



Northern New Hampshire had become a favored territory for market hunters and sportsmen, reached with comparative ease, thanks to the railroads. There was no limit to the number of deer a hunter might legally kill, and lumber camps, which had been springing up faster and faster since the middle of the [19th] century, were fed largely on venison. (Silver, 1957)



150 YEARS

Conserving New Hampshire's Fish and Wildlife

THANKS TO FISH AND GAME, NEW HAMPSHIRE ENJOYS A
LEGACY OF HEALTHY WILDLIFE AND OUTDOOR RECREATION | BY JACK NOON

New Hampshire's fish and wildlife were once so abundant that fishing, hunting and trapping were allowed without limit. Catches and kills could be sold. Commercial fishermen netted salmon and shad on the Connecticut at Bellows Falls and on the Merrimack at Amoskeag Falls and speared lake trout from Winnepesaukee, Squam and Newfound. Woodland caribou, the Sunapee golden trout and the Dublin Lake silver trout would persist into the 20th century.

By the mid-19th century, water-powered industrialism, along with overfishing, market hunting and over-trapping, in all but the wildest regions of the state, had reduced much of the former abundance of these natural resources to insignificance. In response, the legislature in 1865 created the Commission on Fisheries, primarily to restore the runs of salmon and shad. In the following years, growing enforcement and a gradual transition to science-based management led to the healthy fish and wildlife and opportunities for outdoor recreation we enjoy today.

Right up to the present day, the Fish and Game Department has faced the ongoing challenges of steady population growth, reduced public access to hunting and fishing, diminishing habitat, increased responsibilities added by the legislature. Unfortunately, funding for Fish and Game's mission has long fallen short.

Competing Interests

In the Province of New Hampshire, the first legislative effort to protect either fisheries or wildlife came on March 17, 1741, with an act that banned deer hunting from January through July. That measure, along with others in the following decades, required towns to appoint "deer reeves," who had legal authority to enter and inspect any property for evidence of deer taken out of season. During the open season, there were no restrictions on the number of deer that a hunter could kill, either for personal use or to sell.

James Birket, writing in 1750, blamed the complete disappearance of Atlantic salmon from the Piscataqua watershed on the numerous sawmills in operation there and on the poisonous effects of water-logged sawdust. The blame, however, more likely rests on overfishing and on the mill dams across the Salmon Falls River and other Piscataqua tributaries.

In 1754, New Hampshire enacted its first protective law on fisheries. The alewife runs up Cohas Brook from the Merrimack River to Lake Massabesic had been blocked by mill dams, and local fishermen complained. At the time, alewives made up only a small part of the commercial fisheries that hundreds of fishermen pursued each spring near Amoskeag Falls. With dip nets and scoop nets in the three river channels at the falls, and with ocean seines downriver in more open water, they took many tons of fish, including salmon, shad, lampreys, striped bass and Atlantic sturgeon. A catch at the Nutt seine in Bedford in 1762 drew the claim that "at one haul of the net 2500 shad were taken."

The dilemma the legislature faced in 1754 was how best to preserve the jobs both of commercial fishermen and of mill dam owners. Their compromise legislation threatened mill dam owners with a fine of forty shillings if they failed to keep passageways open in their dams for the alewife runs from April 5 to the end of May, but limited the law's power to five years. No thought whatever was given to restricting the numbers of fish that might be caught.

