



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in Idaho

Strategic Plan: Fiscal Years 2012-2016

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Introduction: Where are the Proposed Focus Areas?

Eight Idaho Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (Partners Program) focus areas are proposed to guide program implementation over the next 5 fiscal years:

- Pend Oreille
- Palouse-Clearwater
- Bear River
- Upper Snake River
- Salmon-Lost Rivers
- Danskin-Wood Rivers
- Owyhee
- Weiser



Big Springs Creek Ranch Upland Habitat Enhancement Project, Lemhi-Custer Counties, Idaho

In general, these focus areas were developed from modifications to the current Partners Program Strategic Plan's focus areas, based on updated information on Trust Species conservation needs and our on-the-ground knowledge of partnership opportunities, specifically, landowner interest in the Partners Program.

We recognize our nation's current budgetary crisis, and realize that declining budgets are likely for all restoration programs, including the Partners Program. This could result in a need to reanalyze the Idaho Partners Program operational model, including decreasing the number of focus area identified in this strategic plan. If declining budgets require changes to the program over the next 5 years, the Idaho Strategic Plan will be modified to address these changes and maximize effectiveness of the program.

Methods: How Were the Focus Areas Determined?

The proposed focus area boundaries were developed by implementing a process using a variety of data along with input from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), Idaho Fish and Wildlife Office (IFWO) staff, both within and outside the Partners Program, and other Service program staff.

First, the following GIS layers were acquired:

- 2006 Partners Program focus area boundaries
- Interagency Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Plan (ICBEMP) land ownership
- Idaho Natural Heritage species occurrence database
- Streamnet fish database
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Sage Grouse breeding densities
- Idaho Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) focal areas
- The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Ecoregional Assessment Portfolio of Priority Conservation Areas
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) recovery zones for grizzly bear and Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*)
- USFWS bull trout critical habitat
- Ecotrust focus watersheds

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The original Partners Program focus area boundaries were reviewed to evaluate their utility for restoration and enhancement of trust species and their habitat on private and tribal land. The original Partners Program focus areas were required to follow Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) 6 watershed boundaries. In southern Idaho this resulted in considerable State and Federal land, where Partners Program projects cannot be implemented, being included in the focus areas.

Thus, the first step in modifying the focus areas in southern Idaho was to focus on private land ownership. The ICBEMP ownership layer was used to create separate ownership polygons of U.S. Forest Service, BLM, Idaho State Lands, USFWS National Wildlife Refuges (NWR), Indian Reservations and other Federal lands, with all remaining land depicted as private ownership. In Idaho, considerable land is in Federal or State ownership, with private property generally in valley bottoms along stream and river courses. However, in many cases there is no distinct boundary between public and private land (e.g. checkerboard ownership). Drawing boundaries only around private land would result in very small spatial focus areas too numerous to manage. Therefore, in southern Idaho we started with the previous focus area boundaries and drew new polygons that generally followed the U.S. Forest Service/BLM boundary. Most U.S. Forest Service property was removed while BLM was included where we wanted to focus on geographic areas. This gave us the general areas that we were interested in maintaining from previous focus areas, while excluding large blocks of U.S. Forest Service land, and buffering the small private land boundaries into a manageable spatial scale.

We then developed a list of focal trust species and used occurrence data from the Natural Heritage database. We made separate layers for each species to determine areas of important species habitat. We then expanded or contracted the boundaries of the new focus areas to include areas of high focal species occurrence. Idaho State Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy focal areas and TNC priority areas were also overlaid with the new focus area boundaries to make sure that no important areas were excluded.

In northern Idaho, there was no need to eliminate State and Federal land from the existing focus areas, because those lands make-up a much smaller proportion of the focus areas. Therefore, a different approach was taken for the three current focus areas in northern Idaho. The first task was to separate the Washington portion of the two cross-border focus areas (Pend Oreille and Palouse) and just adjust the remaining Idaho portion of these focus areas.

In addition, since the Palouse and Clearwater focus areas were adjacent to each other, we decided to combine them into one focus area for ease of management.

The next step was to overlay listed species recovery areas, the CWCS focal areas and TNC priority conservation areas over our new draft focus areas. The CWCS focal areas incorporated an analysis of those areas with the greatest number of species of greatest conservation need, federally listed species, rare and unique habitat types, important bird areas, and high priority wetlands. TNC identified those areas with high biodiversity and high risk of disturbance. We also looked at focus areas developed by Ecotrust, a private non-profit working with Service fisheries and NOAA fisheries, to prioritize restoration efforts for listed salmon. Based on these layers, we adjusted the focus area boundaries to incorporate those areas with overlapping priorities to maximize the benefits of habitat restoration. Finally, we overlaid the species occurrence data from the Idaho Natural Heritage database to make sure we were not missing any areas of high focal species concentration.

Our new focus areas were presented to and approved by, the IFWO leadership team on March 8, 2011. The leadership team gave approval to move forward with internal Service coordination and external public comment. The new focus areas were then presented to the South East Idaho Refuge Complex (which includes Camas NWR, Grays Lake, NWR, Bear Lake NWR, Minnidoka NWR, and Oxford Waterfowl Production Area), Deer Flat NWR, and the Turnbull Refuge Complex, which includes the Kootenai NWR.

Project Design and Implementation

Under the new strategic plan, projects will be designed and implemented using several of the Strategic Habitat Conservation elements, specifically: biological planning, conservation design, project implementation, and monitoring (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2008).

All the proposed focus areas have conservation projects in place or ongoing from private landowners, the Service, other Federal or State agencies, or NGOs. Partners Program projects that provide a contribution to landscape-scale conservation benefits for priority species and habitats, by complimenting these other conservation efforts will be given priority.

Most of the projects implemented by the Idaho Partners Program are designed to restore or enhance habitats that have been impacted by various past human land use activities. In the past, generally the goal of these restoration projects has been to restore or shift habitat conditions to

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historical conditions. Conservation measures implemented under these projects always carry with them varying levels of uncertainty with respect to their success in meeting the habitat restoration goals of the project.

This project uncertainty is driven by a variety of factors including the level of habitat degradation that has occurred at the site, the type of habitat being restored, and site-specific factors such as soil type, vegetation conditions, water availability, the presence of invasive species, and a host of other factors. Partners Program biologists and other fish and wildlife habitat managers are accustomed to implementing restoration projects in the face of these uncertainties.

Climate change is a source of additional uncertainty that may influence the success of habitat restoration projects (Nichols et al. 2011, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2010). Some species and their habitat will be enhanced by climate change, while others will be negatively impacted or even lost (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2010). For some habitats, climate change may make the goal of restoration to historical conditions impractical or even impossible.

The Idaho Partners Program will address climate change-related challenges to projects by working collaboratively with others to apply innovative conservation measures, and selecting projects and methods by applying the best available science and information. In some cases this may mean not doing a specific project for a particular species where the best scientific information suggests that, due to climate change, there would be little or no ultimate conservation benefit for the species.

The Service's Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) will be key in providing information useful in identifying potential effects of climate change on species, and the resulting on-the-ground conservation measures suitable to address those effects. In general, we intend to emphasize projects targeted at habitats that are resilient, provide connectivity, and reduce habitat fragmentation in the face of climate change. For example, riparian habitats tend to be resilient, and often provide connectivity between terrestrial, aquatic, and wetland habitats, and restoration and management of riparian habitats will likely be valuable in helping a variety of species adapt to climate change (Seavy et al. 2009).

Finally, the Partners Program will use monitoring and adaptive management to modify the types and locations of projects, and the conservation measures implemented as necessary to address changes influenced by climate change.

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