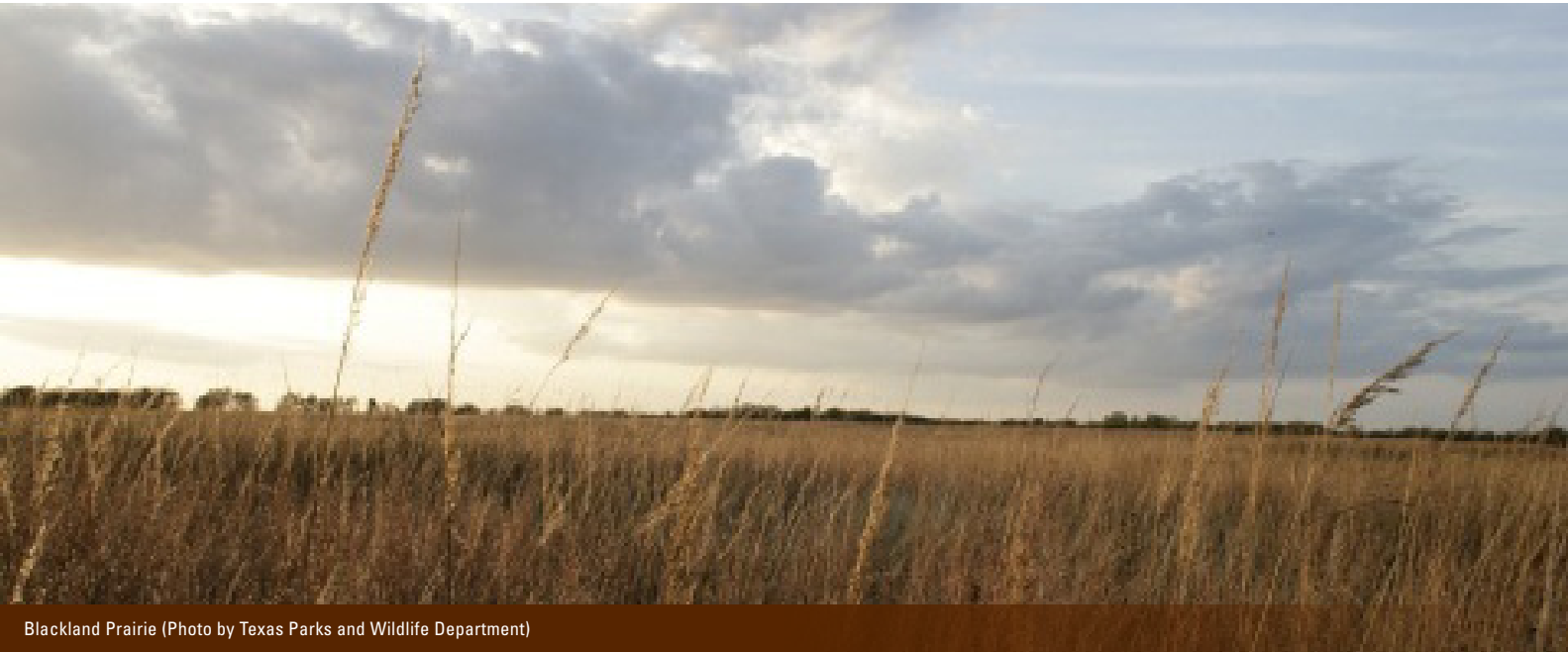




2012 Annual Report

Gulf Coast Prairie Landscape Conservation Cooperative



Blackland Prairie (Photo by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department)

YEAR IN REVIEW

2012 Accomplishments

2012 was a year full of events and accomplishments for the Gulf Coast Prairie Landscape Conservation Cooperative (GCP LCC). Through collaborative projects, symposia and workshops with GCP LCC partners, we made strides to bring awareness and support to the conservation of the Gulf Coast Prairie region.

Leadership

In 2012, we transitioned from Chair Carter Smith, Executive Director at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to U.S. Geological Survey Associate Regional Director, Allison Shipp. Mike Carloss, Biologist Director for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, was elected Vice Chair of the GCP LCC in 2012. Under this leadership, 2012 closed with strong partnerships and successful projects.

