

# Public Participation

On December 30, 2015, we issued a news release announcing the availability of draft SWAP materials for review on IDFG's Web site and held a 21-day public comment period. Upon the news release, the Great Basin Landscape Conservation Cooperative shared the SWAP news release notice on GBLCC's Facebook site and reached 397 people; the post was subsequently picked up and shared by the Society for Range Management. Likewise, the news release was shared among the membership lists of both the Idaho Bat Working Group and the Idaho Bird Conservation Partnership. We also shared the news release with partners and stakeholders who had been involved in SWAP, which included 285 individuals. To facilitate review by the public, we created a Web form on the IDFG Web site for submitting comments and provided several questions to guide the review.

During the public comment period, IDFG hosted 3 2-hour Webinars for partners and stakeholders who had been involved in the process; each Webinar was recorded and made available to everyone on the SWAP distribution list (285 individuals). The first Webinar focused on the southern Idaho sections, the second on the central sections, and the final Webinar on the northern sections. The Webinars gave stakeholders an opportunity for interactive discussion about SWAP and particular issues that had been raised. For example, one of the primary topics was the predicted distribution maps, some of which had overpredicted the distribution for certain species, e.g., Fisher, American White Pelican, and American Bittern. Consequently, we were able to obtain better models to incorporate into our final draft for these species. The other main issue raised was about certain species that particular individuals felt should have been identified as SGCN. For example, some participants questioned the omission of the ESA-listed Bull Trout, 3 cutthroat trout species, Canada Lynx, and Caribou, American Bison, among others. Following the Webinars, we held follow-up coordination phone calls with some of our partners to discuss these species. In the end, based on the best available information on the status of these species in Idaho, we only added two of the recommended species to the SGCN list: Northern Leatherside Chub and Caribou.

We received 45 public comments submitted via the Web form; additional reviewers submitted comments via email directly to Idaho's SWAP Coordinator. Over 61 organizations/agencies (including in some cases comments by multiple individuals within the organization/agency), and private individuals submitted comments on the SWAP. Of these, 60% of respondents who commented via the Web form strongly agreed/somewhat agreed that they supported the Idaho State Wildlife Action Plan as written (if we removed the cutthroat trout respondents, this percentage would have increased significantly). In response to the second question we posed, 80% of respondents who commented via the Web form strongly agreed/somewhat agreed that the State Wildlife Action Plan will be a useful document for the State of Idaho. The most consistent response among reviewers was with respect to the third question; 96% of respondents who commented via the Web form strongly agreed/somewhat agreed that it is important to have a prioritized list of species of greatest conservation need. Finally, 53% of respondents strongly agreed/somewhat agreed that in general, the plan addresses the primary conservation challenges to species and their habitats. Again, if we removed the cutthroat trout respondents, this percentage would have increased significantly.

The most unexpected result of the public review was the controversy generated over Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout not having been identified as a SGCN in the 2015 SWAP revision. This species was a SGCN in the 2005 plan and many respondents requested to include it as a SGCN in the 2015 plan. Of those who provided public comments on Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout, most were concerned that not including it as a SGCN in SWAP would compromise their ability to get funding and impact local economies of eastern Idaho. One NGO issued an “action alert” through an email blast urging its membership to provide comments asking that Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout be included as a SGCN. Unfortunately, the action alert misrepresented our process and criteria for selecting SGCN and many of those who responded to the alert simply asked us to add the Cutthroat but without information to substantiate their request. Follow-up meetings with the IDFG Fisheries Bureau staff resulted in the decision that Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout did not meet the criteria for SGCN.

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission met January 27–28, 2016 with a public hearing in Boise January 27. The SWAP was on the Commission agenda and the SWAP Coordinator presented a summary of public comments to the Commission on January 28, 2016, where we sought and obtained the Commission’s approval to submit the draft SWAP to the US Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Review Team for review. During the public hearing, one individual provided testimony to the Commission on SWAP requesting that we consider adding Moose to the SGCN list. We had originally considered Moose as a SGCN because in some parts of the state the species is experiencing declines. However, in other parts of the state the populations are thriving. From a statewide perspective, Moose does not meet the criteria for SGCN and so we did not add it to the list. However, we will monitor the status of Moose and if other populations begin to show declines, we will reconsider it as a SGCN.

Some individuals and groups asked for a formal response explaining why certain species did not make the 2015 SGCN list. We plan to follow up with these groups post-submission.

One way we plan to continue to involve the public in ongoing SWAP development and implementation is to further develop the SWAP Web page hosted by the Department. In addition, we had created a Web page on Miradi Share as part of our revision and will launch the site to the public once we’re ready for public viewing.