

# Peninsular Florida Landscape Conservation Cooperative

## Charter

### Background

The Peninsular Florida Landscape Conservation Cooperative (Conservation Cooperative) is part of a national network of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs). LCCs are applied conservation science partnerships among federal agencies, regional organizations, states, tribes, landowners, conservation organizations, universities and stakeholders within an ecologically defined area. They are designed to inform resource management decisions in an integrated fashion across landscapes at a broader scale than any individual partner's responsibility. The partnership will consider landscape - scale stressors, including climate change, habitat fragmentation, invasive species, and water scarcity. LCCs can provide scientific and technical support for landscape-scale conservation in an adaptive management framework by:

- supporting biological planning and conservation design,
- prioritizing and coordinating applied research that informs conservation delivery,
- supporting the design of inventory and monitoring programs,
- supporting the development of scientific analysis that informs and empowers land and resource managers to link actions at project sites to outcomes on broader scales.

The Conservation Cooperative is a broad-based partnership of organizations concerned with the conservation of natural and cultural resources, including fish and wildlife; their associated habitats; ecosystem function and resiliency and maintaining sustainable landscapes within the region (Figure 1, Page 9).

The purpose of the Conservation Cooperative is to facilitate planning, design, and implementation of conservation strategies for fish and wildlife species at the landscape level using the adaptive management framework of Strategic Habitat Conservation- integrating planning, design, delivery, and evaluation (Figure 2, Page 2). In concert with Florida's Wildlife Action Plan and other landscape level strategies, the Conservation Cooperative will help manage, and conserve Florida's biodiversity in the face of transformational changes such as global climate change, generational changes in ownership of large tracts of land and development pressure associated with a rapidly growing human population. Science-based planning and design at the landscape level will facilitate consideration of these threats in the conservation of Florida's fish and wildlife resources. The Conservation Cooperative will build on existing species/habitat data to identify and fill information voids and assist in development of species conservation goals and plans needed to achieve them.

The Conservation Cooperative will provide a forum for continuous exchange and feedback among partner organizations and it will aggregate and consolidate existing information and coordinate research activities to leverage resources to achieve landscape scale conservation. It is intended to operate as a self-directed partnership with an open steering committee, workgroup structure, and core support staff. The partnership structure will be formed to empower partner organizations to provide the guidance, support, and capacity necessary to realize the goals of the Conservation Cooperative. A Steering Committee consisting of interested private, organizational and agency representatives will provide direction and oversight for the Conservation

# Peninsular Florida Landscape Conservation Cooperative

Cooperative. Standing Committees and Work Groups will be created for specific topics of interest and will be the core operational units of the Conservation Cooperative. A Coordinator will assist the Steering Committee by organizing and guiding the efforts of the Conservation Cooperative. The Conservation Cooperative's capacity will depend upon common interests of the partner stakeholders in the region. Representation may vary over time as conservation needs across this geographic area evolve and individual partner interests, abilities, and capacities change.

The governance structure of the Conservation Cooperative is intended to facilitate coordination and feedback between landscape-level science and conservation delivery; collaboration and communication among stakeholders; and coordination with entities adjacent to the LCC (including adjacent LCCs and other partnerships sharing common species and conservation issues).



**Figure 2:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) adaptive management framework.

## *Mission*

The mission of the Peninsular Florida Landscape Conservation Cooperative is to foster landscape scale conservation to sustain natural and cultural resources for future generations.

# Peninsular Florida Landscape Conservation Cooperative

## *Vision*

Our conservation cooperative is a valued resource for conservation design and delivery that supports a Florida landscape comprised of functional and interconnected ecosystems valued by citizens that contribute to regional and national conservation landscape connectivity.

## *Guiding Principles*

1. The primary focus for achieving participation across all landowner, organizational and agency groups shall be through incentive-based methods that provide and maintain social, economic and ecological value of natural systems for future generations.
2. Habitat conservation is a means to attain our ultimate goal- the conservation of fish and wildlife populations and ecological functions that sustain them for the benefit of people.
3. Defining measurable population objectives is a key component of landscape scale conservation.
4. Biological planning must use the best scientific information available, both as a body of knowledge and a method of learning. Our understanding of ecological conditions is never perfect. An essential element of the Conservation Cooperative is managing uncertainty through an iterative cycle of planning, doing, and evaluating.
5. Management actions, decisions, and recommendations must be transparent, defensible, and explicit about the nature and magnitude of potential errors and uncertainties.
6. Conservation strategies consist of dynamic suites of objectives, tactics, and tools that change as new information enters the conservation cycle.
7. Partnerships are essential, both for developing conservation strategies and implementing actions to achieve them.
8. Consider and respect each participating organizations unique mandates and jurisdictions.
9. Seek to add value to landscape scale conservation by integrating across partnerships and organizations through identifying and filling knowledge gaps and leveraging resources.
10. Conduct open and frequent communications within the partnership network and be transparent in deliberations and decision-making.
11. Focus on developing shared landscape level priorities that will lead to implementable action.
12. Develop and use peer reviewed science in an adaptive management context..
13. Develop explicit linkages and approaches to ensure products are available in a form that is usable by partners in delivering conservation.

