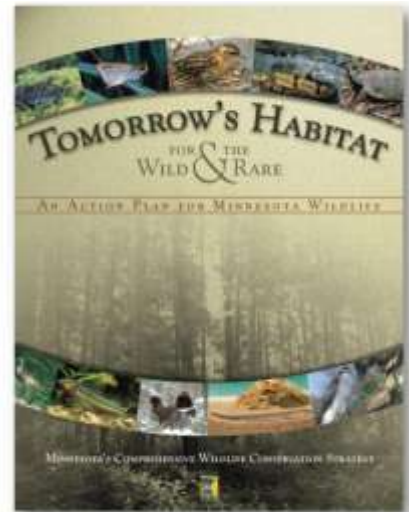


## **Minnesota's State Wildlife Action Plan, *Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild & Rare***

### **Implementation Partners**

#### **SWAP Partnership Policy/Executive Steering Committee**

Throughout the development of Minnesota's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) the partner implementation team ensured that partner organizations were connected and committed to the implementation of the plan. Chaired by the DNR's director of Ecological Resources, the team included leaders from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, and Audubon Minnesota. These agencies and organizations continue to guide implementation of Minnesota's SWAP through the executive steering committee.



Numerous important conservation efforts are being implemented on public and private lands throughout Minnesota, each contributing to the broader conservation picture. A core role of the executive steering committee is to identify and create innovative opportunities for coordination and collaboration that will enhance the efficiency and maximize the effectiveness of conservation actions that sustain Minnesota's wildlife for our children and grandchildren.

#### **Minnesota DNR Programs**

MNDNR's Division of Ecological Resources has a number of programs targeted at federal and state-listed plants and animals and other nongame animals. These programs have strong public support and are key implementers of Minnesota's SWAP. Minnesota's SWAP serves as a resource for staff of these programs to help prioritize activities and target resources to the habitats and Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) identified in Minnesota's SWAP. Biologists and ecologists from these programs provided valuable information for the development of the SWAP and continue to provide the professional expertise and the data essential to the effective implementation of the goals of Minnesota's SWAP. These programs include:

##### **Nongame Wildlife Program**

Nongame Wildlife Program staff are on the front lines in transforming the strategic vision of Minnesota's SWAP into on-the-ground conservation reality. Staff survey and monitor select wildlife species, develop and implement species and habitat management and recovery plans, restore and manage habitats for SGCN, and provide technical guidance to landowners, local units of government, other DNR staff and conservation partners on habitat and nongame wildlife management, planning and policy.

MN County Biological Survey (MCBS) and Natural Heritage and Nongame Research Program (NHNRP). The Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS) systematically collects and interprets data throughout the state on the distribution and ecology of rare plants, rare animals, and native plant communities, and identifies significant natural areas. Information from the MCBS and other survey information are stored in the Natural Heritage Information System. This database system tracks important information about the biology and distribution of rare features and makes the information available to researchers, community planners and local units of government, environmental review staff, developers, educators, and citizens for conservation planning. NHNRP staff maintains these databases and DNR regional ecologists are available to help users interpret and apply the data. NHNRP also administers the endangered and threatened species permitting process, manages the statewide frog and toad, and loon surveys, and provides technical guidance, including participation in recovery planning and implementation for listed species.

Scientific and Natural Areas Program (SNA): The mission of the SNA program is to perpetuate the ecological diversity of Minnesota's natural heritage. Lands recommended for SNA designation are identified as a result of the MCBS survey efforts. Many of these sites provide permanent habitat protection for SGCN. SNA staff and the Commissioner's Advisory Committee, which recommends sites for protection, contribute to the implementation of the SWAP through the acquisition, restoration, management and monitoring of sites that provide important habitat for SGCN.

