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Strategy for the Cooperative Recovery of Rare Species Affecting Training Ranges

2006 Annual Report

Hannah Anderson
The Nature Conservancy

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rare species recovery project annual report 2006



The Nature Conservancy is facilitating cooperative recovery of five rare species throughout their natural ranges to reduce the probability that mandated changes to training activities on Fort Lewis Military Installation and McChord Air Force Base may be imposed for the protection of these species. This proactive project will promote the on-the-ground recovery of these species, and test specific techniques, which can then be transferred to other installations facing similar threats.

Introduction

This report summarizes the products produced and lessons learned through the second year of the Strategy for the Cooperative Recovery of Rare Species Affecting Training Ranges. The project has reported specific progress and provided products on a quarterly basis. This report focuses on an overall summary of the project and success and weakness of the products produced. It does not provide the in-depth descriptions of products that the quarterly reports do. Yet this report does attempt to provide assessment of techniques, discussing aspects others should consider when implementing them on their installations or conservation landscape.

Background

Prairie and oak woodlands are one of the rarest habitats in the Pacific Northwest and the United States. The survival of the species that depend upon these habitats is becoming increasingly more tenuous. Ft. Lewis and McChord Air Base provide large amounts of habitat for these species and may soon be burdened with substantial recovery obligations due to restrictions related to species being listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Four of our species, the Taylor's checkerspot, Mardon skipper, streaked horned lark and Mazama pocket gopher, were listed as official candidates for designation as federal threatened or endangered species in 2001. The status of the western gray squirrel under federal law is currently in flux. The petition for listing of the western gray squirrel has been ruled as not warranted by the US Fish and Wildlife, but two conservation groups, Conservation Northwest and Tahoma Audubon Society, have filed an appeal of this decision in the ninth circuit Court of Appeals. That appeal has been heard and a decision is expected later this year (2007).

The listing of these candidate species would pose a serious threat to training activities at Ft. Lewis and McChord Air Base. In order to reduce this threat, The Nature Conservancy has initiated a project that promotes pro-active and cooperative recovery of these species throughout their range. This will help distribute the burden of species recovery over a variety of partners and locations. It may also help minimize impacts on military training lands if any of these five species is listed.

The project builds on the regional conservation strategy and cooperative actions suggested in the *Endangered Species Range Action Plan*. It works towards a comprehensive program, encompassing partners acting across the full geographic range of the species. In short, the project promotes cooperative recovery of rare species - working beyond political and geographic barriers to work with as many of the diverse organizations and individuals that will assist in the recovery process as possible. This results not only in efficient, effective recovery with the greatest probability of success, but also accommodates military training and operations.

The project's framework involves a three-tier strategy. The primary components of the framework are Information Transfer, Linking of Entities, and Generating and Promoting Incentives. Efficient Information Transfer allows all partners to utilize the best available practices for specific restoration and recovery actions, directly linking practitioners and the results of their recovery actions with researchers and other land managers. Information Transfer is also an important step in bringing new partners to the recovery program. Informing organizations of the regional and national importance of potential recovery actions can be helpful in gaining acceptance of recovery goals. Typical techniques used for this component include web sites, one-on-one meetings and large-scale workshops and conferences.

The formal Linking of Entities is important to facilitate production and implementation of regional goals and to share resources. Methods to link entities range from formal US Fish and Wildlife Candidate Conservation Agreements to an informal Statement of Unity. Each of these agreements makes defining goals and sharing resources more efficient because roles and relationships between organizations are predefined.

The third major component of the framework is Generating and Promoting Incentives. While entities may agree with the recovery of rare species, many also require additional, specific incentives to initiate recovery actions. The most obvious incentives are financial resources. The project helps focus funding on priority recovery actions by generating conservation plans and by working with funding agencies to support those plans. Incentives can be non-financial as well. The offer of technical assistance can be critical in getting partners to undertake new recovery actions. Similarly, an offer to supply the skilled labor or materials, such as native plant propagules, needed to complete an action can be a strong incentive for positive action.

The implementation of efforts within this framework will be closely tracked and the success and costs of each technique documented. These efforts will facilitate the sharing of lessons learned during the project to other military installations facing the threat of imposed changes due to the status of candidate or listed species.

