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Scarlet Tanager by Jacob Dingel

Pennsylvania Study Shows Nongame Wildlife and Conservation Efforts Are Important to Residents

Often accounting for the vast majority of all wildlife in a state, species that are not hunted, fished, or trapped (i.e., nongame species) add **critical diversity to overall fish and wildlife populations and ecosystems.** As the health of all species and their habitats is inextricably tied to the sustainability of the overall environment, many state agencies over the past several decades have acknowledged the importance of nongame species by establishing dedicated wildlife diversity programs for their benefit. Such management proceeds from the understanding that while game species may enjoy a higher-profile status among many residents, nongame species remain equally important to wildlife diversity as a whole.

This study was conducted by Responsive Management for the Pennsylvania Game Commission, in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (both of which are tasked with the management of Pennsylvania's nongame species), and was supported by State & Tribal Wildlife Grants Program funds. Responsive Management examined state residents' opinions on and attitudes toward nongame wildlife, activities and priorities of the Commissions, and funding for the Commissions. The 2014 survey used in this study partially replicated a 1996 study conducted by Responsive Management, thus allowing evaluation of trends in residents' opinions between the two studies. Further, while it was important to know how Pennsylvania residents as a whole felt about wildlife management in the state, the study was also intended to provide lawmakers and decision-makers across the state with data specific to their constituents. For this reason, the 2014 survey was conducted by Congressional District, resulting in statistically valid results for each of Pennsylvania's 18 Congressional Districts.

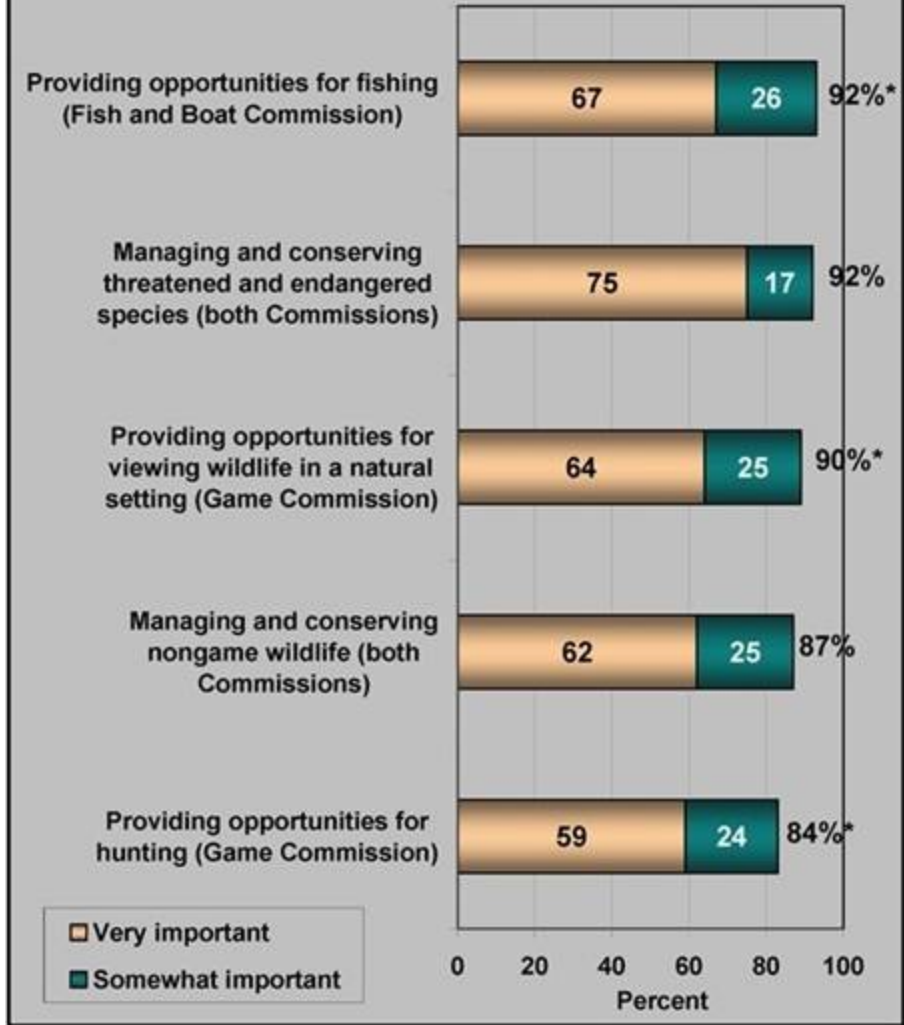
Overall, the study found that fish and wildlife management and conservation is important to the residents of Pennsylvania,

