

# MULTISTATE CONSERVATION GRANT PROGRAM

## Annual Report 2023



Funding Critical  
Conservation Needs

# ABOUT THE MULTISTATE CONSERVATION GRANT PROGRAM



For over two decades, the Multistate Conservation Grant Program (MSCGP) has been firmly dedicated to preserving our nation's fish and wildlife populations and conserving natural resources and crucial habitats. The MSCGP was established through the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs Improvement Act of 2000 (Improvement Act), which amended the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act and the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act.

Each year, the MSCGP directs up to \$6 million—\$3 million from Sport Fish Restoration (SFR) and \$3 million from Wildlife Restoration (WR) funds—to support projects directly benefiting fish and wildlife conservation and state fish and wildlife agencies as well as projects that provide a foundation for future management and conservation. Grants focus on research, education, management leadership, industry relations, and on-the-ground management of fish and wildlife and their habitats.

On December 20, 2019, Modernizing the Pittman Robertson Fund for Tomorrow's Needs Act was signed into law which further amended the Wildlife Restoration Act to create a new Hunter Recruitment and Recreational Shooter Recruitment (R3) Multistate Conservation Grant Program.

It authorized the Secretary of the Interior to make up to \$5 million available annually, specifically for R3 grants that promote a national hunting and shooting sports recruitment program, including related communications and outreach activities.

The program is co-administered by the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The Association solicits grant proposals from state agencies, regional associations, and non-governmental agencies and selects its "priority list" of recommendations at AFWA's Annual Meeting. Those priorities are forwarded to the USFWS, which reviews, processes and approves grant awards.

The Association updates the information on How to Apply for Multistate Conservation Grant Program every year (End of March-Beginning of April). This information can be found on the AFWA website [www.fishwildlife.org](http://www.fishwildlife.org), or by scanning the QR code.



# THE MULTISTATE CONSERVATION GRANT PROGRAM: ANNUAL CYCLE



## 2023 MSCGP Strategic Priorities

### 1. Conservation & Science

- A. Large Landscape Systems & Species
- B. Climate
- C. Wildlife Disease Including Connections with Human Health ("One Health")
- D. Data
- E. Human Dimensions & Social Science
- F. Invasive Species

### 2. Relevancy & Inclusion & Participation

- A. Enhancing Conservation Through Broader Engagement
- B. Communication Programs that Further Regional & National Conservation Efforts
- C. Implementing and/or Expanding Internal and External Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Efforts

### 3. Coordination, Capacity Building & Fish and Wildlife Agencies Support

- A. Leadership Development
- B. Conservation Education
- C. Coordination of International, National & Regional Conservation Efforts & Policies
- D. Integration of Law Enforcement

### 4. Trust Fund Stewardship

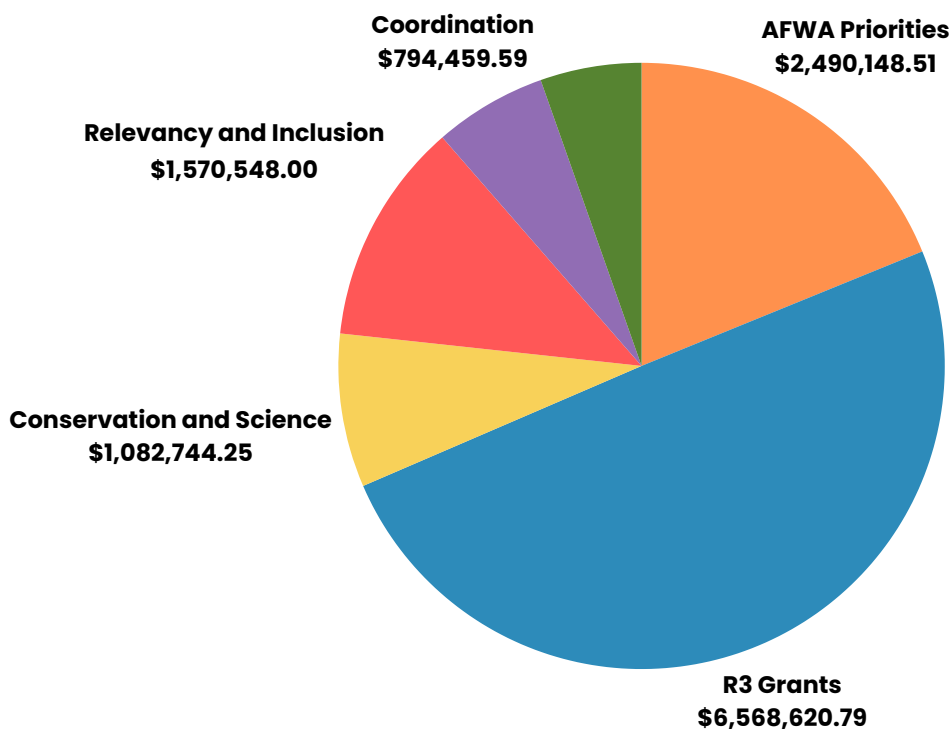
- A. Research that Informs & Supports Conservation Efforts
- B. Trust Fund Education & Promotion of North American Model of Conservation ("Legal Strategy")
- C. Conservation Law Education

