



Shortgrass Prairie Partnership Strategic Plan

October 5, 2007



Central Shortgrass Prairie Ecoregion

The Central Shortgrass Prairie (CSP) ecoregion lies in the western portion of the Great Plains of North America, along the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains. Ecoregions are relatively large units of land or water that are characterized by a distinctive climate, ecological features and plant and animal communities. The CSP ecoregion encompasses approximately 56 million acres and includes eastern Colorado, western Kansas and Nebraska, northeastern New Mexico, the Oklahoma pan handle, a very small amount of Texas, and southeastern Wyoming. Major rivers of the ecoregion include the South Platte, Arkansas, Canadian, Republican and Cimarron. The majority of the land in the ecoregion is privately owned (92%), with 5% in state, and 3% in federal ownership. Fortunately for everyone who lives, works and enjoys the prairie, there are still large, unbroken swaths of grasslands on the Western High Plains that are relatively intact due to a history of ranching and compatible use that provide suitable wildlife habitat for many of the native plants and animals that define the region, including migratory grassland birds, pronghorn, and several rare plants, among others.

Short History of the CSP Assessment & Shortgrass Prairie Partnership

Ten years ago a group of scientists identified wildlife species and habitat priorities for conservation of the representative diversity that was needed for the Central Shortgrass Prairie ecoregion's wildlife to persist over time. This effort was led by The Nature Conservancy and involved a relatively small group of individuals and organizations from the science and conservation community. To take advantage of new scientific analysis methods, better and more recent data and broader participation from state and federal agencies, academics, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), a second iteration of the CSP ecoregional assessment was undertaken in 2004 and completed in early 2007. This second effort was a collaborative effort involving numerous agencies and organizations from all seven states with land and waters in the ecoregion and was funded by the U.S. Department of Defense, Colorado Division of Wildlife and The Nature Conservancy.

The ecoregional assessment provides the public -- scientists, agency personnel, land owners, land managers, policy makers, etc. -- with an understanding of what must be maintained and conserved if the representative natural diversity of the ecoregion (species, natural communities and ecosystems) is to survive in the future -- including *how much* of each species (number of individuals or populations) and habitat (acres) is needed to be conserved as well as where the most efficient and effective places are to focus limited resources to achieve those goals.

But perhaps more important than the assessment results was the emergence of the Shortgrass Prairie Partnership -- a group of dedicated and committed people from the public and private sectors who seek to conserve the representative wildlife of the region while sustaining the human communities that inhabit it. This strategic plan represents the Shortgrass Prairie Partnership's understanding of the best way forward to achieve their very ambitious goals.

Partnership Members

The current Shortgrass Prairie Partnership members include the Colorado Association of Conservation Districts; Colorado Natural Heritage Program at Colorado State University;

Colorado Division of Wildlife, Colorado State Land Board, Directorate of Environmental Compliance and Management, Fort Carson, Department of Defense; Environmental Defense; Environmental Protection Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service; Playa Lakes Joint Venture; Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory; The Nature Conservancy; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Forest Service. The Partnership is always open to new members and collaborators.

Partnership Vision

The Shortgrass Prairie Partnership provides landowners and managers, public agencies and private organizations the opportunity to **collaboratively work together to ensure the long-term viability of the native species, natural communities and ecosystems of the Central Shortgrass Prairie** ecoregion **while promoting the continued existence of economically productive landscapes** that sustain local communities.

Through comprehensive conservation activities we can maintain and restore native species, natural communities and ecological processes at explicit and measurable goals while sustaining human traditions compatible with conservation. This approach provides society with the clean water, air, food, fiber and natural resources that it needs to survive. Working with willing landowners and resource managers to identify and implement conservation solutions that sustain the natural resources, economies and cultures of the Western High Plains is a priority of the Partnership.

Central Shortgrass Prairie Conservation – What will it take?

The CSP ecoregional assessment determined that approximately 44% (43 terrestrial conservation areas and 140 aquatic conservation areas) of the ecoregion's 56 million acres provided habitat needed to meet conservation goals for species, communities, and ecological systems. Conservation areas are, simply, places in which native species, communities, and habitats of the ecoregion are located. These areas are identified as important places that can help to achieve conservation outcomes and to ensure that the representative diversity of the ecoregion will persist over time. These are working landscapes where conservation of native species and habitats occurs within the context of local communities that depend on the area for their livelihood.

The good news is that approximately 50% of the ecoregion is still intact and dominated by native grasslands and the opportunities for conservation and economic productivity abound when compared to most other grasslands in the United States.

Shortgrass Prairie Assessment & Partnership and Other Efforts

There are a number of other important planning and partnership efforts that overlap with the Central Shortgrass Prairie ecoregional assessment and Partnership. These efforts include State Wildlife Action Plans, NRCS watershed plans, USFS resource management plans, USFWS Strategic Habitat Conservation and Ecoregional Plans, Partners in Flight, and Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans (INRMPs). Generally, these plans boil down to answering common critical questions: 1) Which species, ecosystems and habitats are of conservation concern? 2) Where do they occur? 3) How much of each is needed to successfully maintain them in the future?; and 4) How do we measure and monitor progress to ensure accountability and progress?

