
Northeast Regional Conservation Synthesis for State Wildlife Action Plan Revisions

BACKGROUND and NEED

The Northeast Region has a long and productive history of collaboration and coordination for the protection and management of natural resources. This partnership has been enhanced in recent years through the teamwork of the Northeast Fish & Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee, the RCN program and the LCCs (e.g., North Atlantic and Appalachian). States have collectively contributed nearly \$1.4M to completed regional projects since the inception of the RCN program, and have committed an additional \$1.6M to RCN projects in-progress. In addition to these direct expenditures, state agency staff, many of whom are supported by State Wildlife Grants, have dedicated substantial hours attending meetings and reviewing proposals and reports. The RCN and LCCs have been highly effective at producing volumes of regional data and information, tools and other products. Now NEAFWA states are at a critical crossroads: We urgently need to organize and fit together these multiple RCN and LCC products in time to efficiently assist states with incorporating a regional context into their mandatory SWAP revisions.

This project will produce a **synthesis of the growing volumes of regional conservation data and information produced through the Regional Conservation Needs (RCN) program and Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs); see attached Synthesis Table of Contents.** This synthesis will provide the regional context for the elements that states are required to review and revise in their State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs) by 2015. Producing a synthesis of regional information on behalf of all states in the Northeast will save each state significant time and effort in reviewing and determining how to incorporate regional data and information products into their respective SWAP revisions. This synthesis is envisioned as a set of components organized by the required elements of SWAPs that can be readily incorporated into each state's SWAP revision process. Web access to this synthesis of regional information will not only improve use of this information for SWAP revisions, but will also improve access to and use of regional information by states and conservation partners during continued implementation of priority actions. Synthesis and delivery of data, maps and other tools generated through the RCN program and LCCs will ensure they are adopted and thus realize the cost savings and efficiencies originally envisioned when these collaborative efforts were conceived.

OBJECTIVE

To synthesize regional conservation information including ongoing and completed work from the RCN program and LCCs into a format that states can easily access and incorporate into their SWAP revisions, and to influence continued implementation of regional priorities by making this information easily accessible to states and conservation partners.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

For the Northeast region, this synthesis and associated components will:

- Enable more effective use of existing regional and landscape-scale information from RCNs, LCCs and other regional efforts;
- Improve efficiency and reduce costs to individual states in addressing regional needs in their SWAPs;
- Better incorporate regional information into SWAP updates;
- Provide information that allows states and conservation partners to make state and local level decisions within a regional or landscape-scale context and to assess how state work contributes to regional priorities; and
- Facilitate creation of multi-state proposals for alternative funding (e.g., competitive SWG, NFWF, Duke)

APPROACH

Completing the first iteration of this regional synthesis will require a dedicated staff person or contractor to serve as Project Coordinator with overall responsibility for compiling, synthesizing and organizing information and producing documents as well as coordinating with groups and staff who are working on sections of the document. Major sections of this synthesis are already underway, including the development of regional species of conservation need through the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee and the synthesis of habitat information through the North Atlantic LCC's Northeast landscape conservation design project.

A Steering Committee will provide direction and oversight to the Project Coordinator, including feedback and approval of draft and final information. State agency Directors will need to provide clear direction to state agency staff to ensure that assistance and requested information are made available to the Project Coordinator in support of this synthesis.

TIMELINE and MEASURES OF PROGRESS

This synthesis process would be initiated as soon as practicable after the NEAFWA Conference in April 2012, with a target completion date and presentation of results at the NEAFWA Conference in April 2013. The project Steering Committee will meet as needed throughout the year, via webinar, conference call, and occasionally in person. Draft results will be presented to the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee meeting in September 2012 and to the Northeast Directors and North Atlantic LCC Steering Committee in November 2012. This timeline is expected to allow completion of the initial components to inform SWAP updates, and to allow time for each state to incorporate components into their SWAP review and revision process across the Northeast Region.

BUDGET

Justification:

1. This funding will support contractual services of a Project Coordinator (as noted above) who will lead interstate coordination, compile and synthesize regional data and information from RCN, LCC, NEFWDC, SWAPs, and other regional work (see attached Table of Contents) in a format that can be easily used by states as desired in their SWAP review and revision process, including development of web-based access to compiled and synthesized information for easy access and use by states updating their SWAPs.

