

**Public Involvement
in the Development of Arkansas'
Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy**

Report of Accomplishments

In fulfillment of the requirements for the

MOU between

Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

and the

**University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture
Cooperative Extension Service**

December 15, 2005

Introduction

In 2004, AGFC formed a working partnership with the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service to plan and implement a comprehensive public involvement strategy (CWCS) which has since been renamed the Arkansas Wildlife Action Plan. The goal was to reach out to private landowners through Extension's network of 75 county offices to build state outreach capacity that would carry over into future implementation. The Cooperative Extension Service retained ComMetrics, Inc., a consulting firm with experience in leading public involvement processes, to assist in the effort. This report describes accomplishments of the public involvement strategy resulting from this partnership.

Public Involvement Goals

The broad goals for involving the public in the planning process were three-fold:

- To **produce a set of conservation priorities** for Arkansas that will serve as a blueprint for strategic investments and activities that reflect the public interest regarding conservation.
- To **build partnerships** with agencies, organizations and businesses with an interest in, and capacity to conserve wildlife and habitat, in order to improve the quality of the strategy and increase the level of commitment to and ownership of the implementation.
- To **inform the public** about the planning process and provide opportunities for them to share ideas in order to recruit new constituencies for conservation actions.

The goal was not to reach consensus on every plan element within the limited time available for the process. The most important outcome was for planners to understand different perspectives, allay fears where possible, and build broad-based public support. Building relationships and bringing diverse constituencies together to gain mutual understanding is a sound investment in establishing trust that will pay off in streamlining future decisions.

Reaching Out To Landowners And The General Public

The planning and implementation of the public involvement process was a coordinated effort that required a number of meetings with discussions and attention to details. A communications team was recruited to lead the public involvement process (Table 1). The communications team put together a multi-faceted plan to reach a broad audience. Each element of the plan was undertaken to achieve different objectives. The next paragraphs describe elements of the plan and their objectives.

Table 1: Communications Team

CWCS Communications Team	
John Sunderland	Arkansas Game & Fish Commission
Becky McPeake	University of Arkansas, Cooperative Extension Service
Sandra Miller	ComMetrics, Inc.
Nancy Ledbetter	Arkansas Game & Fish Commission
Jane Anderson	Arkansas Game & Fish Commission
Elizabeth Murray	Multi-Agency Wetland Planning Team
Arlene Green	Arkansas Game & Fish Commission
Ellen Fennell	Audubon Arkansas
Steve Filipek	Arkansas Game & Fish Commission
Lucy Moreland	Arkansas Game & Fish Commission
Cindy Boland	University of Arkansas at Little Rock
Karen Ballard	University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service

Gauging Perceptions Of Rural Landowners And The General Public

To begin the process of engaging the public in the CWCS planning process, the communications team retained the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Local Government Institute, to conduct a public opinion survey. The objective of this survey was to gain a better understanding of two different groups' perceptions and values on species and habitat conservation, conservation practices and comprehensive planning.

Two groups were surveyed: the general population of adults over the age of 18 years and rural landowners with more than five acres. The bullets below provide a quick overview of the most relevant findings.

- The majority of respondents are very interested in wild animals that live in Arkansas. Rural landowners (64%) were significantly more interested in the state's wild animals than statewide respondents (49%). When asked how important it is for Arkansans to maintain healthy populations of non-game wildlife, support remains high. Fifty-six percent of rural landowners and 60% of the general public find it very important that Arkansans maintain healthy populations of non-game wildlife, a finding that validates Congressional support for the State Wildlife Grants program.
- When respondents were asked how much effort should be invested in maintaining healthy populations of specific types of non-game wildlife, support varied. Birds, such as songbirds and owls, received the highest level of support with 78% of both rural landowners and the general population indicating that a lot of effort is warranted. While mammals, such as bats and field mice, received the lowest level of support, 30% of rural landowners and 35% of the general public support a lot of effort to conserve mammals. Perhaps surprisingly, support for maintaining healthy populations of insects such as butterflies and dragonflies was higher than expected with 63% of rural landowners and 61% of the general public stating that a lot of effort should be invested in maintaining healthy populations. Broad support for bird conservation sets the stage for effective public discussion of the need to coordinate conservation efforts among states up and down the Mississippi River flyway. Support for charismatic insects, such as butterflies and dragonflies, creates a firm foundation on which to build support for

bees and other pollinators. Lackluster support for mammal conservation suggests the need for increased education.

- Respondents were asked a similar series of questions about how much effort should be invested in conserving different types of habitats. Support for a lot of effort varied from 90% of rural landowners and 89% of the general public supporting a lot of effort to maintain rivers, streams and lakes to 67% of rural landowners and 64% of the general public supporting a lot of effort to maintain pastures, fencerows, and other agricultural lands as habitat for wildlife.
- Respondents were asked about the acceptability of two illustrative management practices to gauge support for different types of conservation action, prescribed burning and selective thinning of timber. Altogether, 89% of rural landowners and 88% of the general public find controlled fires to be an acceptable practice for improving wildlife habitat. Just over half of both groups find this practice to be very acceptable. Eighty percent of both groups think thinning timber tracts is an acceptable way to make wildlife habitat more suitable while not quite half -- 44% of rural landowners and 39% of the general public -- find thinning very acceptable. Three-quarters of both groups find it acceptable to pay private landowners to engage in practices to improve habitat.
- Respondents in both groups tend to be only somewhat concerned about the impact of human activities on non-game wildlife. Fifty-three percent of rural landowners and 51% of the general population are somewhat concerned. More than a third of each group is very concerned with 35% of rural landowners and 38% of the general population very concerned. These findings may disappoint some and encourage others. To be sure, they highlight the need for all of us to make the connection between our lifestyles and their impact on wildlife and critical habitats and suggest a need to find creative ways to identify practices that lessen our human footprint without reducing our quality of life.
- A majority of both groups of respondents, 83% of both rural landowners and the general population, support Arkansas seeking federal funding for wildlife conservation efforts and activities through the State Wildlife Grant program. However, 16% of rural landowners and 17% of the general population either oppose or are unsure about whether Arkansas should seek federal funding to conserve non-game wildlife and their habitats. A clear majority of both groups, 86% of rural landowners and 89% of the general population of adults, support efforts of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and its partners to develop an action plan to manage non-game wildlife with public input. About half, 50% of rural landowners and 53% of the general public, strongly support these planning efforts.

The survey clearly demonstrated that the vast majority of Arkansans in general and rural landowners in specific supported taking action to conserve species and their habitats. Therefore, the communications team moved forward to involve the public in a dialogue.

