

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

2021-23 BIENNIAL REPORT



Kohler-Andrae dunes boardwalk
Photograph courtesy of Jeffrey Ewig



October 2023

State of Wisconsin
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October 11, 2023

Governor Evers and Members of the Wisconsin State Legislature

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, I am pleased to submit our 2021-23 Biennial Report. In accordance with s. 15.04 (1)(d) Wis. Stats., the report includes a review of performance and operations highlights and a summary of our agency's policy on flex-time and alternative work schedules.

Please let us know if you have any questions regarding this report or if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Adam N. Payne'.

Adam N. Payne
Secretary

**Department of Natural Resources
2021-23 Biennial Report**

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AGENCY DESCRIPTION

The Legislature created the department in 1967 by combining closely related conservation functions and combined them with newly emerging environmental protection programs. The department is administered by a secretary who is appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. The Natural Resources Board establishes policy for the department and consists of seven citizen members who are appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. The department is organized with a headquarters office in Madison, five regional offices and over 165 other field stations and offices. The central office staff assists the secretary in directing the regions, which carry out the field operations of the department. Over 70 percent of the department's personnel operate from field stations outside of Madison.

The department coordinates the preservation, protection and regulation of the natural environment for the benefit of the people of this state and its visitors. Included in its objectives are water and air quality maintenance; water supply regulations; solid and hazardous waste management; fish and wildlife management; forest management and protection; providing parks and recreation opportunities; lake management; wetland, shoreland and floodplain protection; and law enforcement.

The department also coordinates federal, state and local aid programs of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other federal agencies, and it administers federal funds available for outdoor recreation and pollution abatement.

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Division

The Division of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks plans and direct activities to protect, manage, conserve, and wisely use the state's lands, plants, wildlife, fisheries, and recreational resources. This program's goals are accomplished by establishing objectives that include developing and maintaining game and non-game fish and wildlife populations; coordinating long-range programs of management and protection for Natural Heritage Conservation; and providing necessary access, opportunities, development and operations for statewide recreational and conservation activities within state parks, southern forests, wildlife and fish lands, public water bodies, scientific areas, and state natural areas.

Division programs include:

Wildlife Management – protects and manages Wisconsin's wildlife populations, their habitats, and promotes wildlife enjoyment and appreciation for the benefit of current and future generations.

Parks and Recreation Management – provides citizens and visitors, of all ages and abilities, with the highest quality state parks, forests, trails, educational experiences, natural resource stewardship and services in their pursuit of a full range of outdoor recreational opportunities. The state park system boasts 49 state parks and recreation areas, more than 500 boat launches, 15 state forests, 16 state and national trails, over 5,000 campsites, plus thousands of acres for adventures.

Natural Heritage Conservation (NHC) – works to conserve Wisconsin's native plants, animals and their habitats using science, collaborative approaches, and creative strategies. The program is responsible for managing and providing guidance on hundreds of non-game species throughout Wisconsin, including state and federally protected species and their habitats. The program also manages the country's oldest and largest system of State Natural Areas which protect outstanding examples of Wisconsin's native landscape and are used for a variety of recreational purposes.

Fisheries Management – manages fisheries activities in Wisconsin's 15,081 inland lakes, 44,000 miles of rivers and streams, 800 miles of Great Lakes shoreline, and 250 miles of Mississippi River frontage.

Office of Applied Science – provides research and consultation services on statewide fish and wildlife priority issues. It is an independent unit, comprised of a fisheries research team and a wildlife research team, which reports directly to Division leadership.

Office of Business Services – supports the work of the Division by providing centralized administrative services such as budget management, grants management, fiscal processing, workforce development, policy, and communications.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

2021 AND 2022 GOALS AND ACTUALS

Performance Measure	Goal 2021	Actual 2021	Goal 2022	Actual 2022
Number of visits to the Wisconsin State Parks System.	15,300,000	22,235,516	15,400,000	20,210,633
Processing time for endangered resource reviews.	7 days	5.8 days	7 days	6.8 days
Percentage of approved fish quotas produced at State Fish Hatcheries that are stocked out. ¹	90%	108%	90%	107%
Cost per unit of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) samples. ²	Reduce per unit sample cost by 2-3% from previous year.	-0.07%	Reduce per unit sample cost by 2-3% from previous year.	2.08%

2023, 2024 AND 2025 GOALS

Performance Measure	Goal 2023	Goal 2024	Goal 2025
Number of visits to the Wisconsin State Parks System.	15,500,000	15,600,000	15,700,000
Processing time for endangered resource reviews.	7 days	7 days	7 days
Percentage of approved fish quotas produced at State Fish Hatcheries that are stocked out.	90%	90%	90%
Average statewide testing turnaround time for CWD samples	15 days	13 days	10 days

¹ Calendar year reporting

² Cost per sample is an estimate that includes supplies, laboratory testing expenses, and staff time.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Wildlife Management

- In FY22 and FY23, WDNR submitted samples from over 34,000 deer for CWD testing at a **new CWD Processing Center** located on the State Game Farm campus in Poynette. Along with surveillance, proper carcass disposal continued with the **expansion of the CWD Adopt-a-Dumpster program**.
- In 2022, with the cooperation of participating counties, Wildlife Management program staff provided **wildlife damage abatement assistance** to 950 agriculture producers who experienced damages to commercial agricultural crops caused by wild deer, elk, bear, geese, and/or turkey. In addition, in cooperation with USDA-Wildlife Services, the Wolf Conflict Program responded to 107 wolf complaints, verifying wolves involved in 63 of these reports. Compensation was paid for verified livestock losses, missing calves, hunting dogs, and pet dogs.
- Through the **Deer Donation Program**, 1,243 deer were donated by hunters in 2022, resulting in approximately 49,720 pounds of ground venison distributed to food pantries across the state.
- In FY22 and FY23, elk program staff **monitored almost 200 elk statewide**, through GPS radio collar tracking, including 32 spring collared calves. Additional herd monitoring and survey techniques were implemented including remote camera surveys, fixed-wing flights, drones flights, and seasonal surveys. Since reintroduction, both the Northern and Central elk herds continue to see annual population increases at average rates of 10% and 16%, respectively.
- The State Game Farm **produced and stocked a total of 150,266 pheasants** for FY22 and FY23. Pheasants were stocked on 89 state-owned properties. An additional 3,824 pheasants were released on public hunting grounds in FY 23 through the Day-Old Chick program. This program was not available in FY22.
- **Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP)** - In FY22 staff provided site visits to 106 new members and 154 re-enrollments resulting in management recommendations for 88,255 acres. In FY23 site visits were provided to 76 new members and 127 re-enrollments resulting in herd and habitat management recommendations on 84,201 acres. In FY23, DMAP staff also engaged with over 1,500 landowners monthly on issues pertaining to deer and habitat management.
- In FY21, a \$1.9 million grant for the **Voluntary Public Access Program & Habitat Incentive Program** was awarded to DNR to carry out private lands leased for public access program. To date, over \$1.5 million has been expended to secure over 40,000 acres of access and 350 acres of improved habitat.
- In FY22, there was an unprecedented highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreak, impacting both domestic and wildlife birds. The **DNR Wildlife Health program** coordinated surveillance of wild birds, response to reports of sick and dead birds, public outreach, and collaboration with partner agencies, especially DHS, DATCP and USDA.
- Wildlife Area Education & Visitor Centers at **Crex Meadows, George W. Mead and Horicon Marsh** hosted over 35,000 visitors in 2022 with over 15,000 visitors participating in over 400 educational programs
- Provided almost **40,000 acres of public access on private lands** through leases with over 200 Wisconsin landowners.

