

G. Appendix VII: Prefaces developed for October 1, 2005, submittal; letters from former Commissioner Campbell and former Director McHugh

I. Preface

A. A letter from Commissioner Bradley M. Campbell

Accompanying this introductory letter is a remarkable document – the New Jersey Wildlife Action Plan (heretofore referred to as the Plan or WAP), a far-reaching blueprint for the protection and management of the wildlife species in our state that are most in need of conservation.

Every state was/is required to develop such a Plan that focuses on species of greatest conservation need during 2005 in order to qualify for federal funds through the State Wildlife Grants program. While the Plan focuses on special need species and describes the conservation work that will benefit those species, ultimately all fish and wildlife species in New Jersey will benefit from this work. An array of partners, including other government agencies, conservation groups, private landowners and other members of the public, helped develop the New Jersey WAP. It lays the foundation for better coordination of wildlife research and management among programs within the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, state and federal agencies and many partners in the conservation community.

As you review it, I believe you will agree with me that the Plan goes far beyond a basic outline. The WAP lays out the formidable challenges that today confront these important species in New Jersey and all those who care about them. In the most densely populated state in the nation, such challenges are inevitable.

Yet, as the WAP makes clear, particularly for a state its size, New Jersey is blessed with an incredible variety of natural resources and amazingly diverse ecosystems and wildlife communities. To protect them, the Department of Environmental Protection, our Division of Fish and Wildlife and the division's cutting-edge Endangered and Nongame Species Program (ENSP) cannot do the job alone. Fortunately, as the Plan also makes clear, we are blessed with a cornucopia of enthusiastic, dedicated partners and collaborators.

Indeed, for me the most noteworthy aspect of the Plan isn't just that, for the first time ever, it provides a comprehensive road map of what needs to be done for particular species, groups of species or particular habitats. It's that it identifies which people, agencies or organizations, whether inside or outside of state government – are best suited to execute each strategy. Not surprisingly, given the fact that this document itself is the product of extensive collaboration, in most cases the Plan calls for multiple collaborators to get involved – including the public.

Underpinning the Plan are seven core principles. These are:

1. Addressing Habitat Destruction

Habitat destruction, the greatest threat to New Jersey wildlife, is analogous to the "taking" or killing of wildlife since it denies organisms the capacities crucial to existence, such as the ability to successfully feed and/or reproduce. New Jersey is currently moving towards adopting

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endangered and threatened species rules paralleling federal rules that protect both rare wildlife and their associated habitats.

2. Advancing Stewardship and Restoration

Another key focus of the WAP is managing lands for biodiversity. To this purpose, the WAP seeks dedicated funding for biodiversity land management on both public and private lands and solicits statewide application of *best management practices* to improve or maintain the ecological integrity of NJ's natural communities.

3. Continuing Sound, Science-based Wildlife Management

In order to control overabundant species where they occur, such as white-tailed deer, the WAP suggests a statewide, multi-organization effort to increase public education and awareness of the benefits that hunting of certain species has for all wildlife and natural communities.

4. Developing Government-wide Invasive Species Policy

Invasive species, both plant and animal, greatly threaten natural biodiversity and often out-compete and crowd out native species in the absence of natural controls. The WAP calls for concerted efforts to control invasive species and for the implementation of bioremediation plans to restore natural biodiversity to the New Jersey environment.

5. Implementing Recovery Plans for All Imperiled Species

In our role as good stewards of the land and flora and fauna that inhabit it, recovery plans for all endangered, threatened, and other rare species must be devised and implemented.

6. Continual Updates of Scientific Data and Geographic Information

Up-to-date scientific data and geographic information is the foundation of the WAP. To guide the Plan as it evolves through regular reviews and updates, we will rely upon habitat mapping, species surveys, and scientific modeling to determine the most critical habitats and wildlife in greatest conservation need.