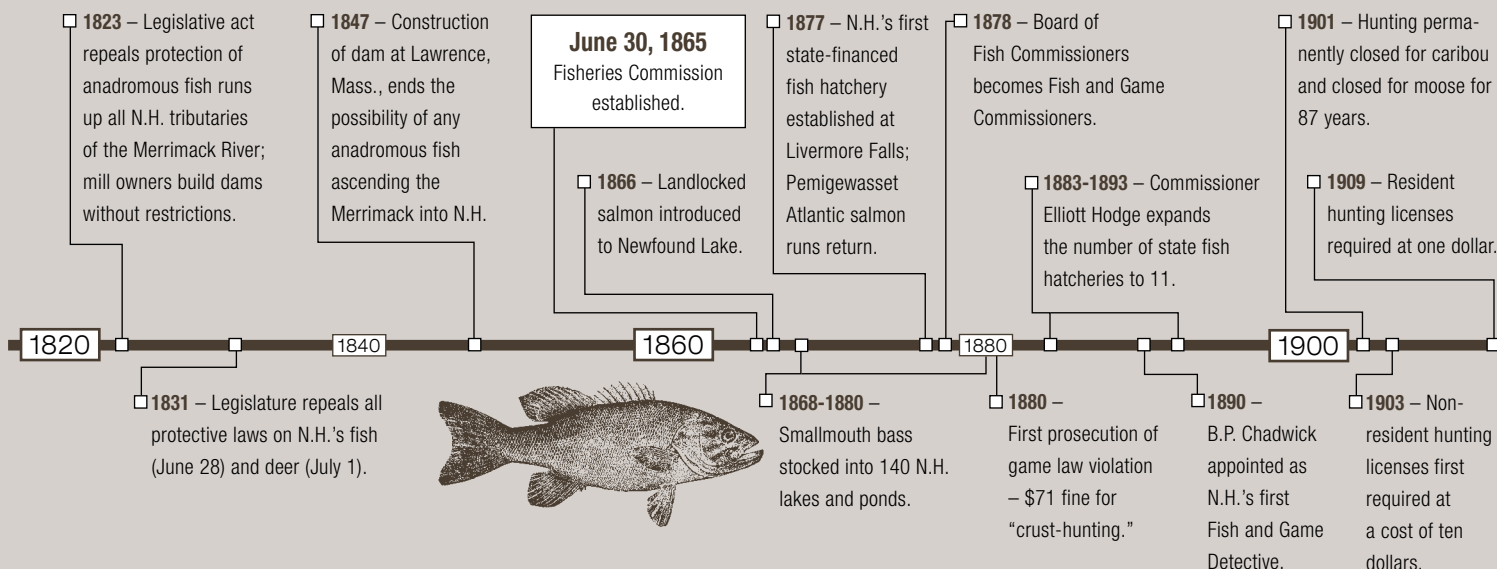
In part because of unrestricted hunting, game was scarce in New Hampshire 150 years ago. The tide turned in the 1900s, as licenses were required, enforcement increased, and outreach campaigns stressed a new code of outdoor ethics.



The enforcement mechanism for the Cohas Brook law relied on private citizens to turn in violators for a reward of half the fine collected. Because this method cost the Province and then the State of New Hampshire nothing, it would be the model for years to come. A series of later approaches set fines for any towns failing to appoint wardens to enforce the fish and game laws. Not until 1890 would anyone be paid for the work; New Hampshire's lone "Fish and Game Detective" B.P. Chadwick was hired that year.

The low point of the legislature's treatment of fish and wildlife resources came in 1831. On June 28, the legislators abolished every protective fishery law then on the books and, on the first of July, repealed the law that had banned deer hunting during late winter, spring and early summer. On those same two days, the legislators incorporated the Winnipisseogee Lake Cotton & Woolen Manufacturing Company and the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF THE N.H. FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT



A New Commission

The legislature in 1865, with great optimism for the emerging technologies of “fish culture,” authorized the Governor to appoint two Commissioners on Fisheries, who quickly set to work introducing landlocked salmon and smallmouth bass to the state and attempting to restore the salmon and shad runs.

The state’s wildlife by 1877 had been decimated by market hunting, absence of bag limits and bounties on many creatures that damaged a farmer’s crops or livestock. A Governor-appointed committee met that year with the Commissioners on Fisheries to discuss any changes that might be needed in the fish and game laws. The published laws of 1878 declared, “The board of fish commissioners . . . is hereby . . . charged with all the duties of fish and game commissioners.” The same published laws responded to the scarcity of deer by banning deer hunting statewide for three years in all but Coos County.

In 1877, in a joint effort with a cooperative Massachusetts legislature, an Atlantic salmon hatchery was built just below Livermore Falls on the Pemigewasset River. Until 1893, Commissioner Elliott Hodge oversaw that hatchery during a period of some highly successful salmon returns and got legislative funding for an additional ten hatcheries.

