

Chapter 6

Review Process, Partner Coordination, and Public Involvement

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Summary

Connecticut’s 2025 Wildlife Action Plan maintains a clear and structured review and revision process, carrying forward the biennial internal review cycle and revision framework established in the 2005 and 2015 versions. Annual reporting under the State Wildlife Grants program will continue to inform adaptive management. At the same time, coordination with five-year updates to Connecticut’s endangered species list ensures that new data and changing conditions are regularly integrated, with the next update to the Wildlife Action Plan scheduled in 2035.

Communication and outreach efforts focused on two key groups, (1) conservation-interested partners (i.e., existing and potential partner organizations identified by CT DEEP or via referrals); and (2) the public at large (i.e., interested members of the public that may or may not have been affiliated with a specific organization). Coordination among conservation-interested partners (Partners) during the development of the 2025 Plan was extensive and multifaceted. The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) worked with social scientists to conduct structured interviews and surveys with over 200 individuals from a contact list comprising more than 400 organizations, including tribal nations, as well as state, federal, and local partners. These efforts provided substantial input on the usability of the plan, conservation priorities, and implementation barriers. Key findings informed revisions to the SGCN list, the Plan's structure, the prioritization of threats and actions, and the design of new tools, including the Conservation Action Tracker and Conservation Opportunity Area maps. The Plan also reflects an increased emphasis on collaboration with land trusts, municipalities, and community-level partners to facilitate the broad-scale implementation, as well as the future development of smaller-scale, customized information packets.

Public engagement efforts during Plan development built upon the success of previous Plans, emphasizing the use of new technologies and a broader online presence.

Due to the increased recognition of the importance of collaboration in ensuring the effective implementation of conservation actions, CT DEEP made considerable efforts to expand awareness and engagement among partners and the public during the plan revision. CT DEEP coordinated outreach through newsletters, social media, public events, dedicated webpages, and community talks, generating broad awareness and participation. Hundreds of residents and stakeholders provided input through online feedback forms on SGCN, habitats, issues, and actions, and ongoing engagement opportunities are embedded throughout the implementation strategy.

Participants identified forest, riverine, and open upland habitats as top priorities, and highlighted development, invasive species, and habitat degradation as major concerns. Public responses also demonstrated a strong interest in conservation actions, especially through land protection, habitat restoration, and community science, as well as a desire for continued involvement through email updates, volunteer opportunities, and local planning efforts.

A communications strategy was developed early in the process, and Connecticut's Wildlife Action Plan outlines both the short-term and long-term strategies to maintain active engagement with partners, Tribal Nations, and the public throughout implementation. The CT DEEP will continue outreach through newsletters, public events, and a dynamic website featuring tools under development, such as the Conservation Action Tracker and Conservation Opportunity Area maps. These platforms will support shared reporting, adaptive management, and data exchange. Municipalities, land trusts, and community members are encouraged to contribute through local planning, biodiversity surveys, community science initiatives, and others. By fostering flexible and inclusive participation, the Plan aims to build sustained momentum for statewide conservation through 2035.

Plan Review Process

Connecticut will continue to use the process outlined in the 2025 Wildlife Action Plan to review and revise the Strategy through 2035. This approach ensures consistency with federal expectations while providing flexibility to integrate new information and partner input throughout the decade. Connecticut will use the annual performance report requirement for State Wildlife Grant-funded projects as a basis for a yearly assessment of progress toward achieving plan objectives.

Internal review and revision will be conducted biennially to coincide with the renewal of the federal grant agreement. This will allow the Connecticut Department of Energy and

Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) to address species or habitat responses relating to management activities within a relatively short period. Evaluations of survey data and project needs at the beginning of each grant agreement period will allow staff to incorporate new information needs or specific projects as priorities or conditions change.

Reviews of Connecticut's Wildlife Action Plan, focusing on the status of the SGCN and SAPS, will be coordinated with CT DEEP's statutorily mandated five-year updates of species listed under the Connecticut Endangered Species Act. Listed species reviews and updates are conducted using biologists and the Endangered Species Scientific Advisory Committees, many of whom also served on the Taxa teams used to designate SGCN species in this plan. The most recent update was completed in 2015. In its priority list of actions, Connecticut's original 2005 Wildlife Action Plan identified the need for a framework to streamline the simultaneous review of both SGCN and state-listed species. As a result, the most recent listings under the Connecticut Endangered Species Act and Wildlife Action Plan updates have informed each other and been coordinated through similar groups of experts.

Connecticut's other conservation and management plans are adaptive and undergo regular reviews. The need to periodically revisit conservation plans and update them to reflect new information, additional programs, and changing conditions is recognized and practiced in these plans, as well as in the Connecticut Wildlife Action Plan.

Tribal Nation, Partner, and Public Coordination

Communication Strategy

CT DEEP staff and consultants developed the initial Communication Strategy in the summer of 2023 for partners (Appendix 6.1) and the public (Appendix 6.2). Throughout the revision process, outreach and coordination were advised by the Wildlife Action Plan Advisory Team, which is comprised of members from the Environmental Conservation Branch of the CT DEEP. Advisory Team Members were invited to bi-weekly planning meetings to solicit input, as well as quarterly Advisory Team status update meetings. In the summer of 2023, CT DEEP started implementing the Communication Strategy by creating a partner directory and reaching out to tribal nations, federal, state, and town governmental agencies, nongovernmental organizations, universities, and the private sector to ensure that a broad segment of existing and potential future partners were aware of the upcoming Plan revision. CT DEEP continued to keep in consistent contact with Tribal Nations, partners, and the public through the CT DEEP website, direct emails, newsletters, social media, structured surveys, and informal feedback forms. Informed by the results of

preliminary surveys of partners (see survey results below), goals, objectives, and actions for a Communication and Education Strategy were developed to guide partner and public outreach for both the revision and early stages of implementation. In October 2024, January 2025, and April 2025, CT DEEP issued newsletters that highlighted key milestones in the Wildlife Action Plan revision process and featured early input from stakeholders and Tribal Nations. Targeted social media posts accompanied each and features in other newsletters accompanied each Wildlife Action Plan newsletter and each request for public input throughout the process, driving traffic to the draft Plan's web portal and inviting partners to review materials and submit their feedback.

To turn awareness into active engagement, CT DEEP organized a series of hands-on workshops and webinars. In the summer of 2024, a workshop brought taxonomic specialists together to discuss priority actions, with CT DEEP staff and consultants capturing those discussions as narrative case studies. The results from this session were added to a shared resource library, providing later participants with concrete examples to inform their comments. Similarly, CT DEEP staff and their consultants delivered a workshop at the Connecticut Landscape Conservation Council meeting in April 2025 to highlight the Wildlife Action Plan, Conservation Opportunity Area maps, and the Conservation Action Tracker, and took note of the feedback. Planned for the winter of 2025, the first "Plan Ambassadors" training session will guide participants through the draft chapters, encourage live annotation via the online review tool, and gather stories of on-the-ground conservation successes.

Throughout the process, CT DEEP built in continuous feedback loops to adapt its outreach efforts. After every workshop and webinar, attendees completed brief surveys, and CT DEEP tracked comments and suggestions in a collaborative spreadsheet, using that real-time input to refine newsletter schedules, adjust webinar topics, and enhance online guidance materials. Once the formal revision phase concludes in late 2025, CT DEEP plans on publishing "Wildlife Action Plan Spotlight" case studies that narrate how stakeholder feedback shaped key elements of the Plan. Those stories will serve both as a celebration of partner contributions and as an open invitation for ongoing collaboration in implementing Connecticut's Wildlife Action Plan.

Intergovernmental Tribal Coordination Summary

Tribal coordination remains an ongoing priority. In the summer of 2023 into early 2024, CT DEEP Wildlife Diversity staff coordinated with the CT DEEP Environmental Justice Program Administrator, serving as the liaison to tribes, to interface with the two federally recognized tribal nations within Connecticut's borders: Mohegan and Mashantucket Pequot. At that

time, Tribes provided intergovernmental review of the SGCN and SAPS lists. Based on the feedback provided by the Mohegan Tribe, the Bald Eagle was added as an SGCN due to its cultural importance to their Tribe, despite the Bird Taxa Team initially recommending excluding that species based on its recovery and widespread distribution. Similarly, CT DEEP invited intergovernmental review of Elements 2-5 by sending feedback surveys to both Tribes in the fall of 2024. In the spring of 2025, during the last phase of developing the 2025 revision, CT DEEP offered both federally recognized tribal nations and three state-recognized tribes, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, and Eastern Pequot, to review each chapter as initial drafts were completed, with each chapter draft being submitted to the tribes between March and May 2025 (see Appendix 6.3). In early April, CT DEEP and its consultants met virtually with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation's Environmental Officer to discuss feedback on Chapters 1 and 2. Throughout the process, Connecticut's tribes provided input on each chapter of the plan. Engagement with the Tribes throughout the process has added important context to the Plan, ensuring that their priorities are not overlooked and identifying shared issues that could facilitate future collaboration.

Partner Outreach Summary

The 2025 Connecticut Wildlife Action Plan was developed to ensure early and sustained input from Tribal Nations, as well as state, federal, and local partners (see Appendix 6.4 for the list of partner organizations). The Core Wildlife Action Plan Revision Team (See Appendix 1.1 for a list of people on the team) established a collaborative framework modeled on the 2015 Wildlife Action Plan revision, guided by best practices from the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA 2012) and informed by extensive partner engagement efforts from 2023 through mid-2025.

Coordination began with CT DEEP consultants conducting targeted interviews and surveys directed at longstanding collaborators and prospective partners. Interviews with 26 individuals from over 22 organizations revealed general awareness of the SWAP and a desire for clearer mechanisms for engagement and implementation. Respondents emphasized the importance of addressing climate change, habitat connectivity, invasive species, and environmental justice. Many indicated willingness to contribute to outreach, technical guidance, or specific implementation efforts, but flagged capacity and funding limitations as common barriers.

Three partner surveys conducted in 2023 and 2024 reinforced these findings. Roughly 90% of respondents expressed interest in using components of the Plan, such as the Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) list, habitat associations, threats, and conservation action, if presented in a clear and accessible format. Survey feedback also informed revisions to the Plan's vision, goals, and objectives. Respondents called for

language emphasizing ecological integrity, biodiversity protection, and system-level conservation over human-centered justifications alone.

Coordination also occurred through structured outreach to umbrella organizations. At the 2025 Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) annual conference, the CT DEEP hosted an interactive session to align land conservation efforts with SWAP goals and previewed implementation tools, such as Conservation Opportunity Area maps (See Chapter 4) and the Conservation Action Tracker (see Chapter 5). Similar engagement is planned with the Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetland Commissions (CACIWC) to further connect local-scale actions with statewide conservation priorities. See Appendix 6.5 for a complete list of outreach activities supporting the 2025 Wildlife Action Plan revision process.

Input gathered through these channels directly informed the development of the Plan. Taxa-specific chapters incorporated partner feedback on priority habitats and threats where it aligned with expert review. Key partners also reviewed and commented on the draft lists of SGCN, associated habitats, and proposed conservation actions. During the development phase, over 450 organizations were contacted, and more than 200 individuals participated in interviews, surveys, or events that contributed to shaping the 2025 revision.

Partner Survey Results

Partner Interviews

During the summer of 2023, qualitative interviews were conducted with 26 individuals representing more than 22 organizations and agencies involved in conservation in Connecticut. The individuals interviewed fell into two predetermined categories of interest to the Core Team for collaboration in developing and implementing the revised Connecticut Plan: key existing partners and key future partners. The primary purpose of the interviews was to gather preliminary information to help the Core Team gain a general understanding of the priorities and preferred methods of engagement of existing and future partners in the Plan revision. For a list of interview questions, see Appendices 6.6 and 6.7.

Partner familiarity and use of the Plan

Overall, interviewees reported general awareness, modest use (particularly as a reference when applying for grants, justifying property acquisition, or making a case for projects), and no major criticisms of Connecticut's Plan. Nonetheless, interviewee comments indicate that the Plan is underutilized and could be improved. Although few interviewees explicitly used the Plan to inform program decisions, several interviewees recognized and utilized the Plan's advocacy, engagement, and educational values for these purposes. Interviewees believed that increased outreach regarding the Plan was necessary, targeting both

potential key implementers of the Plan (e.g., conservation-related organizations and agencies) and Connecticut residents in general.

Partner priorities

Organizational priorities reported by interviewees include habitat protection, restoration, and management; both site-specific and landscape-level focus; breadth of taxa; integration of climate change considerations; managing invasive species; warding off development threats to organisms and their habitats; ensuring environmental justice; and enabling nature conservation activities.

