

State Wildlife Action Plans: *Revitalizing Conservation in America*

Recovery of threatened and endangered species is much more costly than proactively addressing conservation needs before a species reaches the need for listing under the Endangered Species Act. To address the need for proactive conservation measures Congress established the State and Tribal Wildlife Grant Program (SWG). To receive funds through SWG, states are required to develop a State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). These plans must identify wildlife in greatest need of conservation, evaluate their conservation needs and outline 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. SWAPs provide a catalyst for scientists, conservationists and communities to come together to pursue common conservation goals.



In 2005, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in collaboration with over 100 individuals and more than 40 organizations developed Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan, *Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare*. Approval of the plan allowed Minnesota to continue to participate in the State Wildlife Grant Program. Since the inception of the State Wildlife Grant Program, Minnesota has received over \$18 million which has supported over 60 projects throughout the state. Many of these projects inform investment of other conservation funds, including the Legacy Amendment and the Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund. ([Chapter 1](#) of the plan has examples of some of these projects.)

The US Fish and Wildlife Service requires that the Wildlife Action Plans be reviewed and updated every 10 years. From 2013 to 2015 conservation partners came together again to update Minnesota's plan, which has been approved by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan 2015-25 (MN WAP)

The 2015-25 Wildlife Action Plan builds upon the foundation established in the 2005 plan. The goals of the 2005 Wildlife Action Plan have been updated to better reflect our understanding of wildlife conservation needs and the approaches needed to address them. Although climate change was mentioned in the 2005 plan, updating the plan involved conducting a habitat climate change vulnerability assessment and reviewing habitat and species vulnerability assessments and other climate change information. The Wildlife Action Plan addresses many of the strategies recommended in the National Fish, Wildlife and Plants Climate Adaptation Strategy (2012). ([Chapter 4](#) describes the plan's goals, objectives and conservation actions and discusses potential habitat and species changes associated with a changing climate.)

MN WAP 2015-25 Goals:

- 1) *Ensure the long-term health and viability of Minnesota's wildlife, with a focus on species that are rare, declining, or vulnerable to decline;*
- 2) *Enhance opportunities to enjoy Species in Greatest Conservation Need and other wildlife and to participate in their conservation; and*
- 3) *Acquire the resources necessary to successfully implement the Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan.*

Minnesota's 2005 SGCN List Was Reviewed and Updated

The criteria used to revise the 2005 SGCN list were those, with minor revisions, developed by a technical team for the 2005 Wildlife Action Plan. Nine Species Technical Advisory Teams (STATs) composed of DNR staff and external taxon experts reviewed and updated the 2005 SGCN list for the following taxa: mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles, fish, mussels, butterflies and moths, dragonflies and damselflies, tiger beetles, and bees. Species Technical Advisory Teams were not organized for snails, caddisflies, leafhoppers, and jumping spiders due to the lack of known, available experts. The species from these groups designated as SGCN are those included on Minnesota's 2013 state list of endangered, threatened, and special concern species. Strategies to review these taxonomic groups will be implemented during the next 10 years.

Minnesota's 2005 Wildlife Action Plan identified 292 species as SGCN. The 2015 list revision resulted in a total of 346 SGCN.

Minnesota's 346 SGCN include species from all major animal taxonomic groups. Among the changes was the addition of the monarch butterfly and five native species of bees. ([Chapter 2](#) of the plan describes the updating of the list of SGCN. See [Appendix C for the SGCN list](#).)

2015 WAP: 346 Species in Greatest Conservation Need

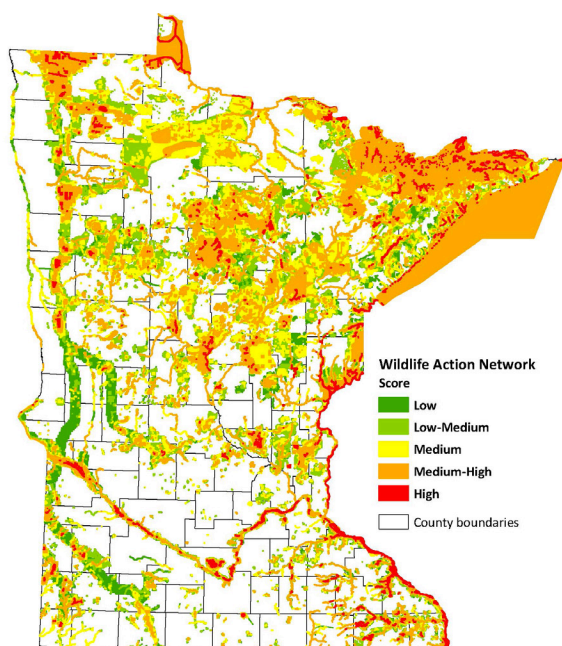
Definition: Native animals, nongame and game, whose populations are rare, declining, or vulnerable to decline and are below levels desirable to ensure their long-term health and stability. Also included are species for which Minnesota has a stewardship responsibility. Stewardship species are those species for which populations in Minnesota represent a significant portion of their North American breeding migrating, or wintering population, or species whose Minnesota populations are stable, but whose populations outside of Minnesota have declined or are declining in a substantial part of their range.



