

2 | Road Map to Plan Elements



Salmon jumping out of the water heading upstream. © M. Emery, used with permission.

This revision of Alaska’s State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) represents a 10-year comprehensive revision to the 2015 plan. The state is required to provide a summary of all significant revisions, describe how the revisions meet the original required eight elements, and provide a “road map” to locate revisions in the plan. This chapter addresses these three requirements. The State of Alaska’s intent to revise the SWAP was communicated to Region 7 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) by letter on April 1, 2024, and amendment on May 2, 2024.

The revision process for the 2025 plan began with over 40 targeted interviews of staff from natural resource agencies, industry associations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), Alaska Native organizations, and wildlife user groups. The goal was to collect feedback on familiarity with the 2015 SWAP and the Threatened, Endangered, and Diversity (TED) Program, the nongame wildlife program at the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G). This solicited feedback also identified potential collaborations and effective engagement with partners in the future. In addition to targeted interviews, TED Program staff led three workshops with statewide working groups of species specialists, including the Alaska Shorebird Group, Boreal Partners in Flight, and the Alaska Small Mammal Working Group. The purpose of these workshops was to share information about the SWAP and identify priority research projects and conservation and management objectives for wildlife in the next decade. The ADF&G Marine Mammals Program and Division of Sport Fish provided SWAP updates for marine

mammals and aquatic species, respectively. The state elicited input from the public during a comment period held in June 2025. At that time, a draft of the plan was widely circulated along with a survey that included free-form response options. Feedback from the public comment period was subsequently incorporated into the final document.

The plan was revised to incorporate current information on the distribution, habitats, status, threats, and conservation and management priorities for “species of greatest conservation need” (SGCN) in Alaska while maintaining the more readable and engaging format adopted in 2015.

Demographics

Because of its remote, northern location, Alaska has seen relatively little of the urbanization and land conversion (e.g., for agriculture, ranching, housing) common in many areas of the lower 48 states. It is the most sparsely populated state in the country (1.3 people per square mile). About 40 percent of Alaska’s 733,391 residents live in a single city (Anchorage), and most development is centered in a narrow north-south “Railbelt” that parallels the Alaska Railroad route between the Kenai Peninsula, Anchorage, the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, and Fairbanks. The state’s capital, Juneau, is in Southeast Alaska. It is the state’s third-largest city, with about 32,000 residents, and is not connected to the road or rail system, except by marine ferry. Alaska’s population increased by 3% between 2000 and 2020, with growth concentrated in the Southcentral region of the state, but has decreased in recent years. In addition to urban centers, there are many small communities, typically with hundreds of residents, including 229 federally recognized Alaska Native Tribes (40% of tribes in the United States). In 2023, Alaska Natives comprised nearly 16% of the state’s total population (U.S. Census Bureau 2024).

Major Improvements to the 2025 SWAP

In addition to incorporating input from partner organizations, specialists, and the public, the 2025 revision includes the following improvements:

1. A thorough review of SGCN, particularly criteria for species inclusion (Chapter 4). The 2025 revision specifically adopts the Alaska Species Ranking System (ASRS), created by ADF&G and the Alaska Center for Conservation Science, to quantify the at-risk status of Alaska’s terrestrial vertebrates and marine mammals (Gotthardt et al. 2012).
2. A new landscape-level focus that provides the first-ever spatial information on SGCN distributions in Alaska. In Chapter 5, we provide statewide, multispecies heatmaps for terrestrial vertebrate and marine mammal SGCN to inform future research on the drivers of SGCN biodiversity. Furthermore, we identify study locations where State Wildlife Grant (SWG) dollars can be spent most effectively to address multiple SGCN species.



Anchorage, Alaska’s largest city, celebrates the outdoors with many lakes, parks, and developed trails for walking, biking, and skiing throughout the city. © K. Marsh, used with permission.

3. A more thorough description of Alaska’s habitats. Habitats are updated across terrestrial biogeographic regions for the first time to align with the U.S. National Vegetation Classification at the macrogroup level (USNVC 2025). In addition, Chapter 6 provides some of the first information on species richness (e.g., numbers of SGCN) of major habitat types across the state and within each biogeographic region.
4. Updated descriptions of threats in Chapter 7, including a more in-depth treatment of climate change and its direct and indirect impacts on Alaska’s fish and wildlife in recent decades, and a range of projected outcomes for the future.
5. More strategic, focused approaches to implementing conservation and management actions for Alaska’s fish and wildlife. For example, the 2025 SWAP identifies new opportunities to reduce steep declines of migratory species that breed in Alaska by fostering multistate or cross-border collaborations that target locations during the nonbreeding season, where adult survival is lowest.

Species of Greatest Conservation Need

The 2025 SWAP specifies SGCN taxonomy at the species level and above; however, if conservation concerns are restricted to lower taxonomic levels, we also provide information on subspecies, distinct population segments (DPS), or stocks (for marine mammals). Species were considered SGCN based on at-risk status, stewardship, and cultural importance. Economic and ecological importance was also considered, especially for aquatic species, given the importance of commercial harvest to Alaska (e.g., salmon and crab) and the role of lower trophic levels that feed many vertebrate SGCN.

