

# **SECAS FUTURES: Structuring Governance to Achieve Landscape-scale Conservation Outcomes**

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*The findings and conclusions in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2011, the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS) partnership has promoted an overarching vision for landscape conservation in the Southeast. To realize that vision, SECAS provides a forum for collaboration, bringing together state and federal agencies and nonprofit conservation organizations. SECAS also functions as an information hub for science delivery and decision support through the Southeast Conservation Blueprint, a data-driven platform that identifies important areas for conservation and restoration. Both of these functions help the partnership pursue its goal of measurably improving the health, function, and connectivity of Southeastern ecosystems.

To ensure the partnership's governance structure facilitates progress toward this vision and goal, the SECAS Steering Committee requested an assessment of the partnership. The assessment included interviews examining how SECAS is adding value to partner organizations and providing momentum to achieve the partnership's goal and vision. The assessment also included a literature review and case study analysis exploring best practices for structuring collaborative, landscape-scale partnerships.

**Interviews Summary** - The interviews assessed stakeholder perspectives on what is currently most valuable about SECAS, what could be improved, and any anticipated future needs that SECAS could help address. The 22 interviewees included official SECAS Points of Contact from state and federal agencies and nonprofit conservation organizations, as well as members of the SECAS Lead Coordinators Team.

The interviews indicate that SECAS stakeholders hold the partnership in high regard as both a forum for collaboration and an information hub. As an information hub, interviewees valued the Southeast Conservation Blueprint for helping agencies establish conservation priorities and attract additional resources to address them. As a forum that brings together a diversity of organizations, stakeholders valued SECAS as a means to build and leverage relationships across agencies. Participants said SECAS eased communication barriers and encouraged familiarity between otherwise unconnected agencies.

**Literature Review Summary** - The literature review synthesized lessons from academic and professional literature in order to identify best practices for designing collaborative landscape conservation governance systems. One overarching finding was that the concept of ecological integrity serves as a useful metaphor for understanding the integrity of well-designed and high-performing landscape conservation partnerships. More specifically, the same elements that sustain ecological integrity (i.e., structure, composition, process, and function), also sustain the partnerships best capable of achieving landscape conservation outcomes.

These sustaining elements were translated into a "governance health checklist" for assessing landscape conservation partnership governance systems and applied to four case studies, including

SECAS. Applying the checklist revealed potential ways that SECAS could refine its governance to facilitate progress toward its goals.

**Case Study Analysis Summary** - The case study analysis applied best practices gleaned from the literature review to evaluate the governance system of SECAS and three similar partnerships - the Midwest Landscape Initiative, the Western Native Trout Initiative, and Nature's Network. These four partnerships were also featured in the 2020 report of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' (AFWA) President's Task Force on Shared Science and Landscape Conservation Priorities as models of strong "regional science-based conservation partnerships." Information from the AFWA report was supplemented by semi-structured interviews with the coordinator of each partnership. The case study analysis revealed strengths in SECAS's current governance system and opportunities for further refinement.

**Overall Synthesis and Recommendations** - The success of SECAS is notable. It is often held up as the preeminent example of landscape-scale conservation partnerships among fish and wildlife agencies. Two elements stand out in support of this success: (1) there are effective and long-standing relationships among leadership, partners, and staff; and (2) SECAS has delivered value as both a forum for collaboration and as a resource for improving decision-making. As SECAS looks to the future, SECAS's Steering Committee and partners should consider the following overarching recommendations. In addition, the full report provides supplemental and complementary recommendations that taken together with these overarching recommendations begin to define a longer-term approach for SECAS to continue to evolve its structure and governance to support its vision, goals, and activities.

**Recommendation:** SECAS should continue providing the necessary governance structure that supports SECAS's role, function, and value by making the SECAS Steering Committee a permanent committee and to include periodic assessments of SECAS's performance and governance as one of its duties.

**Recommendation:** Because coordination is particularly vital in informal partnerships, SECAS leadership should ensure a continued focus on effective coordination by making the SECAS Coordinator a full-time, permanent position.

**Recommendation:** SECAS leadership should continue investment in relationships and in the people, products, and services that are delivering results. Of particular importance, timely development of a leadership succession plan and onboarding materials will ensure continuity in light of leadership and staff changes.

**Recommendation:** SECAS should improve overall coordination and communication while maintaining informal governance by creating a SECAS Statement of Shared Purpose that defines the regional goal and vision, structure, leadership commitments, roles and responsibilities, and focus areas.

**Recommendation:** SECAS should increase connections and deepen engagement with other regional forums and partners by conducting a social network analysis to better understand existing relationships and connections, and implement actions based on those relationships to broaden and enhance the partnership’s conservation accomplishments.



Figure 1: The SECAS Geography

## INTRODUCTION

Since 2011, the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS) partnership has promoted an overarching vision for landscape conservation in the Southeast. That vision calls for connecting the lands and waters of the Southeast and Caribbean to support healthy ecosystems, thriving fish and wildlife populations, and vibrant communities. To realize that vision, SECAS provides a forum for collaboration, bringing together state and federal agencies and nonprofit conservation organizations. SECAS also functions as a science and decision-support hub through the Southeast Conservation Blueprint, a data-driven platform that identifies important areas for conservation and restoration. Both of these functions help the partnership pursue its goal of measurably improving the health, function, and connectivity of Southeastern ecosystems.

**The SECAS Vision:** A connected network of lands and waters that supports thriving fish and wildlife populations and improved quality of life for people.

**The SECAS Goal:** A 10% or greater improvement in the health, function, and connectivity of Southeastern ecosystems by 2060.

As with many landscape-scale partnerships, SECAS has largely relied on an informal governance system to advance its work. This informal governance system has enabled success in many respects, but the partnership has also encountered challenges. In order to ensure the underlying governance system facilitates future success, the SECAS Steering Committee asked the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to lead an assessment of the partnership with a focus on its governance system.

This report provides the results of that assessment, focused on how SECAS is adding value to partner organizations and providing the momentum needed to achieve the partnership's vision and goal. In addition, the assessment examined best practices for structuring collaborative, landscape-scale partnerships and provides recommendations for maintaining a healthy partnership going forward.

The remainder of this introductory chapter presents additional background information and context, including more detail on the need for an assessment and the various pieces of it. The three subsequent chapters of the report provide the results and recommendations from interviews with SECAS partners, a literature review, and case study analyses. The concluding chapter provides an overall synthesis of the findings as well as recommendations for the SECAS Steering Committee, SECAS partner organizations, and others interested in the future of SECAS.

## THE EVOLUTION OF SECAS AND THE NEED FOR AN ASSESSMENT

The Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS) partnership was initiated in 2011 at the behest of the Directors of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA) and the Southeast Regional Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Shortly thereafter, the SEAFWA Directors invited participation from the Southeast Natural Resources Leaders Group (SENRLG), which includes the 13 federal agencies in the Southeast with responsibilities for natural resources policy and management. The partnership was founded in recognition that successful conservation of fish and wildlife requires broad collaboration across diverse public and private organizations, including establishing shared goals and priorities to guide conservation actions in response to landscape-scale conditions and changes. In addition, SECAS was established to help coordinate the six Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) that overlapped with the SEAFWA geography.

As the SECAS partnership took shape, the initial governance structure relied heavily on LCCs. More specifically, the FWS (and the Southeast Climate Adaptation Science Center (SE CASC) to a lesser degree) provided much of the funding, scientific expertise, coordination, and communication through LCC staff. Representatives from SEAFWA and SENRLG agencies, conservation organizations, and other partners served on LCC boards, allowing LCC coordinators to bring their perspectives to a broader regional conversation through SECAS. Furthermore, the primary product of the partnership, the Southeast Conservation Blueprint, was built on data inputs, technical expertise, and partner feedback that originated through the LCCs.

Changes in the underlying support structures for the SECAS partnership challenged this governance arrangement. Beginning in 2017, the Department of the Interior (DOI) ended its staffing and financial support of LCC Steering Committees. As a result, many LCCs transitioned to new arrangements or disassembled. This transition resulted in lost technical and coordination expertise and staffing capacity for SECAS. This transition also undermined the previous informal SECAS governance structure built around LCCs. To help address this shift in capacity and structure, the SEAFWA Directors created an interim SECAS Steering Committee in 2019. That committee went on to recommend an independent evaluation of the SECAS partnership with a focus on providing suggestions for how to best govern the partnership in order to continue adding value to partner organizations while advancing toward the SECAS vision and goal.

Other landscape-scale collaboratives across the country were faced with similar transition challenges during this time. As a result, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) commissioned research into what approaches are needed to overcome challenges to successful landscape conservation. That research resulted in a 2018 white paper acknowledging both the importance and rapid growth of collaborative, cross-boundary approaches to conservation issues. That white paper, titled *Landscape Conservation Collaboration*, highlighted SECAS as one

example of a regional-scale partnership with the potential to provide an overarching framework for aligning conservation actions with state priorities as well as the interests of federal agencies, conservation organizations, and private partners. However, the report also noted structural challenges to the SECAS partnership resulting from the DOI transition away from LCCs as discussed above.

Based on that report, AFWA adopted *Resolution #2018-06-07: Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Landscape Scales*, wherein the Association, “acknowledges the importance of collaborating at landscape scales...” and, “recognizes the need to establish durable partnerships with strong governance structures...” The resolution goes on to call for landscape conservation partnerships to establish “strong governance systems” and to regularly “undergo an evaluation to assess priorities, effectiveness and adaptability so they can be refocused as needed to achieve intended outcomes.”

These two elements from the AFWA resolution informed the SECAS Steering Committee’s recommendation to FWS to conduct an assessment of the partnership. More specifically, noting the changes and challenges to the informal governance system of the SECAS partnership, the Steering Committee expressed interest in learning more about best practices for governing landscape conservation partnerships. They also wanted more information about governance models being used by other regional-scale conservation partnerships that might help inform or refine the SECAS partnership’s model. The Steering Committee was quick to caution against any attempt to ‘over-governance’ the partnership through unnecessarily formalized or burdensome governance structures that might ultimately inhibit progress.

In relation to the latter element emphasizing periodic evaluations, the SECAS Steering Committee suggested taking the opportunity to not only examine the SECAS governance model, but to take a more holistic look at the partnership as well. This included examining how the partnership currently adds value to partner organizations and the emerging partner needs that SECAS could address. This bigger picture examination helps ensure recommendations for governance align with the expressed needs of the partner organizations while building off identified strengths and successes.

## PIECES OF THE EVALUATION

In order to conduct the evaluation and provide suggestions back to the SECAS Steering Committee, the Science Applications program within FWS developed a project team that included both FWS staff as well as independent external researchers and experts on landscape-scale conservation. These external members of the project team came from the Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Policy at the University of Montana and the College of Natural Resources at North Carolina State University.

The project team took a three-pronged approach to assessing the SECAS partnership that included interviews with SECAS partners, a systematic literature review of best practices for governing landscape conservation partnerships, and case study analyses of SECAS and three other partnerships being driven by regional wildlife conservation groups.

Faculty and students at North Carolina State University took the lead on conducting interviews with SECAS partners. These interviews sought a better understanding of the value partners receive from SECAS. Interviews were conducted with 22 individuals from the SECAS Points of Contact and Lead Coordinators Team<sup>1</sup>. The interviews assessed perspectives on what is currently most valuable about SECAS, what could be improved, and any anticipated future needs that SECAS could help address.

Faculty and a graduate student at the University of Montana conducted the literature review and case study analysis, both of which were designed to investigate methods of effectively organizing landscape-scale conservation collaboratives. The literature review identified and synthesized best practices and provided a framework for analyzing the case studies. The case studies included SECAS and three other regional-scale conservation partnerships: Nature's Network, the Midwest Landscape Initiative, and the Western Native Trout Initiative. Case study analysis focused on the challenges and successes associated with the various governance systems these partnerships have adopted.

Finally, all three of these pieces of the evaluation were brought together into an overall synthesis chapter. This synthesis weaves together common findings across the interviews, literature review, and case study analysis, as each piece of the evaluation both builds on and informs the others. The synthesis chapter offers overall observations of where SECAS is in its growth and evolution as a landscape-scale partnership and puts forward a list of recommendations for consideration by the SECAS Steering Committee and other partners. These suggestions identify potential opportunities to improve the overall function and performance of the partnership and ensure appropriate infrastructure is in place to achieve the SECAS vision and goal.

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<sup>1</sup> The Lead Coordinators Team was formed in 2015 and consisted largely of LCC staff including Coordinators and Science Coordinators. Additional team members included FWS staff from External Affairs, state wildlife agency staff, SE CASC staff, and university faculty and nonprofit organizations conducting research for SECAS.

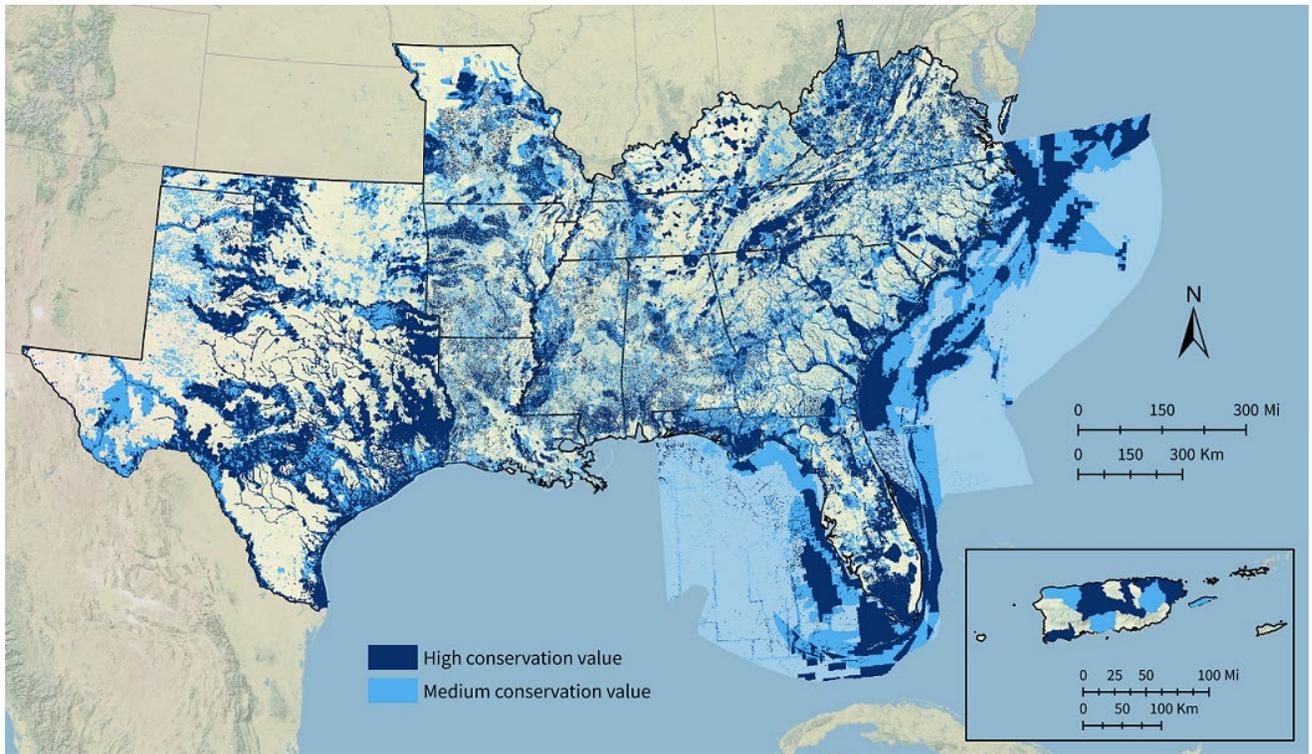


Figure 2: The Southeast Conservation Blueprint, Version 2020

## CHAPTER 1

# STAKEHOLDER IMPRESSIONS OF THE SOUTHEAST CONSERVATION ADAPTATION STRATEGY (SECAS): INTERVIEWS AND ANALYSIS

### INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

For nearly a decade, the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS) has brought together state and federal partners to develop a shared vision for landscape conservation. In order to ensure continued efficacy, the SECAS Steering Committee suggested a holistic assessment of the partnership. To better understand the current value being added by SECAS and future needs of partner organizations, faculty and students in the College of Natural Resources at North Carolina State University conducted interviews with representatives from SECAS partner organizations. The interviews assessed these stakeholders' perspectives on what is currently most valuable about SECAS, what could be improved, and any anticipated future needs that SECAS could help address.

Interviewees included official SECAS Points of Contact from state and federal agencies, nonprofit conservation organizations, and members of the SECAS Lead Coordinators Team. Results and related recommendations can help SECAS continue to meet partner needs, improve governance, identify which activities to continue and which to alter, and guide the future direction and growth of the partnership.

### Methods

The NC State University research team used a naturalistic qualitative research approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interviews were conducted as informal conversations and structured around an interview guide (Appendix I). Data were compiled by capturing quotations from the conversations. Purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was used to ensure a range of perspectives would be represented. In identifying interviewees, the research team sought individuals from different types of agencies and organizations, including state and federal agencies and nonprofit conservation organizations. Purposeful sampling also allowed the research team to select differing levels of participation with SECAS, with some interviewees having worked closely with SECAS since its inception and others having recently become involved or only involved peripherally. The final sample included seven state agency Points of Contact, six federal agency Points of Contact, two nonprofit conservation organization Points of Contact, and seven members of the Lead Coordinators Team.

Active transcription was used to capture the conversations in real time, which took place via phone and internet video conferencing systems. No interviews were recorded to protect confidentiality. Interviews were analyzed using QSR International's NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software and were coded by analyzing the interview transcripts and systematically identifying and grouping similar themes together (e.g., quotations and observations about level of agency engagement with SECAS, useful aspects of SECAS, etc.). To categorize and track transcripts and quotes, each interviewee was assigned a number. State Points of Contact were coded with numbers starting with 101, federal Points of Contact were coded with numbers starting with 201, nonprofit conservation organization Points of Contact were coded with numbers starting at 301, and Lead Coordinators Team members were assigned numbers starting with 401. These numbers were used to protect confidentiality in compliance with North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board guidelines (IRB approval #208987).

## Results

The findings presented below align with the questions from the interview guide. Themes highlighted include: individual and agency engagement with SECAS; value added to partner organizations; barriers and areas for improvement; SECAS governance; and future science and landscape conservation needs. Representative quotes are used throughout each section to support researcher interpretations while allowing stakeholder perspectives to be shared in their own words. Detailed lists of quotations sorted by theme are provided in Appendix J.

### *Individual and agency engagement with SECAS*

The majority of interviewees had been involved with SECAS since it was established in 2011 (N=11). Four interviewees began their involvement in SECAS within the last three years. One such interviewee said, "I've been aware of it for a number of years but haven't directly engaged until this year (POC301)." Six interviewees became involved because of an existing relationship with SECAS's Coordinator, Mallory Martin. For example, one said, "I know [a few of the FWS staff supporting SECAS], and I knew Mallory, and so as the group became the core group that moved SECAS forward I stayed engaged (POC101)." Further, another interviewee said, "I've met Mallory [and other FWS staff] one on one; that's how [the state] and I have communicated with SECAS (POC106)." These responses point to the critical role a partnership coordinator plays in helping establish and maintain the relationships essential to accomplish landscape conservation objectives.

When asked about the level of engagement within their respective agencies, however, the majority (N = 13) said that their agency was "pretty minimally" involved with SECAS. One interviewee said, "Qualitatively, minimally. We're still trying to figure out how to bring SECAS into our overall management programs (POC105)." Four interviewees indicated they were the only ones from their agency involved. However, seven other interviewees stated that a small

team from their agency was engaged. One such interviewee said, “Well we have another person ... who participates from time to time, we collaborate with them and share data that’s included in the blueprint, that’s our biggest focus. Also when they have larger meetings, we have senior leaders there (LCT402).” Another interviewee suggested state agency engagement with SECAS tends to decrease as one goes west, and an increase in communication and engagement with some states may be needed (POC106). These concerns about the depth and breadth of engagement within state agencies were echoed in interviewee responses to the questions about SECAS governance (see below).

### *Value Added to Partner Organizations*

Interviewees hold SECAS in high regard and find value in the partnership as both a forum for collaboration and as an information hub.

As an information hub, interviewees focused on the Southeast Conservation Blueprint, particularly the importance of the Blueprint for helping agencies establish conservation priorities (N=12). The Blueprint was described as a product that alerted stakeholders to high priority conservation areas so they could better focus their resources (Appendix I). As one interviewee said, “I think the idea of having input from all the individual states in priority areas and getting that information on a regional scale to see how areas that are important align, that regional picture of ecological significance, helps us in terms of focus within the state and, thinking about working with other states (POC101).” In other words, knowing that the Blueprint data had been sourced from other states and partners was key to using information to prioritize agency resources and action. In addition, the Blueprint was helping states attract additional resources to work on priority areas. One interviewee said, “So far for us the Blueprint has been the most useful just knowing where high priority areas are for conservation. I think part of the reason is it can help us in writing grants and get a higher scoring (POC107).”

Interviewees also described the Conservation Blueprint as helpful in breaking down sometimes overwhelming global or national issues to more manageable regional and local scales. According to one interviewee, “[The] blueprint is the mechanism for connecting what happens regionally and nationally (LCT404).” Another interviewee focused on how the Blueprint helped connect regional, state, and local priorities in informing land acquisitions, stating, “[The Blueprint’s influence] has been very large. Staff expertise as well, and [the] ability ... to work with states to figure out what we need, redefine land acquisition access using [the] blueprint and SECAS to look at [a] broad landscape (POC102).” Overall, the Southeast Conservation Blueprint was viewed as an essential product of the SECAS partnership, bringing together data to help link and prioritize decisions being made at local, state, regional, and national levels.

As a forum that brings together a diversity of organizations, interviewees valued SECAS’s ability to build and support relationships across agencies. They said SECAS eased communication barriers and encouraged interaction between otherwise unconnected agencies. Five

interviewees emphasized the importance of multi-state involvement in SECAS. One said, “It’s been useful to look at cross-state initiatives where states have shared priorities ... we don’t always consider what’s going on in other states that border us, [and it’s] valuable to see what’s going on at a larger perspective (POC103).” Another said, “I see SECAS as something designed to promote cross-state and cross-regional collaboration (LCT403).” Three other interviewees also used the word “collaboration” to identify how SECAS supports and engages diverse agencies and organizations.

Interviewees also saw added value in SECAS’s ability to focus the experience and expertise represented through those relationships (N = 6), particularly the ability to convene stakeholders with an interest and expertise in landscape planning and conservation. According to one interviewee, “What SECAS has done has brought together other areas of interest that have a stake in landscape planning and conservation in the future (LCT407).” In addition, interviewees described SECAS as a forum for catalyzing opportunities to engage with different fields and areas of expertise. The same interviewee quoted above went on to say, “Engagement through SECAS helps connect dots we probably would have avoided. It’s helped us in the water aspects of managing the landscape [such as] reservoirs [and] river development boards. Those are other elements of the community we have not been involved in in the past (LCT407).”

### *Barriers and Areas for Improvement*

Interviewees identified several barriers to working with SECAS and using SECAS products in their respective agencies (Appendix I). The most important limitation identified was a perceived misalignment between their respective agency’s goals and SECAS’s goal (N = 7). Interviewees expressed uncertainty about whether and how SECAS’s goal and associated activities aligned with their agency’s focus and priorities. For example, one interviewee stated “SECAS doesn’t incorporate as much of the agriculture and forestry [sectors]. It’s been hard to bring SECAS in as the overarching model that we’ll be using (POC105).” Interviewees noted that other sectors seemed under-represented as well, including water management and air quality. According to another interviewee, “SECAS and all the LCC products have always been weak in aquatics, something we struggle with all the time (LCT401).” While some felt that the SECAS focus was too narrow, others described it as too expansive. According to one interviewee, “In order for SECAS to work with us we would have to expand our goals and mission, and our partners are not really interested in doing that (POC204).”

Interviewees also noted that SECAS and the Southeast Conservation Blueprint sometimes challenge staff to think and do business differently, potentially limiting use of the Blueprint (N = 5). For example, one interviewee said, “We have staff who, their vision ends at the state line, their vision ends at the end of their division (POC103).” In addition to challenging jurisdictional silos, other interviewees talked about the challenge of getting staff to use new and different information and tools. As one interviewee stated, “I think we are used to doing things a specific way. And as we are learning now those ways are going to change. I think that the barrier is

getting people to start using it. Once they start, they will see the utility in having [a region-wide vision and the Blueprint] (POC201).” Some interviewees noted that even when working collaboratively, the regional scale of SECAS can seem too big. One such interviewee said, “There are naysayers in the joint venture world saying, ‘it’s beyond what we need to do, SECAS is too broad, too big.’ This is something we face when you talk about scale at every level (LCT407).”

In addition, some interviewees expressed concerns about partnership fatigue. In the words of one such interviewee,

*I think the need is more of having a conversation ... and convincing staff how their work and what SECAS is attempting to do are not at odds. What staff typically say is ‘I’ve got enough stuff to do. I don’t need another group to engage with in trying to do my work.’ I think if there’s a way that SECAS can assist the agency with understanding how it’s not an additional thing, but really something that is checking off two boxes at the same time, getting folks on the same page and not seeing it as an extra burden (LCT406).*

For some, their limited engagement with SECAS was simply a matter of not having enough time. One interviewee said, “The only barrier for me is the time to think about those things. We’re usually just bogged down getting actual deliverables done for the projects that I work on (POC107).” Others noted that it was sometimes difficult to get the right people within their organization connected to SECAS, particularly given limited staffing capacity. One interviewee said, “I feel like the other challenge is figuring out how we can share our limited resources. How do we work with NRCS, Fish and Wildlife Service, other state and regulatory agencies, get local communities, agencies, [and] organizations involved? (POC204).”

Some interviewees expressed a desire to see expanded stakeholder engagement, particularly with private landowners (N=2). One such interviewee suggested, “Better integration with private land-owners, land management, [and] federal agencies [is needed] to get some of the pressure for endangered species off their lands and better engage with private lands (POC202).”

To help address the above barriers, interviewees offered several suggestions for improving SECAS, many of which centered on improving communication and engagement (N = 11, Appendix I). Seven individuals recommended improving communication between SECAS and partner agencies. One such interviewee said, “If you don’t have that much interaction with a group or organization and everybody’s spread out, [you need] more communication about progress ... It’s hard to keep partners engaged and moving forward, whether it’s us seeing a benefit in it or providing input (POC204).” In other words, as a forum, SECAS faces the inherent challenge of facilitating communication with many organizations spread across a large region. Some stakeholders observed that one part of this problem is that agencies do not necessarily understand what SECAS is and what benefits SECAS provides (N = 4).

