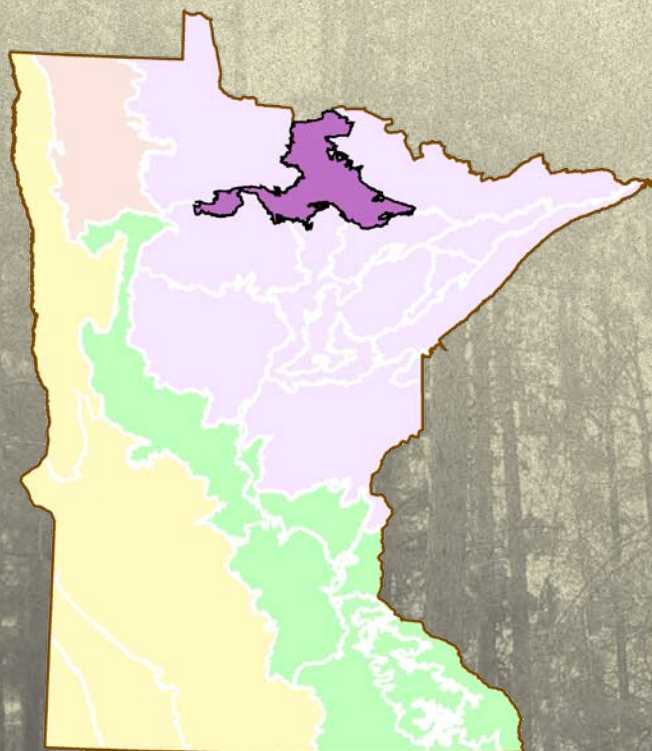


TOMORROW'S HABITAT

FOR THE
WILD & RARE

AN ACTION PLAN FOR MINNESOTA WILDLIFE

LITTLEFORK VERMILLION UPLANDS SUBSECTION PROFILE



MINNESOTA'S COMPREHENSIVE WILDLIFE CONSERVATION STRATEGY



Littlefork Vermilion Uplands

SUBSECTION OVERVIEW

The Littlefork Vermilion Uplands Subsection is located in extreme north-central Minnesota. It is named for the Littlefork River, its western border, and the Vermilion River, its eastern border. Topography is level to gently rolling throughout, with many meandering rivers and streams. There are no large recreational lakes in this area. Before settlement by people of European descent, much of the subsection was forested with aspen-birch, and lowlands were occupied by sedge fen, black spruce-sphagnum bog, and white cedar-black ash swamp.

Forestry is the most common land use in this subsection, and quaking aspen, the most common tree species, is harvested for pulp. Recreation is also important, especially in the southeastern section, where there are many public lands.

SPECIES IN GREATEST CONSERVATION NEED

67 Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) are known or predicted to occur within the Littlefork Vermilion Uplands. These SGCN include 16 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, 4 mammal SGCN are known or predicted to occur in the Littlefork Vermilion Uplands, approximately 18% 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	<i>None documented since 1990</i>
Birds	48	49.5	American bittern
Fish	3	6.4	Lake sturgeon
Insects	8	14.3	Tiger beetle (<i>C. denikei</i>)
Mammals	4	18.2	Northern bog lemming
Mollusks	2	5.1	Black sandshell
Reptiles	1	5.9	Common Snapping Turtle
Spiders	0	0	NA

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Northern bog lemming (*Synaptomys borealis*)

Distribution Extremely limited distribution along the Canadian border from Koochiching to Lake of the Woods and Roseau counties.

Abundance Extremely rare.

Legal Status State list-Special Concern.

Comments This species is found primarily in Canada and the Minnesota sites are on the southern edge of the range.



Photo by Jim Reichel, Montana Natural Heritage Program

Quick facts

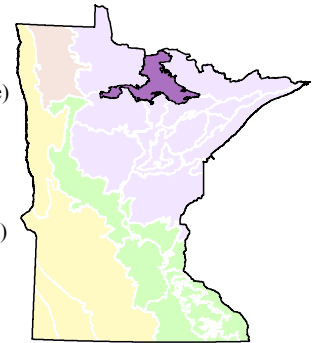
Acres: 1,651,020 (3.1% of state)

Ownership

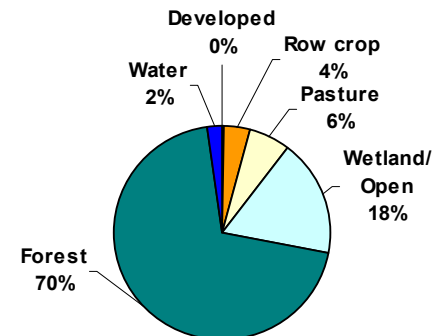
Public	Private	Tribal
57.9%	38.7%	3.4%

Population density (people/sq. mi.)

