

conservation action planning handbook



TNC 2007

Developing strategies, taking actions and measuring success at any scale

This document is a chapter from the Conservation Action Planning Handbook. The complete Handbook is available online at <http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/cap/practices>.

The CAP Handbook is intended as a guidance resource to support the implementation of The Nature Conservancy's Conservation Action Planning (CAP) Process - a powerful instrument for helping practitioners get to effective conservation results. The CAP process is a key analytical method that supports Conservation by Design, the Conservancy's strategic framework for mission success.

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This is a living document that will adapt and change as new information becomes available and as we hear from you about how to improve it. The most recent version will always be available at: <http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/cap/practices>

For more information on Conservation Action Planning visit www.conservationgateway.org/cap.

Introduction to the CAP Handbook

Conservation Action Planning (CAP) is a relatively simple, straightforward and proven approach for planning, implementing and measuring success for conservation projects. The methodology was developed by conservation practitioners working in real places. It has been tested and deployed successfully by hundreds of teams working to conserve species, sites, ecosystems, landscapes, watersheds and seascapes across the globe.¹

CAP - An Adaptive Management Framework

Conservation of the Earth's rich natural diversity is a constantly evolving discipline. Our knowledge of species, natural communities, ecosystems and the processes that sustain them continue to improve. The human activities that threaten or are compatible with them are constantly changing. Conservation Action Planning is designed to recognize this shifting nature of our knowledge and the challenges conservationists face by encouraging practitioners to view the conservation planning process not as a once-a-decade exercise but as a regular, iterative process of “successive approximations.” CAP encourages teams of practitioners to capture their best understanding of the conservation situation, build a set of actions based on that understanding, implement the actions, measure the outcomes of their actions, learn from these outcomes and refine actions over time.

Conservation Action Planning is one of three key analytical methods that support the application of The Nature Conservancy's strategic framework for mission success, called Conservation by Design (The Nature Conservancy 2006). Conservation by Design is a collaborative, science-based approach used to identify the biodiversity that needs to be conserved, to decide where and how to conserve it and to measure our effectiveness. The basic concepts of this conservation approach follow an adaptive management framework of setting goals and priorities, developing strategies, taking action and measuring results. These basic concepts are reflected in each of the three key analytical methods, which in addition to CAP include Major Habitat Assessment and Ecoregional Assessment. In general, Major Habitat and Ecoregional Assessments focus on setting goals and priorities, CAP focuses on developing and implementing strategies to address the priorities and achieve the goals, and all three methods incorporate aspects of measuring results. In addition to serving as the Conservancy's strategic framework for mission success, Conservation by Design also supports the protected area management goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity.²

At its core, CAP is a framework to help practitioners to focus their conservation strategies on clearly defined elements of biodiversity or conservation targets and fully articulated threats to these targets and to measure their success in a manner that will enable them to adapt and learn over time. The CAP process accomplishes this by prompting a conservation team to work through a series of diagnostic steps that culminate in the development of clearly defined objectives and strategic actions. Together these represent a testable hypothesis of conservation success that forms the basis of an “adaptive” approach to conservation management.

An overview of the CAP process is presented in the CAP Basic Practices document (see *Resources and Tools*). This Handbook is a more detailed “toolbox” designed to help you explore and apply this


1. While CAP was conceived and designed for planning for biological values, it has also been successfully adapted for use in planning for archeological, cultural and spiritual values.

http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/cap/resources/capresources_sm/4/2/CAP_Cultural_Summary_JRrev.pdf

2. Information on the Convention on Biological Diversity is available at <http://www.biodiv.org/decisions/default.aspx?m=COP-07&id=7765&lg=0>

process step-by-step. It contains 10 modules, which correspond to the 10 steps in the basic practice of CAP (Table 1). Each module provides a description of the individual step, its importance and expected outputs. In straightforward language, the following chapters detail a basic approach to implementing each step. For each of the steps, there is a discussion of some of the challenges that provide rich opportunities for user innovation. The toolbox also provides case studies that illustrate how different conservation teams have executed each step and a list of additional reading references and related tools. These resources provide more in-depth background on the step and/or ways a user might supplement or enrich both their understanding and application of that step.

