

Session Presentation: The Usefulness and Limitations of Using Evaluation to Improve the Management of Conservation Programs: Experiences from Evaluations of the Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Refuge and Endangered Species Programs.

This overview will briefly present evaluation examples from recent and on-going evaluations of two US Fish and Wildlife Programs -- the National Wildlife Refuge System and the Endangered Species Program. The presentation will provide an overview of the evaluation methodologies used in both evaluations and explore some of the limits and benefits of evaluation for understanding and improving program performance. In particular, the presentation will explore where episodic program evaluations fit into the development and use of an overall results-based management system. Ideas to be explored will include: the development of strategic frameworks, and how they provide a basis for evaluation; the importance of on-going data collection and analysis; and how such processes can enhance and benefit programmatic evaluation.

Session Presentation: The Usefulness & Limitations of Using Evaluation to Improve the (Results-based) Management of Conservation Programs: Experiences from Evaluations of the Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Refuge and Endangered Species Programs.



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FWS – Refuges & Endangered Species Programs

- Why were these Evaluations Undertaken?

The President's Management Agenda

GPRA – the Government Performance Results Act, was passed in 1993 and required all federal agencies to identify outcome-based strategies and results.

PART – is a tool to help link performance to budget allocation considerations, and builds on the concepts and requirements of GPRA.

Independent periodic program evaluations are required under PART (once very five years).

That being said, the ESA Program decided to focus on Habitat Conservation Plans; the FS focused on accomplishment of mission

Evaluation Purpose/Methodologies:

Refuges – assess the program’s effectiveness in achieving its mission, as defined by the strategic plan containing eleven strategic outcome goals

Endangered Species – assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the program

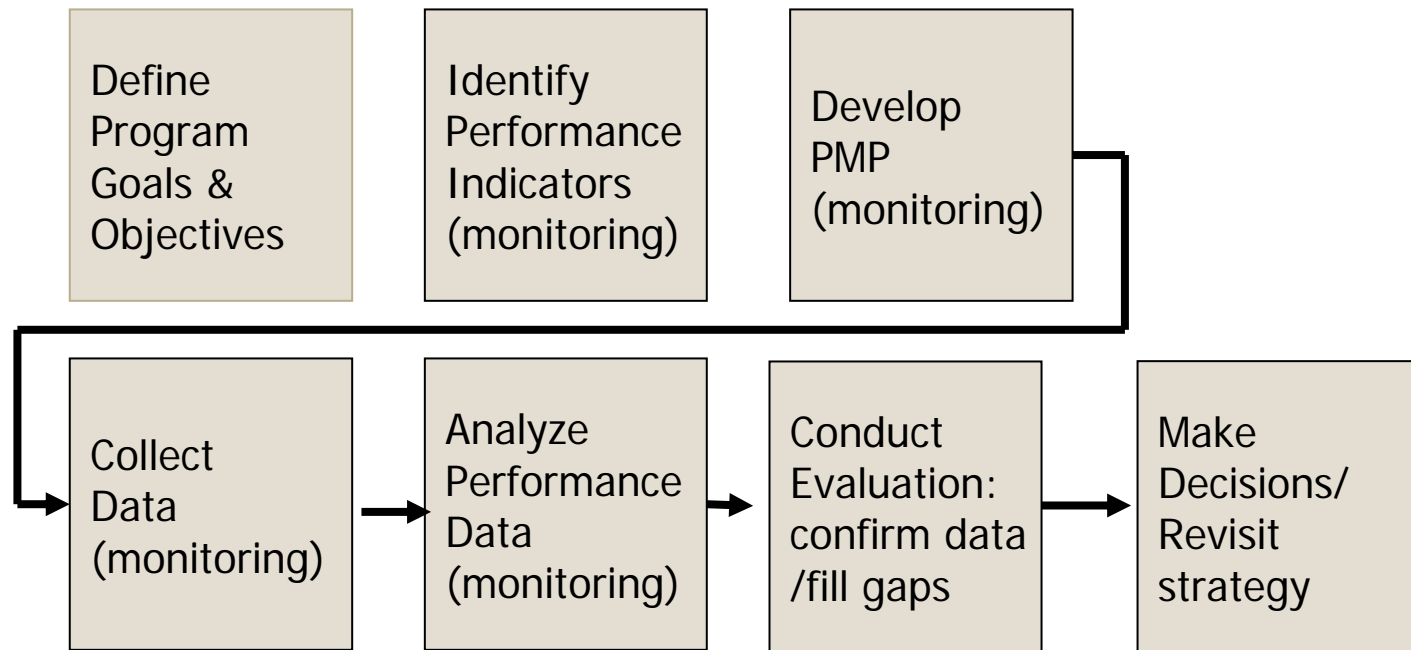
Methodology – multi-method approach:

