



State Wildlife Grants Program

2015

Pennsylvania's conservation of birds & mammals in greatest need

State Wildlife Action Plan Submitted

Pennsylvania's Fish and Boat Commission and Game Commission jointly submitted a revised State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) to the US Fish and Wildlife Service in September 2015, as required by Congress to remain eligible for federal State & Tribal Wildlife Grants Program funding. **The 2015 Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan provides a comprehensive blueprint for fish and wildlife conservation and management activities in the Commonwealth, including prioritized species lists and conservation actions linked to threats and geography.** All of these are defined in standardized terms consistent with most states in the Northeast. The SWAP is available on the Game Commission's website: www.state.pa.us > Wildlife > Wildlife Action Plan > 2015 Wildlife Action Plan).

Guided by the SWAP, the Game Commission engages in a wide array of research, monitoring, and other conservation efforts for species of greatest conservation need in Pennsylvania. Ongoing monitoring projects include targeted surveys for state-listed species, such as bald eagle, peregrine falcon and Indiana bats. Broad-based monitoring of songbirds through the Breeding Bird Survey and bats by acoustic surveys are coordinated. Protection of sensitive sites and guidance on habitat improvement is accomplished through collaboration with many partners and leveraging agency influence. Detailed reports on many of these activities can be found at www.pgc.state.pa.us > Resources > Reports... Highlights are provided here.



PENNSYLVANIA WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN

Osprey Nearing Recovery

The Game Commission's Board advanced another recovery milestone with the approval of the Osprey Management Plan (2015 – 2025). It outlines the goal of removing osprey from the state list of threatened species after having achieved a stable or increasing breeding population of osprey with at least 10 nesting pairs in each of four watersheds (at least fifty nesting pairs) for two consecutive surveys. A planned survey in 2016 is expected to meet these recovery goals and streamline the delisting of this charismatic species, as was done with bald eagles in 2014.

Preventing Birds from Becoming Endangered

Recovery of endangered species, mentioned above, demonstrates that conservation efforts can deliver these landmark results. Better still are efforts that avoid those regulatory burdens, and reverse declines before species are listed. **That is exactly the longstanding theme of the State & Tribal Wildlife Grants Program, and Pennsylvania is at the center of major efforts to arrest the declines of golden-winged and cerulean warblers, which are among the highest-priority declining songbirds.** The efforts to reverse declining trends has been comprehensive: The birds' response to habitat alterations is being examined in careful detail, migratory stopover and wintering sites have been identified and protected, and guidance has been fine-tuned for forest management. These 'full life-cycle' efforts to determine weak links in their biology enables us to promote conservation where it counts most. See details on reverse side and at <http://www.gwwa.org/>

Responding to White-nose Syndrome in Bats

Finding an effective response to White-nose Syndrome's (WNS) devastating effect on bat populations is the goal of a number of experiments currently ongoing. **Scientists are hoping to protect surviving bats with a treatment applied to a roost or direct application to bats wings that would prohibit viability of fungal spores; preliminary signs are encouraging.** Scientists are also assessing the ability of exposed bats to survive WNS between bats from a naïve population to those that have experienced WNS for eight years. This research indicates that the disease is still virulent after many years.

Pennsylvania Mammal Atlas Launched

A comprehensive effort to survey the small mammals of Pennsylvania, **The Mammal Atlas, has gone public with a new website: www.pamammalatlus.com.** All are encouraged to enter mammal observations. Photos submitted will be reviewed for authenticity. Additional features of the website are planned this spring!



IN THE PUBLIC'S INTEREST

The Game Commission's mission is to manage Pennsylvania's wild birds, wild mammals and their habitats for current and future generations.



