

**Guiding Principles for States to Consider in Developing
Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plans and Wildlife Conservation
Strategies (Plans-Strategies) for the State Wildlife Grant and
Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Programs**

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The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies recommends the following guiding principles for the States, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and their conservation partners to consider and apply while developing Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plans to meet their obligations under the State Wildlife Grant (SWG) and the Wildlife Conservation Strategies under the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration (WCRP) programs.

These Guiding Principles identify goals, objectives, and actions to strive for over time. Few if any will be fully realized in any State under what is hopefully just the first round of conservation program development under SWG and WCRP. Some things must occur from the outset, because they are legally required and/or because they are essential to success. Clearly, broad-scale public participation is an example of one such area. Among the diverse stakeholders in this effort are: private, local, State, and Federal agencies and governments, NGOs, etc.

The Plan-Strategy provides an opportunity for the State wildlife agency to provide effective and visionary leadership in conservation. The Plan-Strategy can identify the measures that will be used, the results achieved, and the threats and needs that remain with regard to wildlife and wildlife habitat. It is also an opportunity to address broader issues and programs, including environmental and wildlife-related education, outdoor recreation, and wildlife-related law enforcement. These other areas can constrain, or enhance, wildlife conservation efforts, and funding and public support for wildlife conservation can be increased, or at least stretched, by involving partners that share those interests.

A: Planning Process and Partnerships

1. Involve multiple staff levels within each agency, and broad public-private partnerships, to develop and implement the Plan-Strategy.
2. Involve partners that have the authorities necessary to ensure that the Plan-Strategy addresses the full range of issues at hand.
3. Build capacity for cooperative engagement among all partners in the effort, and make sure that it is productive, so trust and confidence grow, and organizational and interpersonal relationships become strengths of the Plan-Strategy.
4. Share responsibility and credit for planning and implementation among all partners, who collectively share responsibility for success of the Plan-Strategy.
5. Focus on efficiency and effectiveness, so the value added in planning and implementation is commensurate to the funds invested.
6. Ensure that the planning processes and the resultant Plans-Strategies are dynamic — so they can be improved and updated efficiently as new information is gained.

7. Communicate effectively with stakeholders, other partners, and the public, early and often.
8. The planning processes, and the decisions made during planning, should be obvious to those who read and use the Plan-Strategy, and repeatable – document the processes and the decisions so the next planning cycle can build on this one.

B. Focus and Scope

1. Base the Plan-Strategy in the principles of “best science,” “best management practices,” and “adaptive management,” with measurable goals, objectives, strategies, approaches, and activities that are complete, realistic, feasible, logical, and achievable. Describe these processes and practices sufficiently that partners understand what they entail and how they should function.
2. Address the broad range of wildlife and associated habitats, with appropriate priority placed on those species of greatest conservation need and taking into account the relative level of funding available for conservation of those species.
3. Integrate and address wildlife-related issues statewide, across jurisdictions and interests, and coordinate with parallel efforts in other States and countries.
4. Combine landscape/ecosystem/habitat-based approaches and smaller-scale approaches (e.g. focal, keystone, and/or indicator species; guilds; species of special concern) for planning and implementation.
5. Make the Plan-Strategy an effective, long-lasting blueprint for conservation that provides a broad vision and priorities, so a broad array of organizations, including other government agencies and NGOs, can help realize the vision. The Plan-Strategy should have sufficient flexibility to respond to the full spectrum of conditions and circumstances likely to be encountered within the planning area.

C. Format and Content

1. Make the Plan-Strategy readable, understandable, and useful, with well-defined issues, short and long-term goals and objectives, strategies, and realistic measures of performance that enable State agencies and their partners to demonstrate accountability.
2. Make full and effective use of relevant existing information; in particular, integrate appropriate elements of other plans and initiatives (such as Partners-in-Flight and the many regional and other plans), databases, GIS layers, records, reports, other information sources, and management information systems that overlap or complement these Plans-Strategies.

3. Identify knowledge gaps, as well as areas of knowledge, to help focus future efforts to improve understanding and planning, but do not allow a lack of information to inappropriately limit necessary short-term application of the best available science and good judgment in decision-making.
4. Make the Plan-Strategy spatially explicit, to the extent feasible and appropriate, with a full complement of GIS and other maps, figures, and other graphics, as well as appropriate text to provide sufficient detail and consistency in describing species and habitat conditions, conservation needs, conservation recommendations, and other issues/actions, so it can be used effectively by all partners.
5. Use “threats analyses,” “risk and stressor assessments,” and other techniques to help set priorities for goals, objectives, strategies, and activities.
6. In addition to wildlife, address factors that can have substantial impact on wildlife conservation, such as management of invasive species, wildlife-related and conservation-related education, law enforcement, and outdoor recreation.
7. Include a comprehensive glossary, so partners and the public have a shared and common understanding of key terms used in the Plan-Strategy.
8. Develop an updatable information system to monitor Plan-Strategy implementation and the status and trends of wildlife and habitat.
9. Consider wildlife conservation-related education and wildlife-associated recreation as tools that can help accomplishing conservation goals.

D. Completion, Outcomes, and Availability

1. Provide annual written progress updates on the planning effort and progress to IAFWA’s CARA Implementation Committee each September, in addition to annual performance reports that must be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service pursuant to Federal Aid guidelines.
2. Ensure that the Plan-Strategy clearly and definitively meets State obligations to Congress under the WCRP and SWG legislation, and to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with regard to Federal Aid administration.
3. Provide sufficient documentation in or with the Plan-Strategy to facilitate public understanding of the decisions that are made, how and why they were made.
4. Make the Plan-Strategy a driving force in guiding activities under diverse wildlife and habitat conservation initiatives, and usable for helping to inform land-use decision-making.
5. Make the Plan-Strategy readily available to the public in variety of media

6. Provide a mechanism for reporting accomplishments and tracking progress so local partners are aware of both.
7. Ensure that the Plan-Strategy can be implemented, i.e. that it is administratively and politically feasible, and that there are sufficient resources (funding and staff) among the partners to accomplish significant gains at a large scale, and within an appropriate time frame, to preserve our Nation's wildlife heritage.