including management and conservation of all species. Such species include mammals, amphibians, reptiles, fish, and birds, many of which are visible to Pennsylvania residents near and around their homes every day (the 2005 Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan produced by the two Commissions notes that nongame species account for 75% of the state's fish and wildlife). In general, the study results reinforce the impression that while Pennsylvania residents may distinguish between various categories of species, wildlife as a whole remains highly important to most people.

The overwhelming majority of Pennsylvanians think that managing and conserving both threatened and endangered species and nongame species is important.

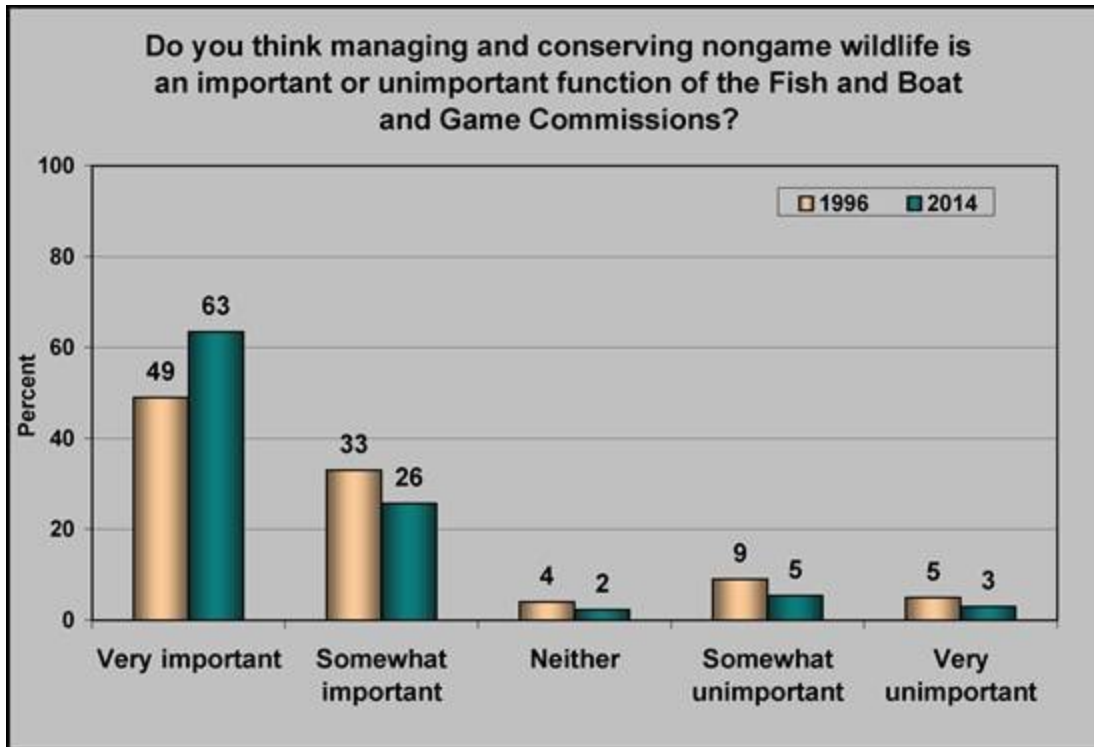
The survey asked respondents to rate the importance of five functions of the Commissions, and the top two items according to the percentage of respondents who said the function is either *very* or *somewhat* important are *managing and conserving threatened and endangered species* and *providing opportunities for fishing* (a total of 92% described each item as important). The function with the greatest percentage of respondents describing it as *very* important is *managing and conserving threatened and endangered species* (75% rated it as such; see first graph below). A large majority of respondents (87%) also rated *managing and conserving nongame wildlife* as important, with 62% rating it *very* important. In fact, the percentage of Pennsylvanians in 2014 who considered managing and conserving nongame wildlife to be *very* important represents a 14-percentage-point increase over the 49% of respondents who gave the same response in 1996 (note that the trend comparison graph, second graph below, excludes "don't know" responses).

