



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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September 21, 2015

Kathy Hollar, Acting WSFR Chief
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Office of Migratory Birds & State Programs
Wildlife & Sport Fish Restoration
911 N.E. 11th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97232-4181

Dear Ms. Hollar:

I am pleased to present Washington's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) 2015 update. This plan serves as our formal comprehensive review and revision of the 2005 Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS), and is required to ensure our continued eligibility for the State Wildlife Grants Program. We believe this plan provides the tools, information, and resources to significantly advance our conservation efforts and we are excited to share it with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and our conservation partners. As we noted in our letter to the Service in June 2013, we determined that a substantial revision of our 2005 CWCS was warranted. A table comparing key differences between the 2005 CWCS and the 2015 SWAP is enclosed with this letter and can also be found in Chapter 1 of the SWAP. We have also enclosed a Roadmap to guide the reviewer in finding information which responds to each of the eight essential elements mandated by Congress.

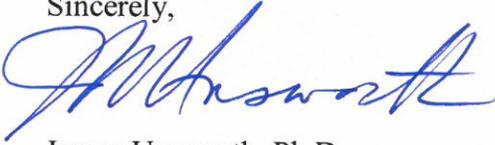
In the years since our CWCS was approved in 2005, we have directed State Wildlife Grant funds, matched with existing state funds, to implement a multitude of strategic conservation projects and initiatives on the ground, some of which are highlighted in the introduction of the new SWAP. State Wildlife Grant funds continue to play a central role in the success of our conservation efforts, allowing us to focus on a diversity of species and to address important conservation needs before animals become endangered and recovery opportunities much more limited and expensive.

The 2015 SWAP articulates the conservation threats and actions needed for 268 species of greatest conservation need and the habitats on which they depend. We intend to use this framework to guide our own work, and also to promote collaborative projects with partners to leverage resources around shared goals. We believe that the SWAP will help us to integrate wildlife conservation with sustainable working landscapes and environments, as we recognize the economic, community and ecological values of agriculture, rangeland, forestry, and fisheries.

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We appreciate the many partners and members of the public who contributed to the development of our SWAP, through suggestions, comments, or technical review. All of us, no matter where we live or work, have an important role to play in conserving our natural heritage. I look forward to working with you to implement this plan as we collectively invest in the vital work to sustain Washington's extraordinary fish and wildlife resources for generations to come.

Sincerely,



James Unsworth, Ph.D.
Director

Enclosures

GUIDE TO MEETING THE EIGHT ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS and MAJOR CHANGES FROM 2005 CWCS

This document provides information on key areas in which the 2015 SWAP Update differs from the 2005 CWCS, as well as a guide to evaluating Washington’s State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) Update in addressing the eight required elements.

Summary of changes in approach and content from the 2005 CWCS

The number of foundational changes in our approach to fulfilling the eight essential elements has resulted in a completely new document from the 2005 CWCS. It is not productive to attempt to cross reference new content to old, given the differences in organization and content. Rather, we have provided a description of these changes below, the rationale for the change and the implications for the 2015 SWAP. These changes profoundly affect the structure and content of the SWAP and include new SGCN criteria and resulting changes in the list, new terminology for defining threats and actions for both species and habitats, a new system for describing and classifying key habitats for SGCN and the integration of climate change throughout the document. We hope that the Road Map provided in this document will be sufficient to guide the reader in assessing how WDFW met each of the eight required elements.

This table is also included in Chapter 1 of the 2015 SWAP Update, Introduction and Overview.

