



# LRO SNAPSHOT

A brief from the Legislative Research Office

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## Exploring Nebraska: A Look at the Game and Parks Commission

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The Legislative Research Office has published its annual report on Boards and Commissions in Nebraska for over two decades. That report highlights the more than 230 statutorily created boards and commissions in Nebraska. This snapshot will take a closer look at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) and how they operate.

### Dating Back to 1879

The NGPC is one of Nebraska's oldest boards and commissions, originating in 1879 as the Board of Fish Commissioners. In 1901, it would later become the Nebraska Game and Fish Commission. Through legislation during the 1929 session, the Legislature consolidated the administration of Forestation, State Parks, and Game and Fish into one board known as the Game, Forestation and Parks Commission. At the time, five members were appointed to the commission by the Governor and confirmed with the approval of a majority of the members of the Legislature. After the creation of the office of the State Forester in 1967, the Legislature removed the oversight of forests from the commission. It would later become what is now the Game and Parks Commission. Today, the NGPC oversees over 200 state parks, recreation areas, designated wildlife management areas, and more across Nebraska.

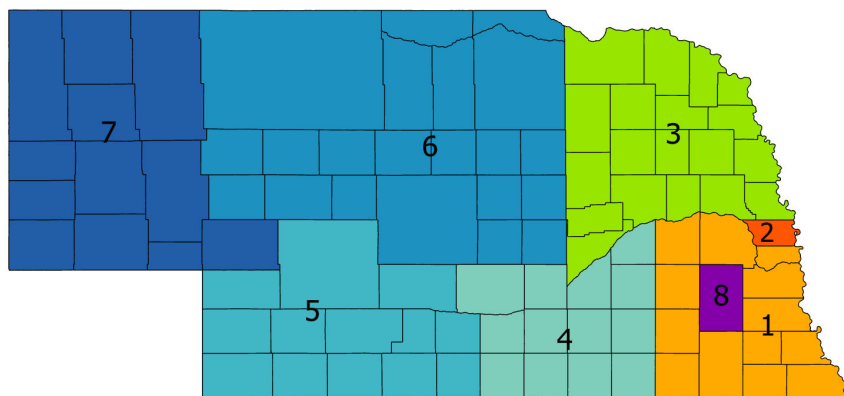
As of 2008, with the enactment of [LB1049](#), the maximum number of members appointed to the commission increased to nine. The commission's members are composed of one member from each of the eight districts in the state and one at-large member. The number of district members increased from seven to eight in 2002 with the enactment of [LB1003](#). All nine members are appointed to the commission by the Governor and subject to confirmation by a majority of the members

of the Legislature. LB1049 also included a limitation on reappointment provision, disqualifying anyone from serving more than two full four-year terms as a commission member. Nebraska Revised Statute [§37-101](#) defines the qualifications and overall makeup of the commission.

### Game and Parks Commission Districts

The Legislature last organized the state's current boundaries of the NGPC districts in 2002 with LB1003. As a result of LB1003, the total number of commission districts increased from seven to eight. Sarpy County moved from District Two into District One, making Douglas County the entirety of District Two. Lancaster County transferred from District One, and it would encompass all of the newly created District Eight. Nebraska Revised Statute [§37-102](#) defines the limits and designations of the NGPC districts.

Map of Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Districts



**Note: At Large (District 9 as referenced by NGPC) encompasses the entire state.**  
Source: Legislative Research Office

### Permits and Stamps Sold

According to their 2023 Annual Report, the NGPC saw a slight decrease in the total number of permits and stamps sold in 2023 compared to 2022. The fees collected from the sale of permits and stamps are vital to the NGPC as most of their revenue derives through user pay. The revenues from selling hunting and fishing permits and stamps, state park entry permits, and other fees through camping, lodging, and other activities comprised approximately 89 percent of the NGPC's funding in 2023.

In 2023, 679,744 game and habitat permits and stamps were sold, compared to 701,634 in 2022. The number of park entry permits sold also decreased, with 485,259 sold in 2023 and 502,393 sold in 2022. The total combined permits and stamps sold in 2023 was 1,165,003, and 1,204,027 in 2022.



