

About The Pennsylvania Game Commission

For more than 100 years, the Game Commission has managed the Commonwealth's wildlife resources for all Pennsylvanians. With the help of more than 700 full-time employees and thousands of part-timers and volunteers, the agency provides a host of benefits to wildlife, state residents and visitors.

Wildlife has always been an important part of Pennsylvania's cultural heritage. Every day, it touches the lives of countless Pennsylvanians and most of us consider it to be a state treasure.

In the late 1800s, however, wildlife was dwindling as a result of deforestation, pollution and unregulated hunting and trapping. From this dark period emerged the Game Commission, created by the state Legislature to protect and conserve wildlife, which was then commonly referred to as "game." The wildlife diversity we enjoy today is largely due to the agency's progressive, scientifically-based wildlife management programs and support from countless Pennsylvanians and outdoors organizations. It's a partnership that has accomplished much for wildlife since the turn of the century, and no doubt will continue.

Pennsylvanians also are indebted to Legislators and Governors, both past and present, who have had the courage to enact critically important laws that set the stage for the state's wildlife recovery, as well as the creation of the "State Game Lands system". They worked closely with the Game Commission to develop wildlife-friendly legislation that became the envy of the nation and the glue that held the Commonwealth's then-fragile wildlife restoration effort together.

Funded primarily by hunting and fur taker license sales; State Game Lands timber, mineral and oil/gas revenues; and a federal excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition; the Commission is almost entirely supported by hunters and trappers, or assets that have been procured with license dollars. The Commission does not receive state General Fund appropriations. More than half its annual revenue comes from license sales, a relatively fixed income source. License fees cannot be increased without approval of the General Assembly, and fee increases have historically come only about every 10 years.

Wildlife Management

The Commission is responsible for managing all of Pennsylvania's wild birds and mammals. Wildlife Management is conservation in its most recognizable form. It's the process used to manage game and other wildlife populations, and includes: monitoring wildlife populations; establishing laws and regulations; setting seasons and bag limits; making habitat improvements; providing outright protection; informing and educating the public; and assessing public expectations and satisfaction. Each offers varying benefits to wildlife and Pennsylvanians.

The Commonwealth's white-tailed deer, black bear and wild turkey populations serve as excellent examples of successful wildlife management. Although each species is hunted, today they inhabit the state in record numbers as a result of Commission programs involving trap-and-transfer work, habitat improvement, research and regulated seasons and bag limits. Pennsylvania currently is home to more deer, bear and turkeys than when colonists first arrived. Elk also are doing incredibly well. Pennsylvania's elk population is larger now than any time in the past 150 years. Its success has been a direct result of modern wildlife management.

One of the agency's more visible examples of wildlife management is species reintroductions. The Commission successfully has reintroduced beavers, river otters, elk, bald eagles, fishers, ospreys and peregrine falcons. Your chance of seeing one of these species is greater today than ever because of these efforts. Other examples include managing endangered and threatened species; constructing and placing nest structures for bluebirds, peregrine falcons and wood ducks; gating caves to protect important bat colonies; performing field studies on wildlife; and conducting wildlife censuses and surveys. Recent field studies have centered on endangered Indiana bats and the prolific white-tailed deer. Some of the wildlife research being conducted by the Game Commission is garnering national attention in the field of wildlife management; however, wildlife populations were dwindling as a result of deforestation, pollution and unregulated hunting and trapping.

Wildlife Protection

Wildlife protection is conducted by a force comprising about 200 full-time Wildlife Conservation Officers and more than 500 Deputy Wildlife Conservation Officers. A full-time officer's area of responsibility is about 350 square miles; deputies help patrol it. Wildlife Conservation Officer duties include: enforcing hunting and trapping laws to protect wildlife; investigating hunting accidents; conducting wildlife surveys; assisting in wildlife research projects; and providing educational programs. Officers are uniformed and have received extensive law enforcement and wildlife management training.

All full-time officers are graduates of the Game Commission's Ross Leffler School of Conservation, America's first game protector or warden school. More than 500 officers have graduated from the school since it was established in 1936.

