

Candidate Conservation

	2006 Actual	2007 CR	2008			Change From 2007 (+/-)
			Fixed Costs & Related Changes (+/-)	Program Changes (+/-)	Budget Request	
Candidate Conservation \$(000)	8,619	8,063	+250	+322	8,635	+572
FTE	62	63		+2	65	+2

Summary of 2008 Program Changes for Candidate Conservation

Request Component	Amount	FTE
• Green River Basin Initiative	+500	+2
• General Program Activities	-178	0
Total, Program Changes	+ 322	+2

Justification of 2008 Program Changes

The 2008 budget request for Candidate Conservation is \$8,635,000 and 65 FTE, a net program change of +\$322,000 and +2 FTE from the 2007 President’s budget.

Green River Basin Initiative (+\$500,000/+2 FTE) - The requested increase is part of the Secretary’s Healthy Lands Initiative and will be used to expand Candidate Conservation work in the Green River Basin of southwestern Wyoming, where there is a critical need to coordinate energy development and species conservation across land ownerships. The increase will support technical assistance to preclude the need to list species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The State’s Wildlife Action Plan will be used to help direct where these activities take place.

The increased technical expertise provided by the Candidate Conservation program will be coordinated with and complement work by the Service’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife and Fisheries programs, the State, other Federal agencies such as USGS and BLM, and other partners. The Service will engage in proactive and integrated conservation efforts implemented under the Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative (WLCI), a local initiative involving the State, within-state Federal partners, and private partners. This collaborative, landscape-scale approach to conservation is a paradigm shift in conserving species while proceeding with energy development in the Basin. A key element of the WLCI involves conservation efforts in habitat priority areas identified by Wyoming Game and Fish. The State’s Wildlife Action Plan will also help to identify priority areas.

For several species in the Basin, threats that could prompt the need for listing under the ESA are relatively well understood. For such species, Candidate Conservation expertise will support development and implementation of conservation agreements and targeted actions that are most likely to be effective in reducing or removing the threats. This includes completion of a programmatic Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for greater sage-grouse on non-federal lands. Through a CCAA the Service can provide regulatory assurances to non-Federal property owners, thus encouraging implementation of conservation measures for species at-risk. Multiple property owners with lands totaling approximately one million acres of non-federal sagebrush habitat would be eligible to enroll in the CCAA. Within the entire range of the greater sage-grouse, the Basin is a stronghold for the species due to the extent of sagebrush

habitat and sage-grouse populations there. Thus, completion of this CCAA and the initial expected enrollment of 15,000 acres in FY 2008 will contribute to the overall conservation of the greater sage-grouse and help continue to ensure that listing this species under the ESA is not necessary.

Another key need identified in Wyoming's Comprehensive Wildlife Action Plan is to address the lack of information for some of the wildlife species identified by the State as being of greatest conservation need. Candidate Conservation program biologists conduct species assessments that are the basis for decisions about whether a listing proposal is appropriate. The information in these assessments also facilitates the design of conservation agreements and strategies for actions to reduce threats so that listing may become unnecessary. Consequently, biologists in the program can provide technical expertise to ensure that information collected or provided by various partners is of the type and quality needed for credible assessments of species' status and for developing appropriate conservation agreements and management actions to effectively address identified threats.

Several species in the Green River Basin will benefit from proactive conservation to strategically identify and address potential threats. These include the yellow-billed cuckoo, a species formally recognized by the Service as a candidate for listing, and several species that could become candidates for listing in the future. Examples include fish such as the roundtail chub, leatherside chub, and flannelmouth sucker, and birds such as the Columbian sharp-tailed grouse and mountain plover. The Green River Basin is a stronghold for some species at-risk such as the white-tailed prairie dog, Wyoming pocket gopher, greater sage-grouse, and several endemic plants (*Astragalus proimanthus*, *Phlox pungens*, and *Physaria condensata*); coordination of conservation agreements, strategies, and actions is essential to retaining secure populations of these plants and animals.



