

# STRATEGIC PLAN

## North Florida Ecological Services Office, Jacksonville

June 2006

### ***INTRODUCTION***

The Jacksonville Field Office (JFO) is part of the Ecological Services organization of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The office focuses primarily on protection and recovery of threatened and endangered species while it also actively supports conservation of migratory birds, anadromous fish, and wetlands.

The core work area covers [32 counties of central and north Florida](#) including the metropolitan areas of Tampa and St. Petersburg, Orlando, and the developing coastal corridor from Cape Canaveral north through Daytona, St Augustine, and Jacksonville. In stark contrast, the area also includes much of Florida's Big Bend, arguably the last vestige of "old" Florida. The work area is home to dozens of listed species and well as nearly half of Florida's human residents and all or part of 13 Congressional districts.

The office, with its 29 dedicated employees, is heavily involved in high profile conservation issues and has Service lead for recovery of [manatees](#), the controversial [Florida scrub-jay](#), several species of [sea turtles](#), two species of [beach mice](#), the [wood stork](#), and several other [animal and plant species](#). Included in the [office organization](#) is a sub-office located in St Petersburg.

The annual office budget is typically about \$3.5 million. Activities include listing, recovery, consultation, and candidate conservation under the [Endangered Species Act](#), proactive habitat restoration through the Service's [Partners for Fish and Wildlife](#) and [Coastal](#) programs, wetlands conservation via the [Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act](#), and identification and resolution of environmental [contaminants](#) issues.

The Strategic Plan was developed utilizing the [Florida Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy](#) as a framework to identify priority habitats. The Service's [Shaping Our Future](#) report was used as a guide to identify priority approaches for allocating staff and budgetary resources.

## **OUR VISION**

[Shaping Our Future](#) recommends that we “begin with the end in mind”. In other words develop a strategic vision...in this case, for our field office. Our vision is expressed in this mission statement:

*“Secure a network of habitats of sufficient quality and extent to insure the viability of our native fish, wildlife, and plants for the use and enjoyment of future generations.”*

## **CORE PRINCIPLES**

### ***Realistic Planning, Working Smart, and Working Together***

The reality of the near future is that JFO will not likely increase in size and in fact may face future reductions in discretionary spending. Reporting requirements from the Congress and the Administration are likely to continue to increase. Even if additional authorities are delegated to the field and administrative processes are streamlined, we will likely have a smaller fraction of our time available to devote to accomplishing our mission.

In our annual workforce planning we will need to allow for the time devoted to administrative tasks related to [Activity Based Costing \(ABC\)](#), [Government Performance and Results Act \(GPRA\)](#), training, and performance reviews in addition to leave and holidays. We need to allocate 30% of our time for these activities.

In addition, we need to anticipate the unanticipated. That is, we know we are going to be asked to complete tasks generated outside of the office. These may be congressional inquiries, briefings for higher-ups, responses to the media, [Freedom of Information Act \(FOIA\)](#) requests, lawsuits, audits, or input on policies, etc. And there is the need for internal coordination and communication...staff meetings, team meetings, strategy discussions, etc.

**Realistically, only about half of each biologist’s time will actually be spent directly on resource conservation activities.**

To accomplish our goals, we have no alternative other than to **work smart**. We have only a limited amount of time to spend and we must use that time wisely. We need to work on the items that provide the greatest return for the most important resources. To do that we need to have clear resource targets, whether it is a specific habitat type, or even habitat types in particular locations. Conversely, we need to minimize the time spent on activities with little resource payoff.

We also need to **work together**, as an office, as an agency, with our peers in state and local government, and with our stakeholders. No single entity has enough money, people, or authority to accomplish its mission. As the Director says, “We can’t do all the things we’ve done in the past, because those demands exceed our resources and we have new demands that require our attention.” However, by working together, and only by working together, we can make a difference...**we can accomplish our goals.**

## ***HABITAT PRIORITIES***

The Florida Strategy identifies 45 different habitat types. Descriptions of each habitat type, its extent, and a list of the species each supports is contained in the document and is available on the [Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's website](#).

For our purposes, each habitat type was evaluated based on its degree of threat on a state-wide basis, extent of occurrence in the JFO work area, value to federal trust species, and program applicability. Three habitats do not occur in the work area. Classifications are as follows:

- **Tier 1 Habitats** are those which are very highly threatened, have very high or high resource value, occur to a great extent in the JFO work area, and have very high program applicability. These include:
  - Beach/Surf Zone
  - Coastal Strand
  - Coastal Tidal River or Stream
  - Sandhill
  - Scrub
  - Spring and Spring Run
  - Submerged Aquatic Vegetation
  - Tidal Flat
  
- **Tier 2 Habitats** are those which have significant threats, substantial habitat values, at least moderate occurrence in our work area, and a high level of program applicability. These include:
  - Bivalve Reef
  - Calcareous Stream
  - Cypress Swamp
  - Freshwater Marsh and Wet Prairie
  - Grassland/Improved Pasture
  - Hardwood Swamp/Mixed Wetland Forest
  - Inlet
  - Mangrove Swamp
  - Natural Lake
  - Natural Pineland
  - Salt Marsh
  