Nearly all of these plans, including the CSP ecoregional assessment, deal with what needs to be conserved and broad strategies to make that happen -- such as conserving terrestrial and aquatic habitats, reducing invasive species, providing connectivity for wildlife to move among larger blocks of wildlife habitat, and implementing best management practices. The plans differ when it comes to specifically identifying where to work, and even more so, with answering the question of how much to conserve. Some identify specific areas and numbers of populations or acres of habitat, but most do not. Nearly all discuss the need to monitor and measure progress to be accountable and the need to develop or improve partnerships to get the work done. In order for the Shortgrass Prairie Partnership to succeed, it must build upon the analyses and plans of these other conservation efforts and collaborate with their members whenever possible. In this way the best expertise and methods to address conservation needs at all scales, from pasture management to landscapes, can be applied. One of the principal purposes of the Partnership is to help facilitate the integration of these efforts.

The values added by the CSP assessment and Shortgrass Prairie Partnership include:

- Regional datasets, analyses, and tools based best available science to guide conservation action policies and decisions across the entire ecoregion
- Consensually reached, measurable conservation goals for species, communities and ecological systems
- Prioritized places upon which to focus our conservation efforts
- A baseline for measuring progress & trends
- A shared vision & collaborative implementation effort to achieve our goals, embodied in the Shortgrass Prairie Partnership

Perhaps some of the most important differences of the CSP ecoregional assessment and Shortgrass Prairie Partnership as compared to the other efforts are: 1) The plan will remain a “living analysis,” with conservation progress tracked and used to inform future decision-making; and 2) The assessment has led to the creation of the Shortgrass Prairie Partnership, which will serve as a regional forum that will actively bring together agency and NGO staff and producers (ranchers and farmers, landowners and managers) to identify shared priorities, common ground and ways to meet the needs of both. No other group or partnership is doing that at the scale of the Shortgrass Prairie ecoregion. However, in order for the Shortgrass Prairie Partnership to be successful, it must rely on the excellent analyses and plans of these other conservation efforts and collaborate with their members whenever possible.

Central Shortgrass Prairie Conservation – Identifying Priorities

Because the resources (staff and funding) of the partners are limited it is essential that the Partnership focus on conservation priorities. A critical question that the Partnership will seek to answer is, “What wildlife species, natural communities and ecosystems will be lost in the next 10 years if action is not taken immediately to effectively conserve them, thus precluding the ability to reach our conservation goals for the ecoregion?”

A second analysis is to further examine all of the conservation areas that were identified in the assessment based on conservation value and urgency of threat. This will include conservation areas and targets that would not be lost if we were not successful in the

next 10 years, but where significant progress should be made to meet goals in the long-term.

A third analysis will cross walk the priorities identified above with the institutional priorities of the Partnership's members. A clear understanding of the geographic and thematic priorities of the partners will allow for specific project and program development and implementation. The Partnership will then prioritize its efforts on those places and policies where success can be achieved -- and we would not achieve our goals but for conservation efforts directed towards them in the near term.

For the results of our prioritization work to-date please see the attached prioritization map.

Conservation Goals for the Shortgrass Prairie Partnership

Several goals will help the Partnership achieve its ambitious grassland efforts. The goals boil down to four simple elements:

- 1) Create a network of effectively conserved working landscapes totaling millions of acres. The working landscapes will serve to demonstrate the balance between resource use and conservation – with much of the land grazed by cattle and/or native ungulates, including bison;
- 2) Address the policies and public programs, particularly those in the Farm Bill, that contribute to the conservation and/or degrade native grasslands through the creation of a policy environment that promotes conservation through incentives, resource allocations and appropriate grassland-related policies;
- 3) Sustain the human communities of the Central Shortgrass Prairie, where the ranching way of life is maintained such that the ecological, social and economic objectives of conservation and local communities can be achieved over the long term; and
- 4) Raise unprecedented public and private resources to address the first three goals.

CSP Partnership Key Strategies to Achieve Our Goals

1) Conservation & Restoration

Promote the use of land protection, good stewardship and restoration projects in conservation areas identified in the CSP ecoregional assessment.

Land protection can be achieved through perpetual and term easements, as well as lease arrangements. Perpetual and term easements as well as leasing arrangements can all contribute to protection goals. Conservation “banking,” which has land managers providing resources for off-site habitat and species mitigation, may be a good means by which to increase the resources available to undertake protection projects.

Good land management practices can be promoted by rewarding those who already apply them and providing incentives for those who do not. Cost share programs, financial incentives for good practices, and grass-banking are examples of mechanisms to promote good land management practices.

Restoration projects, while typically more expensive than protection and management strategies, may be necessary to meet conservation goals. Examples of tools to achieve restoration include purchase of water rights/permits to restore flows, and assisting communities and landowners to address conservation challenges where water transfers have been made.

As mentioned in the prioritization section above, high priority conservation areas (based on conservation value, threat and opportunity or ability to add value to already established conservation efforts and collaborations) will be identified for more intensive focus by the Partnership and the establishment and/or cooperation with existing collaborative conservation efforts.

