BREADCRUMBS TO SUCCESS

Today’s Arkansas Game and Fish Commission does much more than catch poachers, stock fish and set hunting season dates. Those tasks are essential to the health of Arkansas’s wildlife and outdoors lifestyle, but they’re not alone. Building and maintaining infrastructure, increasing and enhancing wildlife and fisheries habitat, ensuring good water quality and educating the next generation are only a few of the other tasks set before our diverse staff.

In today’s sea of technology, economic issues and politics, staying true to our values and focusing on our mission has become harder than ever. A roadmap was needed to help guide us and the men and women who follow us. Through surveys and focus groups consisting of the general public, the hunting and angling community and employees, we created the AGFC Strategic Plan in 2013 to be that roadmap.

Simply having a map isn’t enough, you have to follow it to your desired destination and constantly keep track of your location. Similar to dropping breadcrumbs along a route, this annual report and other steps taken throughout the AGFC monitor not only where we are, but how far we’ve come toward our goal. These breadcrumbs will continue to make the AGFC Strategic Plan a living document, not a set of ideals that rests on a bookshelf.

This report contains some of the highlights from the first fiscal year since the AGFC Strategic Plan was adopted. It is by no means comprehensive, but offers a sample of the many accomplishments we’ve attained in the last year. I hope you feel a sense of pride that so much has been done to protect your natural resources. I also hope you take the time this year to visit an AGFC lake, wildlife management area or nature center to enjoy these wonderful resources that give The Natural State its nickname. After all, none of this would be possible without your help.

– Mike Knoedl, Director

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STICKING TO “THE PLAN”

The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission formally adopted the AGFC Strategic Plan in April 2013. This plan was the result of surveys and focus groups held with the general public, avid stakeholders and employees as well as many hours of strategically planned and facilitated meetings.

Goal-Driven Duties
At the core of the AGFC Strategic Plan are seven major goals. Each of the following was identified as critical to conserving Arkansas’s fish and wildlife resources for future generations:

• Managing Fish and Wildlife
• Serving the Public
• Connecting People With Fish and Wildlife
• Pursuing Employee Excellence
• Maintaining and Enhancing Commission Assets
• Working Together for Fish and Wildlife
• Preparing for the Future

Instead of simply stating theoretical goals, the AGFC Strategic Plan Team developed strategies for each goal that could be incorporated into each employee’s daily job duties. Each year, every AGFC employee and their supervisor create a work plan for that year, outlining their job duties and opportunities to improve the AGFC throughout the year. Each job duty in an employee’s work plan should reflect directly back to the AGFC Strategic Plan. This ensures the Strategic Plan remains a guiding force in the AGFC, enables employees to see where their daily activities impact conservation in The Natural State, and offers a built-in reporting system to produce annual updates such as this report.

Mission for the Future
Each element of the Strategic Plan, and by default, each element of each employee’s work plan, reflects directly back to the AGFC’s mission – to conserve and enhance Arkansas’s fish and wildlife and their habitats while promoting sustainable use, public understanding and support.

Accumulating Achievements
Each division of the AGFC was tasked with reporting their top achievements from Fiscal Year 2014 once work plans were established and accomplishments had become evident. These reports were then edited and combined to create the highlights and case studies you see on the following pages.

Many daily activities, such as grounds maintenance and cleanup, enforcement of regulations, and processing payments from licenses and other funding sources were not included, but were essential to completion of the overall accomplishments submitted.
MANAGING FISH AND WILDLIFE

Arkansas’s abundant fish and wildlife are the result of carefully planned and executed conservation efforts to improve habitat. Management of these habitats is an ongoing job, and a primary concern of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. Protection from overharvest and overpopulation through regulated hunting and angling also is critical to wildlife and fisheries management. The following highlights are a few ways in which the AGFC managed fish and wildlife during Fiscal Year 2014:

- Completed master plans for 16 wildlife management areas, defining current conditions and goals for featured species to guide future operations on these areas.
- Developed strategic species management plans to direct manpower and funding to management activities for white-tailed deer, wild turkey, black bear, furbearers, elk and nongame species of greatest conservation need.
- Streamlined and prioritized areas where federal Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Funds can have the most impact to healthy wildlife populations.
- Inventoried and began new habitat management plans on 15,250 acres of state-owned WMAs.
- Conducted forested habitat enhancement (thinnings, markings, herbicide treatments, cedar removal) on 6,300 acres of state-owned WMAs.
- Developed 22 miles of fire lanes and conducted prescribed burns on over 15,000 acres of WMAs.
- Maintained 3,600 acres of food plots and 7,500 acres of wildlife openings on wildlife management areas.
- Acquired more than $200,000 in grant funding to promote ecosystem resiliency in the Ozark Highlands through grassland restoration, prescribed burning, timber thinning and invasive species removal.
- Obtained more than $1.3 million of Endangered Species Act Recovery Land Acquisition grant to procure 1,622 acres adjacent to Longview Saline Natural Area WMA.
- Secured 959 acres of additional wetland habitat adjacent to Steve N. Wilson Raft Creek Bottoms WMA through a North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant.
- Conducted creel surveys on Lake Columbia, Buffalo River, Little Missouri River, Lake Ouachita, DeGray Lake, Lake Hamilton and Lake Maumelle to determine fishing pressure, catch rates and total harvest of sport fish.
- Placed nearly 1,000 cedar trees, brush piles, PVC structures, rock reefs and hundreds of aquatic plants to 14 lakes to enhance fish habitat.
- Chemically controlled more than 500 acres of nuisance aquatic vegetation in 11 lakes.
- Applied roughly 575,000 pounds of lime and fertilizer to nine lakes to enhance fish growth rates and populations.
- Conducted population sampling on 102 lakes and 20 rivers to assess spawning success, growth, length/weight relationships and stocking success of sport fish.
- Completed five Stream Team habitat improvement/rehabilitation projects (Big Creek in the Buffalo River Watershed, South Fork of the Little Red River in Greers Ferry Lake Watershed, two projects in Lee Creek in the Arkansas River Watershed and Crooked Creek in the White River Watershed.)
- Placed in-stream habitat in the North Fork of the White River in three areas (Cooper’s Island, The Flats and River Ridge Road) to provide cover for trout and their prey species in a cooperative project with the White River and Arkansas chapters of Trout Unlimited.
- Completed implementation of minimum flow on Bull Shoals and Norfork tailwaters to increase quality habitat for trout.
- Stocked 15.4 million fish through four warmwater hatcheries, one coldwater hatchery, 12 nursery ponds and two net pen/caged fish facilities.
- Completed 219 special enforcement operations and saturations in addition to standard around-the-clock enforcement efforts to increase regulation awareness in areas with a history of wildlife violations.
- Completed federal regulations reviews on 623 projects to ensure impacts to fish and wildlife are considered when landscape-scale projects, such as the Bayou Meto and Grand Prairie irrigation projects, are initiated.
Stream Bank Protection and Stabilization Projects on the White and Kings Rivers

Sedimentation and erosion along rivers and streams is a major threat to Arkansas’s aquatic habitats. Not only do sport fish, such as smallmouth bass and trout, rely on clean, gravelly streambeds, but an entire host of aquatic insects and amphibians, such as the endangered Ozark hellbender, require low sediment loads in their home waters also.

The AGFC undertook many stream bank stabilization projects during Fiscal Year 2014, but two major projects stood out due to their size and potential impact on popular fisheries. Each was part of a sub-grant agreement with the Arkansas Natural Resource Commission and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The Sheid Project on the White River in Baxter County protected more than 1,000 feet of river bank that was rapidly eroding into the river. Four 100-foot long rock vanes were constructed to draw the velocity of the stream away from the toe of the shoreline, therefore reducing the amount of shear stress, and preventing further erosion to the shoreline. This project will prevent about 4,481 tons of sediment from flowing into the river each year.

The Blossom Project on the Kings River in Carroll County consisted of restoring approximately 1,120 feet of river, preventing 2,388 tons of sediment from washing into the river each year. Six 100-foot long vanes were constructed along the length of this project area. Additionally, logs and root wads were used to build structures to serve as an additional buffer to current and as habitat for aquatic and terrestrial species near the river.

Ownership of Land
Hunters Use

Deer Hunters

- 75% Mostly Private Land
- 13% Private and Public Land Equally
- 12% Mostly Public Land

Turkey Hunters

- 68% Mostly Private Land
- 19% Mostly Public Land
- 9% Private and Public Land Equally

*“Arkansas Hunters’ Participation in and Opinions on Deer and Turkey Hunting,” Responsive Management, 2014.

Case Studies in Fish and Wildlife Management

Section Update to Private Lands Management

More than 89 percent of Arkansas is privately owned. The AGFC works diligently to provide the best possible wildlife habitat on land it controls, but the success of wildlife management in the state requires the help of landowners. Conservation-minded farmers and other landowners can get free assistance through AGFC private lands biologists stationed throughout the state. These biologists can write customized habitat management plans for landowners to see the most of their property’s wildlife potential. Private lands biologists also are very knowledgeable about federal grant programs intended to pay landowners to convert marginal farmland into productive wildlife habitat.

During Fiscal Year 2014, the Private Lands Section held 86 public meetings to offer advice on federal and state conservation programs to more than 1,000 participants.

Private lands biologists are heavily involved in the AGFC’s Deer Management Assistance Program, which offers specific advice to landowners and clubs wishing to improve the quality of their property for deer hunting. In Fiscal Year 2014, private lands biologists worked with 1,284 landowners and DMAP clubs, impacting 1,039,663 acres of habitat for the benefit of deer as well as many nongame species.
SERVING THE PUBLIC

The general public is the AGFC’s foremost partner in conservation. Communicating and interacting with the public on a daily basis must be of the utmost quality if we are to succeed in our charge to promote and maintain healthy wildlife populations. In Fiscal Year 2014, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission continued its goal of maintaining open lines of communication with the public and involving them in an open, transparent decision-making process. The following few examples are only highlights to the AGFC’s efforts in working with our constituents:

