

# DRAFT

## **Preliminary Summary of Potential Changes to Services Provided by the Endangered Resources Review Program in Response to Stakeholder Requests**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Endangered Resources Review Program (RP) has initiated a process to review the services that it currently provides and consider changes to those services that would better serve its customers and partners. This document outlines potential improvements to and expansion of RP services in response to input received from two stakeholder advisory groups, one consisting of external customers, partners and other entities with an interest in the process, and a second consisting of internal DNR staff from other programs who utilize Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) data in decisions regarding planning and permitting. In brief, the major potential improvements (and associated costs and considerations) to RP services are as follows:

**Creation of Advisory Board:** We suggest that an Advisory Board be formed to provide guidance to the RP. The Board would include representatives from various customer and partner groups, and would play a role in approving the RP budget. The creation of an Advisory Board would likely require a change to administrative code.

**Technical support:** 1) Provide consistent, reliable one-stop customer assistance through the creation of an ombudsperson position. This would require significant long-term staffing resources which cannot be accommodated under the current RP staffing configuration. 2) Redesign the RP website to be more customer-focused and provide comprehensive information on RP services, including under what circumstances they are needed and how to request them. This would require moderate effort from RP staff and increased effort from web staff (~25% of a full-time position). 3) Provide online a list of species and habitat experts. This would require limited effort from RP staff. 4) Improve communication, education and outreach to internal DNR staff and external customers about RP services. This would require limited staffing resources on an ongoing basis which cannot be accommodated under the current RP staffing configuration

**Endangered Resources (ER) Reviews:** 1) Ensure reasonable turnaround times on a consistent, long-term basis by shifting staffing of this service from limited-term to long-term positions. This shift cannot be accommodated under the current RP staffing configuration. 2) Develop a template for ER Reviews that standardizes the information provided and clarifies required versus recommended measures for avoiding impacts to rare species and habitats. This would require limited effort on a one-time basis from existing RP staff. 3) Streamline the ER review process by encouraging customers who have access to detailed NHI data to submit to the RP for review and sign off preliminary recommendations for avoiding negative impacts to rare species and habitats. To be successful, this would require greatly expanded sharing of detailed NHI data with additional customer groups and a certification program that would provide the training necessary to develop recommendations (see next two items). 4) Seek authority for RP staff to conduct accelerated reviews. This would likely require a change to NR 29, Wis. Admin. Code, which involves a public hearing and subsequent review and approval by the Natural Resources Board and legislature.

**Sharing detailed NHI data with customers and partners:** Expand sharing of detailed NHI data to a much broader group of customers to allow consideration of rare species at a much earlier stage in the planning process when it is more efficient, affordable, and feasible to accommodate rare species concerns. We do not anticipate that significantly increased staff resources would be needed to expand data sharing. However an accompanying NHI certification program would be needed to safeguard the NHI data (see next item).

**A pilot NHI Certification Program:** Creation of a pilot NHI Certification Program would ensure the security and correct use, interpretation, and application of the NHI data by requiring comprehensive training and minimum criteria for education, training and/or work experience as a prerequisite to receiving access to detailed NHI data. We anticipate that the training and information that applicants would receive through a certification program would lead to more

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effective conservation of rare species and their habitats. Creation of the program would require significant staffing resources (~1 full-time position) on an ongoing basis that cannot be accommodated under the current RP staffing configuration.

**Information on rare species and high-quality natural communities:** 1) Consolidate, update and provide easier access to existing information on rare species and habitats. Consolidation and improved access likely could be accomplished relatively quickly with existing staffing resources; updating of the information can be accommodated by ER species experts but will take longer. 2) Develop guidance and management recommendations for additional species and habitats by devoting a small portion of RP funding to contracting with recognized experts to produce guidance within a pre-determined time frame using the existing template. Contract services would complement existing Bureau efforts and target species of highest priority to RP customers. 3) Provide online calendars of important dates for rare birds and amphibians/reptiles. These are currently under review and can be completed with existing staff resources.

**NHI training:** Provide advanced, field-based training on specific species and taxa groups. Training would be offered to both DNR staff and externals on a regular basis (1-2 times per year); topics would vary by region and/or over time. This would require significant staff effort (~60% of a full-time position) on an ongoing basis which cannot be accommodated under the current RP staffing configuration. Additional funds would be needed for travel and materials to develop and present the training.

**County and township-level NHI data:** 1) Minor improvements to the website and format of the generalized NHI data are outlined and could be accommodated by existing RP and web staff. 2) It is also possible that we could fundamentally change the way we offer access to these data by modifying the NHI Portal to allow open access to generalized NHI data. It is likely that this would involve considerable time (and expense) from DNR IT staff.

**Incidental Take Authorizations:** Standardize the incidental take authorization process and provide forms and additional information online. This would require relatively little effort and could be accommodated by existing RP staff.

**Endangered and Threatened Species Permits:** Standardize and streamline the E/T permit process and provide additional information and forms online. This would require a moderate amount of effort by RP and web staff and likely could be accommodated under the existing RP staff configuration.

**Maintenance of a comprehensive, up-to-date NHI database:** The RP will be working with NHI staff responsible for inventory and mapping of records into the NHI database to identify ways in which we might improve both the turnaround time for mapping new and updated records into the database and work to fill important gaps in the geographical coverage of our data, particularly through more effective use of volunteers and information in other existing databases.

**Funding and staffing considerations:** The current budget for the RP is approximately \$420,000, funded by a combination of four different sources. We anticipate that provision of the improved and expanded services outlined in this document would require increased funding (approximately \$605,000) and staff resources (particularly in the areas of technical support, training, and creation of a certification program).

**Input from stakeholders:** At the November 5<sup>th</sup> meeting, we will be asking stakeholders to discuss your vision for the RP, how well the potential changes outlined here would address your concerns, and how we might best move forward in the near term to provide the services of highest priority to you. Our next meeting (expected in December or January) will focus on logistical considerations (infrastructure, rules, staff, fees, etc) that would be needed to implement the changes outlined in this document. Our goal is to identify a strategy for the RP to provide the services most important to the conservation of Wisconsin's rare resources and to the work of our stakeholders in an efficient, effective and financially feasible manner.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Endangered Resources Review Program (Review Program) lies within the Endangered Resources Bureau of the Wisconsin DNR. The Review Program strives to help the citizens of Wisconsin comply with Wisconsin's endangered species laws, and in so doing, help conserve the rare plants, animals and habitats found in Wisconsin. This document outlines how services currently provided by the Review Program might be improved and expanded in response to feedback from our stakeholders. We believe that the changes outlined here would better equip our customers and partners to consider potential impacts to rare and sensitive resources early in the planning process as a fundamental part of the work that they do, leading to a more effective, cooperative, and partnership-based approach to land use and management in Wisconsin and ultimately resulting in better on-the-ground conservation of our natural resources.

The eight primary services that the Review Program currently provides to external customers and partners and/or to internal DNR staff are:

- 1) Technical support and assistance related to Endangered Resources Reviews, interpretation of NHI data, use of the NHI Portal, etc.
- 2) Endangered Resources Reviews, which provide information to the applicant on rare species and communities present on and near a specific site along with detailed recommendations for avoiding impacts to those resources
- 3) Access to detailed NHI data, provided via the web-based NHI Portal or GIS shapefiles, for research, conservation and planning purposes
- 4) Online information on the biology and ecology of rare plants, animals, and high-quality natural communities
- 5) Free, online access to county and township level Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) data on rare plants, animals and high-quality natural communities, suitable for many general planning and assessment needs
- 6) Online introductory NHI training, to increase understanding of the screening process for rare resources and the ability to make effective decisions related to these resources
- 7) Incidental Take Authorizations, allowing for the taking of a listed species if the taking is incidental to the carrying out of an otherwise lawful activity; and
- 8) Endangered and Threatened Species Permits, required to take, transport, possess, or sell state-listed animal or plant species

In addition to identifying potential improvements to the above services in response to stakeholder requests, we also outline one potential new service (development of a pilot NHI Certification Program that would accompany efforts to share detailed NHI data with a much broader group of customers and partners) and make one general recommendation (creation of an Advisory Board).

The Review Program is housed within the Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) section of the Endangered Resources Bureau. The mission of the Endangered Resources Program as a whole is to work with others to identify, protect and manage native plant and animal species, natural communities and other natural features; enhance and restore populations and habitats of rare and endangered species; and promote knowledge, appreciation and stewardship of Wisconsin's native species and ecosystem for present and future generations. The Review Program plays a key role in helping to realize this mission by bringing the most current and best available endangered

resources data and information to decision-making processes, empowering Wisconsin's citizens to make better land use decisions that will lead to more effective conservation of Wisconsin's natural resources, including many rare plants, animals and habitats. A key goal of the Review Program is to bring ER data and information into the conversation early in decision-making processes.

