



Conservation Planning Process

While local, state, and federal agencies have a respected track record of delivering localized and single-species conservation, many of the environmental challenges of today are impacting species and habitats at a regional and global scale. Past successes have addressed conservation challenges of National Parks, Refuges, and Fish Hatcheries.



However, threats such as habitat fragmentation, invasive species, drought, and climate change are interacting in concert to degrade natural habitats at alarming rates and require creative collaborations and solutions to achieve positive conservation outcomes.

The Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC) model was designed to coordinate and facilitate the exchange of ideas, strategies, science products, and resources to enable planning and conservation delivery that extend beyond the means of single organizations and regional partners. With regional coordination, long-term conservation planning can inform and help develop plans that lead to resilient landscapes able to support sustainable populations for generations to come.

Conservation planning identifies and prioritizes lands that encompass important natural or cultural resources across the landscape (e.g., critical watersheds, habitat for rare or threatened species) and develops protection and management strategies for these lands. It is a process where science is at the core of planning, but the science is informed by groups of stakeholders using their on-the-ground knowledge and expertise. The goal is to create interconnected reserves and matrix of managed lands that are resilient to the many environmental changes that are occurring rapidly on the landscape.

The first step in this process is to form a core group of people who are capable of defining conservation goals for the organization and the region.

They will use the best available scientific information to assess current conditions, decide on the organization's role, and define project areas. This core group will identify conservation planning experts who will review and gather the relevant spatial data and conduct the modeling process as well as stakeholders that will inform this process.

Next, the modeling process begins and data gaps are identified and eventually those gaps are filled. Once all the desired data has been collected, the actual conservation planning process can begin in earnest. During the conservation planning process, existing conservation plans need to be identified, evaluated, and incorporated whenever possible to maximize collaboration. Over time, new conservation-planning models (scenarios) are calculated, generating map products across the landscape. These products will receive feedback and go through a rigorous review process from experts and stakeholders.

After revision using expert and stakeholder feedback, new models are then released to the general public for review and finally implementation. Even while implemented, models will continue to be revised and refined as new data sources, emerging issues, and the best available information lead to a more accurate picture of what is taking place on the ground.

Conservation planning is a participatory process. Though science is at the core with groups of knowledgeable experts running models and evaluating data, the process is embedded in a region's social, political, and economic realm. The process brings together federal, state, tribal, and local partners and incorporates their knowledge and interests to create resilient landscapes.

The Appalachian region fosters a unique blend of endemic species and climate resiliency, while harboring large reserves of natural resources. The challenges facing this region are vast but the Appalachian LCC is committed to working with partners to develop landscape-level planning and on-the-ground conservation. The conservation-planning framework will be driven by expert knowledge and stakeholder input, feedback, and decision-making. The Appalachian LCC will use this framework informed by science and agreed upon by stakeholders to address the conservation challenges of the Appalachian region for the 21st century.



