
600.00 Introduction

Biological resources include all living things from bacteria and fungi to plants, insects, and other invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, fish, birds, and mammals, including humans. The focus of this handbook is primarily on fish and wildlife resources, how they relate to the environments in which they occur, and how these resources can be integrated into the conservation planning process.

While the environment that NRCS helps its clients conserve, maintain, and improve supports a productive generator of food and fiber for the benefit of society, it is also habitat for fish and wildlife and other biological resources. There is no inch of our environment that is not habitat for some living organism. This maxim is simple to understand. What is not so simple in a complex world of cultures, societies, human needs, and resource economics is how to integrate

fish, wildlife, and plant habitat considerations into resource conservation actions. Habitat is everywhere we are asked to go to provide technical assistance in natural resource conservation.

Today, more and more of our environment, and thus habitat, is in poor condition or unsuitable to support desirable fish and wildlife resources. Human land uses have tended to simplify, fragment, and degrade habitats and the biological communities that depend on them (fig. 600–1).

This handbook will help conservationists effectively and efficiently integrate the habitat considerations of fish and wildlife and other biological resources into conservation plans for farms, ranches, backyards, city parks, rangelands, streams, rivers, lakes, wetlands, estuaries, and riparian areas. Habitats are components of living landscapes, and their conservation is critical to all living things, including humans. Thus, humans cannot set themselves apart from impacts that result from their conservation decisions.

Figure 600–1 Poor land management leads to simplification and degradation of habitat at the site and within the broader landscape (photo courtesy USDA NRCS)



Habitats are not discrete biological units, nor are farms and ranches. These sites are immersed spatially and temporally into ecosystems and landscapes (fig. 600–2). Thus, conservation of biological resources requires a holistic approach to planning.

Animals, be they terrestrial or aquatic, move. Their food sources move or are affected by elements in the landscape. Habitats influence and are influenced by the surrounding landscape of which they are a part.

Considering landscapes when planning saves the conservationist and the landowner time and money, especially in the long term.

As conservationists provide technical assistance to landowners, they need to play the role of natural resource specialist, facilitator, and planning advisor. The needs and desires of the landowner must be respected, and the needs of the biological community within the property and beyond its borders considered.

Figure 600–2 Working lands provide habitat at the site and connect habitats to broader landscapes (photo courtesy Lynn Betts, USDA NRCS)



Technical assistance is diligently offered at a local scale with the greater landscape in mind. The needs of fish and wildlife are better integrated with the objectives of landowners if the conservationists thinks of working lands as habitats (fig. 600–3). Considering habitat components in an environmental context relevant to humans should be considered when planning at a local scale.

The scope of habitat conservation is large. National Initiatives that focus on biological resources and their habitats include those for Conservation Buffers, Invasive Species, Clean Water and Air, Threatened and Endangered Species, Wetland and Wildlife Habitat Restoration and Conservation, Drought Protection, and Upland Watershed Protection.

The purpose of this handbook is to provide field office personnel a well-organized and comprehensive compilation of key technical information needed to integrate

Figure 600–3 Habitat considerations for fish and wildlife should be linked to environmental conditions of working lands

Consider	Habitat	=	Environment of working land
	Biotic community		Farm, ranch, acreage, backyard
Evaluate	Habitat condition, ecological setting, food source, and cover	➔	Site uses, ecosystem, landscape conditions, matrix type, patch size, and connectivity
Integrate	Fish and wildlife needs	with	Landowner objectives, economics, and capability of the land

fish, wildlife, and plant habitat considerations into resource conservation on working lands. Conservation of the biological resources and stewardship of their habitats is everybody's responsibility. This cannot be carried out without the technical, financial, and regulatory support of our Conservation Partners. For this reason, an entire section (part 601) of this handbook provides information on how to develop partnerships to leverage time and money, and be as effective as possible in delivering fish and wildlife habitat conservation on working lands.

In addition, the handbook provides a framework to which state-specific technical guidance related to habitat considerations can be incorporated. This handbook should be used in conjunction with the National Biology Manual, which has the NRCS policies that guide the management of fish and wildlife resources.

The materials in this handbook are designed and presented in a format that provides the conservationist with a consistent and efficient means to determine how to plan and implement habitat-related conservation on the ground, in the environments provided by the working lands of our customers.

Timely transfer of technical resources and guidance to land managers and conservation planners is now easier with the development of online resources. This handbook is available online and will be updated periodically to reflect new science and technology associated with managing lands with fish and wildlife in mind.

