

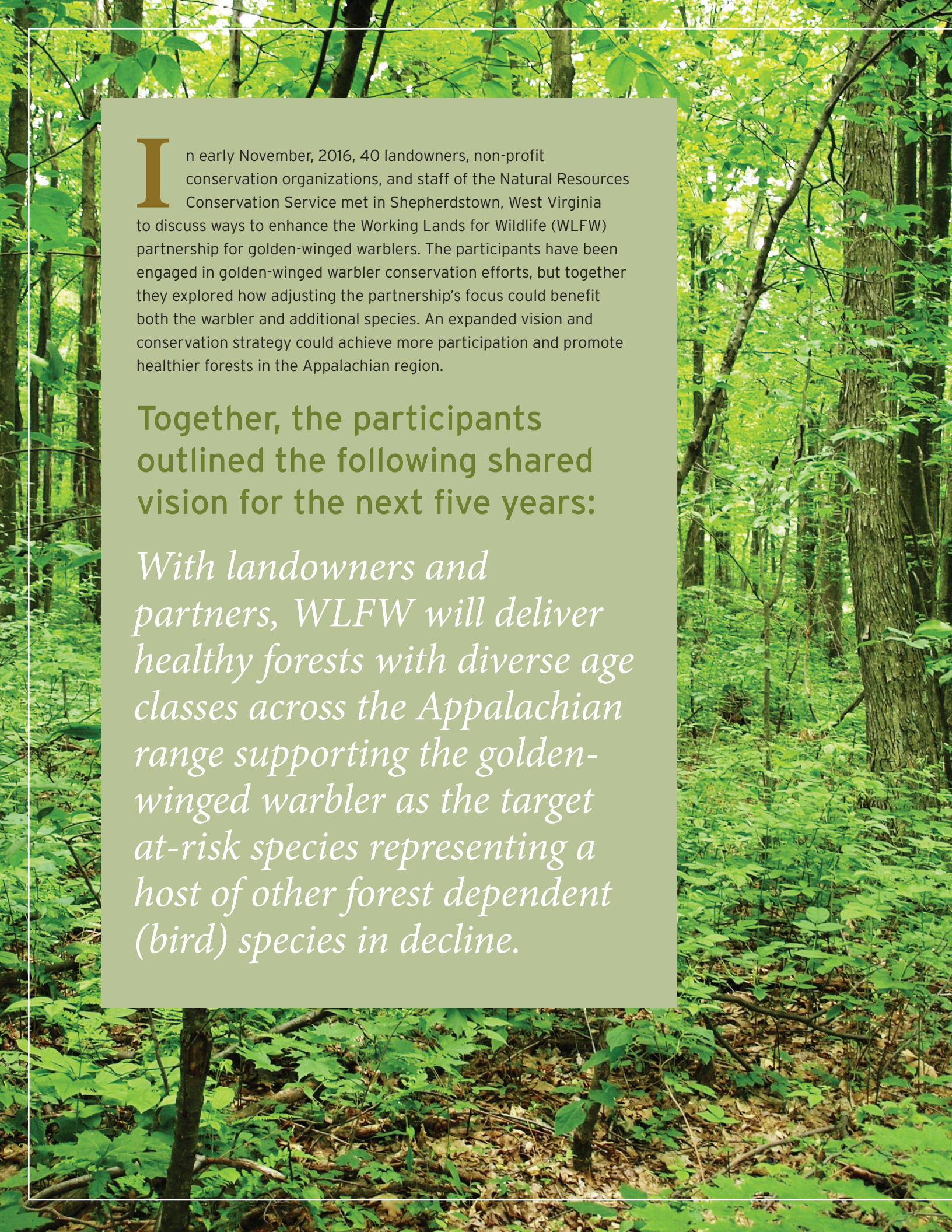
GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER WORKING  
LANDS FOR WILDLIFE PARTNERSHIP

# Regional Landowner Forum



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture





**I**n early November, 2016, 40 landowners, non-profit conservation organizations, and staff of the Natural Resources Conservation Service met in Shepherdstown, West Virginia to discuss ways to enhance the Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) partnership for golden-winged warblers. The participants have been engaged in golden-winged warbler conservation efforts, but together they explored how adjusting the partnership's focus could benefit both the warbler and additional species. An expanded vision and conservation strategy could achieve more participation and promote healthier forests in the Appalachian region.

