

KEEPING IT

Wild

A new strategy to conserve New Hampshire's wildlife and habitats



New Hampshire's State Bird, the purple finch is one "species of conservation concern" that will be protected by wildlife-friendly strategies being developed to guide community planning and conservation activities.

"Mommy. Mommy. Look what I found!" says Graham, as he holds up a large black salamander with yellow spots. "I found it under this rock, right by the house."

"Cool!" says Mom, "Let's take a picture and show Daddy when he gets home." Graham not only discovered a spotted

salamander... he also found one of the things that makes our state so great to live in. The amazing variety of wildlife in our own backyard fulfills our sense of wonder. That's the New Hampshire we all know and love, and that's the way we intend to keep it.

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GRASSHOPPER SPARROW

Ammodramus savannarum

Habitat: Dry fields with sparse grasses. Nests on the ground.

Justification: Rare in New Hampshire. Declining at rate of 5% per year in Northeast.

Distribution in State: Concord, Amherst, Newington, Portsmouth, Merrimack, Derry, Lee, Swanze.

Relative Quality of Habitat Patches: Three are of high quality. The remaining sites are of lower quality and warrant attention to improve conditions.

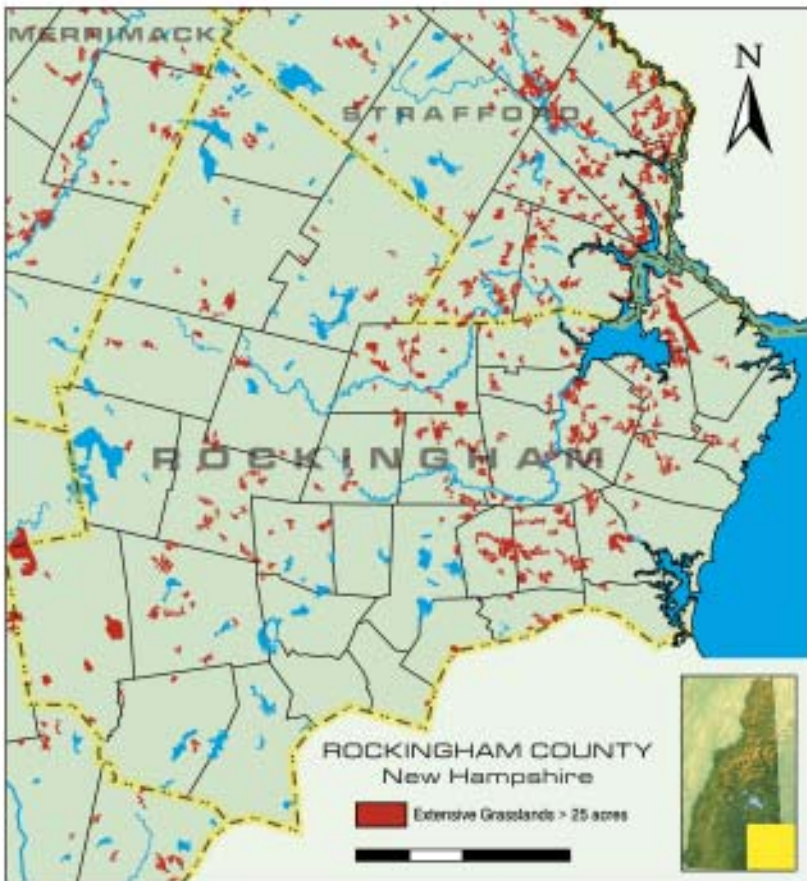
Species Threat Assessment: Early mowing and habitat conversion represent a threat to populations.

Because grasshopper sparrows are ground nesters, mowing fields during the mid-summer breeding season puts eggs and chicks at risk. (Additional threats to species are addressed under the grassland habitat profile).

Conservation Actions: Modify mowing practices at occupied sites to benefit species.

Justification of Action: When mowing practices were modified at sites in Massachusetts, grasshopper sparrow populations increased dramatically.