Part 601

Conservation Partnerships



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Cover photos courtesy Dot Paul, USDA NRCS, and the NRCS West Region Biology Consortium, Utah

601.00 Introduction

The mission of NRCS is to work on the Nation's non-Federal lands to conserve, improve, and sustain natural resources. The agency emphasizes voluntary, science-based assistance, partnerships, and cooperative problem solving at the community level. To carry out its mission, the Agency works in partnership with owners and operators of non-Federal lands, providing resource inventories and assessments and conservation planning technical assistance.

One of the four goals identified in the 1996 NRCS publication, *Framework for the Future of Wildlife*, is to use partnerships for delivery and enhancement of quality wildlife planning assistance to NRCS customers.

This document recognized the great potential to use the expertise and resources of numerous fish and wildlife agencies and organizations to enhance the quality of technical assistance that NRCS provides to private landowners and managers. In addition, it recognized the potential for the extensive field network of NRCS conservationists working with farmers and ranchers to advance the goals and objectives of these many fish and wildlife interests.

Development of productive partnerships is the key to maximizing the ability of the NRCS, other fish and wildlife interests, and owners and managers of working lands, to realize fish and wildlife habitat objectives.

NRCS has entered into a wide variety of partnerships at the local, state, and national levels that directly or indirectly enhance the Agency's ability to foster effective conservation of natural resources on non-Federal lands, including management of fish and wildlife resources. Innumerable additional opportunities exist for new fish and wildlife conservation partnerships to be formed.

601.01 Why partnerships?

Partnerships provide an efficient mechanism for an individual or entity to accomplish more than would otherwise be possible if the individual or entity were working alone. Each party brings a unique set of expertise, resources, perspectives, experience, and energy to the partnership, maximizing the effectiveness of achieving common goals.

Successful partnerships are based on mutual understanding, trust, effective communication and collaboration, and shared objectives as shown in figure 601-1. Characteristics of successful partnerships can be explored by comparing attributes of partnerships that have succeeded with those that have failed or have been ineffective (table 601-1).

The primary purposes of NRCS partnerships with other agencies, groups, and individuals follow:

Conservation planning and implementation.

Providing conservation planning assistance to farmers and ranchers is a primary NRCS field activity. Through partnerships with other entities, planning assistance can be increased and improved by bringing the expertise and resources of partner agencies and organizations into the planning process.

Monitoring conservation activities and projects.

Conservation projects are often easily monitored and managed by local partner organizations or individuals. Where partners have a stake in the conservation work accomplished, the quality of followup monitoring to ensure conservation goals are met is typically very high.

Project funding and implementation. Sharing project costs may be the most recognized partnership purpose. In general, greater conservation accomplishments are possible where several funding sources contribute.

Program coordination and delivery. Coordination and delivery of conservation programs presents a significant workload challenge in many areas. Partner agencies and organizations that have a technically

sound field presence can greatly assist with this heavy workload while meeting shared conservation objectives.

Technical assistance. Each partner organization typically possesses a unique area of technical expertise. This expertise can be applied directly or indirectly to NRCS activities through partnerships.

Technology development. As with technical assistance, the technical expertise of various partner entities can be used to develop technical tools and training programs to improve the quality of technical assistance provided to NRCS clients.

Common mechanisms used to forge partnerships.

Several types of instruments are used to forge conservation partnerships between NRCS and farmers and ranchers, other governmental agencies, private organizations, and other entities. It is important to use the proper instrument in developing partnerships with other entities. Table 601-2 provides general guidance on where to use the various types of instruments. Additional guidance should be sought from NRCS contract specialists as appropriate.

Figure 601-1 The foundation for successful partnerships represented by eight primary factors (adapted from Nebraska Cooperative Extension Publication NF96-262)

