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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240

In Reply Refer To:
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NOV 22 2005

Mr. Wayne Laroche
Commissioner
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
103 South Main Street
Waterbury, VT 05671-0501

Dear Mr. Laroche:

During their October 2005 meeting, the National Advisory Acceptance Team reviewed the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) submitted by your agency. Based upon that review (enclosed), I am pleased to inform you that Vermont's CWCS satisfactorily addresses each of the eight elements required under the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program and the State Wildlife Grants program and is hereby approved.

I appreciate your hard work and that of your partners, and congratulate you on this important achievement. I am confident that your efforts will yield great benefits in the conservation of Vermont's wildlife.

Sincerely,

DIRECTOR

Enclosure

National Advisory Acceptance Team (NAAT) Review Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy Review Summary

State/Commonwealth/Territory: Vermont

Date of NAAT Review Meeting: October 24, 2005

Regional Review Team (RRT) members: Ed Parker, CT Department of Environmental Protection (representing the Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Resource Agencies) and Sherry Morgan (USFWS – Northeast Region).

RRT Recommendation: **Approved**
 Conditionally Approved
 Not Approved

Final NAAT Recommendation: **Approved**
 Conditionally Approved
 Not Approved

Comments:

Vermont's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (Strategy) is a well organized and well written document. Vermont relied on a fine filter and coarse filter approach to address problems and strategies for their species of greatest conservation need. At the fine filter level, the Strategy reviews in a comprehensive manner the current distribution, abundance and habitat conditions of low and declining populations of wildlife species from every taxonomic group present in the State. This information is organized in Species Assessment Reports that are easy to understand and will be useful to both conservation partners and the public into the long-term. At the coarse filter level, the Strategy defines and describes the habitats and landscapes used by these species of greatest conservation need and the current and desired condition of these habitats within Habitat/Landscape Summary Reports. The Strategy details the specific threats facing both species of greatest conservation need and the habitats and landscapes upon which they depend. Conservation strategies are identified for each species of greatest conservation need, habitat and landscape. By taking both a fine filter approach (species and taxon level) and coarse filter approach (habitat and landscapes), Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department and their partners will be able to consider conservation problems and propose conservation strategies at a local, statewide and regional scale.

The Strategy describes the biological monitoring and research needs for individual species of greatest conservation need and their habitats. Furthermore, Vermont proposes to develop a statewide wildlife monitoring plan that will address biological, implementation, effectiveness and validation monitoring, and the need for adaptive management of all species of greatest conservation need and their habitats. The Strategy outlines a process for reviewing and revising

the Strategy every 10 years.

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department involved numerous stakeholders from local, state and Federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, sportsmen groups and the public at large in every phase of the development of the Strategy. These conservation partners helped select species of greatest conservation need, identified threats, developed strategies and influenced the organization of the Strategy. The end result of this level of involvement and partnership is a comprehensive strategy for conserving wildlife that should be useful to any organization, agency, entity or citizen of Vermont who is interested in conserving wildlife.

The NAAT recommends approval of Vermont's CWCS. Although not a requirement to satisfactorily address the 8 required elements, the NAAT recommends that Vermont consider integrating maps into future iterations of the Strategy as the inclusion of more detailed maps would greatly enhance the utility of this strategy.

National Acceptance Advisory Team Signature Page
Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy

State/Commonwealth/Territory: Vermont

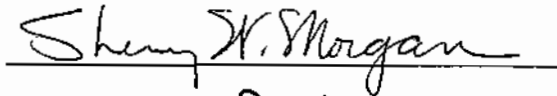
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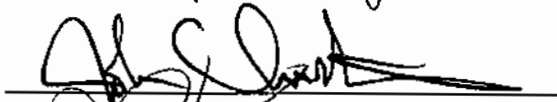
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Sherry Morgan



