

11 | Plan Development, Implementation, and Review



Rufous Hummingbird © Steve Heinl, used with permission.

This chapter addresses the remaining required elements (6, 7, and 8) of Alaska’s 2025 State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP; see also Chapter 2, Table 2.1). The sixth element describes procedures involved in plan review and revision of the 2025 SWAP and into the future. The seventh element requires describing “plans for coordinating the development, implementation, review, and revision of the revised action plan with federal, state, and local agencies and Indian tribes that manage significant land and water areas within the State or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats.” The eighth element calls for public participation in the development and implementation of the plan.

This chapter has four main parts. Part I outlines the evaluation and coordination of SWAP development among agencies, specialists, and partners (element 6). Part II describes the process of our extensive partner and public outreach, summarizing results and examples of how the gathered input was integrated into the 2025 revision (elements 6, 7, and 8). Part III discusses how suggestions from partners and the public were incorporated into the implementation of the 2025 SWAP (elements 7, 8) and the types of work eligible for State Wildlife Grants (SWG) funding. Part IV addresses how future planning and review will occur prior to the next SWAP revision (in 2035; element 6).

Part I: 2015 SWAP Evaluation and Development of the 2025 Revision

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) coordinated internally and externally to evaluate and prioritize areas in the 2015 SWAP for improvement and updating, and to develop the 2025 SWAP revision. Key aspects of such coordination are described below.

Internal Coordination

ADF&G formed an internal team led by the Division of Wildlife Conservation's Threatened, Endangered, and Diversity (TED) Program. The team discussed and assigned tasks within and among key divisions and programs (e.g., TED Program, Division of Sport Fish, Marine Mammals Program). Outcomes were reviewed internally by the Division of Wildlife Conservation, the Division of Sport Fish, the Division of Commercial Fisheries, the Habitat Section, and the Commissioner's Office. Examples of modifications made due to internal evaluation include:

1. Implementing the Alaska Species Ranking System (ASRS) as a more quantitative and Alaska-specific method to rank terrestrial "species of greatest conservation need" (SGCN) occurring within the state. The ASRS was previously developed with SWG funding in partnership with the Alaska Center for Conservation Science to systematically evaluate the status of terrestrial vertebrate taxa in Alaska (Chapter 4).
2. Developing landscape-scale descriptions of SGCN diversity at both the statewide level and within key habitats of Alaska's biogeographic regions. These descriptions were included in the 2025 SWAP to inform research by identifying areas where Alaska's nongame wildlife resources overlap and to provide a more unified approach to examining habitat types and the species that use them in each region (Chapters 5, 6).

Coordination with Technical Specialists

ADF&G's internal team then worked with consultants and other technical specialists to develop Alaska's 2025 SWAP. The technical specialists included environmental consultants and subject-matter specialists (e.g., social and environmental scientists, species specialists). The combined team efforts, collectively referred to as the SWAP Project Team, revised the SWAP by gathering and incorporating new data and other information and updating methods for improving the plan's accessibility for users. All changes were made in close coordination with ADF&G personnel.



Short-eared Owl release. ADF&G.

Coordination with Other Key Stakeholders

The SWAP Project Team used qualitative inquiry to gain input from 39 agency partners, Tribal entities, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), academic and industry professionals, and other organizations. Desired input pertained to the development of the SWAP, including an assessment of familiarity and use of the SWAP, identification of areas in the plan needing improvement, suggested priorities, and preferred methods of engagement, revision, and implementation. ADF&G staff also led lengthy workshops with select statewide working groups (e.g., Boreal Partners in Flight, Alaska Shorebird Group, Alaska Small Mammal Group) to identify highly ranked conservation objectives in other

existing plans that should be linked to the SWAP revision. The workshops also sought to identify near-term projects to coordinate high-priority actions for Alaska’s SGCN.

Part II: Partner Input and Public Outreach

Input from partners for the 2025 SWAP revision was primarily gathered by 1) conducting qualitative interviews of existing and potential SWAP implementation partners, and 2) collecting comments during a 30-day public review period. This section describes the methods for participation, results summary, and how input was incorporated into the revised SWAP.

During the spring and autumn of 2024, an independent social scientist consultant conducted qualitative interviews (30–45 minutes in duration) with 46 individuals representing 38 organizations and agencies (Table 11.1) that were identified by ADF&G staff, the consultant, and existing partners as being either focused on, or substantively interested in, wildlife conservation and management in Alaska. Organizations included existing and previous agency collaborators, as well as new organizations that were identified as promising partners for the future.

Table 11.1. Organizations and agencies interviewed (in alphabetical order).

ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES	
Alaska Beluga Monitoring Program	Great Land Trust
Alaska Center for Conservation Science	Manomet Conservation Sciences
Alaska Division of Forestry and Fire Protection	Mat-Su Salmon Fish Habitat Partnership
Alaska Migratory Bird Co-management Council	National Marine Fisheries Service
Alaska Miners Association	Northern Alaska Environmental Center
Alaska Oil and Gas Association	Northern Latitudes Partnerships
Alaska Outdoor Council	Ocean Conservancy
Alaska Resource Development Council	Peregrine Fund, The
Alaska SeaLife Center	ProNatura Noroeste
Alaska Travel Industry Association	Road to Recovery
Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center	Safari Club International-Alaska Chapter
Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative	Tandem Global (formerly Wildlife Habitat Council)
Audubon Alaska	Trout Unlimited
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers-Alaska Chapter	USFS ¹ Chugach National Forest
Barnacle Strategies	USFWS ² Fisheries and Ecological Services
Boreal Partners in Flight	USFWS ² Migratory Birds Management
Bureau of Land Management	USFWS ² Proactive Conservation Program
Chugach Region Resources Commission	USGS ³ Alaska Science Center
Defenders of Wildlife-Alaska	Wildlife Conservation Society

¹ United States Forest Service

² United States Fish and Wildlife Service

³ United States Geological Survey

The purpose of the interviews was to:

1. Understand partners' backgrounds and perceptions about working with ADF&G on SGCN-related projects.
2. Broadly determine the degree to which partners are familiar with the SWAP and how they use it.
3. Understand partner priorities and ways to improve the SWAP.
4. Assess preferred methods of engagement in the SWAP revision process and implementation.
5. Increase partner awareness of the opportunity to review and provide feedback during the public review period of the SWAP revision process.

Results Highlights

Backgrounds and perceptions about working with ADF&G on SGCN-related projects

Implementing the SWAP requires collaboration with a large diversity of partners. For example, ADF&G has engaged nearly 150 organizations in SGCN research and conservation projects in the past decade. Partners that contributed to implementing the 2025 SWAP included federal and state agencies, conservation and species working groups, technical committees, academic institutions, NGOs, Alaska Native entities, and environmental consultants. Of the partners that worked closely with the ADF&G's TED Program on SGCN-related projects, nearly all held the staff and program in high regard and valued the collaboration, science, tools, and information produced to benefit Alaska's SGCN.

Familiarity, value, and use of the Alaska SWAP

Interviewees who reported using the SWAP indicated it had value, particularly for grant preparation, justification of work on particular SGCN, prioritization of their organizations' efforts, or informing advocacy and educational activities. The interviews also highlighted the value of partnering with ADF&G staff on SWG-funded activities, given frequently overlapping concerns for SGCN taxa. An example of a common conservation or management action included addressing the decline of long-distance migratory birds throughout the annual cycle to ensure that breeding birds survive and return to Alaska.

Overall, interviewees exhibited modest familiarity with the SWAP, and the nature of SWAP use varied. In cases where ADF&G staff partnered directly with an agency, projects were directly related to SWAP implementation. Other organizations used the SWAP and its associated appendices to secure funds for SGCN projects. Few respondents offered specific examples of where the SWAP was used to identify broader priorities or direct activities. The SWAP's value primarily came from its baseline of credible information regarding the status of species or their habitats. For example, baseline information ensured that SGCN were considered in National Environmental Policy Act compliance documents and was also used to describe priority habitats across the state.

Some interviewees recognized the potential for the SWAP to facilitate collaboration and improve coordination of conservation and management efforts for specific species. Since many species on the SGCN list occur on multiple organizations' priority lists, there is significant potential for

future collaborative work on SWG-funded projects. However, as a standalone State of Alaska document, the SWAP had a limited effect on the monitoring or conservation actions of individual agencies, except when they were directly partnered with ADF&G.

Partner priorities

The scope and nature of partner interests are wide-ranging in geographic scale (local to international), taxonomic focus (individual species to species groups and communities), and scope (research, conservation and management, education and outreach, monitoring, advocacy, food security, cultural sustainability, human health, etc.). The remarkable breadth of organizational priorities identified across partner interviews presents both opportunity and challenge, offering the potential for extensive resources for SWAP implementation while making it difficult to gain consensus on the highest priorities based on those interests.