Estimated: \$110,000

2. Travel for State Representatives to attend up to 3 meetings for this project.

Estimated: \$10,000

**Table of Contents
for
Northeast Regional Conservation Synthesis**

A. Introduction:**Background**

- RCN Program
- Albany workshops
- LCCs

Organization

- SWAP required elements

Need

- Provide regional context
- Priority needs from Albany II workshop
- Organization of existing information
- Synthesis to develop/compile landscape designs
- Translation to make data useful at various scales and formats
- Assistance with conservation adoption

Intended audience/use

- SWAPs coordinators leading SWAP review and revisions
- States and conservation partners implementing SWAPs

B. Chapters (matching SWAP elements 1-7)

1. Regional Species of Conservation Concern - Regional assessment, organization and prioritization of SGCNs from all plans; development of regional lists from NEFWDC using NEPARC approach.
 - A. Freshwater Mussels
 - B. Freshwater Fishes
 - C. Amphibians
 - D. Reptiles
 - E. Mammals
 - F. Birds
 - G. Odonates
 - H. Vulnerability assessments

2. Habitat description, conditions

Numerous RCN and other regional projects; work underway through LCC Northeast Landscape Conservation Design.

A. Northeast Habitat Classification and Maps

- i. Terrestrial
- ii. Aquatic
- iii. Coastal and Marine

B. Habitat condition – How much of what habitat is where at various scales:

- i. in the region
- ii. in each sub-region
- iii. in each state

C. Assessments (See proposed NE Habitat Management Database)

D. RCN TNC Condition Assessment

E. Landscape designs that will allow partners to map and prioritize focus areas for conservation

- i. Regional focus areas
 - a. RCN
 - b. Regional partnerships (JV, PIF, NEPARC, FHP, etc.)
- ii. Overlay of individual SWAP/state focus area maps (e.g., MA Biomap, ME Beginning with Habitat)
- iii. Ecological Integrity
 - a. TNC, LCC/UMass
- iv. Species-habitat models
 - a. LCC/UMass
 - b. Other modeling efforts

F. SGCN and rare species locations and associated habitat

G. Vulnerability assessments (RCN, LCC)

H. Assessments of Landscape Change (LCC)

- i. Urban growth
- ii. Climate change

3. Regional threats and drivers (Contract Project Coordinator)

A. Compilation of regional threats from SWAPs (use IUCN/TRACS nomenclature and tie to NE SWAP database)

- B. Compilation of threats from regional plans
 - C. Assessments of landscape change
 - i. Past changes
 - ii. Predicted future conditions
 - a. Urban growth (LCC)
 - b. Climate change (LCC, CSC)
4. Regional strategies/actions (Contract Project Coordinator)
- A. Compilation of regional strategies from SWAPs
 - B. Compilation of strategies from regional plans
 - C. Northeast Conservation Framework and Components
 - D. Albany II and other priority regional needs
 - E. Tying regional information to actions by partners
 - iii. NFWF keystone initiatives
 - iv. NRCS focal species
 - F. Regional work that resulted from synergy between SWAP directed work – NE Cottontail (RCN and Comp SWG), Tidal marsh birds (RCN and Comp SWG), Blandings (RCN)
5. Monitoring and Evaluation (Contract Project Coordinator)
- A. Northeast Performance Monitoring Framework
 - B. SWG Effectiveness Measures
 - C. Taxa-specific Surveys (e.g., Northeast bird coordinated monitoring, frog call monitoring, shrubland)
 - D. Protocols and databases
6. Planned Review of SWAPs
7. Coordination – Regional coordination
- A. RCN
 - B. LCC
 - C. Regional I&M
 - D. Competitive SWG

Northeast State Wildlife Action Plans: Database Framework for Common Elements

BACKGROUND and NEED

The Northeast Region has a long and productive history of collaboration and coordination for the protection and management of natural resources. This partnership has been enhanced in recent years through the collaboration of the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee, the Regional Conservation Needs program and the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (e.g., North Atlantic, Appalachian). Despite this extensive collaboration, it is difficult to compile and compare information among State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPS).

Of the SWAPs under the jurisdiction of the NEAFWA states, there exists broad commonality resulting from the eight required elements, including species of greatest conservation need, habitats, issues, and actions. At the same time, there are also substantial differences among SWAPs because states used different organizational structures for their plans, different criteria for defining SGCN, different habitat classification systems, and different ways to describe issues and actions. Most are lengthy documents that are difficult to search, making it excessively difficult and time consuming, if not impossible, to determine common priorities across the region or sub-regions.

