

GCPO LCC Strategic Plan 2013 - 2018



GCPO

Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks
Landscape Conservation Cooperative



LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION
COOPERATIVES

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[Purple coneflower](#) (*Echinacea purpurea*) MO, David; [War Eagle Cavern](#), AR, Jeff Weese; Kayla Kimmel and Cedric Doolittle, FWS, trapping alligator gar (*Atractosteus spatula*) for telemetry, K Kimmel via the GCPO LCC; Roseate Spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*), USFWS Southeast; Mississippi Riverboat, TN, Gregg Elliott via GCPO LCC; Dusky Gopher Frog (*Rana sevososa*), MS, USDA; [Atchafalaya delta](#), LA, eutrophication&hypoxia; floodplain habitat, MS, Kayla Kimmel via GCPO LCC; *Villosa vibex* mussel, Jeff Powell via gcpolcc.org.

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page 3: [Shiloh peach orchard](#), TN, Loren Mitchell

page 4: [Sunflowers](#), MS, Kevin Scarborough; 2011 Mississippi River flood, Greg Wathen via gcpolcc.org

page 5: [Russell Forest burn](#), AL, John Coley; Pitcher plants, Greg Wathen via GCPO LCC

page 6: Mississippi River sunset, John Ruskey, via GCPO LCC; [Stacked logs](#), Kate Ter Har

page 7: GCPO LCC geography, Alexis Londo via the GCPO LCC Conservation Planning Atlas

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Recommended citation:

GCPO LCC. 2013. Gulf Coastal Plains and Ozarks Landscape Conservation Cooperative Strategic Plan, 2013-18. 7 pages.

Vision

Our vision of success

Our vision is to ensure natural and cultural landscapes capable of sustaining healthy ecosystems, clean water, fish, wildlife, and human communities in the 180-million-acre Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks region through the 21st century.



Mission

Our GCPO LCC mission

The mission of the Gulf Coastal Plains and Ozarks Landscape Conservation Cooperative is to define a shared vision for sustainable natural and cultural resources in the face of a changing climate and other threats; design strategies to achieve that vision; and deliver results on the ground through leadership, partnerships, contributed resources, evaluation and refinement over time.

Challenges

The challenges we face

We live in a world that is rapidly changing, and those changes are accelerating in the 21st century. The job of ensuring that nature's benefits – our working forests, rich soils, clean water, wildlife and fisheries – will exist well into the future is more complex than ever before. To be lasting, conservation must take place over very large areas on a landscape scale, but no single organization or authority can see the whole picture or do the job alone. Overlapping jurisdictions and competing interests complicate conservation efforts further. Urban and rural development are expanding at a rate greater than that of population growth*, increasing demands on our land base for food, fiber, energy, and clean water. On top of everything, a changing climate means that we must plan for future landscapes that may look significantly different from today.

Long-range Goals

Our long-range goals

We recognize that clean air, clean water, fish, wildlife and the beauty of nature are important to a large majority of Americans.** To be responsive to the American people and in fulfillment of our mandate from the Department of Interior, we seek to achieve the following long-term goals:

- Collaboratively identify and agree on the best and most representative examples of healthy ecosystems as priorities for conservation and management.
- Analyze impacts to degraded systems to identify the best opportunities and the best means of restoring ecosystems to health.
- Develop effective ways of managing, mitigating, and adapting to changes driven by climate and the intensive human use of land, waters and oceans.



Way of Working

Our way of working

The GCPO LCC seeks to lead by example in achieving collaborative landscape conservation by:

- Offering partners a landscape perspective for their conservation activities.
- Developing explicit linkages across existing conservation partnerships that span multiple taxa and habitats.
- Incorporating future change (such as urbanization, sea level rise) into conservation planning.
- Pulling these pieces together to help public and private conservation partners define and design sustainable natural and cultural landscapes.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of conservation programs towards achieving sustainable natural and cultural landscapes.

Do you have a role?