ENGAGING THE PUBLIC'S INTEREST

- 14.5 million unique views of Wildlife Diversity web pages were tallied. The Game Commission's website reflects the broad interest in the full range of our wildlife conservation program. A widely successful live streamed camera of an active eagle nest fueled a dramatic increase in web activity. Remarkable insights into the challenges that wildlife overcome drew wide interest. This publicity expanded access to other educational material and reports provided by the Game Commission, such as 46,800 downloads of state endangered and threatened species literature.
- 1.6 million bird reports were entered on PA eBird. This is a growing tool for compilation of bird observations. The trips reported in 2015 represent continued growth in eBird reports.
- More than 500 volunteers assisted the Game Commission with thousands of hours of surveys of eagles, peregrine falcons, osprey, bats, colonial water birds, golden-winged warblers and other species statewide. Volunteers provide the majority of Appalachian Bat Count reports, expanding the reach possible by limited staff in sustaining critical monitoring needs.

Conservation Partners

Collaboration enables the Game Commission to accomplish high-priority projects not otherwise possible with existing staff and leverages private funds to implement the state's Wildlife Action Plan. **The agency has sponsored more than 55 statewide and regional projects in partnership with conservation and sportsmen's groups, and universities.** Projects and programs supported by State Wildlife Grants (SWG) Program funds are illustrated and described on the accompanying large-format Game Commission map. New or ongoing SWG-funded projects in 2015 include:

- **Broad-winged Hawk Habitat Use, Range and Movement Ecology, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary** ~ The broad-winged hawk nests in the state's healthy forests and winters in Latin America. Five tagged broad-wings were tracked as they moved south. All Pennsylvania birds passed through Texas during the last days of September, and have over-wintered in Brazil, Peru and Colombia, pointing to the need for conservation of forests in migration, wintering and breeding areas.
- **Identifying Characteristics and Management Strategies Associated with High Avian Abundance and Diversity in Core Forest Habitats, Penn State University** ~ Surveys of forest birds and their habitat will be used to identify the features of core forests that are most associated with bird abundance and diversity. The study will provide insights into management strategies that may extend and enhance the value of remaining core forests for birds.
- **Implementing Forestland Best Management Practices for Golden-winged Warbler Breeding Habitat on Public Lands in Pennsylvania, Indiana University of Pennsylvania** ~ The golden-winged warbler is one of the most critically threatened birds, not federally listed, in the eastern United States. Thousands of acres of improved breeding habitat has been provided through use of fire and silviculture in recent years, and ongoing monitoring has proven the value of this habitat in the Pocono region of Pennsylvania. Golden-winged Warblers were detected at 88% (29 of 33 locations) of the point counts locations, demonstrating how quickly these birds can respond to recommended forestry practices.
- **Cerulean Warbler response to forest management guidelines, post-fledgling survival and habitat use, and migratory connectivity, Appalachian Mountain Joint Venture** ~ Formerly a candidate for the federal endangered species list, a multi-state collaboration has identified habitat management practices that will benefit the cerulean warbler. Monitoring 39 nests, determining habitat use by 14 young birds followed by tracking telemetry, and recovery of a bird that carried a geolocator from the Allegheny National Forest to Columbia, South America are a few of the highlights of this ongoing research. Efforts are pointing to shelterwood forestry practices to benefit this species.
- **Genetic Catalog of Allegheny Woodrat Metapopulations in Pennsylvania, Indiana University of Pennsylvania** ~ This survey of genetic diversity among woodrat populations will identify populations that require genetic restoration to achieve long-term recovery goals. Tentative results indicate that the greatest difference between currently occupied and historic sites was the level of forest connectivity and human-induced fragmentation surrounding a habitat site. These results illustrate that maintaining forest connectivity around active sites is critical for woodrat survival.
- **Northeast Regional Conservation Needs, Wildlife Management Institute** ~ Through this partnership the northeastern states are able to utilize resources, techniques, expertise and funding to achieve a scale and scope of ecosystem conservation that would not be possible for any single state to deliver.



PRIVATE LANDOWNER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Since the Game Commission established this program in May 2004, habitat guidance has been prepared for more than 1,372 properties covering 212,976 privately-owned acres. **The agency's Private Landowner Assistance Program provides free technical assistance for landowners wishing to manage their properties.** This program, highlighted in the updated 2015 Game Commission Strategic Plan, is implemented by six region biologists who are strategically positioned across the state. These staff help landowners find support to implement their recommendations through Farm Bill programs and other sources.