In the 20th century as cars became common, roads improved, and the population grew, the demand for good fishing and hunting steadily increased. The hatcheries raised both native and imported species of trout and salmon. By 1909, daily bag limits had been set on several species of fish, and hunting licenses were required both for residents and non-residents. In 1913, an annual limit of two deer applied to northern New Hampshire and one for the rest of the state. The limit would be reduced statewide in 1925 to a single deer, along with the provision that logging camps could no longer serve venison. Fishing licenses were added in 1917. License revenues were used in 1918 to hire eight Fish and Game Wardens and 39 Deputy Wardens, and in 1926 provided the wardens with uniforms.



Hunting licenses were first required for nonresidents in 1903 and for residents in 1909. Early Conservation Officers handled both enforcement and educational outreach; below, N.H. Fish and Game Conservation Officers staff an exhibit at the New York Sportsman's Show in 1938.



1926 – Fish and Game Wardens (30 in all) get uniforms.

1935 – Modern-day Fish and Game

Department established, with a five-man Commission that would hire a Director. Wardens are now “Conservation Officers.”

1936 – Earl Hoover begins a four-year biological survey of N.H.’s lakes and streams.

1948 – Fish and Game’s Education Division established.

1950 – Sport Fish Restoration Act establishes an excise tax on fishing gear, providing federal revenue for fisheries projects.

1957 – Fish and Game builds the Winnicut River Dam and fish ladder to create upstream habitat for fish and waterfowl, the first fish ladder on a N.H. coastal river system.

1915 – Game detectives now called “Game Wardens.”

1917 – Fishing licenses required.

1930 – Trapping license required.

1937 – Wildlife Restoration Act establishes an excise tax on firearms and ammunition, providing federal funds to state fish and wildlife agencies for habitat protection, wildlife research and restoration. N.H. receives its first funding in 1939.

1955 – The number of Fish and Game Commissioners increases from five to ten.

1956 – The Department moves from the State House Annex to its new headquarters on Bridge Street.

1920

1930

1940

1950

1960

FORWARD-THINKING LEADERSHIP



Buck Corson

In the latter half of the 20th century, Fish and Game directors worked to protect the natural world in the face of growing human population and the resulting loss of wildlife habitat.

Director Buck Corson (1968-1977) initiated *New Hampshire Natural Resources* magazine (predecessor to the *N.H. Wildlife Journal*) in 1969. This Department publication featured articles on the state's fish, wildlife and ongoing conservation challenges. He advocated renaming the Department "Fish and Wildlife" to reflect its broadening scope to serve outdoor enthusiasts who didn't fish or hunt.



Charles Barry

Director Charles Barry (1978-1986) acquired the enormous federal fish hatchery and nearby conservation camp at York Pond in Berlin in 1983. Barry bore the shock of having Fish and Game's Bridge Street headquarters burn down on April 21, 1984. The disaster inspired a massive cooperative effort among the state's elected officials, assorted state agencies and organizations, and others concerned about the Department's future. The legislature, in solid support, approved the use of General Funds that would build the Hazen Drive headquarters, as well as four regional offices.



Dr. Donald Normandeau

Dr. Donald Normandeau (1987-1994) saw the Lancaster office dedicated in 1988, just a month before the new Concord headquarters. Regional offices in Durham, New Hampton and Keene were completed within the next three years. Normandeau was a strong proponent of conservation education. During his tenure, the Discovery Room opened in 1988 and wildlife education expanded in the early 1990s to include hatchery visitor centers and the Wonders of Wildlife and Schoolyard Habitat programs. The Let's Go Fishing and Watershed Education programs, launched in 1986, continued to grow. Normandeau would later become the first board chairman of the Wildlife Heritage Foundation of N.H.

The "Modern" Era

A major reorganization of Fish and Game in 1935 assigned ultimate authority to a five-man Fish and Game Commission, which would oversee a paid Director. From the start, conservation education was a priority. "It is necessary that the citizen has an intelligent conception of the value of our birds, mammals and fishes," wrote Robert Stobie, the Department's first director, in 1938.

Earl Hoover, the Department's first biologist, conducted comprehensive fisheries surveys of all the state's watersheds. His work helped convince the legislature that a scientific approach to managing the state's fisheries was cost effective. Hoover's reports also chronicled the sources of some of the worst water pollution in the state, including raw sewage and industrial wastes dumped into the Merrimack and Connecticut rivers.