Informing and Engaging The Public

The communications team employed a multi-pronged, integrated strategy to inform and engage the public generally and rural landowners specifically.

Designing A Future For Arkansas Wildlife Website: A website was developed as a central clearinghouse for posting and soliciting public and peer comment on the draft strategy, registering the public for stakeholder meetings, and providing background information. The website was purposefully designed to meet the needs of the general public as well as scientists and technical reviewers. The website can be found at: www.WildlifeArkansas.com or through a link at the AGFC website.

Informational Brochure: A general informational brochure was developed to inform rural landowners and the general public about the CWCS process, its relationship to the State Wildlife Grants program and to promote public involvement through the website. Five thousand copies of the brochure have been distributed. The brochure can be seen at: <http://www.wildlifearkansas.com/materials/brochure2005.pdf>

Letter to leaders of intermediary organizations: A letter was sent under the signature of Scott Henderson, Director, Arkansas Game & Fish Commission to leaders of 107 key intermediary organizations that represent or provide information to individuals and landowners with an interest in species and habitat conservation. The letter introduced these key leaders to the CWCS process and invited them to submit names of individuals who could ably represent their interests in a series of stakeholder meetings. A list of the organizations who received this letter follows.

- Agricultural Council of Arkansas
- American Bass Association, Arkansas Chapter
- American Fisheries Society, Arkansas Chapter
- Arkansas Assn. of Conservation Districts
- Arkansas Cattlemen's Association
- Arkansas Chapter, Associated General Contractors
- Arkansas Dairy Cooperative Association
- Arkansas Delta Byways
- Arkansas Dept. of Environmental Quality
- Arkansas Dept. of Parks and Tourism
- Arkansas Environmental Federation
- Arkansas Farm Bureau
- Arkansas Fly Fishers
- Arkansas Forestry Association
- Arkansas Forestry Commission
- Arkansas Geological Commission
- Arkansas Great Southwest Association
- Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department
- Arkansas Home Builders Association
- Arkansas Horse Council
- Arkansas Hospitality Association
- Arkansas Land of Legends Travel Association
- Arkansas Municipal League
- Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission
- Arkansas Office of the Governor
- Arkansas Oil and Gas Commission
- Arkansas Pork Producers Association
- Arkansas Public Policy Panel
- Arkansas Rice Council
- Arkansas Rice Producers Group
- Arkansas River Valley RC&D Council
- Arkansas River Valley Tri-Peaks Region
- Arkansas Rural Water Association
- Arkansas Soil & Water Conservation Commission
- Arkansas South Tourism Association
- Arkansas State Plant Board
- Arkansas State University
- Arkansas Tech University
- Arkansas Travel Council
- Arkansas Water Resource Center
- Arkansas Wildlife Federation
- Association of Arkansas Counties
- Audubon Arkansas
- Bayou Bartholomew Alliance

- Beaver Lake Watershed Partnership
- Cache River Watershed Partnership
- Central Arkansas Planning & Development District
- Central Arkansas RC&D Council
- Central Arkansas Water
- Diamond Lakes Association
- Ducks Unlimited
- East Arkansas Planning & Development District
- East Arkansas RC&D Council
- Farm Service Agency
- Friends of North Fork/White River
- Green Bay Packaging
- Greers Ferry Lake/Little Red River Association
- Heart of Arkansas Travel Association
- Kings River Watershed Group
- Lake Fayetteville Watershed Partnership
- L'Anguille River Watershed Coalition
- Leatherwood Creek Watershed
- Little Red River Action Team
- Livestock and Poultry Commission
- Lower Little River Watershed Coalition
- National Park Service
- National Wild Turkey Federation
- Northwest Arkansas Economic Development District
- Northwest Arkansas RC&D Council
- Northwest Arkansas Tourism Association
- Ouachita Society of American Foresters
- Ouachita Watch League
- Ozark Foothills RC&D Council
- Ozark Gateway Tourist Council
- Ozark Mountain Region
- Plum Creek Timber Company
- Potlatch Corporation
- Quail Unlimited
- Razorback Chapter Soil & Water Conservation Society
- Scott County Organization to Protect the Environment
- Sierra Club, Arkansas Chapter
- Southeast Arkansas RC&D Council
- Southern Arkansas University
- Southwest Arkansas Planning & Development District
- Southwest Arkansas RC&D Council
- Soybean Promotion Board
- Strawberry River Watershed Group
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Poultry Federation
- The Wildlife Society, Arkansas Chapter
- Trout Unlimited
- University of Arkansas
- University of Arkansas at Monticello
- University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff
- University of Arkansas, Cooperative Extension Service
- Upper White River Basin Foundation
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- US Geological Survey
- USDA Forest Service
- USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service
- West Central Arkansas Planning & Development District
- West Fork - White River Watershed
- Western Arkansas Mountain Frontier
- Western Arkansas Planning & Development District
- Weyerhaeuser
- White County Conservation District
- White River Planning & Development District
- Wildlife Management Institute

Developing a mailing list of key opinion leaders: The organizations listed above, communications team and county extension agents submitted names and addresses of individuals and key opinion leaders with a stake in how habitats and wildlife are managed. These were compiled into a segmented mailing list of some 3700 individuals.

Informational mailing to landowners: An informational mailing was sent to 2600+ individuals, primarily landowners and members of hunting clubs who participate in the Acres for Wildlife program. This mailing included the informational brochure, an invitation to register online for one of five stakeholder meetings, and links to the website.

Invitation to participate in stakeholder meetings: Individualized letters were sent under the signature of Scott Henderson to 1100+ key opinion leaders inviting them to participate in the stakeholder meetings. These letters included the informational brochure, website address and a mail-in response card.

Email distribution list: Email addresses were collected from the website, response to the stakeholder meeting invitation and other sources to develop an email distribution list. The email distribution list was used to confirm meeting registration, send email reminders, notify individuals of updates to the website and conduct a meeting evaluation after the stakeholder meeting. The email distribution list currently includes 250 individuals.

Engaging Staff of Key Institutional Partners

Institutional partnerships are most effective when county staff from different agencies decide to work together to leverage resources and coordinate technical assistance. Recognizing this, a significant component of the public involvement process was “in-reach” to local field staff of key institutional partners. To accomplish this goal, about 40 local staff from three key agencies was recruited to facilitate, record, host and staff the registration table. Staff included NRCS district conservationists, county Extension agents, and AGFC wildlife biologists and stream team coordinators. These individuals participated in a special briefing before the stakeholder meetings and received additional briefing materials by email.

