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Wildlines

WINTER 2012

New Hampshire Fish and Game's quarterly newsletter of the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program

State Wildlife Grants in Jeopardy

What would New Hampshire look like without funding for wildlife conservation?

By John Kanter, Nongame and Endangered Species Program Coordinator

It's no secret that serious cuts are being made to government programs on every level. Because of proposed cuts to State Wildlife Grants – federal funds that make up more than half of the N.H. Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program's budget – the work of our dedicated staff is at risk. In the U.S. House Interior Appropriations bill, the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program is slated for a 64% cut for FY12 – that's on top of a 31% cut to the program last year. In a sagging economy, cuts are understandable. But the proposed slashing of State Wildlife Grants (SWG) is wildly disproportionate – and would jeopardize a 10-year investment in nongame wildlife conservation.

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Wildlines is funded in part
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A New Chapter for Karner Conservation

A decade of successful conservation partnership with NH Army National Guard comes to a close



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When the state-endangered Karner blue butterfly disappeared from its last N.H. home in the Concord Pine Barrens and the effort to restore the butterfly in its native habitat was undertaken, nobody could possibly have imagined all of the

lessons that would be learned or the changes that would come about.

Since 2000, the Nongame Program has worked to restore the Concord pine barrens habitat and its Karner blue butterfly population, in part, with mitigation funding from the N.H. Army National Guard.

"The Guard wanted to construct a new Black

Hawk helicopter hangar, but the proposed site was on the Concord Pine Barrens, which supported the last Karner blue butterflies in the state," said John Kanter, Coordinator for the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program. "It was a win-win situation. The Guard was able to construct their new facility, and biologists could use mitigation funding to initiate habitat restoration in other areas of the Concord Pine Barrens."

During part of their life cycle, Karner blue butterflies need wild blue lupine, which in turn requires sunny open patches on the forest floor and well-drained, sandy soils. From 2001 to 2010, biologists worked to restore 463 acres of conserved pine barrens at the Concord Municipal Airport. A combination of prescribed burning, mechanical treatments (such as shrub grinding) and herbicides were used to treat 314 acres, and mowing was modified to protect the butterflies during the growing season. Over 16,000 lupine and nectar seedlings were planted in treated areas to improve butterfly habitat.

"In addition to funding habitat restoration, the Guard provided use of an old barrack to house a cap-

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Fowler's Toad

Confirmed sighting in Merrimack River Watershed

By Michael Marchand, Nongame Wildlife Biologist

Did you know that there's more than one type of toad in New Hampshire? American toads are common, widespread and can vary considerably in their coloration. But there's another species native to our state – the Fowler's toad. Records of Fowler's toads in New Hampshire are scarce, and reports that are submitted to Fish and Game are often either misidentified American toads or a lack of documentation prevents us from confirming the reported sighting.

As a reptile and amphibian enthusiast, I've been interested in finding Fowler's toads in New Hampshire, but with all the other priorities in life and work, I hadn't found the time to conduct such searches. This past spring, I made it a personal priority to spend a few days searching historic or potential habitat sites. I prepared some basic equipment (camera, tape recorder, maps), waited for darkness, and set off in search of my first N.H. Fowler's toad.

I started in Concord and drove north. At my first several stops, I was unsuccessful in finding a single Fowler's toad. Still, the night

offered promise. Temperatures were in the mid-70s (F), and gray tree frogs, spring peepers and American toads were calling in abundance. I even saw several toads – Americans of course – on roadways. Then it happened! While driving slowly and listening for calling frogs, I saw the distinctive shape of yet another toad on the road. I stopped the vehicle and shined my flashlight out the window. I knew instantly that this wasn't just "another toad." This was a Fowler's, my first in N.H.!

I jumped out and enthusiastically snapped a few photos. Not only had I captured a toad, but I could hear the unique and sheep-like *W-A-A-A-A-H* call of male Fowler's toads from a nearby wetland. I had found an actual breeding population. This represented the first confirmed report for the town of Boscaawen since 1938!

