

Meeting Date: November 19, 2015

Agenda Item No. 15

Agenda Item: State Wildlife Action Plan Update

Bureau Chief Approval: _____

Prepared by: Rita Dixon, State Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator

Background:

In 2001, Congress created the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program, which for the first time, provided funding to state fish and wildlife agencies for the management and conservation of the highest priority “at-risk” species. With an emphasis on nongame, game species are also eligible for funding if deemed to be in the “greatest need of conservation” (examples include Bighorn Sheep, Greater Sage-Grouse, and Burbot).

Funding was distributed to the States with the condition that each state develop a “State Wildlife Action Plan” (SWAP) to provide strategic guidance on implementing proactive, nonregulatory, incentive-based solutions to conserve fish and wildlife. To be eligible to receive funding, Congress also required that all States commit to reviewing and, if necessary, revising their SWAPs within 10 years. As such, IDFG is currently undertaking a comprehensive review and revision of the Idaho SWAP, initially completed in 2005.

Since the August 2015 Commission meeting, staff have developed draft materials describing key conservation targets (habitats and species), threats to those targets, proposed actions to address the identified threats, and a prioritized list of “Species of Greatest Conservation Need” (SGCN). The state is broken down into 14 ecological sections. Supporting information consists of status assessments for all SGCN based on the most recent data available. Ultimately, the revised Idaho SWAP will address eight required elements established by Congress to meet the need for plan adequacy and enable IDFG to receive funding through the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program (see attached handout).

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Approximately 98% of Idaho’s native fish and wildlife species held in public trust by the State of Idaho are not hunted, fished, or trapped and conservation funding for these species is limited. State and Tribal Wildlife Grants provide a critical source of revenue for the management and conservation of these species for which IDFG has statutory responsibility. These grants are the nation’s core program for preventing endangered species listings, thus maintaining state-led management authority for wildlife.

Public Involvement Process:

We have already engaged federal, state, tribal and local agencies, as well as key partners and stakeholders through a series of workshops and Webinars during the initial revision of the Idaho SWAP. Following internal and Commission review, the draft SWAP will be released for broad public, partner, and stakeholder review (14–21 days, TBD).

Justification:

State and Tribal Wildlife Grants funding is critical to sustaining IDFG’s overall Wildlife Diversity Program budget and programs.

Staff Recommendation:

This is an update on plan development and outline for further review.

Action Requested:

Information only.

The “Eight Required Elements” and Proposed Timeline for Plan Revision

Congress identified eight required elements (below) to be addressed in all State Wildlife Action Plans. Further, each plan must identify and be focused on the “species in greatest need of conservation,” yet address the “full array of wildlife” and wildlife-related issues. They must provide and make use of:

- 1.** The distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations as each State fish and wildlife agency deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of wildlife of the State (these species are now referred to as Species of Greatest Conservation Need or SGCN);
- 2.** The location and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to the conservation of each State’s SGCN;
- 3.** The problems [that] may adversely affect SGCN or their habitats, and priority research and surveys needed to identify factors [that] may assist in restoration and improved conservation of SGCN and their habitats;
- 4.** The actions necessary to conserve SGCN and their habitats and priorities for implementing such conservation actions;
- 5.** The provisions for periodic monitoring of SGCN and their habitats, for monitoring the effectiveness of conservation actions, and for adapting conservation actions as appropriate to respond to new information or changing conditions;
- 6.** Each State’s provisions to review its Plan at intervals not to exceed 10 years;
- 7.** Each State’s provisions for coordination during the development, implementation, review, and revision of its Plan 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 or their habitats; and
- 8.** Each State’s provisions to provide the necessary public participation in the development, revision, and implementation of its Plan.

Proposed Timeline:

Mid November — Update to the Commission

Late November — Provide draft materials to the Commission

Early December — Seek Commission approval to release draft materials for public review

Late December — Public comment period

Early January — Prepare complete final draft of the Idaho SWAP for the Commission

Late January — Seek Commission approval to submit a final draft of the Idaho SWAP to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Early February — Submit final draft of the Idaho SWAP to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service