

Cumberland Habitat Conservation Plan

No. 18

Obed Watershed Community Association

April 2007

Development Threats to Habitats: Economic development pressures continue to stress and fragment land and aquatic habitats of Cumberland County. Unplanned development and rural sprawl often adversely impact wildlife and the habitats on which life depends, which can also affect long-term economic security and quality of life for area residents. The growth of Crossville and the resort communities is increasing the demand for more water and for additional impoundments of streams to meet the water supply needs, representing a significant threat to aquatic habitats

Balance of Protection and Development: Habitat Conservation Plans present a viable method to resolve the sometimes conflicting objectives associated with using and conserving natural resources. A Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is a means to integrate the use and conservation of natural resources associated with threatened and/or endangered (T&E) species.

The Endangered Species Act prohibits the harm (also called "take") of T&E species or their habitat. Once a HCP is approved by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, an Incidental Take Permit is issued. The HCP becomes a partnership between a resource user and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service that allows resources to be used and the take to occur as long as the species impacts of the take are mitigated and minimized through the approved Habitat Conservation Plan.

Authorizing Background: Habitat Conservation Planning was approved by Congress to foster proactive and voluntary strategies to address both the use and conservation of resources associated with T&E species on non-federal lands.

Local Resource Management: The HCP process localizes decision-making over use and conservation of natural resources. HCP holders include private landowners, government municipalities, state agencies, corporations, and businesses.

Approach: In developing an HCP, the team works with the multiple and diverse interests found in communities in a proactive way that integrates the use and conservation of natural resources associated with endangered and threatened species. In Habitat Conservation Planning the focus is to work toward multiple community values in a collaborative process rather than becoming stuck in adversarial conflict. Successful conservation in the Cumberlands will require meaningful and lasting partnerships.

This project is focused on building relationships with and between various interests and stakeholders in the region. These include resource users such as private landowners and landowner associations, forestry managers, agricultural producers, mining companies, developers and homebuilders, local and county government officials, other local community groups and state agencies.

Benefits to HCP Holder

- Conserve endangered and/or threatened species in local communities where people live

and work.

- By working with others at a local level, conservation activities can be developed that are innovative and meet specific conditions and needs found in our community.
- The HCP process ensures that landowners and/or other private interests are able to proceed with agreed upon resource uses, as long as conservation measures to mitigate and minimize resource use impacts on endangered species and their habitats are simultaneously undertaken.
- The applicant is provided regulatory assurances that if “unforeseen circumstances” arise, there will be no requirement to commit additional land, water, or financial compensation beyond the original HCP agreement. Such long term planning assurances can be vital to financial and development interests that have invested or may be investing significant financial resources in a project.
- Private landowners and other private interests have more control over finding positive solutions to endangered species protection issues, and in some cases environmental permitting is streamlined.

Habitat Conservation Plan Development Partners

Potential HCP Holder: While this development process is a shared effort of many public and private stakeholders, the ultimate decision to move forward with developing an HCP lies with the potential HCP holder.

Resource Funding: The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources received a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to facilitate development of an HCP in the Cumberlands.

Development Team: The Cumberlands HCP Development Team coordinates activities related to the development of the HCP, research and inventory activities, and outreach activities. The Tennessee Chapter of The Nature Conservancy and faculty and staff from the University of Tennessee and Tennessee Technological University form the primary development team coordinating this effort

- Alex Wyss, TNC Cumberlands Project Director, is lead coordinator for the initiative.
- Dr. David Ostermeier and Emily Saunders of the University of Tennessee are leading the Outreach and Education efforts. Dr. Karen Lannom provides geospatial, website, and technical support.

Water Resources Working Group: The WRG is comprised of representatives of user groups such as private businesses, landowners, local municipalities and professional associations, as well as state and federal agency staff. The working group collaborates with potential HCP holders to help develop the HCP.

