

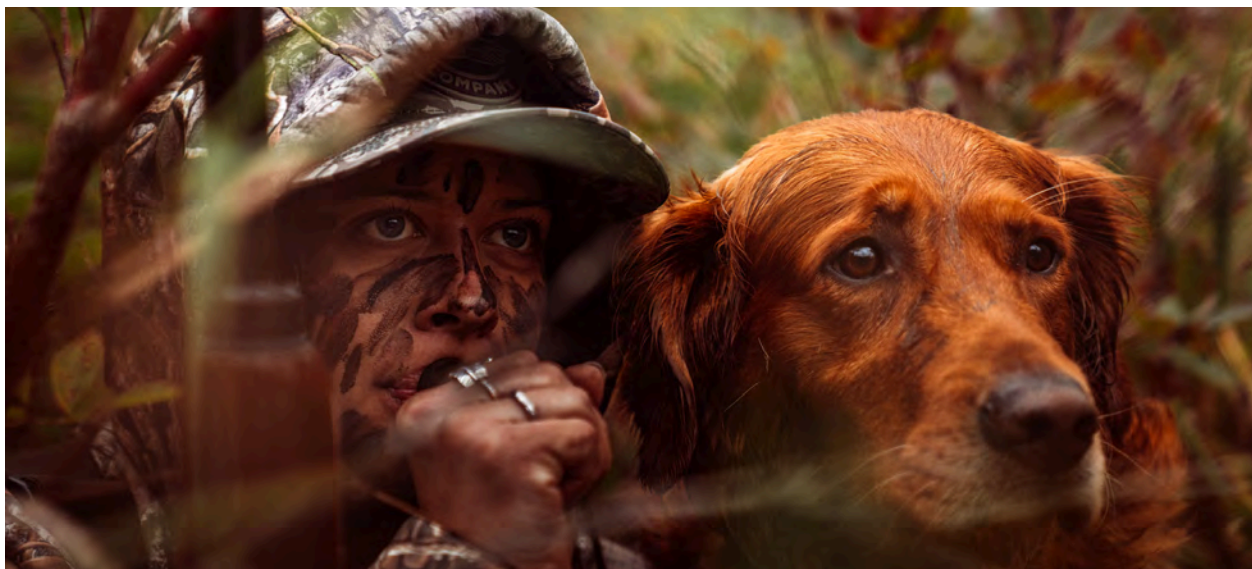
MULTISTATE CONSERVATION GRANT PROGRAM

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

**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,

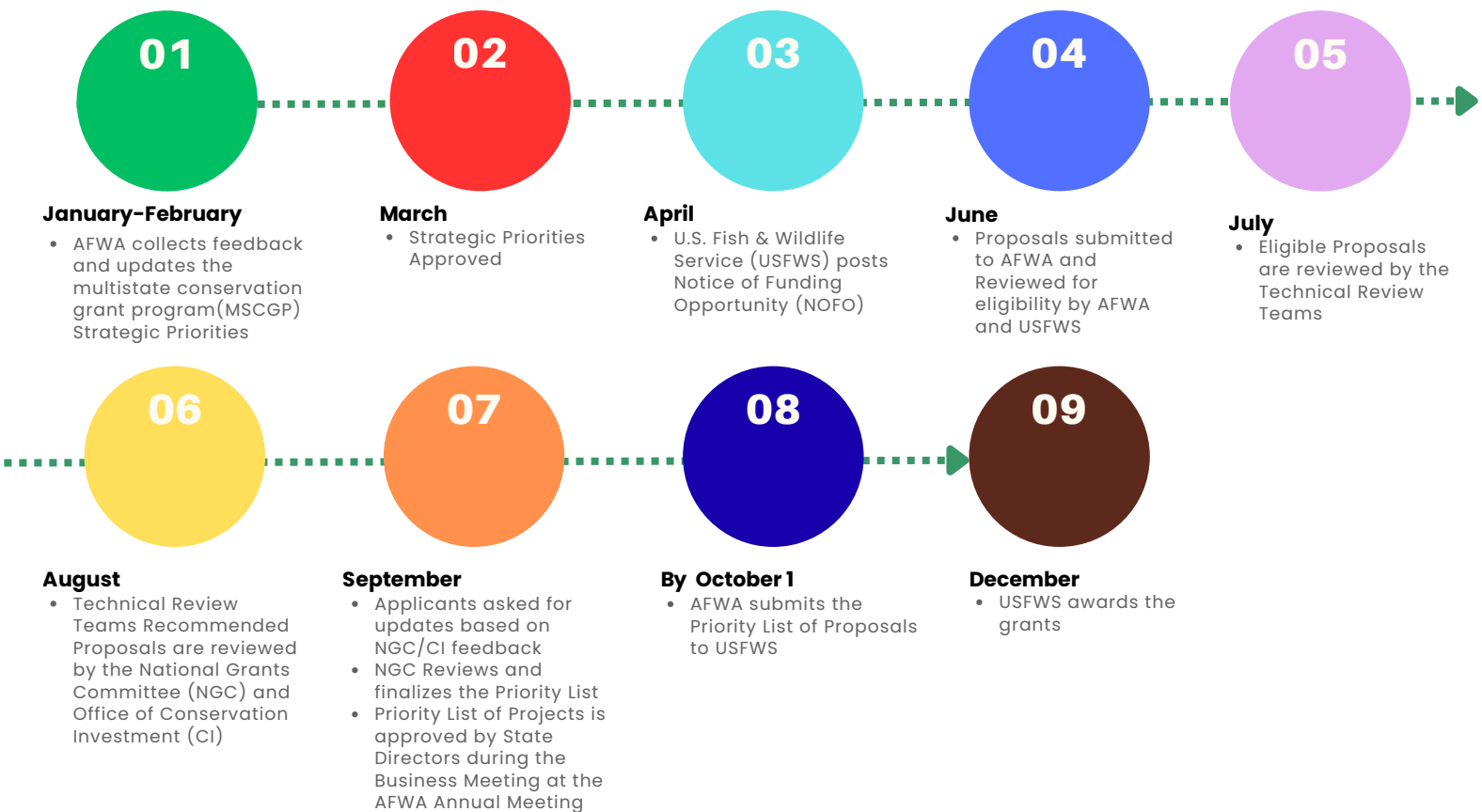
specifically for R3 grants that promote a national hunting and shooting sports recruitment program, including related communications and outreach activities.

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. 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, or by scanning the QR code.



THE MULTISTATE CONSERVATION GRANT PROGRAM: TYPICAL ANNUAL CYCLE



2025 MSCGP Strategic Priorities

1. Conservation & Science

- A. Fish and Wildlife Health
- B. Human Dimensions & Conservation Social Science
- C. Invasive Species
- D. Emerging Technologies for Fish and Wildlife Management

2. Expanding Relevancy and Engagement (ERE)

- A. Enhancing Conservation Through Broader Engagement
- B. Enhance Efforts to Make Fish and Wildlife-Based Recreation Accessible
- C. Research

3. Capacity Building, Conservation Education, and Coordination of Conservation Policies

- A. Leadership Development
- B. Conservation Education
- C. Coordination of Conservation Policies
- D. Integration of Law Enforcement

