

# Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan

## From Vision to On-the-Ground Action

**T**he Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan encompasses five guiding principles: (1) conserving species-at-risk, (2) keeping common species common, (3) recognizing the unique role of Pennsylvania, (4) encouraging voluntary partnerships for species, habitats and people, and (5) taking a comprehensive approach to address strategies and priorities at the species, habitat, and species-group levels.

### *Protecting Imperiled Land, Water, and Wildlife*

#### **Critical Grassland and Prairie Habitat Acquisition**

Pennsylvania's Wildlife Action Plan calls for identifying and protecting high-priority habitats as a way to protect imperiled species. Grassland-dependent species have been identified as highly imperiled in Pennsylvania. With State Wildlife Grants funding, the Pennsylvania Game Commission

purchased Piney Tract, protecting one of the "crown jewels" of grassland habitats remaining in the Commonwealth. The conservation value of this project is significant – priority species such as the state-threatened upland sandpiper, state-endangered short-eared owl, Henslow's sparrow, savannah sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, bobolink, northern harrier and others occur on this site. In addition to the direct wildlife benefits, this site will provide recreational opportunities to wildlife watchers and hunters.

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Henslow's sparrow/Merilee Janusz

***Proactive Efforts that Benefit Wildlife and People***

**Assisting Private Landowners to Conserve Vital Wildlife Habitat**

Working with private landowners to protect the Commonwealth's wildlife is a priority in Pennsylvania's Wildlife Action Plan. Private property comprises more than 85% of the Commonwealth's land area, so focusing attention on these habitats can provide far-reaching and long-term conservation benefits. Through State Wildlife Grants and other funding sources, the Pennsylvania Game Commission and Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission are providing technical assistance to private landowners to make their properties more attractive for fish and wildlife of conservation concern. Thus far, biologists have helped more than 380 landowners develop habitat management plans for more than 71,000 acres of prime private property. Working with landowners to establish permanent conservation easements is another important approach to protecting critical habitats. Private lands program such as these help to slow the state's ongoing decline in habitat quality and loss of wildlife habitat, benefiting wildlife before recovery becomes more difficult and costly.

***Gathering Information to Take Action***  
**Conserving Atlantic Sturgeon in the Delaware River**

Conserving priority wildlife in Pennsylvania requires good information. The Delaware River, on Pennsylvania's eastern border, used to be the center of the world's Atlantic sturgeon population. Attaining lengths of 14 feet and weights of almost 900 lbs, Atlantic sturgeon are the largest fish found in Atlantic coastal rivers. Unfortunately, overharvest, water pollution, and habitat loss led to a drastic decline in Atlantic sturgeon populations

in the late 1800s. To obtain vital information about this species, Delaware State University researchers initiated an assessment of the current population status and breeding habitat in the Delaware River. Results indicate that the river still supports Atlantic sturgeon, but both suspected breeding and feeding habitats are at risk for future degradation, highlighting the need to conserve these critical habitats. This State Wildlife Grants-funded project provides managers with the vital information needed to recover Atlantic sturgeon in the Delaware River for future generations.

**Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies**

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Wildlife Diversity Biologist discussing habitat with a landowner/Eileen Butchkoski, Pennsylvania Game Commission

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Biologists preparing to release Atlantic sturgeon/Lori Brown, Delaware State University