

State Wildlife Action Plan:

A Lifeline for the Commonwealth's Imperiled Species



by Diana Day
Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission
Conservation Coordinator

In the September/October 2013 issue of *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater* magazine, several threats to Pennsylvania's species and habitats were identified, and later in September/October 2014, conservation actions to address those threats were discussed.

Beyond understanding threats and conservation actions, how do we determine what species need assistance and in what habitats they are found? How can we evaluate the conservation actions that are implemented to be sure that they are effective? These are important questions to answer if we are to protect Pennsylvania's natural heritage. The complexity of the relationships among these aspects of our imperiled fish and wildlife requires a coordinated effort.

In Pennsylvania, for the past 10 years, the answers for this coordination have been found in the Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan (i.e., plan), which has served as a blueprint for addressing the needs of Pennsylvania's imperiled species and their habitats. Beyond serving as a focal document outlining the needs for these animals, what are the benefits of a State Wildlife Action Plan? As required by the United States Congress, each state and

United States territory is required to develop a State Wildlife Action Plan for receipt of State Wildlife Grant funds from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Pennsylvania began receiving funds in Federal Fiscal Year 2001 to support development of the plan and later, after its official approval in 2006, to implement conservation actions. With their authorities for protecting, conserving and enhancing fish and wildlife, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) and Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) have led implementation. This work has been supported by the Commission's grantees, landowners and over a thousand volunteers who have offered their time and enthusiasm to help protect these important species and their habitats.

Components of a State Wildlife Action Plan

To be sure the State Wildlife Action Plan contains the necessary information for an effective document, Congress identified eight features or "Required Elements" that each plan must address (Table 1). These required elements provide for a comprehensive understanding of the species, habitats and the factors to provide for their securement.

TABLE 1. Eight required elements of a State Wildlife Action Plan.

Required Element #	Theme	Description
1	Species	Distribution and abundance of species
2	Habitat	Locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types
3	Threats	Problems, which may adversely affect species identified in the first element or their habitats
4	Actions	Conservation actions to conserve the identified species and habitats and priorities for implementing such actions
5	Monitoring	Proposed plans for monitoring species identified in the first element and their habitats
6	Revision	Procedures to review the strategy/plan at intervals not to exceed 10 years
7	Coordination with Agencies	Plans for coordinating, to the extent feasible, the development, implementation, review and revision of the plan with federal, state and local agencies and Native American tribes
8	Public Participation	Necessary public participation in the development, revision and implementation of the plan

TABLE 2. Number and types of State Wildlife Grant-funded projects administered by PFBC.

Project Category	Number of Projects
Coordination and Administration	4
Direct Management of Natural Resources	7
Data Collection and Analysis	34
Planning	3
Species Reintroduction and Stocking	2
Technical Assistance	5

To review the draft plan and provide comments through Friday, September 11, visit www.fishandboat.com/swap2015.htm.

The intent by Congress has been to proactively address the causes of imperilment and keep species from becoming federally threatened or endangered. It is well recognized that costs of recovering species on the brink of extinction are far greater than protecting and managing species when populations are healthier. Often stated is the refrain, “Keep common species common” for if a species is common, less management and fewer regulations are likely required to secure its population.

What species are in the plan? Species from all major taxonomic groups are in the plan including birds, mammals, fishes, amphibians, reptiles, freshwater mussels and many other invertebrates. Many species in the Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan are often difficult to find, because they may be low in abundance, widely distributed, difficult to collect or have features of their life history making them less available to be observed. Consequently, there has been a lack of basic information about some species. Insufficient funding has been, and continues to be, a significant impediment to gathering this information. State Wildlife Grant funding and non-federal match from the Commission and its partners have been of great assistance in addressing these data gaps. Over 61 percent of PFBC’s State Wildlife Grant projects have been directed to “data collection and analysis” to gather information on species distribution (i.e., where it occurs), relative abundance and habitats (Table 2). This data gathering has been important for making informed management decisions and has allowed PFBC to more fully understand the status of many trust species. Since 2005, PFBC has removed 16 species from Pennsylvania’s threatened, endangered or candidate list, or upgraded their status. This is due largely to the increased capacity for conducting surveys to more fully assess these species. Delistings are consistent with the intent of the State Wildlife Grants program (i.e., to keep species off of the federal threatened and endangered species list). If a species is not on the Pennsylvania list, then it is less likely it will be on the federal list.

