



Office *of the* Governor
JOHN BEL EDWARDS



CHALLENGES MET. PROGRESS DELIVERED.

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, 2016–2023

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Introduction

Message from LDWF Secretary Robert Shadoin

In the winter of 2016, when Gov. John Bel Edwards brought new leadership to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, we aimed to tackle the many problems facing our Sportsman's Paradise while enhancing Louisiana's abundant natural resources. Fishermen were coming from near and far to tap into the redfish and speckled trout or to find game in the state's thousands of square miles of hunting grounds.

At the same time, we were continuing our revival of the Louisiana black bear, the brown pelican and the bald eagle and we were continuing our effort to reintroduce the whooping crane in the state.

With the support of the Governor and the legislature, LDWF was finishing the federal certification of the LACreel fish accounting system that would soon become the envy of the nation. It would eventually be a big part of Louisiana winning federal approval of the much-desired state control of red snapper catch in state and federal waters. Through the efforts of LDWF staff at the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council, state management of red snapper was secured and has increased access for Louisiana fishermen to this prized fish.

The 2023 season has been the best so far, with anglers allowed to fish 7 days per week and keep four fish per person per day. This has been an incredible win for Louisiana.

But, this administration had a lot more that drew its attention early on. In the wake of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, Louisiana had secured \$5 billion in Natural Resource Damage Assessment settlement funds. With the support of the Governor, LDWF began to implement comprehensive restoration plans aimed at making Louisiana whole again, with LDWF having a special focus on restoring our state's valuable fish and wildlife resources devastated by the spill.

Under this administration, well over \$3 billion of settlement funds have been committed to restoring wetlands and coastal and nearshore habitats. With funds set aside for birds, important waterbird rookeries such as Queen Bess Island and Rabbit Island were thoroughly restored.

With the Governor's strong support, this agency and others are working through a plan for the revitalization of other large nesting colonies and other restoration strategies designed to enhance avian habitat across our impacted coast.

Restoration of impacted oyster habitats has also been undertaken, and valuable projects to restore impacted recreational fishing opportunities have been completed.

The freshwater lakes continued to be threatened by various invasive species and vegetation, namely Giant Salvinia. The department continues to dedicate large amounts of funding to fighting these invasive species and is anticipated to spend approximately \$7 million in FY24 to battle invasive aquatic vegetation in Louisiana's waterways.

In early days of this administration, it was evident that the well of funding the department depended on to pay for a large portion of its activities and programs was declining with no chance of rising again. The annual revenue collected by the department into the Conservation Fund in FY16 was \$74.6 million. That number decreased each year until falling to \$47.9 million in FY21. LDWF, backed by the Governor, convinced the legislature to pass a comprehensive license restructure in the 2021 regular session. Revenue has averaged \$69 million for the last two years.

With that backdrop, LDWF continued to provide the biology and expertise to battle pending invasive species and other challenges facing the fish and wildlife resources of the state. LDWF partnered with other organizations to build reefs to bolster recreational anglers' fishing opportunities, and new oyster reefs to support the commercial oyster industry.

A dedicated team of enforcement officers rescued more than 5,500 people and close to 1,000 pets in need during the 2016 floods, 2017 Hurricane Harvey, and 2021 Hurricane Ida. Agents also provided transportation to first responders, physicians, and nurses during the freeze of 2021 for a group of veteran nursing facilities in northern Louisiana. The LDWF Enforcement Division completed construction on its' Law Enforcement Training and Emergency Response Complex in 2017 and its Natatorium in 2020. Both structures are in use at the Waddill Training Complex in Baton Rouge for cadet training at the academy and in-service training for active agents.

COVID-19 struck the agency licensing section hard in 2020 and 2021, but the agency was able to continue its daily effort, even though many LDWF employees were out sick, or it was too risky to have them in the offices. Employees from all sections of the department aided the licensing section to continue to deliver services every day during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We even had the Assistant Secretary of Fisheries Patrick Banks at the front desk answering phones and directing public inquiries. We never closed the office during the declared emergency – though an application may have taken longer to process as we worked through an unusual increase in applications due to higher participation in hunting, fishing and boating activities during COVID-19.

Gov. Edwards and LDWF have worked together to get millions of dollars in federal aid to many in the fishing community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Federal aid stemming from the 2019 flood disaster have recently been secured for the fishing community to the tune of \$58 million. Additional federal funding is anticipated to be approved for Louisiana stemming from the devastating hurricanes of 2020 and 2021.