2) Science & Adaptive Management

Provide critical information to decision-makers, based on the best available science, to facilitate effective conservation in the ecoregion. The audience for this information includes elected officials, land managers, landowners, state and federal agencies, counties, academic community, non-governmental organizations, and the general public. The Partnership will continue to: 1) refine the data and analyses of the CSP ecoregional assessment to ensure that the information is relevant in driving conservation actions; 2) define and address the most important science needs and research questions (e.g. where should conservation occur first? How can we proactively address priority threats?); and 3) measure the status of biodiversity health, threats to species and natural communities and conservation progress over time using an adaptive management approach. Public understanding and acceptance of the Partnership's scientific analysis and products, as well as its recommended conservation goals, is critical for long-term success.

3) Facilitate Dialogue among Stakeholders to Promote Shared Solutions

Serve as a facilitator of dialogue among stakeholders to identify and pursue strategies that conserve the diversity of the Central Shortgrass Prairie, emphasizing dialogue between the conservation community, agencies and producers (particularly ranchers) to meet shared conservation and economic development and sustainability goals. This will be achieved through a **working landscapes advisory group**, which will serve as a forum for dialogue among conservationists, agencies and producers (particularly ranchers) to identify and pursue shared goals and strategies in the shortgrass prairie.

4) Promote Policies Compatible with Our Goals

Influence policies & public programs to promote conservation in priority areas identified in the ecoregional assessment. This includes working with agencies to target the resources on priority areas, informing decision-makers about conservation values when considering major infrastructure projects in those areas (wind energy, highway construction, etc.), increasing the public and private resources available for conservation, promoting opportunities for younger ranchers to help sustain ranching within the ecoregion, as well as the consolidation of public lands.

5) Undertake Communications and Outreach with Key Stakeholders

The Partnership will address five aspects of communication: 1) identification of all appropriate audiences; 2) development of key messages for each audience; 3) creation of a visual identity for the Partnership; 4) development of website content and structure and 5) development of print materials for distribution to appropriate audiences.

A plan is currently being developed that identifies objectives for communication, directs elements and timing of tactical implementation, and determines how success will be evaluated. This work will be completed by the end of 2007 -- implementation will be ongoing after that time. Key elements of the plan are:

- Strategy: creation of a communications plan, audience identification, key messages. Includes preparation, facilitation and follow-up of two workshops for representatives from each partner organization brainstorm audiences and messages.
- Visual identity: design of logo and application on letterhead, business cards, note cards, envelopes, and templates for collateral materials.
- Web site: includes design, writing copy and working with external entity to develop site map, handle any necessary programming, etc. We may have more than one web site, as one would serve the science and technical community while the other would be used by the lay public.
- Copywriting and design of other collateral materials: actual materials are undetermined at this time, but proposal allows for some paid and some pro bono design, copywriting, and production. Does not include printing or other hard costs.
- Implement communication plan: includes stakeholder outreach and media relations

6) Internal & Operational Strategies for Success

- Establish the Partnership as an *ecoregional partnership*, involving stakeholders and partners from all the CSP states and provide them with a sufficient understanding of the ecoregion and partnership to meaningfully contribute.
- Complete a marketing/outreach plan that identifies key audiences, media for reaching them and clear/consistent messages about the ecoregion and the work of the Partnership to promote collaboration and success among public agencies, private organizations and land owners/managers. Immediate steps include completing in-reach with all Partnership members' institutions, identifying key audiences, messages, and the creation of a Partnership identity (logo, letterhead, etc.).
- Monitor partnership on-the-ground impacts and partner satisfaction to keep public and private members engaged.

Our Quick Success at the Smith Ranch

The Partnership has already had important successes. The best example is the conservation of the 50,000 acre Smith Ranch in Lincoln County, Colorado. The ranch was on the market and vulnerable to development. Partnership members were able to work together in the spring of 2007 to conserve the ranch while maintaining a viable cattle operation. The ranch will be owned by the Colorado State Land Board, and The Nature Conservancy will hold a conservation easement on more than 23,000 acres using funding from the USFWS, the state of Colorado and several private sources. The easement funding could only be obtained with support from all of the Partnership members, but in particular the Playa Lakes Joint Venture, the Colorado Natural Heritage Program, and NRCS. The Department of Defense provided the funding for the analysis that helped identify the ranch as a conservation priority.

The Nature Conservancy will hold the long-term grazing lease and will, in turn, sub-lease the operation to a ranching family or families. The State Land Board will sell off an equivalent number of acres in Lincoln County to avoid negatively affecting the county's tax base, and the Conservancy will pay the equivalent amount in taxes until those acres are sold to ensure that Lincoln County and its fire and school districts do not feel any negative financial impacts as a result of the deal. The management plan for the ranch was developed in collaboration with a number of Partnership organizations and the restoration of portions of the ranch will involve the Division of Wildlife. Long-term bird monitoring will be undertaken in conjunction with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory.

The project represents a "complete" conservation project involving protection of priority acres, improved management, restoration, long-term monitoring and research – all done on a working cattle ranch.

APPENDICES

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I. Terrestrial and Aquatic Conservation & Restoration

The key to successful large-scale conservation in the CSP is incorporating private landowners in conservation decision-making and implementation processes, as the majority of the portfolio of conservation areas is under private ownership. We recognize that private landowners had minimal representation in the ecoregional assessment process, yet they are critical to building a successful conservation strategy. Thus, the strategies and action steps presented here are focused primarily on bridging the gap between the “planners” and the “doers,” and maximizing our engagement with private landowners and local communities in the CSP.