Parks and Recreation

- Piloted new **visitation counting methodologies** utilizing various technologies.
- Started providing **Wisconsin State Park System (WSPS) information in multiple languages** (signage and visitor guide).
- Launched the **Check Out Wisconsin State Parks at Your Library program** – providing more than 10,000 passes to patrons across the state during the biennium.
- Launched the **Volunteer Impact System** allowing properties to seek more volunteers and allowing volunteers to sign up for opportunities at all properties and to track their efforts.
- Completed more than **\$10 million in upgrades at Peninsula State Park** including work on the roads, toilet shower buildings and vault toilets.
- The DNR owns over 920 bridges and more than 50% of them are 100 years old or older. \$5 million was spent on projects to **rehabilitate, repair and replace a number of these bridges on the state trail system** over the last two years.
- Completion of **Governor Dodge equestrian campground** by Friends of Governor Dodge State Park.
- Friends groups at **Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks** constructed an additional six miles of **single-track mountain bike trails** at each property, creating 21 miles of new bike trail across 2 years.
- A new state park opened – **Lizard Mound State Park** is a 32-acre property in Washington County.
- Partnered with the Natural Resource Foundation on more projects, field trips and grants than any prior years including the **implementation of 20 pollinator gardens**.
- Completed record **acquisition for Ice Age Trail properties** – more than the last 10 years – with a total of 19 land protection transactions.
- Held **OutWiGo Green at the Kettle Moraine Southern Unit** resulting in over 1,000 individuals attending the event to explore outdoor recreation opportunities.
- **Jumpstarted the accessibility program** by working with the Facility and Lands Program to purchase adaptive equipment, invest in universal infrastructure and to assist partners in the development of projects that **promote access to the outdoors for everyone regardless of their ability**. Projects include investments in accessible kayaks, beach wheelchairs, outdoor wheelchairs, beach access mats, fishing piers, walkways, playground equipment and more.
- **Expanded the electronic payment station program** with the purchase of 28 new stations placed at Park and Forest properties around the state. These pay stations provided increase customer service for sales of daily and annual admission passes and have the ability to dispense a Resident Annual Sticker at the time of purchase.
- Implemented a **camping notification system** where potential campers can set a range of dates/amenities at specific properties and be notified if any campsites become available.
- Hosted over **638,000 camping nights at State Parks and Forests in 2022**, with an estimated weekend occupancy of 96% during the summer months.

- Mackenzie Environmental Center and Havenwoods State Forest hosted the **Midwest Outdoor Heritage Educational Expo (MOHEE)**. The three days in the spring of 2023 drew over 4,800 4th-7th grade students, 770 teachers & chaperones, and 200 volunteers attending.

Natural Heritage Conservation (NHC)

- Completed **prescribed burns on 12,374 acres** of prairie, grassland, oak savanna, and barrens habitats managed by program.
- **Controlled terrestrial and aquatic invasive plant species** on 12,284 acres of State Natural Area properties and other public lands.
- Coordinated over 525 volunteers who worked over 9,589 hours to **improve and restore habitats on 54 State Natural Area properties**. This volunteer effort improved habitat conditions across 797 acres of public lands. (SNA Volunteer data from FY22 only. FY23 won't be compiled until early next year)
- Completed **1,876 rare, threatened, and endangered species field visits and desktop reviews** providing technical assistance or consultation for permitted and reviewed projects.

Fisheries Management

- Completed the **statewide Walleye Management Plan** in 2022. The plan sets goals, objectives, strategies, and actions to sustain and enhance walleye populations and habitat throughout Wisconsin.
- **Stocked over 12.6 million fish** to enhance fishing opportunities for anglers throughout the state.
- Fisheries staff received and processed 1,545 fishing tournament permit applications, 499 wild bait harvest permit applications, 28 natural waterbody permit applications, and conducted 225 natural waterbody jurisdictional reviews.
- **Habitat enhancement projects** were completed on 31 lakes and 9 spring ponds. Projects included installation of wood habitat in the form of shoreline tree drops and fish cribs in lakes and dredging of spring ponds that enhanced fishing opportunities throughout the state.
- **Eighteen aquatic connectivity projects** were completed with 1 dam removal and replacement of 17 improperly functioning culverts.
- **Improved 156 miles of stream riparian areas through vegetation management** to enhance fishing opportunities and access throughout the state.
- Completed **74 instream trout habitat projects** to enhance fish populations and fishing opportunities throughout the state.
- **Wisconsin Inland Trout Management Plan**
 - In 2022, 47 streams received classification updates, 33 new streams were classified for a total of 2,295 total classified streams and 13,489 miles.
 - Wisconsin now has **95.6 miles of Class 1 trout streams** due to these updates and 25.33 miles of Class 2 streams.
- Since January 2022, the DNR has **monitored PFAS in fish from 15 different waterbodies**. The finding of elevated levels of perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS) in fish in these waterbodies led to the issuance of several fish consumption advisories to protect public health.

Office of Applied Science (OAS)

- Celebrated the **75th anniversary of the Northern Highland Fishery Research Area (NHFRA)** near Boulder Junction. The NHFRA is one of the longest-running fisheries research projects and serves as an umbrella project for multiple fisheries research initiatives. These projects collectively have contributed to the understanding of how fish communities respond to fishing regulations, environmental change, and angler practices.
- Completed deer and predator tagging as part of the Southwest Wisconsin CWD, Deer and Predator Study, the **largest deer research project ever undertaken in Wisconsin**. Over 1,200 animals were captured and marked during the field phase of this groundbreaking project. The purpose of this study is to understand the factors that impact deer and deer populations and combine them into a single model.
- Continued **Snapshot Wisconsin - a statewide network of trail cameras to monitor wildlife year-round**. This project relies on the help of more than 2,000 volunteers and focuses on developing a cost-effective way to monitor all species of Wisconsin wildlife. Snapshot Wisconsin logged its 50 millionth photo in 2020 and launched a data dashboard—an interactive tool for the public to visualize the data.
- Launched a new study to **better understand panfish population trends** and their responses to angling and predator populations in Wisconsin lakes.
- Completed a study examining **factors impacting population growth of Ruffed Grouse** in the Upper Great Lakes Region.
- Surveys in 2022 included:
 - 16,779 miles of wolf tracking surveys.
 - 83 Spring pheasant survey transects.
 - 80 Ruffed grouse drumming transects.
 - 254 Otter bridge surveys run at 68 bridge sites.
 - 66 Breeding waterfowl transects flown totaling 1,980 miles.
 - 4,900+ Summer deer observations recorded.
 - 1,000 Game bird brood observations recorded by staff and the public.
 - 75,000 hunter harvest and attitude surveys mailed to hunters and trappers throughout the state.

Office of Business Services (OBS)

- Established a new division support section which will focus on **consolidation, coordination and delivery of employee development opportunities and required training**.
- Facilitated a **cross-division work team** charged with monitoring and recommending budgetary modifications to programs to **address an ongoing structural deficit in the Fish & Wildlife account**.

Forestry Division

The Division of Forestry is responsible for developing and implementing programs to protect and sustainably manage the state's forest resources. The 16 million acres of forest land and the millions of urban trees in Wisconsin significantly contribute to our quality of life. It plans, coordinates and administers current and long-range programs for the protection, improvement, perpetuation and sustainable use of Wisconsin's forests, as well as the protection of life, property and resources from wildfire.

The purpose of the Division of Forestry is to work in partnership to protect and sustainably manage Wisconsin's forest ecosystems to supply a wide range of ecological, economic and social benefits for present and future generations. It accomplishes its purpose through an organizational structure that is significantly decentralized, with less than ten percent of the staff located in the central office. The Division has found that this level of decentralization is the most successful for meeting the public's need for service and interaction.