- Conducted a Hunter Participation Survey on 16 of the most popular WMAs in the state to gather information about public use of the WMA, species hunted, success rates and observations.
- Worked with television, radio and print media to communicate important events and reasoning for regulations changes to keep the public informed about AGFC actions that may impact them.
- Delivered information to the public through the Commission’s website agfc.com to more than 1.28 million viewers during 3.1 million visits to the site.
- Reached more than 100,000 “likes” on the AGFC Facebook page, where we can reach out to the public and the public can give feedback or ask questions to stay informed of AGFC policies and activities that benefit them.
- Development of mobile applications for quail and turkey brood surveys, bear sightings and nuisance alligator reports to streamline field recording efforts using new smartphone technology.
- Conducted 39 workshops and field days involving more than 2,400 people to educate landowners on prescribed burning, planting food plots, forest thinning for wildlife health and deer herd management.
- Developed citizens advisory groups and conducted public meetings for public input during the updates to management plans on DeGray Lake near Arkadelphia and White Oak Lake near Camden.
- Provided technical guidance to more than 85 landowners to manage their private ponds and lakes for sport fish and to remove nuisance aquatic vegetation.
- Provided technical guidance to 12 landowners on trout tailwaters to design and recommend strategies for re-vegetation and stream bank stabilization.
- Provided equipment, technical guidance and support to catch-and-release fishing tournaments throughout the state through the use of a live-release boat and five live-release trailers as well as new weigh-in facilities at Lake Hamilton and the Pendleton Access of the Arkansas River near Dumas.
- AGFC Disaster Response Team responded to weather-related disasters in Faulkner, Scott, Monroe, Montgomery and Van Buren counties to assist with search-and-rescue, security assistance and other humanitarian efforts during devastating tornadoes and floods.
- AGFC Dive Team assisted Sheriff’s departments, Arkansas State Police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation in recovering drowning victims and evidence searches.
- AGFC K-9 Unit assisted in 304 calls to help Sheriff’s departments, Arkansas State Police, United States Forest Service and Federal Bureau of Investigation in addition to enforcing wildlife regulations.
- Provided customized mapping features to AGFC-controlled wildlife management areas to more than 36,000 unique visitors to AGFC.com.
- Migrated all AGFC email addresses to the state standard suffix agfc.ar.gov while maintaining old email addresses to keep communication lines with the public clear.
Case Study in Serving the Public

Streamlining and Publicizing Online Public Comment Surveys for Added Public Input

Fiscal Year 2014 marked the first time that public meetings were not held for the general regulations cycle. At most public meetings held in the last 15 years, AGFC staff outnumbered the audience. The meetings consumed valuable resources in staff time, travel expenses and reservations for venues throughout the state. They also had to be conducted at a single time and place for each venue, requiring someone who had a comment to make room in their schedule and drive to a meeting.

The AGFC has used online survey tools to complement public meetings for the last few years, and their acceptance has grown dramatically. Comments can be made at the public’s leisure any time, day or night, for a full 30-day cycle. Written comments also allow people to voice their opinions without feeling pressure from heavy-handed groups that may attend public meetings to intimidate people into non-response.

During the 2013-14 general hunting regulations cycle, the AGFC kept the survey posted on the front page of AGFC.com and directed people to the link through news releases, online newsletters, direct email marketing, the Arkansas State Fair, the AGFC Facebook page and a one hour statewide call-in show on AETN public television. This resulted in more than 7,000 completed surveys within the one-month comment period. This nearly matched the total number of comments received during the previous 15 years of public meetings across the state.

Fine Money Collected in Fiscal Year 2014

Contrary to popular rumors, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission does not keep a single cent of money collected through wildlife violations. Instead, the AGFC voluntarily gives that money back to the county in which it was collected to be used in funding conservation-oriented education programs. In Fiscal Year 2014, the AGFC distributed $679,127 back to Arkansas counties. The top 10 counties in fines were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Fines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pike County</td>
<td>$21,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White County</td>
<td>$20,595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benton County</td>
<td>$19,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union County</td>
<td>$17,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley County</td>
<td>$17,121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew County</td>
<td>$28,078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas County</td>
<td>$25,973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe County</td>
<td>$23,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desha County</td>
<td>$23,319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark County</td>
<td>$22,709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH FISH AND WILDLIFE

The primary charge of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission is managing the state’s fish and wildlife resources for future Arkansans, but we must ensure that future Arkansans feel a connection to those resources. Increasing our ability to conserve wildlife and their habitat relies on a public that sees an interest in the outdoors and is informed about the challenges our wildlife face. Technological advancements, hectic schedules and lack of outdoor mentors all have contributed to a decline in people pursuing outdoor interests such as hunting, angling and watching wildlife. To combat this trend, we must be proactive in passing on Arkansas’s fish and wildlife heritage and increase public involvement in the outdoors. The following list includes some of the highlights from AGFC efforts to connect people with fish and wildlife during Fiscal Year 2014:

- Partnered with eight cities, the Arkansas Bowhunters Association and Arkansas Hunters Feeding the Hungry to conduct urban archery hunts in an effort to control nuisance deer issues, increase hunting opportunity near suburban areas and provide meat to needy Arkansans.
- Procured and managed 282,792 acres of leased lands to provide additional public hunting opportunities to encourage hunting in areas where public opportunity is normally unavailable.
- Created the “Get ‘em Outside Grant” program to provide financial support and guidance to organized groups developing hunting, camping and wildlife-watching camps and workshops for youths.
- Added more than 9,000 acres of public hunting land, including the addition of four new WMAs:
  - Foushee Cave Natural Area WMA (2,732 acres) in Independence County
  - Devil’s Eyebrow Natural Area WMA (1,954 acres) in Benton County
  - Frierson WMA (494 acres) in Greene County
  - Longview-Saline Natural Area WMA (3,837 acres) in Ashley County
- Dropped the Hunter Education requirement for youths applying for drawn youth hunts on WMAs to enable more young hunters to participate in these mentored hunts.
- Dropping permit requirements for youth hunts on many WMAs to encourage more participation.
- Supported live-release efforts with staff and specialized holding trucks at 15 bass tournaments and collected bass tournament catch data from 326 club tournaments, enabling anglers to be a part of managing the state’s fisheries.
- Captured and tagged fish for the “Hot Springs Fishing Challenge” to promote fishing in Lake Catherine and Lake Hamilton May 1-July 31, 2013.