MN DNR Division of Parks and Trails: State Park's staff are collaborating on a number of SWAP projects that include timber rattlesnake recovery planning, habitat management, and threat reduction from human activities on park property; restoration and management of Henslow Sparrow habitat; bat ecology and habitat assessments at Soudan Underground Mine, and SGCN surveys and habitat assessments at a number of parks.

MN DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife: Staff are collaborating on a number of SWAP projects including improving oak savanna habitat, which is important for numerous SGCN, investigating using insect populations to monitor the quality of prairie habitat, and restoring shorelands that are important to a wide variety of wildlife species.

MN DNR Division of Forestry: A **Subsection Forest Resource Management Plan (SFRMP)** is a DNR plan for vegetation management on forest lands administered by the divisions of Forestry and Fish and Wildlife. Ecological subsections, not administrative boundaries, are the basic units of delineation. The plans identify a long-term strategic direction for DNR Forestry- and Wildlife-administered forest lands that focus on desired future forest composition (DFFC) goals. Key habitats identified in Minnesota's SWAP for SGCN are considered when SFRMP Teams prepare their plans. **Forest Certification:** MN DNR has been awarded third-party forest certification on 4.84 million acres of state-administered forest lands from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). These certifications cover DNR's state forests, Wildlife Management Areas (excluding those in the Prairie Parkland Province, and Fisheries

lands in Lake County). Certification of the DNR's forest lands is based on audits to confirm that DNR lands are managed in conformance with standards for well-managed forests that include requirements to protect biological diversity and rare species. One requirement of the FSC Forest Certification is identification and management of High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs). High Conservation Value Forests include:

- Forests with high biodiversity values
- Large intact *natural forest* areas
- Forests with rare or threatened ecosystems
- Forests with critical ecosystem importance
- Forest areas of particular importance to local communities and indigenous peoples

Key habitats for SGCN, as identified in Minnesota's SWAP, and especially Sites of High and Outstanding Biological Significance, as identified by the Minnesota County Biological Survey ecologists, are two of many criteria used to help identify sites to be managed as HCVFs.

**External Agency Partners:** The success of Minnesota's SWAP depends on the entire conservation community. Described below are a few of the conservation partnerships that illustrate the diversity of partners involved in the implementation of Minnesota's SWAP.

#### **Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan**

Minnesota's Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan contains comprehensive assessments pertaining to the future of Minnesota's natural resources and charts long-term strategies for addressing critical issues and trends impacting Minnesota's environment and natural resources. Information from Minnesota's SWAP was used in the development of the Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan. For example, SGCN and key habitat data were utilized by both the aquatic and terrestrial analysis groups to develop priority maps and habitat protection recommendations for the plan.

#### **Statewide Priority Criteria for Appropriations from the Outdoor Heritage Fund**

A portion of the Outdoor Heritage Fund is appropriated for the **Outdoor Heritage Conservation Partners Grant Program** for the enhancement, restoration, or protection of forests, wetlands, prairies, and habitat for fish, game, or wildlife in Minnesota. All wildlife projects funded through this program must link to priority conservation efforts identified in Minnesota's SWAP.

#### **Local Units of Government:**

The cities of **Grand Forks** and **East Grand Fork** partnered with DNR Fisheries on a dam modification project that allows upstream passage for lake sturgeon (SGCN), a once thriving species in the Red River basin, whose populations have declined due to structural barriers such as dams.

**Cass County** and DNR are cooperating to safeguard sensitive shoreline habitat and the species that depend on them. DNR has developed assessment methodologies for the identification of areas along lakeshores that provide unique and critical ecological habitat for SGCN and other

wildlife. Once these areas are identified local and state resource managers use the information to ensure that sensitive habitats receive sufficient protection. The DNR established objective, science-based criteria to identify sensitive shoreland on seventeen large lakes that Cass County identified as high priority. Cass County is using this information to evaluate whether current zoning codes are sufficient to protect these sensitive areas. As a result of this cooperative pilot project, Cass County recently received an Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund appropriation to provide assistance for the donation of perpetual conservation easements to protect sensitive shoreland parcels. Lake associations are key partners in this effort as is DNR's Shoreland Habitat Program that assists shoreline property owners with habitat restoration.

