



Migratory Bird Wetland Protection Advisory Council (WPAC) Meeting Minutes

June 19th 9:00am - 4:00 pm, Meeting

June 20th 8:00am - 3:00p, Field Tour

Meeting Location was held at the Glasgow FWP Office 1 Airport Rd, Glasgow, MT 59230

Virtual option was provided.

The Migratory Bird Wetland Program in Montana was established by the Montana Legislature in 1985 “for the protection, conservation, and development of wetlands in Montana” (MCA 87-2-411(2)).

Steve Christian opened the meeting at 9:02am

Introductions:

Each participant introduced themselves, with individuals from various organizations and regions attending the meeting

•WPAC members

- o Steve Christian (Region 7)
- o Larry Peltz (Region 1)
- o Bridger Pierce (Region 2)
- o Bev Wornom (Region 5)
- o Ken Jansa (Region 6)
- o Justin Julian (Region 3: Virtual)

A quorum was confirmed

• FWP (Fish, Wildlife, and Parks)

- o Scott Thompson, Region 6 Wildlife Manager, Glasgow.
- o Sky Losleben, Habitat Specialist, Region 6.
- o Faye McNew, Statewide Waterfowl Biologist, Bozeman
- o Ryan Williamson, Area Wildlife Biologist, Outlook
- o Ken Plourde, Habitat Bureau Chief, Helena
- o Heather Harris, Grassland/Wetland Coordinator, Glasgow
- o Ken McDonald, Chief of the Wildlife Division, Helena (joined in afternoon)

• Ducks Unlimited (DU):

- o Adam McDaniel, Biologist, Great Falls
- o Cody Pugh, Conservation Specialist, Lewistown (joined in afternoon)
- o Bob Sanders, Manager of Conservation Programs, Elliston (joined in afternoon)

• Public

- o John Wornom

Executive Action: Approve Minutes from December 2nd, 2024

Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the last meeting were approved with no correction

Duck Stamp: (item moved forward on agenda):

- The Duck Stamp contest meeting, held virtually on February 25, 2025, was discussed. Meeting was not recorded but notes were taken and included.
- There were 55 entries in total, and the group narrowed down to a top 10.
- A Montana scene was required, but wasn't included in all top choices, leading to the removal of three entries.
- The top choice (number 9) was the same artist as last year.
- Next steps outlined: license buyers will be emailed links for stickers and stamps, and a partnership with the Montana Outdoor Legacy Foundation is being explored for non-license buyers.

History and Purpose of the Wetland Protection Advisory Council (WPAC):

- Ken Plourde was introduced as new Habitat Bureau Chief. He shared his background, stating that he had been with Fish, Wildlife, and Parks for over 10 years, starting as a Block Management Technician in Region 6 and later working as the Upland Game Bird Habitat Specialist. He recently transitioned to the new position in Helena after his predecessor retired.

1. Purpose of the Advisory Council:

- o Ken provided an overview of the WPAC's purpose and history.
 - The council was established in 1985 by the Montana Legislature.
 - Its main function is to oversee the use of funds raised from the sale of waterfowl stamps, ensuring that money is used for wetland conservation and development in Montana.
- o The council is tasked with reviewing proposals for how funds will be spent for wetland protection and development, and it was originally set up to include representatives from sportsmen, non-consumptive wildlife users, and the agricultural industry.
- o In 2023, laws affecting the council were updated, including an increase in migratory bird license fees and a revision of council structure to include 7 members, each representing different FWP administrators. Members will serve 6-year terms, staggered to prevent all positions from expiring at once.

Program's fiscal updates:

- a. Biennium budget, unallocated balance, pending obligations balance
- b. License sales from 2024/25 & projected annual MBWP revenue 2026 & beyond

- Fiscal update provided regarding project funding, budgets, and unallocated funds, referencing documents previously shared.

1. End of Year 2024 - Unallocated Funds:

- o As of December, last year, just under \$1 million was unallocated.
- o This means no signed agreements or budget requests had been made for those dollars.
- o However, much of that is "earmarked" for expected projects.
 1. in process or awaiting final agreements, funds are not officially drawn until contracts are signed.
 2. Partner-supported positions (e.g., through Forever funding) are accounted for in longer-term planning but not immediately shown in the active budget until a new contract.
- o After factoring in expected expenses, only about \$66,000 was effectively "unspoken for" before the last legislative session.

2. **Current Financial Standing**

- o **Unallocated Balance (as of March):** ~\$813K
- o **Current Contracts in Progress:** ~\$827K
- o **Additional Partner Support Commitments:** ~\$260K
- o **Reverted HCL's:** +\$475K
- **Resulting Working Balance:** Just under \$200K

3. **Reporting & Transparency:**

- o Some confusion arose around how obligated vs. expended funds are displayed.
- o Requests were made for clearer tracking of contracted vs. expended vs. remaining balances. Requested to the current method using color coding to track projects to an alternative, perhaps numbering.

4. **Regional Project Load:**

- Region 6 (Glasgow) is handling a significant portion of the State's wetland work.
 - o Most upcoming regional projects are already planned or in progress, expected to keep the region busy for the next two years.
- FWP staff were asked to put all potential projects "on paper" to help clarify obligations and funding needs.
- Two types of projects are being managed:
 - o **Multi-year projects** (e.g., long-term partner positions or habitat restoration).
 - o **One-time cost-share projects** (e.g., well installation, fencing), reimbursed after completion.
- Most multi-year projects naturally span 2–5 years, requiring thoughtful budget staging over time.

5. **Concerns & Suggestions:**

- There is concern over a lack of new funding allocations, potentially causing gaps in project delivery after current obligations are fulfilled.
- Suggestion made to develop a fiscal year-based forecast showing expected expenditures and obligations annually — to help with long-term planning and ensure sustainability of the program for the next two years.
- Staff also discussed the need for cutoff points if a project stalls for years.

6. **Legislative Authorization vs. Available Funds**

- Even if a fund contains money (e.g., generated by licenses or program revenues), FWP can only spend what the legislature authorizes.
- Funds may appear flush, but unless authorized by the legislature, they can't be accessed.
- There's often a disconnect: Legislators see cash balances but not what's already obligated, not obligated until agreement is fully executed.

- This timing mismatch hurts FWP's credibility when requesting new funds.

7. Project Pipeline and Legislative Timing

- Staff were encouraged to **build a project list by early 2026**, with rough scopes and estimates.
- **Ideal timeline:**
 - o **Summer 2025:** Begin identifying and developing projects
 - o **Jan 2026:** Have a list ready to support a funding request
 - o **July 2027:** Projects are shovel-ready and contractable with legislative authority.

8. Budget Strategy Recommendations

- Legislators prefer specific requests tied to named projects (vs. general dollar amounts).
- Use demonstrated expenditures to justify larger requests. Show ~\$800k+ in recent spending to justify requesting ~\$1.4M–\$1.7M for the next biennium.
- Avoid previous optics (e.g., sitting on \$650k for 6 years), which make larger asks difficult to justify.

9. Partner Engagement & Outreach

- FWP hopes to increase NGO/partner engagement through:
 - o More accessible proposal processes
 - o Streamlined project expansion
 - o Better training for landowners and field staff
- There's already partner buy-in, but room for stronger outreach and clarity.

10. Staffing & Capacity Challenges

- Request was made to consider dedicated biologist staff for this program (like fisheries has).
- Constraints:
 - o Legislative approval required for new FTEs
 - o Budget exists, but FTE caps are the blocker
- Possible Solution:
 - o Redirect new non-game habitat biologist FTE to partially manage this program, bringing more bandwidth.

11. Strategy Moving Forward

- Build up the project pipeline and obligate funds early to justify future asks.
- Continue redirecting projects that better fit under Habitat Montana to maximize this fund's flexibility.
- Use upcoming fiscal growth to strengthen the program and possibly justify new staffing.

12. Operational Takeaways

- There's momentum behind the program, but can take time now to improve:
 - o Technical guidance
 - o Internal communications
 - o Partner-facing resources
- Expect continued focus on training and program efficiency, particularly for large or non-streamlined projects.

- **License Sales and Revenue:** Some details provided on 2024 license sales, specifically tracking resident and non-resident license sales. They noted a general upward trend in sales, but also

highlighted a decrease in non-resident sales, which may be linked to the price increase. However, overall revenue is on the rise, particularly from non-resident licenses.

Project Highlight - Fox Lake WMA: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly (Ryan): Slides from presentation included

Update on season setting proposals: State of the Ducks (Faye): Slides from Presentation included

Current hurdles partners are facing – (Adam):

Funding Challenges and Opportunities:

- Federal funding (NRCS, USDA, CRP, EQIP, ALE, etc.) was temporarily frozen earlier in the year, impacting ongoing agreements.
- Funds are now slowly being unfrozen, but uncertainty remains.
- \$25 million RCPP grant was recently awarded (authored by Pheasants Forever) to support grassland conservation and grazing systems across Montana, with Ducks Unlimited (DU) involved in project oversight.
- \$250,000 from the Arthur M. Blank Foundation helped bridge gaps during funding delays, aiding cover crops and perennial seeding projects.

Conservation Focus & Strategy:

- Montana conservation efforts are prioritizing grassland protection and long-term easements.
- Compared to other states (like the Dakotas), Montana is positioned well to retain grasslands in perpetuity.
- Landowner interest in programs like ALE is high, but WRE interest is lower, likely due to eligibility or project fit.

Shifts in Organizational Capacity:

- Loss of talent and funding at partner organizations (e.g., TNC, Pheasants Forever) has strained staffing and expertise.
- The need for alternative funding sources beyond traditional NAWCA and federal routes is becoming more urgent.

Wetland Development vs. Grassland Focus:

- DU and partners have shifted more toward landscape-scale grassland conservation, but there is still interest in wetland development when justified (especially if public access is a factor).
- Engineering staff and expertise are evolving, with some reliance on local or regional expertise (e.g., DU engineers in wintering grounds like Texas/Kansas).

Opportunity for Partner Updates and Public Comment:

Raising the Funding Cap for Small Private Projects

Current Limit: \$20,000

- The existing cap for small projects is \$20,000, amount set over a decade ago.

Reasoning Behind Original Limit

- Intended to spread limited funds across multiple projects.
- Total pool was possibly \$200,000, so smaller caps allowed more individual projects.
- Based on the average cost of business and infrastructure at the time.

Should we Raise It Now?

- Costs have increased significantly since the cap was set.

- There's now more interest and potentially more funding, meaning they could support larger projects without exceeding budget caps.
- Discussion will continue after lunch during the guideline document review.

Administrative Considerations

- The limit may be written into a **guideline document** that can be amended as part of a **"streamline process"** discussion later today (mentioned for **2:00 PM**).
- There is agreement that **raising the cap would benefit the program**, pending council approval.

Past Council Decision

- When the **new council** was formed, the attitude was to **"wait and see"** before making changes. It may now be the right time to act.

Division/Legislative updates (Ken M):

Sage-Grouse Free Permit Requirement

- FWP is proposing a free permit for sage-grouse hunters.
- This would help track harvest levels more closely as they approach the 10% threshold of the estimated population, which is a management concern.

HB145 – revise nonresident base hunting license fee

- Increases base nonresident hunting license from \$15 to \$50, of which \$40 goes to Block Management
- Expected to generate additional \$423,630 for general license, \$2.5 million for BM

HB146 – License fees for migratory game birds

- Increases resident mig bird license from \$5.50 to \$10.00
- That is projected to increase revenue by \$133,459
- Requires application fee of \$10/resident and \$50/nonresident to apply for swan or sandhill crane permit (current fee is \$5 for res and nnres)
- Should result in an increase of ~\$31,000
- Implements a \$10 license/resident and \$75/nonresident for a crane or swan license.
- That should result in new revenue = \$78,205
- Must also purchase the migratory game bird license.
- Total increase to mig bird account = \$212,000

HB568 – Montana Hunters First Act

- Requires FWP to complete a study of nonresident impacts on deer, elk, upland game bird, and waterfowl hunting in the state and in each of the fish and wildlife commission's administrative regions. (2) The study must utilize a range of data, including but not limited to hunter days, harvest reporting, use of lands that are part of hunting access programs, hunting pressure on public lands, elk and deer population trends, and licensing.

SB514 – revise Upland Game Bird Seasons – residents can't hunt until 10 days after the season starts

- Except on privately owned lands that are not a part of a hunting access program pursuant to 87-1-246 through 87-1-249 and 87-1-265, the commission shall allow residents as defined in 87-2-102 to begin hunting 10 days prior to nonresidents for all upland game birds, including ring-necked pheasant, but excluding mountain grouse.
- Effective March 1, 2026

HB932 – Marijuana money

- Shifts the 20% that was going to Habitat MT as follows:
- 20% = ~\$10 million
- 75% of the 20% for habitat acquisition and up to \$4 million for DNRC water projects (through 2033)
 - o (a) improve, conserve, protect, and maintain terrestrial habitat;
 - o (b) improve, conserve, and maintain aquatic habitat;
 - o (c) participate in water enhancement projects to benefit aquatic habitat and allow for other watershed enhancements that benefit fish, wildlife, and water conservation;
 - o (d) improve and maintain range conditions, restoration of habitat, and drought resilience designed to create habitat uplift on private, public, and tribal lands;
 - o (e) address and mitigate impacts that are detrimental to wildlife habitat and the environment and improve the condition of the land due to noxious weeds, soil disturbance, and loss of diverse habitat communities;
 - o (f) mitigate conflicts and reduce potential for disease transmission between wildlife and domestic livestock;
 - o (g) help fund activities and employees of the state tribal wildlife programs; and
 - o (h) create habitat uplift and net conservation gain for species of conservation need.
- 20% for Wildlife Habitat Improvement grants
- 5% for Wildlife crossings
- Requires rule making; funds won't be available until July 2026

MBWP Program Updates (Heather and Ken P.):

- Projects Status Update
- 2025 work plan and activities.

A document outlining the current project status was previously provided and was reviewed.

- **New projects highlighted** – some of the proposals and projects that have been received since the December 2024 WPAC meeting were highlighted.
 - 1) Silver King Ranch Floodplain Restoration (Region 2):
 - A newer project, though it's been in the works for years.
 - Proposal recently submitted.
 - 2) Region 6 Projects:
 - Several reservoir repair projects that were combined for a placeholder are now outlined as individual projects and details provided.
 - Westwit Wetland Repair & Upland Fence Project:
 - o Historic reservoir is being repaired with added fencing for grazing management.
 - o In partnership with a local rancher.
 - o Proposal expected soon
 - o Optional tour visit planned.
 - 3) Jason Loose Project (via Cody Pugh)
- **Dropped or Changed Projects** - Some previously listed projects are being removed or restructured were highlighted:
 1. Sleeping Buffalo water control structure replacement (combined into one project).

2. Lake Helena project (landowner backed out due to some agreement concerns).
3. Potential CRP split project will be funded by another source.

Project Tracking Document Format Discussion

- The current system uses color coding (green/yellow/red) to show status.
- A request was made to move to a number or code-based system for accessibility, which will be corrected for future documents.

2025 Work Plan & Program Strategy

- Region 6 is particularly active with many strong projects underway.
- Focus areas for the next year:
 - o Continue supporting on-the-ground habitat work.
 - o Improve and expand outreach to:
 - Landowners
 - Partner organizations
 - o Encourage strategic program growth, keeping field implementation effective and consistent.

Streamlined process for “the rest of Montana” - IWJV and NGPIV science integration for streamlined projects – Review and Executive Action. (Heather):

Streamlined Projects Recap

- Streamlined projects are small-scale habitat restoration/enhancement projects ($\leq \$30K$ /project, $\leq \$200K$ /year) that:
 - o Don't require full staff or board review
 - o Are meant to be easier for partners to deliver
- Historically limited to areas with >10 breeding duck pairs, as per the PPJV map.

