

# Biennial Report on the Status of Hunter, Trapper and Angler Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3)

## The Sporting Heritage Council FY2021 & FY2022



The Angler R3 Fishmobile (see page 28) launched in FY21.

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# Executive Summary

We are pleased to submit the 2022 Biennial Report on the status of Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3) of Wisconsin hunters, trappers and anglers.

2011 Wisconsin Act 11 created the Sporting Heritage Council and directed it to send a report to the Wisconsin Governor, the chairperson of the Natural Resources Board, and the chief clerks of the Wisconsin Legislature every two years to update them on the status of the statewide efforts to recruit new hunters, trappers and anglers; retain those currently hunting, fishing and trapping; and reactivate those whose participation has lapsed.

In the past two years, the Sporting Heritage Council (council) has:

- Increased meeting frequency from one half-day meeting per year to approximately six two-hour evening meetings per year (every other month). This more regular schedule allows the council to provide timely input and discussion on issues concerning hunting, fishing, trapping and shooting.
- Met with members of the Natural Resources Board to discuss the future of hunting, fishing, trapping and shooting in Wisconsin.
- Provided input to the Hunter Education program through a focus group discussion regarding methods of administering hunter safety curriculum to students.
- Recommended pursuing potential legislative action to improve the recruitment, retention and reactivation of hunters and anglers through new license packages; a raffle or lottery for special licenses that would include harvest authorizations for limited draw species such as bear, bobcat, elk and/or sturgeon; loyalty license pricing; multi-year licenses; annual license renewal; simplifying hunting; and fishing stamp requirements.
- Drafted and approved a vision statement for the Sporting Heritage Council:

*Our vision is to enhance recreational opportunities, sound conservation practices, and purposeful inclusion of all people, resulting in greater recruitment, retention, and reactivation of hunters, anglers, trappers, target shooters, and other outdoor enthusiasts.*

## **Notes on Pandemic Impacts**

This report reflects circumstances brought on by the novel Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19), which emerged in Wisconsin in March of 2020 (the second half of FY20).

- In March 2020 and running through late summer 2021, all in-person R3 department sponsored events were placed on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- While in-person programs remained on hold, public participation in outdoor activities increased, particularly among first-time fishing license buyers.
- Retaining new outdoor participants remains a high priority for the DNR.

## Hunting

Overall gun deer license sales decreased by 10.4 percent from license year 2016 to 2021 with roughly 52,000 fewer residents purchasing a gun-deer hunting license in that time frame. Small game hunting license sales increased by approximately 7 percent during the global COVID-19 pandemic. However, overall, these have declined from 133,678 in license year 2016 to 115,264 in 2021. The DNR Hunter Education program certified 24,826 students in 2020 and 27,598 students in 2021. These numbers represent a 25.6 percent increase from the 21,976 students certified in 2016 and a roughly 11 percent decline compared to the number of students receiving hunter safety training in 2013 (31,103). The DNR Learn to Hunt and Hunt for Food programs were paused in March 2020 and resumed in August 2021.

## Trapping

The 21,098 resident trapping licenses sold in Wisconsin in 2021 represents a slight increase from years 2016-2020. This coincides with a general increase in outdoor recreation during the COVID-19 pandemic. With all resident licenses that include trapping combined, there were 23,256 total licensed trappers in Wisconsin 2021. Trapper education in Wisconsin is administered by the Wisconsin Cooperative Trapper Education Program (WCTEP). In 2021 there were 1,486 WCTEP graduates which accounts for 6 percent of the 2021 resident trappers.

## Angling

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the sale of resident fishing licenses and first-time-buyers (FTB) licenses exploded in Wisconsin and nationally. As pandemic restrictions have eased, the 10 percent surge in fishing license sales that occurred in 2020 was not sustained as the public returned to work and their former leisure activities.

### Wisconsin License Summaries

2021 License Year Sales - March 2020 – February 2021:

- Resident license sales declined 7 percent from 2020. Nonresident sales increased 3 percent.
- Inland Trout Stamps and Great Lakes Salmon and Trout Stamps increased 0 percent and 3 percent from 2020.
- Resident and nonresident FTB licenses were down 33 percent and 13 percent from 2020.

Early 2022 License Information – comparing 2022 with 2020 for the same timeframe, March – June 30:

- Resident Fishing License Down 13 percent
- Nonresident Fishing License Down 2 percent
- Inland Trout Stamp Down 6 percent
- Great Lakes Salmon/Trout Stamp Down 0 percent
- Resident FTB Down 42 percent
- Nonresident FTB Down 29 percent

See the appendix for more information on Wisconsin fishing license year sales trends for 2016-2021 and early fishing license information, along with national reports tracking fishing license sales during the pandemic.

## Communications and Outreach

R3 communication plans were created and implemented for both FY21 and FY22 to raise current and potential customer awareness of angling, hunting, and shooting sports in Wisconsin. The plans outlined strategies reaching approximately 2 million people each year and encompassed marketing and advertising for all programs housed within the R3 team (Angler R3, Hunter Education, Hunter R3, Shooting Sports). The main marketing outlets utilized included DNR's social media, digital ads (paid), Dan Small Outdoors Radio (paid), Wisconsin Radio

Network (paid), DNR press releases, web page updates, GovDelivery/Eblasts and retention emails, among some others.

## Hunting and Shooting Sports Participation

### Background

Hunting provides essential components necessary for long-term and effective natural resource conservation including providing a mechanism to manage wildlife populations, funding for management and a valuable connection to the natural world in an increasingly urbanized society. However, the total number of hunters (residents and nonresidents with any hunting license) the Wisconsin DNR reported to the federal government declined from roughly 770,000 in 2000 to about 692,200 in 2019. Despite increased participation in some types of hunting activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, total paid license holders continued to decline from 680,733 in 2020 to 666,670 in 2021.

### Hunting License Trends

The total number of gun deer hunting licenses purchased in Wisconsin has decreased by 52,137 from license year 2016 to 2021 (Figure 1). Nonresident gun deer license sales increased by 3.5 percent from 2019 to 2021, while resident gun deer license sales decreased by 3.3 percent from license year 2019 to 2021. The number of junior resident gun deer license sales decreased from 38,787 in license year 2019 to 35,123 in 2021, a 9.4 percent decline.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, small game hunting license sales increased by 7.3 percent from 2019 to 2020 (Figure 2). However, over half the growth seen during the first year of the pandemic was lost in license year 2021 (sales declined approximately 4.75 percent from license year 2020 to license year 2021). Over the long term, small game hunting license sales have decreased by over 13 percent from license year 2016 to 2021.

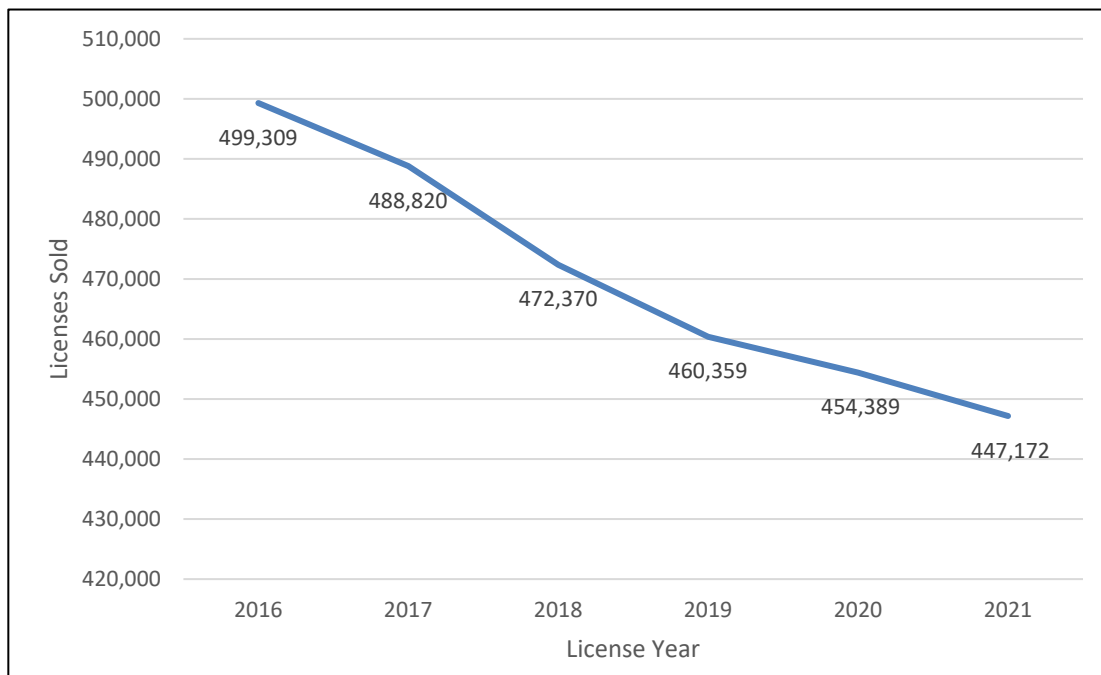


Figure 1. Total gun deer licenses (resident and nonresident) sold from license year 2016-2021. These numbers do not include sales of Conservation Patron or sports licenses.

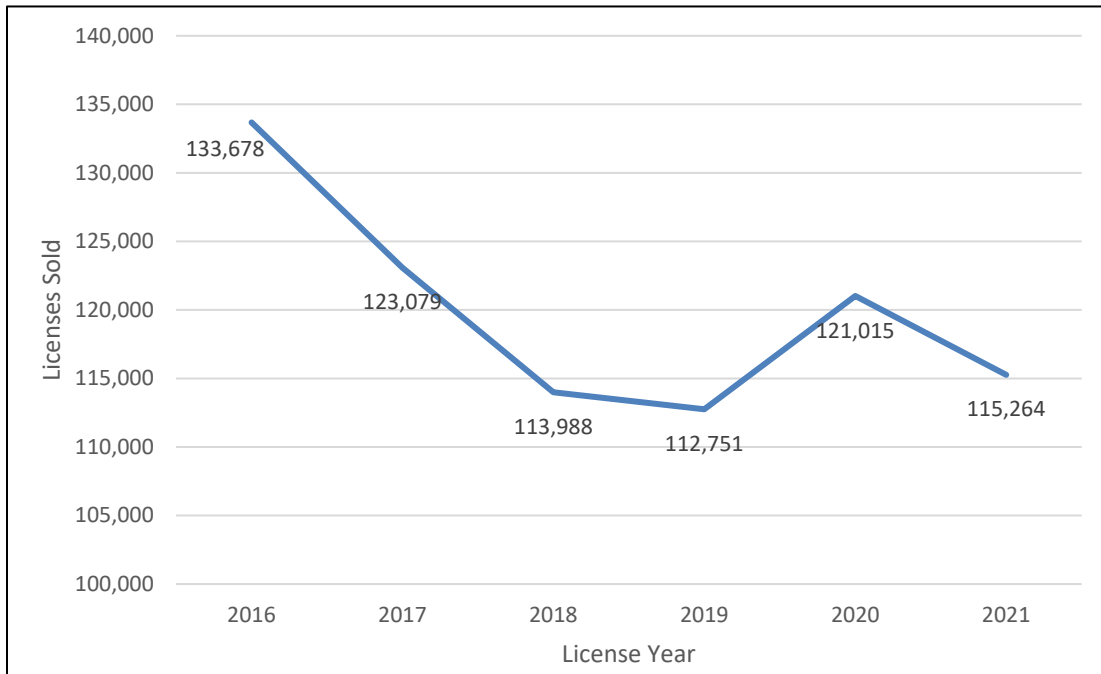


Figure 2. Total small game hunting licenses sold from license year 2016-2021. These numbers do not include sales of Conservation Patron or sports licenses.

### Hunter Education

The mission of the DNR Hunter Education Program and Bowhunter Education Program is to promote safety, conservation, and Wisconsin’s hunting heritage through a comprehensive educational program. Anyone born on or after January 1, 1973, must have completed a hunter education course to purchase any hunting license in Wisconsin. Wisconsin accepts hunter education certificates from any state, Canadian province, and Mexico.

The number of students completing hunter education annually in Wisconsin has trended downward over the past ten years, peaking at 31,103 students in 2013 (Figure 3). In 2020, 24,826 students received hunter education certification and 27,598 students received certification in 2021. The number of students completing bowhunter education certification annually has declined quickly, peaking at 2,461 students in 2014 and continually declining to 507 students in 2021 (Figure 4). Bowhunter education courses are typically not taught as stand-alone classes, but in addition to a hunter education course.

