

The Landowner Incentive Program:
Engaging the Private Landowner
in Cooperative Conservation

**A National Study Conducted by
The University of Michigan
School of Natural Resources and Environment**

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Introduction

Strengthening non-game species habitat management on private lands is becoming increasingly important for the preservation of our nation's biodiversity. Nationally, private landownership exceeds sixty percent of all land, and in the northeast the rates are even higher. At the same time, fewer than 10% of endangered species occur exclusively on public land, and listed species found on private land are declining more rapidly than those on public land.¹ While there is little consensus on the degree to which public policy should guide management on private lands, the need for landowner incentives as part of an overall biodiversity conservation strategy has been widely accepted.²

The Landowner Incentive Program (LIP), administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and implemented through state fish and wildlife agencies, provides an important tool in engaging private landowners in active habitat conservation. Congress initiated this competitive grant program in FY 2003 to provide states with the funding to build a private lands conservation program that delivers technical and financial assistance to landowners who voluntarily restore and maintain habitat for at-risk species. However, just as this collaboration between states and private landowners is showing measurable results, the Bush administration has eliminated LIP from its proposed FY 2008 budget.

The LIP Working Group of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) argues that among private lands incentive programs, the program is unique in its focus on at-risk species and habitat restoration.³ States' use of LIP funds has demonstrated the program's effectiveness in implementing priority conservation actions identified in state comprehensive wildlife conservation strategies, also referred to as state wildlife action plans. Most importantly, LIP gives states the financial resources to proactively engage landowners in implementing conservation and habitat restoration practices that fish and wildlife experts believe are the most effective to achieve state and local conservation goals and accelerate habitat conservation.

Study Overview

Our research on the Landowner Incentive Program and this report are guided by three overarching questions:

1. What have state agencies achieved with LIP in state-led private lands conservation?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of LIP and what have been the major challenges in its implementation?

¹ Theobald, David M. and N. Thompson Hobbs. 2002. "A Framework for Evaluating Land Use Planning Alternatives: Protecting Biodiversity on Private Land." *Conservation Ecology* Vol. 6 Issue 1. <http://www.consecol.org/vol6/iss1/art5> (December 12, 2006).

² Casey, F, S. Vickerman, C. Hummon and B. Taylor. 2006. Defenders of Wildlife. "Incentives for Biodiversity Conservation: An Ecological and Economic Assessment."

³ LIP Working Group, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, "The Landowner Incentive Program – A White Paper," December 2007.

3. What is needed for private landowner engagement and how can future versions of LIP be improved?

The paper begins with a brief discussion of the background and genesis of the Landowner Incentive Program. We then provide an overview of achievements under LIP at the national level and a more focused analysis of LIP in 12 northeastern states. Here, we highlight three exemplar state programs: Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Maine. These three states have each developed effective and innovative conservation and landowner engagement programs. Additionally, these three states were the most successful in the region in competing for LIP grant funds.

Following our summary and analysis of LIP in the northeast, we discuss LIP's success in accelerating fish and wildlife habitat conservation and the ways in which the program has transformed how states engage landowners in conservation. Our analysis highlights the following program strengths:

- LIP strengthens the capacity of states to encourage and fund private land conservation
- LIP serves as an important tool to implement state wildlife action plans
- LIP dollars mobilize existing state resources and leverage other federal conservation dollars
- States use LIP to target and engage landowners proactively
- Direct outreach under LIP is non-regulatory and cooperative
- LIP helps improve relationships between states and private landowners
- LIP engages important local players in habitat management and conservation
- LIP's low match requirement provides strong incentive for landowners to participate in habitat conservation

This paper concludes with a discussion of implementation challenges, a recommendation to reinstate annual funding for a state-based private lands program, and suggestions to improve future iterations of the Landowner Incentive Program. To strengthen future LIP programs, we recommend that FWS:

- Establish a reasonable deadline for fund obligation and expenditure
- Limit the availability of LIP funds to states until existing money is obligated and/or spent
- Develop multiple program evaluation metrics for the Tier 2 competitive grant program
- Keep the LIP program distinct from other federal conservation programs
- Keep LIP Tier 2 funds competitive
- Directly link LIP to state wildlife action plans
- Aggregate and publicly publish LIP results by state
- Provide states with training in best practices landowner engagement strategies

As states work to strengthen collaboration in conservation and improve their delivery of technical assistance to private landowners, we recommend that they:

- Work with private landowners to better publicize the impact of the program
- Hire dedicated LIP staff
- Adopt a two-part conservation strategy weighted towards active management

- Increase outreach to local governments
- Increase cooperation with NRCS and existing private lands programs
- Actively market the program to private landowners and widely disseminate success stories
- Collectively and persistently communicate the importance of LIP to FWS and government decision makers

Methodology

This research and analysis is informed by two primary modes of data collection: a quantitative and qualitative national survey of fish and wildlife agencies throughout the U.S. and telephone interviews of state agency and FWS staff in the Northeastern U.S.

In February 2007, AFWA's LIP Working Group developed and distributed its first survey of the Landowner Incentive Program. In Fall 2007, we partnered with the LIP Working Group Chair to develop a second LIP survey. AFWA distributed both surveys to all 50 state fish and wildlife agency directors. Thirty-five of 50 states responded to the November 2007 survey, generating a 70% response rate. An additional seven states provided information in response to the February 2007 survey.⁴

Beginning in April 2007, we also conducted targeted telephone interviews with fish and wildlife agency representatives in 12 of the 13 northeastern states that make up FWS Region 5.⁵ The interview questions used to guide these conversations are included in Appendix A. Our research was also informed by telephone periodic conversations with FWS LIP staff. Case study analyses of LIP in Maine, New Jersey and Massachusetts are based on telephone interviews and a review of successful Tier 2 grant applications.

Introduction to the Landowner Incentive Program

The work of FWS to protect endangered and at-risk species has historically been driven by regulation under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and by lawsuits in response to ESA's enforcement and implementation.⁶ The federal Cooperative Conservation Initiative represents an alternative approach to regulating land use for the protection of endangered and at-risk wildlife

⁴ **States responding to the November 2007 survey:** Alaska, Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Iowa, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, North Dakota, Nebraska, New Jersey, Nevada, New York, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, West Virginia and Wyoming).

States responding to the February 2007 survey, but not the November survey: Colorado, Georgia, Kentucky, Maine, Montana, Oregon, and South Carolina.

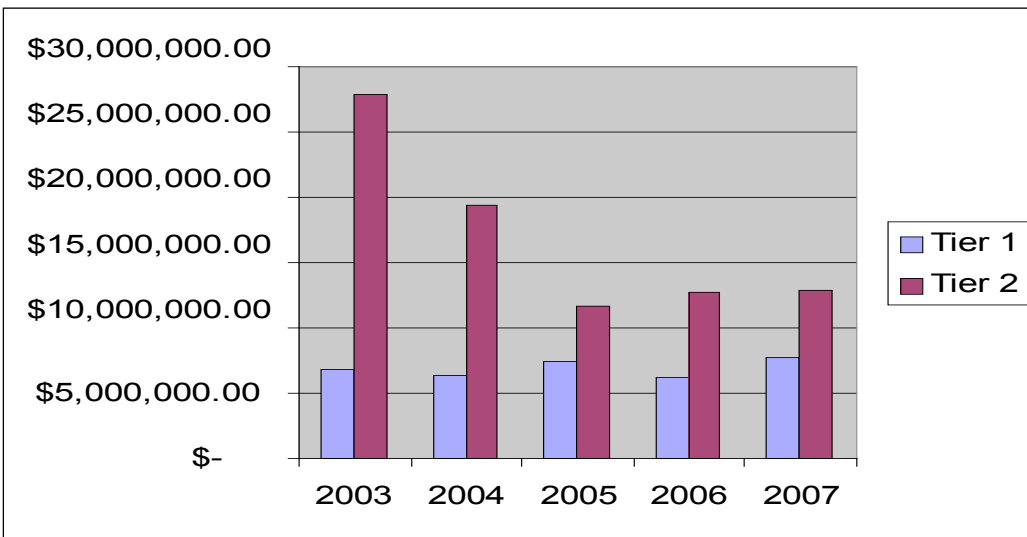
⁵ U. S. Fish and Wildlife Region 5 states include Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia. Rhode Island did not participate in the LIP study.

⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior (USDOI). September 21, 2005. "Testimony of Craig Manson, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Department of the Interior, Before the House Committee on Resources, Regarding H.R. 3824, The Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act of 2005." http://www.fws.gov/laws/Testimony/109th/2005/Interior%20Manson%20statement%20on%20H.R.%203824%20TESRA%209_21_05.html. (12 April 2007).

species. Cooperative conservation is voluntary, incentive-based, and is specifically designed to provide opportunities to partner with private landowners.⁷

In 2002, the Department of the Interior launched the Landowner Incentive Program as part of the Cooperative Conservation Initiative.⁸ To date, Congress has provided approximately \$127 million for conservation under LIP, based on annual appropriations derived from the Land and Water Conservation Fund.⁹ States have leveraged LIP funding with contributions from private landowners, non-profit organizations, and from state funds, often exceeding LIP’s 25% match requirement. The following table shows the annual Tier 1 and Tier 2 fund allocation by year.

Graph 2. Overall National LIP Funding by year.¹⁰



Note: Total national funding(2003-07): \$119,274,617 of which northeast states were awarded: \$30,990,857 or 26% of all funds.

The Landowner Incentive Program is a tiered, competitive grant program. Tier 1 grants of up to \$180,000 are designed primarily to help states pay for staff and other infrastructure needed to establish a private lands infrastructure. Through Tier 2 grants, ranging between \$500,000 and \$1.5 million, states award grants to private landowners based on state-designated criteria. Through these grants, LIP staff and wildlife biologists work directly with private landowners to conduct on-the-ground management or restoration activities and to protect habitat through the creation of conservation easements.

Eligible projects under LIP include, but are not limited to, conducting prescribed burns, restoring native vegetation, removing invasive and woody species to benefit at-risk species, and conservation easements. Applicants must be a private landowner or a private entity (e.g., land

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ U. S. Department of the Interior, Landowner Incentive Program. http://www.doi.gov/initiatives/landowner_incentive_program.html (April 9, 2008)

⁹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. FY 2008 Budget Justification, p. 343.

