



2024 Annual Report on Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund

Presented to the 132nd Legislature Joint Standing
Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife



Prepared by Alexander Fish, Endangered & Threatened Species
Coordinator, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

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History

Maine’s Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund (Fund hereafter) in Title 12, section 10253 was established in 1983, and requires an annual report to the Governor and Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

Executive Summary

The Fund supports the conservation of Maine’s most at-risk wildlife through population surveys, monitoring, and habitat conservation. Since 1984, \$13,753,275 has been raised and deposited into the Fund, and 2024 contributions were \$394,637. The Fund is a dedicated interest-bearing account and is administered by MDIFW. Fund contributions are frequently used as state match to leverage additional federal conservation dollars, primarily through the State Wildlife Grants and Pittman-Robertson Fund programs. Notably, among other conservation successes, these funds have helped support the recovery and delisting of Bald Eagles and the reintroduction of Peregrine Falcons in Maine. These funds are vital to supporting conservation efforts for Maine’s wildlife biodiversity, including but not limited to amphibians, reptiles, freshwater mussels, nongame birds, pollinating insects, and rare freshwater fish. Through time, individual revenue sources have either plateaued or decreased and have further diminished when accounting for inflation. In short, the Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund annually can support fewer conservation projects for Maine’s most at-risk wildlife today than throughout the majority of the Funds history.

Key Findings

- 2024 contributions to the Fund were \$394,637
- Income from the Chickadee Checkoff and Conservation License plates, the two largest revenue sources, are declining, and have further diminished when accounting for inflation
- The Fund is inadequate to address the basic science and habitat conservation needs necessary to ensure healthy wildlife populations in Maine
- Additional revenue sources are necessary to support the conservation of endangered, nongame, and at-risk wildlife in Maine

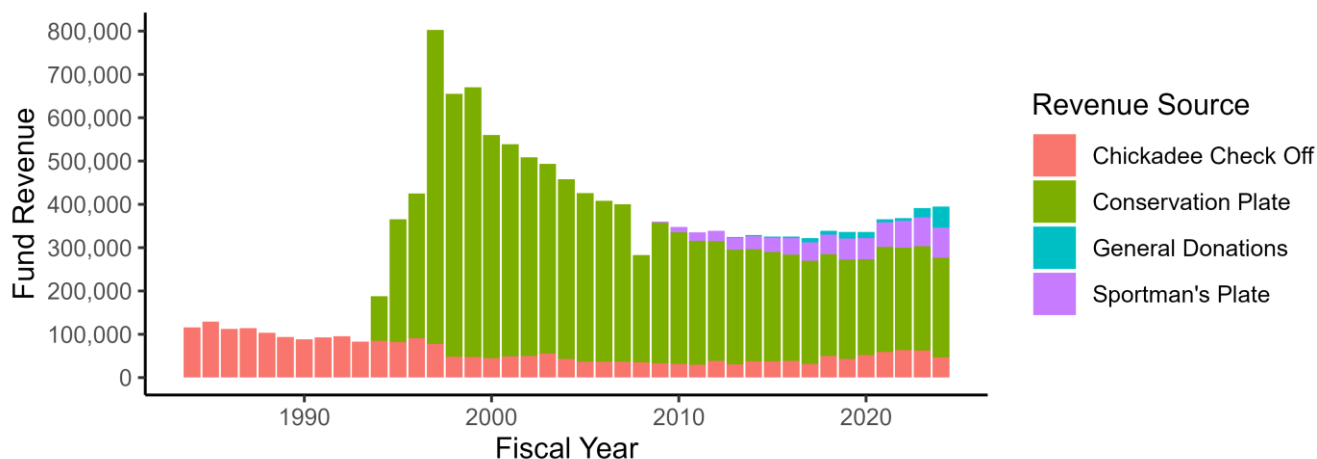


Figure 1. Annual revenue for the Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund broken down by revenue source.

Fund Background

The Fund's revenue sources include voluntary personal income tax contributions via the Chickadee Check-off, excise taxes on both the Conservation Registration and Sportsman's Registration License Plates, interest generated from the account, and other donations. A summary of each source is provided below:

Chickadee Check-off

The Chickadee Check-off is a voluntary charitable donation option available on the Maine personal income tax forms, that began in 1984, and provides filers an opportunity to directly contribute to the Fund. Initially, this revenue peaked at \$129,122 in 1985, decreased by 77% to \$29,454 in 2011 and has plateaued with annual contributions between \$45,000 to \$65,000 (2020-2024). When corrected for inflation, revenue from the Chickadee Check-off is approximately 15% of 1985 contributions. Since 1984, the Chickadee Check-off has raised \$2,533,491 for the Fund. There is no definitive cause of this decline, however we speculate that the increasing number of voluntary charitable donation opportunities and increasing popularity of e-filing income taxes has likely contributed to declining contributions.