7. Confronting Challenges in Urban Environments

As the nation's most densely populated state, New Jersey's urban environment presents unique challenges to the conservation and management of rare wildlife. The WAP addresses issues such as managing rare species that have become adapted to urban environments, identifying oases of urban wildlife habitat, restoring natural resources within urban environments, and minimizing impacts of contaminants and toxins to wildlife.

The WAP divides the state into five distinct physiographic landscape regions, and then further subdivides each of those regions into distinct zones delineated by watersheds and other geographic features. Once you locate the particular zone where you live or in which you are interested, you can read about:

- Key habitat features
- The wildlife of greatest conservation need found in those habitats
- Threats to this wildlife and the habitats upon which they depend
- Habitats
- Conservation goals

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- Conservation actions needed to achieve those goals
- Partners best suited to help achieve those goals
- How progress toward these goals will be monitored

New Jersey faces unprecedented wildlife conservation challenges to address habitat disturbances and destruction caused by widespread development, human activities, recreational vehicles, contaminants, and invasive and overabundant species. Fortunately, we have dedicated partners working with us to protect our resources including non-profit conservation groups and hunter and angler organizations among them. Moreover, we have worked diligently during the past 30 years to identify critical fish and wildlife species and habitats that have special conservation needs and to develop effective strategies to restore and conserve all of our fish and wildlife species.

Our Wildlife Action Plan ties together much of our wildlife data and management strategies so we can provide a brighter future for New Jersey's rare species and important habitats. It also offers New Jersey residents many new opportunities to play a role in wildlife conservation by volunteering to help biologists on research and management projects, through the use of habitat management applications on private lands and by supporting conservation actions and organizations that are key to this Plan's success. I invite everyone to review the Wildlife Action Plan and become involved in conserving New Jersey's wildlife in any way that you can.

Bradley M. Campbell
Commissioner
NJ Department of Environmental Protection

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B. A letter from Director Martin J. McHugh

In the past century the United States has had many tremendous wildlife management success stories. At the turn of the century, many of our common game species could have been considered endangered species candidates if an endangered species act had existed back then. The successes in wildlife management for game species and the foundation for all of our wildlife success stories, both nationally and here in New Jersey, flowed from an engaged and committed public of hunters, anglers and conservationists. At the core of this success has been the partnerships of state wildlife agencies working with federal natural resource agencies, national organizations and local groups to accomplish the science and put into place the programs we have today to conserve fish, wildlife and habitat.

One of the latest programs these partners helped initiate is State Wildlife Grants, which focuses on the more recent wildlife challenges involving non-game species, species that are dwindling due to habitat impacts and species that are at risk of becoming threatened and endangered. State Wildlife Grants is a program that provides federal funds to state wildlife agencies for the conservation of species of greatest conservation need. Initiated by Congress in 2000 under the original moniker of the “Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program,” State Wildlife Grants have provided over \$400 million to state fish and wildlife agencies across the country to deliver on-the-ground conservation. Over the last six years, State Wildlife Grants has become the nation’s core program for preventing wildlife from becoming endangered.

In New Jersey, the State Wildlife Grants provided through our partners at the United States Fish and Wildlife Service has significantly bolstered funding for our Endangered and Nongame Species Program which relied primarily on private contributions such as the income tax check-off and wildlife license plate sales. As a result of State Wildlife Grants, the Division of Fish and Wildlife has been able to put nearly \$4 million into cutting edge wildlife diversity projects for the protection of species ranging from bald eagles to bog turtles and the preservation of habitats from the forests of northwest New Jersey to the marshes of Delaware Bay.

In accordance with the State Wildlife Grants Program, every state was required to submit a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy to the USFWS by October 2005 for review and approval in order to qualify for future federal funds. This was a huge undertaking for every state including New Jersey and over the last year, the Division of Fish and Wildlife has worked hard to complete this Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. However, in the course of finalizing the document, it has become clear that for it to be truly effective, it will never be truly complete. As with all wildlife programs and especially one geared towards “at risk” species, the management strategies must constantly be monitored and adjusted to adapt to changing conditions, new science and progress to objectives.