Working at LDWF over these past years, and serving as the department's Secretary has shown me what a resilient state we live in. We are steadily improving Louisiana's hunting and fishing environments, one mile, one lake, one bird, and one fish at a time. We have benefitted from Gov. Edwards' understanding that maintaining and improving our Sportsman's Paradise is not a sprint but a marathon of developing new approaches to solving problems and creating opportunities to improve.

Progress Delivered

02

2017

Restoration of the Louisiana Conservationist Magazine

Print media has faced difficult challenges since the turn of the century because of the advent of the digital age. Media consumption migrated from paper to online for many people. So in 2010, LDWF made the difficult decision to shelve the print edition of the Louisiana Conservationist magazine and make it digital only.

The magazine had been a staple of Louisiana's outdoor enthusiasts for generations. It had provided the outdoors men and women of the state the latest on LDWF activities since 1923. It explained the science and rationale for department decisions, from hunting seasons, creel limits and forestry prescriptions.

But while informing, it has also entertained many generations. It was a source of enjoyment and enlightenment for its dedicated readers. Folks love the photographs from places in Louisiana they never knew existed.

The magazine told the story of how the department brought back species

from the brink, including the alligator, the brown pelican, the bald eagle and the Louisiana black bear.

But the fine tradition of the Louisiana Conservationist publication was hard to ignore. Many seasoned outdoors folk voiced their desire to hold the magazine again. So in the fall of 2016, the decision was made to bring back the print edition of the magazine while keeping it available online as well.

It was well received.

When the magazine was restored in 2016, Gov. Edwards said, "(Taking away the magazine) left a void in both homes and classrooms that benefitted from the bridge it created between the state and public. I am thrilled LDWF is reviving the magazine. It serves as both an educational asset and a treasured portrayal of Louisiana's wondrous outdoors."

2016

Lifting of the Moratorium on Special Artificial Reef Sites

At the April 10, 2017 Artificial Reef Council Meeting, the Council agreed to lift the moratorium on Special Artificial Reef Site (SARS) development that was enacted in 2008. The moratorium had served to give the program time to establish SARS criteria that eased concerns from the shrimping industry about SARS development and anxieties that the program was reefing too many hurricane-toppled platforms.

The program had been experiencing a decline in the rate at which platforms were reefed compared to the rate of those removed from the Gulf of Mexico. Developing SARS gives the program more flexibility to create new reef sites and reef more platforms.

The program engaged with user groups, including the shrimping and recreational fishing industry, and the oil and gas industry to revise the criteria under which proposals to create SARS were approved. The program agreed to "give back" water bottoms of higher shrimp trawl value when developing SARS and to give the shrimp industry a greater voice during public comment periods, including presenting all proposals to the Shrimp Task Force. The program also agreed to stop reefing hurricane-toppled platforms. The Council approved these changes.

2017

Legislation

HB 474 Act 222	Rep. Garofalo	Authorized the issuance of an alternative oyster culture permit to a person holding an oyster lease on a privately owned water bottom.
HB 200 ACT 17	Rep. Dwight	Restricted the method of taking oysters in Calcasieu and Sabine Lake to tonging only.

Hurricane Harvey Assistance

The LDWF Enforcement Division offered a huge helping hand to its Texas neighbors and rescued 1,513 people and 193 pets in the Lone Star state during one of its worst-ever natural disasters in late August and early September. Three dozen agents, with trucks and vessels rescued people in the Houston and Katy areas.

Agents also rescued 26 people from flooded areas in Calcasieu Parish and two others in Sabine Parish.

Legislation

HB 4 Act 41	Rep. Bishop	Extended the saltwater fishing license fee increase of \$9.50 from 2018 to 2022; additional funding supported the LA Creel Program.
SB 451 Act 159	Sen. Morrish	Prohibited oyster harvest on Sabine Lake.

2018

Louisiana Wins Management Authority over Red Snapper

In 2019, after years of trying, LDWF representatives on the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council won delegated management authority over red snapper in federal waters off the coast of Louisiana. State management of this popular fisheries resource had long been a goal of the state's recreational fishing community.

It was achieved by rebuilding relationships with the Gulf Council, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries representative, and other key voting members of the Council.

Louisiana's effort was greatly assisted by LDWF's development of its nationally renowned LA Creel Survey design, the state's federally accredited method to estimate recreational red snapper catch. The private recreational red snapper fishing season in both state and federal waters is now set annually by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission and managed based on an annual harvest quota set by LDWF.

