EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Natural resources have shaped Idaho's history. The native people of Idaho and more recent residents, beginning 200 years ago with the Corps of Discovery and the Lewis and Clark expedition, have understood the value of natural resources and the need for conserving wildlife. For 60 years, fish and wildlife management benefited from funds accumulated when the U. S. Congress passed the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (i.e., Pittman–Robertson Act) in 1937, the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act (i.e., Dingell–Johnson Act) in 1950, and the Aquatic Resources Trust Act (Wallop–Breaux Amendment) in 1984. These programs, along with state hunting, trapping, and fishing license revenues have been critical to the establishment of state conservation agencies and have provided the primary financial support for game management in Idaho and throughout the country.

Conservation actions targeting game benefited many nongame species by improving habitats. Although these programs have had many successes, some species have continued to decline. Limited resources, specifically funding and restrictions on the use of funds, have constrained the conservation and management of the full diversity of terrestrial and aquatic species in Idaho. Additional funding sources have provided some assistance in addressing the need for direct support of nongame. For example, in 1973, the U. S. Congress passed the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which provided funding to focus on the recovery of federally listed species. In 1981, the State passed legislation to create the Nongame Fund. Monies donated to this fund through a state income tax check–off, and beginning in 1992 the sale of wildlife license plates, supported the establishment of a nongame program and associated education projects.

Even with the addition of these funding sources, Idaho struggles to provide adequately for the majority of its wildlife. In general, the availability of funding for nongame wildlife conservation and management has remained insufficient and unpredictable. This has resulted in conservation efforts that are opportunistic rather than strategic, especially for declining species that are not yet listed as endangered or threatened, and for taxa that remain relatively unstudied, such as some snails and insects. Coordination and strategic planning for the conservation of the entire range of wildlife diversity in Idaho, with consideration of long–term goals and landscape scales, is needed.

In 2001, the U. S. Congress began to appropriate federal funds through the state Wildlife Grants program (SWG) to help meet the need for conservation of all fish and wildlife. Along with this new funding came the responsibility of each state to develop a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS). Idaho has embraced this program by developing a comprehensive strategy that will serve to coordinate the efforts of all partners working toward conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitats across the state. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) has coordinated this effort in compliance with its legal mandate to protect and manage all of the state's fish and wildlife resources. However, the Strategy's development has been, and its implementation must be, a collective endeavor of Idaho's conservation partners,

including state, federal, and tribal agencies, local governments, conservation organizations, universities, industry, and private landowners.

The aim of Idaho's CWCS is to provide a common framework that will enable conservation partners to jointly implement a long–term approach for the benefit of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). To this end, this strategy promotes proactive conservation to ensure cost–effective solutions instead of reactive measures enacted in the face of imminent losses. Specifically, the Strategy:

(1) identifies 229 SGCN (103 invertebrates, 126 vertebrates) and associated habitats;

(2) provides an ecological, habitat–based framework to aid in the conservation and management of SGCN;

(3) recommends actions to improve the population status and habitat conditions of SGCN;

(4) describes an approach for long–term monitoring to assess the success of conservation efforts and to integrate new information as it becomes available;

(5) complements other conservation strategies, funding sources, planning initiatives, and legally mandated activities;

(6) incorporates public participation throughout development and implementation to provide an opportunity for all conservation partners and Idaho residents to influence the future of resource management;

(7) provides guidance for use of SWG funds and fulfills federal requirements associated with these funds; and

(8) provides a clear process for reviewing and revising the Strategy to address changing conditions.

We used an objective rule–based process to evaluate all animals thought by experts to be a candidate for SGCN. This process was designed specifically to reduce subjectivity and to obtain an objective state rank for species considered for inclusion as SGCN. Factors included, but were not limited to, information about population size, trend, viability, environmental specificity, threats, and protection status. A total of 229 animals (103 invertebrates, 126 vertebrates) were identified as SGCN. Of these, 64 species (44 invertebrates, 20 vertebrates) lacked essential information pertaining to their status (i.e., SRank) in Idaho. Therefore, their primary conservation need is more basic population information. For the remaining 165 species (60 invertebrates, 105 vertebrates) there is enough information to determine their status in the state, identify conservation issues, and recommend conservation actions.