Greater Sage-Grouse

General Program Activities (-\$178,000) - The Candidate Conservation Program has adopted a more strategic and collaborative approach to conservation. The Program is helping other Service programs, as well as other Federal and non-Federal partners, leverage limited resources to benefit candidate species by targeting and coordinating their conservation actions. Savings can be realized through increased collaboration, thus making it possible for the Service to propose reducing general program activity funding for Candidate Conservation.

Program Performance Change

	2004 Actual	2005 Actual	2006 Actual	2007 CR ¹	2008 Base Budget (2007 PB + Fixed Costs)	2008 Plan	Program Change Accruing in 2008	Program Change Accruing in Outyears
					A	B=A+C	C	D
10.1.1.1 # of species for which listing is unnecessary as a result of conservation actions or agreements (Bur) (1) *	3	3	5	3	3	4	+1	0
<p>* Costs are not available for this measure. Since the measure is outcome-oriented, it does not accurately capture all the work conducted during a given year, only that small amount for which a determination has been made that listing is unnecessary.</p> <p>1 The performance and cost data in the 2007 CR column is presented at the 2007 plan level, which is based upon a projection of 2007 likely enacted made during the first quarter of 2007. The 2008 plan builds on the 2007 plan. To the extent Congress enacts a 2007 appropriation that is different from the 2007 projection, the 2008 plan may require revision.</p> <p>Note: Projected costs may not equal program change as these are full costs, which may include funds from other sources and (or) use averages.</p> <p>Column A: The level of performance and costs expected in 2008 at the 2007 President's budget level plus funded fixed costs. Reflects the impact of prior year funding changes, management efficiencies, absorption of prior year fixed costs, and trend impacts, but does not reflect the proposed program change.</p> <p>Column D: Outyear performance beyond 2008 addresses lagging performance — those changes occurring as a result of the program change (not total budget) requested in 2008. It does <u>not</u> include the impact of receiving the program change again in a subsequent outyear.</p>								

Program Overview

The Candidate Conservation Program supports the DOI Resource Protection strategic goal by providing technical assistance for voluntary conservation agreements and actions that make it unnecessary to list species under the ESA, and by assessing the status of declining species to identify specific threats that may, if not addressed, require listing the species.

Candidate Species Assessment

Candidate species are plants and animals for which the Service has sufficient information on their biological status and threats to propose them as endangered or threatened under the ESA, but for which development of a listing regulation is precluded by other higher priority listing activities. The candidate assessment process is designed to identify species in need of the ESA's protection, and it assists the Service and our partners in designing and prioritizing conservation efforts.

Each year, the Service uses the best available scientific information to review the status of species previously identified as candidates and decide whether any of them should be removed from the candidate list or if their listing priority should change. The listing priority number is based on the magnitude and immediacy of threats to a species, as well as its taxonomic status. The Service also annually assesses the status of a limited number of other species at-risk to determine if they should be elevated to candidate status. These assessments consider and describe threats and conservation efforts. The candidate assessments are available to the public, and they provide

essential information for designing conservation agreements and actions that will be effective in making listing unnecessary.

In FY 2006 the Service completed assessments of more than 280 species, including updates for all candidates. This resulted in identifying 7 new candidate species, changing the listing priority number for 24 existing candidates, and removing 10 species from candidate status for various reasons. In FY 2007, the Service will again assess approximately 280 species, which will include updating the assessments of all current candidates.

Preventing the Need to List Species: A Collaborative Process

Through the candidate assessment process, the Service has identified 278 plant and animal species that are candidates for listing as of January 5, 2007. For many of these species, conservation actions taken now may eliminate the need to proceed with listing; for others, conservation actions taken before listing occurs will assist in more rapid recovery and delisting. The Service also strongly encourages and facilitates collaborative conservation to address the conservation of species that have the potential to become candidates in the near future, including hundreds of species identified by States and other entities as being imperiled or as species of greatest conservation concern.

