

PENNSYLVANIA GAME COMMISSION

A Vision for the Future

your future is
WILD
2020



Vision for the future...2020 and beyond

Not too long ago, the bald eagle, wild turkey, river otter, fisher, black bear, elk, and even the white-tailed deer in the southern portion of the state were a rare find. Today, thanks to the support of Pennsylvania's hunters and trappers, and the focused mission of the Pennsylvania Game Commission and its committed employees and partners, these species are common. In fact, they're more common today than at any time since the agency was created in 1895.

As Pennsylvania's state wildlife agency, our mission is clear; manage Pennsylvania's wild birds, wild mammals, and their habitats for current and future generations. Our unwavering commitment

to this mission continues.

But new challenges face our agency. In fact, the storm is upon us.

We are living in the golden age of wildlife management. Popular game species like deer, bear, and wild turkey are thriving. Despite the successes the Game Commission has achieved, new challenges represent a real and current danger to the future of wildlife conservation in our state. These challenges hang like a dark cloud on the horizon foreshadowing a severe storm.

Wildlife disease has levied a huge blow to some species of wildlife. White-nosed syndrome showed up in the year 2000 and has reduced populations of several species of cave-dwelling bats by 99 percent. Chronic wasting disease, which showed up in 2012, threatens the future of deer hunting.

In the last few decades we lost the bobwhite quail from Pennsylvania due to habitat loss. Wild ring-necked pheasant populations have largely disappeared from our state due to loss of habitat resulting from changes in agricultural



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practices. And the ruffed grouse, our state bird, struggles as the combination of aging forests and West Nile virus threaten its future.

Nationally, we are witnessing a gradual decline in hunting license sales. This represents a threat to all wildlife conservation in the state as revenue generated from hunting license sales fund the conservation of all wildlife, not just game species. Many factors contribute to the decline in license sales, most, if not all of these factors are outside the direct control of the Game Commission.

But all is not lost. Our *Vision for the Future* will require a tremendous financial investment by the agency, more than we have ever invested in the past. This vision will force us to look at new ways of achieving success, and fully engaging a broader audience of citizens to support wildlife conservation in Pennsylvania. And our *Vision for the Future* will require us to expand our focus on using and applying science to benefit wildlife.

Our *Vision for the Future* includes all lands, not just our 1.5 million acres

of state game lands. Pennsylvania is a large and diverse state; the role of private land management is critical to the future success of wildlife in our state. The agency's role in providing technical information to landowners and helping them put wildlife habitat on the ground is a foundational principle for this effort.

Although hunting license sales continue to decline, this does not mean that hunters will not play a lead role in wildlife conservation. They will continue to do so, and even more in the future. Our *Vision for the Future* includes creating more places to hunt, better hunting, and more diverse species to hunt by expanding the role of controlled burns, expanding grassland and old field management, and continued focus on timber management with a goal of growing more young forests. Developing these critical habitats is important to support our hunters, who largely fund wildlife conservation efforts.

Our *Vision for the Future* showcases many examples of projects the Game Commission is undertaking to realize this vision. To succeed, these projects will require a major financial investment by the agency through personnel, modernized equipment to increase efficiencies, expanded research to ensure our investments are working, and an effective and strategic approach to engage all Pennsylvania citizens in wildlife conservation efforts...reconnecting them to wildlife.

I hope, after reviewing this *Vision for the Future*, you are as excited about the future of wildlife conservation in Pennsylvania as we are. The storm clouds are rolling in, but we have too much at stake not to succeed.

Board of Game Commissioners President Timothy S. Layton, left, and Game Commission Executive Director Bryan J. Burhans

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The Importance of Wildlife

From muggy freshwater marshes to sprawling grass fields waving in the wind, from cavernous rocky outcrops to rugged mountaintop oak stands, brushy suburban fencerows – even your own backyard – Pennsylvania is alive with wildlife.

It's one of the things that makes living here so special.

On any day of the week, in any corner of our Commonwealth, there are countless opportunities to connect with wildlife, whether it be songbirds, gray squirrels, mallards or our state-animal, the white-tailed deer.

It's hard to imagine a Pennsylvania that didn't provide these regular – yet always-special – encounters.

Pennsylvania is home to an amazing 480 species of wildlife. And while only about 50 of them are hunted or trapped, it's those license-buying hunters and furtakers who provide the primary funding for the management of all species.

The Game Commission, which was formed in 1895 to manage and protect the state's wild species and habitats, doesn't receive state tax revenue to assist in carrying out its mission.

Hunters care deeply about wildlife, and the second-to-none opportunities that await them afield in Pennsylvania provide plenty of incentive to continue their commitment to conservation.

