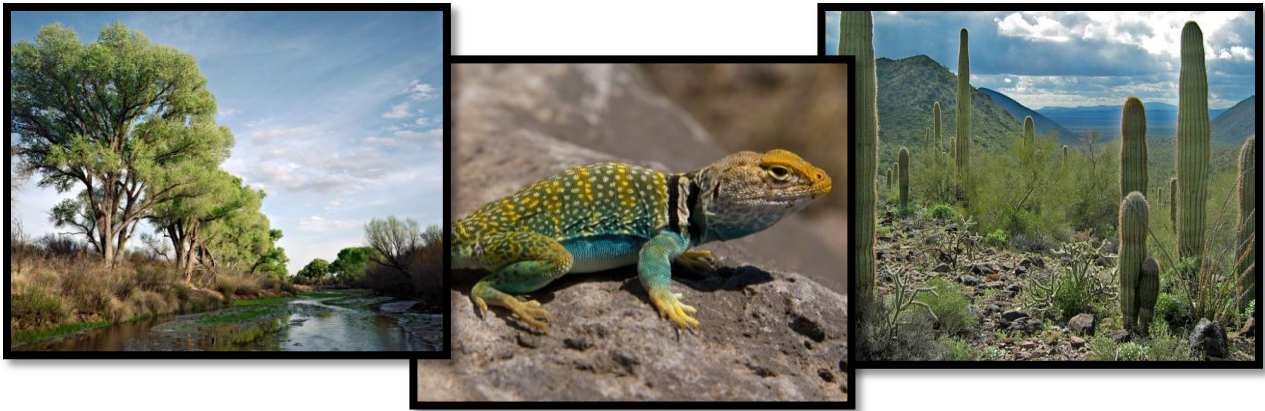


# *Desert Landscape Conservation Cooperative*

## July 2012 Report



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<http://www.usbr.gov/WaterSMART/lcc/desert.html>

## Science and Conservation

Highlights of projects and conservation science activities

### **Comprehensive Science Needs Assessment Approved**

In June 2012, the Desert LCC Steering Committee, upon recommendation from the Science Working Group, approved the Comprehensive Science Needs Assessment. The Comprehensive Science Needs Assessment process consisted of 1) extracting science needs from reports, workshops, and individual input; 2) developing criteria for scoring the science needs; and 3) applying the criteria to arrive at a list of top science needs. The Science Working Group identified 553 science needs from 6 outreach meetings and workshops and 40 published technical documents related to resource assessments in the Desert LCC region. Members then identified priority needs using a set of criteria established by the Steering Committee in January, 2012. This process is now being used to further identify existing information that addresses the science priorities, to identify current science projects underway that could fill the science needs, and to identify opportunities to initiate new science efforts across agencies and organizations.

### **FY2012 Reclamation Funding Opportunity Announcement and Interagency Agreement Opportunity**

The Bureau of Reclamation's Funding Opportunity Announcement closed on June 28<sup>th</sup>. Proposed projects are expected to deliver new capabilities that address priorities identified and shared by Reclamation and the partners involved in the LCC. The cooperative agreements, funded through WaterSMART, will provide approximately \$685,000 to States, tribes, irrigations districts, water districts, universities, nonprofit organizations, or nonprofit research institutions, on a 50/50 cost-share basis, for projects with a water nexus that met the priority science needs of the Desert LCC. Twenty-two science project proposals were received. An application review committee, comprised of Reclamation staff and Desert LCC Steering Committee nominees, is currently reviewing the proposals. Applicants are expected to be notified in August.

In addition, the Bureau of Reclamation announced a *new opportunity* for *federal* partners to develop applied science tools and information to meet Desert LCC science needs through interagency agreements with Reclamation. Reclamation intends to award 2-4 interagency agreements through a competitive selection process, with a maximum of \$100,000 allocated to each agreement. If selected, recipients will be required to cost-share with Reclamation on a 50/50 basis. The announcement closed on June 22 and 14 Statements of Interest were received. Statements of Interest are currently being reviewed by a panel comprised of Reclamation staff and DLCC Steering Committee members. Applicants are expected to be notified August.

### **Other Agency Funding Contributions**

This year, USFWS received funding for Desert LCC science projects. Because it was a smaller allocation, the Service prioritized supporting LCC science thematic areas that had been previously identified as high priority by the Desert LCC and funded through Reclamation's FY11 Funding Opportunity Announcement or those science needs that could not be met under the FY12 Reclamation Funding Opportunity Announcement. Projects include expansion of seeps and springs research to support restoration of habitat for desert fish and other aquatic resources

and expansion of an avian climate change vulnerability assessment to include the Sonoran Desert landscape in Mexico.

The USGS is supporting science “round tables,” which will bring further refinement to understanding science needs and gaps on specific topics of high priority to the Desert LCC. This innovative process (outlined in more detail below under “Business”) is expected to narrow the gap between science and management, and facilitate more effective science delivery to managers.

### **FY11 Project Updates**

Progress continues on seven FY11 funded projects. The Sky Island Alliance is inventorying data on springs and seeps critical to wildlife and the environment in Southeastern Arizona. Findings will provide a better understanding of ground water and surface water interactions and inform better management decisions and stewardship of these critical water resources in context of future climate changes. Kansas State University is completing research on how fish habitat connectivity influences community dynamics and species persistence in the upper Gila River basin. Efforts will result in decision support tools that help evaluate current resource management practices and adapt to the effects of climate change on fish species. The University of Texas is currently compiling and normalizing biodiversity data for all fishes occurring in internationally shared drainages by the U.S. and Mexico throughout the Desert LCC. This project will benefit and enhance management of aquatic resources by addressing information gaps in biodiversity data, as well as improving forecasting of species’ responses to future climate change.

