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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Awards Grants to States to Conserve Imperiled Wildlife

Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne announced today that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will award state and territorial wildlife agencies more than \$60 million to help prevent imperiled wildlife from suffering further decline. The State Wildlife Grant program is designed to provide annual funding to all state and territorial fish and wildlife agencies that have established comprehensive conservation plans, also known as wildlife action plans. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Pacific Region states and territories (OR, WA, ID & HI, American Samoa, N. Mariana Islands and Guam) combined received more than \$4.1 million.

"States know the most about conservation issues within their borders," said Secretary Kempthorne. "Taken together, all 56 state and territorial wildlife action plans represent the most comprehensive national assessment of the health of fish and wildlife resources, and steps needed to ensure healthy populations. The State Wildlife Grant programs demonstrate our support of conservation partnerships with state, tribal and territorial wildlife agencies as well as private partners."

All 56 state agencies have approved plans that collectively provide a nationwide blueprint of actions to conserve imperiled species and prevent them from becoming threatened or endangered. The plans were created in a collaborative effort that included biologists, conservationists, landowners, sportsmen and the general public. The plans were reviewed by a national team that included the Fish and Wildlife Service and directors from state wildlife agencies.

"The bottom line is that we use a strong pro-active approach in 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 Chief of the Bureau of Natural Resources for the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. "It has resulted in closer working relationships with other conservation agencies and organization within our states."

As an example, part of Virginia's plan calls for the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to work in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, Virginia Tech, the Upper Tennessee River Roundtable and private landowners to restore freshwater mussels in the Tennessee River system. Freshwater mussels are one of the most imperiled groups in North America and the Tennessee River system contains more than 100 species, including several listed as endangered.

"The plans describe what species and habitats are declining but not yet necessarily endangered," continued Kempthorne. "By using this information, we can act now before it's too late. The Administration is excited about this historic milestone because it represents our best chance for large scale cost-effective conservation. This sentiment is shared widely by others in the conservation community."

A state may receive no more than 5 percent or no less than 1 percent of the available funds. The District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico each receive 0.5 percent and Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands each receive 0.25 percent. The apportionment is based on a formula that uses the state's land area and population.

Under legislation signed by President Bush in 2001, states and territories so far have received a total of \$367 million in grants for conservation efforts. 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.teaming.com/wildlife_state.htm. To see a state-by-state funding table, please see <http://federalaid.fws.gov>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 547 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices, and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American Tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to State fish and wildlife agencies.