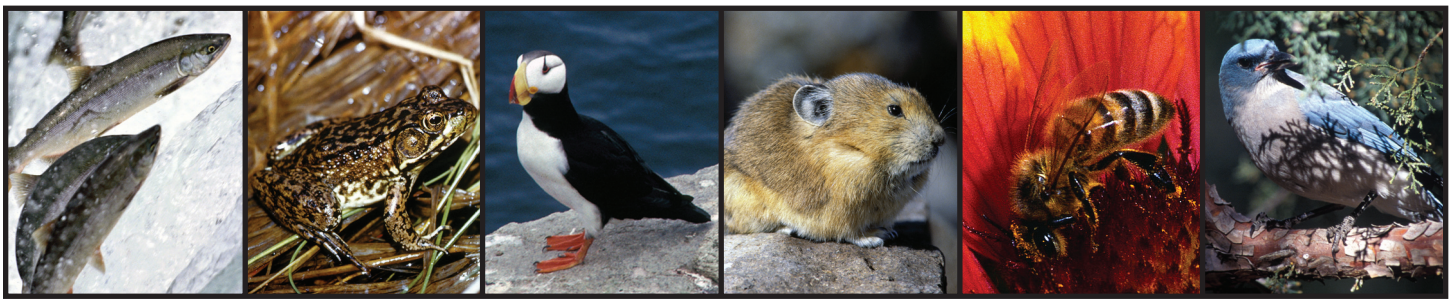

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National Fish and Wildlife Climate Adaptation Strategy

Frequently Asked Questions

Why pursue a National Fish and Wildlife Climate Adaptation Strategy?

Worldwide scientific consensus has shown that human activity—specifically, increases in anthropogenic greenhouse gas—is disrupting the climate system, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, phenological changes in animals and plants, and rising sea levels and coastal erosion.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that during this century the resilience of ecosystems may be exceeded, many species will become threatened with extinction, and ecosystem structure may change greatly. Crucial resources necessary for fish, wildlife, and plants, as well as humankind, such as water, will change with potential reductions and seasonal shifts in availability. Sea levels will continue to rise, threatening both coastal ecosystems and coastal communities. Disturbances such as catastrophic wildfires, insect outbreaks, and spread of invasive species will increasingly threaten functioning ecosystems as well as human communities. Against this backdrop of large-scale change in major ecosystems indiscriminately crossing political boundaries, an integrated, coordinated, and comprehensive response is necessary.

What is a National Fish and Wildlife Climate Adaptation Strategy?

A National Fish and Wildlife Climate Adaptation Strategy is an agreement among major conservation interests (e.g. local governments, states, tribes, conservation organizations, federal agencies, industry and private landowners) that identifies and defines principles and methods to maintain key terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems and functions needed to sustain fish, wildlife and plant resources in the face of accelerating climate change. In short, it is a blueprint for action that outlines appropriate scientific support (including inventory, monitoring, research and modeling to inform management decisions); the need for and importance of collaboration and interdependency; and the financial resources (including grants, appropriated funds, private contributions) to implement the decisions. The strategy will enable national and international conservation communities to harness collective expertise, authority, and skills to define and prioritize a shared set of conservation goals and objectives, as well as a plan of concerted action.

How did this effort originate?

The Conference Report for the FY2010 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act urges the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the Department of the Interior (with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as lead agency) to develop a national, government-wide strategy to address climate impacts on fish, wildlife, plants and associated ecological processes. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) climate change strategy calls for the agency to facilitate the development of such a strategy "to serve as the conservation community's shared blueprint to guide wildlife adaptation partnerships during the next 50-100 years."

How will the strategy be funded?

The strategy is expected to be funded through a combination of federal and state allocations, grants, and private donations.

What steps have been taken to create the strategy?

The FWS convened a Conservation Leadership Forum in June 2009 to gauge support for a national strategy and identify subsequent direction and further discussion. Forum participants included more than 40 leaders from federal and state natural resource agencies, as well as nongovernmental conservation and environmental organizations. Ninety-seven percent either strongly agreed or agreed a National Fish and Wildlife Climate Adaptation Strategy is needed to address the threat to America's natural resources. The FWS convened a second Conservation Leadership Forum in January 2010 to finalize drafts of the strategy's purpose, vision, and guiding principles and develop next steps for engaging the broader natural resource community.

