

2.2.2 Terrestrial Species of Common Conservation Concern

Project Summary

This project is intended to promote the conservation of a selected² group of 17 migratory and transboundary species of birds and mammals (the Species of Common Conservation Concern—SCCC) and their habitats. Given that the majority of the SCCC are associated with grasslands, an ecosystem approach has been followed, resulting in a conservation strategy [preliminary conservation framework] developed in 2002. The finalized strategy provides the context and guidance for enhanced multi-stakeholder cooperation throughout North America's central grasslands. In 2003, action plans will be developed and initiated to facilitate cooperative efforts in the conservation of grassland SCCC.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of this project is to enhance multi-stakeholder cooperation to support the conservation of migratory and transboundary species and their habitats.

The specific objectives are:

- Facilitate trinational collaborative efforts to conserve priority grassland species, building upon the grasslands preliminary conservation framework.
- Foster public awareness of the ecological importance of grasslands and the decline of grassland-dependent species of common conservation concern.
- Promote multisectoral cooperation for the conservation of migratory and transboundary species.

Expected Results

- Joint conservation action plans for grassland SCCC.
- A published strategy for the conservation of grasslands and their SCCC.
- Pilot projects directed to key grassland SCCC.
- Provide policy oriented recommendations related to the conservation of grassland SCCC and their habitat.

Rationale

Habitat destruction is considered the main cause for the decline of biodiversity. Hence, effective and lasting actions for conserving species depend on addressing the causes inducing habitat loss. By developing an ecosystem approach to species conservation, institutions and organizations will be better endowed to coordinate regional multistakeholder efforts and improve resource allocation.

Moreover, the grasslands offer a unique opportunity as a theatre for cooperation on terrestrial species: they constitute not only the sole contiguous terrestrial ecosystem shared by the three countries but are also considered among the most imperiled ecosystems worldwide. This situation also applies for North America, where the decline in grassland area (e.g., tall-grass prairie) since 1830 has exceeded declines reported for any other major ecosystem. As a result of habitat loss and fragmentation, endemic grassland bird species show more consistent, widespread and steeper declines than any other group of North American bird species. The case for concentrating cooperation efforts in the grasslands is further supported by recent studies which single out this North American ecosystem, both in a worldwide comparison of the loss of species, and for its potentially high species' turn-over (sum of colonizations and extinctions) under climate change (see *Nature* 11 April 2002: 626–629, *Science*, 3 May 2002: 904–907, respectively).

The ecosystem approach for the conservation of the SCCC, reflected in the conservation framework facilitated by the CEC, is meant to provide the context to prompt the integration and enhancement of individual initiatives aimed at the conservation of biodiversity, especially from the species to the ecosystem level. It is expected that this

² Species were selected by the wildlife services of the three NAFTA countries using several criteria; among others, candidate species had to be transboundary or migratory, endangered or threatened in one or more countries. The complete set of criteria can be obtained at <http://www.cec.org/files/PDF/BIODIVERSITY/SCCC-Web-e_EN.pdf>.

framework will help to coordinate and complement the efforts of national and international groups working on grasslands and strengthen the involvement of other resource groups besides wildlife, e.g., soils, agriculture, water groups. Furthermore, the coordinated integration of single-species conservation programs with protected areas and adjacent areas could be assisted by applying the ecosystem management principles adopted in the [Fifth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biodiversity](#) (Nairobi, May 2000). This approach is aimed at the integrated management of lands, water and living resources for their conservation and sustainable use.³

Progress to Date

In 2000, through a report supported by the Canada/Mexico/United States Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management, the three wildlife services of North America, assisted by the CEC, agreed to work together to protect 17 species of wild birds and mammals considered “Species of Common Conservation Concern” (SCCC). Given that the majority of these species are associated with grasslands, the CEC is currently facilitating the process to secure the well-being of grassland SCCC through a strategy that takes into account the main issues and conservation needs at an ecosystem level. The CEC report describing these species is available at the CEC web site <http://www.cec.org/files/PDF/BIODIVERSITY/SCCC-Web-e_EN.pdf>.