Revision and implementation assistance

Interviewees expect the revised Plan to consider “systems” holistically (e.g., landscape and habitat connectivity, coupled human and natural systems). Interviewees want the Plan to inspire/motivate members of their organizations to implement conservation actions, but an implicit desire exists for the Plan to reinforce their organizations’ existing priorities.

Interviewees identified the need for conservation actions (e.g., restoration activities, citizen science activities that support conservation, conservation advocacy) to be specified in the revised Plan. They wanted clarity about how distinct groups could contribute. Interviewees also stressed the need for funding to support implementation.

Assistance: outreach and engagement

Numerous interviewees offered to assist with the Plan outreach and engagement. Types of assistance that organizations could foresee include sharing technical information from the Plan with members of their organization, gathering input from members, inviting the Core Team to make presentations to members, organizing interactive sessions (e.g., workshops), engaging members in various Plan implementation activities, and offering specific suggestions on how the Core Team could effectively engage with their organizations.

Implementation and the development of the Conservation Action Tracker

Interviewees presented a mixed picture regarding potential partner involvement in implementing the Plan. Most were interested in the Plan, but alignment with their organization’s interests was an important consideration in their decision to participate. Barriers to participating in implementation activities (e.g., funding, capacity, clearer guidance) were identified by interviewees, but none seemed insurmountable. A substantial level of support was expressed for the idea of a Conservation Action Tracker, but most interviewees mentioned caveats.

Survey #1: Awareness of, use, and priorities for Connecticut’s Plan

During fall 2023, an online survey was conducted among 405 representatives from two populations of interest regarding Connecticut’s Plan: organizations and agencies currently collaborating as Connecticut DEEP partners and those that may be potential future partners. Nearly half (185) of those invited to have input via the survey responded. The objectives of the survey were to:

1. Gain an understanding of current and future partner organizations and learn about their previous and ongoing work with Connecticut DEEP.
2. Reveal partner organizations’ familiarity with and use of Connecticut’s Plan.
3. Assess the interest of partner organizations in participating in Connecticut’s plan revision.
4. Determine demand among partner organizations for Connecticut’s Plan products, including the Conservation Action Tracker (see Chapter 5).
5. Determine the interest of partner organizations in participating in the implementation of Connecticut’s Plan.

For a complete list of interview questions, please refer to Appendix 6.8.

Respondents’ experience

Two-thirds of respondents held mid- to upper-level positions within their respective organizations, and nearly half had been with their current employer for more than 10 years. Two-thirds of the organizations represented by respondents had a narrow geographic focus for their work, specifically targeting cities and towns in Connecticut, while about one-quarter worked statewide.

Familiarity, past use, and usefulness of Connecticut’s Plan

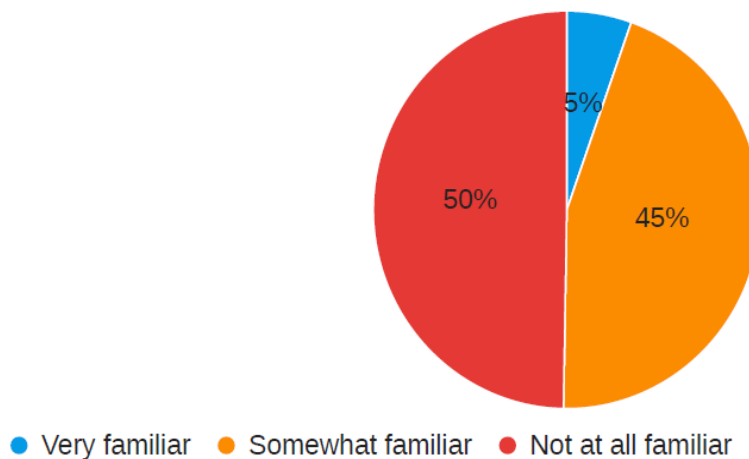


Figure 6.1 – Proportion of the 185 survey participants varying levels of familiarity with the 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan.

Respondents' familiarity with and use of Connecticut's Plan varied. Half of the 185 respondents were very familiar with the Plan, 45% were "somewhat" familiar with it, and 5% were not at all familiar with it (Figure 6.1). About half of the respondents indicated that their organization often or occasionally used Connecticut's Plan, while roughly 42% reported that their organization rarely or never used it (Figure 6.2). Two main reasons were given for not using the Plan: lack of awareness of the Plan and doubts about its utility (e.g., scale misalignment, difficulty navigating the Plan to find information). Organizations that used the Plan found the list of SGCN, the list of habitats associated with SGCN, and threats to SGCN to be useful.

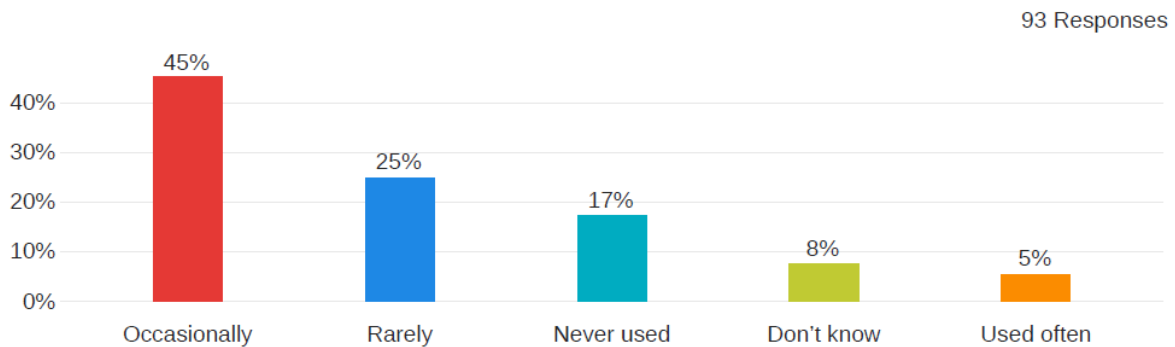


Figure 6.2 – Proportion of the 93 survey participants indicating how often they used the 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan.

Value/usefulness of SGCN and related habitats

Organizational representatives identified the value and uses of the SGCN list for internal and external purposes. Internally, the SGCN list is valuable for informing the development of management and project plans, as well as identifying the focus for organizational effort. Externally, the SGCN list improves recognition, legitimacy, and support, informs the regulatory process, and is useful for public communication and education, as well as for outreach to specific categories of stakeholders. Identification of habitats associated with SGCN in the plan has similar value to partner organizations as the SGCN list itself. Examples of values/uses articulated by respondents include informing habitat management/monitoring, increasing awareness of the value of private land as habitat for SGCN, helping find unusual species, and providing flags that certain habitats should be treated with care to avoid threats to wildlife using those habitats.

Uses and usefulness of the list of threats to SGCN

Respondents view the uses and usefulness of identifying and prioritizing threats in the Plan as having similar value to that reported for the list of SGCN and the habitats associated with those species. One additional important point emerged: the list of threats indicates

not only those species known to be threatened but also those that are on the borderline of becoming a concern. This encourages early threat assessments and offers the possibility of being proactive with conservation interventions. Two important outreach uses of the threats presented in the Plan were noted: (a) encouraging a broader perspective on the problems SGCN species are facing and (b) communicating how to minimize negative impacts on wildlife species (e.g., focusing scientific and conservation efforts).

Usefulness of the list of conservation actions to benefit SGCN

Respondents indicated several general ways that the list of conservation actions has value and can be used to promote conservation in Connecticut. These include: informs management plans and actions; promotes compliance with programs designed to achieve proper management; provides guidelines for activity within certain areas; supports grant applications; provides an expert source of conservation-specific best management practices for planning purposes both at the local and regional levels; informs broader discussions occurring during the development and evaluation of land-use regulation/management plans; informs nonformal and formal educational efforts.

Usefulness of the proposed monitoring plan for the SGCN

Respondents described monitoring as vital for implementing and achieving goals, indicating that monitoring supports assessment of progress toward meeting objectives in species and management plans. They also identified monitoring as an important source of information for conservation-oriented groups.

Interest in engaging in Connecticut's Plan revision process

Three-quarters of respondents indicated that they were “moderately” or “very” interested in providing input to the Plan revision process. However, to achieve breadth of stakeholder input, a variety of methods may need to be used in concert. A majority of respondents preferred not to rely on a single method for providing input. Most (91%) indicated that their organizations would like email updates about the Plan revision process and opportunities to participate in it.

Likelihood of using Connecticut's Wildlife Action Plan products

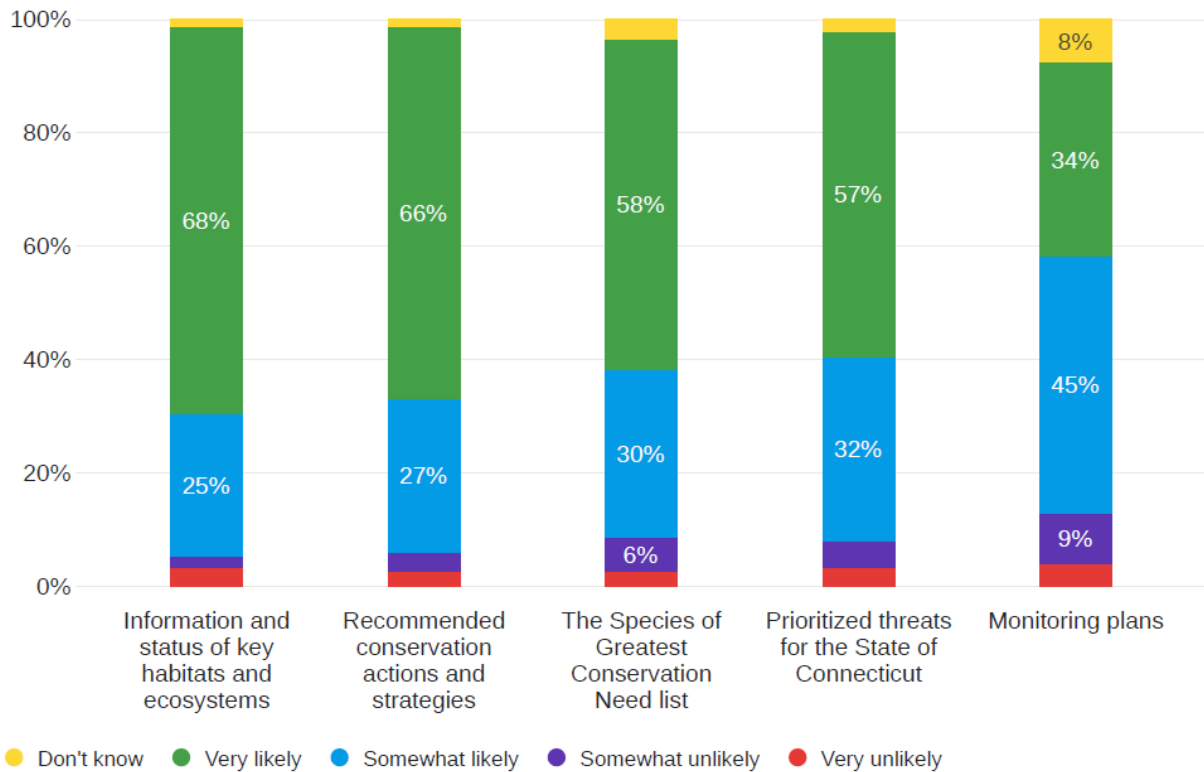


Figure 6.3 – Partner survey response to the question, “How likely are you to use these parts of the State Wildlife Action Plan?” The bars represent the proportion of the 151 participants who picked one of the five options for each component of the plan.

Most respondents (80-90% of the 151) forecasted that their organization would be “somewhat” or “very” likely to use each component of the Plan (i.e., information about and status of key habitats and ecosystems, recommended conservation actions and strategies, SGCN list, prioritized conservation threats, and monitoring plans) (Figure 6.3). However, respondents indicated that their use of the Plan will likely be contingent on the ease of access and user-friendliness of the online version. Other suggestions for improving the likelihood of using the Plan include the ability to easily locate and access components of the Plan (e.g., maps, special information), filter information by species, ecosystem, threat, or conservation strategy, and associate actions and strategies with high priorities. Additionally, they expect the Plan to include high-level overviews of conservation challenges and opportunities, as well as lists of statewide and regional monitoring plans.

Most respondents were likely to utilize the Conservation Action Tracker (see section below) as described to them in the survey if it is easy to use (simple for them to enter information) and the aggregate information compiled in the Conservation Action Tracker is of value to their organization.