Science-based management was bolstered by the federal Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937 (Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration), which established an excise tax on firearms and ammunition, with revenues to be used to support states' wildlife research projects. Federal funds for fisheries followed in 1950, with passage of the Sport Fish Restoration Act and an excise tax on angling equipment.

Fish and Game's Education Division began in 1948 under Ralph Carpenter, who served as Executive Director for a quarter century (1940-1965). During his tenure, fishing and hunting demand expanded tremendously, Fish and Game moved from the State House Annex to new quarters in Concord on Bridge Street, and the complexities of managing natural resources began to assert themselves as fish and wildlife habitat was continually lost to housing developments and business growth.

Legislators required Fish and Game to finance its operations through license sales and fines collected from lawbreakers. Additional state or federal support was at best sporadic. In 1950, some 98.5% of the Department's funding reportedly came from license sales. It was a rare biennial report that didn't include a request from Fish and Game for additional funding.

1960s – The federal Clean Waters Act, Clean Air Act, Wilderness Act and Anadromous Fish Act add to Fish and Game's responsibilities.



1968 – C.O. Carl Carlson issues first summons for unregistered snowmobile in Pittsburg (registration became state law in 1967).

1971 – Fish and Game becomes responsible for enforcing laws regarding snowmobiles and All-Terrain Vehicles.

1972 – Number of Conservation Officers reaches an all-time high of 50.



1984 – Fire destroys Fish and Game's Bridge Street headquarters. Wallop-Breaux amendment to the Sport Fish Restoration Act helps fund Public Boat Access and Aquatic Education programs.

1960

1965

1970

1975

1980

1985

1965 – Marine Division established to manage N.H.'s coastal habitats and saltwater fisheries.

1969 – Anadromous Fish Restoration Project begins in Merrimack, Connecticut and coastal rivers.

1975 – 25 wild turkeys from New York released in Walpole. Hunter Education required for all first-time hunters.



1980 – First hunting season for the reintroduced turkeys; 31 birds are taken.

1985 – Project WILD, a national wildlife supplementary education curriculum, introduced to N.H. schools.

Expanding Responsibilities

The 1954 biennial report recorded the recently added duties “for locating lost persons and covering drowning cases” and “the inauguration of a Hunter Safety Program,” adding to the Department’s workload and expenses. The 1960s brought passage of the federal Clean Waters Act, Clean Air Act, Wilderness Act and Anadromous Fish Act; each involved Fish and Game and required attention from Department personnel. In 1965, the legislature added management of New Hampshire’s recreational and commercial saltwater fisheries to Fish and Game’s duties.



From right: N.H. pioneered the first hunter safety education classes in public schools in the late 1940s. Fish and Game SCUBA divers handled the grim task of underwater recovery; in photo (left to right, ca. 1957) are COs Berton Hiller, Bill Mooney, District Chief Paul Tasker, William Hastings and Peter Lyon. Fish and Game duties expanded in the 1970s to include snowmobile enforcement and safety education.



1988 – Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program established. First modern-era moose hunt in N.H., with 75 hunters selected by lottery.

1990 – Merrimack River Watershed Education Program implemented, focusing on Fisheries Habitat Conservation.

1995 – First “Becoming an Outdoors-Woman” program held.



1998 – Moose Plate Conservation Fund established.

2001 – McGoldrick Dam on the Ashuelot River removed to benefit migratory fish.

2004 – Owl Brook Hunter Education Center opens in Holderness.



2013 – Federal funding ends for Atlantic salmon restoration on the Merrimack River.

2015 – Legislative action will largely determine the future of Fish and Game.

1989 – First Discover WILD New Hampshire Day (April). Great Bay designated a National Estuarine Research Reserve (October).



1996 – Sandy Point (now Great Bay) Discovery Center opens in Greenland. First Big Game Plan for management of moose, deer and bear approved.

2006 – First N.H. Wildlife Action Plan approved, paving the way for federal matching funds for nongame projects. Wildlife Heritage Foundation of N.H. established.

2011 – Saltwater recreational fishing license required.

2013 – The legislature grants stopgap funding to keep Fish and Game in operation at current level.