The services and information provided by the Endangered Resources Review Program are governed and/or affected by the following state laws and administrative code:

- s. 29.604, Wis. Stats., Wisconsin Endangered Species Act,
- s. 23.27(3), Wis. Stats., Natural Heritage Inventory Program,
- s. 29.563, Wis. Stats., Endangered Species Permit fees,
- NR 27, Wis. Admin. Code, Endangered and Threatened Species,
- NR 29, Wis. Admin. Code, Endangered Resources Information Fees, and
- s. 19.31-19.39, Wis. Stats., Wisconsin Open Records Law.

You can find more information about these state statutes and administrative code in Appendix A, or by searching for the specific chapters referenced above at the following websites:

<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/stats.html> (for state statutes) and  
<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/code.htm> (for administrative code).

The remainder of this document is dedicated to providing you, our stakeholders, with a summary of potential changes that might be implemented in response to stakeholder input. In Part 1, we summarize stakeholder input and suggestions related to each Review Program service, provide a brief overview of the current status of each service, and outline potential changes and considerations (staffing, funding, legal authority, etc.) for improvements to the service. Please note that you can access a complete summary of input received from the stakeholder advisory group at <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/review/proposedChanges.asp>. In Part 2, we provide a financial context for the potential changes, including information on the Review Program's current funding status and anticipated changes in funding and staffing resources that we believe would be needed to implement the changes.

As we review and discuss the changes outlined in this document with you, we hope that you will help us to further refine the potential improvements based on your priority needs and the staffing, funding, timing and legal considerations outlined for each of the changes. We hope that the information presented here will inspire ideas and discussion that will help us chart a future path for our program that will strive to provide the services most important to the conservation of Wisconsin's rare resources and to the work of our partners in an efficient, effective and financially feasible manner.

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## **PART 1: POTENTIAL CHANGES TO REVIEW PROGRAM SERVICES IN RESPONSE TO STAKEHOLDER REQUESTS**

### **GENERAL RECOMMENDATION: CREATION OF AN ADVISORY BOARD**

We believe it is critically important to understand and serve our customers and partners in a way that allows them to use and manage land in Wisconsin in a manner that avoids negative impacts to rare species and high-quality communities to the maximum extent practicable. Establishing a

solid, ongoing relationship with the people to whom we provide services is important. We also believe it is important to involve those customers and partners in guiding the program itself. As a result, we suggest that an Advisory Board be formed to provide guidance to the Review Program. A similar board currently advises the Laboratory Certification Program (<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/es/science/lc/INFO/overview.htm#progstruct>). We envision that the Advisory Board for the Review Program would include representatives from various customer groups, and would play a role in approving the Review Program budget as well as providing direction related to services provided by the Program. The creation of an Advisory Board would likely require a change to administrative rule (or possibly statute), and would require some administrative support to be provided by the Review Program.

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## **SERVICE: TECHNICAL SUPPORT**

**BRIEF SUMMARY OF INPUT/SUGGESTIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS:** Technical support was listed as one of the services most important to conducting customers' work. Customers requested additional staff as well as better access to existing DNR staff for consultation. Stakeholders requested that we provide one central "hotline" that people could call with their questions. They noted that if we are to expand data sharing efforts to encompass a broader audience, DNR will need to provide adequate technical support to users (especially to local units of government which vary greatly in terms of both interest in the information and the expertise and ability of staff to interpret these data) to ensure broad and appropriate use, interpretation and application of the data in local land use decisions.

**CURRENT STATUS:** Current staffing levels and patterns do not allow the Review Program to provide this type of hotline at a level of effort and consistency that meets the needs of our customers. Currently, questions about a species or review may be received by any Review Program staff member, who may either answer the question or pass it on to a more appropriate person (e.g., a species expert). This can lead to frustration as species experts and other support staff may be difficult to reach, and there may be delays in responding. Support services involving site-specific consultation or site visits are requested by partner agencies and DNR staff as well as other customers. The Review Program web pages are currently rather scattered and difficult to navigate. Information on important services is missing, and in some cases information presented may be misleading. For example, in the case of the county NHI data, the web page itself implies that review is an appropriate use for these data. Major changes are needed to our website to improve navigation and the clarity and consistency of information provided. Currently only very limited outreach occurs via some DNR permit staff and possibly some individuals who find information on our website. Existing Review Program staff levels cannot accommodate any significant amount of outreach either internally or externally.

**POTENTIAL CHANGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVED SERVICES:** Customers requested improvements in three different areas of technical support: 1) questions pertaining to the review process (ER reviews, NHI data, NHI portal, laws, etc), 2) specific questions for an expert on an individual species or habitat, and 3) site specific consultation and site visits.

- **Stakeholder request: Provide a central hotline that customers can call with all project questions, regardless of topic and better support for individual ER Reviews and the review process (e.g., NHI portal use, endangered species laws, general information and process questions)**

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*Potential improvement to service:* Provide consistent, reliable, and ongoing technical support to customers at all stages in the process (i.e., an ombudsperson). The ombudsperson would be trained to answer many questions, and would follow-up directly with species experts to provide one-stop service to customers and a direct link to species experts when needed. This staff person would also conduct ER Reviews as part of his or her responsibilities, and so would be able to provide follow-up to many individual reviews.

*Associated staffing and funding considerations:* This would require significant effort (e.g., 50% of a full time position) from long-term staff which is not possible under the current configuration of Review Program staff. Long-term staff are critical to building relationships and trust with our customers and partners, and to maintaining continuity, consistency, and a high level of service/training on a long-term basis. This approach to providing high quality technical support on a long term basis should significantly decrease response time and improve customer satisfaction.

*Potential improvement to service:* Develop an NHI Portal Users Guide to help Review Program staff better assist customers with technical difficulties, a Frequently Asked Questions sheet, and a 'Portal tips' section on the Review Program website and/or in a newsletter or direct mailing to customers to provide better overall user support for this tool.

*Associated staffing and funding considerations:* Would require moderate amount of time from existing Review Program staff and minimal time from DNR IT staff.

- **Stakeholder request: Provide easier, more customer-focused access to services and tools offered by the ER Review Program.**

*Potential improvement to service:* Redesign the Review Program web pages to be more customer-focused, with options on the main page that cater to different customer groups requesting specific services or information. The website would clarify what services and tools the Program provides, when different types of services may be needed (e.g., E/T permits) and how to request/proceed with those processes, and would include links to information on ER issues related to other DNR permits. It would also help clarify appropriate uses for different types of information, including the county NHI maps and data.

*Associated costs/considerations:* Would require moderate to substantial one-time effort from existing Review Program as well as limited time from DNR staff in other permit programs. Overall, we anticipate that increased effort from web staff (~25% of a full-time position) would be needed on an ongoing basis to accommodate this and other suggested improvements to the website, online information, and forms. Some changes to the website have already been drafted, and could be completed relatively quickly.

- **Stakeholder request: Provide better technical support for specific questions regarding rare species and how to address rare species issues on a site**

*Potential improvement to service:* Compile and provide online a list of species and habitat experts, including experts in the regions, to internal DNR staff and external customers and partners

*Associated staffing and funding considerations:* Would require moderate time from existing Review Program staff to update and expand the existing list and to address workload implications and other issues for central office and regional ER staff, staff from other DNR programs, and external experts included on the list.

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*Potential improvement to service:* Work with UW Extension and other similar organizations to provide additional species and habitat-specific expertise to Review Program customers. Provide information on the Review Program website outlining how and when to contact these people directly.

*Associated staffing and funding considerations:* Would require moderate amount of time from existing Review Program staff to identify additional external experts and develop a protocol for how and when they should be contacted by customers.

- **Stakeholder request: Provide better support for site-specific consultation questions (may include request for site visits)**

*Potential improvement to service:* Offer greatly expanded field-based training opportunities to both external customers and DNR staff on specific habitats and species of highest priority to them to help customers and staff better evaluate habitat and assess potential avoidance measures on a site-specific basis.

*Associated staffing and funding considerations:* See NHI training section for details.

*Potential improvement to service:* In response to customer requests, work with DNR species experts and others to provide the customer with names/contact information for individuals or organizations with the specific expertise needed to assist the customer with his/her specific on-site consultation need.

*Associated staffing and funding considerations:* Provision of this service would be a part of the technical support hotline; see Technical support section for details.

- **Stakeholder request: Conduct more (and more effective) outreach to customers and partners about the services and tools available to them from the Review Program.**

*Potential improvement to service:* Improve communication with and education for DNR permit staff about how to utilize and communicate with their customers about Review Program services.

*Associated costs/considerations:* Would require better internal communication, cooperation and education. Would require a limited amount of staff time (~10% of a full-time position) which is not possible under the current configuration of Review Program staffing. Work should be conducted by long-term staff who can build relationships and provide long-term support to the effort.

