

Chapter 8: Public Participation

Public and Stakeholder Participation

This chapter addresses Element 8 and describes efforts to seek stakeholder and public participation in the development of the CWCS. Appendix 8a identifies the many stakeholders, collaborators, and experts contacted during CWCS development. Appendix 8b describes the design of the public input plan used in this process. The mechanisms developed to aid in public participation are presented in Appendix 8c.

Connecticut is the third most densely populated state in the nation. Overcoming the challenges presented by increasing pressure from development, habitat degradation, and habitat loss and accomplishing the goals of Connecticut's CWCS requires broad-based public support and participation in the conservation effort. In January 2004, Connecticut initiated the development of a public and stakeholder participation plan, (Appendix 8b) which used a variety of methods designed to engage these groups in the development of the CWCS.

The Bleiker Citizen Participation by Objective (CPO) process was employed to identify and target the Potentially Affected Interests (PAIs), the specific messages and objectives to be communicated, and the most effective techniques to reach these targeted publics. During the initial phase of CWCS development, participants completed worksheets using the CPO method. The results identified seven highly recommended techniques to employ for the ensuing CWCS development and implementation phases (Appendix 8b).

During the development of the CWCS, significant effort was devoted to actively involve the public at different levels and during different stages of the process. Information on each major public and private wildlife- or habitat-related conservation program was researched. This resulted in an inventory of all significant existing local, state, regional, and national programs, data sources, and tools. Information also was compiled from meetings, correspondence, and research from literature and agency or organization web sites. This pool of knowledge helped establish a foundation for public outreach. For the purposes of CWCS development, the "public" was categorized into three groups as follows.

Group 1: Active Consultation Partners and Collaborators

Key public and private conservation groups such as The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Audubon groups, Partners in Flight (PIF) and others. Principal characteristics:

- Leaders, staff, and programs can contribute significant data or provide a scientific knowledge base that can be incorporated directly into the CWCS.
- Leaders, staff, and programs can collaborate on the implementation, monitoring, and assessment/evaluation of the CWCS.

Group 2: Interested Groups and Individuals

A multitude of NGOs and others including local land trusts, watershed groups, and advocacy groups. Principal characteristics:

- Limited knowledge of data and research information needed for the CWCS development.
- Likely to have important role in implementation and future revision of the CWCS.

Group 3: General Public

Persons who may contribute helpful information or realize the associated economic, recreational, and quality-of-life benefits resulting from the implementation of a comprehensive wildlife strategy in Connecticut.

Group 1 participants were contacted for input throughout development of the CWCS. Regular correspondence and sharing of technical information were critical to the development of the CWCS. Some examples of shared information include TNC's ecoregional target species priorities, Audubon Connecticut's Important Bird Area (IBA) and regional and state bird conservation priorities, and Region 5 USFWS's integration of all regional bird conservation plans and associated priorities. Workshops and individual feedback provided "peer review" for:

1. Identifying GCN species and key habitats,
2. Evaluating the most critical problems and threats facing those species and habitats, and
3. Selecting and prioritizing conservation actions.

The incorporation of various existing target species, associated habitats, and conservation strategies into the CWCS was important in focusing actions that complement existing efforts and establish areas for potential collaboration.

Group 2 and 3 participants were informed about the CWCS process and goals in a variety of ways detailed below.

Web Site

The importance of having information available via the Internet was recognized early in the development process. A section of the Connecticut DEP web site was devoted to the CWCS effort (Appendix 8c). This section, developed and updated by Connecticut DEP Wildlife Division's Outreach Program, provides both general and specific information about the CWCS. It provides a feedback mechanism for individuals to submit comments on GCN species, associated habitats and vegetative communities, and draft versions of the CWCS text. In addition to providing periodic updates on the CWCS, the web site also makes it easy for any visitor to reference other aspects of Wildlife Division programs and on-going projects and to obtain information on the activities of other bureaus and divisions within the DEP.

Handouts/Mailings

Mailings and informational materials were provided to a number of groups to increase awareness of the CWCS effort and to invite public participation. Articles detailing the CWCS effort were featured in publications, such as *Connecticut Wildlife* magazine. Newsletters for groups, such as the Master Wildlife Conservationists (approximately 80 members), and the Connecticut Waterfowl Association (358 members) were also employed to help increase awareness.

A full-color brochure, designed for the general public, was developed to introduce the concept of the CWCS, outline the eight elements of the CWCS, detail the benefits of a CWCS, and to provide information on how individuals can get involved in the process (Appendix 8c). Distribution of the brochure was widespread and ranged from meetings and programs to public information areas, kiosks, and exhibits at county agricultural fairs and regional festivals statewide. Nearly 10,000 brochures were distributed to the public.

Public Presentations and Outreach

A multitude of presentations were given by DEP staff and Master Wildlife Conservationist Program volunteers that provided an overview of the CWCS effort, its benefits and importance, the national perspective of the process as a component of State Wildlife Grants (SWG), and CWCS progress updates. These presentations ranged from formal audio-visual presentations to informal discussions. Some programs, such as a special CWCS discussion at the Connecticut River Eagle Festival in 2004 and 2005, reached tens of thousands of people. The 2004 presentation asked Festival participants to list their top wildlife conservation concerns and the 2005 Festival provided progress updates and highlighted ways for continued public participation.

Other programs had a ripple effect on outreach efforts. The Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) and Fisheries Advisory Council (FAC) are two examples of this effect. The CAC has 53 members, alternate members, and emeritus members representing 25 sportsmen and conservation groups. The FAC also represents several groups through the participation of 44 regular and alternate members. The FAC meets quarterly and the CAC meets monthly (except in July and August) with DEP BNR staff. During the CWCS development process, these groups were provided continual updates and were invited to participate through many of the mechanisms previously identified. This information was subsequently conveyed to the larger memberships of the participating groups, multiplying the level of outreach accomplished.

An overview of some of the types of programs and presentations provided on the CWCS effort is detailed below.

Type of Audience	Approximate Number of Attendees
<i>General</i>	
• Earth Day Programs (statewide)	1,500
• BioBlitz 2005	500
• Agricultural Fairs	>10,000
• Connecticut Trails Day	500
• Audubon Festival (Sharon)	800
• Connecticut River Eagle Festival (2004 & 2005)	>20,000
• Yacht Clubs	30
<i>Conservation Organizations</i>	
• Bird Clubs	>100
• Nature Centers	>100
<i>Sportsmen's Groups</i>	
• Fish & Game Clubs	>100
• Waterfowl Seminar	30
• Waterfowl Regulation Meeting	60
• Jake Day Festival	150
<i>Academic</i>	
• Graduate & Undergraduate level programs	>30
<i>Professional</i>	
• Connecticut Environmental Health Association	100
• Connecticut Department of Public Health Seminar Series	30
• Town Conservation Planning Workshops	150
• Yale University CWCS Forum	>50

Efforts similar to those described above will continue in order to engage Connecticut residents, potentially affected interests and stakeholders during the implementation and revision of the CWCS. Enhancing their awareness of, interest and potential participation in implementation is essential to the success of this effort. It is hoped that this process will foster community-based conservation efforts, foster land stewardship, and promote a sound environmental ethic.