these people. Among other things, we can provide additional training/technology or assign roles and responsibilities for them. Volunteers should never be thought of as “free” workforce. They require and deserve investments by the agency, such as continuing training and recognition of the valuable role they play in support of the agency’s mission.



Challenge: Leverage, empower, and promote the volunteer workforce.



## Comprehensive, Focused Communication

In order to successfully implement any kind of organizational change, we will need to provide full transparency, including support at the highest levels of the organization. This requires open communication across the organization, from the Board of Commissioners to all staff. It also needs to address the nature of a workforce widely distributed across the state.



Challenge: Support and champion the strategic plan.



## Shared Mission, Cross-Training, Common Focus

We need to operate as a single entity, focused on the common goals of the Game Commission. This will lead to greater diversity across the organization and promote efficiency of our personnel. It may require cross-training, such as attending professional conferences and webinars that span regions, bureaus, and job categories. It may require flexibility in assigning, deploying, and promoting staff. All members of “Team Pennsylvania Game Commission” need to understand the roles of their colleagues.

This may also require redefining job requirements and pay scales. We need to maximize our agency’s capabilities, including creating incentives for staff to remain with the Game Commission.



Challenge: Maximize human capital across the organization.

## Physical Assets

These challenges pertain to the physical assets – wildlife and land resources – that enable us to execute our mission.

### Management of State Game Lands

The Pennsylvania Game Commission now manages nearly 1.5 million acres. State Game Lands acreage is an important part of the Commonwealth’s portfolio of conservation tools. However, additional acquisition requires additional labor to maintain infrastructure and improve habitat unless we evolve the way in which we manage these lands; acreage under our stewardship has increased over the past decade, even as the number of maintenance staff has decreased. The Game Commission also faces challenges in making targeted sites handicap-accessible, including vehicular ingress and egress, per Commonwealth and Federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policy.

The challenge to maintain current or potentially increased acreage with decreased staff may lead to deterioration of infrastructure, less-developed habitat for some species, and diminished customer satisfaction. In addition, the northern tier region, with its abundance of big game and public land, is located 3-4 hours from



the majority of Pennsylvania hunters. In recent years, hunting has shifted southward, leading to a disconnect between available game due to access availability and convenient location. This may impact Game Land's policies for land acquisition and/or public access.



Challenge: Manage State Game Lands using approaches that are realistic for staffing levels and provide for improvements in long-term habitat quality that is accessible to hunters and trappers.



## Management of Other Wildlife Habitats

State Game Lands are just a portion of the landscape used by Pennsylvania wildlife. Public access is a critical success factor for managing State Game Lands, for hunting and trapping, and for managing the habitat as a whole. With a finite number of staff available to manage these habitats, the Game Commission must evaluate both the Hunter Access Program and ongoing land acquisitions. This may involve cost/benefit analysis, policy changes, and identifying more efficient ways to manage large numbers of small tracts.

Moreover, in many places the State Game Lands become islands of quality habitat surrounded by mediocre or



Challenge: Develop cost/effective policy for habitat management.

poor habitat. Outreach to landowners to advise them on wildlife habitat improvement would improve the quality of the habitat as a whole.

## Management of Invasive Species

Several non-native plants grow aggressively in State Game Lands, displace native vegetation, and can dominate entire habitats, making these plants environmentally destructive. Once established, invasive plants are difficult to control and expensive to contain/eradicate. Feral swine are an issue on some State Game Lands, as are invasive insects. Over time, an overpopulation of a species can threaten the ecological balance and run counter to the mission of the Game Commission.



Challenge: Manage invasive species on State Game Lands to reduce negative impact to ecological function.

## Maintenance of Physical Infrastructure

Numerous assets are located on the 1.5 million acres of State Game Lands. These include fixed assets, such as buildings and structures, and equipment, e.g., tractors, boats, and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). The Game Commission has no formal maintenance/replacement schedule for these physical assets.



