

Vermont's Wildlife Action Plan*

November 22, 2005

Appendix F Sample CWCS Media Coverage

**formally the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS)*



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Wildlife checkup

Vermont is part of a major national project to find out what is needed to keep America's wildlife healthy.

This complex and important endeavor, with a deadline of October 2005, has biologists, sportsmen, ecologists, conservationists, and wildlife experts working together to develop a comprehensive blueprint for effective conservation programs across the United States.

Led by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, the Vermont team is supported by a significant federal contribution, the State Wildlife Grants program, which has a goal of preventing wildlife from becoming endangered. Vermont has received more than \$2.5 million in grants since the program began in 2001, but many of the participants have volunteered countless hours to be part of this pioneering wildlife inventory.

Next fall, when the work has been completed and the public has had a chance to review draft findings, Vermont will have its first "comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy," a long-range vision for conserving the state's wildlife, from the lowly woodland vole to the catamount.

This effort is in refreshing contrast to recent federal initiatives that have seriously undermined entrenched environmental policies such as the Clean Air Act. It is the kind of positive and innovative work that enthuses scientific experts as well as the average Vermonter who respects and admires the state's wildlife.

Very little is known about many of the species being studied, says Jon Kart, coordinator of Vermont's wildlife checkup. But even the smallest insect can play an important role in the ecosystem. Plants are also being studied to provide the most complete picture possible.

Six teams of experts looked at species that have declining populations, are potentially threatened or are virtual unknowns to scientists. The goal is to identify "species of greatest conservation need" and to identify habitats, key threats, the research needed to increase knowledge about them and strategies to conserve the species. A broad-based review team from 60 agencies and organizations will distill the information and provide a "reality check" before recommendations are made for the public to review in the spring.

A preliminary look at the list of species with the greatest conservation need in Vermont suggests there are about 130 vertebrates, including birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles, 120 invertebrates, and about 400 plants that need special attention.

The list includes bobcat, bald eagle, common nighthawk, salmon, lynx, martin, a number of bats, barn owl and even mountain lion, or catamount. Kart says

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catamounts have existed in Vermont, but there have been no documented findings of them in some time.

"If we can get to the species before it becomes threatened, we have many more options to conserve them and it is much cheaper," Kart said in an interview Thursday.

Vermonters take conservation seriously, not only because they have an affinity for the natural environment they grow up in, but because they benefit from it economically. About \$386 million is spent on wildlife-based recreation in Vermont every year, according to a 2001 survey by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Once the conservation strategy is complete, stable federal funding will be needed to follow up on the recommendations. Vermont's congressional delegation has been supportive and must continue to press for this allocation. The state will also be asked to contribute, possibly through investing in conservation programs or providing technical and financial assistance to the landowners who own about 85 percent of Vermont's land. These property owners might have the will, but not the money or expertise to preserve their natural areas.

It will require a partnership and an investment. A healthier future for America's wildlife is worth it.
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State compiling wildlife inventory

December 30, 2004

By Sky Barsch Times Argus Staff

WATERBURY – In an effort to avoid emergency recovery programs, Vermont wildlife specialists are using federal funds to survey and plan for the protection of creatures that might otherwise be headed for the endangered species list.

Vermont's Fish and Wildlife Department, with the help of federal funding and more than 60 agencies and organizations, is compiling an inventory and plan for the state's animals most in need of conservation, according to Jon Kart, comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy coordinator for the department. The list, called the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, will include what experts believe are the best management practices for more than 200 animals, from lynxes and silver-haired bats to southern bog lemmings and American bitterns. The study looks at plants as well.

The goal is to list the mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds, invertebrates and insects that are rare or whose populations are declining, and to identify and implement conservation methods before the creatures become so rare that restoring populations is expensive and potentially not possible.

The program is funded by the State Wildlife Grants program, a federal source that aims to survey and protect animals that aren't on the endangered species list and those that aren't typically hunted or fished, according to Kart

"It's so much cheaper to help something when it's in good shape than to provide triage," Kart said. "That's probably the main reason Congress was interested in enacting this legislation."

Vermont has been eligible for a total of \$2.5 million since the program's inception in 2001, and that money has gone to numerous habitat restoration and conservation programs, Kart said, including studying and restoring Bicknell's thrush, osprey and tiger beetles, as examples.

The state is required to complete a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy in order to receive the grant funding and must provide a match with state funds, donations and funding from other organizations.

