

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

In May of 2002, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) began a process to develop the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) that was funded through the State Wildlife Grants (SWG) program. The SCDNR committed to developing the Strategy and begin implementing the conservation actions by October 1, 2005. The goal of the Strategy is to emphasize a cooperative, proactive approach to conservation while working with federal, state and local governments; local businesses; and conservation-minded individuals to join in the effort of maintaining the fish and wildlife resources of South Carolina.

In order to sustain South Carolina's diverse wildlife resources in the future, the following actions are critical: (1) increase baseline biological inventories with emphasis on natural history, distribution and status of native species; (2) increase commitment by natural resource agencies, conservation organizations and academia toward establishing effective conservation strategies; (3) increase financial support and technological resources for planning and implementation of these strategies; and (4) create public-private partnerships and educational outreach programs for broad-scale conservation efforts. South Carolina's CWCS is a first step toward instituting these actions.

The diversity of animals in South Carolina is vast. Habitats in this state range from the mountains to the ocean and include many different taxonomic animal groups. SCDNR wanted to address as many of those groups as possible for inclusion in the list of priority species for the CWCS; as such, twelve taxonomic groups are included in the Strategy: mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, freshwater fishes, diadromous fishes, marine fishes, marine invertebrates, crayfish, freshwater mussels, freshwater snails, and insects (both freshwater and terrestrial).

The SCDNR identified 1,240 species to include on the state's Priority Species List. Reports were prepared for each species, guild or indicator; in these reports, authors described the species, their status, population and abundance, habitat needs, challenges, conservation accomplishments and conservation actions. This approach allows for identification of both general conservation strategies for wildlife and habitats in South Carolina, as well as development of species-based conservation strategies. The latter allows for management of particular species within a given habitat. A separate volume, Supplemental Volume: Species and Habitat Accounts, contains these reports in their entirety. The SCDNR also identified habitats critical for the priority species considered in the CWCS. Both terrestrial and aquatic habitats were considered and reports were prepared for 38 habitats (terrestrial and marine) organized within five ecoregions, as well as 13 ecobasins, which characterize the freshwater aquatic habitats of the state. These reports are also presented in the Supplemental Volume.

As conservation strategies were developed for each species, it became evident that they could be separated into eight categories, which we have designated as Conservation Action Areas (CAAs). These eight CAAs are: Education and Outreach; Habitat Protection; Invasive and Non-native Species; Private Land Cooperation; Public Land Management; Regulatory Actions; Survey and Research Needs; and Urban and Developing Lands. Within each CAA, conservation actions were condensed from the recommendations prepared for each animal on South Carolina's Priority Species List. Some of the actions identified will affect all species included in the

CWCS; others may affect only a few species. Each of these actions was prioritized and measures that indicate success of implementing the action were identified.

It is also critical that we monitor priority species, their habitats and the effectiveness of the actions that are implemented to conserve them. With the information gathered in this program, project leaders will be required to produce annual progress reports for review by a steering committee and the CWCS coordination team. These reports will be evaluated for insight into adaptive management needs and reassessments of the CWCS.

From the beginning of the CWCS effort, SCDNR and the planning team sought to realize successful partnerships and public involvement in the development of the strategy. It is understood that successful conservation is furthered by the existence of a strong collaborative involvement between all resource stakeholders, private or public, governmental or nongovernmental. Task forces were convened to assist in determining important natural resource issues in South Carolina. Taxa teams were assembled to determine challenges to species and conservation actions to address those challenges. Public meetings were held to gather input from the citizens of the state. Prior to submission of the CWCS, the SCDNR began creating Conservation Action Committees around the CAAs identified above; two of these committees have convened and have begun working toward identifying statewide strategies for species and habitat conservation. Partnerships will continue to be critical in implementing the actions identified in South Carolina's CWCS.