What other partners will be involved in this effort?

The expansive nature of collaboration envisioned by the FWS includes all bureaus within the Interior Department; the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and Natural Resource Conservation Service; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Army Corps of Engineers; state natural resource and agricultural agencies; tribes; non-governmental organizations, including professional and scientific societies; academia; and private sector companies. The FWS has compiled an impressive list of landscape and regional conservation efforts, which includes well-known efforts such as Joint Ventures, Fish Habitat Partnerships and the Western Governors' Association's Wildlife Corridors Initiative. Efforts are underway to identify additional partnerships that exist across the continent.

What is the timeline to complete the strategy?

Forum participants plan to convene a steering committee during spring 2010 to develop a process, timeline and estimated resource needs for the strategy. An initial draft of the strategy will be completed in 2011 and a final plan completed during 2012.

What about natural resource agencies and organizations that need guidance now?

Because climate change demands long-term commitment and immediate action, and many conservation decisions need to be made now, forum participants are also developing interim guidance for climate adaptation strategies currently being developed for fish, wildlife and plants. This document will address both short- and long-term planning efforts and be modeled on the climate adaptation guidance document recently published by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. It will be a product of broad partnership among resource management professionals, providing key components that ensure climate adaptation planning efforts are consistent and complementary at geographic scales ranging from the project to the regional and national level.

The National Fish and Wildlife Climate Adaptation Strategy will build upon the interim climate adaptation guidance document developed during 2010 and provide a framework for long-term collaborative action, including recommendations for capacity building, vulnerability assessment, and on-the-ground conservation and management.

What other draft products have been developed in relation to the strategy?

Conservation Leadership Forum participants have developed a draft vision, purpose, and guiding principles for a National Fish and Wildlife Climate Adaptation Strategy. Guiding principles include:

- a national framework for cooperative climate response
- a focus on national boundaries but with the recognition of the international nature of fish and wildlife resources
- a philosophy of collaboration and interdependence
- landscape-scale, science-based management approaches
- the integration of adaptation and mitigation efforts
- a pragmatic approach with respect to ecological disruptions and the sustainability of biodiversity and functioning ecosystems.

Roseate spoonbill by Diane Borden-Billiot/USFWS

A National Fish and Wildlife Climate Change Adaptation web site also has been developed to provide information on the strategy, copies of draft products and outreach, and an on-line comment form to collect input on any or all of these documents.

Why should I get involved?

The strategy represents a national, not federal, framework for cooperative climate response. Because no single sector can manage climate impacts alone, it embraces a philosophy of collaboration and interdependence among federal, state, tribal, and local governments, and between government, academic, and non-governmental organizations. For the strategy to be effective, it will require an unprecedented commitment for collaboration at all levels of the public and private sector.

By working together, private conservation interests, states, tribes, private landowners, the federal government, professional and scientific societies, academia, and the public can help species and ecosystems adjust to changing conditions on the landscape by increasing their resilience and decreasing their vulnerability to both climate and non-climate stressors. A consortium of conservation interests will also be positioned to collectively evaluate relative risks to ecosystem functions and transparently consider priorities and potential for "triage" in conservation actions.

How do I get involved?

The FWS and its partners are actively soliciting new partners and input to refine draft products associated with the strategy and, ultimately, the strategy itself.

Conservation Leadership Forum participants are developing a long-term engagement strategy that includes a series of follow-up listening sessions (hosted by participating agencies and organizations) across the country to gather partner input on the strategy. Strategies for additional listening sessions, including appropriate venues and sponsors, will be a topic of discussion during the initial listening session at the 2010 North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Potential venues include upcoming annual meetings of natural resource conservation professionals such as the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, American Fisheries Society, Ecological Society of America, Society for Conservation Biology, and The Wildlife Society.

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To review draft documents and provide comments, visit http://www.fws.gov/nfwcas.html