

Wildlines

New Hampshire Fish and Game's quarterly newsletter of the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program

Wildlife Action Plan

Ready for Action!

The state's first Wildlife Action Plan has been submitted to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, after years of intensive research and analysis led by the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program in collaboration with conservation partners from several organizations. All 50 states and six U.S. territories have now created plans, which, if approved, will establish a nationwide look at imperiled wildlife and the actions needed to ensure their survival.

This mammoth effort is the most comprehensive assessment ever done of New Hampshire's wildlife and their habitats. Based on scientific research, the Wildlife Action Plan gives an overall picture of the state's conservation priorities by encompassing individual species as well as their habitats and forms the foundation for future wildlife conservation in New Hampshire.

"I'm extremely pleased with how the plan looks and the dedication I saw from the team and partnering organizations that put the plan together," said John Kanter, Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program coordinator.

Three years ago, the federal government ordered each state to create Wildlife Action Plans and provided funding for the development of these plans through State Wildlife Grants. At that time, New Hampshire's conservation community had already begun creating a



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Pine Marten Make a Comeback

A three-year study of American (pine) marten in New Hampshire reveals that marten are making a comeback in much of their historical core habitats after being nearly wiped out by the early 1900s.

Victims of habitat loss (when much of the state was deforested for farmland) and over-trapping (harvested for their fur), American marten are listed as threatened in New Hampshire. Trapping them has been illegal since the 1930s.

American marten is the species' proper name, but they are widely known as pine marten. These secretive mammals have traditionally been concentrated in the White Mountains and north, but historically were also found as far south as the Massachusetts border.

Jillian Kelly, a Fish and Game wildlife biologist, spent the last three years collecting information on the state's marten. Her work live-trapping marten to find out what type of habitat they're using, and how widely dispersed the population has become, was part of her

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“big picture” or blueprint for conservation with its Living Legacy Project. Funding from State Wildlife Grants allowed them to continue and expand that work.

The State Wildlife Grants were used to contract with conservation partners, who created profiles for 104 species and 27 habitats in the state. The profiles identify risks and outline conservation strategies for each specific species and habitat. The Wildlife Action Plan shines a spotlight on priority species and habitats, “telling us where we need to go to help the species most at risk,” Kanter said.

The Wildlife Action Plan makes very clear that the southern half of the state — especially Hillsborough, Rockingham, Merrimack and Strafford counties — presents a great challenge.

“In these areas, we have a long way to go to secure adequate habitat, because many of the species that are in the greatest need of conservation, like Blanding’s turtles, are associated with habitats that occur in the most rapidly growing counties,” Kanter said.

The northern parts of the state face different kinds of challenges. Though large blocks of land are protected from development, such as the White Mountain National Forest, these higher elevation areas are also the most at risk from pollution, like acid rain and global warming, Kanter said.

Tools created through the Wildlife Action Plan are already being put to use throughout the state. Significant Wildlife Habitat maps have been produced and distributed to nearly all New Hampshire towns to aid local communities in identifying the most important wildlife habitat areas for future conservation. During the next year, conservation strategies, updated maps and additional information will go out to local land use planners to help them make sound decisions that take wildlife and their habitats into account and conserve New Hampshire’s wildlife and habitats

Northern leopard frogs, one of the species included in the Wildlife Action Plan, are believed to be declining throughout New England.

for generations to come.

The next step for the Wildlife Action Plan partners is to prioritize strategies and projects to move forward with. For more information, and to view New Hampshire’s Wildlife Action Plan, please visit:

www.wildlife.state.nh.us/wildlife

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The Nature Conservancy
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Master’s degree thesis for the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

Kelly first gathered all existing historical data on pine marten occurrence, then surveyed 177 locations using live traps. She then combined the data to describe habitat in which pine marten are known to exist, as well as prime potential marten habitat.

Kelly found that marten habitat is concentrated in the White Mountains and northward, where factors beneficial to marten are found: deep snow in winter, relatively few roads and low human population, low fisher densities and forests of softwood or mixed soft and hardwood trees.

Deep snow is beneficial to marten, giving them a hunting advantage, Kelly said. “Marten are especially adapted to deep snow conditions. They have very large feet in proportion to their body size, so they can

cruise on top of the snow very easily.”

A marten’s big feet can help it chase down prey like redback voles and snowshoe hares. Marten also are “subnivean” hunters that tunnel under the snow to find prey. Their ease moving above and under the snow gives them a competitive advantage over fisher.

Marten and fisher are after the same prey species, so they overlap in habitat and resources that they use. “We think snow is playing a driving role in the marten’s progress, keeping fisher at lower elevations and marten at higher elevations where snow is deeper,” Kelly said.

Marten prefer forests of spruce, fir and pine with plenty of dead and fallen trees where prey species are likely to live. They have their young in dens on the ground, using tree cavities and dead fallen trees for cover.

Kelly’s study documented that

marten are coming back to the northern, higher-elevation areas of New Hampshire that have traditionally supported them. “It appears as though a lot of historical habitat has been re-colonized,” she said. Most of the martens captured in Kelly’s study were males, however, so it’s unknown at this time whether breeding populations exist in all the areas of Kelly’s study.

Kelly’s research can now be used to help conserve pine marten habitat and strategize management priorities to aid the species’ recovery. Much of the core habitat is on public land, but many important tracts are privately owned.

“There are a variety of recommendations we can make to landowners,” Kelly said, such as maintaining the type of forest structure that is beneficial to marten by leaving dead and down debris on the forest floor.