Percent of respondents who think that each of the following is a very or somewhat important function for the respective Commission:



[click to enlarge](#)

* Rounding on graph causes apparent discrepancy in sum; calculations made on unrounded numbers.



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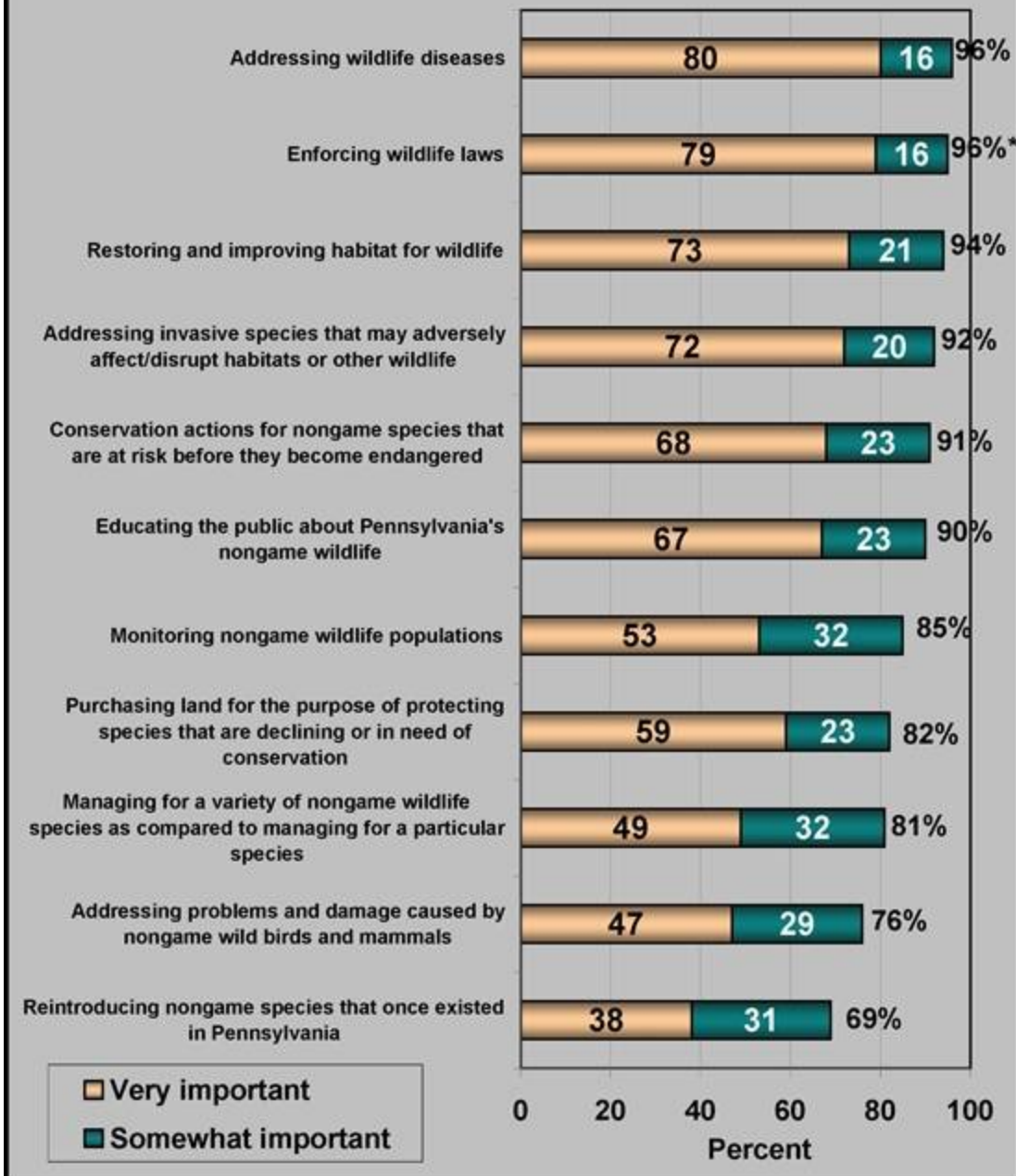
Note that trend comparison graph excludes "don't know" responses.

