



**Field to Market®**

## BIODIVERSITY - HABITAT POTENTIAL INDEX METRIC DOCUMENTATION

Status of Document:	Version 1.0 – Effective September 19, 2013
Document Type:	Metrics Documentation
Contact Details:	<a href="mailto:athomson@fieldtomarket.org">athomson@fieldtomarket.org</a> <a href="http://www.fieldtomarket.org">www.fieldtomarket.org</a>
Next Planned Update:	September 2020

### VERSION HISTORY

Version/Date	Change	Link
1.0	Initial Publication	Current

# Quantification of Habitat Potential for Biodiversity in the Field to Market Metrics

## Final Report

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**STUDY COMPLETION DATE:** **September 19, 2013**

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**LABORATORY PROJECT ID:** Report Number: N/A  
Waterborne Study Number: 539.01

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## STATEMENT OF DATA CONFIDENTIALITY CLAIMS

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## GENERAL INFORMATION

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### Study Dates

Phase I Study Initiation Date: August 1, 2012

Phase I Study Completion Date: October 31, 2012

Phase II Study Initiation Date: March 1, 2013

Phase II Study Completion Date:

### Retention of Raw Data

Data used to conduct these analyses are currently stored at the facility of Waterborne Environmental, Inc., 897-B Harrison Street, S.E., Leesburg, VA 20175. This information may be transferred to the sponsor, at a later date.

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## Executive Summary

The Habitat Potential Index (HPI) for Biodiversity explores the potential impact of agricultural land use on habitat quality and quantity of production and non-production lands. It offers a qualitative estimate of the potential of a grower's farm to provide habitat for biodiversity. Biodiversity under the HPI includes a variety of native species and ecosystems that may be found on or near the farm – for example, plants, invertebrates (such as pollinators and other insects), birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, or fish. The HPI considers current land cover types present at the farm scale— including production lands and non-production lands – as well as the producer's management activities for each land cover type. Land cover types included in the HPI are crop production areas, forest, grasslands and savannas, wetlands, surface waters, and edge-of-field areas such as buffer strips. The approach is intended to promote practical protection and enhancement of existing on-farm habitat attributes, as opposed to the conversion of production area back to pre-agricultural conditions. The HPI approach emphasizes the ecological benefits afforded by effective stewardship of non-agricultural and agricultural land cover types. By design, best management practices and sound environmental stewardship incorporate relevant ecosystem services, including biodiversity.

The HPI is being developed as one of eight metrics for environmental sustainability within Field to Market's Fieldprint Calculator. The Calculator is an educational tool that enables the grower to explore relationships between management practices and a suite of outcomes including habitat potential, land use efficiency, water use efficiency and water quality, soil erosion and soil organic matter, and energy use efficiency and greenhouse gas emissions. When viewed collectively, this suite of metrics can provide a more complete picture of environmental sustainability performance as well benefits and tradeoffs associated with various practices. For example, while the HPI focuses on the overall impact of practices on habitat quality and quantity on the farm (e.g., land sharing), the land use efficiency metric provides insight into how increased productivity can reduce the need for land conversion elsewhere, and thus help conserve habitat potential off farm (land sparing). The Calculator serves as a starting place for the grower to look at his or her performance against all of the metrics and, working with local experts (for example, NRCS or University Extension), identify the most appropriate opportunities for improvement in both productivity and environmental performance within the specific context his or her own operations. The intent is to make the HPI available at the field and whole-farm level. Results to the grower would be provided on an individual land cover and aggregate farm basis, and would be compared to the maximum possible score based on the grower's current land cover types (rather than to external benchmarks and/or to alternative land cover conversion scenarios).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix A provides summary slides that describe of the HPI objectives.

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Agriculture as a contributor to the conservation of biodiversity

The role of private agricultural land in the conservation of biodiversity has gained increasing recognition as providing an important supplement to existing and planned conservation areas (Batary et al. 2010, Polasky 2008, Dumanski and Pieri, 2000, UNEP 1997). Investment in research and incentives for adoption of conservation practices on agricultural lands is evidence of a paradigm shift in which biodiversity and agricultural production are no longer considered mutually exclusive, and growers are increasingly recognized for serving a critical role as good stewards of the land and their influence in environmental stewardship. Sustainability of agricultural ecosystems is defined by achieving a balance between ecological and economic considerations (Feld et al. 2003), and necessitates the development and application of integrated landscape planning approaches that can provide benefits both to ecosystems and landowners (de Groot et al. 2009, Power 2010). One key factor in balancing ecological and economic considerations is the identification of field and farm management practices designed to enhance not only agricultural productivity (yield), but also ecological productivity as well. Alternative crop production practices, for example conservation tillage and integrated pest management (Lindenmayer et al. 2007, Dumanski and Pieri 2000), and other strategies which promote diversification of cropping systems can contribute to achieving this balance. Additionally, the capacity for supporting biodiversity offered by non-production lands present at the spatial scale of the farm (defined for this project as a single continuous parcel of land), is a significant conservation opportunity for growers that should be acknowledged and leveraged wherever possible. Ideally agricultural areas should be evaluated holistically (Yi Vikarri, 1999), as the field-scale may not adequately represent the dynamics of biodiversity such as the fact that the significance of management activities may vary based on the spatial composition of the whole farm, as well as that of the larger landscape (Laterra et al. 2012, Batary et al. 2010, Gabriel et al. 2010, Bengsston et al. 2005). To address this complexity, Field to Market (The Keystone Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture) initiated research efforts to characterize optimal scenarios for the co-existence of agricultural production and biodiversity based on landscape attributes at the farm-scale in addition to the field scale (Field to Market, 2012).

### 1.2 Rationale for a Habitat Potential Index (HPI) approach to address biodiversity

This report describes the development of a land-cover based approach for estimating habitat potential as a proxy measure to address biodiversity (abundance and diversity of native species and ecosystems) for agricultural systems at the farm scale. The Habitat Potential Index (HPI) for

biodiversity proposed in this study addresses and quantifies the ecological benefits of land management practices (current and future), emphasizing effective stewardship of both non-agricultural and agricultural land cover types. The approach highlights protection and preservation of existing land cover/habitat as well as a rationale for intensification of cultivated areas to mitigate further loss or degradation of habitat. Best management practices and sound environmental stewardship incorporate relevant ecosystem services, including biodiversity, to various extents depending upon the practice. The quantification of habitat potential was developed based on the following criteria: land cover types within U.S. ecoregions, farm land cover composition, and land management intensity. Consideration of attributes of the agricultural landscape including pattern, extent, and management intensity enables the characterization of the habitat potential afforded by agriculture and helps identify means to improve. The basic assumption underlying the HPI approach is that habitat degradation and loss (e.g., fragmentation) are primary factors influencing biodiversity (Haines Young 2009, Opdam and Wascher 2004). This assumption underlies the use of land cover structure, function, and related dynamics (land use change, management activities) of production and non-production areas as an indirect indicator of biodiversity. The scientific rationale for extrapolating a biodiversity measure based land cover attributes as opposed to relying heavily on outcome-based biological response measures (such as prediction of individual or groups of species) is discussed in further detail later in this Introduction. As a practical matter, the use of the HPI as an indirect measure of biodiversity avoids the complexity and data gaps that can present challenges for approaches that require detailed species enumeration.

In developing the HPI approach, one of the main objectives was to design a tool based on scientific principles that is also achievable, practical, scalable, and agronomically-grounded (Appendix A). This implies that a balance must be realized between scientific defensibility and simplicity, and correspondingly a balance between addressing the complexity of assessing biodiversity while keeping focus on what is useful from the perspective of a grower. Of particular importance is the ability to characterize and communicate biodiversity benefits of well-managed agricultural lands without creating any additional regulatory burden for producers. The integration of existing, recognizable and accepted approaches in the development of the HPI is one way this issue is addressed. Additionally, given the variety of trade-offs inherent with an issue as complex as the conservation of biodiversity on agricultural lands, the leveraging of existing strategies may better enable stakeholders to find "common ground" in the reliance on (and/or alignment with) widely recognized existing approaches. For example, the landscape accounting approach at the core of the HPI is similar to the established approach used by the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS, USDA) for assessing ecological benefits of conservation programs. The ecological-quality scoring scheme (discussed later) is roughly based on the habitat suitability index approach used by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Additionally, overlap of many of the inputs of the HPI tool with the

existing Fieldprint Calculator and upcoming Water Quality Index metrics by Field to Market point to a practical relationship between these tools; for example, many components of the HPI were refined to create the potential for information from existing Field to Market metrics to be imported to limit the effort level required by the grower using these tools.

Phase I of this project, initiated in August of 2012, encompassed the preliminary development of a HPI approach based on a review of the literature related to existing approaches for assessing biodiversity and the compilation and preliminary definition of the land cover-based framework by which a semi-quantitative representation of habitat potential (and indirectly, biodiversity) could be established. Incorporated within the timeframe of Phase I were three formal feedback opportunities during which input from the Field to Market Biodiversity Subgroup was collected. These interactions included three conference calls where progress on the development of the HPI approach was presented and discussed by the subgroup. The outcome of Phase I resulted in the development of a technical subcommittee, comprised of a smaller subset of Field to Market Biodiversity Subgroup members representing a variety of expertise and stakeholder perspectives, charged with identifying and addressing needed refinements to the Phase I approach during a workshop in March of 2013.

Specific goals of Phase I included:

1. Identifying relevant land cover types comprising the basis of the HPI and determine "ecological weighting factors" associated with them
2. Defining preliminary farm-scale HPI parameters and associated algorithms specific to relevant land cover types
3. Identifying and develop options for benchmarking HPI
4. Initiating development of a "mock-up" tool

Specific goals of Phase II included:

1. Workshop for a technical subcommittee from the Field to Market Biodiversity Subgroup to review and identify needed refinements from Phase I (held March 6-7 at NC State in Raleigh, NC)
2. Revisions to Phase I approach and report based on technical subcommittee recommendations

3. Creation of a functional spreadsheet tool upon acceptance and finalization of HPI approach to enable beta testing prior to web integration

The consensus gathered during Phase I and the technical subcommittee workshop in Phase II was intended to provide the groundwork for further refinement and functionality of the HPI approach as a Field to Market metric for biodiversity. The specific components of the HPI, including their scientific basis, use of existing tools and/or methodologies, and relevance as a biodiversity proxy based on information accessible and intuitive to a grower at the farm-scale, are provided in this report and the accompanying Appendices.

## 2.0 Literature review

### 2.1 Defining and predicting biodiversity: biological outcomes vs. driving factors

Biodiversity can be defined as "the variety of taxonomic, functional and genetic characteristics of life" (Feld et al. 2003) including plant and animal communities as well as ecosystems which represent homogenous combinations of each. Common measures of biodiversity for conservation planning focus on biotic attributes represented in measures such as total species abundance (richness), metrics such as the Shannon Weaver or Simpson indices, or species abundance focusing on specific keystone species or umbrella species assumed to be representative of the total population of species in a given area (Feld et al. 2003, Carigan and Villard 2001). Other indicators of biodiversity include the status of "at-risk" species for a given spatial unit, which focuses on species considered vulnerable to extinction using classifications such as the World Conservation Union (IUCN) Red List, NatureServe conservation status, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife threatened and endangered classification (Flather et al. 2003). These biotic measures provide a literal characterization of biodiversity from a taxonomic and genetic standpoint, but have a number of limitations. Species richness is subject to natural variability across taxonomic groups, and therefore the use of species richness as a measure for representing biodiversity requires accounting for this complexity in data collection, organization and analysis (Flather et al. 2003). Biotic indicators of biodiversity are most accurate at the local scale, but become less representative when extrapolated to larger geographic areas or different regions (YiVikarri 1999, Billeter et al. 2008). Andelman and Fagan (2000) found that the usefulness of keystone, umbrella, and flagship species as surrogates for biodiversity was limited as it was observed that results using these selected species did not differ significantly from those generated using randomly selected assortments of species. Variability in significant spatial and temporal processes can further complicate the use and interpretation of biotic measures of

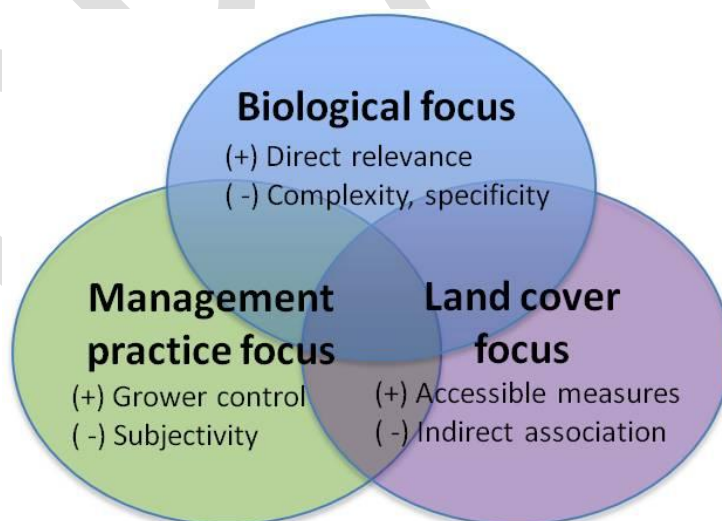
biodiversity. For example, observed species occurrence at the local scale may be most influenced by factors operating at larger scales (e.g., land use pressures at the landscape scale, migratory patterns, climate change) and may also exhibit a time lag between land management actions and subsequent changes in species distribution, resulting in a potential mismatch of management-response relationships (Gabriel et al. 2010, Feld et al. 2003).

Biodiversity is often characterized as having intrinsic value based on the conservation of biological attributes of the environment (Koschke et al. 2012, Burkhard et al. 2009). However, it has been suggested that biodiversity (and its associated indicators) should incorporate a more holistic definition that captures not just specific biotic outcomes (genetic and taxonomic abundance), but also the ecological processes that are intrinsically linked to biodiversity as both an associated outcome and a requirement, and which ultimately are often more relevant to conservation purposes (Mace et al. 2012, Haines-Young 2009, Andreason et al. 2001, Noss et al. 1990). The concept of ecosystem services has been increasingly explored and applied as a more holistic conservation goal (e.g., Mace et al. 2012, Galic et al. 2012, Larterra et al. 2012, Power 2010) that is closely related to biodiversity but often more relevant to practical sustainability performance measures, such as energy flow and nutrient cycling. While ecosystem services and biodiversity are inherently related, it remains difficult to develop a quantitative linkage between them, and moreover to establish linkages between ecosystem services and management practices that may influence them (Mace et al. 2012, de Groot et al. 2009). Due to these uncertainties, greater potential for success may exist in the development of biodiversity indicators representing structural and functional aspects of ecological integrity (i.e. quality) which support ecosystem services and are more directly quantifiable (Burkhard et al. 2011). Ecological quantity and quality (structure, function), as well as the management practices that influence both, can therefore serve as a meaningful proxy for directly measuring biodiversity (UNEP 1997). These attributes can be represented by landscape measures (based on land cover) that have demonstrated a quantifiable link with biodiversity (Frank et al. 2012, Billeter et al. 2008, Bailey et al. 2007, Feld et al. 2003) as well as relevance to ecosystem services. This type of approach, which provides the fundamental basis of the HPI approach in this study, is consistent with the assumption that land cover and land use change (i.e., habitat loss) is ultimately the driving factor of the status and trends in biodiversity (Haines-Young, 2009).

