

CHAPTER 8: IMPLEMENTATION AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Implementation of the SWAP

The primary focus of South Carolina's SWAP is continued, efficient, and effective conservation and management of wildlife diversity. Through implementation of the Plan, coordination of diverse conservation efforts, and forging of effective partnerships, the SWAP will meet its mandate. Coordination efforts will bring together expertise and funding sources from various partners and apply them to needs identified in the SWAP. The initial congressional intent for the State Wildlife Grant Action Plans was to identify and focus on the species in greatest conservation need and yet "address the full array of wildlife and wildlife related issues." At this nexus, the SWAP provides focus and guidance for SCDNR priorities when allocating personnel and financial resources for research and management.

Already, partnerships bolstered during the creation of the SWAP are offering potential resources for meeting the objectives and strategies described in this Plan. Many potential SWAP partners have also identified the Action Plan as an excellent resource to forge additional support for conservation. By compiling state fish and wildlife conservation issues in a single document for the first time, it was possible to develop a coordinated approach ranging from individual species' concerns up to regional habitat-level concerns. This Plan is more than an outline for specific conservation actions; it continues to serve as a framework for expanding partnerships and interdisciplinary collaboration in support of these actions. An important first step will be to identify these additional individuals, land managers, and organizations that can contribute to and use SWAP information in a timely way.

Two main concerns were identified in the past in association with implementation planning. The first, identified in the 2005 public input process undertaken in the early stages of initial Plan development, involved the need to communicate with constituents more effectively about the goals and vision of the SCDNR and the SWAP. Such communication, it was deemed, would increase public support, ownership and partnership development. In response, news articles, poster sessions, videos, and other outreach materials have been created highlighting SCDNR's role in the SWAP. The second concern dealt with the potential expense of time and funding for the collection, analysis, and reporting of extensive data needs as identified by SCDNR biologists. These needs included those associated with the development of the South Carolina Comprehensive Monitoring Program outlined in Chapter 6. The Monitoring Program is still being refined and the SCDNR will continue to expound upon this concept. These challenges must, and will be, met as the evaluation of this Plan in future revisions depends on public support and effective monitoring for dynamic management.

In 2006, SCDNR drafted an Implementation Plan for the SWAP (then CWCS) which made suggestions for priority research. Many of these suggested topics went on to become State Wildlife Grant proposals that were chosen for funding and have been successfully completed. Those projects that have been completed as of 2013 are summarized in Chapter 9. An additional 17 more are in some phase of completion and will be summarized in subsequent iterations of the Plan.

Request for Proposals and Project Selection within the SWAP

Every year, the State Wildlife Grants Coordinator solicits proposals via an email network. All submitted proposals are reviewed and compiled by the Coordinator in preparation for formal review. Rigorous review and selection procedures ensure that sponsored projects are effective and efficient in meeting the goals and objectives of the SWAP. The SWAP Steering Committee reviews all proposals to determine if projects clearly focus on South Carolina priority species and their associated actions recommended within the SWAP.

Members of the SWAP Steering Committee include the following or their designee:

- State Wildlife Grants Coordinator
- Deputy Director of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries
- Assistant Deputy Director of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries
- Chief of Wildlife Management
- Assistant Chief of Wildlife Management
- Chief of Freshwater Fisheries
- Assistant Chief of Freshwater Fisheries
- Deputy Director of Land and Water Resources
- Deputy Director of Marine Resources
- Assistant Deputy Director of Marine Resources

The SCDNR seeks to fund innovative, interdisciplinary projects that attempt to address the needs of priority species listed in the SWAP and undertake practical application of SWAP goals. The urgent need to achieve environmental sustainability and protect South Carolina's ecosystems challenges applicants to develop new ways to engage organizations in problem solving. Proposals selected will:

- contribute to applied problem-solving for an immediate and specific issue that is directly related to wildlife conservation;
- build capacity for collaborative statewide wildlife conservation; and
- incorporate strategies to apply and communicate outcomes for the improvement of policies and/or management practices.

Funding is allocated according to budget cycles and request-for-proposal processes associated with State Wildlife Grants and other funding sources. Competitive SWG and Multi-state SWG proposals are reviewed in the same fashion.

Adaptive Management, Maintenance, and Communication Plan

Implementation will continue to be a dynamic process through time, involving monitoring process management, performance assessment, adaptation as new information dictates, and refocusing to new tasks and projects as appropriate. As described in Chapter 6: SC's Comprehensive Monitoring Program, a major component of the SWAP's coordination and review will be dependant on successful monitoring of conservation projects and actions—

effectiveness monitoring. In the long-term, effective review and revision of the Plan will depend on the proposed effectiveness monitoring protocols and procedures. Conservation actions will have to be evaluated based on their ability to further the goals and objectives of the SWAP. As an agency, SCDNR sets project objectives and identifies measures of success for management actions. As SWAP projects are evaluated, similar indicators of success will be defined at the strategy level.

As a requirement of the SWG program, project leaders will be required to produce annual progress reports for review by the Steering Committee. These reports will be evaluated for insight into adaptive management needs and reassessments of the SWAP. Final project reports will be available in an online repository linked to the SWAP website and will be summarized in future revisions of the SWAP. Continued monitoring and evaluation of management actions will create an active implementation of the “living” SWAP document. Project leaders will also be involved in periodic communication efforts focused on increasing public awareness of SWAP implementation. The Catawba Indian Nation will also receive updated lists of priority species that do or may occur on their tribal lands. Maintaining these communication links with the public and broader conservation community will be critical to the success of the SWAP.

Review and Revision: Considering Lessons Learned

As discussed in Chapter 5, the purpose of a monitoring plan is to assess both species and habitats as well as related conservation actions. Also, as it pertains to the SWAP, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of projects funded through the State Wildlife Grants program. Performance measures should be selected that are realistic goals and easily reportable in the USFWS’s Wildlife TRACS online system.

As per Element 6 of the original legislation establishing the SWG program, all states made a commitment to review and revise the SWAP within ten years. The SWAP/SWG program in South Carolina will continue to be reviewed on a 5-year cycle to ensure the program and the SWAP remain relevant and current with evolving landscapes and developing conservation efforts. This cycle will include the previously described plans for monitoring, maintenance, adaptive management, review and revision. Within the 5-year time period, it is expected that certain issues will trigger an early revision of the SWAP or submission of addendums for the Plan. The identification of new information on species priorities gained through surveys, research, and monitoring or reprioritization of projects and actions following goal achievement will be recognized as adaptive management efforts requiring Plan reassessment. However, planning improvements such as (1) identification and elimination of flaws in the program or SWAP implementation process, (2) identification of more efficient or valid approaches to internal supporting processes such as species prioritization and threat assessment, and/or (3) expansion of those taxa groups treated only cursorily in this current SWAP document would be viewed as lessons learned contributing to the next iteration of the SWAP during a regular revision cycle.