This work is crucial for all of us. Between now and 2060, more than half the nation's population growth and an estimated 65 percent of its economic growth will occur in [10 mega-regions across the country](#). The GCPO is sandwiched between four of them: the Piedmont-Atlantic, Texas Triangle, Central Plains, and the Midwest. Over that same time period, the 180-million-acre Gulf Coastal Plains and Ozarks will see its urban centers more than double in size, expanding by more than 115 percent. That is staggering change in the face of other challenges, including the spread of invasive species, energy development, the loss of important wildlife corridors, increasing challenges related to water quality and quantity, and future impacts from the effects of accelerating climate change.

Just as city and state planners are staking a claim on the landscape, we need to make sure fish, wildlife, and their habitats also have a place. It's why we need your help, whether you are part of a conservation organization, a government agency, a business that stands to gain or lose from these changes on the landscape, or a private landowner. As we build this collaborative partnership, we want your help and participation to make more strategic investments that achieve the conservation goals outlined here. For more information go to <http://gcpolcc.org>, contact the appropriate [staff](#), email elliott.gregg@gmail.com, or call the GCPO LCC Coordinator, Greg Wathen, at 615-781-6610.

Five-year Strategies

Five-year strategies

To reach our long-range goals, we will focus on the following strategies over the next 5 years:

Organizational Representation

Organizational representation and function

The GCPO LCC will continue to maintain a broad based partnership represented by the federal, state, tribal, and non-governmental organizations whose missions align with that of the LCC.

The GCPO LCC Steering Committee will target new member organizations to develop a full suite of federal, state, tribal, and private organizations with responsibility for our GCPO landscape:

- Tribes – we will seek engagement and participation by tribes within the LCC's Steering Committee, and other committees and work groups as appropriate.



- Cultural Resources – we will seek engagement and participation by the cultural resource community (namely, State Historical Preservation Offices) within the LCC’s Steering Committee, and other committees and work groups as appropriate.
- Non-conservation sectors – we will seek to engage non-conservation sectors (for example, highway planning departments, community planners, marine shipping and fisheries interests, and the energy development community), to increase mutual understanding of needs and the potential for collaboration in achieving conservation goals.



The GCPO LCC will maintain a strong Conservation Science Team, Advisory Council, and Adaptation Science Management Team, to develop innovative science-based solutions for our future conservation landscape. Tools that provide spatial visualization and analysis, regularly updated, will be developed and applied in collaboration with a wider conservation network to achieve seamless conservation across LCC borders. Our LCC network includes neighboring LCCs, USGS Regional Climate Science Centers, National Fish Habitat Partnerships, Bird Conservation joint Ventures, and other partnerships that operate within or across the GCPO region. In particular, the GCPO will work with the Southeastern Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies and the Southeast Natural Resources Leadership Group and others leading development of a Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS).

Conservation Science

Conservation Science

The GCPO LCC will work with our partners and other organizations (such as Climate Science Centers) to develop a robust science agenda that employs the principles of adaptive management on a landscape scale, and which defines a future conservation landscape capable of sustaining natural and cultural resources at desired levels.

- Natural resources – the GCPO LCC will define the amount, configuration and condition of functional terrestrial, aquatic, subterranean, and marine ecosystems to meet the needs of the full suite of flora and fauna that are representative of and reliant on those ecosystems.
- Cultural resources – the GCPO LCC will identify and define cultural landscapes within our geography that are historically or culturally significant, and develop appropriate scientific processes to ensure their sustainability in the 21st century.



Conservation Delivery



Conservation Delivery

The GCPO LCC will develop the appropriate tools, decision support, and communications platforms to facilitate strategic and coordinated conservation delivery on both public and private lands by individual LCC member organizations, LCC partners and stakeholders. Priorities include:

- Ecosystem Services – the GCPO LCC will develop appropriate metrics that establish the values people place on [ecosystem services](#) provided by healthy natural and cultural landscapes in the GCPO geography.
- Private lands – the GCPO LCC will develop appropriate means and strategies for achieving conservation by working with private landowners on private lands, focusing on agricultural, forest industry, and non-industrial forestlands. Initiatives will be strategically designed to provide sustainable and functional systems and landscapes within the GCPO region.
- Non-conservation sector – the GCPO LCC will work with non-conservation sectors (such as, highway planning departments, community planners, marine shipping and fisheries interests, developers, energy development community) to develop appropriate and targeted conservation delivery strategies to facilitate the development, restoration, and maintenance of functional systems and landscapes within the GCPO geography.