Major Change	Rationale	Implications for the 2015 SWAP
<p>SGCN criteria The criteria for inclusion as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need was modified from 2005. The criteria from 2005 included both biological and socioeconomic considerations. Modifications included focusing on biological conservation need and using NatureServe ranks as a criterion, based in part on the guidance document, “Best Practices for State Wildlife Action Plans” produced by AFWA¹.</p>	<p>Increased transparency and use-ability The criteria used in 2005 was complicated and proved difficult to explain to a non-technical audience. We simplified the criteria to focus on biological conservation need, with the understanding that socioeconomic needs would be addressed in prioritization processes. We also included NatureServe ranks as recommended in the AFWA Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Best Practices guide.</p>	<p>Robust and updated SGCN list The SGCN list is almost 30 percent larger than in 2005 (from 186 to 268). This number reflects changes in our criteria and the inclusion of updated information and data for all species. The updated criteria resulted in an increased number of invertebrates on the SGCN list – from 42 in 2005 to 95 in 2015. A comparison between 2005 and 2015 is provided in Chapter 3, as well as a list of the species which have been dropped since 2005.</p>
<p>Habitat classification Habitats were classified and described differently than the 2005 CWCS, which relied on a Washington-specific classification system. The SWAP Update uses the</p>	<p>Standardized and mappable habitat classification Ecological systems (part of the NVC) are mapped across the west. Using ecological systems to describe and classify SGCN habitat provides an important spatial component to the SWAP, allowing us to spatially translate</p>	<p>Habitats of Greatest Conservation Need This new term encompasses both ecological systems considered imperiled and those ecological systems particularly important to SGCN. Chapter 4 describes the methodology</p>

¹ Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies. November, 2012. Best Practices for State Wildlife Action Plans, Voluntary Guidance for States for Revision and Implementation.

Major Change	Rationale	Implications for the 2015 SWAP
National Vegetation Classification System (NVC) to represent habitat needs for SGCN. This change resulted in significant changes to the 2005 CWCS.	conservation priorities to specific landscapes.	for identification, the condition of these habitats, important features for the SGCN dependent on them and key stressors and conservation actions needed.
Defining stressors and actions The terminology for describing and defining stressors and actions has changed from 2005. Based in part on the Best Practices for State Wildlife Plans document, the 2015 SWAP update adopts a nationally accepted lexicon for defining threats and actions.	Consistency and relevance We selected the Wildlife TRACS ² system of classification which was not available in 2005. TRACS is the tracking and reporting system for conservation and related actions funded by the USFWS. A nationally recognized classification scheme will help facilitate our ability to identify and characterize projects for State Wildlife Grants Funding.	New categories for stressors and actions When stressors and actions are discussed in the SWAP, they are described by TRACS categories. In addition to helping to identify and track projects for State Wildlife Grants, this change will help provide consistency and to synthesize data.
Inclusion of range maps Potential range and habitat distribution maps are included for a subset of the SGCN for which we had sufficient data.	Conservation Planning Tool The CWCS did not include spatial representation of range and distribution for SGCN. These potential range and habitat distribution are intended to aid in conservation planning activities for SGCN.	Potential range maps for over 80 SGCN Appendix B includes potential range and habitat distribution maps for selected SGCN. These maps are considered working drafts as we continue to refine the methodology used to generate them.
Agency-wide participation Increased engagement by the WDFW Fish and Habitat programs resulted in a more robust SGCN fish and invertebrate list and also ensured relevancy to the entire agency.	Greater transparency and improved process The WDFW Conservation Initiative, adopted in 2012, emphasizes the importance of cross-program engagement in key initiatives.	More engagement in SWAP across WDFW There is greater awareness of the SWAP across the agency, and increased opportunities for implementation.
Climate change Climate change has been integrated throughout the 2015 SWAP Update. Other than being identified as a threat, climate change was not discussed in the 2005 CWCS.	Emerging Issue – Increased availability of data The last ten years have brought a growing recognition of the emerging threat that climate change poses to our fish and wildlife. We used the 2015 SWAP Update as an opportunity to build our understanding regarding specific risks and vulnerabilities.	Climate vulnerability incorporated into SWAP Chapter 5 discusses projected impacts and introduces a list of species and habitats most at risk from climate change. Appendix C includes the full assessment of climate vulnerability for all SGCN. Climate change impacts have also been integrated into Appendix A – Species Fact Sheets, and Chapter 4 – Habitats.