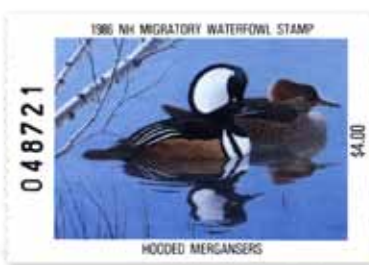
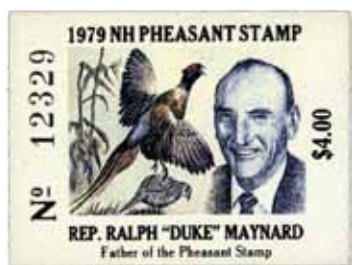
With the rise of off-highway motorized recreation, the Department soon became responsible for enforcing snowmobile and all-terrain vehicle laws (1971) and related safety education (1975), still more tasks that had little to do with fish or wildlife.

The 1970s also saw an experimental coho salmon project, growing numbers of moose, and successful restoration of wild turkeys. Required pheasant stamps and waterfowl stamps came into existence to help fund efforts for better bird hunting. Land acquisition for public access to fishing and hunting, as well as for wildlife habitat, grew increasingly important as developers built lakeside homes, cleared woodlands and converted former pastures and cropland into house lots.

Expanded programs to educate schoolchildren and the general public about conservation became a priority in the mid-1980s. Project WILD was introduced into New Hampshire public schools,



Below, waterfowl and pheasant stamps provided revenue for specific wildlife and habitat programs. The deer stamp was used in conjunction with the hunting license in 1961.



The Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire was established in 2006 to seek out funding for Fish and Game projects. The founding Board of Directors included (L-R) State Representative David Smith, Joseph Bellavance IV, Charles Barry, Donna Cote and Dr. Donald Normandeau.

and Barry Conservation Camp offered summer programs for youngsters.

In 1984, federal matching funds were authorized for buying public access sites to lakes, ponds and rivers, leading to establishment of the Statewide Public Boat Access Program in 1992. Radio collars were put onto twenty moose in 1986, with speculation about a future moose hunt (which came to pass in 1988). Of particular importance, the legislature at long last gave Fish and Game the authority to set hunting seasons and bag limits for deer and bear.

Another milestone came in 1988, when, after 123 years, the legislature acknowledged that the Department should have responsibility for all the state's fish and wildlife. That year, the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program was established, with a single employee.

The Funding Dilemma

For the past quarter century, successive Fish and Game Directors have been forced into highly creative improvisations in their efforts to continue the Department's mission in the face of increasingly uncertain finances. Higher license fees have discouraged some sportsmen from fishing or hunting. Fish and Game personnel have scrounged for grants from wide-ranging sources. Hatchery efforts have been streamlined. Countless volunteers are enlisted each year to teach hunter safety, snowmobile education and more. Ongoing land acquisition helps preserve fish and wildlife habitat and provide access to waters and woodlands.

Traditional interest in hunting and fishing remains strong. More fishing licenses were sold in N.H. in 2013 than in 1994. Hunting license sales have stabilized over the past decade, thanks to outreach efforts and opportunities such as youth hunts and an Apprentice Hunting License. These trends, while positive, are not enough to fund Fish and Game's broad responsibilities.

Three decades ago, New Hampshire's elected officials, organizations and many dedicated private citizens all came together after the fire had destroyed Fish and Game's headquarters. In a tremendous cooperative effort, they reinvigorated both the Department's facilities and its mission. This same spirit of cooperation and dedication is our best hope for the future. In current Director Glenn Normandeau's words, "I honestly believe that most people who enjoy New Hampshire's outdoors and value our quality of life are willing to do their part. Let's focus our energies on finding a solution together."




Jack Noon of Sutton is currently writing a book on New Hampshire's fishing and hunting history and the Fish and Game Department's role for the past 150 years.

"I honestly believe that most people who enjoy New Hampshire's outdoors and value our quality of life are willing to do their part."

New Hampshire Wildlife Journal is your best source for fishing, hunting, wildlife and conservation information in the state.

DID YOU ENJOY READING THIS ARTICLE?

Every issue of N.H. Wildlife Journal includes stunning wildlife photography, in-depth features and "how-to" articles – plus Naturalist's Notebook, Warden's Watch and no advertising.



So what are you
waiting for?
Subscribe today!

www.wildnh.com/pubs/wj-magazine.html