The Sporting Heritage Council is aware of high interest from stakeholders on the topic of strategic direction, particularly for in-person, virtual and hybrid hunter education options in Wisconsin. To address strategic direction for the Wisconsin Hunter Education program, organizations such as the Wisconsin Hunter Education Instructor Association and the Hunter Education Coalition are working collaboratively with DNR program staff to advise on the future of the Hunter Education program. For more on the Hunter Education program, see the FY21 hunter education annual report in the Appendix.

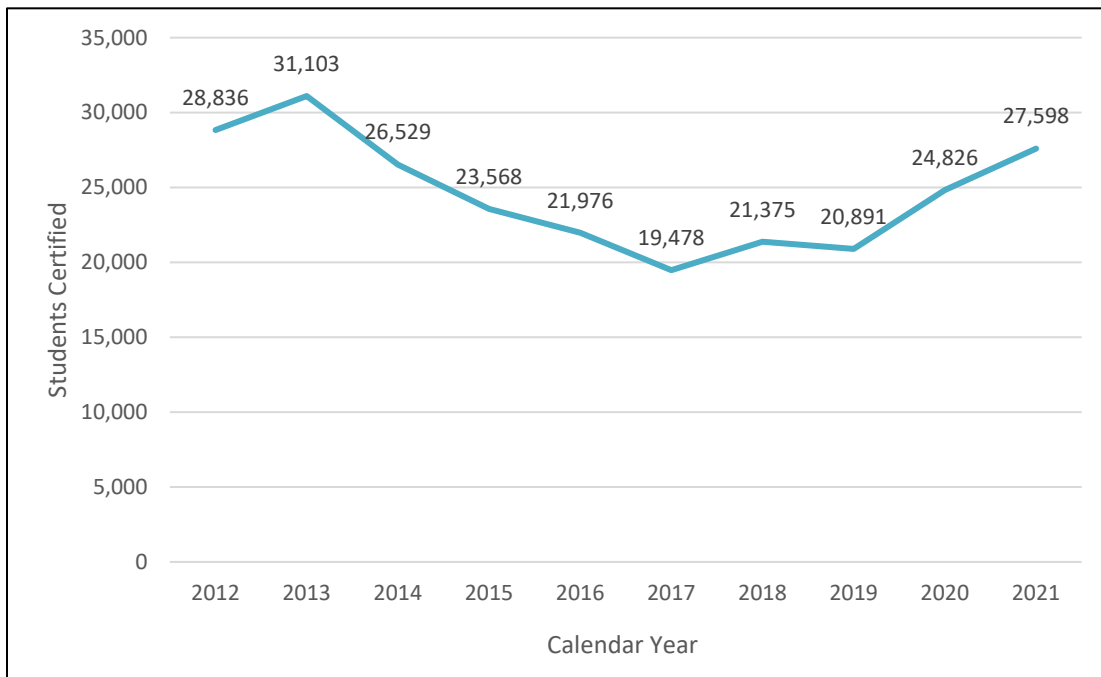


Figure 3. The number of students obtaining hunter education certification each year from calendar year 2012 to 2021.

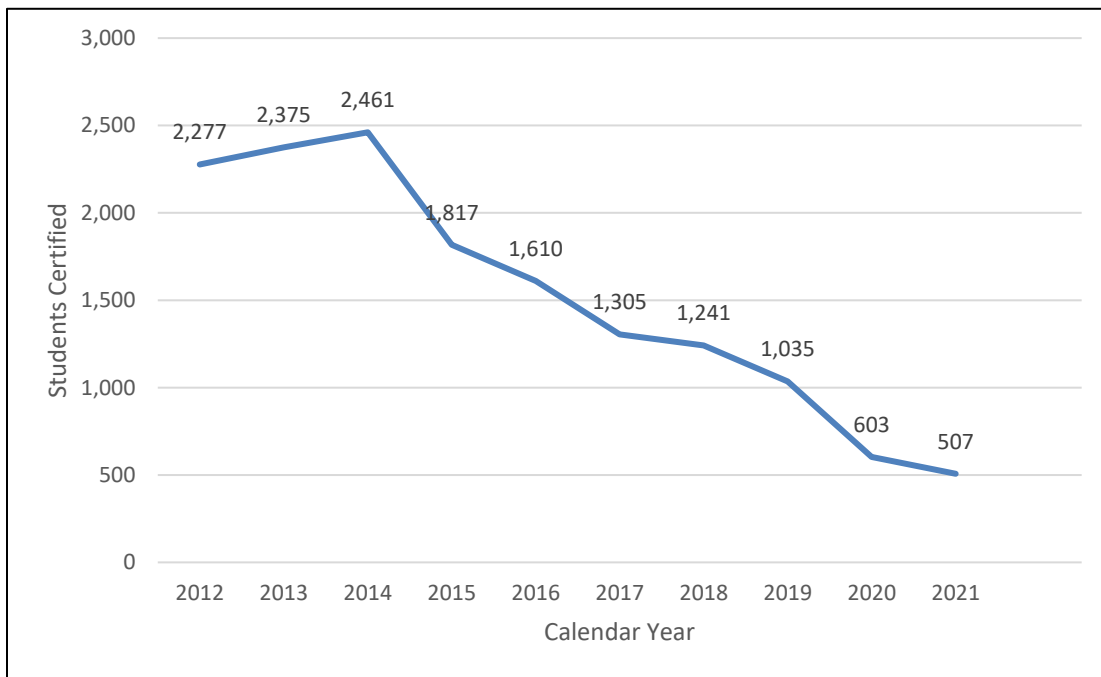


Figure 4. The number of students obtaining bowhunter education certification each year from 2012 to 2021.

# **Hunter Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation**

DNR staff have used a multifaceted approach to recruit, retain and reactivate hunters through the development of marketing strategies and adoption of several programs established by the Wisconsin State Legislature. Wisconsin is among the R3 leaders across state fish and wildlife agencies, largely due to an active legislature that identified decline in hunter participation and responded with legislation that gives DNR tools to address this decline. Wisconsin initiatives such as Learn to Hunt, the Mentored Hunting Law and first-time license buyer discounts are the direct product of legislative efforts, along with the creation of one of the first agency R3 teams in the nation.

## **Learn to Hunt Program**

Wisconsin's Learn to Hunt program, established in 1996, provides novice hunters the opportunity to learn hunting skills and techniques from experienced hunters. Novices are not required to have completed hunter safety prior to attending a Learn to Hunt event, and the department may waive certain hunting laws and requirements (such as season dates and state license and stamp fees) to facilitate a quality teaching and learning experience for experienced hunters and novices. Following a minimum of four hours of classroom and field instruction, novice hunters head afield with an experienced volunteer on a mentored hunt. This program is almost entirely supported by volunteer clubs and organizations across the state.

The number of Learn to Hunt (LTH) participants declined from 2014 to 2018 before showing a moderate increase in participation in 2019 (Figure 5). Some of this decline may be attributable to inconsistent data due to changes in process and staffing when the new R3 team was created; and, because LTH participant reports are requested from host organizations but not required for the program. The Learn to Hunt program saw the number of participants increase from 793 in 2018 to 966 in 2019 (after the new R3 team was established). In March of 2020, DNR made the decision to place on hold all in-person R3-sponsored events through the remainder of the fiscal year and beyond due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, no Learn to Hunt programs were approved by the DNR in calendar year 2020. The hold on in-person events remained in place until August 2021, when in-person R3 programs resumed. Twenty-three organizations held Learn to Hunt events for at least 324 participants through the end of calendar year 2021, with one participant list not being reported. In spring 2022, 37 organizations held turkey Learn to Hunt events for at least 445 people. Ten groups have not submitted participant lists at the time of this report.

The sex breakdown of Learn to Hunt participants changed from approximately 72 percent male and 28 percent female in 2019, to approximately 77 percent male and 23 percent female in 2021. For reference, roughly 11 percent of all Wisconsin hunters are female. The median age of all Learn to Hunt participants from 2012-2019 was 13.26 years old. The median age of male participants was 13.06 years old, while the median age of female participants was 14.02 years old. The median age trended slightly upward for both male and female Learn to Hunt participants from 2012-2019. The median age of participants was 15 for males and females in calendar year 2021. Participant age is one of the primary differences between the Learn to Hunt and Hunt for Food programs.



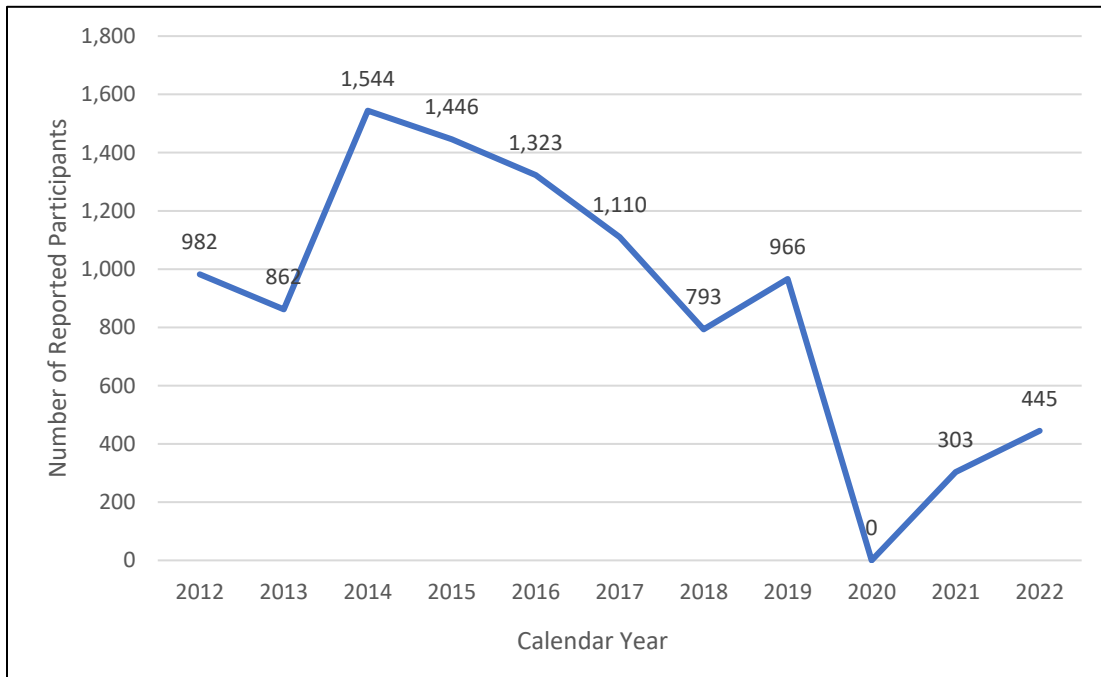


Figure 5. The number of participants attending a Learn to Hunt program annually from 2012-2022.

The DNR Hunting and Shooting Sports program implemented updates to the LTH program approval process in FY21 that are intended to increase communication between the staff program administrators and local event coordinators. Prior to the creation of the R3 team, local event coordinators sought approval for Learn to Hunt events from their DNR county wildlife biologist. The biologists then forwarded the event approvals to the hunting and shooting sports coordinator for reporting purposes. As of fall 2020, the DNR Hunting and Shooting Sports program is now the main point of contact for local LTH event coordinators and point of final approval for events, ensuring that data and records are as complete as possible within the R3 program. Most biologists and wardens maintained their existing relationships with local LTH groups and were helpful in facilitating the formation of new relationships with staff in the R3 program. The department plans to continue updating the program with input from local Learn to Hunt coordinators through the creation of a Learn to Hunt Advisory Committee within the next biennium. Additionally, in FY21, local background checks were implemented for potential LTH mentors because of staff feedback and evaluation of the Learn to Hunt program. The program received and processed 585 mentor background check authorizations in fall 2021 and spring 2022.

### Hunt for Food Program

The Hunt for Food program, established in 2012, focuses on recruiting novice adult hunters who may not have an organic social network through which they can learn to hunt. Novice adults are not required to have completed hunter safety prior to attending a Hunt for Food program and the department may waive season dates and license and stamp fees for Hunt for Food participants through the umbrella Learn to Hunt program/Educational Outdoor Skills Activity administrative code. The main differences between the Hunt for Food program and the Learn to Hunt program are the target audiences and the course content. Hunt for Food participants are much older, more female, more diverse, and often have different motivations to hunt compared to Learn to Hunt participants. Most Hunt for Food programs are currently hosted by DNR staff and partner staff, with a handful of volunteer clubs and organizations now hosting programs.