Interest in providing input or assisting in other ways with the implementation of the 2025 Alaska SWAP

In addition to their willingness to be interviewed as part of the SWAP revision process, all partners expressed at least some interest in assisting with the SWAP implementation in ways consistent with their individual missions. Many interviewees, however, did not see themselves as implementation partners and sought guidance from ADF&G on ways they could make a more meaningful contribution. These offers of assistance ranged from providing feedback during SWAP revision to disseminating information to their members regarding opportunities for collaboration on research, monitoring, or citizen science programs. By pursuing these offers strategically, ADF&G can increase its ability to implement the SWAP successfully.

Species of Conservation Need: Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*)

The Hudsonian Godwit is a large shorebird that migrates over 16,000 miles each year from subarctic meadows across North America to tidal mudflats in southern South America. Up to half of its population breeds in low densities at several disjunct areas across Alaska. Nesting habitat includes wet bogs, open meadows, and dwarf shrub tundra. The greatest threats to this species occur outside of Alaska during the nonbreeding season, including habitat loss due to development and disturbance from humans and dogs on beaches. Satellite tracking data from birds nesting in Cook Inlet have revealed southbound migratory stopover sites in Central Saskatchewan, the Amazon Basin in Colombia, and Buenos Aires Province in Argentina on the southbound migration. An ADF&G partner, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, helps conserve many of these critical migratory stopover sites.



Hudsonian Godwit. A. Bankert, used with permission.

Suggestions for improving the usefulness of the SWAP

Interviewee suggestions for improving the usefulness of the SWAP fell into two categories, 1) improving development of the SWAP and 2) suggestions for improving implementation of the SWAP. The suggestions and additions for improving SWAP development have been incorporated into the 2025 revision (Table 11.2). Suggestions for improving implementation and plans for ADF&G response can be found in Part III.

Table 11.2. Key suggestions by interviewees for improving development of Alaska’s 2025 State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) and how these suggestions were addressed in the current revision.

Suggestion	Action/response in 2025 revision
1) Incorporate partner priorities and improve alignment with existing plans, especially where it is possible to facilitate collaboration at statewide, interstate, and international scales.	We gathered input from interviews, statewide species working group sessions, and public review of the draft SWAP. Additionally, we reviewed existing conservation and management plans. Based on these efforts, various chapters of the 2025 SWAP include new text to identify and highlight common priorities. For example, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) led workshops to identify common priority objectives for “species of greatest conservation need” (SGCN) at working groups of species specialists (Alaska Shorebird Group, Boreal Partners in Flight, Alaska Small Mammal Group), and these objectives were included in the revised SWAP (e.g., Chapter 8, Chapter 9).
2) Clarify why a species is listed as an SGCN and has a particular priority designation.	For SGCN designation, we adopted the Alaska Species Ranking System (ASRS), a quantitative metric for prioritizing species via a standardized procedure with transparent, objective, and repeatable ranking criteria (Chapter 4). The species scores and ranking information are available on the Alaska Center for Conservation Science website. ¹
3) Use and share existing data on SGCN. Update SGCN data as needed, including threats and actions; be as geographically specific as possible.	Existing data on SGCN were updated (Appendices A–C), as well as all appendices with species and habitat information by biogeographic region (Appendices D–H). Potential threats and actions have been identified through input by technical specialists and partners.
4) Update threats and actions, including a more in-depth treatment of climate change, in the SWAP.	Partners identified new issues that have emerged or intensified since 2015 (e.g., microplastics in the marine environment). Threats (Chapter 7) and conservation actions (Chapter 8) have been updated accordingly, including a detailed discussion of climate change impacts.
5) Improve awareness and accessibility of the SWAP.	Outreach efforts were increased compared to 2015 by interviewing 39 organizations as part of the SWAP revision. ADF&G also developed a SWAP draft communication strategy to raise partner awareness of and access to the SWAP. The strategy includes guidelines for identifying new partners and advising partners about how they can contribute to high-priority projects (see also Part III of this chapter).
6) Gather and integrate Alaska Native knowledge.	ADF&G worked with multiple Alaska Native organizations and some Canada-based First Nations partners while implementing the 2015 SWAP through research, monitoring, and outreach efforts. ADF&G’s Division of Subsistence continues to lead conservation and management efforts for SGCN shorebirds with Alaska Native communities. Working with these communities is also the focus of ongoing projects related to marine mammal and waterfowl SGCN.

¹ <https://accs.uaa.alaska.edu/wildlife/alaska-species-ranking-system/>

Public Review Process and Integration of Public Comment into the SWAP

The best practice guide for SWAP development (AFWA 2022) recommends collaborative partner and public engagement that fosters an understanding of how input is used and valued. Consistent with this recommendation, ADF&G invited 133 organizations, agencies, and industry groups to review the draft plan and also solicited public comments over a 30-day period. Opportunities for feedback were advertised via social media posts, a news release, press interviews, and by making the draft available on ADF&G's website.

