

# Wildlife Habitat Management Guidance

## Wildlife Division

August 14, 2009

The degradation or loss of habitat is the primary cause of wildlife declines. Habitat is defined as those environmental features that meet life history requirements of a particular species under consideration.

### Purpose

This document guides the Wildlife Division's (WLD) approach to habitat management and describes how habitat goals can be incorporated into the diversity of division and department plans, projects, and programs. The primary role of the habitat management guidance is to support WLD species management and bring about the habitat related actions needed to manage for those species goals. The WLD works toward providing sufficient habitats within the state of Michigan for viable populations of all wildlife with emphasis on game animals and at-risk species. However, the WLD's public trust responsibility for conserving Michigan's wildlife is an inadequately funded mandate and far exceeds capacity. Recognizing that available funding is limited and often restricted, this guidance directs the prioritization of possible management options to the most important, highly valued, and top priority actions that can be accomplished. These actions shall be geographically explicit, species specific, and applicable to both public and private lands.

### Guiding Principles

- WLD is charged with conserving the number of species (biodiversity) as well as providing sufficient abundance of select game and at-risk species to meet specific goals such as providing hunting opportunities or meeting delisting criteria. These purposes are inherently different and will be incompatible at some locations, but should both be met at regional or statewide scales.
- WLD manages for habitat based upon: *public trust* and *statutory responsibilities*; DNR, public, and stakeholder *values*; *obligations* to those funding wildlife conservation; and available *resources*.
- WLD *consults* and *obtains comments* from other divisions within the DNR, the public, and stakeholder groups in the direction-setting process described in this guidance, and in preparing the actual plans to implement that management.
- WLD uses *science-based management* whenever possible to: identify the problem and potential management options, predict consequences, assess the feasibility of achieving goals, and establish assessment standards.
- WLD understands that habitat management typically benefits some species at the expense of others. At regional or state-wide scales, we have the potential to manage for many species to conserve the wildlife diversity of the state.
- WLD explicitly states the *goals, objectives, and duration* of wildlife habitat management efforts.
- WLD uses a *featured species process* to plan and assess the effectiveness of habitat management.
- WLD *evaluates* wildlife response to habitat management against the goals or future desired condition.

## Implementation

The process for determining statewide, regional, and local *featured species* is outlined below. Featured species are mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and/or insects whose life history requirements are used to focus habitat management efforts. The ease and cost of monitoring is a consideration when selecting featured species.

Direction set by this guidance document will be incorporated into land management by the WLD in the development of: wildlife area master plans, regional state forest management plans, state forest compartment plans, species management plans, recovery plans, private land plans, Landowner Incentive Program, Deer Range Improvement Program, annual work plans, and Work Item Proposals. The Wildlife Habitat Specialist is responsible for assuring the implementation of this guidance document.

## Identification of Statewide Featured Species

1. Featured species for statewide priorities are initially nominated by WLD staff with statewide species-specific knowledge. Timeframe: three weeks – August 10 to August 30, 2009.
  - a) Section I of the *Featured Species Habitat Management Form* (form) will be completed to document the rationale and habitat issue for each nominated species.
  - b) Sufficient biological information must be available to guide planning (Section II).
2. The draft list of nominated statewide featured species will be circulated to all WLD staff for internal review and comment. Timeframe: three weeks – August 31 to September 20, 2009.
  - a) Suggestions for additions and/or deletions to list will be requested. Suggestions for additions will include a completed Section I of the form. Suggestions for deletions will include a rationale.
3. The updated draft list of nominated statewide featured species will be circulated to the main office of FMFM, PRD, FD, LED for comment. Timeframe: three weeks – September 21 to October 11, 2009.
  - a) Suggestions for additions and/or deletions to list will be requested. Suggestions for additions will include a completed Section I of the form. Suggestions for deletions will include a rationale.
4. The updated draft list of nominated statewide featured species will receive stakeholder input. Timeframe: three weeks – October 12 to November 1, 2009.
  - a) A facilitated meeting with a formal process for receiving input will be the mechanism for stakeholder input.
  - b) The number of meeting participants will be limited (~20) but will represent a broad range of interests.
  - c) Participating organizations will include: federal agencies, statewide conservation organizations, and other pertinent organizations.
5. The list of statewide featured species will be selected from the list of nominees.
  - a) WLD Management Team will select a Wildlife Habitat Guidance Team (habitat team) whose purpose will be to review nominated featured species and the completed forms.
  - b) The habitat team will review nominations, and input from WLD staff, other DNR divisions and stakeholders to make a recommendation for the final list of statewide featured species. Timeframe: three weeks – November 2 to November 22, 2009.
  - c) WLD Management Team will review and finalize the WLD list of featured species. Timeframe – three weeks – November 23 to December 17, 2009.