We still don't have a feel for how common the species is in other areas of the state; only further surveys will unveil that mystery. But, it goes to show...if you want to find something, it helps to actually go out and look. There are certainly other secretive spe-



Fowler's toads are listed as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the N.H. Wildlife Action Plan. For more information on Fowler's toads or how to report your observations, go to wildnh.com.

cies just waiting to be found in other special spots of New Hampshire.

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tive-breeding facility for the butterflies," said Heidi Holman, a biologist with the Nongame Program. "Zack Boyajian and all of the Guard staff were extremely supportive, and the N.H. Army National Guard was a great partner to work with." The captive breeding program, funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, provided adult butterflies to be released into the newly restored habitat at the airport to increase the population.

With the overall trend of population estimates for Karners increasing, biologists are cautiously optimistic. "We'll need to continue monitoring Karners to determine if the recovery goal of 3,000 adults will be sufficient for the population to persist in years of extreme weather conditions," said Holman. "Really cold winters, wet rainy springs, dry summers with drought conditions or an outbreak of disease can all have significant impacts on the Karner's productivity in any given year."

While Karners were the primary focus of the restoration efforts, a variety of other species benefited from habitat restoration, and the Nongame Program gained invaluable information about this unique eco-

system. A total of 52 species of butterflies (including the state-threatened frosted elfin) and an astounding 599 species of moths were documented on the Concord Pine Barrens. Survey results ultimately led to one moth species, *Zanclagnatha Martha*, being removed from the state list of threatened and endangered species in 2008.

The Karner project has also provided students with real-life, hands-on conservation education. "Kids for Karners has engaged thousands of students from kindergarten through high school," said Marilyn Wyzga, a wildlife educator at N.H. Fish and Game. "The program connects Concord area students with biologists working on a conservation effort in their city. It allows students to learn in the classroom and in the field, bringing the learning full circle."

The Roger Williams Park Zoo in Providence, R.I., also involved students in the project. "Zoo staff brought students in their summer camp program to New Hampshire for a volunteer day collecting butterfly eggs in the laboratory and planting wild lupine in the pine barrens," said

Lindsay Webb, a nongame biologist who oversees the Karner captive rearing lab and works closely with volunteers.

Though the mitigation funds have now been used, Fish and Game continues to benefit from its relationship with the National Guard. Butterflies will still be raised on the Guard premises for release on the barrens. The butterfly's basic habitat has now been restored, so future management activities can focus on maintaining the ecosystem. The Kids for Karners program will go on, directly involving the wider community.

"Restoring an endangered species and its native habitat is a huge undertaking that cannot be successfully accomplished without the help of conservation partners and support from the community," said Kanter. "We want to thank all of the partners, volunteers, teachers and students for their contributions over the past decade. It's been an amazing journey, and we look forward to bringing you updates as the Karner population continues to rebound and sustain into the next decade!"

Moose Plate Dollars at Work

For the 2011 fiscal year, the N.H. Fish and Game Department received over \$236,000 from the state's Conservation License Plate ("Moose Plate") Program, which helped support the work of the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program.

Proceeds from the sale of the plates can be used as match that allows the Nongame Program to qualify for federal State Wildlife Grants. Combined, these state and federal funds make it possible to carry out research, protection and conservation of nongame, threatened and endangered species in the Granite state.

During the 2011 fiscal year, Moose Plate dollars helped to support:

- Surveys of World War II bunkers resulted in finding over 225 bats, including one species endangered in N.H., and none showed signs of white nose syndrome.
- Youth at eight schools from Manchester to Littleton gained hands-on experience creating wildlife habitat on their school grounds.
- Focus areas for New England cottontails were identified and habitat and population goals were set for New Hampshire as part of the effort to protect the species throughout its range from Maine to Rhode Island.
- Volunteers in the N.H. Dragonfly Survey spent over 1,800 hours and found 150 different species of dragonflies in the state. To date, volunteers have recorded over 6,000 observations of dragonflies in New Hampshire.
- The Nongame Program and UNH Cooperative Extension launched a new website called Taking Action for Wildlife to provide a community guide for wildlife habitat conservation planning.

