

2.2.3 Marine Species of Common Conservation Concern

Project Summary

This project facilitates collaboration among governments, NGOs, marine conservation scientists and other to identify, conserve, and monitor Marine Species of Common Conservation Concern (MSCCC). An important focus of this project is to provide a foundation for informed decision-making and subsequent action at all levels and in all sectors that affect the conservation of species of common interest to the three countries.

Goals and Objectives

Through this initiative, governments, NGOs, marine conservation scientists, the private sector and others are working together to develop a long-term cooperative agenda to help conserve migratory and transboundary marine species at risk.

Specifically, to help conserve the selected MSCCC, the project will:

- develop a North American cooperative agenda and subsequent MSCCC action plans that include bi- and trilateral cross-cutting initiatives and that recognize ecological, economic, social and cultural issues;
- foster improved decision-making, facilitate scientific information exchange, help influence policy and increase public awareness, as they relate to the conservation of MSCCC;
- build regional, national and international capacity to conserve MSCCC by sharing lessons learned, new technologies and management strategies, and by increasing access to relevant information; and
- monitor and assess the status of and threats to MSCCC.

Expected Results

Through the development of the North American Cooperative Agenda and Conservation Action Plans for MSCCC, the resulting cross-cutting initiatives, and a common monitoring and assessment program, the project will build collaborative efforts across political, sectoral, and agency borders to help conserve the species. Specifically, by 2004 the project will have:

- established trilateral, cross-sectoral partnerships to help conserve the MSCCC;
- made significant progress towards developing and implementing a North American Cooperative Agenda for MSCCC by identifying priority species, developing status reports, and establishing action plans;
- improved information and built capacity to help conserve MSCCC; and
- worked towards the regional, long-term monitoring and assessment of the MSCCC (including, for example, the regional status of and major threats to MSCCC, monitoring the health, health trends, and stranding/mortality events of MSCCC, as well as correlating the health/status of MSCCC with available physical, chemical and biological data).

Rationale

Species are the common currency of biodiversity—its most identifiable elements. When we speak of loss of biodiversity, or even degradation of ecosystems, we are often referring to loss of a species or a reduction in species' abundance. At the same time, individual species can galvanize conservation by putting a face to a conservation problem. Also, many MSCCC are also keystone, umbrella or indicator species; thus their conservation can help to protect other species and the assessment of their status can further our understanding of broader biodiversity problems.

Species that undertake migration at the continental scale or from one country to another, species that are transboundary, and species found in one country but affected by actions in another—all require regional approaches to management, conservation and recovery. Development of a North American Cooperative Agenda and subsequent Action Plans for migratory or transboundary species and other species of common conservation concern will help ensure that no link in the chain of needed conservation action is broken to imperil such continentally significant species.

The CEC is ideally suited to foster MSCCC conservation in North America because it brings governments, NGOs, conservation scientists, members of the private sector and other stakeholders from all three countries together to agree upon common frameworks and solutions that span the borders of North America—borders that migratory and transboundary species are oblivious to.

Progress to Date

MSCCC species were identified through a process that included the development of country priorities and trilateral agreements and criteria, as well as a trilateral peer review. Subsequently, species’ profiles were developed which covered the species’ biology, range/important habitat, status, main threats, and species experts. Country Leads and Teams also developed fine-scale criteria that covered the probability of losing the species, the species’ biology, its socio-economic importance, as well as its opportunity for conservation, to prioritize the need for concern for various species and, subsequently, their action plan development.

The project was originally catalyzed under the NA MPA Network in support of the Protection Standards section of the Action Plan Framework. Recognizing the need of a diverse set of conservation tools aside from MPA related initiatives, in the first meeting of the Biodiversity Conservation Working Group (29–30 July 2002), the initiative was proposed to be a stand-alone project in 2003.

Actions 2003

Overview

In 2003, this project will focus on three areas: 1) developing a North American Cooperative Agenda and Action Plans for MSCCC, 2) improving information and building the capacity of decision makers, scientists and other stakeholders to address common challenges facing MSCCC, and 3) initiating the development of a common trilateral system for long-term monitoring and assessment of MSCCC, which could include monitoring the status of and major threats to MSCCC, monitoring the health, and health trends, stranding/mortality events affecting MSCCC, as well as correlating the health/status of MSCCC with available physical, chemical and biological data. The monitoring initiative will build on regional initiatives, developing protocols for data sharing, to identify regional trends and priorities.

To help build capacity to address common challenges facing MSCCC, the CEC will develop a series of comprehensive review and background reports that address specific risks and challenges facing MSCCC in North America. The first report, to be developed in 2003, will focus on the impact to MSCCC from commercial and non-commercial fishing activities. As with all subsequent reports in the series, this first report will seek to share present-day knowledge among involved parties, as well as bridge disparate views held by various stakeholders. The report will cover the topic in light of collaborative, interdisciplinary partnerships, efforts, tools and mechanisms needed for integrated management of MSCCC within the North American marine and coastal environments. It will present a comprehensive review of existing literature, ongoing symposia, agreements, expertise in the subject, information needs and other challenges regarding fisheries issues, including recent mitigation efforts, management tools, and organizational structures that achieve both sustainable use and conservation of marine biodiversity. In addition to serving as a key reference document for conservationists dealing with MSCCC, the reports will also serve as background for the BCWG in its future proposals for CEC work.

