



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Working Together for Wildlife

*A Midwest Region Approach to
Implementing State Wildlife Action Plans*





U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES



MAR 16 2007

State Fish and Wildlife Directors
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Directorate

In January the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) developed a set of priorities that will guide their on-the-ground work and support strategic habitat conservation. In support of this concept, Regional project proposals will be developed by April 3, 2007, to address the six priority areas of landscape conservation, National Wildlife Refuges, migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, aquatic species, and connecting people with nature. Each Service Region will identify at least two focal area projects—one that serves as a “lessons learned” project and one (or more) that provides a model of where we want to go with strategic habitat conservation in the coming years.

This is the Service’s initial effort to catalog successful approaches and identify new projects that are both geographically-based and focused on explicit biological outcomes. Each of the projects will address the elements of strategic habitat conservation (biological planning, conservation design, conservation delivery, monitoring and research); identify measurable outcomes; incorporate the relevant aspects of State Wildlife Action Plans; and involve two or more Service programs and at least one external partner in a collaborative effort.

These focal area projects represent a unique opportunity to incorporate a number of existing strategies and enhance ongoing efforts to work together on priority projects identified in State Wildlife Action Plans. By working together we can better focus our combined resources on important species and habitat management projects to conserve and restore declining and imperiled species, before they become threatened or endangered.

Next week we will be together for the 72nd North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Portland, Oregon. We encourage each of you and your staff to start the dialogue on how best to incorporate the focal area projects with the State Wildlife Action Plans. The Service’s timeline for identifying these initial projects is short and your input is important. Therefore, please make every effort to discuss how we can use our combined resources to benefit species and habitat conservation across the landscape.

H. Dale Hall
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Edward Parker
President
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies



IN REPLY REFER TO:

FWS/RD

United States Department of the Interior

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November 27, 2006

Memorandum

To: Regional Directorate
Region 3 All Field Project Leaders
Region 3 All Regional Office Heads
Region 3 All Field Stations

From: Regional Director *Robyn Thorson*

Subject: Working with States on their Wildlife Action Plans

On May 16, 2006, we sent a memorandum asking you to look for opportunities to partner with States on mutual priorities in State Wildlife Action Plans and to report accomplishments relating to the plans through the Accomplishment Reporting System (ARS). We expect that by now you have had the opportunity to review your State's plan and to begin developing and working on ideas for collaborative projects.

The completion of these plans gives us a tremendous opportunity to increase our collaboration with State partners and to leverage additional funding and efforts toward common objectives. The States in our Region currently have funding to address plan priorities on an annual basis, and there is continued efforts by the States and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to increase these appropriations.

We see numerous benefits to increased participation with the States on their wildlife action plans. We can work together with States to identify mutual priorities and take coordinated action to restore and protect priority habitats, keep common species common, recover imperiled species, and to avoid the need for future species listing actions. And as a result of our mutual efforts, we will distribute limited resources more effectively across the landscape to conserve a greater amount of high priority fish and wildlife resources of mutual concern.

Here are the Regional Directorate Team's (RDT) expectations for the field:

1. Become very familiar with the State wildlife action plans.
2. Work together as a Service team within a State to coordinate your efforts.
3. Look for new opportunities to coordinate our Service priorities with State priorities and increase collaboration with States to leverage added resources towards common goals.
4. Participate at a level consistent with the benefits to be gained.
5. Report your progress and accomplishments through the ARS.

How you address these expectations is up to you as a team. Each State is different and so are their plans and resource issues, and this will affect what approach will be most effective. To avoid duplication and increase efficiency, we recommend that all project leaders within a State discuss the best approach to increase collaboration.

The following project leaders are assigned the lead to initiate these discussions:

Wisconsin – Louise Clemency (ES); Michigan – Jerry McClain (Fisheries); Missouri – Kelly Srigley Werner (PFW); Ohio – Kurt Waterstradt (PFW); Minnesota – Scott Glup/Jim Leach (RF); Indiana – Bill McCoy (RF); Iowa – Jim Munson (PFW); Illinois – John Rogner (ES).

These project leaders should hold initial discussions with the primary State contacts responsible for the State Wildlife Action Plan to see what approach the States would prefer in terms of increased Service participation. In some cases, States will be delegating implementation to their field offices. In other cases, States may be developing implementation strategies out of their central office and may prefer coordinated Service involvement.

The lead project leader assignment is for the short-term. Once the initial contacts and discussions have been made, the project leaders in a State will decide how to proceed. Options may range from a more formal cross-program team of all project leaders meeting with State counterparts to identify mutual priorities and projects to a more decentralized approach, with individual project leaders working with their local State counterparts to implement plan strategies of mutual benefit.

One immediate requirement is for the project leaders within a State to develop a description of how they will work with their State and to submit this in the form of an ARS report on the implementation of the State Wildlife Action Plan. This will be due by January 18, 2006.

We have also developed a Regional Office Wildlife Action Plan Support Team that will recommend guidance to the RDT and provide support and assistance to program field stations. Project leaders should feel free to contact any of the team members for assistance or advice. The team members include: John Christian and Teresa Woods - Co-Chairs; Louise Clemency – ES; Mark Holey – Fisheries; Kelly Hogan – Refuges; Tom Larson – Refuge Planning; Mike Sweet – Federal Assistance; Tom Will – Migratory Birds

The team is developing a website that will contain a number of “tools” for your use. The website will include: a list of key State contacts, full versions and summaries of State plans, Regional priorities such as the Regional Conservation Priority List and program priorities, the NEAT report on strategic habitat conservation, a link to a site that contains information about State Wildlife Grants, and other policies and directives regarding this important Service priority.

In closing, we remind you to report your progress using the ARS. By entering your reports in ARS, the information can be used by offices Regionwide and nationwide to help track progress, report successes, and share information and approaches across all Service programs.

