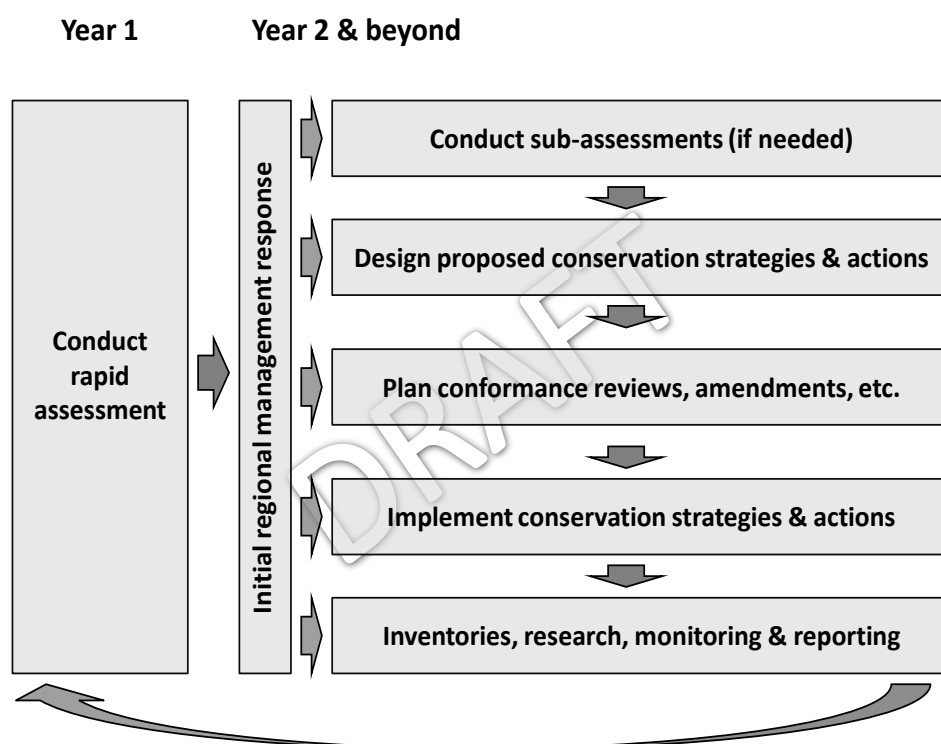


Proposed General Cycle: Rapid Assessments, Strategies, Implementation and Monitoring

Background: BLM land use policies, allocations, and authorizations historically have been driven by local and national considerations. The ecological consequences of such decisions have accumulated at intermediate “landscape” scales along with, and often contributing to, extensive changes caused by invasive species, altered wild land fire cycles, climate change, urban and industrial development, and other agents. We now have the opportunity and tools to systematically identify our remaining landscape-scale values and risks, and to work strategically to achieve ecologically-based conservation and restoration objectives.



Rapid assessments: rapid assessments are collaborative scientist-manager exercises in assembling and synthesizing targeted information about an eco-region. Rapid assessments identify areas of high ecological value that may warrant conservation and restoration; they also identify areas of high exposure to or potential for ecological change. They provide information needed to develop regional conservation and restoration strategies and set the stage for

further landscape-scale collaboration, partnerships, and well-informed decision-making – including decision-making which may result in diminished or foregone ecological values.

Values to be assessed: “areas of high ecological value” are areas which are ecologically intact or readily restorable, and which have (or have high potential to have) one or more of the following characteristics:

- Native fish, wildlife, or plants of conservation concern (e.g., populations, species, or communities identified in state wildlife action plans; species listed under the ESA; species and communities identified through other agency/NGO assessments; etc.)
- Regionally-important, *terrestrial* ecological features, functions and services (e.g., large areas of native vegetation providing important cover, fiber, and forage; habitat strongholds and corridors; upland areas important for water quality or water supply; areas capable of significant carbon sequestration; etc.)
- Regionally-important, *aquatic* ecological features, functions and services (e.g., habitat strongholds and corridors; wetland, riparian, and other aquatic areas important for water quality, water supply, stream bank stability, flood control, and similar purposes)

Change agents to be assessed: conservation and restoration strategies must be based, in part, on an understanding of major change agents and their projected influence on ecological values. Change agents to be addressed include, at a minimum:

- Wild land fire (e.g., fire history, fire regime condition class)
- Invasive Species (e.g., presence/absence, current extent, trend, dominance)
- Urban and industrial development (e.g., existing activities; applications; existing and planned corridors; areas of high resource potential or expressed interest)
- Climate change (e.g., projected changes in precipitation, temperature, evapotranspiration, storm intensity, flood frequency)

A phased approach: rapid assessments will be carried out in three phases.

- *Initiate assessment:* this phase includes establishing management and technical teams; identifying partners and stakeholders; defining preliminary management questions; and preparing statements of work for acquiring and evaluating available information.
- *Identify and evaluate available information:* here we refine management questions with stakeholders and partners; define significant ecological values to be assessed across the ecoregion; define significant change agents affecting ecological values; review existing assessments, data and models; identify information gaps; and develop data standards and a data management plan
- *Conduct assessment:* in the concluding phase we geographically locate (i.e., map) ecological values and change agent attributes; we assess the status, risks, and trends

associated with ecological values; and we categorize ecological values based on exposure to change agents. Note that rapid assessments result in information, not recommendations, strategies or decisions.