The four sub-programs within the Division of Forestry are the Bureau of Applied Forestry, the Bureau of Field Operations, the Bureau of Forestry Business Services, and the Regional Forestry program. The Field Operations are dispersed across the State and are located within three Forestry Districts.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

2021 AND 2022 GOALS AND ACTUALS

Performance Measure	Goal 2021	Actual 2021	Goal 2022	Actual 2022
Total number acres enrolled in Managed Forest Law program.	3,403,400 acres	3,475,373 acres	3,418,400 acres	3,490,638 acres
Number of acres of private forestry outreach to previously unengaged forest landowners.	200,000 acres	223,497 acres	200,000 acres	222,588 acres
Wildland fire response time.	<30 minutes	14.7 minutes	<30 minutes	16.0 minutes

2023, 2024 AND 2025 GOALS

Performance Measure	Goal 2023	Goal 2024	Goal 2025
Number of trees planted on public and private lands as part of Wisconsin's Trillion Tree Pledge*	7,500,000	7,500,000	7,500,000
Number of acres conserved as part of Wisconsin's Trillion Tree Pledge*	12,500	12,500	12,500
Wildland fire response time.	<30 minutes	<30 minutes	<30 minutes

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Aeronautics Team

- Acquired two new drones that multispectral cameras to **support forest health assessments, prescribed fire effectiveness, wild rice restoration projects, and invasive species mapping.**
- Completed 6 months of flying in **support of wildland fire detection and suppression support**; the team was able to support all flight requests.
- Worked closely with Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) on numerous **search-and-locate missions** over 2021 and 2022.
- Flew **reconnaissance for several disasters**, including severe flooding in southcentral Wisconsin as well as a train derailment. Photographically documented damage which was incorporated into the WEM database for use by governmental and civilian agencies.
- Continued to fly extensively for the **spongy moth program to control populations.**

LeMay Forestry Center

- Designed, fabricated, and assembled a new group of heavy-duty trucks and vehicles to update aging equipment, including two new tracked low-ground-pressure units to **serve on front lines of wildland firefighting.**
- Built and modified fourteen smaller three-quarter ton and one-ton trucks to address **fire suppression and prescribed burning needs.**

Good Neighbor Authority (GNA)

The GNA is a collaborative agreement between the U.S. Forest Service and DNR to perform **forest management and restoration activities on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (CNNF)**. Many partners assist in implementation such as counties, private forestry consultants, contractors, associations, and other agencies. Primary goals of the agreement are to increase management and implementation of CNNF's land management plan, provide forest products to the local economy, and collaborate to improve health and resiliency of forestlands and watersheds within Wisconsin.

From inception in 2015 to end of FY23, Forestry has established 169 GNA sales for 28,567 acres, and closed out (completed) 105 for 16,228 acres. The past biennium, the division closed out 32 sales consisting of 5,840 acres. In addition, in the past 2 years, it sold and nearly completed 37 salvage sales as a result of the 2019 derecho (storm) event.

In addition to accomplishing forest management activities, the division began implementing restoration projects that benefit forested ecosystems across the landscape. These include 11 projects from wetland and stream mapping, culvert replacement, coldwater community restoration, botanical surveys, wildlife species of concern surveys, bat acoustic data analysis, and forest stand assessments.

Forest Protection, Prescribed Burns and Wildfire Prevention

In the 2021-23 biennium, Division of Forestry staff and partners **suppressed almost 2,000 fires over 5000 acres** within the state's forest fire protection boundaries. These included several large fires in the 2023 spring/summer season. In addition, **nearly 60,000 acres of habitat was improved through the use of prescribed fire.** DNR works collaboratively with fire departments statewide through formalized

agreements, training, and distributed over \$1 million in grants to local fire departments for forest fire suppression equipment.

One of the program investments that has added value to serving the public and increasing transparency, includes **the 'New' Wisburn mapping application and dashboards** released in February 2023 for identifying current fire danger, burning restriction, wildfire and prescribed burn situation data.

- The application is more mobile friendly and easy to navigate on small screens as 76% of customers are operating mobile devices;
- *Wisburn* is the most visited Forestry webpage (FY23, nearly 800,000 hits);
- Dashboards are also very popular with media, partners, fire departments, dispatch offices, and emergency management departments; and
- Dashboards provide more robust source for historical data, and has prepopulated quick charts to compare data against averages and export data.

Urban Forestry

The division coordinated and led an **urban forestry economic study** for the 21 Northeast and Midwest state region to identify the economic contributions of the urban forestry industry. It was funded by a federal Landscape Scale Restoration grant, the first of its kind with a focus on urban forestry as opposed to the broader green industry and its large geographic footprint. The study is now being replicated across other regions in the nation.

The Urban Forestry program also coordinated a **heat mapping project in Milwaukee** beginning in 2022 to understand how different parts of the city experience high-heat events. This project helped determine where the hottest temperatures are in the city and where trees may be able to mitigate the heat through planting and maintenance. The project mapping also showcases potential funding and service area priorities.

The **Urban Forestry program** administered 111 grants of over \$1.4 million dollars. These grants help Wisconsin communities of all sizes and locations **increase their local urban forestry capacity and canopy** by funding management plans and inventories, tree planting, maintenance and removal, pest and disease response, staff training, public education and outreach, local ordinance development, supporting the development of local advisory or advocacy groups, and more.

Private Forestry

In 2018, the division launched a **5-year initiative to connect 20,000 landowners with a natural resources professional**. This was part of a partnership-driven recommendation through the DNR Private Forestry Advisory Committee. Working closely with Aldo Leopold Foundation and UW-Extension, as well as collaborating with the broader private forestry community, consulting foresters and DNR staff, the division exceeded its goal by completing over 21,000 property visits to new landowners who had not previously engaged with a natural resources professional. The division's overall goal was to be able to **educate landowners, help guide them towards their objectives, and eventually follow-through on land management activities**.

Other Activities

Timber Sales: In 2022, the DNR, county forest partners and the U.S. Forest Service completed over 900 timber sales across 77,000 acres of Wisconsin with a stumpage value of over \$62 million.

Capital Development: Over the 2021-2023 biennium, the DNR completed or nearly completed the replacement of fire response stations in Black River Falls, Gresham and Jim Falls.

Public Safety and Resource Protection Division

The Division of Public Safety and Resource Protection (PSRP) provides public safety, resource protection, and promotion of the safe and responsible use of Wisconsin's natural resources. PSRP's primary objective is to achieve voluntary compliance by the public through a three-pronged approach of enforcement, education, and community-based warden practices to ensure fair and equal treatment.

PSRP Responsibilities Include:

- Public engagement through directed patrols and complaint response to address specific issues and problematic activities.
 - PSRP directed patrols (vehicle and foot patrols) emphasize observations of a specific activity or issue and encourages contacts (warden initiated) with the user public.
 - Patrol efforts are directed to the following: sport fishing (trout, walleye, sturgeon and fish runs); commercial fishing on the Great Lakes and Mississippi River; hunting (deer, turkey, waterfowl, small game, bear); night hunting; safe firearm use; boating; snowmobiling; off-highway vehicle use; state lands, state parks, and state forest use; habitat protection; environmental protection; and forest protection.
- Support of department-wide law enforcement regulatory and managerial activities.
- Administration of safety education programs for hunting, boating, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), and snowmobiles in partnership with volunteer instructors and web-based learning.
- Outreach and educational presentations to the public on the responsible use and the application of both environmental and natural resource recreational laws and regulations.
- Timely investigation of all violation complaints, and if warranted, referral to the attention of the judicial system.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

2021 AND 2022 GOALS AND ACTUALS

Performance Measure	Goal 2021	Actual 2021	Goal 2022	Actual 2022
Maintain or reduce the average number of recreational fatalities; off-highway vehicle (snowmobile, motorcycle and UTV/ATV), and boating and hunting related fatalities per 100,000 combined users.	4.53 per 100,000	4.07 per 100,000	4.53 per 100,000	3.10 per 100,000

2023, 2024 AND 2025 GOALS

Performance Measure	Goal 2023	Goal 2024	Goal 2025
Reduce the number of recreational fatalities per 100,000 combined users each year. Includes off-highway vehicle (snowmobile, motorcycle and UTV/ATV), boating and hunting related fatalities. ³	4.53 per 100,000	Reduce fatalities per 100,000 users from 2023 actual.	Reduce fatalities per 100,000 users from 2024 actual.
Investigate 100% of fatal recreational incidents. ⁴	--	100%	100%

³ Effective with calendar year 2024, the Division of Public Safety and Resource Protection is pivoting from a goal based on a rolling 10-year average of fatalities per 100,000 users to one that is based on reducing the number of fatalities per 100,000 users from prior year actuals.

