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CHAPTER 8

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses Element 8 and describes efforts to seek participation from stakeholders, members of the conservation community, and the public in development of the Wildlife Action Plan (WAP). Appendix 8a identifies and describes the many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that were informed of the WAP revision effort. Input was requested, as was review of the draft plan on the website. In some cases, coordination meetings were used for outreach, and for others, letters, phone calls, and/or email contacts were made. Appendix 8b identifies the many stakeholders, collaborators, and experts contacted during WAP development. Appendix 8c describes the design of the public input plan used in this process. The mechanisms developed to aid in public participation are presented in Appendix 8d.

Connecticut is the fourth most densely populated state in the nation. Overcoming the challenges presented by increasing pressure from development, habitat degradation, and habitat loss and accomplishing the goals of Connecticut's WAP requires broad-based public support and participation in the conservation effort. In July 2014, Connecticut finalized the development of a public and stakeholder participation plan (Appendix 8b), which used a variety of methods designed to engage these groups in the development of the WAP.

PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

The Bleiker Citizen Participation by Objective (CPO) process, employed in 2005 to identify and target the Potentially Affected Interests (PAIs), was used as the foundation to update this 2015 revision. This facilitated the development of specific messages and objectives to be communicated. It also provided the most effective techniques to reach these targeted publics. The process identified several highly recommended techniques for the ensuing WAP development and implementation phases (Appendix 8b).

During the revision of the WAP, significant effort was made to actively involve the public at different levels and during different stages of the process. Public input was sought on the development of Elements 1 through 4, on Greatest Conservation Need (GCN) species and key habitats, as well as the most important threats and actions.

Information on each major public and private wildlife or habitat-related conservation program was researched. This resulted in an inventory of all significant local, state, regional, and national programs, data sources, and tools (Appendix 1). Information also was compiled from meetings, correspondence, and research of literature and agency or organization web sites. This pool of knowledge helped establish a foundation for public outreach. For the purposes of WAP development, the "public" was categorized into three groups as follows.

Group 1: Active Consultation Partners and Collaborators: Key public and private conservation groups included organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, Audubon groups, Partners in Flight, the National Wildlife Federation, and others. Principal characteristics of these active partners and collaborators included:

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

Group 2: Interested Groups and Individuals: A multitude of NGOs and others including local land trusts, watershed groups, and advocacy groups were included in this group. Principal characteristics included:

- Limited knowledge of technical wildlife data and research information needed for the WAP development, but important related conservation efforts or programs.
- The potential to participate directly in implementation and future revision of the WAP.

Group 3: General Public: Persons who may contribute helpful information or realize the associated economic, recreational, and quality-of-life benefits resulting from the implementation of a comprehensive wildlife strategy in Connecticut.

All three groups were contacted for input throughout development of the WAP. Regular correspondence and sharing of information were critical to the development of this document.

Technical information shared by organizations from Group 1 included The Nature Conservancy's ecoregional target species priorities, Audubon Connecticut's Important Bird Areas and regional and state bird conservation priorities, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Region 5 integration of all regional bird conservation plans and associated priorities. Many meetings were hosted by partners at their facilities and their extensive memberships and staff were invited to participate. Key examples were the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, Connecticut Audubon and Audubon Connecticut, and the Connecticut Land Conservation Council. Meetings and individual feedback provided "peer review" for identifying GCN species and key habitats, evaluating the most critical problems and threats facing those species and habitats, and identifying and prioritizing conservation actions. The incorporation of various existing target species, associated habitats, and conservation strategies into the WAP was important in focusing actions that complement existing efforts and establish areas for potential collaboration.

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

WEB SITE

The importance of having information available via the internet was recognized early in the development process. A section of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) web site was devoted to the WAP revision effort (Appendix 8d). This section, developed and updated by the Wildlife Division, provides both general and specific information about the WAP revision. It also provides a feedback mechanism for individuals to submit comments on GCN species, associated habitats and vegetative communities, and draft versions of the WAP text. In addition to providing periodic updates on the WAP, the web site also makes

it easy for any visitor to reference other aspects of Wildlife Division programs and projects and to obtain information on the activities of other bureaus and divisions within DEEP.

HANDOUTS/MAILINGS

Correspondence (e-messaging and handouts) was provided to two dozen groups to increase awareness of the WAP revision effort and to invite public participation. Articles detailing the WAP revision effort were featured in publications, such as *Connecticut Wildlife* magazine. Newsletters for groups such as the Master Wildlife Conservationists (approximately 80 members) and the Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetland Commissions (CACIWC) (approximately 183 members and a newsletter distribution of 2,200 individuals) were also used to help increase awareness. The CACIWC newsletter printed two articles, the last one highlighting the final draft of the plan and encouraging final input from readers.

A full-color bookmark, designed for the general public, was developed to provide information on how individuals can get involved in the process (Appendix 8d). Distribution of the bookmark was widespread and ranged from meetings and programs to public information areas, kiosks, trade shows, and exhibits at county agricultural fairs and regional festivals statewide. Over 10,000 bookmarks were distributed to the public.

SOCIAL MEDIA

In March 2014, graduate students at the UConn's Wildlife and Fisheries Conservation Center developed a WAP twitter page to discuss and describe the plan and facilitate data collection. Residents across Connecticut were invited to tweet pictures of GCN species they encountered. One UConn class will be developing methods to use the time and location data associated with smartphone pictures sent via twitter to spatially reference documentation of these species.

The Bureau of Natural Resources Facebook page was routinely updated with WAP related content. This included descriptions and pictures of GCN species-of-the-month and announcements about opportunities to participate in the revision of the plan. An increased social media presence allowed DEEP to efficiently reach new segments of the public interested in wildlife conservation by providing accessible information about the WAP and ways to get involved.

