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STRATEGIC CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT OF  
GULF COAST LANDSCAPES

**PARTNERSHIP  
FOR GULF  
COAST LAND  
CONSERVATION  
USE CASE STUDY**

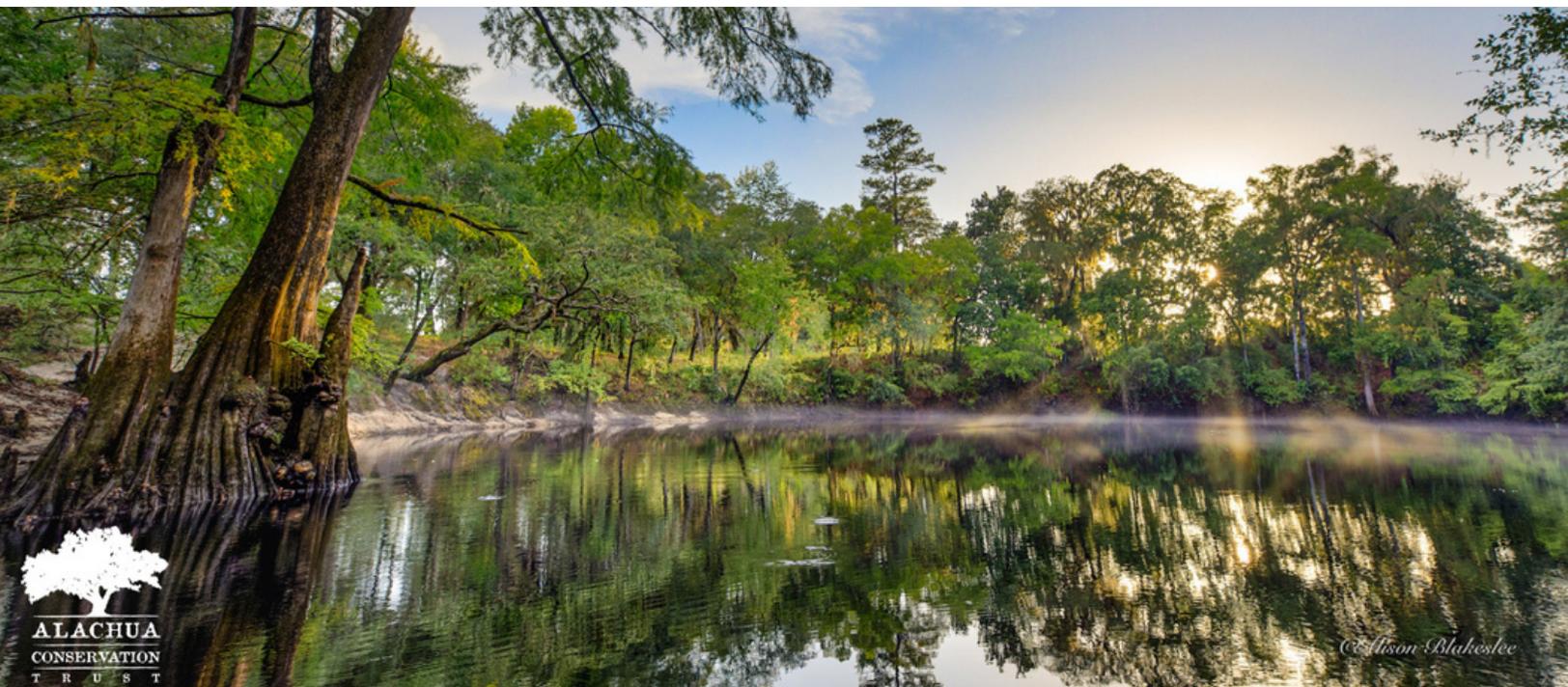
*June 2022*

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# PARTNERSHIP FOR GULF COAST LAND CONSERVATION

*Conservation Geography: Gulf-wide*  
*Primary Stakeholders: Vance Crain and Tom Kay*

Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation, also known as the [Gulf Partnership](#), is a coalition of approximately 28 local, regional, and national conservation organizations in the Gulf Coast Region. Launched as a committee in 2010 by the Land Trust Alliance and Gulf of Mexico regional partners, the Gulf Partnership grew into a standalone 501(c)3 by 2020. Over this time, the Gulf Partnership has operated as a bridging organization bringing together members who work with private landowners, local communities, and government agencies to protect invaluable natural resources and landscapes in the region, including longleaf pine and bottomland hardwood forests, mangrove forests, ranchlands, freshwater springs, sandy beaches, and barrier islands. With the mission of increasing the pace, quality, and permanence of voluntary land and water conservation within the coastal region, the Gulf Partnership has enabled their member organizations to protect more than 27,800 acres of fragile coastal habitat through their Gulf Coast Project Assistance Fund.