Current	Change (2000-2010)
6.8	-0.7



Current Land Use/Land Cover

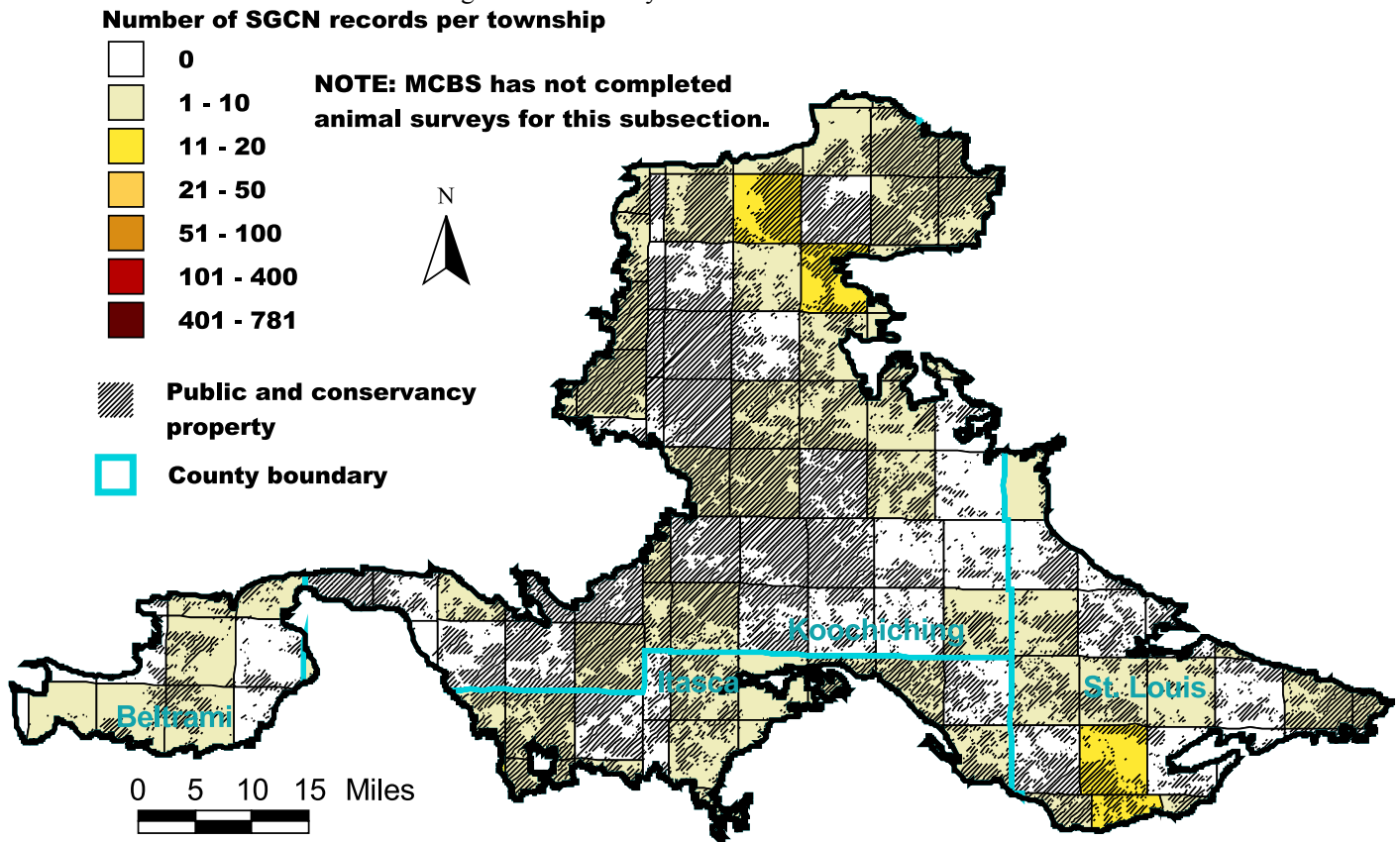


HIGHLIGHTS

- The Littlefork Vermilion Uplands has an excellent mix of northern forests, lakes, and rivers that support a diversity of wildlife on extensive public lands.
- There are bald eagles, Canada lynx, spruce grouse, great gray owls, black-backed woodpeckers, yellow rails, boreal owls, trumpeter swans, boreal chickadees, merlins, red-necked grebes, northern bog lemmings, and lake sturgeons.
- Areas important for SGCN include Nett Lake, Myrtle Lake, Lost Lake, and Caldwell Brook SNAs; McCarthy Beach, and Bearhead SPs; and Koochiching, Big Fork, Pine Island, and Smoky Bear SFs.

