

# Conservation Focus Areas

## Introduction to Overviews

Conservation Focus Areas (CFA) are priority areas for working with partners to identify, design, and implement actions and to report on the effectiveness toward achieving the goals and objectives defined in the Wildlife Action Plan. Conservation Focus Areas are intended to focus conservation efforts over the next 10 years to maintain and enhance the resiliency of the Wildlife Action Network.

Conservation Focus Areas were selected to represent locations with Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and habitat resources that need attention and have the opportunity, such as organized and willing partners or funding, to address those needs over the next 10 years. Conservation Focus Areas do not represent all of the important areas in the Wildlife Action Network for SGCN. Some important areas have received a great deal of attention in the past so that relatively little additional conservation work needs to be done; for other important areas, there may be limited opportunity to address their needs over the next 10 years.

The following pages summarize 36 Conservation Focus Areas, of which at least 6 will be identified for work over the next 10 years. The CFA overviews include a map showing the Wildlife Action Network, ownership, and orientation landmarks such as cities and major highways. The Wildlife Action Network is presented with scores based on five scalable metrics: SGCN population viability scores, SGCN richness, spatially prioritized Sites of Biodiversity Significance, ranks of Lakes of Biological Significance, and Stream Indices of Biological Integrity (IBI). Lower scores (green) in a given area indicate the scores for any of the five metrics were either low or zero, while high scores (red) indicate that multiple metrics with high scores overlap. See Appendix E for more details. Ownership includes federal, state, county, and municipal fee title lands as well as permanent conservation easements on private land.

Each Conservation Focus Area overview also provides a list of target habitats and SGCN present for that focus area. Target habitats are defined as habitats that are present in a Conservation Focus Area which are utilized by SGCN and require management attention to be sustained or enhanced over time. Target species are defined as individual or groups of SGCN that inhabit target habitats and require special management attention or could serve as focal species for monitoring purposes. The target habitats are presented as broad categories (e.g., Upland Hardwood Forest) with crosswalks to the MN DNR Native Plant Community Classification when available (see: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/npc/index.html>). Lakes, rivers, and surrogate grasslands do not have related native plant community classifications. Not all target habitats have associated target species listed as there may not be specific management needs or monitoring opportunities for species that use those habitats. The overview also contains examples of issues and approaches to address those issues related to the target habitats and species. This list is illustrative and not exhaustive. The target habitats, species, issues, and approaches will be reviewed and refined during implementation.

Implementation will consist of biennial regional meetings with partners from within the DNR divisions and other agencies and organizations to be held in each DNR region beginning in early 2016. Examples of regional partners include Tribal Governments, Soil and Water Conservation

Districts, US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Bureau of Water and Soil Resources, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, The Wildlife Society, Ducks Unlimited, and other land managers, including local and regional governments. To the extent possible, CFA teams will utilize existing teams such as the Local Technical Teams organized for implementation of the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

These meetings will accomplish the following:

- Provide opportunities to coordinate implementation of on-the-ground habitat conservation projects to meet Wildlife Action Plan objectives.
- Identify, prioritize, and develop Wildlife Action Plan projects to be implemented within one or more of the mapped Conservation Focus Areas. This could include assessing available resources needed to implement projects; selecting projects; reviewing new information on species and habitats that has become available; establishing clear results specific to SGCN or their habitats; developing Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented and Time-bound (SMART) objectives; identifying conservation actions; defining project effectiveness; and implementing monitoring to evaluate and report on effectiveness.
- Recommend new Conservation Focus Areas for the region or revise the boundaries of existing Conservation Focus Areas.
- Address opportunities for watershed/landscape project planning within Conservation Focus Areas or the Wildlife Action Network. This can include considering how management objectives and actions at the site level can be coordinated across sites to sustain or enhance landscape-scale biological diversity and improve the ecological functionality of conservation lands and waters.

Some conservation issues and approaches were not included in individual Conservation Focus Areas since they apply to most areas or have policy issues best addressed at a statewide scale. Examples of these are the following:

Example conservation issues	Example conservation approaches
<b>Loss of wetlands</b>	Apply Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act standards, and ensure replacement standards are followed.
<b>Reduced incentives for conservation easements due to increased commodity prices</b>	Influence Farm Bill policy: Make incentives match commodity prices, strategically target landowners within Wildlife Action Network.
<b>Pesticide and herbicide impacts on pollinators and other invertebrates and insectivores</b>	Provide Best Management Practices and habitat buffers.