Technical assistance and facilitation are the hallmarks of the Candidate Conservation Program. Service biologists work with interested partners to determine what is needed to reduce threats and conserve declining species. Through these partnerships, broad-scale conservation agreements or strategies can guide specific management actions efforts across multiple land ownerships, including Federal and non-Federal lands. Technical assistance also is provided to individual landowners who volunteer to implement conservation measures on their property.

Candidate Conservation Agreements (CCAs), Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs) or similar documents (such as conservation strategies) describe a series of voluntary actions which, over time, have the potential to result in determinations by the Service that listing a species is not necessary. For example, in 1999 several private landowners, BLM grazing land permittees, the BLM, and the California Department of Fish and Game signed a conservation agreement for the Cow Head tui chub, (*Gila biocolor vaccaceps*), a fish that occurs in a small basin in northeastern California and northwestern Nevada. Numerous conservation actions taken under the agreement contributed substantially to a recent decision by the Service to withdraw a proposed rule to list the chub under the ESA. In another situation, as a result of a CCA adopted in 1996, more widespread inventories and studies shed new light on the abundance and status of the wonderland aliceflower (*Aliciella cespitosa*) in Utah, making it possible for the Service to remove the species from candidate status in FY 2006.

Experience shows that conservation efforts based on a coordinated and strategic approach to addressing threats are more likely to be effective in preventing the need for listing. Therefore, in FY 2006 the Candidate Conservation Program initiated a targeted approach to more effectively leverage limited resources for achieving the conservation of candidate and other species at-risk. This includes a more focused and strategic approach to collaborative conservation within the Service and with other partners.

Within the Service, an on-going pilot project between the Candidate Conservation and Partners for Fish and Wildlife programs is aimed at increasing the number and effectiveness of on-the-ground projects that will reduce or remove threats to target species, so that listing will become unnecessary. The two programs have coordinated to identify a set of species for which threats can be substantially reduced or removed through additional and/or enhanced habitat on private

and other non-Federal lands. The greater sage-grouse is an example of species being addressed in this pilot program. Potential partners for sage-grouse conservation agreements and related habitat restoration and enhancement projects on non-Federal land include several State fish and wildlife agencies, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, and numerous conservation organizations, private landowners, industry groups, and sage-grouse working groups. Another key component of the pilot is developing mechanisms to greatly reduce the paperwork that private landowners currently must complete to receive regulatory assurances in conjunction with their collaborative conservation efforts for candidate and other at-risk species.

Enhanced coordination with external partners also is being emphasized. This includes increased coordination with States to address priorities of mutual interest identified in the new State Wildlife Action Plans. Coordination also is expanding with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service to better utilize Farm Bill conservation programs and initiatives under the Healthy Forest Reserve Program that support conservation on non-Federal lands. In addition, coordination is increasing with several other Federal agencies (e.g. the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Department of Defense, U.S. Forest Service) that administer most or all of the habitat occupied by several candidates and species at-risk. In all of these situations, technical assistance provided by the Candidate Conservation program can give a more strategic focus to conservation agreements and efforts, making it more likely that threats to species will be reduced or removed so that listing is unnecessary.

Use of Cost and Performance Information

The Service has developed a more strategic approach to setting priorities for making listing species unnecessary. This includes using information in species assessments to identify candidate species for which threats can be reduced or removed through habitat restoration or other conservation on non-Federal lands, as compared to species most affected by conservation efforts on Federal lands or on a combination of land ownerships. In addition, the Service has worked with NatureServe to develop maps showing watersheds where candidate and other imperiled species occur. Combining the threats information with the map information provides a basis for targeting conservation efforts in watersheds where more species can benefit, and for making more effective use of limited resources to design and implement actions most likely to make listing unnecessary. Through increased collaboration, savings can be realized, thus making it possible for the Service to propose reducing general program activity funding for Candidate Conservation. Candidate Conservation Program goals will continue to be achieved through the technical assistance offered by biologists in the program, in conjunction with cross-Service program coordination and partnerships with States and others to deliver conservation actions.

