



State Wildlife Action Plans: Species of Greatest Conservation Need

Learning Series #14

Date: January 17, 2024

Time: 2:00pm-3:30pm (ET)

Meeting Link: <https://fishwildlife-org.zoom.us/j/84143847484?pwd=xzc4KdWVTCogo5cBdJbwPnczbcOEyN.1>

Meeting ID: 841 4384 7484

Passcode: 936660

One tap mobile: +13017158592,,84143847484#,,,,*936660#

Overview: Each state, territory, the District of Columbia is required to include Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in their SWAP. Each has its own process for identifying SGCN. In this session, we'll hear from SWAP coordinators about the criteria they're using, how they make decisions about what SGCNs to include, and opportunities to improve regional collaboration and connections related to SGCNs.

MEETING AGENDA

Time (ET)	Topic	Speakers
2:00 PM	Welcome and Introductions (5 min)	Jason Goldberg, FWS; Mark Humpert, AFWA
2:05 PM	USGS National SGCN Database (10 mins)	John Kanter, National Wildlife Federation
	Addressing information deficient SGCN (10 mins)	Rita Dixon, Idaho Department of Game and Fish
	Using consistent criteria for SGCN (10 mins)	Brett Albanese, Georgia Wildlife Resources Division
2:45 PM	Breakout Groups	
2:20 PM	Reconvene	
3:30pm	Adjourn	

Notes

John Kanter, National Wildlife Federation

Enhancing the Accuracy and Function of the USGS National SGCN Database

- Link to USGS SGCN Database <https://www1.usgs.gov/csas/swap/>
- Objectives
 - Engage with States, FWS, and other stakeholders to identify needs and preferences of users of SGCN data and information, and increase awareness about uses of SGCN data
 - ID additional standardized data fields from SWAPs that could be considered for SGCN database ingestion
 - Advance coordination among key stakeholders.

- Design a new landing page for the USGS database.
- Potential uses of the SGCN database.
 - Determine shared species
 - Sort by state and/or Regional Wildlife Associations
 - Sort by species
 - Compare changes
- Will help support taxonomic reconciliation and help reduce text errors.
- This will serve as a living database. Can serve as a clearinghouse service by FWS as part of the SWAP submission process.
- Will help match to taxonomic authorities. Several issues with names in state lists will need to be addressed. For example, scientific names are not fully spelled, text in scientific name that is not a scientific name.
- Currently developing guidance for submissions with instructions and best practices, including a proposed column structure.
- Additional data fields may include features such as habitat and threats.
- Implementation includes:
 - Regular meetings among Regional chairs of Wildlife Diversity Managers/SWAP Coordinators
 - Inclusion of FWS and USGS representatives
 - Establishment of Work Groups centered on species, habitat mapping, and data/databases.
- Discussion
 - **John, I'm wondering if there may be challenges with complete standardization across state lines as some of us maintain certain outdated taxonomy within the game realm or have other standards for when species names are updated that may not match ITIS. If I remember correctly ITIS is sometimes out of sync with AOU, for instance**
 - Would there be a backend tool or data dictionary to match species identified under different taxonomic authorities by different states?
 - Best approach is to ID where those problems are occurring. That could be worked out through conversations. Doing it through the backend – not sure – we can follow-up.
 - Most inverts have no consistent taxonomic authority
 - **Would highly suggest not having sp. or n.sp. SGCN. As they are undescribed, there is no standard to identify which taxon is being referenced. If four states reference an n.sp. in the same genus who knows what it actually is as they are not recognized as a valid species.**

Rita Dixon, Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Addressing information deficient SGCN

- Defined as - SGCN are species known to be experiencing declines or are at-risk due to various stressors or emerging issues, and for which reasonable (and testable) hypotheses can be devised concerning the role of these stressors.
 - Do not have the knowledge uncertainty of species of greatest information need (SGIN)
- SGIN
 - Potentially at-risk but current scientific knowledge and expert understanding are lacking.
 - Uncertainty can stem from one or more sources – taxonomic, distributional, ecological.
 - These are species we believe meet SGCN criteria but there is a lack of adequate data
 - For each SGIN, we assigned the primary source of knowledge uncertainty recognizing that for many, additional knowledge gaps exist.
- 137 SGCN in Idaho, including plants.
- 132 SGIN, also including plants.

