

# History of State Wildlife Grants and the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy in the Southeast Region with Emphasis on Bird Conservation

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*Abstract:* The State Wildlife Grant program resulted from efforts to adequately fund wildlife diversity conservation by State and Territorial Wildlife Agencies through the Conservation and Reinvestment Act. From 2001 to 2005, State Wildlife Grants provided funding for programs for a broad array of wildlife species that were not eligible under other funding initiatives. It has also created a strong partnership between state, federal, and non-governmental agencies working toward conservation goals by requiring the development of Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies in the States and Territories. State Wildlife Grants are one of the mechanisms that can contribute to conservation of birds and other wildlife species in the Southeast.

*Key words:* conservation, funding, strategy, wildlife, grants, birds

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The Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) proposed amending the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act to create a Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (WCRP) with dedicated funding for WCRP at U.S. \$350 million annually. In fiscal year 2001, however, WCRP was funded at the \$50 million level and required states “within five years of the date of the initial apportionment to develop and begin implementation of a wildlife conservation strategy.” FY 2001 was the first and only year WCRP was funded. Under WCRP research, survey, construction and restoration projects were eligible. Ten percent of the apportionment could be used on wildlife education or wildlife-associated recreation.

In fiscal year 2001 the State Wildlife Grants (SWG) program would be funded as a competitive grant program; however, in FY 2002, 2003, and 2004, the SWG program was funded on a formula basis through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Although appropriations for SWG are determined annually, the program has provided a relatively constant level of funding during these fiscal years.

The SWG program created a two-pronged approach to conservation. The

program provided a funding source for a broad array of wildlife with no dedicated source of funding, and like WCRP, it required states to commit to developing a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) by 1 October 2005 to be eligible to receive funding. However, recreation would not be an eligible activity and education would have stringent requirements eliminating the use of the 10% cap allowed in WCRP. The development of each CWCS will create a statewide blueprint for wildlife conservation on a landscape level scale. Every U.S. state and territory received funding through SWG and will develop a CWCS.

### **Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) adopted the required elements identified by Congress in legislation for the WCRP, making one document sufficient to meet the planning requirements set forth in the WCRP and the SWG programs. In relation to the required elements two definitions are important. "Wildlife" is defined as "any species of wild, free-ranging fauna including fish, and also fauna in captive breeding programs the object of which is to reintroduce individuals of a depleted indigenous species in a previously occupied range." And "species with the greatest conservation need" is defined as the group of wildlife species, selected by the state wildlife agency, whose conservation status is of special concern in that state.

The required elements are to be based on the best available and appropriate scientific information and data as follows:

- 1) uses such information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low population and declining species as the state fish and wildlife department deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of wildlife of the state;
- 2) identifies the extent and conditions of wildlife habitats and community types essential to conservation of species;
- 3) identifies the problems which may adversely affect the species or their habitats, and provides for priority research and surveys to identify factors which may assist in restoration and more effective conservation of such species and their habitats;
- 4) determines those actions which should be taken to conserve the species and their habitats and establishes priorities for implementing such conservation actions;
- 5) provides for periodic monitoring of species and their habitats and the effectiveness of the conservation actions determined and for adapting conservation actions as appropriate to respond to new information or changing conditions;
- 6) provides for the review of the state wildlife conservation strategy and, if appropriate, revision at intervals of not more than 10 years;
- 7) provides for coordination to the extent feasible the state fish and wildlife department, during the development, implementation, review, and revision of the wildlife conservation strategy, with Federal, state, and local agencies and Indian tribes that manage significant areas of land or water within the state, or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of species or their habitats.

It also required states to provide an opportunity for the public to participate in the development of the CWCS (Public Law 106-553 Appendix B). These elements are now commonly referred to as the Eight Required Elements.

#### U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Roles

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had a key role in CWCS development and will have one in CWCS acceptance as well. The Division of Federal Assistance provides support and guidance to the states through the Development Assistance Teams (DAT) and National Advisory Acceptance Team (NAAT). The director of the USFWS will make the final decision on acceptance of submitted CWCS for each state.

In the Southeast Region the DAT was comprised of a designated lead contact person in the Division of Federal Assistance and the formation of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan Ad Hoc Committee. This committee is comprised primarily of SWG grant managers and CWCS planners. The committee structure and interaction with the Division of Federal Assistance facilitated the integration of planning approaches and data sharing across state borders, provided the states a key contact point to other USFWS program areas, and promoted consistency among USFWS regions and the Washington Office of Federal Assistance on development assistance issues.