Wildlife Conservation Officers are empowered to enforce the Game and Wildlife Code, Fish and Boat Code, Forestry Laws and Pennsylvania's Crimes Code; they also frequently assist local and state police, especially in rural areas. Our officers have been involved in missing person searches, guiding police in remote wilderness areas and drug eradication programs. Officers also provide assistance in emergency responses to accidents and disasters.

Wildlife Habitat Management

The Commission is deeply involved in Wildlife Habitat Management, because it is one of the most effective and important ways to manage wildlife. To ensure wild animals always have food and shelter, the agency, since 1920, has been purchasing lands for inclusion in its State Game Lands system, which currently contains about 300 separate tracts comprising a total of more than 1.4 million acres. Each State Game Lands has an individual management plan designed to improve wildlife habitat and provide recreational opportunities. Plans are carried out by the agency's Food and Cover Corps. Hunters, anglers, hikers, birdwatchers and other wildlife enthusiasts are welcome on State Game Lands. The Commission also maintains visitors/learning centers at its Middle Creek and Pymatuning wildlife management areas; the Winslow Hill elk viewing area with a pavilion/amphitheatre in Benezette Township, Elk County; and places where there's a great chance to see wildlife and an opportunity to view bird and mammal displays.

The agency runs three cooperative public access programs that open through agreements about 4.5 million acres of private property to public hunting and trapping. The Farm Game, Forest Game and Safety Zone programs provide people outstanding hunting and trapping opportunities. Landowners participating in these programs receive pheasant stockings and habitat improvements. Other programs benefiting landowners offered by the Game Commission, or in which the agency participates, include: the Streambank Fencing Program, where the agency provides labor, equipment and materials to fence livestock out of streams and ultimately improve water quality and streamside habitat; and the Partners For Wildlife, which provides manpower and equipment to restore and build wetlands. The Commission owns and operates the Howard Nursery, which annually produces about five million seedlings to improve wildlife habitat on public and private properties. Seedlings are given to landowners enrolled in the agency's public access programs and planted on game lands and other public lands. The agency also provides a wildlife seed mix to landowners interested in providing food and cover for wildlife.

In addition, the Commission annually reviews hundreds of land development permit applications (road, bridge, building construction) for wildlife impacts. If problems are apparent, the agency recommends ways to reduce or eliminate wildlife conflicts.

Information and Education

Recognizing an informed and educated public better understands wildlife and the basic concepts of wildlife management, education has always been a critical component of the Commission's operations. A recent survey showed one of every two Pennsylvanians is looking for more information about wildlife. To meet that demand, the agency dedicates an extraordinary amount of manpower to the never-ending effort of spreading the word and

educating Pennsylvanians about wildlife. Officers, professional staff and countless volunteers annually log tens of thousands of hours giving wildlife programs at schools, fairs, outdoors shows and banquets.

Over the past three years, the Game Commission's website - www.pgc.state.pa.us - has become one of the agency's chief forms of communication. It provides the latest breaking news, wildlife information, hunter-trapper education course schedules, and links to other important wildlife management sources. The site also has an e-commerce section where individuals may purchase licenses and merchandise. The site's audience has continued to grow since it went live in 1997. It has become an essential reference link on most major outdoors website in the state.

With the help of 3,000 volunteer instructors, the agency annually trains about 40,000 students in its Hunter-Trapper Education Program. The agency also offers a Bowhunter Education Program to further promote safe and responsible bowhunting. The Commission coordinates Pennsylvania's Project WILD program, which provides factual information concerning wildlife and habitat to hundreds of thousands of students. The statewide Project WILD network has 12,000 certified instructors, many of whom are school teachers. In addition, the agency promotes the Becoming an Outdoors Woman Program. BOW provides interested women with a means to acquire or sharpen outdoors skills such as shooting, hunting, fishing and orienteering.

Special Services

The Commission offers many other services. It issues all hunting and furtaking licenses and wildlife rehabilitator permits; conducts testing for wildlife diseases; licenses and regulates wildlife pest controllers; and maintains an elk viewing area with an educational pavilion in Elk County's Benezette Township. The agency also annually raises and releases about 100,000 pheasants; provides shooting ranges on many State Game Lands throughout the state; helps coordinate the Youth Hunter Education Challenge; and annually holds a Hunter Education Youth Essay Contest, as well as Working Together For Wildlife fine-art print competitions.