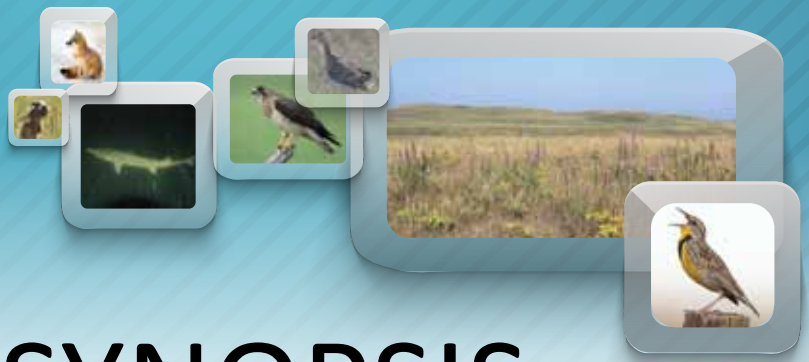


NORTH DAKOTA STATE WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN

2015

SYNOPSIS

February 2016



This is a summary of the 2015 North Dakota State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). The SWAP is a comprehensive document and this synopsis should not be used to replace the SWAP.

WHAT IS NORTH DAKOTA'S STATE WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN?

The 2015 North Dakota State Wildlife Action Plan replaces the 2005 North Dakota Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy as the principle document for safeguarding rare and declining fish and wildlife species in North Dakota. This newer second "edition" not only has a different name, but has been revised to include new information generated by State Wildlife Grant (SWG) studies conducted over the past 10 years. Examples include, but are not limited to, changes to the species of conservation priority list, focus areas, range/distribution maps, threats and management actions.

The SWAP is built upon eight essential elements, with an overall focus on the "species of greatest conservation need," or as we have labeled them, "species of conservation priority." The eight elements include: (1) information on the distribution and abundance of wildlife species, including low and declining populations; (2) descriptions of locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types; (3) problems affecting species and priority research or survey efforts needed; (4) conservation actions needed to conserve the identified

species; (5) plans for monitoring species and the effectiveness of conservation actions; (6) plans for reviewing the plan; (7) coordinating with federal, state and local agencies and Tribal government on the development and implementation of the plan; (8) and involve broad public participation.

The number of species of conservation priority increased from 100 under the old plan to 115 in the current SWAP. While 20 new species were added to the list, five species were removed. The current list includes 47 birds, two amphibians, nine reptiles, 21 mammals, 22 fish, 10 freshwater mussels and four insects. It is important to recognize that species of conservation priority often depend on several habitat types or landscape components for survival. The key to ensuring their long-term survival is to maintain diverse grasslands, wetlands, woodlands, rivers and streams. These habitats cannot be reduced to certain isolated areas, but must occur over a broad landscape.

Completion of the SWAP marks the 10-year anniversary of the first dedicated program for rare and declining fish and wildlife species in North Dakota. Although substantial progress was made in the past decade, considerable work remains. As North Dakota is experiencing widespread habitat threats and challenges, the SWAP will serve as an important tool in dealing with these issues.

Furthermore, preventing species

from becoming listed as federally threatened or endangered is important. A listing has the potential to influence how public and private land is managed and used. The cost of protection or restoration of a listed species is far greater than preventing its decline in the first place. From an ecological perspective, loss of a seemingly insignificant species can cause other animals to decline, or vanish. Such declines are hard to predict as many relationships are not yet well understood. Even so, animals that live in North Dakota are part of the state's legacy, and many people believe the demise of any species is tragic.

SPECIES OF CONSERVATION PRIORITY

Once a species was designated as a SCP they were placed in one of three Levels. The levels were designated as a way to prioritize funding for SWG projects. The levels are defined as follows:

- **Level I:** Species in decline and receive little or no monetary support or conservation efforts. North Dakota Game and Fish Department has a clear obligation to use SWG funding to implement conservation actions that directly benefit these species. Level I species are those having a:
 - high level of conservation priority because of declining status either here or across their range –OR–
 - high rate of occurrence in North Dakota constituting the core of the species breeding range (i.e. "responsibility" species), but are at-risk range wide

– **Level II:** North Dakota Game and Fish Department will use SWG funding to implement conservation actions to benefit these species if SWG funding for Level I species is sufficient or conservation needs have been met. Level II species are those having a:

- moderate level of conservation priority –OR–
- high level of conservation priority, but a substantial level of non-SWG funding is available to them
- **Level III:** North Dakota’s species having a moderate level of conservation priority, but are believed to be

peripheral or nonbreeding in North Dakota.

The important message to remember is regardless of level assignment, all species on the list are of concern for various reasons and there is an urgency to sustain them on North Dakota’s landscape.



