

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Background, Purpose, and Goals of the Idaho Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy

Title 36–103 of the Idaho Code authorizes the Idaho Fish and Game Commission to administer wildlife policy in the state and mandates that: “All wildlife, including all wild animals, wild birds, and fish, within the state of Idaho, is hereby declared to be the property of the state of Idaho. It shall be preserved, protected, perpetuated, and managed.” Title 36–202 IC defines wildlife as: “Wildlife shall mean any form of animal life, native or exotic, generally living in a state of nature.”

As the State’s fish and wildlife management agency, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) has the legal responsibility to develop a statewide Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. IDFG is the appropriate agency to develop and carry out a wildlife strategy. The statutory authority for managing all wildlife is entrusted to IDFG, acting under the policy guidance of the Fish and Game Commission. Although IDFG is the State’s lead wildlife manager, it is not a major land management agency and does not administer significant regulatory programs other than regulating the take of wildlife. By necessity, IDFG’s ability to conserve wildlife will depend on its effectiveness in working cooperatively with others.

State fish and wildlife agencies are the foundation of our nation’s wildlife conservation. United States laws and policies place the primary responsibility for implementing wildlife management programs in the hands of the 50 States. Because of this, state fish and wildlife agencies have taken the leadership role in writing the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies. But effective management and conservation depends upon a partnership with Congress to provide consistent and adequate funding to the States. For decades, federal funding to the States in the form of excise taxes on arms and ammunition (Pittman–Robertson Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937) and fishing equipment and motorboat fuel (Dingell–Johnson Federal Aid to State Fisheries Act of 1950 and Wallop–Breau Act of 1984), has focused primarily on—and has been largely responsible for—successful programs that ensure the conservation and sustainable use of game species for hunting and fishing. There has been, however, a dearth of both state and federal funding for the many wildlife species not supported by hunting and fishing license fees and excise taxes.

To remedy this, Congress established the State Wildlife Grants (SWG) program in 2001. The purpose of this program was to provide a consistent and dedicated source of funding for those species that traditionally received little conservation attention. The SWG program provides the States the opportunity and funding to proactively work to conserve those species of greatest conservation need. By working to avoid species declines, costly Endangered Species Act (ESA) listings, recovery efforts, and associated land use prohibitions can be reduced or eliminated while conserving our wildlife heritage for future generations. The SWG program provides funding for the

States to realize the long-term goal and commitment to prevent species from becoming endangered.

To make the best use of the SWG program, Congress charged each state and territory to develop a statewide Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) by October 1, 2005. These strategies will provide an essential foundation for the future of wildlife conservation and a stimulus to engage the States, federal agencies, and other conservation partners to strategically think about their individual and coordinated roles in prioritizing conservation efforts in each state and territory.

Our core obligation in this strategy is to provide the best information science-wise for decision making and conservation planning. The CWCS is a strategy, not a plan. The Strategy is not a prescriptive document; it does not require any person or entity to implement conservation actions nor does it dictate how conservation actions should be implemented. It is intended to provide information and general direction that will be useful in developing conservation plans for at-risk species and habitats. The development of conservation plans is likewise a discretionary action and is not required by the CWCS. Landowners, state and federal agencies, private companies, and others voluntarily enter into conservation planning efforts as appropriate.

Conservation plans are more specific documents that spell out what specific conservation actions will be implemented, who will do them, and how they will be done. They are typically prepared for a particular location or land ownership and commonly involve multiple partners such as state and federal agencies, private landowners, permittees, private companies, and the public. As such, conservation planning is a collaborative endeavor involving interested and affected parties. To be successful, conservation plans should be developed by the parties that will ultimately be responsible for implementing the conservation actions, monitoring their effectiveness, and adapting them to achieve the mutually agreed upon results.

The Compass, the IDFG's strategic plan, is a long-range big picture document that describes what the Department wants to achieve in the next 15 years and how, in general terms, we intend to accomplish it. *The Compass* goals, desired outcomes, objectives, and strategies that are relevant to the CWCS are:

GOAL: SUSTAIN IDAHO'S FISH AND WILDLIFE AND THE HABITATS UPON WHICH THEY DEPEND.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Idaho citizens are highly satisfied with the diversity and health of the state's native fish, wildlife, and plants.
- There is no net loss of habitat.
- The Department is highly regarded as a comprehensive source of objective, scientifically based information on fish, wildlife, and plants in Idaho.

