**North Atlantic LCC Steering Committee Meeting**

**April 22, 2015**

**Action Items, Highlights, and Discussion Summaries**

**Action Items**

* Steering Committee members should contact [BJ Richardson](mailto:BJ_Richardson@fws.gov) by Friday, May 29 if they or their staff are interested in working with an expanded information Management Team to chart a path forward for continued improvements, and/or have feedback about using the [North Atlantic LCC Conservation Planning Atlas](http://nalcc.databasin.org/) (Data Basin).
* Steering Committee members should contact [David Eisenhauer](mailto:david_eisenhauer@fws.gov) or [Bridget Macdonald](mailto:bridget_macdonald@fws.gov) by Friday, May 29 with feedback about the [2014 Annual Report](http://northatlanticlcc.org/news/news-and-announcements-inbox/north-atlantic-lcc-2014-highlights-report) or the [sample North Atlantic LCC project and product fact sheet](http://northatlanticlcc.org/the-cooperative/steering-committee/meetings/steering-committee-meeting-april-22-2015/handout-13-project-and-product-fact-sheet/index_html) on “Increasing Aquatic Connectivity and Flood Resilience”. This feedback is critical to ensuring these products meet partner needs.
* Steering Committee members will think about their own organizations and consider next steps needed to facilitate adoption and use of LCC products, including technical or marketing assistance, cooperative extension and training and provide feedback to [Ken Elowe](mailto:ken_elowe@fws.gov), [Bill Hyatt](mailto:William.Hyatt@ct.gov) or [Andrew Milliken](mailto:andrew_milliken@fws.gov) before the June Steering Committee call.
* LCC staff will visit with state, federal and other partners as requested in the summer and fall to discuss available LCC products and seek input on relevancy, adoption and use. Steering Committee members should contact Andrew Milliken prior to the June call if interested in scheduling a visit.
* When initial design is complete, Connecticut River Landscape Conservation Design Core Team will implement design and tools developed in the Pilot and provide feedback to the LCC Steering Committee on what works and what needs revision. Initial feedback will be summarized by Fall, 2015 meeting.
* Based on learning from Connecticut River Landscape Conservation Design Pilot and Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas, LCC staff will work with a small team of partners to articulate next steps for regional designs including partners involved in these two efforts.
* LCC staff and technical teams will indicate which Science Needs and Science Delivery Needs could be addressed through direct contracts; create RFPs for remaining highest ranking needs; provide more explicit information on desired outcomes and applications related to Science and Science Delivery needs where requested; and provide updated recommendations to Steering Committee.
* LCC staff will coordinate a Steering Committee conference call in early June to finalize Science and Science Delivery need contracts and RFPs, and discuss strategic planning next steps including consideration of a Northeast Conservation Workshop (Albany III) with states and other partners in 2016.

**Highlights and *Discussion Summaries***

Forty-seven North Atlantic LCC Steering Committee members and partners met for a full day (in person and on the phone), reviewed the state of LCC work, and discussed strategic directions and next steps on several key fronts: conservation design, science development, science delivery, information management and communications. A summary of updates and accomplishments along with key points of discussion are summarized below.

Introductions

Ken Elowe (FWS) introduced the meeting noting the importance of focusing on discussion and decisions towards agreeing on:

* The right balance between new science needs and more effective delivery of what we have already; and
* Next steps towards a regional conservation design – we have the regional information, so how do we approach?

LCC Network Updates

LCC National Coordinator Elsa Haubold (FWS), LCC Network Council member Jad Daley (TPL) and National Academy of Sciences (NAS) Panel member John O’Leary (MA) provided input on the LCC network issues including highlights below.

* NAS panel will complete report on LCCs this fall.
* LCC Network Strategic Plan completed and lines up well with North Atlantic LCC goals.
* LCC Network Council focusing on partnerships and cross-LCC work.
* FY 2016 President’s budget includes significant increase for LCCs that would help increase budgets for LCCs that are currently at lower funding levels.

*Summary of feedback and discussion*

* *Sustaining political support for LCCs demands focusing on relevancy and complementarity to other partnership efforts, and delivery and support for the use of LCC products, which may require adding capacity for market research and technical assistance.*
* *Steering Committee members should consider what their organizations would need in order to ensure that LCC products are relevant, useful and used including the role of technology.*
* *Demonstrating cross-LCC efforts is increasingly important for the network.*

State of the North Atlantic LCC

Andrew Milliken (LCC) provided a detailed presentation on the state of the LCC reviewing key points about where the LCC is, accomplishments from 2014 (as noted in the [Annual Report](http://northatlanticlcc.org/news/news-and-announcements-inbox/north-atlantic-lcc-2014-highlights-report)) and where it needs to go over the next year and emphasizing the need for continued efforts in information management, science delivery and conservation design. He made initial suggestions for a strategic planning process incorporating these elements.