² U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. (2015). Wildlife Tracking and Reporting on Actions for the Conservation of Species (Version 1.0) [Web application software]. Retrieved from <https://tracs.fws.gov>

Road Map to the Eight Essential Elements

This table describes how the SWAP meets each of the eight essential elements and indicates the general location of where the supporting information/material can be found.

Element 1: The distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations, indicative of the diversity and health of wildlife of the State. These species are referred to as Species of Greatest Conservation Need or SGCN.	
<p>The methodology and criteria for identifying SGCN is described in Chapter 3, Species of Greatest Conservation Need. This chapter also compares the number of species between 2005 and 2015, includes a list of species dropped since 2005 and provides a brief explanation of the rationale. Chapter 3 also includes a short, two-page narrative summary of the SGCN included for each taxa group; mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, fishes and invertebrates. Each SGCN is also listed and a summary of the conservation status and concern presented in tabular format (pages 3-5 to 3-47).</p> <p>More detailed information about each SGCN is provided in Appendix A – Species Fact Sheets. Each fact sheet includes information on conservation status and concern, a summary of biology and life history, a narrative description of distribution and abundance and a summary of habitat needs. Key references used are identified in the fact sheet and also included in the Master Bibliography in Appendix F.</p>	
SUB ELEMENT	LOCATION WITHIN 2015 SWAP
Sources of information are identified	Each fact sheet includes a list of key references (Appendix A). References are also included in the Master Bibliography (Appendix F).
Information about both abundance <u>and</u> distribution for species.	Narrative descriptions of distribution and abundance are in Appendix A – Species Fact sheets. Potential range and habitat distribution maps are also provided for selected SGCN – these are available in Appendix B. The SGCN fact sheets include an indication of the availability of a range map for that species.
Low and declining populations are identified.	Population size/trend (for example low/declining) is indicated in a table on page 1 of each SGCN fact sheet in Appendix A.
All major groups of wildlife have been considered	Chapter 3 includes a list of all SGCN list: 44 mammals, 52 birds, 12 reptiles, 14 amphibians, 51 fish and 95 invertebrates.
Process used to select SGCN.	The methodology and criteria for selecting SGCN is described in Chapter 3, pages 3-1 to 3-5.
Element 2. The location and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to the conservation of each State’s SGCN.	
<p>Habitats important for SGCN are identified and described in three locations within the SWAP.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Species Fact Sheets (Appendix A) includes a narrative description of habitats important to the SGCN in different stages of life history. 2. Chapter 4 – Habitats of Greatest Conservation Need describes the methodology used to identify habitats needing conservation attention (pages 4 to 4-). The SWAP uses the National Vegetation Classification to represent SGCN habitats. Two levels within the NVC are used – the formation level (15 formations cover the state) and the ecological systems level (116 included in Washington). Fact sheets are provided for each formation and describe the distribution of the formation, the numbers of SGCN associated with them, habitat features and qualities important to SGCN, major stressors, actions needed and research and data needs. Fact sheets are also provided for selected ecological systems – those which are considered imperiled, and/or which are especially important to SGCN. These fact sheets list the SGCN associated with them and provide more detail on 	

stressors and the specific action needed. References are provided at the end of each fact sheet.

3. Appendix B – Potential Range and Habitat Distribution Maps provide a spatial distribution of potential habitat (as defined by close association with ecological systems) for selected SGCN (55). Range maps were prepared for those SGCN for which we had sufficient information.