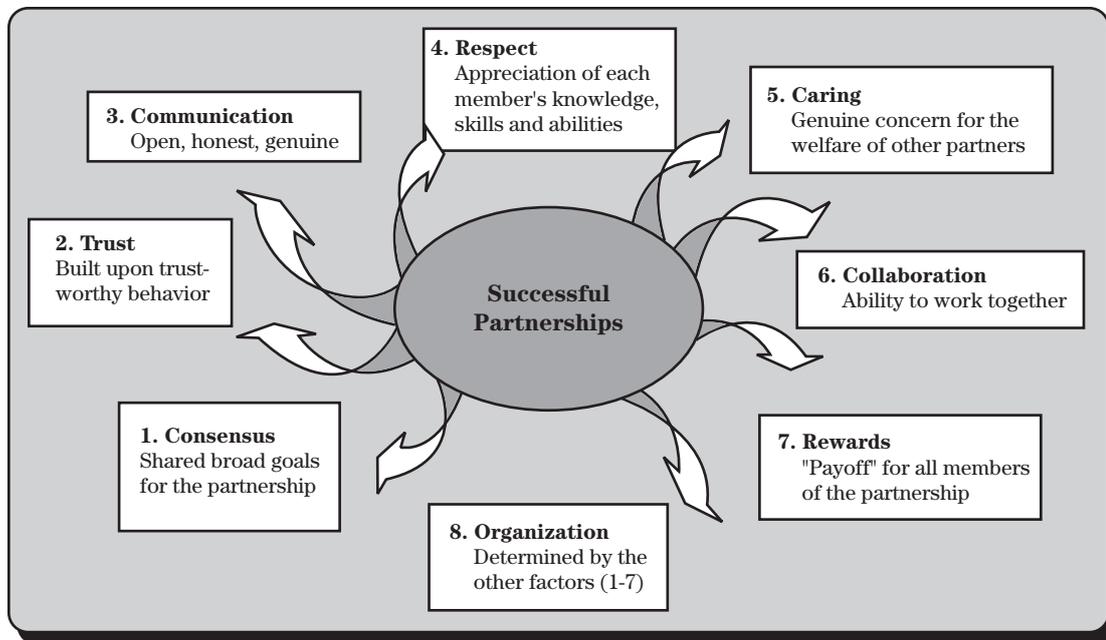


Table 601-1 Comparison of attributes of successful and unsuccessful partnerships

Successful	Unsuccessful
Development of compatible ways of working and flexibility	One partner manipulates or dominates
Good communication	Lack of clear purpose
Collaborative decisionmaking, with a commitment to achieving consensus	Unrealistic goals
Effective organizational management	Differences of philosophy and ways of working
Agreement that a partnership is needed	Lack of communication
Respect and trust among parties	Unequal and unacceptable balance of power and control
Complementary resources	Key interests missing from the partnership
Leadership of respected individual or individuals	Hidden agendas
Commitment of key interests developed through a clear and open process	Financial and time commitments outweigh the potential benefits
Development of a shared vision for the partnership and what might be achieved	A history of conflict among key interests
Adequate time taken to build the partnership	

Table 601-2 Common types of instruments used by NRCS to forge partnerships with other entities to meet fish and wildlife habitat and other conservation objectives

Type of instrument	Use
Memorandum of understanding	Provides a plan for joint sharing in the operation of a project or undertaking. Each party carries out its responsibilities by using its own authorities and resources, including funding. No financial or other resources are directly obligated, transferred, or exchanged between the parties.
Joint agreement	Provides structure for parties to share responsibility for planning and carrying out a project or undertaking. Each party is responsible for doing their own part, and each party contributes funds or other tangible resources to the project. Party contribution may not necessarily be equal so long as they carry out their own role. Joint agreements may be with other Federal agencies, State or local governments, and other entities and individuals.
Contribution agreement	A relationship in which one or more non-Federal party contributes funds or other resources to NRCS so NRCS can accelerate an ongoing activity.
Interagency agreement	Joint or cooperative ventures in which each agency contributes to part of the cost of a project or undertaking, with funding separated and each agency's responsibilities spelled out. Each participating agency must have a program authority for the undertaking.
Grants	Reflect a relationship between NRCS and a State, local government, or other recipient where the purpose is to transfer a thing of value to a recipient to gain public support or stimulation authorized by Federal law and substantial Federal involvement is not anticipated.
Cooperative agreements	Reflects an assistance relationship between NRCS and a State, local government, or other recipient where the purpose is to transfer a thing of value to a recipient to gain public support or stimulation authorized by Federal law and substantial Federal involvement is anticipated.

For additional information on the use of these instruments and other related subjects (e.g., contracts), refer to NRCS General Manual, Title 120 Administrative Services.

601.02 National conservation partnership

A primary mechanism used to deliver technical assistance to non-Federal landowners and operators is the National Conservation Partnership. This partnership is a dynamic relationship among federal, state, and nonprofit groups that have pledged to jointly provide national conservation leadership. The partnership was formalized in January 1993 when three conservation leaders signed a national agreement, pledging to work together for natural resource conservation. A fourth partner was added in 1997. Independently, partnership members have separate responsibilities for sustaining

the environment and conserving the Nation's natural resources. As partners in conservation, they speak with a unified voice and act to realize a common vision: a productive nation in harmony with a quality environment (table 601–3).