Under this new management paradigm, Louisiana anglers have enjoyed a significant increase in fishing access compared to the previous federally-managed regime, often resulting in a fishing season lasting from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

One example of how the change helped: in 2021, the recreational red snapper bag limit in Louisiana doubled to four fish per person, per day for the first time in years. Also, the red snapper season is moved to 7 days per week.

Legislation

Sen. Lambert	Provided for the size and location of escape rings on crab traps.
Rep. Gisclair	Prohibited the taking of immature female crabs and provided for enhanced penalties for certain class four crab fishing violations.
Rep. Leopold	Authorized additional means of harvesting oysters on the oyster seed grounds under the oyster seed ground vessel permit.

2019

Bussey Brake Reservoir Rehabilitation

This 2,200-acre reservoir is located about 7 miles northwest of Bastrop, in northeast Louisiana. In a multi-year project, the water body was drained to allow renovation of both the physical attributes of the water body as well as the fish community. Non-game fish species were removed to the extent practical and a new boat launch and two fishing piers were constructed.

The water body was refilled and stocked with gamefish, including prized largemouth bass and crappie. Since that time, several state-record fish have been harvested by anglers, professional fishing tournaments have visited the reservoir. The American Fisheries Society nationally recognized Bussey Brake and LDWF for excellence in fisheries management with the restoration efforts.

The water body continues to be named to Bassmaster's "Top 100 lakes" in the U.S.

An added benefit that the popular lake is a benefit to the local economy as it brings visitors into area who will purchase gas, bait and ice at local stores. Some will rent rooms there, too.

Oyster Strategic Plan

LDWF developed a comprehensive 13-point initiative Oyster Rehabilitation and Management Strategic Plan that included an estimated \$135 million worth of essential projects anticipated to occur over a five-year period that will assist both the oyster industry and oyster population in adapting to coastal changes.

Approximately half of the cost of this plan has been secured and several initiatives are well on their way to being completed. Included in the plan is traditional cultch planting (reef construction), planting hatchery-raised oyster spat-on-shell, genetic development of a low salinity-tolerant oyster, hydrologic evaluation of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) rock dam modification, and hydrologic evaluation of modifying the Bohemia Spillway (Mardi Gras Pass).

New Website Launched

In February 2020, after a year of gathering feedback from user groups, LDWF launched a new website at www.wlf.louisiana.gov.

The easy-to-navigate site highlights that there is so much more to what LDWF does than meets the eye, from improving the habitat and chance of survival for a rare woodpecker that calls Louisiana home, to managing and restoring hundreds of thousands of acres of land and waterways to ensuring Louisiana remains a paradise for all.

Among its many features is an interactive map with information on where to fish, hunt, hike, and boat, as well as a calendar of upcoming events.

LDWF streamlined the look of the site and made it more aesthetically pleasing (especially if you like green and orange). We also structured it to be friendlier to use on a smartphone and tablet.

Our most popular pages – a quick reference of our Seasons and Regulations, a Species Field Guide profiling Louisiana plants and animals, and a guide to the Wildlife Management Areas, Refuges, and Conservation Areas we manage – are front and center on our home page. Links to our users' top tasks—buy a license, renew a boat registration, or pay a fine—are at the top of the page.

Completion of the Enforcement Natatorium

The Natatorium includes a swimming pool, full gym and locker rooms to be used for training and other activities. The facility is part of Enforcement's effort to have a central location for all of its training. It also fits in with LDWF's goal to have Baton Rouge as the agency's central staging area for emergency efforts.

Fishing Industry Support Related to COVID-19

Similar to businesses and industries across the world, the commercial fishing industry in Louisiana suffered financial hardship as a result of the COVID 19 epidemic. In response, the federal government provided funding through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

The Office of Fisheries administered the application process for financial assistance to fishing industry members as federal funding was made available through the CARES Act. Approximately \$14.6 million in financial assistance was distributed in 2020 and roughly \$12.4 million in 2021. The funds were distributed as direct aid payments by the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission to those who qualified.

Provided Hurricane Ida Community Support

In the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Ida in 2021, the LDWF Marine Fisheries Laboratory on Grand Isle was operated by LDWF as an emergency command center and community support base for the Town of Grand Isle and Jefferson Parish for hurricane recovery.

Despite no public utilities being available, LDWF staff obtained generators, water supplies, meal preparation, and bathroom and shower facilities for response workers and community members for approximately five months.

Most days saw nearly 100 response workers from organizations such as the Louisiana National Guard, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Town of Grand Isle, and Jefferson Parish being housed in the facility. Meal preparation activities reached over 200 people per event on some days, and generally included providing approximately 350 meals per day.

