# 2019

# Recovering America's Wildlife Act

TENNESSEE WILDLIFE RESOURCES AGENCY

# PURPOSE OF
# RECOVERING AMERICA'S WILDLIFE ACT

***Every state has created a State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) to address the management of Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The purpose of SWAPs is to promote proactive conservation for at-risk species.***

***The purpose of Recovering America's Wildlife Act is to fund the implementation of state wildlife action plans.***

Recovering America's Wildlife Act is a bi-partisan bill that funds proactive fish and wildlife conservation by addressing threats to our natural resources before expensive "emergency-room" actions are needed.

"America's wildlife are in crisis—more than one third of all species are vulnerable or at risk. The best way to save America's 12,000 at-risk species is through collaborative, proactive, on-the-ground conservation efforts," said Collin O'Mara, President and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation.

Passage of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act would provide more than $20 million in new dollars each year for Tennessee, transforming efforts to conserve and restore more than 900 nongame fish and wildlife species of greatest conservation need and 568 plants of concern.

By focusing on species of concern and their habitats, it would keep common species common and avoid the need for endangered species listings by getting ahead of wildlife declines while there's still time to act. That's good for jobs and the economy as well as wildlife, which is why this plan started with buy-in from industry and business. These creatures and their wild homes are the "goose that lays the golden egg" that sustains multi-billion dollar nature tourism industries in our state, clean air and water, and healthy outdoor recreation.

This bill would mean millions in new grants to nonprofits, universities, land¬owners, local communities and others. Besides natural resource benefits, this could also transform nature-based recreation and education opportunities for children and families. It would be the greatest wildlife conservation breakthrough in decades.

# RESTORATION **EFFORTS**

***Restoration is the core of Tennessee's plan. Eagles, salamanders, quail and everything else that flies, swims and crawls that is at risk in Tennessee's ecosystem falls under that umbrella.***

***MUSSLES PRODUCED***

Cyprogenia stegaria (**Fanshell**)
Epioblasma triquetra (**Snuffbox**)
Lampsilis ovata (**Pocketbook**)
Dromus dromas (**Dromedary Pearlymussel**)
Epioblasma ahlstedti (**Duck River Dartersnapper**)
Lampsilis fasciola(**Wavy-rayed Lampmussel**)
Epioblasma capsaeformis (**Oyster Mussel**)
Lemiox rimosus (**Bird-wing Pearlymussel**)
Toxolasma cylindrellus (**Pale Lilliput**)
Villosa trabalis (**Cumberland Bean**)

Since 2015, Mussel propagation and restoration have been initiated at Cumberland River Aquatic Center (C-RAC). A total of 98,907 juvenile mussels have been produced through C-RAC in that time. Of those 10 species, 8 are federally-listed species. Of those, 4,000 juvenile mussels of T. cylindrellus (considered extinct in Tennessee) were produced in 2016 and a total of 1,955 juveniles have been reintroduce to the wild.

We have restored our national symbol – the bald eagle – through hacking (method used to simulate Eagle nesting by releasing fledgling eagles into the wild that are raised in artificial nesting towers). Efforts, coordinated by TWRA, to restore Tennessee's eagle population began in 1980 and continued until 2003, and young eagles were "hacked" at several locations in the state.

The first successful Bald Eagle nest was discovered near Dover, Tenn., in the spring of 1983. There are over 175 nesting pairs of Bald Eagles in Tennessee today (as of 2012), and most of these birds remain in the state year round. Individuals from more northern breeding populations migrate to Tennessee for the winter, arriving in late October, and peak numbers of 300 to 500 individuals occur in late January to mid-February.

***Spotlight: Bald Eagle H-51***

Bald Eagle H-51 was banded as a nestling in 1996 at a nest on Lake Monroe near Bloomington, Ind. The bird is 23 years old and has since moved southwest to nest on Kentucky Lake, Tenn. Research shows that H-51's father was taken as a nestling in Alaska in 1990 and released at the Scottsboro Reservoir hack site, 10 miles west of Nashville. Five years later, he was observed at the nest at Lake Monroe, Ind. So began the life of H-51, Kentucky Lake's oldest feathered resident.