This effort is one of our Director’s priorities....The RDT shares his enthusiasm for this effort, and we ask all of you to continue to coordinate with our State partners to achieve our common goals. We recognize and are proud of the strong tradition in Region 3 of working in partnership with our States, and we appreciate your continuing efforts in taking this relationship to even greater levels to benefit our trust resource responsibilities.

Thank you for all your efforts to build bridges to a Midwest conservation future we can all be proud of.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Midwest Region project leaders and their staffs have been meeting with state wildlife action plan coordinators to develop strategies to assist the states with the implementation of their State Wildlife Action Plan. An initial report on progress was produced in April 2007. This report provides an update on activities since April and includes summaries of meetings, emerging strategies for working with each state and examples of new and ongoing projects that support action plan goals and objectives.

Illinois

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The Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Service project leaders and Regional Office program managers met to become familiar with the Illinois State Wildlife Action Plan, discuss Service field station activities and priorities, and identify opportunities to coordinate as Illinois implements its wildlife action plan.

The DNR has already formed a State Wildlife Action Team of about 30 key conservation stakeholder groups, including the Service.

The meeting was co-chaired by Mike Conlin, chief of the Illinois DNR's Office of Resource Conservation and John Rogner, field supervisor for the Chicago Ecological Services Field Office. Conlin's office has the lead for implementing the State Wildlife Action Plan and intends to use the plan as the primary tool for driving its priorities.

Joel Cross and James Renn of the DNR provided overviews of the plan and the implementation process. Rogner summarized the Service's contributions to the plan and said that this meeting was a natural continuation of involvement as the Service and the DNR look for ways to collaborate and leverage resources for shared priorities.

Participants in the meeting agreed that successful implementation of the plan will require closer coordination from a statewide perspective.

Three outcomes were proposed:

- Service project leaders will continue to coordinate activities with local DNR staff.
- As the DNR sets up a system for the State Wildlife Action Team to communicate, Service project leaders will have access to the team's secure Web site to provide feedback on plan implementation and updates on how Service projects may be supporting implementation.
- As the Wildlife Action Team continues to organize around the plan's priorities, Service project leaders will have the opportunity to participate in work groups that will develop actual project proposals.

All agreed that DNR and Service project leaders will schedule annual coordination meetings.

Calumet Ecotox Protocol Will Reclaim Urban Wetland Bird Habitat

On June 9, 2007, formal agreement was reached on a multi-agency effort to rehabilitate wildlife habitat in one of the Midwest's most heavily industrialized areas, the Lake Calumet region, which has suffered from 120 years of intensive industrialization, pollution and waste disposal while supporting valuable wetland bird habitats. Roughly 4,000 acres of the Calumet area will become part of the Calumet Open Space Reserve, a matrix of open lands to be cooperatively managed for preservation – and in some cases for recreation. When completed, the reserve will represent a sizeable contribution to the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan's "Wetlands Campaign." Staff from the Fish and Wildlife Service's Chicago Field Office worked closely

with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the City of Chicago.



- USFWS photo

Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley signs the Calumet Ecotox protocol, which will provide a framework for restoring the property.

Illinois continued

Cooperative Research at Lost Mound Refuge

Through challenge cost-share grants, the Service is helping the Illinois Natural History Survey study habitat dynamics of the loggerhead shrike on the sand prairies of Lost Mound and control the spread of invasive crown vetch at the Lost Mound Unit of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. In cooperation with INHS research, a bobcat study is in its second year at Lost Mound. Scent stations with hair collecting traps are being monitored to determine the genetics and status of the local bobcat population. In addition, a cooperative research project is examining relationships among grassland birds, plants, and insects at the large remnant prairie on Lost Mound and will aid in developing guidelines for prairie management and restoration.

Cache River Watershed Surveys

Cypress Creek NWR continues to work with the Illinois DNR to address sedimentation and hydrology restoration in the Cache River Watershed. The refuge and DNR have worked with the Natural Resource Conservation Service, Union County Soil and Water Conservation District and private landowners to complete several projects associated with an overall Big Creek Pilot Watershed Project. Past land clearing, channelization and poor farming practices on highly erodible soils resulted in excessive sheet and rill erosion and instream sedimentation throughout the Big Creek watershed. Big Creek is the primary tributary contributing high sediment loads into the Lower Cache River Wetlands, a National Natural Landmark and Wetland of International Importance.

Illinois Eastern Massasauga Recovery Team Stays Active in 2007

In October 2005, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Fish and Wildlife Service formed the Illinois Eastern Massasauga Recovery Team to recover this small rattlesnake, once abundant in some wetlands and grasslands in the Midwest. The Eastern massasauga was listed as endangered by the state of Illinois in 1995 and as a candidate for federal listing in 1998, and in 2005 was identified as a species of conservation priority in the Illinois State Wildlife Action Plan. In addition to gathering data on habitat at designated sites, biologists captured, measured, marked with microchips and released individual massasaugas.



- USFWS photo

The Eastern massasauga rattlesnake is a species of concern in Illinois.



- USFWS photo

Mike Redmer, left, of the USFWS Chicago Field Office, and Daniel Ludwig of the DNR Division of Wildlife Resources, conduct surveys for the Eastern massasauga rattlesnake in Illinois.

Youth and Disabled Hunt Opportunities

The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge partnered with the Illinois DNR to design a new youth and disabled deer hunt in closed areas on Lost Mound in 2007. This managed hunt will allow the harvest of deer in areas that have previously been a deer sanctuary because of the presence of environmental contamination. Deer populations are twice the recommended carrying capacity within the closed areas. A deer check station will be operated to survey the condition of the herd.