Case Study in Connecting People with Fish and Wildlife

Expansion of Arkansas National Archery in the Schools Program with 3-D archery ranges at AGFC Facilities

The Arkansas National Archery in the Schools Program has introduced archery to hundreds of thousands of elementary- and high school-aged students throughout Arkansas, but it is still up to the child’s parents or another mentor to get them out in the woods and begin learning how to put their newfound archery skills to use. Finding an outdoor area to shoot a bow while remaining safe and abiding by city ordinances can be a challenge. ANASP has built the audience, but we must capitalize on it by spreading the message of conservation and outdoor recreation to these new ranks of archers.

Thanks to funding through AGFC conservation license plate sales, the AGFC has been able to begin bridging that gap between experienced archer and beginning bowhunter through the building and renovation of 3-D archery ranges across the state. In Fiscal Year 2014, outdoor archery ranges were constructed at Fred Berry Conservation Education Center on Crooked Creek in Yellville, Rick Evans Grandview Prairie Conservation Education Center near Hope, Potlatch Conservation Education Center at Cooks Lake near Humnoke and at the Camp Robinson Special Use Area firing range complex. Each range is outfitted with life-size 3-D targets and is available when the facilities are open.

Four older archery ranges on wildlife management areas also were given a facelift during Fiscal Year 2014 to promote bowhunting and target shooting. By placing these ranges on WMAs, the AGFC hopes to draw people to our public hunting areas and discover how much fun that next step in archery can be. Ranges were improved with signs, yardage markers, cleared shooting lanes and target stands at Mike Freeze Wattensaw WMA near Hazen, Henry Gray Hurricane Lake WMA near Georgetown, Camp Robinson WMA near North Little Rock and Harold E. Alexander Spring River WMA near Hardy.
• Developed a four-week program called “Fishing Fridays” at the Jim Hinkle Spring River State Fish Hatchery to develop fishing skills and promote angler ethics to beginning trout anglers.

• Increased public involvement and understanding of fish and aquatic systems through hundreds of Stream Teams throughout the state helping monitor our state’s waterways.

• Held 822 Hunter Education classes statewide, delivering hunting and firearms safety to 16,814 Hunter Education graduates.

• Held 358 Boating Education classes statewide, graduating 6,301 individuals throughout the state.

• Connected with more than 254,000 visitors through four nature centers and four education centers across the state.

• Conducted more than 3,000 public programs and 1,017 school programs, educating more than 104,000 individuals and 34,500 school children at nature centers and education centers across the state.

• Conducted 52 teacher workshops to deliver our conservation message through more than 1,040 educators statewide.

• Conducted four regional tournaments and one state championship for the Arkansas Youth Shooting Sports Program, which has promoted gun safety and hunter education to more than 35,000 youths since its inception in 2007.

• Conducted regional tournaments and a state championship for the Arkansas National Archery in the Schools Program, which has brought archery back to Arkansas schools and exposed more than 120,000 students to archery since its inception in 2008.

• Completed four new Arkansas Water Trails at Bayou DeView near Brinkley, the Arkansas River in Fort Smith, Lake Maumelle near Little Rock and Grassy Lake in Mayflower.

• Created new watchable wildlife opportunities along the Arkansas River Trail in Little Rock and elk-viewing pull-outs at Boxley Valley.

• Developed a new “Scales of Justice” mobile exhibit to connect with people at state fairs, expos and other events and teach them about hunting ethics, how to become a wildlife officer and the role wildlife officers play in conservation.

• Coordinated with Wounded Warriors Foundation and Make a Wish Foundation to provide special hunts to wounded veterans and sick children who have no access or means to go on their own.

• Continued production of Arkansas Wildlife bimonthly magazine, which is delivered to more than 30,000 paid subscribers and has an overall reach of more than 85,000 readers per issue.

• Delivered Arkansas Outdoors weekly newsletter to every newspaper in the state as well as 16,970 direct email subscribers 51 weeks of the year, garnering more than $200,000 of advertising equivalency per month.

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**Did you take a youth (ages 6-15) hunting this year?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31%</td>
<td>Deer hunters who took a youth hunting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Deer hunters who took a youth for their first deer hunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Turkey hunters who took a youth hunting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>Turkey hunters who took a youth who would not have otherwise gone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1“Arkansas Hunters’ Participation in and Opinions on Deer and Turkey Hunting,” Responsive Management, 2014.
Restructuring Talkin’ Outdoors Television with Online Component

This year saw a drastic improvement in the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission’s weekly television program, “Talkin’ Outdoors.” In 2013, the format of the show changed from primarily talking with some video segments to an in-the-field news magazine format. This takes viewers into the woods and waters of Arkansas instead of simply talking about what’s possible. It also delivers multiple topics in one show that are tied together in a cohesive message.

The show now is also produced entirely in-house in high-definition video and is delivered to KARK for airing, eliminating the need for studio time. The show now airs on the following channels:

- KARK and KARZ in Little Rock
- KNWA in Rogers
- KFTA in Fort Smith
- KARD in Monroe, La.
- KOZL in Springfield, Mo.