# CREATING **HABITAT**

***Many species of greatest conservation need have specific habitat requirements. These habitats must be managed and sometimes created.***

Through prescribed burns, TWRA is able to remove exotic, invasive plant species to help create and manage native grasslands and barrens with fire. Native grasses benefit Bobwhite Quail, an at-risk species whose populations have declined for decades, and the scrub-shrub habitat attracts songbirds such as Hooded Warblers, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-breasted Chat, Eastern Towhee, Field Sparrow and Red-headed Woodpeckers.

***The expected "new" habitat impact over the next 4 years without RAWA is estimated to be:***

| | |
|---|---|
| North Cumberland WMA | ~10,000 acres |
| Foothills WMA | ~1,000 acres |
| Lick Creek Bottoms WMA | ~800 acres |
| Forks of the River WMA | ~200 acres |
| Kyker Bottoms Refuge | ~150 acres |
| Chuck Swan WMA/State Forest | ~100 acres |
| Kyles Ford WMA | ~100 acres |
| Buffalo Springs WMA | ~60 acres |
| Cove Creek WMA | ~30 acres |
| Whites Mill WMA | ~25 acres |

TWRA Land Managers in east Tennessee have worked toward creating early successional habitat for several years. Though emphasis, historically, has been on bobwhite quail, other species like loggerhead shrike, prairie warbler, golden winged warbler, horned lark, eastern meadowlark, field sparrow, song sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, dickcissel, golden mouse, meadow jumping mouse, and all Greatest Conservation Need (GCN) bat species, benefit from creation of these habitat types.

***Spotlight: Prescribed Burns – Good Fire***

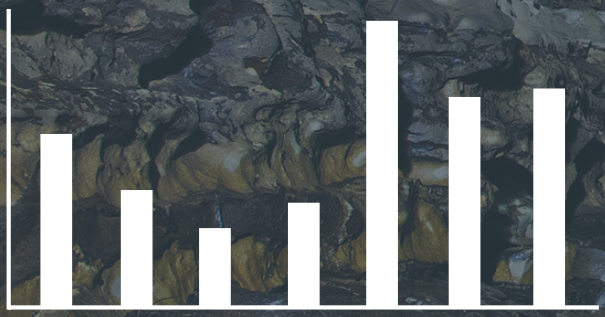
Roughly 3,100 acres of oak savannah have been created and are being maintained with fire at Catoosa WMA. Prescribed fire is applied regularly in the understory to promote native grasses such as big bluestem and wildflowers like rattlesnake master and blazing star – species that thrive in more open conditions.

# PRESERVING **HABITAT**

Since 2005, TWRA has purchased property surrounding two of the three largest bat caves in Tennessee - Bellamy Cave in Montgomery County and Pearson Cave in Hawkins County. Bellamy Cave is a top priority Gray Bat hibernaculum whose population increased dramatically following protection through gating from 91,000 endangered gray bats in 2002 to 381,000 in 2014. This increase occurred despite the discovery of WNS at the cave in 2012.

Pearson's Cave is an important Gray Bat hibernaculum and summer roosting site. The Gray Bat Recovery Plan identifies the acquisition of Pearson Cave as essential to prevent extinction of Gray Bats. Surveys indicate population sizes were down to 147,000 in 2013 after the discovery of white nose, but have climbed back up to 348,656 in 2019.

**Pearson's Cave Population Size (2007-19)**



***Spotlight: Landscape-scale Conservation***

In 2007, the largest land protection deal in Tennessee since the creation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park was made. $82 million in state funding and over $53.2 million from outside sources was used to protect 127,854 acres on the Cumberland Plateau — creating a protective corridor for wildlife as well as preserving a natural sanctuary for the public.

