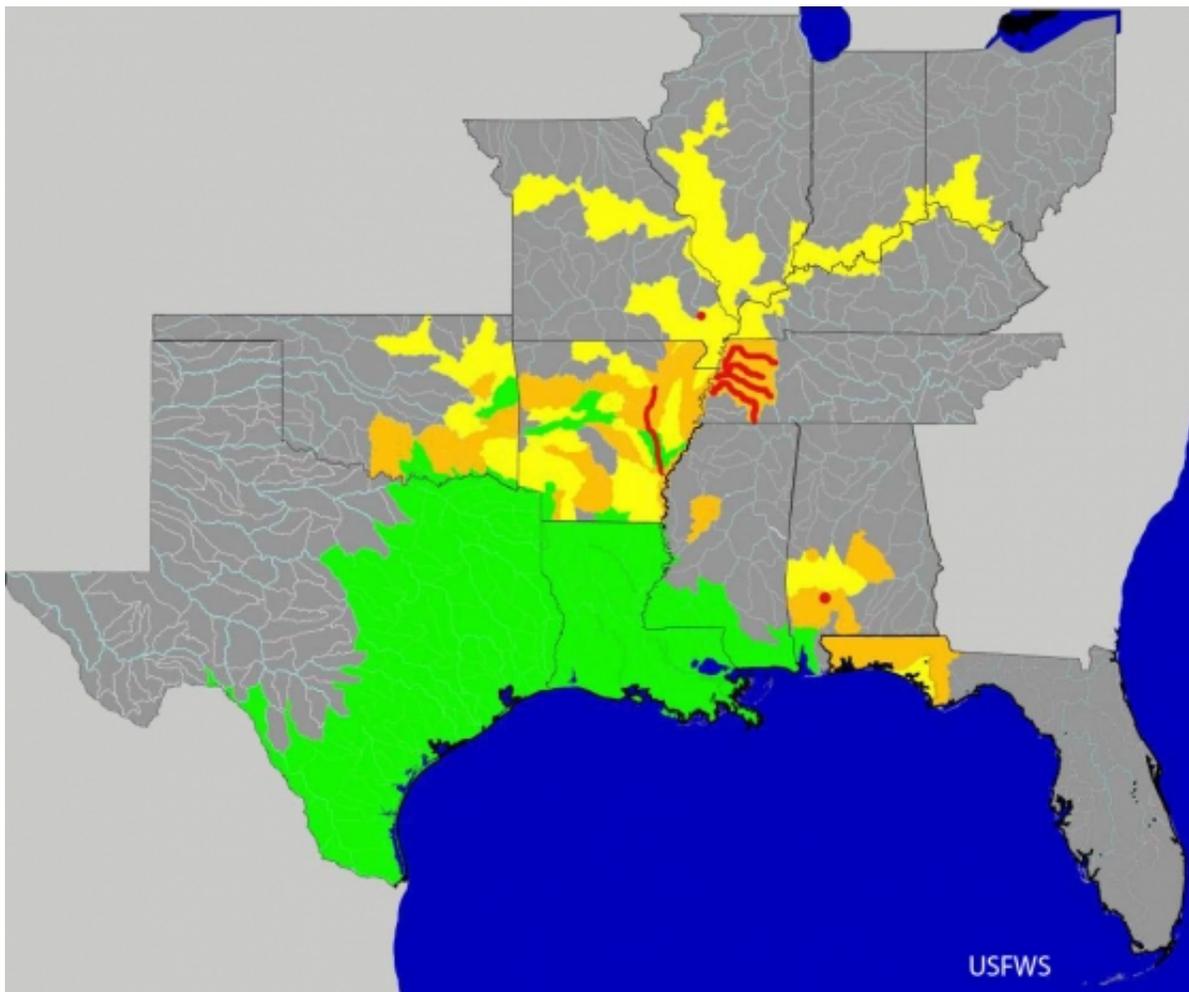


The GCPO Monitor

Newsletter of the Gulf Coastal Plains and Ozarks Landscape Conservation Cooperative



