

SFY 2025

Governor's Recommended Budget

Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife

Christopher Herrick, Commissioner



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Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife

Mission Statement

The mission of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (FWD) is the conservation of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the people of Vermont.

Description of Divisions, Appropriations, and Programs

The major components of the Department of Fish and Wildlife are:

Administration Division

The Administration Division provides policy, planning, personnel, and financial management for the Department. It oversees the production, distribution, and sales of all hunting and fishing licenses and over fifteen types of other permits related to resource protection. The Division is also responsible for managing more than \$9 million annually in federal grant dollars, ensuring the funds are spent appropriately and that all reporting requirements are met.

Wildlife Division

The Wildlife Division is responsible for the conservation and management of wildlife, plants, and their habitat throughout Vermont. Division staff are engaged in a variety of activities such as conducting research; monitoring populations of rare, threatened and endangered plant and animal species; preparing harvest recommendations for wildlife species with open regulated hunting or trapping seasons; participating in the protection of critical wildlife habitat through regulatory processes such as Act 250; land acquisition and management of more than 130,000 acres on the Department's Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs); monitoring wildlife diseases and the importation of wildlife into Vermont; and providing technical assistance, planning, and outreach to wildlife observers, landowners, hunters, school children, and natural resources professionals regarding wildlife in Vermont.

Fisheries Division

The Fisheries Division is responsible for the conservation and management of fish and their aquatic habitats throughout Vermont. Division staff are engaged in a wide variety of activities, including: monitoring populations of sport and endangered fish species and their habitats; cooperating in the research, management, and restoration of fish communities across the state; operating fish hatcheries that rear and stock trout, salmon, and walleye annually for recreational and restoration purposes; maintaining more than

190 developed fishing access areas, in addition to a variety of riparian lands, which provide public access to waters of the state; monitoring fish health; regulating fish importation; controlling aquatic nuisance species such as the round goby and sea lamprey in Lake Champlain; evaluating current and preparing new fishing harvest regulation recommendations for a variety of species; participating in the protection of aquatic species and critical aquatic habitat through regulatory processes; providing technical assistance; and preparing educational materials.

