

## New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan Update Findings from Key Informant Interviews

**Process overview.** During February and March 2015, staff from UNH Cooperative Extension and CrossCurrent Communications conducted interviews with 19 individuals, 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 project steering committee as key informants for their professional knowledge of wildlife and conservation issues in New Hampshire. Common themes and representative direct quotes from the interviews are below. Where applicable, numbers in parentheses indicate the number of respondents with that response. The absence of parentheses indicates a concern unique to one informant.

### Notable Findings

1. Most participants were unsure of the impact of the Wildlife Action Plan. Many offered anecdotal evidence of its impact, but could not quantify its success.
2. The Wildlife Action Plan is most widely used to describe land value for conservation purposes.
3. The habitat maps are the most accessible and commonly used resource from the Wildlife Action Plan.

<u>Informant name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
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 Bureau	NH Dept. of Environmental Services
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

## **Analysis of Informant Responses to Interview Questions**

### **1. What are the conservation priorities of informants, and how does their work relate to wildlife?**

Most informants identified having multiple conservation priorities or connections to wildlife in their work.

- (12) Land Conservation, Restoration, and Management. This was the most commonly cited priority or connection to wildlife. This theme spanned watershed management activities, managing wildlife refuges, habitat restoration including dam removal, administering conservation grant programs, acquiring land for protection, and conserving land through conservation easements.
- (7) Providing education or technical assistance. This includes working with landowners, implementing interpretation and outdoor education programs, and supporting municipal efforts such as natural resource inventories and informing conservation and stewardship practices.
- (5) Planning. This involved conducting natural resource inventories, geographic information system analysis, environmental planning assessment, and conservation planning.
- (3) Permitting, Regulatory, and Enforcement. Respondents referenced meeting federal mandates for environmental reviews in client and state projects, and law enforcement relating to hunting, fishing, and trapping.

### **2. What species or habitats are informants most concerned about?**

The habitats of greatest common concern were those that are sensitive, such as grasslands, vernal pools, and wetlands. Very few expressed significant concern solely about a particular habitat or species. Furthermore, there was little recurring concern amongst informants of individual species. This suggests that there is not a single species that is of high concern in NH within this sample of interviews. Rather, the concerns and focus areas of stakeholders are broad. A few even stated being more focused on holistic issues that indirectly serve wildlife, such as water quality.

Individual habitats and species referenced by informants:

<u>Habitats:</u>	(2) High elevation spruce	Peatlands
(4) Grasslands	fir forests	Riparian connectivity
(3) Vernal pools	(2) Shrubland	Saltmarsh
(3) Wetlands	Early successional habitat	Softwood habitat
(2) Aquatic habitats	Eelgrass	Stream habitats
(2) Coldwater fisheries	Forest habitat	Talus slopes
(2) Early successional	Heron rookeries	Tributaries
Appalachian Oak-Pine	Lakeshore habitats	
	Mature forests	

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### Species

Atlantic salmon	Northern bog lemming	White Mountain fritillary
Bats	Osprey	Wood turtle
Bicknell's thrush	Oysters	
Common loon	Peregrine falcon	<u>Other comments:</u>
Eastern brook trout	Pied-billed grebe	Japanese Knotweed
Eastern small-footed bat	Pollinators and wild bees	(3) I focus on water resources
Goshawk	Salter brook trout	My work is broad in focus
Incurvate emerald	Shellfish	I am not concerned about anything specifically
Little brown bat	Tri-colored bat	
New England cottontail	White Mountain butterfly	

### 3. How do informants use wildlife and habitat information in their work?

There were strong delineations in the way individuals use wildlife and habitat information in their work. The Wildlife Action Plan habitat maps were cited as a key resource across all five themes (listed below).

- (14) To support decision-making and demonstrating land value. Fourteen of nineteen informants explained that this information supports strategic decisions, largely based on understanding the value of land. Such information helps to communicate with policy-makers, donors and funders; it supports grants; and it justifies expenditures.
- (6) Informing management. Those who mentioned *informing management* stated using information to understand hunting and fishing activities, and where to focus enforcement and population management. Also, informants use such information when engaging landowners to suggest management practices for their property.
- (3) In educational applications. These informants described getting the general public more interested in their natural surroundings.
- (3) As a planning resource. Wildlife and habitat information supports regional conservation planning and identifying priority conservation areas.
- (2) In advocacy efforts. Informants cited using such information to communicate with legislators and promote policy.

