

**GCPO LCC Partnership Advisory Council
Meeting Notes
March 7, 2012, 8:30 am – 3:00 pm**

Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture Office
2524 South Frontage Rd., Suite C
Vicksburg, MS 39180
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Attendees

JJ Apodaca, Co-Chair, Southeast Partners for Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (FSU)
Phil Bass, Acting Director, Gulf of Mexico Alliance
Paul Davidson, Executive Director, Black Bear Conservation Coalition
Gregg Elliott, Communications Specialist, Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks LCC (K Gregg Consulting) (remote)
Janet Ertel, Deputy Coordinator, NWRS I&M Network – GCPOLCC (USFWS) (remote)
Jane Fitzgerald, Coordinator, Central Hardwoods Joint Venture (ABC)
Keith McKnight, Coordinator, Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture (USFWS)
Darren Miller, Past President, Southeastern Bat Diversity Network (Weyerhaeuser)
Ron Nassar, Coordinator, Lower Mississippi River Conservation Commission (USFWS)
Michael Osland, Research Scientist, Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks LCC (USGS)
Catherine Rideout, Coordinator, East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture (USFWS)
Scott Robinson, Coordinator, Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (remote)
Laurie Rounds, Gulf Coast Liaison, Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks LCC (NOAA)
John Tirpak, Science Coordinator, Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks LCC (USFWS) (remote)
Greg Wathen, Coordinator, Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks LCC (TWRA)

Summary of Agreements & Decisions from the meeting

Partnership representatives agreed that integration of private landowner needs and perspectives would be important to consider in ongoing LCC initiatives, and there are various ways of doing this – both by the LCC and through existing partners who already work with private landowners.

The GCPO Adaptation Science Management Team (ASMT) will be formed, in part to update the LCC's science needs assessment at the direction of the Steering Committee. The needs assessment will also inform the development of the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy. The ASMT will be asked to hash out technical questions about approaches, scale, etc in doing vulnerability assessments.

The draft GCPO LCC Communications Strategy is complete and awaiting approval by the Steering Committee. Communications Network information (a means of sharing

actionable information beyond the LCC website) will be shared with PAC representatives for them to share with their staffs and organizations.

The FWS Inventory & Monitoring Program within the GCPO LCC is staffing up. It is encouraged to consider expanding its work outside refuges; however the impact on or off refuges will be more tied to the coordination and ability to develop protocols that improve everyone's capacity and comparability.

Vulnerability assessments are important to helping managers contemplate future change, to assist in prioritizing conservation action along the Gulf and within existing programs such as USDA's Mississippi River Basin Initiative. We should move forward with developing VAs while recognizing the need to be clear about how they can and should be used.

The potential of pulling together an Ecosystem Services Workgroup was discussed, and LCC staff provided an overview of ecosystem services approaches to determining valuation of those services. The connection to Gulf hypoxia is in nutrient management practices and the potential value of habitat restoration for both wildlife and nutrient reduction. To this point in time, there appears to be no science program focused on ecological and biodiversity connections to nutrient reduction practices in the Mississippi River Basin. This could be a good role for the LCCs to play in contributing to the response to hypoxia. Nasser suggested both Jim Wise and Richard Ingram would be good state contacts. Both Robinson and Davidson expressed interest in helping with the effort.

A discussion of the needs of the various Partnerships is summarized in the last section of these notes, "Partnership Priorities."

Welcome, Introductions, and Background on Partnerships

McKnight – welcome to the LMVJV Office and Vicksburg, MS

Miller– Bat habitat needs and conservation priorities

Fitzgerald– Modeling of birds and habitat, some work on glades, barrens, and shortleaf pine

Opportunity to collaborate in the Ozarks component of the LCC; has an interest in working with non-avian organisms of concern that are part of the same areas they are interested in

Rideout – Focus on science planning in open pine systems, particularly longleaf; includes outreach to entire conservation community to identify desired conditions; initiating grassland bird science planning. Expanding planning to incorporate other taxa and want to work with the LCC to expand capacity

Bass – works for EPA Gulf Program; on loan to GOMA and currently serves as Acting Director. GOMA is a 5– state alliance started in 2004, with a second action plan in 2008. Grown to a larger alliance and currently addressing the hurricanes of 2005–08 and the oil spill; looking for partners and interested in working upstream to address Gulf restoration needs.

