

Public Participation

Abstract

The 2015 Wildlife Action Plan solicited and included an extensive amount of public participation. A diverse Outreach and Public Engagement Steering Committee guided the effort. UNH Cooperative Extension and CrossCurrent Communications conducted interviews with 19 key experts and held five public engagement sessions throughout the state. These workshops were attended by 166 participants representing 79 communities, and an array of non-profit, municipal, state and federal agencies, and private landowners. The revision of the NH Wildlife Action Plan was the subject of 28 stories in the news media, and 1142 people responded to an online survey to express their concerns and priorities for wildlife in New Hampshire. The final plan was posted on the NH Fish and Game website for 30 days and received 123 comments. All information collected was summarized for inclusion in the Plan.

Overview

The 2005 New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan would not have achieved the impact it has without the participation of many individuals, organizations and agencies. The recommendations of the state's first Wildlife Action Plan were implemented by many stakeholders who care about wildlife including landowners, students, land trusts, watershed alliances, lake associations, state and federal agencies, universities, conservation groups, activists, outdoor recreationists, conservation and planning commissions, other community groups, scouts, 4H clubs and other service agencies, and many others. For the 2015 revision of the Wildlife Action Plan, NH Fish and Game invited input from these same organizations and individuals.

Not only is teamwork the New Hampshire way of getting things done, but is also a requirement of the US Fish and Wildlife Service for state Wildlife Action Plans. This chapter addresses public participation requirements outlined in the NAAT Guidelines, specifically Element 7 requiring “each State’s provisions for coordination during the development, implementation, review, and revision of its Strategy 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”. Also Element 8 requires “each State’s provisions to provide the necessary public participation in the development, revision, and implementation of its Strategy.”

New Hampshire Fish and Game (NHFG) addressed these requirements in a number of ways. The development of the entire plan was overseen by the Wildlife Action Plan Implementation Team, a group of biologists from NHFG, NH Audubon, NH Natural Heritage Bureau (NHNHB), The Nature Conservancy - NH Chapter (TNC) and the New England Field Office of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFW). This group led the development of the list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) with associated profiles, habitat definitions, condition analysis and risk analysis. Please see chapters 2, 3 and 4 for details about these processes. Over 90 wildlife and habitat experts from New Hampshire and surrounding states assisted in the selection of Species of Greatest Conservation Need,

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refinement of habitat designations, provided information to include in species and habitat profiles, and assessed threats to species and habitats. See Appendix N for a full list.

Beyond the technical expertise represented by the Wildlife Action Plan Implementation Team, NHFG invited broad public input. The agency worked with UNH Cooperative Extension (UNHCE) and CrossCurrent Communications, as well as a newly formed Wildlife Action Plan Outreach and Engagement Steering Committee, to build awareness of the Wildlife Action Plan revision process and gather meaningful public input. These consultants to NHFG orchestrated broad stakeholder and community engagement efforts through a variety of means including:

- Focus groups
- Key informant interviews
- Wide distribution of public participation opportunities through conferences, eblasts, newsletters and social media
- Broad coverage by local and statewide news media
- Stakeholder and Community Input Sessions
- Web-based Qualtrics Survey

The amount of public input derived through these different means is noteworthy.

- A ten-member Steering Committee representing different organizations and constituencies throughout the state assisted in the outreach by encouraging their members, supporters, staff and networks to participate.
- Interviews were conducted with 19 key informants representing a variety of non-profits and state agencies to gain their insight and encourage their participation and that of their networks.
- Five input sessions were held in throughout the state with 166 participants representing 79 different communities.
- To encourage attendance, email announcements were sent several times to over 5000 UNHCE natural resource supporters, volunteers, and clients. These emails were also sent out by the Steering Committee and NHFG to additional potential participants.
- Public input opportunities were promoted widely at conferences, meetings, on the NHFG web page and related publications throughout the first half of 2015.
- Targeted press releases were sent to local and statewide media to inform the general public about the input sessions and survey. A total of 28 stories ran on television, radio, print and online news. (see full list of media coverage in Appendix M)
- Additional information was received from 78 participants through comment cards and 100 people shared their thoughts on NH's top threats to wildlife by engagement in the 'dot' exercise (See *Engagement Exercise with Sticker-Dots*).
- An online survey was developed and linked to the NHFG website for input from a broader array of citizens. This was advertised through the UNHCE email lists, NHFG and partner lists, press releases and social media. There was strong interest in the topic with 1142 survey responses.
- Following completion of the draft plan, the plan was posted on the NHFG website as a series of PDFs for 30 days (July 15-August 17).