Challenge: Develop maintenance and replacement plans for physical assets.



# Pennsylvania wildlife is threatened by multiple diseases

## *Containment of Wildlife Disease*

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) affects the brain and nervous system of infected deer and elk, eventually resulting in death. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture regulates disease management for domestic (captive) cervids, while the Pennsylvania Game Commission is responsible for monitoring and containing it in wildlife. CWD was first detected in farm-raised deer in 2012 and is now being found in free-ranging deer. We have established Disease Management Areas (DMAs), publicized issues associated with infected animals, and expanded our focus in monitoring and containing the spread of the disease.

White-nose syndrome (WNS) is a disease affecting hibernating bats. Named for the white fungus that appears on the muzzle and other body parts of these bats, WNS is associated with high mortality of bats in eastern North America. Since the introduction of WNS to Pennsylvania in 2008, it has caused population declines higher than 90% in some species of cave-dwelling bats. West Nile virus, epizootic hemorrhagic disease, avian influenza, mange, and other diseases pose threats to wildlife populations. Monitoring wildlife populations for prevalence and trends in disease transmission and containing them wherever possible are core tasks, require resources and publicity, and directly impact the wildlife we are charged with managing.



Challenge: Control CWD in free-ranging cervids by preventing new introductions into the state, slowing geographic expansion, and decreasing its prevalence where it already exists.



Challenge: Monitor the geographic distribution and prevalence of CWD in Pennsylvania to inform our hunting community and the general public.



Challenge: Monitor the prevalence of WNS and develop measures to protect remaining populations of cave-dwelling bats.



Challenge: Further evaluate the impact of West Nile virus and avian influenza to wildlife populations.

## *Agency Mobile Communications System*

The Pennsylvania Game Commission maintains radio tower sites, channels, and a variety of radio frequencies as part of its statewide mobile radio system, and Game Commission law enforcement staff depend on it to do their duties safely and effectively, particularly in areas where mobile phone reception is inadequate. In executing their jobs, they often communicate with other state/local agencies that use alternate and/or incompatible radio systems. In addition, maintaining the system is labor-intensive.

Most staff have state-issued cellular phones, with a small number of smartphones. In addition, wildlife officers use the Game Commission Computer Automated Dispatch (CAD) system, which allows them to document information in their vehicles and report back on incidents in progress. Both cell phones and the CAD system are dependent on cellular reception, however, reception is very poor in many of the remote areas where we work.



Challenge: Cost effectively use evolving communication technology to increase efficiency of operations for all staff.



# STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Pennsylvania Game Commission has developed five core goals for this strategic plan.

## Core Goals

1. *Put Wildlife First*
2. *Improve Wildlife Habitat*
3. *Follow Sound Business Practices*
4. *Serve the Pennsylvania Public*
5. *Improve Support for Hunting/Trapping*

## 1. Put Wildlife First

**Core Goal #1: Manage, propagate, and protect all of Pennsylvania's wild birds and mammals and put wildlife first in decision-making**

**1.1** Keep Pennsylvania's wildlife from going extinct, becoming extirpated, or reaching the threshold where a species must be listed as Threatened or Endangered, anywhere this can be controlled.

**1.1.1** Recover population of peregrine falcon and ospreys to sustainable levels, sufficiently to de-list them by 2020.

**1.1.2** Have initial release of wild northern bobwhite quail to at least one focus area by 2020.

**1.1.3** Prepare strategies to contain white-nose syndrome and stabilize the population of at-risk bats by 2016.

**1.1.4** Install five bat gates by 2020 to protect highest priority bat hibernacula.

**1.1.5** Begin implementation of priority actions detailed in the 2015 Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan by 2016.

**1.2** Sustain and enhance game bird, game mammal, and furbearer populations at sustained hunting and fur-taking levels.

