U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Strategic Habitat Conservation

A Lasting Fish and Wildlife Legacy

September 2012

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been entrusted to safeguard our Nation's fish, migratory birds, aquatic species, anadromous fish, endangered and threatened species, and public lands. The unprecedented scale and complexity of challenges we face in the 21st century, however, require us to expand our vision for conservation and the partnerships we work with to achieve it.

To ensure a bright future for fish and wildlife in the face of widespread threats such as drought, climate change and large-scale habitat fragmentation, we can no longer base our actions solely on past experience and success. We must conserve landscapes capable of supporting self-sustaining populations of fish and wildlife, while also providing for the needs of people. Conserving these large landscapes, which are subject to multiple changing pressures and uncertainty, will require application of the best available science at every step.

Working to conserve landscape-scale habitats requires the Service to lead and facilitate an era of unprecedented collaboration – focusing and encouraging conservation efforts by many different individuals, agencies, and organizations. To succeed at a significantly larger scale and at a considerably faster rate, scientists and conservationists must work together to develop new approaches to scientific modeling and forecasting, test them in action, learn from experience and continually improve.

Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) is the conservation approach adopted by the Service that establishes self-sustaining populations of fish and wildlife, in the context of landscape and system sustainability, as the overarching target of conservation. SHC relies on an adaptive management framework to inform decisions about where and how to deliver conservation efficiently with our partners to achieve predicted biological outcomes necessary to sustain fish and wildlife populations.

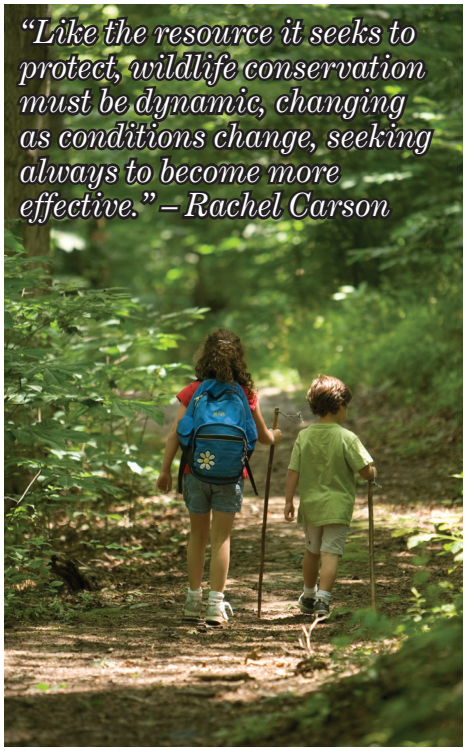
Landscape Conservation Cooperatives are public-private science partnerships that provide the expertise needed to support conservation planning, implementation, and evaluation at landscape scales. LCCs are generating the tools, methods, and data that managers need to carry out on-the-ground conservation using the SHC approach. They also promote collaboration among their members in defining shared conservation goals.

Selecting surrogate species and other conservation targets
Since the sheer number of species for which the Service, states, and other partners work with makes designing and conserving landscape-scale habitats impractical on a species-by-species basis, we are now developing a process to collaboratively identify surrogate species representing other species or aspects of the species' environment (e.g., water quality, sagebrush or grasslands, etc.). Conserving habitat for these species can at the same time address the needs of a larger group of species. This is a practical step in using the SHC framework and the best-known science to conserve landscapes supporting multiple species. Selected surrogate species and biological targets will be used as the basis for regional conservation planning efforts within a landscape or geographic area.

The landscape conservation strategies and actions identified through such planning processes (species or habitat protection or restoration, monitoring, public engagement, research, etc.) will inform our agency's management practices and systems – how we make budget decisions, evaluate performance and ensure accountability. Ultimately, they will enable the Service to make more cost-effective and strategic conservation and management decisions and investments and improve our ability to sustain abundant, diverse and healthy populations of fish, wildlife and plants now and in the future.

To comment on the SHC approach and draft guidance for selecting species, visit:
http://www.fws.gov/landscape-conservation/public-comments.cfm

For more information, visit:
http://www.fws.gov/landscape-conservation



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