15. New River Valley Planning Region Local Action Plan Summary

Wildlife Action Plan and Local Summaries Overview

Wildlife Action Plan

Virginia is fortunate to contain a wide variety of natural resources and landscapes that provide Virginians with a range of benefits, services, and economic opportunities. Natural resource conservation in Virginia, as in most states, is implemented by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private institutions, academic institutions, and private citizens. These groups work to enhance the quality of life within the Commonwealth by conserving Virginia's air, land, water, and wildlife. Adequate funding and human capital needed to manage and conserve these valuable resources are not always available. In 2005, Virginia's conservation community first came together to maximize the benefits of their actions and created the state's first Wildlife Action Plan (Action Plan). It was written to prioritize and focus conservation efforts to prevent species from declining to the point where they become threatened or endangered (DGIF 2005). The 2015 Action Plan is an update of the original Plan. The Action Plan must address eight specific elements mandated by Congress. They are:

> *1. Information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations as the state fish and wildlife agency deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of the state's wildlife; and*
>
> *2. Descriptions of locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to conservation of species identified in (1); and*
>
> *3. Descriptions of problems which may adversely affect species identified in (1) or their habitats, and priority research and survey efforts needed to identify factors which may assist in restoration and improved conservation of these species and habitats; and*
>
> *4. Descriptions of conservation actions determined to be necessary to conserve the identified species and habitats and priorities for implementing such actions; and*
>
> *5. Proposed plans for monitoring species identified in (1) and their habitats, for monitoring the effectiveness of the conservation actions proposed in (4), and for adapting these conservation actions to respond appropriately to new information or changing conditions; and*
>
> *6. Descriptions of procedures to review the Plan-Strategy at intervals not to exceed ten years; and*
>
> *7. Plans for coordinating, to the extent feasible, the development, implementation, review, and revision of the Plan-Strategy with federal, state, and local agencies and Indian tribes that manage significant land and water areas within the state or*

administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats.

8. Congress has affirmed through the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (WCRP) and State Wildlife Grants (SWG), that broad public participation is an essential element of developing and implementing these Plans-Strategies, the projects that are carried out while these Plans-Strategies are developed, and the Species in Greatest Need of Conservation (SGCN) that Congress has indicated such programs and projects are intended to emphasize.

Each species included in the 2015 Action Plan (Species of Greatest Conservation Need or SGCN) has been evaluated and prioritized based upon two criteria: degree of imperilment and management opportunity.

To describe imperilment, SGCN are grouped into one of four Tiers: Critical (Tier I), Very High (Tier II), High (Tier III), and Moderate (Tier IV).

Tier I - *Critical Conservation Need. Species face an extremely high risk of extinction or extirpation. Populations of these species are at critically low levels, face immediate threat(s), and/ or occur within an extremely limited range. Intense and immediate management action is needed.*

Tier II - *Very High Conservation Need. Species have a high risk of extinction or extirpation. Populations of these species are at very low levels, face real threat(s), and/ or occur within a very limited distribution. Immediate management is needed for stabilization and recovery.*

Tier III - *High Conservation Need. Extinction or extirpation is possible. Populations of these species are in decline, have declined to low levels, and/ or are restricted in range. Management action is needed to stabilize or increase populations.*

Tier IV - *Moderate Conservation Need. The species may be rare in parts of its range, particularly on the periphery. Populations of these species have demonstrated a declining trend or a declining trend is suspected which, if continued, is likely to qualify this species for a higher tier in the foreseeable future. Long-term planning is necessary to stabilize or increase populations*.

While degree of imperilment is an important consideration, it is often insufficient to prioritize the use of limited human and financial resources. In order to identify and triage conservation opportunities, development of the updated Action Plan (2015) included assigning a Conservation Opportunity Ranking to each species identified within the Plan. Rankings were assigned with input from taxa or species experts (biologists) and other members of Virginia's conservation community. They are also based on conservation or management actions and research needs identified for the species within the 2005 Action Plan. In addition, a literature review was conducted to garner any new information available since the first version of the Action Plan. The three Conservation Opportunity Rankings are described as follows:

A – Managers have identified "on the ground" species or habitat management strategies expected to benefit the species; at least some of which can be implemented with existing resources and are expected to have a reasonable chance of improving the species' conservation status.

B – Managers have only identified research needs for the species or managers have only identified "on the ground" conservation actions that cannot be implemented due to lack of personnel, funding, or other circumstance.

C – Managers have failed to identify "on the ground" actions or research needs that could benefit this species or its habitat or all identified conservation opportunities for a species have been exhausted.

Over 880 SGCN are listed in the 2015 Action Plan and are found in varying densities across the state (Figure 1). Of the Plan's SGCN, 23.4 percent are classified as Conservation Opportunity Ranking A; 7.1 percent are classified Conservation Opportunity Ranking B; and 69.5 percent are classified as Conservation Opportunity Ranking C. Additionally, of the 883 SGCN:

- Approximately 25% of the SGCN are already listed as threatened or endangered under the Federal or Virginia Endangered Species Act,
- Approximately 60% are aquatic,
- Approximately 70% are invertebrates, and
- All are impacted by the loss or degradation of their habitats.

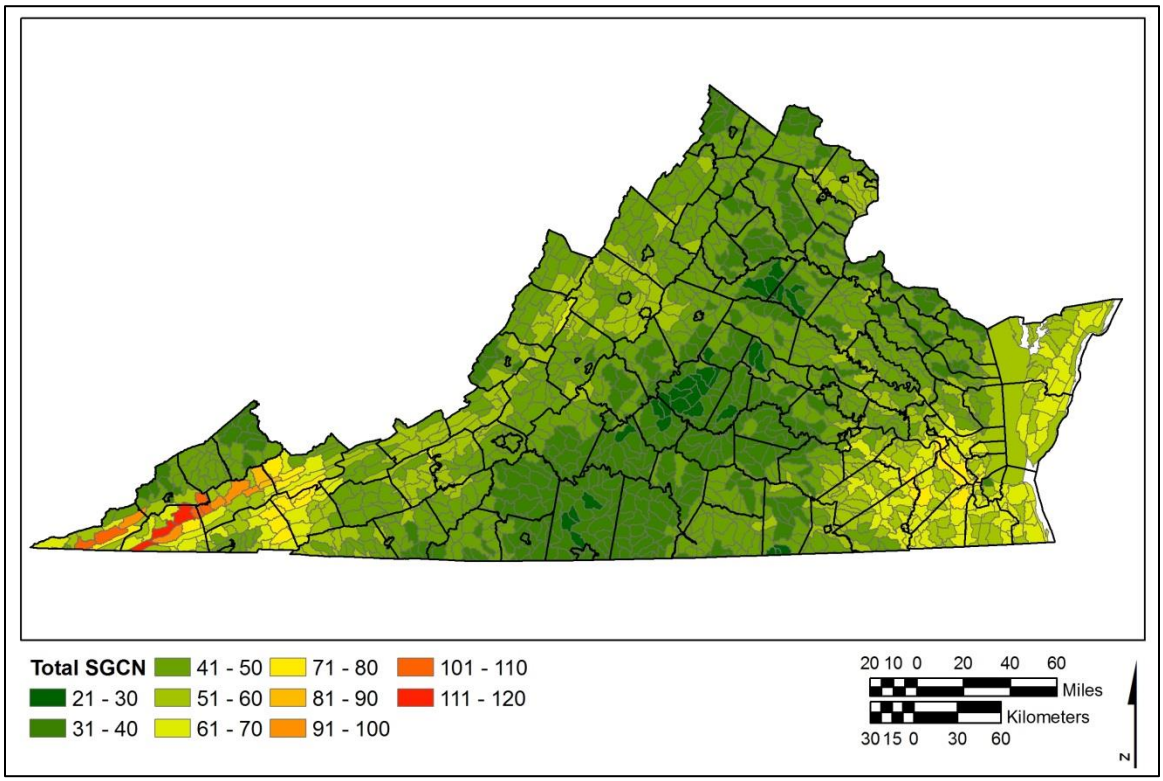

Figure 1. State Distribution of Species of Greatest Conservation Need by HUC12 Watersheds.

Wildlife Action Plan Implementation

Since its creation, the Wildlife Action Plan has helped Virginia acquire over $17 million in new conservation funding through the State Wildlife Grants Program. These resources have been used to implement significant research, advance species recovery efforts via captive propagation, and restore and conserve important wildlife habitats. Despite these successes, many conservation practitioners feel the original Wildlife Action Plan never reached its full potential. One common concern is that it failed to focus at the habitat level where the needs of many species could be addressed at once. Further, many partners indicated the original Action Plan did not provide sufficient details to help prioritize conservation needs and opportunities at a local scale, where many land use decisions are made, and conservation efforts are implemented. Lacking these local insights, it was often difficult for agencies, municipalities, organizations, academic institutions, and landowners to identify and focus on the highest priority wildlife conservation opportunities for their geographic area. To address this concern and make the Action Plan more user-friendly and relevant at a finer scale, this version (2015) of the Action Plan was developed to include locally-based summaries. These summaries identify species that are local priorities, habitats required to conserve those species, regional threats impacting species and habitats, and priority conservation actions that can be taken to address those threats. The goal of these summaries is to facilitate and benefit the work of local governments, conservation groups, landowners, and other members of the conservation community who wish to support wildlife conservation within their regions.

Local Action Plan Summaries

In creating the updated Action Plan, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) adopted a model developed by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for the Virginia Outdoors Plan. The Virginia Outdoors Plan describes recreational resource issues for 21 multi-county Recreational Planning Regions. Each Recreational Planning Region is roughly analogous to one of Virginia's 21 local Planning District Commissions (PDC). The PDCs are voluntary associations of local governments intended to foster intergovernmental cooperation by bringing together local officials, agency staff, the public, and partners to discuss common needs and develop solutions to regional issues. With its focus on local-scale actions, the Virginia Outdoors Plan has become an important tool for identifying and addressing local recreational issues. This DCR model was adapted and used in this Action Plan to address wildlife and habitat issues for the benefit of planning region residents. More broadly, the new Action Plan's Local Action Plan Summaries will create a framework that Virginia's diverse conservation community can use to identify issues and locations of mutual conservation interest, enhance collaborative opportunities, develop new conservation resources, and craft "win-win" situations that can be beneficial for both the people and wildlife of Virginia.

New River Valley Planning Region Summary Overview

The New River Valley Planning Region consists of 929,920 acres (1,453 square miles) and is predominantly rural with several larger cities. The region includes the counties of Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, and Pulaski; the towns of Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Floyd, Narrows, Pearisburg, Pulaski, and Rich Creek; and the city of Radford. The human population in this planning region is estimated to be almost 182,000 people (US Census Bureau 2015). Virginia Tech University and Radford University students make up approximately 20 percent of the human population in the region (DCR 2013). Populations are projected to increase if the average growth rate for the planning region is maintained or increase (DCR 2013).

Less developed and more rural areas often provide a diversity of valuable wildlife habitats, which can be degraded or lost as human populations grow or mining and other extractive uses expand. This planning region contains a range of SGCN, including eight species that occur only within this region and nowhere else in the world. They include the New River Valley cave beetle, Straley's cave beetle, Mitchell's satyr butterfly, Virginia fringed mountain snail, Buffalo Mountain mealybug, Ellett Valley pseudotremia (cave obligate invertebrate), Pygmy snaketail (dragonfly), and Laurel Creek xystodesmid millipede. The planning region includes a variety of habitats such as spruce fir forests, mixed hardwood and conifer forests, young forests, retired agricultural land, karst, non-tidal wetlands, and warm and cold water streams and riparian habitats (Figure 2).

In developing conservation actions for habitats and priority species within this planning region, a number of factors must be considered to determine how limited resources can be allocated to best effect. A project's likely impact and probability of success, the effectiveness of historic and ongoing conservation actions, as well as logistical, economic, and political factors will all influence the selection and prioritization of conservation actions. Virginia's Wildlife Action Plan advocates a proactive approach that focuses conservation resources to manage species before they become critically imperiled and to implement projects that can simultaneously benefit multiple species and human communities. These factors were considered during development of the conservation actions included in the following sections as well as in analyzing the existing threats facing SGCN and their habitats. Threats and conservation actions are organized based on the habitat types found within this planning region upon which priority SGCN depend.

