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Species of Concern Project Guidance

Stakeholder Informed



Introduction

Conservation efforts to protect species of concern and their habitats are of particular importance because these species face high risk of further population losses or extinction. Extinction means a permanent loss of biodiversity and any aesthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value that species provided to natural and human systems. The loss of these species also causes an imbalance in the ecosystems where they lived, particularly if that species was highly specialized and its ecological role cannot be filled by another species.

WHC Conservation Certification defines species of concern as species designated as threatened or facing decline by a credible authority such as a government agency, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), NatureServe, or the Convention on International Trade in Endangered and Threatened Species (CITES). This could include designations such as imperiled species, critically imperiled species, endangered species, threatened species, species of concern, species of greatest conservation need, proposed species for listing, etc.

Many species are protected by laws such as the U.S. Endangered Species Act and CITES, which are designed to protect species of concern by conserving their ecosystems and working with others to minimize impacts that can harm them or their habitats. Landowners have the opportunity to engage in cooperative efforts with relevant agencies to safely conduct activities that will support species of concern conservation.

Building Your Program

Projects are divided into four categories: **Habitat**, **Species Management**, **Education and Awareness** and **Other Options**. You can build a program with more than one of each category but you must associate your program with at least one habitat. This Species of Concern Project Guidance is in the **Other Options** category. You must associate your species of concern project with your habitat; you will also be able to associate it with **Species Management** and **Education and Awareness** projects.



Habitat – Projects that focus on conservation actions to protect, restore and manage different habitats.



Species Management – Projects addressing the conservation needs of targeted wildlife species or groups of species.



Education and Awareness – Projects to improve awareness, understanding and skills relating to conservation and the environment.



Other Options – Specialized projects that add value to your conservation efforts.

Browse the Project Guidance library at wildlifehc.org/pg.

What Do Species of Concern Projects Look Like?

A species of concern project aims to conserve species of concern on corporate lands. Generally, this will be accomplished through protection of a species of concern population and its habitat, or through habitat restoration, management, enhancement, or creation.

The techniques used to accomplish this will vary widely, depending upon which species of concern is being managed for. Techniques include:

- Installation of structures
- Decrease disturbances
- Increase available habitat
- Restore historic habitat

Considerations for Corporate Lands

Projects implemented on corporate-owned lands have different circumstances and challenges to those on public lands, protected lands or wild lands.

Which types of corporate lands are best suited for species of concern projects?

Corporate lands can play a valuable role in species of concern conservation. For example, half of the species listed as endangered or threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act maintain 80 percent or more of their habitat on private lands.

Species of concern projects will be best suited to corporate lands where a species of concern is known to occur. They may also be appropriate for corporate lands within the range of a species of concern where its presence is suspected, or is expected to occur in response to habitat restoration and management or attempts to connect fragmented populations.

Addressing challenges

The corporate context presents certain challenges for implementing species of concern projects. Understanding these concerns and potential ways to overcome them can help your project succeed in the long term.

Concern	Response
Companies may be reluctant to identify and acknowledge the presence of a species of concern on their lands due to concerns that this will trigger additional regulatory requirements.	<p><i>Proactive measures and partnership with government agencies results in greater flexibility for the company in negotiating land use restrictions and allowances should a species become listed as protected by the government agency.</i></p> <p><i>Teams can also develop partnerships to conserve species of concern in off-site locations.</i></p>
Companies may be reluctant to attract species of concern to their lands if the land use may change in future years.	<p><i>Experts agree that even temporary efforts to protect or restore habitat for species of concern have positive impacts on the species and are worth pursuing.</i></p>

Concern	Response
<p>Documenting the presence and status of species of concern on site, as well as the actions being taken to protect them, can be a rigorous and time consuming process for companies to undertake.</p>	<p><i>Although data collection can be work intensive, documenting the species of concern on-site and the steps taken to manage them may put companies in a better position to negotiate land use terms with regulatory agencies. Regular data collection can also help better equip companies to respond to policy and legislative changes. Documenting activities also supports recognition of these efforts by WHC Conservation Certification.</i></p> <p><i>Knowledgeable partners can assist teams with conducting surveys.</i></p>
<p>Some regions of the world lack sufficient laws or regulations for species of concern, or lack the political or cultural will to enforce compliance with those laws.</p>	<p><i>Companies operating in these regions have the opportunity to serve as corporate leaders in species of concern conservation. By engaging in proactive actions to mitigate threats to species of concern and in community education about species of concern, companies can help influence local attitudes and serve as models for other entities in the region.</i></p>

Concern	Response
<p>Species of concern are sometimes targeted by for collection, hunting, or even extermination. Showcasing or otherwise releasing information about these species and their locations may not be preferable.</p>	<p><i>While education about species of concern is a key factor in their conservation, teams should approach these situations on a case-by-case basis to determine how to present information about these species and the actions being implemented on-site.</i></p> <p><i>Teams could seek guidance from knowledgeable partners with experience in engaging communities in these situations.</i></p>

Getting Started with Species of Concern Projects

For a project to qualify toward Conservation Certification, you must be able to answer “yes” to five questions.