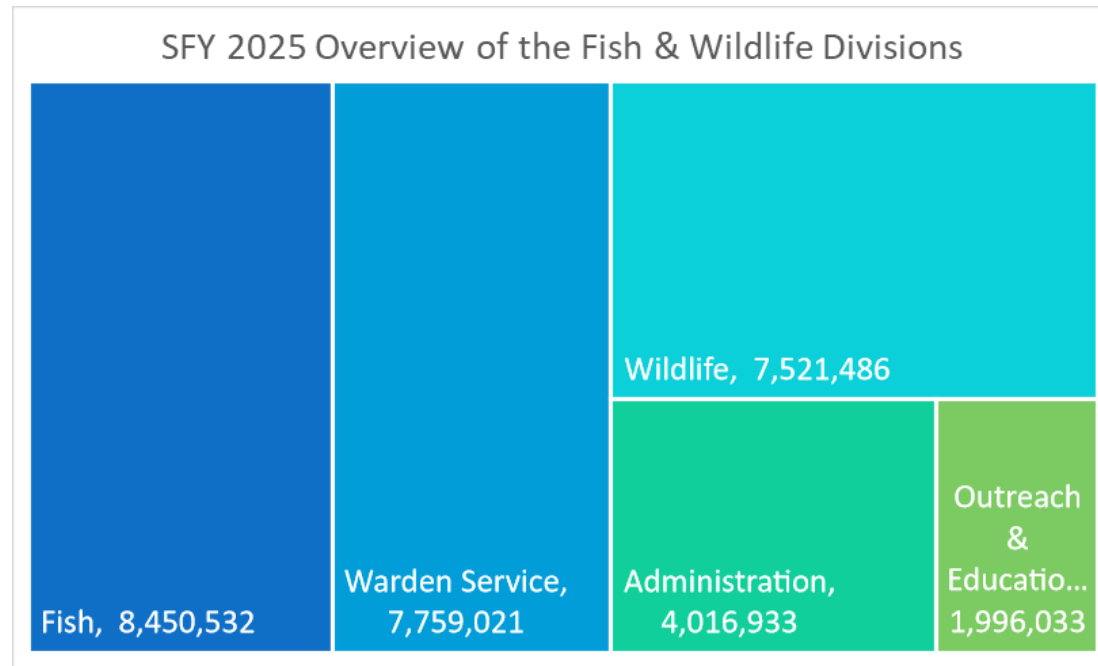
Warden Service Division

The Warden Service Division is an integral part of fish and wildlife conservation and management. The Division's primary duty is to enforce Vermont's fish and wildlife laws and regulations. Fish and wildlife species are held in the 'public trust' and Division staff enforce laws related to the protection of these resources for the benefit of all Vermonters. The Division provides responses to individual requests for Department assistance involving fish and wildlife resources and conflicts. The Division also assists the Vermont State Police in animal cruelty responses, search and rescue operations, and many other law enforcement services provided to residents by State and local law enforcement agencies.

Outreach Division

The Outreach Division is responsible for the informational and formal educational programs of the Fish and Wildlife Department. Programs are designed to improve the public's knowledge and appreciation of Vermont's fish and wildlife resources and their habitats, laws, disease issues, and management programs. Division staff support the Department's mission by providing professional communications and education to residents and visitors alike. These efforts are a means to create awareness of and achieve voluntary compliance with state laws, regulations and programs, as well as encourage support for fish, wildlife and habitat conservation and protection programs. The Division also manages Vermont's popular summer conservation camps for local youth and hunter education courses.

The chart on the following page summarizes the SFY 2025 Vermont Fish & Wildlife department budget by division.



Fish and Wildlife Summary of Budget Changes – SFY2025

The Department of Fish and Wildlife State Fiscal Year 2025 (SFY25) budget reflects an overall increase of \$100,016 compared to SFY24. This relatively modest change is largely a result of one-time project specific cost from SFY24 of \$1,429,600 that masks a \$1.12M increase in annualized salaries, health care and other benefits, increases in operating expenditures, and a class RFR for most of the biologist positions within the Department which resulted in a \$446,220 upward budgetary pressure. In addition, the cost of health care benefits from SFY24 to SFY25 increased by 15% which accounts for \$495,825 of upward pressures, as well \$70,090 associated with the new Vermont Family & Medical Leave Premium and new Child Care Contribution.

The Department budget includes the allowed 3% general fund increase, and all federal and special funds were leveraged to the extent possible. Where funds were not able to absorb the upward pressures, the Department has incorporated expenditure reductions; this includes a significant acceleration in the planned timeline for winding down operations at the Salisbury fish culture station to capture savings associated with both staffing costs and facility operations in SFY25.

Key Budget Issues by Division:

Administration: The Administration Division houses the business office and the Commissioner's office. The business office oversees grants administration, licensing sales and management and the general business operations of the department. There are upward pressures due to an increase of \$16K for legal services costs, as well as increases in internal service fees and insurances other than employee benefits. The Department is recognizing a decrease in the lease with National Life of \$17,828 due to the completion of payment of fit-up costs.

Law Enforcement: The Warden Service Division continues to perform their functions of enforcing hunting, trapping and fishing laws while also responding to hundreds of human/bear conflicts. In addition, the Warden Service has assumed the lead role in recreational boating safety (RBS) program over the past several years, including enforcement as well as education, as well as in animal cruelty investigations. Wardens have also taken over snowmobile and ATV enforcement over the past several years and the Division now handles a majority of the accident investigations on the trail systems. Wardens also assist Vermont State Police (VSP) with crime scene reconstruction and evidence recovery, providing equipment, and specially trained K-9s. The Warden Service Division also assists with search and rescue on a regular basis and handles various calls for VSP as needed; this assistance is varied and depends on other available resources.

Given available revenues, it was necessary to reduce the Warden's equipment budget by \$40k as well as delay replacement of a planned vehicle purchase saving \$50k.

In late 2022, the Warden Service took on significant, new responsibilities related to animal cruelty investigations in response to the Governor's *Comprehensive 10-Point Public Safety Enhancement & Violence Prevention Action Plan*, freeing up State Police resources for high priority response activities. Due to the significant workload associated with animal cruelty cases, there is a need for an additional Warden to add capacity to the Warden Service. For perspective, since September 2022, Wardens have handled over 200 animal cruelty calls for a weekly average of just over three per week. Many of these calls are time consuming and involve issues around mental health/hoarding. During this time, Wardens have seized (or had voluntarily surrendered) approximately 50 animals, including cats, dogs, horses, goats, pigs, cows and other various animals. The SFY25 includes \$299K in general fund to support the Warden Service in providing these labor-intensive services, including the cost for a position as well as \$181K in operating funds to be used, in part, to cover currently unbudgeted costs related to animal boarding and veterinary treatment resulting from the warden's investigations.