The discussion revisits a December 2024 presentation given by Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) and Northern Great Plains Joint Venture (NGPIV)

Purpose: To expand the streamlined migratory bird habitat program beyond Prairie Pothole country using a science-based statewide model.

Key Benefits

- Expands project eligibility geographically
- Builds on trusted science and mapping
- Maintains program rigor while streamlining proposal process
- Promotes better distribution of conservation investments

Funding & Budget Adjustments

- Previously:
 - o \$30,000 per project
 - o \$200,000 annual cap
- New direction
 - o Increased to \$50,000 per project?
 - o New annual cap: \$300,000
- The increase is meant to reflect rising costs and interest.
- Discussion around setting a percentage of total revenue (30%) to streamline funding — considered fair based on projected annual revenue ($\sim \$1.18M$).
- Fiscal vs. calendar year was debated; calendar year will continue to be used.

Executive Action: WPAC unanimously approved using the IWJV and NGPJV model for streamlined projects that have ≥60% on the new suitability map, increasing the streamlined cap to \$50,000/project and \$300,000/calendar year, and not recording projects less or equal to \$50,000 (streamlined or traditional).

***ACTION ITEMS**

- Update guidance documents and contract templates to reflect:
 - o Increased caps
 - o Clarified timelines
 - o Streamlined definitions (e.g., what qualifies as “low-tech”)
- Outreach will be needed to educate partners on the new process and limits.

Update Guidance Document (Field Manual) (Steve, Ken and Heather):

- Staff lessons learned in past year (R6 Wildlife Staff, Heather, Ken P.)
- Incorporating streamlined process into Guidance document

Main Objectives Discussed

- 1. Develop a Comprehensive Technical Manual**
 - o Complement existing programmatic guidance with practical, field-level documentation.
 - o Combine existing documents (original guidance + streamlined version) into one unified PDF/manual.
- 2. Clarify and Standardize Project Processes**
 - o Define steps from conception to implementation (“A to Z”).
 - o Include permitting, contracting, budgeting, engineering, insurance, outreach, etc.
 - o Use lessons learned to streamline and reduce repeated errors.
- 3. Support Field Biologists & Partners**
 - o Provide clear how-tos for those new to wetlands projects.
 - o Recognize a significant loss of institutional knowledge due to staff changes.
 - o Aim for practical tools: checklists, scopes of work, FAQs, timelines, decision trees.
- 4. Clarify Engineering Role & Costs**
 - o Define when engineering is needed, when it's not.
 - o Develop protocol for working with engineers like DU's (e.g., Dylan Peterson).
 - o Address fairness and transparency with NGO contributions and procurement rules.
- 5. Improve Funding and Legislative Communication**
 - o Address time lags between project approval and funding (e.g., legislative cycles).
 - o Include sections explaining funding request preparation and communication timelines.
- 6. Outreach and Landowner Engagement**
 - o Include outreach and educational components for landowners.
 - o Consider separate versions or tailored sections for non-agency stakeholders.

Next Steps

- Collect feedback from Region 6 and other biologists on what would've helped in past projects.
- Incorporate existing tools developed by Sky and others (e.g., checklists).
- Review and merge existing guidance and streamlined documents.
- Assign responsibilities for drafting, review, and formatting.
- Consider a “living document” approach with updates over time.

Development of a MBWP Projects grant program (like) and/or Future Direction (Steve): Slides from presentation included

Summary of Key Issues:

- **Grant-Making Authority & Fund Utilization:**
 - o Currently, there's about \$3.4 million in funds available that need a better process to be utilized effectively on an annual basis.
- **Current process issues:**
 - o Projects and funding requests come in sporadically, causing inefficiency and difficulty managing workload.
- **Existing Grant Programs:**
 - o Several grant programs were reviewed, many focused-on parks, trails, education, habitat, and fisheries.
- **License Sales & Revenue:**
 - o Data on license sales was analyzed, showing stable to increasing sales over recent years.
 - o Non-resident licenses increased from \$50 to \$150, causing a slight drop in sales but a net increase in revenue.
 - o Resident license fees also increased.
 - o COVID-19 caused a spike in non-resident hunting licenses, possibly due to more flexible work-from-home arrangements.
- **Challenges in Securing Legislative Appropriations:**
 - o Attempts to secure legislative funding allocations were unsuccessful despite efforts to engage with committees and legislators.
 - o Other programs require biannual reports by law, which helps in transparency and securing ongoing funding — something MBWP lacks.
- **Comparison with Other Programs:**
 - o Other habitat programs have stronger statutory backing, mandatory reporting, more robust grant administration, dedicated staff, and better matching fund strategies.
 - o These programs tend to leverage matching funds to stretch their budget impact.
 - o Some programs have multiple dedicated FWP employees, while the FWP wetlands or habitat program relies heavily on limited staff who are also engaged in other duties.
- **Recommendations and Questions:**
 - o Consider creating dedicated staff positions focused on grant management and program development.
 - o Improve the grant program structure to be more like other successful programs.
 - o Explore options for legislative or administrative rule changes to improve access and use of funds.
 - o Need a strategy to convince the legislature to authorize appropriate spending.
 - o Consider enhancing reporting requirements to increase accountability and visibility with legislators.

There's consensus that while things are good, the program needs to evolve and improve ("move from good to great").

Discussion Points:

- **Funding Source Differences:**

Ken points out that unlike other grant programs (trails, snowmobile), which use non-license money, the WHIP (Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program) will be funded with marijuana tax money, which is also non-license money but not subject to the same strict controls as license money.

- **Controls and Oversight:**
License money requires heavy oversight since the department remains responsible even if funds are passed to other entities. Future Fisheries has a dedicated full-time grant manager to ensure compliance and involvement in project development.
- **Department's Stance on Grant Programs:**
The department is hesitant and not supportive of a grant program that just makes funds available to others without direct involvement. Audit requirements are a concern, and past programs have raised red flags on audits.
- **Focus on Partnerships and Contracts:**
Instead of a broad grant program, FWP is focusing on partnerships with NGOs like Ducks Unlimited and landowners, working through contracts to maintain control and oversight, as they do with the Upland Game Bird program.
- **Staffing Needs:**
Glasgow emphasizes the need for a dedicated 1 FTE staff member solely focused on the MBWP to improve management and streamline efforts. Right now, responsibilities are fragmented across multiple staff.
- **Funding source:**
Funding could potentially come from MBWP program dollars, which can cover administrative costs such as staffing. This funding currently comes through capital projects legislation (House Bill 5) but would ideally be requested as part of the base department funding via House Bill 2 in the next legislative session.
- **Leveraging Existing Programs & Partnerships:**
Discussion about potential collaboration or co-branding with other programs (e.g., CRP, WRP) to provide added value for landowners and improve outreach.
- **Legislative Caution:**
Ken advises caution about requesting legislative changes due to risks of opening "a door" to unpredictable outcomes.
- **Challenges:**
 - o The position is not guaranteed permanently and must be reapproved every session if funded through capital funds.
 - o Careful, steady growth is necessary to avoid overextending resources.
- **Additional Thoughts:**
 - o There was mention that having an engineer/project manager along with biologists might better suit the program's needs.

***ACTION ITEM:**

- o Confirm funding rules with Ken McDonald.

FOX LAKE WMA:

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

Ryan Williamson



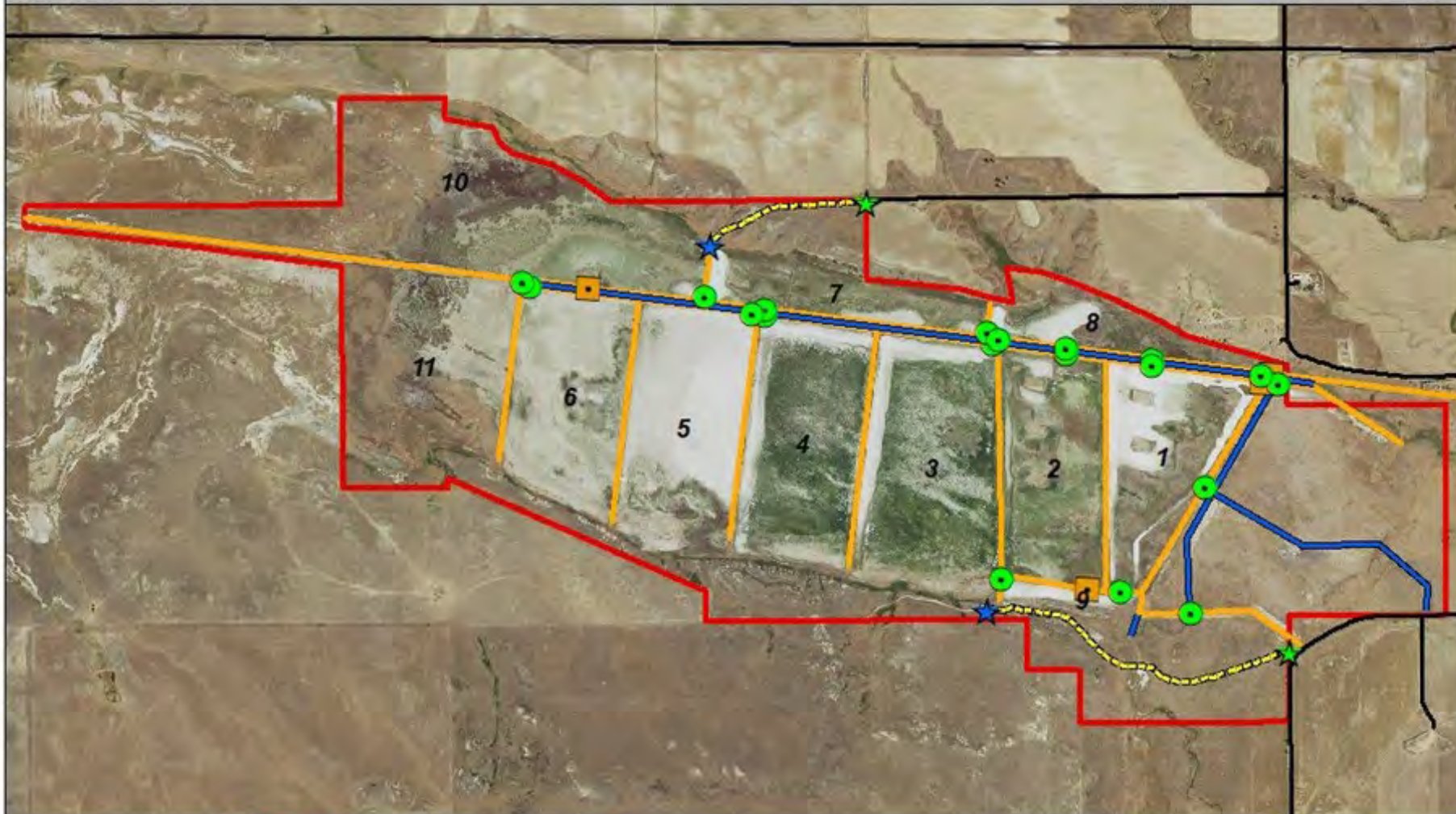
What is Fox Lake?

- Fox Lake WMA is located in Richland County 1 mile west of Lambert, MT
 - Approximately 23 miles west of Sidney, MT
- Fox Lake is a natural lake and marsh created by glacial outwash
 - Classified as a semi-permanent lake (IV)
 - Moderately brackish (B-C)
 - Cover type 2 using the wetland classification of Stewart and Kantrud 1971.
- Historic water depth was thought to be 3-4 feet in the deepest areas.
 - Approximately 67% of the WMA is constructed wetlands
 - 12% lowland hydric wetland habitats
 - 21% is native upland habitat.

(Brief) History

- The Montana Fish and Game Department acquired the lake and surrounding habitats beginning in 1952
 - 264-acre purchase
 - Within 10 years, all the land within and immediately around the marsh was acquired, totaling 1,362 acres
- In 1985, FWP proposed to create a series of dikes and nesting islands throughout the lake to improve waterfowl habitat.
- The railroad right away had been abandoned in 1985 and transferred to FWP ownership in 1987.
- Ducks Unlimited was contracted in 1986 to complete the wetland improvements with work completed in 1987.

Fox Lake WMA Layout



- Fox Lake WMA
- Distribution Canal
- Dikes
- Seasonal Trails

- Weir
- Culvert
- ★ Entrance Parking
- ★ Seasonal Parking

County(s): Richland
FWP Region 6
FWP Staff: Ryan Williamson
Date: 10/14/2020



Possession of this map does not constitute legal access to private land enrolled in the UGBEP.
This map may not depict current property ownership outside the enrolled Program Area.
Data provided by MTFWP and Montana State Library, Helena, MT.

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Miles

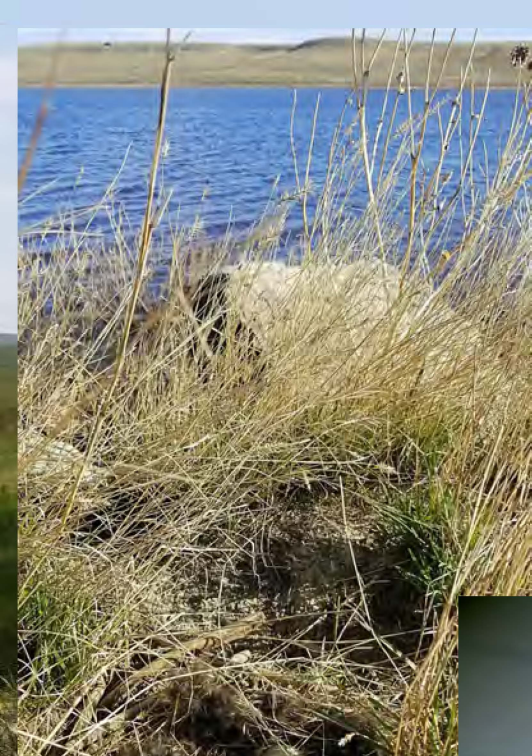


THE GOOD

- When Fox Lake is wet, it produces!
- Large migrations of waterfowl, primarily ducks in spring
- Goose numbers have really increased and done well in the last 25 or so years
 - Nesting islands covered with nests
- Shorebird stopover
 - Some years 10K+ birds, with about every species in eastern MT









