

The Illinois Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan & Strategy Version 2.0 (the next 20 years)

Introduction to the Illinois Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan & Strategy 2.0

Wildlife Conservation efforts have historically focused on meeting commercial and recreational needs associated with harvestable species (e.g., catfish, deer) or on maintaining species that are considered at-risk of extinction. While the majority of native species do not fit neatly into either of these categories they are still held in the public trust with an expectation that they be conserved. Unfortunately resource management agencies generally have few resources available for their management after other priorities have been addressed. This need for dedicated funding was recognized by the Conservation Community (Blue Ribbon Panel 2016) and led to the development of Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plans (also known as State Wildlife Action Plans) and Congressional Funding through the United States Fish & Wildlife Service ([State Wildlife Grants](#)) to support these them. State Wildlife Action Plans are designed to bridge the gap in conservation of native species that occurs due to the historical focus on consumptive recreational uses for wildlife (i.e., fishing and hunting) and the protection of endangered species.

While the ultimate purpose of Illinois' Wildlife Action Plan has remained relatively consistent throughout the past two decades the approach to meet that purpose has shifted over the years. Initially the Action Plan (**CWCP 1.0**) focused on identifying a broad set of potentially at-risk species and an extensive range of possible conservation actions to directly recover them in Illinois. The first major revision of the Action Plan (**2015 Implementation Guide**) attempted to identify the most critical of these needs and actions and more thoroughly organize them into a set of thematic Campaigns focused on implementation of the conservation strategies it outlined. The version of the IWAP presented here (**CWCP 2.0**) is intended to revise, update, and replace previous versions. It attempts to expand on earlier efforts by addressing Native Species Conservation through coarse-filter approaches that enhance the Illinois Landscape and when necessary with fine-filter approaches that target individual species that need extra help beyond the availability of appropriate habitat. The CWCP 2.0 also further develops our use of **Campaigns** and **Conservation Opportunity Areas** as mechanisms for conservation delivery.

Implementation of conservation actions begins with a planning process and Illinois' Wildlife Action Plan is designed to provide a strategic framework for the conservation and management of Native Species. The approach is based on two simple ideas – (1) most native wildlife and plant species can coexist with people on the landscape, and (2) some species need additional help to endure in the 21st Century.

Our **Vision** for Illinois is a landscape that supports resilient populations of native wildlife and plants along with human endeavors. Approaching this ideal necessitates contributions from natural lands, working lands, and developed lands as well as an acceptance of the importance of native species by the public. The Illinois Wildlife Action Plan includes a variety of Conservation Action Strategies that allow public agencies, private landowners, and community members to participate in achieving this vision.

This Wildlife Action Plan identifies three major **Goals** to work towards over the next 20 years – (1) increase the extent and quality of shared lands (by 30%), (2) maintain native wildlife and plant species populations (no loss), and (3) increase the connection and appreciation by the public of native species and their habitats (by 30%). Meeting these goals will improve the capacity of lands to support

populations of native species, enhance the viability of their populations, and move toward our vision for the Illinois landscape.

This document (CWCP 2.0) is organized into six Sections (Introduction, Illinois Landscape, Native Species, Campaigns, Conservation Opportunity Areas, Appendices & Supplements). The Introduction is designed to present the purpose, vision, and goals for the next 20 years of landscape and species conservation associated with Illinois Wildlife Action Plan. The intent is for each of the Sections that follow the Introduction to identify opportunities for participation in the conservation of native species in Illinois.

The Illinois Landscape Section describes the extent and quality of Natural Communities statewide, identifies Objectives and Conservation Action Strategies to address common Threats to Natural Communities, and outlines a monitoring approach to track the status of these Natural Communities and the effectiveness of Conservation Actions on their condition. Land Managers, Landowners, and community members will find opportunities for their participation here.

The Native Species Section defines the range of species that are the focus of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan including Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), Species of Greatest Information Need (SGIN), and Illinois Stewardship Species (ISS). This Section also includes aligning species with Natural Community Classes, identifying Objectives and Conservation Action Strategies to address common Threats to native species, and outlines a monitoring approach to track the status of these species and the effectiveness of Conservation Actions on improving their condition. Everyone interested in addressing common threats to native species will find opportunities to participate in improving their condition in this Section.

The Campaign Section includes an Introduction to the purpose of the Campaigns and four individual Chapters focused on the key Natural Community Classes (Forest & Woodlands, Prairies & Savannas, Streams & Open Waters, and Permanent & Seasonal Wetlands) that support native species in Illinois. These Chapters are designed as stand-alone documents that outline a strategy for implementation of Conservation Action Strategies by Public Agencies and the programs that they execute. Each Chapter describes Conservation Actions that can be applied to natural, working, and developed lands to support populations of native species by addressing stressors that occur within these landscape sectors.

The Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs) Section includes an Introduction to their purpose in Illinois and individual Assessments of active and proposed COAs. COA Assessments are designed to assist local conservation partners focus their work to advance the objectives of the Wildlife Action Plan through implementation of conservation action strategies at the local level. These Assessments identify the boundaries for shared work, a guiding philosophy and co-developed objectives, Conservation Action Strategies to address major stressors, and the primary conservation partners associated with the COA.

The final Section includes Appendices and Supplements associated with Illinois Wildlife Action Plan. It provides lists of SGCN, SGIN, ISS, potentially extirpated species, and plant hybrids that require further examination. This Section also includes a Glossary and list of References and ends with information related to future reviews and revisions, partnering organizations, and guides to changes in the Plan presented here from previous versions.