Comments were received from 64 organizations (e.g., agencies, NGOs) and individuals. The majority of commenters (58) submitted input via an online survey form, and six were submitted via email. Note that the comments received were of various kinds and levels of detail.

ADF&G greatly appreciates and considered all comments, inputting them to the extent possible. The summary below provides an overview of key changes. We also indicate comments that can inform future revisions of the SWAP, and those that we could not address, because they were beyond the scope of the SWAP. Finally, we thank respondents for numerous, smaller edits or corrections that greatly improved this document.

Overall response

Most commenters appreciated the process ADF&G used for developing the Alaska SWAP, as well as its format, layout, and content. They characterized the plan and its development as transparent, readable, engaging, informative, well-organized, actionable, vastly improved, and easy to understand. The positive impressions of the plan overall provide a foundation for a more informed SWAP implementation process in which public and partner involvement can continue to be refined over time.

Many respondents also expressed appreciation for ADF&G's efforts to seek and incorporate public input, for example:

"ADF&G is open to hearing comments and concerns from residents of the state."

"[An] opportunity to voice our concerns and shape guidelines"

"Thank you for the opportunity to review this draft update! Great work!"

Recommended improvements

Below, we provide a summary of how we addressed more than 210 comments, many of which were integrated into and improved the SWAP. We received some comment on introductory materials (Chapters 1–3), but the majority of input focused on Chapters 4–11.

Introductory material (Chapters 1–3): Commenters expressed a need for text to be more inclusive of the range of consumptive users of state wildlife resources and the important connection Alaskans have to natural resources. ADF&G acknowledged the broad array of fish and wildlife user groups (e.g., consumptive, recreation, commercial, subsistence, Alaska Native users), wherever appropriate, throughout the text. We also acknowledge the value of several responses, that are likely amenable for future SWAP revisions. For example, giving the SWAP document more of a regional focus.

SGCN (Chapter 4): Most respondents were satisfied with the treatment of SGCN. Suggestions primarily related to the need for more details on which species qualified for SGCN status. We provided clarification that all species (fish, game, and nongame) listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) qualify as SGCN. Species may be removed from SGCN status when their ESA-listing status changes (e.g., Alexander Archipelago wolf). To address funding questions, we described how SWG funds for SGCN compared to the overall ADF&G budget for managing fish and wildlife.

Several comments asked for new species to be included or removed from the SGCN list. Respondents also emphasized both the intrinsic and cultural values of wildlife. Edits emphasize that the 2025 SWAP adopted the Alaska Species Ranking System (ASRS), which is a quantitative way of ranking conservation needs of all vertebrate species in Alaska based on population trend and vulnerability. The system also identifies species with key data deficiencies. We highlighted that a future goal of the SWAP is to also rank fish as part of the ASRS, as some commenters noted differences between SGCN considerations for aquatic vs. terrestrial species.

Species distributions and abundance (Chapter 5): A majority of respondents were satisfied with the treatment of species distribution, and many liked the new state-wide heatmap of SGCN richness. As requested, we added more detail and provided web links to allow access to the data associated with the heatmap. We also clarified text, directing readers to Appendix E, where they can find all available population estimates of SGCN abundance. Finally, to better describe sites important to multiple SGCN, we added some locations important to sea ducks, other waterfowl, and shorebirds that respondents recommended. Many respondents agreed that species vignettes throughout the SWAP connected multiple important elements (SGCN, habitats, threats, and actions) for the reader.

Key habitats of SGCN (Chapter 6): Most commenters were satisfied with the new treatment of habitats. Some felt the SWAP contained too many fine-scale habitat designations, while others questioned why the plan emphasizes “key habitats” rather than “all habitats.” We clarified further that habitat categories are based on the U.S. National Vegetation Classification (USNVC), which allows Alaska to align habitat types and terminology with other conservation documents, including other states’ SWAPs. We also describe why the USNVC macro group level of habitat descriptions is appropriate. Some respondents pointed out that Indigenous knowledge is a source of insight into fish and wildlife conservation and habitats, pertinent to the SWAP and its implementation. We agree and aspire to include Indigenous knowledge in the 2035 SWAP revision. We recognize that incorporating Indigenous knowledge is an effort that must be grounded in trust and collaboration with Indigenous knowledge holders, which is not something that can be completed before our 2025 deadline. Comments also indicated that recognition of the interdependent relationships in the ecosystem can help readers understand the SWAP as a holistic, systems-aware scientific document. We find this observation very useful and intend to explore it more with interested partners in the SWAP implementation phase.

