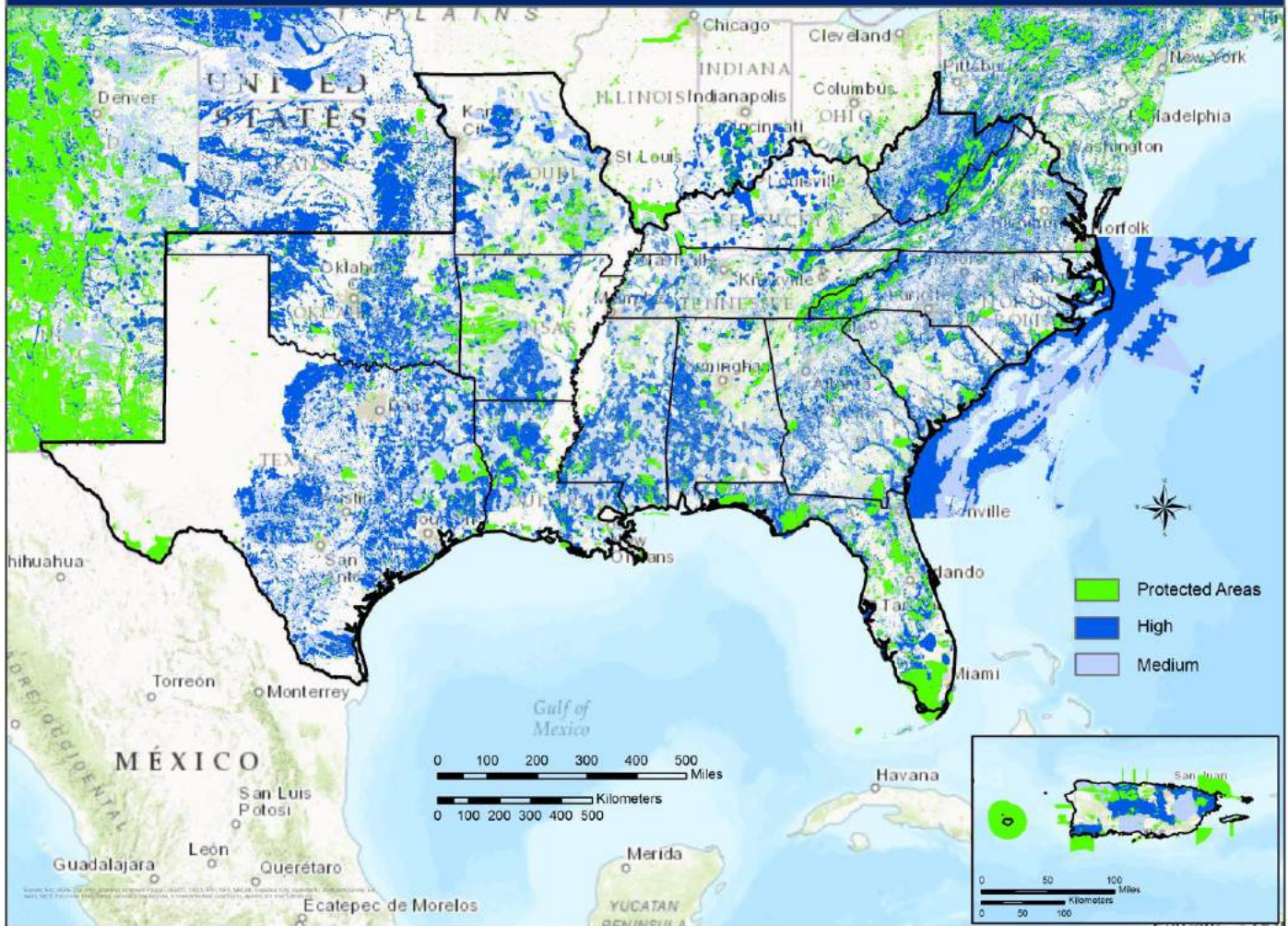


The Blueprint for SECAS - The Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (Version 2.0 with Protected Areas)



SEAFWA 2017 Conference
The Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy:
Aligning Actions for Success

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The Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy: Aligning Actions for Success

The SECAS symposium, *Aligning Actions for Success*, focused on integration of State Wildlife Action Plan objectives into the SECAS Blueprint, a spatial depiction of priority areas for implementing conservation actions across the 15-state southeastern United States.

A diverse group of presenters supported facilitated dialogue sessions around a number of topics relating to the symposium theme, including:

- Reinforcing the value and need for working across jurisdictions
- Improving the Blueprint and incorporating SWAPs
- Specific actions to move from planning to implementation
- Integration for decision support
- Expanding the SECAS vision and moving to 2018 and beyond

The interactive dialogue focused on the need for SECAS to help identify, align, and prioritize state and regional conservation efforts. Major themes of discussion revealed the need for overarching goals and specific objectives to help guide the SECAS initiative in improving conservation outcomes and expanding partner engagement. Following the symposium, the SEAFWA state directors asked the SECAS lead coordination team to initiate an engagement process to establish common goals and objectives for the SECAS initiative.