⁴Effective with calendar year 2024, the Division of Public Safety and Resource Protection is adding this performance measure.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Standardized Off-Highway Vehicle Warden Training:** Snowmobile, ATV, and UTV emergency operations training now includes both classroom-learning and an operations course. Recruit **wardens receive nationally recognized ATV Safety Institute Certification and off-road vehicle safety certification**, as well as warden-specific law enforcement operations training. For more information on how the division works to maintain safe and enjoyable recreational vehicle experiences for all, **please look to the most recent [Wisconsin Recreational Vehicle Safety Education & Enforcement report](#)**.
- Environmental Protection:** Staff continued to ensure public health and safety by resolving environmental complaints and violations through the **stepped enforcement civil process**, which is a series of incremental actions designed to resolve violations at the lowest level appropriate for the circumstances.

Environmental Enforcement Data Summary			
Enforcement Action	2021	2022	2023*
Cases Accepted	131	115	81
Notices of Violations	150	157	95
Enforcement Conferences	127	124	72
Citations	21	18	10
Consent Orders	20	18	18
Referrals	38	28	12
Cases Closed	177	168	113
<i>*2023 data as of September 30, 2023</i>			

- Deer Season Safety Marketing Campaign:** The Deer Season Safety Marketing Campaign was a collaborative effort between the Division of Public Safety and Resource Protection, the Office of Communications and K2W to **target safe hunting**. In addition to this messaging, the **Drive Sober Hunt Sober** campaign was a collaborative effort with Wisconsin State Patrol and the division.
- Shooting Range Grant:** In collaboration with the Wisconsin Conservation Congress Shooting Range Committee, the Bureau of Recreational Skills and Outdoor Safety **increased the shooting range grant budget from \$500,000 to \$800,000** in 2021 based on increased Pittman-Robertson federal grant funding.
- Learn to Hunt (LTH) Streamlining:** In summer of 2021, the Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3) program outlined needs and action steps to update and streamline the **Learn to Hunt program** over the following few years. In fall 2021, the program rolled out an updated approval process for Learn to Hunt programs. In 2022, the division's R3 staff, in collaboration with external partners, worked to **provide 85 Learn to Hunt opportunities** and multiple in-person and virtual workshops.
- Hunter Education Program:** The hunter education program established a strategic roadmap to provide continued **certification services for in-person and all-online learners**. In 2022, approximately 25,000 students were certified through Wisconsin hunter and bowhunter safety education courses. In addition to formal instruction, the division worked hard to engage the public via **radio, podcasts, social media, digital media, and news releases**, with the goal of enrollment in safety courses and reducing avoidable incidents. For more information on the hunter education program and how it promotes safety and conservation of our natural resources, refer to the most recent **[Hunter Education Annual Report](#)**.
- Marine Enforcement Team:** In 2021, the Law Enforcement Management Team (LEMT) initiated a revamp of this team to include all wardens stationed along Lake Michigan and a newly assigned warden

to the Ashland marine station on Lake Superior. The Marine Enforcement Team wardens focus primarily on marine environment through boating, commercial fishing, wholesale fish dealing, Great Lakes charter and guiding, aquatic invasive species (AIS) trades, underwater archaeology protection, traditional fish and game, and environmental enforcement.

- **Operation Dry Water:** Operation Dry Water is an annual national boating campaign focusing on **educating the public of the dangers of operating motorboats while under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol**. During the campaign, Wisconsin conservation wardens are encouraged to focus their efforts on public awareness and intoxicated boat operation enforcement. In 2021, Wisconsin's work received national recognition from the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) when we were presented the Operation Dry Water - Top Law Enforcement Agency award in the large agency division.
- **Fishmobile:** In 2021, the Angler R3 program initiated a new outreach program offered by the **Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF) involving Mobile First Catch Centers (MFCCs)**. The division committed to two trailer units. The outreach trailer provides intentional programming in all neighborhoods including those that are home to Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), communities that are historically underrepresented in the fishing community. In 2022, the division collaborated with partners such as Mobile Madison and Vera Court Neighborhood Center and provided services in response to requests from foster youth agencies and the Wisconsin School for the Deaf.
- **Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Work:** Wardens and environmental enforcement staff have significantly increased efforts into investigating invasive species over the past several years, deploying strategic tactics to achieve this goal. One of these tactics includes focused work in **identifying aquatic invasive species within illegal trade and consumer distribution**. In addition to traditional patrol-based invasive species work (like ensuring boaters are not leaving the water with invasive plants or zebra mussels), **approximately fifty wardens have received specialized training on issues surrounding invasive species in trade on a larger scale**.
- **On-Water Search and Recovery:** Since acquiring our first Underwater Remotely Operated Vehicle (uROV) in 2006, division staff have helped to locate and recover dozens of drowning victims. Each year, the uROV team also provides great assistance to external partners through investigating boating incidents, locating hard to find underwater evidence, assisting with cold cases, and supporting port security in harbors.
- **Boating Safety Welcome Centers:** To reduce the trend in boating related fatalities, the division committed resources to hosting Boating Safety Welcome Centers where DNR staff **promote lifejacket wearing, responsible boating practices and water safety marketing to members of the public**. In the program's first season (2022), the division was present at 22 different venues, primarily throughout Southeast and South Central regions of the state, making contact with approximately a 1000 members of the public and providing over 100 safety demonstrations.
- **Community Service Officer (CSO) Program:** 2022 was the first year of the division's CSO program. The goal of the program is to **provide hands-on learning and internship opportunities** to individuals who are interested in learning more about the work of conservation wardens. CSOs assist the division by facilitating community outreach at special events, educating the public on DNR rules and regulations, assisting with crime prevention efforts, providing general office assistance, and more.
- **Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Fleet Planning:** In 2022, the RSOS OHV Program worked in conjunction with the Business Section to **strategically evaluate the division's OHV enforcement needs**. (i.e., ATV and snowmobile patrols) Most of the recreational fleet was 17 or more years old at the beginning of

2022. In summer of 2022, an OHV replacement plan was approved and implemented, allowing ATVs and snowmobiles to be scheduled for replacement on a 13-year cycle.

- **Body Camera Implementation:** In 2023, 70 Axon **body cameras were purchased for implementation by field wardens in the Northeast and Southeast regions of the state.** This implementation required staff to learn how to properly use the new equipment, and dedicate time to maintaining proper records. It is the goal of the division to eventually implement body cameras statewide, when adequate funding becomes available.

Environmental Management Division

The Environmental Management Division (Division) protects human health, safety and the environment by working in partnership with citizens, communities, businesses and advocacy groups. The Division recognizes the interrelationships between air, land and water resources, and relies on environmental indicators, feedback from others, and self-evaluation to continually improve services. The Division's programs include:

Drinking Water and Groundwater – Protects the quality and quantity of the state's groundwater resources and ensures the safety of drinking water.

Water Quality – Manages activities and land uses that affect water quality and both public health and safety. The program's primary objective is to provide an integrated watershed approach to managing these activities, such as policy development; watershed planning; point source regulation; water quality assessment; and water resource protection and restoration.

The Office of Great Waters – Implements a comprehensive program to protect and enhance Lake Michigan, Lake Superior, the Upper Mississippi River, their tributaries, their shorelines, their habitats and to identify problems and solutions and serve as a contact point for the Great Lakes and Mississippi communities in Wisconsin.

Air Management – Protects human health and the environment while accommodating economic growth by developing air quality implementation plans and collaborating with local, state, regional and international partners to meet state and federal air quality standards.

Remediation and Redevelopment – Oversees the investigation and cleanup of environmental contamination and the redevelopment of contaminated properties. The program provides a comprehensive, streamlined process that consolidates state and federal cleanups into one program (including hazardous waste cleanup, underground storage tank investigation and cleanup, spill response, state-funded cleanups, and brownfields).

