

Social Science Working Group  
Society for Conservation Biology

Strategic Plan, 2015-2020

July 2015

## **Introduction**

The Social Science Working Group (SSWG) of the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) is a global professional community interested in the social dimensions of biodiversity conservation. With nearly 1300 members in more than 70 countries, the SSWG is home to a diverse array of social scientists, natural scientists, and conservation practitioners.

The SSWG grew rapidly in its first 10 years. In 2008, in preparation of the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the SSWG Board of Directors initiated a strategic review to assess achievements to date and identify future directions. The review produced SSWG's first Strategic Plan (2009-2014), available on our website. In 2013, celebrating SSWG's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Board convened another planning retreat and agreed that the strategic vision of the first plan could provide robust guidance for an additional five years.

As before, the vision, goals, and objectives outlined in this strategic plan are designed to focus, sustain, and enhance the impacts of conservation social scientists on conservation science and practice worldwide. Having already established an organizational home for conservation social scientists, this strategic plan focuses on targeted programmatic activities to advance scientific understanding, integrate social scientific science into conservation policy and practice, promote disciplinary diversity in conservation, and strengthen the epistemic community of conservation social scientists. At the same time, the plan highlights the need for organizational development of the SSWG in order to develop and sustain these targeted programmatic activities.

By achieving the goals and objectives articulated in this plan, the SSWG will substantially further its mission -- to strengthen conservation social science and the application of social science to conservation practice. In this way, we will advance the science and practice of conserving the Earth's biological diversity, the mission shared by all members of the Society for Conservation Biology.

Board of Directors  
SCB Social Science Working Group  
July 2015

## **Mission & Vision**

### **Mission**

The mission of the SSWG is to strengthen conservation social science and its application to conservation practice.

### **Vision**

The SSWG seeks to:

- Inform key scientific debates in conservation policy;
- Establish a vibrant global community of conservation social scientists; and
- Catalyze development of the next generation of leaders in conservation social science.

### **Goals**

We seek to realize this vision through continuous progress toward five goals:

1. **Science.** Advance scientific understanding of conservation as a social process.
2. **Policy.** Inform conservation decision-making through scientific dialogue and stakeholder engagement.
3. **Capacity-building.** Enhance the ability of scholars and practitioners to understand and address the social dimensions of biodiversity conservation.
4. **Membership.** Expand, diversify, and engage the SSWG membership.
5. **Organizational development.** Increase the capacity of the SSWG to achieve its mission.

Goal 1. Science. Advance scientific understanding of conservation as a social process.

Rationale: The field of conservation, and the organizations that represent it, have been rooted largely in the natural sciences. Only within the last generation have we begun to recognize the extent to which conservation is a social process, designed and carried out by people, with effects on both people and nature. Recognizing that conservation is about people as much as it is about species or ecosystems suggests a paradigm shift in the nature and use of science in conservation. Social science theories, analytic tools, and established knowledge can make a vital contribution to conservation success. Moreover, because biodiversity conservation is a widespread social phenomenon, conservation research by social scientists can provide insights into human society generally. Thus, advancing scientific understanding of conservation as a social process is a means both to preserve the earth's natural heritage and enhance our understanding of ourselves.

Implementation responsibility: Program Committee

Objective 1. Focus social science inquiry on key questions in the policy and practice of biodiversity conservation.

- 1.1. Identify key social science questions relevant to conservation policy and practice.
- 1.2. Increase donor support for generating and mobilizing social science knowledge on key questions.
- 1.3. Facilitate studies to address key knowledge gaps.

Objective 2. Advance social science knowledge surrounding key questions and enhance collective understanding of emerging insights.

- 2.1. Assess and monitor the state of social science published in conservation science forums.
- 2.2. Through symposiums, workshops, and other forums, convene experts to address key social science questions.
- 2.3. Disseminate social science insights into key conservation questions through SCB publications.

Goal 2. Policy. Inform conservation debates and decision-making through scientific dialogue and stakeholder engagement.

Rationale: Conservation scientists have sometimes been surprised that “good science” does not automatically translate into “good policy.” Decisions regarding conservation policies and investments are complex, requiring decision-makers to make judgments about difficult social, political, and ecological trade-offs surrounding issues with which they may have little prior knowledge. The development of policies and investment strategies that support biodiversity conservation goals thus requires concerted effort to bring the best available science to the fore and engage key stakeholders and decision-makers to ensure that they are aware of the science that can help them make informed decisions. By acting as a bridge between the science and policy communities, the SSWG is uniquely positioned to help stimulate thinking about, and advance the implementation of, pragmatic conservation policies, programs, and initiatives that take full advantage of the wealth of high-quality conservation science in which SCB members are engaged.

Implementation responsibility: Policy Committee (primary), Program Committee (secondary)

Objective 1. Bring social science knowledge to bear on key conservation policy debates.

- 1.1. Identify key conservation policy debates where social science is a limiting factor.
- 1.2. Determine current “state of the science.”
- 1.3. Identify, develop, and deliver products necessary to fill information gaps and inform central stakeholders in key conservation policy debates.

Objective 2. Facilitate social science engagement in SCB policy activities.

- 2.1. Identify SSWG members with expertise in subject areas relevant for SCB policy activities and initiatives.
- 2.2. Engage the SCB policy community to ensure that SSWG expertise is utilized effectively within the SCB policy initiatives.

**Goal 3. Capacity-building.** Enhance the ability of scholars and practitioners to understand and address the social dimensions of biodiversity conservation.

