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## SECTION 8 – CONSERVATION PARTNER INVOLVEMENT IN THE WAP

### 8.1 BACKGROUND

As stewards of the fish and wildlife resources of Pennsylvania, the Game Commission and Fish and Boat Commission have critical roles to play in managing and protecting the public trust resources of the Commonwealth. However, the Commissions cannot achieve this mission alone. The agencies rely heavily on partnerships with other resource agencies, private conservation organizations, and individual stakeholders, in the academic and conservation communities, who care deeply about the fish and wildlife resources of the Commonwealth. Partnerships enable the Commissions to stretch limited resources, in terms of funding, programming and staffing, thereby enabling the agencies to be more effective stewards of our fish and wildlife resources.

The theme of partnerships is one that the Commissions will continue to recognize as a keystone of future programs and initiatives. The Commissions will strive to work with conservation partners and stakeholders in order to maximize the application and effectiveness of existing funding and augment current funding sources for existing efforts. The importance of working in partnership with conservation stakeholders is emphasized multiple times throughout the PGC and PFBC Strategic Plans as well as in the goals and objectives of the WAP. Positive impacts on the resource will be a key measure of effectiveness and success as the agencies continue to foster partnerships to benefit the fish and wildlife resources of Pennsylvania.

### 8.2 WAP DEVELOPMENT – CORE PROJECTS & PARTNERSHIPS

The PGC and PFBC recognize that a comprehensive fish and wildlife conservation strategy must involve conservation stakeholders. To this end, the agencies have funded several projects with SWG/WCRP monies that contribute to development of the WAP. These projects were completed in partnership with various conservation stakeholders throughout Pennsylvania and are listed below.

**Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Terrestrial Vertebrates: A Guide for Research, Management, and Conservation – Required Element #1-5**

This project will result in the publishing of an edited technical volume on the rare, threatened, and endangered terrestrial vertebrates of Pennsylvania. The volume will provide detailed species accounts, maps, and research and management recommendations for each species of vertebrate special concern in the state as well as an overview of the regions and habitats of greatest relevance. This document will be invaluable to land managers and project planners across the Commonwealth.

**Partners:** Wilkes University and taxonomic experts throughout Pennsylvania.

**Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Fish: A Guide for Research, Management, and Conservation – Required Element #1-5**

This project will result in the production of an edited technical manuscript on the rare, threatened, and endangered fish of Pennsylvania. The volume will provide detailed species accounts, maps, and research and management recommendations for each WAP-Priority Species in the state as well as an overview of the regions and habitats of greatest relevance. This document will be invaluable to land managers and project planners across the Commonwealth. **Partner:** Pennsylvania State University

**Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Invertebrates: A Guide for Research, Management, and Conservation – Required Element #1-5**

This project will result in the production of an edited technical manuscript on the rare, threatened, and endangered invertebrates of Pennsylvania. The volume will serve as a first attempt to identify the WAP-Priority Species in the state as well as provide an overview of the regions and habitats of greatest relevance provide. When possible, detailed species accounts, maps, and research and management recommendations will be presented for high-priority taxa. This document will be invaluable to land managers and project planners across the Commonwealth. **Partner:** Carnegie Museum of Natural History

**Mammal Atlas of Pennsylvania - Required Element #1**

This project will provide distribution information for all mammal species in Pennsylvania. Priority will be given to State-listed and Federal species. The project will also create a database containing all known records of specimens of Pennsylvania mammals. The result of this effort will be useful to future researchers and planners, as it will show the present and historic distribution of species in Pennsylvania. **Partner:** The Nature Conservancy

**Breeding Bird Atlas Planning – Required Element #1, #2**

The goal of this project is to ensure that the 2nd bird atlas generates the most important information on bird distributions that can reasonably be obtained in a manner which is scientifically indisputable, employing the volunteer birding community and necessary paid staff. This project will not implement the atlas survey, but is intended to develop the features and infrastructure needed to organize a truly successful atlas project. **Partner:** Pennsylvania Audubon

