

Ten Years of Collaborative Conservation:

**A review of the North Carolina  
Sandhills Conservation Partnership**



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## OVERVIEW

Established in 2000, the North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership (NCSCP) is a collective of organizations dedicated to the protection and restoration of the longleaf pine ecosystem and its flagship species, the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW). The NCSCP represents a diverse set of stakeholders, including core partners that are signatories on the Charter and Memorandum of Understanding and regional partners that are valuable, but non-signatory organizations and individuals. Core partner organizations include: NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources, NC Department of Forest Resources, NC Division of Parks and Recreation, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Sandhills Area Land Trust, Sandhills Ecological Institute, The Nature Conservancy, US Army at Fort Bragg, US Army Environmental Command, and US Fish and Wildlife Service. At least one representative from each core partner organization sits on the NCSCP Steering Committee. Regional partners include: Sustainable Sandhills, Base Realignment and Closure Regional Task Force (BRAC-RTF), Regional Land Use Advisory Committee (RLUAC), NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, as well as individual forestry consultants and private landowners. Both core and regional partner representatives serve on one or more of the NCSCP working groups.

In 2010, the NCSCP celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> year. This benchmark presented an opportunity to ‘check-in’ with partners to reflect on and learn from the past ten years to ensure the continuation of a collaborative path forward. Sara DiBacco facilitated this process by leading an internal review of the NCSCP. The goals of the review were to engage partners, foster dialogue, and promote action that could help ensure the efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of the NCSCP for years to come. Every partner played a vital role by participating in the process and contributing honest and critical feedback. This document presents a synthesis and preliminary assessment of results compiled from surveys and interviews completed during the summer of 2010. Small workshops will be held in the future to collectively discuss results and develop actions that address priorities identified in the interview and surveys.

## REVIEW PROCESS

The review process created for the NCSCP consisted of a comprehensive evaluation, including interviews and surveys, and will culminate in a series of small, facilitated workshops. The immediate, explicit goal for the NCSCP review process was to stimulate reflection, feedback, and action from the NCSCP partners regarding the collaborative process embodied by the NCSCP as well as the conservation outcomes realized because of the NCSCP. The overarching, implicit goal of the review was to reinforce or strengthen partner commitment to, and participation in, the NCSCP to secure a productive and successful future.

To accomplish both goals, core participatory values were incorporated as a foundation for the approach. Core participatory values promote stronger individuals, stronger groups, and stronger agreements<sup>i</sup>. Thus, by creating a neutral forum for expressing and sharing ideas and perspectives about all aspects of NCSCP; and by promoting a common understanding of, and an opportunity to build upon, the successes and lessons learned over the past 10-years, the guiding principles for this process were:

❖ **Full participation** by core and regional partners in evaluations and workshops that results in:

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<sup>i</sup> Kaner S. 2007. Facilitators’ guide to participatory decision-making. San Francisco. Jossey-Bass

- An opportunity to provide open and honest feedback, which participants feel is meaningful and which demonstrates the value of their participation in the evaluation and within the broader context of the NCSCP.
  - A comprehensive representation of partners' viewpoints about the form and function of NCSCP and its path for the next 5 – 10 years.
- ❖ **Mutual understanding** among partners, promoted through participation in evaluations and workshops, that results in:
- An affirmation of the mission and vision of NCSCP as well as the value of the collaborative approach to enhancing conservation benefits on-the-ground and a renewed sense of shared responsibility to that mission.
  - An identification of strengths, weaknesses, misperceptions, or misunderstandings about the form, function, and conservation benefits associated with NCSCP, which forms the basis for a productive discussion on how to move forward, i.e. the groundwork necessary to develop inclusive solutions that address any issues brought out during the evaluation.
- ❖ **Inclusive solutions**, developed by partners and based on the collective awareness raised in evaluations and workshops, that results in:
- Action on, or resolution of, interests, concerns, or issues raised during this process that have a lasting impact.
  - A trajectory for NCSCP that ensures a collaborative path forward through means developed and determined by all partners.
- ❖ **Shared responsibility** among partners, generated through participation in evaluations and the workshops, that results in:
- Recognition by partners of their contributions to the past successes of the NCSCP; thus, the need for continued participation to ensure future accomplishments.
  - An understanding of or a renewed sense of the role each partner plays or can play, as well as clarification or improved understanding of the roles and expectations for steering committee and working groups members.
  - Collaborative and sustained action on inclusive solutions developed through this process.

The evaluation portion of the review consisted of two major steps:

1. Interview current Steering Committee members and the NCSCP coordinator

Purpose: The purpose of the interview process was to provide a personal opportunity for at least one representative from each of the core partner organizations to give feedback about his/her experiences with the NCSCP and to discuss ideas for the future.

Procedure: Face to face or phone interviews were scheduled with all current Steering Committee members and the NCSCP coordinator. Additional partner representatives were also interviewed if the current Steering Committee member had not served for a majority of the 10 years, and he/she could identify another organizational representative with more experience. Interviewees were provided with a copy of the Charter and Memorandum of Understanding and the following questions prior to the interview:

- Question 1: Why did your organization join the Partnership?
- Question 2: What role do you and your organization play in the Partnership?
- Question 3: How has the Partnership been valuable to you and your organization?
- Question 4: What has your experience with the Partnership been like?
- Question 5: Where do you see the Partnership going in the future?

Responses were captured by hand, subsequently typed into a Word document, and emailed to participants so they would have an opportunity to review and make any necessary changes.

Outputs: Interview responses were collected from July – August 2010 from a total of 17 partners including: all current Steering Committee members, the NCSCP coordinator, and additional partners from the Army Environmental Command, Sandhills Ecological Institute, NC Division of State Parks, and The Nature Conservancy.

## 2. Administer an online survey to current core and regional partners and past core partners

Purpose: The purpose of the survey was to provide a maximum number of partners with the opportunity to give feedback and information about the collaborative process (e.g. cooperative activities, complementary organizational objectives), the conservation agenda (e.g. mission, goals, working group objectives), and other benefits of the NCSCP.

Procedure: A 21 question mixed response-type, online survey was administered using Survey Monkey Pro. 60 past and current partners were invited to participate in the online survey, which remained open from July 16 – August 30, 2010.

Outputs: A total of 39 invitees started the survey (65%), and 30 completed all of the survey (50%).

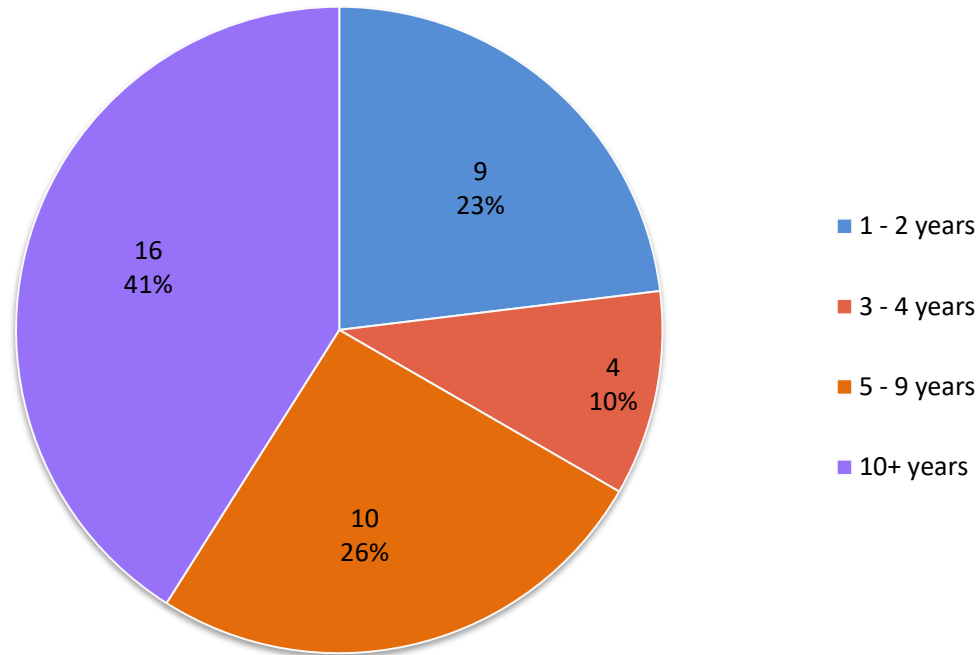
## SURVEY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Section 1: Years of Involvement

Years of Involvement: Q1

39 respondents

Please indicate the years of your involvement with the NCSCP (e.g. 2000 - present).



## RESULTS

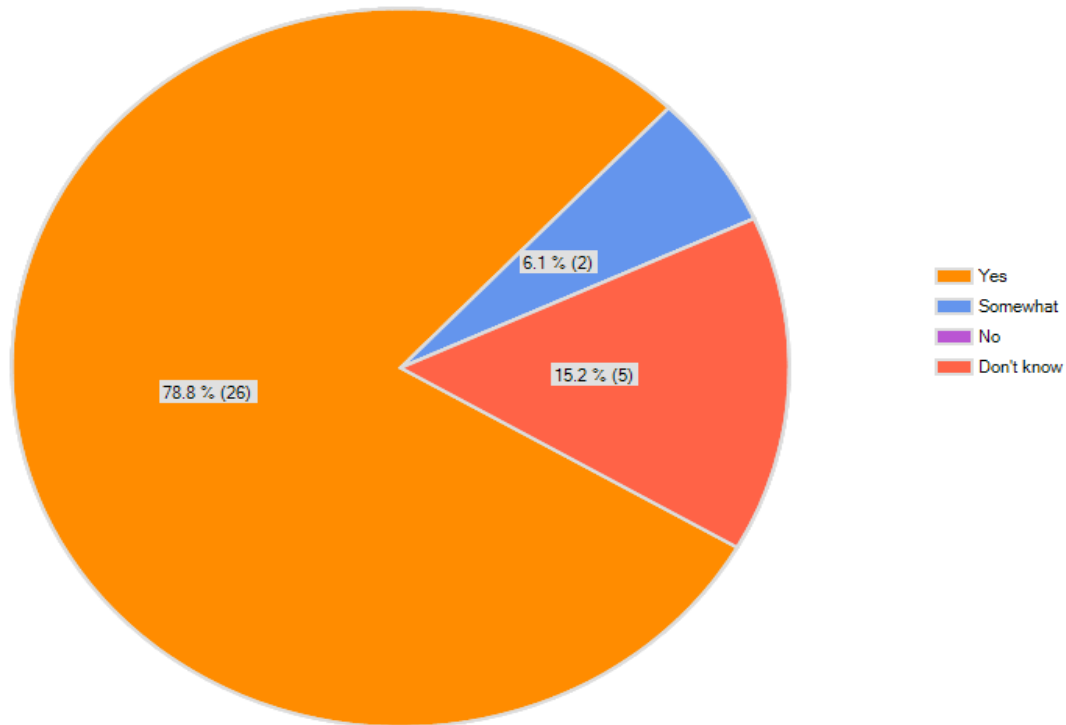
A majority of respondents, 16 of 39, have been involved with the NCSCP for 10+ years, 10 have participated for 5 - 9 years, 4 for 3 – 4 years, and 9 for 1 - 2 years. The following number of respondents from each group started but did not complete the survey: 2 from the 10+ years, 1 from the 5 – 9 years, 1 from the 3 – 4 years, and 2 from the 1 -2 years.

## Section 2: Organizational Structure

Organizational Structure: Q2

33 respondents

### Are the Memorandum of Understanding and Charter effective organizational structures for the NCSCP?



#### RESULTS:

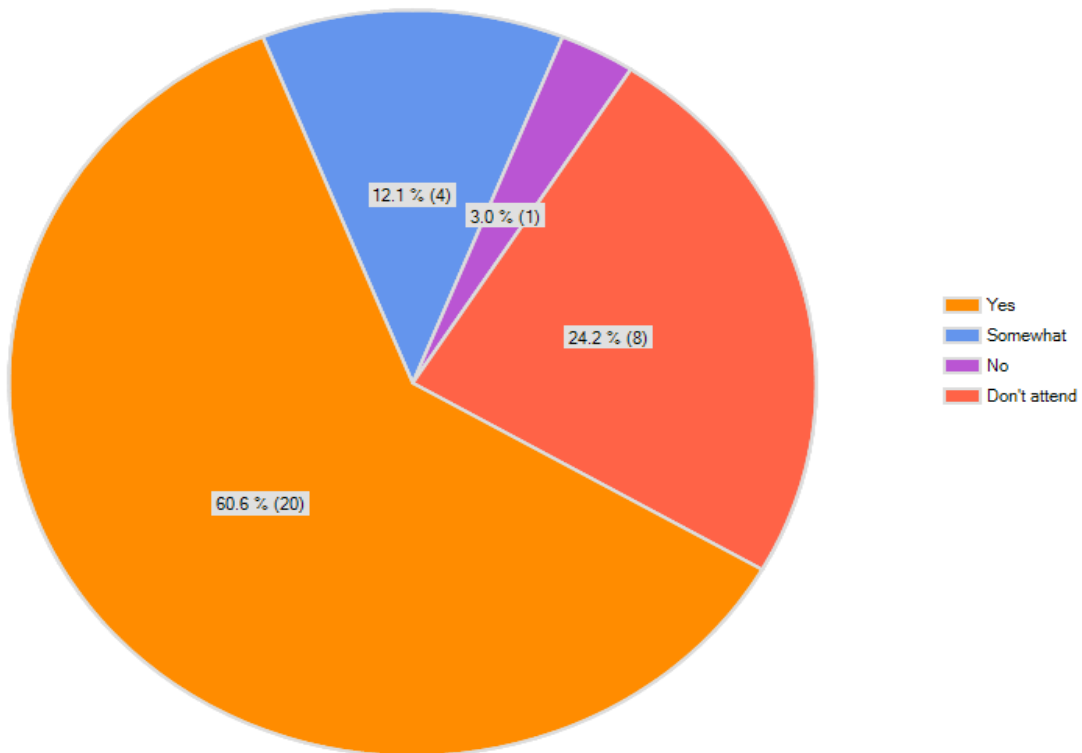
A majority of respondents, 26 of 33, indicate that the Charter and MOU are effective organizational structures; 2 indicate 'Somewhat'; and 5 indicate 'Don't Know'. The four comments include a question about whether the MOU has been signed; a note from a partner that had never seen the documents before; and a comment stating that the Charter is an effective document but that the usefulness of the MOU in the immediate future is doubtful.