*Potential improvement to service:* Conduct direct outreach to existing and potential customers and partners, including other agencies (e.g., Department of Commerce) via direct contacts, articles in local or association newsletters or papers, attendance at professional meetings or other means.

*Associated costs/considerations:* Requires identification of potential customers and partners and better communication with existing customers and partners. The limited amount of staff time that would be needed is incorporated in the previous item (i.e., it would be a portion of the estimated 10% of a full-time position).

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**SERVICE: ENDANGERED RESOURCES REVIEWS**

BRIEF SUMMARY OF INPUT/SUGGESTIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS: Endangered Resources (ER) Reviews are one of the services most commonly used by our customers and partners, and one of the most important tools for their work. Stakeholders requested quicker turnaround times, more

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consistency and clarity in the format of ER Reviews, a more streamlined review process, and the ability to request more detailed information about a record and/or species at a site if needed. They also requested expanded and improved outreach about the services and tools available to them, including but not limited to ER Reviews. Accelerated reviews were suggested as a valuable service if the Review Program can absolutely guarantee the stated turnaround time, and flexible staffing was suggested as a way to maintain (or decrease) turnaround times on ER Reviews during peak periods.

**CURRENT STATUS:** Turnaround times for ER Reviews have improved recently with the hiring and training of a dedicated half-time limited-term (LTE) staff person to do ER Reviews. The number of review requests received per month is highly variable (indicated by the large error bars), but shows no significant pattern of variation by season (see *Figure 1*). When reviews are conducted by limited-term employees, there tend to be more consistency- and clarity-related issues over the long term due to the increased number of reviewers, higher turnover rates for LTE positions, and more limited training and experience of the reviewers. Requests for more detailed information about records or species at a site are difficult to respond to at this time because the ER Review letters are not provided electronically (so we can't include long links to websites) and species information is currently difficult to find on our website. Currently, most review requests are submitted in hard copy, and the ER Review Request form (available as a pdf) cannot easily be filled out electronically.

**POTENTIAL CHANGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVED SERVICES:**

- **Stakeholder request: Decrease turnaround times for ER Reviews and consider flexible staffing to accommodate peak periods during which review requests are received.**

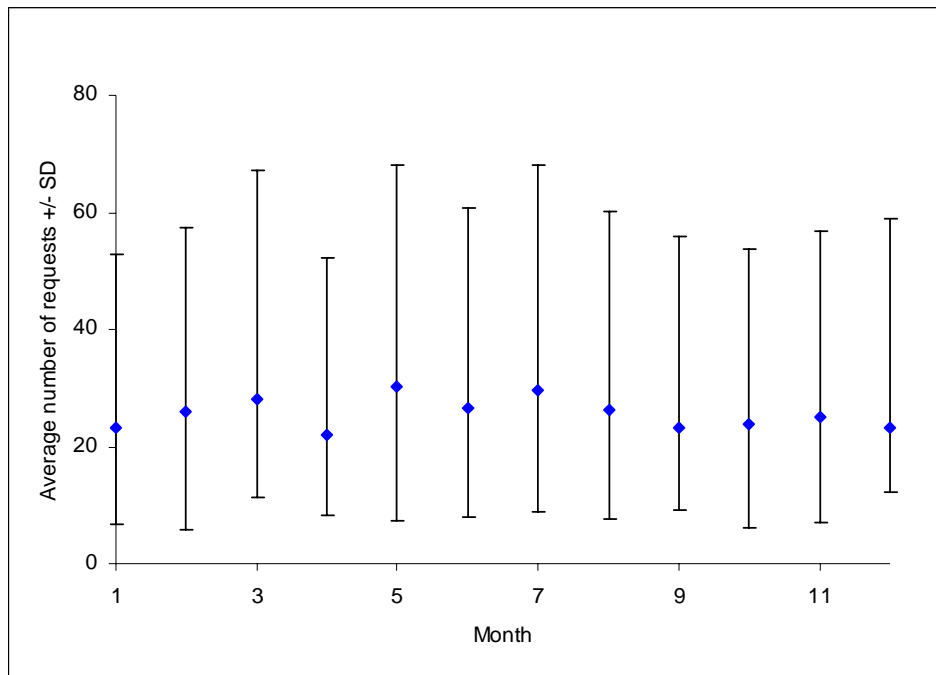
*Potential improvement to service:* Staff the provision of ER Reviews with long-term (FTE) rather than limited-term (LTE) staff to help ensure consistency in turnaround times, even during high volume periods (FTEs have more flexibility in the amount of their time that they can devote to ER Reviews during any given time period). Unacceptably long turnaround times will continue to be an issue periodically, if not consistently, if ER Reviews continue to be conducted primarily by LTEs. LTE staffing allows little flexibility to respond to the highly variable number of requests that we receive during any given time period, and the higher turnover rate of LTEs means that there will always be unpredictable periods of increased turnaround times.

*Associated costs/considerations:* The lack of a pronounced seasonal pattern does not support hiring of seasonal staff, and it would be difficult to hire seasonal staff with the expertise needed to conduct ER Reviews. The highly variable number of requests received in any given month does indicate that the program needs to develop and maintain flexibility in the amount of time that Review Program staff can devote to filling ER Review requests. We believe that this is best done by staffing this service with long-term employees. Assuming that the current level of ER Requests continues, we estimate that significant effort would continue to be needed (~0.75 FTE averaged over time) to respond to ER Review requests in a timely manner on a consistent basis.

*Potential improvement to service:* Provide ER Reviews and invoices electronically as pdf files.

*Associated costs/considerations:* This should involve minimal time from existing Review Program staff and might reduce turnaround time by 1-3 days.

Figure 1. Average number ( $\pm 1$  standard deviation) of ER Review Requests received by month for the period 2000-2008.



- **Stakeholder request: Improve the consistency and clarity in the format of ER Reviews**

*Potential improvement to service:* Develop an ER Review template that includes a standard format for providing site-specific resource information, links to additional species and habitat information online, requirements for avoiding take, recommendations for avoiding negative impacts, and options if take cannot be avoided.

*Associated costs/considerations:* Would require 40-80 hours of time from existing Review Program staff.

*Potential improvement to service:* Move toward long-term staff conducting ER Reviews to address underlying issues of consistency and clarity over the long term.

*Associated costs/considerations:* ER Reviews should be conducted by long vs limited-term staff to help ensure that clear and consistent information, recommendations, and follow-up services are provided to our customers on a long-term basis. See details above.

- **Stakeholder request: Provide the ability to obtain more detailed information about a record and/or species at a site if needed**

*Potential improvement to service:* Three changes listed in other sections would partially address this issue: 1) shifting of staffing of ER Review and technical support services from limited-term to long-term staff, 2) providing ER Reviews to customers electronically, and 3) improved online guidance and information on rare species. Long-term staff who spend a significant portion of their time conducting ER Reviews can provide more efficient and consistent individualize follow-up services on an ongoing basis, and provision of ER Review electronically would allow inclusion of links to specific sites relevant to the project recommendations. Improved and expanded species

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information available online would allow customers to find answers to many of their questions online.

*Associated costs/considerations:* See sections on requests for improved species information and technical support, and item above regarding decreased ER Review turnaround time. Minimal to moderate time from existing Review Program staff would be needed for individualized follow-up, along with clarification of authority and/or mechanisms for billing for in-depth follow-up to ER Reviews.

- **Stakeholder request: Streamline the ER Review process**

*Potential improvement to service:* Provide access to detailed NHI data to a broader audience, so that customers and partners can develop preliminary recommendations for avoiding impacts to rare resources. Review Program staff would then simply review and sign-off on these recommendations, resulting in a significant time savings and reduction of duplicated effort.

*Associated costs/considerations:* Dependent on creation of a certification program; see sections on a pilot NHI certification program and sharing of detailed NHI data.

*Potential improvement to service:* Provide better information on the Review Program website about when and how to request an ER Review. Develop a mechanism for customers to fill out and submit the ER Review Request form (along with needed maps and other supplemental information) electronically to streamline the request process and help reduce the time it takes for a customer to receive their ER Review letter.

*Associated costs/considerations:* Would require limited time from Review Program and web staff. There may be an increase in server fees associated with submitting and storing the bulk of Review Program records and information electronically.

*Potential improvement to service:* Provide online guidance to help users make initial decisions about specific activities determined to have “no impact” to rare resources under existing DNR Screening Guidance, and a way to initiate the consultation process if appropriate. Prior to initiating this effort, we would contact others who have tried this approach (e.g., Illinois DNR and USFWS) to learn from their experiences. We anticipate that implementation would occur on a pilot basis with selected groups.