## **2.2 Recent approaches for developing indicators for biodiversity (review)**

A number of recent approaches for evaluating biodiversity at the field, farm, or larger landscape scale were reviewed in order to investigate how others have addressed this issue and to identify areas of strength and lessons learned to better inform the development of the HPI. The studies evaluated span three major areas of focus to varying degrees, from biologically-focused

assessments based on habitat patterns and likelihood of species occurrence, approaches focused on assigning ecological weight to various specific management practices, and land-cover based approaches assigning ecological weight to specific land cover types (**Figure 1**). Recent studies by North Carolina State (Drew et al. 2012) and Polansky et al. (2008) are examples of different biodiversity characterizations driven by information on local species ranges and habitat preferences specific to a regional study area. In the NC State pilot effort (jointly funded by Field to Market and The Nature Conservancy), probability of species occurrence of approximately 250 species (organized by "sensitivity traits") was estimated through the systematic collection of expert opinions which were used as input for the development of probabilistic responses of species occurrence to field-scale conditions and practices. The resulting metric provided output directly relevant to biodiversity by estimating a biological measure (i.e., species occurrence). Species-based approaches can involve a relatively high degree of study area specificity that can make extrapolation to large geographies a challenge (Feld et al. 2003). These approaches also require a significant level of effort for the organization and attribution of species preferences across large geographic areas, compilation and characterization of expert responses (e.g., NC state study), or geoprocessing requirements to generate habitat measures (e.g., Polansky et al. 2008 study). Management activities may also be used as the primary (or single) attributes for inferring biodiversity and associated ecological quality. The National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS, USDA) has devoted a great deal of resources to developing, researching and



**Figure 1.** Schematic of different focus areas for development of approaches for evaluating biodiversity, with pros and cons for each.

assessing performance of various alternative agricultural management practices designed to improve or maintain structural and functional components important to biodiversity as part of a variety of conservation incentive programs (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>). The NRCS Conservation Measurement Tool scoring system, a component of the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program, assigns a numeric scoring system to various conservation practices based on environmental benefits offered by a given practice, the sum of which can be called the Environmental Benefits Score (“EBS”) for a given practice (“EBS” term used by National Coalition for Sustainable Agriculture, <http://sustainableagriculture.net>). This NRCS scoring provides an assessment of the relative ranking of conservation practices to one another which can guide management decisions based on achieving the greatest benefit to local ecological condition. The biodiversity metric in development by the Stewardship Index for Specialty Crops (<http://www.stewardshipindex.org/>) has a strong focus on a selection of best management practices for both cropped and non-cropped areas. Grower surveys and assessments with a strong management focus can provide valuable information about details of farm operations relevant to biodiversity. A challenge of management-focused surveys is to simplify options to practices demonstrating both high ecological relevance and that are relatively well-known to growers.

A number of approaches have utilized a land cover-based strategy where the influence of various land cover types and associated management strategies on biodiversity have been characterized in order to assess current and future scenarios of land use status. The concept of "high nature value farmland" in Europe (Anderson et al. 2004, Sullivan et al. 2010, Parracchini et al. 2008, Pointereau et al. 2007) applies to agricultural land with high potential to sustain biodiversity, and has been described from a land-cover perspective based on expert-ranked weights for various land cover types (Anderson et al. 2004). Similar to the expert-based ranking of land cover in the delineation of high nature value farmland, Burkhard et al. (2009) used expert assessment to create a matrix of ecosystem services supported by different land cover classifications (CORINE) across Germany. While land cover evaluated in this approach included a variety of cropping systems, it did not incorporate variability in specific management practices beyond basic crop types; however, this approach allowed for mapping of ecosystem services based on easily measurable land cover patterns (Burkhard et al. 2009). A recent study by Von Haaren et al. (2012) introduced a farm-scale approach where rankings were assigned to biotopes (areas of homogenous ecological conditions) based on the relative measure of ecological importance (characterized by naturalness and rarity based on presence of threatened and endangered species), and within each biotope a sub-score was delineated based on conservation management, and this information was combined with a habitat connectivity analysis comparing biotope connectivity for a given farm with connectivity requirements for selected target species associated with the particular biotope (Von Haaren et al. 2012). The influence of different farm management practices was estimated for each biotope using

relationships from the literature (not defined in the study), resulting in the assignment of a "risk" value to biodiversity that can be used to highlight management priorities for a given farm (Von Haaren et al. 2012). The NatureServe Vista tool ([www.natureserve.org/vista](http://www.natureserve.org/vista)) also incorporates a framework for expert-based ranking of land cover type by conservation importance (either as a conservation "element" to be protected or by its relative impact on other conservation elements such as particular species). While the concept of ranking ecological quality amongst and within biotopes provides a useful and simple approach for characterizing land cover patterns in terms their relevance to biodiversity, the integration with species-specific habitat preferences presents similar challenges to those described previously for approaches with a strong biological focus.

An alternative semi-quantitative scoring system to assess biodiversity based on land cover patterns and other attributes was demonstrated by Reidsma et al. (2006) for 100 sub-national regions across the EU. In that study, biodiversity was assessed using an ecosystem quality value based on agricultural and non-agricultural land use at the farm scale. Ecosystem quality, used to represent biodiversity, was defined as the mean abundance of native species within the current status of an ecosystem relative to their abundance in the ecosystem in "pre-disturbed" conditions using a pre-defined selection of species (Reidsma et al. 2006), with a value of 100% corresponding to maximum biodiversity (comparable to "pre-disturbed" conditions) and a value of 0% indicating a total loss of biodiversity. Ecosystem quality values were derived by dose-response-like relationships between land cover (or management intensity represented by information in the Farm Accountancy Data Network for over 50,000 farms) and biodiversity based on a review of available literature. Impacts of land use change could be estimated based on simulated scenarios converting a proportion of a land cover type to another and/or simulating a change in management intensity. Of all the approaches described, the Reidsma et al. (2006) approach is most similar to the HPI approach proposed in this current study, which similarly assigns ecological quality values to land cover types present within a given farm (both production and non-production areas) based on established relationships between land cover attributes, management practices, and biodiversity. However, a number of characteristics from other studies and existing approaches have been incorporated within the current HPI approach as well. The HPI approach is based on a framework in which each land cover present on a farm is assigned an ecological weight based on the relative ecological importance of the land cover using a naturalness and rarity gradient similar to that employed by Von Haaren et al. (2012). Information on the influence of management practices on biodiversity presented in other studies and applications (e.g., NRCS Conservation Measurement Tool scoring system, predicted operational decision impacts in NC State pilot) was used to inform the selection and representation of management practices within the components of the HPI.

## 3.0 Quantifying habitat potential: proposed methodology

### 3.1 HPI Overview

The HPI is a semi-quantitative scoring system for individual farms. The use of a semi-quantitative scoring system to generate an index, comparable to the HPI, has been demonstrated in other studies (see Reidsma et al. 2006, Von Haaren et al. 2012). The scoring approach is supported by narrative, qualitative, and quantitative algorithms that characterize the habitat potential of a farm incorporating all relevant land cover types (e.g., cropland, grassland/savanna, forest, ponds, wetlands, etc.) as influenced by farm management practices. Characterization includes a land cover quality assessment that considers: landscape structure and function, land management intensity, and land use change specified by the user for each defined land cover type. An efficient land-use pattern is one that generates the maximum HPI score for a given land cover type. By maximizing the land quality score over the defined range of possible land cover scores, an efficiency matrix for the agricultural landscape at the farm level can be characterized. There are three primary components of the HPI:

- 1.) **Farm composition** (acreage of various land cover types)
- 2.) **Ecological weighting factors** attributed to different land cover based on a relative scale of 1 to 5 based on the ecological quality of a given land cover (“naturalness” and capacity to support ecosystem services, similar to the concept of biotope rating in Von Haaren et al. 2012 discussed previously)
- 3.) **Ecological quality values** for each land cover type (scale of 0 to 10) based on an aggregated score (weighted average, described in Section 3 and accompanying Appendix C) of individual HPI parameters representing structural, functional and management characteristics of the land cover relevant to habitat potential.

HPI calculations can be summarized in different ways (discussed later in Section 3.6), depending on the specific objective. The following sections describe in detail the components of the HPI (Sections 3.2-3.5) and propose options for integrating the component information (Section 3.6) into meaningful metrics for evaluating habitat potential at the farm scale.

### 3.2 Characterization of land cover types

Fundamental to the development of the HPI approach was the identification of relevant land cover types for individual farms and the larger ecoregion or ecological province in which the farms are located. The initial work makes sequential use of existing broader scale descriptions of ecoregions and provinces from the US Forest Service. Ecoregions represent areas grouped by similarities in geology, physiography, vegetation, climate, soils, land use, wildlife distributions, and hydrology (e.g., Bailey ecoregions, <http://www.fs.fed.us/rm/ecoregions/>). Subcategories of major agricultural and associated ecosystem land cover types were defined for the HPI calculations (**Table 1**). The potential land cover types for a given farm can be generally categorized as "Cultivated areas", including land cultivated for agricultural production, and "Non-cultivated areas" including land cover not intensively managed for agricultural production such as grasslands, savannas, forest, wetlands, buffer features, and surface waters. Land covers were selected wherever possible to correspond with established geospatial land cover classifications in datasets such as the USDA NASS Cropland Data Layer and the USGS GAP Land Cover Dataset. Geospatial data representation of land cover types allows for use of these data resources for determining farm composition (possibly computed in the background by the final web-based tool, or simply as a reference for growers), as well as for potential future benchmarking purposes when evaluating land cover at state or other spatial scales. Additional land cover types were identified for inclusion by the technical subcommittee during the March 2013 Raleigh workshop including a variety of edge-of-field features that may be present on a farm.

**Table 1.** Land use/land cover types included in the HPI tool<sup>2</sup>.

Land Cover	Options (Land Cover Types)
Cultivated land	Corn, Soybeans, Rice, Cotton, Potatoes, Wheat, Alfalfa/Hay, Other crop(s)
Edge features/ Riparian buffers	Buffer strips, Grass waterways, Terraces, Filter strips, Field borders, Pivot corners (uncultivated), Pollinator habitat, Hedge rows, Tree rows, Wind breaks, Headlands, Riparian buffer features
Forest	Conifer Plantation, Deciduous Forest, Evergreen Forest, Mixed Forest
Grassland/Savanna	Native (un-grazed), Native (grazed), Non-native (un-grazed), Non-native (grazed or hay)
Wetlands	Natural wetland, Artificial wetland
Surface waters	River, Stream, Pond (natural), Pond (artificial), Lake (natural), Lake (artificial)

<sup>2</sup> Additional description of the land cover types are provided in Appendix C.

The HPI methodology differentiates between natural and artificial wetlands. Artificial wetlands include constructed wetlands as well as "working wetlands" (also commonly classified as "moist soil units") resulting from the use of certain agricultural management practices such as winter flooding of rice fields which provides an ecological benefit for waterfowl (Manley eds. 2008, NRCS 2007). The characterization of rangeland presents a unique challenge as this land use type is not easily defined by geospatial data classifications. The USGS GAP Land Cover classification "Disturbed, non-specific" provides a potential option to geospatially define high-intensity grazed rangelands as the definition of this land cover notes that it is "*typically associated with heavy amounts of grazing*" (<http://gapanalysis.usgs.gov/gaplandcover/>); however most rangeland is categorized as grassland. In contrast to cultivated land cover, rangeland is typically managed more similarly to native vegetation (NRCS 2003). During the March 2013 workshop, the technical subcommittee determined rangeland would be appropriately included in the "Grassland" category, based on whether the land is subject to livestock grazing. At low-intensity grazing levels, the ecological benefits of rangeland are comparable to natural (un-grazed) conditions (Reidsma et al. 2006, Alkemade et al. 2010). To meet the challenge of representing rangelands in the HPI and to recognize the ecological significance of low-intensity rangelands (for which a landowner should receive more credit), input from the grower on relative grazing intensity will be used to influence the ecological weighting and the ecological quality score for grassland on a farm (discussed in Appendix C). As such, grassland with low-intensity grazing will have the opportunity to be scored similarly to un-grazed grassland.

### 3.3 Ecological weighting factors

Weights were assigned to the different land-use categories defined within the HPI estimator based on (1) general concepts of naturalness (e.g., Von Haaren et al. 2012), capacity to support ecosystem services, and regional landscape context, as well as (2) modifying factors determined by designation of important conservation areas (discussed shortly), and current development pressure (e.g., urban sprawl) to which a land cover may be exposed.

#### 3.3.1 Base weights

**Table 2** lists the base weights for the cultivated and natural ecosystem land-use types defined in the HPI methodology. These values are broadly defined in terms of the relative ecological value (i.e., ecosystem supporting services) associated with each land-use type, with more "artificial" or disturbed land cover types having lower eco-weights, and more natural land cover types having higher weights. Non-native and grazed native grassland/savanna, conifer plantations and

artificial wetlands are given a base ecological weight of 2. One exception for artificial wetlands are seasonally flooded rice fields, which are assigned a higher ecological weight of 4 for farms in ecoregions generally corresponding with the Mississippi Alluvial Valley, the Gulf Coast, and the Central California Valley where seasonally flooded rice fields provide important habitat for migratory birds (State of the Birds 2013 Report on Private Lands <http://www.stateofthebirds.org>). Cultivated (agricultural) lands are assigned an ecological base weight of 1. This categorization scheme is consistent with previous classifications of land cover type by ecosystem quality in which cultivated land has a relatively low range of ecosystem quality compared with other systems (Reidsma et al. 2006). Wetlands, surface waters (streams, rivers, natural lakes and ponds) and riparian areas are assigned high base weights because of their structural complexity, productivity, diverse flora and fauna, waste assimilation, and biogeochemical cycling characteristics. Natural and restored wetlands are assigned the highest value (5) due to the extensive loss of these ecosystems and related biodiversity and ecosystem services (Fennessy and Craft, 2011).