1. Is the project locally appropriate?
2. Does it have a stated conservation or education objective?
3. Does it provide value or benefit to the natural community?
4. Have outcomes been measured and is there supporting documentation?
5. Does it exceed any pertinent regulatory requirements?

Conservation and education objectives

It is a requirement of Conservation Certification that species of concern projects be designed to meet one or more conservation objectives. Objectives can guide the direction of the project, help motivate others to participate and provide a basis for evaluation.

The following are suggested objectives for species of concern projects. Your team may choose one or more of these objectives, or develop your own relevant objectives.

- Protecting or monitoring a species of concern
- Preserving, creating, managing, enhancing or restoring habitat for a species of concern
- Increasing habitat connectivity for a species of concern
- Reducing or eliminating a stressor on a species of concern
- Participating in the recovery effort for a species of concern
- Increasing a local population of a species of concern
- Understanding and reducing operational impacts on species, habitats and ecosystems
- Contributing to scientific research addressing one or more questions related to a species of concern

- Contributing to a citizen science project focused on species of concern

The following strategies are required for species of concern projects:

- Perform a baseline inventory that identifies the presence and status of a species of concern on the site
- Identify which authority designates the species as imperiled, and the reasons for listing
- Identify the stressors that are impacting the species of concern and what actions are being taken to alleviate those stressors

The following strategies are recommended to strengthen the conservation impact of your project:

- Enter into a voluntary agreement with a government agency to conserve species of concern on-site
- Communicate the purpose and the outcomes of the species of concern project to the community
- Contribute credible monitoring of a species of concern towards a citizen science project

- Manage a lesser-known species of concern
- Provide opportunities for credible, scientifically rigorous research or monitoring of a species of concern by professionals from a university, government agency, or conservation organization
- Report data gathered on species of concern populations to relevant databases such as IUCN Red List of Threatened Species or Natural Heritage Program
- Utilize peer-to-peer education such as conferences and publications to share knowledge about species of concern conservation
- Include artificial or manufactured structures that meet a conservation or education objective for a species of concern
- Evaluate positive and negative progress of the project since its inception, using information such as baseline data and follow-up monitoring data
- Commit to protection of species of concern and their habitats on a long-term or permanent basis

- Extend the positive impact of the species of concern project beyond site borders by partnering with neighboring landowners or regional initiatives to connect species of concern conservation efforts across multiple locations
- Connect to other species of concern projects along migratory pathways and across international borders
- Be implemented as part of a corporate-wide initiative for species of concern conservation
- Align with regional priorities for species of concern conservation

Partnerships

Knowledgeable partners can ensure the project is approached correctly, and can help evaluate the success of the project and the response of the on-site species of concern population to management efforts. Partnerships can help teams design, create or monitor its species of concern project and provide educational opportunities for employees and community members. Partners may also be able to assist the team with obtaining funding for the project, and identify learning links to other conservation priorities in the region.

Managing for a species of concern that is protected by law will necessitate working with the governing agency to ensure that all necessary permits are obtained and that proper procedures are followed. These agencies, and potentially other partners such as conservation organizations, can be valuable resources in helping teams to design and implement proactive measures to conserve and monitor species of concern above and beyond what is required.

Companies may also be able to enter into voluntary agreements with government agencies to conserve species of concern on corporate lands.

Resources

Your project may benefit from online or printed resources available for your region to support the design, delivery, maintenance and monitoring of species of concern projects.

A search for “endangered” or “threatened” in the Conservation Registry returns over 100 projects implemented through WHC’s certification program. This is a great place to find inspiration for your project and see what others are doing in and around your location.

The following terms, in any combination, may be useful when searching online for items related to this theme:

species of concern	candidate species for listing
endangered species	species proposed for listing
threatened species	IUCN Red List
imperiled species	CITES
species of special concern	NatureServe Explorer
species of greatest conservation need	Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts (PECE)
species at risk	
vulnerable species	

Understanding the Application Process

Documentation

When applying for Conservation Certification, you will provide documentation of the planning, implementation, maintenance and monitoring of your species of concern project. The following is required documentation for species of concern projects; however, you may also submit additional supporting materials.