They, too, enjoy in our abundance of wild species that have every reason to be a source of pride for every Pennsylvanian.



Hal Korber

Pennsylvania has 22 endangered species, 7 threatened species, and more than 100 species of greatest conservation need. The Game Commission is committed to ensuring Pennsylvania wildlife has a future.

Upgrading wildlife viewing opportunities, Elk County

Home to the largest free-roaming elk herd in the northeastern United States, the Game Commission's Winslow Hill elk viewing area welcomes thousands of visitors each year.

Interpretive signs, live events, guided hikes, and educational presentations at Winslow Hill, Woodring Farm, and the Elk Country Visitor Center provide information on wildlife biology, ecology, and the opportunity to learn about the history of elk and the habitat work undertaken while restoring elk populations to the Commonwealth. New improvements such as upgraded parking areas and paths, elevated walkways and observation platforms are enhancing the experience for those who have made the journey to view Pennsylvania's largest mammal.

The thriving population of elk has increased hunting opportunities and created a boom in tourism, pumping millions of dollars into the local economy.

Through conservation partnerships that led to the acquisition of new lands, and the hard work of Game Commission habitat-management crews that, in some areas have turned barren former strip-mine sites into lush fields where elk graze, Pennsylvania's elk are thriving.



Re-opening the visitors center at Pymatuning, Crawford County

A premier educational facility is replacing the Pymatuning Visitors Center, which closed in 2015. The facility will offer an interpretive nature trail, observation platforms, an outdoor kiosk allowing birders to enter their sightings, a large state-of-the-art multi-use classroom, and an immersive educational experience. Goose blind and deer hunt drawings will be held at the facility, as will the annual Pymatuning Waterfowl Expo and Pennsylvania Waterfowl Print & Stamp Contest.

State Game Lands 214 already is one of the most frequently visited natural areas in Pennsylvania. It is a popular destination for hunting and fishing, as well as other types of outdoor activity, such as bird watching, jogging, bicycling, camping, hiking, and wildlife viewing.

The 17,088-acre lake on Pymatuning Reservoir offers more than 70 miles of publicly accessible shoreline, and nearby Pymatuning State Park receives more than 3 million visitors and generates more than \$80 million in tourism revenue annually.



The original center, built in the late 1930s, was closed and later demolished when repairs to the existing heating, plumbing and electrical systems could no longer keep up with modern codes and standards. The new facility is expected to stand on same site.



Reclaiming the Shohola Waterfowl Management Area on State Game Lands 180, Pike County

The Shohola Waterfowl Management Area is an expansive, open wetland ecosystem in the Delaware River Watershed capable of supporting a wide variety of plant and animal species including bald eagles, golden-winged warblers and many species of migratory birds and waterfowl. Eighty-eight species of birds breed here. The site was one of two selected to reintroduce bald eagles to Pennsylvania during the 1980s.

State Game Lands 180 encompasses more than 11,000 acres, of which 900 are open water and 765 are wetland habitat.

An invasive broadleaf plant, watermilfoil, is stressing many species of submerged and floating vegetation that are beneficial to wildlife. The Game Commission is working to decrease the prevalence of the nuisance milfoil from 70 percent of the submerged aquatic vegetation to less than 10 percent during the next five years, improving the area's ecological health and restoring a once-premier waterfowl resource.

Ducks Unlimited is helping provide necessary equipment and staff training to encourage waterfowl propagation in the area and agency staff are working with PennDOT to create additional waterfowl breeding zones.

More than 3.3 million residents and nonresidents within an hour-and-a-half's drive will soon have new opportunities to view wetland species from otters to osprey at viewing platforms, boardwalks, and marsh blinds. Visitors may even catch a glimpse of the old hack towers used during the bald eagle reintroduction.



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Promoting our legacy at a new conservation museum, State Game Lands 46, Lancaster County

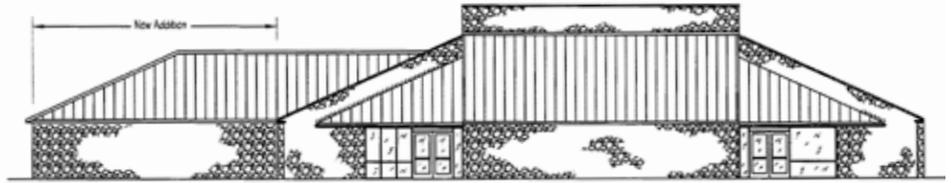
A museum highlighting Pennsylvania's rich wildlife resource history will soon have a home in Lancaster County at Middle Creek. Exhibits will tell the story of habitat destruction and species declines that led to the formation of the Game Commission, and the decades of work involved in creating and maintaining healthy wildlife populations and habitat.