Monitoring

Monitoring

The GCPO LCC will develop the appropriate metrics and methodologies that enable our member organizations and partners to collaboratively evaluate our collective progress in delivering sustainable natural and cultural resources.

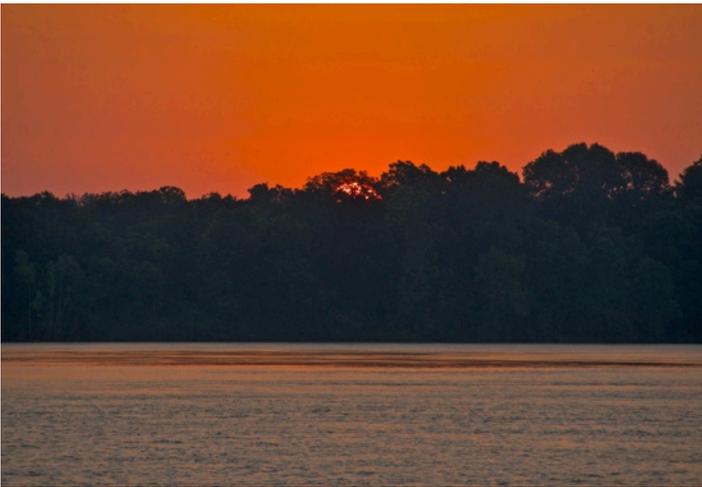


- Monitoring capacity – we will lead and facilitate a collaborative monitoring approach, working with our partners to develop explicit landscape monitoring objectives, share monitoring procedures and increase efficiencies among our various organizations working across the landscape.
- Monitoring landscape change – the GCPO LCC will develop innovative solutions to monitoring landscape changes within the GCPO geography, through improved geospatial processes and methodologies. Landscape change will be monitored on an ongoing and regular basis, to provide partners with the most up to date information possible.

- A voice for monitoring – to promote the feedback loop of adaptive management, which encourages the design of management projects as assumption-based research, the GCPO LCC will advocate and support the need for outcome-based monitoring of on-the-ground project results as well as landscape scale monitoring of changing conditions.

Communications

The GCPO LCC will develop communications platforms and processes that effectively serve the needs of the partnership, including both in-reach strategies targeted at LCC partners, and outreach to the larger conservation community and other sectors that influence use of the lands, waters, and caves of the GCPO region.



- Understanding the conservation community – the GCPO geography easily has more than 225 federal, state, university, and non-governmental organizations that have conservation delivery or related missions. The conservation community of the GCPO is complex, with multiple, and overlapping missions, priorities, and governance structures. The GCPO LCC will seek to untangle this web of competing and overlapping institutions, and develop a communications database, platforms and strategies that effectively communicate our priorities to our partners and stakeholders.
- Reaching out to other sectors that affect the landscape – long-term sustainability of resources constitutes common ground for collaboration with community planners, resource-based industries and others. Long-term success will also require outreach to actors on the landscape who may not share conservation goals, but who have the power to influence land use decisions. To effectively target our conservation outreach, we will improve our understanding of how and by whom conservation decisions are made across the landscape and incorporate human dimensions and social sciences into our communications program.
- Informing the people of our region – to achieve long-term goals across a huge landscape where private landownership predominates, we will need the acceptance, if not the active support, of the people living there. GCPO LCC communications will include techniques to assess public attitudes and educate key audiences about landscape scale conservation.

