

Chapter 1



Photo © Travis Taggart

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

KDWPT's Mission

- *To conserve and enhance Kansas' natural heritage, its wildlife and its habitats to ensure future generations the benefits for the state's diverse, living resources.
- *To provide the public with opportunities for use and appreciation of the natural resources of Kansas, consistent with the conservation of those resources.
- *To inform the public of the status of the natural resources of Kansas to promote understanding and gain assistance in achieving this mission.

Purpose and Need

For years, fish and wildlife conservation in Kansas – and in the Nation – has been funded primarily by hunters and anglers. That funding was mainly through two sources: first, revenue from the sale of fishing and hunting and a few other types of licenses; second, federal excise tax revenue from sales of fishing and hunting equipment, apportioned back to States through the United States Fish and Wildlife Service according to set formulas (through the Pittman/Robertson, Dingell/Johnson, and Wallop/Breaux Acts). This system has been very effective at funding conservation of species that are hunted or fished. Through the Endangered Species Act, limited conservation of federally endangered and threatened species has also been possible. Although in the past, benefits have accrued to nongame species from projects and actions carried out for the benefit of hunted, fished and T&E species, with few exceptions (forage and prey species) there has been little federal funding specifically for nongame species. Federal funding sources for these species were not available until recently and those funds are relatively small compared to those available for game species. The State of Kansas does have a small nongame fund, financed through a checkoff on state income taxes to address the approximately 80% of species that are neither hunted, fished, endangered nor threatened but there was no comparable federal funding mechanism to match or supplement these funds.

To address this recognized inequity in funding, the Commerce, Justice and State Appropriations Act of Fiscal Year 2001, Title IX, Public Law 106-553 created the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program. Although this act provided only one year's appropriation of funds for fish and wildlife conservation, it identified the elements required to be included in the "wildlife conservation plan" that States committed to develop by October 2005. A second act, the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2002, Public Law 107-63, Title 1, created a "State Wildlife Grants Program" and required the states to develop "comprehensive wildlife conservation plans" by October 2005. To remain eligible for State Wildlife Grant funding, states were required to update their original plan every 10 years.

This 2015 planning effort titled Kansas' State Wildlife Action Plan, is that required revision. This is the first revision of a plan implemented in 2005 titled "A Future for Kansas Wildlife, Kansas' Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy" (Wasson et al. 2005). This revision occurs a decade after the original plan was adopted to guide State Wildlife Grant funding. This revision is evidence that this plan is dynamic and adaptive to new biological information and technical tools that allow better assessments of wildlife habitat and population trends. Like the original plan, this revision allowed collaboration of stakeholders ranging from experts to interested citizens of the state. This version is an improvement and refinement of the original plan that will aim State Wildlife Grant funding to target Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) within pre-identified wildlife habitats termed Ecological Focus Areas. It is funded in part by the State Wildlife Grants program, and meets the requirements of both of these Federal acts. It is based on the best available information and points out data gaps where appropriate. It is the result of a huge effort involving virtually all of Kansas' conservation agencies and organizations, and coordinated by the Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. It is truly a plan for Kansas – not just for the Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism.

Eight Required Elements of State Wildlife Action Plan

The enabling legislation, along with regulations governing the State Wildlife Grants and related programs requires that Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plans include the following elements:

1. information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations as the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of Kansas' wildlife;
2. descriptions of locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to conservation of species identified in (a);
3. descriptions of issues which may adversely affect species identified in (a) or their habitats, and priority research and survey efforts needed to identify factors which may assist in restoration and improved conservation of these species and habitats;
4. descriptions of conservation actions determined to be necessary to conserve the identified species and habitats and priorities for implementing such actions;
5. proposed plans for monitoring species identified in (a) and their habitats, for monitoring the effectiveness of the conservation actions proposed in (d), and for adapting these conservation actions to respond appropriately to new information or changing conditions;
6. descriptions of procedures to review the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan at intervals not to exceed 10 years;
7. plans for coordinating, to the extent feasible, the development, implementation, review, and revision of the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan with Federal, State, and local agencies and Indian tribes that manage significant land and water areas within Kansas or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats; and
8. provisions to ensure public participation in the development, revision, and implementation of projects and programs. Congress has affirmed that broad public participation is an essential element of this process.

This plan is the result of a process that was specifically designed to meet the above required elements.

Value of a State Wildlife Action Plan to Kansas

For years, forward-thinking ecologists and others have encouraged that plans be built around habitats rather than species. There are many reasons for this. Perhaps the best reason is that whatever happens to the habitat ultimately determines the suitability for species and the ability of the species to survive/thrive. This Wildlife Action Plan is a habitat-based plan. SGCN were identified, but only for purposes of linking sets of species to key habitats and priority conservation areas, termed Ecological Focus Areas, around the state. Issues and actions relate directly to those focus areas within regions, and indirectly to SGCN which occupy those areas.

This is a strategic plan that identifies broad priorities for conservation of wildlife in the state. It is expected that projects will be developed that address actions aimed at the priority species, habitats, and issues identified in this plan and that these projects will be implemented by teams comprised of individuals representing diverse agencies and organizations with funding provided by multiple sources.

Approval of this plan allows cost-shared federal funding via State Wildlife Grants for projects that address issues and actions identified in the plan. In the last decade, State Wildlife Grants have cost-shared on more than 50 important research initiatives. These included research and assessments of both habitats and organisms. All of these projects have provided information to Kansans regarding the population status and best management of habitats for the wildlife community.

3

This intensive planning effort, with inputs from numerous conservation partners, meshes perfectly well with the mission statement of Kansas' Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. Within that mission statement there is one sentence that epitomizes the role of this strategic plan. It is: *“To conserve and enhance Kansas’ natural heritage, its wildlife and its habitats to ensure future generations the benefits of the state’s diverse living resources.”*

