Conservation Plan for the Blanding’s Turtle and Associated Species of Conservation Need

## in the Northeastern United States

## **The Role of Site Leaders**

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In 2011, with funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Competitive State Wildlife Program, the Northeast Blanding’s Turtle Working Group (NEBTWG), a collaborative group consisting of representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state wildlife agencies, universities, and NGOs, together with independent researchers from five northeastern states, began a comprehensive planning process for Blanding’s Turtle and Associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Northeast U.S. The resulting Conservation Plan (available at: [www.blandingsturtle.org](http://www.blandingsturtle.org)) details a standardized regional sampling methodology, regional baseline population assessment data, a site delineation and ranking framework, an implementation framework, conservation goals and targets for the species in the region, and the regional and site-specific management actions required to achieve those goals. As part of the plan, NEBTWG identified the 36 highest priority sites across the region and developed site-specific management plans for the 18 of these sites.

# Conservation Strategy for High Priority Sites

Once sites have been identified as high priority sites, as described in the Conservation Plan, they undergo the following conservation action process:

1. Their boundaries are further delineated as described in the Conservation Plan to encompass not only the consistently mapped area, but other potential habitat necessary to maintain the integrity of the habitat and the viability of the population;
2. Population evaluation is undertaken by conducting “long-term” sampling at the site, as described in Part II of the Conservation Plan.
3. Core area is identified within the site in order to focus conservation resources;
4. A Site Leader is designated by the State Coordinator, or the State Coordinator serves this role;
5. A site-wide parcel analysis identifying high priority parcels for conservation is conducted for the site;
6. A site-specific management plan is developed for the site, which includes a population, habitat, and threat assessment and identifies critical site-specific actions to be taken, which may include land protection, habitat management, and landowner / manager outreach;
7. The management plan is approved by the NEBTWG and implemented by the Site Leader in coordination with the state agency representative and site partners
8. Progress reports on conservation action implementation and population status are provided by Site Leaders to the NEBTWG on an annual basis;
9. The site is reassessed in conjunction with the regional reassessment and the site specific management plan is adaptively updated

**Role of the Site Leader**

As described above, to further the implementation of the Conservation Plan, a Site Leader will be designated for each of the 36 High Priority Sites in the region. Site Leaders are designated by the state wildlife agency representative to the NEBTWG for each respective state. If no Site Leader is designated for a site, the state wildlife agency representative serves as the *de facto* Site Leader for that site. A single individual may serve as a Site Leader for more than one site.

The Site Leader works in coordination with the state wildlife agency representative and site partners to further Blanding’s turtle conservation at his/her site by developing, implementing, and updating a site-specific management plan, carrying out population reassessments at 10 year intervals, and reporting progress to the NEBTWG at annual meetings.

Annual updates to the NEBTWG will describe current site status, actions accomplished, and challenges encountered, and requests for support as necessary to achieve the site-specific conservation goals outlined in the management plan. Unless otherwise specified in the site management plans, it will be the goal of the Site Leaders to facilitate land protection of key parcels, to facilitate and strengthen partnerships with landowners and land managers, to implement the management plans (or write the first version if one does not exist) and to coordinate reassessment surveys.

Specific responsibilities of Site Leaders include:

1) steward the site through the Conservation Strategy for High Priority Sites outlined above and in the Conservation Plan,

2) work with partners to undertake a baseline population assessment through field sampling,

3) facilitate the development and implementation of the site-specific management plan,

4) conduct landowner / land manager outreach at the site as appropriate,

5) report progress to the NEBTWG, and

6) work with the NEBTWG and partners to reassess the population and adaptively update the management plan.