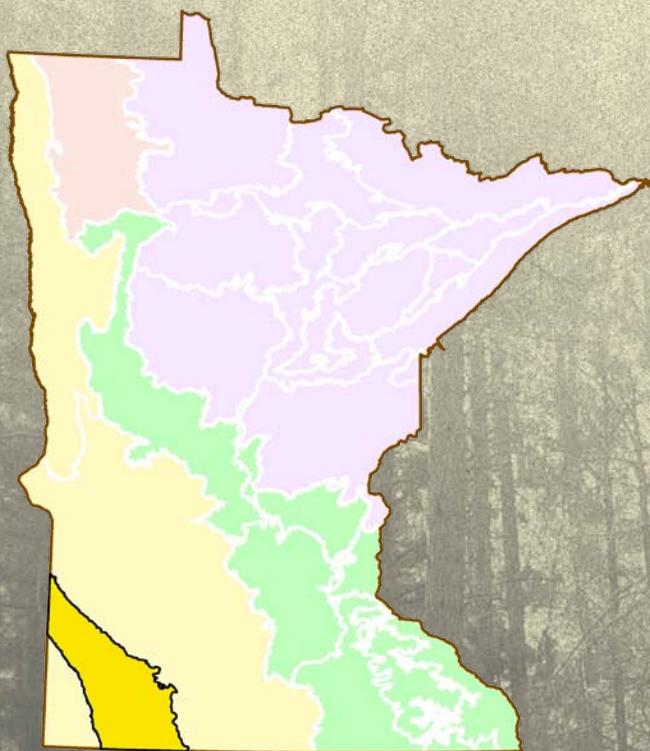


# TOMORROW'S HABITAT

FOR THE  
WILD & RARE

AN ACTION PLAN FOR MINNESOTA WILDLIFE

## COTEAU MORAINES SUBSECTION PROFILE



MINNESOTA'S COMPREHENSIVE WILDLIFE CONSERVATION STRATEGY



# Coteau Moraines

## SUBSECTION OVERVIEW

The Coteau Moraines Subsection in southwestern Minnesota also includes part of northwestern Iowa and extends into southeastern South Dakota. On its northeast boundary, the subsection rises abruptly from the Minnesota River Prairie Subsection. It is a high landform with Buffalo Ridge running along its western edge. The highest point on the ridge is 1,995 feet above sea level, second only to Eagle Mountain in the North Shore Highlands Subsection. Windy conditions are common. Shallow lakes are common, including a few large ones. Prairie wetlands are numerous, making this subsection important for waterfowl. There are a number of small streams here and one larger river, the Des Moines. Before settlement by people of European descent, prairie covered virtually all of the landscape. Fires were common and critical to maintaining the prairie plant communities.

Today, agriculture is the predominant land use, and its expansion and intensification have resulted in water quality and water quantity concerns. Nitrates, phosphates, and pesticides are present in the shallow aquifers. Tiling and ditching of land, and channelization of the river systems have degraded habitat and disturbed aquatic connectivity. Gravel and boulder mining occur in this subsection, and large-scale wind-power production is expanding dramatically. Many of the remaining prairie-grassland complexes are in private ownership and have been used for grazing. Wetland protection and restoration are important conservation issues.

## SPECIES IN GREATEST CONSERVATION NEED

**78 Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)** are known or predicted to occur within the Coteau Moraines. These SGCN include 30 species that are federal or state endangered, threatened, or of special concern. The table, SGCN by Taxonomic Group, displays by taxonomic group the number of SGCN that occur in the subsection, as well as the percentage of the total SGCN set represented by each taxon. For example, 9 mammal SGCN are known or predicted to occur in the Coteau Moraines, approximately 41% of all mammal SGCN in the state.

