

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Mountain-Prairie Region

FY15 Regional Priorities



Operational Priorities

OUR PEOPLE

Invest in Our Workforce

Employee Professional Development

Fiscal Year 2015 Action Items:

- Nurture a workplace culture that encourages and emphasizes employee professional development.
- Expand and improve Employee Development Program opportunities and tools for employees.

Safe and Productive Workplace

Fiscal Year 2015 Action Items:

- Use risk management techniques and tools in daily activities.
- Expand safety training opportunities for wage-grade personnel.
- Complete Annual Safety and Environmental Self-Inspection and associated follow-up actions prior to August 15.

Recruit and Retain a Diverse and Highly Engaged Workforce Reflective of the Public We Serve

Fiscal Year 2015 Action Items:

- Increase the number of highly qualified, diverse job applicants for Regional positions.
- Ascertain barriers/solutions to recruit and retain highly skilled employees.
- Expand participation in the Director's Resource Assistant Fellows Program to recruit highly qualified, diverse future employees.
- Implement a cross-program trainee program that focuses on a robust experiential learning opportunity for entry-level employees.

OUR BUSINESS

Maximize Our Investments into Conservation Efforts

Business Process Improvements and Administrative Efficiencies

Fiscal Year 2015 Action Items:

- Improve reimbursable agreement processing, travel coordination and purchase requests to seek efficiencies to maximize resources for mission delivery.
- Continue to improve Regional fleet management and appropriately right-size Regional fleet.

Continue to Advance the Principles of Strategic Habitat Conservation as our Conservation Delivery Paradigm

Continue to Build Science Capacity Through Our Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC)

Fiscal Year 2015 Action Items:

- Develop a Public Information Portal for sharing information developed by LCCs that managers can use to inform conservation delivery.

Leverage Other Existing Internal Science Capacity

Fiscal Year 2015 Action Items:

- Develop mechanisms for scientific expertise to support decision making within program areas on priority resource issues, including climate science, population modelling, genetics, and geospatial analysis.

OUR PARTNERS

Maintain and Increase our Collaboration with State Fish and Wildlife Agencies, our Primary Partners

Invest in Improving our Relationship with Key Partners

Fiscal Year 2015 Action Items:

- Each Service program, or all programs together, will host at least one general coordination meeting within each of our eight states, to discuss mutual priorities and conservation opportunities with State wildlife agency directors and appropriate agency staff.
- Each Project Leader will ensure that state wildlife agency directors and appropriate agency staff are apprised in advance of local announcements or initiatives.
- For major policy initiatives or decisions (such as the Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing decisions), the Assistant Regional Director, Deputy Regional Director, or Regional Director will personally communicate decisions to state directors in advance of public release.
- Work with our state partners to proactively achieve conservation for at-risk species before they are listed and, through these conservation efforts, work to preclude the need to list these species.
- Work with our state partners to assess and restore natural resource damages that affect shared priority landscapes and species.
- Continue to support our state partner agencies through effective and efficient administration of the Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program.

Maintain and Increase our Collaboration with Tribes

Fiscal Year 2015 Action Items:

- Programs with Tribal interactions will coordinate at least one meeting with those Tribes to discuss issues, goals and priorities of mutual importance.
- Ensure the Region is represented at important Tribal gatherings throughout the year (i.e., Denver Pow Wow, National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Annual Convention, and Native American Fish and Wildlife Society meetings).
- Host a Tribal roundtable meeting, Eagle Summit and Tribal law enforcement training.
- Finalize the Regional Tribal Strategic Plan through the identification of goals, objectives and strategies.

