

MAKING IT HAPPEN



"An old hiking adage warns that 'the map is not the territory.' True enough. You need to keep your eyes open and watch for unexpected outcroppings and changes in terrain. But without a map, you can get so lost in the territory so that it's hard enough to even figure out where you started much less find the way to your outcome."

— MICHAEL QUINN PATTON, OUTCOME MAPPING: BUILDING LEARNING AND
REFLECTION INTO DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES, 2001

he WWF approach to ecoregion conservation adheres to a common set of principles that define the boundaries of ecoregion action programmes, or EAPs. To lose sight of any of these, and the elements to which they give shape, is to risk straying off the map. An effective EAP is built on the following fundamentals:

Biodiversity

The ultimate goal of ecoregion conservation is to conserve the fullest possible range of biodiversity—genes, species, communities, and ecological phenomena—within the entire ecoregion. Biological criteria are the first and most critical layer of information for defining this goal, and they are the ultimate measures of conservation success. Experience shows that setting the vision and targets in biodiversity terms is a powerful force for creating cross-sector collaborations, focusing attention over the long term, and defining targets and milestones as measures of progress.

An Interdisciplinary Approach

Ecoregional scales of planning and action require ecoregion action programmes to be sophisticated in dealing with the interaction of social, economic, and ecological factors. EAPs must call on many disciplines and should look to make strategic linkages to national biodiversity action plans and poverty reduction strategies, international policies and protocols, industry trends, and consumer opportunities when designing and implementing their conservation programmes. The effectiveness of EAP planning and implementation efforts can be enhanced by bringing together teams from different disciplines (such as technical experts, advisors, and planners) to work through how the vision and targets can best be achieved.

Stakeholder Engagement

Lasting solutions for ecoregion conservation rely on participation by key stakeholders—from local people who live off the land, to communities that value the benefits of biodiversity, to corporations, governments, and donor institutions whose attitudes and behaviours will shape the development landscape. Although the processes for engagement and participation will vary

from one ecoregion to the next, ecoregion conservation is a multi-stakeholder, collaborative endeavour that requires discussion and consultation with stakeholders and partners throughout the process.

During the reconnaissance and vision phases, EAP teams should identify and include those individuals and organizations that have an interest or expertise in the biodiversity of the ecoregion or areas within it. As priorities for action are clarified (centred on opportunities and threats) and as broad strategies are developed, stakeholders with intersecting interests, complementary resources, and appropriate expertise will also need to be identified or will identify themselves.

When dealing with a range of stakeholders, partners, or coalition of organizations, it can help to develop a short statement of intent (no more than one paragraph in length) on which everyone agrees. This statement can help serve as a litmus test or filter for any new organization that wishes to join the ecoregion conservation process.

Sharing Responsibilities and Opportunities

No organization can implement an ecoregion conservation initiative alone. Conservation at the ecoregional scale requires coordinated action by many groups and actors. An organization like WWF can be a catalyst and often a leader, but coalitions and partnerships of varying focus and length—with local communities, NGOs, universities, governments, corporations, and others—will be essential to each phase of the design and implementation of ecoregion conservation strategies and actions. Partnerships also contribute to long-term sustainability through their ability to leverage a diverse combination of resources, action, and expertise.

Early on in the reconnaissance and biodiversity vision process, two or three immediate conservation priorities may emerge. One or two organizations might be prepared to act on those priorities, giving the EAP and its partners something positive to rally around. Early actions can also help generate new ideas and commitments as intensive action at one priority site feeds back to inform the broader ecoregion conservation process.

Creating a biodiversity vision and developing a coalition of organizations to translate that vision into action go hand-in-hand and can mutually energize each other. For organizations that have always acted in isolation, the vision and coalition-building processes can provide an important, and potentially first, encounter with like-minded groups. The views and concerns of those organizations should be reflected in the ecoregion process. Including them will give credibility and recognition to those organizations' hard work and potentially inspire the emergence of new leadership for conservation efforts across the ecoregion.

Long-Term Commitment

Working with stakeholders and partners to effect the social, economic, and ecological changes required to achieve the biodiversity vision for an ecoregion is a long-term endeavour, with new challenges constantly arising. Ecoregion conservation requires a long-term commitment because it seeks holistic and lasting solutions to biodiversity conservation. Securing support—financial, technical, human, and political—over a 10-year or 20-year time frame is important to prevent future instability in efforts across the ecoregion.

An Adaptive Learning Model

Working at the ecoregional level requires a continuous reshaping of actions and strategies based on increasing knowledge and understanding of the ecoregion as well as changing needs, influences, and opportunities. Research, experimentation, monitoring, and adaptive management must be integral parts of an ecoregion programme so participants can build knowledge, learn from experiences, test hypotheses and assumptions, and revise plans and programmes as results are achieved.

Flexibility and Judgement

Ecoregion programmes must be flexible enough to ensure that conservation planning and action are tailored to each ecoregion's particular set of issues as well as unique socioeconomic and ecological conditions. EAPs must also be responsive to changing needs and opportunities and have the confidence to act on the basis of information that will often be incomplete and uncertain. Informed judgements (in partnerships with adaptive management) are invaluable in charting the ultimate course for each ecoregion.