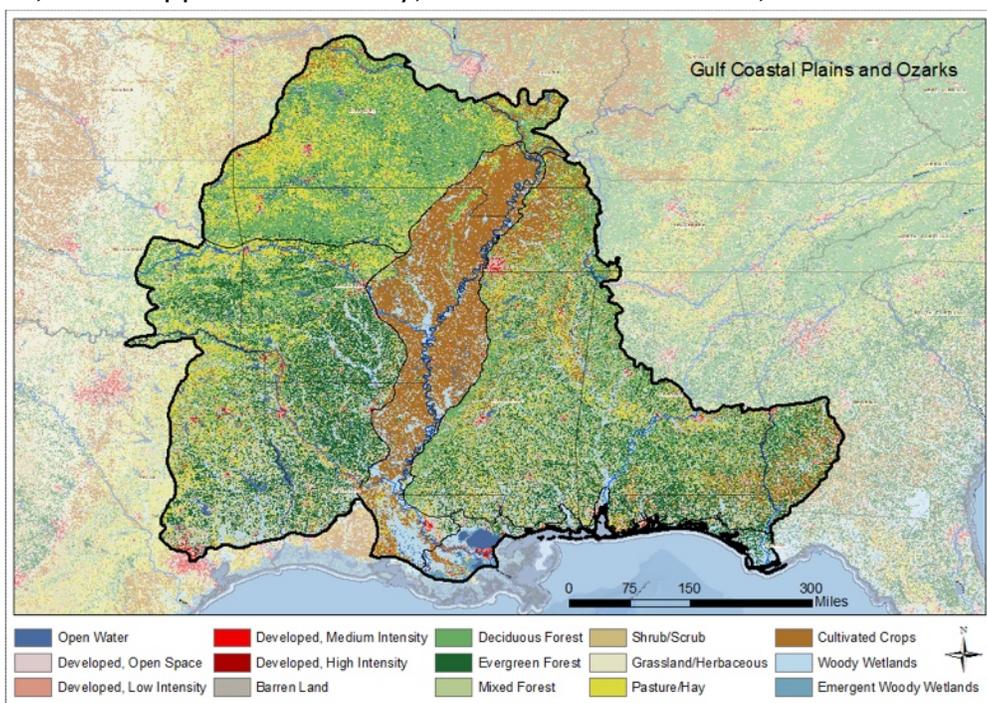


Landscape, geography & heritage

The Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks landscape, geography and heritage

The Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks region is one of [22 Landscape Conservation Cooperatives nationwide](#), established in 2009. Spanning 12 states, the region is a center for biodiversity of fish and wildlife populations, is part of the nation's most significant flyway for migrating waterfowl, and sustains one of the most productive coastal fisheries in the world. In addition, six National Heritage Areas within the GCPO recognize a rich mix of cultural heritage and historic landscapes that reflect aspects of Native American civilizations, European explorers and settlers, African slaves, and the Civil War. The [GCPO LCC](#) is comprised of five distinct subregions: the East Gulf Coastal Plain, Interior Highlands, Mississippi Alluvial Valley, West Gulf Coastal Plain, and Gulf Coast.

The Interior Highlands have high gradient streams, hardwood and montane conifer forests, and unique karst habitats. The highlands slope gradually toward the broad coastal plains, which extend from eastern Texas to the Florida panhandle. Both the East and West Gulf Coastal Plains support open pine, savannas and grasslands through which flow medium- to low-gradient streams, with flooding and fire integral to maintaining healthy habitats.



The entire GCPO region is roughly bisected by the lower Mississippi River, where less than half of historic forested wetlands remain, making habitat restoration and reconnection a priority. Water quality in the Mississippi River and its tributaries powerfully influences the nearshore waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The Mississippi, along with other famous rivers such as the Mobile in Alabama, the Little Red in Arkansas, the Atchafalaya in Louisiana and the Appalachianicola in Alabama and Georgia, contribute to the region's astounding diversity of plants, crayfish, mussels and snails while supporting estuarine habitats that serve as nurseries to economically important fisheries.

* See [The rise and rise of urban expansion](#), April 2012

** See [The American Environmental Values Survey](#), October 2006 and [Gulf Coast Voter Attitudes regarding RESTORE Funding and Conservation](#), March 2013.

View the annual work plan based on this Strategy: [\[LINK\]](#)

[Visit and join the gcpolcc.org](#)