Alaska’s immense size, location, and intact ecosystems provide important habitat for a large proportion of the total population size for many species. To reflect Alaska’s high stewardship responsibility in these cases, a species qualified as an SGCN when a large proportion of the population occurred in Alaska (e.g., 50% or more of the North American population is in Alaska at any time of the year; Chapter 4). Hunted species were excluded from SGCN status unless considered a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) or traditional funding (e.g., Pittman-Robertson) was insufficient to implement a conservation and management program (e.g., Alaska hare, several sea ducks).

The SGCN list includes 266 vertebrate species, six orders of terrestrial arthropods, five classes of freshwater macroinvertebrates, one species of freshwater mollusk, three orders and one subclass of marine zooplankton, two classes of deep-sea corals, and eight species of other marine invertebrates. Of the vertebrates, the SGCN list includes 12 fish species and one genus of rockfish (Appendix C), five amphibians, 183 birds, 42 terrestrial mammals, and 24 marine mammals. The revised plan includes a complete list of all SGCN and the basis for their inclusion (Appendices A through C) and



Alaska hare. C. Barger, ADF&G.



Alaska pipeline. ADF&G.

updated information of distribution and habitat use (for all species), abundance (where known), and monitoring efforts (see Appendices D through H).

The revised plan provides criteria for including SGCN (Appendices A through C) and updated information on distribution and habitat use (for all species), abundance (where known), and monitoring efforts (see Appendices D through H). Scattered throughout the revision are vignettes describing SGCN in Alaska.

Threats and Conservation Actions

This revised plan identifies major threats facing wildlife in Alaska (Chapter 7). It sets clear priorities for research in addition to conservation and management actions for SGCN over the next decade (Chapter 8). We also use the standard terminology of Salafsky et al. (2024) to characterize threats and actions, which is a best practice for SWAP revision and implementation (AFWA 2012). Chapter 7 and others provide an updated and more complete picture of how wildlife and their habitats in Alaska are being impacted by climate change and how the changes can inform the conservation and management of SGCN.

Unlike most other states, Alaska has a great deal of intact, high-quality habitat for wildlife. Still, for many declining SGCN, the causes of population loss are difficult to pinpoint because wildlife spend only part of their life cycle in Alaska. These challenges require new partnerships to prevent species listings as threatened or endangered under the ESA. For example, many populations of long-distance migratory birds that breed in the state are declining (Handel and Sauer 2017), and collaborative international conservation efforts will be needed to address, mitigate, or reverse cross-border declines. In addition, monitoring the status of populations and habitat connectivity may be important methods to ensure that sustainable populations continue to return to Alaska's intact habitats for breeding and thrive into the future. This revised plan points to strategic research priorities such as population monitoring, mapping important habitats, and identifying specific

causes for population declines. Priority actions are guided by the likelihood of improving a species' conservation and management status by internal capacity and by the current work of other agencies, NGOs, or partners that align with SWAP needs.

The Revision Process

The public participation component of the plan was multifaceted and involved targeted interviews with current and future partners, facilitated workshops with species working groups, and broad public outreach to elicit feedback on a draft version of the 2025 SWAP. These steps ensured the effective multidirectional flow of information regarding species of conservation concern, their habitats, and conservation challenges in Alaska and beyond. The in-depth process has strengthened the document so that it can be used as an effective conservation and management tool and an important source of information over the next decade.

The SWAP must minimally satisfy eight required elements (Chapter 1). To ease the reading and review of the document, we summarize the elements and their corresponding chapters in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Locations in this document where the eight required SWAP elements are addressed.

Required Element	Description	Chapter
1	Identify species indicative of the diversity and health of the state's wildlife, including low and declining populations (i.e., "species of greatest conservation need" [SGCN]).	Species of Greatest Conservation Need (Chapter 4)
1	Information on the distribution and abundance of SGCN.	Distribution and Abundance of Wildlife in Alaska (Chapter 5)
2	Descriptions of location and relative condition of habitats and community types essential to SGCN.	Key Habitats of Wildlife in Alaska (Chapter 6)
3	Descriptions of problems that may adversely affect SGCN or their habitats.	Threats to Wildlife (Chapter 7)
3	Priority research and survey efforts to identify factors that may assist in the restoration and improved conservation of SGCN or their habitats.	Alaska Priorities (Chapter 10)
4	Descriptions of conservation actions proposed to conserve SGCN or their habitats.	Conservation Actions (Chapter 8)
4	Priorities for implementing conservation actions.	Alaska Priorities (Chapter 10)
5	Proposed strategies for monitoring SGCN, their habitats, and the effectiveness of conservation actions.	Monitoring and Evaluation (Chapter 9)
6	Descriptions of procedures to review the SWAP at intervals not to exceed 10 years.	Plan Development, Implementation, and Review (Chapter 11)
7	Strategies for coordinating the development, implementation, review, and revision of the SWAP with federal, state, and local agencies and Alaska Native organizations that manage significant land and water areas within the state.	Plan Development, Implementation, and Review (Chapter 11)
8	Description of public participation in developing and revising this SWAP.	Plan Development, Implementation, and Review (Chapter 11)

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