U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Natural Resource Program Center

Human Dimensions Branch
2017 Annual Report

"The conservation social sciences are not an optional complement but rather a vital component, along with the natural sciences, for effective conservation decision-making during planning, implementation and management. Integrating the social and natural sciences will ensure that these processes are indeed guided by the best available information ."

Bennett, N. J., Roth, R., Klain, S. C., Chan, K. M. A., Clark, D. A., Cullman, G., Epstein, G., Nelson, M. P., Stedman, R., Teel, T. L., Thomas, R. E. W., Wyborn, C., Curran, D., Greenberg, A., Sandlos, J. and Veríssimo, D. (2017), *Mainstreaming the social sciences in conservation.* Conservation Biology, 75: 56–66.

Demand for conservation social science to inform and improve decision-making and strategies is growing. No longer are the social sciences an optional compliment for effective conservation decision-making. The work of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) occurs within a social, economic, cultural, institutional and political context where integration of natural and social sciences as well as collaboration across disciplines is essential to success. The Human Dimensions Branch (HD Branch) works to bridge interdisciplinary sciences and build a deeper understanding of this complex context in order to achieve desired biological outcomes.

The HD Branch was established in August of 2012 at the Natural Resource Program Center (NRPC) with a mission to enhance the ability of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) to address the human dimension of conservation. Since our establishment, support has extended well beyond the Refuge System where shared need and interest exists. We integrate social science with biological science through research, technical support, training, tool development and capacity building. This annual report highlights the HD Branch's key accomplishments in 2017, including forward progress on modelling evaluation and monitoring of multiple agency priorities and innovative resources and training to increase our practitioners' social science knowledge, skills and abilities.

Thank you to all those who worked with and supported the HD Branch this past year, including the following external partners: U.S. Geological Survey, Colorado State University, The Ohio State University, Cornell University, Virginia Tech, North American Bird Conservation Initiative, Partnership and Community Collaboration Academy, D.J. Case and Associates, Banner Enterprise, Foundations of Success, and DOI's Office of Collaborative Action and Dispute Resolution (CADR). And, of course, thank you to the social science champions and experts inside the Service for your support and collaboration. We look forward to another successful year in 2018!

Natalie Sexton, Human Dimensions Branch Chief
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HD Branch staff from left: Danielle Ross-Winslow, Kaylin Clements, Brad Milley, Katie Lyon, Amelia Murphy, Natalie Sexton, Christy Browne

Integrating Social Science in the Service

As demand for social science expertise grows across the conservation community and within the Service, strategies to integrate social and natural sciences are evermore central to success. This past year, the HD Branch connected social scientists with each other and encouraged social-ecological integration across regions, programs, and disciplines by meeting people where they are.

Bringing People Together to ID Barriers and Strategies for Integration

In September 2017 we gathered with over 20 Service employees across programs and regions in Estes Park, CO who were attending the HD Foundations training and/or the Pathways 2017 Human Dimensions of Fish and Wildlife Conference. Through group discussions we identified key barriers and opportunities to integrate social science in the Service. Key opportunities included building capacity through more training; adding human dimensions knowledge, skills and abilities to existing position descriptions and adding social science training to individual development plans. Barriers included a lack of awareness about what HD means and how it can inform our work and a lack of qualified employees to carry out HD work. To capitalize on opportunities and overcome barriers, participants suggested practitioners serve as HD champions within their home offices by spreading the word about relevant trainings, connecting those interested in HD with each other, and advocating for hiring social scientists and including HD in other position descriptions. What will you choose in 2018?

Meeting People Where They Are: Practitioner Connections

The HD Branch provides HD training to Service staff within the National Wildlife Refuge System and other programs of the Service. We accomplish this by serving as partners with the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) on their HD training curriculum and strategy. NCTC offers HD courses, shares training videos and podcasts through the online library, and coordinates off-site HD training courses at existing conferences. In addition to these courses, the HD Branch also offers in-situ training upon request. By visiting with people where they are, be that in a regional office or on a refuge, we are able to tailor trainings and courses to reflect the issues that they face every day and gain a better understanding of on-the-ground challenges and successes.

This shared learning occurred during a visit to the Southwest Region in May 2017. The HD Branch delivered a training for region and field staff in the regional office designed to introduce social science concepts to non-social scientists. Later, on a site visit to Valle do Oro, Branch members sat down with refuge manager Jennifer Owen-White and her staff to discuss partnerships they had formed with the local community. Despite overwhelming success, one partnership was proving difficult to nurture. As Branch members and the staff of Valle do Oro discussed options for engagement, the Branch was able to provide a second set of eyes and ears, while also learning about on-the-ground issues faced by the field. This was truly shared learning at its best.

A Spotlight on Evaluation

Evaluation is an essential yet often overlooked component of any adaptive management framework, including Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC). In addition to playing a key role in providing evaluation expertise and facilitating integration of evaluation in programs and initiatives, we practiced what we preach and evaluated our own capacity-building and outreach efforts.

