



# State Wildlife Action Plan E-Newsletter

## Species of Greatest Conservation Need Prioritization

One of the requirements for State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAP) is to provide information on the distribution and abundance of wildlife that describes the diversity and health of wildlife within the state. Part of this requirement is identifying Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). The SGCN designation conveys species whose conservation status warrants receiving increased management attention, funding, and consideration in conservation, land use, and development planning in Wyoming.

Species that receive a Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) Native Species Status (NSS) rank of NSS1, NSS2, NSS3, NSS4 or NSSU are eligible to receive the SGCN designation. A species NSS rank is derived using a matrix which evaluates a species' population status versus the severity of its most limiting factors or conservation threats. A species can receive a rank of NSS1 through NSS7 or NSSU. The lower the rank the more potentially vulnerable is the species' population in Wyoming. Species that receive the NSSU rank are

those where there is a lack of information to adequately assess their conservation status. The NSS score is solely a biological



determination by the WGFD. In assigning a NSS rank, only Wyoming populations for the species are taken into consideration, irrespective of how it may be doing in other portions of its range, including adjacent states.

A species with low population numbers and limited distribution may be omitted from being recommended to receive SGCN status if both the following qualifications are met:

1. The species in Wyoming is not experiencing known population declines or increasing threats and;
2. The species population is abundant and secure throughout its range.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission has final determination regarding a species SGCN status.

In 2005, when Wyoming created its first SWAP (previously known as Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy), 279 species were designated as SGCN. Of these, 235 were listed solely or partly because of a lack of information to assess their conservation status. With such a large number of SGCN, it is not possible to give all species equal attention for conservation purposes.

The WGFD is in a process of developing a system to further prioritize SGCN for conservation need. This has been undertaken to provide a clear and transparent system to assist in focusing internal and external conservation efforts toward species where there is the greatest likelihood of benefiting the species, its habitat, other native wildlife, and the state including preventing



future listings under the Endangered Species Act.

Six variables have been approved by the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission to evaluate SGCN

### Inside this issue:

Species of Greatest Conservation Need Prioritization (cont)	2
New Terrestrial Habitat Types to be Addressed in SWAP	2
Wyoming Legislature Renews Funding for Sensitive Species Work	3
Questions or Comments?	3



# Species of Greatest Conservation Need Prioritization (cont)

conservation priority. Variables were identified through a consultation process which included representatives from the WGFD, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Wyoming Natural Diversity Database, and the Governor's Office. The six approved variables are:

1. WGFD NSS Rank.
2. Wyoming's contribution to the species' overall range-wide conservation.
3. Regulatory or monetary impacts if the species is listed under the Endangered Species Act.
4. Urgency of the need for conservation action.
5. Ability to implement effective conservation actions.



6. The species ecological role including its potential function as a keystone, indicator, or umbrella species.<sup>1</sup>

While details surrounding the system and scoring process will require additional research and testing, the intentions are that a species will be assigned a numerical score for each variable and scores will be compiled to provide an overall score for each SGCN. Species will likely be placed into tiers reflecting conservation priority based on their overall score. Within the WGFD, the tier in which a species is placed will not be the only consideration for directing future resources, but it will be an important one.

When completed, the SGCN prioritization system should contribute to ensuring the best use of limited resources as well as facilitating coordination among all parties that have a stake in the success of Wyoming's State Wildlife Action Plan.

<sup>1</sup> Indicator species are those species whose population status is a good indicator of the overall health of the habitat it occupies. (Ex: Cutthroat trout are a good indicator of water quality). A keystone species is a species that plays a significant role in shaping and defining the habitat in which it lives. (Ex: Prairie dogs would be considered a keystone species because of the large colonies they create and the number of species that are dependent upon prairie dog colonies for their habitat.) Umbrella species are species selected for making conservation related decisions, typically because conserving these species indirectly benefits many other species that occupy the same habitat. (Ex: Efforts aimed at maintaining viable populations of sage-grouse will ensure habitat is available for other wildlife species that depend upon sagebrush habitats.)