Summary of Completed Tasks

The program has progressed successfully and has benefited rare species conservation in the South Puget Sound and beyond. The program has brought partners together, promoted collaborative planning and prompted individual conservation actions. In addition, the project has helped maintain and increase awareness of collaborative recovery efforts and the benefits of this approach.

The majority of products have been completed successfully or are substantially underway, Table 1. Products have been produced under each of the three major components of the project framework, with multiple products completed for some of those components.

The remainder of this report will discuss each of the three components to the project framework and how the products produced assisted rare species conservation. The success, and costs, of related actions will also be discussed, so that other practitioners can evaluate the potential benefits to their programs.

The majority of products have been substantially completed. Several are on track for completion and additional products have been added as a result of collaborative partnership needs. The single product highlighted as incomplete; the Statement of Cooperation linking land trusts and working groups, has been awaiting the completion of the Candidate Conservation Agreement. The pairing of the agreements is seen as complementary as major landowners, including Ft. Lewis, are signatories of the CCA, while other conservation groups and supporting entities will link together through the Statement of Cooperation. Announced together the agreements should illustrate the strong partnerships that are building for the recovery of these rare species.

Table 1. Summary of product status Rare Species Recovery Project – January 2007.

Product	Description	Due Date	Status
FY 06			
Publication	Website, meetings and other techniques for information transfer	12/15/04	Completed - Ongoing
Technical report	MOU integrating DoD, State and county agencies, and NGO planning (Candidate Conservation Agreement)	12/31/06	Draft complete, awaiting partner review and USFWS approval
Technical report	Annual report	01/31/07	Completed
Briefing	Species workshops to determine short-term conservation actions (Gopher and Checkerspot completed, Skipper and Lark to follow).	06/15/06	Completed
Publication	User-Friendly Species Summaries produced for 5 candidate species.	09/01/06	Completed
Publication	MOU/Statement of Cooperation linking conservation organizations and working groups within recovery areas.	12/31/05	Incomplete
New Project Manager	Hiring of Hannah Anderson as the new Project Manager	11/01/06	Completed
North Sound Initiative	Planning of collaborative recovery efforts across the region.	12/31/06	Completed
Funding	Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) Program funding awarded and available for management.	01/15/07	Completed
Publication	Conservation summaries and species specific conservation strategies produced for 4 candidates	12/31/06	Completed
New Management Action	Relocation of candidate species (Mazama pocket gopher)	11/01/06	Completed
Publication	Formal conservation Assessments: Mardon skipper is in review by Forest service and BLM; Mazama pocket gopher workshop proceedings	12/31/06	Substantially Completed.

Information Transfer

Information transfer is the easiest component of the framework to move forward. Most current partners and especially new partners, desire to obtain the latest information about the status of species and the best techniques to recover the species. With proper encouragement these desires creates an atmosphere where information is freely shared and exchanged.

This said, there can be some recalcitrance from individuals or agencies when information transfer steps into their perceived mandate. Unfortunately, some individuals can feel threatened by open exchange of information. While there are several methods to mitigate this problem, an overall open community of professional conservationists all striving for shared goals is the best remedy.

The Rare Species Project continues to affect information transfer with multiple techniques and products, Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Information Transfer techniques and products.

Technique	Project Product	Strength	Weakness
South Sound Working Group	none	Allows one-on-one conversations and partner development. Creates forum for rapid information transfer (3 meetings a year).	Leadership of group is critical. Time needed on a continual basis to plan and implement.
Websites	South Sound Prairies and Rare Species Project websites	Good ongoing forum for transfer of written information (technical documents) and current project updates. Allows some transfer of information to and from partners. Broad availability can help recruit new partners.	Development and maintenance efforts required. Not a good technique for transfer of sensitive information.
Species Conservation Workshops	Mazama pocket gopher Workshop and proceedings white paper	Formal forum to bring partners, including new partners, together. Highlights urgency of conservation actions. Gaining consensus on needed actions can be facilitated in group format.	Focus of workshop can drift if 'pet' issues overwhelm workshop.
Informal Conservation Summaries and Conservation strategy charts	Template conservation strategy produced. Conservation status and strategy for 4 species recorded.	Produced with input from partners, high level of buy-in for needed recovery actions for each species. Easy to reference.	Development needed to optimize usage. The charts must be adaptable and accurate and must be created cooperatively – time consuming to produce initially.
Publication	Formal conservation Assessments	Focus on single species provides forum for complete range of information transfer – from status to conservation techniques. Can provide concise delineation of needed actions in prioritized format. Quick summaries that can be read and digested easily and communicates beyond the technical community.	Sensitivity in relation to formal state recovery plans noted. Trade-off between 'rigor' and timeliness can be complicating. Summaries not a substitute for complete assessment.

