

Introduction to Ohio's State Wildlife Action Plan

I. A Vehicle for Conservation Funding

The history of wildlife management as we know it today dates back to the early 19th century when hunters, anglers, and trappers began to notice declines in popular sport and commercial species. These early conservationists asked legislators for regulations on themselves, as well as restrictions on commercial harvest, so that the activities they cared so much about would be able to continue for future generations. Later that century, after years of lobbying by sportsmen, the first wildlife management agencies were created. These same sportsmen provided the funding for these agencies through license fees, and later excise taxes on their gear. This highly successful model (The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation) is stronger than ever today, and the reason why management of sport species is so well funded.

Through the years, many non-sport species have benefitted from management efforts directed at sport species and their habitats. However, a non-sport species analog to the sportfish and wildlife restoration program has never been developed. Limited funding has been provided through the Endangered Species Act in recent decades. Additionally, fundraising mechanisms such as tax check-offs, license plates, conservation stamps, and the like have been used to generate funding for non-sport and endangered species management. Unfortunately, none of these have generated a fraction of what sportsmen provide through well-established programs. As species and their habitats continue to decline (listed species have doubled in the past 10-20 years), clearly more needs to be done on the conservation front.

The idea for a national wildlife conservation effort for non-game and endangered species goes back several years. The initial effort was intended to provide stable funding for wildlife diversity and non-game species similar to the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson funding mechanisms for game and sport fish. The effort was entitled "Teaming with Wildlife" and was focused on an excise tax based system that taxed outdoor-related and wildlife recreation related items such as binoculars, bird seed, camping gear, etc. The effort failed however, and Congress was forced to consider other options. Eventually, Congress passed a series of bills that provided funding to the states for the "species of greatest conservation need" utilizing general tax revenue dollars that had to be renewed on an annual basis.

To provide additional funding for wildlife diversity, the U.S. Congress passed the Wildlife Conservation and Reinvestment Act in 2001 – a one time national appropriation to the states. State Wildlife Grant (SWG) legislation passed in 2002. The goal of the SWG program is to help ensure healthy fish and wildlife populations and wildlife diversity throughout the United States, especially those species in greatest need of conservation. In addition to providing annually-approved federal funding, the SWG program mandates each state and territory submit a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (this revision of which is now referred to as the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP)) to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Guidelines for development of the CWCS/SWAP and the criteria for approval were provided to state and territory fish and wildlife agencies. Through the State Wildlife Grants Program legislation, Congress has identified eight required elements for each state's Action Plan. Plans must identify and provide for information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife; locations and relative condition of key habitats; problems which may adversely affect species or their habitats; conservation actions to conserve the identified species and habitats; plans for monitoring species and habitats; procedures to review the Plan; development, implementation, review, and revision of the Plan with Federal, State, and local agencies that manage significant land and water areas within the state; and public participation in the development, revision, and implementation of the Plan.

Ohio's Action Plan is a strategic and tactical look at the combined conservation efforts needed to sustain species of greatest conservation need and their habitats across the state. The Plan is intended to serve

as the foundation from which operational-level plans of the multiple conservation agencies and groups within Ohio are generated. Funding provided by the State Wildlife Grants Program will facilitate the development, coordination, and implementation of these plans (projects) through this Action Plan. The Plan is intended to be a living (thus adaptive) document that will continually be updated, revised, and improved based on the involvement and input of all those interested in Ohio's conservation future.

II. A Unifying Force for Conservation

The purpose of Ohio's SWAP is to provide strategic and tactical direction for conserving wildlife diversity in Ohio. It specifically addresses, but is not limited to, species in greatest need of conservation and their habitats, and the development of conservation actions to abate threats to those species and habitats as described by the U. S. Congress in the enabling legislation. In addition, the SWAP provides a vehicle to encourage partnerships and cooperation among conservation partners in Ohio.

Wildlife conservation in Ohio is a very important and very challenging task. The landscape and human population of the state is varied, with extremes of highly developed urban environments, largely undeveloped and forested environments, highly productive farmlands, and the waters of Lake Erie. More than 11 million people call Ohio home, yet very little of the state is in public ownership. This combination of high human population, urban and rural landscapes, extensive agriculture, and multiple state and national boundaries makes Ohio a challenge for wildlife conservation and management.

The task of conducting landscape-scale conservation in Ohio, in reality, will take all the time and resources that government regulatory agencies have, and still ask for more. The amount of work to be done, information needed, fiscal and personnel resources necessary, and time and location issues involved is beyond daunting. Add to that the fact that we are working with very dynamic systems, looming impacts of climate change, and the challenge of getting civilization and nature to coexist – and you begin to get a sense of the enormity of this conservation endeavor. To have any chance at large scale success necessitates that everyone from the governor's office to the average citizen work in a coordinated fashion towards common conservation goals. This starts with identifying a place that everyone wants to go (a conservation endpoint) and then mapping a strategy to get there with buy-in from all that are going to participate.