BUT... Fox Lake Does Like To Go Dry











THE BAD

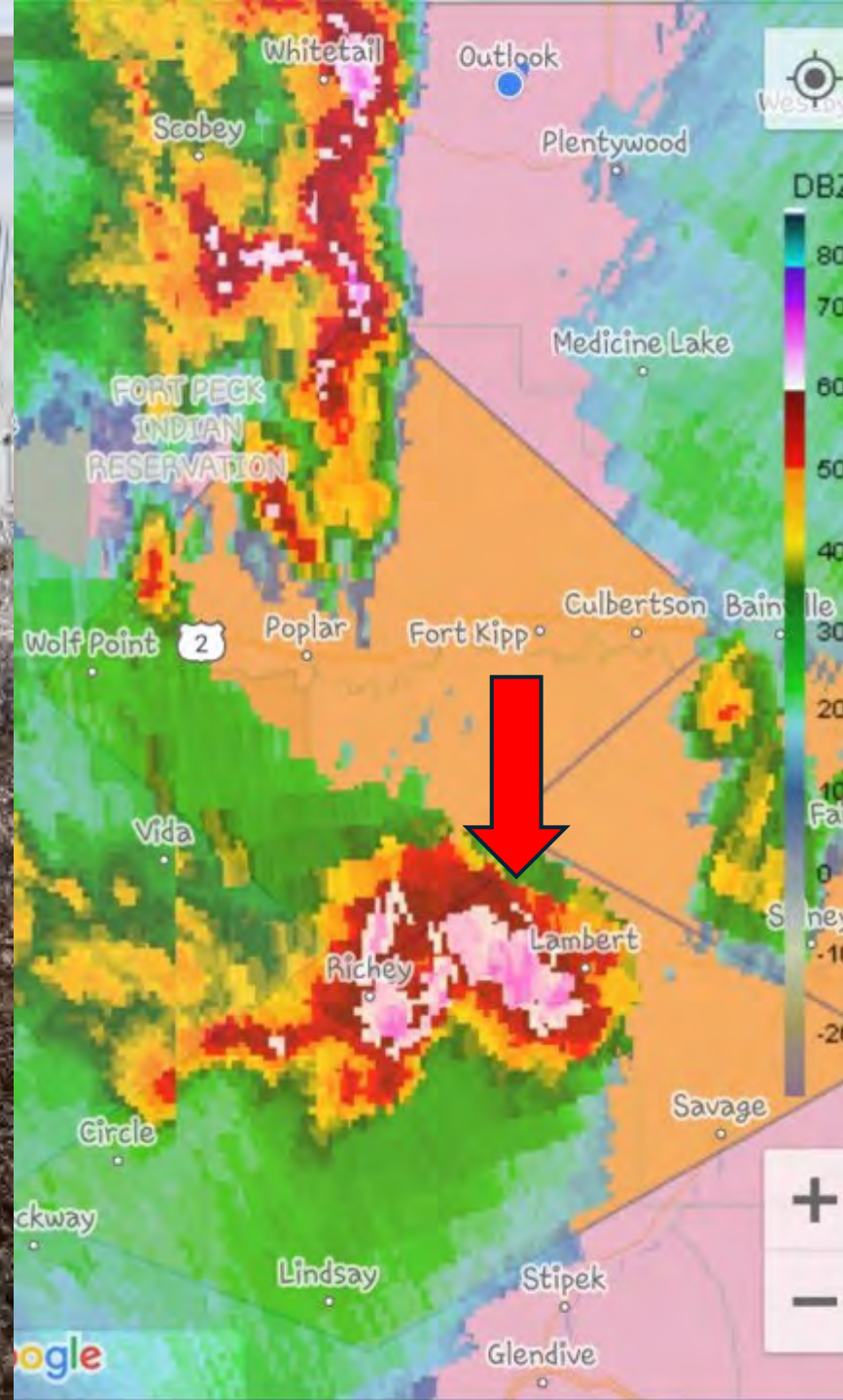
- This is an aging system
 - The DU dike system built in 1986 is showing its age with every flood or high runoff event
- Current Maintenance Issues
 - Corroded structures
 - Washing/failing dike systems (WIND!!!)
- “Uncontrollable” water levels (VERY FLAT)
 - Moving water is extremely difficult (WIND AGAIN!)
 - At a point, the water is on its own and up to nature and evaporation
 - Structure elevation











WIND!!!





THE UGLY

- Significant flood events in 2011
 - Significant damage to most, if not all dikes
 - Silting in most control structures
 - Water management issues
- Spring runoff of 2019
 - Breach of repaired dike on west end
 - Damage to original and repaired dikes
- Spring runoff of 2025 (less significant)
 - High water event with snow runoff
 - Damage to dikes and washing around structures

2011 flooding and 2015 Repairs

- 5 dikes repaired back to functioning order
- 1 new crossing to access both sides of the main channel
- Removal of siltation around control structures
- Add 2 new parking areas
- Control structure jetting (around September 8th)
 - Some are non-functioning and need a desperate cleaning
- Additional gates, signs and seeding around WMA

Cost: \$353K

\$163 Mig Bird

\$110 FEMA

\$80K Habitat MT







Fox Lake Access Trails and Parking



 Fox Lake WMA

★ Entrance Parking

★ New Parking Area

Repaired Dikes

Improved Trail

Roads

New Vehicle Crossing

Overflow structure

County(s): Richland
FWP Region 6

Area of Interest



Possession of this map does not constitute legal access to private land enrolled in the USFWS.
This map may not depict current property ownership outside the enrolled Program Area.
Data provided by MTFWP and Montana State Library, Helena, MT.

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Miles

Flooding 2019 and Dike Breach/Repair

- Heavy spring runoff in spring of 2019
 - The WMA went from dry to FULL in days
- Breached the west end “repaired” dike
- Some minimal washing and damage to other remaining dikes



3/8/2019

- There was a lot of snow cover during 2018-2019



3/21/2019



4/2/2019



4/25/2019

- As you can see the dike has breached by this point



Bureau of Land Management, Esri Canada, Esri, HERE, Garmin, INCREMENT P, USGS, METI/NASA, E...

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So.... What's next?!?

- Focus on repairs, water management?
 - Funding and recurring issues?
 - “...it was a lot of money at the time, but a repair this extensive would be substantially more now” – FWP Engineer
- Do we change management directions?
 - Start abandoning dikes/structures to focus on overall water retention
 - Cannot move water effectively
- Focus funding and effort on remaining infrastructure
 - Focus on east end for maximum potential water?

Thank you





STATE OF THE DUCKS

2025

Faye McNew – Statewide Waterfowl Biologist (Central Flyway Tech. Rep.)

Migratory Bird Regulation Schedule

Month	State Action	Federal Action
May 2024		Population Survey for 2025/26 season
August 2024	Flyways meet and make recommendations for 2025-26 season	2024 Population Status Available Final rule in Federal Register for 2024-25 season
October 2024		USFWS Regulations Committee meets to review recommendations for 2025/26 season
February 2025	MT FWP publishes proposed rules for Public Comment 2025-26 season	Proposed Rule for 2025-26 in Federal Register open for public comment
March 2025	Flyways meet and make recommendations	
April 2025	Proposed season dates presented to MT FWP commission for action for 2025-26 season 2025-26 Season selections sent to the USFWS	Proposed Rule published in the Federal Register X EO 14192
May 2025		Population Survey for 2026/27 season Proposed Rule published in the Federal Register
August 2025		Final rule in Federal Register for 2025-26 season ?

GOOSE MANAGEMENT

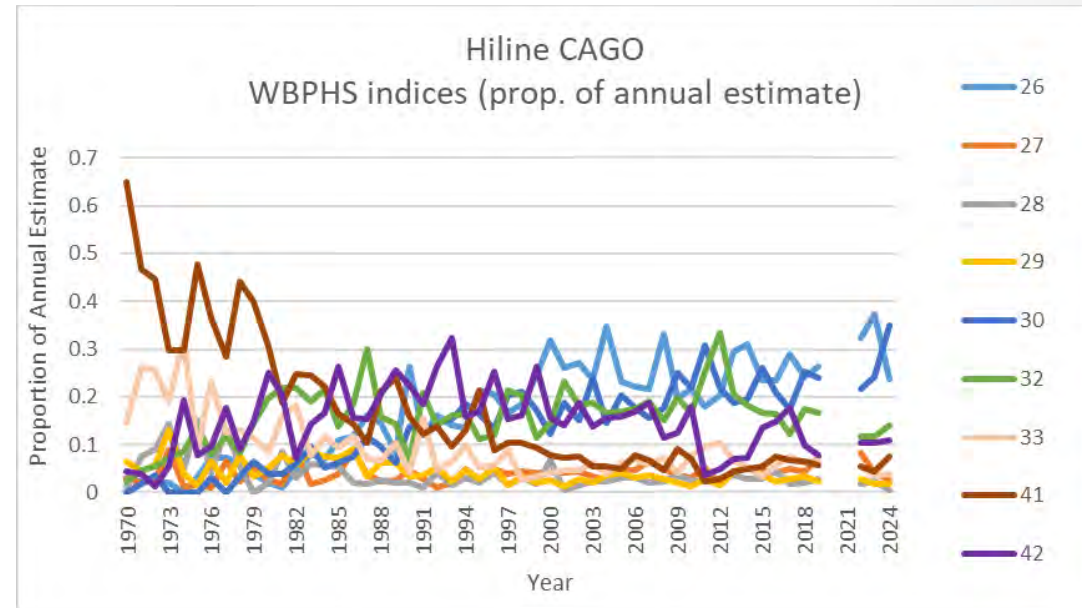
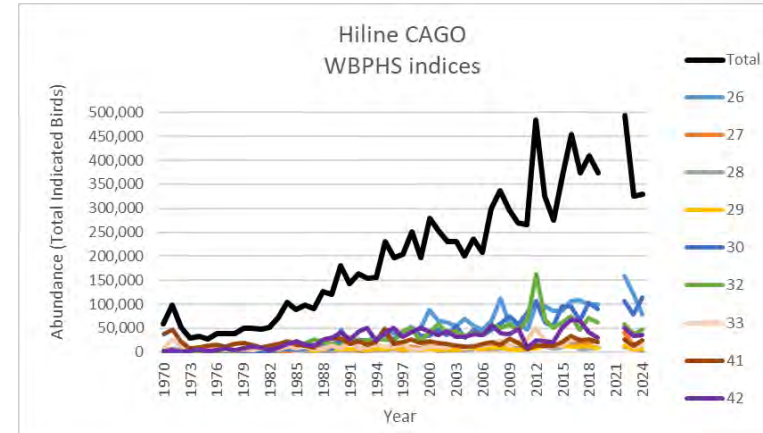


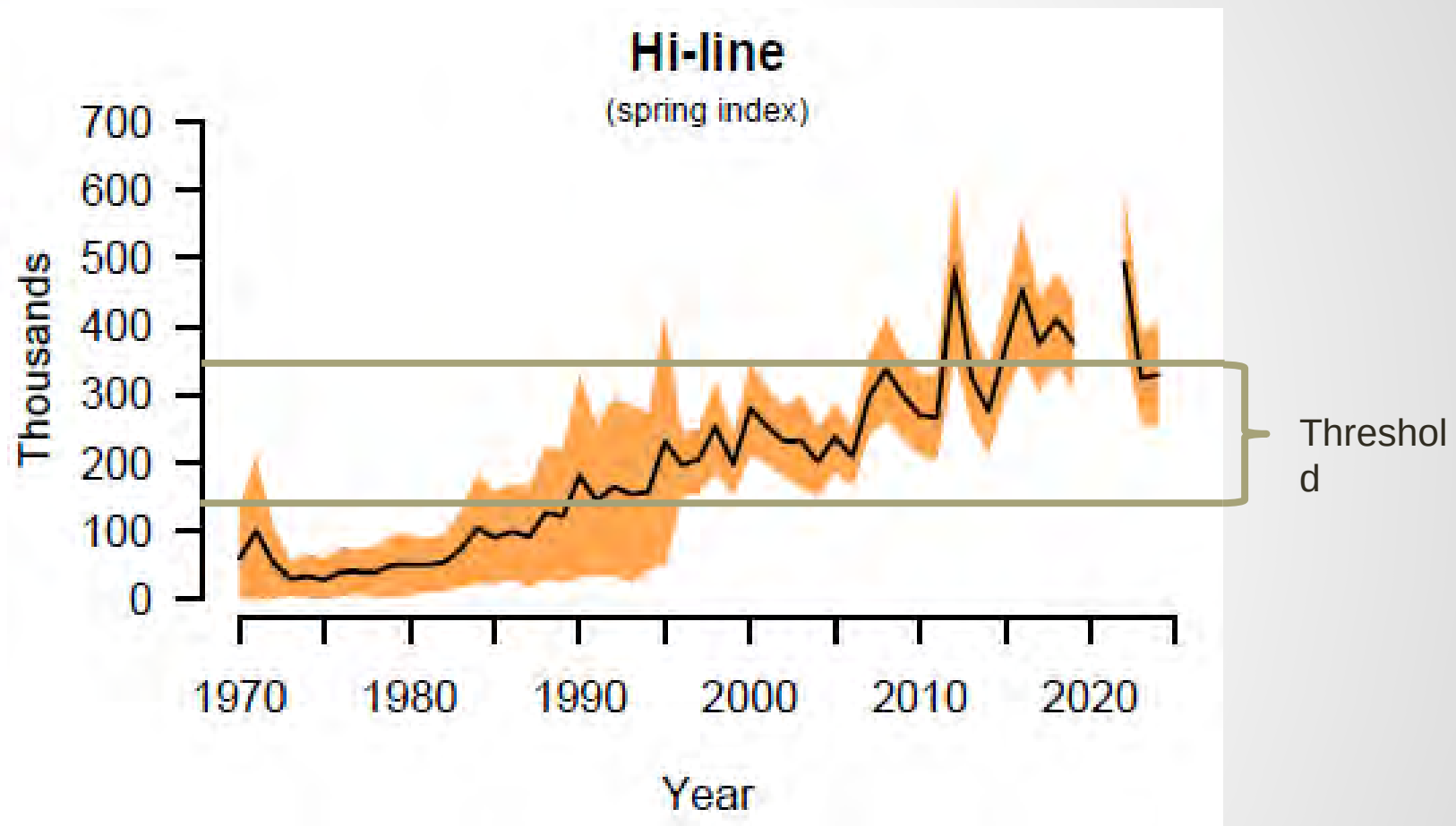




Hiline CAGO WBPHS

- WBPHS indices
 - AB (partial strata 26–29); SK (partial strata 30, 32, 33); MT (partial strata 41–42)





Hi-Line Geese

10-year trend = -1%/year

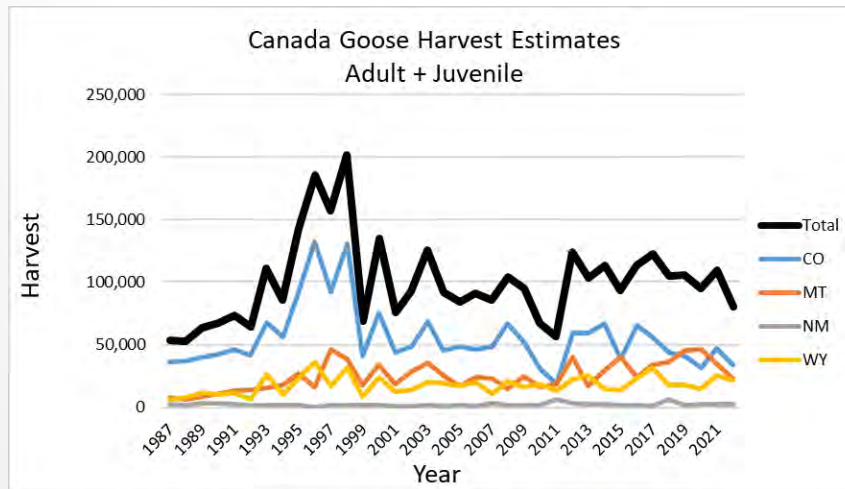
3-year average = 382,000

Threshold: 150,000 –
350,000

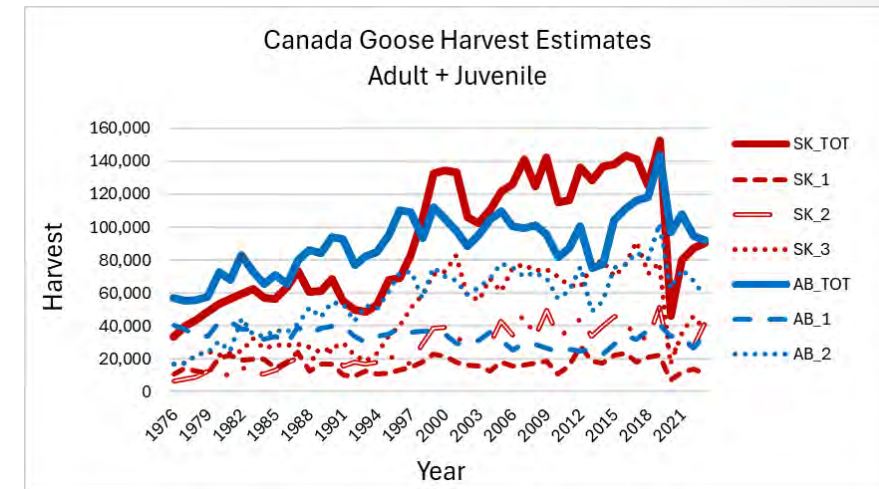


Hiline CAGO Harvest

- U.S. Canada goose harvest estimates (by state, county)
 - 2024 Memo (revised estimates pre-2021)
 - 2021+ estimates in USFWS Harvest Reports



