

# LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION JOINT TASK FORCE



ASSOCIATION of  
FISH & WILDLIFE  
AGENCIES

*Advancing State-Federal Collaboration  
for Landscape-Scale Fish and Wildlife Conservation*



## WHAT IS THE LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION JOINT TASK FORCE

The Landscape Conservation Joint Task Force (JTF) is a peer-to-peer collaborative body established in December 2021 by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The JTF serves as a national forum to explore, coordinate, and enhance voluntary landscape-scale conservation efforts across jurisdictions.

### KEY FEATURES:

- **Exploratory and Advisory:** Builds trust and strengthens relationships between state agencies and federal partners to coordinate landscape conservation priorities.
- **Peer-to-Peer Collaboration:** Respects the distinct authorities of states and the FWS while fostering durable, cooperative partnerships.
- **Barrier Reduction:** Identifies and helps address policy, programmatic, and operational obstacles that hinder multi-jurisdictional conservation.
- **Unified, Not Uniform:** Supports voluntary alignment of regional and national efforts—enhancing strategic impact while preserving partner autonomy and flexibility.

*The JTF unifies efforts through voluntary alignment rather than uniformity — enhancing strategic impact while respecting partner flexibility.*

### WHY DOES THE JTF MATTER?

Wildlife and ecosystems don't recognize jurisdictional boundaries—most species and natural processes span multiple state and federal jurisdictions. Sustaining healthy ecosystems and preventing species decline requires voluntary, landscape-scale collaboration across boundaries and sectors. The JTF helps make that possible by supporting conservation that is:

- **Strategically Aligned:** Connecting regional fish and wildlife priorities with national initiatives, funding, and science.
- **Efficient and Coordinated:** Sharing resources, capacity, and information to avoid duplication and maximize conservation outcomes.
- **Inclusive and Collaborative:** Engaging states, federal agencies, tribes, private landowners, NGOs, and other partners.

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## JTF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Coordinate interests, responsibilities, and efforts across AFWA, states, and FWS.
- Identify and help address barriers to cross-jurisdictional conservation.
- Promote consistent regional approaches where helpful while preserving flexibility and autonomy.
- Support integration of State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs) and landscape conservation design tools in conservation planning.
- Strengthen engagement with partners, including the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Department of Defense (DoD), and tribes.

*Membership: The JTF includes 10 voting members: five from the AFWA Executive Committee (including the current AFWA President and one representative from each regional association), and five from senior FWS leadership (including the Director, Assistant Director for Science Applications, and three Regional Directors). The Task Force is co-chaired by the AFWA President and the FWS Director (or Acting Director). Ex-officio members include the AFWA Executive Director and a representative from Canada.*

## KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Strengthened peer-to-peer collaboration networks between state-federal leaders.
- Helped align national funding into regional landscape conservation priorities.
- Advanced the “feathering the edges” approach—linking conservation science and strategies across regional boundaries.[DR1]
- Launched pilot aligning NFWF business plans with SWAPs.
- Secured funding for dedicated coordinators to sustain national and regional efforts.
- Provided leadership in identifying and communicating strategic cross-regional conservation priorities.

## STRATEGIC BENEFITS OF THE JTF

- **Peer-Based Coordination** - Builds trust and strengthens collaboration between states and FWS
- **Barrier Reduction** - Identifies and helps remove policy and operational obstacles to effective collaboration
- **Shared Capacity** - Leverages combined expertise, staff, and data systems to increase impact
- **Aligned Priorities** - Connects regional goals with national programs, funding, and science
- **Voluntary Unity** - Supports alignment through voluntary collaboration—preserving partner autonomy and flexibility
- **Broad Partner Relevance** - Engages partners working across jurisdictions and sectors

## SUPPORTING STATE WILDLIFE ACTION PLANS (SWAPS)

State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs) identify over 12,000 Species of Greatest Conservation Need and outline strategies to conserve their habitats. As a foundation for state-led conservation, SWAPs offer a unifying framework for advancing collaboration across jurisdictions, improving ecological resilience, and aligning actions at landscape scales.

The JTF strengthens this foundation by promoting integration of SWAPs into cross-boundary conservation planning and addressing challenges such as varying data formats, terminology, and planning approaches. It also works with partners like NFWF to connect SWAP priorities with funding and programmatic support—helping unlock their full regional and national potential.

*SWAPs are foundational to conserving fish and wildlife biodiversity at landscape scales—they connect state-led priorities with broader strategies for lasting impact.*

## LOOKING AHEAD

- Expand pilots aligning NFWF business plans with SWAP priorities across landscapes.
- Work with partners to leverage geospatial technology and improve data sharing.
- Advocate for sustained and increased capacity, including coordinators and technical support.
- Strengthen tribal and private landowner engagement for inclusive conservation.
- Maintain voluntary, flexible collaboration rooted in trust and shared goals.

## LEARN MORE AND CONNECT

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