The Division of Wildlife was the lead agency in the development of Ohio's original Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, as well as the revision now known as the State Wildlife Action Plan. However, neither of these documents could have been completed without a significant amount of help from our conservation partners. Partners contributed to development by providing valuable information on species, habitats, conservation threats and actions, and the relative priorities of those. Besides making this Action Plan a more complete and more useful document, the cooperative development of it should help promote a sense of ownership among all participants. In the end, it is paramount that the Action Plan be viewed as, and function as a tool for anyone interested, to participate in conservation.

Conceptually, the way the model should work and the part everyone plays is fairly straightforward. Holistic conservation will consist of the Action Plan as the source for identifying and prioritizing threats to species and habitats, and actions to abate those threats. Partnerships will then be utilized to implement on-the-ground projects that derive from prioritized actions, and the SWG program will provide the funding. The key is partnerships. Partnerships will provide the increases in efficiency and effectiveness needed to conduct landscape-scale conservation. Partnerships will increase the size of Ohio's conservation workforce.

Partnerships are made productive by focusing partners on aspects of projects that align with their authority, mission, and areas of expertise. As projects are developed and implemented, partners must be selected based upon their "fit" for specific aspects of those projects. This will help avoid duplication of effort, and efficiently align capabilities with tasks to be accomplished. Long-term success of Action Plan implementation will require the combined and coordinated efforts of the Division, its state and federal agency partners, academia, conservation organizations, and every Ohio citizen that values nature.

In a nutshell, Ohio's State Wildlife Action Plan will be the means to bring together all Ohioans with an interest in conservation, and help prioritize and direct conservation efforts for habitats and species so that they are as scientifically effective and financially efficient as possible.

III. Development of Ohio's SWAP

The Division of Wildlife adopted an approach of partnership and public participation in the development of Ohio's SWAP. The DOW has committed to building partnerships and public support for conservation by working with public and private groups and individuals with an interest in management of our natural resources. A broad range of state and federal agencies, conservation organizations, businesses, academics, stakeholders, and general public were invited to participate in the process. Together these groups represent the best resources available in terms of their contributions to our knowledge about Ohio's species, habitats, threats, and conservation actions.

As suggested in the AFWA Best Practices guide, our approach to public involvement included identifying key constituent groups, determining appropriate involvement goals for each, and developing strategies to get the most participation/feedback from each group. To reach out and involve conservation stakeholders in the development of Ohio's SWAP, a variety of strategies involving a number of communication channels were utilized. In each case, efforts were made to scale the level of public participation and information gathering to the level of the group in question. The following is a description of the methods used to facilitate public involvement in the development of Ohio's SWAP.

III-A. Public Participation

The Division of Wildlife has a long standing tradition of communicating with the public and seeking input on conservation issues, including development of planning documents such as the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy and this revised State Wildlife Action Plan. Several activities were conducted to acquire public input into the development of the original CWCS and new SWAP, including public meetings, meetings with constituent groups, advertisement on the Division's website, and statewide conservation club leadership meetings.

The Division undertook numerous activities to gain both public input and agency/organization input into development of the CWCS/SWAP. These activities included:

- Regional Meetings (with surveys)
- Statewide Conservation Summit
- CWCS/SWAP presentations at meetings of the Ohio Wildlife Council (with surveys)
- CWCS/SWAP presentations at the Division's annual Wildlife Diversity Conference (with surveys)
- Advertisement on the Division's website
- Mailing of CWCS/SWAP document (via CD) and surveys to interested parties

III-A-1. The Process and Public Involvement

A series of five regional meetings were conducted with conservation organization leaders during development of the original CWCS. A summary of the Division's CWCS approach and proposed activities was presented at each meeting followed by an open house forum to exchange ideas and gain comments, questions, and concerns. A formal survey related to wildlife diversity activities and the CWCS was also distributed and collected at the end of each meeting. A total of 131 conservation group leaders, representing thousands of Ohioans attended these meetings and completed the CWCS survey.

The Division also hosted a statewide "Conservation Summit". Approximately 100 constituent leaders, academic professionals, and conservation organization leaders were invited to attend the summit. The summit involved a series of presentations regarding the development of the CWCS followed by an open house forum involving Division professionals and administrators. Participants at the summit were also invited and encouraged to complete a survey on current wildlife diversity activities. The CWCS was also presented to approximately 100 transportation planners at the *Ohio Transportation Planning Conference*, where a draft of the document was distributed and input requested from attending transportation professionals.

