

Strategic Habitat Conservation in the Southwest Region

Landscape Conservation for America's Fish and Wildlife

What is Strategic Habitat Conservation?

Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) is an adaptive management approach to habitat conservation. This approach will protect and enhance wildlife populations and ecological functions that sustain them. Additionally, it will direct our limited resources to achieve conservation for priority species. SHC will identify clear, measurable, and achievable goals and objectives.

The Service believes that Strategic Habitat Conservation:

- is a more effective strategic approach to conservation than a largely opportunity-driven approach;
- is a scientific method that is integral for our science-based organization;
- will help meet common conservation objectives through more efficient uses of resources.

Additionally:

- Monitoring is a return to the very basics of applied scientific practice—predicting the outcome of specific actions, implementing those actions, observing and measuring the result of the actions and fine-tuning the actions if the results do not meet expectations; and,
- This approach assists our commitment to State Wildlife Action Plans.

Rarely will a single organizational division of the Fish and Wildlife Service have the capacity to perform all elements of SHC. Conservation success will be achieved through cooperation between divisions of the Service, interagency collaboration and partnerships.

SHC is a framework of four functional elements that must occur in an adaptive management loop. The four elements are:

1. *Biological Planning*
identify priority species and establish species population objectives, identify limiting factors;

2. *Conservation Design*
develop habitat objectives for desired landscape conditions;
3. *Conservation Delivery*
implement on-the-ground conservation actions;
4. *Monitoring and Research*
monitor and evaluate conservation delivery.

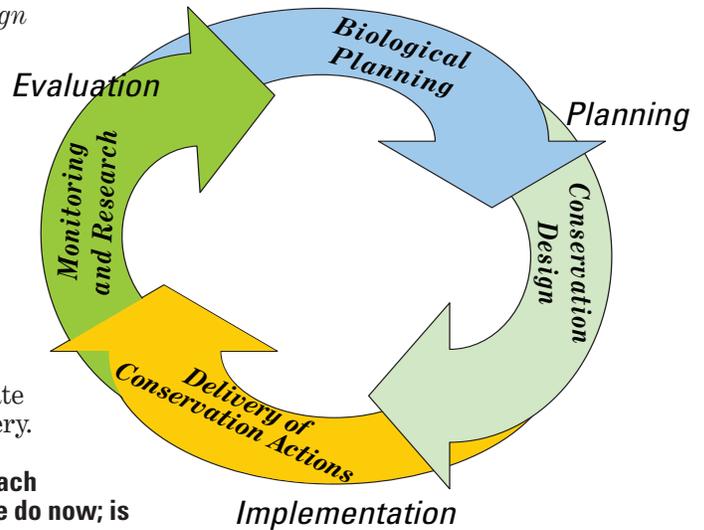
How is the SHC approach different from what we do now; is this a new initiative?

The traditional U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conservation approach has frequently relied more on opportunity and less on scientific strategies. Resulting conservation priorities, policies, and actions have not fully benefited from landscape-level considerations or the priorities and work of others.

Our partners in conservation will collaborate with us on the elements of SHC. Some programs within the Service already use the framework of SHC—notably Joint Ventures and the National Fish Habitat Action Plan. Many of our conservation partners use a similar approach—for example, The Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, and state wildlife departments in their State Wildlife Action Plans.

What are the consequences of not implementing this approach?

Without this approach, we may spread our resources too thin to achieve our goals or fail to tackle the highest priority conservation work first. Also, without a formal evaluation component, we are unable to determine what we have achieved, or communicate that to others.



Without a strategic approach, others may define our future for us.

Do we need to have complete knowledge of all species whose populations we want to influence before we get started?

No. This approach provides a framework for setting conservation objectives based on the best available information. Underlying assumptions will be monitored and tested to improve our knowledge and any necessary changes will be made to our implementation strategies and techniques.

If we focus strategically, will some issues, projects, or needs get left behind?

Yes. Priorities will be identified and coordinated with our partners.



How will the SHC framework be implemented?

Region 2 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service established the Implementation Team for SHC that is actively engaging employees of the Service and cooperating with outside groups. To date, the Team has established an internet website to provide the public with information about SHC (www.fws.gov/southwest/About%20Us/shc.html). During 2007, many Service employees, along with other agencies, met to address SHC in three specific focal areas within Texas, Oklahoma,

New Mexico and Arizona (see the website for further information). In the near future, we will be taking an inventory of SHC skills of all employees in the Southwest Region. The Service (along with experts from U.S. Geological Survey, universities, and other partners) will build geographically specific species and habitat models; determine where best to focus conservation efforts; develop, implement and monitor on-the-ground projects; and use that information in a feedback loop to inform future models and conservation efforts.

For Further Information

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