

2 SETTING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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2.1 Defining Project Goals

PROJECT DRIVERS

Whether you're developing a new project or trying to improve an existing one, establishing clear goals helps you to focus your energy and resources. To identify these goals, you'll need to consider (1) what needs to happen in your target landscape, (2) your organization's mission and expertise, and (3) available funding.

FIGURE 2A: A GREAT PROJECT GOAL LIES AT THE INTERSECTION OF LANDSCAPE NEED, YOUR ORGANIZATION'S MISSION AND EXPERTISE, AND AVAILABLE FUNDING.



1. Landscape need. You're well acquainted with your region. What needs to be happening? Maybe unrestrained development is fragmenting natural areas, an endangered species is on the brink, a new invasive species is creeping in, or nonpoint source pollution is threatening water quality. You know what the important issues are in your region. Keep those front and center as you think about what problem you'd like to address via this project.

2. Organizational mission and expertise. Next, pair that landscape need with your organization's mission and expertise. What does your organization do well? Maybe you protect land under conservation easements, or you help landowners manage their land well. Whatever you do, it is likely that you can find a way for your work to address the landscape need.

It's important not to try to take on something new or make it fit just because there's a need for it in your area. If farm runoff is a big issue in your area, but you have no experience with farmers or agriculture, you're likely to waste time and effort making mistakes and getting up to speed. Instead, find a partner who has the needed expertise ([see Section 3.1: Identifying Potential Partners](#)), or find a different way to improve the landscape using the skills and resources you already have.

On the flip side, it's also important not to keep doing what you're doing if there is little need for it. For example, if forest cover is at an all-time high in your area, your efforts to promote tree planting may be misplaced. Instead, it makes sense to channel your organization's energy toward other needs, such as controlling invasives or planting more valuable species.

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3. Available funding. For most of us, the projects we undertake are bound by available funding. In the world of conservation and land management, available funds are influenced by grants, donors' preferences, or organizational priorities. For government agencies, on-the-ground outreach is often tied to the goals of existing programs, such as the Forest Stewardship Program, or cost-share programs.

We encourage you to think creatively to seek the overlap between an easy-to-fund activity and the

landscape need you are trying to address. Are people excited about the new whisky-barrel business blooming in your region? Maybe you can leverage that excitement into funding better forest management. Is donor interest in your long-standing invasive species management program waning? You might be able to revive interest by taking a different tack, for example, mentoring students or creating job opportunities for ex-prisoners. (Of course, you should do this only if you have the organizational expertise or partners to actually deliver on those mentorships or job skills!)

Identifying a meaningful, yet achievable, project goal involves finding and amplifying areas of overlap among landscape needs, your organization's mission and expertise, and funding opportunities.

PROJECT PARAMETERS

While it is good to think comprehensively about landscape needs and how to address them, it is equally important to narrow huge challenges down to manageable, achievable goals commensurate with your resources.

Your ability to change landowner behavior to achieve landscape goals is limited by many factors, including staff capacity, duration of the program, equipment, or maybe even your ability to follow through with interested landowners. Setting parameters for your outreach effort will help bring focus to the project so you can have an impact. It is much harder to make meaningful and demonstrable progress if you are working in a scattershot manner or resources are spread too thin. So carve out what part of the problem you can reasonably tackle. This might mean focusing on a specific geography (e.g., a particular watershed or selected counties) or on a particular aspect of the overall challenge.

Here are a few examples.

Southeast Longleaf: Many partnerships form around a particular threatened species or at-risk habitat. However, maps of historic ranges or proxy species can still leave partners wondering where to focus their efforts. The Longleaf Alliance uses a combination of many relevant landscape characteristics to narrow the focus of their partnership efforts. Depending on the needs of the specific local partnership, they overlay other conserved lands, existing stewardship efforts, infrastructure that may impact prescribed fire applications, partners' other priority areas, possible corridors, or ground-cover characteristics. Rather than spreading resources across the entire historic range, their partnerships focus on areas where their work is likely to have the biggest and longest-lasting impact.

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New England Land Trusts: The MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership learned through experience to focus its outreach on larger landholdings. The MassConn Woods outreach partnership (which includes the American Forest Foundation and New England Forestry Foundation) started with outreach to all landowners who owned 10 or more acres. This strategy was fine for an offer of a free book, but when the project began offering expert visits to landowners, partners soon realized that local land trusts had limited capacity and were unwilling to work with landowners with small acreages. In subsequent mailings, MassConn made sure to specify a minimum acreage as one of its parameters when offering a land trust contact or forester visit.

Great Plains Windbreaks: Charged with reducing the damaging effects of unabated wind across the plains, the Kansas Forest Service chose to focus on improving windbreaks that were in fair to poor condition in the western part of the state (as identified by the GIS imagery shown below). The western third of the state was chosen because that region had the most windbreaks in poor or fair condition. The forest service staff chose to focus on improving those windbreaks, rather than planting new windbreaks, because they believed repair was an easier ask of landowners and the likelihood of success was greater. The staff also felt that better functioning windbreaks in the region would pave the way for a future campaign focused on windbreak installation.

FIGURE 2B: GIS ASSESSMENT OF ONE COUNTY WITHIN THE LARGER PROJECT AREA SHOWS WINDBREAKS IN GOOD, FAIR, AND POOR CONDITION

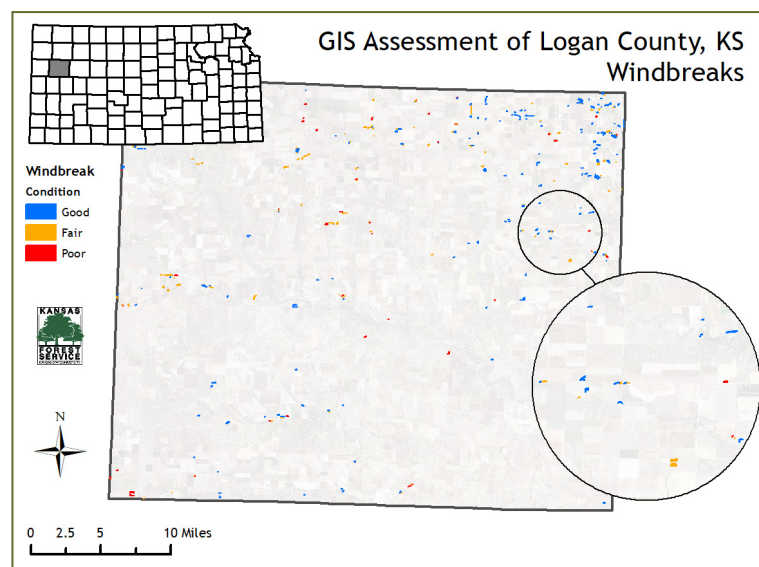


Image courtesy of Kansas Forest Service

When the ecological issue you're addressing is complex and widespread, and your resources are limited, focus your resources on a smaller geographic area or a particular aspect of the problem to have a meaningful impact.