In 2001 the CEC organized a workshop in Nuevo Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, Mexico, to develop the basis for a trilateral strategy for the conservation of grassland species of common conservation concern. The workshop involved government representatives from Canada, Mexico and the United States, as well as representatives from NGOs, academia and landowners. Following the recommendations of the workshop, three main activities were developed in 2001 and completed in 2002: 1) an assessment of collaboration opportunities with Mexico, based upon grassland conservation priorities at a national scale; 2) an updated map of grasslands, including an integrated data base of conservation planning units; and 3) a continental assessment on issues and needs related to the central grasslands of North America, which became the basis for developing the grassland strategy (see <http://www.cec.org/files/PDF/BIODIVERSITY/Chihuahua_Meeting_Final_report-Reporte_final.PDF>).

In the same year, the CEC presented the results of the workshop to the Canada/Mexico/United States Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management, and supported the development of a strategy for achieving the vision established by the Chihuahuan grasslands workshop.

With regard to public participation, in addition to the aforementioned trinational and national workshops held with the participation of multiple stakeholders, expert participation of a variety of backgrounds was sought through more than 240 questionnaires sent out in the three countries inquiring about main issues and conservation needs related to grassland species. Moreover, in September 2002, as part of the Wildlife Society’s annual meeting, the CEC co-hosted a symposium with The Nature Conservancy, the University of Manitoba, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Pronatura and the National Wildlife Federation to raise awareness about North America’s grasslands and create opportunities for cooperation. More than 1,500 participants from the three North American countries attended.

Actions

Overview

The actions for 2003 build upon the trinational strategy for grasslands conservation and are aimed at facilitating cooperation for the conservation of the species of common conservation concern.

2003	Estimated Resources Required (C\$)
Action 1: Facilitate the implementation of joint grassland conservation pilot projects associated to the species of common conservation concern (SCCC).	50,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity 1: Support key action plans and projects related to the conservation, of grassland SCCC that demonstrate the value of the ecosystem management approach for species conservation. 	50,000

³ See <<http://www.biodiv.org/decisions/default.asp?lg=0&dec=V/6>>.

Action 2: Sharing a common platform	30,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity 1: Edit, translate and publish CEC’s framework for the conservation for North American grasslands SCCC, their habitat and ecosystems. 	30,000
Total resources required	80,000

2004–2005

Activities developed in the 2004–2005 work program will take into consideration the advice provided by the Biodiversity Conservation Working Group.

Action 1: Continue support to action plans developed in 2003
Action 2: Sharing a common direction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity 1: Convey to the citizens of North America the importance, challenges, opportunities and results of trinational efforts to protect species of common conservation concern. • Activity 2: Collaborate in the development of a standardized vegetation classification system for grasslands.

In 2004, the CEC will assess its involvement in the Grassland-SCCC project, based on progress made since 2003. The Biodiversity Conservation Working Group will offer ongoing guidance to this work.

Public Participation

The framework for the conservation of grassland SCCC will be made publicly available through the CEC’s web site <<http://www.cec.org>> and supporting articles in *TRIO*.

Capacity Building

Guided by the grassland strategy and action plans developed for the SCCC, partnerships will be sought to ensure the exchange of information and knowledge for developing effective North American joint projects.

Expected Partners and/or Participants

The activities mentioned above can only be accomplished through partnerships among governments and non-governmental organizations. Current partners include wildlife and parks agencies from the three countries, the Nature Conservancy, Canadian Plains Research Center, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, Pronatura, Profauna, the Universities of Chihuahua, Manitoba and UNAM, and Conabio. Moreover, given the interest of IUCN’s Commissions on Ecosystem Management, Species Survival, and likely also the World Commission on Protected Areas, they could be brought in as co-sponsors of action plans and projects related to the conservation, of grassland SCCC that demonstrate the value of the ecosystem management approach. One of the key challenges for 2003 will be to involve indigenous peoples, as well as state/provincial/municipal governments, and farmers’ and ranchers’ associations.

Linkages to other CEC Projects

Depending upon the priorities highlighted for the grassland SCCC in the conservation strategy, linkages will be sought with ongoing CEC programs. Potential areas of collaboration include links with NABCI for the conservation of grassland birds and their habitats; with the Environment, Economy and Trade program area and NABIN for integrated analysis of information as well as ongoing mapping and database-related efforts.