Waste and Materials Management – Protects public health and the environment by ensuring proper management of solid and hazardous wastes, encouraging recycling of materials, and fostering efficient use of resources through waste minimization.

The Office of Emerging Contaminants – Supports Wisconsin's work to address contaminants of emerging concern through coordination, collaboration and information sharing among internal and external partners to protect people and the environment.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

2021 AND 2022 GOALS AND ACTUALS

Performance Measure	Goal 2021	Actual 2021	Goal 2022	Actual 2022
Processing time to issue an individual air construction permit (from completed application to permit decision).	58 days	55 days	58 days	58 days
Acres of abandoned/contaminated property cleaned and made available for redevelopment.	800 acres	1,115 acres	800 acres	1518 acres
Maintain Wisconsin Pollution Discharge Elimination System (majors) water permit backlog at under 10 percent.	<10%	7.6%	<10%	10.4%
Number of wells inspected during construction.	1,000	995	1,000	986
Percentage of community public drinking water systems inspected at least once in the past three calendar years.	100%	98.6%	100%	100%
Percentage of noncommunity public drinking water systems inspected at least once in the past five calendar years.	100%	99.2%	100%	100%

2023, 2024 AND 2025 GOALS

	Goal 2023	Goal 2024	Goal 2025
Processing time to issue an individual air construction permit (from completed application to permit decision).	58 days	58 days	58 days
Acres of abandoned/contaminated property cleaned and made available for redevelopment.	800	800	800
Maintain Wisconsin Pollution Discharge Elimination System (majors) water permit backlog at under 10 percent.	<10%	<10%	<10%
Percentage of annually permitted private drinking wells inspected during construction or installation. *	≥ 10%	≥ 10%	≥ 10%
Percentage of community public drinking water systems inspected at least once in the past three calendar years.	100%	100%	100%
Percentage of noncommunity public drinking water systems inspected at least once in the past five calendar years.	100%	100%	100%

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The EM Division publishes an online-only quarterly digest of highlighted news and accomplishments. The EM Insight can be viewed online at the website below and can be subscribed to for ongoing updates.

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/about/divisions/EM/Insight.html>

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Implementation

Staff from Environmental Management are working closely with staff from the Bureau of Community Financial Assistance (CFA) to develop processes for **administering federal funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)** and coordinate across divisions. Over a five-year period, more than \$700 million in BIL funding will supplement the existing Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water loan programs and will **provide new funding to communities to address PFAS and other contaminants in their drinking water**. With a focus on health equity and environmental justice, the top priorities for using this funding include ensuring all impacted communities or communities that may not otherwise have access to resources are able to invest in needed infrastructure projects, accelerating progress on lead service line replacements, addressing PFAS and infrastructure improvements for climate resiliency.

Drinking Water & Groundwater

PFAS Testing

The **PFAS (Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances) Action Plan** is a **roadmap for Wisconsin to address PFAS contamination** and provides for testing public and private water supplies when appropriate. In partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the DNR initiated a voluntary sampling project with interested communities to determine whether their municipal water supply was affected by PFAS. The department provided a PFAS Interactive Data Viewer on its website to show results from testing municipal drinking water for PFAS. The DNR also conducted a **statewide study to sample PFAS in residences with private water supply wells**. The goal was to obtain a better understanding of Wisconsin's ambient groundwater PFAS contamination.

Well Compensation Fund – ARPA Supplemental

In Fall 2022, the department announced the start of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Well Compensation and Well Abandonment Grant Programs. The new programs will provide **\$10 million in financial assistance to private well owners to address contamination in their wells** by awarding grants for the replacement, reconstruction, treatment or abandonment of their well. The eligibility criteria for both programs were expanded beyond the state-funded Well Compensation Grant Program, and many previously ineligible individuals are now eligible to apply. Expanded criteria include raising the income limit to \$100,000 and changing the contamination requirements to better reflect updated safe drinking water standards. The programs will continue to accept applications and award grants until Dec. 6, 2024, or until funding runs out.

Water Quality

Surface Water Grant Program Updates

DNR Surface Water Grants, managed cooperatively between the Water Quality and Community Financial Assistance programs, **recently awarded over \$6.5 million in funding** to 446 nonprofit organizations, water organizations and municipalities throughout Wisconsin. Applicants requested more than \$7.2 million which is matched by at least a 25% local share. Funded projects cover a wide range of activities including

outreach and education, management planning, habitat restoration, runoff pollution reduction, and aquatic invasive species control. Examples include:

- Sustaining efforts to increase community engagement, promote and implement better land management practices, and create shoreland habitat to **improve water quality in Lake Wausau and the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir in Marathon County**.
- **28 organizations received Healthy Lake grants** to assist private shoreline owners in installing fish sticks, native shoreline plantings, water diversions, water infiltration systems and rain gardens.
- 163 groups will receive support to participate in the **Clean Boats, Clean Waters watercraft inspection and education program** to help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species.

PFAS Surface Water Criteria

Effective August 1, 2022, new administrative rules for PFAS went into effect. Two rules set regulatory standards for PFAS in drinking water and surface water and the third rule sets requirements for using PFAS-containing firefighting foam. The rules provide a better understanding of **where PFAS are located** in Wisconsin and require actions to **correct contamination** when it is found.

Land Application of Biosolids Containing PFAS

The Department developed an interim strategy for Land Application of Biosolids Containing PFAS to **assist municipal treatment facilities in making decisions on land applying biosolids that contain PFAS**. There are currently no state or federal criteria for PFAS in biosolids. The strategy includes recommendations for sampling, land application decisions, source identification and reduction, and farmer and landowner communication.

Water Quality Trading Clearinghouse

The state of Wisconsin has entered into a contract to **establish the nation's first market-based water quality trading clearinghouse**. The clearinghouse is an innovative solution to water quality issues that compensates farmers and landowners, saves wastewater facilities money and protects Wisconsin's water resources.

Municipalities and industries throughout Wisconsin that own and operate wastewater treatment plants can now contract with the Wisconsin Clearinghouse to find and obtain water quality trades to help them **meet wastewater permit requirements**. This approach allows treatment plant owners to protect local water quality while saving money on costly treatment upgrades. This clearinghouse model also encourages farmers and landowners to adopt pollution-reducing practices on their land in exchange for monetary compensation.

Office of Great Waters

Removal of Beneficial Use Impairments In Great Lakes Areas of Concern (AOCs)

Two beneficial use impairments were recently removed from Wisconsin's Areas of Concern on the Great Lakes, marking progress in DNR's work to **clean up historical pollution, restore vital fish and wildlife habitats, and improve recreational opportunities**. The Degradation of Aesthetics Beneficial Use Impairment was lifted from the **Lower Green Bay and Fox River Area of Concern** in April 2022. This was the third impairment removed, out of thirteen identified environmental problems for this Area of Concern. Actions included: remediating contaminated sediment, increasing publicly accessible green spaces and recreational opportunities by the water, restoring fish and wildlife habitats, and implementing watershed management plans for the Lower Fox River Basin to reduce phosphorus and sediment pollution in runoff flowing to the river and bay. Local partners also conducted a monitoring program over several years to document improved public perceptions of aesthetic values of Lower Green Bay and the Fox River.

The Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations Beneficial Use Impairment was removed from the **St. Louis River Area of Concern** in Jan. 2023. This was the fourth impairment removed, out of nine identified environmental problems for this Area of Concern. Projects included habitat restoration for Piping Plover at Wisconsin Point and Common Tern at Interstate Island. These projects were constructed to provide places for the rare shore birds to raise their young, rest and refuel during their migration journeys. Several studies were also completed to determine the area's improved capacity to support healthy fish and wildlife populations. Additionally, several other efforts to restore the St. Louis River and estuary have been underway for decades, including remediation of contaminated sediment, water quality improvements, and restoration of fish, wild rice and wildlife habitats.

