

N.H. Wildlife Action Plan: A Blueprint to Save Threatened Species

By Liza Poinier, N.H. Fish and Game Department information officer

Interior Secretary Gale Norton announced November 2 that wildlife agencies from all 50 states and six U.S. territories have submitted Wildlife Action Plans for approval by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, establishing a nationwide blueprint to conserve imperiled species so they don't become threatened or endangered. This announcement includes the New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan, which is now available for viewing on Fish and Game's web site at <http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us>.

If approved, the Wildlife Action Plans will be the first of their kind—a thorough state-by-state look at wildlife and the actions needed to ensure their survival. The action plans will also allow states and territories to continue to receive grants under the State Wildlife Grant program created under bipartisan legislation signed by President Bush in 2001. Since then, the Fish and Wildlife Service has provided \$400 million in grants to states and territories for conservation efforts.

The law required states and territories to have their individual plans submitted to the Fish and Wildlife Service by October 2005. The Service will distribute \$68.5 million in grants next spring for states and territories to implement approved action plans. New Hampshire expects to receive more than \$600,000 of that to begin implementation of its plan.

“These plans represent a future for conservation in America that is rooted in cooperation and partnership between the federal government and states, tribes, local governments, conservation groups, private landowners and others with a commitment to the health of our land and water, fish and wildlife,” Norton said. “Working together, we are tapping into the expertise of those who live and work on the land so that we can conserve our fish and wildlife before they become threatened or endangered.”

The New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan represents nearly three years of intensive research and analysis by fish and wildlife biologists collaborating with conservation partners from a dozen organizations, and extensive participation and input from other conservation leaders and the public. The official, final version of the Wildlife Action Plan will be announced in early 2006, once reviewed by a team of eight U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists and five state wildlife administrators and approved by the Director of the Service.

The Wildlife Action Plan outlines specific steps, developed by conservationists, scientists, sportspeople and other members of the community, working together, that can be taken to conserve wildlife and habitat in New Hampshire. In developing the plan, biologists identified and studied 104 priority species and 27 habitats in greatest need of conservation in New Hampshire. Partnering organizations, agencies and academic institutions completed assessments of these species and habitats, with the backing of more than a half-million dollars in federal funds through State Wildlife Grants.

The New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan details the state's distribution and abundance of wildlife; species and habitat conditions; risks to species and habitat; and conservation actions that could be taken to improve the future for wildlife. High-tech wildlife mapping done for the Wildlife Action Plan identifies New Hampshire's habitats in greatest need of conservation, as well as “predicted” or potential habitats for many of the priority species. Biologists conducted a risk assessment to consider state and local impacts on wildlife, such as habitat change and development; and many regional factors, such as airborne pollutants and global climate change. Once implemented, the

strategies in the Wildlife Action Plan will help conserve wildlife and natural places in New Hampshire, enhancing the quality of life for people.

“The Wildlife Action Plan shows that wildlife face many challenges in New Hampshire, but if we invest in strategies now, we can conserve wildlife and vital natural habitats for future generations,” said John Kanter, coordinator for Fish and Game’s Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program. “The plan gives communities, conservation commissions, planning boards, and leaders in transportation and economic development more complete information about wildlife populations and critical habitats. As our communities grow, the Wildlife Action Plan will help guide their important decisions around local and regional land and water use and development, so we can fulfill our responsibility to safeguard wildlife and the places they live.”

“Here in New Hampshire, wildlife and wild lands bring peace and relaxation to our lives,” said Lee E. Perry, Fish and Game’s Executive Director. “Fish and wildlife are at the heart of many of our family traditions -- fishing, hunting, birdwatching and moose-watching. These activities contribute to our overall enjoyment of the Granite State’s scenery and natural wonders, as well as the New Hampshire economy. The Wildlife Action Plan is an investment in future generations -- of both wildlife and people.”

Though the Wildlife Action Plan offers a multitude of strategies to address risks to wildlife and habitats, timely implementation of a comprehensive set of strategies will be a challenge, given staffing and financial constraints. “Our organization is excited to work with Fish and Game to help implement the education, outreach and technical assistance components of the plan,” said Darrel Covell of UNH Cooperative Extension, who was co-coordinator of the plan. “Other conservation partners, communities, agencies and many others will find actions within the plan that they can take to conserve New Hampshire's valuable wildlife and habitat resources.”

The next step for the Wildlife Action Plan partners is to prioritize strategies and projects for implementation, and identify adequate, appropriate funding and staffing. The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department will convene a Wildlife Action Plan Implementation Summit for New Hampshire in early February of 2006, giving a broad array of stakeholders a chance to weigh in on the next phase of the Wildlife Action Plan.