### SGCN BY TAXONOMIC GROUP

| Taxa       | # of SGCN | Percentage of SGCN Set by Taxon | Examples of SGCN                  |
|------------|-----------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Amphibians | 1         | 16.7                            | Common Mudpuppy                   |
| Birds      | 44        | 45.4                            | Upland sandpiper                  |
| Fish       | 3         | 6.4                             | Plains topminnow                  |
| Insects    | 9         | 16.1                            | Dakota skipper                    |
| Mammals    | 9         | 40.9                            | Prairie vole                      |
| Mollusks   | 7         | 17.9                            | Spike mussel                      |
| Reptiles   | 4         | 23.5                            | Smooth green snake                |
| Spiders    | 1         | 12.5                            | Jumping spider ( <i>P. pius</i> ) |

## SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

### Poweshiek skipper (*Oarisma powesheik*)

**Distribution** Prairie/grassland regions of western and southern MN, including small remnant prairies.

**Abundance** Rare throughout its range in MN, and even rarer outside of MN. Loss of prairies and grasslands throughout the agricultural regions of MN has contributed to a significant decline of this species. It seems to persist even in somewhat degraded grassland habitat.

**Legal Status** State list-Special Concern.

**Comments** The life history of this species is very poorly known.



Photo by Robert Dana

## Quick facts

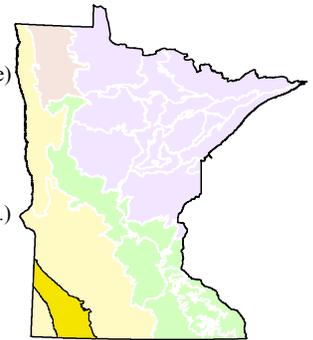
Acres: 2,045,491 (3.8% of state)

### Ownership

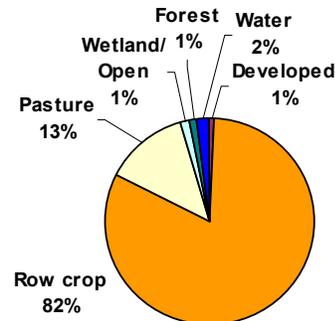
| Public | Private | Tribal |
|--------|---------|--------|
| 2.7%   | 97.3%   | 0.0%   |

Population density (people/sq. mi.)

| Current | Change (2000-2010) |
|---------|--------------------|
| 20.2    | -0.4               |



