

A Review of the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives

DETAILS

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Summary

The United States' tradition of conserving fish, wildlife, habitats, and cultural resources dates to the mid-19th century. States have long sought to manage fish and wildlife species within their borders, whereas many early federal conservation efforts focused on setting aside specific places as parks, sanctuaries, or reserves. Starting in the 1960s, several federal laws were passed to provide additional protection for individual species and particular natural resources. In recent decades, resource managers and scientists gained greater appreciation of broader ecosystem dynamics that extend beyond geographic or political boundaries, as well as the increasing stress on ecosystems due to human activities. The convergence of these trends points to the need for a conservation approach that focuses on the landscape more holistically and integrates across multiple jurisdictional boundaries, sectors, stakeholders, and conservation goals.

The landscape approach (Box S.1) is particularly important where multiple jurisdictions are involved; where the threats to species, ecosystems, and cultural resources occur at large regional scales; and where biological and geomorphic processes span across ecosystems. A migratory elk population, for example, might spend the summer in high-elevation forests on public land, migrate through a mix of public and private lands and water-ways, and overwinter on private agricultural lands at lower elevations, making it challenging to develop a comprehensive management plan for the population. Likewise, historic and archeological properties as well as traditional practices and livelihoods, such as ranching, farming or subsistence harvest, often span public, private, and tribal lands, requiring an integrated approach to management.

In 2009, in recognition of the benefits from conservation partnerships at the landscape-scale, the U.S. Department of the Interior's Secretary Ken Salazar issued Secretarial Order No. 3289 to establish the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs): a network of 22 individual, self-directed conservation areas covering all of the United States, including Pacific and Caribbean islands, as well as parts of Canada and Mexico (Figure S.1). The intent of the Secretarial Order was to provide a collaborative framework that could deliver the scientific information needed for effective management and catalyze conservation planning and actions across multiple jurisdictions through partnerships.

Based on this Secretarial Order, a program entitled the *LCC Network* was established with the main objectives to facilitate collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries, develop shared conservation priorities and common science needs among partners, and create conservation strategies to be implemented by participating agencies or other partners. Each LCC has its own governance structure, coordinators, and steering committee, which develops strategic conservation priorities for their region. The 22 LCCs are coordinated by a small team at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), with input from the LCC Council, an advisory group that helps shape the LCC Network's overall strategic vision and goals. The LCCs and the LCC Network were funded at roughly \$14 million and received about \$ 11 million for science support during the fiscal years 2014 and 2015.

The conservation community had a mixed response to the announcement and initial formation of the LCCs. Some regions eagerly embraced the concept, swiftly formed a steering

BOX S.1**Definitions**

Landscape scale: “The term ‘landscape-scale’ can represent many different spatial scales depending on the resources being managed... a ‘landscape’ is defined as a large area encompassing an interacting mosaic of ecosystems and human systems that is characterized by a set of intersecting management concerns. The landscape is not defined by the size of the area, but rather by the interacting elements that are meaningful to the management objectives. In addition, ...the term ‘landscape’ encompasses watersheds and marine environments that match the above description” (For the purposes of this report, the committee adopts the definition of “landscape-scale” from the President's Priority Agenda: Enhancing the Climate Resilience of America's Natural Resources^a [Council on Climate Preparedness and Resilience, 2014]).

Landscape approach: “The ‘Landscape approach’ seek[s] to provide tools and concepts for allocating and managing land to achieve social, economic, and environmental objectives in areas where agriculture, mining, and other productive land uses compete with environmental and biodiversity goals” (Sayer et al., 2013).

^a Available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/enhancing_climate_resilience_of_americas_natural_resources.pdf

committee, and identified joint conservation priorities. Others argued that a new federal program was unnecessary, pointing to existing efforts that appeared to address at least some of the same issues. Many expressed concerns that participating in LCCs would place more demands on already limited staff time and other resources. Nonetheless, all regions have proceeded to establish a conservation cooperative for engaging stakeholders.