**Together, the participants outlined the following shared vision for the next five years:**

*With landowners and partners, WLFW will deliver healthy forests with diverse age classes across the Appalachian range supporting the golden-winged warbler as the target at-risk species representing a host of other forest dependent (bird) species in decline.*

# *History of the Golden-Winged Warbler WLFW Partnership*

**W**orking Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) has a core mission of conserving at-risk wildlife species in a manner that promotes strong economies on working lands and reduces regulatory burdens. The approach is informed by science and delivers targeted technical assistance for assessment, stewardship, and monitoring through NRCS and its partners. Science combined with clear goals prioritizes critical needs across the landscape. WLFW offers a consistent structure for recovery and stewardship while offering flexibility for variations in local contexts.

The golden-winged warbler WLFW partnership began as an effort to preclude the need to list the species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) through strategic habitat restoration efforts across Appalachia. Foresters have recognized that establishing and

maintaining forests with diverse age classes across the landscape will benefit many keystone species, including golden-winged warblers. Since many of the region's forests are found on private lands, active forest management depends on collaborative efforts with landowners.

However, the golden-winged warbler WLFW partnership has faced impediments to implementation and a negative trend in effective project size. Participating landowners have a clear understanding of the opportunities and benefits they achieve through their engagement, however, the assessed potential capacity is 3 to 4 times the current implementation rate. Participants at the Regional Landowner Forum felt that capacity level could be achieved in future years by expanding partner and landowner support and considering adjustments to the overall program focus.



The diverse partnerships engaged in the Appalachian region reflect the complexity of forest health and provide critical funding, technical assistance, science, monitoring, communication, and outreach. Partners of the effort (and represented at the regional forum) include: bird partnerships (Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture, Audubon, National Wild Turkey Federation, Pheasants Forever, American Bird Conservancy), universities, researchers, state and federal agencies, land trusts, forestry associations, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

# Keys to Success & Recommendations

**E**xcellent land stewardship is a product of relationships built on trust between landowners, forestry professionals, and wildlife experts. In the Appalachian region, sound silvicultural practices that support forest health and local economies are also good wildlife management. By building and enhancing WLFW partnerships for golden-winged warbler conservation, we can provide the foundation for improving forest health in priority areas throughout the Appalachians and benefit hundreds of species now in decline.

The following Keys to Success for golden-winged warbler Working Lands for Wildlife partnerships were identified during the regional forum:

## Program Opportunities

Forum participants supported the overall goals and vision of the golden-winged warbler Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW-GWWA) partnership. However, there was discussion of several opportunities to improve delivery of the program. First, it was recommended that WLFW-GWWA partner activities should shift from short-term goals for early successional habitat development to a long-term vision for sustainable forest health. Second, partners felt that expanding the WLFW-GWWA partnership focus from a single target species to multi-species could increase participation and improve healthy forest habitats at the landscape scale. Finally, it was recommended that the WLFW-GWWA partnership's eligible project boundary be expanded to enhance more working landscapes, while establishing GWWA priority areas for conservation (PACs) to increase benefits in GWWA breeding areas across Appalachia.

## Action Items

- Adopt the current mapped version of the PACs and a larger eligible Project Boundary approximating the existing GWWA Conservation Region; this approach will be reviewed by technical partners in FY2017 and may need adjustment afterward.

- Add a state ranking question that encourages larger projects to meet GWWA resource need (e.g. Pennsylvania NRCS uses 10-acre minimum); when feasible, use a grouped planning approach to link smaller (<20 acre) projects together. This would also be more cost effective for loggers, forestry contractors, and other partners critical to implementation.
- Drop all project elevation threshold requirements for WLFW-GWWA (based on new science).
- Review Farm Bill Conservation Program payment scenarios for consistency across county and state lines, and from year to year.
- Review NRCS conservation practice caps for applicability and consistency.
- Identify a short list of other high priority wildlife that also benefit from WLFW.
- Link the GWWA WLFW effort with state forest plans.
- Enhance oak silviculture in WLFW-GWWA.
- Establish 5-year partnership goals for NRCS WLFW-GWWA.

## Partnerships

Partnerships are essential and can be strengthened with joint agreements to help build capacity, produce necessary science, and monitor the impacts of stewardship actions. Consistent funding to reduce staff turnover and retain the inter-personal relationships and technical expertise that staff build is critical to success.

## Action Items

- Explore additional formal agreements that specify resource sharing among partners (cash and in-kind services).
- NRCS needs to strengthen its partnership with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure workable, clear, and consistent ESA regulatory consultations for WLFW projects.
- Increase collaboration among WLFW and partners within the forestry community of practice.
- Seek to further engage land trusts and public land stewards across Appalachia in hopes they also would set annual goals for GWWA projects.