Moved to the LA Wallet Program

The LA Wallet program had its birth in 2022, not long after LDWF had moved from waterproof paper licenses to regular 8-1/2" x 11" sheets of paper. This conversion angered many hunters and anglers. There was a public outcry for LDWF to bring back the waterproof paper.

In response, LDWF worked to develop a digital hunting and/or fishing license available on the already-established Louisiana Wallet application. Along with that technology, a digital harvest tag system called "Text-To-Tag" was developed for deer and turkey hunting. This technology has provided a convenient way for the public to store their licenses and record their harvest on their cellphones. It has had an overwhelmingly positive response from the users.

Made Licenses Valid for 365 Days

LDWF had legislation passed that made licenses valid for 365 days from the date of purchase, a change that was instantly popular among hunters and anglers. Before this legislation, hunters' and anglers' licenses expired every June 30, no matter the day they purchased them.

While bringing on the new license, the department also added a means for hunters and fishers to sign up for license auto-renewal program where they can automatically renew their license at expiration through a credit card in their account. Users can opt out of auto-renewal any time prior to the renewal date.

Legislation

SB 270 Act 11	Sen. Womack	Allowed for the fishing of nets within five hundred feed or an outlet or pass for the purpose of retaining and removing invasive species of fish and other nongame freshwater fish of commercial value.
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Began Carbon Sequestration Program

In FY22, LDWF collected \$3,175,299 in initial payments for carbon sequestration. LDWF was on the forefront of negotiating and entering into operating agreements for Carbon Capture and Sequestration (CCS) on Department-owned lands. CCS has the potential to replace declining oil and gas revenues, which are critical for maintaining Department operations.

The Department has embraced this aspect of green energy as a potential solution to ease future funding concerns.

Received CARES Act Funds

Received \$34 million in federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act funds to provide financial assistance to Louisiana anglers and others in the industry who were financially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Continuing Carbon Sequestration Program

In FY23, LDWF is anticipating collecting \$3,882,850 in pre-injection rental payments in connection with carbon sequestration.

Secured \$58 Million Federal Grant for 2019 Flood Recovery

LDWF, aided by Gov. Edwards, secured \$58 million in federal dollars for commercial fishermen for losses caused by flooding associated with multiple openings of the Bonnet Carré Spillway. The funding will be used according to a spending plan developed by LDWF after consultation with the fishing industry and adjustments required by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The plan includes a variety of resiliency projects, such as vessel access and dock improvements, oyster cultch plants, research into more resilient oysters and equipment reimbursement grants. More specific uses and how to apply for project and grant funding were explained in public meetings.

Following the historic flooding in 2019, which included two separate Bonnet Carré Spillway openings, Gov. Edwards officially requested that the federal government declare a fisheries disaster. The U.S. Department of Commerce granted that request and directed NOAA to work with LDWF to develop a spending plan based on available federal funding.

In late May of 2020, NOAA informed LDWF that \$58 million would be available to Louisiana following the approval of an appropriate spending plan, which described how the state would utilize the funding to assist the fishing industry in becoming more resilient to similar disasters in the future.

Numerous meetings were held in 2021 with task forces, the Louisiana Shrimpers Association and several parish governments. At those meetings, a draft spending plan was presented to the public for comment. The plan was also disseminated electronically and posted on the LDWF website.

The first checks from the program should be sent out before the end of 2023.

Feral Hogs

The Louisiana Feral Hog Management Advisory Task Force (LFHMAT) was created. The LFHMAT promoted interagency cooperation, which led to the implementation of rules and regulations for feral hog transport as well as for captive feral hog facilities.

Kaput® Feral Hog Bait was federally registered as a toxicant for feral hogs and was temporarily registered in the State of Louisiana although not commercially available. LDWF conducted testing and discovered that the feeder required for use with Kaput® Feral Hog Bait was not resistant to Louisiana Black Bears. Upon this discovery, Louisiana registration of the product was revoked.

Hunter-harvest surveys estimated that hunters killed 143,700 feral hogs in 2016.

HCR9	Rep. Thibaut	Established the Louisiana Feral Hog Management Advisory Task Force
LAC7: 1301, 1312, and 1321	LDAF	Identified feral swine and established rules for legal transport and captivity

LDWF personnel tested five potential toxicant delivery devices (feeders) for resistance to Louisiana black bears. Bears defeated all dispensers.

Hunter-harvest surveys estimated that hunters killed 271,800 feral hogs in 2017.

