

Dave: Hi, this is Dave Eisenhauer with the Office of Communications in Region 9, the Headquarters Region, and today I'm joined by Rick Kearney who is the ARD for Science Application in Region 8. Thank you for joining us, Rick.

Rick: Thank you.

Dave: Rick, I know that you've been spending the last few days here at NCTC with a group of folks from around the country in leadership positions from all the regions and several programs discussing strategic habitat conservation. An effort in our agency right now to engage employees in talking about the agency's vision for strategic habitat conservation as a way to address challenges that we're facing with climate change, urbanization and those type of things, and as well an introduction of what we're calling a draft guidance for surrogate species selection which is a component of SHC, biological planning but I guess I wanted your impressions based on the discussions in the past couple of days of any key things that are emerging and how is this group of folks who are really kind of key opinion leaders in their arenas grappling with this issue or addressing this issue and moving it forward.

Rick: One of the things that I'm taking away from this event is the vision of functional landscapes. We have for many years been focused upon the programs within the Fish and Wildlife Service that are required by law or established under regulation which focus upon one piece of the conservation picture. Be it the conservation of migratory birds or the management of our national wildlife refuges, we have in many ways become experts at dealing with things at a local scale and at a scale that is appropriate for the problem at hand. What we've lacked however is a vision, a vision of how things operate over broader spatial scales, over larger landscapes, and how what we do is impacting and is impacted by the activities of others who are on that same landscape; our ranchers, and farmers, and others who are involved in either the extractive industries or land management industries in which we really can't ignore any longer. If we want to be players in landscape conservation we have to acknowledge those others who are out there and to be able to tell our side of the story on how we can develop a vibrant and sustainable landscape over time.

Dave: Can you speak to – working off of what you were saying there especially in your region, obviously there are so many issues in terms of population growth and impacts in development as it relates to species and management for species, how that approach specific to your part of the country relies on partnerships, relies on sort of an ability to really kind of work not only within the service to do this but work with state partners and myriad partners that are out there on landscape.

Rick: Sure. In California and Nevada, it's a very highly managed system especially in the Central Valley of California where more than half of America's vegetables are grown. We recognize that managing lands strictly for wildlife is probably not sustainable in the long term. There are so many pressures for limited amounts of fresh water, for development of land for homes and industry that we have to be able to tell a more compelling story as to why lands need to be restored, why lands need to be managed for wildlife in this matrix of farms and villages.

Dave: And I know that Director Dan Ashe in his video message and message that he sent out to employees kind of prefacing this that he mentions the word relevance a lot in terms of the Fish and Wildlife Service but really wildlife conservation in general and I wonder if you can speak to that too in terms of that landscape vision, the relevance of wildlife conservation and the importance of being able to tell that story and make the case for conservation with all those other competing indicators.

Rick: Sure, fish and wildlife are good indicators of the health of the ecosystem – the one on which we all depend upon for fresh water, for fresh air, for open space, for recreation and other uses. By managing fish and wildlife resources, we're also ensuring that the ecosystem in which all of the people live maintains its health and is sustainable over a long period of time not just in the short term but rather for our children and our children's children.

Dave: One of the things that I've been asking a lot of folks about is the sort of change component of this within the organization. When we're talking about this vision and a vision for landscape sustainability and sustaining populations – we're changing the way that we're approaching conservation which for a lot of folks in our agency brings some uncertainty some fear some of what's next sort of thing. How has that been, how have you experienced that in your own region in terms of introducing SHC as an ongoing effort within the service as well is now surrogate species and what are some of the questions and concerns that are being raised right now.

Rick: Well, these are tough times not just in terms of the effects such as climate change and invasive species coming into our region, the continuing population growth and pressures on available lands but also economically, we are seeing downturns in states income streams and budgets and so we need to be smarter, we need to work smarter, and work more efficiently in order to get the maximum benefit we can from what resources are provided to us using Strategic Habitat Conservation we can do that. By putting together some technical information - science based information as to what our fish and wildlife species need, we can in fact create a blueprint for conservation in which we leverage our limited dollars with those of our partners to create the most conservation benefit.

Dave: Right. Last question I have for you is one that really relates to legacy – not only the legacy of fish and wildlife conservation but your own personal legacy. I guess the question would be that in the work that you're currently involved and the work that you have been involved in, as related to conservation of natural resources and fish and wildlife. What would you want to be remembered for, for the legacy that you leave?

Rick: Well, I've told others that I want to leave this world a better place than the way I found it. For me that means leaving behind a healthy system, a system that provides for fish and wildlife resources, for clean air, clean water, and open space not just for my own children but for all, everyone's children. And so what I would like to be remembered is that he made a difference.

Dave: Thanks a lot for joining us, Rick.

Rick: Thank you.