

# Maine Wildlife Action Plan

## 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.

## Maine snapshot

**Geography:** Maine is a land rich in contrasts between the boreal and temperate, freshwater and saltwater, upland and wetland, and alpine and lowlands. The state has enormous, natural variety and owes its biological wealth to its 17.5 million acres of forests, its mountains, more than 5,600 lakes and ponds, 5,000,000 acres of wetlands, 31,800 miles of rivers and streams, 4,100 miles of coastline, and 4,613 coastal islands and ledges. Maine is the most heavily forested state in the nation, but also contains significant grassland and agricultural lands.

**Landscape:** Maine is almost as large as all other New England states combined, yet the acreage of public lands is minimal. In fact, 95% of the land in the state is privately owned, thus private landowners are integral to the conservation of our wildlife heritage and natural resources.

**Wildlife:** Maine's mosaic of diverse physical settings supports a wide diversity of wildlife. Maine has the largest population



Canada Lynx/Jennifer Vashon

of bald eagles in the Northeast. The state's islands support one of the most diverse nesting seabird populations on the East Coast, including habitat for rare species such as the Roseate and Arctic Tern, Atlantic Puffin, and Razorbill Auk. Maine's relatively clean, free-flowing rivers sustain some of the best remaining populations of rare freshwater mussels and dragonflies in the East, and host globally rare endemics, such as the Tomah mayfly and Roaring Brook mayfly. Maine's mountains and forested habitats contribute significantly to the global breeding habitat of neotropical migrants such as Bicknell's Thrush and Blackthroated-blue Warbler, and the state has some of the best examples of pitch pine-scrub oak forest remaining in New England, hosting a suite of globally rare plants and invertebrates.

## Maine's planning approach

Maine's Wildlife Action Plan addresses the full array of fish and wildlife and their habitats across the state, including vertebrates and invertebrates. The plan



Eastern Box Turtle/Phillip deMaynadier

targets species in greatest need of conservation while keeping “common species common.” The plan covers the entire state, from the coastline to the heights of Mt. Katahdin. It is intended to supplement, not duplicate, existing fish and wildlife programs, and it builds on a species planning effort that has been ongoing for nearly 40 years, a landscape approach to habitat conservation—*Beginning with Habitat*,—that was initiated in 2000, and a long history of public involvement and collaboration among conservation partners.



Pitch pine-Scrub Oak Forest/MDIFW

*Beginning with Habitat* is a habitat-based model that provides the information to create a landscape in cooperation with local decision-makers that will support all breeding species of wildlife occurring in Maine. Too often, the ability of the landscape to support wildlife is eroded by the impacts of unplanned development. *Beginning with Habitat* takes habitat data from multiple sources, integrates it into one package,

and makes it accessible to communities to use proactively. Beginning with *Habitat* partners can then work with communities to design a landscape that accommodates the growth they need with the highest resource conservation. The program is designed to help towns create a vision for their future that includes maintaining the ability of their landscape to support all wildlife 100 years from now.

## Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Maine

The Maine landscape is not static but the result of profound natural and human changes. Changes brought about by fire, land conversion, abandonment of agricultural land, timber harvesting, and the defoliation of forest by insects have had, and will continue to have, a dramatic impact on habitats and levels of biodiversity. Similarly, aquatic ecosystems in Maine have been profoundly and adversely affected by exotic introductions, dam building, pollution, pesticide use, and excessive nutrient input. These effects have occurred, and are occurring, statewide, but they differ in intensity from north to south.

Wildlife	Total number of species	Species in need of conservation <sup>1</sup>	Threatened/endangered listed species <sup>2</sup>
Amphibians & Reptiles	38	7	4
Birds	292	103	15
Invertebrates	15,000+	72	12
Inland Fish	56	12	1
Mammals (nonmarine)	59	6	1
Marine	1,727 <sup>3</sup>	13 <sup>4</sup>	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>17,000+</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>34</b>

<sup>1</sup> SGCN are species with a moderate to high potential for state extirpation without management intervention and/or protection. Assessment was based on a number of criteria and best scientific opinion of agency staff and conservation partners. Consult Maine’s Wildlife Action Plan for full details.

<sup>2</sup> These species are listed as Threatened or Endangered in Maine.

<sup>3</sup> Includes chordates (37), marine fishes (252), marine invertebrates (1,414), and marine mammals (24). Marine birds (177) are included in the bird taxa.

<sup>4</sup> Attention focused on listed marine mammals (whales), listed marine turtles, and diadromous fish from the suite of marine species. See Plan for further details.

