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Protecting our wildlife and habitats together!

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Commissioner's Quote

“Connecticut is one of the most densely populated states in the nation, and yet it remains home to an extraordinary diversity of wildlife and habitats. Every day, people and wildlife live side by side in these shared landscapes. Just as climate change, pollution, and other human activities can put species at risk, we also have the ability, and the responsibility, to play a vital role in protecting habitats and supporting species recovery.

Protecting our wildlife is not just about preventing loss, it is about ensuring the very quality of life that makes Connecticut special. Healthy habitats and thriving ecosystems enrich our lives by providing opportunities to connect to something larger than ourselves—whether it's the tradition of hunting, the joy of birdwatching, or the simple act of planting a pollinator garden in our backyard. These experiences remind us of our connection to the natural world and motivate us to take action, from shaping conservation policy to making everyday choices that support the species and habitats we cherish.

The 2025 Wildlife Action Plan is not simply a DEEP document; it is a shared blueprint for conservation that reflects the voices and commitments of many incredible partners across Connecticut, reminding us that conservation is not the work of one agency but our collective responsibility as a state. By working together, we can ensure that Connecticut's people, wildlife, and habitats continue to thrive for generations to come.”

Commissioner Katie Dykes

Executive Summary

Connecticut's 2025 Wildlife Action Plan sets forth a shared vision: to conserve the state's diverse native fish, wildlife, and plant species, along with the habitats they depend on, for both their intrinsic value and the ecological and social benefits they provide. Over the next decade, this Plan will serve as a blueprint for achieving six broad goals, ranging from restoring and maintaining resilient species and ecosystems to implementing, monitoring, and evaluating conservation actions, as well as expanding public engagement in wildlife protection, which are tied to each Chapter of the Plan. Developed through extensive coordination with tribal nations, conservation partners, municipalities, state and federal

Connecticut's 2025 Wildlife Action Plan Vision and Goals
Vision: 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.
Goal 1: CT has healthy and resilient populations of native fish, wildlife, & plants.
Goal 2: CT has healthy and diverse habitats and ecosystems supporting native species.
Goal 3: Issues impacting CT's native species and their habitats are identified, understood, and addressed.
Goal 4: Actions are taken to protect CT's native species & their habitats.
Goal 5: CT's native species and their habitats, associated threats, and actions taken to minimize threats are monitored and evaluated to ensure goals and objectives are being met.
Goal 6: People are informed about and engaged in protecting CT's native species & habitats.

agencies, and the public, the Plan reflects an inclusive perspective of the conservation needs of the state over the next ten years. While CT DEEP facilitates the planning process, this is not meant to be solely a state agency plan; it is a plan for all of Connecticut, shaped by and designed to support the collective work of the people, organizations, and communities committed to the stewardship of the state's natural heritage.

Chapter 1 focuses on the identification and prioritization of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and State Assessment Priority Species (SAPS), which form the foundation of the Wildlife Action Plan. Experts used a range of criteria, such as population status, data deficiency, and vulnerability, to categorize. The 2025 Plan identifies 573 SGCN and 515 SAPS, an increase of 4 SGCN from the 2015 list. Some species groups had fewer SGCN (e.g., birds and fish), while plants had far more than in 2015. These changes reflect an evolution in conservation priorities, driven by increased data, conservation successes, and expanded resources for evaluating species and identifying needs, particularly plants. The addition of the SAPS category helps identify species that may merit conservation attention but require additional data collection to determine their status. Prioritizing species in need of conservation and monitoring provides a foundation for the first goal of the Plan, ensuring that Connecticut's biodiversity is healthy and resilient.

Chapter 2 focuses on the condition and extent of Connecticut's major habitats and natural communities, providing the ecological context necessary to guide conservation at all scales and address the second Goal of the plan. The chapter presents updated assessments for twelve core habitat categories, drawn from the Northeast Habitat Classification System, and discusses their relative distribution, ecological integrity, and importance to SGCN. For example, forested uplands remain the most widespread habitat, covering over half of the state. Although forest conditions vary by location within the state, many forests are affected by disease and invasive pests. Wetlands and freshwater aquatic systems support the greatest number of SGCN in the state but face mounting stress from pollution and invasive species. Coastal, estuarine, and marine systems continue to experience compound pressures from sea level rise and coastal development. By assessing habitat conditions across the state and linking them to both threats and species needs, the chapter provides a bridge between Chapters 1, 3, and 4, helping to target actions where they are most needed and where they are most likely to succeed.

Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive description of the issues affecting Connecticut's SGCN, SAPS, and their habitats, drawing on threat assessments from state, regional, and federal experts, as well as academic resources. The biggest issues affecting Connecticut's species and habitats are similar to the biggest issues globally, including climate change and development leading to habitat loss and degradation. The chapter also

highlights several cross-cutting issues affecting various groups of species and habitats, including invasive species and pollution, which interact with and amplify other threats. By clarifying which threats are most prevalent, this chapter supports the third Goal of the Plan and, through its systematic approach and strong foundation in partner input, helps guide conservation actions in Chapter 4 to ensure they are responsive to the most pressing and widespread challenges facing Connecticut's wildlife today and over the next ten years.

Chapter 4 presents priority actions at various scales, including state-wide priorities affecting all of Connecticut's SGCN, SAPS, and habitats, as well as for each group of species (e.g., birds, fish, and plants). These actions were developed to address the threats identified in Chapter 3, emphasizing that direct habitat management, direct species management, research and monitoring, and education and outreach are all central to effective conservation over the next ten years. Multiple examples demonstrate how actions can be tailored to different taxa and habitats, such as restoring healthy forests with early successional habitats for declining birds, insects, and reptiles, or improving aquatic connectivity for freshwater fish and aquatic invertebrates. Many of these actions build upon existing programs while addressing critical gaps, such as the need for early successional habitat management, restoration of aquatic connectivity, and the integration of climate adaptation measures. This Chapter also highlights the Conservation Opportunity Area maps created for the Wildlife Action Plan, which help identify areas within the state where actions may be most effective based on goals, habitats, and the location of SGCN. By presenting a flexible yet focused suite of conservation strategies, Chapter 4 contributes to nearly all of the Plan's core goals and objectives, especially Goal #4 – taking action to protect Connecticut's species and habitats. As a result, this chapter serves as both a planning guide and a practical reference for implementing targeted conservation across Connecticut over the next decade.

Chapter 5 presents Connecticut's strategy for monitoring the effectiveness of conservation actions and addressing knowledge gaps about Connecticut's SGCN, SAPS, and habitats. The monitoring framework found in Chapter 5 provides a structure for assessing progress toward conservation goals and adjusting strategies as new information becomes available. The framework comprises four major monitoring components: species- and community-level tracking, habitat assessments, and evaluation of conservation implementation. The Plan also highlights the value of using existing data sources and partnerships, like those with universities, federal agencies, and community science groups, to build a monitoring program that is both effective and affordable. Chapter 5 introduces a new online tool, the Conservation Action Tracker, which allows organizations and agencies to share information about where and how they are

implementing conservation work. The Action Tracker will help improve coordination, avoid duplication, and track results over time.

The final chapter, Chapter 6, outlines the expected Wildlife Action Plan revision process within the next ten years, as well as the coordination with partners and public outreach used in developing this Wildlife Action Plan. From the start of the revision process in 2023, CT DEEP prioritized broad participation by designing a stakeholder process that engaged conservation partners, municipalities, landowners, federal and state agencies, and the general public. Engagement also extended to formal government-to-government consultation with the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan Tribes, as well as several state-recognized Tribes, ensuring that the Plan reflects the knowledge, priorities, and sovereignty of Connecticut's Tribal Nations. Input was gathered through a combination of interviews, webinars, feedback forms, surveys, and facilitated workshops, which together helped refine species lists and key habitats, prioritize threats, and shape conservation actions. Partner and public outreach consisted of a multi-pronged approach and included face-to-face engagement at events and conferences, newsletter and magazine articles, and social media posts. It reinforces the idea that the Wildlife Action Plan is not solely a CT DEEP document, but a shared conservation strategy for the entire state. New mechanisms, such as the Conservation Action Tracker, a handbook of biodiversity survey methods for land trusts, and a quarterly Wildlife Action Plan newsletter, are designed to sustain stakeholder involvement throughout the next 10 years of Plan implementation.

Together, these chapters present an integrated strategy for wildlife conservation in Connecticut, rooted in science, informed by the perspectives of Tribal Nations, conservation partners, and the public, and aligned with a shared vision for resilient ecosystems and thriving wildlife, fish, and habitats through 2035. Connecticut's 2025 Wildlife Action Plan represents a continuation of the Plans from 2005 and 2015. It is also aligned with regional conservation efforts across the Northeast, incorporating shared species and habitat priorities while scaling actions from multistate initiatives to statewide programs, regional partnerships, and on-the-ground implementation at the local level. The 2025 Wildlife Action Plan establishes a vision for the next decade of conservation in Connecticut. To meet this vision, the Plan provides a blueprint for meeting the objectives and goals necessary to maintain resilient wildlife populations, restore degraded habitats, and address the most pressing issues facing native species and habitats across the state. This Wildlife Action Plan will serve as a living document, helping Connecticut to meet the ever-changing needs of wildlife and people alike over the next decade and beyond.