



BIRDERS AS STAKEHOLDERS IN WISCONSIN NATURAL RESOURCES



WISCONSIN
SOCIETY *for*
ORNITHOLOGY

MISSION: PROMOTE THE
ENJOYMENT, STUDY AND CONSERVATION
OF WISCONSIN'S BIRDS

VISION: A world in which people share an
appreciation for birds and advocate on their behalf

- Statewide
- 1,200-1,300 members
- Nonprofit organization
- Operating continuously since 1939
- Own Honey Creek Preserve in the Baraboo Hills for over 50 years
- Members include several inductees to WI Conservation Hall of Fame



**WISCONSIN
SOCIETY *for*
ORNITHOLOGY**



WSO



Throughout its history, WSO has united academic studies and amateur engagement in Wisconsin's birds.

Both require time spent outdoors observing birds.

WSO is known for:

- Field trips throughout the state
- Annual conventions at a different location in the state every year (Two Rivers/Manitowoc in 2024)
- WSO Awards for birding contributions
- WSO Grants for bird studies
- The Passenger Pigeon bird study journal

BIRDERS AND BIRDWATCHING



Birders enjoy the outdoors and nature in many different areas throughout the state.

BIRDERS AND BIRDWATCHING

Birders travel and gather for great birding opportunities.



BIRDERS AND BIRDWATCHING

People enjoy and observe birds in many different ways.

In their backyards with feeder equipment and water features



Photo by Steve Fisher

With cameras



Photo by Karen Mesmer



Birding backpacks donated to libraries by the Feminist Bird Club

BIRDERS AND BIRDWATCHING

Birding has traditions and multi-generational appeal.



Four generations of the Klemme family united in the pursuit of birdwatching. During this spring bird count, our family group collectively spotted 107 species. Photo by Matt Klemme



WSO AND HUNTING

WSO is not “anti-hunting”

WSO is against hunting this particular bird

Hunters have long been part of WSO membership and leadership, including on its conservation committee.

From the Passenger Pigeon journal issue on all types of birders 2002

The Perfect Pair

Birding and hunting, explains Jennifer Nieland, require many of the same skills and reap many of the same rewards.

by Jennifer Nieland



Figure 1. Birder and hunter Jennifer Nieland displays some of the tools of her hunting hobby—blaze-orange vest and hat, shotgun, and hunting dog, Turk—as well as a brace of Ring-necked Pheasants.

WSO sells federal duck stamps at cost in its web store without any restrictions.



WISCONSIN
SOCIETY for
ORNITHOLOGY

[Home](#) / [Support](#) / [WSO Store](#) / [Main Store](#) / [Duck Stamp 2024-2025](#)



Duck Stamp
2024-2025

\$25.00

SKU:
Duck_Stamp_2024-2025

1

ADD TO CART

Description

Duck Stamp 2024-2025

- Available for purchase June 30, 2024 - December 25, 2024
- Valid for use July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025
- Sold at cost

BIRDS GENERALLY IN TREMENDOUS DECLINE

3 BILLION BIRDS LOST ACCORDING TO 2019 SCIENTIFIC STUDY

- More than 1 in 4 birds since 1970 in North America
- 2.5 billion migratory birds, down 28%
- Grassland birds down 53%
- Shorebirds down 37%
- Aerial insectivores down 32%
- Boreal forest birds down 33%

Exceptions

- Raptors, woodpeckers and waterfowl



Western Meadowlark by
Lynn Barber, WSO President

CRANES ARE A POWERFUL SYMBOL OF WISCONSIN'S CONSERVATION EFFORTS

When Aldo Leopold penned *A Marshland Elegy* in 1937, only two dozen pairs of Sandhill Cranes lived in Wisconsin. Leopold feared the imminent demise of the species, and foresaw the day when “the last crane will trumpet his farewell and spiral skyward from the great marsh.”



Instead, their bugling has become a sound heard and rejoiced throughout Wisconsin with their tremendous recovery. Sandhill Cranes are a large and charismatic ambassador of Wisconsin's wetlands and show what dedicated conservation work can achieve.



WHY SHOULD THIS STUDY COMMITTEE CARE ABOUT BIRDERS?

- Every hunt decision includes not only science but also social considerations.
- Birders and other non-hunting recreational users can help fund the future of Wisconsin natural resources.
 - DNR Fish and Wildlife account potential \$15 million deficit

HUNT DECISIONS INCLUDE SCIENCE

Whether or not to hunt a species requires that a hunt be sustainable.

This is determined by certain scientific metrics and modeling that include:

- population
- reproduction factors
- survival (recruitment)
- death rate and reasons
- habitat information
- other appropriate factors



Photos by Robert Rolley
and Megan Nicholson

HUNT DECISIONS INCLUDE SCIENCE



GENERAL HUNT REQUIREMENTS

Advisory committee with 12-20 people, including DNR, other agencies, and stakeholders for both the game animal and its habitat

Management plan to ensure/build sustainable population

Rulemaking process to establish hunt often takes 2 years or more

- Hunting zones for sandhill cranes likely to be complicated
- May require adaptability for changing conditions over time
- Establish metrics criteria and killing quotas for each zone