The Wide-Angle View

A Message from the GCPO LCC Coordinator, Greg Wathen

Hats Off to the Alligator Gar Technical committee

Last month, John Tirpak (GCPO LCC Science Coordinator) and I had the opportunity to attend the Alligator Gar Technical Committee Meeting at the Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society in Biloxi, MS (In the Alligator Gar range map above, yellow

shows historic habitat; red shows stocked). We had been invited there to discuss the GCPO LCC, what the Cooperative is about and what our priorities are. Most specifically, we discussed how the Alligator Gar Technical Committee could work within the GCPO LCC to develop a range-wide management plan that would meet the conservation needs of this priority species. (Alligator Gar was featured in the October/November 2011 issue of *The Monitor*).

The presentations that John and I made to the Committee were well received, but what was most encouraging for me was the rich conversation that ensued afterwards, during the discussion on whether to pursue a range-wide Alligator Gar management plan, and how to go about it. It was a perfect illustration of how an LCC should be working, with scientists, biologists and managers discussing the merits of various approaches to moving forward, and what kinds of outcomes they could envision. At one point in the discussion, the relative merit of setting conservation targets was raised. Having been involved in the bird joint venture world for many years, I understand the importance and benefits of setting biologically-based conservation targets, but it was interesting and gratifying to listen to these fisheries conservationists wrestle with and think about how they would go about setting conservation targets for fish: a challenging proposition for sure, but certainly doable, and who better than these experts to do it?

The GCPO LCC, through our Conservation Science Staff, certainly has something that can be brought to the table in terms of building a conservation plan for Alligator Gar. We have or can get access to geospatial data and modeling expertise that many biologists and managers either may not know about or may not have the expertise to use. But I can't overstate the importance of a true engagement of the practitioners on the ground to provide some reality and ground truthing to what those models tell us - that is what makes the "Cooperative" in an LCC, and from my perspective as an LCC Coordinator, it's the key to success in all of our conservation enterprises.

So, my hat's off to the Alligator Gar Technical Committee for taking on the responsibility for ensuring the sustainability of Alligator Gar in the GCPO. They are setting a standard for the rest of us to strive for, and demonstrating the leadership needed to pull it off.

Newsletter contents & regular features

(Note: if you are not already a member, apply for GCPO LCC membership at <http://gcpolcc.org/> - membership includes newsletter subscription.)

THE WIDE-ANGLE VIEW

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Hats Off to the Alligator Gar Technical Committee

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Bringing you the Year of the Lizard in 2012

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Southeast PARC

IBAs for Birds, PARCAs for Herps, SE PARC for Vulnerability Assessments

ONE MINUTE FOR THE MONKEY: . . .

Adaptation Science Management Team nomination form

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YCKJTSK>

What are your ideas for the GCPO LCC logo??

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ZHBS6MC>

THE CENSUS

Numbers that describe the GCPO LCC (below)

The Meander

Profiling one of us - the many people and organizations that make up the far-flung Gulf Coastal Plains and Ozarks LCC



Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation

Bringing You the Year of the Lizard in 2012

As any ornithologist will tell you, it's pretty easy to study birds because they sit in their habitat and shout their names at you (at least during breeding season). Herpetologists who study frogs may have the same advantage, but not so with snakes, lizards, salamanders, and crocs! It's therefore not surprising that Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation or PARC [<http://www.parcplace.org/>], which bills itself as the

“premier conservation movement to conserve reptiles and amphibians,” is admittedly a decade or so behind the Joint Ventures that have been working to conserve birds for the past 25 years or so.

The mission of PARC is “to conserve amphibians, reptiles and their habitats as integral parts of our ecosystem and culture through proactive and coordinated public/private partnerships,” yet the organization was founded relatively recently, in 1999.