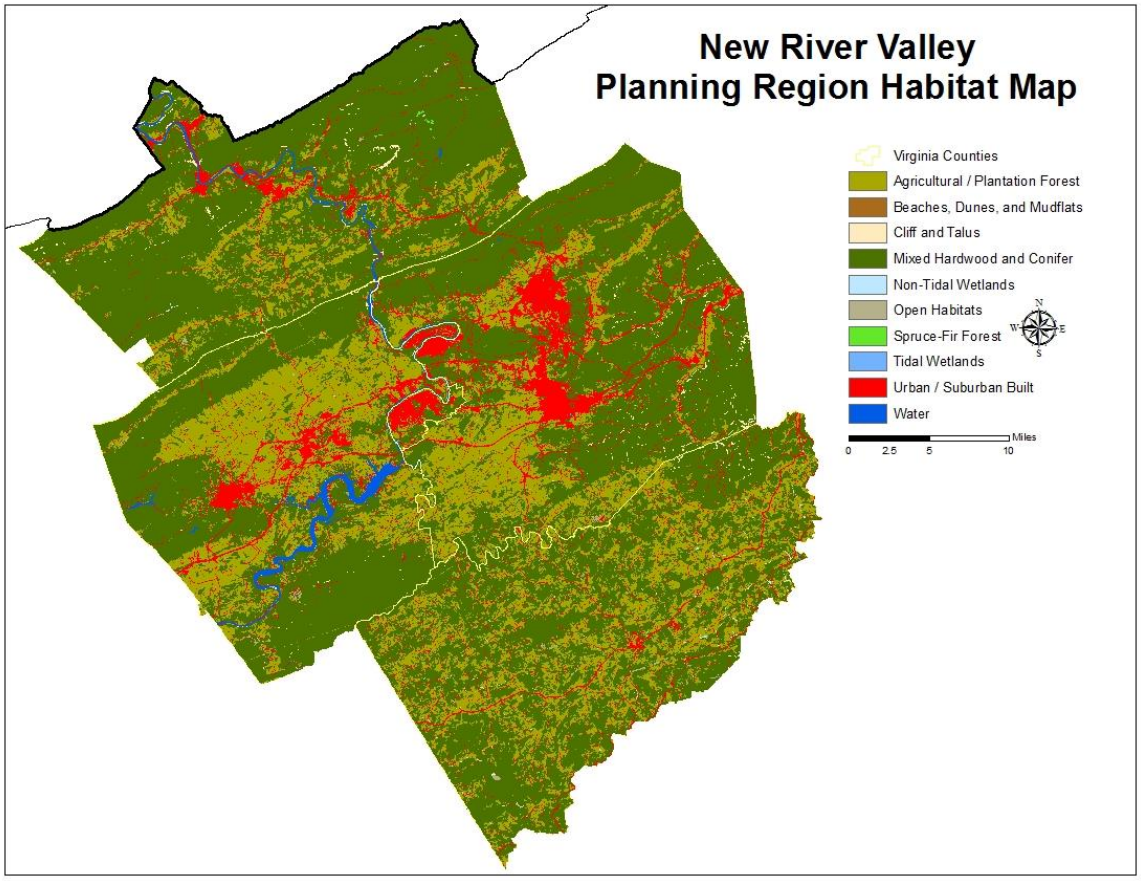

Figure 2. New River Valley Planning Region Habitats (Anderson et al. 2013).

Priority Species of Greatest Conservation Need

Of Virginia's 883 SGCN, 115 are believed to either occur, or have recently occurred, within the New River Valley Planning Region (Appendix A). Of these 116 species, ***78 SGCN are dependent upon habitats provided within the New River Valley Planning Region (Table 2). These species constitute the priority SGCN for the region***. A summary of SGCN Tier and Conservation Opportunity Rankings is provided in Table 1, while Figure 3 demonstrates the density of the 77 priority species within this region.

Priority SGCNs within this Local Summary include species for which this planning region comprises a significant portion of its range in Virginia. To determine species priority, the authors implemented a 10 percent rule to identify locally important species. Under the 10 percent rule, an SGCN is included in a Local Summary if the planning region provides at least 10 percent of that species' range in Virginia. However, there are several other instances that warrant inclusion on a planning region's priority SGCN list. First, several SGCN occur statewide but in low numbers in each planning region and will never reach the 10 percent threshold in any single planning region. Species that fall in this category were manually added to priority SGCN lists where appropriate. Some species only occur in three or fewer planning regions. These SGCN are also included on priority lists for the planning regions in which they are found due to their rarity in the state and the importance of those few planning regions to their survival. For migrant species

that may only be in Virginia for a matter of days, these migratory habitats are considered critical for their long-term conservation. When these circumstances were identified, specific migratory species were manually added to local SGCN lists as well. Finally, where a species may have a particularly strong population in a relatively small portion of a planning region, the population may be determined to be significant enough to warrant inclusion on the local SGCN list. Again, when these circumstances were identified, species were manually added to the local priority SGCN list.

Table 1. Tier and Conservation Opportunity Ranking Distribution among Priority SGCN.

Tier and Conservation Opportunity Rank	Number of SGCN
Ia	8
Ib	3
Ic	7
IIa	2
IIb	2
IIc	12
IIIa	6
IIIb	3
IIIc	6
IVa	13
IVb	6
IVc	10

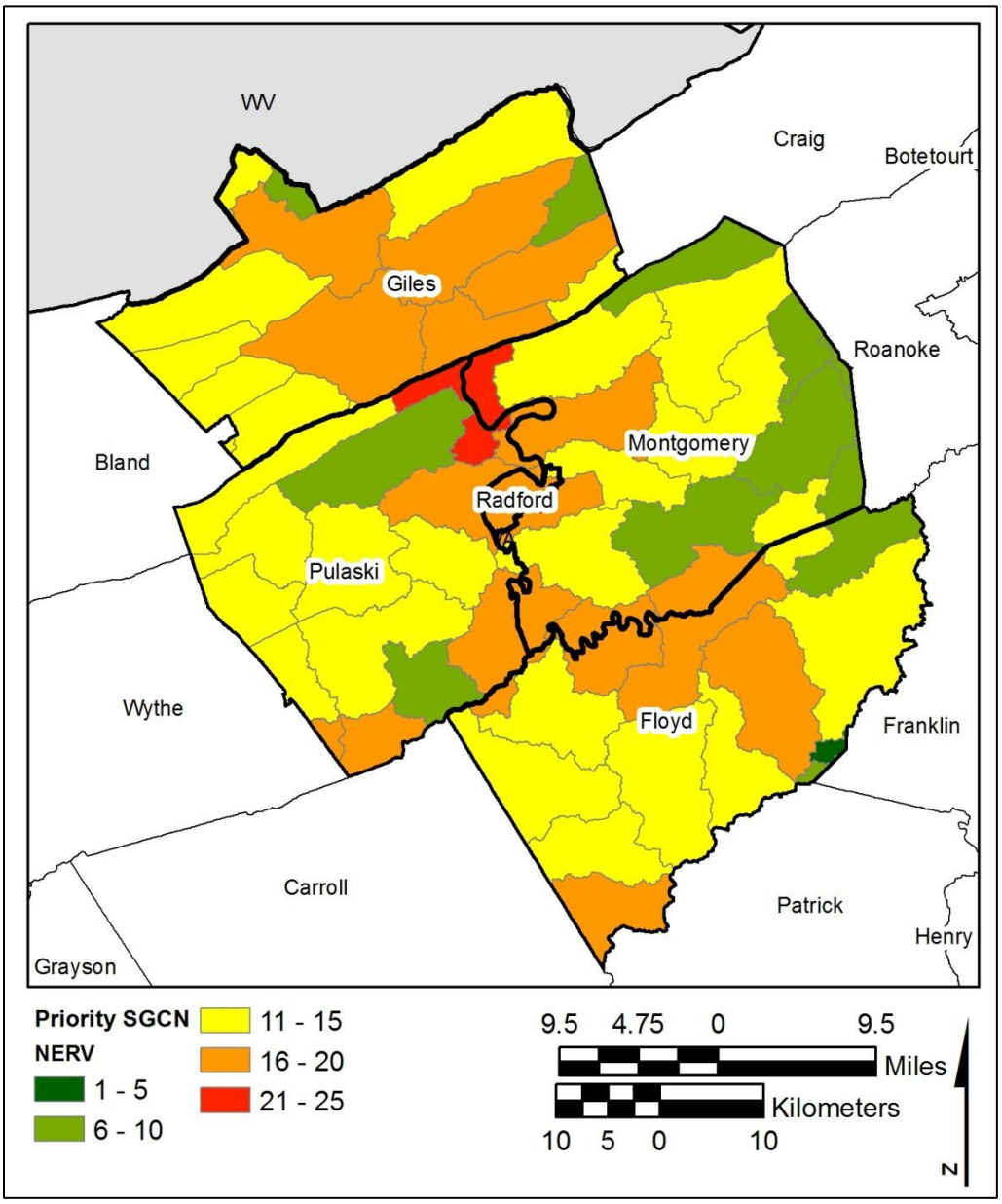

Figure 3. Priority SGCN Density in the New River Valley Planning Region (HUC12 Watersheds).

Table 2. Priority Species of Greatest Conservation Need Distribution in the New River Valley Planning District.

Taxa	Conservation Status	Tier	Opportunity Ranking	Common Name	Scientific Name	Habitat
Amphibian		IV	c	Blue Ridge dusky salamander	*Desmognathus orestes*	High elevation seeps, streams, wet rock faces, and riparian forests
Amphibian	**CC**	I	a	Eastern hellbender	*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis alleganiensis*	Clean streams and rivers with rocky substrates
Amphibian		IV	a	Jefferson salamander	*Ambystoma jeffersonianum*	West of Shenandoah River - high elevation hardwood forests
Amphibian		III	a	Shovel-nosed salamander	*Desmognathus marmoratus*	Cool highly oxygenated high elevation streams with moderate flow and gravel and rock substrates
Amphibian		IV	c	Yonahlossee salamander	*Plethodon yonahlossee*	Mature hardwood forests with deep leaf litter layer
Bird		III	c	Bank swallow	*Riparia riparia*	Habitat includes open and partly open situations, frequently near flowing water. Nests are in steep sand, dirt, or gravel banks, in burrows dug near the top of the bank, along the edge of inland water, or along the coast, or in gravel pits, road embankments, etc.
Bird		III	a	Barn owl	*Tyto alba*	Fields of dense grass. Open and partly open country (grassland, marsh, lightly grazed pasture, hayfields) in a wide variety of situations, often around human habitation.
Bird		III	b	Belted kingfisher	*Megaceryle alcyon*	Primarily along water, both freshwater and marine, including lakes, streams, wooded creeks and rivers, seacoasts, bays, estuaries, and mangroves. Perches in trees, on over hanging branches, posts and utility wires.
Bird		IV	a	Black-and-white warbler	*Mniotilta varia*	Habitat generalist with broad habitat tolerances
Bird		II	b	Black-billed cuckoo	*Coccyzus erythropthalmus*	Forest edge and open woodland, both deciduous and coniferous, with dense deciduous thickets
Bird		IV	a	Brown thrasher	*Toxostoma rufum*	Thickets and bushy areas in deciduous forest clearings and forest edge, shrubby areas and gardens; in migration and winter also in scrub
Bird		IV	b	Canada warbler	*Cardellina canadensis*	Breeding habitat includes moist thickets of woodland undergrowth (especially aspen-poplar), bogs, tall shrubbery along streams or near swamps, and deciduous second growth.

Bird		II	a	Cerulean warbler	*Setophaga cerulea*	A structurally mature hardwood forest in a mesic or wetter situation, with a closed canopy
Bird		IV	b	Chimney swift	*Chaetura pelagica*	Inhabits rural and urban environments having both an abundance of flying arthropods and suitable roosting/nesting sites
Bird		IV	a	Eastern kingbird	*Tyrannus tyrannus*	Forest edge, open situations with scattered trees and shrubs, cultivated lands with bushes and fencerows, and parks; in winter more closely associated with forest clearings and borders
Bird		IV	a	Eastern meadowlark	*Sturnella magna*	Grasslands, savanna, open fields, pastures, cultivated lands, sometimes marshes
Bird		IV	a	Eastern towhee	*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*	Inhabits forest and swamp edges, regenerating clearcuts, open-canopied forests, particularly those with a well-developed understory, reclaimed strip mines, mid-late successional fields, riparian thickets, overgrown fencerows, shrub/small-tree thickets, and other brushy habitats.
Bird		III	a	Eastern whip-poor-will	*Antrostomus vociferus*	Forest and open woodland, from lowland moist and deciduous forest to montane forest and pine-oak association
Bird		IV	b	Eastern wood-pewee	*Contopus virens*	Inhabits a wide variety of wooded upland and lowland habitats including deciduous, coniferous, or mixed forests
Bird		IV	a	Field sparrow	*Spizella pusilla*	Old fields, brushy hillsides, overgrown pastures, thorn scrub, deciduous forest edge, sparse second growth, fencerows
Bird		I	a	Golden-winged warbler	*Vermivora chrysoptera*	Open shrubby habitat (ex. old fields and pastures) at mid to high elevations within broader forested matrix west of the Blue Ridge Mountains
Bird		IV	a	Grasshopper sparrow	*Ammodramus savannarum*	Grassland obligate
Bird		IV	a	Gray catbird	*Dumetella carolinensis*	Thickets, dense brushy and shrubby areas, undergrowth of forest edge, hedgerows, and gardens (AOU 1983), dense second growth.
Bird		IV	b	Green heron	*Butorides virescens*	Swamps, mangroves, marshes, and margins of ponds, rivers, lakes, and lagoons.
Bird	**ST**	I	a	Henslow's sparrow	*Ammodramus henslowii*	Open fields and meadows with grass interspersed with weeds or shrubby vegetation, especially in damp or low-lying areas, adjacent to salt marsh in some areas.
Bird		III	a	Kentucky warbler	*Geothlypis formosa*	Humid deciduous forest dense second growth, swamps.
Bird	**ST**	I	a	Loggerhead shrike	*Lanius ludovicianus*	Grasslands, orchards and open areas with scattered trees
Bird		IV	b	Northern Flicker	*Colaptes auratus*	Open forest, both deciduous and coniferous, open woodland, open situations with scattered trees and snags, riparian woodland, pine-oak association, parks