**2nd Breeding Bird Atlas – Required Element #1-2**

This statewide effort will produce the most important information on bird distributions that can be obtained in a manner that is scientifically indisputable, employing the volunteer birding community to generate the majority of data. It will provide an updated database presenting the modern distribution of all nesting bird species, resulting in a comparison with the first (1980s) effort. New features will provide a look at relative abundance patterns as statewide. Like the first atlas, the 2nd effort will update historic locations of species of special concern statewide, providing new information for management of rare species. The atlas project will provide new levels of understanding of all bird populations that will ensure their future conservation. **Partner:** Carnegie Museum of Natural History's Powdermill Nature Reserve

**Important Bird Areas Conservation Project – Required Element #2**

This project seeks to plan and implement community-based habitat protection and management on high-priority Important Bird Areas (IBA) statewide to benefit state-listed/declining birds and biodiversity conservation. The Important Bird Area program, with its landscape approach, will

deliver substantial conservation benefits for all wildlife in Pennsylvania. This project will accelerate the protection of habitats for state-listed (Endangered, Threatened, Candidate) birds at Important Bird Area (IBA) sites throughout Pennsylvania. An IBA database will be developed, monitoring programs initiated, communication tools developed, and community-based conservation planning initiated, with an emphasis on the thirty IBAs (330,000 acres) most critical to the long-term survival of state-listed bird species. Pennsylvania was the first state in the nation to initiate the Important Bird Area approach, and the program continues to be a jewel in the crown of conservation in the Commonwealth. **Partner:** Pennsylvania Audubon

#### **Pennsylvania Important Mammal Areas - A National Pilot – Required Element #2**

The "important areas" concept embodies an approach to habitat management that is proactive, voluntary rather than regulatory, involves the general public in habitat conservation, and relies on science-based criteria to identify sites that provide essential habitat. First applied to birds (the national pilot project for birds was also conducted in Pennsylvania), implementation of an Important Mammal Areas Project will again put the Pennsylvania Game Commission at the forefront of efforts that blend science and public involvement to conserve biodiversity. **Partners:** National Wildlife Federation, PA Wildlife Federation, Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

#### **Initiation and/or Completion of County Inventories of Pennsylvania – Required Elements #2, #7**

The County Inventory, developed by The Nature Conservancy and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, provides information on locations and management recommendations for natural areas and rare species to state, county, and local officials, the public, the development community, and land managers. Completed Inventories provide county planners with invaluable site-specific information in relation to land use decisions and conservation of open space. Inventory information is also useful to public land managers in the development of management plans and enables developers to avoid costly delays to their projects. Traditionally, counties provide a portion of the funding to complete Inventories. SWG funds for this project will be used to initiate inventories in counties that cannot afford to provide the county-portion of funding. **Partners:** The Nature Conservancy and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

#### **Building a Biodiversity Conservation Movement in Pennsylvania – Required Elements #3, #4, #7, Public Involvement**

This project addresses the need for a comprehensive plan for biodiversity conservation in Pennsylvania. Immediate benefits of a biodiversity conservation plan include 1) establishing informed priorities for inventory, monitoring and conservation; 2) identifying species of greatest conservation concern; 3) proposing solutions for unmet wildlife management needs; 4) increasing cooperation and coordination among stakeholders concerned with biodiversity. Longer-term benefits include more-informed citizens regarding the impacts and importance of biodiversity to their lives. **Partner:** Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership.

### 8.3 SELECTING WAP-PRIORITY SPECIES – STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

The PGC and PFBC have relied, and will continue to rely, upon our conservation partners to help provide the technical expertise and assistance needed to ascertain the species of greatest conservation concern, their distribution, abundance, critical habitats, key threats, management recommendations, and other information presented in this WAP.

In January 2004, the Commissions initiated an expert-opinion process whereby the agencies requested the various taxonomic Technical Committees of the PA Biological Survey to identify species of greatest conservation concern for the Commonwealth, in fulfillment of Federal WAP requirement #1.

Since January 2004, technical committees or appropriate sub-committees have worked to develop the species lists that will be considered WAP-Priority species. Technical committees are made up of taxonomic specialists from various universities and conservation organizations as well as natural resource agency biologists. The PABS Technical Committees are the official advisory bodies to the PGC and PFBC on matters of species status and regulatory listing, reintroductions, distribution and abundance, etc. Each committee represents 10-30 taxonomic experts, many of whom have devoted their entire careers to species of concern. Technical Committee findings therefore provide the best scientific assessment of a species' status in the Commonwealth.