*Summary of feedback and discussion*

* *LCC showing great progress and moving in the right direction.*
* *Hurricane Sandy resiliency work is a great example of strategic value of LCCs.*
* *Important to link resiliency work for natural resources to socio-economic importance.*

Communication

David Eisenhauer (FWS) and Bridget Macdonald (LCC) provided an update on the role of communication in bringing attention to the relevancy of the LCC by focusing on telling and placing stories that highlight people and actions, and on providing support for getting the word out about LCC and partner activities to target audiences including the following examples.

* Stories about LCC partners and projects have been featured in a variety of outlets, including the U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit, the Northeast Climate Science Center website, and in FWS Northeast Region blog.
* The North Atlantic LCC among the top five contributors of stories to the LCC Network website.
* The Aquatic Connectivity fact sheet was created as an example in response to Steering Committee request for communication materials that provide clear overviews of projects and products that highlight practical applications.
* Steering Committee input requested on this sample fact sheet as well as the annual report.
* Working on draft products website.

*Summary of feedback and discussion*

* *Hearing directly from partners/practitioners who are using LCC information is powerful (including testimonials via video/audio).*

Information Management

BJ Richardson (FWS) provided an update on information management, emphasizing that more than just managing data, this effort involves support for sharing, interpreting, and utilizing data through maps, web services, outreach and education to ensure that LCC and partners have access to the best possible information in order to effectively coordinate conservation work across the region.

* There are now more than 200 datasets posted and available for download on the North Atlantic LCC website and Conservation Planning Atlas (Data Basin).
* Key recent information management initiatives include developing a way for states, LCCs, and other partners to access the maps and products resulting from the LCC and complementary Regional Conservation Needs process, and supporting the development of a SWAP database to promote consistency moving forward.
* Working towards greater interoperability with other partner sites.

*Summary of feedback and discussion*

* *Opportunities and importance of sharing data across the border with Canada.*
* *Information management needs to provide support both for (1) partners who have time/interest to digest, but want to visualize it and apply it and (2) partners who want to get at the underlying basic data and models.*

Landscape Conservation Design

Scott Schwenk (LCC) provided an update on the **Connecticut River Watershed Landscape Conservation Design Pilot**. More than 30 conservation partners representing federal and state agencies, nonprofit organizations and universities completed the development of a landscape conservation design for the Connecticut River Watershed, and are now in the process of reviewing the final products within their organizations. A foundation of the design is a core-connector network, which provides a spatial representation of the underlying ecological network, and strategic guidance in identifying priority areas that can contribute to conservation goals for the entire watershed. The suite of products also includes data layers representing species, ecosystems, predictions about climate and land-use change, and potential restoration opportunities.

*Summary of feedback and discussion*

* *Each individual data layer that is incorporated within the design will be available for organizations to look at specific questions and information relevant to their goals.*
* *Initial focus on natural resources but need to relate to agriculture, recreation, transportation, water management and other sectors.*
* *Could help address issues related to flood resilience and aquatic connectivity that came to light in the wake of Hurricane Sandy and Tropical Storm Irene.*
* *Pilot offers lessons on effective team size and diversity for partnership efforts. In order to facilitate transferability of the process, all decisions and lessons learned were carefully documented.*
* *Partners appreciated the thoroughness and inclusiveness of the process.*
* *Partners see initial utility of products and also see ways they would like to see them improved.*
* *Next steps will be to learn from implementing and provide outreach and support for target conservation audiences to interpret and use the design and package of tools.*

Steve Fuller (LCC) provided an update on the **Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas** (RCOAs) process.Representatives from the Northeast states came together at the FWS Northeast Regional Office in March for a three-day workshop to see how Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas for regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need should be developed in order to align with and inform State Wildlife Action Plans. During the workshop, participants utilized real-time survey tools to review and agree upon fundamental objectives, and refine a set of analysis and mapping alternatives for consideration by the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee.

*Summary of feedback and discussion*

* *The refined list of alternatives and percent of participants who supported each is available on the* [*LCC website*](http://northatlanticlcc.org/the-cooperative/steering-committee/meetings/steering-committee-meeting-april-22-2015/handout-15-summary-of-rcoa-alternatives/index_html)*.*
* *The RCOA effort is responding to the priority need identified at the Northeast Conservation Framework Workshop to provide regional context and identify priority areas for conservation actions for fish and wildlife across the Northeast.*

Ken Elowe (FWS) led a discussion on **Next steps for Landscape Conservation Design** to gauge Steering Committee support for continuing to pursue regional landscape conservation designs, and to reach consensus on how to move forward.

