



# PENNSYLVANIA GAME COMMISSION

## EXECUTIVE OFFICE

2001 ELMERTON AVENUE HARRISBURG, PA 17110-9797 | (717) 705-6540

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to present highlights from the Pennsylvania Game Commission's 2024–25 Annual Report. This past year was one of continued progress, as we advanced our mission of conserving wildlife and their habitats while promoting hunting and trapping for current and future generations.

The accomplishments outlined in this report are the direct result of the dedication of our staff, the leadership of the Board of Commissioners, and the continued support of hunters, trappers, landowners, and conservation partners across the Commonwealth. These achievements are built upon a strong foundation of science-based management. Maintaining accurate, up-to-date information on the health of wildlife populations remains central to every major decision we make.

A clear example of this commitment is our continued work with Pennsylvania's elk herd. Elk monitoring efforts advanced this year through the use of GPS collars and aerial surveys, allowing us to better understand survival rates, habitat use, seasonal movements, and population trends. These tools are essential to managing this iconic species and ensuring its long-term sustainability.

Similarly, Pennsylvania's black bear population remains healthy and resilient. Harvest levels continue to reflect a stable population, while ongoing research into bear genetics, movement, and habitat use is helping us refine management strategies and address bear-human conflicts in a thoughtful and effective manner.

Our wild turkey research, one of the largest studies of its kind, continues to provide critical insight into survival, reproduction, movement, and habitat use across a range of landscapes. Data collected from radio-tagged hens is shaping future management decisions and helping us better understand the factors influencing turkey populations statewide.

At the same time, we are seeing encouraging signs from long-term efforts to restore ruffed grouse populations. Habitat projects that combine forest management and prescribed fire are creating young, diverse forests that grouse and many other wildlife species depend upon. These efforts are beginning to show measurable results and reinforce the importance of active habitat management.

We also remain deeply engaged in our multi-year research initiative focused on Chronic Wasting Disease in deer populations. In areas where the disease is most prevalent, expanded monitoring and research, including GPS collaring and targeted sampling, are providing critical insight into disease dynamics and deer behavior. Given the seriousness of this threat, the Board of

Commissioners has continued to use antlerless harvest strategies as the most effective known tool for slowing the spread of CWD.

While much of our work focuses on game species, our responsibilities extend to all 480 wildlife species found in Pennsylvania. A notable example this year was continued progress in the recovery of rare and at-risk species, supported by habitat restoration and long-term conservation planning through initiatives such as the Third Pennsylvania Bird Atlas and the Wildlife Action Plan.

Monitoring wildlife populations, however, is only part of the equation. Equally important is ensuring that wildlife has the habitat necessary to survive and thrive. Prescribed fire remains one of our most effective habitat management tools. Many species, including grouse, turkey, and deer, depend on the young forests and open conditions created by fire. Prescribed burning stimulates native plant growth, improves forage quality, and creates the cover and nesting habitat required by a wide range of wildlife.

During the past fiscal year, thousands of acres of state game lands were treated with prescribed fire, building on a multi-year effort that has restored tens of thousands of acres of habitat across the Commonwealth. Timber harvests also played a key role in habitat improvement, transforming mature, closed-canopy forests into younger, regenerating stands that provide food and cover for wildlife. These projects reflect a balanced approach to forest management that benefits both wildlife and forest health.

In addition to habitat work, improving infrastructure on state game lands, now totaling more than 1.5 million acres statewide, remains a priority. Over the past year, we invested in roads, bridges, and facilities to improve access, safety, and usability for the public. Strategic land acquisitions further expanded game lands, preserving critical habitat while creating new recreational opportunities for hunters, trappers, and wildlife enthusiasts. As we manage wildlife and habitat, we never lose sight of our responsibility to serve the people of the Commonwealth.

Our centralized dispatch center continues to provide round-the-clock support to the public, ensuring timely responses to emergencies and public inquiries. Thousands of calls are handled each year, reflecting both the scope of our responsibilities and the professionalism of our staff. Hunters and trappers remain essential partners in wildlife conservation. Our commitment to preserving Pennsylvania's hunting and trapping heritage, while recruiting and supporting the next generation, remains a central part of our mission.

Through our Hunter-Trapper Education program, tens of thousands of students continue to receive training that has helped make hunting one of the safest forms of outdoor recreation. This success reflects the dedication of our instructors and the responsibility shown by Pennsylvania's hunters.

We also continued to support longstanding traditions through programs such as pheasant propagation, which provides meaningful small-game hunting opportunities across much of the state. Managed dove fields and other habitat projects further expanded access and opportunity.

Investments in public shooting ranges and support for private clubs continued as well. These facilities are vital for hunter development, marksmanship, and safety, and they serve a broad segment of the public year-round.

This year also marked continued implementation following the repeal of Pennsylvania's Sunday hunting ban. The Commission has approached this change carefully, authorizing opportunities within existing seasons while prioritizing safety, landowner considerations, and sound wildlife management.

Our state game wardens remain the backbone of wildlife law enforcement and public safety. Throughout the year, wardens responded to tens of thousands of incidents, issued warnings and citations when appropriate, and maintained a strong presence in communities across the state. Their professionalism and judgment are reflected in consistently high prosecution success rates. We also made significant progress in recruitment and training, strengthening the future of our law enforcement workforce and ensuring that wardens have the tools and support they need to do their jobs effectively.

Taken together, these efforts reflect our enduring commitment to Pennsylvania's wildlife, habitats, and hunting and trapping traditions. But our work is far from finished. Looking ahead, we remain focused on making meaningful investments that will shape the future of conservation in this Commonwealth.

This begins with responsible management of the Game Fund, honoring the trust placed in us by the hunters and trappers whose contributions support our work. We are committed to long-term financial sustainability while keeping licenses affordable and reinvesting revenues directly into conservation.

We will continue modernizing services for hunters, strengthening partnerships with landowners and processors, and addressing wildlife-related challenges in agricultural and suburban landscapes. At the same time, we recognize that our mission serves all Pennsylvanians, including those who may never hunt, but who value healthy wildlife populations and well-managed public lands.

Our success depends on a strong partnership with the General Assembly, and we value the guidance and collaboration of this Committee. We invite you to see our work firsthand, on game lands, at habitat projects, during research efforts, or at milestones that reflect our shared commitment to conservation.

Together, we can ensure a future where wildlife thrives, hunting and trapping endure, and Pennsylvania's game lands remain abundant and accessible for generations to come.