Bird		I	b	Northern saw-whet owl	*Aegolius acadicus*	Higher elevation coniferous woodlands in Blue Ridge and mountains west of Shenandoah river
Bird		III	c	Red crossbill	*Loxia curvirostra*	Spruce-fir or hemlock forests above 4000 feet
Bird		III	a	Ruffed Grouse	*Bonasa umbellus*	Dense forest with some deciduous trees, in both wet and relatively dry situations from boreal forest (especially early seral stages dominated by aspen) and northern hardwood ecotone to eastern deciduous forest and oak-savanna woodland.
Bird		IV	a	Whimbrel	*Numenius phaeopus*	Coastal migrant
Bird		IV	b	Wood thrush	*Hylocichla mustelina*	Deciduous or mixed forests with a dense tree canopy and a fairly well-developed deciduous understory, especially where moist
Bird		III	a	Yellow-billed cuckoo	*Coccyzus americanus*	Open woodland (especially where undergrowth is thick), parks, deciduous riparian woodland.
Bird		IV	a	Yellow-breasted chat	*Icteria virens*	Second growth, shrubby old pastures, thickets, bushy areas, scrub, woodland undergrowth, and fence rows, including low wet places near streams, pond edges, or swamps; thickets with few tall trees; early successional stages of forest regeneration; commonly in sites close to human habitation
Bird	**ST**	I	a	Peregrine falcon	*Falco peregrinus*	Human structures in the east and cliff sites in the west
Crustacean	**FS**	I	a	Ephemeral cave amphipod	*Stygobromus ephemerus*	Cave/ Karst
Crustacean	**FS**	II	c	Henrot's Cave isopod	*Caecidotea henroti*	Cave/ Karst
Crustacean		III	b	Longclaw crayfish	*Cambarus buntingi*	Clean creeks and streams with sand, gravel, clay, or silt substrates
Crustacean	**FS**	II	c	Montgomery County cave amphipod	*Stygobromus fergusoni*	Cave/ Karst
Fish		IV	c	Appalachia darter	*Percina gymnocephala*	Clear, cool and warm streams in the New River drainage with upland gradient and gravel substrates
Fish		IV	c	Blackside darter	*Percina maculata*	Clean streams and rivers with moderate gradient and various substrates
Fish		IV	a	Brook trout	*Salvelinus fontinalis*	Clear, cool, well-oxygenated creeks, small to medium rivers, and lakes
Fish	**CC**	I	b	Candy darter	*Etheostoma osburni*	Clear creeks and streams with rocky substrates
Fish		III	c	Kanawha darter	*Etheostoma kanawhae*	Clear creeks and streams with rocky substrates
Fish		III	c	Kanawha minnow	*Phenacobius teretulus*	Clear moderate gradient streams with clean gravel and rubble substrates

Fish		IV	c	Logperch	*Percina caprodes*	Warm, moderate gradient, streams and rivers with gravel and rubble substrates
Fish		IV	c	New River shiner	*Notropis scabriceps*	Small to large, cool water, tributaries of the New River with high to moderate gradient and unsilted substrates
Fish	**FSST**	II	b	Orangefin madtom	*Noturus gilberti*	Moderate to strong flows with unsilted substrates
Fish		IV	c	Redlip shiner	*Notropis chiliticus*	Clear creeks and streams with moderate gradient, warm or cool water and various substrates
Fish		III	c	Rustyside sucker	*Thoburnia hamiltoni*	Clean clear streams with moderate to high gradient and unsilted substrates
Fish		IV	c	Sharpnose darter	*Percina oxyrhynchus*	Moderate gradient streams and rivers with unsilted gravel, rubble, and boulder substrates
FW Mollusk		III	c	Blue Ridge springsnail	*Fontigens orolibas*	Springs and cave streams in the Potomac basin and along the Blue Ridge
FW Mollusk	**ST**	II	a	Green Floater	*Lasmigona subviridis*	Clean, calm water in streams and rivers of various sizes with sand and gravel substrates
FW Mollusk	**ST**	III	b	Pistolgrip	*Tritogonia verrucosa*	Large rivers with gravel, sand, or mud substrates
FW Mollusk		IV	a	Pocketbook mussel	*Lampsilis ovata*	Either flowing or standing water with gravel, sand, silt, or mud substrates
FW Mollusk		IV	c	Seep mudalia	*Leptoxis dilatata*	If this species is consistent with other species in this genus, clean mid-sized rivers with fast flows and rocky substrates
FW Mollusk	**FESE**	I	a	Virginia fringed mountain snail	*Polygyriscus virginianus*	Forest
Insect	**FS**	II	c	A cave beetle	*Pseudanophthalmus gracilis*	Caves with clean abundant water flowing through the system.
Insect	**FSST**	I	c	Appalachian grizzled skipper	*Pyrgus wyandot*	Dry open areas with shale soils, clear cuts, utility rights of way, and other areas with dwarf cinquefoil
Insect	**FSSE**	I	c	Buffalo Mountain mealybug	*Puto kosztarabi*	South slope of Buffalo Mountain in Floyd county on poverty oatgrass in open glades
Insect		II	c	Green-faced clubtail	*Gomphus viridifrons*	Large rivers with rocks and moderate current
Insect	**FESE**	I	c	Mitchell's satyr	*Neonympha mitchellii*	Wetland
Insect	**FS**	II	c	New River Valley cave beetle	*Pseudanophthalmus egberti*	Cave/ Karst
Insect	**FS**	II	c	Persius duskywing	*Erynnis persius persius*	Pine barrens/ oak savanna and other open sunny habitats

Insect		II	c	Pygmy snaketail	*Ophiogomphus howei*	Large fast flowing rivers
Insect	**FS**	I	c	Regal fritillary	*Speyeria idalia idalia*	Glades and prairie remnants
Insect	**FS**	II	c	Spotted cave beetle	*Pseudanophthalmus punctatus*	Cave/ Karst
Insect	**FS**	II	c	Straley's Cave beetle	*Pseudanophthalmus quadratus*	Cave/ Karst
Insect	**FS**	II	c	Tawny crescent	*Phyciodes batesii batesii*	Dry habitats including clearings, open woods, and roadsides containing wavy-leaved asters
Mammal	**FESE**	I	b	Indiana bat	*Myotis sodalis*	West of Shenandoah River - winter site specific caves, summer forested areas containing trees with scaly or shaggy bark as well as dead trees
Mammal		IV	c	Long-tailed shrew	*Sorex dispar dispar*	West of Shenandoah talus slopes, rock slides and cliffs surrounded by forests
Other Terrestrial Invertebrate	**FS**	II	c	A millipede	*Pseudotremia sublevis*	Cave/ Karst
Other Terrestrial Invertebrate		II	c	A millipede	*PSEUDOTREMIA TUBERCULATA*	No habitats have been identified for this species
Other Terrestrial Invertebrate	**FSST**	I	c	Ellett Valley Pseudotremia millipede	*Pseudotremia cavernarum*	Cave/ Karst
Other Terrestrial Invertebrate	**FSST**	I	c	Laurel Creek xystodesmid millipede	*Sigmoria whiteheadi*	Known from one location where it occurs under leaf litter of rhododendrons and hardwoods within 5 meters of stream
Other Terrestrial Invertebrate	**FSSE**	I	c	Shaggy coil	*Helicodiscus diadema*	Known from four locations and occupies leaf litter at the base of limestone/ shale outcropings
Reptile	**FTSE**	I	a	Bog turtle	*Clemmys muhlenbergii*	Emergent wetlands with dense vegetation

** Federal Endangered (FE), State Endangered (SE), Federal Threatened (FT), State Threatened (ST), Federal Species of Concern (FS), Federal Candidate (FC), Federal Proposed (FP), and Species of Collection Concern (CC).

Conserved Lands in the New River Valley Planning Region

Recognizing the importance of the local habitats to resident and migratory wildlife, state, federal, and private entities have made significant investments to conserve lands within this planning region. Conservation mechanisms range from national forests to state parks and wildlife management areas to conservation easements. Significant conservation assets, in terms of size, include:

- Jefferson National Forest,
- Blue Ridge Parkway,
- Claytor Lake State Park,
- New River Trail State Park,
- Selu Conservancy (Radford University), and
- Mountain Lake Biological Station (UVA).

These properties contain a diversity of open water, forest, agricultural, and wetland habitats (Figure 4). They have been conserved to provide a range of conservation, recreational, and economic benefits such as habitat protection and restoration, ecotourism, and fishing and hunting opportunities. Additionally, military lands that contain habitats and fish and wildlife species can also be valuable to conservation, such as Radford Army Ammunition Plant.

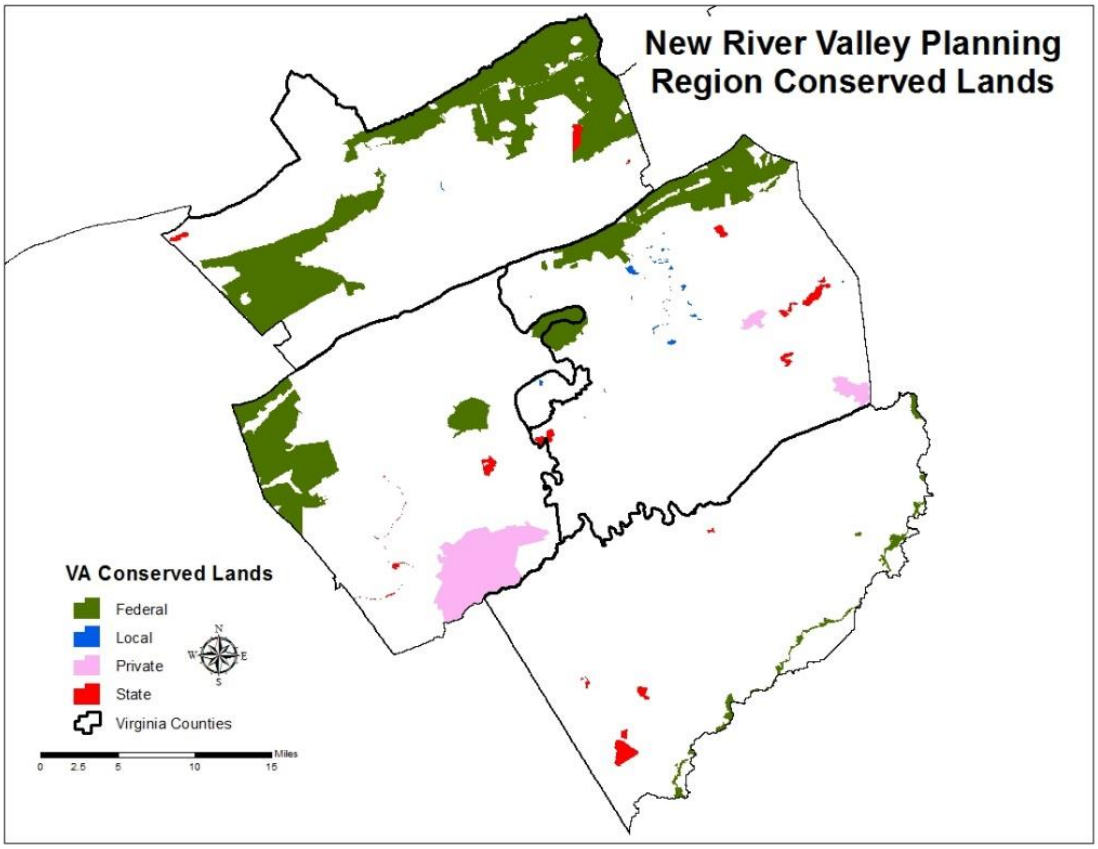

Figure 2. Conservation Lands in the New River Valley Planning Region (DCR, Natural Heritage 2014).

These properties serve as an important component of wildlife conservation efforts on within the New River Valley Planning Region. Healthy and important habitats have been conserved within their boundaries; however, working to conserve other lands could be beneficial for many SGCN and habitats within the region. Additionally, although there may be concern over the economic and social impacts of putting lands into conservation, many of these areas provide recreation and ecotourism benefits (DCR 2013; Carver and Caudill 2013). Through these mechanisms local economies could be bolstered; however, insufficient data exist to fully describe the benefits and drawbacks of lands held in conservation within the planning region. To balance these interests, especially as conditions change, it will be critical for the conservation community to actively engage with local governments and stakeholders to ensure that conservation spending is beneficial for both wildlife and localities.

Climate Change Impacts in the New River Valley Planning Region

Changes in temperature and precipitation will likely negatively affect habitats and SCGN in the New River Valley Planning Region. Based on scientific reports and research, it is clear that temperatures in the state will get warmer. The National Climate Assessment (NCA) is a national climate assessment that provides state level information. The NCA indicates Virginia's average temperature could increase by as much as 7°F by 2100 (Melilo et al. 2014). Earlier models used for Virginia's 2008 Climate Action Plan project that average temperatures may increase by 3.1°C (5.6°F) by the end of the century in Virginia (Governor's Commission on Climate Change 2008).

Temperature changes are likely to be even greater in the Appalachians than at lower elevations due to a range of factors such as snow albedo, water vapor changes and latent heat release, aerosols, among others (Staudinger et al. 2015). Projections also indicate a likely increase in summer high temperatures and longer growing seasons (Staudinger et al. 2015). These changes could affect depth of snow pack and earlier snow melt.

Increased temperatures may lead to heat stress for species and affect water temperature, temperature regime timing, and associated behaviors as well as potentially resulting in changes to food availability (Boicourt and Johnson 2011; Kane 2013). Temperature increases may also be problematic for species at the edge of their ranges. For example, if species are at the more southern end of their range, they may not survive significant increases in temperature that are greater than they can withstand (Pyke et al. 2008). Warmer temperatures may also result in warmer waters, which could favor parasites and other pests in aquatic environments (Pyke et al. 2008; Najjar et al. 2010; Kane 2013). Additionally, if temperatures and precipitation change such that season length is altered, fish and other species reproductive cycles and other phenological processes may be affected. Ecological conditions may also be altered, including food supplies and sympatric animal behaviors (e.g., fish migrations and nest building).