4. AFWA Priorities Identified in AFWA Funding Principles

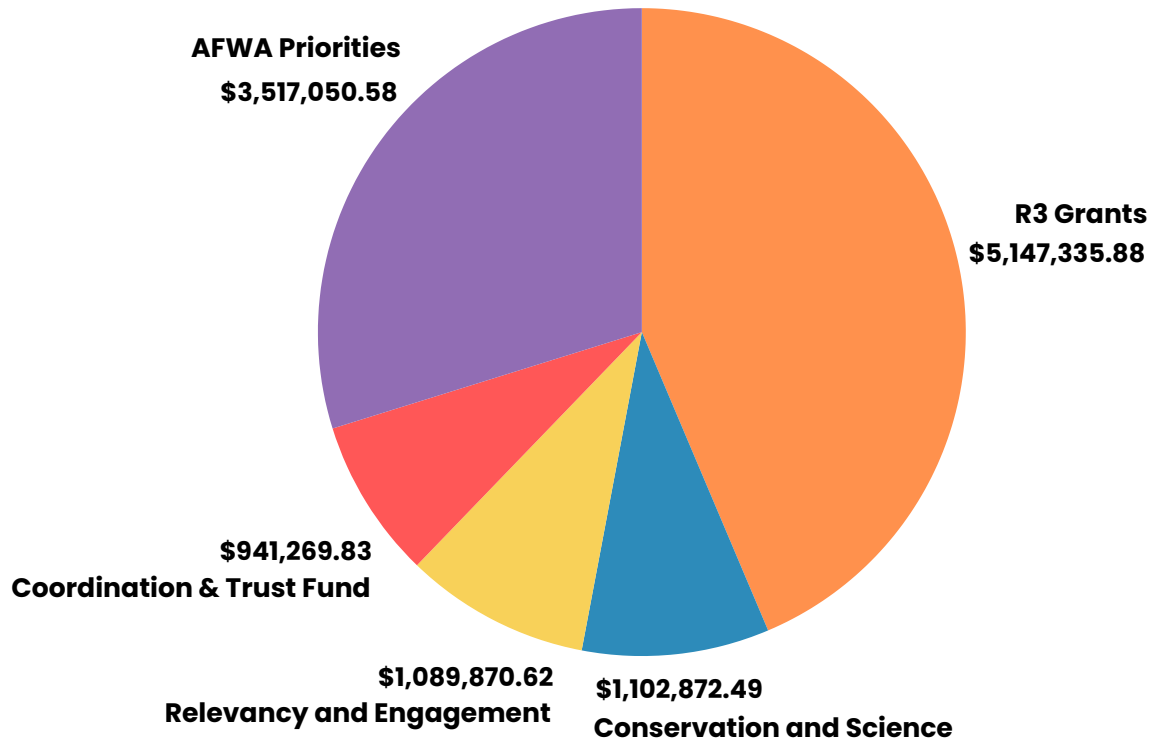
- A. Management Assistance Team
- B. Management of MSCGP Program
- C. CITES and International Conservation Programs and their Impact of State Agencies
- D. Coordination of Conservation on a National Scale
- E. National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation

5. Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation (R3)

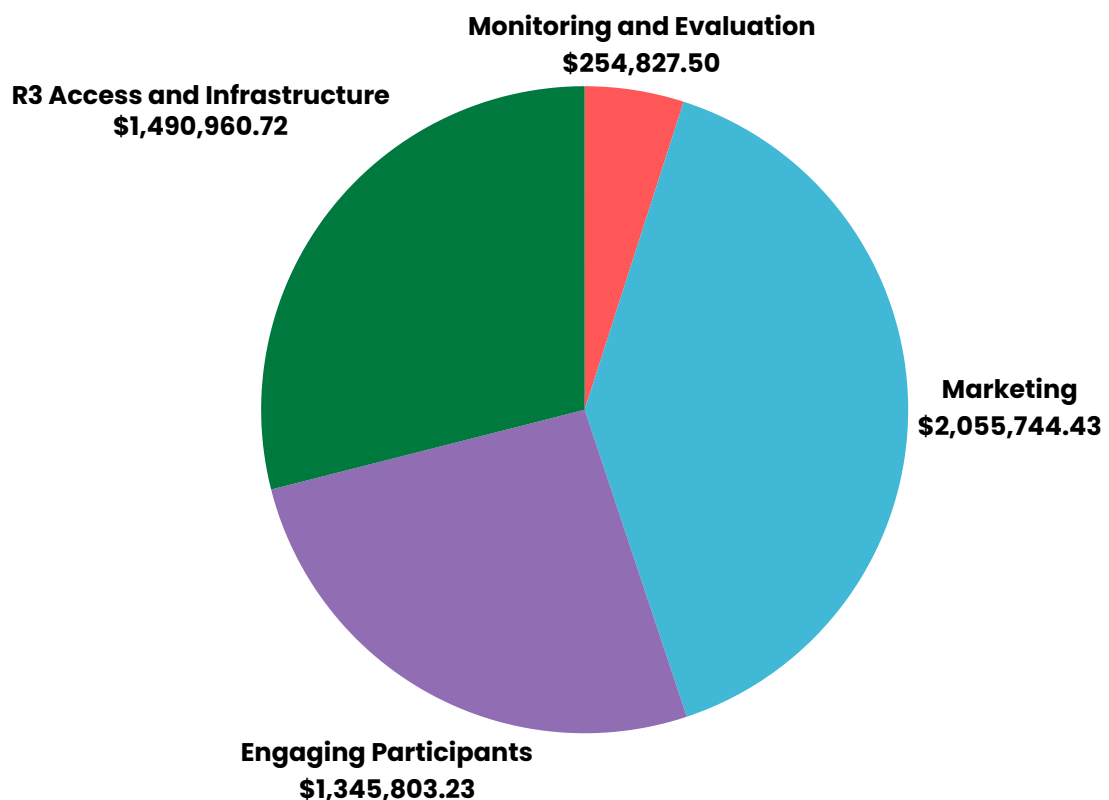
- A. Marketing
- B. Engaging Participants
- C. Monitoring and Evaluation
- D. Hunting and Shooting Sports Access and Infrastructure

The Association established priority areas for the 2025 Multistate Conservation Grant Program and received 104 proposals. In 2025, 43 proposals (in addition to 3 obligated in the previous year) were awarded \$11,798,400.