The Hunt for Food program expanded rapidly in 2018 and 2019 with the creation of the new R3 team in the Division of Public Safety and Resource Protection. At that time, DNR and partner staff were near capacity in the number of Hunt for Food programs they were able to host annually. In March of 2020, DNR put on hold in-person

R3 events due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, no Hunt for Food programs were approved by the DNR in calendar year 2020. The hold on in-person events remained in place until August 2021, when in-person R3 programs resumed.

In fall of 2021, DNR and partner staff led six Hunt for Food events on various topics including shooting skills, squirrel hunting, gun deer hunting, and crossbow deer hunting for 44 participants (Figure 6). One volunteer organization led a series of Hunt for Food events for an additional 20 participants. In spring 2022, DNR and partner staff led 4 turkey Hunt for Food events for 35 participants. One volunteer organization led a turkey Hunt for Food event for an (yet) unreported number of participants.

Moving forward, the DNR and partner staff are working to establish relationships with volunteer clubs and organizations interested in hosting Hunt for Food programs as they do for the Learn to Hunt program.

From 2012 to 2019 the sex breakdown of Hunt for Food participants was 57 percent male and 43 percent female. In 2021 and 2022, the sex breakdown of Hunt for Food participants was approximately 54 percent male and 46 percent female. In comparison, the sex ratio of Learn to Hunt participants during the same time frame was 77 percent male and 23 percent female. The median age of Hunt for Food participants during this time frame was 38 years old for males and 35 years old for females.

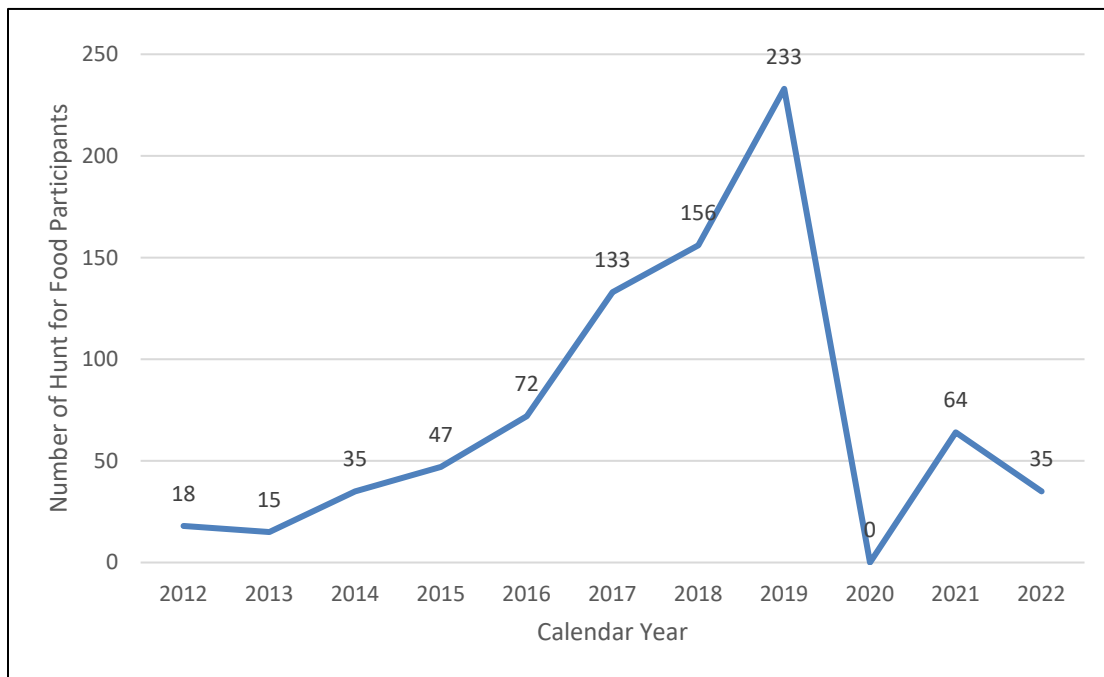


Figure 6. The number of novice adult participants attending Hunt for Food programs held annually from 2012-2021.

### Hunter Mentor Training Program

Between 2018 and 2020, DNR and partner staff held 20 pilot Hunter Mentor Training workshops and trained a total of 278 mentors (Figure 7). During the pandemic in FY21, the R3 program reviewed the pilot training with the assistance of DNR legal staff and determined that updates would be needed to continue offering state liability insurance coverage to trained participants. The R3 team has begun working with DNR Safety & Risk to update the program. Updates will include the addition of safety checklists; a signed volunteer agreement outlining safety protocols and approved mentoring activities (a mentor code of conduct); requirements for complete reporting of specific mentoring occurrences (who, what, when, where); information for mentors on how to report incidents;

and potential recertification requirements. The Hunter Mentor Training program has remained on hold until these changes can be implemented.

The pilot Hunter Mentor Training program trained existing and prospective hunting mentors over the course of a several hour workshop. The program was created in partnership with Pheasants Forever’s Hunting Heritage Coordinator to recruit volunteer mentors for Hunt for Food programs and other adult mentoring opportunities. Pilot workshops were instructed by DNR R3 staff and R3 partners with Pheasants Forever, the National Wild Turkey Federation and Becoming an Outdoors-woman. The curriculum included segments on:

- The Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model
- North American Model of Wildlife Conservation
- Mentoring Strategy
- Adult Learning Principles
- Tips for Mentoring Women

Upon completion of a Hunter Mentor Training workshop, volunteer mentors are considered agents of the State of Wisconsin and are protected by the State of Wisconsin Self-Funded Liability and Property Programs. Volunteer mentors only receive this protection while following certain mentoring guidelines, including that the mentee must be 18 years or older or, if under 18 years old, a parent or guardian must also be present during the mentored hunt. This protection is not limited to mentoring during Hunt for Food or Learn to Hunt programs. DNR staff can recruit volunteer mentors for Hunt for Food programs by reaching out to trained mentors in the event.

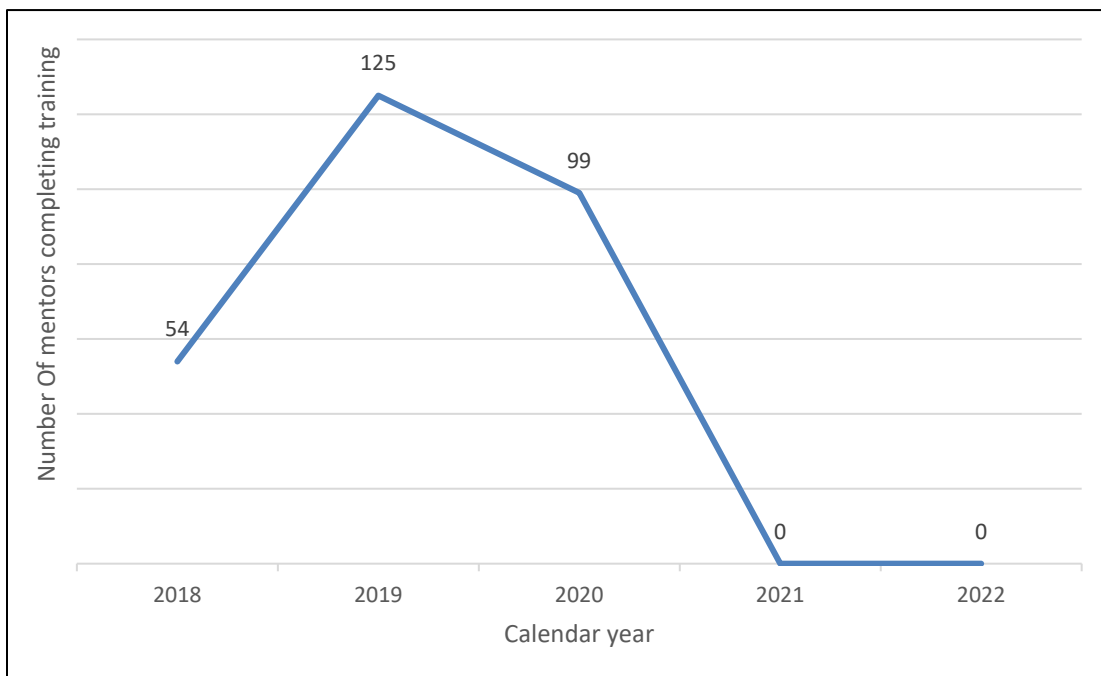


Figure 7. The number of mentors completing the pilot Wisconsin Hunter Mentor Training program since its launch in March 2018. 222 mentors were projected to complete the training by the end of 2020, prior to the emergence of COVID-19. In 2020, the Hunter Mentor Training program was paused until updates to the program can be implemented.

### Wisconsin Mentored Hunting Program

The state eliminated the minimum hunting age in March 2018. Previously, only individuals ages 10 and older were allowed to purchase a hunting license. The elimination of minimum hunting age does not change Wisconsin’s mentored hunting law, which has been in place since Sept. 1, 2009. Anyone may hunt in Wisconsin without first completing a hunter education course if he or she is accompanied by a licensed hunter (mentor), hunts within arm’s reach of the mentor, and follows other program rules. This one-on-one opportunity gives first-time hunters a chance to try hunting in a safe situation and enables veteran hunters to pass on their knowledge and passion for the outdoors.

The number of individuals purchasing a mentored hunting license has increased from 12,553 in 2016 to 18,286 in 2021, a 45.7 percent increase over five years (Figure 8). Following a 20 percent increase in mentored license sales from 2016 – 2019, sales jumped an additional 38.5 percent from 2019 to license year 2020. This jump is likely due in part to concern from the public about participating in in-person hunter safety classes during the pandemic. Mentored hunting license sales fell about 11 percent in license year 2021.

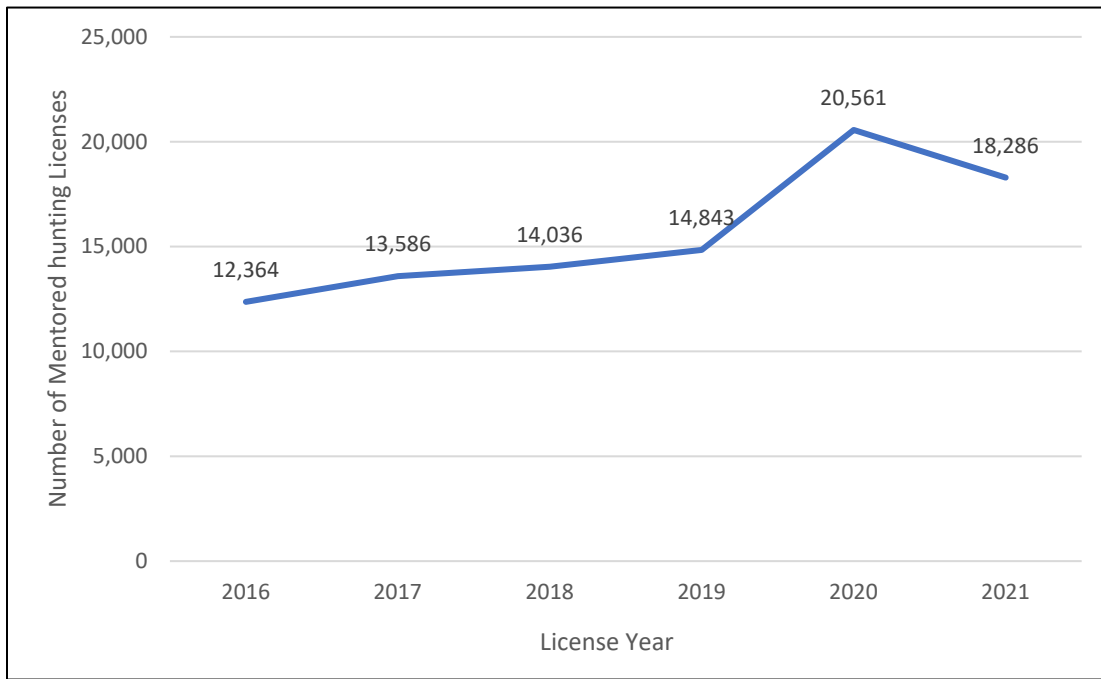


Figure 8. The number of individuals that purchased a mentored hunting license each license year from 2016 to 2021.

In license year 2020, 14,869 individuals under the age of 18 purchased a mentored hunting license, while 5,692 adults purchased a mentored hunting license. In 2021, 12,750 individuals under the age of 18 purchased a mentored hunting license (a decline of 14.3 percent), while 5,536 adults purchased a mentored hunting license (a decline of 2.7 percent). This may indicate that for the most part, adult novices are continuing to seek mentorship to learn to hunt.

