

Chapter 6. CWCS Coordination

The Alabaman Department of Conservation and Natural Resources could not have conducted the ecological assessment summarized in the previous chapters without the assistance of numerous partners both inside and outside ADCNR. ADCNR coordinated with federal, tribal, state and local partners and stakeholders throughout the development of this CWCS (Element 7). This chapter discusses that coordination, the involvement of the public, and plans to continue working with each as the CWCS is implemented and adaptively managed (Elements 5, 6 and 8). Appendix 6-1 provides a detailed summary of the Citizen Participation by Objective method used to involve stakeholders, and Appendix 6-2 lists the individual partners and stakeholders contacted throughout the CWCS development.

CWCS Organizational Infrastructure

In order to coordinate with its partners (Element 7) DWFF first had to establish an effective internal SWG administrative framework (see Table 6-1, Figure 6-1). DWFF officially began CWCS development in the summer of 2003 when a Wildlife Diversity Coordinator (WDC) position was established to oversee the SWG program. This position was strategically placed in the Directors office to liaison with Fisheries and Wildlife Sections of DWFF as well as other ADCNR Divisions and staff. DWFF then contracted a consultant to develop the CWCS process and document. A general scope of work was developed to guide the effort, identifying key tasks to be accomplished. Specific guidance provided by the IAFWA and its committees was used to develop the approach throughout the planning process. With this guidance in mind, and with the input of a broadening circle of stakeholders and conservation community (Element 8), Alabama developed its CWCS process approach, providing for general and technical input throughout the process.

A CWCS Steering Committee was formed with key DWFF staff. This committee met with the consultant to compile existing resources and develop the initial timeline and framework for the development of the CWCS. A series of organizational and input solicitation meetings were held to involve first key staff and then all DWFF staff. The effort to obtain input was then expanded through a series of meetings with other ADCNR Divisions, i.e., Marine Resources, State Parks, and SLD-NHS. A Technical Team was established to deal with the substantial technical, scientific data, issues and correspondence with experts and stakeholders consisting of key Non-game staff, the WDC, and contractor.

All levels of DWFF staff were engaged through initial internal SWG/CWCS informational presentations with question/answer sessions and Section meetings and feedback sessions. Additional input was sought individually at informal meetings and follow-up correspondence. DWFF input was then solicited at the program level, where priority setting and conservation needs were discussed. Meetings with each Section were held to inform and update internal staff/partners on GCN species, key habitats, threats

and conservation actions. A Habitat Committee was then established to address the need for external expert input on habitat and ecological communities for the CWCS.

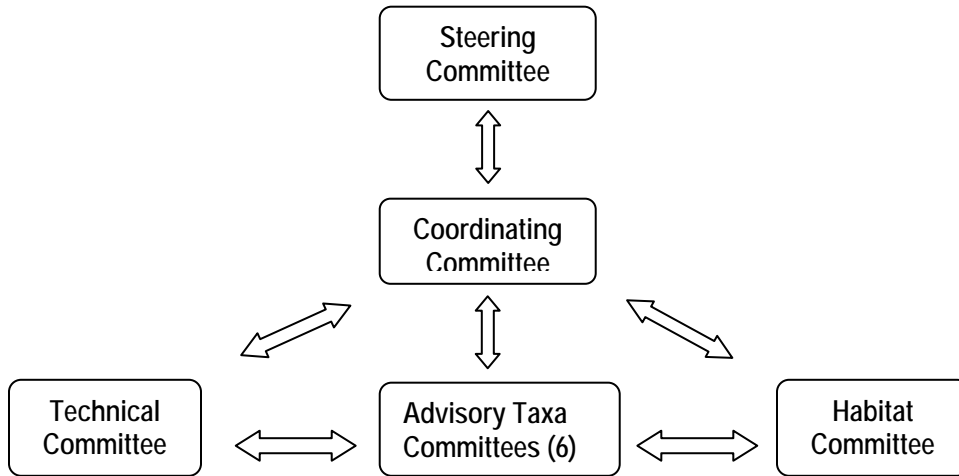


Figure 6-1. CWCS Organizational Flow Chart

TABLE 6-1. ALABAMA CWCS COORDINATING COMMITTEES AND STRUCTURE

Committee	Members	Role	Meeting
CWCS Steering Committee- Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division	Section Chiefs, Asst. Chiefs, Non-game staff, accountant, WDC, contractor	Initiate and develop process and product, oversee and direct process	Every other month meetings, monthly updates
Technical Committee	Wildlife Section Asst. Chief and Non-game program coordinator, Fisheries Section Asst. Chief and Non-game program coordinator, WDC, contractor	Provide input and feedback on process and species/habitat identification (technical QC)	Every other month meetings, monthly updates
Coordinating Committee	WDC, Contractor staff (3), SLD-NHS database manager	Coordination and progress evaluation (administrative and technical QC)	Monthly during process and priority development, then Quarterly, or as input required
Taxa/Scientific Advisory Committees 6 faunal taxa committees	External experts (=University, Partner Agency and NGO, key Stakeholder participation)	Technical input, scientific evaluation and peer review (technical QC)	Monthly or more frequent
Habitat Committee	External experts (University, Partner Agency and NGO, key Stakeholder participation)	Technical input, scientific evaluation and peer review (technical QC)	Monthly or more frequent

Coordination with Federal, State, Local and Tribal Partners

Once an internal framework had been established, the coordination effort expanded with **outreach** to major local, state, federal, and tribal partners (Element 7). DWFF inventoried and identified its federal, state, local agency and tribal partners, employed the Bleiker Systematic Development of Informed Consent (SDIC) and Citizen Participation by Objective (CPO) and developed a process to inform, involve, and engage partners throughout the development of the CWCS. These methods helped to identify Potentially Affected Interests (PAI) or stakeholders, the objectives of ADCNR's CWCS process, and the most effective ways to inform stakeholders.

Partners were included in each major phase of the CWCS development and participated in the development of the GCN species and habitat lists and provided and exchanged valuable information and input throughout the document development. Initial contacts with each partner were followed by informal meetings and then continued information exchange. Small, informal focused meetings were held with key local, state, federal and tribal partners around the state to encourage more detailed and more meaningful input during each step (per Bleiker CPO). Initial introductory meetings were held to inform them of the project and solicit input on the CWCS process and recommendations for GCN species and key habitats. Follow up correspondence occurred on a regular basis throughout 2004 to exchange technical information, coordinate activities, and provide updates to keep them informed and involved. Key partners then participated in additional meetings with other partners and tribes in order to present a coordinated approach to wildlife diversity conservation in Alabama. One example was the meeting with the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, where USFWS staff participated and provided information on USFWS programs to further coordinate and plan for the long-term implementation of the CWCS on Tribal Lands. CPO objectives were to share and integrate program information so that the CWCS could be used by partners to help implement their programs, and vice versa.

A key objective agreed upon by these partners was to integrate the results of this CWCS into their plans developed over the next 10 years. This step was taken to insure that there would be maximum CWCS coordination, implementation and buy-in by partners for the next decade. An example of how this will maximize CWCS effectiveness and implementation by partners can be found in the National Forests in Alabama - Resource and Management Plan (USFS 2004). This 10-year plan incorporates the *Alabama Wildlife* priority species (including the CWCS GCN species) and their conservation actions. This step significantly adds to the input process, as the National Forest plans employ a formal public input process and comment period.

Additional federal partners, in the same manner, USFWS Ecological Services, Private Lands Program and NWR staff were also asked to incorporate the GCN species and key habitat conservation targets identified in the CWCS into their programs and plans. Similarly, other key federal partners including Mobile Bay NERES, NRCS, USACOE,

TVA, etc. were all contacted early in the CWCS process and asked to incorporate CWCS targets into their programs and plans. Especially relevant and promising was the synergy and opportunities between CWCS targets and NRCS Farm Bill programs and the TVA and USACOE projects as they impact GCN species and key habitats.

DWFF employed the same approach, as driven by the Bleiker SDIC/CPO process, with all relevant state agency and local partners. CWCS staff met with state agencies including Department of Transportation (ADOT) and Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) to outline specific programs and projects where CWCS should be incorporated. Follow-up exchange of information and updates established a new level of coordination between these agencies and partners. Each partner was informed of the CWCS targets, process, and schedule and was asked to incorporate the CWCS information in to their appropriate programs and plans.

Coordination with the federally recognized tribal partners, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, consisted of correspondence and meetings that provided information and literature on the SWG state and tribal programs and funding. Coordination included presentation of relevant state and federal programs that might assist the Tribe in wildlife conservation both short and long term as mutually beneficial to GCN species and habitats. Coordination with the USFWS provided for USFWS staff to assist in this effort and resulted in a complementary partnership approach to available programs at both the state and federal levels. Alabama has eight additional state-recognized Tribal Nations: the Cherokee Tribe of Northeast Alabama, Cherokees of Southeast Alabama, Echota Cherokee Tribe of Alabama, Machis Lower Creek Indian Tribe, Mowa Band of Choctaw Indians, Piqua Sept of Ohio Shawnee, Star Clan of Muscogee Creeks, and United Cherokee Ani-Yun-Wiya Nation. These Tribal Nations were given the opportunity to review and comment on the draft CWCS. As partnership opportunities with state-recognized Tribes arise during the implementation stage, DWFF will coordinate with these Tribes on joint conservation projects.

Historically, the 2002 Nongame Conference represented the initial foundation for local, state and federal agencies and tribal involvement in the CWCS process. Participation was solicited at academic and government institutions and invitations were extended to all key local, state and federal entities with programs that significantly affected wildlife conservation in Alabama. Involvement of the Taxa Committees continued through publication of *Alabama Wildlife* in June 2004, the four-volume reference resulting from the Conference. Partners on the Taxa Committees included most of the key state and federal agencies in Alabama, including the USFWS: NWR staff, Ecological Services, Partners; NRCS, USFS, USACOE, NERES, ADEM, SLD-NHP, TVA, ADECA, etc. Therefore, the major stakeholders and partners developed the list of species and conservation recommendations, as DWFF played an oversight role throughout 2002- 2004. This group of partner stakeholders not only identified and ranked all GCN species, but developed conservation actions and detailed accounts for each of the high priority species (Mirarchi et al. 2004a-c). Thus, partner and expert participation has been critical to the process since it began in 2002.

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In developing this CWCS, the five Taxa Committees were reengaged to serve the role of External/Expert Peer Review. Each taxa committee consisted of members who represented the key federal and state partners. They were asked to review and update the lists of species and habitats as well as conservation actions. Their technical input and ongoing review and feedback was organized through five separate taxonomic committees (mammals, birds, herps, fish, and invertebrates) throughout 2004. This group of almost 30 members represented a balanced mix of agency partners and stakeholders from a wide variety of Academic Institutions and Conservation Organizations, and provided essential peer review for technical quality control.

In 2004 and early 2005, a sixth taxa group (crayfishes) was integrated into the CWCS development process. First, two experts were contracted to review available information on Alabama crayfishes and provisionally rank each species using the same criteria used for the five other taxa groups in the 2002 Nongame Conference. During a February 2005 crayfishes workshop, ranks were reviewed and GCN species and habitats were identified.

Local, state and federal agencies and tribal partners were asked to review the draft CWCS and their comments were incorporated into the final document. An effective measure of coordination success will be the degree to which each of these partners integrates GCN species, habitats and conservation actions into their plans and programs. One example of how this occurred early on in the CWCS process is that of the USFS incorporating the GCN species and habitats into their Revised Land and Resource Management Plan. To that end, each partner will receive final copies of this CWCS with the request that they incorporate GCN species and habitats and implement the appropriate conservation actions identified in this document.

Contact early in the process focused on informing and engaging these collaborators in the CWCS process, as well as inventorying their existing programs. An assortment of outreach techniques (Bleiker SDIC/CPO) was used to maximize input, including personal contact and correspondence, meetings, topical advisory groups and an interactive website. Relevant target species, habitats and conservation actions from their existing programs were captured, compiled and integrated into the CWCS process. Follow-up correspondence kept them informed of CWCS progress and solicited their additional input and feedback at each major phase of the process. Information on existing programs was reviewed during the process to identify opportunities for collaboration/partnership in the implementation, evaluative review, and adaptive modification of the CWCS.

The CWCS Steering Committee will continue to lead in monitoring the progress of the CWCS implementation and communicating this information with the network of agency and tribal partners involved in the development of the CWCS.

DWFF plans for the continued coordination with these agencies and tribes in the implementation, review and revision of its Strategy. By employing the Bleiker CPO method, an input plan was developed with the major objective of securing partner buy-in and implementation of the document. To address this implementation objective, that message was communicated to each partner and they were asked to support the

implementation of the plan. In addition, DWFF pointed out specific ways the CWCS supported their programs and how the CWCS could be integrated into their plans. Clear examples of how the CWCS GCN species and habitat conservation information could be adapted into and used by their plans were provided in order to maximize implementation of the CWCS. Partners were informed of the review schedule so that this information and their input could be used to revise the plan.

Public and Stakeholder Participation

DWFF first began its process of involving the public and stakeholders in 2002 with the Nongame Conference (Element 8). This wildlife conference was designed to encourage broad participation of interested publics and stakeholders as they were asked to compile and review existing information on the full array of Alabama's wildlife and identify and recommend priority species deemed to be most in need of conservation. This Conference attracted 240 participants and represented the beginning and foundation for public and stakeholder involvement in the CWCS process. Participation was solicited widely and invitations were extended to all key local, state and federal entities and NGOs. At the same time broad public participation was solicited, academic, private and government institutions that had knowledge, data and programs about wildlife conservation in Alabama were targeted.

As an extension of this effort, a core group of experts and stakeholders were further engaged as taxa committees to develop recommendations for GCN species and habitats. Their continued involvement resulted in a four-volume publication *Alabama Wildlife* (Mirarchi 2004, Mirarchi et al. 2004a, b, c). Members of the taxa committees included representatives of most of the key conservation groups and stakeholders in Alabama, including the Longleaf Alliance, Mobile Bay Estuary Program, TNC, Alabama Natural Heritage Program, Alabama Ornithological Society, TVA, leading universities, state and federal partner agencies, watershed and other coalitions and partnerships.

Therefore, the major stakeholders and partners themselves developed the list of species and conservation recommendations and presented them to DWFF, which played an oversight role throughout 2002-2004. This group of largely external experts and stakeholders not only ranked all species, but identified threats to species and habitats and developed conservation actions (Mirarchi 2004, Mirarchi et al. 2004a, b, c). Thus stakeholder, partner and expert participation was critical to the process since it began in 2002.

This conference therefore provided the foundation for stakeholder and public involvement in the CWCS process. Since then, more general outreach has been in the form of website updates and postings, and mailings to the BAMA Environmental News (BEN) and other widely distributed environmental newsletters. Public participation was solicited and continued at academic and government institutions and many conservation NGOs.

During the active development phase of the CWCS in 2004, the CWCS Steering Committee and contractor worked to actively involve the public at different levels and at each stage of the process (Appendix 6-1). Information on each major public and private program was researched. This resulted in an inventory of all significant existing local, state, and regional/national programs, data sources, tools and information compiled from meetings, correspondence, and research from literature and the Internet (See Appendix 1-1 and 5-1). This pool of knowledge was then used as the foundation for public outreach strategy development.

In January 2004, DWFF developed a public/stakeholder input plan (see Appendices 6-1 and 6-2) and has been actively involving stakeholders through meetings and correspondence, and the public through website and magazine/newsletters/public meetings. The Bleiker CPO process was employed to identify and target the Potentially Affected Interests (PAIs), the specific messages and objectives to be communicated, and the most effective techniques to reach these targeted publics. Worksheets were completed using this method, and the results identified seven highly recommended techniques to employ for the CWCS development and implementation (Appendix 6-1) phases. After the draft CWCS was prepared, a series of meetings was held to solicit input and feedback. The draft was also posted to the DWFF website for public review, and was made available to stakeholders early on for technical review.

For the purposes of this CWCS effort, the "public" was categorized into 3 external tiers:

Tier 1- Partners/collaborators with significant role/program

- Key public and private (NGO) conservation groups, such as AFC, AWF, TNC, NS-ALNHP, AOS, TVA, USFS, USFWS
- Leaders/staff/programs that can contribute significant data/scientific knowledge base to be incorporated directly into CWCS
- Leaders/staff/programs that can collaborate on implementation, monitoring and assessment/re-evaluation of the CWCS

Tier 2- Interested groups and individuals with limited role/program

- Many NGOs with little or no technical data, such as small private preserves, watershed groups, advocacy groups
- Staff/members with limited/no data/scientific knowledge base that is directly applicable to the CWCS Strategy, but have a potential role in outreach/general input into the development and future implementation of Strategy

Tier 3- General, uninvolved Public

- Citizens not directly involved in a Tier 1 or 2 group project
- Able to benefit from the development and implementation of the CWCS as related to economic, recreational and quality of life benefits from effective statewide wildlife conservation

