

State Wildlife Action Plan

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photo: Tim Mares, Shippensburg University

*Spotted Turtle,
species of concern*

Pennsylvania by virtue of its geography, climate and biology has an outstanding variety of fish, amphibians, reptiles and other aquatic life. For decades, and even centuries, its rich natural history has been highly valued and appreciated by citizens of the Commonwealth and the nation. Despite great strides in protecting, managing and recovering species and their habitats, much work remains to address legacy land use problems such as abandoned mine lands as well as stressors such as habitat loss, new forms of energy development, invasive species, diseases and climate change. To help secure the more vulnerable species and habitats, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) and the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC), with substantial support from other state agencies and institutions (e.g., Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and Penn State University) and numerous conservation partners, developed the foundational Pennsylvania State Wildlife Action Plan (PA SWAP).

Development of the PA SWAP

Approximately five years of development and study were required to conduct research and analysis, compile information and write the PA SWAP. Completed in September 2005, and approved by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service in early 2006, the PA SWAP has guided ongoing conservation work on the species and habitats identified within the plan. To view the PA SWAP, go to www.fishandboat.com/promo/grants/swg/00swg.htm.

Need for State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs)

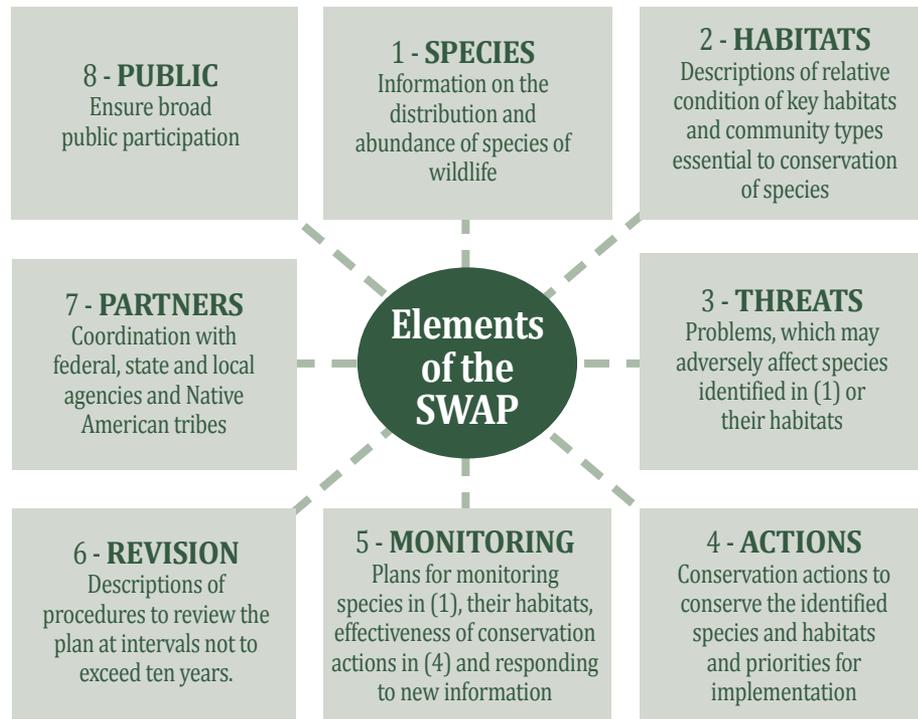
To take a pro-active approach in resource conservation, members of Congress in the late 1990s directed the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) to develop a mechanism to reduce the decline in species and the associated listings as threatened or endangered. Through

development of the SWAPs, states identified species in decline, causes of such decline and provided actions to stabilize and recover each species. The species in the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) are referred to as species of greatest conservation need (SGCN). All states and territories have an approved SWAP, which was developed by that state or territory's resource professionals, conservation partners and the public. Therefore, the SWAPs address the needs specifically identified by the state or territory.

From a financial perspective, recovery of federally threatened and endangered species on the brink of extinction has been found to be exceptionally expensive compared to corrective intervention at earlier stages of a species' decline. Hundreds of SGCNs are identified in the PA SWAP. So, this proactive approach of keeping species from becoming listed or improving their status to allow them to be delisted could potentially save many dollars in future recovery costs.

In addition to financial implications, the designation of a species as threatened or endangered is also an indication of a species in trouble. Numerous limitations are also placed on research, development and other activities associated with each species and its habitats.

Another crucial incentive for developing the PA SWAP was a Congressional requirement that each state must submit an action plan by September 30, 2005 and receive approval of their SWAP in order to receive State Wildlife Grant (SWG) funds. These funds are appropriated annually by Congress and provided by the USFWS. Prior to this date, SWG funding was used to support development of the SWAP. Although federal budget cuts have recently reduced funding for this program, Pennsylvania has historically received about \$2 million annually. These funds are shared equally between PFBC and PGC. Since 2000, PFBC has received a total of approximately \$11.77 million dollars in SWG funding, which has been leveraged with about \$9.9 million in non-federal matching funds nearly doubling Congressional investments to over \$21 million in timely, meaningful conservation work.



