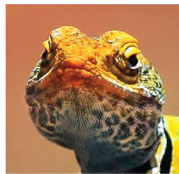


# A Strategy for Improving the Mitigation Policies and Practices of The Department of the Interior



A Report to The Secretary of the Interior  
From The Energy and  
Climate Change Task Force



April 2014





# **A Strategy for Improving the Mitigation Policies and Practices of The Department of the Interior**

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From The Energy and Climate Change Task Force*

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# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	i
<b>Chapter 1 - Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter 2 - Mitigation: Origin, Purpose, and Basic Concepts</b> .....	2
<b>Chapter 3 - Mitigation Challenges</b> .....	5
<b>Chapter 4 - Landscape-Scale Mitigation Strategy: Guiding Principles</b> .....	9
<b>Chapter 5 - Landscape-Scale Mitigation Strategy: Implementation</b> .....	13
<b>Chapter 6 - Signs of Progress</b> .....	16
<b>Chapter 7 - Conclusion</b> .....	19
<b>References</b> .....	20
<b>Appendix I: Authorities, Regulations, and Guidance</b> .....	21
<b>Appendix II: Outreach</b> .....	24
<b>Appendix III: Key To Acronyms</b> .....	25

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The concept of mitigation, as expressly identified or implicit in the mission and statutory direction of the Department and its bureaus, is an essential element in how the Department manages the lands and resources under its jurisdiction. In response to Secretarial Order Number 3330 entitled “Improving Mitigation Policies and Practices of the Department of the Interior,” issued by Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell in October 2013, this report highlights the challenges and opportunities associated with developing and implementing an effective mitigation policy, and describes the key principles and actions necessary to successfully shift from project-by-project management to consistent, landscape-scale, science-based management of the lands and resources for which the Department is responsible. In so doing, we believe that the natural and cultural assets stewarded by the Department can be managed more efficiently, effectively, and responsibly for the greater good of the nation.

To address the challenges associated with mitigation and improve practices while accommodating both infrastructure development and the conservation needs of America’s rapidly changing landscapes, the Department and its bureaus need mitigation policies and practices that a) more effectively avoid, minimize, and compensate for the impact of development on Department-managed lands and resources; b) provide better information and greater predictability to project proponents and land managers; c) improve the resilience of our Nation’s resources in the face of climate change; d) encourage more strategic conservation investments in lands and other resources; and e) increase compensatory mitigation effectiveness, durability, transparency and consistency.

Taking a landscape-scale approach to mitigation can meet these needs while improving permitting efficiencies, reducing conflict, and better achieving

development and conservation goals. In the mitigation context, the landscape approach dictates that it is not sufficient to look narrowly at impacts at the scale of the project; it is necessary to account for impacts to resource values throughout the relevant range of the resource that is being impacted. In order to realize the promise of landscape-scale mitigation, the Department and its bureaus will institute policies and procedures that reflect the following guiding principles:

1. **Landscape-scale:** *Incorporate landscape-scale approaches into all facets of development and conservation planning and mitigation.*
2. **Full Hierarchy:** *Utilize the full mitigation hierarchy in project planning and review.*
3. **Promote Certainty:** *Establish protocols to simplify planning and project review while improving operational certainty for project proponents.*
4. **Advance mitigation planning:** *At the outset of the project planning process, incorporate mitigation and landscape objectives into the design and development of projects that are likely to impact natural or cultural resources.*
5. **Science and Tools:** *Develop and utilize the scientific information and tools necessary to identify the most efficient and effective means of mitigating the effects of development and to inform monitoring and evaluation of mitigation efforts.*
6. **Foster Resilience:** *Identify and promote mitigation efforts that improve the resilience of our Nation’s resources in a rapidly changing climate.*
7. **Durability:** *Ensure that mitigation measures are durable.*
8. **Transparency:** *Promote transparency and consistency in the development of mitigation measures.*
9. **Collaboration:** *Coordinate with other federal and state agencies, tribes, and stakeholders in conducting assessments of existing and projected resource conditions, forming mitigation strategies, and developing compensatory mitigation programs.*
10. **Monitoring:** *Monitor and evaluate the results of mitigation over time to ensure that the intended outcomes are achieved.*

To effectively integrate these guiding principles and enhance the ability of state and federal agencies to address wildland fire, invasive species, climate change and other large-scale stressors, the Department’s management bureaus are moving toward a landscape approach to managing resources. The landscape approach to mitigation involves four distinct steps:

1. Identifying key landscape-scale attributes, and the conditions, trends, and baselines that characterize these attributes;