Mixed forest, deciduous forest, evergreen forest and native grassland/savanna were assigned a base weight of 3 or 4 on an eco-regional basis, determined by the predominant land cover characteristics of the larger landscape. Landscape composition at a large regional scale was represented using land cover statistics for ecological systems from the USGS GAP Program available at the scale of "Landscape Conservation Cooperative" units ("LCC's" U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, <http://www.doi.gov/lcc/index.cfm>). Ecoregional provinces were assigned to an LCC based on the LCC which contained the greatest proportion of their land area. The general

**Table 2.** Eco-weighting factors for land-use categories defined within the HPI estimator.

<b>Eco-weight</b>	<b>Land covers</b>
1	Cultivated lands
2	Non-native grassland/savanna, Grassland/savanna (grazed/hay), Conifer Plantations, Artificial Wetlands, Edge features, Lakes (artificial), Ponds (artificial)
3	Native Grassland/Savanna (un-grazed)/Forest less characteristic of ecoregion
4	Native Grassland/Savanna/Forest more characteristic of ecoregion, Rivers, Streams, Lakes (natural), Ponds (natural), Riparian Areas, Artificial Wetlands based on seasonally flooded rice in select ecoregions
5	Natural wetlands, Native Grassland/Savanna/Forest and Surface Waters in Conservation Priority Areas

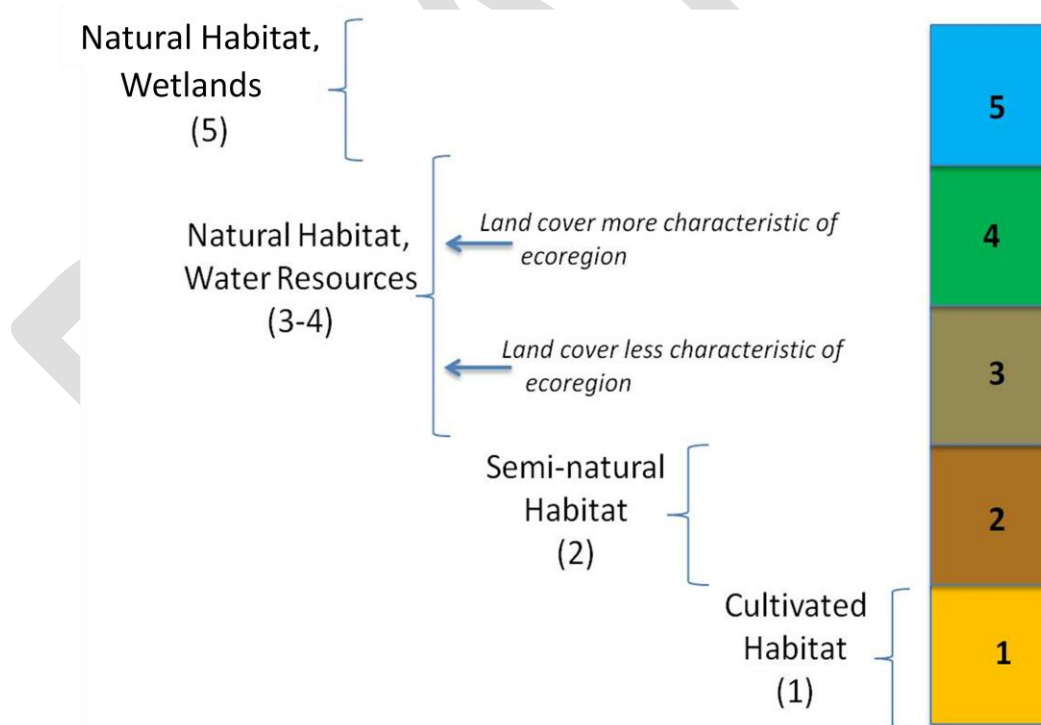
approach (detailed shortly) was to simply score the native grassland/savanna and forest categories with an eco-weight of 3 or 4 on a per-ecoregion basis in terms of their predominance in the regional landscape. This approach significantly differs from the previous (Phase I) effort which emphasized relative scarcity of land use types in assigning scores. The justifications for emphasizing representativeness/predominance instead of scarcity in the revised scoring are (1) acreages that are common land cover types within an ecoregion are assumed to have a higher potential for species diversity characteristic of the ecoregion, (2) the representative or more common land-use types within an ecoregion are more likely to be contiguous with similar land-use types or serve as corridors - and correspondingly provide additional ecological value at the farm scale and surrounding landscape scale, and (3) the concept of scarcity/rarity is already accounted for in the modifying factors (described shortly) which identify and prioritize sensitive/rare ecosystems. Additionally, the quantitative derivation of scarcity scoring in Phase I was determined by the technical subcommittee to add an unnecessary level of complexity to the scoring, compared with a simple 3 or 4 score assigned in this revised approach.

The following approach was used to assign simple ecological weights of 3 or 4 to the native grassland/savanna and forest land cover categories based on ecoregion. The percentage of total grassland/savanna acreage (i.e., Shrubland & Grassland) for an LCC was compared to the percentage of total forested acreage (i.e., Forest & Woodland) for the LCC. If the percentage of grassland/savanna acreage was greater than forest, the LCC was assumed to be characteristically grassland/savanna, and a value of 4 was assigned to the native (un-grazed) grassland/savanna land cover category for ecoregions associated with that LCC. Conversely, if the LCC data indicated the landscape region to be predominantly forest, a value of 3 was assigned to native (un-grazed) grassland/savanna. The derivation of scores for the three forest types was similarly based on the percentage of acreages that broadly correspond to evergreen, deciduous, and mixed forest determined from the regional LCC land-use summaries. The relative importance of evergreen forest was primarily assessed using the relative acreage of the LCC Warm Temperate Forest. LCC summaries of Cool Temperate Forest were used to evaluate the relative importance of both deciduous and mixed forest. The predominant forest types were assigned a score of 4; the less common forest types were assigned a score of 3. The major subcategories of acreages reported for the individual LCC summaries were used to refine the analysis as appropriate for each region. This was particularly important in helping to assess and score the relative importance of deciduous and mixed forest types. Finally, the Bailey ecoregion descriptions for vegetation ([http://www.fs.fed.us/land/ecosysmgmt/colorimagemap/ecoreg1\\_provinces.html](http://www.fs.fed.us/land/ecosysmgmt/colorimagemap/ecoreg1_provinces.html)) were used to ensure that the base eco-weighting factors derived by the LCC approach were consistent with the Bailey ecoregion descriptions for vegetation.

Base eco-weighting factors for land covers are provided by ecoregional province in Appendix B.

### 3.3.2 Modifying factors

While natural wetlands are considered of high ecological value from both an ecosystem service and ecological “scarcity” perspective in the HPI, it is also recognized that many areas of forest, native grassland/savanna and surface water resources provide comparable levels of ecosystem services and habitat. To address this issue, a modifying factor on the ecological weights is proposed where forest, native grassland/savanna and surface waters falling within the spatial coverage of U.S. “Conservation Priority Areas” (The Nature Conservancy, <http://uspriorityareas.tnc.org/>) are assigned the highest ecological weighting factor of 5 (Figure 2). This approach would take advantage of an existing measure of ecological value developed by The Nature Conservancy that identifies geographic areas comprising important habitat for rare and endangered species, are considered rare, threatened or highly sensitive ecosystems, or have other attributes relevant to conservation such as providing landscape connectivity for specific habitat types. Use of this modifier will be dependent upon granted use of the spatial data by



**Figure 2.** Illustration of gradient of ecological weighting values comprised of base weights (moving upward based on ecological quality as defined by degree of naturalness and potential for ecosystem services)

request to The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and would be determined in the background by the HPI tool based on the geographic location of the farm (location information may be imported from the Fieldprint Calculator). Geospatial habitat ranges of threatened and endangered species (NatureServe) may also be used in addition to TNC “Conservation Priority Areas” to ensure that important habitat is included in the eco-weighting; however, the level of effort required to integrate the raw NatureServe data may limit the practicality of using this additional element.

A final additional proposed modifying factor for the eco-weighting is related to land cover change is the relative "threat" of urban development (i.e. urban sprawl) in the vicinity of a farm based on recent land use trends, which provides a relative measure of risk to the local ecosystem (Rodriguez et al. 2007). An additional 0.5 will be added to the eco-weight of a given land cover (up to a maximum eco-weight score of 5) in areas of current high development pressure. This is represented using the recent percent population change estimates (2010 to 2012) for the county in which the farm resides ([U.S. Census Bureau](#) data). Farms located in counties in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile ( $\geq 2.8\%$  population increase, conterminous U.S. counties) will be designated as having land covers exposed to “high- development pressure”, and the eco-weights of the land covers will be increased by 0.5. The result is that land covers on a farm experiencing a high rate of surrounding development pressure are valued slightly higher in order to provide an incentive to preserve the remaining amount of the land cover. Assignment of this modifying factor can be applied in the background of the HPI tool based on the county designation of the farm.

### **3.4 Development of the HPI parameters for Eco-quality scoring**

#### **3.4.1 Parameter definition**

The HPI tool permits the user to enter basic information that describes the farm. The main input requirements in describing an individual farm are (1) the location of the farm and ownership status (own vs. rent) which may impact how the land is managed, (2) the acreages of cultivated and non-cultivated land cover/land use types, and (3) characterization of the quality of each of the land cover types. These inputs will be provided by the farm manager in the form of answers to questions defined in simple drop-down menu format. Specification of the location of the farm facilitates the use of county, state-specific, as well as ecoregion, data in implementing algorithms for evaluating habitat potential for individual land cover types.

In developing and refining the final HPI parameters, the emphasis was placed on:

1. Relevance to estimation of habitat potential

2. Minimizing the amount of information required from the user.

The algorithms underlying the calculation of the HPI are intended to be scientifically-based while requiring minimal input information demanded of the user. The algorithms are intended to infer the overall ecological quality and habitat potential of the specified land cover/land use types. Ecological quality is defined in terms of easily obtained information that describes ecosystem structure. The direct measures of contributions of ecosystem function to land quality and habitat potential are more difficult and costly to obtain. Therefore, the algorithms were developed to reflect the quality of ecosystem function based on information describing ecosystem structure (for example, the spatial configuration of a forest) and management actions provided by the user in the form of answers to the farm-scale survey questions.

The framework used to develop the HPI algorithms is similar to the approach used by various federal agencies (e.g., USACE, FWS) in characterizing habitat suitability for individual species of interest and selected ecological communities (e.g., wetlands). In this approach, relationships are constructed for each factor identified as contributing to habitat suitability. Habitat suitability for each individual factor ranges from 0 to 1 (optimal habitat). An overall habitat suitability index (HSI) is then estimated using a weighted average of the component habitat factor values. The resulting HSI similarly ranges from 0 to 1 with the same interpretation concerning overall habitat suitability. The HSI quality metric is then multiplied by the number of applicable acres to generate habitat suitability units (HSUs). The numbers of associated HSUs are used by the agencies to evaluate alternative habitat management and restoration alternatives (e.g., USACE planning process). Correspondingly, the HPI values are estimated as the weighted average of ecological quality factors (parameters) derived from information on structure, function, and management for each land cover/land use type at the farm scale (e.g., Van Horne et al. 1991). Based on user inputs, each parameter is scored from 0 (i.e., no habitat potential) to 1 (maximum habitat potential). The parameter scores are calculated separately and then averaged across all attributes for the cover type and multiplied by 10 to derive an overall eco-quality score (0-10) for the particular land cover type. This approach offers several advantages:

1. The quality value (0-1) for each separate factor can be defined by various quantitative functional forms, categorical relationships, or semi-qualitative scoring;
2. Qualitatively very different kinds of factors (i.e., structural, functional, management related) can be readily combined in the calculation of the overall farm-scale HPI;
3. Quality factors can be easily added or removed in the overall quality evaluation of any land cover/land use type; and

4. Quality functions for individual factors can be readily modified and refined as new data or information become available (i.e., the HPI tool is designed to evolve over time).

### 3.4.2 HPI eco-quality algorithms

Apart from acreage, many of the farm-scale input descriptors (i.e., survey questions) have been defined as simple check-box “Yes/No” type of questions. This flexibility permits application of the HPI methodology across various levels of rigor and detail concerning the farm-scale description. This approach also avoids detailed (and expensive) quantitative measures of inputs such as soil chemistry, application rates of fertilizers and pesticides, and surface runoff, while still permitting their inclusion in estimating habitat potential based on management practices identified. Many of the HPI parameter algorithms are based on threshold values pulled from the literature; for example many of the surface water parameters are based on habitat classifications from the U.S. EPA Rapid Bioassessment Protocol (Barbour et al. 1999). The algorithms and their corresponding parameters for each attribute were developed using values relevant across a wide geographic scale wherever possible, however in some cases regional variability was used to customize parameter scoring. For example, scoring for the use of tile drainage may be dependent upon regional/local soil drainage characteristics, while scoring for the use of irrigation may be dependent upon water scarcity in the watershed in which the farm is located (using the “Water Supply Stress Index”: USDA, <http://www.wassiweb.sgcp.ncsu.edu/> ). Further detail on this scoring customization is provided in Appendix C.

### 3.4.3 HPI parameter types

HPI parameters can be classified as structural/functional or management-based parameters. Structural/functional parameters of the HPI include the physical characteristics and the spatial aspects (e.g., acreage, patch configuration, etc.) of a land cover type (Bonan et al. 2002). Phase I of the HPI tool development included a large number of structural and functional parameters for various land cover types, for example % canopy cover, as well as a proposed wildlife assessment parameter (relative measure of abundance of fish, birds, mammals). However, it was determined by the technical subcommittee that the level of effort required of growers to input detailed information for structural and functional attributes would be too burdensome, and that the structural/functional parameters required streamlining and simplification down to inclusion of only the most critical factors, with an emphasis on more simplified (e.g., Yes/No) input requirements. Additionally, it is recognized that many structural and functional attributes are not easily within a grower’s control; therefore the Phase II HPI parameters and associated scoring reflect a skew towards management-oriented components.

Human activities at the farm scale that influence the habitat potential of the agricultural and other land cover/use types comprise the land management options. Conventional and best management practices (contributing to the diversification of the cropping system) from a conservation standpoint are offered as options to provide growers the capability to assess the habitat potential of current management practices and to provide learning opportunities for growers to investigate the extent to which the adoption of differing management strategies is estimated to positively or negatively influence habitat potential for the farm. It is recognized that the cost-benefit of a land management change as well as implications to productivity are key to the grower's decision making process. Management parameters selected for inclusion in the HPI parameters were those identified by the diverse stakeholders in the technical subcommittee to be most critical for supporting biodiversity.

