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## News Release

Norton Announces 56 States and Territories Have Submitted Wildlife Action Plans; Blueprint to Keep Species from Becoming Endangered

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( WASHINGTON ) -- Interior Secretary Gale Norton today announced that wildlife agencies from all 50 states and six U.S. territories have submitted Wildlife Action Plans for approval by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, establishing a nationwide blueprint to conserve imperiled species so they dont become threatened or endangered.

If approved, the Wildlife Action Plans will be the first of their kind - a thorough state-by-state look at wildlife and the actions needed to ensure their survival. The action plans also will allow states and territories to continue to receive grants under the State Wildlife Grant program created under bipartisan legislation signed by President Bush in 2001. Since then, the Fish and Wildlife Service has provided \$400 million in grants to states and territories for conservation efforts.

The law required states and territories to have their individual plans submitted to the Service by October 2005. The Service currently plans to distribute \$68.5 million in grants next spring for states and territories to implement approved action plans.

"These plans represent a future for conservation in America that is rooted in cooperation and partnership between the federal government and states, tribes, local governments, conservation groups, private landowners and others with a commitment to the health of our land and water, fish and

wildlife," Norton said. "Working together, we are tapping into the expertise of those who live and work on the land so that we can conserve our fish and wildlife before they become threatened or endangered."

"Through State Wildlife Grants, we are empowering states, territories, and their many partners to do what the federal government cannot do alone," she said. "The grant program is now our nations primary conservation program for keeping species healthy and off the list of threatened and endangered species."

The Wildlife Action Plans establish a coordinated strategy for wildlife agencies to help all wildlife species. In the past, most of the states and territories have had great success in managing game species. This new program will help fund expansion of their conservation work to include all wildlife species and their habitats.

Norton said she has instructed the Fish and Wildlife Service to work with all Interior land management agencies as well as other federal land management agencies to support the goals and objectives outlined in the wildlife action plans in their agencies - land management strategies and plans

"The bottom line is that we use a strong pro-active approach in constructing our state wildlife action plans to ensure the health and survival of all wildlife," says John Cooper, president of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. "It has resulted in closer working relationships with other conservation agencies and organization within our states. Never has such a comprehensive set of plans been constructed with so much input."

"Investments to breathe life into the state wildlife strategies are at the heart of assuring a full wildlife legacy for our childrens future," said Larry Schweiger, president of the National Wildlife Federation.

A team of eight U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists and five state wildlife administrators are in the process of reviewing the plans and will forward their recommendations to the Service Director for final approval.

States may use the funds for either planning or project implementation activities. For the 50 states, the apportionment is based on a formula that uses each states land area and population. States may receive no more than 5 percent or less than 1 percent of the total available funds. The District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico will receive one-half of 1 percent and Guam , American Samoa , the U.S. Virgin Islands and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marina Islands will receive one-fourth of 1 percent.

Each states - or territories - plan must contain information on low and declining populations of wildlife and the habitats they require, identify problems that affect these populations, identify research and survey efforts to improve their conservation efforts, determine actions and priorities. Once the state plans have been approved agencies will revise and update their plans at least once every 10 years.

To learn more about an individual state plan, please contact the state wildlife agencys press officers. A comprehensive list can be found at "**COLOR: blue; <http://www.teaming.com/Newsroom.htm> (<http://www.teaming.com/Newsroom.htm>)** .

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