2025 Multistate Conservation Grant Program



Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation (R3) Priorities



MULTISTATE CONSERVATION GRANTS DATABASE

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies launched the Multistate Conservation Grant Program (MSCGP) Database, 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 650 previous grants, the database 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 database 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 database safeguards against duplication, empowering applicants to ensure their proposed activities build upon existing achievements rather than duplicating efforts.

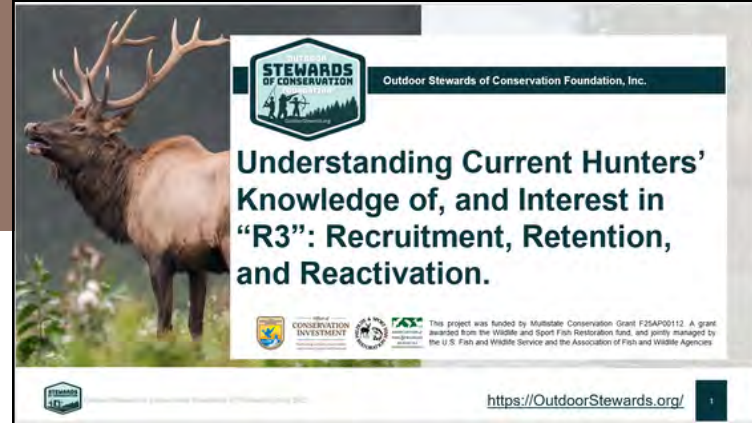
As a pioneering initiative, it stands as a testament to the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' dedication to enhancing transparency, efficiency, and the overall impact.



EXAMPLES OF 2025 AWARDED GRANTS

1

UNDERSTANDING HUNTERS' KNOWLEDGE OF, AND INTEREST IN R3



Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation

Increasing participation in hunting, fishing, trapping, and recreational target shooting has been an important goal for state fish and wildlife agencies, conservation groups, and the outdoor industry for the past few decades. Connecting more folks with nature has many benefits; in addition to the proven health benefits people get by being outside, having a better understanding how land, fish, and wildlife conservation is managed and funded will help improve cultural acceptance of activities like hunting, fishing, trapping, and recreational target shooting, while increasing participation in those activities will sustain the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation for future generations.

To achieve increased participation, stakeholders have focused on recruiting new, retaining existing, and reactivating lapsed participants which is commonly called "R3" among professionals focused on increasing participation in hunting, fishing, trapping, and recreational target shooting. As much as an internal focus R3 has been, there was very limited data on what knowledge current hunters had of R3, and what their opinions were on increasing participation in hunting.

In 2025, Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation (OSCF), with the help of the Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA), conducted a comprehensive research project under MSCGP F25AP00112 titled; Understanding Hunters' Knowledge of, and Interest in "R3". Study objectives included gauging hunters' awareness and opinions about the R3 initiative and quantifying positive and negative feelings about R3.

Key insights include:

- 83% of current hunters report a favorable opinion of R3.
- 89% of current hunters want efforts to increase hunting participation through R3 programs to continue.
- Only 38% of current hunters are familiar with the term "R3".
- Hunters mainly support R3 for: Introducing youth to hunting, and Improving land access and more wildlife using funds from new hunters.
- R3 Support is high for all types of hunting such as; big game, small game, waterfowl, upland, and varmint.
- Hunters reported strong wildlife agency satisfaction, with 72% satisfied on license quantity and strategy to balance hunters' needs versus conservation needs, and 82% approve of the license application process.

The full report includes additional insights, as well as recommended actions, and can be found at: <https://www.outdoorstewards.org/resources-for-hats>.

EXAMPLES OF 2025 AWARDED GRANTS

2 QUANTIFYING THE R3 “RIPPLE EFFECT”

Wildlife Management Institute

Evaluation of recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3) efforts has traditionally focused on outputs such as improved knowledge and skills or sometimes outcomes such as the number of new recruits created by the effort. However, the emphasis on these direct impacts has meant that indirect impacts of R3 efforts remain poorly understood. These indirect impacts (ripple effects) are influences a participant might have on others and can be measured by how one new hunter shapes the thinking and actions of others.