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Each of these components of the Public Engagement process is described in greater detail below.

Outreach and Engagement Steering Committee

The Wildlife Action Plan Outreach and Engagement Steering Committee was charged with identifying key stakeholders and guiding the stakeholder engagement effort. The Steering Committee worked to promote the update of the Wildlife Action Plan through websites, social media and newsletters within their networks.

Outreach and Engagement Steering Committee Members:

Paula Bellemore	Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP)
Jim O'Brien	The Nature Conservancy, New Hampshire
Jack Savage	Society for Protection of New Hampshire Forests
Roger Stephenson	Stephenson Strategic Communications
Jane Vachon	NH Fish and Game
Kris Neilsen	DRED, Tourism/travel
Susan Arnold	Appalachian Mountain Club
Jim Martin	NH Department of Environmental Services
Sabrina Stanwood	DRED Natural Heritage Bureau
Kate Luczko	Stay Work Play New Hampshire

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted in order to understand Wildlife Action Plan priorities, successes, challenges and opportunities. These interviews helped to inform the assessment of current needs and implementation capacity, as well as identify additional stakeholders and opportunities. In February and March 2015, staff from UNHCE and CrossCurrent Communications conducted telephone or in-person interviews with 19 people, listed below. The interviews were semi-structured and averaged 30-45 minutes in length, providing ample opportunity for informants to speak freely to the questions presented. Those interviewed were selected by the Steering Committee for their professional knowledge of wildlife and conservation issues in New Hampshire. The input from the interviews was used to develop content for the input sessions and the survey. See Appendix J for results of the interviews.

Table 1-1. Key Informant Interviewees.

<i>Informant name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>
Rebecca Brown	Executive Director	Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust
Jane Kellogg	Volunteer	Campton Conservation Commission, Coverts Program
Blair Folts	Executive Director	Green Mountain Conservation Group
Jeff Littleton	Natural Resources Consultant	Moosewood Ecological Services
Don Keirstead	Acting State Resource Conservationist	Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)
Nik Coates	Executive Director	NH Association of Conservation Commissions
Kevin Peterson	Senior Program Officer	NH Charitable Foundation
Ted Diers	Administrator, Watershed	NH Dept. of Environmental Services

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	Bureau	
Melilotus Dube	Environmental Analyst	NH Dept. of Transportation, Bureau of Environment
Ted Tichy	Commissioner	NH Fish & Game
Kevin Jordan	Captain	NH Fish & Game Law Enforcement
Sarah Barnum	Senior Wildlife Biologist	Normandeau Associates
Jill Farrell	Community Impact Program Manager	Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership
Will Abbott	Vice President of Policy/Reservation Stewardship	Society for Protection of NH Forests
Brian Hart	Executive Director	Southeast Land Trust of NH
Eric D'Aleo	Naturalist	Squam Lakes Natural Science Center
Jim MacCartney	Director of River Restoration	Trout Unlimited
Leighlan Prout	Wildlife/TES Program Leader	US Forest Service

Focus Groups

A focus group of UNHCE Natural Resources Staff working in Forestry, Wildlife and Water Resources was held using the key informant questions. NH Fish and Game staff held a focus group with the staff from the Wildlife Division and facilitated a discussion for community members in the northern part of NH for those who could not attend other sessions. NHFG also met with NHDES Watersheds Bureau to discuss successes of the 2005 Wildlife Action Plan and input on changes and actions. NHFG held a focus group of land trust staff to discuss the changes to the Wildlife Action Plan mapping and GIS data.

Stakeholder and Community Input Sessions

Information was gathered at five input sessions held in spring 2015 across the state. The sessions were well attended by people working directly with the Wildlife Action Plan as well as people involved with land protection and wildlife issues more generally. The goal of the input sessions was to gather ideas on actions that should be included in the 2015 Wildlife Action Plan from a broad range of organizations and interests.