Conservation Threats and Actions for Wildlife and Habitats in the New River Valley Planning Region

The following sections on threats, conservation actions, and conservation priorities are subdivided based on habitat type. Key habitat conservation strategies, actions, threats, and other impacts are summarized in Table 3. In many cases, actions taken to protect or enhance habitat will positively affect many of the New River Valley Planning Region priority SGCN and other species. Many of these activities are also expected to benefit landowners and communities.

Table 1. Summary of Conservation Strategies and Actions for the New River Valley Planning Region.

Conservation Strategy	Conservation Action	Threats addressed	Economic/ Human benefits	Priority areas
Protect karst habitats	1) Maintain vegetative cover within watersheds where subterranean species occur; 2) Establish vegetative buffers around springs and sinkholes; 3) Minimize nutrients and sediments flowing into the system; 4) Establish parks, greenways, or other conserved lands above karst systems; 5) Develop water conservation and use strategies to help minimize groundwater depletion; and 6) Better control fecal matter and sewage.	Increasing industrial/residential water consumption, sedimentation and pollutants, protection of cave entrances	Drinking water quality; sustainability of private landowner wells and residential water supply	Areas underlain by karst geology
Maintain and restore wetland habitats	1) Work with appropriate entities on wetlands permitting process to ensure adequate mitigation and restoration procedures are in place; 2) Establish or enhance vegetative buffer areas inland of existing wetlands; 3) Utilize relevant data (e.g., Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's wetlands catalog) to identify priority areas for conservation, acquisition, and restoration; and 4) Control invasive species.	Water quality degradation, habitat/ land use conversion, non-native and exotic invasive species	Flood control; filtration services; erosion and sediment control; supports recreational and commercial fisheries; ecotourism/ wildlife watching and fishing/ hunting opportunities	Watershed with priority wetlands identified by DCR
Enhance, maintain, and restore aquatic and riparian habitats	1) Establish vegetated and/ or forested riparian buffers; 2) Work to restore or create wetlands; 3) Restore and revegetate stream banks and channels; 4) Reforest erodible upland areas and disturbed areas; 5) Establish riparian forests, wetlands, infiltration trenches, and other areas to slow runoff and encourage infiltration; 6) Improve pasture management to prevent manure and tainted sediment from flowing into streams; 7) Exclude livestock from streams; 8) Harvest forest products utilizing available BMPs; 8) Repair or replace failing septic systems and eliminating "straight pipes;" 9) Implement a program to encourage urban storm water infiltration; 10) Implement a pet waste disposal program; 11) Implement erosion and sediment control efforts in residential areas; 12)	Sedimentation, contaminants loading, water chemistry alteration, temperature regime alteration, stream nutrient dynamics alteration, land use changes, water withdrawals, climate change, invasive species	Address TMDL concerns by reducing amounts of sediment, nutrients, pesticides, and other pollutants that enter water ways; sustain sport fisheries and recreation opportunities; contribute to water supply	Back Creek, Crab Creek, Dodd Creek, Mill Creek, Little River, Upper Stroubles Creek

	Improve wastewater disposal for downtown businesses; 13) Enhance street sweeping;14) Reduce the improper disposal of grass clippings and trash; 15) Continue to identify impaired waters within the planning region; 16) Restore aquatic connections; 17) Monitor and address invasive species impacts; and 18) Adopt land use practices or policies through zoning or other means to help improve the health of aquatic systems.			
Maintain and restore forest habitat	1) Protect land through acquisition, easement, incentives, or other mechanisms; 2) Implement vegetative buffers around extractive practices and development; 3) Work with state and federal agencies to ensure implementation of appropriate best management practices; 4) Maintain forest health to help ensure forest viability; and 5) Monitor and control invasive species.	Land use change and conversion, invasive species, climate change	Flood control; water quality; ecotourism/ wildlife viewing/other outdoor recreation	Forest patches adjacent to already protected parcels
Maintain and restore open habitats	1) Restore native grasses, shrubs, and forbs; 2) Maintain existing open habitats with periodic disturbance (e.g., prescribed burning, mowing, disking, etc.); and 3) Conserve, via acquisition, easement, collaboration, or agreement, patches from 20 acres to 100 or more acres.	Land use changes, invasive species	Conservation of native pollinators; erosion control; sequestration of nutrients, pesticides, and other pollutants before they enter rivers or karst systems	Areas supporting SGCN that are not already protected

Protect Karst Habitats

The New River Valley Planning Region contains cave/ karst habitats that are relatively unique in Virginia. These features are created by complex interactions of water, bedrock, vegetation, and soils. Karst areas contain sinkholes, sinking and losing streams, caves, and large flow springs (DCR website 2015). Because cave entrances and karst habitats are sensitive systems, exact locations of karst habitats are not provided in this Action Plan; however, general areas that contain karst features are provided in Figure 5. Karst systems provide important habitats for many SGCN, including the New River and Straley's cave beetles, Montgomery County cave amphipod, and a wide variety other important species. Others species such as the Indiana bat and Virginia big-eared bat depend on karst habitat and are endangered throughout their range. Caves in this planning region provide crucial winter habitat for some bat species.

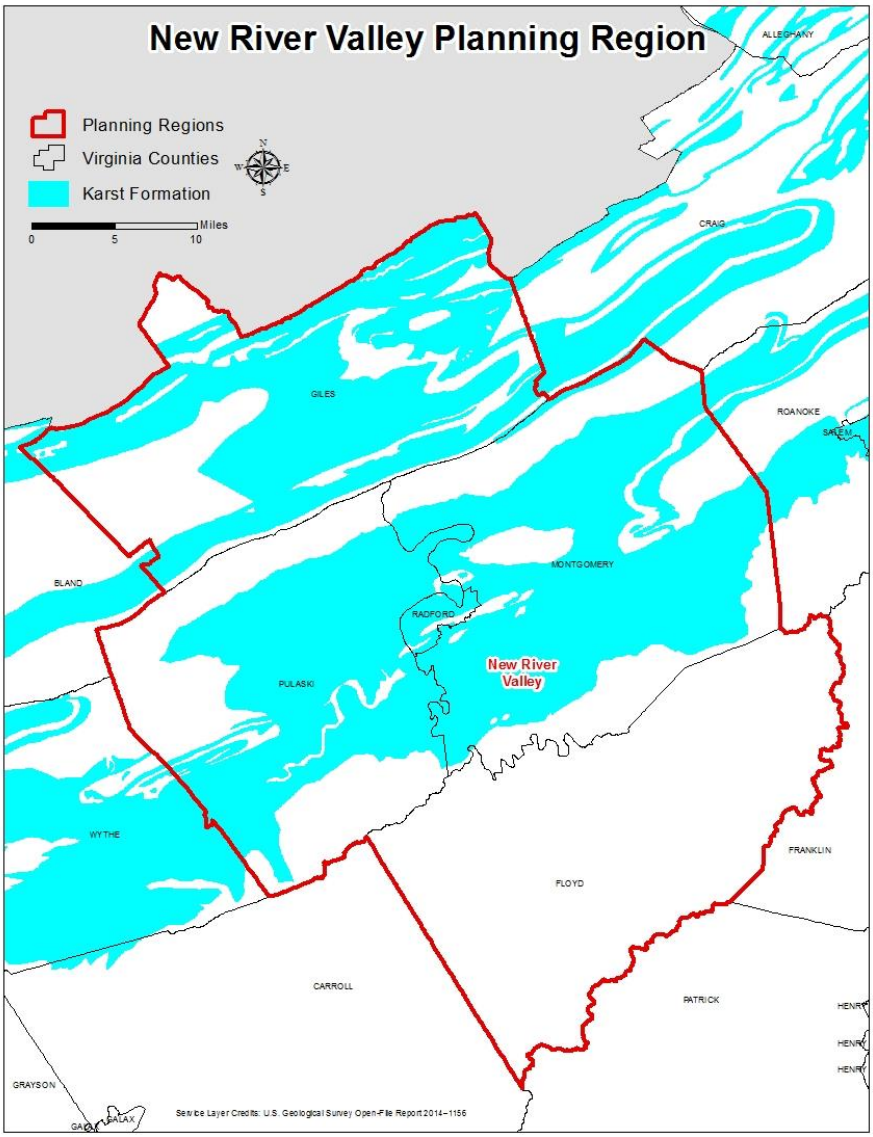

Figure 5. Karst Areas in the New River Valley Planning Region (Weary and Doctor 2014).

Threats

Threats are primarily water-related for karst systems.

1. Water Quality Degradation: Water is the most critical element influencing the health of a karst system. The quality of water entering, and flowing through, Virginia's karst systems is affected by a variety of issues. Nutrient pollution, especially from nitrogen and phosphorus, is a significant cause of water degradation as well as bacteria, fertilizer, and pesticides (DCR 2008). Nutrients often enter aquatic systems from lands without adequate best management practices (BMP), storm water runoff controls, or adequate waste treatment practices. Water quality degradation of karst systems also often occurs when sinkholes are used as disposal sites as well as through development and resulting pollutant-laden runoff (DCR 2008).

2. Altered Hydrology: The amount of water flowing through the system is also important. Withdrawals for human use have the potential to degrade subterranean habitats and change surface topography. Development and other activities which increase the amount of impervious surface can also play a role in changing water flow patterns and altering how much water flows into a karst system.

3. Climate Change: Changes to precipitation regimes that may cause more intense storm events could exacerbate already existing water quality problems. Higher amounts of precipitation in a short time frame could dramatically affect storm water runoff and nutrient run off from impervious surfaces.

Conservation Management Actions

The most efficient and cost effective means of conserving the integrity of karst and cave habitats is to focus on preserving the quality and quantity of water flowing into these systems. To improve water quality, important management actions include: minimizing use of fertilizers and pesticides near karst sites, minimizing runoff and other pollutants around the areas, preventing disposal of residential or agricultural waste near these sites, and ensuring vegetative buffer areas where there are extractive or other intensive land uses (Veni et al. 2001). It is also important to prevent sewage from community or municipal sewer systems from contaminating ecologically sensitive groundwater systems in karst areas (B. Beaty, The Nature Conservancy, personal communication, 2015). Vegetative buffers around sinkholes and entrances work to maintain the quality of water flowing into karst systems and provide vegetative cover in areas underlain by karst geology. However, it is important to note that it can be difficult to identify surface areas above the subterranean system well enough to install appropriate buffer areas.

Additionally, working with residents and municipalities to develop water conservation strategies will be important to control water withdrawals in the area (Veni et al. 2001). Adopting land use practices or policies through zoning or other guidelines focused on karst systems may also help protect and improve the health of karst systems in sensitive areas. Establishing protected areas around these karst systems may also be valuable. Additionally, local government policies or ordinances could include overlay districts, karst feature buffers, geotechnical surveys when in area that could contain karst systems, and/ or performance standards for development (Belo 2003).

Climate-Smart Management Actions

Karst systems are vulnerable to stressors such as poor water quality and changes to water flow that may be exacerbated by climate change. When considering planting vegetative buffers, managers will need to understand how conditions may change in the area and work with appropriate vegetation. For example, if stream flow is expected to become flashier due to increased precipitation, or more frequent flooding is projected to occur, tree and shrub species that can tolerate flood conditions and inundation should be included in the selected plant species. Plant species that are better able to withstand these conditions may be better suited to help mitigate the impacts of flooding and increased runoff. Minimizing impervious surface (see following section) will be even more important under climate change as with increased storm intensity will result in more stormwater runoff.

Maintain and Restore Wetland Habitats

An extremely small percentage of the New River Valley Planning Region is non-tidal wetland habitat (approximately 1,153 acres or 0.12 percent of the planning region) (Anderson et al. 2013). In addition to providing habitat for a diversity of aquatic and terrestrial species, wetlands help maintain water quality and quantity within a watershed and provide recreational opportunities for hunters, anglers, and wildlife watchers. These wetlands provide valuable habitats for the bog turtle and whimbrel. Additionally, the Mitchell's satyr butterfly is found only within wetland habitats in this planning region.

Threats

The health and quality of non-tidal wetlands are affected by a variety of issues, both natural and anthropogenic. As the quality of a wetland degrades, so does the value of that wetland to Virginia's wildlife.

1. Water Quality: Wetlands help filter nutrients and other pollutants from watersheds, but they are also sensitive to activities that impair water quality and overload the system (Hemond and Benoit 1986). When BMP are not implemented upstream, runoff laden with nutrients, sediment, and other pollutants enter the system in concentrations that hinder the wetland's filtering capacity. Storm water runoff from urban and developed areas also contributes to water quality issues that degrade wetlands (Hemond and Benoit 1986). Nutrient pollution and sedimentation are important issues for non-tidal wetlands throughout the planning region.

2. Land Use Changes: One of the most significant threats to these non-tidal wetlands is conversion to other uses that result in a loss of wetland integrity and function. As more areas are developed for additional human uses, wetland areas will likely be lost.

3. Invasive Species: Invasive species often degrade quality of wetland habitat through damage or loss to wetland vegetation. Examples of invasive species affecting these non-tidal wetlands include Japanese stilt grass and exotic invertebrates.

