



TOOLKIT

FOR

Wildlife Conservation Leaders

Working Together to Reverse America's Wildlife Crisis
and Strengthen State Fish & Wildlife Agencies
for the next 100 years

BY NAOMI EDELSON

FRONT COVER:

Sea turtle release at Henderson State Park. June 2017. Florida Wildlife Commission - Photo by Rebekah Nelson

Foreword

THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION is proud to offer the first-ever **toolkit for wildlife conservation leaders** to strengthen state fish and wildlife agencies and reverse America's wildlife crisis. We envision building a broad-based coalition that will empower state wildlife agencies to fulfill their mission to conserve all wildlife for all people. A larger and broader constituency for wildlife will inspire political leadership to strengthen the capacity, governance, funding and meet the growing demands of outdoor enthusiasts who fuel our nation's economy. Our goal is to create the climate for strong and effective state fish and wildlife agencies for the next 100 years.

State fish and wildlife agencies, each state's leading authority for fish and wildlife, have identified the need for increased ability to fulfill their full mission of conserving all wildlife. Most recently, the [Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources](#) identified the need for robust and dedicated funding to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered. Significantly, the panel also recommended that agencies should "examine the impact of societal changes on the relevancy of fish and wildlife conservation and make recommendations on how programs and agencies can transform to engage and serve broader constituencies". The agencies, through the [Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies](#), created a [Fish and Wildlife Relevancy Roadmap](#) as a practical guide to overcoming barriers to broader relevancy, public engagement and support. This toolkit will serve to help support these changes from outside the agencies. The toolkit focus is on non-governmental conservation organizations (NGOs) and others poised to help support these changes from the outside the agencies.

Conservation NGOs have a long history of contributing towards wildlife conservation through scientific research, on-the-ground work like restoring habitat, acquiring lands and waters, recruiting volunteers, providing recreational opportunities, and educating youth and adults alike. Groups often work in close partnership with local, state and federal conservation agencies. NGOs particularly excel and have a unique role in their ability to be visible advocates, often as part of coalition efforts. This guide will help NGOs, particularly through a diverse coalition, advocate for strengthened state wildlife agencies. We need NGOs to take up this banner, if we are to generate the political will for change. The very future of our nation's wildlife is at stake.

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The toolkit will help you:

1

Build a coalition

dedicated to tackling the wildlife crisis and securing the future of all wildlife for all the people in your state.

2

Elevate wildlife crisis

By raising public awareness that we are facing a wildlife crisis as species decline rapidly, and the need for immediate action to prevent more wildlife from becoming endangered or even extinct.

3

Engage, support and inspire state wildlife agency leadership

on the future of the agency with tips on getting to know directors and commissioners, participating in meetings, proactively identifying potential board and commissioners, and developing positive effective relationships.

4

Secure wildlife funding

essential for state wildlife agencies to succeed in addressing the needs of more than 12,000 animal and plant species in need of proactive conservation attention, and to represent and meet the demands of an expanded wildlife and outdoor recreation constituency.

Table of Contents

6 How to use this toolkit

8 Introduction

Wildlife Crisis

Why Focus on State Wildlife Agencies?

10 State Wildlife Agencies

Challenges and Opportunities

15 What does success look like?

Envision the future of your state

17 Action 1: Build a Coalition

26 Action 2: Elevate the Wildlife Crisis

35 Action 3: Engage State Agency Leadership

46 Action 4: Secure Wildlife Funding

60 Conclusion

61 Appendix

Worksheets



Bison with Calf, Wyoming • JEREMY MATHIEU

How to use this toolkit

The aim of this toolkit is to provide a roadmap for the conservation community to support strengthening state fish and wildlife agencies. You'll find many links to connect you with fact sheets, publications, examples of successes from states, and useful background materials—many that have never been compiled in one place before.

Just as you reach into a toolkit for a hammer, screwdriver or tape measure needed for the job at hand, we encourage you to pick up the tool to fit your needs. The tools all serve to build an influential and effective coalition, a responsive and strong governing agency, secure increased funding, and ultimately a healthy future for wildlife. The order is not important, except for launching a funding campaign after you have all your ducks lined up. For example, a key part of building your coalition ([Action 1](#)) is to elevate awareness of the wildlife crisis ([Action 2](#)) and to engage, support and inspire state wildlife agency leadership ([Action 3](#)). To secure wildlife funding ([Action 4](#)), you'll be making the case for why we need investments.

Strengthening State Wildlife Agencies Actions

ACTION 1:

Build a Coalition

- Create a diverse, “big tent” coalition
 - Draft a vision for next 100 years
 - Determine coalition goals and objectives
 - Organize and host a state shareholders meeting or summit
 - Galvanize coalition for action
-

ACTION 2:

Elevate the Wildlife Crisis

- Write about the wildlife decline, stories of success, and the need to take action now
 - Circulate social media on state-specific wildlife crisis content
 - Lead awe-inspiring field trips for media and “influential leaders”
 - Organize press events around the coalition, wildlife, legislative champions, etc.
-

ACTION 3:

Engage, Support, Inspire State Agency Leadership

STATE WILDLIFE AGENCY DIRECTORS

- Develop a good, effective relationship with your state director
- Meet regularly with director, senior leadership, and wildlife diversity leaders
- Advocate for broadened conservation, recreation and education programs
- Advocate for vision of governance, capacity, authority, funding to reflect all wildlife and all citizens
- Proactively identify potential agency directors and advocate for their appointment

AGENCY COMMISSION/BOARDS:

- Attend and actively participate in commission/board meetings
 - Get to know your commission/board members
 - Advocate for broadened conservation, recreation and education programs
 - Advocate for vision of governance, capacity, authority, funding to reflect all wildlife and all citizens
 - Proactively identify potential board/commissioners
 - Advocate for appointment of visionary commissioners with governor and legislators
-

ACTION 4:

Secure Wildlife Funding

- Form a state-based wildlife funding task force
- Conduct feasibility study on funding mechanism
- Conduct polling on winning messaging
- Enlist state legislators and governor as champions
- Lead campaign using your big tent coalition to secure state wildlife funding

Let's Work Together



River Otters, California • JIM CUNNINGHAM

Saving America's wildlife is bipartisan, patriotic, and comes with natural ambassadors to elevate the cause—from river otters to monarch butterflies.

State fish and wildlife agencies are on the front lines of America's fish and wildlife conservation. State wildlife agencies have a legacy of success in recovering many iconic wildlife species, especially game animals and sport fish. However, there is still much left to do. The agencies' [State Wildlife Action Plans](#) identify more than 12,000 animal and plant species in need of proactive conservation attention. Many of these species have lacked significant conservation attention over the last century. The number of petitions for listing under the Endangered Species Act has gone up by 1,000 percent in less than a decade. In addition, over the next 100 years, *all* fish and wildlife will be at *increased risk* due to habitat loss and degradation, the spread of invasive species, imperiled water quality, and a rapidly changing climate.

To ensure wildlife populations recover and thrive, state wildlife agencies must have the abilities and resources to tackle serious challenges.

Now is the time to build momentum. Our window to act is short before conservation becomes too costly or even impossible — akin to heading to the emergency room, rather than taking early preventative action. Already, more than 150 species have gone extinct and 500 additional species not seen in decades may have vanished forever. Essential habitats that conserve the broadest array of species are experiencing stress at local, regional and global levels.



Role of **National Wildlife Federation**

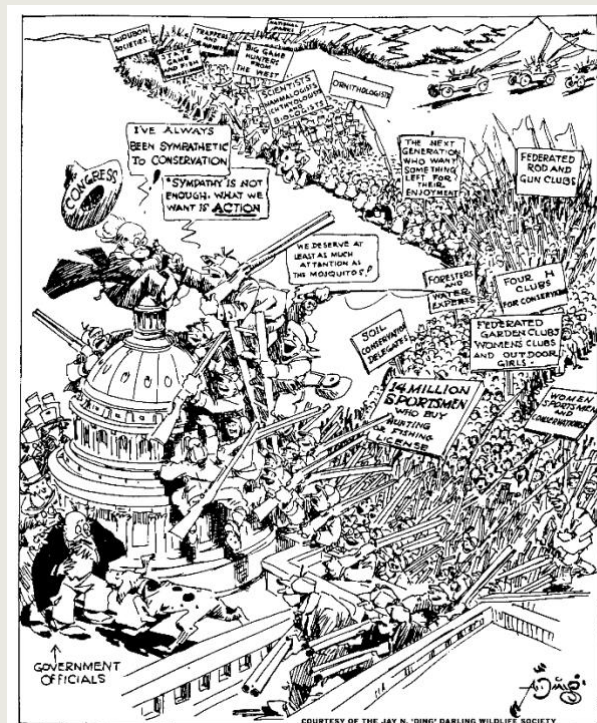
Why are we excited to provide this toolkit, work with partners, and do our part? As America's oldest and largest conservation organization, we work across the country to unite Americans from all walks of life in giving wildlife a voice. We've been on the front lines for wildlife since 1936, fighting for the conservation values that are woven into the fabric of our nation's collective heritage.

National Presence and State Affiliates

We operate from offices across the country, including our headquarters in Reston, Virginia; a National Advocacy Center in Washington, D.C.; and seven regional centers. The Federation also works with 51 state and territory [affiliates](#) autonomous, nonprofit organizations that take the lead in state and local conservation efforts and collaborate with the National Wildlife Federation to conduct grassroots activities on national issues.

A History of Leadership in State Wildlife Conservation

When J. N. "Ding" Darling founded The National Wildlife Federation in 1936, he visualized a conservation army for wildlife conservation. One of his famous cartoons shows garden clubs, hunters, birders, and others marching to Capitol Hill and demanding action. He created a federation of state affiliates to ensure action at the state and federal level. This led to great success with National Wildlife Federation helping lead the way to pass the Pittman-Robertson Act, also known as the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937. The Act established a fund for states for wildlife and their habitats from a federal excise tax on firearms. The Act was so successful that in 1950, [the Dingell-Johnson Act](#) (Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act) passed, using the same model for fishing gear. This was then expanded in 1984 with the [Wallop-Breaux Act](#) to include motor boat fuel. Together these acts have provided more than \$20 billion to states. Again, National Wildlife Federation and its affiliates played a strong role. Now we are among the leaders for the final piece of this three-legged stool to provide funding for species not hunted or fished through the [Recovering America's Wildlife Act](#).



Political Cartoon • JAY N. "DING" DARLING

With so many wildlife species in trouble, we must activate the conservation community, and as many Americans as possible. With broad support, dedication, tools, expertise, and funding, state wildlife agencies can step up to lead as they have before.

Complex societal trends reveal both hope and concern in engaging Americans. How people relate to wildlife is rapidly changing, as investigated by a strong team of researchers and available in the [America's Wildlife Values](#) report (2018). Tapping into these new interests will take making communication, education, and recreation programs relevant for today and future.

Every state fish and wildlife agency deserves our attention, support, inspiration, motivation, and funding. **Stronger state wildlife agencies will result from wildlife conservation leaders taking actions outlined in this toolkit.**

State Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Challenges and Opportunities

Apart from the threats faced by wildlife, state wildlife agencies face at least five related challenges to recover wildlife and habitats in trouble— inadequate and constrained programs; lack of associated funding; lack of awareness from the broader public; and thus lack of broad support. The agencies' structure, culture and governance reflects their origins and the success of a user pay, user - benefit funding source. Today, agencies must modernize to meet new demands and conserve all wildlife.

With every challenge comes opportunity. Outlined below are the main challenges and associated opportunities where coalitions will make a difference.

Challenge 1:

PROGRAMS INADEQUATE TO SOLVE GROWING WILDLIFE CRISIS

Most state wildlife agency programs and expertise are focused primarily on game and sportfish,

because of significantly greater funding from those outdoor recreationists. This had led to a lack of expertise, information, and conservation for songbirds, salamanders and frogs, butterflies, pollinators and many other kinds of wildlife that are at the heart of our wildlife crisis. The smaller-sized programs are under-represented in agency leadership or decision making.

Every agency has a [State Wildlife Action Plan](#) that lays out the *Species of Greatest Conservation Need* and the associated habitat needs with the best science available. However, the action plans are not yet sufficiently implemented and are not influencing agency priorities. Additionally, agencies may lack the full authority to manage all the state's wildlife. The agency's ability to fulfill their mission for all wildlife and all people is severely limited with these challenges.

Opportunity 1:

STRONG PROGRAMS WITH GREATER STAFF WITH GREATER EXPERTISE

Increased expertise, staff and programs would dramatically increase agencies' ability to tackle the direct needs of many declining species. Accelerated implementation of the agency's State Wildlife Action Plan would help focus research, monitoring, and on-the-grounds actions like re-introduction of species and habitat restoration of *Species in Greatest Need of Conservation*. Carrying out State Wildlife Action Plans would also leverage other conservation actions, from private landowners to land trusts to bird observatories to the academic community in that state. The plan is meant to guide all interests not just the agencies.

Challenge 2:

LACK OF UNITED FRONT IN CONSERVATION COMMUNITY

America's wildlife is a public trust—meaning that wildlife has no owners and therefore is entrusted to the people. You can own private property, but not the wildlife that dwells there. Wildlife belongs to all of us, and therefore we are its stewards, with our governments at various levels taking on the role of managing for the public good. This principle came as a response to the converse position in Europe where kings and others owned the wildlife. This public trust is a special opportunity for Americans of all stripes, not just our political leaders, to ensure wildlife thrive in a rapidly changing climate.

Because of the history of state wildlife management and how it has been funded, the most engaged constituents are hunters and anglers. They have a strong active relationship with the state wildlife agencies. Other wildlife conservation groups have often felt like their interests are ignored, since they don't directly contribute towards funding the agency. Additionally, the wildlife community is fractured with one organization focusing on one species, and another on a different one. Some emphasize land and others only water. By not often working together towards all wildlife and their habitats, the broader wildlife community doesn't provide a united front and is easier to disregard.

Opportunity 2:

A RISING TIDE LIFTS ALL BOATS: HEALTHY WILDLIFE AND HEALTHY HABITAT

All wildlife relies on abundant and healthy habitat. Most of the threats facing wildlife are common to all wildlife, and all agencies need greater funding. These elements can offer opportunities for the conservation community, as well as recreation and associated businesses, to work together to lift all boats. A broad and big coalition puts your state in the best possible position to secure strong support for agencies to manage and reliably fund all wildlife for all people. When varied interests come together, their many voices reach key players. An effective coalition creates unity over opposition of special

interests. The power of “surround sound” to engage the media, influencers, and ultimately elected decision makers is remarkable. A united conservation community sends a message of real need and real power.

Challenge 3:

CHANGING RECREATIONAL INTERESTS

While hunter numbers are significant at 11 million nationwide in 2016, participation has been declining and dropped by two million in just the last five years. Anglers increased from 33 to 36 million in the same period. Meanwhile, wildlife watching surged 20 percent from 72 million to 86 million participants ([2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, & Wildlife-Related Recreation, USFWS](#)). Wildlife watching includes the close-to-home bird feeding (59 Million) and wildlife gardening (8 million Americans), and the more active bird-watching (17 million Americans).



