

# 2016 | Plains and Prairie Potholes Landscape Conservation Cooperative Strategic Plan

## **THE CHALLENGE**

Meeting the demand for food, fuel, and fiber drives landscape change across the plains and prairies. In many places growth and interaction of these forces, compounded by changing climate, exceed the scope and reach of agencies and organizations dedicated to conserving natural resources. Where grasslands, wetlands, lakes, and streams give way to competing land uses it affects other services many depend upon like water quality, soil health, and abundant fish and wildlife. Ensuring the future landscape offers the same services as the past requires a different approach; one that draws upon the collective resources of the conservation community, and that also builds relationships with others who drive landscape change. Convening these interests and fostering collaboration in pursuit of a landscape where nature and people thrive across generations is the work of the Plains and Prairie Potholes Landscape Conservation Cooperative (PPP LCC).

## **INTRODUCTION**

Established in 2010, the PPP LCC spans all or portions of seven states and three Canadian provinces, and operates within a network of 22 LCCs addressing natural resource challenges that transcend political and jurisdictional boundaries. A voluntary collaboration of independent entities, the LCC works to meet common conservation goals through the production and application of both natural and social science.

A Steering Committee composed of representatives from federal, state, and non-governmental resource agencies and organizations guides and prioritizes LCC projects and activities that are subsequently put into action by a Coordinator responsible for operations and administration. A Technical Committee drawn from member organizations, in conjunction with a Science Coordinator, advises on matters of science and research. A Landscape Ecologist with the U.S. Geological Survey also assists the LCC (Table 1). A charter and governance document contains further information on roles, responsibilities, staffing, and administration of the PPP LCC.

A collaborative self-directed conservation partnership, the PPP LCC connects agencies, organizations, and pre-existing partnerships. The PPP LCC appreciates and celebrates the long-term partnerships that have preceded its establishment and that serve as models for success. Conservation partners produce valuable conservation science and delivery that intertwines with LCC goals. The purpose of the LCC is to harness the capacities and abilities of all partners in support of common conservation outcomes and to serve as a strategic forum for collegial collaboration, coordination, and integration toward a common vision. The LCC is an extension of existing partnership efforts, and seeks to enhance conservation outcomes across the LCC geography.

**Table 1. Roles and Responsibilities of PPP LCC committees and staff**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>
<b>Coordinator</b>	Serves as the leader, manager, and supervisor of the PPP-LCC.
<b>Science Coordinator</b>	Works with the Steering and Technical Committees and others to identify and address science needs relative to, but not always limited to the PPP-LCC.
<b>Landscape Ecologist</b>	Works with the Coordinator and Science Coordinator in translating, disseminating and addressing science needs identified by the Technical and Steering Committees.
<b>Steering Committee</b>	The Steering Committee members shall represent their agency's or organization's views on issues and represent the science needs, interest and capabilities of their agency or organization. Because participating agencies or organizations are programmatically diverse, there is the expectation that Steering Committee members will represent all of the programs within their organization. They shall work with the core staff to establish broad conservation goals, set priorities, facilitate key activities of the LCC, leverage funding across participating entities to accomplish priority tasks, and provide operational oversight of the LCC.
<b>Technical Committee</b>	The role of the Technical Committee is to provide scientific input to the activities of the LCC within their area of expertise. The LCC core staff will seek participation and will coordinate this group as needed. The Technical Committee will work to identify the science needs of the partnership and will facilitate project solicitation and project reviews. Members of the Technical Committee shall keep informed of the LCC activities through the LCC website and through conference calls, webinars and meetings called by the LCC.

The LCC undertakes work specific to the needs of the geography and collaborators. This strategic plan documents the vision, mission, guiding principles, and goals of the PPP LCC. Each element of the plan plays a role in defining the direction and function of the LCC over the coming years. Vision describes the future we work to create, mission the purpose of the LCC, and guiding principles set sideboards for how we hope to achieve the vision and mission. Three goals—addressing partnership, collaboration, and communication—set the broad course we will follow. Additional planning, among the many partners actively engaged in the work of the LCC, is required to lay out more specific objectives and tactics for each of the goals.