Nasser – LMRCC partnership founded in 1994 that focuses on improvement of water quality and habitat along the 2+ million acre area between the levees along the Mississippi River.

Davidson – BBCC founded to improve conditions for the Louisiana black bear. Now focus on habitat restoration and education; interested in bringing in the private landowner component to the conservation planning. Challenge of when to involve the private interests in the planning process to be inclusive, but not over burden.

McKnight – LMVJV comprised of 15 organizations; focus on habitat conservation for priority bird species from a landscape/ecosystem perspective. Look for those connections to other species in efforts. JV focuses on planning and design part of the bird conservation process. Partners have started to focus more on coordinating the delivery of that design and beginning to see results particularly through the work of Steve Brock in MAV and growing Conservation Delivery Networks

Apodaca – SEPARC is a relatively new organization (~12 years). Interested in partnering with a broad range of folks. Interested in vulnerability assessment for GCPO, which is a global hotspot for herps (particularly turtles). Also want to help identify priority amphibian and reptile conservation areas similar to important bird areas and getting habitat management guidelines into hands of managers.

Robinson – SARP is a fish habitat partnership under the umbrella of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan. Started out 6–8 years ago to bring JV concept to the aquatic conservation community.

Tirpak – job is to leverage science and technology to meet the LCC mission. Appreciates and understands value of conservation partnerships, as formerly served as science coordinator for the LMVJV. Recently moved to Lafayette, LA. Barry Wilson (Gulf Coast Joint Venture Coordinator) is also stationed in Lafayette, LA and he sends his regrets for his inability to make it to Vicksburg.

Elliott – works with the partners and staff to facilitate getting information out and increase participation in LCC; eager to learn more about other efforts to create a more integrated conservation community within the LCC.

Ertel – FWS Refuge I&M Network Coordinator for the GCPO geography. This is a new effort by the FWS and we are committed to working with the LCC.

Wathen – GCPOLCC is one of 22 national LCCs. All have coordinators but are otherwise at different levels of staff and development; all less than 2 years old. He remains a state of TN employee, but works for the Cooperative which now has 22 organizations on its Steering Committee. Office is in Nashville but staff is scattered across the geography. Advisory Council is a group of partnerships that have an interest in the LCC and is a critical component of the LCC's success and how we work together.

Partnerships not represented: Gulf Coast Joint Venture – Barry Wilson at Auburn Univ.

Wathen started by reviewing the agenda and a recap of 2011

Goals for the Day:

Describe what GCPO LCC is working on and has accomplished. Discuss what are Partnerships' priorities, and how to fit those into a SECAS. Whether SC adopts and endorses GCPO LCC working on SECAS. Advisory Council is critical – should guide everything we do.

Annual report was developed that describes accomplishments from 2011as well as goals for 2012.

Also want the Partnership Advisory Council (PAC) to talk about their priorities and where opportunities for collaboration with the LCC exist and what roles would be most beneficial. Want to frame all this in the context of the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS) that will be put in front of the SC in April for potential adoption as an LCC priority.

The PAC was established in the operational guidelines for the LCC and is being viewed as one means to integrate conservation efforts of the LCC with existing partnerships – this is a high priority in DC and on the national level for the LCCs as well as just good practice. The PAC provides a way for LCC to work with existing partnerships and find ways to leverage existing networks of partners, staff, and funding to meet shared needs. The PAC started with 7 organizations, but the group quickly identified 3 new partnerships (GOMA, SBDN, and SEPARC) that should be present, and Greg expressed his appreciation for their willingness to make it today.

The LCC funding for FY12 should be somewhere in the \$1.2 to 1.4 million range. About 600k will go towards staff so \$6–800,000 will be available for projects. This shouldn't limit ideas because the LCC is good at leveraging resources.

GC POLCC staff represents numerous agencies and the LCC is currently advertising for a GIS Coordinator at Mississippi State University. The LCC is also bringing on a SCEP student to work on GCPO issues. Last year was largely spent building staff capacity, and now it's important to build partnership priorities. These will be the topics you hear about from the GC POLCC today.

John Tirpak will talk about the Adaptation Science Management Team, or ASMT, which will establish science priorities and figure out how to get that done.

