

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Mountain-Prairie Region

FY14 Regional Priorities



Operational Priorities

Our People

Invest in Our Workforce

Provide Professional Development Opportunities for our Employees

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Fully implement the new Regional Employee Development Program while continuing to research and provide high quality/low cost professional development opportunities and resources to all employees.
- Work with Regional supervisors to develop a workplace culture that integrates professional development with our mission-focused operations.
- Develop appropriate performance metrics to measure our Employee Development Program progress and success.

Ensure our Employees have a Safe Work Environment

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Better educate our entire workforce on risk management and incorporate user-friendly, risk-based management tools into daily activities and decision making at every level of the Region.
- Ensure that every Project Leader/Station Manager completes and follows up on their Safety and Environmental Self-Inspection prior to August 15.

Recruit and Retain a Diverse and Highly Engaged Workforce that Reflects the Publics We Serve

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Use, refine and grow our extensive network of professional, academic, non-profit and governmental contacts in our efforts to attract, recruit and retain diverse, highly qualified and engaged employees.
- While safeguarding our current workforce, continue successful efforts by Human Resources and Diversity and Civil Rights Program (e.g., Pathways, special hiring authorities) to recruit and retain skilled and talented employees in the Region.
- Work to isolate retention challenges in the Region and develop solutions to address them.

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

Work with Partners to Identify and Utilize Surrogate Species to Achieve Self-sustaining Fish and Wildlife Populations in Functional Landscapes

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Identify a geography to develop Version 1.0 Surrogate Species for the Region, including the identification of potential surrogates, species to be represented, and limiting factors for that geography. We will use this first version to test and refine our approach.



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

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Refine and enhance information flow on Service Regional priorities and the opportunities that LCCs can implement to improve conservation design.
- Establish a cross-programmatic advisory group of Service employees to provide input to the Region's LCC Steering Committee members for both the Great Northern LCC and Southern Rockies LCC to ensure Steering Committees are fully aware of Regional priorities.
- Develop and test a communication mechanism to determine how the Service best shares updated information regarding science support tools developed from Regional LCCs for potential use by Regional programs and partners.
- Integrate existing aquatic data with terrestrial information within the LCC framework to support conservation at landscape levels for priority trust aquatic resources in the Great Plains Fish Habitat Partnership area.

Leverage Other Existing Internal Science Capacity

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Further integrate the Habitat and Population Evaluation Team (HAPET) to support Regional priorities by working with Service offices and programs to support the development of pilot landscape conservation projects by engaging and providing methodologies, data, and training regarding landscape conservation and the development of decision support tools to address landscape threats and protection efforts.
- Develop a cross-programmatic team to integrate the Region's programs to support, strengthen, and coordinate our priority conservation delivery efforts. Specifically, maintain and enhance an annual inventory of priority research and information needs across programs and develop a database of wildlife and plant species that have been designated as priorities (e.g., focal, surrogate, target, conservation concern, threatened and endangered).
- Maintain efforts to utilize National Fish Passage Program's Geospatial Fisheries Information Network (GeoFIN) and the Great Plains Fish Habitat Partnership's Midwest Habitat Assessment to focus and achieve strategic aquatic habitat conservation goals.

Our Partners

Invest in Improving our Relationship with Key Partners

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Within each of our eight states, each Service program or all programs together, will host at least one general coordination meeting 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 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 using information provided by the relevant Service program.
- 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 State Fish and Wildlife Agencies, our Primary Partners

Operational Priorities

Maintain and Increase our Collaboration with Tribes

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Each program/station that has a nexus with a Tribe will schedule at least one coordination meeting (alone or with other programs) with those Tribes to discuss issues of mutual importance.
- A Regional Directorate Team (RDT) member will be identified to represent the RDT and the Region at important gatherings of Tribal leaders from the Region.
- Conduct a Tribal Roundtable Meeting-Part II to further the relationship with the Tribes, explore new ways to increase communication, enhance consultation, explore overlapping priorities, and provide a training workshop for grant writing.
- Increase Tribal communications and awareness of Service priorities, initiatives, programs and funding opportunities.
- Plan, coordinate and host an Eagle Summit III meeting with the Tribes.