Evaluating Monarch Conservation Efforts of the Service: An Integral Component of Successful Conservation

The Service's national monarch conservation initiative operates on a broad geographic scale that spans across three socially and ecologically diverse countries. A systematic, strategic approach to conservation planning and evaluation is critical to its success. Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) provides an adaptive management framework for program planning, implementation, and evaluation in such complex systems.

This year the HD Branch continued its role in the monarch initiative by providing social science and evaluation expertise in support of a socio-ecological approach to conservation, as well as continued support of the SHC process through the use of tools offered by the *Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation* (OS), another adaptive management framework. We facilitated the refinement of the monarch conceptual model, which depicts direct threats to the monarch and its habitat, as well as the social, economic, cultural, and political factors associated with those threats. This foundational model provides a baseline for monarch conservation planning and evaluation, thereby laying the groundwork for the Service's Monarch Conservation Evaluation Plan. In collaboration with consultants from Foundations of Success, experts in OS, we developed an evaluation planning proposal and initiated the first steps in its implementation. This included forming an evaluation planning team representing diverse expertise from across the Service. The team identified strategies and activities to be evaluated in the first phase of this national effort. We are excited to facilitate the implementation of the evaluation plan in 2018.

Evaluating HD Branch Training and Outreach Products

Evaluation is essential to the success and legitimacy of any program and the HD Branch's training and outreach efforts are no exception! Over the past five years, both in partnership with NCTC and independently, we've developed and shared a plethora of outreach products including broadcasts, newsletters, and podcasts to address gaps in social science knowledge and skills of Service practitioners. This past year, we developed and implemented an evaluation plan for these products, looking at quality of resources, level of use and viewership of each product, and the cost to create them vs the impact we believe they are having. We enlisted the help of top students from Colorado State University's School of Journalism and Communications to evaluate the quality of podcasts and broadcasts and have begun applying their recommendations. We also monitored use of website features such as blogs, expert directory, and search tools on HDgov via Google Analytics, while NCTC tracked use of our podcasts and broadcasts. From these analytics we can gauge the level of interest in different topics and resources. For instance, we know that our last broadcast, featuring the Nature of Americans study, has been viewed 350 times, our podcasts were viewed 461 times in FY17, and that the majority of Service employees who visit our site return to use it again.

Evaluating the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program

The Service's goal for the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program (UWCP) is to partner with urban communities in conservation. With 80% of the country's population living in cities, we recognize the need to make real changes in the way our agency relates to urban communities. We are getting to know the communities around our urban refuges and in urban partnership cities and working to support an engaged and inspired conservation constituency so together we can ensure abundant and healthy wildlife and wildlands exist for all to enjoy. We strive to continually evaluate these efforts to ensure we are strategic and adaptive, modifying our practices to ensure success.

The HD Branch leads the evaluation efforts for the UWCP in collaboration with the Division of Visitor Services and Communication and NCTC's Division of Education and Outreach. Last year, we developed guidance, resources, and assessment tools to evaluate how refuges are implementing the UWCP Standards of Excellence. This year, we facilitated the rollout of the tools to the 14 priority urban refuges. The assessments help us meet the UWCP policy directive to continually evaluate our achievement of objectives and provide critical insights to refuges, regions, and headquarters about how the program is working. It is a guide for refuges to reflect on what they have accomplished so far, measure progress, and identify gaps and needs for future efforts. It provides regional and national leadership with an understanding of ongoing efforts and what support refuges need to progress.

With the analysis and reporting of the phase one evaluation assessment we are facilitating shared learning about successes and challenges across the UWCP and beyond. Understanding the barriers communities face to accessing nature-based activities, how refuges are working to be welcoming and inclusive, and the strengths and weaknesses of relationships with partners are insightful for *any* program striving to connect Americans to nature and the outdoors. Moving forward with evaluation for the UWCP we will shift from looking at what we do, to measuring the changes that occur as a result of our work. In 2018, we will continue work with the four funded priority urban refuges (John Heinz NWR, Urban Refuge Program of the Portland-Vancouver Metro Area, SoCal Urban Refuge Program, and Valle de Oro NWR) to evaluate the outcomes of programs and activities they are implementing in their communities. These funded refuges serve as a testing ground for the goals of the UWCP. Through this process we will develop guidance, tools, and resources to conduct outcome evaluation more broadly for the UWCP. For more information, check out the UWCP evaluation website (www.fws.gov/urban/evaluation).

Identifying and Connecting HD Experts and Champions in the Service

Part of our efforts to build capacity and connect demand for social science expertise with appropriate resources is identifying who in the Service already has social science skills and knowledge. In addition to finding the social science "experts" in the Service, we worked to identify "champions," or those individuals who do not have social science expertise but who support and promote the integration of the social sciences with natural resource conservation. In 2013, the Branch conducted focus groups, surveys, and a social network analysis to gain a better understanding of the Service's social science capacity and needs. Last year we focused on furthering this roster of experts and champions and invited them to be a part of our "Expert Directory," available on our website and accessible to Service employees only. The directory provides custom-made profiles, including information on each person's expertise, location, position, etc., as well as contact information. The idea is to provide a living platform for social scientists across the Service to connect and share their expertise, put their knowledge and skills to greatest use, and brainstorm new ideas and solutions.

