

North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership: Ten Years of Collaborative Conservation

OVERVIEW

Established in 2000, the North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership (NCSCP) is now celebrating its 10-year anniversary. This benchmark provides an opportunity to check-in with partners to learn about their perspectives on the collaborative effort embodied by NCSCP and the conservation outcomes achieved as a result. Engaging partners in an evaluation of the NCSCP will foster dialogue and promote action that can help ensure the efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of the NCSCP for years to come. Sara DiBacco will facilitate this process by conducting interviews, administering surveys, and hosting a series of small workshops, but every partner will play a vital role by participating in the process and contributing honest and critical feedback. As part of the evaluation, it is useful to look back on two founding documents, the NCSCP Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the NCSCP Charter. The MOU and Charter respectively establish the conservation function and organizational form of the NCSCP. Key components are summarized below:

MISSION

The mission of NCSCP is to coordinate the development and implementation of conservation strategies for the red-cockaded woodpecker, other native biota, longleaf pine, and other ecosystems in the Sandhills of North Carolina compatible with the land use objectives of the partners.

STAKEHOLDERS

NC Dept of Environment and Natural Resources
NC Division of Forest Resources
NC Division of Parks and Recreation
NC Wildlife Resources Commission
Sandhills Area Land Trust
Sandhills Ecological Institute
The Nature Conservancy
US Army at Fort Bragg
US Army Environmental Command
US Fish and Wildlife Service

GOALS

Collaborative landscape-scale planning * Protection and management of endangered species and rare natural communities * Natural resource education * Research * Development of a ecosystem database for use by NCSCP members and other Federal, State, and local organizations

COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES

Cooperative efforts will build on the strengths of individual programs, resulting in better stewardship of public trust resources. It is the intent of NCSCP, therefore, to promote cooperation to the greatest possible extent, prevent duplication of effort, and ensure that information produced by each partner is used to the maximum extent possible. NCSCP Partners agree to cooperate in the use of data, personnel, funding, equipment, and other resources in order to maximize conservation benefits.

COMPLEMENTARY ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES

- Identify and map highest priority habitats and species in need of conservation attention in this region;
- Promote conservation, restoration, health, and sustainable use of the landscape and native terrestrial and aquatic communities that depend, in whole or in part, on the lands and waters of the NCSCP focus area;
- Encourage public/private partnerships among participating governmental agencies, community and non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, corporations, and private landowners to enhance resources and achieve land conservation results on a landscape scale;
- Enhance coordination among participants concerning current and future initiatives such that participants will be able to take better advantage of the work already being done by others, as well as identify opportunities to undertake more ambitious projects than any single participant's resources would otherwise permit;



COMPLEMENTARY ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES cont.

- Encourage an on-going regional dialogue among participants and other regional stakeholders about sustainable land management, working landscapes, and native biodiversity;
- Establish a network of conservation lands and waterways and to promote the establishment of landscape corridors and buffers between and adjacent to existing conservation lands in order to protect and enhance long-term wildlife population viability and genetic exchange and to ensure land management flexibility;
- Promote the education of interested private individuals and corporate landowners and local government agencies on conservation land management through demonstrations, workshops, and field trips;
- Provide local, county, and state government entities with the information and tools necessary to help conserve the natural resources of the region;
- Promote recognition of the beauty, significance, and value of the region's special conservation resources;
- Establish coordinated strategies and formal mechanisms to facilitate habitat management on public and private lands at a landscape scale; and
- Develop and implement methodologies and appropriate agreements to maximize data compatibility among partners, promote exchange of data, and standardize quality assurance protocols to meet the mutual needs of participants.

STEERING COMMITTEE

The primary responsibility of the Steering Committee is to provide the necessary resources and guidance to accomplish the NCSCP mission. The Steering Committee is also a supervising body for the Working Groups, resolves impasses in consensus within the Working Groups, and approves all final Working Group plans.

Other responsibilities include:

- Attendance at all meetings. Alternates may represent.
- Preparation for meetings including reading appropriate materials and arriving prepared to work.
- Members represent their individual organization's positions to the Steering Committee and vice versa, members represent the position of the Steering Committee to their individual organizations.
- Members agree to support the mission of the NCSCP.

WORKING GROUPS

Working Groups were initially tasked with developing management plans that would be incorporated into a comprehensive conservation strategy. A list of the current working groups and a short description of each are provided below. Details were obtained from Working Group related documentation.

- Communications Working Group – Establish plans for internal and external communications for the purposes of information distribution, engagement, and public relations.
- Land Protection Working Group – Establish a landscape-scale network of conserved lands and waters to ensure the long-term viability of the Sandhills longleaf pine ecosystem.
- RCW Recovery Working Group – Develop a series of strategies to address the overall recovery of the red-cockaded woodpecker in the NC Sandhills, including connectivity between subpopulations.
- Reserve Design Working Group – Synthesize biological information and create a vision to guide long-term conservation of native Sandhills ecosystems.
- Resource Management Working Group – Identify issues regarding longleaf ecosystem management in a landscape with mixed ownership and develop recommendations to resolve those issues.

COORDINATOR

The responsibility of the coordinator is to provide logistical support for Steering Committee members and to serve as a liaison between the Steering Committee and each of the Working Groups.

OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Regional partners do not sign the MOU and are not listed as Steering Committee members in the Charter, but they are valuable working group participants. These include: Sustainable Sandhills, Base Realignment and Closure Regional Task Force, Fort Bragg/Pope AFB Regional Land Use Advisory Commission, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, individual forestry consultants, and private landowners.

