

Delaware Wildlife Action Plan

Executive Summary

Despite its small size Delaware harbors a diversity of wildlife and habitats within its borders from the Atlantic Ocean coastline to the Piedmont border with Pennsylvania. More than 1,000 species of wildlife have been documented in the state, and more than 125 different types of habitat have been identified including coastal marine waters and brackish marshes, tidal and non-tidal freshwater streams and wetlands, and upland forests and meadows.

This document, the *Delaware Wildlife Action Plan* (“Plan”), represents the state’s first attempt to develop a comprehensive strategy for conserving the full array of native wildlife and habitats – common and uncommon – as vital components of the state’s natural resources. It is intended not only to be comprehensive in terms of the species, habitats, issues and actions it addresses, but also comprehensive in terms of those responsible for implementation. Though the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife (“DFW”) will play a lead role in its continued development and in coordinating implementation, the Plan is intended for all who are actively engaged in conservation efforts. Together with conservation partners, we aim to keep species common, and to prevent species from being listed as endangered.

The Plan was developed with the participation of key conservation partners and public input was solicited primarily through a website. The Plan identifies more than 450 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and 50 different types of habitat. Because this is a comprehensive plan for all wildlife, large blocks of forest and wetland habitats that support many common species are also identified. Maps depicting habitat for a full array of wildlife (“Key Habitats”) are presented to show areas of the state where conservation efforts can be focused. These maps are also intended to help guide more site-specific conservation planning efforts. A successful site-specific community-based planning effort was conducted in partnership with The Nature Conservancy as a subset of the state’s wildlife strategy development.

Recognizing all possible issues that affect species and habitats of conservation concern, whether we fully understand their impacts, is an important step in building a comprehensive plan. Nearly 90 different conservation issues affecting species or habitats of conservation concern were identified, representing 16 different categories of issues. To address this extensive list of issues and impacts on SGCN and Key Habitats, more than 230 different conservation actions were developed.

This extensive list of issues and actions were prioritized by reviewing several natural resource plans developed for Delaware over the years. As a result, a clear picture of priorities emerged; among themes represented were habitat loss and degradation, as well as institutional capacity of DFW as the lead agency for the Plan.

Implementation of the Plan will be guided by a steering committee that meets regularly and is comprised of key partners including representatives from other state agencies, conservation organizations, and stakeholder and user groups. The Plan will be updated continuously by DFW as soon as new information becomes available about species, habitats, issues or actions, and the first formal review will take place two years after approval, with subsequent reviews every five years. A database is under development to track updates of Plan components in order to facilitate the review process, and an interactive version of the Plan will be posted on the DNREC website and made widely available on CD following the Plan’s acceptance.

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