¹⁰ Material drawn from a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service LIP funding spreadsheet depicting Tier 1 and Tier 2 funds allocation since the program’s inception in 2003.

conservancies, community organizations, or conservation organizations) working with private landowners. Under LIP, applicants are generally required to sign a landowner agreement to maintain LIP-funded habitat enhancement or restoration projects for a designated length of time.

LIP Case Study: Tackling Invasive Species. Invasive species are cited as a threat in the Wildlife Action Plans of every state in the northeast. Consequently, there is a strong focus among landowner incentive programs to restore native natural communities through exotic species removal.

Connecticut: The Old Saybrook Land Trust (OSLT) secured \$120,000 in LIP funds in 2006 to restore the tidal marshes by treating approximately 113 acres that have been over taken by phragmites, a non-native, invasive species. With the OSLT acting as LIP project steward and liaison, the group held public informational meetings, created and sent out project pamphlets and worked to collect the signatures of some 200 landowners so that tidal marsh properties in North and South Cove could be treated. Control efforts call for a repeated cycle of spraying and mulching treatments so that the native tidal wetland vegetation and the species at-risk that this critical habitat supports may flourish once again.¹¹

Maryland: Sensitive joint-vetch is a state endangered and federally threatened plant species that occurs in less than 25 locations in the country, one of which is along the Patuxent River. The invasive species phragmites has taken over much of this intertidal region along the river, preventing the establishment of the annual sensitive joint-vetch, which is a poor competitor and relies on the presence of bare mud in order to germinate and grow. LIP staff contacted local private landowners and paid for the treatment on the land of eight landowners. The Department of Agriculture weed control team applied a chemical treatment by boat to shoreline phragmites stands in the region.¹²

National LIP Highlights

The following data is based on agency reported results as of November 2007. The amount of land and projects continues to increase as states initiate and complete more projects. Agencies reported that well over 400,000 acres of at-risk species habitat has been conserved nationwide using Tier 2 LIP funds. More than 4,359 private landowners have partnered with state fish and wildlife agencies to implement over 980 LIP projects on private property. Additionally, over 750 landowners are engaged in the project design phase and projects have been initiated on more than 918,000 acres.¹³

More than 100 full-time staff members are dedicated to LIP delivery, and 16 additional positions may be created to administer the program. Table 1 provides an overview of this information.

Table 1. LIP data: Tier 2 (November 2007)

Item	Quantity			
	Current		Pending	
Number of staff associated with LIP Tier 1 funding		103		16
Number of acres impacted by LIP Tier 2 funding	Completed	400,696	Initiated	918,485
Number of landowners involved in the LIP program	Completed	4,359	Pending	752
Number of projects associated with LIP funding	Completed	982	Initiated	1885

¹¹ Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program. Unpublished raw data. 2007.

¹² Maryland Department of Natural Resources. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program. Unpublished raw data. 2007.

¹³ National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program. Unpublished raw data. 2007.

Over 250 non-LIP funded staff members have worked on LIP- related projects, demonstrating the broad reach of LIP within wildlife agencies. LIP staff members often play an important role in promoting private lands conservation, even when they are not working on projects funded by Tier 2 funds. Table 2 provides figures for the number of projects that LIP coordinators helped to advance without the use of LIP Tier 2 funds.

Table 2. LIP data: Tier 1-related (November 2007)

Item	Quantity			
	Completed	Initiated	Completed	Initiated
Number of acres affected without Tier 2 funds	397,285	412,194		
Number of projects affected without Tier 2 funds	566	1150		

One important finding of the national survey is how states have used LIP in conjunction with other government incentive programs. Over 70% of respondents (24 of 33 states) report that they have been able to use LIP to leverage funds from different federal sources.¹⁴ Doing so has allowed agencies to partner with others in implementing land management practices on a larger scale, thus achieving a conservation impact beyond the scope of individual or more isolated efforts. Given that some private lands programs have monetary caps on individual projects, LIP complements such programs by providing funding to implement landscape-level projects or projects conducted on adjacent lands.¹⁵

Written answers to national survey responses, found in Appendix B, clearly demonstrate that private landowners have embraced LIP. eighty-one percent of states (27 out of 33 states) have reported that landowners were pleased or excited by the Landowner Incentive Program. Twenty-one of thirty-three states, or 63%, said that they received more requests for LIP funds than they were able to accommodate, evidence of the growing popularity and impact of LIP.

States throughout the U.S. reported working with a wide range of landowner types. Every state the responded to the survey reported working with traditional, individual landowners. Nineteen states have used LIP funds to engage absentee landowners in conservation work on their property. Over 50% of states have collaborated with land trusts to accelerate wildlife habitat conservation under LIP, and nearly 70% have worked with non-government organizations to achieve program goals. States are also using the LIP program to build relationships with community associations, sportsman’s clubs, towns and corporate landowners.

The most frequently cited way for landowners to meet LIP’s 25 percent cost share requirement is by accepting reduced rental payments from states or conservation organizations in exchange for implementing management practices on their property. Many landowners provide in-kind contributions of equipment and project materials, and often contribute their own “sweat equity.” In many cases, states and conservation partners help contribute to the 25% match by providing funding or in-kind services of their own. Landowners interested in permanent conservation often agree to sell conservation easements based on discounted land values.

¹⁴Many states reporting using LIP funds to support projects funded form other programs such as the following programs: Wildlife Grant program, (8 states); EQIP (11 states); WHIP (14 states); CRP (9 states); and CREP (3 states).

¹⁵ LIP Working Group, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, “The Landowner Incentive Program – A White Paper,” December 2007.

LIP in the Northeast

The Landowner Incentive Program plays an especially important role in conservation in the Northeast because of the high cost of land acquisition, development pressure and land fragmentation. The northeast region has the least public or federally owned land, and the highest percentage of privately held property in the U.S.¹⁶

In 2006, the region's urban, suburban and rural communities supported 54.6 million people.¹⁷ The dense band of urban and suburban communities from Boston to Washington D.C. is the nation's largest megapolitan region, and is growing faster than the national average.¹⁸ Six of the region's nine states are among the top ten most densely populated in the nation.¹⁹

Co-existing with this high concentration of people are more than 1,300 vertebrate species that depend on ecosystems across the region for their survival.²⁰ Yet, the region's human network of urban, suburban and rural communities overtakes more undeveloped land each year. As forests, wetlands and agricultural lands are developed with roads and buildings, wildlife species face shrinking and fragmented habitat.

Northeast Conservation Priorities and Strategies

Successional habitats in the Northeast are facing drastic decline largely due to a lack of active land management and a lack of fire on the landscape.²¹ Consequently, many New England states have used LIP to target early successional habitat, including grasslands, shrub-scrublands, and early successional wetlands.²² States such as Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Jersey have restored significant areas of native grassland habitat--commonly warm season grasses--to benefit grassland birds. New York State Department of Environmental Conservation is just beginning to complete its first grassland restoration projects.^{23 24}

Coastal New England states such as Maine and Maryland have dedicated LIP dollars towards the acquisition of conservation easements or the funding of active management to protect sensitive coastal areas, particularly those that provide shorebird roosting and feeding habitat. Many SGCN

¹⁶ National Resources Inventory. (1997). Percent of Land in Federal Ownership. Department of Agriculture. Washington, D.C. <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Technical/NRI/maps/meta/m5554.html> (Accessed 18 Feb 2008.)

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau. (2006). "State and County Quick Facts." Population Estimates, Census 2006.

¹⁸ Kelly, Eric Damian. (2004). *Managing Community Growth*. Westport, CT: Praeger. p. 5.

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2006). "State and County Quick Facts." Population Estimates, Census 2006.

²⁰ Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies,

http://www.wildlifeactionplans.org/pdfs/action_plan_summaries/new_york.pdf. (Accessed April 9, 2008).

²¹ US Fish and Wildlife Service agency representative. Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis and Christopher Theriot. April 12, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

²² One federally listed species found in the northeast that relies on early successional habitat is the New England Cottontail (*Silvilagus transitionallis*),

²³ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service representative. Review comments on draft, March 27, 2008.

²⁴ New York prioritizes grasslands projects that protect bird species such as the upland sandpiper, honed lark, sedge wren, vesper sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, and Henslow's sparrow. (New York Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources, 2007 Tier 2 application, p. 3.)

species are dependent on coastal habitat, which is in serious decline as a result of increasing development along the New England coast and Long Island Sound.

To target these habitats, the northeastern states have employed two distinct conservation strategies. Seven states under study dedicate LIP funds towards active habitat management projects that engage landowners in a variety of conservation activities.²⁵ In these cases, LIP provides the necessary financial and technical assistance to help eligible landowners, including land trusts, to restore native habitat and enhance benefits for wildlife in greatest need.

The second conservation strategy involves permanent land protection through the purchase of conservation easements. Acute development pressures in the northeast have prompted at least five states under study to pursue this more complicated and time consuming approach.²⁶ Conservation easements under LIP are structured through bargain sales in which development rights tied to the enrolled land are purchased at a 30-75% discount.²⁷ Most states use LIP funds to provide assistance to land trusts and environmental organizations so that they may acquire easements and manage the land to support at-risk species.

States in the northeast have a long tradition of permanent land conservation, and state agencies with strong existing relationships with land trusts and conservation organizations were well positioned to create effective easement programs under LIP. This has not been the case with Delaware, a state with few land trusts.²⁸ As a result, this state has been much slower to obligate and spend funds to support easement acquisition.²⁹

Case Study: Creating early successional habitat for at risk species

Delaware: The Nature Conservancy is leading a project to convert a 30 acre loblolly pine planting to a mixed native hardwood forest community. The project entailed removing 30 acres of loblolly pines from wetland depressions, along the Piney Fork Branch and in clusters throughout the loblolly stand. Once the loblollies were removed, over 15,000 hardwood seedlings were planted. The long-term goal is to provide habitat for over 24 at-risk species.³⁰

Almost all of the northeast states identify specific focus areas or natural habitat types for LIP projects, demonstrating the flexibility that LIP provides states in addressing conservation priorities. For example, the New Hampshire LIP targets 17 priority habitats associated with

²⁵ States using an active management strategy include Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Virginia and West Virginia.