**1.2.1** Update existing species management plans to guide and prioritize research, monitoring, and management efforts by 2020. All plans will be reviewed by 2016 and resubmitted to the Board of Commissioners for approval. Revisions will align with agency budgetary capacity.



## 2. Improve Wildlife Habitat

### Core Goal #2: Manage wildlife habitats

**2.1** Transition management practices on State Game Lands towards large-scale (increase average acreage by 50%), high-quality, early successional habitats via timber harvest, planting native warm-season grasses, old field management, and prescribed fire. Decrease use of high-input, single-value plantings and practices, such as agricultural plantings.

**2.2** Increase grassland and young forest habitat on private land, including hunter access lands, by 5,000 acres by 2020. Focus as much effort as possible on hunter-access and State Game Lands properties to enhance hunter opportunities.

**2.3** Develop regularly updated State Game Lands Comprehensive Management Plans that maximize habitat potential, with the first round of initial planning accomplished by 2017; by 2020, implement completed plans according to timeline set within each plan.

**2.4** Focus State Game Lands acquisition efforts on lands which provide access to existing State Game Lands, inholdings, indentures, and sensitive habitats for special concern species and other unique landscapes consistent with available funding levels from the Game Fund, mitigation funds, and federal matching funding. When funding is lacking, curtail or discontinue land purchases and prioritize acquisitions to obtain the most critical and unique tracts.

**2.5** Expand use of the number of acres of prescribed fire to improve field, forest, and shrubland habitat by 10% annually by 2020.

## 3. Follow Sound Business Practices

### Core Goal #3: Operate using sound, proven business practices to ensure long-term financial stability, to sustain performance improvement and commitment to excellence

**3.1** By 2020, initiate construction of Game Commission Wildlife Research and Education Center in State College to house specific Game Commission staff.

**3.2** By 2020, reposition 20% of dispersed non-law enforcement field staff from home offices to the most efficient headquarters.

**3.3** By 2016, reduce the number of in-person staff meetings by 50% and replace with webinar technology.

**3.4** Send all new members of the Board of Commissioners to a wildlife management training course to better support Board activities.

**3.5** By 2020, build annual revenues to \$140 million.

**3.6** By 2015, assign senior management team to review all proposed/new programs to foster increased collaboration and efficiency. The Executive Office will review and approve all grant applications prior to submission.

**3.7** Develop marketing plan and offer expanded product offering through outdoor shop by 2017 and evaluate nontraditional revenue sources.



## 4. Serve the Pennsylvania Public

### Core Goal #4: Serve the Commonwealth as the leader in wildlife conservation

- 4.1 Establish a monthly webinar series available to all citizens by 2016 to provide education and outreach on wildlife conservation and agency topics, targeted to reach 50,000 viewers by 2020.
- 4.2 By 2020, develop a comprehensive communications and marketing plan to increase Pennsylvania Game Commission effectiveness in reaching all Pennsylvania citizens.
- 4.3 By 2018, evaluate new tools to improve communications and engagement with the non-hunting public and merge as part of the Working for Wildlife program.
- 4.4 By 2020, increase volunteer Deputy Wildlife Conservation Officer ranks to 450 officers by increasing recruitment efforts and removing barriers from Pennsylvania Game Commission employees' becoming Deputies.
- 4.5 The Alternate-users Working Group is comprised of users of State Game Lands who do not necessarily use these lands for the primary use of hunting, trapping, and wildlife management (bicyclists, hikers, bird watchers, snowmobilers, etc.). By May 2016, working group will collectively develop strategic plan to reduce conflict between user groups, reduce illegal activities, and reduce damages to State Game Lands system.
- 4.6 By 2018, overhaul agency website to increase user satisfaction, utility, and provide a more professional image for the agency.