Threats (Chapter 7): Some respondents were satisfied with the treatment of threats, but many were not. A recurring theme in a majority of comments called on ADF&G to address the topic of bycatch and trawling. In response, ADF&G added an entirely new section to Chapter 7 on this multi-faceted issue. Some commenters also expressed that resident consumptive use should be prioritized over commercial use of Alaska’s fisheries. ADF&G manages fish and wildlife according to the sustained yield mandate of the Alaska Constitution (Art. VIII, § 4), which provides for the beneficial use of fisheries and other natural resources by all Alaskans. While we acknowledge the importance of

Engaging Indigenous partners and knowledge to inform Alaska's SGCN research

Limited data on harvest and population parameters impede assessments of shorebird harvest sustainability. Because of sharp declines in shorebird populations (many included in Alaska's SGCN list; Chapter 4), timely conservation efforts require approaches that account for uncertainty in harvest sustainability. ADF&G has partnered with Alaska Native communities and other entities to quantify subsistence harvests in Alaska, better understand related management and conservation concerns, and support culturally sensible conservation actions. For example, in 2017–2019, ADF&G led interdisciplinary, collaborative research to estimate Alaska-wide shorebird subsistence harvest, document Yup'ik Indigenous knowledge on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, and better understand the importance of shorebirds for the local communities (Naves et al. 2019). Harvest estimates were based on surveys conducted in 1990–2015 ($n = 775$ community years). Key respondent interviews ($n = 72$) documented shorebird ethnotaxonomy and ethnography. The estimated average Alaska-wide shorebird harvest was 2,783 birds per year, including 1,115 godwits per year. The geographic and seasonal distribution of the harvest suggested that harvested godwits are mostly Bar-tailed Godwits (*Limosa lapponica baueri*), whose population has low harvest potential. The shorebird egg harvest was 4,678 eggs per year, mostly reported as small shorebird eggs. Documented Yup'ik ethnotaxonomy included at least 24 shorebird names and 10 ethnotaxonomic categories. Children learning harvesting skills focused on small birds. Adults also occasionally harvested shorebirds, but shorebirds were not a prominent food source. Older generations associated shorebirds with a time when people were closer to nature and Yup'ik tradition. Shorebirds connected people to their environment in addition to Yup'ik culture and language. The results of this research have informed improvements to harvest assessment and management, including outreach and communication efforts to engage subsistence users in shorebird conservation.



Sharing a meal of wild foods with the James family at the Alaska community of Platinum after an Indigenous knowledge interview. L. Naves, ADF&G Division of Subsistence, 2017.

resident consumptive use for many Alaskans, determining allocation among user groups is outside the scope and purpose of the SWAP and is the responsibility of the Board of Fish and Board of Game. Similarly, comments relating to improvement of regulations and enforcement, although important, were also outside the scope of the SWAP.

Some commenters thought the draft SWAP expressed sufficient urgency for threats and need for action, while others felt more research was required to understand impacts on fish and wildlife. ADF&G recognizes both sides of this issue. In addition to inserting greater detail and references for the threats described above, we added language in Chapter 11 on the importance of enhancing our partnership network to help us collaboratively apply conservation resources where we can have the greatest impact on Alaska's SGCN. Additionally, we added, reviewed, and revised text as needed in Chapter 7 to clarify other anthropogenic threats, such as the potential for vessels and lighted infrastructure (including gas flaring from oil and gas development) to attract migrating birds and cause collisions and the potential for recreational vehicles to impact habitat at local scales. In response to other comments about oil and gas exploration and extraction, in Chapters 7 and 11, we emphasized an opportunity to partner with industry in the next 10 years for potential research, monitoring and/or mitigation activities related to SGCN. Finally, we assessed the treatment of urbanization on wildlife populations, but found that this topic was already discussed in Chapter 7. We agree that future efforts to improve information in this chapter could investigate methods to assess scale and severity of threats.

Many respondents liked the new information on climate change in Chapter 7 and throughout the SWAP. However, others believed that rapidly changing environmental conditions required longer planning horizons or climate models, which could help align the SWAP with regional and national climate adaptation efforts. The SWAP is intended to be a plan for fish and wildlife conservation and management over the next decade and therefore longer-term planning efforts, although important, are outside the plan's scope.

