



## PLANTS EXCLUDED FROM STATE WILDLIFE GRANTS PROGRAM

**\$600 Million in Conservation Spending Restricted to Fauna**

October 2, 2007

### **BACKGROUND: WILDLIFE ACTION GRANT PROGRAM**

The State Wildlife Grants program is one of this nation's core programs for conservation of wildlife and their habitats. The Program uses federal energy revenues to supply funds to each state and U.S. territory to support wildlife conservation projects and programs.

In order to receive funding under this program, each state/territory is required to develop a "wildlife action plan" that would outline priority species, habitats, threats, and actions for the allocation of funds. These plans are also known as Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies, Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plans, Wildlife Conservation Plans, and Wildlife Conservation Strategies.

More than \$600 million in conservation funding has passed through the Wildlife Action Plan program in the past six years: roughly \$400 million in federal aid matched by \$200 million in state funds. The Bush Administration's 2008 Budget Proposal includes \$69.5 million for the program.

Program funds may be used for a variety of state species conservation projects including restoration of degraded habitat, breeding and reintroduction of native wildlife, development of partnerships with private landowners, and research on declining species.

For general information about the program, including its origins, expenditures and examples of projects see: [http://www.teaming.com/state\\_wildlife\\_grants.htm](http://www.teaming.com/state_wildlife_grants.htm)

## **EXCLUSION OF PLANTS**

Funds from Wildlife Action Plans *may not be used for plant conservation* unless the plants support animal habitats.

This is because the State Wildlife Grants program excludes plants from its definition of species that may be conserved under the program.

This problem stems from the origin of the State Wildlife Grants program. The current authorizing legislation evolved from the “Pittman-Robertson Act”, adopted in 1937. This early legislation established a fund to benefit wildlife management for hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation.

The 1937 Act defined ‘wildlife’ as:

*“any species of wild, free-ranging **fauna** including fish, and also **fauna** in captive breeding programs the object of which is to reintroduce individuals of a depleted indigenous species into previously occupied range.”* (16 USC 669 (a); emphasis added)

The absence of the word ‘*flora*’ from the definition excludes plants from the program, and therefore from funding that would support their inclusion in the state Wildlife Action Plans.

## **OUTDATED LANGUAGE OBSTRUCTS CURRENT SCIENCE AND IS OUT OF STEP WITH STATES AND PUBLIC**

Despite the fact that fully 70 years have passed since this definition was adopted, it is still present in the State Wildlife Grants program authorizing and funding legislation. This definition is completely inconsistent with current scientific understanding that plants and animals are inextricably intertwined in the web of life. While this wording may have been adequate for a 1937 hunting based program, it is now a barrier to meeting conservation needs. Fundamental principles of science dictate that *effective wildlife conservation simply cannot occur in the absence of equally vigorous plant conservation.*

In addition to its departure from current science, the State Wildlife Grants program’s plant prohibition is directly at odds with other federal laws. For example, Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act authorizes the Department of the Interior to cooperate with and fund state programs for conservation of federally listed plants.

The public and the states want conservation programs to reflect science and protect plants. Many states have expressed frustration with the limitations on the use of Wildlife Grant funds. Public comments on Wildlife Action Plans in states such as California have also questioned the exclusion of plants.

Rather than attempting to update the law to reflect basic principles of conservation biology - and the desire of states to use this funding for plant conservation - the problem is being perpetuated. In January 2007, the Department of the Interior issued final guidelines for implementation of the program which further codify this obstacle (see 2007 Guidelines at <http://federalasst.fws.gov/swg/2007%20SWG%20Guidelines.pdf>)

## **SOLUTIONS**

Awareness of this problem is limited. Too few agency leaders and elected officials realize that plants are excluded from state Wildlife Action Plans. Even some native plant societies, botanical gardens and arboreta remain unaware of the problem. Therefore, the Native Plant Conservation Campaign is working to educate the public, native plant science and conservation community, elected officials and others.

It is no longer 1937. Conservation programs must incorporate information and experience gained over the past 50 years to reflect the best science and management practices available today.

**Our goal is to persuade Congress to amend the State Wildlife Grant program's definition of "wildlife" to include both fauna *and* flora.**

For more information contact the  
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### **NPCC AFFILIATE ORGANIZATIONS**

Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum \* Arizona Native Plant Society \* Arkansas Native Plant Society \* Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) \* California Native Plant Society \* California Oak Foundation \* Colorado Native Plant Society \* Florida Native Plant Society \* Grand Prairie Friends of Illinois \* Herb Society of America \* Idaho Native Plant Society \* Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society \* Iowa Native Plant Society \* Kansas Native Plant Society \* Kauai Native Plant Society \* Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center \* Maryland Native Plant Society \* Minnesota Native Plant Society \* Missouri Native Plant Society \* Montana Native Plant Society \* Native Plant Society of New Jersey \* Native Plant Society of New Mexico \* Native Plant Society of Northeastern Ohio \* Native Plant Society of Oregon \* Native Plant Society of Texas \* Native Prairies Association of Texas \* New England Wild Flower Society (NH, CT, RI, MA, ME, VT) \* New Mexico Rare Plant Technical Council \* North Carolina Botanical Garden \* North Carolina Wild Flower Preservation Society \* Oklahoma Native Plant Society \* South Carolina Native Plant Society \* Ticonderoga Arboretum and Botanical Gardens, VA \* Utah Native Plant Society \* Virginia Native Plant Society \* Washington Native Plant Society \* West Virginia Native Plant Society \* Wyoming Native Plant Society