## 5. Improve Support for Hunting/Trapping

### Core Value #5: Support our hunting and trapping heritages

- 5.1 Increase Hunter Access with an enrollment campaign focused on new, high-value opportunities with a goal of no net loss by 2020.
- 5.2 By 2018, develop online, advanced hunter education courses
- 5.3 Working with NGO partners, establish a non-Pennsylvania Game Commission position to develop support network to better recruit and sustain women hunters, lapsed hunters, and mentored adult hunters. Use this network to add 5,000 new license buyers by 2020.
- 5.4. By 2020, increase harvest rate of Pennsylvania Game Commission-released pheasants by 10% to increase hunter opportunity.
- 5.5 By 2016, develop a formal stewardship process for landowners enrolled in the public Hunter Access program. The goal is to increase retention of existing landowners and build program branding.
- 5.6 Revise and improve Hunter Access Program. Create an internal committee by 2017 to address future direction of the Hunter Access Program; define a five-year strategy and specific management goals; and develop marketing strategies to support program goals. This committee will develop the plan to align with agency financial capacity.
- 5.7 Implement marketing programs and outreach efforts to achieve a no-net-loss of general hunting licenses sales between 2015 and 2020.
- 5.8 Expand hunter recruitment/retention outreach to maintain no-net -loss in license sales through 2020.

Most Pennsylvanians know the Game Commission for its role in administering hunting privileges in Pennsylvania. Our mission actually touches citizens and businesses in a number of ways, especially protecting wildlife and wildlife habitats.

## Wildlife Science

The Pennsylvania Game Commission uses the best available science to manage our state’s wildlife resources using a team of highly trained wildlife biologists. These biologists monitor wildlife populations and their habitats, and conduct targeted research to best manage our state’s wildlife. These scientists provide a broad diversity of skills to support the Commonwealth, including expertise in urban deer management, veterinary science, statistics, public outreach, game and non-game wildlife management, State Game Lands habitat planning, and management for species in greatest conservation need.

Science has played a major role in the past and current conservation successes of our agency. Using the best available science, the agency has restored the bald eagle, elk, river otter, fisher, and wild turkey, just to name a few. In addition, our wildlife biologists develop season and bag limits for our hunters and trappers. Our wildlife biologists also work with private landowners to make recommendations on how to best manage their land



to provide critical wildlife habitat. Although the Game Commission focuses much attention on our almost 1.5 million acres of State Game Lands, the agency is responsible for managing wildlife on all lands in the Commonwealth.

Agency staff respond to activities that require an environmental permit, normally associated with the Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory (PNDI). For bird and mammal wildlife, the Pennsylvania Game Commission executes a formal review of the proposed activity to ensure compliance with Pennsylvania regulations and to make recommendations on avoiding/mitigating potential negative impact.

### *Private Wildlife Habitat Programs*

Our biologists provide habitat plans, recommendations, and improve wildlife habitats on private lands, where appropriate. Included under this is the Private Landowner Assistance Program, Barn Owl Conservation Initiative, and the Voluntary Public Access-Habitat Improvement Program, which will pay for actual habitat practices on private lands. We also provide seedlings and nesting boxes designed to benefit various species of wildlife.



# Law Enforcement Services

While the role of law enforcement at the Pennsylvania Game Commission is broad and varying, the primary mission is focused on the protection of the Commonwealth's wildlife resources on behalf of all of its citizens. In fact, this significant mission can be sourced right from Article I, Section 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution. The goal of the Game Commission's law enforcement program is to generate voluntary compliance by professionally fulfilling the legislative mandates of the Game and Wildlife Code in a fair and equitable manner and also to vigorously pursue, apprehend, and prosecute willful and deliberate violators of the Game and Wildlife Code. Wildlife Conservation Officers and other designated officials enforce various laws and regulations that promote the following general areas:

## *Wildlife Protection*

These laws and regulations promote conservation of the Commonwealth's wildlife resources. This often includes efforts to protect the land and waters wildlife depend upon to thrive.

## *Public Safety & Property Protection*

These laws promote not only the safety of those individuals that participate in hunting and trapping activities, but also the safety of the general public and private property that may be in the vicinity of such activities.