Facing the Challenges of Ecoregion Conservation

evelopment of ecoregion conservation strategies and implementation of an action plan will require conservation organizations to act in new and expanded ways. Large-scale thinking brings new opportunities along with new challenges. But ecoregion teams can anticipate and prepare to meet those challenges, based on lessons learned from other ecoregion conservation initiatives. In many instances, addressing the challenges will require new capacities and operating procedures. The following list articulates some of the most common challenges that accompany ecoregion conservation.

Mobilizing Transnational and Transcontinental Action

Implementing conservation actions that address the causes of biodiversity loss at the ecoregion scale will, more than ever, require that EAPs access global networks as well as substantial policy, communications, and fund-raising capabilities to effect change. This places a premium on close coordination and partnerships.

Meshing Ecoregions with Political and Administrative Units

Because ecoregions typically cross multiple political boundaries (state or provincial as well as national), special attention needs to be given to translating an ecoregion-wide strategy into action. This requires that an EAP work flexibly, balancing complex, multi-institutional, multi-scale planning processes with the development of ecoregion scale strategies and targets. An EAP needs to be clear about when it should push for ecoregion-level activities and when it should work within existing political and administrative boundaries and processes. While an EAP will use biological boundaries for visioning and target setting, implementation is likely to be more strongly influenced by political and administrative boundaries and mandates.

Building a Team

Implementing ecoregion action programmes will depend on strong teamwork and communication. Teamwork is essential in bringing together staff from the many disciplines that are needed for ecoregion conservation, and from programmes and offices (in the ecoregion and elsewhere) that will have roles to play in the EAP. Assessing the time and expertise that needs to be devoted to ecoregion conservation can help an EAP team identify and secure the right balance of expertise. Team members need to communicate effectively, learn as they gain experience (both positive and negative), and work together to address problems and opportunities that emerge during implementation.

It is important to recognize that the duties and responsibilities of EAP teams (and their coordinators) may change as the EAP moves through target setting, strategic planning, and implementation. This need to evolve is linked not only to the ecoregion conservation process, but also to partners and stakeholders as they define their own action programmes.

Integrating Site-Specific Projects

An action plan will typically include projects that are delivered at different scales. Over time, project locations should be chosen and activities designed on the basis of the priorities set out in the ecoregion vision and targets. In many ecoregions, there will already be a range of projects underway (e.g., field, policy, and education). Practitioners need to give special attention to ensuring a strategic and thoughtful transition to integrate those existing projects into a broader ecoregion strategy.

Enlisting Others

Ecoregion conservation requires resources and skills that are beyond the capacity of any one organization. EAPs need to be aggressive in enlisting other organizations (and their programmes) to contribute and work towards the goals and targets of an ecoregion. Efforts should begin early in the planning stages of an EAP to obtain the expertise of key institutions and stakeholders, and the inclusion of a range of experts must continue right through to implementation. The key is to identify and "recruit" to the ecoregion conservation process (through technical, advisory, or steering-group roles) influential and intelligent people who have the confidence and ability to push the boundaries of conservation planning and action. Recruiting people with the skills and capacity to implement activities requires good relationships with local institutions; government agencies; corporations whose agendas and activities affect the ecoregion; nongovernmental organizations; international policy and financial institutions; and potential donors.

Integrating Research, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

A commitment to adaptive management must be part of the development and implementation of ecoregion conservation. Research, monitoring, and evaluation of conservation actions and their impact are all part of an active learning process. Organizations contributing to an ecoregion conservation plan must continuously reshape their actions and strategies based on their increasing knowledge and understanding of the situation, past successes and failures, and changing needs and opportunities.

Making a Commitment to Leadership

"Someone observed that project management is similar to wrestling with an octopus: Its arms outnumber your hands and legs, so three or four of its legs are out of control at any one time, and every time you grab one of those you have to let go of the one you've got."

> — LAWRENCE LINDEN, GOLDMAN SACHS AND COMPANY, ECOREGION CONSERVATION: STORIES FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

Ithough the ecoregion conservation process will engage many partners, the ultimate responsibility for implementation is likely to fall on the shoulders of one or two organizations. The scope and ambition of ecoregion conservation requires a team approach—one that supports and invigorates the evolution of ecoregion conservation throughout its early life. Because of its size, experience, and mission, a large organization (such as WWF) will often emerge as the primary leader or facilitator of an EAP team, but as time goes by the balance of influence and responsibility for action is likely to shift to other organizations.

From the crafting of an initial vision to implementation of an action plan, an EAP team needs to include people who have broad biodiversity interests and capabilities. The profile of the EAP team will vary, depending on the profile of the ecoregion and the phase of development that needs to be managed. However, planners should anticipate that the team will need access to high-quality programme coordination and project design experience, good science, GIS expertise, strategic planning, decision-making, policy, fund-raising, communications, and monitoring and evaluation capacity. In addition, a range of technical experts and advisors can be brought in to support the team across themes as diverse as economics, education, and institutional development.

Strong, focused leadership is a key characteristic of any successful EAP. Whether the ecoregion exists in a single country or straddles international borders, the clarity and focus of EAP leadership and management is likely to determine the level of conservation achievement and sustainability.