Five years after the Secretarial Order was issued, Congress directed the FWS to ask the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to “evaluate: (1) the purpose, goals, and scientific merit of the program within the context of other similar programs; and (2) whether there have been measurable improvements in the health of fish, wildlife, and their habitats as a result of the program.” In response, a statement of task was developed to both address this Congressional request and provide an assessment of the evaluation process for LCCs (see Box S.2). The Academies established a study committee, which met numerous times, solicited extensive input from members of the stakeholder community, and authored this report.

NATIONAL NEED FOR A LANDSCAPE APPROACH TO CONSERVATION

Despite the strong rationale and broad support for landscape approaches in the conservation literature, many conservation activities in the United States continue to proceed in a piecemeal fashion because of the way conservation programs and institutions have been established over time. Congressional and Executive Branch actions over the past century have created a complex tapestry of environmental and conservation policies intended to reverse the decline of the nation’s natural and cultural resources. For example, the primary responsibility for

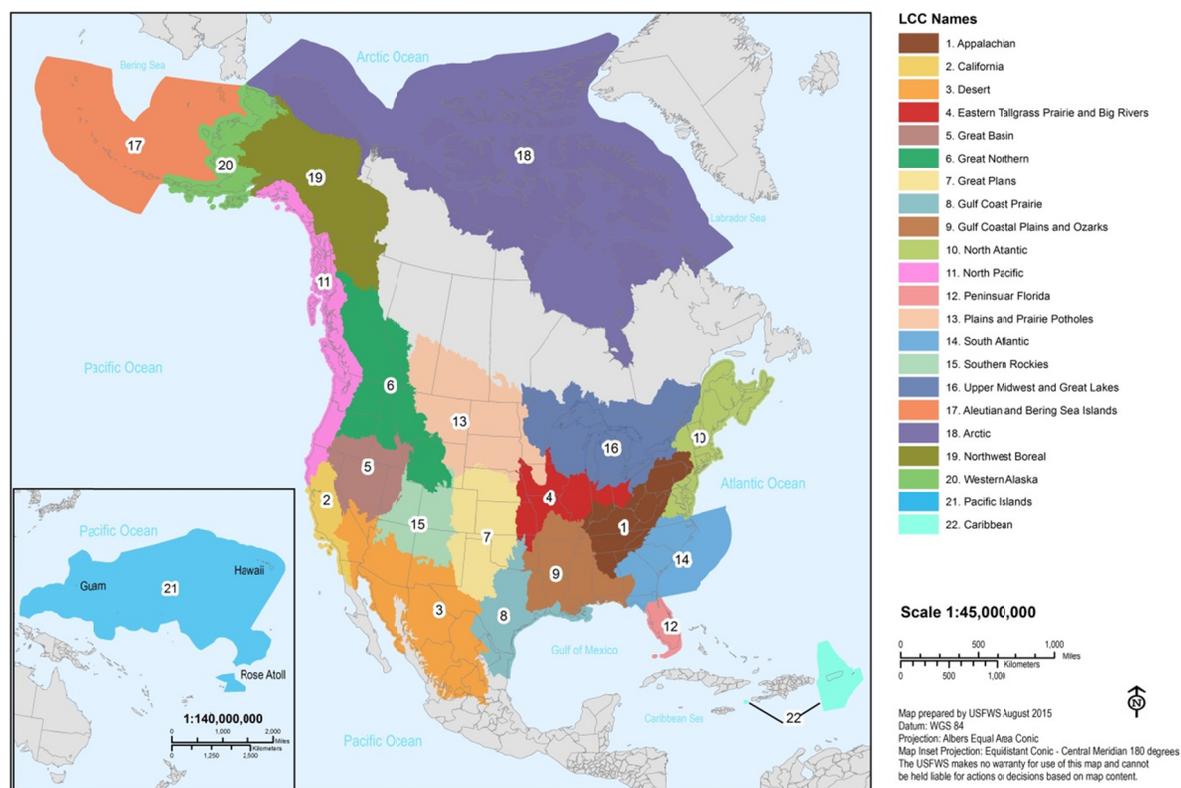


FIGURE S.1 Map of the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives. Each distinctly colored area on the map depicts the geographic coverage of each of the 22 individual, self-directed Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, which together cover all of the United States and parts of Canada, Mexico, and the Pacific Islands. (Source: <http://lccnetwork.org/>)

