

## **2015 Maine Wildlife Action Plan Update Committee – Meeting #1**

**July 8, 2014**

**Location: Pineland Farms, New Gloucester**

### **Meeting Notes**

#### **I. Welcome by James Connolly, Director Bureau of Resource Management:**

- State Wildlife Action Plan is a resource plan for the state.
- It is your plan. Be engaged; take ownership of the plan and the implementation.
- Engage with us to help implement and improve it as times goes on.

#### **II. Background of the State Wildlife Grant Program, State Wildlife Action Plans, and the 2005 Maine Wildlife Action Plan as well as Maine's State Wildlife Grant accomplishments, Judy Camuso, Wildlife Division Director:**

- MDIFW is mandated to conserve, protect, and enhance Maine's inland fisheries and wildlife resources, including game and non-game species.
- The State Wildlife Grant Program (SWG) focus is to restore/enhance at-risk wildlife populations and habitat.
- SWG is a core program to prevent species listing. SWG is not, however, a land acquisition plan or process for listing new species.
- It is dependent on partnerships.
- There was no stable funding source for nongame species before the SWG Program. MDIFW constantly struggles to come up with match monies, however.
- The State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) is a strategic plan to manage Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN); it is a State plan which indicates what we have and where we want to go.
- SWAP is required by Congress in order for states to receive SWG monies; updates of these plans are required every 10 years with the next update due in October 2015. It includes 8 required elements. This updated SWAP will be reviewed and approved by the USFWS.
- Maine's SWAP update is dependent on partners and most important, actions;
- SWAP plan will identify and focus on SGCN animals, not plants. The plan should be dynamic and fluid; meant to be enhanced as you go.
- Key habitats must have associated SGCN; focus areas must contain high concentration of SGCN habitat and significance.
- The 2005 plan was developed by MDIFW and several partners. It focuses on two pillars (species conservation and habitat conservation) which support the goal of maintaining landscape-scale habitat.
- Landscape-scale habitat conservation implemented via 5 program initiatives: surveys & inventories, research, population & management, habitat conservation and education & outreach.
- Plan identified 213 SGCN, 21 Key Habitats, 140 Focus Areas of Ecological Significance, and 100's of threats and conservation actions.
- Guiding principles for implementing SWAP given limited funds: using umbrella approach, be flexible for emerging issues.
- SWG accomplishments have included the Beginning with Habitat Program (BwH), surveys and inventories, conservation and monitoring, environmental assessments.

## Questions & Discussion

- Any data on measured success of the BwH Program?
  - BwH is an education outreach tool, which can be difficult to measure.
  - Many towns use it as a tool in their planning process. Data is required in comprehensive plans (incorporated into Comprehensive Plan Criteria Rule in 2008). Land trusts have embraced it as well.
  - IFW works with 25-30 towns and 5-10 land trusts each year, plus numerous landowners.
  - Great opportunity now to review and improve the program.
- How much SWG Program funds have been received over the years?
  - Funds are unstable; previously around \$700,000 now down in the \$400,000 range.

### III. Elements of Wildlife Action Plans, Mark Stadler

- [\*The Best Practices of State Wildlife Action Plans\*](#) shows exactly what Congress is looking for in the SWAP update.
- A SWAP is required to receive SWG Program funds
- It needs to address the following 8 elements:
  - 1) *Distribution and abundances of species* - Identify and prioritize SGCN. Congressional directive to preclude the need to list species as threatened or endangered. Goal to keep common species common.
  - 2) *Extent and condition of key habitats and common types essential to conservation of SGCN*- Identify SGCN habitat and habitat at greatest risk. Need uniformity in habitat classification across states and greater prioritization of SGCN habitats.
  - 3) *Identify threats to SGCN and habitats* – Need to prioritize threats to SCGN and their habitat; greater uniformity across states in the classification of threats needed. Consider climate changes (ME has done a vulnerability assessment).
  - 4) *Conservation actions needed to address threats to SGCN* - Greater prioritization of conservation actions necessary. Development of conservation actions to prevent E & T listings and spur recovery, with more specificity concerning on the ground actions, which are time bound and specific so they can be measured. This fall we will know habitats, needs and threats. This is a diverse group and we need to set priorities acceptable to all parties. Need to consider cost of management and likelihood actions will succeed.
  - 5) *Monitoring*- Plan for three levels of monitoring: species and habitat, effectiveness of conservation actions and adaptive management. If actions not successful, back up and determine reason and re-assess.
  - 6) *Periodic Review*- Renewal of SWAP is required every 10 years at least. Review process must be transparent, open to the public, and reflect stakeholder's values. The SWAP is a plan for the citizens of the State of Maine and should reflect the visions and values of this group.
  - 7) *Coordination with Conservation Partners*- Review, develop and implement conservation action plan in conjunction with conservation partners. All of us together are conservation partners; we need to pool resources and cultivate awareness. For this update, we have doubled the number of contacts made in 2005 – over 70 this year.
  - 8) *Public Involvement* – Approach for broad public engagement.