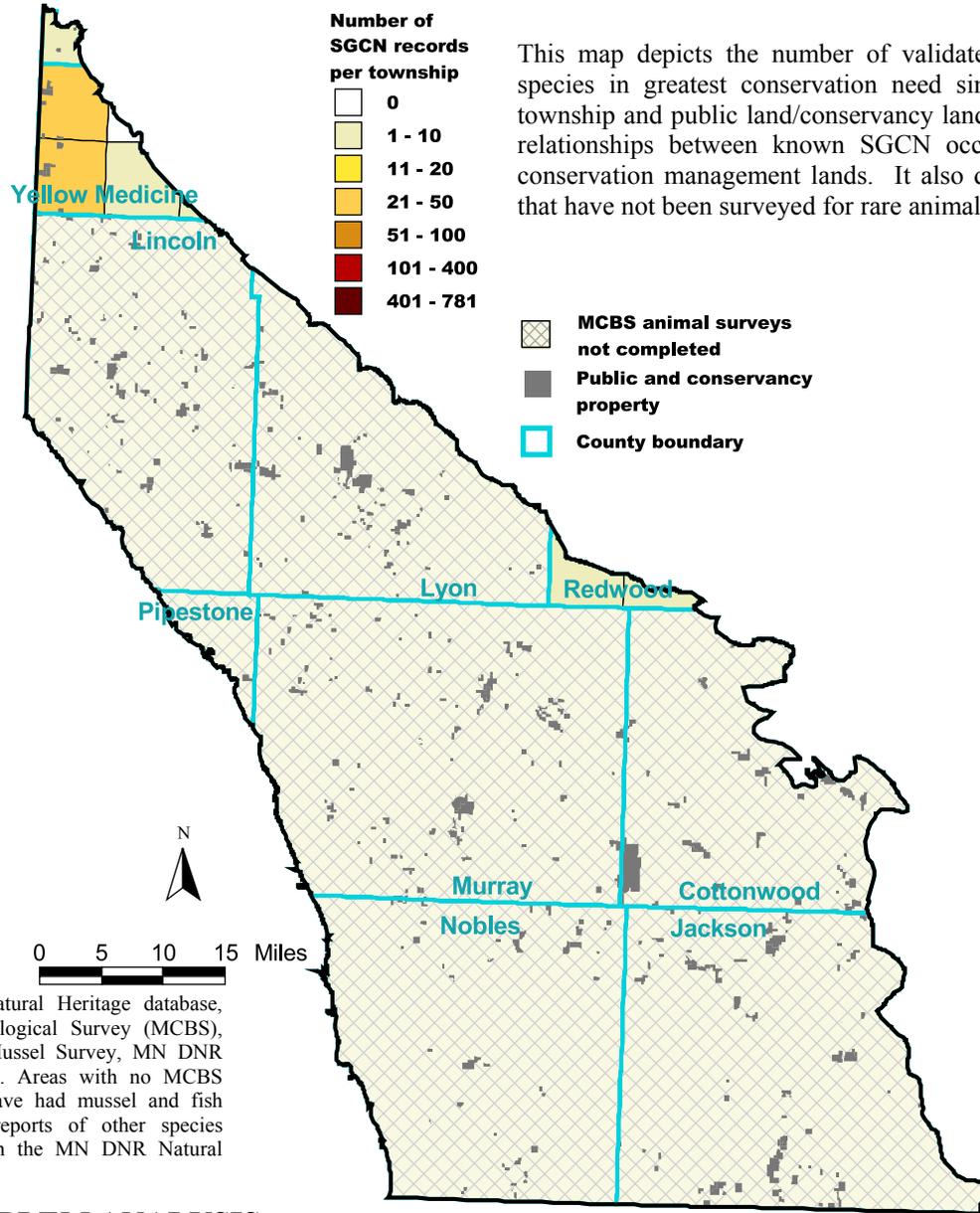
### Current Land Use/Land Cover



## HIGHLIGHTS

- The abundance of publicly owned wetlands on state and federal wildlife areas and associated grasslands provides important habitat for American bitterns, Franklin's gulls, northern harriers, short-eared owls, Forster's terns, and a multitude of nesting ducks and associated wetland birds.
- Areas important for SGCN include numerous state WMAs; federal WPAs; Nature Conservancy lands; Camden, Kilen Woods, and Lake Shetek SPs; and Compass, Prairie Bush Clover, and Des Moines River SNAs.
- The greater Heron Lake Complex (and surrounding grasslands/prairies) is widely considered to be a highly significant resource in this subsection, providing breeding and/or migration habitat for many species of SGCN (such as waterbirds, shorebirds, and grassland birds).

SGCN ELEMENT OCCURRENCES BY TOWNSHIP



This map depicts the number of validated records of species in greatest conservation need since 1990 per township and public land/conservancy land. It suggests relationships between known SGCN occurrences and conservation management lands. It also displays areas that have not been surveyed for rare animals by MCBS.

Sources: MN DNR Natural Heritage database, MN DNR County Biological Survey (MCBS), MN DNR Statewide Mussel Survey, MN DNR Fisheries Fish database. Areas with no MCBS animal surveys may have had mussel and fish surveys, as well as reports of other species occurrences recorded in the MN DNR Natural Heritage database.

SPECIES PROBLEM ANALYSIS

The species problem analysis provides information on the factors influencing the vulnerability or decline of SGCN that are known or predicted to occur in the subsection. The table lists the nine problems, or factors, used in the analysis, and the percentage of SGCN in the subsection for which each factor influences species vulnerability or decline. The results of the species problem analysis indicate that habitat loss and degradation in the subsection are the most significant challenges facing SGCN populations.

