

Utah 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.

Utah snapshot

Geography: In Utah, climate varies by elevation, ranging from semi-arid to montane. With deserts like the Great Basin and Mojave in the state, stream-side areas are the richest landscapes in terms of species variety and wildlife numbers. The Great Salt Lake, too, creates a desert oasis for migrating birds.

Landscape: Federal agencies manage over two-thirds of Utah's landbase. An innovative coalition, the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development, is working to resolve issues like introduced non-native species and apply best management practices to address changes to wildlife communities associated with agriculture, mining, and urban development.

Wildlife: Approximately 700 species of wildlife and thousands of species of insects inhabit Utah. Almost 250 species of birds use habitats within the Great Salt Lake environment alone. The Great Salt Lake supports colonies of rare birds, such as the American pelican, while other species that visit the lake are salt water specialists that rely upon the unique life forms in and around the lake.



UDWR

Utah's planning approach

To create its wildlife action plan the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources forged an on-going public-private partnership from the beginning of the planning process that will continue through plan implementation. Planners used the best science and knowledge available to document the status and condition of species and habitats, identify and understand threats, develop effective responses and initiate monitoring assessments. The plan serves as a foundation for cooperative conservation efforts.

Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Utah

Utah identified many threats to species of conservation need and to the top wildlife habitats in the state, including development, stream channelization,

Habitat loss: With a rapidly urbanizing population, prime agricultural lands with high wildlife values are being subdivided and developed along the Wasatch Front and Back. Additional habitat loss occurs from road and trail expansion, energy development, transmission corridors, and surface mining.

Fire cycle alteration:

Though fire suppression and the resulting lack of disturbance degrade habitat for many wildlife species, increased fire frequency and intensity caused by certain invasive, non-native plant species, such as cheatgrass, also pose a habitat threat. In the shrub-steppe rangelands, drought has created a precipitous drop in winter forage in northeastern and southeastern Utah



Bighorn capture/UDWR

environmental contamination, habitat loss, invasive species, fire cycle alteration, and human disturbance.

for both wildlife (such as greater sage-grouse, pygmy rabbits and mule deer) and livestock.

“Fish and wildlife in Utah will benefit from the strategic and science-based planning that went into this plan, which is one of the first wildlife action plans to be approved in the nation.”

– Ralph Morgenweck,
Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Mountain-Prairie Region

Utah taxa groupings	Total	Tier I*	Tier II**	Tier III***
Amphibians	10	2	2	6
Birds	44	8	12	24
Fish	29	15	7	7
Mammals	39	5	14	20
Mollusks	40	5	24	12
Reptiles	34	1	12	21
Totals	196	4	71	90

*Tier I species are federally threatened, endangered and candidate or conservation agreement species.

**Tier II species are Utah’s “state species of concern” which the UDWR manages to prevent from being federally listed.

***Tier III species are those species that: have need more information, indicate a habitat at-risk, demonstrate a marked decline in status, or are facing an immediate threat.

Wildlife highlights

General Threats	Specific Threats	General Conservation Action	Specific Conservation Action	Priority
Development	Direct loss of habitat/habitat fragmentation	Education and Outreach	Educate the public and conservation partners about the consequences of losing grassland habitat.	M
		Permanent Conservation of Habitat	Acquire conservation easements or fee-title to key grassland areas.	M
		Restore Degraded Habitats	Improve degraded grassland habitats to compensate for areas lost to development.	H
		Increase Coordination with Federal/State Agencies and Private Landowners	Coordinate with agency planners so that management activities enhance, not degrade, important grassland habitats; coordinate habitat management activities with private landowners who own key wildlife habitats.	H
Fire Cycle Alteration	Cheatgrass and other non-native species are favored by (and result in) increased fire frequency	Restore Natural Fire Cycle Where Appropriate	Use herbicides, mechanically remove, or otherwise control invasive non-native vegetation; plant desirable vegetation, including use of non-invasive, non-native perennial grasses when ecologically indicated to fight invasive annuals.	H
		Restore Degraded Habitats	Use herbicides, mechanically remove, or otherwise control invasive non-native vegetation; plant desirable vegetation, including use of non-invasive, non-native perennial grasses when ecologically indicated to fight invasive annuals.	H
Improper Grazing Practices	Over-grazing or grazing at the wrong time of year can greatly degrade the value of habitat for wildlife	Improve Grazing Practices	Change season of use as appropriate; introduce time-controlled grazing with appropriate rest-rotation schedules.	M
		Habitat Monitoring and Research	Conduct grazing research and monitor results of grazing changes to determine response in habitat conditions.	M
Invasive Plant Species	Cheatgrass and noxious weeds can out-compete desirable plant species	Restore Degraded Habitats	Use herbicides, mechanically remove, or otherwise control invasive non-native vegetation; plant desirable vegetation.	H
		Education and Outreach	Educate the public about the negative impacts from cheatgrass.	M
		Determine and Map Distribution	Map areas impacted by invasive non-native plant species.	M
		Restore Natural Fire Cycle Where Appropriate	Restore natural fire cycle by restoring degraded habitats.	H
		Habitat Monitoring and Research	Conduct research into new methods of invasive species control.	M

Recommended actions to conserve Utah’s grassland wildlife

Examples of grassland species: Black-footed ferret, Utah prairie-dog (Tier I); Long-billed curlew, Grasshopper sparrow, Gunnison’s prairie-dog, White-tailed prairie-dog (Tier II); Idaho pocket gopher, Coachwhip, Glossy snake (Tier III); land ownership is predominantly by the federal agency, Bureau of Land.

“It ... (Utah’s Wildlife Action Plan) ... also helps conserve the places that bring peace and relaxation to our daily lives, (a)nd it shows us how to cooperatively conserve the wildlife and natural places that are important to many of the family traditions we have in Utah.”
– James Karpowitz,
Director of the Utah
Division of Wildlife
Resources

Working together for Utah’s wildlife

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) recognized that a successful wildlife action plan required the insights and input of a coalition of Utahns. To develop the plan, the Division encouraged participation among interest groups and solicited input into proposed actions for wildlife enhancement and land management, particularly through the Utah Partnership for Conservation and Development.

Since 2003, collaborative habitat restoration at the regional and community levels has been crucial for the success of the Utah Wildlife Action Plan. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources gave presentations across the state over an eight-month period, initiating more than 50 dialogs with strategy partners like the Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society, Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife and the Utah Anglers Coalition. Such collaboration has resulted in not only informed partners and stakeholders, but shared resources, agendas and projects as well.



Otter release/UDWR

Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

David Chadwick
Wildlife Diversity Associate
444 North Capitol St. NW, Suite 725
Washington, DC 20001
Tel: 202.624.7890
chadwick@fishwildlife.org
www.teaming.com
www.fishwildlife.org

State Contact

Janet Sutter
Sensitive Species Specialist
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
1594 W. North Temple
Salt Lake City, UT 84114
Tel: 801.538.4713
janetsutter@utah.gov
www.wildlife.utah.gov/cwcs/