

NCSE WILDLIFE HABITAT POLICY RESEARCH PROGRAM
Project Overview
Research Project 2C

Time Sensitivity of Priority Habitats

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To be eligible to receive funds from the State Wildlife Grants Program created by Congress in 2000, every U.S. state and territory was required to develop a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy, also known as a state wildlife action plan (SWAP). One goal was to identify priority habitat conservation areas, or focal areas, that are threatened by urban and exurban development. (An *exurb* is a municipality/community or urban area in a metropolitan area that is separated from the principal urban area by rural territory)

Key Issue

Development due to urbanization, exurbanization, and associated infrastructure will be a major threat to U.S. wildlife habitats in the coming 30 to 40 years. Between 1980 and 2000, development grew at a rate of 1.6 percent a year. Over the next 15 years, urban and suburban housing densities are expected to increase by 2.2 percent a year and exurban development by 14.3 percent a year

Project Objective

The overall goal was to identify critical habitats at risk from conversion in six pilot study states—Colorado, Georgia, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, and Tennessee—and provide them with a clearer understanding of how much time they have to conserve the focal areas identified in their SWAPs. A subsidiary goal was to provide recommendations on how other states could conduct a similar analysis.

Approach

The approach involved three steps:

- Preparing development maps
- Preparing priority habitat conservation area maps
- Conducting an overlay analysis.

Key Findings

The investigators found that in three case-study states, focal areas identified in the SWAPs will probably lose more than 10 percent of their area to residential development in the next 10 to 30 years. As most of these focal areas have already been reduced substantially, additional loss be-

yond 5-10 percent is very significant. Much of the area represented in the states' focal areas had already been developed by 2000.

Deliverables

A final project report is available on the WHPRP web site at:

<http://www.ncseonline.org/00/batch/WHPRP/2008%20Final%20Reports/WHPRP%20Final%20Report%202C.pdf>

Two articles are being developed for peer-reviewed publications. The first will be tailored for *Conservation Letters* and will tentatively cover historical and future long-term trends in extent of U.S. terrestrial ecological systems. The second will be submitted to *Conservation Biology* for a possible series documenting the status of ecological systems.

An updated version of a technical presentation developed for the WHPRP final meeting was presented at the International Symposium on Urban Wildlife and the Environment in June 2009 and will be delivered at other appropriate venues.

The investigators are working with NatureServe, an international network of biological inventories, to develop two outreach products tailored for non-technical "users" such as wildlife policy-makers, managers and practitioners. The first will be full-color summaries of the status of each state's terrestrial ecosystems for incorporation into NatureServe's LandScope and other efforts to communicate the threats of development on habitat and species. The second will be a full-color book documenting the status of U.S. terrestrial ecosystems. Development of these materials is under discussion within NatureServe and will depend on securing additional funds.