Input from the general public regarding the development of the CWCS/SWAP has been obtained by several methods. The Division's annual Wildlife Diversity Conference is hosted in Columbus and open to the general public. On average, 700-900 participants attend. The Ohio CWCS/SWAP has been a prominent component of the conference, and all participants have been invited to review drafts of the document and complete surveys about it. Surveys received during and after the conference are analyzed and then archived for future reference. Over the years, a number of relevant comments have impacted the content of the final draft of the CWCS and SWAP. Examples of recent public meetings and conferences include:

September 2013 Wildlife Diversity Leadership Conference – 50 conservation leaders attended; attendees were given the opportunity to comment on SGCN and habitats; surveys were filled out and attendees were asked to stay connected throughout the SWAP revision process

March 2014 Wildlife Open Houses – held at 5 locations around the state; SWAP informational display was used to solicit public input/comments; attendees were directed to the Division's website for access to the draft SWAP

March 2014 Wildlife Diversity Conference – 800 attendees included a mix of government, academia, and the public; SWAP information booth was used to communicate with attendees; attendees were directed to the Division's website for SWAP review and comment

September 2014 Wildlife Diversity Leadership Conference – 50 conservation leaders attended; attendees were given a presentation on conservation threats and actions; attendees were asked to review draft threats/actions online and continue to remain connected through the SWAP revision process

March 2015 Wildlife Diversity Conference – 800+ attendees included a mix of government, academia, and the public; SWAP review information was included in the registration packet; attendees were directed to the Division's website for SWAP review and comment

August 2015 Wildlife Diversity Leadership Conference – approximately 50 conservation leaders attended; attendees were given a presentation on the completed final draft of the SWAP, and how their groups could use the document; attendees were asked to access the SWAP online, and make it a tool for future conservation efforts.

Multiple CWCS/SWAP presentations have been made at the Ohio Wildlife Council meeting in Columbus. The Wildlife Council is appointed by the governor and approves all Wildlife rules. This group is a primary liaison between the Division of Wildlife and the public, and all Wildlife Council meetings are open to the public.

As suggested in the AFWA Best Practices guide, the public was notified of the state's intent to revise its SWAP and given the opportunity to review and comment on the Plan via the Division's website. SWAP content was first posted online in March of 2014. As sections of the document reached completed draft status, they were added to existing sections on the website for review and public comment.

In summary, the Ohio CWCS/SWAP has been presented to more than 1000 individuals from throughout Ohio. Public input resulting from review opportunities was evaluated and relevant information incorporated in the final CWCS/SWAP document. Participants at each public gathering were strongly encouraged to regularly communicate with the Division regarding wildlife diversity issues and activities.

III-A-2. General Public and Constituent Involvement in Conservation

Since adopting a Comprehensive Management System in the late 1980s, the Division of Wildlife has included the general public, constituent groups, and academia in its decision making and administrative processes. These groups have provided valuable information, opinions, and attitude assessments which have aided the Division with management, administrative, and regulatory decisions. A variety of formal and informal approaches are used to gather information from the public and constituent groups.

III-A-2.1 Formal Approaches to Public Involvement

In addition to a variety of informal approaches to public involvement, the Division of Wildlife also employs a wide array of more formal approaches for communicating and gathering information from the public, government agencies, conservation clubs, constituent groups, and other parties interested in natural resources management.

Wildlife Council

The Wildlife Council is the Division of Wildlife's formal connection to the public, and acts as the advisory group for all rules and regulations. All Division rules related to the establishment of hunting, trapping, and fishing seasons, bag limits, size, species, method of taking, and possession, including traditional game species and non-game species such as reptiles and amphibians, are adopted only with approval of the Wildlife Council. Wildlife Council meetings are open to the public, and typically occur at a rate of about 6-8 per year. At these meetings, the public has opportunities to interact with Council members as well as Division personnel. Presentations regarding the development of Ohio's SWAP were made at multiple Wildlife Council meetings.

Wildlife District Open Houses

The Division of Wildlife has adopted several formal methods for gathering public input concerning proposed wildlife regulations. One method is to hold five district open houses in March of every year. These open houses introduce the public to upcoming rule proposals, revisions, and/or modifications. The public is encouraged to offer comments and discuss the proposals with Division employees. Comments are taken in writing, and analyzed and archived. Strong sentiment by the public on a proposal(s) can influence the final version. In addition to public review of rule proposals, open houses are used to inform the public about emerging issues, new opportunities, and/or new programs related to conservation in Ohio. Open houses were used to inform attendees about Ohio's SWAP, and how they could participate in the development and implementation of the Plan.

State Fish and Wildlife Hearings

Following the district open houses, the Division reconsiders the proposed regulations and presents the final recommendations to the public at statewide hearings in the spring and fall. At the statewide hearings there is a formal reading of the proposed regulations followed by time for public input and formal comment. Both the open houses and the statewide hearings are publicized through Division publications and newspaper announcements and are open to the public. Records of public comments are kept as a formal part of the hearing process.