As with all Biodiversity Conservation projects, the North American MPA Network is in a transition period awaiting finalization of the Strategic Plan for North American Cooperation in the Conservation of Biodiversity (hereafter: Strategic Plan). In light of this situation, the project is following the recommended actions found in the draft Strategic Plan, as well as the advice of the marine expert advisors.

2003	Estimated Resources Required (C\$)
Action 1: Developing a North American cooperative agenda	70,000

North American Agenda for Action: 2003–2005
Conservation of Biodiversity

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity 1: Hold a trilateral meeting of species experts, natural resource managers, and other stakeholders to develop multidisciplinary teams that will build upon the species profiles developed to establish North American Cooperative Action Plans for the first set of MSCCC; disseminate results. 	70,000
Action 2: Building capacity to address common challenges facing MSCCC	40,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity 1: Develop first in a series of comprehensive review and background reports on existing agreements, literature, ongoing symposia, and expertise on the risks and challenges facing MSCCC in North America. Reports will present a concise review of recent mitigation efforts, management tools, and organizational structures that achieve both sustainable use and conservation of marine biodiversity. Information needs and other challenges will also be outlined. In 2003, the focus will be on the specific impact to MSCCC from commercial and non-commercial fishing activities. 	30,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity 2: Collect and enhance information about MSCCC for the North American Biodiversity Information Network (NABIN) marine pilot. 	10,000
Action 3: Developing a regional MSCCC monitoring and assessment program	30,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity 1: Integrate MSCCC into and expand programs for monitoring of these species. Survey experts and identify both: a) the potential use of MSCCC in existing monitoring programs, as well as b) the needs for monitoring MSCCC. 	30,000
Total Resources Required	140,000

2004–2005

Building on previous work, it is envisioned that the MSCCC work will continue in the following areas: 1) developing a North American Cooperative Agenda for MSCCC; 2) building capacity to address common challenges; and 3) developing a regional monitoring and assessment program. Actions for this time period will benefit from the guidance of the Strategic Plan and the Biodiversity Conservation Working Group.

Public Participation

Meetings to establish a North American Cooperative Agenda and Action Plans will include experts from government, NGO, academic and other members of the research community involved with the conservation of marine mammals, sea birds and sea turtles of common conservation concern, as well as representatives from fishing communities and indigenous communities.

Capacity Building

The establishment of trilateral, cross-sectoral partnerships and subsequent development of a North American Cooperative Agenda and Action Plans will help stakeholders from the three countries learn from and build upon each others' experience and expertise. Development of the MSCCC profiles and their subsequent inclusion on the NABIN web site will also help to increase accessibility to, synthesis and exchange of information enhancing decision-makers, scientists and concerned stakeholders' capacity to conserve MSCCC. Moreover, the series of reports on common threats to MSCCC will help share experiences and knowledge on best technologies, practices and management tools, developing capabilities for stakeholders to sustainably use resources and conserve marine biodiversity.

Expected Partners and/or Participants

To successfully protect MSCCC, governmental agencies, nongovernmental organizations, consumers, industry and the research/academic community all have important roles to play. The trilateral, multi-sectoral MSCCC expert advisors/country leads and country teams have and will continue to work together to help protect these and other migratory and transboundary species of common concern. Partnership will continue with the project team from the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS), Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Institute of Ecology of Mexico (*Instituto Nacional de Ecología*—INE), *Centro de Investigación Científica y de Educación Superior de Ensenada* (CICESE), and Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO), and Sound Seas, without whose experience, insight and cooperation the project would not be possible. Linkages and partnerships will be extended to other agencies, groups and institutions in the development of the North American Cooperative Agenda, Action Plans and cross-cutting initiatives, including other organizations that deal with MPAs, such as the *Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas*—Conanp), the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Parks Canada. The OBIS (Ocean Biogeographic Information System) initiative led by Duke University is developing a digital archive of global marine mammal, seabird and turtle distribution data. The OBIS-SEAMAP (Spatial Ecological Analysis of Megavertebrate Populations) project will provide valuable data on the distribution and abundance of MSCCC.

Linkages to other CEC Projects

The MSCCC project of the CEC will continue to forge links with other areas of the CEC work program. Present linkages include those with the following programs/projects:

- NABCI: identifying common areas for collaborative action with sea birds;
- NABIN: increasing information integration and availability related to MSCCC, subsequently building capacity of decision makers, and helping educate civil society about MSCCC;
- NA MPA Network: using MSCCC to help define priorities for conservation and establish integrated ecosystem management, as well as to coordinate on appropriate actions for MSCCC;
- Environment, Economy and Trade: building on and learning from experience in Green Goods and Services, and working with EET to identify alternative means that support best practices, technologies and methodologies; and
- the JPAC Conservation of Biodiversity working group and NAFEC will also play pivotal roles by helping to reach out to other groups and institutions in the development of the Cooperative Agenda and Action Plans as well as in the implementation of cross-cutting initiatives.