Boys having fun learning to birdwatch • NAOMI EDELSON

These numbers reflect a nation that connects with nature, but much differently than a century ago. We're more urban, and ethnically and culturally diverse. Unfortunately, there is little infrastructure or skills training aimed at these growing wildlife enthusiasts. Nature photographers need blinds and early morning access. Budding birders would benefit from the availability of binocular rentals and guided nature walks. Wildlife gardeners want information on the best native plants for their area. Some of this is available from NGOs who have filled the void, but agencies have the opportunity to

expand their reach to these other enthusiasts, or potentially lose them as constituents.

Opportunity 3:

TAP INTO SURGING WILDLIFE-WATCHING CONSTITUENCY

A changing demographic offers a tremendous opportunity for state wildlife agencies to tap into that rising constituency for funding and support. Imagine if 86 million wildlife watching participants all understood the wildlife crisis, recognized the significance of healthy wildlife and habitats, and were willing to take action. At the same time that increasing numbers of people participate in birdwatching, the birds themselves are plummeting in numbers—from the red-headed woodpecker to the bobolink and Allen’s hummingbird.

State fish and wildlife agencies have strong programs to recruit, retain and reactivate hunters and anglers, but nothing comparable with those interested in participating in other recreational interests like birdwatching or nature photography. A strengthened state wildlife agency will provide recreational and educational opportunities for wildlife watchers—building engagement and relevancy, too.

When wildlife agencies meet demands of all wildlife recreationists, they are investing in the economic future of their state. The same USFWS 2016 report stated that 101 million Americans participated in wildlife-related recreation and spent \$156 billion on equipment, travel, licenses and fees, and supported thousands of jobs. The related outdoor economy is booming ([\\$887 billion in consumer spending resulting in 7.6 million jobs](#)). As a result, a growing outdoor industry is vigorously advocating for the environment. This advocacy, along with that of the wildlife watchers, would be a momentous addition to Team Wildlife.



Hundreds of our 1,154 native bird species in the United States are in trouble. There [are 3 billion fewer birds](#) in the U.S and Canada since 1970. Birders should be strong advocates for recreational and conservation related programs at their state agency.

Birders on Field Trip • PAUL FUSCO, CT DEEP-WILDLIFE

Challenge 4:

TOO FEW PEOPLE ENGAGED IN NATURE AND EVEN FEWER WITH STATE WILDLIFE AGENCIES

While 40 percent of the populace participates in some wildlife-related recreation, that leaves 60 percent who do not, and are increasingly disconnected from nature. Wildlife is no longer a part of many people’s daily lives. The 2017 [Nature of Americans report](#) of 12,000 American adults and children surveyed found more than half of adults spent five hours or less in nature each week, and 8-12-year-old children spend three times as many hours with computers and televisions as they do playing outside. This report also shows some hope with Americans still having a deep and even growing interest in nature, but lack the experiences to strengthen this interest.

A disturbing disconnect also occurs with the public and their state wildlife agency. While all citizens have a stake in healthy fish and wildlife very few have a connection with their state wildlife agency, despite its charge to protect, restore and manage all wildlife for all citizens. The disconnect is often so great that it would be like sending your children to

school with little idea of who cared for them each day—from teachers on up to the principal, superintendent, and school board. This detachment fuels a lack of adequate funding and overall concern for policies.

“Every citizen has a stake in and benefits from healthy fish and wildlife, but most have little contact with or understanding of the state agency responsible for their stewardship. To remain relevant, state fish and wildlife agencies will need to transform their structures, operations and cultures to meet the changing expectations of their customers. If state fish and wildlife agencies fail to adapt, their ability to manage fish and wildlife will be hindered and their public and political support compromised.”

[The Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources](#)

Many citizens might even think their state parks department is the “authority” for wildlife, since they are more likely to have visited a state park than a state wildlife management area. Unless they are hunters and anglers, most hikers, paddlers, bird watchers, and backyard wildlife enthusiasts may not have interacted with their state fish and wildlife agency. The agency’s governance tends to represent only a narrow range of citizen interests in decision making, via their board or commission. This missing representation limits the agency’s support base and thus power to help wildlife.



The Nature Fix

Time spent in nature with wildlife nearby is good for everyone’s mental and physical health, according to the well-researched book, [The Nature Fix](#). For example, studies showed that 15 minutes in the woods reduced levels of the stress hormone cortisol. By increasing time in nature to 45 minutes, people in studies showed measurable improvements in cognitive performance.

Crested Butte, Colorado • KELLY LYON

Opportunity 4:

GET PEOPLE ENGAGED AND CULTIVATE A CONSERVATION COMMUNITY

Given the chance, encouragement, and pathway, Americans want more wildlife and nature in their lives, as the [Nature of Americans 2017](#) report reveals. Nature brings us happiness and clarity, and the more of it the better. More than the physical exertion of outdoor exercise, happiness is tied to the beauty of forests dappled in sunlight, the mellifluous song of a meadowlark, the rippling currents of a stream, and the unexpected appearance of a soaring hawk, trotting fox, or a bear padding by. Getting children outdoors, where studies show time in nature leads to healthier, stronger kids, promotes creativity, increases attention spans, decreases aggression, and improves learning in the classroom. Important to our cause, research also shows children who spend time in nature regularly become better stewards of

the environment. These data also hold true for adults!



Florida wildlife agency brings gopher tortoise to Girls Can Do Anything! camp • FWC – TIM DONOVAN

State fish and wildlife agencies can play a significant role in formal and informal education by leading people of all ages to nature, to wildlife, near and far. They can expand their educational outreach to schools, partner with state parks and nature centers, zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens, and create more citizen science opportunities. The very future of wildlife and the wildlife agencies depends upon that success.

Challenge 5:

TOO LITTLE MONEY FOR STATE WILDLIFE AGENCIES

State fish and wildlife agencies face a double challenge with funding—the need to diversify funding sources to benefit the full range of wildlife, and the simple need for more money for conservation.

Hunter numbers are declining nationally and thus traditional associated funding for wildlife agencies is dropping. These hunters and anglers have long paid for licenses and user fees (excise taxes) on gear that has provided the majority of funding for state wildlife agencies. The model has led to impressive conservation and restoration of wildlife and their habitats. The emphasis on game species has benefited many non-hunted species, too, and a wide range of recreationists. For example, protecting quail habitat conserves declining grassland songbird havens. Conserving rivers and providing accessible

fishing offers outstanding opportunities for birders and paddlers, too.

However, the funding is far less than what agencies need to meet their full mission and reflects only one arm of the entire constituency for wildlife. Because of the user-pay, user-benefit model, the structural organization of most agencies emphasizes game species management, while other wildlife programs (often titled wildlife diversity or in some cases nongame programs) receive little attention or funding. But the fact remains that agencies are responsible for a much broader suite of fish and wildlife than just those that are hunted or fished.

Opportunity 5:

MOVING BEYOND USER PAY, USER-BENEFIT

Strengthening state wildlife agencies means giving them the means, ability, and support for strong wildlife diversity programs, while continuing to honor the hunting and angling traditions. Added funding is critical to address the 12,000 animal and plant species identified in the State Wildlife Action Plans, and to better serve all outdoor recreationists. Moving beyond a user-pay, user-benefit system is necessary when wildlife is the public trust—the responsibility of all to fund and for the benefits to extend to the greater public.



Big Creek, TN • WARREN SANDER

What does success look like?

We offer this vision of a future strengthened state wildlife agency to inspire you and others, and to invite you to create a vision specific for your own state. What are we building with all these tools? What will that final “house” look like?

ENVISION THIS:

Increased Capacity

Every state wildlife agency has staff expertise and resources to address the full suite of wildlife and ecological challenges facing the state, including climate change. They have full program responsibility/authority, recognized in law, to conserve all wildlife species and native plants. Similarly, they have the capacity to meet the demands of all outdoor recreationists and reach out to all people in the state, through formal and informal education programs, who have yet to discover the importance of wildlife in their lives.

Positioned for Success

Every agency is fully equipped and re-tooled to solve the wildlife crisis and manage all wildlife for

all people. The agency’s structure, operations and culture are representative of the full array of wildlife, outdoor recreationists, and all citizens of the state.

Broader Constituency

Every agency has widespread support for its mission of conserving wildlife and habitat. Every agency has the trust, popularity and funding to conserve wildlife and habitats and provide education and recreation opportunities. Hunters and birders and gardeners alike are motivated to work together to conserve all wildlife, unified by a common desire to enjoy the outdoors, hike, paddle, and to pass on a love of nature to youth.

Reliable Funding

Every agency has adequate and reliable funding necessary to proactively conserve wildlife at levels identified in State Wildlife Action Plans. The funding comes from public sources and gives the agency the ability to provide education and outdoor recreation

and nurture the next generation of people who care about wildlife and habitat.

What's your vision?

We encourage each state coalition to write a vision for a strong state wildlife agency and offer the following as one example. Feel free to use, modify, or start from scratch. See also Action 3. . Please customize!

In my state, strong game and sportfish programs now include equally vibrant wildlife diversity programs with leadership at top levels and biologists and ecologists employed that fill in missing gaps—from entomologists (insect scientists) to ornithologists (bird scientists). Habitat is managed for the full breadth of wildlife.

Our education and outdoor recreation programs extend across rural and urban areas, engaging people in nature through wildlife viewing, hands-on participation, and citizen science. As we strengthen existing partnerships with hunting and fishing groups, we also work closely with the entire outdoors community and outdoor-related business in new partnerships, like expanding hiking and canoe trails into new areas that simultaneously protect wildlife habitat. We engage in ecotourism with birding and other wildlife trails. We develop and grow partnerships with native plant societies, master gardeners and master naturalists on behalf of pollinators. We support local communities, including city parks and schools to restore wildlife habitat. We partner with zoos, aquariums, and botanical gardens to reach their many visitors eager to safely experience wildlife close-up.

Reliable and consistent wildlife funding gives all state residents a way to join hunters and anglers in

contributing to fish and wildlife conservation. Our State Wildlife Action Plan is fully funded, and more species are recovered every year with dedicated funding to solving the crisis through research, monitoring, habitat restoration and protection including habitat connectivity. Private landowners have financial assistance and guidance to conserve and manage habitat, from backyards to woodlands, grasslands, and farms.

Our state wildlife agency is popular and well known everywhere. Our commission/board reflects the diversity of the state's public as well as active constituencies. Our state legislature supports the state wildlife agency to make science-based decisions. Diverse conservation and recreation interests have come together to resolve competing visions and move forward to conserve wildlife and habitats. The economic value of the full array of outdoor recreation and nature-based infrastructure is well understood and valued in decision making. Public participation in wildlife decision-making is high, along with trust, and good will.

An important note: other state, local and federal agencies undertake significant work that benefits wildlife in many ways. All of these agencies working together can greatly improve the future for wildlife. However, the state fish and wildlife agencies have the full authority and mission to specifically address fish and wildlife. Thus, this toolkit focuses on these agencies. Our hope is that the more state wildlife agencies are able to fully address the wildlife crisis, the better they can partner with other agencies. All these agencies deserve our active support.

ACTION #1

Build A Coalition



Hikers • AUSTIN BAN

GOAL

Build a diverse coalition of individuals, groups and businesses dedicated to tackling the wildlife crisis and securing the future of all wildlife for all people in your state.

A diverse and broad coalition will cultivate the political willpower to inspire leadership, elevate the wildlife crisis, transform the culture and secure funding for state wildlife agencies. You will need to galvanize the coalition to take on these important actions. But how to go about it? Often, our instinct is to campaign for wildlife funding right off the bat. However, a large campaign succeeds when you start

with a strong, diverse and effective coalition with a clear purpose to reverse the wildlife crisis. A coalition gives you different voices, capabilities, raw numbers, and eventually power. Remember, no campaign is an island. You need a coalition.

There are some notable wildlife coalition examples including Teaming with Wildlife and more recently groups working together on [Recovering America's Wildlife Act](#). Teaming with Wildlife spent several years growing a coalition that then allowed it to become a force in the U.S. Congress resulting in securing first-time funding to states to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered through the [State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program](#). Additionally, nearly all successful state-based

funding programs resulted from diverse interests (water, parks and wildlife, sometimes even the arts community) coming together to overcome their opponents. Taking the time to organize a powerful coalition will lead to greater likelihood of success. A lasting coalition gives you staying power after your first successes to ensure accountability and continued progress.

This section leads you through four steps. First, create and lead a diverse, big tent coalition. Second, use this coalition to draft a vision statement. Third, organize a state shareholders/summit meeting. Fourth, galvanize this coalition to action! At the end, find more useful background, case studies, and a list of materials.

1. Create and lead a diverse, big tent coalition

While coalition building is hard work, simple steps will make the task easier and increase your likelihood of success.

The Guide to Building a State Coalition will outline the important steps to building any kind of coalition. First, establish a small core group or steering committee. Next, ensure your coalition is well balanced with a diversity of interest and capacity. Enlist “influential” and “influencers.” Act strategically, and consider tapping into existing coalitions.

NGOs are especially suited to coalition building and creating this conservation army. You—the NGOs—are less cautious, more creative, and less bureaucratic, can act faster, can get out compelling messages and mobilize citizens. That is your JOB. Several former state wildlife agency directors were interviewed and asked what they wished the NGOs in their state would do, or would have done: Here is what they had to say: “do and say the things we cannot say, howl over the bad things and applaud the good things”.

A united conservation community builds support with state legislatures, governors, or federal members of Congress, and becomes a force to be reckoned with, rather than ignored.

Early Planning

Each coalition needs a strong vision and goal(s), which will dramatically influence who should be in your coalition. Start by getting together with a small core group and determining your ultimate goal and objectives. A goal is the broad, long term outcome you want in the form of a “what” statement, not a “how.” An example of a goal may be “to do X by this percentage in our state by the year 20__.”

Next, determine the specific objectives, or milestones, to get to the goal. Examples of objectives might include “landowners educated about better land use practices to protect wildlife; political support for wildlife programs in the state legislature; state agency and regulatory practices in place to protect wildlife; and legislation for wildlife protection passed (or bad legislation blocked).”

A popular tool when planning goals and objectives is to use the “**SMART**” methodology. Make sure your plans are **Specific** (What do you want? When do you need it? Where does it need to happen? Who is the decision maker?) **Measurable** (What are your metrics for progress? How will you course-correct and adjust along the way? Consider criteria that is a mix of both quantity and quality, and both interim and long term) **Achievable** (What is realistic and attainable considering restraints of staff, time, resources, and potential opposition) **Realistic** (What is the political context? What are your resources? How intense is opposition? What happens after you win? Can you then implement your conservation success and defend it?). And **Timely** (How long will this take to achieve? Can this be achieved near term? Set an aggressive yet realistic timeframe to give effort urgency and focus).

Your ultimate goal and objectives will determine your most likely strategy. Strategy is *how* to achieve your objectives and ultimately the goal. Examples of strategies may be an information campaign directed

at a specific constituency; a behavior change campaign directed at landowners and farmers to change their land use practices; a corporate campaign working with specific industries to change business practices; a regulatory campaign to change how state agencies implement certain rules; or a legislative lobbying campaign or ballot measure to pass (or block) legislation. Your strategy will in turn determine what tactics to use to carry out the strategy. Examples of tactics are the building of strategic coalitions, events, reports and publications, earned and social media, and building grassroots and grassroots networks for support.

