

Office of Resource Conservation

State of Illinois

Grant Segment

SWG Project number: T-55

Project title: Illinois Conservation Opportunity Areas: Coordination of Planning and Implementation Strategies in Illinois

Objectives:

1. Assess current status of planning of ILWAP COAs, track planning progress in the COAs, and provide coordination among conservation partners.

Planning and implementation are already being conducted in some COAs (e.g., Cache River, Midewin Grasslands) and little work may be required in these areas. Yet there may be other sites where such activities have not yet been initiated or there is need for assistance. Working with the Illinois Fish and Wildlife Action Team and other conservation partners, this objective will identify the priorities of COAs needing coordination assistance. This assessment may range from COAs where no planning has been initiated to COAs with on-the-ground implementation of best management practices. This objective will provide an initial status of the COAs and document change throughout the scope of the project. Through this objective, support will be directed towards local COA efforts (up to 10 COAs or suite of COAs per year, where such coordination represents a more efficient use of resources). This may include: fostering communication among partners by convening meetings, supporting coordination among various organizations, institutions, or agencies where such activities might not otherwise occur, and identifying potential funding opportunities in support of the COAs.

2) Identify a model process for on-going coordination within and among the COAs.

It is anticipated that COA planning will achieve a common pattern that may include components such as: identifying key partners, gathering data, coordination, developing a plan, acquiring funds, and implementation. However, one overall process may not address the needs of specific COAs that may have local planning and implementation requirements. Given the longevity of the ILWAP (reviewed every 10 years), this objective will help identify these COA-specific needs and will serve as a historical reference, to document progress in the COA planning and implementation process. This process will be developed in close coordination with on-going planning (e.g., The Nature Conservancy, IDNR)

3) Explore the development of performance measures for the COAs.

Where such work has not already been conducted, or where additional support may be needed, this objective will evaluate the development of performance measures for specific COAs. The purpose of these performance measures will help document success of a COA in achieving its goals and will help support the overall ILWAP.

4) Communicate progress to conservation partners and develop a final report.

Through this objective, information about this effort will be communicated through a variety of approaches including meetings, conferences, and workshops. Annual reports and a final report will provide a review of activities and overall status of COA planning and implementation.

Expected Results and Benefits:

Illinois COAs, as identified in the ILWAP, represent high-priority conservation areas within the state and thus are critical to species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) and their habitats. This project supports a critical function of the ILWAP and the State Wildlife Grants program by assisting local conservation partners with planning and implementing activities that will protect these SGCN's and habitats within and near these priority areas. Although such planning and implementation efforts may be underway in some COAs, there is a need to document this progress and to support COAs where such assistance would be considered beneficial.

This project will provide critical support to the ILWAP and will contribute the following expected results and benefits.

- 1.** Status review of COA planning needs (priority COAs to be identified by the Illinois Fish and Wildlife Action Team using an ecoregional approach throughout the state). Up to 10 COAs will be selected per year (or suite of COAs where proximity increases efficiency for assessment) with a summary of available management plans, needs, protection status, threats, data gaps. These will be based upon interviews with staff of conservation partners and available materials.
- 2.** Improved local (i.e., COA) coordination through meetings and other formats with conservation partners, including local landowners, to identify planning and coordination needs for development of COA plans.
- 3.** Guidance materials, with an assessment on approaches to coordination among the COAs (to be included with the third year report). The purpose of this activity is to identify a process for continued coordination to address COA-specific needs where appropriate.
- 4.** Identification of potential output and performance measures from COAs.
- 5.** Support of the ILWAP COA planning, with the intended purpose of implementation, is crucial to implementation of the ILWAP; COAs provide a geographic area on which to focus this planning.

Approach:

Considerable data gathering, planning and implementation have been conducted that support the ILWAP (e.g., Acres for Wildlife, Illinois Forestry Development Act) as well as geographically directed efforts to document Illinois' natural resources (e.g., Illinois Natural Areas Inventory, Important Bird Areas) (Illinois Wildlife Action Plan 2005).

Additional sources of information include the Conservation 2000 Ecosystem Partnerships, Green Infrastructure, Illinois Stream Classification project, and The Nature Conservancy planning efforts (e.g., Cache River, Illinois River). COA-specific goals were developed as part of the ILWAP, but additional planning and data-gathering efforts may be needed at the level of a COA. This project will help coordinate and guide COA planning.

To accomplish this COA coordination and communication, a project coordinator will be hired who will perform the following tasks (listed below).

In addition to the coordinator, an assistant will provide geospatial (GIS) and database support, data entry, analysis and other technical, logistical, and organizational support.

Based upon the recommendations and guidance of the ILWAP Fish and Wildlife Action Team, approximately 10 COAs per year will be addressed and all COAs are expected to be served over the 3-year grant period.

The extent of interaction with each COA will be based upon need (i.e., some COAs may already be implementing practices; others may not yet be organized).

This COA coordination will be conducted in a variety ways including: meetings, teleconferencing, written and oral communication.

The project will:

(The following tasks address objectives 1 and 2)

1. Review management, protection, and implementation goals for the COAs (or group of COAs). These documents may include: watershed plans, site plans, C2000 ecosystem partnership plans, green infrastructure, stream classification, etc. Work with conservation partners to develop COA-specific goals, if needed.

2. Coordinate planning and implementation among local, state, and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations and private landowners for regional priority of COAs and surrounding habitats. (Note: If a COA is in a watershed and protection of the watershed, stream, prairie, forest, etc. outside of the designated COA is needed to maintain the COA, then this will need to be identified in the planning process).