NOTE: The inverse of the percentages for each problem does not necessarily represent the percentage of SGCN for which the factor is not a problem, but instead may indicate that there is not sufficient information available to determine the level of influence the factor has on SGCN in the subsection.

| Problem                                   | Percentage of SGCN in the Subsection for Which This Is a Problem |
|---|--|
| Habitat Loss in MN                        | 88   |
| Habitat Degradation in MN                 | 92   |
| Habitat Loss/Degradation Outside of MN    | 31   |
| Invasive Species and Competition          | 28   |
| Pollution                                 | 35   |
| Social Tolerance/Persecution/Exploitation | 21   |
| Disease                                   | 5  |
| Food Source Limitations                   | 5  |
| Other                                     | 21   |

# Coteau Moraines

## KEY HABITATS - For Species in Greatest Conservation Need

The CWCS identified key habitats for SGCN within the subsection using a combination of five analyses, labeled A-E below. The table depicts the five analyses, and under which analyses the key habitats qualified. To qualify as a key habitat for the subsection, the habitat had to meet the criteria used in at least one of the five analyses, as specified in the descriptions to the right of the table. The graphs below depict results from four (A-D) of the five analyses used in determining key habitats. Those habitats that meet the criteria are highlighted in **RED** in the graph for that analysis. Those habitats that do not meet the criteria are shaded in **GOLD**. Analysis E is not represented by a graph; the results of this analysis are presented as a list of key rivers/streams in Appendix I. For a more detailed explanation of the five analyses used, see [Chapter 7, Methods and Analyses](#).

| KEY HABITATS                             | ANALYSIS |   |   |   |   |
|--|----------|---|---|---|---|
|  | A        | B | C | D | E |
| <a href="#">Prairie</a>                  | X        | X | X |   |   |
| <a href="#">Wetland-Nonforest</a>        |          | X | X |   |   |
| <a href="#">River-Headwater to Large</a> |          |   |   |   | X |

### Description of Analyses

**A: Terrestrial habitat use analysis** - terrestrial habitats that represent more than 5% of 1890s or 1990s landcover and are modeled to have the most SGCN using them based on a z-test with  $p < 0.01$ .

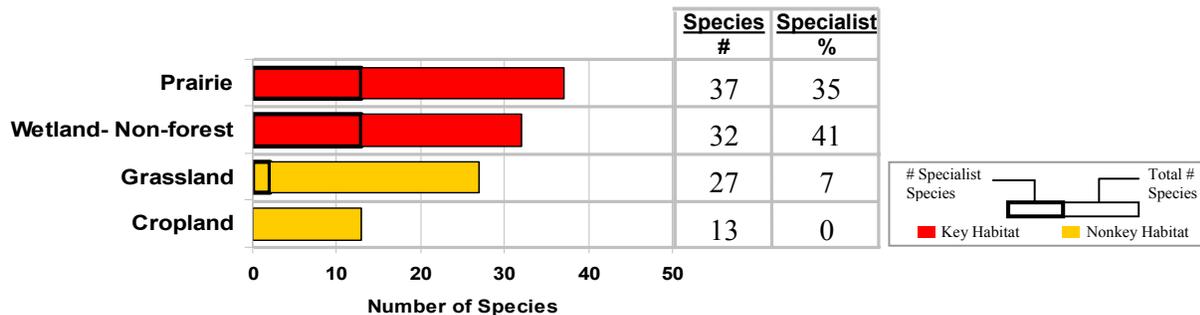
**B: Specialist terrestrial habitat use analysis** - terrestrial habitats that represent more than 5% of 1890s or 1990s landcover and have more than 15 species, 20% of which use 2 or fewer habitats (specialist species).

