

1. Introduction, Purpose and Organization

1.1 Background

Today, there are over 2000 species¹ that are federally listed as threatened or endangered. Over 4000 additional species² are considered vulnerable. Comprehensive planning remains essential at the federal and state levels just to sustain current levels of ecological health and diversity, let alone conserve species from becoming threatened or endangered. Strategic planning helps allocate funding, human capital and opportunities to ensure that these limited resources are used effectively and efficiently to achieve conservation goals—as would be expected with any other aspect of our environment.

Nationwide, many state fish and wildlife agencies have traditionally relied on funding for game species conservation through hunting and fishing licenses and federal excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment established by the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act and Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act. This funding was responsible for the recovery of many critically imperiled fish and wildlife species, including non-game species, during the last century and continues to form the core of wildlife and natural resource agency budgets.

The Endangered Species Act provides funds for federally listed species, but for state listed species, agencies commonly rely on grants, donations, tax check-off and license plate programs to support conservation programs for rare species. Once a species has declined to the point where it is federally or state listed as threatened or endangered, the cost to protect or restore populations and their habitat is far greater than would have been required to prevent their decline in the first place.

The State Wildlife Grants (SWG) Program continues to be the nation's core program for preventing wildlife from becoming endangered. The SWG program provides federal grant funds for developing and implementing programs that benefit wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Wildlife, as defined by this program, is any species of wild, free-ranging fauna including fish and invertebrates.

To remain eligible for funding under the SWG program, states must have an approved state wildlife action plan (SWAP) that must be revised at a minimum of every ten years.³ The first Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan (WWAP) was approved in 2005. Priority is placed on projects that benefit Species of Greatest Conservation Need; grant funds must be used to address conservation needs identified within a state's SWAP such as research, surveys, species and habitat management, and monitoring. These funds may also be used to update, revise, or modify SWAPs. This is the only federal program that provides substantial funding to address conservation of rare and declining species and their

¹ Source: USFWS: <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/>

² Source: NatureServe: http://www.natureserve.org/library/endangered_species_us.pdf

³To improve your knowledge and sources on this subject go to: <http://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/GrantPrograms/SWG/SWG.htm> (Search Terms: state wildlife grant program).

habitat in every state. Wisconsin's participation in this program positions us to proactively conserve many species of native wildlife and their habitats.

The task of conserving declining wildlife is certainly a challenging one, and yet we know that success is possible as we recall our history of wildlife conservation. By starting early and planning our actions, we can have a positive impact and avoid short-term and expensive recovery efforts. This is why since 2005 each state has been required to develop and submit a SWAP to continue receiving funds under the State Wildlife Grant Program. SWAPs provide an essential foundation for the future of wildlife conservation and an opportunity for the states, federal agencies, individuals and organizations wholly or partially dedicated to conservation of species and habitat to act individually and collectively.

Currently, states receive funds from the State Wildlife Grants program on an annual basis, which are allocated according to a formula that takes into account each state's size and population. A portion of grant money is also allocated to competitive grants. Plans are submitted to a regional review team (RRT) comprised of regional representatives from state wildlife agencies and the USFWS, which makes recommendations to the Regional USFWS Director to approve, amend or deny each revised plan.

Each SWAP must address the eight required elements listed below. While Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources has the primary responsibility for developing our state's wildlife action plan, we've cast a broad net to engage an array of partners, including other government agencies, conservation groups, the business sector, private landowners, the public, and others who have a stake in the conservation of our state's wildlife.

Even after the revisions and updates are approved, we will continue on the path of taking the WWAP to the many organizations and individuals making conservation decisions in our state and beyond. The Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan should not only inform, but be informed by the knowledge, experience and success of its users. Revising the WWAP in future years will be part of a continuous cycle of assessment, improvement and implementation not limited to once every ten years.

1.2 Purpose

The Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan (WWAP) is a plan for all of Wisconsin to help Species of Greatest Conservation Need and the places they live. Although its initial impetus was to meet the congressional requirement to continue receiving SWG funds, its mission has grown beyond that, to provide a framework for organizations and individuals interested in conserving and sustaining rare and declining animal species and natural places in our state for future generations. USFWS helps us broaden that mission by leading and encouraging a coordinated effort to address threats to priority habitats and Species of Greatest Conservation Need on a regional and national level through State Wildlife Action Plans.