species management falls to states; however, federal agencies are tasked with managing migratory birds, eagles, marine mammals, endangered species, and marine resources in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone. Furthermore, several federal statutes and regulations confer authority to federal agencies for managing and conserving the habitat on which species—managed by the states—depend. In addition, changes in species and landscapes have impacts on cultural resources, which fall under federal, state, local, or tribal authority. Often, critical habitat is privately owned, further impacting conservation strategies. For example, as wildfires in the western United States have become of increasing concern, differences in fire management policy across national parks, federally managed forests, tribal lands, state lands, and private lands can make it difficult to manage large fires, especially where the destruction of property and the potential for loss of human lives are at stake. These jurisdictional boundaries in management responsibilities raise some particular challenges with respect to the large number of species with ranges that cover federal, state, local, and private lands across multiple states. Given this complex web of management responsibility for natural and cultural resources, a collaborative approach to conservation is needed, especially in a time of sparse resources.

The LCC Network is part of the Department of Interior's efforts to address this recognized national need. In 2014, the LCC Network published a strategic plan that articulates its

BOX S.2**Statement of Task**

The National Academy of Sciences will convene an ad hoc committee to examine the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC) program. This committee will evaluate the purpose, goals, and scientific merits of the program within the context of similar programs, and whether the LCC program has resulted in measurable improvements in the health of fish, wildlife, and their habitats. This will include:

1. An evaluation of the scientific merit of the LCC program and its goals.
2. A comparison of the stated purpose and goals of the LCC with other similar programs. How are these programs similar, and how do they differ? Is there substantial overlap in their mission and purpose? If so, is there rationale for and benefit from this overlap? Is there sufficient coordination with these related programs?
3. A comparison of the types of projects, activities, and collaborations supported by LCC and related programs.
 - Do the projects, activities, and collaborations supported by the LCC program overlap significantly with the traditional portfolio of other FWS programs (as the primary sponsoring agency)? Is there sufficient coordination and integration with these related programs? What benefit, if any, is gained by moving and/or consolidating this work within the LCC program? What effectiveness or efficiency is lost, if any, by housing this work within the LCC program? What changes can the FWS consider to address concerns?
 - Do the projects, activities, and collaborations supported by the LCC program overlap significantly with the portfolio of related programs in other agencies? Is there sufficient coordination with these related programs?
4. An examination of the evaluation process for the LCC program. What is FWS's strategy to assess the effectiveness (output and outcomes) of the LCC program? What are reasonable short, medium, and long-term metrics for the effectiveness of the LCC program in achieving its stated purpose and goals?
5. An assessment of the impacts of the LCC program at various scales. What goals (and/or objectives) have been achieved? What improvements in managing and conserving habitat and fish and wildlife species might be reasonable to expect from the LCC program in the timeframe it has existed? What longer-term impacts are likely to be realized?

goals, objectives, and representative tactics for the next five years (Box S.3). The committee reviewed the high-level goals and objectives of this plan to assess whether the LCC network has a strategy, structure, and function that can deliver on the promise of a landscape approach to conservation at the national scale. The committee concludes that the goals and associated objectives described in the LCC Network Strategic Plan are consistent with the research literature on landscape-scale conservation. The goals and objectives include most of the critical elements of a landscape approach, such as a unifying theme, a process for stakeholder engagement, adaptive management, and delivery of landscape-scale designs at the regional level with the aim to scale up to the network level. In general, the LCC Network Strategic Plan is consistent with the recognition that the most significant conservation challenges faced in the United States need to be confronted at a large spatial scale that transcends administrative and

BOX S.3**Goals and Objectives of the LCC Network Strategic Plan**

“The LCC Network Strategic Plan identifies goals, objectives, and example tactics that support the Network’s vision and mission. The goals identify common aims for individual LCCs and provide a way for them to align across the Network’s geography.” (LCC, 2014)

Four goals are identified in the LCC Network Strategic Plan:

- Goal 1. Conservation Strategy: “An ecologically connected network of landscapes and seascapes adaptable to global change — such as climate change — with the ability to sustain ecological integrity and health to meet the needs of society at multiple scales.”
- Goal 2. Collaborative Conservation: “Facilitated alignment of partnership efforts within and amongst LCCs, including planning efforts and resources, that improves conservation outcomes across LCCs and the Network.”
- Goal 3. Science: “Natural and cultural resources are conserved at large landscape and seascape scales, guided by the collaborative application of science, experience, and cultural or traditional ecological knowledge and the generation of new conservation knowledge.”
- Goal 4. Communication: “Advance the knowledge of, support for, and engagement in landscape-scale conservation across the LCC Network.”

geopolitical boundaries and engages a diversity of stakeholders across federal, state, tribal, local, and private land ownerships.

In examining the implementation of the LCCs to date, the committee concludes that, individual LCCs were created to convene diverse stakeholders to work together across geopolitical boundaries to take on large-scale conservation challenges. LCC steering committee members include representatives from state agencies responsible for managing fish and wildlife species, from nongovernmental organizations, and from a range of federal agencies. These LCCs facilitate new opportunities to identify common conservation goals and priorities to leverage efforts of individual partners at much greater scale. Each LCC is engaging stakeholders within its region to identify and respond to the needs of local and regional partners. For example, several LCCs jointly produced the Gulf Coast Vulnerability Assessment, which is the first step in adapting to potential impacts of climate change. At the same time, the collection of LCCs is developing a national network to contribute to some of the federal agencies’ national priorities.

The committee concludes that the nation needs to take a landscape approach to conservation and that the Department of the Interior is justified in addressing this need with the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives.

THE LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION COOPERATIVES IN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER SIMILAR PROGRAMS

Many programs within the Department of the Interior as well as in other federal agencies also aim to coordinate conservation efforts or engage similar stakeholders, leading to questions about the extent of overlap and coordination among these programs. The committee examined

the goals and structure of many other federal programs and used the following five attributes to determine how similar they are to LCCs: extent of land-coverage by the program, emphasis on research, emphasis on climate change as a driving issue, emphasis on natural and cultural resource conservation within the stated priorities, and extent to which the program's governance is concentrated in a single agency. These five selection criteria were chosen because the committee believes they sufficiently capture the essential attributes of the LCC Network.

Although many different programs and initiatives across federal agencies aim to undertake landscape-scale conservation, only a few programs overlap extensively with LCCs. Many other federal programs are more narrowly focused, with either a greater emphasis on research or a greater emphasis on conservation. Similarly, some of the federal programs span a much smaller geographic area, or are more narrowly focused on a single sector or a smaller set of target species. Generally, the committee found that there is good rationale for these overlaps and sufficient coordination with overlapping programs.

The committee concludes that the LCC Network is unique in that no other federal program is designed to address landscape conservation needs at a national scale, for all natural and cultural resources, in a way that bridges research and management efforts.

The programs with the most similarities to the LCCs are NOAA's Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments (RISA) program, FWS's Migratory Bird Joint Venture Program, FWS's Fish Habitat Partnership, and USGS's Climate Science Centers (CSCs).

- The RISA program supports 11² regional research teams that help expand and build the nation's capacity to prepare for and adapt to climate variability and change. Broadly, RISAs focus more directly on adapting socio-economic systems including urban water availability, public health, and community resilience to climate change. There is as much coordination between the LCCs and the RISAs as is reasonable to expect, given different heritages, different structure, and different focuses.
- The Joint Ventures were originally designed to develop conservation partnerships in support of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. The conservation projects of the Joint Ventures are supported by a federal grants program. The Joint Ventures share many similarities with the LCCs, in part, because the LCCs were modeled after the Joint Ventures due to their successful track-record in establishing partnerships and achieving conservation goals. The Joint Ventures consists of self-directed, regional partnerships that aim to develop shared priorities and goals. In general, they are more narrowly focused on specific migratory bird species and their habitats. The LCCs are, thus, much broader in scope, and each individual LCC has the flexibility to determine the target issues or species for conservation based on input from its steering committee members. LCCs and

² Since this report entered review, the committee has learned that the Southeast Climate Consortium is no longer currently funded, though they will have an opportunity to apply for future funds again. Therefore the RISA program now currently supports 10 regional research teams, not 11. Because the committee learned of this after the report entered review, references to the Southeast Climate Consortium remain throughout this report.