Upcoming Steering Committee (SC) meeting in April will have a focus on the Gulf of Mexico and what the role of the LCC is in the region. We will spend about a day on discussions with the Steering Committee on that topic as an example of how we address that same question in other parts and systems of the LCC (Ozarks, longleaf, MAV, etc). We'll also be discussing other priorities for the GCPO LCC. Today's discussions will help shape potential priorities for that meeting.

Past Steering Committee Meetings and Decisions

The Spring Steering Committee meeting will build on previous meetings. The first was in Biloxi in Fall of 2010 and focused on building the LCC. The next was in the Spring 2011 and was the first with Greg as the Coordinator. The theme was charting the course for the GC POLCC. The latest was in Fall 2011 in Nashville and focused on value-added roles of the LCC and building towards a future conservation landscape

Outcomes from meetings included a commitment from the SC to build the LCC (Biloxi), adoption of geographic constructs, ways of working with adjacent LCC, priority projects (Vulnerability Assessments; consistent land cover classification; conservation planning atlas); creation of a Communication Strategy; chartering the ASMT; modeling for climate change; SECAS, and hiring a Gulf Coast liaison.

Wathen provided an update on these activities and which were still incomplete. Shared areas with the Apps LCC and the ACF Basin; work has started by not completed on the land cover database; conservation planning atlas is now getting started with Amy Keister with SALCC; Advanced Applications group at NWRC is moving forward with Tirpak now in Lafayette

Fitzgerald noted that the LCC has made a lot of great progress. In hindsight, the move away from using the LMVJV board to a separate Steering Committee was a good thing for the LCC (though that may not have been apparent at the time).

Private Landowner Integration

Miller asked if there was any plan for integrating private landowners in the LCC, noting that this was critical given the amount of private land in the GCPO; Wathen noted that Elliott has several connections and experience working with private landowners. Some

questions around what is the value added role above what others are already doing; may be to provide some of the science to prioritize where to work so that it could help guide work with the private landowners. Tirpak felt private landowners should increasingly be part of the conversation but the LCC has yet to make strong connections to this group. There is definitely a need to improve outreach over the next year.

McKnight– may be useful to define who are private landowners (e.g. corporations or individuals) which have very different interests and perspectives and will want to be involved in different ways. Need to understand the private landowners' interests and perspectives to help identify successful strategies and how to involve them in conservation delivery

Miller – engage them in the delivery and help them understand the value of the conservation and needs/priorities.

Wathen– a proposed ecosystem services team may be one avenue to put values on conservation and this may be where we can reach out to private landowners on the benefits.

Rideout – agrees about when to involve private landowners and stage of science planning but there may be a role for the economics to influence the planning related to private landowners– need to address economics in addition to protecting priority species and private landowner perspectives can help achieve that balance.

Miller – LCC needs to think carefully about this in the future where private landownership is increasing.

Robinson– need to keep in mind the roles of PAC organizations and don't want to approach private landowners individually. We need to have a simple and single message.

Science Needs Assessment

Tirpak then turned attention to the Science Needs Assessment. Current assessment based on 2010 effort by a small group that identified key initial needs. The Steering Committee supported this and asked for additional efforts to involve existing partnership needs and opportunities for collaboration. We now need to update this assessment, and would like to have a broad partnership perspective in outlining a conceptual model of the drivers, stressors, and targets of the system and the specific needs we have within an SHC framework applied to that model – rather than just a laundry list of needs. The Adaptation Science Management Team will be used for this effort – more on that later. The LCC wants to expand the culture of landscape scale science and conservation planning and design that incorporates a strategic approach and includes adaptive management.

Rideout – still thinking about the SECAS. Shouldn't that effort identify some research, monitoring, science planning gaps and needs?

Tirpak – yes, but that will be an organic process and the LCC’s science needs assessment will help shape the SECAS and provide some framework for that effort.

Wathen – there’s an implied directive that the LCCs will take a leadership role in the SECAS to help find and define what a sustainable landscape will look like.

Communications

Elliott next discussed Communications, beginning by building further on the earlier discussion regarding interactions with private landowners. Elliott noted that there is a middle ground on approaching private landowners where you do outreach throughout the process but do not create a firestorm needlessly with engagement at the wrong time or on the wrong topic. Elliott works with the Working Lands– Private Landowner Network. It’s important to involve landowners early enough to ensure they understand how priorities are set and have the opportunity to contribute their perspective.

