

ECO-LOGICAL PROJECT

Background

In 2008, H-GAC received a Federal Highway Administration “Eco-Logical” grant to create a tool to better integrate long-range environmental and transportation planning. Working with experts from natural resource agencies and conservation organizations from throughout the region, H-GAC staff has developed an on-line mapping tool that can perform high level assessments of the potential impact of transportation projects on important ecosystems.

Key project elements included GIS mapping of six ecotypes, or ecological zones distinct to this region, and evaluating the ecotypes in terms of size, shape and quality of wildlife habitat, among other metrics. This work was imported to a web -based mapping tool enabling users to quickly see which natural areas would be potentially affected by transportation project alignments. The tool is aimed at promoting more efficient project implementation by allowing sponsors to identify potential conflicts early in the planning process. This tool can be customized by the user to be scaled for different sizes of projects or different environmental issues.

Current Situation

H-GAC staff is in the process of doing a final quality check of the base data in the mapping system before bringing the tool on-line for broad review and use by local governments, conservation organizations and other interested parties. It is anticipated that this tool can be used in RTP development and help H-GAC comply with the environmental coordination requirements of SAFETEA-LU. It also should be a useful tool for conservation organizations and scientific researchers to focus on preserving the “best of the best” of the region’s natural environment.

Action Requested

For information only