- Review of internal databases
- **Site visits/case studies (sampling)**
- **Surveys – partners and staff (internal view/bias)**
- Literature review

Purpose and Focus of a Program Level Evaluation

- ✓ Overall achievement at the program level, *if not already well understood from performance monitoring.*
- ✓ Why performance is above or below expectations and why some components contribute more than others to results.
- ✓ Unplanned results and the effects of external factors and other initiatives.
- ✓ Lessons for the future.

Steps of Performance Management System

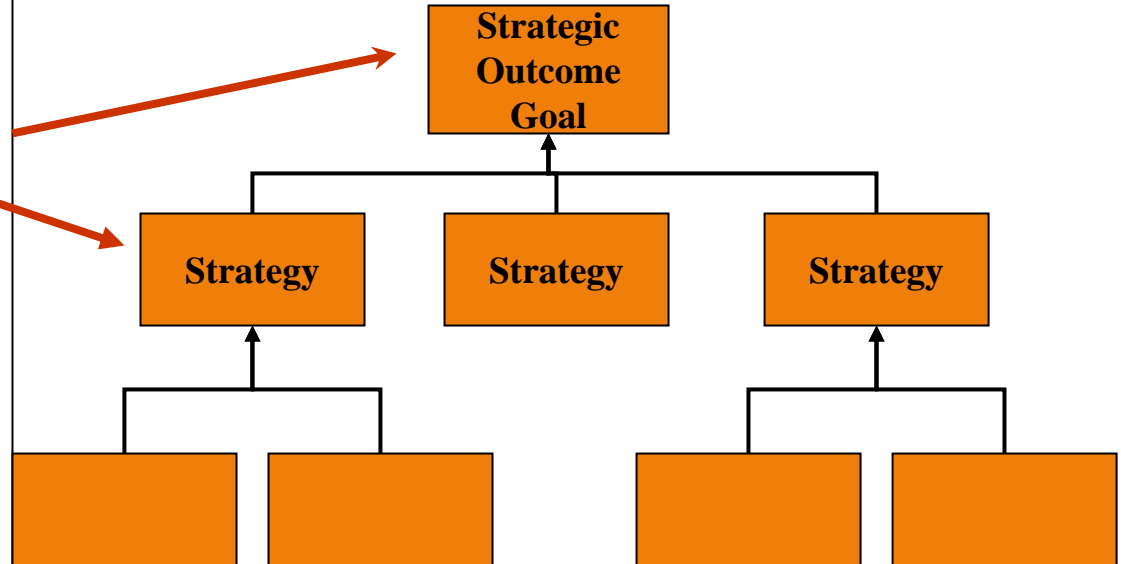


- ✓ Apply these steps to project and program design and management
 - ✓ Results can also be used to inform related processes and functions at the institutional level (e.g., workforce planning or personnel assessments)
- ▶ RBM – Results-based Management = Adaptive Management

Performance Monitoring – tells us what is happening

Monitoring:

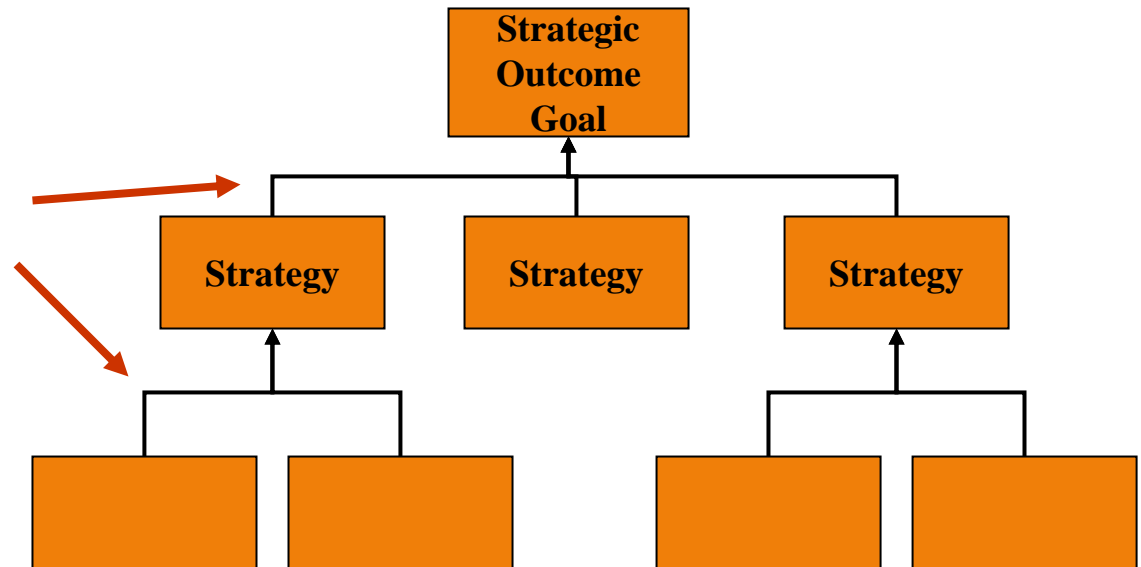
- Focuses on whether and to what extent goals and objectives have been achieved.
- Raises flag for unexpectedly poor or exceptional performance
- Helps to frame critical evaluation questions