Local Working Group – The South Puget Sound Prairie Landscape Working Group has been functioning for more than a decade, under the guidance of The Nature Conservancy. This group has been a key component in the growth of prairie and rare species conservation over that period. The group provides a forum for information sharing, developing partnerships and even creating incentives. The development and fostering of such group is critical in giving focus to the problems and solutions of the region. The benefits of the group to rare species conservation are tremendous. Growth of the group has been continuous.

Formal Conservation Assessments

Conservation assessments communicate the results of species workshops, they are essentially limited recovery plans. The Project and associated partners have produced both formal assessments and short summary brochures. The full assessments are best for communicating with conservation practitioners that are interested in the full details of threats and needed actions. The shorter brochures are best for communicating to a broad audience including installation managers, or the general public.

As evidenced by the name, conservation assessments, the project has used for these documents there is some sensitivity concerning their relationship with official state and federal recovery plans. The assessments do not need to contain all of the mandated sections that an official recovery documents require. In fact the short-term focus of the assessments was chosen to explicitly sidestep some of the difficult questions, such as recovery goals, that a formal recovery plan must address. This is a specific strength of the assessment. They can focus solely on the priority actions needed for immediate conservation results.

A conservation assessment for the mardon skipper is being developed by partners: the Interagency Special Status / Sensitive Species Program (ISSSSP) of the US Forest Service and Oregon/Washington Bureau of Land Management. The final draft of the assessment is currently in review and will be available in 2007.

Proceedings of the workshop for Mazama pocket gopher were written up and made available to the conservation community and resulted in a number of new relationships and information. In addition, a highly successful relocation of a number of Mazama pocket gophers took place shortly after the workshop..

Web Site

Websites can be very efficient communications tools, reaching out to diverse groups, especially those that are separated geographically. 3 sites have been or will be developed under the Rare Species Project: the South Sound Prairie and rare species recovery sites already exist, and a site for the North Sound initiative will be developed.

South Sound Prairies site

The South Sound Prairies website has served as a central communications vehicle, especially for working group members between group meetings. While the site has several differing goals, the most pertinent to short-term conservation action is the repository of technical information. This not only allows for wide distribution, but also allows continued distribution of items that are physically out-of-print.

The website also offers the opportunity to influence users, by highlighting specific articles. This can lead discussions into new conservation areas, helping to stimulate discussion throughout the overall community. The site can also help highlight conservation success and credit organizations, critical for continuing partnerships. Enhancement of the web site is an ongoing process and success of this enhancement can be seen through web site use statistics which show the number of “hits” and “downloads” going up on a regular basis. The website currently experiences approximately 800 hits per month.

Rare Species Project Website

This site is designed to be a tool for use by military installations for gaining information about the cooperative recovery of rare species occurring on military lands. The site is currently in review and will be updated in the next fiscal year.

Conservation Summary and Strategy charts –

The conservation summary and strategy flow charts were created to outline the status of conservation actions completed and a strategy to implement actions needed for recovery of each of the candidate species occurring on prairies and oak woodlands in the South Puget Sound. Each species has its own series of flow charts starting from a broad base look at the overarching categories of actions needed for conservation of that species. Separate charts are developed for each site area where the species currently exist and the needed actions are further developed on these. Prioritizing actions was done on a collaborative basis to maximize knowledge of experts and buy-in of partners. These charts can now be used as a road map to conservation and recovery. In addition they will guide the use of funds so that monies are used effectively, avoiding duplicative efforts. These charts are also useful for identifying gaps in research so that energy can be directed at those needed areas.