Illinois continued**Marsh Bird Working Group Develops Plan to Enhance Bird Habitat**

The largest concentration of basin marsh and glacial wetlands in Illinois is in the Chicago metropolitan area. Through the early 1990s many of the region's "hemi-marsh" wetlands provided habitat for birds listed by the state as rare or endangered. However, as urban and suburban development has continued, former marshes have either become shallow or become lakes, resulting in a regionwide decline in marsh dependant bird species such as the yellow-headed blackbird and black tern. In May 2007, biologists from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Fish and Wildlife Service formed a working group of regional land managers who will devise a plan for coordinated water level management throughout the region. It is hoped that this approach will allow altered wetlands to cycle to ensure optimal conditions for marsh-dependant birds. This approach would also assist with implementing aspects of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan's "Wetlands Campaign."



- USFWS photo

The yellow-headed blackbird, seen here at the DNR's Black Crown Marsh, is listed as endangered by the state of Illinois.

Restored Marsh Provides Outdoor Experiences for Children

In 2001, the Illinois DNR and the City of Chicago successfully competed for \$1.5 million in grants from the Service's State Wildlife Grants Program to purchase 100 acres of Hegewisch Marsh and work with partners, including the Service, to protect and restore this remnant coastal wetland in the one-time backwaters of Lake Michigan, nestled in one of the most heavily industrialized areas in the country. A state-of-the-art environmental education center to be built on the site, funded in part by the Ford Motor Company, will provide for area children and their families a nearby place to experience frogs, birds, fish and wetlands in a natural setting — a world that they might never know otherwise.



- USFWS photo

A restored vernal pool at Hegewisch Marsh.

Indiana

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Nine Fish and Wildlife Service project leaders in Indiana met with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to discuss the Conservation Action Plan and potential areas of collaboration.

Preparation of Indiana's comprehensive wildlife strategy marked the first time the DNR thoroughly assessed its habitats, wildlife species and conservation partners. The resulting database will track partners' operation action plans to enhance effective collaboration among agencies, organizations and individuals where resources and conservation needs overlap.

The DNR will establish the Indiana Conservation Action Plan, a Web site through which all partners can provide input on their conservation projects such as habitat restoration and management actions benefiting specific fish and wildlife species across the state. This compi-



- USFWS photo by Mike Sweet

Both the Fish and Wildlife Service and the state of Indiana strive to protect the marsh wren.



- USFWS photo by Mike Sweet

Sandhill cranes migrate in large numbers through Indiana, stopping at places like the state-managed Jasper-Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area.

lution will set the stage for greater cooperative efforts for on-going projects.

The Web site will also provide an opportunity to identify new projects such as conducting surveys to monitor species about which information is lacking, or targeting acquisition of lands with existing important habitat or where habitat restoration can pay big dividends.

After all the partners have had an opportunity to contribute data on conservation actions, the DNR will summarize this information, identify gaps in conservation, renew coordination efforts with partners and adjust activities as appropriate.

The Indiana Conservation Action Plan will serve as a forum for regular meetings

of conservation partners to set new priorities, collaborate on mutual priorities, promote conservation activities through the media, identify new partners and interest groups, and generate funds to do more to meet the habitat needs of the full array of wildlife and wildlife-related issues across Indiana.



- USFWS photo

Patoka River NWR employee Bob Dodd places an electric fence on Tern Island at the Cane Ridge Wildlife Management Area on the refuge. Cane Ridge WMA is a partnership project to provide nesting habitat for the interior least tern, an endangered species and a species of conservation concern in the Indiana Conservation Action Plan.

Indiana continued

Tern Bar Slough Wildlife Diversity Area

One noteworthy project coming to fruition is the restoration of habitat at the Tern Bar Slough Wildlife Diversity Area in southwest Gibson County. This 840-acre property lies adjacent to the Cane Ridge Wildlife Management Area (WMA) administered by the Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR).

Tern Bar Slough is managed by the Wildlife Diversity Section of the Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife.

Tern Bar Slough is an example of collaborative efforts among state, federal and non-governmental organizations to provide critical habitat for a state and federal endangered species, as well as outstanding habitat for many other birds and waterfowl.

In 2002, the staff of Patoka River NWR volunteered to prepare a Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition Grant on behalf of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. The Indiana DNR submitted the grant application and received \$850,000 for land acquisition to provide nesting habitat for the state and federal endangered



- USFWS photo

Least tern chick at Cane Ridge WMA.



- Indiana DNR photo by John Castrale

A view of the restored Tern Bar Slough in southern Indiana, with a wildlife observation deck in the foreground.

interior least tern.

The refuge initiated negotiations with a willing seller of the 840-acres of prior converted farmland adjacent to the existing 463-acre refuge-owned Cane Ridge WMA.

Additional funds were needed, so the refuge requested the land owner to enroll the land in the Wetland Reserve Easement Program administered by the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Mineral rights to the deep minable coal reserves were owned by another private party. Surface access rights to mine the coal had to be secured from the mineral owner to protect the surface from future disturbances related to underground coal mining. Ducks Unlimited played a critical role in securing a purchase agreement of these surface access rights.

In June 2003, the land was purchased with payment

made by Wetland Reserve Program easement and a portion of the HCP grant received by the Indiana DNR. NRCS also agreed to carry out the wetland restoration activities with the Indiana DNR responsible for the interior least tern nesting islands.

Wetland restoration efforts and construction of the interior least tern nesting island were initiated in 2006. By June 2007, the NRCS had completed 50 percent of the wetland restoration with a final goal of 663 acres plus 150 acres of bottomland hardwood forest to be planted in 2008. The interior least tern nesting pool with two fenced islands was also nearing completion with a target use date of spring 2008.

Tern Bar Slough is a shining example of what can be accomplished to preserve and restore habitat for a wide diversity of wildlife. The Indiana Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy can lead the way to renewing partnership efforts focused on habitat restoration to conserve all species.

Iowa

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Staff representing all Service offices and programs in Iowa has discussed opportunities to collaborate with Iowa Department of Natural Resources staff to accomplish Iowa Wildlife Action Plan objectives.

Previously both agencies developed independent approaches for coordination and implementation of the plan, which will be evaluated to identify partnering opportunities.

