STRATEGIC CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT O GULF COAST LANDSCAPES

ALL STATE

THE WATER INSTITUTE OF THE GULF USE CASE STUDY

September 2022

INTRODUCTION

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THE WATER INSTITUTE OF THE GULF

Conservation Geography: Gulf-wide Primary Stakeholders: Erin Kiskaddon and Tim Carruthers

The Water Institute of the Gulf (the Institute) is a non-profit, independent, applied research and technical services institution based out of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The Institute is dedicated to helping coastal and deltaic communities thoughtfully prepare for an uncertain future, and they do so through several research areas including Coastal Ecology, Applied Geosciences, Human Dimensions, Natural Systems Modeling, Flood Risk Management, and Supporting Resilience. The Institute works with partners to bring decades of knowledge and expertise to the challenges facing coastal communities, ecosystems, and economies through projects such as the Louisiana Climate Action Plan, the Natural Classroom Project, and Houston's Resilience Strategy. Most relevant to this Use Case Study, the Institute also works with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in support of the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS).



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Use Case Study Purpose:

Improving visualization and utility of the Southeast Conservation Blueprint, developed by the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS), in the Gulf Region

This project met several of the Strategic Conservation Assessment of Gulf Coast Landscape's (SCA's) Use Case Study selection criteria (see below) and was valuable in representing Gulf-wide conservation efforts. Ten Institute stakeholders were involved in this Use Case Study, with the two primary being Dr. Tim Carruthers, Director of Coastal Ecology, and Erin Kiskaddon, Benthic Ecologist.

The SCA Team (hereafter we) launched this Use Case Study with an initial scoping call in October 2020 during which the purpose of the effort was determined. To achieve this purpose, we had eight hours of engagement in preparation and working sessions with the Institute stakeholders from October 2020 to July 2021.

Use Case Study Selection Criteria



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Prior to our first working session, we had a high-level discussion with the Institute stakeholders to talk about the technical steps regarding transferring the Southeast Conservation Blueprint to the SCA hexagonal framework. This discussion also expanded into a brainstorming session about **potential future opportunities and the incorporation of social science aspects that could enhance the SCA Tools**. Additional meetings were held with Dr. Scott Hemmerling, Senior Research Scientist, to further explore these social science considerations and measures.

In total, we held three working sessions during which we worked with the Institute stakeholders to prepare, transfer, and review the incorporation of the Southeast Conservation Blueprint into the SCA Conservation <u>Prioritization</u> and <u>Visualization</u> Tools. This incorporation meant we achieved the purpose of this Use Case Study; however, our collaboration did not stop there.

In addition to the technical steps of this Use Case Study, we engaged in adaptive conversations which allowed for consideration of new thoughts and approaches and led to further points of integration and collaboration. One additional outcome of this Use Case Study was the integration of the Institute's Social Vulnerability Index data into the SCA Conservation Prioritization and Visualization Tools. The integration of this index provided co-benefits by helping us further round out the Community Resilience RESTORE Goal measures and by helping the Institute visually and dynamically display their data. The integration of this index will also help tool users interested in considering this as a conservation priority.

Another output of this Use Case Study was the production of a Technical Memorandum of an independent tool assessment conducted by Erin and Tim. This in-depth assessment of ten Louisiana 2017 Coastal Master Plan marsh creation projects showed similarities in scope and important differences between the data used in the <u>Conservation Prioritization Tool</u> and the Gulf-wide Data Suite. The findings from this assessment were invaluable to further ground truth the SCA Tools and highlight the complementary advantages of using multiple tools to evaluate lands for conservation as a stakeholder moves through their decision refinement process. This was a powerful conclusion, especially coming from stakeholders, because decision support tools are often seen as competitive versus complementary. It is important to recognize the benefits and limitations of tools as they are incorporated in various contexts and land use decisions.

Stakeholder input has been central to the entire SCA project and associated efforts, and these Use Case Studies are no exception. Through this Use Case Study, we were able to support Tim, Erin, and the additional Institute stakeholders in their efforts while also incorporating their feedback to improve the tools for current and future use. To ensure a co-production approach through the completion of the Use Case Study, Tim (TC) and Erin (EK) were asked to answer several questions regarding the overall process.

Why were you interested in becoming a Use Case Study?

TC: "Potential for SCA tool as a delivery mechanism for SECAS data to link to management planning."

What did you enjoy about this process?

EK: "Working with the SCA team was very productive and we enjoyed the collaboration. The SCA team was very responsive to questions and eager to assist."

What was your most valuable lesson from this effort? *TC: "Developing and applying these types of tools takes a long time!"*

Do you think your Use Case Study was a success?

EK: "Yes it was. Data and analyses were successfully delivered."

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

TC: "Opportunity to further explore inclusion of additional data within the SCA tool prior to engagement with state agencies and final data assessments."

What do you see as the major accomplishment of this effort? *EK: "Bridging two highly valuable information resources and tools for successful conservation and restoration planning."*

LESSONS LEARNED & CONCLUSION

Thanks to the engagement and expertise of our stakeholders, this Use Case some great lessons Study ended with learned and valuable accomplishments. Continued coordination from both sides of the collaboration was essential for ongoing engagement and efforts over the extended period of this Use Case Study as the teams experienced priority and personnel changes. The level of commitment from Tim, Erin, and the additional Institute stakeholders was essential to ensure success of this effort. The relationships initiated and cultivated through this Use Case Study will endure and have already shown promise for future collaboration. Reflecting on the Use Case Study and looking forward, Erin said "It was a tremendous pleasure to work with the SCA Team and we hope additional collaboration can add greater sensitivity and information depth to the Conservation Prioritization Tool such that users can increase project implementation across the northern Gulf of Mexico."

At the conclusion of the effort, Tim commented that "*These products indicate a huge amount of work and are impressive. Great work!*" Aligned with this sentiment, Erin expanded in a way that nicely represents the whole of the SCA purpose and these Use Case Study efforts:

"Successful use of spatial information in conservation/restoration planning requires communication of transparent and easy-to-understand methodology, from input data through analysis and presentation."

This Use Case Study is currently considered complete, though we intend to stay connected with Tim and Erin regarding future use and improvement of the SCA Tools and Southeast Conservation Blueprint.



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