²⁶ States using a conservation easement strategy include Delaware, Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania will use LIP funds for habitat management only if it is part of an easement project.

²⁷ According to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service representative, several easement projects in New Hampshire have involved bargain sales at a 75% discount rate.

²⁸ Delaware agency representative. Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife. Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis. October 17, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

²⁹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service representative review comments, March 30, 2008.

³⁰ Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program. Unpublished raw data. 2007.

seven focus areas located throughout the state.³¹ Maryland LIP gives priority to 12 rare or imperiled habitat types that support many of the state's declining species.³²

Other states, such as Delaware, Vermont, and Virginia, take a far more targeted approach. Delaware LIP focuses on the five habitats at risk identified in its state wildlife action plan that support its SGCN.³³ Vermont directs its LIP funds towards the purchase of conservation easements in the Champlain Valley, which is the most biologically diverse and urbanized region in the state.³⁴ Virginia's LIP program focuses exclusively on riparian and streamside restoration to improve habitat for rare fish and mussel species. This focus follows directly from Virginia's State wildlife action plan—60% of the state's SGCN are aquatic species or species that depend on freshwater systems.³⁵ A summary of LIP in the northeast appears below in Table 3.

Case Study: Habitat improvement for the endangered Indiana Bat

New Jersey: The state worked with a land speculator to stabilize an Indiana bat hibernacula and mine subsidence. This project had been identified for years, but the state lacked funds to accomplish the entire project. New Jersey LIP staff and USFWS Partners for Fish & Wildlife developed a proposal for the land speculator and the quarry to apply for LIP funds. The project was completed within 6 months, and the quarry provided nearly 40% in-kind match.³⁶

Vermont: The LaPlatte Headwaters Initiative on the Bissonette Farm in Hinesburg, Vermont is a collaborative effort to conserve and restore 577 acres of wildlife habitat, prime farmland, public recreational trails, rare natural communities, drinking water resources and maternal roosting habitat of the federally endangered Indiana bat. This collaborative effort combines the resources and expertise of conservation organizations at the local, state, and national levels. LIP Funds will go towards the purchase of an easement on a 136-acre parcel that contains an exceptional 30-acre example of mature clayplain forest, an extremely rare and threatened natural community in Vermont, and 106 acres of habitat for the federally-endangered Indiana bat.³⁷

³¹ New Hampshire Fish and Game Department. March, 28, 2006 Priority Habitats for LIP Focus Areas. <http://www.private-landowner-network.org/yellowpages/resource.asp?id=9557> (14 January 2008).

³² Maryland agency representative. Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis. October 10, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI. 2007.

³³ Delaware agency representative. Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife. Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis. October 17, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

³⁴ Vermont agency representative. Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife. Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis. 17 April 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

³⁵ Virginia agency representative. Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Telephone interview with Christopher Theriot. October 26, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

³⁶ New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife Endangered Species Program. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program. Unpublished raw data. 2007.

³⁷ Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program. Unpublished raw data. 2007.

Table 3. LIP in the Northeast³⁸

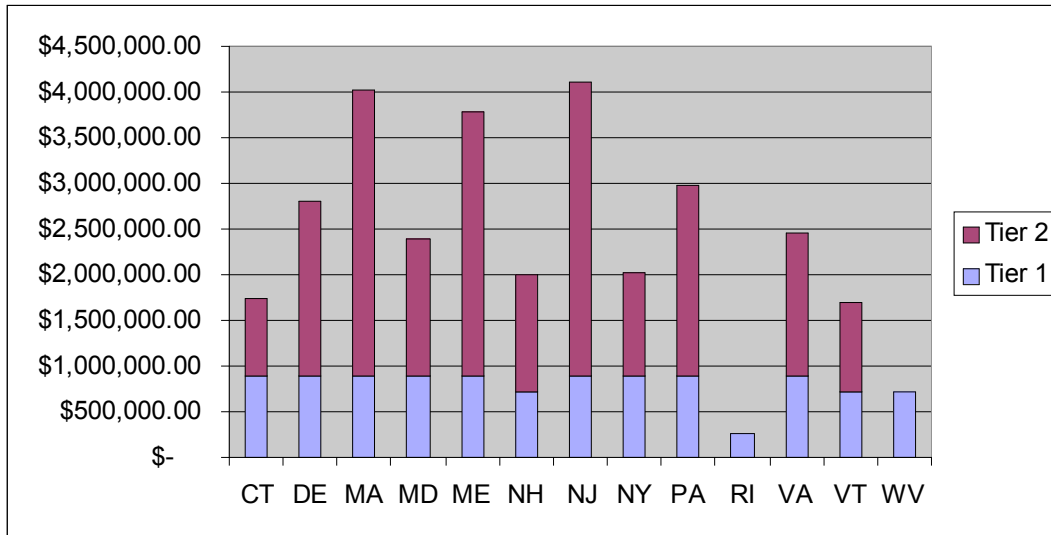
State	Habitat Focus	Conservation Strategy	Geographic Focus
CT	Grasslands, early successional forests, tidal and freshwater wetlands	Active management	Statewide
DE	Wetlands, upland early successional habitat	Active management and conservation easements	Statewide
ME	Multiple habitats	Conservation easements	20 eligible focus areas
MD	Multiple habitats	Active management	Statewide and Maryland's Ecologically Significant Areas
MA	Grasslands, early successional woodlands	Active management	Statewide
NH	Multiple habitats	Conservation easement with some funds dedicated for active management.	Statewide & designated priority areas
NJ	Grasslands > 10 acres	Active management	Statewide with Cape May Peninsula as a priority area
NY	Grasslands	Active management	Designated priority areas statewide
PA	Grasslands, wetlands	Conservation easement	Statewide
VT	Valley Clayplain forest and Sandplain forest	Conservation easement	Champlain Valley
VA	Riparian and stream-side habitat	Active management	5 designated river basins statewide
WV	NA	Conservation easement (had the state received Tier 2 funds).	Designated priority areas

Cumulative state funding for FWS Region 5 appears below in table 4. With the exception of West Virginia and Rhode Island, every northeastern state has secured at least one Tier 2 grant.

Graph 1. Cumulative Northeast LIP Funding³⁹

³⁸ Table information drawn from multiple sources including LIP coordinator interviews, agency websites, and the November, 2007 national survey.

³⁹ Material drawn from a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service LIP funding spreadsheet depicting Tier 1 and Tier 2 funds allocation since the program's inception in 2003.



Northeast LIP Case Studies

To provide a more vivid picture of LIP in action, we highlight three states that have received the most Tier 2 funding in the Northeast. Massachusetts and New Jersey LIP programs focus on active management, while Maine focuses on conserving lands through the purchase of conservation easements.

Massachusetts Landowner Incentive Program

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife (MassWildlife) uses Tier 2 funds exclusively to create, manage, and restore habitat for species identified in Massachusetts’ state wildlife action plan. LIP is the only state administered funding source for active habitat management on private lands.⁴⁰

In Massachusetts, there are a total of 1.3 million acres of protected open space. On over 100,000 acres of this property, land use covenants restrict development in order to create long-term value specifically for at risk wildlife.⁴¹ While over 60% of Massachusetts is forested, the lack of early successional habitat throughout the state continues to imperil important suites of species, including declining, state-listed species such as the golden-winged warbler and the mourning warbler.⁴²

LIP in Massachusetts helps meet the demand for active habitat management throughout the state by focusing on restoring grasslands, early woodlands, coastal shorebird habitat, and habitat for

⁴⁰ Commonwealth of Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife (MassWildlife). Landowner Incentive Program 2007, Tier 2 Proposal. p. 2.

⁴¹ MassWildlife 2007 Tier 2 application, p. 4.

⁴² Ibid, p. 9.

the federally- and state-listed bog turtle.⁴³ Landowners enter into one-year management agreements with the state. Under Massachusetts' LIP project ranking criteria, projects in phase 2, 3 or 4 are awarded more points when their applications are scored to ensure that projects are completed and that longer-term management projects receive priority.

Massachusetts Grasslands Case Study Projects:

The following are two examples of creative "win-win" LIP projects.

- A private landowner has created additional grasslands on his old farm and lets a local bird club monitor his fields. The club members gain additional land for bird watching and birds gain more habitat. The monitoring of the property contributes to the LIP match requirement.
- A sportsmen's club uses LIP funds to manage a portion of their land for the benefit of grassland birds during the summer when it is not being used for hunting purposes. They provide a benefit to the birds and their land is better managed for their activities once the birds are fledged and gone.⁴⁴

Eighty-two percent of LIP sites are permanently protected under conservation easements.⁴⁵ However, if the land is not already under permanent protection, Massachusetts places a 10-year deed restriction on the enrolled area of property stipulating that the land's primary function is to support wildlife habitat.

Conservation Impact

Each year since the program's inception, landowner demand for technical assistance under the program has exceeded the state's capacity to manage projects.⁴⁶ According to MassWildlife's 2007 Tier 2 grant proposal, LIP recipients and the agency have successfully restored nearly 7,000 acres of habitat that benefit more than 122 species at risk. Over 106 projects have been implemented, with landowners and participant conservation groups contributing nearly \$998,000 towards project completion. Massachusetts has spent \$1.9 million, or 88%, of its federal funds.⁴⁷

New Jersey Landowner Incentive Program

New Jersey LIP provides another example of a successful landowner incentive program that focuses on active habitat management. New Jersey prioritizes the protection and restoration of habitat for grassland birds throughout the state, protection and management of Indiana bat and bog turtle habitat, and protection of migratory bird habitat on the Cape May Peninsula.^{48 49}

Unlike Massachusetts, New Jersey has used LIP to create two distinct landowner incentive programs: the Landowner Incentive Program and the LIP Small Project Grant Program. Through

⁴³ Referred to by the latin name *Glyptemis muhlenbergii* or *Clemmys muhlenbergii*, the bog turtle relies on a mosaic of microhabitats for foraging, nesting, basking, hibernation, and shelter that includes open canopy wetlands (USFWS 2000, as cited on NatureServe Explorer. www.natureserve.org (11 March 2008)).

