



## PRESS RELEASE

1101 WILSON BOULEVARD, 15<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR  
ARLINGTON, VA 22209  
TEL 703-908-1800  
WWW.NATURESERVE.ORG

**Contact:** Rob Riordan, NatureServe / 703-908-1831  
e-mail: [rob\\_riordan@natureserve.org](mailto:rob_riordan@natureserve.org)

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### **U.S. Plants Need Additional Protection, New Report Finds**

Few State Wildlife Action Plans Address Needs of Threatened Flora

*Arlington, Virginia* — A thorough study of how plants are treated in state wildlife action plans finds that, while the plans represent a major step forward for conservation planning, most of the action plans did not attempt to address the conservation needs of plants.

The analysis, contained in a new report titled *Hidden in Plain Sight: the Role of Plants in State Wildlife Action Plans*, was carried out by NatureServe, a non-profit conservation group that provides science to inform effective conservation action.

Completed in 2005 by all U.S. states and territories, wildlife action plans are designed to guide wildlife conservation efforts and prevent wildlife from becoming endangered. Developed based on the best available scientific information and with broad public engagement, these plans are increasingly important in a wide variety of conservation and planning efforts.

Because the federal guidelines governing development of these plans specifically excluded plants from the definition of “wildlife” and did not provide funding to study them, few states were able to consider rare or endangered plants in their planning process. However, plants are essential to the functioning of healthy ecosystems, and represent more than half (56%) of species federally listed as threatened or endangered.

“State wildlife action plans represent a tremendous opportunity for strategically advancing conservation in America,” said Bruce Stein, chief scientist for NatureServe and a co-author of the study. “Now is the time to complement the attention they have brought to wild animals with additional focus on the needs of our nation’s imperiled plants.”

The study found that only a modest number of wildlife action plans explicitly considered plant species of conservation concern. Just eight of 56 plans (14%) took the most direct approach of including plants on their list of “species of greatest conservation need,” while only six plans (11%) considered plant species of concern in their methods for setting habitat priorities. Twelve plans (21%) included plant species of concern in their approaches for defining geographic focal areas, generally relying on plant data maintained by state natural heritage programs. The study found that wildlife action plans for Georgia, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oregon were especially effective at addressing the needs of wild plant species.

The study makes several recommendations for better conserving the nation’s plant life:

- Promote wildlife action plan implementation strategies that would also benefit plant species of concern.

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- Avoid implementation actions that could be detrimental to sensitive plant species.
- Add plant-specific components to existing wildlife action plans where possible.
- Develop state-level plant conservation strategies to complement wildlife action plans where necessary.
- Ensure that plants are fully represented in major new conservation funding opportunities, including those related to climate change adaptation.

*Hidden in Plain Sight* was authored by Dr. Bruce A. Stein and NatureServe botanist Kelly Gravuer, and was supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. The report can be accessed at <http://www.natureserve.org/publications/library.jsp#nspubs>.

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**NatureServe** is a non-profit conservation group dedicated to providing the scientific basis for effective conservation action. Representing a network of 80 natural heritage programs and conservation data centers in the United States, Canada, and Latin America, NatureServe is a leading source for detailed scientific information about threatened plants, animals, and ecosystems. Visit us online at [www.natureserve.org](http://www.natureserve.org).