OUR PUBLIC

Enhance Communication Efforts and Further Align Outreach with Regional Priorities

Invest in Improving Communication with Key Audiences

Fiscal Year 2015 Action Items:

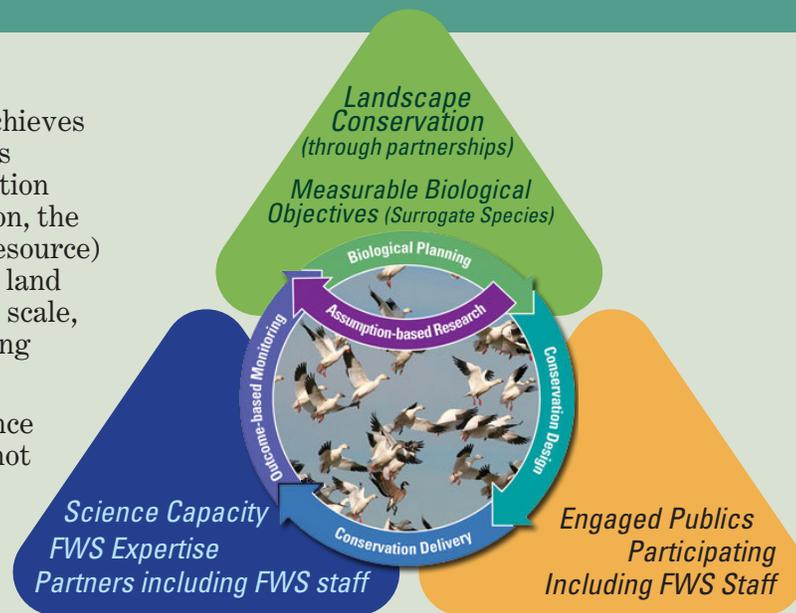
- Finalize the redesign of the Regional websites and ensure it is updated and provides timely and helpful information to the public.
- Build strategic, proactive approaches to communications around our Regional resource priorities.
- Further implement visual tools (such as webcams) to capture real-time on-the-ground conservation efforts for Regional priority activities.
- Strategically engage key Members of Congress, state legislators, and county commissioners on Regional priorities.
- Prioritize our outreach efforts using urban and high visitation field stations to communicate Service priorities.

Resource Priorities

Preamble:

The graphic is an illustration of how the Service achieves its priorities for landscape conservation through its operational paradigm, Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC). To achieve true landscape scale conservation, the Service must establish measurable biological (or resource) outcomes for priority resources. Given the diverse land ownership and resource authorities on a landscape scale, the Service can only achieve its goals by establishing partnerships with the appropriate entities.

The primary foundation for our success is the science expertise of the Service and our partners. We cannot establish achievable resource goals without foundational science to direct our efforts. The second foundational component is the involvement of the public. This involvement must go beyond passive support, to include an engaged and active public.

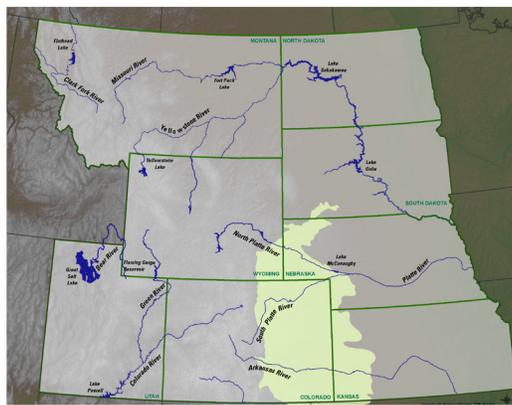


The center of the triangle illustrates the central importance of the SHC paradigm. The SHC effort is the process through which the Service, partners and engaged publics design, implement and evaluate landscape conservation delivery, a component of Surrogate Species. SHC is critical to the Service's success in achieving conservation at a landscape scale by delivering the most effective conservation actions in the most efficient manner.

Shortgrass Prairie

The shortgrass prairie supports a complex suite of species that have been considered for, or are currently protected under the ESA. In addition, this landscape is experiencing widespread expansion of wind power development, with its accompanying risks to many species, highlighted by potential impact to golden eagles. A fully functioning shortgrass prairie ecosystem with its assemblage of species is essential for successful recovery of critical species.

