

NCSE WILDLIFE HABITAT POLICY RESEARCH PROGRAM
Project Overview
Research Project 1C

**Approach to Developing Performance
Measures for U.S. Habitat Conservation**

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The scientific literature and practitioners generally agree that steps in developing performance measures for wildlife-habitat conservation include:

- identifying management goals and objectives
- identifying management resources or processes
- identifying threats
- developing a conceptual model linking resources, processes, and threats
- identifying management actions
- selecting appropriate indicators of resource status and management effectiveness
- developing approaches for measuring changes in these indicators
- implementing the project, including monitoring
- modifying management approaches using monitoring information.

Key Issues

Determining whether conservation actions are effective is a multidimensional problem, and each dimension provides special challenges. Defining overall goals and objectives requires integrating what is possible with what is desirable. Defining overall objectives is closely related to, but not identical with, identifying indicators for tracking change and providing the basis for evaluative assessments. Finally, attributing observed changes to specific conservation actions is complex.

Project Objective

Every U.S. state and territory was required to develop a state wildlife action plan (SWAP) to be eligible to receive funds from the State Wildlife Grants Program created by Congress in 2000. The project focused on these plans, but many of its findings should apply for other contexts and scales. The primary objective was to outline an approach and process for identifying and selecting performance measures for state (and other) wildlife conservation activities. This approach would provide feedback for planners, implementers and evaluators at project, program and state levels and would use indicators that are scalable to the Heinz Center's *State of the Nation's Ecosystems* <<http://www.heinzctr.org/ecosystems>> indicators for at-risk species, ecosystem extent and landscape patterns.

Approach

The approach maximized input from practitioners, state wildlife biologists, evaluation experts and other key stakeholders. Specific activities included:

- a literature review
- interviews with practitioners
- input from state wildlife diversity program managers
- input, review and analysis by a multi-sector working group.

Key Findings

- Wildlife and ecosystem monitoring programs can be costly and complex, but need not be.
- Simple metrics are available that show progress towards addressing key goals (habitat and species conservation) of the SWAPs.
- Simple modeling exercises can help identify important intermediate steps and metrics that should be tracked in monitoring and evaluating the SWAPs.

Deliverables

Deliverables include:

- a technical report, “Measuring the Results of Wildlife Conservation Activities”
- a technical paper accepted by a peer-reviewed journal that describes two indicators from a pilot study in Nevada
- presentations at the 2008 annual meetings of the Ecological Society of America and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- briefings for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Summaries for practitioners, managers and policymakers include a report describing the major findings and several PowerPoint presentations. A PowerPoint presentation was field-tested with the Wildlife Diversity Program Managers group in August 2007. This presentation and other products from the project are available at: (<http://www.heinzctr.org/wildlife>).

Although the technical report and associated documents are available in print and on the website, the project investigators believe that workshop presentations and peer-to-peer communications have been much more effective in communicating the results of the project.