

Major Highlights and Action Items from Appalachian LCC Steering Committee Meeting & Workshop Sept 3-5, 2014

The focus of the Steering Committee Meeting & Workshop was to advance the work of the conservation planning process. During the Workshop, Steering Committee members and invited experts began developing a process for articulating Appalachian LCC priority resources – considering both natural and cultural resources.

Cultural Resources

- A large team of National Park Service (NPS) staff from both the National Capital Region and the Washington HQ Office participated. The NPS team organized a full day of presentations and facilitated discussions aimed at how cultural resources can be incorporated into landscape conservation planning and design along with natural resource considerations. The LCC-focused presentations developed by NPS team provided an excellent orientation to the vast array of cultural resources (National Heritage Areas, traditional ecological knowledge, state historic preservation and national registry, and related cultural geospatial datasets.)
- Its ongoing collaboration with NPS has positioned the Appalachian LCC to serve as a model of how NPS can work more closely with LCCs to achieve landscape-level planning.
- NPS participants and Steering Committee members suggested the LCC review data needs for cultural resources, understand local values to help guide strategy, and look at the common ground between biological and cultural resources.

Socio-economic Aspects

- Members of the Executive Board of the Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere (SAMAB) provided keen insights throughout the meeting pertaining to cultural resources and socio-economic aspects of conservation. SAMAB was established to work with regional, state, and local governments, individuals, and other interested organizations to develop a land ethic that recognizes the importance of ecologically sound management of natural and cultural resources in the Southern Appalachians.
- Specific examples and success stories were presented on how the Cooperative and its partners have integrated both natural and cultural resources to address challenges and develop solutions to protect a region's unique environment and heritage.
- Dr. Jim Fox, Director of the University of North Carolina-Asheville National Environmental Modeling and Analysis Center gave a demonstration of the "Vitality Index" tool, developed by the Center and originally applied to community and watershed group decision-making in Western North Carolina. The "Vitality Index" reports on the 27 counties of Western North Carolina through the perspectives of the region's natural, social, built, and economic environments

- Angie Chandler, Executive Director of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, then presented an illustrative demonstration of how partners were directly using the Vitality Index Tool to help integrate natural and cultural resource data to allow planners, decision makers, and the public access to information necessary to inspire discussion and craft decisions on issues impacting natural and cultural areas.

Natural Resources: Identifying and Integrating Priority Resources

Partners at Clemson University and Appalachian LCC staff facilitated conservation planning and modeling exercises to begin to describe resource choices, solicit input, identify data needs, and develop a process to identify measurable priority resources for the Appalachians. Use of the open-source model MARXAN, which can be used for terrestrial or aquatic resources, was used to run the modeling exercises and aid the facilitation of the Workshop.

- The process agreed to by the Steering Committee for articulating priority resources in the Appalachian LCC includes:
 - Steering Committee members will submit nominees to a Technical Team (comprising of around 15 experts) to work with the Steering Committee on drafting a list of priority resources
 - The LCC will distribute nominee list to entire Steering Committee for comment and final approval
 - LCC Chair will correspond with States and other appropriate data sources (e.g. NatureServe) to obtain datasets of interest to the LCC, especially species occurrence data (and key cultural resource datasets)
 - The Technical Team will utilize Appalachian LCC Guiding Principles to set parameters on potential priorities for decision-making
 - Technical Team will assess the quality and appropriateness of the datasets for use in landscape planning and design. They will determine which are of sufficient quality to support species-specific modeling and narrow down the list of priority resources
 - A select number of species will be modeled for suitable habitat
- A follow up webinar to the Steering Committee will take place in the coming months to give an update on these action items and the ongoing process for selection priority resources, as well as to engage more fully with Dr. Tim Murtha of Penn State University on his cultural integration and landscape-level planning studies related to expanding natural gas development in the northern region of the AppLCC.