The symposium also included release of the latest version of the SECAS Blueprint that integrates sub-regional conservation planning efforts, including Version 2.2 of the South Atlantic Conservation Blueprint. This latest SECAS Blueprint features improved consistency in prioritization within the southeast and establishes priority connections with western states through their Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool.

Speakers and participants at the workshop discussed habitat loss, urban growth, fire suppression, transportation corridors, sea level rise and water quality and quantity, and other threats. These conservation challenges cross borders and have regional impact. They can't be addressed by isolated acts of conservation. Greater levels of cooperation and cooperative investment are necessary to meet these threats.

SECAS's goal is to help partners identify priority conservation investments and enable greater levels of cooperation. The Southeast has made significant progress coordinating conservation efforts. The region has a unique cooperative relationship between state, federal, private landowners, and nonprofit partners. The SECAS blueprint is an important tool for growing conservation partnerships in the region.

State and federal partners backed establishing a conservation blueprint that addresses the threats and identifies areas for cooperative conservation. The blueprint can also strengthen public-private partnerships by establishing shared conservation priorities. With less than 10% of Southeastern lands publicly held, private landowner cooperation is essential.

The blueprint enhances the ability of government agencies to work across borders. Identifying cross-border projects with significant conservation impact is a new focus for many states. The blueprint provides a tool for identifying high-value candidate projects and leveraging multi-partner investment. Habitat and species do not recognize political boundaries. The need for organizations to work across borders is not going away.

The blueprint provides individual partners with the ability to prioritize conservation actions. It can also help measure and track cumulative effects of conservation on the landscape. Tracking the cumulative impacts of conservation investments provides a score card for measuring progress. The conference identified ways the blueprint can assist in coordinating multi-state actions in State Wildlife Action Plans.

The SECAS conservation blueprint is assisting with the integration of species and habitat knowledge that crosses borders. The blueprint is making it easier to communicate the priority conservation needs. It also is providing a useful tool for coordinating conservation investments in the Southeast.

SEAFWA Directors requested the SECAS Lead Coordination Team to work with the SECAS Points of Contact to initiate an engaging process that establishes explicit common goals and objectives for the SECAS to be presented to the Directors in 2018.

The following discussion highlights were captured from the session.





SECAS Is:

Unique

- A non-regulatory approach to working across borders and landscapes.
- A shared conservation blueprint that highlights how mutual interests can be identified and cooperatively addressed across the region and landscape. It is a roadmap to target mutual benefits; partners can see where and how they fit into a bigger picture.
- The conservation blueprint that provides the type of information needed to make the large-scale conservation decisions facing the Southeast.
- There is a strong tradition of partnering in the Southeast between Federal and State conservation agencies.

Necessary

- Isolated acts of conservation can't have the same impact as coordinated, strategic action that works collectively and across borders.
- Individually, partners don't have the resources to address these challenges. Collectively partners do.
- The conservation blueprint is helping create roadmaps for determining the "best bang for the buck" conservation investment.
- The blueprint is providing managers insight to make better decisions on how to pool limited resources for jointly defined conservation outcomes.

Delivering Results

- Conservation tools SECAS partners are supplying are preserving working lands and reducing habitat fragmentation.
- Increased cooperation between SECAS partners and private landowners is reducing the need to list threatened species.
- The blueprint is being used to attract new sources of conservation funding to the Southeast, including \$3 million for fire resilient landscapes and \$15 million for the Salt Bayou McFaddin Project.
- Stakeholder involvement is the key ongoing enhancements to the functionality and usefulness of the blueprint.

Continuously Improving

- Stakeholder involvement is the key ongoing enhancement to the functionality and usefulness of the blueprint.
- SECAS continues to add new partners and cooperators to a voluntary family of aligned conservation interests.



Where do we want to be in 5 years?

- The partnership believes in a stronger shared conservation vision for the Southeast. Financial support will come from well-defined conservation priorities and outcomes that resonate with new, diverse groups; especially the private sector and private land owners. Partnerships with the energy, transportation, and planning sectors are critical for sustaining SECAS and delivering conservation outcomes.
- Growth of ongoing partnerships with the Department of Defense will continue to have conservation benefits, while supporting a national security mission.
- Establishing new partnerships with bio-energy, wind and solar sectors, and the Department of Energy.
- Continue work with Partners for Conservation, Allied Forestry Groups, and other private landowners and landowner initiatives needs to be a priority approach for delivering conservation outcomes.
- Continue improving the models and tools available to partners; tools that inform where and how to invest limited resources for conserving threatened species and essential habitat.
- Reduced habitat fragmentation and fewer listed species through the increased understanding and voluntary support of private landowners.





