

Preparing for Compliance with the Endangered Species Act at the Idaho National Laboratory

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Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem

- An ecosystem in decline due to a number of threats.
 - Infrastructure Development
 - Human Disturbance
 - Livestock
 - Wildland Fire
 - Invasive Species
 - Sagebrush Control
 - Energy Development



Idaho National Laboratory

- 890 sq. mi. with only about 2% developed
- Largest remnant of high quality sagebrush steppe ecosystem
 - Diverse complement of plant community types and habitats
 - Substantial wildlife diversity and abundance
 - Many sagebrush-obligate species
 - Many species considered sensitive



New Regulatory Issue

- The Endangered Species Act (ESA) will likely become a regulatory concern for INL activities.
- An ESA listing would likely have a major impact on INL activities.



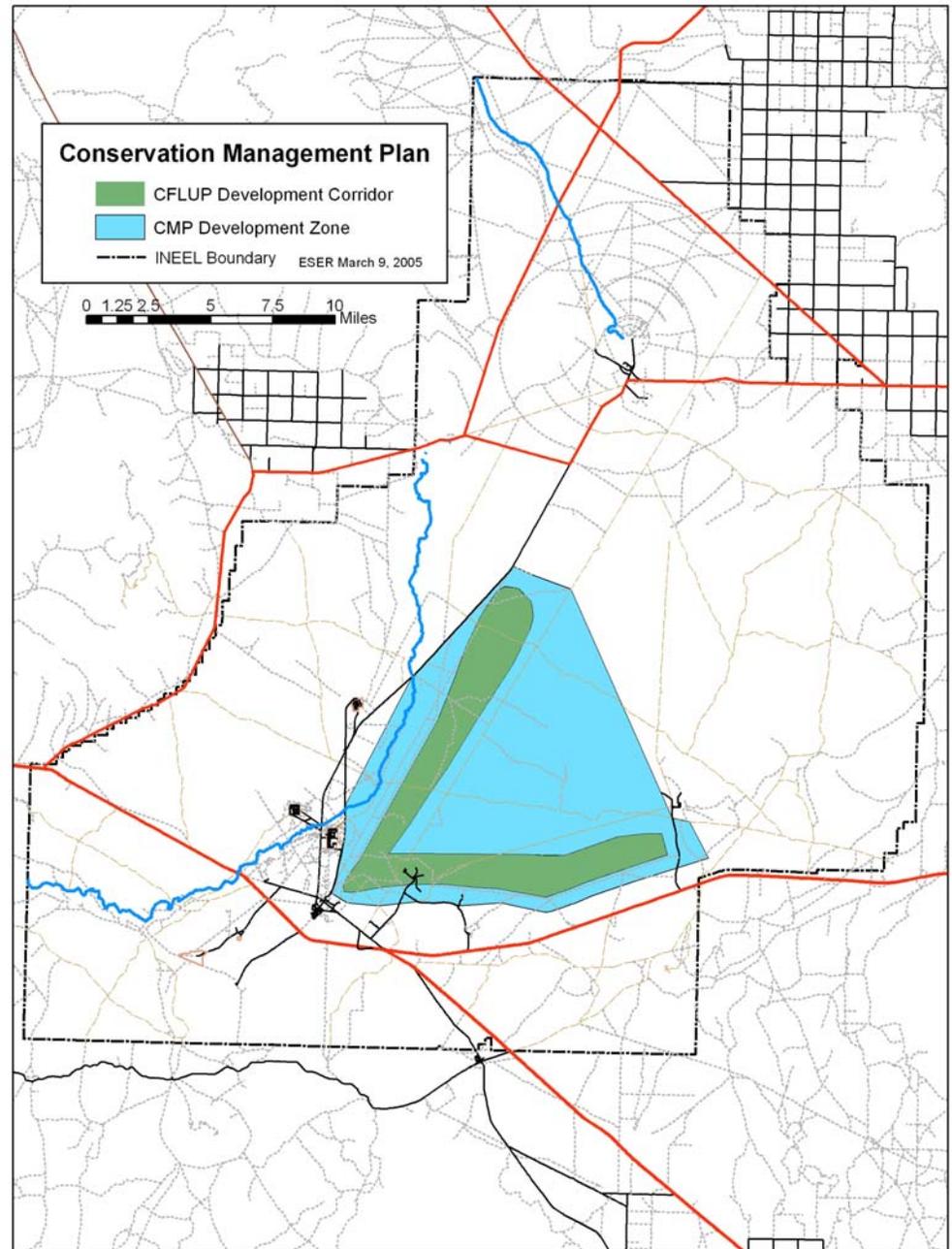
Conservation Management Plan

- Conceptual design work began in 2002.
- Initial Scoping Meeting with USFWS in 2003.
- Funding started Fall 2004.
- Focus on 125 sq. mi. Development Zone



