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COORDINATION WITH FEDERAL, STATE, LOCAL, AND TRIBAL PARTNERS

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## CHAPTER 7

# COORDINATION WITH FEDERAL, STATE, LOCAL, AND TRIBAL PARTNERS

### DEEP COORDINATION

This chapter addresses Element 7 and describes how the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) developed the Wildlife Action Plan (WAP) and coordinated with internal and external partners.

In order to coordinate with its partners, the Wildlife Division first had to establish an effective internal WAP administrative framework. The Wildlife Division officially launched the WAP Revision in 2014 when a core steering committee within DEEP's Bureau of Natural Resources (BNR) was established. In addition, the original consultant from the 2005 WAP (Terwilliger Consulting, Inc. [TCI]) was contracted to assist in the WAP's update. Specific guidance provided by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) Best Practices (AFWA 2012), and later by the Northeast Lexicon and Synthesis (Crisfield and NEFWDC 2013 and Terwilliger and NEFWDC 2013), informed the approach throughout the planning process. With this guidance in mind, and with the input of a broadening circle of stakeholders and the conservation community, Connecticut developed its 2015 WAP partnership approach, providing for general and technical input throughout the process.

A WAP Core Team consisted of key BNR staff from each division: Forestry, Inland Fisheries, Marine Fisheries, and Wildlife. The Core Team guided coordination among the divisions for the development of the WAP.

All levels of BNR staff were engaged through initial internal WAP informational meetings and presentations with question/answer sessions. Additional input was sought individually at informal meetings and through follow-up correspondence. BNR input was then solicited at the program level, where priority setting and conservation needs were discussed. Meetings were held to inform and update staff and partners on Greatest Conservation Need (GCN) species, key habitats, threats, and conservation actions.

External partners, many also serving on the Connecticut Endangered Species Advisory Committee (ESSAC), participated in technical teams to guide the development of the GCN species and Key Habitats list. Taxonomic teams were continued from 2005 and coordinated with the established ESSAC to address the needs of the Connecticut listed species as well as the development of the GCN species list. This external input on ecological data and issues for the WAP included multiple academic institutions, agency and non-governmental organization (NGO) staff, and noted species experts. Key partners were asked to participate as part of a team or through targeted consultation during the process.

DEEP identified its federal, state, local, and tribal partners (see Appendix 7) and employed the Bleiker Systematic Development of Informed Consent (SDIC) and Citizen Participation by Objective (CPO) process (Bleiker and Bleiker 2000) to inform and engage partners throughout the development of the WAP. Partners that participated in the 2005 plan were contacted again

in 2014 to request a meeting and/or to provide ongoing information exchange. Partners were asked to review portions of the WAP during its development.

Meetings or correspondence were conducted with key local, state, federal, and tribal partners around the state to encourage input during each step of the development of the WAP (per Bleiker CPO). Initial meetings were held to inform them of the project and to solicit input on the WAP process and recommendations for GCN species and key habitats. Beginning in 2014, follow-up correspondence occurred on a regular basis to exchange technical information, coordinate activities, and provide updates. Key partners, such as the Connecticut Department of Transportation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Steward B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), participated in additional correspondence within their organizations to consider the range of ideas and diversity of approaches to wildlife conservation in Connecticut. Technical information was provided from the USFWS's Region 5 integration of all regional bird conservation plans and associated priorities. Specific questions and preparatory materials were provided for review, and input was solicited on each of Elements 1-4. Input on the draft GCN species list, the key habitat list, and the 2005 list of threats and actions was requested and their input provided the foundation for the 2015 WAP development. This process resulted in comments and consensus among partners regarding the GCN species list, threats, priority research needs, and conservation actions identified in the WAP.