- Idaho SWAP includes discussion of taxonomic (8 species), distributional (89 species), and ecological uncertainty (36 species).
- Examples of conservation actions to address:
 - Taxonomic – Perform genetic analyses
 - Distributional – exploring better survey techniques, such as eDNA
 - Ecological – Determine factors affecting SGIN survival.
- Key reference - Raphael and Molina (2007), *Conservation of Rare or Little-known Species: Biological, Social, and Economic Considerations*
- Final approved SWAP will be posted to IDFG public website.
- Discussion
 - Are SGCN completely separate from SGIN list?
 - They are listed separately in the plan. Even though we categorize species into these two groups, we don't say one is more important than the other. It was a way for us to split out conservation actions into different categories.
 - Can State Wildlife Grants be used for SGIN?
 - SGCN are named specifically in legislation. FWS has advised that it is okay to use another term, like SGIN. FWS doesn't get involved at that level in SWAPs. We don't have an opinion about designating. Make sure the text notes that SGIN is clearly stated to be nested within SGCN species. Those species would be eligible for funding. Idaho called all of their species SWAP species, and then created two categories: SGCN and SGIN.
 - From Paul V: The SWAP text makes it clear your "SWAP Species" are treated as SGCN.
 - As an additional clarification of Idaho's SGCN & SGIN--all species met our criteria for inclusion in our SWAP. The distinction really comes down to the type of action needed for the species.
 - **Are SGIN considered SGCN in terms of being able to qualify for SWG funding? Or are SGIN limited to only being able to do research/surveys and not other sorts of actions using SWG funds?** Response: The primary actions outline in the Idaho SWAP are related to resolving questions about their taxonomy, distribution, or ecology (including for example, habitat associations, stressors, etc.). So for this suite of species, we are focused on resolving this uncertainty. For species with taxonomic uncertainty, the primary action is to do genetic analyses to resolve this uncertainty. For species with distributional uncertainty, we need to expand survey efforts across the state or revisit historic locations for example. For ecological uncertainty, that can involve trying to get a better understanding of the species' needs/threats/habitat relationships. For example, some species are experiencing significant declines either in Idaho, regionally, or rangewide. The action for these species is to investigate the causes of declines so that we can develop appropriate actions to address the decline. At that point, if we reveal the reason for decline, we can shift the species to the SGCN category and develop appropriate actions for it. Similarly, if for example, we resolve the taxonomy for one or more species and it reveals that species is synonymized with another more widely distributed species that is secure, then it would get dropped from SWAP altogether. But in the opposite case, if we discover that the species is distinct, range-restricted, and with high threats, it would get moved to SGCN and we would develop appropriate actions for its conservation.
 - **Can you comment specifically on how ID has tackled the threshold between SGCN and SGIN? And on the challenge of doing so consistently between taxa (broadly)?** Response: All SWAP species were subjected to the selection criteria to warrant making it into our SWAP. The next task was to split species into 2 groups based on their need, i.e., as described above, species we have enough information on to develop appropriate conservation actions for

- went into the SGCN bin; those whose primary need is to resolve various types of uncertainty went into the SGIN bin. This was an evaluative process where we took each species one-by-one and assigned it to what we thought was the most appropriate category. And then within SGIN, whether the primary source of uncertainty was taxonomic, distributional, or ecological.
- **Is there a predetermined commitment of some resources to fill knowledge gaps for the SGIN? Like lower tiers the other species often become lower priorities and data gaps often remain unfilled. I have seen some states identify or earmark a percentage of resources to fill those areas of uncertainty to avoid perpetual data deficiencies. Have any of those items been addressed when partitioning the list? Not that inverts make up most of the SGIN or anything ;)** The Idaho Department of Fish and Game has committed to making SWAP implementation a priority for the Department agency-wide. We recently formed a SWAP prioritization team at the Director's request to develop a process for prioritizing actions in our new SWAP. Once we develop that process, and vet it throughout the agency, we will begin the exercise of prioritizing SWAP actions for implementation across the Department, i.e., not just for the Wildlife Diversity Program. Our SWAP includes both game/nongame species that have relevance to many programs. In addition, we have many actions in the new SWAP where the Technical Services Bureau will be the lead in implementing them. In short, until we see what the prioritization process looks like, I can't give you a definitive answer to your question. One thing we have discussed in terms of a criterion for prioritization is urgency, i.e., the more urgent the need for the species, it will likely be assigned a higher priority for action.
 - As I mentioned in the message above, all SGIN met our criteria for "SGCN," e.g., ESA status, G-rank/S-rank, IUCN status, level of endemism, rangewide declines, lacking information, etc. You can find a complete description of our selection process and criteria as well as the distinction between SGCN and SGIN in our draft SWAP at <https://idfg.idaho.gov/swap>. Happy to visit with you more if you want. You can reach me at rita.dixon@idfg.idaho.gov