This project met several of the Strategic Conservation Assessment of Gulf Coast Landscape's (SCA's) Use Case Study selection criteria (see below) and was valuable in representing Gulf-wide conservation efforts. This Use Case Study was unique in that it had the largest numbers of engaged stakeholders. In total, **24 stakeholders** were involved representing a variety of Land Trust partners and Gulf Partnership members.

The SCA Team (hereafter we) launched this Use Case Study with an initial scoping call in October 2020 during which the purpose of the effort was determined: **Updating the Gulf Partnership's Conservation Vision document and master plan to inform conservation priorities for 28 land trust partners across the Gulf**. To achieve this, we had 25 hours of engagement in preparation and working sessions with the Gulf Partnership stakeholders (**the Partners**) from December 2020 to January 2022, with additional ongoing collaboration with Vance Crain, the Gulf Partnership Executive Director, and Tom Kay, the Gulf Partnership Board of Directors Chair, through the launch of a new Strategic Conservation Vision Tool in March 2022.

### Use Case Study Selection Criteria

- ✓ focuses on the acquisition or easement of land (land conservation; not restoration)
- ✓ exhibits a transferable issue that could be experienced by other areas in the region
- ✓ represents an application scale that fits into the hexagonal framework of the SCA project
- ✓ represents a diversity of agency type / mission
- ✓ fits within the existing RESTORE Council goal framework
- ✓ focuses in an area that complements the geographic diversity of the SCA region
- ✓ has planning or funding decisions going to be made within the SCA project timeline

We started our work together by reviewing the [2014 Conservation Vision](#) document to determine which priority measures should be retained and identify additional data layers that should be incorporated. This was an important effort because the organization had grown since the Gulf Partnership first completed this Vision and they wanted to ensure representativeness of partners and their priorities and objectives. We also spent time reviewing each of the SCA Tools, primarily the [Conservation Visualization Tool](#), to investigate measures that could serve as data sources for the additional identified data layers of interest.

At the end of several working sessions, the Partners confirmed incorporation of [six priority conservation layers](#) (see Table 1). Additionally, to ensure the inclusion of the Partners' focus areas, we encouraged each partner to provide geospatial data files of their priority conservation areas of interest. We joined this data, [Partner Priority Areas](#), with the data sources outlined in Table 1 to create an updated Conservation Vision map.

Table 1. Conservation Vision Priority Layers and Data Sources.

Priority Conservation Layer	Data Source
Partner Priority Areas	Layer created from the 11 Partner submissions that were received
Wetlands >10ha	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetland's Inventory 2021 data: <a href="https://www.fws.gov/program/national-wetlands-inventory/wetlands-data">https://www.fws.gov/program/national-wetlands-inventory/wetlands-data</a>
Longleaf Pine	American's Longleaf Local Implementation Team (LIT) project area data: <a href="https://americaslongleaf.org/media/4xupl1xi/longleaf-rangewide-teams.pdf">https://americaslongleaf.org/media/4xupl1xi/longleaf-rangewide-teams.pdf</a>
Migratory Birds	The Nature Conservancy's Gulf Wings Migratory Bird Stopover Habitat data: <a href="https://www.fs.usda.gov/treesearch/pubs/31695">https://www.fs.usda.gov/treesearch/pubs/31695</a>
Working Lands	SCA conservation database via Gap Analysis Project, Florida Cooperative Land Cover, and Texas Ecological Mapping Systems data: <a href="https://scatoolsuite.gitbook.io/sca-tool-suite/support/economy">https://scatoolsuite.gitbook.io/sca-tool-suite/support/economy</a>
Connectivity of Natural Lands	SCA conservation database via ESRI's Green Infrastructure Initiative data: <a href="https://scatoolsuite.gitbook.io/sca-tool-suite/support/habitat">https://scatoolsuite.gitbook.io/sca-tool-suite/support/habitat</a>
Composition of Riparian Zones	SCA conservation database via NLCD 2016 data: <a href="https://scatoolsuite.gitbook.io/sca-tool-suite/support/waterquality_quantity">https://scatoolsuite.gitbook.io/sca-tool-suite/support/waterquality_quantity</a>