Potential actions for Service cooperation on Iowa Wildlife Action Plan implementation include participation on the plan implementation team the Iowa DNR expects to develop. The team will incorporate federal, state and county natural resource agencies, private conservation organizations and landowners, and will identify mutual priorities, partnership opportunities, funding needs, and monitoring and strategies needed to accomplish plan goals.



- Photo courtesy Doug Harr, Iowa DNR

DNR Wildlife Biologist Bill Ohde (left) and Port Louisa NWR Manager Tom Cox unveil sign for the Southeast Iowa Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area, against a background of typical herptile habitat at Horseshoe Lake.

The Iowa Multiple Species Program Technical Manual, which concerns Iowa's 296 species of greatest conservation need, will likely be reviewed by Fish and Wildlife Service biologists to determine its applicability to agency wildlife monitoring programs. The Iowa DNR has asked the plan's conservation partners consider using the manual protocols for monitoring, whenever appropriate or possible, to promote data sharing and consistency.

Other ongoing efforts are already supporting Iowa Wildlife Action Plan goals, strategies and priorities.

Protecting Amphibians and Reptiles

Port Louisa NWR has partnered with Iowa DNR, Corps of Engineers, county conservation boards and The Nature Conservancy to create the nation's first designated Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area, in southeast Iowa. Efforts will be made to better manage this priority landscape for herptiles on nearly a half-million acres of public and private lands within the Mississippi alluvial plain. Of 51 resident species currently documented in this "herptile hotspot," one third are Iowa Species of Greatest Conservation Need as designated in the Iowa State Wildlife Action Plan.

Coordination Groups, Partners Making a Difference

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife program in Iowa will review designated priority areas in the plan to determine where overlap occurs with Partners focus areas, and target those areas for collaboration.

Desoto NWR and Neal Smith NWR will work cooperatively with the Iowa DNR to develop implementation strategies for plan goals related to wildlife recreation and education, two of the six priority public uses of national wildlife refuges.

Existing coordination groups focused on the upper Mississippi River, prairie potholes, Loess Hills, Missouri River, and southern Iowa prairies and oak savannas could be used as entry points into efforts to implement the Iowa Wildlife Action Plan. Service staff assigned to these groups will learn about the plan's goals and, where mutual objectives exist, recommend using mechanisms developed by these working groups to accomplish the plan's objectives.

One such coordination group, the Fish and Wildlife Workgroup, an interagency subgroup of the Corps of Engineers St. Paul District's River Resources Forum, includes members from federal and state natural resources agencies, including the Service and the Iowa DNR. The workgroup has prepared environmental plans for the habitat in pools 1 through 10 of the Mississippi River.

The interagency Mussel Coordination Team is tasked with restoring and enhancing populations of the endangered Higgins eye pearl mussel. The team is made up of state and federal natural resources agencies including the Service and the Iowa DNR.

Alliances formed to preserve and protect Iowa's Loess Hills include partners such as The Nature Conservancy, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, county conservation boards, private landowners and the Service.

Michigan

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At a meeting of Service project leaders and Michigan Department of Natural Resources staff this winter, a central focus was on becoming familiar with the State Wildlife Action Plan developed by the DNR. Project leaders discussed how the Service could assist the state with its implementation process.

Mike Sweet, of the Midwest Region Federal Assistance Program, and Amy Clark Eagle, the Michigan DNR's wildlife action plan coordinator, provided their perspectives. The group developed a strategy for providing assistance and agreed on a number of action items as starting points. Continued discussion between the Service and the DNR will help guide the collaborative effort.

As a first step, the state will assemble available information on wildlife populations, habitat conditions and threat severity, and identify data gaps. The DNR is also trying to assemble information about which conservation needs named in its plan are already being met and which are not yet being addressed. To help with this effort, the project leaders agreed to provide a summary of Service activities in Michigan.

The Michigan DNR convened a Wildlife Action Plan Conservation Partners' Working Meeting, in which the Fish and Wildlife Service participated to help refine priorities in the action plan and develop a common set of statewide priority research, monitoring and on-the-ground actions.

Other efforts in Michigan are already going a long way toward meeting the priorities and goals of the Michigan Wildlife Action Plan.

Partners in the Michigan Bird Conservation Initiative organized a Michigan Ornithological Congress meeting of state agency and Service scientists, non-government conservation professionals, birders and other citizen stakeholders aimed at sharing information and updating the group on bird planning initiatives. The Michigan State Wildlife Action Plan and Joint Venture bird conservation plans were a focus of discussion. Although these planning initiatives developed independently, they are complementary.

The State Wildlife Action Plan and Joint Venture Plan will be revised periodically as implementation of habitat actions occur; results are measured and new research findings allow refinement of recommendations for goal achievement. Greater links between the two efforts will exist in the next iteration of both plans.



- USFWS photo by Mike Sweet

The blanding's turtle is a species of conservation concern in states across the Midwest, including Michigan.

Controlling Invasive Species

An on-going cooperative project addresses invasive species—one of the highest priority threats identified in Michigan's wildlife action plan—on Seney National Wildlife Refuge and adjacent state forest lands. The goal of the project is to control glossy buckthorn in a lowland area along a stream where it otherwise could significantly decrease species diversity with its capacity to crowd out native shrubs and completely dominate an area. The Michigan DNR provides a prison crew and the refuge provides a staff person to guide the crew as they work with buckthorn on both refuge and state forest lands.



The Service, the Michigan DNR, the Michigan DEQ and other partners worked collectively to construct a lake sturgeon spawning reef in the Detroit River near Belle Isle.

- USFWS photo

Michigan continued

Managing Habitat for Endangered Birds

The Fish and Wildlife Service and Michigan DNR have for many years cooperatively managed jack pine habitats in the northern lower peninsula for many species of greatest conservation need, including the endangered Kirtland's warbler, and for other more common species. Management occurs on both state and federal lands and includes habitat management, cowbird control and survey efforts. Both agencies are part of the Kirtland's Warbler Research and Recovery Team that reviews research and develops outreach efforts. The Service and the DNR are also working together on piping plover protection, which includes habitat protection, predator exclusion efforts, surveys, monitoring of active nests, and outreach efforts.



