

South Dakota

Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan: From Planning to Implementation

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OVERVIEW

As part of a distributed graduate seminar funded by the National Council for Science and the Environment's (NCSE) Wildlife Habitat Policy Research Program, eight universities conducted research on development and implementation of Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies (CWCS) in all 50 states. Our goal was to gain a synoptic view of state activities related to wildlife habitat conservation in the U.S. and territories. Our overarching question was: "How do conservation science, social, and institutional processes come together to set state and regional conservation priorities and the design and implementation of conservation solutions across the U.S.?"

The 2005 South Dakota Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan (CWCP) takes an ecosystem

planning approach to guide the Department of Game, Fish, and Park's (SDGFP) specialists and others addressing species and habitat conservation needs and priorities. The plan is the state's first comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy.

The Plan divides South Dakota into five primary management units (i.e., habitats) and describes conservation problems, recommended actions, and potential partners in each.

The first anticipated revision of the South Dakota CWCP will take place in 2011.

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE STATE IN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Progress has been fair. The primary activities related to plan implementation have been continued use of State Wildlife Grants funding in support of actions identified in the plan.

SDGFP sets aside a significant portion of its State Wildlife Grants allocation for a competitive grants

program, which has expanded collaboration with some entities that the agency had limited or no interaction with prior to this funding opportunity. Top priority for SWG funds has been collecting baseline information and inventorying poorly studied resources.

COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES

The three principal organizations that collaborated with SDFGP to draft the strategy include Ecosystem Management Research Institute, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Dynamic Solutions Group. EMRI was contracted to draft the technical portion of the document, NRCS was consulted and involved because of South Dakota's planning system made use of NRCS' ecological site descriptions and soil surveys, and DSG was contracted to assist with the public involvement portion of the plan.

Since approval of the Strategy, numerous nonfederal partners have become involved in

implementing conservation actions including but not limited to several University researchers, Ducks Unlimited, and the Nature Conservancy. South Dakota was able to engage some of its tribal counterparts in a planning effort that was non-confrontational. This may have opened up lines of communication that have been strained in the past. Several tribes volunteered for the Plan Advisory Team.

SDGFP also reached out to partners such as Ducks Unlimited that are involved in landscape-level planning. South Dakota coordinated with adjoining

states through meetings hosted by the Association

of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

INFLUENCE OF THE PLAN ON OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

While the Plan has not changed priorities for conservation organizations such as The Nature Conservancy or Ducks Unlimited, it has increased their ability to implement conservation actions on the ground. In both cases, there is significant overlap in funding and planning priorities with the Strategy. The Plan is seen as having strengthened past Nature Conservancy planning efforts, especially regarding species of concern and areas of focus.

SDGFP has worked efficiently to take advantage of planning and implementation capacities that exist within the conservation community. For example,

Ducks Unlimited has focused some of their realty staff on obtaining grassland easements that protect key grassland/wetland complexes for a host of species funded by CWCP. Within their constituency, Ducks Unlimited has used the Plan to show how their priorities for waterfowl overlap a great deal with priorities for many other species. Doing so has enabled DU to collaborate and leverage their non-federal funds with SWG to achieve greater benefits than either organization could have achieved alone.

Various universities have utilized the Plan in some of their research projects.

KEY CHALLENGES TO PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Cooperators have had some difficulty finding the nonfederal match, which South Dakota requires them to provide in their competitive grants program; they have not yet developed a formal implementation plan because of the uncertainty of future funding; and SDGFP has not increased its staff to correspond with the additional workload associated with SWG projects.

The loss of CRP acreage in South Dakota is very significant to SDGFP because of its dependence on license revenues. The Wildlife Division receives almost no general funds, so any large decrease in other revenue streams will ultimately impact their activities, including the match that they provide for SWG funds and future nongame funding opportunities.

EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIVE OR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

1. Statewide inventory of colonial nesting birds and development of a monitoring strategy for subsequent evaluation of colony status. This was the first statewide inventory of colonial nesting birds in the state; SDGFP contracted the work to Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, which hired a highly-driven and effective coordinator who built many partnerships; the quality of the data are good; South Dakota was not dealing with any state or federal listed species, so there was no fear associated with the collection of the information.

2. Identification of important bat roosts in abandoned mines in South Dakota and financial assistance to private landowners in construction of bat-friendly gates. This project addresses a liability issue – the many abandoned mines in the Black Hills. South Dakota is offering financial assistance to private landowner, who might otherwise simply close these sites regardless of their value to bats.

3. Assessment of the impacts of tree plantings on grassland birds in South Dakota. This research was part of a much broader research effort conducted

by Dr. Dave Naugle of the University of Montana. The practice of planting trees in grassland is a traditional use that has the side benefit of providing game winter cover. Before challenging this long-standing practice, it is imperative to collect sound information to support a management recommendation.

These projects were mentioned in the plan and can be found at:

<http://www.sdgifp.info/Wildlife/Diversity/wcrp.pdf>

HIGHLIGHTS OF PLAN DEVELOPMENT OR IMPLEMENTATION

The plan uses an ecosystem diversity approach to habitat conservation. The most important priority is to evaluate this approach on the ground. The plan takes a landscape view of habitat evaluation, so those projects that are not species-specific must address a broader habitat perspective to be consistent with the planning approach and to be eligible to receive South Dakota SWG funds.

The Teaming with Wildlife legislative campaign is a successful method of engaging people and groups that have a shared interest in wildlife conservation and habitat enhancement. South Dakota has actively promoted this initiative within the State and has assisted with the effort at a national level.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE NEXT PLANNING CYCLE

SDGFP needs to develop specific guidelines for monitoring the implementation of the action plan, which contains a great deal of information about the State's species and habitats but lacks clear and convincing conservation actions that focus on important habitat areas. The State also lacks a map of conservation focal areas.

In the next phase it would be useful to include actions lists in each of the ecosystem sections after the threats to that ecosystem are presented, as was done in neighboring North Dakota.

REFERENCES

South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks. 2006. South Dakota Comprehensive Conservation Plan. South Dakota Dept. of Game, Fish, and Parks, Pierre, Wildlife Division Report 2006-08

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support for this project by the National Council for Science and the Environment-Wildlife Habitat Policy Research Program with funds from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and by the US Geological Survey Gap Analysis Program. Additionally, we thank South Dakota Game and Fish Department, the Nature Conservancy, and Ducks Unlimited for their participation.