More specifically, interviewees focused on expanding engagement and communication with non-administrative levels with a given agency (N = 7), particularly with those closer to project-level implementation (N = 5). One interviewee suggested, “the need is more at the field level or mid-management level. It’s hard to get field level folks engaged. There are folks that have interest but there’s not logistically an easy forum for them to get engaged (LCT406).” Another said:

*There’s a nuance to that: being able to communicate with staff members internally and how they can plug into [SECAS] ... Driving down communication to the lower part of any agency out there is where the biggest challenge is ... One of the things that hasn’t happened that might be good ... would be a presence within the agency. Maybe a visit or call to our director, anything that could encourage some additional communication there and drive some commitment (POC105).*

The above responses indicated that SECAS may need to consider ways to improve ‘in-reach’ within existing partner organizations. This could focus on not only getting more staff engaged, but also the right staff who could really take advantage of SECAS’s value as both a forum for collaboration and as an information hub.

In addition, interviewees suggested a need to broaden engagement to include different and more diverse stakeholders (N = 8, Appendix I). One interviewee said, “The only barrier I see is that it becomes too much of a fish and wildlife thing and not a broader resource tool (POC203).” In other words, and as discussed above, some stakeholders perceive SECAS’s focus, goals, and membership as too narrowly focused on fish and wildlife concerns at the expense of broader conservation issues. To help address this, interviewees suggested seeking out input and engagement from more diverse agencies (N=6). For example, one interviewee suggested increasing outreach to conservation nonprofits and other NGO’s, “One thing is getting it in the bloodstream of the conservation nonprofits. It’s new enough and the outreach has been to the state level, but I don’t think [that] the outreach has gone as much to NGO’s as it could (POC301).” Another interviewee listed a variety of other potential partners: “It needs to expand to local government, private industry, retailers ... those are the people that have the marketing capabilities (POC105).” This observation suggests that one benefit of broadening engagement may be an increase in SECAS’s communication capacity, which would simultaneously help address other barriers as discussed above. Another interviewee noted that the narrower focus on fish and wildlife agencies was perhaps a more recent shift: “The involvement of outside organizations has not seemed as broad as what it was under [the] LCCs; I know there are folks that feel left behind [during the transition away from LCCs], especially the private forest folks (POC102).” This perspective highlights that the current makeup of the SECAS partnership is in some respects an artifact of the now disassembled LCCs, whose broader membership previously had provided additional perspectives for SECAS.

## SECAS Governance

Because of the Steering Committee's specific interest in governance considerations, interviewees were asked about potential ways to improve the governance of SECAS in relation to the barriers and suggestions discussed above. (Appendix I). In line with previous suggestions for general SECAS improvement, the most common suggestion was to diversify stakeholder involvement (N = 8). This response echoed both the earlier suggestions to enhance in-reach within existing partner agencies and expand outreach to organizations beyond fish and wildlife management agencies. One interviewee stated:

*I think in having key people, representatives from organizations that go beyond fish and wildlife agencies in active participation in SECAS, [is important to the future governance of SECAS]. I know [SECAS has] had involvement from the Department of Defense, and that's a step in the right direction. [In addition], participation from regional, national, city, and municipal planning groups would be good and strengthen the partnership (LCT407).*

Other suggested improvements included bringing more people to the table and fostering a greater sense of shared ownership. One interviewee said:

*It comes back to having more bodies at the table. That could be a governance issue. Having input from more stakeholders is often better, and builds on the collaborative nature of it. You don't want anyone to feel left out of it ... Education for NGOs is helpful in that type of partnership (POC301).*

As the above response indicates, part of expanding both in-reach and outreach may involve helping stakeholders understand what SECAS is and how they can effectively participate.

One interviewee suggested that an increase in involvement and engagement could be achieved through a nested governance structure. More specifically, SECAS could have an "inner circle" coordination group that changed depending on what SECAS was currently working on (POC205). In this model, SECAS partners would only move to the inner circle if SECAS were working on an issue that pertained to that specific agency, organization, or private sector interest. In part, this suggested model reflects the current SECAS governance structure, where a core Steering Committee guides key decisions and broader participation occurs through the Points of Contact and Lead Coordinators groups. However, this existing structure may not be clear to current stakeholders and may require additional communication about the existing SECAS governance structure.

Along these lines, other interviewees believed that there could be better communication about roles and responsibilities within the SECAS partnership (N=4). One said:

*I'm not sure if some people listed as a POC understand they are POC's. My take is that there's a couple of state agency directors who are paying close attention ... They occasionally will bring a SECAS-related matter to the SECAS directors every 6 months. I don't know if SECAS is really front and center for the directors (LCT403).*

To help provide additional insights into potential governance improvements, interviewees were asked about key aspects of other partnerships they were involved with that SECAS should consider incorporating or mimicking (Appendix I). The most common suggestions again related to communication and engagement (N = 9). One interviewee stated:

*I kind of feel like maybe if they can figure out how to communicate more – more involvement from members, communicate goals and next steps, ways they can help get more input [and] feedback. Not just surveys but webinars, subcommittees working on specific things, making sure membership has opportunities for involvement (POC204).*

Interviewees emphasized the importance of SECAS as a forum for collaboration and focused on communication as a means by which SECAS could enhance its convening and relationship-building role. Stakeholders wanted to see SECAS continue to facilitate connections and relationships between the different organizations. One interviewee recalled an example that excelled at coordinating relationships:

*A long time ago ... we had the Governor's South Atlantic Alliance ... getting the leaders of the state environmental organizations together with federal leaders that deal with natural resources and making sure everyone knew each other, [s]o when we ended up in tense or complicated circumstances they had already connected (POC201).*

Another interviewee said:

*[T]here needs to be that personal interaction that helps build not only knowledge but long term builds trust and respect ... For me, the instream flow council is an excellent example of a limited number of people across the US and Canada [about 50-100 people] getting to know people and building that relationship over time. That to me is really important to an organization being effective (LCT406).*

As both of the above examples indicate, forums that build relationships enhance the ability of partner organizations to identify shared priorities, communicate effectively, work through difficult issues, and ultimately advance conservation work on the ground. Enhancing SECAS's

existing governance system to foster more meaningful relationships will be a critical step toward advancing both SECAS and partner agency goals.

### *Future Science and Landscape Conservation Needs*

To help SECAS leadership think proactively about positioning the partnership for future success, interviewees were asked about anticipated future needs for their respective agencies. They identified water management (N = 8), landscape-scale work (N = 7), and climate modeling (N = 5) as the current science needs of their agencies (Appendix I). Water-related needs included the need for more data to inform efforts focused on clean water protection and flood control as well as more information to guide aquatic wildlife management. One interviewee said, “[L]and impacts water, but there’s not good empirical data that says what land we should protect. We don’t understand at the watershed scale what’s most important (POC301).” Landscape-scale science needs (N = 7) ranged from habitat conservation to bird migration. Specific climate change science needs (N=5) included scalable information on impacts and conservation in an era of accelerated climate change. One interviewee said, “To do an effective job [maintaining] biodiversity in ... [the state] we need scalable information on climate change impacts (POC101).”

To help address these current and future needs, stakeholders identified four key ways that SECAS could help, including identifying opportunities for shared projects (N = 5); providing science products in response to landscape-scale needs (N = 4); assisting with planning activities (N = 4); and increasing communication (N = 4) (Appendix J). Finding shared projects relates in some ways to interviewees’ interest in deeper engagement around specific projects related to partner agency priorities. For example, one interviewee was interested in, “Looking at where those opportunities exist near urban centers to help connect folks with nature and looking at green space for the public (POC102).” Interviewees also suggested SECAS could provide more science and research (N = 4). This included adding layers to the blueprint, having more layers available, and generally increasing the amount of science shared by SECAS. In the words of one interviewee,

*[T]here’s a lot of layers that went into [the Conservation Blueprint], but having that information to help with planning projects, habitat condition, stream barrier information--almost a conglomeration of all those things in one place--having a repository on where to go for informing different planning projects [would be useful] (POC107).*

The potential exists to address several of these identified needs simultaneously. The idea suggested above, for example, highlights the connection between science and information needs and planning activities (N = 4). This includes planning for specific ecosystems and species. In turn, those planning activities help inform actions that will help the partnership advance toward its vision and goal. As one interviewee said, “Helping to improve the quality and

actionability of state wildlife action plans is something useful for SECAS to go towards (LCT403).” This recommendation mirrors recent findings from the AFWA President’s Task Force on Shared Science and Landscape Conservation Priorities, suggesting that one key place to simultaneously address a number of identified needs – including improving information sharing, planning, and communications activities – would be enhancing coordination and collaboration around State Wildlife Action Plans.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Taken altogether, the interview findings indicate that stakeholders hold the partnership in high regard as both a forum for collaboration and an information hub. The primary recommendations from interviewees center around improving these two functions of the partnership. In addition, two key themes emerged in relation to potential improvements: communication and stakeholder engagement. Communication came up in many interviews and in the context of several different questions. Similarly, stakeholder engagement recommendations surfaced throughout the interviews and included enhancing both in-reach within current partner organizations as well as outreach to additional, more diverse organizations. Recommendations around communication and engagement were often tied together. For example, SECAS could focus on better communicating to all levels of an agency and look for ways to modify existing materials to make them applicable to common management tasks, in addition to high level planning. This may facilitate in-reach at partner agencies beyond official Points of Contact.

SECAS could also consider increasing communication and engagement with a broader range of stakeholders, particularly conservation organizations and others involved in land use and water management, including agriculture, private lands, and aquatics. This communication should clearly convey what SECAS is and does, how new partners can be involved, and what they can expect to both gain from, and contribute to, the partnership.

It should be noted that at the suggestion of the SECAS Steering Committee, three conservation nonprofits were added to the Points of Contact in 2020. Based on the findings presented above, SECAS should continue to diversify the partnership by engaging additional stakeholders and ensuring that they have the opportunity to be fully integrated in the partnership.

Finally, SECAS needs to consider transition periods and succession planning. Quite a few interviewees were senior staff within their respective organizations. Transition planning would promote continuity in terms of maintaining organizational connections to SECAS, providing technical input to the Southeast Conservation Blueprint, and continuing to build effective working relationships with other partners. The SECAS coordinator could work with Steering Committee members, Points of Contact, and the Lead Coordinators team to actively recruit new participants and agency representatives as others transition to new jobs or retire. This will help prevent leadership voids or time lags that could stall out the partnership in the future.

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## CHAPTER 2

# BEST PRACTICES IN LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION GOVERNANCE: GUIDANCE FROM AFWA AND LESSONS FROM THE LITERATURE

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Since its inception in 2011, SECAS has established informal systems and norms to orchestrate the coordination necessary to make progress towards the partnership’s goals. However, changes to the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (as described in the Introduction) and emerging, complex conservation challenges have presented new governance challenges and opportunities for the partnership. By formally reviewing its governance system, SECAS is proactively implementing the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies’ (AFWA) recommendations, enacting best practices in landscape conservation governance, and serving as an example for similar regional partnerships.

This literature review aims to identify best practices for designing collaborative landscape conservation governance systems. The review synthesizes lessons from academic and professional literature regarding governance structure, composition, processes, and functions that enable partnerships to achieve conservation objectives at the landscape scale.

### LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION AND COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

Tackling today’s complex natural resource challenges requires a coordinated, transboundary approach. As a result, conservation planning and coordination activities are increasingly focused at the landscape scale. In a 2018 white paper, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA, 2018, 2) elevated the importance of landscape conservation, explaining that it “is needed because most fish and wildlife species occur and complete their life requirements in ecological systems that cross administrative boundaries.” Coordinating conservation efforts across large areas presents unique conservation opportunities and challenges for local, state, and federal agencies, as well as for non-governmental (NGO) organizations.

AFWA and the academic literature agree that the key to successful landscape conservation is collaborative governance.<sup>2</sup> Governance refers to the “formal and informal rules, rule-making

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<sup>2</sup> The AFWA resolution recognizes that “landscape-scale conservation efforts are characterized by conservation of connected and healthy ecological systems, use of science-based and culturally sensitive conservation planning, *collaborative network structure* and meaningful multi-sector stakeholder engagement” (emphasis added, Resolution # 2018-06-07 Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Landscape Scales).

systems, and [social] networks at all levels (local, regional, global) that influence how societies identify, design, and implement conservation actions” (Alexander et al., 2016, 155). A collaborative system of governance enables *networks* of conservation organizations and agencies “to integrate local-scale conservation activities with broad-scale goals” (Bixler, Johnson, et al., 2016, 145). A network, in turn, is “an informal arrangement where two or more autonomous individuals and/or organizations come together to exchange ideas, build relationships, identify common interests, explore options on how to work together, share power, and solve problems of mutual interest” (Scarlett & McKinney, 2016, 116). Ultimately, networks allow entities to address problems they cannot resolve independently or tackle goals they cannot accomplish effectively on their own.

Networks tend to be organized in a more horizontal structure, which is better suited to facilitating collaboration than the hierarchical structure that characterizes most bureaucracies (Imperial et al., 2016, 126). These networked, collaborative governance structures allow partners to “bridge the geographic and jurisdictional boundaries of the complex socio-ecological systems in which landscape-level conservation occurs” (Committee on the Evaluation of the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, 2016, 9). Collaborative governance can therefore support a more inclusive, holistic, and comprehensive approach to natural resource management.

Establishing effective collaborative governance systems is a challenging and ever-evolving task, and many landscape conservation partnerships struggle to forge governance structures that are robust, nimble, and context-appropriate. Social scientists frame the dilemma in the following manner: “The core challenge for practitioners is to match the process of governance to the particular problem, issue, or opportunity they are addressing. A related challenge is to understand the existing legal and institutional arrangements and to create a ‘homegrown’ governance system that respects these formal norms, rules, and expectations” (Scarlett & McKinney, 2016, 124). Recognizing this challenge, AFWA passed a resolution in 2018 (Resolution # 2018-06-07 Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Landscape Scales, hereinafter “AFWA 2018 Resolution”) that “acknowledges the importance of collaborating at landscape scales ...” and “recognizes the need to establish durable partnerships with strong governance structures ...” The resolution also provides a number of suggested “guiding principles” for landscape-scale conservation partnerships, including two that are particularly relevant to this assessment:

- Landscape-scale conservation partnerships should consider a governance model that includes a steering committee or board of directors made up of state fish and wildlife agency directors and leaders of federal agencies or their designees that can set policy and when appropriate include private landowners, private conservation organizations, tribes, academic institutions and other diverse stakeholders to optimize conservation outcomes.

- Landscape-scale conservation partnerships should periodically undergo an evaluation to assess priorities, effectiveness and adaptability so they can be refocused as needed to achieve intended outcomes.

## THE FOUR KEY ELEMENTS OF LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION GOVERNANCE

In synthesizing the academic and gray literature on governance, the research team identified four core components of any governance system: function, structure, composition, and process. While new to this context, these four components make intuitive sense and are, not coincidentally, the same basic elements of ecological integrity and health.<sup>3</sup> The concept of “ecological integrity” refers to an ecosystem’s ability to support a biological community similar to that which would exist within its “natural,” undegraded habitat (Parrish et al., 2003, 852). When the appropriate ecological function, structure, composition, and processes are in place, ecosystems have the integrity and resilience to withstand most disturbances (Parrish et al. 2003).

The concept of ecological integrity and health serves as a useful metaphor for understanding the health of well-designed and high-performing landscape conservation partnerships. Systems of governance with the appropriate structure, composition, and processes create functioning, well-connected, resilient *social networks*. Partnerships that enjoy this “governance integrity” are then better able to improve the integrity of their target *ecological systems*. Thus, the same elements that sustain ecological integrity are those that sustain the partnerships best capable of achieving landscape conservation outcomes.

Furthermore, maintaining, restoring, and enhancing ecological integrity is a primary goal of many landscape conservation efforts, including SECAS. Indeed, the AFWA 2018 Resolution states that landscape conservation partnerships “should seek to conserve ecological integrity that supports healthy and functioning natural communities and working landscapes that conserve fish and wildlife, particularly species of greatest conservation need.” This guidance is reflected in the SECAS goal, which aims to improve the health,<sup>4</sup> function, and connectivity of ecosystems throughout the region by at least 10% in the next 40 years.

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<sup>3</sup> “An ecological system has integrity when its dominant ecological characteristics (e.g., elements of composition, structure, function, and ecological processes) occur within their natural ranges of variation and can withstand and recover from most perturbations imposed by natural environmental dynamics of human disruptions” (Parrish et al., 2003, 852).

<sup>4</sup> Ecological health and ecological integrity are used largely interchangeably in the scientific literature. The term ecological “health” as used in the SECAS goal (as stated on [its website](#)) is defined by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, as the “[a]biotic composition, structure, and functioning of the environment consistent with natural conditions, including the natural abiotic processes that shape the environment” (United States Fish & Wildlife Service, 2000).

The remainder of this chapter examines these four core components of governance systems—function, structure, composition, and process—in greater detail, and builds off them to provide an evaluation framework in the form of a “governance health checklist”.

## Function: Successful Partnerships Effectively Plan, Fund, and Implement Conservation Actions

### *Employ adaptive management to identify conservation objectives and evaluate progress*

According to AFWA, the key responsibility of landscape conservation partnerships is to “agree on a long-term vision and goals and clear, specific, practical and measurable objectives, performance measures and outcomes to guide work and ensure accountability” (AFWA 2018 Resolution). This process of identifying goals and adjusting them based on performance feedback is known as adaptive management. While the cycle of adaptive planning and management is an organic process that takes a unique form for each partnership, the phases typically progress roughly as follows (Doyle-Capitman & Decker, 2018, 30):

1. *Define a collective and strategic vision.* Identify shared purpose, values, and priorities.
2. *Identify goals and objectives.* Set targets that can be feasibly quantified and achieved.
3. *Develop planning products and a data management system.* Create a central hub for shared data (information contributed by, and for the benefit of, all partners).
4. *Establish appropriate social and ecological indicators.* Identify relevant metrics to effectively measure success. Given that many landscape conservation partnerships seek to both improve environmental quality and quality of life, it is important that both social and ecological outcomes are considered.
5. *Monitor and evaluate performance.* Include monitoring into conservation plans and funding applications. Failing to do so makes it nearly impossible to demonstrate progress and impact.
6. *Adapt planning processes and products.* Use information gleaned during the monitoring and evaluation phase to modify objectives and strategy in order to better achieve the long-term vision and goal. Thus, the cycle begins anew.

### *Secure funding and resources for sustainable, long-term support*

Another, related function of landscape partnerships is to pool together resources to maximize conservation impact. This includes finding the funding necessary to support coordinating the partnership, conducting scientific research, developing technical tools, implementing projects, and engaging in education and outreach (Labich, 2015). Indeed, building a partnership’s capacity to “optimize, scale up, and sustain [its] impact” requires substantial financial resources (Leigh Goldberg Consulting, 2018, 6). However, many partnerships struggle to acquire the initial seed capital necessary to launch collaborative conservation efforts and to secure sustainable funding streams for the partnership in the long term (Leigh Goldberg Consulting, 2018).

One proven strategy is to pilot projects that, if successful, could then attract further funding (Leigh Goldberg Consulting, 2018). It is also prudent for partners to remain vigilant for opportunities to apply for grants together, rather than competing for the same pool of funds (Labich, 2015). Additional strategies may include establishing a fiscal agent, drafting memoranda of understanding, or collecting membership dues. Ultimately, each partner should conduct their own cost-benefit analysis to determine whether participating in the partnership is worthwhile (Labich, 2015).

Overall, AFWA recognizes that “planning, funding and implementing on-the-ground conservation is important to the success of landscape-scale conservation partnerships and should recognize the important role of private landowners, nonprofit organizations and other stakeholders in achieving collaborative and cost-effective outcomes” (AFWA 2018 Resolution). Establishing the appropriate governance composition, structure, and processes will ensure that the partnership is able to carry out these essential functions effectively and with the most efficient use of resources.

### Structure: Effective Partnerships are Well-supported, Well-coordinated, and Well-connected

*The backbone: provide coordination and support*

Governance experts recognize that the structural integrity of conservation partnerships is contingent upon “having some shared, centralized coordinative infrastructure and some small group or entity tasked with stewarding the network as a whole” (Texas Hill Country Conservation Network, 2017, 5). This typically takes the form of a management board or steering committee, accompanied by a dedicated coordinator position or organization. More specifically, AFWA recommends that landscape conservation partnerships include “a steering committee or board of directors made up of state fish and wildlife agency directors and leaders of federal agencies or their designees that can set policy” as well as a “dedicated coordinator” (AFWA 2018 Resolution). Collectively, the leadership team is usually responsible for the following roles, among others:

*[F]acilitating a shared collective purpose and vision; facilitating consistent, timely communications between network members; producing meeting agendas and facilitating consensus building; tracking decisions and activities and holding members accountable to agreements and tasks; helping to monitor and measure collective progress and network impact; maintaining a central hub for shared data, adopted practices, technical agreements, and financial statements; and helping to support and sustain leadership and member transitions (Leigh Goldberg Consulting, 2018, 6).*

Given the volume and breadth of these demands, the most successful partnerships have full-time coordinator positions, rather than tasking an employee with coordinating the network on top of other existing job responsibilities (Leigh Goldberg Consulting, 2018). Additionally, the leadership team must have the time, desire, and skills to effectively “‘champion’ the network’s development” (Imperial, Johnston, et al., 2016, 142).

#### *The connective tissue: create a web of strong, trusting relationships*

In addition to providing a supportive “backbone” for the partnership, the steering committee and coordinator serve as the “connective tissue” necessary to provide cohesion (Bureau of Land Management, 2018, 8). When the “nodes” (partnership members or key stakeholders) of a network are connected by trusting relationships, the network forms a durable web capable of maximizing its full, collective potential (Alexander et al., 2016, 161). Achieving this level of connectivity requires “bridge builders” who strategically link otherwise disconnected nodes; “cross-scale knowledge brokers” who facilitate information exchange between entities across spatial scales, locations, jurisdictions, and ecosystems; and “network weavers” who promote the flow of resources to enhance synergy (Alexander et al., 2016, 161).

### Composition: Effective Partnerships Include the Appropriate Leaders, Experts, and Stakeholders

#### *Engage Leaders*

Collaborative partnerships greatly benefit from leadership with relevant decision-making power and influence. It is imperative that these leaders have the “rightful authority to lead decision processes” and “exercise power with integrity” (Doyle-Capitman & Decker, 2018, 28). If key decision-makers are absent, the partnership’s leadership will not be able to meaningfully commit to the actions necessary to achieve shared goals.

The most successful leaders not only possess appropriate legal authorities, but also the appropriate collaborative skills to “engage partners as equals and to bring multiple, interdependent collaborators together for a common end” (Imperial et al., 2016, 131). These include “bridging skills (linking to external resources), mobilizing skills (making the best use of existing assets), persuasive skills (selling and marketing the benefits and strategic opportunities of collaborative efforts), and adaptive skills (capacity to deal with changing contexts...)” (Imperial et al., 2016, 132). If a partnership’s leadership team has not yet fully developed these skills, it may be worth providing training in group dynamics, conflict resolution, collaborative problem-solving, cultural awareness, fundraising, strategic planning, and evaluation (Imperial, Ospina, et al., 2016; Leigh Goldberg Consulting, 2018).

#### *Utilize Diverse Expertise*

It is also critical to have the appropriate expertise present at the table in order to make informed decisions. Large landscape conservation problems are complex, involving “compounded problems that stretch beyond single domains” (Bodin et al., 2017, 294). Addressing them holistically and comprehensively therefore requires interdisciplinary knowledge and experience. Indeed, the AFWA 2018 Resolution recognizes that it is important that the partnership includes representation from all the relevant domains of expertise. Partnerships benefit from interdisciplinary knowledge across the fields of social science, natural science, technology, policy, law, and communications.

### *Identify Stakeholders*

Successful partnerships are composed of a broad array of interested and affected entities (Alexander et al., 2016; Bixler, Johnson, et al., 2016; Scarlett & McKinney, 2016). In order to be accepted as legitimate, governing bodies must “reflect, or at least represent, the diversity of stakeholders with power over and a vested interest in the outcome of resource conservation decisions” (Doyle-Capitman & Decker, 2018, 28). The AFWA 2018 Resolution echoes this characteristic of effective governance systems, touting governance models that include “private landowners, private conservation organizations, tribes, academic institutions and other diverse stakeholders to optimize conservation outcomes.” Similarly, the AFWA President’s Task Force on Shared Science and Landscape Conservation Priorities Final Report (“AFWA 2020 Task Force Report”) acknowledges that “[s]uccessful partnerships reflect the priorities and desires of partners and stakeholders” (Mawdsley et al., 2020, 18).

Overall, inclusivity must be carefully aligned with the purpose and objectives of the partnership. Establishing thoughtful membership criteria can help partnerships identify the most relevant partners and avoid the problems of “issue dilution,” “partner turnover,” and “meeting fatigue” (AFWA 2018 White Paper, 19). Explicitly and clearly delineating the appropriate (and distinct) roles and responsibilities of federal agency staff, state agency staff, and conservation organization staff in formal governance documents can serve to avoid tensions down the line regarding decision-making authority. At the beginning, it can be beneficial to keep the partnership small to “demonstrate value to those partners first,” before reaching out to a wider network (Leigh Goldberg Consulting, 2018, 15).

## **Process: Effective Partnerships Operate Collaboratively, Make Decisions Transparently, and Communicate Clearly**

### *Operate Collaboratively*

Collaborative decision-making is a core process of an effective landscape conservation partnership. Consequently, AFWA urges partnerships to use shared science that is “collaboratively obtained” to inform its decisions, and to reach those decisions through consensus-building processes (AFWA 2018 Resolution). Eliciting and integrating “diverse

perspectives and sources of knowledge” requires well-designed collaborative processes (Doyle-Capitman & Decker, 2018, 34).<sup>5</sup> Additionally, in order for stakeholders to feel comfortable sharing their “values, interests, needs, and beliefs,” the collaborative’s leadership must promote trust between individuals and instill a sense of trust in the decision-making process itself. In short, designing effective collaborative processes ensures that participants “are not only satisfied with the outcome of the process, but with the process itself” (Doyle-Capitman & Decker, 2018, 25).

In order to avoid counterproductive “turf battles,” partners must acknowledge and respect the distinct authorities and responsibilities—as well as the sovereignty and legal trust obligations—of federal, state, regional, local, and tribal governments throughout the decision-making process (Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, 2018; Bureau of Land Management, 2018). This principle is reflected in the 2018 AFWA Resolution, which states: “State and federal agencies with management responsibility for fish and wildlife should be considered as peers and integral to development of an initial framework, boundaries and priorities for landscape-scale conservation partnerships.”

#### *Make Decisions Transparently*

For a partnership to be legitimate and fair, its decision-making processes and authorities must be transparent (Alexander et al., 2016). Full transparency entails establishing explicit charters, bylaws, membership protocols, procedures for reaching agreement, and criteria for determining the “boundary” (extent) of the network (Alexander et al., 2016, 158). Some partnerships take this one step further and make these governance documents publicly available. Clearly designating roles and establishing checks and balances ensures accountability while also distributing leadership responsibilities equitably (Alexander et al., 2016, 160). It is also important to clearly establish the appropriate avenues for both core and peripheral partners to participate in decision-making and implementation (Doyle-Capitman & Decker, 2018). Such measures serve to reduce the risk of “network capture,” in which special interests are able to “direct the processes and outcomes of large-scale initiatives in ways that advance a [specific stakeholder’s] positions, concerns, or economic interests” (Bixler, Wald, et al., 2016, 165). Removing this possibility of undue influence protects the integrity of the governance system as a whole.