### 5. AFWA Priorities Identified in AFWA Funding Principles (submitted by ExCom)

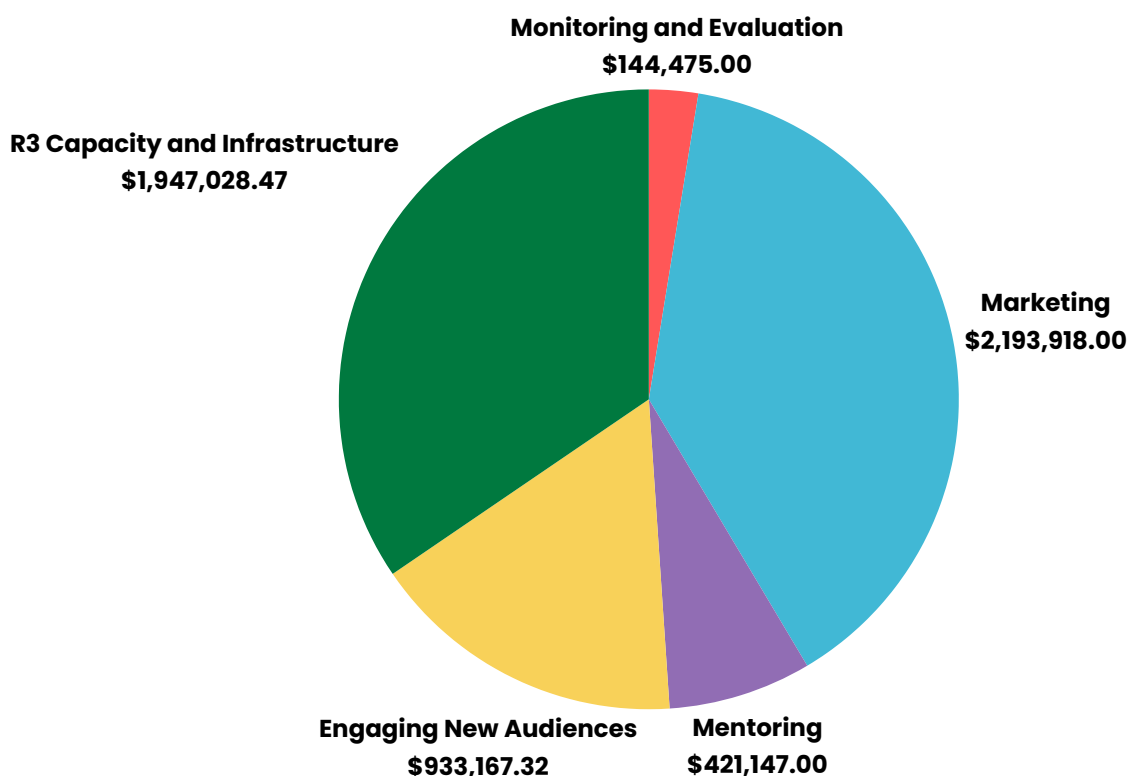
- A. Management Assistance Team
- B. Management of MSCGP Program
- C. CITES and International Conservation Programs and Their Impact of State Agencies
- D. Coordination of Conservation on National Scale

