# **Showcasing the DNR: Making history – today’s modern, female conservation officers**

*Editor’s note: In celebration of the department’s centennial anniversary, the Showcasing the DNR feature series will highlight one story each month during 2021 that recalls various accomplishments of the department over the past century. This story also highlights Women’s History Month.*

**By KATIE GERVASI**

**Michigan Department of Natural Resources**

Wife, mother, daughter, sister, aunt, niece, caregiver and friend.

The women who serve in the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Division are recognized by more than one of these terms, in addition to “officer.”

In 1897, [Huldah Neal became the first state game warden](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MIDNR/bulletins/1de1b36), paving the career path forward for women. Neal, from Grand Traverse County, was the first female conservation officer in the United States, according to media reports.

Today, there are 21 women who serve at all ranks of the DNR Law Enforcement Division. Like their male counterparts, they have sworn under oath to protect the state’s natural resources, environment and the health and safety of the public through effective law enforcement and education.

“It’s an honor to our division and the department to work with these qualified and determined women who make a difference every day in their communities and serve as role models to future generations,” said Gary Hagler, chief of the DNR Law Enforcement Division.

Andrea Erratt, a 24-year veteran conservation officer, has followed in Neal’s footsteps, as the first Michigan DNR female to independently earn the prestigious Shikar Safari Officer of the Year Award in 2019.

Shikar-Safari Club International is a conservation-based organization that presents awards to wildlife law enforcement officers in all states, provinces and territories in the U.S. and Canada. The annual award honors a state officer whose efforts show outstanding performance and achievement among sworn conservation law enforcement personnel.

Beyond national and regional awards given by the club, the DNR Law Enforcement Division selects an officer each year to be presented with the honor on behalf of the organization, as was the case with Erratt.

“It’s almost like everything in my life led and prepared me to be a conservation officer,” said Erratt, who patrols Antrim County. “I grew up in a family that loved recreating outside and with parents and grandparents who taught me the importance of conservation.

“My parents raised me to believe that I could do anything I put my mind to, as long as I worked hard. I know it’s a unique job for a woman, but I love it and work extra hard, so nobody has any reason to question my ability.”

Also serving Antrim County is Erratt’s law enforcement partner Andrea Albert, who joined the DNR as a conservation officer in 1997. Antrim County is one of two counties in the state patrolled entirely by female conservation officers.

“Before I became a conservation officer, I taught and coached at a community college,” Albert said. “After that, I earned my master’s degree at Eastern Kentucky University, where I interned with the DNR Parks Division for my master’s program.

“I was interested in law enforcement and later became a volunteer conservation officer in Bay City – the physical aspect of the job and the ability to help people in Michigan was a natural fit.”

Sgt. Bobbi Lively joined the DNR conservation officer ranks with a passion to deescalate problems and to hold wrongdoers accountable.

“After graduate school, I focused my career on wildlife biology and wetland ecology,” said Lively, who supervises officers in four northern Michigan counties. “I didn’t like that I couldn’t hold people accountable for their wrongdoings, and I saw the positive, direct impact that conservation officers have.”

As the only female to graduate from Michigan’s 2003 Conservation Officer Recruit School Academy, Conservation Officer Angela Greenway, who patrols Mecosta County, was expected to do everything – mentally and physically – that her male classmates had to accomplish.

“The other female in my class dropped out of the academy around halfway,” Greenway said. “At this point, you’re in the thick of the academy. I didn’t have a roommate to talk to. I was on the women’s floor alone, but I got to know my classmates better.

“There were a couple of physical challenges that I had to overcome, like running and the rope climb. To work on the running, I would run at night with a couple of my classmates to get some extra miles in. As for the rope climb, I just worked on strength and technique and by the end I was able to climb the rope as well as my male classmates. It was about finding your limits and pushing past them, and to never give up.”

Conservation Officer Shannon Kritz, who patrols Menominee County, was one of two women hired in 2015.

“In the 90s, my mom was bird hunting when two men approached her and told her hunting wasn’t for females and to go home,” Kritz said. “This stereotype isn’t the case anymore. Women are breaking barriers in all types of ways.

“People are surprised when they see a female conservation officer, so all eyes will be on her when she is in the field. A long line of female conservation officers paved the way for the rest of us in the department. Michigan has top-notch training for its conservation officers. I wanted to be a part of a department that valued its officers and made sure they were successful in the field.”

