

PROGRESS REPORT Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas (RCOAs) Version 1

BACKGROUND

A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

The Northeast Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas project is a collaboration between states and North Atlantic LCC (NALCC), building on Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (NEAFWA) needs outlined at the Northeast Conservation Framework meeting (Albany 2). The project was initiated with the completion of the Northeast Regional Conservation Synthesis in December 2013, when comprehensive regional landscape data were compiled in support of State Wildlife Action Plan updates and NALCC and Northeast Fish and Wildlife Diversity Committee (NEFWDC) began discussing RCOAs.

In 2014, the states and LCC developed objectives and established a governance process. Technical experts were delegated by NEFWDC and NALCC to serve on an RCOA technical team, and charged with developing a methodology. In 2015, the methodology was drafted, reviewed and recommended as the basis to develop RCOAs. The RCOA team was charged to implement the methodology and seek additional expertise as needed.

The resulting spatially delineated places identified as RCOAs are intended to supplement, not replace, state-specific spatial information and conservation planning.

OBJECTIVES

As defined by the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee, RCOAs will identify areas within the Northeast Region where actions to support or enhance populations of RSGCN and/or their habitats are likely to be most effective. Included in the areas are:

CORE AREA OPPORTUNITIES

Identify intact terrestrial and aquatic areas that, if protected or maintained in their current condition, may support the greatest diversity of RSGCN and their habitats in the Northeast.

RSGCN AND HABITAT OPPORTUNITIES

Identify important locations for the most threatened species and habitats that may be excluded from intact landscapes. If protected in their current intact condition, these locations would contribute significantly to the security of the most threatened RSGCN and their habitats in the Northeast.

RESTORATION OPPORTUNITIES

Identify degraded locations that have potential, and, if restored, would contribute significantly to the best opportunities identified through the core areas and RSGCN habitat analyses.

CONNECTIVITY OPPORTUNITIES

Identify upland corridors and riparian areas supporting the connectivity and ecological function of each landscape or location identified as important or valuable for RSGCN and their habitats.

PROJECT STATUS

In the current year, the team work has focused on:

- recruiting and orienting needed experts to implement the draft methodology
- analyzing and discussing alternative approaches to implementing the draft methodology
- refining the scope of version 1 through (1) verifying that analyses and products are feasible and aligned with states and other user needs, (2) resolving outstanding issues and (3) prioritizing and assigning tasks on a timeline to deliver version 1 in July, 2016

Through this effort and process the workgroup arrived at a shared understanding on the version 1 RCOA scope, an integrated timeline for the development of version 1 RCOAs and operational plans to meet a summer 2016 release of version 1 RCOAs.

VERSION 1

The following lists outline the products to be produced for version 1 RCOAs:

CORE AREAS	RSGCN HABITATS	RESTORATION	CONNECTIVITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ecosystem core areas ● Ecosystem core areas including representative species <i>species TBD with NEFWDC input</i> ● Aquatic core areas ● Resilient stream networks overlay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Single species focus areas <i>species TBD with NEFWDC input</i> ● RSGCN habitat opportunity areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Early successional habitat management ● Threatened ecological systems ● Agricultural lands ● In-stream connectivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Permeability ● Core connectors ● Salt marsh migration zones

NEXT STEPS

In the coming year, the team will focus on:

- developing draft version 1 RCOA products for RCOA team review in June
- completing version 1 RCOAs for state and partner review by July
- create a communications sub-team to develop an outreach plan for the piloting of version 1 RCOAs