Ways to enhance Connecticut's Plan implementation

Representatives of current and potential future partner organizations were asked about the likelihood that their organization will want to be involved in implementing the revised Wildlife Action Plan. Three-quarters of respondents forecast that their organizations would be “somewhat” or “very” likely to participate in implementation. Still, actual participation is likely conditional on the perceived utility of the revised Plan. Without specific reference to their organization, 80-90% of respondents felt the following factors were “moderately” to “very” important for effective implementation of the Plan:

- Regular, timely communication and meetings with collaborators for progress reports and information sharing.
- Agreement on clear goals/objectives for collaboration, including timelines.
- Implementation activity builds on the strengths of collaborators.
- Agreement on a lead coordinator, with various responsibilities delegated among partners.
- Collaborative implementation effort, from design to action, is inclusive.
- Agreement on methods, metrics, and timeline for assessing progress.
- Collaborators work together to find resources needed for implementation.

Additional considerations for their specific organization's decision to collaborate on implementation include a clear role for their organization to play, partners agreeing on the information, expertise, and resources each partner will contribute, and the organization's members or constituents wanting the organization to be involved in the specific implementation effort.

The nature and extent of involvement in the implementation of Connecticut's Plan can take many forms. The kinds of “implementation functions” respondents indicated their organizations would be interested in were of three types: *informative* (e.g., sharing relevant information/updates with constituents); *facilitative* (e.g., providing constituents with opportunities to participate in conservation activities; helping to coordinate implementation of priority projects; participating in efforts to find funding), and *performative* (e.g., participating in regional or state-level implementation teams).

Respondents' comments suggest that “one-size doesn't fit all” when it comes to how potential partners may want to be involved in the Plan implementation, underscoring the need for flexibility to facilitate partner involvement. While this may add to the complexity of administration, it may also allow partners to overcome situation-specific implementation challenges.

Survey #2: Plans, Visions, and Goals

The 2023 survey of partners, as reported above, emphasized the need to have broadly accepted goals and objectives for Connecticut’s 2025 Plan. Following this guidance, in 2024, the Core Team worked with subject-matter experts and partners to produce a draft set of overall intentions, a vision statement, goals, and objectives for future fish and wildlife conservation activities in Connecticut. Gaining partner input on these intentions was part of the process for revising the Plan. Consequently, partners were asked to review the draft vision, goals, and objectives via a survey sent to Connecticut DEEP’s Partners Master List (n = 450); 40 people responded. The survey sought respondents’ overall impressions of the materials, encouraged specific input and suggested edits, asked for an evaluation of relevance to their organizations’ purposes, and inquired whether the draft vision, goals, and objectives would likely motivate participation. For a complete list of survey questions, please refer to Appendix 6.9.

Revision Suggestions for Vision, Goals, and Objectives

Vision

Four-fifths of respondents believed the draft vision statement was generally good (81%). Although all respondents indicated that the vision statement was relevant to their organization/agency, two-thirds (66%) believed the statement needed minor or major edits. Among the concerns expressed about the vision statement, one significant “theme” emerged: the need to broaden perspective, especially to tamp down the human-centric tone in the draft. At the core of this theme was the idea of revising the vision statement to be more expansive, including conservation for (a) sustaining wildlife species for the sake of their ecological value (not just for the benefit of current and future generations of people) and (b) the intrinsic value of protecting ecosystems (i.e., benefiting healthy ecosystems). This theme sought emphasis on the inherent importance of biodiversity and intact/functioning ecosystems beyond their benefits to humans.

Relatedly, the words “conserve” and “conservation” seemed to carry baggage among some respondents who viewed them as implying wildlife is a “resource” (i.e., something to be used or extracted from nature for human benefit). Again, these terms are thought by some respondents as giving the vision statement too much of a human-centered (narrow) perspective. For example, it was suggested that the words “conserve” and “conservation” be replaced, or at least amended, with protect, restore, steward and perhaps other words that would imply less of a human-centric emphasis. This realignment of emphasis was variously articulated as a focused effort for the benefit of the “land,” the animals, the state’s ecology and ecological diversity, as well as for the benefit of current and future

generations of humans. Several respondents suggested alternative wording for the vision statement.

Goals

Over 91% of respondents believed the draft goals were good, but 41% indicated minor or major edits were in order. Perhaps the three most important themes in the comments about goals relate to (a) goal specificity, (b) whether a goal is actionable, and (c) goal statement format/style. Regarding specificity, three points stood out: the attribution of responsibility for the goal, indicating that some historically non-native species that have become embedded in the ecosystem should be the subject of conservation, and indicating whether species with stable populations and currently not threatened should be protected preemptively or proactively. Regarding the extent to which a goal was actionable, it could be argued that this is answered in context by the objectives associated with each goal; nevertheless, some goals were identified as needing revision to address this concern. Ensuring that goals were measurable and achievable was also an inherent interest of respondents. The format and style of writing various goal statements were identified as needing attention (e.g., consistency across the goals concerning specificity, presentation as complete sentences, etc.).

Objectives

Ninety percent of respondents reported that the draft objectives were generally good, but 45% believed they needed minor or major revision. Several respondents called for greater specificity, including time-bounded and outcome-articulated statements, as well as tighter wording, such as using a more specific and actionable framework.

Other suggestions for objectives included: specific reference to and emphasis on climate change (i.e., identify the types, extent and impacts of climate change to Connecticut's native fish, wildlife and their habitats); declaration of "the state" as having responsibility for objectives; increase emphasis on ecosystem viability, diversity and connectivity; address how fish and wildlife benefits are inequitably distributed now, and what actions can be taken to ensure more people benefit from them; infrastructure modification opportunities; include explicit reference to education.

Plan complementarity with the partner organization's purpose

Ninety percent of respondents felt that, generally, the draft Plan's vision, goals, and objectives were complementary to the interests of their organization/agency. Two identified areas of misalignment were: (a) including consumptive uses of wildlife under conservation, and (b) consideration of introduced species of wild animals that have become part of Connecticut's ecology. One respondent expressed concern about the lack

of information on how the Wildlife Action Plan and CT DEEP can support partner organizations in completing projects key to the Plan's goals.

Motivating participation in the Plan's implementation

Three-quarters of respondents (76%) believed their organization or agency would find the draft vision and associated set of goals and objectives important enough to motivate them to participate in implementing Connecticut's Plan. Most respondents indicated that the reason they felt their organization would engage in implementation at some level was because they saw the Plan as aligned with their purposes, and for some, they thought their input had been used in the Plan's planning process. Although largely answering in the affirmative, respondents also indicated some caveats or considerations that need attention to ensure participation in implementation. These mostly reiterated the importance of alignment with their organization's work (purpose, scale, level, location) and relevance to their members/constituents (i.e., addressing their interests and inviting their engagement in decisions), but also include concern about breadth of support to be expected if involved in implementation (e.g., provision of advice, planning, funding, specific guidance on implementing strategies, etc.) and, again, clarity of goals and objectives.

Box 6.1 - Connecticut's Wildlife Action Plan: Vision, Goals and Objectives
<i>Vision:</i> <i>Connecticut's diverse native fish, plants, wildlife species, and associated habitats are conserved for their intrinsic value and the ecological and social benefits they provide.</i>
Goal 1: Connecticut has healthy and resilient populations of native fish, wildlife, and plants. Objective 1.1: Conduct applied research and monitoring to understand the status, trends, issues, and impacts of issues facing Connecticut's fish, wildlife, and plant species. Objective 1.2: Increase and maintain abundance, distribution, resiliency, redundancy, and representative populations of Connecticut's fish and wildlife.
Goal 2: Connecticut has healthy and diverse habitats and ecosystems supporting native species.

Objective 2.1: Improve and maintain the quality, distribution, functions, and processes of Connecticut's species and their habitats.

Goal 3: Issues impacting Connecticut's native species and their habitats are identified, understood, and addressed.

Objective 3.1: Identify the types, extent, and impacts of key threats to Connecticut's species and their habitats.

Objective 3.2: Identify appropriate actions needed to address issues negatively impacting Connecticut's species and their habitats.

Goal 4: Actions are taken to protect Connecticut's native species and their habitats.

Objective 4.1: Implement actions to prevent and minimize issues negatively impacting Connecticut's species and their habitats.

Objective 4.2: Implement actions to recover and increase the abundance of declining or vulnerable species.

Objective 4.3: Implement actions to increase the quality, quantity, and diversity of Connecticut's habitats.

Goal 5: Connecticut's native species and their habitats, associated threats, and actions taken to minimize threats are monitored and evaluated to ensure goals and objectives (above) are being met.

Objective 5.1: Monitor and evaluate the status and trends of Connecticut's species and their habitats.

Objective 5.2: Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the actions taken to benefit Connecticut's species and habitats.

Objective 5.3: Use monitoring results to inform evaluations and make needed changes in conservation actions.

Goal 6: People are informed about and engaged in protecting Connecticut’s native species and habitats.

Objective 6.1: Increase familiarity, interest, and engagement of a diversity of partners in the implementation and evaluation of actions to benefit Connecticut’s species and their habitats.

Objective 6.2: Increase public familiarity, interest, and engagement in protecting Connecticut’s species and their habitats.

Objective 6.3: Ensure equitable access to the benefits of Connecticut’s species and their habitats among all members of the public.

Survey #3: Habitats, Issues, and Actions

Conservation-related organizations and agencies were surveyed in December 2024 to enhance CT DEEP’s understanding of conservation issues as perceived by various stakeholders and to identify actions that stakeholders suggest addressing these issues. The survey was sent to 184 conservation-related organizations and agencies in Connecticut via email; 41% responded. For a complete list of survey questions, please refer to Appendix 6.10.

The survey sought input about (a) the importance of various habitat types, (b) perceptions on issues affecting Connecticut’s SGCN, and (c) the relative priority of potential categories of actions to address such issues. Survey participants were also asked whether their organization/agency addresses the issues and whether they face obstacles that could limit participation in implementing actions identified in Connecticut’s 2025 Plan.

Habitats

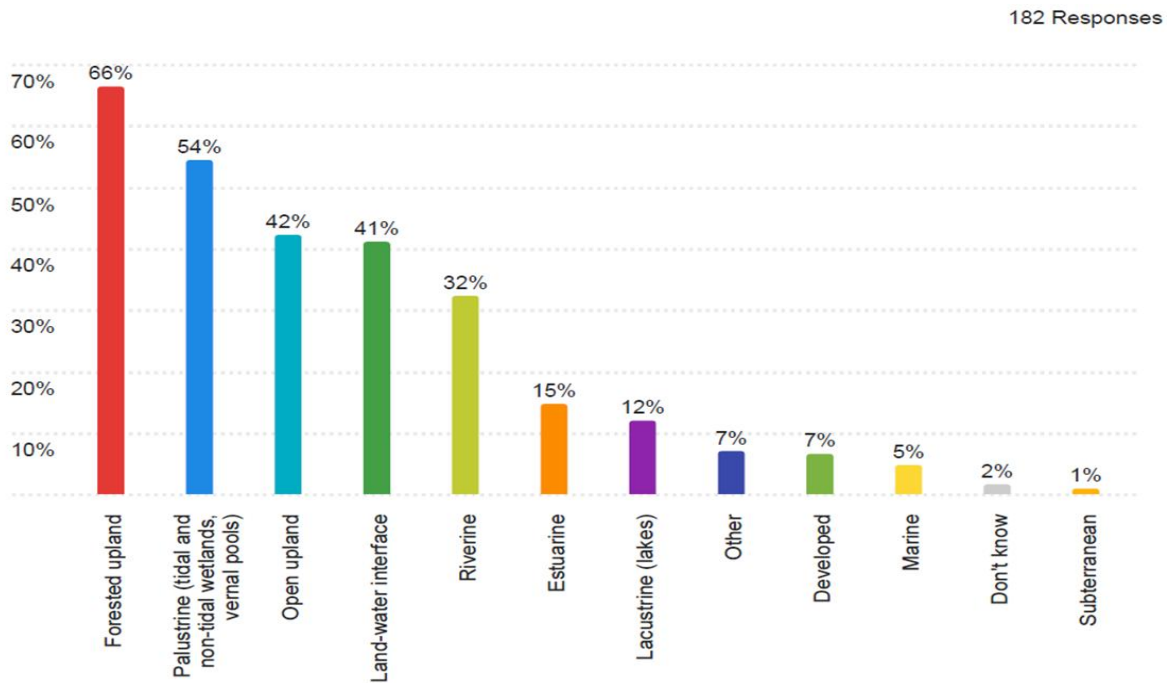


Figure 6.4 – Proportion of the 182 survey participants who selected each habitat as one of their top three priorities.

