



State Wildlife Action Plan E-Newsletter

Wyoming Game and Fish Department

December 2009

State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) Priority Area Identification

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (Department) is investigating processes to identify priority areas for management of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) within the 2010 SWAP. The purpose of priority areas are to:

- 1) Ensure the Department is making best use of limited resources,
- 2) Communicate internally and externally areas of high conservation value to aid in future planning for conservation and development, and
- 3) Address mandated elements for State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAP), particularly the need to include information regarding "Descriptions of locations and relative conditions of habitats essential to species in need of conservation."

Features of the priority area mapping process were developed through consultation with Department and non-Department personnel experienced with map-based conservation planning including the Wyoming Natural Diversity Database, The Nature Conservancy, and WyGIS.

Priority areas will be identified using three variables: 1) SGCN occurrence, 2) habitat intactness, and 3) overlap with existing priority areas. SGCN occurrence will be determined using distribution maps being created

by the Wyoming Natural Diversity Database. Distribution maps are based upon areas of suitable habitat within a species' known range. SGCN location information will identify areas where multiple SGCN species are present as well as habitats that may be vital to the persistence of an individual species.

Habitat intactness is determined by evaluating overlaying mapping information (GIS layers) of known habitat impacts or threats such as roads, subdivisions, dams, and mines. Lastly, areas identified based on SGCN occurrence and habitat intactness will be compared with existing Department priority areas to investigate consistency and to potentially further refine SWAP maps. Existing priority area maps which will be evaluated include comparison to the Department's Strategic Habitat Plan's Crucial Habitat Areas, bird and mammal key wildlife areas, and Sage-grouse Core Areas.

Priority maps created for the 2010 SWAP are intended to be a starting point. A key feature will be the documentation of the strengths and weaknesses of the mapping process as well as the underlying data. This documentation will help to focus future research to allow maps to be continually updated and improved as data becomes available. Draft maps will be available for review when initial drafts of the SWAP are available for public comment in May 2010.



Sensitive Species Legislative Funding



Proactive conservation approaches are more effective and less expensive than efforts initiated after a species has been listed under the ESA.

Proactive approaches to conserving wildlife are more effective and less expensive than recovery efforts initiated after a species has been listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This is true both in terms of financial investments necessary to reverse a species' decline as well as avoiding negative economic impacts that can result from land use and development restrictions that often accompany a species ESA listing. This is particularly relevant for states like Wyoming whose economies are heavily dependent upon natural resource industries. By not waiting for last-ditch species recovery efforts, wildlife conservation activities can be better coordinated with initiatives to secure Wyoming's rich wildlife resource, natural areas and quality of life including maintaining clean air and water; reducing the spread of invasive species; effectively planning for energy development; and retaining Wyoming's working family farms and ranches.

State and federal legislators have recognized these facts. Funding for sensitive species work in Wyoming increased significantly in recent years. For the 2009-2010 biennium, the Wyoming legislature appropriated \$1.2 million to fund the Department's existing nongame program and an additional \$609,000 to implement additional sensitive species projects. In addition, the legislature appropriated \$2.8 million for sage-grouse conservation efforts, and Governor Freudenthal dedicated almost \$1.3 million in endangered species funding for sensitive species

project work.

Federal match funding for the State Wildlife Grants Program, which supports the development and implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAP), has been increased for fiscal year 2010. About \$756,600 will be allocated to Wyoming compared to \$610,704 in 2009. Additionally, the nonfederal matching fund requirement for projects has been reduced from 50:50 to 35:65.

It is hoped that Wyoming legislators will maintain their commitment and financial support for the Department's nongame/sensitive species programs in the upcoming legislative session. As previously stated, there is no better way to conserve Wyoming's rich wildlife resource and reduce Wyoming's vulnerability to future ESA listings. Wyoming is being increasingly targeted to supply a growing proportion of the nation's energy demands through both renewable and non-renewable sources. Continued state financial support will be required to effectively address wildlife conservation challenges presented by an acceleration in the amount and type of energy development and to maintain the natural areas and outdoor recreation opportunities which are hallmarks of our state.

Meeting with the US Fish and Wildlife Service



The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission will review and approve Wyoming's 2010 SWAP before it is forwarded to the USFWS.

A meeting with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) was held on November 12, 2009 to review Wyoming's plans to revise its State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). The USFWS is responsible for reviewing and approving SWAPs in order for the state to be eligible for State Wildlife Grant Program funds.

Wyoming, which plans to submit its revised SWAP to the USFWS in October 2010, will be one of the first western states to revise its plan. With the submission of a revised SWAP, state wildlife agencies must include a summary of significant changes and how the plan adequately addresses the eight required elements for SWAPs (see:

http://www.wildlifeactionplans.org/pdfs/eight_elements_handout.pdf), including an up to date public review process, and a "road map" to locate revisions within the plan. Before submission, drafts of the 2010 SWAP will be reviewed internally and externally by wildlife habitat and species experts, the public, and the Department's administration. The revised SWAP will also be formally approved by the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission in July 2010 before being forwarded to the USFWS for final review.

An outline of Wyoming's 2010 SWAP and drafts of several chapters were presented to USFWS representatives during the November 12 meeting. USFWS representatives were complimentary of the Department's revision plans. A letter was sent from the Director of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Steve Ferrell, to the regional USFWS Chief of the Division of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration announcing the Department's intentions to revise its SWAP as the first required step of the revision process.



The USFWS is responsible for final review and approval of SWAPs.

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Questions or comments about the SWAP or this newsletter can be forwarded to:

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