

Background



- The Recovery Credit System is a framework for federal agencies to implement recovery measures for threatened and endangered species. This crediting framework was developed by a working group convened by the Texas Department of Agriculture to allow Fort Hood Military Reservation to receive credit for recovery actions being implemented off-site through conservation and management action on private lands. An independent third-party review was designed to meet the following needs:
 - Provide an objective and thorough evaluation of the three-year proof of concept for both the process and the intended impact.
 - Assess the utility of the Recovery Credit System.



Evaluation Questions

1. What is the Recovery Credit System (RCS) and how does it differ from other **models**?
2. Was the Recovery Credit System **implemented** as planned?
3. How did participants, contractors, and stakeholders perceive the **process**?
4. Did the RCS promote effective federal/non-federal **partnerships** for species recovery?
5. Did the operation of the RCS meet its goals for endangered **species** conservation?
6. Did the RCS increase the **flexibility** of federal agencies to accomplish their mission while meeting their requirement under the Endangered Species Act?
7. To what degree did the **scientific** information generated provide reliable information likely to lead to more effective conservation and recovery strategies for the species in this and other models?
8. What can **lessons learned** contribute to aspects of different or new models?



Data Sources

1. A **Peer Review Panel** to assess model features, and species conservation
2. Review of all successful (21) and unsuccessful (23) **bids** along several variables (region, acreage, length, cost share, cost)
3. Review of program **documents**, such as biological opinions and weighting criteria
4. Review of the **habitat** on eight contracted sites using purposeful sampling
5. Seventeen interviews with participating **landowners** using convenience sampling, for an 85 percent response rate
6. Twenty-three phone and in-person **interviews** with program operators, military personnel, and stakeholders using purposeful sampling

Conclusions

- **Question 1: What is the Recovery Credit System and how does it differ from other models?**

- The Recovery Credit System is a framework for federal agencies to implement recovery measures for threatened and endangered species under which federal agencies may offset adverse effects of agency actions taken elsewhere for that species. While the evaluation did not provide an exhaustive comparison to all other conservation strategies, it did document the differences between selected strategies.

- **Question 2: Was the Recovery Credit System implemented as planned?**

- Yes, the system was implemented as planned and demonstrated in a real-world environment that the model was viable and feasible.

- **Question 3: Did the participants perceive that the process was efficient?**

- Yes, landowners and other interviewees described the process as efficient (defined as whether the proof of concept activities occurred in a timely manner, the nature and extent of perceived problems that occurred, and the nature and extent of perceived successes). Landowners expressed positive impressions of the program, comparing the program favorably against prior experiences with similar government programs.

Conclusions

- **Question 4: Did the Recovery Credit System promote effective federal/nonfederal partnerships for species recovery?**
- Yes, the program promoted landowner partnerships; other federal/nonfederal partnerships had both successes and challenges.

- **Question 5: Did the operation of the Recovery Credit System meet its goals for endangered species conservation?**
Yes, the program met its goals for habitat conservation. The model could be enhanced, however, to further impact the species.

Conclusions



- **Question 6: Did the Recovery Credit System increase the flexibility of federal agencies to accomplish their mission while meeting their requirement under the Endangered Species Act?**
- Yes, the model provided additional flexibility, but there is even greater potential.

- **Question 7: To what degree does the scientific information generated by the Recovery Credit System monitoring and research program provide reliable information likely to lead to more effective conservation and recovery strategies for the species in this and other models?**
- The program used three dissemination strategies: an annual local symposium, peer-reviewed articles, and presentations at conferences. No specific outreach plan targeted managers or practitioners. Those with frequent contact with the program were highly satisfied with the scientific information generated, feeling that the information generated was a significant contribution to the recovery effort for the species; stakeholders with less frequent contact reported less awareness.

Evaluation Report Summary



- Proof of concept pilot demonstrated RCS viability to create a market mechanism for trading credits, engaging landowners, and increasing competitiveness.
- Interviewees and the peer-review panelists agreed that the model provided important contributions to both conservation and to the military:
 - working toward species recovery,
 - extending conservation beyond the boundaries of the installation by engaging private landowners,
 - formalizing a market-based tool for trading credits, and
 - providing an additional method for removing restrictions on training.
- Effect on endangered species habitat protection and federal agency flexibility was positive, but could be enhanced.

Recommendations



Recovery Credit System model:

- Establish metrics for recovery and action agency results at the onset and establish baselines, if possible.
- Place greater emphasis on materially enhancing habitat and/or addressing additional recovery measures; protection of habitat is important but by itself may not be adequate to meet the net benefit standard.
- Think actively about the length of impacts and recovery of habitat and match contract enrollments accordingly.

Recommendations



Recovery Credit System for the golden-cheeked warbler:

- Allow landowners to receive credit for supporting habitat that will be managed to produce higher quality habitat. Considering expanding protected habitat to include a buffer.
- Allow for term contracts beyond 25 years for the golden-cheeked warbler; this will add to the flexibility of federal agencies.
- Establish metrics for conservation and for participating Federal Action Agency activities during the planning process, and develop a clearer link between the wildlife management plan and conservation metrics. Report throughout the project on both process measures and these metrics.
- Develop more refined criteria in the future, particularly with regard to supporting and restorable habitats.
- Incentivize warbler-benefitting practices through scoring during the enrollment competition. The program currently supports management practices that are intended to benefit warblers *and* separate practices that are implemented exclusively to benefit ranching operations.

Recommendations: RCS at Fort Hood



- Refine management actions to enhance deciduous recruitment and manage supporting habitat in ways that improve or maintain its suitability to support breeding, feeding, and other activities of the golden-cheeked warbler.
- With a group of stakeholders, implement a formal communication plan to share successes and challenges. The plan should identify stakeholders and their information needs.
- If the proof of concept continues at Fort Hood Military Reservation, then consider the recommendations under the Recovery Credit System, as described above.