2015 Maine Wildlife Action Plan

Conservation Partner Meeting #2

September 30, 2014

Full Day Notes

Welcome/Agenda/Background

- Volunteer sheets are available for both group meetings and for individuals. All non-state and non-federal employees should keep track of their time spent on the Action Plan update, as this can be used as match for State Wildlife Grant Funding
- Today's Agenda:
    - Brief background
    - Update Conservation Partners on Action Plan activities since the July 8th meeting
    - Finalize the SGCN list
    - Discuss adding marine fauna to the Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) list
    - Discuss the habitat classification system and SGCN – habitat associations
    - Break-outs to discuss habitats
    - Brief introduction to the October 30th meeting
- Maine Wildlife Action Plan Background
    - In 2001 Congress established the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program.
    - In order to be eligible for funding, an approved Wildlife Action Plan must be in place.
    - Action Plans must have 8 required elements.
    - Maine's first plan was approved in 2005 and resulted in $500,000 - $750,000 in annual funding to the State of Maine.
    - The next plan is due in October 2015 and must include greater prioritization and specificity.
- Activities since the July 8th Conservation Partner Meeting
    - Established a Steering Committee to provide rapid guidance to IFW on key issues, ensure that scientific principles are adhered to, and that the update process is transparent.
        - Members include Tom Doak (SWOAM), Molly Docherty (MNAP), Tim Glidden (MCHT), Mitch Hartley (USFWS), Jeff Norment (NRCS), Barry Burgason (MFPC), Sally Stockwell (Maine Audubon), Angela Twitchell (BTLT), Barbara Vickery (TNC), Jed Wright (USFWS)
        - The first meeting was held September 18th, monthly meetings are planned
        - Additional members are being considered, although there is a desire to keep the group small and efficient.

        - Comment: We should consider including a 'community representative' from northern Maine. Perspectives of residents in northern Maine are not well represented currently.
    - Established a Public Outreach Committee to define key audiences and communication goals
        - Members include Roberta Scruggs (MFPC), Sally Stockwell (Maine Audubon), Jim Vogel (BPL), and Faren Wolter (UMO)
        - First meeting held on August 28th
    - Convened a meeting with a group of landowners to discuss their role in the development and implementation of the Plan
        - Some concerns have been expressed over the term 'threats' for element 3. The reality is that many factors that have negative impacts on a particular SGCN have a positive impact on other SGCNs. It was agreed that the term 'Stressors' would be used to more accurately convey the meaning of element 3.
        - A number of common objectives were discussed. It was recognized that private landowners have a key role to play for many potential Conservation Actions.

SGCN Discussion: Philip DeMaynadier (MDIFW)

- Federal guidance: Action Plan should focus on 'At Risk' species and be well prioritized
- In 2005 Maine had fewer SGCNs than most states in the northeast
- In 2015 there was a desire to use more objective criteria to develop the SGCN list. These criteria included:
    1. Risk of Extirpation
    2. Recent Significant Declines
    3. Regional Endemicity
    4. High Regional Conservation Priority
    5. Climate Change Risk
    6. Understudied Rare Taxa
    7. Historical Presence
- Peer review has included expert taxa teams, Conservation Partners, and MDIFW inter-group review
- Feedback was received on individual species, and on the conservation criteria
    - Species: IFW is developing a written response to each comment. These will be posted on the SWAP webpage when complete
    - Conservation criteria: feedback was generally related to one of 9 themes
        1. Greater prioritization
        2. Adding species listed as State Special Concern
        3. Use a higher bar for Climate Change vulnerability
        4. Combine regional priority with other criteria
        5. Revisit the minimum species residency rule
        6. Provide greater consideration for marine taxa

7. More consideration for data deficient species
8. Consider habitat vulnerability as a separate criteria
9. Differentiate core vs. edge of range vulnerabilities

- Themes #1-7 were addressed by
  - Adding a 3rd priority level
  - Requiring 2 or more criteria to be met for inclusion as priority 2
  - Adding State Special Concern as a criteria for priorities 2 and 3
  - Lowered the residency threshold for P3 species to >10 years
  - Engaged DMR and other marine experts
- Now have a total of 338 SGCN species on the list
  - 54 Priority 1
  - 116 Priority 2
  - 168 Priority 3
- A higher percentage of Maine's reptiles are included on the SGCN list, however the greatest number of SGCNs are invertebrates and birds.