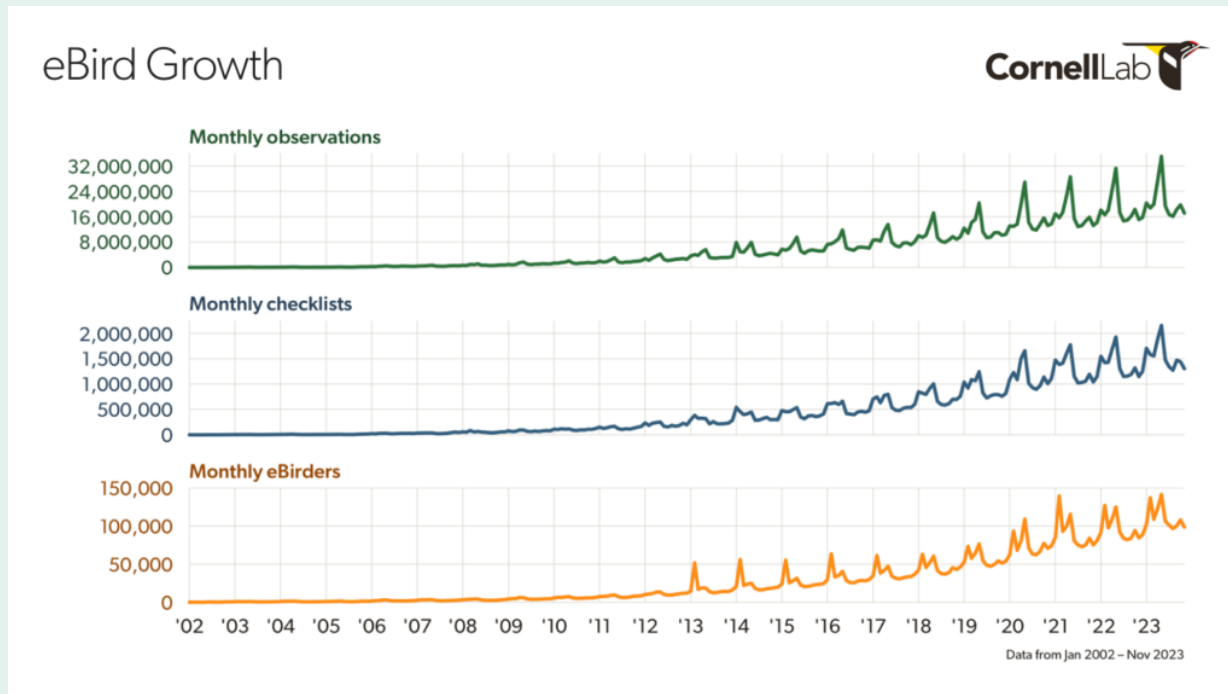
Every year, decide hunt quotas and review management plan

Research may be required to create or support metrics for decisions

BIRDERS CONTRIBUTE TO SCIENCE

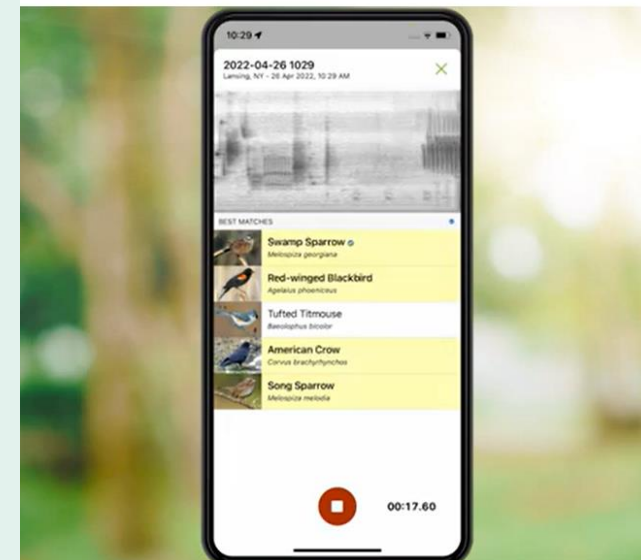
Many birders are engaged with science on a regular basis and that is only growing

Includes participatory citizen science efforts on eBird, Merlin and local studies