Revisions to the Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan have been prepared with substantial input from experts, partners and stakeholders across the state. This plan provides information about species and their habitats to support meaningful conservation decisions regardless of whether conservation is the primary objective or incidental to other resource and land use objectives.

It has become increasingly clear that habitats (i.e., natural communities) are often more appropriate targets for conservation actions than individual species. Public, private, and individual conservation partners in Wisconsin have made concerted efforts to focus management actions at the habitat level, rather than operating on a species-by-species approach. Even more of a challenge is to develop on-the-ground

The Eight Required Elements for State Wildlife Action Plans

- (1) Information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations as the State fish and wildlife agency deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of the State's wildlife; and,
- (2) Descriptions of locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to conservation of species identified in (1); and,
- (3) Descriptions of problems which may adversely affect species identified in (1) or their habitats, and priority research and survey efforts needed to identify factors which may assist in restoration and improved conservation of these species and habitats; and,
- (4) Descriptions of conservation actions proposed to conserve the identified species and habitats and priorities for implementing such actions; and,
- (5) Proposed plans for monitoring species identified in (1) and their habitats, for monitoring the effectiveness of the conservation actions proposed in (4), and for adapting these conservation actions to respond appropriately to new information or changing conditions; and,
- (6) Descriptions of procedures to review the strategy at intervals not to exceed ten years; and,
- (7) Plans for coordinating the development, implementation, review, and revision of the plan with Federal, State, and local agencies and Indian tribes that manage significant land and water areas within the State or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats; and,
- (8) Congress also affirmed through this legislation that broad public participation is an essential element of developing and implementing these plans, the projects that are carried out while these plans are developed, and the Species in Greatest Need of Conservation that Congress has indicated such programs and projects are intended to emphasize.

conservation actions with outcomes that support diverse assemblages of biological communities, rather than generic statements to "manage for diversity." The WWAP

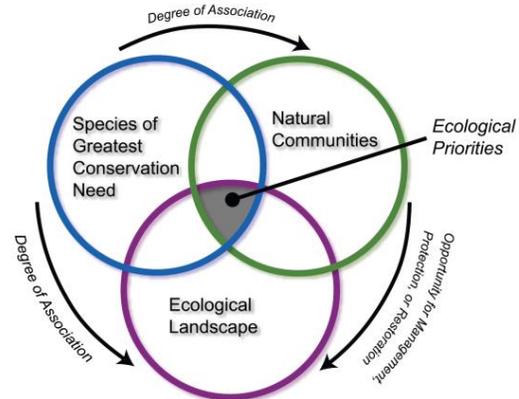
emphasizes habitat-based management to help Wisconsin's Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

1.3 Overview of Revisions to Wisconsin's Wildlife Action Plan

This submittal of updates to the WWAP is organized into the following sections. This submittal emphasizes elements of the WWAP that have undergone significant updates or revisions. Once they are approved, they will replace content from WWAP1⁴ that is currently available to the public via web-based pages or online text and maps.

Section 2: Approach and Methods contains:

- Updated methods used to identify vertebrate and invertebrate Species of Greatest Conservation Need.
- Method used to assign association scores to Species of Greatest Conservation Need, Ecological Landscapes, and Natural Communities⁵.
- Method used to identify and classify issues and conservation actions affecting SGCN and their habitat (Natural Communities).
- Description of the Actions Database, a tool that records characteristics of conservation actions important for sorting, tracking and prioritizing them.
- An approach for updating Conservation Opportunity Areas and a tool for recording important characteristics about each COA.



Section 3: SGCN Summaries (Elements 1, 2, 3 and 4) contains:

- Results from the analysis of SGCN status presented by taxonomic group (e.g., mammals, birds, fish, herptiles and invertebrates), including final SGCN lists.
- SGCN-Natural Community, SGCN-Ecological Landscape association scores for each species organized by taxonomic group.
- Association scores combined with Natural Community-Ecological Landscape opportunity scores help to determine ecological priorities.
- Compilation and summary of the issues affecting conservation and conservation actions for each taxonomic group.

Section 4: Natural Community Summaries (Elements 2, 3 and 4) contains:

- Natural communities that existed, but were not considered in WWAP1.
- Some new community types in Aquatic, Northern Forest and Miscellaneous Community Groups.