The goal of this project was to discover and quantify the presence and extent of these ripple effects in current North American hunters. To achieve this goal, project researchers completed three objectives:

- 1) Conduct 21 virtual interviews with R3 professionals to gather insights on how the ripple effect might be defined and measured,
- 2) Complete two virtual focus groups with 10–15 new, adult-onset hunting license buyers to understand their perspectives on the ripple effect, and
- 3) Implement a national survey of adult-onset hunters who only recently purchased their first hunting license.

After completing extensive interviews with R3 professionals and focus groups with new hunters, project researchers compiled the results of a quantitative survey that reached 25,095 hunters from 25 states. They discovered, for the first time, that there are, indeed, quantifiable ripple effects generated from the creation of a new hunter. Some of these findings are:

- On average, hunters reported that in their hunting career they had recruited 1.8 new hunters and talked to 9.9 non-hunters about hunting. But these averages hide that 49% of respondents reported recruiting zero new hunters.
- Hunters that continued hunting from youth into adulthood reported the highest ripple effects, claiming to have recruited 2.5 new hunters, 7.7 new target shooters, and talked to 23.1 non-hunters about hunting.
- Compared to men, women were less likely to have started hunting as kids, were less likely to recruit new hunters, and had talked with fewer non-hunters about hunting.

To read the full report and findings, go to the Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports' [online R3 Clearinghouse](#), and search "ripple effects."



EXAMPLES OF 2025 AWARDED GRANTS

3 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF ORGANIZED YOUTH SHOOTING SPORTS

MidwayUSA Foundation



The MidwayUSA Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that supports and helps fund approximately 2,800 school, club, and private youth shooting team programs nationally, in addition to 80 state and national youth shooting organizations. The MidwayUSA Foundation (Foundation) partnered with the Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports (Council), as well as Southwick Associates and Ipsos Group S.A. (Ipsos) to develop and facilitate this research study. The goal is to increase support and capacity for youth shooting programs, especially those reaching youth from non-target shooting backgrounds.

The objectives of the study are: 1) Investigate the personal, psychological, and social impacts of participating in organized shooting sports on youth; 2) Estimate the participation in and economic impact of organized youth shooting sports.

The 2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated that the number of youth ages 6-17 that participated in firearms target shooting was just under six million. However, to date no concerted effort has been made to estimate the total youth participation in organized shooting sports nor the corresponding economic impacts. Further, aside from a potentially large economic impact, anecdotal reports suggest that youth shooting sports have a positive influence on the individual participants, including increased self-confidence, discipline, leadership skill development, academic performance, and motivation. While these impacts are often reported at state and national levels, in conference presentation and used in marketing materials, no research across programs has been undertaken to validate those claims. Quantifying and sharing the social and economic impacts could potentially help youth shooting sports programs secure greater support for increased participation and longevity.

Southwick Associates and Ipsos both completed their data collection and market research portions of this study in November 2025. The final analysis of data and subsequent research summary reports are being finalized and are expected to be delivered in late December 2025. The Foundation and Council will then work with both firms to create user-friendly, visually-appealing informational slide decks so the finding can be easily disseminated and communicated. The final reports will be housed at the [National R3 Clearing House](#), making them readily accessible to the greater R3 community. The Foundation and Council will also present the results at the National R3 Symposium, in the AFWA Hunting and Shooting Sports Committee Meeting at the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Annual Meeting, at the four association regional meetings, and at the National Youth Shooting Sports Conference. The reports will also be shared via webinars and digital communications in 2026.