Partnership & Science Support

Partnerships continued to grow in 2012 between federal, state and non-governmental organizations (NGO) sharing technical capacities with a focus on leveraged cooperation and strong collaborative involvement. Since

the Steering Committee was established in 2011, GCP LCC has worked alongside Wildlife Management Institute (WMI) and Texas A&M University Institute of Renewable Natural Resources (TAMU IRNR) to address priority species and ecological functions, and has identified GCP LCC two-year priority science projects and baseline data/information needs (see page 5).

GCP LCC highlights include collaboration with the new South Central Climate Science Center (SC CSC) to support science priorities and ensure conservation consistency across the landscape. In 2012, specific projects funded through the SC CSC (see page 5) were focused on GCP LCC science needs.

The National Wetlands Research Center (NWRC) and GCP LCC partners continued to work on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Gulf of Mexico Data Atlas in 2012. Through NWRC Director Phil Turnipseed and Spatial Analysis Branch Chief Scott Wilson, the effort includes how U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) data can support the atlas. Director Turnipseed worked with the USGS Office of Surface Water to resolve latitude and longitude coordinates, data protocol, and issues involved with merging USGS environmental data in the atlas.

Also in 2012, the Gulf Coast Vulnerability Assessment (GCVA) Steering Committee released a project work plan for comments to a wide range of stakeholders to ensure results are tailored to meet the needs of coastal resource managers, state and regional conservation planners, and the conservation partnerships of the GCP LCC. The project will enhance conservation and restoration planning and implementation by providing a better understanding of the effects of climate change, sea-level rise and land-use change on the Gulf of Mexico coastal ecosystems and their species. The GCVA is led by the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, NOAA, Gulf of Mexico Landscape Conservation Cooperatives and USGS Climate Science Centers.

GCP LCC GIS Specialist Blair Tirpak worked with the Gulf Coastal Plains and Ozarks and South Atlantic LCCs to develop a Southeast Conservation Planning Atlas (SE-CPA). The SE-CPA is a web-based platform that will serve data in a consistent manner across the Southeast and allow casual GIS users to discover, access, and integrate existing spatial data and tools.

GCP LCC Coordinator Bill Bartush and GCP LCC GIS Spatial Analyst Nicholas Enwright facilitated the formation and development of the Edwards Plateau Working Group with GCP LCC partners in Central Texas. The group successfully identified a process that would consolidate existing data and develop a strategy to design conservation planning for this critical area of the GCP LCC landscape.

An important benchmark for the GCP LCC included the naming of its 15-member Science Team in June of 2012 whose membership represents a cross-section of conservation partners of the cooperative (see page 7). The Science Team spent the balance of 2012 on its first major task by developing a process to identify focal species for the LCC. Dr. Bruce Moring coordinated the formation of the GCP LCC Science Team and led Science Team conference calls, webinars, and face-to-face meetings between June and December of 2012. In parallel to the focal species process, the Science Team also agreed to intersect the GCP focal species process with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Surrogate Species Guidance.

Since July, Dr. Bruce Moring led an effort to evaluate candidate fishes, freshwater mussels, and aquatic

invertebrates for consideration as focal species in support of sustainable landscapes conservation in the LCC. Dr. Moring led a conference call in November for the Science Team's Freshwater Aquatic working group, which resulted in an evaluation plan of the suite of freshwater taxa as part of the GCP LCC's focal species process.





Dolon Falls on the Devil's River Near Del Rio, Texas (Photo by Bruce Moring, USGS)

Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units 2012 Highlights

Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units (CESUs) provide research, technical assistance, education, outreach, and capacity building to federal land management, environmental, and research agencies and their partners. The CESU Network includes more than 300 partners, including 13 federal agencies, in 17 CESUs representing biogeographic regions that encompass all 50 states and U.S. territories. The CESU network includes the biological, physical, social, cultural, and engineering disciplines needed to address natural and cultural resource management issues at multiple scales and in an ecosystem context. The multi-disciplinary structure of CESUs allows federal agencies to expand their scientific capacity by building multi-disciplinary, multi-agency teams to solve problems related to their agency missions. This collaboration encourages innovation and promotes timely exchange of information among partners. CESU agreements allow each of the participating federal agencies to efficiently transfer funds and station employees at university partners while maintaining responsibility for agency-sponsored activities within CESUs.

The Gulf Coast Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (GC-CESU) is part of the national CESU Network. The GC-CESU, through a partnership of 11 federal agencies and 31 universities, serves seven states from Texas to Florida as a vehicle for increasing the availability of working collaborations and the quality of research projects within and beyond the region. Texas A&M AgriLife Research through

Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources serves as the host for the GC-CESU.