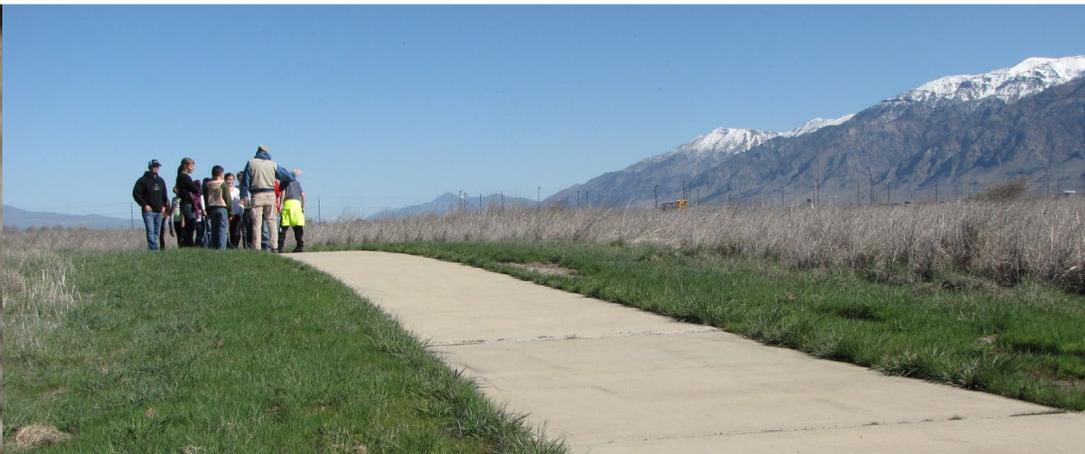
Our Public

Invest in Improving Communication with Key Audiences

Enhance Communication Efforts and Further Align Outreach with Regional Priorities

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Build strategic, proactive approaches to public information campaigns and communications around Regional resource priorities.
- Implement visual tools (such as webcams) to capture real-time on-the-ground conservation efforts for Regional priority activities.
- Redesign the Region's website to provide increased interactivity, brand consistency, streamlined maintenance, and user-centered focus.
- Strategically engage key Members of Congress, state legislators, and county commissioners on Regional priorities.
- Increase the relevance of the Service and National Wildlife Refuges and incorporate the "Urban Standards of Excellence" into planning and daily operations at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal (RMA) and Bear River Refuges. These efforts will target non-traditional audiences as well as highlight Denver Urban Bird Treaty activities at RMA.
- In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, feature articles on each of the eight field stations in the Region with designated or proposed wilderness areas.



Resource Priorities

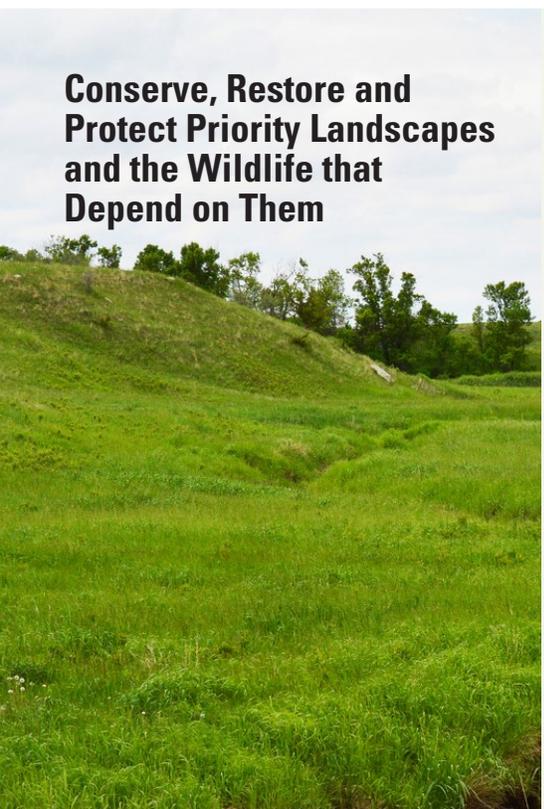


Proactively Identify and Influence Significant Environmental Stressors to Minimize Impacts to Fish, Wildlife and their Habitats

