

# The GPS - Guiding Principles and Strategies

## Michigan Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Division Strategic Plan 2021-2026

### *Working together for Michigan's wildlife and wild places*

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#### Welcome

We are on a journey to ensure that wildlife conservation continues to play a defining role in Michigan's future. Our state's wildlife is a remarkable resource that belongs to all of us. From iconic game species including deer, turkey and elk to nongame species such as osprey, moose and peregrine falcon, Michigan's wildlife provides many ecological benefits and enhances outdoor recreation opportunities that improve people's physical, psychological, and social well-being.

The benefits go even further. Michigan's wildlife has shaped our state's development and influences our economy, attracts tourists, and is critical to quality of life. It is not a stretch to say that the state's long, strong ties to wildlife and the natural world do, in fact, color residents' views and pride about what it means to be a Michigander.

The Wildlife Division of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources is responsible for managing this public resource on behalf of this state's residents, to be enjoyed today and conserved for tomorrow. This document *Guiding Principles and Strategies*, or *the GPS*, first developed in 2010 and updated here continues to set our strategic direction in conserving of Michigan's wildlife resources for the next leg of our journey.

We are truly fortunate in this country because wildlife belongs to the public; the state government has the privilege and responsibility of managing wildlife for the benefit of current and future generations. This public trust doctrine, along with dedicated fund sources first established in 1937, is at the core of wildlife restoration and management in the United States. State wildlife agencies across the country rely on hunters and trappers, through hunting license fees and excise taxes on guns, ammunition and archery equipment, to fund the majority of wildlife conservation. Conservation throughout the 20th century focused on restoring populations decimated by overharvest, loss of habitat and environmental contamination. The early 21st century is bringing new challenges as well as opportunities.

(Photo: Brown and white striped Barred owl sitting on a wooden tree stump.)

## Establishing Waypoints

Conservation challenges are more global and more complicated than ever. Invasive species and wildlife disease continue to present new threats to the health and well-being of wildlife, habitats and people. Climate change is not only magnifying these effects, but also altering wildlife and plant distributions and ecological processes, which could fundamentally transform Michigan's ecosystems and wildlife communities. These challenges will require even greater adaptability and forward-looking action.

In addition to these ecological challenges, people's values related to wildlife are changing. Hunting and trapping participation continues to decline across the country, including Michigan. Coupled with this trend, people are increasingly more interested in wildlife protection and non-consumptive activities over more traditional, consumptive ways of engaging with wildlife. Changes in the distribution and abundance of some species have led to increased human-wildlife interactions, both positive and negative. We also are responding to increasing expectations for engagement in decision-making, among both traditional and new stakeholders. Our public trust responsibilities and the growing demand to align conservation initiatives to changes in societal value is constrained by the current funding model for wildlife management.

In the midst of a global pandemic in 2020-2021, the country saw increased participation in outdoor recreation, including wildlife-related activities. People found themselves with more leisure time, and many people traded indoor activities for safer outdoor activities such as hiking, birding, hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching. At the same time, people took a greater interest in urban and backyard wildlife. An unexpected bright spot, the pandemic highlighted the unmistakable value of nature and public lands to people's well-being. We hope to continue to demonstrate the role the DNR and the division play to support physical and mental health by providing diverse opportunities to connect with Michigan's wildlife.

These trends point to challenges, as well as opportunities, for the division to be responsive and enhance the relevancy of our work to the broader Michigan public. Our success in navigating the changing landscape of wildlife conservation will continue to be

tied closely to the wildlife stewardship ethics of our partners, stakeholders, and the public. We look forward to continuing this journey with you!

## Strengthening Our Signal

As a division within the Department of Natural Resources, we are proud that the GPS aligns with department goals to:

- Protect natural and cultural resources.
- Ensure sustainable recreation use and enjoyment.
- Enable strong natural resource-based economies.
- Improve and build strong relationships and partnerships.
- Foster effective business practices and good governance.