The experience of EAPs around the world has provided some powerful lessons on leadership, teamwork, responsibility, and accountability. In many instances the situations behind those lessons have shaped (both positively and negatively) the scope and scale of EAP efforts and achievements.

From a "project management" point of view, a successful EAP will have:

 Clearly defined leadership roles and responsibilities, with direct reporting lines to senior decision makers (internal and, where appropriate, external)

⁵ For more on project management at a large scale, see: *Managing Large-Scale Programs: An Easy-to-Use Field Guide to Successful Programs!* by Ivan Barkhorn and Larry Linden. 2003. WWF-US: Washington, DC.

- An EAP leader with clear authority for the ecoregion conservation process (whatever form or title that role takes)
- A multidisciplinary team supporting the process
- Rigorous systems of monitoring, evaluation, and auditing to ensure the effective delivery of the conservation strategies and plans and the accountability of leadership.

Why Is Leadership Important to the Success of an EAP?

One of the most consistent and powerful lessons that has emerged from ecoregion conservation is the importance and value of strong leadership and teamwork. Without these, EAPs have suffered from inertia, become dysfunctional, or failed to realize tangible opportunities for conservation action and leveraging. With them, ecoregions have achieved much more than anyone expected in terms of programme development, conservation impact, and collaboration.

Leadership lessons from around the world demonstrate that effective ecoregion leaders are:

- Focused on the ecoregion (i.e., do not have split responsibilities or accountabilities)
- Respected by all participating organizations, programmes, and individuals
- Able to give direction and build relationships
- Able to grasp key elements of the big picture and identify priorities
- Innovative
- Excellent communicators
- Confident that ambitious conservation goals and targets can be reached
- Able to share power but still ensure that objectives are achieved

How Can an EAP Achieve These Standards of Leadership?

To provide EAP leaders and teams (including management and steering committees) with the authority and opportunity to move the ecoregion process along, it is necessary to provide clear terms of reference (TOR) for all EAP roles and positions.⁶

It is also important to recognize that, in addition to being shaped by the ERC process, the role of an EAP leader will evolve alongside the wider conservation and development context—whether that be large-scale programmes that have been established outside the ecoregion conservation framework, national poverty alleviation or development strategies, or a changing political and economic climate. These realities require that the role and function of an EAP leader be open to change and amendment as the ERC process evolves, and particularly as it establishes relationships with external processes and initiatives.

For the development phase of an EAP's life, a number of leadership models have been tested. Shaped by circumstance, opportunity, and resources, those models have included:

1. The appointment or contracting of a leader (individual or organization) who, first and foremost, is an intelligence gatherer, planner, and facilitator. These leaders are charged with

⁶ See Appendix E (page 106) for sample TORs for ecoregion programme leaders.

developing the relationships needed to support the EAP, gathering information, and adapting and refining the ecoregion conservation process as local conditions require. WWF offices that have taken this approach tend to operate in crowded or politically complex conservation landscapes. In those situations, the introduction and pursuit of ecoregion conservation needs to be politically aligned with key institutions and processes already well established across the ecoregion landscape.