Joint Ventures have overlapping membership on their respective steering committees to ensure coordination.

- The National Fish Habitat Action Plan, which was developed in 2006 and updated in 2012, called for a network of regional Fish Habitat Partnerships that would focus on conservation of important aquatic habitats and species. The program is also modeled after the Joint Ventures and currently includes 19 regional, cross-jurisdictional Fish Habitat Partnerships comprising members from state and federal agencies, tribal governments, conservation groups, resource managers, academia, and other stakeholder groups. The FHPs operate regionally as self-directed partnerships and are collectively overseen by the National Fish Habitat Board. The Fish Habitat Partnerships have a more narrow focus than the LCCs. The two programs have overlapping membership on their steering committees to ensure coordination and reduce redundancies.
- The Climate Science Centers (CSCs) were established through the same executive order as the LCC Network. Both programs have a geographic focus that spans the entire contiguous United States from coast to coast (although unlike the CSCs, the LCCs also include parts of Canada and Mexico), are intended to address the full range of conservation challenges, and are housed in the Department of the Interior. The two programs were intended to be distinct but complementary with the CSCs having a greater emphasis on climate science delivery, while LCCs focus more on defining research needs for conservation, and on science and tool delivery to support conservation outcomes. Both CSCs and LCCs award external grants; are guided by steering committees; include an emphasis on natural and cultural landscapes; and incorporate climate science to support decisions.

Of the programs reviewed, only the Joint Ventures and the CSCs appear to have some potential for redundancy that might need further consideration. In general, the LCCs have sought to enable coordination and reduce redundancies with these other related programs, for example, by having overlapping members of their steering committees. Each individual LCC has the flexibility to respond to its stakeholder conservation priorities, which makes it possible for the LCCs to avoid redundancies with the Joint Ventures and identify synergies. Despite the recognized need and unique niche for these multiple landscape conservation partnerships, the number of such efforts can pose challenges to some partners whose active engagement is critical to achieving success.

Recommendation: The Department of the Interior should review the landscape and habitat conservation efforts, especially the Joint Ventures and the LCCs, to identify opportunities for improved coordination between these efforts. Special consideration should be given to the limited capacity of state agency partners to participate in multiple efforts simultaneously.

The CSCs and LCCs were initiated to be complementary, strong coordination between the two programs was always intended, and has been encouraged by having CSCs participate in LCCs activities within their regions. In many cases the coordination between the two programs

has been effective in helping bridge research investments and on-the-ground conservation needs. For example, many of the LCCs and CSCs run joint calls for proposals or at least consult during the design of a request for proposals. However, distinguishing the research funded by the two programs can be difficult, especially because both entities have evolved and aspire to fund scientific research and tool development in response to their respective stakeholder committees. Given this evolution, coordination becomes very important to ensure that the science funded by the two entities is complementary and not duplicative.

Recommendation: The LCC and CSC programs should be more clearly delineated. They should explicitly state how their research efforts differ and how they complement each other, identify and build on existing examples of coordination across the network, and make adjustments as appropriate. At the regional scale, LCC coordinators and CSC federal directors should coordinate their activities, including calls for proposals, as much as possible to avoid duplication of effort.

EARLY ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE LCCS

The FWS developed the Science Investment and Accountability Schedule (SIAS) to evaluate individual LCCs. Each LCC is asked to conduct a self-evaluation using the SIAS instrument and submit to the Network Coordinator. This self-evaluation tool is currently the only formal assessment that is conducted regularly. The committee reviewed the self-assessments of the individual LCCs and other materials provided by the LCC Network to evaluate what has been accomplished to date.

Despite the relative youth of the program, numerous objectives and milestones have been achieved by individual LCCs, especially related to developing partnerships and collaborative governance as well as identifying shared conservation goals. Each of the 22 self-directed LCCs appointed staff coordinators, science coordinators, and a steering committee; developed a governance structure; and convened a steering committee to develop a common set of goals. Most LCCs have identified shared conservation and research priorities for use by all partners and a few LCCs are developing Landscape Conservation Designs. All LCCs and their steering committee members have initiated a critical first step in adapting to the impacts of climate change by developing vulnerability assessments. In fact, they all have developed vulnerability assessments for at least 33% of their geographic area or 33% of their priority resources.

