

WILDLIFE DIVERSITY PROGRAM OVERVIEW & FUNDING BRIEF – NOV 2025

What is Wildlife Diversity?

The term “wildlife diversity” came into common usage in the 1990s and 2000s as an alternative to the historically used “nongame” as a descriptor of programs focused on conservation work for species that aren’t hunted, fished, or trapped. Wildlife diversity also better describes program function (i.e., is reflective of the broad *diversity* of species worked on) and is aligned with the national model developed by the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies.

Although there is no formal definition for wildlife diversity, it is typically used to encompass all native fauna, and in some cases, flora too. Approximately half of the nation’s state fish and wildlife agencies use the term “wildlife diversity” in their program name, while fewer use nongame and endangered species, and fewer still use terms like natural heritage or biodiversity. The Idaho Fish & Game Commission formally adopted the **Wildlife Diversity Program** name for its nongame wildlife and endangered/at-risk species program in 2011.

Core Responsibility

The Idaho Department of Fish & Game (Department) has statutory responsibility for approximately 10,000 species of fish, wildlife, and plants. Of these, about 550 are vertebrate animals, 80% of which are “nongame” and not hunted, fished, or trapped (Fig. 1).

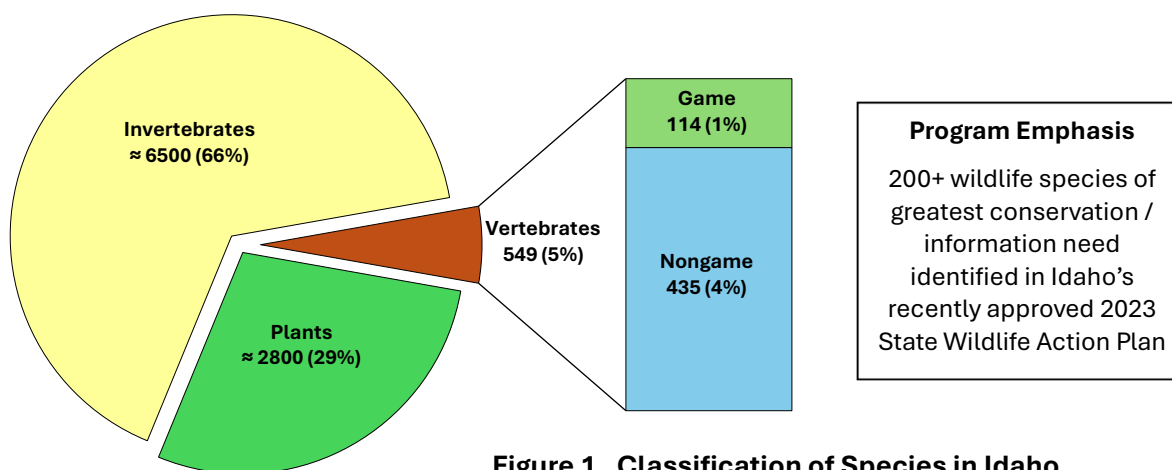


Figure 1. Classification of Species in Idaho

The Wildlife Diversity Program’s core responsibilities are to implement Idaho’s State Wildlife Action Plan (which includes actions designed to conserve 269 nongame and game species of greatest conservation/information need), and to implement those elements of the Department’s Strategic Plan that relate to public trust “nongame” wildlife.

Program staff work proactively to collect data on those species deemed to be most at-risk for consideration by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for listing as Threatened or Endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Conservation actions, strategically guided by the State Wildlife Action Plan, are designed to preclude the need for future endangered species listings, thereby maintaining state-led management authority for Idaho’s wildlife. This, in turn, avoids the need for increased federal regulations and costly endangered species recovery efforts, as well as providing a safe and dependable regulatory environment for industry and landowners to both invest in and operate from.

Budget & Funding

The Wildlife Diversity Program operates on an annual budget of approximately \$2M (~1.2% of the Department's annual budget) and receives limited funding from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. Instead, program revenue comes primarily from the sale of Idaho's specialty wildlife vehicle license plates (bluebird, elk, trout), and voluntary state income tax checkoffs. Income from these sources is then used as match to leverage federal funds primarily through the State & Tribal Wildlife Grants and Cooperative Endangered Species Fund Traditional Section 6 programs. Approximately half of the program's budget is comprised of state/private fund sources with the other half coming from Congressionally appropriated federal grants (Fig. 2).

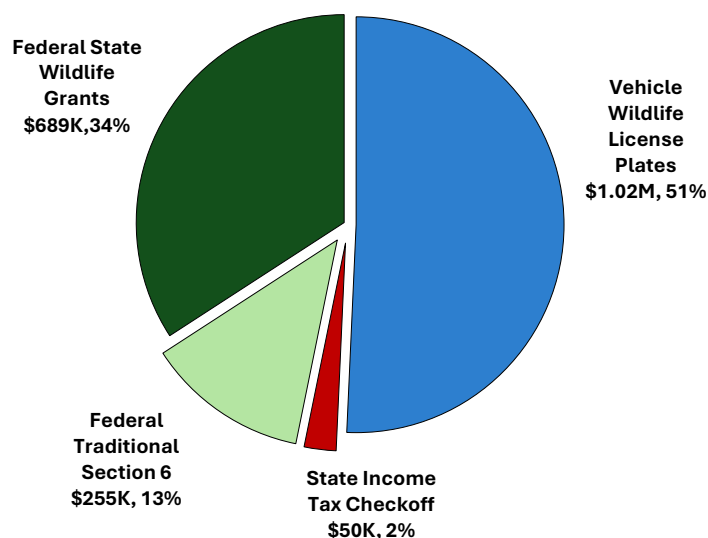


Figure 2.
Program Funding by Revenue Source in FY25

Expenditures

Annual expenditures primarily constitute personnel funding for the Wildlife Diversity Program's 12 staff, with those at Headquarters (currently 3 FTEs + 1 year-round temporary) being funded differently from those in the regions (currently 8 FTEs; 1 FTE/administrative regional office) (Table 1). FY25 expenditures amounted to \$1.32M in personnel costs and \$598K in operating costs. Regional biologists are fully integrated into broader wildlife programs and use their limited PR and License dollars to work on game species that aren't included in the Idaho State Wildlife Action Plan.

Table 1. Number of Months of Personnel Funding for Diversity Program Staff by Fund Source

| Staff Location | Specialty Vehicle Wildlife Plates | State & Tribal Wildlife Grants | Pittman-Robertson | Hunting & Fishing Licenses |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Headquarters | 12 months | - | - | - |
| Regions | - | 9 months | 2 months | 1 month |

Challenges & Needs

Annual appropriations from Congress for federal funding are especially vulnerable to budget cuts or even complete elimination. The development of new dedicated revenue sources would reduce the reliance on annually appropriated federal funding, enabling the Department to more completely implement Idaho's State Wildlife Action Plan and invest proactively in conservation actions designed to provide healthy populations of all native fish, wildlife, and plants. Complementing existing Department funding programs would help the Commission conserve and manage the full array of Idaho's treasured fish and wildlife to ensure a rich outdoor heritage for all Idahoans.