The new Conservation Heritage Museum is a partnership between the Game Commission and the Conservation Officers of Pennsylvania (COPA), a nonprofit organization comprised mostly of current and retired Game Commission employees. During the past several years, members of COPA have worked to raise money to help fund museum exhibits and to purchase and catalogue a large inventory of conservation artifacts.

The Middle Creek Visitors Center is within an hour's drive of more than 1.6 million Pennsylvanians. Because of its proximity to such a highly populated part of the state, the new museum offers a unique opportunity to introduce people to wildlife conservation, wildlife viewing, and the role hunting and trapping play in conservation.

Unique to this museum is the concept of a rotating display. The rotation will feature historical artifacts that tell various stories about conservation in Pennsylvania and will change throughout the year. Featured speakers will tell the story of the artifacts on display. By keeping the museum fresh and new, and incorporating talented speakers, the agency intends to reach a diverse audience with its conservation message.

Tracy Graziano photo



The Conservation Heritage Museum will be an addition to the Visitors Center at Middle Creek, where, annually, more than 100,000 snow geese pass through between the months of January and March.



Protecting Pennsylvania's diverse wildlife resource, statewide

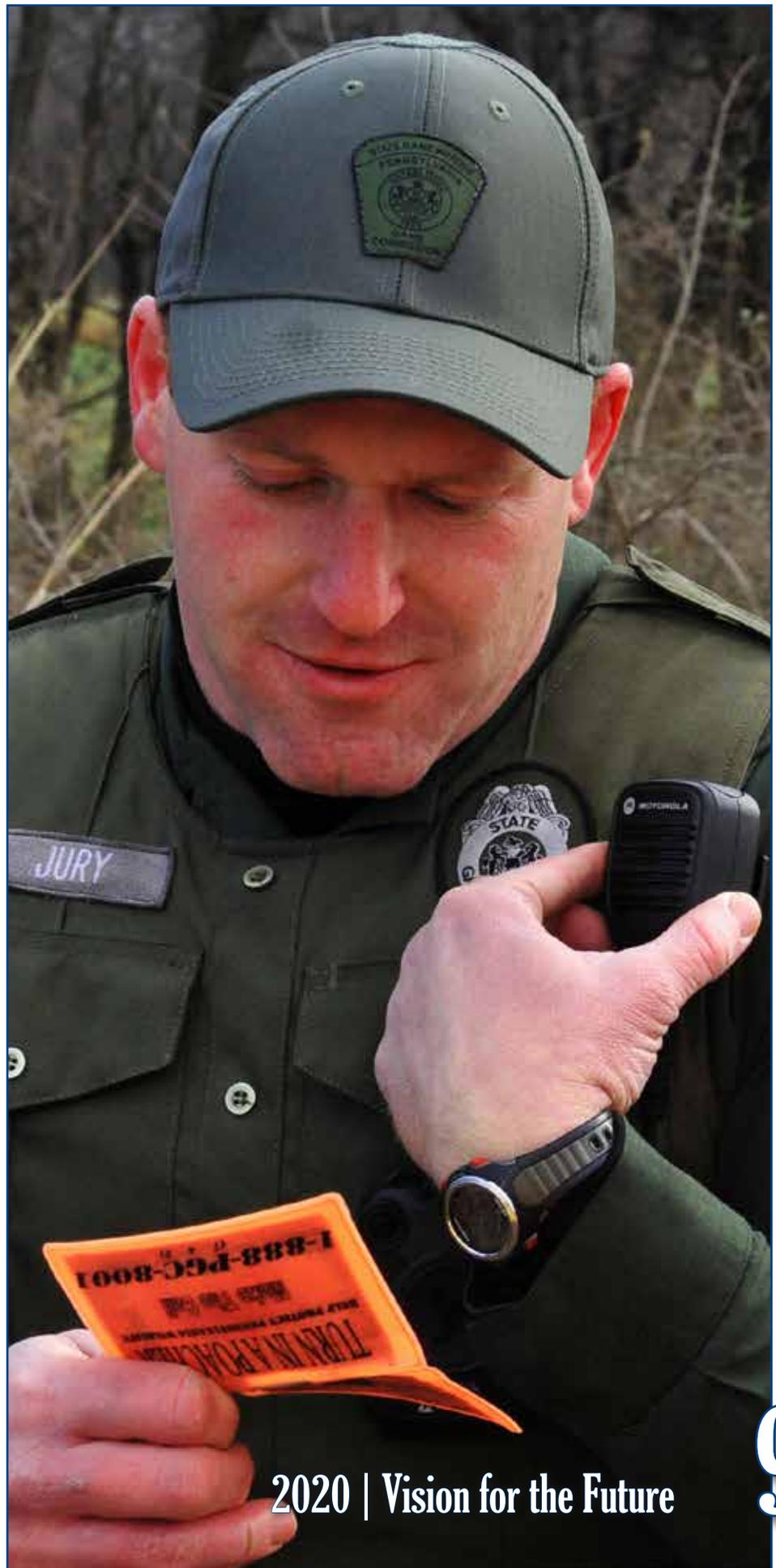
The Game Commission is making improvements to its wildlife protection efforts, and will soon be adding approximately 52 new wardens to the workforce from two cadet classes over the next three years. The agency will be updating officer equipment and vehicles, allowing wardens to be more efficient and effective at their jobs.

