



1 Introduction and Public Process

What is the SWAP?

In 2001, the U.S. Congress established the State Wildlife Grant Program to provide federal funds to help states conserve their species in “greatest conservation need.” In order to qualify for these funds, each state must complete and update at least every 10 years a State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) which will address the species the state fish and wildlife agency deems to be “in greatest conservation need,” while addressing the full array of wildlife and wildlife-related issues. Funds appropriated under the State Wildlife Grant Program are allocated to the states according to a formula which takes into account each state’s size and population.

In 2005, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts submitted a SWAP plan titled the *2005 Massachusetts*

Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. This was approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2006. The 2005 Massachusetts plan covered 262 animal species considered Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) across the state.

This current plan is the required update of the 2005 SWAP. The update must address the eight required elements described by the U. S. Congress and must be approved by the Regional Review Team (RRT) from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The RRT consists of two members: the Assistant Regional Director from the USFWS, or the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WFSR) Chief or a designee; and a State Director. The RRT provides a recommendation to the USFWS Director. The Director approves the SWAP. This

approval is necessary for the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) to receive funds through the State Wildlife Grant Program.

The eight required elements are:

1. **Information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife** with low and declining populations which are indicative of the diversity and health of the State's wildlife;
2. **Descriptions of locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types** essential to the conservation of the species identified in #1;
3. **Description of problems** which may adversely affect the species identified 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 their habitats;
4. **Description of conservation actions** proposed to conserve the identified species and habitats and priorities for implementing such actions;
5. **Proposed plans for monitoring** species identified in #1 and their habitats; for monitoring the effectiveness of the conservation actions proposed in #4; and for adapting these conservation actions to respond appropriately to new information or changing conditions;
6. **Descriptions of procedures to review the strategy** at intervals not to exceed ten years;
7. **Plans for coordinating the development, implementation, review and revision of the plan with Federal, State, and local agencies and Native American tribes** that manage significant land and water areas within the state or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats;
8. Congress also affirmed through this legislation that **broad public participation** is an essential element of developing and implementing these plans, the projects that are carried out while these plans are developed, and the Species in Greatest Need of Conservation that such programs and projects are intended to emphasize.

What are the SWAP's main components?

The 2015 Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan has six main components:

- Progress on conservation goals since the 2005 SWAP;
- 570 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), with a short fact sheet on each;
- 24 SWAP Habitats, into which all the SGCN are grouped, with a description of the habitats and the threats affecting each;
- Projects dealing with the effects of climate change on the SGCN;
- 6 major conservation actions, aimed at conserving the SGCN and their habitats;
- Proposed monitoring actions, to track our collective progress toward conservation.

We would like to highlight here elements that go across all six components:

- First - and **this is essential to biodiversity protection in Massachusetts** – a myriad of conservation-minded organizations, agencies, and individuals work **together as a conservation community** to conserve our diverse and precious

landscape. Federal and state government agencies, local and regional non-profits, colleges and universities, Native American tribes, municipalities: all of us coordinate and collaborate toward this shared goal. While a state agency, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW), is charged with writing this plan, this is not DFW's plan alone; **this is everyone's State Wildlife Action Plan.**

- Second, while Congress charged the states with producing plans to conserve only animals thought to be of greatest conservation need, **we have chosen to include plants** in this update, as we recognize that both plants and animals are essential components of biodiversity in Massachusetts.
- Third, plants and animals cannot exist without their specific habitats and, indeed, the landscape in which their habitats are embedded. In this plan, **we emphasize the conservation and management of habitats and landscapes** across the state, particularly in light of current and future climate change.
- Fourth, we recognize that **people** are as much a part of the state's landscape as any moth, hawk, or

orchid. Conservation of the breadth of Massachusetts biodiversity must recognize and accommodate human needs as well as those of

other species if biodiversity conservation is to succeed.

How was the SWAP developed?