## **FEDERAL PARTNERS**

Input from key federal partners was solicited via electronic correspondence, invitations to meetings and workshops, and requests to review draft versions of the WAP. The list of participants included, but was not limited to;

- USFWS Ecological Services, National Wildlife Refuges including Steward B. McKinney and Conte NWR, Private Lands Program, Coastal Program, Fisheries, and Federal Aid, North Atlantic Land Conservation Cooperative;
- Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC);
- New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC);
- Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC);
- Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (ACJV);
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS);
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA);
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA);
- U.S. Forest Service (USFS);
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE);
- U.S. Geological Survey (USGS);
- National Park Service (NPS);
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA);
- National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS);
- Department of Defense (DOD);
- Department of Transportation; and
- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

These key federal partners were encouraged to review the GCN species and key habitat conservation efforts posted on the DEEP Web site. One major accomplishment and

advancement from the 2005 plan was that several key partners incorporated the 2005 WAP conservation targets (GCN species and key habitats) into their programs and priorities. Especially relevant are opportunities within the NRCS Farm Bill programs to work with private landowners to benefit GCN species and key habitats, notably the New England cottontail as well as other shrubland and grassland species.

## STATE AND LOCAL PARTNERS

Similarly, development of the WAP was coordinated with key state and local partners. At the state level the following entities were contacted:

- Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM, Policy Development and Planning Division)
- Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development;
- Department of Transportation (DOT, Division of Intermodal and Environmental Planning);
- Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (all Bureaus and Programs);
- Department of Agriculture
- UConn (College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and the Agricultural Extension Service);
- Other academic institutions; and
- Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station.

BNR staff contacted key agencies including Connecticut DOT and OPM staff and invited them to participate in the 2015 revision. In May 2015, OPM informed the BNR that the WAP conformed to the 2013-2018 Conservation and Development Plan which places the WAP officially in compliance with Connecticut General Statute 16a-31(e). Additional coordination was conducted through correspondence with the Department of Agriculture, the Agricultural Extension Service, and many DEEP programs. An enhanced level of coordination between these agencies and programs resulted from the exchange of information and public updates on plan development. Each partner was informed of the WAP targets, process, and schedule and was encouraged to include the WAP information in their conservation/environmental programs.

Additional outreach efforts at the local level, specifically the Regional Planning Agencies and Councils of Government, included contacting numerous local decision makers across the state and encouraging participation and input into the revision process. Two articles in the regional newsletter of the Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetland Commissions informed local planning and zoning officials, inland wetland conservation commissions, and other key municipal leaders about the WAP and requested their input on the revision.

Coordination with the development of the Connecticut Forest Resource and Assessment Strategy (Forest Action Plan) provided additional opportunities for partner outreach and engagement. Efforts to work with the Forestry Division will continue as that plan is revised in the next two years. The teams that are currently revising key state plans are also being provided information on the WAP. These include the Water Plan, the Green Plan, and the Environmental Literacy Plan. A collaborative workshop hosted by the Connecticut Forest and Park Association and the Connecticut Land Conservation Council in the Spring of 2015 highlighted all these plans, their areas of overlap, and the importance of coordination in the implementation process.

## **INDIAN TRIBES AND GROUPS**

Both of Connecticut's federally-recognized Native American tribes, the Mohegan and Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nations were contacted and provided an opportunity to participate in the development of the WAP. The Bureau of Indian Affairs and Native American Fish and Wildlife Society provided more detailed information regarding natural resource stewardship programs developed by these entities. A meeting with natural resources staff of the Mohegan and Mashantucket Pequot Tribes was held to discuss the WAP and to identify opportunities to conserve wildlife and habitat on their lands through the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program.

Continued coordination with federal, state, local, and tribal partners is an essential aspect of the WAP. The same approach used to coordinate the development of the WAP will be followed in future revisions. BNR will take the lead in assuring on-going coordination with these groups. Engaging these groups in the future review and revision of this WAP will insure that wildlife conservation efforts in Connecticut are considered at every level of planning and governance.

All entities that were contacted during the WAP revision will be encouraged to include elements of the approved WAP revision into their planning activities and programs over the next decade. Correspondence encouraging implementation and meetings to discuss collaborative implementation will be offered to each group.

## CHAPTER 7 REFERENCES

- Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) and Teaming With Wildlife Committee, State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) Best Practices Working Group (BPWG). 2012. Best practices for state wildlife action plans—voluntary Guidance to States for Revision and Implementation. Washington, D.C. Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.
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