In addition, it is essential for the Partnership to have a full understanding of the cooperative conservation efforts and partnerships that already exists within the ecoregion, beginning with eastern Colorado. Over the next six months the Partnership will complete an analysis/review of those existing efforts and will identify ways for the Partnership (many of whose members are already members of these groups) to support and/or complement their efforts. Priority agencies for cooperation include NRCS, FSA, CDOW and the USFWS, as they have extensive program and networks in place already. Increasing the ability of local districts, partnerships, watersheds and conservation districts to “speak up” to these agencies as to how resources should be expended to achieve conservation goals is essential. The Partnership’s role is to help steer the priorities of these various efforts because of its science data and network among the Partnership’s members.

It is also important to assess the current toolbox to promote the programs, policies and activities that best drive conservation; and, when and if necessary, develop new tools and incentives that are specific to local needs and opportunities. Focusing on a few top priority “working landscapes” to test new tools/incentives is suggested as a first step. This strategy dovetails with other CSP implementation teams and is not a stand alone strategy. Meanwhile, continued pursuit of more traditional tools (e.g., conservation easements) on high priority lands and waters across the ecoregion is important.

Key Questions:

1. What are the current cooperative conservation efforts and partnerships that already exist within the ecoregion and how can the Partnership engage and support these efforts?
2. How can we better engage landowners in developing and implementing conservation strategies?
3. Is the existing conservation “tool box” adequate? What other tools could we develop that would specifically address conservation in this ecoregion?
4. What types of restoration activities would benefit our conservation priorities?
5. Where are the priority areas (based on threat, conservation value and opportunity) to focus on over the next five years?
6. How do we best integrate the data and science of the Partnership with the strategies, policies and efforts of others and measure changes in the ecoregion over time (including landscape trends, the loss of wildlife habitat, and what is successfully conserved).

Strategies and Action Steps:

Strategies 1 and 2 focus primarily on assisting individual landowners in compatible management practices and conservation efforts on their own property. Strategies 3 and 4 focus on potential approaches to cross-boundary management by multiple landowners to achieve landscape-scale conservation.

1. Support and participate in existing conservation and restoration efforts, collaborations and partnerships on private lands, including terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.
 - a. **18-month goal:** Compile comprehensive list of existing working groups, collaborative efforts, and local partnerships, to identify potential opportunities for support and participation by the CSP Partnership. Prioritize potential support and engagement opportunities and initiate communication with appropriate group(s). Work with at least 2 local group(s) to identify and pursue projects and funding that would achieve mutual conservation goals, and to implement Best Management Practices.
 - b. Coordinate with governmental agencies and landowners to maximize effectiveness of incentive programs such as the Farm Bill (refer to Policy team strategies).
 - c. Identify and engage appropriate contacts within the Colorado Cattlemen's Association, the Colorado Farm Bureau, Colorado Association of Conservation Districts, the Farm Service Agency, and the NRCS' Resource Conservation & Development program.
 - d. **3-5 year goal:** Complete habitat restoration or enhancement projects in at least 5 high priority portfolio sites.
2. Continue to pursue opportunities for legal land protection via fee simple purchase or conservation easement, coupled with adaptive management agreements where appropriate.
 - a. **3-5 year goal:** Pursue potential conservation easement projects with at least 10 landowners in high priority conservation areas, as identified by the Conservation and Restoration Team and the Science, Planning, and Adaptive Management Team.
3. Conduct focused outreach efforts to discuss potential options for implementing collaborative conservation strategies and to develop partnerships. Primary audiences for outreach are private landowners, agencies, and other groups who have significant influence over lands in the CSP (e.g., industry).
 - a. **18-month goal:** Host a pilot symposium for landowners and other local stakeholders, potentially in conjunction with the annual meeting of a Conservation District watershed, in a high priority area. The purpose of the symposium would be to introduce *new* conservation tools, and to explore interest in, and ability to, implement these ideas. Explore existing models for credit programs, stewardship cooperatives, grassbanking, ecosystem management agreements, ecotourism efforts (e.g., Laikipia, the Colorado Birding Trail, partnerships with State Parks), conservation leases (e.g., similar to TNC's Bohart Ranch project) and other tools that