Conservation Actions (Chapter 8): A majority of commenters suggested that ADF&G add more specifics about conservation actions, such as projects to facilitate collaboration for implementation of the SWAP, or note where additional capacity is needed, or provide lists of in-state and out-of-state partnerships or coordination opportunities. While ADF&G recognizes the value of collaboration and the need for connecting actors in conservation, such lists can quickly become outdated. Instead, we have included new text in the implementation section of Chapter 11, directing readers to a set of ADF&G contacts, who can direct and assist interested parties in engaging more with SGCN and SWAP-related activities. Potential and sustaining partners are encouraged to reach out to these ADF&G staff to facilitate making connections.

Monitoring and Evaluation (Chapter 9): A majority of respondents were satisfied with the monitoring and evaluation processes described in the SWAP. Commenters expressed interest in engaging more in citizen-science activities related to monitoring and evaluation. We have added a goal to strive for greater public involvement, education and outreach as part of SWAP implementation. Other suggestions called for a mechanism whereby local or nonprofit monitoring data can be submitted and considered in ongoing ADF&G-led tracking efforts. Though the suggestion has merit, ADF&G currently lacks capacity for additional data curation tasks.

Some expressed interest in developing a list of top-priority data gaps by region, taxon, etc., so that tribes, NGOs, and universities can address them. Plan readers are reminded of the "Alaska Priorities"

chapter (Chapter 10 and Table 10.1), which provides top species examples. We would like to acknowledge the value of comments encouraging new metrics, frameworks, or processes that can lead to summative evaluations of both project and overall SWAP accomplishments. In the near term, ADF&G will investigate how other states handle evaluation topics in their SWAPs and plan to update our evaluation process in future SWAP revisions.

Alaska Priorities (Chapter 10): Some respondents wanted a better understanding of ADF&G's priorities in specific terms, such as projects planned for the next 10 years. Others thought the priorities were clear and liked Table 10.1, which illustrates example SGCN of high concern. Since every SWG-funded project develops its own set of species- or conservation-specific objectives, a comprehensive articulation is not practical for inclusion in the SWAP. We revised text to explain that developing specific work plans is a two-stage process, requiring different information at the strategic (action plan) stage and the operational (project proposal) stage.

Plan Development, Implementation and Review (Chapter 11): A majority indicated satisfaction with how the SWAP was developed and the plans we described for implementation. However, commenters wanted to see specific examples and more detail related to implementation focus areas. Many existing or aspiring partners were ready to work more with ADF&G on SWAP implementation by sharing specialized knowledge and skillsets, disseminating information, and/or engaging their members, customers, or visitors.

To better facilitate collaboration and tap into public and partner interest, we have enhanced the implementation section with more detail, adding and emphasizing the importance of improving our efforts to increase public and partner awareness and participation. We have also added new text about how organizations and the public can contact ADF&G staff to facilitate engagement in SWAP activities.

Part III: SWAP Implementation

Advancing the SWAP's impact will require focusing on implementation actions and establishing clearly defined criteria for evaluating proposed work eligible for SWG funding. This part provides an overview of both implementation components for the 10 years until the 2035 SWAP revision.

Interviewees from partner organizations and comments from the 30-day public review provided numerous suggestions for improving SWAP implementation. Most suggestions fell into one of three themes, including expanding the list of partners involved in SWAP implementation; exploring how partners can contribute to implementation; and making a greater effort to increase general public awareness of Alaska's SWAP, while identifying ways people can get involved. Coordination with partners and Tribes is essential to ensure alignment across jurisdictions, fulfill shared responsibilities, and maximize the impact of conservation efforts.

The first suggestion was that ADF&G strategically expand its list of SWAP implementation partners, specifically those key to effective implementation. To address this suggestion, we identified three potential areas for future partner expansion:

1. **Alaska Native knowledge holders.** As landowners and Indigenous knowledge holders for the entire state, Alaska Native Tribes and organizations are key to conservation and management of Alaska's SGCN. Although there has been some engagement with Alaska Native groups in implementing previous Alaska SWAPs, it is an area that needs increased attention for the 2025 plan. Enhancement and expansion of partnerships
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with Alaska Native knowledge holders through direct engagement with tribes, Alaska Native consortia, or nonprofit organizations (e.g., Northern Latitudes Partnership) that work effectively with Alaska Native people is a high priority to help ensure successful implementation of the 2025 SWAP. Exploring ways to work with these entities and others to develop pathways for use of Indigenous knowledge to help inform species assessments and conservation strategies is a priority for SWAP implementation and will be important moving forward.

