

## Office of Resource Conservation

### State of Illinois

### Grant Segment

### Project number: T-55 P-1

**Project title:** Illinois Conservation Opportunity Areas: Coordination and Planning in Support of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan

**Purpose:**

During development of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan (see Pages 96-97: Table 8, Pages 270-271 in [http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/wildliferesources/theplan/final/Illinois\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/wildliferesources/theplan/final/Illinois_final_report.pdf) and at <http://dnr.state.il.us/ORC/WildlifeResources/theplan/maps.htm>), through regional meetings with experts such as IDNR biologists, research scientists and other partners, 31 specific Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs) (Figure 1.) were identified as high priorities for protection and management.

The criteria for selection of these areas included:

- 1) areas where a significant wildlife or habitat resource occurs (or could reasonably occur with restoration),
- 2) one or more organizations willing to implement conservation actions and evaluate the results,
- 3) funding is, or could be available
- 4) a specific, plausible conservation objective could be articulated.

The goals of this project are to facilitate planning and coordination of ILWAP Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs) and provide coordination among conservation partners.

The **primary objective** is to provide for the direct refinement and revision of Illinois' Wildlife Action Plan consistent with criteria X.A.2 and X.A.3 of the October 18, 2006 US Fish and Wildlife Service "Guidelines for the State Wildlife Grant (SWG) program."

These activities will identify COAs that are in need of assistance with planning and coordination and allow for an assessment of initial status of the COAs as well as progress in planning and coordination over a 3-year period.

This effort will also allow for development of a model system for planning and coordination within and among COAs and will provide a foundation for future assessment of the success of COAs' (e.g., achieving goals related to management activities, coordination, and/or funding).

## **Need:**

Because of the diverse needs among the COAs, as well as potential numerous local partners associated with specific COAs, coordination and planning activities for these COAs requires focused, local attention.

With the large number of COAs statewide, as well as the need for including many local partners (e.g., county soil and water conservation districts, local conservation organizations), the scope and capacity of the current statewide Wildlife Action Plan (ILWAP) coordination efforts are greatly exceeded by this need.

Yet, without this local input or “site-scale” coordination, it will be difficult for the IDNR and its conservation partners to assess the local status of the COAs and to fully address the resource needs at the local level and update the ILWAP.

The ILWAP is an active strategic planning document and the localized COA planning will provide for specific revisions and updates to the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan.

There is also a need to understand how the individual and collective status of the COAs translates to the overall progress in the implementation of the ILWAP.

The COAs represent a very small percentage of the overall spatial extent of the state, yet they can serve as indicators of the ecological health of the state and other high-priority areas.

Individually, at the local scale, and cumulatively, at the statewide scale, these areas represent components (e.g., species of greatest conservation need, critical habitats) that are vital to the success of the ILWAP and the protection of the state’s natural resources.

Fostering communication and coordination among the local conservation partners can serve as a catalyst for implementation of on-the-ground actions.

Success of COA planning and coordination is predominantly dependent upon local interest in such efforts.

However, a well-developed plan and the availability of funding are also necessary.

Motivating and assisting local conservation partners to address their needs, in the context of the ILWAP, will be important for this project.

The importance of such coordination is highlighted by the successful Cache River Joint Venture and the dedication of the late Don Hankla.

In this biologically rich and internationally recognized area (i.e., a RAMSAR site), Mr. Hankla’s capacity to communicate needs and foster collaboration resulted in a partnership of diverse parties that has translated into a model for coordination and planning efforts.

As such, we will use the successful Cache River partnership as a model for this effort.

In particular, we will pay careful attention to identifying key individuals and groups to lead organization and planning for each COA, as this appears to be a critical factor for success of these efforts.

