

Heritage Data Management System (HDMS)

HDMS is part of a network of more than 80 Natural Heritage Programs and Conservation Data Centers worldwide. This information is made available to help Arizonans make prudent decisions weighing future development, economic growth, and environmental integrity.

During fiscal year 2015, Department staff entered 646 new records and updated an additional 1,088 records within the Department's HDMS. In addition, Department staff updated 200 species abstracts and created 38 new species abstracts; and provided occurrence and status information to 65 requests related to research, conservation actions, and development projects.

The Online Environmental Review Tool was moved to a new technical platform to enhance the users' experience. The tool is used for viewing Department data, creating maps, and receiving lists of species documented in a geographic area related to conservation, education, or development actions. Department staff continued to explore additional options of Citizen Science data collection.

IIAPM – Acquisition

The Arizona Game and Fish Commission (Commission) purchased a 31.64 acre parcel adjacent to the Page Springs Hatchery in Cornville, Arizona, along with a court approved water right for 106.8 acre feet appurtenant to 9.53 acres of land. The property includes approximately 0.25 mile of riparian stream habitat. The Department plans to manage the new property for the northern Mexican gartersnake.



The northern Mexican gartersnake is listed threatened, (effective August 7, 2014) under the ESA. This location has been included in the USFWS proposed designation of 5,533 acres (2,239 ha) of critical habitat along 38.5 stream mi (62.0 km) of Oak Creek, from its confluence with the Verde River south of Cornville, upstream to Midgely Bridge at the confluence with Wilson Canyon, in Coconino County, Arizona. The populations are known to have decreased, with several localities having experienced extirpation, occupying less than ten percent of its former range. The main cause of decline is destruction or modification of habitat. The northern Mexican gartersnake is a riparian obligate (generally found in riparian areas when not engaged in dispersal, gestation, or hibernation behaviors), and this population, specific to the Bubbling Ponds Hatchery, occurs in small, often isolated wetlands such as cienegas—mid-elevation wetlands with highly organic, reducing (basic or alkaline) soils.

Public and Private Lands: Sensitive Habitats (Heritage IIAPM Stewardships)

The focus of the Identification, Inventory, Acquisition, Protection and Management (IIAPM) program is to work cooperatively with private landowners to accomplish projects that benefit sensitive habitat and at-risk species. Every effort is made to match these state funds against federal programs in order to expand the scope and impact of these projects.

The Sensitive Habitats Project works to improve the status of wildlife with particular emphasis on those species listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Department's SWAP Plan and restore sensitive habitats for species at-risk.

The Department worked with Landowners to complete 12 new habitat agreements utilizing Heritage IIAPM funding, of which two were focused to directly benefit perennial waters and riparian habitats, which are critical for wildlife in Arizona. In regards to utilizing these funds as match to federal programs, nearly all 15 of the agreements matched Department funds to outside sources bringing in a total of \$330,000 in non-department funding. Staff paid out of this fund also worked on an additional three habitat agreements that improved grassland habitat for a suite of grassland obligate species. Together these nine projects leveraged funding from non-profit groups and several federal agencies to a total of \$250,000.

Examples of IIAPM Stewardship Projects:

The Sands Ranch Project

The Sands Ranch project will restore 650 acres of grassland habitat and reliable water for wildlife on over 5,000 acres of rangeland. The total cost of this project was \$150,000 of which the Department provided \$34,000 in Heritage funding. The remaining \$114,000 in funding was secured by Department Staff for the ranch to complete this project.

Mexican Wolf/Livestock Conflict Reduction Project

In fiscal year 2015, the Department entered into four agreements with four separate ranches in Eastern Arizona in order to reduce wolf/livestock conflicts. Two projects provided funding to a ranch to bring livestock into a home pasture during calving to reduce the threat of wolf interaction with the calves. Two projects provided funding to move livestock out of wolf habitat and into a new pasture during the calving season.

HABITAT EVALUATION AND PROTECTION

As defined in Title 17, Heritage Habitat Evaluation and Protection funds shall be spent on programs that provide assessment of the status, condition and ecological value of habitat and subsequent recommendations of management, conservation, mitigation or other protection measures, including but not limited to; recommendation of reasonable alternatives for the proposed projects that might otherwise affect the habitat under assessment; in addition to protecting the quality, diversity, abundance, and serviceability of habitats for the purposes of maintaining or recovering populations of Arizona wildlife.

Heritage IIAPM and Habitat Evaluation and Protection funding supports a realty program that includes acquisition, disposals, and exchanges; existing property and water rights tracking; land and water use fees associated with Commission owned property; drafting and execution of land use agreements on Commission owned properties; drafting and execution of land use agreements with federal, state, local government, and private property; project review on Commission owned property; and maintenance of property and water right information.

- In fiscal year 2015, the Department paid \$18,127.06 from Heritage non-acquisition funds for voluntary payments in lieu of taxes.