

U.S. Geological Survey Cooperative Research Units Program

Education, Research, and Technical Assistance for Managing
Natural Resources

Supporting Partners Since 1935

The Cooperative Research Units program was established in 1935—and codified by Congress in 1960—to enhance graduate education in fisheries and wildlife sciences, to facilitate applied research for fish and wildlife resources, and to transfer technical knowledge to natural resource agencies. Today, there are 43 units located in 41 States, at 44 host universities, with a national program office located at the U.S. Geological Survey headquarters in Reston, Virginia (fig. 1). The program’s success stems from a collaborative focus on solving problems faced by State and Federal wildlife and fisheries managers.

Each unit is a unique partnership among the U.S. Geological Survey, a host university, one or more State agencies, the Wildlife Management Institute, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The units are staffed by 2 to 5 U.S. Geological Survey research scientists and are grouped into three regions, each with a U.S. Geological Survey supervisor.



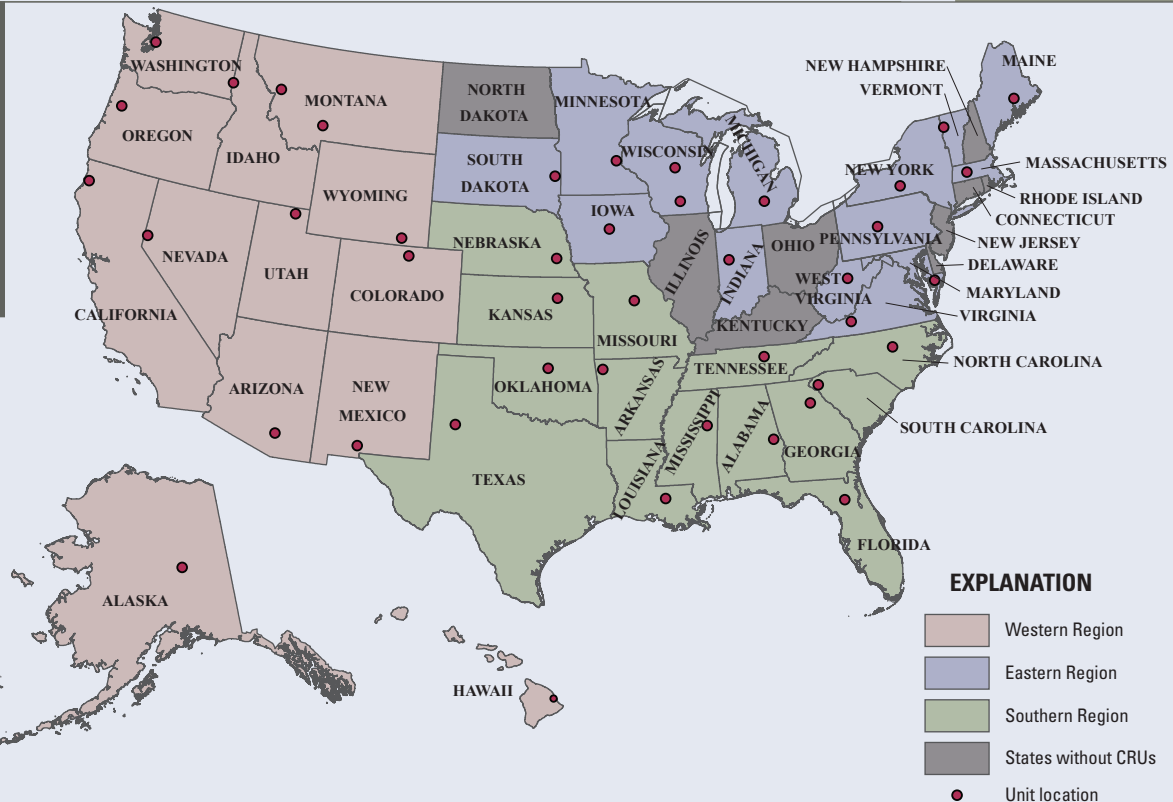
Mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) migrating past a trail camera. Photograph by Tanner Warder, Wyoming Migration Initiative, University of Wyoming.

Mission

The mission of the Cooperative Research Units program is to

1. Support the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation through disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transboundary applied research of natural systems and related socioecological processes.
2. Develop future natural resource managers and researchers through graduate education in wildlife and fisheries sciences.
3. Enhance cooperator capabilities through technical assistance in the use and application of state-of-the-art science practices.

Figure 1. Map of the United States showing locations of the 43 U.S. Geological Survey Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units.





"The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission has enjoyed a long-tenured relationship with the Arkansas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. By working together, we have increased the State's scientific knowledge to move conservation forward in Arkansas. In addition, and just as importantly, we strongly believe that the investment in the students as future conservation professionals is fundamental and crucial to the future of wildlife and fisheries management. A close working relationship and partnership is the key to our success!" —Cory Gray, Chief of the Research Division, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

Photograph by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission.