4. Climate Change: As precipitation regimes change and temperatures likely increase, water availability may change, such as in summer months where droughts may become more frequent and water availability may decrease.

Conservation Management Actions

A number of actions can be taken to address threats affecting wetlands in the New River Valley Planning Region. To address development and fill impacts, the federal government and the Commonwealth of Virginia has established an extensive wetlands permitting process to help landowners and developers avoid impacts to wetlands while pursuing their management objectives. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has authority to issue permits for impacts to non-tidal wetlands through the federal Clean Water Act, while DEQ has authority under Virginia's State Water Control Law. Permits are issued through a Joint Permit Application Process that can be initiated with DEQ (DEQ 2011). Mitigation to compensate for wetland loss is often required under these permits. However, wetlands restoration to reestablish or rebuild former wetland areas or restore functions to a degraded wetland also are voluntary conservation actions agencies and conservation partners can implement outside of required wetlands mitigation and are an important component to protecting wetlands (DEQ 2011). These types of conservation actions also help provide migration corridors for migratory birds that depend on wetlands for nesting, roosting, and foraging. Various programs implemented by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and other partners also provide guidance related to conserving wetlands, establishing oyster reefs, and implementing other actions.

Establishing or protecting vegetative buffers upland of wetlands is important to protect health of the existing wetlands as well as to provide a potential migration route as conditions change (Kane 2011). Protection of additional wetland areas through acquisition, easement, or agreement would allow for further conservation of this important habitat and associated SGCN. Working to limit invasive plants and animals and predators that might degrade the quality of these habitats will be important conservation actions.

Priority areas for wetlands protection and restoration within the New River Valley Planning Region include those wetlands that would allow for large wetland complexes to be protected, ensuring larger habitat patches remain available for wildlife. Areas identified by conservation partners, such as the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), as outstanding opportunities for conservation should also be considered priorities for protection and conservation. An initial review of the Virginia Wetlands Catalog identifies priority wetlands for conservation and restoration (Weber and Bulluck 2014). Designation of these areas was based on several factors, including existing plant and animal diversity, presence of significant natural communities, presence of natural lands providing ecosystem services, presence of corridors and stream buffers, proximity to conserved lands, inclusion within or downstream of healthy watersheds, and location of drinking water sources (Figure 6) (Weber and Bulluck 2014). DCR also designates potential restoration sites, identified based on similar factors as conservation areas, but also including consideration of inclusion within degraded watersheds, proximity to impaired waters, location of existing wetland mitigation banks, presence of prior converted and farmed wetlands, and inclusion of stream reaches with lower aquatic biodiversity (Figure 7) (Weber and Bulluck 2014). Highest priority areas for conservation are adjacent to already protected lands in many parts of the planning region, providing a good opportunity for potential expansion. The highest restoration priority areas are adjacent to already conserved lands in some counties but other priority areas are not, such as is Floyd and Montgomery counties.

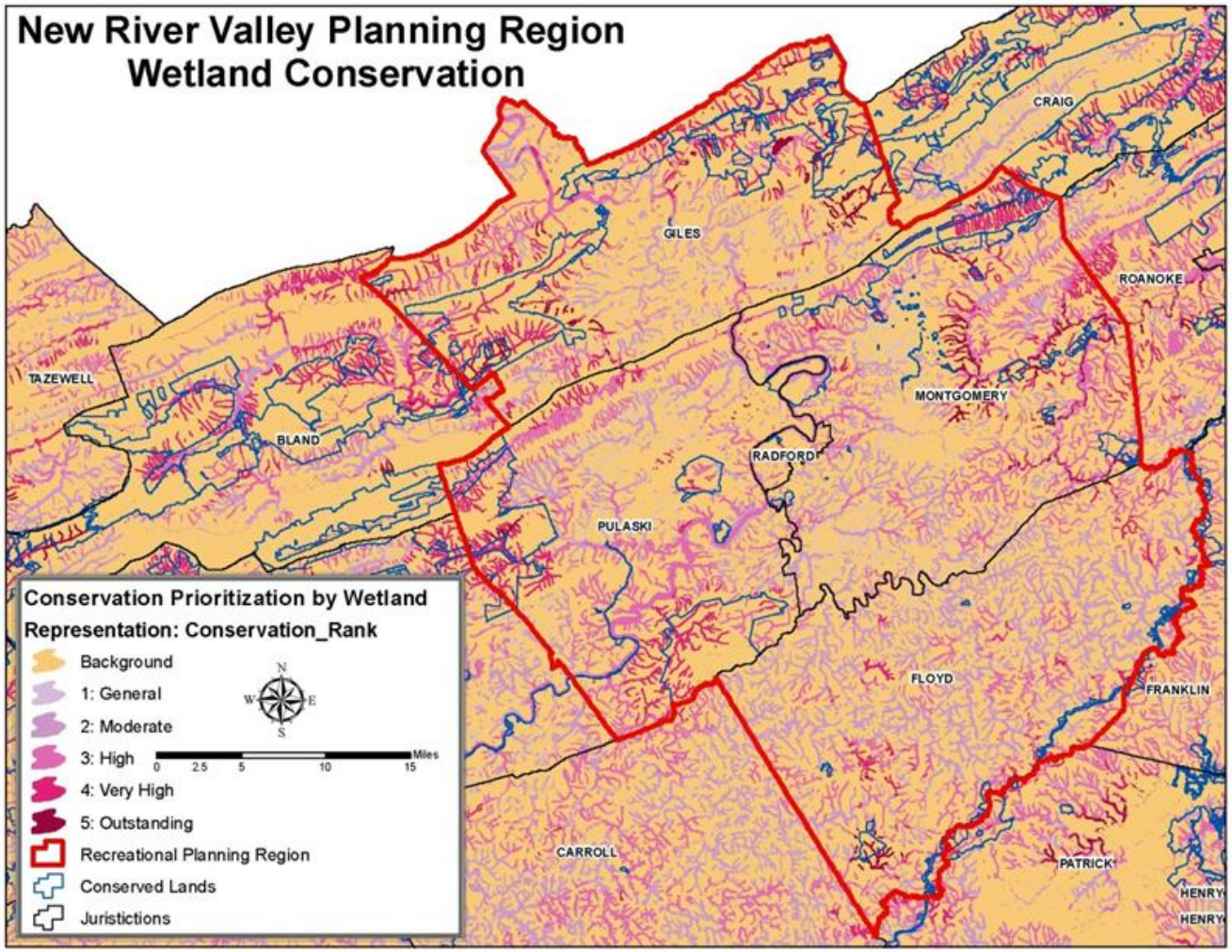

Figure 6. Wetlands Conservation Priority Areas in the New River Valley Planning Region (Weber and Bulluck 2014).

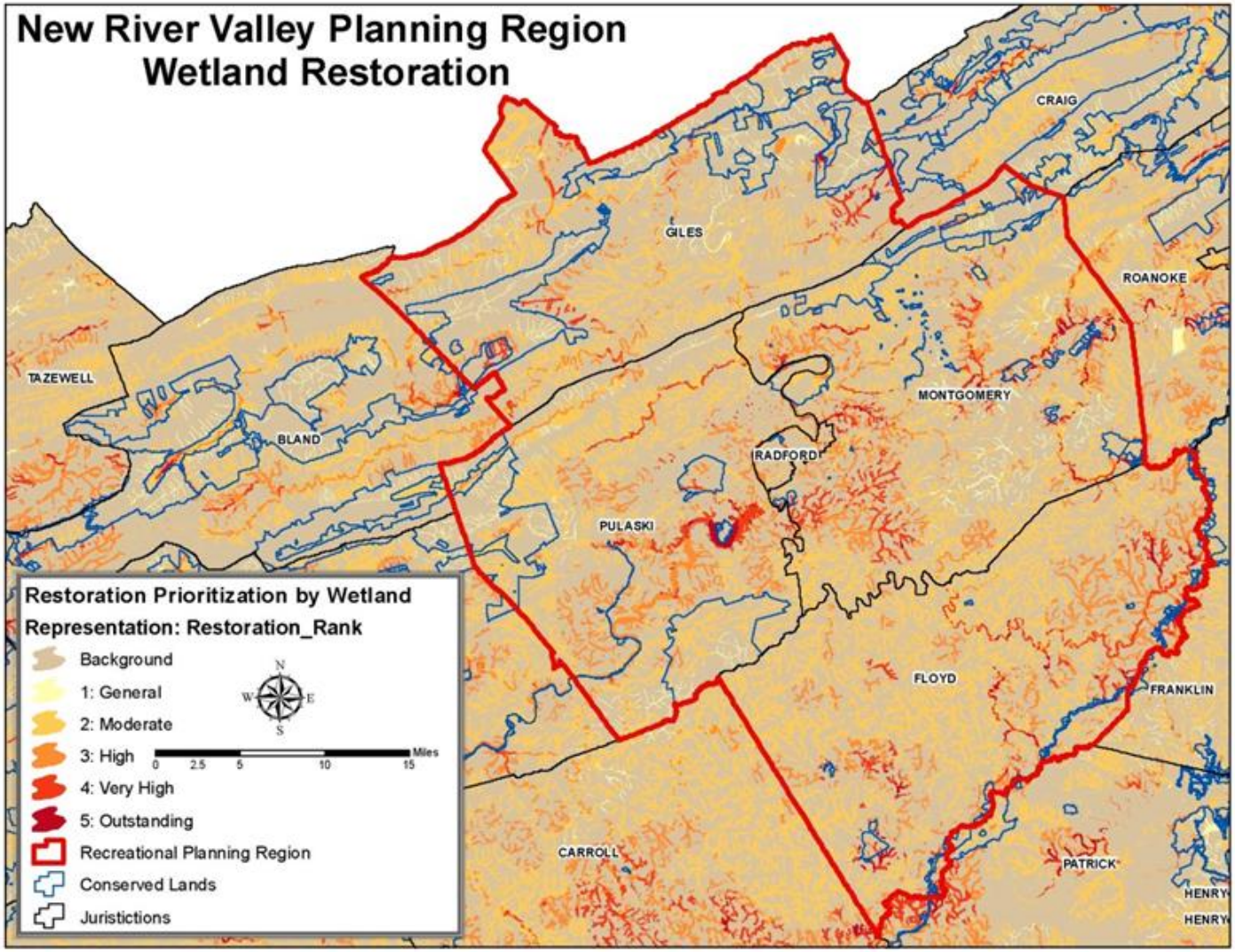

Figure 7. Wetlands Restoration Priority Areas in the New River Valley Planning Region (Weber and Bulluck 2014).

Climate-Smart Management Actions

Additional wetlands climate-related conservation actions include: restoring and enhancing vegetation within the wetlands to support changing conditions (e.g., using vegetation species that can withstand a broader array of conditions such as more frequent inundation) and enhancement of wetlands by targeted restoration or acquisition in areas where impacts from climate change may be mitigated.

Enhance, Maintain, and Restore Aquatic and Riparian Habitats

Aquatic systems in the New River Valley Planning Region include cold and warm water rivers, streams, and creeks. The majority of this planning region is in the New River watershed, but it also includes headwaters for the James and the Roanoke Rivers. Approximately, 10,200 acres (1.1 percent) of the planning region is considered aquatic (Anderson et al. 2013). These systems provide important habitat for numerous species of wildlife, fish, and invertebrates. Priority SGCN that depend on these habitats include many mussels, snails, crayfish, and fish species, such as the candy darter, New River crayfish, eastern hellbender, pistolgrip, brook trout, and New River shiner.

Threats

Aquatic and riparian habitats within the New River Valley Planning Region face multiple threats from water quality related issues to invasive species.

1. Water Quality Degradation: Pollution is the most significant threat to aquatic species and riparian habitats within the New River Valley Planning Region. Polluting materials include fertilizers, eroded sediment, and human and animal waste flowing into the region's creeks and rivers from storm water runoff, failing septic systems, and agricultural practices that do not conform to standard best management practices (DEQ 2014). In many cases, watersheds have insufficient riparian buffers and vegetative areas to stop these materials from flowing into the creek or stream (ACJV 2005). Once present in aquatic systems, these materials may concentrate in sediment and bottom-dwelling organisms where they can result in reduced levels of dissolved oxygen and altered pH levels (Chesapeake Bay Foundation 2014). In addition to the impacts on aquatic life, many of these substances pose a risk to human health and local economies (Chesapeake Bay Foundation 2014).

2. Impervious Surface: Impervious surfaces (i.e., land covers that do not permit water to permeate the ground) give a useful measure of the environmental condition of an area. In a developed watershed there is often significant impervious surface cover; thus, a greater amount of surface water, often laden with pollutants, arrives into a stream at a faster rate than in less developed watersheds, increasing the likelihood of more frequent and severe flooding. Substantial amounts of impervious surface area can also lead to degradation of water quality, changes in hydrology, habitat structure, and aquatic biodiversity. Additionally, impervious surfaces often run along areas that directly interact with the stream or river through flooding, geomorphology, or material inputs. Although the New River Valley Planning Region has some areas with a high percentage of impervious surface cover, overall the planning region has a low percentage of impervious surface cover (Figure 8).