Species of Concern: *black-footed ferret*, *golden eagle*, *Topeka shiner*, *other prairie fishes*.



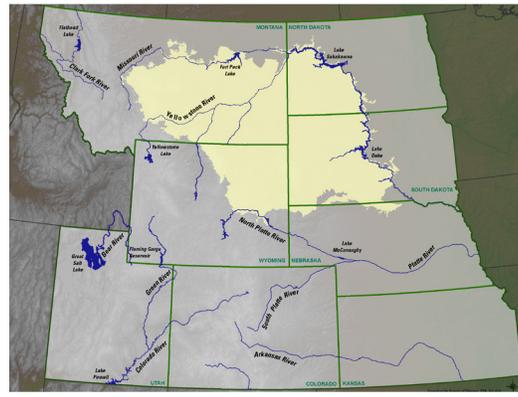
Fiscal Year 2015 Actions:

- Implement the Safe Harbor Agreement for black-footed ferret and the incentive programs with private landowners.
- Work with the State of Colorado and Natural Resource Conservation Service to establish 1-3 black-footed ferret reintroduction sites in Colorado.
- Continue to support the field trials for the black-footed ferret for the sylvatic plague vaccine and begin preparing a deployment strategy in coordination with partners.
- Complete the statewide 10(j) designation for black-footed ferret in Wyoming.
- Finish planning documents and site preparation at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge for potential black-footed ferret reintroduction in 2016.
- Apply predictive modeling developed by the Western Golden Eagle/Energy Team to prioritize threats from wind power and implement relevant conservation and mitigation measures.
- Test hypothesis regarding movements and survival of multiple age classes of golden eagles.
- In collaboration with state, federal, Tribal and other partners, develop a strategic approach to conserving imperiled plains aquatic species in the shortgrass prairie.

Northern Mixed Grass Prairie

Several species of grassland nesting birds in the Northern mixed-grass prairie are experiencing a long-term decline, and conservation actions to benefit these species will depend upon strategic use of resources within this private-lands dominated landscape. While ongoing partnership efforts have tentatively prioritized key species, threats and conservation tools to prioritize conservation actions, success will depend on more complete development of a conservation strategy, and coordinated delivery of resulting conservation actions.

Species of Concern: *grassland nesting migratory birds*:
Sprague's pipit, *Baird's sparrow*,
chestnut-collared longspur,
McCown's longspur



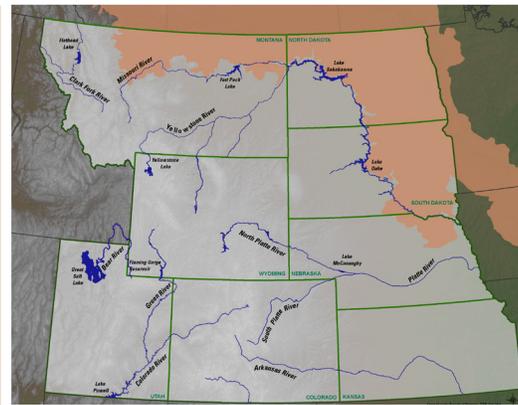
Fiscal Year 2015 Actions:

- Implement a conservation strategy to benefit the suite of grassland nesting birds in this ecosystem.
 - Align Service resources across programs to deliver conservation strategies within this ecosystem.
- Use Service science assets, such as HAPET, Refuge Inventory and Monitoring and partner-driven assets such as relevant Joint Ventures and LCCs, to provide decision support tools for strategic application and conservation actions.
- Use data from the Breeding Bird Survey and other monitoring programs to develop metrics to assess the success of the conservation strategy.
- Coordinate with partners to focus continuing research on the most relevant outstanding management questions, including development of local-scale information to step down existing rangewide habitat prioritization tools.

Prairie Pothole Region

The Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) is one of the most productive systems in the country for grassland nesting birds; however, it is one of the most threatened. Agricultural and energy development have profound impacts on grassland and wetland habitat. Socially important wildlife species such as waterfowl rely on this area to meet critical life cycle needs such as breeding. The rate of threats we are witnessing in the PPR requires us to increase our efforts to conserve this critically important area of our region through acquisition and productive relationships with private landowners.