The Game Commission's migration to the PA-STARNet P25 System will improve the agency's two-way radio communications capabilities and save license buyer's dollars by the decommissioning the legacy radio system. These improvements are a cost-effective use of evolving communication technology that will:

- increase efficiency of operations and adhere to Governor's Office Management Directive requiring all state agencies with two-way radio communication needs to migrate to the STARNet system,
- dramatically increase the areas where coverage is available,
- increase officer safety, and
- increase response to calls and requests from the public.

Game wardens are sworn peace officers with statewide law-enforcement authority. While enforcing wildlife laws is a core responsibility, fulfillment of an officer's full range of duties requires significant training and responsibility. Their duties extend into wildlife surveys, wildlife trap-and-transfer, field research, and providing conservation and education programs, including Hunter-Trapper Education, to civic groups and public schools. They also represent the agency at conservation club meetings, and respond to nuisance wildlife complaints, reports of injured wildlife, and calls about wildlife suspected to be rabid.

Joe Kosack photo



The Importance of Hunting

Pennsylvania's hunting tradition traces as far back as its first inhabitants.

And while more has changed than has stayed the same in the time since, wildlife and hunting opportunities remain. They are better now than ever before, and hunters haven't stopped passing along the tradition.

Hunting in Pennsylvania often is a part of life. It's what you grew up doing, learning at the side of a friend or family member. And no matter your age, it's likely something you still look forward to with Christmas-day anticipation and enjoy as much now as you ever did.

It's no wonder why.

From whitetails to waterfowl, black bears to snowshoe hares, and gobblers to grouse, Pennsylvania offers hunters an incredible array of opportunity – one hunters so often make the most of.

The state's Big Game Records book largely has been rewritten in the last two decades as the hunter-harvest of giant bucks has become common, and world-class bear and elk entries have continued to increase.

However, while the chance to take home a trophy on any given day afield is undeniable, it's usually not what drives hunters or makes hunting in Pennsylvania so special. Simply spending time with friends or family, or getting away from it all and enjoying the outdoors, wildlife, and the hunt itself, more often are motivators.

Most hunters will tell you, any harvest is a trophy.



Hal Korber

“Dad, I love spending time with you outdoors.”

