

**Workshop Summary**  
**Pennsylvania Habitat and Species Workshop**  
**February 5, 2009**  
**Tom Ridge Environmental Center**  
**Erie, Pennsylvania**

Lori Boughton of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP), Office of the Great Lakes, provided a brief welcome and indicated that the habitat web tools showcased during the workshop will be a state priority. She called upon state partners to work together in moving habitat restoration forward in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Colonel Dan Snead of the Buffalo District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, also welcomed workshop participants. He indicated that the Corps' Buffalo District is working regionally on habitat restoration to achieve common goals across the Great Lakes basin. Roger Gauthier, Great Lakes Commission, reviewed the agenda and logistics of the day.

Mike Greer, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District, provided an overview of the Corps' Great Lakes Habitat Initiative (GLHI), which provided the impetus for the 2007 state habitat workshop series, developed regional database of habitat projects (actual and proposed), and a database of habitat funding programs. The GLHI also produced a final implementation plan, primarily directed at the Corps, but also for consideration by other agencies. These products are available online at [www.glhi.org](http://www.glhi.org). Greer noted that the GLHI was a two-year project that has been officially completed, but that the stakeholders involved have continued to work together and are now part of a formal Habitat/Species Subcommittee under the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy (GLRC). Greer completed this overview with a brief description of recent updates underway to improve and link the habitat and projects databases.

Roger Gauthier provided additional detail on the updates and enhancements underway for the habitat projects database/repository and the habitat funding database. These enhancements include additional quality control over projects that were previously entered, a more simplified data entry form for habitat projects, a new, more user-friendly web user interface and linkages with the funding database. Regarding this last point, Gauthier provided examples of how users will be able to query the databases to find potential funding sources that match habitat projects. Finally, he indicated that enhancements to the web tools are now fully functional.

Participants then heard from a panel of speakers who provided overviews of programs involving habitat protection and restoration from a lake basin and statewide perspective. Sean Rafferty of Pennsylvania Sea Grant presented on the Presque Isle Bay Watershed Monitoring, Restoration, and Protection Plan. He described the background, purpose and goals of the Plan. He discussed characterization of the watershed including habitat and chemical assessments that have been conducted, as well as a fisheries assessment. The Plan also includes a GIS-based natural resources inventory, which includes nonpoint source information and a suite of metrics obtained from open sources. The Plan also

describes Presque Isle Bay restoration priorities, implementing the Plan, publishing data online, and a monitoring plan.

Kenneth Anderson of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission provided an overview of the Pennsylvania State Wildlife Action Plan. He reviewed the goals of the Plan and its conservation priority tiers, which includes three-tiered habitat units. Grant projects funded under the plan address major species, taxa and habitat conservation and restoration priorities. Future priorities of the plan include using Erie stamp money to acquire property or easements and conduct habitat enhancements, construct fish passage facilities, and modify homogenous environments making habitat more heterogeneous. A question was raised as to whether the Fish and Boat Commission coordinates work with the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Mr. Anderson responded affirmatively, stating that the Plan's goals are mutually developed.

Christopher Tracey of the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program (Western Pennsylvania Conservancy) described the Erie County Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) and its associated conservation efforts. The NHI focuses on the delineation of Biological Diversity Areas around rare, threatened and endangered species including maps, species descriptions, threats and conservation recommendations. Erie County harbors a great amount of biodiversity, including over 277 species of concern across 973 populations. Several areas of focus outlined in the Plan include:

- Presque Isle
- Erie Coastline
- Wetlands across the county – plant & animal species conservation
- Great Lakes Region Lake Plain Palustrine Forest
- Lake Erie Region Scarp Seep (cliffs along Lake Erie, water seeps out between layers of rock) – species conservation
- Lake Erie Watershed Forest Patches
- Specific species and habitat conservation, such as the Blanding's Turtle

The Conservancy is mid-way through conducting an update to the Inventory, which is expected to be completed in June of 2010. The original 1993 NHI is available on the PNHP web site at <http://www.naturalheritage.state.pa.us/>; the updated NHI will be made available as well.

Mike Campbell of Mercyhurst College detailed the Pennsylvania Great Lakes Rivers Conservation Plan. He outlined the strengths/opportunities and weaknesses/threats of the region's watersheds. Key strengths and opportunities highlighted:

- Many community stakeholders are involved in advancing the Plan – key organizations are collaborating and working together to achieve common goals;
- Natural resources are generally in good shape – there is tremendous biological diversity;
- The steelhead fishery and its economic importance to the region;
- Wetlands are on the increase, particularly in forested areas;
- The Plan includes priorities to advance protection and restoration efforts; and
- Because development has stalled due to the state of the economy, people are more willing to donate property as conservation easements.

Key weaknesses and threats highlighted:

- The steelhead fishery is not naturally sustainable;

- The effects of climate change – particularly temperature changes in the region's waters and headwaters – could impact the future of the steelhead fishery;
- Urban sprawl has fragmented the landscape;
- There is a lack of adequate protection for headwater streams;
- Although funding for restoration may be on the rise, there is an apparent lack of funding for planning and a need for creative funding mechanisms in this regard; and
- More leadership at the county and local levels to focus on habitat issues is needed.

Brian Smith of the Citizens Campaign provided an overview of the Healing Our Waters (HOW) Coalition and described ways HOW can help advance state priorities related to habitat restoration and protection. He reviewed HOW's FY2009 priorities and authorizations and FY2010 priorities and appropriations. He encouraged those present to join HOW.