*Associated costs/considerations:* Lists of “no impact” activities in the DNR Screening Guidance were intended for use by internal DNR staff reviewing DNR projects. Significant time would be required from Review Program and other ER staff to review this guidance and determine what changes would be needed to adapt it for use by external customers and partners.

- **Stakeholder request: Provide accelerated ER Reviews**

*Potential improvement to service:* Seek authority for Review Program staff to provide this service as part of the suite of services offered by the program. Legal authority currently allows accelerated reviews to be performed only if they are conducted by persons outside of the Department on a contract basis. Because of logistical difficulties with setting up such a program and with concerns with ensuring the qualifications of contractor and the provision of quality services on time, we have not pursued this option to date.

*Associated costs/considerations:* For Review Program staff to be able to provide an accelerated review option to our customers, a fee and guidelines for providing this service would need to be established. This would likely occur through a change to NR 29 (Wis. Admin. Code), which would require a public hearing, subsequent review, and approval by the Natural Resources Board and the Legislature.

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**SERVICE: SHARING DETAILED NHI DATA WITH CUSTOMERS AND PARTNERS**

**BRIEF SUMMARY OF INPUT/SUGGESTIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS:** There was strong support among our stakeholders for expanding our current data sharing services to include more users, as long as appropriate safeguards were in place to ensure the appropriate use, interpretation, application and security of the information. The group believed that sharing detailed data with a wider variety of partners would make project planning more efficient, allow customers to plan for avoidance early in the planning process, and enable them to identify activities with the potential to impact rare species before project dollars were spent. The group requested a more streamlined process, asked that we consider providing different levels of access to the data in response to different levels of need for detail, and requested some general improvements to the NHI Portal.

**CURRENT STATUS:** Currently we share detailed NHI data with a limited number of partners and customers each year through formal license agreements (which include associated security protocols). Limited and intermittent staffing for this service mean that we are behind in renewing existing license agreements and new requests are experiencing longer delays than we would like.

**POTENTIAL CHANGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVED SERVICES:**

- **Stakeholder request: Expanded sharing of detailed NHI data**  
*Potential improvement to service:* Expand sharing of detailed NHI data to a much broader group of customers for the purposes of conservation. With the proper data safeguards in place, the expansion of data sharing would result in a partnership based approach to conservation. Rare species issues in land use decisions would be addressed at a much earlier stage in the development process when it is more efficient, affordable, and feasible to alter projects to accommodate rare species concerns.  
*Associated costs/considerations:* An expanded NHI data sharing effort would need to be accompanied by a mechanism to ensure the security, correct use, interpretation, and application of these data for authorized purposes. The proposed mechanism is a required certification program, which would include initial comprehensive training as well as required annual training updates. A certification program would likely eliminate the need for separate security protocols and would reduce the time required to process some license agreements. Requiring certification for individuals would also eliminate the need for sublicense agreements. Researchers seeking one-time information on a single species would not be required to complete the certification training. We anticipate that the fees and paperwork for the certification program and license agreement would be combined where applicable. The option to seek certification solely (at a lower cost) in preparation for future NHI data needs would be available as well. We do not anticipate that the actual expansion of data sharing services would result in a significantly greater need for staffing resources. However, the accompanying certification program will require significant additional effort (see section on NHI certification).
- **Stakeholder request: Add additional data layers, mapping tools and functionality to the NHI Portal**  
*Potential improvement to service:* Add additional layers and functionality to the existing NHI portal, allow for varying levels of access to the NHI Portal (e.g., generalized access for all users to township-level NHI data), and allow for data to be downloadable. These improvements would provide users with additional information and functionality to allow better interpretation and application of NHI data to their projects and would eliminate the need to maintain separate county and township-level NHI data on the internet.

**Associated costs/considerations:** This improvement would require a significant amount of time from Review Program staff as well as other Endangered Resources and DNR GIS staff.

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## **NEW SERVICE: A PILOT NHI CERTIFICATION PROGRAM**

**BRIEF SUMMARY OF INPUT/SUGGESTIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS:** Stakeholders believed strongly that a certification program must accompany any expansion of data sharing efforts. The group agreed that comprehensive training, which addresses the access, use, interpretation, application, and security of the NHI data, must be a requirement for certification. They believed that the training and information that applicants would receive through such a certification program would result in better on-the-ground conservation because more people would have better knowledge about issues related to rare species and habitats as a result of completing the required training.

**POTENTIAL CHANGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVED SERVICES:** Below we outline the basic components that would comprise a pilot NHI Certification Program. This information is based largely on suggestions from our stakeholder group.

**Purpose:** The purpose of an NHI Certification program would be to ensure the proper use, interpretation, application and security of the NHI data. NHI certification of an individual would be required prior to the individual receiving access to detailed NHI data. Certification would allow the Review Program to greatly increase sharing of NHI data with customers and partners, resulting in more efficient project planning which better protects endangered resources while still safe-guarding the NHI data.

**Guiding principles:** The certification program would be as simple and straightforward as possible, with clear standards and guidelines, a transparent step-by-step process to certification, a set of attainable goals for applicants, and clear and prompt communication with applicants about exactly what would be expected and required of them. Benefits, limitations, and liabilities (perceived, legal, and otherwise) for all parties (DNR, certified individual, employing organization, landowner) would need to be clearly identified and addressed at the outset of the program so that all parties would have a clear understanding of exactly what the certification program would provide and how it would affect them.

**What certified individual would and would not be able to do:** The creation of an NHI Certification Program would not authorize applicants to make formal determinations about potential impacts of land management or land development projects on rare species and habitats. It would however, provide those certified with access to detailed NHI data for the area of interest to help *better plan projects* to avoid sensitive areas, and to *make preliminary recommendations* for avoiding negative impacts to rare species and high-quality natural communities. In all cases, all preliminary recommendations developed by certified individuals would be submitted to the Review Program for review and approval. As such, *the certified individual or organization would incur no liability related to the certification process.*

**Waivers/exemptions:** We would need to carefully consider if, and under what circumstances, an applicant might be able to demonstrate that he/she has achieved the desired level of knowledge, in lieu of taking the actual certification training and what cost would be incurred by the applicant as a result of the waiver/exemption process.

**Application process and materials:** We anticipate that interested candidates would be required to complete the online Introductory NHI training prior to applying to the certification program. As part of the application, candidates would submit a resume documenting their background (including education, training and work experience) relevant to interpretation of data on rare species and habitats. We recognize that applicants would likely come from diverse educational backgrounds and have a broad range of technical specialties. In light of this, we would need to carefully develop criteria outlining the minimum educational, training, and experience requirements for participation in the NHI Certification Program.

**Training:** Accurate interpretation of data on rare species and habitats, and subsequent recommendation of measures to avoid and minimize negative impacts to these species and habitats in the course of conducting land management and development activities requires specific training in endangered species law, screening procedures, and appropriate protection, use, interpretation, and application of NHI data. As a result, we anticipate that three training courses would be required as part of either initial or continuing certification:

- 1) All applicants would be required to have completed the NHI Screening and Methodology Training prior to applying for certification. This training provides information on the Wisconsin NHI Program and the Wisconsin Endangered Species Law, details the endangered resource screening process and how to access NHI data via the web-based NHI Portal, and outlines resources for additional information about protected species and habitats. This ½ day training is currently offered online and can be taken at any time.
- 2) Comprehensive NHI Data Interpretation and Application Training would be required as part of the initial certification process. This comprehensive training would be at least 1 day in length (possibly up to 3) and would be provided in-person, but might be followed or preceded by additional training/materials provided in hard copy or online. It would provide detailed guidance and information on understanding and interpreting NHI data, recommending measures for avoiding and minimizing impacts to rare species and habitats, and guidance for when to contact species experts. The training would acknowledge and address that in many cases ‘correct’ interpretation and application of NHI data is complex and variable, and would provide applicants with the skills and tools they would need to develop recommendations for avoiding impacts to rare species associated with varied land management and development activities.
- 3) Attendance at Annual NHI Training Updates would be required to maintain certification. The goal of the annual updates would be to provide a reminder of the rules, inform individuals of new tools/guidance/policies/interpretations (e.g. Species Management Guidance developed within the last year), and build knowledge and capacity relevant to interpretation and application of NHI data on rare species and communities. We anticipate that the annual refreshers would involve a field component (e.g. 2-4 hours classroom and 2-4 hours in the field). We might also consider whether other training (offered by outside sources) might be valid as an annual update, or whether a short online portion of the annual update might be completed independently and supplemented by different options for fulfilling the remainder of the annual update requirement (e.g., approved training offered by another organization or DNR program). If we choose to accept outside training as part of the annual update requirements, the Review Program would work with outside vendors to offer courses that would allow

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certified individuals to improve their skills and maintain the high quality of knowledge necessary to meet the requirements of the program.