⁴⁴ Massachusetts agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

⁴⁵ MassWildlife 2007 Tier 2 application, p. 9

⁴⁶ Massachusetts agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

⁴⁷ MassWildlife 2007 Tier 2 application, p. 4.

⁴⁸ New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife. (New Jersey 2005 *Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy* (Boston, MA: Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, September 2006), p. 5.

⁴⁹ New Jersey agency representative. New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife. Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis. 3 October 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

the Small Project Grant Program, the New Jersey Endangered and Nongame Species Program (ENSP) funds smaller projects that would not otherwise receive funding under LIP, many of which focus on the federally threatened bog turtle.⁵⁰

New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the country. As in Massachusetts, New Jersey's early successional habitat is declining dramatically as a result of growing development pressures and intensive farming practices.⁵¹ Because grassland birds are area sensitive, the state's remaining large, contiguous patches of grassland habitat require protection in order to provide the necessary benefits for these bird species.⁵²

According to ENSP, New Jersey's LIP program is one of the most effective means to establish or restore large grassland management areas.⁵³ New Jersey pays rental payments to agricultural landowners to implement management practices to protect wildlife, particularly the state's 12 listed endangered and threatened bird species.⁵⁴ Grassland agreements are typically structured to last five to 10 years in duration.⁵⁵

Landowners can use LIP funds to restore native warm season or cool season grasses, and to delay mowing fields to allow ground nesting birds to fledge young.⁵⁶ LIP rental payments offset the economic loss associated with choosing not to plant row crops or cut multiple hay crops in a given season.

In addition, New Jersey LIP provides assistance to landowners in the lower Cape May Peninsula who are committed to restoring and enhancing habitat to benefit migratory birds, for which even small parcels can make a significant difference when managed appropriately. The best example of projects in Cape May can be seen in the active restoration and management of early successional habitat on two properties owned by The Nature Conservancy (TNC): the Cape May Migratory Bird Refuge and the Cape Island Creek Preserve.

LIP Case Study: Early Successional Habitat Management on the Cape May Peninsula

From a heavily grazed pasture twenty years ago, TNC's 198 acre Cape May Migratory Bird Refuge has become a mosaic of open water ponds, Phragmites-dominated marsh, mid-successional woodlands, and meadows. The removal of shrubs and trees along the trails will visually reconnect wetlands, benefiting area sensitive wetland species such as the Pied-billed Grebe. In addition, annual mowing of a 13.5 acre meadow, where many rare plant species are found, will provide an important component of the mosaic of habitats available for migrating raptors and songbirds.

The Cape Island Creek Preserve includes salt marshes, narrow tree lines, a pond, and old farm fields. To maximize habitat diversity at this migratory bird stopover, TNC planted groupings of native shrubs and small trees to create mid-successional, berry-rich patches to provide foraging habitat for birds during fall

⁵¹ New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife Endangered and Nongame Species Program. Grant Proposal for the Landowner Incentive Program: Tier 2. Proposal for FY 2007. p. 4.

⁵² Ibid, p. 5.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Endangered or threatened species include the Savannah and Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobolink, American Kestrel, and Eastern Meadowlark.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 12.

⁵⁶ New Jersey FY 2007 Tier 2 proposal. p. 3.

migration. TNC will mow meadow around these habitat plantings to discourage the growth of invasives and to provide a mosaic of habitats for migrating birds. TNC also will install American Kestrel nest boxes in suitable habitat. Good numbers of wintering Eastern Meadowlarks and fall migrating Palm Warblers have been noted in these meadows over the past year.⁵⁷

Because New Jersey focuses its conservation efforts at the landscape scale, smaller projects are not able to compete with the large projects that receive high priority consideration under the state's LIP ranking criteria. For this reason, New Jersey partnered with the Conserve Wildlife Foundation (CWF) to establish its LIP Small Project Grant Program. Under this program, CWF provides reimbursement of up to \$5,000 for smaller scale conservation projects. Several projects funded under this program focus on the federally threatened bog turtle and have used prescribed grazing to clear potential habitat of encroaching vegetation.⁵⁸

Conservation Impact

New Jersey has enrolled nearly 3500 acres in its delayed mowing program, to the benefit of over 30 grassland dependent listed and priority species. Of those 3500 acres, 1470 acres will be planted in native warm season grasses, providing increased biodiversity and habitat for several invertebrates. The LIP Small Grants program has funded 4 bog turtle projects (approximately 19.25 acres), 5 wood turtle projects, and one project focused on providing habitat for box turtles. Small grants have also funded one vernal pool restoration effort and several additional habitat restoration projects.⁵⁹

New Jersey's successes illustrate the effectiveness of establishing partnerships to achieve conservation goals. New Jersey Audubon and the Conserve Wildlife Foundation have played central roles in ensuring that LIP reaches landowners and provides meaningful opportunity for landowners to contribute to and participate in wildlife conservation. ENSP has contracted with 52 landowners in the large grant program and 19 landowners under the small grants program.⁶⁰ As of April 2008, NJ LIP had encumbered all of its FY04 and FY05 funds and 95% of its FY06 funds.^{61 62} In the words of one New Jersey Fish and Wildlife representative:

I think [LIP] really empowers our private citizens to manage for these declining species on their property, and hopefully once the contract ends you've created a sense of ownership of these species on the ground and so the management may not stop. I don't think that there is any other program that can do that.⁶³

Maine Landowner Incentive Program

⁵⁷ New Jersey agency representative. Personal correspondence. April 9, 2008.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 14.

⁵⁹ New Jersey agency representative. Written comments. April 9, 2008.

⁶⁰ Kim. Personal correspondence. April 9, 2008.

⁶¹ ENSP p. 3.

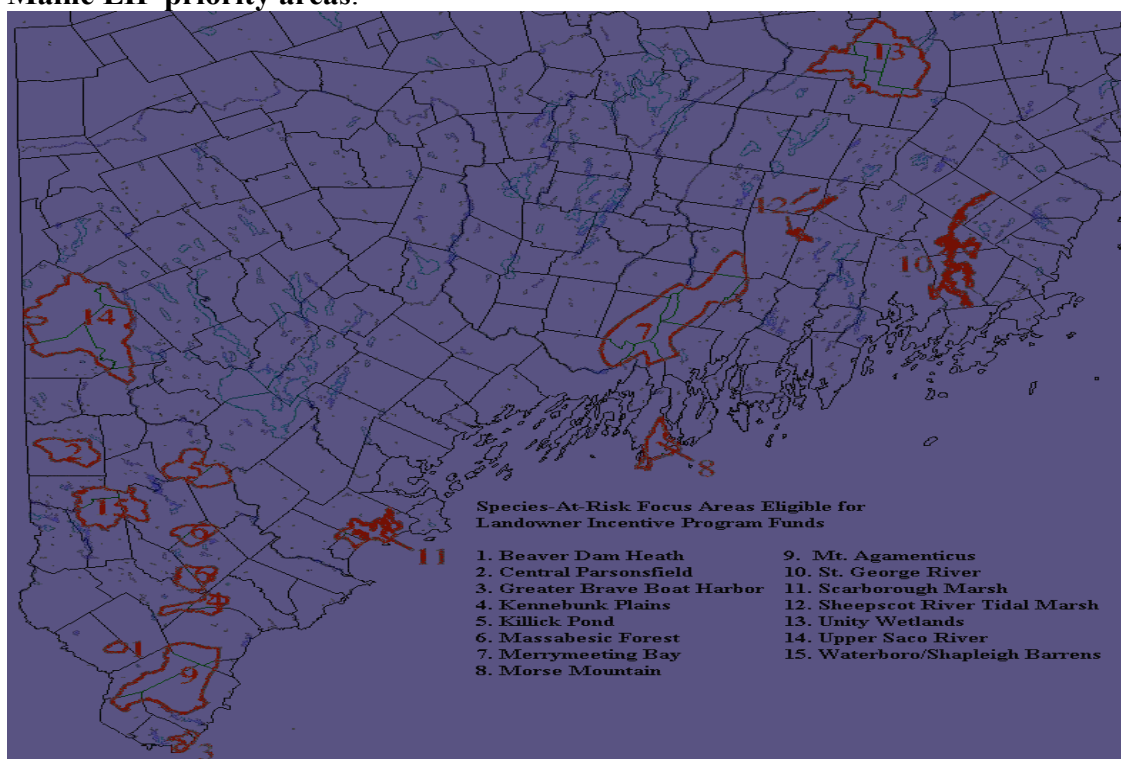
⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ New Jersey agency representative. New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife Endangered Species Program representative). Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis. 3 October 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

As sprawl consumes the remaining open space in southern and coastal Maine, the state must protect existing high quality habitat that supports SGCN. Southern Maine's 90% private landownership rate means the state must partner with its citizens to accelerate habitat conservation.⁶⁴ According to Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW), LIP is the only program in Maine that provides incentives to landowners interested in the permanent conservation and management of habitat for rare, threatened, and endangered species.⁶⁵

Maine LIP provides a strong example of an extremely targeted program. The state focuses on the purchase of conservation easements in 22 eligible focus areas in southern and coastal Maine and the protection of shorebird roosting and feeding habitats in 3 coastal focus areas.⁶⁶ These target areas make up the 1.7% of the state's land with the highest concentration of at risk species and are areas with the greatest development pressure.

Maine LIP priority areas.⁶⁷



By accepting LIP funds, the landowner agrees to the development and implementation of a Conservation Management Plan.⁶⁸ Species biologists and the landowner will review management plans every five years to determine that management activities are benefiting species of concern.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Acheson, James. M. 2006. "Public Access to Privately Owned Land in Maine." Maine Policy Review. www.umaine.edu/mcsc/mpr/Vol15No1/V15_acheson.pdf (12 March 2008).

⁶⁵ Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, 2007 Tier 2 application, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 10.

⁶⁷ Maine LIP fact sheet. <http://www.mainenaturalareas.org/docs/lip/resources/6.pdf> (accessed April, 12, 2008).

⁶⁸ Maine 2007 Tier 2 application, p. 14.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 4.