⁴ To make a distinction between the first WWAP and revisions in this submittal, "WWAP1" and "WWAP2" will be used; if there is no comparison to be made, "WWAP" will be used.

⁵ The Ecological Landscape classification system divides Wisconsin into 16 ecologically similar regions. These regions differ from each other in ecological attributes and management opportunities. They have unique combinations of physical and biological characteristics that make up the ecosystem, such as climate, geology, soils, water, or vegetation. They differ in levels of biological productivity, habitat suitability for wildlife, presence of rare species and natural communities, and in many other ways that affect land use and management.

- Links to existing community descriptions online; new descriptions are provided in Section 4.
- Natural Community – Ecological Landscape opportunity scores for each community type organized by community group.
- Compilation and summary of issues affecting conservation and conservation actions for each natural community group.
- Summary of results from climate vulnerability assessment workshops for each Natural Community group.

Section 5: Conservation Opportunity Areas (Elements 2 and 4) contains:

- Starting points to revise existing COAs during plan implementation
- Example considerations for revised COAs: high diversity forests in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest; and The Nature Conservancy's portfolio lakes conservation planning assessment.
- Using the combination of SGCNs most associated with the Natural Communities that have the highest management opportunity within each Ecological Landscape to assess potential COAs yet to be identified.

Section 6: Monitoring (Element 5) contains:

- General purpose and strategy for monitoring the Species of Greatest Conservation Need and their habitats, and approaches for monitoring the outcomes and effectiveness of conservation actions.

Section 7: Plan Review (Element 6) contains:

- Process for updating the WWAP in the short-term and long-term based on an adaptive management model that relies, in part, on monitoring outcomes and effectiveness of conservation actions.
- Areas for continued improvement within the WWAP that were outside the scope of this revision because of their complexity or broad interest among WWAP users and conservation decision makers.

Section 8: Public and Agency Participation and Coordination (Elements 7 and 8) contains:

- Public participation for the WWAP revision is split into technical participation and traditional public involvement.
- Public involvement process that was used, including coordination efforts with other agencies, tribes, and conservation partners.
- Continued involvement of conservation partners and interested parties in the implementation, review, and revision of the WWAP.

1.4 Organizational Structure of the WWAP Revision

In the hierarchy of organizing the WWAP revisions, technical teams are supported by WDNR - Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation (NHC), which has primary responsibility for producing the WWAP. NHC staff serve on the Coordination Team to help guide content and outcome. The Fish and Wildlife Management Team consists of NHC and other Bureau Directors that ensure consistency with other fish and wildlife programs within the Lands Division. The WWAP Coordinator leads the Coordination Team and

facilitates information to and feedback from the technical Advisory Team to the Coordination Team. The WWAP Coordinator, members of the Coordination Team and individual “Leads” for each of the Technical Teams are all DNR staff within NHC and they are charged with compiling input, feedback and recommendations from all the teams into the products of the WWAP revision as well as authoring portions of the WWAP. NHC staff and their roles are listed in Table 1.1.

The process for completing revisions to the WWAP was structured to encourage participation at various levels of involvement. Participants were invited and organized into several teams based on the topic of the revision. Revision topics and the scope of work for each team were based on two core objectives: 1) update data and information about SGCN, their habitat, and the most important conservation actions needed to address the issues that affect them; and 2) make improvements to the format and presentation of information to make the WWAP more meaningful and easier to use for people making conservation decisions within and outside the Department. The role of these teams, including the Advisory Team, is technical, although they may have stakeholder affiliations.

Members of the public, stakeholders, organizations or individuals with a particular interest in the outcome of the revision were invited and encouraged to participate in a parallel public involvement process employing traditional and novel methods. Having two paths for participation helped to optimize the efficiency of the revision process, achieve balance in content and results, and make the best possible use of the scientific and technical knowledge possessed by each participant. The following Figure 1.1 illustrates the organizational structure for the WWAP revision. Because technical teams are considered part of the public participation process, their roles and membership are described in more detail in Section 8, Public and Agency Participation and Coordination.

