

Scientists seek national wildlife conservation network

— | [no comments](#)**Marie Thoms**

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Wildlife conservation efforts in the United States are facing habitat loss, climate change and major reductions in funding. To address these threats, a group of prominent wildlife biologists and policy experts is recommending the formation of a state-based national conservation-support network. Their proposal is published in the November issue of the journal *BioScience*.

“We surveyed wildlife managers from every state and territory to assess the state of the wildlife conservation system,” said co-author Brad Griffith, a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Geological Survey and University of Alaska Fairbanks. “We kept hearing ‘we don’t have the maps we need’ and ‘we don’t have current tools.’ It was clear after listening to all these folks that better coordination of resources and planning among states, across regions and nationwide could make our conservation efforts more effective and efficient.”

The proposed network, which would bring together state, federal, nongovernmental and private initiatives, has five goals: establish a common habitat classification map, identify at-risk species not currently managed federally, coordinate planning opportunities, disseminate planning information and document the potential uses of new conservation data tools.

“Individual state wildlife action plans provide a strong foundation for biodiversity conservation, but a state-by-state approach does not protect ecosystems and habitats that extend across state borders and occur at regional and national scales,” said Griffith, the leader of the USGS Alaska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit in UAF’s Institute of Arctic Biology. “This approach also does not enable states to address species that are declining throughout a multistate range, but are not yet endangered or threatened.”

The authors suggest that a program to support state wildlife agencies be independent, rather than housed within a federal agency because of the potential for relatively frequent administrative changes in focus and support for conservation philosophies and actions.

“A national conservation-support network could work to identify large-scale conservation challenges and facilitate their resolution,” Griffith said. “This network could integrate local and regional efforts, enhance large-scale conservation, and advance collaborative conservation among states and their partners. It would make the most efficient use of limited conservation funds, maintain ecological integrity and ecosystem services and reduce the need for more stringent environmental protections.”

Other co-authors are: Vicky Meretsky of Indiana University Bloomington, Lynn Maguire of Duke University, Frank Davis and David Stoms of the University of California at Santa Barbara, J. Michael Scott and Dale Goble of the University of Idaho, Dennis Figg of the Missouri Department of Conservation, Scott Henke of Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Jacqueline Vaughn of Northern Arizona University and Steven Yaffee of the University of Michigan.

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