- **Tier 3 Habitats** are those which on occasion merit attention depending on the significance of the potential resource payoff. These include:
  - Annelid Reef
  - Bottomland Hardwood Forest
  - Dry Prairie

- Hardwood Hammock Forest
  - Hydric Hammock
  - Mixed Pine Hardwood Forest
  - Reservoir/Impoundment
  - Shrub Swamp
  - Softwater Stream
- **Tier 4 Habitats** rarely merit special consideration because of low threats, limited occurrence, low values, or limited program applicability. These include:
    - Aquatic Cave
    - Artificial Structure
    - Bay Swamp
    - Hard Bottom (marine)
    - Industrial/Commercial Pineland
    - Pelagic
    - Seepage/Steephead Stream
    - Subtidal Unconsolidated Marine/Estuarine Sediments
    - Terrestrial cave
    - Tropical Hardwood Hammock
  - **Tier 5 Habitats** are those where we may have a measurable workload and little resource payoff. In the regulatory arena, these could be considered personnel “sinks”. However, they may also present restoration opportunities to higher value habitats. These include:
    - Agriculture
    - Canal/Ditch
    - Disturbed Transitional
    - Urban/Developed

Coral Reef, Large Alluvial Stream, and Pine Rockland habitats do not occur in our work area.

## ***CONSERVATION STRATEGIES***

### **All Programs**

1. **Focus on priority habitats.** If you are working on something not directly beneficial to the conservation of Tier 1 or Tier 2 habitats, there needs to be a really good reason.
2. **Look for opportunities to help one another.**
3. **Leave the “bowling shirts” at home.** Better yet, donate them to a clothing bank. We are all on the same team...in the office, the program, and the agency.
4. **Respect each other, our peers, and our stakeholders. Apply the Golden Rule.**
5. **Communicate! Communicate! Communicate!**

## Endangered Species Recovery

1. **Develop and maintain specific conservation targets (habitats/locations) for each species.** Adopt targets using the habitat conventions in the Florida Strategy.
2. **Provide standard conservation, minimization, and mitigation measures for each species for use in regulatory decisions.**
3. **Provide templates for biological opinions.**
4. **Team with regulatory staff in development of Conservation Enhancement Memorandum of Understanding (MOU's) to facilitate recovery through regulatory programs.**
5. **Promote species recovery through education and partnerships.** Work with public affairs officer (PAO) and others to emphasize and promote the targets in item 1.
6. **Ensure priority research needs are current.**
7. **Recovery plans (borrowing the famous line) should be as simple as possible, and no simpler.** Find easy ways to communicate priorities.
8. **Use the 5 year reviews as an education opportunity and tool.**
9. **Reduce reliance on discretionary Service funds. Take advantage of other conservation programs in Federal and State government.** Actively promote conservation of endangered species with these entities. Don't forget our internal Service partners.

## Endangered Species Regulatory Activities

1. **Minimize individual technical assistance.** Funds and staff are not sufficient to provide attention to individual requests, especially for low impact proposals. We need to put as much information on our website as possible for use by individuals and permitting authorities.
2. **Focus on streamlined approaches with permitting entities. Team with recovery staff to develop Conservation Enhancement MOU's.** Develop area-wide HCP's with Counties, Water Management Districts, or State agencies. It should be easier and significantly more effective to work with 5 permitting entities than it is to work with 500 applicants.
3. **Promote development of conservation banks.**
4. **Stay out of the "weeds".** Fix the problem by fixing the program, not by getting wrapped up in a particular project.
5. **Invite agencies or applicants to propose/provide drafts of BO's for our consideration.**
6. **Assist internal Service partners with compliance issues as needed.**

## **Habitat Restoration Programs**

- 1. Look for crossover opportunities for T/E conservation.** Familiarize yourself with T/E conservation targets.
- 2. Coordinate closely with both internal and external partners.** Make sure you know what is going on at Service facilities to see how we can help or compliment what they are doing.

## **Wetlands Conservation**

- 1. Ensure mitigation banks will achieve their intended purpose.**
- 2. Conduct individual reviews for only those projects that would have significant impact, set adverse precedent, or impact listed species.**

## **Environmental Contaminants**

- 1. Integrate EC functions into day to day office activities.**
- 2. Insure we are adequately prepared to respond to emergencies.**

## **Supervisors, Budget and Administrative Support, and Technical Support Staff**

- 1. Keep the ship running smoothly and in the right direction.** Look for opportunities to assist in the actions above.
- 2. Look for means of administrative streamlining and improving efficiencies in tracking, processing, and reporting.**
- 3. Look for “marketing” and education opportunities.**
- 4. Foster an environment that encourages creativity and innovation.**