

March 2003

**1. All Key Partners Engaged**

The ecoregional assessment process will actively engage an array of stakeholders and partners (e.g., major institutions/agencies/organizations, key peers, external scientists, and other TNC operating units and programs) in gathering data and developing/reviewing interim and final products. A strategic assessment of key partners and stakeholders will be conducted at the onset of the exercise to identify those that will play an important role in developing and implementing the ecoregional assessment.

**2. Public Availability and Consistent Management of Data**

The best available data and expert knowledge will be used in undertaking an ecoregional assessment. All assessment data will be maintained within designated standard management tools. The Conservation Planning Tool (CPT) is the standard for maintaining tabular data; standard tools will be forthcoming relative to spatial data and assessment reports. Detailed documentation of assumptions, rationale for key decisions/actions, data sources (including metadata), data confidence levels, and data gaps/research needs will be included as a component of the assessment. As initial ecoregional assessment or subsequent refinements are completed, resulting data products (i.e., CPT data set, digital spatial portfolio data set, and electronic version of the ecoregional assessment report) will be sent to the Global Priorities Group for archiving, national and global rollup, and other analyses. Ecoregional assessments and supporting data will be made widely available as applicable. Additional data and mapping standards will be forthcoming from Technology and Information Services and the Global Priorities Group.

**3. Peer Review Throughout the Process**

To bring a measure of consistency and quality to ecoregional assessments, proposed work plans and assessment processes will be reviewed by peers (e.g., practitioners, partners, scientists and the Global Priorities Group) at critical points throughout the exercise. Both adopted process and final products will be assessed against published standards at the completion of the assessment. Areas requiring improvement will be identified, and a proposal for bringing the assessment up to standards will be included in the final report.

**4. Adaptive Process: Priorities and Strategies at Multiple Scales**

The assessment process will be executed within a broader adaptive conservation process, and will immediately lead to identifying priorities and developing strategies at multiple scales. Data will be organized and portrayed by target, conservation area, and threat (for target occurrences and conservation area). These data will be used as a means of engaging partners, identifying priorities, and developing strategic approaches at multiple scales to abate threats and address conservation actions for the entire portfolio.

**5. Ecoregional Assessments within Ecologically Defined Regions**

Ecoregional assessments will be conducted within ecologically-defined regions based on published, scientifically rigorous frameworks. Analysis of terrestrial, freshwater, and marine targets in an area may be best served through the use of separate ecoregional frameworks. However, for consistency in reporting and facilitating the rollup of information, these separate analyses must be synthesized and reported using a standard framework. The framework for reporting results will be based on the following terrestrial and marine classifications: Terrestrial (U.S. [Bailey 1995]; Canada [Ecological Stratification Working Group 1995], elsewhere [World Wildlife Fund 2001]); Marine (U.S. [NOAA 1993]; Latin America/Caribbean [Sealey and Bustmante 1999]; elsewhere [under development]). The Global Priorities Group will maintain the definitive global ecoregion framework

in use by the Conservancy. Ecoregional assessment teams considering modifying an ecoregional boundary will consult with adjacent ecoregions and submit proposed modifications (including rationale and accompanying shapefiles) to the Global Priorities Group for approval.

## **6. Full Array of Terrestrial, Freshwater and Marine Conservation Targets**

Conservation targets will be identified to represent the *full* range of biological diversity within the ecoregion (freshwater, marine and terrestrial), using the coarse-filter/fine-filter approach. The suite of identified targets will include all ecological systems, and selected communities and species not adequately addressed by the coarse filter.

## **7. Conservation Goals Reflecting Quantity and Distribution**

Conservation goals will be set for each conservation target and/or group of targets. Goals will reflect the quantity (number or area) and preferred distribution (stratified across the different physical environments) of qualified occurrences within the ecoregion. Goals will reflect collaboration between adjacent ecoregional planning teams for targets that transcend planning boundaries, such as wide-ranging species, and use the best current scientific information (e.g., population viability analyses, recovery plan goals) available.

## **8. Screening of all Target Occurrences**

All target populations/examples will be screened to determine if they are of sufficient quality to contribute towards conservation goals. Non-screened and poor quality populations/examples may be included in the portfolio, but will not count towards meeting conservation goals. Screening criteria will be explicitly stated and confidence levels set for the data.

## **9. Effective Design of Ecoregion Portfolios**

Ecoregional portfolios will be designed to most effectively meet goals set for conservation targets, using the principles of representation, functionality, irreplaceability, and efficiency. Areas of Biodiversity Significance will be depicted at the appropriate scale judged necessary to fully capture viable populations/examples of conservation targets. Portfolios will reflect the concept of connectivity to allow for movement of species and for meta-population dynamics.

## **10. Threat Assessments to Inform Strategy Development**

An ecoregional portfolio threats assessment will be completed to inform the development of strategies of sufficient scope and scale to conserve the whole portfolio (sequencing action among areas of biodiversity significance and identifying multi-scale strategies for threat abatement).

## **11. Final Reports and Data to Facilitate the Adaptive Conservation Process**

Completed ecoregional assessment reports will comprise (at a minimum) the following: 1) description of the ecoregion, with accompanying map showing stratification units, 2) complete list of conservation targets with established conservation goals, 3) text explaining the planning process, assumptions, key decisions and accompanying rationale relative to each of the standards listed above, 4) map depicting the complete conservation portfolio, with associated tabular data on each conservation area (i.e., conservation targets selected to meet goals and their suitability screening, general land ownership information, and associated threats); 5) assessment of target success in meeting conservation goals; 6) threats assessment of selected areas of biodiversity significance based on targets in those areas, 7) bibliography, and 8) participants with contact information. Supporting tabular and spatial data including the CPT data set and spatial files will be submitted along with the final report.