

North Central Texas Regional Ecological Framework (REF)

North Central Texas Council of Governments, Total Cost: \$355,000, FHWA Share: \$177,500

Period of Performance: 31 months, Dates: May 9, 2008 – December 9, 2010

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http://www.nctcog.org/TRACES/Reg_Ecosystem_Framework.asp

Project Goals

The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) *Eco-Logical* project aims to develop an REF to help agencies assess environmental impacts of proposed infrastructure projects and enhance multi-agency understanding of critical resource protection areas. The REF is an overlay of maps of agencies' individual plans¹ that includes a corridor assessment component in which NCTCOG will analyze resource agency management plans and social and environmental GIS data to assess potential environmental effects by watershed. The grant project focuses on three pilot corridors associated with transportation projects where related impacts are being assessed at sub-watershed levels (Lake Lavon Transit Line, State Highway 360, and State Highway 170). Using the *Eco-Logical* approach, NCTCOG has a long-term goal (outside the scope of this grant project) of identifying priorities and strategies for each of the hundreds of wetlands in the region.

Project Activities

NCTCOG conducted a series of stakeholder meetings introducing the REF strategy and explaining how the REF fits within the eight-step *Eco-Logical* approach.

Key Accomplishments

In the past year, the project team identified vital environmental data, including watershed and habitat data, in the pilot corridors. They formed initial links with key stakeholders in the pilot communities, which they plan to strengthen as they move into a cumulative effects analysis. NCTCOG plans to use the initial findings of its project to identify broad mitigation and permitting strategies that cities can consider as part of their transportation development process.

Challenges

NCTCOG has found several challenges in working with stakeholders. First, NCTCOG had to maintain stakeholder interest in the project while simultaneously managing expectations for quick action. Second, some agency stakeholders were accustomed to working at scales either much larger or smaller than the project scale, and NCTCOG had to present data at scales comfortable to these different groups. Finally, NCTCOG holds the perception that resource and regulatory agencies tend to be involved in very particular stages of the planning and project-review process; each agency's respective focus on technical parts of the process might detract from its ability to view and participate in the planning process holistically.

Future Steps

Technical efforts to collect watershed data are a key ongoing component of the project. Ultimately, NCTCOG will overlay the data on three transportation corridors to complete its cumulative effects analysis. While NCTCOG selected three corridors as an illustrative example for the large region, it is still seeking ways to portray data from these corridors so that the REF is relevant to other infrastructure projects or watersheds. Once the overlay is complete, NCTCOG will meet with communities to discuss all potential impacts of infrastructure development.

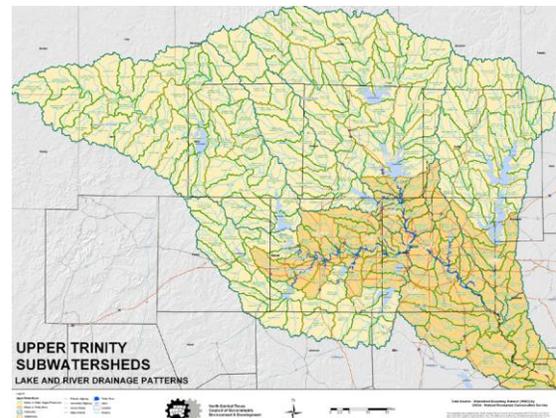


Figure: Lake and river drainage patterns of the Upper Trinity Sub-watersheds, Texas.

¹ *Eco-Logical* recommends that a REF consist of an overlay of maps showing agencies' individual plans, accompanied by descriptions of conservation goals in the defined region(s).