Native Plantings

Create Wildlife Habitat in Your Backyard

Winter is the ideal time to browse through nursery and seed catalogs and dream of spectacular roses or the perfect green bean. It's also a great time to plan some spring landscaping projects that will bring wildlife to your yard.

A simple rule of thumb for planning a wildlife-friendly yard is to choose a variety

of native plants, shrubs and trees, according to Marilyn Wyzga, who teaches children and teachers around the state how to attract wildlife to their schoolyards as part of N.H. Fish and Game's Project H.O.M.E.

"Often, we choose plants that are pretty or that our neighbors have or that are the newest cultivars offered by the catalogs; instead, choose something that is native and relates to the plant community surrounding the place where you live," Wyzga said. "There are so many wonderful native plants that we overlook or may not be aware of,

plants that have beautiful structure, color or texture and also produce fruit or provide cover that wildlife can use."

Dogwoods, for example, come in a wide variety of species that fit into many landscapes while offering beautiful fall leaves and fruits for birds. Native shrub roses offer lovely flowers for you that later turn into fruits that persist into winter, providing food at a critical time for birds and small mammals.

Another tip: Think about what your yard has to offer in all seasons, and choose native plants that yield fruit at various times throughout the warm seasons and species like evergreens that offer protection in winter.

Working with nature rather than against it is not only beneficial to wildlife, but also for

you, the gardener, because native plants are uniquely adapted for New Hampshire's growing conditions.

- There are several resources available to help plan your own backyard wildlife habitat. For more information:
- The N.H. Department of Agriculture has an invasive species fact sheet, http://agriculture.nh.gov/pdf/topics/hyperlinks/Webpage_introduction.pdf.
 - The N.H. State Forest Nursery grows native plants and sells to the public, <http://nh.gov/dred/nhnursery>.
 - UNH Cooperative extension has information on gardening, native and invasive plants, <http://ceinfo.unh.edu/Pubs/HGPubs/altinvs2.pdf>.
 - The N.H. Fish and Game website provides information on creating your own backyard wildlife habitat and lists additional resources, www.wildlife.state.nh.us/Wildlife/create_wildlife_habitat.htm.
 - The National Wildlife Federation website provides tips and step-by-step instructions on a variety of topics from attracting wildlife to creating your own backyard habitat www.nwf.org/habitats.



Both bees and butterflies feed on nectar from the Monarda or beebalm flowers.

you, the gardener, because native plants are uniquely adapted for New Hampshire's growing conditions.

"If you put in a native plant, you don't have to fuss with it, you don't have to spray it and cover it ... just take some care to get it into the ground and water it well. It's generally lower maintenance," Wyzga said.

Wyzga advises that what we really need to watch out for are species that are

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Fast Facts

Status: Endangered at both the state and national level.

Description: Small, rarely bigger than 1.5 inches in length. Brown, yellowish-brown or black in color.

Habitat: Streams and rivers with a slow to moderate current and sand, gravel or mud bottom.

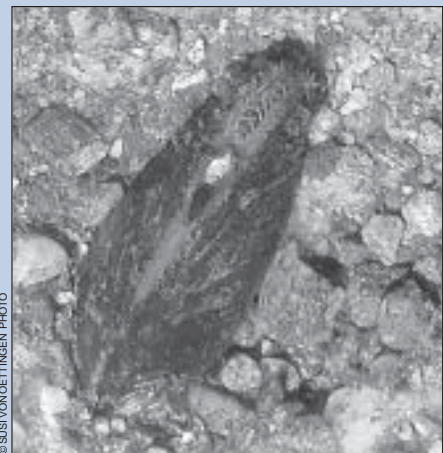
Range: New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina. In New Hampshire, populations occur in Cheshire, Coos, Grafton and Sullivan counties.

Diet: Filters algae from the water.

Threats: Water pollution such as acid rain, fungicides, herbicides, insecticides and fertilizers contaminate the water in which mussels live. Dams on rivers alter currents and change habitat conditions in rivers and can block fish that are hosts for dwarf wedge mussel larvae from making their way to areas where mussels occur.

Life Span: Approximately 10 years.

Fun Fact: Larvae (also called glochidium) have a small hook that they use to attach themselves to the fins or gills of fish and catch a free ride to disperse to different parts of the river.



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Dwarf Wedge Mussel
(Alasmidonta heterodon)

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 not only non-native to New Hampshire but also damaging to the natural landscape. These detrimental plants are called invasives, because they out-compete native plants and can take over a landscape while offering little benefit to wildlife.

Some invasive plant species were banned from sale in New Hampshire recently, while other very popular species won't be banned until 2007. These include burning bush, Japanese barberry and Norway maple. There are many native and non-invasive alternatives to these traditional landscaping choices. Instead of burning bush, try American cranberrybush viburnum or highbush blueberry for great fall color. Instead of Japanese barberry, try weigela, slender deutzia or common ninebark. And instead of Norway maple, try red maple, ginkgo or northern red oak (which will drop plenty of acorns for wildlife).



WINTER Wildlife Almanac

JANUARY

- Winter visitors to New Hampshire, snowy owls can be found in seacoast marshes.
- Eagles soar over Great Bay, the lakes region and the Androscoggin, Connecticut and Merrimack rivers in search of open water where they can find fresh fish.

FEBRUARY

- Wild blue lupine plants with Karner blue butterfly eggs on their leaves are insulated under several inches of snow.
- Eastern hognose snakes are in their underground dens several inches below the frost line.
- Beavers are busy during the middle of the month, which is the peak of their breeding season.

MARCH

- Chipmunks emerge from their winter quarters; watch for them scampering along rock walls.
- Wood frogs start making their duck-like calls from vernal pools in wooded areas.

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