While most television programs you see on television must pay for their time slot and try to offset the costs with advertising, “Talkin’ Outdoors” is given free air time at all of the above stations.

“Talkin’ Outdoors” also has expanded its reach into the Internet with bi-weekly updates to YouTube (www.youtube.com/user/ArkansasGameandFish). The channel continues to grow exponentially, exploding from 10,000 views in 2011 and 2012 combined to more than 125,000 views in the last 12 months. A single YouTube video on goose hunting from a segment of “Talkin’ Outdoors” has been viewed more than 22,300 times since its publish date in January 2014.

Case Study in Connecting People with Fish and Wildlife

Deer Hunter Success

How many deer did you harvest in 2013-14?

- Did not harvest a deer ..................... 47%
- Harvested 1 deer .......................... 27%
- Harvested 2 deer ......................... 13%
- Harvested 3 deer ......................... 7%
- Harvested 4 deer ......................... 2%
- Harvested 5 deer .......................... 1%
- Harvested more than 5 deer ........... 1%
- Didn’t know ................................. 2%

“Arkansas Hunters’ Participation in and Opinions on Deer and Turkey Hunting,” Responsive Management, 2014.
The AGFC’s mission can only be fulfilled by a well-trained, staff that works seamlessly across division boundaries in many locations throughout the state. Advancements in science and technology can increase efficiency and create new possibilities to manage fish and wildlife and recruit new hunters and anglers. To take full advantage of these new tools, we must recruit and hire diverse, highly qualified individuals and encourage them to continue their training and cooperation with each other throughout their careers. Here are a few highlights from the AGFC’s employee recruitment and training efforts from Fiscal Year 2014:

- AGFC staff participated in more than 15 career fairs hosted by colleges, universities and other organizations to recruit high-quality candidates from all walks of life.
- AGFC staff made presentations advocating careers in conservation to middle schools, high schools and colleges throughout Arkansas to encourage the next generation of conservation leaders.
- Coordinated employee field trips where staff could venture out from the central office to learn more about the work being done in the field and make connections with AGFC employees across many divisions and locations.
- AGFC staff conducted interagency training sessions to provide information on photography techniques, waterfowl identification, wildlife management and fisheries techniques and training for responding to interview requests by television news.
- Participated in the Arkansas Association of Colleges and Employers, a statewide professional association providing business and career service professionals the opportunity to engage, connect and collaborate.
- Participated in Minority in Natural Resources Committee activities sponsored by the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to recruit minorities into the natural resource arena.
- Consolidated several types of devices with cellular and mobile technologies to improve in-the-field communication and efficiency.
- Enabled wildlife management staff to attend 63 different workshops and conferences specific to their focus of study to broaden their knowledge and bring successful programs home to incorporate into Arkansas’s management efforts.
- Hosted the 143rd annual meeting of the American Fisheries Society, hosting 1,200 professional fisheries biologists from around the world and nearly 700 technical and scientific presentations to coordinate fisheries initiatives throughout Arkansas and the United States and share information with professionals around the globe.
- Interagency training and education of new Geographic Information System technology to maximize the efficiency of field operations.
- Recognized the efforts of employees who went above and beyond and encouraged continued performance through internal awards at the divisional level and the agency level.
- Trained one new class of wildlife officer cadets through the Hugh “Red” Morris Enforcement Training Center, a fully accredited center which meets Arkansas law enforcement standards, to excel at both law enforcement and conservation awareness.
- Recruited interns through the use of conservation license plate funds to develop skills in future potential employees.
MAINTAINING AND ENHANCING COMMISSION ASSETS

The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission has the responsibility to maintain and enhance the land, water and facilities it owns and operates for the benefit of all Arkansans. By keeping our assets in top condition, we strive to be the example private landowners can look to when they decide to manage their properties with wildlife or fisheries habitat in mind. As facilities age, upkeep is inevitable. The following highlights from Fiscal Year 2014 are only a few ways in which the AGFC has kept its facilities up to date and functional for outdoors enthusiasts and wildlife:

- Spent $1.8 million to maintain more than 400 boating access sites, 400 miles of wildlife management area roads and water-control structures. This included mowing, grading, sediment removal, maintaining portable toilet and trash facilities and maintaining parking areas.
- Completed modifications to lakeside facilities at nine sites on Lake Norfork and 13 sites on Bull Shoals to compensate for the water level change required to implement Minimum Flow on the White and Norfork tailwaters.
- Constructed new boating access facilities at Lake Saracen spillway in Pine Bluff.
- Built new public fishing piers at Lake Columbia and the Arkansas River at North Little Rock.
- Settled three land encroachment cases on Lake Jack Nolen.
- Settled boundary disputes on Lake Crystal.
- Settled multiple issues of fence and structure encroachments on Sugarloaf Lake.
- Completed construction surveys for proposed Panther Bay boating access on Lake Norfork and for Shooting Sports Complex at Warren, Ark.
• Developed a new Geodatabase to inventory physical features on wildlife management areas. Converted many spatial data servers from physical machines to virtual machines (aka the cloud) to streamline function and reduce maintenance costs.

• Updated AGFC’s fleet of boats to reduce maintenance costs and conducted used boat auction to help offset cost of new equipment.