Terry Riley with the National Park Service [Terry_Riley@nps.gov] is the national federal agencies’ coordinator for PARC. “PARC was the herpetologists’ idea of creating a voice in the conservation community similar to that of Partners in Flight [<http://www.partnersinflight.org/>] - but for herpetofauna. PARC operates as an inclusive group, with conservationists, academics, forest companies, zoos, the pet trade, and people from private industry.” Like most multi-agency movements, the steering committee is 100% volunteer, with two co-chairs. “We try to keep a balance among states, feds, and others on our board,” Terry says.

PARC has national and regional working groups, which Terry hopes to broaden since he sees the strength of this conservation approach as the linkages between groups that normally would not work together, such as academics partnering with state agencies. In their ongoing game of “conservation catchup” PARC has responded to requests from resource managers for more information on habitat management by developing a series of handbooks with habitat management recommendations, and a pending publication will provide an exhaustive survey of inventory and monitoring techniques for all North American amphibians and reptiles.

“Some regions already have guidelines on how to engage in Farm Bill conservation programs,” exclaims Terry. PARC is organized much like Partners in Flight, with national and regional working groups. They are seeking to broaden their membership on both Working Groups and “task teams,” which focus on producing specific deliverables with a timeline. Task teams currently are focusing on designated amphibian and reptile focus, or priority, areas, diseases, pets, and single species conservation (for example gopher frogs).

The best way for people interested in PARC or Southeast PARC to get involved, is to consult the websites and attend their meetings.

From Under the Scope: The View of the GCPO LCC Science Coordinator

	Fish	Herps	Birds	Mammals	Aquatic Inverts	Terrestrial Inverts	Plants	Cultures
E. Gulf Coastal Plain/ Tennessee								
Interior Highlands / Missouri-Ohio-Upper Miss								
Mississippi Alluvial Valley /Lower Miss								
W. Gulf Coastal Plain/ AR-Red-White								
Gulf Coast/Gulf								

HELP WANTED: Adaptation Science Management Team

An excellent opportunity to influence the strategic direction of landscape conservation in the GCPO

For the last year and a half, the GCPO LCC has been operating under a science plan put together by an ad hoc group of scientists and managers that met in Starkville, MS. Although the group was small, it represented a diverse assemblage of state, federal, and private conservation partners spanning multiple taxa and resource interests across the GCPO. This group did an excellent job identifying initial tasks for the LCC in its infancy, putting us on a course to realize our ultimate mission – developing a shared vision for sustaining natural and cultural resources in light of anticipated changes across our landscape.

Most of the tasks this group identified were fairly self-evident – the proverbial “low-hanging fruit” – and included projects ranging from developing foundational landcover, urban projections, and downscaled climate data to demonstration projects highlighting an adaptive management approach to conservation such as the alligator gar model and Louisiana pearlshell mussel prioritization tool. The GCPO LCC community owes a huge debt of gratitude to these early pioneers for pointing us in the right direction.

Today, a new chapter in the GCPO LCC is beginning. The overarching framework remains unchanged – we continue to embrace an adaptive management approach for defining, designing, and delivering landscapes capable of sustaining natural and cultural resources now and into the future. However, low-hanging fruit has been picked and the next steps toward that end aren’t nearly so clear. . .

Though the Steering Committee continues to provide broad direction to the Partnership in

identifying these next steps, they also recognize the need for a team to advise them on the technical details of alternative options. For example, the Steering Committee unanimously agrees that the integration of aquatic and terrestrial resource priorities is needed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our limited conservation dollars (whether they be for delivery, communication, or planning). However, they also recognize that the technical details of the science needed to make that happen and the operational logistics of turning that science into field-level reality is largely beyond the scope of their time and/or expertise. How then does this Partnership distill from the nearly limitless supply of “good” projects those that are the “right” projects to meet the priorities this Partnership has established relative to achieving its overarching mission?

The answer is the Adaptation Science Management Team! Formally chartered by the Steering Committee last October, this group “serve[s] as the technical forum for coordination and communication among LCC partners in matters pertaining to the achievement of the GCPO LCC’s mission. The Team serves at the nexus of science and management and provides the Steering Committee and Partnership Advisory Council insights into the proper balance of scientific rigor and operational reality in achieving its priorities.” (The charter in its entirety can be found here. Note: you may have to log-in to the <http://gcpolcc.org> site to view it).