Water, Energy Development and Invasive Species

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Implement a cross-programmatic, non-hierarchical team to address water quality and quantity issues, in light of water's broad-ranging impact on the trust species for which we have responsibility. The team will be authorized to independently identify opportunities and explore measures otherwise unlikely to be pursued through traditional program approaches.
- Continue to reach out to the energy industry to develop conservation strategies that are consistent with State/Federal conservation efforts for sage-grouse.
- Develop an analytical framework utilizing geospatial analysis, incorporate such analysis into Landscape Energy Action Plan (LEAP), and present to the energy industry to advance their sage-grouse conservation efforts.
- Identify high priority eagle conservation practices and incorporate those into existing decision support systems such as LEAP, as well as relay the practices to the energy industry to be implemented in eagle permitting efforts.
- Finalize Regional policy to establish processes to prevent invasive species range expansion by Service personnel.
- Update Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) plans for Regional Fisheries and Aquatic Conservation stations and develop HACCP plans for Regional Ecological Services field stations to minimize risk of spreading invasive species through Service activities. Initiate annual Aquatic Invasive Species inspections for all hatcheries in the Region.
- Conduct baseline water quality assessments for three hatcheries to document existing water quality and to determine if environmental contaminants may be present that could adversely impact fish recovery.



Conserve, Restore and Protect Priority Landscapes and the Wildlife that Depend on Them

Grassland Dependent Species and Native Grassland Ecosystems

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Protect over 40,000 acres of grassland and 8,000 acres of wetlands of highest priority migratory bird breeding habitat at risk of conversion with perpetual conservation easements using Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF) dollars.
- Develop "Phase II--Crisis in the Prairies" strategic communication campaign on the value of the prairies to gain public support, attract national attention, and work collaboratively with our partners on prairie conservation efforts.
- Continue the collection of Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data while identifying the need for additional sampling for under-represented species, habitats, and geographies while integrating spatial models derived from BBS to inform landscape conservation delivery actions.

Resource Priorities

Conserve, Restore and Protect Priority Landscapes and the Wildlife that Depend on Them (continued)



Sage-Grouse and the Sage Steppe Ecosystem

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Lead the Service's participation in the range-wide effort to conserve the Greater sage-grouse. Use the Field Management Team as the principle operation advisory group to Service leadership on the adequacy of conservation efforts range-wide.
- Working with Region 1 and 8, develop a mitigation framework that identifies the mitigation tools and principles for both traditional mitigation as well as advancing the principles associated with advanced crediting.
- Develop the necessary metrics to report measurable biological outcomes for sage-grouse conservation efforts.
- Provide direct input to the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service planning efforts regarding Greater sage-grouse conservation and work with and advise state planning efforts regarding Greater sage-grouse conservation.
- Accelerate the Sage-Grouse Initiative (SGI) through the Intermountain West Joint Venture's (IWJV) coordination of the multi-partner Strategic Watershed Action Team (SWAT). This involves leveraging potential new funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and partners to support capacity that will continually refine the SGI's approach to strategic conservation delivery and quantify outcomes to sage-grouse populations.
- Enhance Greater sage-grouse partnership conservation efforts through full implementation of our cooperative agreements with the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA). Implementation will include, but is not limited to, the current efforts to complete funded research, facilitate state data integration in LC MAP and the compilation of information and management of the invasive species/fire complex with WAFWA.

Advance Conservation for Priority Trust Resources



Black-Footed Ferret Recovery

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Maximize additional reintroduction sites with the recently completed Safe Harbor Agreement.
- Implement the Black-tailed Prairie Dog Management Plan at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR in support of the goals and objectives outlined in the Habitat Management Plan to lay the groundwork for the reintroduction of black-footed ferrets.
- Work with NRCS to implement a working lands for wildlife program for black-footed ferrets.
- Work with Animal Plant Health Inspection Service/Wildlife Services (APHIS WS) and others to implement range-wide boundary control program for management of prairie dogs.
- Work with the U.S. Geological Survey, APHIS WS, and others to implement a range-wide disease management program for black-footed ferrets.



**Advance Conservation for
Priority Trust Resources
(continued)**

Grizzly Bear Recovery

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Finish the whitebark pine food synthesis for Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE).
- Finalize the revised GYE demographic criteria.
- Finalize the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) Conservation Strategy.
- Utilize food synthesis and the Conservation Strategy to develop decision documents on listing status of grizzly bears in the NCDE and GYE.

Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Finalize a basin-wide aquatic invasive species control strategy that provides a sustainable approach to managing threats of predation and competition to the endangered Colorado River fish.
- Publish a draft Colorado Pikeminnow Recovery Plan.
- Convene a Recovery Team to begin revision of the Humpback Chub Recovery Plan.
- Revise and finalize the Recovery Program's Integrated Stocking Plan with the intent of improving survival of hatchery reared bonytail.