The director of the USFWS is responsible for determining if the CWCS developed in each State is acceptable based on the required elements. With assistance from the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA), the USFWS and the states worked in partnership to develop a mechanism for evaluating each CWCS. The result was the formation of the National Advisory Acceptance Team (NAAT). The NAAT is composed of the assistant director for Federal assistance (chair), one representative from the IAFWA (co-chair), the seven assistant regional directors for migratory birds and state programs from each of the USFWS geographic regions, and four state agency directors representing the state regional fish and wildlife associations. The NAAT is charged with recommending approval, conditional approval, or disapproval of each state and insular territory's CWCS based upon the process used in addressing the required element. The NAAT chair will compose a letter to the USFWS director detailing reasons for the recommendation.

The USFWS director will then send a letter to the state, notifying it of approval, conditional approval, or disapproval. If the CWCS is conditionally approved or disapproved, a letter drafted by the NAAT will identify each deficiency and include a brief explanation supporting the NAAT's conclusions and recommendations (USFWS 2004a or 2004b).

Direction from Congress' House Interior Appropriations Committee stipulated that a state which has a conditionally approved CWCS will have six months after the receipt of the USFWS director's letter to resubmit a revised CWCS for evaluation and possible approval. During this time the state will still be eligible to receive SWG funds; however, if a CWCS is disapproved, the state can resubmit a revised strategy but will not be eligible to receive SWG funds until the CWCS has been approved.

In either scenario, the resubmitted CWCS will go back through the NAAT process (USFWS 2004a or 2004b).

### State Wildlife Grant Program

The SWG program is an annual appropriation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. In FY 2001, State Wildlife Grants were funded as a competitive grant program; however, beginning in FY 2002, the program was funded on a formula basis. The apportionment formula is a ratio based on land area and population. One-third of the ratio is derived from the land area of a state in relation to total land area. The other two-thirds of the ratio is derived from the population of a state in relation to total population of the United States. To ensure equitability no state can receive less than 1% and no more than 5% of the total apportionment available each year. Puerto Rico receives no more than .5% and the Virgin Islands receive no more than .25% (Public Law 107-063). The southeastern states receive approximately 16% of the annual appropriation. For FY 2002 through FY 2005, the total average annual appropriation for the southeastern states was \$12.5 million per year with the average state receiving \$940,000 (Table 1).

SWG legislation (Public Law 108-7) states that a state must develop "a comprehensive wildlife conservation plan, consistent with the criteria established by the Secretary of the Interior, that considers the broad range of the state, territory, or other jurisdiction's wildlife associated habitats, with appropriate priority placed on those species with the greatest conservation need and taking into the consideration the relative funding available for the conservation of those species."

The intent of the grant program is to fund projects that address one of the required elements and will facilitate the planning process by filling in data gaps and integrating existing planning efforts. This program allows for both planning and implementation projects. The emphasis until the CWCS submittal on 1 October 2005

**Table 1.** State Wildlife Grants Funding History in the southeastern states from 2001 through 2005.

Fiscal Years	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total
Total for states	\$8,897,999	\$77,600,000	\$57,672,675	\$61,201,916	\$61,046,854	\$257,021,445
Total for SE states	\$2,727,454	\$15,162,911	\$11,269,138	\$11,958,721	\$12,131,979	\$53,250,203
Alabama	\$682,000	\$1,205,716	\$896,094	\$950,854	\$964,630	\$4,699,294
Arkansas	\$0	\$906,455	\$673,685	\$714,925	\$725,283	\$3,020,348
Florida	\$0	\$3,286,987	\$2,442,897	\$2,592,298	\$2,629,854	\$10,952,036
Georgia	\$1,000,000	\$1,921,295	\$1,427,913	\$1,515,288	\$1,537,242	\$7,401,738
Kentucky	\$135,900	\$1,041,613	\$774,131	\$821,523	\$833,425	\$3,606,592
Louisiana	\$0	\$1,176,676	\$874,511	\$928,044	\$941,490	\$3,920,721
Mississippi	\$0	\$891,399	\$662,495	\$703,052	\$713,238	\$2,970,184
North Carolina	\$0	\$1,845,774	\$1,371,785	\$1,455,766	\$1,476,857	\$6,150,182
Puerto Rico	\$0	\$388,000	\$288,363	\$306,009	\$310,443	\$1,292,815
South Carolina	\$0	\$959,976	\$713,459	\$757,142	\$768,112	\$3,198,689
Tennessee	\$909,554	\$1,345,020	\$999,624	\$1,060,816	\$1,076,184	\$5,391,198
Virgin Islands	\$0	\$194,000	\$144,181	\$153,004	\$155,221	\$646,406

has been on planning to aid in the development of the CWCS. The Federal share of planning grants cannot exceed 75% and the Federal share of implementation grants cannot exceed 50% (Public Law 107-063). Planning projects included surveys, inventories, research, database development, and public participation in the review, development and revision of the CWCS. Implementation projects include restoration, construction, land acquisition and the carrying out of actions identified in other planning efforts, such as the plans developed by the bird conservation initiatives, other State plans or Recovery Plans.