This toolkit offers many suggestions for taking action. Determining your path forward with a core group will help you decide who to invite to be part of the larger coalition. Take a closer look at several key constituencies featured here, with talking points to encourage participation.

Hunters and Anglers



Next generation learning to fish • NAOMI EDELSON

These outdoor enthusiasts often have a strong relationship with their state fish and wildlife agency. Many of them understand the agency's role, on-the-ground results, funding, and political power. Hunters and anglers often include conservative voices and can ensure the coalition can form bipartisan support. They are a very important asset, can play a significant leadership role, and are an essential ingredient in any state's coalition. The benefit to them is clear in sharing the cost of wildlife conservation and securing urgently needed

funding for habitat conservation and restoration. Find talking points [here](#).

Gardening and Backyard Habitat Enthusiasts



Gardening for Wildlife

About 80% of our nation resides in an urban/suburban area according to the U.S. Census. Please reach out to urban community and gardening groups that increasingly recognize the importance of access to nature for children and people of all ages. National Wildlife Federation's [Garden for Wildlife](#) website is an excellent resource for outreach and for directly connecting with people in your state already involved with wildlife habitat certification at their home, or in schools, houses of worship, and other pollinator and monarch butterfly gardens.

There are 90 million gardeners in the United States and almost 9 million that "garden for wildlife," a growing and potentially active support base. Find talking points [here](#).

All Outdoor Recreationists

Engage the fast-growing sector of outdoor recreationists participating in activities like bird watching ([find talking points here](#)), nature photography ([find talking points here](#)), and gardening for wildlife. In 2016, 86 million people (34 percent of all Americans) watched wildlife (see [USFWS report](#)).

The [2017 Outdoor Participation Report](#) from the Outdoor Industry Association documents 144 million Americans, or almost half of the US population, taking part in an outdoor activity at least once in 2016. A significant 42 million Americans went hiking, with an average of 14 outings per hiker. Camping (car, backyard, backpack, RV) attracted 40 million participants, with an average of 13 outings per camper. Find talking points here.

Outdoor Businesses

From nature tourism-related bed and breakfasts to outfitters and guides and to retailers and manufacturers of outdoor recreation equipment, many businesses share a common interest in supporting increased state wildlife funding and stronger state wildlife agencies with expanded capacity and authority.



Great American Campout • DANA ROMANOFF

Without thriving wildlife and habitats, the economic loss alone would be monumental. The outdoor recreation industry contributes \$887 billion to our national economy annually, creates 7.6 million direct jobs, and generates \$124 billion in federal, state, and local tax revenue, according to the [Outdoor Industry Association](#). You can find your state's data there, too. As threats multiply to our wildlife, public lands and waterways, more alliances are forming, and existing ones are expanding. Take a look at the [Maine Outdoor Coalition](#), the [Outdoor Alliance](#), and the [Washington Wildlife & Recreation Coalition](#). Find talking points here.

Businesses Linked to Lands, Waters and Wildlife

Think broad. While the outdoor industry is a natural connection, consider all businesses that make a living off the land and have a vested interest in preventing wildlife from becoming endangered. Those include farmers, foresters, ranchers, small private landowners, and developers and energy companies. One strong appeal of proactive wildlife management is preventing wildlife from becoming listed under the Endangered Species Act, a critical safety net for species at risk of extinction that triggers a strong regulatory process to succeed. Being proactive and addressing wildlife declines gives businesses many assurances, more flexibility and reduces risk for them. Business talking points here.

Accredited Zoos, Aquariums and Botanical Gardens

Almost 200 million people a year visit these nature filled educational experiences. Zoos, aquariums and botanical gardens have large networks, are leaders in their communities, and reach families who may love wildlife but do not yet venture off the pavement. Their conservation work includes captive rearing and propagation of endangered species, rescue and rehabilitation of injured wildlife, and conducting important research. Their mission to save wildlife makes them a natural and powerful ally.



Woodland Park Zoo, Seattle, WA • RYAN HAWK

As you customize your coalition for your state, continue to think outside the box for groups to involve, including the business and tourism community that can carry a “good for business” message. Consider groups with good political connections.

For examples of coalition diverse memberships:

- [Minnesota Environmental Partnership](#)
- [Colorado Outdoor Stewardship Coalition](#)
- [Recovering America’s Wildlife Act](#)

OTHER TIPS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Focus on What Unites Not What Divides

We suggest the coalition you build follow the “big tent” model—bringing everyone in who cares about the future of wildlife under one tent. From urban to rural, hunters to birders, gardeners to farmers, and hikers to boaters, you’ll find a common passion for wildlife. As you build your coalition, credit generously and showcase everyone.

When starting out, look for groups that contribute skills to further the coalition, like grassroots organizing and communications. A compelling vision for saving wildlife and habitats for all will bring people together.

Stay with the common ground and purpose, acknowledging where you may not agree on some issues. With a common goal of strengthening our state fish and wildlife agencies to secure a future for all wildlife and people, you all wear that same hat to the table.

Follow the 90 percent rule—focus on the 90 percent you agree on and put aside the 10 percent of differences.

Habitat is a common denominator—a future where all wildlife has room to thrive. Your group may

already apply this common ground value with your membership as a way to move forward with unity.

FOCUS ON THE BIG PICTURE TO CULTIVATE STAYING POWER

Many coalitions form for one-time purposes, like passing funding legislation or a ballot measure. This coalition should be built to achieve the full slate of goals, acting more like shareholder groups that assure their trustees are investing wisely, since everyone has a stake in wildlife and the outdoors. There are many more issues for this coalition to take on beyond funding.

WORTH IT? YES!

Many voices speaking up together are powerful, especially when a coalition represents a broad spectrum of public interests. Without the 6,300-strong Teaming with Wildlife coalition nationally, we would not have the [State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program](#), the first federal funding program to focus on preventing wildlife from becoming endangered. That same coalition is instrumental in the current national efforts to pass the critically needed [Recovering America’s Wildlife Act](#) that will directly benefit your state-level efforts. Your state has its own history of successful coalitions.

Finding Coalition Members—Teaming with Wildlife

Many states developed coalitions in the late 1990’s as part of Teaming with Wildlife. Look here for the full list of 6000+ groups that made up Teaming with Wildlife, and note your state’s own list. Some states like Alaska, Iowa, and Ohio grew to more than 300 groups each. State wildlife agencies often played key coalition-building roles. Check here for ideas for groups to join your coalition. For Recovering America’s Wildlife Act’s growing [coalition](#) look here.

Role of Influentials

Who do you know who has influence to get you in the door to meet with a key decision maker? As we know, connections are everything. An influential might be a business leader, elected official, campaign donor, or prominent community member.

This is distinct from an “influencer” that might be swaying opinion via social media. An influential is usually someone that has a clear traditional leadership role with access to others in power. You also would want to engage social media influencers (see elevate wildlife crisis).

Make Strategic Choices

Always think strategically. You might gain early support from a statewide group representing hunting or angling to build buy-in and participation from all sportsmen groups. Early endorsements and participation from influential leaders can do wonders for launching your coalition. Your chair or co-chair might be a former governor, legislator, or celebrity.

Revive or Expand an Existing Core Group or Coalition

Your state may be ahead of the game and already rolling with a coalition. You may have one that needs reviving, could be bigger and more effective, or would be willing to focus on the wildlife crisis and the importance of carrying out the actions of this toolkit to strengthen state fish and wildlife agencies. You may have a coalition that has a related yet relevant focus, like outdoor recreation. Or you may have a coalition of arts and cultural interests that you could team up with to secure funding, as in the Minnesota example. Rather than develop a whole separate coalition, you might join and raise the voice and issues there.

Many state agencies created advisory groups to help develop [State Wildlife Action Plans](#). Since public input is a required element of action plans, every state has a list of groups that commented, as well as groups that participated in summits or public meetings. Some advisory groups may still be in place. Check for a list of groups in your state. Look at the focus of existing core groups for coalitions to see where you might direct their attention to solving the wildlife crisis. Groups are eager to work on positive, offensive strategies.

Coalition building can sound daunting and cost prohibitive. However, there are many creative ways to make excellent progress on a shoestring budget. One of your partners might have strength with fundraising and take the lead as your coalition grows. Remember, solving the wildlife crisis is of great importance to many groups. Once they know the solution lies with strengthened state wildlife agencies, they will want to be part of the conservation army.

2. Draft a vision for the next 100 years

A vision for a strong and adequately funded wildlife agency requires finding common ground. Clearly identify what the coalition can support, starting with your core group. We live in an era of innovation with start-up’s disrupting many long-held traditions and business models. In this case, we are not interested in creating disruption per se. Rather, drafting a vision for the next 100 years takes agreement that now is the time to look creatively at the challenges and opportunities. You will want to create time to “get on the same page” and thus have the same roadmap ahead. However, do not get stalled by the lowest common denominator. Consensus is good, but not always achievable.

Think big! The magnitude of the solution must match the magnitude of the problem. See the example from Washington for a vision of a future state wildlife agency. The Montana Wildlife Future Group drafted a white paper including a summary of their values and plan. A vision statement could be simple or include many specific aspects, depending on the expected campaign goals ahead.

3. Organize and host a state shareholders meeting and/or summit.

As your coalition grows, bringing groups together can be a powerful way to learn, exchange ideas, and

champion a vision and actions. A shareholders meeting and a summit are two similar but distinct suggestions. Pick the one that moves you forward. The idea of a shareholders meeting is to invite robust discussion of our commonly held wildlife “investment” that the agencies manage for us, and review where we are and want to go. A wildlife summit rallies and mobilizes participants around a cause or theme or to passing legislation, or securing funding. Whether hosting a shareholders meeting or a summit, use the State Wildlife Action Plan to focus the conversation.

Shareholders Meeting

Consider convening a meeting based on the concept of wildlife as a public trust. People are the shareholders and state wildlife agencies are the managers of that trust. Similar to the way corporations share successes and obstacles in an annual report, a shareholder meeting is a state-of-the-wildlife report with a focus on accomplishments and the challenges ahead. Invite your state wildlife agency to report to the coalition on accomplishments and challenges from the past year, with a focus on implementation of their State Wildlife Action Plan. Expand that invitation to other related agencies and groups to also highlight their work on behalf of wildlife, habitats, and wildlife-related recreation.

You might post a big map of the state and invite participants to write sticky notes with wildlife-related achievements or work in progress in various locations. This technique worked well in a recent series of [Monarch Butterfly Summits in the Midwest](#). The results identify strengths, weaknesses, gaps, and opportunities. A map is energizing to see all the work happening! Hiring a professional facilitator will assure you reap successful outcomes.



Wisconsin Monarch Butterfly Summit • WI DNR

Different from a town hall where people are invited to speak up and air complaints, the purpose is to share in a respectful environment. Being transparent and accountable is important to trust building. Rather than focus on all that’s gone right or avoid conflicts, be open about what could be improved and obstacles to success. The goal is to foster constructive dialogue to improve wildlife conservation with all players working together and to develop a shared pathway forward.

Wildlife Summit

We know from experience that a wildlife summit is an excellent tool for networking, strategy, and coalition building. While a shareholders meeting concept serves as a place to report, discuss, and build productive relationships, a summit mobilizes groups to be champions and enlists even more supporters. Consider a summit as a way to rally people to the cause. You want everyone to feel they are part of a historic, exciting time for wildlife.

Please see the Wildlife Summit guide for steps to a successful event as well as specific examples from five states (e.g. Missouri). Almost all of the Midwestern states hosted monarch butterfly summits that assembled diverse interests, including some that had never sat at the same table together. Zoos aquariums and botanic gardens are great venues to host such an event.

4. Galvanize for Action

Starting your coalition is one key step. Galvanizing and keeping it engaged is equally important. The Guide to State Wildlife Coalitions includes three essential tips for a galvanized coalition. Share information in a timely manner. Provide easy-to-take clear actions. Keep everyone motivated and focused with an eye on the prize.

Sharing information cannot be undervalued. Your coalition wants to know the latest and greatest news. They want to be kept in the loop and included. Show your members you value their involvement. Not everyone wants all the information, but erring on the side of more to meet all levels of interest. Create digestible, bulleted regular updates. You can always report on coalition member activities, even if there is not yet legislative action.

Take small steps to build the ladder of engagement. Some of your coalition leaders will be heavily invested and bring massive support to the table. Others might have simply signed a letter of support. Creating a menu of small actions can allow your members of differing capacities do what they can. If you make actions as easy as possible, members will likely do more. Creating template materials (draft letter to the editor, draft action alert, draft script) offers short cuts for action. Templates can be especially important for organizations with grassroots power, but no time to create their own action alert.

Aside from the basics of informing and engaging the coalition, you will want to provide inspiration! Reminding them of successes to date, the importance of the campaign's goals, the differences they can make—all in strong positive language—will keep them at the table. They joined your coalition to make a difference. Remind them of their power to do so. Credit them when they do. Many small accomplishments add up to a strong foundation for the larger campaign. Inspire to create the momentum for the next stage. Offer hope!

Case Studies

More funding for state fish and wildlife agencies often serves as a common denominator, allowing groups with differing interests to work together and forge stronger relationships. While they may differ on certain funding priorities, they likely support more dollars targeted to reverse the wildlife crisis. Often, the strongest state coalitions are those that include diverse funding goals (e.g. wildlife and parks, or wildlife and water, and arts and culture (see Minnesota).

CASE STUDY

Missouri Model

Missouri is the first, and one of only a few states with expanded funding for the Missouri Department of Conservation. The Conservation Federation of Missouri, an NWF affiliate, was integral to an impressive coalition formed in the 1970s. Their campaign was entitled the *Design for Conservation* and called for a one-eighth-of-one-cent sales tax. These groups came together for a diversity of projects that met the coalition's similarly diverse goals, as detailed in this [history on the state's website](#).

Design for Conservation called for creating community lakes for close-to-home fishing, research on endangered species, developing stream accesses and, above all, more public land for recreation and species conservation. The carefully planned road map has become a national model for conservation.

CASE STUDY

Minnesota Coalition—Merging Wildlife with Parks, Arts, Clean Water, Trails

The [Minnesota Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment](#) passed in 2008 as a ballot measure, because of its **broad, successful coalition**. The constitutional amendment creates a dedicated and stable funding source

through an increase of the sales tax for clean water, parks and trails, arts and culture, and habitat restoration. Note that by bringing more interests into the coalition, the support broadened. Today, the **outcomes are clearly documented and easy to access**—assuring continued popularity for the program. Please

see this link to: [Minnesota's Legacy- Watch the Progress, Monitor the Funds.](#)



Additional Resources

- Target audience talking points
- How to form and lead a state coalition
- Join the coalition form template
- State coalition members
- How to organize and host a state summit and shareholders meeting
- Draft a vision for the future

ACTION #2

Elevate the Wildlife Crisis



Monarch butterfly, MN • JENNIFER STROM

GOAL

Raise awareness that we are facing a wildlife crisis with many species at risk, and the need for immediate action to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered.

Americans from all walks of life value wildlife and in general support its conservation. This is true in rural, urban, and suburban communities. Valuing wildlife crosses many divides in America—geography, politics, race, ethnicity, and more. A long polling record is evidence of this support. In fact, a June 2017 poll of hunters and anglers showed strong support for conservation across party lines. [A 2015](#)

[poll](#) of registered voters across a wide spectrum of the public found a whopping 90 percent support the Endangered Species Act.