#### DISCUSSION:

If the Charter and MOU are meant to be guidance documents for NCSCP operations, it might be worthwhile to refresh the collective group memory about the relationships, responsibilities, goals, and objectives that have been stated and agreed upon in each document. In general, it might be useful for partner agencies to ensure that any staff working on NCSCP efforts understand or at least have access to these documents. The strength and effectiveness of these documents ultimately depends on awareness and buy-in from the majority of the group, regardless of the individual signatures on the document. Additionally, when there is leadership

or personnel turnover within partner organizations, documents such as these can be useful to communicate background information about the NCSCP and to help convey partner commitments and responsibilities.



**Are quarterly Steering Committee meetings useful?****RESULTS:**

A majority of respondents that attend the Steering Committee meetings, 20 of 25, indicate that these meetings are useful; 4 indicate 'Somewhat'; and 1 indicates 'No' (8 - 'Don't attend').

Responses associated with the 'Somewhat' and 'No' categories (total = 5) suggest that the Steering Committee take a more active role in shaping the decisions and actions of the NCSCP. Comments include:

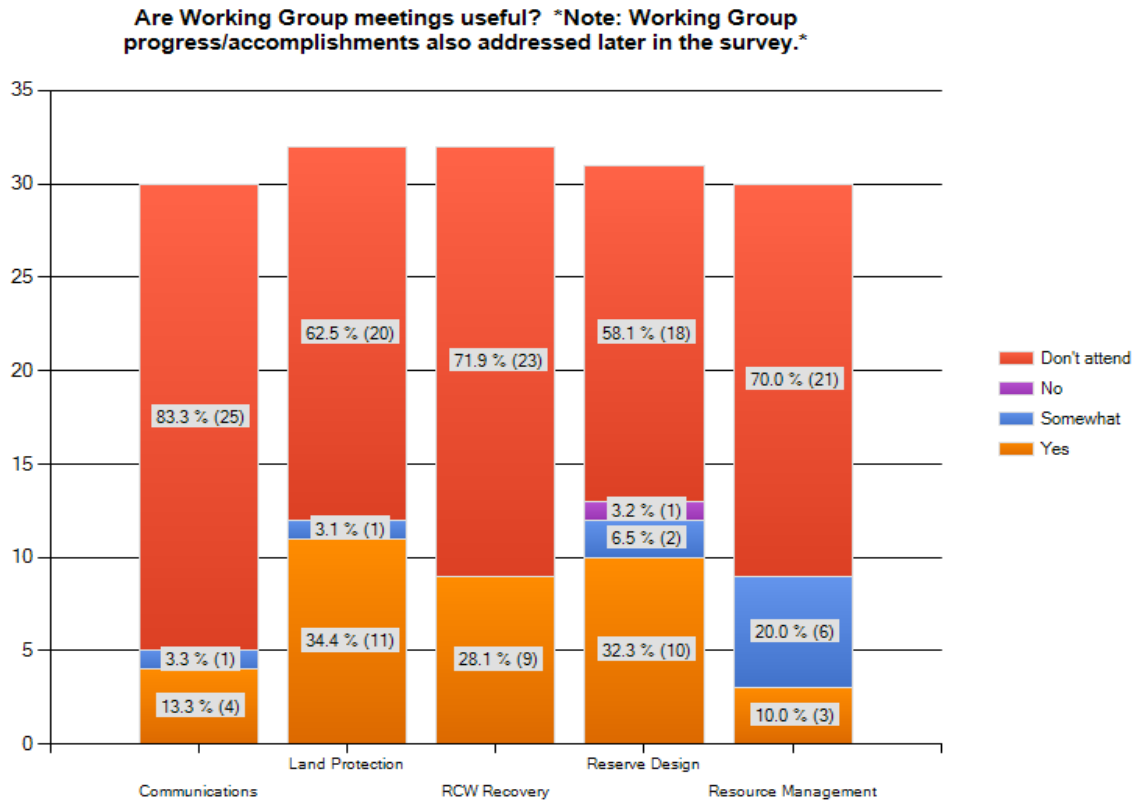
- Use Steering Committee meetings not only as information sharing opportunities, but also to inform Steering Committee members of issues that require their input to make critical decisions.
- Structure Steering Committee meetings so that the agenda includes several actions items that are set in advance and upon which Steering Committee members come prepared to discuss. This would require that action items be submitted well in advance of the actual meeting.
- Involve Steering Committee members more directly in working through challenges or priorities.

Other considerations from the 'Yes' respondents include having one less meeting per year to better accommodate members' busy schedules and having one meeting that is set over lunch to encourage more social interaction among partners. Another comment indicated that there were sometimes too many unnecessary items being discussed.

## DISCUSSION:

Results suggest that partners would like to see the Steering Committee take more of an active role in guiding the NCSCP forward and working together as a united group to help resolve major issues or challenges. As suggested, one less meeting per year may not affect ongoing efforts. However, this might depend on whether or not the Steering Committee chooses to adopt a meeting structure in which action items are set for each meeting. Varying the structure of the meeting such that once a year it is held over lunch is probably a good idea for keeping these meetings dynamic and productive.

As a general recommendation, Steering Committee members should have an opportunity to meet and consider these comments and their implications on the overarching structure, role, and responsibility of the Steering Committee. To maximize the outcomes of any such 'self-evaluation', the Steering Committee should consider all of the review results so that the most well-informed decisions regarding any changes to their current form and function can be made.



**RESULTS:**

Most respondents indicate that working group meetings are at least ‘Somewhat’ useful. Working group specific results are:

Communications Working Group (CWG): Excluding the ‘Don’t attend’ responses, 4 out of 5 respondents indicate that CWG meetings are useful, and 1 indicates ‘Somewhat’.

Land Protection Working Group (LPWG): Excluding the ‘Don’t attend’ responses, 11 out of 12 respondents indicate that LPWG meetings are useful, and 1 indicates ‘Somewhat’.

RCW Recovery Working Group (RCW WG): Excluding the ‘Don’t attend’ responses, 9 of 9 respondents indicate that RCW WG meetings are useful.

Reserve Design Working Group (RDWG): Excluding the ‘Don’t attend’ responses, 10 of 13 respondents indicate that RDWG meetings are useful; 2 indicate ‘Somewhat’; and 1 indicates ‘No’.

Resource Management Working Group (RMWG): Excluding the ‘Don’t attend’ responses, 3 of 9 respondents indicate that RMWG meetings are useful, and 6 indicate ‘Somewhat’.

General comments for this question are summarized by four broad categories:

1. Better Communication: Partners need and want to understand the actions and activities of other working groups. There is a lack of communication between the working groups and the Steering Committee.
  - a. One partner suggests having at least one large meeting with all working groups and Steering Committee members.
2. Reinvigoration: Each working group needs to revisit their goals and objectives and ensure that relevant strategies are being implemented.
  - a. One partner suggests that each working group create an annual work plan with performance measures to support and assess progress.
  - b. One partner suggests that the Research Working Group be reconsidered in order to fund research projects that satisfy mutual interests, e.g. Bachman sparrow, invasive species.
3. Limitations on Partner Contributions: In recognition of partners' busy schedules and time constraints, all working group meetings should have a defined purpose and no meetings should be held for, 'the sake of meeting'.
4. Streamline Working Group Structure: Consolidate working groups to increase effectiveness and eliminate any non-functioning or non-productive groups.

Working group specific comments are as follows:

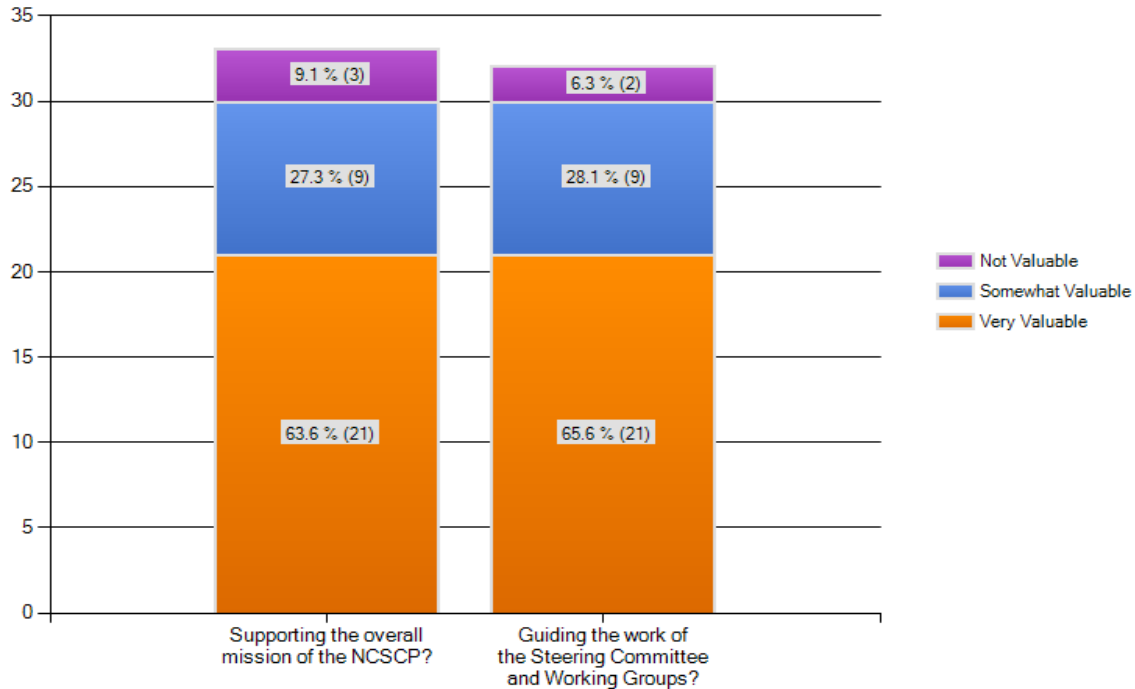
1. LPWG: The group has demonstrated success in reacting to and capitalizing upon land protection opportunities; however, it should now shift focus to play a more proactive, strategic role in coordinating action on the most important protection priorities.
2. LPWG and RDWG: These two groups should communicate and coordinate to implement more effective conservation actions; a joint meeting is planned for October 2010.
3. RDWG: This group lacks direction and purpose.
4. RMWG: There are concerns about the effectiveness of this working group especially because it has not been meeting regularly; however, since most members are on-the-ground land managers, it is difficult to maintain involvement.

#### DISCUSSION:

The general comments capture the sentiments expressed in the working group specific responses. Overall, better communication between working groups and among all partners is necessary to promote mutual understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and contributions of each working group. The proposal to consolidate or reconsider certain working groups should be considered as part of an effort to reinvigorate each group. Also, any restructuring or reorganizing of the working groups should recognize the practical limitations on partner contributions; this theme could also guide the creation of realistic yet productive annual

work plans. As with many of these questions, follow-up discussion and actions could be informed by the outcomes of a Steering Committee self-evaluation.

The NCSCP Charter describes that Working Groups were initially tasked with developing various management plans for incorporation into a 'comprehensive conservation strategy'. How valuable do you believe finalizing such a document would be to:



#### RESULTS:

Overall, responses indicate that partners support the development of a comprehensive conservation strategy to support the overall mission of the NCSCP and to guide the work of the Steering Committee and Working Groups. A majority of respondents, 21 out of 33, indicate that finalizing a 'comprehensive conservation strategy' will be 'Very Valuable'; 9 more indicate 'Somewhat Valuable'; and 3 indicate 'Not Valuable' for *supporting the overall mission of the NCSCP*. Similarly, a majority of respondents, 21 out of 32, indicate that finalizing a 'comprehensive conservation strategy' will be 'Very Valuable'; 9 more indicate 'Somewhat Valuable'; and 2 indicate 'Not Valuable' for *guiding the work of the Steering Committee and working groups*.

Comments are summarized by response category:

1. Very Valuable
  - a. A comprehensive conservation plan with strategies to reach concrete goals and objectives is essential for effective conservation activities.
  - b. Development of a comprehensive conservation strategy would be a good way to identify truly common goals and to decide how partners might best contribute toward that objective in a concerted manner.