Species of Concern: *continental migratory waterfowl populations*, *declining grassland birds*, *wetland dependent birds*.



Fiscal Year 2015 Actions:

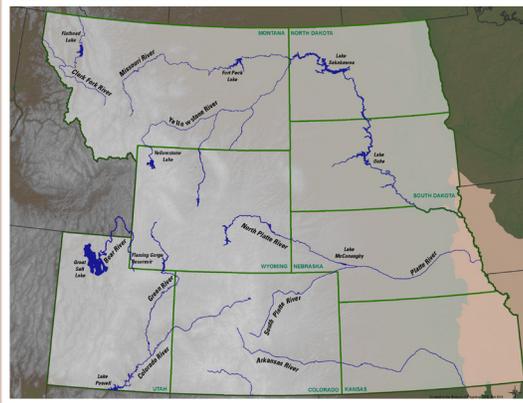
- Fully integrate the two HAPET offices into one science delivery hub and identify key science needs to support conservation delivery in the PPR.
- Continue conservation delivery to perpetually protect prairie resources:
 - Protect 30,000 acres of grassland and 10,000 acres of wetlands by utilizing Migratory Bird Conservation Fund and Land and Water Conservation Fund resources.
 - Utilize the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to continue efforts to build collaboration with private land constituents through conservation practices on private lands.
 - Continue the priority emphasis on completing easement evaluations with private landowners.

Resource Priorities

Tallgrass Prairie

Once stretching uninterrupted across more than 140 million acres, the tallgrass prairie was a complex ecosystem dominated by unique native grasses. This diverse natural community has been reduced to 1% of its original expanse and stressors include surface and subsurface water extraction for irrigation, extractive mineral development, agricultural development, grazing, barriers in streams, and climate change. These grasslands provide essential habitat for numerous migratory bird species, most of which are grassland obligate birds and are declining.

Species of Concern: *grassland birds, prairie fishes, freshwater mussels.*



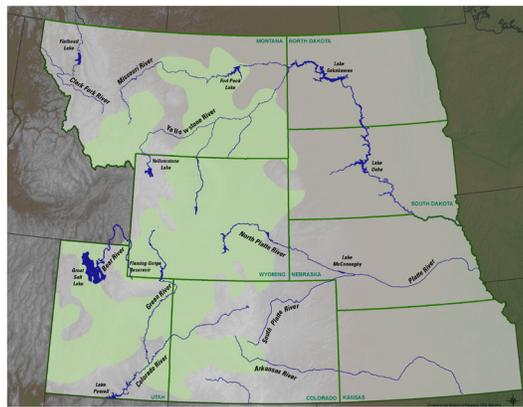
Fiscal Year 2015 Actions:

- Develop and begin to implement a Flint Hills Action Plan with key partners. The Action Plan will specify management objectives, decision support tools and information needs.
- All programs will identify and deliver conservation actions in support of this landscape.

Sage-steppe

The sage-steppe covers a large portion of the western U.S. and supports a large assemblage of sensitive species reliant on this ecosystem, including the sage grouse. While sage grouse will continue to be a focus of the Service's efforts in support of sage brush steppe conservation, the landscape is also a focus for renewable energy development, with the accompanying potential impacts on trust species to include the golden eagle. Aquatic resource stressors in sage-steppe streams are similar to those found in the prairie landscapes, but primarily extractive mineral development, grazing, barriers in streams, and climate change.