#### *Communicate Clearly*

The most effective conservation partnerships have coherent and consistent messaging—both internally and externally (Leigh Goldberg Consulting, 2018). Clear and timely communication fosters a shared understanding of common purpose and highlights the payoffs of investing in

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<sup>5</sup> Resources on how to design effective collaborative processes and examples of formal decision-making protocols in particular can be found at the Collaboration & Conflict Resource Library on the Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Policy [website](#).

collaboration (Bureau of Land Management, 2018). For this reason, many partnerships benefit from hiring a communications specialist or forming a communications team (Doyle-Capitman & Decker, 2018). This process element received attention in the AFWA 2018 Resolution, which emphasized that “[r]egular communication from top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top should be a priority” for landscape partnerships (AFWA 2018 Resolution). More broadly, AFWA recognizes that “working at larger scales requires broader stakeholder engagement, effective communication, transparency and accountability” (Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, 2018, 2).

Collectively, these collaborative processes both foster and rely upon trust and respect. The AFWA 2020 Task Force Report found that a landscape partnership’s success “depends on effective relationship building and operates from a foundation of trust among a broad diversity of partners” (Mawdsley et al., 2020). Ultimately, partnerships that take the time to design collaborative processes based on these best practices will enjoy strong working relationships and make greater progress towards their goals.

## CONCLUSION

### *Intentional, adaptive governance is critical*

Establishing intentional partnership composition, structure, and processes will ensure that a landscape conservation initiative is able to carry out its core functions effectively. In addition, governance systems must remain adaptive in order to respond as the institutional context evolves, the partnership’s leadership turns over, the boundaries of the work shift, and new opportunities and challenges emerge. One leader in landscape conservation provides the following advice: “Whether your governance is formal or informal, make it intentional. Assess its effectiveness often, and adapt those structures when circumstances call for change” (Network for Landscape Conservation, 2018, 12, quoting Joanne Marchetta, Executive Director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency).

### *Once established, governance systems benefit from regular assessment*

Once created, “homegrown” governance systems should be regularly (re)assessed as the partnership evolves (Scarlett & McKinney, 2016, 124).<sup>6</sup> According to guidance from the 2018 AFWA Resolution and the academic literature, periodic evaluations can help maintain healthy governance systems for landscape conservation partnerships (Committee on the Evaluation of the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, 2016; Alexander et al. 2016; Imperial et al., 2016; Bixler & Johnson 2016). Collaborative conservation experts agree that “it is critical to cultivate a

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<sup>6</sup> For additional information on how to assess and “sustain healthy network governance” throughout each of the key “stages of network development,” see Imperial et al. (2016), especially Table 2 on page 142.

network culture that commits to regularly assessing its governance structure and effectiveness and to regularly reflecting on lessons learned and integrating improvements” (Leigh Goldberg Consulting, 2018, 8). This reflective exercise allows the partnership to determine whether its governance system remains appropriate under ever-evolving conditions.

#### *Knowing what to assess and why is important*

In order to conduct a robust governance evaluation, it is important to identify the governance elements to be assessed and the criteria by which they will be assessed (Leigh Goldberg Consulting, 2018). Based on this literature review of effective governance systems for landscape conservation partnerships, we propose a new framework to evaluate a partnership’s governance system. The framework focuses on the four key elements of effective governance systems for landscape conservation: function, structure, composition, and process.

#### *Using the evaluation framework*

The case study analyses that follow in Chapter 3 examine the governance systems of four landscape-scale conservation partnerships using the evaluation framework introduced in this chapter. To apply the framework systematically across the four case studies, a “governance health checklist” was developed. The checklist focuses on the following elements of each landscape conservation partnership:

1. **Function:** How does the partnership identify, fund, and implement its objectives?
  - a. Does the partnership effectively employ adaptive management?
  - b. Is there adequate and sustainable funding for long-term success?
2. **Structure:** How is the partnership coordinated and managed?
  - a. Does the partnership have institutional support and an organization or coordinator that serves as an effective “backbone” and build relationships?
  - b. Does the partnership have a steering committee or executive committee to provide strategic direction and effectively champion the partnership?
3. **Composition:** Who participates?
  - a. Are the stakeholders, leaders, and experts with the appropriate authorities, relevant expertise, and diverse perspectives included?
4. **Process:** How does the partnership communicate, collaborate, and make decisions?
  - a. Is internal communication and external messaging clear?
  - b. Is decision-making collaborative and transparent?
  - c. Is the partnership built on strong relationships and trust?

This “governance health checklist” can be a useful tool to help identify the strengths and limitations in the governance systems of the four selected partnerships. In addition, the case studies provide a comparative examination of approaches to the governance elements, thereby providing examples and ideas that can be used by SECAS (or any comparable landscape conservation partnership) as it reviews, refines, and adapts elements of its governance to better achieve its goals.

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## CHAPTER 3

# LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION GOVERNANCE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

## INTRODUCTION

This case study analysis explores whether and how the best practices gleaned from the literature review in Chapter 2 are part of the current governance systems of four landscape conservation partnerships—the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS), the Midwest Landscape Initiative, Nature’s Network, and the Western Native Trout Initiative. The three landscape conservation partnerships in addition to SECAS were chosen because they have similarities to SECAS but have unique insights to offer. Taken altogether, these four case studies provide real-world examples of how to implement the principles from the literature and the 2018 Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Resolution on Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Landscape Scales (AFWA 2018 Resolution).

Importantly, all four partnerships in this chapter were also featured in the 2020 report of the AFWA President’s Task Force on Shared Science and Landscape Conservation Priorities (2020 AFWA Task Force Report) and have been recognized by AFWA as models of strong “regional science-based conservation partnerships” (Mawdsley et al., 2020, 5) Important considerations to keep in mind in reviewing the four partnerships include the following:

- ⇒ Each partnership represents one of the four AFWA regions (West, Midwest, Southeast, and Northeast) and receives support from its respective regional AFWA. Each partnership therefore operates in a unique geographic and environmental context.
- ⇒ Each partnership has similar goals, yet employs a different structure. The common purpose across the partnerships, according to the 2020 AFWA Task Force Report, is “to work collaboratively at landscape scales to address shared conservation priorities” related to “sustaining and connecting healthy ecosystems, conserving species and habitats, and improving the effectiveness of management decisions” (Mawdsley et al., 2020, 17). However, in order to respond to the specific needs of partners within their respective regions, each partnership has established a “homegrown” governance system. Some partnerships are governed by formal documents (including charters, memoranda of understanding, and bylaws), while others are governed by informal structures.
- ⇒ Each partnership is in a unique phase of development. Some partnerships are only a few years old while others are 15+ years old. Regardless of age, some partnerships are still establishing their governance systems while others are revising their governance systems in response to the loss of institutional support from the LCCs or other changing circumstances.

- ⇒ Each partnership uses science (including spatial data) to set conservation priorities but has different associated decision support tools based on the specific needs of their partners and end users.

Following the three case studies, the “governance health checklist” described in Chapter 2 is used to assess SECAS’s governance system. Using this checklist to evaluate SECAS’s governance structure provides a more in-depth look at best practices that SECAS has already implemented and those that it could consider adopting in the future.

1. **Function:** How does the partnership identify, fund, and implement its objectives?
  - a. Does the partnership effectively employ adaptive management?
  - b. Is there adequate and sustainable funding for long-term success?
2. **Structure:** How is the partnership coordinated and managed?
  - a. Does the partnership have institutional support and an organization or coordinator that serves as an effective “backbone” and build relationships?
  - b. Does the partnership have a steering committee or executive committee to provide strategic direction and effectively champion the partnership?
3. **Composition:** Who participates?
  - a. Are the stakeholders, leaders, and experts with the appropriate authorities, relevant expertise, and diverse perspectives included?
4. **Process:** How does the partnership communicate, collaborate, and make decisions?
  - a. Is internal communication and external messaging clear?
  - b. Is decision-making collaborative and transparent?
  - c. Is the partnership built on strong relationships and trust?

## METHODOLOGY

Information about the case studies was gleaned from the 2020 AFWA Task Force Report and supplemented by semi-structured interviews with the coordinator of each partnership based on the questions outlined in checklist. Additional information was obtained from each partnership’s website and governance documents, some of which are attached to this report as Appendices A-H.

Each case study begins by examining the functions and processes of the partnership, including core functions and how it makes, implements, and communicates decisions to partners, funders, and the broader public. Next, each case study examines the structure and composition of the partnership, including its membership, management, and coordination. Finally, each case study summarizes the best governance practices the partnership employs.

Following these case studies is an evaluation of SECAS’s governance system. The assessment applies lessons taken from the literature, AFWA guidance, and the case studies to identify current strengths, limitations, and recommendations for improvement.

## CASE STUDY 1: WESTERN NATIVE TROUT INITIATIVE

### *Background*

The Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI) works to restore 21 native trout and char species across the western U.S. WNTI was established in 2006 as a Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) initiative and became a formal [National Fish Habitat Partnership](#) (NFHP) in 2007. WNTI has funded over 700 assessments of watershed, habitat, and fish population health in order to identify the highest priority projects. The partnership has also funded habitat improvement projects (led by state and federal agencies and over 350 organizations) that have removed 116 barriers to fish passage, placed 38 protective fish barriers, and reconnected or improved 1,398 miles of native trout habitat.

### *Function & Process*

WNTI has formally adopted a strategic plan, which was last updated in 2015. Some of the goals outlined in the strategic plan include continuing to protect and restore native trout populations and habitat, adding new target conservation species, cultivating collaboration between agencies and stakeholders, increasing funding to implement high-priority projects, and developing effective education and outreach plans.

WNTI identifies strategic priorities through a formal planning process. First, interagency recovery teams and rangewide conservation teams conduct scientific assessments and prioritization studies that combine expert and local knowledge of fish populations and their habitat. These collaborative, proactive efforts have been successful in eliminating the need to formally list several species as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act, as was the case with the Interior Redband Trout in 2014. The WNTI coordinator then takes the strategic priorities and recommendations provided by the interagency recovery teams and translates them into easily digestible reports for the public and funders.

In order to fund projects to address these priorities, WNTI and its partners have jointly raised \$38 million in funding from federal grants (such as the NFHP and the National Fish Passage Program) and matching state and private dollars. WNTI issues an annual [request for proposals](#) and makes public its project proposal evaluation criteria, which includes factors such as the proposal’s alignment with conservation plans; support from state or tribal agencies and impacted landowners or partners; condition of the watershed and species, etc. WNTI then awards NFHP funds to projects that best align with these criteria and the receiving agency or organization implements the proposed conservation and restoration work.

WNTI has a robust communications campaign. The Coordinator utilizes [websites](#), social media, maps, videos, and reports to highlight the partnership's accomplishments and explain the science behind conservation actions and management decisions to the public in an engaging manner. The Coordinator also runs the "[Campaign for Western Native Trout](#)" outreach plan and the "[Western Native Trout Challenge](#)" to keep partners informed and build support for conserving western native trout and char. WNTI also contributes articles to WAFWA's quarterly newsletter and works with WAFWA to draft press releases.

WNTI has also established processes to promote internal collaboration and coordination. Most notably, WNTI has an official set of bylaws and a memorandum of agreement signed by each member agency and organization that outlines the expectations for participation in the partnership. These governance documents state that all decisions are to be made through consensus, with unanimous agreement needed to approve projects. If unanimity cannot be achieved, a vote is called, with a simple majority constituting a quorum. However, the need to vote is rare, due to the spirit of collaboration and strong relationships that the Steering Committee has developed. The Coordinator and Steering Committee Chairs work to maintain strong bonds within the partnership through collaborative leadership practices such as conferring with individuals who may have reservations or questions about a particular project or upcoming meeting agenda item. This ensures that each Steering Committee member's concerns are addressed both prior to and during regular meetings.

### *Composition & Structure*

WNTI is led by a Steering Committee that includes representatives from all 12 WAFWA member states as well as relevant federal agencies (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management) and non-governmental partners (Trout Unlimited). The Steering Committee has designated seats for tribal and provincial fish and wildlife agency representatives as well, but they are currently vacant. Per WNTI's bylaws, the individuals selected to serve on the Steering Committee are senior leaders within their agency or organization. This ensures that all Steering Committee members have the authority to commit financial and/or staff resources to the partnership's conservation and management actions. The members meet annually in conjunction with WAFWA gatherings and share a meal together to develop relationships and rapport.

In addition to the Steering Committee, which provides oversight and guidance in implementing WNTI's strategic plan, the partnership also has a full-time Coordinator who is responsible for managing the partnership's communications and finances. The Coordinator also advances the partnership's goals by leading meetings, coordinating with partners, and providing progress reports. The Coordinator meets monthly with the Steering Committee Chair and Vice-Chair, who represent state fish and wildlife agencies. This is an independent contractor position to

WAFWA, with half of the funds coming from the NFHP and the remaining half coming from the 12 state fish and wildlife agencies participating in WNTI.

Finally, WNTI receives institutional support from WAFWA. WNTI provides regular progress reports to the WAFWA Inland and Marine Fisheries Committee (IMFC) and submits proposals for new Steering Committee members to the IMFC Chair for approval. As the fiscal agent for WNTI's operational funds and federal grants, WAFWA administers grants and contracts and pays WNTI invoices. WAFWA's Foundation for Western Fish and Wildlife is WNTI's 501(c)(3) fiscal agent for public donations, grants, and sponsorships.

### *Key Takeaways*

WNTI's governance documents (including the bylaws, memoranda of agreement, and strategic plan) facilitate effective collaboration and provide transparency. These documents (some of which are attached to this report as Appendices A and B) can serve as examples of how to establish clear and transparent decision-making processes and membership protocols. Explicitly outlining a partnership's structure, composition, processes, and functions clarifies roles and responsibilities and is important for establishing legitimacy and fairness according to Alexander et al. (2016). One particularly notable element of the WNTI bylaws is that they ensure that key decision-makers (i.e., those with the appropriate authority) are at the table and committed to advancing the goals of the partnership. Doyle-Capitman & Decker (2018) observe that partnerships are more likely to be able to successfully implement their objectives and achieve their goals when leaders with the power to execute decisions are involved.

WNTI's strategic communications campaigns also provide examples of how to effectively garner the public support and private funding necessary to achieve shared conservation priorities. Indeed, attracting diverse, sustainable sources of support (including funding and resources) is critical to the success of collaborative partnerships, as highlighted in Labich (2015).

Finally, WNTI's Coordinator and Steering Committee Chairs act as "bridge builders," networking with key "nodes" of the partnership to improve the cohesion and functions of the collaborative as a whole (Alexander et al., 2016, 161). The bridge-building strategies they employ reflect best practices from the literature regarding how to cultivate strong relationships and trusting bonds within a partnership (Alexander et al., 2016; Bureau of Land Management, 2018).

## CASE STUDY 2: MIDWEST LANDSCAPE INITIATIVE

The [Midwest Landscape Initiative](#) (MLI) is a forum for agencies and organizations to collaboratively identify and address shared conservation priorities in the region. In 2017, Midwest representatives of the AFWA Wildlife Resources Policy Committee and Landscape Conservation Working Group proposed a partnership to continue the landscape-level

conservation work of the LCCs and other regional collaborative efforts to conserve at-risk species. The Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) Board voted unanimously to approve the proposal to establish MLI and invited FWS to participate.

MLI seeks to improve the health and function of ecosystems throughout the region by collaboratively identifying and addressing key conservation priorities at the landscape scale. MLI has also served as a forum to discuss emerging and urgent regional issues such as chronic wasting disease, coronavirus related challenges, and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substance contamination. Thus far, MLI has established a governance system and created a “Priority Setting Framework” to identify initial shared priorities. The partners are currently developing an overarching conservation strategy, action plans for each priority, a vision for conserving at-risk species, and a communications plan. Within the next few years, the partnership hopes to have a database of at-risk species and associated decision-support tools.

#### *Function & Process*

MLI’s current priorities include: (1) developing landscape-based conservation approaches to minimize the need to list at-risk species, (2) developing landscape-scale habitat inventory and assessment tools, including maps, (3) developing plans to mitigate adverse impacts of wind energy development on wildlife, and (4) developing a durable governance model and unifying conservation vision for the region. In order to address the fourth priority, MLI has hired a consultant from the Wildlife Management Institute (WMI). The consultant is helping MLI identify the 4-5 challenges they want to tackle over the next decade and establish a conservation vision that can transcend the turnover of state directors and gubernatorial administrations. The WMI consultant is also reviewing the partnership’s communications and prioritization frameworks. Finally, the consultant will interview the Steering Committee and Technical Committee, as well as conduct focus groups with external partners, to assess MLI’s current governance system and potential opportunities for improvement.

MLI has an official Priority Setting Framework, which outlines the partnership’s collaborative process for developing, reviewing, and evaluating priorities. A key principle in the framework is that the best available science—including social science—should be used to identify conservation priorities and guide implementation. Each priority has its own action plan, which serves as a roadmap that includes the following information: problem statement, objectives, strategies, rationale, actions, desired outcomes, performance measures, monitoring plan, timelines, research gaps, key partners, and capacity needs. Each action plan also includes a statement describing how social science and the human dimensions of natural resource management will be incorporated. Work groups review and modify action plans on a quarterly basis, based on tracking tools designed to monitor and evaluate the status of each action and identify anticipated milestones, challenges, and opportunities.

MLI has created a number of governance documents that outline clear and transparent collaborative decision-making processes. In 2019, MAFWA passed a resolution supporting MLI and providing direction for the fledgling partnership. The resolution directs MLI to regularly evaluate its priorities, to develop a Comprehensive Regional Conservation Action Plan, to adopt the principles of the 2018 AFWA Resolution, and to coordinate with other regional landscape initiatives.

MLI also adopted its own charter that same year. The document outlines the partnership's composition, including the roles and responsibilities of the Coordinator, Steering Committee, Technical Committee, and work groups. Additionally, the charter identifies the partnership's shared priorities, communication protocols, decision-making procedures, and process for appointing members of the committees and work groups. The charter states that MLI should make its meeting notes, agendas, and organizational documents available to the public, and publicize upcoming events and information regarding how to engage with the partnership. Each work group has also developed its own charter, which outlines the group's purpose, membership, goals, objectives, tasks, and communications protocols.

In order to formalize institutional support for MLI, FWS and MAFWA signed a cooperative agreement. The agreement commits those parties to provide support to MLI in identifying preliminary priorities, goals, and objectives; developing a communications, engagement, and outreach strategy; developing a conservation vision for the partnership; and establishing and improving MLI's governance and operations. Additionally, as mentioned previously, Executive Liaison and Technical Coordinator positions are funded through this agreement.

Unlike WNTI, MLI is not an organization and therefore the partnership itself cannot receive or allocate funding to implement its priorities. However, the MLI charter states that the Steering Committee has the authority to make recommendations to MAFWA, FWS, state, and provincial leadership, as well as partner organizations, regarding how funds could be spent to achieve the regional conservation goals.

### *Composition & Structure*

There are four central components of MLI's governance structure: the Steering Committee, the Technical Committee, work groups, and the partnership coordinators that liaise among these entities. The work flow is more or less hierarchical, with the Steering Committee providing direction to the Technical Committee, which provides direction to the Work Groups. Conversely, the work group provides recommendations to the Technical Committee, which provides recommendations to the Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee provides strategic direction and oversight, including determining the partnership's key priorities and approving associated action plans. The committee consists of several state fish and wildlife agency directors (appointed by the MAFWA President), FWS

regional directors, the U.S. Geological Survey Cooperative Research Unit Chief, and a MAFWA ex officio member. The Committee is chaired by one state agency representative and one federal agency representative. The Steering Committee members are executive level staff with decision-making authority, and they respect each other's distinct management roles, responsibilities, and public trust obligations. The Steering Committee meets at least quarterly to review the progress of the Technical Committee, work groups, and coordinators. They also meet annually to review the priorities, goals, and objectives of the partnership.

The Technical Committee advises issue-specific work groups in developing action plans and provides recommendations to the Steering Committee regarding implementation. Additionally, the Technical Committee was responsible for drafting the governance documents and Priority Setting Framework described above. The Technical Committee consists of 10-15 state and federal fish and wildlife agency staff, as well as MAFWA representatives, with expertise ranging from wildlife biology to communications to law. The Technical Committee Co-Chairs (one state and one federal representative) and members are appointed by the Steering Committee.

Action plans for each MLI priority are developed by distinct work groups, who report to the Technical Committee on a monthly basis. The bi-weekly work group meetings are led by an impartial, external facilitator. Each work group has a core team of state and federal government partners who are then expected to engage in stakeholder outreach and may even choose to form subgroups with external partners. MLI's governance documents (described above) stipulate that the work groups must include diverse membership.

The partnership's Coordinator provides support to the Steering Committee and Technical Committee. The Coordinator's responsibilities include leading meetings, conducting engagement and outreach, and delivering presentations. This is a full-time position funded by FWS and housed in the Science Applications Program.

MLI also has a Technical Coordinator to support the Technical Committee and the work groups, including leading the At-Risk Species Work Group. The Technical Coordinator is also responsible for operational and administrative tasks such as maintaining the website and working with external vendors. This is a full-time position funded through a cooperative agreement between MAFWA and FWS.

Finally, MLI has an Executive Liaison to interface with MAFWA and FWS leaders and solicit their feedback on MLI's priorities and strategies. The Executive Liaison provides overall high-level strategic advice, including developing an overarching communications framework. This is a part-time position funded through the cooperative agreement between MAFWA and FWS.

#### *Key Takeaways*

Like WNTI, MLI's governance documents (including the MAFWA resolution, the MAFWA-FWS cooperative agreement, the Priority Setting Framework, and the partnership and work group

charters) clearly and explicitly outline the partnership's function, process, composition, and structure. These governance documents improve the transparency of the partnership's collaborative process.

One unique aspect of MLI's charter is that it identifies governance itself as one of the partnership's core priorities. The inclusion of governance goals demonstrates a deep commitment to implementing the guiding principle of the AFWA 2018 resolution that partnerships should regularly evaluate their governance systems. This is also in accordance with guidance from the academic literature that partnerships regularly assess and adapt governance (Committee on the Evaluation of the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, 2016; Alexander et al. 2016; Imperial et al., 2016; Bixler & Johnson 2016).

When MLI's leaders established the partnership, they realized that implementing projects on the ground would be impossible without a strong system in place to guide the partnership's work. Half of the Technical Committee meetings in its first year were dedicated to discussing how to establish an effective governance system. Crafting bylaws was a particularly trying process for those more comfortable discussing biology than governance. However, there was a great sense of collective accomplishment and celebration when the group completed drafting their governance documents. The members ultimately saw the value in establishing protocols so that future conflicts could be resolved or even avoided.

Finally, MLI's Priority Setting Framework provides a potential model for how to operationalize adaptive management. The framework maps onto the phases of the cycle of adaptive planning and management outlined by Doyle-Capitman & Decker (2018) and described in the literature review in Chapter 2. The principles that are particularly evident in MLI's Priority Setting Framework include the following:

- a. The problem statement defines a collective and strategic vision;
- b. The goals and objectives are tied to performance measures and desired outcomes;
- c. The habitat and inventory assessment tools serve as a central hub for shared data;
- d. The priorities are informed by natural and social science;
- e. The action plans include tracking tools to monitor and evaluate performance; and
- f. The Steering Committee evaluates progress towards implementing the action plan on a quarterly basis, and reviews the priorities, goals, and objectives on an annual basis.

## CASE STUDY 3: NATURE'S NETWORK

### *Background*

Nature's Network was formally established by the [North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative](#) (NALCC) and the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee (NEFWDTCC) of the Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (NEAFWA) in 2016. Prior

to the creation of Nature’s Network, these same entities convened 13 state wildlife agencies, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and universities to develop a [landscape conservation design](#) (LCD) that identifies priority landscapes, watersheds, habitats, and migration corridors throughout the region. Since then, the partners have continued to build decision-support tools, such as the analysis of Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas and “conservation planning atlas.” These tools allow the partnership to identify [Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need](#), prioritize conservation actions, inform natural resource management, promote collaboration and ultimately stitch together a network of connected, intact, and resilient habitats across the landscape.

#### *Function & Process*

Nature’s Network’s functional focus is on building and refining regional decision-support tools, including the Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas and conservation planning atlas. To advance its work, the partnership relies on strong, long-standing working relationships between state and federal agencies. Additionally, the scientists across all the agencies and organizations involved are well-respected. These relationships have enabled the current collaborative, interagency approach to conservation efforts focused on at-risk species. FWS staff within the partnership reach out to their state agency counterparts to identify Species of Greatest Conservation Need (as identified in State Wildlife Action Plans) that would most benefit from federal assistance. Federal and state agency staff jointly examine conservation plans to identify actions that will preclude the need to list the species as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

#### *Composition & Structure*

The original Nature’s Network Steering Committee was composed of representatives from the NALCC Steering Committee, the Northeast Climate Adaptation Science Center, NEAFWA-member state agencies, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and NGOs, such as the Wildlife Conservation Society and The Nature Conservancy. The Steering Committee met twice a year (coinciding with NEAFWA meetings) to review and approve LCD projects. The technical advisory team conducted prioritization studies for the Steering Committee, who then vetted the recommendations with NEFWDC. Nature’s Network also originally had two partnership coordinators, including a state designee and a position funded by the NALCC. The partnership also included nearly 30 member organizations of the NALCC. When the LCCs were disassembled, FWS Science Applications staff stepped in to maintain and update Nature’s Network decision-support tools and provide Nature’s Network updates at monthly and annual NEFWDC meetings. The loss of robust support from the NALCC has prompted the partnership to re-evaluate its governance structure.

As noted above, partners have begun to focus their efforts on projects that prevent the need for federally listing at-risk species within the region as threatened or endangered. Currently, some of those efforts have their own governance structures. For instance, the New England

Cottontail conservation initiative (NEC) has formal bylaws and an Executive Committee, including state wildlife agency directors, a FWS representative, a Natural Resource Conservation Service representative, and an ex officio (non-voting) member from a conservation organization. However, no such formal structure exists to coordinate many other similarly complex efforts to conserve other at-risk species or habitats identified by Nature's Network decision-support tools.

### *Key Takeaways*

When the NALCC was disassembled, the partnership lost its original structure, including its coordinators and Steering Committee. Since then, the partnership has struggled to identify and address mutual interests and concerns in a consistent and coherent manner. This situation demonstrates how critical the “backbone” and “connective tissue” elements of a partnership are to its health and vitality (Bureau of Land Management, 2018, 8; Alexander et al., 2016). Indeed, NEC has been one of the most successful conservation efforts under the Nature's Network umbrella largely because NEC has a strong governance structure, according to the FWS staff interviewed for this case study. The NEC Executive Committee is able to facilitate more effective coordination and collaboration than other, currently ad hoc, conservation efforts focus on at-risk species.