Merlin has 15 million users

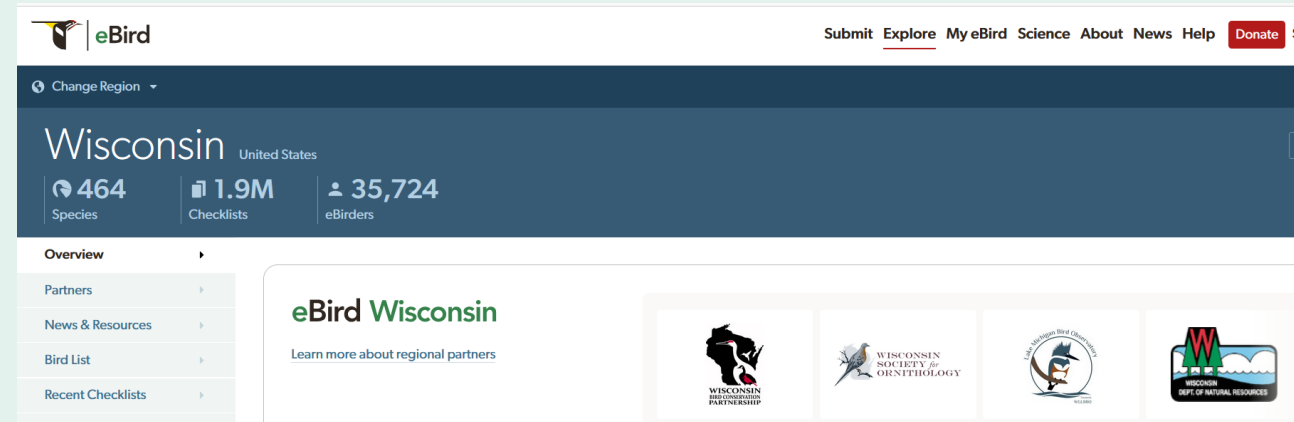
See How Merlin Can Help You ID Birds



WISCONSIN EBIRD

Year	eBird Checklists	Percent increase	eBirders for year	Percent increase
2019	174,187	7.8%	15,319	10.9%
2020	231,494	32.9%	19,048	24.3%
2021	305,322	31.9%	22,893	20.2%
2022	276,523	-9.4%	25,329	10.6%
2023	299,610	8.3%	27,845	9.9%
Increase		72%		82%

1.29 million checklists in 5 years



WSO financially sponsored the start of the Wisconsin eBird portal.

Many of the identification reviewers are WSO members.

4,089 eBird hotspots all over Wisconsin that birders actively visit



WISCONSIN BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

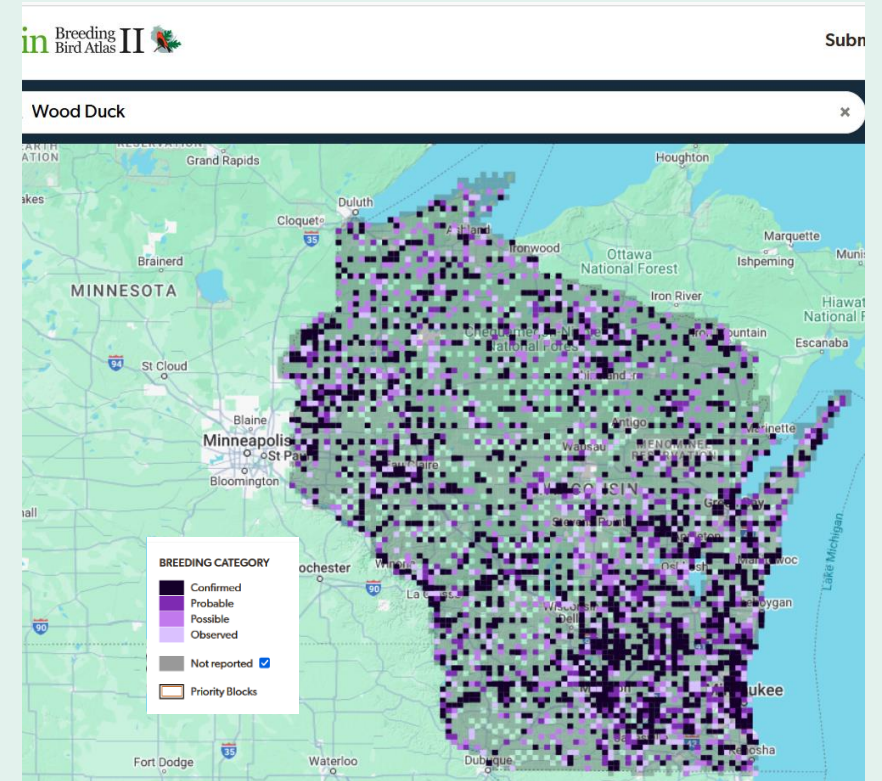
Distribution study of all breeding birds in Wisconsin

First Atlas published in 2006 - organized, funded, and published by WSO

Second Atlas work began about 10 years ago

- Partnership among DNR and bird nonprofit organizations
- 5 years of observational work
- 2.8 million observations from 2,000 people
- 1,283 square grids across the state
- Includes game species

Comparisons of two will be included in the new Atlas



The WBBA II is a “comprehensive field survey that documents the distribution and abundance of birds breeding in an area. The information will allow us to see changes in bird populations since the last survey and to measure future changes. These insights help us identify the conservation needs of breeding birds and try to meet those needs.”

From About the WBBA II eBird webpage

HUNT DECISIONS INCLUDE SCIENCE

Science does not
“support” a hunt.

Science allows a
hunt when it can
happen sustainably.

There are still other factors
to consider about whether
a hunt should happen.



HUNT DECISIONS INCLUDE SOCIAL FACTORS

Advisory committees for game species include other stakeholders.

Managing for game species includes managing and building their habitat.

The WDNR needs private NGO partners to build and restore habitats and to provide matching funding for collaborations.

Volunteers may assist in population and site monitoring as well as habitat work.



WISCONSIN
DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES

HUNTING FISHING PARKS CLIMATE ENVIRONMENT F



Photo: Ryan Brady

In September 2018, an ad hoc committee was formed to create Wisconsin's ruffed grouse management plan. The Natural Resources Board approved the Wisconsin Ruffed Grouse Management Plan 2020-2030 on Dec. 11, 2019.