• Performed routine maintenance to more than 500 current fleet vehicles and upgraded vehicle shop to service vehicles, install radios and mount specialty lighting and other equipment.

• Improved infrastructure at the Little Rock Headquarters, Hot Springs Regional Office, Brinkley Regional Office and Mountain Home Regional Office.

• Repaired damage to the Jonesboro Regional Office from recent lightning strikes and ice storms.

• Inventoried and analyzed more than 10,000 acres of property for needed management alternatives.

• Maintained 267 camping areas on wildlife management areas.

• Renovated 48 acres of hatchery ponds at Joe Hogan State Fish Hatchery to increase production and efficiency.

Case Studies in Maintaining Commission Assets

Dam No. 3 Renovation on the Spring River
The AGFC’s Jim Hinkle Spring River SFH produces more than 1 million rainbow trout annually (roughly 50 percent of the rainbow trout stocked in Arkansas). Since 2009 production at the hatchery has declined due to extensive damage to the 100-year old dam on the Spring River. The dam provides gravity-fed water to the fish production units and is extremely important to the operation of the facility. Mechanical deficiencies in the spillway, including damage to the motorized gates that allow water levels to be controlled during flooding have occurred throughout the life of the dam, and since 2008 the dam has been virtually inoperable. The hatchery is at risk of further damage in the event of a flood without repairs. The cost to repair the dam, install new gates and replace the hatchery’s predator control netting over the fish production units was $3.1 million with repairs scheduled to be completed by September 30, 2014.

Moist-Soil Habitat Management
Arkansas is one of the most important wintering areas for waterfowl in North America. Under the guidance of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, AGFC has a responsibility to cooperate in providing resources to support target wintering waterfowl populations.

One of the most beneficial wetland habitat types in Arkansas is moist-soil wetlands. AGFC is the single largest land manager of this habitat type, with about 6,800 acres on WMAs. When properly managed, moist-soil wetlands provide abundant seed resources as well as abundant invertebrate species for forage and overhead cover valuable for loafing and pair-bonding.

Recently AGFC has heightened efforts to improve moist-soil management on WMAs. Intensive moist-soil management – with spring drawdowns, summer irrigations, disking and staggered fall flood-up – can consistently produce more than 1,500 lbs. of forage per acre, contributing to the large energy needs waterfowl have while traveling through The Natural State. In addition to managed moist-soil units, the AGFC maintains 54,000 acres of greentree reservoirs, flooding them in late winter, when waterfowl can use the flooded hardwoods for loafing and feed on high-energy acorns when the moist-soil seeds and agricultural waste rice is depleted.
WORKING TOGETHER FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE

The AGFC manages hundreds of thousands of acres in Arkansas, as does the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service, but more than 80 percent of the state is still managed by private landowners. Establishing and working through partnerships with other agencies and organizations is critical to the continued success of conservation in Arkansas. Not only can we achieve more through increased funding, but we also are able to impact larger landscapes, making our combined efforts much more successful than each entity working individually. During Fiscal year 2014, the AGFC has accomplished these highlights toward establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial partnerships with other agencies and private stakeholders:

• Joined the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact national database to form a coalition with other state wildlife agencies to prevent poachers from avoiding punishment by crossing state lines.
• Partnered with the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to implement a renewed large-scale feral hog trapping program and make regulations changes to maximize the potential for feral hog eradication.
• Partnered with the Arkansas Livestock and Poultry Commission to implement new regulations concerning feral hogs and hog transport in Arkansas to stem the importation of this injurious species.
• Partnered with the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission to add 1,622 acres to Longview Saline Natural Area Wildlife Management Area with a grant of $1.3 million and $1.6 million in ANHC funds.
• Took part in a grant to promote ecosystem resiliency with the U.S. Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy and a private landowner to restore Ozark pine-oak woodlands and glades by the use of prescribed fire on 3,251 acres, timber thinning on 153 acres and invasive species removal on 633 acres.
• Formed the Arkansas/Louisiana Gulf Coastal Plains Conservation Delivery Network to share expertise from potential stakeholders in southwest Arkansas and northwest Louisiana to positively impact species of greatest conservation need.
• Continued participation in the Arkansas Mississippi Alluvial Valley Conservation Delivery Network to best benefit species of greatest conservation need in east Arkansas, west Mississippi and east Louisiana.
• Collaborated with the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff on a fish production study of the hatcheries AGFC owns and operates.
• Collaborated with UAPB fish pathology staff for viral inspections of fish during fish kills where pathogens are suspected.
• Partnered with Bass Pro Shops Little Rock location for the grand opening’s conservation night, which directed proceeds to the Arkansas Game and Fish Foundation.

Photo courtesy of Mike Steffen.
• Organized several meetings with a number of partners, including the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission, Farm Bureau, Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arkansas Canoe Club, The Nature Conservancy and others to work on the Arkansas Water Plan, a program to ensure water use is managed responsibly for residential, commercial and environmental needs.

• Collaborated with county Sheriff’s offices and city police departments to maximize effectiveness of law enforcement in rural areas of Arkansas.

• Coordinated with the U.S. Forest Service to eliminate clandestine marijuana operations in the Ozark/St. Francis and Ouachita National Forests.

• Coordinated with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers St. Louis District and the Arkansas and Missouri branches of the United States Geological Survey to complete a $4 million remote sensing Lidar project in a priority area at a cost to the AGFC of only $107,700.