In addition, progress has been made toward the LCC Network's goal to advance science; a considerable amount of scientific work has been funded and disseminated to resource managers. For example, 142 projects are funded under the "data acquisition and development" category, and 221 projects are funded under the "decision support" category. Although it was beyond the committee's scope to look at all of the research projects and activities undertaken by each LCC, the committee did hear from several stakeholders that a number of tools and research results have already improved resource management decisions and helped develop more cost-effective management options.

The committee concludes that the individual LCCs can point to many early accomplishments, and have made progress toward the LCC Network's high-level goals

related to addressing conservation strategy, developing collaborative conservation, and advancing science for conservation.

EVALUATING PROGRESS FOR THE NATIONAL LCC NETWORK

The committee found it difficult to determine whether the LCC Network had resulted in measurable improvements in the health of fish, wildlife, and their habitats and cultural resources. One significant limitation is the youth of the program. Most of the individual LCCs were only initiated four or five years ago, whereas conservation efforts typically take many years or decades to demonstrate measurable changes in the health of resources. Thus, it is too early to expect to see much improvement in the status of habitat, fish and wildlife.

In addition, the LCC Network poses some unique challenges with regard to evaluating progress. Because the LCCs do not have the authority to deliver conservation actions, but instead rely on their partners to implement the on-the-ground management objectives, it becomes particularly challenging to measure conservation outcomes. In other words, while it is clear that improved coordination among these partners is needed to reach their shared conservation goals, it is not straightforward to measure the added value of the coordination. This, in turn, makes it challenging to measure and document how the LCCs contribute to improved management of fish, wildlife, their habitats and cultural resources. While acknowledging these challenges, it is important to attempt to articulate conservation measures for the purpose of evaluating and guiding LCCs progress toward its stated goals.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the LCC Network must contend with a tension between demonstrating how individual LCCs meet the goals of their respective partners versus the goals of the federal government as required by legislation. The LCCs are designed to respond to their stakeholder needs, yet, as part of the federal government are required to report on accomplishments to Congress. Thus, it is unclear at this point, what evaluation and attribution process could link actions on the ground by partners of the LCCs to the planning effort of an individual LCC or the LCC network as a whole to meet Congressional requirements. In addition, it is not apparent to the committee how the strategic planning effort at the scale of the entire network of 22 LCCs shown in Figure S.1 will result in actions on the ground.

Recommendation: The LCC Network should improve its evaluation process to better capture the contributions made by all partner agencies or groups toward common objectives. In particular, to demonstrate the effectiveness of the individual LCCs and the LCC Network, the evaluation process should measure how resources invested in any portion of the LCC Network further the goals of the LCC Network and their partners. The efforts invested in the LCCs and the LCC Network consist of: (1) federal funding allocation via the FWS; (2) partners' in kind contributions via staff time or technical expertise; and (3) funding from other state/federal agencies or private partners.

DEMONSTRATING BENEFITS TO LCC PARTNERS AND THE NATION

Ultimately, the LCC Network needs to demonstrate measurable benefits to its partners and the nation. This will require a framework that can connect needs and actions at a regional

scale with conservation priorities identified at a network scale. The LCC Network has taken some steps in this direction by developing the LCC Network Strategic Plan and implementing the SIAS to evaluate individual LCCs. The committee has identified several ways that these efforts could be improved, particularly to address challenges in aggregating the achievements of individual LCCs to measure the progress toward network-wide goals.

An effective evaluation process must consider the programmatic goals, the reporting requirements, and the intended audience for the evaluation. Because the LCC Network is a federal program, their evaluation process needs to conform to guidelines by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to demonstrate the performance of the program. It also needs to be able to evaluate the collaborative processes, which constitute a central program goal of the LCCs and a relatively unique goal of a federal program.