- [Sept. 19, 2019 Meeting Minutes \[PDF\]](#)
- [May 21, 2019 Meeting Minutes \[PDF\]](#)
- [Oct. 31, 2018 Meeting Minutes \[PDF\]](#)

RUFFED GROUSE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Ruffed Grouse & Woodcock Advisory Committee, a diverse group representing government agencies, non-governmental organizations, tribal interests and conservation groups, meet to discuss issues relating to ruffed grouse and woodcock management and young forest management in Wisconsin.

The Ruffed Grouse & Woodcock Advisory Committee reviews and makes recommendations on managing ruffed grouse and woodcock in Wisconsin. The Committee advises the Wildlife Policy Team on various topics such as hunting regulations, surveys and research priorities.

- [April 1, 2024 Meeting Minutes \[PDF\]](#)
- [April 12, 2023 Meeting Minutes \[PDF\]](#)
- [April 14, 2020 Meeting Minutes \[PDF\]](#)
- [Upcoming meeting dates](#)

HABITAT PARTNERSHIPS

The department collaborates with various partner groups to promote young forest management on both state-owned and privately-owned land. One part of these partnerships is to provide private landowners with technical and financial assistance to manage their property for young forests, which benefits ruffed grouse. See below for more information on these partnerships.

SANDHILL CRANE HUNT IS EXTREMELY UNPOPULAR

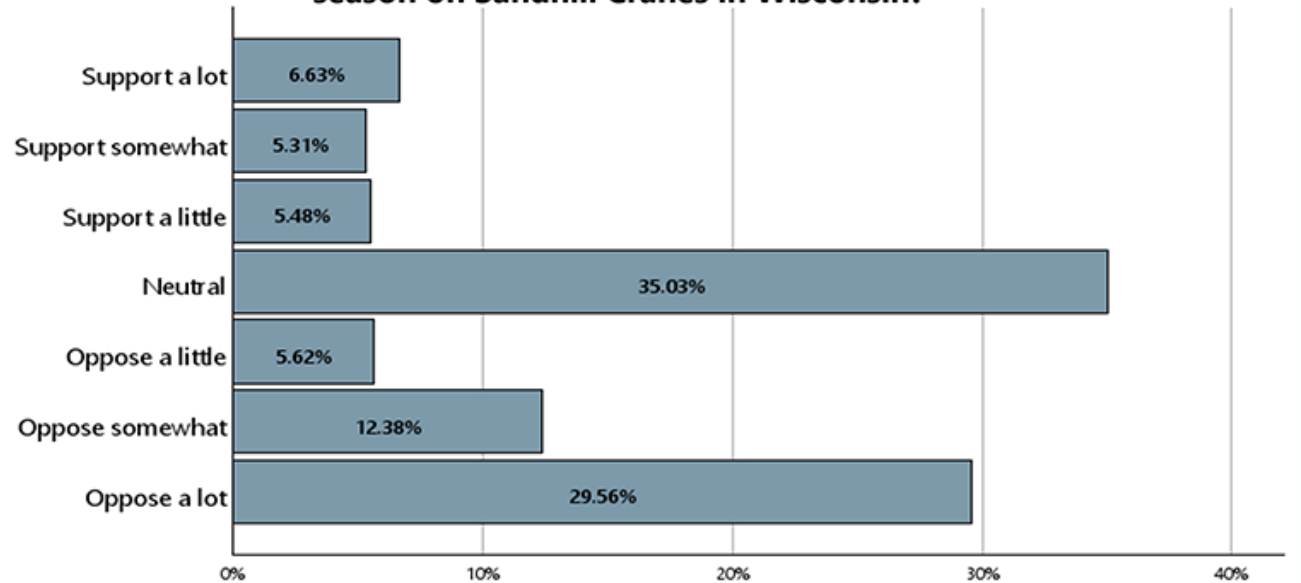
2024 by UW Survey Center

2,679 with 78% response rate

Less than 1 in 15 (6.6%)
strongly support a hunt

Only 1 in 6 Wisconsin residents
(17%) support a hunt at all

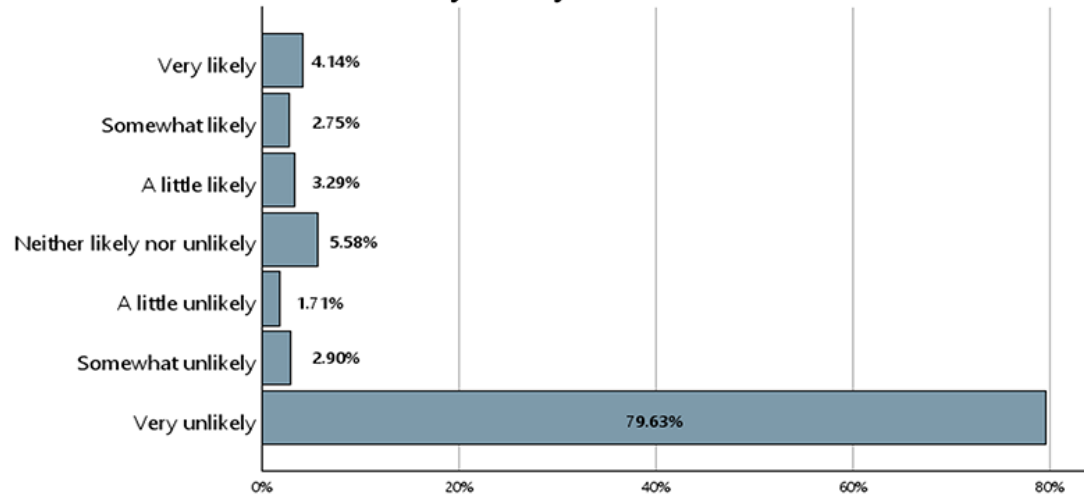
Figure 2.1: To what extent do you support or oppose a hunting season on Sandhill Cranes in Wisconsin?