• Maintained participation in the Arkansas GIS Board, which is considered one of the most advanced partnership projects in Geographic Information Systems coordination in the United States, partnering information from a variety of state, city and regional information systems analysts into one organized system.

• Implemented software for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for tracking and reporting actions for conservation species to maximize the use of Federal Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration funds.

• Provided professional expertise and oversight on congressionally authorized federal projects such as the Grand Prairie and Bayou Meto Irrigation Projects, the Cache River Restoration Project and Mississippi River Channel Improvement Project.

• Coordinated the building of 26 new watchable wildlife trails throughout the state using $2 million from gas lease bonus payments paid in 2009.

Case Studies in Working Together for Fish and Wildlife

Delisting of the previously listed Threatened Magazine Mountain Shagreen snail

AGFC Nongame Programs Biologists facilitate and administer grant funding for, and collaborate with, academic researchers on projects directed toward the identification and conservation of Arkansas’ biodiversity. In 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed the endemic Magazine Mountain Shagreen Snail from the endangered and threatened species list. This was accomplished, in part, through research funding administered by the Nongame Programs Malacologist. This snail was originally listed due to threats to its existing habitat and limited distribution. These habitat threats have since been eliminated and federal and state funded research has revealed the life history of the species, determined population size, and discovered a new population. To insure the species does not decline in the future, a 5-year monitoring program will track population changes over time.

Discovery and protection of a new salamander species between AGFC, Arkansas State Parks, and the University of Tulsa

While collecting specimens for an ongoing research project, the Nongame Programs Herpetologist and a Ph.D. student from the University of Tulsa discovered the recently described Ouachita Streambed Salamander. This new species is genetically, morphologically, and ecologically distinct and has one of the smallest known ranges of any animal in the U.S. This is a significant event, since it is very rare to find a new species of vertebrate in the U.S. This discovery underscores the importance of Nongame Programs collaborations with academic researchers, enhances our knowledge of Arkansas’ biodiversity, and allows us to focus necessary conservation actions to preserve this natural heritage. AGFC is working with the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism to conserve the new species and the stream where it was discovered.
PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission has a solid foundation and a history steeped in conservation victories. We must be prepared to adapt to future challenges if we are to remain successful. All goals in the AGFC Strategic Plan lead up to a successful future, but we must be prepared to tackle unforeseen challenges by keeping up with the latest trends in technology, making decisions based on the most recent science and remaining vigilant in a constantly changing political realm. The following highlights from Fiscal Year 2014 exemplify the AGFC’s efforts in tackling issues before they arise and responding to crises as they occur:

• Continued providing a pathway for the next generation of conservationists by devoting $403,250 derived through conservation license plate sales to college scholarships for Arkansas students studying a conservation-oriented major.

• Continued education of regulations, state laws, law enforcement techniques and wildlife and fisheries techniques through at least 40 hours of in-service training per officer annually.

• Upgraded and enhanced the agency’s citation program to aid in identifying trends in poaching activities on a regional basis.

• Completion of a mobile application for nuisance alligator complaints to ensure better record-keeping to identify possible conflicts in the future.

• Completion of a mobile application for emergent wetland species to keep better records of marsh birds and other wetland wildlife to identify population declines before they reach critical levels.

• Assessment of controversial projects that could impact Arkansas’s fish and wildlife resources, such as oil pipelines, electrical transmission lines and natural gas exploration.

• Secured funding for a redundant, secure offsite data center to house duplicate electronic copies of all information in the AGFC servers.

• Training of enforcement personnel to handle disaster aid and procurement of trailers to serve as mobile response units during natural disasters such as tornadoes and floods.

• Increased education efforts on aquatic nuisance species such as Asian carp, northern snakeheads and invasive vegetation such as water hyacinth and giant salvinia.

• Adopted a new hazard analysis tool similar to the standards of the food industry to assess risks to our hatcheries from aquatic plants and animals on hatchery grounds.

• Closed the Pot Shoals Net Pen Facility on Bull Shoals Lake due to the recent discovery of zebra mussels in the lake. This will prevent the inadvertent spread of zebra mussels from the stocking of rainbow trout and catfish that were grown in these net pen operations.

• Instituted a ban on all uncleaned skull plates and bones from deer killed in any state outside Arkansas to prevent importation of CWD-positive remains that could infect Arkansas’s deer herd.

• Monitored bat populations in Arkansas through fieldwork and outreach efforts, which led to the recent discovery of white-nose syndrome in Arkansas. Researching ways to prevent further spread of the fungus that causes the disease.

• Incorporating climate change strategies into the state wildlife action plan in accordance with recommendations from the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to monitor habitats and wildlife most susceptible to impacts.

• Assessed condition of more than 50,000 acres of greentree reservoirs on wildlife management areas to modify management and flooding regimes, if necessary, and promote long-term sustainability of these areas which are critical to duck wintering success.
Case Studies in Preparing for the Future

Mayflower Oil Spill

On March 29, 2013, AGFC received notification that the 20-inch Exxon-Mobil Pegasus crude oil pipeline had ruptured in the town of Mayflower and oil was entering a tributary creek of Lake Conway. Local staff used quick response, critical thinking, and local knowledge of Lake Conway to immediately begin working on site with local officials to contain the oil. AGFC staff built several earth coffer dams within a few hours of the oil spill and local officials blocked a critical series of pipes, ultimately keeping the oil out of the main body of the Lake Conway and contained within Dawson Cove.