Public Attitude Surveys

The Division of Wildlife periodically conducts public attitude surveys to determine the public's opinion on, or level of understanding regarding wildlife, wildlife management, endangered species, and other aspects of conservation in Ohio. These surveys may be conducted online, or in person depending upon the type of survey and information to be collected.

Professional Memberships/Communication

The Division of Wildlife is active in a number of professional conservation organizations, and has been for many years. These organizations include the Ohio Biological Survey, the Ohio Fish and Wildlife Management Association, Ohio Chapters of the American Fisheries Society and The Wildlife Society, Ohio Lepidopterists, as well as several national organizations. This regular networking and communication has been an important tool in helping the Division connect with professional and academic communities. Through membership in these organizations, the Division directly communicates with groups and individuals who can provide views and opinions related to various conservation issues. These professionals include academic professionals, non-governmental organization professionals, statewide constituent group leaders, and professionals from other governmental agencies and organizations. Connections made through activity in these organizations facilitated identification of species and habitat experts that played key roles in the development of Ohio's SWAP.

Academic Cooperatives

Currently the Division has cooperative programs with The Ohio State University (OSU) and several other Ohio colleges and universities. At The Ohio State University, the Division supports both the Terrestrial Wildlife Ecology Laboratory (TWEL) and Aquatic Ecology Laboratory (AEL) which conduct valuable research for the Division. As part of the agreement with the OSU TWEL and AEL, the responsible departments host an annual review of their research. These gatherings of academic and agency professionals facilitate the exchange of ideas, topics of concern, future research needs, and other issues related to fisheries and wildlife management. Through research relationships created with Ohio's colleges and universities, a number of individuals were identified that assisted with the development of Ohio's SWAP.

Statewide Conservation Organization Meetings

Ohio is home to many conservation organizations that focus on species, habitats, ecosystems, and outdoor activities, and whose missions are the preservation and enhancement of these for future generations. The Division actively communicates and partners with these organizations on conservation-related issues in Ohio. These groups were given the opportunity to review and provide input on the development of Ohio's original CWCS as well as the newly revised SWAP. These groups will also play a role in the implementation of Ohio's SWAP going forward. To illustrate the diversity and breadth of these organizations, a sampling includes the following:

- Beaver Creek Wildlife Education Center
- Black Swamp Bird Observatory
- Black Swamp Conservancy
- Buckeye Big Bucks
- Canton Audubon Society
- Cleveland Metroparks
- Columbus Audubon Society
- Crawford County Parks
- Erie Metroparks
- Firelands Audubon Society
- Friends of Magee Marsh
- Friends of the National Rifle Association
- Geauga County Parks
- Grand River Partners Land Conservancy
- Greater Mohican Audubon Society
- Hamilton County Parks
- Isaak Walton League
- Lake County Metroparks
- Lake Erie Charterboat Association
- Native Plants Society of NE Ohio
- Ohio Association of Garden Clubs
- Ohio Audubon Council
- Ohio BASS Chapter Federation
- Ohio Blue Bird Society
- Ohio Chapter of Ducks Unlimited
- Ohio Chapter of Pheasants Forever
- Ohio Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation
- Ohio Environmental Council
- Ohio Farm Bureau
- Ohio Greenways
- Ohio Historical Society
- Ohio Huskie Muskie Club
- Ohio Lepidopterists
- Ohio Ornithological Society
- Ohio Sea Grant
- Ohio Smallmouth Alliance

Richland County Parks
Rivers Unlimited
Stark County Parks
Summit County Metroparks
The Nature Conservancy
The Wilds
Toledo Metroparks
Trout Unlimited

Citizen Science

Citizen Science is scientific research conducted by volunteers and its success depends on public participation. Current citizen science projects in Ohio are listed below. These projects allow the public to actively participate in conservation, and provide information that the Division would have difficulty collecting with its limited resources.

Ohio Frog and Toad Calling Survey

In Ohio, naturalists have been documenting the occurrence of amphibians for over 160 years. In 1838 Dr. Jared Kirtland published the first list of amphibians collected in Ohio. Since then a myriad of individuals have worked to determine how Ohio's frogs, toads, and salamanders are distributed. The Ohio Frog and Toad Calling Survey utilizes the efforts of volunteers from around the state to conduct audio surveys at selected breeding sites.

Breeding Bird Atlas II

A breeding bird atlas is a grid-based survey used to document the status and distribution of all bird species that breed within a given country, state, or county. Atlas projects are largely accomplished with the help and dedication of a statewide network of volunteers that document the breeding status of all bird species encountered. The ultimate success of Ohio's next breeding bird atlas depends on the active participation and efforts of birders and outdoor enthusiasts from throughout the state.

Bowhunter Survey

The Ohio Bowhunter Survey is a program the Division uses to track year-to-year changes in furbearer populations, and to record sightings of special interest species such as black bear, bobcat, and river otter. Because bowhunters typically spend many hours in the field observing wildlife, this group of outdoorsmen and women provide some of the best information on certain wildlife species that are difficult to monitor using other survey methods.