SANDHILL CRANE HUNT IS EXTREMELY UNPOPULAR

Only 4% very likely to hunt and only 11% at all inclined to hunt

Figure 2.2: If a hunting season for Sandhill Cranes was permitted in Wisconsin, how likely would you be to hunt Sandhill Cranes?



Even hunters not likely to hunt cranes

25.2% hunted in the past 5 years

- Primarily deer (87.1%)
- Also turkey (35.2%) and waterfowl (21.2%)
- Likely to hunt cranes only 11%

Less than half likely to hunt cranes

Only 1 in 6 very likely to hunt cranes

HUNT DECISIONS INCLUDE SOCIAL FACTORS

The social question to be answered is whether a small number of hunters deserve the privilege of hunting Sandhill Cranes in spite of the majority opposition of both non-hunters and hunters to such a hunt.

WHY SHOULD THIS STUDY COMMITTEE CARE ABOUT BIRDERS?

- Every hunt decision includes not only science but also social considerations.
- Birders and other non-hunting recreational users can help fund the future of Wisconsin natural resources.
 - DNR Fish and Wildlife account potential \$15 million deficit

DNR FISH & WILDLIFE ACCOUNT DEFICIT

One-time \$25,000 transfer within DNR to cover Fish & Wildlife Account deficit
Need to resolve continuing deficit after that

**Structural
Deficit:
How Did
We Get
Here?**

License Fees

- Nearly 19 years since last license fee increase (2005)
- License exemptions, discounts, waivers: ~\$17 million/yr.
 - Disabled
 - Veterans
 - Age-Related
 - Spousal
 - Recruiters
 - Learn-to-Hunt Participants
 - New Buyers

Participation Rates

- Reduced hunter/angler participation rates
 - Baby boomers aging out of activities
 - Changing competition for free time
 - Proximity and access to public lands

Inflation

- 59% since 2005 fee increase
- Impacts staff compensation, fuel, feed, vehicle and other operational costs.

**Structural
Deficit:
Current
Estimate**

FISH & WILDLIFE ACCOUNT: REVENUE & SPENDING ESTIMATE

	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026
Revenue			
Base level revenue estimate	60,500,000	59,620,000	60,100,000
Forestry account one-time transfer	12,500,000	12,500,000	0
Non-rez license increases: Act 19	2,200,000	2,200,000	2,200,000
Non-rez license Archer/Crossbow increases: Act 99		400,000	400,000
Total Est. Revenue	\$75,200,000	\$74,720,000	\$62,700,000
Est. Spending Authority	\$74,603,400	\$73,612,300	\$78,212,300
Est. Structural Surplus/Deficit	\$596,600	\$1,107,700	(\$15,512,300)

From DNR presentation to joint conservation/hunting organization participants on September 12, 2024

ESTIMATED SANDHILL CRANE HUNT COSTS

Revenue from hunt unknown

- USFWS annual quota system, initial experimental hunt
- License cost not determined
- At \$10 (as proposed in 2021), \$8 available (\$2 goes to wildlife damage fund)

2021 DNR estimate - \$107,800 to set up a sandhill crane hunt

- \$10,800 to set up licensing and train customer service staff
- \$97,000 rulemaking staff time, quota and management staff time, hunter education course (bidding process)
- Additional time and cost for other Advisory Committee members

HUNT TIMING AND POTENTIAL REVENUE

Sandhill crane hunts take years before permit numbers are large enough to generate significant offsetting revenue.

Estimated harvest and number of permits sold for EP sandhill cranes

Year	KY Harv	KY Tags	TN Harv	TN Tags	AL Harv	AL Tags	Harvest	Permits
2011	50	534	No Season	No Season	No Season	No Season	50	534
2012	92	570	No Season	No Season	No Season	No Season	92	570
2013	87	570	350	1,200	No Season	No Season	437	1,770
2014	96	704	393	1,200	No Season	No Season	489	1,904
2015	75	694	161	1,200	No Season	No Season	236	1,894
2016	171	672	586	1,200	No Season	No Season	757	1,872
2017	119	660	830	2,319	No Season	No Season	949	2,979
2018	60	1,432	555	2,711	No Season	No Season	615	4,143
2019	96	1,237	746	2,958	291	1,200	1,133	5,395



ESTIMATED ANNUAL HUNT COSTS

Annual quota and management plan staff & volunteer time

WDNR staff time for habitat management, population monitoring, law enforcement and other responsibilities for a game species