Ecological Goal: By altering mowing practices, the amount of quality habitat will increase. Populations on existing sites should be monitored to document increases toward population goals. The goal is to secure a stable population of grasshopper sparrows in New Hampshire.



The red habitat patches on this map of Rockingham County represent grasslands, agricultural and other open areas greater than 25 acres — potential habitat for grasshopper sparrows and other grassland-dependent species.

This is a condensed example of a species profile that will appear in the wildlife strategy. The full profile is being written by Pam Hunt of New Hampshire Audubon.

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Spotted salamanders do well in my family's meager backyard because of the complex of vernal pools and moist woodlands nearby.

In the spring, they crawl slowly across the one bumpy road, which carries little traffic. If you change just one of these features of this neighborhood, then in 10 years, the next child may not experience this same sense of wonder. If you fill in those vernal pools, replace the moist woodlands with houses or increase the cars going by the house, then the salamanders will disappear.

We want to conserve New Hampshire's wildlife by thinking long-term about the critical needs of our animal neighbors. That's why the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department and its many partners are working on a federally funded wildlife conservation strategy, to be released later this year as part of a comprehensive effort involving all U.S. states and territories. With a focus on less-common or declining animals and habitats, we will identify opportunities to help secure the future for wildlife in the Granite State.

Priorities and Partners

In biologist lingo, less-common or declining wildlife species are called "species of conservation concern." Threatened and endangered species are included in this category — as well as some wildlife that you can still find in your backyard. (Though luckily for Graham, the spotted salamander is doing just fine in New Hampshire!) *Habitats* of conservation concern are exactly what they sound like: types of places that are uncommon or may be in danger from environmental changes that would have a negative impact on wildlife. It costs an enormous amount of time and money to bring back wildlife from the brink of extinction — if it's even possible — or to restore damaged habitat; it is far easier and cheaper to do what we're doing now, planning strategically to find ways to coexist with wildlife.

The new strategy helps do this by providing location-specific wildlife and habitat maps, with actions relevant to those targeted areas. These wildlife and habitat specifics are detailed in "profiles" that are much more complete than you would find in a natural history guide. They detail threats to populations and actions needed to address those threats (*see sidebar, left*). Besides being important references for biologists, the profiles will help direct the state's wildlife strategy for years to come.

Fish and Game's Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program is taking the lead on the wildlife conservation strategy, but no single agency or organization has the staff or the money to halt the decline of these animals or prevent the loss of

critical habitat. Our many partners in developing and implementing the plan include N.H. Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, the University of New Hampshire and an array of other local and state-wide agencies, conservation organizations, planning boards and the like. Landowners also play a key role in helping manage the New Hampshire landscape in a way that ensures the long-term protection of our rarest species, along with abundant populations of the wildlife we've grown accustomed to seeing all the time.

We asked people with a wide range of interests and backgrounds — business and community leaders, landowners and transportation officials, to name a few — what important issues they think are likely to affect the future of wildlife in New Hampshire. One clear priority for people is the need to plan appropriately for inevitable human population growth and development in our state. They want to know: What are the most important areas for wildlife? As we grow, what can we do to minimize people's impact on wildlife?

Room for Wildlife

There's room in New Hampshire for New England cottontails and bobcats, just like there's a place for deer to roam and grouse to fly. If we can manage for traditional species like bear, turkey and deer, then we can manage for some of the less-common species as well — like wood turtles, meadowlarks and Karner blue butterflies. Some species, like the peregrine falcon, may be found nesting on cliffs,

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SPOTTED TURTLE

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SPECIES OF CONCERN

Biologists have identified more than 100 "species of conservation concern." A handful of the New Hampshire species we'll be watching carefully:

- Marbled salamander
- Common tern
- Bald eagle
- Spotted turtle
- Eastern meadowlark
- Karner blue butterfly
- Spruce grouse
- Whip-poor-will
- Pine marten
- New England cottontail
- Northern leopard frog
- Peregrine falcon