The Association established priority areas for the 2023 Multistate Conservation Grant Program and received 103 initial proposals. 63 proposals were selected for further consideration and invited to submit full grant proposals. In 2023, 55 projects (in addition to 3 obligated in the previous year) were awarded \$13,220,376.

## 2023 Multistate Conservation Grant Program



## Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation (R3) Priorities





# MULTISTATE CONSERVATION GRANT DASHBOARD

Last year, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies launched the Multistate Conservation Grant Program (MSCGP) Dashboard, marking a significant milestone in its two-decade history since its establishment in 2000.

This platform provides a comprehensive overview of awarded MSCGP grants from the program's inception to the present year. Featuring over 450 previous grants, the dashboard is a great tool for applicants, offering a unique opportunity to explore the wealth of projects and initiatives that have received funding over the years.

The dashboard helps prospective applicants by allowing them to examine the historical landscape of conservation efforts and inspires them to get ideas and strategies from previously successful projects. The dashboard safeguards against duplications, empowering applicants to ensure their proposed activities build upon existing achievements rather than duplicating efforts.

As a pioneering initiative, it stands as a testament to the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' dedication to enhancing transparency, efficiency, and the overall impact of the Multistate Conservation Grant Program.



# EXAMPLES OF 2023 AWARDED GRANTS

## 1

### **IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE WILDLIFE VIEWER SURVEY: Enhancing Relevancy and Engaging Support from a Broader Constituency**

*Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University*

Wildlife viewers compose 57% of the American public, making them a critical constituency for wildlife agencies aiming to broaden engagement in conservation and increase their relevancy. With the support of a 2021 Multistate Conservation Grant, the Dayer Human Dimensions Lab at Virginia Tech, in collaboration with the AFWA Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Working Group, conducted a National and Regional Wildlife Survey [Report available: <http://hdl.handle.net/10919/111539>]. The report concluded with five key recommendations, co-developed with agency practitioners, for improving management for wildlife viewing and increasing agency relevance:

1. Develop programs for and engage with wildlife viewers;
2. Support the wildlife viewing experiences of underserved groups;
3. Develop opportunities for viewers to financially support agencies;
4. Support agencies in implementing results; and
5. Conduct future research.

In 2023, with the support of a second Multistate Conservation Grant, the Dayer Lab began facilitating a Community of Practice to address recommendation #4, supporting agencies in implementing results. A Community of Practice is a group of people who interact with each other on an ongoing basis to share knowledge, resources, experiences, and expertise about a common interest. Through the Community of Practice, state fish and wildlife agencies have developed and implemented their own wildlife viewing plans, based on recommendations from the survey for their region or state. Plans include developing information and materials about wildlife viewing, especially for less experienced viewers (Colorado, Nevada, North Carolina, South Carolina), improving and evaluating programs for wildlife viewing (Nebraska, Yukon), developing mechanisms for wildlife viewers to contribute financially to agencies (Wisconsin), and improving websites for wildlife viewing (Florida).

To date, the Community of Practice has met eight times, including a one-day training workshop in Fort Collins, Colorado. At this workshop, participants provided feedback on each other's plans and developed line of logic models to assist in implementation and evaluation of wildlife viewing plans. Fourteen state agencies have developed wildlife viewing project plans, with seven currently in the pilot and implementation phase. Highlights from this project will be shared in February 2024 at the Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Working Group Academy in Duck, North Carolina. Virginia Tech and the state agencies are also developing a wildlife viewing toolkit website with materials for other states to use as templates in developing and implementing their own wildlife viewing projects. The website aims to inspire other state agencies and wildlife program practitioners to better serve wildlife viewers in pursuing their passion, connecting with agencies, and ultimately being inspired to conserve our wildlife resources.