NHFG, UNHCE, CrossCurrent Communications and the Steering Committee promoted the public input sessions extensively to their networks, as well as at conferences, meetings, on the NHFG web page and NHFG publications (the New Hampshire Wildlife Journal and the Nongame Program's quarterly newsletter *Wildlines*), and several editions of the Taking Action for Wildlife email newsletter. The Wildlife Action Plan revision was also discussed at the NH Association of Conservation Commissions Annual Conference, Saving Special Places conference, NH Water and Watersheds Conference, and with the NH Land Trust Coalition members and supporters.

Input Sessions: Who Participated?

166 participants representing 79 different communities and multiple organizations.

85% were very or somewhat familiar with the Wildlife Action Plan with only 15% not familiar at all.

The participants represented an engaged group of stakeholders and potentially new stakeholders.

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UNHCE sent email announcements to its extensive email database of 5000 on two occasions. CrossCurrent Communications provided communications expertise and messaging, and also conducted a comprehensive push for media coverage in print, television, radio and online news.

A total of 166 participants attended the sessions. Just over 400 hours were spent discussing the threats to wildlife and ideas for addressing these threats. The input sessions were attended by non-profit organization staff and volunteers and a large number of volunteer conservation commission members. State and federal agencies were also represented. The participants were from 79 different communities across the state. See Appendix K for results of the input sessions.

Wildlife Action Plan Stakeholder Input Sessions:

Thursday 4/23	4:00-6:30pm	Plymouth High School Cafeteria
Tuesday 4/28	6:00-8:30pm	Exeter High School Cafeteria
Tuesday 5/5	1:00-3:30pm	City of Keene Parks and Recreation Center
Wednesday 5/6	2:00-4:30pm	NH Fish and Game Office in Concord
Tuesday 5/12	2:00-4:30pm	Appalachian Mountain Club Highland Center Lodge

The Input Sessions were designed as small group dialogues using a modified world café model. Participants were split into groups of 8 to 12 people who sat together in a circle. UNHCE-trained facilitators presented information on six different threats and potential actions to address the threats. The threats discussed included natural systems modifications, invasive species, development and transportation, pollution, direct resource use and climate change. Each group discussed each threat using the following questions as a guide:

1. What actions do you think are needed to address this threat?
2. Who can address the actions for this threat?



Figure 1-1. A banner displaying the Wildlife Action Plan cover and encouraging participants to become involved with the 2015 revision.

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Table 1-2. Input Sessions: Attendee Affiliations.

Antioch University New England	NH Army National Guard
Appalachian Mountain Club	NH Association of Conservation Commissions
Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust	NH Audubon
Barrington Conservation Commission	NH Community Rights Network
Bath Conservation Commission	NH Coverts Project
Bear Camp Trackers	NH Department of Environmental Services
Bedford Land Trust	NH Division of Historic Resources
Bellamy River Collaborative	NH Fish and Game
Brox Environmental Citizens	NH House of Representatives
Carroll Conservation Commission	NH licensed wildlife rehabilitator
Center for Wildlife and Nottingham	NH Natural Heritage Bureau
Chester Conservation Commission	NH Natural Resources Steward
Chesterfield Conservation Commission	NH Project Learning Tree
Danbury Grows	NH State Parks
Exeter Conservation Commission	Northern Pass Opposition Coalition
Fitzwilliam Conservation Commission	National Wild Turkey Federation
Five Rivers Conservation Trust	O'Brien Forestry
Fremont Conservation Commission	Pemi Baker Land Trust
Lamprey River Advisory Committee	Pillsbury Lake
Friends of Moeckel Pond	Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership
Gilford Conservation Commission	Private Citizen
Granite State Priorities	Quincy Bog Natural Area
Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership	Randolph Conservation Commission
Groton Conservation Commission	Rindge Conservation Commission
Hanover Biodiversity Committee	Rochester Conservation Commission
Harris Center for Conservation Education	Rockingham County Conservation District
Holderness Conservation Commission	Russell Farm and Forest Conservation Foundation
Holderness County Commissioner	Salmon Press
Homeowners	Southeast Land Trust
Hubbard Brook Research Foundation	Society for the Protection of NH Forests
Ibis Wildlife Consulting	Stoddard Conservation Commission
Indian Woods	Strafford Conservation Commission
Landowner	SWC
Land and Community Heritage Investment Program	Tamworth Conservation Commission
Lempster Conservation Commission	The Nature Conservancy
Loon Preservation Committee	Town of Groton
Mahoosuc Land Trust	Trailwrights
Mason Conservation Commission	University of New Hampshire
Merrimack Conservation Commission	USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Milford Conservation Commission	USFS White Mountain National Forest
Monadnock Conservancy	Upper Valley Land Trust
Moose Mountains Regional Greenways	Volunteer
Moosewood Ecological LLC	Wagner Forest Management, LTD
New England Forestry Foundation	