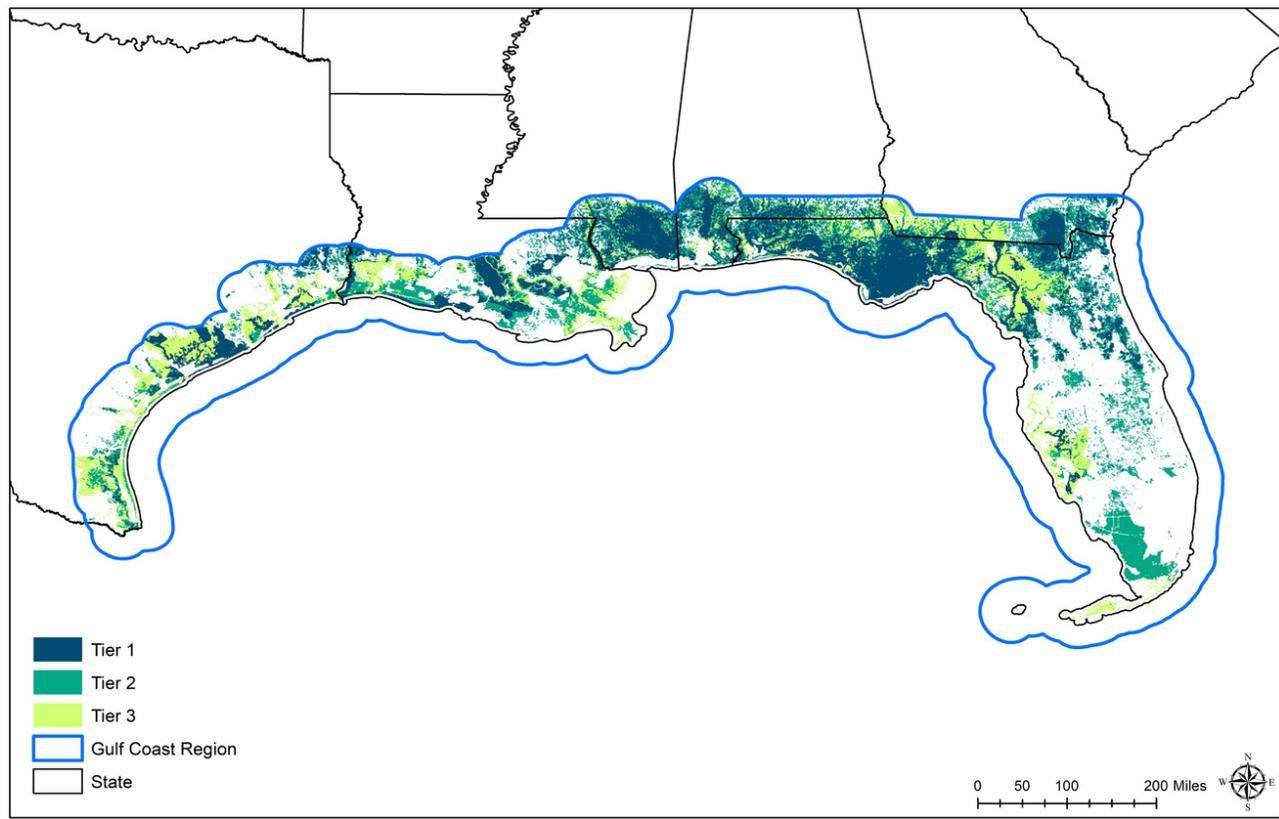


Figure 1. Gulf Partnership 2022 Conservation Vision Map.

In alignment with the 2014 Conservation Vision process, we worked with the Partners to develop a decision tree to establish a tiered conservation priority structure based on increasing intersections of priorities and conservation measures. This structure resulted in the final version of the [2022 Conservation Vision](#) (see Figure 1).