Wildlife: The Wildlife Division continues to address a wide variety of issues including the management of the deer and moose herds, fur bearers, game and non-game birds, as well as supporting the protection and recovery of threatened and endangered amphibians, reptiles and plants. Wildlife Division staff also manage tens of thousands of acres of public lands at over 100 Wildlife Management Areas and continue to acquire critical habitat for conservation purposes.

As mentioned above, a class RFR was approved that covers scientist and specialist positions in both the wildlife and fisheries divisions; overall the RFR is anticipated to increase the wildlife division's personnel costs by \$226,611. Much of the upward pressure, across both divisions, from this RFR is proposed to be offset by savings associated with the closure of the Salisbury fish culture station, which is discussed in more detail below. In addition, to stay within the general fund target, the Wildlife Division will eliminate the part-time position at the Dead Creek visitors' center, delay a planned vehicle purchase, reduce equipment purchases and transfer 50% of a fulltime employee's cost to federal Pittman-Robertson funds. The transfer of duties will cause a reduction in time spent researching how the public views hunting, trapping and fishing and data analysis with more time spent in small mammal management.

Fisheries: The Fisheries Division works to ensure a vibrant and healthy fish population for many different species, many of which contribute to the overall economy of the state. This includes the production and stocking of fish as well as research regarding the overall health of the fish and the rivers, streams and lakes. The Fisheries Division also oversees and maintains the hundreds of access sites around the state that provide critical public access for motorized and non-motorized recreation on Vermont's extensive waterways.

The 2023 class RFR mentioned above is anticipated to increase the fisheries division's personnel costs by \$219,609, again to be largely offset by the closure of the Salisbury fish culture station. In addition, to conform to the budget target, the Fisheries Division will reduce seasonal staffing by 15%, by both hiring fewer individuals and focusing their time to April through November. Seasonal employees assist fishery biologists with the numerous studies performed to monitor the health of the fish population and are integral in keeping the field work on schedule. This reduction will reduce the overall capacity of the Division for necessary fieldwork. The Division is also delaying a planned vehicle replacement, resulting in current year savings of \$28,000 and reduce equipment purchases.

Unfortunately, given the significant upward pressures, it was not possible for the Department to stay within available general fund revenues without significant changes to its operations. Specifically, the Department's FY25 budget assumes an accelerated timeline for ending operations at the Salisbury fish culture station, with facility closure being advanced from SFY29 to SFY25. While this will create an annual savings of \$446,298 in personnel costs and \$174,706 in operational savings, it is not without impact. Financially,

there will be costs associated with demobilizing the site and, because it is listed on the National Register of Historic Sites, there would be an annual upkeep cost.

Three of the classified, permanent positions currently working out of the Salisbury fish culture station will be reassigned to the Wildlife Division to perform other duties where the Department is able to utilize a combination of federal and special funds:

1. Land Acquisition Assistant – This position will assist the Land Acquisition Coordinator (LAC) with wetland and water quality conservation projects throughout Vermont to include identifying projects, reporting on results, support completion of complex real estate projects, coordinate land records management and coordinate with partner organization who may provide technical or financial support of conservation projects. This position will be funded by an EPA wetlands grant through the Department of Environment Conservation, funds from the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission and federal Pittman-Robertson funds.
2. Wildlife Habitat Forester - This position will advance and accelerate wildlife habitat management, enhancement, and restoration projects on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) owned by the department and on state forests owned by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR). This added capacity will enable the department to implement mission-critical wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement projects. This position will be funded 100% by federal Pittman-Robertson funds.
3. Assistant Small Mammal Biologist – This position will work closely with the Small Mammals Biologist on planning, research, monitoring, and management for the conservation of 33 aerial and terrestrial small mammals. Duties include technical assistance, data compilation, setting conservation priorities, contributing to the Wildlife Action Plan, and pursuing opportunities to establish continued research and management. This position will be funded with federal Pittman-Robertson funds and state threatened and endangered species funds.