It is important to note that, in designing its governance structure, the NEC Executive Committee chose to include an NGO representative as an ex officio member. Including outside organizations in a partnership's leadership team runs the risk of making agencies feel like their influence is somewhat diluted or that their management authorities are not fully recognized, according to general observations from interviewees. One way to address this tension is to clarify that the NGO's role is to contribute ideas and funding but not to make decisions. For this reason, the NEC Executive Committee's bylaws explicitly establish that the NGO representative is a non-voting member.

The success of Nature's Network to date can be attributed in large part to the fact that state and federal agency partners respect each other's respective contributions and management authorities. In working with the states to conserve at-risk species, FWS has taken the approach of asking state counterparts what their priorities are and what assistance they need from their federal colleagues. According to the individual interviewed, it is imperative that federal agencies consult state agencies as equal partners throughout the entire species conservation process. A conservation initiative could quickly become very contentious if it does not begin by collectively identifying a shared goal and how state and federal partners can contribute in a manner that is coordinated, rather than duplicative or even counterproductive. Guidance from the Bureau of Land Management (2018) and the AFWA 2018 Resolution suggests that identifying and acknowledging the management authorities of each partner is foundational to building respect and trust.

Nature’s Network also highlights the importance of clear communication and transparent decision-making. The individual interviewed stated that all stakeholders must be brought along at the same pace so that no one gets out in front of another partner or has disproportionate influence. The latter situations can erode trust and weaken relationships. To prevent such an outcome, it is important to communicate internally so that all the agency representatives (and all relevant programs within each participating agency) have a clear understanding of the initiative and are on board. Securing buy-in and a shared commitment to the partnership takes time but ultimately expedites progress by precluding the need to backtrack for the sake of repairing relationships. Indeed, clear communication and equitable and transparent decision-making processes are the antidote to “network capture,” as described in the literature review in Chapter 2 (Bixler, Wald, et al., 2016, 165; Doyle-Capitman & Decker, 2018).

## EVALUATING THE SOUTHEAST CONSERVATION ADAPTATION STRATEGY (SECAS) GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

SECAS was formed to collaboratively identify and conserve a connected network of lands and waters in the Southeast to improve ecological and social well-being throughout the region. The partnership was established in 2011 by the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA), the Southeast Region of FWS, and federal agency representatives from the Southeast Natural Resources Leaders Group (SENRLG). SECAS’s current goal is to improve ecosystem health, function, and connectivity by 10% by the year 2060, according to the partnership’s [website](#). Additional information about the evolution of the partnership can be found in the *Introduction* and *Synthesis and Recommendations* sections of this report.

The following assessment examines the four key elements of SECAS’s governance system. The evaluation seeks to answer the questions in the “governance health checklist” introduced at the beginning of this chapter.

### **1. FUNCTION: How does the partnership identify, fund, and implement its objectives?**

#### *1a. Does the partnership effectively employ adaptive management?*

SECAS employs the adaptive management framework in both its conservation planning process and in refining its governance system. SECAS completed the steps of the adaptive management cycle to develop the Southeast Conservation Blueprint, which identifies priority areas for conservation and restoration. The map is updated annually based on subregional conservation plans and new and/or revised data from SECAS partners.

SECAS has also adapted its governance structure to respond to changing conditions and emerging needs. For example, in response to diminished support for the LCCs, FWS Science Applications adopted SECAS as its framework for landscape conservation in the region and

continued to fund the SECAS Coordinator position. In 2017, SEAFWA charged SECAS with establishing formal goals and objectives. The following year, the SEAFWA directors and SENRLG principals approved the SECAS goal. Furthermore, SECAS is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the partnership's governance, as detailed in this report. The insights from this assessment will allow the partnership to more strategically chart a course for the future by identifying governance needs, partner needs, and the best means of sustaining the partnership's value.

#### *1a. Recommendations*

In order to continue achieving its goals under changing environmental and institutional conditions, it will be critical for SECAS to maintain its flexibility and adaptability. Establishing a process to continue reviewing the performance and governance of SECAS would allow the partnership to learn, adapt, and evolve in order to sustain value into the future. This aligns with a guiding principle in the 2018 AFWA Resolution to “periodically undergo an evaluation to assess priorities, effectiveness and adaptability so they can be refocused as needed to achieve intended outcomes.”

SECAS could also consider following the example of MLI and incorporate governance objectives into the partnership's core objectives. Additionally, SECAS could create a document similar to the MLI “Priority Setting Framework” that outlines the partnership's criteria and process for identifying and assessing key priorities.

#### *1b. Is there adequate and sustainable funding for long-term success?*

The partnership is currently funded primarily by FWS Science Applications, with some funding for science support coming from the Southeast Climate Adaptation Science Center. While support for SECAS within FWS at a programmatic, regional, and national level remains strong, it is worth noting that the U.S. President's proposed budget for the past four years has zeroed out the entire Science Applications program. Congress has subsequently funded the program every year. However, this lack of support from the current Administration creates some uncertainty every year as to whether or not the Science Applications program will be able to continue providing the bulk of the financial, scientific, coordination, and communication support for SECAS.

It is also worth noting that, unlike WNTI, SECAS does not distribute funding for projects. Partners are responsible for funding and implementing projects to advance SECAS's goals.

#### *1b. Recommendation*

The SECAS Steering Committee could take this opportunity to evaluate the sustainability of current funding sources for the partnership and its projects, and identify potential additional sources of financial support.

## **2. PROCESS: How does the partnership communicate, collaborate, and make decisions?**

### *2a. Is internal communication and external messaging clear?*

SECAS invests in communicating with the public and its partners. For instance, the User Support and Communications Specialist manages a blog, newsletter, webinar series, and website content that highlight SECAS's accomplishments and outline the partnership's vision and objectives. Additionally, the SECAS Coordinator promotes regular internal communication by facilitating monthly and quarterly coordination calls and an annual symposium.

### *2a. Recommendations*

Continuing to fund the SECAS Coordinator and its User Support & Communications Specialist will allow the partnership to continue conveying its value to partners and the public. Following the example of WNTI, SECAS could develop a strategy to communicate its value to prospective funders as well in order to attract private dollars to match public investments in Southeast Conservation Blueprint projects. SECAS could also consider establishing a network of communications professionals (as MLI is currently attempting to do) to advise SECAS leadership and staff in developing a more strategic communications, outreach, and engagement strategy.

### *2b. Is decision-making collaborative and transparent?*

The SECAS vision, goal, and Southeast Conservation Blueprint were crafted collaboratively by the Steering Committee, POCs, and SECAS staff. These products were approved by the SEAFWA Directors and SENRLG principals. The POCs and SECAS staff continue to work together to develop the work plan, identify priority areas, and update the annual goal report and Southeast Conservation Blueprint. Decision-making is therefore clearly quite collaborative.

However, SECAS does not currently have a formal charter or similar document that captures its governance system. Without a written record and agreement detailing the decision-making process, the SECAS governance system lacks full transparency. Moreover, the distinct roles and responsibilities of the Steering Committee, the POCs, and the Lead Coordination Team are not entirely clear to the partners or the public.

### *2b. Recommendations*

SECAS could consider establishing a charter, resolution, or other formal statement detailing the partnership's shared purpose, vision, and goals, as well as its governance function, process, composition, and structure. The WNTI and NEC Executive Committee bylaws, along with the MLI resolution, charter, and cooperative agreement (Appendices A-H of this report) could serve as potential models or sources of inspiration. As a first step, it would be helpful for the partnership to clarify and document the relationship between the Steering Committee, the POCs, and the Lead Coordination Team.

2c. *Is the partnership built on strong relationships and trust?*

The SECAS Coordinator has focused on building strong relationships between all the “nodes” of the network. As discussed in Chapter 1, POCs interviewed appreciate that the Coordinator promotes a spirit of collaboration and trust between the Steering Committee, SEAFWA directors, SENRLG principals, POCs, and additional partners. It is also important to note that SECAS was built on a strong foundation of trust between SEAFWA and FWS.

2c. *Recommendations*

In selecting the next SECAS Coordinator, the Steering Committee may want to consider prioritizing candidates with the ability to cultivate strong, trusting relationships within the partnership and with outside stakeholders. SECAS could also consider investing in additional collaborative leadership training for this position, and potentially for the Steering Committee and SECAS staff as well. Finally, as SECAS’s leadership and staff turn-over, it will be important to have transition plans in place to transfer institutional knowledge and ensure continued strong working relationships between state and federal agency staff.

**3. STRUCTURE: How is the partnership coordinated and managed?**

3a. *Does the partnership have institutional support and an organization or coordinator that serves as an effective “backbone” and builds relationships?*

Staff support for SECAS is provided by the FWS to coordinate conservation efforts and provide technical and communications support. The SECAS Coordinator, Southeast Blueprint Coordinator, and several technical support specialists and coordinators are funded by the FWS Science Applications program in the Southeast Region.

Additionally, SECAS receives support from, SEAFWA, SENRLG, as well as [other federal agencies and partnerships](#), such as the Southeast Climate Adaptation Science Center (a partnership between the U.S. Geological Survey and regional universities). Initially, the relevant LCC steering committees provided coordination and began to outline an action plan for SECAS. After LCCs were disassembled, the FWS Science Applications program adopted SECAS as its overarching framework for promoting landscape conservation in the region.

In 2019, SEAFWA directors established the current Steering Committee. SEAFWA technical committees continue to provide input on SECAS’s science priorities, tools, and products. Additionally, the SECAS Steering Committee is a sub-committee of SEAFWA, SECAS is a regular agenda item on SEAFWA Wildlife Diversity Committee meetings, SECAS participates in the annual SEAFWA conference, and SECAS provides progress reports during the bi-annual SEAFWA Directors’ meetings.

SECAS also receives support from SENRLG, which is an effort to improve coordination and collaboration among the 13 federal agencies with natural resource management responsibility and authority in the region. Each agency is represented by a principal, or senior leader (typically a regional director). The FWS SENRLG principal is a representative on the SECAS Steering Committee and serves as a liaison between SEAFWA and the other SENRLG principals. Some of the SENRLG agencies have contributed to developing and updating the Southeast Conservation Blueprint and several SENRLG agencies have used or are using the tool to inform their conservation actions.

*3b. Does the partnership have a steering committee or executive committee to provide strategic direction and effectively champion the partnership?*

SECAS is currently led by a Steering Committee consisting of five state representatives (directors of state natural resource agencies) and one federal agency representative (the FWS Regional Director for the Southeast). The Committee provides oversight and direction, including reviewing and approving the partnership's strategy. Additionally, each entity represented in the partnership designates a "Point of Contact" to serve as a liaison. POCs provide technical and scientific input and inform priority setting and decision-making. Finally, the SECAS Lead Coordinators Team was formed in 2015 to support development of the first regional conservation blueprint. The LCT remains active in support of SECAS and comprises former LCC staff as well as Southeast Climate Adaptation Science Center staff and other university faculty conducting research for SECAS.

### *3a/3b. Recommendations*

SECAS's current staff and Steering Committee provide the leadership necessary to advance the partnership's objectives. These leaders effectively connect partners and synergize conservation science and actions. SECAS has dedicated champions who convey the continued need for the partnership. Making the SECAS Coordinator a full-time, permanent position and making the recently established Steering Committee a permanent element of the governance structure would ensure that the partnership has the "backbone" support necessary to sustain its value in the long-term. Other partnerships that have full-time coordinators (e.g., WNTI and MLI) have greater capacity to facilitate complex collaboration and strategic communication. Moreover, Nature's Network provides an example of how a partnership without an official Coordinator or Steering Committee struggles to effectively coordinate and integrate conservation efforts at the landscape scale.

SECAS receives robust institutional support from numerous state and federal agencies and SEAFWA. One way that SECAS could strengthen its ties with key institutional partners would be to nominate the SECAS Coordinator to be a FWS representative on the SENRLG Executive Committee. Having not only SENRLG representation on SECAS's leadership team, but also SECAS representation on SENRLG's leadership team, could allow federal agencies in the

Southeast to better integrate their conservation efforts with the Southeast Conservation Blueprint, and vice versa.

#### **4. COMPOSITION: Who participates?**

*4a. Are the stakeholders, leaders, and experts with appropriate authority, relevant expertise, and diverse perspectives included?*

SECAS's leadership consists of state and federal natural resource agency staff with relevant and complementary decision-making authority. SECAS engages additional non-agency stakeholders (such as the Open Space Institute, The Nature Conservancy, and Southern Group of State Foresters) as SECAS Points of Contact (POCs). The partnership therefore benefits from a diverse set of expertise, ranging from spatial analysis to communications to natural science.

*4a. Recommendations*

SECAS could further diversify its representation by engaging more entities directly impacted by the Southeast Conservation Blueprint. Key stakeholders such as tribal leaders, local government leaders, business owners, private landowners, and universities could lend valuable insights and expertise as official representatives in the partnership. Furthermore, the Southeast Conservation Blueprint is being used by partners who do not have an official SECAS POC. This indicates broader interest in and use of the partnership's data, science, and decision support than is currently reflected in SECAS's formal representatives. SECAS could make an effort to include additional key stakeholders using its products.

#### **Conclusion**

When it comes to designing governance systems for landscape-scale conservation partnerships, one size does not fit all. Each partnership will require a unique governance composition and structure with its own governance processes and functions. However, these case studies reveal a set of best practices that can inform the establishment, evaluation, and refinement of partnership governance systems. The common themes that emerge from the analysis of the governance system of WNTI, MLI, Nature's Network, and SECAS are summarized below.

1. All four partnerships add value to their partners and external stakeholders by serving as a unique forum for collaboration and establishing a shared, collective conservation vision for the region. Each partnership has a formal goal statement that seeks to maintain, restore, and/or enhance ecological integrity and community well-being at the regional scale by aligning local and state conservation actions to maximize collective impact. This commonality aligns with the finding in the 2020 AFWA Task Force Report that “[p]artnerships deliver value when there is a focus on tangible accomplishment, driven by the shared priorities of their partners” (Mawdsley et al., 2020, 18).

2. All four partnerships rely on shared science to inform conservation priorities and employ adaptive planning and management. All of the partnerships serve as a hub for shared data and decision-support tools. These products allow the partnerships to identify the most pressing conservation needs, measure progress towards shared goals, and adjust conservation priorities and actions accordingly. The 2020 AFWA Task Force Report notes that the partnerships all “feature a variety of differing products, tools, and other outputs designed to support decision making at various scales, specific to the needs and desires of their partners and stakeholders” (Mawdsley et al., 2020, 18).
3. All four partnerships enjoy the support of a regional fish and wildlife association and federal natural resource agencies. Institutional support is provided in the form of funding, staffing, and formal endorsements of the partnership, its goals, and its conservation actions. State and federal staff respect each other’s management responsibilities and authorities while cooperating to conserve species, habitats, and ecosystems across boundaries. The 2020 AFWA Task Force Report notes that all four partnerships have “strong structural and operational relationships with their regional AFWAs” and that the relationship between the state and federal fish and wildlife agencies “is a peer-to-peer arrangement in each partnership that formally respects differing agency responsibilities and authorities” (Mawdsley et al., 2020, 18).
4. All four partnerships have a dedicated leadership team. This includes (a) a coordinator to provide strong “backbone” support for the partnership; (b) communications specialists to clearly convey the partnership’s vision and garner support from partners, the public, and funders; and (c) a steering committee composed of state and federal agency staff with the relevant management authority to make and implement decisions. This commonality aligns with the finding in the 2020 AFWA Task Force Report that “[s]uccessful landscape partnerships require and benefit from effective communications, strong leadership from within, and dedicated and fully supported coordination functions to advance the interests of the partnership...” (Mawdsley et al., 2020, 18).
5. All four partnerships are built on a foundation of trust and strong relationships. Partnership coordinators noted that recognizing and respecting the unique roles, responsibilities, and contributions of each partner was critical to successful collaboration. This commonality aligns with the finding in the 2020 AFWA Task Force Report that “[s]uccess depends on effective relationship building and operates from a foundation of trust among a broad diversity of partners” who make decisions through “consensus-based operational approaches” (Mawdsley et al., 2020, 18).
6. All four partnerships have evolved in response to shifting institutional support and partner needs. As conditions change, the partnerships have adapted by evaluating and adjusting their governance systems. This commonality aligns with the finding in the

2020 AFWA Task Force Report that “[s]uccessful landscape partnerships evolve organically and reflect the priorities and desires of partners and stakeholders” (Mawdsley et al., 2020, 18).

These lessons point to the strengths in SECAS’s current governance system and highlight opportunities to refine the partnership’s governance going forward. A synthesis of recommendations regarding how to implement best practices from these case studies, the academic literature, and guidance from AFWA and the interviews in Chapter 2 are provided in the following chapter.

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## CHAPTER 4

### SYNTHESIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides an overall look at SECAS’s history and evolution and concludes with a series of observations and recommendations for the future. The observations and recommendations integrate insights and analysis from the interviews, literature review, and case studies detailed in Chapters 1 through 3. Moreover, they reflect input from SECAS’s lead coordinators, POCs, and staff; participants in the Fall 2020 SECAS Symposium held during the SEAFWA Conference; and guidance from the SECAS Steering Committee.

#### SECAS: LOOKING BACK AT THE EVOLVING STORY OF A LANDSCAPE-SCALE CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP

Throughout the Southeast and across the country, there is growing recognition and agreement that many natural resource conservation and management challenges need to be addressed at the landscape scale. At the same time, landscape-scale approaches are stymied by a legacy of institutions, jurisdictions, and practices that have been optimized for a particular objective, place, or sector. In the face of these barriers, landscape-scale partnerships and networks have emerged as a mechanism to engage people and organizations across scales.

One of the unique features of many landscape-scale partnerships is that they are not formal organizations. Instead, they are the result of informal connections and relationships that are largely voluntary, ad hoc, and supplemental to existing efforts. These partnerships seek to influence behavior and shape outcomes by identifying common interests, a shared goal or vision, and collective priorities at a geographic scale that is determined by partnership members. Implementation activities are often dependent on formal organizations or agencies, acting alone or in small groups, to carry out projects and activities that align with the overall vision and objectives for the partnership. Furthermore, many decisions made toward shared objectives are decentralized. In an effort to maintain cohesiveness across these informal and dynamic partnerships, most establish a way to coordinate their activities through a “backbone organization” that helps facilitate conversations, coordinate programming, and track and communicate progress.

From the beginning, SECAS has largely followed the approach of other landscape-scale partnerships by developing an informal governance structure to advance shared priorities and activities. SECAS’s particular role and niche has been to provide state and federal agencies in the region with a framework for conservation planning across the broad geographic landscape of the Southeast. When it was launched, SECAS was connected to and benefited from the six Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) in the Southeast region. Those LCCs supported

partners by providing scientific and technical expertise and by providing a forum for collaboration. Combined, these connections and relationships – and the intersecting and complementary roles and benefits they provided – became the core components of the informal governance structure that enabled SECAS partners to advance their shared work (see “SECAS governance structure, 2011-2017” below).

## SECAS governance structure 2011-2017

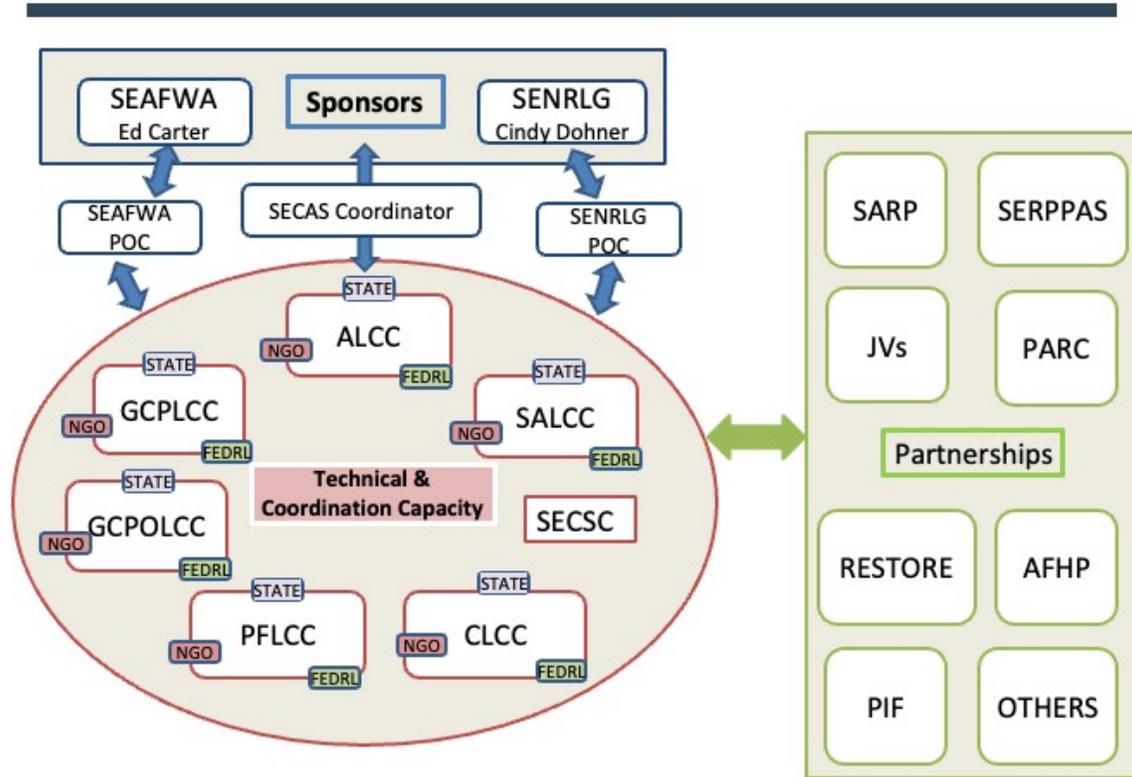


Figure 3: SECAS Governance Structure from 2011-2017

Following the disassembly of the LCCs in 2017, many of the relationships and connections in place were fundamentally altered. In response to these changes, SECAS adapted both its role and its governance structure. Most notably, SECAS assumed a broader role as a regional forum for collaboration while continuing to provide science- and data-driven products aimed at informing conservation priority setting and planning activities. SECAS’s informal governance structure has taken time to adapt both to this expanded role and to the absence of the LCCs. In part, this governance evolution reflects a shift toward more robust state agency involvement

even as many of the coordination tasks remained under the auspices of FWS (see “SECAS interim governance structure, 2019” figure 4 below).

One of the governance challenges that emerged during this transition was that relationships with nonprofit conservation groups established through the LCCs could not be easily transferred to SECAS. This challenge stemmed from several factors, including the mismatch between the sub-regional geographic footprint and focus of each LCC vis-à-vis SECAS and the fact that there was not a corresponding region-wide entity in place to effectively integrate the voices and perspectives of existing conservation nonprofit partners. Finding ways to include these conservation nonprofit interests remains an important governance consideration as SECAS continues to evolve. Notably, the Interim Steering Committee made a decision at the fall 2019 SEAFWA Conference to add three conservation nonprofit representatives to the SECAS Points of Contact community.

## SECAS interim governance structure 2019

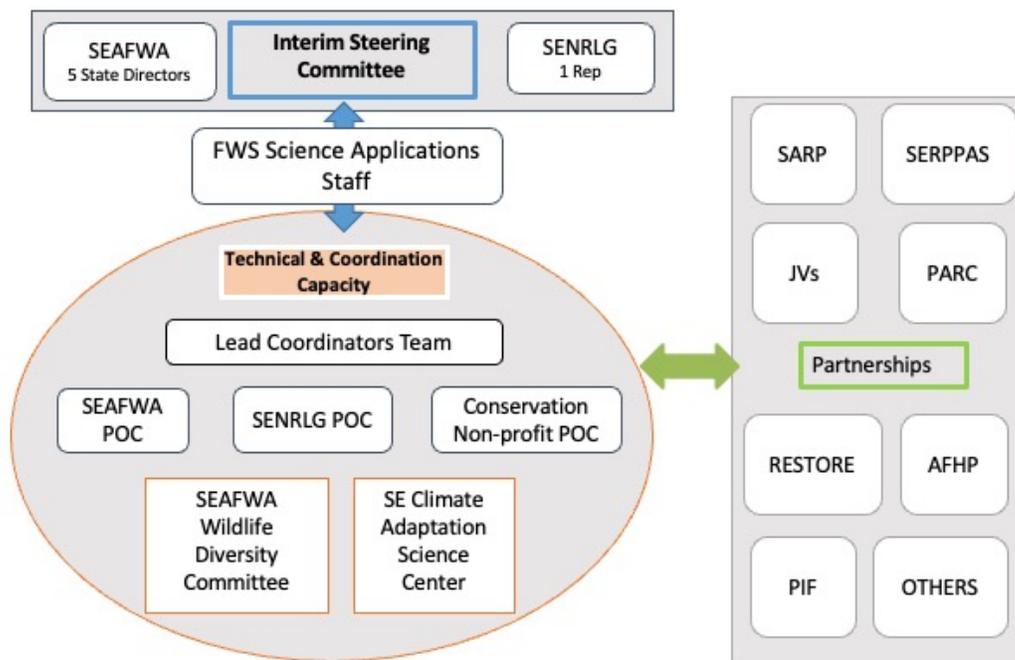


Figure 4: SECAS Governance Structure in 2019

This history and evolution provides important context to this chapter’s focus on SECAS’s future needs and opportunities. In particular, it helps illuminate why SECAS is perceived by some to be particularly strong in providing decision-support tools and products (e.g., the Southeast Conservation Blueprint), while its role and function in providing a forum for communication and collaboration continues to take shape and evolve.

## SECAS TODAY: A REGIONAL FORUM FOR COLLABORATION AND A SCIENCE / DECISION-SUPPORT HUB

Today, SECAS is seen as a successful landscape-scale partnership that adds value as both (1) a regional forum for discussion, collaboration, and coordination, and (2) a science and decision-support hub. SECAS’s ability to advance these dual roles is derived in part by a host of enabling conditions, including the following elements:

- scientific and technical competency;
- support from state and federal agency leadership;
- effective relationships between leadership, staff, and partners
- informal, adaptive governance system;
- effective service and support for Southeast Conservation Blueprint users;
- consistent engagement of agency and NGO points of contact (POCs);
- communications infrastructure, including SECAS’s website, blog, and newsletter; and
- demonstrated relevance and added value.

Together, these enabling conditions have set the stage for what SECAS has achieved – establishing a vision and goal; creating the Blueprint and a goal-tracking protocol and reporting system; providing a forum for engagement with other regional and sub-regional partnerships; and contributing to a multitude of conservation actions informed by these products and activities.

