

## **Facilitating Conservation Planning at Multiple Scales in the Northeast Region**

*Desired Outcome: Landscape designs in use at multiple scales to guide conservation decisions*

### **Abstract and Summary of Recommendations**

In order to effectively facilitate conservation planning and decision support for partners and stakeholders across the Northeast Region, the North Atlantic LCC needs to ensure that conservation science information and tools are provided and applied at scales and in formats that best meets their needs. As a partnership, we need to agree on and clearly articulate how LCC efforts will be prioritized, organized and integrated around these needs.

The LCC should continue to support an integrated program of information management, science delivery and conservation design that addresses multiple scale and format needs for conservation decision making. The LCC should focus its resources on managing information and facilitating conservation design at larger scales (regional, sub-regional, and landscape) while developing and supporting a partner network to deliver and help partners apply information and tools at more local scales.

Specifically, the LCC should support the following components.

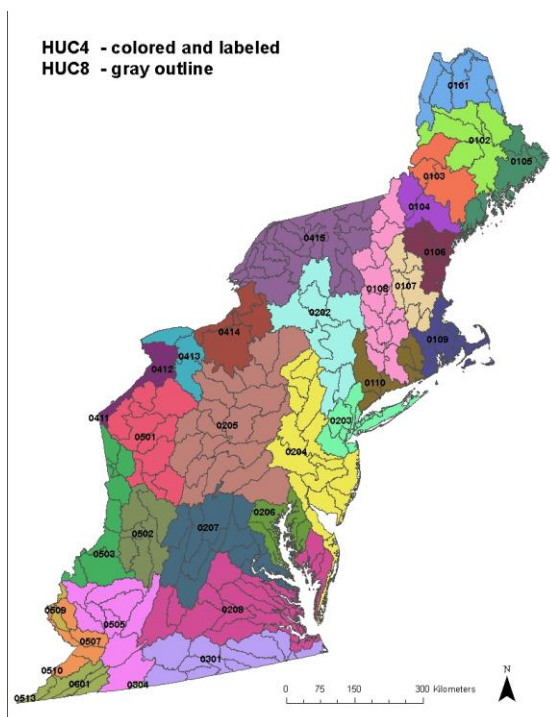
**Management of information** through the Conservation Planning Atlas (Data Basin) and LCC website that makes regionally consistent information and simple tools easily available for partners and partnerships to access and use. The focus of spatial data and tool development and information management should be on spatial data that is consistently developed across the extent of the Northeast region using a common resolution to allow data sets to be used together to work across scales from regional down to local scales. The Conservation Planning Atlas and website should include options for downloading data, simple visualization and weighting tools as well as galleries and work spaces for partners working at the regional, sub-regional and landscape scales.

**A science delivery program** and network that builds on existing partner networks, reaches multiple scales, provides assistance and demonstrates applications of information and tools at those scales. Delivery should include information sessions for conservation decision makers and planners and training and support for agencies, organizations, partners and partnerships that can then train others within their organizations, jurisdictions and networks. Online training modules should be developed to complement in-person training. A focus of these efforts should be at finer scales beyond the direct reach of the LCC including local partnerships, land trusts and municipalities. Delivery should also include demonstration projects focused on application of available science and tools to a range of conservation decisions and scales and subsequent sharing of lessons learned with partners. Ongoing staff and partner capacity to respond to questions, provide assistance and act as extension agents will be needed.

**Collaborative conservation designs at regional, sub-regional and landscape scales** to both support planning at those scales and apply lessons learned to future efforts. The initial focus at the regional scale is a collaboration with state fish and wildlife agencies and LCC staff to support the development of regional Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs) for State Wildlife Action Plans that informs the identification of state-level COAs for Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need and potentially becomes part of a national network of ecologically-connected areas. Lessons learned through this process should be applied to future regional conservation designs targeted to broader audiences.

Initial **landscape scale conservation designs** should be focused on in large watersheds or other similar scale ecoregions where there are active partnerships working. An initial pilot facilitated by the LCC and FWS in the Connecticut River Watershed provides an opportunity for a broad range of partners to learn about both the process and products for landscape scale conservation and apply a systematic approach for linking together landscape change, assessments of ecosystems and species and decision support through conservation design. Similar conservation design efforts in other watershed and landscapes across the region should be encouraged to learn from the Connecticut River Pilot and draw from the same set of tools and information so that they results can be compared across landscapes.

The LCC needs to ensure that these efforts **promote learning and dissemination** about the process and products so that future conservation design efforts are able to benefit and to prioritize future investments in information and tool development.



Example of nest scales in the Northeast Region that are important for conservation planning

## **Next Steps for Conservation Design in 2015**

Iterative process of developing and testing collaborative conservation designs at regional, sub-regional and landscape scales to both support planning at those scales and apply lessons learned to future efforts.

- a. Landscape scale conservation design pilot in the Connecticut River Watershed
  - i. Complete the landscape conservation design (LCD) pilot in the Connecticut River Watershed with core team of partners, LCC and FWS staff support (March, 2015) DONE;
  - ii. Deliver design and associated package of information to core team (March 2015) DONE;
  - iii. Core team review with their agencies and organizations (April 2015) IN PROCESS;
  - iv. Revisions if needed and adoption of design by core team (May 2015);
  - v. Implementation of design and tools, feedback, lessons learned and revisions needed (May-December 2015);
  - vi. Revised design (2016)?
  
- b. Regional Conservation Design – entire Northeast Region
  - Upscaling Connecticut River Pilot
    - i. Completion of Designing Sustainable Landscapes regional components developed by UMass and tested in the Connecticut River LCD including ecological integrity, landscape capability and climate suitability for 30 representative species, (April –July, 2015)
  
  - Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas (RCOAs)
    - ii. Identification and articulation of alternatives for designing a network of core areas for Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need and their habitats with RCOA team appointed by the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee (January-February 2015) DONE;
    - iii. Workshop with RCOA team to review and select initial set of alternatives (including alternatives developed through Connecticut River pilot (March 2015) DONE;
    - iv. Development and testing of draft methodology (April-June, 2015) IN PROCESS;
    - v. Workshop to reach consensus on methodology (July, 2015);
    - vi. Presentation to Northeast Fish and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee (September, 2015);

- vii. Incorporation into State Wildlife Action Plan updates by reference (April – October, 2015).

Regional Design Based on Connecticut River and RCOAs

- viii. Utilize decisions, weighting and lessons learned from the Connecticut River LCD pilot and RCOA process to develop an initial (version 1.0) regional conservation design (core-connector network) with input by a regional conservation design team, including members of RCOA and Connecticut River teams (August-September, 2015);
  - ix. Review of regional results by LCC Steering Committee (October, 2015);
  - x. Partner review, workshops and revision of regional results (October 2015-?)
- c. Other landscape scale conservation designs
    - i. Conservation design efforts may be undertaken in other watershed and landscapes across the region where are active partnerships and capacity for facilitating design process including demonstration projects supported by the LCC as well as FWS programs;
      - 1. Effort in the Susquehanna watershed by the Chesapeake Conservancy and FWS programs (initial scoping meetings February-April, 2015; timing for additional steps unknown);
      - 2. Effort in the Gulf of Maine Watershed by FWS programs and State of Maine (timing unknown)
    - ii. Although those efforts may be facilitated by other partners, they should draw from the tools, information and designs developed for the Connecticut River pilot and the region so that they results can be compared between these landscapes and have the same regional context.