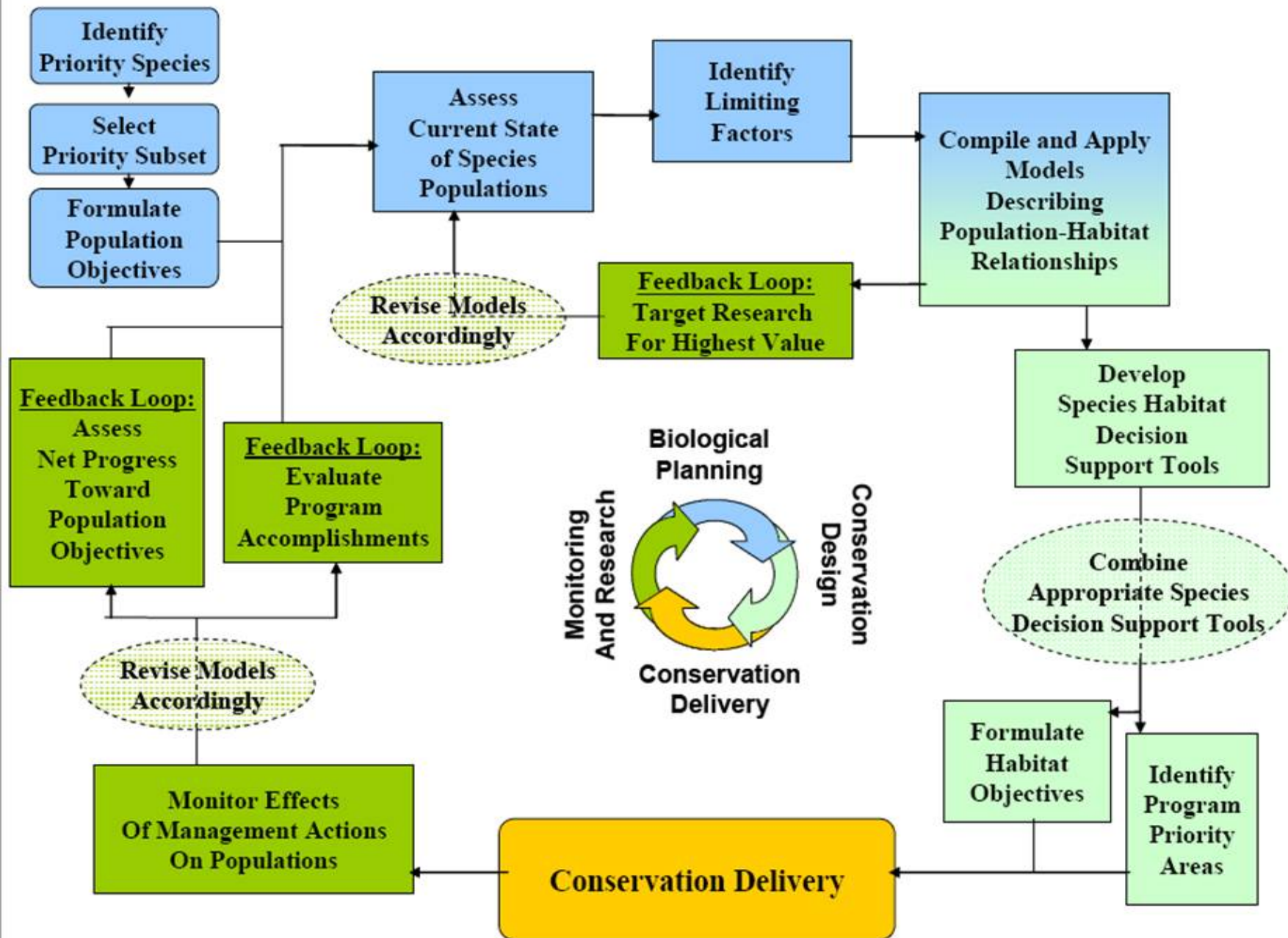


Strategic Habitat Conservation Diagram





Conservation Science and Policy

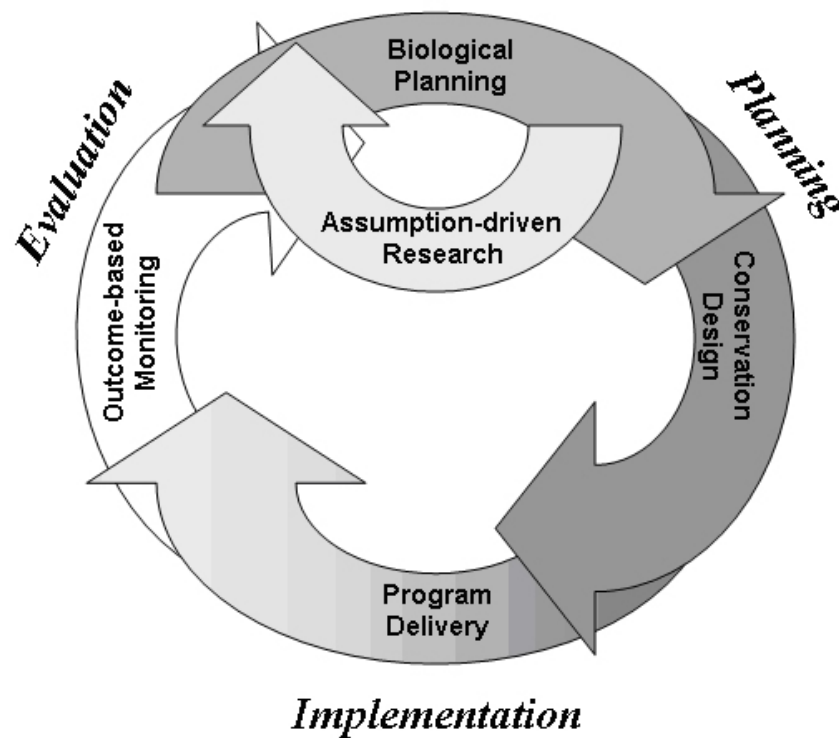
National Conservation Training Center

Strategic Habitat Conservation Fact Sheet

From the National SHC Technical Advisory Team

Strategic habitat conservation (SHC) is a science-based framework for making management decisions about where and how to deliver conservation efficiently to achieve specific biological outcomes. Although originally focused on habitat conservation, this strategic conservation approach will include all Service programs and address both habitat and non-habitat factors limiting fish and wildlife populations. SHC is a way of thinking and of doing business that requires us to set specific biological goals, allows us to make strategic decisions about our work, and encourages us to constantly reassess and improve our actions.

Strategic habitat conservation incorporates these elements – biological planning, conservation design, delivery, monitoring and research – in a framework that allows change (adaptive) and repetition (iterative).



- Biological planning involves identifying priority trust resources, determining population objectives, assessing the current status of populations, identifying threats and limiting factors, and using models to describe the relationship of populations to habitat and other limiting factors.
- Conservation design uses the results of biological planning to develop decision support tools, including maps and models, to guide management. It also identifies priority geographic areas for conservation and determines population-based objectives for habitat or other limiting factors based on these tools.
- Conservation delivery involves implementing conservation actions through programs and partnerships that are guided by decision support tools and targeted to achieve specific biological results (outcomes).
- Monitoring collects data to evaluate the effectiveness of conservation actions in reaching biological outcomes and to provide feedback to future planning and delivery.
- Research tests assumptions in biological planning and conservation design that have the greatest impact on management decisions and provides feedback to future planning.

The question we each need to ask is: **"How we can incorporate this approach into our management decisions and our day-to-day routines?"** Building on past success and informed by experience, strategic habitat conservation integrates all the facets of conservation biology necessary to achieve our highest conservation priorities.

- Strategic habitat conservation is not something to do, but a way to do something.