- Canadian Canada goose harvest estimates (by province, zone)

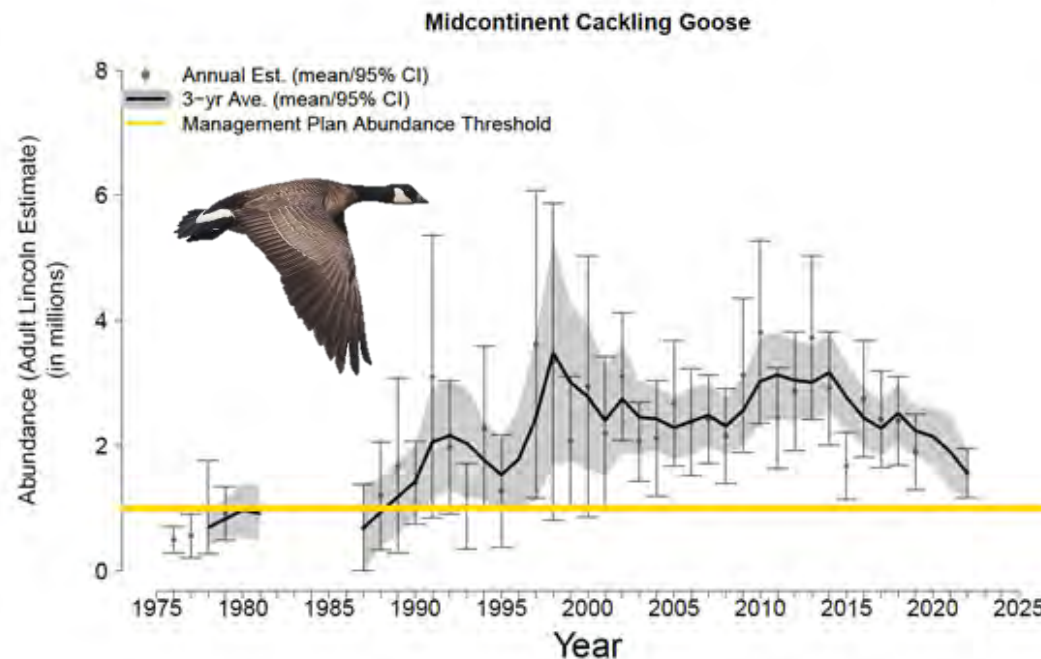




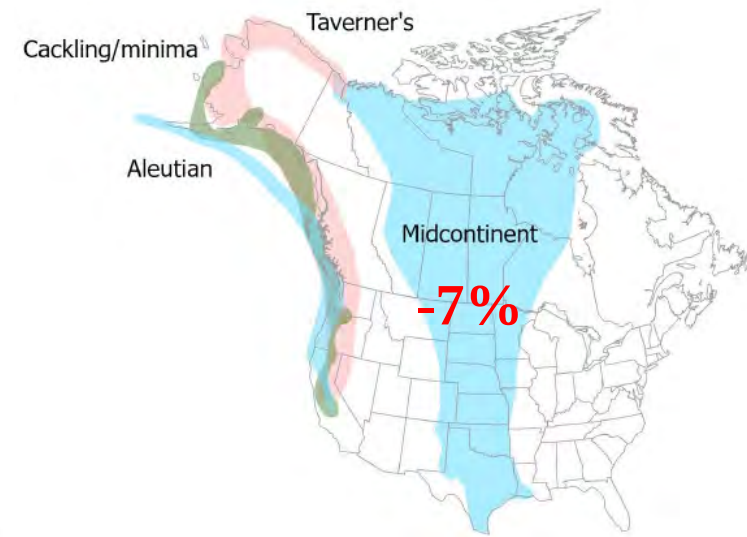
Status/Trends

Midcontinent Cackling Geese

- Adult Lincoln estimates (through 2022)
 - 3-year average = 1,563,254
 - Threshold: 1,000,000
 - Current harvest rate = 5%
 - Threshold: 10%



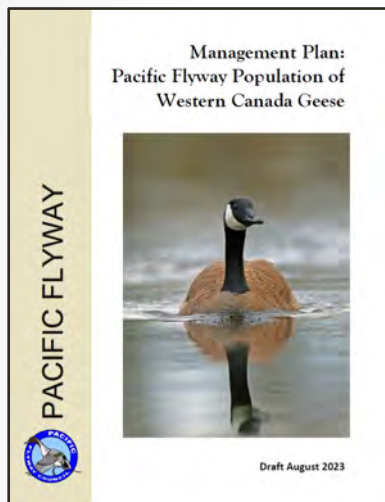
10-year Trend Populations of Cackling Geese



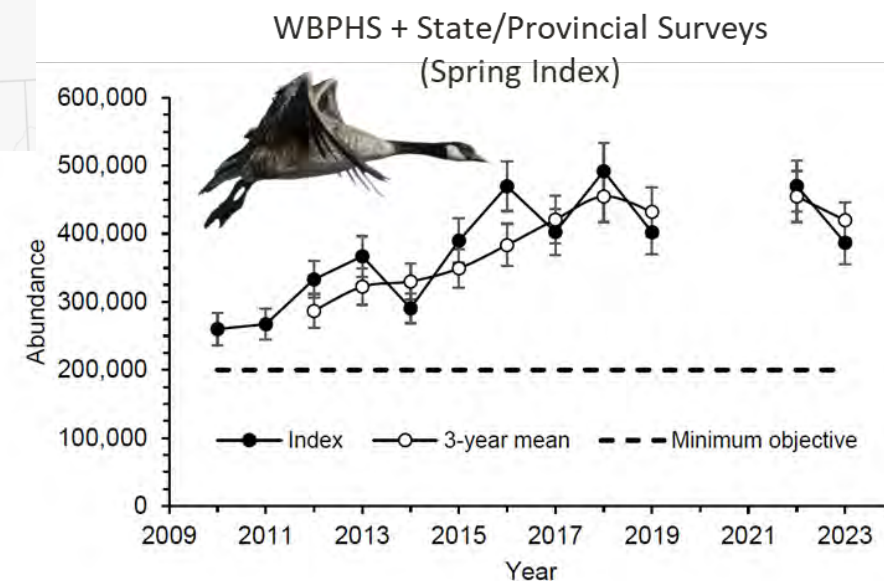


Pacific Flyway Western Canada Goose

- Management Plan updated in 2023
 - Combined Pacific and Rocky Mountain Populations



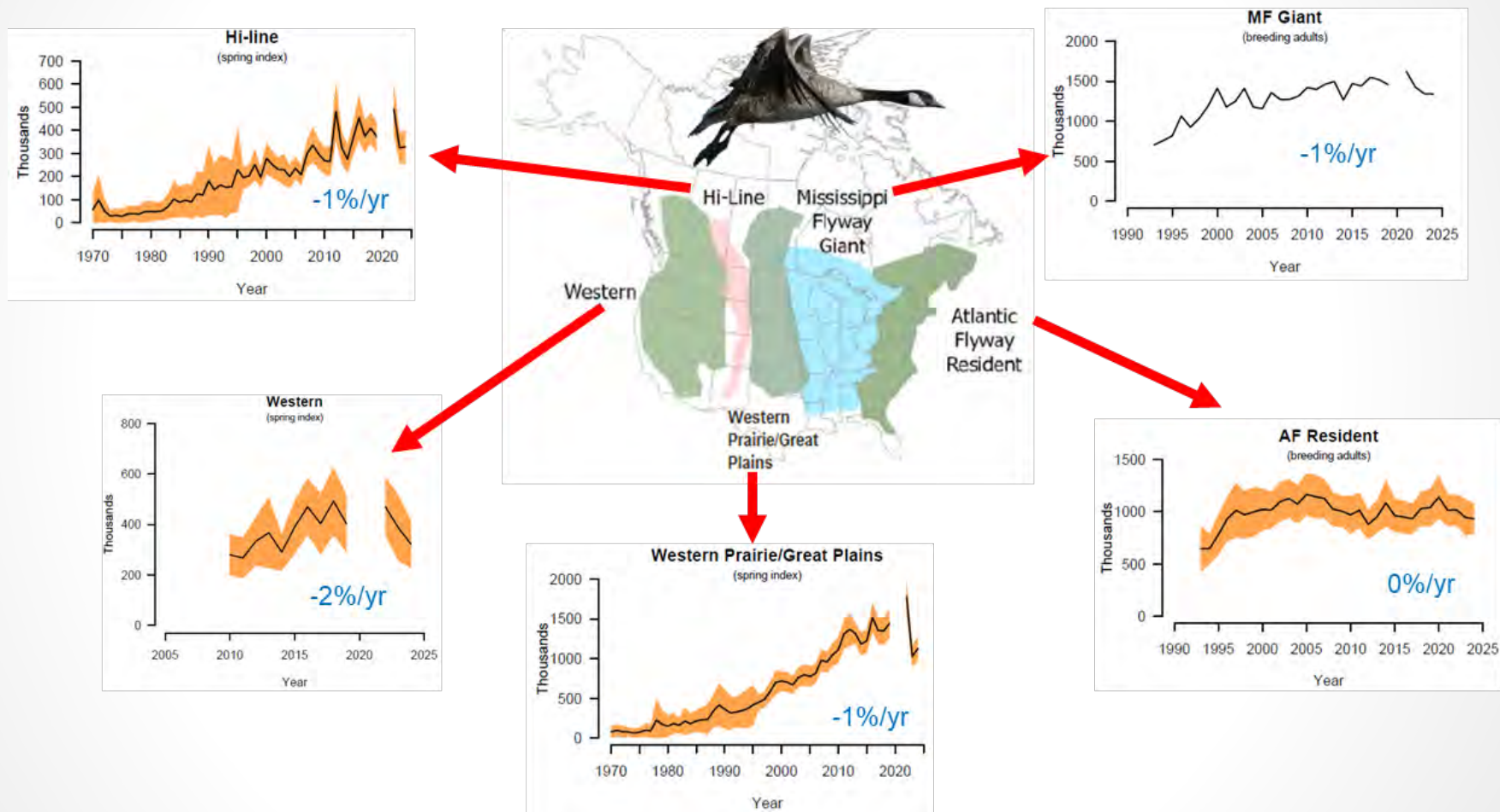
- Primary monitoring survey
 - WBPBS + State/Provincial surveys





Status/Trends

Temperate-breeding Canada Geese



Dark Goose Frameworks

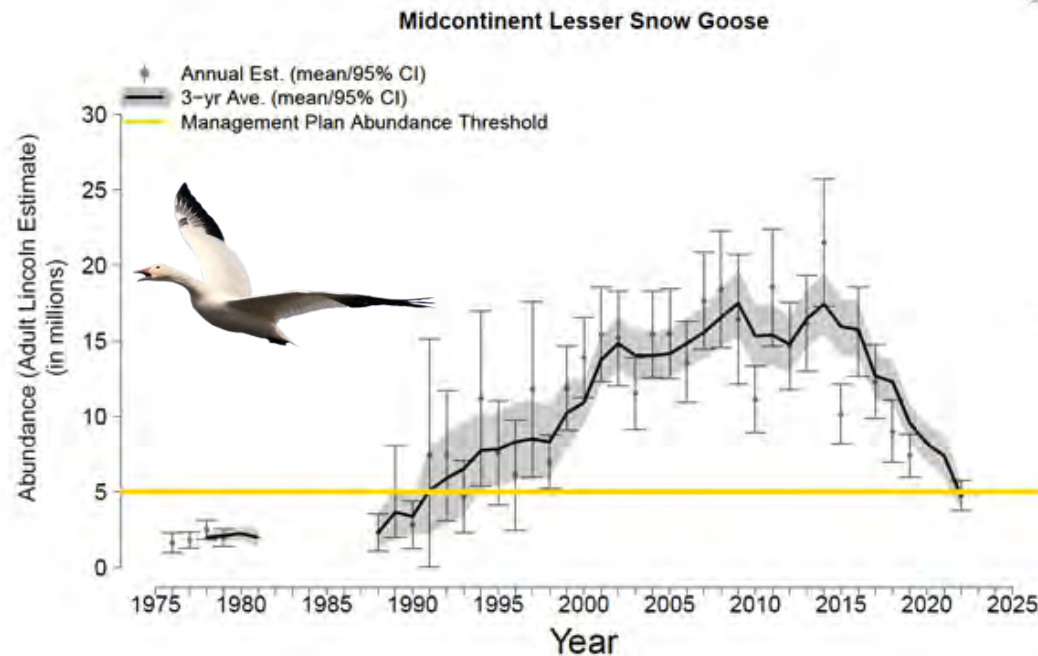
- Season Length: 107 days
- May be split into 2 segments
- Bag limit: 5 Dark geese
- Possession Limit: 3 times the daily bag limit
- Framework Dates: Saturday closest to Sept. 24 to the Sunday closest to Feb. 15
- Shooting hours: ½ hour before sunrise to sunset



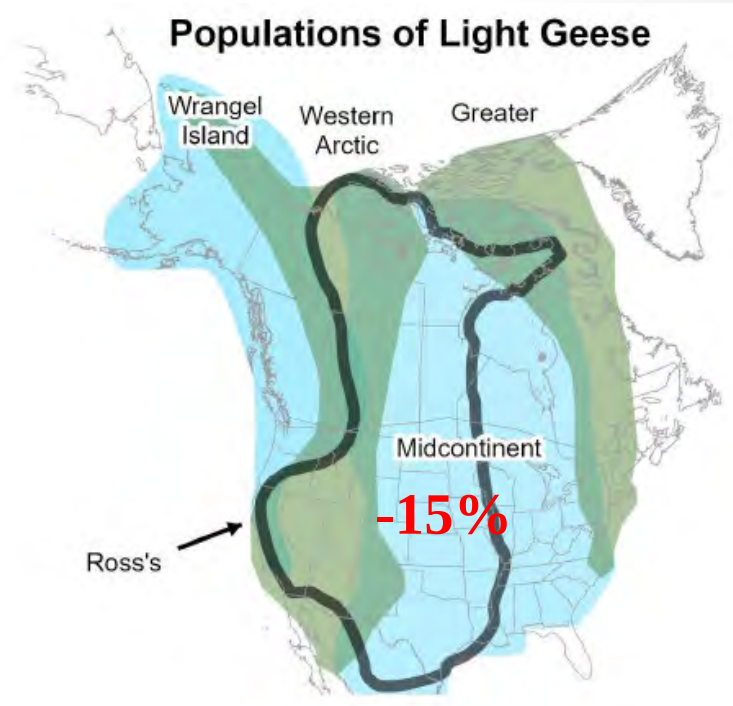
Status/Trends

Midcontinent Lesser Snow Geese

- Adult Lincoln estimates (through 2022)
 - 3-year average = 4,741,754
 - Threshold: 5,000,000
 - Current harvest rate = 2.4%
 - Threshold: >11%