However, despite hundreds if not thousands of species of wildlife in steep decline, most people have little awareness of the crisis or the need to take action now before they become endangered. They also lack understanding of the role of the state fish and wildlife agency to protect, conserve and restore wildlife and their habitat. Meanwhile, fewer Americans spend time in nature. The challenge is to engage, inform, and inspire groups and individuals to make strengthening state fish and wildlife agencies a high priority. We must communicate the

urgent wildlife crisis and reach a diverse constituency with relevant messages.

While polling shows biologists are especially trusted sources of information, government agencies are often not fully equipped to communicate with a broad public. Conservation organizations often are highly experienced at compelling messaging, including social media, have the freedom to communicate the needs of an agency, and frequently work with the state's media. The agency's State Wildlife Action Plan provides detailed information on the needs in every state. If a state coalition can work together to use this information and elevate the crisis, the stage will be set for a ballot or legislative funding campaign, broadening agency authority, or other conservation needs.

Why the Crisis is Often Overlooked

One reason why many Americans overlook the wildlife crisis may lie in seeing high numbers of common wildlife, like white-tailed deer and wild turkeys. Most do not know that the two game species once teetered on the brink more than 100 years ago. State fish and wildlife agencies played a key role in their restoration, with support and funding from hunters and anglers. Their recovery today is no accident. Meanwhile, Americans may view more news about the plight of Amazonian or African wildlife than the alarming decline of many songbirds right out their doors. Overall, Americans are less connected with nature and may have no idea what is happening with wildlife unless we tell them.

Recent news attention on the loss of birds and pollinators demonstrates the power of media to alert the public. Monarch butterflies have become a rallying species for people to take action, including the [Mayors Monarch Pledge](#). This success story of elevating a species in trouble demonstrates what's possible for songbirds, amphibians, bats, bees, shorebirds and other wildlife in trouble. In fact, the

Monarch butterfly is an excellent ambassador for any campaign.



When taking actions to elevate the wildlife crisis, keep in mind the importance of targeting two distinct audiences: 1) Influential leaders such as business leaders, state legislators, governors, and members of Congress; and 2) General public/voters to help set the stage for any public funding campaign.

Explore the four sections below—the first focused on getting the story out, the second on field trips, the third on press events, and the fourth on presentations. At the end, find more useful background, case studies, and materials.

1. Get the story out on America's declining wildlife—and the need to take action.

Communicate via **newsletter articles, op-eds, blogs, letters to the editor, public news stories, and social media** to make two points — there is a real problem and a real solution to the crisis. When we invest, we succeed, and therefore, we have hope for the future. Use case studies to illustrate success. This toolkit contains links to newsletter articles, op-eds, blogs, letters to the editor, magazine articles, news stories and other examples Explore National Wildlife Federation's guide to online and social media and overview of working with the media.



Northern Slimy Salamander • DENNIS P. QUINN

Use [Fast Facts](#) as a simple way to present the information. For details, access Reversing America's Wildlife Crisis.

TELL THE STORY SO PEOPLE WILL CARE

In all forms of media, tell the story so people will care. Depict the wildlife crisis and state wildlife. Direct attention to State Wildlife Action Plans, the proactive blueprint to addressing the crisis. Use the plans to demonstrate that we have a solution ready that only requires support and funding. Give people hope and tangible actions to make a difference. If needed, create your own materials or encourage your agency to write short wildlife and habitat fact sheets that highlight the crisis and actions succinctly. Broader messaging about clean water and air is very effective and should be integrated into any communications plan.

America's Wildlife Crisis: By The Numbers



<p>~1/3 Species at Increased Risk of Extinction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of species in best-known plant and animal groups with conservation status of critically imperiled to vulnerable (G1-G3) • Extinction risk assessments by NatureServe and state natural heritage programs based on verified occurrences and population trends <p>www.natureserve.org/explorer</p>	<p>~12,000 Species of Greatest Conservation Need</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of species identified in State Wildlife Action Plans as in need of conservation attention and investment • SGCN lists developed by state fish and wildlife agencies with partner input • Primary target of funding from Recovering America's Wildlife Act <p>www1.usgs.gov/csas/swap</p>	<p>>1,600 Species Listed Under Endangered Species Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of federally listed threatened or endangered species • Species listings determined by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration • >10% of Recovering America's Wildlife Act funding for federal or state T&E species <p>www.fws.gov/endangered</p>
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State Wildlife Agency websites that lay out the wildlife crisis and invite the public in:

Hawaii: Compelling information — “More than half of native habitats have been lost, and the introduction of non-native plants, animals, and diseases constitutes an ongoing threat to native animals and the very existence of entire species.”

Massachusetts: Points to how many species right up top in a large heading—“The Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan, as required by Congress, presents the 570 Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Commonwealth, the 24 types of habitat that support these species, and the actions necessary to conserve them.”

Pennsylvania: Lists the groups of species of greatest conservation need on its home page and has a welcoming tone and includes an inspiring quote:

“In the end, the 2015-2025 State Wildlife Action Plan is a declaration -- an affirmation that each of these wild creatures is an important part of a vivid, vibrant Penn's Woods, and the birthright of every Pennsylvanian.”

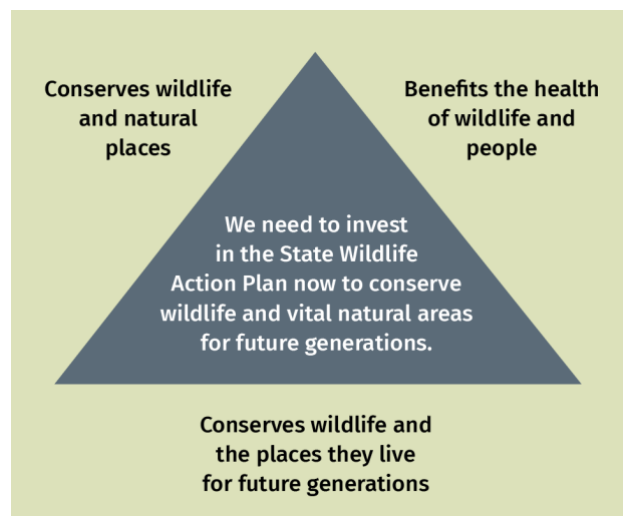
from the PA Wildlife Action Plan Foreword

Oregon: Oregon Conservation Strategy: A Blueprint for Success website highlights species, habitats, and actions that include [outreach](#). The full color photos and easy online access are an excellent example, by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Use Your State Wildlife Action Plan and Associated Effective Messaging.

Your [State Wildlife Action Plan](#) contains significant information on wildlife at-risk and proactive actions to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered. It's a great resource, and unfortunately largely overlooked. The plans can appear daunting, yet some agencies have produced excellent webpages and fact sheets that highlight wildlife of greatest conservation need. If your state lacks easy to access information to communicate with the public, encourage your state wildlife agency to highlight compelling wildlife, habitat, and actions from their plans into simple digestible information.

When the plans were first created and ready to be released, significant message testing was undertaken including focus groups, telephone surveys of voters, and online polls aimed at conservationists. The results and messaging recommendations are still relevant today and should be considered as you talk about your state's Wildlife Action Plan.



State Wildlife Action Plan messaging summary.
To view the complete graphic go [here](#).

USING WILDLIFE AS THEIR OWN AMBASSADORS

Identify wildlife ambassador species with wide appeal and tell the story of how one creature is in trouble and needs our help, including success stories for hope. Your state may already have excellent fact sheets ready to use, like Connecticut's on the [wood turtle](#). [National Wildlife Federation's blog](#) often has great examples too. Monarch Butterflies, so well known, are indeed a true wildlife ambassador reaching a variety of constituents and the public-at-large.

EMPLOY THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Reach out to people of all ages in the media they like. Make use of Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, E-News, Blogs, and other sources with appeal to certain demographics and levels of engagement. Use social media wisely for best benefits. For instance, currently [Snapchat](#) is the most popular social media platform for teens through 34-year-olds, but drops off sharply for older users. Some examples are provided here. Can your coalition's social media savvy members create a campaign for five wildlife species in crisis in your state? Enlist social media influence to reach many more people than your own following.

CELEBRATE WILDLIFE AGENCY HEROES AND HEROINES

Elevate the importance of the wildlife crisis and the role of the wildlife agency in solving the crisis. By doing both, you will increase support for your state wildlife agency to add needed expertise and capacity. Showcase agency biologists and others who are in the field making a difference for wildlife. Share on social media. Giving conservation awards to staff within the agency can lead to great media coverage. Here's an example from Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries: "[LDFW Botanist Chris Reid's Work to Save Louisiana's Remaining Coastal Prairie Recognized by Louisiana Wildlife Federation.](#)"

BROADER CONSERVATION MESSAGING

The Nature Conservancy has repeatedly commissioned surveys to find out the best language and messaging to build support for conservation. These include:

- Talk about safety and health first—shifting conversation from conservation as nice to have to need to have. Stress how conserving land, water, and wildlife protects our own health. Make the connection to how we are safer from floods or drought, for example, when we care for and restore watersheds for wildlife and people.
- Connect to clean water, and especially conserving drinking water.
- Stress the importance of protecting natural areas as a way to help children get outdoors.

"Outdoor recreation is a part of our way of life—from hunters and fishermen to young children who play in parks. Protecting our natural areas will ensure that we still have places to hike, bike, boat, fish, hunt, see wildlife, or just enjoy the peace and quiet of nature."

*Sample message that polls well
(from TNC survey 2012).*

CUSTOMIZE YOUR MESSAGES

You should customize messages to be relevant to different influential people in your state, as well as conservation groups, businesses, and outdoor recreation groups. Articulate why they should care and how their activity will be impacted by inaction.

EXAMPLE: Invasive species outcompete native wildlife and ruin your favorite hikes. Here's a relevant message from the [Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#): "Hunters, hikers and birdwatchers can find that they are no longer able to walk in their favorite natural areas. Thorny multiflora rose, dense stands of buckthorn and other invaders fill in the understory of once open forests and grasslands. As the habitat is modified by such invasive plant species, the wildlife that depends on native species decline as well."

LOOK FOR NEWS HOOKS AND MULTIPLE MEDIA OUTLETS

Share your message in multiple ways to access different age groups and interests. Insert the issue into existing forums and materials. Always look for relevant news hooks and timely events that provide a touchstone for telling the story. For example, every December or early January, the media covers [Christmas Bird Counts](#). Plan ahead to engage reporters to link the count to declining birds and the importance of citizen science. For example, the counts show serious declines of the American kestrel, bobwhite quail, and loggerhead shrike.



Bobwhite Quail • FLORIDA FISH & WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Other wildlife related dates for news opportunities specific to your state include Earth Day (April), International Migratory Bird Day and/or Gardening for Wildlife Month (May), Endangered Species Day (May), and National Hunting and Fishing Day (September) ([LINK TO CALENDAR](#)).

New reports on the wildlife crisis, changing wildlife participation, or progress in the Recovering America's Wildlife Act offer a natural hook for your state. Rare bird sightings garner media attention, too, and offer an excellent chance to be quoted on both the rare bird and efforts to reverse the wildlife crisis.

SHOW THE CRISIS HAS A SOLUTION

Point out that success is possible against improbable odds, using examples with both historic recovery stories, like the wild turkey and more

recent successes, like the [return of trumpeter swans to Minnesota](#)—an effort made possible by the state's wildlife diversity program.



Trumpeter Swans • KELLY SIEBECKE

Since the inception of the federal State Wildlife Grants program in 2000, many state agencies have increased efforts to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered and have inspiring stories to share. The return of our nation's symbol, the bald eagle, is an inspiring story for states to tell the story of their role in recovery of a once endangered bird.

Tell the story of a wildlife species where preventative action resulted in not having to list it as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (see [New England Cottontail Rabbit story](#)). Celebrate a win where the investment or resources turned around a dire situation. Highlight the state wildlife agency role in the success, including their expertise and actual on-the-ground actions.

HOLD UP PARTNERS

Using your State Wildlife Action Plan as one resource and branching out to find others, look for wildlife success examples that involve partners. Why? With a task this daunting, we need all the partners we can get for success. No one agency or group can succeed alone. Partnerships also build good will and are cost-effective.

You might showcase a conservation group that helped band birds or remove invasive plants. Elevate a private landowner who received technical

advice based on new research that led to new best management practices. Profile a member of the business community that avoided siting a project in an area important for wildlife.



[Conservation Northwest](#), founded in 1989 “to protect, connect, and restore wildlands and wildlife from the Washington Coast to the British Columbia Rockies” has a legacy of leading successful campaigns through coalition building with an emphasis on collaboration. The group leads or helps a range of coalitions based on a principle of working together to build a “stronger, wilder future for the Great Northwest!” This strategy of collaboration and coalition building, including a 2018 success story, played a key role in helping the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife [restore vanishing fishers](#) to forests. This great story generated excellent media coverage.

Fisher in snow at Mount Rainier National Park
BRIAN R. BARNES

2. Host an awe-inspiring wildlife experience for Influentials and Media



Hill staff releasing shorebird • JILL FELDHOUSEN

One of the best ways to tell the story of proactive conservation to influential leaders (state legislators, your governor, congressional representatives, and businesses) and the press is to organize and host a field trip. Showcase a wildlife project on behalf of a declining species that need our attention. By partnering with your state wildlife agency, you can provide people with a close-up awe-inspiring and even magical experience.

With your help as an NGO, your state wildlife agency can create an event that allows people to come into close contact with wildlife in a way they wouldn't otherwise. For example, they might organize a trip for influentials to a site where migrating songbirds or shorebirds are caught in nets, weighed, measured, banded, and released. NGOs can take care of the invitations, logistics to get people to the site, talk about the importance of the agency and need for action, with the agency playing the key role of being the biologists in action, showcasing their expertise with wildlife.

Many successful field trips were organized in several states for staff with members of Congress, taking them to witness concentrations of migrating shorebirds in one case, and in another, a memorable visit to a hacking (transitioning birds

back to the wild) tower for Peregrine Falcons. The influentials got to hold the falcon chick for just one life-changing second—enough for them to become ardent supporters of funding for state wildlife agencies.

3. Organize press events around coalition, wildlife or legislative champions, or newsworthy actions

When you hit a newsworthy milestone, issue a press release or take it to the next level. Hosting a press event requires more planning and can yield excellent coverage. Press events, like field trips, can be held in a dramatic setting (as long as they are within easy reach of the media) and combined with a breathtaking release of an injured eagle or some other bird or animal (like a sea turtle) that draws reporters. As always, make the highest use possible of your wildlife ambassadors and the people working to conserve them.

A good example is the 2016 release of New England Cottontail rabbits back into the wild that attracted an [AP News Story](#) and drew attention to the plight of this species and hope for its recovery.



Reintroducing a New England Cottontail, JOHN KANTER

Zoos, aquariums, and botanical gardens offer another way to provide a photo-op with wildlife, especially if there isn't a readily available wildlife experience. A central location makes it easier for press to attend.

Forming a coalition of diverse groups (the unlikely or unusual allies' angle) dedicated to solving the wildlife crisis is a potential milestone, with opportunities for representatives to be together on a panel addressing the media and taking questions.