Chestnut-collared longspur



Short-horned lizard



Monarch butterfly

BIRDS	LEVEL	BIRDS (con't.)	LEVEL	INSECTS	LEVEL
American Avocet	II	Upland Sandpiper	II	Dakota Skipper	II
American Bittern	I	Western Meadowlark	II	Poweshiek Skipperling	II
American Kestrel	II	Whooping Crane	III	Monarch Butterfly	I
American White Pelican	II	Willet	II	Regal Fritillary	I
Baird’s Sparrow	I	Wilson’s Phalarope	I	FISH	
Bald Eagle	II	Yellow Rail	I	Blacknose Shiner	III
Black Tern	I	AMPHIBIANS		Blue Sucker	I
Black-billed Cuckoo	I	Canadian Toad	I	Burbot	II
Bobolink	II	Plains Spadefoot	I	Carmine Shiner	III
Brewer’s Sparrow	III	REPTILES		Chestnut Lamprey	III
Burrowing Owl	II	False Map Turtle	III	Finescale Dace	III
Canvasback	II	Northern Prairie Skink	III	Flathead Chub	II
Chestnut-collared Longspur	I	Plains Hog-nosed Snake	I	Hornyhead Chub	III
Dickcissel	II	Sagebrush Lizard	III	Largescale Stoneroller	III
Ferruginous Hawk	I	Short-horned Lizard	II	Logperch	III
Franklin’s Gull	I	Smooth Green Snake	I	Northern Pearl Dace	I
Golden Eagle	II	Smooth Softshell	III	Northern Redbelly Dace	II
Grasshopper Sparrow	I	Snapping Turtle	II	Paddlefish	II
Greater Prairie Chicken	II	Spiny Softshell	III	Pallid Sturgeon	II
Greater Sage-grouse	I	MAMMALS		Pugnose Shiner	III
Horned Grebe	I	American Marten	II	River Darter	III
Lark Bunting	I	Arctic Shrew	III	Sicklefin Chub	I
Le Conte’s Sparrow	II	Big Brown Bat	I	Silver Chub	II
Least Tern (Interior)	II	Black-footed Ferret	II	Silver Lamprey	III
Lesser Scaup	II	Black-tailed Prairie Dog	I	Sturgeon Chub	I
Loggerhead Shrike	II	Eastern Spotted Skunk	III	Trout-perch	II
Long-billed Curlew	I	Gray Fox	III	Yellow Bullhead	III
Marbled Godwit	I	Hispid Pocket Mouse	III	MUSSELS	
McCown’s Longspur	III	Little Brown Bat	I	Black Sandshell	II
Nelson’s Sparrow	I	Long-eared Bat	III	Creek Heelsplitter	I
Northern Harrier	II	Long-legged Bat	III	Creeper	III
Northern Pintail	II	Merriam’s Shrew	III	Deertoe	III
Peregrine Falcon	III	Northern Long-eared Bat	I	Fragile Papershell	III
Piping Plover	II	Plains Pocket Mouse	III	Mapleleaf	III
Prairie Falcon	II	Pygmy Shrew	II	Pink Heelsplitter	II
Red-headed Woodpecker	I	Richardson’s Ground Squirrel	II	Pink Papershell	I
Red Knot (Rufa)	III	River Otter	II	Threeridge	II
Sharp-tailed Grouse	II	Sagebrush Vole	III	Wabash Pigtoe	II
Short-eared Owl	II	Swift Fox	II		
Sprague’s Pipit	I	Townsend’s Big-eared Bat	I		
Swainson’s Hawk	I	Western Small-footed Bat	III		

HABITAT

North Dakota's natural habitat was predominantly prairie. Over the past 150-plus years, the landscape has changed dramatically. Although tracts of native prairie still exist in many areas, they are traversed by a road nearly every mile. It is estimated that more than 50 percent of the prairie and wetlands have been plowed or drained. Numerous tree shelterbelts were planted to help reduce erosion and protect farmsteads, which provides habitat for some species, but may interfere with the lifecycle of others, such as grassland nesting birds. Several large reservoirs were constructed, including Lake Sakakawea, which altered the natural flooding cycle of the Missouri River, North Dakota's largest riparian system. The landscape described by many early explorers and pioneers has changed considerably. North Dakota is not the vast expanse of treeless prairie it once was. There is, however, great potential to protect, conserve and enhance what remains and restore what was lost.