#### 3.4.4 Individual HPI parameters

In Phase I, 65 preliminary parameters (survey questions) were identified for the HPI across all land cover types, ranging from characteristics of land cover composition and land use change, structural and functional attributes of land cover, as well as associated management strategies. In Phase II, the list of parameters was refined with guidance from the technical subcommittee down to 29 parameters. The actual number of questions a grower will be prompted to provide input for is further limited by the specific land cover(s) present on their farm (i.e., most growers will not need to answer all 29 questions). Additionally, wherever possible, input from existing Field to Market metric tools will be imported to the HPI to automatically populate the parameter inputs.

The individual Phase II HPI parameters are summarized below in [Table 3](#) and detailed in Appendix C. Parameters which can likely utilize input from existing Field to Market metric tools are identified.

#### 3.4.5 Differential weighting of HPI parameters

Differential weighting is applied in the eco-quality scoring of HPI parameters. For all land cover types, HPI parameters relating to direct management activities are assigned twice the weight of structural and functional HPI parameters to give greater weight to factors more directly within control of a grower. Parameters may additionally be weighted on a per-land cover type basis. For cultivated lands, the contribution of specific agricultural management practices to the HPI score for cultivated areas is differentially weighted using the cumulative for the practice

**Table 3.** Individual HPI parameters by land cover category. Management parameters are assigned double the weight of structural/functional parameters in the computation of the eco-quality score (see Eq. 1). Additional parameter weights are applied for cultivated lands using Environmental Benefits Scores (EBS) from NRCS conservation practice scoring, and reducing the influence of parameters related to riparian zone condition for ponds/lakes. Ability to import some/all parameter input from existing Field to Market metric tools is also denoted.

Parameter Category	Parameter ID	Parameter Name	Parameter type	Additional parameter weight (if applicable)	Import some/all input from existing FtM tool
All land covers	HP-0	Farm location and ownership	(Base input)		✓
	HPI-1	Current land cover (acreage)	(Base input)		✓
	HPI-2	Recent land cover change	Structural/functional		
Cultivated Land	HPI-3	Residue cover	Management	35	✓
	HPI-4	Crop rotation	Management	31	✓
	HPI-5	Cover crop	Management	42	✓
	HPI-6	Nutrient management	Management	19	
	HPI-7	Pest management	Management	31	✓
	HPI-8	Water conservation	Management	44	✓
	HPI-9	Drainage water management	Management	26	✓
	HPI-10	Wildlife enhancements	Management	87; 174 for seasonally flooded rice	
Edge features/ Riparian Buffer	HPI-11	Native vegetation (edge features/riparian buffer)	Structural/functional		
	HPI-12	Habitat management (edge features/riparian buffer)	Management		
Forest	HPI-13	Forest arrangement/fragmentation	Structural/functional		
	HPI-14	Habitat management (forest)	Management		
Grassland/Savanna	HPI-15	Grassland/savanna arrangement/fragmentation	Structural/functional		
	HPI-16	Grazing intensity	Management		

<b>Parameter Category</b>	<b>Parameter ID</b>	<b>Parameter Name</b>	<b>Parameter type</b>	<b>Additional parameter weight (if applicable)</b>	<b>Import some/all input from existing FtM tool</b>
	HPI-17	Habitat management (grassland/savanna)	Management		
Wetlands	HPI-18	Water regime	Structural/functional		
	HPI-19	Water level management	Management		
	HPI-20	Habitat management (wetlands)	Management		
Surface waters	HPI-21	Riparian buffer	Structural/functional	½ for ponds/lakes	
	HPI-22	Vegetative cover, riparian zone	Structural/functional	½ for ponds/lakes	
	HPI-23	Riparian zone management	Management	½ for ponds/lakes	
	HPI-24	Bank stability	Structural/functional		
	HPI-25	Channel modifications (streams and rivers only)	Structural/functional		
	HPI-26	In-stream disturbance (streams and rivers only)	Management		
	HPI-27	Primary use of pond/lake (ponds and lakes only)	Management		
	HPI-28	Depth of pond/lake (ponds and lakes only)	Structural/functional		
	HPI-29	Management of pond/lake (ponds and lakes only)	Management		

defined by NRCS, in order to align quantitative scoring of the HPI approach with established numeric rankings of management practices (see Appendix C for examples). The integration of established EBS values enhances the HPI scoring for management practices beyond simple binary "Yes/No" outputs based on adoption of BMP's and reinforces the multiple benefits of diverse cropping systems for production areas. Parameters regarding the condition of the riparian buffer zone were assigned half the weight for ponds and lakes compared with streams and rivers as the technical subcommittee considered these parameters should be more influential for streams and rivers.

For a given land cover type, the ecological quality value (0-10) is computed as:

Ecological quality value = \_\_\_\_\_

*MCPI* = individual management parameter scores, value 0 - 1

*SCPI* = individual structural/functional parameter scores, value 0 - 1

*W* = Additional parameter weight (if applicable, such as EBS values; otherwise = 1)

An example calculation of the eco-quality score is provided in Appendix D.

### 3.5 Benchmarking resolution

While the HPI tool is designed to evaluate habitat potential based on a scale of lowest to highest benefit to ecological quality for a given farm, it is also useful to place this value in the context of the status of other farms. Benchmarking provides a means for comparison of farm-scale HPI results to a population of farms in a similar context (geographic or other) using existing data. However, availability of relevant data resources to use for benchmarking can limit how HPI parameters can be benchmarked. It was determined by the technical subcommittee in Phase II that while the ability to benchmark HPI results would be a useful component of the HPI tool in the future, it should not constrain the optimal development of the survey questions that comprise the eco-quality scoring. Therefore, benchmarking remains a future consideration for the HPI tool, but not a current component of the tool. While the use of non-geographic factors (for example, farm size) would provide an informative option for benchmarking, most existing data is not available in a raw (individual farm) form that would enable the summarization of data by non-geographic attributes. The compilation of input into the HPI tool through pilot projects with targeted groups of growers (regional, farm size, type, etc.) could enable this type of benchmarking in the future, however actual versus scenario/test user inputs would need to be

specified to attain reliable benchmarking data. This section discusses geographic-based approaches to benchmarking that may be also considered in the future.

The primary considerations for benchmarking feasibility for each geographic scale were:

1. Relevance of the scale for benchmarking
2. Data availability (scale, coverage, and access constraints)
3. Data processing requirements (compilation and geoprocessing)

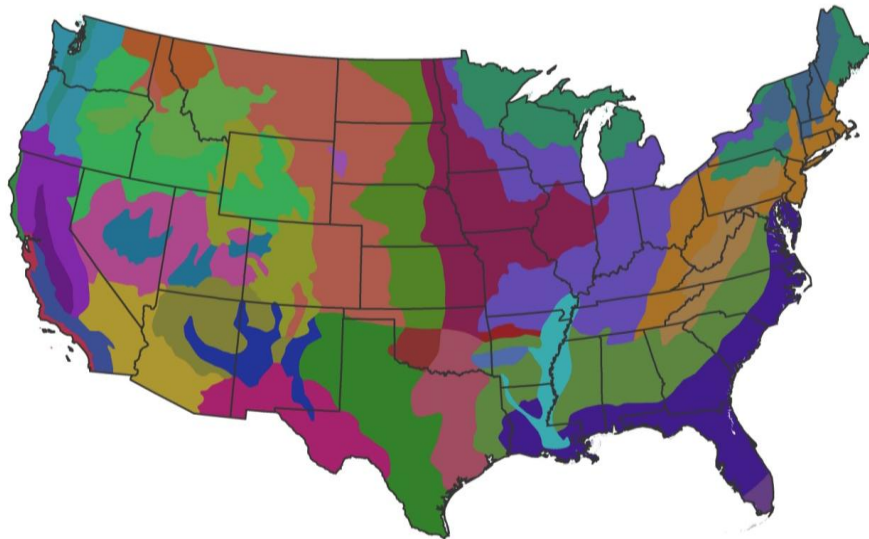
A variety of geographic scales were considered based on their potential relevance for benchmarking of farm-scale HPI parameters ([Table 4](#)), ranging from broad-scale regions (U.S. Land Resources Region, USDA) to watersheds (USGS hydrologic unit codes). During the initial development of the farm-scale HPI parameters in Phase I, a wide range of geospatial and other data resources were reviewed to determine benchmarking options and the available resolution and processing requirements of benchmarking at various scales. Some data resources, while relevant to the purpose of the HPI tool were found to be currently unsuitable for benchmarking due to limitations imposed by the format of the data available. For example, the USDA Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act (RCA) data viewer provides state and regional summaries of participation in USDA conservation practices within USDA conservation programs based on official enrollment statistics in the USDA-NRCS National Conservation Planning Database (raw data not available to the public). However, these data (# acres and # enrollments) are summarized by fiscal year and conservation practice. This summarization results in overlapping data records (farms counted multiple times across years and across practices) that make it difficult for meaningful benchmarking values to be developed. Furthermore, while official enrollment in conservation programs provides one measure of incidence of farming practices, this statistic is limited to representing only instances where the conservation practice is conducted within an official program. This can underestimate the prevalence of a given farming practice when considering the wider population of farm operators. Farming practice data evaluated for potential benchmarking feasibility were mainly obtained from other USDA resources (e.g., USDA ARMS, USDA NASS Agricultural Census) which were not limited only to survey respondents participating in conservation programs.

Potential future benchmark resolution options ([Table 4](#)) were assigned a ranking by data availability and processing feasibility (time and effort required for compilation and geoprocessing). The highest availability of data was at the scale of state boundaries, as many data resources, particularly management practices, were summarized at the state-level. The state level also provides reasonable geoprocessing feasibility in both land area and number of runs required (i.e., 48 states). While some data was available at a county-level (U.S. Agricultural

**Table 4.** Benchmark options evaluated, ranked by data availability and data processing feasibility (scale 1-3). Recommended benchmark resolution options are highlighted.

<b>Benchmark Resolution Option</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Data availability rank (1= highest availability)</b>	<b>Data processing feasibility rank (1= highest feasibility)</b>
USDA Land Resources Regions	<i>"Homogeneous areas of land use, elevation, topography, climate, water resources, potential natural vegetation, and soils" (USDA)</i>	3	3
USDA Farm Resource Regions (Economic Research Service)	<i>"Regions defined by similar farming characteristics" (USDA ERS)</i>	3	3
Ecoregional Province (Bailey, USDA FWS)	<i>"Large areas of similar climate where ecosystems recur in predictable patterns" (FWS)</i>	2	2
State	U.S. state boundaries	1	1
County	U.S. county boundaries	2	3
Hydrologic Unit Code (USGS)	Watersheds or sub-watersheds	3	2/3

Census and some U.S. Forest Inventory data), in general there was little data specific to geographic scales smaller than state-level at the coverage and practical ease of acquisition/processing required to provide an adequate benchmarking option for the HPI tool. Little data was available at larger regional scales, with the exception of forestry data which had some data summarized across U.S. Forest Service regions. Larger geographic regions (Land Resource Regions and Farm Resource Regions) are likely limited in their relevance for benchmarking, and they also pose a challenge with requiring greater time and CPU usage for any geospatial processing. While the state-level was identified as a relevant and feasible benchmarking resolution, it is also useful to account for sub-regional differences in climate, soils, and vegetation types which are generally independent of state boundaries and are critical factors in variation in habitat potential across a state. For example, the state of Ohio has a significant east-west division in ecoregion (based upon historic glacial activity) and resulting major east-west differences in land cover and use (Ohio EPA). Farm operators in the heavily agricultural (and highly fragmented forest) western portion of the state have a significantly different set of background conditions area compared with those in the more densely forested



**Figure 3.** Recommended benchmarking resolution for potential future benchmarking of HPI: Ecoregional Provinces (FWS) and U.S. state boundaries (Feature intersection: N= 186 unique features).

eastern portion of the state. A benchmarking strategy that accounts for these differences would provide better point of reference for farm operators to see how their land cover and use compare with others in a similar geographic context. While the ecoregion-based ecological weighting factors (described previously) provide some standardization for this variability, it is limited to the importance attributed to particular types of land cover within each ecoregion and not the actual structural/functional attributes of the land cover determined by farm-scale survey responses or benchmarking data.

Our recommended resolution for potential future benchmarking for the HPI tool based on existing data resources is the state-ecoregion level, in addition to the state level (**Figure 3**). This entails the intersection of state boundaries with ecoregional province boundaries (Bailey, U.S. FWS), which yields 186 unique polygons. Data values specific to the state level (such as statistics on management practices) could remain static across ecoregion boundaries, but other data not limited by state boundaries (such as land cover) can be calculated at the state-ecoregion resolution to provide a more customized benchmarking point of reference for evaluating farm-scale HPI results. Geospatial data resources that were evaluated in Phase I that may be considered for *potential* future benchmarking are briefly listed at the end of the References section.

## 3.6 Farm-scale Habitat Potential

### 3.6.1 Summary options

The HPI components (acreage, eco-weighting, and eco-quality scores) can be summarized by various means based upon the desired assessment objective of Field to Market. Appendix D provides examples of the computation of an overall HPI score.

#### *Example 1, Basic HPI score*

A basic HPI value for a specific land cover type on a farm can be computed as:

$$\text{Land cover HPI} = \text{acreage} * \text{eco-weighting factor} * \text{eco-quality score}$$

Due to variability in land cover composition across different farms (often outside a grower's control) as well as acreage, use of the above HPI score is intended for use in benchmarking a grower to themselves, based on current and future land management. This number can be evaluated on a per-land cover basis as well as summed across land cover types to arrive at a score specific to the individual farm.

$$\text{Total HPI, Individual farm} = \sum(\text{acreage} * \text{eco-weighting factor} * \text{eco-quality score})$$

Changes in the HPI score can be expressed as a percent increase (or decrease) in HPI based on different scenarios (user-input) affecting land cover structure, function and management. Additionally, this farm-level The variability in ecological weighting of land cover types allows a grower to identify land covers that may be prioritized for conservation and/or enhanced management in order to achieve the greatest improvements (% increase) in the HPI score. Individual farm-level scores would be optimally computed separately for cultivated and non-cultivated lands, as it is not the intention of the HPI tool to skew in a direction that requires converting croplands to non-productive land in order to receive a higher score.