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COMMON TERN



©JULIAN KELLY PHOTO

PINE MARTEN



©USF&WS PHOTO

PEREGRINE FALCON



©NHFG VICTOR YOUNG PHOTO

NORTHERN LEOPARD FROG



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KARNER BLUE BUTTERFLY

HABITATS OF CONCERN

New Hampshire is addressing 23 habitat types that are uncommon, declining or otherwise at risk — imagine how important these habitats are to wildlife. Here are some of them:

- Rivers and lakes
- Northern bog
- Vernal pools
- Pitch pine/sand plains
- Alpine zone
- Unfragmented lands
- Spruce-fir forests
- Grasslands
- Salt marsh
- Old fields
- Floodplain forests



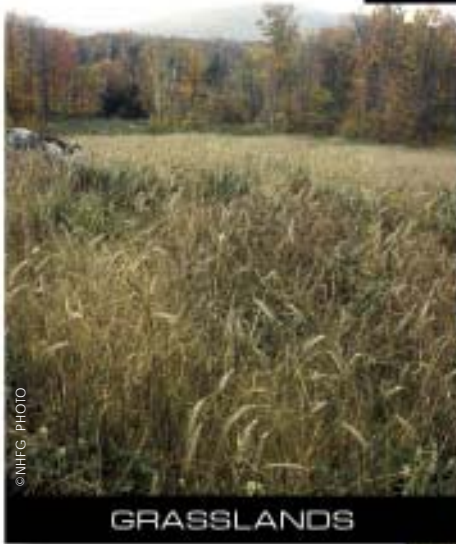
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NORTHERN BOG



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LAKES



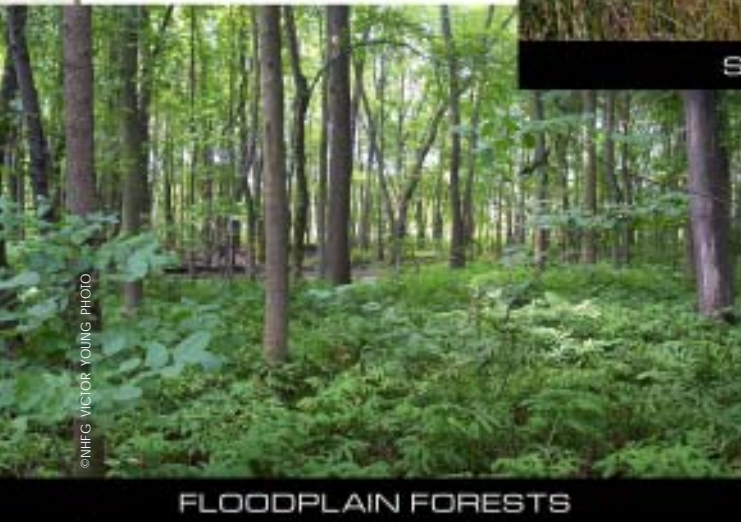
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GRASSLANDS



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SALT MARSH



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FLOODPLAIN FORESTS



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SPRUCE-FIR FORESTS

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mostly in protected lands. Others, like the American woodcock, which uses a mix of alder thickets and open fields, will depend on many landowners — both public and private — to manage their habitat.

There are global threats, too, that cut across many species and go beyond the local scope. Strategies for these bigger issues, like mercury in the environment, will be discussed at a statewide, regional or even national scale.


We can think of the comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy as a big blueprint for conservation. But more than just a blueprint, it comes with suggested instructions — laying out the most effective steps to take to ensure that we build a wildlife-friendly New Hampshire in the coming decades. Already, some communities are conducting workshops, using the habitat maps we've created to help guide development decisions around critical habitats. By setting our future course of action today, tomorrow's kids won't have to wonder where the wildlife are... they'll live in a world made richer by the variety and abundance of living things in their own backyard. **W**

Darrel Covell, wildlife specialist with the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension in Durham, is co-coordinator of the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy for New Hampshire.

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