

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

Wildlife Action Plans: Building on America's Conservation Legacy

Recognizing the vast unmet needs of our nation's wildlife resource, Congress created the [Conservation and Restoration Program](#) and the [State Wildlife Grants Program](#) in 2000. As a requirement Congress asked each state wildlife agency to develop a "comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy"—a wildlife *action* plan—that evaluates wildlife conservation needs and outlines the necessary action steps. While the action plans share a common framework, they are tailored to each state's unique wildlife, habitat and conservation needs.

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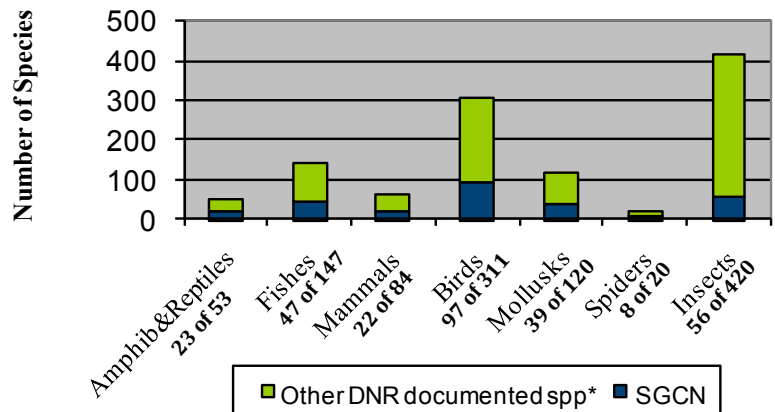
The [State Wildlife Action Plans](#) (SWAP) build on the tremendously successful fish and game programs of the 20th century that were focused on species that were hunted and fished. These programs include the 1937, Wildlife Restoration Act (also known as the Pittman-Robertson Act) that established a user fee in the form of an excise tax on hunting equipment to conserve game species and assure conservation of their habitats, and the Sport Fish and Restoration Act of 1950, which extended the user free to fishing gear with a focus on restoring fisheries. In 1973, Congress specifically addressed species on the brink of extinction with the passage of the Endangered Species Act.

While successful, these programs cover only about fifteen percent (15%) of our wildlife species. Approximately 85 percent of our wildlife lack adequate conservation resources. Recognizing that recovery of species is much more costly than addressing habitat needs before a species reaches the need for listing, Congress has given states the opportunity to address the needs of species through the establishment of the State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAP) and the State Wildlife Grants Program (SWG). The SWAPs are revitalizing conservation in America. Never before have scientists, conservationists and communities come together at this scale to pursue common conservation goals.

Minnesota's response

[Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare](#) is Minnesota's response to this historic opportunity. *Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare* is an action plan for Minnesota's [species in greatest conservation need](#) (SGCN) and the habitats that support them. SGCN are defined as native animals whose populations are rare, declining, or vulnerable to decline and are below levels desirable to ensure their long-term health and stability. In Minnesota, 292 species meet the definition of SGCN and represent approximately one-quarter of the state's nearly 1,200 known native wildlife species.

Number of Species in Greatest Conservation Need Compared to all species in Minnesota by Taxa
(Underestimates the total # of invertebrate species in MN)



Source: MN DNR, 2004

Minnesota's wildlife action plan was developed under the leadership of the Department of Natural Resources in collaboration with over 100 individuals and more than 40 organizations. Partner organizations included the [U.S Fish and Wildlife Service \(USFWS\)](#), [The Nature Conservancy \(TNC\)](#), [University of Minnesota \(UMN\)](#), [U.S Geological Survey \(USGS\)](#), [Natural Resources Research Institute \(NRRI\)](#), and many others. The plan was completed in September of 2005, and approved by the USFWS. Approval of the plan allows Minnesota to continue to participate in the State Wildlife Grant Program (SWG), which has provided about \$1.1 million per year to implement *Tomorrow's Habitat*.

A Focused Approach:



Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare has three goals:

- Stabilize and increase populations of species in greatest conservation need.
- Improve knowledge about species in greatest conservation need.
- Enhance peoples' appreciation and enjoyment of species in greatest conservation need.