**Exam:** As part of the initial application, after attending the NHI Data Interpretation and Application Training the applicant would likely be required to complete a series of case studies. Successful completion of the case studies would demonstrate the applicant's ability to access, understand and interpret NHI data and apply that data to specific, on-the-ground scenarios, including formulating preliminary recommendations for avoiding negative impacts to rare species and high-quality natural communities.

**Maintaining NHI Certification:** Mechanisms would need to be developed to provide feedback to certified individuals on a continuing basis to foster improved skills and partnerships. We would also need to develop a mechanism for reporting of complaints or allegations of misuse of data, for investigating these complaints, and for determining a course of action in response. We anticipate that verified complaints/reports of a type and magnitude warranting serious action could result in a warning, suspension or revocation of certification depending on the nature and severity of the action.

**Review Panel:** We anticipate creating a panel that would develop and review criteria and guidance for the NHI Certification program in addition to evaluating applications and case studies. This panel would likely consist of DNR staff with knowledge and experience in the ER review process along with experts on rare species and high-quality communities. If we choose to include externals on the panel in some capacity, we would need to address potential conflict of interest issues.

**Conflict resolution:** We would need to develop a process for dealing with conflicts or disputes between certified individuals and the Department.

**Learning from experience:** Before pursuing development of the certification program, DNR staff would explore and learn from successes and difficulties of other certification programs (e.g., Certified Plan Writers for the DNR Managed Forest Law program; the Wisconsin Birder Certification through the UW-Green Bay's Cofrin Center for Biodiversity, and the DNR Wetland Delineation Professional Assurance Initiative).

**Associated costs/considerations:** The Department currently has the authority to create a certification program under 23.27(3)(b), stats. If we were to initiate a pilot certification program, we anticipate that we would add language regarding the certification program to DNR administrative rule once the pilot phase of the certification program is completed. Significant effort (~50% of a full-time position) would be required to develop, implement, support and oversee a Certification program and the accompanying required training. A similar amount of effort would be needed to provide administrative support to the program (i.e., ~50% of a full-time position). This level of effort is not possible under current Review Program staffing configurations.

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**SERVICE: INFORMATION ON RARE SPECIES AND HIGH-QUALITY NATURAL COMMUNITIES**

SUMMARY OF INPUT/SUGGESTIONS: Stakeholders requested more information on listed (Endangered and Threatened or E/T) and special concern species, including fact sheets, avoidance

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guidance, and recommended management practices (including forestry management practices) for all rare species and habitats. They also requested a calendar of taxa groups' important dates (nesting, emergence, etc.) that are likely to affect the timing of projects, and a reference list of experts for species and habitats, especially experts within each region.

**CURRENT STATUS:** Information on rare species is scattered in multiple locations on the DNR website and is often difficult for users to find; some is only available through the NHI Portal which can be accessed only by authorized users with whom we have NHI data sharing agreements. Because of this, it is difficult and time consuming for species experts to review and update this information. Creation or improvement of fact sheets, species guidance, and management guidelines has been a priority for years, but guidance currently exists for only a few species. There is a half-time LTE working on developing species guidance, but work is progressing relatively slowly.

**POTENTIAL CHANGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVED SERVICES:**

- **Stakeholder request: Provide easier access to existing online information on rare species and habitats**  
*Potential improvement to service:* Consolidate existing information into one central location with a uniform format and provide easy, straight forward navigation for external users to find that information; move information currently available only on the NHI Portal to an external site accessible to all customers. A web template for all species and natural communities is in development now and will look similar to what is currently in the NHI Portal: a species' common and scientific name, photo and short summary paragraph, followed by links to additional information (e.g., ATRI, WAP species and natural communities, NHI working list, breeding bird atlas, all-bird plan).  
*Associated costs/considerations:* A Forestry staff person is currently working on this project; moderate time for web staff would be needed to consolidate existing information. Moving information from the NHI Portal to the internet site would likely involve limited time from DNR IT staff.
- **Stakeholder request: Update and improve consistency of existing online information on rare species and habitats**  
*Potential improvement to service:* Consolidate existing information first (see previous item), then request review and updating of existing information by species experts once the information for each species.  
*Associated costs/considerations:* Would involve moderate amount of time from species experts, for whom this is a lower priority work item, potentially resulting in delays. Task would be much easier once information is consolidated (see previous item).
- **Stakeholder request: Develop fact sheets, species guidance, and management recommendations for additional rare species and habitats**  
*Potential improvement to service:* Make better headway on providing guidance for high priority species, including special concern species, and habitats.  
*Associated costs/considerations:* Devote a small portion of Review Program funds to contracting with internal or external species experts to produce guidance on high priority species (for Review Program customers) within a pre-determined time frame using the existing species guidance template. This effort would add to (rather than replace) ongoing efforts by the Endangered Resources Program to produce guidance for more species. Review Program staff would oversee review of the final product and post it to the website. Using a small portion of Review Program funds for this effort would provide

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significant benefit for external and internal customers and for on-the-ground conservation of rare species and habitats.

- **Stakeholder request: Provide calendars of important rare bird and reptile/amphibian dates that may impact the timing of projects, as tools to use in project planning**

*Potential improvement to service:* Complete and post online the calendars identifying key dates for avoiding impacts to rare birds and amphibians/reptiles in Wisconsin. Begin work on a comprehensive calendar or other tool that highlights key dates to consider for all rare species (this may refer customers to other places for more specific information).

*Associated costs/considerations:* The Review Program has been able to recruit interns from UW-Madison to work on specific projects. The bird calendar is an example; it is being completed by an intern from UW-Madison at no cost to the program (a Review Program staff person provides guidance and supervision to the intern). Calendars identifying key dates for avoiding negative impacts to rare birds and amphibians/reptiles are currently being reviewed. Creating a more general calendar/planning tool would require additional time from Review Program staff.

- **Stakeholder request: Provide maps showing the distribution of rare species in Wisconsin**

*Potential improvement to service:* Create distribution maps for rare species and post or link them from the to-be-developed central webpage for each species so that they are accessible to all customers.

*Associated costs/considerations:* Maps showing the distribution of rare species in Wisconsin were requested by customers in January and are currently being developed by ATRI staff.

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**SERVICE: NHI TRAINING**

**BRIEF SUMMARY OF INPUT/SUGGESTIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS:** Stakeholders requested training on specific species and habitats, and asked that the content vary by region and over time to maximize the variety of training opportunities available to specialized customer groups. They also indicated that having a face-to-face component to the training was important, preferably supplemented with additional online training or materials. Stakeholders agreed that comprehensive training addressing the access, use, interpretation, application, and security of the NHI data must be a requirement for an NHI certification program that would accompany expanded data sharing efforts.

**CURRENT STATUS:** At this time, completion of online NHI Training is required for external users to access the NHI Portal. Review Program staff have been directed to focus on higher-priority activities, and thus have been able to make only minor improvements to the existing training (originally intended to serve only as a temporary measure until new staff were hired) over the last several years. More advanced training is currently offered only on rare occasions to specific user groups.

**POTENTIAL CHANGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVED SERVICES:**

- **Stakeholder Request: Offer advanced field-based training focusing on specific taxa groups or species**

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*Potential improvement to service:* Greatly expand advanced training opportunities for both external customers and DNR staff. Advanced training would be held in-person (taped for later online posting), include a field component, focus on specific habitats and species of highest priority to stakeholders, and be offered on a regular basis (e.g., once or twice yearly). Content would vary by region and over time to maximize the variety of training opportunities available to specialized customer groups.

*Associated costs/considerations:* Creation, presentation and administrative support for providing advanced training on a frequent basis would require significant effort (~60% of a full-time position) on an ongoing basis, which is not possible given current staffing resources and configurations in the Review Program. Additional funds would be needed for travel and materials to develop and present the training. We anticipate that the DNR Regional Ecologists would play a role in the training sessions, but we would need to work with them to determine if and how they might be involved.

*Potential improvement to service:* Pursue joint development, presentation, and/or advertisement of additional relevant training opportunities offered by other DNR programs (e.g. Karner Blue Butterfly monitoring, Citizen-Based Monitoring training) or external organizations (e.g., wetland plant identification).

*Associated costs/considerations:* The limited amount of staff time that would be needed for coordination with other programs and organizations is incorporated in the previous item (i.e., it would be a portion of the estimated 60% of a full-time position).

- **Stakeholder Request: Improve the introductory NHI training**

*Potential improvement to service:* Continue to provide introductory NHI training online, but update it to improve presentation and include activity- and audience-specific modules for both external customers and DNR staff.

*Associated costs/considerations:* Would require a moderate amount of staff time on a one-time basis. It is unlikely that improvements would occur in the near term without the additional staff resources listed as necessary to implement advanced training (see above).