Though residents are primary users of NGPC permits and stamps purchased, many non-residents utilize Nebraska's offerings to fish, hunt, and access state parks. In 2023, there was an increase in the number of non-resident permits sold in 2022 for annual fishing (2.9 percent increase), one-day fishing (5.4 percent increase), and annual hunting (8.5 percent increase).

## Sources of Revenue

While the NGPC is appropriated funds from the State General Fund, approximately only 11 percent (\$12.89 million) of their funding came from the State General Fund in 2023. In total, revenue for the 2023 calendar year was approximately \$112 million, including \$15.25 million in federal and state grant reimbursements. The top revenue source for the commission in 2023 was through camping and lodging fees, which generated \$16.25 million. The NGPC 2023 Annual Report shows that the fees from hunting permits and stamps generated \$15.17 million, fishing permits and stamps generated \$6.03 million, and the fees from park entry permits generated \$8.65 million. Fees for permits for entry into Nebraska's state parks will increase beginning in 2024.

Outside of the State General Fund, 18 individual funds serve specific purposes and are available for use by the commission. Several funds comprise the fees collected through user pay revenue. For example, the Park Cash Fund was the NGPC's largest funding source in 2023. The fees collected from the sale of park entry permits, lodging, camping, and other activities fund the Park Cash Fund. Additional funds, such as the Wildlife Education Fund, receive a portion of dollars collected from issuing the Mountain Lion conservation plates through the Department of Motor Vehicles.

## Recent Legislation

In 2023, the Legislature amended provisions of [LB474](#) into [LB531](#) with [AM1835](#). These provisions directed the NGPC to receive, rehabilitate, and manage the Mayhew Cabin historical site in Nebraska City.

Furthermore, the Legislature amended provisions of [LB474](#) into the state budget package. It appropriated \$35 million for the Standing Bear Museum and the Fort Robinson historical site.

In 2021, the Legislature created the State Tourism and Recreational Water Access and Resource Sustainability (STAR WARS) Special Committee through the passage of [LB406](#). Part of the committee's responsibilities is to examine the state's water resources to enhance outdoor recreational opportunities. To respond to the committee's recommendations for water projects in

the state, the Legislature passed [LB1023](#) in 2022. With the adoption of [LB1023](#), the Legislature authorized the NGPC to oversee the Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area, Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area, and Niobrara State Park projects.

In 2020, with the enactment of [LB770](#), certain military veterans in Nebraska became eligible to receive a lifetime permit for free access to Nebraska's state parks. As defined in [§37-438](#), a legal resident of Nebraska veteran may be issued one disabled veteran permit without fee payment. An eligible veteran must have been discharged or separated under honorable conditions and be rated as fifty percent or more disabled by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) as a result of service in the armed

forces or be receiving a pension from the USDVA as a result of total and permanent disability not incurred in the line of duty. From 2021 to 2023, the NGPC issued 6,632 disabled veteran park permits.

## Conclusion

The NGPC has promoted and preserved Nebraska's outdoor recreation since its inception in 1879. Since then, the commission's involvements and authorities have evolved as the Legislature continues to invest in generating future revenue through Nebraska's outdoor tourism, recreation, and wildlife to benefit future generations.

### Examples of Funds for Specific Use by NGPC

Fund Name	Statutory Authority	2022-2023 Revenue
State Game Fund	<a href="#">37-323</a>	\$30,453,499
State Park Cash Revolving Fund	<a href="#">37-345</a>	\$36,705,111
Nebraska Habitat Fund	<a href="#">37-431</a>	\$8,397,578
Capital Maintenance Fund	<a href="#">37-327.02</a>	\$7,623,035
Nebraska Aquatic Habitat Fund	<a href="#">37-431</a>	\$3,438,653
Nebraska Outdoor Recreation Development Cash Fund	<a href="#">37-351</a>	\$1,380,269

Source: [2023 LFO Directory of State Agency Programs and Funds – Vol. 2, Agcy. 33-95](#)