**C: Terrestrial habitat change analysis** - terrestrial habitats that represent more than 5% of the 1890s landcover and have declined by more than 50% in the 1990s landcover. For wetlands this change was based on an analysis done by Anderson & Craig in *Growing Energy Crops on Minnesota's Wetlands: The Land Use Perspective* (1984).

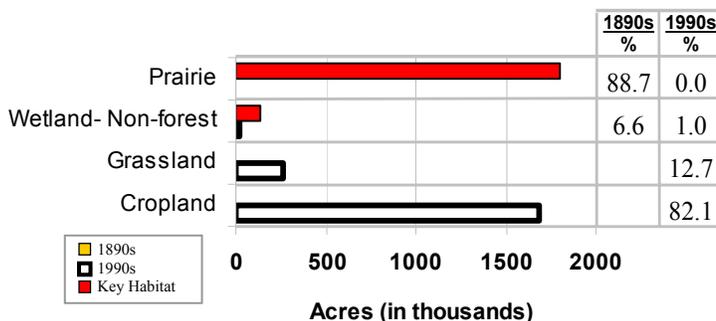
**D: Aquatic habitat use analysis** - lake or stream habitats that have the most SGCN use based on a z-test with  $p < 0.01$  of all subsections.

**E: The Nature Conservancy/SGCN occurrence analysis** - stream reaches identified in the Areas of Aquatic Biodiversity Significance in the four TNC Ecoregional Assessments and reaches with high SGCN occurrences (see [Appendix I](#) for list of stream reaches).

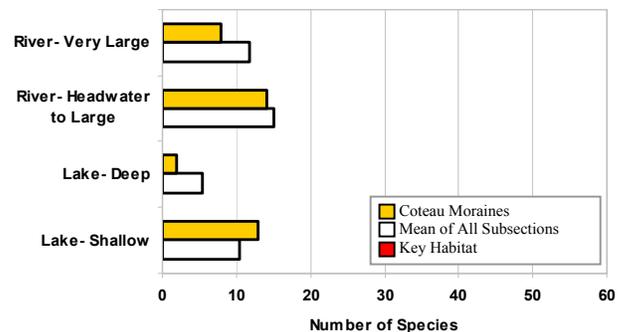
### A/B – Terrestrial Habitat Use/Specialist Terrestrial Habitat Use