- Photo courtesy David Kenyon, Michigan DNR

The Service and Michigan DNR manage forest land in Michigan for the endangered Kirtland's warbler.



Banding piping plovers in Michigan.

- Photo courtesy David Kenyon, Michigan DNR

Partners Help Establish Priority Needs

A Wildlife Action Plan Conservation Partners' Working Meeting in March brought together more than 80 representatives of 53 conservation partner organizations to develop a set of 25 common statewide priority conservation needs for addressing threats to wildlife and their habitats in Michigan. These priorities will help to guide actions for all partners in the years to come, and help to identify projects for funding through the State Wildlife Grants program.

Minnesota

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Published in 2006, the Minnesota State Wildlife Action Plan focuses on species of greatest conservation need in the state, and emphasizes monitoring, restoring, managing and preserving habitats to support these species.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Fish and Wildlife Service have a long history of working cooperatively to meet similar conservation goals. The Minnesota wildlife action plan presents an excellent opportunity for these agencies to further develop and strengthen this alliance.

To date, the Service's coordinators for working with Minnesota on its plan have undertaken a number of activities including meeting with DNR Ecological Services and Wildlife divisions to determine how to begin helping to implement the plan.

The first phase of working with the DNR was to ensure that Service field project leaders in Minnesota were aware of the plan and assist them in becoming familiar with it. Project leaders receive information on the plan via e-mail and at meetings where emphasis on the plan is made.

The Service will continue to coordinate with the DNR to relay information to Service field stations regarding implementation strategies and opportunities. A second printing of the Minnesota State Wildlife Action Plan is complete, and copies

have been distributed to each Service field station.

The DNR identified native prairie and oak savanna as key habitats on which to focus management while implementing its plan. The Service and the DNR will look for opportunities to work together to survey and monitor these habitats as well as implement management actions.

The Service has a representative on a Partnership Implementation Team, to help guide implementation of the plan.

Coordination between the DNR and the Service on the Minnesota State Wildlife Action Plan will continue. However, Service field stations will not wait for this process to mature, but rather actively look for opportunities to cooperate with the DNR at the individual field station level. Many opportunities exist through ongoing efforts.

Several wetland management districts are working with partners—including the DNR and other agencies and organizations, and private landowners—to control woody vegetation invading native prairie and surrogate grassland habitats. This effort includes sharing equipment and funding. Many of the sites targeted for woody vegetation control are native prairie on public and private land with known populations of species of greatest conservation need, including birds that require open grassland habitat, and a variety of mammals and invertebrates.



- USFWS photo

In May 2006 and 2007, a one-day Shorebird Blitz survey was conducted to document the presence of marbled godwits, upland sandpipers and Wilson's phalaropes in northwest Minnesota. Each year more than 20 Service, TNC and state employees, and volunteers have completed this 80 miles plus walking survey in one day.

Wetland management districts, refuges and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program have been working with the DNR and The Nature Conservancy to conduct prescribed burning on public and private lands to enhance native prairie, surrogate grasslands, oak savanna and early succession brushland. This will benefit a host of species of greatest conservation need that rely on these habitats, among the rarest in Minnesota.

Several Fish and Wildlife Service field stations are working with the DNR and various watershed districts to monitor water quality and implement water quality improvement strategies on a variety of watersheds in Minnesota. Water quality improvement actions completed include grassland planting and wetland restoration that will not only benefit aquatic species of greatest conservation need such as mussels and fish, but will also benefit wetland-dependent species such as marbled godwit, black terns, wading birds and waterfowl.

The Service's Fisheries Program has a long track record of working with Minnesota Department of Natural Resources on aquatic

Minnesota continued

species of greatest conservation need. Most notable are efforts related to recovering paddlefish in the upper Mississippi River and lake sturgeon in the Red River.

Several Fish and Wildlife Service field locations in Minnesota have been working with the DNR, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, and private landowners to restore shallow lake habitat, managing water levels to remove invasive fish species such as carp, fathead minnows and bullheads, and restore water quality and clarity. This results in increased growth of plants that are beneficial to water-dependent birds, many of which are on the Minnesota species of greatest conservation need list.

Glacial Ridge NWR Supports Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan

Glacial Ridge NWR in northwestern Minnesota is supporting the Prairie Parkland Province and Red River Prairie sections of the Minnesota State Wildlife Action Plan in a number of ways. Recent land acquisition included purchase of 491 acres for inclusion in Glacial Ridge NWR that will be managed as part of the tallgrass prairie ecosystem, with plans to remove woody vegetation and begin re-introducing fire on the landscape. A 2006 Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program agreement with The Nature Conservancy

resulted in cutting 300 acres of brush and trees to improve fire management effectiveness for the restoration of upland prairie sites. In 2007, the refuge assisted the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the University of Minnesota-Crookston with research on prairie chickens, providing a vehicle, bunkhouse space for volunteers and access to booming grounds. The work involves capturing hens, placement of radio transmitters and recapture after nesting for transplanting to new locations to help expand the population.

Water Level Management on the Mississippi River

The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge and its partners in the River Resources Forum are helping to meet mussel restoration goals for the Minnesota and Wisconsin state wildlife action plans through summer water-level pool drawdowns on the Mississippi River. Three drawdowns have been conducted since 2001 and planning is underway for a 2008 drawdown. Significant biological benefits of the drawdowns include increases in perennial emergent vegetation, decreases in the



- USFWS photo

Rescuing mussels before a drawdown on the Mississippi River.

acres of open water, increased water clarity and increased migratory waterfowl and shorebird use. They also provide the opportunity to monitor the effects of drawdowns on fish and mussel species. A mussel “rescue” in 2006 moved mussels out of areas that would be exposed during the drawdown.