**While the ILWAP coordinator serves the statewide coordination needs critical to implementing the plan, this project will support those statewide coordination needs by providing local planning and coordination.**

Thus, the COA planning project will provide specific needs for updating and revising performance measures, goals and actions in the Wildlife Action Plan consistent with criteria X.A.2 and X.A.3 of the October 18, 2006 US Fish and Wildlife Service “Guidelines for the State Wildlife Grant (SWG) program.”

**Job 1.**

- Assess the current status of planning within Illinois Wildlife Action Plan – Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs),
- track planning progress in the COAs,
- provide coordination among conservation partners for the development of COA plans leading to revision of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan.

For projects with many potential partners, designation of a coordinator or leader is necessary for the activity to be successful.

**Thus, many states have designated coordinators for their WAP's, but the demands for this statewide coordination can often exceed the supply.**

In Illinois, for local, high-priority areas (i.e., COAs), this same leadership and coordination is needed to initiate local planning which can then lead to on-the-ground conservation actions.

Building upon other planning efforts (e.g., Conservation 2000 Ecosystem Partnerships), the diversity of the biological and habitat conditions among COAs across the state dictates a local approach to planning.

For this job, the coordinator will bring together conservation partners (i.e., local, state, federal agencies, non-governmental organizations and private landowners) to foster communication and the development of a plan for the COA.

This COA-plan will contribute to the further development and revision to the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan..

The coordinator will assist the COA through activities such as:

- 1) coordinating meetings when appropriate or requested;
- 2) providing technical assistance and available background materials;
- 3) identifying funding opportunities;
- 4) other appropriate needs that may be required for the planning process.

The amount of time and materials required for each COA will be contingent upon the local issues and capacity of conservation partners.

Some existing COA partnerships (e.g., Cache River) have active planning and implementation, and thus may require minimal assistance.

However, other COAs such as perhaps the Little Vermilion River may require more time and participation to achieve a plan.

**The coordinator may assist with developing a plan, but will not be responsible for writing the plan or for its implementation.**

Thus, the coordinator's role is to serve as an "organizer/facilitator" in the local COA planning process,

The successful development of a COA plan is a collaborative effort requiring initiative and interest from all parties.

Planning and coordination activities are already being conducted in a few COAs (e.g., Cache River, Midewin Grasslands) and little work may be required in these areas.

Yet there may be other sites where such activities have not yet been initiated or there is need for assistance.

Working with the **Illinois Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator**, the Office of Resource Conservation's (ORCs) **Project Manager** for this grant

**((( the IWAP Coordinator is not the Proj Mgr for this grant )))**

and other conservation partners, this job will identify the priorities of COAs needing coordination assistance.

This objective will provide an initial status of the COAs and document change throughout the scope of the project.

Through this job, support will be directed towards local COA efforts

(up to 10 COAs or suite of COAs per year, where such coordination represents a more efficient use of resources).

This may include:

- **fostering communication** among partners by convening meetings,
- **supporting coordination** among various organizations, institutions, or agencies where such activities might not otherwise occur,
- **identifying potential funding opportunities** in support of the COAs.

#### **Tasks:**

1.
  - Work with the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator and ORC Project Manager for this grant to identify the COAs for which planning should be developed.
  - Communicate the status of planning efforts through updates to the Illinois Fish and Wildlife Action Team's Share Point website administered by IDNR.

2. Facilitate and help coordinate meetings of COA partners.

3. Review existing management, protection, and future implementation goals for the COAs (or suite of COAs).

These may include:

- watershed plans,
- site plans,
- Conservation 2000 Ecosystem Partnership plans,
- green infrastructure,
- stream classification, etc.

4. Identify funding needs and opportunities for management, conservation easements, or acquisitions.

5. Work with conservation partners to develop plans for proposals and identify funding opportunities from federal, **state**, and private sources to address management needs and information deficiencies.

**6. Develop recommended revisions to the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan and provide those to the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator.**

7. Where needed, provide technical support to researchers, resource managers in the form of research proposals and reports, reconnaissance and related planning activities, with specific focus on species of greatest conservation need and habitats, for COAs and nearby areas.