General Donations and Interest

The Fund additionally received revenue from a combination of general donations, sales from Department merchandise, and interest from the Fund balance. Beginning in 2013, we began separating these revenue sources from the Chickadee Check-off to better understand sources of Fund contributions. This was supported in part by the implementation of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife online store, which sold endangered species posters specifically for the Fund and provided donation opportunities for the public. Revenue in this category typically only generates a few thousand dollars annually (e.g., \$2,205 in 2013), and had previously peaked with \$15,370 in 2019, but reached a record high of \$48,767 in 2024. There may be an increasing trend for the last few years, however, in general, this revenue source remains a relatively small contribution to the Fund and has raised a total of \$142,299.

Conservation Registration Plate

The Conservation Registration Plate (e.g. Loon Plate) was first sold as a specialty plate in 1994, with proceeds from the \$20 specialty plate fee split between the Fund and Bureau of Parks and Lands to support State Parks. The Loon plate was one of the first specialty plates offered in Maine and revenue peaked in 1997 with \$724,942 being deposited in the Fund. Annual revenue has since slowly decreased, as additional specialty plates were created. Revenue stabilized between 2016-2024, with approximately \$220,000-\$240,000 being contributed annually. However, when corrected for inflation, this represents an approximate 17% decrease between this same time period. The Loon plate has been the single largest revenue source for the Fund and has raised \$10,449,003 over the past three decades (76% of the total revenue).



Sportsman’s Registration Plate

The Sportsman’s Registration Plate (e.g., Sportsman’s Plate) was first sold as a specialty plate in 2008, with proceeds from the \$20 specialty plate fully allocated to the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. Ten percent of the revenue is allocated to the Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund, 50% to Maine’s fish hatcheries, 25% to the warden service’s landowner relations program, and 15% to develop public boat launches. The Sportsman’s Plate has raised \$628,482 for the Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund since its creation. Sales of this specialty plate continue to grow, and in 2024 the annual Fund contribution was \$69,503.



Fund Insights and Analysis

Annual contributions to the Fund peaked in 1997, has declined annually in the decades since, and has plateaued since approximately 2010. However, when we account for inflation, the Fund has devalued over time. We identified three years in which the Fund received peak (1997), average (1995), or low (2009) contributions, and assuming contributions remained constant, we projected revenues into 2024 while accounting for inflation (Figure 2). This analysis showed that 2024 contributions essentially matched inflation corrected contributions from The Great Recession in 2009 and are approximately half of inflation corrected contributions since 1995. Contributions in 2024 were approximately 25% of inflation corrected contributions since the peak in 1997 (\$1,555,563). Accounting for inflation highlights the reduced purchasing power of the Fund through time.

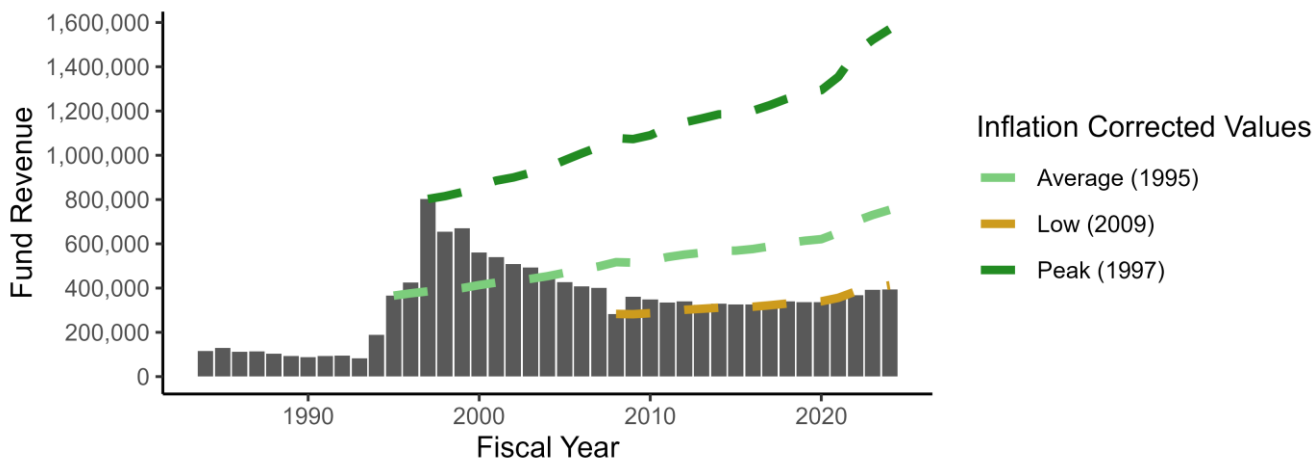


Figure 2. Fund inflation corrected projections for three scenarios: peak annual contributions (1997), average annual contributions (1995), and low annual contributions (2009). Low annual contributions coincided with The Great Recession (2007-2009).