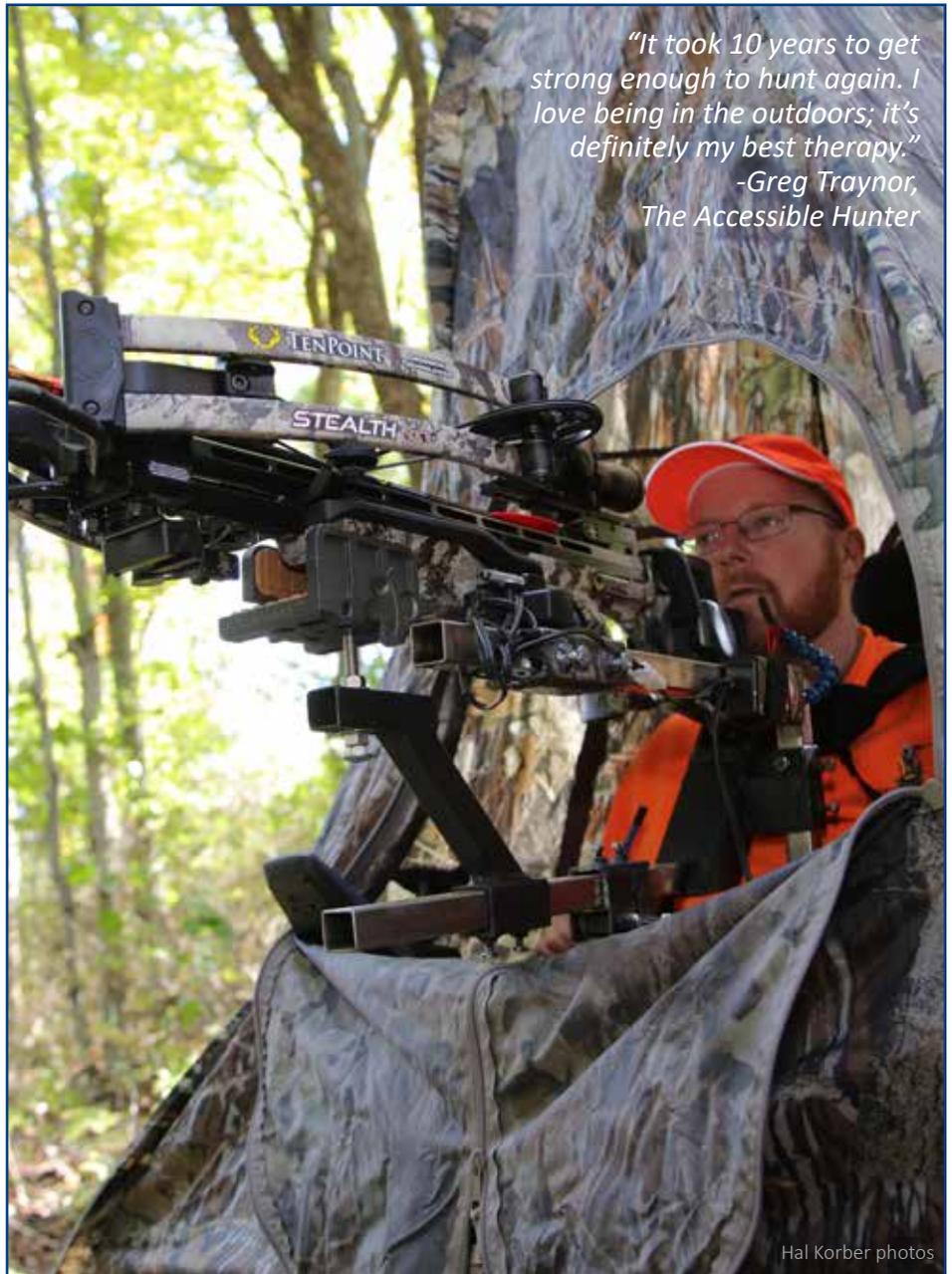
Improving access for hunters who use mobility devices

Hunters who use mobility devices are gaining better access to Pennsylvania state game lands.

The agency is working with constituents to creatively capitalize on landscape changes occurring as a result of approved oil, gas and mineral development in an effort to provide greater access to state game lands for hunters who require mobility devices to move about while pursuing their sport. Well pad access roads are adding to the travel network navigable by hunters using mobility devices.

For example, sedimentation ponds at these sites are being repurposed as out-of-vehicle waterfowling locations. Gas line rights-of-way are providing improved lines of sight and accessible vantage points and game-retrieval trails for hunting a variety of species. Firebreaks planted in clover and mowed to facilitate safe fire management are being cultivated for use as accessible small-game hunting spaces and providing continuous accessible travel loops, scenic sight lines and shot opportunities for hunters using mobility devices.

The agency is committed to collaborating with this group of hunters to expand hunting experiences and opportunities on state game lands statewide.



"It took 10 years to get strong enough to hunt again. I love being in the outdoors; it's definitely my best therapy."

*-Greg Traynor,
The Accessible Hunter*

Hal Korber photos

The agency is utilizing pre-existing infrastructure to efficiently and effectively increase access to state game lands. Hunters with disabilities soon will have access to miles of roads created for gas extraction. And, mowed field perimeters will provide access to hunt waterfowl, deer, turkey, pheasants, doves, and other small game.



Providing world-class small-game hunting at Blue Marsh, State Game Lands 280, Berks County

At more than 5,000 acres, the Blue Marsh area has the potential to become not only a small-game destination for Pennsylvania, but for the entire East Coast. Ring-necked pheasant, rabbit, dove, and woodcock are just a few of the species targeted with this new habitat initiative.

Located within an hour's drive for 1.9 million Pennsylvania residents, this unique project has the potential to provide vast opportunities for hunters and wildlife watchers.

This game lands has fallen short of its potential due to high-intensity agriculture on site. Modern agricultural practices don't benefit small game, in fact, they can and do destroy small-game hunting opportunities.

The Game Commission's long-term goal is to transition the Blue Marsh area to a model state games lands focused on providing state-of-the-art small-game hunting by balancing quality small-game habitat with wildlife-friendly agricultural practices.

This change will result in dramatic improvements for hunters. For example, the Game Commission currently releases 6,000 pheasants annually for hunters to enjoy on this game lands. When this project is complete, this game lands will be able to support the release of around 12,000 pheasants every year. This transformative project will dramatically enhance rabbit hunting and provide one of the largest continuous tracts of small-game habitat in the state.