- c. The NCSCP is already implementing an informal plan so creating a formal plan document would only help these activities become more effective. Any concerns about a lack of implementation of plans should be assuaged by the accomplishments of the NCSCP to date.
  - d. An overall guidance document can help maintain focus on the agreed upon goals and objectives and provide information that working groups can use to create annual work plans.
  - e. Without a plan, the whole project is not likely to be successful.
2. Somewhat Valuable
- a. The value of finalizing a comprehensive conservation strategy will be determined in part by the time and commitment required to pull together a cohesive document.
  - b. One caveat is that the document would be too vague to be useful and not worth the time and energy necessary to create it.
  - c. If the result is that all groups are, 'on the same page', then it will be valuable.
  - d. Often, these types of documents are only supporting documentation with no real 'teeth' to guide the mission towards accomplishment.
3. Not Valuable
- a. For the partnership to continue serving its information sharing function, a comprehensive strategy is not necessary. There may be some value in describing work on priorities shared by partners; however, each partner is not likely to adopt the priorities of others simply because they are part of the partnership.
  - b. In the past, this idea has not been embraced by the RMWG because it was agreed that the work being done inherently supported the conservation strategy, and there was some question about how a comprehensive strategy would be beneficial to the Partnership as a whole. Perhaps an annual or biannual summary from each partner on the resource management activities performed could be archived and somehow beneficial.
  - c. For those working groups that are functioning, plans are not needed, and any groups that have not been functioning by now have no purpose.

DISCUSSION:

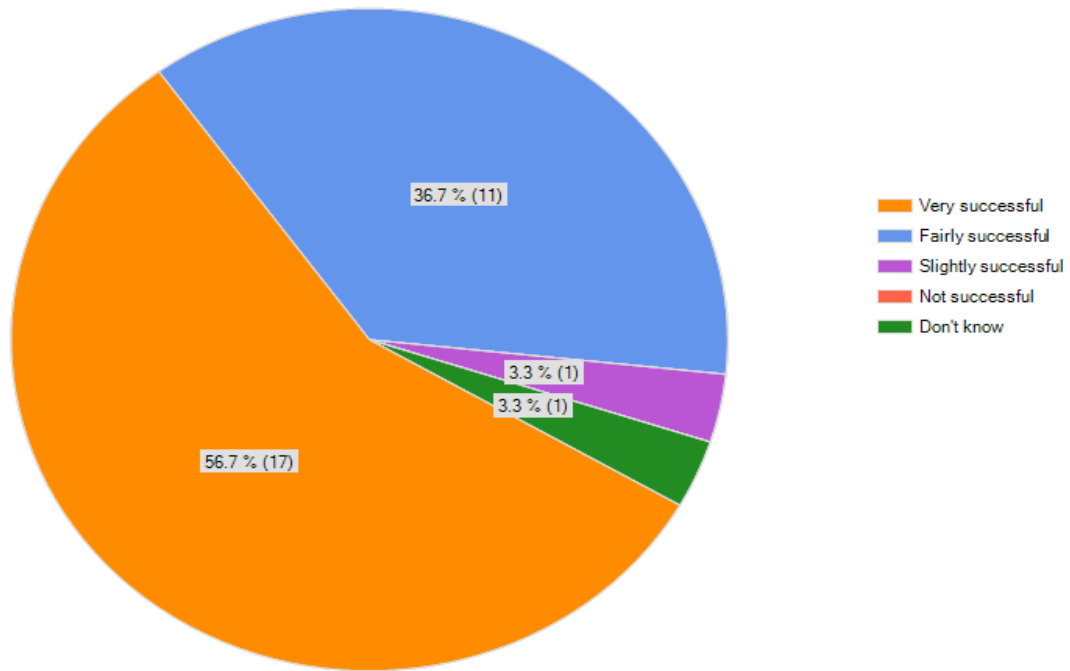
It will be important to balance the benefits of creating a comprehensive conservation strategy with the costs of doing so. Also, as an idea that has been brought up in the past but never fully realized, partners may be skeptical of its utility, so it will also be important to ensure that a majority of partners buy-in to the idea, process, and projected outcomes associated with developing a comprehensive strategy for the NCSCP. This topic is appropriate for discussion at a Steering Committee or partner workshop to collectively assess the pros and cons and to build up trust and support among partners for this effort.

### Section 3: Mission and Goals

Mission & Goals: Q6

30 respondents

How successful has the NCSCP been in demonstrating progress toward or accomplishing its mission? The mission of the NCSCP is to coordinate the development and implementation of conservation strategies for the red-cockaded woodpecker, other native biota, longleaf pine, and other ecosystems in the Sandhills of North Carolina compatible with the land use objectives of the partners.



#### RESULTS:

Overall, a majority of respondents, 28 out of 30, indicate that the NCSCP has been 'Fairly' to 'Very successful' in demonstrating progress toward or accomplishing its mission. The following successes are cited:

- Protection of habitat in key locations
- Recovery of Sandhills East RCW population 6 years ahead of schedule
- Buffers along 16 miles of Ft. Bragg boundary
- Creation of new State Parks
- Land transfers to the Wildlife Resource Commission
- Habitat restoration and prescribed fire
- Enhanced coordination between partners
- Support from the NCSCP that helps individual partners be more efficient and effective in making progress toward conservation objectives



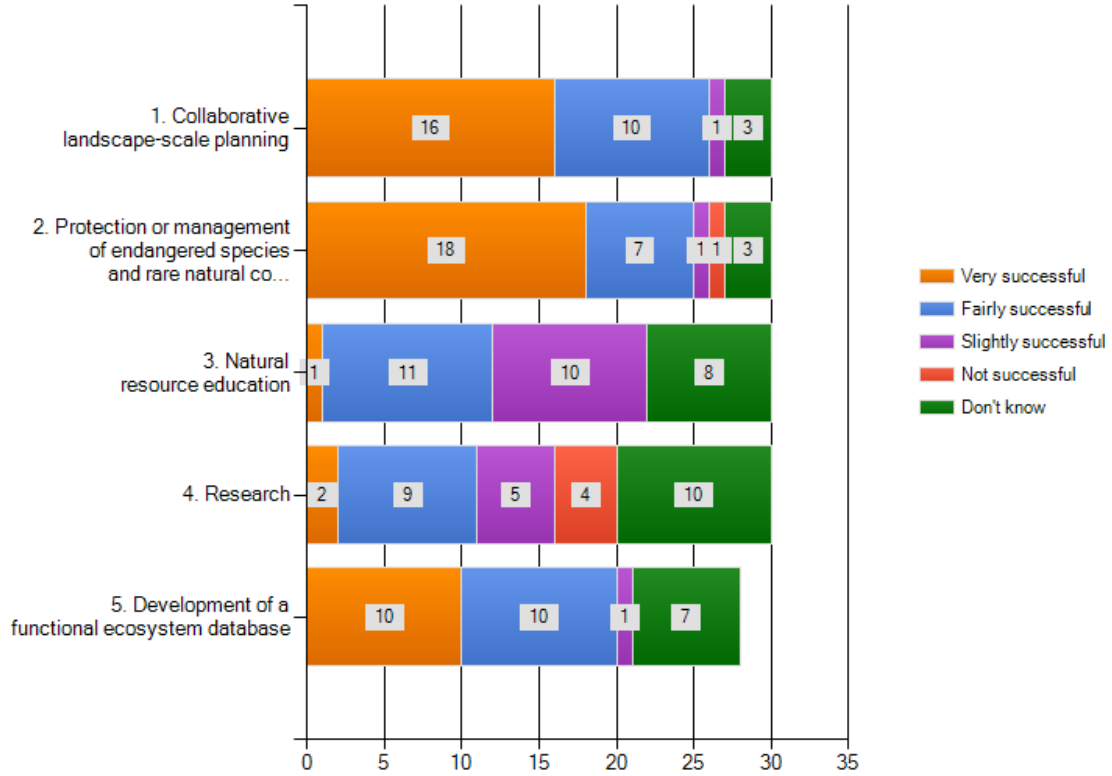
One respondent rates the NCSCP as slightly successful and attributes this rating to the fact that the scale of the mission is very large. A single respondent that indicates 'Don't know' does not provide any comments. Suggestions and comments corresponding to 'Fairly' and 'Very successful' are summarized below:

1. Increase communication with the public inside and outside of the Sandhills.
  - a. The NCSCP needs better public relations; it has not done a good job documenting and publicizing its successes.
  - b. It needs to translate the value of, and share information about accomplishments with the greater Sandhills population by capitalizing on the internal and external partner network that has been developed over the last ten years.
2. Increase emphasis on other native and rare species (besides RCW) and natural communities such as seeps. Also, consider invasive species.
3. Increase effectiveness at developing private lands interest in conservation. Some landowners do not share the vision.
4. Limited resources have constrained success of implementation of conservation strategies developed by the NCSCP.

#### DISCUSSION:

Enhanced communication and outreach with the public is a common theme in the results of this survey and is also mentioned in many of the interviews; thus, it is probably an important idea to consider future action on. In addition, shifting focus beyond RCWs to other native rare species and habitat types is another common theme mentioned in interviews. In general, both topics should receive special attention and focus in any Steering Committee discussions or partner workshops.

**How successful has NCSCP been in demonstrating progress toward or accomplishing each goal?**



**RESULTS:**

Overall, a majority of respondents indicate that the NCSCP has been ‘Fairly’ to ‘Very successful’ in demonstrating progress toward goals 1, 2, and 5 while approximately half of the respondents indicate the same for goals 3 and 4. Specific results are summarized by each goal:

1. Collaborative landscape scale planning: Excluding the ‘Don’t know’ responses, 26 of 27 respondents indicate that the NCSCP has been ‘Fairly’ to ‘Very Successful’ in demonstrating progress toward this goal; 1 respondent indicates ‘Slightly Successful’.
2. Protection or management of endangered species and rare natural communities: Excluding the ‘Don’t know’ responses, 25 of 27 respondents indicate that the NCSCP has been ‘Fairly’ to ‘Very Successful’ in demonstrating progress toward this goal; 1 respondent indicates ‘Slightly Successful’; and 1 respondent indicates ‘Not Successful’.

3. Natural resource education: Excluding the ‘Don’t know’ responses, 12 of 22 respondents indicate that the NCSCP has been ‘Fairly’ to ‘Very Successful’ in demonstrating progress toward this goal; 10 respondent indicates ‘Slightly Successful’.
4. Research: Excluding the ‘Don’t know’ responses, 11 of 20 respondents indicate that the NCSCP has been ‘Fairly’ to ‘Very Successful’ in demonstrating progress toward this goal; 5 indicate ‘Slightly Successful’; and 4 indicate ‘Not Successful’.
5. Development of a functional ecosystem database: Excluding the ‘Don’t know’ responses, 20 of 21 respondents indicate that the NCSCP has been ‘Fairly’ to ‘Very Successful’ in demonstrating progress toward this goal, and 1 respondent indicates ‘Slightly Successful’.

As a general comment, one partner noted that the core issues of managing land and wildlife are being handled well; however, the additional responsibilities of educating the public and working with public officials may be beyond the scope and expertise of committee members. The remaining comments focused on the research goal and are summarized as follows:

- No money is available for research because it is all directed toward buying and managing land.
- Research should expand beyond RCW, and opportunities to share funding for research on bats, Bachman’s sparrow, mussels and other aquatics should be explored.
- Unaware that research was a priority or even something of interest for the NCSCP.

#### DISCUSSION:

A majority of partners that could knowingly respond indicate that the NCSCP is successfully demonstrating progress toward or accomplishing the goals of collaborative planning, land protection, and development of an ecosystem database. In contrast, half of the knowing respondents indicate that the natural resource education and research goals are minimally or not at all successful. As a general recommendation, the NCSCP should collectively consider or reconsider the value of these goals to the mission; assess whether these goals are practical and realistic for the NCSCP; and/or if they would best be pursued by other entities perhaps with some support from the NCSCP.

### How does the NCSCP assess progress toward or accomplishment of its mission and goals?

#### RESULTS:

Of the 30 total respondents, 26 provide a response other than 'skip' or 'N/A'. The most frequent responses, i.e. 8 of 26, reference metrics such as:

- Acres of land protected from development /Increases in amount of conservation land/Priority tracts protected/Number of properties protected and their location with respect to military lands, Game Lands, or RCW corridors
- Acres restored to longleaf
- Acres burned each year
- Miles buffered
- Clusters protected and created
- Dollars obligated, spent, and leveraged
- Recovery of the Sandhills RCW population
- RCW reproductive success
- Improved connectivity and manageability – difficult to measure
- Education - as evidenced at least in part by articles in the newspaper that described the importance of protecting the Longleaf Pine ecosystem

In contrast, the next most frequently repeated response, i.e. 7 of 26, is 'Not sure'. Overall, this theme can be summarized by the following quote:

There is no end-state defined, nor are there established metrics. Progress has been measured solely by the general perception of NCSCP members that the group was making good progress in areas generally understood to be measures of success: increase in RCW groups, acres protected, buffered, etc.

Other comments and suggestions related to 'Not sure' include:

- A note that a comprehensive strategy could include a process for addressing this question.
- Two suggestions about working groups establishing goals and objectives with measurable outcomes, upon which they would prepare an annual report to detail progress and brief the Steering Committee.
- There is a number for acreage protected since 2000, but the conservation value of said acreage, i.e. what it contributes to preserving Sandhills biodiversity, would be an added measure of effectiveness.