Elliott next discussed the Communication Strategy. A draft is complete and the goal for the coming year is to create an integrated conservation community aligned along the 5 focal areas in the SHC compass. Key components include a working group, communication network, and outreach. The communication network will build on current processes whereby each agency develops its own messages and gets them out through their channels. The network would take actionable messages (like forming the ASMT), could share the same message and send it to their channels. For external messages there may be additional work that is needed. There is a cross–LCC network for communications developing (including SARP). Outreach efforts are also ongoing. The PAC can participate by joining the website and setting up preferences to receive emails; please send appropriate contact information for communications liaisons to Elliott; she is also working on a presentation that members can give to their partners.

McKnight– is the communication network more than just asking everyone to join the website?

Elliott – joining the website is a good start but that alone will not establish a communications network. In addition to staff joining the website, the formal network will help craft, disseminate, and integrate internal communication efforts.

Gulf of Mexico Liaison Work

Rounds talked about her position as Gulf Coast Liaison and some of the ongoing work she has already been involved with in her first 6 months on the job

Bass– The appropriate geography of the GOM is very issue–dependent. For community resilience, it’s very much focused on the flooding or impact zone; for nutrients it’s a Mississippi River focus as well as inland watersheds. GOMA is also including Mexico and perhaps even may need to look at the Caribbean including Cuba for some issues. We are already working with Sea Grant, who developed a research priorities plan that built on the GOMA Action Plan; oil spill research has also focused on a regional alliance of universities and research institutions that was developed to increase research capacity and integration in the GOM.

Wathen- LCCs with coastal components have a responsibility to incorporate marine and coastal areas into planning so the liaison with NOAA is important. Another reason is the big focus on the region and the opportunity to help with the restoration and connection with the GCERTF.

Inventory & Monitoring Network

Ertel then provided an overview of the I&M Network. The I&M Network is a new effort with the Refuge System to provide new capabilities including people, infrastructure, and expertise; to collaborate between refuges; bring increased resources and data to the LCC and refuges to support SHC. This is a national effort. There is a national office in Colorado that looks at I&M from a national viewpoint. Also a regional and local approach to implementation. Currently identifying common needs and questions that are needed for biotic and abiotic monitoring. This will use the refuge system as a network to answer questions at the right scale- landscape, regions, local. Region 4 is co-locating on refuges but focusing on the LCC geography to stay connected to that scale. SALCC was staffed first. Staffing up now in the GCPO. Ertel is coordinator in GCPO and started in mid-January. Moving in April to Starkville. Field ecologist- David Richardson at North Mississippi Complex. Currently filling 3 more field ecologist positions (plant, aquatics, coastal). Staff will provide expert support for monitoring and design. They are also hiring a data manager. After identifying questions, will develop an approach to answer those questions using standard approaches to I&M.

Wathen- the LCC and the PAC needs to consider how this monitoring network can help meet our needs.

Fitzgerald- what are the staff's expertise?

Ertel - We are looking for people that can understand and identify good protocols and conduct analysis. Also people that have on the ground implementation skills so that they can inform design and training people on protocols; need to be good communicators; and specific people for data management.

Fitzgerald- monitoring is important and we need to define the questions, but there are needs for just basic inventory for distribution and abundance too.

Tirpak- that is related to the 'inventory' side of the I&M Network, but even here there must be standardization and coordination of protocols for assessing status. The nexus between the LCC and I&M is to help coordinate those protocols among multiple partners to help broaden the I&M network to include areas off refuge.

Osland- are the I&Ms linked to the LCCs nationally?

Ertel- they are all a little different in that connection but they are all connecting at some level. Many (most) are not necessarily as close as the relationship developing with LCCs in the Southeast. We know we cannot meet all the needs of all the partners, but there are good opportunities to partner and coordinate without spreading too thinly.

McKnight– the value of this network to the LCC is proportional to the amount of time the staff that can work off the refuges; could use balance to not have it all on the refuges.

Ertel – impact on or off the refuge will be more tied to the coordination and ability to develop protocols that improve everyone’s capacity and comparability.