Recognizing the need for multi-state and international conservation science centered on landscape conservation, GCP LCC has partnered with the Gulf Coast CESU to facilitate conservation science, develop regional partnerships, and enhance communication among partners in setting common goals and assessing shared science needs. This partnership leverages the resources of a network of federal agencies and universities to provide science and outreach.

In 2012, GCP LCC identified a suite of high priority science needs. Utilizing the network of the Gulf Coast CESU, two projects addressing some of these needs were initiated. The first project to develop a spatially-explicit decision support tool for guiding habitat conservation for western Gulf Coast mottled ducks, is currently underway by Texas A&M Kingsville. The second project focuses on the development of a conservation framework for priority species of grassland-shrubland habitats in the southern Great Plains. This project is being conducted by a team of research and extension faculty from Texas A&M University.

2012 Events

Event highlights include the GCP LCC Priority Science Needs Forum in Fort Worth, Texas, hosted by LCC partners in conjunction with the Texas Chapter and Southwest Section of The Wildlife Society. The February event was created to develop long-term Priority Science Needs and garnered an attendance of 50 managers, biologists and scientists.

GCP LCC and its partners were invited to present at the Fall Symposium of the Louisiana Association of Professional Biologists and the Louisiana Chapter of the Society of Wetlands Scientists. GCP LCC Coordinator Bill Bartush, Gulf Coast Prairie Ozarks Landscape Conservation Cooperative (GCPO LCC) Science Coordinator, Dr. John Tirpak, USGS NWRC Director Phil Turnipseed and USFWS Region 4 Ecological Services Lafayette Field Office Chief Jeff Weller presented current and future biology research in the region to federal, state, and local agencies, academia, NGOs and private industry representatives.

More than 70 participants attended the USFWS Region 4 Workshop in October, supported by the GCP LCC, where GCPO LCC led a presentation on the key concepts for selecting species as drivers for landscape-scale conservation. At the event, USGS NWRC Director Phil Turnipseed acknowledged the NWRC's support for the LCC mission, goals and functions.

GCP & GCPO LCC hosted the National LCC Staff Workshop in Lafayette, Louisiana, in cooperation with the USGS NWRC, NOAA Estuarine Habitats and Coastal Fisheries Center and USFWS Regions 2 and 4. Workshop discussions included topics such as strengthening Network-wide relationships among LCC coordinators and science coordinators; identifying critical near-term LCC needs and solutions for addressing the needs; developing thematic Network goals as part of the Network Strategic Plan development, and more. The November event gathered more than 70 coordinators, scientists and administration and management personnel.

Laurie Rounds, NOAA Science Coordination Liaison for the GCP LCC, participated in the Gold Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council's first public meeting in Mobile, Alabama. The RESTORE Act will develop and oversee

implementation of a comprehensive plan to help restore the Gulf of Mexico region following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.



Photo by Larry Allain, USGS

LOOKING FORWARD

GCP LCC Partner Projects

A variety of projects will continue into 2013 such as:

Wildlife Management Institute (WMI)

1. "Common Ground" Landcover Classification - STD Precision & Delineation (focus on Oklahoma to connect Crosstimbers (year 1) & Rolling Plains (year 2) ecoregions and south-Mexico (year 3))
2. Conservation Design Considering Sea-Level Rise Impacts on Coastal Wetland Carrying Capacity for Whooping Cranes and Other Wading Birds, Piping Plover and Other Shorebirds, Waterfowl, and Impacts on Nesting Islands for Colonial Waterbirds
3. Managing Instream Flows and Developing Hydrological Information for the Gulf Coast Prairie Landscape Conservation Cooperative to Benefit Stream/River Fishes, Mollusks, Amphibians, Stream and Wetland Dependent Wildlife
4. Riparian Corridor Re-Vegetation/Restoration Design in the Tamaulipan Brushlands and Gulf Coast Prairie Bird Conservation Regions

Cooperative Ecosystems Studies Unit (CESU) projects administered by Texas A&M University Institute of Renewable Natural Resources (TAMU IRNR)

1. Mottled Duck Habitat Conservation Prioritization Tool
2. A Conservation Framework for Priority Species of Grassland-Shrubland Habitats of the Southern Great Plains