Though the strategy inventory is a requirement of the federal program, Kart indicated the chance to complete the inventory as an exciting opportunity rather than a burden.

"This is the first time this has ever been done. No state has done anything like this. It's all on uncertain territory. We're trying to do this with wildlife we know very little about. It's an incredible exploration," he said.

So far, teams of biologists, ecologists, conservationists and sportsmen and women have identified about 130 vertebrates, including mammals, birds and fish, and more than 120 invertebrates, including insects and mussels, as in greatest need of help. These include martens, shrews, voles, eastern darters, Atlantic salmon, spotted turtles, Western chorus frogs and different species of mayflies.

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"They've all been identified," Kort said of the animals in need of conservation. "We go from peregrine falcons, which we know a lot about, to little (woodland) voles, a rodent we only have historically maybe 50 records of them. There's only 50 of those and we don't know, are they very rare in the state? Or are they everywhere and people just didn't look?"

Kart said the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy has many benefits. With such a large number of wildlife experts putting their heads together, Kart hopes that the inventory will allow all individuals and organizations who are interested in conservation to be on the same page. Experts are trying to figure out what conditions are adversely affecting Vermont's wildlife. Threats may include a lack of contiguous forest, competing exotic species, or an uncontrolled harvesting by people.

The Conservation Strategy also aims to provide a science-based foundation for understanding the issues involved in addressing wildlife needs, allow conservation actions to be more proactive and less reactive, allow conservation actions of agencies, landowners, interest groups, conservation organizations and others to be coordinated so that they are more cost-effective and produce cumulative benefits and allow existing programs that provide incentives or technical assistance to private landowners for voluntary actions to conserve natural resources on private lands to be used more effectively, among others.

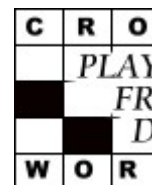
The final strategy, subject to public comment and federal approval, will likely be an electronic document the public will be able to access, Kart said. That way, an individual who is interested in property improvement for wildlife habitat could access the document and get the most comprehensive data available on land management practices.

Vermont is not alone in this mission. The 49 other states and several territories are participating in the conservation program as well, Kart said. Federal money is awarded based on a formula that takes into account a state's size as well as its population.

Kart said he is in frequent contact with those working on the same project in other states, to see what sort of management plans can be implemented regionally.

Field work will continue in the spring, and a draft of the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy is due out sometime next year.

Contact Sky Barsch at sky.barsch@timesargus.com or 223-3335.





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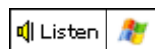
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Steve Zind



COLCHESTER, VT (2004-12-31)

(Host) The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is involved in a nationwide effort to take stock of country's wildlife. Officials say when the work is completed it will be the first time that all of the state's animals, plants and insects have been surveyed.

VPR's Steve Zind reports.

(Zind) Biologists, sportsmen and conservationists have spent a lot of time studying Vermont's game animals and endangered species. But Jon Kart of the state Fish and Wildlife Department says most of the state's wildlife doesn't fall into those categories.

(Kart) *"The other 95 percent of the wildlife in the state has been virtually ignored due to lack of funds, due to lack of biologists to work on them and manage them and care for them. Finally, just a few years ago, Congress came up with the state wildlife grant program and this program provides money for that other 95 percent."*

(Zind) The federal government is requiring states to devise what's called a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. Kart heads up Vermont's effort. He's been working with representatives from more than 60 groups to gather information about everything from crawfish to black bears.

The idea is to alert officials to species that are in trouble before they reach a critical point. Kart says the study is designed to find out which species are healthy and which are in decline, and to identify threats to species and strategies to conserve them. He says it's clear that for many species declining habitat is clearly an issue.

(Kart) *"In the Champlain Valley we have a fraction of the clay-plain forest we once had. And the number of species that might live there, well we're just starting to figure out because there's maybe 10 percent left. I guess the main piece is, we're finding key habitats that need attention."*

(Zind) Kart says the biggest surprise so far is how little we know about many species. He says once every state has completed its survey, scientists, policymakers and the public will for the first time have a big picture idea of the health of the nation's wildlife.

(Kart) *"And really be able to show what do we need to do to preserve wildlife in America. And that's going to be a great moment."*

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(Zind) Kart says a draft of Vermont Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy should be complete by spring when the state will hold public hearings on the plan. But the work will be ongoing because Kart says there's still much to learn about Vermont's wildlife.

For Vermont Public Radio, I'm Steve Zind.

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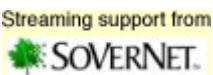
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