### **Identification of Ecoregional Featured Species**

1. Nomination of ecoregional featured species will be processed through the management unit supervisors. In ecoregions with more than one management unit, the supervisors will consult and submit a consensus recommendation. Featured species for ecoregional priorities will initially be nominated by the management unit(s) staff in each ecoregion. Timeframe: three weeks – August 10 to August 30, 2009.
  - a) Section I of the *Featured Species Habitat Management Form* (form) will be completed to document the rationale and habitat issue for each nominated species.
  - b) Sufficient biological information must be available to guide planning (Section II).
2. Draft list of nominated featured species for each ecoregion will be circulated to all WLD staff in the ecoregion and the habitat team for internal review and comment. Timeframe: three weeks – August 31 to September 20, 2009.
  - a) Suggestions for additions and/or deletions will be requested. Suggestions for additions will include a completed Section I of the form. Suggestions for deletions will include a rationale.
3. Interdivisional input on the updated draft list of nominated ecoregional featured species will occur through the ecoregional review process. Timeframe: five weeks – September 21 to October 25, 2009.
4. Stakeholder review and input on the draft list of nominated ecoregional featured species will be conducted by the ecoteams after ecoregional department review but prior to October 26, 2009. Timeframe: five weeks – September 21 to October 25, 2009.
5. Management unit supervisor(s) will submit to the habitat team, the updated draft list of featured species for the ecoregion, in prioritized order. Timeframe: one week – October 26 to November 1, 2009.
6. Selection process for the final list of featured species for each ecoregion:
  - a) The habitat team will review nominations, and input from WLD staff, other DNR divisions and stakeholders to make a recommendation for the final list of ecoregional featured species. Timeframe: three weeks – November 2 to November 22, 2009
  - b) WLD Management Team will review and finalize the WLD list of featured species. Timeframe – three weeks – November 23 to December 17, 2009.

### **Identification of Local Featured Species**

1. Nomination of local featured species is processed through the management unit supervisor. Exceptional species of high local value can be nominated as local featured species (e.g. local geographically-restricted T&E species or local highly-valued game species). Timeframe: three weeks – August 10 to August 30, 2009.
  - a) Section I of the *Featured Species Habitat Management Form* (form) will be completed to document the rationale and habitat issue for each nominated species.
  - b) Sufficient biological information must be available to guide planning (Section II).
2. Draft list of nominated local featured species will be circulated to all WLD staff in the management unit for internal review and comment. Timeframe: three weeks – August 31 to September 20, 2009.
  - a) Suggestions for additions or deletions will be requested. Suggestions for additions will include a completed Section I of the form. Suggestions for deletions will include a rationale.

3. Management unit supervisor will circulate the updated draft list of nominated local featured species to local FMFM, PRD, FD, LED staff for review and comment (suggest additions and/or deletions to list). Timeframe: three weeks – September 21 to October 11, 2009.
4. Updated list of nominations for local featured species, in prioritized order, will be submitted by management unit supervisor to the habitat team. Timeframe: three weeks – October 12 to November 1, 2009.
5. Selection process for the final list of local featured species:
  - a) The habitat team will review nominations, and input from WLD staff, other DNR divisions and stakeholders to make a recommendation for the final list of local featured species. Timeframe: three weeks – November 2 to November 22, 2009.
  - b) WLD Management Team will review and finalize the WLD list of featured species. Timeframe – three weeks – November 23 to December 17, 2009.