Women in Conservation Award for Gina McCarthy • NWF

A press event centered on a wildlife champion can honor an outstanding volunteer, a member of your coalition, or an agency staff person. The latter is a chance to hold up and shine a light on the unsung heroes and heroines in our state fish and wildlife agency. Here's an example—a story about [Carroll Henderson, Minnesota DNR](#).

You can tie your press event on a wildlife champion to a larger commemorative month, like Women's History Month. NWF gives out awards to [women wildlife champions](#) during this month. While a news tip to a reporter or press release might be all you need to highlight a champion, awards are often excellent press events. For the mechanics of holding a press event, see National Wildlife Federation's Guide to Media.

4. Give presentations at regular meetings of conservation groups and partners

Create a show to take on the road that your coalition members can present at meetings. All you need is a PowerPoint and a fact sheet. You might start with these sample PowerPoints. Show rather than tell people about the wildlife crisis in your state, choosing charismatic wildlife species as

ambassadors. Make sure it's clear what you are asking people to do—whether it's joining the coalition, writing letters to the editor, supporting legislation, or attending wildlife commission meetings on key topics. You are bringing the issue right to the target audience rather than just hoping

they will read an article. Attendees are the most interested or active members of a group, so more likely to actually take action on your behalf. Be sure to send around a sign-up sheet so you can add their names to your action alert lists.

Additional Resources:

- Guide to online tools and social media
- Overview to working with the media (interviewing, contact lists, placing op-eds, etc.)
- Talking points on Wildlife Crisis and Preventing Wildlife from Becoming Endangered
- Example op-ed, newsletter article, LTE
- Example social media
- Field trip examples
- Conservation Language Tips
- State Wildlife Action Plan Messaging
- Polling
- Power points
- Crisis reports and articles
- Wildlife Calendar

ACTION #3

Engage, Support, Inspire State Agency Leadership



North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission staff Kevin Parker and Mike Lanzone hold a golden eagle • C. KELLY | NCWRC

GOAL

Engage, support and inspire state agency leadership and governing entities to create the future state wildlife agency by expanding the successful model of conservation for game species to all wildlife and to expand wildlife-related outdoor recreation and education to all people.

Fulfilling Agency Mission: Expanding Capacity, Expertise, Leadership

State wildlife agencies mission statements (check your agency here) lay out their charge and duty to

take care of all wildlife for all people. These agencies have a proven track record with game and sportfish, employing well trained professional biologists to apply proven wildlife management techniques to recover numerous wildlife species. The agencies have staff dedicated to waterfowl, upland birds, furbearers, big game (deer, elk), and sportfish. These programs and their managers lead the agency at the highest levels working closely with the agency director. We need to replicate this expertise and capacity for other wildlife species and incorporate these staff into leadership roles as well.

Wildlife diversity programs are often a division within the agency that manages a large suite of mammals, birds, amphibians, invertebrates, and

sometimes plants that typically are not game or sportfish. These programs would ideally have expertise from biologists with expertise in various species and habitats. See Texas's job description for an invertebrate biologist [here](#). With our growing wildlife crisis we must increase both agency expertise, capacity, and ability to include the needs of all wildlife when making important habitat restoration and acquisition decisions. Currently, wildlife diversity programs with their limited funding and few staff (some as low as 3) often fall lower in the agency structure and have limited means to inform agency leadership decision making.

State wildlife agency staff created a "functional model" that shows key areas for growth for the agencies ([link here](#)). Also, you can find [here](#) examples of several wildlife diversity programs (Montana, Idaho, Georgia and Missouri).

Joining the need for capacity and expertise is the importance of expanding programs to meet today's challenges. For example, most states do not have an urban wildlife program, even as more people live in cities. Some do. Texas serves as a model for hosting an urban biologist in all of their largest cities.

While several states work with municipalities (Maine, New Hampshire and Texas), most do not provide technical assistance to guide the emerging pollinator habitat and wildlife aspects of green infrastructure, including transportation, water and climate resiliency. As our natural world shrinks, these urban areas offer the potential to restore wildlife habitat while reaching people where they live.

Law enforcement is rightly focused on protecting our wildlife from poaching and illegal activity tied to hunting and fishing regulations. In our nation's past, misuse or non-existent laws resulted in drastic loss of fish and wildlife. Today we need more enforcement, and in some cases establishment of new laws, to protect other species such as reptiles and amphibians. Conservation officers also are on the front line in public places and play a vital role as educators. Ensuring they have good information

to share about all wildlife will allow them to serve as wildlife ambassadors for the agency.

Finally, agencies need human dimension staff to better understand the social values, behavior and needs of the various citizens in their state. This information is critical for agencies to evolve as their state changes over the next 100 years.

Broadened and expanded recreation and education programs are important to every state. These critical programs meet the demands of rising numbers of gardening, birding, nature photography and other outdoor constituencies, while interpreting nature for an increasingly disconnected population. Programs could include expanding access, enhancing wildlife viewing sites, skills training, and formal and informal education programs for urban, suburban and rural communities.

Many states (including Virginia, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Delaware) created birding trails that offer greater recreation and economic growth for local economies. [Maryland DNR's Master Naturalist program](#), much like a Master Gardener program, trains people in natural history who then volunteer at least 40 hours per year to help steward the natural world. Master Naturalist programs in some ways are akin to agencies' long-standing hunter education classes.

West Virginia's Wildlife Diversity Program used to host a popular annual Weekend for Wildlife that provided outdoor learning for adults and children alike. New Hampshire hosts a Discover WILD New Hampshire day to teach outdoor skills. Utah's Department of Natural Resources hosts an annual bald eagle day. These events create a fun, safe and easy way for people to learn about wildlife.

Information and Education programs have a significant job to do to alert people to the wildlife crisis. Agency website and materials should showcase species, habitats and actions from the State Wildlife Action Plan.

How an agency is structured affects each program's role in the agency. States structure their agency differently, with some focusing on species or categories of wildlife, habitat type, or kinds of work (habitat, research, education, etc.). [California has their "nongame" program within their wildlife branch](#), which is typical of most agencies. Some agencies also have integrated wildlife diversity staff and projects within several branches, instead of a stand-alone program; South Carolina, Ohio, and Colorado are examples.

Florida is one of the most recent states to reorganize to fully support their full mission and is the best example to date. Georgia and Nevada also elevated their wildlife diversity programs, even with lack of significant funding to ensure these programs were participating in key agency decisions. See how your agency is organized here; be sure to ask for the agency's latest organizational chart to ensure you have the most up-to-date version.

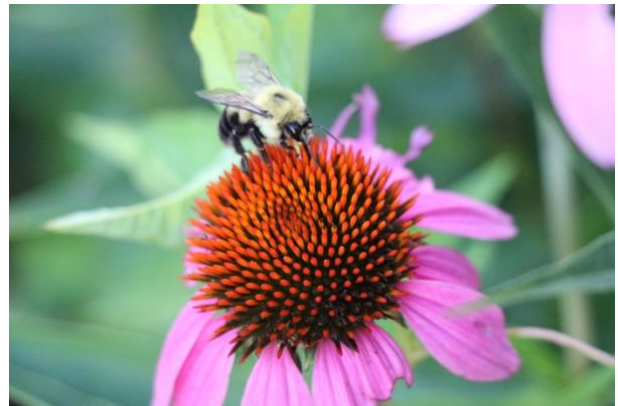
Legislative authority needed to expand state agency's role?

To better equip state wildlife agencies to manage all wildlife, agencies might need more legislative authority to expand their responsibilities. Some wildlife agencies, for instance, do not have the legal authority to manage plants or insects, and cannot address monarch butterflies and other pollinators directly, except in terms of habitat. This lack of legal authority reflects antiquated policies from state legislatures that viewed plants and insects as crop or nuisance species and placed them under the authority of their agriculture department. Importantly, some agencies might not even have the legal authority at the state level to protect endangered species. This is increasingly important as the federal Endangered Species Act becomes a target for elimination or reduced authority. California, with among [the highest number of endangered species including plants](#), has a program focused on native plants, as does Georgia which

employs a trained botanist. Additional authority ideas are outlined in AFWA's Functional Model.

While other state, local and federal agencies also have significant roles to play in wildlife conservation, placing conservation responsibilities under one roof with a conservation mission is crucial.

A vision for a future state wildlife agency is at chapter's end.



Bumble Bee, Kentucky • SUSAN HAMMOND

Developing Rapport with Leadership

State wildlife agencies are either independent agencies or are part of a larger department, most often a Department of Natural Resources (DNR) of which they are a division. The wildlife director reports to the DNR secretary who is part of the Governor's cabinet and has an overall board that governs it. An independent agency will have a commission that typically has governor involvement in the appointments. The director has a straight line to the governor, but is not part of the governor's cabinet. In engaging agency leadership you will want to understand your agency situation and leadership.

State fish and wildlife agency directors and senior leadership and their commissioners/board members have developed excellent rapport over

the decades with the hunting and angling segments of outdoor recreationists. In most cases, the leadership has not yet developed a similar rapport, outreach, and support for the full spectrum of outdoor recreationists, like hikers, nature photographers, climbers, birdwatchers, paddlers, and gardeners. Similarly, there's a need to build rapport, trust, and outreach with a wider range of conservation nonprofits for agencies to serve the public trust responsibly. For state wildlife agencies to lead, they must have the full capacity, the commitment, and the constituency to succeed.



Reintroducing ko'ko' to Guam (U.S. Territory) • GINGER HADDOCK

As in all our endeavors, there's nothing like getting to know people one-on-one to find out the many things we share in common — starting with a passion for wildlife. Creating strong relationships with agencies and commissioners will allow more communication and trust that in turn builds support for expanding the successful conservation model to all wildlife and all people. Remember, the agency directors want this strong relationship with you too. Several former state wildlife agency directors were interviewed and asked what they wished the NGOs in their state would do, or would have done: Here is what they had to say: “do and say the things we cannot say, howl over the bad things and applaud the good things”.

Good Governance for Managing Wildlife in the 21st century

A key reason to focus on motivating state wildlife agency leadership is to help them with the task of good governance for wildlife that works in today's society with its complex suite of threats to wildlife and changing demographics.

Recognizing the agencies serve managers of wildlife for the people of the state, often referred to as the public trust doctrine, there are numerous articles and ideas for how they might reflect this enormous responsibility. State agencies themselves have hosted workshops. Others have shared lessons learned and academics have provided advice. Good government starts with good public citizens exercising their rights to share their ideas and undertake constructive dialogue. Agency commissions/boards are one of best avenues for citizens to publicly share their opinions.

Enlist your coalition to empower state wildlife agencies. Keep your goal in sight—to increase their expertise, capacity, funding, and governance ability to address the growing wildlife crisis and meet the increasing demand of outdoor enthusiasts who fuel our nation's growing outdoor economy. Get to know the directors. Get to know the commissioners and others in leadership. Participate in meetings and public comments.

This action section will help you navigate the system to develop meaningful and respectful relationships. The first section focuses on state fish and wildlife directors and the second on agency commissions/boards. Find useful tips, case studies and additional materials at the end.



Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission Youth Conservation Center • ANDY

Wildlife Governance Principles

Here are ten principles of good governance for all wildlife agencies—state and federal alike—to serve as a guide for both ecologically and socially responsible wildlife conservation. The intent is to address systemic problems and to encourage people inside and outside agencies to work to achieve them:

1. **WILDLIFE GOVERNANCE WILL** be adaptable and responsive to citizens' current needs and interests, while also being forward-looking to conserve options of future generations.
2. **WILDLIFE GOVERNANCE WILL** seek and incorporate multiple and diverse perspectives.
3. **WILDLIFE GOVERNANCE WILL** apply social and ecological science, citizens' knowledge, and trust administrators' judgment.
4. **WILDLIFE GOVERNANCE WILL** produce multiple, sustainable benefits for all beneficiaries.
5. **WILDLIFE GOVERNANCE WILL** ensure that trust administrators are responsible for maintaining trust resources and allocating benefits from the trust.
6. **WILDLIFE GOVERNANCE WILL** be publicly accessible and transparent.
7. **WILDLIFE GOVERNANCE WILL** ensure that trust administrators are publicly accountable.
8. **WILDLIFE GOVERNANCE WILL** include means for citizens to become informed and engaged in decision making.
9. **WILDLIFE GOVERNANCE WILL** include opportunities for trust administrators to meet their obligations in partnerships with non-governmental entities.
10. **WILDLIFE GOVERNANCE WILL** facilitate collaboration and coordination across ecological, jurisdictional and ownership boundaries.

Source: Decker et al. 2016, *Conservation Letters*, A Journal of the Society of Conservation Biology

1. Engage State Fish & Wildlife Agency Directors

How well do you know your state wildlife agency director? The senior leadership? The director of the wildlife diversity program? The State Wildlife Action Plan staff? What do they know about your group and your interests?

We recommend you meet with them and start cultivating relationships. Let them know you support them in their efforts to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered, to broaden the constituency for wildlife, and to increase funding. The more they can see groups ready to act and support addressing the wildlife crisis, the more inspired they will be to take action. This is a partnership between the agency and the conservation community.

When a new director is being hired, proactively identify potential agency directors and advocate for their appointment. State agency directors are either appointed by a Commission (20 states) or a Governor (30 states). See your state [here](#).

As wildlife becomes increasingly political, state director turnover also increases, with the average tenure as little as one and a half to three years. Thinking ahead will help assure your agency has strong leadership.

WE SUGGEST THREE STEPS TO TAKE FOR SUCCESS:

1. **Develop a good relationship with your state director.**

We strongly encourage in-person meetings in offices and outdoors with your state director. Get to know each other on a first name basis. You don't need to share all the same views. However, look for what you do hold in common as people who care about wildlife. Maybe it's a favorite lake, picnic spot, vista, fishing hole, or hike. Be open-minded, a listener, and also direct about what you'd like to see happen to strengthen your state fish and wildlife agency.

Let the director know you are on his or her side — you want to help them take the next step to solve the wildlife crisis and raise the influence, reach, scope, and funding of the agency to manage all wildlife for all people. Be sure they know you are eager to play a role in securing greater and more reliable funding, something they cannot do on their own.

2. **Meet regularly with the director, as well as senior leadership, and wildlife diversity leaders.**

After a first meeting, continue checking in and also getting to know the people in charge of various programs of the agency. Be sensitive to people's busy schedules. Your meetings need not be long and should have a reason besides saying hello, from sharing your position on a current issue to giving an update on coalition building. Ask them where the agency needs help right now. Often, the agency cannot speak up, but we can! It's your chance to ask what's important to them and engage in a respectful and results-oriented dialogue.

3. **Proactively identify potential agency directors and advocate for their appointment.**

As noted earlier, states have different processes for appointing agency directors. They might be appointed by the governor or by the commission. The change in guard offers an opportunity to recruit and advocate for a champion willing to advocate and lead on solving the wildlife crisis, expanding constituencies, and bringing people together.

2. Engage the Agency Commission or Board Leadership

Most state fish and wildlife agencies have a commission or a board that oversee them. Commissions and boards are very influential—enacting policies and regulations to be carried out by the agencies (see commission fact sheet and guidebook). They have great power over the agency and often are a valuable link to state legislators, their Governor and other influential people.

