



WILDHERITAGE

**Strengthening Conservation
through Comprehensive
Ecoregional Conservation
Assessments (ECAs)**

About Wild Heritage, a Project of Earth Island Institute

Wild Heritage, a project of the Earth Island Institute, works to secure protections for primary forests in US and international policy. We also support ecological restoration of degraded forests. We focus on primary forests because of the exceptional and irreplaceable benefits they provide, including supporting at least two thirds of Earth's terrestrial species and storing vast amounts of carbon, and as the homelands of Indigenous peoples.

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ECOREGIONAL CONSERVATION ASSESSMENTS

Ecoregional conservation assessments (ECAs) provide a roadmap for conservation groups and decision makers to integrate protection of priority conservation areas and focal species with land-use planning. They can be used to elevate conservation proposals in areas where wildfire risk reduction and climate change issues have stalled progress in advancing protections.

In the Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregion (OR/CA), we are helping conservation partners advance protected area proposals along the Siskiyou Crest, a critically important migration corridor for plants and animals dispersing in response to climate change. In the Eastern Oregon Cascades and Blue Mountains, we are assisting groups with mapping



mature and old-growth forests, and habitat for wolves and other focal species in large-landscape planning. In the Santa Fe area of New Mexico, we are helping conservation partners build from the ECA in developing conservation alternatives to Forest Service backcountry "fuel reduction" projects by instead targeting home defense. In the Mogollon Highlands (AZ), we are working with the Natural History Institute in shining a regional spotlight on the importance of protecting large landscapes. In Northwest Montana, we are assisting groups in the location of climate refugia and connectivity corridors so that they can propose the area as a national climate refuge.

Ecoregional Conservation Assessments: A Primer

ECAs overlay conservation priorities on to ecoregions broadly defined as large landscapes with distinct landforms, climate, and species assemblages. They consider a variety of factors, including focal species distributions, important terrestrial and aquatic habitats, key ecological processes like wildfire, climate change planning, and land-management impacts. ECAs transcend political boundaries, aligning conservation interests with the natural contours and dynamics of an area.

ECAs uniquely integrate forest protections with climate change and wildfire planning that offer many benefits for conservation groups focused on issues like wildfire risk reduction, mature/old-growth forest (MOG) preservation, and broader landscape and local conservation needs, including:

- **Strategic Focus and Efficiency:** By highlighting key priority areas within ecoregions, they can help groups target their conservation efforts where they can have the most impact, ensuring efficient use of resources.
- **Evidence-Based Advocacy:** The data, maps, and insights can empower nonprofits to advocate more effectively for policy changes and more responsible land management with a solid scientific basis.
- **Enhanced Funding Opportunities:** Detailed knowledge of ecological priorities and needs can strengthen grant applications and fundraising campaigns, making them more compelling to potential funders by demonstrating a clear, evidence-based need for conservation efforts.
- **Community Engagement and Education:** they underline the importance of ecosystems and their services, providing a powerful tool for educating and engaging local communities. And they enable groups to communicate the value of conservation in relatable terms, fostering local support and involvement.
- **Partnerships and Collaboration:** The comprehensive nature of ECAs encourages collaboration across landownerships and management agencies leading to more effective conservation outcomes.
- **Adaptive Management:** By providing a baseline and framework for ongoing monitoring, they allow groups to practice adaptive conservation. They can adjust their strategies based on real-world results and emerging scientific knowledge, ensuring their efforts remain relevant and effective over time.

ECAs offer nonprofit organizations and groups targeted, informed, and collaborative conservation actions. Leveraging these assessments can significantly amplify the impact of conservation initiatives, making a lasting difference in the preservation of

critical habitats, species, and ecosystems even in controversial settings such as in relation to effective wildfire risk reduction that otherwise has hampered conservation approaches.

A CALL TO ACTION

We urge organizations, community groups, and all stakeholders committed to conservation of nature to join us in leveraging the power of ecoregional conservation assessments. By working together, we can ensure a more targeted, informed, and united approach to conservation, safeguarding invaluable ecosystems for future generations.

This is more than just an invitation; it's a call to action for all of us to contribute to a collective mission that transcends individual interests. Together, we have the power to effect significant, positive change. Let's embrace this opportunity to make a lasting impact. Join us in this vital journey towards a more sustainable and ecologically vibrant planet.

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