Our conservation work often involves working in partnership with others. As we move forward with strategic habitat conservation, we need to be working with partners to determine who is best-suited to accomplish each phase of this process. For example, the Service is well-known for on-the-ground conservation actions, while USGS is known for their research capabilities. Using a strategic approach, our partnerships with state fish and wildlife agencies, tribes, USGS, private landowners, and conservation groups will grow stronger and the results will be more substantial. Here's a look at one instance of the approach in action:

The Service's work on Virginia's eastern shore is an excellent example of strategic conservation in action. Many habitat use and migration studies sponsored by the Service, the Commonwealth of Virginia, TNC and others have led us to concentrate our activities along the migratory funnel created at the southern tip of the Delmarva Peninsula. The Service put together a land protection planning group composed of federal, state, local and non-government partners who work together to identify priority land protection needs, pool funding sources and manage bird habitats under a memorandum of understanding agreement. Partners for Fish and Wildlife staff worked closely with the Division of Migratory Birds staff, National Wildlife Refuge System's Realty and Refuge staff and many non-Service partners to develop and implement two North American Wetlands Conservation Act grants in 2004 and 2005 to protect and restore over 9,000 acres of habitat for migratory birds and endangered species in Northampton, Virginia.

The Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge's comprehensive conservation plan will guide both protection and restoration efforts within the acquisition boundary. The on-going use of radar data will allow us to better understand and respond to migratory bird movements, and monitoring of habitat treatment areas will lead us to adjust future restoration actions to achieve the best responses from plant and bird species.

- The elements of strategic habitat conservation are the scientific method in action.

Strategic habitat conservation is not a new organization. It is not a new initiative. It is not a set of procedures to be checked off. It is, instead, an approach to guide our conservation work with more integrated information and more cross-programmatic collaboration to achieve even stronger results. It is a blending of science and relationships to meet our highest conservation priorities. As its name implies, it is a strategy for building on the incredible conservation work being accomplished on the ground by improving coordination, planning, implementation and monitoring at the landscape level.