The fourth position currently at the Salisbury fish culture station will remain at the hatchery in SFY25 and focus on demobilization of the site.

Broodstock from Salisbury will need to be distributed to the other fish culture stations. The amount of fish available to stock Vermont's waters will be reduced due to both the steps needed to relocate the broodstock and the reassignment of three hatchery staff to the Wildlife Division. In turn, reduced stocking levels may impact the number of licenses sold – as stocking levels are seen as integral to angler experience – which could in turn reduce Department revenue and have a generally negative impact on the economy.

Outreach Division: The Outreach Division works to inform the public about the work of the Department. They utilize formal publications like the hunting and fishing law guides, produce social media content and press releases, and coordinate with local and national press outlets. Staff monitor the social media posts on the Department sites as well as others to gauge the general atmosphere regarding the many topics impacting the Department. While the division does not account for a large portion of the overall budget, the SFY25 budget reduces the amount we spend on paid advertising by \$50,000. This includes eliminating the grant to the Lake Champlain International fishing derby. We plan to increase our use of social media which may partially fill the gap realized by this reduction.

The outreach team also oversees the conservation camps held at Buck Lake and Kehoe where approximately 900 youth receive education in ecology and hunter safety each summer. By migrating to a different registration system, the Department anticipates savings of \$10,000.

Additional Pressures to the Base Budget:

The Department, in coordination with the Department of Health and the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, pays USDA to run a rabies hotline for public inquires and concerns. The budget has not properly reflected the actual cost of this program and in the SFY25 we have addressed this discrepancy by adding \$11,111 to this line item.

Per-gallon gasoline prices have increased over the past few years. The Department has previously trued up the cost increase up by reducing expenditures in other areas, but we are unable to continue to absorb this increased cost. This change will increase division budgets to be commensurate with the actual expenditure for this expense. This represents an increase of \$70,000 in budgeted expenses.

Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife Budget Summary

	FY 2023 Actuals	FY 2024 Budget	FY 2025 Gov Rec	24-25 Change
Major Object				
Personal Services	20,374,037	21,567,730	22,222,550	654,820
Operating Expenses	8,008,226	7,140,027	6,668,389	(471,638)
Grants	1,080,008	936,232	853,066	(83,166)
Total	29,462,271	29,643,989	29,744,005	100,016
Funds				
General Funds	7,632,364	7,173,206	7,717,967	544,761
Special Funds	824,670	370,644	365,427	(5,217)
Fish & Wildlife Fund	10,795,784	10,921,090	10,418,331	(502,759)
Federal Funds	9,471,125	9,793,589	9,751,683	(41,906)
Interdepartmental Transfer	738,328	1,385,460	1,490,597	105,137
Total	29,462,271	29,643,989	29,744,005	100,016