#### *Example 2, "% Realized HPI, Individual Farm"*

In addition to a basic HPI score for an individual farm, the HPI score can also be expressed as a “% Realized” value based comparing the current HPI score of the farm to the total possible HPI score (eco-quality scores of 10 across all land cover types) for the current land cover configuration on the farm.

$$\% \text{ Realized HPI, Individual Farm} = \frac{\text{HPI Score}}{\text{Maximum Possible HPI Score}}$$

(The above score would be computed separately for cultivated and non-cultivated land).

*Example 3, "% Realized HPI, Specific Land cover"*

Expression of acreage values as the proportion of the farm land is an alternative approach to computing the HPI score that would additionally enable more direct farm-to-farm comparison if desired in the future; however, it is recognized that growers should only be scored based on what is present on their farm (i.e., in their control). An additional HPI assessment that is suited to both comparison of an individual farm to itself and also other farms within a particular geographic area (e.g., state, subregion) is the expression of HPI in terms of "% Realized HPI". This measure puts habitat potential in terms of conservation performance relative to the maximum ecological quality (10) for each land cover present on a given farm. For a given land cover, this can be simply computed as:

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The "% Realized HPI" can also be averaged across all land cover types present on a farm to yield an average "% Realized HPI" value. Conversely, a % Realized HPI value can also be computed for individual HPI parameters for a specific land cover to provide a grower with more specific information on areas for potential improvement. The "% Realized HPI" is more relevant to the assessment of a farm's overall current conservation performance compared with the basic HPI score which is more suited to assessing potential or actual changes in habitat potential. As with the basic HPI score example, a grower can utilize the "% Realized HPI" to compare scenarios for their individual farm, and in addition due to the relative nature of this metric it can also be considered (if desired) for comparing individual farms to corresponding benchmark values at state or regional level.

### 3.6.2 Integration of farm productivity

An effort was also initiated in Phase I to explore ways to provide a linkage between habitat potential with agricultural productivity. As noted previously, the HPI approach was developed with the goal of balancing productivity with conservation and enhancement of existing habitat. One suggested option in Phase I was the addition of a "% soil yield potential realized" parameter, possibly represented by the soil conditioning index (SCI) already in the Fieldprint Calculator, as an individual parameter in the HPI score for cultivated lands to give growers additional credit for

cultivating soils with high yield potential. Another option suggested in Phase I was the expression of productivity in terms of "habitat acres saved" based on the decrease in conversion of natural ecosystems to cultivated land (concept of indirect land use change) as a result of increased productivity (yield) on existing cropland compared to a baseline such as the state average productivity. During the workshop in Phase II, however, it was determined by the technical subcommittee that these concepts are already accounted for by the existing metrics in the Fieldprint Calculator (Soil Conditioning Index and Land Use Efficiency Index), and that their inclusion in the HPI metric would result in direct "double-counting" of these concepts. The technical committee recommended that in contrast to the inclusion of productivity as a quantitative component of the HPI, that the recognition of the need for a balance between productivity and biodiversity would be communicated in the way the HPI score is computed and displayed. For example, as discussed previously, the separation of cultivated and non-cultivated land in the computation of an aggregate HPI score emphasizes the optimization of existing farm status, as opposed to encouragement of conversion of existing cultivated land to its "pre-cultivated" status. The emphasis on management practices across all land cover types (but particularly for cultivated land) provides direct opportunities for growers to positively influence biodiversity on their farm.

#### 4.0 HPI spreadsheet tool

A macro-enabled Excel "mock-up" spreadsheet version of the HPI tool was developed in Phase I to provide a general understanding of the functionality and outputs of the application for Field to Market members. A Phase II HPI functional spreadsheet tool will be developed for beta-testing of the revised and updated algorithms and approach resulting from Phase II. The goal is to develop a HPI tool that could ultimately be integrated into a web-based application that can import relevant input from the current existing Field to Market metric tools.

***The Phase II HPI spreadsheet tool will be completed upon final approval of the HPI parameters and methodology by the Field to Market Biodiversity Subgroup.***

## 5.0 Conclusions

The primary objective for the Habitat Potential Index (HPI) metric development is to enhance the ability of growers to evaluate and communicate their land quality status as well as to understand opportunities for improvement without compromising productivity. Through the integration of existing strategies, resources and information from the literature, the HPI approach was developed to provide a scientifically-based proxy for biodiversity that is also driven by a focus on farm-scale information generally intuitive to a grower. Phase I investigated and developed a preliminary framework for estimating a farm-scale (HPI) for Biodiversity for eventual application as Field to Market metric. Phase II involved refinement of the HPI approach in close collaboration with experts in Field to Market to develop further consensus and streamline the HPI input, including integration (where possible) with existing Field to Market applications. Feedback from the Field to Market Biodiversity Subgroup and technical subcommittee members provided invaluable guidance for the development of the approach. Prior to the process of web integration of the final HPI tool, the prototype spreadsheet tool that will result from Phase II will be subject to a beta-testing “Phase III” for selected Field to Market members involving the implementation of a number test scenarios for optimal tool calibration.

Upon finalization of the HPI parameters and approach in Phase II, other considerations identified by the technical subcommittee regarding the web application of the tool include:

- Balancing the particularities of the HPI with the need for consistency in terms of scoring and displaying information, across all of the metrics included in the calculator.
- Data entry should be made as simple as possible for the user, by pre-populating land cover data from existing calculator input or providing sample data, whenever possible.
- The educational value of the scoring would be enhanced by visually presenting the information in a way that clarifies the benefits of different land cover types and management practices – for instance, a “slider” tool that shows how the application of different practices would impact a user’s score, or a “spidergram” that illustrates the relative values associated with land cover types.
- An assessment should be conducted to determine how many additional cultivated land-related questions (and, possibly, those related to edge features) would be required at the start-up page of the calculator in order to provide a field-level HPI score.
- Cultivated land questions should be incorporated into the start-up page of the Fieldprint calculator, so that, when users receive their Fieldprint score, they also receive an initial

field-level HPI score. After receiving this initial field-level score, users would be informed that if they have non-cultivated lands, they have additional options for increasing biodiversity. Users should then be invited to enter additional information for their other fields and land cover types in order to receive a farm-scale HPI score.

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**Selected geospatial Data Resources that could be considered for future benchmarking:**

- USDA NASS Cropland Data Layer (2008)
- NLCD 2006 Land Cover Change dataset
- USGS GAP Program data (Protected Areas, National Land Cover, and ancillary data)
- USDA Environmental Research Services (ERS) Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS)
- USDA/NASS Quick Stats (Survey and Census data)
- USDA Agricultural Census 2007 (state and county profiles)
- US Forest Service Forest Inventory and Analysis data
- USDA National Resources Inventory (2007)
- USDA National Resources Inventory Rangeland Assessment (2010)
- USDA Soil and Water Conservation Act RCA data
- USDA PLANTS database
- USDA NRCS Conservation Easement layer
- USDA FWS National Wetlands Inventory
- US EPA National Stream Assessment (2007)
- US EPA National Lake Assessment (2010)
- National Hydrography Dataset Plus (NHD Plus, Horizon Systems)
- USDA SURRGO Soils Data

# What is “habitat potential” for biodiversity?

- Habitat potential (HP) is a concept that defines and quantifies the ecological benefits of land management decisions at the farm scale.
- Habitat potential can be quantified for individual farms through the calculation of a Habitat Potential Index (HPI).
- Allows the user to evaluate implications concerning production and land management decisions .
- The HPI can be used in benchmarking the performance of the individual farm for individual land covers or over the whole farm.
- Value to Grower- reinforces productivity and educational opportunities
- The approach highlights protection and preservation of existing land cover/habitat as well as rationale intensification of cultivated areas to mitigate further loss of habitat.

# Principles for “Getting Started on Biodiversity” by assessing the Habitat Potential on the Farm

- Land use change (habitat loss) is major driver of biodiversity
- Focus on status of farm today and not a “prior to agriculture” pristine ecosystem
- Aligned to LCA Methodology (Management Change)
- Land cover, land use, land quality, and land management decisions utilized as indicators of conservation potential
- The proposed HPI metric emphasizes a simple, semi-quantitative approach
- HPI metric is doable in the short term; practical and easy to implement

## APPENDIX B: Base Ecological weighting factors by Ecoregion

[http://www.fs.fed.us/land/ecosysmgmt/colorimagemap/ecoreg1\\_provinces.html](http://www.fs.fed.us/land/ecosysmgmt/colorimagemap/ecoreg1_provinces.html)

### Bailey Ecoregions/Provinces

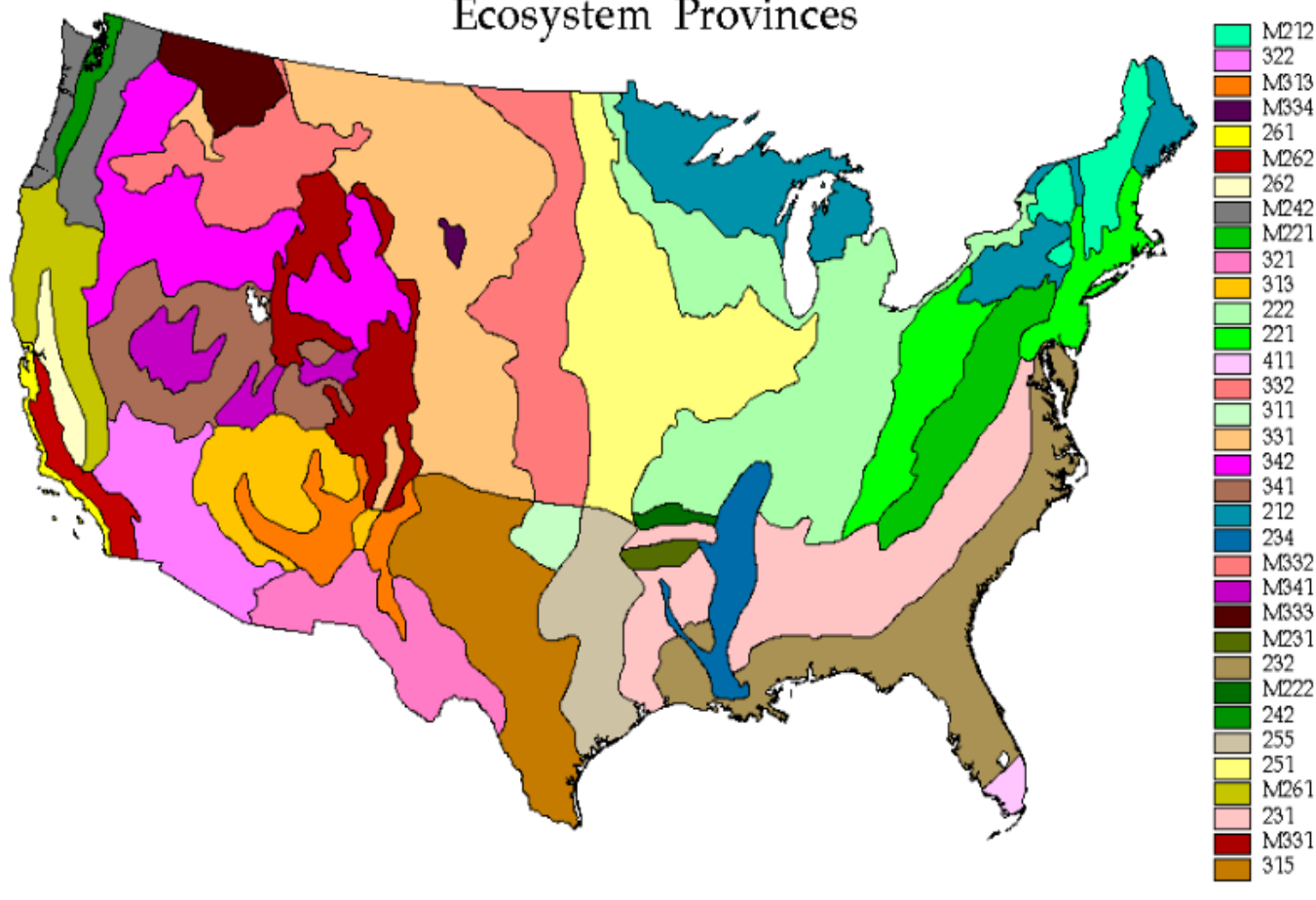
#### ID Number

M212	Adirondak - New England Mixed Forest - Coniferous Forest - Alpine Meadow
322	American Semidesert and Desert
M313	Arizona - New Mexico Mountains Semidesert - Open Woodland - Coniferous Forest Alpine Meadow
M334	Black Hills Coniferous Forest
261	California Coastal Chaparral Forest Shrub
M262	California Coastal Range Open Woodland - Shrub - Coniferous Forest - Meadow
262	California Dry Steppe
M242	Cascade Mixed Forest - Coniferous Forest - Alpine Meadow
M221	Central Appalachian Broadleaf Forest - Coniferous Forest - Meadow
321	Chihuahuan Desert
313	Colorado Plateau Semidesert
222	Eastern Broadleaf Forest (Continental)
221	Eastern Broadleaf Forest (Oceanic)
411	Everglades
332	Great Plains Steppe
311	Great Plains Steppe and Shrub
331	Great Plains - Palouse Dry Steppe
342	Intermountain Semidesert
341	Intermountain Semidesert and Desert
212	Laurentian Mixed Forest
234	Lower Mississippi Riverine Forest
M332	Middle Rocky Mountain Steppe - Coniferous Forest - Alpine Meadow
M341	Nevada - Utah Mountains Semidesert - Coniferous Forest - Alpine Meadow
M333	Northern Rocky Mountain Forest Steppe - Coniferous Forest - Alpine Meadow
M231	Ouachita Mixed Forest - Meadow
232	Outer Coastal Plain Mixed
M222	Ozark Broadleaf Forest - Meadow
242	Pacific Lowland Mixed Forest
255	Prairie Parkland (Subtropical)
251	Prairie Parkland (Temperate)
M261	Sierran Steppe - Mixed Forest - Coniferous Forest - Alpine Meadow
231	Southern Mixed Forest
M331	Southern Rocky Mountain Steppe - Open Woodland - Coniferous Forest - Alpine Meadow
315	Southwest Plateau and Plains Dry Steppe and Shrub