8. Work with conservation partners to develop proposals to address planning and coordination and information deficiencies identified in the planning process.

### **Deliverables:**

1. A report to the ORC Project Manager for this grant providing an assessment of the planning process for each COA (up to 10 COAs per year).

This report will highlight major activities conducted to facilitate this COA planning effort, including: number of meetings, status of the planning process, data gaps, products, funding needs, and other relevant information.

For COAs with ongoing planning and coordination, the report will provide an update on each of these COAs.

The report will document how the COA planning process is working to address goals of the IL WAP.

**Job 2.** Identify a model COA planning process and develop planning guidance materials for use by conservation partners.

It is anticipated that COA planning will achieve a common pattern that may include components such as:

- identifying key partners,

- gathering data,
- coordination,
- developing a plan,
- acquiring funds.

However, one overall process may not address the needs of specific COAs that may have local planning requirements.

Given the longevity of the ILWAP (reviewed every 10 years), **this objective will help identify these COA-specific needs and will serve as a historical reference, to document progress in the COA planning process.**

This process will be developed in close coordination with on-going planning (e.g., **The Nature Conservancy, IDNR**)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requires a 10-year review of the Wildlife Action Plans and thus development of a COA planning process will help guide the conservation partners into the future.

The ILWAP is an active strategic planning document and the localized COA planning will provide for specific revisions and updates to the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan.

To help ensure this planning and coordination maintains its vigor, this job will help identify both general and specific actions necessary for ongoing progress.

For such a long-term effort, it is critical for success that

a process be developed to provide for continued support through changes in staff within the conservation partners, particularly within the COAs.

This will build upon a variety of planning efforts within Illinois (e.g., Conservation 2000 Ecosystem Partnerships, **the Nature Conservancy planning, ILWAP planning**).

These planning efforts have often encompassed much greater areas than are specified by the designated COAs.

It is therefore expected that as the COA planning process becomes more localized, the availability of resources (e.g., site-specific resource data), staff, local interests, will vary.

Understanding these needs in the context of the statewide WAP will be important for this integration.

### **Tasks:**

1. Consult conservation partners, use current and recent planning efforts both in Illinois and other states (where appropriate), and review other pertinent sources to document planning processes.
2. Compile guidance materials and assess their relevance to COA planning.

### **Deliverables:**

1. This job will provide to the ORC Project Manager for this grant, a guidance document outlining a process for COA planning and highlighting specific COA needs where appropriate.

This document will help to link the local COA planning to the statewide WAP and serve to identify needed revisions to the WAP.

**Job 3. Develop performance measures** for the COAs that will be used to revise and update the Wildlife Action Plan.

Where such work has not already been conducted, or where additional support may be needed, this Job 3 objective will evaluate the development of performance measures for specific COAs.

The purpose of these performance measures will help document success of a COA in achieving its goals and will help support the overall ILWAP.

Performance measures will be linked to action items and goals in the Action Plan and revised performance measures and goals will be drafted for incorporation into the ILWAP.

**Tasks:**

1. Within the scope of the ILWAP, develop local performance measures for assessing the status of the COAs.

**Deliverables:**

1. Provide revised performance measures, goals and actions **for incorporation into Wildlife Action Plan future revisions and updates.**

**Job 4. Communicate progress to the IDNR and develop a final report.**

Coordination and communication will be critical for the success of this project.

The coordinator will provide technical information about this planning project to IDNR in order to assist in the overall statewide coordination of activities related to the Wildlife Action Plan.

This coordination and communication will involve:

- attendance by grant project staff at meetings, conferences, workshops and other functions where such attendance supports the IL WAP and provides information on this project.

It is recognized that the pace of planning, especially at the local level (i.e., COAs), will vary with the capacity of the local conservation partners.

- Status of COA planning activities needs to be monitored in order to ensure that the correct resources are enlisted at each stage.