- Service field offices are using this information to work with State wildlife agencies and other partners to identify watersheds where expansion of on-going conservation efforts or development of new efforts are most likely to be effective in making listing unnecessary for one or more species. The approach emphasizes working with the States and using information, recommendations, and priorities provided in Comprehensive State Wildlife Conservation Strategies.
- The Service is working with other Federal agencies to adopt more strategic approaches for leveraging available resources. For example, increased collaboration between the Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is resulting in more focused NRCS assistance to private landowners for candidate conservation activities supported by Farm Bill programs and the Healthy Forest Reserve Program.
- The Service's Candidate Conservation and Partners for Fish and Wildlife Programs are engaged in a pilot project focusing on candidate species that are most likely to have threats reduced or removed through voluntary habitat restoration activities by private landowners, with technical support from the Service.

2008 Program Performance

In FY 2008, the Candidate Conservation Program will continue providing technical assistance for developing CCAs, CCAAs, and facilitating voluntary conservation efforts by private landowners, States, tribes, territories, federal agencies, and partners for candidate and other species for which potential listing is a concern. The Service's cross-program approach to candidate conservation will continue. This includes sharing information resources and expertise, and coordinating conservation work for priority species and geographic focus areas in order to increase efficiency and maximize benefits to target species.

The Candidate Conservation and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife programs have expanded coordination in applying a strategic approach to focus on those candidate and species at-risk that will benefit from voluntary habitat conservation projects on private lands. By identifying those species with significant amounts of habitat on private lands and working with landowners who are willing to implement on-the-ground habitat improvements that reduce or remove threats to those species, the likelihood of future listings may be avoided.

Planned accomplishments and activities include:

- The listing of four species will be unnecessary as a result of conservation actions or agreements. This includes three species that will benefit from strategic collaboration with various States and other partners, plus one of the species that will be addressed using the proposed increase in funding to support the Green River Basin Initiative. Also, conservation agreements and strategies developed with technical assistance supported by Candidate Conservation funds will continue to result in improvements in the status of a number of species in outyears.
- The Service will complete rigorous assessments for approximately 280 species under the candidate assessment process, the same as planned for FY 2007. These assessments will include information on threats to each candidate species that can help guide the choice of cooperative conservation efforts. Based on past history, the Service expects some species will be removed from candidate status, while others may be elevated to candidate status. Species assessments include information on threats that can help guide the design of conservation agreements and actions so that listing might become unnecessary for species identified as candidates. The exact number of candidates in 2008 will depend on the outcome of the assessments.
- The Service will provide updated tools and training to our partners to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of candidate conservation efforts. This includes continuing to work in close partnership with the States to design and implement conservation agreements, strategies, and management actions to address candidate and potential candidate species identified in the State Wildlife Action Plans.
- The Service expects a cumulative total of approximately 6.4 million acres will be covered by CCAs, an increase of 678,000 acres over the past few years, while the cumulative total covered by CCAAs will reach approximately 230,000 acres, an increase of 15,000 acres from FY 2007 expected acres. However, the exact number of acres covered through new CCAs and CCAAs in a given year depends on the number of interested partners, scope and scale of the agreements, and partners' timelines for working on these agreements.
- In FY 2006, the Service provided assistance for 13 CCAAs, 3 of which were completed and signed in FY 2006. For example, in Montana, the Service worked with Montana Fish,

Wildlife and Parks, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and other interested parties to complete a CCAA to improve habitat for the fluvial Arctic grayling in the Big Hole River. Habitat enhancements and other conservation measures are being funded, in part, by conservation programs in the Farm Bill. Additionally, in FY 2006, the Service continued technical assistance for development of 10 CCAs, 6 of which were approved in FY 2006. Conservation actions and agreements made listing unnecessary for five species in FY 2006.

- In FY 2007, as a result of continued technical assistance and collaborative conservation, the Service expects the listing of three candidate species will be unnecessary as a result of conservation actions or agreements.