As part of LIP's pilot outreach effort, MDIFW sent letters to landowners with property in eligible program focus areas, achieving a 10% rate of return. Letters include management recommendations for each species or natural community found on the property; contact information for state biologists, ecologists and local land trusts; and conservation options such as tax incentive programs and other state and federal programs.⁷⁰

Conservation Impact

Maine's Program is viewed by conservation stakeholders within the state and from other states as a well-designed, highly targeted program. \$1.35 million has been allocated toward the permanent protection of nearly 2,000 acres. This investment leverages \$1.86 million in matching funds and protects 18 known at-risk plant and animal populations and 5 rare or exemplary natural community types. Of the 11 projects that have received funding, 2 closed in 2007. LIP staffs anticipate closing on 4 more in 2008. Maine will allocate an additional \$800,000 in 2008.⁷¹

Maine LIP is an example of a state program positioned to succeed as a result of the state's history of conservation planning and its well-established conservation programs. The Land for Maine's Future Program and Beginning with Habitat (BwH) both provided a strong foundation for the design and implementation of LIP. BwH's identification of the habitat that supports Maine's full range of native plant and wildlife species has been instrumental in establishing a targeted, landscape level program.⁷² Land for Maine's Future provided the documents and templates necessary for easement acquisition.

Strengths of the Landowner Incentive Program

The following section provides an overview of the strengths of the Landowner Incentive Program, and of the many ways the program has accelerated state efforts to protect and improve at-risk wildlife species habitat. Cooperative conservation under LIP has strengthened states' relationships with private landowners and created effective partnerships at the local and federal level.

Accelerating Wildlife Habitat Conservation on Private Lands

LIP strengthens the capacity of states to encourage and fund private land conservation.

Many states did not have a private landowner engagement program before LIP. Of the 35 states responding to the November 2007 survey, at least 21, or 60%, implemented a new private lands program or made significant changes to a program already established. In the Northeast, only Vermont and Virginia reported having a distinct, state-administered private lands program in place prior to LIP.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 8.

⁷¹ Heritage Foundation representative. April 8, 2008.

⁷² In addition, the program's Conservation Management Plans evolved as a partnership with WoodsWise staff. Heritage Foundation representative. April 8, 2008)

States that provided limited assistance to private landowners before LIP explained that program funding significantly expanded the agency's ability to engage and support private landowners. According to an agency representative in Connecticut, "We provided very limited technical assistance to landowners under an existing [Public Relations] Technical Assistance Job, but nothing on the scale of the LIP program. Tier 2 funding made possible a vibrant program in Connecticut that is just now establishing a solid reputation amongst landowners and the conservation community."⁷³

Some states, like Illinois, reported that LIP provided the means to link existing programs into a cohesive, state-led private land conservation strategy. Explained an agency respondent, "Until the Illinois LIP was developed, there was no coordinated effort to focus [Department of Natural Resources and Farm Bill programs] on species at-risk. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources has several private lands habitat conservation programs, but they operate out of different offices and divisions within IDNR."⁷⁴

States use LIP to improve non-game species protection and implement wildlife action plans. LIP requires that LIP-funded projects benefit at-risk species or species of greatest conservation need as identified in state wildlife action plans. LIP has provided the means to expand the focus of existing wildlife conservation practices to actively target non-game species. A quote from a Washington State representative underscores this point, "We had private lands biologists who worked on game species, but LIP provided financial means to expand their focus to include diversity and at-risk species."⁷⁵

The Landowner Incentive Program is a critical implementation tool for realizing the conservation goals of the state wildlife action plans. Thirty-two of the thirty five (32 of 35) states surveyed indicated that they used LIP funds to directly address objectives outlined in their state wildlife action plans. States such as New Hampshire require that applicants have documented evidence of species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) on their property to be considered for support under LIP.⁷⁶

In Iowa, the LIP program has very narrow parameters for eligibility, which forces staff to focus their efforts on landowners who could make a difference for Iowa's species of greatest conservation need.⁷⁷ Similarly, in Nevada the LIP coordinator considers the state wildlife action plan the program's guiding document, as it has been used to specify the wildlife species LIP targets and the problems or threats that have become the focus of the program.⁷⁸

LIP protects federally-listed species. LIP has also become an important tool for protecting federally listed fish and wildlife species. California's Landowner Incentive Program focuses exclusively on riparian habitat restoration in its Central Valley. The 42 at-risk species that

⁷³ Connecticut agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

⁷⁴ Illinois agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

⁷⁵ Washington agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

⁷⁶ Agency representative. New Hampshire Fish and Game Commission.

Telephone interview with Christopher Theriot. October 16, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

⁷⁷ Iowa agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

⁷⁸ Nevada agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

require riparian habitat in this region include federally listed species such as the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle, Least Bell's Vireo and Willow Flycatcher.⁷⁹

Five northeastern states that have received Tier 2 LIP funds focus in part on protecting early successional habitat to support the New England cottontail rabbit, a candidate species for federal listing.⁸⁰ Because Maryland's wet meadows, fens, and bogs provide habitat for almost 30% of the global population of federally threatened bog turtles, the state's LIP program coordinates and funds vegetation management projects to protect bog turtle habitat in central Maryland.⁸¹ In New Jersey, the Division of Fish & Wildlife also gives priority to LIP projects that benefit the bog turtle, as well as and the federally endangered Indiana bat.

LIP dollars mobilize existing state resources. Creating a landowner incentive program that is integrated with other state-administered conservation programs is one of the great benefits of establishing a private lands conservation program at the state level. While nearly all fish and wildlife agencies administer LIP as an independent program, states utilize existing financial resources to execute a focused LIP program with the capacity to actively target landowners with high quality habitat on their property.

We found particular evidence of this while conducting personal interviews with LIP coordinators in the Northeast. In at least four states, access to spatial data from the state Natural Heritage Program and the availability of state tax parcel data has allowed states to target and contact landowners living within priority habitat areas. In Delaware, the use of Natural Heritage Program GIS data of documented species occurrences has been critical to identifying tax parcels eligible for consideration under LIP.⁸² Maryland's Wildlife and Heritage Service, New Hampshire's Natural Heritage Bureau, and Maine's Heritage Program were also central to identifying LIP focus areas and targeting candidate LIP participants.⁸³

Vermont links LIP project with other state conservation programs to leverage LIP's potential. The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife (VFWD) targets landowners who have recently allowed the Natural Heritage Program to conduct surveys on their property, and whose lands were determined to provide state-significant wildlife benefits. Depending on the interest of the landowner, LIP staff then follows up with them in person to discuss management and conservation options.⁸⁴ VFWD's Community Wildlife Program, which works directly with municipalities to protect their natural resources, has provided another important point of entry for LIP to reach out to landowners in local communities.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ California Department of Fish and Game Lands Program. California Landowner Incentive Program FY 2007 Tier 2 Proposal. p. 3.

⁸⁰ Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. FY 2007 Tier 2 application, p. 9.

⁸¹ Agency representative. Maryland Department of Natural Resources representative. Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis. October 10, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

⁸² Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife Division. Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis. October 17, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

⁸³ Maryland agency representative. Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis. October 10, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI; Heritage Foundation representative. Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis. 3 October 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

⁸⁴ Vermont agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

⁸⁵ Vermont agency representative. Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife. Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis. 17 April 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

LIP funds can also be used to leverage other federal conservation dollars. States reported that LIP staff members have helped advance conservation work on nearly 400,000 additional acres by leveraging funds from private lands programs such as National Resource Conservation Service's (NRCS) Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and other federal, state, and private programs.⁸⁶

Transforming Landowner Engagement

States use LIP to actively target and engage landowners. LIP has transformed the way many states think about and actually engage with private landowners. Twenty-six of twenty-seven (26 of 27) states responding in the national survey reported that they now proactively contact landowners known to own high conservation-value property.

Prior to LIP, Michigan's non-game species program focused on public education and the state was not able to provide direct, on-site assistance to landowners.⁸⁷ According to an agency representative,

Before [LIP], we could only advise other programs that may or may not have focused on state wildlife priorities. We are now able to work one-on-one with landowners and affect the way they view and manage their property for wildlife.⁸⁸

When asked directly about how LIP has changed the way its fish and wildlife agency engages with private landowners, the Delaware LIP coordinator reported,

LIP lets our agency go beyond merely educating landowners, or contacting them to ask their permission to survey rare species and habitats on their property. We can now offer technical assistance in designing projects to benefit these rare species and habitats. Most importantly, we can offer a source of funding with which these projects may be accomplished.⁸⁹

Direct outreach under LIP is non-regulatory. Traditionally, land use regulations have served as the primary tool for government to initiate conservation on private lands. FWS believes that not only has the designation of critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act often resulted in negative public sentiment, but that the Act and its implementation have provided little

⁸⁶ National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

⁸⁷ Michigan agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Delaware agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

additional protection to threatened or endangered wildlife species.⁹⁰ The same may be said of regulation imposed at the state or local level.⁹¹

In contrast, under the Landowner Incentive Program, participation is voluntary and states have something to offer landowners for their time and effort. As New York explains, “LIP significantly increased the Department’s interaction with private landowners. Previously, the state engaged with landowners on permitting issues, not conservation.”⁹²

LIP improves relationships between states and landowners. This shift to a direct, non-regulatory approach to engaging landowners has expanded the role of wildlife agencies from that of regulator to conservation partner. For example, Pennsylvania reported that “LIP funds have changed the public perception of what the Game Commission does.”⁹³ This shift to cooperative conservation has improved relationships with private landowners.

In Louisiana, “Private landowners are much more positive and less resentful about implementing management practices for at-risk species when LIP funds are available.”⁹⁴ According to Arizona, “LIP has dramatically helped the Department form working relationships with several landowners, some of which did not have a good working relationship with the Department.”⁹⁵

LIP engages an important new constituency in habitat conservation and management. LIP’s versatility has allowed states to fulfill the federal match requirement and implement novel and innovative outreach practices in ways that have inspired active participation in conservation at the local level. By directly involving landowners and local communities in wildlife habitat conservation, the Landowner Incentive Program fosters partnerships where collaboration matters most.