**98.9K**
Juvenile mussels produced at C-RAC

**1,499**
Species of greatest conservation need identified

**12K**
Acres of native grasslands created in E. Tennessee

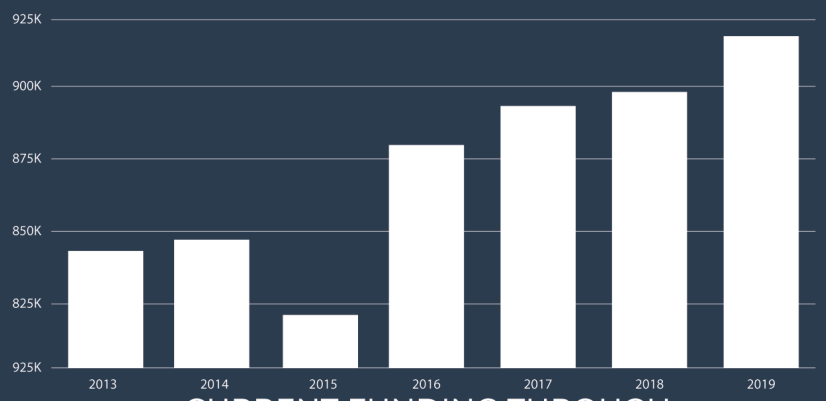
RECOVERING AMERICA'S WILDLIFE ACT WOULD MEAN

# $20 MILLION

A YEAR FOR SPECIES OF GREATEST CONSERVATION NEED

## RECOVERING AMERICA'S WILDLIFE ACT 2019

**2,074%**
Increase from current funding should Recovering America's Wildlife Act pass



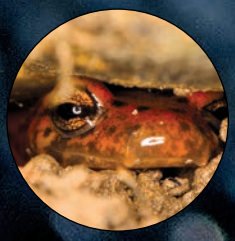
CURRENT FUNDING THROUGH STATE WILDLIFE GRANT

**370**
Species of fish in Tennessee waters

**600K**
Gray bats protected

**56**
Species of salamanders in Tennessee

# FIGHT **DISEASE**



***TWRA funds research on wildlife disease to protect animals all across our state — from snakes, to salamanders, birds and bats.***

TWRA funds many types of wildlife disease research. These include snake fungal disease and amphibian chrytrid and ranavirus studies.

Tennessee is leading the Nation in preventing the next invasion of the salamander chytrid fungus called Bsal. This disease is devastating salamander populations in Europe, and Tennessee is the salamander capital of the world with 56 salamander species! We cannot allow this disease to reach our incredible salamander populations. TWRA is working with the University of Tennessee and partners across the country to stop this disease at the US borders.

TWRA Biodiversity Biologists monitor White-nose Syndrome in our cave dwelling bats. We are also funding Middle Tennessee State University researchers to learn why endangered Gray Bats are immune to WNS which could lead to WNS treatments.

### *Spotlight: Fighting Bsal at Our Borders*

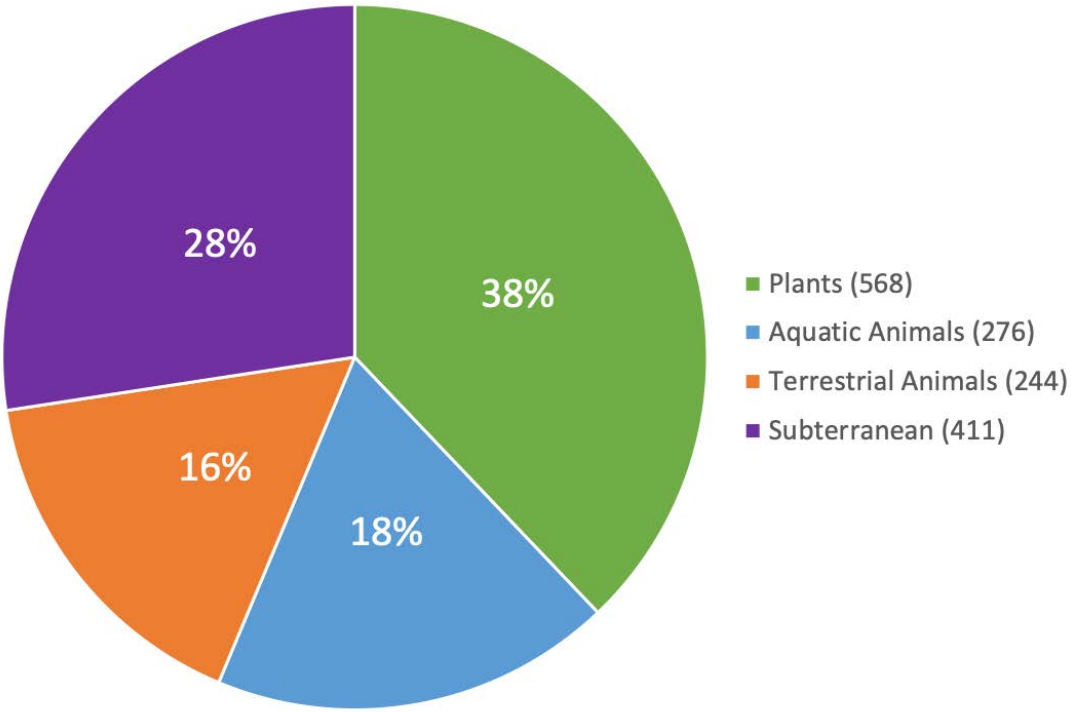
Tennessee is leading a proactive approach to estimating invasion risk and identifying effective disease management strategies for Bsal. These include susceptibility trials and testing the effectiveness of several strategies, including salamander host densities and bioaugmentation (i.e., treatment of the environment or hosts with native bacteria that have anti-Bsal properties).

