



DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

2025 SWAP Public Comment Summary

MassWildlife invited the public to review the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) and provide comments during a 30-day comment period (July 17 through August 18, 2025), consistent with the requirements of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We reviewed and considered all comments received, both before, during, and after this window had concluded. In total, we received 135 submissions via email or through an online form. Comments came from 107 individuals, spread throughout the Commonwealth, and 28 organizations. Of the organizations, two were towns, three were state agencies, and 22 were non-profit conservation organizations, including but not limited to The Nature Conservancy, Mass Audubon, American Bird Conservancy, and Backcountry Hunters and Anglers. All comments were carefully reviewed and considered by a team of MassWildlife staff.

The overwhelming response to the SWAP was very positive. Reviewers commented on the depth of information, ease of finding information, and quality of the visuals used. Substantive comments resulted in revisions to four of the eight elements of the SWAP: Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), Habitats, Threats, and Conservation Actions. Below, we provide a summary of comments and any SWAP revisions made in response to those comments.

Species of Greatest Conservation Need

A few comments recommended the addition of three species and one taxonomic group (mosses) to the list of SGCN. Only one of the species—white perch (*Morone americana*, diadromous populations)—met the minimum of two criteria required to designate an SGCN. Native, diadromous runs of white perch are considered in steep decline, both in distribution and abundance, by the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries. Although white perch have been introduced throughout the state, it is these declining populations that were added as SGCN.

The two other species were not added because one is extirpated (cougar) and the other did not meet at least two criteria for consideration (eelgrass). Mosses were identified as being in regional decline by two members of the public, as well as MassWildlife staff, but their

distribution and abundance in Massachusetts is uncertain at this time. Consequently, monitoring of rare mosses was added as a planned conservation action in the SWAP. Monitoring is necessary for MassWildlife to determine the conservation status of these mosses.

Habitats

We received several comments requesting the addition of more information regarding the importance of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) to marine habitats. We recognize SAV as important to several SGCN, as well as to biodiversity in the Commonwealth as a whole. SAV is already identified in the marine habitat fact sheet, which contains a link to another page detailing the importance of SAV as a unique natural community. We have also added language related to the state's Ocean Management Plan in the Conservation Actions section.

Commentors also recommended additional information be added to several freshwater habitats, floodplain habitat and rivers and streams. Fact sheets for these habitats were expanded to include information on threats and conservation actions, including the importance of terrestrial habitat restoration and land protection to aquatic habitat health.

Regarding terrestrial habitats, we received comments related to mature forests and oak forests and woodlands. One comment requested inclusion of species that are more abundant in mature forests than in other forest habitats; in response, we added reference to obligate mosses - mosses only found in this habitat type - to the mature forest fact sheet. Finally, there was a request to clarify the threats related to oak forests and woodlands. To this end, we added a discussion of mesophication—the transition of forests from fire-adapted to fire-sensitive habitats due to fire suppression efforts - to this fact sheet.

Threats

The SWAP landing webpage was revised with the addition of a “Threats” section that points to where this information can be found throughout the SWAP. Additional revisions included a description of rodenticides (especially second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides), light pollution, and plastic pollution as threats to a variety of SGCN. SGCN fact sheets have also been revised to include these where appropriate.

Conservation Actions

Revisions of conservation action sections in species and habitat fact sheets included language to address the threats listed above: rodenticides, light pollution, and plastic pollution. We also expanded the list of relevant state and regional plans (e.g., Franklin Regional Council of Governments guidebook *River Restoration Design and Permitting in*

Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Ocean Management Plan) that should be considered when planning related conservation actions.

Ongoing Efforts

Several commentors recommended the inclusion of more detailed information on habitat restoration and management practices, such as culvert replacement and prescribed fire. MassWildlife recognizes this is important information to share with the public and had already completed several habitat restoration and management practice fact sheets that are available to the public through the BioMap Habitat Restoration Center. However, this is not a SWAP requirement and so had not been completed prior to the start of the public comment period. MassWildlife is continuing to develop fact sheets for a suite of additional habitat and management restoration practices. The remaining practices are expected to become available by early 2026.

Another comment specifically asked for definition of restoration goals. Although likewise not a requirement for the SWAP, we agree that restoration goals are important. High-level goals have already been identified as part of the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game's (DFG) recently released Biodiversity Goals for Massachusetts available at mass.gov/biodiversity. DFG and MassWildlife will be engaging with conservation partners to establish more refined habitat restoration goals for 2030, 2040, and 2050.

Lastly, one comment requested a return to a pdf product instead of a web-based format. However, the web-based format aligns with the Commonwealth's accessibility standards, contributes to MassWildlife's efforts to reach a wider audience, and allows for updates to be made in real time as new information becomes available.

Thank you

We thank the many individuals and organizations that took the time to review the SWAP and provide comments. The revisions stemming from the many thoughtful comments have resulted in a stronger, more meaningful and collaborative SWAP. Although the public comment period is over, we continue to welcome feedback from our partners and public. The SWAP will be revised to incorporate new information over time.