**(New) First-Time License Buyers**

Beginning in 2012, the department offered deep discounts in license prices to first-time buyers (FTB) and returning buyers and sought to track participation. Total resident first-time license buyers declined approximately 4.5 percent from FY16 to FY21 (Figure 9).

Notably, in license year 2020, new gun-deer license buyers increased over 36 percent from license year 2019. This increase contrasts with overall gun-deer license sales, which continued to decrease by 1.3 percent between 2019 and 2020. Except for 2020, the number of new people who purchased a gun deer license in 2021 remains higher than years prior to the pandemic.

The number of new, small game license buyers increased dramatically in 2020 by nearly 42 percent from 2019. This is consistent with the 7.3 percent overall increase in small game license sales during the same time but indicates particularly high interest from new buyers or people who haven't purchased a small game license in more than 10 years. Like new gun deer license buyers, the number of small game license sales in 2021 was marginally higher than in years prior to the pandemic.

First-time resident fishing license buyers increased approximately 6.6 percent from FY16 to FY21.

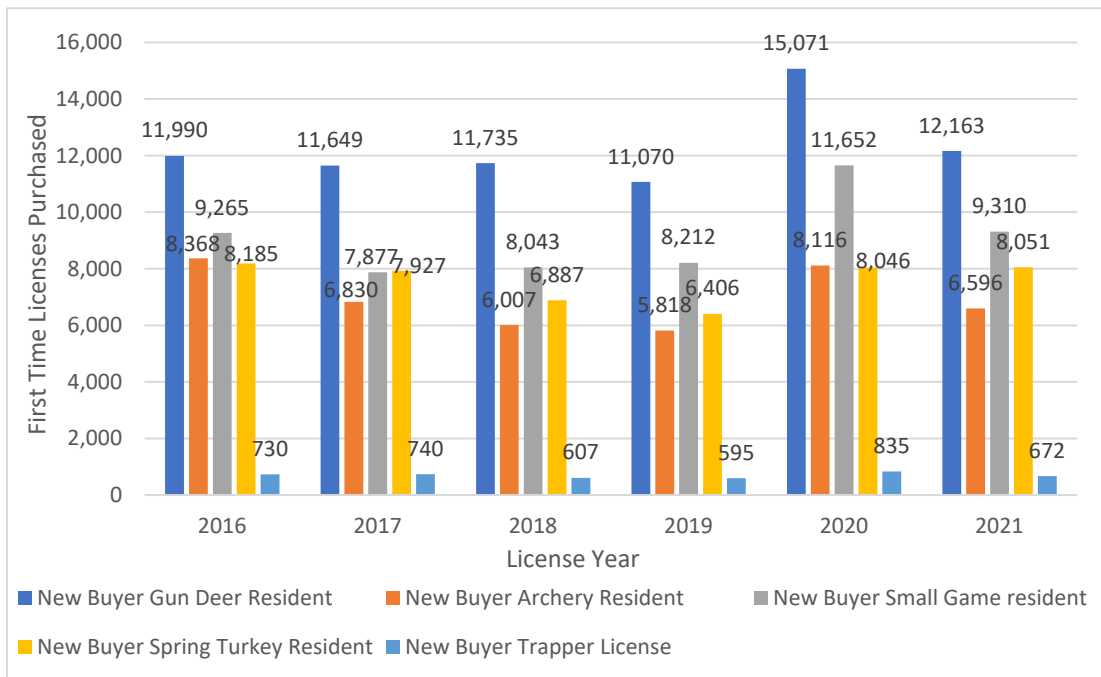


Figure 9. The number of individuals that purchased a resident first-time buyer license for archery, gun deer, spring turkey, trapping and small game in each license year from 2016 to 2021.

## Hunter R3 Grant

In 2014, the department launched the Hunter Recruitment, Development, Training & Education grant to engage external partners in R3 efforts to recruit and retain diverse new participants to the Wisconsin hunter population or reactivate traditional hunters. In 2019, DNR staff conducted the first major revision of the grant program guidance and renamed it the Hunter R3 Grant to link the funding more clearly to the DNR R3 program. The Hunting and Shooting Sports program awarded \$65,970 in projects submitted in FY2020 (Table 1). Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, program staff asked these applicants to pause the in-person components of their projects and extended the grant agreements with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These projects have been allowed to resume and are expected to be completed by FY24.

The Hunting and Shooting Sports program again made significant updates to the Hunter R3 grant in FY22. Originally accepted on a biennial (every-other-year) timeline, applications will now be accepted annually to maintain consistency with other DNR subaward grants and to allow staff additional opportunity to hone the program. The grant priorities and associated scoring criteria were updated and clarified to make the scoring process more objective. While the budget remains unchanged (\$175,000 per annual grant cycle), the maximum award cap of \$25,000 per project was removed to attract a wider variety of quality projects. The department awarded \$142,415 to three organizations in the FY22 grant cycle (Table 2).

There is great need for strategic programs with robust evaluations of results on which to base future R3 program priorities. For this reason, the grant program seeks to test and develop various R3 strategies by funding both pilot programs and proven R3 initiatives, such as Hunt for Food programs conducted by entities outside of the state agency. In FY22, hunting access and outreach to demographics underrepresented in the hunting community were identified as high priorities for the Hunter R3 grant.

Table 1. FY2020 Hunter R3 grant funding recommendations.

Title	Applicant	Amount Requested	Recommend Funding
Learn to Hunt Program	Wisconsin Backcountry Hunters and Anglers	\$14,360	\$14,360
Mentor Incentive Pilot	National Wild Turkey Federation	\$7,500	\$7,500
Learn to Hunt for Food Mentor Incentive	Brad Hasheider	\$4,410	\$4,410
Horicon Marsh Learn to Hunt Waterfowl Program	Mark Kakatsch	\$15,210	\$15,210*
University Hunting Program	Delta Waterfowl	\$4,840	\$4,840*
Outdoors Access for All	Access Ability Wisconsin	\$19,650	\$19,650
Totals		\$65,970	\$65,970*

\*Up to, but not more than, this amount—contingent on cost-efficacy of proposed budget items.

Table 2. FY2022 Hunter R3 grant funding recommendations.

Title	Applicant	Amount Requested	Recommend Funding
Outdoors Access for All	Access Ability Wisconsin	\$79,100	\$79,100*
Wisconsin Grouse Camp	Ruffed Grouse & American Woodcock Society	\$14,315	\$14,315*
Leveraging the Waterfowl Hunters Expo	Wisconsin Waterfowl Association	\$49,000	\$49,000*
Totals		\$142,415	\$142,415*

\*Up to, but not more than, this amount—contingent on cost-efficacy of proposed budget items.

## Wisconsin National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP)

Wisconsin schools offering the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) decreased by approximately 9.2 percent from 2016 to 2022, with 286 schools reporting so far for 2021-2022 (Figure 10). Public, parochial, private, homeschool and online/virtual schools are using the NASP curriculum and format for physical education, lifetime sports and other classroom programs. Roughly 20 percent of students participating in the NASP curriculum occur after school or at club programs that give archers additional time to hone their skills and grow their experiences, increasing the likelihood they continue. The NASP curriculum is also taught at parks and recreation programs, archery clubs, retail archery shops, and at several youth camps across the state. NASP is widely recognized around the world as one of the best beginner archery programs available.

The National Archery in the Schools Program is implementing a new reporting requirement that will better equip DNR staff to track instructor certification, ensure instructors are following the curriculum, track the number of archers, grade levels and overall number of programs offered. The reporting requirement also provides better data to track program success and a method to hold instructors accountable for the classes they offer.

The Wisconsin NASP State Tournament saw a 20 percent decrease in participation from 2016-17 to 2021-22, with 1,201 students participating in 2021-22 (Figure 11). This may be due in part to a staffing vacancy in early FY21. However, the National Archery in Schools Program/International Bowhunting Organization (IBO) round, where students shoot life-sized 3D animal targets with the NASP scoring rings on them, saw a jump in participation. Schools across the state were exposed to the NASP/IBO targets through a loaner program offered by the DNR. In exchange, teachers collect the students DNR Customer ID numbers, which enables DNR staff to track NASP participants license purchase behavior (Table 2). The NASP/IBO program allows students and families to learn about arrow placement and increase their interest bowhunting while allowing them to also shoot competitive rounds of archery at life-sized animal targets.

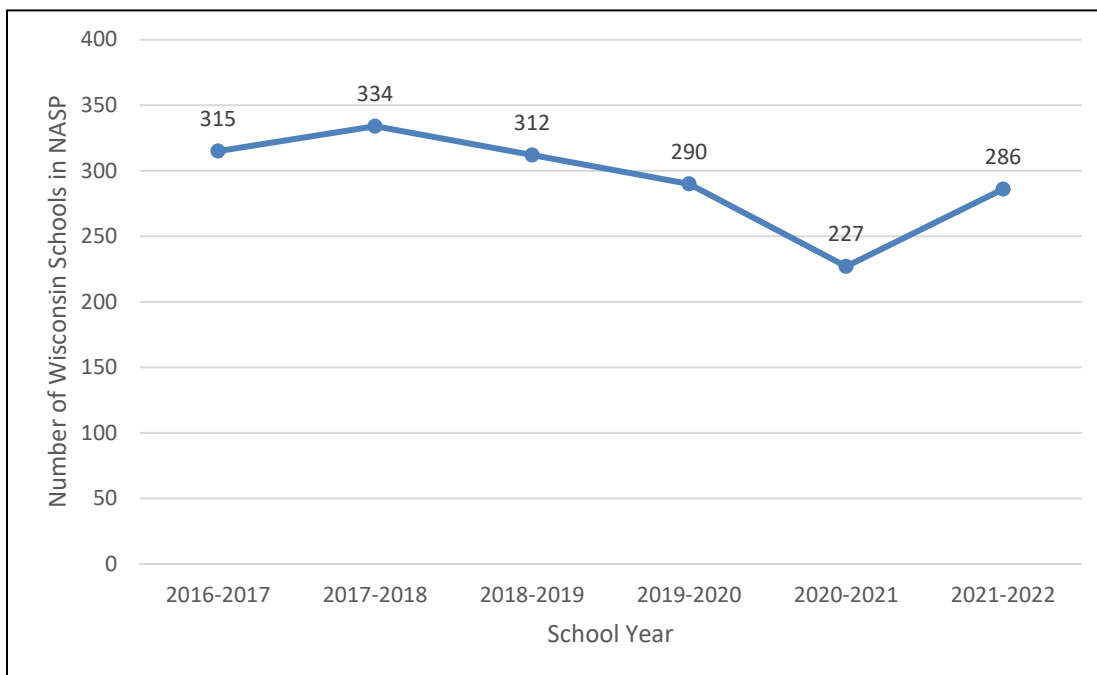


Figure 10. Number of Wisconsin schools offering the National Archery in the Schools Program from 2016-2022.

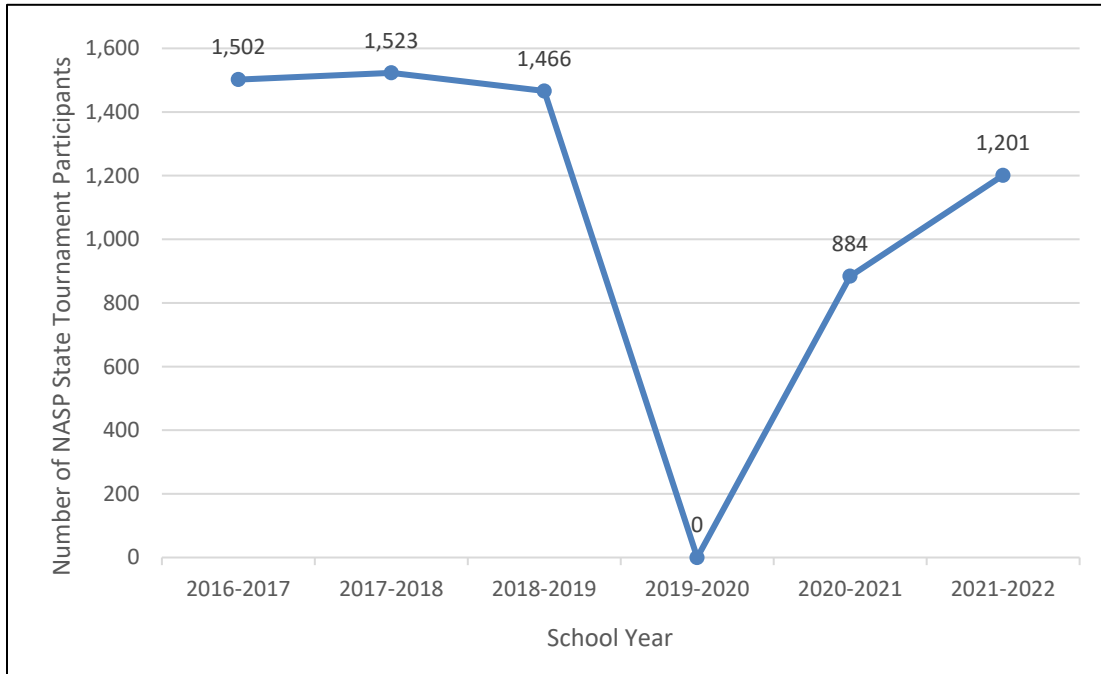


Figure 11. Number of students attending the Wisconsin National Archery in the Schools Program State Tournament from 2016-2022.