Involving Stakeholders

Two-hundred eighty-eight individuals attended five evening stakeholder meetings in Hope, Jonesboro, Fayetteville, Lake Village and Little Rock in June 2005. To start each meeting, a local host told a story about a species and/or habitat that hold special childhood memories that children of today are less likely to experience. Participants were asked to add species that they used to see but rarely see today to the list. Table 2 shows the list of species and frequencies of species named in this exercise. While not all of the species identified are on the Arkansas list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need, the majority are.

Table 2: Species stakeholders meeting participants perceive as declining

Species	Southwest	Northeast	Northwest	Southeast	Central	Total
Alligator - Gar	1	2		3	4	10
Alligator Snapping Turtle	1			1	1	3
American Eel				1		1
American Toad (Bufo woodhoosri)					1	1
aquatic species					1	1
Armadillo					1	1
Army Worms					1	1
Baltimore Oriole				1	1	2

Species	Southwest	Northeast	Northwest	Southeast	Central	Total
Bats				3		3
Beavers			1			1
Bigfoot	2					2
Black Bear					3	3
Bloodroot	1					1
Blue Birds				2	1	3
Blue Eraser			1			1
Blue Racer Snake	1	1				2
Blue Suckers					1	1
Bob White Quail	10	9	11	18	20	68
Bobcat	2	1	1	3	2	9
Box Turtle			1		2	3
Brook Trout					1	1
Brown Trout					1	1
Bullfrog	3		1		2	6
Bumblebees					1	1
Butcher Bird	1		1	2		4
butterflies					1	1
Cedar Waxwing	1					1
Cerulean Warbler	1					1
Channel Catfish					1	1
Chipmunk			1	1		2
Civet Cat		1				1
Coach Whip			2			2
Corn Snake	1					1
Diamondback Rattlesnake			1		1	2
Dove			3			3
Dung Beetle	1	1				2
Eastern Collared Lizard			1			1
Eastern Meadowlark		1				1
Eel		1				1
Elk					1	1
Evening Grosbeak	1					1
Flying Squirrel			2	1		3
Fouke Monster	1					1
Fowler's Toad	1					1
Fox	1		1	1		3
Freshwater mussels/clams					1	1
Garter Snake			1			1
Gilled Snail			1			1
Greater Prairie Chicken		1			1	2
Greater Roadrunner	1					1
Green Anole Lizard					1	1

Species	Southwest	Northeast	Northwest	Southeast	Central	Total
Green Grass Snake	1					1
Grey Catbird	1			1		2
Grey Fox	1	1	2	2		6
Hognose Snake (spreadsitter)	1		1			2
Honey Bees					5	5
Hooded Mergansers					1	1
Horn Toad	1					1
Horned Lizard				1		1
Horny Toad	1					1
insects					1	1
Interior Warblers					1	1
Ivory Billed Woodpecker	1		1		1	3
Jack Rabbits					1	1
Killdee	1					1
King Rail				1		1
King Snake		1				1
Kingfisher				1		1
large black snakes				1		1
large game fish					1	1
Leach (long one)	1					1
Lightning Bugs/Fireflies	1			1		2
Loggerhead Shrike	1	1				2
Loggerhead Turtle				2		2
Mallard Duck				2	1	3
many amphibian species					1	1
Meadowlark	1		1	1	1	4
Mink	2		1		1	4
Mockingbirds					1	1
Mountain Lion/Cougar	1			2	2	5
Mud Snake				1		1
Mussel				1		1
Mussels - Shells		1				1
Northern Bobwhite	1				1	2
Ornate Box Turtle					1	1
Owl				1		1
Paddle Fish	1					1
Painted Bunting	1			2	2	5
Palid Sturgeon		1				1
Panther		1	1			2
Pileated Woodpecker			2		1	3
Praying Mantis			1			1
Purple Martins					1	1
Rabbits			1	5		6

Species	Southwest	Northeast	Northwest	Southeast	Central	Total
Rattlesnake			5	1		6
Red Fox	2	1	3	3	1	10
Red Rat Snake	1					1
Red Squirrel					1	1
Red Wolf		1			1	2
Red-headed Woodpecker	1	1	2	2	3	9
Red-Shouldered Hawks					1	1
Ring Neck Pheasant					1	1
River Otter	1					1
Road Runner	4		4	4	5	17
Robin			1			1
Ruffed Grouse			1			1
Salamander			1			1
Salt & Pepper King Snakes					1	1
Scarlet Tanagers					1	1
Scissor Tail Bird	1				1	2
Scissor-Tailed Flycatcher				1		1
shorebirds					1	1
Shrike			2	1		3
Skinks					1	1
Skunk			1			1
Snapping Turtle				2		2
songbirds					1	1
Sparrow hawk		1			1	2
Spoonbill Catfish	1					1
Spotted Salamander		1			1	2
Spotted Skunks					2	2
Spreading Adder	1					1
Sturgeon	1					1
Sunfish					1	1
Swallow Tailed Kite				1		1
Swamp Rabbit		3		2	2	7
Tarantula	1				3	4
Teal			1			1
Terrapin		1				1
Tiger Salamander					1	1
Timber Rattlesnake			1			1
Tumble Bug	1					1
Turkey				1	1	2
Wasp	1					1
Weasel	1					1
Whippoorwill	2		2		2	6
Wild Hogs					1	1

	Southwest	Northeast	Northwest	Southeast	Central	Total
Species						
Wolf			1			1
Wood Duck			1			1
Wood Stork	1					1
Woodcock	1		1	5	2	9
Meeting Total	74	35	68	86	114	372

In addition to the informal survey, the stakeholder meeting included a PowerPoint presentation on the federal requirements for the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy and the current status of the planning process in Arkansas. The species of greatest conservation need and their habitats were presented. This PowerPoint presentation can be viewed at: www.WildlifeArkansas.com

During the stakeholder meetings, facilitated small group discussions were held, giving participants an opportunity to discuss what they had just heard about the scope and direction of the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation. Participants were asked to discuss three questions. Recorders captured the range of participant perspectives and suggestions. The three discussion questions were:

- What do you think about the list of species of greatest conservation need? Why?
- What conservation practices will be most attractive to private landowners? Why are they attractive?
- What prevents landowners from implementing conservation practices that benefit wildlife? Why?

A summary of the types of comments collected from the small group discussions can be found below. This summary is meant to provide a general sense of the range of ideas and common themes expressed by participants. The steering committee and work teams have used input from these stakeholder meetings to revise and refine the CWCS. This feedback will provide a framework to help guide and evaluate how Arkansas presents species and habitat information to the public and how it promotes voluntary conservation actions.

