

Maryland's State Wildlife Action Plan: Signed, Sealed, Delivered—and Ready to Help Vulnerable Species!

By MIMI SANFORD

THE LATEST REVISION to Maryland's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) was approved on July 31, 2026. The SWAP homepage (link below) includes links to current and previous plans. With the approval of the latest plan, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and its partners are poised to move forward with implementation of the SWAP objectives including addressing the impacts of invasive species, minimizing and reducing habitat fragmentation, and increasing coordination and funding for conservation work. By focusing on SWAP priorities, DNR and its partners believe that great progress can be made before the next SWAP revision.

Protecting vulnerable species and habitats is a daunting task anywhere, and possibly more so in Maryland. Despite being the ninth smallest state, Maryland contains an astonishing variety of habitat types within five physiographic provinces—Atlantic Coastal Plain, Piedmont Plateau, Blue Ridge, Ridge and Valley, and Appalachian Plateau—across about 12,000 square miles. The diverse habitats within these ecologically distinct regions support a large number of species not found in other comparably sized states.

Maryland's rich flora and fauna provide the basis for its State Wildlife Action Plan. Led by the DNR, the SWAP is a non-regulatory, collaborative document guiding conservation of the state's Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and the habitats they depend upon. More than 250 people from across 100 organizations contributed to the revision of Maryland's SWAP, lending their expertise to this state-wide effort. Furthermore, each state is required to submit an updated SWAP to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service every 10 years

in order to receive State Wildlife Grant funding. In Maryland, this funding is critical to support the conservation of non-game species and their habitats, especially since no state general funds are provided for this purpose.

In addition to meeting basic federal requirements, states are permitted to tailor their plans to their own needs. Although not typical or required, Maryland has chosen to include plants in its SWAP. A total of 454 plant species and their conservation needs have been included as SGCN in Maryland's updated SWAP. Threats and conservation actions for the key habitats that support these threatened species, as well as for individual animal species and species groups, are a key component of Maryland's SWAP.

Because plants are intrinsically tied to their habitats, the Maryland SWAP addresses

their needs primarily at the habitat level. This influences the SWAP's objectives and the funding that supports meeting these objectives for plants. For example, for the Eastern Shore's Delmarva Bays, the State Wildlife Grant funding has gone towards the conservation and restoration of sites like the Andover Flatwoods Natural Area. In this case, by considering the habitat as a whole rather than on an individual species level, DNR and its partners are able to safeguard all 20 SGCN animals, 34 SGCN plants, and rare species like Mid-Atlantic Beakrush (*Rhynchospora mesoatlantica*) and Canby's Dropwort (*Tiedemannia canbyi*) found in Delmarva Bay habitats.

If you have questions or would simply like to chat about Maryland's SWAP, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at mimi.sanford@maryland.gov.



The front cover of the 2025–2035 Maryland SWAP.

Delmarva Bay on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Photo credit to Kayt Jonsson, USFWS.

State Wildlife Action Plan Website

dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/pages/plants_wildlife/swap_home.aspx

2025-2035 Maryland State Wildlife Action Plans

dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Pages/plants_wildlife/SWAP_2025.aspx