First, find out how your own state fish and wildlife agency runs. Does it have a commission or a board? Sometimes an agency can have additional forms of oversight or expertise, including advisory councils like the Washington Wildlife Diversity Advisory Council (see more below).

Who is on the commission and what are the requirements to be a member? The average number of commission members is nine, with each commissioner having an average term of six years. Most Commissioners are appointed by the governor. Some states also require confirmation by the state legislature. The requirements for individual commissioners vary by state. Approximately 20 states call for interest, knowledge, or experience in wildlife and conservation. See your state here.



Dr. Maime Parker, Chair, Board of VA Game & Inland Fisheries
NAOMI EDELSON

Commissioner/Board Eligibility Requirements:

Formal degree related to conservation and natural resources (1 state)

Water resource conservation background/expertise (2 states)

Diversity of expertise (2 states)

Interest, knowledge or experience in fish and wildlife (6 states)

Interest or experience in hunting and fishing (10 states)

Experience, knowledge or education in agriculture/farming (11 states)

In addition, most commissions do not yet reflect the diversity of Americans. From data collected in 2015, gender and race were not well represented on commissions. There was only one woman or no women on 74% of commissions/boards, and only 20% had at least one person of color. However, more women than ever are agency directors (Five in 2019; ME, RI, MT, MO, OH) which bodes well for diversifying commissions. A strong and broad conservation-focused commission/board is important for an agency to have strong and broad policies, budgets, and priorities. Work with your Governor and state legislature to ensure representation of all your state's citizens.

When do commissions and boards meet? The meeting date and agenda usually is required by law to be publicized (find your agency's meeting schedule). Check the agency website or call the director's office and ask to be notified. Go to the leadership in nonprofit groups that are well versed in state fish and wildlife public involvement and get their advice. Your [National Wildlife Federation affiliate](#) is a great place to start.

Suggested topics for meetings. Be sure to share your ideas and vision of the future state wildlife agency.

- **State Wildlife Action Plans:** Ask for updates on the State Wildlife Action Plan including progress on priorities and new actions underway. How are they incorporating the plan into overall agency planning, staffing and performance measures?
- **Climate Change:** Ask for updates on how the agency is incorporating climate change or extreme weather into their short and long-term overall agency plans. Ask if they have trained their staff or brought in new expertise. Ask if they are monitoring these changes in the state's wildlife and associated habitat.
- **Recruit, retain, and reactivate a range of outdoor enthusiasts:** Ask what the agency is doing and what they might do if they had more capacity to provide services for these enthusiasts?
- **Public Outreach:** Ask how the agency is reaching out to the larger public about the state's wildlife and habitats and conservation needs. What more would the agency like to do?
- **Commission/Board Members:** Recommend that the commission or board be representative of the full array of the wildlife constituency. Suggest names or background.
- **Funding:** What are the agency's full needs for funding, such as for implementation of the State Wildlife Action Plan and broadened recreation and education programs.

Here are key steps to engage the agency board or commission leadership:

1. ATTEND AND ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN COMMISSION/BOARD MEETINGS AND ENCOURAGE PARTNERS TO DO THE SAME.

Ask for your issues to be on the agenda. Speak up during the public comment time or question and answers associated with other issues. Recruit members of your group and others to come with you and show support just by being there, even if not speaking. See this tip sheet on attending and speaking at such meetings. A sample agenda is provided here.

2. GET TO KNOW YOUR CURRENT COMMISSIONERS/BOARD MEMBERS.

Typically, your state wildlife agency will list the commissioners or board members on their website and how to contact them. Get to know them outside of meetings. Let them know what's important to you. Find out what's important to them, and what you might have in common, or might steer clear of

as an issue. If they live in your area, meet with them in person. Invite them to your group's meeting or into the field. Consider them as part of the influentials for helping with other aspects of this toolkit like the media. By influential, we mean people who can pick up a phone or get an in-person meeting with a key decision leader.

3. PROACTIVELY IDENTIFY POTENTIAL COMMISSIONERS/BOARD MEMBERS WHO SUPPORT MANAGING ALL FISH AND WILDLIFE FOR ALL PEOPLE; ENCOURAGE THEM TO SERVE.

Note when terms expire for commissioners/board members. Don't wait to see who the governor appoints, (if that's your state's process). Cultivate leaders willing to serve that would be supportive of strengthening your state fish and wildlife agency—expanding its constituency and including facets of the outdoor and wildlife community not represented yet. Look for people who are bridge builders, open-minded, good listeners, and effective advocates for taking action to solve the wildlife crisis through a funding campaign. Look for people

that reflect your state's ethnicities, race, and gender.

4. ADVOCATE FOR APPOINTMENT OF VISIONARY COMMISSIONERS WITH GOVERNOR AND LEGISLATORS.

Advocate for people you believe should serve on the commission/board. Set up appointments with the governor and legislators. Even without specific commissioners in mind, set up a meeting with the governor or legislator. Prepare a list of the issues you care about, and the experience and backgrounds you would hope to see represented. If needed, advocate with state legislatures for changes to the eligibility of the commission to reflect the full diversity of interests.

Advisory Councils

While your agency might not yet have strong wildlife diversity allies on its commission or board, some states have advisory groups (e.g. NJ, WA NC) with expertise. You should determine their composition, meeting schedule, and attend these meetings as well.

In Texas, advisory council members are authorized by the state legislature. The commission selects members who then convene to provide recommendations to the commission (<https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/HDj9CjRvklHjjLEKtWwX-f?domain=txrules.elaws.us>). Committee members represent landowners and conservation organizations. They advise the department on matters pertaining to management, research and outreach activities related to nongame and rare species in the State of Texas, including the following: (1) development and implementation of wildlife diversity related projects, grants, and policy, (2) wildlife diversity conservation and regulations, (3) education and communications with various constituent groups and individuals interested in wildlife diversity in the State of Texas.

State Wildlife Action Plan Public Participation

The federally mandated revisions of the State Wildlife Action Plans offer an excellent avenue for the public to weigh in. Authorized by Congress and required to get federal State Wildlife Grants, every state wildlife agency must update their action plans at least every 10 years. These plans contain eight elements, including broad public participation. The revisions are tremendous opportunities to provide scientific expertise, and to speak up for agency priorities in terms of species, habitats, threats and actions. Many agencies have used revisions to assemble a broad range of interests with a goal of stronger plans and stronger partners.

State Wildlife Action Plan

Eight Elements:

- 1.** Information on the distribution and abundance of wildlife including list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need
- 2.** Locations and condition of key habitats and communities
- 3.** Problems for species and their habitats, including priority research and survey needs
- 4.** Conservation actions for species and habitats
- 5.** Monitoring plans for species, habitats and actions effectiveness
- 6.** Procedure to update plan, not less than every ten years
- 7.** Plans to coordinate development, review, revision and implementation with federal, state, local agencies and Indian tribes
- 8.** Broad public participation

Future State Fish & Wildlife Agency

Here are some elements to consider for envisioning your future state fish and wildlife agency. Please **customize** to best fit your state. In our state we would like to see:

Strong conservation program for all wildlife:

- Focus on preventing wildlife from becoming endangered.
- State Wildlife Action Plan recognized as leading blueprint for wildlife planning and implementation.
- State Wildlife Action Plan priorities integrated into other state/local agency and private plans (e.g. transportation, forest, water, parks, land trusts).
- Recover threatened and endangered species.
- Secure and enhance wildlife habitat as identified in State Wildlife Action Plans (via acquisition, easements, restoration).
- Legislative authority to manage all species, including invertebrates like butterflies, native plants and endangered species.
- Climate change integrated into agency planning and implementation.
- Wildlife management areas dedicated to conserving all wildlife.
- Citizen science programs established or expanded (e.g. Master Naturalist).
- Urban wildlife programs established in largest cities (e.g. pollinator habitat, assistance to urban planners on connectivity, natural solutions for climate resilience).

A strong recreation program for all citizens:

- Recruit, retain, and reactivate programs for broad range of outdoor enthusiasts, from birders to gardeners, to hikers and paddlers, to hunters and anglers, and nature photographers.
- Develop and enhance wildlife viewing sites: providing viewing blinds and observation platforms, field guides, self-guided tours, and on-site guides and equipment.
- Provide outdoor skills trainings (how to and where to clinics like [Discover WILD New Hampshire Day](#)) for birding, photography, camping, hunting, fishing, and gardening for wildlife.
- Increase access for wildlife viewing and other outdoor recreation through trails, easements, facility development, and land protection.
- Promote ecologically sensitive economic development with strong partnerships on nature-

based tourism like birding trails (e.g. John James Audubon Birding Trail in Kentucky).

- Support wildlife festivals, wildlife viewing events, and nature photography contests.
- Partner with recreation based organizations and agencies to provide more wildlife related recreation.

A strong education program for all citizens:

- Connecting children and adults alike to nature and the outdoors experience through formal and informal education programs across urban, suburban, rural areas.
- Expand Project Wild, Project Wet and Project Learning Tree programs to reach more schools.
- Develop additional teacher materials and training to help link environmental literacy to existing curriculum standards from pre-k through high school.
- Recommend curriculum improvements to meet the emerging needs of undergraduate and graduate natural resource professionals.
- Provide outdoor classroom opportunities for urban, suburban and rural youth.
- Provide summer and other camps information on local native wildlife.
- Partner with state and local parks, nature centers, museums, zoos, aquariums and botanical gardens to highlight native wildlife.

Modernize the agency to meet today's demands and culture:

- Elevate wildlife diversity efforts and programs in the agency structure to be part of leadership.
- Ensure representation of the full range of nature-based activities, and a growing, changing constituency on governance bodies.
- Assure increased attention to diversity, inclusion and equity for the entire public constituency for wildlife.
- Be transparent and accountable as the agency serves more diverse stakeholders.
- Greater and more reliable funding for expanded capacity and expertise.
- Public financing to ensure all citizens are contributing to wildlife conservation.

Additional Resources:

Commission/Board:

- Commission/Board fact sheet
- Meeting schedules
- Commissioner/Board composition and eligibility
- Example agenda
- Responsibilities and guide
- Public testimony tips
- Appointments

Agency Governance, Programs, Authorities

- State fish and wildlife agency fact sheet
- Agency mission statements
- Agency organization examples
- Governance, Public Input, Public Trust, Transformational Change
- Programs, Capacity, Expertise, Authorities

ACTION #4

Secure Wildlife Funding



Ohio DNR collects milkweed seed to help Monarch butterflies • OHIO DNR

GOAL

Increase funding for state fish and wildlife agencies to tackle the many challenges of wildlife conservation for today and into the future, including fully implementing their State Wildlife Action Plans.

State fish and wildlife agency budgets fall vastly short of the needs of wildlife. Nearly all agencies still rely on hunting and fishing user fees, instead of support from all citizens who all benefit. It is time for greater and more diversified funding. Only then our agencies can fully meet the needs of all wildlife and all its citizens. Several states serve as models, with Georgia in 2018 finding success with the dedication of an existing sales tax on outdoor

recreational gear, generating more than \$20 million per year to several conservation needs that include wildlife. This section explores the limits of current funding and recommends a path towards robust, reliable, diversified and public financing. The Georgia model is recommended as the most likely to succeed.

Current Funding

Collectively, state wildlife agencies annual budget is around \$5.6 billion. Of this, agencies receive \$3.3 billion from hunting and fishing-related activities, either directly through the sale of licenses, tags, and stamps, or indirectly through federal excise taxes on hunting, recreational shooting, and angling

equipment. Many states rely only on these hunting and fishing funds, with a few states generating additional significant funding from a dedicated sales tax (e.g. Missouri, Arkansas, Minnesota) or dedication of the existing sales tax from outdoor gear (GA, TX, VA). The hunting and fishing dollars are, in almost all states, the only source of reliable and substantial funds. Other funding comes from a variety of sources at the state level, including general funds, lottery funds, portions of state outdoor gear taxes, real estate transfer fees, income tax checkoffs, sales of wildlife license plates, a mix of federal grants, and even voluntary donations (NH and GA).

On average, about **10 percent** of an agency's budget for fish and wildlife conservation and law enforcement activities funds conservation for species that are not hunted or fished—typically referred to as “wildlife diversity” or “nongame” programs.

Move Beyond the “Bake Sale” Approach

To fund wildlife diversity programs, states rely primarily on a bake sale approach. Funding often comes from voluntary income tax check-offs and purchases of wildlife vehicle license plates. For example, [Texas Parks and Wildlife](#) now features a menu of conservation license plates. Purchase of a plate from the “[Wild for Texas Collection](#)” of a hummingbird, rattlesnake and horned toad helps fund the State Wildlife Action Plan. Georgia hosts a very successful and popular Weekend for Wildlife. These voluntary contributions remain important, but they are not sufficient or reliable or fitting for wildlife and the agencies that serve as a public trust.



User-Pay, User-Benefit Model Success and Limitations

The user-pay, user-benefit approach to funding wildlife conservation has resulted in terrific success stories for many game species, like waterfowl, upland game birds, deer, elk, and sportfish like bass and trout. Because all species need healthy and plentiful habitat, the traditional game-focused funding for wetlands, grasslands, rivers and lakes has benefited a range of wildlife.

However, when it comes to conserving specific wildlife species not hunted or fished for, biologists need to know basic information like their populations, locations, preferred foods, and more. Without this important natural history, the most urgent, priority actions can't be determined for particular species as they begin to decline. The lack of funding and focus often results in discovering too late that a species is in dire straits, after populations have dropped so low they are at risk of extinction. Some of this valuable information can be found in State Wildlife Action Plans, but there is no funding to take the identified actions.

In addition, hunting and angling no longer assures adequate funding even for game species. Declines in hunting over the last decade, and in certain states, a drop in fishing participation, results in less funding from sales of licenses, stamps, and gear. State agencies must seek more funding sources to effectively manage wildlife and to better focus on the needs of all wildlife and all people. On top of inadequate and declining funds, the earth's rapidly changing climate is adding to the complexity and urgency to assure our wildlife and the habitats they depend upon will be as resilient as possible.

Need for diversified funding

In a prior section, we introduced the concept of a shareholders meeting that reports on investments and builds trust. Just as investment portfolios aim for diversification, reliability and growth, so should

state wildlife funding sources be diverse, reliable and able to meet the increasing challenges of the future.

Fewer than [10 percent](#) of state fish and wildlife agencies have budgets that include funds from their state legislature, commonly referred to as the “general fund” (the overall state budget that comes primarily from taxes). Many also rely on various federal grants and other impermanent, and thus unreliable sources. While some agencies have made strides toward expanding and diversifying funding sources, all state wildlife agencies lack the full capacity to carry out their responsibilities under the public trust—managing so all wildlife can thrive in this and in future generations. As we know from State Wildlife Action Plans, more than 12,000 animals and plants are in need of proactive conservation.

At the national level the federal [State Wildlife and Tribal Grants program](#) has been a great start toward bolstering wildlife diversity budgets. The State Wildlife and Tribal Grants program is the only federal program explicitly dedicated to preventing species from becoming endangered. The grants program is able to partially fund the plans, but does not provide nearly enough to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Since 2001, states have received altogether more than one billion dollars. That sounds impressive, yet the average is \$60 million per year, spread over 50 states, and Puerto Rico, District of Columbia and all U.S. Territories. That’s far short of the estimated \$1.3 billion annually necessary to protect species from becoming endangered now and into the future.