Summary of Small Group Discussions

The goal of the small group discussions was to surface the range of opinions, not to come to consensus. Ideas are grouped into general themes, some themes also have sub-themes. In many instances, ideas and suggestions conflict, which reflects the range of opinions expressed in small group discussions. Quotations that capture the essence of the discussion are included in *italic*, where appropriate.

While discussions were organized by region, regional differences in the group discussions were minimal and largely reflected the predominant land uses of the region. Urban development was more of an issue in Fayetteville and Little Rock. Row crop agriculture was a focus of discussion in Jonesboro and Lake Village. Animal agriculture was discussed in Fayetteville and Hope. Industrial forestry was discussed at Hope and Lake Village. Participants in Fayetteville and Hope talked about the need to change eligibility requirements for cost-share programs to increase participation of livestock and poultry farmers. Participants in Lake Village and Jonesboro made suggestions about tweaking cost-share programs to make them more attractive to row crop farmers.

The content of discussions also varied based on who participated. More academics participated in Fayetteville and Jonesboro. Landowners predominated in Hope and Lake Village. Land managers with industrial forestry firms participated in the discussions at Hope and Lake Village. While federal and state agencies, industry groups and environmental organizations were represented at all of the stakeholder meetings, they predominated at the Little Rock meeting. With notable exceptions, all participants were more likely to offer suggestions about what others could/should do to conserve wildlife and habitats rather than identifying things that they can/will do.

Question #1:

What do you think about the list of species of greatest conservation need? Why?

Theme #1: The list of species of greatest conservation need coupled with the overall strategy will enrich environmental outreach and education programs.

“How do you grab the public interest in five seconds?”

- ❖ Many participants commented that the list was almost overwhelming due to the number of species included.
- ❖ Need to explore ways to package the information in ways that reduce the complexity and make the information more user-friendly. Suggestions include:
- ❖ Pick “poster-child” species that create hold special feelings for the general public. Use these species to generate interest in and understanding of the concepts (e.g., Bobwhite Quail).
- ❖ Organize species by habitat.
- ❖ Develop a series of habitat posters that illustrate the species that live in the habitat and their relationships to each other.
- ❖ Organize species by conservation actions (e.g., pick a conservation action and list all of the species/habitats that will benefit from that conservation action)
- ❖ Start education in the early elementary grades. Involve 4-H, Scouts, and other youth programs in conservation education and hands-on projects (e.g., build a salamander pond). The list creates the opportunity for expanded partnerships with educators.

- ❖ The *Designing A Future For Arkansas Wildlife* website provides useful information on individual species and habitats.
- ❖ “I didn’t know there were so many types of mussels.” “How do we know how many of a species makes a healthy population?” “Why is fill-in-the-blank on the list?” “Why are coral snakes, mice, bats, (or some other species that some people feel are unwanted) on they list?” “Too much emphasis on birds, once again.” These kinds of responses create teachable moments for conservation education.

Theme #2: The list and strategy will provide information to support and improve planning by industry, nonprofit, local, county state and federal groups.

- ❖ While nearly all participants acknowledged the value of the list for planning and decision-making, some expressed concern that the list might generate pockets of fear of new regulation and erosion of private property rights. Suggestions offered to allay such fears included:
 - When communicating with the public about species of greatest conservation need, stress that the list will only be used to allocate funding for the State Wildlife Grants program and has no other purpose
 - To foster trust, continually remind public and private land owners and land managers that the State Wildlife Grant program calls for *voluntary* conservation. It is not a regulatory program.
 - Some expressed concern that managing habitats to protect species on the list of species of greatest conservation need might affect how habitat for game species are managed (e.g., ivory billed woodpecker was found in duck habitat) or result in limitations on hunting and fishing.
- ❖ Linking species and habitats in the CWCS database to specific conservation actions (e.g., NRCS Technical Manual) will provide a practical tool to promote implementation of best management practices (BMPs).
- ❖ Threats to a species may differ in different ecoregions. Species reports could identify where specific threats are an issue.
- ❖ Explain to the public how the list was developed, including who was involved, what sources of information were used, the criteria for selecting species to be included.
- ❖ Consider adding endangered plants that are critical to habitat restoration to the list.
- ❖ Landowners need a dynamic website where they can point to the location of their land and get a list of habitats, species of greatest conservation need and specific conservation practices that they should consider based on information they enter about their current land uses and practices,

Theme #3: The list of species of greatest conservation need and related information (in the database) can improve natural resource management by providing information for application by resource professionals in industry, public and nonprofit organizations.

- ❖ The list will help managers more effectively manage natural resources in several ways:
 - By helping to set priorities for conservation actions (e.g., land acquisition, management projects, inventory needs).
 - By helping fill gaps or make connections between projects and work already underway.
 - By supporting habitat restoration.
 - By providing information that enhances funding applications (to the extent that funders and cost-share providers consider the list in making funding decisions).
- ❖ The list will help groups compete for additional funds for stream work.

Theme #4: The list of species of greatest conservation need is a flexible list that will change over time as new information is obtained.

- ❖ Many participants suggested species to be added or deleted. These suggestions were forwarded to the taxa teams and peer reviewers for consideration and are summarized in Appendix X.
- ❖ Consider making the list shorter in order to more effectively focus resources.
- ❖ Consider adding some additional game species to the list that will generate popular interest, such as Mottled Duck, Fulvis Whistling Duck, and Black-bellied Whistling Duck.
- ❖ Questions were raised about why species on the edge of their historic range are included on the Arkansas list. Some thought the list should focus on species currently found in Arkansas while others believed the list should also include species that were plentiful in this part of their historic range.
- ❖ Consider dividing the list of species of greatest conservation need between species with declining populations and species where little is known about their population trends.
- ❖ Consider adding indicator species to the list even if their population is not declining.
- ❖ Consider including invasive species like zebra mussels, fire ants, feral dogs and cats, brown algae, and other invasive species that will need to be managed to protect desirable species on the list.
- ❖ Consider excluding species that are common in other states but rare in Arkansas.
- ❖ Some participants want the list to only include native species while others recommend including desirable non native species, such as trout.
- ❖ Some participants laud the breadth of the list while others question why insects and other invertebrates are included.