Two-thirds (66%) of the 182 respondents indicated that forested uplands were one of the three habitat types they believed should receive the greatest attention, followed by palustrine (tidal and non-tidal wetlands, vernal pools) habitats (54%; Figure 6.4). Many respondents also indicated that open upland (42%), land-water interface (floodplains, shorelines, beaches) (41%), and riverine (32%) habitats were types that should be high priorities for conservation attention. More than half of the respondents reported that forested uplands (85%) and open uplands (67%) were relevant to their organization or agency. Interest in uplands includes undeveloped land in urban/suburban areas as well as old-growth, uncut, mature, non-fragmented, contiguous, and native forests and meadow/grassland habitats (Figure 6.4).

Issues impacting Connecticut's SGCN

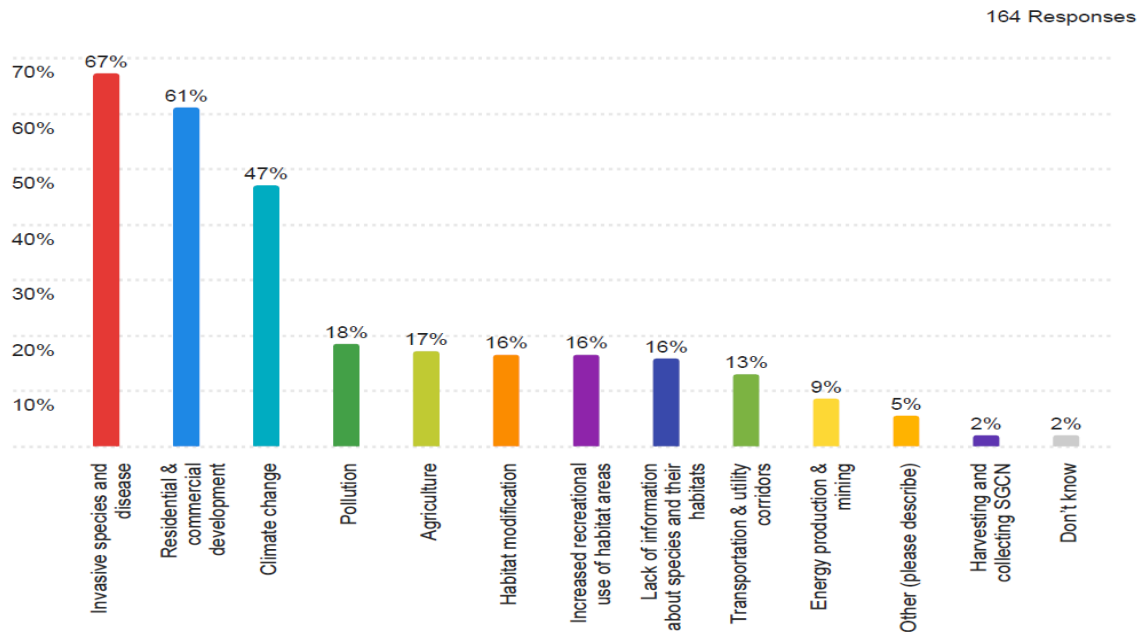


Figure 6.5 – Proportion of participants who identified each issue as one of their top three threats.

Respondents identified the top three issues impacting Connecticut's SGCN as invasive species and disease (67%), residential and commercial development (61%), and climate change (47%; Figure 6.5).

Potential actions to address high-priority issues

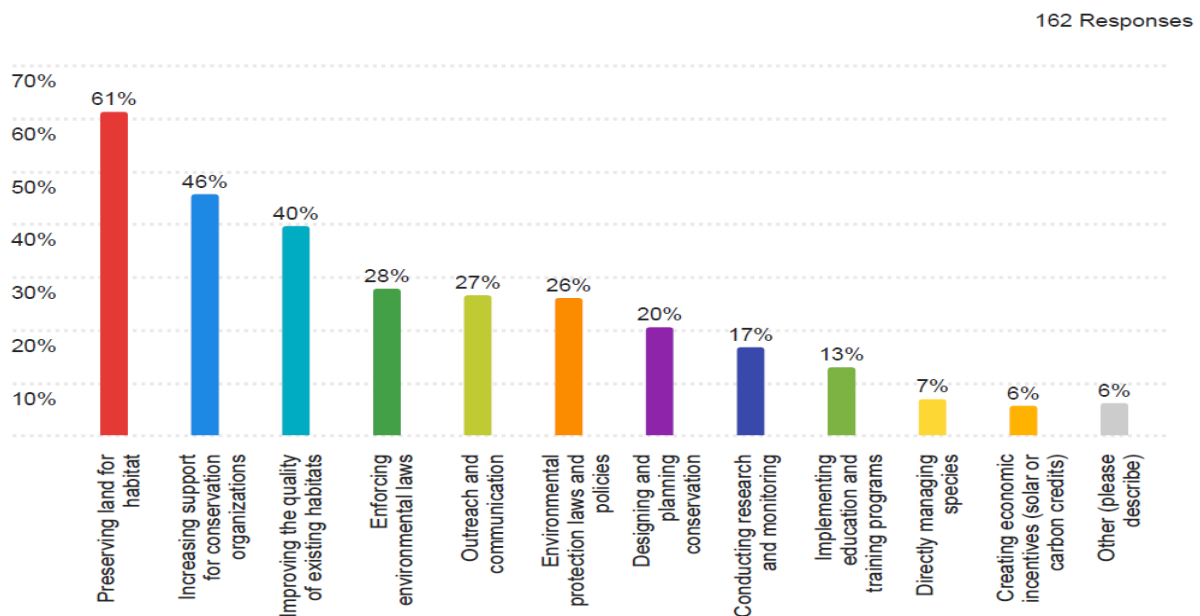


Figure 6.6 – Proportion of the 162 survey participants who selected each action as one of their top three priorities.

Three broad actions were identified most frequently: preserving critical habitat (61%), increasing support for conservation organizations (funding, capacity, and partnerships) (46%), and improving the quality of existing habitats (40%). Actions that protect or enhance habitats and support entities involved in habitat work are a high priority for conservation organizations (Figure 6.6).

Most survey respondents (86%) believed the work of their organization/agency addresses issues that impact Connecticut SGCN, and even more (91%) thought that this would be true in the future. The organizations/agencies represented in the survey reportedly contribute to addressing issues impacting Connecticut’s SGCN in a variety of ways:

- Land/habitat preservation, restoration, and enhancement
- Invasive species management
- Research, monitoring, and science
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation
- Public education and community engagement
- Policy advocacy and legislation
- Wildlife protection and species-specific actions

Obstacles to participation in actions

Although current and anticipated activity that supports priority wildlife conservation needs is substantial, 51% of survey respondents believed their organization/agency faces significant obstacles that could limit participation in implementing actions identified in Connecticut’s 2025 Plan. Survey respondents (n = 72) reported several barriers that their organizations or agencies may face. The obstacles fell into five categories:

- Funding challenges and limited resources
- Capacity and staffing limitations
- Slow or inadequate government action and regulations
- Balancing public access and habitat protection
- Engagement and public support

Encouragingly, respondents also identified possible solutions (e.g., better coordination and resource sharing between conservation-oriented organizations working at various levels) for the obstacles they enumerated.

Important considerations for the Connecticut 2025 Wildlife Action Plan

At the end of the survey, respondents emphasized important considerations for the 2025 Plan revision. Responses fell along three themes:

- (a) **Collaboration:** Respondents strongly emphasized the value of collaboration and the need for even better coordination between conservation-oriented organizations working at various levels, local governments, and state agencies.
- (b) **Public education and outreach:** Respondents emphasized the need for increased public awareness and education about biodiversity, species conservation, and how individuals can contribute to habitat preservation in suburban, exurban, and rural areas, including landowners. Additionally, many organizations require support for community engagement and public education efforts aimed at promoting responsible coexistence with wildlife.
- (c) **Barriers to implementation:** Despite the willingness to participate, many organizations face significant obstacles in effectively contributing to the Plan.

The survey results highlight the presence of numerous individuals and organizations within Connecticut's complex conservation system, which varies in terms of level and scale, tenure, capacity, focus, and public recognition. On the one hand, this indicates the presence of the necessary ingredients for effective conservation in the state. On the other hand, it also highlights the complexity of facilitating coordination and collaboration, as well as avoiding unproductive competition, in a situation where resources are limited.

Content Analysis of CT's Municipal and State Conservation Plans

Summary

Municipalities were identified as a potential gap in implementing the 2015 Wildlife Action Plan in the first partner survey (see above). The first survey assessed awareness and use of the State Wildlife Action Plan among conservation partners, asking respondents whether they were familiar with the Plan and whether they had applied its recommendations in their work. While NGOs and state agencies reported relatively high familiarity and active use, responses revealed a gap at the municipal level; many towns neither seemed to know of the Plan nor had integrated its recommendations into local planning. To more formally assess the degree to which each of Connecticut's 169 towns engaged with the 2015 Wildlife Action Plan, a content analysis was conducted of the available plans from each town and for the entire state. Overall, of the municipalities with available plans (107), only ~7% referenced the 2015 Wildlife Action Plan (7 total). Statewide plans were marginally better, with only 18% of the statewide plans available referencing the 2015 Wildlife Action Plan (4 out of 22). However, most town and state plans mention wildlife in some capacity, such as referencing wildlife habitat and corridors. This finding prompted a shift to engaging municipalities more actively as key partners (e.g., providing workshops at conferences attended by town representatives, like the Connecticut Landscape Conservation Council in April 2024). Because conservation actions occur at multiple scales, parcel, town,

ecoregion, state, and beyond, these findings demonstrated a need to explore strategies for embedding the 2025 Wildlife Action Plan into municipal and regional plans (for example, “mini-wildlife action plans” tailored to municipalities and/or ecoregions; see Chapter 4) and provide clear guidance on how local governments can adopt and adapt prioritized actions in their land-use, open-space, and watershed management policies.

Methods: Content Analysis of CT’s Municipal Conservation Plans

Content Analysis to Identify Common Topics

Town and state plans were found online and screened, with only those considered action plans included. These documents were loaded into R 4.2.3 (R Core Team, 2023) to identify topics or groups of similar words that represent a semantic theme across town and state plans using structural topic models (Roberts et al., 2014). Multi-word expressions (e.g., “open space”) were established, and rare expressions and words were excluded because if they were kept, they could dominate topics (Banks et al., 2018). The research goal was to determine common issues shared amongst most plans. Ten common topics were identified across town plans, and five common issues across the state plans. Once topic models were run, similarity among town and state topics was determined by computing Jaccard Similarity values (ranging from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating no shared words and 1 indicating all the same words) for the 50 most common words within each topic across models.

Keyword Search for Wildlife Action Plan References

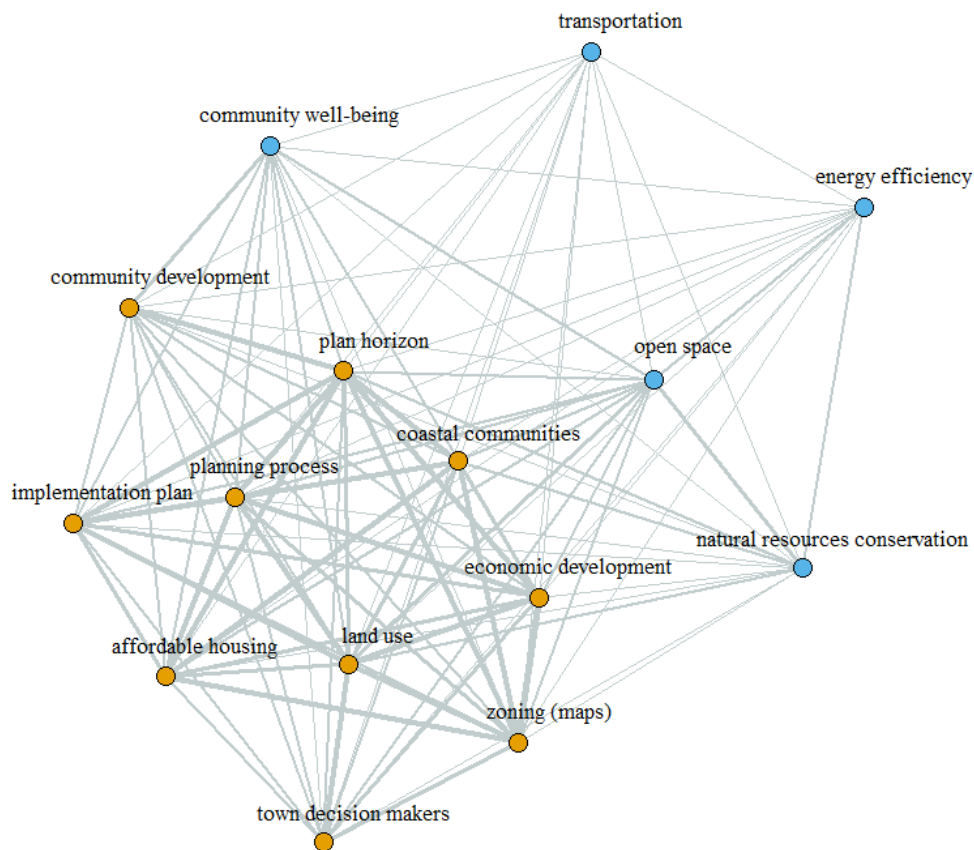
To determine the use of the previous CT SWAP revision within town and state plans, a keyword search was conducted of all town and state plans using the *qunateda* package (Benoit et al., 2018) in R 4.2.3 (R Core Team, 2023). Each plan was searched for mentions of “wildlife action plan”, “wildlife conservation strategy” (former name of the CT Wildlife Action Plan), “SWAP,” and “WAP” (common acronyms for the plan). Once a keyword was found, five words were extracted upstream and downstream of the keyword and used this context to determine if the keyword occurrence was relevant, removing any irrelevant mentions (for example, a town plan may mention “SWAP” but be discussing swap meetups).