# EXAMPLES OF 2023 AWARDED GRANTS

## 2 UNDERSTANDING THE MANAGEMENT, FUNDING, AND STAFFING OF HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICTS BY STATE FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

*Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies*

Wildlife conflict takes many forms, and it is viewed differently by people. For some, conflict is a raccoon in the basement; for others, it's ungulates in a stored forage intended for livestock, while others view conflict as a mountain lion sighting in an urban area. While state fish and wildlife agencies have an obligation to manage all species for the public benefit, how they address conflicts varies from state to state. Given that agency funding is largely borne on the back(s) of license buyers, some conflict management is essentially an 'unfunded mandate.' Indeed, the WAFWA human-wildlife conflict committee was formed partly to address these messy natural resources issues.

Additionally, how agencies staff and fund conflict issues varies tremendously. To answer some of these questions, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies is working with Southwick Associates and the Wildlife Management Institute to survey state fish and wildlife agency conflict managers on this topic.

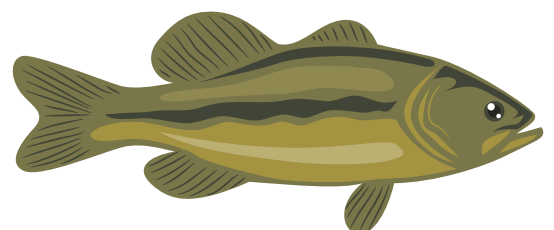
The survey addresses how agency staff define wildlife conflict, who works in those programs, how much money is spent, and the source of those funds. A final report analyzing the current status of human-wildlife conflict authorities and obligations will be prepared for distribution to all 50 state wildlife agencies. This report will also contain recommendations based on current data to improve the ability of states to manage these conflicts effectively. Agencies will benefit from this information because the array of methods to address wildlife conflict will be consolidated into one source; thus, they can draw on what works (or doesn't work) in other states to tailor their programs.

---

## 3 CREATING A DIGITAL REPOSITORY OF CALCIFIED STRUCTURES FROM KNOWN-AGE FISHES

*American Fisheries Society*

Fish age estimation is a fundamental component for fisheries management, but validation of the accuracy of age estimates is challenging, time-consuming, and often not feasible. Furthermore, known-age reference collections are limited and not publicly available, limiting the ability to train new fisheries professionals. Collectively, this gap in knowledge and opportunity may continue to foster poor age estimation practices and lead to widespread mismanagement for both exploited fisheries and native species in need of conservation.