The Summary of the Conservation Action Planning Process in Table 1 provides a short-hand list of the types of “products” one might expect from each step in the CAP process. This list can guide you as you navigate the handbook. While the Summary and Handbook present the steps in a linear fashion, the practice of CAP tends to be much less so. Many teams find that there are elements of the process that they will return to again to invest more deeply, with new information, or that they might apply a step in a slightly different sequence. Sometimes a project team will decide to use a limited number of the steps in conjunction with other things that are more familiar to them. This is ok. The practice of CAP is an evolving and open adaptive management framework that we hope will spark much innovation and adaptation.

Recognizing this iterative approach to conservation, the outputs of the CAP process can be captured in a simple, customized Excel tool--the [CAP Workbook](#), which lends itself to easy entry of information and modification. Throughout this document the globe icon  will indicate references to the CAP Workbook. However, you can still use this guidance material even if you don't use the CAP Workbook.

Tips for First Time Users

Experience has shown that project teams can develop a credible Conservation Action Plan if they do the following:

Build on previous experience. CAP works best if you invest some time in modest preparation by compiling existing information and basic maps and reviewing existing plans and reports relevant to your area and biodiversity.

Work as a team. Although one person can develop a CAP plan on his or her own, it is better to assemble a CAP team composed of members with diverse skills and expertise. Conservation experience, knowledge of the area (both biological and sociological) and good strategic thinking skills are all important skills for the team to possess. It is also important to have a clear team leader who will be committed to ensure that the plan is implemented and a knowledgeable process facilitator, who is both competent with the CAP process and an experienced conservation professional. While CAP is relatively simple, like any new tool, it does help if someone shows you how to use it the first time you pick it up. This handbook will provide some guidance, but if you can engage a knowledgeable practitioner to help you through the process the first time, you may find it easier to avoid pitfalls.³

3. The Nature Conservancy trains and supports a network of conservation professionals who are committed to supporting teams by coaching them through the application of Conservation Action Planning to their conservation site. These individuals work for different conservation projects and organizations but share a common commitment to understand the CAP method and support at least one team every year in the successful application of CAP to their project. They are members of the Efromson Coaches Network for Conservation Action Planning. For information on a coach near you visit <http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/cap/contact>

Stick to the basics the first time around. At its essence the CAP process is simple. But like anything else, when you go somewhere the first time it always seems longer and more confusing. Your first time around with CAP may appear that way, too. To overcome this first impression, an experienced user will tell you, first and foremost, “don't expect to do everything completely or 'perfectly' the first time you go through each step in this process.” Remember, this is meant to be an iterative cycle -the idea is to deliberately and yet rapidly go through the steps, develop a credible draft of the outputs, capture your ideas and current knowledge and then step back and look at what you have done. You will revise your work over time as new information becomes available and the project changes and matures: CAP is a series of “successive approximations” built on a set of working hypotheses.

Adjust as necessary. The basic practices described in this document can be applied to almost any conservation project -regardless of scale or type. It is this flexibility that many practitioners really like about CAP, but it is up to you to adjust the method to meet your unique situation. If you are just starting out at a place or you are deeply invested and have been working there a long time or anything in between, the detail and investment in different steps will vary greatly. Your core project team should feel comfortable changing or adapting the basic practices as necessary. If you find success in modifying a step, share your innovations and modifications, as chances are there are other teams that would greatly value learning from your experience. Lessons learned can be shared by posting a case study through the CAP Toolbox using a standardized form.⁴

Learn to live with uncertainty. You will encounter gaps in available information and knowledge at many points along the way. There is no way around this in the business of conservation. The best advice a seasoned practitioner can give you is “don't allow this to stop you in your tracks - state your hypotheses and move forward with the best course of action determined by your best available information.” Just be sure to note what you don't know, record any assumptions you are making, and capture your reasons for going in the direction you chose. Capturing your rich discussions and the assumptions which led to your decisions will provide priceless reference points for your own learning as well as for future team members and practitioners in this and other projects. And by recording the gaps in your knowledge, you will be able to more readily fill in the gaps over time.