Legislation

HCR 62	Rep. Bishop	Directed LDWF and LDAF to jointly evaluate feral hog toxicants before they are registered in Louisiana
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LDWF continues to work with the LSU AgCenter on the toxic feral hog bait. The LWFC penned a resolution urging the Louisiana Legislature and the U.S. Congress to instruct the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to waive fees for Experimental Use Permits for toxicant testing by universities and to reduce the time that EPA has to review feral hog toxicant registration packages, which is currently three years.

Challenges Met

2016 Floods

LDWF Enforcement Division performed Search and Rescue Efforts following heavy rains in 2016. LDWF agents rescued a total 3,971 people and 760 pets during these two floods. Agents rescued 805 people and 148 pets for the March floods from March 8 to 16 in northern Louisiana. Agents then rescued 3,152 people and 612 pets from Aug. 13 to 17 in southern Louisiana.

2017 Hurricane Harvey

The LDWF Enforcement Division offered a huge helping hand to its Texas neighbors and rescued 1,513 people and 193 pets in the Lone Star state during one of its worst ever natural disasters in late August and early September.

Conservation Conversations

In July 2020, LDWF began hosting live online sessions to provide Louisiana residents a forum where they could learn more about the department's activities. Each session features a discussion with one or more experts on a trending topic related to wildlife and fisheries. Viewers can submit questions related to the topic and get answers in real-time. The half-hour show, titled "Conservation Conversations" airs semi-monthly on LDWF's Facebook page.

The viewership for each episode pulls in anywhere between 3,000 and 9,000 viewers, as topics vary from the agency's financial situation, changes in licensing, programs designed for youth, to how climate change affects various species of fish. The most popular show to date, which featured waterfowl migration research, in particular a bird tracked from Louisiana to Russia and back, received more than 22,000 views.

LDWF Wins Effort To Strengthen Financial Stability

LDWF began to see a significant drop in mineral revenue derived on Department properties in FY 2016. At that time, mineral revenue attributed over 50% of the annual revenue in the Conservation Fund. The Conservation Fund is a Statutory Dedicated fund that functions as the general fund for the department. With the reduction in mineral dollars, in 2017 it was projected that the Conservation fund would be exhausted by FY 2022.

Based on other strategies adopted by other states like Michigan and Nevada, which were able to pass license fee increases with very conservative legislatures, the department developed a plan to reduce the number of licenses required for hunters, anglers, vessel registration and commercial, was proposed and passed.

This would generate more money overall but also provide discounts to users who purchase multiple privileges. Louisiana had not increased these fees since FY 2001 on recreational and 1985 on commercial licenses. A new fee structure that streamlined the old requirements reducing the number of licenses required for hunters, anglers, vessel registration and commercial, was proposed and passed.

These changes will provide the agency with a more stable source of revenue, which is crucial to our ability to provide programs and services to the people of Louisiana. The recreational license increase went into effect on June 1, 2022, and generated \$23.3 million in FY 23 compared to \$16.8 million in FY 21. The commercial license increase went into effect January 1, 2022 and LDWF collected \$1.3 million more than FY21. The department's Conservation Fund is now projected to be solvent through FY 2027.

HB 691 ACT 356	Rep. Bacala	Provides relative to fee increases for the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
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2021 Hurricane Ida

LDWF Agents rescued 219 people and 15 pets from the LaPlace area and six people from the Lafitte area after high water inundated those areas in the storm's aftermath.

Resolution	LWFC	Louisiana Legislative Petition of the U.S. Congress for Exception to the Environmental Protection Agency Protocols for the Evaluation and Registration of Feral Swine Toxicants
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CWD Action

When deadly Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) was discovered in deer in the Tensas Parish area in January of 2022, LDWF was prepared. Long before the discovery, LDWF had developed an action plan which included setting up a CWD Control Area to mitigate the spread of the disease. As of this writing, CWD, which is only deadly to deer, has only been found in Louisiana in the area where it was originally discovered.

So impressed with LDWF's actions, the National Deer Association selected LDWF as its 2022 Agency of the Year for its work in suppressing the disease as well as the outstanding work done by LDWF's Deer Program.

Mitigation measures included export restrictions. These measures were approved by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission as well as the Legislature. The strong support by policymakers aided LDWF's rapid response.

LDWF is providing CWD drop-off locations within the Franklin, Madison and Tensas parishes CWD Control Area for deer hunters to submit samples for CWD testing.