"I am truly grateful to be part of the Montana Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit where I am working on human dimensions of grizzly bear recovery in the Bitterroot Valley. My graduate experience has been shaped by dedicated researchers whose expertise in wildlife management inspires and challenges me. Their guidance and commitment to natural resource management has made this an invaluable opportunity."

—Anna Baize, University of Montana

Photograph by the U.S. Geological Survey.



"Looking back at my career, I believe that being a Cooperative Research Units Ph.D. student was the impetus for a career that spanned the administration of three state fish and wildlife agencies, serving as the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and President of the Wildlife Management Institute. Involvement with the Pennsylvania Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit provided the opportunity for interaction with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff and State fish and wildlife biologists. The graduate research experience addressed real-world wildlife issues in a practical and applied manner. Throughout my 40-year professional career, I have had the pleasure and honor of interacting with Cooperative Research Unit and other Federal and State fish and wildlife biologists across the country. As Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, I am proud that I could reconnect the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife program. The Cooperative Fish and Wildlife experience was certainly instrumental and a high point of a very satisfying career." —Steve Williams, Former Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Past President of the Wildlife Management Institute

Photograph by Ryan Hagerty, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



John Veon (left, Arkansas Unit and University of Arkansas) and John Carbaugh (right, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission) learning feather identification at the Mississippi Wingbee. Photograph by the U.S. Geological Survey.



Leveraging Partner Contributions 1:3

The Cooperative Research Units program advances wildlife and fisheries management by partnering with Federal, State, and university cooperators to co-develop, support, and enhance strategies that benefit both natural resources and communities nationwide. Federal appropriations for the Cooperative Research Units program primarily fund Federal staff, with limited support for operational expenses. Our unique cooperative model and the high productivity of our staff generates a three-fold return on our appropriated funds.

Over the last 10 fiscal years (2015–2024), Federal appropriated funds to the program have ranged from \$17.3 to \$28.2 million. During those 10 years, the Cooperative Research Units program leveraged an average of \$42.3 million annually in research funding from cooperators and stakeholders, benefitting host universities (fig. 2). Additionally, each year universities provided an average of \$22.1 million in-kind support through facilities, student tuition, and reduced overhead to the program. On average, these leveraged funds supported 31 non-federal positions annually at each host university, including graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and research technicians, ultimately creating more than 1,000 jobs annually (fig. 3).

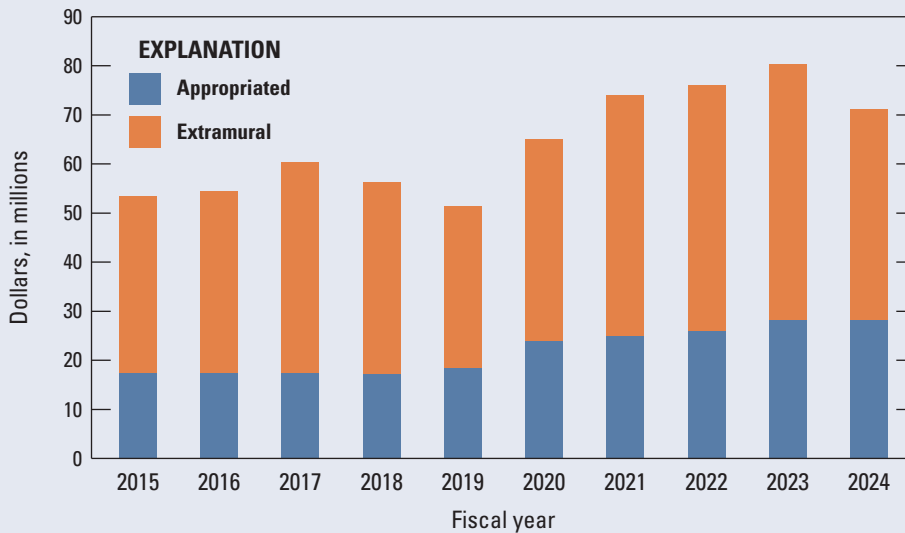


Figure 2. Federally appropriated funds (blue) and extramural funds (orange) for the USGS Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units program over the past 10 fiscal years.