** Rounding on graph causes apparent discrepancy in sum; calculations made on unrounded numbers.*

In addition to the major functions of the Commissions, respondents were asked to rate the importance of a larger list of more specific Commission activities. **The two highest-ranked Commission activities in importance are addressing wildlife diseases** (96% of Pennsylvanians said this is important, with 80% saying it is very important) **and enforcing wildlife laws** (a total of 96% of respondents rated this as important, including 79% who indicated it is very important) (see graph below).

In the ranking by the percentage of respondents who rated the items as very or somewhat important, four more activities had at least two-thirds of respondents saying they are very important: *restoring and improving habitat, addressing invasive species, conservation actions for nongame species at risk, and educating the public about nongame wildlife.*

Percent of respondents who think that each of the following is a very or somewhat important activity for the Commissions:



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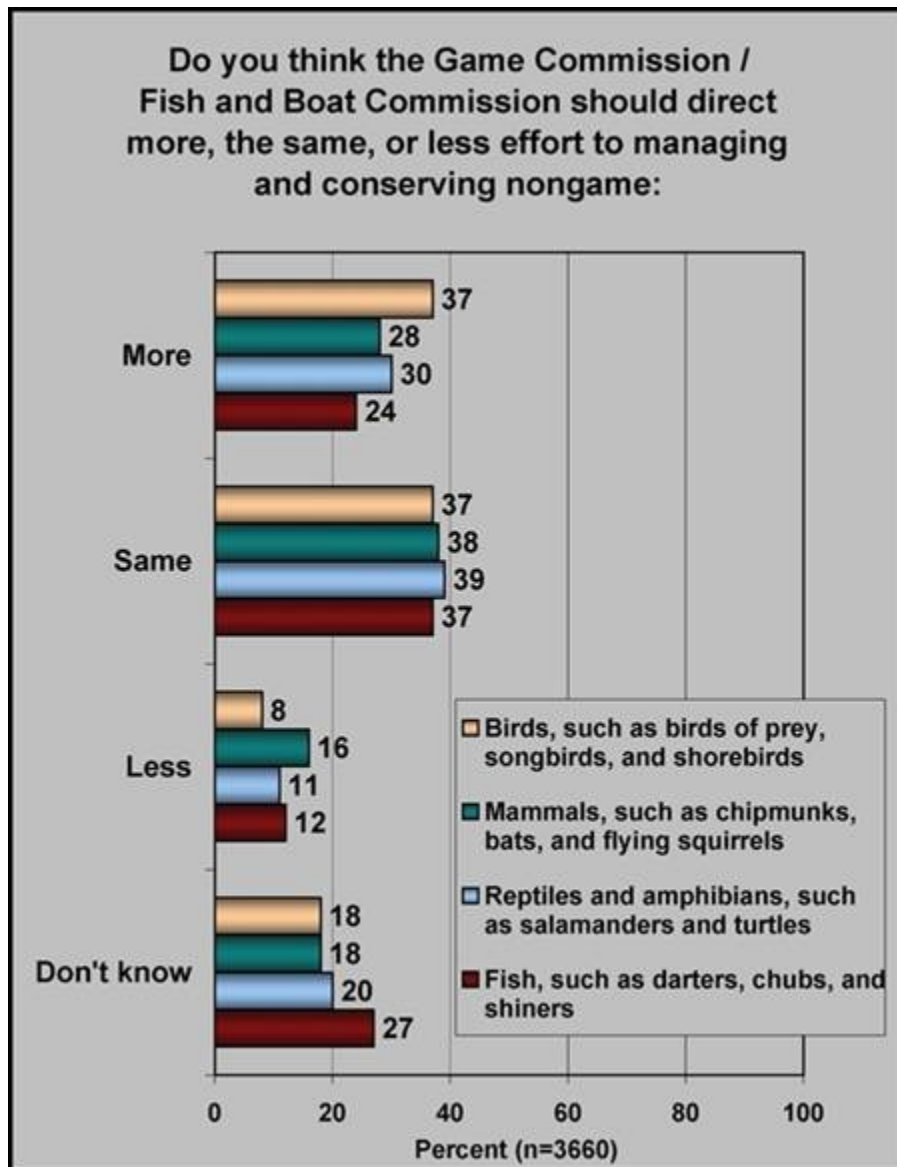
* Rounding on graph causes apparent discrepancy in sum; calculations made on unrounded numbers.