We used 55 ecological systems, defined as recurring groups of vegetative communities with similar physical environments (e.g., cool temperate rainforest with basalt geology) and influenced by comparable ecological processes (e.g., fire) as the primary land cover units. Ecological systems provided a universally recognized classification scheme for remotely–sensed imagery that was aggregated into 18 spatially exclusive habitats covering the entire State. These included potential native vegetation (e.g., dry conifer forest habitat) and human–influenced environments (e.g., urban habitat). Furthermore, by examining the distribution of SGCN and ecological systems/habitats we inferred species habitat relationships.

Traditional wildlife management tends to focus on single species. However, given the dearth of information for some of the SGCN, we felt a species–by–species approach was not the most effective nor practical way to conserve biological diversity. Alternatively, maintenance of ecological processes rather than management for individual taxonomic groups may be a more productive way to use limited resources to benefit the most species. Therefore, the Strategy used the best available data to emphasize the principles of ecosystem management. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that ecosystem processes operate over a wide range of spatial and temporal scales, and that information gaps and poorly understood relationships do occur at various ecological levels. Nevertheless, some species may not respond to changes within their habitat or share habitat associations with other SGCN. These species cannot be ignored and may require a single–species approach. We believe using a species–based fine filter to assess and address the needs of these species in conjunction with the habitat–based coarse filter results in a balanced approach to conserving Idaho's wildlife diversity.

The vast majority of the document individually addresses needs of SGCN and their associated habitats within a nested geographic design consisting of the entire state, 5 ecoregions (e.g., Canadian Rocky Mountains), and 14 ecological sections (e.g., Okanogan Highlands), We believe this format will be valuable to conservation partners regardless of the spatial extent of the area of focus or land ownership type. Furthermore, habitat and geographic summaries include a general description of the physical environment, ownership and land uses, identify priority habitats and associated vertebrate SGCN, issues of concern for conservation, and recommended actions. In combination with other available data, this information will enable all conservation partners to make more informed decisions regarding SGCN and habitats. Given the different interests and resources of potential partners, not all of the information provided will be pertinent or of use for all purposes.

Implementation of recommended actions should proceed by acknowledging that ecological processes are dynamic, and that change and evolution are inherent in sustainable ecosystems. Therefore, the Strategy also incorporates principles of adaptive management to aid in conservation of these processes over the long term.

Throughout the development of the document we have adhered to the concept that this is a strategy, not a plan. It is not regulatory and is not intended to be prescriptive. The

recommended actions in the Strategy are general, and operational plans must develop specific conservation actions by involving partners, setting measurable objectives, and establishing monitoring protocols before implementation is possible. We have organized the content of the Strategy to provide maximum utility for conservation stakeholders to use in identifying meaningful actions. The Strategy is designed to be cohesive and provide continuity from beginning to end, but individual chapters and sections can also be used as stand–alone documents. For example, users can refer to a particular species, habitat, or ecological section to gain an understanding of issues and recommended actions that might be most appropriate for their specific location or interests. It is our intent that this document be used to appropriately address the needs and interests of a wide range of conservation partners at varying spatial scales.

This Strategy has been nearly 3 years in development. The process was greatly strengthened by the input, feedback, and participation of hundreds of stakeholders across the state. However, this is just the beginning. The Strategy is a living document that will continue to evolve during implementation and through revisions. It is hoped that this Strategy, and others like it for other states will demonstrate to the U. S. Congress the need for increased and permanent federal conservation funding in the future. Regardless of funding sources, the partnerships and collaborative efforts that this strategy fosters will serve the wildlife resources, citizens, visitors, and future generations of Idaho well.