

# Living Lands:

Helping Land Trusts  
Conserve Biodiversity



Living Lands Project

# Defenders of Wildlife

- Mission: to protect native wild animals and plants in their natural habitats, with a focus on conserving biological diversity.
- Focus: conservation policy and incentives for private lands
- Approach: collaboration, diverse partnerships

# Living Lands Mission

- To support and increase the capacity of the land trust community to conserve biodiversity on private lands through financial and technical assistance.

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# Biodiversity Definition

- The variety of life and natural processes, including:
  - Species
  - Genetic variation
  - Communities, ecosystems
  - Natural processes (flood, fire, predation, symbiosis, etc.)

# Why is Biodiversity Important?

- Many species at risk on in decline
- Protection cheaper than recovery
- Natural heritage and legacy
- Balance of nature
- Ecosystem services and natural functions (clean air/water, food, medicine, recreation)

# Living Lands: Standards and Practices

- Standard 8: Evaluating and Selecting Conservation Projects
- Standard 11: Conservation Easement Stewardship
- Standard 12: Fee Land Stewardship



# Living Lands: Survey

- Purpose: Determine the current extent of local land trust work that contributes to biodiversity conservation
- Interviews with LTA staff, land trusts, conservation organizations
- Web survey, January 2006:
  - Sent to approx. 800 land trusts
  - 135 responded (18%)
  - 28 states

# Survey Responses

- Most local land trusts missions include wildlife, habitat, and/or biodiversity
- Most land protected by land trusts does not include plans, restoration or management
- Most land trusts are interested in increasing their capacity to conserve biodiversity

# Survey Responses

- About half of land trusts have used federal funding
- Each federal funding program is only used by 10 - 30% of land trusts

# Survey Responses

- Major barriers:
  - Limited stewardship / monitoring funding
  - Limited staff capacity
  - Limited staff expertise
  - Not a priority for funders
  - Not a local community priority
  - Uninterested landowners

# Survey Responses

- Assistance or training needs:
  - Conservation planning
  - Habitat restoration and management
  - Monitoring
  - Grant writing
  - Partnering / merging for effectiveness
  - Identifying funding sources
  - Matching funds

# Strategic Conservation Planning for Biodiversity

# Landscape-level Planning

- Identify priorities in your local area based on priorities from a state or regional biodiversity or habitat conservation plan
- Focus on:
  - At-risk / rare habitats
  - Habitats for multiple at-risk species
  - Functioning ecosystems
- Many landscape-level plans already exist (SWAP, TNC, GAP, NH, Joint Ventures)

# Site Selection

- Find sites in your area that fit into landscape-scale priorities
- Core, buffer, and connectivity areas





# Site Planning

- Goal: functioning ecosystems with diverse native species
- How: may need restoration and/or management to...
  - Restore or enhance habitat / native vegetation / structural elements
  - Control invasive species
  - Remove barriers / constraints
  - Mimic or restore natural processes

# Restoration and Management

- Easement document:
  - Refer to a management plan?
  - Affirmative commitments?
- Landowner: education / resources / goals
- Other partners
- Funding

# Think about Ag and Ranch Lands

Biodiversity is not incompatible with agriculture and ranching.

Increasing need to rely on ag and ranch lands for biodiversity

Utilize NRCS Programs, Other sources of information: Wild Farm Alliance

# State Wildlife Action Plans

# State Wildlife Action Plans

- Brand new, all 50 states
- Required for states to continue receiving State Wildlife Grants
- Approved by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Originally “State Comprehensive Wildlife Strategies” (some states use other names)
- Focus is “Species of Greatest Conservation Need” and their habitats

# State Wildlife Action Plans: 8 Required Elements

- At-risk species
  - At-risk habitats
  - Threats
  - Conservation actions
  - Monitoring
  - Review
  - Coordination
  - Public Participation
- 
- 50 experiments in wildlife conservation

# California Wildlife: Conservation Challenges (California's Wildlife Action Plan)

The first comprehensive look  
at California's non-game  
wildlife.