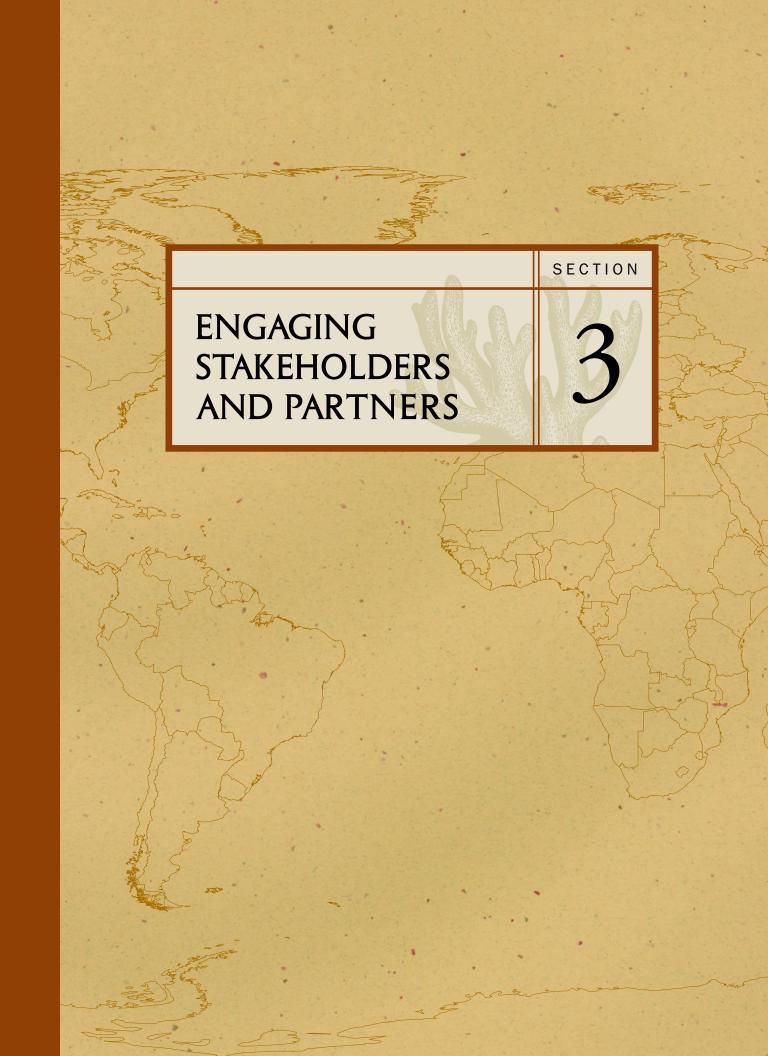
- **2.** The appointment of a leader who is employed specifically to deliver a biodiversity vision and plan. The position is articulated in a detailed TOR document, the objectives of which are set out in an EAP workplan. The document articulates the objectives and scope of the ecoregion work and its relationship (as a delivery mechanism or supporting player) to other conservation programmes. It is the leader's responsibility to deliver those objectives within the designated time frame. This approach perhaps best suits EAPs where a framework for EAP implementation (including institutional arrangements or funding options) already exists and the opportunity to introduce elements of ecoregion conservation into that framework has been identified or negotiated.
- **3.** The employment of an EAP leader who is given responsibility for defining and shaping the entire EAP process (from reconnaissance through to action). The job description for this form of EAP leadership is often developed by host or donor agencies (such as the local WWF office or other partnering NGOs) that want to establish an EAP leadership role in a country or across multiple countries where large-scale conservation initiatives haven't existed before. The evolving nature of ecoregion conservation may pose a challenge for individuals who fill these sorts of leadership positions. In a number of instances where individuals have been installed to lead the EAP process from day one, the evolution of the EAP (and the accompanying relationships, issues, and challenges) has required the creation of complementary roles. In some cases, those roles include the establishment of new, independent entities that can assume responsibility for stakeholder dialogue and the negotiation of potentially divisive issues, leaving the EAP leader free to pursue development of the biodiversity vision followed by advocacy and lobbying.
- **4.** Irrespective of the leadership model pursued, the leader or leaders of the EAP need to be the primary force behind making conservation action happen at the ecoregional scale. At every phase of the process, it is important that the role of the EAP leadership is reviewed to ensure that the EAP has been designed and is operating in a manner most likely to achieve the processes' ambitious goals and targets. In addition, it is critical that, as EAPs move into implementation, the role and responsibility of EAP leadership is considered alongside other positions that the lead organization or partner organizations already have in place and that are influential in the ecoregion. This coordination is important to ensure that EAP leadership rests with those best placed to allow the ecoregion conservation targets and strategies to gain maximum leverage with institutional partners, key stakeholders, and influential processes effecting the ecoregion.

Management and Coordination

In addition to the technical elements of ecoregion conservation, the development of an EAP requires that significant attention be given to organizational details, such as management and coordination. To ensure that an EAP (either single-country or multi-country) runs smoothly and efficiently, it is important to:

 Secure the agreement of host and donor offices (such as WWF and other partners) on EAP objectives, management, and operational responsibilities

	Provide a clear mandate for the individuals or offices taking the lead in EAP development
•	Produce and secure early commitment of host and donor offices to an EAP management plan that includes timelines, standards, and an articulation of roles and responsibilities
•	Agree (through a memorandum of understanding or contract) on the parameters for inter-institutional EAP development and implementation.
22	A Guide for Practitioners



ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS



Laying the Groundwork

"A key stakeholder is anyone who is crucial to project success, may be affected by the plan, and wants to participate."

- AMANDA YOUNGE, PLANNING CONSULTANT, 2000

ince the first meetings about ecoregion conservation, stakeholder engagement has been identified as one of the core strategies. It is important to pursue a stakeholder engagement strategy from the first days of an EAP through to the implementation of activities because ambitious biodiversity-vision and ecoregion-conservation targets will never be fully developed or achieved without the understanding, contribution, and support of key individuals and organizations.

The nature of stakeholder engagement will vary from ecoregion to ecoregion. It will depend on the political and social governance structures in place across the ecoregion; the history of the conservation community's engagement with key stakeholders outside the conservation realm; and the influence of government and the private sector on local residents' attitudes and behaviours. Regardless of the relations between stakeholders, an EAP should create a strategy to initiate dialogue, share information, and secure key stakeholder participation in the development and implementation of the biodiversity vision and conservation actions.

The implementation of ecoregion conservation initiatives over recent years has taught WWF and its partners a great deal about the importance of stakeholder engagement in the ecoregion context. Specifically, WWF has learned that having a strategy to guide interaction with key individuals and organizations—whether within national boundaries, across boundaries, or across sectors—is necessary if conservation practitioners are going to effectively motivate participation and collaboration in ecoregion conservation. That strategy needs to focus on analysing: Who knows what? Who controls what? Who can help to change negative patterns of behaviour? Who can help realize opportunities? The following section includes some of the key lessons that EAPs, partner organizations, and external agencies have learned with respect to stakeholder strategies and collaboration.