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**SERVICE: COUNTY AND TOWNSHIP-LEVEL NHI DATA**

**BRIEF SUMMARY OF INPUT/SUGGESTIONS:** Some stakeholders thought the generalized data and maps are a good compromise for the public in terms of level of precision – providing a good indication of whether species might be present while not compromising data security. Others thought the data and maps are too coarse for many purposes including land use planning. Despite high traffic on the website, the stakeholders we spoke with reported that these data were not a high priority service for their purposes.

**CURRENT STATUS:** These data are available online, free of charge, in the form of county NHI maps and township-level NHI data. Semi-annual updates of these data require relatively little effort from the NHI data manager and web staff. The website is accessed about 20,000 times each month (total for the county maps and township level data combined).

**POTENTIAL CHANGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVED SERVICES:**

- **Stakeholder request: Provide more useful generalized NHI data**

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*Potential improvement to service:* Change language on website, maps, and data printouts to provide more effective guidance on interpretation of and appropriate uses for the information. The format of the township-level data has recently been improved, but could still be changed slightly to be more relevant and useful to users.

*Associated costs/considerations:* Would involve a relatively small amount of time from existing Review Program staff, the NHI database manager, and web staff.

*Potential improvement to service:* It might be possible to provide these generalized data through the NHI Portal. Allowing generalized access through the Portal would ensure that customers are always receiving the most up-to-date data, provide significant additional functionality and information to assist in the interpretation and application of NHI data (e.g., aerial photos, topographic maps, water bodies), and allow creation of individualized maps. Basic NHI Portal access would look similar to the current DNR WebView Interactive Map Viewer (<http://dnr.wi.gov/maps/gis/appwebview.html>).

*Associated costs/considerations:* Any significant changes to the NHI Portal would involve additional time from IT staff (which is expensive) and may involve delays, but it is unknown at this point how much time and expense might be involved.

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**SERVICE: INCIDENTAL TAKE AUTHORIZATIONS (ITAs)**

**SUMMARY OF INPUT/SUGGESTIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS:** Stakeholders provided little direct input regarding Incidental Take Authorizations, although they were familiar with the service. As a result, we tried to adapt general input received from stakeholders that is applicable to ITAs and would improve the ITA process (e.g. improved technical support and internal coordination).

**CURRENT STATUS:** We do not currently charge a fee for providing this service although a fee is authorized. There is a need to provide better information online about the process, timeline, and information required to complete an ITA, and to better educate both internal DNR staff and external partners about what the Grassland and Savanna Protocols are and how they apply to land management activities conducted by DNR and other organizations.

**POTENTIAL CHANGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVED SERVICES:**

- **Stakeholder request: Provide more online tools and information for ITAs**  
*Potential improvement to service:* Improve the ITA web page and create an ITA request form/application to standardize the process, ensure the appropriate authorizations have been received, and provide the applicant with more complete information regarding the ITA process.  
*Associated costs/considerations:* This would require relatively little staff time and could be completed by existing Review Program staff.
- **Stakeholder request: Make changes to the Broad Authorized Incidental Taking Protocols for Grassland & Savanna Management**  
*Potential improvement to service:* Update the individual species protocols for grassland and savanna management.  
*Associated costs/considerations:* This would require species experts to review and update individual species protocols, a time consuming process because of the work involved and other priority requests for species experts' time. This improvement could be

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accommodated by existing DNR staff, but would not be considered a priority. Changes to the ITA and/or ITA language would require a 30 day public notice period.

*Potential improvement to service:* Rewrite the Grassland and Savanna Protocols to cover work conducted by all land managers, regardless of whether or not they are DNR staff (similar to the Butler's gartersnake broad ITAs).

*Associated costs/considerations:* This would require significant staff resources, which cannot be accommodated given existing Review Program staffing configurations. The Review Program would need to gather additional information from partner organizations before beginning such an effort. Changes to the ITA and/or ITA language would require a 30 day public notice period.

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### **SERVICE: ENDANGERED AND THREATENED SPECIES (E/T) PERMITS**

**BRIEF SUMMARY OF INPUT/SUGGESTIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS:** While customers were familiar with E/T Permits and generally thought they are an important service, there were no specific suggestions or input directly addressing them. As a result, we tried to identify general areas where improvement could be made based on prior feedback and general input received from stakeholders that is applicable to E/T permits and would improve the E/T permit process. Prior feedback has suggested that we clearly differentiate between E/T Permits and the endangered resources review process because E/T Permits do not pertain to development in the same way that some other DNR permits do (e.g., wetland or stormwater permits).

**CURRENT STATUS:** We do not currently charge a fee for providing this service although a fee is authorized. There is no required or established turnaround time for new E/T Permit applications, renewals, or amendments; turnaround time varies based on the complexity of the request and the workload of the coordinator and the other staff members involved. The review and approval process can be very time consuming. Currently, the bulk of time spent on these processes is for review of the permit/amendment/renewal by multiple species experts or other reviewers. Delays can and often do occur when one person in the review chain is out of the office or doesn't address the application right away. There is a need to improve communications with law enforcement and the community to publicize when E/T permits are needed and to improve communication with regional ecologists, wildlife and law enforcement staff to inform them of activities that have been permitted in their region or on a property for which they are responsible.

#### **POTENTIAL CHANGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVED SERVICES:**

- **Decrease turnaround time for new E/T Permit applications, amendments, and renewal requests**

*Potential improvement to service:* Develop a more efficient and streamlined review process for permit applications, including the designation of "backup" reviewers for specific species when primary reviewers are unavailable.

*Associated costs/considerations:* This would require a relatively small amount of time from existing Review Program staff and species experts. This will soon become a higher priority as all E/T Permits are renewed in December/January.

- **Clarify, standardize and streamline the E/T Permit process**

*Potential improvement to service:* Develop an E/T Permit webpage to provide information both for permit holders and for the general public. The webpage would have

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information about when a permit is needed, costs, links to permit laws and regulations, an application form, information on other permits (i.e. scientific collector's permits, rehab permits, salvage permits, etc.), and a Frequently Asked Questions section. This would provide better information to customers and make the permit process more efficient.

*Associated costs/considerations:* Would require moderate one-time effort from Review Program staff to develop the content for the webpage and limited time from web staff to post the content online.

*Potential improvement to service:* Allow online submittal of new applications, amendments, renewals and annual reports to expedite the process and save paper.

*Associated costs/considerations:* Would require a moderate to significant one-time effort from Review Program staff to develop the online forms (the application form is currently being revised), and some time from web staff to post the forms and information and to develop a mechanism for submitting the application and reporting forms and attachments so that the information can be easily incorporated into our database.

- **Improve outreach efforts regarding E/T Permits**

*Potential improvement to service:* Improve coordination with other DNR bureaus and externally so that we can provide more helpful information to customers about what other permits (besides the E/T Permit) they might need for a specific activity.

*Associated costs/considerations:* Would require moderate amount of time for Review Program staff to establish appropriate contacts in other programs and compile information on other permit programs and requirements.

*Potential improvements to service:* Develop a list of regional contacts who should be informed of permit activity in their area and a mechanism for sharing information on new and existing permits with these staff (possibly online or via email).

*Associated costs/considerations:* Would require a moderate amount of time for Review Program staff to establish appropriate contacts in other programs and determine how best to educate and share information with those staff on specific permits and the E/T Permit process in general. Would require minimal time from ER web staff to post the information.

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**SERVICE: MAINTENANCE OF A COMPREHENSIVE UP-TO-DATE NHI DATABASE**

**BRIEF SUMMARY OF INPUT/SUGGESTIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS:** The group stated strongly and consistently that the quality of the NHI data is very important. They would like to see a focus on improving the quality and completeness of the database in three ways: a faster turnaround time for mapping new records into the NHI database; a focus on tapping other databases (e.g., eBird) for information; and a focus on using citizen monitors and volunteers to help us collect data specifically for the NHI database. We should look to non-profit organizations to fund or help enter NHI data, and require that certified parties with whom we share data submit rare species records back to us. Filling gaps in the NHI data was identified as a priority, acknowledging that limited access to private lands makes this difficult.

**CURRENT STATUS:** Having complete, up-to-date information in the NHI database is the foundation upon which the Review Program relies. It is for this reason that a portion of Review Program funds are currently used to support mapping of new records into the NHI database and

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maintenance of the NHI database itself. All records of rare species and high-quality communities are entered into the NHI database by NHI mapping specialists who are trained through the Natureserve Core Methodology Training program; many have higher-level training as well. This ensures that the data are accurate, consistent, and of the highest quality across the entire international network of NHI Programs. However, it also limits the number of people who are able to process and map records into the NHI database. Funding to support mapping of records into the database by existing staff and training of new staff is the primary limiting resource. Funding that is currently available is often project specific, requiring specific geographical focus, and thus is not an effective way to address geographical gaps in the database.

