
STRATEGIC CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT OF
GULF COAST LANDSCAPES

**FLORIDA FISH
AND WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION
COMMISSION
USE CASE STUDY**

December 2021

FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Conservation Geography: Florida
Primary Stakeholder: Beth Stys

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is a government agency that manages and regulates Florida's fish and wildlife resources. They are dedicated to ensuring healthy populations of native wildlife and their habitats on a statewide basis for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people. The FWC leads a variety of programs, special initiatives, and additional efforts, such as research and public engagement, to conserve the diversity and value of Florida's living resources.

The FWC met several of the Strategic Conservation Assessment of Gulf Coast Landscape's (SCA's) Use Case Study selection criteria (see below), and provided unique value by representing statewide efforts in Florida by a government agency. The primary stakeholder was **Beth Stys**, FWC, Associate Research Scientist, and often also engaged was **Larame Ferry**, FWC, Land Conservation Coordinator.

Use Case Study Selection Criteria

- ✓ focuses on the acquisition or easement of land (land conservation; not restoration)
- ✓ exhibits a transferable issue that could be experienced by other areas in the region
- ✓ represents an application scale that fits into the hexagonal framework of the SCA project
- ✓ represents a diversity of agency type / mission
- ✓ fits within the existing RESTORE Council goal framework
- ✓ focuses in an area that complements the geographic diversity of the SCA region
- ✓ has planning or funding decisions going to be made within the SCA project timeline



Use Case Study Purpose:

Evaluating potential areas for conservation based on agency priorities and comparing the SCA tools across scales using regional and local data.

The SCA Team (hereafter we) launched this Use Case Study with an initial scoping call in September 2020. Beth's primary goal was:

"to learn more about the SCA tools and how they could compliment other review processes, data, and tools for land acquisition prioritization in Florida."

The FWC uses a variety of tools for land conservation prioritization and evaluation, which means these skills were already present in our stakeholders. Additionally, previous exposure to the tools during the SCA charrette series and Beth's role on the SCA Core Working Group allowed us all to hit the ground running and take a deeper and more thorough dive into the tools during our working sessions. The dedicated engagement with the SCA tools allowed them to quickly **become super users of the tools, which has been essential for generating detailed feedback for tool improvements.**

Most of the efforts for this Use Case Study were focused on using the **Conservation Prioritization Tool**. Beth and Laramé were interested in becoming more familiar with this tool as they thought it may provide further justification for their future proposals, such as for the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program. The combined experience from previously using the **Florida Conservation Blueprint** and **Florida Forever** tools for their conservation efforts in Florida and their growing knowledge of the SCA tools made this Use Case Study unique in that it allowed for comparison of results across tools to show their complementary nature. For example, the results from the evaluated areas of interest were similar across the tools but they were not completely comparable. The results were generated using different measures in the three tools and there was some additional subjectivity in the rankings outside of the Conservation Prioritization Tool (e.g., they were able to incorporate knowledge about the areas of interest and the previous efforts there). The findings produced informative insights and spurred discussions regarding the unique value of each tool type.





After our final working session, Beth provided incredibly helpful and thorough feedback on how to improve the function and performance of the Conservation Prioritization Tool. **We are currently working on incorporating this feedback into our tool updates and fixes to ensure we address each item, ultimately ensuring the continued co-production process of this project.** Beth recently provided additional feedback regarding this tool by responding to the following questions.

Do you find value in using this tool? Please explain why or why not.

“Yes - this tool provides valuable insight and outputs that can provide decision making support and provide justification for those decisions. The flexibility of the tool allows for inputs to meet the needs of individual project specification/objectives -which is very important.”

Have you used this tool in any of your conservation efforts (e.g., comparing areas of interest, strengthening proposal justifications)?

“We used this tool for our case study - comparing three potential project sites.”

Do you have any recommendations for improving this tool?

“No, we provided multiple suggestions during the course of our case study and interactions with the SCA Team. The SCA Team was very responsive to our input/suggestions.”

Although the focus of this Use Case Study was on the Conservation Prioritization Tool, the additional SCA tools proved to be beneficial. For the **Conservation Planning Inventory Tool**, Beth thought there was value because “it is important to be able to see who is doing what, where. This provides opportunities to learn from each other and identify potential collaborations/partnerships.” The **Conservation Visualization Tool** also provided value because “being able to show results through a visualization tool like this can help support project planning, prioritization and decision making.”

From the beginning of the SCA project, stakeholder input has been vital to inform our efforts, which is why we adopted a co-production approach. These Use Case Studies provided an opportunity to dig deeper and learn more from stakeholders engaged with real-time conservation efforts, ultimately ensuring tool applicability and relevance. Through this Use Case Study, we were able to help Beth and Laramie learn additional tools to **support their future efforts and incorporate their constructive feedback to improve the tools for current and future use**. To learn more about Beth’s experiences with this effort, we asked her additional questions regarding the overall process.



Why were you interested in becoming a Use Case Study?

“To learn more about the project and process, and to learn more about how the SCA tools could be incorporated into our project. Additionally, being a use case study allowed for opportunities to work very closely with project staff on a project we were knowledgeable about and provide insights and request specific modifications to the tools that could benefit our case study project and other projects with similar needs and goals.”

What did you enjoy about this process?

“I enjoyed the very collaborative and responsive nature of the case study process. The SCA team was always ready to engage, listen and find ways to address concerns or additional ideas. The SCA team was great!”

How do you think this process could be improved?

“I can't think of any - given the additional challenges over the past year+, the SCA team has been able to adapt and continue to move forward.”

Do you think your Use Case Study was a success?

“Although we have not moved forward with using the information we gathered from the case study - submitting a National Coastal Wetlands Conservation grant application - we learned a lot about the SCA tools and that the outputs provided add value to this type of prioritization/selection process and one that we can use in the future.”

Can you think of anything that would have made your Use Case Study more successful?

“No, it was on FWC staff to move forward with next steps - and there were other external factors (timing of application for grants, etc.) that just didn't work out for the grant cycle we had planned for.”



With the FWC's commitment to this effort, expertise regarding tool use and conservation efforts, and attention to detail, we were able to **learn more about the applicability of the SCA Tool Suite and capture several opportunities for improvement**. When asked what her most valuable lesson from this effort was, Beth said:

“Adaptability and flexibility are important!”

Beth believes the major accomplishment of this effort was allowing for:

“access to data and tool use/outputs that anyone can use, share, document – [a] transparent process that is repeatable. Flexibility to select metrics/filters that best fit the goals and objectives of a wide variety of projects.”

This Use Case Study is currently considered complete, though we intend to connect with Beth and Larame moving forward when we have updates on the incorporation of their feedback and associated tool improvements.

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