## *Collaboration and Coordination*

*Highlights of partnership and coordination activities*

The Steering Committee approved Genevieve Johnson to represent the Desert LCC on the Southwest Climate Science Center Stakeholder Advisory Committee. Genevieve attended a meeting in June, where the committee agreed on the importance of coordinating the science needs and projects from the LCCs and the other CSCs with the SWCSC Science Plan.

The Desert LCC Acting Science Coordinator, Mark Kaib, initiated a Seeps and Springs conference call to assess the science and management implications of seeps and springs science. Participants, including USGS, University of Arizona, Sky Island Alliance, and Spring Stewardship Institute, discussed research gaps and management needs, how to complete this research in a complimentary fashion, and how the LCC can play role.

Mark also initiated a conference call with the National LCC coordinators and the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP) manager, John Cissel. The discussion included possible use of the JFSP internet platform for fire science proposal review and science tracking accountability system. This partnership opportunity between JFSP and the LCC’s could enhance future science applications and delivery.

Genevieve Johnson gave a Desert LCC presentation at Western Regional Partnership (WRP) Natural Resources Committee meeting in Sierra Vista, AZ on June 8, 2012. WRP is a collaborative effort headed by Department of Defense (DoD) which “provides a proactive and collaborative framework for senior-policy level Federal, State and Tribal leadership to identify common goals and emerging issues in the states of Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah and to develop solutions that support WRP Partners and protect natural resources, while promoting sustainability, homeland security and military readiness.”

WRP’s Natural Resources Committee works on broad based regional planning issues. Specifically within the Desert LCC, WRP identified the Mojave Desert Region as an important focus area and is expanding ongoing efforts in the lower Colorado River and Southeastern Arizona/New Mexico Region. In addition, WRP maintains a vast GIS and project database that could be useful to LCC partners.

Genevieve Johnson and Mark Kaib met with staff of Arizona and New Mexico National Wildlife Refuges to brief them on LCCs and promote discussion of potential collaborative efforts. Genevieve and Mark also met with John Rice, Science Coordinator for the Southern Rockies LCC, during his visit to Arizona for the USGS Environmental Flow Studies Workshop to discuss future possibilities for collaboration between the LCCs.

## *Business*

*Highlights of LCC committees, meetings, decisions*

The Desert LCC Steering Committee held a conference call on June 21, 2012. In addition to finalizing the Comprehensive Science Needs Assessment, the committee reviewed and finalized the GIS/Spatial Data Working Group needs statement, adopted the National LCC data standards, and supported the concept of a data steward that could potentially be shared, at least initially, with another LCC.

The Steering Committee also agreed to have the Science Working Group further develop a science needs roundtable concept. In partnership with USGS, the Science Working Group will refine the Desert LCC science need priorities via the Round Table science scoping and framing process. The goal of this process is to gather scientists and resource managers together to identify known science related to a specific science topic, identify needed science in relation to specific management questions, build partnerships and communicate results throughout the Desert LCC network.

The Science Working Group has had several conference calls to finish the Comprehensive Science Needs Assessment, refine the Science Round Table concept, and welcome new members. The Science Working Group will be adding a Co-Chair position from our membership to assist the Science Coordinator in leading the group. Janet Monaco, a Division Manager with the Southern Nevada Water Authority in Las Vegas, is the newest member of the Science

Working Group. Janet provides experience surrounding Mojave Desert hydroecological issues, as well as a perspective from a local water authority, both identified as expertise needs for the group. Lisa Soo, BLM Arizona State Office climate change coordinator with invasive species and noxious weeds expertise, has also joined the Science Working Group, replacing Karl Ford who recently retired. Cecil Schwalbe from USGS, a recognized applied herpetologist, will be retiring this fall.

The Administrative Working Group continues to identify strategies to engage partners that are currently underrepresented within the Desert LCC community. This process will help guide the structure of the Desert LCC Steering Committee, and help us determine additional needed working groups to ensure we effectively engage multiple partners in determining science priorities and communicating results.

Tom Owens, USGS Science Coordinator, will also be moving on from the Desert LCC. Tom has led our GIS and Data Management Working Group. He was instrumental in providing coordination and expertise for our needs. Frank D'Erchia, one of USGS's very experienced science leaders, will be replacing as the Desert LCC Steering Committee alternate and lead of the GIS and Data Management committee.

## *Outreach and Upcoming Events*

*Highlights of outreach activities and important future events*

- The Desert LCC and Nature Serve are hosting the Mojave-Sonoran Deserts Natural Communities Vulnerability Assessment Adaptation Strategy Workshop on August 1-2 in Phoenix, AZ. The goal of the workshop is to identify management strategies that can be readily implemented in managed lands of the Sonoran and Mojave deserts to promote adaptation of natural communities and associated species to climate change.
- The Desert LCC Steering Committee will review Administrative Working Group recommendations on group structure and outreach during an August 21 conference call.
- The next in person Steering Committee meeting will be held October 10-11 in El Paso, Texas.



## *Other Updates*

- Mark Kaib is serving a 90-day detail as the Science Coordinator for the Desert LCC while the USFWS goes through the hiring process for a permanent selection.