## *Overall Structure*

The Conservation Cooperative will initially function through a Steering Committee and Working Groups appointed by the Steering Committee to address specific issues. The initial structure and function is a starting point for operation of the partnership but is intended to change and evolve as the partnership develops. The governance structure will be reviewed as needed to evaluate whether additional tiers or different structure would be beneficial (e.g., a committee to assist

# Peninsular Florida Landscape Conservation Cooperative

with operational oversight or a Partnership-at-Large Council to provide opportunities for a broader set of partners to participate). Any changes to the governance structure will be approved by the Steering Committee.

The initial emphasis of the Steering Committee is to quickly create a functioning Conservation Cooperative. One of the Steering Committee's first responsibilities will be to conduct a further assessment that will be used to inform the long-term structure and membership of the Conservation Cooperative. In the meantime, interested organizations and individuals not represented on the Steering Committee are encouraged to communicate their views to Committee members and the Coordinator. It is anticipated that there will be many opportunities to serve on working groups.

## I. Steering Committee

### A. *Membership and Organization*

1. The Steering Committee will consist of executive level representatives from organizations or individuals that collectively have the following characteristics, especially at a regional level:
  - jurisdictional responsibility for natural and/or cultural resource management
  - significant capacity for furthering the purpose of the Conservation Cooperative
  - actively engaged in addressing significant natural and/or cultural resource management issues
  - experience and knowledge regarding private lands operations, regulatory issues and incentives of economic value
  - provide direct links and communication with other conservation organizations or private and public land managers involved in conservation delivery, particularly those operating at local levels.

The ultimate composition of the Steering Committee is intended to be as broad as necessary to effectively carry out its mission. It is anticipated that it will at least include representatives from state, federal, and local agencies, tribes, landowners, conservation organizations and the academic community.

2. Initial composition of the Steering Committee will include one primary and one alternate representative from each of the following partner organizations that accepts an invitation to participate at the Steering Committee level.
  - *State Natural Resource Management Agencies*
    - Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
    - Florida Forest Service
    - Florida Department of Environmental Protection
    - Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
    - South Florida Water Management District
    - Southwest Florida Water Management District
    - St John's River Water Management District

# Peninsular Florida Landscape Conservation Cooperative

- *Non-governmental Organizations:*
    - The Nature Conservancy
    - Florida Wildlife Federation
    - Florida Land Council
    - Florida Farm Bureau
    - Florida Forestry Association
    - Florida Natural Areas Inventory
  - *Private Sector Members At Large*
    - Private Company/Land Owner/Resource Manager
    - Private Company Representing Resource Management
    - Private Individual Representing Private Lands/Resource Management
  - *Regional Organizations and Partnership*
    - Regional Planning Councils
    - County land use planners
  - *U.S. Federal Agencies:*
    - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
    - U.S. Geological Survey
    - National Park Service
    - U.S. Forest Service
    - Natural Resource Conservation Service
    - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
    - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
    - Department of Defense
  - *Native American Tribes:*
    - Seminole Tribe
    - Miccosukee Tribe
3. Steering Committee members are expected to represent their respective interests at an administrative and policy level on matters pertaining to allocating human and financial resources that are inherent to sustained, long term landscape conservation planning and implementation. They should also be sufficiently knowledgeable about landscape-scale conservation, climate change and other stressors to make informed decisions or recommendations on priority projects and activities (see #4 under *Responsibilities* below).
  4. Members are expected to commit to develop a shared vision of landscape sustainability for the Conservation Cooperative and coordinating their otherwise independent actions in the cooperative pursuit, refinement, and implementation of that vision consistent with member authorities, appropriations, and available resources.
  5. New members will be considered by the Steering Committee upon receipt of a written request to the Chair from the individual, agency or organization that documents its interest in participating and identifies the individual that will be representing such

# Peninsular Florida Landscape Conservation Cooperative

stakeholder interest. A majority vote of the Steering Committee, with a quorum (majority of members) required for the vote to proceed, is required for acceptance of membership. Removal of Steering Committee seats is determined by the Steering Committee

6. Activities of the Steering Committee are run by an elected Chair and Vice Chair, each of which is elected for a two-year term. One of these positions should be non-federal. At the end of a term, the Vice Chair succeeds the Chair, and a new Vice Chair is elected. The Chairperson with the assistance of the Coordinator will organize and conduct the business meetings of the Steering Committee. The Vice-chairperson shall preside in the absence of the Chairperson.
7. The Steering Committee will schedule at least two meetings per year. Additional meetings may be called by the Chair, and additional Steering Committee business will be conducted by e-mail, teleconference and web conference. If a Steering Committee member is unable to attend a meeting or teleconference, he/she should delegate an individual from their respective interest with full decision-making authority to represent them.
8. For actions that require Steering Committee approval decisions will be made through consensus. For purposes of Conservation Cooperative business, “consensus” means votes of affirmation or no objection by members present at the time of the vote. For issues directly affecting the programs or prerogatives of one or more entities not present at the time of the vote, then votes of affirmation or no objection shall be obtained from each such entity prior to the proposal being placed into effect. The presence of at least 60% of the primary or alternate designees from participating entities shall constitute a quorum. Steering Committee Membership shall be maintained and recorded in meeting summaries and notes by the Coordinator or administrative designee.
9. All partners are welcome to attend Steering Committee meetings and opportunity will be provided for comment during the Steering Committee deliberations.