Science Advisory Committee: Science drives the HCP process. The SAC, formed in 2005, includes experts on the species or groups of species that may be included in the HCP and collectively holds a wealth of knowledge on the current status and threats to the species. In May 2006, Dr. Hayden Mattingly, Tennessee Tech University, took on the role of coordinating the committee. This team is providing expert information and recommendations on species

conservation priorities, information about threats to species, conservation strategies and other scientific data needs necessary to develop HCPs.

Steering Committee: The Cumberland HCP Steering Committee, consisting of state and federal agency representatives, provides direction to the project. The steering committee was formed in January 2005, and includes:

- Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency
- Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation
- Tennessee Department of Agriculture -Division of Forestry
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- NPS Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area
- Obed National Wild and Scenic River
- Office of Surface Mining
- Tennessee Valley Authority

HCP Development Funding: Funding for the Cumberland HCP project comes from the Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Endangered Species Program, Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act) Grant Programs. (CESCF-06, CFDA Number 15.615 Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund.)

Species Selection

Plateau Diversity: The forests and rivers of the Cumberlands are among the most biologically diverse temperate zone habitats in the world and harbor an extraordinary variety of plants, fish, mussels, salamanders, fungi, and other species—many of which are found only in the Cumberlands. Over 80 rare species of plants and animals occur in the project area, including 20 federally listed Endangered or Threatened animal species, one of the highest concentrations of protected species in the United States. The area also contains an extensive karst topographical region, with thousands of caves which support one of the most diverse assemblages of cave-dwelling animals on the planet. Some of the species, like the Big South Fork Crayfish, are endemic, meaning they only live in the Cumberlands and nowhere else.

Focal Species of the HCP:

- Spotfin chub
- Cumberland elktoe mussel
- Indiana bat
- Blackside dace
- Purple bean mussel
- Cerulean warbler

Species Selection Process: The Science Advisory Committee selected these focal species because of their broad distribution in this portion of the Cumberlands and the amount of available information about these species (distribution, population status and threats). Additionally they may serve as “umbrella species” where protection activities for the focal species provide protection for species that occupy the same habitats. Except for the cerulean warbler, all these species are federally listed animals.

Other Candidate Species for HCP Inclusion: In addition to the above species, six species have also been identified as good candidates for inclusion into a HCP: gray bat, ashy darter, Cumberland Johnny darter, Big South Fork crayfish, Cumberland rosemary, and Virginia spiraea. These species compliment the focal species, occupying similar ranges and habitats within the project area.

Other Species: While these focal species are a priority of inclusion in an HCP, the objective of this project is to cover as many animal and plant species as practical to provide the greatest conservation benefit and benefits to the future HCP holder. Ultimately, the HCP holder works with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine the final list of species that will be covered by the HCP.

Development Process

Phase I (2005-2006): The Development Team facilitated the process that led to the City of Crossville identifying its interest in developing and possibly holding an HCP. This was accomplished through the organization of several supports:

- Organization of the Steering Committee and Scientific Advisory Committee. These committees collected and coordinated the communication of information to potential HCP holders and other project partners.
- The Cumberland Science Advisory Committee provided scientific evaluation of the wildlife species that could be covered in an HCP and recommended potential impact avoidance and mitigation strategies that could be included in an HCP.
- Additional analyses were conducted by consultants to clarify how HCPs might add value to existing environmental regulations and to identify the range of benefits and challenges that could be encountered by entering into an HCP.
- The Development team coordinated outreach activities to increase awareness and knowledge about HCPs and foster involvement by the broader community within the process of this Phase.

Phase II (2007 to completion of HCP): The future HCP holder will be responsible for determining the detailed components of the HCP including what species, land use activities and impact mitigation measures are included in the HCP and how the HCP will be developed. Technical advice and planning support will be available from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Cumberland HCP partners and others.

For more information, please contact:

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The Obed Community Association has as its purpose community appreciation and volunteer involvement in ongoing research of the natural and cultural heritage of the Obed River watershed within Cumberland County. Louise Gorenflo, OWCA director, produced this fact sheet. Those wanting to join this membership organization or more information may contact OWCA at 484-2633 or at 185 Hood Drive, Crossville, TN 38555.