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS AND OUTREACH

DEEP and Terwilliger Consulting Inc. (TCI) staff gave numerous public presentations that provided an overview of the WAP revision, its benefits and importance, a national perspective on the process as a component of State Wildlife Grants, and WAP progress updates. These presentations ranged from formal audio-visual presentations to informal discussions and two radio shows on the Connecticut Radio Network. Some programs, such as a presentation to the Jonah Center for Earth and Art, which was broadcast on the CT-N (Connecticut Network) television station, reached tens of thousands of people.

Press releases were prepared by the Wildlife Division and submitted to Connecticut newspapers, and one of these was picked up by the Associated Press. Other news articles or radio interviews had a ripple effect on outreach efforts. A feature article in the *Connecticut Mirror* newspaper (<http://ctmirror.org/2014/12/03/a-decade-brings-dramatic-change-to-connecticut-wildlife/>) about the plan revision was referenced nationally on websites such as the

North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative. A public informational meeting about the WAP generated additional coverage on the Connecticut television station News 12. A radio interview about the WAP revision on WNPR in Connecticut was posted on the National Public Radio website and featured in The Wildlife Society e-newsletter. A second radio interview with the DEEP state coordinator, Jenny Dickson, about the final draft of the plan aired on WSHU/NPR in Connecticut. The Connecticut Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) and Fisheries Advisory Council (FAC) are other examples of this effect. The CAC has 53 members, alternate members, and emeritus members representing 25 sportsmen and conservation groups. The state WAP coordinator made a formal presentation to the CAC about the plan in November 2014. The FAC also represents several groups through the participation of 44 regular and alternate members. The FAC meets quarterly and the CAC meets monthly (except in July and August) with DEEP staff. During the WAP revision process, these groups were provided regular updates and were invited to participate through many of the mechanisms previously identified. This information was subsequently conveyed to the larger memberships of the participating groups, multiplying the level of outreach accomplished.

At a Forestry Forum of professional foresters and tree cutters, 124 participants were surveyed about the WAP in coordination with the Connecticut Forest Action Plan revision process. More than half indicated that they had never used the original 2005 WAP, but were interested in using the 2015 WAP revision.

Ten facilitated workshops, organized jointly by DEEP and TCI, were hosted by partners at their educational facilities and at eight public libraries spread throughout the state. Together, these facilitated workshops provided ample state coverage during day, weekend, and evening hours, thus creating many opportunities for the general public to attend. All meetings were announced by press release, web and social media postings, and extensive email newsletters to membership networks, reaching more than 2,000 people. All meetings were open to the public and designed to encourage input about the WAP revision. The 76 participants, representing some 31 organizations and the general public, provided substantive input into the GCN species and key habitat lists. They also helped to develop a new list of threats and actions for the 2015 WAP.

An overview of some of the types of programs and presentations provided on the WAP revision effort is detailed below (Table 8.1).

TABLE 8.1: PUBLIC OUTREACH PROGRAMS AND PRESENTATIONS

Type of Audience	Approximate Number of Attendees
General	
Public Libraries	24
Agricultural Fairs	500
<i>Sky is the Limit</i> DEEP Parks Day	50
Northeast Fishing and Hunting Show 2015	>4,000
Conservation Organizations	
Hiking Groups	12
Land Trusts	150
Bird Clubs/Groups	>100
Nature Centers	27

Type of Audience	Approximate Number of Attendees
Jonah Center for the Earth and Art	30
DEEP Master Wildlife Conservationist and Public	26
Environmental Groups	21
Sportsmen's Groups	
Fish & Game Club	16
Academic	
Graduate & Undergraduate level programs	>30
Connecticut Conference on Natural Resources 2014	281
Connecticut Conference on Natural Resources 2015	335
Professional	
Connecticut Entomological Society	40
Connecticut Land Conservation Council Conference	Attended meeting and provided WAP input, 408
Yale University Forum	2

OUTREACH FOR FUTURE WAP IMPLEMENTATION AND REVISION

Programs and presentations similar to those described above will continue in order to engage Connecticut residents, potentially affected interests, and stakeholders during the implementation and future revision of the WAP. Meetings with Group 1 members will be yearly and ongoing as collaborations continue throughout the timeframe for this WAP revision. Efforts to reach out to Group 2 and 3 members will be strongest when they can provide assistance on specific conservation actions. Enhancing these groups' awareness of the WAP and their interest and participation in its implementation is essential to the plan's success. It is hoped that this process will foster community-based conservation efforts and land stewardship and promote a sound environmental ethic.

Specific techniques to be used during WAP implementation and review are similar to those identified as most effective during the WAP development stages. PAIs will be informed and involved through active committee and working meetings, website updates and interaction, and by making use of existing stakeholder organization meetings and newsletters. Informal meetings with key partners and Group 1 and 2 members will be an ongoing part of program updates and evaluation. Solicitation of input and technical information from expert taxa committees in the form of peer review and evaluation will occur on a regular basis, providing updates to the GCN species status review. Finally, Group 1 and 2 members will be intimately involved in the next 10-year revision of this document, as they will continue to play a major role in identifying GCN species and key habitats, as well as updating and identifying new threats and actions for the next decade of WAP implementation. Stakeholders and the public will be kept informed of any updates, and participatory events can be used to solicit additional information. This includes magazine and newsletter articles and exhibits and presentations at public events (e.g., fairs, festivals, public meetings). The public input plan outlines the methods and intervals of outreach and communication to keep both stakeholders and the public involved and informed throughout the implementation phase, while at the same time creating a strong foundation for their participation in the next revision process.