Figure 1.1 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR THE WWAP REVISION

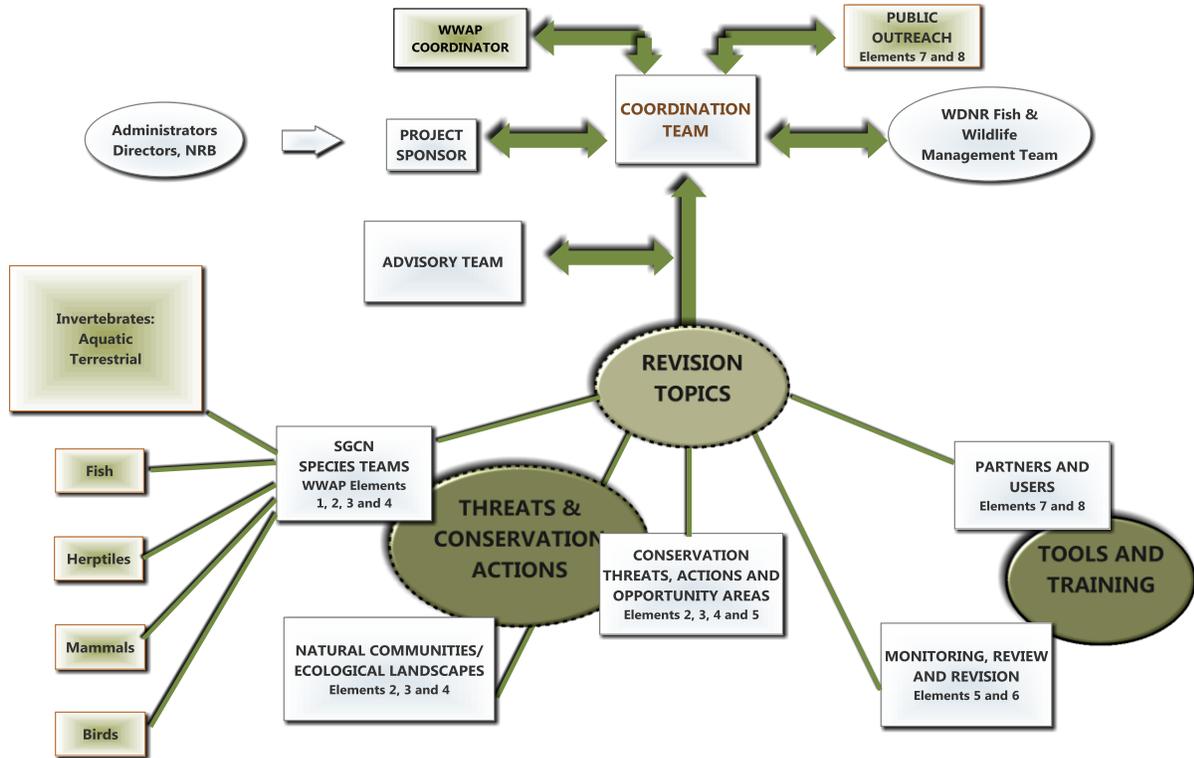


Table 1.1 WDNR-Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation (NHC) Coordination Team and SGCN Leads

Role	First Name	Last Name
Coordination Team	Armund	Bartz
Coordination Team/Herptile SGCN Lead / Public Participation / Monitoring and Effectiveness Measures	Tara	Bergeson
Coordination Team – NHC Section Chief, Species Management	Owen	Boyle
Project Sponsor - Deputy Division Administrator, Lands Division	Erin	Crain
Plant Lead	Kevin	Doyle
WWAP Assistant	Amy	Dubruiel
Coordination Team / Invertebrate Team / Data Management	Terrell	Hyde
Coordination Team / Invasive and Problematic Species Lead	Kelly	Kearns
Fish SGCN Lead	Lisie	Kitchel
WWAP Revisions Coordinator	Shari	Koslowsky
Coordination Team / Bird SGCN Lead	Davin	Lopez
Coordination Team	Ryan	Magana
Natural Communities / Northern Forest Communities / Climate Change Vulnerability Assessments	Ryan	O'Connor
Natural Community Lead / Climate Changes Vulnerability Assessments / Inland Lakes	Amy	Staffen
Coordination Team / Mammal SGCN Lead	Rich	Staffen
Invertebrate SGCN Lead	Jay	Watson