Spider Survey

The Ohio Spider Survey is an effort to find out how many species of spiders live in Ohio. The original list of Ohio Spiders was published by William Barrows in 1924 and included 306 species. The current project was begun in 1994 and the list of spider species known for Ohio has now reached 583. There are probably more species yet to be discovered. The aim of the Ohio Spider Survey is to fill a major data gap in our understanding of spider populations in Ohio.

III-A-2.2 Informal Approaches to Public Involvement and Communication

Less formal approaches to public involvement are many and varied. Many of these are aimed at building support for conservation by educating the public about species, habitats, and outdoor recreational opportunities. To help spread the conservation message, efforts are made to include members of Ohio's outdoor media at newsworthy events. In order to build and maintain relationships with professional conservation partners, Division personnel are regular attendees of conservation-focused conferences and meetings.

WILD Ohio Magazine

WILD Ohio Magazine had a distribution of approximately 150,000 copies per edition, until transitioning to a paid subscription in 2012. Distribution has now decreased to approximately 12,000 copies per edition. The Division has been publishing *WILD Ohio* magazine for approximately 26 years. The magazine

showcases all aspects of conservation in Ohio, and is a significant means of communication between wildlife professionals and the public. Many important SGCN and habitats have been highlighted in *WILD Ohio Magazine* over the years. The magazine has also been an important tool for building support for key conservation issues.

WILD Ohio Video Magazine

WILD Ohio Video Magazine has been produced for approximately 23 years. The 30-minute show is distributed at no charge to Public Broadcasting Service Stations (via satellite link) and is also provided to local governments and cable stations. Like the print edition of the magazine, the TV show covers all aspects of conservation in Ohio and has been a great tool for cultivating interest in the outdoors.

Internet Communications

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources website hosts pages for all of the ODNR divisions, including the Division of Wildlife. Serving more than 2 million Internet visits each year, the Division of Wildlife Website serves the public through the dissemination of various technical publications, educational and instructional materials, and other value-added pieces of information. Ohio's SWAP was available through the Wildlife webpage for review and comment by the public. The SWAP in various stages (drafts) of completion was available online for 17 months.

Call Center Operations

The Division of Wildlife maintains a toll-free line for public requests, questions, and comments. This phone system is operated during regular work hours and receives about 80,000-100,000 calls per year.

E-mail Communications

As part of the Division's communications efforts, visitors to the website are invited and encouraged to submit comments, questions, or opinions directly to a wildlife specialist or other Division employee. In reviewing Ohio's SWAP, the public was encouraged to email comments to the SWAP revision coordinator.

Social Media

The public is now able to communicate with the Division and with each other regarding conservation issues and opportunities via Facebook and Twitter.

Project WILD

Project WILD is a supplementary education program emphasizing awareness, appreciation, and understanding of wildlife and natural resources in young people. The program teaches young people basic concepts about wild animals, their needs and importance, and their relationships to people and the environment. *Project WILD* activity guides are available to educators free of charge when they attend a workshop. Trained facilitators conduct educator workshops throughout the year. In addition, the Division of Wildlife conducts annual leadership workshops to train new facilitators

Personal Communication

The most basic, yet perhaps most important, communication channel with the public comes in the form of personal communication between Division personnel and the citizens of Ohio. County wildlife officer duties include not only wildlife law enforcement, but also speaking engagements and presentations for schools, youth groups, conservation clubs, and other interested groups. Wildlife and fisheries biologists and technicians routinely communicate with local and statewide conservation clubs, make presentations for interested groups.

Ohio is home to more than 100 local or county fairs and festivals throughout the year. The Division of Wildlife staffs displays at more than half of these events every year, helping to reach thousands of Ohio citizens with information about conservation in Ohio. The Division plays an important role in all of the major outdoor-related shows in the state. In addition, the Division maintains displays at garden shows and other similar events that attract a different outdoor crowd.

Angler Surveys

Surveys of anglers are conducted annually throughout Ohio, providing an important conduit for information exchange between the Division and the public regarding all facets of management and conservation of aquatic species and habitats.