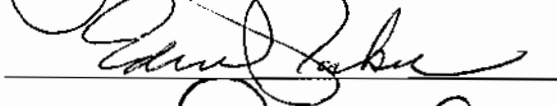
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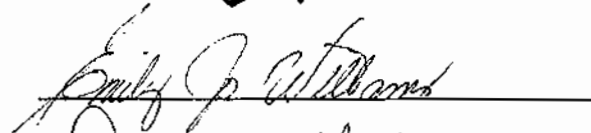
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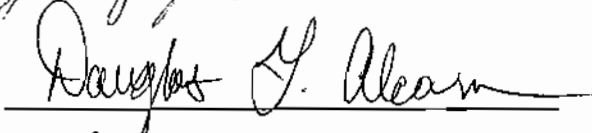
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EJ Williams



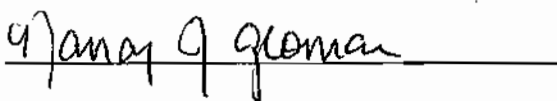
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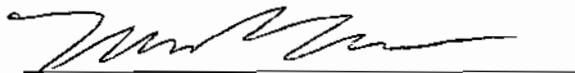
Chris McKay



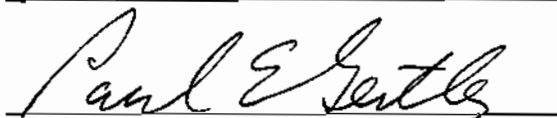
Nancy Gloman



Mike McKenna



Paul Gertler



1st Element. Information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations as the State fish and wildlife agency deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of the State's wildlife.

Comments:

Vermont used the best science and information available to assess the abundance and distribution of wildlife and plants. Six Species Teams (Bird, Fish, Invertebrate, Mammal, Plant, and Reptile and Amphibian) including Vermont Fish and Wildlife Staff and taxa experts from other agencies, universities and the private sector were convened to assess the status and distribution of Vermont's species. These teams consulted databases of records maintained by the Nongame and Natural Heritage Program of Vermont, Natureserve, universities and research facilities, regional and national monitoring efforts, and the knowledge of technical experts. An Integration Team made up of Species Team leaders, other Fish and Wildlife staff, and non-staff experts in wildlife conservation developed criteria and guidance for reviewing the status of Vermont's wildlife. These criteria included categories for species that are rare or declining, vulnerable, with an unknown status, and species with other considerations (keystone species, responsibility species, etc). Based on these criteria and guidance, the six species teams then selected 853 species of greatest conservation need in Vermont, of which 577 were plants and 276 were wildlife species. Species Assessment Reports for each bird, mammal, reptile, and amphibian species of greatest conservation were developed that included information on species abundance and distribution, low and declining populations, and research and monitoring needs. Due to the limited information regarding distribution, abundance and habitat requirements of individual invertebrate species, these species were lumped into taxonomic or habitat groupings (i.e. carabid beetles, vernal pool odonates, wetland butterflies, etc) denoted as Invertebrate Species Groups. Assessment Reports were developed for each of these groups. These reports include information (where known) on abundance and distribution by biophysical region, and a distribution summary containing a narrative description and county record information when available. The research and monitoring section of each Species/Species Group Assessment Report identifies specific strategies for collection of additional data on abundance and distribution.

Yes No **Element 1 is satisfactorily addressed.**

2nd Element. Descriptions of locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to conservation of species identified in the 1st element.

Comments:

Vermont's Strategy systematically identifies and defines the key habitats and community types essential to species of greatest conservation need. The Integration Team in consultation with the Species Team reviewed existing habitat classification systems and their ability for use in the Strategy. Through this process, Vermont determined that no single habitat classification system satisfactorily integrated the aquatic habitats, terrestrial communities, successional stages, cultural habitats and landscapes used by species of greatest conservation need. Instead, a hybrid of

several classification systems with 120 habitat types organized into 24 major habitat categories was created. The Strategy includes summaries of these 24 major landscape and habitat categories. For each category the following information is provided: 1) characteristics and distribution of the habitat, 2) the associated species of greatest conservation need, 3) the current and desired condition, 4) problems and information needs, 5) prioritized conservation strategies, and 6) a description of how these efforts should be coordinated with existing plans. Strategies to address data gaps associated with locations and conditions of habitats are included in Landscape and Habitat Summaries. The current and desired condition section coupled with the priority conservation strategies for each habitat summary provide an excellent blueprint as to the conservation actions needed to restore, protect and manage key habitats for species of greatest conservation need.