ID Number	Forest				Grassland/savanna			Wetlands	
	Conifer Plantation	Evergreen Forest	Deciduous Forest	Mixed Forest	Native Grassland, ungrazed	Native Grassland, grazed or hay	Non-native Grassland	Artificial	Natural
M212	2	4	4	4	3	2	2	2	5
322	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	5
M313	2	4	3	4	3	2	2	2	5
M334	2	4	3	4	4	2	2	2	5
261	2	4	3	3	4	2	2	2	5
M262	2	4	3	3	4	2	2	2; if rice, 4	5
262	2	3	3	3	4	2	2	2; if rice, 4	5
M242	2	4	3	4	3	2	2	2	5
M221	2	3	4	4	3	2	2	2	5
321	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	5
313	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	5
222	2	3	4	4	3	2	2	2; if rice, 4	5
221	2	3	4	3	3	2	2	2	5
411	2	4	3	3	4	2	2	2; if rice, 4	5
332	2	3	3	3	4	2	2	2; if rice, 4	5
311	2	3	3	3	4	2	2	2; if rice, 4	5
331	2	3	3	3	4	2	2	2; if rice, 4	5
342	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	5
341	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	5
212	2	3	3	4	3	2	2	2; if rice, 4	5
234	2	3	4	4	3	2	2	2; if rice, 4	5
M332	2	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	5
M341	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	5
M333	2	4	3	4	3	2	2	2	5
M231	2	3	3	4	3	2	2	2; if rice, 4	5
232	2	4	3	3	3	2	2	2; if rice, 4	5
M222	2	3	3	4	3	2	2	2	5
242	2	4	3	4	3	2	2	2	5
255	2	4	3	4	4	2	2	2; if rice, 4	5
251	2	3	3	4	4	2	2	2; if rice, 4	5
M261	2	4	3	3	4	2	2	2	5
231	2	3	3	4	3	2	2	2; if rice, 4	5
M331	2	4	3	4	3	2	2	2	5
315	2	3	3	3	4	2	2	2; if rice, 4	5

ID Number	Other features		Surface waters					
	Edge-Features	Riparian Areas	Streams	Rivers	Ponds (natural)	Ponds (artificial)	Lakes (natural)	Lakes (artificial)
M212	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
322	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
M313	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
M334	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
261	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
M262	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
262	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
M242	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
M221	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
321	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
313	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
222	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
221	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
411	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
332	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
311	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
331	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
342	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
341	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
212	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
234	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
M332	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
M341	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
M333	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
M231	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
232	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
M222	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
242	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
255	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
251	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
M261	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
231	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
M331	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
315	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	3

# Ecosystem Provinces



# **Appendix C**

## **Habitat Potential Index (HPI) Parameters for Derivation of Land Cover-Based Ecological Quality Values**

**September 19, 2013**

*\* = some or all information can be imported from other Fieldprint Calculator metrics*

**(HPI-0) Farm location\***

**Please enter the following information for your farm (defined as a single contiguous tract or parcel):**

<b>Farm location options</b>
State
County
Ecoregion
Do you rent or own?
(Rent only) Does your lease arrangement limit or specify your management options? Y/N

} *Location information may be Fieldprint Calculator input*

**(HPI-1) Land cover**

**Do you have the following land cover on your farm? What type? What size?**  
*(“Farm” refers to a single contiguous tract or parcel)*

*Options (selected options determine which subsequent questions are asked):*

<b>Land Cover</b>	<b>Options (Land Cover Type)</b>	<b>Size (per option)</b>
Cultivated land	Corn, Soybeans, Rice, Cotton, Potatoes, Wheat, Alfalfa/Hay, Other crop(s)	Area (acres)
Edge features/buffers	Edge features (Buffer strips, Grass waterways, Terraces, Filter strips, Field borders, Pivot corners (non-cultivated), Pollinator habitat, Hedge rows, Tree rows, Wind breaks, Headlands), Riparian buffer	Area (acres)
Forest	Conifer Plantation, Deciduous Forest, Evergreen Forest, Mixed Forest	Area (acres)
Grasslands/Savanna	Native (ungrazed), Native (grazed), Non-native (ungrazed), Non-native (grazed)	Area (acres)
Wetlands	Natural or Restored wetland, Artificial wetland	Area (acres)
Surface waters	River, Stream, Pond (natural), Pond (artificial), Lake (natural), Lake (artificial)	Length * constant <sup>1</sup> , or Area (acres)

Land cover types are assigned an “eco-weight” (Table 2, Report) based on their general capacity to support biodiversity; this value is also influenced by urban development pressure (see Report Section 3.3.2).

<sup>1</sup> It is suggested to represent stream/river area using the length plus a given constant (ex. 100 ft) to account for varying stream/river sizes and seasonal variability in “wetted width”.

## (HPI-2) Land cover change

**Was any of this land cover converted from another land cover type in the past 5 years? If yes, select the predominant previous land cover type (most recent) and the amount of acres converted.**

*Options (per land cover type; does not include crop-to-crop changes):*

Option	Size
From "Previous land cover"	Area (acres)

Land use change impacts on habitat potential can be directly evaluated from two perspectives, 1) a measure of recent loss of ecological value in the case of conversion of a land cover from a higher ecological weighting value to a lower value (i.e., conversion of a natural wetland to cultivated land), or 2) a measure of how established a given land cover is in the case of conversion of a land cover from a lower ecological weighting value to a higher value (i.e., conversion of crop production to grassland), which can provide an estimate of functionality such as soil quality.

For each land cover present at the farm-scale, the user will identify the predominant land cover change within the past 5 years (if any) from a selection menu (ex. "From *Deciduous Forest*", or "None", if no land cover change), as well as the number of acres comprising the land cover change. From this input, the algorithm determining the score for land use change is as follows:

$$\text{Land use change score} = 1 - ((A_C/A_T) * (\text{ABS}(E_C - E_P))/4)$$

Where  $A_C$  = # changed acres of land cover

$A_T$  = # total acres of land cover

$E_C$  = Ecological weighting value for current land cover

$E_P$  = Ecological weighting value for previous land cover

High scores correspond with an established land cover (i.e., past 5 years). This is the case for both land cover types that have declined in ecological weight (ex., a wetland that was recently converted to cultivated land), as well as those which have increased in ecological value (ex., forest that has been recently restored from pasture). In both cases, land cover types that are established earn a higher score than the same land cover type that is "new". This parameter is just one component of the eco-quality score for a given land cover, and should not be confused with the eco-weighting factors used to relatively rank the land covers. For example, a recently restored wetland will have a lower score for this specific parameter compared with an established forest; however the wetland will still have a higher eco-weight than the forest).

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## Cultivated Land HPI Inputs

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*User first selects crop type(s), size and previous land use (See HPI-1 and HPI-2):*



### **Cultivated land (Specify crop type)**

*(Photo from NRCS)*

<b>Corn</b>
<b>Soybeans</b>
<b>Rice</b>
<b>Cotton</b>
<b>Wheat</b>
<b>Potatoes</b>
<b>Alfalfa/Hay</b>
<b>Other crop(s)</b>

Cultivated land cover includes seven crop types specified by Field to Market, as well as a category for “Other crop(s)” encompassing any other cultivated land on the farm. The subsequent cultivated land HPI questions were designed for the specified (7) crops and may not be applicable to other types of crops, and/or may be difficult to generalize answers across multiple “other” crop types. Therefore, the current recommendation is to include the acreage from “Other crop(s)” in the overall HPI calculation for the whole farm, but not prompt users to answer survey questions for this “Other” category. Instead, a proxy eco-quality score for the “Other crop(s)” category will be assigned based on the average eco-quality score derived from the specified (7) crop types present on the farm. If the “Other crop(s)” category comprises 25% or more of the total cultivated land on the farm, the user will be alerted (by means such as a pop-up box) to the introduced uncertainty due to this assumption.

**(HPI-3) Residue Cover (per crop)\***

**What is the predominant tillage practice used?**

*Options:*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Score</b>
> 30% residue (No-till, strip till, conservation tillage)	1
15-30% residue (Reduced tillage)	0.5
< 15% residue (Conventional or intensive tillage)	0

Tillage practices (and associated residue cover) have a significant impact on soil organic matter, soil erosion, and soil compaction (NRCS, 1996).

This parameter is weighted by the Environmental Benefit Score for residue and tillage management (value of 35, [NRCS Practice Code 329](#), Conservation Program Activity list, 2013).

**(HPI-4) Crop rotation (per crop)\***

**What is the predominant crop rotation practice used?**

*Options:*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Score</b>
Crop to fallow	1
Conventional rotation	0.5
Continuous single crop	0

This parameter evaluates the use of crop rotation for each crop type. While crop rotation practices can vary from simple rotations of two crop types to highly complex sequences of cropping patterns (NRCS 1996), this parameter is provided as a simple response based on the predominant practice for a crop type.

This parameter is weighted by the Environmental Benefit Score for conservation crop rotation (value of 31, [NRCS Practice Code 328](#), Conservation Program Activity list, 2013).

**(HPI-5) Cover crop (per crop)\***

**Do you use a cover crop, either native or planted?**

*Options:*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Score</b>
Use on most of crop	1
Use on approximately half of crop	0.5
Generally do not use	0

The establishment of a cover crop in between seasonal cropping cycles provides a number of habitat benefits related to maintaining soil quality on cultivated acreage, including reduced erosion, increased organic matter, retained soil moisture and enhanced local nutrient cycling, and promotes biodiversity of both soil biota and other organisms by providing habitat and a food source outside the regular growing season (NRCS Practice Standard Code 340).

This parameter is weighted by the Environmental Benefit Score for conservation crop rotation (value of 42, [NRCS Practice Standard Code 340](#), Conservation Program Activity list, 2013).

**(HPI-6) Nutrient management (per crop)**

**Are you implementing an approved Nutrient Management Plan and/or do you apply nutrients according to the “4 R’s” of nutrient stewardship (see options below)?**

*Options: (scores will be added to a maximum value of 1)*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Score</b>
Implement nutrient management plan	1
Right source	0.25
Right rate	0.25
Right time	0.25
Right place	0.25
None	0

This parameter provides an indicator for nutrient management activities based on whether the respondent is implementing an approved nutrient management plan (nutrient management that meets the standards of [NRCS Practice Standard 590](#) for “Managing the amount, source, placement, form and timing of the application of nutrients and soil amendments”, and/or whether the respondent is practicing any of the “4 R’s” of nutrient management stewardship.

The principles of the “4 R’s”, as described by the 4-R Nutrient Stewardship Initiative: <http://www.nutrientstewardship.com/what-are-4rs/> are:

*“... Right Source- Ensure a balanced supply of essential nutrients, considering both natural available sources and the characteristics of specific products, in plant-available forms.*

*Right Rate- Assess and make decisions based on soil nutrient supply and plant demand*

*Right Time- Assess and make decisions based on the dynamics of crop uptake, soil supply, nutrient loss risks, and field operation logistics*

*Right place- Address root-soil dynamics and nutrient movement, and manage spatial variability within the field to meet site-specific crop needs and limit potential losses from the field...”*

This parameter is weighted by the Environmental Benefit Score for “plant tissue tests and analysis to improve the management of nitrogen”, representing a basic component of a nutrient management plan (value of 19, [NRCS Practice Standard Code WQL04](#), Conservation Program Activity list, 2013).

**(HPI-7) Pest management (per crop)\***

**What is the predominant pest management practice used?**

*Options: (identical to Water Quality Index in the Fieldprint Calculator)*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Score</b>
IPM strategies used to manage pests primarily without the use of chemical control	1
IPM strategies used to manage pest including chemical control	0.75
Pest managed primarily using chemical control and additional site-specific techniques	0.5
Pest managed solely using chemical control	0

This parameter identifies the management practice in place for pest management, equivalent to the options used in the Water Quality Index in the Fieldprint Calculator.

*Additional text will be included from the WQI Index in the Fieldprint Calculator.*

This parameter is weighted by the Environmental Benefit Score for “High-level Integrated Pest Management” (value of 31, [NRCS Practice Standard Code WQL13](#), Conservation Program Activity list, 2013).

**(HPI-8) Water Conservation (per crop)\***

**If you irrigate, what is your water source?**

*Options: Score dependent upon farm location in “water scarce” region (see notes)*

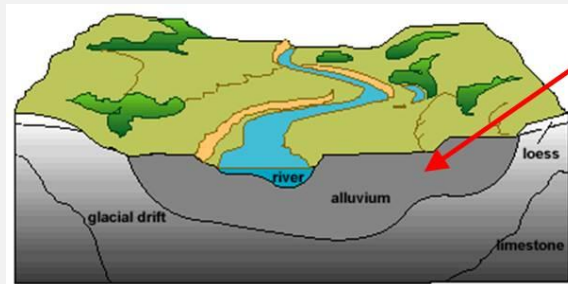
Option	Score
Crop not irrigated	1
Surface water or alluvial groundwater source (see notes)	(see below)
Groundwater or other source not connected to surface water	1

*For “Surface water or alluvial groundwater source,” select from the additional options below:*

**Do you use water conservation methods (see notes for examples)?**

Option	Score
Yes, water conservation methods used	0.5 – 0.75 (see notes)
No, water conservation methods not used	0 – 0.25 (see notes)

This parameter identifies how a grower is managing surface water consumption. An alluvial groundwater source is groundwater that is hydraulically connected to a surface water body (an alluvial aquifer, see figure below).



*Cross-section of alluvial aquifer; arrow added to Prior (1991) image, <http://ia.water.usgs.gov>*

Water conservation includes methods such as irrigation scheduling, tailwater recovery, and drainage water management.

Parameter scoring is dependent upon whether the farm is located in a “water-scarce” watershed (computed in the background based on the “Water Supply Stress Index” (“WASSI”; USDA, <http://www.wassiweb.sgcp.ncsu.edu/>). Farms located in watersheds within the top 25% of nationwide WASSI values will be classified as “water-scarce”.

Option	Score
No irrigation or Irrigation with non-surface water source	1
Irrigation with water conservation (not in water scarce watershed)	0.75
Irrigation with water conservation (water scarce watershed)	0.5
Irrigation, no water conservation (not in water scarce watershed)	0.25
Irrigation, no water conservation (water scarce watershed)	0
<p>The parameter is weighted by the Environmental Benefit Score for “Decrease Irrigation Water Quantity or Conversion to non-irrigated crop” (value of 44, <a href="#">NRCS Practice Standard Code WQLT08</a>, Conservation Program Activity list, 2013).</p>	

**(HPI-9) Drainage Water Management (per crop, excluding cotton)\***

**Do you use tile drainage? If so, are you implementing an approved drainage water management plan?**

*Options: Local soil condition (soil drainage) determines the lowest score (see notes)*

Option	Score
No tile drainage (natural drainage or other drainage water management)	1
Tile drainage with drainage water management	1
Tile drainage without drainage water management	0 – 0.5 (see notes)

Tile drainage systems can reduce the amount of surface run-off (and associated erosion) generated by a cultivated field; however, this practice can also significantly increase the loading of nitrates into receiving waters which can negatively impact aquatic life (for example by causing periodic depletion of available oxygen). Due to the both positive and negative potential impacts of tile drainage on habitat potential, this parameter is scored based on whether tile drainage is implemented with or without drainage water management. Drainage water management (adhering to a plan that meets the [NRCS Standard 554](#), also see NRCS [Drainage Water Management Ad Hoc Action Team Final Report](#), 2011) can reduce the negative impacts of tile drainage. If drainage water management is used, the parameter is assigned the maximum value of 1 (same as no tile drainage).