Littlefork Vermilion Uplands

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. Please note that MCBS has not begun animal surveys in this subsection.



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	79
Habitat Degradation in MN	87
Habitat Loss/Degradation Outside of MN	46
Invasive Species and Competition	19
Pollution	28
Social Tolerance/Persecution/Exploitation	22
Disease	1
Food Source Limitations	1
Other	4

Littlefork Vermilion Uplands

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
Forest-Upland Coniferous	X	X			
Forest-Lowland Coniferous	X	X			
River-Headwater to Large					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 $p < 0.01$.

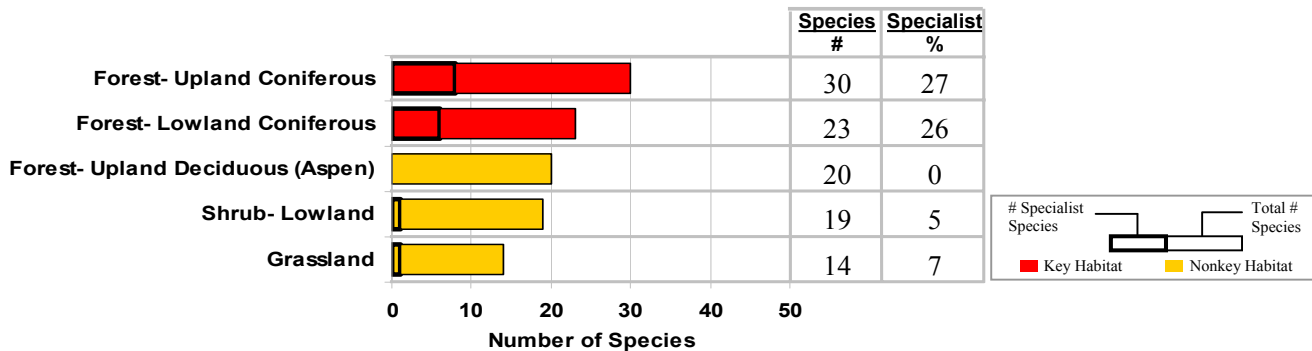
B: Specialist terrestrial habitat use analysis - terrestrial habitats that represent more than 5% of 1890s or 1990s landcover and have more than 15 species, 20% of which use 2 or fewer habitats (specialist species).

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).

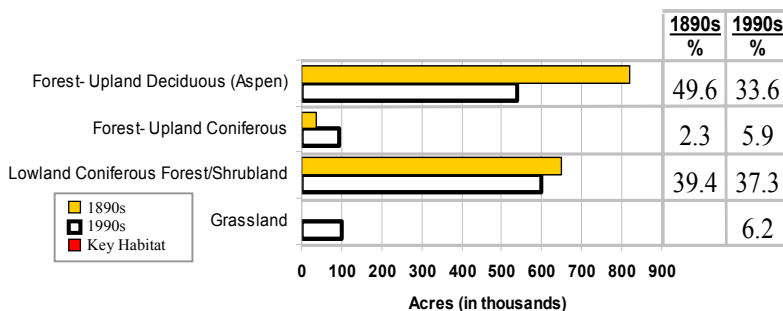
D: Aquatic habitat use analysis - lake or stream habitats that have the most SGCN use based on a z-test with $p < 0.01$ of all subsections.

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).

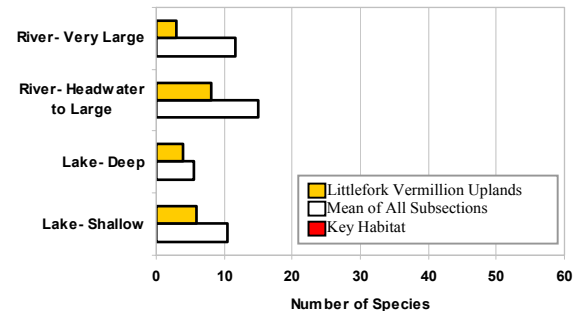
A/B – Terrestrial Habitat Use/Specialist Terrestrial Habitat Use