CMP Development Zone

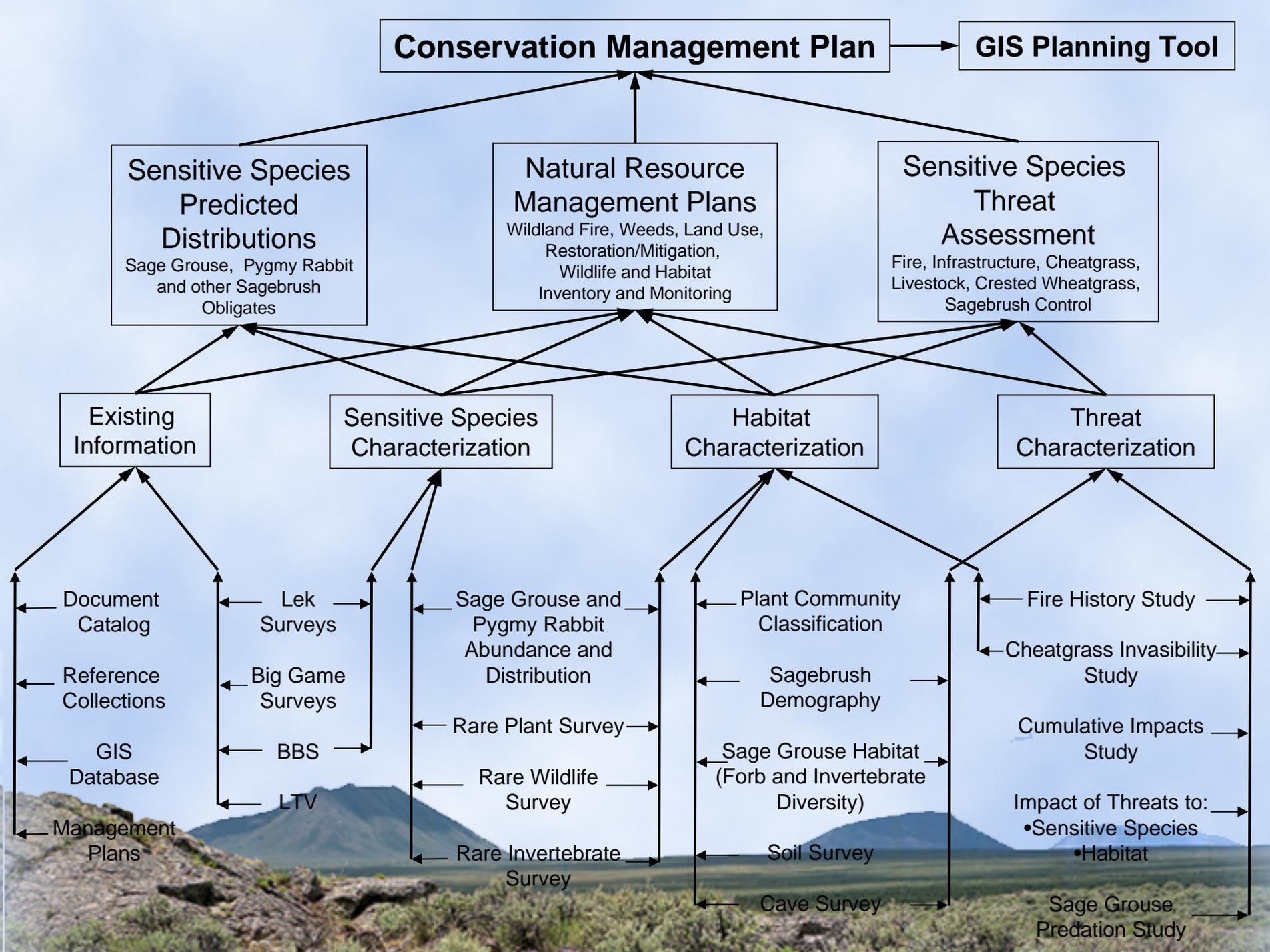
- All sensitive species addressed in 125 mi² Development Zone (the area most likely to be used for future facilities)
- Sage Grouse and Pygmy Rabbit addressed INL-wide