PFBC use of SWG funds

SWG funding has been vital for addressing the critical needs of many cryptic or sparsely populated species for which surveying has been historically limited. Guided by the PA SWAP, PFBC has developed over 50 SWG funded projects that have included surveys for rare fishes, amphibians and reptiles, the restoration of hundreds of miles of rivers and streams through dam removal projects, information management, data analysis, permit reviews and conservation planning. SWG has provided the much needed funding to address these crucial resource needs. Several of these projects are highlighted in PFBC's SWG summary documents. To view these documents, visit www.fishandboat.com/promo/grants/swg/00swg.htm.

A variety of federal and non-federal funds can be used to address the SWAP, but SWG funds can only be expended on the species or their associated habitats, which are identified in the SWAP.

Features of the PA SWAP

Each SWAP is required to address eight essential elements. These elements help ensure that the SWAPs and associated funding are used in the best interest of the resources and taxpayers.

Future of PA SWAP

As directed by Congress, all states must conduct a comprehensive update of their SWAPs every 10 years unless a state or territory opted for a more frequent revision cycle. Pennsylvania chose the standard 10-year cycle, so a revised PA SWAP must be submitted to the USFWS no later than September 30, 2015. As with the current PA SWAP, the original eight elements must be addressed in the revision.

Given the enormity of the effort, PFBC and PGC have recently begun this revision process. As we proceed, there will be opportunities for partners and the general public to provide input into the plan. We encourage you to be a part of this effort by sharing your ideas for securing Pennsylvania's natural heritage for current and future generations. For more information, visit www.fishandboat.com. □

photo-Mary Walsh, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy



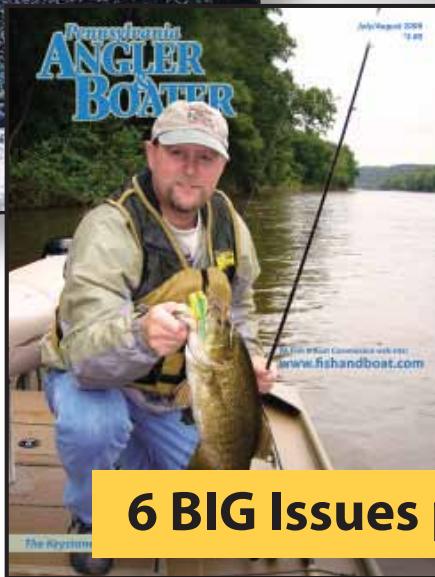
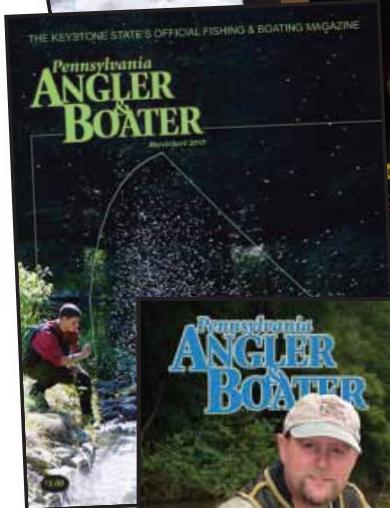
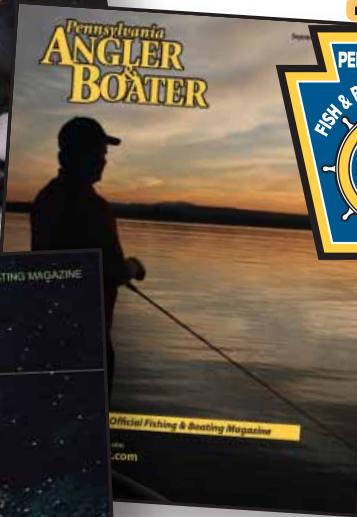
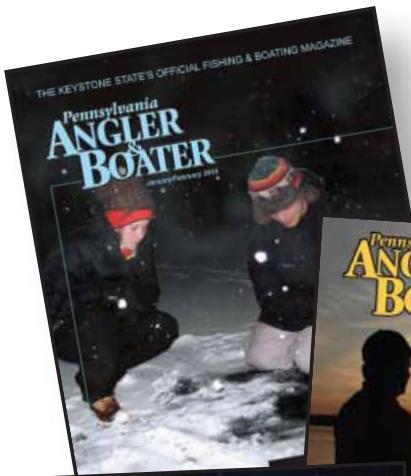
Yellow Lampmussel, species of concern

The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission has developed over 50 State Wildlife Grant funded projects that have included surveys for rare fishes, amphibians and reptiles.



Blandings Turtle, candidate species

photo-Ryan Miller, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy



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