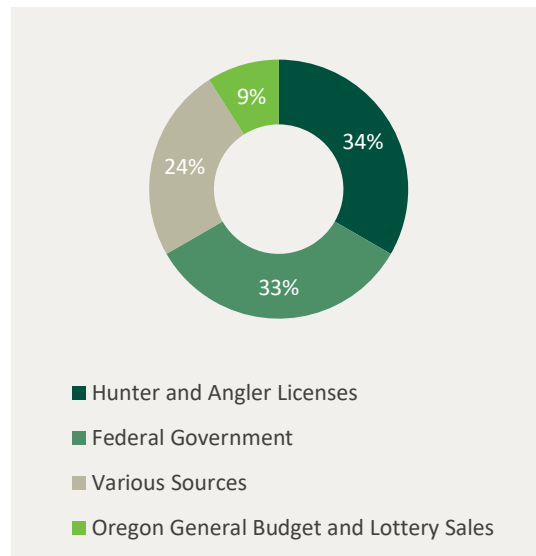
On average, states need 10 times more funding than the State Wildlife Grants program offers to solve the wildlife crisis. The key is prevention to avoid much higher costs and permanent losses of our priceless wildlife and habitats.

A growing coalition of wildlife interests is now working on the passage of the federal [Recovering America’s Wildlife Act](#) which would, as proposed, provide \$1.3 billion/year ([see your state here](#)) in

annual funding back to states to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered. Enacting the legislation would be a huge step forward in addressing the wildlife crisis. This bill requires every state to come up with a 25 percent match to receive the new federal funding. Therefore, each state needs to find additional funding for the match.

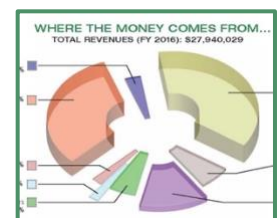
Example of typical agency funding:

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE



A third of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s budget comes from sales of hunter and angler licenses, a third from the federal government—most tied to the sale of hunting and fishing equipment. The remaining third comes from a variety of sources, most tied to specific purposes in grants, contracts, or statute. Despite ODFW’s task to manage wildlife for all Oregonians, only a small percent of its budget comes from the general budget and lottery sales combined.

New Hampshire is similar ([link to NH budget](#)) with only three percent of the funding coming from the state’s general budget. The Nongame and Endangered Species Program is provided \$50,000 from this general budget but must match



[View NH budget online](#)

it in private donations, effectively acting like an NGO in raising its own funding.

Reliable Funding Mechanisms

Restoring wildlife can take decades of investment. Unlike funding the building of a new hospital over a five-year period, assuring wildlife recovers and thrives takes time. Further, wildlife once recovered still need our attention and care, especially in a rapidly changing climate. The return of America's symbol—the bald eagle—took decades of effort and shows why investing in a future for wildlife matters. The bald eagle's future depends on our continued stewardship of the clean waters, fisheries, and habitat. [Read the NWF blog here.](#)

The good news is that some states have moved beyond the bake sale approach toward reliable funding. Funding mechanisms include sales taxes (Missouri, Arkansas, and Minnesota), real estate transfer taxes (Florida and South Carolina) and dedicated lottery funds (Arizona, Colorado, Maine, and [Oregon](#)). Nevada's \$27.5 million bond program is slated for acquiring wildlife habitat and enhancing recreational opportunities related to wildlife. Georgia, Texas, and Virginia took the user-pay, user-benefit traditional model and applied it to a range of outdoor gear that includes all outdoor enthusiasts, without creating a new sales tax. Iowa passed an initiative that assures the next tax increase will give the Iowa Department of Natural Resources a portion of the proceeds. Missouri is considered the pioneer having this program since the 1970's, see their agency budget in their annual report here (<https://mdc.mo.gov/about-us/business-information/annual-reports>).

Public Financing for Wildlife

The time has come for public financing in all states in keeping with wildlife as a public trust. As we've stressed repeatedly, states must have resources to conserve the thousands of wildlife species and their habitats they are mandated to protect. The simplest

way to secure public financing, although not necessarily the most reliable, is for a state governor to include funding for the agency in his/her budget. The legislature would then need to approve it. This is how most government agencies are funded and likely how most citizens in a state assume their agency is funded. Even minimal general funds to start would be a good foot in the door. Convincing a governor to allocate funds might take repeated efforts, as most state legislatures are not used to providing wildlife funding. By elevating the wildlife crisis, the stage is set for making the case for general funds.

Some agencies might be reluctant to go with the governor's budget approach, as it gives the legislature more control over the agency in contrast to user fee funds that usually do not require legislative approval. However, a strong coalition can both advocate for the funds and monitor the legislature's actions.

Articulating the case for funding and building strong partnerships are two key challenges. Partnerships should unite state wildlife agencies and sportsmen and women with all who support strengthening fish and wildlife agencies. Again, find the common ground for the funding case. The hunting and angling community will benefit from new sources of funding that enhance wildlife and their habitats. Much of the on-the-ground conservation action will include securing more habitat, benefiting both game and all other wildlife. More habitat translates into more access for all wildlife recreationists. Funds could also go toward conservation education for the next generation of conservationists.

Ultimately, when all people contribute, all wildlife profits from more habitat and all people profit from more access to outdoor recreation and assurance that our next generation will carry the conservation torch forward.

Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act 2018

This legislation was offered as an amendment on the state ballot in November, 2018. It had already garnered support from nearly 100% of the state legislature and polls showed 80% support from the voting public. It took 7 years of work to build this support and included a coalition of the Georgia Wildlife Federation, The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Lands, Park Pride, The Conservation Fund, and the Georgia Conservancy. The coalition made the case that conservation creates more jobs and revenue than cotton or any sports team in the state.

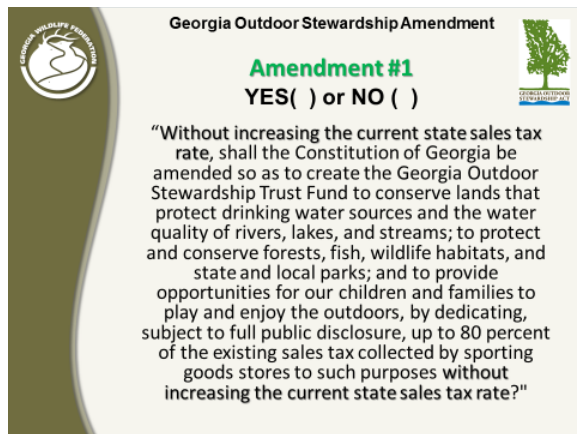
The amendment called for up to 80 percent of the state sales tax already collected on the purchase of outdoor sporting goods and recreational equipment be dedicated to conservation funding. See the exact language below.



on wildlife conservation is justified as a user-pay, user-benefit model, without the administrative burden and potential opposition that comes with a separate tax.

While successful in many ways and important, unfortunately the revenue stream has not been consistent. Texas capped revenues at \$32 million per year and then diverted some of that to debt service. Virginia's legislature allocates its fluctuating amounts to be under a \$13 million/year cap, and also does not allocate any other general funds to Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Nevertheless, this mechanism is considered as the most likely to succeed, as Georgia just proved. For those states with a sales tax, this is highly recommended. Dedication a share of sales tax revenue does not increase taxes and the data justifies re-investing outdoor gear related fees back into wildlife, land and water.



TEXAS AND VIRGINIA'S OUTDOOR EQUIPMENT SALES TAX

Texas (1993) and Virginia (1998) each passed similar legislative bills dedicating a share of the existing state sales taxes collected on outdoor gear to wildlife conservation. Rather than creating a new tax, spending estimates (based on [National Survey of Hunting, Fishing, and Wildlife Related Recreation spending](#) in that state) are used to allocate a share of general revenue to wildlife accounts. Spending

Making the Funding Case—Leading a campaign

The campaign is the heart of the action. It stands or falls on the strength of your coalition and public support. The likelihood of success is highest when you have good research to back your communications and messaging, strong partnerships developed through a coalition, and support of your state agency, your governor, and key legislators.

What gets groups excited to join your campaign and associated coalition? Likely, it's increased and reliable funding for wildlife and the outdoors. As we've noted, your funding campaign will succeed with a strong coalition in place, widespread public recognition of the wildlife crisis, and an inspired state wildlife leadership.

For an outstanding toolkit on campaigning for conservation funding, please refer to the [Campaign](#)

[Toolkit from Trust for Public Lands Action Fund](#) (The Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land team up regularly, with other state based entities like NWF affiliates, to lead ballot and legislative funding campaigns). They have developed a multi-phase technical assistance approach that includes the following elements:

1. Feasibility Research
2. Public Opinion Polling
3. Program Design

AS YOU GO FORWARD, KEEP THESE QUESTIONS AT THE FOREFRONT:

- What factors in your state must you consider when choosing a funding mechanism?
- What is achievable?
- What does success look like?
- What is your clear, organized plan for success?
- Are you building public support at every step?
- Are you proactively defusing opposition and clearing obstacles?

To secure wildlife funding, we break this section into three steps: form a wildlife funding task force, enlist state legislators and governors as champions, and then lead the campaign. Find tips, more case studies, and useful materials at the end.

1. Form a state-based wildlife funding task force

A task force on state wildlife funding immediately elevates the wildlife crisis as an important issue. The task force makes recommendations on funding needs and mechanisms and creates a credible report on why your agency needs the money, how much, and where it should come from. It also creates ambassadors for the associated campaign.

WHO ESTABLISHES A TASK FORCE? COALITION, LEGISLATURE, OR GOVERNOR

Your coalition itself could establish a funding task force or a similar panel. That was the strategy of the [Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources](#)—leading to the introduction of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act.

The advantage is that you can pick your own members. See who they included and their final recommendation.

Preferably, a state task force can be ordered by a legislature or a governor, depending on who might be most supportive. While you have less say over the makeup, you can advocate for who should be on it. There are three main advantages to going this route. First, it shows the legislature or governor are convinced the issue is so important it merits a task force. Second, a task force develops recommendations that come back to the governing body for action. Third, the legislature might provide funding to support the task force (e.g. Oregon).

COMPOSITION OF TASK FORCE

On the task force, you will need experts in funding, wildlife, and outdoor recreation, representatives of different constituencies and outdoor businesses, members with political influence, and ambassadors that can make the eloquent case for the recommendations. The key is to represent a range of stakeholders and not favor one outdoor recreation or wildlife sector over another.

A state task force typically ranges from a handful to a dozen or more people. They merge their different skills, viewpoints, and ideas to come up with credible recommendations that will be well received across a broad spectrum of interests. (Examples from Oregon, Wyoming, Washington).

To be effective, the group should have reasonable deadlines to conclude work and a specific charge to study with an expectation of funding recommendations that have a realistic shot at passing as a ballot measure or legislation.

Polling of Voters

One key action to help inform the state task force is to conduct a poll early in the campaign to secure wildlife funding. A poll can help determine:

- Level of support for wildlife;
- Level of support for outdoor recreation and other conservation-related issues like clean air and water;
- What funding mechanisms are popular and would be voted for;
- How much voters are willing to spend;
- Opposition, so you can address that up front.

A state-based wildlife funding task force will generate enthusiasm, interest, and more groups joining in for an ultimate campaign.

CASE STUDY

Wyoming: Governor's 2015-17 Task Force on Fish and Wildlife

In 2015, Wyoming Governor Matt Mead established a task force “to develop a coherent strategy, including recommendations and measurable actions that the State can implement in order to broaden opportunities to effectively manage Wyoming’s fish and wildlife resources.”



Pronghorn, Wyoming • DANIELLE FARRELL

Mead appointed 18 members, including the Wyoming Wildlife Federation ([see list here](#)). Mead announced the task force will “engage everyone who enjoys wildlife, not just hunters and anglers.” In 2017, the task force recommended that license, stamps, and permit revenues should fund programs that benefit game species; general fund appropriations should fund nongame species and other legislatively mandated programs; the Governor’s Endangered Species Act budget should be adjusted to prevent listings that could affect the state’s economy; and the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust should be fully funded.

CASE STUDY

Oregon: 2015-16 Task Force on Funding for Fish, Wildlife and Related Outdoor Recreation

House Bill (2402) established a legislative task force to strengthen the ability of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) “to carry out conservation and related outdoor recreation and education programs, maintain and enhance hunting and angling opportunities; and improve public access and habitat conservation programs.” The charge was to identify “sustainable, alternative funding to support those activities.”

The task force met its deadline of [reporting to the legislature in September, 2016](#). The final report shows this committee of 17 worked diligently, conducted a statewide survey to learn what funding they would support and their impression of the state fish and wildlife agency. They took their ideas on the road, listened, and incorporated what they learned to come up with two funding mechanisms—one an Oregon income tax return surcharge and the other a wholesale beverage surcharge. The Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund would bring in a minimum of \$87 million a biennium and would be clearly

allocated to expand conservation efforts, improve hunting and angling opportunities, connect Oregonians with the outdoors, and deferred maintenance.

The [list of members](#) of Oregon's funding task force offers some potential ideas for your state—showing just how broad the spectrum can be to address all those with a stake in the future of wildlife and outdoor recreation, including the travel and tourism industry, counties and tribal governments, the outdoor education community, and communities that may be “underserved or underrepresented.” The task force included state legislators. Both the ODFW director and the chair of the ODFW commission served on the task force as nonvoting members.

The task force recommendations led to a funding bill introduced by champion Rep. Ken Helm (chair of the House Interim Committee on Energy and Environment) in the 2017 legislative session. That bill was not voted on. [A new bill was introduced in the 2019 session](#) asking for \$17 million in general funds for the biennium to the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund, as a temporary stopgap measure that would give the agency the ability to match its federal allocation based on passage of Recovering America's Wildlife Act.

While it typically takes several runs at legislative and ballot initiatives before they are successful, it is important to work on creating a coalition and campaign ready to go upon the release of a task force's recommendations. If not, then the work involved in fundraising and staffing and building a coalition will take up to a year and you will lose the momentum and power of the release of the recommendations. Many of these aspects can and should take place simultaneously.

2. Enlist state legislators and governor as champions.

To ensure the passage of your selected funding mechanism, you'll need champions with influence

and reach to promote its merits and help steer the campaign through obstacles. In fact, you may want to start with enlisting legislators and the governors first to establish a state funding task force.

In **Virginia**, the co-chair of the House Resources Committee Vick Thomas championed House Bill 38, a dedication of the state's existing tax on outdoor equipment to a fund for wildlife conservation, and became a spokesperson for the need to conserve all wildlife, too. He raised the Assembly's awareness of the need to fund Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, increasing key support for the mechanism and moving the process to success efficiently and quickly.

IDENTIFY LEGISLATIVE CHAMPIONS

To sleuth for potential legislative champions, check with your state fish and wildlife agency leadership to find out who is friendly to the agency and supportive of their requests.

Take a look to see who in your state is a member of the [National Caucus of Environmental Legislators](#).

Look at the [Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation](#) website to find hunting and fishing champions in the legislature as well as governors. Look up your state [here](#).

WHO'S ON THE RIGHT COMMITTEE?