At the same time, there are some notable challenges, or constraining conditions, that are useful to be aware of as SECAS continues to evolve and advance as a regional partnership. These include:

- SECAS’s broad vision and mission are open for interpretation;
- there are ongoing communication and coordination challenges in connecting different scales, sectors, and activities (e.g., local partners vs state agency leadership vs FWS);
- knowledge and awareness of SECAS’s role and function doesn’t permeate deeply within organizations and agencies; and
- there is a lack of understanding about the scope, role, and relevance of SECAS (e.g., it’s not just for wildlife agencies), especially as it relates to other landscape conservation efforts and activities across the region.

These specific SECAS-related challenges are embedded within a broader set of organizational and structural challenges facing fish and wildlife-oriented landscape-scale partnerships more generally, including:

- coping with the loss of LCCs as sub-regional forums for collaboration among NGO, state, and federal agency partners;
- providing continuity and ongoing partnership development in the face of turnover of state and federal agency staff;
- ensuring sustainable, long-term funding;
- incorporating social science as a necessary complement to natural science and spatial analysis;
- stitching together disparate datasets to better inform decision-making; and
- building the capacity of leadership, staff, and partners, especially in the context of understanding and implementing best practices and lessons learned in landscape-scale conservation.

Understanding both these SECAS-specific and more general challenges facing landscape-scale partnerships is helpful as SECAS leadership, staff, and partners consider future directions, needs, and opportunities.

## SECAS FOR THE FUTURE: OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As SECAS looks to the future, three overarching observations stand out. Those observations, and a set of corresponding recommendations, are provided below. The recommendations are intended to initiate a discussion among SECAS leadership, staff, and partners rather than serve as an exact prescription. Based on input from SECAS staff and leadership, actions in **bold** should receive immediate attention, with additional actions and recommendations to follow over time.

### Observation 1: SECAS is Effectively Advancing a Partnership-based Approach to Landscape Scale Conservation

The success of SECAS is notable. It is often held up as the preeminent example of landscape scale conservation among fish and wildlife agencies. This effectiveness is derived in large part from its ability to advance the principles and best practices of landscape conservation in the context of the Southeast region. Notably, SECAS continues to be highly regarded despite the disassembly of the LCCs. While there are many reasons for this success, two elements stand out: (1) there are effective and long-standing relationships among leadership, partners, and staff; and (2) SECAS has delivered added value as both a forum for collaboration and as a resource for conservation decision-making.

## Recommendations to Build on SECAS's Success

**Overarching Recommendation 1:** To continue this success, SECAS leadership should continue investment in relationships and in the people, products, and services that are delivering results. This could include the following:

- ⇒ To continue to improve SECAS's structure and processes:
  - ***Make the Steering Committee a permanent committee and include periodic assessments of SECAS's performance and governance as one of its duties.***
  - *Establish a SECAS position or committee focused explicitly on communications, outreach, and engagement.*
  - *Develop decision-making protocols or similar form of group agreement to guide partnership actions and priorities.*
  
- ⇒ To sustain and enhance staffing and capacity:
  - ***Make the SECAS Coordinator a full-time, permanent position.***
  - *Continue to fund current User Support & Communications Specialist positions to allow the partnership to continue conveying its value to partners and the public. Following the example of WNTI, SECAS could develop a strategy to communicate its value to prospective funders as well, in order to attract private dollars to match public investments Blueprint projects.*
  - *Secure long-term, sustainable investments from lead agencies and partner organizations.*
  
- ⇒ To build and maintain relationships:
  - ***Develop a succession plan and onboarding materials to ensure continuity and momentum in the face of leadership and staff changes.***
  - *Create additional opportunities for shared learning and team building within SECAS meetings, projects, and activities.*
  - *Consider including relationship-focused criteria for any future SECAS Coordinator (e.g. the SECAS Coordinator should have existing and effective relationships across the region with relevant agencies and partners).*

## Observation 2: There is Room to Improve Understanding about SECAS's Origin, Purpose, and Scope

In conversations with SECAS leadership, partners, staff, and advisors, as well as through interviews with SECAS POCs, there remains some confusion about SECAS. In particular, there is not wide-spread understanding of *SECAS roles and functions*. This is important so that people have a better understanding of SECAS's history and evolution; what SECAS does and what it doesn't do; and the roles and responsibilities of partner agencies, nonprofit conservation

organizations, leadership, and staff. This is not to say that there is a lack of thinking or engagement on these issues. Rather, there is an opportunity to expand understanding of the role, relevance, and value of SECAS beyond a relatively small group of dedicated partners.

## Recommendations to Strengthen Communications and Build Understanding

**Overarching Recommendation 2:** SECAS should improve overall coordination and communication while maintaining informal governance. While SECAS is already doing many things well, a couple of minor tweaks in current practice could provide significant benefits to address the confusion around its origin, evolution, purpose, and scope that continues to exist in some corners.

- ⇒ To improve overall coordination and communication:
  - ***Create a SECAS Statement of Shared Purpose that provides the regional vision and goal, governance system, leadership commitments, roles and responsibilities, and focus areas.***
  
- ⇒ To embed communications and outreach considerations into SECAS’s core activities:
  - *Establish a network of communications professionals (as MLI is currently attempting to do) to advise SECAS leadership and staff in developing a more strategic communications, outreach, and engagement strategy.*
  
- ⇒ To foster and advance ongoing learning about SECAS and facilitate progress toward SECAS’s goal:
  - *Establish regular, periodic assessments of the performance and governance of SECAS to allow the partnership to learn, adapt, and evolve in order to sustain value into the future.*

## Observation 3: Too Few People See Themselves in SECAS’s Vision for the Southeast Region

Although SECAS worked with a wide range of partners to develop its vision and goal, SECAS is not yet fully engrained in the day-to-day practices of agencies and conservation partners across the region. This disconnect between SECAS’s vision and goal and the respective mission, goals, and activities of partner agencies and organizations is a barrier to effective coordination of landscape-scale conservation activities. As a result, SECAS is not currently benefitting from the full range of interests and organizations that could be helping the partnership increase its capacity and advance toward its goal.

## Recommendations to Increase Depth and Breadth of Engagement

**Overarching Recommendation 3:** SECAS should increase connections and deepen engagement with other regional forums and partners. Many barriers to engagement can be addressed

through activities that demonstrate how SECAS is helping coordinate, contribute to, and align existing efforts. The following recommendations provide a range of options that could serve to deepen engagement:

- ⇒ To connect to and deepen engagement with other regional forums and partners:
    - ***Conduct additional research (e.g., a “social network analysis” describing existing connections and relationships) to determine how people are currently connected on a range of conservation issues; and***
    - *Explore opportunities to meet regional needs based on the findings of the additional research and analysis.*
  
  - ⇒ To help partners see the benefits of SECAS:
    - *share more information about “use cases” (examples of people and organizations using the Southeast Conservation Blueprint), including best practices, lessons learned, and opportunities for replication; and*
    - *share stories about the relationships and connections that have been formed through SECAS and the benefits they’ve provided.*
  
  - ⇒ To help partners understand their work in the context of SECAS’s goal:
    - *provide guidance to partners on how their programs and activities can contribute to the SECAS goal in measurable ways (e.g., explain what metrics are used to measure progress and what steps partner organizations are taking (or could take) to help advance toward the goal); and*
    - *provide a tracking mechanism to capture partner activities and contributions over time.*
  
  - ⇒ To help agencies and organizations see how SECAS contributes to their work:
    - *offer a series of webinars or similar engagement opportunities to build awareness and understanding of the role, functions, and value of SECAS.*
    - *conduct “in-reach” activities focused on helping more people understand how SECAS’s vision, goal, and activities inform and support their agency or organizational mission and activities; and*
    - *continue to engage with AFWA’s Science & Research Committee (and specifically AFWA President’s Task Force on Shared Science and Landscape Conservation Priorities).*
  
  - ⇒ To improve work across institutional scales and boundaries:
    - *target communications efforts to specifically address challenges and bridge institutional and jurisdictional boundaries, including boundaries between states, former LCC regions, agencies, and resource areas.*
-

- ⇒ To connect to field staff and local partners:
  - *facilitate understanding of how the Southeast Conservation Blueprint informs local conservation actions.*
  
- ⇒ To expand engagement to new partners including additional conservation nonprofit representatives and representatives from other state and federal agencies with an interest in landscape conservation objectives (i.e., beyond fish and wildlife agencies):
  - *engage potential partners around their interest in one or both of SECAS's key functions (as a forum for collaboration and as an information/decision-support hub); and*
  - *explore opportunities to expand existing activities and committee structures to include additional partners.*
  
- ⇒ To build capacity and deepen engagement:
  - *provide training and resources in landscape conservation and collaborative leadership in order to equip and empower people with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to engage in SECAS and to benefit from its tools and resources, specifically the Southeast Conservation Blueprint.*

## Conclusion

As dynamic and evolving entities, landscape-scale partnerships play a unique role in advancing landscape conservation and stewardship objectives. They exist and evolve because the partners need and want them to – not because of mandate or statute. In short, the life and evolution of these partnerships is dependent on their ability to add value to both individual partners and to help them advance shared objectives. As such, the touchstone for success and impact is based on their ability to take up activities and achieve outcomes that none of them could achieve on their own.

This assessment of SECAS follows the partnership’s history and evolution through this perspective of whether and how it is “adding value” across the Southeast. There is substantial evidence that SECAS has proven effective in adding value as both a forum for regional collaboration and as a hub for information and decision-support. At the same time, there are notable opportunities to improve the partnership. These opportunities are found in three main areas: (1) shoring up core elements of SECAS’s structure and processes; (2) improving communications and outreach efforts; and (3) broadening and deepening participation in the partnership. As SECAS continues its evolution, sustained focus and engagement in these areas will compound its ability to add value to partner efforts to achieve conservation outcomes well into the future.

## **APPENDICES**

APPENDIX A – Western Native Trout Initiative Bylaws

APPENDIX B – Western Native Trout Initiative Strategic Plan

APPENDIX C – New England Cottontail Executive Committee Bylaws

APPENDIX D – North Atlantic LCC Cooperative Structure and Governance Handout

APPENDIX E – Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Resolution

APPENDIX F – Midwest Landscape Initiative Charter

APPENDIX G – Midwest Landscape Initiative Priority Setting Framework

APPENDIX H – Midwest Landscape Initiative Wind Working Group Action Plan

## BYLAWS OF THE Western Native Trout Initiative Steering Committee

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### Article I. NAME

**SECTION 1.** The name of the Steering Committee shall be the Western Native Trout Initiative Steering Committee.

### Article II. PURPOSE

**SECTION 1.** The Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI) is a working initiative of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and is recognized by the National Fish Habitat Board as a National Fish Habitat Partnership under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP). The WNTI Steering Committee is a self-directed group of Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) state, federal agency, tribal, Canadian government representatives and private partners interested in achieving the Initiative's mission of conserving, protecting and enhancing the status of western native trout. The Steering Committee operates under the auspices of the WAFWA Inland and Marine Fisheries Committee (IMFC). The Steering Committee serves as the guiding work group for the Initiative, and has oversight responsibility for all WNTI activities. The activities of the Steering Committee directly support the WNTI Strategic Plan, which identifies the planning, implementation, and evaluation Goals and Objectives for WNTI.

### Article III. LOCATION

**SECTION 1.** The principal office of the Initiative at which the general business of the Steering Committee will be transacted and where the records of the Steering Committee will be kept will be the office of the WNTI Coordinator.

### Article IV. STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**SECTION 1.** Procedure for Membership. The WNTI Steering Committee will solicit recommendations for Steering Committee members from the participating WAFWA-member states and participating federal, Canadian, Tribal and conservation organizations. The Steering Committee will review those recommendations and will submit proposed members to the WAFWA IMFC Chair for IMFC approval. Steering committee members should represent the highest level of their organization as feasible. This representation should be at the administrative level, so that Steering Committee members have some authority to commit WNTI financial resources, and recommend the use of respective Agency staff resources, or other types of organizational support. Modifications to membership will be approved by the WAFWA IMFC at their annual summer meeting as needed.

**SECTION 2.** Steering Committee structure. The WNTI Steering Committee will not exceed 18 Members. This will include representation as follows:

- 12 - WAFWA State Members– One per the twelve participating state agency members of WNTI
- 3 - Federal – selected from WAFWA participating federal agencies (FWS, FS, BLM)
- 1 - Conservation organization representative
- 1 - Tribal Nation or organizational representative
- 1 - Canadian Provincial representative

The Steering Committee will be staffed by the WNTI Coordinator, whose responsibilities are identified in Article VI, SECTION 5

**SECTION 3.** *Election of Chair and Vice Chair and their Terms of Office.* The position of Chair and Vice Chair shall be recommended to the WAFWA IMFC through an election by the Steering Committee of individuals who are WAFWA member state representatives. The Chair and Vice-Chair will not have a set length of term, but the Steering Committee will review the continuance of the Chair and Vice Chair in their positions at two-year intervals. If the Chair resigns from the position, the Vice-Chair will automatically fill the Chair position with approval from a 2/3 majority of the Steering Committee. In the event that the Vice Chair is unable or unwilling to take the position of Chair, the Steering Committee shall select a new Chair for recommendation to the WAFWA IMFC. If the Vice Chair resigns from the position, the Steering Committee shall select a new Vice-Chair for recommendation to the WAFWA IMFC. The Steering Committee, if it so chooses, may remove the Chair or Vice-Chair from the positions through a motion that receives a 2/3 majority approval.

**SECTION 4.** *Steering Committee Membership Expectations.* Steering Committee members remain seated on the Steering Committee until replaced. A Steering Committee member's (or proxy) failure to attend three consecutive Steering Committee meetings, or teleconferences, may result in the member being replaced by a new member identified through the process described in Article IV, SECTION 1.

## **Article V. MEETING OF MEMBERS**

**SECTION 1.** *Face-to-Face Meetings.* Two face-to-face meetings of the Steering Committee members will be held each year on dates set by the Steering Committee. One meeting will coincide with the WAFWA annual summer meeting. The second meeting will be at a time and place determined by the Steering Committee.

**SECTION 2.** *Teleconference Meetings.* Teleconference meetings will typically be scheduled on a monthly basis. Business conducted by the Steering Committee by teleconference will carry the same authority as business conducted in person at Face-to-Face meetings.

**SECTION 3.** *Special Meetings.* Special meetings of the members may be called by the Chair or Vice-Chair who shall have stated in writing to the Steering Committee members the purpose of such a meeting.

**SECTION 4.** Proxies. In the event that a Steering Committee member is unable to attend a meeting or conference call, they must designate a proxy via letter, email or fax to the Chair in advance of the meeting in order to have representation in their absence.

**SECTION 5.** Quorum. At meetings of the Steering Committee, a simple majority (9 members) shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

**SECTION 6.** Meeting Management. Each Steering Committee meeting will have an agenda developed by the WNTI Coordinator in consultation with the Chair and Steering Committee. Steering Committee meetings will be led by the Chair or, in the absence of the Chair, the Vice Chair, and will follow Roberts's Rules of Order.

**SECTION 7.** Voting. The Steering Committee will attempt to conduct business by consensus. In the event that the Steering Committee is unable to reach consensus on a decision, the Chair may decide to ask for a vote of the members. Each member shall be entitled to one (1) vote on each matter submitted for a vote of the members. For Steering Committee actions that require a vote, a quorum as described in Section 5 will be required. All Steering Committee members have the right to vote on motions, and Steering Committee members may designate proxies to vote in their absence as specified in Section 4. A simple majority of voting members voting in favor of a motion will carry the motion. The Chair may direct that all or some business and policy matters be addressed via mail or electronic mail ballot, in which case the same voting procedures apply.

**SECTION 8.** Executive Sessions. The Steering Committee meetings shall be open to the public, provided, however, that the Steering Committee may meet in executive sessions closed to the public to discuss personnel, legal matters, or any other matter of a private or necessarily confidential nature.

## Article VI. BUSINESS OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE

**SECTION 1.** Actions. The WNTI Steering Committee will promote and facilitate the actions described in the strategic plan. These include, but are not limited to:

- Supporting the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of western native trout conservation actions at rangewide, regional and local scales;
- Promoting planning efforts among partners and stakeholders;
- Rank, Support and recommend WNTI projects for funding;
- Providing direction and input to any WNTI special work groups, and creating WNTI ad-hoc task groups as needed;
- Supporting the partnerships and projects of the WNTI with financial and/or staff resources as available per agreement of the WAFWA directors;
- Participating in marketing efforts/information campaigns to garner additional resources to meet WNTI objectives (within agency/organization guidelines);
- Reporting to partners and stakeholders on the status and accomplishments of the Western Native Trout Initiative.

**SECTION 2.** Authority. The WNTI Steering Committee shall operate as a function of, and report to the WAFWA Inland and Marine Fisheries Committee, with guidance from the WAFWA Directors. The Steering Committee, through the WNTI Coordinator, will report on WNTI activities and progress to the WAFWA Directors at their regularly scheduled meetings.

**SECTION 3.** Other committees. The Steering Committee shall have the authority to form specific sub-committees within the Steering Committee or WNTI partners and participants as needed to assist in the implementation and operation of the WNTI and the accomplishment of actions listed in Section 1 of this article. Sub-committees will report to the Steering Committee as directed.

**SECTION 4.** Partners Council. The Steering Committee shall have the authority to invite entities who wish to participate in WNTI to form a Partners Council to provide assistance in implementing the WNTI mission, vision, goal, objectives and strategic actions. The Steering Committee will work with potential partners to develop a charter for a Partners Council that would provide purpose, direction and expected responsibilities for participants in the Council.

**SECTION 5.** Contract with WNTI Coordinator. The Steering Committee on an annual basis will as necessary recommend a contract for the services of a WNTI Coordinator to the Chair of the WAFWA Inland and Marine Fisheries Committee for WAFWA Directors approval. This contract will identify the WNTI Coordinator responsibilities, including but not limited to providing primary staff support to the Steering Committee, working with the Chair on Steering Committee business, disseminating information, coordinating and facilitating Steering Committee activities, coordinating outreach activities, and pursuing funding and grant opportunities that focus on WNTI objectives. The Steering Committee shall approve the WNTI Coordinators' annual and quarterly work plans during the contract year.

## Article VII. AMENDMENTS

**SECTION 1.** Amendments. After sixty (60) days' written notice to the members, the Steering Committee may amend these Bylaws at any meeting of the Steering Committee. Any number of amendments or an entire revision of the Bylaws may be submitted by members and/or the WNTI Coordinator, and voted upon at a single meeting of the Steering Committee. Bylaw amendments will be adopted at such a meeting upon receiving a 2/3 majority yes vote from the Steering Committee voting on each amendment.

## Article VIII. DISSOLUTION

**SECTION 1.** Dissolution. In the event of the dissolution of the Western Native Trout Initiative, the Steering Committee will cease to exist.

## **THE WESTERN NATIVE TROUT INITIATIVE PLAN FOR STRATEGIC ACTIONS November 2016**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In January 2008, after an intensive scoping and development process, the Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI) achieved WAFWA Directors' approval of its Plan for Strategic Actions and in February 2008 was approved as a National Fish Habitat Partnership. In 2010, the Plan for Strategic Actions was modified to address the inclusion of core conservation populations of six additional native salmonids within their historic ranges (Arctic Char, Arctic Grayling, Dolly Varden, freshwater Rainbow trout sub-species, freshwater Kokanee and Lake Trout). The WNTI Steering Committee reviewed the Plan for Strategic Actions at its July 2015 meeting, and subsequently updated the plan to document progress made since 2008 and to set goals for the next 5-10 years.

*Note: "Support" in the context of this strategic plan means to support an activity philosophically, administratively, and by seeking funding.*

### **GOALS, OBJECTIVES, and KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS**

One key feature of WNTI's approach is the reliance on existing and ongoing native trout efforts across the West and national partnership through the National Fish Habitat Action Plan. WNTI's strategic goals, objectives and actions demonstrate the strength of the approach – increased coordination, action, and accountability. These strategies represent what will be done to conserve, protect and enhance western native trout.

#### **Goal 1 – Protect, restore and enhance western native trout populations and measure success in improving the status of western native trout**

##### **Objectives:**

##### **A. Continue to identify and characterize conservation populations through 2020 and monitor populations already assessed. Revisit on a five year basis.**

1. Develop common characterization of populations and habitats by completing comprehensive, standardized species assessments utilizing GIS-based protocols, such as the Inland Cutthroat Trout Protocol (ICP) (May, et al. 2005) or other similar methodologies. Update these no less than every five years. Encourage sub-species conservation teams that have not adopted IMP to adopt it or to use other developed protocols that can be adapted to a common database.
2. Annually gather information, establish baselines, and complete overall monitoring of species status.

3. Utilize the species conservation teams as needed to periodically update WNTI priorities, to serve as a forum to focus on particular species problems or needs, and/or recommend actions to the WNTI Steering Committee for consideration and funding.

**B. Support assessment and monitoring data to protect, restore or enhance important native trout populations through focused actions. Tie this work to ongoing federal status review processes where possible.**

1. Use standard population manipulations to protect, restore or enhance native trout. Maintain and expand genetically pure populations, as well as pure populations with distinct migratory life-history requirements.
2. Protect the best core conservation areas and maintain genetic integrity of populations from degradation.
3. Utilize the species conservation teams to recommend and assist in prioritization of projects for WNTI directed funding.
4. Annually conduct research on habitats, population distribution, genetics, and species ecology to increase knowledge of native trout life stage requirements and to evaluate the success of conservation actions.
5. Work with neighboring NFHP partnerships to coordinate data collection resources and share fish population information to help identify key watersheds that may be beneficial to multiple partnerships.

**C. Integrate the use of non-native salmonids with conservation needs of western native trout species in a manner that recognizes the biological, cultural and economic importance of each.**

1. Support, encourage and facilitate definition and maintenance of core conservation areas for native trout to avoid conflicts between native trout conservation and non-native trout species management and implementation of non-native salmonid removal from habitats within core conservation areas.
2. Facilitate and promote the establishment and use of native trout populations for recreational purposes in conjunction with or as a replacement for non-native salmonid fisheries.

**D. Support development of a western native trout database with common data fields and data descriptions.**

1. In cooperation with the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, use scientifically rigorous and standardized methodology to monitor and report changes in the status of native trout populations.
2. Share data on western native trout populations (and habitats) within guidelines established by a science and data sub-committee.
3. Work with the NFHP Science and Data team to incorporate the national data needs into WNTI's data collection and analysis efforts to meet WNTI's responsibilities as a national partnership.
4. Work with overlapping NFHP partnerships to develop communications between data teams to ensure that data collections meet NFHP expectations.
5. Work with NFHP and WAFWA to seek additional long-term funding for native trout data collection and population management.

Objectives A to D address the underlying concerns for maintaining the integrity – both physical and genetic – of native trout populations at a watershed level. Continual identification and characterization of watersheds and populations of western native trout are major objectives of the Western Native Trout Initiative. Monitoring of populations is required to effectively measure the impact and success of conservation actions. Developing a common language for describing the status of species will prioritize communication needs and describe progress at all levels of the initiative.

**Benefits:**

The effective characterization of native trout populations will serve as the basis for the various conservation and recovery teams to focus attention on specific actions that will contribute to improving the status of the species. Identification of key watersheds in each species range will provide opportunities for local partners to become involved in species conservation. Sharing data and updating range-wide databases with data from a well-designed field monitoring program will allow for monitoring of native trout status over time. Maintenance and expansion of the recreational angling opportunities for native trout will maintain and increase public support for the actions of WNTI.

**Goal 2 – Ensure protection and enhancement of intact watersheds, and enhancement or restoration of habitats that have been impacted by human activities or catastrophic natural events.**

**Objectives:**

**A. Support the use of habitat assessment data to identify, protect, restore or enhance existing native trout strongholds.**

1. Continue to characterize key western native trout habitats and watersheds for species not already characterized using GIS-based protocols (i.e. ICP) or similar techniques.
2. Support habitat actions at the local and species-levels that protect, restore or enhance core conservation populations and the life history and migratory needs of the species.
3. Support conservation strategies of species teams to enhance degraded watersheds for western native trout while protecting and maintaining current core conservation populations and high-value watersheds.
4. Secure and enhance watershed conditions through standard habitat manipulations (e.g., barrier placement or removal, in-stream structure, flow enhancement, habitat connectivity).
5. Implement, evaluate, and monitor best management practices that include but are not limited to: modifying grazing practices, fencing riparian areas, closing and obliterating roads in the riparian areas, and ameliorating road, timber and mining disturbances.
6. Restore and enhance water flow, water quality, natural sediment regimes, and physical integrity of channels where feasible by replacement of culverts to allow fish passage (where passage is desirable). Screen water diversions to prevent entrainment, modify diversions to allow fish passage, and restore and improve altered channel and riparian habitat and flow conditions.

**B. Encourage new research on native trout related to climate change, energy development, invasive species, and human encroachment or development in native trout habitats.**

1. Support new research on impacts of new and developing habitat concerns such as climate change, habitat loss from energy development and population growth and increased catastrophic habitat losses from fires, etc.

**C. Support local and regional recommendations for western native trout habitat restoration and enhancement actions and seek additional funding from WNTI partners.**

1. Maintain WNTI's status as a recognized partner under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.
2. Coordinate with neighboring fish habitat partnerships to identify key watersheds where multiple species could benefit from mutual habitat conservation (protect, restore or enhance) actions.
3. Involve the WNTI species conservation teams through their respective US Fish and Wildlife Service regions to recommend and prioritize watersheds for project funding that will provide the best opportunities for native trout conservation and enhancement.
4. Modify habitat priorities based on best available science, the results of the 2015 National Fish Habitat Assessment, and in coordination with neighboring national fish habitat partnerships.

Objectives A to C are intended to address the underlying challenges of native trout habitat at a watershed level. A combination of protecting current habitat strongholds and rehabilitating potential or degraded habitats through a variety of means is necessary. Successful accomplishment will require agencies, organizations, industry, and private individuals working together to implement actions on a local level, guided by the overall approach of the WNTI Strategic Plan. Healthy watersheds are the keystone for WNTI success.

**Benefits:**

Healthy watersheds constitute the foundation for improving and protecting native trout populations. Prioritized habitat actions will address habitat needs for life stages and life forms of native trout. Specific improvement projects at a local level energize partners to participate in the shared objectives of WNTI.

**Goal 3 – Develop collaborative approaches and partnerships among agencies and stakeholders that emphasize cooperation and shared effort, and increase funding to implement high-priority projects for the protection, restoration or enhancement of western native trout.**

**Objectives:**

**A. Continue to support and assist in the completion of conservation agreements or recovery plans for key western native trout based on collaborative development and publication of realistic conservation strategies with priorities at the local and regional level.**

1. Stimulate and inspire – through funding and meeting frameworks – the initiation of planning efforts for those native trout species that do not currently have a multi-state, multi-agency conservation plan or strategy.
2. Encourage periodic updates of the conservation agreements and strategies among states, agencies and partners that revise and refine the priorities for action to protect, restore, or enhance native trout populations.
3. Support actions and projects consistent with action plans and conservation recovery plans for each species to prevent federal listings.