The following committees were consulted in this expert opinion process:

Pennsylvania Biological Survey

- Mammal Technical Committee
- Ornithological Technical Committee
- Fisheries Technical Committee
- Herpetological Technical Committee
- Invertebrate Technical Committee

The species of greatest conservation concern lists generated by this expert opinion process, as well as the factors used to select WAP-Priority species, are presented in Section X of the WAP.

In addition, the PGC has contracted with the Carnegie Museum of Natural History to assist in the development of technical materials relating to invertebrates: Identifying species of concern, critical habitats, key threats, management recommendations, etc; Providing a "snapshot" of the state of invertebrates in the Commonwealth so the state's natural resource agencies can prioritize research and management efforts.

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## 8.4 WAP SPECIES ASSESSMENTS – TAXONOMIC EXPERT INVOLVEMENT

Taxonomic experts from across the Commonwealth have continued to assist in the development of technical materials for the WAP. Various individuals have labored extensively to produce individual species assessments for each of the WAP-Priority species.

The WAP species assessments, presented in Appendix 3, are designed to provide information in fulfillment of the following Federally-Required WAP elements:

- Distribution and abundance of species of concern (Element #1) – including sources of information used to develop assessments, as well as recommendations on acquiring the information if lacking.
- Key habitats (Element #2) – key habitats and relative conditions described in enough detail that the state can determine *where* conservation actions should occur (by physiographic region and/or watershed) and *what* conservation actions should occur.
- Descriptions of problems that adversely affect WAP-Priority species (Element #3) – threats and problems are described in sufficient detail to develop focused conservation actions; threats are considered regardless of their source; research and survey priorities are identified where additional information on threats is needed; priorities are described sufficiently to allow for the development of research and survey projects after the Strategy is approved.
- Descriptions of Conservation Actions (Element #4) – species assessments describe prioritized conservation actions sufficiently to guide the implementation of the WAP through execution of specific projects and programs; if available information is insufficient to identify conservation actions, then appropriate research and survey needs are identified for the species.
- Monitoring Needs (Element #5) – plans for monitoring WAP-Priority species are identified in the Species Assessments when such information is available; when monitoring protocols have not been developed for a species/habitat, that is identified as a research/survey need; WAP-Priority species that could serve as indicator species for monitoring habitats/guilds are identified.

Though species account authors and editors received limited payment for their efforts, the monetary compensation did not adequately cover the time invested in preparing a Species Assessment: In some cases, authors put in upwards of 150 hours in completing a species account. The Commissions would like to publicly recognize the commitment and dedication of these authors. Their desire to further the conservation of the target species and to support the comprehensive management approach of the Commissions is greatly appreciated.

## 8.5 WAP VISION AND GOALS – PARTNER INVOLVEMENT

Stakeholder involvement began in Pennsylvania's WAP as soon as the Commissions were aware of the federal WAP requirement. Beginning in 2002, planning staff began to build internal and external awareness of the WAP process by: 1) informing conservation partners of the WAP requirement; 2) presenting information on the seven Federally-required elements of the WAP at various technical and public forums, and; 3) seeking partner involvement in the planning process.

The stakeholder involvement process was formalized in March 2004, when the Game Commission and Fish and Boat Commission hosted a daylong-facilitated meeting to develop the WAP Vision, Purpose, Issues and Goals. In this meeting, participants were provided with a background on the WAP requirement and asked to identify issues that would affect the development of the WAP as well as conservation needs that should guide formation of the WAP.

The following stakeholder organizations sent representatives to participate in this meeting:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Pennsylvania Biological Survey  
The Wildlife Society – PA Chapter  
Pennsylvania Audubon  
Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership  
Pennsylvania Habitat Alliance  
The Nature Conservancy  
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy  
Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs/PA Wildlife Federation  
Penn State School of Forest Resources  
Allegheny National Forest  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Department of Conservation of Natural Resources – Bureau of Forestry

The WAP vision, purpose and goals that resulted from the day-long facilitated meeting are presented in *Section 9: WAP Vision, Issues, Goals*.

## 8.6 WAP PHASE 2 and IMPLEMENTATION – PARTNER INVOLVEMENT

Working with stakeholders to complete the first iteration of the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, the PGC and PFBC have identified and summarized the statewide threats, issues, and management needs of the nearly 200 species of greatest conservation concern in the Commonwealth. Phase 2 of the WAP will focus on coordination with stakeholders throughout the Commonwealth to refine the statewide WAP at the level of the physiographic area.