Specifically, the Team is empowered to:

- Identify the technical challenges inherent in achieving the goals of the GCPO LCC Partnership; outline solutions for overcoming these challenges; and provide recommendations on preferred approaches, tasks, timing, and projects;
- Develop and refine the overarching framework for a regional Conservation Adaptation Strategy; and
- Identify and prioritize science needs for the GCPO LCC Partnership, in the context of a regional Conservation Adaptation Strategy.

Although ideally this Team would include all individuals with any interest in shaping the GCPO LCC’s science agenda, the realities of effective group size prevent this level of direct egalitarian participation. Nevertheless, the ASMT needs to reflect the numerous geographic, resource, functional, and organizational perspectives of GCPO partners. Therefore, the team is structured by geography and resource with all functional (researcher vs. manager) and organizational (private, state, and federal) perspectives being sought within each. Those serving on the team will have a responsibility to not only provide their own insights, but those of the larger community they represent. Conceptually, this team is structured like this:

	Fish	Herps	Birds	Mammals	Aquatic Inverts	Terrestrial Inverts	Plants	Cultures
E. Gulf Coastal Plain/ Tennessee								
Interior Highlands / Missouri-Ohio-Upper Miss								
Mississippi Alluvial Valley /Lower Miss								
W. Gulf Coastal Plain/ AR-Red-White								
Gulf Coast/Gulf								

Hopefully, many of you reading this are slightly overwhelmed by the complexity and enormity of this challenge ahead of us. Even more, I hope you are intrigued by the potential and rewards that participation on this Team presents. In talking with many of you over the past year, I have been encouraged by the positive response and desire to serve on this Team. Over the next month, leading up to the GCPO LCC's Spring Steering Committee, we will be soliciting nominations to participate on this team - whether as a volunteer yourself or to suggest someone else with appropriate expertise - through a brief on-line survey at: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YCKJTSK>

If you would like to participate on this team or know of someone who would be an excellent addition, please be sure to submit a completed survey by March 23rd. Final nominations will be submitted to the Steering Committee for approval in early April. A meeting of the team is tentatively scheduled for mid- to late summer. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact me directly by e-mail (john_tirpak@fws.gov) or phone (601-630-7010). Additional information on the ASMT (including the link to the volunteer/nomination survey form) is available on the group's publicly accessible page at: <http://gcpolcc.org/group/asmt>

Thanks for the great work to date and the great work yet to come!

The Tidal Exchange

News from partners and partnerships within
the Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks region



Photo by Pete Oxford

IBAs for Birds, PARCAs for Herps, SE PARC for Vulnerability Assessments

As an undergraduate student at the University of South Florida, JJ Apodaca, who had always been interested in herps, came under the spell of Dr. Henry Mushinsky, a leader in the conservation of gopher tortoises. “I was inspired to become a conservation biologist,” JJ says. Then at the University of Alabama, where he received his PhD, Working with Dr. Leslie Rissler, JJ discovered the Red Hills salamander, the species central to his research and career. Apodaca, or “JJ,” is a conservation biology post-doc at Florida State University [japodaca@bio.fsu.edu] and co-chair of SE PARC along with Chris Jenkins, CEO and Director of The Orianne Society [<http://www.oriannesociety.org/>]. JJ has been involved with SE PARC for the past eight years. Southeast PARC [<http://www.separc.org/>] is the Southeast branch of PARC, and its mission is the preservation of amphibian and reptile populations in the southeastern United States.

“Absolutely, we could use SEPARC to get word out about the LCCs!”

JJ is a good candidate for developing “one or twenty” rapid vulnerability assessments for amphibians and reptiles as part of the GCPO LCC’s ongoing steps to develop a means of predicting wildlife response to climate change. Certainly, he would be the go-to guy for Red Hills salamander. “Absolutely we could use SEPARC to get word out about the LCC’s Vulnerability Assessments and recruit more participation!” JJ enthuses.

