

# Illinois Wildlife Action Plan

## 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.

## Illinois snapshot

**Landscape:** Illinois spans nearly 400 miles from north to south, with species ranging from Ice Age relicts like the Iowa Pleistocene snail on rocky outcrops in the northwestern corner of the state, to bird-voiced treefrogs in 1,000-year old cypress swamps at the southern tip. In between live 12 million people, reaping the benefits of fertile soils, 26,000 miles of streams and rivers, and other natural treasures.

**Management:** The amount of forest in Illinois has doubled over the past century, but in spite of efforts like the Conservation Reserve Program, the state has less than half as much grassland today as in 1950. The Mississippi Flyway and Lake Michigan shoreline continue to bring spectacular concentrations of migratory birds to Illinois, and the state has long been a leader in identifying and conserving high-quality natural areas.

**Wildlife highlights:** Bald eagles and river otters, once endangered, now thrive. Meanwhile, greater prairie-chickens—the signature bird of the tallgrass prairie—barely hang on in The Prairie State. Water quality and many fish populations have greatly improved, but a quarter of our freshwater mussels are extinct or ex-

tirpated. Game animals like white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, and Canada geese are doing well, while bobwhite are not.



King Rail/USFWS

## Illinois' planning approach

The Illinois Wildlife Action Plan provides a means for public agencies, not-for-profit organizations and citizens to focus collective efforts on common goals. The action plan gives an overview of the major habitat types: their current condition, challenges to their integrity, and actions to conserve them. Assessments of the 15 ecological regions of Illinois focus on key natural communities and species, places with special importance for conserving

*“Illinois has tremendously valuable land and water. As we use these resources for housing, agricultural production and economic development, it is important to consider how we are going to conserve our wildlife and natural areas for future generations to enjoy. A pro-active plan will be more cost-effective than waiting until wildlife becomes more rare and more difficult to protect.”*

*– Sam Flood, Acting Director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources*

wildlife, and opportunities for outdoor recreation. The assessments also denote regions with partners who are already working together locally.

## Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Illinois

In much of Illinois, intensive agriculture and development limit wildlife habitat. Carefully planned development, along with incentives and technical assistance to landowners are keys to conserving wildlife species. Habitat fragmentation and fire suppression, among other factors, diminish habitat quality. Invasive species are an enormous prob-

lem. For example, Asian carp escaped from fish farms into the Mississippi River system. Now, Asian carp account for 90 percent of the biomass in some pools of the Illinois River and are threatening to invade the Great Lakes. Securing a future for Illinois's wildlife will require a blend of maintaining the habitat we have,

helping landowners restore some habitat that has been lost, and finding ways to balance economic needs and wildlife conservation.

## Working together for Illinois' wildlife

More than 850 people representing 150 agencies and organizations helped develop the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan. These partners represented diverse perspectives, and included the Illinois Farm Bureau, Field Trial Clubs of Illinois, and the Sierra Club. They also varied greatly in geographic scope, from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to municipal park districts. In the fall of 2004, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources hosted 8 planning workshops for partners. Drafts of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan were posted on our website, with hard copies sent on request, for 2 public comment periods in the spring and summer of 2005.

Grouped by habitat and issues, these seven overlapping 'campaigns' outline the steps to reach our goals:

### Farmland & Prairie Campaign - Expand-



Kids in a stream/Adele Hodde

*“The Illinois Wildlife Action Plan is not just an inventory of species, but a plan to address the particular needs of wildlife that are declining. This is a blueprint for the future of successful wildlife management in Illinois.”*

*– Joint statement from Carl Becker of The Nature Conservancy, John Burk of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Marilyn Campbell of the Illinois Audubon Society and Eric Schenck of Ducks Unlimited*

Wildlife	Total number of species	Species in need of conservation *	Threatened/endangered listed species
Mussels	61**	29	24
Snails	170	25	2
Insects	About 17,000	347	12
Crustaceans	207	22	10
Fish	187	80	31
Amphibians	41	14	8
Reptiles	60	23	16
Birds	300**	83	32
Mammals	59	20	9
<b>Totals</b>		<b>638</b>	<b>144</b>

\* Based on seven criteria, including low or declining populations, dependence on a rare or vulnerable habitat, and usefulness as an indicator of the health of a community or habitat.

\*\*An additional 19 species are extinct, or have been eliminated from Illinois.

\*\*\*Approximate number of regularly occurring species. Including vagrants and accidentals, 432 species have been documented.

## Wildlife highlights

Highlight habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
<b>Savanna</b>  <b>Ownership: mix of private and public</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Red-headed woodpecker</li> <li>• Baltimore oriole</li> <li>• Slender glass lizard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invasion by exotic shrubs</li> <li>• Succession into closed forest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mechanical removal and chemical treatment of invasive shrubs</li> <li>• Use prescribed fire to maintain a healthy, grassy ground layer</li> </ul>
<b>Streams</b>  <b>Ownership: private</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creek heelsplitter</li> <li>• River redhorse</li> <li>• Smooth softshell turtle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Channelization</li> <li>• Streambank erosion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restore meanders, pools, riffles, and stream-side habitat</li> <li>• Moderate the speed of drainage waters by planting filter strip vegetation and enhancing upstream wetlands</li> </ul>
<b>Grassland</b>  <b>Ownership: mostly private</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regal fritillary</li> <li>• Crawfish frog</li> <li>• Bobolink</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scarcity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with farm conservation programs to focus in areas with greatest restoration potential</li> <li>• Develop incentives for grazing practices with economic and wildlife benefits</li> </ul>

### Recommended actions to conserve Illinois' wildlife

ing and improving grassland, shrub and wetland habitats in agricultural landscapes, with economic incentives and technical assistance for private land owners

**Forests Campaign** - Improving wildlife habitat, ecological integrity, and economic value of the state's forests and savannas with through appropriate, sustainable forestry practices

**Wetlands Campaign** - Restoring and enhancing wetlands for wildlife habitat, reduced flooding, and improved water quality

**Streams Campaign** - Reduce sedimentation and enhance biodiversity by protecting riparian areas, stabilizing stream banks, and repairing in-stream habitat

**Invasive Species Campaign** - Working together to prevent, contain and manage exotic plants, animals and diseases that threaten natural areas, wildlife and



Wildflowers/DNR

*“To conserve low and declining populations that are indicative of the diversity and health of Illinois state’s wildlife.*

*–Element One, as set forth in the guide by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service’s National Acceptance Advisory Team*

human health

**Land & Water Stewardship** - Providing public and private land owners with the knowledge and tools to best manage healthy forests, grasslands, wetlands, streams and lakes with abundant wildlife

**Green Cities Campaign** - Making cities and towns more livable through smart growth, protecting open space, and providing wildlife recreation opportunities

*“The cooperation of many agencies, the agricultural community, and conservation organizations in putting together the action plan has been encouraging. We all recognize that healthy wildlife populations, functioning natural systems and clean water go hand-in-hand with our own health and quality of life.”*

– Jeff Walk, Developer/Author of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan, Illinois Department of Natural Resources



Barn Owl/IDNR



E/T Prairie Chickens/Adele Huddle, IDNR



E/T Eastern Massasauga/Scott Ballard, IDNR

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