

Support for Revision of State Wildlife Action Plan

Kevin Wehrly
Institute for Fisheries Research, Ann Arbor

Background

This study supports the revision of Michigan's Wildlife Action Plan (MWAP), which focuses on rare or threatened species (Species of Greatest Conservation Need). Each state is required to submit a Wildlife Action Plan every 10 years in order to receive funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's State Wildlife Grant Program. State Wildlife Grant monies come from royalties from offshore oil drilling and are allocated to the States to support conservation activities. Michigan's first Wildlife Action Plan was written in 2005 and a revision was completed in 2015.

Wildlife Action Plans provide a strategic vision for wildlife conservation, and must address eight required elements as mandated by Congress:

1. Information about wildlife species numbers and distributions
2. Descriptions of key habitats and locations
3. Descriptions of problems that may affect identified species and research needed to improve the situations
4. Description of proposed actions for conservation of the identified wildlife and their habitats
5. Descriptions of how the species and results of the actions will be monitored
6. Descriptions of how the strategy will be reviewed and updated periodically
7. Coordination with federal, state, and local agencies and Indian tribes if the plans impacts land managed by these groups
8. Public participation to identify their priorities

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify high priority conservation areas for both inland lakes and rivers.
2. To assess environmental conditions of Michigan's rivers and inland lakes.
3. To identify key environmental threats to each water body.
4. To develop map-based (GIS) tools to meet implementation needs of the Fisheries Division's MWAP programs.
5. To develop and write the aquatic portion of the 10-year conservation strategy refinement report.

Key results

In 2015, a revision was completed by a team of DNR staff representing Wildlife, Fisheries, Parks, and Forest Resource Divisions. During the revision process, it became clear that the 2005 Wildlife Action Plan was too large and lacked specific conservation goals. This together with decreases in funding made it difficult for Michigan to show progress in wildlife conservation. With the aid of tribal, federal, state, and local agencies, and conservation organizations, a more concise, goal-oriented Wildlife Action Plan was completed using a series of terrestrial and

aquatic mini-plans. In addition, improvements were made to the Wildlife Action Plan by incorporating new data on species status and threats, assessing species vulnerability to climate change, linking conservation actions to existing planning documents, and mapping places for cooperative work with partnerships.

A conservation mini-plan was written for the following six aquatic priorities: Big Rivers, Cisco (a type of whitefish) Lakes, Great Lakes Coregonids (whitefishes), Littoral Zones, St Clair-Detroit River System, and Warmwater Streams and their Headwaters. Each mini-plan was written as a stand-alone document, allowing conservation partners to easily extract information that is relevant to their interests and efforts. Each mini-plan represents a conservation strategy and consists of background information about priority habitats and focal species, realistic goals that are measurable over the next 10 years, and priority conservation actions that are necessary to meet these goals. Conservation actions are both habitat-based and species-based, and are consistent with existing conservation and management efforts. Finally, each mini-plan identifies areas of the state where the DNR and stakeholders should focus conservation efforts.

The Michigan Wildlife Action Plan serves as a comprehensive strategy for rare and threatened species and their habitats, with the goal of preventing more species from becoming threatened or endangered. The Wildlife Action Plan contains prioritized conservation actions needed to successfully conserve Michigan's key habitats and focal species, and therefore represents a guidance document for the DNR and its conservation partners for the next 10 years. Many of the conservation actions identified in the Wildlife Action Plan are linked to existing conservation and management efforts which will facilitate implementation of the plan. Essential next steps for implementation will involve making personnel and partners aware of the WAP, incorporating conservation actions into agency work plans, and developing partnerships.

Additional Information: For more information about Michigan's Wildlife Action Plan, please visit the following website:

www.michigan.gov/dnrwildlifeactionplan. Detailed project information is available at http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10364_52259_19056-333302--,00.html.