Providing high-quality dove hunting opportunities is another focus. Highly managed dove fields strategically placed throughout the game lands will provide hunting opportunities for thousands of dove hunters.

Creating these small-game habitats will require intensive use of controlled burns, invasive plant control, development of young forest habitats, and a strategic use of wildlife-friendly agriculture practices. The result is a small-game oasis second to none.

Economic Impact of Wildlife Watching



The 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation estimated that wildlife watchers in the United States spent \$75.9 billion during that year.

Grassland Bird Species Benefited at Blue Marsh



- Eastern Meadowlark
- Grasshopper sparrow
- Savannah Sparrow
- Field Sparrow
- American kestrel
- Long-eared owl
- Short-eared owl
- Barn owl
- Northern harrier

Pheasants Forever Approves



"Blue Marsh offers a unique opportunity to manage for grassland dependent species and is large enough to make landscape scale impacts for game and nongame wildlife that depend on this type of habitat. Maximizing small-game hunting opportunities by restoring and maintaining grasslands is a great way to ensure the future of hunting."
-- Kent Adams, East Region Director
Pheasants Forever, Inc.

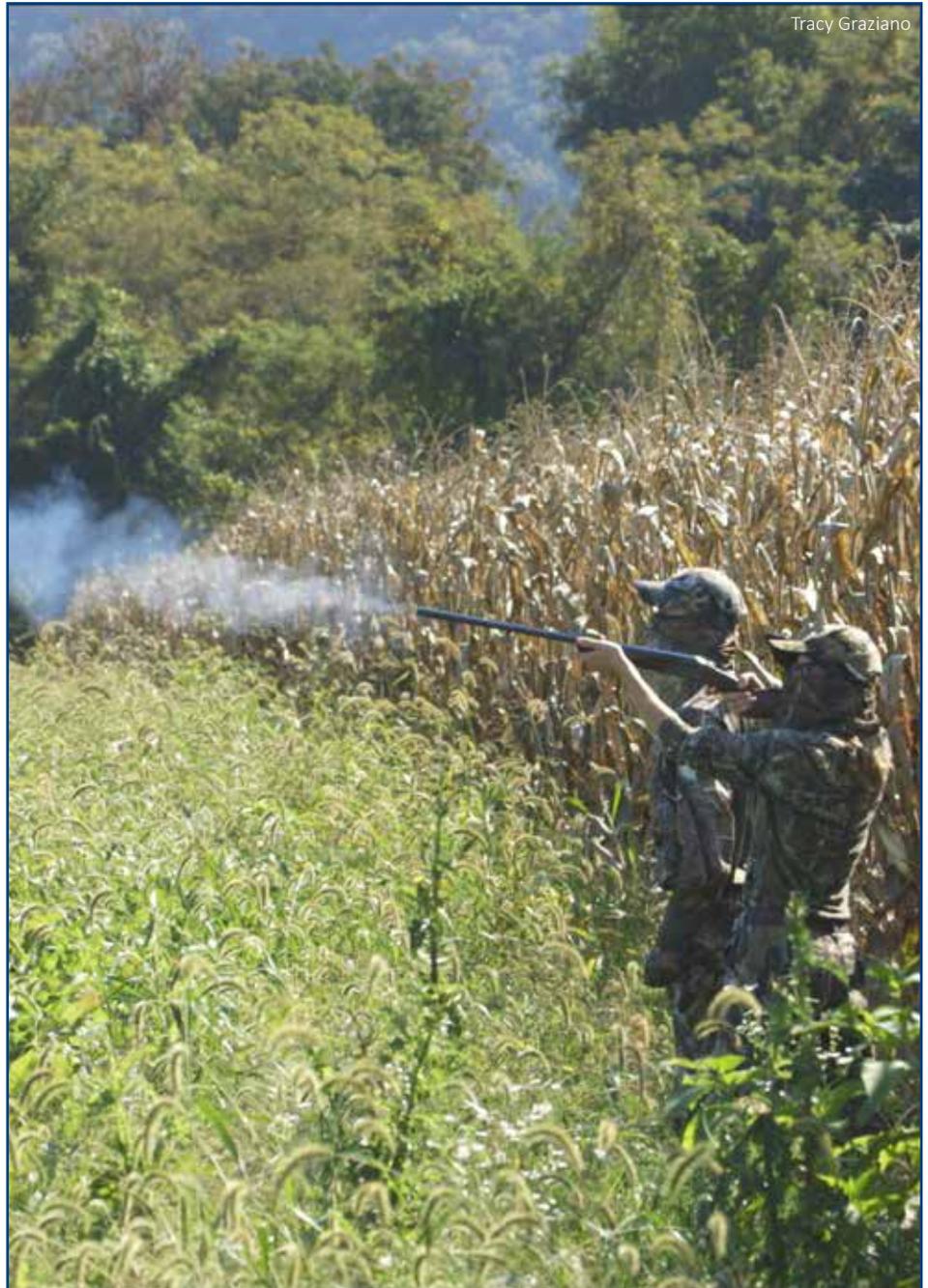
Improving small-game hunting at Haldeman Island, State Game Lands 290, Dauphin County

