

Connecticut Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy

What is a wildlife action plan?

Congress asked each state to develop a wildlife action plan, known technically as a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy. These proactive plans examine the health of wildlife and prescribe actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and more costly to protect.

Connecticut snapshot

Landscape: Stretching from southern coastal plains to mountain ridges and valleys in the northwest and northeast corners, Connecticut is bisected by the broad Connecticut River Valley and Metacombet Ridge. Both salt and fresh water define the state, including mountain streams, tidal creeks, numerous lakes and ponds, the Connecticut and Housatonic Rivers, and the southerly bounding Long Island Sound.

Management: The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, through its Bureau of Natural Resources has a long and successful record in wildlife management. This is credited to a dedicated professional staff, and the science-based wildlife management that has been implemented with the help of many conservation partners. Most of the success, to date, has involved the restoration of game species including birds, fish and mammals, such as the wild turkey, the striped bass and the fisher. These and other efforts were made possible by the revenue derived from both the sale of fishing and hunting licenses, and the payment, by anglers and hunters, of federal excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment as required pursuant to the



Freshwater Marsh/USFWS

public laws known today as Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson. These laws were enacted many decades ago because congress recognized that a stable, long-term funding mechanism was needed to reverse the decline in the populations of many of these species across the nation. In keeping with the Department's commitment to wildlife management, the comprehensive strategy creates a framework for wildlife conservation for the next decade.

At the heart of this strategy are conservation actions. Implementing these actions will improve the quality of life for the citizens of Connecticut by conserving the diversity of ecosystems and wildlife in the state. Additionally, the likelihood of new species being listed as endangered or threatened will be minimized, helping to keep today's common species common in the future.

Wildlife: Connecticut is home to a variety of terrestrial, freshwater, estuarine, and marine species, including black bears, bog turtles, bald eagles and burbotts. Here, too, live globally significant populations of species such as the saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow and the blue-winged warbler. Ancient species such as the horseshoe

“This is an historic opportunity to help reverse the decline of wildlife populations and the loss of key habitats, with the goal of keeping common species common and minimizing the need to list additional species as endangered or threatened.”

– Edward C. Parker, Chief, Connecticut DEP Bureau of Natural Resources



Backpack Shocking/CT DEP

crab share the state with species expanding their ranges and species that are newly discovered and as yet unnamed. Porcupines reside in the north-west corner's most remote areas; peregrine falcons hunt the skies of Connecticut's most urbanized areas; diamond-back terrapins float in the quiet covers and inlets along the states' extensive shoreline. Connecticut's wildlife is remarkably diverse for a small state. This diversity is due to the state's wide range of landscapes, waterscapes, and habitat diversity.

Connecticut's planning approach

The strategy was developed after an exhaustive two-year planning and coordination process that included the compilation and review of an extensive inventory of natural resource information and conservation programs, in consultation with a diversity of stakeholders in the state, region and nation. In addition, information on the full array of wildlife and wildlife conservation efforts in Connecticut was solicited, researched, and compiled. From these data, DEP Bureau of Natural Resources staff, an Endangered Species Scientific Advisory Committee, and conservation partners identified those species of greatest conservation need. Altogether, 475 species of greatest conservation need were identified, including 27 mammals, 148 birds, 30 reptiles and

amphibians, 74 fish and 196 invertebrates. A lack of information on the status of many GCN species, especially invertebrates, confirms the need for targeted research so that these species can be addressed in future revisions of this Strategy.

Internal and external scientific experts and stakeholders associated the GCN species with 12 key habitats and 43 sub-habitats located throughout Connecticut. Each of these habitats was linked to standardized state, regional and national vegetation classification systems. These habitats, including both terrestrial and aquatic, were identified as those of greatest conservation need in Connecticut. They include several types of forest, wetlands, and other unique communities such as sparsely vegetated areas, caves, and coastal beaches. The location, distribution and condition of each of these habitats were researched and summarized. Threats facing the key habitats and GCN species along with priority research,



Bat Research/CT DEP

| Wildlife | Total number of species | Species in need of conservation * | Threatened/endangered listed species |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Invertebrates | More than 20,000 | 196 | 170 |
| Fish | 168 | 74 | 7 |
| Reptiles and Amphibians | 49 | 30 | 18 |
| Birds | 335 | 148 | 50 |
| Mammals | 84 | 27 | 11 |
| Totals | | 475 | 256 |

* Each state is using its own criteria for this category. Connecticut defines species of greatest conservation need as those legally listed as threatened or endangered, as well as those with declining or vulnerable populations, those having special conservation or management needs, or those for which Connecticut has a global responsibility for conservation.