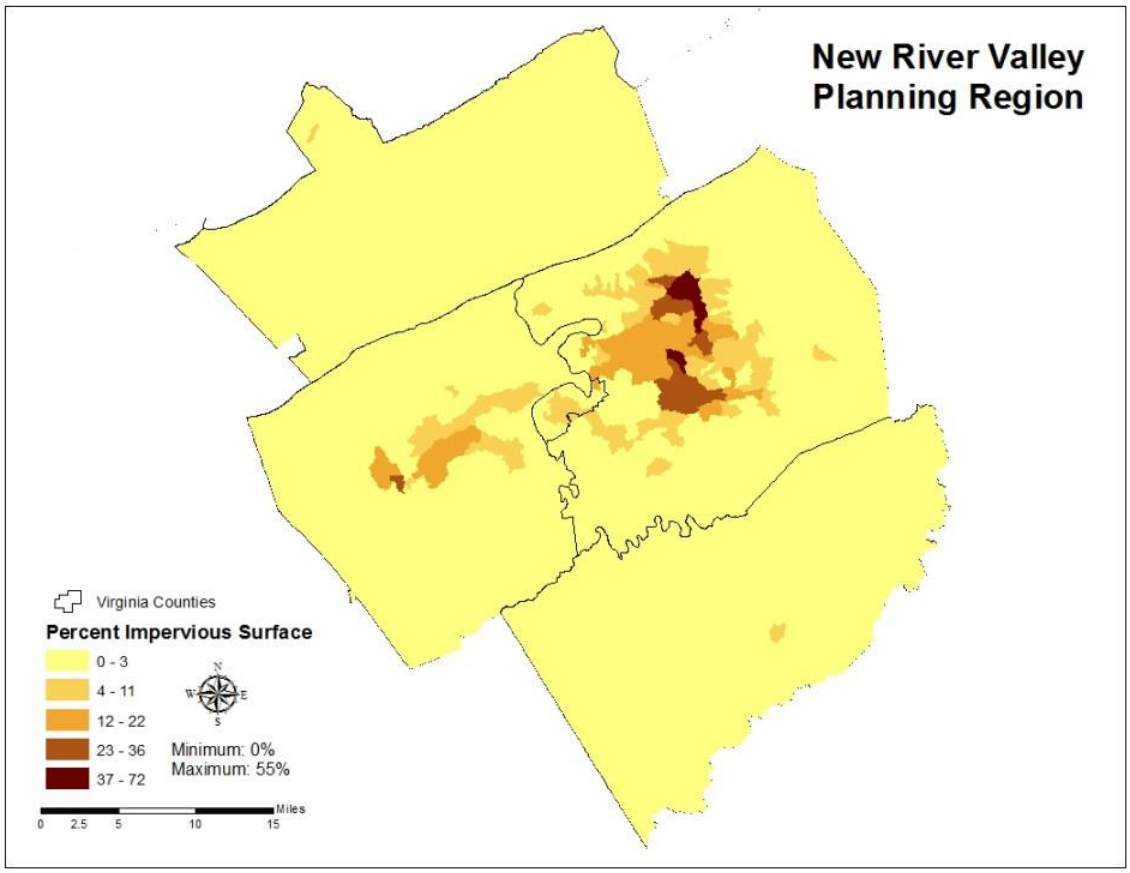

Figure 8. Impervious Surface Cover in New River Valley Planning Region (SARP 2014).

3. Catastrophic Spills: Catastrophic spills from industrial sites or road crossings can result in extensive loss of species and habitat in a short time period.

4. Habitat Conversion and Alteration: Rivers are fragmented by dams, culverts, and other impediments that limit the connectivity of these aquatic habitats. This fragmentation can prevent aquatic species from accessing important aquatic habitats crucial to various life stages. Channelization, shoreline alteration, and extractive land use practices can alter aquatic habitats in terms of changes to hydrology, chemistry, and water temperature. These practices may also directly alter habitats through loss of vegetative riparian cover, filling of streams, or hardening of stream banks.

5. Invasive Species: Invasive species such as white perch threaten western warm water streams and rivers. Invasive species are less of a direct threat to fish within cold water systems, but invasive species cause significant impacts to the forests surrounding these systems. Defoliation by the emerald ash borer, gypsy moth, hemlock woody adelgid, and southern pine beetle can alter river and stream hydrology and temperature, especially important to cold water streams.

6. Stream pH: Fish species are sensitive to water pH, and pH can play a role in species richness. Waters flowing through the non-karst areas in this planning region have experienced acid

deposition over decades, making the waters more acidic and potentially harming or extirpating aquatic species such as brook trout (Webb 2014). Streams may also become more alkaline due to mine runoff and underground mine pumping, which can also alter stream habitat.

7. Climate Change: Climate change will also affect both warm and cold water streams. Changes to precipitation regimes and temperatures will result in changes to flow patterns, erosion rates, and water temperatures.

Conservation Management Actions

Water Quality Improvement Plans have been developed by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and various partners. Watersheds within the planning region that have Water Quality Improvement Plans include: Back Creek (New River – Highlands RC&D 2006), Crab Creek (Crab Creek IP Steering Committee 2014), Dodd Creek (DCR and MapTech 2006b), Mill Creek (DCR and MapTech 2006b), Little River (MapTech and New River-Highlands 2011), and Upper Stroubles Creek (Stroubles Creek Steering Committee 2006) (Figure 9).

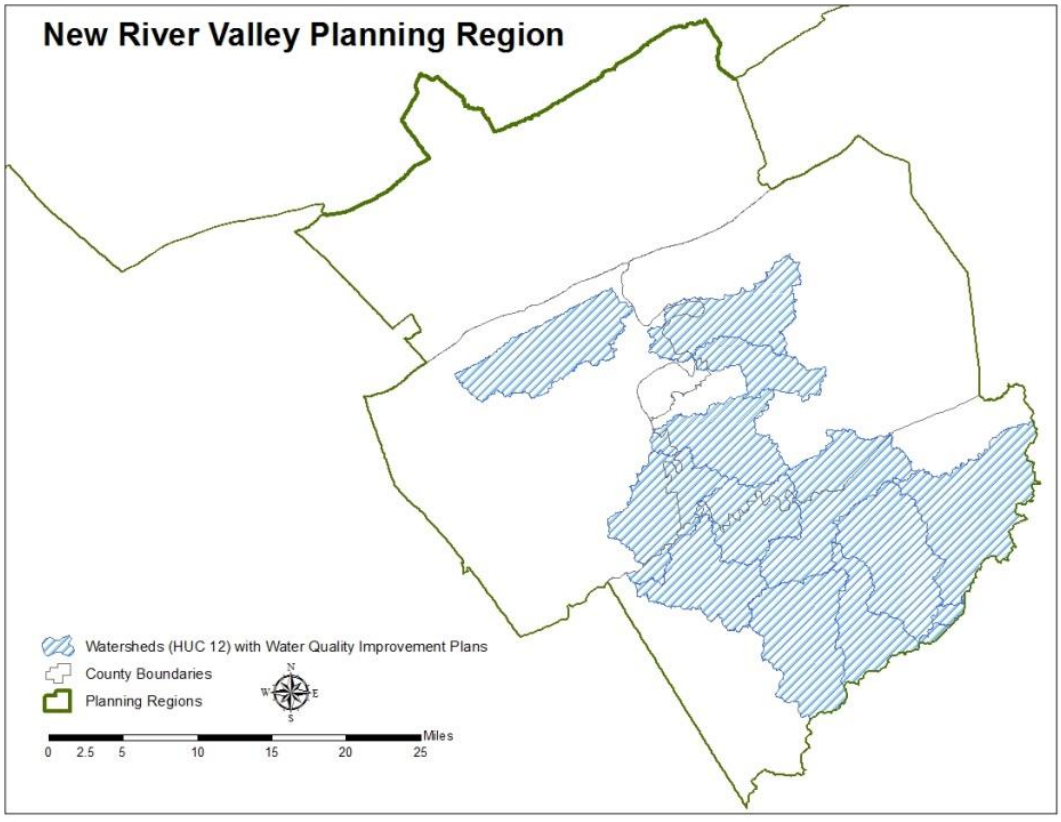

Figure 9. Watersheds with Water Quality Improvement Plan.

Each of these watersheds is designated as being impaired, and the primary actions needed to improve water quality within these watersheds include:

- Establishing vegetated and/ or forested riparian buffers;
- Working to restore or create wetlands;
- Restoring and revegetating stream banks and channels;
- Reforesting erodible upland areas and disturbed areas;
- Improving pasture management to prevent manure and tainted sediment from flowing into streams;
- Excluding livestock from streams;
- Harvesting forest products utilizing available BMPs;
- Repairing or replacing failing septic systems and eliminating “straight pipes” that deposit human waste into the stream;
- Implementing a program to encourage storm water infiltration including rain gardens, bioretention ponds, and other techniques;
- Implementing a pet waste disposal program including waste stations and digesters;
- Implementing erosion and sediment control efforts in residential areas;
- Relocating a gravel road in a riparian area between Horse Farm and Rt. 460);
- Restoring culvert capacity along Kabrich Street;
- Upgrading culverts along Rt. 460;
- Improving wastewater disposal for downtown businesses;
- Enhancing street sweeping;
- Reducing the improper disposal of grass clippings and trash;
- Detecting and eliminate illicit storm water discharges to the sanitary sewer system;
- Establishing an ordinance prohibiting illegal dumping and non-storm water discharges to streams; and
- Establishing an education and outreach campaign to promote efforts to improve water quality within this watershed.

Members of Virginia’s conservation community may consider working in other watersheds of local significance that may not have a Water Quality Improvement Plan. The Virginia Watershed Integrity Model identifies high value watersheds within the planning region for conservation based on their proximity to headwater streams, drinking water source protection, and biological integrity indices (Ciminelli and Scrivani 2007). These areas provide a starting point for identifying additional areas to focus conservation efforts (Figure 10).

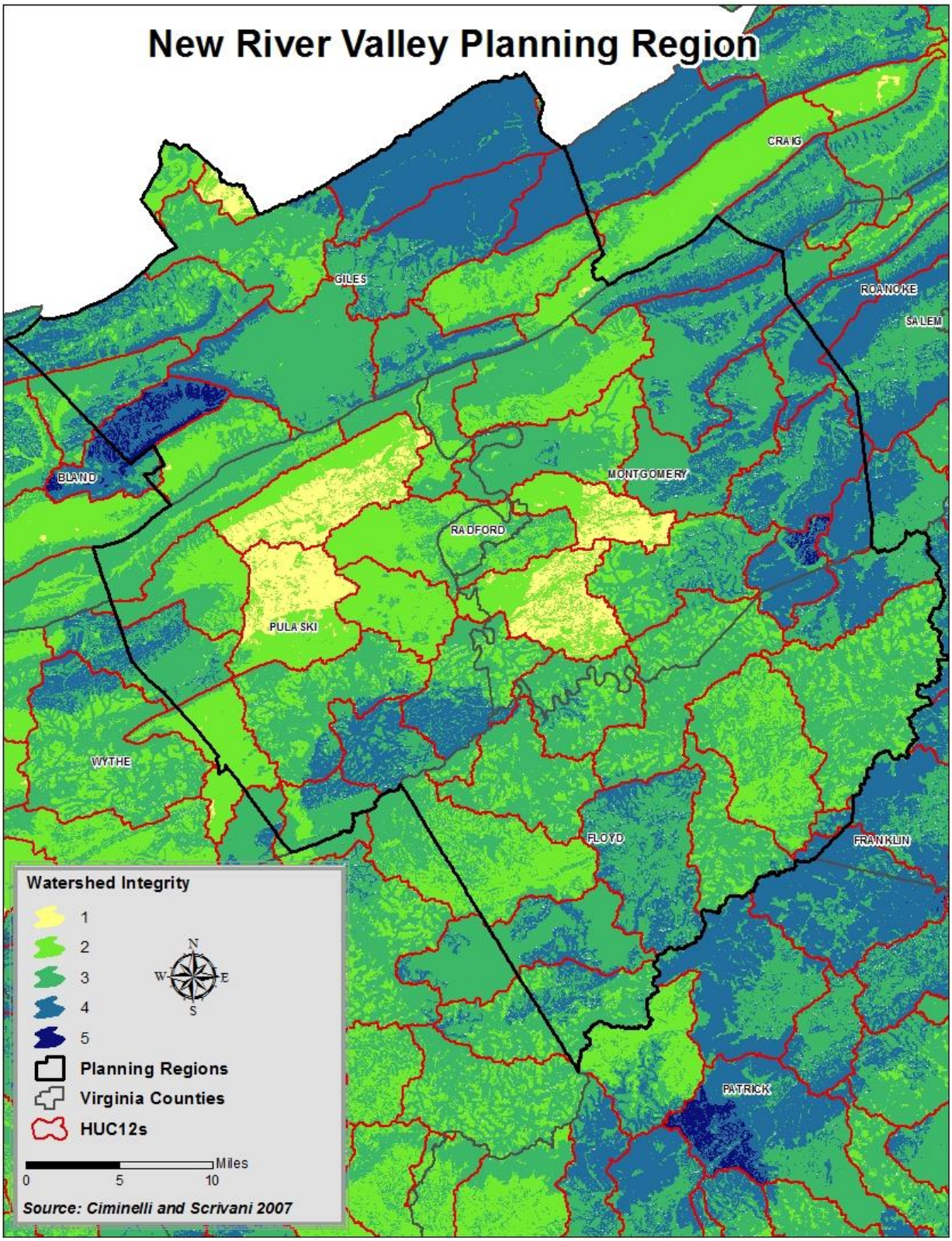

Figure 10. Watershed Integrity Model for New River Valley Planning Region (Criminelli and Scrivani 2007).