Conservation Management Plan

- **Goal: Ensure DOE mission activities are minimally impacted by ESA listing.**
 - Maintain data on abundance and distribution of sensitive species to support NEPA and ESA compliance.
 - Biological Assessments
 - Conservation Agreements
 - Consultation with FWS
 - Proactive plan for land management





Conservation Management Plan

GIS Planning Tool

Sensitive Species Predicted Distributions
Sage Grouse, Pygmy Rabbit and other Sagebrush Obligates

Natural Resource Management Plans
Wildland Fire, Weeds, Land Use, Restoration/Mitigation, Wildlife and Habitat Inventory and Monitoring

Sensitive Species Threat Assessment
Fire, Infrastructure, Cheatgrass, Livestock, Crested Wheatgrass, Sagebrush Control

Existing Information

Sensitive Species Characterization

Habitat Characterization

Threat Characterization

- Document Catalog
- Reference Collections
- GIS Database
- Management Plans

- Lek Surveys
- Big Game Surveys
- BBS
- LTV

- Sage Grouse and Pygmy Rabbit Abundance and Distribution
- Rare Plant Survey
- Rare Wildlife Survey
- Rare Invertebrate Survey

- Plant Community Classification
- Sagebrush Demography
- Sage Grouse Habitat (Forb and Invertebrate Diversity)
- Soil Survey
- Cave Survey

- Fire History Study
- Cheatgrass Invasibility Study
- Cumulative Impacts Study
- Impact of Threats to:
 - Sensitive Species
 - Habitat
- Sage Grouse Predation Study

Two Species on INL Under Consideration for ESA Listing Now

Pygmy Rabbit



Sage Grouse



Sage Grouse

- FWS Status Review underway
 - In December 2007, Judge Winmill ruled that the 12-Month Finding was arbitrary and capricious and remanded the case back to FWS for further consideration.
 - Agreement between plaintiff and FWS for new 12-Month Finding in May 2009.
- Abundance and distribution on INL under investigation



Pygmy Rabbit

- FWS Status Review underway
 - In September of 2007, Judge Lodge reversed the 90-Day Finding and remanded the case back to the FWS for preparation of a new 90-Day Finding.
 - New 90-Day Finding of May be Warranted
 - 12-Month Finding due January 2009
- Abundance and distribution on INL under investigation



Conservation Management Challenges

- Both Species are Common on the INL
Sage Grouse is a "Landscape Species"