Evaluation – explores linkages between objectives levels, and seeks to understand “why”

Evaluation:

- Focuses on if/why goals and objectives have/have not been met, e.g., are the cause and effect relationships in the strategy valid? Are there special circumstances that make for success or failure? Are the necessary & sufficient objectives being implemented?



Evaluation Context

Strategies	Refuges	Endangered Species
Define goals & objectives	11 strategic outcome goals identified – no hierarchy	No formal goals developed
Performance/ success measures	120+ indicators developed	Database containing profile data, e.g. # of habitat plans – no performance info
Collect & analyze data – Make decisions	Data collected & reported	Data not used or reviewed
	Not analyzed for program use; too many indicators, numerous inconsistencies	No analysis
Operational Units	500 + refuges – no/few evaluations – workplans uneven?	800 Habitat Conservation Plans; highly detailed; no assessments/summaries/assessment system
Evaluation implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - good base of information - no causality linkages to test, e.g. cause and effect relations 	- virtually no information upon which to build evaluation assessment

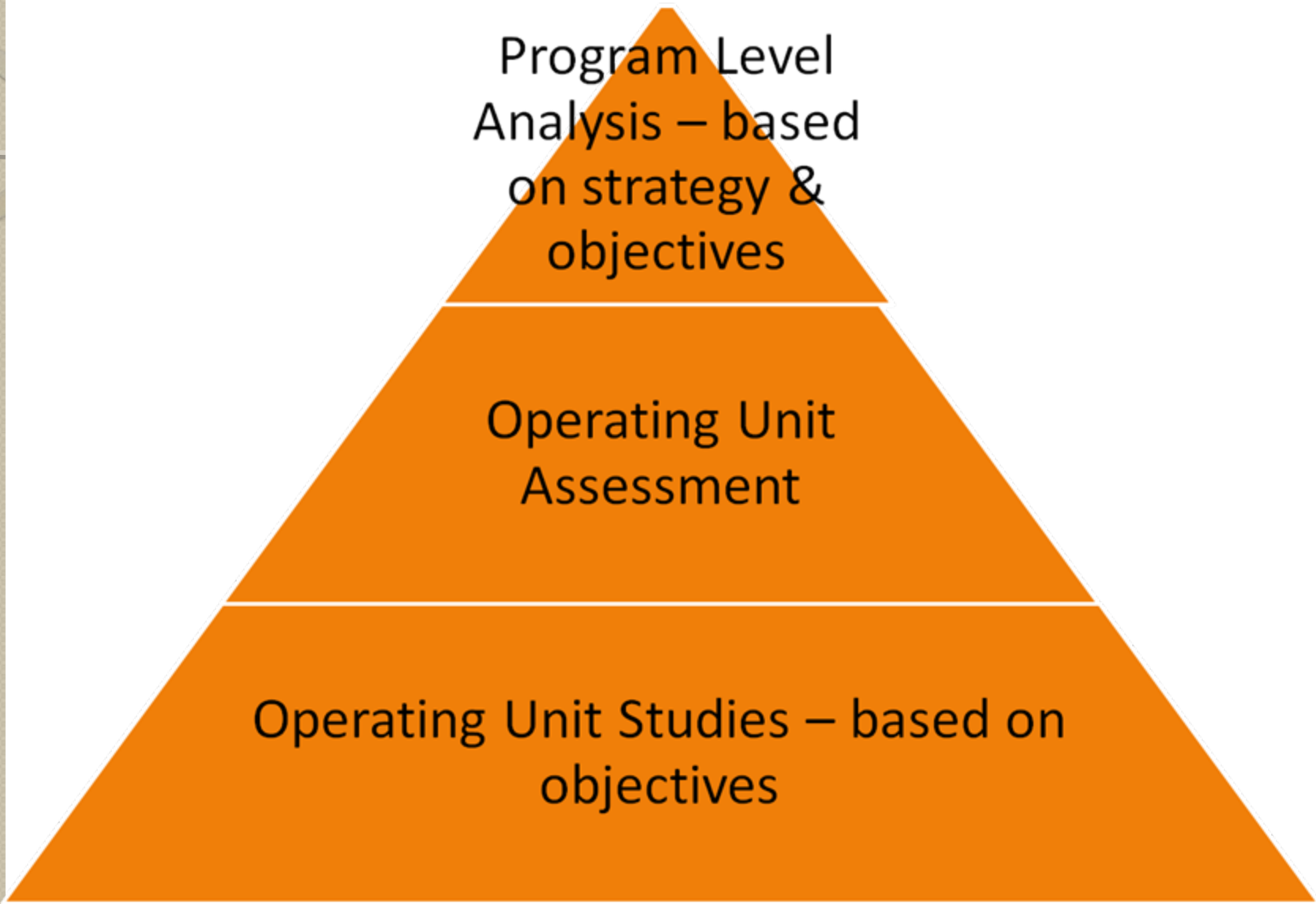
Challenges in Assessing the Program Effectiveness

