

Preface

“I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been.”

– Hockey great, Wayne Gretzky.

Preparing for and coping with the effects of a changing climate—known as climate change adaptation—rapidly is becoming the dominant framework for conservation and natural resource management. Developing sound adaptation strategies requires that managers understand which of the resources they are managing are most likely to be affected, and what options may be available to sustain them into the future. Climate change vulnerability assessments provide an essential tool for informing the development of such adaptation plans, and a variety of approaches for assessing vulnerability are now in use or are under development.

Scanning the Conservation Horizon is designed to help fish and wildlife professionals and other conservation practitioners understand how vulnerability assessments can help them in responding to the challenges of managing natural resources in an era of rapid climate change. Developed by a collaborative working group of conservation professionals and conservation scientists (see below), the document provides guidance for agencies and organizations to consider in developing and conducting vulnerability assessments in support of their conservation and management missions and as a tool in the development of climate change adaptation strategies. The guidance document has three primary objectives:

- Provide an overview of the general principles of climate change vulnerability as it relates to species, habitats, and ecosystems
- Describe the various approaches available for assessing the components of vulnerability and address key issues and considerations related to these tools and practices
- Highlight examples of climate change vulnerability assessment in practice among government agencies, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and other stakeholders

Because the needs and challenges facing conservation and resource management agencies and organizations are so variable, this document offers a framework and general guidelines for assessing climate change vulnerability rather than provide a step-by-step “cookbook” for conducting assessments. Similarly, the intent is not to identify and promote a single “best” approach for assessing vulnerability, but rather to help readers understand the range of approaches available and enable them to identify the best match for their particular conservation requirements, decision processes, and available resources. Guidance documents, no matter how well written, are no substitute for in-person training and hands-on experience, and this guide is designed to support future training sessions to be held on the topic of vulnerability assessment and adaptation planning.

Acknowledgements

This guidance document is a product of an expert workgroup on vulnerability assessment convened by the National Wildlife Federation in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This workgroup includes many of the leading thinkers and practitioners in this rapidly evolving field and draws from state and federal agencies, non-governmental conservation organizations, and universities. We are grateful to the workgroup members listed on page iii who have given unstintingly of their time and expertise to participate in this workgroup and collaboratively develop this guidance document.

We are also grateful to the following individuals who collaborated with workgroup members to co-author case studies: Jennifer Newmark and Kristin Szabo (Nevada Natural Heritage Program), Jeff Price (World Wildlife Fund), Megan Friggens and Karen Bagne (U.S. Forest Service), Michael Wilson (Center for Conservation Biology), Patrick McCarthy (The Nature Conservancy), and Michael Case (University of Washington).

We would like to acknowledge the following individuals for assisting the workgroup in various ways: Dan Ashe, Kurt Johnson, and Eleanora Babij (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service); Arpita Choudhury (Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies); Craig Groves and Chris Zganjar (The Nature Conservancy); Mike Harris (Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division); and John Kostyack, Natalie Flynn, Helen Chmura, Maggie Germano, Nicole Rousmaniere, Erin Morgan, Austin Kane, Melinda Koslow, and Amanda Staudt (National

Wildlife Federation). In addition, we thank Krista Galley (Galley Proofs Editorial Services) for editorial assistance and Maja Smith (MajaDesign, Inc.) for design and production assistance.

This publication has undergone scientific peer review in accordance with U.S. Geological Survey guidelines for Fundamental Science Practices (*SM 502.3*). We thank the U.S. Geological Survey for coordinating the formal peer-review process for this publication, and are grateful to Lawrence Buja (National Center for Atmospheric Research), Harold Mooney (Stanford University), David Peterson (U.S. Forest Service and University of Washington), and J. Michael Scott (U.S. Geological Survey and University of Idaho) for their careful and insightful reviews. We also appreciate the thoughtful comments offered by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff.

We are especially grateful to the following organizations and agencies for providing financial support to this effort: Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Department of Defense Legacy Resource Management Program, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station, U.S. Geological Survey, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Climate Program Office, Coastal Service Center, and Office of Habitat Conservation.

Finally, we dedicate this publication to the memory of Dr. Stephen H. Schneider, whose lifelong pursuit of scientific knowledge and steadfast commitment to effective communication set the stage for the tremendous contribution that the science of climate change has made for the public good.