Four comments reference a procedure that the NCSCP or individual partners use to assess progress, including:

1. Updates given at quarterly Steering Committee meetings.
2. ACUB reports including a number for acres protected with notes about any significant habitats (as indicated by the Significant Natural Heritage Areas dataset).

3. By measuring the results of each goal, 1. RCW recovery 2. Land Protection 3. Research. All have been somewhat successful and have clear indicators that can be measured.
4. By the collective accomplishments of partners and stakeholders in land protection and conservation efforts.

Two general suggestions are that progress should be evidenced by participation from the community, i.e. landowners or managers using guidelines or procedures suggested by the NCSCP, and that metrics should relate to biological outcomes for priority species and habitats, not just outputs such as number of acres.

#### DISCUSSION:

The results from this question suggest that there is not common understanding among partners about how the NCSCP knows that it is progressing toward or accomplishing its mission. Although many metrics are given as examples, there is no formal process or procedure that requires such assessments to be regularly conducted and reported to the Steering Committee or the NCSCP as a whole. There are also some suggestions that indicate that partners would like to see other standards for assessing progress incorporated in to NCSCP operations, e.g. biological outcomes, private landowner engagement.

In an environment of increasingly tight budgets and heavier organizational and individual workloads, the ability to demonstrate results through precise and accurate reporting mechanisms is likely to become more critical for: sustaining engagement in NCSCP efforts; justifying continued support and funding of NCSCP activities; and providing some accountability for how funds and other resources are used. Partners should consider this idea to decide whether more formal mechanisms for tracking progress toward the NCSCP mission is warranted and what procedures need to be established in order to do so.

**What limits the NCSCP in demonstrating progress toward or accomplishing its mission and goals?**

## RESULTS:

Of the 30 total respondents, 27 provide a response other than ‘skip’ or ‘N/A’; 4 indicate ‘Don’t know’. Funding for land acquisition and management is mentioned most often. Additional limitations and associated comments include:

- Performance Measures
  - Lack of distinct performance measures related to land protection and management objectives
  - Lack of clear, specific, measurable goals or a failure to communicate these effectively if they do exist
  - Difficulty in measuring some of the values of the NCSCP such as enhanced collaborative relationships, reduced conflict, greater level of knowledge among partners, etc. Also, many of the efforts of the partnership (e.g. public education, information sharing) may not pay dividends for a long time or propagate in ways that are hard to trace back to the partnership.
- People power
  - Lack of human resources that are dedicated solely to the mission – there is a need for a paid coordinator
  - Limitations on the amount of time partners have available to engage in Partnership activities because they have full time jobs and other pressing issues that can dominate their workload
  - Limitations associated with attitudes toward working within the NCSCP framework
- Exposure
  - The NCSCP needs to cultivate a more active partnership with the local press in the region.
  - One partner suggests submitting periodic human interest and success stories to newspapers and other publications.
- Land prices and availability
  - “Low-hanging fruit” have been purchased, and the smaller parcels that remain typically cost more on a per acre basis and take the same amount of personnel time to acquire.
- Landowner cooperation
- Local government cooperation

## DISCUSSION:

Results from this question support the finding that performance measures are an important component of a productive and successful future for the NCSCP. It also notes challenges or limitations that are echoed in interview responses such as the need for a dedicated, full-time coordinator, the need for more public engagement and outreach, and issues with land prices and landowner cooperation. An interesting point is

also made about the attitudes of partners as a potential limiting factor; this type of issue may need to be addressed throughout the hierarchy of partner organizations.

**What changes, if any, would you suggest to the mission and goals of the NCSCP? Please explain.**

## RESULTS:

Of the 30 total respondents, 27 provide a response other than 'skip' or 'N/A'; 1 indicates 'Don't know'. 13 partners respond that no changes are needed but corresponding notes mention that the mission and goals are evolving from RCWs to include other species and that the ideas of educating county commissioners, planning staff, and possibly chamber of commerce officers is now less compelling than once thought. One partner suggests that the goals and mission should be revisited since they were created in 2000. Other comments and suggestions include:

- Finding new grant or sources of money for research.
  - One partner suggests connecting with a university for grad students to conduct the research.
- Finding increased funding for land protect and management.
- Increasing outreach to landowners and local governments.
- Applying innovative conservation measures such as smoke easements and supporting riparian buffer ordinances.
- Developing/revalidating a threat-benefit matrix to articulate the level of threat.
- Improving communication and coordination with neighboring partnerships.
- Improving communication about the goals and developing specific benchmarks for each
- Preparing annual summaries of what was accomplished each year and identify the needs for the next year.
- Increasing action on the ground to accomplish the goals and fewer meetings.
- Improving implementation of mission and goals.

## DISCUSSION:

Almost 50% of respondents are satisfied with the mission and goals as they are currently laid out. However, there are enough comments suggesting alternative approaches or special considerations that follow-up discussion and action is warranted. Some of these suggestions could be incorporated into specific working groups' goals and objectives. The responses about using innovation to find more funding sources and create new conservation strategies or opportunities is also mentioned in interview responses; this theme is especially important for 'staying relevant' and competitive for existing funding and overall, for maximizing the NCSCP's potential for success in increasingly challenging environments.

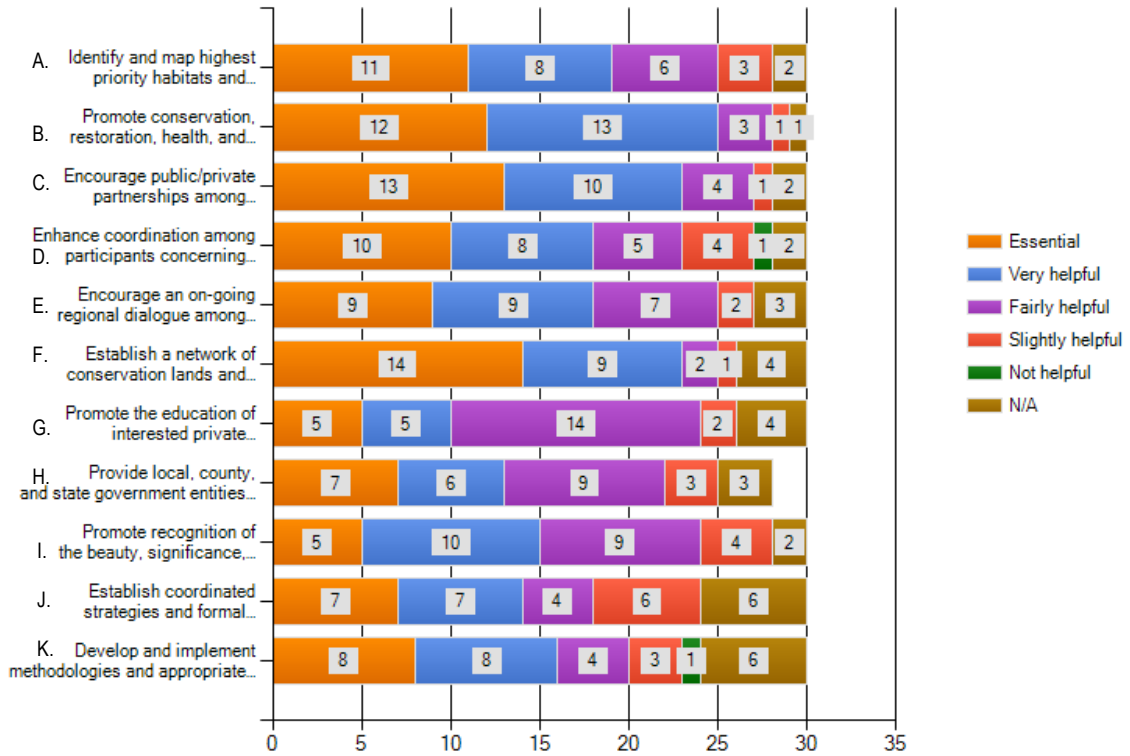


## Section 4: Complementary Organizational Objectives

Complementary Organizational Objectives: Q11

30 respondents

**How helpful has your organization's participation in the NCSCP been for working toward or accomplishing the complementary organizational objectives?**



		Essential	Very helpful	Fairly helpful	Slightly helpful	Not helpful	N/A
<b>A</b>	Identify and map highest priority habitats and species in need of conservation attention in this region.	<b>36.7%</b> <b>(11)</b>	26.7% (8)	20.0% (6)	10.0% (3)	0.0% (0)	6.7% (2)
<b>B</b>	Promote conservation, restoration, health, and sustainable use of the landscape and native terrestrial and aquatic communities that depend, in whole or in part, on the lands and waters of the NCSCP focus area.	40.0% (12)	<b>43.3%</b> <b>(13)</b>	10.0% (3)	3.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	3.3% (1)
<b>C</b>	Encourage public/private partnerships among participating governmental agencies, community and non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, corporations, and private landowners to enhance resources and achieve land conservation results on a landscape scale.	<b>43.3%</b> <b>(13)</b>	33.3% (10)	13.3% (4)	3.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	6.7% (2)
<b>D</b>	Enhance coordination among participants concerning current and future initiatives such that participants will be able to take better advantage of the work already being done by others, as well as identify opportunities to undertake more ambitious projects than any single participant's resources would otherwise permit.	<b>33.3%</b> <b>(10)</b>	26.7% (8)	16.7% (5)	13.3% (4)	3.3% (1)	6.7% (2)
<b>E</b>	Encourage an on-going regional dialogue among participants and other regional stakeholders about sustainable land management, working landscapes, and native biodiversity.	<b>30.0%</b> (9)	<b>30.0%</b> <b>(9)</b>	23.3% (7)	6.7% (2)	0.0% (0)	10.0% (3)

		Essential	Very helpful	Fairly helpful	Slightly helpful	Not helpful	N/A
	Establish a network of conservation lands and waterways and to						
F	promote the establishment of landscape corridors and buffers between and adjacent to existing conservation lands in order to protect and enhance long-term wildlife population viability and genetic exchange and to ensure land management flexibility.	46.7% (14)	30.0% (9)	6.7% (2)	3.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	13.3% (4)
G	Promote the education of interested private individuals and corporate landowners and local government agencies on conservation land management through demonstrations, workshops, and field trips.	16.7% (5)	16.7% (5)	46.7% (14)	6.7% (2)	0.0% (0)	13.3% (4)
H	Provide local, county, and state government entities with the information and tools necessary to help conserve the natural resources of the region.	25.0% (7)	21.4% (6)	32.1% (9)	10.7% (3)	0.0% (0)	10.7% (3)
I	Promote recognition of the beauty, significance, and value of the region's special conservation resource.	16.7% (5)	33.3% (10)	30.0% (9)	13.3% (4)	0.0% (0)	6.7% (2)
J	Establish coordinated strategies and formal mechanisms to facilitate habitat management on public and private lands at a landscape scale.	23.3% (7)	23.3% (7)	13.3% (4)	20.0% (6)	0.0% (0)	20.0% (6)
K	Develop and implement methodologies and appropriate agreements to maximize data compatibility among partners, promote exchange of data, and standardize quality assurance protocols to meet the mutual needs of participants.	26.7% (8)	26.7% (8)	13.3% (4)	10.0% (3)	3.3% (1)	20.0% (6)

## RESULTS:

Approximately 2/3 of all respondents identify participation in the NCSCP as at least 'Fairly helpful' in working toward or accomplishing the complementary organizational objectives listed in the MOU. Of the remaining responses, between 10 and 20% indicate 'Slightly helpful' for objectives A, D, H, I, J, and K. 'Not helpful' is indicated in one response for objectives D and K. Only three comments are associated with this question, and one mentions that other than the regional RCW database, resources are not shared.

## DISCUSSION:

It might be useful for the NCSCP to collectively assess the value of each complementary organizational objective in satisfying the mission and goals of the NCSCP and for meeting the needs and interests of each partner before re-examining the results to determine if more discussion or action is warranted. For example, if an assessment reveals that objectives D and K are high priorities, they would be obvious first targets for action since they both had indications of 'Not helpful' and between 10 and 20% indicate only 'Slightly helpful'.

Other general considerations about the complementary organizational objectives might include: Which ones are practical? Can we define them more explicitly so that they could serve as a performance measure by which partner organizations can assess the value of their participation in the NCSCP? Should this be done on an individual partner basis (this might depend on how important the ability to track performance related to participation in the NCSCP is to each partner)?

**How does your organization measure or assess the contributions of NCSCP to its own mission, goals, or objectives?**

RESULTS:

Of the 30 total respondents, 28 provide a response other than ‘skip’ or ‘N/A’; 2 indicate ‘Don’t know’. At least 6 responses explicitly indicate that individual organizations do not measure or assess the contributions of the NCSCP to their missions, goals, or objectives. A total of 10 responses describe how it is valuable, but not how that value is measured, and 10 responses include some metrics for how individual organizations assess contributions of the NCSCP.

Comments corresponding to ‘Do not measure’ include:

- We recognize and value the NCSCP and credit it or promote it in our work and outreach efforts.
- Our missions overlap closely in the conservation of North Carolina’s native biodiversity.
- We provide critical information and data, but the NCSCP does not do anything for us and does not view our goals and objectives as important.
- At a minimum, we use RCW numbers that private NCSCP lands contribute to RCW goals.