### C – Terrestrial Habitat Change



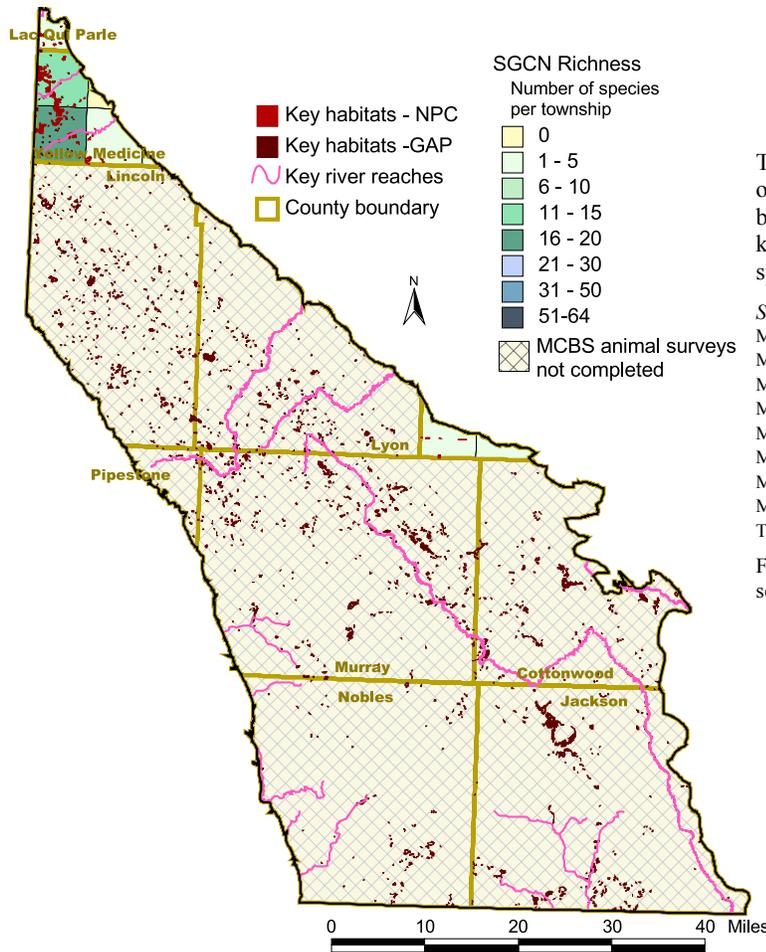
### D – Aquatic Habitat Use



### E – The Nature Conservancy/SGCN Occurrence

To reference the key rivers and streams for the subsection, see [Appendix I](#).

DISTRIBUTION OF KEY HABITATS AND SPECIES RICHNESS BY TOWNSHIP



This map depicts key habitats and the number of species of SGCN per township based on the sources listed below. It suggests there is often a relationship between key habitats and species richness (i.e., the variety of species of SGCN in a township).

Sources:

- Major River Centerline Traces in Minnesota, 1984
- MCBS Native Plant Communities (NPC), 2005
- MN DNR 24K Rivers and Streams, 2005
- MN DNR County Biological Survey (MCBS), 2005
- MN DNR Fish database, 2005
- MN DNR Natural Heritage database, 2005
- MN DNR Statewide Mussel Survey, 2005
- MN GAP Landcover, 1993
- The Nature Conservancy Rivers and Streams combined dataset, 2005

For more information on how this map was constructed, please see the [Subsection Profile Overview in Chapter 5](#).

SUBSECTION HABITAT PERCENTAGES AND HABITAT USE BY SGCN TAXA

This table presents information on the percentages for each habitat in the subsection (showing changes in coverage between the mid- to late 1800s and the 1990s), as well as habitat use by SGCN taxonomic group. Habitats are listed in ranked order for percent coverage within the subsection in the 1990s. Key habitats for the subsection (as identified on previous page) are listed in **BOLD**. SGCN habitat use is broken down by taxonomic group, with a total number of species for all taxonomic groups listed at the far right of the table.

| HABITAT                            | Percentage of Subsection (1890s) | Percentage of Subsection (1990s) | SGCN BY TAXONOMIC GROUP |       |      |         |         |          |          | Total Number of Species |         |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------|------|---------|---------|----------|----------|-------------------------|---------|
|                                    |                                  |                                  | Amphibians              | Birds | Fish | Insects | Mammals | Mollusks | Reptiles |                         | Spiders |
| Cropland                           | N/A                              | 82.2                             |                         | 7     |      |         |         | 5        |          | 1                       | 13      |
| Grassland                          | N/A                              | 12.7                             |                         | 15    |      |         |         | 9        |          | 3                       | 27      |
| Lake-Shallow                       | N/A                              | 1.7                              |                         | 11    |      |         |         |          |          | 2                       | 13      |
| <b>Wetland-Nonforest</b>           | 6.6                              | 1.0                              |                         | 28    |      |         |         | 2        |          | 2                       | 32      |
| Forest-Upland Deciduous (Hardwood) | 0.0                              | 0.8                              |                         | 5     |      |         |         | 3        |          | 1                       | 9       |
| Developed                          | N/A                              | 0.7                              |                         | 4     |      |         |         | 2        |          |                         | 6       |
| Shrub/Woodland-Upland              | 0.6                              | 0.4                              |                         | 11    |      | 1       |         | 6        |          | 2                       | 20      |
| Forest-Lowland Deciduous           | 1.0                              | 0.3                              |                         | 6     |      |         |         | 1        |          | 1                       | 8       |
| Lake-Deep                          | N/A                              | 0.2                              | 1                       |       |      |         |         |          |          | 1                       | 2       |
| Forest-Upland Coniferous           | 0.0                              | 0.0                              |                         | 5     |      |         |         | 3        |          | 2                       | 10      |
| <b>Prairie</b>                     | 88.7                             | 0.0                              |                         | 15    |      | 9       |         | 9        |          | 3                       | 37      |
| Shoreline-dunes-cliff/talus        | N/A                              | N/A                              |                         | 10    |      |         |         | 3        |          |                         | 13      |
| <b>River-Headwater to Large</b>    | N/A                              | N/A                              | 1                       | 1     | 3    |         |         |          | 7        | 2                       | 14      |
| River-Very Large                   | N/A                              | N/A                              | 1                       |       |      |         |         |          | 5        | 2                       | 8       |

