

# Pennsylvania 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.

## Pennsylvania snapshot

**Geography:** From east to west, Pennsylvania's ecosystems include an estuary on the Delaware River, woodlots and wide agricultural valleys in the southeast, deciduous forests from the central ridges to the extensive mixed forest of the Allegheny high plateau, and glaciated woodlands and wetlands to Lake Erie in the northwest.

### Landscape:

Pennsylvania is part of six major river basins -- Ohio, Lake Erie, Susquehanna, Potomac, Genesee, and Delaware River drainages -- and contains numerous wetlands, nearly 4000 lakes and over 83,000 miles of flowing waters ranging from high-gradient coldwater streams to large warm-water rivers. These waters support a high diversity of fish, freshwater mussels and other aquatic life, dependent upon Pennsylvania's management and protection efforts. One example, the Chesapeake logperch in the lower Susquehanna River, may

represent an estimated 40% of the global population of this species.

**Wildlife:** Sitting at this ecological crossroads means that Pennsylvania plays an



Short-eared owl/ Dan Brauning, PGC

important role in conserving many diverse species and habitats, both resident and migrant, common and rare. For example, the Commonwealth's expansive hardwood forests, which cover 62% of the landscape, provide critical wildlife habitat for abundant white-tailed deer and an array of neotropical migrant songbirds.

## Pennsylvania's planning approach

Pennsylvania's Wildlife Action Plan vision and the focus of the plan development encompass five guiding principles:

**Conserving species at-risk:** Species exhibiting warning signs today must be conserved before they become imper-

*"The development of the Wildlife Action Plan is strategic action, designed to proactively manage and safeguard Pennsylvania's declining fish and wildlife."*

*– Carl Roe,  
Executive Director,  
Pennsylvania Game  
Commission*

*"The health of our fish and wildlife is an indicator of overall environmental conditions and therefore protecting and improving the habitats for these vulnerable species can provide benefits for humans as well. Pennsylvania's Wildlife Action Plan will serve an important role in guiding resource agencies, institutions and organizations in managing and protecting the diversity of the Commonwealth's fauna."*

*– Dr. Douglas Austen,  
Executive Director,  
Pennsylvania Fish and Boat  
Commission*

*“These efforts surely will become milestones in Pennsylvania’s wildlife conservation timeline. They are historic and far-reaching, and represent our greatest opportunity yet to shape the future of fish and wildlife management and expand coverage to more species than ever before.”*

*– Peter S. Duncan,  
retired Pennsylvania  
Game Commission  
Executive Director*

iled at the regional, national or global level.

**Keeping common species common:** Native wildlife species must be retained in healthy numbers throughout their natural ranges to maintain their role in ecological processes.

**Recognizing the unique role of Pennsylvania:** Action Plan strategies and priorities incorporate the needs of species and their associated habitats for which Pennsylvania holds particular responsibility.

**Voluntary partnerships for species, habitats and people:** The resources of public and private organizations throughout the Commonwealth must be brought to bear on this effort – common contribution to common values.

**A comprehensive strategy:** The strategies and priorities are presented at the species, habitat, and species-suite levels so that the diverse stakeholders of the Wildlife Action Plan can find meaningful recommendations regardless of their scale and scope of interest.

## Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Pennsylvania

**Factors affecting habitat are critical in**

**Pennsylvania.** The features to be addressed include maintaining and improving existing habitat quality by minimizing habitat fragmentation and loss of wetlands, and improving forest regeneration. These factors also play a significant role in water issues.

**Protecting surface and groundwater,** instream flows, and water quality is an important aspect of Pennsylvania’s plan. There are numerous urban and industrial demands upon the water sources of Pennsylvania due to expanding human population and habitat degradation.

Stable funding sources need to be developed in order to address species-of-concern. The dynamic landscape and complexity of the problems requires a long-term and sustained initiative to protect and recover species of greatest conservation need. Stable funding will be critical for maintaining the successes achieved thus far.

## Working together for Pennsylvania’s wildlife

Pennsylvania developed the State Wildlife Action Plan through extensive public input. The major components of that input took the following forms:

**A facilitated meeting,** hosted by the PGC

Wildlife	Total number of species	Species of conservation concern*	Threatened/endangered species
Mussels	65	41	22
Snails	>170	52	23
Crayfish	13	4	1
Insects	>10,120	312	161
Fish	194	69	20
Amphibians	36	15	4
Reptiles	37	22	5
Birds	394	44	17
Mammals	73	14	6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>&gt;10,854</b>	<b>572</b>	<b>259</b>

\*Species of concern excludes “maintenance” species

### Wildlife highlights

Highlight habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
<b>Wetlands</b>  <b>Ownership:</b> <b>Private and Public</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wood turtle</li> <li>• Jefferson salamander</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Habitat loss</li> <li>• Road mortality</li> <li>• Degraded habitats including polluted waters</li> <li>• Collection for use as pets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect wetlands and vernal pools by encouraging buffers and implementing management activities, developing conservation easements.</li> </ul>
<b>Rivers and Streams</b>  <b>Ownership:</b> <b>Private and Public</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eastern sand darter, Spotted darter and 11 other darter species occur in this drainage (French Creek Drainage)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Siltation from non-point sources</li> <li>• Potential biotic interactions with invasive species (round goby in Lake Erie Drainage)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Riparian habitat protection through conservation easements (e.g., Landowner Incentive Program) and other management activities.</li> <li>• Conduct surveys to evaluate populations and determine if additional conservation measures are needed.</li> </ul>
<b>Northern Hardwoods Forest</b>  <b>Ownership</b> <b>Public: 25%</b> <b>Private: 75%</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cerulean warbler</li> <li>• Wood thrush</li> <li>• Many forest birds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forest health,</li> <li>• Lack of regeneration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private Landowner Assistance Program outreach and other forms of landowner outreach to priority habitats and species occurrences, funded with LIP and SWG.</li> <li>• Deer management designed to sustain deer populations that don't impede healthy regeneration</li> <li>• Acid rain mitigation</li> </ul>

### Recommended actions to conserve Pennsylvania's wildlife



Wood turtle/ Andy Shields, PFBC, [www.fish.state.pa.us](http://www.fish.state.pa.us)

and PFBC, with conservation partners from across Pennsylvania worked together to identify the overall vision, issues, and goals of the State Wildlife Action Plan. These partners have continually provided comments and suggestions as Commission staff worked to develop Strategic and Operational Objectives in order to accomplish partners' vision for comprehensive wildlife conservation in the Commonwealth.

**Scientific committees** of the Pennsylvania Biological Survey selected and prioritize lists of species of concern.

**Collaboration with the Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership's** (PBP) stakeholder and public input process to assist in developing a comprehensive statewide Pennsylvania Biodiversity Conservation Plan, including a) 500 surveys presented for the public to complete at conferences and meetings attended by PBP and b) a series of facilitated focus groups designed to gather critical information and input from a broad range of stakeholders

**Survey of public input** conducted in May-June of 1996, with more than 1,000 persons participating.

**Assorted facilitated meetings**, including an "All-Bird Workshop" in November 2004.

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Jefferson salamander/Andy Shiels, PFBC