
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2001, through the efforts of the 3000 member groups of the Teaming With Wildlife Coalition (<http://www.teaming.com>), the US Congress passed legislation now known as the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program (SWG) and created the nation's core initiative for conserving our country's biodiversity and thereby precluding the necessity of listing more species as threatened and endangered. Planning and actions to recover species that have become endangered are controversial and expensive. Annual spending on listed species in the United States has increased more than six fold over the past 10 years, to a level of over \$600 million a year. The SWG program promotes proactive and collaborative conservation action *before* wildlife reaches that serious and controversial status. Since 2001, Congress has allocated more than \$400 million to the states for this purpose, apportioned on the basis of their respective land areas and human populations. New Mexico's share of the national appropriation has averaged about \$1 million per year. In order to maintain eligibility for this funding, each state must develop and submit a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) no later than October 1, 2005.

The Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy for New Mexico focuses upon Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), key wildlife habitats, and overcoming the challenges affecting the conservation of both. The overriding desired outcome is that New Mexico's key habitats persist in the condition, connectivity, and quantity necessary to sustain viable and resilient populations of resident SGCN and host a variety of land uses with reduced resource use conflicts. We believe this document will greatly facilitate meeting our statutory mandates to provide an adequate supply of game, fish, and furbearers and to carry out the provisions of the Wildlife Conservation Act pertaining to conserving indigenous threatened or endangered wildlife. Associated funding will allow the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) and its partners to broaden their attention beyond single species to include the species and habitats necessary to conserve all of New Mexico's biodiversity. Some significant revelations emerging from development of the CWCS are:

- New Mexico has 452 vertebrate, mollusc, and arthropod SGCN. Significantly larger proportions of amphibians (58%) and crustaceans (91%) are recognized as SGCN than other taxonomic groups.
- The greatest diversities of terrestrial SGCN are predicted to occur in the Apache Highlands, Arizona-New Mexico Mountains, and Chihuahuan Desert Ecoregions.
- The greatest diversities of aquatic SGCN are predicted to occur in the Pecos, Rio Grande, and Gila Watersheds.
- The most significant factors affecting the persistence of SGCN statewide are those that cause habitat conversion, loss, and degradation.
- Conversion to other uses, extraction of minerals or water, removal of biological resources, and pollution present the highest probability of altering New Mexico's key habitats.

- Ephemeral natural catchments, perennial marsh/cienega/spring/seeps, and riparian habitats may be at a higher risk of alteration by multiple factors than other habitat types in New Mexico.
- The effects of oil and gas development on SGCN and their key habitats are of most concern in the Southern Shortgrass Prairie, Colorado Plateau, and Chihuahuan Desert Ecoregions. Mining poses potential adverse effects in the Arizona-New Mexico Mountains Ecoregion.
- The Chihuahuan Desert, Arizona-New Mexico Mountains, and Southern Shortgrass Prairie Ecoregions have been subjected to significant habitat alterations as the result of off-road vehicle and other recreational uses and military activities.
- Non-native aquatic species have considerable adverse effects upon native fish, molluscs, and crustaceans in New Mexico's aquatic habitats. However, many non-native species have been introduced to enhance sport fishing opportunity, and the challenge remains in balancing these interests with maintaining viable and resilient populations of native species.
- Findings to date suggest that key areas upon which to focus conservation efforts in New Mexico may include riparian and aquatic habitats throughout the state, areas in the "boot heel" region of southwestern New Mexico extending northward into the Madrean habitats, and areas of the shortgrass prairie and western mountain ranges where they converge with Chihuahuan Desert and Pecos River habitats. These areas contain key habitats, have a high diversity of SGCN, are subjected to a moderate to high magnitude of multiple habitat altering factors, and lack legal constraints or long-term management plans protecting them from habitat conversion.
- There is a strong need to fill the information gaps impeding assessment and conservation of New Mexico's biodiversity through the collaborative and coordinated implementation of research, survey, and monitoring projects.
- The highest priority conservation action for both terrestrial and aquatic key habitats statewide is to work with federal, state, and private organizations, research institutions and universities to design and implement research, survey, and monitoring projects to enhance our understanding of SGCN and their key habitats. Knowledge of SGCN abundance and distribution and the connectivity and condition of key habitats is of particular interest as are studies that monitor the status of SGCN and identify and quantify factors limiting their populations.
- We will need to create partnerships among local, state, federal, and tribal governments, non-government organizations, universities, and individuals to effectively forward our common wildlife conservation interests.
- We will need to implement conservation strategies that are effective on a landscape scale.

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- Our perceptions and effectiveness can be greatly enhanced by involving private landowners and the agricultural industry in the CWCS implementation, review, and revision phases and otherwise providing them continual opportunities to inform and influence project development. New Mexico is 51% rangeland, 2.4% cropland, and 0.3% pasture. Even primarily urban Bernalillo County, which includes less than 1% of the state's total land area and 30% of its population, produces \$40 million in agricultural products and has numerous agriculture-related industries.

Though NMDGF has led the development process to date, the CWCS is a strategic plan intended as a blueprint to guide collaborative and coordinated wildlife conservation initiatives involving NMDGF, local, state, federal, and tribal governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and interested individuals. It identifies many more conservation actions and research, survey, and monitoring needs than can be addressed in the near term by any one entity. To facilitate effective implementation, this broad array of strategic intentions will need to be further narrowed through an executive staff process to comprise a wildlife action plan focused upon near-term conservation priorities. NMDGF will next employ an operational planning process by which to propose, select, schedule, design, staff, and budget the site or area-specific projects through which these strategic conservation priorities will be implemented. The operational planning process will include appropriate coordination with local, state, and federal government agencies and tribes and afford these entities, NGOs and interested publics opportunities to influence and participate in project design and implementation. NMDGF will encourage partnering and cost sharing with and among these interests. We will promote awareness of implementation progress through periodic announcements and events, including an annual CWCS for New Mexico Progress Report, and provide regularly scheduled and interim review and revision opportunities.

The scope, focus, and content of this document were influenced by the direct involvement of over 170 individuals external to NMDGF who provided valuable technical and socio-economic insights and constructive criticism from diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives. We sincerely hope they will continue to engage with us in further CWCS development and implementation.