

2025 State Fish & Game Protection Fund Report

Creation and Purpose

The State Fish and Game Protection Fund (commonly known as the Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund, “FWTF”) is a dedicated trust fund established by state law in 1937 and enshrined into Iowa’s Constitution in 1996.

The FWTF operates on a highly successful user-pay, public-benefit model. Its core financial structure relies almost entirely on fees paid by those who directly utilize Iowa’s fish and wildlife resources—hunters, anglers, and trappers—through the purchase of licenses. This revenue, along with federal funds generated by excise taxes on outdoor sporting equipment, is constitutionally protected and can only be used for the promotion, management, research, and protection of Iowa’s natural resources.

While funded by a specific user group, the FWTF pays significant dividends to all Iowans. The three managing bureaus (Wildlife, Fisheries, and Law Enforcement) ensure the health and abundance of Iowa’s natural heritage, which underpins substantial economic activity. Simply, the fees paid by sportsmen and women support the conservation infrastructure that benefits the state’s economy, environment, and Iowans’ quality of life.



FWTF Bureaus

The management and regulation of Iowa’s wildlife and fishery resources are accomplished by three bureaus: Wildlife, Fisheries, and Law Enforcement.

The Fisheries Bureau manages eight hatcheries, 200 lakes, 19,000 miles of interior rivers, 200,000 acres of the bordering rivers, 78 trout streams, and establishes fishing opportunities for Iowans across the state. The bureau’s work includes a

broad range of water quality improvement projects, research, aquatic education, and fish stocking. According to the federal Department of Commerce’s U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, [boating and fishing contribute \\$341M to Iowa’s GDP](#).

The Wildlife Bureau is responsible for the management of Iowa’s abundant wildlife resources and oversees 513 public wildlife areas and 336 boat ramps. Professional wildlife staff conduct surveys, censuses, and research studies and produce data to support science-based management and policy decisions. According to the federal Department of Commerce’s U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, [hunting, shooting, and trapping contribute \\$116M to Iowa’s GDP](#).



Iowa celebrated the 100th year of pheasant hunting in 2025. Excitement among the 80,000+ hunters is due to the jump in pheasant numbers, at a 20-year high, thanks to a string of mild winters and cooperative springs.

The Law Enforcement Bureau is responsible for ensuring compliance with Iowa’s fish, game, and outdoor recreational laws, which ensures public safety and the health of the state’s natural resources. Officers carry out a range of duties beyond enforcement, including public education, inspections, and outreach.



2024 Iowa Resident License Sales

- 101,911 hunting licenses
- 224,747 fishing licenses
- 32,021 hunt/fish combo licenses

875,430 = total hunting and fishing privileges sold (all types) in 2024
371,772 = number of unique customers in 2024

Trout = 43,710 trout stamps
Deer = 311,379 deer tags sold across all seasons
Turkey = 62,278 turkey tags sold across all seasons
Migratory Bird = 25,177 migratory bird fees
Furharvester = 14,812 trapping licenses

License Fee Evaluation and Reporting Requirements

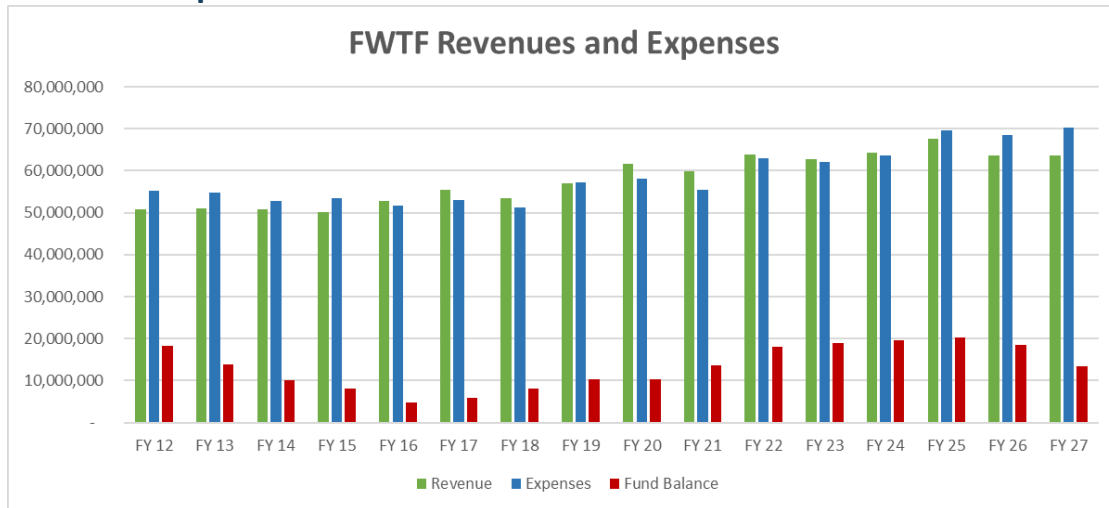
To ensure the FWTF's financial sustainability and responsiveness to natural resource management needs, Iowa Code section 483A.1 requires that license fees be periodically reviewed and adjusted, if warranted:

- **Periodic Evaluation:** The department is required to evaluate license fees at least once every three years to ensure they are sufficient to “meet the needs of natural resource management and the public.”

- **Annual Report to the Legislature:** By December 15 of each year in which a license fee evaluation is completed, the department must submit a written report to the commission and the general assembly. This report must include “the evaluation and recommendations for changes, if any.”
- **Fee Increase Limitations:** An individual license fee cannot be increased in any calendar year by more than five percent.



Current Income and Expenses for the Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund



The chart above illustrates the annual finances of the FWTF. While annual revenues (Green) have shown moderate growth, they are outpaced by the upward trend of expenses (Blue) due to increasing operational costs. This persistent gap is causing the Fund Balance (Red) to decline significantly, moving from a healthy surplus in earlier years toward the zero line.

Recommendation

To ensure the financial stability of the FWTF and the continued management and protection of Iowa's natural resources, a two-pronged strategy is recommended.

- 1) The department will implement comprehensive adjustments to reduce operational expenditures and maximize efficiency.
- 2) The department recommends a 5% increase in license fees.

This adjustment, combined with the cost-containment measures, is essential to bridge the fiscal gap resulting from increasing operational costs. This recommended action is supported by the Natural Resource Commission.