POTENTIAL CHANGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVED SERVICES: We have shared input from our stakeholders with NHI staff responsible for inventory and mapping of NHI records into the database, and anticipate working with them over the coming months to identify ways in which we could improve both the turnaround time for mapping new and updated records into the database and work to fill important gaps in the geographical coverage of our data. At this time, we offer the following preliminary information:

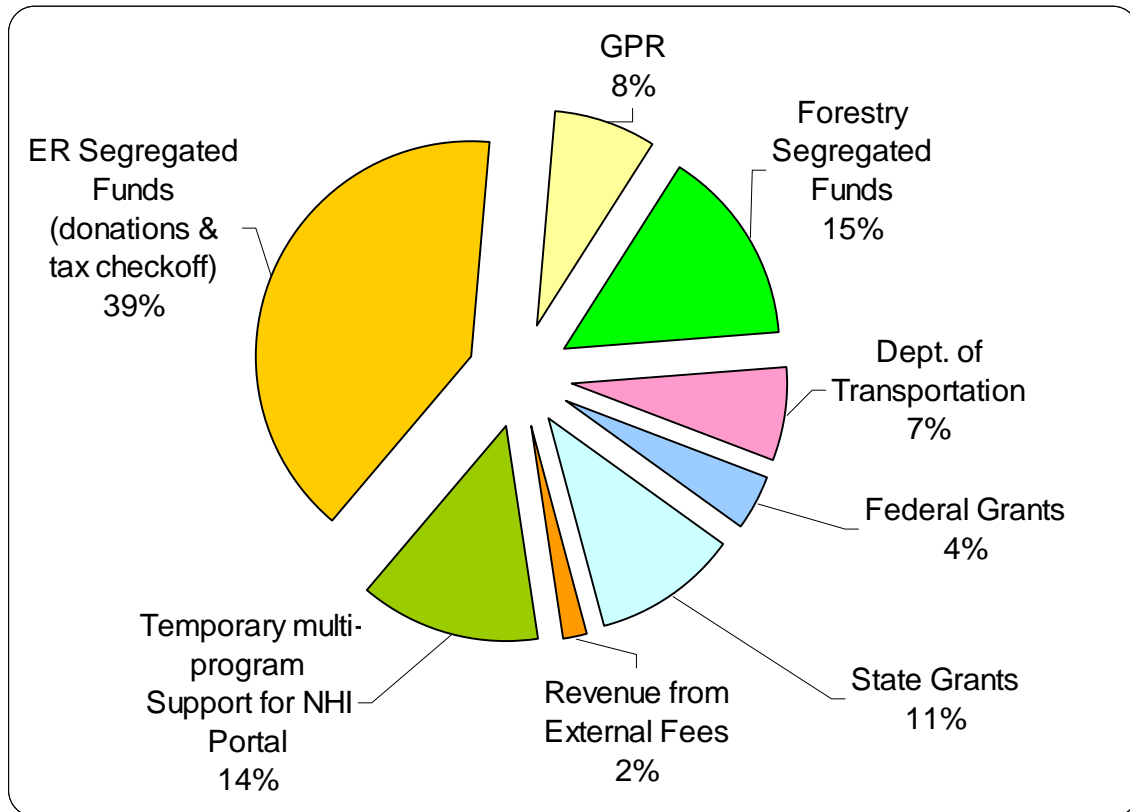
- **Stakeholder request:** Regularly update NHI database with observations recorded in other databases (e.g., Ebird, herbaria, museums, etc).  
*Potential improvements to service:* NHI staff recently began to utilize eBird for some general site level information. However the lack of habitat information collected via eBird means that these data cannot be used to document new rare bird locations in NHI. A future goal would be to work with eBird to address this issue. NHI staff currently do access information from a variety of other databases (e.g. WI Herp Atlas, Statewide Herbaria) but in many cases data currently reside in our backlog records, awaiting funding for processing and mapping to the NHI database.
- **Stakeholder request:** Shorten turnaround time for mapping new records into the NHI database.  
*Potential improvements to service:* Approaches that NHI staff have begun to utilize to decrease turnaround times include batch importing of large datasets (e.g., eagle and osprey nest data, gray wolf territory and den locations) and hiring pre-mappers to pre-process spatial and tabular data to speed subsequent mapping into the NHI database.
- **Stakeholder request:** Utilize volunteers, citizen monitors, and other partners to help fill gaps in the NHI database.  
*Potential improvements to service:* NHI staff have begun to consider how they could better use volunteer surveyors while still ensuring that strict data quality standards are maintained. Online certification of volunteer surveyors (e.g. Bird Surveyor Certification) may prove helpful along with requiring submission of detailed photographs to confirm species identification. They have also recently created rare species and habitat report forms that can be submitted online, simplifying the data submittal process. They would like to work with other organizations to better connect with qualified volunteer surveyors and encourage them to submit rare species and habitat information, and to add information to the DNR website to help ensure that submitted data can be fully utilized (e.g., posting an example of an accurately filled out rare animal/plant reporting form, encouraging collection and electronic submittal of GPS waypoints and/or shapefiles).

## **PART 2: FUNDING AND STAFFING CONSIDERATIONS**

### **REVIEW PROGRAM FUNDING**

The Review Program resides within the Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) Section of the Endangered Resources Bureau. The budget for the Endangered Resources Bureau as whole is approximately \$4 million (including federal funding). The budget for the NHI Section comprises approximately \$1.04 million of that total. Funding for the NHI section comes from a wide variety of sources (Figure 2).

*Figure 2. Sources of funding for the Natural Heritage Inventory Section*



Costs for the NHI section are distributed among three major functions: Data Acquisition (statewide inventory, gathering and compilation of data from contributions, vouchering, and methods development) – 26%, Data Management (applying NHI methodology to data, quality assurance, assigning state and global ranks, GIS and developing customized data sets) – 30%, and Data Application (data delivery tools, NHI Portal maintenance, endangered resources review, and support for research, planning and management, including master planning, Wildlife Action Plans, and partner-led efforts) – 44%.

The Review Program lies largely within the Data Application function of the NHI section, and is supported by a much less diverse funding pool: ER Segregated funds (donations to the Endangered Resources Bureau and tax checkoff), Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT), revenue from external fees, and temporarily allocated support funds from programs

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within the DNR which use NHI data. The current budget for the Review Program is approximately \$420,000 (Table 1).

*Table 1.* Current budget for the Review Program (RP) and estimated funds that would be needed to implement the improvements identified in this document. FTE = long-term staff; LTE = limited-term staff; Contract = staff working for the Department on a contract basis.

	<u>Current budget</u>	<u>Funds needed to implement improvements to RP services</u>
Long-term staff salary (1 FTE currently; 3 FTE needed to implement improvements to RP services)	58,240	\$ 178,214
fringe benefits @ 48.45%	28,217	\$ 88,127
Limited-term staff salary (2.55 LTEs currently, 2.25 LTEs needed to implement improvements to RP services)	102,000	\$ 91,800
fringe benefits @ 24.58%	25,072	\$ 23,482
DOT services & support (1 contract position)	70,000	71,400
Supplies & Travel	5,000	15,000
NHI Portal server & license fees	32,245	33,857
NHI Portal maintenance	24,645	25,877
NHI data mapping & management (0.87 contract positions)	50,374	51,381
NHI database server & license fees	24,246	25,458
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 420,039</b>	<b>\$ 604,598</b>