Located only 20 minutes North of Harrisburg, Haldeman Island provides a unique opportunity for high-quality small-game hunting, waterfowling, and wildlife viewing. This 1,051-acre game lands is a hidden gem; it's time to let this premier game lands shine.

Nestled at the confluence of the Juniata and Susquehanna rivers in Reed Township, Dauphin County, State Game Lands 290 is a mosaic of water impoundments, wetlands, agriculture, woodlots, and shrublands. Converting this game lands to a showcase of wildlife management will require transitioning agricultural into wildlife-friendly practices, establishing more grassland and shrubland habitats, and providing high-quality waterfowl hunting opportunities.

The 12 water impoundments on the main island were created by past mining activities. Steep banks with poor soils, deep water, and the challenge of managing invasive plant species have prevented the establishment of high-quality habitats for waterfowl.

Whether your passion is hunting pheasants, woodcock, waterfowl, doves, or wildlife viewing, State Game Lands 290 represents a go-to destination for the Harrisburg area.



Upgrades coming to Haldeman Island

- Providing access via a public bridge to the island
- Improving and creating more small-game habitat
- Adding the island to the list of locations receiving pheasant releases during pheasant season
- Establishing managed dove fields to provide enhanced dove hunting opportunities
- Improving existing water impoundments and installing a 10-inch water pump to create better habitat for waterfowl and wading birds
- Improving 100 acres of woodcock habitat
- Installing seven waterfowl hunting blinds for hunters
- Developing a public boat launch to support waterfowling and fishing opportunities
- Resurfacing 2,700 feet of walking trails and constructing public a viewing platform to support wildlife viewing opportunities

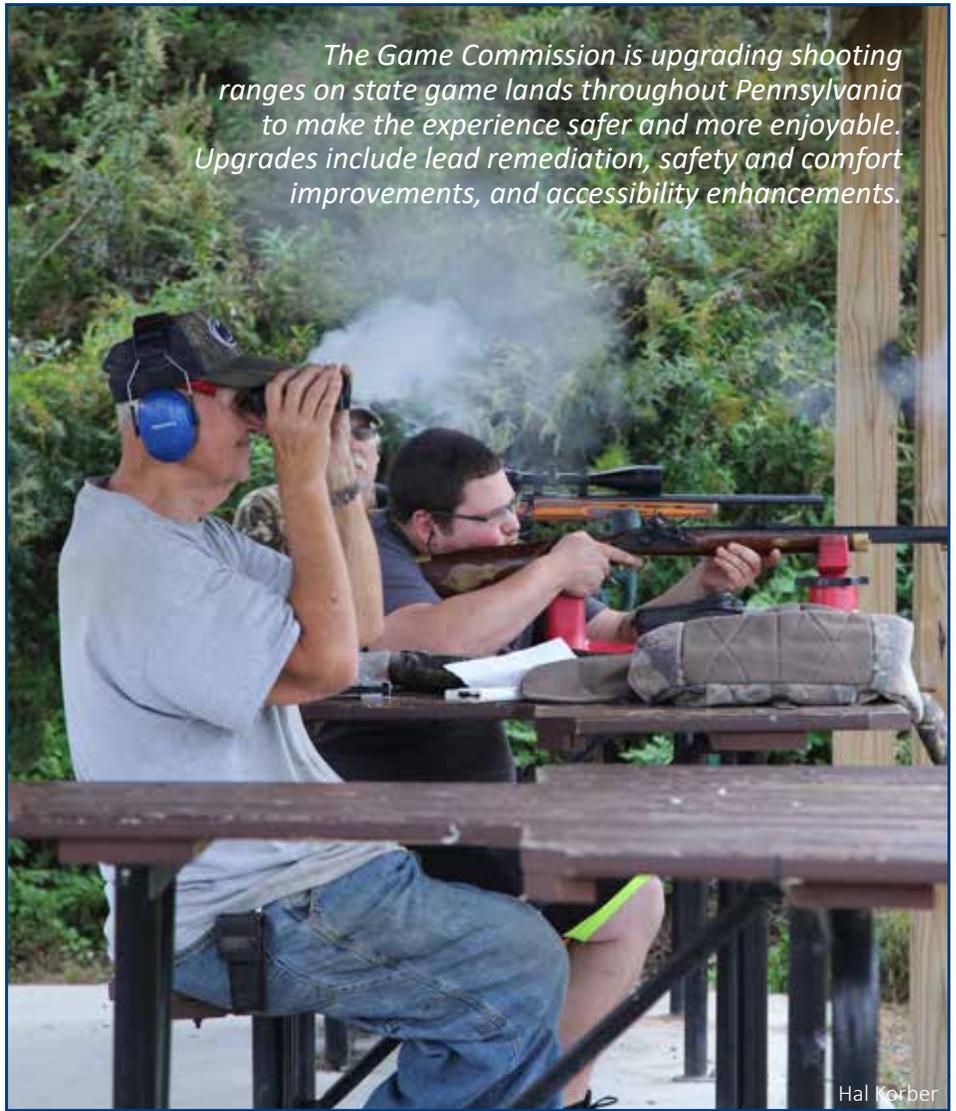
Creating a better shooting range experience, statewide