## Questions

- On the ground actions – How specific? Will they get into land acquisition priorities, etc.?
  - We do not know what the plan is yet – we all need to evaluate and participate.
- Established community values – How will they be determined? Census based?
  - Expectation of partners developing, reviewing and implementing the plan.

#### **IV. Role of Conservation Partners in Wildlife Actin Plans, Mark Stadler**

- Developing, reviewing and implementing the plan.
- This *is not* a MDIFW plan! Plan must reflect stakeholder values/share a common vision.
- You are a representative for your organization, share with your colleagues and solicit ideas. We need to work together and pool the resources to be successful.
- Process to engage is to reach out to partners, identify new partners, and engage conservation partners to create comprehensive vision.
- Timeline:
  - July – September 2014- Department develops proposed SGCN list which has been done; Review of this list is the focus of today’s meeting. Develop and review habitat and habitat associations for SGCN over the summer using the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Classification System for Threats. All states in the NE are using the same classification system to have uniformity so plans can be looked at more regionally.
  - July – August 2014- Develop public outreach plan to general public, formal public comment will occur later in the spring of 2015.
  - October – March 2015- Develop actions. This will require heavy lifting. Elements 4 and 5 will be done concurrently.
  - July 2014 – September 2025 – Implement the plan! Implementation actually begins today even though the plan is not yet developed. Conservation partners should start seeking input now.
- 2015 SWAP update committee is everyone here today. Mark has drafted an operational charter and is looking for volunteers to review. The goal is to reach a consensus on the charter by the end of summer.
- Question on how to reach consensus within each organization. Answer: this needs to be considered in operational charter.
- Question on what about those who are not in the room (ATV, Wind, Snowmobile, etc.); as these people could be affected or could contribute. Answer: The charter draft allows the inclusion of other groups, also there will be general outreach to the public.

#### **V. Process used to develop Maine’s Draft *Species of Greatest Conservation Need* list by Philip deMaynadier**

- SGCN is the foundation of the SWAP.
- Guidance has been given from USFWS and Congress in regards to context.
- Full array of wildlife and associated habitats not hunted or fished, including low population and declining species.
- There is an effort to make plans more consistent, science based, and transparent with an emphasis on prioritization.
- SGCN definition is fairly broad; it is up to the states to come up with their own definition.

- In 2005, 120-900 species were designated by the Northeast states (VT included plants as did about 12 states or territories nationally).
- SGCN list is not just a data dump, it is a prioritization process.
- Why prioritize? To avoid wasting time, money and political capital. To prevent “random acts of conservation”. National SWG funds are limited but are a huge part of nongame funding for the Department and partners in some cases.
- Maine’s annual SWG monies would only equate to \$2,300 per SGCN if spread evenly, which makes prioritization very important.
- ME 2015 draft SGCN criteria were developed by the Department by looking at 2005 SWAP to see what we liked and learned. Partner input was used to develop criteria within classification 1 and 2, which has been done so far on a scientific basis. Criteria 1-4 = priority 1.
- Criteria Concepts:
  - Risk of Extirpation (Priority 1 or 2) – identify those species that, without intervention, will likely become extirpated;
  - Recent Significant Declines (Priority 1 or 2)
  - Regional Endemic (Priority 1 or 2) – scale dependent concept, those with very small geographic range; at least 90% contained within USFWS Region 5;
  - High Regional Conservation Priority (Priority 1 or 2) – includes many scientific assessments across taxa and relevant to the Northeast.
  - Climate Change Vulnerability (Priority 2) –species identified as high vulnerability in Mahomet’s climate vulnerability assessment (69 animals and 89 plants).
  - Understudied Rare Taxa (Priority 2) – very rare, not enough survey efforts, recently documented or poorly surveyed. This may include species not ready to list yet because of not enough study done; also specialized habitat or other vulnerability.
  - Historical (Priority 2) – state historic or global historic by MDIFW or NatureServe; reasonable probability of being rediscovered.
- Maine Species Status Database:
  - Developed to document all criteria decisions, etc. and plan to use this to track all official status of species in Maine;
  - There are 17- 18 documented wildlife extirpations & extinctions in ME;
  - Draft number of SGCN is 298 (up from 213 in 2005); 45 are Priority 1 and 253 are Priority 2;
- A parallel process to today’s review is going on with species experts who are concurrently reviewing SGCN list as well.
- Majority of match for nongame funding comes from the Chickadee check off on tax returns and funds received from the sale of Loon Plates; SWG funds cannot be leveraged without the required match funds.

