

Arkansas Wildlife Action Plan

Executive Summary

The Arkansas Wildlife Action Plan (AWAP) is a dynamic compendium of knowledge that is used to prioritize the research, monitoring and conservation actions required to address the conservation needs of 369 species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) in the context of 45 terrestrial habitats and 18 aquatic habitats in 7 ecoregions in Arkansas. It provides the essential scientific foundation and direction for actions and decisions to benefit wildlife conservation and an opportunity for state agencies, federal agencies and other conservation partners to fit together individual and coordinated roles in conservation efforts across the state.

Purpose

Arkansas was required by Congress to prepare and submit a Wildlife Action Plan in order to retain funds provided by the State Wildlife Grants program and to be eligible for future funds.

Congress identified eight required elements to be addressed in wildlife conservation plans. Further, the plan must identify and be focused on the “species in greatest need of conservation,” yet address the “full array of wildlife” and wildlife-related issues. They must provide and make use of:

- (1) Information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations as the State fish and wildlife agency deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of the State’s wildlife; and,
- (2) Descriptions of locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to conservation of species identified in (1); and,
- (3) Descriptions of problems which may adversely affect species identified in (1) or their habitats, and priority research and survey efforts needed to identify factors which may assist in restoration and improved conservation of these species and habitats; and,
- (4) Descriptions of conservation actions proposed to conserve the identified species and habitats and priorities for implementing such actions; and,
- (5) Proposed plans for monitoring species identified in (1) and their habitats, for monitoring the effectiveness of the conservation actions proposed in (4), and for adapting these conservation actions to respond appropriately to new information or changing conditions; and,
- (6) Descriptions of procedures to review the plan at intervals not to exceed ten years; and,
- (7) Plans for coordinating the development, implementation, review, and revision of the plan with Federal, State, and local agencies and Indian tribes that manage significant land and water areas within the State or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats.
- (8) Congress also affirmed through this legislation, that broad public participation is an essential element of developing and implementing these plans, the projects that are carried out while these plans are developed, and the Species in Greatest Need of Conservation that Congress has indicated such programs and projects are intended to emphasize.

The plan was approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on January 17, 2007 and was revised October 1, 2015. In addition to representatives of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, conservation partners involved in the AWAP creation and revision include: the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, Audubon Arkansas, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service, The Arkansas Academy of Science, University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, several Arkansas Universities and private citizens.

Emerging Issues

The Plan is intended to be flexible enough to address emerging issues. To date, Arkansas has received approval to add four emerging issues as fundable topics:

1. Climate change effects on SGCN;
2. Wind energy development effects on mammalian and avian species of concern;
3. Effects of Fayetteville shale gas exploration and extraction on SGCN; and
4. White Nose Syndrome in bats.

All of these topics were formally incorporated into the revised AWAP in October 2015.

AWAP Applicability with other Conservation Programs

Reports from Congress to the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies indicate that they are pleased with the targeted results that have occurred as a result of using Wildlife Action Plans to focus efforts. In the past two years, we have seen many millions of dollars come to Arkansas as a result of using conservation priorities developed in the AWAP that were incorporated into Farm Bill programs.

Currently, the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives are utilizing information from state wildlife action plans to build a conservation blueprint for the Southeastern United States. Conservation actions and SGCN from the AWAP are also considered in the USFWS's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the Arkansas Forest Action Plan.

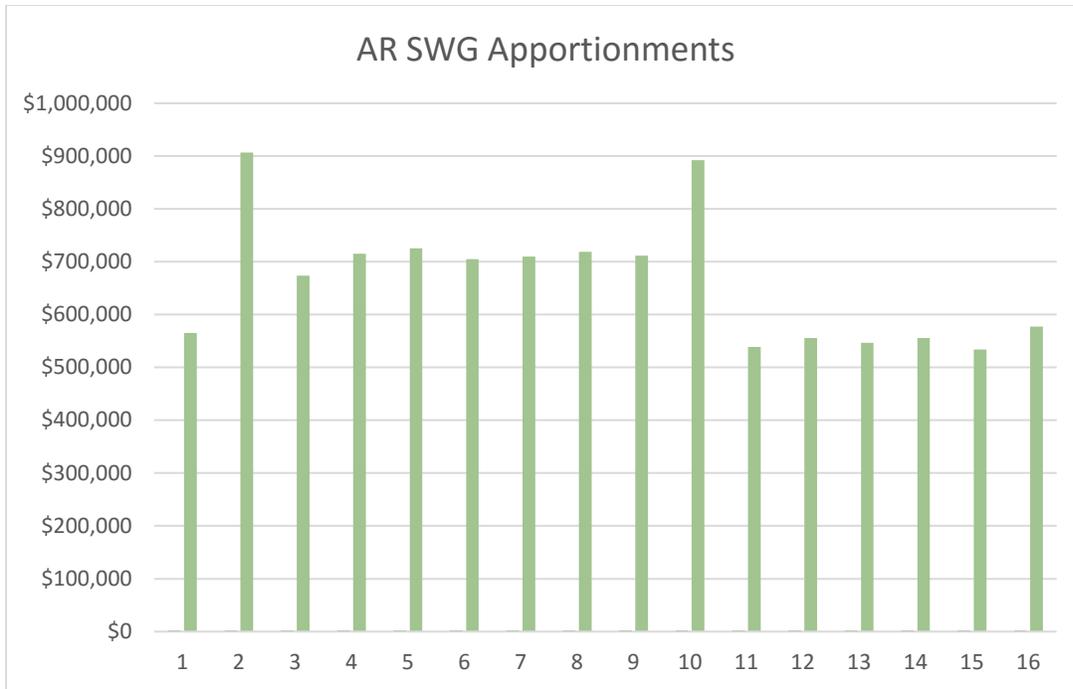
Implementation through State Wildlife Grants

