Landscape Conservation Cooperatives

Operational Memo for Addressing Requests for Consideration of LCC Geographic Boundary Changes

(Effective December 6, 2011)

As the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC) mature, it is inevitable that the issue of boundary changes will be discussed and proposals for modifications of the geographic boundaries developed. LCC boundaries were defined through a joint FWS-USGS team tasked to recommend a scalable geographic framework. This framework was primarily based upon appropriate aggregations of Bird Conservation Regions while best retaining homogeneity of terrestrial and aquatic systems as characterized by Omernik's level II ecoregions and the freshwater ecoregions defined by Abell et al. Details of the process were published in "LCC Information Bulletin #2: Developing the National Geographic Framework" (USFWS, Office of the Science Advisor, January 2010). Although this process was rigorous and based upon well accepted ecological mapping approaches, it was recognized that changes may be needed to address implementation challenges or to incorporate new information about the ecology of the regions. Recognizing the need to provide a process for addressing and evaluating proposed boundary changes, a subsequent document was developed, "Criteria for Modifying the Geographic Framework", (April 19, 2010, USFWS, Office of the Science Advisor). This document specifies a clear set of criteria and the initial decision point for advancing proposed changes. The process described below provides a step-by-step approach for addressing boundary changes and a final decision point for such requests.

<u>LCC's evaluating and proposing boundary changes should do the following</u>:

1. Before advancing a formal boundary change request, any parties considering a boundary change proposal should review both documents identified above ("LCC Information Bulletin #2" and "Criteria for Modifying the Geographic Framework"). Initiating parties should fully discuss the basis for the current boundaries and the evaluation criteria for assessing proposed boundary changes to ensure complete understanding of the origin of the LCC boundaries and the process for changes to those boundaries.
2. Boundary change proposals can be initiated by any conservation organization within the LCC but must be proposed for consideration by the LCC through a formal member of the LCC steering committee. The LCC proposing the boundary change is identified as the Initiating LCC.
3. A complete boundary change proposal should be developed by the parties recommending the boundary change. The proposal should address, at a minimum, all four questions in the document "Criteria for Modifying the Geographic Framework". The proposal should also include a map of sufficient resolution to accurately display the current and proposed boundaries.
4. The proposal must then be submitted by a member of the initiating LCC steering committee for review and preliminary consideration by the full initiating LCC steering committee.
5. During this period of preliminary consideration, the initiating LCC steering committee should provide notification to all other LCC steering committee chairs and LCC coordinators affected by

the boundary change. This notification should include a copy of the full boundary change proposal and the opportunity to engage in discussions among all affected LCC's.

6. The boundary change proposal must be approved by the initiating LCC steering committee through their approved LCC governance process. This should result in either a recommendation to advance the proposed boundary change to other affected LCC's or a denial of the request. If the initiating LCC steering committee does not recommend further consideration of the boundary change request the process is terminated.
7. The approved boundary change proposal must be submitted by the initiating LCC steering committee chair to all other affected LCC's and a request made for their full consideration and approval. Only after all affected LCC's have approved the change through their LCC governance processes should it be submitted, via a joint letter from all affected LCC's, to the National LCC Coordinator for further action. The submission should include all supporting documentation (e.g., final proposal, maps).
8. Final approval (interim): Upon receiving submission of the boundary change proposal that has been approved by all affected LCCs, the National LCC Coordinator will request final approval by the DOI Climate Change Working Group. This body represents all DOI bureau's and is co-chaired by the Counsel to the Assistant Secretary, the Science Advisor to the USFWS, and a representative of the USGS.
   Final approval (future): It is anticipated that the LCC National Council (or similarly responsible body), once established and operational, will assume the duty of addressing boundary changes and act as the final approval body for proposed changes.
9. Upon a decision by either the Climate Change Working Group or the National LCC Council, the National LCC Coordinator will notify all LCC's of the change and will direct the LCC GIS liaison to make appropriate modifications to the National LCC Geographic Framework. No modifications to the national LCC map or to individual LCC maps is allowed or approved until this process has been fully completed.

Boundary Dispute Resolution:

If the initiating LCC steering committee does not obtain approval from other affected LCC's but desires to proceed with a request for boundary change approval, a formal request for consideration of a boundary change should be made by the initiating LCC to the National LCC Coordinator. In addition, all affected LCC's will be asked to provide the National LCC Coordinator with the basis for their non-approval. The National LCC Coordinator will then submit this information to the DOI Climate Change Working Group (or other appropriate future body) for continued evaluation and consideration. No modifications to the national LCC map or to individual LCC maps is allowed or approved until this process has been fully completed.

Attachments:

LCC Information Bulletin #2: Developing the National Geographic Framework. USFWS, Office of the Science Advisor, January 2010.

Criteria for Modifying the Geographic Framework, USFWS, Office of the Science Advisor, April 19, 2010.