Hunters wishing to submit deer heads to have them tested for CWD can visit seven locations, submit samples and view results online using the sample number obtained at the drop-off location. The locations are self-service and hunters can place deer heads in freezers provided. Instructions as well as sampling bags and hunter information cards are provided at the locations.

Louisiana Wins Court Challenge Against CA Law That Would Have Crippled Alligator Industry

In December 2019, the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission joined private landowners and members of Louisiana's alligator industry to challenge a California law aimed at preventing the importation and sale of crocodilian goods within the State of California. The U.S. District Court in California's Eastern District granted a preliminary injunction in October 2020, which prevented California from enforcing the importation restriction on alligator parts.

In March 2023, the Court granted the motion for summary judgment filed by the plaintiffs, including the WLF Commission, Louisiana landowners, and alligator industry representatives to void any state law or regulations that prohibit what federal laws and regulations permit, namely intrastate and international trade of alligator parts.

On July 11, 2023 the Court rendered a final judgment declaring the California law prohibiting the import, possession or sale of alligator products in the state to be unenforceable and unconstitutional.

The final order permanently enjoined California officials from enforcing the law. This victory keeps a major market open for the Louisiana alligator industry and provides a continuing incentive for conservation of the American alligator species and preservation of their coastal habitat.



Leaving Louisiana Better Than We Found It

04

Restoration of Queen Bess Island

Queen Bess Island holds ecological and historical significance for Louisiana's state bird. Following their extirpation in the 1960s, the island was home to our state's first successful recolonization of brown pelicans. As the fourth largest rookery in Louisiana, it currently produces more than 4,000 nests annually.

Notwithstanding its importance, the island faced the impacts of Deepwater Horizon oiling as well as the ever-present forces of erosion and subsidence. In time, the island dwindled to approximately 5 acres of suitable nesting habitat. In response, with the support of the Governor and with assistance from collaborating agencies (the LA TIG), LDWF oversaw the full restoration of Queen Bess Island, creating 30 acres of brown pelican and wading bird nesting habitat and 7 acres of tern and skimmer nesting habitat.

Restoration of Rabbit Island

Rabbit Island is home to the second-largest brown pelican rookery in Louisiana. However, over the years, the low-lying island has been battered by storms and wave energy, placing nesting populations in peril from loss of habitat and frequent inundation.

The island eventually lost 89 acres of landmass and the remaining low-lying areas could no longer support the large numbers of nesting birds it once had. With the Governor's support and assistance from collaborating agencies (the LA TIG), LDWF oversaw restoration of 102 acres of bird nesting habitat on the island, utilizing dredged sediment from the nearby Calcasieu Ship Channel.

Restoration of this westernmost brown pelican colony was funded with Deepwater Horizon oil spill restoration dollars set aside for spill-impacted birds.

Continued Efforts to Restore Whooping Crane Populations

The whooping crane is one of the world's rarest birds and was listed as endangered in the United States under the Endangered Species Act in 1967. Historically, whooping cranes were found in Louisiana as both a resident, non-migratory flock and migratory birds that wintered in the state. Conversion of the species' prairie and wetland habitat to farmland and unregulated hunting led to the decline of this species both in Louisiana and across the nation. By 1945, only two whooping cranes remained in Louisiana. In March of 1950, the last remaining whooping crane in Louisiana was captured at White Lake and transported to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the central Texas coast with the hopes that it would join the small migratory flock of whooping cranes there.

For 60 years, whooping cranes were absent from Louisiana's landscape. However, in 2011, LDWF and partners began a reintroduction project, releasing 10 juvenile cranes at White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area. The 2022 breeding season was a big success for Louisiana's experimental whooping crane project as eight wild hatched chicks fledged and been added to the Louisiana population. The eight chicks are the most in a single breeding season since the project was initiated by LDWF in 2011. The Louisiana population is now 83.

Supporting partners have included Chevron, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Audubon Nature Institute, Coypu Foundation, Entergy, Cameron LNG, SLEMCO, International Crane Foundation and the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries, supplemented by \$24.5 million in matching funds from the state – the initiative launched with a total investment of \$74.5 million.

Oyster Management and Rehabilitation Strategic Plan

LDWF developed a comprehensive 12-point initiative Oyster Rehabilitation and Management Strategic Plan that included an estimated \$135 million worth of essential projects anticipated to occur over a five-year period that will assist both the oyster industry and oyster population in adapting to coastal changes.

The Strategic Oyster Plan is a comprehensive investment in Louisiana's oysters and industry. The plan's goals are to increase oyster densities in state waters, expand oyster resource resilience, and to provide options and resilience to the oyster industry. The plan is midway through year three of implementation and the state has made great strides toward recovery of our natural oyster resources.