### Wildlife highlights

Highlight habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
Marine Open Water	Greater shearwater, Red-necked phalarope, Atlantic salmon, Humpback whale, Atlantic ridley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oil spills and contamination, prey availability/competition with commercial harvesters, entanglement (fishing lines and traps), wind energy development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoid over-fishing and polluting nursery areas for herring, hake, and other fish stocks important as food for seabirds.</li> <li>Continue Oil Spill Response and planning.</li> <li>Utilize state and federal contacts for Whale Disentanglement Networks to locate entangled whales and remove gear.</li> </ul>
Deciduous and Mixed Forests	Canada warbler, Eastern box turtle, American burying beetle, Early hairstreak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Habitat fragmentation and stand conversion, development, predation and nest parasitism, contaminants, over collection/illegal collection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop specific forest management guidelines for priority species.</li> <li>Work with partners to conserve upland habitats for priority species.</li> </ul>
Rivers and Streams	Barrow's goldeneye, Wood turtle, American eel, Redfin pickerel, Boreal snaketail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Watershed conversion to impervious surfaces, invasive plants and animals, aquatic vegetation control and/or removal, development in adjacent uplands, contaminants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with partners to conserve riverine and riparian habitat.</li> <li>Remove invasive plants and animals and prevent new introductions.</li> </ul>

#### Recommended actions to conserve Maine's wildlife

*“The first Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy for Maine not only focuses on a wonderful array of wildlife, ecosystems, and habitats, but it sets in motion actions to sustain all Maine’s wildlife resources, thus ensuring these resources will be available for future generations to enjoy. The word “comprehensive” within the title was carefully chosen, and is of critical importance from a number of perspectives. Its use indicates that one of the goals of this endeavor is to engage people and organizations with a diversity of interests and viewpoints. The word also speaks to the fact that this initiative embraces a broad spectrum of species within its definition of “wildlife”; including fish, invertebrates, amphibians, and reptiles, along with birds and mammals. It speaks to the fact that the approach includes rare and endangered species, as well as common and abundant ones, and little known species, as well as highly visible and popular ones. It speaks to the fact that wildlife is valued and sought by many: photographers, nature enthusiasts, educators, philosophers, and casual wildlife watchers, as well as by hunters, trappers, and anglers. It recognizes that wildlife can be valued and appropriately managed for all those varied uses, and that conserving habitat, often at an ecosystem or landscape scale, is at the root of any comprehensive approach.”*

*– Alan Hutchinson, Executive Director, Forest Society of Maine*

The primary challenges affecting wildlife diversity in southern and coastal Maine are conversion and fragmentation of habitats. This area has the highest level

of plant and wildlife diversity in the State, yet is also one of the most desirable areas for development. Sprawl—the conversion of rural lands for urban or suburban purposes—in the greater Portland area is occurring at one of the fastest rates in the country. Nesting sites for endangered birds, such as the Piping Plover and Least Tern, have been lost to development. Of 2,700 lakes in southern and coastal Maine, more than 200 have been harmed by development, and another 300 are at risk if current trends continue.

Northern Maine has remained largely unsettled but not un-

touched. As a result of increased demand for forest products and the opening of more extensive road systems as transportation corridors, the nature of timber harvesting in Maine has changed over the last 50 years. Though still the most heavily forested state in the country, Maine's forested landscape is strongly influenced by human use.

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## Working together for Maine's wildlife

As is the case in most undertakings of this magnitude, Maine's Wildlife Action Plan could not have been completed without the assistance of many devoted individuals who infused their expertise and passion into this effort. The Plan brought together scientists, managers, hunters, anglers, conservationists, landowners, academics, guides, community leaders, and many others with an interest in working together for Maine's wildlife. All worked to challenge assumptions, provide constructive criticism, and encourage the Department to complete what many of them believed to be an historical effort on behalf of fish and wildlife conservation in Maine. These collaborative efforts, and their accomplishments, provide the foundation on which Maine's Wildlife Action Plan was built and will be implemented, reviewed, and revised.

Five Taxa Committees were responsible for identifying species of greatest conservation need and assessing needs, habitats, threats, and conservation actions. A Coalition of more than 70 state and federal agencies, tribes, conservation organizations, and other partners provided guidance and input into the development and review of the Plan. An Implementation Team will oversee program development and implementation, review progress, reevaluate priorities, foster partnerships, build cross-state alliances, and leverage funding.

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Freshwater Mussel Surveys/Beth Swartz