

North Dakota Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy

What is a wildlife action plan?

Congress asked each state to develop a wildlife action plan, known technically as a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy. These proactive plans examine the health of wildlife and prescribe actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and more costly to protect.

North Dakota snapshot

Geography: North Dakota is a prairie state harboring hundreds of thousands of wetlands and prairie pot-holes. Bison skulls still lay in prairie streams and lakes today, reminders of the animals that inhabited this unique ecosystem.

Landscape: Nearly 90 percent of North Dakota is held in private ownership, with much of that land entered into various agricultural practices. Cropland, rangeland, prairie, wetland, and woodland components are the framework of a farm or ranch, and



Avocet/NDGFD

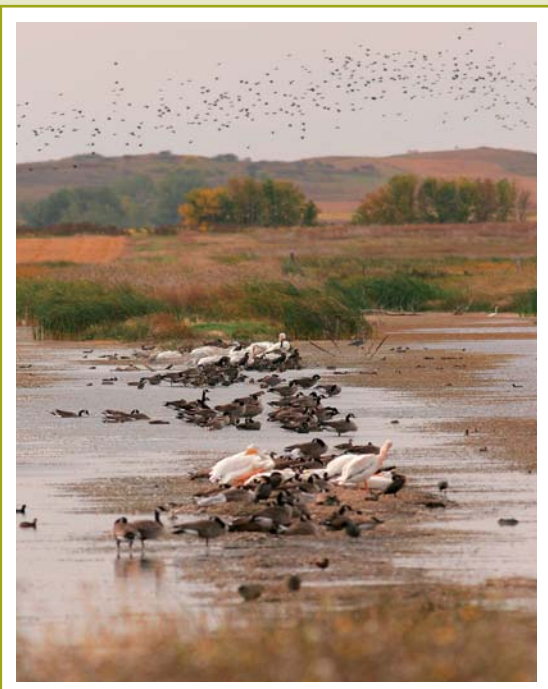
the majority of the state's habitat. Working with landowners to conserve fish and wildlife resources is a top priority.

Wildlife: Baird's sparrows fill the prairie with song heard in few other places. Endless flocks of migrating ducks and geese find food and rest on countless wetlands or rivers. North Dakota is one of the last strongholds for the ancient pallid sturgeon.

North Dakota's planning approach

The North Dakota Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy is a habitat-based approach to conserving all types of fish and wildlife including rare, declining, common, nongame and game species. Nine landscape components, or major habitat types such as mixed-grass prairie, wetlands/

"North Dakota's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy does a good job of highlighting the important systems, like native grasslands and wetlands, that are critical to maintaining healthy populations of myriad species of wildlife for future generations of North Dakotans. I'm hopeful this plan will generate a diverse suite of partners who can focus their efforts on protecting these critical components of North Dakota's natural heritage."
—Scott Stephens
Director of Conservation Planning, Ducks Unlimited, Inc.



Wetland with waterfowl/NDGFD

lakes, badlands, or upland deciduous forest, comprise the habitat found in North Dakota. Twenty-one focus areas represent



Sage grouse study/NDGFD

Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in North Dakota

North Dakota’s plan identifies habitat loss, fragmentation, degradation, invasive and noxious species, pesticides, industrial development, human impacts, and conservation awareness as common challenges for managing fish and wildlife across all habitat types.

Direct loss of habitat was identified as a key threat to wildlife in North Dakota. The prairies are at risk of being converted to farmland and other uses which result in the complete loss of grassland. A minimum of 25 bird species of conservation concern require expanses of prairie to maintain populations.

Habitat degradation is of concern to the quality of wildlife habitat. For example, grazing practices that result in little to no residual vegetation or allow for direct contact with wetlands or streams, thereby degrading water quality, are of concern. The loss of fire regime, a natural element of the prairie cycle, allows woody invasion of grassland that can be detrimental to some grassland species of wildlife.

“I think it’s fitting that while celebrating the Department’s 75th year of managing fish and wildlife resources in North Dakota, we look to the future as well as the past. The State Wildlife Grants Program represents an ambitious endeavor as we take a more active hand in keeping species from becoming threatened or endangered in the future. This strategy will provide the framework for working towards that goal and preserving an important part of our state’s heritage for future generations.”

*–Dean Hildebrand
former Director
ND Game and Fish
Department*

unique natural community types rare to North Dakota or are habitats outlined as especially crucial to species of conservation priority. The strategy provides a framework for developing coordinated conservation actions involving partners to safeguard all fish and wildlife resources found in the state. The key to ensuring long-term survival of these resources in North Dakota is to maintain diverse grasslands, wetlands, woodlands, rivers and streams.

| Wildlife | Total number of species | Species of conservation priority* | Threatened/endangered |
|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Mussels | 13 | 7 | 0 |
| Fish | 103 | 22 | 1 |
| Amphibians | 11 | 2 | 0 |
| Reptiles | 15 | 9 | 0 |
| Birds | **365 | 45 | 4 |
| Mammals | 86 | 15 | 2 |
| Totals | 593 | 100 | 7 |

* North Dakota assigned all species of conservation priority a designation based on conservation need. Level I species are those having a high level of conservation priority because of declining status in North Dakota or across their range; or have a high rate of occurrence in North Dakota, constituting the core of the species breeding range, but may be at-risk range-wide. Level II species are those having a moderate level of conservation priority; or a high level of conservation priority but a substantial level of non-SWG funding is available to them. Level III species are those having a moderate level of conservation priority but are believed to be peripheral or non-breeding in North Dakota.

** Includes 365 species known to occur in North Dakota, with at least 223 considered breeding species.

Wildlife highlights

| Highlight habitats | Wildlife (examples) | Issue (examples) | Action (examples) |
|---|---|---|--|
| Mixed-grass Prairie Ownership: primarily private | Northern pintail, Ferruginous Hawk, Marbled godwit, Baird's sparrow, Richardson's Ground squirrel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat Loss: native prairie conversion • Noxious Weeds: leafy spurge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect native prairie where possible. • Control noxious weeds through biological and chemical methods |
| Rivers, Streams and Riparian Ownership: primarily private | Bald eagle, Smooth softshell turtle, Sicklefin chub, Blue sucker, Threeridge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat Loss: alteration of natural hydrology • Restriction of Fish Migration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the North Dakota State Water Commission to develop minimum in-stream flow recommendations, and work with partners to implement easements. • Work with dam owners for potential removal or modification. |
| Badlands Ownership: majority public, interspersed with private | Prairie falcon, Burrowing owl, Swift fox, Short-horned Lizard | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat Fragmentation: oil well roads • Habitat Degradation: loss of fire regime | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate with the oil industry to minimize road impacts. • Work cooperatively with state and federal agencies to develop Best Management Practices that promote the use of fire. |

Recommended actions to conserve North Dakota's wildlife



Piping Plover/NDGFD



Wetland/NDGFD

Working together for North Dakota's wildlife

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department invited over 60 federal, state and local agencies, conservation groups, and local experts to provide comments on identifying species of conservation priority, offer feedback on the development of the strategy, and identify ways to

strengthen partnerships. Expert meetings were held to gather more specific information on threats and to determine necessary conservation actions, monitoring and survey efforts needed. The Department informed the public and provided an opportunity for input on fish and wildlife issues through the Department's monthly magazine, news releases, radio and television programs, website, and other media outlets throughout the state.



Coteau Wetland/NDGFD

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