Research costs

- Research funding divided among many priorities

- Adding a new game species potentially takes funding away from others

Wildlife Damage Abatement and Claim Program

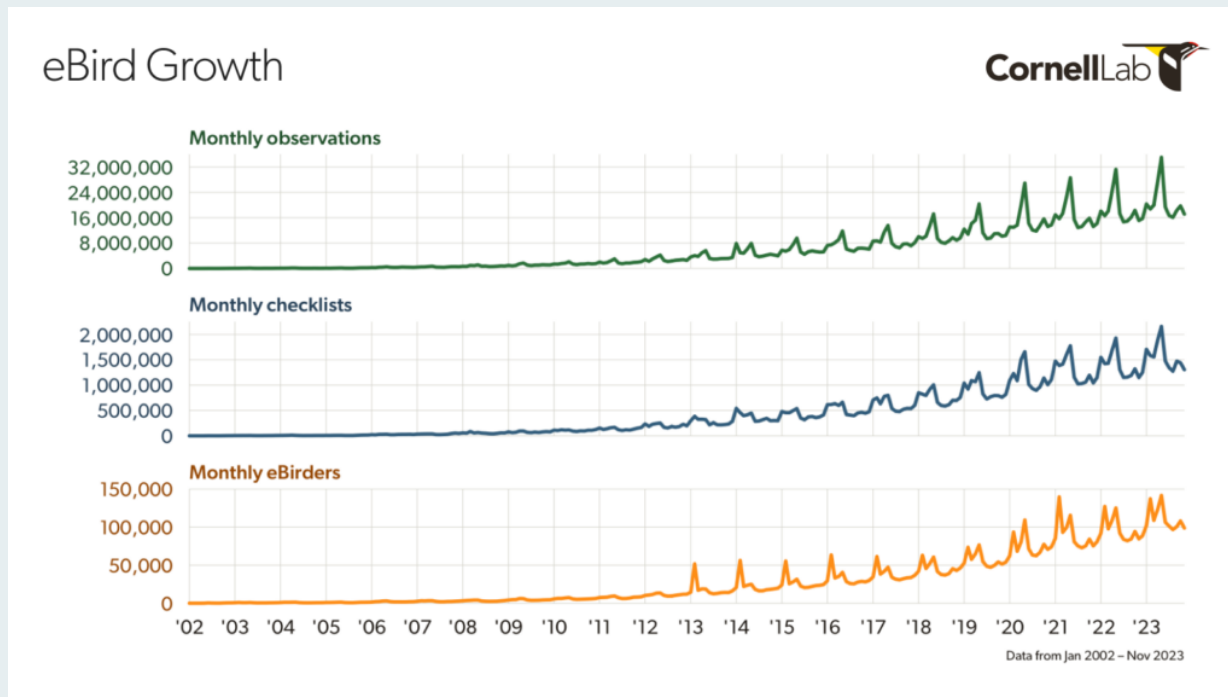
- Previous memos show including sandhill crane damage within the current program could overrun its annual revenue.

WHY SHOULD THIS STUDY COMMITTEE CARE ABOUT BIRDERS?

- Every hunt decision includes not only science but also social considerations.
- Birders and other non-hunting recreational users can help fund the future of Wisconsin natural resources.
 - DNR Fish and Wildlife account potential \$15 million deficit
 - Birding is experiencing tremendous growth while hunting declines

BIRDER GROWTH

The growth of birding generated many news articles during and after the COVID confinement. Many of those new birders have continued and contribute to science now.



The Birds Are Not on Lockdown, and More People Are Watching Them

Bird-watching has surged in popularity during the pandemic. It's easy to start, and you can do it anywhere — even from inside, and even in urban spaces.

New data show that birding mania isn't just a lockdown fad

After Covid-19, Bird Watching Skyrockets in New York City

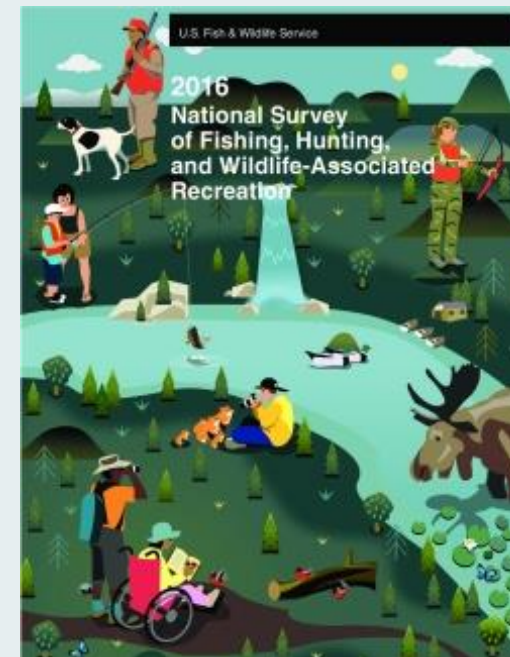
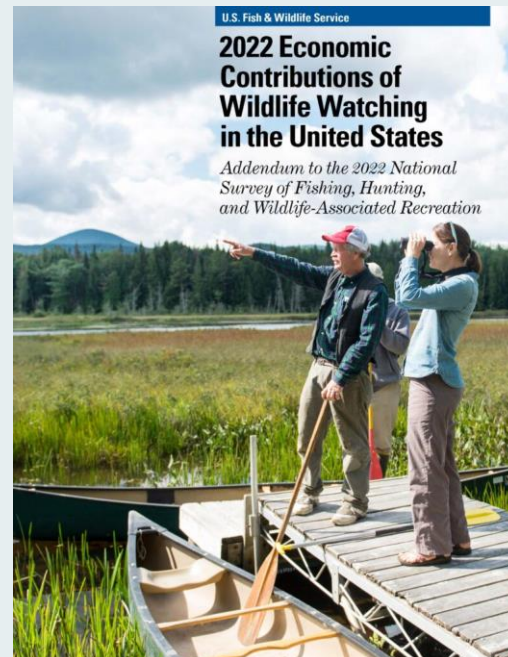
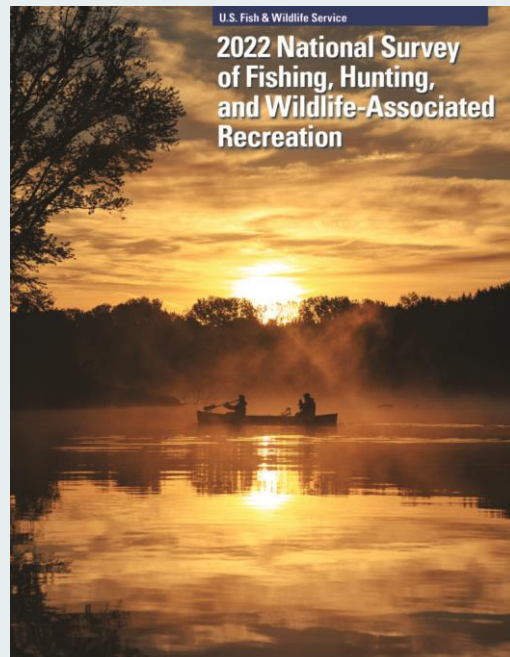
BY ELEONORA FRANCA APRIL 28, 2022