Approximately half of the cost of this plan has been secured and several initiatives are well on their way to being completed. Included in the plan is traditional cultch planting (reef construction), planting hatchery-raised oysters as spat-on-shell, development of a Brood Stock Reef network, establishment of production requirements and evaluation of state oyster leases, expansion of hydrological monitoring across state waters, genetic development of a low salinity-tolerant oyster, expansion of Alternative Oyster Aquaculture through grant funding, hydrologic evaluation of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet rock dam modification, and hydrologic evaluation of modifying the Bohemia Spillway (Mardi Gras Pass).

- Creation of 220 acres of reefs with 94,010 cubic yards of cultch material.
- 2022 Drum Bay Cultch Plant- As of July 2023 oyster seed and market resource availability 75,872.2 barrels.
- 2021 Sister Lake Cultch Plant- As of July 2023 oyster seed and market resource availability 194,249.1 barrels.
- \$1,265,000 in Alternative Oyster Aquaculture grants for 8 oyster nursery farms, 21 oyster farms, and 2 aquaculture parks.
- Michael C. Voisin Oyster Hatchery has produced 166,745,695 oyster larvae used in restoration efforts on the state's oyster brood reef network as part of this strategic plan since 2021.
- Lo-Spat initiative is in the process of evaluating their Genomic Selection model for low salinity tolerance. 29,500,000 low-salinity tolerant oyster larvae are being deployed to our Brood Reef Network as a Spat on Shell operation.

LDWF's Consistent Alligator Management Benefits Louisiana Financially

LDWF has been consistent in its management of the American alligator as a commercial, renewable natural resource. LDWF's sustained use program is one of the world's most recognizable examples of a wildlife conservation success story. Louisiana's program has been used as a model for managing various crocodylian species throughout the world. Since the inception of LDWF's wild harvest program in 1972, over 1 million wild alligators have been harvested and sold, bringing in millions of dollars of revenue to landowners and trappers. Conservative estimates have valued these resources at over \$320,000,000, providing significant, direct economic benefit to Louisiana.

Aquatic Education Program Prepares New Generations

Aquatic education encourages the wise utilization of fisheries resources and is vital in gaining interest of current and new anglers. The Aquatic Outreach and Education Program has a versatile approach and utilizes a variety of programs to instill an understanding of Louisiana recreational fisheries in the public. These programs and associated information are dispersed to a diverse public, with emphasis on awareness of Sport Fish Restoration projects as well as recruitment, retention and reactivation of anglers.

Since 2016, LDWF's Outreach and Education Programs, such as the Aquatic Volunteer Instructor Program, Get Out & Fish! Community Fishing Program, Fishing Workshops, Native Fish in the Classroom, and other Teacher Workshops and Programs, have trained nearly 800 volunteers, attended or held 790 events, reaching over 200,000 Louisiana citizens.

New Facilities Under Construction

New Pineville office – Under construction

New Rockefeller office – Under construction

Stories of Our Success

05

Sgt. Stephen Rhodes Saves Nine People In Gulf of Mexico

Being the right person at the right time and in the right place to save a life is extremely rare and something most people will never experience. It is even rarer when the right person was not even supposed to be in the right place or at the right time to begin with to start the day.

Sgt. Stephen Rhodes, a 15-year veteran with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Enforcement Division, was supposed to be working out of Grand Meadow on a patrol boat for closed season shrimpers in inside waters on the morning of May 7, 2022. Before he could get to his original work location, he got the call to go to the beach in Grand Isle to check on recreational shrimpers that were catching shrimp over the limit.

"The shrimp were running that day near the beach and people with cast nets were getting their 50-pound limit in mere minutes," said Sgt. Rhodes. "When I got there I had to park my truck and walk the beach checking on shrimpers. I was there about 40 minutes and was actually in the middle of writing a few citations for over the limit of shrimp when I saw the vessel having trouble in front of me in the gulf."

The vessel had nine people on board and it was having trouble navigating some large waves that were inundating the boat. Sgt. Rhodes was keeping an eye on the boat.

While writing the citations Sgt. Rhodes heard someone yell that the boat had just capsized. He immediately dropped what he was doing and started running for his truck that was about 1,000 yards away on the Hwy. 1 of the Bridgeside Marina.

"While I was running for my truck to launch my vessel a Good Samaritan on an ATV (all-terrain vehicle) pulled alongside of me and offered me a ride," said Sgt. Rhodes.