### Wisconsin Scholastic 3D Archery Program

The Scholastic 3D Archery (S3DA) program was established in Wisconsin in January 2016. The program has grown to 24 clubs. Many students involved with the NASP program have continued their archery interests with the S3DA program. S3DA uses equipment that gets students one step closer to bowhunting and further into the sport of target archery, increasing the likelihood of them purchasing archery equipment. These young archers are also connected with college campuses across the state and country, many of which provide scholarship opportunities, to grow their interest in bowhunting and competitive archery into college and beyond. S3DA events have been offered across the state and provide nonhunting students and families with information on how to participate in Learn to Hunt and Hunt for Food programs.



While the S3DA program is focused on youth 18 and younger, many of the parents and other family members have either gotten started in archery or have been re-engaged by their kids' interest. S3DA encourages and invites family members to get into, or back into the sport—making S3DA a true family program and pathway to hunting and the outdoors.



## **Wisconsin Explore Bowhunting Program**

The Explore Bowhunting curriculum continues to grow in Wisconsin. Schools, park and recreation programs, youth camps and archery clubs have adopted the Explore Bowhunting and Explore Bowfishing curriculum to teach kids and families skills and techniques. Many of these groups follow the classroom or camp experience up with an actual hunting or bowfishing opportunity. Currently, there are two very experienced groups offering Explore Bowfishing camps and programs as part of Wisconsin NASP and S3DA programs. These programs give kids and parents the opportunity to climb onto a raised platform and shoot down into a tank of water at life-sized, moving, rough fish targets.

Explore Bowhunting and Bowfishing programs are also offered through Future Farmers of America (FFA) classes, physical education classes, and as part of lifetime skills and other high school classes. FFA teachers and staff are now required to hold a beginner level archery instructor certification to ensure the groups are being taught safe and correct archery techniques. This is also a requirement to receive loaner DNR Explore Bowhunting and Bowfishing equipment. Teachers are asked to collect participants DNR Customer ID numbers so DNR staff can track their license purchase behavior and evaluate program success.

## **Explore Archery Program**

Explore Archery provides another pathway to the outdoors and archery using a larger variety of equipment and curriculum materials. Explore Archery programs allow students to use their skills to earn progressive awards as they increase their proficiency using a variety of archery equipment. Department staff are currently working with USA Archery to grow programs across the state. Programs that want to add Explore Archery materials to their curriculum must first register their program with USA Archery. Curriculum materials are then made available at no charge through the DNR. Groups running these programs range from after-school programs to municipal park and recreation programs to YMCA camps.

# **Shooting Ranges**

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources owns or operates 11 shooting ranges open to the public for free or for a reasonable fee (Figure 12). The department has a lease or partner agreement in place with external entities for the maintenance and operation of four of the eleven ranges: McMiller Sports Center, C.W. Caywood Memorial Shooting Range, Boulder Junction Shooting Range, and Northwoods Wetlands & Wildlife Club. The remaining ranges are maintained and operated by DNR Shooting Sports program staff and internal partnerships with Wildlife Management and Fisheries staff.

In March 2020, DNR temporarily closed some state-owned properties including the 11 shooting ranges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In May 2020 the shooting ranges were re-opened to the public.

Several state ranges have been closed and re-opened for safety updates or maintenance needs. Two state ranges, Columbia County and Peshtigo, were closed in FY20 for large maintenance projects and safety upgrades. Columbia County was re-opened in part in FY21, but Peshtigo remains fully closed due to an unmet need for staff or volunteers to act as range monitors. In FY21, C.W. Caywood Memorial Shooting Range was closed after staff recognized that rounds were leaving the range during a property inspection. The range was reopened to the public later that year with limited hours. These closures have prompted the Shooting Sports program to prioritize and schedule third-party range inspections to better address potential issues before closures are needed.



Figure 12. Shooting ranges owned or operated by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

## Public Shooting Range Operations & Maintenance

Operations and maintenance activities were conducted at all 11 shooting ranges in FY2021 and FY2022, amounting to total expenditures of approximately \$460,000. Recreational shooting, especially with handguns and other modern-type target firearms, is increasing in popularity. The state ranges have required a corresponding increased level of maintenance and monitoring of operations. Most operations and maintenance activities have included the reconstruction of berms and backstops, target board replacement, mowing, porta-john and dumpster maintenance, and staff monitoring of range use.

## McMiller Sports Center Range Projects & Maintenance

McMiller Sports Center is the largest shooting range owned by the state of Wisconsin. It is operated in partnership with a third-party concessionaire through a lease from WDNR. In FY20, the five-year lease with the concessionaire was re-awarded through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process. McMiller continues to bring in strong revenues through heavy use by the public. While the range was closed to the public from March – May 2020, revenues rebounded and exceeded projected sales in FY21. The facility’s French drain was repaired in FY21, and a new bullet catcher was constructed on the 50-yard range. The McMiller strategic plan was revised in FY22 and includes plans to open a 3D archery range, install new signage, make upgrades to the lodge building, replace the shooting sheds on the 25 and 100-yard ranges, and more.

## Columbia County Public Shooting Range

The Hunting and Shooting Sports program closed the Columbia County shooting range due to rain damage in late summer of 2019 and opted to perform more permanent repairs to the berms, which included research into

alternative backstop materials. Additionally, reports of user behavior causing damage to the shooting sheds and portable restroom have required staff to post additional signage, install security cameras on site, and have limited physical presence to monitor activities at range, which was originally intended to be unsupervised. Three of the four ranges at Columbia County reopened in October 2020, after a half-time range supervisor was hired to provide consistent staff presence. An emergency capital development project was also submitted in FY21 to install a bullet catcher on the handgun range. The handgun range will remain closed until this construction is complete (expected completion is FY23). A contractor was also hired to perform regular maintenance on the berms and backstops as needed after the range reopened in FY21.



*The Columbia County public shooting range.*

### **Public Shooting Range Development: Hay Creek Range Expansion**

In FY21, a proposal to expand the Hay Creek Wildlife Area shooting range was approved and initiated as a capital development project. The existing shooting range includes two lanes, one at 50 yards and the other at 100 yards. They are separated and enclosed on both sides with tall, 35-foot-wide berms that allow users to be safe in each lane if they are down range changing or checking targets. The shooting pads are gravel with most benches under the cover of recently renovated roofs. There are five benches on the 50-yard range and eight benches on the 100-yard range with one handicap accessible bench at each range.

The expansion project has two major components. First, a new 200-yard rifle range and a 25-yard pistol range will be constructed including berms, benches, and roofed shooting shelters. Additionally, the current ranges will be renovated by top dressing the backstops, increasing erosion control, and re-graveling the walkways. The project is expected to cost approximately \$300,000. Construction is anticipated to begin in FY23.

### **Private and Public Shooting Range Grant Projects**

Since the advent of the department's range grant program in 2013, the council has supported the allocation of over \$3.3 million dollars in Pittman-Robertson funds to assist local rod and gun clubs in managing and improving their ranges. To date, approximately \$1.3 million in grant funding has been awarded to private ranges and nearly \$2 million has been awarded to publicly owned ranges. To continue adapting and improving the grant, managers in the R3 program and Bureau of Community Financial Assistance (CFA) made significant updates to the Shooting Range grant in FY21 and FY22.

*FY21 Private and Public Shooting Range Grant Updates and Funded Projects*

Until FY21, private range grant applications were accepted once every other year in September and public range grant applications were accepted once every six months in February and September. In FY21, the grant managers consolidated the application deadlines for both private and public range grants to one annual deadline in September. This will help streamline and create consistency for the Shooting Range grant, improving promotion efforts. Additionally, the R3 team has typically budgeted \$250,000 for public range grants each fiscal year and \$250,000 for private range grants every other fiscal year. With the change to a single annual deadline for both public and private ranges, the R3 team will offer a combined budget of \$500,000 annually for both types of range grants.

In FY21, a cap of \$75,000 was also implemented for private range renovation projects to help applicants prioritize projects for each grant cycle. Previously, range grant applicants have requested funding for a variety of upgrades and renovations, with total project costs approaching or exceeding the program budget. The \$75,000 cap was implemented to allow ranges sufficient funding to complete one or two projects each grant cycle without depleting the program budget at a single range.

In September 2020 (FY21), the department received six private range grant applications and five public range grant applications (Table 3). Two of the five public range grants are from Northwoods Wildlife and Wetlands Club and Boulder Junction Shooting Range, which are state-owned ranges with partner agreements in place to allow third-party organizations to manage the ranges.

Table 3. September 2020 (FY21) Private and Public Shooting Range Grant Applications.

Applicant	Total Project Cost	Requested Funding	Recommended Funding
<b><u>Private Ranges</u></b>			
Cable Rod & Gun Club	\$42,875	\$21,440	\$21,440
Ellsworth Rod & Gun Club	\$152,676	\$75,000	\$75,000
Sauk Prairie Trap & Skeet	\$18,225	\$9,113	\$9,113
Schultz Resort Rod & Gun Club	\$158,882	\$75,000	\$75,000
Waunakee Gun Club	\$39,660	\$19,830	\$19,830
Wern Valley Sportsmens Club	\$22,500	\$11,250	\$11,250
<b>Total Private Range Grant Funding</b>	<b>\$434,818</b>	<b>\$211,633</b>	<b>\$211,633</b>
<b><u>Public Ranges</u></b>			
Northwoods Wildlife & Wetlands	\$15,893	\$11,920	\$11,920
Boulder Junction Shooting Range	\$36,950	\$27,713	\$27,713
Village of Iron Ridge	\$198,360	\$75,000	\$75,000
Village of Shiocton	\$24,240	\$18,180	\$18,180
Price County Forestry & Parks Dept.	\$98,950	\$74,212	\$74,212
<b>Total Public Range Grant Funding</b>	<b>\$374,393</b>	<b>\$207,025</b>	<b>\$207,025</b>
<b>Total Shooting Range Grant Funding</b>	<b>\$809,211</b>	<b>\$418,658</b>	<b>\$418,658</b>

*FY22 Private and Public Shooting Range Grant Updates and Funded Projects*

The R3 and CFA grant managers again made several updates to the shooting range grant in FY22. Based on the recommendations of the Conservation Congress Shooting Sports Committee, Sporting Heritage Council, and record-breaking nationwide sales of firearms and ammunition in 2020 and 2021, the range grant program budget was increased significantly from \$500,000 to \$800,000. For consistency and to ensure that the full budget was awarded to range projects, staff grant managers decreased the match requirement for privately-owned shooting range projects from 50 percent to 25 percent (the same match requirement for publicly owned ranges). The cap of \$75,000 for range renovation projects was maintained from FY20.

In September 2021, we received 18 private range grant applications and one public range grant application, totaling \$822,618 in requested grant funds (Table 4).

Table 4. September 2021 (FY22) Private and Public Shooting Range Grant Applications.