Migratory birds are returning to New York City, and there are more bird watchers than ever waiting for them

USFWS SURVEY OF RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with the U.S. Census process to get information about recreation uses and economic contributions.

Best picture we have about this type information, estimates with statistical modeling.



A Closer Look: Wildlife Watching Participation in the United States.

Wildlife watching age 16 and older in 2022

148,280,092
wildlife watchers

\$250,198,668,336
spent on wildlife watching



7 trips
on average

88 days
on average

\$39
average trip-related
expenditures per trip

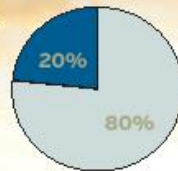
\$1,687
average annual amount
spent per wildlife watcher

\$284
average total trip-related
expenditures per wildlife watcher

96.3 million
bird watchers out of the
148.2 million wildlife watchers

Population Distribution
of Wildlife Watchers

Urban Residents
113 million
Rural Residents
34.8 million



SOURCE: The
National Survey of
Fishing, Hunting, &
Wildlife-Associated
Recreation. Scan the
QR code on the left to
read the full report.



Office of
**CONSERVATION
INVESTMENT**

Wildlife Watchers

10 times as many as hunters

6.7 times as many birders as hunters

Spend 4 times as much

Outdoors more days, 1 out 4 days

(Two not necessarily mutually exclusive)

A Closer Look: Hunting Participation in the United States.

Hunters age 16 and older in 2022

14,374,589
hunters

\$45.2 billion
spent by hunters



11 trips
on average

17 days
on average

\$75
average trip-related
expenditures per trip

\$3,146
average annual amount
spent per hunter

\$857
average total trip-related
expenditures per hunter

Species Hunted in 2022

11.5 million hunters
of Big Game

5.3 million hunters
of Small Game

2.8 million hunters
of Migratory Birds

2.3 million hunters
of Other Animals
(raccoons, feral pigs, etc.)

USFWS SURVEYS

Wildlife watching has always been more popular than hunting.

It increased over time even before 2020.

Fishing is also more popular and has generally been increasing.

Hunting increased slightly, leveled off, and then declined in 2016 to around the 1965 level.

Number of Hunting, Fishing, and Wildlife-Watching Participants: 1955-2016

The number of hunters and anglers has increased since the first Survey in 1955. Angling has more than doubled. In 2016 the number of adult hunters was 16% higher than in 1955. See Figure 1. Recently, however, from 2001 to 2016, hunting participation went down. The number of hunters 55 years old and older did increase in number over that time period, but the increase was less than the drop in the number of 16–44 year olds. Fishing participation went up from 2001 to 2016.

Wildlife watching was not part of the Survey until the 1980's, and comparable estimates begin in 1991. Over that time period, about a third of adult Americans closely observed, photographed, or fed wildlife, and that activity was at its highest in 2016.

Analysis of wildlife-watching participation and expenditure trends will be presented in a later report. The focus of the remainder of this report will be on hunting and fishing.

Figure 1. Number of Anglers, Hunters, and Wildlife Watchers: 1955-2016
(Population 16 Years of Age and Older)

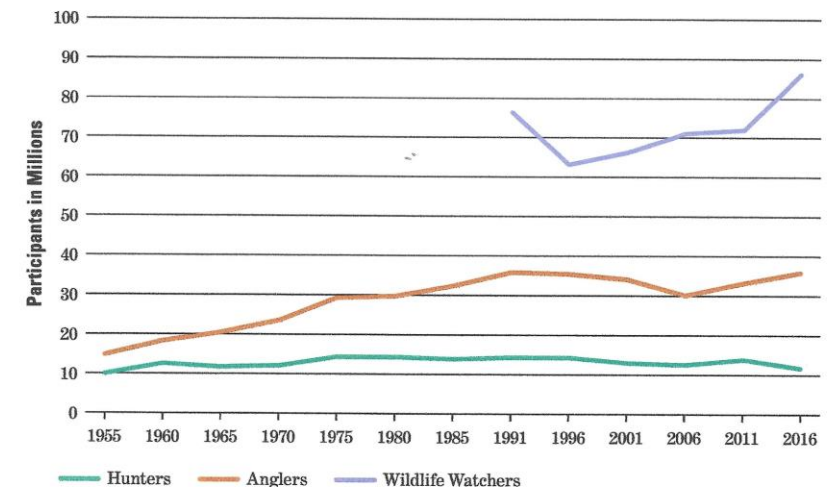


Table 1. Number of Anglers, Hunters, and Wildlife Watchers: 1955-2016
(Population 16 Years of Age and Older: Number in Millions)

