



The Species Status Assessment Framework

An Integrated Framework for Conservation

“The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday’s logic.”

– Peter Drucker

Although significant progress has been made in safeguarding species and their habitats, limited resources and an ever-increasing workload jeopardize our long-term effectiveness at fulfilling our responsibilities. In addition, novel and significant conservation challenges lie ahead, including a changing climate. While we continue to build on our successes, ensuring successful conservation and recovery of the nation’s species requires an increasing commitment to new ways of thinking, working, and sharing. From a budgetary and conservation standpoint, we simply cannot afford business as usual. The Species Status Assessment (SSA) Framework, in concert with other transformative efforts, better allows us to meet the complex challenges ahead and guide our efforts to continually enhance our conservation success.

The SSA Framework

The SSA Framework is an analytical framework for assessing a species’ biological condition and level of viability. Building on the best of our current analytical processes and the latest in conservation biology, this framework integrates analyses that are common to all ESA functions, eliminates duplicative and costly processes, and allows us to strategically focus on our core mission of preventing extinction and achieving recovery. In addition, the SSA Framework provides a structure for effectively engaging with our State partners and soliciting peer review.

Our Vision

Our vision is a common, consistent, repeatable, scientifically sound approach that will serve as the basis for future ESA decisions. Using the SSA Framework early provides the context for a decision on whether protections are warranted, then for decisions regarding what is needed for its conservation and recovery, what the greatest research needs are, and how public or private actions may affect the species. Staff in each region are available to provide support and training to help ensure we continue to build on the successes the SSA Framework has already delivered.

“The Species Status Assessment offers a unique opportunity to transform how the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service delivers conservation.”

– Gary Frazer, Assistant Director
Ecological Services Program

Realized Benefits

By having the biological analyses in the SSA report, and referencing it in the proposed listing rule, we saved an estimated 65 pages of Federal Register printing – a \$30,000 cost saving – for the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse proposed rule alone.

Efficiency – structured and repeatable biological analysis saves time

Defensibility – analysis grounded in accepted science and a logical process with explicit assumptions and complete reasoning will inform our statutory decisions

Consistency – consistent framework and terminology will be used across all ESA functions and across regions and field offices

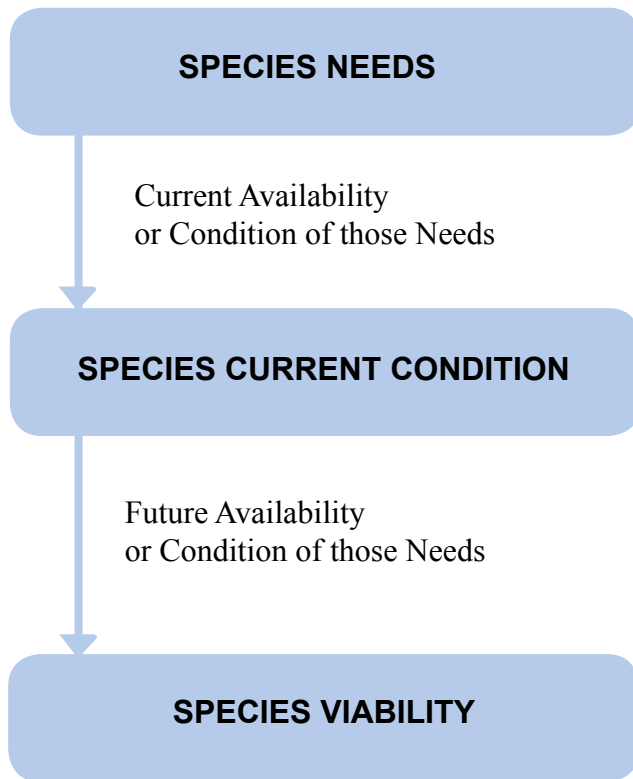
Effectiveness – clearly articulated reasoned decisions will foster effective communication and make for better conservation

Collaboration – a better forum for being inclusive; partners, particularly States, are more likely to understand and support



New Mexico meadow jumping mouse.
Credit: USFWS

Species Status Assessment Framework



Assessing the species level of viability is achieved by completing the above assessment framework. Credit: USFWS

Applying SSA

We begin an SSA with an understanding of the species' unique life history, and from that evaluate a species' needs or biological requirements at the scales of individuals, populations, and species. We then consider the current and future availability or condition of those needs and investigate the reasons those needs are missing. The consequences of any missing needs are assessed to describe the current condition of the species, and project the future species condition over time. Using the principles of resilience, representation, and redundancy, the species' level of viability and risks to its viability are evaluated and characterized. Generally, the more redundant, representative, and resilient a species is, the more likely it is to persist over time, even under changing environmental conditions. The characterization of viability is enhanced by estimates at multiple time intervals under a range of probable scenarios to describe the possible changes in viability over time and to characterize the uncertainty.

Where to Learn More

Visit <https://sites.google.com/a/fws.gov/ssa/> to see examples of SSA reports, connect with others who have applied the Framework, get answers to frequently asked questions, find contact information for your Region's SSA Framework Implementation Team member, and access the guidance on applying the draft SSA Framework.

"The SSA is an intuitive framework that, once completed, allowed me to more clearly and quickly develop, explain, and write my listing argument."

- Craig Hansen, Species Lead for Gunnison's prairie dog

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Gunnison's prairie dog. Credit: USFWS