Roger Gauthier provided an overview of the Joint Ventures model that is used to implement the North American Waterfowl Management Plan under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. He indicated that much of the work under the program is state-driven and is a practical approach to get work accomplished. A question was asked as to whether the Joint Ventures model is tenable in Pennsylvania. Gauthier responded that the difference between Pennsylvania and states with larger watershed areas in the Great Lakes basin, such as Michigan and Wisconsin, is the amount of resources dedicated to the program. He indicated that some restoration efforts in Pennsylvania can be accomplished within the existing organizational structures of the area, but that there is a need for more coordination and collaboration to make this model effective in Pennsylvania. A suggestion was offered that this model could be more useful if it included the Great Lakes watershed area in Crawford County which would bring more stakeholders to the table and create more opportunities for joint ventures.

Next, three local projects were discussed as examples of fostering collaboration to advance restoration projects. Mike Campbell provided an overview of the Jenks Gameland and Coastal Trail Acquisition. The project features an 85-acre parcel that was put into protection by the Lake Erie Regional Conservancy (LERC) and made available for public use. The parcel is adjacent to nearly 5,000 acres already in public protection. Two acres are set aside for LERC to manage, facilitate and develop a trail. Other greenway trails have been developed through collaboration with area schools, Mercyhurst College and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. Challenges included working with three state agencies and their various requirements for appraisals, etc., pulling together several different funding sources, getting critical mass and approvals to move the project forward, and continuing work in the face of declining funding.

Harry Leslie of Presque Isle State Park described the Gull Point restoration project. The project is defined as a Special Management Unit within Presque Isle State Park and is a sensitive, low-density natural area. Thus, Gull Point requires special management techniques. One of the main challenges is severe erosion issues in which remediation requires increased federal and Commonwealth funding. Gull Point is also critical habitat

for the Piping Plover which requires extensive monitoring from April through June. Implementing habitat restoration recommendations has also been a challenge due to the prevalence of invasive species such as Phragmites. There have also been regulatory conflicts over what best management practices to use to achieve ecosystem management goals while trying to manage a number of stakeholders with an interest in the area. A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers representative at the workshop indicated that funding from the Corps has helped with restoration efforts, but a need for more advocacy by nongovernmental organizations in obtaining additional federal and state support is a critical need to keep the project moving forward.

Kevin Hess provided an overview of the Conneaut Creek Headwaters project. The area is comprised of some dense, urbanized wetlands. Some of the watershed's streams are impaired due to Mercury contamination. The project is one of two Pennsylvania conservation areas in the Great Lakes (the other being Presque Isle Bay). Hess pointed out that the linkages of habitat in the area go beyond the Conneaut Creek watershed which brought up the question of how far up the watershed is considered "coastal." This impacts what funding is available for restoration. Again, the issue of coordinating four federal agencies with multiple state agencies is a challenge for moving restoration efforts forward.

Kevin Hess provided an overview of the Conneaut Creek Headwaters project. Contiguous forest and forested wetlands still exist in this area - and to re-create or restore wetlands in an urbanized area and expect this level of natural function and biodiversity is not realistic. He indicated that protection and restoration should not be judged and scored against each other. For the habitat function of wetlands, protection is more cost effective; restoration in an urbanized area is difficult at best. One the watershed's streams is impaired due to mercury in fish flesh. The project is one of two areas identified by the Nature Conservancy's Conservation Blueprint for the Great Lakes (the other being Presque Isle Bay). Hess pointed out the significant habitat hubs and linkages that extend from the lake and through the Conneaut Creek watershed and continue south beyond the Lake Erie watershed into the Ohio basin. This brought up the question of how far up the watershed is considered "coastal." This impacts what funding is available for restoration. Again, the issue of coordinating four state agencies with multiple federal agencies is a challenge for moving restoration efforts forward. Hess stated support for block grant type funding for specific geographical areas and habitat types. This would allow for the necessary expediency when dealing with real estate transactions involving habitat acquisitions and easements.

Federal agency representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA provided brief overviews of their habitat funding programs and handed out related materials or pointed participants to relevant web sites.

Roger Gauthier revisited the web tools with a few more details of how to use the web tools to search for potential funding to for specific habitat projects. He encouraged participants to register in order to update or add records and asked participants to query the database.

Roger Gauthier and Lori Boughton (with input from other participants) then provided summary points they gathered throughout the workshop:

- Some form of inducements are needed to promote stakeholder engagement in keeping the databases active and up to date to use more regularly in resource allocation decisions.
- Inconsistencies in the project database requires collaborators to come together to better define projects and needs.
- Climate change could make habitat restoration and protection more challenging.
- Total ecosystem management coordination is difficult and time consuming.
- The state should continue to focus on land acquisition and easements to extend services of natural habitat; private property issues could increasingly come into play.
- Four state agencies involved in project granting should coordinate more often.
- Need to think more creatively about involving all relevant partners for restoration projects.
- Need better coordination at the state and local levels in terms of addressing habitat management goals with limited resources.
- Need to lessen bureaucracy and increase collaborative efforts involved in carrying out projects from planning through implementation; this will help build efficiency and credibility.
- As far as Stimulus funding, the web tools should be the “game in town.” Agencies and partners must work together in making efficient use of these tools
- Many local plans currently use ARC-MIS platforms; need to make sure geospatial coverages are made available as web services and compliant to open source approaches. Need to be able to drill down across the region and state and look at correlations available; this will help integrate local data.
- Diminishing resources will force stakeholders to work together to achieve habitat restoration priorities.