

## Project Highlight – SD State Wildlife Grant

**Project Type** monitoring and reintroduction evaluation

**Title** Determination of river otter distribution and evaluation of potential sites for population expansion in South Dakota

**In a nutshell** The river otter is a state threatened species that is slowly expanding in South Dakota. Although SDGFP has a variety of data sources on river otters, a coordinated effort was needed to determine current status in areas that have not been surveyed recently and to evaluate various drainages for suitability for river otter translocation. This project also included radio-implanting and monitoring of 2 river otters translocated from the eastern to the western part of the state to evaluate their movements and survival.

### Relevant Species of Greatest Conservation Need

- river otter (*Lontra canadensis*)

**Relevant Habitats** aquatic habitats likely to support beavers and river otters

**Cooperators** Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)

### Purpose

- Update river otter occupancy status of drainages with evidence more than 5 years old
- Determine river otter occupancy status of agreed-upon drainages
- Evaluate agreed-upon sites for reintroduction suitability
- Instrument and release  $\leq 8$ , live-trapped South Dakota river otters into previously selected, unoccupied streams predicted to be suitable river otter habitat to monitor movements and evaluate reintroduction potential.

**Timeframe** October 2011 – December 2014

**Location** statewide, with less emphasis on Black Hills

### Summary or Important Findings

- Melquist visited more than 300 bridge crossings, conducted aerial surveys of multiple streams and evaluated individual stream bodies to evaluate their suitability for river otters. Summaries by water body are presented.
- Three otters were fitted with surgically implanted radio transmitters. Movements of the two surviving animals were tracked by Melquist, SDGFP staff and Lacreek NWR staff following their release at the Little White River Recreation Area near Lacreek NWR.
- Melquist also evaluated current threats to river otters in South Dakota, reviewed the need for reintroductions to assure full recovery, discussed delisting parameters, and described future monitoring and research needs.

**Best contact person** Silka Kempema, SDGFP

**More Information**

Melquist, W. E. 2015. Determination of river otter (*Lontra canadensis*) distribution and evaluation of potential sites for population expansion in South Dakota. Report for Grant Number T-55-R-1, Study No. 2465.