- ❖ Some participants want to exclude migratory species while others want to include migratory species.
- ❖ The list needs to be consistent with other programs/regulations. How can you have species on the list that are hunted, for example, purple gallinule and American woodcock? Some of the species on the list are also on depredation permits (e.g., double breasted cormorant).
- ❖ There will need to be a formal process for adding/deleting species from the list. The website should provide for continuous comment so that the public can easily suggest species to add or delete anytime.
- ❖ Some participants expressed concern at the number of species on the list. They wondered whether it wouldn't be more effective to focus on 5, 10 or 50 priority species in order to more effectively target scarce resources and capture the hearts and minds of a sometimes fickle public.
- ❖ Some participants raised concern about the number and complexity of terrestrial habitats. They wondered whether our ability to identify habitats at this level of specificity matched our ability to describe them.

Theme #5: The critical question is “how will the list be prioritized for practical use?”

“We don’t need a shotgun approach! We need to find and focus on the sweet spots where our actions can make the most difference.”

- ❖ Some participants asked how prioritization would balance scientific analysis and public perception in prioritization and who would be setting priorities.
- ❖ As we prioritize, we shouldn't get caught up with individual species; rather we should promote biodiversity within habitats.
- ❖ We need to find balance between species and habitats. Too much emphasis on the list of species may inadvertently trivialize the importance of habitats.
- ❖ Stakeholders want to be involved in selecting the criteria for how the list will be prioritized and which conservation actions will be promoted (much the way the forest industry was involved in developing best management practice guidelines for water quality).
- ❖ Participants identified particular habitats in which species are at particular risk and should be given high priority, stating “Aquatic species are most at risk. Most streams in central and Northwest Arkansas have been impacted by urban sprawl.” “Another group of species that are at risk are grassland dependent birds.” Early successional species also are at risk.”

Question #2

What conservation practices will be most attractive to private landowners? Why are they attractive?

Theme #1: It's all about managing habitats. Habitat affects everything.

“If you bring back the quail population you will clean up the water and increase the amphibians. Everything is connected to everything else in the ecosystem.”

- ❖ When it comes to habitats, quality matters. Resources should be directed toward promoting quality habitat.
- ❖ We should decide on the scale and outcomes we desire and then set goals for restoring whole systems (e.g., restoration of bottomland hardwood forests encompasses water quality, species diversity of plants and wildlife, wetland hydrology, and other considerations).
- ❖ Farm bill funds set aside for habitat restoration should be targeted to carefully targeted goals instead of distributed scatter-shot in order to establish corridors or restore systems.
- ❖ Organizing technical assistance and education strategies around habitats reduces the complexity of the species list and will make the strategy more understandable to landowners and the general public.
- ❖ If we have to choose between spending State Wildlife Grants (SWG) funds on population studies or habitat restoration, Arkansas needs to focus on habitat restoration.
- ❖ Need to measure the net loss/gain of habitat. One new development or hardwood timber harvest or new pasture can destroy more habitat than WRP or CRP restores in a year.
- ❖ In rapidly urbanizing areas, we will need to manage land development more effectively in order to slow habitat loss (e.g., incorporate mitigation as an integral part of development projects such as Mud Creek in Fayetteville where quail and great blue heron can be seen in 18 mitigated wetlands behind Wal-Mart, Home Depot and other commercial developments).
- ❖ Develop education programs that are targeted not only by ecoregion but also by landownership patterns (e.g., there are many landowners in Northwest Arkansas with 40 acres who do not farm. These landowners may be more amenable to planting food plots without expectation of cost share if approached effectively).

Theme #2: Many landowners are interested in “simple” actions they can take, such as prescribed burning, buffers and food plots, recognizing that even seemingly simple conservation actions may not be so simple to implement.

- ❖ Few private landowners know how to do prescribed burning. There is no where they can go to learn how to do prescribed burning. They are not sure who to hire to do

prescribed burning for them. They are concerned about liability with respect to their neighbors. So while there is a desire to do prescribed burning, few landowners actually do prescribed burning.

- Increase the supply of private vendors who can provide services to private landowners (e.g., prescribed burning).
- Provide a directory of private vendors who can provide services to private landowners.
- ❖ Cost share for alternative water sources for pastured livestock would create more interest in establishing riparian buffers.
- ❖ Many landowners want “clean” fencerows and “cleared” land down to the water’s edge because “messy” or “weedy” looking buffers may lead neighbors and others to view them as poor managers. Implement a creative broad-based public awareness campaigns to re-shape public values (e.g., Wildman Steve Wilson)
- ❖ Identify or develop sources of low-cost native seed and plant stock accessible to the public (e.g., native shrub/tree bundles that provide berries and nuts with instructions for developing a food plot and examples of species likely to visit the food plot).
- ❖ Identify conservation practices that can easily be incorporated into existing management systems for different size landowners.
- ❖ Provide access to equipment for planting food plots or other “simple” conservation actions will help promote voluntary action, particularly among “weekend” and “hobby” farmers.
- ❖ Plant native grasses for pasture, rather than introduced species.
- ❖ Eradicate Bermuda grass and fescue.
- ❖ Take floodplains out of crop production and restore riparian buffers.
- ❖ Replant mixed species of bottomland hardwoods.
- ❖ Re-establish shelterbelts and fencerows.
- ❖ Increase conservation tillage and implementation of other practices that reduce soil erosion and stormwater runoff.
- ❖ Provide ponds for wildlife watering.
- ❖ Let fields like fallow.
- ❖ Manage forests for multiple benefits, including wildlife (e.g., create small openings, species diversity, etc)

Theme #3: Tie conservation recommendations to popular or widely accepted goals.

“I have to go to Texas to quail hunt, I would much rather go out my back door. If I leave a strip and then start seeing quail and Baltimore Orioles, I would do that. But there has to be somebody to personally contact people like me.”

- ❖ Promote habitat restoration for quail. By focusing on a popular game species, landowners will restore habitats for other upland wildlife species of conservation need.
- ❖ Promote protection of water quality in order to restore riparian buffers and streambank restoration. Since nearly all citizens value clean water, landowners will be more likely to implement wildlife conservation measures that improve water quality.
- ❖ Focus on one or two “poster child” species that affect a large number of other species in the most vulnerable habitats.

Theme #4: Landowners don’t always know what conservation actions to take to generate the desired outcomes.

“The problem is if I don’t know what it takes to attract a chimney sweep, how can I implement the plan? Certain kinds of foliage attract certain kinds of birds. How do we get over that hump – of persons not knowing what to do?”

- ❖ Identify conservation actions that do not greatly restrict use or potential use of the land.
- ❖ Identify conservation actions that could enhance revenue for the private landowner (e.g., seasonal flooding for duck hunting, bird-watching, butterflies).
- ❖ For landowners who have never implemented a wildlife conservation project, provide a list of simple projects to get them started.
- ❖ Identify conservation practices that benefit multiple species.
- ❖ Pesticide education is needed. Landowners do not realize the impact of pesticides on nesting bird eggs and invertebrates and other aquatic species.
- ❖ Differentiate annual and permanent conservation practices. Identify practices that have relatively small labor requirements. Promote practices that achieve multiple purposes.
- ❖ Identify conservation practices that landowners with small holdings can take to benefit wildlife to dispel the notion that only landowners with large holdings can make a difference.