## Communication

Forest health is a complicated message but participants agreed it is essential to communicate the value of diverse age class forests in terms of economics and multi-species benefits. In addition, outlining the opportunity for private landowners to play a role in regulatory decisions that could avoid an Endangered Species Act listing can be compelling, especially when success stories showing the benefits for landowners are shared. NRCS partners are effective, and sometimes more appropriate, messengers to communicate the importance of these “young forest” habitats. By effectively communicating how forest stewardship will benefit the landowner, partners can outline the short and long-term economic implications and identify potential cost-sharing opportunities.

### Action Items

- Distribute an outreach document that gives simple, easy to understand explanations of programs available to forest land stewards.
- Adopt the term “young forest” in WLFW communications.
- Share GWWA biological needs information regarding use of different age classes of forests at different life stages (i.e. nest in young forest/early successional, but by Day 6 fledglings begin to move to mature forests).
- Explore and develop messaging regarding the economic implications of good forest stewardship and share ideas for enhancing economic returns; inform the public of unsustainable forestry practices now commonly used.
- Define and communicate to the public the concept of ecosystem services provided by healthy forests and share how those services benefit communities.
- Enhance recognition of good forest stewardship by developing signage for project sites, and possibly use an icon and web address for detailed information.

## Technical Assistance

Private landowners highly value the technical assistance they receive and continuously stressed during the forum that this one-on-one interaction with natural resource professionals was key to their participation, success, and satisfaction. However technical assistance capacity is lacking in several states and funding for these positions has been strained. When shared positions with partners are co-located with NRCS staff, the synergy and increased communication creates more effective program delivery. Working with a “stable” of competent, trained technical partners including agency foresters, forestry consultants, agency and partner wildlife biologists, and loggers in the private sector will help expand opportunities.

### Action Items

- Develop a range-wide plan for addressing the necessity of a stable work force and filling voids in technical staff support across the Appalachian range.
- Leverage WLFW capacity dollars to stabilize and increase staffing.
- Whenever possible, embed partner biologists within NRCS field offices.
- Determine paths for partners to support WLFW in monitoring project outcomes.





## Attendees

### **Kent Adams**

Pheasants Forever, PA

### **Louis Aspey**

NRCS, WV

### **Gayle Barry**

NRCS, WDC

### **Amanda Bassow**

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, WDC

### **Emily Bellush**

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

### **Jennifer Boyer**

Facilitator, MT

### **Denise Coleman**

NRCS, PA

### **Bridgett Costanzo**

NRCS, WDC

### **Todd Fearer**

Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture, VA

### **Danielle Flynn**

NRCS, WDC

### **Justin Fritscher**

NRCS, WDC

### **Dave Gagner**

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, WDC

### **John Gehman**

Landowner, PA

### **Norma Gehman**

Landowner, PA

### **Jim Gillis**

NRCS, PA

### **Galon Hall**

NRCS, WDC

### **Terron Hillsman**

NRCS, MD

### **John Hoover**

Landowner, CT

### **Laura Jackson**

Landowner, PA

### **Mike Jackson**

Landowner, PA

### **Steve Jester**

Partners for Conservation, TX

### **Jeff Jones**

NRCS, VA

### **Becky Keller**

Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture, VA

### **David Kientzler**

Landowner, NJ

### **Jeff Larkin**

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

### **Tom Leidy**

Landowner, PA

### **Carrie Lindig**

NRCS, NJ

### **Doug Little**

National Wild Turkey Federation, NY

### **Casey Lott**

American Bird Conservancy, UT

### **Evan Madlinger**

NRCS, NJ

### **Melissa Martin**

NRCS, WDC

### **Warren Mickey**

Landowner, WV

### **Dina Moore**

Landowner, CA

### **Andrew Rothman**

American Bird Conservancy, VA

### **Kaveh Sadeghzadeh**

NRCS, WDC

### **Casey Shrader**

NRCS, KY

### **Curtis Smalling**

Audubon North Carolina, NC

### **Laura Smith**

NRCS, WV

### **Bill Sproul**

Landowner, KS

### **Steve Strano**

NRCS, MD

### **Clyde Thompson**

U.S. Forest Service, WV

### **David Tucker**

NRCS, NC

### **Richard Williams**

Landowner, PA

### **Chris Wolkonowski**

NRCS, TN



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