

❖ **Standard 5: Assemble an ecoregion team with strong and ambitious leadership, ecology, conservation biology, data analysis and management and socioeconomic capacity. [CONCEPTUALIZE]**

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### **Rationale**

Lasting conservation of biodiversity across the ecoregion requires an interdisciplinary approach that ensures both biological rigor and creative solutions that are reflective of overarching socioeconomic and political realities. These capacities may stem from either the lead organization responsible for development of the plan or from partner organizations.

### **Recommended Products**

- A team with the technical skills and experience to engage a wide range of technical staffs, policymakers, and stakeholders, and led by a knowledgeable, energetic, and respected ecoregional coordinator.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Strong, focused leadership and management is critical to successful ecoregional assessments and conservation actions. Whether the ecoregion exists in a single country or straddles international borders, the clarity and focus of leadership and management is likely to determine the level of conservation achievement and sustainability.

Although the ecoregional assessment process will engage many partners, the ultimate responsibilities for implementation will likely fall on the shoulders of one or two organizations. Because of its size, experience, and mission, a large organization (such as TNC or WWF) will often emerge as the primary leader or facilitator of an ecoregion team. The experience of TNC, and WWF in ecoregions around the world has provided some powerful lessons on leadership, teamwork, responsibility, and accountability.

At the outset of the assessment process, teams should be assembled by considering:

- Components of strong leadership
- Definition of roles and positions
- Multidisciplinary skills and expertise

### *Components of strong leadership*

One of the most consistent and powerful lessons that has emerged from ecoregional conservation is the importance and value of strong leadership and teamwork. Without these, conservation efforts have suffered from inertia, become dysfunctional, or failed to realize tangible opportunities for conservation action and leveraging. With strong leadership, ecoregional conservation teams have achieved much more than anyone expected in terms of program development, conservation impact, and collaboration.

From a project management point of view, a successful ecoregional assessment will have:

- Clearly defined leadership and management roles and responsibilities, with direct reporting lines to senior decision makers (internal and, where appropriate, external).
- An ecoregional assessment leader with clear authority for the ecoregion conservation process (whatever form or title that role takes)
  - A multidisciplinary team supporting the process

Effective ecoregional assessment and conservation leaders are:

- Focused on the ecoregional work (i.e., do not have split responsibilities or accountabilities)
- Respected by all participating organizations, programs, and individuals
- Able to give direction and build relationships
- Able to grasp key elements of the big picture and identify priorities
- Innovative
- Excellent communicators
- Confident that ambitious conservation goals and targets can be reached
- Able to share power but still ensure that objectives are achieved

A number of successful leadership models have emerged from various ecoregional assessment projects around the world. Some examples:

- **The appointment or contracting of a leader (individual or organization) who, first and foremost, is an intelligence gatherer, planner, and facilitator.** These leaders are charged with developing the relationships needed to support the ecoregional assessment: building partnerships, gathering information, conducting analyses, identifying priorities and defining strategies and adapting and refining the assessment process as local conditions require.
- **The appointment of a leader employed specifically to deliver an ecoregional assessment/biodiversity vision and plan.** The ecoregional workplan articulates the objectives and scope of the ecoregion work and its relationship (as a delivery mechanism or supporting player) to other conservation programs. The workplan also sets out the objectives of the team leader.. The team leader is primarily responsible for delivering the plan's objectives within the designated time frame. This approach perhaps best suits ecoregions where a framework for implementation of the ecoregional assessment/vision (including institutional arrangements or funding options) already exists and the opportunity to introduce elements of ecoregion conservation into that framework has been identified or negotiated.
- **The employment of an ecoregion leader who is given responsibility for defining and shaping the entire ecoregion process (from reconnaissance through to action).** The job description for this form of ecoregion leadership is often developed by host or donor agencies (such as the local TNC/WWF office or other partnering NGOs) that want to establish an ecoregion leadership role in a country or across multiple countries where large-scale conservation initiatives haven't existed before. The evolving nature of ecoregion conservation may pose a challenge for individuals who fill these sorts of leadership positions. In a number of instances where individuals have been installed to lead the

ecoregion process from day one, the evolution of the ecoregional conservation plan (and the accompanying relationships, issues, and challenges) has required the creation of complementary roles. In some cases, those roles include the establishment of new, independent entities that can assume responsibility for stakeholder dialogue and the negotiation of potentially divisive issues, leaving the ecoregion leader free to pursue development of the biodiversity vision followed by advocacy and lobbying. WWF develops programs around ecoregions. The Nature Conservancy has state and country programs which affect ecoregional conservation using a variety of organizing frameworks. When programs are built around ecoregions, the model above works well. In situations where other programs are affecting conservation in ecoregions under different frameworks, it may not be necessary to appoint an ecoregional leader.

The leader or leaders need to be the primary force behind inciting conservation action. The leader and ecoregional team need to review the role of leadership at every phase of the process to ensure that the ecoregional plan has been designed and is operating in a manner most likely to achieve the plan's ambitious goals. In addition, it is critical that, as the conservation process moves into implementation, the role and responsibility of ecoregion assessment leadership is considered alongside other positions that the lead organization or partner organizations already have in place and that are influential in the ecoregion. This coordination is important to ensure that ecoregion leadership rests with those best placed to gain maximum leverage with institutional partners and key stakeholders.

