



HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2015



Photo: Casey Nyeholm

HABITAT

▶ Launched the Habitat Pays public relations campaign and website in October as a result of eight recommendations written by the Governor's 2014 workgroup to improve wildlife habitat conditions throughout the state.

AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES

- ▶ The GFP Commission adopted new regulations in the spring prohibiting the transport of boats with drain plugs in place and the transport of aquatic bait in lake or river water.
- ▶ Overhauled the SD Least Wanted public relations campaign as a result of the aforementioned regulation. The campaign included improved targeted messaging to anglers and boaters and a newly-designed website (sdleastwanted.com) documenting information as it relates to aquatic invasive species in South Dakota.

FISH STOCKING

- ▶ Stocked 43.7 million fish throughout the state.
- ▶ Introduced lake trout to Deerfield Lake in the Black Hills and began stocking Lake Sharpe with young paddlefish to reestablish the population.

MANAGEMENT PLANS

- ▶ Completed and implemented management plans for Black Hills lakes and streams.
- ▶ Completed the first-ever elk management plan in April 2015, which was developed to provide management direction for the next five years. The plan outlines population objectives and required extensive discussions with grazing permit holders. The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA), honored the Department with a Special Achievement Award for its efforts on the plan.
- ▶ Began efforts toward a statewide deer management plan. Currently there are four wildlife management plans in progress; revisions for the existing pheasant, turkey, resident Canada goose plans and now the development of the new deer management plan.
- ▶ Received approval for South Dakota's revised wildlife action plan in May 2015. This plan focuses on habitats that positively impact multiple species to maximize limited resources. An interactive website also compliments the plan for a more in-depth user experience.
- ▶ Updated the Custer State Park Resource Management Plan. The plan is currently out for public review and, when finalized, will provide a 10-year strategic guide for the integrated management of forest, fire, range, wildlife and bison in the park.

LANDOWNERS AND WILDLIFE DAMAGE

- ▶ Responded to more than 2,500 wildlife damage reports and provided assistance to 1,900 landowners and producers throughout the state.
- ▶ Leased more than 1.22 million acres of private land for public hunting access through the Walk-In Area program.
- ▶ Provided landowners with cost-share and incentive payments exceeding \$1.24 million for establishing wildlife habitat.





PARKS AND RECREATION

- ▶ Increased visitation at State Park and Recreation Areas by four percent more than 2014, totaling 7.5 million visitors.
- ▶ Hosted a record of 21,500 visitors to commemorate the 50th Annual Buffalo Roundup at Custer State Park.
- ▶ Initiated the Go Fourth program, distributing free park passes to 12,500 fourth graders, promoting active lifestyles and South Dakota State Park and Recreation Areas.
- ▶ Hosted more than 315,000 camper units in State Park and Recreation Areas.
- ▶ Initiated the Environmental Impact Study for the Mount Rushmore National Memorial Connector Trail, linking the existing George S. Mickelson Trail from south of Hill City to Mount Rushmore National Memorial.
- ▶ Started construction on a new visitor center at Custer State Park and broke ground for a visitor center at Good Earth State Park at Blood Run.
- ▶ Awarded bids for the first phase of improvements at Custer State Park Resorts, including the replacement of the Legion Lake Store, the replacement of 14 cabins, the Game Lodge Motel unit renovation and three new reunion cabins.
- ▶ After an intense 10 year effort, less than 6,000 trees infested with mountain pine beetles were found in Custer State Park in 2015, down from 25,000 trees last year and a high of 100,000 in 2012. The park will continue to seek out and remove infested trees, thin dense stands and conduct timber sales to reduce risk and manage towards a healthy forest.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

- ▶ Updated the licensing system so hunters, anglers and trappers can now carry licenses on their smartphone devices in lieu of traditional paper copies.
- ▶ Provided funding (in addition to all criminal fines already remitted) to local school districts in South Dakota through fines assessed for the illegal take of trophy wildlife. More than \$33,000 in liquidated civil damage payments have been remitted to school districts from the illegal taking of wildlife since legislation was revised in 2010.
- ▶ Conducted an interstate road check in conjunction with the opener of the west river deer season. Inspected 1,253 hunters and anglers and documented 147 violations.
- ▶ Collaborated with South Dakota State University to form a new degree program: natural resource law enforcement. This degree will focus on environmental policy, natural resource management, criminal justice and conservation biology.
- ▶ Investigated 213 reports of illegal hunting, fishing or trapping activity via citizen reports on the Turn In Poachers Hotline (1-888-OVERBAG), resulting in 126 arrests.