LIP participants in Wisconsin employed a number of innovative approaches that have sparked active community participation in habitat conservation. These include:

- Arranging for the local high school wrestling team to remove non-native, invasive vegetation in exchange for a monetary donation to their school program.
- Coordinating with ecology classes and student groups at the University of Wisconsin who seek on-the-ground ecology experience.
- Involving the whole family in active habitat management on enrolled property.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ U.S. Department of the Interior. 21 September 2005. “Testimony of Craig Manson, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Department of the Interior, Before the House Committee on Resources, Regarding H.R. 3824, The Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act of 2005.” http://www.fws.gov/laws/Testimony/109th/2005/Interior%20Manson%20statement%20on%20H.R.%203824%20T%20ESRA%209_21_05.html. (12 April 2007).

⁹¹ The recent increase in development setbacks to protect Maine’s shorebirds and waterfowl and to limit deleterious effects to vernal pools is one recent example of an instance in which the use of regulations before outreach has caused a strong, negative reaction among affected landowners (Heritage Foundation representative. 3 October 2007).

⁹² New York agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

⁹³ Pennsylvania agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

⁹⁴ Louisiana agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

⁹⁵ Arizona agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

⁹⁶ Wisconsin agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

This in-kind labor approach, also characterized as “sweat equity,” encourages greater buy-in on the part of landowners and among the community, and raises their level of engagement in or commitment to improving benefits to wildlife in their neighborhood or on their property.

Massachusetts Field Days provides an example of a highly successful landowner outreach strategy that has generated strong interest in LIP and helped to encourage landowners to take conservation action. MassWildlife hosts five field days annually across the state, where landowners are invited to visit active management sites and connect with landowners enrolled in LIP. Through Field Days, LIP participants have been able to involve their neighbors in the program, in some cases resulting in the creation of large blocks of contiguous habitat. According to one state representative, in addition to paying landowners in a timely manner, the ‘word of mouth’ that this outreach strategy helps to generate is one of the great reasons for the program’s success,

As a state biologist you can tell them whatever you want and they will either listen to you or they won’t listen to you. But hearing from a landowner that’s actually gone through the whole process seems to hit home a little bit more. They think they really can do this and it’s really not as hard as they thought it would be seeing the success of someone do it, on similar property.⁹⁷

LIP’s low match requirement provides true incentive for landowners to participate in habitat conservation. LIP’s match is an important reason for states’ ability to build new partnerships and leverage outside support for private lands conservation under this program. Compared with the State Wildlife Grant (SWG) match requirement of 50% and similar requirements under other private land programs, LIP’s 25% required match provides strong incentive for landowners and non-profit organizations to partner with states in conservation. States such as Wisconsin reported that in almost all cases landowners exceeded the necessary match.⁹⁸

Implementation Challenges

Proactively engaging private landowners in conservation has presented a new set of challenges for state agencies of which this report only begins to address. Prior to LIP, many states did not have a private landowner program to provide direct funding and technical assistance to landowners through a competitive grant process. To create a new program, states had to win the support of their legislatures, hire and train staff, determine program priorities, design marketing materials and outreach methods, and create application templates and review protocols and develop contractual processes to pay landowners.

While the challenges of private landowner engagement vary across the country, building trust between state agencies and landowners is a universal hurdle, and one that takes time. LIP put state agencies, typically charged with designing and enforcing regulatory standards that restrict private property rights, in direct partnership with landowners who may hold deep concerns about

⁹⁷ Massachusetts agency representative. Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife representative. Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis. October 9, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

⁹⁸ Wisconsin agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

legal limitations on the use of their land. Given the regulatory climate that has traditionally characterized threatened and endangered species protection, some landowners harbor concerns about state and federal wildlife conservation efforts.

Case Study: Conservation easement supports Pennsylvania bird habitat

Bald Eagle Ridge. In June 2007, the Clearwater Conservancy purchased a 244.6 acre conservation easement on Bald Eagle Ridge in Patton, Huston, Worth, and Half-moon Townships in central Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania Game Commission awarded a LIP grant (the first LIP project to be completed in Pennsylvania) to Clearwater Conservancy in October 2006. The property contains a large forested tract providing habitat for bird species of greatest conservation concern, such as Scarlet Tanager, Wood Thrush, and Worm-eating Warbler. Clearwater Conservancy has the responsibility to steward the property in perpetuity to ensure that the property's forest habitat continues to support birds of greatest conservation concern.⁹⁹

Many states are using LIP funds to purchase private conservation easements, arguably the most complicated form of conservation.¹⁰⁰ The focus on permanent land protection through easement acquisition may in part explain why it has taken so long for many states to spend LIP grant funds. According to the FWS, obligating funds in a timely fashion has been a particular challenge in the Northeast.¹⁰¹

Because LIP in many states is successfully engaging a variety of landowners, many of whom lack experience in conservation, program implementation requires dedication and patience. An interviewee from Maine aptly summarizes the state's own experience and that of many others,

I think the part that is most important for people to hear is that in Maine, and I think in many, many other states, we chose not to do what was easiest, what was fastest, what was the most politically correct. We chose to focus on at-risk species because so many of us do not have funding - state, federal or otherwise - to solely focus on at-risk species conservation.... These are complex projects that deal with individual landowners who have their whole slew of individual issues that you have to deal with if you want to work on that level. If [we] wanted to work with the easiest landowners, it wouldn't be an effective program.¹⁰²

The elimination of the Landowner Incentive Program underscores one of the central challenges for states: the lack of consistent funding dedicated to at-risk species conservation. Without renewed LIP funding, many fish and wildlife agencies will only be able to continue LIP until current funds are spent. Several program coordinators mentioned the possibility of using State Wildlife Grant (SWG) funds for this purpose, but few were optimistic, as most states have already obligated SWG funds. According to one state LIP coordinator

⁹⁹ Pennsylvania Game Commission. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program. Unpublished raw data. 2007.

¹⁰⁰ Some members of Congress oppose the use of conservation easements. In some cases, conservation groups like the Nature Conservancy have used LIP funding to place easements on land that they already own.

¹⁰¹ US Fish and Wildlife Service agency representative. Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis and Christopher Theriot. April 12, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

¹⁰² Heritage Foundation agency representative. Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis. October 3, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

Our SWG budget barely covers the projects we are obligated to implement under SWG, and other cash funds fill the gap for SWG match (salary costs).... Staff is concerned that many of our recommendations involving private landowners carrying out specific actions in the [Wildlife Action Plan] will have little likelihood of success without LIP funding providing cost share and LIP biologists providing technical assistance.¹⁰³

Recommendations

Any future private land conservation program should build on the success of the past five years, while making adjustments that address implementation challenges as well as FWS' primary justification for cutting the program: the low obligation of funds. If LIP funds are reinstated or if the program is recreated, we recommend that FWS and states consider the following suggestions for program improvement.

Recommendations for Congress and FWS

Reinstate annual funding for the Landowner Incentive Program. As the mission of fish and game agencies expanded to include protection of at risk, non-game species, the need for a consistent funding stream for these species has become evident.¹⁰⁴ Some people look to the change in administration as an opportunity to revisit LIP. Others hope that the proposed Warner-Lieberman climate bill, America's Climate Security Act, may present opportunities for reinstating LIP or a similar program. Currently, the climate bill includes language for an adaptation fund to carry out activities in accordance with state wildlife action plans of which LIP is closely aligned.

Specifically, America's Climate Security Act calls for 20 percent of the adaptation fund to be dedicated towards supporting endangered species, migratory bird, and other fish and wildlife programs administered by the FWS. While there is currently no specific mention of the Landowner Incentive Program, the climate bill presents a possible opportunity for Congress and the administration to address private land engagement.¹⁰⁵

Establish a reasonable deadline for funds obligation and expenditure. One of the problems with LIP is that Congress did not require states to obligate their money within a defined time period. For SWG, states must obligate their money within 2 years or else the money reverts back

¹⁰³ New Jersey agency representative. National Survey of the Landowner Incentive Program, November 2007.

¹⁰⁴ Collectively, three programs provide the majority of federal funding for wildlife management in the U.S: the 1934 Migratory Bird Conservation Act, the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, more commonly referred to as the 1937 Pittman-Robertson Act, and the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration, also known as the 1950 Dingell-Johnson Act. Both Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson provide funds through the collection of excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment.

¹⁰⁵ SB 2191 SEC. 4702. Adaptation Fund. <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/F?c110:1:./temp/~c110epi4nT:e182316>: (12 March 2008)

and is redistributed the following year to all states.¹⁰⁶ This time limit has worked well for SWG and only a low percentage of funds are returned every year.¹⁰⁷ Had Congress imposed a similar time limit on LIP, states would have felt an urgency to establish their programs, knowing that if they did not obligate the money, then they could lose Tier 2 funds. Based on data provided by FWS, the amount of unobligated Tier 1 and Tier 2 funds, as of June 15, 2006 equaled \$22,474,673.¹⁰⁸

While some might argue that this “no year money” policy is necessary when working with landowners on developing and implementing projects, this policy and the states’ slow start clearly left the program vulnerable to being cut based on the low obligation rates. In the future, FWS must give states guidance on whether they should make long-term investments for long-term practices, rental programs or permanent easements, or if states should focus funds on short-term practices with the hope that the landowners will continue to re-apply and the funding will be available.

Limit the availability of LIP funds to states until existing money is obligated and/or spent.

There is a difference between obligated funds and expended funds. Obligated funds mean that states have filed all the necessary paperwork with FWS and have met the requirements for particular projects. Expended funds relates to actual money granted to landowners for Tier 2 projects. In any future version of LIP, FWS should consider excluding states that fail to obligate their funds in a timely manner from being eligible to apply for new Tier 2 funds. This kind of approach would provide an incentive for states to act more proactively and reward states that successfully spent their LIP funds.

Develop multiple program evaluation metrics for the Tier 2 competitive program. FWS faced a challenge in evaluating states’ Tier 2 LIP performance. Should FWS measure success by the expenditure of funds, number of landowners engaged, the number of acres impacted, or actual ecological impact? According to one LIP coordinator, basing program success on the amount of money spent over a designated time period is not effective.¹⁰⁹ For certain wildlife populations, it may take years to achieve significant ecological results. We recommend that FWS develop metrics that address all of these criteria and actively aggregate the results across the country to show the impact of LIP. This information was not available and, to our knowledge, has not been compiled.