The strategic plan is composed of the following sections:

- Assessment
- Vision
- Mission
- Guiding Principles
- Goals
- Implementation

## **ASSESSMENT**

An Operations Plan guided work through the initial years of the Cooperative, funding science projects centered on conservation issues within the sagebrush steppe, prairie potholes, and river and riparian corridors of the LCC geography. In 2013, the Steering Committee endorsed the recommendation of the Technical Committee to focus science efforts within two broad topical areas: Human Dimensions and Land Use Change. Five years of project implementation and input from LCC members and staff prompted a strategic planning process to initiate another cycle of the Assess-Plan-Implement learning loop that infuses LCC actions.

In early 2015 the PPP LCC Steering Committee requested a review and synthesis of LCC member plans to identify both commonalities and gaps suited for LCC action. Additional work followed including review of the LCC Network Strategic Plan and Science Plan, draft versions of LCC vision, mission, and guiding principles, and a survey of Steering Committee and Technical Committee members. The October 2015 Steering Committee meeting served as a forum to present and deliberate assessment findings as well as gain additional insights from those present. Although most members valued the LCC as a venue for collaboration many expressed uncertainty regarding the role and strategic direction of the LCC. The group reaffirmed the present LCC research focus on human dimensions and land use change while acknowledging a need to refine and specify direction within these broad topics and potentially include additional new topics. This strategic plan begins the process to further clarify LCC direction and operations over the coming five years.

### **Human Dimensions and Land Use Change**

Human Dimensions refers to the social attitudes, processes, and behaviors related to how we maintain, protect, enhance, and use natural resources. Collectively, human dimensions play a pivotal role in conservation, especially within the PPP LCC where private landowners decide the fate of natural resources across more than ninety percent of the geography. Land use changes, driving conversion of native habitats and simplification of complex systems, arise directly or indirectly, from the domain of human dimensions with dramatic implications for biological diversity, ecological processes, and human well-being. Although the state, rate, and direction of such changes varies across the LCC, the close relationship between human dimensions, and land use change remains constant and warrants a collaborative approach that matches the complexity of the challenge, an undertaking well suited to the LCC.

## **VISION**

The vision of the Plains and Prairie Potholes Landscape Conservation Cooperative is “People and nature thriving, across landscapes, across generations.”

## **MISSION**

The mission of the Plains and Prairie Pothole Landscape Conservation Cooperative is “To help meet broad-scale conservation challenges by convening partners, leveraging their resources, and connecting shared plans that improve conservation decisions and outcomes.”

### **Convene**

Provide a forum, bringing stakeholders together to facilitate effective communication, foster trust-building and mutual understanding, co-produce relevant, credible and applied knowledge, and incubate new ideas and approaches.

### **Leverage**

Magnify results by applying collective resources and capabilities of partners and attracting support from others.

### **Connect**

Draw on shared understanding, knowledge, and ideas to develop shared priorities and provide new tools to improve conservation decisions.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- Work collaboratively with partners and others across boundaries to maximize capacity and avoid redundancies.
- Respect each participating organization’s unique viewpoints, capacities, mandates and jurisdictions.
- Design conservation solutions hand in hand with the people and communities of the region.
- Combine science with local knowledge to build shared understanding and facilitate landscape-scale conservation.

## **GOALS**

The following goals reflect the interdependence of the people and communities that form the social and cultural fabric across the PPP LCC geography, and the grasslands, wetlands, lakes, and rivers that underpin their prosperity. These goals are, by design, descriptive, open-ended, and broad statements of our desired future conditions that convey a purpose, are consistent with the vision, but do not define measurable units. Additional work is required to develop measureable objectives and specific actions associated with each goal.

### **Goal 1**

A robust and inclusive partnership that serves its members.

**Goal 2**

Landscape stakeholders working together to co-design conservation actions, based on co-produced knowledge, that sustains rural communities while building functional ecosystems across the PPP LCC geography.

**Goal 3**

Trust among stakeholders built on open, transparent, and effective communication.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

Implementation details (*e.g.* objectives, tactics, performance measures) to achieve each goal will be developed by teams set up by the Steering Committee and Technical Committees.