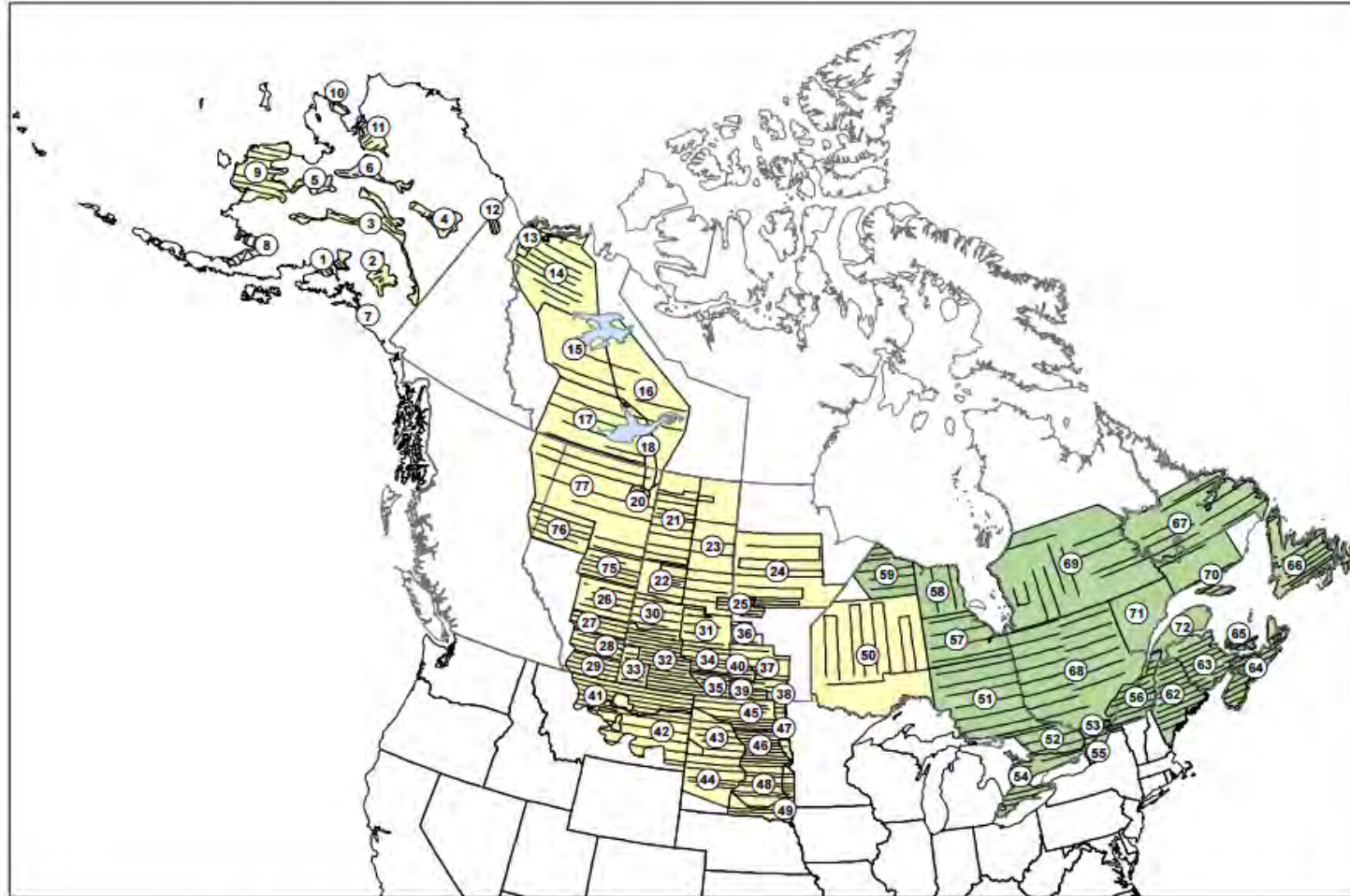
10-year Trend





DUCK MANAGEMENT

B. Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey map



Strata and transects of the Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey (yellow = traditional survey area, green = eastern survey area).



2024 WATERFOWL BREEDING POPULATION STATUS

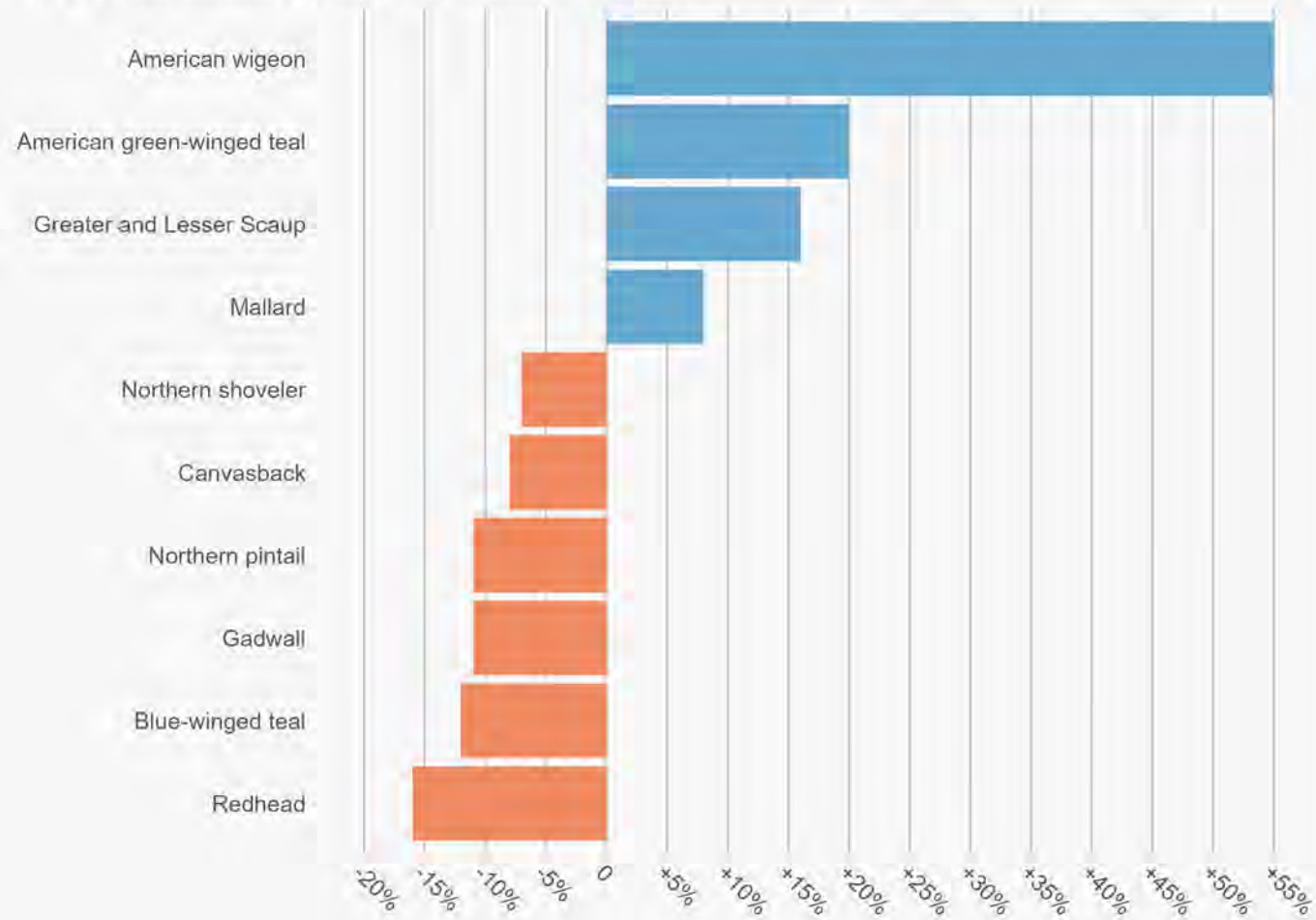


	SPECIES	2024	2023	% CHANGE FROM 2023	% CHANGE FROM LTA*
	MALLARD	6,609	6,126	+8	-16
	GADWALL	2,284	2,561	-11	+11
	AMERICAN WIGEON	2,922	1,890	+55	+12
	GREEN-WINGED TEAL	3,005	2,503	+20	+38
	BLUE-WINGED TEAL	4,599	5,250	-12	-10
	NORTHERN SHOVELER	2,646	2,858	-7	0
	NORTHERN PINTAIL	1,975	2,219	-11	-49
	REDHEAD	782	930	-16	+6
	CANVASBACK	566	619	-8	-4
	SCAUP	4,069	3,517	+16	-17
	Total Ducks	33,988	32,305	+5	-4
	May Ponds (U.S. & Canada)	5,159	4,975	+4	-1

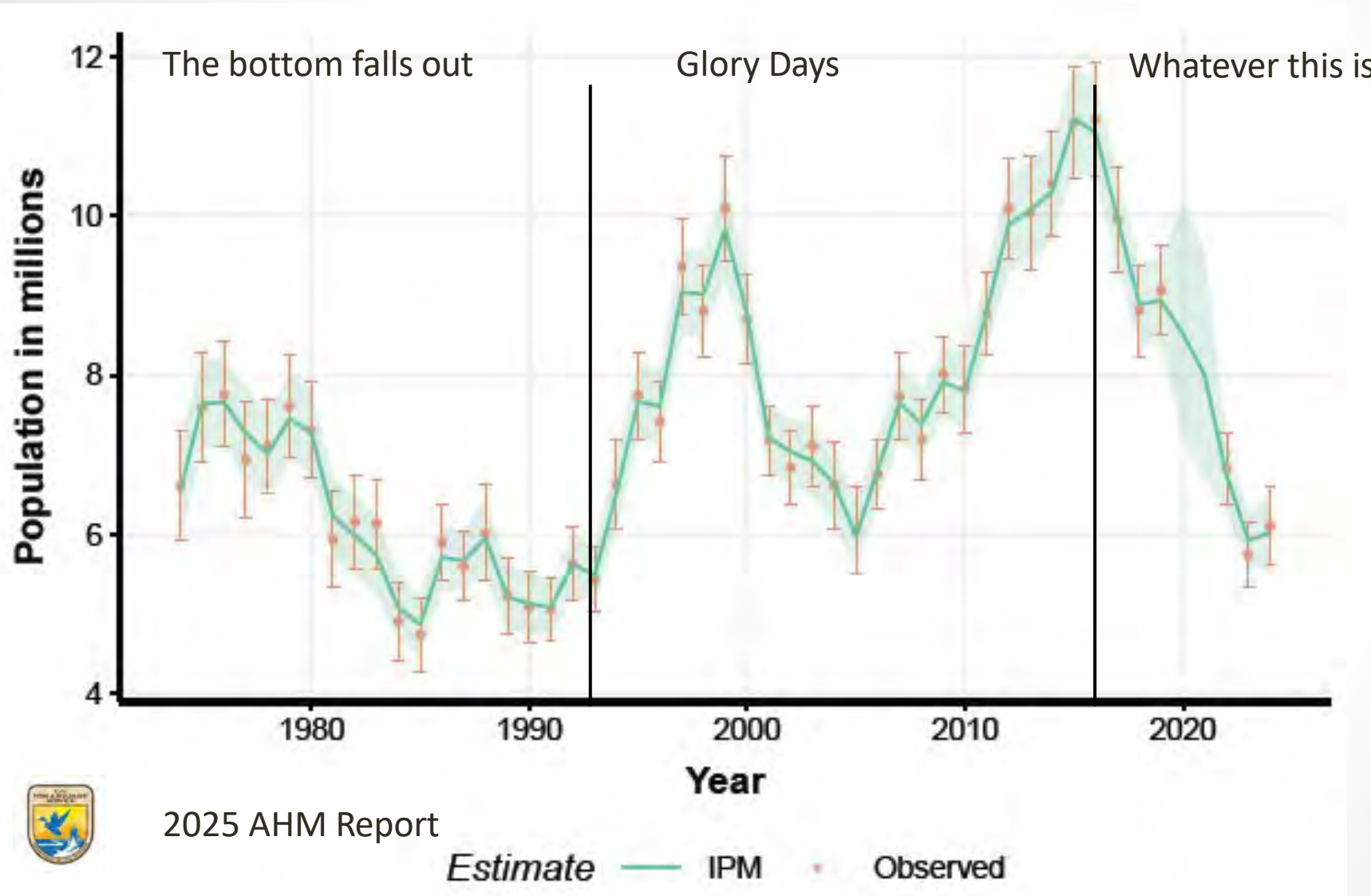
NUMBERS IN THOUSANDS. *LONG-TERM AVERAGE (LTA)

