

Peer and Partner Comments Received for SGCN: Herptiles

Compiled October 2014

MDIFW's responses (in blue) to peer and partner comments were provided by Phillip deMaynadier and Derek Yorks, Research and Assessment Section: Reptile, Amphibian, and Invertebrate Group.

For comments related to the general process for designating species of greatest conservation need, please see the presentations 'SGCN Process' from the July 8, 2014 meeting and 'Revised SGCN Process' from the September 30, 2014 meeting on Maine's Wildlife Action Plan revision website (<http://www.maine.gov/ifw/wildlife/reports/MWAP2015.html>).

Please direct any questions to mainewildlifeactionplan@gmail.com.

1. Email from Jonathan Mays (7/7/14)

-*Glyptemmys insculpta* (Wood Turtle) - You're well aware of my affinity to reptiles and I certainly don't want to downplay the conservation importance of Maine's other scaly denizens (black racer, Blanding's Turtle, Spotted Turtle). That said, I do want to draw specific attention to the high regional conservation priority that Maine has for the wood turtle. This species is declining at alarming rates throughout its range and while it's still found (mostly) statewide in Maine, not all populations/EO's are equal (i.e., York Co. and other population centers in the state have undoubtable experienced population declines and even possible extirpations). Wood turtles are harbingers of wild, undeveloped spaces and to me they epitomize the *real* Maine as much as the moose or the loon. Wood turtles also offer a rare conservation opportunity - while the other above listed reptiles are already on the ropes (some even life support) in the state, Maine has a unique chance through proactive and cooperative management to get ahead of the 8-ball on this one and as the WAP motto states "to keep common species common" (though perhaps 'common' in this k-selected and already declining species' case is likely overstated). Nevertheless, there is opportunity here for this to be yet another unique success story for Maine conservation - by acting now on behalf of wood turtle conservation we can assure that this species stays off E&T lists and continues to flourish for future generations...bringing along wonderfully wild habitats for other fish and wildlife in the process. If we hesitate on this one though, like many turtle species wood turtles could become critically endangered and past the point of recovery within our lifetimes.

We agree that Maine has a unique opportunity and thus a responsibility to conserve wood turtles. This species is indeed of conservation concern throughout its range and meets qualifications for Priority 1 through our ranking process. It will remain a Priority 1 species.

2. Email from Mac Hunter (7/7/14)

I am not sure about "down listing" the **sea turtles** based on absence of breeding as that is true of many birds listed. And **leatherbacks** may be more common than widely appreciated.

We initially considered all marine turtles documented in the Gulf of Maine together when we shifted leatherbacks and all other marine turtles from Priority 1 to Priority 2. In light of comments by Maine DMR as well as data presented in a report prepared by NOAA and USFWS detailing the risk posed to leatherbacks by entanglement in commercial fishing gear, we now feel that Priority 1 designation for this species is more appropriate.

An additional response is forthcoming from Maine DMR.

3. Comments from July 8, 2014 break-out group

- Why are the following species not on the list?
 - **Smooth green snake**

The smooth green snake has been widely and frequently reported in Maine though the efforts of the Maine Amphibian and Reptile Atlas Project, and there is no evidence that it has undergone a decline in the state. This species appears to be locally abundant in some areas while uncommon or largely absent from others. Smooth green snakes are of modest conservation concern in some states in the southern part of its range but it appears to be secure in northern New England.

- **Four-toed salamander**

The four-toed salamander was removed from the list of Special Concern species and from the environmental review tracking process because increased survey efforts indicated this species is more abundant than historical records suggest, and their habitat is widespread and abundant. While this species is relatively uncommon due to its patchy distribution, it is not rare and does not qualify for any of the SGCN Conservation Criteria. A de-listing worksheet for removing this salamander from the Special Concern list is available for review upon request.

- Is climate change enough for **mink frogs** to be on the list?

Mink frogs are the only amphibian (or reptile) to reach the southern edge of their range in northern Maine. This species is highly aquatic and is closely associated with slow, permanent cold waterbodies possibly because of the requirement for high oxygen conditions for egg and larval development. There also are indications that mink frogs may not compete well with other common, warm-water ranids. For these reasons the mink frog was identified as highly vulnerable to projected climate change in Maine in “Climate Change and Biodiversity in Maine” (Whitman et al. 2013). Using the revised SGCN criteria, mink frogs are ranked as Priority 3 (from Priority 2) due to only qualifying for the climate change vulnerability criteria.

- We should focus on habitat management for **black racers**

In Maine, black racers are a species that depend upon dense, low-growing shrub habitat that often requires management to persist. Management for this type of habitat occurs at a handful of well-known sites where racers occur, but these efforts could be expanded to additional sites as opportunities arise. Currently, there are few additional protected sites that host racer populations and are also good candidate locations for vegetation management.