Reaching Out

Whether working in an ecoregion where conservation is already on the political agenda (e.g., through national biodiversity strategies) or in one where it doesn't rate a mention, it will be necessary to initiate stakeholder dialogue around the concept of ecoregion conservation and a biodiversity vision.⁷ In some instances, a communications outreach strategy might be needed

⁷ For further information on engaging stakeholders in conservation, see: *Stakeholder Collaboration: Building Bridges for Conservation* by WWF Ecoregional Conservation Strategies Unit. 2000. WWF-US: Washington, DC.

to put the EAP into a context to which key stakeholders can more immediately relate, and therefore engage in discussion around. In other ecoregions, the production and dissemination of communications materials around the ecoregion conservation process itself may be needed. The scope and focus of any communications outreach activities will also be shaped by the profile and scale of conservation activity in the ecoregion. Where WWF has been active—developing and maintaining relationships with government, institutions, local communities, and other NGOs—ecoregion conservation can strengthen relationships and add value to sustainable development efforts. Where existing relationships are neither strong enough nor broad enough to immediately integrate the full scope of ecoregion conservation, initial information sharing and gradual coalition building around the ecoregion conservation principles and objectives will most likely be needed.

Setting the Scene

The hosting or facilitation of EAP orientation meetings and stakeholder dialogue can do much to help set the scene for ecoregion conservation. ⁸ Engaging key stakeholders and experts in planning and biodiversity vision workshop discussions will help create a shared set of values and common vocabulary. Without that common language, it will be difficult for stakeholders to fully engage in or support the evolving EAP.

It is critical that influential stakeholders and expert representatives from all of the affected countries within multi-country ecoregions attend orientation and planning meetings. Given that these early discussions are likely, among other things, to define the ecoregion boundaries, endorse or amend the vision process, and identify (and initiate action around) immediate opportunities or threats, it is important to have key voices at the table from the outset.

Assessing Capacity

Stakeholder consultations can help identify institutional and individual capacity needs and opportunities for the ecoregion conservation process (from the visioning process to the development of action plans). EAPs will need effective and legitimate institutions to buy in to, and then support implementation of, the ecoregion conservation process. For this to happen, an EAP needs to understand the institutional environment, including the capacity and willingness of partner institutions to deliver, implement, and enforce conservation targets and actions.

An EAP should work to identify the opportunities that exist for improving the capacity of institutions and individuals key to ecoregion conservation. EAPs also need to assess the capacity that exists to build partnerships, secure financing for, and implement ecoregion conservation (including the realignment of existing budgets).

Institutional profiles or organizational assessments can help identify the capacity-building needs (in terms of competence, governance, and performance) of those groups and organizations that an EAP will need to work with to realize ambitious targets. In situations where resource management responsibilities have been devolved down to various provincial and local levels, it will probably be necessary to assess capacities across a range of institutions.

⁸ For more on conducting an orientation meeting, see *A Workbook for Conducting Biological Assessments and Developing Biodiversity Visions for Ecoregion-Based Conservation. Part I: Terrestrial Ecoregions* by Eric Dinerstein et al. 2000. WWF: Washington, DC.

Organizational Assessments

An organizational assessment is an evaluation of an organization's capacity, covering areas such as the organization's external relations and image; its performance in achieving its objectives; and its internal functioning and resources, role, and strategy. The assessment process also helps identify an organization's strengths, weaknesses, and development needs. 9

Assessment is an essential tool in building an organization's capacity to more effectively achieve ambitious goals. The main use of the assessment is as a diagnosis of the capacity of an organization. Information from this diagnosis can help identify key organizational needs and, hence, inform the planning and development of appropriate capacity-building activities.

Finding Incentives for Collaboration

Wherever possible, EAPs should identify incentives for collaboration among key stakeholder groups in the ecoregion. Shared incentives might include the economic benefits that the different groups derive via tourism from a healthy environment (e.g., pristine coral reefs or stable populations of mountain gorillas), or the shared dependence (for lifestyle and livelihood purposes) of stakeholders on a single resource, such as a watershed. Or it may be as simple as the opportunity that collaboration offers government to do its job as effectively and efficiently as possible (e.g., by using the biodiversity vision to enhance presentation and protection of areas of national importance). Stakeholders are much more likely to respond positively to ecoregion conservation efforts if they can see that working with the EAP will bring them benefits or rewards. Initially these rewards will probably not be conceived at the ecoregion scale—indeed, they may be single community, country, or sector focused. But a strategy that can deliver those rewards within a wider ecoregion context is one that holds the potential to expand stakeholder engagement in conservation over the long-term.

After identifying key stakeholders and any incentives that may exist for collaboration, it is useful to think about the kind of mechanism or entity that is needed to facilitate a dialogue and deliberation around ecoregion conservation (process and objectives). In some ecoregions, a consortium of agencies has joined forces to initiate and develop an ecoregion conservation approach to natural resource protection and management.