#### Nongovernmental Organizations:

**Audubon Minnesota:** In addition to serving on Minnesota's SWAP Executive Steering Committee, Audubon continues, with financial assistance provided through the State Wildlife Grants Program, to identify, conserve and monitor a network of Important Bird Areas that provide crucial habitat for birds in Minnesota. These sites, which include important breeding, migration, and wintering habitats occur on both public and private lands and may or may not be protected.

The **Nature Conservancy of MN (TNC):** In addition to serving on Minnesota's SWAP Executive Steering Committee, TNC is contributing to the implementation of Minnesota's SWAP in a number of ways, including but not limited to providing leadership and support for the Grasslands Monitoring Partnership and the implementation of a private lands, prairie grazing collaborative in southwest Minnesota. The Grasslands Monitoring partnership is a multi-agency grassland adaptive management collaborative to develop and refine protocols and models for assessment of the prairie community response to management. Collaborators include DNR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

**The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF):** NWTF is a key partner in southeast Minnesota where it is working with the Nongame Wildlife Program, the Landowner Incentive Program, and Minnesota Land Trust on bluff prairie restoration and habitat management for the timber rattlesnake, wild turkey and other species.

**The Minnesota Land Trust:** The Minnesota Land Trust has acquired a perpetual easement on 366 acres of bluff prairie located adjacent to the Rushford-Peterson State Forest and the Rushford Sand Barrens Scientific and Natural Area. Nongame Wildlife Program staff worked with the landowner prior to the easement designation to develop and implement management plans to benefit the Timber Rattlesnake and other SGCN on and in the vicinity of the site and served as the DNR's liaison during the acquisition process.

### Regional and County Parks:

Regional and county parks often provide important habitat for SGCN as well as other wildlife.

**Ramsey County Parks** is collaborating with DNR in the implementation of Minnesota's SWAP through two restoration projects: a grassland restoration project at Bald Eagle Regional Park and an oak woodland/savanna, and shrub-swamp project at Snail Lake Regional Park. **Three Rivers Park District** is an important partner on Blanding's turtle monitoring, habitat management and restoration.

### The Public

Citizens of Minnesota play a crucial role in the implementation of Minnesota's SWAP through participation in the loon monitoring and frog and toad calling surveys to collect long-term information about the status and distribution of these species, as well as through the implementation of conservation practices on their land.

### Partnerships Form Around SWAPs at the National Level

The **Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)** and the **U.S Fish and Wildlife Agency** have signed a Memorandum of Understanding under which the NRCS will, among other things, emphasize the use of NRCS State Technical Committees as a vehicle for coordinating efforts among the signing agencies. This coordination is designed to enable more strategically focused and effective conservation efforts for species at-risk and increase coordination among NRCS Farm Bill programs, Fish and Wildlife Service collaborative conservation programs, and State Wildlife Action Plans.

The **Department of Transportation**, under the *Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users*, includes provisions that integrate consideration of wildlife conservation into the transportation planning process. This law calls for metropolitan planning organization (MPO) and state department of transportation (DOT) to consult with resource agencies in developing long range transportation plans and compare transportation plans with conservation maps of natural resource inventories- such as the State Wildlife Action Plans. The U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration web page notes, "State wildlife action plan are available in every state. Transportation agencies are required to consult these when developing transportation plans and identifying mitigation needs and strategies."

The **Department of Defense (DoD)** has management responsibilities for approximately 30 million acres throughout the United States and is responsible for creating programs and implementing management strategies to conserve and protect biological resources on its land. To this end, DoD develops and implements Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans (INRMPs) at its installations. The Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense , with the support of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have been hosting regional workshops to gather information and facilitate the integration of the INRMPs with SWAPs, as well as identify collaborative conservation opportunities.