- This strategic approach to conservation is a living process that changes and evolves.





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A U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and U.S Geological Survey Vision - Strategic Habitat Conservation

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service mission is to work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The U.S. Geological Survey serves the Nation by providing reliable scientific information to describe and understand the Earth; minimize loss of life and property from natural disasters; manage water, biological, energy, and mineral resources; and enhance and protect our quality of life. The American public created this role for government to make sure that populations of fish and wildlife will still be here for our grandchildren.

Anadromous fish, migratory birds, marine mammals, endangered and threatened fish, wildlife and plants, and refuge lands are entrusted to our management and conservation care. Further, we understand that humans, as a species, depend on the same ecological systems that sustain fish and wildlife. The health of these systems will determine our future as well.

Alongside our State and other conservation counterparts, we have proudly met the 20th century's conservation challenges:

- Ending unregulated and exploitive taking of public trust resources;
- Restoring and recovering wide-ranging, naturally abundant species;
- Acquiring, protecting, and managing public lands devoted to the perpetuation of fish and wildlife and their habitats;
- Representing the public's conservation interests in decisions relating to the development of the Nation's land and water resources; and
- Identifying and protecting rare species from extinction.

However, conservation of the future presents new and different challenges. In the 21st century, we face issues of scale, pace, and complexity that will make it virtually impossible for the Services, as we currently operate, to fulfill our role in assuring the future of our Nation's fish and wildlife - the reason we devote our careers to research and conservation. These challenges include:

- Sprawling development patterns and intensifying agriculture
- Lack of understanding and acceptance that people depend on the same environmental systems that sustain fish and wildlife - that any system separating people from conservation efforts is not sustainable
- Difficulty in ensuring a functional landscape that will support wildlife, because of the complex logistics of working with thousands of private landowners
- Lack of transparency and credibility
 1. lack of understanding and acceptance by public of what we are trying to achieve and why - we have difficulty articulating population and habitat objectives for trust resources, how they were developed, and why they are important

2. lack of understanding and acceptance by public of how we try to achieve population objectives – we have difficulty articulating how each program contributes to population and habitat objectives for trust resources and how much habitat is needed to support public expectations for population levels
- Constraints on staff and funds

We are expert at acute management – the management of harvest and take – and we need to continue to manage acute population impacts. However, we must envision and ensure functioning landscape-scale habitats a century from now that will support the abundance and diversity of trust species that the public expects. The contiguous landscapes needed are far too large to be simply acquired or regulated – we must become facilitators of cooperative conservation – focusing, leading, and encouraging all conservation efforts by individuals, agencies, and organizations to target strategic conservation outcomes that assure landscape habitat and population sustainability.

We must meet these challenges or accept the inevitable fate that we will fail in the mission that the American people have entrusted to us. We will only be able to count what is left.

To avoid this fate, we will commit to a new role of strategic conservation leadership that we call Strategic Habitat Conservation:

- We will engage partners and the public in development of population objectives for trust species, emphasizing transparency and credibility. These population objectives will result from knowledge of both biological resource viability and social impacts, and the public must, ultimately, support the consequences needed to achieve the objectives.
- We will facilitate the development and sharing of scientific information to help define the functional habitat landscapes needed, across large areas, to support population objectives for trust species. We will become a leader in facilitating conservation of functional landscapes across large regions to assure that fish and wildlife trust species will be here for our grandchildren.
- We will align our programs and conservation efforts to make clear contributions towards population and habitat conservation outcomes to achieve population objectives for trust species.
- We will recognize a shared responsibility to public trust resources with State Fish and Wildlife agencies and that the conservation required cannot be accomplished except in partnership. We honor State missions, passions, capacity, and expertise, and will facilitate and encourage programs that contribute towards strategic conservation outcomes that we develop together. We will develop a facilitation and coordination role in all of our programs that is not redundant, but complementary and synergistic, to the conservation efforts of other organizations and fulfills needs that are not easily accomplished by States across larger regions. We will catalyze and strengthen the collective capacity of State, Federal, and private conservation efforts.
- We will continue to provide leadership in promoting the need, development, and the use of cooperative and financial incentives for private landowners to manage habitat for the benefit of trust species and recognize that the entire public benefits from positive conservation actions of private landowners.

The future of North America's fish and wildlife depends on our success in achieving this vision. The Service and Survey together have a unique role and are the only entities that can facilitate needed conservation across such large areas. The American public has entrusted us to ensure the future of our resources for our grandchildren and theirs – it is our responsibility. This vision of landscape conservation for all trust species is daunting, with no assurance of success. However, we are certain of the outcome if we do not rise to this conservation leadership role, so we commit to this vision with the hope and determination that we will succeed.