Most of the top-ranked activities above can be directly associated with at least one of the four main areas addressed by Pennsylvania's State Wildlife Action Plan: Species of Greatest Conservation Need, habitat condition where those species

live, threats to species and habitats, and conservation actions to lessen those threats. Although the

majority of residents are not currently aware of the plan—which is a proactive plan to keep species from becoming threatened or endangered—the Commission activities they rated as greatest in importance align with the goals and values of the plan. These results, as well as many of the results of this study, are currently being used by the Game Commission and Fish and Boat Commission to update the State Wildlife Action Plan.

In the survey, respondents were also asked whether *more*, the *same*, or *less* effort should be directed to managing and conserving four types of nongame wildlife: birds, small mammals, reptiles/amphibians, and fish. Although the most common response for three of the four types of wildlife was the *same*, the percentage saying that *more* effort should be directed to management and conservation exceeded the percentage saying *less* for each type of wildlife. In comparing the four types of wildlife, the most concern is for birds: 37% want more effort directed to managing and conserving this category of wildlife.



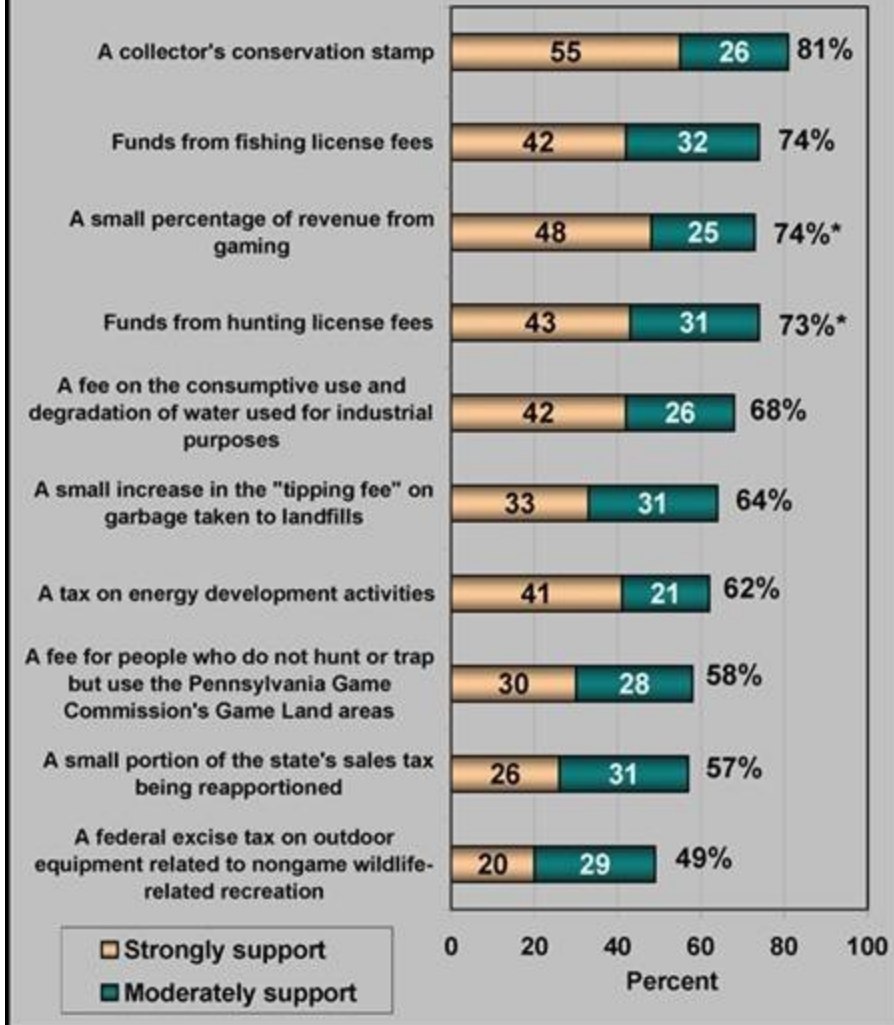
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Another important objective of the 2014 Responsive Management study was to examine support for nongame funding options. On this topic, it is useful to note differences in the funding traditionally available for game and nongame species. While funding for management of the former typically comes from such reliable mechanisms as license fees from hunters and anglers and excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment, many agencies rely on direct donations from residents or other voluntary contributions (e.g., tax check-offs or license plate purchases) to provide non-federal funding for nongame conservation efforts.

In the survey, respondents were asked about ten potential funding sources for nongame wildlife conservation. **All funding sources on the list except one have a majority of Pennsylvanians in support. The funding source with more than half of respondents strongly supporting it is a collector's conservation stamp:** 55% *strongly* support this potential funding source (overall support for it, including *moderate* support, is at 81%). Other top ranked funding sources include *funds from fishing license fees, a small percentage of revenue from gaming, funds from hunting license fees, a fee on the consumptive use and degradation of water used for industrial purposes, and a tax on energy development activities.*