Wildlife and Habitat Review

Tamarac NWR hosted a wildlife and habitat review with federal, state and local government entities, university affiliates and non-government organizations to identify a long-term vision, establish priorities and develop strategies for the refuge’s wildlife and habitat management. Participants provided a broad perspective, which served to strengthen our resolve, redirect our efforts and broaden or focus our scope in the landscape. The Minnesota State Wildlife Action Plan was instrumental in placing Tamarac in a landscape context and was used to identify species and habitats of concern and critical conservation issues. We used the plan to identify targets that would improve refuge wildlife and habitat management as well as contribute to the ecological integrity of the National Wildlife Refuge System from local, regional, ecosystem and national scales.



In August 2006 and planned again this year, Glacial Ridge NWR will host a Prairie Appreciation Day to allow the public an opportunity to explore and learn about the Tallgrass Prairie Ecosystem. The Service, The Nature Conservancy and state wildlife biologists present a program with a guided tour of the prairie focusing on plant identification and other unique features of the area.

- USFWS photo

Missouri

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The Missouri Department of Conservation developed its Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy as an approach to conservation planning that uses ecologically based assessments and existing plans to integrate conservation action for all wildlife.

The framework of the strategy is action oriented toward cooperative conservation efforts and identifies places where state and federal agencies, conservation organizations, and private citizens can coordinate work to benefit species of concern and their habitats.

Service field stations in Missouri are collaborating with the MDC and its conservation partners toward mutual goals and priorities for the 33 designated Conservation Opportunity Areas, or COAs, which are priorities based on biological diversity, current stressors and interest from cooperating partners, among other key elements.

Kelly Srigley Werner, the Service's Missouri Private Lands Coordinator, met with MDC staff to discuss approaches to addressing the state's wildlife conservation strategy. With information from this meeting, Service project leaders from all field offices in Missouri met to discuss opportunities, levels of cooperation and involvement to help meet implementation objectives of the strategy.

A number of approaches and actions have been identified as first steps toward helping implement Missouri's Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy.

A core group of Service field

leaders will convene with MDC staff to further refine Service field involvement with the strategy and the designated COAs.

The MDC has requested that national wildlife refuges developing comprehensive conservation plans consider incorporating COA strategies if appropriate, on a formal or informal basis.

The MDC and the Service will identify resources and strategies to address invasive species issues of mutual concern; techniques and approaches for invasives control; procedures for inventorying the extent of invasive species in COAs; and ways to work with other partners to help reduce this threat.

Existing partnerships are venues to further implementation of the strategy by ensuring Service personnel are familiar with its goals and desired outcomes.

Big Muddy National Fish and Wildlife Refuge is a voting member of Missouri's Natural Areas Committee and has preserved habitat on the refuge that is representative of high-quality natural communities in the state.

The Missouri Private Lands Office serves on the steering committee of the Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative, a consortium of more than 40 bird interests working together for on-the-ground restoration of key habitats to benefit all-bird conservation. Since 2003, partners have implemented nearly \$1 million of bird habitat projects ranging from prairie restoration in southwest and northeast Missouri to wetland habitat restoration along the Missouri River floodplain, to controlling invasive exotic species in Kansas City.

Bringing Back a Fish Species of Concern

After three decades, a fish of conservation concern in Missouri now inhabits Mingo National Wildlife Refuge. In 2001, Roderick May of Neosho National Fish Hatchery proposed reintroducing alligator gar at Mingo because of the refuge's unique spawning and deep water habitat, similar to alligator gar habitat. This project is identified in the Missouri State Wildlife Action Plan under the Mingo Basin Conservation Opportunity Area. In the next six years, the refuge continued efforts to restore habitat, and Refuge Manager Kathleen Burchett, Missouri Department of Conservation Fisheries Biologist Chris Kennedy and MDC Media Outreach Coordinator Phil Helfrich embarked on public outreach activities, while MDC Fisheries Resource Scientist Supervisor Bob Hrabik sampled fisheries resources throughout the Mingo Basin. On May 25, 2007, Mingo NWR and the Missouri Department of Conservation released 19 alligator gar—brought by MDC hatchery personnel and equipped with radio transmitters and floy tags to track their dispersal—in Monopoly Marsh on the refuge. In July, some 200 small fry alligator gar will be released to augment initial reintroduction efforts.



- USFWS photo

Kathy Burchett, Mingo NWR refuge manager, works with the MDC's Chris Kennedy to reintroduce this alligator gar back into Mingo Basin Conservation Opportunity Area.

Missouri continued Working on the Landscape in COAs

The Fish and Wildlife Service is working in just over half of the 33 priority Conservation Opportunity Areas in Missouri and in some cases, multiple Service offices are participating with state personnel and other partners to find ways to move forward towards additional conservation in one or more COAs. Activities include providing information on ways the Service and MDC can work together, providing technical assistance and refugia for reintroductions of declining species, and providing on the ground habitat restoration work through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, the Private Stewardship program and the Fish Passage Program, which target Missouri Species and Communities of Conservation Concern that include Service trust resources.

Restoring Grasslands in the Mystic COA

Kelly Srigley Werner, supervisor of the Missouri Private Lands Office and Chris Woodson, Private Lands Wildlife Biologist continue efforts in northern Missouri to improve native grassland habitat by working with partners including the Missouri

Prairie Foundation, Pure Air Native Seed Company, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Farm Services Agency, Truman University, Audubon Society of Missouri and the Missouri National Wild Turkey Federation in the Mystic COA. Restoration activities include fescue conversion, invasive species control, native grass and forb planting, and pasture resting. The restoration opportunity in northern Missouri is particularly important for declining grassland birds and for listed species such as the Indiana bat, Topeka shiner, western prairie-fringed orchid and Mead's milkweed, and the state endangered greater prairie chicken. To date, the Missouri Private Lands Office has restored nearly 2,000 acres of native prairie in the Mystic COA.

