



Overview

State wildlife agencies have broad responsibilities to conserve wildlife on behalf of all people. Hunting and fishing license sales provide critical funding to state wildlife agencies to conserve hundreds of species, yet there are thousands of species within states and many are in greater need of conservation efforts. In addition to more broad-based public funding, many wildlife agencies need greater authority to conserve all state biodiversity and stay accountable to diverse public values and interests.

Policy Options

Define Wildlife Broadly: Expand the definition of wildlife to include all members of the animal kingdom ([Maine](#)), insects such as pollinators ([Minnesota](#)), and plants ([California](#)).

- **Colorado [HB 1117 \(2024\)](#):** Adds rare plants, invertebrates.
- **Maryland [HB 0345 \(2024\)](#):** Modifies the definition of wildlife to include every living non-human creature endowed with sensation and power of voluntary motion.

Manage for Diverse Recreational Activities: Broadly define activities managed by agency to make decisions on behalf of “all user groups” ([Oregon](#)) or requiring preservation for all “aesthetic, scientific, educational, recreational, and economic benefits.” ([Nevada](#))

- **Minnesota [S.F. 2570 \(Introduced 2023\)](#):** Expands walk-in access program to support access “for bird-watching, nature photography, and similar compatible uses.”

Adhere to [Public Trust Doctrine \(PTD\)](#): PTD declares the government has a duty to protect wildlife for benefit of all. States can amend code by stating wildlife is “held in trust” and “shall not be reduced to private ownership.” ([Vermont](#))

- **New Mexico [H.B. 486 \(Introduced 2023\)](#):** Declares state policy is to provide conservation and management of wildlife as public trust resource with intrinsic, ecological value, and for the benefit, use, food supply and nonconsumptive enjoyment of all.

KEY POINTS

- One-third of wildlife species are at risk for extinction, yet wildlife agencies typically only spend around 10% of their budget on conserving species that are not hunted or fished. ([NWE](#))
- 40% of insects are declining globally, threatening food chains, soil health, water quality, and the pollination critical for upholding human food systems, yet most state wildlife agencies do not have adequate authority to manage insects. ([Science Direct](#))
- Wildlife agencies allocate at least 60% of their funding to managing hunting and fishing, yet participation in hunting and fishing has declined to around 3-5% and 12-15% of the public, respectively. Meanwhile, participation in other forms of outdoor recreation that involve wildlife (e.g., wildlife watching, hiking, paddling, etc.) are skyrocketing. ([FWS](#) and [Outdoor Industry](#))

Other Resources

- **National Wildlife Federation:** [Toolkit on Strengthening State wildlife Agencies](#)
- **Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies:** [Fish and Wildlife Agency Relevancy Roadmap](#)
- **New York Times:** [Are Butterflies Wildlife? Depends Where You Live](#)
- **NCEL:** [State Wildlife Agency Funding](#)
- **NCEL:** [State Wildlife Commission Appointments and Governance](#)