**B. Foster and support a diverse array of western native trout conservation actions based on public, private, and conservation organization partnerships. These efforts should be formed around distinct watersheds, species, or geographic areas, based on conservation agreements and strategies.**

1. Maintain a steering committee in accordance with WNTI Bylaws . Use the WNTI operational structure to seek and promote public/private partnerships for on-the-ground actions.
2. Develop a prospectus to inspire new partners to contribute financially to western native trout actions.

**C. Promote and foster new partnerships at all levels to increase funding and public support for identified needs.**

1. Identify and communicate the need for funds with potential public/private conservation partners to encourage involvement in the Western Native Trout Initiative. This will broaden the scope of support for improving the status of the native trout species.
2. Develop a WNTI Partners Council or Friends Group and invite entities to propose projects, provide financial assistance, and share ideas for improving the status of western native trout.

3. Work with current funding partners – states, federal agencies, the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, Trout Unlimited, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and others – to focus on implementing on-the-ground improvement actions.
4. Utilize venues such as the Wild Trout Symposium, local AFS Chapter meetings, and the Western Division American Fisheries Society annual meeting as forums to re-energize local support for native trout conservation and provide ideas for future direction through discussion of large-scale issues that impact western native trout (i.e. continued human population growth, impacts from a warming climate and increased emphasis on extractive energy development, mining and increased water use).

**D. Develop a long-term funding approach and Plan to secure funding from NFHP and alternative sources to fund both habitat and non-habitat WNTI Projects.**

1. Continue to work with outside funding organizations such as Trout Unlimited, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, etc. to promote availability of non-NFHP funds for western native trout conservation projects that include fish population data collection, renovation and management actions.
2. Continue to meet NFHP responsibilities to ensure WNTI receives NFHP funds for conservation projects.

Objectives A to D are designed to foster and support a diverse array of western native trout conservation actions based on public, private, tribal, and private partnerships. These efforts can be formed around distinct watersheds, species, or geographic areas. Collaborative development and dissemination of realistic conservation strategies at the local and regional level has been cited as a critical component to jump-start the conservation of a particular species. Improving the status of western native trout and providing additional recreational opportunities will require the involvement of partners at all levels. Support for future funding and on-the-ground projects absolutely requires partnerships.

**Benefits:**

One of the key features of WNTI's strategy is the reliance on the existing strengths of ongoing efforts for native trout in the West. Cooperative development, publication and update of conservation strategies with priorities at the local and regional level are critical components to unite the efforts for improving the status native trout. Increasing local efforts and providing additional recreational opportunities will require the involvement of partners at all levels. Support for future funding and on-the-ground projects absolutely requires partnerships and joint ventures that build upon existing local and regional efforts. In order to effectively utilize scientific data, and make good management decisions, there must be effective sharing of information between and among agencies and their partners.

**Goal 4 – Develop and implement effective communication, education and outreach programs as a tool to increase public awareness and encourage partnerships that benefit western native trout.**

**Objectives:**

**A. Complete the communications and outreach plan for WNTI by December 2016.**

1. Work with WNTI NGO partners and the National Fish Habitat Action Plan communications director to increase effectiveness of communications to a variety of media and other potential partners.

**B. Annually develop communication products for WNTI partners, anglers and others.**

1. Engage partners, the fish conservation community, and other western native trout interests to initiate communication, to understand their communication and outreach needs, and to determine the most effective means of information dissemination.
2. Identify elements of success in other campaigns that have promoted recreational use of western nonnative trout and incorporate successful elements into WNTI communications and outreach..
3. One product per year will be developed and made available to WNTI partners to promote public education and support for western native trout conservation.

**C. Use the WNTI website as a comprehensive source of information on western native trout species.**

1. Maintain the WNTI website as a comprehensive source of information on all 21 western native trout species and include information on their status, biology, distribution, conservation needs and impediments, and conservation actions. Include links to official recovery plans, conservation strategies and conservation agreements and action plans. Develop the website as a repository for WNTI-related planning, news releases, informational brochures and other related items.
2. Pursue establishment of a western wide native trout “Challenge” program by 2020.
3. Develop enhanced communication to anglers about angling opportunities in existing programs such as the Wyoming Cutt-Slam, California Heritage Trout Challenge, Nevada Native Fish Slam, Utah Cutthroat Slam, and Arizona’s Trout Challenge and the benefits of conservation and management of western native trout to recreational angling opportunities.
4. Maintain links on the WNTI website to all western states and partners that promote and educate WNTI visitors about special angling programs for western native trout.
5. Serve as a clearinghouse and source of information about how to obtain funding for native trout projects.
6. Develop and promote western native trout educational opportunities through web links to the various state, Tribal and NGO organizations that have native trout conservation and programs with educational materials about western native trout for use in schools and community-based events.

Objectives A to C and related actions will guide more consistent communications and coordination among WNTI, the fish conservation community, and groups that can play roles in education and outreach such as school teachers, universities and recreation and tourism interests. There is a need to develop, implement, and manage comprehensive communication and outreach efforts to engage, inform, and inspire the public and agency program managers about conservation and management of western native trout. A more engaged citizenry can lead to development of strong partnerships between states and federal agencies, conservation organizations, and citizens.

**Benefits:**

It is essential to keep local governments, tribes, landowners and public land managers informed about native trout conservation and techniques that can be used to achieve conservation goals. This will ensure more routine and consistent communication and coordination between WNTI and the fish conservation community. It also will generate public and private funding and support for WNTI and fish habitat conservation, and support for continued recreational opportunities for western state anglers.

## WNTI Accomplishment Reporting

### Objectives:

- A. Update the WNTI strategic plan every ten years and the 2007 Species Status review *Western Native Trout Status, Concerns and Opportunities A Special Report of the Western Native Trout Initiative* and individual species Status Reports every five years to provide new recommendations for conservation actions.**
- B. Complete performance evaluations as required by NFHP to assess the impact of WNTI accomplishments and to maintain the Initiative's NFHP status.**
- C. Develop and maintain a catalog of local, state, and range-wide success stories that can be shared among groups and disseminated to the public.**
- D. Update the species project lists on the WNTI website and post completion reports as they become available each year.**
- E. Develop progress and accomplishment reporting guidelines and annual reports for WAFWA, WNTI Partners, the NFHP Board, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, WNTI partners, the media, and other interested parties.**

Objectives A to E will keep WNTI and WNTI-related planning and assessment up to date and help provide useful information to those seeking to improve WNTI's funding base. Revisions and regular updates of the strategic plan and species assessment report will describe changes in the overall status of western native trout.

### Summary of common obstacles, concerns, and threats to viability of western native trout that are addressed in the WNTI strategic plan

Not unexpectedly, the obstacles and threats to improving the status and protecting populations of western native trout are fairly similar across the wide geographic range considered. Opportunities and potential actions for achieving the WNTI objectives are likewise relatively similar across geographic areas, but vary in design and emphasis to reflect the specific needs of each taxon (see Table 1 on next page). Maintaining and increasing the geographical distribution of healthy populations of all western native trout is basic to improving their status. Concerns common to all species assessments include habitat loss and degradation and impacts of non-native salmonids. Other concerns include sustaining current genetic diversity, maintaining and using protective land use regulations, buffering against climate change, improving conservation planning and cooperation among agencies, and providing additional information to the public. Other obstacles and concerns frequently identified, but not common to all species, include impacts of invasive and aquatic nuisance species, data shortfalls, and energy development. Species-specific concerns, obstacles and opportunities for future projects are detailed in individual native trout assessments. These status reports are available on the Western Native Trout Initiative website, [westernnativetrout.org](http://westernnativetrout.org).

**Table 1. Relative level of concern of obstacles preventing improvement in status**

| Concerns:<br>3 = high<br>2 = medium<br>1 = low | Health of populations<br>(genetically, physically) | Degraded or isolated habitats | Available comprehensive range-<br>wide conservation plans | Data shortfalls | Lack of public awareness of<br>species needs | Aquatic nuisance species or<br>disease | Non-native species impacts | Climate Change |
|--|--|-------------------------------|---|-----------------|--|--|----------------------------|----------------|
| Alaskan Kokanee                                | 2  | 2                             | 3   | 2               | 2  | 2                                      | 2                          | 2              |
| Alaskan Lake trout                             | 1  | 1                             | 1   | 2               | 2  | 1                                      | 1                          | 1              |
| Alaskan Rainbow trout                          | 1  | 1                             | 1   | 2               | 2  | 1                                      | 1                          | 2              |
| Apache Trout                                   | 2  | 3                             | 1   | 1               | 1  | 1                                      | 2                          | 3              |
| Arctic Char                                    | 1  | 1                             | 2   | 2               | 2  | 1                                      | 2                          | 2              |
| Arctic Grayling                                | 1  | 1                             | 1   | 3               | 2  | 1                                      | 1                          | 1              |
| Bonneville Cutthroat Trout                     | 1  | 3                             | 1   | 1               | 2  | 2                                      | 3                          | 2              |
| Bull Trout                                     | 2  | 3                             | 2   | 2               | 2  | 1                                      | 2                          | 3              |
| California Golden Trout                        | 3  | 2                             | 1   | 1               | 2  | 1                                      | 3                          | 3              |
| Coastal Cutthroat Trout                        | 2  | 2                             | 2   | 2               | 2  | 1                                      | 2                          | 1              |
| Colorado River Cutthroat Trout                 | 2  | 2                             | 1   | 1               | 1  | 2                                      | 3                          | 2              |
| Dolly Varden                                   | 1  | 1                             | 3   | 2               | 2  | 1                                      | 1                          | 1              |
| Gila Trout                                     | 2  | 3                             | 1   | 1               | 2  | 1                                      | 2                          | 3              |
| Greenback Cutthroat Trout                      | 3  | 2                             | 3   | 1               | 2  | 1                                      | 3                          | 2              |
| Lahontan Cutthroat Trout                       | 2  | 3                             | 2   | 2               | 2  | 1                                      | 3                          | 3              |
| Little Kern Golden Trout                       | 3  | 2                             | 3   | 1               | 2  | 1                                      | 2                          | 3              |
| Paiute Cutthroat Trout                         | 2  | 3                             | 1   | 1               | 2  | 1                                      | 3                          | 3              |
| Redband Trout                                  | 1  | 2                             | 1   | 2               | 1  | 1                                      | 2                          | 3              |
| Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout                     | 2  | 2                             | 1   | 1               | 1  | 2                                      | 2                          | 2              |
| Westslope Cutthroat Trout                      | 2  | 2                             | 2   | 2               | 2  | 1                                      | 3                          | 3              |
| Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout                    | 2  | 2                             | 1   | 2               | 2  | 2                                      | 3                          | 1              |

# BYLAWS

## NEW ENGLAND COTTONTAIL

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Revised and Approved  
November 20, 2012

#### I. Mission

To promote recovery, restoration, and conservation of New England Cottontail (*Sylvilagus transitionalis*) and their associated habitats so that listing is not necessary.

#### II. Purpose

- a. Provide for cooperation among the participating State and federal land, conservation, wildlife management and science agencies in the conservation and management of New England Cottontail
- b. Provide for coordination among participating State and federal land, conservation, wildlife management and science agencies in assessing and setting priority actions for habitat management, habitat protection, research, communication, and accomplishment tracking.

#### III. Board of Directors

- a. The Board of Directors shall serve without pay and shall consist of up to nine (9) members.
- b. The Board shall be composed of:
  - i. The Director of each NEAFWA member agency, or their designee, from each state within the range of New England Cottontail defined to include New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine.
  - ii. The Regional Director, or their designee, from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region 5.
  - iii. The Chief, or their designee, from the U. S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service.
  - iv. One representative from a non-profit conservation organization to serve in ex-officio status as the overall program coordinator at the discretion of the Board.

#### IV. Officers

- a. The Officers of the Board of Directors shall consist of a Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary and shall be nominated by the Board and elected by a majority of Board members.
  - i. The Chair shall be a Board member representing a state fish and wildlife agency.
  - ii. The Vice Chair shall be a Board member representing a federal agency.
  - iii. The Secretary shall be a member of the Board of Directors.
- b. Elected Officers shall serve a term of two years.
- c. Duties of Officers shall include:
  - i. The Chair shall preside over all Board meetings, appoint committee members and perform other duties as associated with the office.
  - ii. The Vice Chair shall assume the duties of the Chair in the event of the Chair's absence.
  - iii. The Secretary shall be responsible for the minutes of the Board, keep all approved minutes in a minutes book, and send out copies of minutes to all.

- V. **Committees**
  - a. The Board may appoint standing and ad hoc committees as needed.
  
- VI. **Meetings**
  - a. Meetings shall be held at any time when called for by the Chair or by a majority of Board members
  - b. Meetings shall be held at least once per Fiscal Year or as frequently as necessary to facilitate Board business and advance conservation of the New England Cottontail.
  - c. Agendas shall be provided in advance of scheduled meetings.
  
- VII. **Voting**
  - a. Quorum
    - i. Four (4) State members and one (1) Federal Board members constitutes a quorum
    - ii. In absence of a quorum, no formal action shall be taken except to adjourn the meeting to a subsequent date.
  - b. Passage of a motion requires a simple majority of Members present.
  - c. State or federal Board members shall at their discretion, designate a proxy for their vote. Proxies shall be identified in advance to the Chair.
  
- VIII. **Conflict of Interest**
  - a. Any member of the Board who has a financial, personal, or official interest in, or conflict with any matter pending before the Board, of such nature that it prevents or may prevent that member from acting on the matter in an impartial manner, will offer to the Board to voluntarily excuse him/herself and will refrain from discussion and voting on said item.
  
- IX. **Fiscal Year**
  - a. The fiscal year of the Board shall be October 1 to September 30.
  
- X. **Amendments**
  - a. These by-laws may be amended by a two-thirds vote of Board members present at any meeting, provided a quorum is present and provided a copy of the proposed amendment(s) are provided to each Board member at least fifteen (15) days in advance of said meeting.

## **North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative Structure and Governance**

The North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC) is part of a national network of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs). LCCs are applied conservation science partnerships among federal agencies, states, tribes, NGOs, universities and other entities within a geographic area that inform resource management decisions to address national and regional scale stressors, including climate change, in an integrated fashion across landscapes. LCCs provide scientific and technical support for landscape-scale conservation in an adaptive management framework by:

- supporting biological planning and conservation design,
- prioritizing and coordinating applied research that informs conservation delivery,
- supporting the design of inventory and monitoring programs, and
- supporting the development of scientific analysis that informs and empowers land managers to link actions at project sites to outcomes on broader scales.

The North Atlantic LCC is a broad-based partnership of organizations focused on the conservation of fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats within the North Atlantic LCC area. The North Atlantic LCC provides a forum for continuous exchange and feedback among partner organizations, scientists and fish, wildlife and habitat managers. The North Atlantic LCC will aggregate and consolidate existing information and coordinate research activities to meet common science needs identified across partner organizations, with particular attention to how climate change will impact fish and wildlife conservation. Further details on the purpose, goals and description of the North Atlantic LCC are available in the North Atlantic LCC Development and Operations Plan<sup>a</sup>, and more general information on the intended form and function of LCCs is available in the LCC Information Bulletin #1<sup>b</sup>.

The North Atlantic LCC governance is intended to facilitate coordination and feedback between landscape-level science and conservation delivery, collaboration and communication among partner organizations (including existing partnerships such as joint ventures and fish habitat partnerships) and coordination with entities adjacent to the LCC (including adjacent LCCs and other partnerships sharing common species and conservation issues).

### **Overall Structure**

The North Atlantic LCC will initially function through a Steering Committee and Task Groups appointed by the Steering Committee to take on specific tasks or address specific issues. The initial structure and function of the North Atlantic LCC as described herein is a starting point for operation of the partnership but is intended to change and evolve as the partnership develops. The NALCC structure will be reviewed after the first year of operation to evaluate whether additional tiers or a different structure would be beneficial (e.g., a committee to assist with operational oversight or a Partnership-At-Large to provide opportunities for a broader set of partners to participate). Any changes to the North Atlantic LCC structure will be approved by the Steering Committee.

The initial emphasis of the Steering Committee is to quickly create a functioning North Atlantic LCC. In light of this, to encourage operational efficiency the composition of the Steering Committee outlined in the following section is relatively lean. However, one of the Steering Committee's first responsibilities will be to identify other organizations that should be invited to serve on the Steering Committee. Interested organizations not represented on the Steering Committee are encouraged to communicate their views to Steering Committee members; there also will be opportunities to serve on North Atlantic LCC task groups.

### ***Steering Committee***

#### *Membership and Organization*

1. North Atlantic LCC Steering Committee will consist of representatives from organizations that collectively have the following characteristics, especially at a regional level:
  - jurisdictional responsibility for natural resource management
  - significant capacity for furthering the purpose of the North Atlantic LCC
  - actively engaged in addressing significant natural resource management issues
  - provide direct links and communication with other conservation organizations or land managers involved in conservation delivery, particularly those operating at local levels

The ultimate composition of the Steering Committee is intended to include representatives from state and provincial agencies, federal agencies, tribes, NGOs, and the academic community.

2. Initial composition of the North Atlantic LCC Steering Committee will include one representative from each of the following partner organizations that accepts an invitation to participate at the Steering Committee level; if all organizations accept the invitation, the Steering Committee would initially be composed of 33 voting members and 3 non-voting members:
  - A Natural Resource Management Agency from each State within the boundaries of the North Atlantic LCC and the District of Columbia that agrees to coordinate with and represent other natural resource state agencies including wildlife, fisheries and marine interests; the following agencies were initially identified :
    - Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
    - New Hampshire Fish and Game Department
    - Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife
    - Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife
    - Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife
    - Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection
    - New York Department of Environmental Conservation
    - New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife
    - Pennsylvania Game Commission
    - Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
    - Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife

## Handout 5

- Maryland Department of Natural Resources
- Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
- District of Columbia Fisheries and Wildlife Division
  
- Non-governmental Organizations:
  - Ducks Unlimited
  - Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences
  - National Wildlife Federation
  - The Nature Conservancy
  - National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
  - Trust for Public Lands
  - Wildlife Management Institute
  
- Native American Tribes:
  - The following recognized tribes were invited to participate individually: Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, Mohegan Tribe of Indians of Connecticut, Aroostook Band of Micmacs, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, Passamaquoddy Tribe - Indian Township Reservation, Passamaquoddy Tribe - Pleasant Point Reservation, Penobscot Indian Nation, Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah), Shinnecock Indian Nation, Narragansett Indian Tribe. The United South and Eastern Tribes Natural Resources Committee nominated Greg Soder (Narragansett Indian Tribe) to serve as an official member on the North Atlantic LCC steering committee to represent those USET-membered Tribes that fall within the LCC's geographic boundary regarding activities within the North Atlantic LCC.
  
- U.S. Federal Agencies:
  - Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation, and Enforcement
  - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
  - U.S. Geological Survey
  - National Park Service
  - USDA Forest Service
  - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
  - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
  
- Canadian Partners:
  - Initially represented by Canadian Wildlife Service, Atlantic Region
  
- DOI Climate Science Center (once established in the Northeast)
  
- Neighboring Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (non-voting members):
  - South Atlantic LCC
  - Appalachian LCC
  - Great Lakes LCC

3. Representatives sitting on the Steering Committee should represent the highest level of their organization as feasible, preferably at the administrative level so as to have some authority to commit financial, staff or other organizational resources. They should also be sufficiently knowledgeable about landscape-scale conservation and climate change to make informed decisions regarding North Atlantic LCC recommendations on priority projects and activities (see #4 under *Responsibilities* below).
4. New seats on the Steering Committee may be created by invitation from the Steering Committee or by petition from partner organizations wishing to participate on the Steering Committee. Removal of Steering Committee seats is determined by the Steering Committee
5. Activities of the Steering Committee will be led by an elected Chair and Vice Chair, each of which is elected for a two-year term. At the end of a term, the Vice Chair will succeed the Chair, and a new Vice Chair elected.
6. The Steering Committee will schedule at least two meetings per year. Additional meetings may be called by the Chair, and additional Steering Committee business will be conducted by e-mail, teleconference and web conference. If a Steering Committee member is unable to attend a meeting or teleconference, he/she should delegate an individual from their organization with full decision-making authority to represent them.
7. For actions that require Steering Committee approval, decisions will be made by majority vote of Steering Committee members, with a quorum (majority of members) required for the vote to proceed.
8. All partners are welcome to attend Steering Committee meetings and opportunity will be provided for comment during Steering Committee deliberations.

### *Responsibilities*

The Steering Committee of the North Atlantic LCC has the following collective responsibilities:

1. Serve as the North Atlantic LCC's executive body for decision making, providing guidance on North Atlantic LCC policy and actively engaging in development of the North Atlantic LCC's operational and strategic plans.
2. Evaluate which additional organizations should be invited to participate in the Steering Committee, and communicate with and receive input from organizations not represented on the Steering Committee regarding science needs and capacity for science delivery.
3. Promote cooperation, coordination, consolidation of information and collaboration among partner organizations to support the goals and objectives of the North Atlantic LCC.

4. Determine the coordination, planning and science activities that the North Atlantic LCC will undertake. Prioritize North Atlantic LCC -recommended projects and related activities for implementation. North Atlantic LCC priorities are intended as recommendations to inform funding decisions of partner organizations.
5. Work collectively to identify funding opportunities and other available resources (e.g., staff, in-kind services) for supporting North Atlantic LCC priority projects and activities. Substantial resources from multiple partners will be required to establish and maintain the North Atlantic LCC.
6. Establish standing and ad-hoc task groups as necessary to carry out the purpose and function of the North Atlantic LCC; define the initial purpose and responsibilities of each task group; provide direction to task groups and facilitate their progress on action items.
7. Maintain regular, clear communication with and among existing conservation partnerships (such as those indicated in the North Atlantic LCC Development and Operations Plan), other LCCs and the DOI Climate Science Center and maintain transparency in North Atlantic LCC decision-making.

### ***Task Groups***

The North Atlantic LCC Steering Committee can establish standing and ad-hoc task groups at any time and can identify initial task group chairs at their inception. Task group members can be appointed by the Steering Committee or may be volunteers approved by the task group. Task group participants can include representatives from organizations not represented on the Steering Committee. Task groups will be responsible for accomplishing their responsibilities as defined by the Steering Committee but can refine or expand their tasks in consultation with the Steering Committee. The Chair of each task group will be responsible for reporting the group's progress and results directly to the Steering Committee.

### ***Staffing***

The North Atlantic LCC initially will have a dedicated Coordinator funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Coordinator will serve as the LCC's operations manager, with direction from the Steering Committee. A Science and Technology Coordinator and another additional staff capacity will be added strategically over time to enhance the North Atlantic LCC's functions to meet partner needs for additional products and services. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is also funding a communications position to assist with initial outreach and communications regarding the North Atlantic LCC and climate change issues, emphasizing the importance of communication functions. All staff positions may be supported by, or through, any LCC partner or shared among partners.

<sup>a</sup> available at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/science/pdf/NALCCfactsheetFinal.pdf>

<sup>b</sup> Available at <http://www.fws.gov/science/shc/pdf/LCCInfoBull1FormandFunction011610.pdf>

## **RESOLUTION SUPPORTING MIDWEST LANDSCAPE INITIATIVE**

**WHEREAS**, landscape-scale conservation efforts are characterized by conservation of connected and healthy ecological systems, use of science-based and culturally sensitive conservation planning, collaborative network structure and meaningful multi-sector stakeholder engagement;

**WHEREAS**, conservation challenges unique to the Midwest region of the United States and Canada require coordinated and collaborative efforts of the members as well as those of federal agencies, tribes, private landowners and conservation groups;

**WHEREAS**, the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Association) recognizes the important role and unique responsibility of state and provincial fish and wildlife agencies in conserving fish and wildlife and their habitats;

**WHEREAS**, the Association, in cooperation with historical Regions 3, 4 and 6 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, had established the Midwest Landscape Initiative (MLI) Steering Committee in June 2018 to identify shared priorities and define how to best address them;

**WHEREAS**, the MLI Steering Committee has developed preliminary co-identified priorities, goals and objectives related to them; has established a Technical Committee, which is developing work groups around the priority areas; and has developed preliminary governance documents for operation of the MLI;

**WHEREAS**, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) adopted a resolution to promote Landscape Level Collaborations at Landscape Levels, which provides guidance to the development and implementations of forums like the MLI.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Association, in annual assembly on June 26, 2019 in Oregon, OH hereby enthusiastically supports and endorses the continuation of the Midwest Landscape Initiative and further directs the following:

1. The work groups must be populated with robust and diverse membership from groups and individuals interested in fish and wildlife conservation in the Midwest Region.
2. The MLI should continually evaluate the co-identified priorities and make recommendations for adjustments or modifications to them. The MLI may hold workshops or use other appropriate mechanisms to engage in such evaluation.
3. The MLI should develop a Comprehensive Regional Conservation Action Plan (Action Plan). This Action Plan will be a regional framework intended to address the co-identified conservation priorities of the MLI and to coordinate voluntary conservation actions and investments in the region. The Action Plan should include clear, specific, practical and measurable objectives, performance measures and outcomes.

4. All work of the MLI must be based on sound scientific principles, including but not limited to social science and human dimension.
5. The work of the MLI should align to the principles of the AFWA Resolution described above.
6. The work of the MLI should, to the extent possible, integrate with and inform the work of other regional landscape initiatives, particularly in instances where landscapes overlap.

## **MIDWEST LANDSCAPE INITIATIVE**

### **Working Charter**

May 17, 2019

#### **Purpose:**

The purpose of the Midwest Landscape Initiative (MLI) is to explore shared conservation priorities among the states of the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), those state and federal agencies in the region with management responsibility for fish and wildlife, to make recommendations regarding identification of those shared priorities, and define how to best address them.

All of these actions will culminate in the creation and possible implementation of a Comprehensive Regional Conservation Action Plan (Action Plan), a regional framework to coordinate conservation actions and investments. The Action Plan will be based on the best available applied science and shall include elements that can be measured to evaluate performance and effectiveness of the Action Plan and the MLI.

Individual organizations, which may include state fish and wildlife agencies, FWS, and other conservation groups and partners, will be responsible to ultimately implement any conservation strategies or work in their respective areas or jurisdictions that may be identified in the Action Plan.

#### **Composition:**

The MLI is open to all organizations, groups, individuals and sectors engaged or interested in fish and wildlife conservation in the MAFWA geography. Any person or group may make suggestions to the MLI Steering Committee about the substance and function of the MLI by reaching out to any member of the Steering Committee or the MLI Coordinator.

#### **Organization:**

The MLI is comprised of a Steering Committee, a Technical Committee and work groups and sub-teams, as more thoroughly described below and in the graphical elements in the appendix.

#### **Identified Priorities:**

Per preliminary meetings of the MLI Steering Committee, the initial priorities of the MLI include:

1. Prioritizing at-risk species and/or species of greatest conservation need across the MAFWA states and FWS Regions,
2. Developing habitat inventory and assessment tools to meet the needs of the Midwest,
3. Providing wind energy development support to best avoid or mitigate against negative wildlife interactions, and

4. Developing a long-lasting governance model and unifying conservation vision across the region.

These priorities will continue to be reviewed and evaluated by the MLI Steering Committee. These priorities may be modified, deleted, or replaced by others upon the approval of the MAFWA Board and FWS, and with input from organizations, individuals and sectors interested in fish and wildlife resources in the MAFWA region.

