From:	Acting Director
To:	
Subject:	All Employee Message: National geographic framework for landscape conservation
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In their meeting in April, Service Directorate members and Deputies made three key decisions that will move our agency toward its goal of establishing and building capacity for science-driven landscape conservation on a continental scale. These decisions will have a profound impact on the way the Service does business —allowing us to be more strategic when working with our partners and applying our resources.

Our leaders agreed:

- The Service needs a national geographic framework to improve our ability to implement landscape conservation—adaptive resource management principles applied to the entire range of a species, a group of species, or a natural community of plants and animals. Our agency "brand" for this approach is called Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC).
- The Service needs a geographic framework that is common to all regions.
- The primary purpose of a national geographic framework for implementation of SHC is to provide spatial context for biological planning and conservation design at landscape and population scales to inform our day-to-day activities.

A national geographic framework is a network of connected "ecoregions"—large units of land and water containing a geographically distinct assemblage of species, natural communities, and environmental conditions. These areas are designed to put science in the right places so resource managers have the information and decision-making tools they need to conserve fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats in the most efficient and effective way possible.

Just as flyways have provided an effective geographical frame of reference to build capacity and partnerships for international, national, state and local waterfowl conservation, a national geographic framework provides a continental platform to which the Service can connect project- and site-specific efforts to larger biological goals and outcomes. This is particularly important as we work with partners to develop national strategies to help wildlife adapt in a climate-changed world. A geographical frame of reference also allows us to more

precisely explain to partners, Congress, and the American public why, where and how we target resources for landscape-scale conservation how our efforts connect to a greater whole.

In the coming weeks, the SHC Executive Oversight Committee—composed of executive-level leadership from the Service and U.S. Geological Survey—will work with the SHC Technical Advisory Team to help the Directorate determine what this national geographic framework will look like. While we realize no system is perfect, the Service is taking great care to design a framework that:

- addresses terrestrial and aquatic species needs, as well as multiple ecosystems;
- is understandable to employees and partners;
- facilitates conservation delivery;
- is scaleable to address a range of complex conservation challenges (including accelerating climate change); and,
- enables the Service to explain our activities in the context of higher-level goals.

The Executive Oversight Committee also will provide recommendations to the Directorate on how a national geographic framework will inform the development of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs). The Service has requested $10 million (leveraged with partner contributions) in its FY 2010 budget to begin establishing a national network of these cooperatives to conceptualize, design and grow shared science capacity to inform resource management decisions.

Finally, <u>there is, in no way, any discussion of regional or programmatic reorganization associated with any aspect of SHC or the definition of a geographic framework</u>. We are simply trying to define a method and geography to help us effectively and methodically build scientific and technical capacity that will support landscape-scale conservation and our field structure.

Service leadership cannot overstate the respect and appreciation we have for the excellent work of our employees. We believe a national geographic framework will help employees and managers clearly see how that work—whether it’s in the field or in the Regional or Washington Offices—connects to broader conservation efforts in their part of the country and throughout the United States. A national geographic framework for landscape-scale conservation is a step toward that goal, and a clear indicator that our agency is looking toward the future and not living in

the past.

In the next few days we will post links to related information on the Service Intranet site, as well as video interviews with Directorate members. You can visit the site at https://intranet.fws.gov/