Broad spectrum application

Flow charts are useful in so far as they can visually denote large concepts. However, the more complex the concept, the more complex, necessarily, is the flow chart. This can make wading through the charts a time consuming prospect in and of itself. Taking this tool at face value, it is the first step in a long road to recovery for these species. Without further development and cooperative thinking, their usefulness is significantly reduced. Further, adapting the charts so that they both encompass accurately the individual situations of each species must also be broad enough to adapt should new obstacles or successes come to light.

Species Conservation Workshops –

These workshops can be very effective at both transferring information and linking entities. They serve to bring together key partners and focus on specific species or aspects of conservation. They have been important in concentrating energy on conservation priorities for the recovery of several South Sound species, most notably this year, the Mazama pocket gopher. Without the workshop, and subsequent reports, efforts would have been diffuse and scattered. With the workshop, conservation actions have improved to the extent that a relocation effort was cooperatively attempted and consequently extremely successful. Close to 100 gophers were relocated from a site slated for development onto a preserve where they can establish themselves safely. Efforts to establish new populations of Taylor's checkerspot were also implemented for the first time in Spring of 2006. The attempt resulted from availability of captive reared individuals that would otherwise have perished. The success of that effort will be measured in 2007. Both of these represent huge steps forward for conservation efforts of these species.

The need for and effectiveness of workshops varies with the amount of expertise and interest in the species. The gopher workshop attracted a number of practitioners from of varied backgrounds. A number of new relationships were formed and new information transferred to the group, in particular the results of several relevant genetic studies on the gopher were shared with the group.

Linking Entities

The formal or informal linking of entities can help solidify partnerships and collaborations. These agreements can help delineate the role of organizations in the conservation effort. This is especially important when issues are broad in scope or for the long-term. Agreements can also link entities for planning efforts. This type of agreement allows shared, collaborative visions right from the beginning and can lead to extremely beneficial partnerships. The past year has seen several large leaps forward in this category.

The Rare Species Project has focused on two types of agreements to link entities, the informal Statement of Unity or Cooperation and the formal Candidate Conservation Agreement, Table 3. The Candidate Conservation Agreement is in its final draft form. We anticipate that the CCA document will be signed during the summer of 2007.

Several lessons have emerged as these agreements have developed. First is that multiple party statements, even an informal statement of cooperation can be difficult to culminate. This has been true even when the Statement of Cooperation is essentially a non-binding restatement of shared values between the partners. Difficulties can arise due to word-smithing between partners, or due to political concerns about all 'MOU's' within a single important partner agency.

In some ways the more formal Candidate Conservation Agreement has met less difficulty. The rigid goals and legal oversight of the US Fish and Wildlife Service has helped to keep partners aligned. Yet the production of a multi-species, multi-partner Candidate Conservation Agreement is an enormous task. The use of project funds to contract a consultant to facilitate the production

of the Agreement has been immensely helpful. Without this assistance it is doubtful the Agreement would be completed.

Table 3. Summary Linking Entities techniques and products.

Technique	Project Product	Strength	Weakness
Statement of Cooperation	Draft Statement of Cooperation	Informal agreement explicitly states shared values and goals. Statement is good to bring disparate partners, in size, contribution or outlook together and highlight shared needs. Can be positive media event.	The weakness of the non-binding Statement can reduce incentives for completion. Can exaggerate minor differences in conservation philosophy or direction.
Candidate Conservation Agreement	Final Agreement under review by USFWS.	Can formally dictate conservation actions over extended areas and periods of time. ‘Assurances’ for non-federal entities forms strong incentive for completion of adequate agreement. Requires partners to explicitly evaluate their holdings and future conservation actions.	Complexity of agreement is daunting. Substantial resources from all partners are needed. Process can highlight differences in perspective or aggressiveness of conservation strategy.
North Sound Initiative	Contract signed between TNC and Whidbey – Camano Land Trust	Formal agreement requiring the initiation of a working group, a web site and an eco-regional field trip in the North sound provides a true “regional” conservation effort. New opportunities for linking entities, information transfer and finding incentives are a natural by-product.	While the Infrastructure of this new initiative is in place, communication between the North and South Puget Sound groups should be strengthened for this tool to be optimized.
Species Workshop followed by informal discussion	~100 individual gophers translocated	Strengthens partnerships through successful conservation of gophers and rehabilitation of prairie lands. Helps to establish consistent and effective methodology for gopher translocation.	Success or failure of translocation only visible over time.