- Feedback/Discussion
  - How will the priority levels be used? This hasn't been determined yet, although there are several possibilities.
  - How will plants be considered? There was much discussion on this topic, however it was generally agreed that plants should be incorporated into the Action Plan to support the identification of Conservation Actions and Focus Areas. Mark S suggested convening a separate committee to discuss this further.
  - It is important to have IFW responses to individual comments in order to understand the changes that have been made to the SGCN list. Action: All responses will be posted on the webpage, and an email will be sent to Partners when this occurs.
  - In cases where professional judgment was used to adjust a species up or down on the priority list, the reasons should be described.

Marine Discussion: Claire Enterline (MDMR)

- Marine SGCN
  - 2005 plan has 13 spp.
    - No mollusks, marine fish, invertebrates, or sharks/skates
  - The Draft 2015 list didn't include marine invertebrates
  - DMR reviewed the draft 2015 list, met with MDIFW to discuss goals
  - 'Final' list was submitted to MDIFW in September
  - Currently undergoing peer review
  - Changes from the draft list:
    - Mammals: humpback whale moved from P2 to P1
    - Reptiles: Leatherback turtle moved from P2 to P1

        - Mollusks: Native American oyster added as P2, softshell clam and hardshell clam added as P3
        - Finfish: American shad, wolffish, cusk, and cod added as P2. Blueback herring, rainbow smelt, and American eel moved from P2 to P1. Tautog dropped from list
        - Sharks: no changes
        - Invertebrates: Northern shrimp and horseshoe crab added as P1, Sea stars, sea cucumber, and sea urchin added as P2
- Marine Habitats
    - 2005 Plan used 5, very basic habitats (Marine Open Water, Estuaries & Bays, Rocky Coastline & Islands, Unconsolidated Shore, and Estuarine Emergent Saltmarsh
    - There are several other habitat classification systems available, including TNC, NOAA, etc.
    - The Northeast Habitat Classification System uses 16 habitats in 5 categories: Freshwater Marsh, Saltmarsh, Coastal Scrub-Herb, Intertidal, and Tidal/Marine
    - Other considerations include:
        - Level of Salinity
        - Physical characteristics (substrate/seafloor)
        - Biological characteristics
    - Some habitats could be assigned to either terrestrial or marine (e.g. Saltmarshes)

<u>Habitat Discussion: Andy Cutko (MNAP)</u>

- Role of habitats in SWAP
    - Allow a multi-species, coarse filter approach to conservation
    - Management can be directed towards habitats, which benefit many species
    - 90% of Maine is privately owned, which creates some unique conservation challenges & opportunities
- NE Terrestrial Habitat Classification System
    - Covers from Maine to Virginia
    - Developed based on a combination of GIS modelling and ground truthing
    - Hierarchical and nested design: Class, formation, macrogroup, system
    - 58 habitat types in Maine. By contrast, the 2005 system had 21 types
    - Aquatic habitat types are very general…more work is needed to refine these.

- Linking SGCN to habitats
    - Database developed in-house to make associations (will also be used for Stressors, etc.)
    - IFW taxa specialists made associations for each SGCN
    - Challenges encountered
        - Understanding the habitat descriptions (the nomenclature is very technical)

        - 'Primary' vs 'Secondary' vs 'Limiting' habitats for each SGCN. The database does not currently allow this distinction, but it may be important moving forward.
        - Species that are extreme generalists (e.g. bats, tree swallows) use almost every habitat type, so the associations may not be very useful.
        - Taxa experts went to the finest classification level possible for each species, but this differed depending on the amount of knowledge for each species.
        - In many cases a species exists in a certain habitat type, but its range is limited. It doesn't occur in that habitat across the entire state.
    - Initial Results
        - Forested Wetland, Open Upland, and Open Wetland habitats are disproportionately important to SGCN. This varies slightly by taxa group, but in general the less abundant habitats contain a large number of SGCN.
        - Example: Northeastern Interior Pine Barrens are 1/20th of 1% of the state, but contain 42 SGCN.
        - Rivers and Streams contain the largest number of Priority 1 SGCN.
    - Focus Areas
        - Each habitat macrogroup occurs in multiple Focus Areas
        - Some habitats are highly represented (Alpine, Saltmarsh etc.)
    - Conserved Lands
        - 3.8 million acres (20% of state) has some type of conservation status. Most is in managed forests with conservation easements
        - Each of the 58 habitat types occurs in conserved lands somewhere in Maine
        - Most wetland types are very well represented on conserved lands
        - More than 99% of Maine's alpine is conserved
        - Upland forests are less well represented on conserved land, especially in southern Maine
- Feedback/Discussion
    - Are LMF-funded easements included in conserved lands? Yes, except for those funded by Agriculture.
    - How is funding allocated to easements? There are several different types of easements, and the Action Plan process should identify which types of easements are most appropriate for SGCN conservation

