

# How the Swift Fox Escaped the List

*U*nder the U.S. Constitution, most fish and wildlife management responsibilities in our country are retained by the states and tribes. The exceptions, trust species such as migratory birds, anadromous fish, and species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), are jointly managed by federal and state governments through various treaties and laws enacted by Congress. While a listing under the ESA can provide an important conservation tool for a listed species, the law can be complex and challenging. Most state and tribal budgets are insufficient to fund work on all the species under their authority, but if a species declines to the point that it becomes a listing candidate, it is not surprising that agencies may devote additional resources to prevent the need for ESA protection.

The states developed a rangewide conservation plan for the swift fox (*Vulpes velox*) after it became a listing candidate in 1994. Their plan relied heavily on additional surveys and monitoring to document that the status of the swift fox did not warrant listing. Based on the information provided by the states and the long-term monitoring they committed to undertaking, the Fish and Wildlife Service removed the swift fox from the candidate list. The Service recognizes the significant resources that the states and tribes bring to the conservation table. Working collaboratively allowed those resources to be used to promote long-term conservation of the swift fox.

The conservation plan for the swift fox includes states in the area covered by its range: Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming. The plan was developed by a team that includes Francie Pusateri (Colorado Division of Wildlife); Matt Peck (Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks); Brian Giddings (Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks); Richard Bischof (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission); Terry Enk (New Mexico Department of Game and Fish); Jacquie Ermer (North Dakota Game and Fish Department); Julianne Hoagland (Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation); Eileen Dowd-Stukel

(South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks); Heather Whitlaw (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department); and Martin Grenier (Wyoming Game and Fish Department).

The team accomplished its goal to document that the fox didn't need listing under the ESA. Marsha Sovada from the U.S. Geological Survey developed and maintains a database that shows historic and current habitat use by the swift fox. It clearly demonstrates the extent of the swift fox range and was instrumental in justifying the removal of the species from the candidate list. But the team had its challenges. Such a broad-ranging species requires the cooperation of many entities and considerable resources. It took time and effort to amass the momentum to get the team functioning and to keep it going.

What lessons did the parties learn? When they involved the managing entities to assist in development of conservation plans, they obtained their "buy-in." The states can do a better job of managing certain species if conservation efforts take effect before the species gets to the point of needing ESA protection. They also learned that developing successful partnerships to manage broad-ranging species requires the breadth of experience, knowledge, and authority amply contributed by the states.

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