Change in abundance from 2023

The 10 most common species in the Traditional Survey Area

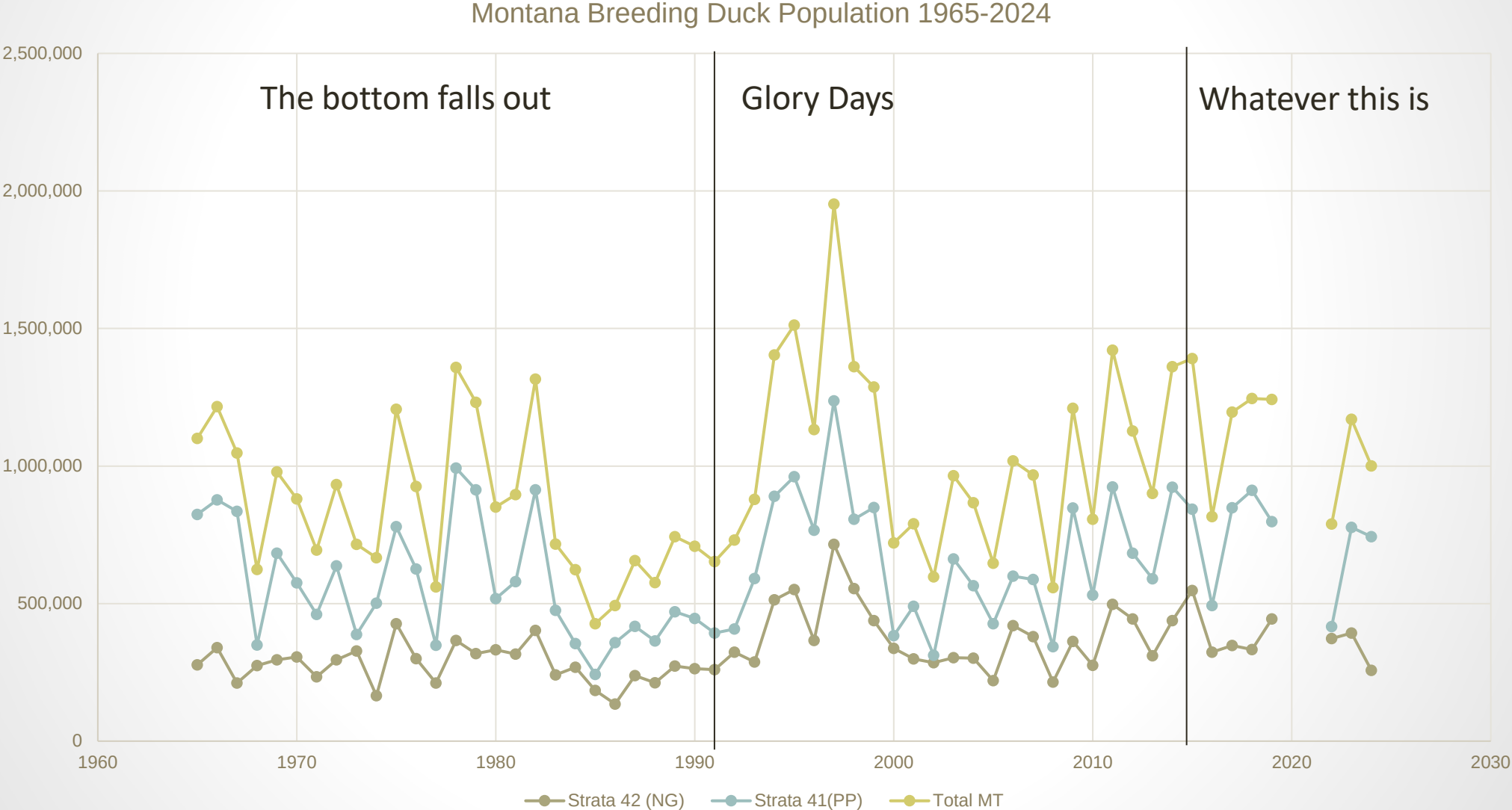


Midcontinent mallard abundance



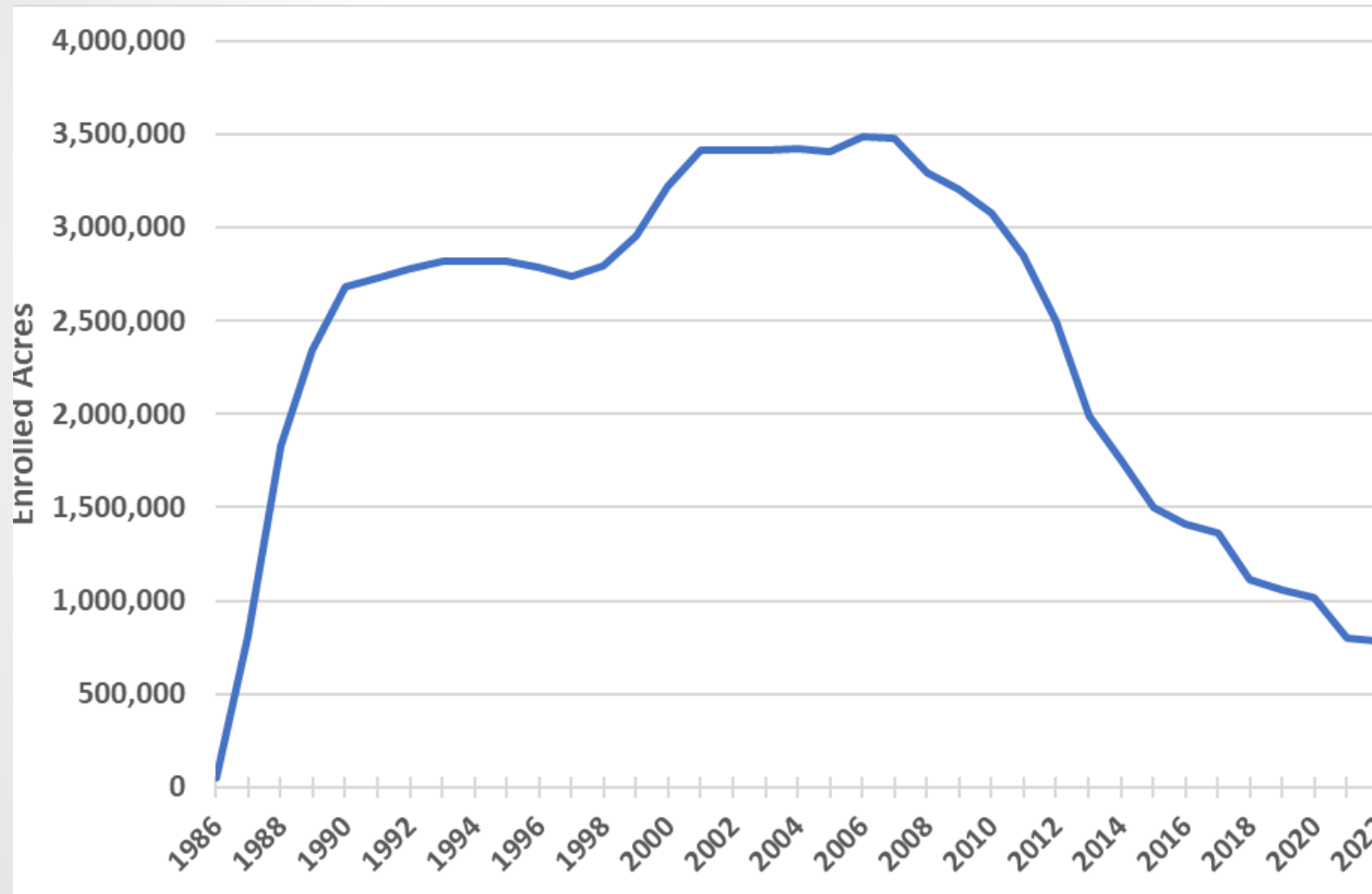
As the midcontinent population unwinds, a smaller source population will result in lower fall flights, even when conditions are wet. We will again enter a time where population size is small enough to more likely be impacted by harvest. We're not there yet.