Comments corresponding to how it is valuable include:

- A critically important component for ensuring that the development community does not destroy the longleaf pine ecosystem within 5 miles of Ft. Bragg, Pope AFB, and Camp Mackall.
- Involvement with the greater, regional conservation community benefits our organization. Not sure we would be doing business much differently without the NCSCP, but it provides opportunities that otherwise may not be feasible or apparent.
- Use as a prime example of the success of military/DENR partnerships.
- Quarterly meeting provide an opportunity for AEC ACUB team members to meet in person with other NCSCP participants, see newly protected lands, meet landowners, etc – this is something we are unable to do at many of our other ACUB installations. We often bring this up as a great attribute of AEC’s relationship with the Sandhills – promoting it as one of our reasons for such a successful partnership.
- Without the collaborative work of NCSCP partners, we would be unable to successfully achieve recovery of the two Sandhills RCW populations.
- We are limited in our resources and therefore we need to work together. Our organization stresses partnerships to be successful in meeting our mission.
- The greatest contribution is collaboration between the different agencies/organizations.
- Essential to progress of our Green Growth program.

Comments that include metrics for assessing contributions by general category include:

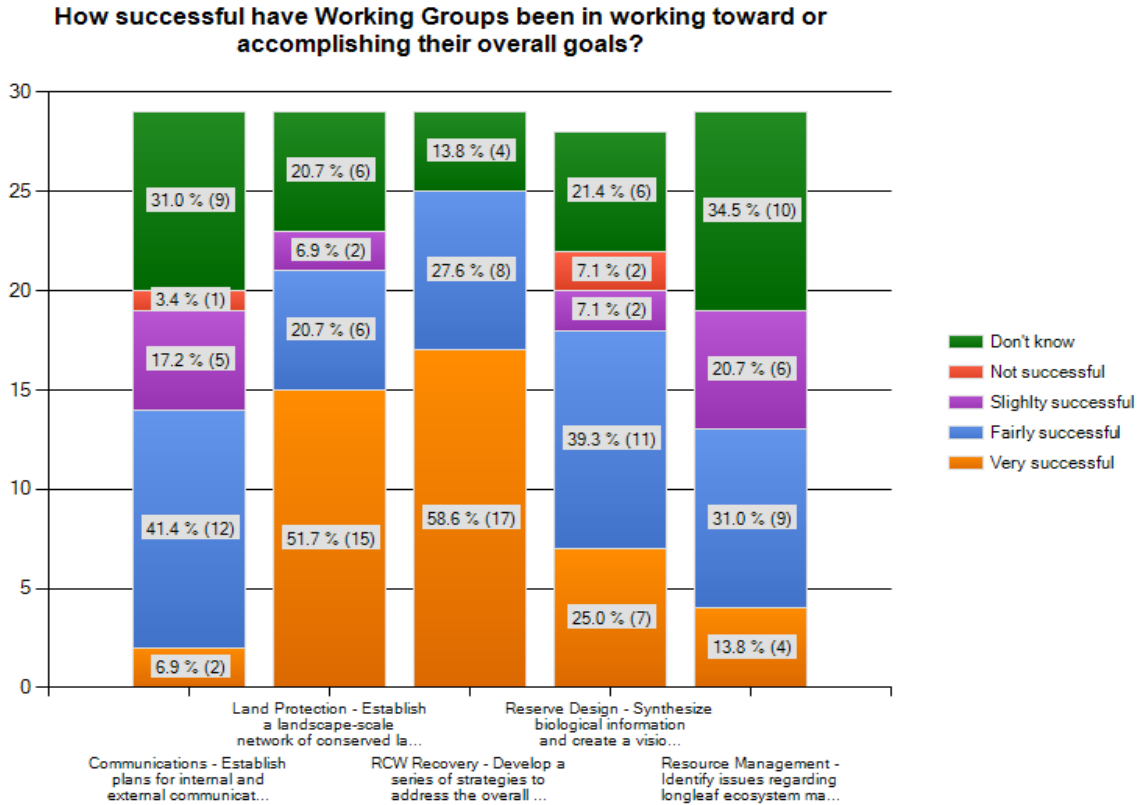
1. Land and Species Protection
  - a. Amount of acreage protected from incompatible development

- b. Priority acres permanently protected
  - c. Acres protected
  - d. Protected lands within 5 miles of the boundaries of Ft. Bragg, Camp Mackall, and Pope Air Force Base
  - e. Protection of endangered species
  - f. Avoiding habitat loss
  - g. RCW recovery
2. Management and Restoration
- a. Acres of longleaf restored
  - b. Acres burned
3. Funding
- a. Amount of funding provided for acquisition, management, staff, and resources
  - b. Army money obligated
  - c. USFWS grant money obligated
4. Other
- a. Goals that can be publicized to organization's membership
  - b. Number of partner actively engaged in the activities of my organization
  - c. Qualitative assessments of contributions in annual reports
  - d. Reported in monthly updates and quarterly reports to the funding source
  - e. Access for soldiers onto protected properties
  - f. Establishment of new state park, a Sandhills Fire Council, the NC Prescribed Fire Council

#### DISCUSSION:

Many partners do not have a formal mechanism for measuring or assessing the contributions of the NCSCP to its own mission and goals, but most partners agree that participation in the NCSCP helps. This topic directly relates to the theme about tracking performance of the NCSCP and in this case, for documenting the value it provides to its partners. Further discussion is warranted because outcomes may affect the NCSCP's ability to sustain and justify partner involvement especially when time and budgets are limited.

## Section 5: Working Groups



**RESULTS:**

Results and specific comments are summarized by working group:

Communications Working Group (CWG): Excluding the ‘Don’t know’ responses, 14 of 20 respondents indicate that the CWG has been ‘Fairly’ to ‘Very successful’ in accomplishing their overall goals; 5 indicate ‘Slightly’; and 1 indicates ‘Not successful’.

Land Protection Working Group (LPWG): Excluding the ‘Don’t know’ responses, 21 of 23 respondents indicate that the LPWG has been ‘Fairly’ to ‘Very successful’ in accomplishing their overall goals; 2 indicate ‘Slightly’.

- In terms of landscape scale network, the land protection group has made some progress on ecologically connecting large managed areas, but there is still a lot of work to do and some important habitats to protect.

RCW Recovery Working Group (RCW WG): Excluding the 'Don't know' responses, 25 of 25 respondents indicate that the RCW WG has been 'Fairly' to 'Very successful' in accomplishing their overall goals.

Reserve Design Working Group (RDWG): Excluding the 'Don't know' responses, 18 of 22 respondents indicate that the RDWG has been 'Fairly' to 'Very successful' in accomplishing their overall goals; 2 indicate 'Slightly'; and 2 indicate 'Not successful'.

- Reserve design has been successful at pulling together data sources and developing new ones but has been less successful at getting this map and vision used by other members of partnership.

Resource Management Working Group (RMWG): Excluding the 'Don't know' responses, 13 of 19 respondents indicate that the RMWG has been 'Fairly' to 'Very successful' in accomplishing their overall goals; 6 indicate 'Slightly'.

Other general comments note that all working groups have demonstrated progress but that there is more work to do and that communication and information sharing between groups, which would be useful, is lacking.

#### DISCUSSION:

These responses again show that better internal communication is necessary, especially between the different working groups. They also emphasize that while partners generally agree that progress has been made by most working groups, certain critical steps have yet to be achieved and require action. As a general recommendation, it may be useful for each working group to embark on a 'self-evaluation' using the results of this review as a basis. The purpose would be to assess the stated goal and whether it adequately captures the role the particular working group can and should play and what changes to priorities or objectives need to occur.



**What limits the Working Groups' ability to accomplish their overall goals? If appropriate, please specify the name of the working group.**

RESULTS:

Lack of funding, time, and personnel are mentioned throughout the responses as the major limitations to working groups' success. One response summarizes that each group faces similar challenges: group participation is voluntary and it is collateral duty; groups do not use strategic documents; groups do not create annual work objectives; and groups lack the leadership necessary to execute action. These and other general limitations are summarized below:

1. Funding
  - a. Acquisition
  - b. Management
  - c. Restoration
2. Personnel
  - a. Too few people trying do it all along with their regular job duties
  - b. Everyone has another job to do
  - c. Individuals' personal level of commitment and ability/willingness to make the most out of the Partnership.
  - d. Working group members are volunteers that must work on things on their own time.
3. Other
  - a. Lack of willing landowners
  - b. Limits on prescribed fire
  - c. Lack of interest or buy-in from participating organizations
  - d. Infrequent meetings
  - e. No set goal - a moving target
  - f. Without a dedicated coordinator, limitations will persist

Comments that are specific to a particular working group are shown below. The RCW WG did not receive any comments.

CWG:

- Lacks the manpower to adequately address public outreach and engagement
- Event coordination is good but need better communication targeting the public

LPWG:

- More acquisition funds are needed, particularly state matching funds
- Source of biggest pot of money, the Army, has limited focus areas of interest
  - A fully funded Land Water Conservation Fund will enable an expanded land protection approach, which would include connecting with adjacent landscapes.

- Limited use of reserve design information

RDWG:

- Lack of clearly defined goals and objectives

RMWG:

- Need more funding and skilled personnel
- Sharing labor and equipment for prescribed fire is difficult because all managers have the same time window available
- Devoting necessary time is difficult because everyone has full time jobs
- Lack of clear goals and objectives linked to realistic performance measures
  - One partner suggests revisiting goals and objective to see if they are relevant or need modification.

DISCUSSION:

The challenges noted to affect all working groups (i.e. group participation is voluntary and it is collateral duty; groups do not use strategic documents; groups do not create annual work objectives; and groups lack the leadership necessary to execute action) are worthwhile topics for discussion at both the Steering Committee and individual working group levels. Besides time, funding, and personnel issues, some of the major limitations seem to center around a lack of clearly defined goals and objectives and the ability to assess progress. Structural or organizational changes may need to be considered to address these limitations; some examples are suggested in the results of the following question.

**What changes, if any, would you suggest to the Working Group structure or their goals? Please explain and if appropriate, please specify the name of the working group.**

RESULTS:

Of the 29 total respondents, 22 provide a response other than 'Skip', 'N/A', or 'Can't answer'; 8 suggest 'None' or 'No changes'. All other responses are summarized below:

1. Rotate the chair position for all working groups and the Steering Committee at least biennially, but there may not be enough partners willing to step up and take on this task.
2. Consider seeking funding to employ one or more full-time employees to oversee daily progress of one or more working groups.
3. Increase interaction between Reserve Design and Land Protection
  - a. Establish an active and effective communication link between the groups
  - b. Create a way to implement the conservation plan
    - i. Use a tracking tool
4. Take steps to reverse trends identified in the previous question.
  - a. Partnership coordinator must become more involved with each group, encouraging their activities, helping them generate new goals, objectives, performance measures, annual work plans, and asking them to provide frequent status updates.
5. Ensure that each group has something well defined to do
6. Enhance communication
7. Integrate working groups
  - a. A member of another working group could go to a meeting of another working group. This may help other groups understand the goals, objectives, and even the people involved. Some people might not ever get the big picture if they are not attending Steering Committee meetings.
8. Eliminate committees that are not working.
9. Focus efforts of those in the group who want to try to accomplish goals.
10. RMWG needs to revisit goals and objectives.
11. RMWG needs to focus more on resolution of issues.

DISCUSSION:

The Steering Committee and individual working groups should consider the limitations noted in the previous question and the solutions suggested in this one to prioritize a list of action items for improving the function

and effectiveness of the working groups. Discussion and decisions about working group form and function may be affected by any changes the Steering Committee adopts and implements.