The need for tile drainage is considered in the scoring in order to account for regional/local differences in soil condition (soil drainage). Growers using tile drainage without drainage water management in poorly-drained soils are scored higher than growers using tile drainage without drainage water management in well-drained soils. Soil drainage condition (e.g., well-drained vs. poorly drained) can be imported in the background of the tool based on the soil condition information in the WQI (“moist” or “dry/well-drained”).

Option	Score
No tile drainage (natural drainage or other drainage water management)	1
Tile drainage with drainage water management	1
Tile drainage without drainage water management (poorly-drained soil)	0.5
Tile drainage without drainage water management (well-drained soil)	0

This parameter is weighted by the Environmental Benefit Score for “Drainage Water Management for Nutrient, Pathogen, or Pesticide Reduction” (value of 26, [NRCS Standard Practice Code WQL27](#), Conservation Program Activity list, 2013).

**(HPI-10) Wildlife habitat enhancements on cultivated land**

**Do you practice any seasonal habitat enhancements?**

*Options: assigned a score of 1 if any of the below are practiced, or 0 if “None”*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Score</b>
Seasonal flooding ( <i>option for rice only</i> )	1 and increase eco-weight to artificial wetland status (2-4 based on ecoregion)
Provide foraging habitat	1
Provide breeding and/or nesting habitat	1
None	0

This parameter identifies wildlife enhancements on cropland that provide seasonal habitat for foraging, breeding and nesting habitat. Examples include providing waterfowl habitat (winter wheat), vegetative cover, supplemental crop, and/or not harvesting part of the crop.

For weighting, this parameter does not have one clear corresponding NRCS Standard Practice, but is weighted by a representative (most relevant) Environmental Benefit Score for “Enhance Wildlife Habitat on Acres with Perennial Vegetation Managed as Hayland” (value of 87, [NRCS Practice Standard Code WQLT08](#), Conservation Program Activity list, 2013). If seasonal flooding of rice fields is used, the weighting of this parameter will be doubled to 174, to recognize the importance of this habitat enhancement in providing surrogate wetland habitat for migratory birds (The State of the Birds 2013 Report on Private Land (<http://www.stateofthebirds.org/>)).

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## Edge Feature and Riparian Buffer Land Cover HPI Inputs

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*User first selects edge/riparian type(s), size and previous land use (See HPI-1 and HPI-2):*



**Edge-of-field Features**



**Riparian buffer**

*(Photos from NRCS)*

Edge-of-field features include natural and semi-natural land cover on the farm associated with adjacent cultivated fields including features such as buffer strips, grass waterways, terraces, filter strips, field borders, pivot corners (non-cultivated), ditches, hedge rows, tree rows, wind breaks, and headlands.

Riparian buffer is non-cultivated land comprised of grasses, shrubs and/or trees that is adjacent to a surface water.

### (HPI-11) Edge Feature/Riparian Vegetation

**How much of the edge feature/riparian buffer is vegetated and how much is native?**

*Options:*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Score</b>
All vegetated, all native	1
All vegetated, some native	0.85
All vegetated, no native	0.7
Some vegetated, all native	0.55
Some vegetated, some native	0.4
Some vegetated, no native	0.25
No vegetation (bare soil)	0

This parameter provides a general estimate of how much native vegetation is present in the edge-of-field or riparian buffer features on a farm.

## (HPI-12) Management of Edge/Riparian Features

**Do you manage the edge/riparian features for habitat, and if so how?**

*Options: Select all that apply; sum all selections not to exceed a total value of 1*

Option	Score
Remove/discourage spread of invasive species	0.25
No grazing or grazing management (ex. conservation grazing)	0.25
Prescribed burn or mowing	0.25
Wildlife habitat enhancements (e.g., edge feathering)	0.25
Add plant diversity (native and/or recommended by Extension/NRCS/other expert)	0.25
Extend field border	0.25
Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategy	0.25
Limit or avoid ditch cleaning	0.25
None of the above	0

This parameter determines if any management practices are being implemented that can improve habitat potential. Implementation of at least four (4) of the above practices yields a maximum score of 1. NRCS Practice Codes relevant to edge-of-field and riparian management include Prescribed Burning ([338](#)), Biological Suppression and Other Non-Chemical Techniques to Manage Brush, Weeds and Invasive Species ([WQL01](#)), Upland Wildlife Management ([645](#)), Establishment of Pollinator Habitat ([PLT15](#)), Riparian forest buffers (ANM05, ANM33, 390, 391), Extending filter strips or herbaceous riparian cover ([ANM32](#)), Filter strips ([393](#)), Establishment of windbreak/shelterbelt ([PLT06](#), [380](#), [650](#)), Incorporation of native grasses ([ANM03](#)), and Field border ([ANM07](#) and [386](#)).

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## Forest Land Cover HPI Inputs

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*User first selects forest type(s), size and previous land use (See HPI-1 and HPI-2):*



**Deciduous Forest**



**Mixed Forest**



**Evergreen Forest**



**Conifer plantation**

*(Photos from NRCS)*

For natural forest types, the definitions provided with the National Land Cover Dataset (MRLC 2001, <http://www.epa.gov/mrlc/definitions.html>) can be used as guidance:

*“...Deciduous Forest - Areas dominated by trees generally greater than 5 meters tall, and greater than 20% of total vegetation cover. More than 75 percent of the tree species shed foliage simultaneously in response to seasonal change.*

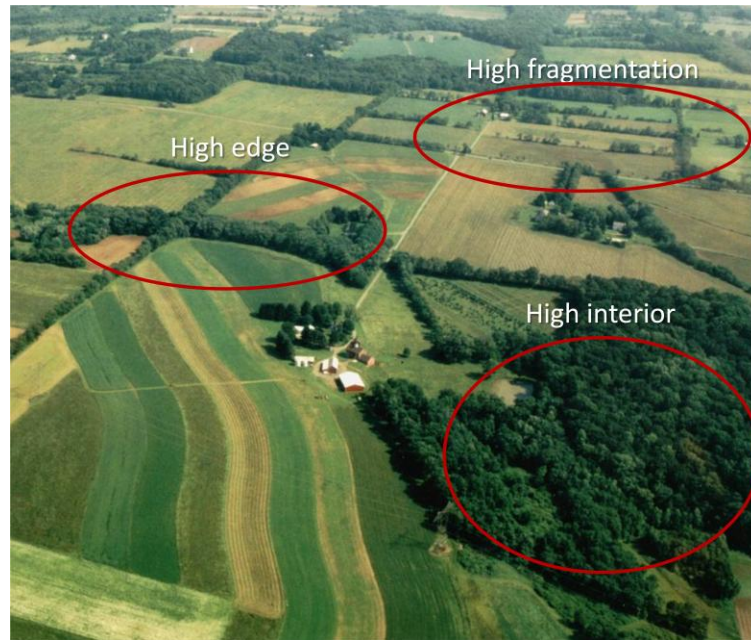
*Evergreen Forest - Areas dominated by trees generally greater than 5 meters tall, and greater than 20% of total vegetation cover. More than 75 percent of the tree species maintain their leaves all year. Canopy is never without green foliage.*

*Mixed Forest - Areas dominated by trees generally greater than 5 meters tall, and greater than 20% of total vegetation cover. Neither deciduous nor evergreen species are greater than 75 percent of total tree cover...”*

**(HPI-13) Arrangement/Fragmentation**

**What is the predominant arrangement/configuration of your forested land?**

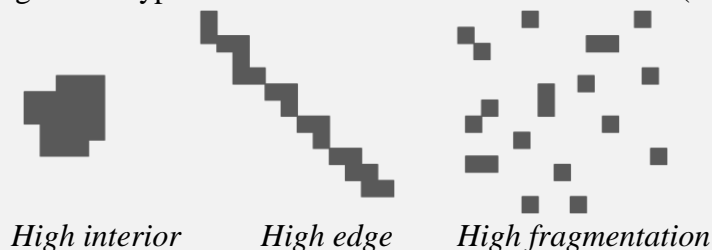
*Options: Select image that best represents the arrangement of your forest:*



*(Photo from NRCS with labels added)*

Option	Score
High forest interior (single large forest cluster)	1
High forest edge (narrow line of trees)	0.5
High forest fragmentation (small clusters of trees scattered throughout farm)	0.25

This parameter describes the spatial configuration of the forest land on a farm. Forest with high interior provides the greatest habitat potential for wildlife, while high amounts of edge and fragmentation limit habitat potential. It is recognized that some wildlife species prefer edge habitat, however, overall habitat potential appears more highly influenced by the availability of larger intact forest parcels. In a past study, a forest interior distance of <100m is associated with disturbance related to edge effects (Broadbent et al. 2008). Below is a graphical representation of the three forest configuration types based on the same number of blocks (ex. acres) of forest:



## (HPI-14) Forest habitat management

**Do you manage the forest land for habitat, and if so how?**

*Options: Select all that apply; sum all selections not to exceed a total value of 1*

Option	Score
Selective harvesting of timber for age diversity	0.25
Retain special features beneficial to wildlife	0.25
Manage understory	0.25
Manage forest edge	0.25
Long-term conservation easement	0.25
Wildlife corridor (see illustration in notes)	0.25
None of the above	0

This parameter identifies a variety of forest management practices that can improve habitat potential. Example NRCS Practice Codes relevant to forest management include Enhance Wildlife Habitat on Forestland ([ANM36](#)), Patch Burning to Enhance Wildlife ([ANM11](#)), Biological Suppression and Other Non-Chemical Techniques to Manage Brush, Weeds and Invasive Species ([WQL01](#)), Upland Wildlife Management ([645](#)), and Establishment of Pollinator Habitat ([PLT15](#)).

*Example, wildlife corridor (Photo from NRCS with arrow added)*



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## Grassland/Savanna Land Cover HPI Inputs

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*User first selects grassland type(s), size and previous land use (See HPI-1 and HPI-2):*



**Non-native, grazed  
Grassland/Savanna**



**Non-native, non-grazed  
Grassland/Savanna**



**Native, grazed  
Grassland/Savanna**



**Native, non-grazed  
Grassland/Savanna**

*(Photos from NRCS)*

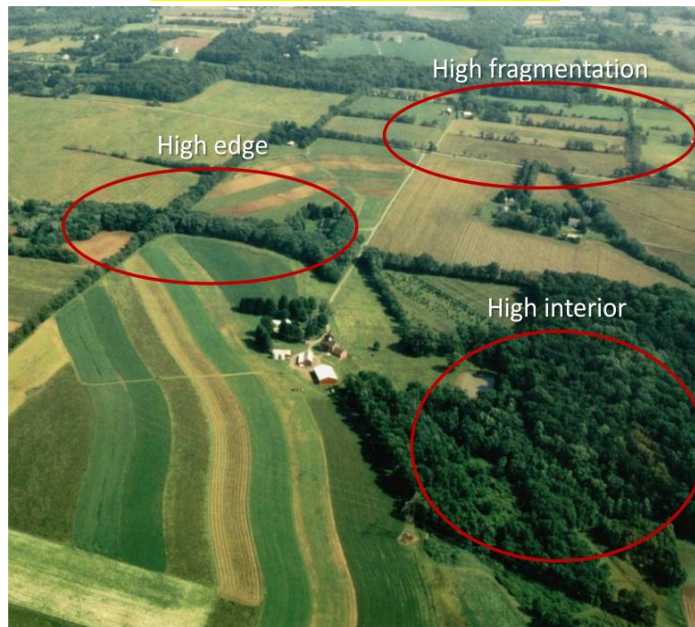
Grassland/savanna is defined as land dominated by grasses, forbs, shrubland or savanna conditions on which the predominant land use is grazing (permanent pasture or rangeland) and/or wildlife habitat. Non-native grassland/savanna indicates that the vegetation present is introduced, while native grassland/savanna is land historically having vegetation characteristic of a native grassland or savanna ecosystem.

**(HPI-15) Arrangement/Fragmentation**

**What is the predominant arrangement/configuration of your grassland/savanna?**

*Options: Select image that best represents the arrangement of your grassland/savanna:*

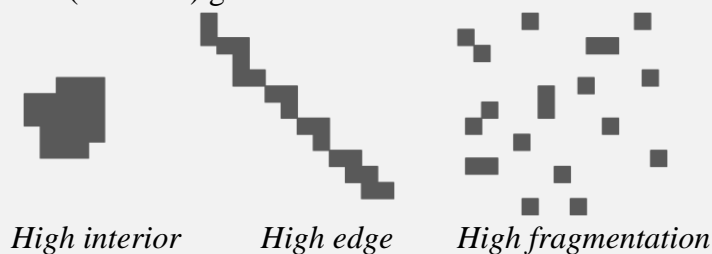
**(PLACEHOLDER GRAPHIC)**



Option	Score
High interior grassland/savanna (single large cluster)	1
High edge grassland/savanna (narrow line)	0.5
High fragmentation grassland/savanna (small clusters scattered throughout farm)	0.25

This parameter describes the spatial configuration of the grassland/savanna on a farm. Grassland/savanna with high interior provides the greatest habitat potential for wildlife, while high amounts of edge and fragmentation limit habitat potential.

Below is a graphical representation of the three grassland/savanna configuration types based on the same number of blocks (ex. acres) grassland/savanna:



### (HPI-16) Grazing intensity

**What is the relative level of grazing intensity on the grassland/savanna?**

*Options: Select all that apply; sum all selections, not to exceed a total value of 1*

Option	Score
Low or no grazing	1
Moderate	0.5
High	0
Practice rotational or conservation grazing	Add 0.5 to score (up to max of 1)

This parameter identifies the intensity of grazing activity on the grassland and whether grazing management is implemented. Grazing intensity varies by region (climatic zone), therefore the grower is asked to provide a relative qualitative estimate of grazing intensity. Grazing intensity may be defined as stocking intensity (ex. livestock units per acre), or in terms of the % biomass remaining at the end of the growing season. A regional example in a past study of the Northern tallgrass prairie defined heavy grazing as  $\leq 10\%$  biomass remaining (Biondini et al. 1998).

NRCS Practice Codes relevant to grazing management include Grazing Management to Improve Wildlife Habitat ([ANM09](#)), Prescribed Grazing ([528](#)), Intensive rotational grazing ([PLT16](#)).