#### Questions

- Why not rare plants like Atlantic white cedar, etc.
  - We are hoping plants will be partially covered when we address habitats; but plants have been designated SGCN by some other states and we could consider them as well.
- Why not marine invertebrates like horseshoe crab?
  - Don’t know the answer, will talk with Dee Blanton at USFWS to get answer; could be part of species @ risk assessment. DMR is the agency with primary jurisdiction over marine species – standby for more marine taxa to be added to the SGCN list.

- What about concept criteria to address the risks to habitat due to land use changes (grasslands we know are declining)?
  - Grasslands could be considered based on species in the habitats that host SGCN that have been documented vs. prediction.
  - One suggestion was to change #5 to climate and habitat - but are these species already included anyways? Philip suggests climate change vulnerability should stand alone because of the emphasis put on this by USFWS.
- What about keeping track of plant species that are increasing, therefore, overtaking habitats and decreasing other flora?
  - Some of these things are factored in climate change vulnerability, etc.
- Please explain note on Distribution and Abundance document “Priority 1 designation is not intended for: species who have expanded their range into Maine within the past 50 years and species with only historic documentation”.
  - There is some hesitation to invest limited conservation funds into species that have erupted and expanded recently into Maine as we don’t know enough about the population yet. On the other hand, IFW is not necessarily wedded to the arbitrary cut-off of 50 yrs.
- This also brings up the question of climate change surge shift issues and how we accept climate refugees quickly & easily (like the Sandhill Crane – late 80’s). Perhaps these would drop out because they are expanding and not declining?
  - Tom Hodgman explained the criteria comes from historic ET listing criteria and provided some examples of species (red belly woodpecker) that have come and stayed for a while, but then disappeared. Maybe we should consider these species when addressing habitats? More time is needed to evaluate as the status is insecure. The Department needs to have discussions on timeframe and maybe consider these species when looking at habitats.
- Looking at the Priority 2 list, but criteria doesn’t sum as equal in weight or importance. Should we consider refining Priority 2 even further, perhaps making a Priority 3 and 4?
  - In 2005 only Priority 1 and 2 SWG eligible species were included; we have put more thought into Priority 1 this time. In 2005, priority listing never played a significant role but if partners envision a greater role for priority species differences then perhaps we should consider greater sub-priorities of SWG eligible species.
  - What about considering species that don’t currently receive funding – many species on the list are T & E but other species like horseshoe crab are understudied and no dedicated funding- they might be more deserving of money.

**VI. Break out group reports – see Attachments.**

- The group split up into five break out groups to discuss the draft SGCN list. Groups focused on birds, mammals, herps, invertebrates, and fishes.
- See attached notes from each break out group.
- Follow up suggestions and concerns can be sent to general email address (mainewildlifeactionplan@gmail.com).

**VII. Introduction of Element 2: Habitats, Andy Cutko MNAP Ecologist and Don Katnik, Habitat Group Leader**

- Habitat types in 2005 were broad (21 Key Habitats); states defined their own classifications.
- For this revision we need to make these definitions finer and we need something that works across state borders.
- It has been strongly encouraged that all states use The Nature Conservancy's Northeastern Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat Classification (NTWHC), which contains a combination of land form, elevation and geology modeling and some ground truthing.
- NTWHC identifies 60 +/- ecological system types in ME and these systems can be grouped into macro groups (similar to 21 key habitats).
- 140 Focus areas (Element 2) have also been identified in Maine and adopted in 2005 SWAP. Focus areas are areas with unique concentrations of rare species and their supporting habitat. Focus areas are non-regulatory. They are used to guide conservation actions. Focus areas are currently being reviewed.
- Linking SGCN with habitats:
  - Jason C. built a database that has all criteria used to determine SGCN as well as list SGCN threats. Also has a habitat component. 2005 habitats have been cross walked w/Ecosystems classification.
  - Since 2005 MDIFW has built a relational database to track observations of endangered, threatened, and special concern species, many of which are SGCN species. Part of the data includes high-resolution mapping of habitats associated with each observation. This is an ongoing effort.
  - Identify areas where species don't have habitat or where habitats no longer have species, etc.
  - We have not been tracking a number of species on the current SGCN list– how to deal with this?
  - New since 2005 is the mapping of development tracking (buildings, pavement, etc.). This will play into our plan – to measure our success and how well have we done protecting habitats.
- Question on similar list for Aquatic NE Aquatic Habitat System Developed for regional planning.
  - It has been highly encouraged by USFWS to use it.
- Question on collaboration between states on classifying habitat types.
  - Difficult to do but there is an effort underway for regional collaboration on now neighboring states are classifying species to habitats. LCC might drill down across states to ID regional priorities.