**Quorum:**

For purposes of this charter, a quorum shall be 2/3 of the appointed or assigned members of the respective committee, or their delegates. Vacant positions shall not be considered in determining whether a quorum exists.

**Steering Committee:**

*Composition:* The MLI Steering Committee will consist of executive level staff with public responsibility for species conservation, legal authority to undertake conservation actions, and with decision authority for their respective agency.

It will consist of three-to-five MAFWA-member state or provincial directors, or designees, identified by the President of MAFWA, and three senior FWS staff from Legacy Regions 3, 4 and/or 6, as identified by Regional Directors of those FWS regions or related Unified Regions to follow. It may also include up to three ex-officio (non-voting) members representing key sector and/or agency partners at the discretion of the Committee.

Steering Committee members shall serve in two-year terms; the number of terms are not limited. If a person is unwilling or unable to serve his or her term, the MAFWA President may appoint a new member based on recommendations from the MLI membership and remaining Steering Committee members, based on a call for nominations or whatever process the President deems necessary. Appointments should be staggered in order to provide continuity to the MLI actions.

The Steering Committee will be co-chaired by a state and a federal member of the Steering Committee, as approved by the other Steering Committee members. The co-chairs shall serve one-year terms, though they may serve more. If a Steering Committee member is unable to attend a meeting, he or she may identify a delegate to attend on his or her behalf.

Membership may adapt to changing needs of the committee, subject to approval of MAFWA and FWS.

*Charge:* The Steering Committee will explore shared priorities of MAFWA member states and FWS and make recommendations regarding identification of those shared priorities and how to best address them. It will approve Action Plans to address those recommendations, oversee implementation of approved recommendations and communicate results. The Steering Committee will provide direction and guidance to any committees or working groups established.

*Authority:* The Committee will have the authority to appoint a technical committee to support its governance and technical functions and will have the authority to approve the Technical Committee's establishment of working groups to address individual priorities most effectively.

The Steering Committee does not have authority to receive or expend funds; however, the Steering Committee shall have the authority to make recommendations to the MAFWA Executive Committee, the MAFWA Board, FWS leadership and other organizations about how funds should be spent to meet the priorities, goals and objectives identified by the Steering Committee.

*Meeting:* The MLI Steering Committee will meet as needed but at least quarterly to review performance of the MLI Coordinator, Technical Committee and Work Groups; and review progress on development and implementation of the Action Plan.

The Steering Committee shall identify and review the priorities, goals and objectives of the MLI at least annually.

A quorum is required for a meeting and any decision of the Steering Committee. While at least one or more in-person meetings per year are encouraged, conference calls and web-enabled meetings are permissible and shall meet the requirements of this section.

#### **Technical Committee:**

*Composition:* The MLI Technical Committee will consist of 10-15 technical, science, communications or management staff from MAFWA member state agencies and provinces, tribes, and the FWS in the MAFWA region, and other organizations or key partners in the MAFWA region and as approved by the Steering Committee. To appoint the Technical

Committee, the Steering Committee will use a call for nominations process. It may also take recommendations from the various members.

Technical Committee members shall serve in two-year terms; the number of terms are not limited. If a person is unwilling or unable to serve his or her term, the Steering Committee may appoint a new member based on recommendations from the MLI membership or its own call for nominations. If a Technical Committee member is unable to attend a meeting, he or she may identify a delegate to attend on his or her behalf. Appointments should be staggered in order to provide continuity to the MLI actions.

The Technical Committee will be co-chaired by a state and a federal member of the Technical Committee, as appointed by the Steering Committee. The co-chairs shall serve one-year terms, though they may serve more.

*Charge:* The Technical Committee will help the MLI Steering Committee to develop a comprehensive, regional conservation strategy and prioritize and implement related actions, as defined in the Action Plan.

Guided by the Steering Committee, the MLI Technical Committee's primary roles are drafting and implementing the Action Plan, tracking accomplishments, evaluating progress, soliciting ideas from others, and recommending Action Plan adjustments over time. The Technical Committee will provide recommendations, identify strategic opportunities for engagement, identify funding and staffing needs, and identify funding needs and opportunities that may be available.

The MLI Technical Committee also recommends the need for and make up technical work groups to assist the development and implementation of the Action Plan. The Technical Committee is responsible to provide the work groups transparent, clear direction that is developed for each work group; such direction should set out clear expectations, deadlines, performance measures and outcomes that leave room for work group input and innovation. The Technical Committee identifies problems to be solved and seeks input from the work groups about potential solutions.

The Technical Committee will help to recruit individuals and organizations representing diverse and expansive backgrounds and expertise, to participate in work groups to ensure diverse and expansive participation. The Technical Committee should also identify established partnerships and work groups that are already operating in those priorities areas to help carry out or further refine tasks identified in the Action Plan to

reduce duplication. It will also engage with other regional collaborations, as needed or as requested by the Steering Committee.

The Technical Committee shall develop a draft annual report of activities of the MLI and the Action Plan, due to the Steering Committee at least 60 days prior to the MAFWA Annual Meeting. This annual report shall include: reports from the working groups, progress on Action Plan implementation, and any recommendations about changes or modifications going forward.

*Authority:* The Technical Committee shall have the authority to evaluate the recommendations and activities of the work groups and make recommendations as described above and those related to the development and implementation of the Action Plan to the Steering Committee. It shall also have the authority to draft an annual report of activities the MLI for the Steering Committee's review and consideration and to direct the work of the work groups.

*Meetings:* The Technical Committee will meet biweekly while initiating its efforts and then approximately monthly thereafter. It shall meet at least quarterly.

Meetings will occur primarily over the phone or through web-enabled conferences, though in-person meetings are encouraged as they are possible. Full participation is key, as membership is limited.

## **Work Groups:**

*Composition:* Work groups will consist of a core team of individuals representing MAFWA member states and FWS regions operating in the MAFWA geography, as well as any other person or organization, as approved by the Technical Committee, able to provide expertise or input on the work of the Work Group. Vast and robust participation at the work group level is encouraged by the MLI Steering Committee.

Each work group shall have a chair, or may use co-chairs, who will be responsible to assemble the work group and make reports of work group activities, including a report of no activity, to the Technical Committee at least monthly. The chair(s), who may be Technical Committee members, will attend the Technical Committee meeting at least quarterly to report activities.

*Charge:* Work groups shall draft elements of the Action Plan related to their respective priority areas and in alignment with the goals and objectives approved by the Steering Committee; make recommendations for implementing, tracking accomplishments related to, and evaluating progress toward those elements; report progress; solicit ideas from others who may have expertise or interest; and recommend adjustments to their respective portions of the Action Plan over time.

The elements of the Action Plan may include proposals intended to address the priorities and/or provide input on shared priorities, goals and objectives. The proposals should be scalable for application across the landscape, engage diverse groups working in the area and be proactive where possible.

*Authority:* Work groups have the authority to establish sub teams to provide recommendations or reports of work with a narrower focus. Work groups also have the authority to seek additional input from other groups, provided such additional input would be based on sound scientific principles enumerated elsewhere in this Charter.

*Meetings:* Work groups will meet at least monthly or more frequently as directed by the Technical Committee. The chair shall maintain notes of all meetings and submit appropriate reports of any outcomes to the Technical Committee as described above. Meetings of sub-teams should be noted.

**Communications:**

The leaders of the MLI have expressed a strong desire to have the meetings and work of the MLI and its various committees and work groups to be as transparent and visible as possible. To that end, the leadership of the MLI shall strive to operate the MLI in an open and transparent way.

*Website:* FWS shall work with MAFWA to host a website for MLI. The website will include basic information about the MLI, how to get engaged with the MLI, information about past meetings, copies of any organizational documents, and events upcoming. The Steering Committee may provide additional direction about what to include on the website, provided the content meets the content-management, accessibility and other legal requirements or restrictions of the respective hosting entities.

*Meeting notes:* Agendas will be published for all meetings of the Steering and Technical Committees. Meeting minutes will be prepared for all meetings of the Steering and Technical Committees. Drafts of the meeting minutes shall be provided to the requisite committee for their review and approval. All final meeting minutes and agendas shall be published on the MLI website.

Work groups will report on its finding as well as its planning and implementation efforts after each of its meetings and at least bimonthly. Reports may be developed through emails, phone calls or collaborative means.

*Presentations:* Members of the MLI are encouraged to present about activities of the MLI. Presentation materials are available by contacting the MLI Coordinator.

**Funding Recommendations:**

The MLI, as a forum for conservation planning and not an organization unto itself, does not have authority to receive or expend funds. However, the MLI, acting through its Steering Committee, shall have the authority and ability to make recommendations to the MAFWA Executive Committee, the MAFWA Board, FWS leadership, member states and provinces, and other organizations about how funds should be spent to meet the priorities, goals and objectives identified in the Action Plan.

**MLI Coordinator:**

MLI Members agree that landscape-scale conservation partnerships, such as this one, are complex and require trust and a dedicated coordinator.

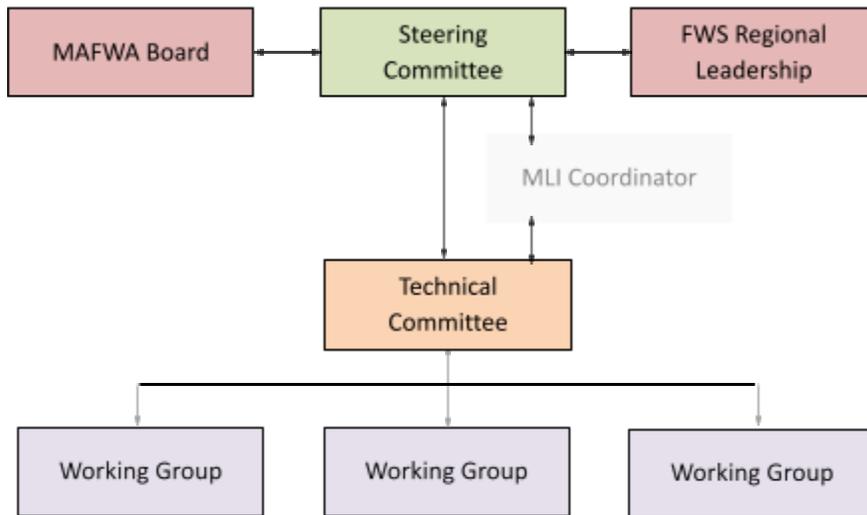
To initiate the MLI, FWS has made available the use of FWS staff to coordinate the MLI and provide support to: the development of the preliminary priorities, goals and objective; the initial standing up of the Technical Committee and Work Groups; the drafting of preliminary guidance documents; the negotiating of agreements to further the purpose of the MLI; and other actions necessary for the initiation of the MLI.

As funds and capacity may be available, MLI will continue to use a coordinator to provide overall support to the Steering and Technical Committees. The Coordinator will assist the co-chairs of the respective committees in all affairs of the MLI, specifically including but not limited to scheduling and documenting meetings; presenting about the MLI in all venues; engaging groups and recruiting individuals to participate with the MLI; reaching out to members as needs arise; assisting in the implementation and strategies identified in the Action Plan; and performing duties as requested by the Steering and Technical Committees.

The Steering Committee will continue to evaluate the quality and need for a coordinator and his or her functions as part of its annual review of MLI activities.

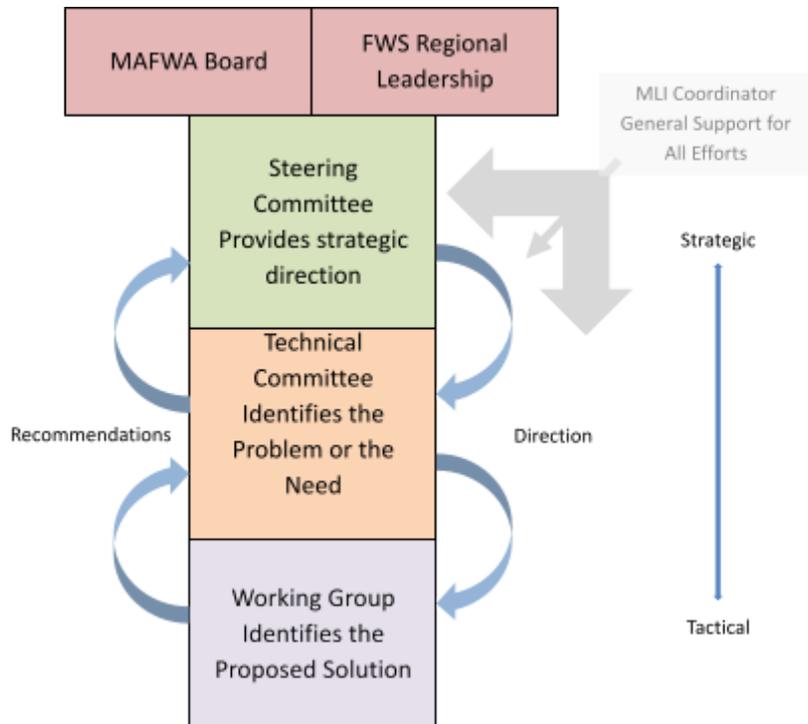
## Appendix 1

### Visual Representations of Organization

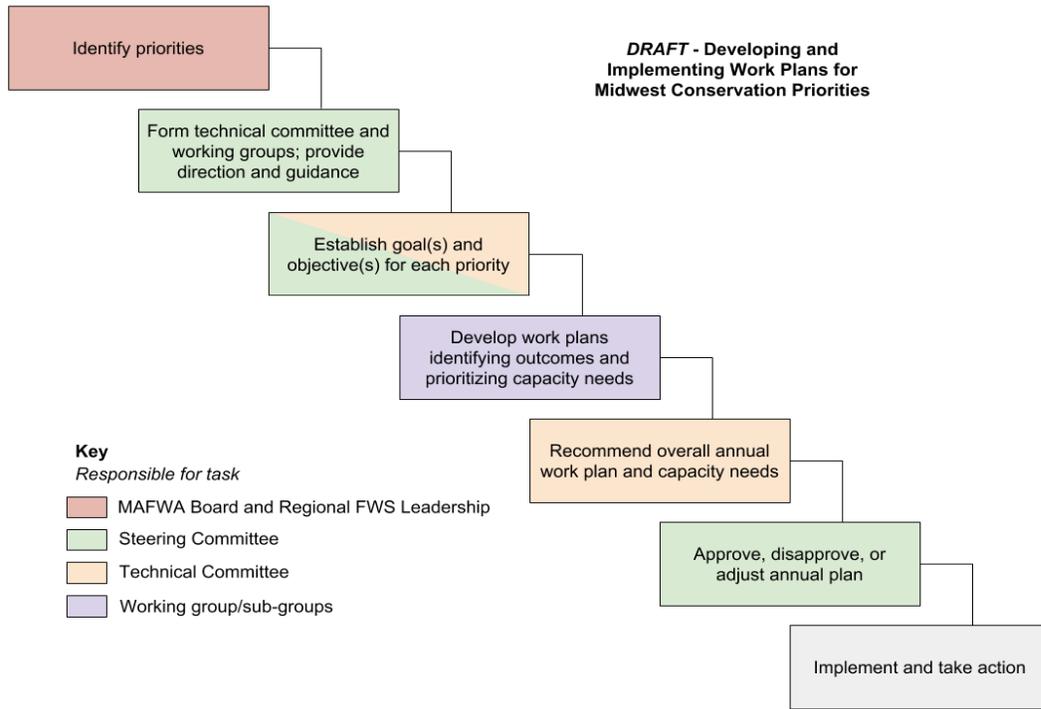


## Appendix 2

### Committee/Working Group Roles Visual



### Appendix 3 MLI Workflow



## **Priority Setting Framework Midwest Landscape Initiative**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this document is to provide an overall framework for developing co-identified Midwest Landscape Initiative (MLI) priorities and for ongoing review, evaluation, and adjustment of priorities as warranted.

This document provides process guidelines and recommended criteria for facilitating the establishment, review, and ongoing evaluation of priorities for the MLI. It is designed to help assure that a consistent and understandable approach is used to identify and address the highest priority landscape conservation needs in the Midwest. It provides a framework for co-identifying new priorities; identifying and evaluating specific ecoregion/habitat, species, threat, or research/monitoring related priorities within overarching priority categories (see below); and modifying or removing existing priorities.

The MLI Steering Committee has identified the following initial MLI priorities:

- 1) Coordinating on at-risk species conservation
  - 2) Developing effective and integrated habitat assessment tools to better leverage and inform conservation investments
  - 3) Minimizing negative impacts of wind power generation and transmission on wildlife
  - 4) Developing a long-lasting governance model and unifying conservation vision across the region; providing an ongoing forum to support challenging and informing dialog on shared regional conservation priorities

### **Process for new or modified priority development**

Work Groups for the existing priority categories are identifying more specific priorities within those categories as data on regional at-risk species and their landscape connections, habitat assessment needs, threats, and data gaps are further analyzed.

As more specific priorities are identified and considered, the following process steps and responsibilities will provide a consistent framework for development, review, and evaluation of new or modified co-identified priorities. These steps are designed to facilitate an open and transparent approach to proactively identifying and addressing long term and important conservation issues, not reacting to the urgent crises of the moment.

#### **Input and solicitation of proposals:**

Proposals for new or modified MLI priorities may originate from any of the MLI Work Groups and Committees, MAFWA Committees, USFWS, MAFWA Board, any state or federal agency, academic institutions, partner organizations, or any other entities sharing an interest in landscape conservation in the Midwest. Proposals for new priorities are welcome on an

ongoing basis. Evaluation of existing priorities will occur every two years, to allow adequate time for progress to be made and to avoid ongoing emphasis on an issue for which there is no longer consensus.

When developing or reviewing and evaluating proposed priorities or modifications, the MLI may seek input and involvement from:

- MAFWA State Wildlife Action Plan Committee, including state SWAP Coordinators, Diversity Coordinators, and Threatened and Endangered Species specialists.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Ecological Services staff from the affected regions
- AFWA research needs survey
- Academia, including Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units in the Midwest
- Partner agencies and NGOs engagement, input, and review
- Results of discussions on priority needs at regional conferences or forums (e.g. Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference; MAFWA hosted partner and stakeholder meetings)

#### **Roles of MLI organizational units:**

##### **MLI Work Groups**

- Develop proposals for new or modified priorities as needed to address current challenges and opportunities
- Review and evaluate proposals received from others within their scope of responsibility, based on established criteria (see below)
- Recommend new or modified Work Group priorities to the Technical Committee, with rationale summarizing how proposed priorities relate to established criteria
- Recommend new or modified Work Groups or Subgroups to the Technical Committee, if needed to address proposed changes to priorities
- Periodically review and evaluate existing priorities (at least every two years?)

##### **MLI Technical Committee**

- Seeks input from a wide variety of sources for co-developing priorities
- Develops proposals for new or modified priorities as needed to address current challenges and opportunities
- Reviews and evaluates proposals for changing priorities received from others, based on established criteria (see below)
- Recommends new or modified priorities to the Steering Committee
- Establishes new or modified Work Groups or Subgroups if needed to address priorities established by the Steering Committee
- Periodically reviews and evaluates existing priorities (at least every two years?)

##### **MLI Steering Committee**

- Assures broad input was received into co-identification of priorities and may seek additional input through regional or national meetings or other forums
- Makes the final determination of MLI priorities
  - if determined to be a regional priority, these could be taken on as part of MLI or referred by MLI to another existing or specifically chartered entity
- Periodically reviews and evaluates existing priorities (at least every two years?)

**Proposed priority review and evaluation criteria:**

Proposed priorities for the Midwest Landscape Initiative should be evaluated against the criteria outlined below to assure that they are consistent with direction from the FWS, MAFWA and the Steering Committee and that they are targeted at the highest priority, proactive, landscape-scale conservation needs in the Midwest.

**Evaluation criteria**

1. A proposed new or modified priority should be considered as a priority for the MLI if:

- It is a priority for multiple state fish and wildlife agencies
  - Potential subcategories include species, habitat types, threats, data gaps/research needs
  - Subcategory criteria, (*example criteria for at-risk species displayed below*)
    - Federal listing status, and species on the National Listing Workplan.
    - What proportion of the range of SGCN is in the Midwest? (regional responsibility for the conservation of the species)
    - How many SGCN occur across broad regions of the Midwest and share similar regional landscape connections that could be addressed by the proposed priority action?
    - % of midwest states for which species is state-listed as endangered, threatened, or SGCN.
    - Likelihood of cooperative action influencing species recovery.

-AND-

- It is a priority for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
  - Subcategory criteria, such as (*Note: these are placeholder criteria for example only – substitute actual*)
    - Listed or Candidate species
    - Species on the National Listing Workplan
    - Migratory Birds
    - Etc.

2. A proposed priority meeting the above criteria should be further considered as a priority for MLI if:

- It is a priority for partner agencies or organizations
- It addresses an unmet conservation need
- It will become or remain urgent if unaddressed
- It has a landscape connection
- It is not currently being done or likely to be done in the future by another entity (e.g. joint ventures, habitat partnerships, joint commissions); or if involvement by MLI could enhance alignment or address gaps where efforts of existing entities overlap
- For a research or monitoring priority, it has applied elements supporting objectives of an unmet conservation need
- It is resource intensive and would benefit from a more coordinated and focused approach
- Making it an MLI priority would add conservation value (including by enhancing alignment among existing initiatives and programs)

3. An existing priority may be considered as no longer a priority for the MLI if:

- It is being effectively addressed by others and there is no net benefit from MLI engagement
- Its objectives have been effectively accomplished
- It becomes precluded by higher priorities
- It is found to be not feasible to accomplish the objectives of the priority

## **Background**

At the June 2019 annual Directors' meeting the MAFWA Board passed a Resolution supporting and providing additional direction for the Midwest Landscape Initiative that had been initiated by MAFWA in 2018. That Resolution called for, in part, developing a comprehensive regional action plan to provide a regional framework to address the co-identified priorities of the MLI and coordinate conservation actions and investments in the region.

The 2019 MAFWA Resolution also stipulated that the action plan should include clear, specific, practical and measurable objectives, performance measures, and outcomes and that the work of the MLI must be based on sound scientific principles, including social science and human dimensions aspects.

Based on this direction, MLI priorities should be co-identified and science based, and must lend themselves to the development of specific and measurable objectives, performance measures, and outcomes as part of an action planning process. Established priorities will help to focus, align, and increase efficiency of current efforts and programs directed at the highest priority regional landscape conservation needs and they may also inform and help support the need for increased capacity to accomplish conservation objectives.

**Next Phase -- Implementation of identified priorities:**

As new or modified priorities are identified and approved by the Steering Committee, there may be a need for new Work Groups or Subgroups to be formed to develop action plans for the priority with clear, specific, practical and measurable objectives, performance measures, and outcomes. The need for these groups should be identified and recommended by existing Work Groups or the Technical Committee and chartered by the Work Group (for subgroups within existing Work Groups) or Technical Committee (for new Work Groups).

Working Groups or Subgroups should lead the development of an Action Plan for the approved priority. They may consider forming temporary and broad-based technical working groups comprised of representatives of agencies and organizations with specific expertise, authorities, or interest in the specific priority being worked on. These technical working groups would be dissolved once their portion of an Action Plan is developed.

Once an Action Plan is developed, recommended by the Technical Committee, and approved by the Steering Committee, then there would be voluntary implementation of objectives by each participating or interested entity based on their authorities, land or species management responsibilities, and capacities.

**Recommendation:** A new committee should be developed to examine what the Action Plans should entail. Consider Work Group team leads to be on that committee and develop a proposed table of contents for the overall action plan. Some preliminary thoughts and illustrative examples of potential content and outline of action planning follow, but should be more fully developed by a group provided with this specific charge.

**Examples:**

Some illustrative examples (not comprehensive) of potential priorities: **At Risk Species** in prairies/grasslands/savannas, rivers, riparian/floodplain, young successional forests/open lands, old forest, streams, caves/karst areas, wetlands, lakes; **Threats** such as land conversion, wildlife disease, invasives, pesticides, or predation; **Data Gaps** such as species life history requirements and limiting factors, distribution, habitat or species monitoring, landscape health.

If determined to be a regional priority, these could be taken on as part of MLI or referred by MLI to another existing or specifically chartered entity.

**DRAFT action planning template for approved priorities (might consider requiring key elements of this for proposed priorities as well to provide consistent information for review and evaluation?):**

Co-identified MLI Conservation Priority \_\_\_\_\_.

Work Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Subgroup/Technical working group: \_\_\_\_\_

- Statement of problem
- Objectives (clear, specific, practical, and measurable)
  - Objective 1. \_\_\_\_\_
    - Performance Measures
    - Outcomes
  - Objective 2. \_\_\_\_\_
    - Performance Measures
    - Outcomes
- Background on the priority
  - Assessment of threats/data gaps
    - Summary from scientific literature and other key data sources and their relative significance
    - General description of overall tools, actions, and policies available or needed to implement this priority
    - Description of how coordinated conservation actions and investments under this priority will:
      - lead to efficient use of existing resources in alignment with overall landscape objectives; and
      - jointly address the identified priority and minimize gaps or redundancy in efforts
- Key strategies for addressing the priority objectives
  - Strategy 1. \_\_\_\_\_
  - Strategy 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- Rationale for how strategies will lead to accomplishment of objectives
- How will results be monitored and measured?
- How will biological and human dimensions information be used in an adaptive approach to evaluate and adjust actions based on monitoring and evaluation?
- Does the action plan support a compelling case for added capacity, if necessary to accomplish objectives?
- Key groups engaged in developing or commenting on the priority.

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Midwest Landscape Initiative**  
**Wind Working Group**

**Action Plan**

Document Updated: April 13, 2020

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### Statement of problem/issue being addressed by working group

Wind energy development continues to expand across the Midwest region providing both economic and environmental benefits, but also environmental concern when projects are located in certain high value wildlife areas. Negative impacts of wind turbines to migratory and non-migratory birds, bats, other species of concern, and wildlife habitat continue to be documented. There is an inconsistent patchwork of local, state, and federal regulations for wind turbine siting and operations across the Midwest region. Inconsistency in regulatory frameworks, project consultation processes, pre-/post-construction monitoring guidelines, and other efforts may exacerbate unintended consequences for wildlife and priority habitats at site, state, and/or regional scales. Therefore, many natural resources agencies see value in improving collaboration and guidance to support lessening impacts to important wildlife areas and species from wind development that includes the siting and operation of turbines and associated infrastructure.

### Charge of the working group

The purpose of the Midwest Landscape Initiative (MLI) Wind Working Group (WWG) is to explore shared conservation priorities among the states of the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The WWG is a government-only “safe space” for these state and federal agencies with management responsibility for fish and wildlife. The WWG is charged to advance the objectives identified by the MLI Steering Committee including exploring actions and recommendations to continue identifying shared priorities and defining approaches to address them.