Although it was not part of the original purpose for this Use Case Study, we initially brainstormed about the possibility of incorporating an updated Conservation Vision layer into the SCA Tools. To ensure visibility and the dynamic nature of the updated Gulf Partnership Conservation Vision priorities, members of the SCA Team created a separate tool called the [Strategic Conservation Vision Tool](#). Shortly after this tool was launched in March 2022, the Gulf Partnership released a [Request for Proposals](#) (RFP) for their Project Assistance Fund that specifically cited reviewing and using this tool to ensure project eligibility.

This tool will make the Gulf Partnership funding decisions more strategic as they hope to allocate more funding over the next few months than they have in the last decade of this program. A staggering number of RFP proposals has been submitted and the interest indicates the high demand for and power of this Gulf Partnership program. Vance provided some preliminary results indicating the initial impact of these Use Case Study efforts:

*“The Strategic Conservation Vision Tool developed has been incorporated in the Gulf Partnership’s Project Assistance Fund and is already showing results. With the Gulf Partnership’s first round of applications currently under review, we have approximately \$350,000 in funding for 23 regional projects, covering over 26,000 acres and leveraging an estimated \$48,000,000 in conservation funding, all of which aligns with the Vision Tool created by the SCA Team.”*



Stakeholder input has been central to the entire SCA project and associated efforts, and these Use Case Studies are no exception. Through this Use Case Study, we were able to support Vance, Tom, and the rest of the Partners in their strategic conservation efforts while also incorporating their feedback to improve the tools for current and future use. To ensure a co-production approach through the completion of the Use Case Study, Vance (VC) and Tom (TK) were asked to answer several questions regarding the overall process.

### Why were you interested in becoming a Use Case Study?

*VC: "Aligning the work of the SCA group, the Vision Tool, and how the Gulf Partnership is able to leverage these resources into direct conservation outcomes provides an excellent example that bridges the gap between science and conservation action."*

### What did you enjoy about this process?

*TK: "The SCA staff was a pleasure to work with and patient with both the subcommittee focused on this Use Case Study as well as the organization's board as a whole. Debating the priorities, thresholds, and impacts of decisions was intellectually invigorating."*

### How do you think this process could be improved?

*VC: "I have only heard positive feedback from Gulf Partnership members during this process. On our end, staff turnover likely created challenges, but the experience of the SCA Team, and dedication of the Gulf Partnership members kept things on track and the results speak for themselves. Y'all do great work!"*

### Do you think your Use Case Study was a success?

*TK: "The Partnership does believe the Use Case Study was a success overall. We will have a dynamic, online Conservation Vision that will aid our efforts and those in the region in making decisions about conservation priorities both for acquisition as well as restoration."*

