

Focus Area Review ‘Analysis’ Subcommittee Meeting Notes

September 5, 2014
MNAP Office, 1-3:30 PM

Participants: Bethany Atkins (IFW), Andy Cutko (MNAP), Sarah Demers (IFW), Phillip DeMaynadier (IFW), Molly Docherty (MNAP), Bill Hancock (IFW), Liz Hertz (ACF), Don Katnik (IFW), Bob Houston (USFWS), Ryan Robicheau (IFW), Amanda Shearin (IFW), Wade Simmons (MNAP), Mark Stadler (contractor), Sally Stockwell (ME Audubon), Bob Stratton (IFW), Barbara Vickery (TNC), Steve Walker (MCHT)

1. Task and Timeline

- Andy reviewed the draft overall goal and introduced the list of potential tasks to be accomplished to fulfill our Focus Area review obligations relative to the SWAP.
- We will need to revise and update the SWAP language on Focus Areas from 2005 to reflect current functions and uses of Focus Area.
- The work as outlined should meet the requirements of the USFWS grant regarding Focus Areas and climate change resilience.
- Focus Areas will not be a significant component of the SWAP Stakeholders meeting on September 30 but will be likely be addressed at a meeting later in the fall or winter.

2. Tasks/updates from prior call

- More than half the SGCN species have been linked to habitats, with an emphasis on using the finest scaled habitats possible (i.e., systems vs. macrogroups). IFW staff should be done with this task by September 12. However, DMR will likely be adding species using similar criteria, and it is not clear to which habitats they will be assigned (the TNC classification is not finely divided for many coastal/estuarine types). MNAP has assigned its rare plants to ecological systems, but this information is not in IFW’s database.
- A simple assessment based on habitats and species linkages will not recognize that many species ranges cover only a fraction of the state (e.g., spotted turtles in southern Maine). Refining the habitat/species analysis using range maps will be a longer term task. Our current assessment also overlooks habitat patch size, which is limiting for many species.
- All habitat macrogroups occur in multiple Focus Areas, and the most common wetland types are represented in nearly all Focus Areas. We may be missing some useful information by not assessing representation at the finer scale of ecological systems, but that level of detail may be too much for public consumption.
- Further information will be solicited separately on Focus Areas meeting no or one criteria using the spreadsheet provided in a prior e-mail.

- Coastal issues: There has been some involvement with DMR staff regarding coastal/estuarine SGCN, but we need to reconnect with regard to DMR's review of coastal Focus Areas. Emily Norton (ME Coastal Program) has reviewed SWAP treatment of coastal issues in other states.
- Aquatic issues: MDIFW has taken TNC's aquatic classification and developed a total of 8 types – 4 lotic (streams and rivers) and 4 lentic (ponds and lakes). We can potentially do a 'gap analysis' of these 8 types as we have for terrestrial systems. We should also look at Class AA and A waters (DEP data layer) and existing fisheries data from IFW. We need to incorporate review from fisheries biologists of Focus Areas, but first establish clear aquatic criteria. We will get this on the radar of the group at a fisheries meeting next week and then shoot for more involvement later this fall.

3. Revisit Focus Area criteria ('spokes on the wheel')

- Our group is generally comfortable with the existing criteria, but we will leave placeholders for high quality aquatic and coastal systems, and we may also re-define some high quality terrestrial habitats to steer away from regulatory language.

4. Process for adding/deleting Focus Areas & public input

- We need to create a standard form to enable nomination of new Focus Areas or to suggest deletion of existing Focus Areas. The review committee would ideally consist of some subset of this Focus Area Review committee and/or the Beginning with Habitat Steering Committee (much overlap between the two).
- While there have been landowner concerns regarding Focus Areas, there has also been a positive effect, with Focus Areas providing additional leverage for land protection. We need to establish protocols for more actively working with landowners regarding Focus Areas that intersect their lands. This topic may also be addressed the SWAP outreach committee.

5. Integrating Climate Change Resilience

- Barbara described the proposal to use TNC data to assess climate change resilience of Focus Areas, both as a network and individually. Components include representation of ecological land units (physical features), landscape complexity, and both internal and external connectivity. Details are in a document attached to the agenda, and some technical methods still need to be ironed out, as well as questions about how to use the results (e.g., aggregate scores or keep separate?). The group generally concurred with the proposal.

6. Next Meetings & Next Steps

We will schedule a check-in conference call in a few weeks prior to the September 30 stakeholder meeting.

- **Andy** will revise the scope of work for updating Focus Area to reflect today's discussion.
- **Andy** will acquire the updated aquatic classification (list of types) from IFW (Jason) and acquire the digital aquatics data from TNC (MNAP may have this already). MNAP will look into doing a 'gap analysis' on these aquatic habitats in the same manner as was done for terrestrial habitats. MNAP will also review DEP's shape file of 'AA' waters.
- **Bethany** will follow up with Merry G. regarding the fisheries section meeting next week and getting Focus Areas on the radar of the fisheries biologists.
- **Amanda** will follow up with Charlie regarding DMR's involvement in coastal habitats, additional coastal species, and review of coastal Focus Areas.
- **Andy** will draft meeting minutes and circulate them and will also send out a Doodle poll to pick upcoming dates for a conference call and next meeting.