Each time you buy, or renew, your N.H. Moose Plate, your money is

matched, making it go further in helping to conserve New Hampshire's wildlife. Thank you for your continued support of the N.H. Conservation License Plate Program! For more information, visit www.mooseplate.com.

Fast Facts: Northern Cardinal

Status: Common and widespread

Physical description: 8-9" long, with a 10-12" wingspan. Males: bright red all over, with black face. Females: buffy brown with warm red accents on the wings, tail and crest. Both sexes have a noticeable crest on top of the head and short, thick, red bills. Both sexes sing year round.

Habitat: Areas with thick brush or shrubs. Often found in woodland edges, streamside thickets, open swamps, parks, residential areas and suburban yards. Feeds on seeds, fruit and insects. Very easy to attract to bird feeders with black oil sunflower seeds.

Range: Non-migratory, year-round resident in N.H., except for northernmost part of the state.

Diet: Seeds and fruits, some insects.

Threats: Cardinals are very well adapted to live in close proximity to humans and commonly inhabit residential areas. Their primary threats are predation by wild (e.g. fox) and domestic (e.g. cats) animals.

Interesting fact: Northern cardinals are recent residents of New Hampshire. They first began nesting in Massachusetts in the 1970s and expanded their range north into New Hampshire via major river valleys. During winter, they may congregate in flocks of a dozen or more birds.



Male



Female

Northern Cardinal
(*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

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What would the consequences be of deep funding cuts for New Hampshire's wildlife? Without funding, Karner blue butterflies, terns and plovers, all of which depend on intense management, would quickly disappear. Little brown bats and New England cottontails would continue to decline. Land conservation projects would no longer have access to maps of the state's priority habitats. Even if enough funds remain to help the most critically imperiled species, the Wildlife Action Plan's strategies to halt declines in wildlife populations and habitats – and prevent the need for more listings and expensive recovery efforts – will need to be shelved.

In this issue of *Wildlines*, you'll read about the results of the Pine Barrens and Karner blue butterfly restoration effort. It's a case study in how reviving a species and bringing back habitats takes time, money and people. And you'll note that even with a well-funded, ten-year effort supported by hundreds of volunteers, much remains to be done to ensure that the butterflies will persist in the wild.

Too often, people contend that there is a stark choice to be made – between jobs and the environment, for example, or people versus wildlife – but the truth is that wildlife and conservation are a net benefit to the economy. Wildlife-related recreation brings in \$520 million annually to New Hampshire and supports 4,000 jobs. Moreover, conservation can only succeed with dedicated and well-trained biologists. The Nongame Program has eight staff members, and several more people working under contract at UNH, N.H. Audubon and the Natural Heritage Bureau, which receive significant funding from SWG.

Our program is successful largely because of 10 years of federal funding through State Wildlife Grants. Despite our amazing volunteers, donors and partners, our ability to maintain and build on that success will be severely compromised if SWG takes major cuts in the new Congressional budget. I've written before about the need for long-term, dedicated funding for nongame and endangered wildlife – it's always been a goal, but with SWG in danger, it's more

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Win one of 5 "Wild NH" embroidered turtle caps! Just tell us more about you and your ideas for supporting conservation efforts. Complete the survey by February 1 at www.wildnh.com/nongamesurvey. Thanks!



important than ever.

To that end, we need to rejuvenate the Teaming With Wildlife coalition here in N.H. This national grassroots effort of organizations and individuals helped bring about State Wildlife Grants 10 years ago. Perhaps together we can create a solution to the volatility that seems to mark wildlife conservation funding; please take our survey and share your ideas (see above). Thanks for helping ensure that wildlife and habitat conservation funding stays off the endangered list!



WINTER Wildlife Almanac

JANUARY

- Fresh snow on the ground? Put on some snowshoes and look for fresh animal tracks. If you look close, you may even spot a snowshoe hare or ermine; both turn white to blend in with their surroundings during the winter months.

FEBRUARY

- Spring is not far off! Beavers, bobcats, skunks and more are busy this month as breeding seasons get underway.

MARCH

- Barred owls nest in tree cavities. Pairs tend to nest in the same area each year. Some pairs have even been documented nesting in the same location for over 25 years! Listen for their distinctive "who cooks for you" call.

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