

# Executive Summary

## New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan

The 2015 revision of the Wildlife Action Plan incorporates new data, methodologies and extensive public input to identify species in greatest need of conservation, habitats that are at the greatest risk, as well as land uses and activities that present the greatest threats to wildlife and habitat. It outlines more than 100 actions that can be taken by diverse stakeholders to protect and manage wildlife and habitat in New Hampshire.

In 2005 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approved New Hampshire's first 10-year Wildlife Action Plan, a document that was two years in the making and which laid out strategies for managing and protecting the full array of wildlife that occurs in the state and the habitats that support them.

Successful implementation of the NH Wildlife Action Plan has been documented. Since 2005, New Hampshire Fish & Game (NHFG) staff, in partnership with dozens of organizations, agencies, universities, municipalities, scientists, professionals and volunteers in every part of the state, has been guided by the Wildlife Action Plan during land use planning and decision-making, landscape conservation planning, and species and habitat management and conservation. 495 species and habitat actions were implemented from 2005-2015 (forty-five percent of all actions identified in the 2005 plan). Over 4,250 acres were targeted by NHFG for land acquisition or habitat management for specific species or habitat, and overall 235,000 acres of highest ranked habitat was conserved by partners. Technical assistance was provided to over 3,500 citizens, landowners, and land managers. Over 1,300 structures were installed (such as bat gates and nesting structures) or removed (such as dams and other fish passage barriers) to benefit wildlife populations. Additionally, the northeast states have worked together to conserve the wildlife that topped their lists of Species of Greatest Conservation Need including New England cottontails (work that prevented federal listing), Blanding's and wood turtles.

The benefits of investing in the Wildlife Action Plan's strategies go well beyond "saving" rare species. Wildlife-associated recreation is a significant economic engine for New Hampshire. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation determined expenditures for these activities to be nearly \$551 million in New Hampshire.



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Outdoor recreation brings in \$4.2 billion annually from New Hampshire residents and tourists (Trust for Public Land 2014). Any downturn in participation in these activities would have a negative impact on the state's economy, whereas efforts to improve wildlife and habitat in New Hampshire would likely bring more revenue into the system from hunters, anglers, wildlife watchers and outdoor enthusiasts.

There are additional economic benefits to healthy wildlife populations and habitats. People live in and visit New Hampshire, and spend money here, in large part because it is a place of great natural beauty. Yet increased development, and the associated conversion of forest and other wildlife habitat into roads, houses, and businesses, degrades the land's value to New Hampshire's wildlife. New Hampshire can support a growing population and economy while maintaining the overall health of wildlife and their habitat with better planning, new understandings of wildlife populations and their needs, increased support, and strong collaboration throughout the public, private and non-profit sectors.

All wildlife species native to New Hampshire were eligible for identification as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) including game species, nongame species, fish and marine animals. Information on their populations, habitats, risks and status throughout the northeast were considered during the process. A total of 169 species are identified as SGCN, of which 27 species are listed as state endangered and 14 listed as state threatened. The 2005 Wildlife Action Plan listed 118 species as SGCN, and 13 of those species were deemed recovered enough or stable enough not to be included on the 2015 list. The 2015 Wildlife Action Plan also identifies 27 distinct habitats that support both common species and SGCN. By identifying and protecting high quality examples of all of New Hampshire's natural communities, all of the state's native wildlife species will have access to intact habitats.

The revised NH Wildlife Action Plan (2015) habitats are based on habitat types developed by the Northeast Terrestrial Habitat Classification and the Northeast Aquatic Habitat Classification. Wildlife habitat condition was assessed for 27 habitat types. NH Fish and Game developed a methodology to assess the relative ecological condition of habitats through the use of statewide GIS data that represent species diversity, landscape context, and human impacts. Habitats were then ranked to identify priority conservation targets across all habitat types. These maps and the underlying data are used for species recovery, land conservation, and habitat restoration efforts.





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Risk assessments were conducted for 27 habitats and 169 Species of Greatest Conservation Need using a standard methodology adopted by the northeast states. Eleven different threat categories with 37 sub-categories were ranked in terms of their potential impact on each species and habitat throughout New Hampshire. Saltmarshes, warmwater rivers and streams, dunes, lowland spruce-fir forest, and vernal pools had the greatest number of high-ranking threats. Commercial and residential development, pollution, disease, and climate change are among the higher-ranking risk factors that impact the health of wildlife populations and habitats. As a part of the revision process, scientists identified where and how wildlife will be affected over the next ten years and what actions need to be taken to prevent further losses of the most vulnerable species and habitats.

The revision of the Wildlife Action Plan included an extensive amount of public participation. Over 90 wildlife experts throughout New Hampshire and neighboring states assisted in the evaluation of species for inclusion as Species of Greatest Conservation Need and assessed threats to those species and their habitats. Five public engagement sessions were held throughout the state, attended by 166 participants representing 79 communities and an array of non-profit, municipal, state and federal agencies, and private landowners. During these sessions participants identified a wide range of actions to help conserve wildlife and habitats. In addition, 1,142 people responded to an online survey to express their concerns and priorities for wildlife in New Hampshire. A complete draft of the Plan was posted on the NH Fish and Game website for 30 days and received comments from 123 people.

The successful implementation of the 2015 NH Wildlife Action Plan will require coordinated and strategic involvement by all levels of government and by landowners, non-profit organizations, universities and varied interest groups throughout the state. 117 overarching actions are identified that span monitoring, research, species and habitat management, land protection, interagency and interstate coordination, local and regional planning, education and technical assistance. Dozens more actions were identified specific to certain species or habitats. It is only through a broad-based, all-hands-on-deck approach that the state will continue to protect and manage species and habitat that improve the quality of life and the economy in New Hampshire.

New Hampshire Fish and Game uses many techniques, data sets and programs to monitor changes in wildlife populations and habitat. Where available, NHFG uses standardized protocols for



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monitoring to allow for consistency and comparison among states. New research and data is continually integrated into conservation planning, implementation, monitoring, and performance evaluation. This approach to adaptive management has been ongoing since the original Wildlife Action Plan was developed in 2005 and will continue through the next 10 years until this document is revised again.

Through existing and new partnerships, NHFG is moving forward with implementing the Wildlife Action Plan. Doing this effectively will require additional sources of financial support over the coming 10 years. It also requires prioritization of action items and participation of partner organizations. Prompt action is crucial—not only for the health and diversity of wildlife and habitats in the state - but also to ensure that future generations will have the opportunity to experience and enjoy the Wild New Hampshire we love and appreciate today.

Information from the Wildlife Action Plan is accessible through the NHFG website ([wildlife.state.nh.us/wildlife/wap.html](http://wildlife.state.nh.us/wildlife/wap.html)) and “Taking Action for Wildlife” ([takingactionforwildlife.org](http://takingactionforwildlife.org)).



New Hampshire Fish & Game Department

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**Blandings turtle (Emydoidea blandingii)**

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