The groundwork for this revision of the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) began to be laid more than 5 years ago, with the development of *BioMap2*, a joint project of the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP), part of the DFW, and the Massachusetts Chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC). *BioMap2* is a map of important biodiversity resources across the state, including species, natural processes, and landscape-scale features (see Chapter 2, Section E for more details on *BioMap2*). In the beginning stages of developing *BioMap2*, NHESP and TNC consulted with the core team of scientists at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in the Department of Environmental Conservation who developed the [Conservation Assessment and Prioritization Systems](#) (CAPS) and, as a result, incorporated CAPS data extensively in *BioMap2*. Towards the end of the production of *BioMap2*, NHESP and TNC convened outside reviewers for input; these reviewers included individuals from universities, MassAudubon, The Trustees of Reservations, the Vernal Pool Association, the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, and the Walden Woods Project. The concerns and concepts given visibility by all the stakeholders in *BioMap2* have continued to be the focus of conservation efforts by DFW and all its partners during the development of this revised SWAP.

Indeed, this ongoing process of communication, coordination, and cooperation among Massachusetts conservation partners is the norm and is, perhaps, one of the most important reasons why biodiversity conservation in this state has been remarkably successful. Here are three additional recent examples (among many) of this cooperation:

- The development of a [plan for conserving grassland birds](#) in Massachusetts, which was created by DFW and its NHESP, The Trustees of Reservations, the Massachusetts chapter of TNC, and MassAudubon. After a 30-day public comment period, this plan was approved by the Governor-appointed Board of the DFW. It is now being implemented, including substantial investments in grassland habitat restoration by DFW.

- The regional collaboration of conservation botanists, in the [New England Plant Conservation Program](#) (NEPCoP), which seeks to use surveys, habitat management, reintroductions, seed banking, research, and propagation to prevent the extirpation and promote the recovery of regionally rare plants. Based at the New England Wild Flower Society in Framingham, MA, Massachusetts collaborators include NHESP staff, TNC, Mass Audubon, the New England Botanical Club, and numerous professional and amateur botanists.
- The coordination of planning efforts for properties owned by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the largest landowner of important biodiversity resources in the state, with the DFW's NHESP. Over the past nine years, NHESP has provided DCR with extensive written documentation and guidance regarding important biodiversity resources on 255 DCR properties across the state. This information is being incorporated into DCR's planning efforts, and the two state agencies are cooperating on implementation of numerous actions benefiting biodiversity.

While DFW was responsible for compiling this revision of the SWAP, the revision is based on the continued conversations with our conservation partners. For example, the grassland bird conservation plan noted the necessity for conserving not only three species protected under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA), but also unlisted grassland birds, such as Eastern Meadowlark, American Kestrel, Field Sparrow, and Savannah Sparrow. As a result of NEPCoP efforts, the New England Wild Flower Society recently published its updated *Flora Conservanda* (Brumback and Gerke 2013), a list of regionally rare plant species, upon which we drew heavily for the list of plan SGCN included in this revised SWAP.

Public involvement in any DFW policy activities, such as sport harvest regulation changes or the creation of the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), must include a formal public review process and be approved by the Massachusetts Fisheries and Wildlife Board. Once the

Draft SWAP was completed by DFW staff, it was presented to the Fisheries and Wildlife Board at its public meeting on June 22, 2015, in Newburyport, MA. It was scheduled to be presented to the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee at its July 9, 2015, public meeting in Westborough, MA, but that meeting was canceled at the last minute. Instead, an electronic version of the draft was sent to each member of the Advisory Committee.

The members of the Massachusetts Fish and Wildlife Board, who are appointed by the Governor to represent all areas and interests of the state, include:

- George L. Darey, Chair (Western District)
- John Creedon, Vice Chair (Southeast District)
- Michael P. Roche, Secretary (Valley District)
- Bonita (Bonnie) Booth (Central District; agriculture)
- Joseph S. Larson, Ph.D. (at large; research)
- Brandi L. Van Roo, Ph. D. (at large; research)
- Frederic Winthrop (Northeast District)

The regular members of the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Committee include:

- Kathleen S. Anderson, Chair
- Gwilym S. Jones
- Joseph S. Larson, Ph.D.
- Mark Mello
- Wayne R. Petersen
- Thomas J. Rawinski
- Jennifer Ryan

The associate members of the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Committee include:

- William Brumback
- Andy Finton
- Timothy Flanagan
- Mark Pokras, D.V.M.
- Kevin Powers
- Karen B. Searcy
- Dave Small
- Bryan Windmiller

As required by the USFWS, the Draft SWAP was posted for a month on the DFW web home page, throughout July, 2015. Prior to this posting, DFW sent out an email announcement of the Draft SWAP to over 13,000 email addresses, as part of our regular email newsletter. In the release, we stated that the Draft SWAP was ready

for public comment, that it would be posted on our home page, and that we were soliciting public comment. In addition, individual emails were sent to the Massachusetts Tribes, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the USFWS, soliciting comments.