2012 Priorities

Wathen then shifted the discussion to the LCC’s 2012 Priorities and provided a handout outlining some potential priorities that the LCC staff were considering and seeking input from the PAC on. The overarching goal was to strengthen the Cooperative. These priorities included contributing to the GCERTF strategy–overarching initiative for the Gulf, including creating linkages between the LCC geography and the Gulf through the Mississippi River and impacts to the Gulf Hypoxia zone; developing a team to quantify ecosystem services and incorporate this approach into conservation planning and communicating additional benefits of management for wildlife; further integration and planning towards shared goals under the umbrella of the SECAS; increasing website activity to move towards a more engaged community that communicates and shares information organically; creation of an Adaptation Science Management Team (ASMT) to develop an overarching conservation framework and identify/prioritize science needs as well as a transparent means of investing resources to address them.

Tirpak then jumped into the discussion of the ASMT. The genesis of this team is a response to the challenge of science planning within a diverse partner and partnership universe. The Team is structured to ideally have representation by geographic, organizational, and functional role. We are looking for networked people that have a landscape perspective on a resource within a specific geography. An [ASMT public webgroup](#) has been created on gcpolcc.org that has more information about this group (nomination/volunteer form, ideal participant profile, charter, and 1–page overview).

McKnight– what is the status of members so far?

Tirpak– We have had a good response in some resource areas with multiple names in some cells. There remains a number of categories with gaps. The nominations are open until March 23, 2012, so we are hoping to get more response. Tirpak will be following up with specific individuals and PAC members to solicit the right people for these slots.

Rideout– There’s some confusion about the nomination process and purpose of the team within the Migratory Bird world – particularly relative to SECAS group, may need to communicate this more.

Robinson– what is the difference between this team and the PAC?

Tirpak– the ASMT will think about the technical challenges with implementing the priorities identified by the SC and PAC.

Vulnerability Assessments

Fitzgerald– the ASMT seems like the group to think about the vulnerability assessments and how to best do that and what the questions are and the technical needs.

Tirpak– this group can definitely be leaned on to hash out the questions about approaches, scale, etc to doing vulnerability assessments.

McKnight– coordination with the formation of SECAS teams and support is needed to make sure that if the LCC is taking the leadership role in that effort the same people are not working separately.

Wathen– agreed and if the SC buys in on the LCC role for the SECAS, the ASMT would then become the mechanism to engage with the SECAS.

Tirpak next provided an overview of Vulnerability Assessments and the ‘decisions’ made by the SC in the past two meetings.

Apodaca– Will there be efforts to incorporate other landscape change such as fragmentation and urbanization which may affect species status more than climate alone?

Tirpak– yes, there are efforts to incorporate non–climate stressors into the model.

Robinson– how much will this tell us about present conditions vs 50 years from now?

Tirpak– if there is high uncertainty about present conditions, the process will tell you that but it is largely a forward looking process.

McKnight– do we have examples from other areas?

Wathen– there are good examples of the cursory approach, training from CTC, examples in northeast.

Tirpak – Scanning the Conservation Horizon is the guide that shows both approaches; in general our community does not have a good understanding of V.A.s and how to use them. This is a first step without having to make very large investments.

Fitzgerald– the question is what are V.A.s important for? I have heard they are to help people think about vulnerability and identify what we need to know to understand vulnerability. The ASMT should examine the question about what the V.A. will answer or why it’s needed, and this will inform the approach and level of investment. Some needs will require more rigor and we should know when that is necessary.

Apodaca– one advantage being missed is the combination of all these assessments together that will help develop overarching goals that will be important in the future.

Miller– what about using the SWAPs to help prioritize species.

John- doing this LCC-wide will help with consistency across states and their SWAP needs.

McKnight - is it helpful to ask whether V.A.s are necessary for prioritizing in the SECAS effort?

Fitzgerald- if it is necessary for that, you want it to be good.

Nasser- we don't necessarily need to know everything about every species.

Osland- in the SE there are very clear abiotic drivers that will affect ecosystems. That could be one alternative approach that is fast and based in sound science.

Fitzgerald- that approach is better to answer vulnerability using the underlying causes for a range of species.

Apodaca- the NatureServe framework incorporates these questions within the assessment.