Initial regional management response: this is envisioned as a brief (2-3 months) step during which BLM managers work with assessment scientists and others (e.g., agencies and stakeholders) to formulate a *regional* approach or plan of action which is responsive to findings from the rapid assessment. This is an “initial” response; here we will set the stage and establish policy and direction for work that will follow (see the general cycle flow diagram). Decisions made during this step are “interim” in that they will be reconsidered as subsequent steps are completed. This will be a *joint* response; i.e., it will represent the shared thinking of affected BLM managers (and possibly others), and a shared commitment to responsive landscape-scale action. It will be documented and will include the following elements:

Analysis of rapid assessment findings: here we would briefly summarize what we have learned of particular significance regarding regional ecological values, change agents, risks and vulnerabilities. We would identify the areas of high regional ecological values, areas which are ecologically intact, and areas with good potential for restoration. We would identify areas of high potential for adverse ecological change. We would summarize what we have learned about the nature and projected rate of change, and the general implications for natural resources, stakeholders, and management activities.

Interim regional management strategy and guidance: based on the assessment findings and other relevant considerations, we will identify what responsive actions will we take and how will we stage and schedule the work to be done. We will establish our objectives and priorities.

1. We will identify areas within the eco-region which will be managed (or proposed for management) primarily for the conservation or restoration of identified ecological values. We will identify actions that can be taken immediately in support of conservation and restoration objectives in these areas, and actions that are needed over the longer term. We will lay out a plan for accomplishing them.
2. We will determine if interim guidance is needed (and prepare it if it is) to assure proper management of resources (e.g., to maintain existing conservation and restoration opportunities where sufficient protective measures are not currently in place). Interim guidance could establish policy and direction for conservation and restoration of ecological values; climate change adaptation and bio-sequestration; water resources; energy development; and other resource management needs.
3. We will identify areas of high ecological value within the region which will be managed (or proposed for management) primarily for non-ecological values and services (e.g., solar development zones). We will identify considerations and constraints that may be needed.
4. We will identify areas where more information, collaboration, planning, and analysis (and thus more time) are needed before responsive actions can be determined. We will lay out a plan for proceeding in these areas.

5. We will determine if major land use plan amendments or revisions will be needed, and establish a schedule to accomplish them.
6. We will determine if inventories, research, monitoring, or reporting activities should be initiated. We will identify what information will be needed for on-the-ground project planning, and to evaluate success in meeting conservation and restoration objectives.

Organizational and other management considerations: We will identify how we will organize ourselves to accomplish needed work based on eco-regional priorities; how leadership will be provided; how decisions will be made and priorities established as we move forward; who will do what, and where. We will determine what guidance, processes, and tools will be needed; how agency resources (people, dollars, etc.) will be pooled and accounted for; how we will coordinate with other agencies, governments, Tribes, and NGOs; and what our approach to public involvement will look like.

Sub-assessments: through rapid assessments we quickly assemble and synthesize targeted information covering entire eco-regions; we then quickly develop an initial, strategic, eco-regional management response. But some management decisions and actions may require finer-scale information and better understanding of values, change agents, and trade-offs. Thus it may be necessary to conduct “sub-assessments” before detailed management strategies and proposals can be developed and decisions made. Such sub-assessments may be geographically or topically defined. Priorities for sub-assessments generally should be determined by eco-regional values, ecological risks, and the significance of potential resource trade-offs.

Designing proposed conservation strategies and actions: here we flesh out and firm up our proposed strategies and actions for achieving conservation, restoration, and other eco-regional objectives. This will largely be a continuation of work started in developing our initial regional management response, incorporating information obtained from sub-assessments, partners and collaborators, and other sources. This step will be highly collaborative, both within BLM and with external parties. It ultimately will result in a documented *eco-regional* proposal for strategies and actions needed to attain conservation, restoration, and other objectives. This proposal will form the basis for subsequent activity planning, land use plan conformance reviews, and possible plan amendments or revisions.

RMP conformance reviews, amendments, etc.: some proposed conservation and restoration actions may conform to existing RMP guidance and thus can be implemented more-or-less immediately, subject to NEPA, ESA, and other compliance and coordination requirements. Other proposed actions may require consideration through plan amendments, revisions, or even legislation (e.g., proposals to modify the boundaries of NLCS units) before they can be implemented. Priorities for major planning actions should be firmly based on eco-regional considerations; i.e., the highest priority needs for action within the eco-region should be addressed through planning first. It may be worth considering a single planning process to programmatically amend or revise all plans in the eco-region.

Implementing conservation strategies and actions: once needed resource management planning is done and long-term, eco-regional conservation and restoration strategies are in place, we will be positioned to fully integrate the implementation of those strategies and actions with other BLM business. This may entail a wide range of measures, starting with review and revision of existing RMP implementation plans. Again, priorities for action should be firmly based on eco-regional considerations; i.e., those actions most important to conservation and restoration of regionally important values generally should be implemented first.

Inventories, research, monitoring and reporting: good information and good science are essential to achieving conservation and restoration objectives; targeted monitoring and evaluation are essential to knowing whether we are moving in the right direction and when adjustments in our approach may be needed. Inventories, research, monitoring and reporting all contribute to an “information platform” essential to eco-regional collaboration, decision making, and cumulative effects analysis.