

### III. A User's Guide to Vermont's Wildlife Action Plan

Vermont's Wildlife Action Plan identifies conservation strategies designed to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered or threatened. It provides guidance that state and federal agencies, local governments, private landowners, businesses, universities, and non-government organizations all can follow. As a statewide, all-species conservation guide this document contains an enormous amount of information. Although it may seem easy to get lost in the details, readers are encouraged to remain mindful of the following:

- Use the Wildlife Action Plan to identify how your organization's mission and goals relate to and match up with the needs of wildlife and wildlife habitat. Some questions to consider include the following: What strategies, in what part of the state, could our organization implement? Which would provide the most benefits for the greatest number of Species of Greatest Conservation Need?
- Be aware of groups of species with similar needs. Use the Action Plan as starting points in planning and implementing various conservation efforts. For example, projects focused on a particular species, habitat type, landscape or problem might also address the needs of many other Species of Greatest Conservation Need (as well as other species that are not rare or declining).
- Consider the problems or opportunities you wish to address and determine the scale at which you are comfortable working. The Wildlife Action Plan contains strategies that range up the scale from local to statewide and beyond. For example do you prefer to work locally (e.g., maintaining and improving habitat on your own land), within your community (e.g., incorporating wildlife conservation your town plan), within a landscape or watershed (e.g., maintaining or improving the connectivity of a river and its tributaries), or at the statewide level (e.g., reducing the economic pressures that drive land conversion and fragmentation).
- Recognize the complexity of habitat management. By its nature, managing habitats can positively affect some species while negatively affecting others. This is to be expected, and land managers have long wrestled with how best to balance the needs of multiple species and habitats for a variety of conservation and economic uses. For example, managing for older growth forests at a location may benefit some species, but may not benefit (in fact, may displace) others that require forests at earlier successional stages. Similarly, thinning a forest stand will likely displace species requiring "forest interior" conditions.

Further complicating habitat management issues is the fact that, in some cases, several Species of Greatest Conservation Need may be associated with a particular habitat type, but they may have different management needs or may use the same location at different times of the year or at different life stages. At times, managing for one or several Species of Greatest Conservation Need may conflict with the needs of other Species of Greatest Conservation Need or other more common species.

There is no single "right" way to manage lands— just different ways that result in different outcomes. It is often beneficial to approach this complexity by looking beyond a specific property and examining how it fits into a broader area. This larger scale assessment should incorporate not only ecological opportunities but also economic issues, social needs, and political factors.

- Implementing these strategies will significantly help Species of Greatest Conservation Need, but they are not requirements. The Wildlife Action Plan is a guidance document, not a regulatory one. They are intended to provide a "menu" of opportunities; some may or may not be appropriate at any given place or point in time.

Finally, as complete and comprehensive as it is, the document is not without limitations. For example, by virtue of the federal guidance that helped create the Wildlife Action Plan, it focuses only on animals. Additional work is required to integrate the findings and recommendations in this document with other environmental conservation and resource management plans, recreation plans, forest management plans, transportation plans and town plans to name just a few.

# Examples of Using the Wildlife Action Plan

## **If you are interested in management of a particular property or area**

As an example, if you are developing a management plan for your woodland property in northern Vermont, you might be interested to know which habitat and community types are most likely to occur in that part of the state and the Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) generally found in them. Thus, you might want to “enter” the document at chapter 4:35 and appendix B. There you’ll find community descriptions, SGCN lists, information on the problems impacting those communities as well as priority conservation strategies, potential partners and potential funding sources. More detailed information about management considerations for these species can then be found in appendix A. Together with forest stand data and other economic factors this set of information can help guide on-the-ground management decisions.

## **If you are interested in the conservation a particular species or taxonomic group**

“Enter” the document at appendix A to find detailed information about each Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), or at chapter 4 to learn about a taxonomic group (e.g., birds, fish, invertebrates, mammals, reptiles and amphibians). For example, if you are interested in conserving reptiles and amphibians you can go straight to chapter.4.30, if you are particularly interested in wood turtle conservation go to appendix A5 for the wood turtle Species Assessment Report.

The habitat description section of in each Species Assessment Report contains a list of habitat types, communities and landscapes used by that species. From the species-specific information you can then go to chapter 4:35 and appendix B to find conservation information for those habitat types, communities and landscapes and to see which other species occur in these habitats. This broader habitat-based level of analysis can enable more “bang for the buck” from various conservation actions.

## **If you are interested in a particular habitat type, community or landscape**

“Enter” the document at chapter 4:35 and at appendix B. Here you will find information on the Species of Greatest Conservation Need that are associated with the habitat type, community or landscape as well as the Ecological Landscapes where the best management and restoration opportunities occur for the habitat. For example, if you are interested in lake (lacustrine) conservation you can go to appendix B:67 to find the Lacustrine Summary. It contains a list of the SGCN associated with lacustrine areas, ecological descriptions, and summaries of problems impacting lakes as well as priority conservation strategies.

## **If you want to address the overarching problems impacting wildlife across the state and region**

“Enter” the document at chapter 1:9-Statewide Themes for Action. Here you will find strategies designed to address the issues and problems impacting Vermont’s wildlife and wildlife habitat that are most effectively addressed at the state, regional/national and international levels. For example, habitat loss along migration routes and the economic pressures that drive habitat fragmentation.

Regardless of how you intend to apply the information (whether for research, education, grant writing, or on-the-ground management) or which way you choose to “enter” the document, you’re encouraged to read the introduction and to move from one section to another. This approach should help put the conservation strategies listed within each section into a broader perspective and enhance the value, effectiveness and impact of your conservation work.

## **Additional Resources available from the VT Fish & Wildlife Department (FWD)**

- *Conserving Vermont’s Natural Heritage: a Guide to Community-Based Planning for the Conservation of Vermont’s Fish, Wildlife and Biological Diversity*, available from FWD ([www.vtfishandwildlife.com/library.cfm](http://www.vtfishandwildlife.com/library.cfm)) is designed specifically to help communities plan for and conserve wildlife at the municipal level.
- The USDA's voluntary Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) provides technical and financial assistance to landowners to create and enhance wildlife habitat on their lands. For information contact 802-241-3700 or [fwinformation@state.vt.us](mailto:fwinformation@state.vt.us)
- In the coming months the Department expects to complete a new landowner’s guide to managing wildlife habitat. To check on its status contact [fwinformation@state.vt.us](mailto:fwinformation@state.vt.us).