## *Fair Chase & Fair Share*

These laws promote the continued public acceptance of traditional hunting activities in today's modern culture by restricting unethical and non-sporting hunting and trapping methods. They also ensure that each citizen is given equal access to the Commonwealth's wildlife resources by restricting excessive take and consumption by only a few persons.

## *Turn In a Poacher Program*

The Turn In a Poacher (TIP) Program helps keep poaching in check by encouraging citizens to report people who kill Threatened and Endangered species or multiple big game animals, such as white-tailed deer, black bear, elk, and wild turkey. The TIP program provides a reward to individuals whose tips lead to the successful prosecution of someone who has killed endangered species or multiple big game animals.



# Public Access to Hunting Lands

State Game Lands are the premier public/hunter access service provided by the Game Commission, with habitat improvements designed to enhance wildlife habitat and public use of these lands. State Game Lands have facilities, such as parking lots, open and gated roads to access the interior, and signage, all primarily designed for the hunter/trapper. These facilities are also used for other recreational purposes, such as hiking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, wildlife-viewing, and other forms of outdoor recreation.

# Education Services

## Hunter-Trapper Education

By law, all first-time hunters and trappers, regardless of age, must successfully complete Hunter-Trapper Education (HTE) training before they can buy a Pennsylvania hunting or trapping license. A training certificate, recognized throughout North America, is awarded when the student passes a test at the end of the course. Students must be at least 11 years old to enroll; parents are encouraged to attend with their children. The training is designed to produce safe, responsible, knowledgeable, and involved participants.

The results of this program are remarkable. **Since 1959, hunting-related shooting incidents have declined drastically.** Hunting is safe and getting safer, thanks to hunter education.



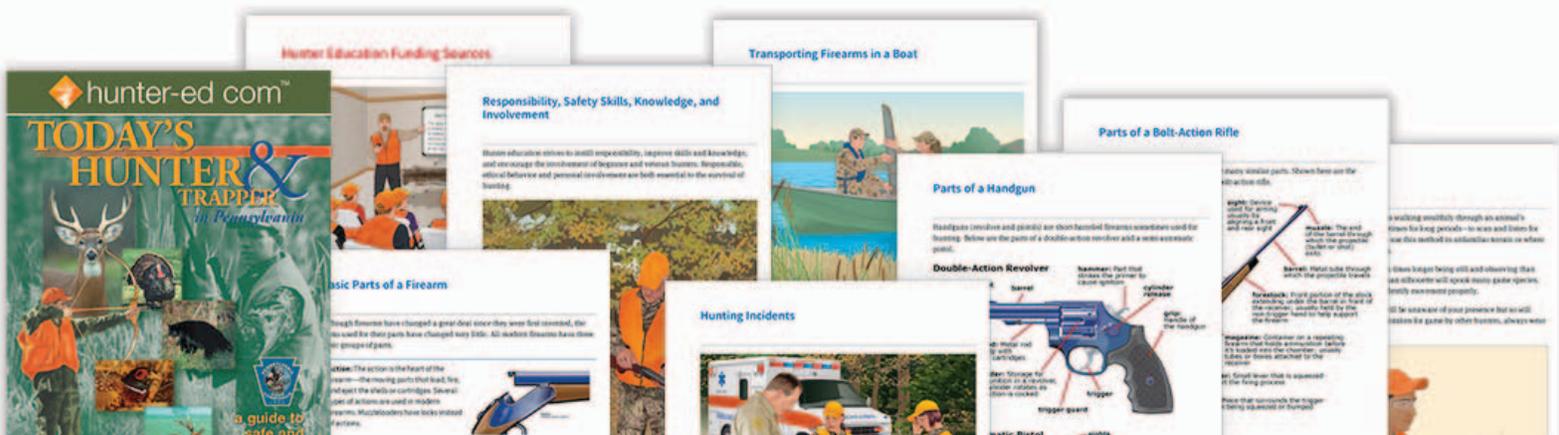
### Training Options

Students can complete training in a classroom, and register for a class using the Hunter Education Class Calendar. Students can use the study guide, *Today's Hunter & Trapper in Pennsylvania*, to complete the independent-study portion of the class. Students can register to take a 6-hour class requiring some pre-class independent study or an 8-hour class requiring some pre-class independent study and a skill-station format.