This will help ensure efficient and effective use of resources.

- **It is expected that this process will continue beyond the scope of this project,**

It will be important for continuity of these many local planning efforts to understand their current status.

Through this job, information about this effort will be communicated through a variety of approaches including meetings, conferences, and workshops.

Annual reports and a final report will provide a review of activities and overall status of COA planning, coordination, and development.

**Tasks:**

1. Work with conservation partners to identify GIS support needs at the local COA level.
2. Coordinate those localized GIS support needs with the ORC Watershed Protection Section.
3. As appropriate, provide updates on status of the project as noted above.
4. Write annual and final reports for the project.

**Deliverables:**

1. Provide COA planning progress and update information to Watershed Protection Section for incorporation into the ORC Management Tracking System (MATS).
2. This Job 4 will provide interim reports and a final report on this project. Both hard-copies and electronic copies will be made available with specifications on number of copies to be determined by mutual agreement.

**Expected Results and Benefits:**

Illinois COAs, as identified in the ILWAP, represent high-priority conservation areas within the state and thus are critical to species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) and their habitats. This project supports a critical function of the ILWAP and the State Wildlife Grants program by assisting local conservation partners with planning and coordination activities that will protect these SGCN's and habitats within and near these priority areas. Although such planning and coordination efforts may be underway in a few COAs, there is a need to document this progress and to support COAs where such assistance would be considered beneficial.

This project will provide critical support for revising the ILWAP and will contribute the following expected results and benefits.

1. Status review of COA planning needs (priority COAs to be identified by the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator and ORC Project Manager for this grant using an ecoregional approach throughout the state). Up to 10 COAs will be selected per year (or suite of COAs where proximity increases efficiency for assessment) with a summary of available management plans, needs, protection status, threats, data gaps. These will be based upon interviews with staff of conservation partners and available materials.
2. Improved local (i.e., COA) coordination through meetings and other formats with conservation partners, including local landowners, to identify planning and coordination needs for development of COA plans consistent with guidelines.
3. Guidance materials, with an assessment on approaches to coordination among the COAs (to be included with the third year report). The purpose of this activity is to identify a process for continued coordination to address COA-specific needs where appropriate.
4. Identification of potential output and outcome performance measures from COAs to update the ILWAP.

5. Support of the ILWAP COA planning and coordination project is crucial to successful implementation of the ILWAP; COAs provide a geographic area on which to focus this planning.
6. Documentation provided to IDNR with specific recommendations for revising and updating Illinois Wildlife Action Plan goals, actions and performance measures.

### **Approach:**

Considerable data gathering and planning have been conducted that support the ILWAP (e.g., Acres for Wildlife, Illinois Forestry Development Act) as well as geographically directed efforts to document Illinois' natural resources (e.g., Illinois Natural Areas Inventory, Important Bird Areas) (Illinois Wildlife Action Plan 2005). Additional sources of information include the Conservation 2000 Ecosystem Partnerships, Green Infrastructure, Illinois Stream Classification project, and The Nature Conservancy planning efforts (e.g., Cache River, Illinois River). COA-specific goals were developed as part of the ILWAP, but additional planning and data-gathering efforts may be needed at the level of a COA. This project will help coordinate and guide COA planning.

To accomplish this COA coordination and communication, a project coordinator will be hired who will perform the following tasks (listed below). In addition to the coordinator, an assistant will provide other technical, logistical, and organizational support. GIS support is critical to this effort because COA planning and coordination must be approached with a landscape perspective. GIS support for this project will be provided by the IDNR Watershed Protection Section (WPS) and coordinated with SWG project T-15-P-1 as part of the ORC Management Activity Tracking System (MATS). The project coordinator hired for this project will be responsible for coordinating with WPS GIS staff for these GIS support needs. Based upon the recommendations and guidance of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator and ORC Project Manager for this grant, approximately 10 COAs per year will be addressed and all COAs are expected to be served over the 3-year grant period. The extent of interaction with each COA will be based upon need (i.e., some COAs may already be implementing practices; others may not yet be organized). This COA coordination will be conducted in a variety of ways including: meetings, teleconferencing, written and oral communication.