- could help achieve collaborative stewardship/conservation and integrated management on both public and private lands.
- b. **18-month goal:** Partner with the Colorado Division of Wildlife and others on workshops for landowners to explore how cooperative conservation efforts may be initiated and supported under new Farm Bill provisions (this step assumes that this provision get approved in the 2007 Farm Bill).
 - c. Recruit specific landowners to participate on the Working Landscapes Advisory Group. It is also desirable to include a member of the Conservation and Restoration Strategies team on that advisory group.
4. Based on results of symposia and workshops, facilitate development of stewardship/conservation cooperative(s) where all stakeholders share in decision making and implementation. This strategy will increase landowner participation in conservation within the CSP, and will improve integrated management across public and private lands. The process should be science-based and citizen driven, but government and NGOs should also be included.
- a. Follow-up on opportunities identified at symposia/workshops to develop local collaborative working groups (ideally partnering with existing efforts such as wetland focus areas and conservation districts) in high priority conservation areas (as identified by the Conservation and Restoration Team and Science, Planning, and Adaptive Management Team). Southeast Colorado and the Pawnee National Grasslands are obvious focus areas. Ranchers in southeast Colorado are already collaborating on biodiversity conservation, and the area around the Pawnee is highly threatened by expanding residential development pressures.
 - i. **5 year goal:** Establish at least one active collaborative working group with willing landowners.
 - b. Design and implement an incentive-based conservation program that focuses on offsetting adverse impacts to species and natural communities, protecting and/or restoring habitat, and aiding recovery of declining prairie species. Several models exist that could inform this strategy. The DoD's Recovery Credit System at Fort Hood funds habitat restoration and conservation projects (both temporary and permanent), on nearby private lands as a means of offsetting adverse impacts on the installation. The CDOT Shortgrass Prairie Initiative focused on perpetual conservation easements coupled with management agreements on private lands to offset permanent habitat loss.
 - i. **18-month goal:** Work with DoD and private landowners to develop a conservation program that would maximize operational flexibility for military installations in the CSP, and be compatible with the needs and desires of neighboring landowners. Evaluate the utility of the Fort Hood, CDOT, and other appropriate models, or some sort of hybrid.
 - ii. **5-year goal:** Implement pilot collaborative conservation project.
 - iii. **5-year goal:** Investigate the potential future application of the collaborative conservation program to the energy development industry, and to the residential/commercial development industry.

II. Science & Adaptive Management

The Partnership completed a conservation assessment of the Central Shortgrass Prairie ecoregion in 2006 with the primary objective of promoting the long-term survival of all native species, natural communities and ecosystems representative of the ecoregion through the collaborative design and conservation of a network of conservation areas. As part of Phase Two of the project, a science team has been meeting over the past 8 months to develop a set of science and adaptive management strategies and goals to help implement the assessment. The overall goal of the Science and Adaptive Management team is *to provide critical information, based on the best available science, to guide effective conservation action and measure progress*. The audience for this information includes key decision-makers, policy-makers, land managers, landowners, academic institutions, state and federal agencies, counties, and non-governmental organizations. Public understanding and acceptance of the Partnership's scientific analysis and products, as well as its recommended conservation goals, is critical for long-term success.

Overarching Questions:

1. How can we continue to keep the CSP assessment useful to partners to make conservation decisions?
2. What are the most pressing science data gaps and questions that could help inform effective on-the-ground conservation and policy, and what is the best way to address these needs?
3. What information or analyses can we provide or improve to abate threats?
4. What are the trends in biodiversity health, threats, and progress towards goals?
5. How do we best link ecological/biodiversity scorecards and indicators with socio-economic and political indicators to address the Partnership's holistic vision?

Strategies and Action Steps:

1. Maximize the utility of the 2006 CSP ecoregional assessment results and further analyses to drive stakeholder conservation actions towards achieving ecoregional goals.
 - a. **18-month goals:**
 - i. Scientific information and assessment results are incorporated into all partnership strategies, with emphasis on the communication plan and outreach activities.
 - ii. Assessment report and associated products are available on the internet (www.conserveonline.org), linked to partner websites, and SPP website.
 - iii. Results shared with at least 10-15 key partners and stakeholder groups to guide effective conservation actions.
 - iv. Completed at least one pilot project stepping down the regional assessment to the conservation area level.
 - b. **3-5 year goals:**
 - i. Develop and apply decision support tools to address key questions identified by the partnership and to inform effective conservation and interpret results for key partners and audiences (e.g., NatureServe Vista, threat analyses).

- ii. Actively incorporate new data and update assessment products (e.g., occurrences, threats, completed conservation actions) to keep the assessment up-to-date to facilitate effective conservation.
 - iii. Create a process to assess the rate and importance of change in information used to conduct the CSP assessment and identify triggers for re-analysis.

- 2. Proactively address the most important ongoing science/data needs and research questions (and identify ways to get the work done). Conduct analyses to answer key conservation questions and inform decision-making.
 - a. 18-month goals:**
 - i. Prioritized list of key science needs and questions to focus conservation activities and develop strategies, addressing both Partnership members and others' needs (*see Attachment A*).
 - ii. Prioritized map/list of areas needing conservation.
 - iii. Identification of best management practices for key conservation targets.
 - iv. Decision support tools and analyses used to address priority needs and questions identified by the partnership, e.g., to proactively assess threats and cumulative impacts on targeted species and communities (e.g., Superslab, wind energy, oil and gas development, climate change, biofuels, transmission lines, altered fire regime).
 - v. Best scientists from across the ecoregion convened to identify and discuss ways to address priority questions, research needs and data gaps (possibly in conjunction with the CDOW grassland meeting in 2008).

 - b. 3-5 year goals:**
 - i. Assessment completed of vulnerability and adaptability of species and systems to climate change, using past responses and current tolerance limits as a guide and to help identify targets needing additional planning.
 - ii. Results shared with partnership and key stakeholders.