Accompanying each goal is a set of [priority conservation actions](#) that can assist conservation partners focus investments in SGCN management.

In developing *Tomorrow's Habitat*, conservation partners assessed a number of factors that contribute to the decline of Minnesota's SGCN. The assessment identified habitat loss and degradation as the primary problem. The action plan recommends a direct approach to this problem: conserve [key habitats](#) used by Minnesota's SGCN in order to conserve the majority of Minnesota's wildlife. It is based on a series of analyses that examined the needs of all 292 SGCN and identify key habitats that benefit them. The analysis was conducted in each of [Minnesota's 25 ecological subsections](#). *Tomorrow's Habitat* identifies priority conservation actions to maintain, enhance and protect these key habitats. Additional [priority conservation actions](#) address acquiring the knowledge required to more effectively manage SGCN and their habitats, as well as actions for public outreach and recreation.

SGCN and their habitats provide many benefits to Minnesotans. These benefits (often referred to as [ecosystem services](#)) include economic benefits from wildlife viewing, hunting and fishing, as well as the less easily quantified benefits from ground water recharge, flood mitigation, water purification, cycling and movement of nutrients, pest control, pollination of crops and natural vegetation, and aesthetic beauty to name a few. The priority conservation actions contribute to meeting the goals of *Tomorrow's Habitat* while maintaining the ecosystem services that contribute to Minnesotan's economic health and quality of life.

Implementing Tomorrow's Habitat: Working Together for Minnesota Wildlife

The Department of Natural Resources and partner conservation organizations have turned their attention to implementing *Tomorrow's Habitat*. Efforts are underway to incorporate the plan's strategic vision, goals and priority conservation actions into the on-going operations of conservation organizations.

Implementation involves assessing how the vision and priority conservation actions outlined in *Tomorrow's Habitat* reflect existing priorities and how they can be used to shape future priorities.



Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) nesting at [Lake Christina](#), a 3,949 acre shallow lake restoration project

The DNR, Division of Ecological Resources is using the plan to prioritize funding, identify priority key habitats, and [partner on projects](#) with groups such as [USFWS](#), [TNC](#), [Minnesota Land Trust](#), [The Conservation Fund](#), [Audubon Minnesota](#), [Wild Turkey Federation](#), [USGS](#) and other divisions within the Department.

A very important implementation component is the development of a monitoring framework and commitment to long-term monitoring of SGCN and key habitats. Mussels, goshawks, and rattlesnakes are currently being monitored, and a collaborative grassland monitoring effort is also underway. Staff is working on developing multi-level performance measures for the plan and upgrading and developing communication tools.

Examples of Priority Conservation Actions Being Implemented		
Projects	Key activities or findings	Outcomes
Accelerated completion of the County Biological Survey (MCBS)	Documented numerous new county occurrences records for animal species Important habitats and rare features identified and mapped	Improves our understanding of the status of MN natural resources Brings focus for areas of management, protection and collaboration
Statewide mussel survey	Completed statewide survey Developed and implemented long-term monitoring Began propagation and restoration of rare mussel species	Provided an indication of the health of our water systems Aids in the management and protection of mussel populations
Identification of Sensitive Shorelines	Characterized shoreline areas most important to rare species Develop ecological models to rank shorelines and their relative importance to wildlife	Information on sensitive shorelines is used to develop local ordinances
Prairie enhancement	Restoration and enhancement of over 5000 acres of prairie that supports numerous SGCN	Contributes to the stability and health of MN wildlife and one of the state's most endangered ecological systems
Partnership Grants	Developed partnership grant opportunities. Funded 15 projects focused on SGCN and implemented by external partners	Builds partnerships that aid in conservation Increases our knowledge base on SGCN Expands our ability to implement habitat enhancement projects
Information management	Database development and maintenance	Essential in making informed management decisions

Interested in learning more?

Jane Norris

Phone: 651-259-5228

E-mail: Jane.Norris.state.mn.us

Daren Carlson

Phone: 651-259-5079

E-mail: Daren.Carlson.state.mn.us

Faith Balch

Phone: 651-259-5074

E-mail: Faith.Balch.state.mn.us