Long-term, the agency has continued engagement with local, state and federal agencies to ensure the state’s natural resources are being taken care of. An internal working group made up of staff from multiple agency divisions continues to plan and execute a variety of strategies aimed at restoring the areas affected by the oil spill. A remedial action plan is being developed and will set the framework for any and all future remediation actions in Dawson Cove. Although there have certainly been impacts to our state’s natural resources as a result of the oil spill, there is no doubt that the swift and appropriate response early on and the long-term commitment by dedicated AGFC staff reduced the initial magnitude of the impact and ensures that Lake Conway’s natural resources will be restored.

Managing water through 2050 via the State Water Plan with multiple user groups

Arkansans use more than 11 billion gallons of water a day to drink, irrigate crops and manufacture products. In 2013, the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission began the process of revising the state’s water plan, the comprehensive water policy document for the management of the state’s water resources. This document’s goal is to help manage our water needs through 2050 while protecting our fisheries and wildlife resources.

Biologists with the Fisheries Division of AGFC collaborated with a number of partners including the ANRC, Farm Bureau, Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arkansas Canoe Club, University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, The Nature Conservancy, and many other government- and non-government organizations to work on the Arkansas Water Plan. Led by a consulting agency hired by ANRC, meetings were attended in each region of the state to discuss ways and means to accomplish the conservation and use of water in Arkansas until the year 2050. Over 200 recommendations from a total of 11 sectors including representatives from agriculture, industry, municipal water, fish and wildlife, recreation, navigation, etc. were compiled, categorized and prioritized so that they could make up a part of the 2014-15 version of the Arkansas Water Plan. AGFC fisheries biologists attended meetings in all 5 major river basin regions of the state (North, Central, East, Southwest and South Central) to voice their views and recommendations on the intelligent use of water throughout the state and for all the various uses of water that the public desires and the state’s natural resources require.
INCOME AND EXPENSES

The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission receives funds from a variety of sources, but the three primary income sources are license sales, federal funding and Arkansas’s 1/8-Cent Conservation Sales Tax.

**Fiscal Year 2014 Income**

- **1/8th-Cent Conservation Sales Tax** ........................................... $28,828,108 ..... 37.32%
- **License Purchases** .................................................... $23,533,285 ..... 30.46%
- **Federal Aid** ............................................................... $16,975,750 ..... 21.97%
- **Marine Fuel Tax** ....................................................... $2,151,133 ..... 2.78%
- **License Plate Funds** ................................................. $1,264,940 ..... 1.64%
- **Fines (Returned to county quorum courts)** ......................... $671,785 ..... 0.87%
- **Interagency Federal Transfers** ...................................... $619,235 ..... 0.80%
- **Timber Sales** ............................................................. $598,719 ..... 0.78%
- **Gas Lease Revenue** ................................................... $393,034 ..... 0.51%
- **Sale of Merchandise** ................................................. $176,219 ..... 0.23%
- **Elk Fund** .................................................................... $5,440 ..... 0.01%
- **Other Receipts** .......................................................... $1,478,825 ..... 2.63%

**Fiscal Year 2014 Expenses**

- **Manpower** ........................................................................................................ 48.41%
- **Vehicle Maintenance and Operations** ............................................................. 3.93%
- **Building Maintenance and Operations** .......................................................... 3.61%
- **Telecommunications, Network Services, and Other Office Operations and Supplies** ............................................................. 4.29%
- **Travel Expenses** ............................................................................................. 0.48%
- **Conference, Seminar and Other Training Expenses** .................................... 0.33%
- **Wildlife and Fisheries Project Maintenance and Operations** .................... 16.15%
- **Professional Services** ..................................................................................... 3.17%
- **Other Operations** ......................................................................................... 10.49%
- **Equipment, Land and Assets Under Construction** .................................... 7.85%
- **Debt Service** .................................................................................................. 1.29%

**Percentage of State of Arkansas’s 2014 Funded Budget**

- **Institutes of Higher Education** ................................................................. 26.84%
- **Department of Human Services (includes Medical Services)** .............. 24.20%
- **Department of Education** ......................................................................... 14.58%
- **Highway and Transportation Department** ............................................... 8.53%
- **Other Agencies Combined** ....................................................................... 25.47%
- **Arkansas Game and Fish Commission** .................................................... 0.38%

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FUTURE FLEXIBILITY

Just as the AGFC must be prepared for the future, the AGFC Strategic Plan must be flexible enough to accommodate changes in the landscape of the conservation arena. Just as in nature, adaptation to a constantly changing world is the key to success. For that reason, the AGFC will continue to develop a Strategic Plan Annual Report each fiscal year to highlight achievements and identify areas in need of improvement.

In addition to annual reports, the AGFC Strategic Plan will undergo a five-year review process, with the first formal review scheduled for 2018.

The review will consist of formal meetings with members of the original Strategic Plan Team to review and reassess annual reports and identify needed alterations to the plan to keep it consistent with the AGFC’s mission. Focus groups consisting of randomly selected people from the general public, avid hunters and anglers and employees also will be conducted to identify any additional needs. These reviews and reassessments will be combined to make adjustments to the AGFC Strategic Plan, then it will be submitted to the Director of the AGFC as well as the Commission for final approval.

Flexibility in goals and strategies through a focused and facilitated effort ensures The AGFC Strategic Plan will remain true to our mission, vision and values well into the future.