OBJECTIVE: ENSURE THE LONG-TERM SURVIVAL OF NATIVE FISH, WILDLIFE, AND PLANTS.

STRATEGIES

- Inventory, monitor, and assess the status of native fish, wildlife, and plants and the habitats upon which they depend.
- Identify species with the greatest need for conservation action.
- Restore native species where they have declined or disappeared.
- Provide information on the distribution, abundance, and conservation of native fish, wildlife, and plants.
- Assist public and private landowners in the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of native fish, wildlife, and plants.
- Collaborate with interested and affected parties to develop and implement plans to recover threatened and endangered species and conserve native fish, wildlife, and plants.

OBJECTIVE: INCREASE THE CAPACITY OF HABITAT TO SUPPORT FISH AND WILDLIFE.

STRATEGIES

- Develop measurable and achievable management objectives for fish and wildlife habitat.
- Assess and prioritize habitats for protections, restoration, or enhancement.
- Provide information, analysis, and recommendations to improve fish and wildlife habitats and reduce impacts from land and waters use and development.
- Seek mitigation for adverse impacts to fish and wildlife.
- Provide incentives and assistance to landowners to improve habitat on private land.
- Acquire interest in property where Department management can provide exceptional benefits to fish and wildlife and associated recreation.
- Work in cooperation with other agencies and local governments to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species.
- Develop partnerships with landowners, land management agencies, and others to restore, enhance and conserve fish and wildlife habitats.

The Eight Required Elements to include in Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies

Congress identified eight required elements to be addressed in these wildlife conservation strategies. Further, the Strategy 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) information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations as the State fish and wildlife agency deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of the State’s wildlife; and,
- (2) descriptions of locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to the conservation of species identified in (1); and,
- (3) descriptions of problems that may adversely affect the species identified in (1) or their habitats, and priority research and survey efforts needed to identify factors that may assist in restoration and improved conservation of these species and habitats; and,
- (4) descriptions of conservation actions determined to be necessary to conserve the identified species and habitats and priorities for implementing such actions; and,
- (5) proposed plans for monitoring species identified in (1) and their habitats, for monitoring the effectiveness of the conservation actions proposed in (4), and for adapting these conservation actions to respond appropriately to new information or changing conditions; and,
- (6) descriptions of procedures to review the Strategy at intervals not to exceed 10 years; and,
- (7) plans for coordinating, to the extent feasible, the development, implementation, review, and revision of the Strategy with federal, state, and local agencies and Indian tribes that manage significant land and water areas within the state or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats.
- (8) Congress also affirmed through this legislation, that broad public participation is an essential element of developing and implementing these strategies, the projects that are carried out while these strategies are developed, and the Species in Greatest Need of Conservation that Congress has indicated such programs and projects are intended to emphasize.

The Idaho Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy provides a coordinated vision and mechanism to enact conservation at a landscape level. The Strategy will be

available to anyone who is interested in conservation. It identifies which species and habitats in the state warrant conservation attention, isolates the problems they face, and outlines steps to foster their continued existence. The Strategy creates a legacy in Idaho that preserves the wildlife heritage so important to all Idahoans.

Report Organization: What's In The Document

The Strategy is organized into several components and 8 appendices. We began by providing a foreword, which was written by Dr. J. Michael Scott, Idaho Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit leader and Professor of Wildlife Resources in the College of Natural Resources at the University of Idaho. Following the Foreword is the Introduction, which outlines the purpose of the Strategy, provides background information on why we developed the Strategy, and lists the eight elements defined by Congress that each state and U.S. territory were required to address in these strategies.

The Approach and Methods section outlines the process we used to develop the Strategy, how we identified the Species of Greatest Conservation Need, the prioritization process, public involvement and partnership, coordination, and the process we intend to take to review and revise the Strategy.

Following the Approach and Methods section, comes the State Overview. The purpose of the State Overview is to provide the reader with an overall summary of the state of Idaho, the key issues in the state, the priority sections and habitats, a detailed account of the habitats in the state complete with a general description and relative condition of the habitats, and the issues and actions associated with each of the 15 priority habitats. This section also provides reference to the full array of wildlife in the state (Appendix A) as well as the Species of Greatest Conservation Need that were identified during the development of the Strategy. Both the English common name and scientific name have been included for ease of use. This section also includes a series of maps of the state depicting counties, land ownership, topography, climate, geology, land use, ecoregions and ecological sections, managed areas, roads, and habitats.

