

Butterflies Benefit from Statewide HCP

by Lisa Mandell



Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, looks on while Fish and Wildlife Regional Director Bill Hartwig (left) and Wisconsin DNR Secretary George Meyers sign the implementing agreement.

Photo by John Christian

Opposite page:

(top) An adult Karner blue butterfly, subject of the statewide HCP.

Photo by Richard Fields/USFWS

(center) Wild blue lupine is the food plant for Karner blues during their larval stage.

Photo by Joel Trick

(bottom) Important Karner blue habitat such as this will be protected under the statewide HCP.

Wisconsin DNR photo

*E*ndangered Karner blue butterflies (*Lycaeides melissa samuelis*) in Wisconsin will be protected by the first comprehensive statewide conservation agreement authorized under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The agreement, known as the Wisconsin Statewide Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for the Karner Blue Butterfly, will be implemented on more than 260,000 acres (105,200 hectares) of potential and existing butterfly habitat in Wisconsin. The incidental take permit issued for this HCP allows landowners, businesses, and governments to continue land management activities.

"This is the first comprehensive statewide HCP and the most inclusive agreement of its kind in the country," Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt said at a September 27, 1999, signing ceremony at the Sandhill Wildlife Area in Babcock, Wisconsin. "It is an excellent example of how the flexibility of the Endangered Species Act can promote regional habitat conservation planning by states and local partners and is a model for what other states and their partners might consider."

An HCP provides conservation measures that minimize and mitigate impacts on endangered species while allowing economic development to continue. Permits issued by the Fish and Wildlife Service allow landowners to "take" individual endangered species for which HCPs have been developed when such take occurs incidental to otherwise lawful activities. Currently, there are more than 300 HCPs in effect nationwide, and more than 250 are under development.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Secretary George Meyer signed the Implementing Agreement for the HCP on behalf of the state. The Karner blue butterfly HCP was developed by the Wisconsin DNR in coordination with the Service's Ecological Services Field Office in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and in conjunction with 25 private and public partners, including county and industrial forest owners; utility companies; the Wisconsin Department of Transportation; the Wisconsin Department of Trade, Agriculture, and Consumer Protection; and The Nature Conservancy.

"Most HCPs involve localized areas with only one or a few partners," said Secretary Babbitt. "What is unique about Wisconsin's HCP is that it is statewide in scope and involves 26 partners working across an extensive landscape. These partners represent most of the significant private and public landowners within the Wisconsin range of the Karner blue butterfly."

The Wisconsin DNR was issued an incidental take permit for the butterfly during the HCP signing ceremony. Each partner receives incidental take privileges under the permit and the purview of the state. Other landowners can become partners to the HCP through an application process. In addition, the HCP identified a voluntary (unregulated) private landowner group that is automatically covered for incidental take by the permit.

The statewide HCP includes such conservation measures changing the timing of mowing and herbicide applications to the fall to protect plants used by the butterflies, the creation of habitat corridors linking Karner blue

butterfly sites, and maintaining a shifting mosaic of suitable habitat for the butterfly throughout the landscape.

“Partners will continue with normal activities such as mowing, burning, herbicide application, and forestry practices in such a way as to avoid or minimize hazards to the Karner blue butterfly,” said Dave Lentz, Wisconsin’s Karner blue butterfly HCP Coordinator. Many other rare species require similar habitat and will benefit from the conservation efforts taken under the HCP. These include animals such as the Kirtland’s warbler (*Dendroica kirtlandii*), slender glass lizard (*Ophisaurus attenuatus*), eastern massasauga rattlesnake (*Sistrurus c. catenatus*), Blanding’s and wood turtles (*Emydoidea blandingi* and *Clemmys insculpta*, respectively), Persius dusky wing butterfly (*Erynnis persius*), and plants such as the prairie flame flower (*Talinum rugospermum*) and sand violet (*Viola fimbriatula*).

The Karner blue is a small, mostly blue butterfly with a wingspan of about 1 inch (2.5 centimeters). While most animal species rely on a stable habitat, Karner blue butterflies depend on disturbances within their habitat to create or maintain openings for the growth of its larval food plant, wild blue lupine (*Lupinus perennis*). In its early life as a caterpillar, the Karner blue eats only the leaves of the lupine, which depends on open sandy habitats such as oak savanna and pine barrens. In Wisconsin, the butterfly lives in utility and roadway rights-of-way, abandoned agricultural fields, forest lands, military training areas, and remnant barrens, savannas, and prairies that support wild lupine plants.

For more information on the HCP, check out this website:
http://midwest.fws.gov/eco_serv/endangrd/insects/kbbhcp.html.

Lisa Mandell was the Permits Coordinator for the Service’s Twin Cities, Minnesota, Regional Office from February 1995 through January 2000.