Collaborative Approaches in an Area Known for Floods, Ducks and Development

The Service is involved in the Confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. Kelly Srigley Werner is helping to lead collaboration among 40 partners to protect the Confluence, which is largely agricultural land, from development. Within the last two years, the Missouri Private Lands Office has restored or begun restoring nearly 1,000 acres of wetland habitat in the Confluence and we are working with the largest land concentration of duck clubs, landowners, county parks and non-profit organizations. Other activities include involving landowners in wetland habitat restoration efforts near Great River NWR and securing new lands for the Big Muddy National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. Funds provided by North



- USFWS photo

Chris Woodson, wildlife biologist for the Missouri Private Lands Office, and Scot Mikols, MDC Private Lands Services biologist, review the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program plan to restore native wet prairie and wetland habitat for Washington, Mo., on the Missouri River floodplain in a high priority area for all wildlife conservation.

American Wetlands Conservation Act have helped secure several conservation easements in association with Marais Temps Clair and B.K. Leach state conservation areas and have contributed to land protection for waterfowl in the Upper Mississippi Great Lakes Joint Venture. On the fisheries side, MDC has successfully sampled for the endangered pallid sturgeon at the Chain of Rocks low water dam.

Novel Mitigation Approach May Benefit Threatened Fish

The Missouri Department of Transportation is in the first phase of developing a Highway 54 loop around the heavily congested Lake of the Ozarks region. More than 3,000 feet of streams will be placed in culverts. Missouri DOT biologists approached the Missouri Department of Conservation, Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with a novel idea to meet their mitigation requirements: replacing up to four lower water crossings over the Little Niangua River with free-span structures that would open habitat for the threatened Niangua darter. Columbia FRO surveyed all four crossings for their aquatic organism passage impacts in December 2006.



- USFWS photo

The Service is working closely with partners in the Missouri/Mississippi River Confluence Conservation Focus Area to support habitat restoration and protection through conservation easements.

Ohio

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The Ohio Division of Wildlife's State Wildlife Action Plan is based on the DOW's ten-year plan focusing on issues and opportunities as well as specific geographic areas to support viable wildlife populations, unique habitats, and aquatic resources.

Assisting Ohio in implementing its wildlife action plan will help focus Service efforts, creating measurable biological outcomes.

After a Service representative met with the Ohio DOW, a team of Service field staff began developing strategies to assist with implementation of the plan:

- Hold annual coordination meetings, by program area, to identify priorities, build strategic alliances, strengthen the Service's partnership and engage the DOW.
- Identify focus areas and priorities for habitat restoration in Ohio of mutual interest to both agencies.
- Continue to emphasize field-level implementation of habitat management activities.

In addition to newly developed efforts for cooperation identified in the State Wildlife Action Plan, each Service program in Ohio has ongoing projects and initiatives that will complement this process.

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife program will assist in implementing Ohio's plan, which identifies conserving and protecting habitat on private lands within geographic focus areas as essential for viable populations of fish and wildlife in Ohio. The Partners program works with conserva-

tion partners to deliver on-the-ground habitat restoration through a variety of internal and external conservation programs that benefit federal trust resources.

The Fisheries Program provides technical expertise for preserving and enhancing interjurisdictional fisheries and their habitats in

Lake Erie and the Ohio River watersheds and works closely with DOW and other Service program offices.

State Wildlife Grants provide more than \$8 million annually to reimburse up to 75 percent of Ohio's costs for statewide wildlife management programs.

The DOW and Ottawa NWR jointly own and manage Metzger Marsh, a 900-acre wetland unit with an experimental water control and fish passage structure, which allows the wetland to maintain its connection with Lake Erie.

In addition, the DOW assists with avian censuses and cormorant control on West Sister Island NWR, as well as goose and wood duck banding on Ottawa NWR.

Partners For Fish and Wildlife

The Service's Partners program in Ohio is implementing many of the strategies outlined within the Ohio SWAP and has built its own Strategic Plan with focused efforts in key areas around the state that complement the state plan.

In 2007 alone, the Partners program will spend nearly \$200,000 in



- USFWS photo

This scoured streambank along the North Fork of the Licking River contributed 1,100 tons of sediment to the river system until a revetment project led by the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program. Ohio's Wildlife Action Plan identified restoring and protecting privately owned riparian habitats as the single most critical component of managing biotic communities in Ohio streams.

Ohio on habitat related projects. Nearly 400 acres of wetlands and 500 acres of uplands will be restored and hundreds of acres will be affected through technical assistance. These habitat contributions work towards the goals of Ohio's Wetland, Waterfowl, Grassland, and Unique Habitat Tactical Plans identified in the SWAP. Nearly all of these projects enlist our conservation partners such as the Ohio Division of Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever.

As identified in the SWAP, streambank stabilization on private land is critical to healthy waters in Ohio. The Partners program continues to work with private landowners restoring riparian corridors along some of Ohio's streams with high levels of biodiversity. The "Cerulean Warbler Private Lands Initiative" is one of the Ohio Partners program goals to reforest reclaimed coalmine lands as is identified in the SWAP-Forest Habitat Tactical Plan. One of the most intriguing components of the reforestation process will be planting a blight-resistant Chestnut tree specie in partnership with the Division of Forestry and the Ohio Chestnut Foundation.

Wisconsin

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Wisconsin DNR and FWS Project Leaders Develop Strategy for Jointly Implementing the State Wildlife Action Plan

In May, Fish and Wildlife Service project leaders met with Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Endangered Resources Director Signe Holtz, Lakes and Wetlands Section Chief Jeffrey Bode and DNR regional ecologists and other biologists to develop a coordination strategy for implementing Wisconsin's Wildlife Action Plan. The plan identifies key links among species of greatest conservation need, Wisconsin's Ecological Landscapes and Natural Communities, and describes threats and needed conservation actions for rare or declining species. Service project leaders described their priorities and how the Wildlife Action Plan has provided useful information to guide those activities. The DNR and Service identified ways to cooperatively implement plan priorities, including Service assistance in generating maps and conservation



- USFWS photo by Mike Sweet

The willow flycatcher is designated as a species of concern in the Wisconsin State Wildlife Action Plan.

actions for invertebrate species of federal interest such as mussels, the Karner blue butterfly and the Hine's emerald dragonfly; working across state lines and integrating efforts with the plans of neighboring states, for example, through the Midwest Driftless Area Restoration Effort; cooperative monitoring of the status of priority species; and sharing reports with the state as the Service implements conservation actions identified in Wisconsin's plan. The DNR will identify geographic priority areas; in the initial analysis, Big Rivers has emerged as an area where many State priorities overlap. Later this year, the Service, along with other conservation partners, will be invited to work with the DNR to identify priorities among the plan's 1,700 listed conservation actions.