What are the values and concerns of regional approaches?

Values

- Incentive-based, proactive, non-regulatory effort.
- Collaboration: the need to work together.
- Objective decision support tool, not prescriptive actions.
- Support for working lands and private landowner rights.
- We believe a broader landscape view enables us to use limited public resources more effectively and efficiently.
- Understanding that 90% of Southeast is privately owned. With or without us, the landscape is being shaped.
- Understanding that predictability, financial incentives, and regulatory certainty are priorities for the private landowners.
- Understanding that private land owners expect lands that are being managed for conservation usually expect them to generate economically sustainable income.

Concerns

- An uncertain future for LCCs.
- Great work can't continue if it isn't integrated.
- Balancing traditional hunting and fishing funding with the need for new sources of financial support for all species.
- Do we have support from partners who are willing to speak up regarding the value of SECAS?
- Developing a common set of messages and talking points needed to sustain support for SECAS
- Tribalism that discourages willingness to engage new groups, ideas or perspectives.



Questions about the blueprint are helping partners identify where to focus efforts first

Themes discussed included:

- How can it help integrate SWAPs and LCCs?
- How can we better align planning tools?
- How can we align the blueprint revision and development phases with partnership needs?
- How can SECAS better integrate staff and the Steering Committee efforts to work in a more complementary manner?
- How can additional blueprint filtering capabilities be evaluated, prioritized and added that will help users better identify high priority and high opportunity conservation areas? Understanding better why some of these areas are high priority would be helpful (i.e. longleaf condition, corridors and prioritizing prescribed fire is an area of opportunity).
- Can the blueprint help with the need to filter by aquatic species diversity?
- How can the conservation blueprint be more customizable and generate views based on user-selected criteria?
- How can the blueprint help maximize “bang for the buck” conservation investments?
- Can we quickly refine the blueprint functionality to better develop models that inform where and how to invest limited resources to conserve species and habitats?

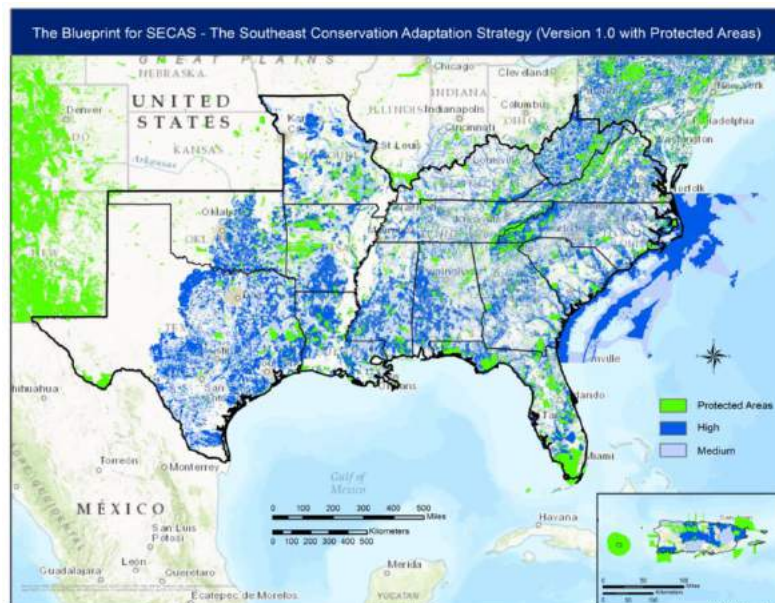
What additional blueprint features or capabilities would be useful to the work you do (added to V2.0 and beyond)?

- Updates should use the most recent data available.
- Improve consistency in methods and approaches.
- Clearly identify priorities for action in the next 10 years in the face of future change.
- Specific at-risk species layers that helps avoid ESA listings. We need to be able to pull this out species by species while we are working to conserve habitat.
- Is there an element or layer related to “urgency” that can be added to the blueprint? Urgency and threat layers have not been added yet. They are logical enhancements to consider.
- Is there a capability of monitoring progress toward getting defined habitat zones into some form of conservation suitability?
- “What If” Tools are needed that help partners answer management and philosophical questions such as do partners want to focus efforts on places that are rapidly changing or stay as far away from them as possible?



Who else needs to be a part of the SECAS conversation and vision?