The project will:

*(The following tasks address jobs 1 and 2)*

1. Review management and protection goals for the COAs (or group of COAs). These documents may include: watershed plans, site plans, C2000 ecosystem partnership plans, green infrastructure, stream classification, etc. Work with conservation partners to develop COA-specific goals, if needed.
2. Coordinate communication and planning among local, state, and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations and private landowners for regional priority of COAs and surrounding habitats. (Note: If a COA is in a watershed and protection of the watershed, stream, prairie, forest, etc. outside of the designated COA is needed to maintain the COA, then this will need to be identified in the planning process).
3. Work with COA partners to identify information gaps for species, habitats, or threats to the COA and develop potential strategies to address these issues.
4. Identify funding needs and opportunities for management, conservation easements, or acquisition.
5. Work with conservation partners to develop proposals and identify funding opportunities from federal, state and private sources that would address management needs and information deficiencies.
6. Where needed, provide technical support to researchers and resource managers in the form of research proposals and reports, reconnaissance and related planning activities, with specific focus on species of greatest conservation need and their habitats.

*(The following task supports Job 2).*

7. Identify procedural guidance for coordination and planning within and among the COAs.

*(The following task supports Job 3).*

8. Within the scope of the ILWAP, explore the feasibility of developing local performance measures for assessing the status of the COAs. Where appropriate and feasible, work with the COAs to propose performance measures for revising the ILWAP.

*(The following task supports Job 4).*

9. Provide technical information about this planning project to IDNR in order to assist in the overall statewide coordination of activities related to the Wildlife Action Plan. . Technical information will also be provided on the Illinois Fish and Wildlife Action Team's Share Point website administered by IDNR.

10. Provide IDNR a compilation of findings and recommendations for specifically what updates and revisions are needed in the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan.

**Project schedule:**

(Note: Individual COAs may be grouped for efficiency)

**Year 1**

Year 1-Months 1-3

- Meet with the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator and ORC Project Manager for this grant to identify prioritization of COAs for planning.
- Gather background materials on initial priority COAs.
- Develop contact lists for the first set of COAs and initiate coordination efforts.

Year 1-Months 4-6

- Work with IDNR and other partners on evaluating and improving COA planning.
- Continue to gather background materials on initial priority COAs.
- Meet with local COA key partners (at least 3 COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of on-going COAs.
- Develop a list of potential funding opportunities for COAs.

Year 1-Months 7-9

- Continue to gather background materials on initial priority COAs.
- Meet with local COA key partners (3-4 new COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of already selected COAs.
- Meet with the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator and ORC Project Manager for this grant to provide information on project status.
- Initiate draft version of guidance for COA planning.

Year 1-Months 10-12

- Meet with local COA key partners (at least 3 COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of previously selected COAs.
- Begin to gather background materials on Year 2 priority COAs.
- Begin to develop contact lists for Year 2 COAs and initiate coordination efforts.
- Coordinate GIS support needs at the local COA level with the IDNR Watershed Protection Section. Provide COA planning information to the IDNR Watershed Protection Section for

coordination with SWG project T-15-P-1, and incorporation into the ORC Management Activity Tracking System (MATS)

- Provide draft guidance for COA planning to the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator and ORC Project Manager for this grant.
- Develop an annual report.

## **Year 2**

### Year 2-Months 1-3

- Meet with the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator and ORC Project Manager for this grant to provide update on project status.
- Meet with local COA key partners (at least 3 COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of previously selected COAs.
- Provide on-going support to Year 1 COAs.
- Provide IDNR, Watershed Protection Section with status and planning progress information regarding COA planning activities for incorporation into the ORC Management Activity Tracking System (MATS).
- Finalize guidance for COA planning.