Pygmy Rabbit



Sage Grouse



Candidate Conservation Agreement

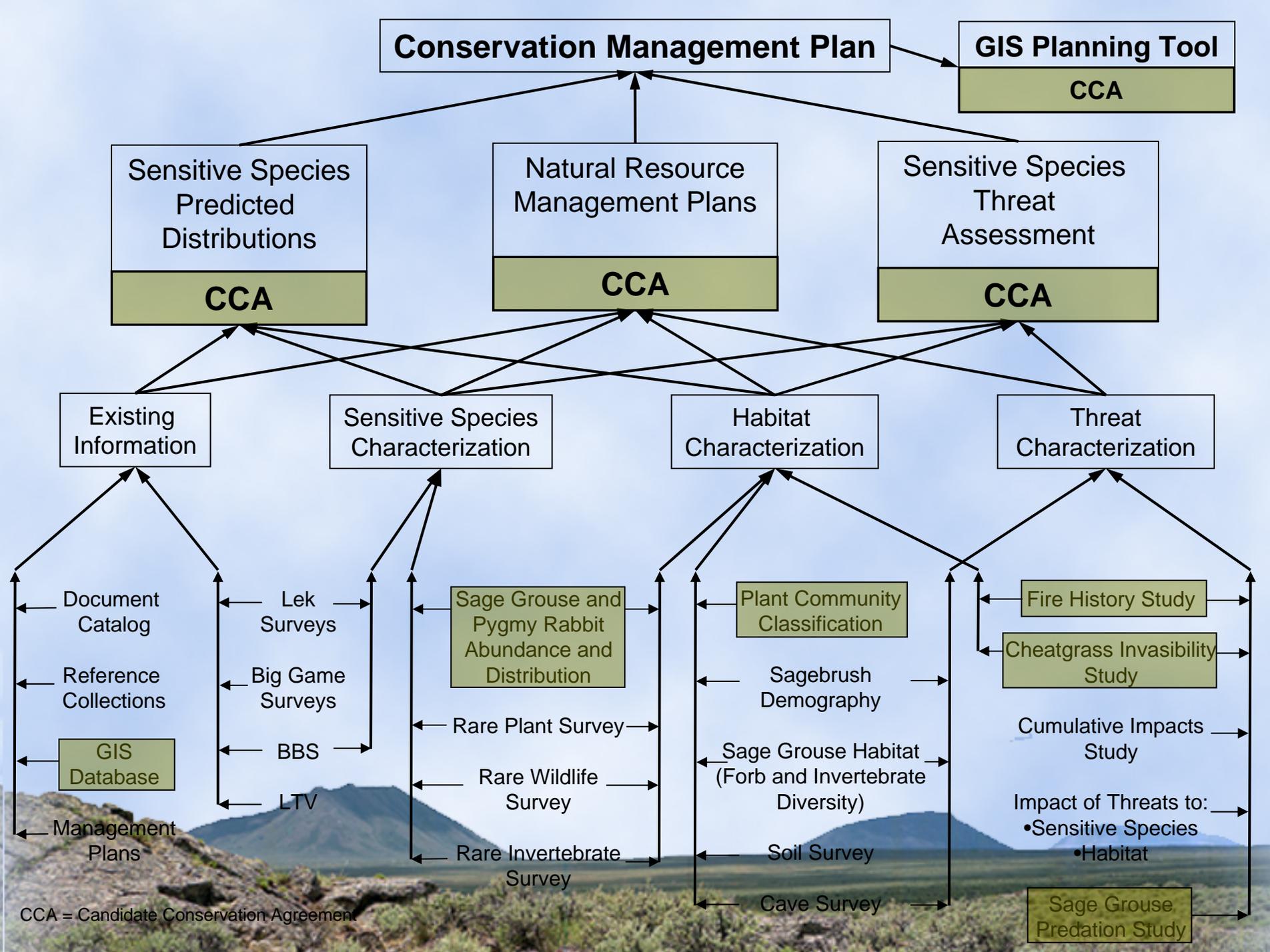
- Goal: Ensure long-term survival and conservation of sage grouse and pygmy rabbit and their habitats within lands owned by DOE-ID.
 - Between USFWS and other Federal agencies
 - Collaborative/Cooperative Strategy
 - Establishes a Conservation Plan for the species



Conservation Agreement

- Goal: Ensure long-term survival and conservation of sage grouse and pygmy rabbit and their habitats within lands owned by DOE-ID.
 - Between USFWS and other Federal agencies
 - Collaborative/Cooperative Strategy
 - Establishes a Conservation Plan for the species
 - Sets guidelines for ongoing, routine and maintenance activities
 - New Actions Not Covered





Conservation Planning Approach

- The Nature Conservancy has done more conservation planning than any other organization.
- Our approach is to mimic TNC method.
 - Conservation Action Planning Handbook, June 2007



Key Principles for Successful Conservation Projects

- The people responsible for implementing the plan must be involved in designing it.
- Project teams that are interdisciplinary generally produce plans that are innovative and resilient.
- Project teams need to evolve as the project matures and to accommodate changing conditions.



General Process Steps

1. Define the Project

- Identify the people involved
 - Core Project Team
 - Stakeholders (Internal to INL and External)
 - Charter, Terms of Reference, Partnering Agreements
- Determine the project scope
 - Conservation Targets
 - Vision Statement - Success Scenarios



General Process Steps

2. Develop Conservation Strategies and Measures

- Identify Key Ecological Attributes and Measurable Indicators for Conservation Targets
- Identify Critical Threats
- Develop a Situation Analysis of:
 - Threats and Degraded Attributes
 - Linkages between threats and conservation targets
 - Set Conservation Objectives and Actions
- Establish methods for measuring success



General Process Steps

3. Implement by Integration into INL Site Operations

- Land Use/Management Plan
- Wildland Fire Management Plan
- Restoration and Mitigation Plan
- Species/Habitat Monitoring Plan
- Environmental Management LWP
- NEPA Process
- Others?



Current Status

- Field Research, Inventory and Monitoring are ongoing
- GIS Planning Tool database being populated
- Core Project Team being developed
- Stakeholders being identified
- Affected Projects (both ongoing and new) being identified