USGS Southeast Climate Science Center

1. Southeast Regional Assessment Project (SERAP)
2. A Handbook for Resource Managers to Understand and Utilize Sea-Level Rise and Coastal Wetland Models for Ecosystem Management Under Future Conditions
3. Connectivity for Climate Change in the Southeastern United States
4. Ecological Implications of Mangrove Forest Migration in the Southeastern United States

USGS South Central Climate Science Center

1. Terrestrial Connectivity Across the South Central United States: Implications for the Sustainability of Wildlife Populations and Communities
2. Occurrence and Variation in Submersed Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) Along the Northern Gulf of Mexico: A Hierarchical Approach to Assess Impacts of Environmental Change on SAV Resources
3. Ecological Implications of Mangrove Forest Migration in the Southeastern United States
4. Delineation of Fresh, Intermediate, Brackish, & Saline Marsh Types of North Central Gulf of Mexico Coast
5. Synthesizing Ecohydrology Models as a Management Tool for Landscape Conservation Under Climate Change

USGS National Wetlands Research Center

1. Application of a Terrestrial Landscape Fragmentation Framework for Texas and Louisiana
2. Synthesis of the State of the Science Regarding Modeling Urban Growth
3. Edwards Plateau Working Group

Possible GCP LCC Partner Projects to address 2013 GCP LCC priorities are:

1. Prairie Pilot and Grassland - Prairie Inventory Tool
2. Gulf Coast Vulnerability and Conservation Framework
3. Data stewardship and Conservation Planning Atlas
4. Collaboration - Human Dimension working groups such as Edwards Plateau, Red River



Controlled Cajun prairie fire (Photo by Larry Allain, USGS)

2013 Calendar

- January **GCP LCC Steering Committee meeting**, Lafayette, Louisiana.
- February, GCP LCC Coordinator Bill Bartush and GCPO LCC GIS Spatial Analyst Nicholas Enwright will present their abstract titled, "Collaborative Conservation in the Edwards Plateau Region, Texas," at the Texas Chapter of the **Wildlife Society Annual Meeting**, in Houston, Texas.
- February, GCP LCC GIS Specialist Blair Tirpak will present on the Southeast Conservation Planning Atlas at the Texas Chapter of the **Wildlife Society Annual Meeting** in Houston, Texas.
- February's **Alliance of Prescribed Fire Associations** will be in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and the **CESU Meeting** will be in San Antonio, Texas in March.
- **GCP LCC Steering Committee meeting** will be in Austin, Texas in June.
- Presentation at the July **Esri International User Conference** in San Diego, California.

Science Priority Plans 2013

Our Network will continue to identify priority research topics that work in tandem with one another and can efficiently achieve common science goals. Science efforts that amplify the Adaptive Management Process and use of focal species will be significant in 2013. An expanded and engaged science staff and an active Science Team will ensure meaningful and practical products for GCP LCC partners.

- Initiate use of GCP LCC Focal Species for development of Conservation Objectives
 - > Restoration, conservation and preservation of functional landscapes based on each focal species needs
- Integrate Climate Science Center goals and objectives
 - > Incorporate First Nation and Tribal natural resource/cultural conservation priorities

FY 2013 Goals & Benchmarks

As we advance our science goals, effective communication to our partners and to the conservation community will be emphasized. Inclusion of economic, cultural and social areas of interest will be integrated in science to fortify conservation implementation. Consideration for recreation, fishing industries, agriculture and private land owner needs will be included when addressing focal species needs, climate change and conservation planning and management.

- Host Steering Committee meetings, January 2013 & June 2013
- Initiate and continue science projects related to priority science needs (see WMI & CESU, page 5)
- Increase capacity of science staff and efforts as advised by the Steering Committee
- Develop Gulf-wide working group
- Strengthen partnerships to address private and agriculture lands conservation
- Create strategy to incorporate the America's Great Outdoors Initiative

GCP LCC Steering Committee

Federal Agencies

- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- National Park Service
- USDA National Resources Conservation Service
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Geological Survey (2012 Chair)

State Agencies

- Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fish (2012 Vice Chair)
- Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Non-governmental Organizations