Following the State Overview are the 14 ecological section summaries. Each section summary includes a map of the section with habitats, roads and towns. We chose the ecological section as the framework for the Strategy because it is biologically-based and provides descriptions of similar habitats and suites of species. There are five ecoregions in Idaho: the Canadian Rocky Mountains, the Middle Rockies-Blue Mountains, the Columbia Plateau, the Utah-Wyoming Rocky Mountains, and the Wyoming Basins. All five ecoregions have completed ecoregional plans that were developed by The Nature Conservancy.

Each of the 14 ecological section summaries are organized by a general description of the section, a land use and land ownership summary, a list of habitats in the section and their respective area in the section in both metric and English units, a list of the Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the section, the priority habitats in the section and the key species associated with them. We have addressed the aquatic species with the

terrestrial habitats. The reason we elected to take this approach is that adjacent terrestrial systems affect the aquatic systems within. Therefore, issues in terrestrial systems can impact the aquatic species within them.

The Monitoring and Adaptive Management section outlines a plan for monitoring species, habitats and the effectiveness of the conservation actions outlined in the habitat section and the individual species accounts (Appendix F).

Appendix B lists the Species of Greatest Conservation Need and their respective status according to NatureServe (Global rank), the Idaho Conservation Data Center (Heritage State rank), USFS Regions 1 and 4 (Sensitive Species), BLM (Type 1–5), State of Idaho classification under the Idaho Administrative Rule (e.g., game species, protected nongame, furbearer, state threatened or endangered, etc.), and status under the Endangered Species Act.

Appendix F, Species Accounts is comprised of brief summary narratives of each of the Species of Greatest Conservation Need. These accounts include:

- the English common name and scientific name for species, scientific name for class, order, and family;
- basis for inclusion (a brief statement that describes why the species was identified as a species of greatest conservation need, e.g., status under the Endangered Species Act, high threats, declining trend, disjunct population, isolated populations, restricted distribution, endemic to Idaho, taxonomic uniqueness, etc.);
- relevant taxonomic notes;
- information on the distribution and abundance;
- population trend (e.g., increasing, decreasing, stable, unknown);
- brief summary of the habitat and ecology of each species;
- key issues facing the species in Idaho; and
- recommended conservation actions.

Following the narrative information is a distribution map that includes the ID–GAP predicted distribution as well as known point locations, area of occupancy (e.g., grizzly or brown bear), lek location (e.g., greater sage–grouse), or 6th-code Hydrologic Units (HUCs) for lampreys and fishes. The purpose of the maps is to show the distribution of a species in the state given habitat relationships that have been carefully reviewed by the people in Idaho most knowledgeable about these species. For some species, the ID–GAP predicted distribution closely mimics the known point data distribution. For others, there are areas within the predicted distribution where there are no point data. This can result if one of the following situations applies: (1) there have been no surveys for the species in that area, (2) surveys have been conducted in the area but failed to detect the species, or (3) the model did not adequately predict the species range. Including both predicted range and known point locations provides a visual picture of where the data gaps are and can serve as a tool for prioritizing areas that have not been surveyed. Moreover, once surveyed, will serve to refine our knowledge of the species in Idaho.

How To Use This Document

There are a variety of ways to use the Strategy. If a reader is interested in a particular land area, the reader should go to the State Overview section to determine which ecological section the land in question is in. Once this is determined they go to the chapter for that ecological section where they will find a listing of the species of greatest conservation need that are predicted to be found in that section. They can also determine what habitats are found on the land in question and the species of greatest conservation need that are predicted to use that habitat in that ecological section. Conservation issues and recommended actions for priority habitats are in the State Overview. Appendix F contains the species accounts with a table of contents at the beginning of the appendix. These accounts contain conservation issues and recommended actions as well as a map showing predicted distribution and known locations.

If the reader is interested in a particular species, the reader should go to Appendix F Species Accounts, find the species in the table of contents and locate the species account. The predicted distribution map gives a general idea of where the species might occur as well as the known locations of the species. Maps for some species do not have predicted distribution and some do not have point locations because the information is not available. However, all maps have some information about the distribution of the species in the state.

Appendix A is a list of all the vertebrate species (fishes, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals) in Idaho. Appendix B is a list of species of greatest conservation need. The list is divided into two parts: species with substantial information pertaining to status in Idaho and species lacking essential information pertaining to status in Idaho. Information on how species with greatest conservation need were identified is contained in the Approach and Methods section.