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A Manual for Natural Resource Managers to Integrate Downscaled SWAP Information with INRMPs

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Background:

In 2015, all state fish and wildlife agencies were required to update their State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). The SWAP outlines the status of wildlife and their habitats, along with specific threats and stressors, and recommendations to protect them. The goal of the SWAP is to take conservation actions before species decline to the point that their recovery is in question, and they require listing under the Endangered Species Act.

The Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) is a planning resource to guide installations in the management of natural resources in concert with other agencies and interests. One of the challenges to integrating information from SWAPs with INRMPs is to identify which species of greatest conservation need (SGCNs) are truly affected, positively or negatively, by actions within the installation landscape. The goal of this project was to make the SWAP more useful to installation natural resource managers.

Objectives:

The objectives of this project were to create a resource for installation managers that would guide them in the process of integrating SWAP information with their INRMPs, and to demonstrate a method of downscaling SWAPs to the installation level using real case-study examples.

Summary of Approach:

Our approach was to develop a manual that outlines each step in the process along with some background and guidance on tailoring to the needs of the installation. The downscaling process starts by identifying the installation landscape, which was used to refine the SWAP information. Next, we discussed ways to use information from the SWAP, along with other installation and geospatial data, to identify which SGCNs and habitats were likely to occur within the installation landscape. This information served as the basis for a prioritization of SGCNs based on the context of the installation, and other factors such as socioeconomic importance or compatibility with the training mission. Using the priority SGCN list, we consulted the SWAP to identify efficiencies that may exist by conserving habitat, or mitigating common threats across species. Finally, threats and conservation actions from the SWAP are identified and incorporated into the INRMP.

This general process was used for three example installation case studies. We worked through the downscaling process at Aberdeen Proving Ground (Maryland), Military Training Center Fort Pickett (Virginia), and Quantico Marine Corps Base (Virginia). In each case, we explained how the downscaling was completed, and offer guidance on other options for natural resource managers to incorporate conservation actions to mitigate threats present on their installations.

Benefit:

By actively integrating conservation activities outlined in their respective SWAP, installations can contribute to ongoing conservation actions that decrease the risk of species listing and encroachment on military training.

The process results in a list of priority species for each installation. By prioritizing for specific SGCN, the installations can direct resources more efficiently and effectively than trying to address every SGCN on the landscape. Furthermore, that information can be shared with partners to improve overall conservation efforts.

This process will also help define the importance of DoD lands to the conservation of SGCN within the installation landscape and state. Installations provide critical SGCN habitats, often as a direct result of training practices that are crucial to the persistence of the species. The downscale process provides additional perspective on the conservation value of DoD lands and how they contribute to the overall conservation network.

Accomplishments:

The manual provides a straightforward approach to incorporating SWAP information into INRMPs that will improve management of at-risk species. Keeping at-risk species from further decline prevents encroachment on the training mission and demonstrates the importance of DoD lands for achieving broader conservation goals.

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