Bat Management Plan

Implementing the Wisconsin bat conservation and management plan is part of a long-term approach for monitoring bats throughout the state. Eight bat species recorded in Wisconsin constitute 12 percent of the state's mammal diversity. Four of 14 mammals listed as species of greatest concern in the plan are bats. This cooperative project answers the call for increased inventory and monitoring efforts to address the lack of information on bats of Wisconsin; builds a lasting reference tool for acoustical surveys compatible with the expanding resources of the citizen-based monitoring network; and continues to build partnerships to leverage resources and gather information for science-based resource planning.



- USFWS photo by Matt Ruwaldt

Students remove woody debris at the Pecatonica River Restoration under the guidance of the Wisconsin Waterfowl Association. This project was funded with State Wildlife Grant dollars.

Riparian Restoration Helps Reconnect Habitat

A project to restore the riparian corridor of the east branch of the Pecatonica River to pre-settlement conditions will result in a more diverse fishery, less fragmented habitat, and improved conditions for grassland bird species. Ten acres of agricultural fields will be converted to wet prairie and 10 acres will be converted to mesic prairie with a total of 20 acres of treeless land.

Partners Projects

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife program is providing critical resources for a project evaluating the effects of habitat management—specifically, removing wooded fence rows—on density and productivity of grassland birds and their nest predators. The objectives are to determine the impact of removing linear woody features on the density and productivity of grassland birds in idle grassland fields enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. The Partners program is funding a majority of the wooded fence row removal on treatment sites.

Wisconsin continued **Restoring Savanna and Prairie**

Horicon NWR used information from Wisconsin's plan to identify priority habitats for its Comprehensive Conservation Plan, and will be restoring oak savanna and upland prairie at the Refuge. Refuge management will now target restoration of free-flowing river conditions. The refuge has found the state plan useful in guiding management of the various units to benefit primary species.

Whooping Crane Management Plan

Ecological Services staff helped to guide development of the 2006 Wisconsin Whooping Crane Management Plan. The whooping crane is identified as a species of greatest conservation need in the Wisconsin State Wildlife Action Plan and is being reintroduced by a coalition that includes the Service and the DNR. The crane management plan will be used by the state to inform management decisions and guide management actions. The whooping crane is one of the nation's most endangered birds and resource managers and wildlife professionals in Wisconsin and other states will use the plan to guide activities.

Wildlife Action Plan is a Reference for Refuge Planning

The Upper Mississippi National Wildlife Refuge Complex has recently completed its Comprehensive Conservation Plan, for which the Wildlife Action Plan is a reference. Species group specific step-down plans and the monitoring plan will build off the Wildlife Action Plan. The refuge will use the information in the plan to target land acquisition and guide development of habitat restoration projects with the Corps of Engineers. Part of the complex, the Driftless Area NWR protects two species of greatest conservation need, the Iowa Pleistocene snail and the Northern monkshood. The state's plan will also be used to identify the suites of species benefiting from closed areas being implemented under the new Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

Addressing the Needs of Priority Species

The Green Bay Ecological Services office addresses priority conservation actions for wildlife identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Wisconsin's Wildlife Action Plan, through habitat management, restoration, surveys, and population monitoring and species protection

for the whooping crane, lake sturgeon, piping plover, Kirtland's warbler, Hine's emerald dragonfly and Karner blue butterfly, supporting conservation actions that restore the eight natural communities identified in the state plan and the numerous associated species. Genoa National Fish Hatchery and La Crosse Fisheries Resource Office are implementing actions consistent with Wisconsin's plan for freshwater mussel restoration, focusing on winged mapleleaf, Higgins eye, black sandshell and sheepsnose mussels. They are also contributing towards lake sturgeon restoration, and large and smallmouth bass restoration.

Activities in the Lake Superior Basin

Focusing on the Lake Superior Basin, the Ashland Fisheries Resource Office is co-located with the U.S. Geological Survey and is willing to coordinate efforts with USGS to support the Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan. The office can also use Wisconsin's plan to guide priorities for Coastal Program funding, which supports restoration projects in Great Lakes coastal habitats in Wisconsin.

Habitat Management Planning

Whittlesey Creek NWR is working to restore coldwater streams and coastal wetlands. The refuge recently completed its habitat management plan. The state's Wildlife Action Plan is helping to identify types of habitat needed to be restored in lowland forests. The refuge has focused habitat restoration efforts for coaster brook trout, but can use Wisconsin's plan to identify other priority species in their habitats.



- USFWS photo by Eric Engbretson

The Green Bay Fisheries Resource Office works in the Lake Michigan basin on lake sturgeon rehabilitation and habitat restoration projects that will contribute to implementation of Wisconsin's plan.



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“The states possess a wealth of knowledge about the conservation issues and wildlife species within their borders. These plans tap into this expertise and demonstrate our commitment to conservation partnerships with the state wildlife agencies. Working together with them, as well as with tribes, local governments, conservation groups and private landowners, we can help prevent wildlife from becoming threatened or endangered.”

--Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne, Feb. 16, 2007

**For more information about the Wildlife Action Plans
for the eight states in the Midwest Region,
click on http://www.fws.gov/midwest/FederalAid/state_plans_home.html**

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