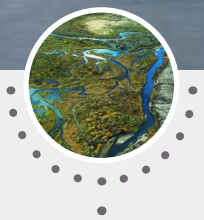
UPPER MIDWEST AND GREAT LAKES
LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION COOPERATIVE

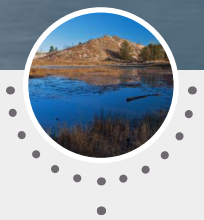
PROGRESS REPORT 2017

Detroit skyline, Duško Pilić
https://flic.kr/p/v52K6Q

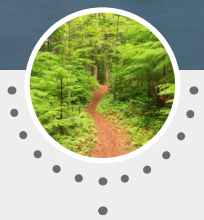
FOCUS



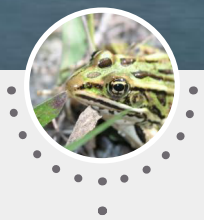
Aquatic Habitat Connectivity



Coastal Conservation



Forest Conservation



State Wildlife Action Plans

Urban Conservation

The upper Midwest is home to a diverse range of natural resources provided by the Great Lakes, North America's largest freshwater resource, coastal wetlands, forests, major rivers and prairie. Embedded in these natural areas are heavily populated urban centers. This juxtaposition of natural landscapes and people creates ample opportunity for stewardship and collaboration to solve major ecological challenges.

The Upper Midwest and Great Lakes Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC) is a community composed of conservation agencies, organizations, and individuals with unique purposes, missions, and mandates, that align our actions around shared goals and objectives for ecological challenges that transcend boundaries and jurisdictions in the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes geography.

WE ADD VALUE...

to solving complex, geographically broad conservation problems in the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes region. Our leverage and promise reside in our role as a credible convener that catalyzes a diverse conservation community for identification and pursuit of shared outcomes and goals. By aligning around our shared interests, we leverage our collective capacity, talented and skilled people, and financial resources for more effective conservation. By attracting thought leadership and new expertise we enable creative solutions to conservation problems and shift the implementation paradigm towards collective impact. We are leaders in improving governance and management and build new partnerships to advance our strategies.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

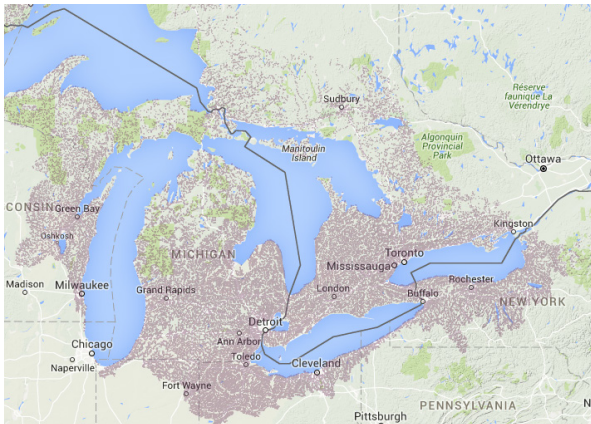
The idea that no single entity can tackle complex conservation issues alone is a foundation of the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives. The Upper Midwest and Great Lakes LCC has taken a giant step toward reconnecting waterways in the Great Lakes basin by rallying together a mosaic of tribal, federal, state, academic and non-profit groups to form the Great Lakes Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative. Together, this group harnessed the capacities, expertise, and abilities of all its partners in support of common conservation outcomes, and to serve as a strategic forum for collaboration, coordination, and integration.

> “ OUR EFFORTS WILL NOT ONLY RESTORE FISH POPULATIONS BUT ENHANCE OUTDOOR RECREATION EXPERIENCES AND BOOST LOCAL ECONOMIES THAT RELY ON OUTDOOR TOURISM.

This wealth of expertise is now being brought to bear to restore the historic breeding areas of iconic native fish species, such as lake sturgeon and brook trout, whose populations have been in rapid decline after more than a century of obstructed waterways. Our efforts to remove these barriers will not only restore fish populations but enhance outdoor recreation experiences and boost local economies that rely on outdoor tourism.

Towards these efforts, we convened more than 40 natural resources and transportation infrastructure experts to develop and prioritize a set of problems and potential solutions for agencies in those fields to work on together. Going forward, this group will implement strategies to improve aquatic connectivity, such as determining how to best direct funding for dam and culvert replacement projects. They have also started to inventory available decision support tools, are evaluating their use and making improvements in the information.

Working with the University of Wisconsin and others the LCC helped further develop one such toolset. Fishwerks is a web-based GIS platform that allows users to access sophisticated optimization tools that identify barriers which, if removed, would maximize habitat improvements for migratory fish in the Great Lakes basin. The tool is helping to make funding decisions, and can be applied at scales covering multiple jurisdictions. Researchers developing the tool have already found that barrier removal projects coordinated across the entire Basin are nine times more cost-effective than projects conducted at the county or local level.



We were very proud when our work to protect coastal wetlands in the Great Lakes was selected as a Resilient Lands and Waters Partnership in 2015. The designation was part of the Administration's Climate and Natural Resources Priority Agenda that recognizes where federal agencies are working with state, tribal and local partners to conserve natural resources in the face of climate change.