For grazed grassland/savanna with both the “Low or no grazing” and the “Practice rotational or conservation grazing” options selected, the eco-weight will be adjusted to be consistent with the “un-grazed” grassland value due to relatively comparable ecological benefits of low-intensity rangeland (Reidsma et al. 2006).

**(HPI-17) Grassland/savanna habitat management**

**Do you manage your grassland/savanna land for habitat, and if so how?**

*Options: Select all that apply; sum all selections not to exceed a total value of 1*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Score</b>
Conservation easement (ex. <a href="#">NRCS Grasslands Reserve Program</a> )	1
Remove/discourage spread of invasive species	0.25
Manage for native woody encroachment (e.g. prescribed burn)	0.25
Prescribed fire for grassland maintenance	0.25
Providing residual cover for wildlife	0.25
Adding plant diversity (inter-seed legumes and native forbs)	0.25
Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategy or no chemical use	0.25
None of the above	0

This parameter identifies grassland/savanna management practices that can improve habitat potential. Grassland/savanna protected by a conservation easement and/or implementing at least four (4) of the above management practices yields the maximum score of “1”, while the individual practices provide opportunity for partial credit (0.25 each). Examples of NRCS codes relevant to grassland management practices include Prescribed Burning ([338](#)), Biological Suppression and Other Non-Chemical Techniques to Manage Brush, Weeds and Invasive Species ([WQL01](#)), Upland Wildlife Management ([645](#)), and Establishment of Pollinator Habitat ([PLT15](#)).

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## Wetland Land Cover HPI Inputs

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*User first selects wetland type(s), size and previous land use (See HPI-1 and HPI-2):*



**Artificial wetland**



**Natural or restored wetland**

*(Photos from NRCS)*

Natural wetland (as defined in NRCS Natural Resources Inventory, 2007): “...Lands transitional between terrestrial and aquatic systems where the water table is usually at or near the surface or the land is covered by shallow water. Wetlands have one or more of the following three attributes: (1) at least periodically, the land supports predominantly hydrophytes [aquatic plants]; (2) the substrate is predominantly undrained hydric soil; and (3) the substrate is nonsoil and is saturated with water or covered by shallow water at some time during the growing season of each year (Cowardin et al. 1979)...”

A comprehensive listing of region-specific wetland vegetation is provided at: <http://rsgisias.crrel.usace.army.mil/NWPL/>.

Restored wetland (as defined in NRCS General Manual): “...the return of a wetland and its functions to a close approximation of its original condition as it existed prior to disturbance on a former or degraded wetland site...”

Artificial wetland (as defined in NRCS General Manual): “...land that was formerly non-wetland under natural conditions but now exhibits wetland characteristics because of the influence of human activities...”

**(HPI-18) Water regime (natural/restored wetlands only)**

**What type(s) of water regime(s) are present in the wetland(s) on your farm?**

*Options: Select all that apply; scores will be added up to a max value of 1*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Score</b>
Seasonally flooded	0.75
Temporarily flooded	0.5
Semi-permanently flooded	0.5
Permanently flooded	0.25
Saturated	0.25

This parameter identifies the water regime(s) present in the wetlands on a farm, generally based on the [Cowardin et al. \(1979\)](#) non-tidal water regime modifiers, as follows:

*Temporarily flooded: surface water is present for brief periods during the growing season, but the water table usually lies well below the soil surface for most of the season.*

*Seasonally flooded: surface water is present for extended periods especially early in the growing season, but is absent by the end of the season in most years.*

*Semi-permanently flooded: surface water persists throughout the growing season in most years.*

*Permanently flooded: water covers the land surface throughout the year in all years.*

*Saturated: the substrate is saturated to the surface for extended periods during the growing season, but surface water is seldom present*

Different water regimes offer different aspects of habitat potential and associated benefits supporting biodiversity. For example, seasonally flooded wetlands provide an important breeding habitat for waterfowl, while temporarily flooded wetlands can be colonized by a variety of invertebrate populations. The presence of more than one wetland type (water regime) significantly increases the potential for habitat provided by wetlands on the farm. The more wetland types on the farm, the higher the parameter score (up to a max of 1).

**(HPI-19) Water level management (artificial wetlands only)**

**Do you use water control structures to manage wetland water levels (i.e., periodic drawdowns)?**

*Options:*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Score</b>
Yes	1
No	0

This parameter identifies whether a grower has the capability to manipulate water levels to implement periodic drawdowns (drainage) of the artificial wetland. Periodic drawdowns simulate the natural wet and dry cycles of a wetland, enhancing plant productivity and overall habitat potential ([Ducks Unlimited Wetland Habitat Management Guide for Landowners, 2005](#)). Water control structures include flashboard and full-round risers, as well as screwgate structures. Timing, rate and frequency of drawdowns are important to approximate a natural water regime. For example, in the Great Lakes region, drawdown should typically coincide with the local growing season length, be implemented at a relatively slow rate (2-3 weeks), and optimally be scheduled to occur every 3-5 years (Ducks Unlimited 2005).

**(HPI-20) Wetland habitat management**

**Do you manage your wetland for habitat, and if so how?**

*Options: Select all that apply; scores will be added up to a max value of 1*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Score</b>
Conservation easement (ex. <a href="#">NRCS Wetlands Reserve Program</a> )	1
Manage for nutrients, sediment and/or habitat enhancements (see notes)	0.5
Remove/discourage spread of invasive species	0.5
None	0

This parameter identifies whether the grower is implementing wetland management practices that can improve habitat potential. Examples of management of nutrients and habitat includes limiting/restricting nutrient run-off from livestock or pesticide run-off from cultivated acreages (for example the inclusion of a vegetative buffer zone), and adding physical habitat features such as logs or artificial nesting structures for wildlife (NRCS Practice “Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management”, code [644](#)). A perfect score of 1 is attained through implementation of both management options listed, or protection of the wetland under a conservation easement.

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## Surface Water Land Cover HPI Inputs

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*User first selects surface water type(s) and size (See HPI-1 and HPI-2):*



**Stream**



**River**



**Pond**

**(Specify Natural or Artificial)**



**Lake**

**(Specify Natural or Artificial)**

*(Photos from NRCS)*

Surface water land covers include four classifications: rivers, (wadeable) streams, lakes and ponds. For user selection of surface water type, rivers and streams can be differentiated by average depth- wadeable streams are typically defined as less than 1.5 m depth (Missouri Dept. of Natural Resources, 2002). While characteristics of lakes and ponds overlap, lakes are generally larger and deeper inland water bodies, while ponds are smaller and shallower inland water bodies.

**(HPI-21) Riparian buffer**

**What is the estimated percent of the surface water edge that has a riparian buffer? (See notes for specifications)**

*Options: Enter % estimate*

Option	Score
> 75%	1
51 to 75%	0.5
25 – 50%	0.25
< 25%	0

A riparian zone buffer is defined as a non-cultivated area (comprised of grasses, shrubs or trees) that has a width of at least **35 feet**, or **at least 2.5 times** the width of the surface water (NRCS Conservation Practice Standard [390](#)).



*(Photo from NRCS)*

A riparian buffer provides benefits to water quality and provides habitat and food resources for aquatic communities and other wildlife (NRCS Conservation Practice Standard document, CPS [390](#)). All riparian-related questions (HPI-21, HPI-22, HPI-23) are assigned half the weight for ponds/lakes as streams/rivers.

## (HPI-22) Vegetative Cover, Riparian Zone

What is the % of vegetative cover of the riparian zone (land adjacent to surface water)?

Options: Enter % estimate (from 0% to 100%)

Option	Score
Optimal > 90%	1
Suboptimal 70 to 90%	0.5
Marginal 50 – 69%	0.25
Poor < 50%	0

This parameter provides a relative estimate of protective plant cover (grasses, shrubs, and/or trees) within the riparian zone, with high vegetative cover having the greatest benefit to aquatic life. The parameter options are based on those used in the U.S. EPA Rapid Bioassessment Protocol metric for bank vegetative protection (Barbour et al. 1999).

Example images below from Barbour et al. 1999 (U.S. EPA) for low and high-gradient streams:

### 9a. Bank Vegetative Protection—High Gradient



Optimal Range  
(arrow pointing to streambank with high level of vegetative cover)



Poor Range  
(arrow pointing to streambank with almost no vegetative cover)

### 9b. Bank Vegetative Protection—Low Gradient



Optimal Range  
(Peggy Morgan, FL DEP)



Poor Range  
(arrow pointing to channelized streambank with no vegetative cover)  
(MD Save Our Streams)

### (HPI-23) Riparian Management

**How are you managing the riparian zone (land adjacent to surface water)?**

*Options (enter the % of riparian zone falling within each management option (adds up to 100%):*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Percent of Riparian Zone</b>	<b>Score</b>
Conservation easement or undisturbed wildlife habitat	Enter %	1
Limited cattle access for grazing/watering	Enter %	0.5
Unlimited cattle access for grazing/watering	Enter %	0
Crop production	Enter %	0
Roads or other disturbances/ constructed features	Enter %	0

This management parameter provides information about livestock access and other potential disturbances within the riparian zone that can affect water quality, habitat and wildlife food sources. A weighted average of the scores will be computed based on the total riparian zone (100%). This approach allows growers to get some credit for any undisturbed wildlife habitat that may be present in the riparian zone.

**(HPI-24) Bank Stability (Erosion)**

**What is the condition and management for the majority of the surface water banks?**

*Options (select bank stability level and if a management plan is in place):*

Option	Score
Banks highly stable (little to no erosion)	1
Banks moderately stable (infrequent erosion)	0.50
Banks moderately unstable (high erosion during floods)	0.25
Banks unstable (obvious erosion over majority of banks)	0
Implementing bank restoration with guided design	Add 0.50 to score (up to 1)

The bank stability classifications in this parameter are based on those used in the U.S. EPA Rapid Bioassessment Protocol metric for bank stability (Barbour et al. 1999). Additionally, implementation of a bank restoration plan can enhance the score for this parameter (ex. an approved plan designed to meet the NRCS Conservation Practice Standard for stream habitat improvement and management (NRCS Practice Standard [395](#))).

*Example images below from Barbour et al. 1999 (U.S. EPA) for low and high-gradient streams:*

**8a. Bank Stability (condition of banks)—High Gradient**



**Optimal Range**  
(arrow pointing to stable streambanks)



**Poor Range** (MD Save Our Streams)  
(arrow highlighting unstable streambanks)

**8b. Bank Stability (condition of banks)—Low Gradient**



**Optimal Range** (Peggy Morgan, FL DEP)



**Poor Range**  
(arrow highlighting unstable streambanks)

**(HPI-25) Channel modifications (river and streams only)**

**What is the extent of modifications to the river/stream channel (on the farm)?**

*Options: (select predominant channelization extent and if levee(s) or dam(s) are present):*

Option	Score
Channel is managed by another authority	Question will be omitted from HPI score
Channelization absent or minimal	1
Some channelization, mostly historical	0.5
Extensive channelization	0.25
Completely altered channel, artificial banks	0
Levee(s) or dam(s) present	Subtract 0.25 from channel score >0

The channelization options are generally based on the U.S. EPA Rapid Bioassessment Protocol metric for channel stabilization (Barbour et al. 1999). Presence of levees and/or dams also indicate disturbance in the natural flow regime and physical habitat of the surface waterbody. This parameter does not apply if the channel is managed by another authority.

*Example images below from Barbour et al. 1999 (U.S. EPA) for low and high-gradient streams:*

**6a. Channel Alteration—High Gradient**



Optimal Range



Poor Range  
(arrows emphasizing large-scale channel alterations)

**6b. Channel Alteration—Low Gradient**



Optimal Range



Poor Range

(John Maxted, DE DNREC)

**(HPI-26) In-stream disturbance (river and streams only)**

**How are you managing the in-stream habitat of the river/stream?**

*Options (check all that apply; scores added up to maximum value of 1):*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Score</b>
No in-stream disturbance	1
Disturbance only related to adding fish habitat	1
Unmaintained stream crossings	0.5
Flow modifications (elevated culverts, diversion structures)	0
Dredging, gravel mining, maintenance of stream crossings	0

This parameter provides information about what disturbances occur within the in-stream habitat of the river or stream that can affect water quality as well as physical habitat and food sources for aquatic communities.

**(HPI-27) Predominant use of pond/lake (pond and lakes only)**

**What is the *predominant* use for the pond/lake?**

*Options (select one):*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Score</b>
Wildlife habitat	1
Aesthetics/recreation (includes fishing)	0.75
Cattle watering using external trough or other external system	0.75
Aquaculture	0.25
Cattle watering into pond using partial fencing	0.25
Flooding or erosion control	0.25
Irrigation	0.25
Cattle watering into pond with unlimited access	0

Scoring for this parameter decreases as the predominant use becomes more intensive in its potential for habitat disturbance.

**(HPI-28) Pond/lake depth (pond and lakes only)**

What is the average depth of the pond/lake?

*Options: enter average depth (ft), which is scored as a range from 0 to 1 based on increasing depth up to 10 ft.*

<b>Option (range, min/max shown below)</b>	<b>Score</b>
≥ 10 ft (optimal)	1
9 ft	0.9
8 ft	0.8
7 ft	0.7
6 ft	0.6
5 ft	0.5
4 ft	0.4
3 ft	0.3
2 ft	0.2
1 ft	0.1
< 1 ft	0

The farm pond management literature (ex., University of Arkansas Pine Bluff Extension; Austin et al. 1996) identifies a range of 10 – 12 feet in depth as desirable to minimize oxygen depletion and winterkill. Therefore, for this parameter a value of 10 ft. is used as the optimal score (1), and the score will decrease with decreasing depth from 10 ft. (ex. 5 ft depth = score of 0.5).

**(HPI-29) Management of pond/lake (pond and lakes only)**

**How are you managing the pond/lake?**

*Options: (check all that apply; scores are added up to value of 1):*

<b>Option</b>	<b>Score</b>
Surrounding land is under conservation easement	1
Habitat structures	0.75
Species stocking (native)	0.75
Aquatic vegetation management	0.5
None of the above	0

Implementing a conservation easement is assumed to provide the greatest opportunity to preserve, protect, and enhance habitat quality and associated wildlife diversity of the pond or lake at the farm scale (score = 1). Alternatively, adding physical habitat structures to a lake or pond can significantly increase productivity and diversity (Score =0.75). Certain species of fish and wildlife might be stocked to increase diversity (Score =0.75). Management of aquatic vegetation provides benefit to ponds/lakes by controlling excessive growth of aquatic weeds (Score =0.5).