Nine landscape components encompassing the major habitat types of North Dakota were identified in the SWAP. There are a variety of grassland habitat types, including native or uncultivated land, and planted grasslands. The major grassland landscape components are **Tallgrass Prairie (Red River Valley)**, **Eastern Mixed-grass Prairie (Drift Prairie)**, **Mixed-grass Prairie (Missouri Coteau)**, and **Western Mixed-grass/Short-grass Prairie (Missouri Slope)**. In addition, **Planted or Tame Grassland**, has been identified as a major grassland landscape component. These grasslands are located across

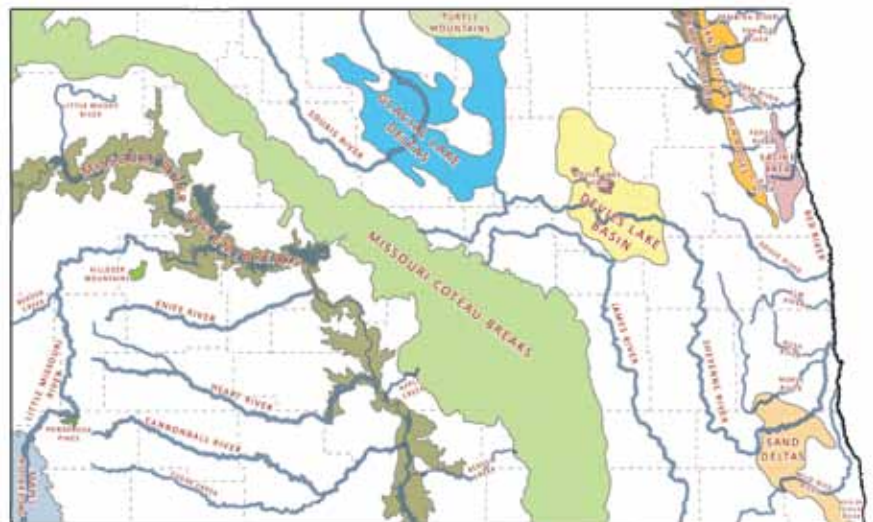
the state. The other major landscape components are **Wetlands and Lakes; Rivers, Streams and Riparian; Badlands; and Upland Forest**.



In some cases there was sufficient information or reason to identify focus areas within a particular landscape component. Focus areas typically exhibited unique or easily identifiable differences in vegetation, soils, topography, hydrology or land use. Focus areas are highly variable in size and often represent an area of native vegetation or a natural community type rare to North Dakota. A total of 21 focus areas were identified. Note that no specific focus areas were identified within the wetlands and lakes and badlands landscapes, but that does not imply these are not important habitats. More than one million wetlands are scattered across North Dakota and all wetland types are important for wildlife and hydrophyte plants, water storage and water quality. Wetlands are included as a key component within identified focus areas.

CONSERVATION ACTIONS

There are various reasons why a particular species may be declining or at-risk. Threats impacting species are wide-ranging, including but not limited to direct conversion of habitat (e.g. from urban, cropland, or energy development), invasive or detrimental plants and noxious weeds, fire or fire suppression, wetland consolidation, or even anthropomorphic related, such as noise and light pollution. The SWAP provides detailed description of threats and conservation



actions for each of the major landscape components and species specific management recommendations. The focus must remain on solutions to preventing species from becoming federally threatened or endangered. There are five recurrent conservation actions identified throughout all major landscape components that will make this happen.

1. Offer incentives and programs to protect, enhance, and restore habitat.

The majority of land in North Dakota is held in private ownership. There are numerous federal, state and local programs to provide landowners, with cost-sharing assistance to protect, enhance and restore wildlife habitat. This is the primary mechanism for ensuring long-term conservation of SCP and other wildlife in North Dakota. North Dakota Game and Fish Department staff will work with partners to ensure programs are fully encompassing the needs to conserve SCP and expand programs where necessary, particularly farm bill programs, such as the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, and pollinator habitat programs.

2. Urge ecologically responsible ordinances and suitable reclamation standards.

Increasing demand for urban, energy and utility development is heightening the need to minimize impacts to SCP and other wildlife. Although environmental review is provided by federal and state agencies, the recommendations are often unheeded. Ecologically sound ordinances and reclamation standards must be strengthened and utilized.



3. Promote and support holistic grazing and work with grass-based agricultural groups.

The majority of the SCP are grassland dependent. The key to maintaining grassland as an integral part of the North Dakota landscape is to ensure grassland ranching persists. Furthermore, prairies evolved with grazing by large ungulates and cattle grazing is a beneficial tool to maintain native vegetation, particularly if applied in a holistic manner.



4. Use best management practices or ecological site descriptions.

Experts in various fields have developed best management practices for a particular habitat component. The Natural Resources Conservation Services has developed ecological site descriptions, which describe the composition and ecological

function of a historic plant community, and use a state and transition model to help managers understand



how plant communities will respond to changes in management. These valuable tools should be employed when restoring or managing native communities. Additionally, managers should consider implications of climate change when planning and implementing a management practice.

5. Public education and outreach.

The key to successful implementation of wildlife conservation for public use and enjoyment depends upon their awareness, understanding and appreciation of these resources. Ecological services provide values to the public that they are likely unaware of in their daily lives.

Where to find more information...

NORTH DAKOTA STATE WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN

<http://gf.nd.gov/wildlife/swap>

SPECIES OF CONSERVATION PRIORITY

<http://gf.nd.gov/wildlife/scp>

NORTH DAKOTA STATE WILDLIFE GRANTS

<http://gf.nd.gov/wildlife/swg>

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