Other ecoregion action programmes have established a more formal coalition in support of the ecoregion process. The Northern Plains Conservation Network is an alliance of more than 20 conservation organizations working in the Northern High Plains ecoregion of the United States. The groups share a common goal of restoring the biodiversity and ecological health of the North American prairie. In Chile, the Coalition para la Conservacion de la Corillera Costa is made up of nine organizations (including WWF, local NGOs, and indigenous groups) committed to the conservation of the coastal region of the Valdivia ecoregion. (For more on this example, see the "The Power of a Coalition" on page 31.)

⁹ WWF has developed an organizational assessment process and tool. For more information, contact WWF International at Avenue du Mont Blanc, 1196 Gland, Switzerland. www.panda.org.

In other ecoregions, existing government initiatives, inter-institutional processes, or national laws have been identified as providing the most appropriate framework for ecoregion conservation and associated stakeholder engagement. These external processes can include regional initiatives (led by government or multilateral institutions), commissions, or development entities (such as Australia's Murray-Darling Basin Commission, which manages a regional planning framework across the Murray-Darling Basin ecoregion). Whatever option is pursued, it is important that the mechanism for stakeholder engagement and collaboration contributes to the EAP agenda while also serving its members' interests.

Clarifying Terms of Engagement

EAPs must make sure that stakeholders and potential partners understand from the outset that both the biodiversity vision and ecoregion conservation targets are based on a scientifically valid set of biological criteria. By sharing a common understanding of and appreciation for the visioning process and its products (i.e., vision, goals, and priorities), practitioners, partners, and interested parties will be less likely to try to add their own favourite priorities or projects to the process. All stakeholders (including lead agencies) should understand that the issues or projects in which they are interested can be considered as the ecoregion conservation strategies are developed, but they will not define the vision or biodiversity priorities.

Building Credibility

EAPs should work to secure the participation of recognized experts in the ecoregion planning process. Audiences reading ecoregion documents will often look at the list of contributors and participants (to the vision, targets, or plans) and assess the credibility and mandate of the messages and recommendations based on the diversity, expertise, and influence of the group of people involved in developing those messages.

Pursuing an Outreach Strategy

Building trust and securing people's interest in the ecoregion conservation process helps establish a solid foundation for the work of an EAP. Developing partnerships and communicating intentions to potential partners and key stakeholders must happen from the outset. EAPs should commit time and resources to the development and implementation of an outreach strategy involving influential experts, key stakeholders, government agencies, and communities. Throughout the biodiversity assessment, vision, and action phases, it is important to keep people informed about what the EAP is, what its current activities are, how EAP staff are using information (which has often been provided by the stakeholders), and what is being planned. In a number of ecoregions, interested stakeholders and practitioner groups have received regular newsletters to inform them of progress through the reconnaissance and assessment phases. In other ecoregions, regular face-to-face meetings between the EAP team and key stakeholders provide the opportunity for an open exchange of information, development of ideas, and discussion of concerns. Regular interaction with groups that have a traditional or direct cultural or economic interest in the fate of the ecoregion (such as indigenous peoples or the private sector) is particularly important.

In Action: Reaching Out

he engagement of stakeholders in ecoregion conservation is not always easy. Each EAP needs to think through how it can successfully involve stakeholders (from experts, to the powerful, to the poor) in the discussions and decision-making processes associated with ecoregion conservation. Fundamental to the success of an EAP will be the support that it receives from key stakeholders, the understanding that it has of stakeholder interests and needs, and its relevance to local social and political realities. The characteristics of an ecoregion and its stakeholders will shape how EAPs communicate and engage with others. Whatever the approach or process, stakeholder engagement will always be a core element of an EAP's work.

- The Cape Floral Kingdom (Fynbos) EAP ran a public involvement programme throughout the vision and planning phase. Focusing on the full range of stakeholders—from "inheritors" (i.e., agencies likely to end up implementing the Cape Action Plan) to the scientific community to special interest groups—the EAP hosted a series of meetings, presentations, and briefings designed to keep interested parties informed about the process, its objectives, and its progress over the year of planning. These stakeholder consultations were informed by expert workshops, focus groups, and questionnaires and were backed by newsletters and media coverage. Stakeholder involvement in the ecoregion conservation process was seen as a priority for the EAP.
- ➤ As a first step in its ecoregion-conservation process, the **New Zealand Marine EAP** hosted an "information gatekeepers" meeting. Recognizing the extent to which New Zealand government departments, research institutions, and universities are the keepers of information and expertise critical to large-scale conservation planning, WWF-New Zealand brought together senior managers from those organizations for a conversation about ecoregion conservation and its potential application to the New Zealand marine environment. As a result of that initial dialogue, the biodiversity assessment process was given access to the full range of research information available on the New Zealand Marine ecoregion. In addition, the organizations that took part in the initial conversation became comfortable with the objectives of the EAP and are assisting it to inform and influence relevant marine conservation efforts of the New Zealand Government.
- ➤ In Fiji, where a number of significant national and community-based conservation programmes are already in place, the **Fiji Island Marine EAP** team is working to build stake-holder understanding of ecoregion conservation and its potential to add value to existing efforts. Cooperative activities—such as a joint WWF, Department of Fisheries, and university expedition to complete the first-ever baseline survey of the great sea reef of Fiji—are helping to build relations with key stakeholders and share information about the opportunities offered by ecoregion conservation.
- ➤ In the **Bismarck Solomon Seas ecoregion** (BSSE), the need for increased information sharing and consultation across borders applied to WWF as much as it did to any other organization. Prior to a BSSE pre-visioning workshop, most WWF staff working on marine issues across the three countries of the ecoregion (the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, and Papua, Indonesia) had never met. Starting at the national scale, the BSSE EAP team (made up of representatives from the three countries as well as a group of technical advisors)