Upper Mississippi River Restoration (UMRR) Program Update

The [Upper Mississippi River Restoration \(UMRR\) Program's long-term monitoring report](#), published in July 2022, compiled over **25 years of data to assess river health and inform river management and restoration investments**. The Wisconsin DNR Long Term Resource Monitoring Field Station (LTRM) in La Crosse is a key member of the data collection and analysis network operated by the five Upper Mississippi River states and the U.S. Geological Survey.

Milwaukee Estuary Area of Concern (AOC)

The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District is partnering with the City of Milwaukee, Port Milwaukee, We Energies and Wisconsin DNR to build a new Dredged Material Management Facility in the Milwaukee harbor. When it's completed, this facility will provide **safe, secure containment for approximately 1.9 million cubic yards of polluted sediment** that will be removed from the Milwaukee, Menomonee and Kinnickinnic Rivers. The facility is specially designed to contain dredged material and control potential releases of contaminants to the environment. Design and permitting will be completed by the end of 2023 to early 2024, and construction is slated to occur in 2024 to 2026.

Manoomin (Wild Rice) Restoration in the St. Louis River Estuary

Manoomin (the Ojibwe name for wild rice) plays a vital role in the culture, livelihood, and identity of the Ojibwe people. Manoomin harvest is part of a long-standing tradition in Ojibwe communities, and the St. Louis River estuary is culturally important because of the historical presence of vast wild rice resources that provided food, community connection, and opportunities for the intergenerational transfer of traditional ecological and cultural knowledge.

Restoration as part of the St. Louis River Area of Concern (AOC) is ongoing and includes **annual seeding, vegetation management, and protection** from being eaten by waterfowl until wild rice beds become self-sustaining. A team of tribal, state, local and federal governments along with other community partners are implementing a restoration plan that includes **seeding over 100 acres each year** in sheltered bays on both the Minnesota and Wisconsin sides of the St. Louis River estuary and in Allouez Bay. AOC restoration will continue through 2026 as part of the longer-term effort to restore hundreds of acres of wild rice in the estuary.

Air Management

Sulfur Dioxide (SO₂) Air Quality Standards

The entire state of **Wisconsin now meets federal sulfur dioxide air quality standards**. In January 2022, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved a request by the DNR to redesignate an area around Rhinelander as "attainment" for the 2010 1-hour sulfur dioxide (SO₂) National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS). This designation officially recognizes that the air quality in the Rhinelander area is

meeting this health-based air quality standard. Air Management worked closely with the facility primarily responsible for SO₂ emissions in the area to identify and implement new emissions control measures. As a result of these actions, monitored SO₂ concentrations decreased by over 75%, and the area's air quality began meeting the NAAQS in 2018. Statewide, **emissions of SO₂ from Wisconsin sources are about 90% lower than 2002 levels**, with most of this decline attributable to the use of cleaner-burning fuels at power plants and industrial facilities, along with the introduction of low-sulfur diesel fuels.

Diesel Emissions Reductions Program (DERA) funding

In April 2022, the DNR awarded \$320,000 through the State Clean Diesel Grant Program to nine projects that will improve Wisconsin's air quality and address climate change. Another application period in late 2022 awarded an additional \$375,000 to eight more projects. The projects **replaced older, higher-emitting diesel engines on school buses across the state with newer, cleaner technologies**. The State Clean Diesel Grant Program is part of the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA) and is funded through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Air Management American Rescue Plan (ARP) Funding

The Air Management Program was selected to receive \$500,000/yr. in funding over three years to support **community air monitoring projects** that will encourage greater community engagement and local air quality understanding in areas that have historically been **disproportionately impacted by environmental and socioeconomic factors**.

Ozone Standard Redesignation

As ozone levels in Wisconsin have continued to decrease, more areas have been formally recognized by EPA as meeting the federal ozone standards. In April 2022, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) redesignated the final 2008 ozone standard nonattainment area in Wisconsin (in **Kenosha County**) to attainment. As a result, **the entire state is now meeting the 2008 ozone standard**. In spring 2022, **Manitowoc and Door counties** were similarly redesignated to attainment by EPA for the more stringent 2015 ozone standard, thereby reducing the areas of the state that continue to measure ozone values above that standard. These air quality improvements were due largely to the long-term reduction in emissions from industry and power plants, mobile sources, and upwind states.

Waste & Materials Management

Grants to Rural Communities for Recycling Electronics

The E-Cycle grant program created by 2021 Wisconsin Act 79, gives priority to projects in counties that do not have any permanent collection sites registered under E-Cycle Wisconsin. Money for the grants comes from fees electronics manufacturers pay under E-Cycle Wisconsin to **ensure the proper collection and recycling of used electronics**.

In 2022 and 2023, the Department of Natural Resources provided more than \$135,000 in E-Cycle Wisconsin Electronics Collection Grants for projects in 18 counties. The projects include 30 one-day collection events and three permanent electronics collection sites that increase **electronics recycling access and reduce costs for rural residents**.

Response to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) Outbreak

In 2022, the United States experienced its first major outbreak of HPAI since 2015. The outbreak infected wild birds, backyard flocks and large commercial operations. In Wisconsin, the disease affected 11

commercial poultry facilities in Barron, Dunn, Jefferson, Polk and Racine counties between March and November, resulting in the deaths of 3.3 million birds.

As part of the state response, the **DNR worked with other state, federal and local agencies** to provide technical assistance and oversight for the disposal of animal carcasses, eggs, personal protective equipment, and other contaminated waste from the farms. This included helping find locations and carbon sources (e.g., wood chips) for large compost piles of carcasses and eggs. Staff went on-site to make sure the piles reached and maintained temperatures high enough to kill pathogens.

Remediation & Redevelopment

Superfund Site Clean-up

The DNR received funding from the 2022 federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) to aid in clearing the backlog of unfunded Superfund Sites, including the **continuation of cleanup efforts at the former Penta Wood Products Superfund site in Burnett County, near Siren, Wisconsin**, where soil and groundwater have been contaminated with pentachlorophenol (PCP) and arsenic.

Howards Bay Dredging

The Great Lakes Legacy Act dredging project in Howards Bay is complete, marking a **key milestone in pollution cleanup in the St. Louis River Area of Concern (AOC)**. Howards Bay is the shipping center in the city of Superior, Wisconsin and is important for Great Lakes commerce. It is the **largest contaminated site in Wisconsin** on the St. Louis River due to centuries of industrial use that has polluted the sediments of the bay with lead, PAHs, mercury, and tributyltin; the contamination made routine dredging impractical which made it difficult for large vessels to access the bay. The project was performed in partnership with the DNR, Fraser Shipyards Inc., the City of Superior, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in coordination with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The \$21.5 million project was funded through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, with contributions from the non-federal partners. The completed project **re-opens the channel to the bay for Great Lakes commerce, solves leaching and runoff issues, and provides healthier aquatic habitat** that will improve the overall health of the St. Louis River, the largest U.S. tributary to Lake Superior that flows for 179 miles.

Fox River Clean-up Close out

In October of 2022, state closure was granted for the **Lower Fox River PCB Cleanup Project**. The **17-year project** was completed through a partnership of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, tribal nations, and the responsible parties. The Lower Fox River PCB cleanup began in 2004; the river had housed over 20 pulp and paper mills which had released polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in wastewater discharges during production and disposal of carbonless copy paper. PCB contamination, along with other industrial and manufactured gas plant contamination, posed health risks to humans and wildlife in a 39-mile contaminated section of the river. The river is one of the largest freshwater estuaries in the world and plays a vital role in Wisconsin's environment and economy. **Dredging, capping, sand covering, sediment excavation and disposal** were the selected remedies for the project. Long-term monitoring will continue on the Lower Fox River for decades; however, **there have already been positive ecological impacts** such as a 60% or more reduction in fish tissue PCB concentrations and the American White Pelican returning to nest after decades of absence.

EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency awarded a \$2 million grant to DNR, via the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), to **support assessment of potentially contaminated brownfield properties**

throughout the state in historically underserved areas. This grant encompasses brownfields throughout the state, as well as three target areas – the North Central Regional Planning Commission 10-County service area, the Lake Superior Lakeshore, and the Old North Milwaukee neighborhood. Priority sites include a parcel that formerly housed an automobile repair site and dry cleaner buildings in the city of Rhinelander, a historic underutilized warehouse located on a marina in the city of Superior, and three former dry cleaner buildings in the older northern area in the city of Milwaukee. The DNR will also use a portion of the grant from the U.S. EPA to continue the Wisconsin Assessment Monies program, which provides contractor services and community-managed funding for the environmental assessment of eligible brownfield sites. The grant will also make possible a new initiative to assess the risks of vapor intrusion from historical dry-cleaning operations.

Office of Emerging Contaminants

PFAS Foam Collection

The 2021-23 biennial budget (2021 Wisconsin Act 58) provided \$1 million to the DNR and Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) for a fluorinated **firefighting foam waste collection and disposal program**. The DNR and DATCP worked with professional firefighting associations and local fire departments to identify the quantity and distribution of unwanted foam throughout Wisconsin. North Shore Environmental Construction, Inc., a Wisconsin-based company selected through the competitive state procurement process, began collection at fire departments in Oct. 2022. The response to this collection and disposal program by the firefighting community has been strong and North Shore **has already collected approximately 40,000 gallons of unwanted foam waste**.

PFAS Community Response Toolkit

Multiple agencies coordinated to develop a community response to PFAS in drinking water toolkit. The toolkit is intended to provide local governments and residents with **information about possible steps to take when responding to PFAS contamination in their community**. It includes information about what happens when PFAS is found in drinking water – both from public water systems and private wells. It also offers steps local government and residents may take to address the contamination.

Internal Services Division

The Division of Internal Services (Division) provides support and services to WDNR staff throughout the state to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. The Division's programs include:

Facilities & Lands – Provides professional technical services related to planning, development, and maintenance of WDNR facilities, with responsibility for the acquisition, disposal and maintenance of the Department's vehicles and heavy equipment.

Finance – Administers and manages the Department's fiscal and procurement functions.

Human Resources (HR) – Recruits, develops, and maintains a diverse, qualified and productive workforce, and coordinates payroll and benefits functions.

Technology Services – Provides information management consulting, systems development and computer processing to best meet the Department's business needs.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

2021 AND 2022 GOALS AND ACTUALS

Performance Measure	Goal 2021	Actual 2021	Goal 2022	Actual 2022
Percent of simple open records requests fulfilled within 10 business days. ⁵	95%	86.5%	95%	83.9%
Number of lost workdays per 100 employees resulting from worker's compensation claims.	4.0 days	0.005 days	3.5 days	0.16 days
Percent of department-managed property under an approved master plan.	45%	50%	55%	60%

2023, 2024 AND 2025 GOALS

Performance Measure	Goal 2023	Goal 2024	Goal 2025
Percent of simple open records requests fulfilled within 10 business days.	95%	95%	95%
Number of lost workdays per 100 employees resulting from worker's compensation claims.	3 days	3 days	2.5 days
Percent of department-managed property under an approved master plan.	70%	85%	95%

⁵ Reported on a calendar year basis.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Facilities & Lands

Outdoor Recreation

Over the 2021-2023 biennium, the department completed or nearly completed the construction on **projects for improving outdoor recreation, public access, and property experiences**, including:

- **boat launches** at Kettle Moraine State Forest-Pike Lake, Merrick State Park (boat launch and universal kayak launch) and Sand Lake
- **public road and parking improvements** at Peninsula State Park, Kohler Andrae State Park, Governor Dodge State Park, Richard Bong State Rec Area, and Kettle Moraine State Forest-Northern Unit
- **toilet shower buildings** at Council Grounds, Kettle Moraine State Forest-Southern Unit, Yellowstone Lake State Park, and Mirror Lake State Park

Public Health and Safety

Over the 2021-2023 biennium, the department completed or nearly completed the construction on **projects for public health and safety**, including:

- replacement of **fire response ranger stations** at Black River Falls, Gresham, and Jim Falls;
- replaced over 150 **water fountains** at DNR properties statewide; and
- 49 new and replacement **vault toilets** at 14 state parks, state forests, and state recreational areas statewide including Big Bay, Big Foot Beach, Blue Mound, Devils Lake, Governor Dodge, Kohler Andrae, Mirror Lake, Northern Highland American Legion State Forest, Peninsula, Richard Bong Rec Area, Rocky Arbor, Sauk Prairie Rec Area, Wildcat Mountain, Wyalusing, and Yellowstone Lake.

Communication and Outreach

- **Completed the Rib Mountain State Park Master Plan.** The plan, which balances resource and recreation management with the property's capabilities and community needs, received over 6,000 public comments throughout the process.

Fleet Updates

- DNR Fleet, in partnership with all DNR programs, has made great strides towards lowering vehicle emissions. The DNR developed a **carbon emissions dashboard** that provides users/programs with past and current vehicle emission data.
- Fleet has **purchased lower emission vehicles** as manufacturers have made them available, including:
 - 72 Biodiesel
 - 16 Compressed Natural Gas (CNG)
 - 11 Electric Vehicles (EV)
 - 39 Hybrid Vehicles
- The DNR has provided **infrastructure support for EV vehicles** by installing charging stations at the Milwaukee service center, GEF 2 (central office) underground parking garage, and the DNR fleet facility at Darwin Road (Madison).

Land Acquisition

Some notable real estate acquisitions include:

- 80-acre land donation in **Devil's Lake State Park** from the Nature Conservancy
- 440 acres in **Leola Marsh Wildlife Area** in support of Prairie Chicken habitat.
- 38 acres for an **Ice Age Trail connection route** in Waukesha County—a long sought-after property that eliminates over ½ mile of dangerous road travel by ice age trail users

Rural Prosperity

Conveyed over 130 DNR property easements to utilities, which are essential **for expanding broadband to rural communities**.

External Services Division

The Division of External Services serves as a primary entry point to DNR for the public, businesses, and local government; facilitates cross-divisional integration and project management; and invests in sustainable infrastructure projects.

The Division's programs include:

Watershed Management – Manages activities and land uses that affect water quality and public health and safety. Its primary objective is to provide an integrated watershed approach which encompasses policy development, watershed planning and regulation, habitat protection, and water quality assessment.

Waterways – Manages activities and land uses that affect wetlands, Public Trust and public health and safety. Its primary objective is to provide regulatory oversight for dam safety and land use planning and activities in and near waterways and wetlands including wetland fill, water withdrawal, waterway structure placement, grading, floodplain zoning and shoreland zoning.

Office of Communication – Oversees agency communication efforts and consults with management and programs to direct the department's communications, public affairs management, marketing and outreach initiatives. It also serves as a focal point for department media requests and contacts statewide.

Community Financial Assistance – Administers grant and loan programs and works closely with local governments and interested organizations to develop and support projects that protect public health; natural resources; the environment; and outdoor recreational opportunities.

Environmental Analysis and Sustainability (EAS) – Provides a single point of contact service to businesses and governmental agencies and enhances their ability to meet and exceed environmental and economic objectives. EAS facilitates cross-agency coordination on important project and policy proposals; leads social science research for internal programs; provides laboratory services and certification; which ensures proactive and clear DNR engagement and communication with business, internal and government customers.

Customer and Outreach Services (COS) – Serves as a first point of contact for many public inquiries regarding the interpretation of regulations pertaining to natural resources use and management; sale of outdoor recreational licenses and permits; registration of boats and watercraft, snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles and off-highway motorcycles; and the titling of boats. It manages license and registration sales and general information service delivery at DNR Service Centers, online sales and statewide DNR call center operations. It is responsible for the daily management of the Go Wild System, that is used to issue license and off highway recreational vehicle privileges for natural resources users.