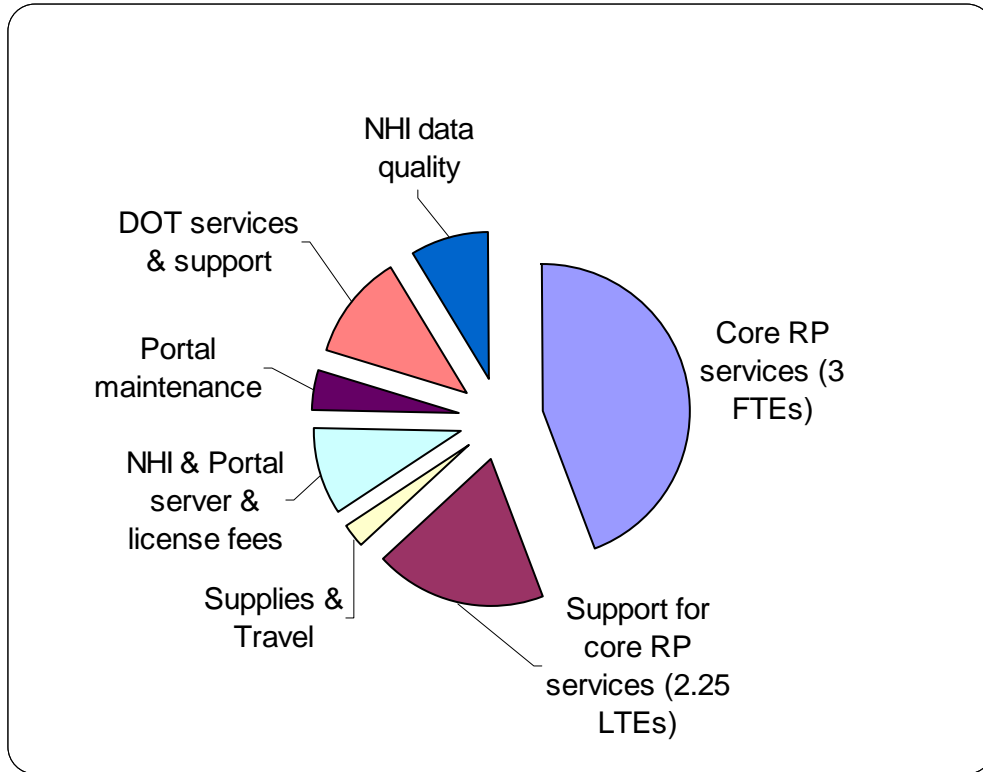
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**LEVELS OF FUNDING AND EFFORT THAT WOULD BE NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT THE IMPROVEMENTS TO REVIEW PROGRAM SERVICES OUTLINED IN THIS DOCUMENT**

Taken as a whole, the potential improvements requested by stakeholders to Review Program services outlined in this document are significant and comprehensive. We anticipate that provision of the improved and expanded services outlined in this document would require both increased staff resources and increased funding. Table 1 outlines the funding that we believe would be needed to implement the changes outlined in this proposal (approximately \$605,000). The majority of these funds would be devoted to long-term staff implementing core Review Program services (Figure 3).

Table 2 outlines how efforts of existing Review Program staff are distributed among the different services that the Review Program currently provides. Implementation of the complement of changes outlined in this document would require increased staffing resources. We estimate that the levels of effort shown in the right-hand columns of table 2 would be necessary to successfully implement the improvements outlined in this document. Note that major improvements to the functionality of the NHI Portal (outlined in the section on Sharing of Detailed NHI Data) are not considered in either Table 1 or 2, and would likely involve considerable additional cost.

Figure 3. Anticipated distribution of costs that would be needed to implement the improvements to Review Program (RP) services identified in this document.



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Table 2. Distribution of current staffing resources among services provided by the Review Program (RP) and changes that would be needed to implement the improvements identified in this document. FTE = long-term staff; LTE = limited-term staff; Contract = staff working for the Department on a contract basis.

Service	Current status				Changes in effort that would be needed to implement improvements to RP services				Change
	FTE	LTE	Contract	Total	FTE	LTE	Contract	Total	
ER Reviews	0.2	0.8		1	0.75	0.3		1.05	0.05
Sharing detailed NHI data	0.15	0.5		0.65	0.5	0.2		0.7	0.05
Technical Support	0.1	0.15		0.25	0.5	0.1		0.6	0.35
Species information*	0.05			0.05	0.1		0.15	0.25	0.2
NHI Training	0.05	0.1		0.15	0.3	0.3		0.6	0.45
Certification program				0	0.5	0.5		1	1
Online county maps & data**			0.05	0.05	0.05		0.05	0.1	0.05
E/T Species Permits		0.35		0.35		0.3		0.3	-0.05
Incidental Take Authorizations	0.15			0.15	0.2			0.2	0.05
Outreach				0	0.1	0.1		0.2	0.2
DOT support/liaison			1	1			1	1	0
Special projects (RP redesign)		0.5		0.5				0	-0.5
Web support		0.05		0.05		0.25		0.25	0.2
NHI Portal/IT support	0.1			0.1	0.1			0.1	0
NHI Data Quality		0.5	0.32	0.82		0.5	0.32	0.82	0
Administrative support Program oversight (NHI section chief, vacant)		0.1		0.1		0.2		0.2	0.1
				0				0	0
Butler's gartersnake activities	0.3			0.3				0	-0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>3.05</b>	<b>1.37</b>	<b>5.52</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>2.75</b>	<b>1.52</b>	<b>7.37</b>	<b>1.85</b>

\*The increased effort would be accomplished by providing funding (via contract) for the equivalent of 8 wks/year to internal or external species experts to draft species guidance documents.

\*\* This funding (2 wks/year) is provided to the NHI database manager to produce updated county maps and data twice yearly for online posting.

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## **APPENDIX A: LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND CONSIDERATIONS**

Below are excerpts from and/or direct links to state statutes and administrative code that guide and/or affect the services that the Review Program provides and the fees charged for those services.

s. 29.604, Wis. Stats., Wisconsin Endangered Species Act and s. 29.563, Wis. Stats., Endangered Species Permit fees: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/statutes/Stat0029.pdf>

s. 19.31-19.39, Wis. Stats., Wisconsin Open Records Law:  
<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/statutes/Stat0019.pdf>

s. 23.27(3), Wis. Stats., Natural Heritage Inventory Program

(3) Natural heritage inventory program. (a) *Duties*. The department shall conduct a natural heritage inventory program. The department shall cooperate with the department of administration under [s. 16.967](#) in conducting this program. This program shall establish a system for determining the existence and location of natural areas, the degree of endangerment of natural areas, an evaluation of the importance of natural areas, information related to the associated natural values of natural areas, and other information and data related to natural areas. This program shall establish a system for determining the existence and location of native plant and animal communities and endangered, threatened, and critical species, the degree of endangerment of these communities and species, the existence and location of habitat areas associated with these communities and species, and other information and data related to these communities and species. This program shall establish and coordinate standards for the collection, storage, and management of information and data related to the natural heritage inventory.

(b) *Access to information; fees*. The department shall make information and data from the natural heritage inventory program available to any individual or public or private agency for research, educational, environmental, land management or similar authorized purposes. The department may establish a fee to be collected to recover the actual cost of collecting, storing, managing, compiling and providing this information and data. The department may reduce or waive the fee established under this paragraph if the department determines that a waiver or reduction of the fee is in the public interest. The natural heritage inventory and related information and data are not subject to [s. 19.35](#) and the department may refuse to release information or data for any purpose which is not authorized.

NR 27, Wis. Admin. Code, Endangered and Threatened Species (including NR 27.05 Permits for endangered and threatened species, NR 27.06 Exceptions to permit requirements, and NR 27.07 Incidental take applications): <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/code/nr/nr027.pdf>

NR 29, Wis. Admin. Code, Endangered Resources Information Fees:

NR 29.01 Purpose. This chapter establishes and describes fees for providing natural heritage inventory information, pursuant to [s. 23.27 \(3\) \(b\)](#), Stats.

NR 29.02 Applicability. The provisions of this chapter apply to all persons who request natural heritage inventory information from the department of natural resources.

NR 29.03 Definitions. As used in this chapter: (1) "Department" means the department of natural resources. (2) "Natural heritage inventory information" means information collected by the department under the natural heritage inventory program, including information on the biology, existence and locations of native plant and animal communities and of endangered, threatened and critical species; the degree of endangerment and protective status of these communities and species; information on managed lands; life-history information on Wisconsin's native flora and fauna, and biological consultation and recommendation.

(3) "Person" means an individual or any corporation, partnership, association or body politic.

NR 29.04 Fees for providing natural heritage inventory information. (1) The department may charge a fee for compiling and providing natural heritage inventory information to any person requesting that information for the purposes authorized in [s. 23.27 \(3\) \(b\)](#), Stats. (a) The department shall charge a

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minimum fee of \$60 per request, for which the department will provide up to 3 hours of staff time. The \$60 fee includes the associated administrative costs in compiling, interpreting and providing appropriate natural heritage inventory information. The department shall charge an additional \$20 for each hour, or any portion thereof, of staff time required in excess of 3 hours to answer the request.

(b) For frequent requesters of natural heritage inventory information, the department may set and charge an annual fee for providing updated copies of all or any portion of the actual natural heritage inventory data and for providing training and support in the use and interpretation of this data. This annual fee shall be no less than \$500 and no greater than \$1,000.

(2)(a) The department may waive or reduce fees for any person with whom the department has a contractual agreement or other mechanism by which the department's costs are reimbursed, or a memorandum of understanding by which the department is obligated to provide natural heritage inventory information.

(b) The department may waive or reduce fees for providing natural heritage inventory information for any research or educational project, where it has been determined that:

1. Such waiver is in the public interest because the project furthers the interests of the endangered resources program; and
2. The department has determined the requester has demonstrated that they are not financially capable of paying the fee. The department may request financial statements.