Keep LIP Tier 2 funds competitive. Future versions of LIP should retain a competitive component that rewards states that complete projects, implement innovative conservation

¹⁰⁶ Two different U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service representatives provided contradictory information about SWG time limits. One person said the unspent funds reverted back after two years. Another person said that states had two years to obligate money but no deadline for spending SWG funds.

¹⁰⁷ Written comments by a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service representative. March 30, 2008.

¹⁰⁸ FWS Obligation Status of the Landowner Incentive Program. Spreadsheet provided by the FWS program administrator who explained the June 15, 2006 data was the most current available at the time of request.

¹⁰⁹ New York State Department of Environmental Conservation agency representative. Telephone interview with Christopher Theriot. October 2, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

programs, and demonstrate success in working effectively with private landowners.¹¹⁰ In the northeast, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Maine received the most Tier 2 funds based on their ability to deliver successful projects in partnership with private landowners.

Keep the LIP program distinct. A future version of LIP should remain distinct from SWG and other funding sources even if it requires separate accounting and reporting. This way, FWS can ensure that LIP funds are dedicated to at risk species protection on private lands and are not subsumed by other conservation approaches. FWS will be better able to demonstrate the results that states achieve with LIP, so that there is more support for the program in subsequent funding cycles.

Directly link LIP to state wildlife action plans. The 2007 FWS LIP guidelines ask state applicants how their Tier 2 LIP proposal addresses priorities in local, state, regional, and national conservation plans, including the state wildlife action plans.¹¹¹ Requiring states to link LIP proposals directly to state SWAP goals should remain an important component of the Tier 2 funding competition.

Aggregate and publicly publish LIP results by state. The 2007 grant guidelines require an annual interim performance report for LIP Tier 1 and Tier 2 grants for grants longer than fifteen months in duration. Additionally, FWS requires a final performance report that includes a list of project accomplishments. FWS should aggregate this information and make it public. To our knowledge, the November 2007 survey is the most up to date national summary of LIP accomplishments. Making program statistics readily available is a way to protect the LIP program for funding cuts.

Recommendations for State Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Better publicize the impact of the program in conjunction with private landowners. LIP would clearly have benefited from more advocacy from state agencies and private landowners at a national level. While conservation groups and states did champion LIP when the administration first proposed to cut the program, the effort proved too little too late. Without a “broad, organized and relentless campaign,” programs with funds that are not fully obligated are at risk of losing out to other more established, efficiently administered programs.¹¹²

Hire dedicated LIP staff. Interviews with LIP coordinators show that states that hired dedicated LIP staff are more effective in implementing the program. Given the many challenges associated with launching an interagency, public/private program, it is clear that LIP requires the full attention of dedicated staff. If the LIP program is funded again, states should be required to demonstrate to FWS that they have adequate staffing to implement a program before they become eligible for these funds.

¹¹⁰ Male, Tim. Environmental Defense. June 2005. “The Landowner Incentive Program: Strategies for Long-Term Effectiveness.” p. 3.

¹¹¹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2007 Landowner Incentive Program Grant Guidelines, p. 9.

¹¹² Written comments from a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service representative. March 30, 2008

Adopt a two-part conservation strategy weighted towards active management. To increase speed of delivery of LIP funds, states may want to focus on developing active management projects in addition to pursuing the more complicated conservation easement strategy, if the latter is a priority for the state. The negotiation and sale of easements is a complicated and time-intensive process, which is one reason it has taken so long for several northeastern states to obligate and spend LIP Tier 2 funds.

Regarding the dual strategy of active management and easements, one FWS interviewee cautioned against this approach by suggesting that developing two strategies might further stretch LIP staff in their duties given the time demands.¹¹³ States will need to weigh the merits of a dual strategy based on their resources, partners, and conservation needs.

There may be other intangible benefits to active management. Actively engaging landowners in the restoration of their property may engender a stronger conservation ethic among landowners. This, in turn, can lead to better management decisions and greater advocacy from the private landowner for conservation in his/her community.

The Environmental Defense Center for Conservation Incentives (CCI), a champion of the Landowner Incentive Program, has raised valuable concerns about the conservation easement approach of some state LIP programs. In a 2005 report entitled, “The Landowner Incentive Program: Strategies for Long-Term Effectiveness,” CCI argues that while permanent protection through easements is an effective conservation strategy, many existing state and federal programs and private organizations already provide this service.¹¹⁴ Duplication with other programs was another justification for cutting the program.

Increase outreach to local governments as part of landowner engagement strategy. Recent studies of the state wildlife action plans and their implementation reveal how critical local government and community involvement is to wildlife habitat conservation. One LIP coordinator suggested that states enhance outreach efforts to local governments and engage these bodies in marketing LIP to landowners.¹¹⁵ Increasing outreach to local governments may have additional benefits such as helping local planning bodies policies with state conservation goals. In at least one state, a local land use ordinance has restricted landowner rights to enhance native habitat on private property.¹¹⁶

Increase cooperation with NRCS and existing private lands programs. One LIP coordinator in the northeast recommends greater cooperation with state NRCS offices.¹¹⁷ Given NRCS’

¹¹³ Written comments from a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service representative. March 30, 2008.

¹¹⁴ Most notable among these programs are conservation and land management programs funded under Farm Bill, including USDA’s Wetland Reserve Program, the Grassland Reserve Program, and the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program.

¹¹⁵ Delaware agency representative.

¹¹⁶ In Delaware, some local counties have adopted a rule that prohibits landowners from growing vegetation higher than 12 inches. As a result, LIP-enrolled landowners have received citations, forcing them to mow their grassland habitat. (Delaware agency representative October 17, 2007).

¹¹⁷ Massachusetts agency representative. Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife representative. Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis. October 9, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

expertise in land management and in implementing private land programs, and state fish and wildlife agencies' biological and conservation planning expertise, both groups – and thus environmental management on private lands - stand to benefit from strengthened collaboration.

Conclusion

By creating the Landowner Incentive Program, the federal government has made a considerable investment in private land conservation. States' effective use of LIP funds to mobilize existing relationships and expertise, and to motivate action in conjunction with other programs, demonstrates the true value of supporting a state-driven landowner incentive program. LIP has provided critical support for states to implement their wildlife action plans. Perhaps most importantly, LIP funds have bolstered cooperative conservation efforts by improving relationships between landowners and the state and successfully engaging an important new constituency in conservation.

LIP's demise came during the same budget crunch when many other FWS programs were cut, including the Private Stewardship Grant program, another program introduced as part of the Cooperative Conservation Initiative.¹¹⁸ Unfortunately, the termination of LIP has occurred just as states have begun to achieve tangible results. However, the administration's justification to cut the program due to the low obligation rates is not without merit. Low obligation rates made LIP an easy target, especially when compared to other efficiently administered private land conservation programs, such as the Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP). This program, created under 2002 Farm Bill, was operating within a year, and quickly obligated and spent all the GRP funds on conservation easements within five years.¹¹⁹

Over the last five years, LIP has proved itself to be an innovative model that, while not perfect, is effective in bringing together state agencies and private landowners to advance conservation. Any future version of LIP must account for both the complexities and opportunities associated with conservation and restoration work on private lands. The creation of LIP underscores the need to engage private landowners in the conservation of shrinking habitats and at-risk species. This need will only grow more acute in the years to come, as urban and suburban development leads to increasing habitat fragmentation and other impacts to wildlife.

¹¹⁸ Written comments from a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service representative. March 30, 2008.

¹¹⁹ Written comments from a representative from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation,

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Appendix A: Interview protocol and study introduction for Northeast state fish and wildlife agency representatives

Overview of Northeast Regional LIP Study

Nicole Lewis and Christopher Theriot, current graduate students at the University of Michigan, School of Natural Resources (SNRE) will conduct a targeted research study and develop a progress report on the Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) of the thirteen states, stretching from Maine to Virginia, that comprise Region 5 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Beginning in 2002, states had the opportunity to apply for Tier 1 and Tier 2I competitive funding from the USFWS. Since FY 2003, all 13 states in Region 5 have received Tier 1 funding to hire designated staff for the LIP program. And, with the exception of Rhode Island and West Virginia, the northeast states have received at least one round of Tier 2 funding. States use Tier 2 funding to provide competitive grants to private landowners for conservation of species of greatest concern.

In developing this study, we have consulted with USFWS Region 5 representatives, and a senior ecologist at the Environmental Defense Fund. We have had also had initial talks with two LIP coordinators and the LIP Working Group Chair of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. This report comes at a time when future funding for the LIP program is in jeopardy. There is hope that a recent amendment proposed by Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL) will lead to a reinstatement of LIP funding in the FY 2008 budget.

Objectives for the Northeast LIP study

- Understand the successes and challenges of implementing a new landowner engagement program.
- Gauge the initial level of impact LIP is having on private lands conservation at the state level.
- Understand the connection between LIP and the state wildlife action plans and the degree to which LIP funding helps states realize the goals and priorities identified in the state wildlife action plans.
- Explore how the LIP program has contributed to changes in the way wildlife agencies engage with private landowners.

Approach and Methods

As mentioned above, we have had several conversations with LIP experts and coordinators to learn about the program and to develop our research design and interview questions. During the fall of 2007, we will complete our research by doing the following:

- 1) Conduct telephone interviews with LIP coordinators for the 13 northeast states in USFWS Region 5. These interviews will be recorded with the agreement of LIP coordinators.
- 2) Review state LIP websites, if available, and other background materials, including recent Tier 2 applications and annual state LIP evaluations.
- 3) Following a synthesis of initial findings, we will develop several case studies, focusing on different states, to provide a closer look at key issues in program implementation.

With the input from state LIP coordinators, and possibly landowners, we hope that our study will highlight the strengths and importance of this program in promoting conservation. To our knowledge, this study will be the first regional evaluation of the LIP program. All research findings will be shared with LIP coordinators and other interested parties. Names of coordinators will not be used in the final report.

Interview Questions for LIP coordinators:

Background

1. What is your background and how/when did you start your work as LIP coordinator?
2. What different conservation mechanisms does your program employ?
3. How do you use Tier 1 and Tier 2 funds?