### Can you think of anything that would have made your Use Case Study more successful?

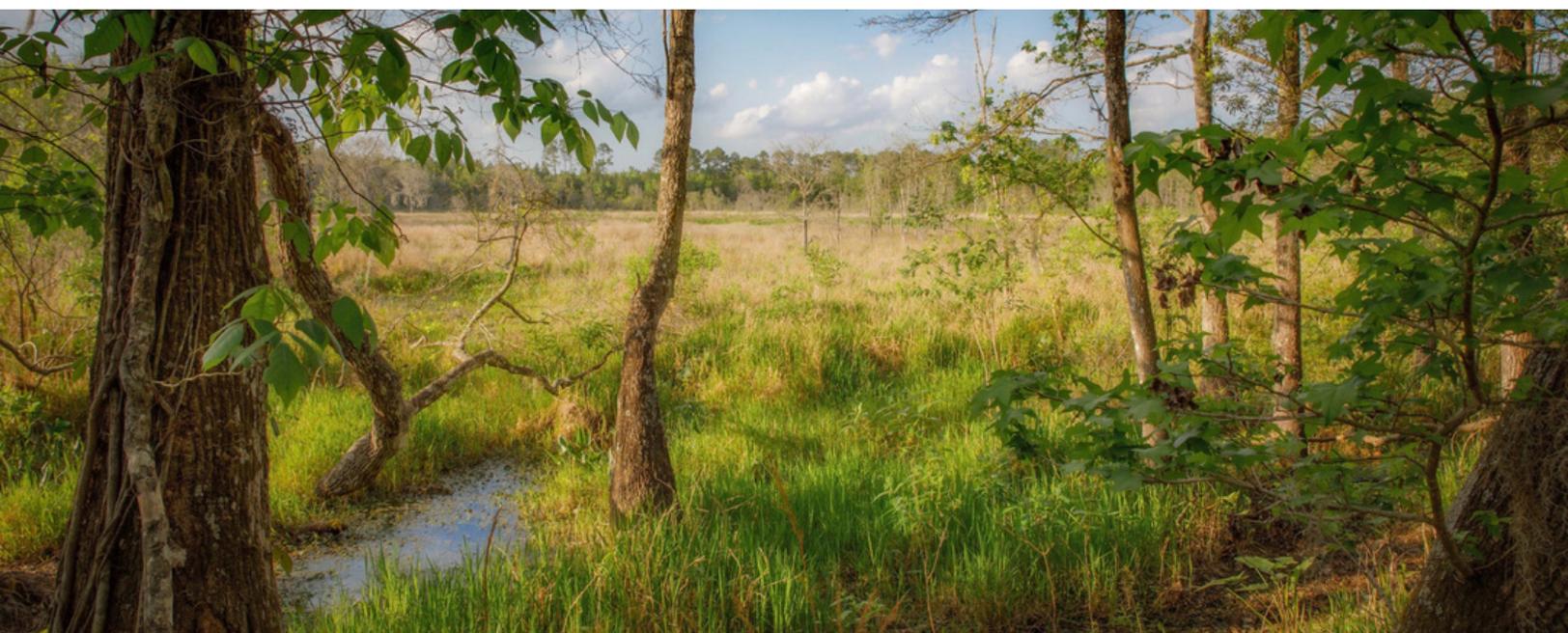
*VC: "Aligning the Conservation Vision Tool to the Project Assistance Fund has been a great success. It has provided a funding mechanism and example for science-driven conservation. It's hard to top the results we are seeing, but building this program out is the next level in judging success. We have the tools, and it falls on the Gulf Partnership to leverage that support into tangible outcomes."*

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This Use Case Study was our **largest relative to geographic scope and engaged stakeholders**, which allowed for many lessons learned and valuable accomplishments. Coordination from both sides of the collaboration was essential for ongoing engagement and efforts over the past year and a half through multiple personnel changes. The level of **commitment** from Tom, Vance, and the additional Partners was incredible and invaluable ensuring success of this effort. The SCA Team's **innovativeness** and **dedication** to assisting with an updated Conservation Vision allowed for the creation of a conservation planning support tool the Gulf Partnership will use for years to come. Finally, the relationships initiated and cultivated through this Use Case Study will endure and have already shown **promise for future collaboration**. When asked what his most valuable lesson from this effort was, Vance said:

*“Knowing that the SCA Team exists, and how they can work with conservation members to build tools that meet regional needs. They provide a skillset beyond the capabilities of most conservation organizations, and their ability to facilitate this process from start to finish leads directly to the conservation outcomes described earlier. Their value goes beyond the tool, and we hope to continue our work with them going forward.”*

This Use Case Study is currently considered complete, though we intend to stay connected with Vance and Tom regarding future use and improvement of the **SCA Tools** and **Gulf Partnership Strategic Conservation Vision Tool**.





This success of this Use Case Study is the result of incredible collaboration and partnership over a year and a half period. **We want to extend our gratitude to all those were who involved in these efforts as they helped make this updated Conservation Vision a strategic and inclusive reality.** Particularly, we would like to thank our core group of stakeholders who attended and helped coordinate the working sessions, dedicating much of their time, energy, and expertise. These stakeholders persevered through multiple personnel and leadership changes and we owe them a debt of gratitude:

- **Robert Bendick**, The Nature Conservancy
- **Lisa Creasman**, The Nature Conservancy
- **Vance Crain**, Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation
- **Elisa Donovan**, The Coastal Prairie Conservancy
- **Walter Ernest**, Pelican Coast Conservancy
- **Kara Fox**, National Audubon Society
- **Dawn Haight**, Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain
- **Melissa Hill**, Alachua Conservation Trust
- **Tom Kay**, Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation / Alachua Conservation Trust
- **Becky Prado**, Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation
- **Robert Smith**, Wildlife Mississippi

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Thank you again to the Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation members for their dedicated collaboration over the entirety of the Use Case Study efforts.

Funding for this project was provided by the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council through an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Cooperative Agreement no. F17AC00267), and was produced with support from the Forest and Wildlife Research Center at Mississippi State University. The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council.



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## PHOTOGRAPH CREDITS:

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