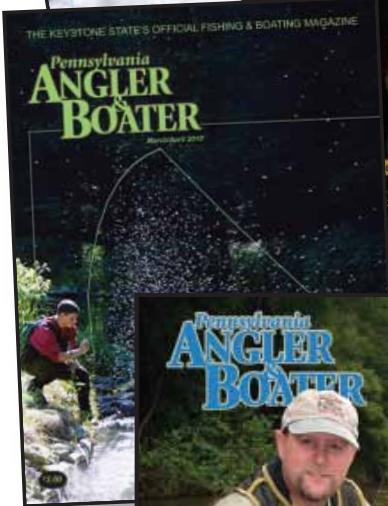
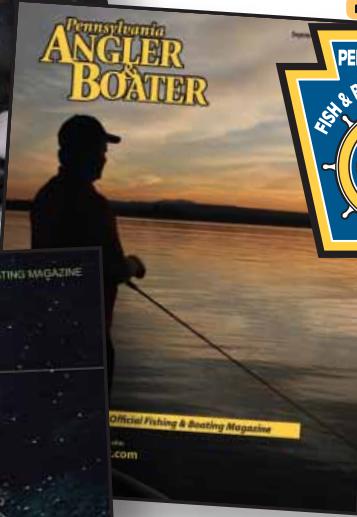
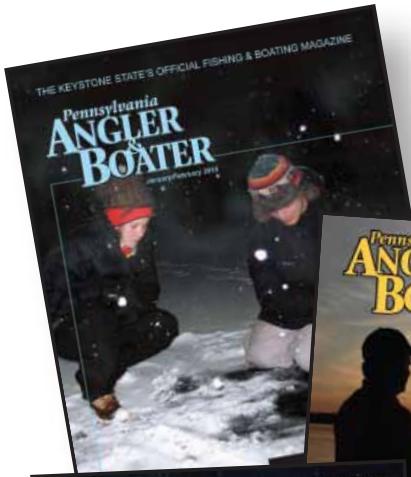
Yet, this new information has also found some species to be more imperiled than previously recognized. Since 2005, 14 species have either been listed or downgraded (i.e., changed to a more imperiled status) and will require increased attention to understand causes of imperilment (i.e., threats) and conservation actions for their recovery.

Revising the 2005 Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan

The environment is changing rapidly due to many factors including new invasive species, land use from activities such as energy development, and alterations in temperature and precipitation patterns. Therefore, it is important that the Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan is maintained to adequately address these evolving imperilments. To maintain eligibility for State Wildlife Grant funding, Congress requires states to revise their State Wildlife Action Plans no less than every 10 years (Required Element #6). Beginning in 2012, PFBC and PGC initiated a collaborative comprehensive revision of the 2005 plan. With assistance from numerous agencies, organizations and volunteers, the revised plan, due fall 2015, will guide conservation initiatives for Pennsylvania’s imperiled species for the next 10 years. Many historical and emerging threats are placing at risk the future of Pennsylvania’s natural heritage. The scope of these problems is beyond any single agency or organization, rather it requires a collective effort for success. We encourage you to get involved with implementing the 2015 Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan. The plan will be available on both PFBC’s and PGC’s websites. ☐

State Wildlife Action Plan Implementation

- PFBC has administered 55 State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program funded projects since 2001.
- 34 PFBC projects (~61%) directed to Data Collection and Analysis.
- 16 species removed or upgraded as Pennsylvania threatened, endangered or candidate species; 14 species added to, or downgraded as, Pennsylvania threatened, endangered or candidate species



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