Miller- it's important to talk about uncertainty and regionally downscaled data and how to incorporate it.

Apodaca- that is another strength of the NatureServe approach - you are not modeling the specific response but more conducting a qualitative assessment.

Fitzgerald- need to consider that there is a degree of change before ecological response may be detected and it's important to understand how those changes lead to species impacts; you need to answer why are you doing it and how rigorous it should be; be careful with asking for expert time without having a solid understanding of what it will be used for.

Wathen- SHC is the construct for conservation and with the Gulf Restore Act there is a good example of needing to be strategic in conservation delivery to be most effective. There is a lot of capacity to do climate planning that can be leveraged to make V.A.s more and more rigorous. The investment by the LCC is to get that interest and foundation to make climate planning more effective.

Miller- how does the work by others such as Future Forests connect to this idea? Would be good to use these and build on them.

Tirpak- We are working to incorporate these efforts and use these in a coarse filter-fine filter approach.

Rideout- staff have been charged with doing V.A.s and must do them, so we should move forward and this approach seems like it can work.

Tirpak- it is important to have these conversations and make sure the approach is good and for the right needs.

Robinson– we struggle to get conservation money on the ground for dealing with current challenges; we just don't have resources to deal with future challenges.

Bass– no one knows how much will come to the Gulf and where it will go. There are assumptions that Clean Water Act fines if RESTORE Act doesn't pass the money will go to the OPA fund and treasury. There are discussions of a settlement that will prevent this even without the RESTORE Act but may have more parameters about how the money is used. The federal government may control some of that and influence opportunities. If that is the reason to do a VA in the Gulf (that the money will be there) it won't be determined until the settlement or Act is determined.

Wathen– The Gulf effort isn't the only thing that VAs would inform. There are also other efforts like MRBI and others that should be informed by conservation planning and prioritization.

Fitzgerald– in the CHJV there were studies to look at metapopulation modeling for viability of 3 bird species and developed scenarios that put restoration in different places and modeled the response given metapopulation dynamics.

Ecosystem Services

Osland and Wathen discussed the potential of pulling together an Ecosystem Services Workgroup and provided an overview of ecosystem services approaches to determine valuation of those services.

Wathen asked for thoughts on needs and tools that would be helpful related to ecosystem services valuation.

Darren– there are some great examples out there of agricultural pest control provided by bats and birds; Mississippi State University is looking at recreational services of habitat vs timber management.

Davidson– you need a market for those services though.

Apodaca– there is growing number of land trusts in the SE and this would be useful for them.

Fitzgerald– value of ecosystem services does not translate into profit by private landowners but may be a way to get markets for paying landowners to set aside forests .

Apodaca– Georgia has put in their land trust programs that the value of their habitat can be used for tax incentives.

McKnight– there are also policy implications for ecosystem service valuation.

Phil– big priority for GOMA and there is a lot of activity that can be leveraged (EPA).

Davidson– the landowner may not get the value, as there are now middle-men that are taking credit for that ecosystem services market. The BBCC was originally very

interested in carbon markets for private landowners, but now there is less incentive for landowners and more for the consultants and middle-men who make the majority of the profit.

Fitzgerald– good example from Wisconsin on forests– Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science.

Wathen next discussed Gulf Hypoxia and described his exposure to it at the GOMA workshop and connections he made to it with USGS Sparrow models that allow identification of stream reaches and model the loading of nutrients and delivery to the Gulf. Some of the highest contributors are the main tributaries of the Mississippi River. Is there a connection with the forest restoration and other restoration in the MAV and the goals of nutrient reduction? Mike Woodside at the TN Water Science Center manages SPARROW and met with Wathen and Tirpak to talk about potential opportunities.

To this point there is not an ecological/biodiversity connection to nutrient reduction practices. This could be a good role for the LCCs to play in contributing to the response to hypoxia. Last week, met with USGS in Nashville and looked at pilot efforts using the MRBI to help select areas and incorporate monitoring. Wathen wants to form a small group to think through the purpose of LCC engagement on this issue.

