

Strategic Habitat Conservation:

Five Key Points

Despite our best efforts, the overall condition of natural systems is declining. Despite all our hard work and past achievements, when it comes to keeping pace with 21st-Century conservation threats we have lots of local successes but not at a scale that is changing the course of conservation. The overall condition of natural systems – and the many species of fish and wildlife that inhabit them – is declining.

To meet the challenges of the 21st Century, we must change our conservation approach. To effectively address landscape-scale challenges like habitat degradation, encroaching development, climate change, and loss of biodiversity, we must shift from a site-specific or single-species approach to a more integrated and complex landscape-scale model – one that accounts for the complexity and interrelated nature of ecosystems. That means treating our own organization as an integrated system as well, and coordinating more effectively with partners across programs, agencies, and boundaries. It means applying the best available science and technology to address the conservation challenges we face.

This change is already underway.

- Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) is the conservation approach adopted by the Service that establishes self-sustaining populations of fish and wildlife, in the context of landscape and system sustainability, as the overarching target of conservation. SHC relies on an adaptive management framework to inform decisions about where and how to deliver conservation efficiently with our partners to achieve predicted biological outcomes necessary to sustain fish and wildlife populations.
- Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) are public-private partnerships that provide the expertise needed to support conservation planning, implementation, and evaluation at landscape scales. LCCs are generating the tools, methods, and data that managers need to carry out conservation using the SHC approach. They also promote collaboration among their members in defining shared conservation goals.
- Selecting surrogate species and other conservation targets. Since the sheer number of species for which the Service, states, and other partners work with makes designing and conserving landscape-scale habitats impractical on a species-by-species basis, we are now developing a process to collaboratively identify surrogate species that represent other species or aspects of the species' environment (e.g., water quality, sagebrush or grasslands, etc.). This is a practical step in using the SHC approach and the best-known science to conserve landscapes supporting multiple species.

The end goal: landscapes that support sustainable populations of fish and wildlife and provide for the needs of people – now and in the future. Working in collaboration with partners on science-based landscape-scale conservation will help the Service make smarter,

more cost-effective conservation investments. It will improve our ability to ensure landscapes capable of supporting sustainable populations of fish and wildlife while providing for the needs of people – now and in the future.

Leading change now will leave a lasting wildlife legacy for future generations.

When it comes to conserving the species and habitats that are our passion and our life's work, we are unwilling to accept the status quo. We want to do our best to conserve America's fish, wildlife and plants for future generations. With your participation and commitment, and in collaboration with our conservation partners, we can build a conservation legacy made to last.

For more information on the draft technical guidance and process for selecting surrogate species, as well as the Service's broader landscape conservation efforts, visit www.fws.gov/landscape-conservation

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