Yes No **Element 2 is satisfactorily addressed.**

3rd Element. Descriptions of problems which may adversely affect species identified in the 1st element or their habitats, and priority research and survey efforts needed to identify factors which may assist in restoration and improved conservation of these species and habitats.

Comments:

Vermont identified 22 problem categories some of which are habitat dependent (i.e. habitat conversion) and others which are not habitat related (i.e. disease). Priority problems impacting species of greatest conservation need are listed in the Problem section of each Species/Species Group Assessment Report. This section contains a habitat-related and a non-habitat related problem list each followed by a narrative description of problems for that species of greatest conservation need. Problems impacting habitats are addressed in the Problem section of each Habitat Summary. Broad-scale problems such as global warming and acid deposition, regional problems such as habitat loss and conversion, local problems such as the impact of recreational trails, and species specific problems such as collection, harvesting and disease were all identified in the Strategy. Technical teams focused their efforts on identifying the significant problems impacting a species or habitat. Specific research and survey needs to obtain information regarding problems facing species of greatest conservation need are identified at all levels in the Strategy. The Species/Species Group Assessment Reports includes a "threats and their significance" data field under research and monitoring. In some cases, research is also identified in the conservation strategies section of the Reports. Overviews of species groups (birds, mammals, etc) in Chapter 4 identify research needs related to problems that came up repeatedly, particularly with regard to obtaining baseline survey information. Habitat/Landscape Summaries contain a "Problem and Information Needs" table that includes areas where insufficient information is a significant problem. At the statewide level, data needs were identified as one of the major problems limiting the State's ability to conserve wildlife.

Yes No **Element 3 is satisfactorily addressed.**

4th Element. Descriptions of conservation actions determined to be necessary to conserve the identified species and habitats and priorities for implementing such actions.

Comments:

Vermont uses the term *conservation strategy* to describe the actions presented in the Strategy. In general, the strategies are broad and directional but they do provide sufficient detail to guide development and execution of specific projects and programs.

Vermont identifies a comprehensive list of conservation strategies necessary to address problems facing species of greatest conservation need throughout the state. These strategies address problems facing individual species, species groups (birds, amphibians, etc), habitats, and landscapes, and those problems that are statewide in scope. The conservation strategies go far beyond the scope and scale of activities that could be conducted by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department alone. Each conservation strategy in Species/Species Group Assessment Reports and Habitat Summaries includes a list of dozens of potential partners that could undertake implementation. These partner lists identify the major organizations and agencies likely to assist in implementing strategies. Performance measures are included for every conservation strategy in the Species/Species Group Assessment Reports and in the Habitat Summaries. All conservation strategies identified in the Strategy are considered priorities. The rationale for this approach is that no prioritization would satisfy all partners and their varied missions and interests within the State. Detailed discussions with the Conservation Strategy Review team focused prioritization efforts on problems impacting species of greatest conservation need and habitats rather than on strategies. Habitat problems were ranked according to a process described in Salafsky et. al. 2003. Priority Conservation Strategies were developed only for habitat problems that ranked medium or high.

Yes No **Element 4 is satisfactorily addressed.**

5th Element. Descriptions of the proposed plans for monitoring species identified in the 1st element and their habitats, for monitoring the effectiveness of the conservation actions proposed in the 4th element, and for adapting these conservation actions to respond appropriately to new information or changing conditions.

Comments:

Vermont's Strategy addresses biological monitoring of species and habitats at several levels. First, monitoring needs for each species of greatest conservation need are described in the research and monitoring needs section of the Species/Species Group Assessment Report. Monitoring needs for habitats are included in the Priority Conservation Strategies section of the Habitat Summaries. The majority of these monitoring actions focus on survey and research to determine where populations of species of greatest conservation need and their habitats occur. Each conservation action identified in the Species Assessment Reports and Habitat Summaries include a performance measure to determine if the desired outcome has been achieved. Given the large number of proposed conservation strategies and performance measures to monitor, the