EXAMPLES OF 2025 AWARDED GRANTS

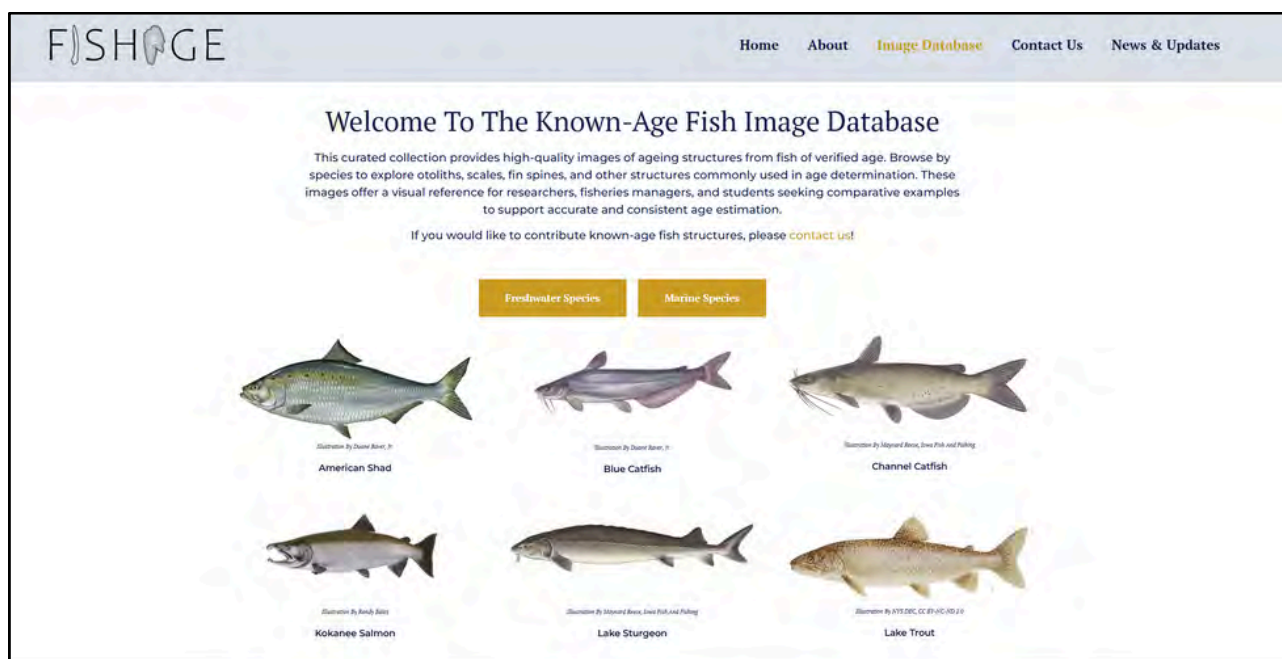
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CREATING A DIGITAL REPOSITORY OF CALCIFIED STRUCTURES FROM KNOWN-AGE FISHES

American Fisheries Society

Fish age estimation is a common practice in fisheries management and provides fundamental data for calculating dynamic rate functions and modelling populations. However, accuracy of age estimates is often unknown due to the limitations of having known-age fish for comparison. With support from the Multistate Conservation Grant Program (MSCGP), the project sponsors set out to create the first publicly available digital repository of known-age calcified fish structures.

The goal of this American Fisheries Society (AFS) project was to develop a user-friendly, open-source operating system to share and archive digital imagery of known-age fish structures. This collection serves the fisheries community by not only archiving these invaluable structures but also serving as a conduit for fisheries education and training. AFS purchased the web domain, www.fishage.org, in spring of 2024 and the website officially launched in August. At website launch, known-age calcified structures from six freshwater species: largemouth bass, American shad, muskellunge, striped bass, lake sturgeon, and channel catfish were included; over 645 images were available for public reference. In September 2024, efforts were made to market the webpage by creating social media posts that were shared by the University of Georgia and AFS. This directed users to the website, where 2,900 unique users from 10 different countries visited and engaged with their content within the first month. In the past year, AFS has been successful in acquiring additional calcified structures from eight new species, including an expansion into marine sport fishes. AFS has added a blog to incorporate articles aimed at providing educational content and updates on the project, and will be incorporating video to demonstrate processes associated with fish ageing. AFS believes this project will be an integral resource for implementing Quality Assurance/Quality Control measures and anyone looking to learn the science of age estimation.



