

## **A Regional Eco-Logical Assessment Protocol for the South Central United States**

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 6, Total Cost: \$170,500, FHWA Share: \$100,000**

*Period of Performance: 36 months, Dates: May 1, 2008 – May 1, 2011*

*AOTR: Mark Sarmiento, Grant Project Website: <http://www.epa.gov/region6/index.htm>*

### **Project Goals**

The goal of the EPA Region 6 *Eco-Logical* grant project is to develop a Regional Ecological Assessment Protocol (REAP) as an expansion of the Texas Ecological Assessment Protocol (TEAP). The TEAP and REAP are tools that use existing GIS data to classify land on the basis of ecological importance. The REAP will cover all of Region 6, which includes Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.

### **Project Activities**

EPA Region 6 has collected nearly all of the needed data over the past year, and the project team has started merging data sets to create the GIS tool.

### **Key Accomplishments**

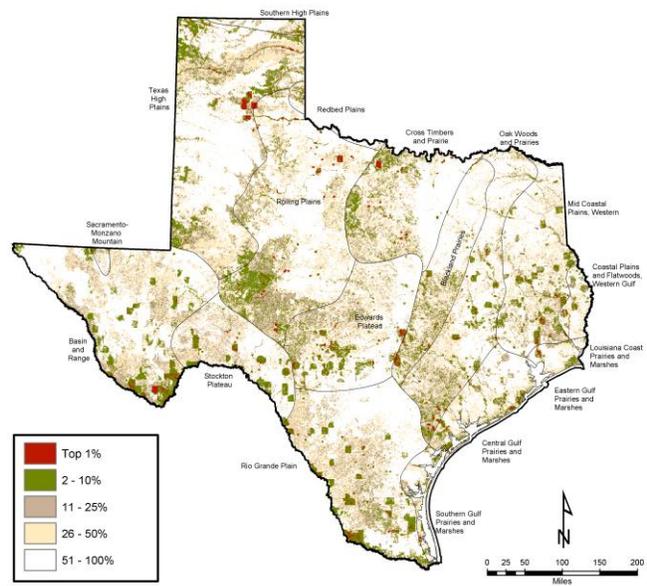
The EPA project team found new relationships and opportunities created through the grant process, including greater opportunities for environmental agencies to employ GIS modeling. In terms of future benefits, EPA anticipates that REAP will allow transportation planners at the MPO level to identify areas of avoidance or to test the environmental impacts of different alternatives.

### **Challenges**

EPA anticipated challenges in collecting data from six separate States. In most cases, EPA had no prior relationships with the State-level agencies; however, the EPA Region 6 project team found that it was able to collect all of the data with relative ease, with the exception of Louisiana, for which the project team is still pursuing data. Some States were reluctant to give out specific data, but the EPA Region 6 project team worked with each State to explain the value of the project as a useful transportation planning tool. Furthermore, the team clarified that it would make the REAP tool available to the States. EPA also agreed not to release data except in an aggregated form, thereby protecting the classified nature of certain data sets.

### **Future Steps**

Once the final report is completed and the data are made publically available, EPA staff will visit state departments of transportation and FHWA offices to educate States about the REAP. EPA staff plans to use these visits to start conversations between transportation and wildlife agencies about joint planning.



**Figure: TEAP composite, that is a model for the REAP composites.**