Results: Content Analysis of CT’s Municipal Conservation Plans

The most prevalent town topics were land use, implementation plan, economic development, and zoning (maps). Economic development, zoning, planning process, and plan horizons were the town topics most similar to each other (Figure 6.7). The most prevalent state topics were energy efficiency and community well-being. State topics shared a few words, with the most similarity between natural resources conservation and

open space. State and town topics did share some words, but the overlap in topics was generally low. State and town topics with the highest similarity were community development in the town plans and community well-being in the state plans, as well as land use in the town plans and open space in the state plans (Figure 6.7). As a result of these findings, these topic models were included within the Conservation Opportunity Areas (see Chapter 4).

State and town plans rarely referenced the 2015 Connecticut Wildlife Action Plan; however, they frequently mentioned wildlife in various ways. Seven of 107 town plans (7% of town plans) referenced the 2015 CT Wildlife Action Plan, and four of the 22 state plans (18% of state plans) also referenced it. Most town and state plans referred to wildlife as wildlife habitat(s) (69% of town plans and 45% of state plans) and wildlife corridor(s) (47% of town



plans).

Figure 6.7. Network plot where points represent topics (blue are state topics and orange are town topics), with the lines representing the similarity between topics. The width of the line between the issues represents the Jaccard similarity value (possible range from 0-1) between those topics. Thicker lines correspond to a higher number of shared words between the issues, with the thickest line corresponding to a value of 0.47 and the thinnest line corresponding to a value of 0.03. The

physical distance between topics is not statistically meaningful and is chosen for aesthetic purposes.

Public Engagement

Public Outreach Summary

Connecticut employed a comprehensive and multi-platform approach to engage the public in the 2025 revision of its Wildlife Action Plan. Building on outreach structures established in 2015, CT DEEP expanded its strategy to include electronic newsletters, social media campaigns, public surveys, dedicated web content, live events, and presentations. These efforts were designed not only to solicit feedback on SGCN, habitats, issues, and conservation actions, but also to increase public understanding of the Plan’s purpose, relevance, and opportunities for participation. Please refer to Appendix 6.5 for detailed information on CT DEEP’s public outreach and engagement.

Electronic newsletters served as a primary tool for reaching a broad public audience. The Wildlife Highlights newsletter, sent monthly to over 7,300 subscribers as of early 2025, featured 10 articles focused on the Action Plan from January 2024 through June 2025. Topics included invitations to participate in public surveys, explanations of the Plan’s goals, and stories from conservation partners that highlighted the implementation of the Plan. Click-through rates for these articles ranged from 18 to 162 per issue, with the highest engagement corresponding to surveys on SGCN and draft actions.

In Fall 2024, CT DEEP launched a new quarterly publication, the Connecticut Wildlife Action Plan Partner Network Newsletter, which focuses on partner engagement. The first two issues reached over 400 recipients each, with open rates above 50% (Table 6.1). The content included results of the partner surveys, updates on the Plan’s progress, partner stories, and introductions to team members of the Wildlife Action Plan. For a comprehensive list of outreach activities supporting the 2025 Wildlife Action Plan revision, please refer to Appendix 6.5.

Table 6.1 - Numbers of recipients who received, opened, and clicked hyperlinks within each issue of the Partner Network Newsletter as of May 2025. The Issue column contains hyperlinks to view each newsletter issue.

Issue	Received	Opened	Clicked
Fall 2024	407	219	22
Winter 2025	442	279	21
Spring 2025	451	204	17

Parallel efforts were conducted across multiple CT DEEP-hosted webpages, which provided accessible information and hosted public feedback opportunities through Google Forms. The Public Input and the 2025 Revision page served as a central hub for updates and comment collection, while supplementary pages were created for SGCN, habitat, action categories, frequently asked questions, and partner stories. These web resources were iteratively updated to reflect Plan milestones and were explicitly designed to facilitate broad engagement through plain language explanations and intuitive navigation.

Social media served as a complementary engagement platform, reaching broad audiences, with the CT Fish and Wildlife Facebook Page reaching over 66,000 followers in 2025. Regular posts about the Wildlife Action Plan appeared on CT DEEP's Facebook and Instagram channels, highlighting opportunities for public input, sharing success stories from partner organizations, and promoting public-facing events (see Figure 6.8 for an example). Posts in 2023, 2024, and 2025 included calls to participate in surveys, features on SGCN, such as those on bats and pollinators, and partner-led projects aligned with Plan actions. Instagram posts received 87 to 192 likes each, while Facebook posts were widely shared within relevant conservation networks (see Appendices 6.5 and 6.14 for details on post engagement).

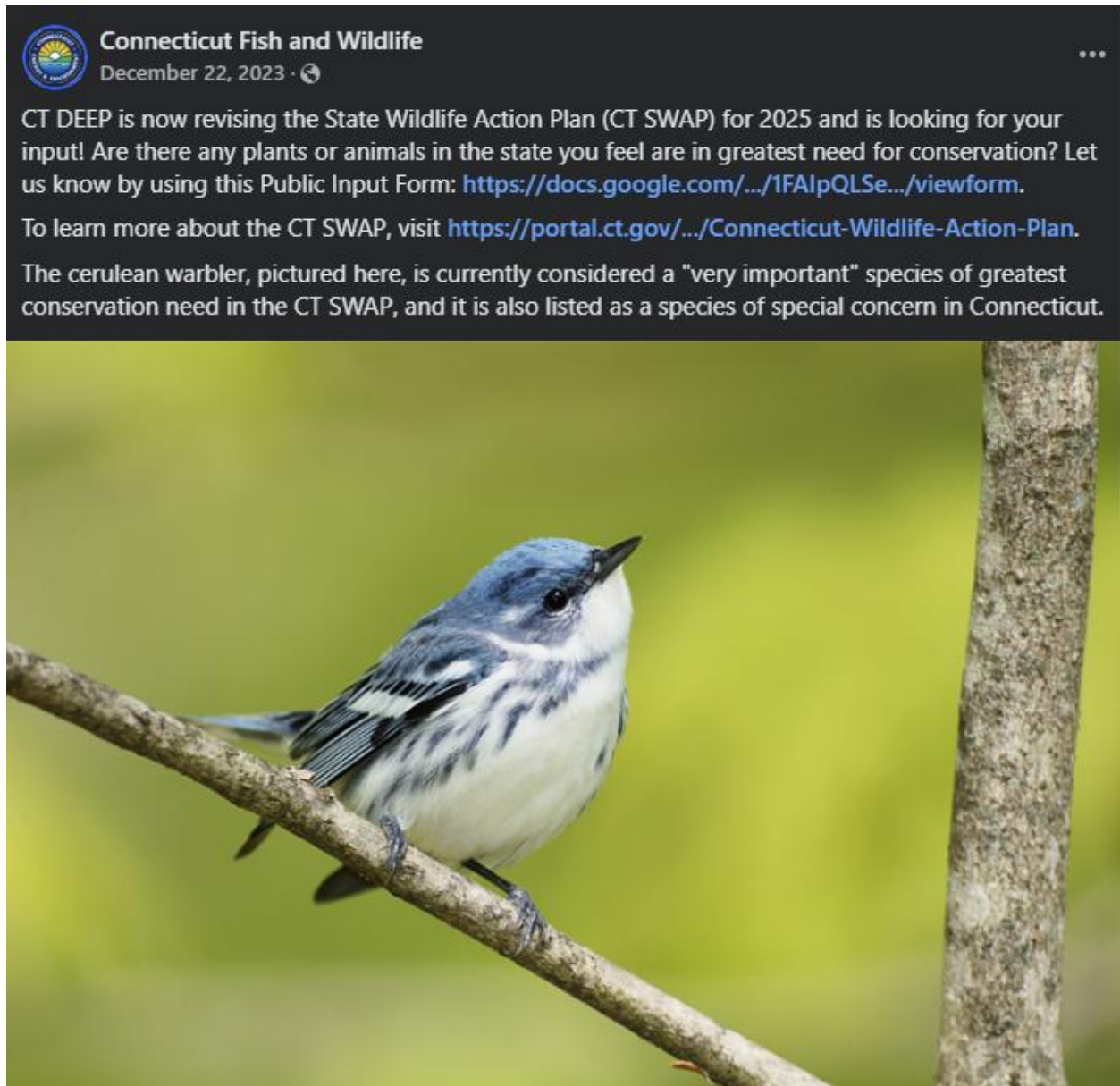


Figure 6.8 – Example social media post on Facebook from December 2023.

Public-facing events and talks provided in-person avenues for engagement. Between March 2024 and March 2025, Wildlife Division staff and trained volunteers presented Action Plan content at six major public events, including the Connecticut Fishing and Outdoor Show, Durham Fair, and Bat Appreciation Day (Table 6.2). Educational tables featured SGCN handouts, flyers, draft species lists, and opportunities to sign up for updates. The 2025 Wildlife Action Plan content was also integrated into slide presentations at libraries, nature centers, and academic institutions, emphasizing the role of individual residents, landowners, and local groups in contributing to the Plan's goals (Figure 6.9). For more details and a complete list of public and partner outreach, see Appendix 6.

Table 6.2 - Public events where information from the State Wildlife Action Plan was featured.

Event	Dates	Location	Town
Connecticut Fishing and Outdoor Show	Mar 22-24, 2024; Mar 21-23, 2025	Mohegan Sun Convention Center	Uncasville, CT
Annual Celebration for the Bats	Jul 20, 2024	White Memorial Conservation Center	Litchfield, CT
Bat Appreciation Day	Sep 15, 2024	Old Newgate Prison and Copper Mine	East Granby, CT
Durham Fair	Sep 26-29, 2024	Durham Fairgrounds	Durham, CT
National Hunting and Fishing Day	Sep 28	Blackrock State Park	Watertown, CT

CT DEEP's outreach strategy reached thousands of residents and stakeholders across multiple platforms. Public feedback solicitations yielded hundreds of responses on draft SGCN, habitat types, issues, and conservation actions (see below). The feedback received was used to inform species and habitat prioritization, refine messaging, and identify barriers to participation.

Connecticut's Wildlife Action Plan

- Provides guidance and vision for wildlife conservation in CT
- Revised every 10 years
- Identifies Species of Greatest Conservation Need, important habitats, issues, and conservation actions






Scan to follow and get involved!










Figure 6.9 – The State Wildlife Action Plan slide is incorporated into multiple Wildlife Division presentations.

Public Feedback Form Results

Summary

As part of the Communication Plan, CT DEEP sought to solicit public input on the major elements of the Wildlife Action Plan, while also gauging public awareness and the likelihood that the general public would find the Wildlife Action Plan useful. To this end, CT DEEP and its consultants launched three feedback forms, one in the winter of 2023-24, one in spring 2024, and one in fall 2024. The first, starting in November 2023, asked the public to review the draft SGCN list and provide their input. Fifty-one respondents reviewed the draft SGCN list and expressed broad satisfaction, with 67% rating it 4 or 5 out of 5. The second feedback form was launched in March of 2024 and asked questions about the updated SGCN list and the general awareness of the Wildlife Action Plan. One hundred ten respondents completed the input form on plan awareness and engagement. Only 26% knew about the 2015 plan beforehand; yet, 98% plan to use the 2025 update for grant applications, habitat restoration, policy development, or research, and 89% requested ongoing email updates.