Wildlife highlights

| Highlight habitats | Wildlife (examples) | Issue (examples) | Action (examples) |
|---|--|--|--|
| Upland Woodland and Shrub Ownership: mix of private/public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New England cottontail • Brown thrasher | Lack of wildlife conservation on most private lands. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement specialized management techniques (e.g., burning) to benefit certain Greatest Conservation Need species. |
| Upland Herbaceous Ownership: mix of private/public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upland sandpiper • Bobolink | Loss, degradation, or fragmentation of habitats from development or changes in land use. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and protect key grassland areas. • Monitor population trends of grassland birds within Connecticut and as part regional efforts among other Northeastern states. |
| Estuarine Aquatic Ownership: mix of private/public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horseshoe crab • Atlantic sturgeon | Disturbance, destruction, alteration, or loss of critical habitat structure or function. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimize disturbance of spawning habitat of horseshoe crabs. • Work with the DEP Environmental Quality Branch to mitigate the effects of sediment pollution, water contamination, nutrients and pesticides. |

Recommended actions to conserve Connecticut's wildlife

survey and monitoring needs, and conservation actions to address these threats were then developed for each habitat. Key partnership opportunities for implementation, priority areas for conservation, proposed performance measures for each research and conservation action, and a list of sources for more information were developed for each key habitat.



Connecticut River Estuary/CT DEP

By identifying the species and habitats of greatest conservation need, and defining the conservation actions and research needs required to conserve them, the plan serves as a comprehensive guide to the conservation of wildlife in Connecticut for the next decade.

Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Connecticut

Connecticut is the 3rd smallest state in the nation and the 4th most densely populated. Despite this, Connecticut ranks third in forest cover and supports a wide variety of wildlife from black bears to Atlantic sturgeon. The challenge of balancing



Horseshoe crabs/CT DEP

“The Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy [Wildlife Action Plan] provides the greatest opportunity in the history of Connecticut for pro-active wildlife conservation.”

*–Gina McCarthy,
Commissioner,
Connecticut Department of
Environmental Protection*

natural resource protection with cultural priorities requires smart planning and an informed and committed public.

The most significant threats to Connecticut’s land and waterscapes include habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation from development; changes in land use; and competition from non-native, invasive species. Other threats include insufficient scientific knowledge regarding wildlife and their habitats (distribution, abundance and condition); the lack of landscape-level conservation; insufficient resources to maintain or enhance wildlife habitat; and public indifference toward conservation. In total, Connecticut’s plan identifies 43 threats to wildlife species and their habitats. These threats are categorized as statewide, species-focused or habitat-focused.

Working together for Connecticut’s wildlife

Connecticut’s conservation actions address threats at multiple scales and levels. For this reason, implementation of these actions will be coordinated with key partners, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Connecticut Office of Policy and Management, The Nature Conservancy, Partners in Flight, Connecticut Audubon, Audubon Connecticut, Connecticut Forest and Parks Association, Ducks Unlimited, Trout Unlimited, tribal groups, watershed groups, land trusts, and many others.

As the plan is implemented, the State will continue to use the best scientific information available, while communicating and collaborating with conservation partners and constituents. New information on species distribution and abundance derived from this effort will help these many partners make informed decisions on issues that affect wildlife and their habitats in Connecticut.

At a time when Connecticut’s wildlife species and their habitats face formidable threats, the strategy helps provide the vision necessary for conservation partners to work together over the next decade to conserve Connecticut’s wildlife.



CWCS Logo/CT DEP

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