*Summary of feedback and discussion*

* *Realizing a regional vision for Landscape Conservation Design**involves moving forward on three fronts:*

1. *Connecticut River Watershed Landscape Conservation Design Pilot (Pilot);*
2. *Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas (RCOAs); and*
3. *A regional conservation design that utilizes tools and learns from both of these efforts*

* *Need to clearly articulate how RCOAs are different from a regional conservation design – not yet clear.*
* *RCOAs are partially focused on Species of Greatest Conservation Need (does not include all taxa). Could apply learning from RCOAs and expand approach for a regional design that is also based on learning from Pilot.*
* *Regional atlas of prioritization tools are available now or will be available by late summer – this part is straightforward. But an integrated core-connector design similar to what was developed in the Pilot will involve making decisions about what to include, how to weight inputs, and which aspects are easily scalable.*
* *Need to consider whether developing a regional core-connector design before seeking broad partner input will be useful.*
* *Implementing the results of the Pilot beyond the core team will indicate whether participation is critical for buy-in. It is important to learn from implementation.*
* *Level of effort needed for Connecticut River Watershed was very high for staff, contractors and partners - not feasible to replicate this process at this level in all other watersheds across the region.*
* *Need to focus on where we need to make what decisions today and whether the level of effort is justified.*
* *Need to move forward, implement and learn.*
* *Partners including Highstead and Regional Conservation Partnerships are already using information and sharing success stories.*
* *Based on learning from Pilot and RCOAs, LCC staff can articulate a set of next steps towards a regional design guided by a team of partners including those involved in these efforts.*

Review of Budgets and Progress on Science Projects

Scot Williamson (WMI) provided updates on budgets and contract administration, and Scott Schwenk (LCC), Megan Tyrrell (LCC), and Steve Fuller (LCC) provided updates on the progress of ongoing science and science delivery projects. There are more than 25 science projects and associated products with applications in Foundational Mapping, Vulnerability Assessments, Conservation Design, and Decision Support for terrestrial, coastal, and freshwater resources including a suite of projects supported through Hurricane Sandy resiliency funding. There are three completed demonstration projects and four science delivery projects underway. These are demonstrating the application of LCC and related products and resulting in trained individuals and networks of partner networks.

Science and Science Delivery Needs

Scott Schwenk (LCC), Steve Fuller (LCC), Megan Tyrrell (LCC) and Amanda Babson (NPS) shared the results of the Science and Science Delivery Needs process, involving representatives from U.S. and Canadian federal agencies, state agencies, NGOs, and partnerships identifying the highest ranking priorities in three subgroups: freshwater aquatic, coastal and marine, and terrestrial and freshwater wetlands. Ken Elowe facilitated a discussion of needs using a combined science and science needs budget as a starting point.

*Summary of feedback and discussion*

* *Steering Committee generally support top-ranked science and science delivery needs presented. They requested more information on a few of the needs and would like to see more specificity in RFPs, focusing on desired outcomes and specific applications to ensure relevance.*
* *It is important to continue to connect LCC tools to actions, agencies and organizations; there was some interest in seeking professional assistance from a facilitating or marketing entity to help connect tools to practitioners, and demonstrate positive outcomes.*
* *Need to be sure there is not already support for coastal projects through Hurricane Sandy funds and that there are not redundant approaches (e.g. for marsh migration) already being undertaken.*
* *Need to be sure not to neglect core science needs by focusing on science delivery*
* *Getting the tools out there is going to require buy-in from the state leadership. There is a burden on the LCC to do and show and demonstrate, and there is a burden on others to learn and understand and capitalize. It’s a two-way street.*
* *Outcome - clearly articulate what is needed in RFP and what would be handled by contracts, develop draft RFP and detailed outcomes and applications and then bring this information back to the Steering Committee to finalize RFP on a call in early June.*

Other Business/Next Call and Meeting

Will need to follow up and agree on process for strategic planning update that engages Steering Committee and partners and relates to completion of State Wildlife Action Plan updates.

Steering Committee conference call to be scheduled for early June with two agenda items:

* Review detailed science and science delivery needs descriptions and draft RFPs and finalize needs to be addressed
* Discussion next steps for strategic planning

Next in-person meeting scheduled for October 26-27 in Portsmouth, NH or Rhinebeck, NY.