The national conservation partnership involves:

- Listening and responding to customers' local resource conservation needs
- Fostering economically viable environmental policies
- Advocating a total natural resources approach to conservation
- Maintaining and advocating grass roots conservation delivery systems

Table 601–3 The National Conservation Partnership

Conservation partnership member	Conservation partnership role
NRCS	As the Federal agency with the lead in assisting the American people to conserve natural resources on private lands, NRCS brings over 60 years of scientific and technical expertise to the partnership.
National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)	NACD is the national organization for 3,000 local conservation districts across the country. Conservation districts are local units of government responsible for the soil and water conservation work within their boundaries. The districts' role is to increase voluntary conservation practices among farmers, ranchers, and other land users.
National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA)	NASCA is a coalition of state conservation agencies across the country. These agencies provide guidance and funding for conservation districts. They operate numerous state environmental, sediment control, and soil erosion prevention programs.
National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils (NARC & DC)	NARC&DC provides a collective voice for more than 300 local Resource Conservation and Development councils nationwide. The NARC&DC serves as an advocate and assists local councils to identify and take action on issues and opportunities to improve the quality of life and environment in their communities. Local RC&D councils are grass-roots community leaders working collectively on behalf of conservation and sustainable development.

601.03 Other partnerships

While the National Conservation Partnership strives to address a broad range of natural resource conservation issues on non-Federal lands, the Agency is engaged in numerous other partnerships to address effectively the full range of issues necessary to carry out its mission. Along with individual owners and operators of non-Federal lands, NRCS' conservation partners also include:

- Conservation districts
- Local communities
- State and Federal agencies
- Native Hawaiians, Alaskans, and Tribes
- Agricultural and environmental groups
- Conservation organizations
- Professional societies
- NRCS Earth Team volunteers
- RC&D councils
- Watershed councils and associations
- Agribusiness
- Schools and universities

(a) Fish and wildlife habitat partnerships

Many partnerships are developed either for the purpose of or have the potential of benefiting fish and wildlife resources on private lands. Partnerships have been developed around funding and delivery of specific programs, such as agreements with State agencies to implement Conservation Reserve Enhancement Programs, as well as around more generic technical assistance objectives.

Opportunities for partnerships identified by fish and wildlife interests outside NRCS (adapted from Framework for the Future of Wildlife) include:

- Sharing employees through details and inter-agency personnel agreements
- Recruiting new partners from diverse sectors, including corporations and industry
- Increasing networking through workshops and demonstration projects

- Developing agreements based on funding and donation of time and materials
- Nurturing results-oriented partnerships through embracing the various motives, resources, and objectives of parties
- Soliciting partner input of information into the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide
- Serving on State Technical Committees to engender field input
- Conducting region-specific technical meetings and retreats
- Inviting partners to assist in training NRCS personnel on fish and wildlife issues

Examples of broad-based fish and wildlife partnerships follow.

North American Waterfowl Management Plan—

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) was launched in 1986 with the signing of an agreement between the United States and Canada. Mexico joined the program in 1988. NAWMP provides a policy framework for analyzing North American waterfowl issues. It sets out a number of objectives relating to waterfowl habitat and populations, with a focus on conserving and expanding wetland areas.

NAWMP is based on the principle of joint ventures that serve as a framework for the activities of its private and regional member agencies. These partners coordinate their efforts in the pursuit of common objectives for waterfowl protection in each region, province, or state. The goals of NAWMP extend beyond waterfowl to include all wetland wildlife resources.

North American Bird Conservation Initiative—

The vision of North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) is to see populations and habitats of North America's birds protected, restored, and enhanced through coordinated efforts at international, national, regional, state, and local levels, guided by sound science and effective management. NABCI-US seeks to accomplish this vision through:

- Broadening bird conservation partnerships
- Working to increase the financial resources available for bird conservation in the United States and wherever these birds may occur throughout their life cycle

- Enhancing the effectiveness of those resources and partnerships by facilitating integrated bird conservation

The efforts of NABCI are intended to integrate the bird conservation work associated with implementation of the NAWMP, the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, the North American Colonial Waterbird Conservation Plan, and Partners in Flight. Productive and creative conservation partnerships are the fuel that drives all of these efforts.

Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation—The mission of Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) is to conserve amphibians, reptiles, and their habitats as integral parts of our ecosystem and culture through proactive and coordinated public/private partnerships. PARC represents the most diverse group of individuals and organizations ever to work together to address problems confronting reptiles and amphibians on a national and global scale.

To maintain this strength, and to enhance it in the future, membership in PARC is open to all persons, businesses, and organizations that share a commitment to herpetofaunal conservation through cooperative means, and who can bring resources to PARC in support of this objective.

North American Bat Conservation Partnership—The North American Bat Conservation Partnership (NABCP) is a program to promote more effective protection of bats and their habitats through the collaboration of bat researchers, private organizations and foundations, corporations, and government agencies in Mexico, Canada, and the United States.