- Difficult to evaluate at the operational level without some clear notion as to what is expected and what is happening in terms of performance (clear strategic focus, not so clear a process at operating level)
- Lack of objectives & lack of standard and targets, i.e., “Success” measures are not always defined – no targets. (x% of managers completed training, habitat restored)
- **Performance management systems of limited value for assessing program effectiveness** – data not used, tested and refined; do not demonstrate key effectiveness metrics.
- **No evaluation performance assessment at “unit” level**

Lessons – related to Evaluation & RBM:

- Evaluation is not a substitute for a solid internal strategy development and an effective monitoring system
- Evaluations can be more effective if built on and influenced by good monitoring data
 - monitoring data provides basic information helpful/necessary to assessment – beyond profile data
 - data helps to focus evaluation – what is not working and we can then focus evaluation on why?
- It is critical to define SOPs with regard to structuring and assessing work at the operating unit level...otherwise there are no expectations/targets/standards for performance.
- Pair technical expertise with managerial/evaluation specialist

Program Effectiveness Analysis



Operating Unit Studies

- Define objectives and targets – link to program strategy
- Conduct periodic studies of sample operating units
- Conduct studies by theme/programmatic area, e.g. coastal estuaries, high-visitation refuges, environmental education, wilderness
- Develop a continuous/on-going evaluation culture

Programmatic Benefits of Evaluation – to Building RBM

Refuges	Endangered Species
Used as an opportunity to refine and clarify strategy	Will lead to development of program objectives and performance indicators
Performance measures being revised	Will lead to a revision of Handbook – SOPs, and possibly policy revisions
Evaluation/Performance issues are now receiving national/Director attention on an annual basis	National work teams formed to address performance issues and implement solutions on a topical basis
Evaluation helped focuses management on discussing and addressing a specific set of performance issues.	

Phases of Building a Results-based Mgmt System

- **Define program strategy and objectives**
- **Develop performance indicators**
- **Collect performance data**
- **Produce performance reports (usually for external audience)**
- Analyze data
- Define performance and information gaps
- Refine performance information system
- Evaluation
- Performance and management reviews

Refuge Evaluation: Tangible Results

- Used to brief Congressional staff on funding shortfalls and impact on key objectives, e.g. Law enforcement rated ineffective – subsequently 40 new positions have been added (approx \$10 million increase)
- Development of a national-level integrated GIS system
- Standardization of websites to provide a better brand, better and more consistent public information, and improve management efficiency/costs
- Evaluations can be intimidating, but they can be used as a basis to acquire new resources and make fundamental improvement changes

Developing a Results-based Culture

Ideally – a clear strategic framework precedes an evaluation
– provides a basis for performance analysis;

Alternatively – an evaluation can prompt the development of a clearer strategy and establishment of a performance management system