Breeding Duck Population Montana





CRP Acres in Montana



- 75% decline in acres since peak in 2006-2007
- > 2.6 million acres expired

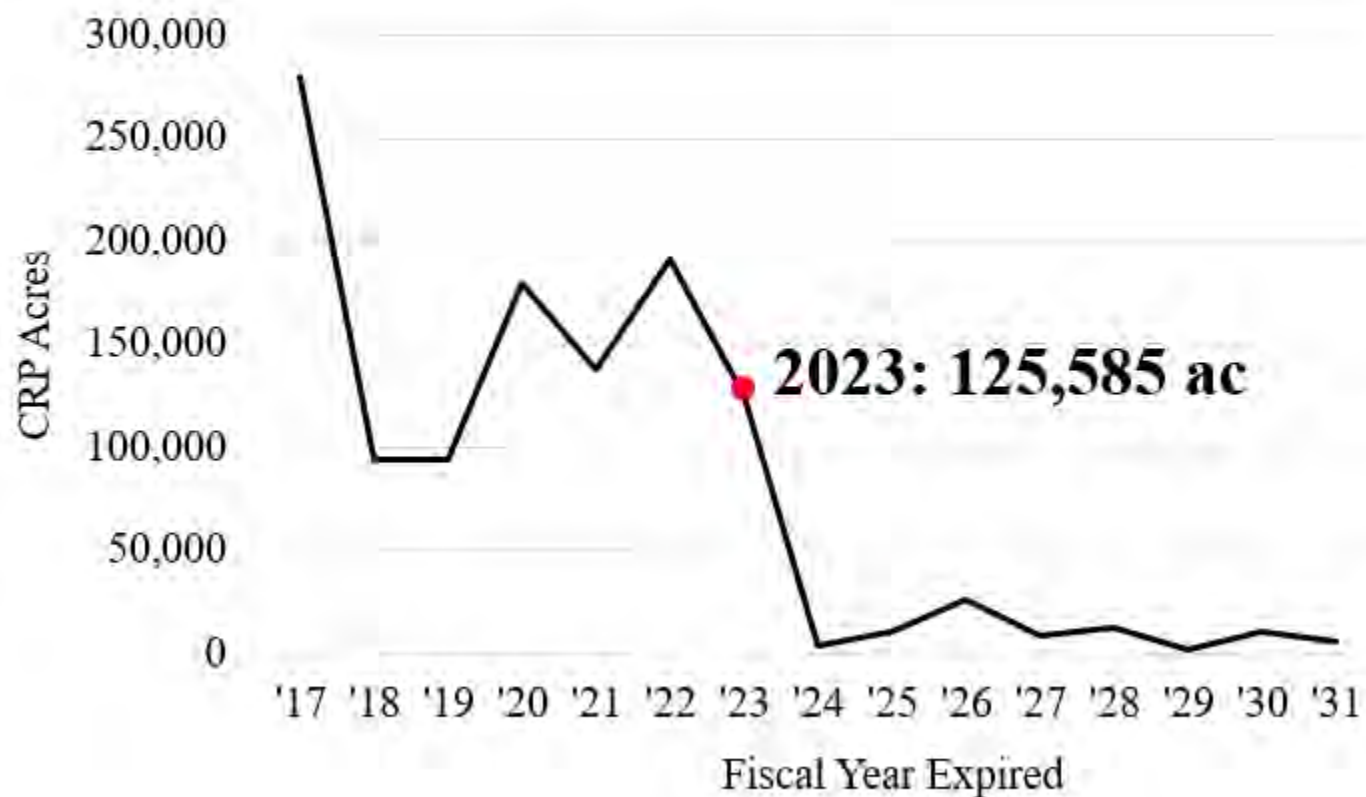


Prairie Pothole
JOINT VENTURE

Migratory Bird Program - Conserving America's Birds

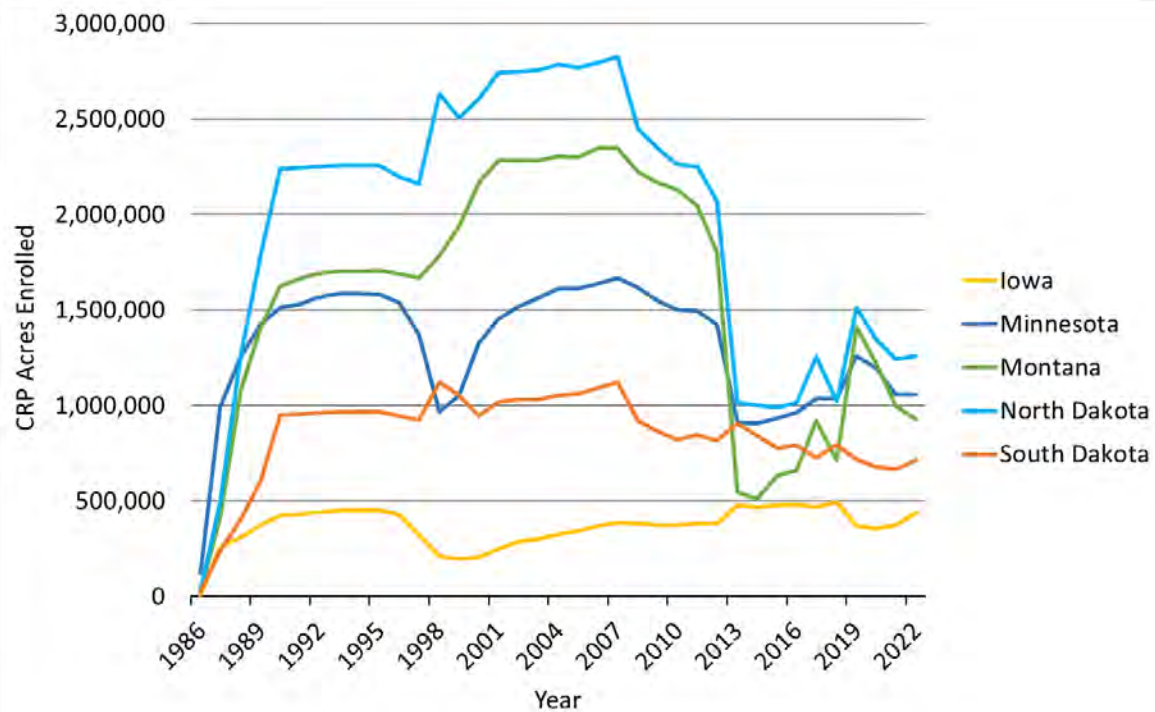


Expiring CRP in MT

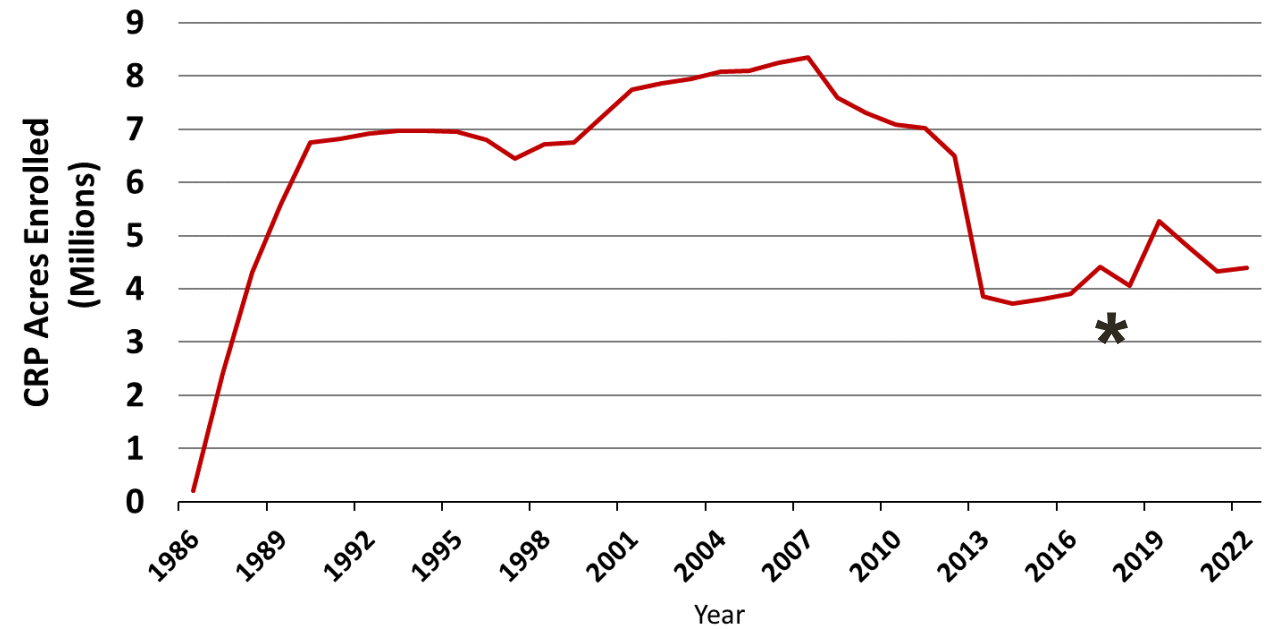


Wetland & Grassland Loss in PPJV

CRP Acres by State



Total CRP in PPJV



*Increase from Grasslands CRP

Wetland & Grassland Loss



% Cropland Conversion From CRP per County

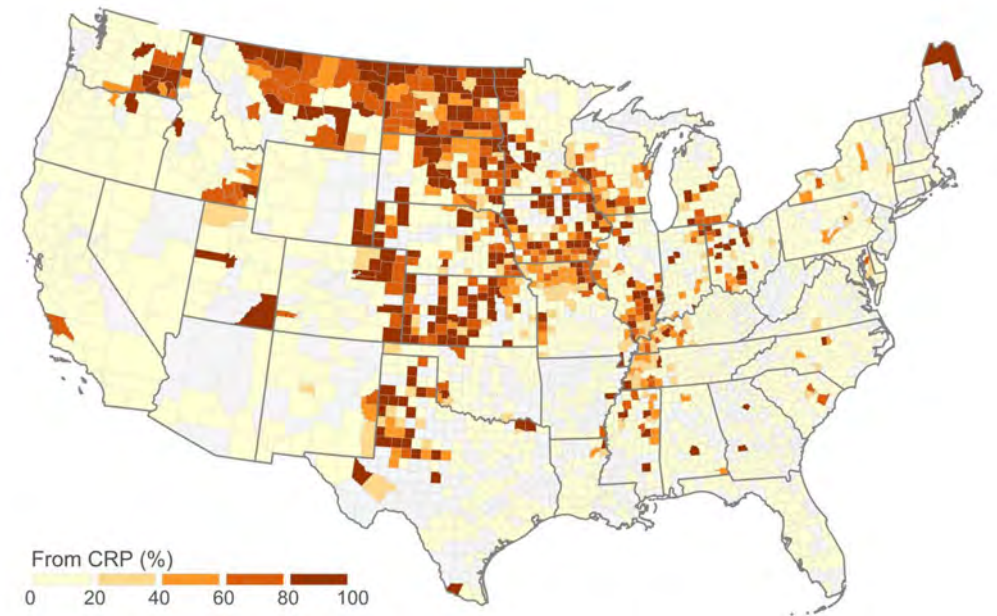
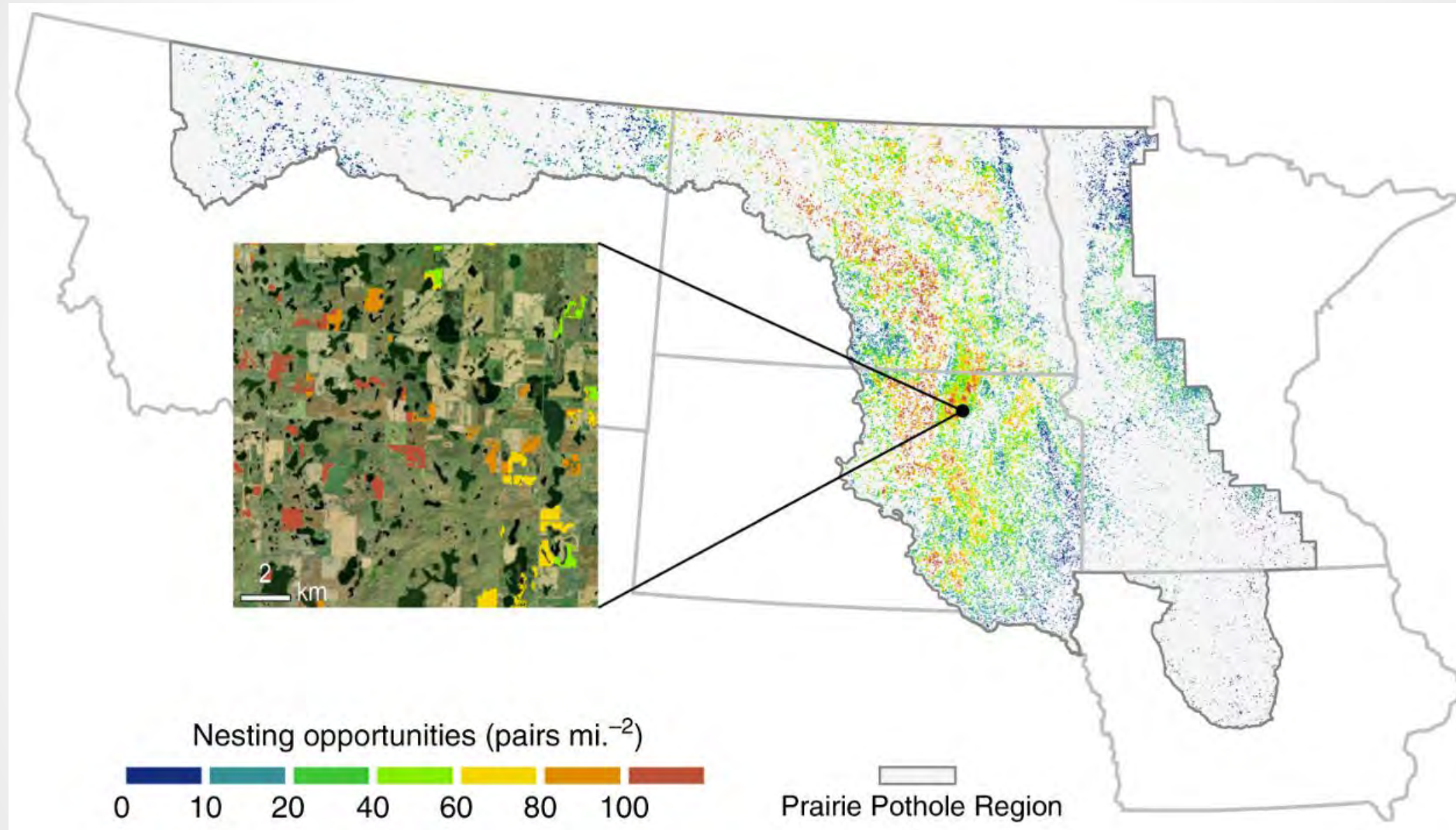


Figure 3. Proportion of cropland expansion occurring on land previously enrolled in Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The map displays the estimated percentage of conversion to cropland coming from CRP in each county. From Lark et al. 2020 Supplemental Material Fig. 12)

Lark et al. 2020

Loss of grassland habitats (Lark et al. 2020)



- 2008-2016 losses impact 138,000 duck nesting activities/yr

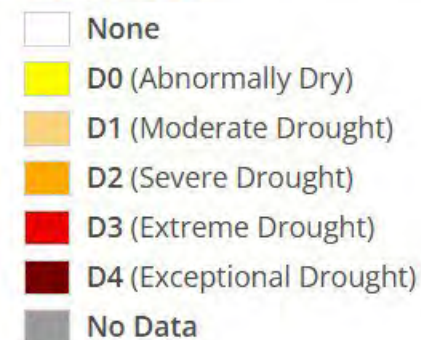
U.S. Drought Monitor

[Current](#)[Maps](#)[Data](#)[Summary](#)[About](#)[Conditions & Outlooks](#)[Ag in Drought](#)[En Español](#)[NADM](#)

Map released: Thurs. June 5, 2025

Data valid: June 3, 2025 at 8 a.m. EDT

Intensity



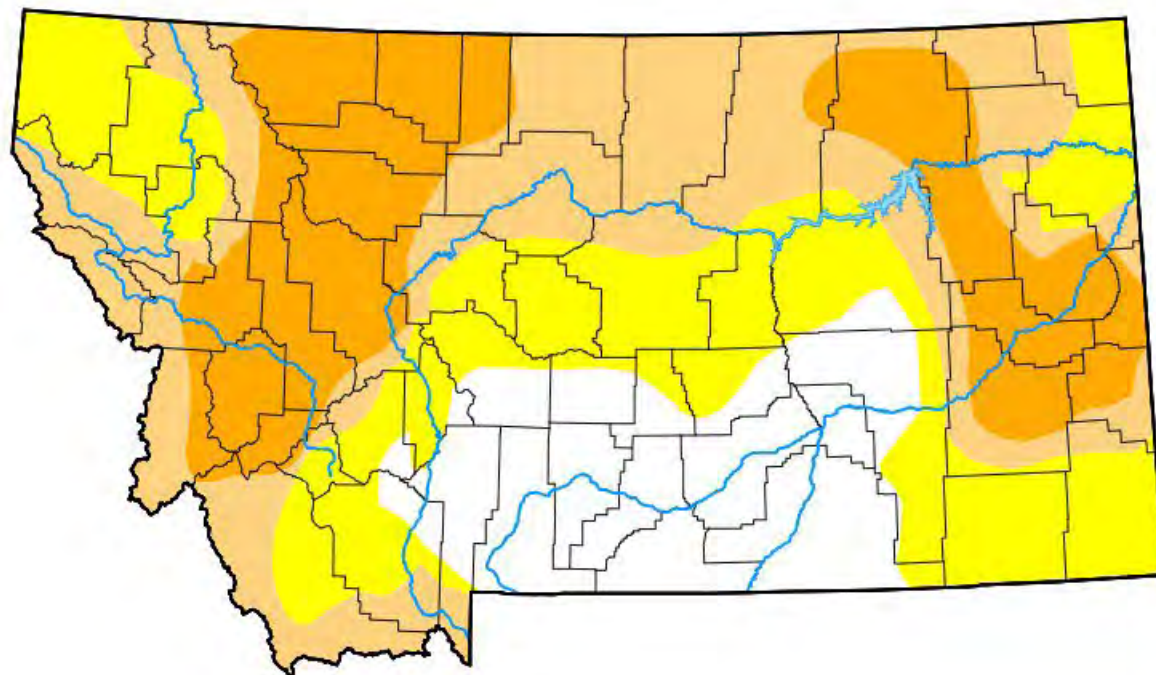
Authors

United States and Puerto Rico Author(s):

[Brad Pugh](#), NOAA/CPC

Pacific Islands and Virgin Islands Author(s):

[Curtis Riganti](#), National Drought Mitigation Center



U.S. Drought Monitor

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North Dakota

[Home](#) / [North Dakota](#)

Map released: Thurs. June 5, 2025

Data valid: June 3, 2025 at 8 a.m. EDT

Intensity

-  None
-  D0 (Abnormally Dry)
-  D1 (Moderate Drought)
-  D2 (Severe Drought)
-  D3 (Extreme Drought)
-  D4 (Exceptional Drought)
-  No Data

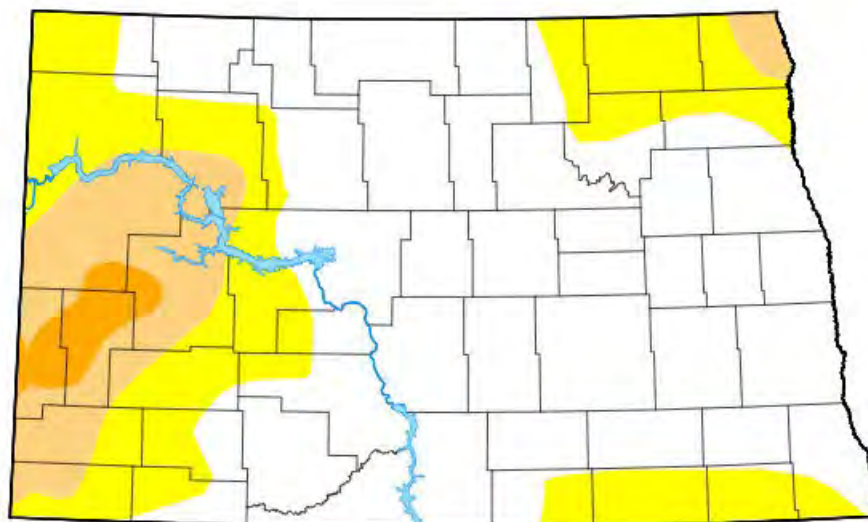
Authors

United States and Puerto Rico Author(s):

[Brad Pugh](#), NOAA/CPC

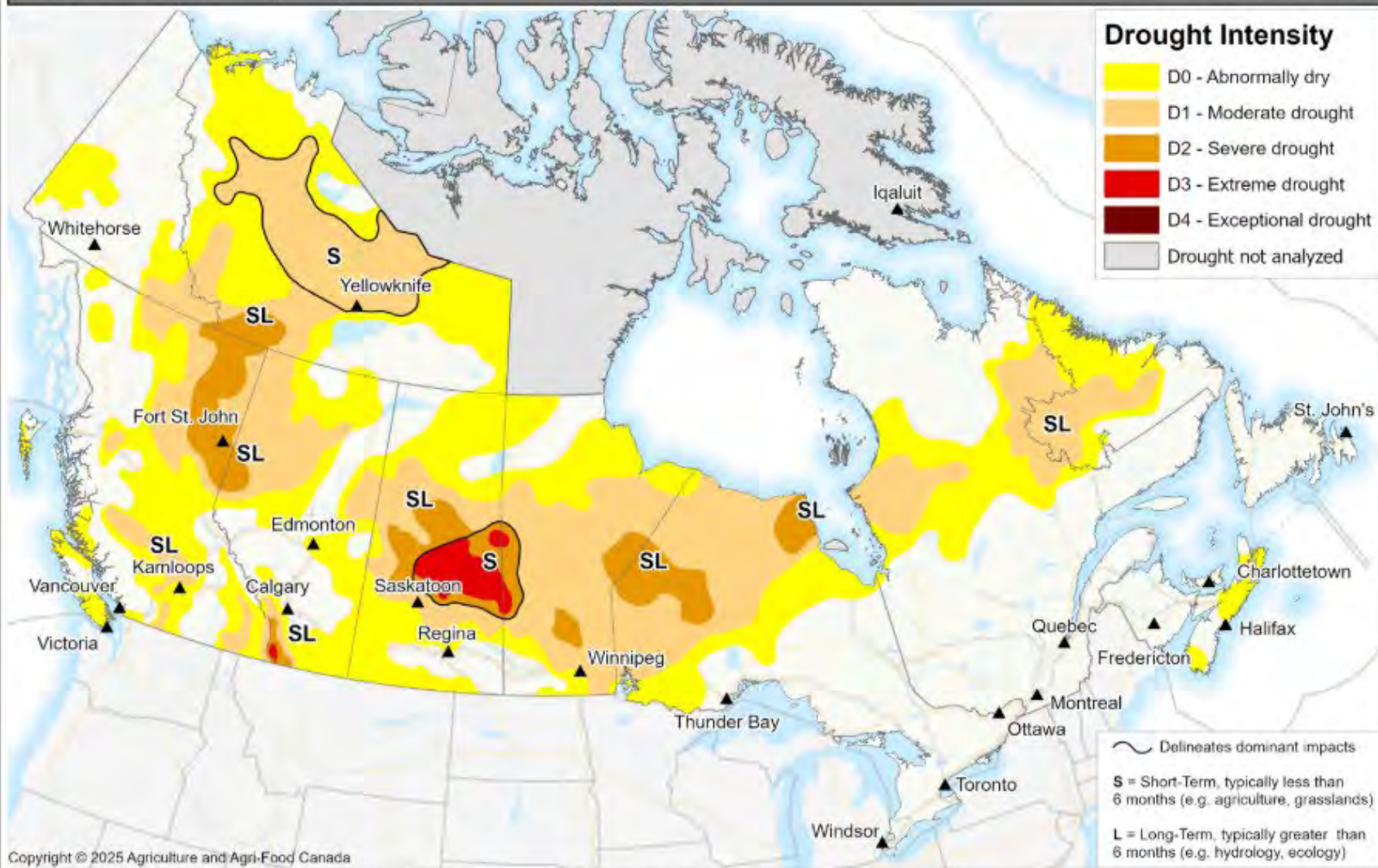
Pacific Islands and Virgin Islands Author(s):

[Curtis Riganti](#), National Drought Mitigation Center



Canadian Drought Monitor

Conditions as of May 31, 2025



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Prepared by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's National Agroclimate Information Service. We also acknowledge various provincial, territorial and non-government organizations whose reports and assessments are consulted.

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Regions in northern Canada may not be as accurate as other regions due to limited information.

Created: 6/4/2025
www.agr.gc.ca/drought

Desperate times, desperate measures

- Once again, intensive management is coming into the picture.
- Hen Act
 - Hen houses aren't the savior, but can be an important tool to bolster production of mallards in landscapes with high wetland densities, low grass
- Conversations about haying dates



What could happen to regs

- A restrictive package:
39 days, 3 ducks/day.

Regulatory Alternative	Mid-Continent		Western	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Closed (U.S.)	0.009	0.002	0.009	0.018
Restrictive	0.055	0.013	0.073	0.017
Moderate	0.094	0.021	0.122	0.029
Liberal	0.111	0.016	0.142	0.027

Harvest rates under the regulatory alternatives.

	Ponds ^c																				
BPOP ^b	3	3.25	3.5	3.75	4	4.25	4.5	4.75	5	5.25	5.5	5.75	6	6.25	6.5	6.75	7	7.25	7.5	7.75	8
≤3	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
3.25	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	R
3.5	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	R	R	R	R	R
3.75	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
4	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	M	M
4.25	C	C	C	C	C	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	M	M	M	L
4.5	C	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	M	M	M	L	L	L	L	L
4.75	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	M	M	M	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
5	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	M	M	M	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
5.25	R	R	R	R	M	M	M	M	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
5.5	R	M	M	M	M	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
5.75	M	M	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
6	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
6.25	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
6.5	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
6.75	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
7	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
7.25	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
7.5	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
7.75	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
8	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
8.25	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
8.5	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
8.75	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
9	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
≥9.25	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L

^a C = closed season, R = restrictive, M = moderate, L = liberal.

