

**Game and Fish Department
Budget No. 720
House Bill No. 1017**

	FTE Positions	General Fund	Other Funds	Total
2025-27 legislative appropriation	170.00	\$0	\$114,864,690	\$114,864,690
2023-25 legislative appropriation	170.00 ¹	0	108,151,604 ¹	108,151,604 ¹
2025-27 appropriation increase (decrease) to 2023-25 appropriation	0.00	\$0	\$6,713,086	\$6,713,086

¹In Section 4 of Senate Bill No. 2017 (2023), the Legislative Assembly appropriated \$27.15 million of other funds and authorized 4 FTE positions to implement the federal Recovering America's Wildlife Act during the 2023-25 biennium, contingent upon enactment of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act and after corresponding federal funds have been made available to the state. Congress did not enact the Act, resulting in the contingent funding and FTE positions not being available to the department.

Item Description

Full-time equivalent changes - The Legislative Assembly authorized 170 FTE positions for the Game and Fish Department for the 2025-27 biennium, the same as provided for the 2023-25 biennium.

New and vacant FTE pool - The Legislative Assembly transferred \$1,862,509 for estimated savings from vacant FTE positions from the salaries and wages line item to the new and vacant FTE pool line item.

One-time funding - The Legislative Assembly appropriated \$7.5 million of one-time funding to the Game and Fish Department for the 2025-27 biennium, as follows:

	Federal Fund	Special Funds	Total
Information technology (IT) projects		\$380,000	\$380,000
Baukol-Noonan Dam repairs		150,000	150,000
Equipment	\$91,850	128,350	220,200
Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery - Pond liner replacements	1,125,000	375,000	1,500,000
Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery - High-pressure pump replacements	225,000	75,000	300,000
Wildlife habitat and access on private lands ¹	4,100,000	900,000	5,000,000
Total	\$5,541,850	\$2,008,350	\$7,550,200

¹Funding appropriated for wildlife habitat and access on private lands includes funding for the Habitat Improvement Program (\$1 million), private land open to sportsmen (PLOTS) payments (\$2.3 million), and the Rangeland Legacy Program (\$1.7 million).

Status/Result

The department had between 1 and 4 FTE positions vacant from July 2025 through January 2026.

Through January 2026, the department had estimated vacant FTE position savings of \$143,836. The agency used \$91,373 for accrued leave payouts, extra salary increases, extra temporary salary funding, and extra overtime funding.

The following is a summary of the status of the department's one-time funding items:

IT projects	The department has allocated \$100,000 for the Game and Fish Department mobile application and \$30,000 for a video asset management system. The department anticipates both projects will be completed by the end of 2026. The remaining \$250,000 was intended for a customer relationship management solution system to be completed in partnership with the Information Technology Department; however, due to program and funding changes for the Information Technology Department's business gateway project, the Game and Fish Department is evaluating other IT project needs for the 2025-27 biennium.
Baukol-Noonan Dam repairs	The repairs were completed in the summer of 2025 for approximately \$140,000.
Equipment	Through March 2026, the department has spent \$12,000 on the purchase of all-terrain vehicles and anticipates spending the remaining appropriation on law enforcement radios, an enforcement boat and trailer, a tractor, and firearms by the end of the 2025-27 biennium.

Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery - Pond liner replacements	The department replaced the pond liners for \$1,367,122 in August 2025. There are 40 pond liners at the Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery. The department anticipates continuing to request funding to replace at least 2 pond liners each biennium. Each pond liner has an estimated use life of 20 to 30 years.
Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery - High-pressure pump replacements	Through April 2026, the department spent \$31,690 for the repair of high-pressure pumps. The department is evaluating other pumps at the Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery to determine if the other pumps need to be repaired or replaced. The department intends to spend the entire appropriation to repair or replace as many pumps as possible during the 2025-27 biennium and anticipates requesting funding during the 2027 legislative session for additional repairs and replacements.
Wildlife habitat and access to private lands	Through March 2026, the department has spent \$2 million for PLOTS payments and has not spent funding on the Habitat Improvement Program or the Rangeland Legacy Program. The department anticipates spending the \$1 million for the Habitat Improvement Program by the end of the 2025-27 biennium. See the Midterm conservation agreement section below for more information on the Rangeland Legacy Program.