## Section 6: Other Benefits

Other Benefits: Q16

27 respondents

### In what OTHER ways have conservation efforts in the Sandhills benefited from the NCSCP?

#### RESULTS:

Of the 27 total respondents, 20 provide a response other than 'Skip', 'N/A', or 'Not sure'. One partner mentions a concern that although the NCSCP has made good progress, it lacks a regional identity. All other responses about the benefits of the NCSCP to conservation efforts in the Sandhills are summarized below by category:

- Species and Habitats
  - All species benefitted from raised awareness and management efforts that have occurred over the last 10 years.
  - The habitat saved and managed benefits many rare species under the RCW umbrella.
- Public Benefits
  - Lands that may have become housing developments turned into public lands for hunting, biking, and walking.
- Public Awareness
  - There is now a greater awareness of the biological importance of the Sandhills and the need for greater conservation efforts.
- Symbolism
  - NCSCP surviving and thriving over the last 10 years is a statement to the community and others outside that our conservation community has its act together.
  - The mere existence of the NCSCP promotes conservation because it symbolizes the importance of and commitment to conservation in the Sandhills.
- Trust
  - Convening like-minded and at time opposing perspectives fostered trust that would have been more difficult to obtain in a vacuum.
  - Trust between agencies has allowed good working relationships to exist.
- Inspiration
  - Successes of the NCSCP inspire others to do more; it breeds enthusiasm.
- Project Incubator
  - The NCSCP has been an incubator for the development and/or implementation of:

1. Sandhills Regional GIS database – NCSCP helped develop this database that is available to local planning entities and partners. It also includes several data layers that were not available before inception of the NCSCP.
  2. Sandhills Weed Management Group – NCSCP helped create and support this group that has surveyed for and eradicated invasive plant on many partner lands.
  3. Suitability Surfaces – NCSCP assisted Sustainable Sandhills in developing the natural areas and working lands surfaces. This data has been provided to local governments for use in planning processes.
  4. Green Growth Toolbox in the Sandhills – NCSCP invested significant amount of time in development of Sandhills Data Appendix. It is a way to convey best practices to county and local planners and developers.
- Resources for acquisition, research, and implementation of projects like the Green Growth Toolbox.
  - Stronger partnerships between individual organizations
  - Proof of concept for the collaborative approach to conservation

DISCUSSION:

*See summary in last discussion of 'Other Benefits' section, p40.*

**In what other ways has YOUR ORGANIZATION benefited from its participation in the NCSCP?**

## RESULTS:

Of the 28 total respondents, 23 provide a response other than 'Skip', 'N/A', or 'Don't know'. The most frequently mentioned organizational benefit is the opportunity to network with partners within the NCSCP, with other conservation stakeholders in the Sandhills, and with the greater conservation community across the state. Many responses also indicate the value of the NCSCP in providing the proof of concept about the collaborative approach to conservation. These and all other responses about the benefits of the NCSCP to participating organizations are summarized below by category:

- Network
  - Developed relationships with Ft. Bragg staff and other Sandhills partners
  - Met great people who are dedicated to the protection and enhancement of the longleaf pine ecosystem. Have gotten many ideas and speakers for RLUAC programs
  - NCSCP leadership helped us to execute the Suitability Maps and other follow-up projects
  - Chance to meet other agencies involved in preservation
  - Opportunity to increase coordination with other agencies toward land protection
  - They know who each other are. You can put a name and face together.
  - Developed working relationships
  - Meeting new people and potential partners to work with on common goals
  - Established working relationships with people we may have had little contact with otherwise
- Increased involvement with greater conservation community
  - Greater awareness of other activities in the region
  - Good public relations between the military and conservation groups
- Increased involvement with local conservation community
  - Maintain close contact with other agencies and non-profit groups working in the same area toward the same goals.
  - Chance to let all partners know what individual agencies are working on and how it may affect them.
- Proof of Concept
  - More has been accomplished through the partnership than would have been possible on our own.
  - A model for other partnerships across the state.
  - Model for Army on how to successfully protect the vital training missions of an Army installation
- Reduced Conflict
  - There is less tension and even harmony to some degree between partners that were once in conflict with each other.

- Leverage Resources
  - Leverage modest financial investment with partner resources to achieve mission of conserving threatened and endangered species in the Sandhills.
  - Support for land acquisition
  - Management agreements that allow us to burn more and get more training for prescribed fire
  - Access to a reliable funding source in a high priority landscape where it would otherwise be limited
  - Active state co-op partners that work together to write matching grants to enable transfer of lands
  - Ability to leave Army money in the ground to leverage State funding
  
- Manpower
  - AEC funds an ORISE position within the FWS office, which increases its capacity to coordinate and support the Partnership.
  
- RCW Recovery
  - Reached population goal several years sooner than expected
  - Assistance with RCW monitoring
  
- Gained knowledge
  - Opportunity to understand the goals and achievements of the NCSCP
  
- Having a seat at the table
  - Organization feels like an essential part of the partnership and community
  
- Association with success of the Partnership
- Reduced training restrictions
- Buffers around base
- Raised awareness about the organization's conservation efforts
- Formation of partnerships
- Opened lines of communication
- Focused on specific tasks
- Coordinated responses
- Working toward a common goal

DISCUSSION:

*See summary in last discussion of 'Other Benefits' section, p40.*



**In what other ways have YOU benefited from your participation in the NCSCP?**

## RESULTS:

Of the 28 total respondents, 26 provide a response other than 'Skip', 'N/A', or 'Don't know'. Professional development, networks, and personal satisfaction are mentioned in several responses as benefits of the NCSCP to individual participants. All responses are summarized below by category:

- Professional Development
  - A learning process – knowledge, skills, and experience gained by participating in the NCSCP
    1. Knowledge and understanding of the longleaf pine ecosystem
    2. Knowledge and understanding of Sandhills conservation efforts and the region in general
    3. Knowledge and understanding of the importance of conservation and its benefits
    4. Knowledge and understanding from other partners about their programs
    5. Knowledge and skill in communicating with others
    6. Experience leading a group
    7. On-the-ground learning and experience with land protection
    8. Exposure to new ideas/current initiatives/collaboration
  - It is why I have a conservation job.
- Networks: Personal and Professional Friendships and Relationships
  - Develop new contacts
  - Maintain personal contacts with various members
  - Excellent friendships and professional relationships
  - Meeting new people and potential partners to work with to accomplish common goals
  - Opportunity to learn from and network with most of the major conservation entities working in the state in a cooperative venue
  - Opportunity to understand the perspectives of other partners
- Personal Satisfaction
  - Enjoyed being part of a group with common goals in the same ecosystem
  - Enjoyed meeting partners in person at the Steering Committee meetings and at other face to face meetings
  - Making progress on statewide goal of improving conservation of endangered species and significant natural heritage areas
  - Gratified to see successes
- Professional/Work Support
  - Raised awareness
  - Access to experts
  - Support for projects I work on
  - Support from organizational leadership

- Ability to export knowledge to other conservation efforts in the Sandhills, in NC, and beyond
  - A chance to communicate what I know about conservation to the key players in the Sandhills
  - Opportunity to communicate and share knowledge
  
- Opportunities to explore new approaches to achieving conservation objectives
  - “Testing ground” for new policies and initiatives that would not have come to fruition without the help of counterparts in the NCSCP

#### DISCUSSION:

It is important to acknowledge that the NCSCP has been a leader in conservation and that many of the successes and lessons learned here in the Sandhills have been used to benefit conservation efforts across the state and even across the nation. Results highlight numerous benefits to organizations and individuals from participation in the NCSCP. Many of these themes are also echoed in interview responses.

Some of the benefits identified by respondents, such as trust, inspiration, and networking are more difficult to measure or assess but are captured well in a review process such as this. Others like species conservation, raised public awareness, and projects fostered by the NCSCP can be more easily measured (whether or not they are actually measured). Overall, all benefits are important sources of pride and motivation for the NCSCP and its members, which can help sustain or increase partner involvement and motivation. Additionally, documenting benefits of the NCSCP can help justify requests for resources and provide accountability for what outcomes are achieved with those resources.

## Section 7: Future

Future: Q19

29 respondents

### What challenges will the NCSCP face in the future?

#### RESULTS:

Of the 28 total respondents, 26 provide a response other than 'Skip' or 'Don't know'. Respondents cite funding issues, sustaining momentum, overcoming turnover, and the threat of development as the top challenges the NCSCP will face in the future. All responses are summarized below by category:

- Funding
  - Reduced funding streams
    1. Decreased budgets, scarce funding will hamper effectiveness and involvement of some partners
    2. Decreased DOD funding
    3. Loss of funding programs outside and within
    4. Shrinking budgets shift public and private priorities to address basic critical services and human needs
  - Greater competition for diminishing resources
    1. Greater demand on both State and Department of Defense REPI funding
    2. Competition for funding from similar partnerships across the state and nation affecting funding from state trust funds and federal funds.
    3. Increasing competition for ACUB program funding from other Army installations and other branches of the services.
    4. Loss of competitive edge since RCW reached recovery goals, which could hurt other species
- Momentum
  - Being able to sustain a viable mission may be an issue
    1. As initial goals accomplished, new ones need to be generated to keep the NCSCP vibrant and relevant
    2. Maintaining momentum requires continuing to achieve important accomplishments.
    3. Keeping group together and productive as more and more of its goals are accomplished
  - To stay relevant, it will need to continue to evolve to meet the needs and interests of the partners; any partnership is only effective to extent it makes people more efficient and effective in their jobs, and it is not an "extra" thing to do on top of already busy work commitments.
  - There will always be times that some organization bring more to the table than others
  - Lack of dedicated capacity to coordinate activities of the partnership
  - Sustaining momentum now that RCW populations are considered recovered.
- Turnover
  - Key people in organization retiring with their knowledge
  - Leadership changes; succession is tough to plan for

- Changing roles of partners, e.g. State Parks' role increases. others may scale back or change/broaden focus
- Keeping momentum and interest of current partners and finding new folks to take leadership roles
- Maintaining momentum even as budgets are cut and members come and go through transfers, job changes, etc.
- Development Threats
  - Increasing development pressure on natural resources around Ft. Bragg and in the Sandhills impacts NCSCP's ability to conserve land and managed land already conserved.
    1. Slowing or managing development in a smart way
    2. Development, rising land prices, and small parcel sizes threaten to reduce the ability to connect and buffer protected lands.
    3. Rate of development
- Acquisition
  - Lack of lands to protect and not enough funds to buy them
  - Shift focus to connecting with adjacent landscapes
  - Running out of land to protect
- Management
  - Ability to keep prescribed fire on the ground; further regulatory restrictions/limits on fire
  - Switching focus to management of protected lands
  - Shift to management as acquisition wanes will be harder to fund
  - Impacts from invasive species
  - Impacts from old school forestry and wildlife management practices
- Landowner outreach/interaction
  - Aging population will reduce face to face interaction with landowners
  - Will have to deal with more absentee landowners
  - Lack of interest from landowners in conservation easements
- Other Threats
  - Challenges for conservation and land protection as pressure for training increases at Bragg
  - Habitat fragmentation and permanent habitat loss
    1. Loss of forested property, wetlands, off post and on post
  - Population increases and changing demographics
  - Nature deficit disorder
  - Biomass production and potential unintended consequences
  - Global warming
  - BRAC impacts not (yet?) fully realized
- New Focus
  - Water resources (esp. rivers and streams)
  - Conserving Sandhills seeps, which is no more a restoration effort.

- Focus on gopher frog conservation

DISCUSSION:

All challenges facing the NCSCP in the future should be considered and understood by all partners, but sustaining funding, momentum, and turnover are the most often mentioned. As such, these might be prioritized for discussion at Steering Committee or partner workshops. It is also possible that individual working groups can revisit their strategies (or create new ones) to tackle some of these challenges.

### What aspects of collaboration does the NCSCP need to focus on in the future?

#### RESULTS:

Of the 28 total respondents, 24 provide a response other than 'Skip', 'Not sure', or 'Don't know'. Respondents mention internal communication within the NCSCP; external communication with conservation groups across the state; and public outreach and awareness as major collaboration-related themes on which the NCSCP needs to focus in the future. All responses are summarized below by category:

- Better communication among NCSCP partners and working group members
  - Need for effective communication increases as individual job demands increase because of budget cuts and/or loss of staff
  - Communication between partners to ensure successful delivery of priorities, goals, initiatives
  - Better communication between the working groups
    1. One partner suggests working group representatives could summarize what other groups and/or the general Partnership is doing to their working group members (or could provide Steering Committee minutes to them).
  - Better dissemination and explanation of Reserve Design
  - Engaging
    1. Tooling projects to meet the work objectives of partners so partner work together more and have more ownership, probably.
  - Sharing of resources among partners
    1. Effective management for prescribed fire and invasive species
- Reach out to other partnerships
  - Start discussions of habitat restoration across larger areas
    1. Cross-landscape collaboration
    2. Integrating work at broader landscape scales
  - Work more closely with adjacent collaborative to achieve common goals
- Continue to identify partners with resources to advance the mission
  - Make some contacts with more traditional conservation groups and agencies to keep them informed about the work being done
  - Increase engagement with BRAC-RTF
  - Continue collaboration with RLUAC
- Public outreach/public awareness
 

General

  - Let them know what NCSCP is all about
  - Public awareness of the benefits of conservation and land management
  - Increasing public awareness about value of natural resources
  - Increase education to private land managers
  - Education about importance of beavers instead of considering them pests

- Education about aquatic resources

#### Government

- Increase education to town managers, town chambers, developers, etc.
  - More work with local governments?
  - Local land use planning and education
  - Better outreach to higher levels of state government
  - Educate legislators about the successes and benefits of the partnership
- Research
    - Bring in researchers from NC universities
  - Full-time coordinator – obtain sufficient financial backing to provide
  - More influence on partner organizations
    - NCSCP matured to a point where it ought to be affecting the planning processes of member organizations, rather than just trying to coordinate plans of various organizations produced without input from the NCSCP or consideration of its goals.