Consequently, this is a “living document” and while we are submitting this version to the USFWS by October 1, 2005, we are doing so with the understanding that we will continue to make revisions to the strategy on a regular basis. Therefore, we are extending the time for accepting comment during the federal review period and we will take those comments into consideration in developing the first revision to this ongoing strategy, which we plan to complete by late winter in 2006.

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The October submission of our Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy in conjunction with those of the 49 other states presents an exciting and unique moment in the history of wildlife management. For the first time, the 50 state strategies will provide a national picture and

blueprint for conservation action for wildlife with the emphasis on preventing wildlife from becoming endangered. This unprecedented nation-wide effort from the state's perspective will set forth plans for action in each state. In addition, when the strategies are viewed as a whole, regional and national issues and action needs will emerge. The strategies will therefore become a "call to action" in each state, regionally and nationally. In recognition, the conservation partners responsible for State Wildlife Grants have determined that following the historic submission of these 50 Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies, they will henceforth be referred to as the state's Wildlife Action Plans to reflect the dynamic, active and broad affect these will have in conjunction with existing wildlife management programs.

State Wildlife Action Plans will have a broad conservation affect for two primary reasons. First off, much of the conservation that results will benefit not only the species of greatest conservation need, but all wildlife species. Secondly, these Wildlife Action Plans are not just action plans for state wildlife agencies, but they are action plans for all agencies and organizations that have a desire or a need to contribute to conservation. The State Action Plans will leverage conservation actions from many conservation partners such as foundations, environmental and conservation groups, who participated in the action plan development and wish to have input into future revisions and implementation. Leveraging will also include current and new conservation partners ranging from the US Forest Service, USGS and state/federal departments of transportation as they all look to the Wildlife Action Plans for conservation options to fulfill their own program needs. Finally, the investment Congress made in the State Wildlife Grants Program will yield additional conservation dollars as funds are leveraged from other federal programs like the Farm Bill and from state match programs in every state.

The investment in New Jersey has already yielded a conservation return, as the State Legislature passed a bill to ensure adequate funding needed for our state match and the Governor signed it into law this summer. New Jersey Conservation organizations had a major role in making the case for providing this match and similar efforts will be undertaken in other states. We believe there will be further conservation returns as agencies and organizations look to our Wildlife Action Plan to address the threats to our state's important natural resources.

As our Wildlife Action Plan sets out, the greatest threats to New Jersey's wildlife include habitat loss, destruction, alteration, and fragmentation. This has been a recurring theme within our state for years as it is the most densely populated state in our nation with an annually increasing population requiring additional homes, roads, commercial buildings, schools, etc. Additional threats include, but are not limited to, invasive species (flora and fauna, aquatic and terrestrial), pollution, and unsustainable land management practices. To address these threats, the Wildlife Action Plan provides a common comprehensive conservation vision with guidance and specific actions for both long- and short-term management efforts that can be implemented by government and non-government agencies, conservation organizations, land stewards, and private landowners. The Wildlife Action Plan will guide partners in conservation in a cooperative effort to minimize the threats and improve habitat quality for NJ's wildlife species of greatest conservation need.

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New Jersey's Wildlife Action Plan lays the foundation for better coordination of wildlife research and management between the programs within the Division of Fish and Wildlife, state and federal agencies, and the many partners in the conservation community. Our Wildlife Action Plan and those of the other states present an opportunity - not to build a separate conservation model for all-species conservation - but to expand on a rich tradition and a winning formula by broadening objectives, public engagement, and funding sources to address the greatest threats to our wildlife.

On behalf of the wildlife professionals at the Division of Fish and Wildlife, I would like to express our gratitude to all those who participated in the development of this historic Wildlife Action Plan. We look forward to the future input we hope to receive on our Wildlife Action Plan and the coordination with existing and new conservation partners as we begin to implement the Wildlife Action Plan upon its approval by the USFWS.

Martin J. McHugh
Director
NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife