

West Virginia Wildlife Conservation 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.

West Virginia snapshot

Geography: West Virginia, with a mean elevation of 1500 feet, is the most elevated state east of the Mississippi River. Because of the wide variation in elevation, latitude and longitude, West Virginia is considered a “transition state,” having attributes of the northern and southern states, and to some extent, eastern and western states. With a population of only about 1.8 million, it is also one of the most rural states in the East.

Landscape: Approximately 12 percent of land in West Virginia is public land, with the remaining 88 percent in private holdings. Thus, West Virginia faces the challenge of working with private landowners to conserve species in greatest need of conservation.

Sphagnum Bog in a High Elevation Wetland/ Elizabeth Byers, WVDNR



Wildlife: With its wealth of contiguous quality forested habitats, West Virginia is crucial to sustaining viable populations, as well as providing source populations, for many of the declining neotropical migratory bird species. The state’s pristine mountain streams harbor a broad array of fish, mussels, dragonflies and damselflies, and other aquatic invertebrates.

West Virginia’s planning approach

Recognizing that in many cases vital conservation information on the natural history, abundance and distribution of those species defined as in greatest need of conservation is incomplete, the West Virginia Wildlife Conservation Action Plan charts a course for science-driven, active conservation of fish and wildlife resources over the next decade. Key features of the plan are its emphasis on



Golden-winged Warbler/Peter and B.B. Wood

“The plan is really a roadmap for habitat conservation in West Virginia. That’s a goal shared by hunters, anglers, birdwatchers, nature photographers and everyone else who enjoys the outdoors.”

*– Frank Jezioro, Director
West Virginia Division of
Natural Resources*

conservation actions, including a habitat conservation initiative, and the collaborative approach to plan implementation. The plan is both species- and habitat-based, its core component being the 128 species and species group fact sheets that will function as mini-plans within the broader comprehensive plan. Although the plan covers a ten-year span, it is actually only the first step in a continuous, adaptive management process for collaborative conservation of the state's fish and wildlife resources and the habitats that sustain them.



Allegheny Woodrat
/Jeff Hajenga, WVDNR

Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in West Virginia

The West Virginia Wildlife Conservation Action Plan identifies eight major conservation issues, although 12 others were identified in the planning process and identified in the individual fact sheets. The three major regional conservation issues include mining, commercial and residential development and atmospheric acid deposition. The remaining five major conservation issues occur statewide and include stream sedimentation, forest health, invasive species, water pollution and in-stream, wetland and riparian habitat loss.

Wildlife	Total number of species	Species of conservation concern*	Threatened/ endangered**
Birds	234	74	1
Mammals	72	26	3
Amphibians	49	19	1
Reptiles	39	20	0
Fish	180	73	0
Mussels	69	43	6
Crayfish	21	9	0
Snails (land)	130	10	1
Cave invertebrates	190	87	1
Butterflies	128	31	0
Tiger beetles	12	12	0
Stoneflies***	12	12	0
Odonates****	146	72	0
Moths*****	92	17	0
Spiders*****	401	18	0
Totals		524	13

*Each state is using its own criteria for this category. The West Virginia focus is on species that exhibit a lack of specific or quantifiable data, small or declining populations, are found in habitats facing imminent threats, or on the federal threatened and endangered species list.

**West Virginia has no state designated threatened or endangered species. Species listed in this column appear on the Federal Threatened and Endangered Species List.

*** Species listed here are those that appear only on the West Virginia Natural Heritage List of Tracked Species. It is estimated that there are 135 species in the state.

****Odonates are dragonflies and damselflies.

*****The species listed here represent only those species in the WVDNR database.

*****The species listed here represent only vouchered specimens; it is estimated that there are about 650 species in the state

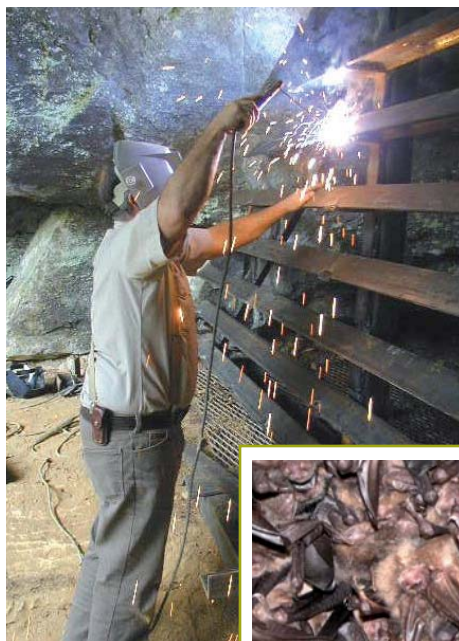
Wildlife highlights

Highlight habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
Red Spruce Mix of public/ private ownership	Northern Flying Squirrel, Cheat Mountain Salamander	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spruce conversion, loss to development and forest fragmentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the Monongahela National Forest to develop and carry out a red spruce management plan • Conserve additional habitat through easement purchases or donations
Caves Mix of public/ private ownership	Several rare bat species, many globally rare cave invertebrates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss to development and sedimentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cave gates • Monitoring • Easements • Management of surface areas for recharge of cave streams
Streams Mix of public/ private riparian ownership	Candy Darter, Crystal Darter, Elk River Crayfish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mine drainage, atmospheric acid deposition, sedimentation, and losses of riparian buffers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stream liming • Catalogue potential habitat conservation projects for implementation with a variety of partnerships

Recommended actions to conserve West Virginia's wildlife

Working together for West Virginia's wildlife

Over a period of two years the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources held several meetings with 31 experts to review the lists of candidate species in order to select the state's species in greatest need of conservation, as well as to analyze threats to the species and to recommend conservation actions. The Division offered the draft plan for review to 57 cooperators, including the West Virginia Wildlife Diversity Council, Partners in Flight, Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Oglebay Institute, Nature Conservancy, New River Gorge National Park, Entomological Society and Trout Unlimited. In addition, plan partner meetings were held to provide an opportunity for face-to-face input. The West Virginia Conservation Action Plan was also available



Building a Cave Gate at Hoffman-Schoolhouse Cave/Craig Stihler, WVDNR



Hoffman-Schoolhouse Cave—Winter Roost of the Federally Endangered Virginia Big-eared Bat /Craig Stihler, WVDNR

“The work that we do and much of the work that the Division of Natural Resources undertakes have similar goals—the protection of plants, animals and natural communities through the protection of their habitats. . .The West Virginia Wildlife Conservation Action Plan is a further step that strengthens this commitment to conservation and gives direction for successful conservation action and implementation.”

*—Thomas Minney,
Conservation Programs
Manager, The Nature
Conservancy in West Virginia*

for public review on the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources website. At the National Hunting and Fish Days Celebration held at Stonewall Jackson Lake State Park, the plan was presented at a Division-sponsored booth, which was visited by over 300 interested individuals. Finally, every two years the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources will host a

public symposium to share information on the species and habitats listed in the plan, reassess the species in greatest need of conservation, set priorities for the next two years and revise the plan. In that way the Conservation Action Plan will remain a dynamic and useful document to conserve wildlife and their habitats for the future.



High Elevation Wetland—Otter Creek, Monongahela National Forest/Elizabeth Byers, WVDNR

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