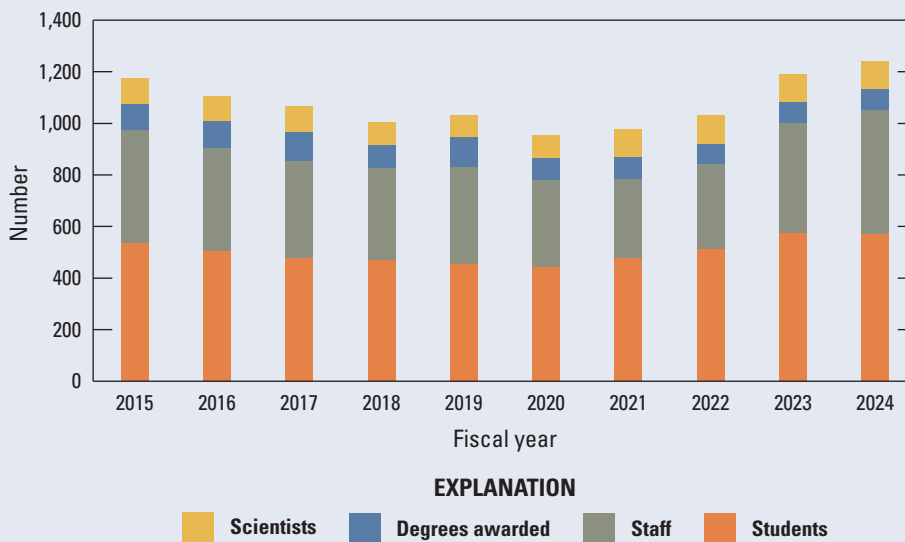


Figure 3. Number of active students, research staff, students awarded graduate degrees, and USGS scientists in the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units program during fiscal years 2015–2024.



Wisconsin Fishery Unit graduate student dipping fish from a fyke net. Photograph by the U.S. Geological Survey.

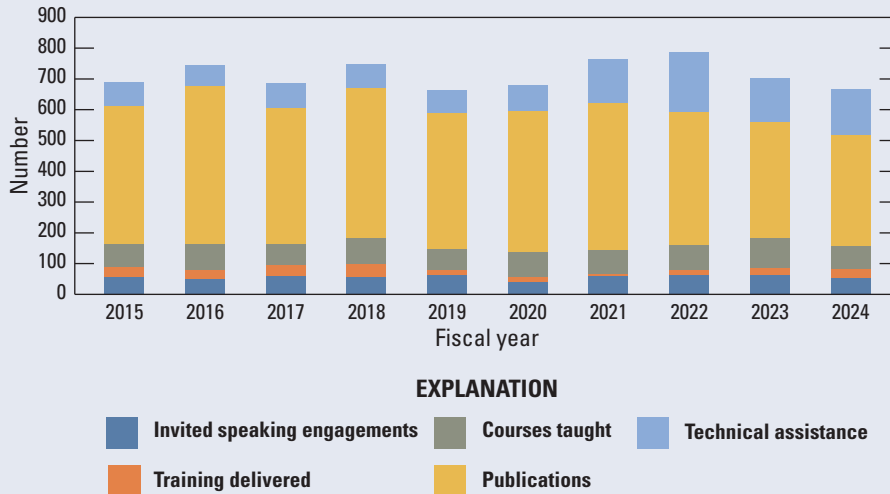


Figure 4. Products delivered from Cooperative Research Unit scientists, research staff, and students for fiscal years 2015–2024.



Mule deer doe (*Odocoileus hemionus*) wearing a GPS collar released by two biologists. Photograph by Benjamin Kraushaar.

Delivering Products to Our Partners

Scientists, research staff, and students in the Cooperative Research Units program are highly productive. Each year the program staff collectively provided, on average, the following products: 443 scientific papers published, 108 technical assistance actions enacted, 80 university courses taught, 58 invited public speaking engagements delivered, and 24 workshops or short courses provided to cooperators and stakeholders (fig. 4).

Science for Partner Decision Making

Unit scientists and staff have extensive expertise to relay scientific findings to a broad cross section of decision makers and the public. Through decades of applying the program’s mandated mission of delivering graduate education, applied science, and technical assistance to Unit partners and other stakeholders, the program has been responsible for significant advances in management and conservation of fish and wildlife resources.

Unit scientists provide critical insight and guidance to managers facing complex conservation challenges, ensuring that science directly informs decision making at State, regional, and national levels. With approximately 700 research projects underway in fiscal year 2025, Unit scientists are addressing pressing ecological issues and delivering applied solutions that enhance resource management.

Headquarters Contacts



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Connect With Us

Cooperative Research Units program scientists have extensive expertise and can relay scientific findings to a broad cross section of decision makers and the public.



An expertise directory for Unit scientists can be accessed here: https://usgs-cru-department-data.s3.amazonaws.com/headquarters/unit_docs/CRU_Expertise-1.pdf.



Search the Cooperative Research Units program project database here: <https://www1.usgs.gov/coopunits/allProject/all>.



A list of formal Cooperators can be found here: <https://www1.usgs.gov/coopunits/allCooperator/all>.

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