

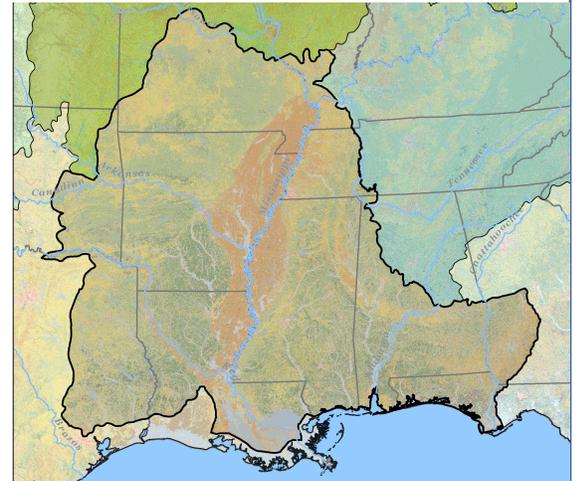
Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks Landscape Conservation Cooperative

The mission of the Gulf Coastal Plains and Ozarks Landscape Conservation Cooperative is to articulate the shared vision for sustainable natural and cultural resources in the Gulf Coastal Plains and Ozarks region in the face of a changing climate and other threats, foster a cooperative capacity within the conservation community to meet the challenges of achieving that vision, and facilitate the refinement of that vision through targeted evaluation over time.

Overview

The Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks Landscape Conservation Cooperative describes both a unique geographic region in southeastern North America as well as a new kind of conservation partnership. The GCPO is one of 22 [Landscape Conservation Cooperatives](#), or LCCs, that cover the entire United States. In scientific parlance, “landscape” refers to a large mosaic of interacting ecosystem elements. In the case of LCCs, “cooperative” refers to the multiple states, federal and local agency jurisdictions, and private interests that overlap within the landscape.

Encompassing 180 million acres and thousands of river miles, the Gulf Coastal Plains and Ozarks region is defined by its diverse forests and hydrology, which contribute to the Southeast’s status as a global center for biological diversity. The Missouri and Arkansas highlands of the Ozark, Boston and Ouachita mountain ranges slope gradually toward the broad Gulf Coastal Plains, which extend from eastern Texas to the Florida panhandle. The entire region is roughly bisected by the alluvial valley of the lower Mississippi River, which in turn powerfully influences the nearshore waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The deciduous forests of the interior highlands and the vast stretches of open pine in the Coastal Plains are key to the region’s land animals, water supply and water quality. In turn, water has sculpted the unique lakes, caves and springs riddling the Ozark karst, creating habitat for many endemic aquatic species. Likewise, the seasonal ebb and flow of famous rivers such as the Mobile in Alabama, the Little Red in Arkansas, the Atchafalaya in Louisiana and the Apalachicola in Alabama and Georgia contribute to the region’s astounding diversity of plants, crayfish, freshwater mussels and snails. Gulf Coast estuaries and wetlands at the mouths of these rivers provide essential nursery habitat supporting economically important freshwater and marine fisheries.



Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks LCC Conservation Science Staff & website

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Laurie Rounds, Gulf Coast Landscape Conservation Liaison – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Laurie.Rounds@noaa.gov (this is a shared position, across 4 LCCs with Gulf Coast responsibilities)

Planned: Assistant Research Professor, Geomatics – MSU

For more info: gcpolcc.org

GULF COASTAL PLAINS & OZARKS LCC

Purpose and Value-Added Roles of the GCPO LCC

A great variety of government agencies, nonprofit and academic organizations, and other partnerships that focus, for example, on birds, fish or forests already work within the Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks region (see “Interim Steering Committee Members”). The GCPO LCC’s role is to connect and strengthen these efforts by:

- providing a vehicle for many interests to agree on common conservation goals;
- eliminating redundancies;
- linking and coordinating efforts across the region;
- and pooling resources while jointly developing the scientific information and tools needed to achieve shared goals.

Opportunity and Vision in the GCPO Region

GCPO ecosystems are crucial to many of the region’s largest industries and local economies - including the pulp, paper and timber industries, agriculture, mining, outdoor recreation and tourism, and fledgling biotech and biofuels companies. Moreover, nature’s benefits have influenced the region’s cultural values for centuries.

People from the Midsouth to the Gulf Coast still have time to avoid many of the mistakes that have come with denser development in other parts of the country. Direct economic ties to the land and water, as well as deep-rooted traditions that celebrate the abundance of wildlife, provide a springboard for collaboration and the development of a shared vision for the future.

Science Project Highlights

Geomatics is the science of geographically-referenced information. The GCPO LCC science staff and key partners are developing a consistent, LCC-wide landcover database that details the status and types of natural communities throughout the area. Universally welcomed by the LCC partners, it is based on a consistent classification system that will provide a common foundation for regional conservation planning. In conjunction with this database, a conservation atlas consisting of an online platform for serving landcover and other databases will allow end users to easily discover, access, and integrate existing data and models.

Vulnerability Assessments are science-based “rapid assessments” of species and ecosystems that will help to identify their vulnerabilities to changing environmental conditions caused by stresses such as urbanization and climate change. An understanding of future vulnerability is the first step toward developing adaptation strategies and designing a conservation blueprint for the future.

Future Scenario Modeling is a means of integrating data, vulnerability assessments and scientific modeling to “road test” conservation decisions by predicting their effectiveness based on future environmental conditions, and assessing consequences of different actions. Models will show how future changes in urbanization and vegetation, combined with climate projections, may impact priority species and their habitats. Key partners in this effort include the Southeast Regional Assessment Project (SERAP) and the [Southeast Climate Science Center](#).

Inventory and Monitoring is an essential component of adaptive management. Adaptive management is smart management that incorporates a feedback loop to learn from natural resource management successes and mistakes. The GCPO LCC is partnering with the USFWS Southeast Region Inventory & Monitoring Program to establish priority inventory and monitoring projects on National Wildlife Refuges within the region.

Strategic Communications and Outreach are essential to any effort that relies on cooperation and collaboration, not to mention extension and training. The GCPO LCC is combining the expertise of many partners to develop a communications strategy aimed at achieving its goal of improved access to information, decision-support tools, and management training for a wide variety of interested audiences.

Interim Steering Committee
 Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
 American Bird Conservancy
 Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
 Auburn University
 Ducks Unlimited
 Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
 Illinois Department of Natural Resources
 Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
 Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
 Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks
 Mississippi State University
 Missouri Department of Conservation
 National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
 National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration
 Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
 Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency
 Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
 The Conservation Fund
 The Nature Conservancy
 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 U.S. Geological Survey
 USDA Forest Service
 USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service