Zoos, Museums, and Other Family Attractions

Ohio is fortunate to be home of some of the world's best and most prestigious zoos and museums. The Division of Wildlife emphasizes interaction and partnerships with these professional institutions. Over the years, cooperative programs have been developed related to conservation education, as well as endangered species propagation and reintroduction. Current or recent cooperative efforts involving these zoos and museums include:

- Osprey rearing and hacking
- Bald eagle fostering, rehabilitation, and release
- Trumpeter swam rearing and reintroduction
- Endangered freshwater mussel research, propagation, and reintroduction
- American burying beetle propagation and reintroduction
- Karner blue butterfly propagation and reintroduction
- Eastern plains garter snake propagation and reintroduction
- Western banded killifish propagation and reintroduction
- Pirate perch propagation and reintroduction
- Development & delivery of educational materials and workshops to promote stream conservation
- Participation in zoo or museum sponsored symposia or professional meetings

Conferences and Meetings

The Division of Wildlife hosts, co-hosts, or cooperates with a number of professional conferences and meetings that focus on conservation. For the most part, these events are open to the public and offer a unique opportunity for Division personnel to interact with other professionals and conservation-minded members of the public in a more structured setting. A partial listing of these conferences and meetings includes:

- Ohio Outdoor Writers Annual Conference
- Ohio Fish and Wildlife Management Association
- Ohio Wildlife Diversity Conference
- Ohio Avian Ecology Conference
- Audubon's IBA Technical Committee
- Ohio Blue Bird Society Annual Meeting
- Ohio Lepidopterists Society Annual Meeting
- Ohio Prairie Conference
- Ohio Herpetological Work Group
- Bird Conservation Initiative Conference
- Ohio Farm Bureau Conference
- Ohio Natural History Conference
- Ohio Wildlife Rehabilitators Conference
- Wing Watch Birders Conference

III-B. Coordination with Federal, State, and Local Agencies

Coordination of fish and wildlife management plans and activities is found at all levels within the structure of the Division of Wildlife, and occurs cooperatively with federal, state, and local government partners. As a state bordered by five other states and one Canadian province, it is critical that all fish and wildlife management activities be conducted with coordination of all natural resource management agencies in both the state and the region.

The Division of Wildlife has a long standing tradition of partnering with other agencies, natural resource organizations, private landowners, and other natural resources-related groups. These partnerships have

involved partnering on fish and wildlife management plans, management activities, land purchases, public displays, and other activities that further the conservation of fish and wildlife in Ohio.

The Division coordinates all fish and wildlife management activities with all the significant land owners in the state, both private and public. Major landowners include:

Wayne National Forest (US Forest Service)
ODNR, Division of Parks and Recreation
ODNR, Div. of Natural Areas and Preserves
ODNR, Division of Forestry
Cuyahoga National Park (National Park Service)
The Nature Conservancy
Ohio Historical Society
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Numerous Metro Park and Local Park Agencies

All major and significant landowners, as well as natural resources agencies, were involved in development of the SWAP and were invited to comment on the Plan. There are no tribal lands in Ohio.

III-B-1. International Coordination and Cooperation

The Division of Wildlife participates in a number of international efforts to conserve and manage fish and wildlife resources in North America, most notably the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission, the Mississippi Flyway Council, and the Partners in Flight program. Each of these efforts involves cooperative activities across state and/or international boundaries, and the management efforts of the cooperating states are coordinated at an international or national level. Participating in these efforts ensures that the fish and wildlife management activities in Ohio are part of a larger, regional or national effort to conserve fish and wildlife populations throughout North America. Representatives from these efforts are consulted on a regular basis (including during development of Ohio's SWAP) to ensure that Ohio's conservation activities support national and international goals and objectives.

Examples of internationally coordinated organizations and initiatives in which Ohio actively participates include:

- Lake Erie Committee of the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission – involves coordination of fish management activities in all the Great Lakes; members include all Great Lakes states and provinces
- Lake Erie Water Snake Recovery Plan – involves population recovery of the state threatened (federally delisted in 2011) Lake Erie water snake; members and cooperators include Ohio DNR divisions, Toledo Zoo, Metropolitan Park District of the Toledo Area, The Nature Conservancy, Ohio Lepidopterists, Toledo/Lucas County Port Authority, Michigan DNR, American Zoological Association, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) – a unit of the United Nations which focuses on international trade in endangered species; the Division of Wildlife coordinates the harvest of paddlefish and river otters with CITES and adheres to all relevant agreements

III-B-2. Coordination with National Agencies and Organizations

Significant federal land holdings in Ohio are limited to the Cuyahoga National Park near Cleveland, the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge in northern Ohio, and the Wayne National Forest in the southeastern portion of the state. In addition, the Ohio Division of Wildlife cooperates extensively with the Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge in West Virginia. These holdings are managed by the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Forest Service, respectively. There are no tribal lands in Ohio.

Fish and wildlife management activities in the Cuyahoga National Park are limited. The acreage of the Cuyahoga National Park is relatively small and management of the area does not greatly impact the overall fish and wildlife diversity of the state except in very specific instances. The Division of Wildlife and the National Park Service meet annually to discuss and coordinate fish and wildlife management activities, the status of endangered species, nuisance wildlife, and other issues. Additional meetings and discussion are held as needed.

The Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge (and its satellite areas) primarily represents some of the last remaining wetland complexes in northern Ohio and the few remaining undeveloped islands in Lake Erie. Management of the area is conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and coordination of fish and wildlife management activities is done in cooperation with the Division of Wildlife. The refuge staff meets regularly with Division of Wildlife staff to coordinate management activities and the management goals of both agencies.

