NACCB Policy Declaration: Advance Ecological Connectivity Implementation in the Rocky Mountains and North America

July 31, 2020

The biennial North America Congress for Conservation Biology (NACCB) is one of the largest gatherings of conservation professionals in North America. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Congress convened virtually to bring together scientists, researchers, Indigenous Peoples, policy makers, practitioners, students, and others interested in biodiversity conservation.

With a theme of *Crossing Boundaries—Innovative Approaches to Conservation*, we have an excellent opportunity to highlight recent ecological connectivity successes and advance strategies for more widespread implementation in North America. With many on-going initiatives to restore and conserve ecological connectivity at multiple scales, we seek to address the extent of continent-wide habitat fragmentation/degradation. Significant action is urgently needed to increase conservation of ecological connectivity, proactively link climate change policy to conserving connectivity, and implement strategies that rely upon transboundary cooperation and information sharing among practitioners and the public.

POLICY DECLARATION[i]

The participants of the 2020 North American Congress on Conservation Biology (NACCB) and Members of the Society for Conservation Biology North America (SCBNA) declare the need for strong policy, management, and implementation actions that maintain, enhance, and restore ecological connectivity across North America. This is a top priority of SCBNA to support conservation of biodiversity, increase resilience to climate change, and safeguard human health.

To that end, SCBNA:

- Promotes a coherent approach to identify and conserve ecological connectivity at all scales across North America in accordance with the new International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) “Guidelines for Conserving Connectivity through Ecological Networks and Corridors.”

- Calls for action at all levels of governance, including indigenous, to invest in and implement a system of ecological corridors that enables protection and restoration of native fish, wildlife, and plant species as well as ecological and evolutionary processes [e.g., calling on the U.S. Congress to provide funding for wildlife crossings and corridors through federal transportation legislation, including HR 2, Moving Forward Act, and SB 2302, America's Transportation Infrastructure Act].

- Calls for action at all levels of governance, including indigenous, to integrate climate change into ecological connectivity, climate resiliency, and adaptation policies.

- Encourages action by SCBNA members, North American conservation practitioners, and interested citizens to engage across diverse communities and stakeholders for the purpose of sharing knowledge, coordinating action, and increasing ecological connectivity implementation from local to international scales.

These actions include:

1) Raising Awareness and Building Capacity
2) Identifying Corridors and Collecting Data
3) Planning for and Advancing Connectivity Conservation

1) Raising Awareness and Building Capacity

- Raise awareness of key local, regional, national, and international constituents who have the ability to advance ecological connectivity conservation, including through formal and informal cooperation, enabling policies and mechanisms, and public and private sector engagement for funding and implementation.
- Promote evidence-based case studies, analyses, and practical guidance for scientifically informed policies, laws, and plans.
- Encourage natural resource agencies to build new partnerships for public engagement and education to increase support for ecological networks and corridors.
- Provide technical and scientific expertise to identify key drivers, species, areas, ecosystems, and processes to prioritize ecological connectivity, especially in indigenous areas, urban areas, and working lands.
- Seek opportunities to join together to work locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally, to advance connectivity conservation policy, planning, implementation, and capacity-building. We propose an SCBNA Ecological Corridor Working Group or Community of Practice for knowledge exchange and implementation support.
- Create a new outreach initiative on connectivity conservation associated with NACCB conferences and through other venues reaching both youth and adults.

2) Corridor Identification and Data Collection

- Advance and support formal identification and designation of ecological corridors and encourage governance authorities to eventually report ecological corridors and ecological networks for conservation to the Protected Planet Database managed by the UNEP and IUCN.
- Support data collection and analysis for identification of corridors, including state of the art technologies, such as remote sensing and genetic data as well as traditional indigenous knowledge.
- Enable data-sharing, including crowdsourced roadkill datasets and other relevant corridor identification data.

- Support monitoring and evaluation of connectivity implementation strategies to enable networked learning and adaptive management over time.

3) Planning for and Advancing Connectivity Conservation

- Encourage international, federal, provincial, regional, and local legislation and policy that supports the identification, maintenance, and or restoration of ecological corridors in according with the aforementioned IUCN Guidelines and best-available science.
- Support the convening of multijurisdictional, state-federal partnerships to address ecological corridors to streamline implementation processes.
- Encourage planning for ecological connectivity with and across agencies and regulatory bodies charged with management of wildlife, natural resources, transportation, etc.
- Promote identification of priority ecological corridors through best-available science, including understanding economic and/or social values that may align with them
- Identify available and innovative funding mechanisms from local to national levels.
- Integrate emerging climate change science and policy with connectivity conservation.
- Advocate for policies that mainstream ecological connectivity in development, infrastructure, and public health planning as well as natural resource management.

[i] Based on recommendations from the National Council of Environmental Legislators.