To support the overarching DNR and Wildlife Division goals, collaboration is key. We comanage lands with the Forest Resources and Parks and Recreation divisions to provide multiple benefits (e.g., timber, recreation) to the public, while enhancing the conservation of wildlife and habitats. We work with the Fisheries Division on species and habitat conservation across the state. Our Law Enforcement Division plays a vital role in safeguarding our natural resources, including wildlife. The Finance and Operations Division is critical to our budget management, facility management and customer service. Marketing and Outreach Division collaborates with us on license sales, innovative materials about wildlife and supports hunting and trapping retention and recruitment efforts. These connections help magnify our work and help us better serve the public.

To strengthen our mission and goals, we also partner with a strong network of conservation leaders – nongovernment organizations, along with other state, federal, and local agencies – who do exceptional work. And as we look at the challenges ahead, we will continue to rely on and look for ways to strategically expand these relationships. The long-term conservation of wildlife and their habitats will take the best efforts of all of us.

(Photo: Two young women dressed for winter weather, standing on a beach holding guns and two geese that they hunted).

(Photo: An adult female deer looking straight at the camera).

## True North

### **Our mission:**

To enhance, restore and conserve the state's wildlife resources, natural communities and ecosystems for the benefit of current and future generations.

### **Our principles:**

**Public service:** In serving the public, we strive to be inclusive, to listen and to incorporate different perspectives into our work. We are committed to fostering and promoting an environment focused on inclusion and equity to expand and broaden the diversity of our beneficiaries. We will work to be fair and transparent in our processes and engagements to increase our trust and credibility with the public.

**Public trust responsibilities:** We uphold our responsibilities under the public trust doctrine, that wildlife resources are held in trust by government for the people of Michigan, both now and into the future. As the trust managers, we work to conserve wildlife on the people's behalf, balancing providing short-term benefits with long-term sustainability of our trust resources. The public trust doctrine is the foundation of our work, and we remain accountable to the public in fulfilling our trust obligations.

**Stewardship and sustainability:** We are committed to being good stewards of the land and wildlife resources, to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Our passion is tied to securing the future of Michigan's wildlife and their habitats.

**Scientific and adaptive management:** We believe scientific management is in the public interest, and we use sound science to inform management decisions, evaluate the outcomes of those decisions and adapt our management accordingly. We recognize that our understanding of ecosystems is incomplete and will improve with new information. Changes in climate and a global society create large-scale challenges (e.g., spread of invasive species and diseases) that will require continuous learning. We are committed to an adaptive, empirical approach to our stewardship through research, monitoring, and evaluation.

## Commitments to Change

These commitments outline our long-term desired future and give us direction on how to move toward where we want to be 20 years from now to meet the future challenges of wildlife conservation. These are areas of work that will add to our traditional efforts and will, simply and slowly, become how we function. Focusing on small strategic shifts allows us to learn and adapt.

1. We deliberately manage habitats and wildlife for a diverse set of values. Specifically, we address impacts the public cares about, such as:

- a. Health—recognizing the physical and emotional health of people is closely connected to the health of wildlife and our shared environment.
- b. Quality of life—providing diverse opportunities for people to connect with nature, including wildlife-based recreation.
- c. Ecological—managing wildlife, habitats and infrastructure to create resilient, sustainable ecosystems.
- d. Economic—addressing human-wildlife interactions that involve impacts to livelihoods.

e. Socio-cultural—acknowledging cultural relationships and the societal interactions created by wildlife.

2. We work with communities across Michigan, including local municipalities, regional governments and tribes, to improve conservation outcomes.

## Commitments to Change Objectives

These five-year objectives will begin moving us toward achieving the commitments to change. They are about strategic and incremental change and will account for 5 -10% of our work.

1. Expand partnerships with wildlife-related recreation organizations that work with groups we historically have not engaged to help connect more people with wildlife.
2. Collaborate with urban and suburban communities to address human-wildlife interactions while fostering appreciation and tolerance for wildlife.
3. Engage local governments and relevant planning groups to enhance wildlife conservation while addressing community

(Photo: A man in an orange hunting vest and green baseball cap kneels beside a brown and white dog and holds a pheasant that he hunted).