<u>Group Reports</u>

See individual break-out group notes for more information

- Marine: Claire Enterline (MDMR)
    - There was concern over the lack of breadth for invertebrate SGCNs
    - Some marine habitats overlap with terrestrial habitats

    - The 'Open Water' habitat category is over simplistic and should be refined based on substrate and biotic communities.
    - The best scale for describing distribution is 'Ecoregion'
- Upland: Sarah Demers (MDIFW)
    - The successional stage of a particular habitat is very important, however it may not be possible to capture this in the SGCN associations
    - The group wanted more information on why SGCNs were classified to different levels of the habitat system
    - It will be important to identify which species are habitat generalists vs. those that are habitat specialists.
    - Need to come up with a method to prioritize habitats for each species. The group discussed several possible ways to do this but did not come up with any recommendations.
    - PDF reports of habitat associations for each SGCN, and the SGCNs within each habitat, should be made available for the Conservation Partners to review.
    - The database should be made publicly available at some point
    - Species distribution should be identified at the finest scale possible.
    - Should develop simpler nomenclature for habitats.
- Wetlands: Danielle D'Auria (MDIFW)
    - Several terms to describe habitats that are of critical importance to SGCN were discussed, including 'Essential', and 'Obligate'
    - The species for which habitats were assigned at a high level in the hierarchy (e.g. 'unknown habitat system') needs further work.
    - Several ways of prioritizing habitats were discussed, including
        - The number of SGCN, or the number of P1 and P2 SGCN.
        - Whether the habitat is 'Obligate' or not.
        - Selecting an umbrella species in each habitat on which to focus Conservation Actions
    - Species distribution should be identified at the finest scale possible.
- Freshwater Aquatics: Merry Gallagher (MDIFW)
    - Water quality is a critically important habitat characteristic
    - Need to develop further classification for drainage size classes
    - Pond classification will work for now, but there is a need to go further.
    - Prioritization
        - Should look at the condition of habitats, and identify areas of high quality/good condition
        - Degree of development
        - Degree of water fluctuation
    - Distribution should be described at the watershed scale, probably using HUC 10 or 12. Township could be used as a secondary method for SGCN with very little data.

Stressors Discussion – Nate Webb (MDIFW)

- Identifying stressors to SGCN is a required element (element 3) in the Action Plan
    - The northeastern states have agreed to classify stressors using the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Threat Classification Scheme
    - In the Action Plan revision, we need greater prioritization
        - We cannot address 300+ SGCN independently
        - Conservation actions should address the big picture and as many SGCN as possible
            - Example of a big picture conservation action from Missouri
                - 'Water quality will be improved in a certain watershed'
                - This approach addresses habitat quality as well as SGCN that occur in the watershed
        - However, certain SGCN have special needs that have to be addressed and may not be captured through big picture or habitat-based approaches
    - Potential process for assigning stressors
        1. Assign SGCN to habitats
        2. Identify priority habitats for conservation actions
        3. Assign stressors to P1 habitats
        4. Use the NatureServe Conservation Status Rank Calculator to identify priority stressors
        5. Develop conservation actions to address priority stressors
            a. Also incorporate non-habitat stressors for high priority species
- Feedback/Discussion
    - Need a process to assign stressors to all habitats
    - Stressor assignments are almost ready for P1 and P2 species
    - Levels of hierarchy in the stressor classification system
        - Fairly general at the first level
    - Need to identify species that have an obvious habitat association and assign threats there
    - Vulnerability of habitat needs to be incorporated into the habitats in order to prioritize them
    - Need to be clear about certain threats to be able to identify meaningful actions
    - What level are we assigning threats to?
        - Macrogroup or habitat system?
    - How will we deal with regional differences in stressors and vulnerability?
        - Need to think about distribution of stressors
        - Are they the same across the state?

General discussion/comments from conservation partners

- How are we including plants?
    - Plants are entered into the SGCN database as a value-added component

    - SGCN fish and wildlife species still drive the process but conservation actions also could benefit plants associated with SGCN species
- Email partners once break-out group and full day notes are available