Strategy proposes to develop a statewide wildlife monitoring plan (Chapter 5, pages 1-11) that will include procedures for implementation, effectiveness and validation monitoring, and adaptive management. Implementation monitoring will assess the degree to which a conservation strategy was implemented (Were the trees planted in a riparian area?). Effectiveness monitoring will measure the impact of the conservation strategy on species of greatest conservation need and their habitats (Did planting the trees stabilize the stream bank?). Validation monitoring will check the assumptions upon which the strategy was based (did stabilizing the bank reduce sedimentation in spawning beds thus producing more salmon fry?). By incorporating implementation, effectiveness and validation monitoring, Vermont will be able to assess whether conservation actions are working, and *adapt* actions and strategies as appropriate based on new information. Vermont has already begun implementation monitoring for State Wildlife Grant-funded projects, and proposes to begin development of the statewide monitoring strategy in the coming months.

Yes No **Element 5 is satisfactorily addressed.**

6th Element. Descriptions of procedures to review the Strategy/Plan at intervals not to exceed ten years.

Comments:

Vermont's Strategy will be reviewed on a 10-year cycle. Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department will follow procedures to review and update the strategy that are analogous to those procedures employed to develop the original Strategy.

Yes No **Element 6 is satisfactorily addressed.**

7th Element. Descriptions of the plans for coordinating, to the extent feasible, the development, implementation, review, and revision of the Plan-Strategy with Federal, State, and local agencies and Indian tribes that manage significant land and water areas within the State or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats.

Comments:

Vermont coordinated extensively with Federal, State and local agencies in the development of their Strategy. Many Federal and State agencies (see Table 1-1, Chapter 1 page 8) participated in the Strategy development and provided input at the start and throughout the planning process and served on technical teams (Species Teams, Integration Team, Conservation Strategy Review Team; see Table 3-1, Chapter 3 pages 4-5). The agency representatives provided detailed input into the selection of species of greatest conservation need, identification of problems, and development of strategies, plan format and overall integration of the plan. Local agencies were invited to participate in the development of the Strategy. The Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions, representing town conservation commissions from throughout the

state, was an active participant as a Conservation Partner on the Conservation Strategy Review Team. The Vermont League of Cities and Towns received regular updates and were invited to participate in the Strategy process as a conservation partner. State, Federal, and local agencies (with other Conservation Partners) also previewed and provided comments on drafts of the Strategy before a draft was made available to the general public. There are no Native American tribes within the borders of Vermont that are officially recognized by the State or by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Further, there are no tribal entities that manage significant land and water areas within the state or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of species of greatest conservation need or their habitats. Vermont stresses throughout the Strategy that ongoing collaboration and coordination among partners (including local, state, and federal agencies as well as with neighboring states and the province of Quebec) is required to ensure effective implementation of the plan. Vermont proposes to coordinate with these entities in future Strategy revisions using the same approach and procedures used to develop the initial Strategy.

Yes No **Element 7 is satisfactorily addressed.**

8th Element. Descriptions of the necessary public participation in the development, revision, and implementation of the Plan.

Comments:

Public involvement was an integral aspect of development of the Strategy. Public involvement occurred particularly through non-governmental organizations and citizen committees such as the VT Fish and Wildlife Board and the VT Agency of Natural Resources' Endangered Species Committee. Public involvement began early in the Strategy development process. Many participated in Strategy development as Conservation Partners (Table 1-1) and staff from many NGOs served on Strategy technical teams (Table 3-1). NGO's also previewed and provided comments on drafts of the Strategy before a draft was made available to the general public. The General public was invited to review and comment on a draft of the Strategy in July and August of 2005. Further documentation of public involvement can be found in these portions of the Strategy:

- Charters for Conservation Partner and technical team participation are in appendix D.
- Sample correspondence with partners is in appendix E.
- Sample media coverage is in appendix F
- Sample outreach documents are in appendix G

Outreach efforts are ongoing to help inform and involve the public in Strategy implementation. The public are identified as essential partners in implementing many of the conservation strategies (particularly those involving private lands). The review and revision process will follow the same process used in the development of the Strategy and the public will be encouraged to participate broadly.

Yes No **Element 8 is satisfactorily addressed.**