Applicant	Total Project Cost	Requested Funding	Recommended Funding
<b><u>Private Ranges</u></b>			
Blackhawk Bowhunters Archery Club	\$84,846	\$63,634	\$63,634
Brill Area Sportsman's Club	\$140,146	\$75,000	\$75,000
Cable Rod & Gun Club	\$85,700	\$64,275	\$64,275
Cassville Conservation Club	\$33,102	\$24,826	\$24,826
Deer Creek Sports & Conservation Club	\$12,643	\$9,482	\$9,482
Door County Rod & Gun Club	\$48,546	\$36,410	\$36,410
Ellsworth Rod & Gun Club	\$152,800	\$75,000	\$75,000
Fishbowl United Sportsman's Club	\$17,044	\$11,827	\$11,827
Heart of Wisconsin Sportsman's Club	\$67,711	\$50,783	\$50,783
Hudson Rod Gun & Archery Club	\$100,200	\$75,000	\$75,000
Joe's Clays LLC	\$36,333	\$27,249	\$27,249
Outagamie Conservation Club	\$7,573	\$5,680	\$5,680
Rio Conservation Club	\$13,270	\$9,953	\$9,953
Sauk Prairie Trap & Skeet	\$69,000	\$51,750	\$51,750
Schultz Resort Rod & Gun Club	\$165,000	\$75,000	\$75,000
Waunakee Gun Club	\$111,290	\$75,000	\$75,000
Wausau Skeet and Trap Club	\$18,630	\$13,973	\$13,973
Woods and Meadow Sporting Clays LLC	\$72,441	\$54,331	\$54,331
<b>Total Private Range Grant Funding</b>	<b>\$1,236,275</b>	<b>\$799,173</b>	<b>\$799,173</b>
<b><u>Public Ranges</u></b>			
Barron County Owen Anderson Public Shooting Range	\$31,260	\$23,445	\$23,445
<b>Total Public Range Grant Funding</b>	<b>\$31,260</b>	<b>\$23,445</b>	<b>\$23,445</b>
<b>Total Shooting Range Grant Funding</b>	<b>\$1,267,535</b>	<b>\$822,618</b>	<b>\$822,618</b>

# Trapping

## Background

Trapping and the use of fur is woven into the history of Wisconsin. Though the fur market is not as prevalent today as it was when trading posts began springing up here, trapping remains an important wildlife management and research tool steeped in cultural significance.

Trapping has come a long way in the past 30 years. Known as the “BMP era” this period is defined by the Best Management Practices for trapping developed by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA). Capture devices and methods have improved due to these efforts, along with the ability to communicate the humaneness of trapping with the non-trapping public.

Trapping is an important wildlife management tool that can be used to reduce human-wildlife conflicts, promote biodiversity, and help people to connect with the natural ecosystem. Carefully regulated to ensure healthy populations are sustained, seasons and quotas are set using the best available science.

By partnering with trappers, DNR researchers have been able to learn a lot about some of our most elusive species, like bobcats. To date, over 100 bobcats have been collared with the help of Wisconsin trappers. The collars are providing important home range, habitat use and mortality data on an animal that is difficult to monitor. Dr. Nathan Roberts from the Office of Applied Science has estimated that partnering with private trappers has saved the DNR a six-digit sum in this effort. A sample size of 100 collared bobcats is exceptional. Not a single capture related mortality has been observed in doing so, which is equally outstanding.

A survey conducted by Responsive Management for AFWA in 2015 estimated that there were just over 170,000 licensed trappers in the USA with around 95,000 of those residing in the Midwest region. Wisconsin consistently ranks in the top couple states in terms of licensed trappers. In the 2021 license year, 21,098 people purchased resident trapping licenses in Wisconsin (Figure 13).

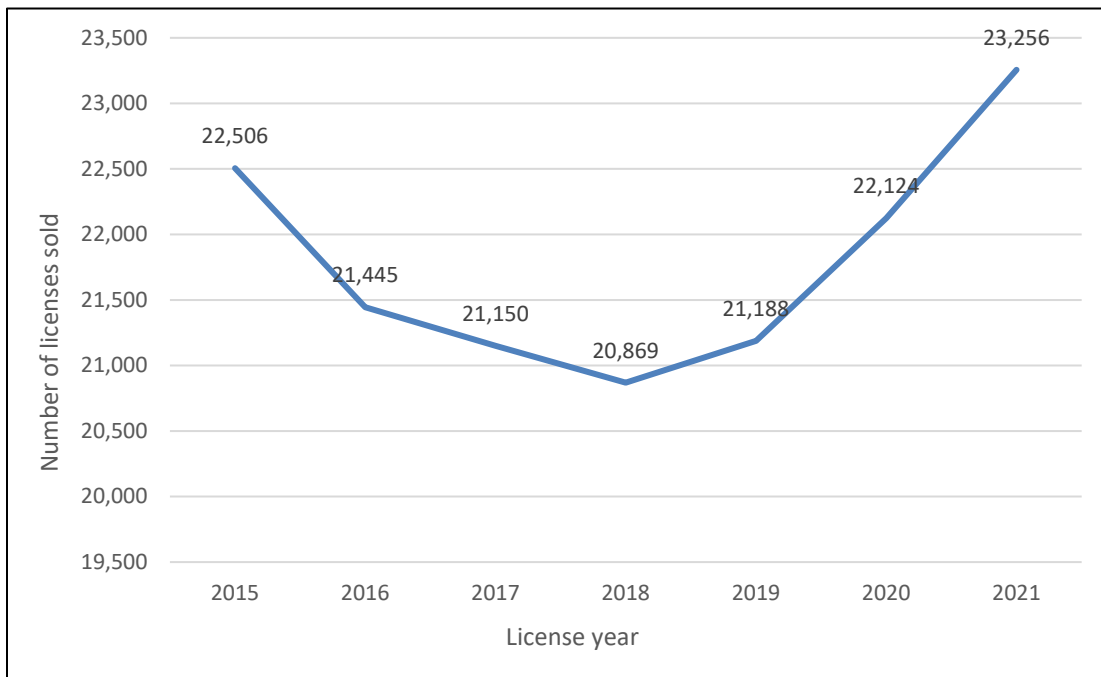


Figure 13. Resident trapping licenses sold in Wisconsin from 2015-2021.

Resident trapping licenses are not the only license type that would allow people to trap. Those with a Conservation Patrons license can indicate if they intend to trap and are also tracked. Graduates of a Wisconsin Cooperative Trapper Education Program (WCTEP) course do not need to purchase a license as their course certificate acts as such for the first season. When combined with WCTEP course graduates and Conservation Patrons license holders who indicated they would trap, there were 23,256 licensed resident trappers in Wisconsin for the 2021-2022 license year (Table 5). Additionally, the mentored trapping license first became available in 2018 and increased in utilization in 2021 with 1,244 people purchasing a mentored trapping license. Trappers under the age of 16 may trap without a license if being supervised by a licensed trapper. Landowners may also trap certain nuisance species without purchasing a permit. The latter two unlicensed cohorts are not accounted for in Table 5.

Table 5. Number of licensed Wisconsin resident trappers 2015-2021 by type.  
Note that mentored trapping licenses debuted in 2018.

Year	Resident Trapper	WCTEP Students Certified	Resident Trapping First Time Buyer	Mentored Trapping	Total Resident Trappers
2021	21,098	1,486	672	1,244	23,256
2020	20,356	933	835	973	22,124
2019	19,275	1,318	595	581	21,188
2018	19,161	1,101	607	39	20,869
2017	19,476	934	740	NA	21,150
2016	19,706	1,009	730	NA	21,445
2015	19,911	1,569	1,026	NA	22,506

### Trapper Recruitment and Retention

Trapping is on the high end of the spectrum in terms of both time and equipment needed among the outdoor pursuits. Traditionally, the number of licensed trappers has closely tracked fur market trends. Despite more uncertainty in the markets than ever, license sales seem to be relatively stable. The department processed a slight increase in resident trapping license sales during the COVID-19 pandemic when more people took interest in outdoor recreation. The Wisconsin Cooperative Trapper Education Program aims to increase recruitment with a hands-on education course designed to give students the skills they need to be successful trapping on their own, while also introducing them to a network of trapping contacts. With trapper education being mandatory for all new trappers, new graduates are used to measure recruitment. In 2021, there were 1,486 students who completed trapper education in Wisconsin (Figure 14). WCTEP graduates account for about 6 percent of the total number of resident trappers in 2021.

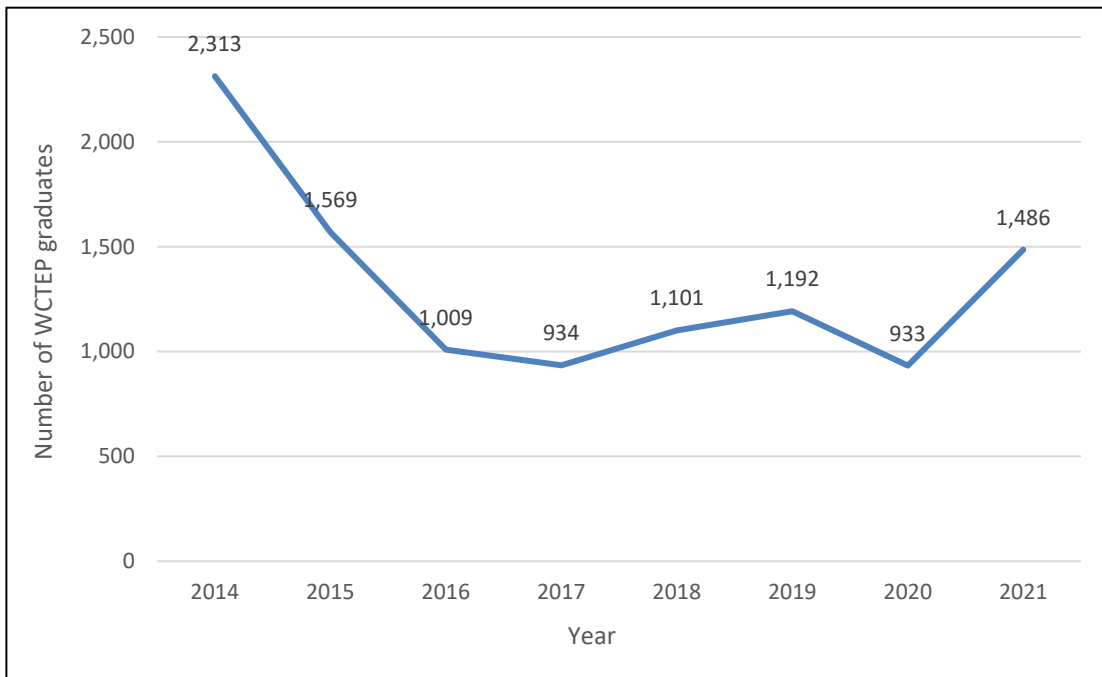


Figure 14. Number of Wisconsin Cooperative Trapper Education Course graduates in 2014-2021.

### Wisconsin Cooperative Trapper Education Program

Trapper education in Wisconsin is a cooperative effort between the DNR’s Bureau of Wildlife Management and the Wisconsin Trappers Association (WTA) that began in 1982. The course has been shaped over the years to help give novice trappers enough skills to be successful on their own while focusing on ethics to help ensure the sustainability of trapping. Becoming mandatory in 1992, Wisconsin routinely graduates more trapper education students than other reporting states.

WCTEP now offers three course options to potential students. The traditional in-person course has been by far the most popular and preferred option in the past. The correspondence course allows students to complete the coursework through the mail, and the internet course can be done online (Table 6) which proved valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic. For 2020 and 2021 calendar years, in-person test-outs were not required to become trapper education certified for students of the online or correspondence courses. In-person tests for online and correspondence are set to resume Nov. 1, 2022.

Table 6. Wisconsin Cooperative Trapper Education Program classes and graduates by type 2019-2020.

Year	2019	2020	2021
Total WCTEP Graduates	1,318	933	1,486
Online/Correspondence Course Graduates	40	465	855
Total WCTEP Classes Offered	99	34	65
Test-Outs Offered	19	0	0



## **Fur Schools**

The DNR furbearer program and the trapper education program hold Fur Schools for current and future wildlife professionals. Fur schools offer trapper education certification and cover all aspects of a trapper education class with more hands-on fur handling and focus on furbearer research and management.

There is a Wildlife Fur School for DNR employees and other natural resources professionals held each year. This is a great opportunity for staff to learn about trapping in a way that could help them answer questions they may receive on the job. This program has been well received and usually fills up quickly with about 25 participants. WCTEP assists with similar Wildlife Fur Schools in New York, Idaho and Kentucky and University fur schools in Wisconsin for future natural resources professionals by targeting students in appropriate majors.



## **Future Trappers of Wisconsin**

The Future Trappers of Wisconsin is a youth organization hosted by the Wisconsin Trappers Association aimed at teaching kids about trapping and the outdoors. The trapper education department provides educational materials and helps administer the annual youth trapping camp.

