



U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Protecting Endangered Species on Military Lands:

Conservation Partnerships

Interagency cooperative management is a powerful tool in the effort to protect threatened and endangered species and their ecosystems. Because the habitats of threatened and endangered species cross administrative boundaries, effective management and recovery can only occur with the cooperation and participation of all land owners within a species' range. The formation of partnership agreements for cooperative management helps to achieve this goal. These partnerships provide an open forum for information and resource sharing, increase the efficiency of biodiversity conservation, reduce habitat fragmentation, and improve overall community relations with neighboring landowners.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) have teamed up to establish partnerships with other Federal, State, and non-government organizations to promote protection of endangered and threatened species by targeting large-scale habitat and ecosystem conservation. These partnerships have enabled the military and the FWS to carry out their missions, meet local community objectives to retain open space areas, and share natural resource management goals, while reducing conservation pressures on DoD lands. The following are examples of such partnerships.

Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership

The Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP) was formed in 1996 when landowners came together to conserve and restore the dwindling longleaf pine ecosystem and the unique aquatic resources of northwest Florida and southern Alabama. The GCPEP landscape encompasses 20 to 25 percent



Photo courtesy GCPEP
GCPEP, Eglin Air Force Base staff, and volunteers install native plants for erosion restoration on Eglin streamside for the federally endangered Okaloosa Darter.

of the world's remaining large tracts of longleaf pine, including the largest public ownership and more than 50 percent of the remaining old growth stands.

Partners include Eglin Air Force Base, FWS, The Nature Conservancy, International Paper, Blackwater River State Forest, Northwest Florida Water Management District, National Forests in Alabama, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

The Partnership identified 18 focal conservation targets that will best protect total biodiversity across the GCPEP landscape. These include both species-level and ecosystem-level targets. The species level targets include listed and unlisted species such as the red-cockaded woodpecker, Florida black bear, Flatwoods salamander, Okaloosa darter, Florida bog frog, gulf sturgeon, and upland game birds. The 10 GCPEP community/ecosystem-level targets include the longleaf pine sandhill matrix, pine flatwoods matrix, blackwater rivers/streams/floodplains,

alluvial rivers/streams/floodplains, barrier island complex, estuarine systems, depression wetlands, and mainland sand pine scrub.

A primary focus of GCPEP is to develop cooperative conservation strategies to protect upland longleaf pine ecosystems. This effort has stabilized populations of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, increased prescribed fire, and advanced restoration of thousands of acres of longleaf pine sites.

GCPEP has recently extended this successful collaborative work to encompass freshwater ecosystems through the GCPEP Freshwater Ecosystem Demonstration project.

Great Basin: An Ecoregion-Based Conservation Blueprint

The Great Basin Ecoregion encompasses more than 72 million acres of semi-desert from the east slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains across much of Nevada to the Wasatch Mountains of the western Rocky Mountains in central Utah. The region

is characterized by salt desert scrub and sagebrush shrublands in the valleys and lower slopes and pinyon-juniper woodlands, mountain sagebrush, open conifer forests, and alpine areas in the mountain ranges. More than 280 plants and animals are endemic to this region. Threatened and endangered species in this area include a species of greasewood and the kangaroo mouse. The myriad of ecological habitats combined with the high degree of endemic species highlight the need for ecoregion-based planning.

In the spring of 1999, The Nature Conservancy initiated the Great Basin ecoregion planning process. Partners in this effort include DoD, FWS, Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, The Nature Conservancy, private landowners, and various State and local organizations including university and government science and land management experts.

The first step in this effort was to develop a regional "conservation blueprint," a portfolio of conservation areas that fully represent natural communities and species characteristic of the Great Basin in viable populations and landscapes within the least area possible. This effort was the first broad attempt to assemble biological information for strategic conservation planning in the Great Basin.

The planning team identified areas where government agencies, The Nature Conservancy, and other entities should work together to protect key areas of biodiversity in the Great Basin region. It identified common threats across sites to help frame strategies necessary to protect those areas. It also identified knowledge gaps to facilitate future assessments and planning.

The team also used ecological models of vegetation and physical gradients to map the distribution and diversity of ecological systems throughout the Great Basin. The next step was to establish conservation goals for each target based on its global distribution, rarity, and vulnerability.

The Great Basin project identified 358 conservation sites covering about 40 percent of the ecoregion as key to conserving the region's biodiversity.

About 75 percent of the sites are on lands managed by public agencies, typically for multiple use purposes, and the remaining 25 percent have no guaranteed management production.

One of the final steps in the planning process was to set site-based priorities. Sites were ranked according to their conservation value, uniqueness, threats, feasibility, and leveraging opportunities. The team identified 20 top-priority action sites based on this analysis. The next step is to develop and implement conservation plans for each of the top-priority sites.

South Texas Natural Resources Partnering Team

The South Texas Natural Resources Partnering Team (STNRPT), formed in August of 2002, is comprised of Naval Air Station (NAS) Corpus Christi, NAS Kingsville, Naval Station (NS) Ingleside, Navy Region South, FWS, and Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPW). The team provides a forum for early coordination of Navy activities with the FWS and TPW. The team also provides a cooperative setting for the development, implementation, and review of Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans (INRMP) for the Navy bases.

Threatened and endangered species that benefit from this partnership include the South Texas ambrosia, piping plover, and brown pelican.

Success of the partnering effort depends upon open and honest communication and the development of trust and respect between all team members. Such team steps are important in working together on conservation of endangered species, species at risk, management of fish and wildlife, water resources management, migratory bird management at air fields and air training ranges, and environmental management including hazardous materials.

In a year-long effort, the team developed vision and mission statements, goals and objectives, standards of commitment, and measures of success. Senior management demonstrated crucial support for the team by their presence at the charter signing event and their signatures on the

charter for the STNRPT. As an added step, the team agreed to use a business practice model to help facilitate team communication and partnership development.

These partnership tools are important to the Navy's future joint forces missions and training needs at the three bases in South Texas. As the Navy evaluates solutions to encroachment issues, such as conservation buffer lands initiatives, the team is key to expanding the partnership to include surrounding ranches and communities.



STNRPT Senior Management Representatives

Accomplishments in the first year of the partnership effort include cooperative INRMP development, the purchase of a conservation easement to protect declining live oak – red bay habitat, further partnership development to implement endangered species, species at risk, and wildlife research and management projects, and construction of a nature trail with interpretative signage.

Future projects include a facility-wide species survey at NAS Kingsville, initiation of a grassland bird study, and initiation of a management study for the endangered South Texas ambrosia.

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