



Conservation Planning Process Video Transcript

I'm Rob Baldwin and I'm on the faculty of Clemson University and I am a Conservation Biologist and do quite a bit of Conservation Planning at multiple scales. I am going to suggest that conservation planning follow a pretty rigorous process where science is at the core, but the science is informed by sort of nested group of stakeholders.

There are many conservation plans in existence for any region as large as the Appalachian LCC. During the conservation planning process, those existing plans need to be identified, evaluated, and in some form incorporated because the groups that have come up with these plans are the stakeholders. They will only implement the plans usually that they believe in. If they made them, they believe in them. At least these plans need to be evaluated in the larger spatial context of the LCC and often times they may meet significant conservation planning goals.

When you begin of course you have to identify your problem. What are we trying to do with conservation planning? You have to have a group of people who decides what the specific goals are for this organization or region. In the Appalachian LCC, you want to ask yourselves what specifically we need to do? Do we need to go through a site selection, a reserve selection process? How are we going to handle connectivity? Are we going to do focal species conservation or are we going to do structural conservation?

Once these questions are answered and the project area is defined, then you move into a work plan. At the core you want a group of scientists, modelers, people who are actually doing the scientific work. These can be academics, agency biologists, a combination. They are informed by a group of experts who know a lot about the region, who are engaged in the planning process but are not actually doing it. That in turn is informed by a larger group of stakeholders who review product and ask questions from a practical implementation point of view.

Out of that process comes an understanding of data gaps. What data gaps do we need to fill and how are we going to fill them? Are we going to issue a RFP to have somebody make the data or gather it? Once those data gaps are filled, then the actual conservation planning process can begin in earnest and the modeling work will produce a number of mapped products that will have to be reviewed. That same nested group of experts and stakeholders can review, at various levels, these mapped products.

But that is not the end. Modeling is a continual process, it is iterative and you are never finished. As many people have said, all models are wrong, just some are more wrong than others. After the modeling is complete during the implementation phase, many questions will arise. From those questions, new modeling will have to be done. The other thing to remember is that new conservation planning tools are coming up practically every single month. The science is very fertile right now and people are generating lots of new programs and data sources to answer conservation-planning questions.

Of course the big question of conservation planning is where and when to do conservation planning and that is a very complex questions because it involves species distribution, underlying geophysical variability, climate, and land-use change, and all these factors need to be considered. Therefore it is a very complex problem, it is not simple, and new products are constantly being devised to address this problem. So you have to be vigilant about these new products and revise the conservation planning process according to is there anything new that has arisen that would allow us to answer this question better. Even in the implementation phase, you might go back to your process and produce new results. It has to be very open and dynamic.

Now conservation-planning science by necessity includes many iterative loops where stakeholders can define the parameters of the process. Setting conservation targets and goals, deciding on focal species, even going so far as to provide parameters to models on how different species behave in the landscape relative to resistance and connectivity.

The review of models is just one thing that these groups do. It comes back out of this review process and you release to a wider group of stakeholders. Eventually after more review, you release all this to the general public. It comes back from the general public with some broad general questions that need better interpretative text or better explanation of what all of this means.

Luckily, the field of conservation planning has evolved to the point where there is a ton of literature on the various goals of conservation planning, whether they are climate resilient or habitat connectivity. All these things boil down to the idea that you want a system of interconnected reserves and a matrix of managed lands that is resilient to the many environmental changes that are occurring rapidly right now on the landscape.