**VIII. Introduction to Element 3: Threats – Nate Webb**

- Must include descriptions of problems facing SGCN or their habitats and should clearly point to conservation actions
  - Habitat threats – broad actions for multiple species
  - Species threats – specific actions
- Recommended use of IUCN Classification System which uses standard terminology and being used by NE states; uses 3 tiered system.
- Some species threats are not easily identified
- Proposed threat classification for each SGCN, in each habitat:
  - P1 classify to 2nd level of IUCN hierarchy

- P2 classify to 1st level only to 1<sup>st</sup> level of IUCN hierarchy
- Question: Does that analysis consider those species that require habitat management?
  - Succession will be listed as threat action – to arrest succession
- Question: What about potential data deficiency of not fully categorizing threats?
  - Identifying threats – ability to update classifications as ongoing maintenance
  - After linked SGCN to habitats – 10 habitats of GCN and then see threats to those – see habitats at risk.
  - One of the conservation actions could be to go through threat characteristics
  - For species we don't have enough information on might not be much for threats but may find this down the line.

#### **IX. Public Communications – Amanda Shearin, MDIFW Wildlife Planner**

- How to reach general public? Why is public involvement important?
  - Because they vote, own the resources and they own the plan!
- USFWS looking for broad public participation/engagement.
- Minimum time to post the plan is 30 days to get comments.
- This revision will actively engage the public.
- When is the public involved? During the plan revision and the implementation.
- Ideas for public participation:
  - Action plan website updates; dedicated email: [mainewildlifeactionplan@gmail.com](mailto:mainewildlifeactionplan@gmail.com)
  - Social media – IFW Facebook page, twitter
  - Create personal narrative videos – how species affect economy, etc.
  - Public forums.
  - Public surveys via web and mailings
  - Post plan for public review/comment.
- Finalize communication plan in August 2014.

#### Group discussion/comments

- Plan for the next generation by engaging school kids.
- What messaging as to why public should care? Connect with liaisons from various communities/organizations to spread the message (tailor messages for each) - Boy Scouts, Lyons, etc.
- What do we expect the public to do?
  - As a group we need to ID what is the public's role.
- How will this affect at the Town level? They respond when they get an idea of what has helped them; public responds to regulatory measures.
- Place where projects are sold is when they are carried out – how can we take projects that have already been executed as a way to bring people in.
- Identifying implementation actions for different individuals, organizations and agencies.
- Creating contests for school students with prizes (posters, hats, etc.).
- Effort for defining “who” the public is.
- Hire professionals to translate the plan to make it more user- friendly.
- Need to define who the target is and what do you want them to do? Will they help to achieve objectives?
- Need for focus based messages.

- Concerns for private landowners – how do you characterize sales pitch to get people involved – need to be sensitive to public and conservation partners?
- The best way to reach folks in room and/or other folks in their organization:
  - Email – make it short, sweet, direct (provide links, include FYI or RESSPONSE in subject line)
  - Presentations
  - Provide information for newsletters
  - Attend staff meetings at other agencies
- Who should be here that isn't?
- Next steps:
  - Complete feedback survey
  - Send comments: [mainewildlifeactionplan@gmail.com](mailto:mainewildlifeactionplan@gmail.com)
  - Sign up for communications sub committee

**X. Wrap up – Mark Stadler**

- How many more meetings/how often?
  - September 23<sup>rd</sup> (tentative) – final endorsement SGCN list/discuss habitat and associated threats and possible creation of sub committees.
  - October 16<sup>th</sup> (tentative) – endorsement of habitats; develop actions.
  - April/May should have 1<sup>st</sup> draft
  - Public comments
  - August/Sept 2015 – final draft
  - End of Sept. 2015 – submit to USFWS
- Philip proposed that IFW staff consider partner comments and proceed with potentially revised SGCN Criteria and List so we can then make progress on analyses of threats/habitats in time for next partner meeting – deadline for comments by end of July.