coordinated a series of workshops for national experts and key decision makers. The workshops —part introduction to ecoregion conservation, part reconnaissance, and part biodiversity assessment—served to build a constituency of support for the ecoregion conservation process in the three countries. The workshops also inspired the establishment of national marine working groups and contributed to the decision by leading international conservation NGOs working in the ecoregion to pool information and expertise for the biodiversity vision workshop.

> During the initial stages of the **Northern Andes ecoregion** conservation programme, partners and stakeholders received *What's New in the Northern Andes?*, a periodic email newsletter written by the EAP team. The purpose of the newsletter was to let people know what the EAP was doing, who was involved, and where to get more information. Over time, as the EAP evolved, the newsletter gave way to the Northern Andes Web site as the key vehicle for communication. > > >

In Action: The Power of a Coalition

"The coalition played a key role in changing the highway's route. This shows that when NGOs are serious, professional, and their opinions are well founded, the chances of success are greatly increased."

— HEAD OF CHILE'S MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS, ENVIRONMENTAL AND TERRITORIAL PLANNING UNIT

n the **Valdivia ecoregion of Chile,** WWF has incorporated stakeholders in the ecoregion conservation process from the outset. Using a gradual approach to stakeholder engagement—starting with the most approachable groups and consolidating agreements with them before expanding to include less approachable organizations—WWF has helped develop a broadly representative voice for conservation across the ecoregion. A key feature of this effort has been the establishment of the Coalition para la Conservacion de la Cordillera de la Costa. WWF and the eight other organizations that make up the coalition (including indigenous groups and environmental organizations) are working together to advocate for alternatives that will serve to reduce biodiversity threats and realize conservation opportunities in the Valdivia ecoregion. Through the work of the coalition, a number of the goals and objectives established by WWF during the biodiversity vision process are being achieved.

The proposed construction of the Coastal Highway through a priority area of the ecoregion (identified during the visioning process) has been an issue around which the coalition has rallied. As indicated by the lead quote from the head of the Ministry of Public Works, the coalition has successfully influenced government decision-making around the issue. The coalition's influence resulted in the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the coalition and the government that secures 85 per cent of the outcomes that the coalition has been seeking in relation to the routing and development of the proposed highway.

Served by its efforts to work from a solid foundation of science, and with a pool of scientists to back it up, the experience of the Coastal Coalition provides a number of general lessons on how to create an effective and supportive voice (and entity) for conservation planning and action:

- ➤ Maintain your differences but work together to broker common positions. Clarify with all players that forming a coalition does not mean that the groups need to become more like each other or always agree with each other. It is essential to organize around the principle of maintaining each organization's own position while, at the same time, brokering common positions.
- **Identify a common broker.** A formal coalition needs a centre point around which the coalition's member groups can organize. A new and neutral player in the ecoregion can often play this role. However, once they become a more established entity, they may have a difficult time maintaining consistency and objectivity.
- **Establish roles and responsibilities.** Pay attention to the design of a structure for decision-making. Once established, a structure can be very difficult to change given the diversity of interests and skills around the coalition table.

- ➤ Choose a strong coordinator. Where possible, the full board of directors of the coalition should be involved in the selection of a coordinator. In Valdivia, the skilled and diplomatic coordinator of the Coastal Coalition is considered to be a significant resource to the EAP.
- ➤ Invest in building trust and communications capacity. Face-to-face time in situations with minimal stress can help establish trust among coalition members. For the Coastal Coalition in Valdivia, field trips, conferences, and trips organized to the U.S. Land Trust Alliance and New Zealand (with the help of a grant from WWF International and WWF-US) helped forge relationships among the coalition members.

Communicating Effectively

ood communications lies at the heart of a successful ecoregion action programme. Without it, the commitment of staff, partners, and stakeholders to the ambitious goals and objectives of ecoregion conservation, and the broad participation of individuals and institutions in its implementation, would be impossible to achieve.

Effective communication strategies require the timely combination of experienced communicators, clear communications objectives, effective knowledge management, focused message development, good relationships, and targeted delivery. Increasingly, EAPs are recognizing the power of communications as they see critical information and ideas embraced or rejected by stakeholders on the basis of when, where, and how the messages are presented. Knowing and understanding key audiences will be critical to successful communication around ecoregion conservation targets: Who are the key audiences? What do they know? What do they want to know? What will motivate them to take action? As some EAPs have discovered, communication is not something that can wait until the biodiversity vision or action plan have been developed. Communication is, in fact, one of the key tools to ensuring that the biodiversity vision and ecoregion conservation targets have the support and commitment of the people and institutions that are needed to make conservation happen.

