

Filling the Gaps: Placing Private Landowners at the Forefront of Recovery of Threatened and Endangered Plant Species



Presented by Erin Medvecz

Advisors: Dr. Troy Knight and Dr. Jean Lavigne

College of Saint Benedict | Saint John's University

Introduction

The number of plant species added to the threatened and endangered species lists each year is on the rise; yet the number of plants being delisted, or taken off the list, remains extremely low. This incongruity has revealed gaps in the Endangered Species Act and the recovery plans created to facilitate the recovery of the species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service focuses on acquiring habitat as its main recovery strategy. With this mindset, the recovery efforts of private landowners go unacknowledged, creating a **private landowner gap**. This is problematic because about 2/3 of federally listed species are found on private land. **To facilitate the recovery of these species, landowner engagement should no longer be prevented; rather, it should be prioritized.** A lack of incentives for landowner participation and the presence of many disincentives deters landowners from becoming involved in endangered species recovery. **However, by fostering partnerships between private landowners and a conservation organization or within a community of landowners, the private landowner gap can be filled, leading to the successful recovery of more plant species.**

Methods

1. I analyzed the Endangered Species Act and the Western Prairie Fringed Orchid Recovery Plan. I then engaged peer-reviewed literature to assist in formulating my critiques of the ESA and recovery plan.
2. I interviewed five employees from The Nature Conservancy, a non-profit conservation organization, who engage with landowners out in the field in Minnesota and North Dakota. They offered their own perspectives on the possibility of incorporating private landowners into endangered species recovery.
3. I interviewed four private landowners who currently partner with The Nature Conservancy to understand their current relationship with TNC, to assess their willingness to engage in endangered plant species recovery, and to understand their concerns in doing so.

Picture Sources

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| http://fisherynation.com | http://blogs.marketwatch.com | http://tenthamendmentcenter.com | http://www.agandfoodlaw.com |
| http://www.iconarchive.com | http://www.facebook.com | http://www.cbsnews.com | http://www.thenhmgrouop.com |
| http://www.facebook.com | http://www.nrcs.usda.gov | | |

Results

Figure 1. Current implementation (left) and proposed implementation (right) of the Endangered Species Act and recovery plans.

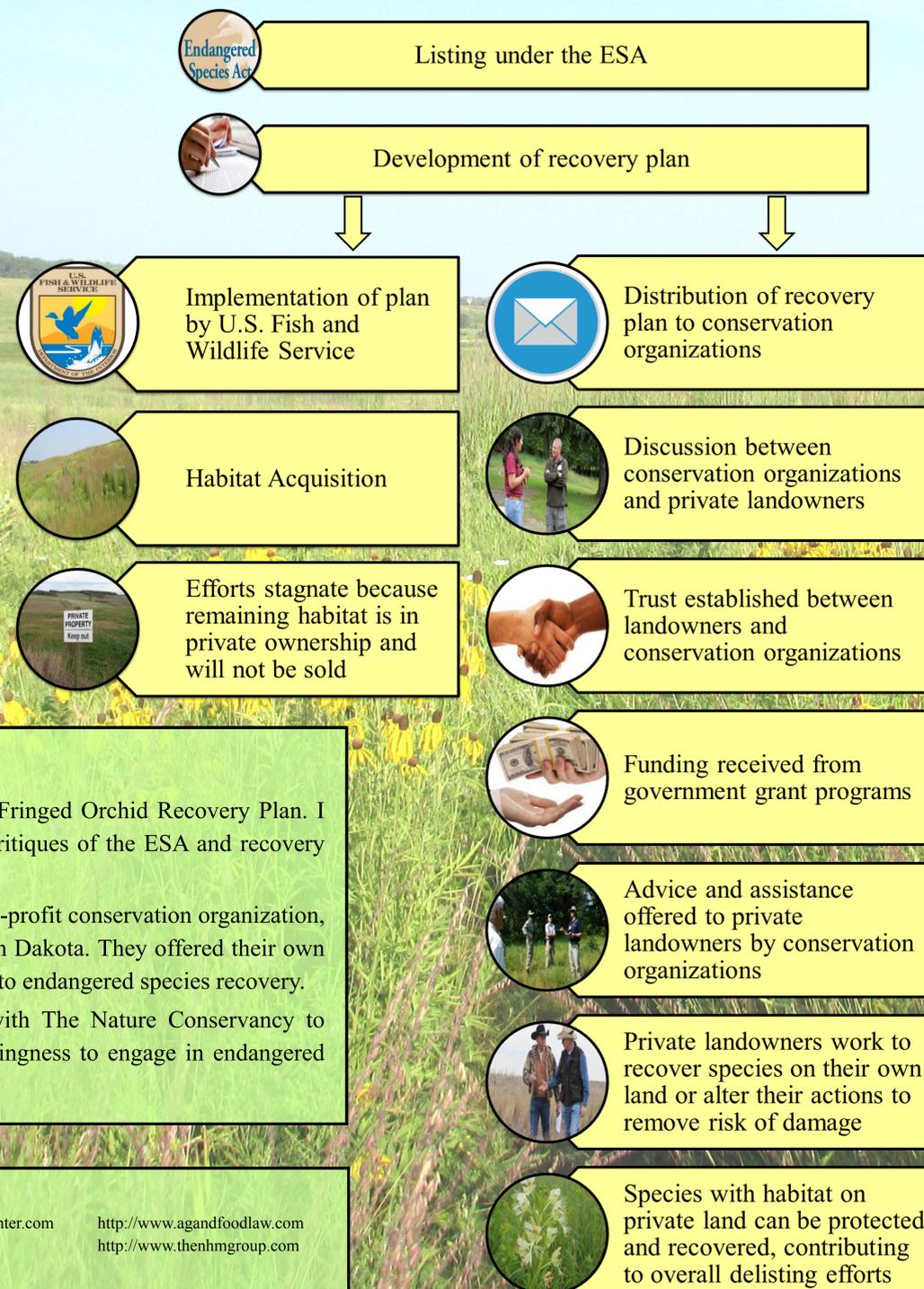


Figure 2. Interviews with employees from The Nature Conservancy

- “We need to make **one-on-one connections** before we give advice to landowners.”
- “You almost always need a **third party** to bridge the gap between government funding and private landowner action: this is where **conservation organizations** come into play.”
- “Overall, I believe landowners are **conservation-minded** and would be willing to receive information about managing endangered species.”
- “People in Minnesota use the land more for hunting and recreation so they tend to have a **greater interest** in caring for it.”

Figure 3. Interviews with private landowners

- “I would receive advice from TNC because they know the **value** and **experience** of considering different ways to manage property to promote growth.”
- “There has to be a **give and take**.”
- “If we can work as **friends** and **neighbors**, yes, I’d work as part of a community-conservation organization.”
- “We need to think **outside** the box.”
- “It is **past dire time** things changed when it comes to how we treat the land.”

Conclusion

To fill the private landowner gap, the good that can be accomplished by private landowners themselves must be recognized in order to encourage conservation and recovery actions on their part. **Facilitating the creation of community-centered conservation groups or partnerships with conservation organizations to carry out recovery actions are the best avenues to fill the private landowner gap.** Advice should be offered from conservation organizations, while funding can be supplied by the government. It is important that no agency, whether the USFWS or the conservation organizations, come onto private land and state how it should be managed. A conversation is the best approach to understanding both sides of the issue and finding a balance between private actions and conservation goals. Ultimately, through listening to and engaging private landowners as key components of plant species recovery, it is hopeful that many more plants will be delisted in the near future.