3. Work with COA partners to identify information gaps for species, habitats, or threats to the COA and develop potential strategies to address these issues.
4. Identify funding needs and opportunities for management, conservation easements, or acquisition.
5. Work with conservation partners to develop proposals and identify funding opportunities from federal, state and private sources that would address management needs and information deficiencies.
6. Provide technical support to conservation partners for development of legislation to secure funding for the COAs.
7. Where needed, provide technical support to researchers and resource managers in the form of field assistance, GIS assistance, review of research proposals and reports, and reconnaissance and related activities, with specific focus on species of greatest conservation need and their habitats.
8. Work with tracking systems currently being developed within IDNR, The Nature Conservancy, and others organizations to track progress on these COAs.

(The following task supports Objective 2).

9. Identify procedural guidance for coordination and planning within and among the COAs.

(The following task supports Objective 3).

10. Within the scope of the ILWAP, explore the feasibility of developing local performance measures for assessing the status of the COAs. Where appropriate and feasible, work with the COAs to propose performance measures.

(The following task supports Objective 4).

11. Provide technical information about this project to researchers, managers, administrators, legislators, and non-governmental organizations. Provide information to the IDNR for posting on the IDNR web-site (where appropriate).

Project schedule: (Note: Individual COAs may be grouped for efficiency)

Year 1

Year 1-Months 1-3

- Meet with ILWAP Fish and Wildlife Action Team members (individually and/or collectively, based on meeting schedule) to identify prioritization of COAs for planning.
- Gather background materials on initial priority COAs.

- Develop contact lists for the first set of COAs and initiate coordination efforts.

Year 1-Months 4-6

- Work with IDNR and other partners on tracking system for COA planning.
- Continue to gather background materials on initial priority COAs.
- Meet with local COA key partners (at least 3 COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of on-going COAs.
- Develop a list of potential funding opportunities for COAs.

Year 1-Months 7-9

- Continue to gather background materials on initial priority COAs.
- Meet with local COA key partners (3-4 new COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of already selected COAs.
- Meet with IL WAP Fish and Wildlife Action Team to provide information on project status.
- Provide a draft version of tracking system for review to ILWAP Fish and Wildlife Action Team.
- Initiate draft version of guidance for COA planning.

Year 1-Months 10-12

- Meet with local COA key partners (at least 3 COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of previously selected COAs.
- Begin to gather background materials on Year 2 priority COAs.
- Begin to develop contact lists for Year 2 COAs and initiate coordination efforts.
- Finalize tracking system for COA planning and bring COA planning information up-to-date in the system.
- Provide draft guidance for COA planning to IL WAP Fish and Wildlife Action Team.
- Develop an annual report.

Year 2

Year 2-Months 1-3

- Meet with IL WAP Fish and Wildlife Action Team Committee to provide update on project status.
- Meet with local COA key partners (at least 3 COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of previously selected COAs.
- Provide on-going support to Year 1 COAs and track progress.
- Finalize guidance for COA planning.

Year 2-Months 4-6

- Continue to gather background materials on Year 2 priority COAs.
- Meet with local COA key partners (3-4 new COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of previously selected COAs.

- Provide on-going support to Year 1 COAs and track progress.

Year 2-Months 7-9

- Provide on-going support to Year 1 COAs and track progress.
- Meet with local COA key partners (at least 3 COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of previously selected COAs.
- Meet with IL WAP Fish and Wildlife Action Team to provide update on project status.

Year 2-Months 10-12

- Meet with local COA key partners (at least 3 COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of previously selected COAs.
- Provide on-going support to Year 1 COAs and track progress.
- Begin to gather background materials on Year 3 priority COAs.
- Begin to develop contact lists for Year 3 COAs and initiate coordination efforts.
- Develop an annual report.

Year 3

Year 3-Months 1-3

- Meet with IL WAP Fish and Wildlife Action Team to provide update on project status.
- Meet with local COA key partners (at least 4 COAs) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of previously selected COAs.
- Provide on-going support to Year 1 and Year 2 COAs, and track progress.

Year 3-Months 4-6

- Meet with IL WAP Fish and Wildlife Action Team to provide update on project status (if needed or requested).
- Meet with local COA key partners (remaining COAs that have not been visited) to understand planning needs; attend meetings of previously selected COAs.
- Provide on-going support to Year 1 and Year 2 COAs, and track progress.

Year 3-Months 7-9

- Provide on-going support to COAs, and track progress.
- Compile information for Final Report

Year 3-Months 10-12

- Develop an Annual report.
- Develop Final Project Report

Related grants:

The Illinois Nature Conservancy has committed \$25,000 per year for the 3-year duration of this project. These funds represent part of the required 25% minimum match for planning projects. SIUC and TNC contributions combined constitute a 36% non-federal match for this project.

Personnel: Matt Whiles will serve as project coordinator and will supervise the project director and graduate student.

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Compliance:

This project requests a Categorical Exclusion 1.4B because its purpose is support of planning efforts and therefore will have minimal or no effect on the human environment. Any research, inventory, or information collection activities directly related to the conservation of fish and wildlife resources will involve negligible animal mortality or habitat destruction. Nor will such activities result in the introduction of contaminants or non-indigenous organisms. Most field collection efforts relevant to this project would be part of ongoing efforts (e.g., fish surveys, bird surveys) and only initiated as part of this project when other sampling efforts are not planned. These surveys would be in support of COA planning efforts.