The NABCP seeks to develop, through its partners:

- A continental strategy for bat conservation
- Improved conservation efforts through increased communication
- Efficiently delivered resources and matching funds for bat-related projects in the field

(b) National MOUs

NRCS has entered into Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with fish and wildlife organizations at the national level to formalize the productive working partnership it shares with these entities. These MOUs establish the general framework of cooperation between the parties to foster better conservation and fish and wildlife management on private lands. Copies of national MOUs are filed as exhibits in the National Biology Manual.

The following pages have national and regional fish and wildlife-oriented partner organization names and contact information. As of December 2003, NRCS had national MOUs with entities identified with an asterisk.

National Fish and Wildlife-Oriented Partner Organizations

(* indicates National MOU with NRCS, ** indicates National MOU with NRCS in development)

American Fisheries Society
5410 Grosvenor Lane, Suite 110
Bethesda, MD 20814-2199
(301) 897-8616
www.fisheries.org

Bat Conservation International *
P.O. Box 162603
Austin, TX 78716
(512) 327-9721
www.batcon.org

The Conservation Fund
1800 N. Kent Street, Suite 1120
Arlington, VA 22209-2156
(703) 525-6300
www.conservationfund.org

Ducks Unlimited *
One Waterfowl Way
Memphis, TN 38120
(901) 758-3825
www.ducks.org

**International Association of Fish
and Wildlife Agencies**
444 North Capitol Street, NW, Suite 544
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 624-7890
www.iafwa.org

National Audubon Society **
700 Broadway
New York, NY 10003
(212) 979-3000
www.audubon.org

National Association of Conservation Districts *
509 Capitol Court, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4946
(202) 547-6223
www.nacdnet.org

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation *
1120 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 857-0166
www.nfwf.org

National Wild Turkey Federation *
P.O. Box 530
Edgefield, SC 29824
(803) 637-3106
www.nwtf.org

National Wildlife Federation
8925 Leesburg Pike
Vienna, VA 22184
(800) 332-4949
www.nwf.org

Pheasants Forever *
1783 Buerkle Circle
St. Paul, MN 55110
(651) 773-2000
www.pheasantsforever.org

Quail Unlimited *
31 Quail Run, P.O. Box 610
Edgefield, SC 29824
(803) 637-5731
www.qu.org

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation *
2291 W Broadway, P.O. Box 8249
Missoula, MT 59807
(406) 523-4500
www.rmef.org

Society for Range Management
445 Union Blvd., Suite 230
Lakewood, CO 80228
(303) 986-3309
www.rangelands.org

National Fish and Wildlife-Oriented Partner Organizations

(* indicates National MOU with NRCS, ** indicates National MOU with NRCS in development)

The Nature Conservancy *
4245 North Fairfax Drive, Suite 100
Arlington, VA 22203-1606
(800) 628-6860
www.nature.org

The Wildlife Society *
5410 Grosvenor Lane
Bethesda, MD 20814
(301) 897-9770
www.wildlife.org

Trout Unlimited **
1500 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 310
Arlington, VA 22209-2404
(703) 522-0200
www.tu.org

Wildlife Habitat Council *
8737 Colesville Road, Suite 800
Silver Spring, MD 20910
(301) 588-8994
www.wildlifehc.org

Wildlife Management Institute *
1101 14th Street, NW, Suite 801
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 371-1808
www.wildlifemanagementinstitute.org

Quality Deer Management Association
P.O. Box 227
Watkinsville, GA 30677
(800) 209-3337
www.qdma.com

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Regional Fish and Wildlife-Oriented Partner Organizations

Point Reyes Bird Observatory
4990 Shoreline Highway
Stinson Beach, CA 94970
(415) 868-1221
www.prbo.org

Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory
14500 Lark Bunting Land
Brighton, CO 80603-9311
(303) 659-4348

Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences
81 Stage Road, P.O. Box 1770
Manomet, MA 02345
(508) 224-6521
www.manomet.org

California Waterfowl Association
4630 Northgate Blvd, Suite 150
Sacramento, CA 95834
(916) 645-1406
www.calwaterfowl.org

Alabama Waterfowl Association
1346 County Road #11
Scottsboro, AL 35768
(256) 259-2509
www.alabamawaterfowl.org

Minnesota Waterfowl Association
3750 Annapolis Lane, Suite 135
Plymouth, MN 55447
(763) 553-2977
www.mnwaterfowlassociation.org

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Agriculture

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National Biology Handbook

Subpart A—General Information

Part 602

Training Opportunities