**Rationale:** Despite increased awareness of the importance of social considerations in conservation, practitioners often lack the expertise necessary to assess “the human dimension” and to integrate this information effectively into conservation strategies. The SSWG works to respond to these challenges by providing training and resources that help practitioners better solve conservation problems through integration of social science approaches into their work. To adequately prepare the next generation of conservation professionals for social science applications, a goal of the SSWG is to continue to expand these capacity building efforts and ensure they are designed to target diverse audiences, including practitioners as well as students and researchers in conservation-related fields of study.

**Implementation responsibility:** Conservation Committee, Education Committee, and Student Affairs Committee

**Objective 1.** Build basic social science knowledge among conservation practitioners.

- 1.1. Offer tailored trainings designed to promote integration of the social sciences into day-to-day conservation practice.
- 1.2. Increase practitioner access to conservation social science tools and resources through online delivery and other necessary means.

**Objective 2.** Enhance understanding of conservation social science among students and researchers in conservation-related fields of study.

- 2.1. Train students and researchers from conservation-related fields of study in integration of the social sciences into conservation practice.
- 2.2. Draft core curricula for conservation social science that can be adapted for use in a variety of capacity-building contexts.

Goal 4. Membership. Expand, diversify, and engage SSWG membership.

Rationale: A vibrant global community of conservation social scientist is essential to the SSWG mission. Further expanding, diversifying, and engaging the SSWG membership – especially underrepresented groups – will lay the foundation for SSWG to advance scientific understanding and integrate social science knowledge into conservation policy and practice. Each and every member represents a source of new ideas, a resource to the rest of the SSWG community, and a means of communicating with an even broader set of conservation scientists and practitioners, communities, and political leaders.

Implementation responsibility: Membership & Nominations Committee (primary), Communications Committee and Student Affairs Committee (secondary); Program Committees (tertiary)

Objective 1. Expand and diversify SSWG membership.

- 1.1. Characterize current and prospective future SSWG members.
- 1.2. Strengthen and build upon existing SSWG membership programs and activities.
- 1.3. Enhance membership incentives to help build a sustainable support system for the SSWG and its activities
- 1.4. Tailor and target strategies to enhance membership among underrepresented groups.

Objective 2. Engage SSWG membership more fully in SSWG and SCB activities..

- 2.1. Enhance outreach and encourage wider member involvement in new and longstanding SSWG activities.
- 2.2. Explore feasibility of organizing sessions earmarked for underrepresented groups at SCB global and regional meetings.
- 2.3. Explore feasibility of hosting SSWG activities in venues other than SCB meetings and other traditional settings.
- 2.4. Establish additional mechanisms for practitioners and students to engage in SSWG activities.

Goal 5. Organizational development. Enhance the capacity of the SSWG to achieve its mission.

Rationale: To reach its programmatic goals the SSWG must have adequate organizational capacity. Along with clearly stated goals and an overall vision, SSWG effectiveness rests on a diverse and engaged membership, sufficient financial resources, and conscientious leadership. The application of social science skills and knowledge is central to conservation success, and critical to the continued growth and influence of SCB in global conservation efforts. As the primary advocate of conservation social science within SCB, and given SCB's desire to increase its influence in global conservation efforts, the SSWG seeks to increase its organizational capacity.

Implementation responsibility: Officers of the SSWG Board, with support from other Board members and SCB Executive Office.

Objective 1. Enhance SSWG leadership capacity.

- 1.1. Ensure successful SSWG leadership transitions
- 1.2. Strengthen SSWG Committees and explore additional methods for expanding participation in SSWG leadership.
- 1.3. Strengthen SSWG internal procedures and enhance leadership communication.
- 1.4. Build social science leadership within other SCB organizational units.
- 1.5. Foster innovation in implementing the 2015-2010 SSWG Strategic Plan.

Objective 2. Raise funds to support SSWG operations and activities.

- 2.1. Solicit funds for discrete SSWG activities.
- 2.2. Develop mechanisms and implement strategic activities that contribute to SSWG fiscal sustainability and further the SSWG mission.

Objective 3. Further integrate social science content and expertise into SCB structure, membership, and activities.

- 3.1. Actively engage in SCB strategic planning process for after 2020.
- 3.2. Explore designation of SSWG as "section" within SCB.
- 3.3. Lead SCB efforts to engage with relevant social science professional societies and journals.

## **Implementation**

Realizing the five goals and overall vision described in this Strategic Plan requires an implementation plan that describes concrete activities to be conducted by the SSWG. Such a plan must include indicators and monitoring to track progress and assess performance. Specific monitoring indicators are included in Appendix 1. The SSWG will review its activities and progress toward the goals and objectives above on a regular basis. Annual workplans will provide the primary mechanism for translating the Strategic Plan into specific implementation activities. The SSWG Board and its committees are responsible for making this translation.

## Appendix 1. Monitoring progress

Indicators for monitoring progress toward our vision:

### Resolve key scientific debates in conservation policy

1. % of “top 100” questions addressed through organized sessions at SCB meetings
2. % of “top 100” questions with research papers derived from SCB presentations
3. % of “top 100” questions with SSWG-sponsored scientific consensus statements

### Establish a vibrant global community of conservation social scientists

1. % change in SSWG membership (expand)
2. % of countries represented in SSWG membership (diversify)
3. % of SSWG member countries with SSWG speakers at SCB global meeting (engage)

### Catalyze development of the next generation of leaders in conservation social science

1. # people trained by SSWG
2. # of student members in SSWG
3. % of SSWG members among SCB student award winners

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This strategic plan was approved by the SSWG Board

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