Although widespread threats and conservation issues (habitat loss, fragmentation, degraded habitat quality from non-point source pollution, invasive species, acidification) are occurring at a statewide level, each physiographic area of the Commonwealth has its own stresses, conservation issues, planning documents, priority species and habitats and stakeholders. Pennsylvania is a large and diverse state. There are many stakeholders and conservation organizations, some of which have been developing comprehensive planning efforts and tools for years.

The PGC and PFBC, being the jurisdictional agencies for fish and wildlife in the Commonwealth, have much to contribute to these ongoing planning efforts. The Commissions have begun the process by developing a statewide WAP. However, in order to maximize results, our agencies must carefully coordinate with their conservation partners to complement planning efforts and identify the necessary implementation tools and strategies. To fully implement the WAP and realize the potential of the SWG program, Phase 2 emphasis must be placed on coordination and implementation at the physiographic area level.

In Phase 2 of the WAP, we propose to continue working with conservation partners and stakeholders in the Commonwealth's diverse physiographic areas to fine-tune the recommendations of the WAP. In Phase 2, we will work with our conservation partners to review the statewide WAP, identify priority and responsibility species, assess habitat-level threats and conservation issues within each physiographic area, pursue opportunities that exist within each physiographic area to address threats, improve coordination among conservation stakeholders and planners, and perhaps gain more secure, long-term funding for the important job of conserving Pennsylvania's fish and wildlife heritage. In addition, the Commissions will begin to develop the multi-species management guidance and other tools necessary to incorporate the management of WAP-Priority species into existing programs.

## **8.7 THE PENNSYLVANIA BIODIVERSITY PLAN PROCESS – STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT**

The Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership (PBP), a public-private partnership dedicated to building a biodiversity conservation movement in the state, was formed in March 2000. From its inception, the PBP has included representatives from state agencies, industry, universities, and conservation organizations. PBP's mission is to conserve biodiversity statewide by promoting communication and cooperation among a broad spectrum of stakeholders.

PBP is unique among biodiversity organizations in Pennsylvania in its involvement from the beginning of government, business and industry, and environmental organizations as equal partners. Although members represent a diversity of backgrounds and opinions, a consensus has emerged that a plan focusing on strategies and opportunities for protecting Pennsylvania's biodiversity must be developed and implemented. With significant financial

support from WCRP and SWG, as well as other public and private sources, the PBP is presently producing a strategic plan for conserving biodiversity statewide.

Although the PBP plan and the WAP are both efforts aimed at statewide conservation planning, an important difference exists between the two efforts. Because of the unique makeup of the PBP, the PA Biodiversity Plan will focus more on statewide needs and strategies relating to the relatively broad areas of Policy, Science, Education, Funding, Bioinformatics, Public Relations, and Stewardship. Because the PGC and PFBC are the jurisdictional agencies for fish and wildlife (and their habitats) in the Commonwealth, the WAP focuses much more on the statewide research, management, and conservation needs of species and habitats of concern.

Pennsylvania is fortunate to have both planning efforts underway; each effort complements the other. High-level policy recommendations that do not relate to on-the-ground species and habitat-level concerns would be of limited use to landowners and resource managers, whereas detailed species and habitat recommendations are of limited use unless some of the broader-scale statewide needs relating to policy and funding are addressed.

The other benefit of having both planning efforts underway simultaneously is that both efforts benefit from public input. Since the issues surrounding biodiversity conservation are inextricably linked with the issues surrounding the conservation of fish and wildlife diversity, the PGC and PFBC have incorporated the public involvement results of the PBP into our WAP planning. As discussed in Section VII and XI, the public comment forms developed by the PBP regarding threats to biodiversity, the need for planning, and priority habitats for PA, have helped inform the development of the WAP. Likewise, the information gleaned from Stakeholder Focus Groups, summarized below, will help inform the development and implementation of the WAP, particularly when it comes to coordination with other agencies.

### **Stakeholder Focus Groups**

The primary purpose of the stakeholder focus group process is to gather primary (first-hand) information from specific stakeholders. A secondary purpose is to increase awareness on the part of stakeholders of PBP and its efforts to develop a comprehensive statewide plan for the conservation of biodiversity in Pennsylvania.

