## SECTION 5 – INTRODUCTION TO THE WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN

#### 5.1 BACKGROUND

Recognition that a cooperative, non-adversarial conservation approach is required to address fish, wildlife, and habitat issues at a continental scale led the U.S. Congress to create the State Wildlife Grants Program (SWG) in 2001. This annually appropriated funding aims to reduce declines of fish and wildlife at the state level before an imperiled species require federal protection under the Endangered Species Act. As part of the SWG program, each state is required to produce a Wildlife Action Plan (WAP) that includes the seven elements described below.

# **WAP Scope**

The Pennsylvania Strategy has incorporated the following federally required elements:

- 1. SPECIAL CONCERN SPECIES STATUS "uses such information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low population and declining species as the State fish and wildlife department deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of wildlife of the State;
- 2. Habitat Inventory "identifies the extent and condition of wildlife habitats and community types essential to conservation of species identified under paragraph (1);
- 3. THREATS ANALYSIS "identifies the problems which may adversely affect the species identified under paragraph (1) or their habitats, and provides for priority research and surveys to identify factors which may assist in restoration and more effective conservation of such species and their habitats;
- 4. RECOVERY PLANS "determines those actions which should be taken to conserve the species identified under paragraph (1) and their habitats and establishes priorities for implementing conservation actions;
- 5. MONITORING AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT "provides for periodic monitoring of species identified under paragraph (1) and their habitats and the effectiveness of the conservation actions determined under paragraph (4), and for adapting conservation actions as appropriate to respond to new information or changing conditions;
- 6. PLAN UPDATING "provides for the review of the State wildlife conservation strategy and, if appropriate, revision at intervals of not more than 10 years;
- 7. COORDINATION "provides for the coordination to the extent feasible the state fish and wildlife department, during the development, implementation, review, and revision of the wildlife conservation strategy, with federal, state, and local agencies, and Indian tribes that manage significant areas of land or water within the state, or

administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of species identified under paragraph (1) or their habitats."

## 5.2 PENNSYLVANIA-WAP PURPOSE

This document is the final and most important part of the strategy for the management of nongame wildlife in Pennsylvania. For the first time in the histories of our agencies, this document presents a strategic approach, a "comprehensive strategy," for managing the Commonwealth's nongame fish and wildlife resources. The purpose of this strategy is to present the mission, goals, objectives and strategies the Game Commission and Fish and Boat Commission will pursue to meet their nongame species management mandates. In so doing, this WAP will help define our Commissions' direction in nongame resource management through 2010.

This strategy attempts to provide a statewide perspective on conservation, presenting geographic, species, and habitat priorities. A statewide approach is essential because many species breed, migrate, and winter in more than one location. A salamander may cross township boundaries to reach the vernal pool where it breeds, the range of an endangered darter may flow through and past several counties, and migrating warblers pass through the length and breadth of the Commonwealth. A comprehensive strategy is required before comprehensive results can be realized.

This Strategy is a blueprint for fish and wildlife conservation and, as such, is not intended to replace existing or developing conservation plans at the local, regional, or state level. In fact, there are several complementary planning efforts underway that should assist in the implementation of statewide conservation action. Statewide conservation plans such as the PA Biodiversity Blueprint, The Nature Conservancy's ecoregional planning process, DCNR's Forest Resource Management Plan, as well as individual organizations' strategic plans all have a role to play in conserving the state's valuable fish and wildlife resources. The conservation and management strategies required for several hundred species are far too complex and variable across the Commonwealth to be treated in just one plan. Further, implementation – that critical step in the process where a plan becomes an on-the-ground conservation action – must take place at state, county, township, and local levels. To be most effective, however, such actions should be guided by an overall strategy: this type of statewide guidance is what the WAP is designed to provide.

It is recognized that once statewide guidance is presented, it will be up to regional and local conservation partners to identify priority species and habitats that fall within their jurisdiction, set goals and objectives for their organization's involvement, identify local issues and opportunities, and develop strategies for implementing local conservation actions. Content of partners' plans may not be in full synchrony with the content of this WAP as a natural consequence of working at different scales and in different operating environments.