A MN Stewardship SGCN:

The golden-winged warbler requires a forest landscape consisting of mature and young forests and shrubby wetland edges. Minnesota includes less than 10 percent of the warbler's breeding range, but an estimated 47 percent of the breeding population nests in the state.

A Three-Pronged Approach to SGCN Conservation



Habitat Approach: MN Wildlife Action Plan takes a three-pronged approach to ensuring the long-term health and viability of Minnesota's wildlife. The first and most comprehensive is the habitat approach.

In identifying Minnesota's 2015 list of SGCN, experts considered a number of causes for decline, including habitat loss, habitat degradation and fragmentation, disease, pollution, and exploitation. They also considered life-history traits of species that could increase their vulnerability to threats. The primary causes of decline are habitat-related. The habitat approach focuses on sustaining and enhancing terrestrial and aquatic habitats for SGCN in the context of the larger landscapes.

To facilitate the implementation of this approach, the plan identifies a Wildlife Action Network that represents quality habitats for terrestrial and aquatic SGCN, and it provides for updating the network as new SGCN population and habitat



information become available. (See [chapters 1](#) and [2](#) of the plan for a discussion of the habitat approach and the Wildlife Action Network.)

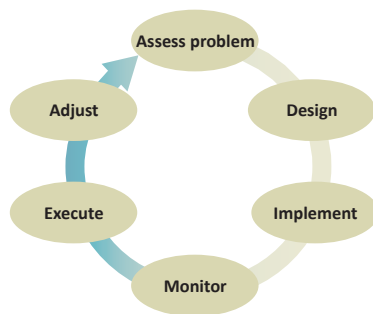


Species Approach: The second approach focuses on specific SGCN or groups of species that are affected by non-habitat related issues. The species approach identifies a prioritized group of species whose needs cannot be sufficiently addressed by the habitat approach, and suggests specific conservation actions. The plan also identifies species for which more information is needed to assess their conservation status or the factors contributing to population declines.

The Wildlife Action Network and many of the habitat-related conservation actions identified in the plan also may mitigate specific life-history traits (such as limited dispersal ability or requirements for multiple habitats throughout a species life time) that may increase a species' or a population's sensitivity to climate change and other stressors. ([Chapters 3](#) and [4](#) of the plan provide more information on the species approach.)



Opportunities to Enjoy Wildlife: The third approach recognizes that providing people with opportunities to enjoy wildlife and habitats and to actively participate in their conservation helps to ensure an engaged conservation community now and into the future that supports conservation funding and contributes to Minnesota's outdoor recreation-based economies.



A Greater Focus on Adaptive Management and Monitoring

Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-25 defines a monitoring framework to assess the effectiveness of the Wildlife Action Network and conservation actions and to identify broad trends in species populations and habitats. Existing and new monitoring efforts will be analyzed and structured to assess the status of habitats and focal species both within and outside of the Wildlife Action Network. ([Chapter 5](#) of the plan describes the monitoring framework.)

Strengthening Existing and Building New Partnerships

The successful implementation of the MN WAP will be ensured through the continued involvement of existing partners and the development of new partnerships. New in the 2015 plan are biennial regional meetings to be held in each DNR region with partners from within the DNR divisions and other agencies and organizations. These meetings will provide opportunities to coordinate implementation of on-the-ground habitat conservation projects to meet Wildlife Action Plan objectives. At the regional meetings partners will select a Conservation Focus Area (CFA) within which to develop conservation projects and target conservation actions, apply adaptive management, and report on effectiveness.

The Conservation Focus Area approach further targets conservation actions within the Wildlife Action Network and addresses a fundamental need for State Wildlife Action Plans to increase on the ground habitat management for SGCN and other wildlife and to track and report on effectiveness. Due to a lack of resources for monitoring the effectiveness of MN WAP at the larger scale of the Wildlife Action Network, CFAs will provide discreet areas within the Wildlife Action Network to apply adaptive management and report on the effectiveness of conservation actions. MN WAP sets a target for a relatively small number of CFAs (at least 6 over ten years). (See [Chapters 1](#) and [6](#), and the Conservation Focus Area Overviews for more information.)



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