Amanda McCurdy was one of six women to graduate from Conservation Officer Recruit School No. 8 in 2017. She recently led a successful multi-agency [search and rescue operation for a missing North Carolina hunter near Sleeping Bear Dunes](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79136_79772_81097-545263--,00.html).

“We joined this profession to protect society, enforce the law and hopefully leave this world a little better than we found it,” McCurdy said. “That is accomplished regardless of your demographic.”

Conservation Officer Jenni Hanson, who works in Gogebic County, graduated from recruit school with McCurdy.

“Females can offer different perspectives and approaches, and I believe this benefits the department and communities we work for,” Hanson said.

Assigned to Montmorency County, Conservation Officer Sidney Collins also graduated in 2017 and shares a similar perspective about the unique approach females bring to law enforcement.

“Being a woman in law enforcement can be a very useful tool, for example, sometimes women are able to deescalate situations easier,” Collins said. “I use my position to engage and improve community-police relationships through communication and education.”

Conservation Officer Jessica Curtis, Alpena County, also from the 2017 recruit school, attributes the communication skills she now uses as an officer to her experience managing her family’s business.

“I managed my family’s pawn shop,” Curtis said. “It was interesting, and I gained many life skills that I use in my career now, such as communicating and deescalating situations with emotional customers.”

In 2018, six women graduated as a part of Recruit School No. 9, including Conservation Officer Anna Cullen of Muskegon County.

“Being a woman in law enforcement can be challenging,” Cullen said. “I only say this because society is more accustomed to seeing men in uniform. It’s gratifying when a woman in uniform demonstrates that she is just as successful as a man and earns a good reputation from her peers and the public.”

Muskegon County is the other county in Michigan patrolled entirely by female conservation officers.

“There are times where we are challenged about our knowledge of the activity an individual is participating in,” said Conservation Officer Jackie Miskovich, a 2018 recruit school graduate who patrols Muskegon County. “When working with male officers, often the person we’re speaking to looks at the male officer to answer a question that was asked, instead of to the female officer. We’re challenged, and we make it through each time as a better person and officer, demonstrating that we are knowledgeable and capable.”

Conservation Officer Danielle Zubek has been with the DNR since 2017 and patrols Oakland County. Many people do not consider the vast waterfowl, fishing and recreational opportunities southeast Michigan offers.

“Most people will stop me and ask what I do, not knowing the job of a conservation officer,” Zubek said. “Others will ask, ‘Why are you down here? The woods are up north!’

“Being a part of the metro-Detroit area gives us as conservation officers the ability to connect with the public, educating them about the opportunities, laws and regulations, particularly at Belle Isle State Park.”

In May 2020, more than 40 Michigan DNR conservation officers patrolled the Belle Isle Freedom March, which had more than 1,000 attendees. The mission of the officers was to ensure the public’s safety, control traffic and protect the island’s cultural treasures.

“Our department was fortunate to be able to connect and walk with members of the Detroit community during the Belle Isle Peace March last summer,” Zubek said. “It was a great way to show the community that as a department, we are there for them and that we are here to protect and serve the people of Michigan.”

All the women serving as Michigan conservation officers agree that DNR law enforcement is a rewarding, equal opportunity for females.

“I quickly recognized a level of camaraderie within the DNR Law Enforcement Division that I didn’t see in other agencies,” McCurdy said.

Conservation Officer Breanna Reed, who has worked in the job since 2018 and patrols in Missaukee County, offered some advice to females new to the job.

“Be an asset to your agency by continuously striving to be the best officer you can be, and surpassing goals set by yourself and those around you,” Reed said. “This will help you build your own confidence and prepare you to be able to handle anything the job throws at you.”

Conservation Officer Anna Viau, who graduated as the Recruit School No. 9 class orator and patrols Iron County, also offered supportive suggestions.

“My best advice for women interested in a career in law enforcement would be to have faith in yourself and always work hard toward your goals,” Viau said. “I recommend finding a female officer who can mentor you and help you work through challenges and offer encouragement as you work toward your goals. There will always be challenges, but believe me, the results of your effort are more than worth it.”

For more information on Michigan’s conservation officers, visit [Michigan.gov/ConservationOfficers](http://www.Michigan.gov/ConservationOfficers).

Check out previous Showcasing the DNR stories in our archive at [Michigan.gov/DNRStories](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79137_79770_79873_80003---,00.html). To subscribe to upcoming Showcasing articles, sign up for free email delivery at [Michigan.gov/DNR](http://www.Michigan.gov/DNR).

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