- 3. Measure conservation success using the methods outlined in the report and refine using an adaptive management approach.
 - a. 18-month goal:** Completed *Central Shortgrass Prairie Biodiversity Scorecard* report based on partner needs, building on existing framework, incorporating new information, and assessing of the following:
 - i. Biodiversity status: degree to which ecoregional goals are met for targeted species, communities and ecological systems
 - ii. Threats and impacts
 - iii. Management effectiveness using new methods
 - iv. Progress towards meeting ecoregional goals at conservation areas.

 - b. 3-5 year goals:**
 - i. Compiled monitoring data and trend information about conservation status of biodiversity and threats to biodiversity over-time (assess trends every 5 years after baseline completed).

- ii. Future regional or statewide monitoring plans/activities, e.g., state agencies on wildlife action plans, incorporate CSP results.

Roles of the Team (meet at least quarterly):

1. Develop/refine strategies to address key science questions, issues, and data gaps;
2. Develop/implement prioritization process to guide conservation efforts;
3. Engage and recruit others to address priority science and planning issues;
4. Determine funding needs and develop proposals for highest priorities

Questions for Partnership Members:

1. What are your priority needs for getting conservation done on the ground?
2. Do you need more detailed information about the conservation areas (e.g., strategies to address key threats or how best to manage various systems)?
3. What other analyses could you use to help prioritize areas for conservation or management?

Team Membership:

- David Hanni (RMBO)
- Chris Hise (OK-TNC)
- Steve Kettler (USFWS)
- Jan Koenig (CO-TNC)
- Brent Lathrop (WY-TNC)
- Jim McDermott (Ft. Carson)
- Rob Manes (KS-TNC) and/or Bill Busby (KS-BS)
- Betsy Neely (CO-TNC)
- Eric Odell (CDOW)
- Chris Pague (CO-TNC)
- Amy Pocewicz (WY-TNC)
- Renee Rondeau (CNHP)
- Rick Schneider (NE Game and Parks)

Others are welcome and encouraged to participate, as we seek to engage other experts as needed to address various questions and/or fill data gaps.

Attachment A: Central Shortgrass Prairie Science Needs and Questions (Draft)

1. What science or planning information is lacking and limiting our ability to identify strategies?
2. What questions need to be answered to facilitate conservation actions?

Questions/Information Needs	Products	Status/Analysis Needed	Priority
A. Where should conservation occur first?			
1. Where are irreplaceable species (federally listed and G1-G2) & plant communities?	Map of priority hexagons for entire CSP	Done	Very High
2. Where are biodiversity concentration areas (multiple high priority conservation targets)	“ “	Done	Very High
3. Where are the most intact landscapes?	“ “	Done	Very High
4. Where are viable matrix and large patch ecological system occurrences?	“ “	Done for 2 matrix systems (shortgrass & sandsage)	High
5. What are the key aquatic areas?	“ “	Done	Very High
6. Where are the most important areas to build on existing conserved areas?	“ “	Sample done	High
7. Where are key areas needed for restoration (where could restoration have the biggest bang for the buck?)?	Playa lakes?	Done	High
B. What are best management practices for ecological systems, plant communities, and species?	System integrity guidelines & conservation action plans	Lots of science	Medium
1. What is fire's role and where can it be applied? What is fire return interval, in what pattern did it burn, and what were the effects?			Medium High
2. What are the best management strategies to establish, maintain, and achieve conservation goals for prairie dogs?			Medium

C. How can we proactively address key threats, such as wind energy development, major highways, noxious weeds, etc.?			High
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Prioritization criteria:

1. Will actions lower probability of global extinction, probability of ecoregional extinction, meet national plan goals, ecoregional goals, state CWCS goals, local goals
2. User needs have to help meet conservation goals/objectives of the partnership

III. Stakeholder Facilitator -- Working Landscapes Advisory Group

The role of the Working Landscapes Advisory Group is to provide a forum for private landowners, Partnership members, public agencies and private organizations with the opportunity to honestly and productively discuss shared interests and priorities for the identification and implementation of strategies to continue to keep the large, intact grasslands of the region economically productive and ecologically intact. The group will provide information and perspective on how best to work with the land owners, producers (both ranchers and farmers) and communities of the Western High Plains. It will also serve as a “reality check” for the Partnership’s members with regard to their conservation goals, strategies, communications, etc.

Key questions to answer include: 1) What projects, policies, programs and initiatives will have the greatest impacts towards these goals? 2) What changes or modifications should be made to have even greater impacts? 3) Who are key institutions and individuals with whom the Partnership should collaborate? 4) What are the best ways for the Partnership to reach out to the private landowner and producer community to facilitate collaboration?

While members do not need to have conservation backgrounds, it is important that they be willing to discuss in a candid and productive manner how best to meet the shared needs of conservation and production in the region.

It is envisioned that the Working Landscapes Advisory Group will meet as a group twice a year. Meetings will be held in locations around the Western High Plains and producer and land owner representatives will always outnumber representatives from the agencies and NGOs. In addition, less formal and smaller get-togethers can be organized at producer events (Colorado Cattlemen’s annual meeting, CACD quarterly and annual watershed meetings, Colorado Farm Bureau annual meeting, etc.) and locally in the communities of the shortgrass prairie. However, while we want advisory group members from these groups, we are not looking for formal representatives of those groups. It is hoped that the members of the advisory group will serve as ambassadors on behalf of the group to their communities, organizations, and local stakeholders

We seek a diverse membership – ranchers and farmers, older and younger generations, both men and women, to form the committee. All expenses incurred due to member participation (mileage, meals, etc.) will be covered by the Partnership if they are not covered by an affiliated organization. We are looking for approximately 12-15 people to serve on the committee initially with the possibility of having it grow over time. We would like to start with approximately 12 members.

