

# Plains and Prairie Potholes Landscape Conservation Cooperative



The Plains and Prairie Potholes Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC) is dedicated to the conservation of a landscape unparalleled in importance to breeding waterfowl and many species of wetland and grassland birds in steep decline. This area also provides vast expanses of habitat for resident game and nongame animals, and its waters are home to many unique aquatic species.

The LCC, which transcends existing U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regional boundaries and the international border with Canada, includes the entire state of North Dakota; a portion of South Dakota; two-thirds of Montana; one third of Wyoming; large blocks of southern Alberta and Saskatchewan; and portions of Nebraska, Minnesota and Iowa.

There are two distinct geographic components of the LCC: the Northern Great Plains and the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR). Currently, the Service and our partners are working to develop and apply the scientific tools necessary to determine how climate change, coupled with existing stressors such as conversion of native prairie for agriculture may affect the health and productivity of populations of federal trust species in this landscape.

The PPR includes millions of varied wetlands that constitute one of the richest wetland and grassland systems in the world. These “prairie potholes” and their surrounding grasslands are highly productive and support an incredible diversity of wildlife. The area provides habitat for both breeding and migrating birds, as well as a host of other wetland and native grassland dependent species, including waterfowl, long-billed curlew, Sprague’s pipit, native stream fishes such as Topeka shiner, and big river fishes such as the pallid sturgeon, burbot, and paddlefish.

The Northern Great Plains portion includes the upper Missouri River system and several major tributaries such as the Yellowstone River. Priority species in the Missouri River basin include the pallid sturgeon, piping plover and least tern.



*Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuge by USFWS*

Habitats include tall and mixed grasslands, small emergent wetlands, lakes, rivers and riparian forests, aspen parklands, and small-river systems. Aquatic habitats have been altered through the construction of major dams, smaller impoundments, introduction of non-native invasive species construction of irrigation ditch systems, and significant channelization of rivers and streams, which has negatively impacted species such as pallid sturgeon, lake sturgeon and native mussels. A major priority for pallid sturgeon recovery is an interagency effort involving the Service, Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation to open up 160 miles of spawning habitat on the Yellowstone River through the Yellowstone Intake Project, in addition to the recovery of the Missouri River to the confluence with the Mississippi River. The area is also critical to ongoing recovery efforts for the endangered black-footed ferret, for which the Service may develop new partnerships with NRCS and other agriculture organizations.

## Partnerships

Our work in this area will be accomplished through a variety of Service and non-Service partners. The Service envisions the Plains and Prairie Potholes LCC will provide applied science support to the conservation community, including supplying specialized expertise in landscape scale conservation planning and design.

The Service is working to involve a diverse array of partners in this LCC, including the fish and wildlife agencies of Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Montana, as well as Native American tribes. The LCC may expand to include Canadian federal and provincial organizations as partners. Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, The Nature Conservancy, Delta Waterfowl and many other NGOs are long-standing partners in this landscape, and the Service envisions these organizations will participate in the LCC. The Missouri River Recovery efforts include partnerships with federal

agencies such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, five states and numerous tribes and NGOs. The Service's existing focus on prairie grasslands includes partnerships with The Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, and others and is aimed at recovering imperiled species such as the black-footed ferret.

We have a rich history of collaboration with USGS's Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, and other USGS offices, as well as with universities throughout the LCC. The LCC is working with these institutions to develop research capacity to support this LCC. The Service expects the Prairie Pothole and Northern Great Plains Joint Ventures, numerous Missouri River conservation and management organizations, and other existing partnerships will be strong partners and cooperators in the establishment and operation of this LCC. The Glacial Lakes and Great Plains Fish Partnerships, part of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP), will have substantial science needs to meet the NFHAP goal of assessing the status of all priority aquatic habitats. The LCC and its associated science partners can play an important role in meeting these needs.

### Capacities

Existing Service science and strategic conservation planning capacity includes the Habitat and Population Evaluation Team (HAPET) Offices in Fergus Falls, Minn., and Bismarck, ND, and the Fish Technology and Fish Health centers, in Bozeman, MT. The USGS operates the Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center and the South Dakota State University Cooperative Research Unit and is planning to establish an Intermountain West Regional Climate Change Hub. Other public and private partners have potentially significant science capacity that may provide capacity for this LCC. However, the Service will be responsible for coordinating the LCC and ensuring existing program functions continue. Similarly, the Service will be responsible for coordinating science and monitoring activities throughout the LCC.

To achieve full capacity, the LCC may – depending on actual needs for the LCC and its objectives and operations - establish additional staff positions with expertise in the following disciplines:

- Energy and development
- Prairie Pothole threatened/endangered species
- Data management and analysis
- Prairie ecology
- Farm policy and rural economics
- Administrative support
- Communications (addressing key audiences using innovative methods)
- Social science
- Monitoring coordination
- Decision analysis
- Genetics

### Timeline (subject to change)

#### September 2009:

Bi-regional LCC advisory team established.

#### October 2009:

Conduct scoping session with internal and external partners.

#### November 2009:

Advisory team will analyze scoping data and develop specific form and function of LCC.

Regional Service leadership will appoint an Interim LCC Coordinator.

#### January 2010 – September 2010:

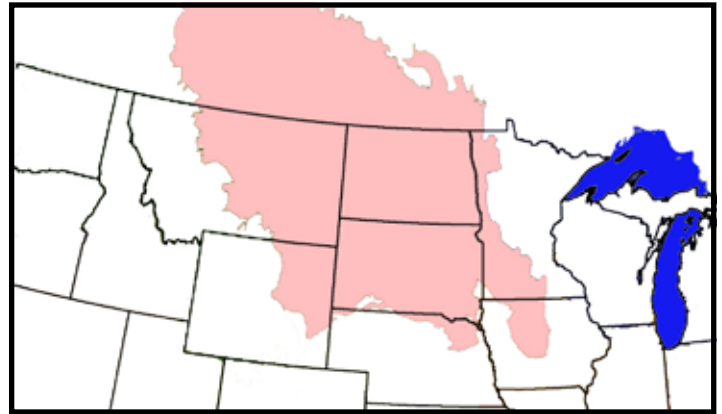
Formalize partnerships.

Fill permanent LCC coordinator and other key positions within the LCC.

Identify and science needs and begin funding research.

### Cost (estimates)

Depending on the existing capacity and actual needs of the LCC, a fully functioning LCC may include an additional 8-15 FTEs within the Service or cooperating partner organizations. Because of the large geographic size of this LCC, it may be necessary for the LCC to establish more than one physical office, which would in turn affect staffing levels. We estimate each fully functional LCC office will require an operating budget of \$1 million to \$1.5 million annually.



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