The Wayne National Forest in southeastern Ohio represents the largest federal land holding in Ohio. As a multiple-use agency, the U.S. Forest Service manages the forest for timber, wildlife, recreation, and other sustainable uses. Division representatives meet with the Forest superintendent on a regular basis to discuss common areas of interest and areas of concern, including completion of the Wayne National Forest strategic plan. In addition, representatives from the Forest have been included in discussions involving the Division's strategic and tactical plans, including the SWAP.

In addition to government agencies, the only national non-government organization that has significant land holdings in Ohio is The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The Edge of Appalachia preserve in southwestern Ohio and some properties in central Ohio represent the significant land holdings of The Nature Conservancy in the state. These properties are managed by TNC primarily as nature reserves, however limited recreational opportunities are permitted in cooperation with the Division of Wildlife under the guidance of the Division's strategic and tactical plans, including the SWAP.

Examples of nationally coordinated initiatives and organizations with which the Division of Wildlife actively participates include:

- The Nature Conservancy (TNC) – critical habitat purchases
- American Zoological Association (AZA) – endangered species propagation and reintroduction
- Ohio Bird Conservation Initiative
- Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association (MICRA) and Ohio River Fisheries Management Team (ORFMT) – coordinate efforts to conserve and manage fisheries in the Mississippi River drainage including the Ohio River

III-B-3. Coordination with State Agencies and Organizations

Three state and one quasi-governmental agency have significant land holdings in Ohio – the Ohio Divisions of Parks and Recreation, Forestry, and Natural Areas and Preserves, and the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District, respectively. Representatives from each of these agencies are included in discussions concerning statewide fish and wildlife management issues or activities, and local or regional issues are discussed on a case-by-case basis with the appropriate agency. These activities are coordinated and implemented as described in the Division's strategic and tactical plans, and Ohio's SWAP. Representatives from the Ohio Division of Forestry, Ohio Division of Parks and Recreation, and the Ohio Division of Natural Areas and Preserves were invited to review and comment on the SWAP.

Ohio also has several significant non-government agencies that are involved in natural resource management, including the Ohio Farm Bureau, the Ohio Forestry Council, Ohio Environmental Council, and Ohio Audubon Society. Representatives from each of these organizations, and others, have been included in all discussions and meetings involving statewide fish and wildlife management activities, including development of the Division's strategic and tactical plans, and the SWAP.

Examples of statewide initiatives and organizations that the Division of Wildlife actively participates in include:

- Grand River Partners – habitat protection in the Grand River watershed
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) – habitat restoration and riparian protection projects
- Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) – habitat restoration and protection
- Columbus Zoo/The Wilds – endangered species propagation and research
- Ohio Departments of Health and Agriculture – coordinated efforts to control animal diseases

III-B-4. Coordination with Local Agencies and Organizations

Ohio is home to more than 700 local conservation organizations representing thousands of Ohioans concerned about fish, wildlife, and other natural resource issues. Each of these organizations has local interests and concerns, and the Division of Wildlife works closely with these organizations to ensure that local fish and wildlife management concerns are addressed as effectively and efficiently as possible. Each of these concerns, and others, are addressed using the guidance provided by the Division's strategic and tactical plans, and the SWAP.

In addition to local conservation organizations, Ohio also has numerous local park agencies. These agencies represent tens of thousands of acres of parkland throughout the state. The management of county, metro, and other local parks is important to the success of conservation in Ohio. Therefore representatives from the larger park districts in the state, as well as the professional organization representing Ohio's parks, the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association (OPRA), were invited and participated in various levels of development of Ohio's SWAP.

Many fish and wildlife issues for local park and recreation agencies involve either fish/lake management activities, or nuisance wildlife management and control. Any actions or activities related to these issues must be coordinated with the Division of Wildlife, as the permitting agency, using the guidance provided by the Division's strategic and tactical plans, including the SWAP.

In certain instances local park and recreation agencies have provided partnerships for acquiring valuable wildlife habitat, including critical habitat for the Karner Blue Butterfly in northwestern Ohio. In one case the Metropolitan Park District of the Toledo Area provided partial funding for purchasing Karner Blue Butterfly habitat in the Toledo area. The resulting wildlife area is managed in cooperation with the park district under the guidance of the Division of Wildlife's strategic and tactical plans, including the SWAP. Other examples of locally coordinated initiatives in which the Division of Wildlife actively participates include local park district deer and geese control and management, monitoring and management of urban nesting peregrine falcons, and raccoon strain rabies control.