Aquatic Nuisance Species Program - The Legislative Assembly, in Senate Bill No. 2293 (2019), established a surcharge on fishing and hunting licenses and increased the fee on motorboat licenses to provide funding for an Aquatic Nuisance Species Program Fund. The Legislative Assembly appropriated \$2,885,507 from the Aquatic Nuisance Species Program Fund and federal funds to the Game and Fish Department, for the purpose of administering aquatic nuisance species education, inspection, and monitoring programs for the 2025-27 biennium.

Midterm conservation agreements - In Section 5 of House Bill No. 1017, the Legislative Assembly identified \$2,777,778 from other funds in the land habitat and deer depredation line item is for National Fish and Wildlife Foundation midterm conservation agreements with private landowners and that the department is required to limit the term of these agreements to a maximum of 30 years. The department is required to provide buyback provisions after the 15th, 20th, and 25th years of the agreement if the property owner desires to withdraw all or a portion of acreage from the lease.

Line item transfers - In Section 6 of House Bill No. 1017, the Legislative Assembly authorized the Game and Fish Department to request the transfer of up to \$2 million between the operating expenses, capital assets, and grants - game and fish line items during the 2025-27 biennium.

Through March 2026, the department has received \$954,775 for the Aquatic Nuisance Species Program, including \$710,063 collected from a surcharge on fishing and hunting licenses and fees on motorboat licenses, \$240,439 from federal funds, and \$4,273 from interest income. Through March 2026, the department has spent \$722,859 for aquatic nuisance species education, inspection, and monitoring programs under North Dakota Century Code Chapter 20.1-17.

The department was awarded \$2.5 million of federal funds from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for the Midterm Conservation Agreements Program, also known as the Rangeland Legacy Program, during the 2023-25 biennium. The grant award was authorized through June 2028.

Through March 2026, the department has not been awarded any federal funding for the program during the 2025-27 biennium. It is unknown if funding will become available during the biennium. The department has 19 agreements in place with landowners totaling 13,796 acres.

Through March 2026, the department has not requested any line item transfers but anticipates funding may need to be transferred from the grants line item to the capital assets line item. The potential transfer amount is not yet known.

PLOTS Program - The Legislative Assembly appropriated \$21.7 million for land habitat and deer depredation funding for the 2025-27 biennium, of which \$20 million is estimated to be used for landowner payments.

The following table summarizes the total annual PLOTS Program acreage available for public access:

Year	Acres
2003	374,245
2004	745,979
2005	853,954
2006	978,735
2007	1,027,088
2008	1,041,611
2009	1,010,384
2010	1,007,999
2011	969,834
2012	838,548
2013	759,383
2014	734,700
2015	716,535
2016	726,580
2017	737,640
2018	764,688
2019	790,901
2020	800,640
2021	799,324
2022	796,908
2023	799,998
2024	835,784
2025	880,633

Funding for Parks and Recreation Department - In Section 5 of House Bill No. 1019 (2025), Legislative Assembly appropriated \$122,000 from the Game and Fish Department Fund for a grant to the Parks and Recreation Department for state park boat ramp maintenance and improvements.

Hunting fees and waterfowl stamps - In House Bill No. 1470 (2025), the Legislative Assembly increased hunting, fishing, and gun dog activity fees.

In Senate Bill No. 2216 (2025), the Legislative Assembly created a Waterfowl Habitat Improvement Fund and required a \$5 waterfowl habitat restoration stamp be purchased in addition to the purchase of a resident small game license.

These funds are granted to the Parks and Recreation Department on a reimbursement basis. Through March 2026, the Game and Fish Department has reimbursed the Parks and Recreation Department \$45,351 for state park boat ramp maintenance and improvements.

From August 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026, the department collected approximately \$2 million from fees increased in House Bill No. 1470 (2025). The department's annual license year begins on April 1 and ends on March 31. The department anticipates increased fee revenue collections for the remainder of the biennium now that the new fee amounts are effective for an entire license year.

From August 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026, the department collected \$294,223 for the waterfowl habitat restoration stamp requirement established in Senate Bill No. 2216 and anticipates increased fee revenue collections for the remainder of the biennium now that the new stamp requirement is effective for an entire license year.