Species of Concern: *sage-grouse, golden eagle, and other sage dependent species, Kendall Warm Springs dace and sauger.*



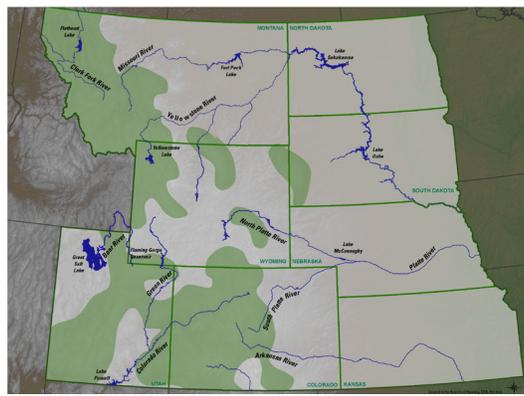
Fiscal Year 2015 Actions:

- Work with partners, including the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV), to fully develop a long-term conservation vision for the sage-steppe ecosystem.
- Identify and address scientific data gaps regarding sage-steppe ecosystems and the response of sage-grouse to changes.
- Continue working with state and federal partners to provide scientifically sound recommendations for maintaining a viable sage-steppe ecosystem to support sage grouse and other sage dependent species.
- Apply predictive modeling developed by the Western Golden Eagle/Energy Team to prioritize threats from wind power and implement relevant conservation measures and mitigation options.
- Test hypothesis regarding movements and survival of multiple age classes of golden eagles.
- Use the principles of Strategic Habitat Conservation to design a landscape scale conservation program for the Upper Green River Watershed.
- Implement a decision analysis framework to support a decision whether or not to propose the greater sage grouse for listing under the ESA.
- Continue efforts with state and Tribal partners to restore native sauger populations on the Wind River Reservation.
- Finalize the recovery plan for Kendall Warm Springs dace.

Montane

The montane landscape and associated habitats of the Rocky Mountains extend through the western portion of the Mountain-Prairie Region from the Canadian border on the north to the New Mexico border to the south. This landscape contains some of the most iconic and prominent terrestrial and aquatic species in North America as well as some smaller, but ecologically important species. While some of these species are being successfully recovered and restored, a variety of stressors, including hard rock mineral extraction, water development, non-native species and now climate change continue to challenge montane ecosystems.

Species of Concern: *grizzly bear*, *Arctic grayling*, *Canada lynx*, *cutthroat trout* and *bull trout*.



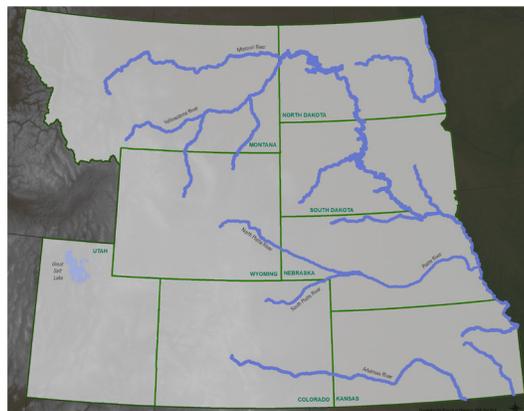
Fiscal Year 2015 Actions:

- Work with partners to finalize a post delisting regulatory framework for grizzly bears.
- Complete a status review of greenback cutthroat trout.
- Develop a recommendation for taxonomic/conservation status of the green lineage Colorado River cutthroat trout.
- Continue Arctic grayling conservation efforts in Montana with partners.
- Continue working with state partners to transition propagation programs at Jones Hole National Fish Hatchery to native cold water species.
- Develop with partners a strategic guidance document for cutthroat trout conservation.
- Protect an additional 12,000 acres within the Crown of the Continent in Montana through conservation easements.
- In cooperation with the Pacific Region, draft Recovery Unit specific plans for bull trout for the Columbia Headwaters and St. Mary Units.

Big Rivers

The habitats of the upper Missouri, Arkansas, and the Red River of the North and their major tributaries provide important aquatic and riparian landscapes in the eastern portion of the region. Numerous species have been seriously affected by a variety of ongoing stressors, including agricultural and extractive mineral development, and reservoirs as well as ground and surface water irrigation in portions of these systems. These stressors, along with introduction and spread of non-native species, such as Asian carp, continue to present challenges in restoring and managing ecosystems within these important landscapes.

