



Atlantic sturgeon

State Wildlife Grants Program: Keeping Common Species Common

by Dave Day and Chris Urban

As with our own personal health, the old adage of “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” can be similarly applied to fish and wildlife that are struggling to maintain their populations and even their very existence. It is generally recognized by resource professionals that the most efficient and effective approach to fish and wildlife management is to keep a species from becoming threatened and endangered. Once a population is listed as threatened or endangered, it often requires special management actions and protections to recover it or keep it from declining further. These special management actions are often accompanied by increased costs. The theme of the State Wildlife Grants Program (SWG) is to “Keep Common Species Common,” and this philosophy is both good for the environment and good for businesses since it is less costly to address the needs of common species than to deal with them once they are threatened or endangered. The Government Accountability Office estimates that the cost of recovery of a single threatened or endangered species can exceed \$150 million.

Despite these benefits, recent federal budget proposals would reduce funding for the State Wildlife Grants Program. At press time for this issue of *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater*, the current year’s federal budget and state allocation have not been finalized.

“In the Commonwealth, the Commission has received approximately \$8 million since 2002,” said Executive Director John Arway. “This has been leveraged with at least an additional \$8 million—more than doubling Congressional investments for over \$16 million in timely, meaningful conservation work. We cannot afford to lose that support now. Congressional funding for State Wildlife Grants also goes hand-in-hand with job creation and

economic sustainability since more than half a million United States jobs center around wildlife conservation and wildlife-related recreation. This includes Pennsylvania’s \$3.4 billion fishing and boating industry,” added Mr. Arway. He stressed that losing State Wildlife Grant support would curtail the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission’s ability to deliver timely project reviews, recommendations to applicants and on-the-ground projects.

For the past 11 years, the United States and its territories have used SWG funds to keep species from becoming listed. In fact, with SWG funded projects, we have acquired new data allowing us to remove ten fish species from the Pennsylvania

Threatened and Endangered Species list. Similarly, we have found that some species populations are not doing well and have listed ten species. A number of species are “on deck” to be de-listed and listed in the near future. These findings will allow us to direct funds to these species to help address their needs. SWG funds have been used to proactively address a variety of resource concerns including habitat restoration (e.g., dam removal), species assessments and several much needed research projects to fill data gaps. SWG funds also support staff who assist businesses by reviewing and commenting on environmental review permits that have potential conflicts with rare, threatened and endangered species. A State Wildlife Action Plan guides the spending of these funds. For continued receipt of SWG funds, the United States Congress required each state and United States territory to complete a State Wildlife Action Plan. Pennsylvania’s Wildlife Action Plan was approved in 2006.

The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission’s jurisdictional responsibilities go well beyond fishing and boating and include the conservation and management of aquatic habitats, amphibians, reptiles, mussels and other aquatic invertebrates. SWG funds help the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission address these critical resource needs while saving valuable angler license dollars for game fish uses.

For more information on SWG-funded projects and Pennsylvania’s Wildlife Action Plan, visit www.fishandboat.com/promo/grants/swg/00swg.htm.

State Wildlife Grants Program information can be found at the Teaming with Wildlife website: www.teaming.com. □



photo-Kelly Wiley

Chris Urban, Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission Natural Diversity Chief, guides a timber rattlesnake into a ventilated tube for evaluation.