# SCIENCE-BASED **STEWARDSHIP**

***TWRA and species experts have identified 1,499 species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) in Tennessee.***

## *At-Risk Species in Tennessee*

In order to manage at-risk species wildlife biologists must first know where they occur. Field researchers have documented 300,000 new occurrences of SGCNs since 2005. This data provides the science necessary to inform current management decisions and to guide future strategic planning for these wildlife species.



### *Spotlight: Finding New Colonies*

Tennessee has 16 bat species, nine of which are considered species of greatest conservation need. TWRA initiated a migration study of the federally endangered Indiana Bat maternity colonies. The project has resulted in the discovery of six previously unknown Indiana Bat colonies in Tennessee and improved knowledge of cave habitat use by other bat species.

# USE OF
# ADDITIONAL FUNDING

***Recovering America's Wildlife Act would provide annual appropriations that will allow wildlife biologists and managers the funding necessary to do what we do.***

## *Here is what the additional funds would go to:*

1. Create a Statewide Burn Team – Increase native grassland habitat for species such as Northern Bobwhite Quail by returning natural fire regimes to fire dependent habitats such as barrens and glades.

2. Provide water security for the Cumberland River Aquatic Center – Home to over a dozen Endangered Species.

3. Protect more Critical Habitats – Prevent more Extinctions.

4. Maintain diverse gene pools by reconnecting populations of fish, mussels, hellbenders and other aquatic organisms by removing stream obstructions including deadly low-head dams.

5. Increase the number of researchers to fill the data gaps about rare wildlife.

6. Find Cures for devastating Wildlife Diseases.

7. Protect native wildlife from invasive exotics including Asian Carp.

### *Spotlight: Cumberland River Aquatic Center*

Lake Sturgeon and Alligator Gar are endangered fish species at the Aquatic Center. Between 2010 and 2012, 1,840 Alligator Gar have been released back into the wild. Since 2008, 5,915 Lake Sturgeon have been released. C-RAC is also home to American Eel being studied to learn which mussel species they may serve as the host fish species.

# CALL TO **ACTION**

Without much-needed funding for the full array of fish and wildlife, our entire way of life is threatened.

With the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, we would secure that funding and wildlife's future. Take action at **ournatureusa.com**.

Support the Recovering America's Wildlife Act. Every Tennessean and American benefits when we have healthy and accessible fish and wildlife.

# JOIN A **CAMPAIGN**

Join the TN Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife to support dedicated wildlife funding

To learn more about Recovering America's Wildlife Act or to join TN Alliance, visit **https://tnwf.org/join-the-alliance/**

TENNESSEE ALLIANCE FOR AMERICA'S FISH & WILDLIFE

TENNESSEE WILDLIFE FEDERATION

TENNESSEE WILDLIFE RESOURCES AGENCY

**Photos provided by Tom Wood, and TWRA's Daniel Istvanko**

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