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Interior Department Approves Plans by 56 U.S. States and Territories to Keep Wildlife from Becoming Endangered

Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne announced today that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has approved wildlife action plans for all 56 states and territories, marking the final phase of an important step in conservation history. For the first time ever, all state and territorial fish and wildlife agencies have established comprehensive conservation plans that, together, provide a nationwide blueprint of actions to conserve imperiled species and prevent them from becoming threatened or endangered.

"The states possess a wealth of knowledge about the conservation issues and wildlife species within their borders," said Secretary Kempthorne. "These plans tap into this expertise and demonstrate our commitment to conservation partnerships with the state wildlife agencies. Working together with them, as well as with tribes, local governments, conservation groups and private landowners, we can help prevent wildlife from becoming threatened or endangered."

The Wildlife Action Plans are a thorough state-by-state look at wildlife and the actions needed to ensure their survival. The plans will also allow state and territorial fish and wildlife agencies to continue to receive grants under the State Wildlife Grant program signed by President Bush in 2001.

In order to be eligible for State Wildlife Grant funds, each state fish and wildlife agency was required to complete a wildlife action plan. The plans were developed as a collaborative effort that included biologists, conservationists, landowners and the general public. The plans were reviewed by a national team that included representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and several state fish and wildlife agencies.

The in-depth approval process took more than a year for some action plans. The final nine plans were approved today by the Service, covering Massachusetts, Ohio, Colorado, Arkansas, American Samoa, Guam, California, Delaware and the District of Columbia.

"A strong cooperative approach was integral when constructing our state wildlife action plans to ensure the health and survival of all wildlife," said Ed Parker, president of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and bureau chief of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. "In just a few years time, we have already seen the results of working in closer relationships with other conservation agencies and organization within our states. Never has such a comprehensive set of plans been constructed with so much input."

"The plans identify what species and habitats are declining, but not yet officially threatened or endangered," Kempthorne added. "By using this information we can act now before it's too late. The Administration is excited about this historic milestone since it offers a new and creative approach to broad scale, cost-effective conservation and this sentiment is shared widely by others in the conservation community."

Each plan must provide information on low and declining populations of wildlife and the habitats they require, identify problems impacting these populations, identify needed research and survey efforts to improve conservation, and determine priorities. Agencies will revise and update their plans at least once every 10 years.

The state plans must also contain specific actions. For example, Alabama will use some of the grant money to establish a facility dedicated to captive breeding the state's fish, mussel, snail and crayfish species of highest conservation concern. Alabama is hoping to reintroduce a number of these species back to their historic habitats in the future.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has provided more than \$360 million in grants to states and territories for conservation efforts. A state may receive no more than 5 percent or less than 1 percent of the available funds. The District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico each receives 0.5 percent and Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands each receives 0.25 percent. The apportionment is based on a formula that uses the state's land area and population.

The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number for the State Wildlife Grants is 15.634.

To learn more about a particular state's plan, please see <http://www.wildlifeactionplans.org> and <http://www.teaming.com>.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies - the organization that represents all of North America's fish and wildlife agencies - promotes sound management and conservation, and speaks with a unified voice on important fish and wildlife issues.

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