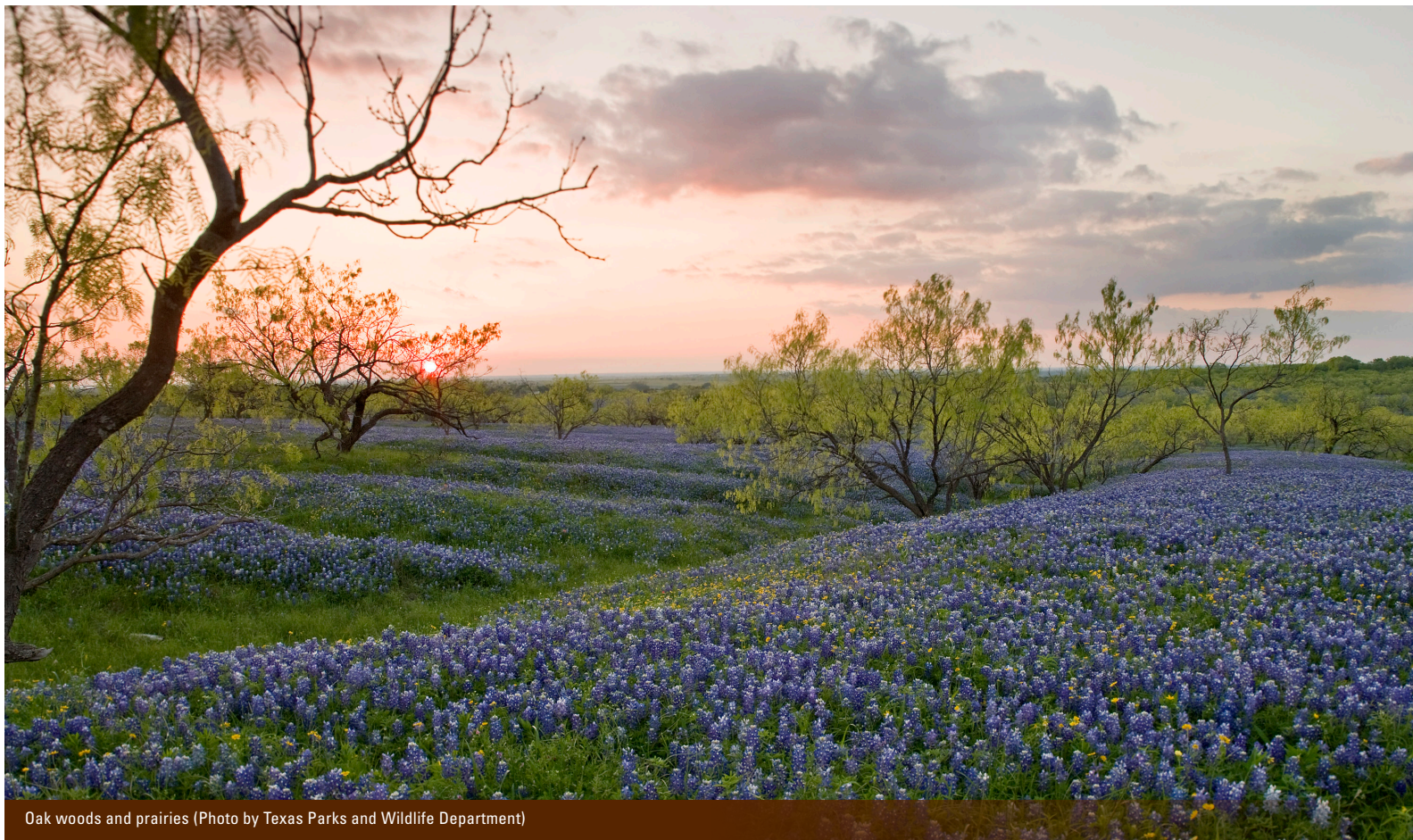
- Ducks Unlimited
- The Conservation Fund
- The Nature Conservancy

Partnerships

- Gulf Coast Joint Venture
- Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture
- Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership
- Rio Grande Joint Venture
- Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership



South Texas Plains (Photo by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department)



Oak woods and prairies (Photo by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department)

GCP LCC Science Team

Federal Agencies

- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Partners for Wildlife Program

State Agencies

- University of Texas – Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR)
- Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute-Texas A&M University, Kingsville
- Oklahoma Climatological Survey
- Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

Non-governmental Organization and Partnerships

- The Nature Conservancy
- Ducks Unlimited
- Gulf Coast Joint Venture
- Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership

GCP LCC Staffing

Bill Bartush, Coordinator,

Gulf Coast Prairie Landscape Conservation Cooperative

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Gulf Coast Prairie
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