### **Determining Goals for Featured Species**

Wildlife Staff will be assigned to recommend habitat management goals for each featured species on the final WLD featured species list. A *Featured Species Habitat Management Form* will be completed for each species, describing:

- a) Scope for the featured species (statewide, specific ecoregion, local unit);
- b) Rationale for why it was chosen;
- c) The primary limiting habitat need(s). If multiple needs, list in priority order;
- d) Goals for that species (this could include target population levels; general statement of increase, decrease, or remain stable; hunter satisfaction indices, etc.);
- e) Habitat objectives for the primary habitat need: what we are doing (i.e. treatment, modification, etc.) and the quantity desired (i.e. acres, miles, number, etc.);
- f) Identification of priority landscapes where management could be executed, this should include the landscape type, geographic location, and/or a map of specific locations;
- g) Recommended evaluation methods and time schedule;
- h) Species goals: is there an acceptable monitoring method for the species and what is it? Timeframe: three weeks – January 4 to January 24, 2010;
- i) Final list of featured species and completed forms will be circulated to WLD staff and stakeholder participants. Timeframe: four days - January 25 to January 29, 2010.

## Glossary

**Featured species** are species that are highly valued AND have a habitat issue AND have been selected to focus management efforts. The WLD is stating that featured species are priorities for the division and that it will direct resources towards management of their habitats. These species are not the only species that the WLD values, but they are the higher priority species that have a habitat issue that we can address. The management of habitat for the featured species will affect other species to varying degrees.

**Goals** are broad-based statements of desired future conditions that give general direction and guidance for objectives. They describe the ultimate aim, accomplishment, or end toward which efforts are directed. Goals are the desired outputs or results, not the inputs or actions to get there. The format for a goal can be stated as “The goal is . . .” followed by a phrase describing the desired condition without the use of action verbs. Goals should not describe operational details but can be as specific as necessary to describe the desired condition. For example: “The goal is a population of 30,000 red kangaroos.”

**Management** is the judicious use of means to accomplish an end. There must be a problem, an unsatisfactory condition, or a concern that an unsatisfactory condition will develop in the future, in order to motivate management. The goals of management must: address an unsatisfactory condition, be capable of being achieved, and be backed by sufficient resources to accomplish the desired end.

**Objectives** subdivide the goal into separate and distinct approaches that can be implemented independently of other objectives to achieve a particular goal. They are measurable inputs that specify the “what” and “when” while avoiding the “how” and “why. Objectives provide targets toward which efforts are directed and standards against which accomplishments are measured. The format for an objective is: “The objective is . . .” followed by the word “to”, an action verb, the target of your action, the extent or intensity of your planned accomplishment, and a target date. For example: “The objective is to develop 2,000 acres of kangaroo winter cover each year over the next ten years.”

**Rationale** is an explanation or justification for “why” one has or has not set a goal. It is a list of reasons such as: documented threats; research; inventories; current paradigms, advocacy group positions; stakeholder wishes; historical records, available funding, other national, statewide, or regional plans; and anything else a reasonable person would find convincing. For example: “In the past, red kangaroos were common to the three counties where we plan management; they are highly valued by our citizens and are a part of our culture and lore; and there is a national advocacy stakeholder group which has frequently cooperated in funding habitat projects for kangaroos in our state.”

**Wildlife Habitat** is the home or environment where an organism or population lives. It is the total elements in an organism’s surroundings which have a direct bearing on that organism’s life, growth, reproduction, and survival. Habitat is meaningful only in the context of individual species. Habitat is a subset of the factors that affect a species or population and one way to promote or discourage a species.

## Featured Species Nomination Form Wildlife Division

*Section I is to be filled out during nomination process.*

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**Species Common Name:**

**Person Completing Form:**

**Date:**

**Scope:** (check only one) **Statewide:**

**Ecoregion:** EUP  NLP  SLP  WUP

**Local:**  **describe:**

**Rationale:** *Why is this species being recommended as a featured species?*

**Primary Habitat Need(s):** *What is the primary limiting habitat need(s) for this species?*

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*Section II is to be filled out after final featured species have been selected.*

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**Population Goals for Species:** *Identify goals for the species. This could include specific target population numbers; presence-absence; a general statement of increase, decrease, or remain stable; number of metapopulations; hunter satisfaction indices; reduction in complaints; etc.*

**Habitat Objectives:** *Approach that will be used to enhance habitat. Identify habitat objectives for the primary habitat need: what we are doing (i.e. treatment, modification, etc.) and the quantity desired (i.e. acres, miles, number, etc.).*

**Priority Landscapes:** *Identify priority landscapes where management could be executed. Include a description of landscape type, geographic location, and/or map of specific locations.*

**Recommended Evaluation Method:** *Method to be used to monitor goals for the species.*

**Time Schedule:** *Schedule for evaluating featured species response to habitat management.*

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