	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016
Hunters	9.8	12.2	11.3	12	14.3	14	13.7	14.1	14	13	12.5	13.7	11.5
Anglers	14.8	18.0	20.1	23.5	29.3	29.7	32.2	35.6	35.2	34.1	30	33.1	35.8
Wildlife Watchers	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	76.1	62.9	66.1	71.1	71.8	86

USFWS SURVEYS

- Wildlife watchers typically about 80% of total participants
- Post-COVID, nearly 10 times as many wildlife watchers as hunters
- Migratory bird hunters usually around 20% of hunters
- Wildlife watchers spend 5.5 times as much as hunters
 - Equipment sales
 - Travel expenses

From Outdoor Life Oct 2023

U.S. HUNTING AND FISHING PARTICIPATION

Data from the National Surveys of Fishing, Hunting, & Wildlife-Associated Recreation

	2001	2006	2011	2016	2022*
Total participants (in millions)	82M	87.5M	90.1M	103M	202.6M
Total anglers	34.1M	30M	33.1M	35.8M	39.9M
Total hunters	13M	12.5M	13.7M	11.5M	14.4M
Total wildlife watchers	66.1M	71.1M	71.8M	86M	148.3M
Total expenditures (in billions)	\$108B	\$76.7B	\$145B	\$156.9B	\$394.8B
Fishing expenditures	\$35.6B	\$42B	\$41.8B	\$46.1B	\$99.4B
Hunting expenditures	\$20.6B	\$22.9B	\$34B	\$26.2B	\$45.2B
Wildlife watching expenditures	\$38.4B	\$45.7B	\$55B	\$75.9B	\$250.2B
Total days (in millions)	786M	737M	836M	643M	1000M
Days spent fishing	557M	517M	554M	459M	785M
Days spent hunting	228M	220M	282M	184M	241M
Hunting participation (in millions)	13M	12.5M	13.7M	11.5M	14.4M
Big game (deer, turkey, elk, bear)	10.9M	10.7M	11.6M	9.2M	11.5M
Small game (squirrel, rabbit, upland birds)	5.4M	4.8M	4.5M	3.5M	5.3M
Migratory birds (ducks, doves, geese)	3M	2.3M	2.6M	2.4M	2.8M
Other animals	1M	1.1M	2.2M	1.3M	2.3M

*Comparability with Previous Surveys: As a result of major changes to the questions and methodology, the results from the 2022 Survey should not be directly compared to results from any previous surveys.

WISCONSIN WILDLIFE WATCHING



2011 USFWS survey listed information by state

Wisconsin ranked #3 in wildlife watching

- Estimated at 2.15 million participants
- 48% of the state's population
- \$1.49 billion in spending
 - \$607 million in travel spending
 - \$480 million in equipment

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BIRDERS

Rare bird sightings are increasingly popular and bring revenue to these areas.

2022 study on tourism for Stellar's Sea-Eagle appearance in New England

- Over 2,000 visitors in two months
- Spending \$380,604 to \$476,626, about \$180 each

2017 study that a vagrant black-backed oriole generated \$223,000 over 67 days (over \$3,000 per day)

Photos by Derek Sallman, Kyle Arpke and Braden Meyer



BIRDER FUNDRAISING

The Great Wisconsin Birdathon has contributed over \$1 million to bird conservation since 2012



In 2024

- Nearly \$118,000 to NRF Bird Protection Fund
- Additional \$22,000 for local projects
- More than 600 birders on 86 teams

Top Fundraisers

1. Cutright's Old Coots \$23,882
2. Lake Superior eBirders \$10,456
3. River Raptors \$6,930
4. The Motmot Crew \$5,201
5. Finch Gang \$4,190

Most Species Seen

1. Good Godwits: 188 species
2. Don't Be Cross, Bill!: 182 species
3. Lake Superior eBirders: 178 species
4. River Raptors: 165 species
5. MuirLand Merlins: 161 species

SANDHILL CRANES IN NEBRASKA

Average 35,000 visit sandhill crane areas annually

2017 scientific study estimated \$14.3 million economic impact for a single year

- 46,500 estimated visitors to multiple counties
- 93% not local
- Spending averaged \$93.37 per day
- Supported 182 full-time job equivalent
- Generated \$379,000 annually in property, sales, and lodging tax revenue



DECISION TIME

Does Wisconsin want to be more like Nebraska, where crane watching brings pride and revenue, rather than just another crane hunting state?

Does it make sense for Wisconsin to satisfy the wants of a small handful of hunters over all other stakeholders in Wisconsin natural resources?



QUESTIONS?

