Where do States get their authority to manage wildlife?

In general, the States possess broad trustee and police powers over fish and wildlife within their borders, including fish and wildlife found on Federal lands within a State.
Since Roman times jurisdiction and access to wildlife have been the subject of legal debate. Questions of ownership and access to wildlife have been addressed in principles surrounding the Public Trust Doctrine. The traditional public interests protected by the public trust doctrine were navigation, commerce, and fishing. Court cases have primarily addressed these three interests. However, Geer v. Connecticut (1896) added "wild fowling" (wildlife) within a state's trustee relationship. Although partially reversed in Hughes v. Oklahoma (1979), state statutes and state courts continue to assert state ownership of wildlife.

The Public Trust Doctrine has also been recognized as a fundamental cornerstone of what has come to be known as the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. The North American model has two basic principles: that our fish and wildlife belong to all North American citizens, and are to be managed in such a way that their populations will be sustained forever and to further advocate for the doctrine of primacy of state management authority for resident wildlife. The Doctrine establishes a trustee relationship of government to hold and manage natural resources for the benefit of both the resource and the public. This Public Trust Doctrine has been codified in many state statutes and constitutions.

The federal government has the constitutional ability to preempt state fish and wildlife management on State or Federal lands through the Commerce Clause, the Treaty Clause, and the Property Clause of the United States Constitution or when Congress specifically exempts federal lands from state law, such as it has done with the National Park Service lands. The federal law permits the National Park Service to restrict or ban fishing, hunting, or trapping within national parks. Other examples of Congress speaking on the subject of state fish and wildlife management on federal land are on National Wildlife Refuges Land. In this case, the Fish and Wildlife Service may allow sport hunting and fishing on the refuges in any manner consistent with state law. The rule is that Fish and Wildlife Service regulations must follow state law if the state law is consistent with federal management objectives and the primary purpose for which the refuge was established. U. S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands are governed by the multiple-use philosophy. As a general principle, public uses should be consistent with state law. Both federal agencies have ambiguous closure authority to ban hunting or fishing for public safety or administrative reasons. (43 CFR 24)