Theme #5: Don’t limit education and programs to rural landowners. Work with urban landowners, developers, county officials and others to promote voluntary conservation actions.

- ❖ In Northwest Arkansas and Central Arkansas, land values are rising. Developers are buying up land adjacent to urban centers. Developers are not focused on wildlife. Arkansas needs to engage developers in wildlife conservation.

- ❖ Develop education programs that engage urban landowners (e.g., promote butterfly weed and other native plants, distribute the Building Backyard Habitat book by the National Wildlife Federation, etc)
- ❖ Bring back the Bird Sanctuary program where neighborhoods can declare their neighborhood or subdivision as a bird sanctuary and get assistance from AGFC.
- ❖ Work with county road crews and developers to ensure adequate maintenance and stormwater management on unpaved roads.
- ❖ Need incentives for cities to implement effective wildlife conservation practices, establish greenways, plan for open space.
- ❖ Establish conservation partnerships. Involve volunteers, churches and civic groups. Organize urban constituency for wildlife conservation.

Question #3

What prevents landowners from implementing conservation practices that benefit wildlife? Why?

Theme #1: Most landowners expect cost share in order to implement voluntary conservation actions. Arkansas needs a strategy to invest cost-share in a way that achieves the most with limited resources.

- ❖ Many conservation actions are expensive, not only in terms of monetary costs for implementation and maintenance but also the time and complexity involved in management.
- ❖ More money is needed for cost-sharing.
- ❖ Cost-sharing needs to be adequate (e.g., a landowner may not be motivated if cost share is 25% but if cost share is 75% they will be more willing to implement conservation practices).
- ❖ If technical assistance providers place more emphasis on the benefits of conservation practices to the landowner (e.g., “what’s in it for me?”), landowners may not require as much cost share to implement conservation practices.
- ❖ The period over which cost share subsidies are provided often is too short to make a meaningful difference.
- ❖ Some landowners are unwilling to sign long contracts because of worries about giving up property rights. Consider using shorter contracts in some situations.
- ❖ Requirements to fence out livestock make farmers reluctant to apply for cost share to implement some conservation practices.
- ❖ Recommended conservation practices need to be cost-effective and fit into the landowners’ operations.
- ❖ The volume of reporting and paperwork associated with cost-share can be a disincentive.

- ❖ Promote creative use of existing programs, not only WHIP but also wetland reserve program, 319(h), Environmental Quality Improvement Program, Forestland Enhancement Program, Grassland Reserve Program, etc.

Theme #2: Fragmentation and non-local land ownership create special challenges for implementing meaningful conservation practices for some species, particularly those that require large areas of contiguous habitat.

“We have to identify the ‘sweet spots’ where there are multiple species in vulnerable habitats. Landowners will respond more positively if they know that the work they do will benefit many species.”

- ❖ Species differ in the scale of the land area that must be managed to reverse declining populations. Species reports could identify the relevant size of the land area that will need to be managed and whether the land area must be contiguous in order to make improvements.
- ❖ Give priority in allocating cost share and technical assistance to creating corridors and contiguous tracts of habitat. Funding currently gives preference to small projects.
- ❖ Develop special pools of cost share for landowners that hold/manage large tracts of land to promote conservation of carefully selected priority species and/or habitats.
- ❖ Priority for Farm Bill funds should be given to groups of landowners working together to implement conservation measures on a larger scale (e.g., landscape or watershed). This would give small landowners confidence that their individual actions can add up to some relevant, effective scale.
- ❖ We need to negotiate more land swaps in order to aggregate contiguous land at a relevant scale.
- ❖ Allow in-kind services as cost-share in order to provide incentive for more projects.
- ❖ Develop mechanisms to reach non-resident landowners who lease their land.

Theme #3: More technical assistance is needed to develop wildlife management plans for privately owned lands.

“It’s difficult for landowners to learn about all of the programs out there. A one-stop ‘shopping experience’ where landowners could talk to one person about all of the programs would make conservation more attractive.”

- ❖ Improve coordination of technical assistance and education programs across state and federal agencies to reduce confusion and mixed messages to landowners.
- ❖ Some landowners fear letting a professional develop a wildlife management plan because of what they might find (e.g., a threatened or endangered species).
- ❖ Increase the number of private lands biologists.

- ❖ Expand the acres managed under conservation easements so that private lands can be managed by professional resource managers.
- ❖ Help landowners identify what species can be adapted to current habitat and what habitat can be added to attract other species.
- ❖ Identify mechanisms to enforce provisions of voluntary conservation agreements.
- ❖ Go to farmers and landowners with practical suggestions rather than waiting for them to ask for a wildlife conservation plan.
- ❖ Technical assistance should help farmers maximize points on cost share applications by addressing multiple goals.
- ❖ Focus plans on species that fit into current land use, rather than trying to conserve species that may have been historically present but are no more (e.g., don't promote quail in rice production areas).
- ❖ Many farmers reluctant to invest the time required to complete applications for cost share because denial rates are so high.
- ❖ Changing farming practices are affecting migratory waterfowl. Today's combines are more efficient so less food for migratory waterfowl. Hunting leaseholders complain about reduced number of birds. Winter wheat provides higher returns than hunting leases so some farmers no longer winter flooding fields to create habitat for migratory waterfowl.

Theme #4: Landowners are more likely to implement conservation practices when the benefits are explained in terms of things the landowner values.

“When landowners realize that they are drinking the water they are protecting then they begin to understand “what’s in it for me?”

“We have to show the landowner the bottom line. Show them the positive effects of a practice that will benefit these species. Don’t tell them about saving a bird. Tell them about how much erosion they will stop, how much soil they will save. Tell them how much better the water quality will be”.

- ❖ Use landowner interest in game species as entrée to benefit species on the list of greatest conservation need and their habitats.
- ❖ User public concern for drinking water quality as entrée for education and technical assistance aimed at increasing implementation of conservation measures.

- ❖ Present recommended conservation actions in terms of how they will impact the landowners' bottom line. Focus on soil erosion, water quality, hunting and fishing, whatever the landowner cares about.
- ❖ Involve landowners in the evaluation of conservation actions before promoting them in order to foster a sense of ownership.
- ❖ One of the most effective and lowest cost mechanisms to influence landowners to implement conservation practices is peer pressure. To create peer pressure, technical assistance providers and educators should work together to set up contests, offer rewards and prizes, give public recognition to landowners who implement wildlife conservation practices.