### Year 2-Months 4-6

- Continue to gather background materials on Year 2 priority COAs.
- Meet with local COA key partners (3-4 new COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of previously selected COAs.
- Provide on-going support to Year 1 COAs.
- Provide IDNR, Watershed Protection Section with status and planning progress information regarding COA planning activities for incorporation into the ORC Management Activity Tracking System (MATS).

### Year 2-Months 7-9

- Provide on-going support to Year 1 COAs.
- Provide IDNR, Watershed Protection Section with status and planning progress information regarding COA planning activities for incorporation into the ORC Management Activity Tracking System (MATS).
- Meet with local COA key partners (at least 3 COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of previously selected COAs.
- Meet with the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator and ORC Project Manager for this grant to provide update on project status.

### Year 2-Months 10-12

- Meet with local COA key partners (at least 3 COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of previously selected COAs.
- Provide on-going support to Year 1 COAs.
- Provide IDNR, Watershed Protection Section with status and planning progress information regarding COA planning activities for incorporation into the ORC Management Activity Tracking System (MATS).
- Begin to gather background materials on Year 3 priority COAs.
- Begin to develop contact lists for Year 3 COAs and initiate coordination efforts.
- Develop an annual report.

### **Year 3**

#### Year 3-Months 1-3

- Meet with the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator and ORC Project Manager for this grant to provide update on project status.
- Meet with local COA key partners (at least 4 COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of previously selected COAs.
- Provide on-going support to Year 1 and Year 2 COAs.
- Provide IDNR, Watershed Protection Section with status and planning progress information regarding COA planning activities for incorporation into the ORC Management Activity Tracking System (MATS).

#### Year 3-Months 4-6

- Meet with the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator and ORC Project Manager for this grant to provide update on project status (if needed or requested).
- Meet with local COA key partners (remaining COAs that have not been visited) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of previously selected COAs.
- Provide on-going support to Year 1 and Year 2 COAs.
- Provide IDNR, Watershed Protection Section with status and planning progress information regarding COA planning activities for incorporation into the ORC Management Activity Tracking System (MATS).

#### Year 3-Months 7-9

- Provide on-going support to COAs.
- Provide IDNR, Watershed Protection Section with status and planning progress information regarding COA planning activities for incorporation into the ORC Management Activity Tracking System (MATS).
- Compile information for Final Report

#### Year 3-Months 10-12

- Develop an Annual report.
- Develop Final Project Report
- Provide documentation for updating Illinois Wildlife Action Plan

### **Related grants:**

The Illinois Nature Conservancy has committed \$25,000 per year of non-federal funding for the 3-year duration of this project. These funds represent part of the required 25% minimum match for planning projects. SIUC and TNC contributions combined constitute a 25% non-federal match for this project. Spatial information/data and other related products created under existing or previous SWG grants may be utilized in this project and provided to the grant Project Coordinator by IDNR Watershed Protection Section as needed. These include but are not limited to:

- T-15-P-001 (MATS II, COA Tracking Wildlife Division)
- T-17-P-001 (Conservation Practice Mapping, Biotics 4 and Owned, Managed and Leased Properties, or OMLP)
- T-13-P-001 (Coolwater Streams Identification Project)
- T-20-P-001 (Biologically Significant Streams, BSS)
- T-25-P-001 (Habitat Quality Index Development)
- T-02-P-001 (Development of an Illinois Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan and Supporting Information Systems)
- T-03-P-001 (State Wildlife Conservation Plan/Strategy Data Systems)

**Personnel:** The primary personnel match for this project is from \$56,745 contributed by the Illinois Nature Conservancy toward salary and fringe benefits for the project director. SIUC also contributes 1 month per year salary time for Matt Whiles. Whiles will serve as project coordinator and will supervise the project director and graduate student (both to be determined).

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