Emphasis for SWG projects is on species with the greatest conservation need taking into consideration the relative level of funding available. Although identified species of greatest conservation need in the CWCS may include federally listed threatened or endangered species and species that are hunted or fished, funding available through Federal Assistance under the Endangered Species Act, Sport Fish Restoration Act or Wildlife Restoration Act should be considered when developing the grants for funding the SWG program.

#### Examples of Bird Projects Eligible for Funding through SWG

SWG is intended to fund conservation and management of a broad array of wildlife species that the states have identified as species of greatest conservation need. In the southeast, numerous bird species, particularly non-game birds, are included in this classification. The existing personnel and organizational structure in each state to address wildlife diversity conservation, and the available funding sources, have influenced the types of projects and level of complexity of projects that were funded during the strategy development phase of the SWG program.

During FY 2002 through FY 2004, many southeastern states have funded coordination, research, survey, and inventory projects that focus on birds. SWG funds allowed states to conduct surveys for species for which little data existed and in areas that were previously not surveyed or areas that were surveyed irregularly or infrequently. Such surveys and inventories have allowed states to develop databases and crosswalk sightings, specimens, and other data to facilitate access to more complete information, better interagency planning and informed decision-making. Research projects have allowed states to evaluate effects of traditional management practices on bird populations and communities and have assisted in incorporating management actions and priorities appropriate for these species into the CWCS. Coordination projects have allowed States to hire coordinators for Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) and Partners in Flight making it possible for them to fully participate in ongoing regional partnerships and nationwide initiatives to benefit birds. These projects also have facilitated mechanisms to develop habitat conservation planning on a landscape scale, coordinate breeding bird surveys and monitoring protocol, and provide technical guidance to other agencies.

*Kentucky SWG Bird Projects.* Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR) was awarded a State Wildlife Grant (SWG) in 2004 to facilitate various planning efforts associated with three BCRs or Joint Ventures (JVs) yet to receive permanent federal funding (Central Hardwoods JV, East Gulf Coastal Plain

BCR, and Appalachian Mountain BCR). Through this grant, KDFWR will provide financial support to each BCR/JV annually for three years to assist in monitoring efforts, research projects, habitat modeling, and staff support. KDFWR is implementing this project through agreements with the organizations responsible for administering the budgets for each BCR/JV. For example, the managing entity for the Central Hardwoods JV is the American Bird Conservancy (ABC), so KDFWR has established a mechanism to distribute funds to ABC annually. KDFWR is providing nonfederal match for this grant in the form of cash (\$5,000 annually), staff time, and travel costs associated with steering committee meetings for each BCR or JV. KDFWR felt their participation in these emerging partnerships was essential to meet their habitat and conservation goals, and for coordination of all-bird conservation activities; these three BCR/JVs provide nearly complete east to west coverage of the entire state (a fraction of western Kentucky lies in the Lower Mississippi Valley JV). KDFWR felt that BCR/JV multi-organization partnerships have proven to be the most effective way to deliver bird conservation on a landscape level, but without SWG support, KDFWR would have been extremely limited (or even unable) in their ability to financially support each of the BCR/JVs. Active participation in these partnerships has assisted KDFWR in developing the all-bird conservation components of their CWCS. BCR/JVs prioritization of species and research needs has been extremely useful in KDFWR's planning efforts, and the numerous habitat models and landcover associations that are planned will be valuable. The BCR/JVs will also play key roles in implementation of CWCS all-bird conservation activities, and KDFWR plans to fully utilize each BCR/JV to the extent possible through their Bird Conservation Region Coordination grant.

*Louisiana SWG Bird Projects.* The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) was awarded a State Wildlife Grant (SWG) in 2004 to facilitate various planning efforts associated with Important Bird Areas (IBA) in Louisiana. The coordinator hired for this project will be working in conjunction with the Technical Committee to organize and analyze information on bird communities, identify a network of IBAs, produce a map of IBAs, develop site conservation plans to address needs, threats, and opportunities, and develop in conjunction with the Steering Committee, a three-year IBA implementation plan which will outline the overall strategy for the term beyond the first three-year period covered by the grant.

## Literature Cited

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