Statement of Cooperation – Expressing the conservation values and goals shared between multiple partners would seem to be an easy task. Unfortunately, that has not been the case for the Statement of Cooperation, which was previously known as the Statement of Unity. In fact, the change in the name of the document illustrates some of the contortions that the Statement has undergone. While the intent and basic content of the Statement has remained the same over the last year and a half, there have been at least half-dozen iterations discussed by partners. Wordsmithing by both conservationists and lawyers have taken a toll on the enthusiasm for the Statement, since all parties must review alterations. This workload, combined with the diffuse benefits of the Statement has stalled its implementation. While the benefits of linking a wide variety of entities through the Statement is still a goal, and will produce benefits, its completion is currently on hold as effort is focused on the Candidate Conservation Agreement.

Candidate Conservation Agreement –This formal document will guide rare species conservation in the South Sound for the 25-year duration of the agreement. Its development is a critical step, which shows the commitment of the participating entities to rare species conservation. The concrete incentive of ‘assurances’ for non-federal entities and the delineated plan for federal agencies are huge. While partners were dedicated to producing the agreement, the scope of the project was larger than the resources the partners could apply to the project. Progress was slow until funds from the Project hired a consultant to support production. This has jumpstarted the process, helping to keep partners together, and has lead to an aggressive schedule for completion. Without this infusion of assistance the project would have likely remained bogged down and may not have been completed by all partners. The agreement is now in its final stages of completion.

North Sound Initiative

The North Sound Initiative was signed with the Whidbey-Camano Land Trust in November of 2006. This initiative is a large positive step for the conservation of rare prairie and oak habitat across the region. It affords real opportunities for conservation and recovery across the broader eco-region. It also furthers the opportunities for new partnerships and information transfer. With the advent of this new Initiative several products of the South Sound are being replicated in the North Sound including a North Sound web site, working group and eco-regional field trip.

Generating Incentives

This year has seen significant progress in generating incentives. In addition to several million awarded through the Army Compatible Use Buffer Program for allocation to prairie and oak woodland management projects in the region, the Project has hired a new Project Manager, which has contributed significantly to the Project . Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Generating Incentives techniques and products.

Technique	Project Product	Strength	Weakness
Indirect Influence	Hiring of new Project Manager, Hannah Anderson	On the ground communication and coordination of projects to optimize their effectiveness and to encourage forward momentum on new and upcoming efforts.	
Direct Influence	Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) Funds awarded for management use. Implementation plan cooperatively developed.	The money garnered through the ACUB funds specifically target management needs for the conservation and recovery of candidate species. Multiple projects will be proposed for funding	An implementation plan and overall strategy are needed to be sure the funds are optimized.

Indirect Influence

This year the Project hired a new Project Manager who will be cooperating with a wide range of public and private entities, including federal and state agencies, conservation organizations, private landowners, and interested individuals to work collaboratively toward promoting conservation of the four federal candidate species occurring on Puget Prairies. Already this new position has forged stronger alliances and clarified the needs of partnering agencies. This position is ideally placed to push forward the common goals of regional conservation entities and has been instrumental in the production of an implementation plan for the ACUB monies.

Direct Influence

\$500,000 has been awarded through the Army Compatible Use Buffer program to be used toward recovery efforts of the candidate species that occur on Fort Lewis. For the first time in the history of the fund, this money has been allocated not only for land acquisition, but also for the management of existing protected lands outside Fort Lewis. This is a significant step forward for the Project and a number of proposals have been submitted for the first round of funding. The immediacy of this opportunity has increased the level of scrutiny for the recovery of candidate species by regional conservationists. The need for cooperation and a collaborative understand of the goals for each species came to the fore and the Project has taken huge leaps forward as a result.