To address the remaining elements, the last feedback form was launched in September of 2024, where 438 Connecticut residents responded to questions about habitat, threat, and action priorities for the State Wildlife Action Plan. They placed the greatest emphasis on conserving Forests (71%), Rivers (55%), and Open Uplands (46%) and identified Residential and Commercial Development (69%), Invasive Species and Disease (62%), and Human Disturbance (46%) as the top statewide threats. When asked which measures would most benefit Connecticut's SGCN, 62% prioritized land preservation, 53% supported habitat improvements, and 39% advocated for stronger enforcement of environmental laws. Respondents also demonstrated a strong willingness to engage; over 80% are already participating in or are likely to participate in community science, nearly 80% volunteer with conservation organizations, and 86% vote on conservation issues. Forty-seven percent of participants indicated that they would pursue conservation easements on their land. Collectively, this feedback demonstrates general public support for Connecticut's Wildlife Action Plan as a practical conservation framework. A comparison of public, partner, and expert opinions on habitats, issues, and actions is provided below. All questions for each feedback form are listed in Appendices 6.11, 6.12, and 6.13.

Feedback Form #1: Draft SGCN List

The first public feedback form (Appendix 6.11) was posted on the CT DEEP website in November 2023, inviting the public to review the draft SGCN list and provide their input. To

increase visibility of the feedback form, social media posts and a newsletter article in CT DEEP’s Wildlife Highlights Newsletter, featuring links to the form, were published. Fifty-one people responded before the feedback form was closed in February 2024. CT DEEP outreach staff directly contacted each respondent to thank them or address any questions they may have raised.

After reviewing this Draft Species of Greatest Conservation Need list, on a scale from 1 to 5 how satisfied are you with it?

46 responses

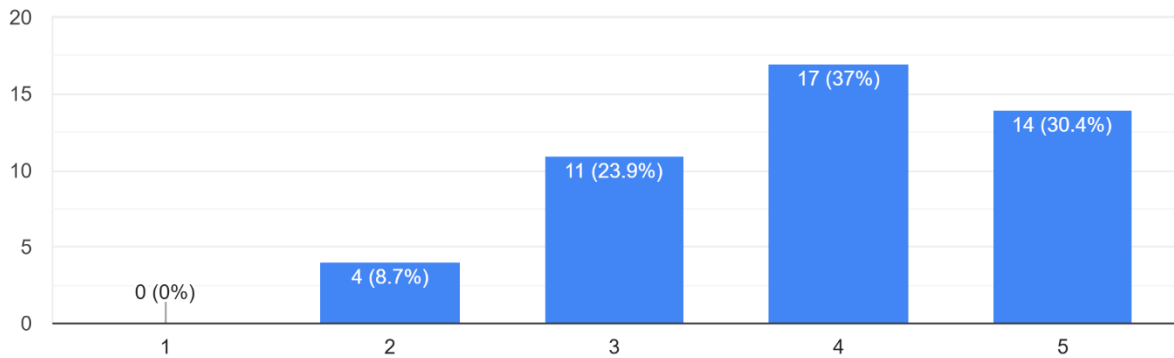


Figure 6.10 – Proportion (and number) of the 46 participants that selected each value on a scale of 1 to 5; the scale ranging from “1,” which is “Not Satisfied at All,” to “5,” which is “Very Satisfied” based on their assessment of the draft SGCN list.

Respondents generally expressed approval of the Draft Species of Greatest Conservation Need list, with a combined 67% assigning satisfaction ratings of four or five out of five and just 9% rating it at two or below (Figure 6.10). Most indicated that they plan to leverage the list for grant applications, research projects, or on-the-ground conservation efforts, underscoring its perceived value as a planning tool. Free-text suggestions for missing taxa coalesced around a handful of species with strong public recognition or concern, notably the Eastern Hognose Snake, Wood Turtle, Monarch Butterfly, Northern Long-eared Bat, and Piping Plover, suggesting that future drafts may require clearer inclusion criteria or additional outreach for lesser-known species. A solid majority (68%) requested ongoing email updates, reflecting widespread interest in staying engaged through the revision process. Comments ranged from appreciation for the transparency of the draft, “Thank you for soliciting feedback,” to constructive calls for finer stratification of data by ecoregion and more explicit explanations of why certain watchlist species did not qualify for SGCN status. Taken together, this feedback suggests that while stakeholders broadly support the current SGCN framework, they also seek more detailed contextual information, regular

communication, and assurances that the final list reflects both ecological rigor and public familiarity.

Do you think you will use the 2025 Wildlife Action Plan once it is released (e.g., learning more about Connecticut’s conservation programs, learning what... conservation, applying for conservation grants)?
49 responses

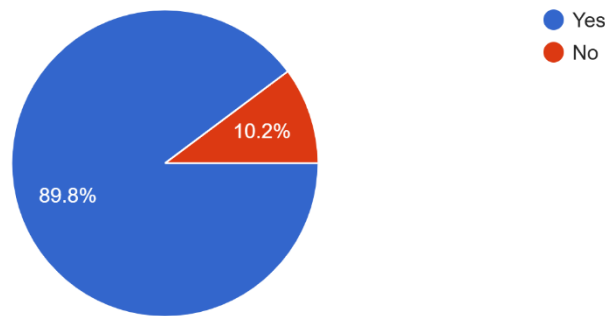


Figure 6.11 - Feedback form response to the question, “Do you think you will use the 2025 Wildlife Action Plan once it is released?”

Nearly nine out of ten survey participants (~90%) affirmed that they will actively use the final 2025 Wildlife Action Plan in their work, with only ~10% indicating they will not (Figure 6.11). Respondents represented land trusts, academic researchers, municipal planners, and NGOs, suggesting the Plan will serve as a cornerstone reference for grant applications, research design, habitat restoration projects, and policy development. Many noted that having a single, comprehensive state-led framework will streamline the process of aligning local and regional initiatives with statewide priorities. Although detailed use-case comments were not captured in this column, the overwhelming “yes” response signals widespread confidence that the Plan will deliver practical guidance, promote consistency across programs, and foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders.

Feedback Form #2: Final SGCN List, Plan Awareness, and Engagement

The second public feedback form was posted to CT DEEP’s website in March 2024 (Appendix 6.12). Similar to the first public input opportunity, the second feedback form launch was accompanied by multiple social media posts on Instagram and Facebook and featured in various CT DEEP newsletter articles. One hundred and ten people filled out the survey before it closed in May 2024.

Were you aware of Connecticut's 2015 Wildlife Action Plan before taking this survey?

109 responses

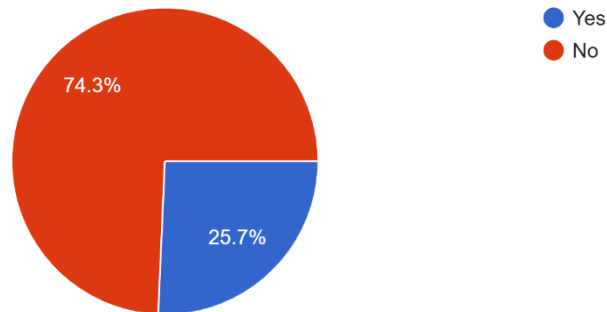


Figure 6.12 - Feedback form response to the question, “Were you aware of Connecticut’s 2015 Wildlife Action Plan before taking this survey?”

Respondents to the Connecticut SGCN public input form displayed limited prior awareness of the 2015 Wildlife Action Plan; only about 26% reported being aware of it before this survey (Figure 6.12). Yet, nearly everyone (98%) expects to use the 2025 Plan in their work (Figure 6.13), whether for grant applications, research, restoration planning, or policy development, which is about 8% higher than the response to a similar question asked in the first feedback opportunity (Figure 6.11). Partners offered a wide array of suggestions for new content, ranging from enhanced species accounts and distribution maps to integrated climate vulnerability assessments and clearer guidance on implementing conservation measures, but no single suggestion dominated the responses. A handful of participants specifically called out specific species they thought were missing from the list, though most comments focused on structural or informational enhancements rather than particular taxa. Interest in staying engaged through the revision process was also high, with almost 89% of respondents requesting email updates on how they can contribute to Connecticut’s SGCN. This feedback suggests that while Connecticut’s wildlife community may not be deeply familiar with the existing plan, they view the 2025 update as an indispensable tool and are eager both to influence its content and to remain connected as it progresses.

Do you think you will use the 2025 Wildlife Action Plan once it is released (e.g., learning more about Connecticut’s conservation programs, learning what... conservation, applying for conservation grants)?

108 responses

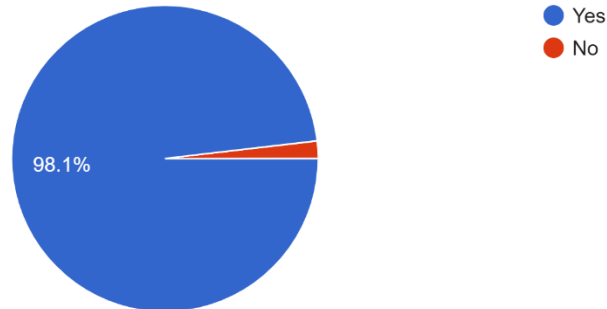


Figure 6.13 - Feedback form response to the question, “Do you think you will use the 2025 Wildlife Action Plan once it is released?”

Feedback Form #3: Habitats, Issues, and Actions

The last public feedback form was posted to CT DEEP’s webpage in September 2024 (Appendix 6.13). The launch of the feedback form was accompanied by multiple social media posts on Instagram and Facebook, as well as several articles in various CT DEEP newsletters. This feedback form elicited the biggest response of the three public input opportunities, with 438 completing the form before it closed in November 2024.

Conservation Engagement

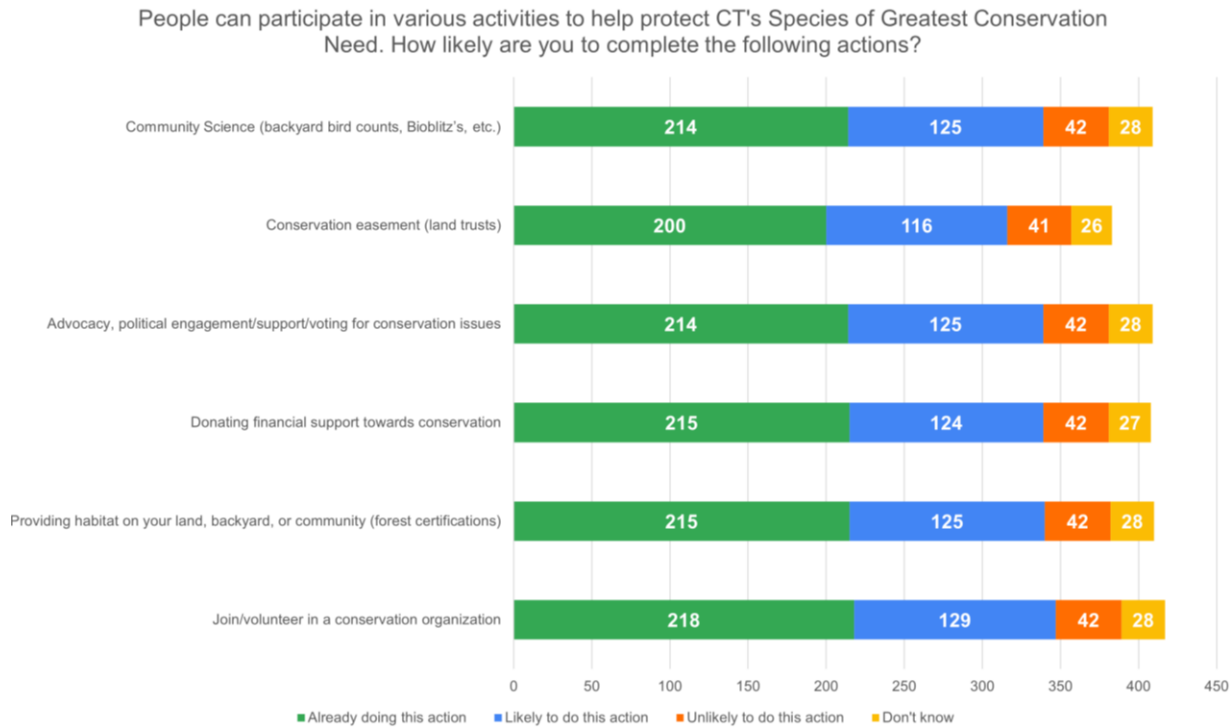


Figure 6.14 - Feedback form response to the question, “How likely are you to complete the following actions?” The bar for each action represents the number of participants who selected one of the four categories: already doing this action, likely to do this action, unlikely to do this action, or don’t know.