N/A: Insufficient data available to determine percent coverage within subsection. We have no data to indicate the existence of cropland, grassland, or developed land prior to settlement by people of European descent, although these land uses likely did occur at very low levels. NOTE: 0.0 indicates less than 0.05 percent coverage.

## Ten-Year Goals, Management Challenges, Strategies, and Priority Conservation Actions

### Goal I: Stabilize and increase SGCN populations

*Management Challenge 1 – There has been significant loss and degradation of SGCN habitat*

*Strategy I A – Identify key SGCN habitats and focus management efforts on them*

#### Priority Conservation Actions to Maintain, Enhance, and Protect the Key Habitats

1. **Native prairie habitats**, actions include:
  - a. Manage invasive species
  - b. Use prescribed fire and other practices to maintain prairie
  - c. Manage grasslands adjacent to native prairie to enhance SGCN habitat
  - d. Encourage prairie restoration efforts
  - e. Provide technical assistance and protection opportunities to interested individuals and organizations
2. **Nonforested wetlands**, actions include:
  - a. Enforce the Wetlands Conservation Act
  - b. Manage habitats adjacent to wetlands to enhance SGCN values
  - c. Provide technical assistance and protection opportunities to interested individuals and organizations
3. **Stream habitats**, actions include:
  - a. Maintain good water quality, hydrology, geomorphology, and connectivity in priority stream reaches
  - b. Maintain and enhance riparian areas along priority stream reaches
  - c. Provide technical assistance and protection opportunities to interested individuals and organizations

*Management Challenge 2 – Some SGCN populations require specific management actions*

*Strategy I B – Manage federal and state listed species effectively*

#### Priority Conservation Actions for Specific SGCN

1. Implement existing federal recovery plans
2. Develop and implement additional recovery plans
3. Provide technical assistance to managers, officials, and interested individuals related to listed species
4. Enforce federal and state endangered species laws, as well as other wildlife laws and regulations

*Strategy I C – Manage emerging issues affecting specific SGCN populations*

#### Priority Conservation Actions for Specific SGCN

1. Work with partners to effectively address emerging issues affecting SGCN populations
2. Enforce federal and state wildlife laws and regulations

### Goal II: Improve knowledge about SGCN

*Management Challenge 1 – More information about SGCN and SGCN management is needed*

*Strategy II A – Survey SGCN populations and habitats*

#### Priority Conservation Actions for Surveys

1. Survey SGCN populations within the subsection, actions include:
  - a. Continue MCBS rare animal surveys
  - b. Survey SGCN populations related to key habitats
  - c. Survey wildlife taxa underrepresented by MCBS animal surveys
2. Survey SGCN habitats within the subsection, actions include:
  - a. Assess the amount and quality of key habitats and map their locations

*Strategy II B – Research populations, habitats, and human attitudes/activities*

#### Priority Conservation Actions for Research

1. Research important aspects of species populations within the subsection, actions include:
  - a. Better understand the life history and habitat requirements of important SGCN
2. Research important aspects of SGCN habitats within the subsection, actions include:
  - a. Identify best management practices for maintaining and enhancing key habitats
  - b. Identify important patterns and distributions of key habitats to better support SGCN populations
  - c. Identify important functional components within key habitats to support specific SGCN
  - d. Explore important, emerging SGCN habitat management issues