C – Terrestrial Habitat Change



D – Aquatic Habitat Use



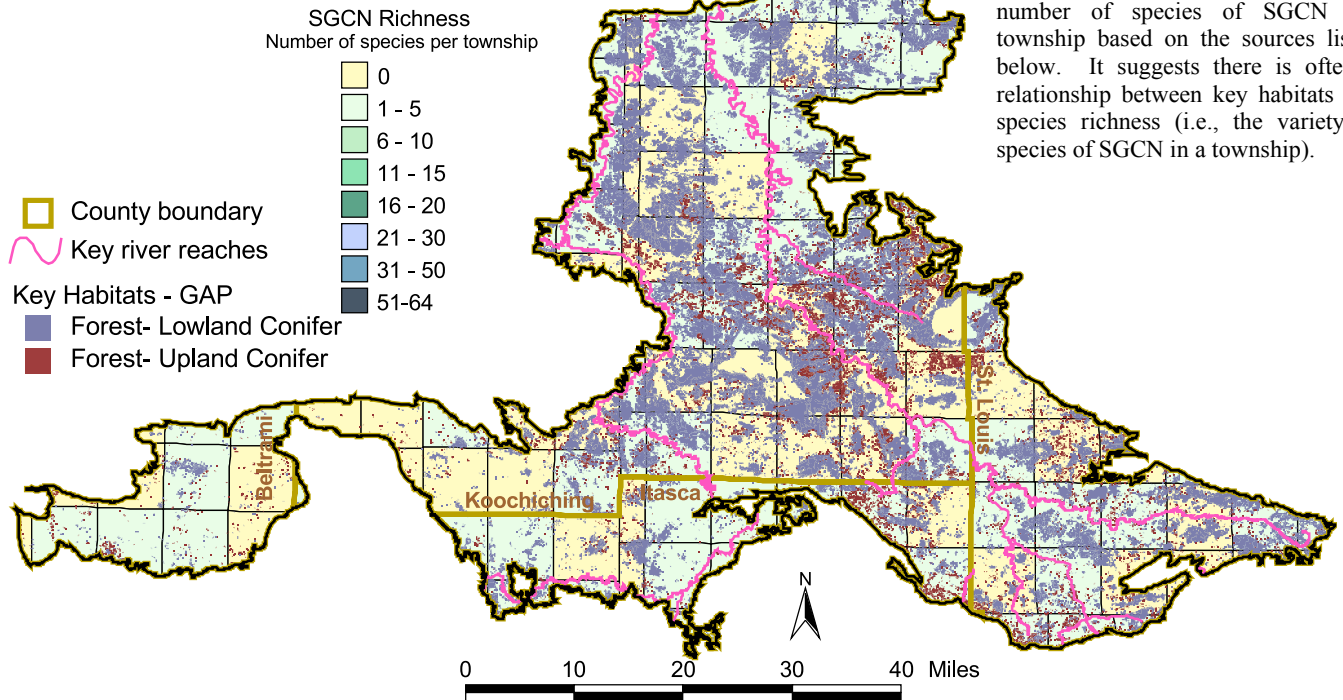
E – The Nature Conservancy/SGCN Occurrence

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

Littlefork Vermilion Uplands

DISTRIBUTION OF KEY HABITATS AND SPECIES RICHNESS BY TOWNSHIP

NOTE: MCBS has not completed animal surveys for this subsection.



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; MN DNR 24K Rivers and Streams, 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
Forest-Lowland Coniferous	39.4	37.3		18		2	3				23
Forest-Upland Deciduous (Aspen)	49.6	33.6	1	16		1	2				20
Grassland	N/A	6.2		12			2				14
Forest-Upland Coniferous	2.3	5.9	1	22		4	3				30
Cropland	N/A	4.0		4			2				6
Shrub/Woodland-Upland (Jack pine woodland)	3.7	3.0		13		3	3				19
Forest-Lowland Deciduous	1.3	2.6		12			1				13
Wetland-Nonforest	0.2	2.5		18			2		1		21
Forest-Upland Deciduous (Hardwood)	1.0	2.2	1	15			3				19
Lake-Deep	N/A	1.8		2	1				1		4
Lake-Shallow	N/A	0.6		4					1		5
Developed	N/A	0.3		4		1	1				6
Shoreline-dunes-cliff/talus	N/A	N/A		7		1	1				9
Shrub-Lowland	N/A	N/A		15		1	3				19
River-Headwater to Large	N/A	N/A		2	2	1		2	1		8
River-Very Large	N/A	N/A			1			1	1		3

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.

Littlefork Vermilion Uplands

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. **Upland coniferous forest habitats**, actions include:
 - a. Incorporate SGCN habitat concerns in forest management planning
 - b. Provide technical assistance and protection opportunities to interested individuals and organizations
2. **Lowland coniferous forest habitats**, actions include:
 - a. Incorporate SGCN habitat concerns in forest management planning
 - b. 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
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

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.