Please Share What You Learn

Conservation Action Planning is supported and freely distributed by The Nature Conservancy to any conservation practitioner in the hopes that it will result in more focused and effective conservation action taking place across the globe. Over the last fifteen years, many teams from many different organizations have adopted and are using CAP in one form or another. Their experiences and feedback have helped refine and shape the method. We welcome information on your experiences, your adaptations and your results. Sharing your knowledge will help improve the method and the practice of conservation across the globe. Visit www.conservationgateway.org for ways to share your knowledge.⁵

4. The CAP Case Study Template is available at <http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/cap/practices/capcasestudyform.doc>.

5. WWF and Foundations of Success have developed a useful device known as “Results Chain Modeling” to facilitate the articulation of assumptions that link proposed actions to outcomes.. Guidance available at http://assets.panda.org/downloads/2_1_results_chains_11_01_05.pdf.

Resources and Tools

For comprehensive guidance on Conservation Action Planning:

In Spanish:

Granizo, Tarsicio et al. 2006. Manual de Planificación para la Conservación de Áreas, PCA. Quito: TNC y USAID.

http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/cap/resources/2/2/Manual_PCA_Spanish.pdf

Online:

<http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/cap/resources>

Supplementary reading providing overview and context for CAP:

TNC, 2005. Conservation Action Planning: Developing Strategies, Taking Action, and Measuring Success at Any Scale--Overview of Basic Practices. The Nature Conservancy. Available in English and Spanish.

http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/cap/resources/1/TNC_CAP_Basic_Practices.pdf

http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/cap/resources/1/TNC_CAP_Basic_Practices_Spanish.pdf

Low, G. 2003. Landscape-Scale Conservation: A Practitioners Guide. The Nature Conservancy.

http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/cap/resources/4/2/Landscape_Practitioners_Handbook_July03_PR.pdf

TNC, 2006. Conservation by Design, A Strategic Framework for Mission Success. The Nature Conservancy.

http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/files/cbd_brochure.pdf

Summary of the Conservation Action Planning Process

A. Defining Your Project

1. Identify People Involved in Your Project

- Selection of core project team members and assignment of roles
- Identification of other planning team members and advisors as needed
- Identification of a process leader

2. Define Project Scope & Focal Conservation Targets (5S = Systems)

- A brief text description and basic map of your project area or scope
- A statement of the overall vision of your project
- Selection of no more than 8 focal conservation targets and explanation of why they were chosen

B. Developing Your Conservation Strategies and Measures

3. Assess Viability of Focal Conservation Targets (5S = Systems)

- Selection of at least one key ecological attribute and measurable indicator for each focal target
- Your assumption as to what constitutes an acceptable range of variation for each attribute
- Determination of current and desired status of each attribute
- Brief documentation of viability assessments and any potential research needs

4. Identify Critical Threats (5S = Stresses & Sources)

- Identification and rating of stresses affecting each focal target
- Identification and rating of sources of stress for each focal target
- Determination of critical threats

5. Develop Conservation Strategies (5S = Strategies)

- A situation analysis that includes indirect threats/opportunities and associated stakeholders behind all critical threats and degraded attributes
- A "picture" - either in narrative form or a simple diagram - of your hypothesized linkages between indirect threats and opportunities, critical threats, and focal targets
- At a minimum, good objectives for all critical threats and degraded key ecological attributes that your project is taking action to address and if useful, for other factors related to project success
- One or more strategic actions for each conservation objective

6. Establish Measures (5S = Success)

- A list of indicators and methods to track the effectiveness of each conservation action
- A list of indicators and methods to assess status of selected targets and threats you are not currently working on

C. Implementing Your Conservation Strategies and Measures

7. Develop Work Plans

- Lists of major action steps and monitoring tasks
- Assignments of steps and tasks to specific individual(s) and rough timeline
- Brief summary of project capacity and a rough project budget
- If necessary, objectives and strategic actions for obtaining sufficient project resources

8. Implement

- Action.
- Monitoring.

D. Using Your Results to Adapt and Improve

9. Analyze, Reflect & Adapt

- Appropriate and scheduled analyses of your data
- Updated viability and threat assessments
- Modifications to objectives, strategic actions, and work plans, as warranted
- Regular updates of project documents

10. Learn & Share

- Identification of key audiences and appropriate communication products for each