Each summer the Future Trappers of Wisconsin hold a youth trapping camp at Trees for Tomorrow in Eagle River. Students learn about wildlife, trapping and survival skills. They run a small trapline on a nearby property, put up some fur and even build some sifters and weasel boxes. The campers leave with trapper education certification and a nice haul of trapping equipment to get started.

## **Youth Supervised and Mentored Trapping**

Starting with the 2018 license year, youth-supervised, and mentored-trapping options are available for those wanting to give trapping a shot before taking trapper education.

Youth under age 16 may trap before taking trapper education and without a license if trapping under the supervision of a licensed trapper. Youth may trap for the limited draw species of bobcat and fisher under the youth supervised trapping rules if they successfully draw a permit or are transferred one. Without needing a license, it's difficult to track how many are using the youth supervised trapping option but increasing the ways youths can get involved is a good thing.



People 16 and older who want to try trapping before becoming certified may purchase a mentored trapping license for \$10. This allows them to trap under the supervision of a licensed trapper before taking trapper education. People can only purchase the mentored trapping license twice in their lifetime and may not trap the limited draw species (bobcat and fisher) with this license. If someone 16 or older draws a bobcat or fisher permit, they will need to take trapper education and purchase a trapping license to trap for these species. In the first year offered (2018), 39 Wisconsinites purchased the mentored trapping license and in 2021 there were 1,244 participants.

Prior to 2020, river otters were also a limited draw species. Beginning with the 2020/2021 license year, river otter is a bag-limit species, and every trapper (including mentored trappers) will be able to pursue and take the otter bag limit. Harvest authorizations are now manually added to WCTEP graduates and youth supervised trappers since they aren't purchasing a license.

For additional information on trapping statistics in the United States, see the report appendix.

## **Angling Recruitment and Retention**

Angler R3 includes outreach, Fishing for Dinner, the Angler R3 Grant, and the Angler Education program. Angler Education, in turn, has several components that support Fishing for Dinner and broader R3 goals. For fishing license and stamp trend data, see the appendix.

### **DEI and JEDI**

The Angler R3 work unit was immersed in a deep dive to learn about the historical framework of cultural norms and practices by the dominant culture that excluded Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) from participating in outdoor recreation. The program is moving beyond tokenism in depiction of BIPOC participation in outdoor recreation and strives for authenticity. Also, at the start of every program, staff acknowledge Native American ancestral occupation of the lands upon which we have built our homes. The program has intentionally woven Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) into the fabric of all aspects of the Angler R3 Program. Justice is often added to DEI and the letters rearranged to spell JEDI. Staff intend to be JEDIs in the angler programs and welcome all to join in this mission.

## Outreach

*Objectives:* Be intentional in programming and include communities home to Black, Indigenous and People of Color. Support traditional Free Fishing Weekend clinics, held by state parks staff and partners.

*Results:* If one project defines this bienium, it's the roll-out of the Fishmobile - the department's new outreach tool that also serves as a work truck for DNR staff conducting angler education instructor training workshops, Fishing for Dinner classes and high-visibility events such as the Governor's Fishing Opener.

In February of 2021, staff learned of an opportunity offered by the Recreational Fishing and Boating Foundation (RBFF) to receive a free Mobile First Catch Center (MFCC), which is a trailer stocked with fishing gear. With department sponsored programs on hold, the Angler R3 program had surplus Sport Fish Restoration (SFR) funds and purchased an MFCC in FY-21 and dubbed it the *Fishmobile*. The program accepted RBFF's generous offer in FY22 and now have two Fishmobiles, one based in Madison and one in Milwaukee. There was a quiet launch with the first unit in July 2021 to keep numbers manageable amid the ongoing pandemic and a staffing shortage. This approach allowed staff to test the waters with the new trailer and reach out to familiar partners to work with. The program had a total of 14 events that served 212 people, plus hundreds more when it was displayed it at the State Fair and Harbor Fest, which is a street fair in one of Milwaukee's Latino neighborhoods (Table 7).



*Fishmobile's Maiden Voyage, Vilas Park, July 16, 2021.  
Photo by Jeff Schimpff*



*Harbor Fest, September 2021. Photo by Emma Gilbertson*

Table 7. Fishmobile participant demographics for FY22 (excluding State Fair and Harbor Fest).

Age	Male	Female	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Mixed	Unknown/Unrecorded	
0-8	80	26	54	23	27	3	7	0	
9-15	49	27	22	30	12	8	1	0	
16-18	4	4	0	0	3	0	0	1	
19-33	40	19	21	4	23	6	1	0	
33-64	37	21	16	11	22	1	4	0	
65+	2	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>23</b>

The department’s in-house magazine covered the Fishmobile’s outing with Vera Court Neighborhood Center, which serves BIPOC youth in Madison, and it served as a backdrop for a 2022 episode of PBS-Wisconsin’s *Wisconsin Foodie*. With partners, the program looks forward to providing regular, recurring fishing opportunities, focusing on neighborhoods that are largely home to BIPOC. One highlight from last summer was working with five youth and their counselors from [GrowAcademy](#), a Department of Corrections program. The boys caught bluegills with staff demonstrating cleaning, then invited two youths to give filleting a try. Ingredients and cooking supplies were provided, and their counselors cooked and served their catch. It was rewarding to see these kids engaged in a nature-based activity and be given another chance to get back on the right path. The program plans to work with them for the remainder of FY22 and into FY23.



*Fishmobile at Lake Wingra, Madison. October 2021. Photo by Theresa Stabo*

## **Additional Fishmobile Activities Completed or Planned for the Remainder of FY22**

### Milwaukee

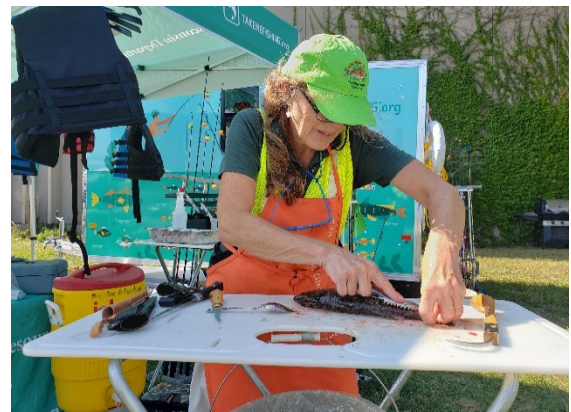
- Southeast Wisconsin Urban Fishing Program – Spring Kids’ Clinics, Dineen Park, 30 kids, estimated.

### Madison

- Mobile Madison Community Event at Elver Park
- Vera Court Neighborhood Center – two outings in June for up to 50 elementary school children and up to 25 middle schoolers.

### Outstate

- Governor’s Fishing Opener, Shell Lake
- Fishing for Dinner classes – see that section later in this report



*Fish Cleaning Demo at Harbor Fest 2021. Photo by Emma Gilbertson*

## **Angler R3 Grant**

*Objectives:* Establish an Angler R3 grant program and encourage potential partner organizations to apply and grow the community of anglers. Write guidance and notify the public via the web and mailing lists. Improve the timing of the grant to accommodate spring and summer fishing programs. *Results:* In FY21 eight grant applications were received, and seven were reviewed for consideration (Table 8). Two organizations withdrew their applications. In FY22, 12 applications were received and reviewed, and 10 are expected to be funded (Table 9). During the application and review process, staff encouraged applicants to consult with the R3 team to increase their success in writing acceptable projects that would comply with the guidance and satisfy federal eligibility requirements. The pandemic required the department to notify FY18-20 award recipients who had projects still underway and those from the FY20-21 round that had yet to begin, that all projects were on pause and no reimbursements would be made for work done during that time. Four projects awarded in FY18 were extended into FY22.

The grant calendar for FY22 was changed to improve the timing for potential applicants who wish to implement spring and summer programs and added language to the guidance to encourage applicants to consider the Fishing in the Neighborhood internship program as a model for their project.

Table 8. 2019-2020 Angler R3 grant project funding summary.

Applicant	Total Project Cost	Requested Funding	Recommended Funding	Match
Access Ability Wisconsin, Inc	\$14,338.00	\$10,000.00 - est., pending revision	\$10,000.00	\$4338.00
Harry & Laura Nohr Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TU)	\$3,980.00	\$2,985 .00	\$2,985.00	\$995.00
Green Bay Chapter of TU	\$10,040.00	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$5,040.00
Milton High School	\$9,333.38	\$6,595.68	\$6,595.68	\$2,737.70
Prescott High School <b>Canceled</b>	\$3,446 .80	\$2,585.10	\$2,585.10	\$861.70
Urban Ecology Center	\$16,899.30	\$10,000 .00	\$10,000.00	\$6,899.30
UW System Board of Regents (Camp Upham Woods)	\$11,894.45	\$8,920.84	\$8,920.84	\$2,973.61
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$69,931.93</b>	<b>\$56,086.62</b>	<b>\$56,086.62</b>	<b>\$23,843.31</b>
<b>Not Recommended for Funding - Denied</b>				
WI Federation of GLSF Clubs	\$14,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$0.	N/A

Table 9. 2019-2020 Angler R3 Project Funding Summary for Approval 2022-2024.

Applicant	Total Project Cost	Requested Funding	Recommended Funding	Match
Anthony Acres Charter School – Mondovi	\$17,226.00	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$7226.00
Access Ability Wisconsin, Inc.	\$8,272.00	\$6,204.00	\$6,204.00	\$2,068.00
Cassville School District	\$4,249.81	\$3,187.36	\$3,187.36	\$1,062.45
Denmark High School Ice Fishing Club	\$14,732.00	\$10,000.00	\$8442.69	\$6,289.31
Kiaptuwish Chapter of Trout Unlimited	\$8228.00	\$5,828.00	\$5,828.00	\$2,400.00
Madison Parks Foundation – Warner Park	\$14,750.00	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$4,750.00
Milwaukee Riverkeeper	\$20,266.60	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$10,255.00
Muskies, Inc. Between the Lakes Chapter 20	\$20,597.08	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$15,597.08
Riveredge Nature Center	\$8541.95	\$6337.95	\$6337.95	\$2204.00
Wisconsin Women Fish	\$50,126.00	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$40,126.00
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$166,989.44</b>	<b>\$76,557.31</b>	<b>\$75,000.00</b>	<b>\$91,989.44</b>
<b>Not Recommended for Funding - Denied</b>				
Fishing Has No Boundaries – Hayward Chapter	\$10,540.00	\$7,905.00	\$0	n/a
Tomorrow River Valley Conservation Club, Inc	\$11,100.00	\$8,325.00	\$0	n/a

## Fishing for Dinner

*Objective:* Engage potential anglers by offering Fishing for Dinner (FFD) classes statewide to reach a diverse group of participants. The goal is for participants to purchase fishing licenses after attending classes and join the community of anglers for the long term. Outreach includes exhibiting and conducting demos at events, fairs, and trade shows where people gather to learn about sustainable lifestyle practices, such as eating locally. DNR staff collects information on potential partners and participants and follows up with people who express interest. Classes cover basic fishing skills, where to fish, an overview of the Public Trust Doctrine, effective responses to threats to sustainability, safe and ethical harvest practices and cooking the catch.

*Results:* By the end of June 2022, the program had held three multi-session classes, each with different themes serving 32 people. One was a hybrid virtual and in-person ice fishing class in Madison, another was a trout fishing class in the Driftless area and the third was about pan fishing urban waters in Milwaukee with partners at the Urban Ecology Center. Another class scheduled for June 2022 in the Northern Kettle Moraine State Forest was canceled due to staffing limitations.



*First time angler at Trout Fishing for Dinner class, May 2022.  
Photo by Chuck Horn*

Among the 20 participants, 16 indicated that they had already purchased licenses in 2020-2022 and 4 benefited from the educational license waiver. The program will use DNR customer identification numbers collected from participants to track future license-buying habits and encourage their continued participation.

## Fishing in the Neighborhood

*Objective:* Restore the Fishing in the Neighborhood (FiN) internship program by incorporating it into the Angler R3 Grant guidance and by participating in the State of Wisconsin Student Diversity Internship Program (SWSDIP) to recruit interns (FiN'terns). The hope with SWSDIP is to recruit bilingual candidates who can bridge language barriers, welcome people from communities of color to fishing and improve compliance with regulations and awareness of the fish health advisory.

*Results: Continued transition to Angler R3 Grant:* The Angler R3 grant program was to fund future FiN efforts, but the previous format and timing of the grant were not compatible with summer programming schedules and only the Urban Ecology Center (UEC) was able to submit a grant for the second half of the 2018-2020 biennium. Their project was extended due to the pandemic. The hope was to place four FiN'terns in BIPOC neighborhoods through SWSDIP for the summer of 2022, but hiring complications resulted in landing only one intern. The SWSDIP will need to continue efforts to look for ways to attract diversity within applicant pool, who represent the communities in which they will be placed.