It will be important over the next few years to resolve differences and arrive at ever better conservation objectives at all scales and for all fish and wildlife species.

# **5.3 PENNSYLVANIA-WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN VISION and GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

In Pennsylvania, the vision and purpose statements for the Wildlife Action Plan were developed through facilitated meetings with conservation stakeholders from across the Commonwealth (see Section 8 for information on the WAP stakeholder involvement process). The statements are simple in wording, but profound in scope:

#### **WAP Vision:**

Pennsylvanians working together to attain sustainable wildlife populations, communities and ecosystems and to prevent and reverse the declines of species.

## **WAP Purpose:**

To conserve Pennsylvania's diverse wildlife to maintain its role in ecological processes, and to protect and enhance species of conservation concern.

The WAP vision and purpose encompass five guiding principles:

- Conserving Species At-Risk. Species exhibiting warning signs today must be conserved before they become imperiled at the regional, national or global level. Allowing species to become threatened or endangered results in long-term and costly recovery efforts whose success often is not guaranteed. Species that have attained endangered or threatened status must not be protected from only extinction, but also must be recovered. For this reason, WAP strategies and priorities incorporate the needs of Immediate Concern, High Level Concern, and PA Vulnerable species and their associated habitats.
- **Keeping Common Species Common**. Native wildlife species, both resident and migratory, must be retained in healthy numbers throughout their natural ranges to maintain their role in ecological processes. Common species are the foundation upon which ecological processes operate; aquatic insects feed trout, forage fish feed sport fish, meadow voles feed foxes, hawks, owls, snakes, and acorns feed a staggering diversity of species. It is said that "little things run the world," and nowhere is this more true than in the native ecology that surrounds Pennsylvanians. For this reason, WAP strategies and priorities incorporate the needs of Maintenance Concern species and their associated habitats.
- **Recognizing the Unique Role of Pennsylvania**. Pennsylvania straddles the border of many ecological systems and exhibits a diversity of physiographic provinces. As such, the Commonwealth is home to a mixed variety of species from northern and southern climates,

lowlands and uplands, grasslands and forests. Pennsylvania's ecosystems morph from marine and estuary environments in the southeast corner, through rocky mountain ridges and wide agricultural valleys in the central region, eastern deciduous forests of the central ridges to the northern forest of the Allegheny high plateau, then end with the glaciated regions and Great Lakes in the northwest corner. Few other states can compare with the diversity of flora, fauna and habitats that mix throughout our borders. Sitting at this ecological crossroads means that Pennsylvania plays an important role in conserving many diverse species and habitats, both resident and migrant, both common and rare. For this reason, WAP strategies and priorities incorporate the needs of Responsibility Concern species and their associated habitats.

- Voluntary Partnerships for Species, Habitats and People. To be successful, a central premise of the WAP is that the resources of public and private organizations throughout the Commonwealth must be brought to bear on this effort. Human and capital resources must be combined, coordinated, and increased in order to achieve success in conserving fish and wildlife populations and their habitats. Our audience includes decision-makers, land managers, scientists, private landowners, and conservation organizations across the Commonwealth, who collectively have the ability to meet the WAP's ambitious goals for fish and wildlife conservation. The power of conservation lies in the synergy that builds when diverse, committed partners work together toward a common goal. For this reason, the WAP presents an extended narrative section on the importance of private lands and a summary of tools for conserving habitat.
- A Comprehensive Strategy. Although the WAP identifies Conservation Priority Species, no one advocates single-species conservation as the only, or best, approach to addressing issues. That approach may be required in some cases, particularly when protecting highly endangered Immediate Concern species. Rather, partners are encouraged to identify common issues or habitats among suites of high-priority species. This enables a more practical approach for implementing conservation actions at the habitat level, which will simultaneously benefit many species. For this reason, the WAP strategies and priorities are presented at the species, habitat, and species suite levels so that the diverse stakeholders of the WAP can find meaningful recommendations regardless of their scale and scope of interest.