2. **Non-Alaskan partners, including other states or cross-border partnerships.** Migratory wildlife that return annually to breed in Alaska often encounter environmental stressors elsewhere that can negatively impact them and even cause high mortality during the nonbreeding period. Migratory bird conservation emphasizes the need to engage in long-distance partnerships to address conservation and management actions throughout a species' annual life cycle (Hagelin et al. 2021; McDuffie et al. 2022a, b). ADF&G intends to expand its engagement with interested partners across boundaries to identify research/monitoring needs and conservation actions where collaboration is essential to ensure desired outcomes for Alaska's SGCN.
3. **Industry.** Many sectors have interest, means, and incentives to participate in implementing Alaska's SWAP. For example, the tourism industry in Alaska markets wildlife viewing, photography, fishing, and hunting as activities for Alaskans and visitors alike. Many industry partners also conduct environmental monitoring and have wildlife experts on staff. Industry partners work hard to minimize impacts on wildlife and often provide valuable insights on improving mitigation measures and wildlife monitoring (e.g., in oil and gas development areas), making collaborations with industry a good fit for SWAP implementation.

The second suggestion was for ADF&G to more actively and broadly involve interested partners in implementation. We invite interested organizations and individuals to reach out to the following ADF&G staff, who can explore potential opportunities for collaboration on SGCN and SWAP-related projects:

- Conservation & Management Coordinator of the TED Program
(<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildlifediversity.staff>)
- Coordinator of the Invasive Species Program
(<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=invasive.report>)

Other opportunities to collaboratively involve interested partners came from interviews and comments during the public review period. For example, the new landscape-scale perspective in the 2025 SWAP may also help identify geographic areas ideal for new partnerships. ADF&G could also explore workshops with entities that have developed their own plans (e.g., tribes, Joint Ventures) to identify and consider local, regional and larger-scale priorities. In addition, there may be opportunities to engage partners in assisting with species-level research, such as monitoring, in an effort to understand changing habitats, populations, revise ASRS assessments of SGCN, or to develop more comprehensive statewide species or landcover maps for wildlife research. ADF&G plans to explore ways to keep the SWAP updated and to keep partners engaged and informed between decadal revisions. This can be done by continuing work with partners to make SWAP-related tools and information more accessible, spatially explicit, and interactive. ADF&G aims to share progress

on conservation activities, SGCN status changes, and will encourage partners to incorporate this information in their relevant planning documents.

The third suggestion for SWAP implementation involved greater emphasis on increasing the public's awareness and engagement. There is a particular opportunity to collaborate with partners that can connect their members, visitors and clients to implementation. For example, it may be beneficial to work with partners that have high public interaction (e.g., Alaska Sea Life Center, state and national refuges and parks, Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center, tourism industry) to increase public exposure to the SWAP and participation in Alaska species conservation (e.g., citizen science, such as helping to ground truth heatmaps). Further, it will be beneficial for ADF&G to continue enhancing the momentum built during the revision process (e.g., increased social media content related to the SWAP) to increase awareness, interest and support for Alaska's SGCN conservation among Alaskans and visitors alike.

Funding Decisions

One challenge for SWAP implementation is identifying how to best apply limited funding to many potential project ideas, given conservation needs and the broad interests of partners and the public. When there is an opportunity to initiate a new project, ADF&G considers several factors before deciding what species and objectives SWG will fund:

- **Conservation need.** Is the species ranked highly on the ASRS, or is it likely to become threatened, endangered, or extinct in the near future?
- **Stewardship responsibility.** Does the species have a high proportion of its population in Alaska relative to its range?
- **Cultural, economic, commercial, and ecological importance.** Is it important to conserve the species for multiple reasons?
- **Efficiency and feasibility.** Is the specific research or monitoring project likely to succeed (i.e., is the project technically feasible, and would the results be useful for conservation)?
- **Program capacity.** Does ADF&G have the expertise and capacity to successfully address a given species, habitat, threat, or action? If not, is creating new capacity the best alternative, or should the work be directed to a partner with existing capacity and expertise?
- **Opportunity for synergy.** Does a project leverage available synergies by partnering with other agencies and organizations, or is it redundant to the work those agencies are already doing well?
- **Funding availability.** Can a project be completed successfully with the current funds available? Are there opportunities for attracting matching funds, personnel, or other resources that might elevate one proposal over another?

Eligible Activities

As ADF&G implements the 2025 SWAP, it is important to describe the types of activities eligible for SWG funding (Table 11.3; USFWS 2024).

Continued coordination among existing and new partners to implement the SWAP is essential. Through outreach to agencies, organizations, and others during the revision process, ADF&G gained a greater understanding of the diversity of interest, capacity, and opportunities that exist to assist

Table 11.3. Key implementation activities described in Alaska’s State Wildlife Action Plan eligible for State Wildlife Grants funding.

