CT River Watershed (CRW) Pilot Project – Terrestrial Team Meeting – June 23, 2014

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Summary of Discussion Points and Key Outcomes

1. Discussed the process for incorporating under-represented species into the landscape design process:
A) Landscape design process will continue forward as planned using representative species models and information on a small selected set of rare or under-represented species initially identified as lacking representation under the 13 representative species being modeled for this pilot project (i.e., bats, tiger beetles, New England cottontail, and possibly Jessup’s milk-vetch).
B) When the initial landscape design is completed, an opportunity will be provided for States and other partners to review the draft product to see how well it captures additional rare or under-represented species of interest/concern.
C) If additional rare and under-represented species are identified as not well-covered in the initial landscape design, States and other partners will have the opportunity to propose to the Terrestrial Subteam and Core Team additional species to be incorporated into the final landscape design.
2. Discussed value of incorporating indices of projected changes to climate niche suitability into final habitat models for representative species.
A) There was general agreement among meeting participants that climate change should be addressed in some manner in the landscape design process, with the preference for highlighting areas where suitable climate conditions are most likely to persist (i.e., areas with climate resilience).
B) Incorporating climate resilience onto the final species models is a good concept, but there might some species/habitats for which this is more meaningful and useful than others. The suggestion was made that highlighting climate resilience in the species models be used as a general rule, but that changes in climate suitability under different climate change scenarios be reviewed on a species-by-species basis to make sure the general rule is applicable.

*OUTCOME:* propose to the larger team that an index of projected change in climate niche that places higher weight on areas with high climate resilience be incorporated into the species habitat models, but these should be reviewed on a species-by-species basis as to whether using this index of change in climate suitability is something that makes sense and what the weight should be (should not be uniformly applied across all species without assessment).
3. Discussed value of incorporating indices of projected direct anthropogenic landscape change (e.g., urban/suburban expansion) into final habitat models for representative species.
A) There was general agreement among meeting participants that anthropogenic landscape change should also be incorporated into final species models, with the preference for giving greater weight to areas with current high habitat suitability and high probability of loss from human development. One caveat was that these areas of high suitability and high risk to development should be evaluated to ensure they would not end up being isolated patches in a matrix of low quality habitat and not connectivity to other high quality habitat.

*OUTCOME*: propose to the larger team that an index of projected change due to anthropogenic development be incorporated into the final species models with higher weights placed on areas with high current habitat suitability but also a high risk of being lost to human development, as long as such areas will not become isolated patches with little connectivity to other high quality habitat.
4. Discussed criteria for weighting among species in the final selection index for the landscape design. There was general agreement that the suggested criteria (degree of current threat, regional responsibility, regional rarity) are appropriate for using in assigning weights to species.
- *Degree of threat*: species that have experienced significant population losses or face significant threats should be weighted higher.
- *Regional responsibility*: species for which a relatively high proportion of their regional (or even larger scale) population and/or landscape capability occur with the CT River Watershed should get increased weight.
- *Regional rarity*: species that are considered rare at the regional (or larger) scale should be weighted higher.

A) Species that are rare because they are at the edge of their range should not receive increased weight. To receive increased weight, rare species should reasonably be expected to receive substantive population benefit from conservation actions.

B) when using these criteria to assign weights to species, the criteria should not only be applied to the representative species themselves, but also to the species and habitats it is intended to represent.