To ensure limited resources are most effectively and efficiently targeted toward the highest priorities across the region, states need a *shared database framework* that brings consistency to the various ways states fulfilled the required SWAP elements. *A common web-accessible and searchable database framework will allow states, LCCs and other partners to view SWAPs across state lines and allow plan users to perform cross-state queries, searches, compilations and comparisons.*

This need was recognized at the June 2011, Albany II regional workshop which produced the following charge:

“[Support] development of SWAP database to promote consistency in the next generation of SWAPs, allow easy state rollout, guide revisions, and improve accessibility.”

The proposed SWAP database framework will facilitate the development of multi-state, regional proposals and make it more likely that other partners will implement SWAP actions. This product will help address a common need for states to determine:

1. How will the work of each state align and contribute to regional priorities?
2. How will the regional context help inform state work?

OBJECTIVES

To create a web-accessible database framework that will be populated with the required elements from each state's SWAP, and will allow states, LCCs and other partners to roll-up SWAP contents and extract common elements at any desired scale across the region.

APPROACH

This project will result in a web-accessible and searchable *SWAP database framework that will function as the planning complement* to the USFWS "TRACS" project-reporting database expected to debut this fall. This framework will increase the accessibility of SWAPs by states and partners, and realize the full potential of the SWAPs. The database will include common SWAP data elements. The SWAP database can be hosted through the LCC web portal.

- **SGCN** – Database will include individual state criteria as well as the species themselves. Vulnerability assessment information will also be supported.
- **Habitats** – Database will include the Northeast terrestrial and aquatic habitat classification systems, and support the ability to cross-walk state habitat classification systems to the Northeast systems. GIS data/maps and vulnerability assessment information will also be supported and incorporated via the work of the NALCC-complementary effort to compile and synthesize spatial data from RCN and LCC-supported projects.
- **Issues and Actions** – Database will include the modified IUCN categories used in TRACS and support the ability to cross-walk to state descriptions used for these elements.

The framework will be created through the following steps:

1. Enlist a database development contractor to work with a steering committee comprised of Northeast SWAP coordinators, LCCs and major NGO partners.
2. Develop consensus input on the essential queries that states and partners need, including spatial information.
3. Define common data elements and data relationships, including text and spatial attributes.
4. Ensure that WAP database platform is capable of integrating other ongoing LCC and RCN database development efforts identified at Albany 2, including regional compilation and synthesis of RCN and other spatial data and that it will provide access to spatial data and synthesized WAP content for each state via a common web portal.
5. Develop a functional prototype/template and "ground-truth" with steering committee.
6. Present to NEAFWA for adoption and implementation.

Work will be accomplished by a contractor with overall responsibility for producing the functional prototype of a web-accessible SWAP database ready for implementation by states as they prepare their SWAP revisions. State Agency Directors will need to provide clear

direction to state agency staff to ensure that assistance and requested information are made available to the Project Coordinator, in support of this synthesis.

A Steering committee will be convened with the responsibility for providing direction and overseeing a person dedicated to this project. The Steering Committee will provide guidance and feedback on draft materials and final approval of completed documents.

TIMELINE and MEASURES OF PROGRESS

This synthesis process would be initiated as soon as practicable after the NEAFWA Conference in April 2012, with a target completion date and presentation of results at the NEAFWA Conference in April 2013. The project Steering Committee will meet, as needed, throughout the year, via webinar, conference call, and occasionally in person. Draft results will be presented to the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee meeting in September 2012 and to the Northeast Directors and North Atlantic LCC Steering Committee in November 2012. ***Time is of the essence and is expected to allow completion of the initial components to inform and be incorporated into the SWAP updates in the Northeast Region.*** The effectiveness measure for this framework will be an increase in the number of agencies and organizations that use the SWAPs to inform their individual conservation actions.

BUDGET:

Justification:

1. This funding will provide services of a contractor (noted above), including interstate coordination, data/information compilation and quality assurance/quality control, development of a web-based Graphic User Interface (GUI) and database for access to the information.

Estimated: \$110,000

2. Travel for State Representatives to attend up to 3 meetings for this project.

Estimated: \$10,000

NALCC Projects coordinated with.....RCN PROPOSALS