## *B. Responsibilities*

The Steering Committee has the following collective responsibilities:

1. Serve as the executive body for decision making and actively engaging in development of the operational and strategic plans.
2. Evaluate what additional stakeholders should be engaged and participate on the Steering Committee and develop appropriate mechanisms for communicating with and receiving input from stakeholders not represented on the Steering Committee regarding science needs and capacity for science delivery.
3. Promote cooperation, coordination, consolidation of information, and collaboration among partners to support the goals and objectives of the Conservation Cooperative.
4. Prioritize and approve projects where funding is being provided to the Conservation Cooperative.
5. Work collectively to identify funding opportunities and other available resources (e.g., staff, in-kind services) for supporting Conservation Cooperative priority needs and projects.
6. Establish standing and ad-hoc working groups as necessary to carry out the purpose and function of the Conservation Cooperative; define the initial purpose and responsibilities



# Peninsular Florida Landscape Conservation Cooperative

of each task group; provide direction to task groups and facilitate their progress on action items.

7. Assure regular, clear communication with and among existing conservation partnerships, other LCCs and the Department of Interior Southeast Climate Science Center.
8. Provide input on the Coordinator position description and selection as Coordinator position reopens.

## II. Staffing

The Conservation cooperative staff will be dedicated to carrying out the vision and priorities of the Steering Committee. The staff will work with a variety of standing committees, task groups, organizations, and individuals to conduct the day to day business of the partnership. Examples include development of draft products such as species priorities, science priorities, and work plans for consideration and approval by the Steering Committee. Staff capacity will be added strategically over time to meet partner needs for additional products and services. Initial capacity is as follows:

**Coordinator:** The Coordinator serves as the executive director for the partnership, working directly with the Steering Committee Chair to provide communication to the steering committee and receive their direction. The Coordinator leads, facilitates, and communicates the vision among the staff; directs overall daily operations; and ensures coordination among staff as per operations and direction from the Steering Committee.

**Science Coordinator:** The Science Coordinator works under the direction of the Coordinator to provide coordination and synthesis of science activities, products and needs. The Science Coordinator provides assistance to the Coordinator on specific technical and science-related duties and tracks and translates status and results of relevant science and research activities among the partners.

## III. Conservation Partnerships Council

The Council facilitates coordination and integration with existing landscape or regional conservation partnerships (i.e. joint ventures, fish habitat partnerships, etc.) and provides advice and recommendations to the Steering Committee on conservation issues, strategies, and initiatives of mutual interest to the conservation community. The Conservation Partnerships Council will provide a forum for:

1. Collaborating on issues of mutual interest.
2. Sharing expertise, resources and assets to meet mutual goals and objectives.
3. Avoiding duplication in planning, science, and monitoring.
4. Making recommendations to the Steering Committee on allocation of resources and setting priorities.
5. Making recommendations on science integration, projects, strategies, and initiatives for the collective conservation community.
6. Promoting, test, and suggest improvements of decision support tools and conservation plans.

# Peninsular Florida Landscape Conservation Cooperative

Membership in the Conservation Partnerships Council will be open to representatives (generally Coordinators or designated staff) of any partnership that crosses both state and organizational boundaries within the Conservation Cooperative (e.g., Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership, Southeast Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, etc.). The committee will be chaired by the Coordinator. The Council will provide a liaison to participate in Steering Committee meetings.

## **IV. Standing Committees**

Standing committees would be distinguished by the expected long-term nature of their chartered purpose. The Steering Committee can establish standing committees at any time and can identify initial committee chairs at their inception. Committee members can be appointed by the Steering Committee or may be volunteers approved by the committee and will reflect the collaborative character of the Conservation Cooperative. Committees will be responsible for accomplishing their responsibilities as defined by the Steering Committee but can refine or expand their tasks in consultation with the Steering Committee. The Chair of each committee will be responsible for reporting the group's progress and results directly to the Steering Committee.

## **V. Working Groups**

Task groups can be established by the Coordinator to support needs of an ad-hoc nature and with short term (one year or less) duration. These groups would be convened to assist staff with items of a developmental nature that the Steering Committee has yet to communicate a specific need for. Membership on these groups would be at the request of the Coordinator or Science Coordinator.



# Peninsular Florida Landscape Conservation Cooperative



Figure 1. Current boundaries of the Peninsular Florida Landscape Conservation Cooperative