## **Priority Conservation Actions for Research (continued)**

3. Research important aspects of people's understanding of SGCN within the subsection, actions include:
  - a. Identify people's attitudes and values regarding SGCN
  - b. Identify places and ways people can enjoy and appreciate SGCN

### *Strategy II C – Monitor long-term changes in SGCN populations and habitats*

#### **Priority Conservation Actions for Monitoring**

1. Monitor long-term trends in SGCN populations, actions include:
  - a. Continue existing population monitoring activities
  - b. Develop additional monitoring activities for specific SGCN populations
2. Monitor long-term trends in SGCN habitats, actions include:
  - a. Develop long-term monitoring activities for important SGCN habitats

### *Strategy II D – Create performance measures and maintain information systems*

#### **Priority Conservation Actions for Performance Measures and Information Systems**

1. Create and use performance measures, actions include:
  - a. Develop partner-specific performance measures within the subsection
  - b. Develop project-specific performance measures for SWG-funded projects
  - c. Actively incorporate monitoring and performance measure information to enhance adaptive management
2. Maintain and update information management systems

## **Goal III: Enhance people's appreciation and enjoyment of SGCN**

### *Management Challenge 1 – Need for greater appreciation of SGCN by people*

#### *Strategy III A – Develop outreach and recreation actions*

#### **Priority Conservation Actions for Outreach and Recreation**

1. Create new information and communicate with people to enhance their appreciation of SGCN
2. Create opportunities for people to appropriately enjoy SGCN-based recreation

# *Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare: An Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife*

## How to use this subsection profile

### **Intended audience: Natural resource professionals and interested stakeholders**

- \* Identify how the priority conservation actions and key habitats intersect and inform your current and future priorities.
- \* Using your additional insights and local knowledge, “step-down” the priority conservation actions into more detailed actions and practical on-ground tasks.
- \* Use it to understand species in greatest conservation need priorities and tell a story about the subsection (its history, biology, ecology, demography) to other natural resource professionals, managers, decision makers and land owners.
- \* Visit our website, or give us a call, and tell us how you’re using it, how others are using it, and ideas that “step-down” the priority conservation actions.

### **Website:**

[www.dnr.state.mn.us/cwcs](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/cwcs)

### **For more information, please contact:**

Emmett Mullin, Project Manager, MN DNR, phone: 651-259-5566, email: emmett.mullin@dnr.state.mn.us

Daren Carlson, Ecologist/GIS Analyst, MN DNR, phone: 651-259-5079, email: daren.carlson@dnr.state.mn.us

Brian Stenquist, Strategic Planner, MN DNR, phone: 651-259-5144, email: brian.stenquist@dnr.state.mn.us

### **How to cite this document:**

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 2006. *Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare: An Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife*, Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. Division of Ecological Services, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.



©2006, State of Minnesota, Department of Natural Resources

Department of Natural Resources  
500 Lafayette Road  
St. Paul, MN 55155-4040  
(651) 296-6157 (Metro Area)  
1-888-MINNDNR (646-6367) (MN Toll Free)

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is available to all individuals regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, public assistance status, age, sexual orientation, disability or activity on behalf of a local human rights commission. Discrimination inquiries should be sent to MN DNR, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155-4049; or the Equal Opportunity Office, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

This document is available in alternative formats to individuals with disabilities by calling (651) 296-6157 (Metro Area) or 1-888-MINNDNR (MN Toll Free) or Telecommunication Device for the Deaf/TTY: (651) 296-5484 (Metro Area) or 1-800-657-3929 (Toll Free TTY).

Printed on recycled paper containing a minimum of 10% post-consumer waste and soy-based ink.