EXAMPLES OF 2025 AWARDED GRANTS

5 THROUGH 3 PROJECTS IN 2025, THE NATIONAL DEER ASSOCIATION HAS BEEN ABLE TO MOVE THE R3 NEEDLE

National Deer Association

Nexus of Deer and R3– This National Deer Association (NDA) project was able to show many contrasts between deer management and hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3) that must be resolved. State fish and wildlife agency staff are busy and programs are often siloed; while staff are generally engaged, they are often worlds apart. NDA’s project sought to bridge the gap between these important programs and provide insights and recommendations that help R3 practitioners incorporate their work into deer management strategies, which are often focused on lowering populations. The NDA did this by surveying statewide deer and R3 coordinators regarding their programs and how they coordinate. In addition, they gained insights from hunters as to what they believed R3 meant to them and how it should be implemented. Simply, agencies focus much attention on recruitment, when they should focus on retention, reactivation, and relevancy. When a hunter thinks about programs that introduce people to hunting, it’s not because there aren’t enough hunters. On the contrary, they support R3 from the perspective of ethics, safety, and hunting tradition – not adding more people. Recognizing that people mostly learn to hunt from family members, R3 programs should work closely with deer managers to identify the problems and work toward collective solutions. In areas of deer overabundance, R3 programming should focus nearly exclusively on deer as they provide the greatest return on the investment regarding participation. For example ... can adult/youth programs be developed on private lands to reduce conflict? Can staff meet annually to season recommendations and shared program objective? Breaking down these silos and reframing how R3 programs are delivered can benefit not only agency staff, but the stakeholders we serve.

Game Processing and New Hunter Knowledge Gap – This NDA project has resulted in high quality, no logos featured processing videos for turkeys, squirrels, ducks, and most importantly, deer. These are videos that will be released early next year and without a doubt valued by the R3 community at large. These videos are really the first of their kind designed to instruct a first timer or someone trying to improve their skills. The NDA was able to use subject matter experts from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to be the instructors to take viewers through step by step instructions of what you need to do from field to storage for each species.

Podcast and Streaming Ads – This NDA project ran from mid-October through the end of November in targeted locations in Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and South Carolina, the NDA ran an audio streaming and podcast ad campaign based on the New Hunter Persona research in the [National R3 Clearinghouse](#). The campaign had tons of impressions (see table) of the new creative developed around the personas. The NDA is currently getting the year over year license sales data to be able to compare license sales as an indicator of participation.

	Impressions	Podcast	Streaming
Alabama	2,551,909	358,519	2,193,390
Georgia	2,646,756	383,527	2,263,229
Tennessee	2,647,504	383,292	2,264,212
South Carolina	2,551,854	358,461	2,193,393

TABLE: analytics on advertisements in each state.

EXAMPLES OF 2025 AWARDED GRANTS

6

TOOLS FOR REGIONALLY COORDINATED FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies



This project represents a regional commitment to modernizing how we coordinate fish and wildlife conservation. With support from the Multistate Conservation Grant Program (MSCGP), the Northeast Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (NEAFWA) is building the Northeast's next-generation regional species of greatest conservation (RSGCN) need database — a tool that will support science, management, and policy across 14 jurisdictions. This project is focused on modernizing the Northeast RSGCN Database to improve how states and partners coordinate on fish and wildlife conservation. The target completion date is December 31, 2025.

This is truly a regional tool. Every state in NEAFWA, including the District of Columbia, directly benefits. It also empowers more than 150 state experts across the northeast who annually contribute scientific knowledge to keep our shared priorities up to date. This project isn't just a database upgrade. It directly addresses the NEAFWA's highest strategic priorities: building scientific capacity, improving coordination, and preparing the region to tackle environmental stressors, wildlife health threats, invasive species, and new technology challenges.

The Northeast RSGCN Database houses information on more than 800 species: notable mammals include 13 bat species, New England cottontail, snowshoe hare, American marten, gray fox, Canada lynx, and moose. The 70 birds of regional conservation concern includes eastern whip-poor-will, peregrine falcon, golden eagle, ruffed grouse, northern bobwhite, pale-bellied brant, American black duck, and many more for which the northeast has considerable regional responsibility during their migratory life cycle. Many of the 152 freshwater, diadromous, and marine fish on the 2023 Northeast RSGCN List are sport fish, from brook trout, lake sturgeon, lake whitefish, and lake trout in freshwater habitats to bluefish, flounders, bluefin tuna, Atlantic cod, and black sea bass in marine habitats. Eleven diadromous fish like striped bass, blueback herring, alewife, hickory shad, and American shad, rely upon both the freshwater and marine waters of the northeast. The needs and conservation of traditional Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program species and what have been considered non-game species have become increasingly intertwined. Threats from zoonotic diseases, invasive species, effects of environmental stressors, and loss of biodiversity affect all species as well as human health. Angler interest in non-traditional fish species is expanding, with the phenomenon of "microfishing" for small species like shiners, darters, sculpins, dace, and minnows of growing management concern. Some online angler forums advocate "the smaller the better" and the use of "fish life lists" modeled after birding life lists. Most of the invertebrate species on the RSGCN list are prey for sport species or birds and mammals in general. Horseshoe crab eggs, for example, are a critical food source for migrating red knot in the northeast and brook trout prey on aquatic insects, invertebrates, and small fish.