Species of Concern: *sturgeon*, *paddlefish*, *numerous mussel species*, *whooping crane* and *Wyoming toad*.



Fiscal Year 2015 Actions:

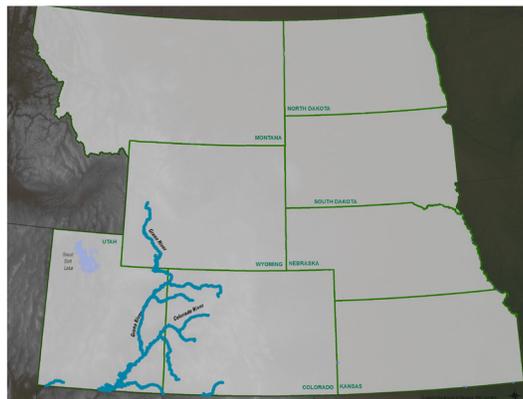
- Lead a collaborative partnership to monitor pallid sturgeon in the Missouri River and provide essential information on survival, abundance and life history.
- Implement strategies to stock genetically diverse juvenile pallid sturgeon to augment populations in the Missouri River.
- Collaborate with partners to restore native lake sturgeon populations in the Red River of the North.
- Collaborate with partners to develop landscape-scale conservation strategies for native mussel restoration.
- Work with the State of Wyoming to restore shovelnose sturgeon in the Big Horn River.
- Identify priority habitat needs along the North and Central Platte River for Whooping crane and related migratory birds to target conservation delivery.
- Fully explore opportunities for land acquisition/protection as a priority recovery strategy for the Wyoming toad.
- Continue efforts to increase captive propagation capabilities for Wyoming toad and release toads at appropriate life stages and in numbers to effectively contribute to recovery goals as requested by the Recovery Team.

Resource Priorities

Colorado River Basin

The Colorado River and major tributaries support a variety of native fishes. Some of these fishes have been stressed to the point of requiring listing under the ESA. The Colorado River system is the most important source of water for agriculture, industrial and other uses in the southwestern U.S. It has been altered by dam construction, trans-basin diversions, irrigation, as well as introductions and spread of non-native species, all of which continue to be major challenges in managing and restoring this important ecosystem.

Species of Concern: *razorback sucker*, *bonytail chub*, *pikeminnow*, *woundfin* and *Virgin River chub*.



Fiscal Year 2015 Actions:

- Continue working with state partners to implement the Upper Colorado River Basin Nonnative and Invasive Aquatic Species Prevention and Control Strategy.
- Publish a draft Colorado Pikeminnow Recovery Plan.
- Convene a recovery team to begin revision of the Humpback Chub Recovery Plan.
- Increase recruitment of razorback sucker at Johnson Bottom on Ouray National Wildlife Refuge.
- Monitor endangered fishes in order to assess effectiveness of and focus conservation delivery efforts for recovery.

Cross Cutting



Fiscal Year 2015 Actions:

- Continue the Accelerate Team effort to address water quality and quantity issues.
- Expand project to assess and determine needs and priorities for propagation of native aquatic species utilizing hatchery facilities.
- Identify significant environmental stressors that threaten the viability and persistence of priority landscapes and ecosystems and minimize impacts of those stressors.
- Conduct water quality assessments for Service facilities and lands to establish existing water quality conditions to identify significant stressors and establish baseline conditions.
- Create a Regional Pollinator Conservation Program to identify relevant Regional pollinators and their conservation needs.
 - Collect native grass and forb seeds, including milkweed and restore 2,500 acres of prairie acres on Service lands for monarch butterflies.
 - Restore 4,000 acres of native prairie on private land, including planting milkweed for monarch butterflies.
- Identify high priority landscapes affected by energy development, work with our state and industry partners to site new energy facilities to minimize impacts and develop tools to facilitate smart energy planning.