## Destination: Securing the Future of Michigan's Wildlife

**Our vision of success in 2026:** Michigan has healthy and diverse wildlife that people enjoy for wildlife-related recreation, including hunting, trapping and wildlife watching, and for its cultural, ecological and intrinsic value. Wildlife-compatible recreation continues to increase, resulting in more people valuing state-managed public lands. These connections drive more engagement and broaden wildlife-based activities that people participate in throughout the year. Our effective communications strengthen trusting relationships with partners and the public, improving wildlife conservation. The Wildlife Division culture is inclusive and is supported by open and honest communication, regular contact among employees, learning, and innovation. We continually evaluate our work to ensure we are effective stewards of Michigan's natural resources.

## Goals 1 and 2

### **Goal 1: Manage for healthy and sustainable wildlife populations.**

1. Develop and revise management plans and guidance for priority game species and focal species of greatest conservation need.
2. Conduct research to address priority management needs.
3. Monitor and sustain the health of wildlife populations.
4. Develop, recommend and implement policies and regulations to manage wildlife and human-wildlife interactions.

## **Goal 2: Protect, manage and enhance lands for sustainable wildlife populations and wildlife-compatible recreation.**

1. Develop and revise management plans and guidance for priority habitats.
2. Implement habitat management for priority species and habitats on public and private lands.
3. Conduct research and monitoring to improve management of wildlife habitats.
4. Maintain and develop public access and habitat management infrastructure for wildlife-compatible recreation and habitat management purposes.
5. Administer and protect Wildlife Division-managed lands for their primary purpose of wildlife, habitat management and wildlife-compatible recreation.
6. Align land portfolio with department and Wildlife Division priorities and goals.

(Photo: A beaver sitting in water, gnawing on a thin stick).

(Photo: Three people, standing in water, wearing waders and holding binoculars up to their eyes.)

## Goals 3 and 4

### **Goal 3: Connect people to wildlife, wildlife-compatible recreation, and public lands.**

1. Design and implement innovative education and outreach strategies.
2. Foster and promote diverse, equitable and inclusive external engagement and relationships to implement Wildlife Division goals.
3. Diversify opportunities for people to engage in wildlife-compatible recreation, including hunting and trapping, on public and private lands.
4. Increase public understanding of human-wildlife interactions while promoting positive outcomes.

### **Goal 4: Provide, manage and align a diverse set of resources to support division priorities.**

1. Foster an inclusive and trusting environment within the Wildlife Division and across the department through effective internal engagement and relationship building.
2. Provide and maintain effective work assets and business support tools.
3. Support the Wildlife Division through effective administration and strategic funding of programs.
4. Develop and implement systems that lead to continuous improvement in how we work.
5. Promote a forward-thinking workforce through inclusionary hiring practices and professional development.

## Continuing our Journey

The GPS will continue to be our navigational aid as we do the important work of

wisely conserving Michigan's wildlife resources. We will continue to look to our partners to magnify positive conservation outcomes. Involvement from the public, stakeholders, partners and staff is crucial for the success of this plan moving into the future. To fulfill our public trust responsibilities, we will continue to evaluate our progress to ensure we are being good stewards and publish an annual report to share our progress with fellow Michiganders.

We will continue to be adaptive and forward-looking, working across the division and the department and with partners, to ensure our management and conservation efforts are resilient and relevant in the face of the challenges ahead.

(Photo: A woman holding a kayak paddle and sitting in a red kayak. Several other kayakers are paddling behind her and are out of focus).

### Wildlife Division Mission

To enhance, restore and conserve the state's wildlife resources, natural communities and ecosystems for the benefit of current and future generations.

Link: [www.Michigan.gov/Wildlife](http://www.Michigan.gov/Wildlife)