Building Awareness

Ecoregion conservation will take conservation practitioners, stakeholders, and other constituencies through a number of phases over the course of its development and implementation. Through each of the phases, the level of awareness of key stakeholders—not about ecoregion conservation per se, but about the state of biodiversity, threats, and opportunities—will be critical to the focus, pace, and quality of conservation planning and action. As EAPs work through the ecoregion conservation process, it is important to articulate ambitious goals for stakeholder awareness and engagement. For example, an EAP might want to work towards ensuring that:

- National and regional populations develop an interest in (or passion for) the biodiversity of their region
- Key stakeholders can articulate what the region's biodiversity means to them
- Key experts (such as scientists, policy makers, and community leaders) are engaged in the development and implementation of conservation strategies and actions
- A biodiversity vision statement and conservation targets are understood and committed to by key audiences
- The investment by stakeholders and donors in conservation efforts in priority areas of an ecoregion increases significantly (measured by funding commitments, policy alignment, and so on).

How Can an EAP Achieve These Milestones?

To achieve these milestones over the first five years of an EAP, it is necessary to systematically integrate communications and education strategies and activities from the outset. Each EAP should aim to have the following:

- A communications strategy (with specific objectives) that supports the ecoregion conservation process
- An outreach strategy to support stakeholder dialogue and interaction
- Terms of reference (TOR) for ecoregion leaders and programme staff that incorporate communications aspects.

What Is Needed to Achieve These Outputs?

Developing an effective EAP communications strategy or plan is not the outcome of one meeting or the sole efforts of the communications officer. The completion and implementation of a strategy will require inputs from a range of staff, partners, and events over the life of the EAP. Critical inputs include:

- The participation of a lead communications specialist in EAP workshops and events
- The participation of the full EAP team in the development of communications strategies (specifically the identification of target audiences, key messages, and appropriate tools)
- Communications and public-outreach training for EAP staff and partners (in terms of the tools that they need to use to convey messages to their target audiences)
- Targeted communications materials that match intended communications objectives and audiences.

As EAPs have developed around the world, communications and education staff have worked closely with EAP leaders, steering committee members, and other partners to develop a systematic process for integrating good communications and public education efforts into EAP planning and action. ¹⁰

 $^{^{10}}$ See the communications strategy worksheet (provided in Appendix C on page 96), which outlines the steps proposed by various EAPs for developing communications strategies that support planning and action.

In Action: Developing Messages

he effective communication of ecoregion conservation principles, aims, and objectives can help build an "external constituency of support with links to sympathetic communities and agencies within the region." ¹¹

In the case of the **Great Barrier Reef ecoregion**, WWF-Australia used a campaign-style approach to build community support for ambitious conservation targets (such as an expansion of the percentage of the GBR ecoregion identified as fully protected). They did this by combining local initiatives with a global campaign using the Internet. In the **Cape Floral Kingdom** more general ecoregion conservation communications were used to involve the public in the conservation planning process. Those communication strategies included brochures; briefing papers on the environment and its connection with lifestyles and livelihoods; and a Web site, newsletters, and questionnaires. The issues and themes presented using these communications strategies targeted the local audience by incorporating constituent-friendly language and locally relevant examples. Maps were also a useful tool that helped convey the scope of ecoregion conservation concepts to stakeholder audiences.

Other EAP teams have used a combination of communication and education approaches to develop the messages they feel are important for stakeholders to understand about the ecoregion. For example, when conducting an education needs assessment in the **Chihuahuan**Desert ecoregion, the EAP talked with a number of people in the region to clarify the general messages they wanted to share with all ecoregional residents. Then the team worked on incorporating those messages into EAP education and communication initiatives. The Chihuahuan-based messages focused on key information, such as:

- > Where the Chihuahuan Desert is
- > That the Chihuahuan Desert is a biologically rich ecoregion
- > That the Chihuahuan Desert is one of the most important arid ecoregions on Earth (and that it is a globally outstanding ecoregion)
- > That the Chihuahuan Desert is showing signs of stress, especially in areas of high population density
- > That many species—from migratory birds to cacti to fish—depend on the Chihuahuan for their survival
- > That only about one percent of the ecoregion is formally protected
- > That there are specific things that individuals, communities, and governments can do to help protect the Chihuahuan Desert ecoregion (fleshed out with more detail, depending on the issues)
- > That there is still time to protect this biologically rich area—but people need to act quickly to ensure protection for the long term.

 $^{^{11}}$ From: Ecoregions in Action: Lessons from Three WWF-Australia Ecoregion Programmes by Ray Nias. 2001. WWF-Australia: Sydney.

The ecoregion team also wanted to develop messages for people who live in the Chihuahuan (on both the U.S. and Mexican sides), as well as those living in areas adjacent to the desert (e.g., what should Texans know?). To develop those messages, the team thought about what national audiences in both the United States and Mexico should know. For example, what should the target audiences in El Paso know, feel, and do about the Chihuahuan? What should people in the states of Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico know, feel, and do about the Chihuahuan? And, finally, what does the EAP want all Americans to know, feel, and do?

Identifying key messages is an interactive process. An EAP team might start with some initial thoughts, but will need to recognize that those thoughts will change as they continue to gather input from stakeholders and develop a better understanding of key biological, social, and economic issues and connections.