Several conservation actions common to most water quality and instream habitat enhancement plans can be implemented with little chance of ill consequence to wildlife or human communities downstream in these areas. Some of the most beneficial actions would include:

- Working with landowners to exclude livestock from streams;
- Restoring or enhancing vegetated riparian buffers;
- Reducing impervious surface by replacing with more porous materials or vegetation; and
- Working to enhance the health of upland forests and grassland habitats.

Additionally, many agencies help landowners in the New River Valley Planning Region establish vegetative buffers along waterways flowing through their properties. The Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF), Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), and DCR have established BMPs for various land uses which, if implemented serve to minimize land use impacts upon adjacent and downstream waters. In addition, landowners are encouraged to work with DOF through the Forest Stewardship Program to utilize timber production BMPs, such as implementation of buffers and careful planning of roads and stream crossings, and agricultural producers are encouraged to work with VDACS and the local Soil and Water Conservation Districts to control erosion and limit runoff through the various available programs (DOF 2014; DCR 2014). NRCS provides landowners with other opportunities, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Additional actions to improve aquatic systems in the New River Valley Planning Region include: restoring aquatic connections (i.e., removing culverts, dams, etc.), monitoring and addressing invasive species impacts, and working with the planning region to adopt use practices or policies through zoning or other guidelines (e.g., impervious surface limits) to help improve the health of aquatic systems within and downstream of regions that have significant impervious surface areas. Additionally, land acquisitions or easements that will help protect the land surrounding creeks should also be considered.

Climate-Smart Management Actions

When planting, restoring, or maintaining riparian buffers, managers should consider how conditions may change in the area and work with appropriate vegetation. For example, if stream flow is expected to become erratic due to increased precipitation or more frequent flooding as is projected to occur, native tree and shrub species that can tolerate flood conditions and inundation should be included in the selected plant species. Utilizing native species that may provide better erosion control (broader, deeper roots) than other should be encouraged. Techniques and tools may be needed (e.g., fencing, biomats, etc.) to ensure success. Additionally, as stream temperatures will likely increase and hydrologic regimes may shift, it will be important to focus on maintaining and/ or improving stream connectivity to ensure aquatic organism can move to preferred habitats as these conditions change. Minimizing impervious surface will be even more important under climate change as increased storm intensity will likely result in increased levels of stormwater runoff. Improving stormwater control methods, to ensure they account for predicted changes in precipitation and flow, could help minimize the future impacts of storm water under climate change (Kane 2013).

Conserve and Manage Forest Habitats

Mixed hardwood and conifer forests make up almost two thirds of the New River Valley Planning Region and are important for a broad range of species (Table 4). Within this forest type, young forests make up a specific age class of forest, loosely defined as referring to areas dominated by woody seedlings and saplings (Oehler et al. 2006). Previously, young forests may have been referred to as an early successional habitat for eastern portions of North America. The young forest component (age class) in most of the forests within the planning region is lacking, which will impact the tree species present within these forests in the future. Lack of young forest habitat has detrimental effects on the wildlife species that depend on this forest stage for survival. Spruce-fir forests make up a very small percentage of the forest types within this planning region, while the majority of the forested lands are made up of mixed hardwoods and conifers. These forests help protect water resources within the region and provide habitat for species such as the Yonahlossee salamander, Jefferson salamander, and Northern saw-whet owl, among others.

Table 4. Forest Acreage Totals in the New River Valley Planning Region (Anderson et al. 2013).

Forest Type	Acreage	Percent of Planning Region
Spruce Fir	131.22	0.01%
Mixed Hardwood and Conifer	613,009.04	65.11%

Threats

Forests within this planning region face a range of threats.

1. Land Use Changes and Conversion: The largest threat to spruce fir and mixed hardwood and conifer forests within the New River Valley Planning Region is fragmentation, mainly due to expanding residential and commercial development and resulting roads. In many cases, the losses can be complete and have profound impacts on local wildlife species composition, water quality, and outdoor recreational opportunities. If established BMPs are followed, then impacts to waterways and adjoining properties can be prevented or mitigated such as through implementation of vegetative buffer areas (see below). Mining and other extractive uses could also degrade habitat and affect species composition and water quality.

2. Invasive Species: Invasive plant species and pests are also a significant problem in this region. Of particular note is the hemlock wooly adelgid. Although more prevalent in the western portion of the state, it may still affect oaks and other species within these forests (DOF 2014).

3. Lack of Young Forest Conditions: During recent decades, managers of federal and state-owned forests have managed properties for mature forest conditions. While mature forests provide habitat for a variety of species, the lack of young forest conditions in the western parts of Virginia has curtailed distribution of many species that rely upon open habitats. Forests with balanced age classes are critical for the health of the forest and the survival of forest dependent wildlife species.

4. Climate Change: More intense storm events, higher temperatures, and the potential for droughts may exacerbate existing stressors as well as damage intact forests and result in more forest fires and an increase in incidence of pests.

Conservation Management Actions

Actions for conserving mixed hardwood and conifer forests (the majority of the spruce fir forests in the planning region are already under some form of conservation) in the New River Valley Planning Region may include working to conserve, either through acquisition, easement, cooperative management, or incentives, intact forest patches capable of supporting a variety of Action Plan species. Land protection will help reduce conversion of forests to development.

Working with landowners to ensure BMPs such as vegetative buffers are in place around agricultural operations or timber harvest areas will help prevent erosion and run off of sediments and nutrients into adjacent streams. Research demonstrates that vegetative riparian buffers can filter significant amounts of nutrient run off from timber operations and agricultural fields (DOF 2014). Some BMPs recommend a 50 foot buffer and allow some timber harvest within the buffers, while other BMPs encourage a 100 foot buffer with no harvest (DOF 2014; A. Ewing, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, personal communication, 2015). BMPs also recommend building roads on areas with minimum slope and minimizing or avoiding stream crossings (DOF 2014). The *Draft Crab Creek Bacteria and Sediment TMDL Implementation Plan* developed by stakeholders and DEQ specifically highlights reforesting areas around eroding crop lands and pastures within the Crab Creek watershed to help decrease sediment run off as well as provide wildlife habitat (Crab Creek IP Steering Committee 2014). Similar actions are recommended for the Little River watersheds (MapTech and New River-Highlands 2011)

Several agencies, including DGIF, NRCS, DOF, and the USFS advocate that efforts be expanded to create young forest habitats on public lands. Managing forests via silvicultural practices and/or through the use of fire are the most economical options to create these desired conditions.

Working to maintain forest health (balance age classes and diversity of tree species) is also integral to ensuring forest habitat is available to be conserved and protected. DOF makes several key recommendations that relate to habitat health, including but not limited to using species within their native ranges, if feasible using a mix of tree species to help minimize susceptibility to pests, preventing unnecessary site disturbance, and protecting unusual (rare) forest habitats (DOF 2014). In terms of invasive species and pests, monitoring and control will be important to prevent its spread. Some of these forest habitats should be managed with thinning and prescribed burns to minimize outbreaks (Brooks and Lusk 2008; DOF 2014).

Climate-Smart Management Actions

To best manage forests in the New River Valley Planning Region as the climate changes, it will be imperative to understand how climate may affect potential future composition of forests in Virginia and how that may affect SCGN. Conservation and management efforts may need to focus on trees that can better withstand increased temperatures and drought, among other impacts. Providing forest habitat at elevation gradients for species migration also will be an important factor for enhancing resilience to climate change. Managers may wish to consult the U.S. Forest Service's tree atlas when planning management and conservation of these forests. Additionally, harvest guidelines may need to be revised,

depending on projections for future tree composition. Invasive species monitoring and prevention will also become even more important to include in forest management as climate change may favor some tree pests, diseases, and invasive species.

In terms of considering how to best manage for birds, mammals, and other species that depend on these forests, managers will want to try to provide refugia for SGCN as habitat is lost as well as establishing corridors both north/ south and east/west between protected areas to assist with species movements as conditions change (King and Finch 2013). Some SGCN will not be able to migrate without contiguous forests, so some species may still be lost, but implementing conservation management actions and developing corridors can help provide can them the best chance at continued existence. It will also be important to work to maintain species diversity and continue to reduce existing stressors that will likely exacerbate impacts from climate change (McKelvey et al. 2013).

Maintain and Restore Open Habitats

Open habitats represent an assortment of habitat types that are botanically characterized by grasses, forbs, and shrubs. Trees may be present, but they tend to be widely spaced and crowns do not form a canopy. DGIF biologists and partners have indicated several varieties of open habitats are important for action plan species. Open habitats are often comprised of post-agricultural lands, glades, and barrens and make up approximately 3,240 acres (0.34 percent) of the planning region (Anderson et al. 2013). These habitats are becoming rare in Virginia as agriculture and timber harvest practices change; however, they are important to a range of species that depend on these areas for nesting, feeding, protection, etc. These areas provide habitat for the golden-winged warbler, Henslow's sparrow, loggerhead shrike, Persius duskywing butterfly, Buffalo Mountain mealybug, and Appalachian grizzled skipper, among others.

Threats

Changing land use patterns has played a large role in the loss of open habitats as has alteration to natural disturbance regimes.

1. Land Use Changes: Dozens of open habitat species have been affected by changing land use and agricultural practices that resulted in either degraded or destroyed open habitats. The most serious threats to remaining open habitats within the planning region involve either development (where habitats are converted for human use) or natural succession (where trees are allowed to dominate and the site eventually becomes forest).

2. Invasive Species: Invasive species are also problematic, especially tree of heaven, Japanese stilt grass, garlic mustard, and privet. These species can out-compete native open habitat species and take over the landscape. Some species such as tree of heaven can change the landscape from an open habitat to a more closed habitat relatively quickly due to its ability to spread and colonize areas rapidly (VISWG 2012). Japanese stilt grass also grows quickly and in mats that can crowd out native grasses. It also alters soil pH inhibiting growth of other native plants (VISWG 2012).

Conservation Management Actions

Specific management practices could include the removal of non-native grasses, encouraging the growth of native warm-season grasses, shrubs and forbs, and periodic disturbance (e.g., burning, mowing, disking, etc.) to maintain the early successional communities and prevent the growth of forest trees (DGIF 2015). Opportunities also exist with forest managers. Silviculture creates young forest conditions that can be managed to provide open habitat opportunities for the first 10 to 15 years after harvest (WMI 2014). Additional actions include working to protect open land patches at a minimum of 20 acres (Wolter et al. 2006). Focus also should be placed on protecting circular or square patches rather than rectangular areas to minimize edge effect (Wolter et al. 2006). NRCS provides landowners with opportunities to improve or restore open habitats via programs like the Conservation Reserve Program and the Environmental Quality Incentive Program.

Many glade habitats occur within this planning region. The majority occur on conserved lands. Conserving these habitats will require managing invasive species, maintain the vegetative communities with fire, and managing the recreations uses of these areas to prevent the unique plant communities from being trampled.

Climate-Smart Management Actions

Changes in temperature and precipitation regimes could negatively affect open lands as temperatures increase and summers become drier and more drought prone. However, research demonstrates that many species that make up open habitats are already relatively drought tolerant, meaning that open lands may not be as affected by climate change as other habitats if they can maintain their diverse make up of vegetation species (Craine et al. 2012). It is important to note that if there is extended severe drought, open lands may succumb over time (Craine et al. 2012). To maintain diversity and help build resiliency in open lands within this planning region, it will be important to implement the management options above, especially focusing on removing non-natives and ensuring a diverse mix of vegetation species. Additionally, working to protect and preserve larger tracts of grasslands will help provide refugia for the species that depend on this habitat.

Effectiveness Measures Examples

As discussed within the Action Plan's Introduction (see Measuring the Effectiveness of Conservation Actions), it is increasingly important for the conservation community to demonstrate the effectiveness of conservation actions. Elected officials, budget authorities, private donors, and members of the public want to know that their investments in wildlife conservation are having the desired effects. During 2011, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies developed and tested a series of effectiveness measures meant to support the Wildlife Action Plan implementation and the State Wildlife Grants program (AFWA 2011).

Virginia's 2015 Wildlife Action Plan describes a diversity of conservation actions that should help keep species from becoming endangered. The majority of these involve habitat protection, habitat restoration, controlling invasive species, or implementing efforts to keep pollutants from flowing into Virginia's waterways. Important data that can demonstrate the effectiveness of these conservation actions can include the following:

Conservation Action	Indicators of Effectiveness
Creation of Vegetative/ Forest Buffers along Streams or Wetlands	• Before/ after photos of project site; • Photos documenting changes as vegetation matures over multiple years; • Before/ after measurements of sedimentation immediately downstream of site; and • Changes in the number and diversity of species utilizing the site.
Control of Invasive Plants	• Before/ after photos of project site; • Photos documenting changes as restored vegetation matures over multiple years; and • Before/ after comparison of the number and diversity of species utilizing the site.
Remove Cattle from Streams	• Before/ after photos of project site; • Photos of alternative watering systems (if appropriate) • Photos documenting changes in shoreline as restored vegetation matures over multiple years; • Before/ after comparison of sediment and water chemistry immediately downstream of site; and • Before/ after comparison of the number and diversity of species utilizing the site.
Creating or Improving Open Habitats	• Before/after photos of project site; • Photos documenting changes to the site as the vegetation matures; and • Before/ after comparison of the number and diversity of species utilizing the site.

CONCLUSION

The development of the Virginia Wildlife Action Plan presented a unique opportunity for the Commonwealth—an opportunity not only to assess the condition and status of the state's wildlife and habitat resources, but to provide a shared vision and purpose in the management and conservation of this "common wealth." The true value of this initiative is this recognition of common interests and the enhancement of existing and fostering of new partnerships to address issues of mutual concern. The Action Plan's long-term success will depend on the implementation of the recommended actions by partners across the state and the effectiveness with which conservation partners collectively manage these natural resources.