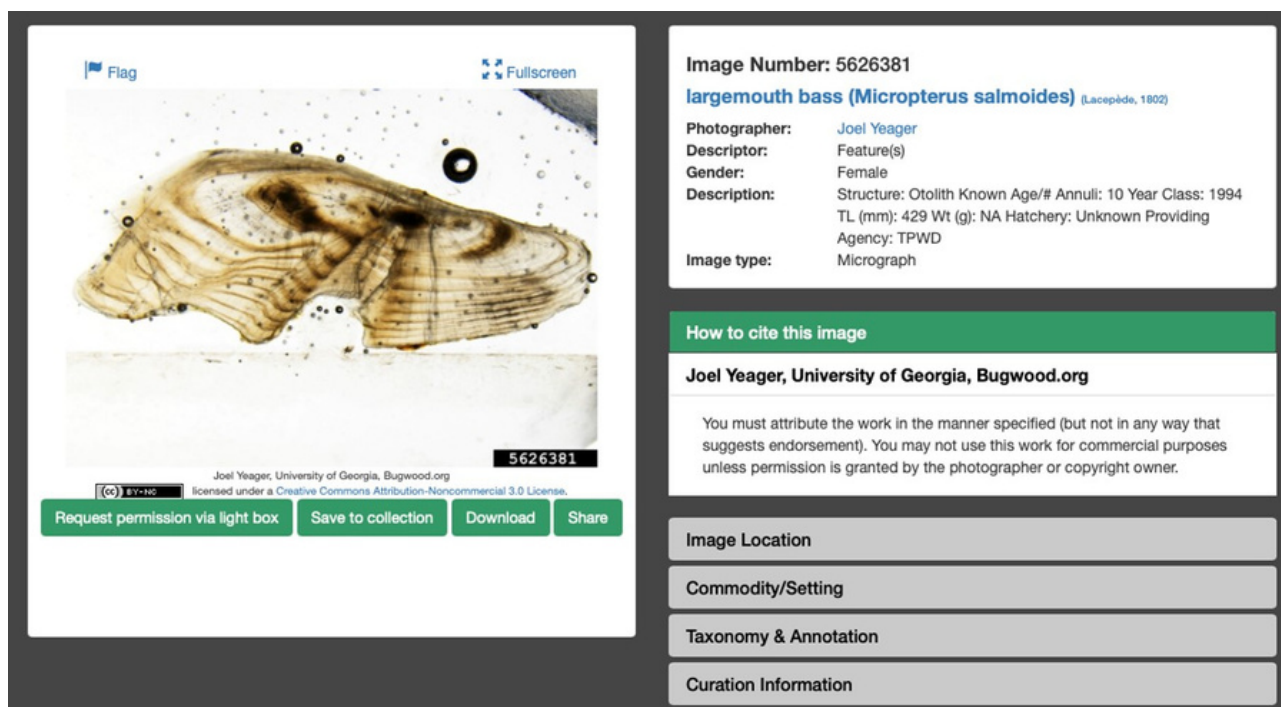


# EXAMPLES OF 2023 AWARDED GRANTS

The goal of our project was to develop a user-friendly, open-source operating system to share and archive digital imagery of known-age fish structures. A previous survey published by our team indicated high demand and widespread support for the creation of an online repository. Interested parties indicated that known-age fish structures were available from over 40 North American freshwater species. With the support of the 2023 Multistate Conservation Grant Program, we began collecting these structures for imaging and subsequent development of a website.

In the summer of 2023, we began processing a subset of known-age structures. Metadata and digital imagery of these initial structures were used to construct a template for our database and website. We are continuing to build features and functionality into the website for a user-friendly experience where visitors can search for and view known-age structures sorted by a variety of data fields such as species, location, and age. In the upcoming year, we will continue to expand our collection of known-age structures and will be busy processing and digitizing these structures as they become available. Our goal is to have a functioning website in 2024 that will continually be updated with new material and functionality.

By the end of this project, users will have access to an online repository for known age fish structures that will provide opportunities for training and quality assurance in age estimation. We envision this product to be a valuable resource for both aspiring and experienced fisheries biologists alike.



The screenshot displays a digital image viewer interface. On the left, a large micrograph of a fish otolith is shown, with a 'Flag' icon and a 'Fullscreen' icon in the top right corner. Below the image, the number '5626381' is displayed. At the bottom of the image area, there is a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 License logo and the text 'Joel Yeager, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org'. Below the license information, there are four buttons: 'Request permission via light box', 'Save to collection', 'Download', and 'Share'. On the right side of the interface, there is a metadata panel with the following information:

- Image Number:** 5626381
- Species:** largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*) (Lacepède, 1802)
- Photographer:** Joel Yeager
- Descriptor:** Feature(s)
- Gender:** Female
- Description:** Structure: Otolith Known Age/# Annull: 10 Year Class: 1994  
TL (mm): 429 Wt (g): NA Hatchery: Unknown Providing  
Agency: TPWD
- Image type:** Micrograph

Below the metadata panel, there is a section titled 'How to cite this image' with a green background. The citation information is: 'Joel Yeager, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org'. Below this, there is a disclaimer: 'You must attribute the work in the manner specified (but not in any way that suggests endorsement). You may not use this work for commercial purposes unless permission is granted by the photographer or copyright owner.' At the bottom of the interface, there are four tabs: 'Image Location', 'Commodity/Setting', 'Taxonomy & Annotation', and 'Curation Information'.