Theme #5: Effective, coordinated education is critical. It matters how education is delivered, who delivers the education and how education is integrated with technical assistance.

“If we all preached the same sermon, we could get a lot done. Right now, it is very difficult to figure out who’s doing what where.”

- ❖ Education should inform landowners not only what can be done but also how it will benefit both the habitat and species of greatest conservation need as well as social and economic benefits to landowners.
- ❖ Education is most likely to be acted on when it is delivered by local institutions landowners trust.
- ❖ Education should target specific audiences with specific messages (e.g., realtors and developers would benefit from education on the role of riparian buffer strips)
- ❖ Integrate education across agencies and disciplines (e.g., the educator providing information about pasture management also can provide information about vegetative buffers, agencies hold joint meetings at the local level)
- ❖ Involve people of all ages and walks of life in implementing conservation actions (e.g., Stream Team program) in order to increase knowledge and build constituency.
- ❖ Use trusted spokespersons and mass media (e.g., television & radio) to deliver simple educational messages to general population
- ❖ Coordination and collaboration among technical assistance providers and educators is critical. When landowners don't know where to go to get information or they get conflicting advice from different providers, landowners often decide that the best course of action is to do nothing.
- ❖ Educate the public about conservation easements, transfer of development rights, purchase of development rights and other creative mechanisms to compensate landowners for voluntary conservation.
- ❖ Educate the public by involving them in action-oriented projects, including monitoring (e.g., nature mapping) or streambank restoration (e.g., stream teams).
- ❖ Educate landowners through local and regional demonstration projects.

- ❖ Target education where it will have the greatest impact (e.g., specific landowners in a particularly vulnerable habitat where targeted conservation actions can effect multiple species).
- ❖ Integrate wildlife conservation education into existing programs (e.g., 4-H, stream teams, Master Gardeners, Urban*A*Syst)
- ❖ Consider developing a Master Conservationist program for rural landowners, patterned after the Master Gardener program.
- ❖ Use more demonstration and more testimonials to show landowners the benefits of implementing wildlife conservation actions.
- ❖ Many species are seeing population increases after years of decline. Promote these successes to give landowners and the public a sense that their actions can make a difference. Give private landowners credit for what they are already doing to dispel landowners' perception that they are always taking blame.
- ❖ Don't rely on websites to convey information to landowners. Strategies are needed to do proactive outreach to landowners.
- ❖ Consider targeting education and technical assistance to the younger generation of landowners.

Theme #6: In some cases, public policy may need to be changed in order to expand voluntary implementation of conservation measures.

- ❖ State employees cannot do prescribed burning on private lands. Private landowners would be willing to pay for this service if state employees could do prescribed burning to reduce the fuel load on their private lands.
- ❖ It might be beneficial if State Wildlife Grant implementation funds could be spent for education.
- ❖ Implement tax incentives for land taken out of production for habitat protection.
- ❖ Consider using a tax on tourism to increase funds available for cost share for voluntary conservation actions.
- ❖ Local ordinances are needed in rapidly urbanizing areas requiring developers mitigate damage to habitats (e.g., zoning, required set aside for green space).
- ❖ Evaluate existing ordinances that may inadvertently negatively affect wildlife conservation (e.g., requirements that lawns be mowed to a certain height)
- ❖ Consider enacting "right to burn" laws that limit liability of landowners who do prescribed burning in some specific situations.
- ❖ Consider property tax relief for landowners that implement voluntary conservation actions.
- ❖ Consider increasing USDA funding for Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP).
- ❖ Expand the Grassland Reserve Program to upland farmers with pasture.

- ❖ Arkansas should find the match to participate fully in all federal conservation programs (e.g., CREP).
- ❖ Cumbersome regulations concerning landlord/renter participation need to be simplified.
- ❖ Indemnify landowners against the effect of changes in regulations and cost-share program requirements.
- ❖ Improve mechanisms for inter-state cooperation to conserve migratory birds.
- ❖ Change funding criteria and funding formulas for cost-share programs to distribute funds more equitably between farmers of different sizes, increase funding for smaller scale projects, and between regions of the state.

Theme #7: Some landowners are afraid to participate in voluntary conservation programs for fear of increased regulation, erosion of property rights or loss of privacy.

“I only have a small acreage, but what if the woodpecker turned up on my land? It makes me concerned.”

- ❖ Address landowners’ fear of regulation and loss of property rights through education and demonstration projects. Education should proactively assure farmers that species can be helped without shutting down their operations.
- ❖ Develop a mechanism so that landowners can report finding species of greatest conservation need on their land without fear of media coverage or loss of privacy.
- ❖ Some landowners unwilling to participate in cost-share programs that require them to open their lands to public use.
- ❖ Clarify the relationship between threatened and endangered species relative to the list of species of greatest conservation need to alleviate fears.
- ❖ Encourage landowners who participate in cost-share programs to share their success stories with other landowners to ease fears of government programs and build trust.
- ❖ Partner with local institutions that landowners trust to promote wildlife conservation (e.g., Cooperative Extension Service).

Input from Meeting Participants

Meeting participants were advised before adjourning that a follow-up questionnaire would be e-mailed or postage-mailed to those without internet access. Participants with significant roles in planning and/or facilitating the meeting were removed from the sample, leaving 246 possible respondents (226 were e-mailed surveys and 20 were mailed surveys). A little less than half (45%, n = 111) responded to the questionnaire, resulting a confidence interval of +/- 7 at a 95% confidence level.

Demographically, most respondents were male (70%) and between the ages 40 to 64 years (61%).

As expected, more of those who attended the meeting were interested in nongame wildlife compared to the public at large. When asked the importance of Arkansans maintaining healthy populations of non-game wildlife, 79% responded that it was very important compared to 56% of rural landowners and 60% of the general public. The majority (96%) believed it was important for Arkansas to develop a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy. The majority agreed (53%) or strongly agreed (32%) that the meeting presentations helped them better understand the planning process for the Arkansas CWCS. All (100%) agreed that it is important for Arkansas to promote voluntary conservation strategies that maintain habitats where wildlife live.

Questions about the meeting itself indicated participants learned not only about the plan, but also about the status of ecosystems, habitat, wildlife populations, and land use practices in their region. Many were knowledgeable about conservation issues prior to attending the meeting. However, the meeting improved knowledge for some who knew little to none about the status of habitat in their ecoregion (17%), status of nongame wildlife in their ecoregion (22%), local land use practices and issues that impact wildlife and habitat (11%), key habitats critical for nongame wildlife (10%), and practical habitat practices to support non-game wildlife (17%).