## License Waivers

*Objective:* Provide educational Learn to Fish license waivers to novice anglers that are part of an organized group participating in an approved program, either the DNR's Angler Education Program, Fishing for Dinner or one of their own design. Audiences are high school physical education and biology class students, and adults attending approved programs, not one-day events.

*Results:* The Angler Education program did not issue any Learn to Fish educational license waivers in FY21 and issued nine in FY22, including seven to high schools and two to the DNR's FFD classes statewide. The waiver allowed teachers and group leaders to introduce 213 older teens and four adults to fishing.

## **Tackle Loaner Program**

*Objective:* Stock loaner sites with basic fishing equipment. Provide specialty items to sites where there is staff interest and expertise to make proper use of it, as budget allows. Supply loaner sites with non-lead sinkers and instruct site managers to purchase non-lead sinkers when they need to make replacements on short notice, outside of the main distribution period. At least one-third of the sites that desire help with maintenance will receive it through volunteer recruitment.

*Results:* The department currently has 54 tackle loaner sites statewide, with about half at state parks and a handful at partners. The pandemic shuttered all tackle loaner sites until late summer 2021 and the program is awaiting use reports for the remainder of this biennium. The type of information expected in these reports includes numbers of individuals, families and different groups that borrowed the gear, and the number of fishing days logged. Parks typically serve family groups and individuals while service centers tend to serve larger groups from organizations and schools.

## **Free Fishing Weekend**

*Objective:* Provide opportunities for novice anglers of all ages to be introduced to fishing at organized clinics or by the invitation of friends and family. It's also a "welcome back" to lapsed anglers to be reminded of what they've been missing. With an emphasis on community engagement, Free Fishing Weekend is a catalyst for families and social groups to plan future fishing outings. By state statute 29.197 (3), two statewide Free Fishing Weekends are scheduled every year; a summer event occurs the first full weekend in June and a winter event is held the third full weekend in January.

*Results:* Like summer Free Fishing Weekend at the end of FY20, the winter event for FY21 was a Do-it-Yourself affair with no organized clinics being offered due to the pandemic. The media efforts centered on encouraging people to participate in the special weekend as individuals or with members of their household, the department has not been able to gather data on participation. Pandemic restrictions were easing by January of 2022, and colleagues and partners were allowed to offer events; three stepped up providing ice fishing instruction to 95 people. The summer version at the close of the biennium brought a slate of 15 Free Fishing Weekend clinics. Participation numbers have not yet been reported, but estimated attendance is 1,500.

## **Angler Education Instructor Training and Activity**

*Objective:* Train a minimum of five facilitators per year to lead and conduct angler education instructor training and certification workshops in their communities. Improve Angler Education Instructor training workshops with an emphasis on increasing instructor networking through local fishing clubs, conservation clubs, and youth organizations to reach new audiences. Evaluate and survey instructors and program participants to determine long-term involvement, effectiveness and needs. Support efforts of certified and noncertified volunteers to deliver angler education programming and fishing clinics. Encourage instructors and others who plan Free Fishing Weekend events to target adults as well as families with young children. Purchase supplies and services for workshops and support volunteer efforts.

*Results:* For this biennium, the department conducted four trainings where the program certified 60 people as Angler Education R3 Instructors. Two workshops were online, one was in-person for warden trainees, and the fourth was a hybrid hosted by the Ho-Chunk Nation at the House of Wellness. Instructor training was combined with program delivery so that new instructors will have a better understanding of the nuts and bolts of community education.

While adults are the target audience for FFD, many instructors still want to focus on youth programming, so family programs were encouraged. The program recognizes that group dynamics will be different for groups of mixed ages and instructors will have to adjust the program.

Identifying people willing and able to step up to the next level of instructors and become trainers (coordinators, lead instructors or facilitators) is an effort in process as there are a handful of volunteers who fit that description.

Restoration of volunteer-led programming to pre-pandemic levels has been slow and cautious. The program estimates that fewer than five approved clinics were held by certified instructors.

## **National R3 Interests**

### **Federal Omnibus Legislation -- Reauthorize the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Safety Trust Fund ([HR3702/S1995](#))**

The Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Safety Trust Fund consists of funding from fuel taxes on small engines and motorboats. Reauthorization would be through federal fiscal year 2026 and would modify use of the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, which provides funding for fisheries conservation and management, water and boating infrastructure, and recreational boating safety. The bill modifies use of the Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration Fund, which supports wildlife restoration, conservation, and hunter education and safety programs.

The bill requires the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to report on (1) the increasing use of nonmotorized vessels and their impacts on motorized and nonmotorized vessel access, (2) user conflicts at waterway access points, (3) the use of Sport Fish Restoration Program funds to improve nonmotorized vessel access and the reasons for providing such access, and (4) the use of Recreational Boating Safety Program funds for nonmotorized boating safety programs.

The GAO shall consult with the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council and the National Boating Safety Advisory Council on study design, scope, and priorities for the report.

These proposals were rolled into the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act which became Public Law No.: 117-58 on November 15, 2021.

### **National Hunting and Shooting Sports Action Plan**

Wisconsin DNR staff played an integral role in developing the National Hunting and Shooting Sports Action plan, which was approved by the Council for the Advancement of Hunting and the Shooting Sports (CAHSS) in 2016. In 2018, the CAHSS Board of Directors tasked council staff with identifying key areas which should be addressed to further advance implementation of the national plan. To accomplish this task, the council developed the National R3 Implementation Workgroup (IWG). This workgroup of 24 R3 experts (representing 11 states including Wisconsin and 18 organizations) dedicated more than 3,500 hours of work over 18 months to develop five priority projects that could be completed with available resources. In August 2020 these five solution-based projects were announced: the National R3 Clearinghouse, the Marketing Guide, the State R3 Structure Case Studies, the Mentoring Program Self-assessment, and Strategies for Building an R3 Culture. These solutions were released in 2020. The IWG reached the end of its term in July of 2021. With valuable input from a cross-section of IWG participants, the need for a team of R3 professionals to assess the National R3 Plan and evaluate the products created in support of that plan was addressed. To meet those objectives, The Assessment Group (TAG) and TAG Review Panel were assembled in November of 2021.



# Sporting Heritage Council Recommendations

Several new members were appointed to the Sporting Heritage Council in FY20. The group expressed interest in increasing meeting frequency to an every-other-month basis to increase opportunity for discussion of R3 topics and make thoughtful recommendations to the Department of Natural Resources, Natural Resources Board, Governor's Office, and Legislature.

## **License Packages to Improve Recruitment, Retention & Reactivation**

In exploring ways to improve recruitment, retention, and reactivation of hunters and anglers the council had several discussions about additional program funding. Other interest groups and outdoor enthusiasts have also investigated and encouraged the development of a dedicated funding source. Some variations have been the subject of voting at Conservation Congress spring hearings.

A concept that has arisen is to establish a Cherish Wisconsin hunting and fishing license that would be issued through a lottery of individuals that have made a minimal, voluntary contribution to fund recruitment, retention, and reactivation efforts. This limited number of licenses would authorize nearly all the hunting, fishing, and trapping activities that are offered in Wisconsin, possibly even the limited draw species such as bear, bobcat, and sturgeon.

The council identified staffing as a strategically important way to utilize this long-term, stable funding source.

Creating this funding source would require an act of the legislature.

## **Wisconsin Shore Fishing Program**

In FY21, the Sporting Heritage Council discussed and voted unanimously to recommend that the department initiate a shore fishing program.

It is common for new or young anglers to have their first angling experiences while fishing from shore. Fishing from shoreline areas is an activity that is inexpensive and readily accessible. Opportunities to fish from shore are relatively abundant in Wisconsin. These and other factors lead to a perception that increasing shore fishing opportunities will help to recruit, retain, and reactivate anglers. The expenditures of new anglers will have related economic impacts locally and statewide.

Initial discussions with the DNR Bureau of Fisheries have been positive and are ongoing. Final efforts may not involve all aspects described here, but products should minimally include new fishing locations identified on the department's website.

### Potential shore fishing program components:

1. **Website** - a revised presence on the department's website. There are currently a variety of lists that describe fishing opportunities, as well as a mapping tool. There may be ways to improve the packaging and consistency of this information.
2. **Mapping** - mapping platted waterway access points has recently become feasible. It is possible that many of these access points can provide good fishing opportunities.
3. **Signage** – Volunteers have expressed interest in obtaining permission from landowners such as cities and villages to post signs identifying public access points for fishing. It may be possible for the department to cooperate by providing generic signs that are available from local fisheries staff. DNR owned/managed properties will still have DNR signs.
4. **Coordinating with volunteers** – Local fishing clubs have identified fishing locations and would like a way to submit that information to the department for publication in lists or mapping tools. A form for

submitting this information and a potential role for local fisheries staff to communicate with volunteers may be components.

5. **Accessibility** – There are opportunities to develop accessible fishing locations that are part of approved master plans. Completing one or more of these during this two-year period would help provide access in those locations and would help highlight the abundant shore fishing opportunities generally.
6. **Publicity** – There will be opportunities to publicize shore fishing both at the start of the initiative and as there are accomplishments. Good public relations can help drive anglers to the locations we are publicizing.
7. **Habitat** – Where resources are available, improving habitat to attract fish is desirable.

### Needed Resources

Resources to accomplish these tasks are likely already in place. They include the services of the staff specialist and Angler R3 coordinator who currently maintains the department’s shore fishing web pages. Developing and ordering signs might be a function of the R3 program. Local fisheries staff might receive the signs and communicate with volunteers who would obtain permission, place, and submit information about the locations.

A shore fishing program might be made up of the people who have the various roles in implementation. They would meet periodically to coordinate and could be chaired by a person selected by the bureau director. The team does not need to be permanent but would serve until some of the projects are completed, likely over two years.

### Related opportunities

- A shore fishing program and related publicity would provide opportunities to emphasize the importance of Wisconsin’s stewardship programs.
- This could also be a chance to highlight DNR partnerships with fishing clubs and organizations to expand shore fishing opportunities and related economic benefits.
- Focusing on urban fishing areas also addresses the department’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## **Sporting Heritage Council Members FY2020 - FY2022**

<b>Chair (DNR Appointee):</b>	Scott Loomans
<b>Governor’s Appointee:</b>	Reggie Hayes
<b>Conservation Congress Representative:</b>	Tony Blattler
<b>Deer Hunting Representative:</b>	Liz Baker
<b>Bird Hunting Representative:</b>	Mark LaBarbera
<b>Angling Representative:</b>	Robert Haase
<b>Bear Hunting Representative:</b>	Bill Tollard
<b>Furbearer Hunting/Trapping Representative:</b>	Scott Zimmerman
<b>Senate Representative (Republican):</b>	Vacant
<b>Senate Representative (Democrat):</b>	Sen. Bob Wirch
<b>Assembly Representative (Republican):</b>	Sen. Rob Stafsholt
<b>Assembly Representative (Democrat):</b>	Rep. Nick Milroy
<b>DNR Staff:</b>	Keith Warnke (retired April 2022)
<b>DNR Staff:</b>	Bob Nack
<b>DNR Staff:</b>	Emily Iehl
<b>DNR Staff:</b>	Theresa Stabo

# Appendix

Southwick Associates' study *Retaining 2020's Surge of Licensed Anglers* examined the wide fluctuation in license sales and surveyed anglers on their motivations and other factors that affected their license-buying habits. Wisconsin was included in this study. The Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF) also conducted research on this phenomenon and provided resources to capture this new audience in their [report](#), *Casting a Wide Net – Identifying New Anglers & Boaters and Determining Tactics for Retention*. They also provided an [infographic](#) outlining attributes of these newcomers to fishing and in 2022, did a “leaky bucket” analysis in their [Special Report on Fishing](#) to look at what happened to those newcomers.



2020 South Central  
Angler Questionnaire



FishLicenseSalesTren  
dsFeb20162021.pdf



FishLicenseSalesTren  
dsApril20162022.pdf

Fiscal Year 2021 Hunter Education Annual Report: [https://widnr.widen.net/s/ddqphtxfv9/he\\_annual-report\\_2021](https://widnr.widen.net/s/ddqphtxfv9/he_annual-report_2021)

US Trapping statistics: <https://www.fishwildlife.org//afwa-inspires/furbearer-management>