#### DISCUSSION:

*See summary in last discussion of 'Future' section, p47.*

**What aspects of conservation does the NCSCP need to focus on in the future?**

## RESULTS:

Of the 28 total respondents, 24 provide a response other than ‘Skip’, ‘Not sure’, or ‘Don’t know’. Respondents note management, acquisition, and research among others as major conservation aspects on which the NCSCP needs to focus in the future. All responses are summarized below by category:

- Management
  - Ensure ability to keep burning on maximum number of days in the future
  - New inventories on existing conserved lands as part of management activities
  - Habitat management will become equal to land acquisition as more properties are protected and will surpass it once enough of the critical areas are acquired. Being able to demonstrate results goes hand in hand with this, especially results in the form of larger and more vigorous populations of key species.
  - Encourage sustainable land management practices among all stakeholders, public and private
  - Ensuring effective management of lands already protected for RCWs as well as appropriate guidelines for other important species
  - Restoration
- Acquisition
  - Remaining significant natural areas
  - Use all available means to acquire land that is identified in the Reserve Design (one of the strengths of the Partnership)
  - Land protection
  - Inter-landscape connectivity
  - Reducing fragmentation
- Research
  - Identify and fund critical research needs
  - More scientific studies, particularly on effects of pine straw raking on understory
  - Better system for communication of research needs to contact who can make local researchers/students aware of these opportunities.
  - Monitor land use changes and impacts on conservation priorities/targets
- Other Species
  - Shift focus to other rare species; make it clear that work is not done, especially when it comes to continuing to fund our efforts
  - Endangered species habitat other than RCW
  - Rare and isolated populations, e.g. gopher frogs – connections between sites needed to persist – focus protection on groups of known populations



- Measures of Success
  - Concrete, solid, identifiable benchmarks for success with attainable, reasonable goals
  - (repeat from above) Being able to demonstrate results goes hand in hand with sustaining funding for management, especially results in the form of larger and more vigorous populations of key species
- Population growth
  - Focus on growth surrounding Ft. Bragg, including transportation, schools, etc.
  - Population growth throughout Sandhills
- New issues
  - Invasive species
  - Aquatic resources
- Integrating conservation priorities into local land use decisions
  - Ultimately county commissioners, county planning boards, and county planning staff determine what actually happens or doesn't happen to our landscape.
- More of the same focus
  - Continue with focus on preserving lands adjacent to Bragg, Pope, Mackall (encroachment protection and conservation corridors)
- RCW
  - Connection of RCW populations
- Land Turnover
  - Aging population; need to keep land in production
- Landowner Outreach
  - Increasing outreach to landowners interested in improving land management.
- Climate Change
  - Getting ecosystems in shape to help them ready for climate change – should be more resilient
- More public education
- Integrating economic, social, and cultural data into our conservation planning process
- Comprehensive conservation including critical management like fire, native versus invasive species, potential impacts from global climate changes – dealing with unknowns there

#### DISCUSSION:

All aspects of collaboration and conservation that partners identify as needing particular or additional focus in the future should be considered as opportunities for improvement. On the collaborative theme, better

communication within the NCSCP and among external partners, including other partnerships, appears most often and could be a priority area. Outreach to the general public and local elected officials is the next most reported response. Likewise, land management and acquisition issues top the list of conservation issues to focus on going forward. Similar priorities are indicated in responses to the corresponding interview question.

Charting a path forward for the NCSCP is a major impetus for this review effort. As such, all of the ideas generated about collaborative and conservation priorities are important considerations. These topics should be discussed, prioritized, and translated into action at Steering Committee meetings or partner workshops.

## INTERVIEW SUMMARY AND RESULTS

### Executive Summary

Interview responses were collected from July – August 2010 from a total of 17 partners including: all current Steering Committee members, the NCSCP coordinator, and additional partners from the Army Environmental Command, Sandhills Ecological Institute, NC Division of State Parks, and The Nature Conservancy. All interviewees were asked the same five questions:

- Question 1: Why did your organization join the Partnership?
- Question 2: What role do you and your organization play in the Partnership?
- Question 3: How has the Partnership been valuable to you and your organization?
- Question 4: What has your experience with the Partnership been like?
- Question 5: Where do you see the Partnership going in the future?

Following each interview, responses were typed and sent to each participant for verification. After necessary changes were made, responses were aggregated and processed to identify general themes and key examples. These results are summarized below by question.

#### Question 1:

Partners that were already involved in the RCW situation prior to the inception of the NCSCP note that they elected to participate as a logical step toward sustaining their work on RCW recovery. Other partners mention reasons such as: they were asked to; and/or they also wanted to play a role in RCW recovery; and/or they wanted to learn more about managing longleaf pine; and/or their geographic focus area overlapped with that of the NCSCP. Partners cite other reasons as well, but regardless of the initial motivation, most note that the NCSCP presented an opportunity to proactively and cooperatively plan and implement conservation strategies for Sandhills species and their habitats.

#### Question 2:

Partners list a variety of roles they have played in contribution to the efforts of the NCSCP. These include everything from providing meeting space, to funding for tracts, to equipment for burning, to capacity to lobby state and federal government, to public outreach and education. In contribution to the mission of the NCSCP, partners offer a range of logistic, financial, and personnel support, as well as expertise in science and research.

#### Question 3 & 4:

In return for their contributions, partners mention numerous benefits received at both the individual and organizational level. These include: the ability to leverage funding for acquisition and resources for management; the establishment of stronger relationships that consistently help prevent major issues before they arise; and access to data and other information that increase knowledge and mitigate project difficulties.

Partners also highlight contributions the NCSCP has made to the greater conservation community. They note that the NCSCP model has demonstrated the success of the collaborative approach to conservation and has been used to foster and grow other conservation partnerships in the state. Successes and lessons learned

have also influenced the approach taken by partners in their work in other landscapes, regions, or states. Other wide-reaching benefits of the NCSCP include energizing non-traditional bases of support and providing the cooperation and flexibility necessary to demonstrate new and innovative ways of doing business.

Question 5:

In terms of future priorities for the NCSCP, partners note that the NCSCP must continue to focus on sustaining RCW recovery while at the same using its success as a launching pad for conservation of other Sandhills species like the tiger salamander, gopher frog, and St. Francis satyr. Additionally, partners mention that the NCSCP needs to focus on acquiring the last big tracts of land, which are vital connectors or intact, natural longleaf sites while at the same time consider when focus might shift to enabling and sustaining management activities over the long-term. Partners also indicate new directions for the NCSCP such as working toward connectivity across the landscape; increasing work with local governments; and incorporating aquatics into conservation strategies.

Discussion about the future also included references to challenges the NCSCP continues to face or will face in the future. Most notably, partners identify the following major challenges: securing/sustaining money to buy lands; securing/sustaining money and capacity to manage lands; identifying opportunities to increase public support; finding new opportunities to educate landowners; sustaining turnover in land and leadership; and defining success to justify and secure resources.

## Question 1: Why did your organization join the Partnership?<sup>ii</sup>

### QUOTES:

- ‘The NCSCP provided an opportunity to “de-conflict” the tense situation surrounding RCW recovery and offered a way forward that provided for rare species and ecosystem protection in a manner that considered training needs.’

### DETAILS:

- Requested or asked to (mentioned by 3 partners)
- Called upon to support development of partnerships with stakeholders that could support RCW recovery
- Opportunity to test off post conservation strategies to alleviate on-post restrictions
- Opportunity to insert expertise into on-the-ground RCW recovery efforts
- Opportunity to also prevent additional species listing
- Missions overlapped (protect and preserve habitat and species)
  - Actively involved in documenting natural areas and rare species and pursuant with mission, wanted to help protect them
- Geographic focus overlapped
- Contribute ecosystem and species information
- Recognized need to overall approach to RCW recovery
  - Interest in RCW management/recovery
- Move beyond single species approach to ecosystem management at the landscape level
- Logical next step
  - A long history of activity in the Sandhills
  - Established foundations working with military
  - Knew the value of partnering to match resources, augment conservation efforts, and coordinate activities to benefit the big picture and each other.
  - Obvious next step to sustain its interaction with RCW stakeholders and in the bigger picture, to contribute to increasing protection and stewardship of the entire longleaf pine ecosystem
- To learn more about managing longleaf pine
- To participate in a Partnership, a novel and increasingly positive model
- Increase effectiveness of organization’s role, e.g. regulation
- Prevent reactive responses that often lead to adversarial situations

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<sup>ii</sup> This question stimulated discussion about the origins of the RCW conflict, initiatives that formed the foundations of the NCSCP, and working relationships that developed prior to the inception of the NCSCP. This information was documented, but it is not presented here.

## Question 2: What role do you and your organization play in the Partnership?

### SOUND-BITES:

\* Land acquisition \* Conservation planning \* Management \* Restoration \* Lobbying \* Promoting cooperative conservation \* Science and research opportunities \* Public and landowner outreach \* Community engagement and interaction \* Access to funding sources \* Partnership coordination \* Conservation delivery \* Environmental Education \* Public access to nature \* Fund dedicated Partnership personnel \* Contributions in establishing an environment in which partnerships could be effective \* Logistical support \* Funding for land acquisition, research, habitat management, and education/outreach activities \* Leverage other internal programs in pursuit of partnership priorities

### DETAILS:

- Support private landowner engagement to conserve and protect woodlands
- Inform regional conservation and other activities
- Provide resources to accomplish mission and goals, e.g. funding for properties, ORISE fellows, RCW monitoring
- Provide leverage to accomplish mission and goals
- Provide expertise on working groups
- Collect, maintain, and provide extensive species and ecosystem data to accomplish mission and goals
- Contribute years of experience and knowledge about ecology, fire, geology, and aquatic systems
- Serve as ‘research arm’
- Serve as ‘real estate arm’
- Conservation planning
- Management, stewardship, and restoration
- Create RCW habitat on acquired lands
- Lobby state and national government for conservation
- Promote cooperative conservation and the example set in the Sandhills
- Provides opportunity for researchers and students studying threatened and endangered species
- Share information gained to benefit other partners that manage wildlife and habitat

### Question 3: How has the Partnership been valuable to you and your organization?

#### QUOTES:

- 'Real-win'
- 'Brings together stakeholders with a common interest and creates a forum that would not otherwise exist'
- 'Recovery of Sandhills East population of RCW five years ahead of schedule an unprecedented accomplishment in the world of endangered species'
- 'Explore new approaches for achieving our conservation objectives'

#### SOUND-BITES:

\* Leverage funding \* New opportunities \* Personal & professional relationships \* Proof of concept  
\* Information sharing \* Success by association \* Personnel support \* Access to expertise \* Credibility associated with working within such a diverse partnership for this amount of time \* Benefits outweigh costs \* 'A Seat at the table' \* Access to GIS data & technical resources \* Professional networks \* Technical expertise networks \* Access to experts \* Ability to export knowledge gained \* A learning opportunity \* A way to explore new approaches \* Increased training flexibility \* Success lead to increased capacity from within \* Direct lines of communication \* Proactive instead of reactive approaches \* Leverage resources for land management activities \* Realize a mandate for RCW recovery \* Provides the bigger picture (of what's happening in the landscape so partners can dovetail off efforts to create corridors and enhance connectivity)

#### DETAILS:

- Successes and lessons learned benefit entire agency or organization (even beyond Sandhills)
  - ACUB model exported to other post dealing with similar off-post issues and needs
  - ACUB model at Ft. Bragg makes life easier for upper-level ACUB management
  - Demonstrated a new opportunity and strategy for land trusts working in conservation in all areas in or near military installations – exported the model to the larger organization
  - Experiences and successes demonstrate and justify why continuing to fund ACUB is still worthwhile and practical
  - Proof of concept – value of multilateral action over unilateral or bilateral efforts – the value of the multiple partner approach
  - An example for leveraging military and state funds for natural resources protection that has been exported to other military installations
- More (diverse) knowledge gained by staff and organization
  - Seeing how the process works has been a learning experience
  - Participation has increased knowledge and skill in communicating with others
- NCSCP is a forum for disseminating information among major players and learning about what they are doing
  - Sharing important RCW recovery and other species information with partners that can benefit from
  - Opportunity to share information allows partners to maximize the use of resources
  - Ability to export knowledge gained (a forum for sharing)
- Relationships strengthened

- Fosters professional and personal relationships that can be used as resources to prevent major issues before they arise
- Funding
  - Brainstorm, network, and partner for funding
  - NCSCP has helped obtain some research money
  - In a competitive funding environment, letters of support from Partners makes a big difference
- More informed landowners → more woodlands
- More woodlands → more job security
- Built-in partner support and flexibility offered by NCSCP allows Bragg to be a test bed for innovation
- Individual missions - NCSCP is a direct outlet for accomplishing organizational mission
- Internal validation from parent agency - Work with the NCSCP highlights for the rest of the organization its role and value in the Sandhills and how it makes a difference on the ground
- Allows organization to work with a larger group of stakeholders toward a common goal
- Partners implement on-the-ground strategies for recovery of RCW
- Better land management and quick resolution to any specific management issues
- Training opportunities, especially around fire



#### Question 4: What has your experience with the Partnership been like?

##### QUOTES:

- 'NCSCP has only grown stronger'
- 'Great experience'
- 'Very beneficial'
- 'Created conservation champions out of non-traditional partners like the Army'
- 'Successful in helping stakeholders move past the original conflict over RCW recovery'
- 'Very satisfying'
- 'Overall, a very positive experience'
- 'It has made all the difference in resolving natural resource conflicts in the Sandhills'
- 'A model group for how to make collaborative conservation a success that has been exported around the state'
- 'The talent and knowledge base that sits in at each Steering Committee meeting is a, "a treasure trove of life experiences."'
- 'There is lots of give and take and this is necessary'
- 'Overall benefits (of participation) outweigh costs of inputs'
- 'Overtime and with the ability to show results directly related to the partnership paradigm, much of the initial internal struggles were overcome.'