Visits to the Draft SWAP webpage totaled 1,472. From there, 72% of visitors clicked through to view the draft itself.

Notice of the Draft SWAP and request for public comments was also posted on the Division's Facebook page, on June 30, 2015, and July 6, 2015. The June 30th post reached 2,711 people, 58 of whom clicked through to the Draft SWAP webpage. The July 6th post reached 1,744 people, 30 of whom clicked through to the Draft SWAP webpage.

In addition to these public meetings and notifications to the public, we held three informational meeting for the general public:

- July 8, 2015, Wednesday, from 6 to 8:30 PM, in the University of Massachusetts Cranberry Station, 1 State Bog Rd., East Wareham, MA.
- July 14, 2015, Tuesday, from 10 AM to noon, at the DFW Western District Headquarters, 88 Old Windsor Rd., Dalton, MA.
- July 18, 2015, Saturday, from 10 AM to noon, in Room 110 at the DFW Field Headquarters, 1 Rabbit Hill Rd., Westborough, MA.

Invitations to this meeting were included in all the announcements described above. Six members of the public attended the meeting, representing three groups and organizations. These groups and organizations were:

- Franklin Land Trust
- Massachusetts Outdoor Heritage Foundation
- Westfield State University

We received 445 written comments from this public review of the Draft SWAP. They came from individuals, the Massachusetts chapter of The Nature Conservancy, and MassAudubon. We received requests to add 27 species to our list that were not already on the list of SGCN:

- Mammals: Gray Wolf, Cougar, Fisher
- Birds: Green Heron, Blue-winged Teal, Nashville Warbler, Cory's Shearwater, Manx Shearwater,

Sooty Shearwater, Northern Gannet, Atlantic Puffin, Red-necked Phalarope, Red Phalarope, Long-tailed Duck (N.B: this already was on the SGCN list), Little Blue Heron

- Insects: 8 species of bumblebees

Eight species were recommended for deletion from the list of SGCN:

- Birds: Herring Gull, Semipalmated Sandpiper, March Wren, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Red-throated Loon, Willet, Black Skimmer, Worm-eating Warbler

Comments also included other concerns and suggestions, besides additions and deletions to the species list.

All comments were reviewed and the Draft amended accordingly. The revised SWAP was presented to and approved by the DFW Board at their September 29, 2015, public meeting in Tyngham, MA.

When will the SWAP be updated?

The guidance the state agencies have received from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding review and revision of the SWAP require that this take place within 10 years.

The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife plans to review the SWAP on a 10-year timetable, which means the next update will be due in 2025. We believe that this time interval will provide us with an opportunity to have enough years of experience with the 2015 SWAP in place so that, when the formal review and revision process begins, we will have a good baseline of information available to us and our partners to make the process meaningful. The formal process of review by the Division's appointed Fisheries and Wildlife Board is a transparent and open process which ensures that anyone who wishes to provide comment has an opportunity and that those comments are addressed. During this process, the public, Federal, State, and local agencies, and the Tribes, who manage significant land and water resources or who administer programs which can significantly affect the Species of Greatest Conservation Need, will have multiple opportunities to make recommendations to add or delete species and to provide comment on other significant amendments to the SWAP that the Fisheries and Wildlife Board may consider.

However, we will not wait for the 10-year formal review to make fine-scale adjustments to the SWAP. Results-based management decisions will be made on an ongoing basis throughout the period, based on professional judgment, new information gained as a result of our activities or provided by our partners, and recognition of changing threats to the Species of Greatest Conservation Need.