# EXAMPLES OF 2023 AWARDED GRANTS

## 4 ARCHERY IS FOR EVERYONE! SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN.

*USA Archery*

USA Archery received a multistate conservation grant to create and execute Archery for Everyone! social media campaign with Marvel Entertainment, LLC in 2023. This grant aims to collaborate with partners to execute a nationwide social media campaign to generate awareness, interest, and excitement for archery and to convert that interest into on-the-ground try-archery event attendance, recruitment, and retention.

In partnership with Marvel Entertainment, USA Archery created an influencer video featuring TikTok influencer Female Peter Parker and 3-time Olympian Brady Ellison. Once Marvel posted the video, USA Archery also posted an organic post with the video, which was shared with all partners to share on their social media platforms, further driving awareness of Archery is for Everyone! Following the video was a Call to Action to “Find a Try Archery Event Near You” to Try Archery AND collect a FREE Marvel Steps of Shooting Poster between May 13th and September 15th, 2023. Each social media post provided a link to the online Try Archery locator.

More than 250 Try Archery events were registered in 38 states by 80 unique event hosts, including USA Archery clubs and other national archery organizations, clubs, archery retailers, state fish and wildlife agencies, L.L. Bean, and more! The campaign’s overall performance across all platforms yielded substantial digital traction, amassing 2.8 million impressions and 2.6 million views across various social media platforms. An estimated 72,000 total social engagements evidenced significant audience interaction.



## 5 RECRUITING FEMALES AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE YOUTH PARTICIPANTS INTO SHOOTING SPORTS

*Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies*

Youth shooting sports are some of the fastest-growing youth sports in the country. However, the participation in these activities by females and students of color does not truly reflect the general population. Archery tends to reflect populations better than firearm-related activities. Though data on minority participation is not readily available, by careful observation it is evident that minorities are repeatedly underrepresented in many of the shooting sports programs. Understanding the motivations and barriers regarding shooting sports participation across a diverse group of students will enable us to develop strategies to increase participation in the future.

# EXAMPLES OF 2023 AWARDED GRANTS



This is a two-phase project, with the first phase (2023) focusing on data collection, research, and analysis of coaches, youth participants, and nonparticipants. Phase two (2024) of the project will utilize information from the initial phase to focus on developing specific marketing and communication tools and strategies, coaching education and tools, and participant/coach/mentor recruitment and retention strategies.

We have completed four focus groups of Midwestern Shooting Sports Coaches. Archery (largely NASP) seems to be more diverse than firearm shooting sports, but both are becoming more diverse in schools with diverse populations. We also discovered a different kind of diversity that we had never considered. Both activities appeal to kids not typically interested in or accepted by traditional school sports. These children are differently abled, not good at, or interested in traditional athletic competitions. They thrive in the individual nature of shooting. They can compete with themselves by achieving new goals from week to week but also compete on equal footing with the “jocks” due to the more level playing field shooting offers. The coaches did not believe that we would have too much difficulty setting up the student phase of the project.

The coach focus groups took us into the spring, and school being out for the summer made it very difficult to contact the schools. We are now locating and negotiating with the schools to set up the next phase of the research. We aim to find 3 or 4 public high schools with a firearm and archery team that is considered a varsity sport (rather than a club). Once these schools are located, our goal is to have a separate focus group with the members of the firearm and archery shooting sports participants regarding why they joined the team and what they believe are the obstacles keeping other children from participating. After that, we will conduct one-on-one interviews with children who don't participate in either activity. With these children, we will discuss four teams they could have joined at their school: a traditional team sport, a traditional individual sport, firearm shooting sports, and archery. The goal will be to explore why they do or don't participate in traditional sports and compare that to why they don't participate in shooting sports. We hope to make arrangements with the schools by the end of the calendar year and begin research in the schools after the first of the year.



This Project was funded by a Multistate Conservation Grant [F23AP00459](#), a program funded from the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, and jointly managed by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.