Federal funds are available to Arkansas through State Wildlife Grants (SWG) to address the conservation needs, for species of greatest conservation need identified within each state's plan.

Matching funds are required for each grant. Currently, the match rate is 35%. Federal funds may not be used as match. Match can be "in-kind" effort or other value provided documentation of such meets federal approval.

State Wildlife Grant Funding Amounts

The amount of grant funding each state receives is based upon the state's population size and land area. The funding must be appropriated by Congress each year and comes from general funds. Funding levels for the past 5 years have been substantially less than levels in the early 2000s.



State Wildlife Grant Process

The AWAP includes over 300 SGCN, each with its own set of needs for conservation. Because funding is severely limited, prioritizing needs and actions is imperative in order to maximize benefits to species. The SWG process in Arkansas is well-defined and has been in place for nearly 10 years. The process includes conservation partners from numerous agencies who serve on teams and/or committees to organize and prioritize conservation needs, determine the highest priorities, and to select projects for funding.

Taxa and Habitat Teams

There are 9 taxa association teams including: Bird, Mammal, Fish, Insect, Crayfish, Mussel, Amphibian, Reptile, Invertebrates - other. Habitat teams include: Karst habitat, Aquatic Habitat and Terrestrial Habitat. Professionals from agencies, organizations, and universities assemble in a team and participate in meetings to determine priority conservation actions and review resulting actions. The biennial AWAP Symposium is the primary meeting venue for taxa and habitat teams.

Steering Committee

The steering committee is a select group of generalist biologist/administrators who take the work of the taxa and habitat teams and pare their priorities down to an annual request for proposals. The Steering Committee reviews, discusses and decides overarching AWAP policy and process as directives to the AWAP Coordinator. This group meets once annually, although communication by means of email happens more frequently.

Implementation Team

The Implementation team is comprised of: AGFC Assistant Director for Conservation, AGFC Wildlife Management Chief, AGFC Fisheries Chief and administrative leaders of two partner organizations on a rotation. The Implementation Team meets once a year to review pre-proposals that have been provided to them and select projects for funding. This group may recommend changes to projects. Their directives are carried out by the AWAP Coordinator.

Project Proposals

Each year, twenty or more proposals are received in response to a request for proposals. The proposals are made available to the conservation community for peer-review and comments. They are evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

- 1) is feasible and practical in 2-3 year time period;
- 2) demonstrates cost-effectiveness;
- 3) addresses the priorities identified in the annual Request for Proposals; and
- 4) is within qualifications and abilities of organization/individuals proposing the project.

Projects selected for funding are submitted to the US Fish and Wildlife Service for approval.

State Wildlife Grant Projects

Since 2001, \$10,629,303 has been used to fund 179 projects for SGCN conservation. Many projects have involved conservation partnerships, with over 40 agencies and organizations represented.

Highlights:

- Over 550 acres of habitat were restored at Warren Prairie Natural Area. This allowed biologists to re-locate federally threatened Red-cockaded Woodpeckers to the site.
- 320 acres of recharge area for Foushee Cave were acquired, allowing for the protection of seven SGCN, including the endemic Foushee cavesnail and federally endangered Indiana and Gray bats.
- Wet prairie habitat restoration in northwest Arkansas resulted in an increase in Arkansas darters, a candidate for federal listing.
- 32 new state records for beetle species, having never been identified before in Arkansas, as a result of an insect faunal inventory.