



Strategic Habitat Conservation

The USFWS Framework for Landscape Conservation

Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) is an adaptive management framework that informs decisions about where and how to expend resources for wildlife species, or groups of species, in identified priority areas or regions with particular biological importance—often referred to as landscapes. SHC is the Service’s name for a conservation approach used by many states and partners.

Learning by Doing

Adaptive resource management is essentially “learning by doing.” It allows partnerships of managers, scientists, and other stakeholders to actively test theories and make adjustments based on new information. SHC is a form of adaptive management driven by conservation priorities and population objectives. It is an ongoing process of biological planning with measurable outcomes; conservation design that integrates biological objectives for different wildlife species, management practices, and ecological functions; conservation delivery on the ground—something the Service does as well as any organization; decision-based monitoring that emphasizes evaluation and appropriate decision making throughout the process; and finally, assumption-driven research grounded in the best science available.

Ultimately, SHC allows the Service to better assess risk and work more effectively across landscapes with partners such as U.S. Geological Survey, State and Tribal wildlife agencies, conservation organizations, landowners and others who have an understanding of and interest in the issues.

Responding to Change

SHC is a response to large-scale changes that affect the way in which the Service and its partners carry out wildlife and natural resource conservation, including:

- Land conversion (urban sprawl, energy development, agricultural uses)
- Deteriorating environmental conditions faced by many wildlife species.
- Increased public demands for transparency and accountability.
- A shift to sustaining species, populations, communities and systems rather than managing individual resource components.
- A shift to more science-intensive approaches to planning.
- Increased public demands for interagency collaboration.

Additionally, climate change magnifies resource management challenges involving habitat fragmentation, urbanization, invasive species, disease, parasites and water management. SHC



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provides a framework within which scientists and managers can factor in the anticipated impacts of actual and projected changes in climate. Using this approach, resource managers and partners can strategically connect the most important wildlife and aquatic habitats. Habitat fragmentation, the need for migration corridors, changes in ecosystem response, intensified wildfires, droughts and storms can be addressed through this framework.

Measuring Success

The SHC framework is being applied successfully in many parts of the United States, such as the Lower Mississippi Valley and Prairie Pothole Region and is expanding to many more geographic areas:

- Recognizing the king rail as a priority species, the Eastern North Carolina/Southeastern Virginia SHC team is working with North Carolina State University to establish population objective models

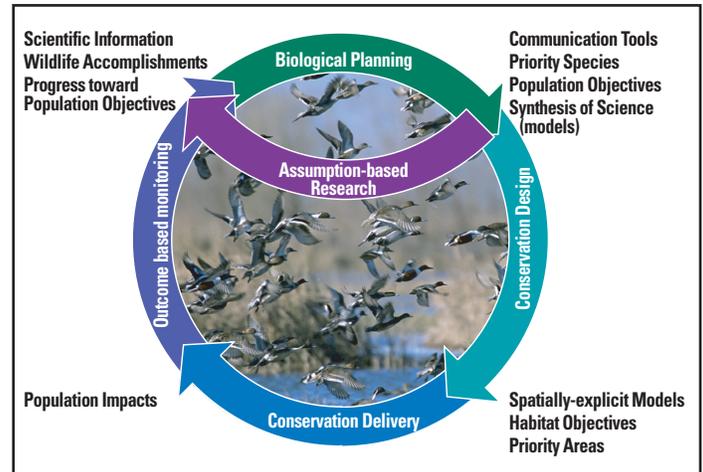
through the USGS Science Support Partnership. Working across two regions, this data will be used to find gaps in current knowledge, identify potential partners to help fill those gaps and determine priority actions as part of the biological planning and conservation design elements of SHC.

- In the Midwest, biologists in Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio are viewing copperbelly water snake recovery efforts through the SHC lens, developing models to test population objectives, predict occurrence and prioritize restoration activities.
- In the plains of the West-Southwest, the Playa Lakes Joint Venture followed the SHC framework to conserve habitat for the lesser prairie-chicken and associated wildlife through strategic enrollment of land into Farm Bill conservation programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program.
- Using the SHC framework as a guide, the Service's Alaska Region has created an Arctic Strategy Team of multiple Service programs that is working with state and federal agencies, NGOs, and universities to design a strategy for responding to the impacts of climate change in the Arctic.

The ultimate success of landscape conservation depends on the imagination and innovative spirit of our employees and partners.

SHC is the Service's most promising strategic tool to address a future filled with uncertainty for our trust species and habitats. In the face of global climate change and changing and expanding human uses of natural resources, SHC may well be the Service's best hope to ensure its historic legacy of wildlife and natural resource conservation is not lost. It builds on work the Service has accomplished for more than a century by leveraging the lessons we have learned, the data we have collected, the relationships and partnerships we have established, and the reputation we have acquired as the nation's foremost delivery system for fish and wildlife conservation. In short, it helps ensure we're doing "the right conservation in the right places" to benefit America's fish and wildlife resources.

This strategic approach to conservation is a living process that changes and evolves.



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