



## **Wisconsin DNR Facilitates Habitat Protection Plan**

The Karner blue butterfly was listed on the Federal Endangered Species List in December 1992. Although the species is rare nationwide, it is relatively common in central and northwestern Wisconsin, especially where pine barrens, oak savannas, and mowed corridors support wild lupine, the only food of the Karner blue caterpillar.

Shortly after the Karner blue was listed as endangered, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approached the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) about how the state would respond to the listing in light of widespread distribution of the species across the state and the large number of landowners affected. With ongoing conflicts over the listing of other species around the country, both federal and state agencies were eager to avoid similar problems in Wisconsin. DNR responded by developing a statewide Habitat Conservation Plan

(HCP) that would maintain Karner blue habitat while allowing continued forestry and highway maintenance activities. The concept of a statewide HCP was revolutionary; to date, almost all HCPs had been limited to a small geographic range and one or two landowners.

DNR distributed information throughout the state explaining the listing and the statewide HCP concept, and conducted a series of public meetings. Through this process they identified the major land managers who would need to be involved as partners in developing a statewide HCP. In all, the process involved 28 full partners, nine limited partners and 23 participants and cooperators. The group included federal, state and local government officials; the forest product industry; utilities; and representatives of environmental groups.

After the first several meetings of heated debate among stakeholders, DNR contracted with a facilitator (David Lentz) to ease tensions, identify common goals, and help the group work collaboratively toward developing the HCP.

The group agreed to create several committees and task forces to address specific issues and iron out differences. For example, a biological committee was formed to assemble scientific research on the Karner blue, and to share relevant research findings with the rest of the group.

Throughout six years of plan development, every decision of the group was reached through consensus. The public comment period generated

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only seven comments, none of which opposed the HCP.

The Wisconsin HCP, approved in September 1999, was the first of its kind in the United States. It covers 250,000 acres of partner-managed land in central and northwestern Wisconsin. While the national recovery plan for the Karner blue focuses on growth and maintenance of populations, Wisconsin's HCP stipulates no net loss of butterfly habitat in the state.

A source of pride for many of the stakeholders involved in its development, the HCP provides for voluntary participation for small landowners (under 1,000 acres), prescribes land use limitations on habitat land, and employs adaptive management techniques to deal with changing conditions affecting the butterfly in Wisconsin. Incorporation of adaptive management helps make the plan dynamic and flexible. Should numbers of the species decrease due to lack of habitat conservation on the part of small landowners, the exemption can be modified or deleted from the plan.

Among the innovative outcomes of the process was approval of in-kind contributions for HCP funding. These contributions include hours spent on surveys and management activities, as well as outreach efforts such as brochures and videos produced by partners. In the end, the success of this approach to managing the Karner Blue habitat depends on the strength of continuing relationships among local, state, and federal agencies, private companies, and the non-profit groups and individuals who use and manage the land.

*For more information on the statewide Habitat Conservation Plan, visit the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources [web site](#).*