Students age 16 or older can complete the training entirely online on any web-accessible device, e.g., smart phones, tablets, and computers. Students simply complete the online course, print a temporary hunter education certificate (the permanent one will be delivered by mail), buy their license, and head afield. Students can sign up at [www.hunter-ed.com/pennsylvania](http://www.hunter-ed.com/pennsylvania), study for free, and pay only after passing the final exam.

### What does the course include?

- Responsible hunting behavior
- Basic firearm knowledge and safe handling
- Wildlife conservation and management
- Outdoor safety and survival
- Basic and advanced hunting techniques
- Trapping and fur-taking basics
- Basic shooting and safe hunting skills
- Expanding your hunting opportunities



## National Archery in the Schools

The National Archery in the Schools Program is a joint venture that partners with state education and wildlife management agencies to promote student education and participation in the lifelong sport of archery. The program's focus is to provide international-style archery training in school classes in grades 4 through 12.

## Project WILD

Project WILD is a national hands-on conservation education program focusing on wildlife and the environment, and how we as humans interact and relate to both. A variety of basic and advanced workshops are offered, varying from region to region and year to year. Topics include:

- ▼ Project WILD
- ▼ Growing Up WILD
- ▼ Endangered Species
- ▼ WILD about Elk
- ▼ Black Bears
- ▼ PA Songbirds

A complete listing is available online. This professional development opportunity is offered to educators of all sorts, from public, private, and home school teachers/facilitators to scout, youth, and church group leaders.



## Hunter Access on Private Land

The Hunter Access Program is critical to the future of our hunting heritage in Pennsylvania and to the management of wildlife. Through this program, we partner with landowners to allow public access for hunting and trapping on their lands. More than 13,000 landowners and tenants are currently participating; the properties cover more than 2.6 million acres. Since this program's creation in 1936, participating landowners have found relief from the damage game animals and furbearers can cause and

protection from law breakers. Those positive aspects of the program help make it appealing to countless farmers and other property owners. The Hunter Access Program requires a landowner to place under agreement an area comprising at least 50 acres for five or more years.

We also collaborate closely with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and other public land management agencies to provide access to our hunting public. This is achieved through good communications, assisting with programs, law enforcement, the Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP), and other habitat projects.

# Other Services

## *Public Shooting Ranges*

The Pennsylvania Game Commission maintains 29 public shooting ranges across the state. People who shoot firearms at one of the State Game Lands public shooting ranges must possess and carry with them an annual range use permit or a current general hunting or fur-taker license.

Unless otherwise posted, these ranges are open year-round, from 8 a.m. until sunset, Monday through Saturday, and noon to sunset on Sundays. Hunters need to contact the appropriate region office to check the daily status of ranges.

## *Communication Services*

Dispatch operations provides for extended hours when the public can receive help and get answers to questions and concerns from a real person as they relate to the Pennsylvania Game Commission and its programs. These communication services also include various social media sites, including a web page and an open e-forum for the public to voice opinions on Game Commission programs and receive written answers to questions and concerns.

Wildlife Conservation Officers and other agency professionals regularly set up exhibits at fairs and other similar venues to promote agency programs and respond to inquiries and questions.