This Local Action Plan Summary aims to prioritize species, habitats, and conservation actions within this planning region, so that partners working within this region can use limited resources to greatest effect. However, Virginia faces serious issues. Not addressing these problems would risk more species becoming threatened or endangered, the quality of our land and water would decline, and Virginians could lose important pieces of our natural heritage that contribute to our quality of life. However, there are significant conservation opportunities to benefit wildlife and people in the planning region. Our

problems are not insurmountable, and most can be addressed with proven conservation management techniques.

Working to maintain and protect existing high quality habitat will be a priority before restoration; however, restoration is still an important action and necessary in many cases. Within the New River Valley Planning Region, priority conservation opportunities include:

- Protecting karst habitats.
- Maintaining existing vegetated wetlands and restoring vegetated wetland habitats where possible.
- Protecting the quantity and quality of water.
- Maintain and conserve patches of spruce fir and mixed hardwood conifer forests.
- Enhance and protect open habitats.

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APPENDIX A. COMPLETE LIST OF SPECIES OF GREATEST CONSERVATION NEED IN NEW RIVER VALLEY PLANNING REGION

Complete SGCN list for the New River Valley Planning Region (SGCN=115). Table includes federal and state statuses, Wildlife Action Plan Tier, and Conservation Opportunity Rankings. Species are listed in alphabetical order by taxa.

Taxa	Conservation Status	Tier	Opportunity Ranking	Common Name	Scientific Name
Amphibian		IV	c	Blue Ridge dusky salamander	*Desmognathus orestes*
Amphibian	**CC**	I	a	Eastern hellbender	*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis alleganiensis*
Amphibian		IV	a	Eastern mud salamander	*Pseudotriton montanus montanus*
Amphibian		IV	c	Eastern spadefoot	*Scaphiopus holbrookii*
Amphibian		IV	a	Jefferson salamander	*Ambystoma jeffersonianum*
Amphibian		II	a	Mountain chorus frog	*Pseudacris brachyphona*
Amphibian		III	a	Shovel-nosed salamander	*Desmognathus marmoratus*
Amphibian		IV	c	Yonahlossee salamander	*Plethodon yonahlossee*
Bird		II	a	American black duck	*Anas rubripes*
Bird		II	a	American woodcock	*Scolopax minor*
Bird		III	c	Bank swallow	*Riparia riparia*
Bird		III	a	Barn owl	*Tyto alba*
Bird		III	b	Belted kingfisher	*Megaceryle lcyon*
Bird		IV	a	Black-and-white warbler	*Mniotilta varia*
Bird		II	b	Black-billed cuckoo	*Coccyzus erythropthalmus*
Bird		IV	a	Brown thrasher	*Toxostoma rufum*
Bird		IV	b	Canada warbler	*Wilsonia canadensis*
Bird		II	a	Cerulean warbler	*Dendroica cerulea*
Bird		IV	b	Chimney swift	*Chaetura pelagica*
Bird		II	a	Common tern	*Sterna hirundo*
Bird		IV	a	Eastern kingbird	*Tyrannus tyrannus*
Bird		IV	a	Eastern meadowlark	*Sturnella magna*
Bird		IV	a	Eastern towhee	*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*
Bird		III	a	Eastern Whip-poor-will	*Caprimulgus vociferus*
Bird		IV	b	Eastern wood-pewee	*Contopus virens*
Bird		IV	a	Field sparrow	*Spizella pusilla*
Bird		I	a	Golden-winged warbler	*Vermivora chrysoptera*
Bird		IV	a	Grasshopper sparrow	*Ammodramus savannarum*
Bird		IV	a	Gray catbird	*Dumetella carolinensis*
Bird		IV	a	Greater scaup	*Aythya marila*

Bird		IV	b	Green heron	*Butorides virescens*
Bird	**ST**	I	a	Henslow's sparrow	*Ammodramus henslowii*
Bird		III	a	Kentucky warbler	*Oporornis formosus*
Bird	**ST**	I	a	Loggerhead shrike	*Lanius ludovicianus*
Bird		III	a	Northern bobwhite	*Colinus virginianus*
Bird		III	a	Northern harrier	*Circus cyaneus*
Bird		IV	c	Northern rough-winged swallow	*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*
Bird		I	b	Northern saw-whet owl	*Aegolius acadicus*
Bird	**ST**	I	a	Peregrine falcon	*Falco peregrinus*
Bird		III	c	Red crossbill	*Loxia curvirostra*
Bird		III	a	Ruffed grouse	*Bonasa umbellus*
Bird		IV	b	Rusty blackbird	*Euphagus carolinus*
Bird		II	b	Swainson's warbler	*Limnothlypis swainsonii*
Bird		IV	b	Virginia rail	*Rallus limicola*
Bird		IV	a	Whimbrel	*Numenius phaeopus*
Bird		IV	b	Wood thrush	*Hylocichla mustelina*
Bird		III	a	Yellow-billed cuckoo	*Coccyzus americanus*
Bird		IV	a	Yellow-breasted chat	*Icteria virens*
Crustacean	**FS**	I	a	Ephemeral cave amphipod	*Stygobromus ephemerus*
Crustacean	**FS**	II	c	Henrot's Cave isopod	*Caecidotea henroti*
Crustacean		III	b	Longclaw crayfish	*Cambarus buntingi*
Crustacean	**FS**	II	c	Montgomery County cave amphipod	*Stygobromus fergusoni*
Fish		IV	c	Appalachia darter	*Percina gymnocephala*
Fish	**FS**	III	c	Bigeye jumprock	*Moxostoma ariommum*
Fish		IV	c	Blackside darter	*Percina maculata*
Fish		IV	a	Brook trout	*Salvelinus fontinalis*
Fish	**CC**	I	b	Candy darter	*Etheostoma osburni*
Fish		III	c	Kanawha darter	*Etheostoma kanawhae*
Fish		III	c	Kanawha minnow	*Phenacobius teretulus*
Fish		IV	c	Logperch	*Percina caprodes*
Fish		IV	c	New River shiner	*Notropis scabriceps*
Fish	**FSST**	II	b	Orangefin madtom	*Noturus gilberti*
Fish		IV	c	Redlip shiner	*Notropis chiliticus*
Fish		I	a	Roanoke bass	*Ambloplites cavifrons*
Fish		IV	c	Roanoke hog sucker	*Hypentelium roanokense*
Fish	**FESE**	II	a	Roanoke logperch	*Percina rex*
Fish	**FS**	I	b	Roughhead shiner	*Notropis semperasper*

Fish		III	c	Rustyside sucker	*Thoburnia hamiltoni*
Fish		IV	c	Sharpnose darter	*Percina oxyrhynchus*
FW Mollusk	**FSST**	I	a	Atlantic pigtoe	*Fusconaia masoni*
FW Mollusk		IV	c	Atlantic spike	*Elliptio producta*
FW Mollusk		III	c	Blue Ridge springsnail	*Fontigens orolibas*
FW Mollusk		IV	a	Creeper	*Strophitus undulatus*
FW Mollusk		IV	c	Gravel elimia	*Elimia catenaria*
FW Mollusk	**ST**	II	a	Green Floater	*Lasmigona subviridis*
FW Mollusk	**FESE**	I	a	James spinymussel	*Pleurobema collina*
FW Mollusk		III	a	Notched rainbow	*Villosa constricta*
FW Mollusk	**ST**	III	b	Pistolgrip	*Tritogonia verrucosa*
FW Mollusk		IV	a	Pocketbook mussel	*Lampsilis ovata*
FW Mollusk		IV	c	Seep mudalia	*Leptoxis dilatata*
FW Mollusk	**SE**	II	a	Tennessee heelsplitter	*Lasmigona holstonia*
FW Mollusk		IV	a	Triangle floater	*Alasmidonta undulata*
FW Mollusk	**FS**	II	a	Yellow lance	*Elliptio lanceolata*
Insect	**FS**	II	c	A cave beetle	*Pseudanophthalmus gracilis*
Insect	**FSST**	I	c	Appalachian grizzled skipper	*Pyrgus wyandot*
Insect	**FSSE**	I	c	Buffalo Mountain mealybug	*Puto kosztarabi*
Insect		II	c	Green-faced clubtail	*Gomphus viridifrons*
Insect	**FESE**	I	c	Mitchell's satyr	*Neonympha mitchellii*
Insect	**FS**	II	c	New River Valley cave beetle	*Pseudanophthalmus egberti*
Insect	**FS**	II	c	Persius duskywing	*Erynnis persius persius*
Insect		II	c	Pygmy snaketail	*Ophiogomphus howei*
Insect	**FS**	I	c	Regal fritillary	*Speyeria idalia idalia*
Insect	**FS**	II	c	Spotted cave beetle	*Pseudanophthalmus punctatus*
Insect	**FS**	II	c	Straley's Cave beetle	*Pseudanophthalmus quadratus*
Insect	**FS**	II	c	Tawny crescent	*Phyciodes batesii batesii*
Mammal		IV	c	Allegheny woodrat	*Neotoma magister*
Mammal		IV	c	Appalachian cottontail	*Sylvilagus obscurus*
Mammal		I	c	Eastern small-footed myotis	*Myotis leibii*
Mammal		IV	c	Eastern spotted skunk	*Spilogale putorius putorius*
Mammal	**FESE**	II	a	Gray bat	*Myotis grisescens*
Mammal	**FESE**	I	b	Indiana myotis	*Myotis sodalis*
Mammal		IV	c	Long-tailed shrew	*Sorex dispar dispar*
Mammal	**FESE**	II	a	Virginia big-eared bat	*Corynorhinus townsendii virginianus*

Other Terrestrial Invertebrates	**FS**	II	c	A millipede	*Pseudotremia sublevis*
Other Terrestrial Invertebrates		II	c	A millipede	*PSEUDOTREMIA TUBERCULATA*
Other Terrestrial Invertebrates	**FSST**	I	c	Ellett Valley Pseudotremia millipede	*Pseudotremia cavernarum*
Other Terrestrial Invertebrates	**FSST**	I	c	Laurel Creek xystodesmid millipede	*Sigmoria whiteheadi*
Other Terrestrial Invertebrates	**FSSE**	I	c	Shaggy coil	*Helicodiscus diadema*
Other Terrestrial Invertebrates	**FESE**	I	a	Virginia fringed mountain snail	*Polygyriscus virginianus*
Reptile	**FTSE**	I	a	Bog turtle	*Clemmys muhlenbergii*
Reptile		IV	a	Common ribbonsnake	*Thamnophis sauritus sauritus*
Reptile		III	a	Eastern box turtle	*Terrapene carolina carolina*
Reptile		IV	c	Eastern hog-nosed snake	*Heterodon platirhinos*
Reptile		IV	a	Queen snake	*Regina septemvittata*
Reptile		III	a	Smooth greensnake	*Opheodrys vernalis*
Reptile	**CC**	IV	a	Timber rattlesnake	*Crotalus horridus (timber)*

APPENDIX B. SGCN SPATIAL ANALYSIS METHODS

Analysis Units

The species data was analyzed within three spatial units for Virginia: county, planning region, and hydrologic unit (HUC12). The source spatial data for these units were provided by Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF). The analysis extent was constrained to that of the Virginia counties, so that portions of the planning region and HUC12 units falling outside of the county boundaries were eliminated from the analysis. Each of the 21 planning region units was assigned an alphabetic code (e.g. Accomack-Northampton = "ACNO"). Nottoway County does not fall within the jurisdiction of any Virginia planning region and was not included in any of our analyses.

Species Data

The source data for the species analysis consisted of three datasets, all of which were provided by DGIF: aquatic tier I-II plus species, terrestrial potential and confirmed species, and peer-reviewed HUC12 species. Within these datasets, individual species are identified by Biota of Virginia (BOVA) code.

Methods

Aquatic Species

The aquatic species are represented in the source dataset by linear stream segments, or reaches. For each BOVA code present, the total length was calculated for all assigned reaches within the analysis extent. The dataset was then divided by the three analysis units, and the total BOVA length was summarized again by county, planning region, and HUC12. The BOVA percent of total length was calculated by dividing the species length for the analysis unit by the total species length.

Terrestrial Species

The terrestrial species are represented in the source dataset by area. For each BOVA code present, the total area was calculated within the analysis extent. The dataset was then divided by the three analysis units, and the total BOVA area was summarized again by county, planning region, and HUC12. The BOVA percent of total area was calculated by dividing the species area for the analysis unit by the total species area in Virginia.

Peer-Reviewed HUC12 Species

The peer-reviewed species are represented in the source dataset by 6th order hydrologic units. For each BOVA code present, the total area was calculated within the analysis extent. The dataset was then divided by the county and planning region analysis units, and the total BOVA area was summarized by county, planning region, and HUC12. The BOVA percent of total area was calculated by dividing the species area for the analysis unit by the total species area.

Priority SGCN

For each planning region, priority species were identified as those SGCNs with a total planning region unit area or length ≥ 10% of the total SGCN area or length for Virginia. SGCN unit calculations were drawn from only one of the source datasets: if an SGCN was present in both the aquatic dataset and the HUC12 dataset, then the aquatic dataset took preference; and if an SGCN was present in the terrestrial dataset and the HUC12 dataset, then the terrestrial dataset took preference.