Brett Albanese, Georgia Wildlife Resources Division

Using consistent criteria for SGCN

- Recommend deliberate process for species to consider in SWAP revision.
- Recommend using NatureServe ranking methodology to decide whether species merit SGCN status.
- GA developed Southeastern SGCN database to help identify a number of factors, such as threats and actions. Includes ranking factors.
- Highlighted overall SGCN Assessment process that GA uses.
- Georgia has a number of resources available at https://georgiabiodiversity.org/sgcn_development/swap_support_2025.html - Feel free to use!
- Discussion
 - **Georgia's example emphasizes rarity. How are you addressing the requirement that SGCN should help serve a representative role for all species?**
 - Answer: The Highest and High SGCN tiers do place the greatest emphasis on the rarest SGCN who are at risk of extirpation or further population losses during the next SWAP cycle. However, our Moderate Conservation Concern Tier includes "...species that may be currently stable or representative of an ecosystem or community in need of conservation...". We also have other SWAP committees that are focusing on conservation opportunity areas and habitat management.
 - **What # did you end up with for SGCN after the new process?**
 - To date, Technical Teams have identified 828 Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Highest, High or Moderate Conservation Concern categories. Additional species will be designated in the Data Deficient category, which will bring our total

SGCN list to over 1000 species in the 2025 SWAP. The increase in SGCN reflects the addition of species not addressed in the 2015 assessment, including species recently listed under the ESA, marine fishes and invertebrates, plant and animal Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need and many aquatic and terrestrial invertebrate species.

Breakout Group Discussion Trigger Questions

What criteria do you use to select SGCNs?

What are the pros and cons of using consistent criteria?

What do you need to help in your decision-making with SGCN criteria? For example, could you use a spreadsheet describing SGCN criteria in each state?

What changes might need to be made to help you identify SGCNs?

Links to Video and Notes from Past SWAP Learning Series and Tentative Future Topics

Date*	Topic (w/Recording Link)	Recording Password	Link to Notes
Wednesday, November 16, 2022	#1 Engaging Tribes and Indigenous People in State Wildlife Action Plans	0T?41Gz.	SWAP & Tribal Engagement Notes
Wednesday, December 14, 2022	#2 SWAPs and Climate Adaptation Guidance	XU.=69*j	SWAP & Climate Adaptation Notes
Wednesday, January 18, 2023	#3 State Wildlife Action Plans and Renewable Energy	=7NSqgQT	SWAP & Renewable Energy Notes
Wednesday, March 15, 2023	#4 Interactive data and tools for SWAP planning and implementation	+6@f9jQW	SWAP & NatureServe Notes
Wednesday, April 19, 2023	#5 Engaging Diverse Partners & Making your SWAP More Relevant	\$p?=!g95	SWAP & Engaging Diverse Partners Notes
Wednesday, May 17, 2023	#6 Using the SWAP & Landscape Conservation Framework for Interjurisdictional Landscape Conservation	B=Jg^@8=	SWAP & Landscape Conservation
Wednesday, June 21, 2023	#7 Making Your SWAP RAWA-Ready	FnJane%1	Making SWAP RAWA-Ready
Wednesday, July 19, 2023	#8 Incorporating corridors into your SWAP	2r#+^rla	Incorporating Corridors into SWAP
Wednesday, August 16, 2023	#9 Roundtable Discussion	LtnZ1x\$V	SWAP Open Discussion
Wednesday, September 20, 2023	# 10 SWAPs, Federal Planning, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	3v4O08?X	SWAPs and Federal Planning

October 18, 2023	#11 SWAPs and Bat Conservation	?2W2UA*B	SWAP and Bat Conservation
November 15, 2023	#12 Incorporating Fish & Wildlife Health into your SWAP	7XvFM&a\$	SWAP & Fish & Wildlife Health
December 13 th , 2023 (2 nd Wed of Dec.)	#13 2023 Round-up on Lessons Learned & Open Forum	M&md51We	
January 17, 2024	#14 Species of Greatest Conservation Need		
February 21, 2024	#15 Tentatively- Dashboards & Paperless SWAP		
March 20, 2024	No Learning Series See you in Portal, AZ for the WDPM Annual Meeting		
April 17, 2024	#16 Topic TBD		
May 15, 2024	#17 Topic TBD		
June 12, 2024 2 nd Wed	#18 Topic TBD		
* Note all SWAP Learning Series sessions will be held from 2:00pm-3:30pm ET unless otherwise indicated.			