##### SOUND-BITES:

\* Valuable lessons-learned \* Successes demonstrate numerous values of the collaborative approach \* Successes and lessons-learned exported across state and nation to support other conservation efforts \* Forum for accumulating and sharing data and information \* Bridges the communication gap between relevant stakeholders \* Framework for responding to conservation opportunities and challenges \* Leverages funding for conservation and research

##### DETAILS:

- Lessons learned include:
  - How to grow and manage this kind of partnership
  - The value of multilateral leveraging
  - The value of learning from each other
  - The need to check egos at the door
  - Proof of concept was critical (for maintaining participation in the long run)
  - The difficulty in preventing partners from reverting back to 1-on-1 relationships, which highlights importance of constantly showing the value-added component of working with a greater cohort of stakeholders (an ongoing "lesson-learned")
- Success of the NCSCP model
  - Much success attributed to the strong personal and professional relationships that have been developed as a result of working together toward a common mission.

- Increased buy-in and commitment to working in partnerships fostered by momentum and successes shown by the NCSCP.
  - Right initial composition of stakeholders allowed NCSCP to be nimble and take advantage of opportunities.
  - Right set of core individuals
  - Allowed Sandhills to be a center of innovation in new ways to do conservation; results of which were shared with other partnerships and throughout participating agencies (across the state and country).
  - Impacted policies nationwide
  - Transformed perspectives on the value of partnering
- Successes and lessons learned exported:
    - Throughout Army
    - To foster other conservation partnerships in the state
    - To nationwide affiliates of organizations such as TNC
- Keeps communication gap between relevant parties bridged
    - Brings everyone together in same room to share perspectives
    - Provides opportunity to influence partner agency leadership in ways that may not be achieved from individual, internal efforts
- The more partners talk, the more friction can be avoided
    - Promotes genuine camaraderie among partners – partners take extra steps to recognize each other’s needs, missions, and ways of doing business
- NCSCP great resource for accumulating data and information
  - NCSCP helps leverage funding for conservation and scientific research
  - NCSCP provides a framework to discuss and respond to conservation opportunities and challenges
  - NCSCP provides an outlet for university research and gets different stakeholders involved and excited about the ongoing work
  - NCSCP demonstrated that incredible accomplishments can be realized when working on mutual interests
  - NCSCP demonstrated the usefulness of the partnership framework to deal with incompatible development and encourage smart growth and sustainability

## Question 5: Where do you see the Partnership going in the future?

### QUOTES:

- ‘Challenges will always arise but none that cannot be overcome together’
- ‘The NCSCP will continue on the positive momentum that led to strong conservation success in the past’
- ‘Adjust to changing roles or the relative roles that partners play’
- ‘Adjust to changing drivers – from RCW recovery and buffering Ft. Bragg to major population growth due to BRAC and other shifting, growing demographics across the region and state’
- ‘Partnerships increasingly relevant to face increasing challenges’
- ‘Maintain integrity and connect patchwork of existing protected lands’

### SOUND-BITES:

Address needs and challenges associated with:

\* Increasing development pressure \* Decreasing availability of land \* Strengthening the unified voice and regional identity of the NCSCP \* Recognizing and understanding changing funding climates \* Finding creative solutions to funding challenges for land protection, land management, research, administrative support, partner contributions \* Enhancing collaborative activities to obtain funding \* Recognizing that without private commitments, large scale ecosystem sustainability is not possible \* Increasing education and outreach to landowners to increase participation and buy-in \* Defining success to better justify and provide accountability for funding and partner support \* Defining benchmarks to signal necessary shifts in focus, e.g. land acquisition to long-term management \* Sustaining turnover in all levels of partner organizations to maintain motivation, commitments, and progress \* Sustaining turnover in private property and dealing with influx of new, uninformed landowners \* Finding a way to hire a full-time NCSCP coordinator \* Improving communication with broad, public audiences and land-use decision makers \* Communicating more effectively with partner agencies and other conservation stakeholders and partnerships \* Focusing beyond the RCW to other threatened, endangered, or declining species \* Prioritizing acquisition for land protection while it remains a viable strategy \* Connecting and restoring habitats but understanding the challenges \* Sustaining funding for long-term management \* Dealing with issues surrounding prescribed fire \* Increasing management capacity in all organizations that own or manage lands \* Linking up natural areas across broader scales \* Considering new focus on aquatics, conservation of working lands, work with local governments, and impacts of climate change

### DETAILS

#### Future Directions - General: Needs/Challenges

- Dealing with increasing development pressures as less land is available
  - Increased pressure for remaining lands b/c of population growth
- Enhancing the unified voice of the Partnership to garner more power and impact
  - Generate more recognition to better serve its purpose
- Increase capacity to do conservation
- Focus on results of survey and review

- New ways to leverage resources that may come with ecosystem banking and crediting systems

#### Financial: Needs/Challenges

- Financial challenges are the biggest; individuals, agencies, state and federal governments are going to continue to see difficult financial times.
  - The benefits of the NCSCP in leveraging funding will be increasingly crucial in these tough times.
  - Understand and pay attention to how some of the common funding sources are evolving and changing, and decrease reliance on those that are declining.
  - Seek alternate funding sources when the public money runs out (e.g. private donors).
  - The NCSCP will need to continue to provide tangible, real-time results to maintain its ability to attract and leverage resources.
- Financial sustainability for management over the long-term
  - Better using existing resources so partners are more efficient in management
- Sustaining decreases in revenue streams (administrative and staff support):
  - In a time of tighter budgets, more questions about how money is spent in support of the NCSCP may arise, which could require more rigorous justification. Or, it may be possible that support of the NCSCP through currently appropriated funds is deemed unnecessary. Is it in the organization's best interest to continue providing funds for administration, support positions, research, etc??? What do other Partners contribute to support administration of the NCSCP??? The amount of resources directed at supporting the NCSCP is relatively small but at what point does it get questioned and require renewed justification.
- Sustaining decreases in revenue streams (research):
  - Available research funds may contract unless direct, tangible benefits of the outcomes can be tied back to a practical concern of the Army.
- Sustaining decreases in revenue streams (threatened and endangered species):
  - Instantaneous responses to RCW recovery in 2005 were that it must be okay to decrease financial support. Tracking of money spent on threatened and endangered species in Sandhills may be questioned when other bases have greater needs/problems.

#### Private Landowners: Needs/Challenges

- Landowner education and outreach to broaden people's outlook and appreciation of what they have – this is the only hope for preserving land
- Getting ahead of estate and land turnover to prevent forest fragmentation
- Ecosystem sustainability is not possible without involving private landowners on a much bigger scale
- Increasing participation has been a big challenge
- Increasing use of working lands supported as conservation buffers

#### Defining Success: Needs/Challenges

- Installation will need to define more concretely what success looks like
  - Develop objective criteria to assess when ACUB has maximized its potential for success

- NCSCP will need to decide how much is enough in terms of acquisition
  - Develop criteria for when enough is enough and a shift to connectivity, restoration, management is made
- Using benchmarks – create specific and measurable goals. Otherwise we don't know what success looks like (especially relevant because of changing drivers)
  - Keep partners energized and motivated, demonstrate tangible returns on partners' inputs.
  - Also a system of checks and balances

#### Sustaining Turnover: Needs/Challenges

- Identify those people in each partner agency that will be committed for the next 5-10 years
  - Anticipate turnover on Steering Committee
  - Sustain leadership turnover at upper-agency levels
  - Legacy is important – the value and past accomplishments of the NCSCP as well as the role each organization plays
- Dealing with private property turnover
  - Safe Harbor Program - The rate of turnover in property owners enrolled in the Safe Harbor Program was not anticipated, and new owners are often unaware that the property was enrolled (not disclosed in real estate transactions?). This requires a fresh round of education and solicitation of new landowners and means that the same piece of property is dealt with multiple times.
  - General - People with no knowledge of the longleaf pine ecosystem and management practices like prescribe burning are constantly moving into the area and can end up sitting on the steering committee for a golf course development. This requires constant education and outreach.
- Dealing with turnover of local government officials and Army leadership presents challenges for education and outreach too.
  - Only a handful of people have been around for a decade or more, but they do not have the authority to make policy.
- Make sure the right people stay involved, stay in leadership roles
- Continuity of leadership and personnel – need to consider how to maintain strong ties
- Need a young, creative, generation to step-up and take over

#### Full-time Coordinator: Needs/Challenges (mentioned by at least 4 interviewees)

- Individual partners already bogged down

#### Communication and Outreach: Needs/Challenges

- Increasing public support
  - Helps to weather the storms especially in bad financial years as we are experiencing
- More emphasis on education and outreach
  - Success in the last ten-years is attributable to the right set of stakeholders coming together with good funding in place. In the future, public buy-in will be increasingly important and the NCSCP can do more to get people excited about whole ecosystem conservation in the Sandhills
- Communicating more effectively with land use decision makers.

- Even though there have been great efforts to disseminate information about important habitat and corridor areas, major projects have been able to slip through the cracks and create large problems.
- Ensuring the message makes it way appropriately down the chain.
  - A developer may be on your side, but the local project manager is unaware and goes ahead with a project in a destructive manner.
- Communicating more effectively with partner agencies that are pursuing priorities that are not necessarily in synch with the mission of the NCSCP.
  - For example, there is lots of evidence that the creation of food plots does not increase bobwhite quail populations and likely contributes to a decrease, but because of political pressure and a resistance to change, Ft. Bragg and Game Lands still create and maintain food plots. This drains resources that could be directed elsewhere, i.e. potentially for the benefit of game and non-game species.
- Explore new tools for working in Moore County
  - The NCSCP has not been very successful with permanent conservation activities where land prices are high and where there are not big tracts left.
  - The Ft. Bragg perimeter in Moore is not protected.
- Notice and balance public perceptions of the NCSCP efforts, which could be confounded with other regional organization's efforts

## CONSERVATION MISSION

### More of same re: conservation mission

- Protect highest value natural areas
- Manage habitats
- Connect habitats through restoration
- Provide connectivity and stability necessary to enhance RCW

### Beyond the same re: conservation mission

- Shift to delivery of bigger message of ecosystem benefits beyond the RCW
- Consider corridors across landscape to Piedmont and Uwharries, to Coastal Plain, to SC Sandhills
- Think about intersection climate change issues and NCSCP efforts
- Put more emphasis on conservation of working lands
- Incorporate aquatics, surface and groundwater concerns into conservation strategies
- Work with local governments

### Species: Needs/Challenges

- Increased conservation of listed species to sustain and decrease training restrictions
- Continued efforts to protect and sustain the recovered status of the RCW

### Acquisition: Needs/Challenges

- Land acquisition should remain a priority while this strategy is viable
  - Opportunities dwindling in next 10 years and organizations will be left managing what they have

- Number of large landowners dwindling, and thus the opportunity to purchase large contiguous tracts of land for military training purposes is becoming scarcer
- Sustaining/increasing funding for acquisitions
  - Several key properties are still not permanently protected from development.
- Connect existing core lands
  - The NCSCP needs to increase the scale of restoration, share techniques, and continue to learn from each other to create connections between existing core areas.
- Determine how much is enough in terms of acquisition
  - There are not a lot of big core areas left, which will begin shifting focus from acquisition to more stewardship and restoration.
- Shift land acquisition planning to be more proactive and evaluate threats as a way to prioritize
- Reach out to other components, e.g. Dept of Agriculture, and others with assets needed for land protection

#### Restoration: Needs/Challenges

- Understanding and recognizing the limitations of restoration as a conservation strategy.
  - Restoration is not a panacea for the destruction of natural habitats. The destruction of high diversity areas cannot be offset by restoration of sandy old fields. The only definite way to maintain the longleaf pine ecosystem is to preserve those pristine areas that remain. Restoration efforts are complicated and expensive and should not be expected to translate into a return to the high diversity levels found in pristine longleaf pine sites. Some issues include:
    - A lack of knowledge about how to propagate most of the diverse herbaceous vegetation, which is exacerbated by destruction of seed banks.
    - A lack of knowledge about species requirements and how to restore insects or pollinators that were once present and about what impact this might have in the future.
    - Difficulty in eradicating invasive species and then keeping them out.
    - The potential for new invasive species to arrive such as Cogon Grass.
    - Difficulty in connecting small, isolated blocks of restored habitat – they need to be tied together, ideally with large blocks of natural habitat areas.
- Use cost-share to target habitat improvements on private lands
- Investigate habitat improvements, maintenance needs on public lands

#### Long-term Land Management: Needs/Challenges

- Prescribed fire issues
  - Carbon as a pollutant
  - Burning and smoke emissions
- Focus efforts on increasing management capacity in all agencies and non-profits, possibly through cooperative management across ownership boundaries
  - Collaboration with Ft. Bragg has been focused on the military training side, but increasing coordination and understanding of what's going on with the natural resources branch could be helpful.

- Enhance integration of management resources among partners
- Look at how existing ACUB lands maintained and stewarded over the long-term
  - Ft. Bragg crafting and experimenting with criteria
- Sustaining/increasing funding for management
- Secure monies to manage properties in perpetuity
- Vulnerabilities of commitments to manage over the long-term

#### Larger Landscape Connectivity: Needs/Challenges

- Link up with the larger Sandhills
  - The NCSCP should start thinking in the context of the entire Fall-Line, at least from NC to SC. There are lots of unprotected areas in between and to start achieving larger-scale conservation of the longleaf pine, this will be crucial. Also, connecting to the Uwharries will be important for promoting the integrity of natural ecosystem networks across the state.
- Lessons learned about longleaf ecosystem recovery should be propagated – knowledge transfer to support on-the-ground efforts across the landscape, e.g. Bladen Lakes, Coastal Plain.



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