Among producers and land owners we have JD Wright, Kenny Rogers, Laura Negley, Pat Karney, Tim Thatcher, Jeff Thorton, Elaine White, Steve Wooten, Nate Tanner and Nathan Andrews signed up. Partnership members who will participate include Mike Carter, Playa Lakes Joint Venture; Seth Gallagher, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory; Herman Garcia, Natural Resources Conservation Service; Dan Grossman, Environmental Defense; Ken Morgan, Colorado Division of Wildlife; Bill Noonan, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; Bill Ulfelder, The Nature Conservancy; and J.D. Wright, Colorado Association of Conservation Districts (also “producer”)

Tasks include:

- Recognize that production agriculture and conservation activities are often compatible, and will need to become more so in the future to avoid regulatory issues and to maintain the ecosystem services that provide food, clean air and water, recreation opportunities, and open space that society desires.
- Clearly identify mutual goals and benefits of agricultural and conservation interests working together.
- Serve as the sounding board for understanding and working within the social and economic context of local communities.
- Find economically viable ways to mitigate or minimize resource use impacts.
- Find ways for production agriculture and conservation to compete with other activities that may have negative impacts on natural resources.

Potential tools/activities:

- Develop or promote economic incentives to keep native grasslands intact and avoid development or conversion to non-native systems.
- Develop or promote economic rewards for land management practices that result in conservation benefits.
- Promote ways to keep rangeland intact and well managed by using low cost financing and loan guarantees for Beginning Rancher Program.
- Undertake exchanges between groups and geographies to share best practices, lessons learned, create networks, etc.

18 month goals for Working Landscapes Advisory Group

- Establish a working landscapes advisory group that is geographically diverse; and includes men and women, as well as ranchers and farmers; and whose members participate in a variety of agricultural production organizations (Cattlemen's, Farm Bureau, Farmer's Union, etc.).
- Organize at least three meetings of the working landscapes advisory group, providing members with an understanding of the vision, goals and strategies of the Shortgrass Prairie Partnership.
- Identify with the group 2-3 priorities to be addressed by the Partnership that promote wildlife habitat conservation and sustained economic productivity that can be achieved in 3-5 years.

3-5 year goals for the Working Landscapes Advisory Group

- Establish a beginning rancher program in Colorado that provides young ranchers with access to land, low cost financing and coaching in the fields of range management, conservation and finance.
- Expand the working landscapes group to address the interests and priorities of producers and communities in the other CSP states (either by expanding the group to be multi-state or creating similar bodies in at least NE and KS).

- Make landowners and managers increasingly aware of the programs and incentives available to manage and conserve land for grazing and conservation, with widespread understanding of the opportunities and resources available.

IV. Policy

The goal of the Partnership's policy work is to influence policies and programs to facilitate the implementation of conservation goals identified in the assessment and strategic plan.

To accomplish this goal the Policy Team felt it was necessary for the Partnership to first engage in a policy scoping process, before developing a full strategic plan. We anticipate this process to take six months and will be completed by March 2008. The purpose of the policy scoping process will be to:

1. Identify policies that effect grassland conservation in the region;
2. Rank those policies in terms of their relationship to the conservation goals of the CSP and their relative importance; and
3. Identify which policies CSP has the potential to influence and what new policies may be needed.

We will complete the scoping process by first expanding the Policy Team and then soliciting feedback from a broad range of policy experts including members of the ranching, wildlife, real estate development, and agricultural lending communities as well as local politicians and conservation district leaders. The members of the Team will complete the scoping process through investigation of other similar efforts elsewhere, by holding conversations with other experts, and through their own experiences.

When this process is complete, we will develop a more complete strategic plan that links specific policy options to the conservation goals of the CSP. We expect implementation to begin in mid-2008.

Current Policy Team Members:

1. Ted Toombs, leader (Environmental Defense)
2. Mike Carter (Playa Lakes Joint Venture)
3. Barth Crouch (Pheasants Forever)
4. Rob Manes (TNC)
5. Matt Reddy (Ducks Unlimited)
6. Tim Sullivan (TNC)

V. Outreach & Communications

The Partnership needs assistance with five aspects of communication:

1. Identification of all appropriate audiences
2. Key messages for each audience
3. A visual identity for the partnership
4. Website content and structure
5. Print materials

A plan will be developed that identifies objectives for communication, directs elements and timing of tactical implementation, and determines how success will be evaluated.

- Strategy: creation of a communications plan, audience identification, key messages. Includes preparation, facilitation and follow-up of two workshops for representatives from each partner organization brainstorm audiences and messages.
- Visual identity – design of logo and application on letterhead, business cards, note cards, envelopes, and templates for collateral materials.
- Web site: includes design, writing copy and working with external entity to develop site map, handle any necessary programming, etc.
- Copywriting and design of other collateral materials: actual materials are undetermined at this time, but proposal allows for some paid and some pro bono design, copywriting, and production. Does not include printing or other hard costs.
- Implement communication plan: includes stakeholder outreach and media relations

This work will be completed by the end of 2007, but the implementation will be on-going after that time.