SUB ELEMENT	LOCATION WITHIN 2015 SWAP
Explanation for the level of detail provided.	Chapter 4 includes fact sheets for each formation type, which includes a discussion of research and data needs. At a finer scale, fact sheets for each ecological system of concern includes a list of stressors and actions needed. In instances where additional data is needed, this is described as an action.
Key habitats and their relative conditions are described in enough detail such that the State can determine where and what conservation actions need to take place.	Chapter 4 describes habitats for SGCN, as defined through association with ecological systems and formations, two levels of classification within the National Vegetation Classification. Relative conditions is described in the fact sheets for both formations and ecological systems. Additionally, we have used the NatureServe ranking methodology to ecological systems to determine which systems are most imperiled in Washington. These systems are included in our list of Ecological Systems of Concern.

Element 3. The problems which may adversely affect SGCN or their habitats, and priority research and surveys needed to identify factors which may assist in restoration and improved conservation of SGCN and their habitats.

Chapter 3 – SGCN, provides a narrative summary of conservation threats and actions needed across each taxa group, as well as a general summary of conservation concern.

Appendix A – SGCN Fact Sheets provides a table for each SGCN listing key stressors, a description of the stressor and a corresponding action and a description of the action needed. “Resource collection needs” is a category used in the stressor column of this table. Where research and surveys are needed, these are identified in this category and a description provided in the table.

Chapter 4 - Habitats, includes fact sheets for each formation, and each ecological system of concern. These fact sheets include a list of key stressors and actions needed to the address them. Where research and survey information are needed, these are indicated here.

SUB ELEMENT	LOCATION WITHIN 2015 SWAP
Sources of information used to determine the threats are identified.	Key references are provided at the end of each fact sheet for SGCN (Appendix A) and each fact sheet for habitat formations and ecological systems (Chapter 4). In addition, all references used in the document are provided in the Master Bibliography, Appendix F, separated by Chapter.
Threats/problems are described in sufficient detail to develop focused conservation actions.	Each threat is described in a summary fashion, with enough detail to identify a corresponding action to address the threat. Threats are described as noted above.
Research and survey efforts are identified to obtain needed information.	Research and survey efforts needed for SGCN and their habitats are described in Appendix A – Species Fact Sheets, Chapter 4- Habitats, in the formation and ecological systems fact sheets.

Element 4. The actions necessary to conserve SGCN and their habitats and priorities for implementing such conservation actions

Chapter 3 – SGCN, provides a narrative summary of conservation threats and actions needed across each taxa group, as well as a general summary of conservation concern.

Appendix A – SGCN Fact Sheets provides a table for each SGCN listing key stressors, a description of the stressor and a corresponding action and a description of the action needed. “Resource collection needs” is a category used in the stressor column of this table. Where research and surveys are needed, these are identified and described here.

Chapter 4 - Habitats, includes fact sheets for each formation, and each ecological system of concern. These fact sheets include a list of key stressors and actions needed to the address them. Where research and survey information are needed, these are indicated here.

SUB ELEMENT	LOCATION WITHIN 2015 SWAP
Identifies how actions address identified threats to SGCN and their habitats.	Appendix A – Species Fact Sheets include a conservation action for each identified threat. Chapter 4 – Habitats, also includes a corresponding conservation action for each identified threat in fact sheets for habitat formations, and ecological systems of concern.
Describes conservation actions sufficiently to guide implementation of those actions	Actions are very briefly described, but in context with the additional information provided in species and habitat fact sheets there should be adequate information to guide implementation.
Links conservation actions to objectives and indicators that will facilitate monitoring	We identified conservation actions needed for each of 268 SGCN, 15 habitat formations and 30 ecological systems of concern – with a total number of actions close to one thousand. The sheer number addressed in the SWAP made it infeasible to provide fully fleshed out actions. The SWAP acknowledges that only a small number of actions will be able to be implemented with additional actions included as funding and other opportunities become available. Those actions selected for implementation will be fully described and will include objectives and indicators to facilitate monitoring.
Describes actions that could be addressed by Federal agencies or others partners	A lead role for each conservation action was identified as either WDFW, external partners, or both (external partners were not described in any further detail). With 268 SGCN it wasn’t feasible to describe a lot of detail under each action needed. Once an action is selected for implementation, the need to include conservation partners will be fully fleshed out and described.
Identifies research or survey needs.	Research and survey efforts needed for SGCN and their habitats are described in Appendix A – Species Fact Sheets, Chapter 4, Habitats , in the formation and ecological systems fact sheets.
The Plan identifies the relative priority of conservation actions.	The conservation actions in the SWAP are not prioritized; rather the Plan clearly indicates that prioritization will be conducted as funding, partnership or other opportunities arise for implementation. The criteria for prioritization is described in Chapter 7, Implementation, and detail about the matrix developed to prioritize is presented in Appendix E, Prioritization Matrix.