EXAMPLES OF 2025 AWARDED GRANTS

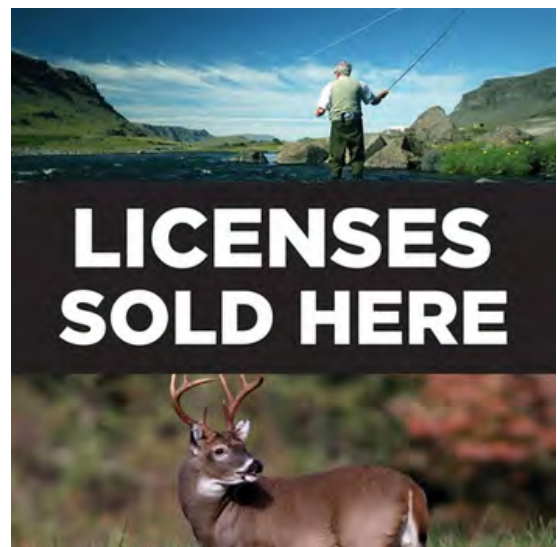
The upgraded database is more than a repository. It's a decision-support tool — helping states address environmental stressor resilience, track invasive species and align game and non-game management. It will also strengthen the region's ability to compete for funding. So far, challenges have been limited. The main need has been coordination with the parallel State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) Database project. By working closely, we're ensuring seamless integration and preventing duplication or gaps.

7 IMPROVING CONSERVATION EFFORTS ENGAGING RETAILERS AS R3 PARTNERS

American Sportfishing Association

New anglers rely heavily on in-person support from fishing tackle retailers, yet many do not receive the guidance they need to become confident, long-term participants. Research shows that 40% of first-time anglers depend on brick-and-mortar retailers for initial instruction, and 10% rely on them to learn where and how to fish. However, mystery shopper studies have found that many new anglers—especially women and non-traditional audiences—are overlooked or poorly served, often leaving stores feeling unwelcome or unprepared. To ensure that new anglers receive the support necessary to become long-term participants, the project aims to better engage and equip retailers as critical partners in R3 efforts.

The American Sportfishing Association (ASA), Southwick Associates and the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation first developed a large-scale survey of new, novice, and lapsed anglers. Southwick Associates led state recruitment, data collection and analysis, reviewing state license data and supplementing it with a national sample to reach a robust dataset. With this research complete, ASA, partners and industry members are translating its finding to the development of a retailer “toolkit”—a set of resources designed to help frontline staff better identify and support new and novice anglers. These initial toolkit materials will be tested with at least eight retailers across the country before refinement and nationwide distribution through ASA channels, industry platforms, and recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3) channels.



EXAMPLES OF 2025 AWARDED GRANTS

Survey results from nearly 3,000 respondents – both new anglers and lapsed anglers – confirm that local knowledge and personal connection are the strongest drivers of continued participation. Many lapsed anglers reported they would have kept fishing if they had received an invitation from a friend or family member, or if they had access to clear information about nearby fishing opportunities. One-third of anglers who currently shop online stated they would be more likely to purchase in-store if they could receive local fishing advice. Lapsed anglers also indicated they stopped fishing because they were not sure where to go fishing, and they could be reactivated through invitations, free fishing days or reduced license prices, and better access to clean, safe, and convenient places to fish. Findings also reveal a disconnect between where new anglers shop and where they receive expertise: big-box retailers attract most beginners but often lack knowledgeable staff, while those who visit local tackle shops report far stronger engagement and guidance. Respondents additionally expressed an interest in receiving local advice through digital media, including online videos and email newsletters.

Following the completion and review of the survey analysis, ASA and Southwick Associates have begun developing the retailer toolkit, drawing on research insights and early discussions with ASA's R3 Committee, retailers and other industry members. The toolkit will include communication resources and practical guidance that helps frontline retail staff identify new anglers, provide actionable local fishing information and prepare these anglers to fish confidently. A refined, final version is scheduled for release by March 2026, following evaluation of a pilot toolkit by eight retailers.



This Project was funded by a Multistate Conservation Grant [F25AP00156](#), 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.