Type of funding eligible activity	Specific activities and limitations
1) Conservation and management actions, such as:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Research. b) Surveys. We may approve surveys and monitoring to obtain data for ADF&G to decide if it should designate a species as an SGCN. c) Species monitoring. d) Species and habitat management. If an SGCN depends on a plant species for its survival, we consider the plant species as part of its habitat. e) Habitat evaluations. f) Evaluations of the effectiveness of conservation and management actions. g) Acquisition of real property, including monitoring acquired properties to ensure that they continue to serve the purpose for which they were acquired. h) Facilities development.
2) Coordination and administrative activities, such as:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Developing and maintaining data management systems to record, store, or disseminate information. b) Monitoring progress of projects. c) Developing strategic and operational plans. d) Coordinating implementation meetings with partners. Partners are entities that take part in planning or carrying out a State Plan. These entities include but are not limited to: federal, state, and local agencies; tribes; nonprofit organizations; academic institutions; industry groups; and private individuals.
3) Education and law enforcement activities, when the activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Are critical to achieving the project’s objectives. b) Are no more than 10 percent of the respective project costs, and c) Specifically benefit SGCN or their habitats.

Source: USFWS (2024).

in collaborative implementation of the SWAP. Consequently, ADF&G incorporated input from the public and partners into its implementation plans and looks forward to increased collaboration to advance conservation and management of Alaska’s SGCN.

Part IV: Future Revision of Alaska’s State Wildlife Action Plan

The sixth element required for Alaska’s SWAP is a description of procedures for reviewing and revising the plan at intervals not to exceed 10 years (e.g., by 2035). ADF&G will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the current plan annually. Specific guidance for future revisions to the plan is provided in a 2017 joint memorandum from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA 2022, USFWS and AFWA 2017). The guidelines

outline the revision process and provide clear procedural steps for comprehensive, major, and minor revisions. These guidelines intend to offer states flexibility to update their plans based on new insights and shifting circumstances. With this framework in mind, we aim to make updates or revisions as needed. If new information suggests a major revision is warranted before 2035, ADF&G will undertake that effort. Barring that circumstance, we expect to revise the plan on the normal 10-year schedule, which would put the next comprehensive revision of this action plan due in October 2035.

The core of any SWAP revision is an updated assessment of the conservation and management status of native species and their key habitats. The process helps evaluate the relative risks facing wildlife and ecosystems and identify potential actions. Therefore, we plan to continue updating the ASRS to provide guidance on the at-risk status of SGCN and keep up-to-date taxonomy, scientific names, and English names. If new SGCN are designated or issues are raised that are not in the current plan, we will amend through the “process to address emerging issues” (Table 11.4; USFWS 2024).

We anticipate that spatial information will continue to improve over the next decade; thus, we will strive to integrate landscape-level information into the 2035 SWAP revision. Also, AFWA recently provided voluntary guidance on integrating climate information and actions into SWAPs (AFWA 2022). We updated climate topics throughout the 2025 SWAP and will do so again in the future to ensure we include the best available information on climate and environmental change.

As outlined in Part III, ADF&G will continue to engage partners in implementing the SWAP and expand and create new partnerships. Enhancing existing partnerships and engaging new ones is possible due to the new information we gathered while interviewing many organizations during this SWAP revision. ADF&G will also strive to ensure more consistent communication with the public and partners to increase awareness and use of the SWAP to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes for Alaska’s SGCN. Before undertaking the next revision, ADF&G will meet with partners to determine a process that will produce the most useful plan in the most efficient manner possible.

Table 11.4. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) requirements for documenting emerging issues.

The following requirements for documenting emerging issues must be met if applicant(s) propose to address an emerging issue, per Federal guidance (517 FW 10.15; USFWS 2024).¹

Requirements:

- a) Describe the emerging issue fully by identifying the SGCN or habitats that would benefit from the proposed action(s);
- b) Explain why it is an emerging issue; and
- c) Commit the State of Alaska to monitoring the effectiveness of the completed action(s) so the state can adaptively manage future activities.

¹ The application must include a commitment letter that the director of the state fish and wildlife agency has signed, stating that the next version of the SWAP will include the emerging issue if it remains a priority. The assistant regional director for Migratory Birds and State Programs, or a USFWS official in a similar position associated with the Office of Conservation Investment (OCI), must review the grant application or any future amendments that include emerging issues not in the SWAP before the application is sent to the national review panel for scoring. The assistant regional director of the Service must concur that the issue is an emerging one, or the application will not be considered for funding. OCI must retain the original paper copy or an electronic copy of the concurrence or nonconcurrence document.

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