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Engagement Exercise with Sticker-Dots

Each participant at the public engagement sessions was invited to identify what he/she felt were the two greatest threats to wildlife in that region. A chart that included 10 threats to wildlife and natural lands was on display and each participant was given two stickers with which to vote. Overall, development was ranked the highest in all locations except Plymouth. Climate change ranked as second overall, and although it ranked fourth in Plymouth, it ranked second in all other locations. Plymouth also ranked both transportation corridors and energy development highly. Pollution and invasives also garnered more concern at other locations. Agriculture and Aquaculture along with Recreation and Other Human Disturbances were seen as the least threatening.

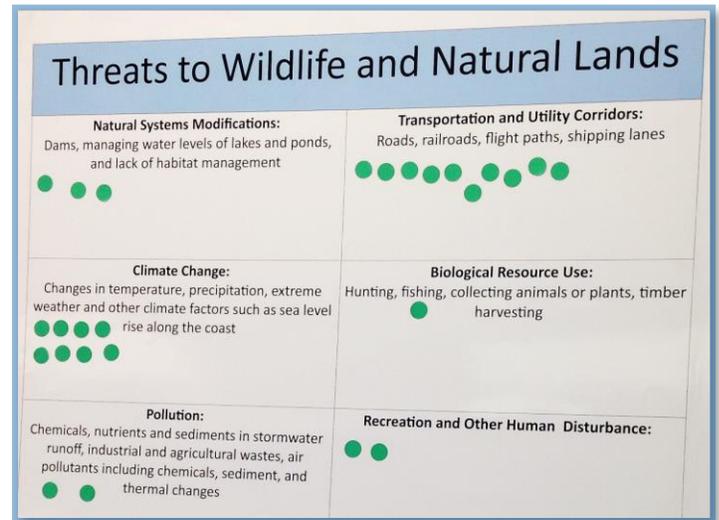


Fig. 1-2. Participants at each input session were asked to place a dot indicating the two top threats to wildlife.

Comment Cards by Participants

At the close of each session, participants were provided an opportunity to provide anonymous feedback on the process or to share other thoughts. A handout was provided to participants to fill out, if they chose. Responses were received from 78 participants overall. They were presented with two questions:

1. What else would you like to tell NHFG and its partners about the Wildlife Action Plan?
2. What can you do to take action to protect NH's natural lands and wildlife?

Survey

UNHCE developed a web-based Qualtrics survey for existing and potential partners and those interested in wildlife and natural lands. Information from the stakeholder input sessions was used to develop survey content. The purpose of the survey was to gather information relative to the importance of wildlife and natural lands and refine action priorities that emerged from the input sessions. The survey was non-random as individuals chose whether or not to complete the survey. The 20-question, online survey was available May 15, 2015 through May 29, 2015. There was very strong interest with 1142 survey responses received. See Appendix L for results of the survey.

CrossCurrent Communications promoted the survey through traditional and social media (see full list of media coverage in Appendix M). The Wildlife Action Plan Engagement Steering Committee members encouraged their members, supporters, staff and networks to complete the survey. UNHCE sent two email notifications to their target audience of over 5000 contacts in the natural resources field.

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Public Review of Revised Wildlife Action Plan

The entire Wildlife Action Plan was posted on the NHFG website (<http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/wildlife/wap.html>) for public comment from July 15 to August 17, 2015. For ease of public review, the individual chapters and appendices were in separate PDFs. Species profiles were grouped by major taxonomic groups (mostly by Class, with insects by Order). Press releases announcing the availability of the plan for review were sent to media outlets and emails were sent to everyone who had been invited to the public input session plus others involved in natural resources programs around the state (over 6600 emails). Several newspapers publicized the draft, and NHFG staff appeared on both WMUR Channel 9 and NH1 television news to talk about the Plan. 123 comments were received. Most comments related to a single species, with eastern wolves getting the most attention. 95 nearly identical comments were received on wolves, plus two additional comments. Only two reviewers, both conservation professionals, addressed multiple sections of the Plan. All comments were reviewed by the authors of the appropriate section and incorporated where appropriate.