Bass– worked with the Hypoxia Task Force since it was formed. USGS is doing good work to identify priority watersheds for implementing MRBI. The MRBI is paying landowners to put in BMPs and requires them to do the monitoring, but may be done through paper estimates instead of in situ monitoring. States are doing nutrient reduction strategies and that may be a better way to get in the door and influence how the MRBI dollars are spent. Wathen should come to the Hypoxia Task Force meeting to meet the state members and work with them.

Davidson– in early efforts to identify corridors for bears, we successfully worked with NRCS to incorporate extra points for BMPs in those areas to target conservation dollars.

McKnight– the two approaches (conservation for nutrient reduction and wildlife habitat) are not mutually exclusive nor perfect overlaps. You need to document success of both approaches. TNC looked at water quality and WRP and found that they were not necessarily providing the benefits of the practices. They want to look to at the current ditches and how to improve nutrient reduction.

Bass– finding mutually beneficial practices to reduce nutrients is good. For example, flooded fields for ducks reduce nutrients but farmers want to release the water in the spring which is the worst time from a hypoxia perspective.

Nasser– Jim Wise and Richard Ingram would be good state contacts.

Robinson– volunteered to help and is very interested.

Davidson– volunteered to help with the effort.

Partnership Priorities

Following discussion of the LCCs progress and priorities, the floor was opened for the Partnerships to share their priorities and identify means of working with the LCC or each other in achieving those objectives together

Rideout- pleased with the progress on several fronts and with good outreach.

Nasser- the Mississippi River is critical to the LCC and Gulf and there is a lot of potential for better capitalizing on benefitting the river and it will benefit the whole region. 327,000 acres of agricultural lands that are regularly flooded and represent an opportunity for restoration. NRCS policy doesn't support restoration of bottomland hardwoods and there is a need to better plan for the types of habitats that should be restored based on what can be supported.

Robinson- LCC can play an important role in meeting science needs for SARP priority waters. The Mississippi River offers a good opportunity to further prioritize restoration and habitat management. Bring some attention to the needs of Mississippi River, which receives little national/federal attention.

Wathen- working with the Alligator Gar committee to help them identify conservation strategies. Does that approach work with SARP goals. At SARP meeting in May, will we have some discussion on how to work together in a similar way.

Robinson- yes that approach will feed into SARP prioritization efforts.

McKnight- Identified 3 ways to link priorities of LMVJV and LCC: 1) in the partner leading the effort with LCC input; 2) the LCC effort with partner input; and 3) some in the middle where independent projects are coordinated to match a larger purpose. Land cover database is one of the most important common useful products because it is filling a gap and provides the ability to think in the same currency. Gulf hypoxia is a good, shared capacity. Adaptation strategy needs to use the components being developed by the partners to make the bigger connection. There is a need for better climate planning within those components conducted by partners - need to understand the downscaled data for that. Need to continue to improve the understanding of how species respond to changes. Communication is also a priority. Can also look at using a division of labor to help reach our mutual goals and needs.

Rideout- JVs have a challenge with databases for tracking accomplishments. This need has come up in longleaf pine restoration efforts.

Wathen- one of the emerging criteria to evaluate LCCs is the establishment of conservation targets. There are other efforts to develop report cards to show accomplishments/progress and could be one approach to use in this region.

Fitzgerald- Penn State developed a web-based tracking system and includes a mapping interface that may be something can be modified.

Wathen– the USGS may also provide that capability. The LCC can invest in helping develop databases.

Apodaca– setting landscape conservation priorities. For some taxa there is no group working on this need. This would meet needs for today to protect what we have now.

Miller– bottomland hardwood systems are important and we are working with Michael Lacki to develop a conservation plan for Rafinesque’s big-eared bat in this ecosystem. There were some earlier efforts to do a bat conservation plan, but it fell through the cracks and it’s growing in need due to threats like diseases, habitat loss. There’s been some concerns about conflicts between bat and bird conservation on refuges, particularly surrounding implementation of Desired Forest Conditions. A committee was set up to look at these conflicts and better ways to integrate bat management.

Ertel– this is important to the refuges and the USFWS is looking for partners through the LCC to continue to address this issue.

Wathen closed by thanking everyone for attending, passed out handouts on the SECAS document and a draft agenda for the April steering committee meeting, and noted the panel discussion by PAC members on day 2 of the meeting to help identify the role of the LCC in the Gulf. Wathen noted that he would be following up with PAC members about participation.