The committee reviewed the goals and objectives in the LCC Network Strategic Plan and compared them to the benchmarks contained in the SIAS and concludes that the SIAS provides a meaningful initial evaluation of the individual LCCs. Specifically, the performance metrics categories (process, outputs, and outcomes) in the SIAS conform with guidelines from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB); the metrics align with some of the goals in the LCC Network Strategic Plan to some degree; and the metrics enable aggregation across the individual LCCs.

However, the SIAS tool falls short in the following ways: it is not based on the LCC Network Strategic Plan and thus, does not assess progress toward the network's goals, and it does not measure how the LCCs and the LCC Network contribute to the goals of their partners. Most notably, the SIAS does not currently include a process to measure the outcomes that result from the collaborative process and its partners' on-the-ground conservation efforts. While this FWS evaluation approach meets the agency's federal reporting requirements, the current metrics are not well suited for measuring the value added of the LCCs.

Recommendation: The FWS, in its next iteration of the SIAS, should (1) identify how and where the SIAS relates to elements of the LCC Network strategy; (2) identify the benchmarks associated with each activity area; and continue that exercise by (a) classifying benchmarks as short-, medium-, or long-term and (b) ensuring that benchmarks are adequately developed for and assigned to each SIAS Activity Area; and (3) begin the process of identifying, to the extent feasible and practicable, costs relative to returns on investment associated with achieving each benchmark.

The LCC Network Strategic Plan describes the network-wide goals and objectives, and therefore could provide a useful framework for metric-setting. However, the committee found that the plan does not always distinguish clearly between the conservation goals or objectives it is trying to achieve and the processes and means by which it aims to achieve those conservation goals. There is some redundancy among plan "objectives" as well as some misplacement of objectives within main goals. As a result, the LCC Network Strategic Plan does not provide a clear hierarchy for goals and objectives. If revised, the plan could be used to develop an efficient set of metrics for evaluating the LCC Network activities.

Developing metrics for the network as a whole may best be incorporated into an evaluation tool that is complementary to, but separate from, the SIAS. Because the SIAS is a FWS product that is reflective of the agency's own goals and objectives and is needed for federal reporting requirements, the LCC Network as a whole may consider an additional evaluation framework that can better capture goals, objectives, and measurements of the individual LCCs and allow aggregation toward network-wide progress evaluation.

Recommendation: Establishment of metrics at the individual and network-wide scales should become a high priority.

- **Metrics should be developed to measure each LCC's unique goals, yet, be consistent enough across LCCs to permit aggregation to a network scale.**
- **The criteria used to rate the performance of the LCC Network as a whole, and its components, should be closely related to the objectives that they are intended to evaluate, and articulated clearly enough that any evaluator with access to the same information about the LCC Network could apply those criteria consistently.**
- **To more clearly demonstrate relevance to the stated purpose and goals of the LCC Network, as well as to better define the FWS role in support thereof, the SIAS Activity Areas and benchmarks should be written in a manner that clearly aligns with the LCC purpose and goals, as captured in the LCC Network Strategic Plan or its next iteration.**

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The nation needs a landscape approach to conservation. Implementing landscape approaches in the United States is challenging because of the multitude of federal, state, local, and tribal jurisdictions, as well as numerous private landholders and stakeholders. The LCC Network initiated by the Department of the Interior aims to address this national need. Many other programs are also striving to address regional conservation challenges. However, only the LCC Network is designed to address this need at a national scale for all natural and cultural resources, and to bridge from research to management.

As reported in the LCCs self-assessments, individual LCCs have identified conservation priorities and undertaken many projects that will enable them to contribute to improved resource management. Evaluating progress at the network-wide scale has been more challenging because the program is still relatively new and because it needs better ways to measure the outcomes that result from the collaborative process and to link the conservation efforts undertaken by partners with network-wide goals and objectives. Improving their evaluation process will allow the LCCs and the LCC Network to demonstrate measurable benefits to its partners and the nation.

Assuming the LCC Network successfully implements its strategic plan, the LCCs will provide an important process by which stakeholders can engage at the landscape-scale to set strategic conservation priorities that can span interest groups, disciplinary expertise, and sectoral approaches. This report provides guidance to further improve on the ability of the LCC Network to deliver on its vision of "landscapes capable of sustaining natural and cultural resources for current and future generations."