The Conservation registration plate has generated more revenue for the Fund compared to any other single source, yet the declining sales of Conservation plates from peak sales of 111,082 plates in 1999 to 43,703 plates in 2024 has subsequently decreased revenue contributions (Figure 3). Annual sales have been relatively stable since 2016 and have fluctuated by a few thousand plates. The decline in Conservation plate sales has likely been influenced by the increasing number of specialty plates available at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (Figure 3) and

the creation of the Sportsman’s plate, which generates a lower contribution to the Fund per sale (Appendix A). Beginning in 2021, more sportsman’s plates have been sold than conservation plates (Appendix A).

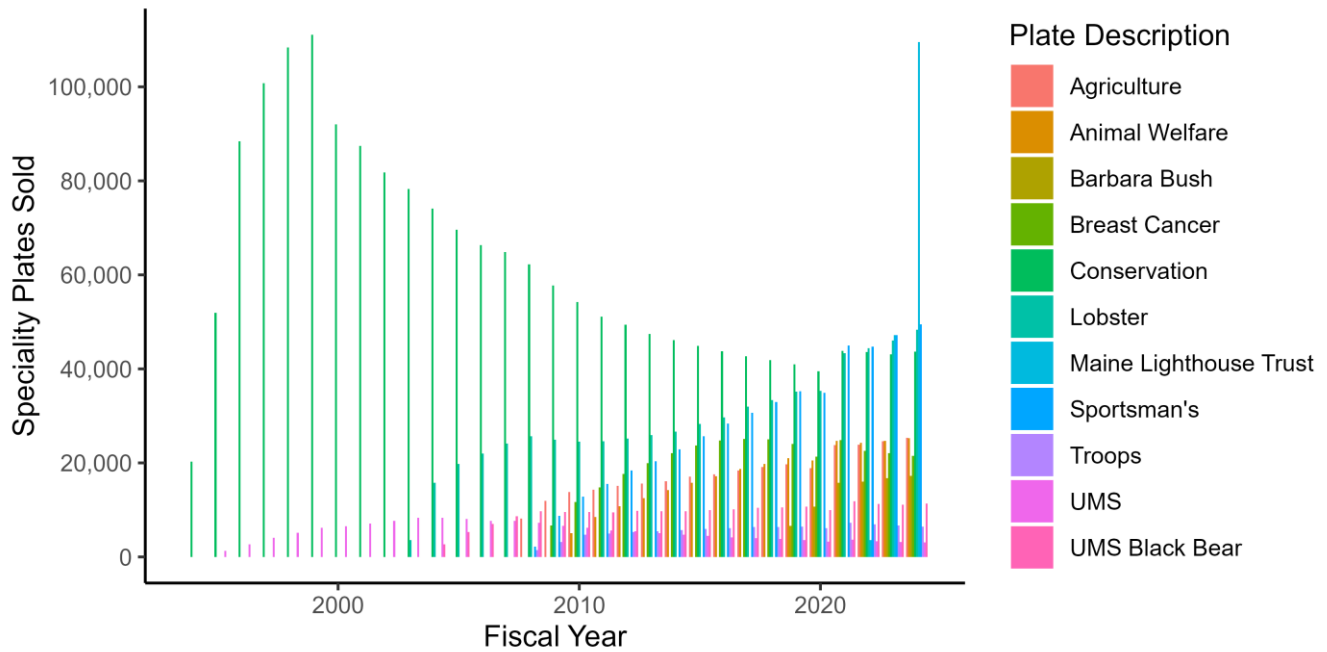


Figure 3. The number of conservation plates has steadily decreased since 1994, while the number of specialty plates available for purchases has increased. Eleven specialty plates are currently available for purchase through the Bureau of Motor Vehicles in Maine.

The declining annual contributions to the Endangered and Nongame Wildlife fund, paired with annual inflation has handicapped the ability of the Fund to support projects on endangered, threatened, and at-risk wildlife. Yet, Maine’s wildlife and biodiversity are facing numerous and growing threats. Thirty percent of North America’s birds have been lost in the past fifty years (Rosenberg et al. 2019), and there is growing concern about a global ‘insect apocalypse’ (Goulson 2019). In short, the Fund is inadequate to address the basic science and habitat conservation needs necessary to ensure healthy wildlife populations in Maine; additional revenue sources are necessary to engage the on-going biodiversity crisis.

Literature Cited

Goulson, D. 2019. The insect apocalypse, and why it matters. *Current Biology* 29: R969-971. doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2019.06.069.

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