Part 1: Planning and Outreach

1. What were the key challenges in developing your state's LIP program?
2. How does the LIP program fit in with other conservation efforts of your agency?
 - Does the LIP program address priorities identified in your state wildlife action plan?
 - Do you coordinate LIP projects in conjunction with other conservation incentive programs? If so, which programs and how does this work?
3. Please describe your agency's marketing and outreach strategy for LIP. Has the LIP program led to new ways to engage and/or educate landowners on conservation?
4. How would you characterize the general response from landowners?
 - Are you receiving more applications or inquiries (demand) than your agency can fund?
 - What types of landowners are applying, e.g. private landowners, land trusts, NGOs?
 - Are your applicants new to conservation or experienced in ecological restoration and familiar with incentives and conservation resources/strategies?

Part 2: Program Impact and Future

1. Please describe a completed project or a project currently underway.
 - How did the landowner meet the 25% cost share requirement (i.e. in kind contributions or cash)?
 - How did the landowner learn about LIP?
 - What has been the landowner's role in implementation/management?
2. What, if any, performance measures have you used to track progress? To date, how many projects have been funded and how many acres have been protected or improved under LIP, or how many acres are under consideration?
3. To what degree and in what ways has LIP changed the way your agency engages private landowners?
4. If LIP funds are not reinstated, how do you expect your agency to continue to promote private landowner engagement? For example, could you foresee your state using SWG funding to support future LIP grants? Other cash funds?
5. What are the particular strengths of your state's LIP program and do you have any suggestions on ways to improve the LIP program in the future?
 - At the state level?
 - At the national level?
6. Does this program fulfill the niche that its proponents claim it does? In other words, how critical is this program to wildlife conservation on private lands in your state?
7. If LIP funding is restored, would you plan to use it similarly in the future or would you foresee changes (i.e. What would you most focus on improving? Would conservation priorities change?)?

Appendix B: Selected Answers from AFWA National LIP Survey

Survey question: Did your agency have a private lands habitat conservation/engagement program in place prior to LIP?

Alabama: LIP allowed for the development and expansion of a private lands network that previously did not exist and is independent program from existing wildlife management programs. More importantly, our agency did not have a monetary assistance program in place for habitat restoration.

Alaska: No. We had an hoc function that operated more or less on the basis of whatever grant funds were secured each year.

Connecticut: We provided very limited technical assistance to landowners under an existing PR Technical Assistance Job, but nothing on the scale of the LIP program. Tier 2 funding has made possible a vibrant program in Connecticut that is just now establishing a solid reputation amongst landowners and the conservation community. If funding is not restored, this vibrant program will just be short very positive blip on the conservation history screen.

Michigan: There was an information/education component, but no direct on-site assistance to landowners.

For states with preexisting programs

Illinois: Until the Illinois LIP was developed, there was no coordinated effort to focus these programs (IDNR and Farm Bill) on species-at-risk. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources has several private lands habitat conservation programs, but they operate out of different offices and divisions within the IDNR. A new delivery system was modeled after the successful Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).

Washington: We had private lands biologists that worked with game species, habitat and access with non-game benefits as a sideline. LIP provided financial means to expand their focus to include diversity and at-risk species.

Vermont: We created a new delivery system focused around state-significant natural communities.

Wyoming: We created new positions and infrastructure dedicated to delivering private land conservation.

Survey question: In what ways has LIP changed the way your agency engages with private landowners, e.g. what's different?

Delaware: We usually have two RFPs in the fall and early winter and throughout the rest of the year we target priority habitats using GIS software.

Florida: Because of LIP, Florida is pro-actively engaging landowners within focal areas by directly soliciting participation. As such, there is a significant amount of landowner interest in LIP. Applicant properties are individually evaluated for natural resource value using a GIS based process that assigns a property rank. Once ranked, FWC biologists recommend beneficial and cost-effective practices to landowners and conduct site visits.

Iowa: The LIP program has very narrow parameters for eligibility which forces staff to target and focus their efforts on those landowners who could make a difference for Iowa's species of greatest need. The Private Land Program staff identify landowners within the pre-set priority areas that may be interested in implementing habitat improvements for species of greatest conservation need.

Maryland: LIP has offered a chance for our agency to go beyond merely educating landowners, or contacting them to ask their permission to survey rare species and habitats on their property. We solicit applications from landowners in three ways:

1) general outreach using our website and brochure, by attending public events like the State Fair, and by giving presentations to landowner workshops, watershed associations, etc.

2) sending letters directly to landowners, followed by phone calls to let them know about the unique resources their property supports, and to tell them about the possibilities with LIP.

3) working closely with our partners and conservation personnel from other agencies (e.g. NRCS District Conservationists, Maryland Forest Service Foresters), Local NGO's (e.g. the Chesapeake Bay Trust), Land Trusts, Watershed Associations, Partners for Fish and Wildlife and others, to help us identify landowners who might be eligible for LIP.

Michigan: We target landowners within focus ecosystems in several priority areas around the state. We are able to direct the landowner's on-the-ground management with funds. Before we could only advise other programs that may or may not have focused on state wildlife priorities. We are now able to work one-on-one with landowners and affect the way they view and manage their property for wildlife.

Vermont: We target landowners who have recently allowed the Natural Heritage Program to conduct surveys on their property. Whichever sites are determined to be state-significant, then LIP staff follow-up with them for a site visit to talk about management and conservation options. LIP enables us to have an ongoing relationship with landowners and to have a point person for landowners to contact for assistance.

Survey question: Does the LIP program address priorities identified in your state wildlife action plan?

Alabama: The LIP has become an integral part of protecting at-risk species and addressing the priorities identified in the Wildlife Action Plan, which recognizes Alabama's wildlife diversity, critical habitats and identifies 303 species in greatest conservation need.

Connecticut: Yes, LIP strategy is to concentrate on early successional and wetland habitats, two broad habitats identified as habitats of greatest conservation need in our 2005 Comprehensive Conservation Strategy. All of our LIP projects directly support the priorities set forth in the plan to manage for species at risk/greatest conservation need species on private land.

Florida: Absolutely, FL's LIP directly addresses threats and actions outlined in FL's Wildlife Action Plan by focusing on high priority habitats.

Nevada: Absolutely, the Wildlife Action Plan is the guiding document for LIP in Nevada. The plan has identified specific wildlife species, their locations, and the habitat problems they face; LIP is considered an important restoration implementation tool for the plan.

Survey question: Do you mix LIP projects with other conservation incentive programs?

Idaho: We are able to provide information and direction to private landowners about the variety of funding that is available to them, as well as make it easier for them to wade thru the maze of grant writing and meeting the criteria associated with the Farm Bill programs.

Survey question: How would you characterize the initial response from landowners?

New Jersey: Landowners are now actively participating and reaching out to the Division for assistance with habitat management. Even if the landowner is unsuccessful in getting LIP funds, we have developed a relationship with a landowner regarding how they can do better for wildlife on their property.

Wisconsin: We have landowners who have never participated in land programs attend our workshops because they wanted to learn more about what their neighbors are doing. LIP is one of the few programs that results in people knocking on the door of a state agency, asking us to help manage their land and increase the number of listed species to their property. The DNR does not currently have any other programs that focus this intently on helping private landowners, and the interest demonstrated through LIP-related inquiries indicates that there is a great need to augment this approach rather than cut back.

Survey question: If LIP funds are not reinstated, how do you expect your agency to continue to promote private landowner engagement?

Connecticut: There may be some very limited opportunities for SWG to fund a particular project or portion of a project. We could run a program that would directly support the first major initiative of the SWG plan.

Illinois: Without LIP, Illinois will lose the ability to restore and maintain critical, unique habitats in two key state focus areas. A number of plant and animal species are not found anywhere else in the state and they are threatened by habitat loss and degradation. It is unknown how Illinois can replace the LIP delivery system for technical and financial assistance. At this time there is no other source of State Funds to replace LIP. SWG funding, at this time, are insufficient to fund both LIP and work on critical habitats on public land.

Maryland: MD DNR does NOT have alternative fund dedicated to keep LIP going if funding is not re-instated. We and our director feel strongly that landowner contact, education, and restoration on private land are crucial to improving habitat in Maryland and preventing the listing or extinction of species-at-risk, and we will try to find funding to maintain the program if LIP funding is cut. However, the state's SWG funding is largely needed for research and monitoring. The future of LIP in Maryland is most definitely in doubt without federal funds.

Iowa: Iowa would depend greatly on the Farm Bill programs to deliver wildlife improvements to landowners. The problem with that is the program in the Farm Bill are not directed toward species of greatest conservation need and are not narrowly targeted with the thought that all Iowan's have to be eligible equally.

New Jersey: Our SWG budget barely covers the projects we are obligated to implement under SWG and other cash funds fills the gap for SWG match (salary costs). It does not appear that there will be funding to engage private citizens to steward their land for the benefit of declining species. Staff is concerned that many of our recommendations involving private landowners carrying out specific actions in the WAP will have little likelihood of success without LIP funding providing cost share and LIP biologists providing technical assistance.

Survey question: If LIP funding is restored, would you plan to use it similarly in the future or would you foresee changes?

Maryland: We would focus on continuing on with the momentum we are just beginning to build, continuing to pursue the restoration and outreach goals laid out in our Tier 2 and Tier 1 agreements, and expanding upon them in consultation with our Heritage ecologists and other partners.

Tennessee: We would continue to increase capabilities through equipment purchases and man power as well as focus management to increase pairing of restoration work with EQIP, WHIP, and CCRP where they fall short. Placing more emphasis on species associated with cave/karst protection, prairie/barren restoration, wetland enhancement and restoration, and continued emphasis on aquatic habitat restoration and protection.

Wisconsin: A more stable future would encourage the program to conduct more targeted outreach efforts and focus some long-range goal setting. This would result in improved coordination with other state/federal efforts on newly emerging priority areas, such as allowing us to periodically focus funding towards specific species or areas of importance. Again, we are doing this now but with constant hesitation that we may not be able to deliver if we make commitments to our partners without the funding to back it up.

Alabama: If LIP funding was restored, the agency would be able to expand the staff support for the program. Biologists could be available for technical assistance and complete biological assessments at all of the LIP restoration sites. Also, funding would allow for more landowners workshops to be held and more informative literature to be published for educational purposes. In so far as on the ground restoration, we would expand on what has been established as a state wide program. This would allow more opportunities for landowner enrollments and more on the ground accomplishments for species at risk.