After launching his boat, he made it to the capsized vessel in a few minutes. At the scene, he was able to get eight occupants of the upside down vessel onto his vessel. After getting the eight occupants onto his patrol vessel, Sgt. Rhodes was notified that there was still a person missing from the capsized vessel.

Sgt. Rhodes figured the missing boater was trapped under the vessel since he was told she was wearing a personal flotation device. Sgt. Rhodes then flagged down a nearby vessel for assistance in holding his vessel still while he prepared to jump in the water to search for the missing boater.

With the nearby boater holding Sgt. Rhodes' patrol vessel in place, he jumped into the water and started searching under the vessel.

"I held onto the side of the overturned vessel and started making my way down the side while also feeling underneath the boat with my legs in a sweeping motion," said Sgt. Rhodes. "After a short time I felt something that could be a person. I dove under the boat and found a little girl trapped underneath. I was able to get her to the surface and hand her to the Good Samaritan that was holding my boat."

Once back on his boat, Sgt. Rhodes noticed the girl was not responsive and her eyes were unfocused. He immediately began cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) in an attempt to revive her. Sgt. Rhodes estimated that she was trapped under the water for about 15 minutes.

"I started CPR and on my second try I could see her eyes come back into focus," said Sgt. Rhodes. "I then saw her breathing and immediately got back behind the wheel of the vessel to bring them to waiting EMS personnel at the marina."

Sgt. Rhodes brought nine people, including the little girl, to the Bridgeside Marina. The girl, who was 7, was stabilized by the EMS crew and airlifted to Children's Hospital in New Orleans. She was released soon thereafter and has made a full recovery.

"We are extremely proud of the actions of Sgt. Rhodes," said Col. Chad Hebert, head of LDWF's Enforcement Division, at the time of the incident. "He did an exceptional job of using good judgement and his training to help save the life of this young girl and the other occupants in the capsized vessel. We would also like to thank all of the good Samaritans that assisted in this successful rescue. Sgt. Rhodes was on patrol by himself and these good Samaritans helped him perform this rescue faster. That time saved probably made it possible to resuscitate the young girl."

Sgt. Rhodes estimated the time that the Good Samaritans saved him to make the rescue was more than 15 minutes.

"The guy that gave me the ride to the truck and helped me launch my boat easily saved me 10 to 15 minutes," said Sgt. Rhodes. "Also the Good Samaritan that held my boat was a big time saver and help. Without him, my boat would have floated away while I was searching or I would have had to tie off to the engine since that was the only thing there for me to tie off to. Plus getting her from me and bringing her to my boat once I found her."

Sgt. Rhodes said that his experience and training helped prepare him for this moment. He also said this is something that will stick with him his entire career and live.

"We are trained in life saving and disaster response," he said. "Your career, personality, and experience play a part in it as well. Do I feel awe struck that I saved that young girl...sure. She is alive against some very serious odds and I played a big part in that. The memory of everything that happened that day will never leave me."

06

BY THE NUMBERS

Since 2016:

- Boater Education certificates issued: over 64,000
- LA Creel surveys conducted: 79,811
- Licensed hunters since 2016: 897,378
- Licensed anglers since 2016: 2,234,272
- Commercial Fishing Licenses issued: 80,157
- Boat Registrations: 775,808
- Total number of fish stocked in public waterways: 60,700,000
- Total number of hunter education certifications: 80,994
- Website Users: 16.8 Million
- Acres of aquatic vegetation sprayed: 337,756
- Archery in school program 113,921 students
- Hunter Education has reached 74,707 students. This includes in-person classes such as Hunter Ed, trapper education, and Bow hunter education.
- Some 210,000 people have used our shooting ranges since 2016
- Patrol Hours: 2,183,089
- Citations: 82,169
- DWI Arrests: 675
- Number of Conservationist Issues since 2016: 27

Social Media Audience

	2015	Now
Facebook	73,732	139,147
Twitter	2,295	8,050
Instagram	2,491	11,333

New Facilities completed

- Relocated New Orleans Office to reduce office expenses.
- New Lafayette office, consolidated Opelousas, New Iberia and Lafayette into one space, securing additional tenants to help with operational costs
- New Hammond office, saving \$70k per year
- The new Lake Charles office replaced an aging, virtually obsolete building. New office is larger, modern and has more room for personnel, equipment, vehicles and growth.
- New offices at Lacombe Fish Hatchery
- Completed Enforcement Natatorium



Office of the Governor
JOHN BEL EDWARDS
2016–2024