Percent of respondents who strongly or moderately support each of the following as a funding source for nongame wildlife conservation in Pennsylvania:



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* Rounding on graph causes apparent discrepancy in sum; calculations made on unrounded numbers.

Methodology

The study entailed a telephone survey of 3,660 Pennsylvania residents, 18 years old and older. The sample was stratified to ensure at least 200 interviews would be obtained in each of Pennsylvania's 18 Congressional Districts, allowing statistically valid data to be obtained at the District level. Each District sample was representative of the population in that District. The calling effort included both landline and cell phones. Analysis was conducted at the Congressional District and statewide levels. For overall statewide results, the Districts were properly weighted so that the results were representative of the state as a whole. For the entire sample of Pennsylvania residents on statewide analyses, the sampling error is at most +/- 1.62 percentage points.

To read the full report, please [click here](#).

Responsive Management is an internationally recognized public opinion and attitude survey research firm specializing in natural resource and outdoor recreation issues. Our mission is to help natural resource and outdoor recreation agencies and organizations better understand and work with their constituents, customers, and the public.

Responsive Management has conducted human dimensions research in all 50 states and 15 countries, completing more than 1,000 studies. We have conducted research for every state fish and wildlife agency, most federal resource agencies, and most DNRs and NGOs, including the National Shooting Sports Foundation, the Archery Trade Association, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, SCI, and dozens of others.

Additionally, Responsive Management has conducted survey research for many of the nation's top universities, including Colorado State University, Duke University, North Carolina State University, Penn State University, Rutgers University, Stanford University, Texas Tech, University of Florida, Virginia Tech, West Virginia University, and more.

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