## New Terrestrial Habitat Types to be Addressed in SWAP.

Two new habitats have been added to those which will be addressed within Wyoming's revised SWAP. The habitat type formally designated as "Other Shrublands" was divided into "Desert Shrublands and Playas" and "Foothills Shrublands". In addition to these two shrublands, sagebrush shrublands will also be addressed.

These new habitat types brings the total number of terrestrial habitat types which will be addressed in the SWAP to 11, along with 6 aquatic basins (Figure 1). Terrestrial habitats and aquatic basins were identified by plant communities and geographic areas that contain similar species and threats, habitat types that are frequently used in wildlife management decisions both within and outside the WGFD, and habitats that the public and policy makers can easily understand and identify.

**Figure 1—Part A**

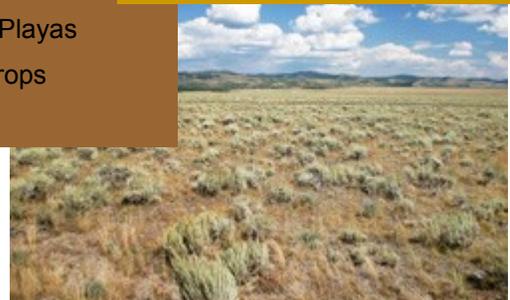
Terrestrial Habitat Types

- Xeric Forests
- Aspen/deciduous Forests
- Montane/subalpine Forests
- Riparian
- Wetlands
- Prairie Grasslands
- Mountain Grasslands
- Sagebrush Shrublands
- Foothills Shrublands
- Desert Shrublands and Playas
- Cliff/Canyon/Rock Outcrops

**Figure 1—Part B**

Aquatic Basin

- Northeastern Missouri
- Northwestern Missouri
- Upper Colorado
- Great Basin
- Pacific Northwest
- North/South Platte



# Wyoming Legislature Renews Funding for Sensitive Species Work

The Wyoming Legislature renewed its commitment to conserving sensitive species by awarding \$1.3 million for 2011/2012 to the WGFD during its recently ended 2010 budget session. The funding will be used to administer this program and for project work. In addition, the Governor's Endangered Species Account received \$1.8 million, a portion of which will be made available to the WGFD for projects and research.

This support recognizes that proactive approaches to conserving wildlife to reduce the need for listings under the Endangered Species Act are more effective and less expensive than recovery efforts initiated after a species has been designated threatened or endangered. This is true both in terms of the costs of conservation actions as well as avoiding potential negative impacts to Wyoming's economy and natural resource industries through additional land use restrictions. Legislative funding has significantly enhanced the WGFD's ability to inventory, initiate monitoring, and assess the status of many species of wildlife classified as sensitive. As of July 2009, after only one year of the enhanced nongame/sensitive

species program, sufficient inventory data has been collected to document the species status on 18 fishes, 79 birds and mammals, 4 amphibians, and 2 reptiles. This is on track to meet all projected funding benchmarks.<sup>2</sup> For those few species whose populations and/or habitat trends have been identified as needing additional attention, the WGFD is using appropriated project funding to implement conservation actions. The availability of this funding has also been useful in meeting matching fund requirements for the national State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program and other conservation funding sources.



<sup>2</sup>The WGFD is meeting FY09/10 biennium funding projections to complete sufficient inventories to evaluate, strengthen the current knowledge, and potentially reclassify the status of 34 of 40 fishes, 57 of 114 birds and mammals, 8 of 12 amphibians, and 15 of 26 reptiles identified as sensitive by 2014. All sensitive species inventory work will be completed by 2020.

## Questions or Comments?

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

Glenn Pauley

State Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator

Wyoming Game and Fish Department

5400 Bishop Boulevard

Cheyenne, WY 82006

Phone: (307) 777-4637

Email: [glenn.pauley@wgf.state.wy.us](mailto:glenn.pauley@wgf.state.wy.us)



**We're on the Web!**

**See us at:**

<http://gf.state.wy.us/>

To be added to the mailing list, send an e-mail to [joinswapenews@ewyoming.gov](mailto:joinswapenews@ewyoming.gov) from the email account at which you would like to receive the newsletter. You may unsubscribe by sending an e-mail to [leave-swapenews@ewyoming.gov](mailto:leave-swapenews@ewyoming.gov). To subscribe or unsubscribe, leave the subject line and body of email blank.