THANKS TO THE GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE, WE NOW HAVE THE DATA WE'VE ALWAYS NEEDED. THE COASTAL WETLAND PRIORITIZATION TOOL ACTS AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN THOSE DATA AND THE DECISION MAKERS. IT WILL ALLOW STAKEHOLDERS TO VISUALIZE DATA ON WETLAND CONDITIONS, COMPARE WETLANDS TO ONE ANOTHER, AND RANK WETLANDS BASED ON USER DEFINED CRITERIA. WE'LL ACHIEVE SUCCESS BY INVESTING IN WETLAND RESTORATION PROJECTS THAT HAVE THE GREATEST IMPACT.

– DR. MATTHEW COOPER, NORTHLAND COLLEGE BURKE CENTER FOR FRESHWATER INNOVATION

THERE ARE MANY GOOD INITIATIVES, PROJECTS AND RESEARCH OCCURRING IN THE GREAT LAKES TO CONSERVE WETLANDS. I SEE GREAT VALUE IN THE LCC'S COASTAL CONSERVATION EFFORTS TO COORDINATE, SYNTHESIZE, AND COMMUNICATE THIS INFORMATION SO THAT IT CAN BE USED BY WETLAND MANAGERS, LAND USE PLANNERS, AND POLICY AND DECISION MAKERS.

– BARB AVERS, WILDLIFE AND WETLANDS SPECIALIST, MICHIGAN DNR

In 2016, our Coastal Conservation Working Group engaged the Great Lakes coastal conservation community in a Landscape Conservation Design process targeting the coastal regions from Michigan's Saginaw Bay to Ohio's Sandusky Bay. They started by hosting workshops that brought together the Michigan and Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, local communities and many others to identify what motivates them, individually and collectively, to conserve coastal wetlands. They also identified opportunities to improve knowledge and where collaboration would result in the most effective, strategic work in coastal wetlands.

Based on the information gathered from these meetings and data gathered through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the Coastal Conservation Working Group funded and facilitated the development of two new coastal wetland decision support tools that were launched in December 2016. The Coastal Wetland Prioritization Tool provides information on the ecological condition, water quality, surrounding human pressures and conservation status of coastal wetlands. The Great Lakes Coastal Wetland Restoration Assessments help coastal wetland managers consider the broader context of their local conservation opportunities by identifying specific areas with high potential for restoration, comparing results with basemaps and oblique aerial photography and generating reports on areas of interest.

Guided by these tools, the Coastal Conservation Working Group can focus the efforts of coastal wetland managers towards on-the-ground implementation, for greater conservation impacts.

BY WORKING TOGETHER, WE CAN POOL OUR LIMITED RESOURCES AND LEARN FROM EACH OTHER, ENABLING EFFECTIVE CONSERVATION ACROSS THE REGION. – AMY DEROSIER, STATE WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN COORDINATOR, MICHIGAN DNR

State Wildlife Action Plans are instrumental in defining conservation practices best geared toward the needs of wildlife species in each state. Since natural processes do not recognize state lines, our LCC continued to play a role in bringing together state agencies. With the states having recently completed revisions to their plans, the LCC convened a workshop in 2016 to provide support for a regional collaboration, discuss commonalities among their Wildlife Action Plans and think strategically about implementing the Plans for the good of the Great Lakes region and beyond. "Now that the State Wildlife Action Plans are updated, this is a great time for us to focus on working across our state boundaries, securing healthy wildlife populations.

By working together, we can pool our limited resources and learn from each other, enabling effective and efficient conservation across the region," explains Amy Derosier, State Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator for the state of Michigan. Our LCC will continue to fuel the energy around regional collaboration while states define resources needed to get their conservation actions on-the-ground.

Andy Reago & Chrissy McClarren, Flickr Creative Commons

Our Forest Conservation Working Group continues its efforts to influence forest conservation for resilient northern forests into the future. 2016 saw the completion of a study to quantify and mitigate the impacts of emerald ash borer on black ash forests in the upper Great Lakes region. The results of this effort can be seen online at the Emerald Ash Borer Information Network. The group is also currently facilitating a project with the University of Michigan, to be completed in Spring 2017, that will result in the mapping of forest values, services and threats in the Northwoods.

We upgraded and relaunched GreatLakesLCC.org in January 2016. To celebrate our collaborative contributions to landscape-scale conservation our new website is structured around people, teams and organizations. We will continue to use this valuable tool to share the latest stories, events, resources and projects illustrating the connections we forge across the region.

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Since our inception in 2010, we have steadily improved our operations and have built a solid foundation for solving complex ecological challenges. With a new five-year strategic plan released in October 2016, we are well poised to advance our collaborative efforts in 2017.

Bradly Potter, Upper Midwest and Great Lakes LCC Acting Coordinator

LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION COOPERATIVE NETWORK

For more on the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes LCC, including the latest news, project information, upcoming events, and resources visit www.GreatLakesLCC.org.