

Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy

Executive Summary

In order to provide additional funding for wildlife diversity, the U.S. Congress passed the Wildlife Conservation and Reinvestment Act in 2001 and the State Wildlife Grant (SWG) legislation in 2002. In addition to providing annually-approved federal funding the SWG program mandates each state and territory submit a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service by October 1, 2005. The goal of the SWG program is to help ensure healthy fish and wildlife populations and wildlife diversity throughout the United States, especially those species in greatest need of conservation.

Guidelines for development of the CWCS and the criteria for approval were provided to the state and territory fish and wildlife agencies from early 2003 through the summer of 2005. These guidelines indicated that the document must include information on distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, location and condition of key habitats, problems associated with populations or their habitats, necessary actions for conserving priority species, plans for monitoring results, and a plan to review the document on a regular basis. Each CWCS must be coordinated and developed with significant land holders and natural resource management agencies in the state, a process that also must include broad public participation.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife (DOW), began development of its CWCS in late 2003 with a review of its Comprehensive Management System (CMS) and related supporting documents. The DOW has employed a CMS to guide its decision making process for more than 15 years. As part of the CMS, the DOW developed a general strategic plan, from which were developed tactical and focus area plans, that were developed with broad public and professional involvement and input. These documents focus primarily on habitat and landscape issues and provide the framework for all Division of Wildlife projects and activities and therefore are the primary documents for the Division's CWCS.

The Division of Wildlife Strategic Plan, 2001-2010 includes nine strategic issues and 14 program areas. Strategic issues are identified areas of concern that will affect the fish and wildlife resources of Ohio or the Division of Wildlife over the life of the strategic plan. Program areas are focused areas of concern, interest, or responsibility that is related to one or more of the strategic issues. Each program area has specific issues with direction statements and strategies to address the issue. The Division's CMS documents, including strategic plan, tactical plans, focus area plans, and other related documents provided the basis for development of the CWCS.

The Division of Wildlife's CWCS is a tactical document broadly divided into two areas of concern, terrestrial wildlife conservation and aquatic wildlife conservation. The terrestrial information is categorized by five habitat tactical plans and eight focus area plans representing forestland, wetland, and grassland habitats. The terrestrial tactical plans directly address the issues, direction, and strategies related to the habitat type, while the strategies

identified in the terrestrial focus area plans are designed to provide sufficient habitat for the most sensitive terrestrial species that inhabit the habitat type. Each section includes overviews of the habitat type or focus area, as well as information about the wildlife species present, the conservation issues associated with the area, the conservation actions that are proposed for the area, and plans for monitoring both the populations and the success of the proposed actions. A sample focus area plan (Appalachian Foothills Focus Area Plan) and a sample terrestrial wildlife tactical plan (Lake Erie Water Snake) follows this executive summary. These samples allow the reader to view how the eight elements of the CWCS criteria were satisfied by the Division's documentation. Similar information is available for each of the five habitat types and eight focus area plans as well as each species of greatest conservation need as identified in the Division's CWCS.

The aquatic portion of the strategy is divided into 11 watershed plans that represent the principal watersheds of Ohio. Each watershed plan identifies the characteristics of the watershed, the aquatic species present, the conservation issues concerning the area, as well as the proposed actions and plans for monitoring the area and the impacts of the conservation actions taken. A sample watershed plan (Grand River Watershed Plan) and a sample aquatic species plan (Shovelnose Sturgeon Plan) follows this executive summary and will give the reader an opportunity to view how the eight elements of the CWCS are met. Similar information is available for each of the 11 watersheds and each of the aquatic species of greatest conservation need as identified in the Division's CWCS.

The technical portion of the CWCS (tactical plans, focus area plans, and watershed plans) was developed with input from a number of professional and public individuals from a variety of backgrounds, including academic, constituent groups, and non-governmental agencies. The plan is scheduled to be evaluated and appropriate modifications incorporated every five years.

The Division of Wildlife's CWCS also includes information about the process of reviewing the document, as well as information related to coordination of the plan with other conservation agencies and organizations, and information about public involvement during development of the plan. A number of appendices also are included as reference materials.

Following development of the tactical portions of the Division's CWCS, the proposed plan was presented to a number of conservation organization leaders throughout the state through five regional meetings and one state-wide presentation. Approximately 200 people attended these meetings and completed survey forms related to the CWCS. The comments and suggestions gained from these meetings were evaluated and the strategy adjusted accordingly. Additional public review was invited in March of 2006 at the Division of Wildlife's *Wildlife Diversity Conference* in Columbus. More than 700 people from the general public attended this conference and were invited to review and comment on the CWCS document. Approximately 50 surveys were completed and reviewed with relevant comments incorporated into the Division's CWCS.

In addition, during May and June of 2006, the Division of Wildlife advertised the draft of its CWCS on the Division's website and interested parties were invited to review the entire document (via CD) and comment on the content, scope, and completeness of the strategy. Relevant comments and suggestions will be reviewed and the CWCS modified accordingly.