Description of how coordinated conservation actions and investments under this priority will lead to efficient use of existing resources in alignment with overall landscape objectives; and jointly address the identified priority and minimize gaps or redundancy in efforts.

Many state and federal mitigation policies stress the value of coordination between agencies and the value of working cooperatively with companies to achieve the best outcome for offsetting unavoidable impacts to natural resources. In the case of wind development, many components of the mitigation hierarchy are voluntary in nature and there are wide discrepancies whether mitigation occurs, and to what level. Additionally, many state and federal agencies are not well equipped to coordinate wind and wildlife issues alone or accept external funds to accomplish mitigation or offsets on behalf of companies. While there are many initiatives underway to offset wind development impacts to natural resources, a coordinating body for federal and state agencies has not yet been created to advance these agency initiatives.

Within this Action Plan, the WWG outlines a process for identifying research gaps and shared priorities to advance conservation actions and investments. Throughout this entire process, the WWG will coordinate with other Midwest agencies to ensure that research initiatives are aligned with the overall landscape objectives and jointly addressed by the appropriate agencies.

### Description of the context in which this group is operating:

The Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are coordinating the Midwest Landscape Initiative (MLI) - a landscape level conservation initiative across four USFWS regions in the Midwest and 13 states. The purpose of the Midwest Landscape Initiative (MLI) is to explore shared conservation priorities among the states of MAFWA and

the USFWS, those state and federal agencies in the region with management responsibility for fish and wildlife, to make recommendations regarding identification of those shared priorities, and define how to best address them. There are many additional collaborative initiatives involved in the advancement of wind energy and wildlife work, including AWEA, AWWI, and the broader AFWA collaborative. The WWG intends to engage in continued coordination with agencies pursuing similar actions to increase collaboration and more efficiently advance these issues.

The Wind Working Group (WWG) was convened in the fall of 2019 as directed by the MLI Steering Committee. USFWS is providing funding for external, impartial facilitation and Action Plan implementation support. The WWG is intended to be a “safe space for government” – with working group participation limited to state and federal government partners, while subgroups may be convened including external stakeholders.

The MLI WWG prepared the Draft Action plan, which outlines the three planning horizons for the group’s objectives, strategies, and actions.

## ACTION PLAN

Planning Horizon of less than one year:

**Objective 1:** Identify what wildlife resources are most critical to avoid and minimize impacts to (e.g., bat hibernacula and maternity colonies, bat and bird migration pathways, high wetland or grassland densities) for the Midwest.

**Strategy 1a:** Identify and utilize existing maps that identify areas of high wildlife value that wind companies can avoid or at least understand the potential high cost of mitigation if such areas are not avoided.

**Rationale:** This strategy is to aggregate available state-level map resources that help inform areas of high wildlife resource value and guide wind development to areas of lower wildlife resource value within the Midwest. Ultimately, the goal is to expand resources for wind companies to reference and guide development activities towards areas of lowest wildlife resource value.

**Action:** Develop an inventory of site-specific and state maps. Conduct an assessment to examine existing products, identifying common variables and develop a spreadsheet that aggregates and characterizes existing mapping resources. Potential variables include resources mapped, “intent” of map, related decision points (regulatory, recommendations, etc.), geographic scope (site, state, regional, national), etc.) Coordinate with the MLI Habitat Assessment Work Group throughout this action.

**Desired Outcome:** WWG members and stakeholders will gain a better understanding of the region’s site-specific, state, and regional map resources. In discussing inventory results, the WWG will explore questions about mapping guidelines, data accuracy, regional mapping gaps and opportunities for improved mapping and coordination. Continued coordination between the WWG and Habitat Assessment Team during the WWG’s inventory assessment will enable the two groups to stay informed on the current state of information gathering and avoid redundant activities.

**Performance Measure(s):** Number of map resources included in the inventory. Quality of WWG discussion assessing identified mapping resources. Progress identifying and reaching consensus on any WWG recommended follow-on actions.

**Timeline:** Initial mapping inventory complete 6 months from Action Plan approval. WWG discussions to continue for duration of year 0-1.

**Key stakeholders and participants:** WWG, MLI Habitat Assessment WG, map resource “owners”, industry at future stages of this action.

**Capacity needs:**

**Strategy 1b:** Define shared research priorities among agency, industry, and NGOs.

**Rationale:** There are currently inconsistencies in research prioritization. Creating a set of shared priorities amongst stakeholders would help with advancement activities.

Year 0-1





Year 0-1



**Action:** Coordinate with AFWA Energy Wildlife Policy Committee advancing development of shared regional research priorities through member briefings and updates from those involved in both activities.

*Desired Outcome:* Aligning wildlife resources priorities amongst the states will increase coordination and help to outline a top-down process for which agency is advancing certain research priorities. Discussion summaries will capture outcomes and discussion about AFWA outcomes, providing consolidated WWG input into that process and minimizing redundancy.

*Performance Measures:* Level of consensus on WWG feedback about this AFWA initiative.

*Timeline:* This activity will advance through regular bi-weekly WWG activities.

*Key stakeholders and participants:* WWG members who also sit on the AFWA Energy Wildlife Policy Committee.

*Capacity Needs:*

**Action:** Facilitate a WWG / American Wind Wildlife Institute (AWWI) briefing to hear updates on the AWWI research database and related activities.

*Desired Outcome:* WWG debrief discussion on AWWI research database. Potential follow-on recommendation.

*Performance Measures:* Status of briefing (identified, scheduled, conducted) and level of consensus around any follow-on actions.

*Timeline:* First 6 months.

*Key stakeholders and participants:* WWG, AWWI

*Capacity needs:*

**Action:** Organize presentation / panel or other activities during partner's conferences and events (e.g., NWCC Wind Wildlife Research Meeting).

*Desired Outcome:* This strategy will enable the WWG to initiate collaboration and potential partnerships, stay connected to regional initiatives on wind wildlife research priorities, inform state and regional activities.

*Performance measure(s):* Meeting status (identified, scheduled, conducted)

*Timeline:* First six months following Action Plan approval.

*Key stakeholders and participants:* WWG, AFWA, AWWI

*Capacity needs:* In-person / remote conference attendance (anticipated to align with existing WWG member engagements.)

**Objective 2:** Synthesize and share existing best practices across the region and with other regions.

**Strategy 2a:** Research and compile existing wind energy best management practices (BMPs) from within the region and other regions.

**Rationale:** This strategy is to catalogue wind energy BMPs for the related objective across all 13 states in the MLI geography.

**Action:** The WWG will compile a BMP inventory comprised of information from pre-and-post-construction monitoring data (collection, exchange, and analysis), surveys, survey monitoring data, state wind position statements, and aspects of the WEGs. In compiling this inventory, the WWG will characterize activities (compensatory/permit condition, BMP, pre/post, unverified/self-verified/externally verified, etc.) When the initial BMP Inventory has been completed, the WWG will explore interests for follow-on recommendations.

**Desired Outcome:** BMP Inventory framework developed initial inventory populated. WWG decision about a follow-on Action advancing collaboration on BMPs.

**Performance Measure(s):** Status of BMP inventory, level of consensus for WWG follow-on action.

**Timeline:** Year 0-1; ongoing

**Key stakeholders and participants:** WWG, State BMP leads and reviewers

**Capacity needs:**

**Action:** Coordinate ad-hoc virtual meeting among AFWA survey state respondents (includes all contacts for Midwest states) to 1) hear overviews of state regulatory or internal processes; and 2) explore interest in standing up a community of practice / peer group to meet monthly / bi-monthly to share updates and explore topics of shared interest.

**Desired Outcome:** Engagement with states, particularly those not actively participating in the WWG. Increased awareness of WWG activities, and opportunities to help inform ongoing WWG actions. Creating connectivity across the 13-state region. Decision on if group should proceed.

**Performance Measure(s):** Level of participation, decision on continuing group.

**Timeline:** First 3 months; potentially ongoing.

**Key Stakeholders and participants:** AFWA State Survey participants across all 13-states in the MLI territory.

**Capacity Needs:** If continued, support for work products from this group.

**Objective 3:** Identify the literature, studies, and information that are relevant to wildlife and natural resource impacts resulting from wind development and the measures that can offset those impacts.

**Strategy 3a:** Identify and compile the different mitigation approaches used within the region to determine similarities and differences.



**Rationale:** This strategy is to gain a better understanding of the various mitigation approaches of organizations, developers, and state and federal agencies within the region. The WWG also hopes to understand what others are doing to decrease data and research gaps to inform wind energy development.

**Action:** Define “mitigation approach”, develop repository framework (e.g., by state, compensatory status, monitoring / verification, etc.), and populate resource with examples of mitigation approaches.

**Desired Outcome:** An initial framework for organizing and assessing mitigation approaches. Initial mitigation approach database population. WWG discussion informing related year 1-3 actions.

**Performance Measures:** Status of mitigation approach database framework and initial population of approaches. WWG confidence advancing to related year 1-3 actions.

**Timeline:** 0-1 years.

**Key stakeholders and participants:** WWG

**Capacity needs:**

**Objective 4:** Maintain working relationships with wind companies and permitting entities so that as science and understanding of impacts improve, we can have continued engagement to lessen or offset impacts to natural resources.

**Strategy 4a:** Develop shared approaches, guidance, and tools for engaging with wind developers and permitting entities.

**Rationale:** This baseline information synthesis will help the WWG have grounded discussions, identify points of regional consistency or state-by-state variance, identify opportunities for coordinated approaches, and explore best practices for evolving engagement, among other inputs to actions in the 1-3 and 3-5 year planning horizons.

**Action:** Refresh on models for each state’s wind development process with natural resource agency engagement including resource identification, siting, the permitting process, management and monitoring, etc. Conduct a crosswalk exploring how reviewers engage with which stakeholders (e.g., RTOs, PSC/PUCs, developers, state/federal agency partners, etc.) at which points in the process.

**Desired Outcome:** Permitting process models for 13 states in MLI territory and facilitated crosswalk discussion to establish a “shared baseline” for WWG discussions across all actions. Engage with partners working on similar activities to collect existing.

**Performance Measure(s):** Progress identifying (and updating, as needed) state permitting models, and level of consensus on crosswalk.

**Timeline:** Completed in the first 12 months.

Year 0-1





*Key stakeholders and participants:* WWG (and related internal reviewers), potential process partners (e.g., RTOs, PSCs/PUCs, developers, etc.)

*Capacity needs:*

Planning Horizon of 1-3 years:

**Objective 1:** Maintain working relationships with wind companies and permitting entities so that as science and understanding of impacts improve, we can have continued engagement to lessen or offset impacts to natural resources.

**Strategy 1a:** Create a simplified method/process for wind developers to continue offsetting their unavoidable impacts to wildlife resources from wind development.

**Rationale:** This strategy will enable wind developers to more easily implement offset measures to mitigate impacts to wildlife resources.

**Action:** WWG agenda / case study series exchanging examples of offsets. WWG will develop framework / variables to explore, which could include options, state/region, effectiveness, offset mechanism, fiduciary responsibility, habitat / species, driver and buy-in, liability, 3<sup>rd</sup> party role, etc. May include guest presenters.

*Desired Outcome:* 3+ “case study” examples

*Performance Measure(s):* Completion of case study and related facilitated discussions.

*Timeline:* Years 1-2

*Key stakeholders and participants:* Government, industry, NGOs (offset program administrators)

*Capacity needs:*

**Strategy 1b:** Develop shared approaches, guidance, and tools for engaging with wind developers and permitting entities. Share best practices for when wind energy developers should engage with natural resource agencies in the permitting process.

**Rationale:** Natural resources agencies have different approaches, guidance, and tools for engaging with these organizations. It would be helpful for WWG to identify commonalities among state needs to provide guidance. Wind energy developers that engage earlier are typically more proactive in solving potential issues outside of the formal permitting process, which provides for more certainty and a smoother permitting process.

**Action:** Develop WWG talking points communicating reviewer preferences and expectations for engaging with developers throughout the wind project lifecycle.

*Desired Outcome:* Talking points

*Performance Measure(s):* Level of consensus on talking points

*Timeline:* Years 1-2

Years 1-3





*Key stakeholders and participants:* WWG (and related internal reviewers), potential process partners (e.g., RTOs, PSCs/PUCs, developers, etc.)

*Capacity needs:* None

**Action:** Conduct outreach using talking points, including potential WWG hosted events, and presentations / panels for industry audiences (e.g., AWEA.)

*Desired Outcome:* Improved coordination and engagement alignment among developers and agency partners.

*Performance Measure(s):* Breadth of developer community engaged.  
Meeting/conference session evaluation feedback.

*Timeline:* Years 2-3

*Key stakeholders and participants:* WWG, developers

*Capacity needs:* In-person / remote conference attendance (anticipated to align with existing WWG member engagements.)

**Objective 2:** Generate a synergy of mitigation strategies used by states across the region.

**Strategy 2a:** Explore the existing and potential mitigation “suite” to consider opportunities for more consistent and impactful mitigation approaches, while providing for individual state flexibility.

**Rationale:** To advance consensus on the best types of mitigation approaches across the region.

**Action:** Facilitated conversations with industry leaders related to avoidance / site selection and mitigation. Engage AWEA and other potential partners to hear presentations on industry practices before projects are proposed.

*Desired Outcome:* Gaining a deeper understanding of industry’s decisions around avoidance and site selection can help inform WWG’s communications around their uniform approach

*Performance Measure(s):* Completion of briefing and meeting summary.

*Timeline:* 1-2 years

*Key stakeholders and participants:* Government, Industry, Petitioners, NGOs

*Capacity needs:*

**Action:** WWG agenda series focused on exploring needs and potential scoping for developing a suite of technologies, conservation approaches, and mitigation strategies and related guidance tailored for the MLI geography and considering a framework allowing application across site, state, and regional scales.

Years 1-3





Years 1-3

*Desired Outcome:* WWG decision on how to proceed, may include decision not to proceed, identification of new subcommittee, request for research support, alignment with other stakeholder activities, etc.

*Performance Measure(s):* Was a decision reached?

*Timeline:* Years 1-2

*Key stakeholders and participants:* WWG

*Capacity needs:*

**Action:** Convene a cumulative impact assessment methodology subcommittee.

*Desired Outcome:* The WWG could stand up a subcommittee to explore methodologies and existing activities / research for cumulative impact assessments.

*Performance Measure(s):* Subcommittee convened? Development of subcommittee scope / charge (scope for methodology, decision points, discussion and research questions, etc.)

*Timeline:* Years 2-3

*Key stakeholders and participants:* WWG, subcommittee membership TBD

*Capacity needs:*

Planning Horizon of 3-5 years:

The WWG will reprioritize activities for the planning horizon of 3-5 years based on accomplishments and outcomes from short-term and near-term priorities. The WWG anticipates reviewing and calibrating this Action Plan annually.

Years 3-5

**Objective 1:** Maintain working relationships with wind companies and permitting entities so that as science and understanding of impacts improve, we can have continued engagement to lessen or offset impacts to natural resources.

**Strategy 1a:** Continue to collaborative to incorporate the mitigation hierarchy into planning and management processes.

**Rationale:** This strategy is to continue coordination among stakeholders as wind energy development advances within the Midwest region.

**Action:** Continue WWG activities initiated in years 0-3 based on their continued value-add. Identify and initiate new long-term activities annually as needed.

*Desired Outcome:* Continued coordination and collaboration to advance the WWG Charter.

*Performance Measure(s):* Qualitative assessment of charter progress, potential WWG membership survey on WWG performance.





*Timeline:* Annually.

*Key stakeholders and participants:* WWG

*Capacity needs:* None.

## IMPLEMENTATION & COMMUNICATION

How will the actions and progress of this working group be measured, monitored, and communicated internally and externally?

The WWG conducts bi-weekly calls to stay coordinated internally and identify and implement external communication activities. The WWG charter will be revised for alignment with this Action Plan and to include operational procedures, including:

- Chair Responsibilities & Transitions: A protocol for rotating WWG leadership, including the responsibilities for the WWG co-chairs. The WWG will have one federal chair and one state chair role, and seek to keep them filled at all times. Responsibilities for each chair will include reporting to the Technical Committee as requested, participating in one quarterly Technical Committee update call, and coordinating with the WWG facilitation team as needed. The WWG anticipates chairs will serve a one-year term.
- Communications Protocol: The WWG will be developing a brief “communications protocol” that describes how discussions move from WWG discussion into external communications including agreement to communicate, identified points of contact, and approach for media inquiries.
- Confidentiality: The WWG charter will be revised to note that discussions among WWG members are confidential, and unless explicitly states limited to participation by approved WWG members from state and federal government.
- External Communications: The WWG is aware of the volume of similar activities underway lead by other collaboratives (AFWA, AWEA, AWWI, etc.) and will assess external communications needs and opportunities regularly, including a QBR evaluation on the quantity and quality of external engagement. WWG External engagement will align with the MLI Communications Strategy. If the WWG determines there is not sufficient external communications, the WWG will convene a natural resources / wildlife / developer subcommittee for as needed coordination calls.
- Flexibility: The WWG appreciates that this Action Plan and many of the specific action activities and deliverables will be circulated for review and comment through the MLI Technical Committee, MLI Steering Committee, MAFWA, and others as appropriate. The WWG remains flexible to ensure that activities can advance and remain calibrated as leadership and decision-maker needs naturally evolve.
- Monitoring & Evaluation: The WWG facilitation team will be developing and managing an Action Plan tracking tool. The tool will capture current status of each action, including timeline, key benchmarks / decision points, challenges and opportunities, and other information the WWG identified for monitoring. The WWG will conduct Quarterly Business Reviews (QBRs) to step back and evaluate progress and adapt the WWG Action Plan as needed.

- Technical Committee Coordination: WWG membership will always include at least two Technical Committee representatives, and WWG chairs will be responsible for providing updates to the Technical Committee as requested.

How will an adaptive approach be used to evaluate and adjust actions based on monitoring and evaluation?

The WWG will conduct a “Quarterly Business Review” (QBR) meeting once a quarter. The meeting will have an adaptive / evaluation agenda, reviewing the Action Plan, checking in on status for ongoing and upcoming actions to identify key benchmarks for communication, evolving monitoring, or adjustments to meet overall MLI objectives and the rapidly-evolving work of WWG members on the ground.

How will human dimensions considerations be integrated into the work of this group?

The WWG is exploring human dimensions across all of the actions identified in this work plan. Several actions will specifically address human dimensions, for example exploring research priorities, conducting a “crosswalk” of permitting process engagement, or development of best management practices will all include specific discussions on the human dimensions of the current landscape and assumptions on how human dimensions may be impacted.

What are the key groups or partners necessary to implement the strategies and actions detailed in this plan?

- AFWA Energy Wildlife Policy Committee
- AFWA State Survey participants across all 13-states in the MLI territory.
- American Wind Wildlife Institute
- Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (AFWA)
- Developers & Industry
- Government
- Map Resource “Owners”
- Midwest Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA)
- Midwest Landscape Initiative (MLI)
- MLI Habitat Assessment Work Group
- Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)
- Offset Program Administrators
- Project Petitioners
- Public Service Commissions / Public Utility Commissions (PSCs / PUCs)
- Regional Transmission Organizations (RTOs)
- State Natural Resource & Wildlife Agencies

*Additional key groups and partners, including potential subcommittee membership, to be determined based on actions identified in this Action Plan.*

## ATTRIBUTIONS

List members of working group and additional individuals that wrote this action plan, if different

### Wind Working Group Members

- Chris Berens, Kansas
- Hilary Morey, South Dakota
- Mona Khalil, USGS
- Scott Larson, USFWS
- Zac Eddy, Kansas
- Dave Azure, USFWS
- Erin Hazleton, Ohio

### MLI Technical Committee Representations & Facilitation Team

- Kelley Meyers, USFWS
- Brad Potter, USFWS
- Claire Beck, MAFWA / Technical Committee
- Jason Gershowitz, Kearns & West
- Sam Ramsey, Kearns & West

List dates of approval by MLI technical and steering committees

WWG Draft Action Plan Approved May 1, 2020

## APPENDICES

Full Working Group Charter

### **MLI Wind Working Group Charter**

#### **IMPACTS TO WILDLIFE FROM WIND ENERGY DEVELOPMENT**

##### **Purpose**

To identify what impacts to avoid or minimize, identify ways to avoid or minimize impacts, and develop acceptable guidelines for siting and operations to avoid or minimize negative impacts.

##### **Context**

Wind energy development continues to expand across the Midwest region providing both economic and environmental benefits, but also environmental concern when projects are located in certain high value wildlife areas. Negative impacts of wind energy development to migratory and non-migratory birds, bats, other species of concern, and wildlife habitat continue to be documented. There is an inconsistent patchwork of local, state, and federal regulations for wind turbine siting and operations across the Midwest region. Inconsistency in regulatory frameworks, project consultation processes, pre-/post-construction monitoring guidelines, and other efforts may exacerbate unintended consequences for wildlife and priority habitats at site, state, and/or regional scales. Therefore, many natural resources agencies see value in improving collaboration and guidance to support lessening impacts to sensitive species and important wildlife areas from wind development.

Efforts to identify and offset impacts to fish and wildlife resources from project developments have a long history in the United States. In the 1970's, the National Environmental Policy Act was enacted along with other statutes, that provided for the identification of impacts to fish and wildlife resources from various project development along with measures to offset identified impacts. This typically involved a hierarchal approach whereby efforts are undertaken to: 1. **Avoid** the impact altogether, 2. **Minimize** the impact, 3. **Rectify** the impact, 4. **Reduce** or eliminate the impact over time, or 5. **Compensate** for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources. These mitigation concepts are relied upon in various mitigation policies including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services' Mitigation Policy of 1981 up through more recent direction provided by the Western Governors' Association Policy on Compensatory Mitigation passed in December of 2018. These two examples are located here:

<https://www.fws.gov/policy/46FR7656.pdf>

<https://westgov.org/resolutions/article/policy-resolution-2019-03-compensatory-mitigation>

Importantly, many state and federal mitigation policies stress the value of coordination between agencies and the value of working cooperatively with wind energy and permitting entities to achieve the best outcome for offsetting unavoidable impacts to natural resources. In the case of wind development, many components of the mitigation hierarchy are voluntary in nature, which can lead to wide discrepancies in whether mitigation occurs, and to what level. Engaging in collaborative approaches between natural resource agencies and wind development companies and permitting entities provides value in identification of impacts to wildlife resources and can help facilitate companies' initiative to provide offsets for impacts.

We believe it is appropriate for wind developers to continue identifying impacts to fish and wildlife resources from wind development using existing literature and other available resources. After identification and quantification of unavoidable impacts, developers should propose mitigation or offset plans to compensate for unavoidable impacts.

Some wind developers are willing to propose mitigation, but their experience with creating habitat or mitigation banks is limited and their preference in many cases is to provide funding to other agencies or groups to fulfill the mitigation plans. Many state and federal agencies are not well equipped to coordinate wind and wildlife issues alone or accept external funds to accomplish mitigation on behalf of companies. Therefore, establishment of mitigation banks or agreements with other groups to accomplish the mitigation can be a key component as to whether on the ground mitigation or offsets actually occur.

Finally, we recognize it is early in the process of fully understanding the impacts of wind development on wildlife resources and that ongoing or future research are important components to advance our understanding of wind development impacts. Many wind developments seek authorization for periods of 30 or more years, and we anticipate that as our understanding of impacts improve, it will be valuable to work with companies to incorporate new information into existing operations of turbines.

#### **MLI WWG Goal**

1. Identify and avoid or minimize the direct and indirect negative impacts of wind power generation on wildlife and the surrounding environment.
2. Offset remaining unavoidable direct and indirect impacts of wind power generation on wildlife and the surrounding environment.
3. Ensure those offsets last as long as the project impacts last.
4. Establish a consistent mitigation or offset approach across the region.

#### **MLI WWG Objectives**

1. Identify what wildlife resources are most critical to avoid and minimize impacts to (e.g., bat hibernacula and maternity colonies, bat and bird migration pathways, high wetland or grassland densities) for the Midwest.
2. Synthesize and share existing best practices across the region and with other regions.
3. Identify the literature, studies, and information that are relevant to wildlife and natural resource impacts resulting from wind development and the measures that can offset those impacts.
4. Generate a synergy of mitigation strategies used by states across the region.
5. Maintain working relationships with wind companies and permitting entities so that as science and understanding of impacts improve, we can have continued engagement to lessen or offset impacts to natural resources.

#### **Short-term Tasks (year 1)**

1. Identify and utilize maps that identify areas of high wildlife value that wind companies can avoid or at least understand the potential high cost of mitigation if such areas are not avoided.
2. Define shared research priorities among agency, industry, and NGOs.
3. Research and compile existing wind energy best management practices (BMPs) from within the region and other regions.
4. Identify and compile the different mitigation approaches used within the region to determine similarities and differences.
5. Develop shared approaches, guidance, and tools for engaging with wind developers and permitting entities.

#### **Mid-term Tasks (year 1-3)**

1. Create a simplified method/process for wind developers to continue offsetting their unavoidable impacts to wildlife resources from wind development.
2. Develop shared approaches, guidance, and tools for engaging with wind developers and permitting entities. Share best practices for when wind energy developers should engage with natural resource agencies in the permitting process.
3. Explore the existing and potential mitigation “suite” to consider opportunities for more consistent and impactful mitigation approaches, while providing for individual state flexibility.

### **Long-term Tasks (year 3-5)**

The WWG will reprioritize activities for the planning horizon of 3-5 years based on accomplishments and outcomes from short-term and near-term priorities. The WWG anticipates reviewing and calibrating this Action Plan annually.

1. Continue to collaboratively incorporate the mitigation hierarchy into planning and management processes.

### **Charge**

The purpose of the Midwest Landscape Initiative (MLI) Wind Working Group (WWG) is to explore shared conservation priorities among the states of the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The WWG is a government-only “safe space” for these state and federal agencies with management responsibility for fish and wildlife. The WWG is charged to advance the objectives identified by the MLI Steering Committee including exploring actions and recommendations to continue identifying shared priorities and defining approaches to address them.

### **Sub-teams**

We anticipate there will be small teams that focus on state by state basis to identify important wildlife areas in that state, what BMP’s if any are currently used in that state along with the existing literature that may be relied by natural resource agencies when making recommendations on wind development projects.

## **Appendix A: Membership**

### Chairs:

- Federal Chair: Scott Larson, USFWS Interior Regions 5 and 7
- State Chair: Hilary Morey

### Members:

- Dave Azure, USFWS Interior Region 5
- Tom Kirschenmann, South Dakota
- Mona Khalil, USGS
- Chris Berens, Kansas
- Zac Eddy, Kansas
- Erin Hazelton, Ohio
- Hilary Morey, South Dakota

### Facilitation & Leadership Team:

- Kelley Myers, USFWS
- Brad Potter, USFWS
- Claire Beck, MAFWA
- Jason Gershowitz, Kearns & West
- Rebecca Beauregard, Kearns & West
- Sam Ramsey, Kearns & West

Background on the priority

The WWG also intends to conduct a SWOT analysis at the end of the first year.