The facilitation process is designed to provide a high level of objectivity and to mitigate or reduce as much as possible any participant bias and response contamination. Each topic (see below) is presented individually and participants are allowed a few minutes to record their responses on index cards. The responses are collected and read to participants without comment. Discussion as a group prior to the recording responses was not allowed. A brief time period is available at the end of all focus groups for any additional questions and comments. The topics presented to each focus group are:

- What are the five most important issues relative to biodiversity in Pennsylvania?

- What are the five least important issues relative to biodiversity in Pennsylvania?
- What role should [participant's organization/type of organization] play in biodiversity conservation in Pennsylvania?
- Relative to accomplishing the specific mission of the organization(s) participants represent, what should be in the biodiversity conservation plan?
- Relative to accomplishing the specific mission of the organization(s) participants represent, what should **not** be in the biodiversity conservation plan?
- What is the participant's vision of the best achievable condition of biodiversity in Pennsylvania in the year 2013?
- What format(s) should the plan be in? Should the plan include maps? If yes, what types?
- Other suggestions and comments.

**Participants:** The following groups have participated in the stakeholder focus group process to date.

- Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, Harrisburg, PA (13 May 2003)
- Southeastern Pennsylvania land trusts, Doylestown, PA (9 Sep 2003, co-hosted by the Heritage Conservancy)
- Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership Board Meeting, Warren, PA (18 Sep 2003)
- Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Professionals, Eastern Region Section, Blue Bell, PA (1 Oct 2003)
- Pennsylvania Biological Survey Steering Committee, Kempton, PA (9 Oct 2003)
- Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Professionals, Western Region Section, Pittsburgh, PA (20 Oct 2003)
- Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Harrisburg, PA (27 Oct 2003)
- Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Educators (7 Nov 2003)

### **Summary of Results**

A full report of PBP focus group results is included in Appendix 1.

## **8.8 STATE WILDLIFE GRANTS PROGRAM – PARTNER INVOLVEMENT**

The distribution of SWG funds is based upon land area and population size. Therefore, Pennsylvania has received a large proportion of these funds, ranking in the top six states in funding received. To date, Pennsylvania has received nearly \$10 million in new funding, which has greatly benefited fish and wildlife conservation efforts in the Commonwealth.

At the outset of this program, Pennsylvania's agencies partnered with local and statewide conservation interests to support high-priority conservation efforts in order to maximize the use of funds and the impact of projects. This approach has been held up as a national model by the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Working with partner organizations, the agencies have been able to intervene in wildlife conservation and management at the state level before species require protection under the Federal Endangered Species Act. The agencies are proud of the program they have created with the State Wildlife Grants funding.

Since federal funds were first appropriated to the state fish and wildlife agencies, the PGC and PFBC have sought public assistance in identifying high-priority projects to receive WCRP/SWG funds. Each year since 2000, joint press releases announcing the annual 'Call for SWG Projects', are distributed to more than 5,000 outlets, including news media, sportsmen's clubs and license issuing agents. Press releases are also distributed via PRNewswire, a service that distributes news releases to every daily newspaper in Pennsylvania, as well as a handful of major weekly papers. Additionally, press releases are posted on both Commissions' websites.

In addition to stakeholder solicitation via press release, hardcopies of the Project Nomination Packets, with all necessary forms, are direct mailed to more than 800 conservation organizations, sportsmens' clubs, and individuals. The Project Nomination packets also are posted on both Commission websites. Project nominations are received from across the Commonwealth. In late-spring/early-summer, staff of the PGC and PFBC Diversity sections review and rank the submitted project proposals.

More than one-third of Pennsylvania's SWG funds have been distributed to conservation organizations through this public nomination process. The remaining funds are typically used by the PGC and PFBC to accomplish Commission-priority projects that address species of greatest conservation need. It is important to note that these Commission-priority projects also are accomplished in partnership with conservation stakeholders. Historically, the Commissions have internalized very little of these funds, functioning more often as a conduit to getting funding "on the ground" for high-priority projects. More than two-thirds of WCRP/SWG funding, minus administrative and WAP planning costs, has been distributed to conservation partners for high-priority projects.