

**The Western Governors' Association has launched the west-wide Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool, or WGA CHAT, at the December 2013 meeting in Las Vegas. This online GIS-mapping tool is designed to provide a coarse-scale view of crucial fish and wildlife habitat to inform the pre-planning phase of energy and infrastructure development. This application allows the user to compare their area of interest with crucial habitat as defined by the states; this is provided in a non-regulatory context.**

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In December 2013, the [WGA CHAT](#) was published on the internet with habitat information shown across the 16 western states that participated in its development. This first version includes selected datasets from Alaska, with a full complement of key fish and wildlife resource areas to be delineated by December 2014. At that time, Alaska will launch its own state CHAT with higher resolution and added functions.

Other state fish and game agencies have already created individual state CHATs such as [Wyoming WISDOM](#), [Montana CAPS](#), [Arizona HabiMap](#) and [California ACE](#). Alaska began its concerted effort on this project in early 2012. We have made substantial progress in developing the structure and initial mapping products that meet the WGA configuration for the west-wide CHAT. In this process, staff is challenged with the separate and variable datasets that exist for each species and region; ADF&G lacks a centralized fish and wildlife spatial data management system. When assembling crucial habitat for a landscape scale species such as caribou, data must be first be collected from each herd's respective biologist and analyzed separately to account for distinct herd characteristics. Through regional and divisional coordination, ADF&G staff is identifying ways to connect data sets across regions that may eventually lead to a statewide system. Managing and archiving ADF&Gs big game spatial data in this manner enhances the value of the investment for game management and its use for other applications such as oil and gas development plans.

With committed regional support for the CHAT, the Division of Wildlife Conservation is developing scientifically valid mapping products in support of habitat conservation to enable responsible development on the landscape. This robust mapping tool depicts much more than species ranges; rather it delineates those areas on the landscape that aquatic and terrestrial species need for their survival, migration and reproduction.

To support user interests in the Alaska CHAT, progress and updates along with sample maps and a comment form are provided at [ADF&G's CHAT website](#). Developing Alaska's CHAT is

a complex and multi-faceted endeavor that will yield long-term benefits to the public, industry, NGO's, other agencies and the Department by ultimately enhancing the value of wildlife data. Creating mapping products viewable on the web, along with supporting the agency mission to manage fish and game resources in the best interest of the economy and the people of Alaska is well-served by this effort.

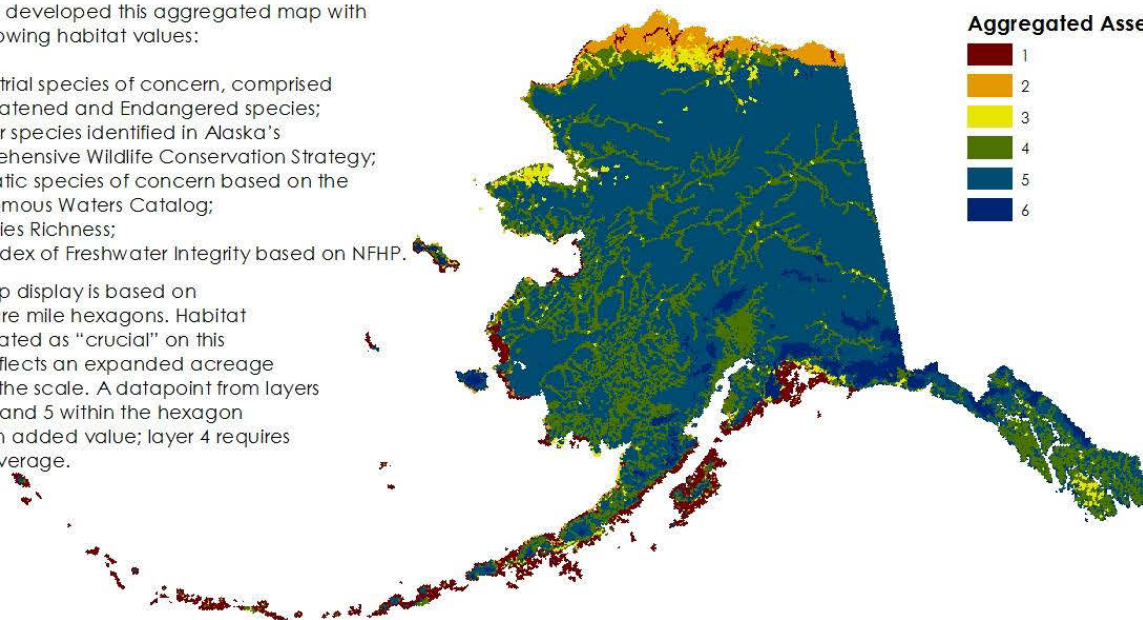
ADF&Gs efforts are currently focused on the North Slope and are scheduled to expand statewide in the coming year. The emphasis on the North Slope fulfills multi-agency needs to support oil, gas, infrastructure and other planning efforts. Funding is provided through WGA via the Department of Energy and the BLM. The DNR North Slope Area Plan needs the same data layers that are already being developed for the Alaska CHAT which are consistent with the needs of the BLM North Slope Rapid Ecoregional Assessment. Additional stakeholder outreach is underway with Conoco, BP, North Slope Borough and others to gage how this product can be modified to support industry and agency needs for wildlife information into the next decade. Coordination with the Subsistence Division supports the identification of important hunting and fishing areas with an emphasis on conserving subsistence and harvesting practices. ADF&G staff is reviewing how to best apply the CHAT to the web with respect to existing applications such as the [Fish Resource Monitor](#) and the [Subsistence Division's](#) spatial viewer (in progress). Through these partnerships, ADF&G is building a tool that increases the exposure and utility of wildlife information across the state.

ADF&G developed this aggregated map with the following habitat values:

1. Terrestrial species of concern, comprised of Threatened and Endangered species;
2. Other species identified in Alaska's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy;
3. Aquatic species of concern based on the Anadromous Waters Catalog;
4. Species Richness;
5. An index of Freshwater Integrity based on NFHP.

This map display is based on 10 square mile hexagons. Habitat designated as "crucial" on this map reflects an expanded acreage due to the scale. A datapoint from layers 1, 2, 3, and 5 within the hexagon results in added value; layer 4 requires 50% coverage.

Aggregated Assessment of Habitat



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