“It helps in our *decision-making* about acquiring gifts of land or easements. For example, we received a gift of land but it was landlocked with no access and therefore wasn't very threatened. However, it was ranked as having very high-value wildlife habitat, so that was the driving force in accepting the gift and helping us raise the money to accept it.” – Informant

### 4. What types of experience do informants have with the Wildlife Action Plan?

A recurring response from participants was a lack of in-depth experience with the Wildlife Action Plan. Most informants expressed that they had used only a portion of the Plan, such as a species profile or a description of a habitat. The maps from the Plan were widely cited as being useful and easy to interpret, though occasionally lacking in resolution.

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- (8) I have used the maps. The most common and detailed experience that informants described was using the Wildlife Action Plan maps.
- (7) I have used the plan. Informants cited the plan as informing restoration projects (e.g., dam removal, culvert replacement), setting conservation priorities for a watershed, and writing conservation easements.
- (4) I have used the habitat brochures. Informants use the habitat brochures in-house and with landowners who hold easements, borrow language from the brochures, supply them to communities, and bring them to public events.
- (2) I have used the species profiles. The species profiles are useful as a reference, but not as useful as the maps.
- (2) I have participated in Taking Action for Wildlife. Informants stated presenting to conservation commissions on how to access the Plan online, and that the Taking Action for Wildlife Program helps people understand the benefits of wildlife and habitat.

“When looking at a potential project with a landowner, we always use the WAP maps and look to see how it’s ranked.” – Informant

### 5. Do informants feel that the Wildlife Action Plan is having an impact on wildlife in New Hampshire?

While nine informants stated “Yes,” just over half of informants (10/19) stated that they were unsure if the Plan was having an impact. They went on to explain that either (1) they lacked communication about progress toward the goals of the Wildlife Action Plan, or (2) did not know what the goals of the Plan are and therefore could not say if it was having an impact. However, participants stated confidently that the Plan is being used in planning, permitting, and in grants. Lastly, several informants offered that the Plan’s principles are being implemented, it just is not being referenced by name or as a result of the Plan.

“I don’t have a clear feeling that’s been articulated from NHFG or from any other state agencies. I don’t know how they are implementing that to accomplish the goals. I’m aware it’s there, but don’t have a clear idea of steps that have been taken.” – Informant

### 6. Do informants think the Wildlife Action Plan is focused on the right conservation priorities?

About half (8/19) of the informants responded “Yes,” about half (8/19) responded “Unsure,” and the remainder (3/19) responded “No.” Among those who said “Yes” or “Unsure,” there was a common appreciation for the Plan’s broad focus with lots of useful information. Among those who said “No,” there was a recurring perspective that the Plan needs to promote conservation of open space. Other suggestions for priorities included better articulated goals, a focus on cultural and economic benefits of protecting habitat and wildlife, and advice on landscape-level conservation strategies.

### 7. What changes or additions to the Wildlife Action Plan did informants suggest?

## *Appendix J - Key Informant Report*

- (7) Updated, interactive maps – Informants want maps with greater resolution, and the ability to zoom in, draw, and view metadata about parcels and ownership
- (4) Greater engagement with public
- (4) Climate adaptation – Particularly identifying habitat and providing guidance for cold water fisheries
- (2) Riparian corridors and resources across boundaries
- (2) Integrate Natural Heritage Bureau data
- (2) Action items – informants described that the Plan needs to be more directive.
- A broader overview of the Wildlife Action Plan – i.e., an executive summary version accessible to lay people
- Best management practices for species
- Ecosystem services and socio-economic considerations
- Greater metrics
- Include non-threatened game
- Need prioritization of what species to focus on – prioritize “biggest bang for the buck”
- Substrate data
- Topography data
- Updated habitat brochures
- USFW Landscape Cooperatives data
- Wetlands inventory data

“We find partners and communities are constantly faced with tradeoffs, and a better quantification (or understanding) of the economics of healthy water and habitats would be valuable.” – Informant

### **8. What closing comments did participants offer?**

- (2) Issues with state agency capacity for stewardship – Two informants described lack of capacity amongst state agencies for long-term stewardship of lands. One referenced NH Fish & Game specifically.
- Align the Wildlife Action Plan with Natural Heritage Bureau.
- The habitat information is more important than species information.
- The technical parts of the plan are useful, but not accessible for general public to use.
- Very happy to have this geo-referenced resource.
- Make management recommendations more specific, more concrete.
- Need a better “feedback loop” for tracking implementation.
- Wildlife is one lens for viewing land and natural resources, but it needs to be integrated with other values that people have around land.
- Dollars and cents of wildlife needs to be available through the plan.
- Species biology information would help people better understand the connection and risk to species.
- The GIS information is extremely helpful but needs better accuracy.