Tier 1 individuals and groups were contacted for input throughout the CWCS development and review process. Regular correspondence and sharing of technical information was critical to assist in the development of the CWCS. Input and feedback from Tier 1 groups was solicited through personal, informal meetings with organization representatives and staff. Per the input plan and CPO techniques, input was solicited at each stage of the project. Expert Committee working meetings and additional follow-up for committee and individual feedback provided “peer review” and refinement during each of the processes of identifying GCN species and key habitats with their associated vegetative communities, of evaluating the most critical problems and threats to species and their habitats, and of selecting and prioritizing effective conservation actions. Use of various programs' existing target species/habitats and recommended conservation strategies were important in focusing existing DWFF programs and projects to benefit from and complement potential collaborative efforts.

Tier 2 and 3 publics (individuals and groups) were informed about the CWCS process and goals. They were kept informed of on-going progress through information posted on the web, articles, and by utilizing their scheduled meetings and newsletters to provide presentations and updates through their existing mechanisms. Input was then solicited from Tier 2 individuals and groups after DWFF staff had sufficiently developed the document to a “Draft” product stage, ready for external review by those interested.

Bleiker's CPO process employed during the development of the CWCS also planned for the continuation of this input and involvement through revision of this CWCS. One important objective identified through the Bleiker CPO was to maintain stakeholder and public involvement through the implementation stage. The various levels of involvement that were solicited from all these groups during strategy development were designed by objective to continue input and feedback from these informed stakeholders/publics during implementation and review of the Strategy. The CWCS and CPO processes were designed to include continued input from stakeholders both short and long-term and to keep these publics informed of SWG projects and results through annual reports, magazine articles, meetings, organization newsletters and web site progress reports. Through these methods of continued coordination and updates, the CWCS process was designed to keep stakeholders and the public informed and involved throughout the implementation stage.

Specific techniques to be utilized during CWCS implementation and review are similar to those identified as most effective during the CWCS development stages. PAIs will be informed and involved through active committee and working meetings, website updates and interaction, and by utilizing existing stakeholder organization meetings and newsletters. Informal meetings with key partners and Tier 1 and 2 stakeholders will be an ongoing, regular part of annual program updates and evaluation.

The general public (Tier 3) and PAIs will be kept informed and educated about the CWCS, its projects and results through a variety of existing public outreach mechanisms. ADCNR recently established a Citizens Conservation Forum that uses the internet to

continually survey the public about conservation issues and concerns. In addition to public website progress reports and educational materials, magazine articles, newsletters, and newspaper articles, public outreach can utilize environmental centers (to host public outreach events on the CWCS, GCN species and habitats, and how ADCNR and its partners are implementing conservation actions to improve Alabama's fish and wildlife resources and their habitats).

Both private and public partners' existing facilities and programs can serve as valuable tools to disseminate conservation education and public outreach materials into classrooms throughout the state. Universities, Labs and other conservation centers undergraduate and graduate programs can integrate CWCS priorities and activities into ongoing and new research and education efforts at the collegiate level. One such example, the Marine and Estuarine Environmental Education Resource Center, has community education and distance learning programs that also provide an opportunity for public outreach on Alabama's wildlife and conservation. The Center is a partnership between the Gulf States Fisheries Management Commission, ADCNR, and several academic institutions, the USDA Cooperative Extension Service, NGOs and local governments. Utilizing this existing partnership to educate the public also involves these partner PAIs.

Outreach to PAIs and the public can also occur through educational booths and displays at the many festivals and events throughout Alabama each year. Existing centers, like the Wehle Nature Center operated by ADCNR provides educational programs, activities and displays that can further citizen's knowledge of GCN species and the key habitats in Alabama. Information about caves, their GCN species and threats can be incorporated into existing tour programs at state parks like Cathedral Caverns. By incorporating information about Alabama's wildlife and state conservation programs into existing environmental education programs, the CWCS will reach a much larger audience and be coordinated with partner agencies and organizations.

Solicitation of input and technical information from expert taxa committees as peer review and evaluation will occur on a biennial basis to provide updates to the ADCNR database and GCN status review. Their expert advice will be consulted regularly during the process of SWG proposal solicitation and selection review. Finally, Tier 1 and 2 stakeholders will be intimately involved in the 10- year revision of this document, as they will continue to play a major role in identifying GCN species and key habitats, as well as updating and identifying new threats and actions for the next decade of CWCS implementation.