Evaluation can become “a going concern” and lead to the development of a results-based culture

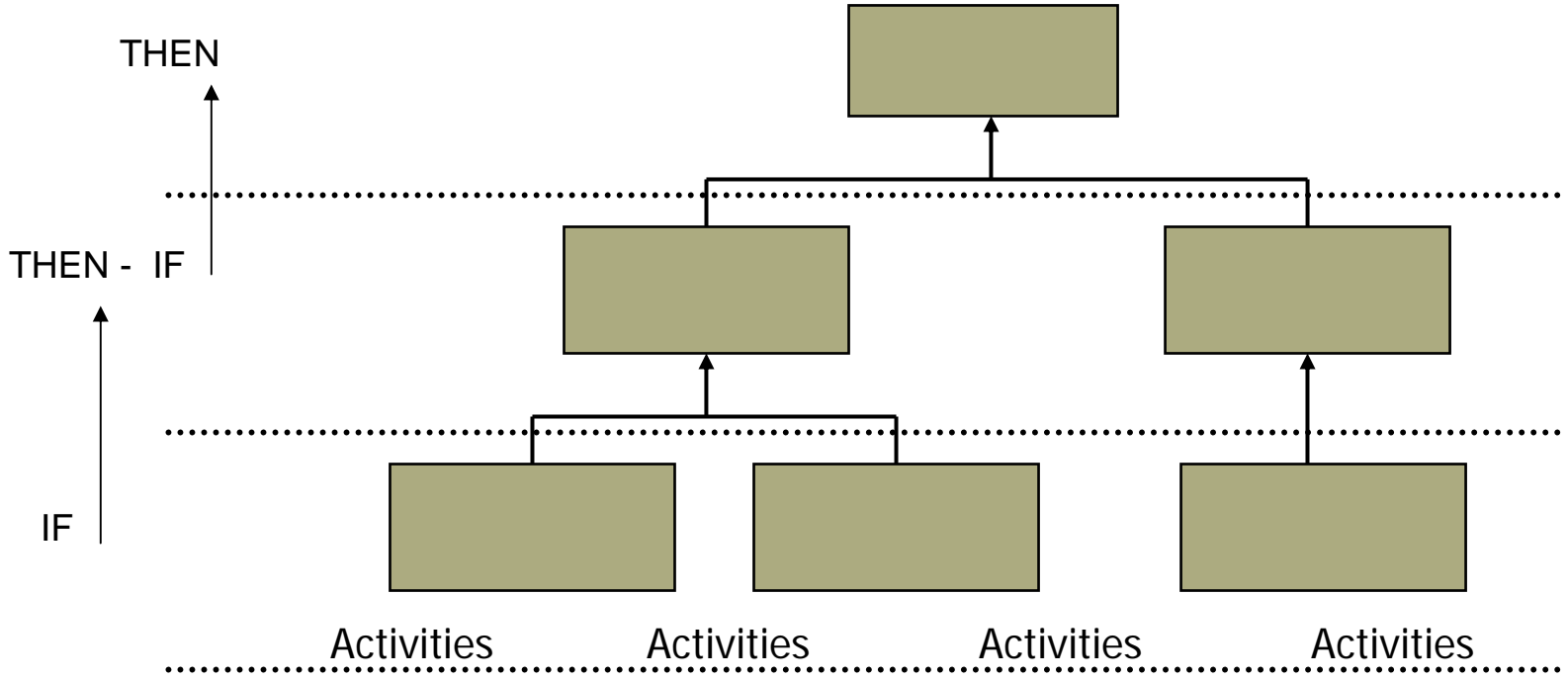
- Implementing recommendations helps to instill culture
- Holding periodic/annual evaluation “progress” sessions or program reviews, e.g. revisiting progress on evaluation recommendations, or annual performance reviews of program aspects shown to be lagging as per monitoring data



Step One ...

Define Results

Place Results in a Strategic Framework



Why – what will be the outcome?



What else is necessary?



How will this result be achieved?

Step Five ...

Analyze
Performance
Data

Performance Data Table

Objective/Indicator	Base-line	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3	
		Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
Objective 1: More Consistent School Attendance							
<u>Indicator:</u> Annual persistence rates	40	45	40	50	50	60	65
<u>Indicator:</u> % of enrolled students who attend at least 80% of scheduled school days (in the given school year)	55	60	60	70	68	80	70



Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
Objective set of data	Based on and supported by findings	Suggested actions to address conclusions