The Partnership is in an active “in reach” phase, providing the staff and cooperators of our 14 member institutions with an understanding of the ecoregional assessment and the Partnership. Considerable in reach is still needed to better engage the Division of Wildlife, Natural Resources Conservation Service, eastern Colorado watersheds and conservation districts.

Finally, it is also important for the communications and outreach team to expand their membership to include more representatives with outreach and communications experience from representing a variety of groups.

VI. Partnership Health & Internal Operations

Four primary areas of interest related to health and operations include the level of partner engagement/satisfaction; the resource sustainability of the Partnership– both economic & social; planning strategically and generating conservation success.

Key areas for focus include answering the following questions:

a) Partner engagement/satisfaction

- How well does the Partnership further member goals and objectives?
- How well does the Partnership engage the multiple states and institutions that have conservation interests in the ecoregion?
- Is the Partnership’s leadership available at all levels at the right times, on the right issues and opportunities, to make the Partnership successful?
- Are partners rewarded by their involvement in the Partnership?

b) Resource sustainability – economic & social

- Does the Partnership have the necessary resources (staff time, in-kind, goodwill and funding) from diverse sources to succeed?
- Are there sufficient resources to address the various types of work that the Partnership does – administrative; outreach, networking, and political; as well as the on-the-ground projects?

c) Strategic planning

- Does the Partnership have a strategic vision/plan that Partners agree to?
- Does the plan reflect the changing realities of the ecoregion and partners?
- We must always ask the questions, “What are we doing now to meet the needs of the group and what more/different do we need to do that builds upon our foundation of success to-date?”

d) Conservation success

- What is the rate of loss of native prairie in the CSP ecoregion?
- What are amounts of land and waters “effectively conserved” in the ecoregion?
- How do we address conservation success in our work?
- Are the right stakeholders being engaged?

Strategies

1) Solidify the support and engagement of the Partnership’s members. It is important to recognize that while the Central Shortgrass Prairie ecoregion ties together seven states, each state must determine and pursue its own strategies to achieve conservation success. While the Shortgrass Prairie Partnership is not a monolith, it should serve as a network across states to help identify conservation opportunities that exist and which ones would benefit from coordinated action. Colorado is well advanced in developing its portion of the Shortgrass Prairie Partnership. Nebraska, Kansas and Wyoming should come next given the amount of the CSP ecoregion they contain. The Partnership members, most of whom are currently in Colorado, should provide support for Partnership “subsets” to emerge and grow in the other states.

- Do annual “check ins” with partners through small group and one-on-one meetings to determine partner satisfaction.

2) A healthy Partnership will attract resources (staff time, in-kind support, goodwill and funding). Identify diverse funding sources for the institutional “management,” policy and on-the-ground projects/efforts of the Partnership, including the support of the Partnership’s members.

- Develop a resource plan for partner management, policy work and projects. The plan should recognize and account for the various ways our partners and collaborators contribute to the Partnership.

3) Complete a strategic plan for the partnership and maintain the plan as a “living document,” with updates as necessary done with the full participation of the Partnership’s members. We will not “over plan” by spending too much time on strategic planning. We will do the minimum necessary and get back to the conservation work at hand. We will always focus on “What should we do to keep the Partnership engaged and successful?”

- Update the strategic plan annually or as necessary.

4) Develop and apply a *simple* adaptive management framework for the Partnership through the efforts of the science/adaptive management team.

- The science team will develop an adaptive management framework to measure conservation success. We will demonstrate and recognize conservation success and manage adaptively so that on-going and future work reflects changes necessitated by success.

18 month goals for Partnership Health

- Complete and consensually approve the Shortgrass Prairie Partnership strategic plan.
- Expand the Shortgrass Prairie Partnership to include active, consistent engagement from both public agencies and private organizations in Kansas and Nebraska.
- Complete at least one round of partnership satisfaction surveys and interviews/discussion and with at least 90% of Partnership members who believe the Partnership is important, advances their institutional missions and goals, is focused on the right priority and is headed in the right direction.
- Develop and begin application of simple measures of success framework with very simple annual reports on success to-date. At a minimum the following questions should be answered: What is the rate of loss of native prairie in the CSP ecoregion? What are amounts of land and waters “effectively conserved” in the ecoregion? How do we address conservation success in our work? Are the right stakeholders being engaged?
- Complete a resource sustainability plan.

3-5 year goals for Partnership Health

- Keep the strategic plan updated as conditions change and success is achieved.
- An expanded Partnership that includes more active, consistent engagement from public agencies and private organizations, as well as landowners, in all seven Central Shortgrass Prairie states.
- Complete every 24 months partnership satisfaction surveys and interviews/discussions with at least 90% of Partnership members stating that they believe the Partnership is important, advances their institutional missions and goals, is focused on the right priorities and is headed in the right direction.
- Successfully implement a simple to use “measures of success” framework.
- Provide for the sustained resource viability of the Partnership.