

GFP SEEKING ADDITIONAL

PUBLIC ACCESS ENROLLMENT

MARK NORTON | HUNTING ACCESS & FARM BILL COORDINATOR

South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks (GFP) is seeking to lease additional private land for public hunting access through the Walk-In Area (WIA) and the Controlled Hunting Access Program (CHAP) to provide more quality public hunting opportunities and improve access to land-locked public land. In 2025, over 1.44 million acres of private land were enrolled in these programs by over 1,500 landowners across South Dakota.

“One of the reasons I wanted to become a GFP Commissioner was to help my local Conservation Officer get more land enrolled in public access,” said GFP Commissioner, Dean Kirkeby. “The Walk-in Area and CREP programs have worked well for my family. One benefit that we really appreciate is that hunters know where they can go hunting on private land and it reduces the disruptions from them asking for permission to hunt during busy farming and ranching activities in the fall”.

The WIA program annual payment rates range from less than \$1/acre to \$13/acre per year. These rates are determined by the land’s proximity to population centers, amount of undisturbed habitat, hunting opportunity provided, number of hunting seasons in the contract, and if the land provides access to otherwise inaccessible public land. Land in the WIA program is open year-round to all legal hunting by human foot traffic only. Restrictions like “No Hunting in Unharvested Crops” can be added to a WIA without a payment reduction.

There are also one-time upfront signing bonuses for multi-year WIA contracts that provide access to undisturbed habitat or priority big game hunting opportunities. New land enrolled for 10 years in WIA may also be eligible for an additional sign-up bonus from Pheasants Forever through the Public Access to Habitat (PATH) initiative.

Another type of WIA contract allows driving on harvested cropland for waterfowl decoy placement and

disabled hunters to hunt from their vehicles. These are called COOPs and work well for cropland in areas of the state that hold large concentrations of migrating waterfowl. The annual payment rate ranges from \$1.25 to \$3 per acre depending on if driving is limited to ATVs and how much noncropland undisturbed cover acres are included in the contract. Multi-year COOP contracts offer sign-up bonus payments of half the annual payment multiplied by the number of years in the contract.

The CHAP allows the landowner to limit the number of hunters that can hunt the land per day, the types of hunting that are allowed, what game species can be hunted, what seasons the land is open to hunt, and what days of the week the public can hunt it. It has a minimum annual payment of \$500 plus an additional \$20 per hunter that hunts the CHAP per day. A new CHAP bonus of \$1,000/year for up to a 5-year contract is available to landowners who put new land into CHAP that wasn’t in WIA or CHAP before. Multi-year contracts may also be eligible for a signing bonus payment.

Aquatic access opportunities are another option that can allow for added payments to landowners. If a landowner has a waterbody that contains or could contain a fishery as well as providing waterfowl or other hunting opportunities, they could qualify for an aquatic access lease. The lease base payment starts at \$500/year with increased payment opportunities for meeting certain criteria, such as access and fishery considerations. There is also an option for a multi-year longevity signing bonus payment.

If you would like to learn more about leasing your land to GFP for public hunting and fishing access in 2026 through the WIA, CHAP, or Aquatic Access, please contact your local conservation officer, private lands habitat biologist, or aquatic habitat and access biologist listed on page 14 and 15.