Respondents expressed a strong willingness to engage in hands-on and supportive conservation activities. Fully 80% of participants reported that they already participate in or are likely to join community science efforts, such as backyard bird counts and Bioblitzes. In comparison, another 79% are already members of or have the potential to volunteer with a conservation organization. Similarly, 79% indicated that they already donate or would consider donating financial support to conservation causes, and 86% said they already vote or would vote in support of conservation policies (Figure 6.14). In contrast, just under half (47%) reported that they already hold or would pursue a conservation easement on their land, backyard, or community through a land trust (Figure 6.14). These findings suggest that, although most respondents are willing to contribute time, expertise, and money, comparatively fewer are prepared to engage in longer-term land-protection agreements, highlighting an opportunity for CT DEEP to promote and facilitate conservation easements through targeted outreach and incentives.

Habitats

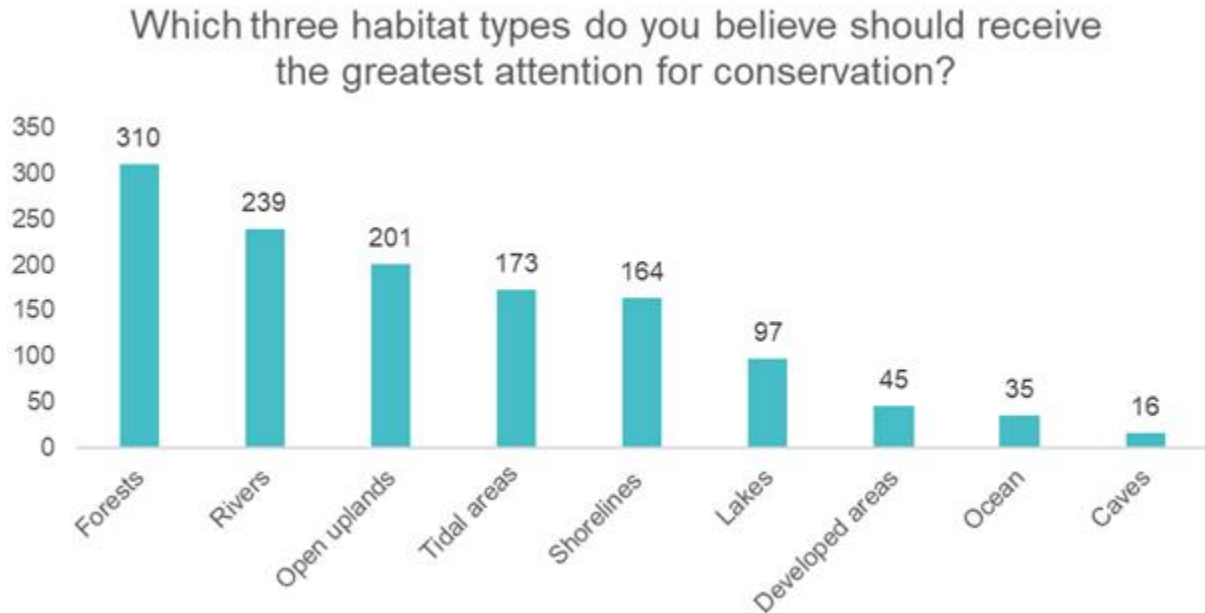


Figure 6.15 - Feedback form response to the question, “Which three habitat types do you believe should receive the greatest attention for conservation?” Each bar represents the number of times participants selected each habitat as one of their top three.

Respondents ranked Forests (71%), Rivers (55%), and Open Uplands (46%) as the habitats demanding the greatest conservation attention (Figure 6.15). Many comments highlighted that intact forests serve as core refugia for nesting birds and mammals, while healthy rivers sustain aquatic communities and maintain connectivity across the landscape. One respondent captured this interplay: “Habitat fragmentation and quality are the primary concerns... get the right habitat, and the animals will be there.” Open uplands, which include prairies, grasslands, and shrublands, were the third-ranked habitat, noted for their support of pollinators, grassland birds, and species that require early-successional conditions. Together, these priorities point to a need for integrated strategies that preserve large forest blocks, protect riparian corridors against channelization and water withdrawals, and restore open-land mosaics through targeted mowing or grazing regimes.

Issues

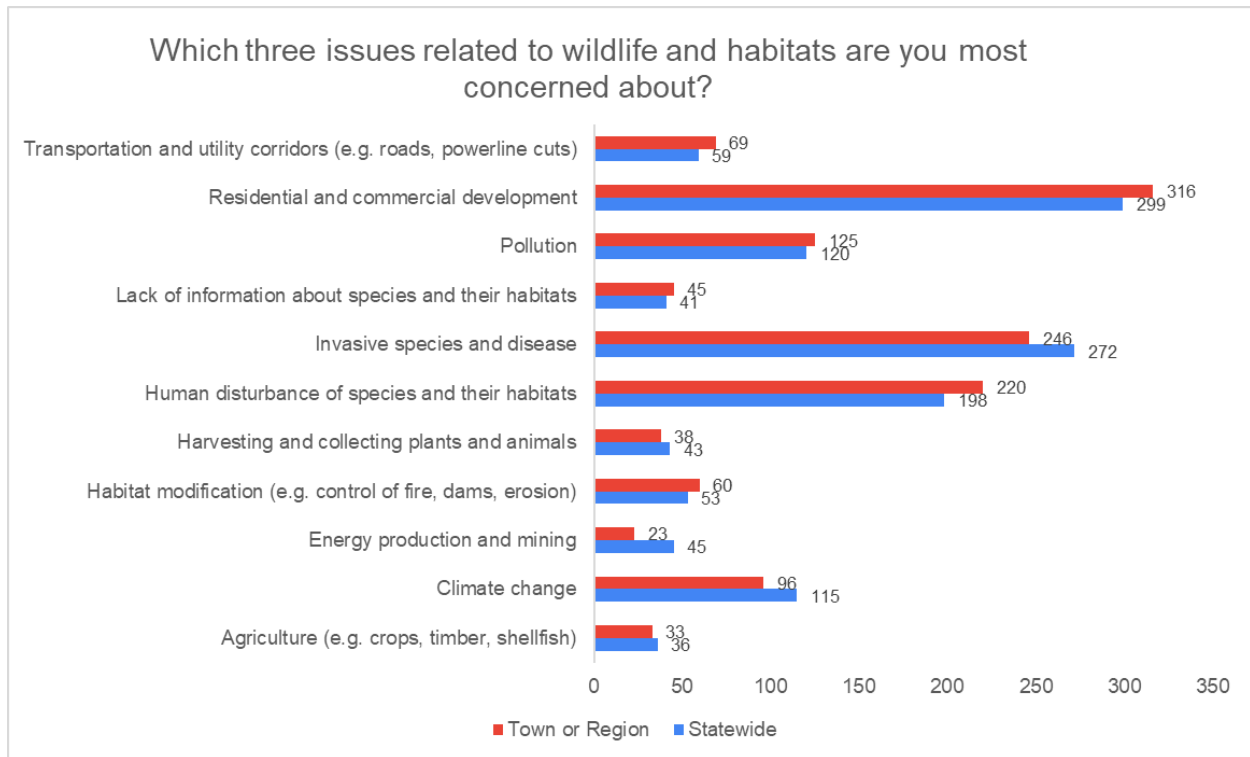


Figure 6.16 - Feedback form response to the question, “Which three issues related to wildlife and habitats are you most concerned with?” Each bar represents the number of times each issue was selected. The blue bars represent the participants’ assessment of the state as a whole, while the red bars represent their assessment of their local area.

Respondents identified Residential and Commercial Development as the foremost statewide threat (69%), outpacing Invasive Species and Disease (62%), Human Disturbance (46%), Pollution (28%), and Climate Change (27%; Figure 6.16). Many emphasized that “development takes away the natural habitat of many species,” underscoring how unchecked land conversion fragments critical forests, meadows, and riparian corridors. They further noted that disturbed landscapes facilitate the spread of non-native pests and pathogens, arguing that controlling development impacts must precede broader efforts to reduce pollution and adapt to a changing climate. Respondents also stressed that non-native pests and pathogens can “undermine entire ecosystems,” as one respondent noted, “invasive species and diseases threaten every aspect of our environment.”

Actions

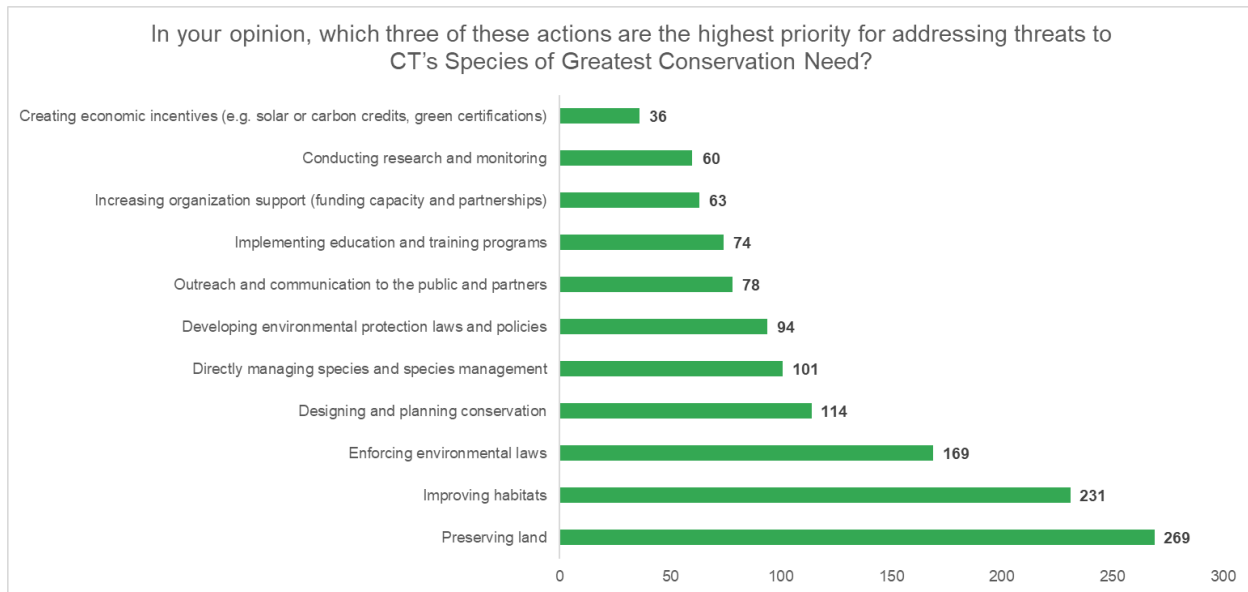


Figure 6.17 - Feedback form response to the question, “Which three of these actions are the highest priority for addressing threats to Connecticut’s SGCN?” The bars represent the number of participants selected who chose that action as one of their top three priorities.

When selecting actions to benefit Species of Greatest Conservation Need, participants prioritized Preserving Land (62%), Improving Habitats (5%), and Enforcing Environmental Laws (39%; Figure 6.17). Many respondents urged that land protection efforts be paired with habitat enhancements, such as wetland restoration, native planting, and removal of barriers to fish passage, to translate conserved acreage into functional ecosystems. A respondent underscored this linkage: “We need more enforcement (e.g., catch-and-release only areas),” highlighting the role of compliance in safeguarding restoration gains. Enforcing existing statutes, whether preventing illegal take, regulating development buffers, or ensuring pollution limits, ranked third, with comments noting that without clear legal accountability, even well-designed projects can fail. These insights suggest that Connecticut’s Wildlife Action Plan should integrate land acquisition, on-the-ground habitat rehabilitation, and a robust enforcement framework to deliver measurable benefits for SGCN.

Comparing Expert, Partner, and Public Feedback

Throughout the Wildlife Action Plan revision process, CT DEEP consistently sought feedback on priorities from three primary audiences: experts from the Taxa Teams, tribal nations and partners, and the general public. Across these three groups, there was notable agreement in identifying Connecticut’s highest-priority habitats, biggest issues, and most

important conservation actions. Forested uplands, river systems, and open uplands consistently emerged as key habitat priorities. While experts did not explicitly rank habitats, both partners and the public independently placed forests at the top, citing their ecological integrity and importance for wide-ranging and habitat-sensitive species. Similarly, rivers and open uplands were highly valued for their role in supporting aquatic species and pollinators, respectively. This shared prioritization suggests strong consensus on the need to focus future conservation on large, intact landscapes that maintain biodiversity and ecological function.

Threat rankings were also broadly aligned, though with some variation in emphasis. Although not ranked by priority, these three broad habitat types are also the top three habitats in terms of the number of SGCN that use them (see Chapter 2). Experts ranked climate change as the most pervasive and complex issue, particularly for aquatic species and those in disturbance-dependent or low-lying habitats. In contrast, partners and the public emphasized more immediate and visible problems, such as invasive species and development. Notably, development pressure was ranked as the biggest issue by the public, reflecting land-use changes and fragmentation that they can see in their local communities. In contrast, climate change remains a less visible issue, although that is rapidly changing. Rather than conflicting, these perspectives are complementary, underscoring the importance of addressing both long-term systemic threats and direct habitat loss together.

