

Massachusetts Wildlife Action Plan

What is a wildlife action plan?

Congress asked each state to develop a wildlife action plan, known technically as a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy (CWCS). These proactive plans examine the health of wildlife and prescribe actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and more costly to protect.

Massachusetts snapshot

Landscape: In Massachusetts, the landscape ranges from calcium-rich valleys of western Massachusetts to the cold, acidic Worcester Plateau, and from the mountains of the Taconics and the Berkshires to the floodplains of the Connecticut River Valley. The Atlantic Ocean shapes the sandy glacial outwash plains of Cape Cod and the rest of Massachusetts' coastal system.

Management:

The land trust movement began in Massachusetts. In 1891, Charles Eliot founded The Trustees of Reservations, the first non-profit land trust. With the Boston area rapidly developing, Eliot feared that city dwellers would lose touch with the countryside if specific places of natural beauty were not preserved. Today, Massachusetts leads the nation with a total of 143 land trusts in operation. The population of Massachusetts has grown by 28 percent from 1950-2000 but the area of developed land has increased by 200 percent.



Eastern box turtle/Massachusetts

Massachusetts's planning approach

Perhaps because Massachusetts is a small state with a large population where the

negative impacts to wildlife populations are clearly recognized, development of the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy was more a bringing together of existing plans rather than having to start the planning process from scratch. For example, the BioMap project analyzed Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program data collected over many years to identify key wildlife habitats throughout the state. This information allows land-use planners from the most local level right on up to the broadest landscape perspective to understand why these areas are so important to the long-term conservation of declining wildlife populations.

The Ecological Restoration Program funds research that assesses the dynamics of natural communities before initiating

“Massachusetts has a closing window of opportunity to conserve our most vulnerable wildlife habitat from the effects of poorly planned development. The Massachusetts Wildlife Action plan outlines collaborative goals and strategies for the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Mass Audubon, and other partners that are essential steps to protect the nature of Massachusetts for people and wildlife.”

– Laura Johnson, President of Massachusetts Audubon, the largest conservation organization in New England.

management actions to restore ecologically significant systems. The Upland Program restores and maintains early-successional habitats needed by so many declining bird and small mammal populations in New England. Taken together, these pieces and many others described in the document lay out strategies to improve our knowledge of declining species populations and create partnerships that will engage Massachusetts citizens in actions that will conserve our wildlife legacy for future generations.



Shadbrush/Massachusetts

“The conditions facing the thousands of wildlife species in Massachusetts provide a key measure of the health of our overall environment. The health of wildlife is important in its

own right and is often an early indicator of problems that can affect us all. Investing in the Massachusetts Wildlife Action Plan will allow us to identify, remedy, or prevent such problems before they threaten the natural systems that wildlife and humans alike depend on.”

– Jim Gomes, President of the Environmental League of Massachusetts

Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Massachusetts

The loss of habitat and the secondary impacts to wildlands and wildlife from increased water usage and pollution are the main threats addressed in the Massachusetts Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. The primary challenge to conserving wildlife in Massachusetts is protecting enough habitat to support the species identified as being in greatest need of conservation. Whether habitat is lost to development, fragmented into smaller and smaller pieces that cannot

“The Massachusetts Wildlife Action Plan details how to conserve the varied and abundant wildlife and habitat that are important to the interests and traditions of sportsmen and women. We need to act now to preserve the sporting heritage for future generations of hunters and anglers.”

– Mike Moss, President
Massachusetts Sportsmen’s
Council

Wildlife	Total number of species	Species in need of conservation*	Threatened/endangered listed species
Fish	98	27	10
Amphibians	21	7	6
Birds	30	19	16
Reptiles	448	63	28
Mammals	101	20	11
Mussels	12	8	8
Snails	31	8	7
Sponges	15	2	1
Flatworms	54	1	1
Segmented Worms	58	1	1
Beetles	Estimated 2,500 - 4,000	10	9
Dragonflies/damselflies	165	31	30
Butterflies/ Moths	Estimated 2,500 - 3,000	53	48
Other Invertebrates	Estimated 1,300 aquatic	3	0

**All animal species on the state list of Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern species, as of June 18, 2004. All federally listed species extant in the state are automatically included in the state list. All globally rare species as ranked by NatureServe as G1 –G3 if not already listed by the state and are extant in Massachusetts. Other regionally rare or declining species were added under specific conditions and a number of other species judged to be declining or uncommon in the state were also included. Each state is using its own criteria for this category.*

Wildlife highlights

Highlight habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
Connecticut and Merrimack Rivers	Shortnose sturgeon Atlantic salmon Bald eagle Dwarf wedge mussel	Flow alteration, bypass reaches, population fragmentation	Continue ongoing anadromous fish restoration programs on both rivers. Investigate effects of mainstem dams on resident fish populations. Fund research on the natural history of river mainstem animals.
Upland Forest About 2.82 million acres mainly in private ownership	Silver-haired bat Eastern bat Hoary bat Long-eared owl Box turtle	Development, invasive species, forest cutting practices	Survey for long-eared owl, silver-haired bat, eastern bat and hoary bat to determine range, distribution and abundance. Participate in multi-agency task force to identify invasions of exotic fungal and insect pests which threaten forests. Employ even-aged forest cutting practices that can successfully regenerate oak stands as a model for private forest owners who want to provide good wildlife habitat.
Vernal Pools Potentially	Marbled salamander Blanding's turtle	Destruction of pool, clearing of surrounding	Determine land area and habitat features needed to protect existing wildlife populations using vernal pools. Produce conservation and recovery plans for suites of vernal pool animals. Prioritize clusters of vernal pools across the state for survey and conservation efforts.

Recommended actions to conserve Massachusetts's wildlife

support these species, or degraded by pollution and competition from invasive plants, the challenge before us is to protect enough habitat now before the opportunity is lost.

Working together for Massachusetts's wildlife

Public involvement in policy issues such as the development of the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy must include a formal public review process and be approved by the Fish and Wildlife Board. Once the Strategy draft was completed, it was presented at a public meeting of the Fish and Wildlife Board and the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee. The Division of Fisheries and Wildlife also made a special presentation of the draft Strategy to the Massachusetts Teaming with Wildlife Committee.

Melly Beatty Bog/USFWS



The draft Strategy was posted on the Division website for a six-week public comment period and received hundreds of visits to the site. In addition to announcing the web posting at the public meeting, the Division sent out announcements by email, fax and mail to more than 4300 stakeholders and interested parties. Drawing on comments taken during this period, the Division revised the Strategy reposted it on the website, and scheduled a formal public informational meeting to field additional oral and written comments.

“With the understanding that it is our responsibility to conserve our wildlife through professional management and planning, the Massachusetts Wildlife Action Plan has been put in place to provide us with a map that will lead us to a successful future. By bringing people from all walks of life together to participate in this virtuous effort, the Massachusetts Plan will lead all of us to a healthy tomorrow for our wildlife species.”
--James Wallace, Executive Director
Gun Owners Action League



Parker River National Wildlife Refuge/USFWS

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