Fish and Wildlife Budget Development Form

	General \$\$	Transp \$\$	Educat \$\$	Clean Water \$\$	Special \$\$	Glob Commit \$\$	Federal \$\$	Int. Service \$\$	Interdept'l Transfer \$\$	All other \$\$	Total \$\$
Approp #1 [612000000]: Support and Field Services FY2024 Approp	7,173,206	0	0	0	11,291,734	0	9,793,589	0	1,385,460	0	29,643,989
Other Changes: (Please insert changes to your base appropriation that occurred after the passage of the FY24 budget)											0
FY 2024 Other Changes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Approp. After FY 2024 Other Changes	7,173,206	0	0	0	11,291,734	0	9,793,589	0	1,385,460	0	29,643,989
CURRENT SERVICE LEVEL/CURRENT LAW	544,761	0	0	0	(507,976)	0	(41,906)	0	105,137	0	100,016
Personal Services	420,495	0	0	0	(8,431)	0	110,163	0	132,593	0	654,820
500000: Salary & Wages: Classified Employees	67,042				170,730		141,828		21,693		401,293
500010: Salary & Wages: Exempt Employees											
501500: Health Insurance: Classified Employees	131,606				227,259		110,157		26,803		495,825
501510: Health Insurances: Exempt Employees											
502000: Retirement: Classified Employees	46,815				55,997		12,755		6,604		122,171
502010: Retirement: Exempt Employees											
All Other Employee Payroll Related Fringe Benefits	12,904				15,435		3,515		1,821		33,675
504040: VT Family & Medical Leave Insurance Premium	14,217				17,005		3,874		2,006		37,102
504045: Child Care Contribution	12,641				15,120		3,444		1,783		32,988
505200: Workers' Compensation Insurance Premium	11,672				11,897						23,569
508000: Vacancy Turnover Savings (1 Warden position, 12 months)					75,642						75,642
508000: Vacancy Turnover Savings (1 Biologist position each in Fish and Wildlife Divisions, 3 months)					38,109		88,918				127,027
Class RFR - Approved by Classification 12/15/23					290,485		148,819		6,916		446,220
Reduce temporary staff cost					(66,315)		(22,771)				(89,086)
Closing Salisbury-Staff cost					(317,832)		184,916		64,967		(67,949)
Additional Warden for animal cruelty work - personnel costs	117,598				(117,598)						0
Contract fund source adjustment to capital					(12,582)						(12,582)
Remove one-time expenditures added in SFY24 - strategic fund bump					(179,283)		(340,292)				(470,187)
Remove one-time expenditures added in SFY24 - access area projects					(225,000)		(225,000)				(450,000)
Remove one-time expenditures added in SFY24 - contracts					(7,500)						(7,500)
Additional Warden for animal cruelty work - contractual costs	6,000										6,000
Operating Expenses	133,155	0	0	0	(509,018)	0	(68,319)	0	(27,456)	0	(471,638)
515010: Fee-for-Space Charge	7,567				6,825						14,392
516000: Insurance Other Than Employee Benefits	17,672				47,770						65,442
516010: Insurance - General Liability	7,646				8,220						15,866
516671: VISION/ISD	4,356				(735)						3,621
516685: ADS Allocated Charge	6,420				3,624						10,044
519006: Human Resources Services	7,941				13,677						21,618
523620: Single Audit Allocation											0
Increase cost of ANR attorney	16,040										16,040
National Life lease	(17,828)										(17,828)
Increased cost of gasoline					70,000						70,000
Remove one-time expenditures added in SFY24 - vehicle purchase					(45,000)						(45,000)
Remove one-time expenditures added in SFY24 - strategic fund bump					(105,100)		(292,820)				(397,920)
Remove one-time expenditures added in SFY24 - operating					(9,610)						(9,610)
Agency of Digital Services cost for message export	3,500										3,500
Merit bonus' for ANR regional office point of contacts	2,500										2,500
Misc operating fund source adjustment	(48,638)				(174,707)		224,501		(1,156)		0
Reduce vehicle purchases					(28,000)						(28,000)
Reduce equipment purchases	(40,000)				(71,276)				(26,300)		(137,576)
Eliminate paid advertising					(50,000)						(50,000)
Reduce Agency of Digital Services timesheet billing	(10,000)										(10,000)
Closing Salisbury-Operating cost					(174,706)						(174,706)
Additional Warden for animal cruelty work - operating costs	175,979										175,979
Grants	(8,889)	0	0	0	9,473	0	(83,750)	0	0	0	(83,166)
Lake Champlain International grant reduction	(20,000)				(10,000)						(30,000)
Subgrant changes					19,473		(83,750)				(64,277)
Rabies hotline agreement with USDA	11,111										11,111
Subtotal of Increases/Decreases	544,761	0	0	0	(507,976)	0	(41,906)	0	105,137	0	100,016
FY 2025 Governor Recommend	7,717,967	0	0	0	10,783,758	0	9,751,683	0	1,490,597	0	29,744,005
Department of Fish and Wildlife FY 2024 Appropriation	7,173,206	0	0	0	11,291,734	0	9,793,589	0	1,385,460	0	29,643,989
Reductions and Other Changes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FY 2024 Total After Other Changes	7,173,206	0	0	0	11,291,734	0	9,793,589	0	1,385,460	0	29,643,989
TOTAL INCREASES/DECREASES	544,761	0	0	0	(507,976)	0	(41,906)	0	105,137	0	100,016
Department of Fish and Wildlife FY 2025 Governor Recommend	7,717,967	0	0	0	10,783,758	0	9,751,683	0	1,490,597	0	29,744,005