All three groups agreed most on conservation actions, prioritizing land protection and habitat improvement, which shows widespread support for preserving Connecticut's most important habitats. Experts placed the highest emphasis on research, monitoring, and management planning due to their importance for effective conservation, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding climate change. Partners and public respondents advocated for preserving land and improving habitat quality, but also emphasized the importance of enforcement and organizational capacity; factors that directly influence on-the-ground outcomes and program longevity and effectiveness.

While some differences in emphasis exist among the three groups, they reflect the varying lenses through which conservation is approached: strategic planning, institutional capacity, and direct community experience. A major source of agreement among all three groups is that sound science, habitat protection, and effective management are key to ensuring the future of Connecticut's fish, wildlife, plants, and habitats. By integrating scientific guidance with public values and partner capacities, Connecticut is well-positioned to implement a conservation strategy that is both grounded in the best available science and responsive to community concerns.

Review of Connecticut’s 2025 Wildlife Action Plan

Table 6.3 – Timetable for multiple stages of review for each Chapter of Connecticut’s 2025 Wildlife Action Plan.

Chapter	Core Team	Tribal Nations	Advisory & Taxa Teams	CT DEEP Commissioner	Public & Partners
1	11/25/24 – 12/5/24	3/17/25 – 7/13/25	1/21/25 – 2/4/25	6/11/25 – 6/20/25	6/27/25 – 7/27/25
2	2/9/25 – 2/16/25	3/17/25 – 7/13/25	3/1/25 – 3/15/25	6/11/25 – 6/20/25	6/27/25 – 7/27/25
3	3/18/25 – 3/25/25	4/18/25 – 7/13/25	4/18/25 – 5/5/25	6/11/25 – 6/20/25	6/27/25 – 7/27/25
4	3/18/25 – 3/25/25	5/16/25 – 7/13/25	5/8/25 – 5/23/25	6/11/25 – 6/20/25	6/27/25 – 7/27/25
5	5/14/25 – 5/20/25	5/27/25 – 7/13/25	5/21/25 – 5/30/25	6/11/25 – 6/20/25	6/27/25 – 7/27/25
6	5/21/25 – 5/26/25	5/27/25 – 7/13/25	5/27/25 – 6/3/25	6/11/25 – 6/20/25	6/27/25 – 7/27/25
Appendices	5/27/25 – 6/3/25	5/27/25 – 7/13/25	5/27/25 – 6/3/25	6/11/25 – 6/20/25	6/27/25 – 7/27/25

Preliminary Reviews

Each chapter of Connecticut’s 2025 Wildlife Action Plan was reviewed and revised multiple times before sending out for the 30-day Public Review on June 9th, 2025 (Table 6.3). The first level of review was conducted by the Core Wildlife Action Plan Team, which consisted of CT DEEP staff, CT DEEP contractors, and collaborators from the University of Connecticut (see Appendix 1.1). Once the Core Team reviewed each chapter, it was revised and then sent to the Advisory and Taxa Teams (see Appendix 1.1) for review to ensure technical accuracy, as well as to the five Tribal Nations (see above) for their review and feedback. Upon review by the Advisory and Taxa Teams, each chapter was revised based on the input received to prepare for review by the CT DEEP commissioner before the Public Review period.

Public Review

After a final internal review by CT DEEP, the draft 2025 Wildlife Action Plan was posted to the CT DEEP website on June 27th, 2025, along with a link to a feedback form built in Qualtrics (see Appendix 6.15). The launch of the draft plan was accompanied by social media, a press release, and newsletter announcements directing interested people to the form and draft Plan (see Appendix 6.5 for details). In addition to the Qualtrics form, CT DEEP set up an email address for people to provide feedback if they did not want to use the form. The Plan remained online for 31 days and was taken down before midnight on July 27th, 2025.

Public Review Results

Overall, CT DEEP received 40 Qualtrics feedback forms with at least one question completed (see Appendix 6.16 for all of the comments). Additionally, CT DEEP received nine emails with feedback on the plan. Social media posts were monitored for any relevant feedback, but no substantive comments were received on 2025 Wildlife Action Plan-related posts during the Public Review Period. Numerous partners and one Tribal Nation provided input, including the Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe, the National Audubon Society, the Connecticut Audubon Society, the Connecticut Butterfly Society, and the Connecticut League of Voters, Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments, as well as the Long Island Sound River Restoration Network (see Appendix 6.16 for a full list). All of the comments were organized by relevant chapter and reviewed by CT DEEP and its consultants (Appendix 16). Each comment was discussed, and many of the suggestions were incorporated into the Plan, where appropriate.

Comments ranged from pointing out minor typos to suggestions to include new species on the SGCN list, and those expressing appreciation for the Plan. Based on the feedback, several sections of the Plan were revised to make the writing more accessible and appeal to a broader audience. During the revision process, all of the typos were addressed. Much of the remaining feedback involved adding additional details where requested. Relevant information provided during the feedback period was forwarded to the appropriate department within CT DEEP. Some comments were not incorporated into the Plan, due to either not being relevant (e.g., not including the Eastern Cougar in the SGCN list due to it being extirpated to the state) or may be subject to more review and possible inclusion in a minor revision in the future (e.g., reconsidering the Monarch Butterfly as an SGCN). One particular comment suggested by several partner organizations was to incorporate an operational component into the Wildlife Action Plan, complete with a list of specific actions assigned to individual organizations and a corresponding timeline for each project. While such a finely detailed operational plan falls outside of the scope of Connecticut's 2025 Wildlife Action Plan, this comment led to a new action for the plan – for CT DEEP to work with partner organizations over the next ten years to develop smaller, more detailed operational plans to implement the priority actions outlined in this plan (see below section on future partner engagement).

Differences between the 2015 and 2025 Plans

Compared to the 2015 Plan, coordination with Tribal Nations and federal, state, and local partners has evolved and expanded, leveraging new technologies and an expanding online landscape. The 2015 Plan relied heavily on consultation with technical teams and standing

committees, such as the Endangered Species Advisory Committee. Building on the strategies implemented in 2015, the 2025 Plan formalized broad partner engagement through structured interviews, multiple survey efforts, and targeted outreach to umbrella organizations, such as CLCC and CACIWC. The result is a comprehensive understanding of partners' needs and a stronger emphasis on co-development and role clarity during future implementation.

Public outreach has also evolved since 2015. Building on the success of the previous Wildlife Action Plan, the 2025 revision effort continued many of the same strategies and also integrated new digital and online tools. The 2015 Plan's outreach relied primarily on newsletters, bookmarks, and public presentations, with minimal data on reach or engagement, as tracking these metrics is often difficult. The 2025 Plan was built on this foundation by integrating digital communications, tracking click-through and response metrics and designing content for multiple audiences. Public participation has become broader and more strategic, guided by feedback forms, partner feedback, and web analytics to inform the development of communication tools and messaging.

Finally, the 2025 Plan emphasizes continuity in public and partner engagement throughout the implementation period. While the 2015 Plan focused largely on participation during Plan development, the 2025 updated version commits to ongoing outreach, tool refinement, and feedback loops. New additional tools, such as the Conservation Action Tracker and interactive Conservation Opportunity Area maps, which will be available in 2026, will also serve as planning tools and engagement interfaces, reinforcing the Plan's dual role as both a technical document and a public resource.

Continued Engagement Over the Next Ten Years

Partners

Connecticut's implementation strategy emphasizes continued coordination with federal, state, and local agencies and Tribes through structured engagement, shared data systems, and facilitated partnerships. CT DEEP intends to build on the relationships cultivated during the Plan development to ensure consistent partner involvement in monitoring, action delivery, and future revisions.

Partner survey responses demonstrated strong interest in implementation, with over 75% of respondents noting that their organizations were likely to engage in future actions, particularly if Plan components aligned with their existing missions and the information remained accessible. Respondents emphasized the importance of clear roles, coordinated planning, and regular communication. Nearly all rated collaborative structures, such as

lead coordinators, shared metrics, and inclusive implementation teams, as important prerequisites for successful engagement.

To support this work, CT DEEP is developing a Conservation Action Tracker and a suite of Conservation Opportunity Area maps. During development, Taxa Team members and partners provided feedback on both the Action Tracker and Opportunity Area maps and methodology. Based on this feedback, CT DEEP and its contractors made improvements in design, spatial filtering capabilities, and integration with external datasets. CT DEEP intends to use these tools to coordinate activities across tribal nations, land trusts, municipalities, and state and federal agencies, facilitating shared reporting on conservation outcomes at multiple scales.

Furthermore, actions identified during the solicitation of feedback on Element 4 include those that will help expand and continue meaningful collaboration with partners, tribes, and the public. For instance, the review of the most recent Conservation and Development Plans for each of Connecticut's 169 municipalities found that very few incorporated or used the 2015 Wildlife Action Plan (see above). To support municipalities, a suggested action for the next ten years is to engage with municipalities, Councils of Government (COGs), and each town's open space and conservation committees to help incorporate the Wildlife Action Plan into their town planning. This opportunity could also be utilized to exchange data about habitats and the status of SGCN and SAPS. Another example of an action identified during this process was to create a resource for land trusts, municipalities, and Council of Governments, and the public to conduct basic biodiversity surveys for properties they may own to help with natural resource inventories, as well as a portal for the public and partners to share the biodiversity data they may collect.

Ongoing coordination will occur through biennial Plan reviews, stakeholder working groups, and program-level partnerships. CT DEEP will continue to leverage its cross-divisional Core Team structure to integrate fisheries, forestry, and wildlife management expertise into future updates. Key federal partners, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, will remain central to implementation efforts, particularly where joint funding, permitting, or landowner engagement is required. Local partners, including conservation commissions and non-governmental organizations, will be engaged via newsletters, presentations, and targeted outreach to high-priority projects and emerging conservation opportunities. Additionally, comments provided by partners during the public review period suggest the development of a fine-scaled operational plan, which identifies specific projects, partners, and timelines. Based on this feedback, CT DEEP plans to

collaborate with partners and Tribal Nations to develop detailed operational plans that will help implement the priority actions outlined in Chapter 4.

Public

CT DEEP will maintain and expand public engagement throughout the implementation and future revision phases of the Wildlife Action Plan. Consistent with the biennial review and ten-year update framework, CT DEEP plans to continue to provide opportunities for residents, conservation organizations, and other stakeholders to evaluate conservation outcomes, identify new priorities, and support implementation actions across the state.

Recurring communications will include continued publication of Wildlife Highlights and the Partner Network Newsletter, both of which will serve as channels to share progress updates, highlight conservation successes, and solicit feedback on adaptive management needs. As of 2025, Wildlife Highlights reaches over 7,300 subscribers monthly and will continue to be CT DEEP's primary tool for engaging the broader public. The quarterly Partner Network Newsletter will continue to focus on implementation strategies, Plan tools such as the Conservation Action Tracker, and opportunities for collaboration among land trusts, municipalities, and non-profit partners.

The CT DEEP website will be updated to support ongoing transparency and feedback. Webpages developed during the 2025 revision, including the SGCN list, action summaries, partner stories, and FAQ documents, will be maintained and updated as needed. Interactive tools, such as the Conservation Opportunity Tracker and Conservation Opportunity Area maps, will allow partners and the public to map priority areas, report conservation actions, and align local conservation actions with Plan goals. Feedback mechanisms embedded in these tools will allow users to submit updates, share implementation results, and request technical assistance.

Public events, training courses, and presentations will also continue with in-person engagement. CT DEEP will prioritize including Wildlife Action Plan content at educational exhibits, festivals, and community science events. Volunteer presenters trained through the Master Wildlife Conservationist program will continue to share Plan objectives with community groups and landowners, using tailored presentations that highlight SGCN, relevant actions, and simple steps for involvement.

The 2025 Plan also identifies community science and public education as foundational elements of implementation. CT DEEP will continue to promote and support initiatives that connect the public to wildlife monitoring, habitat stewardship, and species reporting. These efforts will be integrated into future evaluations of Plan success, allowing public contributions to be reflected in outcome tracking and biennial updates. Where

appropriate, DEEP will also engage the public in refining metrics and methods used to assess Plan performance, ensuring alignment between scientific rigor and community relevance.

Together, these strategies will help ensure that Connecticut's Wildlife Action Plan remains an accessible, inclusive, and participatory framework for biodiversity conservation through 2035 and beyond.

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