## *Pennsylvania Big Game Records Program*

The Pennsylvania Game Commission bases its Big Game Scoring Program after, and uses the measuring system, of the well-known Boone and Crockett Club. The Boone and Crockett Club was founded in 1887 by

Theodore Roosevelt and a group of his close friends. Due to the Club's efforts to promote fair chase hunting and implement game laws and regulations, many big game animals were brought back from the verge of extinction. Scoring and keeping track of big game animals is important because harvesting a record book animal brings to attention the excellence of habitat and wildlife management practices that produce healthy wildlife populations. The scoring program also stresses hunter and conservation ethics and is another tool that promotes recreational hunting and supports Pennsylvania's strong hunting heritage.



## *Pheasant Propagation*

The Pheasant Propagation Program started with the purchase of pheasants for stocking in 1915, and the Game Commission opened its 1st 2 game farms in 1929. Today we have the largest pheasant stocking program of any state wildlife agency in the nation.

We stock pheasants as a service to our hunters, to promote our hunting heritage by producing and stocking up to 250,000 pheasants annually.

Our pheasant propagation program is very popular with our hunters. There are nearly 100,000 hunters participating in pheasant hunting in PA, racking up nearly 400,000 hunter days and spending nearly \$30 million annually. Results of the recent hunter survey on pheasant management indicated that nearly 80% of our hunters support the pheasant stocking program. Even 65% of hunters who have never hunted pheasants support the program. Other benefits include that:

- ▼ It provides a tangible product for our hunting license buyers;
- ▼ It provides diversity to today's hunting experience at a time when small game populations are low;
- ▼ And very important, it allows the Game Commission to provide a hunting opportunity for junior hunters with the goal of increasing hunter recruitment, retention and reactivation. Research shows that kids that start hunting small game early on are more likely to remain a hunter throughout their lifetime.

Pheasants are produced at our four game farms by a dedicated and professional propagation staff. Also food and cover crews from across the state travel to the game farms to transport the birds to their stocking locations.

Pennsylvania has a great history of pheasant hunting. During the pheasant's hey day of the late 1950s into the early 1970s, more than 900,000 hunters pursued pheasants in Pennsylvania, and many hunters still remember those times. Wild huntable pheasant populations have been gone for nearly 2 decades, but we can still create great opportunities and memories with today's pheasant stocking program.



## *Other Outreach and Support*

In addition, the Pennsylvania Game Commission offers many services such as providing programs to schools, clubs, and other organizations. We respond and deal with nuisance wildlife. This includes trapping bears, beavers, and other species and picking up road-killed wildlife. Employees score antlers for Game Commission record books as well as entry into the Boone and Crockett Club registry. Wildlife Conservation Officers collect and transport, for rabies testing, species that come in contact with pets and humans. Employees in just about all disciplines within the agency will provide advice to the public and cooperating organizations without hesitation when requests are received.

## *Economic Support*

The Pennsylvania Game Commission indirectly supports the state and local economy. The hunter retention and recruitment initiatives add indirectly to the \$2 billion industry surrounding the sport of hunting and trapping. In other words, as we recruit hunters and trappers and provide an adequate wildlife resource and a place for them to hunt/trap, we support the economy as they buy goods to follow their sport. Examples of indirect sales include gasoline to travel to pursue recreation, sporting equipment, and agent fees from license sales, taxidermy, and butchering. Similarly, millions of Pennsylvania residents feed birds or travel to watch wildlife, which contributes another billion dollars to our economy.

We also issue licenses, permits, and contracts to allow for commerce associated with surrounding wildlife and State Game Lands. This would include professions such as “pest control agents,” whose standards are set and regulated by the Commission. Our leasing program for oil, gas, and minerals, as well as the right-of-way licensing program, benefit the Game Commission as well as the energy industry and consumers.

Our impact also gets down to the small but important, such as a fire company whose biggest fund-raising event is the concession at the bear check stations that we hold at their facilities.



For further information about the Pennsylvania Game Commission and our Strategic Plan 2015-2020, please contact:

PA Game Commission  
2001 Elmerton Avenue  
Harrisburg PA 17110  
Monday-Friday  
7:45 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

[www.pgc.state.pa.us](http://www.pgc.state.pa.us)