There are currently 32 experts listed in the directory. To access the Directory, visit our website at https://my.usgs.gov/hd/team/usfws, click on "Expert Directory" and log in using your active directory username and password. You can then search by region, program, and area of expertise.

First Regional Social Scientist Joins the Ranks

We welcomed a new social scientist to the Service in 2017! Dr. Wylie Carr joined the Office of External Affairs in the Southeast Region as the Service's first official regional social scientist. Based out of Atlanta, Wylie's work so far has focused on using social science theory, methods and data to inform regional priorities. For instance, he's been leading an effort to develop a stakeholder engagement process for the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS), a collaborative effort involving 15 states, 13 federal agencies, and 2 U.S. territories. Check out the SECAS website at http://secassoutheast.org/. Wylie works closely with the HD Branch to build social science capacity across the Service. He served as a co-instructor for the HD Foundations course in Estes Park in September, and is developing collaborative conservation and stakeholder engagement resources for practitioners. Previously, Wylie worked as a research scientist with the U.S. Geological Survey in Fort Collins, Colorado. He holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia, and a master's and doctorate from the University of Montana. His graduate work applied conservation social sciences to better understand large-scale environmental changes. You can contact Wylie at 404-679-7217 or wylie_carr@fws.gov.

Social Science Research Highlights

Monitoring Visitors and their Experiences on National Wildlife Refuges

National wildlife refuges provide access for education and interpretation of the natural world and hunting, fishing, wildlife watching and other recreation opportunities for over 50 million visitors annually. In many places, refuges are economic engines for local communities. In preparation for the 2018 rollout of the National Visitor Survey, the HD Branch convened a team of field, regional and headquarters representatives from various program areas (e.g., economics, transportation, visitor services) to ensure the survey instrument and sampling approach meet the needs of the Refuge System. Information collected as part of this systematic monitoring effort can help focus limited resources on amenities and experiences that better support the public's needs and wants – providing a direct benefit to the public. Refuges that have at least 50,000 visits will be surveyed on a rotating basis every five years beginning in 2018.

Programmatic Clearance for Service-Sponsored Social Science Surveys

The Service-wide programmatic clearance is one step away from final approval! The HD Branch continues to pursue a Service-wide programmatic clearance to facilitate an expeditious process to collect information from the public through standard social science methods (e.g., public surveys, focus groups, interviews). The programmatic clearance simplifies and streamlines the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval process, increasing the efficiency of Service personnel in collecting necessary information by significantly shortening the amount of time required. It will also improve coordination of social science research across Service programs and lessen potential redundancy in studies. Look for communications detailing the programmatic clearance and how to use it in 2018.

Voluntary Conservation on Private Lands

Approximately 70% of the nation's lands are privately owned. The voluntary conservation efforts undertaken by private landowners through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (Partners Program) are essential for accomplishing conservation of large, connected natural areas and promoting stewardship of working lands to meet the conservation challenges of the 21st century. The Partners Program teamed up with the HD Branch to research landowner behaviors and motivations related to voluntary conservation projects on their property. A recent publication (Dayer et al. 2017; http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/conl.12394/references) identified this type of research as critical for understanding the long-term effectiveness and environmental benefits of voluntary conservation programs. The article challenges the assumption that landowners who engage in incentive programs will maintain conservation practices post-agreement and goes on to call for research on the extent of behavioral persistence and the factors that aid or impede this persistence. Results of this study will identify characteristics that attract landowners to the Partners Program as well as factors that contribute to landowners' long-term conservation commitment. The survey will take place in early 2018.

Meet the Human Dimensions Team

Meet our team, a diverse mix of talent and skills. Here is a peek into some of the project areas each of us works on. Below, you'll also find each of our answers to the question: If you could spend a whole day doing just one thing, what would it be?

Christine Browne

- Strategic planning and evaluation
- Social-ecological integration
- National monarch conservation
- Wildlife crime

I could probably lay on a warm beach **all day**

Natalie Sexton

- HD Branch Chief
- Social-ecological integration in the Service
- Promoting public and stakeholder engagement

I could probably craft **all day**

Danielle Ross-Winslow

- Evaluation
- Urban Wildlife Conservation Program
- HD capacity building
- Social-ecological integration

As a new mom, **I could probably** sleep **all day**

Brad Milley

- Private land conservation
- Fish and wildlife conservation policy
- Communication and outreach
- Landscape conservation

I could probably go hunting with my lab **all day**

Kaylin Clements

- HD capacity building
- Evaluation
- Monarch Initiative situation analysis
- Communication and outreach

I could probably play with baby polar bears **all day**

Amelia Murphy

- Social science integration and evaluation for the Monarch Initiative
- Public and stakeholder engagement
- Urban Wildlife Conservation Program

I could probably cook **all day**

Katie Lyon

- National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Survey
- Survey design
- Paperwork Reduction Act/ OMB review

I could probably read a book **all day**

Contact Us

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