Joseph J. Apodaca cautions that Southeast Partners in Reptile and Amphibian Conservation is in its infancy when it comes to implementing conservation on-the-ground. That's why he's excited about their newest "PARCA" initiative, modeled after the global Important Bird Area designation adopted by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, or NABCI. PARCA stands for "priority amphibian and reptile conservation area."

Working to Identify Herp Conservation Areas

While PARC is developing the guidelines for defining PARCAs, it's up to each region to find the areas worthy of designation. Jumpstarted by a grant from the South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative, or SALCC [<http://www.southatlanticlcc.org/>], SE PARC has begun work on southern species. "We're trying to do it right," says JJ, "by looking for areas that represent a disproportionate amount of herpetological diversity, doing single species gap analyses, and also tapping experts for their knowledge. The strength of IBAs is that they focus on breeding populations or migratory stops where large numbers of birds gather. Breeding information is much scarcer for herps, and there are no known migratory concentrations either."

At the Southeast PARC's 2012 annual meeting, held Feb. 16-19, they organized a roundtable discussion including each of the states that touches the Southeast Atlantic LCC to make an initial cut of where PARCAs might be and to gain feedback. Their next step will be to look at how much the habitats and ranges of mammal and bird species overlap with the PARCAs by combining herp data with bird and mammal range data obtained through the SE GAP [<http://www.basic.ncsu.edu/segap/>]. Finally, SE PARC will seek to develop a habitat model for amphibians and reptiles that can predict the extent of each species occurrence. JJ did similar work for his PhD dissertation and as a post-doc at Florida State.

"Once we designate the PARCAs, we will attempt to account for the effects of climate change by remodeling all species using climate change data. We'll use existing models to create an 'envelope' of temperatures (a range of highs and lows) within which the species currently live. Then we'll use models of future climate change to see how the temperature envelopes for specific areas are affected."

Prioritizing PARCAs

After taking into account climate change effects, SE PARC will seek to first designate PARCAs that appear to be the most stable over time, because they will provide long-term protection. The second tier of PARCA importance will come from seeing where important habitat areas appear to shift with predicted climate change. This, as JJ says, "is something that's tricky."

Areas that are unprotected or important areas that appear to shift into unprotected sites will become prime targets for land acquisition or other forms of stewardship. “PARC does not acquire or protect habitat, but we will work with others who have that ability. One of our most active SE PARC partners is from the forest products industry, and we are also seeking additional members such as people working in agriculture, ranchers, etc.”

“My experience is that we can probably work with USDA to develop conservation practices to benefit herps,” continues JJ. “Hopefully, we can try to get the NRCS and FSA to modify or examine some of their wetland conservation and restoration practices to see if they can be improved for reptiles & amphibians. We’d like to develop a set of conservation practices for the state or the nation, along with financial incentives available for farmers and ranchers to implement them.”

Midwest PARC is already setting up a working group to engage the USDA on those issues. “That’s all we can do with feds,” says JJ, “publications, training, information, etc. Up to now, we have not had a private lands focus, but that’s where we’re headed in the future.” Given that there is a good deal of species overlap between the GCPO LCC and the SALCC, SE PARC’s work on PARCAs and habitat modeling is bound to benefit amphibian and reptile conservation in the GCPO geography.

One Minute for the Monkey

TWO very brief Survey Monkey polls! Help Wanted & Logo Ideas

Adaptation Science Management Team nomination form

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YCKJTSK>

What are your ideas for the GCPO LCC logo?

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ZHBS6MC>

The Census

A little box of statistics about the GCPO LCC

Amphibians & Reptiles in the Southeast (does not include TX)

- over 260 amphibians and reptiles
 - 9 federally listed reptiles (24 IUCN endangered or vulnerable)
 - 5 federally listed amphibians (16 IUCN endangered or vulnerable)
 - the southeast is a world hotspot for both amphibians, especially plethodontid (lungless) salamanders and turtles
 - the southeast contains 10 completely endemic genera of salamanders
-

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