The losses, and masked problems

- Memory is short, so every time indices go up, it sounds good.
- Lower highs and lower lows.
- NDGF bpop dropped below 3M ducks 4 times recently (17,18,21,24).
- Really wet conditions recently (20,22,23) have slowed the decline
- Ducks don't live forever
 - More significant declines coming

The losses, and masked problems

- CRP losses also expose embedded wetlands that would have been protected de facto
- Really good situations (climate, timing) don't hit big like they used to
 - 2023 was a good year for production, but...
 - USPPR can stem the tide, but can't consistently carry anymore
 - Overall midco populations going down

Have, don't have, need

- Defining ecological traps
- Adding grass to low (<30%) grass landscapes adds to BOTH nesting locations AND nest survival probability (Pearse et al. 2022)
- Amount matters...configuration, maybe not so much.
- Small postage stamp habitats aren't the goal,
 - Can fulfil needs for now, and maybe provide the basis for buildout.

Conclusion

- So, no, ducks aren't doing that great
 - This would be more apparent without extreme wetness in USA
 - More reliant on water creating odd areas for upland nesting.
 - Dry years will hurt more
 - But, this isn't 1985
- Can't lose focus because wetland loss is going stronger than ever
- Opportunity to do more with less habitat
 - Without red fox and a continuation of the "new wet", small parcel delivery can work
 - Targeting, remove frictional costs



Thank You

Question and Comments?

MGBP / WPAC

Glasgow, MT

June 19, 2025

Does the Migratory Game Bird Program (MGBP) need to improve our Grant Making Authority Process or other project funding mechanism to fully utilize MGBP funds?

FWP Administered Grant Programs	
Trails	Recreational Trails Program
	Trail Stewardship Program
	Off-Highway Vehicle Program
	Summer Motorized Trail Pass Program
	Snowmobile Program
Habitat	Future Fisheries Improvement Program
	Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program
	Habitat MT Legacy Fund (Future)
Educ. & Rec,	Community Pond Program
	Land and Water Conservation Fund
	MT WILD Transportation & Lodging
	Shooting Ranges

MGBL Sold and Esimated Fees Raised (Rev. 0, 6/10/2025)

MT MGBL Sales Data ¹						Fee - Adult/Youth				~ Fees Raised ⁴		~ MBGL \$\$ Total	Crane & Swan Lic. \$\$ Total
Year ²	Resident ³		Non-res ³		Total	Resident		Non-res		Resident	Non-res		
	Adult	Youth	Adult	Youth ⁵		Adult	Youth	Adult	Youth				
2015	19,757	91	3,675	2	23,525	\$ 6.50	\$3.50	\$ 50.00	\$25.00	\$ 128,739	\$ 183,800	\$ 312,539	\$ -
2016	20,436	2776	3,347	143	26,702	\$ 6.50	\$3.50	\$ 50.00	\$25.00	\$ 142,550	\$ 170,925	\$ 313,475	\$ -
2017	19,578	2468	3,349	127	25,522	\$ 6.50	\$3.50	\$ 50.00	\$25.00	\$ 135,895	\$ 170,625	\$ 306,520	\$ -
2018	20,294	2468	3,879	156	26,797	\$ 6.50	\$3.50	\$ 50.00	\$25.00	\$ 140,549	\$ 197,850	\$ 338,399	\$ -
2019	19,827	2369	3,965	160	26,321	\$ 6.50	\$3.50	\$ 50.00	\$25.00	\$ 137,167	\$ 202,250	\$ 339,417	\$ -
2020	23,106	2641	4,946	215	30,908	\$ 6.50	\$3.50	\$ 50.00	\$25.00	\$ 159,433	\$ 252,675	\$ 412,108	\$ -
2021	24,174	2890	5,282	205	32,551	\$ 6.50	\$3.50	\$ 50.00	\$25.00	\$ 167,246	\$ 269,225	\$ 436,471	\$ -
2022	23,769	2847	5,347	293	32,256	\$ 6.50	\$3.50	\$ 50.00	\$25.00	\$ 164,463	\$ 274,675	\$ 439,138	\$ -
2023	24,474	2927	5,798	348	33,547	\$ 6.50	\$3.50	\$ 50.00	\$25.00	\$ 169,326	\$ 298,600	\$ 467,926	\$ -
2024	28,965	3236	5,224	319	37,744	\$ 5.50	\$2.75	\$150.00	\$75.00	\$ 168,207	\$ 807,525	\$ 975,732	\$ -
2025*	29,000	3250	5,225	300	37,775	\$ 5.50	\$2.75	\$150.00	\$75.00	\$ 168,438	\$ 806,250	\$ 974,688	\$ -
2026*	29,000	3250	5,225	300	37,775	\$10.00	\$5.00	\$150.00	\$75.00	\$ 306,250	\$ 806,250	\$1,112,500	\$ 72,575
											2026 est. Grand Total		\$ 1,185,075

¹ Source: MTFWP License Bureau

² Migratory game bird license purchases extend into the next calendar year (Ex. 2016 is actually data for the 2016-17 license year).

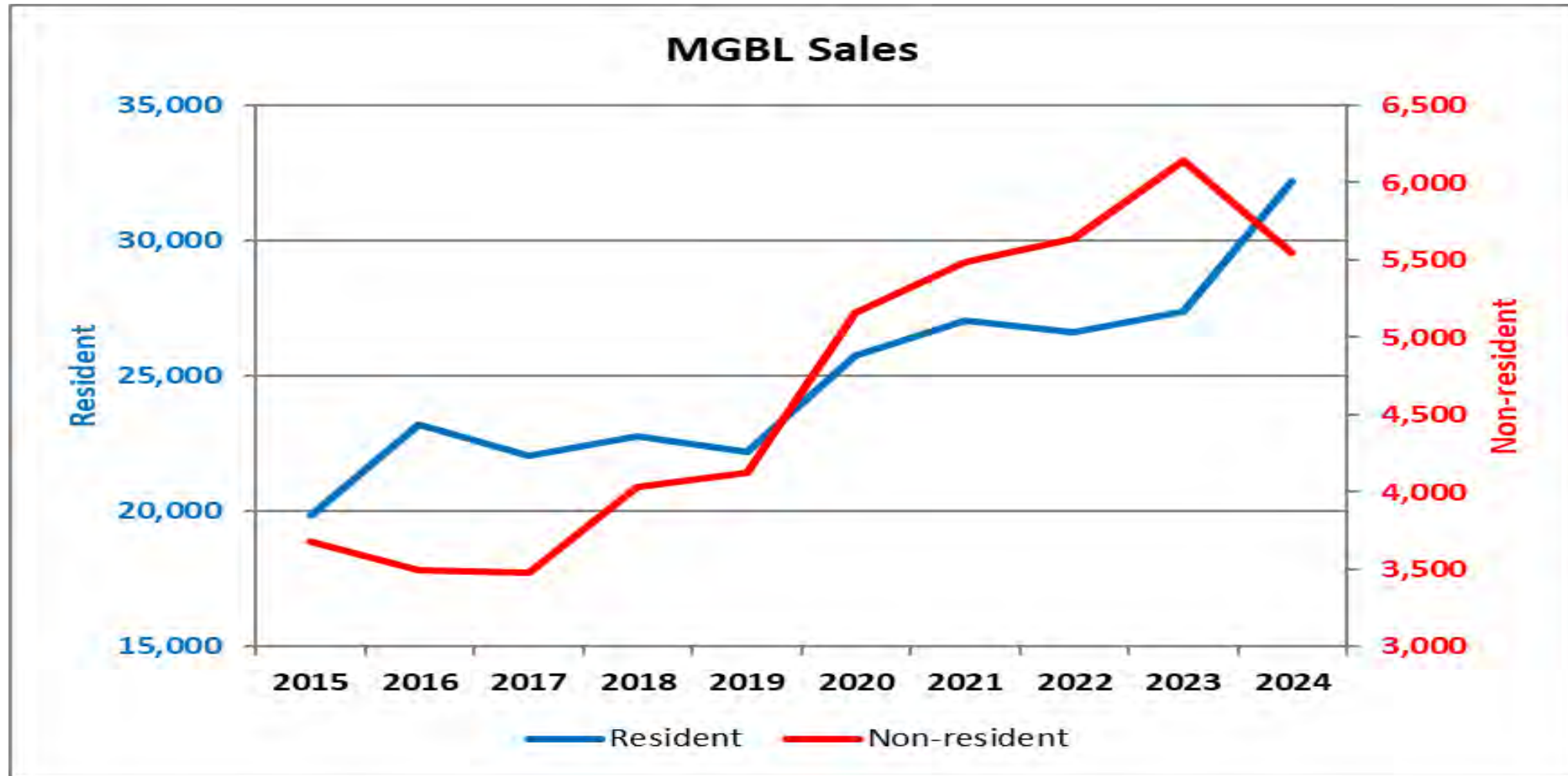
³ Resident and Nonresident sales for each year are the total of Adult and Junior MGBL sold.

⁴ Calculated as the Total of [(Adult sales x Adult fee) + (Junior sales x Junior fee)].

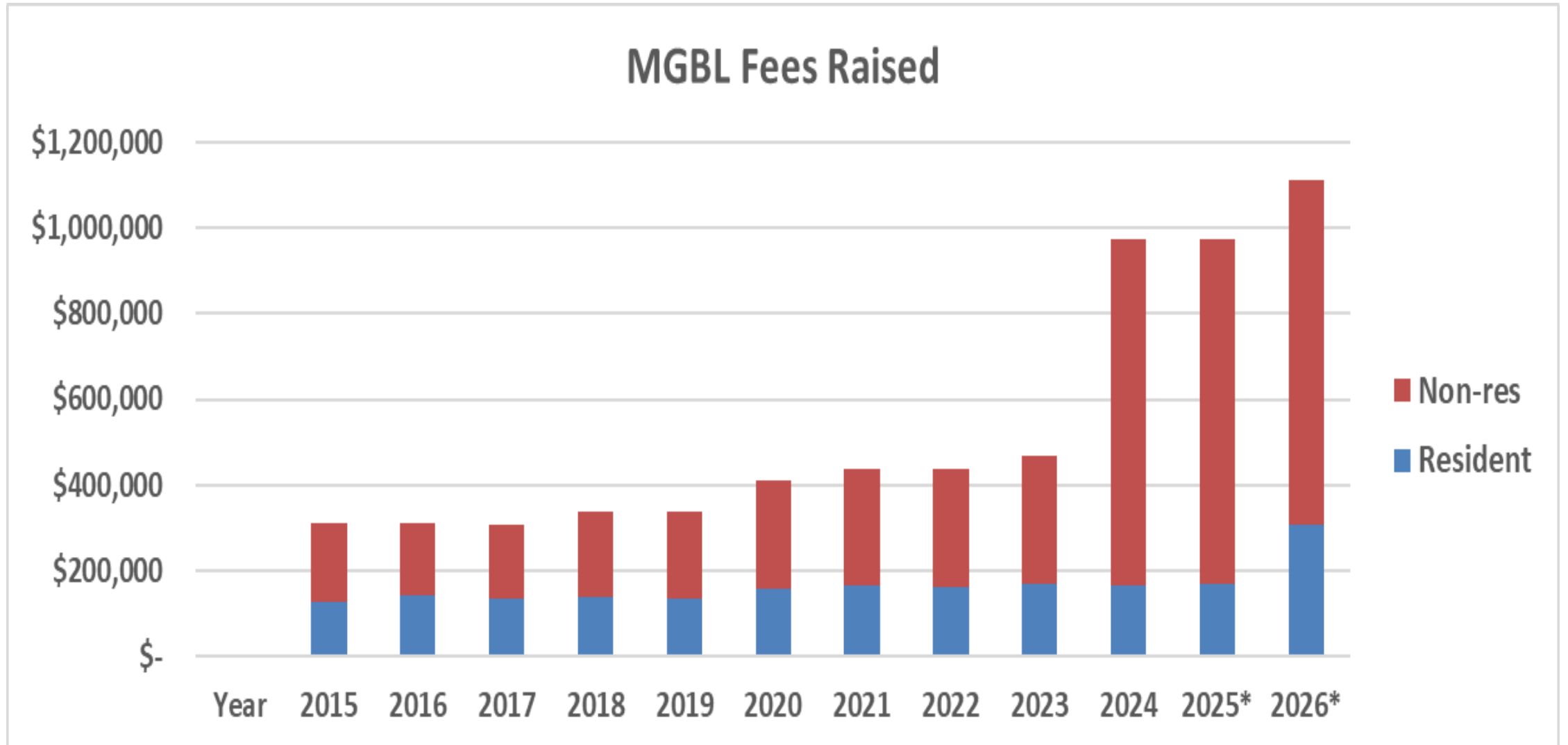
⁵ Includes Non-Resident College & Youth MGBL

* Estimated

MGBL Sales 2015 - 2024



Estimated MGBL Fees 2015 - 2026



How do we utilize our MGBP /Sportsmen's \$\$ Effectively?

1. Status quo w/ an update to Guidance Document?
2. Hire dedicated Wetlands/MGBP Staff?
3. Outsource project development & management?
4. Improve our Grant Program?
5. Can Commission assist thru ARM process?
6. Allocate MGBP Special Fund \$\$ to other FWP programs?
 1. UGBEP, FWP Fee Title Acquisitions, FFIP, Block Mgmt., etc.
7. ??

Comparison of Similar FWP/Citizen Advisory Committee Partnerships				
Element	FFIP	WHIP	UGBEP	MBWP/WPAC
Lines of MCA Statute	30	75	73	5
Biennial Report Req'd	X	X	X	
Grant Projects	X	X	?	
Annual Budget	~\$1M	~\$2M	~\$1M	\$500K
Annual Revenue	~\$1M	~\$2M	~\$1M	~+\$1.0M
Annual Expenditures	~\$1M	~\$2M	\$800K	
# on Committee	13	10	12	7
Utilize Matching Funds	X	X	X	?
# Assigned FWP Employees	3	1	4	0.25
Admin. (FIE) Costs Cov'd	X	X	X	
Grants/Contracts Awarded	Semi-A	A	A	Inter.
Strategic Plan			X	

How can we Improve our Grant Program? Development & Implementation?

- Thru Legislative action (a tortuous path).
- Use FFIP & WHIP as guides to write new code.
- Present at next legislature (by FWP & WPAC).
- Hurdles
 - Find a Sponsor(s)
 - Appropriations Committee (ask for \$1M/year)
 - House Fish, Wildlife, & Parks Committee
 - Hearing, Public Comment, Debate, Amendments?, Vote
 - Senate Fish & Wildlife Committee
 - Hearing, Public Comment, Debate, Amendments?, Vote
 - Full House vote
 - Full Senate vote
 - Governor
- Would go into effect in 2028.

An Improved Grant Program Advantages

- Project Partners have matching funds available
- Grant Recipients (GR) conduct all project research
- GR handle project management
- GR bill FWP MGBP for work performed.
- GR & FWP monitor projects

Two Prong Approach?

- Strengthen 2015 Guidance Document
 - Use up allocated budget
 - Rely less on non-direct MGBP FWP resources
 - Engineering, general biologists
 - Prioritize NGO projects
 - Can Commission assist thru ARM process?
- Legislative
 - Research developing an Improved Grant Program
 - FWP ask for major increase to MGBP Biennial \$\$ Allocation
 - MGBP dedicated staff, funded thru program \$\$.

Discussion & Questions

Move from
Good
to
GREAT!