In order to meet the needs of hunters and shooters, the Game Commission will be creating premier shooting facilities that exceed customer expectations in safety, comfort and accessibility.

The commission is improving user comfort by upgrading shooting benches and installing shelter over shooting stations to provide protection from inclement weather. Ranges are being evaluated for opportunities where improvements are necessary to make them accessible to a wider variety of users. Plans are in the works for additional lead remediation, and updates, repairs and maintenance to backstops along with appropriate drainage to ensure the lead doesn't leave the range.

The agency is exploring the costs and benefits of providing additional public shooting opportunities, and installed its first archery range in Montgomery County in 2017. The commission is evaluating other sites for archery ranges as well.

The Game Commission is upgrading shooting ranges on state game lands throughout Pennsylvania to make the experience safer and more enjoyable. Upgrades include lead remediation, safety and comfort improvements, and accessibility enhancements.



Hal Korber



The Importance of Habitat

Wildlife can't exist without adequate habitat. And with each passing day in Pennsylvania, wildlife habitat loses ground to new development.

There's likely never been a time in our state's history where it's been more important to protect the habitat that remains and enhance existing habitat to better benefit wildlife.

The state's hunters and others who care about conservation have made a lasting investment in wildlife's future by contributing to the Game Commission's more than 1.5 million-acre system of state game lands. These lands not only provide public hunting and trapping opportunities, but just as importantly, a network of permanently preserved wildlife habitat.

Through things like the removal of sunlight-shielding timber and the use of controlled burns to eliminate invasive plant species and promote regeneration of mast-producing trees; through the planting and maintenance of native grasses and the development of young forests that are optimally beneficial to so many wildlife species, the Game Commission works tirelessly to get the most out of the habitat state game lands provide.

Wildlife in our existing era faces many challenges. Diseases such as white-nose syndrome and West Nile virus have decimated cave-bat and ruffed grouse populations, while chronic wasting disease poses a serious threat to Pennsylvania's deer and elk, and its deep-rooted hunting tradition.

Quality habitat is the catch-all that helps all wildlife weather difficult times.



Hal Korber photo

Controlled burns improve wildlife habitat and hunting opportunity by increasing soft-mast production in shrubs, such as blueberry, huckleberry, and blackberry; rejuvenating succulent browse plants preferred by deer and elk; promoting oak habitats and their vitally important acorns and maintaining grasses and broad leaf plants sought by brooding turkeys and grouse.

*In working for better habitat,
wildlife wins, and so do we.*

YOUR STATE WILDLIFE AGENCY

Pennsylvania's wildlife management has had many successes during its brief history, but was borne of great tragedy. The state's wildlife was severely depleted by the end of the 1890s and in 1895 the General Assembly responded by creating the Pennsylvania Game Commission. The fledgling agency protected wildlife, restocked several species that had been extirpated, and developed wildlife habitat, fostering an environment where wildlife could begin to recover and would eventually thrive.

Mission

To manage wild birds, wild mammals, and their habitats for current and future generations

Vision

To be the leader among wildlife agencies, and champion of all wildlife resources and Pennsylvania's hunting and trapping heritage

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Richard Palmer, *Deputy Executive Director*
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PARTNERS MAKE IT POSSIBLE:

The agency is committed to being connected with its constituents and engages with its partners in actively conserving Pennsylvania's wildlife resources. While they are too numerous to name and only a few are mentioned in this report, we thank all the volunteers and organizations who help, for their persistent support and generosity in protecting and promoting the state's wildlife. Partners make it possible.