- The urban planning community: The American Planning Association. SALCC has made a good start with this organization looking at aligning goals and objectives with SECAS and blueprint. Great conversations are underway with APA conservation planners.
- State and Federal forestry organizations. A report about progress in this collaboration will soon be published.
- Private landowners (large and small) are vital to developing and implementing a large-scale, cooperative vision. All landowners are aware of development pressures within the region.
- Land trusts: Mallory Martin is actively working with SE Land Trust alliance on SALCC steering committee.
- NRCS.
- All Departments of Transportation.
- The Southeast Grasslands Initiative.
- Pew Trusts and organizations that can help with surveying on specific attitudes/Human Dimensions.
- Biofuels (pellet) companies (promote native/habitat management along with biofuel production).
- Extension departments of land grant universities.
- Outdoor recreation industries.
- Reaching additional partners means understanding and addressing issues that are important to them. Jobs and economic growth messaging and themes that are relevant to a broader community need to be developed.



SECAS 2018 and Beyond

How can SECAS help identify, align, and prioritize state & regional conservation efforts?

- A discussion thread emerged regarding the clear desire from State leaders for SWAPs to be integrated more effectively than they are now. Integrated SWAPs are part of the long-term vision of where States and Federal partners need to better align and coordinate conservation efforts. Opportunities for cross-state collaboration of SWAP projects need to be supported by the blueprint and SECAS.
- The GCPO LCC has \$150k to test new ideas and models.
- Assist with developing multi-state grants (reduced match).
- New SWAP Species of Greatest Conservation Needs tool (USGS).
- New funding via Recovering America's Wildlife Act?



What additional resources and tools would be useful?

- Support for the Blue-Ribbon Panel Recommendations. Congress has dedicated up to \$1.3 billion annually in existing revenue from the development of energy and mineral resources on federal lands and waters to the Wildlife Conservation Restoration Program.
- Examine the impact of societal changes on the relevancy of fish and wildlife conservation and make recommendations on how programs and agencies can evolve to engage and serve broader constituencies.
- SECAS can be the link that connects partners to support these efforts.
- The more we look at the issues together, the more connections we are able to make.
- Continue close work with Partners for Conservation, Allied Forestry Groups, and other private landowner groups interested in working together.
- *If we only work with the people we know our success cannot continue to grow.* Coordinating and communicating with new sectors and constituencies is important. SECAS should promote the involvement of new, non-traditional partners who are actively using and supporting the conservation blueprint. We need to involve all outdoor user groups that benefit from the resource. Industry also needs to be part of this conversation.

What barriers need to be overcome?

- Finding the one big thing (or things) we agree on will make it easier to work together. *Let's focus on the areas of agreement and not disagreement.*
- Many of the barriers aren't science issues, they are people barriers. How do we break through the fear, uncertainty, and doubt that surrounds the future of current efforts? There was extensive discussion about the need to focus on traditional users, while thinking about future opportunities to broaden the groups engaged in support of conservation.
- Conservation progress is unwieldy and unstructured. That's the nature of any complex problem solving.
- What are the top tier species we need to focus on now to avoid long-term problems? Tiering species by priority is key. Focusing our limited funding on the priority species is the only way to go.
- Conservation on this scale has never been attempted before. Expectations of immediate results are unrealistic. There is a long way to go, and we are just getting started.



Needs and Next Steps

The conservation blueprint is now providing the type of information partners need to make the large-scale conservation decisions they face. It is truly a time to work together. Losing what's been developed would be a real blow to conservation.

1. Resources: We can't do it alone. Being able to prioritize and discuss priorities among ourselves is critical. Partners can't do it without resources and continuing support from their leadership. Support from industry is critical.
2. Increase our emphasis and contact with more private foundations. The more information we can share, the more persuasive our presentations can be to these organizations.
3. Economic messages can be improved. Western Governors Association, Southern Governors Association, and the Southern Council of Legislators should be groups we are informing of conservation issues and opportunities. We need to let these influential organizations know how what we are doing and how it affects the economic growth of each state. SECAS is a coordinated way we can push this forward.
4. Solid field work to assess species and species communities must continue. Well-developed indicators for our ecosystems are needed to support this effort. Using our network in SECAS, the LCCs, and SEAFWA we can better align all these efforts.
5. Partners need to commit our resources (manpower, money, mission) to protect the priority habitats and ecosystems that contribute the most value to biodiversity.
6. Funding is limited. Partnerships that emphasize landscape scale conservations have to work together to get the most bang for the buck. Groups like SERPPAS and SENRLG are prime examples that leverage multi-agency resources.
7. We need to look at public-private partnerships with industry for the funding, for the newsworthiness, and for the outreach. This will challenge conventional thinking within the community and gets us out of our stove pipes.
8. Land use planning is key. We need to work outside our silos with communities to talk about our goals, needs, mission.
9. We need new advocates for landscape level planning efforts. Find out what is important to these new advocates and their constituencies and partner with them on aligned goals and outcomes.
10. Public awareness needs to focus on more than charismatic mega fauna. Focus on the economy, sustainability, and recreation values.
11. Identify the messages and things that resonate with everyone regardless of age. We've hit a lot of the easy targets and need to find other ways to get the message to the public.