Plan approved by FWS in  
late 2006.

Plan is final, but not yet  
released by DFG.



Photo: Southwestern willow flycatcher  
Source: U.S. Geological Survey

# California Wildlife Action Plan

- The Plan identifies 11 key issues for wildlife conservation in California:
  - The need to integrate wildlife conservation in local land use planning
  - Agencies need to ensure that infrastructure projects avoid harm to species
  - CA needs to better integrate wildlife conservation into transportation planning
  - Need to secure sensitive habitat and key linkages
  - The need to restore and conserve riparian areas
  - The need to provide water for wildlife
  - The need to control invasive species
  - Increase efforts on ag and ranchland to benefit wildlife
  - CA must strengthen its capacity to implement conservation actions
  - The need to expand conservation education



# California Wildlife Action Plan

- Divides CA into 9 Eco-Regions
- Very Detailed Threats Assessment
- Laundry List of Conservation Actions
- Drawbacks:
  - No prioritization
  - No mapping of key conservation areas
  - No plan for implementation

# For States w/o Mapped Priorities

- The Nature Conservancy – ecoregion priorities  
[www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org)
- NatureServe – ecosystem / rare species data  
[www.natureserve.org](http://www.natureserve.org)
- Audubon – Important Bird Areas  
[www.audubon.org/bird/iba](http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba)
- Gap Analysis Program (GAP)  
<http://gapanalysis.nbii.gov>

# Funding for Biodiversity Conservation (Federal Programs)

Information and links to federal  
conservation incentive programs:

[www.biodiversitypartners.org/incentives](http://www.biodiversitypartners.org/incentives)

# Federal Incentive Programs

- Purchase conservation easements
- Cost share (restoration, conservation)
- Rental payments
- Incentive / bonus payments
- Technical assistance

# Easement Programs (NRCS)

- Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP)
  - Floodplains after flooding, restoration too
  - Permanent
- Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRLP)
  - Agricultural lands
  - Permanent; held by land trust
- Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
  - Grasslands vulnerable to conversion
  - 30 year or permanent
- Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
  - Restore farmed wetlands
  - 30 year or permanent

# Easement Programs (not NRCS)

- Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP; USFS / NRCS)
  - Forests with at-risk species
  - 10, 30, 99 year easements
- Forest Legacy Program (FLP; USFS / states)
  - Environmentally sensitive forest land
  - Permanent easement or acquisition
- Landowner Incentive Program (LIP; USFWS / states)
  - Listed and at-risk species, multiple species
  - Long term or permanent benefits → can be used for easements

# Cost Share Programs (NRCS)

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
  - 4 priorities include at-risk species habitat
  - Focus is livestock operations and water quality
- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)
  - All private land and some public land are eligible
  - State NRCS develops priorities



# Cost Share Programs (USFWS)

- North American Wetlands Conservation Act Grants Program (NAWCA)
- Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW)
- Private Stewardship Program (PSP)

# Cost Share Programs (USFS)

- Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP)
- Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)

# Rental Programs (NRCS)

- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
  - Highly erodible lands
  - Recently expanded – rare and declining habitats
- Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)
  - State / federal partnership; not all states
  - Often for riparian restoration for habitat and/or water quality

# Stewardship Programs (NRCS)

- Conservation Security Program (CSP)
  - Rewards ongoing stewardship on producing land
  - Whole-farm approach
  - Available to all producers (any size, crop)
  - Offered by watershed
  - Tier III requires wildlife component

# Living Land Opportunities (2006-2008)

- Case studies
- Pilot projects – funding, assistance
- Trainings – Rally, Leadership Courses
- Revolving fund for up-front cost of restoration
- Other web resources – sample easement language, sample conservation plans, links to other

# Closing Thoughts:

- Identify local priorities based on landscape-level priorities (e.g., State Wildlife Action Plans)
- Restoration and management may be needed
- Increase focus on Ag and Ranch Lands
- Living Lands Project: assistance and resources