

The science of restoring endangered species depends upon good data, suitable habitat—and a plan.

Recovery Plans



River otter (*Lontra canadensis*)

(Photo courtesy Michael Jeffords.)

Crucial to the survival of any endangered species is a comprehensive understanding of suitable habitat and a distinctive management plan which encourages permanent habitat protection and sustainable, healthy populations. These items are typically addressed by biologists in a formal document known as a Recovery Plan.

The Illinois Endangered Species Protection Act, passed in 1972, mandates that the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) actively plan and implement programs for the conservation of endangered/threatened species with the advice of the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board. Programs may include research, management, habitat acquisition and education of the general public. Recovery plans provide the format by which biologists can officially describe the recovery goals, objectives and criteria for a listed species. These technical documents typically advocate an overall goal of re-establishing native, listed plants or ani-

mals in suitable habitats, monitoring populations and conserving key habitats to ensure the long-term viability of the species. The target area can be as general as across all of North America, or a specific county within Illinois. A number of state recovery plans have been prepared and published to date by DNR including: river otter (*Lontra canadensis*), Eastern wood rat (*Neotoma floridana*), greater prairie-chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido*) and alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys temminckii*).

The river otter recovery plan has been successfully implemented and this animal was officially removed from the state's endangered and threatened species list in September 2004.

Translocation/re-introduction efforts for the Eastern wood rat continue in extreme southern Illinois and post-release monitoring is yielding positive results.

Intensive grassland habitat acquisition and prairie management for the greater prairie-chicken continues in southeastern Illinois, and DNR is investigating the feasibility of prairie-chicken

survival on other large grassland complexes, such as the Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie near Joliet.

Initial translocation efforts for the alligator snapping turtle will begin in the lower Mississippi River drainage in 2007 and continue for the next 10 to 15 years.

With the availability of several new state and federal conservation initiatives such as SWG (State Wildlife Grants), LIP (Landowner Incentive Program) and WHIP (Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program), DNR has the unique opportunity to partner with various conservation organizations and citizens groups. These partnerships will greatly contribute toward and facilitate the continued recovery of Illinois' most imperiled plant and animal species. There are many conservation challenges ahead in the 21st century and the key to success remains cooperation.



—**Joe Kath**, Terrestrial Endangered Species Project Manager, DNR Division of Natural Heritage

(Photo courtesy Joe McFarland.)

Eastern wood rat (*Neotoma floridana*)