Office of Agriculture and Water Quality (OAWQ) --- Responsible for generating clear, achievable goals in collaboration with communities representing agricultural and environmental interests and serves as the internal point of contact for the science and policy approaches to addressing agricultural impacts on water quality.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

2021 AND 2022 GOALS AND ACTUALS

Performance Measure	Goal 2021	Actual 2021	Goal 2022	Actual 2022
Number of small business contacts made through Small Business Environmental Assistance Program.	95,000	129,625	95,500	113,377
Processing time to issue waterway individual permit decisions (measured from the date of receipt of a completed permit application to issuance of the permit decision).	70 days	51.33 days	70 days	32.21 days
Processing time to issue wetland individual permit decisions (measured from the date of receipt of a completed permit application to issuance of the permit decision).	70 days	3.61 days	70 days	2.63 days
Processing time to issue storm water construction site permit decisions.	30 days	19 days	30 days	24 days
Percent of hunting, fishing and trapping licenses purchases on-line.	50%	60.7%	50%	63.1%

2023, 2024 AND 2025 GOALS

Performance Measure	Goal 2023	Goal 2024	Goal 2025
Number of small business contacts made through Small Business Environmental Assistance Program.	95,500	95,500	95,500
Processing time to issue waterway individual permit decisions (measured from the date of receipt of a completed permit application to issuance of the permit decision).	70 days	70 days	70 days
Processing time to issue wetland individual permit decisions (measured from the date of receipt of a completed permit application to issuance of the permit decision).	30 days	30 days	30 days
Processing time to issue storm water construction site permit decisions.	30 days	30 days	30 days
Percent of hunting, fishing and trapping licenses purchases on-line.	50%	50%	50%

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Watershed Management

- Signed an updated and revised memorandum of understanding to establish a process to **define roles and cooperatively manages salt storage facilities across the state** to improve governmental efficiency, ensure consistent implementation, and protect waters of the state.
- Implemented **improvements to electronic permitting** to provide customers the ability to apply for permits online, submit permit compliance documents, and to check the status of their permit application. The system features the following:
 - Electronic payment
 - Electronic signature
 - Improved online application functions and clearer understanding of required attachments.
 - Dashboard features to search and track the status of submittals and public notices; and
 - Mapping features to improve identification of project areas.

Waterways

- Implemented an **updated program structure** to improve customer service, permit efficiency, team functionality and bench strength.
- Launched a new website that summarizes **wetland impact acreage and acres of wetlands restored** through wetland conservation and mitigation projects. This website is available at: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Wetlands/dashboard>
- Developed and launched a new **Waterway and Wetland Information Tracking System (WWITS)** database that improves tracking, reporting, and more efficient project management.

Community Financial Assistance

- Awarded a total of **8,062 grants** to local governments, tribes, lake districts, lake and river associations, fire departments, dry cleaners, nonprofit conservation organizations, and individuals through forty-one distinct grant programs totaling over \$153 million.
- Awarded ninety-six **Clean Water Fund loans** totaling over \$511 million; forty-three **Safe Drinking Water loans** totaling over \$126 million; and one hundred twenty-one **Private Lead Service Line Replacement** Funding Program awards totaling over \$62 million. In total, awards were made to 162 different Wisconsin communities.
- The department received additional federal infrastructure funding including a one-time contribution of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to **expand the Well Compensation and Well Abandonment grant programs**, as well as the first year of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funds to supplement the Clean Water Fund and Safe Drinking Water loan programs. The additional funding is included in the grant and loan awards listed above.

Environmental Analysis & Sustainability (EAS)

- **Solar Permitting Resources:** Solar installations are becoming more common as individuals, communities, companies and utilities look for renewable energy solutions. Sustainability and Business staff built a comprehensive web page to **provide information on the permitting process for ground solar installations to successfully navigate state permitting**. The page provides resources covering

early planning opportunities, permitting requirements, long term land use, life cycle analysis and equity-based evaluations for developing a solar infrastructure project.

- **Green Tier Charter for Climate Action:** The Green Tier charter is a flexible way for businesses, local governments and non-profits to work together to address climate change in Wisconsin. Building on the efforts of those who have or are willing to set climate goals **the charter facilitates collaboration between partners** so that our communities will be more resilient and ensure an equitable future.
- **Brule River Headwaters Watershed Restoration Action Plans:** Partnered with the U.S. Forest Service to secure \$1.5 million in federal funding to develop Watershed Restoration Action Plans (WRAPs) in three priority northern Wisconsin watersheds. The project will **eliminate at least 50 fish passage barriers** to expand habitat connectivity to over 60 stream miles and strengthen community flood resilience, ensuring public access to nature, tourism, and forestry activities.
- **Stakeholder Surveys and Public Input:** The social science team conducted multiple studies and managed public input opportunities to inform department policy. Particularly noteworthy achievements include:
 - A comprehensive statewide, household survey of **general public attitudes and opinions regarding wolves and wolf management** in Wisconsin to support development of an updated wolf management plan.
 - A **survey of Wisconsin ruffed grouse hunters** regarding their grouse hunting behaviors and opinions regarding grouse hunting seasons and regulations in Wisconsin.
 - Extensive interviews with recreational property visitors and e-bike retailers and surveys of campers and property managers to **assess public sentiments regarding various visitor behaviors and emerging recreation opportunities**. These efforts will help inform revisions to the administrative codes covering visitor behaviors on state properties.
 - Focus groups and surveys to **identify and measure opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of Wisconsin panfish anglers**. Findings supplement biological and ecological data collected for a comprehensive review of experimental panfish regulations.
 - A **repeat survey of Conservation Patron License holders** to document changes in participation in hunting, fishing, and other outdoor activities covered by the license.

Customer & Outreach Services

- Despite high turnover due to a very competitive job market, the COS program was able to **maintain staffing and service at 13 service counters** across the state. The program answered over 280,000 customer phone calls and averaged over 14,000 tip line violation contacts per year.
- Customer demand for **online sales options** continued to increase. Over 6.7 million hunt, fish, trap licenses and harvest authorizations were issued by all sales channels in FY 22, dropping by 2% in FY 23 to 6.6 million, with over \$76 million of gross revenues for hunt/fish/trap products.

Office of Agriculture and Water Quality

- In collaboration with DNR and DATCP staff, the Office **identified and promoted services available to Producer Led Watershed Groups**, including but not limited to: watershed assessment & planning, water quality monitoring, grazing & regenerative agriculture on DNR wildlife lands, financial support and sharing success stories of partners and producers.
- Hired the first **Nutrient Reduction Strategy Coordinator** for Wisconsin to administer the Gulf Hypoxia Grant Program and spearhead the update to Wisconsin's Nutrient Reduction Strategy.

- **Strategically invested in DATCP & WDNR IT data systems** (1) To tell the story of progress (2) To highlight Wisconsin's Nutrient Reduction Strategy, (3) To track locations of conservation practices & quantify nutrient loss reductions (4) to develop of visual communications tools for agencies, partners, and farmers.

Policy On Flexible Work Schedules

(in accordance with s. 230.215(4), Wis. Stats.)

The Department of Natural Resources recognizes the benefit for employees and Department operations to have a variety of work schedules and alternative work patterns. Further, the Wisconsin legislature finds and declares under Section 230.215, Wis. Stats., *That employment practices which provide flexibility in scheduling hours of work often result in increased worker productivity, reduced absenteeism, improved employee morale and a more economical and efficient use of energy, highways and other transit systems.*

Alternative Work Schedules include flexible schedule variations and telework options. Many factors are considered prior to the approval of an alternative work schedule, or to offer these benefits as part of a recruitment strategy. At the same time, it is important to review and consider these options as there are business benefits for the Department and employees.

Alternative Work Schedules allow the Department to accommodate employees with varying scheduling needs and provides an incentive to employees, yet it allows the Department to maximize efficiency of agency operations, maintain and improve its level of services to the public, and facilitate energy conservation and employee productivity.