As Ohio's fish and wildlife resources face greater and more complex challenges, the Division of Wildlife must coordinate its efforts with other agencies and organizations in order to meet its goal of sustaining healthy fish and wildlife populations throughout the state. These efforts have resulted, in part, in the reintroduction of several extirpated species of wildlife, the stabilizing of endangered or threatened species, more widespread populations of common species, and increased opportunities for fish and wildlife related recreation. Additional conservation success stories are on the horizon as the Division of Wildlife continues to work with its national, state, and local partners.

For additional information on utilizing partnerships to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of conservation efforts, see Ohio's Approach to Conservation in Chapter 1.

IV. Evaluation and Adaptation of the SWAP

The Division's Comprehensive Management System mandates that planning documents (strategic plan, tactical plans, conservation opportunity area plans, etc.) be reviewed mid-cycle of the life of the plan (see Chapter 1, Action Plan Evaluation and Updates section for details). The SWAP will be reviewed on the same schedule, meaning that review will occur every five years for this document. Project reviews will occur annually in the form of performance or final project reports, with evaluations based on performance measures specific to each project. When possible, the SWAP review will be aligned with reviews of other

related conservation planning documents within the Division in order to identify shared conservation actions, objectives, and outcomes. Prior to the next revision, as recommended in the AFWA Best Practices document, a review and revision charter will be developed. This charter will formalize a structure, process, schedule, and anticipated workload to help delineate roles, responsibilities, and contributions for those involved.

IV-A. Conservation Partner Engagement

Conservation partners will be invited to participate in contributing information and completing tasks associated with reviews and revisions (see also Future Conservation Partner Involvement and Communication below). Their participation will be scaled the level of the type of review or revision (i.e., comprehensive, major, or minor). Outside partners with specific expertise will be utilized to help address SGCN, habitats, threats, and conservation actions. Mechanisms for selected conservation partners to engage in the review/revision process will be developed to further collaboration. Measures of success for partners that contribute information and complete tasks will be developed to help them understand how their input is used and valued. Conservation partners that contributed significantly to the SWAP will be recognized to help create a sense of ownership and desire to participate in implementation of the plan.

IV-B. Public Review and Comment

Public review and comment will be scaled with the type of review or revision (i.e., comprehensive, major, or minor) to make effective use of Division resources. Established public notification channels will be used for disseminating information and presenting schedules to garner internal and external support for the process.

The formal five-year review of the SWAP serves as a “worse-case scenario” benchmark for review. In reality, the Action Plan is a living document and will receive continual revision and updates as data gaps are filled, technology and methodologies are developed and/or improved, new information arises, new issues emerge, and additional public input is received. Reviews and revisions in response to these occurrences will take place as necessary at intervals shorter than the periods stated above. The Division will notify the USFWS Regional office by letter of intent to make minor revisions, and the letter will include a statement that addresses why the change is considered a minor revision.

IV-C. Emerging Issues

In the case of emerging issues, time may not allow the full revision process to be used. In these cases, changes to the Action Plan to reflect emerging issues will be addressed through documented coordination with the USFWS Regional Office. The process followed and changes made will be documented and included in the next SWAP revision in the Summary of Changes section.

IV-D. SWAP Use and Accessibility

As described in the AFWA Best Practices document, it is recommended that if time and resources allow, some/all of the following recommendations be instituted:

1. Include a section or companion document about “how to use this document” organized by the types of targeted audiences (e.g., land trusts, data providers, researchers, stewardship specialists, policy makers, legislators, private landowners, grant seekers).
2. Provide a Web link to the entire document as well as a segmented and searchable version of the SWAP, using software that is easily accessible and used by the public and diverse audiences (e.g., free software downloads online such as Adobe Reader for PDF file viewing). Ideally, provide a linked set of documents, references, tools, etc. that are easily updated, compared to a static, fixed documents.
3. Create a limited number of hardcopies and make available in state libraries.
4. Create a short and/or condensed version of the SWAP that is more easily printed and marketed to pique interest and participation.

IV-E. Future Conservation Partner Involvement and Communication

As recommended in the AFWA Best Practices document, we will use “Public TRACS” as a reporting and communication tool for conservation within Ohio and regionally. We will create an Ohio Portal that will contain information about ongoing projects, and reports for projects that have been completed. We will also include maps of species and habitat distributions. All data will be restricted to that which can be made available to the public without endangering sensitive species. Other states in the region will be able to access project information through the portal.

Public TRACS will help to ensure that Ohio’s SWAP functions as a tool that can be used by all conservation partners to facilitate development, implementation, evaluation, and adaptation of conservation actions. The numbers and breadth of conservation groups in Ohio make it difficult to monitor and coordinate programs and activities in a fashion that promotes some kind of consistency. Keeping all of Ohio’s conservation entities focused so that work being done is appropriate, and allows all involved to leverage the results of others is a daunting task. Public TRACS can be the communication and reporting channel that makes this kind of coordination possible. It will help focus conservation actions on high-priority issues, and allow all involved to benefit from project results and new data collected by others.