5. The provisions for periodic monitoring of SGCN and their habitats, for monitoring the effectiveness of conservation actions, and for adapting conservation actions as appropriate to respond to new information or changing conditions.

Chapter 6 describes WDFW’s approach to monitoring and adaptive management for SGCN and their habitats.

This chapter clarifies that monitoring objectives have not been identified for each of our 268 SGCN, the 15 habitat formations, the 30 ecological systems of concern or the roughly 1,000 needed conservation actions identified. As discussed elsewhere in the roadmap, the SWAP Update outlines a flexible process for prioritization with different criteria depending on the specific opportunity (funding source or partnership opportunity). Actions have been described very generally in the SWAP. However, once they are teed up for implementation, monitoring objectives and adaptive management considerations will be fully developed, as described in the remainder of Chapter 6.

Page 6-2 describes Population assessment (status and trends monitoring), identifies priorities and outlines opportunities for addressing gaps.

Page 6-4 describes Effectiveness and compliance monitoring and provides examples.

SUB ELEMENT	LOCATION WITHIN 2015 SWAP
Describes plans for monitoring SGCN and their habitats.	Chapter 6 outlines WDFW’s approach to population assessment (status and trends monitoring) and effectiveness and compliance monitoring. These approaches will be applied to conservation actions for SGCN and their habitats selected for implementation.
Describes how the outcomes of the conservation actions will be monitored.	Chapter 6, page 6-4 describes WDFW’s approach to compliance and effectiveness monitoring and provides examples of how these have been used to implement adaptive management.
Allows for evaluating conservation actions and implementing new actions accordingly.	Chapter 6, page 6-4 describes WDFW’s approach to compliance and effectiveness monitoring and provides examples of how these have been used to implement adaptive management.

6. Each State’s provisions to review its Strategy (Plan) at intervals not to exceed ten years.

Chapter 6 (page 6-5) includes a description of the process to review and revise the SWAP.

7. Each State’s provisions for coordination during the development, implementation, review, and revision of its Plan with Federal, State, and local agencies and Indian Tribes that manage significant areas of land or water within the State, or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of species or their habitats.

Appendix D – Stakeholder Engagement and Outreach, includes a full description of the process WDFW used to engage conservation partners, local, state and federal agencies, Indian tribes, stakeholders and the public in the development and review of the 2015 SWAP Update.

SUB ELEMENT	LOCATION WITHIN 2015 SWAP UPDATE
The State describes its continued coordination with these agencies and tribes in the implementation, review and revision of its Plan.	Chapter 7 – Outreach, includes a discussion of opportunities for other organizations to work with WDFW in implementing the SWAP Update and to use the tools and resources developed as part of the Plan.

8. Each State’s provisions to provide the necessary public participation in the development, revision, and implementation of its Plan

Appendix D – Stakeholder Engagement and Outreach, includes a full description of the process WDFW used to engage conservation partners, local, state and federal agencies, Indian tribes, stakeholders and the public in the development and review of the 2015 SWAP Update.

SUB ELEMENT	LOCATION WITHIN 2015 SWAP UPDATE
Describes its continued public involvement in the implementation and revision of its Plan.	Chapter 7 – Implementation, describes opportunities for engaging in implementing the SWAP Update.