Find out who sits on key influential committees, like finance and natural resources. One of the obstacles you can run into is that the legislators who want to champion your cause are not on the committees that can put forward such legislation. You will want to target those committee members—and find out what most moves them to support funding for wildlife, or make sure your champions have strong relationships on the committee(s). Remember, you can educate and enlist legislators that are not yet champions. Take them into the field where they can have a memorable experience with wildlife—like a [million bats emerging at dusk to catch mosquitoes!](#) Remember, you have the best ambassadors right at your fingertips—wildlife.

MEET WITH GOVERNOR AND KEY LEGISLATORS

The influential members of your coalition should set up meetings with the governor and legislators who will back wildlife funding. Use the power of your task force findings effectively. You will immediately have the attention of the governor if it's a governor's task force, and similarly the legislature, if it's ordered by them. The key is to try to have the support of both entities no matter what.

BE PREPARED—MESSAGING TO ENLIST CHAMPIONS

While it's a good idea to go to the champions early on in the funding campaign, you will get their full attention as you show them your developing coalition and public support. They will want to know who is for funding, both quantity and quality. Be clear on what you are asking for. Be specific with tangible examples.

Avoid the trap of saying you want funding. Instead, you want to save wildlife in trouble and invest in a sustainable outdoor recreation economy. Funding is the mechanism.

Do your homework. Be aware of who else is competing for funding and see if you can be allies rather than competitors. Put yourself in the position of the governor being courted for funding from many sectors. How can you stand out and shine?

Before your meeting, research convincing messages that will resonate with a certain legislator or the governor. For example, if you know your governor's number one issue is to boost the economy, then you might lead with this point:

- The best way to invest in our growing outdoor recreation economy (add stats) is to invest in a future for our threatened wildlife and the lands and waters both wildlife and recreationists depend upon. Put together powerful statistics in a way that combines the economic contributions together, as in this [example from Colorado](#).

If a legislator or governor is a hunter or angler concerned about maintaining those traditions, you

might lead with the fairness angle such as: After a century of shouldering almost all responsibility for our state's wildlife, it's time for the entire population to chip in if we are going to solve the wildlife crisis and continue our hunting and fishing traditions.

Another legislator or governor may be a hiker concerned only with access and adding trails or might be most interested in parks and clean water. Show that wildlife funding is not only compatible, it can be a driver for gaining public support for access, trails, parks, and clean water.



Alligator, Florida • BARBI MARTINSON

What excites people more, a trail with plentiful wildlife or a trail without? Show how legislation can provide for wildlife, access, and parks in one package with much higher support than if proposed separately. Funding for clean water is always at the top of any voter message testing.

Political Leaders like to see

- Voters like it. (Share polling).
- The state's economy will benefit. (Show power of outdoor recreation economy, and support from business community)
- It's a wise investment.
- There's urgency.
- It's your chance to leave a legacy for future generations.

3. Lead campaign to secure state wildlife funding.

Armed with recommendations from a task force and your champions in place, it's time to rollout the campaign to secure funding. Make sure you are ready, your coalition is in place, and you are elevating awareness of the wildlife crisis. Several past efforts focused on the task force without taking the time to build external support and/or have a campaign ready to go.

You will want to launch the campaign as soon as a task force issues its report. Hold a task force press event with fanfare to release the recommendations. Have your diverse coalition ready to inform members and galvanize them toward action. Use this report to create momentum. If you do not use a task force, then you should create another way to launch the funding campaign publicly.

Your campaign will be centered on assuring a future for the people in your state to enjoy wildlife and the precious lands and waters that support them. You will need to connect the dots from funding to outcomes—showing spending will be accountable and fulfilling the goals. Messaging that connects voters with what they care about is an essential ingredient. Do not miss this important step. For example, we know from numerous successful state funding initiatives that clean air and especially clean water are the most compelling messages, especially for urban voters. In fact, WATER was THE

reason for most wins. For more tips that will help you convince influentials and voters alike please see the [Trust for Public Lands Action toolkit on messaging](#).

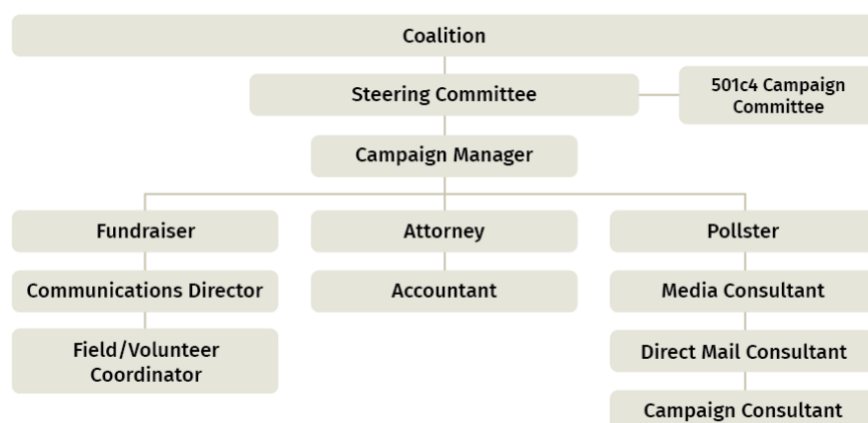
YOU WILL HAVE HELP

In addition to the National Wildlife Federation and its state-based affiliates, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Trust for Public Lands (TPL) are committed to help states design, pass, and implement public funding through ballot or legislative measures. TNC and TPL have successfully led ballot and legislative campaigns in more than 20 states and localities that have resulted in more than 70 billion dollars for conservation. They win 90 percent of the time! Their campaign planning template can be tailored to your state.

TPL maintains an excellent database called [LandVote](#) that records all land, wildlife, and recreation measures by year—a way to get creative and see what works, at the city, county, and state levels.

We will not go into detail on a running a funding campaign here, since you can easily access the excellent toolkit with case studies from the [Trust for Public Lands Action Fund](#). National Wildlife Federation also offers an overall campaign toolkit here. Instead, we offer a few key useful points, and examples for campaigns to secure state wildlife funding and other materials.

CAMPAIGN STRUCTURE—POTENTIAL MODEL FOR WILDLIFE FUNDING



LEGISLATIVE OR BALLOT MEASURE?

How your campaign goes forward depends on whether you have chosen a legislative or ballot initiative. A feasibility study, like what the Trust for Public Land regularly does, will help you evaluate your options. Below are some considerations.

Political

- How do political leaders and the community feel?
- What other funding needs are you competing with?

Electoral

- What is the best time to put this on the ballot?
- What has been the success rate of other ballot measures?

Fiscal

- What is the economic situation now? Tax base? Debt?
- What would be the best funding mechanism?

Legal

- What are the legal rules for a ballot measure?

Once you decide on your funding mechanism and route, you can make informed decisions on key partners and members of a larger coalition. Key conservation players will always be important, but depending on your funding mechanism, you will likely include others. Most successful campaigns addressed several funding needs, with water as most important. Remember your goal is to WIN. Compromise along the way is inevitable. If someone leading the key committee in the legislature wants funding for arts, then arts gets included as part of the package. You must make pragmatic decisions to ensure success.

Make Sure the Ballot Language:

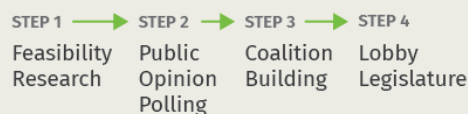
- Meets Legal Standards
- Includes Benefits
- Presents Costs in Understandable Ways
- Includes Accountability Provisions
- Includes a Title

Implementation is an often over-looked consideration. Anticipate your work after you win. You will need to defend your win. Funds are often targets to be raided or simply not spent. Sometimes initiatives are brought back to the ballot. Your coalition will need to keep fighting. Add defending the prize to your early planning as you build your coalition and support.

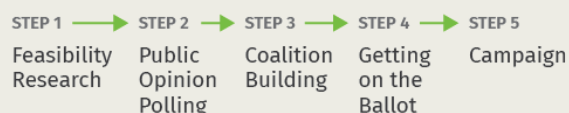
LEARN FROM MISSOURI—A CONTINUING MODEL FOR FUNDING SUCCESS

In 1970, the Conservation Federation of Missouri began its campaign for dedicated funding for wildlife, called Design for Conservation. Six years later, in 1976, Missouri voters passed a ballot measure establishing the Missouri Conservation Sales Tax. For every \$8 in sale, one penny goes toward conservation. Note that the phrase “one penny...” is deliberate, showing just how little you pay for a big outcome.

Legislatively Approved Funding Process



Ballot Measure Process



(Creating State Funding, TNC)

Time and time again, Missouri has defended its 1/8 of 1 percent sales tax against assaults. Since 2012, the sales tax has generated about \$100 million each year. The programs remain popular and well

supported—funding for wildlife and forest conservation and nature centers throughout Missouri. The money is consistent and growing to meet increasing demands. Wildlife is a public trust and all benefit, so paying in makes sense and gives all people a voice.



Checking minnow trap • NANCY SWANSON

Keys to Success

Here are a few keys to success originally and today (adapted from 2017 observations of David Thorne, Missouri Department of Conservation):

- 1. Citizen Support:** The original funding initiative passed as a ballot measure of the people of Missouri. To assure that citizen support is rock solid and growing, the Missouri Department of Conservation reports to Missourians through outreach: that includes a [free monthly magazine](#) with more than 725,000 subscribers for a hard copy or online version. The Department also reaches out to youth with its [Xplore Magazine](#).
- 2. Listening to Missourians:** The staff relies on what people in the state have to say about conservation—via comments, surveys, open houses, and public meetings. They use social media effectively—Facebook Twitter, YouTube, and a Blog. A service called GovDelivery sends email and text messages to those who request it.
- 3. Urban, Suburban, and Rural Outreach:** It took support from all those areas to pass the sales tax initiative with 50.8 percent voting yes in 1976. For the sales tax to pass, only 25 counties and the city of St. Louis had more than 50 percent voting yes—the counties where most of the Missourians live. The urban counties, similar to those counties voting yes, represent 73 percent of the population. In other words, the urban population is critical and must feel connected to the wildlife programs.
- 4. Increased Investment in Hunter/Angler Programs:** To answer concerns from anglers and hunters that expanded programming might reduce funding for their interests, the Department demonstrated that investments in their interests increases—not decreases—with broadened programming and increased funding.
- 5. The Power of a Broad Coalition:** Missouri has a powerful and successful wildlife coalition, because it is broad and inclusive. The coalition members are empowered, because they see their demands are met and show that people in Missouri are willing to pay to meet their wants and needs.
- 6. Funding Links to Specific Outcomes:** People in Missouri can see that the money that comes in via the sales tax goes to specific outcomes that are articulated in strategic plans. There are stated measures to evaluate success, determine progress, and accomplishments. The Department encourages transparency, as in this [January 2018 annual report](#) that calls attention to its responsibility to the public with the tagline: “Serving Missouri and You.”
- 7. Design for Conservation a Firm Foundation:** The original strategic plan was so well done that it laid a foundation for all that has followed, as well as fueling an excellent marketing and communication campaign.
- 8. Brand Awareness:** Prioritizing a Department “brand” that people know well helps citizens connect personally with conservation efforts, building ownership and pride.

Tips and more useful information for securing funding

Learn from Successful Funding Campaigns

To pass legislation or ballot initiatives to secure wildlife funding can take time and repeated efforts. You can learn from successful funding campaigns—that have strong coalitions and an educated, inspired public and leadership backing them.

Agencies are asked to do more with a shrinking funding base that is still primarily supported by hunter and angler user fees. Agencies need funding for all wildlife with a focus on preventing wildlife from becoming endangered, as well as meeting the increasing demand for recreation and education from a variety of constituents.

A temptation for wildlife leaders is to make the case for more funding without enough public support for why it's needed and a coalition ready to campaign for it. Coalition building and choosing a funding mechanism for a campaign can go hand-in-hand. The funding campaign ideally should have the backing of the coalition, state wildlife agency leaders, the governor, legislators, and more.

Meeting the public where they are.

Message testing is an absolutely key ingredient. While wildlife tends to score high, water always is the highest. Water brings out all the voters. You want all those voters to vote on voting day.

Recent History of Coalitions and Funding Campaigns to Solve the Wildlife Crisis

From experience, we know that unified coalitions for wildlife and recreation can be powerful and effective at national and state levels. We've learned from experience and are becoming a more effective voice for change.

Teaming with Wildlife Coalition



In the 1990s, the national Teaming with Wildlife campaign was created to secure dedicated federal funding back to states to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered as well as expanded recreation and education needs and opportunities. The original proposal would have applied the user fee model via an excise tax to an array of birding and outdoor-related recreation equipment. That would have extended user fees to many more people, relieving the burden on hunters and anglers, and moving closer to caring for wildlife as a public trust. More than 3,000 groups and businesses joined the Teaming with Wildlife coalition by 1998.

First Time Funds to States to Prevent Wildlife from Becoming Endangered

As interest in the legislation grew, members of Congress switched the original user fee proposal to use existing oil and gas fees as more palatable than a “new tax.” The coalition grew to 5,000+ supporting \$350 million annually needed for state wildlife conservation, recreation and education. The advocacy led to the establishment of the federal [State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program](#). To qualify for funding, states developed [State Wildlife Action Plans](#) that are now the blueprint for conservation across the country. The plans have now created their own coalitions of support in many states.

Recovering America's Wildlife Act coalition

To address the growing wildlife crisis connected to lack of funding, the [Recovering America's Wildlife Act](#) follows the recommendation of a diverse group of energy, business, and conservation leaders. This group, known as the [Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish & Wildlife Resources](#), determined that an annual investment of \$1.3 billion in revenues from energy and mineral development on federal lands and waters could

address the needs of thousands of species, preventing them from needing to be added to the Endangered Species list. A [growing coalition](#) is forming around this federal bill, with some changes, that will send funds to states.

No Need to Reinvent the Wheel

The materials listed at the end of this section provide in-depth case studies on mechanisms for funding and strategies for successful campaigns. Several reports are particularly good overviews and offer recommendations, including *Investing in Wildlife: State Wildlife Funding Campaigns*, and more recently the [Colorado Parks and Wildlife Future Funding Mechanisms Study](#). Investigate how other funding campaigns in other states have succeeded, whether as ballot measures or as legislation. Learn from their coalitions and campaigns.

Additional Resources:

- Case studies of state wildlife funding initiatives
- Case studies of wildlife funding task forces
- Lessons learned and considerations of state funding campaigns
- Mechanisms and Legislative Language
- Polling
- PPT
- Recovering America's Wildlife Action Plan
- Campaign Planning
- State agency budget examples
- State agency funding fact sheet

Step Up and Lead



Little Blue Heron, Species of Greatest Conservation Need • FWC, ANDY WRAITHMELL

With so much of our wildlife in dire need of proactive conservation attention, wildlife conservation advocates must step up to lead in their state to ensure our children have a future with wildlife. We must not wait for things to change by default, the right political leader or the perfect climate; there is no right time. Reversing the wildlife crisis may indeed take time, but it is up to us to start. This toolkit shares many lessons learned, tips, and steps to get started. Be bold and lead! Others are waiting to follow your leadership! We wish you success

For more information contact: Naomi Edelson, Senior Director, Wildlife Partnerships, National Wildlife Federation, edelsonn@nwf.org or 202-797-6889.

www.StateWildlifeToolkit.nwf.org

Funding and Support



Coming off the river • MICHAEL CARL

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