

❖ **Standard 2: Have work plans, content, and products reviewed by peers (and if appropriate, key stakeholders and partners).**

[ANALYZE]

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### **Rationale**

Peer review provides an important opportunity to strengthen the assessment/vision process and ensure that the results are scientifically rigorous, comprehensive, appropriately presented and available to support implementation.

### **Recommended Products**

- Participation by ecoregional assessment/vision teams early in their process in a peer-review workshop. This review will result in a formal document ("contract") among peers stating next steps to strengthen the process and products. Participation in later stages is helpful as well, and highly recommended.
- Documentation of how peer review (both through formal workshops and informal means) was accomplished.
- Present final results (products and methods) for peer review. This review will evaluate the assessment in relation to standards, identify gaps, comment on potential successes and limitations of the assessment in supporting conservation, and propose priorities and next steps to strengthen it.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Peer review is used in ecoregional assessments to share work plans, processes, information, technical/scientific aspects, challenges and decisions with peers and outside experts in order to strengthen them relative to our set of standards. Reviewers can provide critical feedback regarding the technical and scientific merit of approaches and methods, ensure that information used to build the assessment is complete and accurate, and identify best practices from their own experiences that might enable a team to strengthen their assessment and address key challenges facing them. Team members use recommendations to make adjustments to generate more robust ecoregional assessments and better inform the implementation and measures of conservation actions.

Although many teams regularly use reviews, some teams fail to fully exploit the value of reviews to enhance their efforts. The vast majority of teams use opportunistic reviews, often only in the scientific realms of the assessment process and ask limited questions such as: Are the supporting data complete and accurate? Is the assembly process technically and scientifically sound? However, peer review should be ongoing during the assessment/vision process, extending beyond the scientific in order to set the stage for implementation. Reviews should address broader questions such as: Is the work plan developed with a vision toward implementation? Are the right stakeholders engaged in the process at the right times? Are sufficient resources (staff and money) available to produce the desired results? Are products aimed at delivering greater conservation impact by TNC or WWF and their partners?

There are three major components of an ecoregional assessment that should undergo peer review:

- The work plan
- Content
- Products

### *The Work Plan*

The work plan is perhaps the most critical component of the ecoregional assessment/vision process. It sets the stage for the entire process, ensuring that all standards are adequately addressed to the extent possible, that resources are available to achieve the desired result, that the timeline is appropriate to the task at hand, and that the right mix of partners/stakeholders are engaged to ease the task of implementation. Reviewers of the work plan should include those from science, senior management and implementation realms of the lead organizations as well as participants from partner organizations.

### *Content*

Content is the specific information, data, methods and tools used in the assessment process. Review of the content enables teams to receive critical input to address major challenges related to the more technically-oriented ecoregional assessment/biodiversity vision standards. Are there sources of critical information that have not been accessed? What are some methods for producing high quality products given limitations in data? Are approaches credible? What additional resources and expertise is available to assist teams with completing specific tasks? Reviewers for technical components of the planning process should include external and internal scientists and other conservation planners.

### *Products*

Ecoregional assessments will not advance conservation if products are not specifically designed to inform conservation actions. Products of the assessment/vision process must meet the needs of the lead organizations and partners. Review of planned and draft products by implementation, communication, development, government relations and senior management staff can greatly improve final products and associated communication strategies. Ideally, initial thoughts and considerations into products and communication should also occur during the project planning process at the onset of the assessment/vision process, and during associated peer review of that plan.

Formal review of content and products may be necessary for certain key partners and stakeholders to use them. Government agencies often have requirements for specific information, formats, processes and participants for reviews in order to use certain type of products. These requirements are often in place to ensure that decisions that are made using the information are supported by sufficient expert review to be upheld in court. Publication of ecoregional assessment products in peer reviewed journals provides a broader community access

to, and an indication of the credibility of the work. Peer reviewed literature can be cited, and is suggested by many as the ultimate source of credibility.

## **CASE STUDIES**

Under development

## **TOOLS**

TNC/WWF [Peer Review Workshops](#): Aside from peer review opportunities created by ecoregional assessment teams, The Nature Conservancy and World Wildlife Fund are partners in providing formal peer review opportunities in the form of 3-day workshops. These are held around the globe 3-4 times per year and target team at all phases of the assessment/vision process as well as teams that have experience implementing assessments and are considering additional iterations. One of the great benefits of this form of peer review is the opportunity to see many other ecoregional assessment teams addressing challenges in a variety of situations, many of which share similarities with other teams. Teams will also benefit from hearing suggestions to strengthen approaches from many teams and peers with a wide range of expertise. Details about the ecoregional assessment peer review workshops are available at: [www.sites-conserveonline.org](http://www.sites-conserveonline.org).

## **REFERENCES**

### *Websites*

The Peer Review Programme of the European Employment Strategy shows peer review principles from a very different sector, but focused on learning and development of best practices. See <http://www.almp.org/en/principles.html>

The National Strategies for Sustainable Development in France has many related articles helpful when considering and soliciting peer review. See [http://www.nssd.net/peer\\_review\\_b.html](http://www.nssd.net/peer_review_b.html)

This peer review handbook has some interesting peer review guidelines. See <http://sky.fit.qut.edu.au/~bruce/peerreviewhanbook/>

### *Publications*

Collison, C. and Parcell, G.. 2004. Learning to Fly. Capstone Books.. Outstanding insights concerning peer-reviews and peer-assists.

Dalal-Clayton, B. (2004). [A Proposed Options -Based Methodology for Shared Learning and Peer Review of National Strategies for Sustainable Development \(NSDS\)](#). International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), London.

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Ruckelshaus, William D. (2002). [Science and Public Policy: The Twain Must Meet](#). Wolfe lecture speech given at University of Washington May 16, 2002.