



Wisconsin: Safeguarding Wildlife From Global Warming

Global warming is the single-biggest threat today to wildlife and natural resources across the world and in the United States. The Great Lakes region is already suffering reduced water levels, fluctuating weather patterns, and faces major shifts in habitat. In other regions like the American Southwest, millions of acres of forest have fallen victim to beetle infestations linked to global warming. Sea levels around the world are rising and the oceans are damaged on all fronts, increasingly unable to sustain their brilliant diversity of life. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has forecast mass extinctions if we continue a “business as usual” approach to greenhouse gas emissions.

Fortunately, we still have a chance to avert disaster. Citizens and governments worldwide are rallying to support strong climate legislation. In the United States, President Obama and leaders in Congress are calling for a cap-and-trade system to

limit global warming pollution and shift the US toward a clean energy economy. However, the global warming pollution already in our atmosphere will continue to alter the climate for centuries to come. By developing strategies to assess and address local climate impacts, we can still prevent the worst damage to our natural systems.



Sunset on Lake Michigan

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Regional groups and agencies across the country are already at work on these strategies. Incorporating climate science into their projects, they are showcasing a fresh approach to conservation. But to protect wildlife and natural resources from global warming, these strategies and projects will need to be implemented at an unprecedented scale. This will take a new dedicated funding stream to

allow for long-term planning. Cap and trade legislation must invest in protecting wildlife and natural resources for our children's future.

Migration Corridors for Wildlife

From the Great Lakes to the Northern Highlands, Wisconsin residents rely on — and cherish — their surroundings. The landscape is punctuated by towns and cities but preserves ample room for the original inhabitants: almost half of the state remains forested and is invaluable habitat for animals like gray foxes, black bears, ruffed grouse and beaver. This rich natural heritage defines a way of life for the many citizens who hunt, fish, and hike in the state; the beautiful Door Peninsula in eastern Wisconsin is one of the region's major tourist draws. Just as it does in many other places, global warming threaten citizens' livelihoods as well as wildlife.

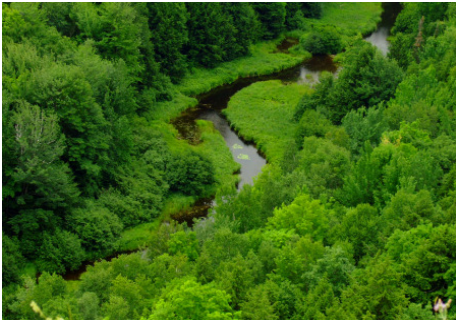
With so many competing interests, however, wildlife in the Great Lakes region face the same problems as elsewhere. The lakes themselves are still one of the world's freshwater treasures, but are plagued by invasive species, pollution and declining water tables. Many native species have been extirpated as a result of overfishing or other human influence. Development has fragmented wildlife habitat, constraining the ability of animals to migrate and roam freely in search of food, shelter, and mating opportunities. And climate change is further escalating the stresses on these ecosystems, taxing already-fragile plant and animal communities.

The Conservation Resource Alliance (CRA) is a nonprofit organization working to reduce these threats while simultaneously nurturing the economic vitality of the region. The Traverse City, Michigan-based CRA maintains two complementary programs — RiverCare and WildLink — dedicated to maintaining the structural integrity of wildlife habitat in a changing world.

“We recognized that habitat fragmentation has a synergistic negative effect with climate change,” says Amy Beyer, Director of the CRA, “and wildlife need these large connective spaces,” especially now that global warming is causing habitats to shift in latitude and elevation. “The big question,” continues Beyer, “is, what *can* you do? We have a chance to preempt fragmentation in places where development is occurring, and climate science has really endorsed our approach.”



Pine marten



Through RiverCare and WildLink, the Conservation Resource Alliance helps preserve high-value habitat, particularly the riparian corridors where most diversity occurs. CRA staff collaborate with private landowners to develop detailed project plans, arrange grant funding, encourage conservation easements, and assist with the implementation of habitat improvement projects. Projects often include invasive species removal, streambank and wetland restoration, and sustainable timber harvesting. The Alliance also sponsors programs like RiverCare Kids, which connects young people with nature by organizing stream cleanups projects that enhance habitat for fish and wildlife.

Climate impacts across the region make collaborations like these more important than ever. CRA has been successful in safeguarding the ecological integrity of over 4 million acres by working on the critical habitat connections between large areas of public land. This includes major north-south habitat connections that may provide migration routes for wildlife populations displaced by climate change. Eric Ellis, WildLink’s biologist and manager, says that private lands “make up a large percentage of the area, and even if it’s not the highest quality, they are still functional passages.” Management plans include specifications for planting trees, like black gum, that are already at the northernmost point of their range. Strategies like this help habitat keep pace with global warming, moderate negative impacts and preserve diversity in a time of rapid changes.

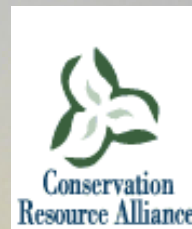


Ellis thinks that the most meaningful changes occur when residents are invested in the process. “This land isn’t just a commodity to be parceled up and sold,” says Ellis, “we need to manage it for the long term.” In the end, everyone benefits — property owners, local contractors, outdoor enthusiasts and wildlife.

Natural Resources: An Economic Driver in the Great Lakes

Without conservation, states will lose more than just biodiversity: they will also lose valuable ecosystem services like clean air and water, carbon sequestration, and buffers against flooding and storm surges. Fortunately, protecting natural resources is good business, too. **Wildlife-related recreation supports almost 73,000 Wisconsin jobs, and consumers spend \$4 billion annually on hunting, angling, birding, and related activities in the state. 3 million Wisconsinites participate in these pastimes.**

The direct relationship between habitat health and economic health is great news: it means we can boost our economy while protecting wildlife, two things everyone can agree on. Federal legislation recently passed by the US House of Representatives allocated around \$10.8 million annually for state-based conservation programs in Wisconsin, plus more specifically for Great Lakes and coastal restoration. Given the size of the problem and the opportunities for remediation, funding on this scale is necessary to safeguard our natural resources against global warming.



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