Baseline data that provides a biological baseline upon which post-implementation monitoring can be based and used to evaluate the progress of the project and determine next steps. At a minimum, a baseline for a species of concern project should seek to identify what species of concern are on-site (presence/absence) and what their stressors are in the context of the property. More detailed baselines could cover aspects such as the size of each species of concern's population, locations and habitat types where each species was found, and the biodiversity impacts of species of concern management.

Map/image of the project area, showing the relative size and approximate location of the project (other relevant information can be shown in the map as well, but is not required).

Photographs or videos that depict the progress of the project implementation and management.

Monitoring logs that show the frequency, type, and results of monitoring of the project, whether in an informal manner or a scientifically rigorous manner. Monitoring for species of concern will be largely dependent upon the species and habitats being managed; however, it will be most effective when a monitoring protocol is devised to answer a strong, clear question about what impact(s) it seeks to evaluate (and why). In some cases, a permit may be required to monitor a species of concern, which may influence what techniques might be used for monitoring.

Maintenance plans that demonstrate appropriate activities that meet the needs of the habitat to fully support the target species and support the conservation and education objectives.

Examples of technical advice utilized in the project, such as consultants, guidebooks, websites, journal articles, etc.

Application questions

As you complete the application online, you will be asked the following questions about your species of concern project. These questions will help us understand and evaluate your project.

	Question	Why this question is important
Objective	What are the project's conservation objectives?	<i>Having a conservation objective is a requirement for certification.</i>
Overview	What species of concern is being targeted through this project?	<i>This provides us with a description of your project to allow us to assess it, including what the target species is, and how and why the target species is designated as a species of concern.</i>
	What is the official designation of the species as a species of concern?	
	What authority designates the species as a species of concern?	
	Briefly summarize the main reasons the species has been listed.	
	Briefly describe activities taking place to address the targeted species.	
Target Species	Has the species been identified at the site?	<i>We want to ensure you are targeting species of concern that are known to occur or have the potential to occur on the site.</i>
	How was the species identified?	
	Why is the species being targeted if it has not been identified at the site?	

	Question	Why this question is important
Management	Briefly describe activities taking place to address the targeted species.	<i>Certain conservation actions, particularly those that address a threat, are very valuable to the target species. Voluntary agreements that address management of the target species are also valuable.</i>
	Are you taking actions on-site to address a specific threat to the species?	
	What actions are being taken on-site to address a specific threat to the species?	
	Have you entered into a voluntary agreement to address this species?	
	Who have you entered into an agreement with?	
	Briefly summarize the voluntary agreement.	
	Upload a copy of the agreement.	
	Does the project include a commitment to long-term or permanent protection?	
	Explain the long-term or permanent protection.	
Monitoring Data	Has monitoring data specific to this project been collected?	<i>Monitoring is essential to understand the impact of the project and to be able to adapt the project develops.</i>
	Upload the monitoring data and any analysis, if applicable.	
	Does the project contribute data towards research or monitoring of the target species?	
	What is the data being contributed to?	

	Question	Why this question is important
Alignment	Does the project align with a corporate strategy or species recovery plan?	<i>Aligning conservation efforts with large-scale conservation plans and other regional conservation initiatives allows a site-based activity to support a landscape-scale objective.</i>
	Is the project part of a corporate level commitment to species of concern?	
	Upload documentation of your corporate commitment to species of concern.	
	Does the project align with an existing recovery plan for the species?	
	List the plan the project aligns with and provide website links, if available.	
	How does your project align with the plan?	
Regulatory Requirements	Are any aspects of the project done in relation to regulatory requirements?	<i>Going beyond compliance is a requirement for certification.</i>
	Explain how the project exceeds requirements.	

Content development for Conservation Certification

To inform the development of Conservation Certification, WHC analyzed the projects it was recognizing through its certification program to assess whether they were aligned with contemporary conservation and education priorities.

Following this assessment and using information from it, WHC convened Advisory Committees around conservation and education themes to develop the content that would guide practitioners and applicants in the future. This content is the basis for the Project Guidance and the online application process.

The following provided feedback on the initial draft of the Species of Concern Project Guidance:

Becky Azevedo, Waste Management
Charlie Butt, BirdLife International
Terry Enk, Freeport-McMoRan, Inc.
Richard Henry, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior
Leslie Honey, NatureServe
Michael Ingraldi, Arizona Game and Fish Department
Glen Lubcke, Pacific Gas & Electric Company
Michele Maxson, Fairmount Santrol
Micheal Rabe, Arizona Game and Fish Department
Martin Sneathy, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
Dave Waldien, Bat Conservation International

More information can be found about this process in the “Our Impact” section of wildlifehc.org under “Commitment to Transparency.”



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The WHC Strategy and Planning team can help you build a successful project by identifying needs, making connections with partners and resources, and providing strategies that meet business and conservation goals. Contact us today.

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Every act of conservation matters.