### *Defining roles and positions*

Clear terms of reference (TOR) for all roles and positions provide ecoregional leaders and teams (including management and steering committees) with guidance toward effective completion of ecoregional assessments. The role of a leader will be shaped by the ecoregion conservation process and evolve alongside the wider conservation and development context—whether that be large-scale programs that have been established outside the ecoregion conservation framework, national poverty alleviation or development strategies, or a changing political and economic climate. These realities require that the role and function of a leader be open to change and amendment as the conservation process evolves, and particularly as it establishes relationships with external processes and initiatives.

In addition to the technical elements of ecoregion conservation, the development of ecoregional assessments and the implementation of conservation strategies demands significant attention to organizational details, such as management and coordination. To ensure that conservation planning and implementation (either single-country or multi-country) run smoothly and efficiently, it is important to:

- Secure the agreement of host and donor offices (such as TNC/WWF and other partners) on ecoregion objectives, management, and operational responsibilities
- Provide a clear mandate for the individuals or offices taking the lead in ecoregional assessment and conservation
- Produce and secure early commitment of host and donor offices to an ecoregion management plan that includes timelines, standards, and an articulation of roles and responsibilities

- Agree (through a memorandum of understanding or contract) on the parameters for inter-institutional ecoregion development and implementation.

### *Skills and expertise*

From the development of an initial vision or assessment to implementation of an action plan, an ecoregional team needs to include people who have broad biodiversity knowledge, interests and capabilities. The profile of the ecoregion team will vary, depending on the profile of the ecoregion and the phase of development that needs to be managed. However, planners should anticipate that the team will need access to high-quality program coordination and project design experience, good science and ecology experience, experts with access to and familiarity with data, GIS and data management expertise, strategic planning, decision-making, policy, fund-raising, communications, and monitoring and evaluation capacity. In addition, a range of technical experts and advisors can be brought in to support the team across themes as diverse as ecology, economics, education, and institutional development. Many partners with data sets and technical expertise will be academic and agency institutions.

The assessment/vision must have a strong science basis in order to be robust and credible. This will require that the ecoregional team contains conservation biology expertise. Of course, the need for this expertise does not stop at the assessment phase – questions of implementation, monitoring and evaluation will all call for solutions and techniques grounded in conservation biology.

At the same time, long-lasting conservation solutions will work within the confines of socioeconomic reality. A thorough understanding of the socioeconomic situation is a good starting point, but such conditions are very dynamic, and a member(s) of the team will need to be looking out for trends, emerging threats and opportunities.

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR INNOVATION**

Ecoregional conservation has often been viewed as a two stage process: scientists develop information which is then handed to programs that implement strategies. This transfer often results in a loss of information and understanding. Having staff involved in the analyses continue as part of the strategy and implementation phases benefits the process.

There is room for innovation to improve the breadth of expertise involved in ecoregional assessments and conservation implementation. While the ecological science has been the focus in the past, there needs to be growth in socioeconomic science to better inform strategies and incorporate the human context. Project management training is becoming a more common experience for staff in many organizations, and the results of such training should provide lessons for future ecoregional teams.

### **TOOLS**

[Ecoregion Programme leader: Sample Terms of Reference](#). WWF (2004) Several examples of TOR for leaders of ecoregion assessment efforts can be viewed in Appendix E page 106 of WWF (2004). Ecoregion Action Programmes; A Guide for Practitioners. Washington, DC.

*TNC intranet resources:*

A basic overview of Project Management training objectives available at:  
<http://34568.portal.tnc.org/hr/staffdev/resources/art12313.html>

A set of links to Project Management resources is available at:  
<http://34568.portal.tnc.org/is/pmo/animals/>

TNC resource for Memoranda of Understanding, Memoranda of Association and Contractual Agreements. This site includes a list of existing agreements and provides examples which could be used to draft a new agreement. Please consult government relations and legal staff when drafting an agreement. See <http://34568.portal.tnc.org/xa/gr/partnership/>

## **RESOURCES**

### *Websites*

Institute for Conservation Leadership (<http://www.icl.org/>)

Conservation Study Institute (<http://www.nps.gov/mabi/csi/about/about.htm>)

### *Publications*

Adams, J., (ed) (1986). Transforming leadership: from vision to results. Miles River Press, Alexandria, VA.

Barkhorn, I. and L. Linden (2003). Managing Large-Scale Programs: An Easy to-Use Field Guide to Successful Programs! WWF-US: Washington, DC.

Benveniste, G. (1989). Mastering the politics of planning. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

Dietz, J. M., R. Aviram, et al. (2004). "Defining Leadership in Conservation: a View from the Top." Conservation Biology 18(1): 274-278.

Lewis, J. P. 1991. Project planning, scheduling, and control. Probus, Chicago, IL.

Lewis, J. P. 1995. Managing the project team. American Management Association Workshop Bookseries.

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Newman, A. (2001). [Built to Change](#): Catalytic capacity-building in nonprofit organizations. Washington DC, The Nature Conservancy.

Oncken, W., Jr. 1984. Managing management time. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

WWF (2004). [Ecoregion Action Programmes: A guide for practitioners](#). Washington, DC.