Topeka Shiner

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Fully implement a project plan to evaluate designation of two Distinct Population Segments (DPS - northern and southern), and initiate rulemaking to change the status of the northern DPS if appropriate.

Pallid Sturgeon

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Lead a collaborative, multi-agency partnership strategy to conduct population monitoring on two vital segments of the Priority Management Areas for the Missouri River to further refine survival estimates of juveniles to adjust stocking goals, develop population recovery targets and guide habitat protection and restoration efforts.





Aquatic Species

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Initiate multi-year project to assess and determine needs and priorities for propagation of native aquatic species utilizing Regional hatchery facilities.
- Working with State, Federal and NGO partners, prioritize and initiate three fish passage/habitat projects that will assist target species/populations to be more resilient and adaptive in dealing with the impacts of environmental stressors, such as climate change.
- Continue working with state partners to transition propagation programs at Jones Hole National Fish Hatchery to further conservation goals for native fish.
- Develop a native cutthroat conservation plan with partners, including States, Federal agencies, and Tribal governments.



Golden Eagles

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Collaborate with Regions 1, 2, and 8 to initiate landscape-scale conservation planning for golden eagles in relation to impacts from renewable and nonrenewable energy development in the western United States. Through an appointed team, prioritize landscapes at an appropriate scale and develop a first draft of specific conservation strategies applicable to energy development in those landscapes.
- Develop a research plan and measure environmental contaminants in eagles and other large raptors to evaluate concerns over dietary exposure to rodenticides, mercury and lead.
- Complete one National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) evaluation concerning potential issuance of a programmatic eagle take permit for a wind energy facility.

Wyoming Toad

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Announce availability of draft revised recovery plan for public comment.
- Fully explore opportunities for land acquisition/protection as a priority recovery strategy for the Wyoming Toad.
- Increase captive propagation capabilities.



Sprague's Pipit

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Develop and support publication of an international model of Sprague's Pipit population distributions.
- Collaborate with U.S. Geological Survey Breeding Bird Survey to analyze Sprague's Pipit population trends within population core areas.



Continue Existing and Identify New Priority Landscape Conservation Efforts

Fiscal Year 2014 Action Items:

- Protect an additional 12,000 acres within the Crown of the Continent in Montana through conservation easements to prevent land fragmentation and protect habitat for numerous trust species including grizzly bears, Canada lynx, bull trout and numerous migratory bird species.
- Protect an additional 4,000 acres of prairie in the Dakota Grasslands Conservation Area through easements to protect critical migratory bird habitat from accelerated habitat loss and conversion.
- Protect an additional 3,500 acres of tallgrass prairie habitat in the Flint Hills using perpetual conservation easements.
- Establish the Bear River Conservation Area through the acceptance of the first easement, in coordination with partners and Region 1.
- Secure Director's approval to establish the San Luis Valley Conservation Area that will protect up to 280,000 acres of habitat in south-central Colorado through a mix of easements and fee acquisition for key species, including the southwestern willow flycatcher, Gunnison sage-grouse, and Greater Sandhill cranes.
- Refine and build partner support for the Southern Laramie Plains Conservation Area in southeast Wyoming that will protect key habitats for the endangered Wyoming Toad through a mix of easements and fee acquisition.
- Refine and build support for the Ponca-Niobrara project that will protect up to 140,000 acres of habitat along the Missouri River for key species including bald eagle, piping plover, least tern, and pallid sturgeon.

Front cover photos: Juvenile paddlefish, Black-eyed susan, Greater Sandhill crane, Prairie flowers, Mission Mountains in Montana.

Back cover photos: Woodland skipper, Dwarf bearclaw-poppy, Eared grebe, Grizzly bear at Yellowstone National Park, Tallgrass prairie at Marais des Cygnes National Wildlife Refuge

Photos: Environmental education in a classroom at Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, Colorado pikeminnow / Joe Ferreira, Graham's beardtongue / USGS, Environmental education walk at Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge, Kopriva farm and prairie in South Dakota, Greater sage-grouse, Black-footed ferret, Juvenile pallid sturgeon, Fish passage project / Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks, Golden eagle, Wyoming Toad, Sprague's Pipit, Bald eagle in South Dakota

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