Almost two-thirds (64%) used the website at some point for registration (69%), to learn more about the issue before the meeting (62%), to learn more about this issue after the meeting (32%), and to submit additional comments after the meeting (18%). The majority gave the website high marks, with 68% indicating it was an excellent tool for keeping participants updated about the status of the plan and 58% indicating the website was an excellent venue for providing additional opportunities for feedback about the plan. About 43% indicated the website was excellent for communicating content that went beyond what was learned at the meeting.

Landowner perspectives about wildlife habitat practices also changed as a result of participating in the meeting. Almost two-thirds (63%) of respondents were landowners or land managers. This group was asked to report their current use of a particular voluntary conservation practice and their intent to adopt the practice in the next 12 months as a result of the meeting.

The most change that occurred as a result of participating in the meeting were for controlled or prescribed burn, thinning forests, and strip disking. Of the 40% who had not used a controlled or prescribed burn in the past, 19% reported they intended to adopt the practice in the next 12 months. An additional 14% intended to thin their forest, given the majority (63%) currently used this practice prior to attending the meeting. Seven percent indicated they strip-disked “a lot” prior to the meeting, which increased to 21%. Nineteen percent who had never used buffers around water sources before indicated they would do so after attending the meeting. One in five (21%) intended to adopt oak restoration techniques, and 17% intended to create more wildlife openings in their forests.

Some practices were already performed by many who attended the meeting. Only 8% decided to adopt wildlife food plots after attending the meeting, but three-quarters (75%) reported using food plots prior to the meeting. The majority reported leaving snags or dead trees in their forest (77%), however an additional 12% intended to implement this practice. Most had left a little (42%) or a lot (22%) of fencerows undisturbed prior to the meeting, however an additional 11% indicated they would use this practice “a lot” after attending the meeting.

Other practices applied to a subset of landowners who attended the meeting. The practice of flooding cropland in the winter applied to 52% of the respondents (n = 31). Before the meeting, 68% stated they did not use this practice. After the meeting, over one-third (35%) indicated they intended to adopt this practice “a little” or “a lot” in the next 12 months. Similarly, wetland restoration applied to about half (49%, n = 35) respondents. Of those, 11% indicated they would adopt wetland restoration after attending the meeting.

Participants were also asked about their intent to participate in cost-share programs. About 8% decided NOT to participate in cost-share programs after attending the meeting. The interpretation of this result isn't clear, although 7% reported that they didn't know about cost-share programs before the meeting. Perhaps these participants learned about cost-share programs from the meeting and decided that it was not of value to them.

Respondents (79%) wrote a response to “the most valuable thing they gained from this stakeholder meeting.” Their responses are broadly grouped into the following themes:

Theme #1: Networking and learning about other participants' perspectives was an important outcome of the meeting. Some viewed participants as having similar interests with the common goal of reversing the decline of wildlife populations and improving habitat. Others viewed the meeting discussions as a dialogue of divergent opinions.

“It was very helpful to learn the point of view from a variety of people from different backgrounds.”

- ❖ Provide additional, meaningful opportunities for networking among wildlife enthusiasts.
- ❖ Offer more educational opportunities about species of concern. Some perceive although this meeting focused on species of concern, more value was attributed to hunted species.

Theme #2: The meeting was a learning opportunity for many participants about declining wildlife populations, associated habitats, and habitat management practices.

The most important thing I learned was “the understanding that since my childhood there has been a reduction in sightings of many of the wildlife species that I saw as a child. Also, the habitat for many wildlife species is being reduced much faster than I suspected.”

- ❖ Provide more educational opportunities about species of concern, associated habitats and habitat management practices.
- ❖ Keep participants informed and updated about plan implementation and outcomes toward reversal of declining species and habitats.

Theme #3: The meeting participants reported a better understanding of the agencies and partnerships associated with the plan.

“The main thing that struck me was that no matter what the viewpoint, everyone there really cares about Arkansas and assuring a healthy habitat statewide. And that so many folks were able to work together, although they might be approaching the situation from differing viewpoints.”

- ❖ Add partners including the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service.

Theme #4: Better understanding of the role of threatened and endangered species in the plan, as their listing (along with the broader list of species of concern) may impact land management practices and landowner rights.

I did not get an answer as to whether U.S. Fish and Wildlife threatened and endangered species list was used to identify species of concern, in addition to other game/non-game species.

- ❖ Clarify how the list of species of concern was developed in relation to those that are threatened or endangered.
- ❖ Continue education efforts targeting landowners about voluntary habitat practices which improve habitat associated with species of concern.

Continued Public Involvement

As a result of this process, several avenues were identified to aggressively foster public involvement in planning and implementation.

Expanded Representation on the Steering Committee. As a result of the public involvement process, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service state director has joined the steering committee. We anticipate that other agencies and organizations will see the value of serving on this important coordinating body and that representation on the steering committee will continue to expand over time.

Increased Content On Website. The website will evolve and continue to serve as the primary clearinghouse for wildlife conservation information and ideas. AGFC has appointed a website content coordinator to expand the content and retained the services of a web developer to continue to develop the website. Emphasis will be placed in the near term on establishing links to the websites of key partners and increasing traffic on the website.

Ongoing partnership with Cooperative Extension Service. AGFC will continue its partnership with the Cooperative Extension Service. With local faculty and offices in 75 counties spanning the state of Arkansas, the Cooperative Extension Service will provide a vital, ongoing link to landowners who manage the vast majority of wildlife habitat in private ownership. This partnership will be particularly important as planning shifts to implementation.

Continued strengthening of relationships with those who participated in the public involvement to date. Email and periodic mailings to participants in the public involvement process to date and key opinion leaders will be used to draw the public into the website and to strengthen their involvement over time. The support of these groups will be critical as planning shifts to implementation, particularly landowners and organizations and agencies that have direct contact with landowners.

Mass Media. Increased attention will be given to mass media communications as planning gives way to implementation. Newspaper, radio and feature articles in house publications (e.g., Extension, AGFC, and other institutions) will be used to expand public involvement.

Budget Expenditures

	<u>Expense</u>
Extension faculty – Salary & Employee Benefits	\$10,745
Travel (includes mileage, meeting meals and room rental)	\$ 6,882
Materials and supplies	\$ 798
Printing	\$1,000
Postage	\$1,117
Professional services (subaward)	\$26,218
Indirects (28% of some items)	\$13,093
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Total	\$59,853