

Lafayette

Ecological Services Field Office

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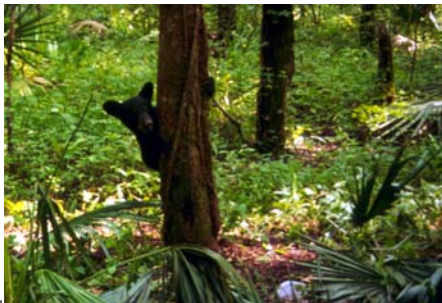


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Photos (top to bottom):

*Mississippi Delta/
coastal Louisiana wetlands*

Louisiana black bear

Partners' activity

Louisiana pine snake

Station Facts

- Established 1972.
- FY 05 budget: \$1,717,000.
- Staff: 24 permanent, 4 term, 3 student interns.

Station Goals

- To protect and restore ecosystems and habitats, with special emphasis on wetlands and other declining habitats that support threatened and endangered species, concentrations of migratory birds, and interjurisdictional fisheries.
- Use an ecosystem approach to address habitat issues and leverage resources through partnerships with other agencies, private landowners, and other entities to achieve the greatest possible benefits to Federal trust fish and wildlife resources.

Services Provided to

- Landowners, private citizens, military bases, other Federal and State agencies, and conservation organizations.

Activity Highlights

- Represents Department of the Interior on Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Task Force; plans and builds wetland restoration projects funded by Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act (CWPPRA).
- Assisted Corps of Engineers in developing the Louisiana Coastal Area (LCA) Near-term Ecosystem Restoration Plan. If authorized, we will participate extensively in implementing the

\$1.9 billion LCA to complement CWPPRA with several large-scale, critically needed restoration projects over 10 years.

- Assists Corps of Engineers and State agencies in implementing the Atchafalaya Basin Multipurpose Plan for flood control, water management and habitat protection; works with Corps of Engineers to plan flood control, navigation, hurricane protection, and freshwater introduction projects by recommending ways to mitigate habitat impacts and increase habitat benefits.
- Coordinates Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in Louisiana by providing technical and financial assistance to landowners and other agencies to restore wetlands and increase habitat benefits.
- Helps develop habitat conservation plans and "Safe Harbor" agreements to allow logging on lands inhabited by red-cockaded woodpeckers. Works with Black Bear Conservation Committee (BBCC) to restore the threatened Louisiana black bear through collaborative, highly leveraged partnerships.
- Assesses known or suspected contaminant problems affecting fish and wildlife resources, and recommends ways to resolve them.

Questions and Answers

What is the Fish and Wildlife Service doing to restore the threatened Louisiana black bear?

The Service continues to work in partnership with the BBCC to facilitate recovery of the Louisiana black bear, and provided \$25,000 in FY 2004 to support the BBCC's executive Director.

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The Service, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF), the BBCC, USDA Wildlife Services, and Louisiana State University are implementing a project to relocate Louisiana black bear females and their cubs to suitable unoccupied habitat in the Three Rivers/Red River complex of east-central Louisiana. That site comprises more than 100,000 acres of publically owned land (National Wildlife Refuge and State Wildlife Management Areas). The purpose of that project is to establish another breeding subpopulation between the Tensas and Atchafalaya River Basin subpopulations to accelerate population expansion. In March 2001, four female bears and their cubs were released on the Red River Wildlife Management Area. Since then, 12 additional female bears and their cubs have been relocated. The Service and its partners anticipate relocating another group of bears to that area in 2005.

We support and actively participate in the annual Bayou Teche Bear Festival in Franklin, Louisiana. That event brings together multiple State and Federal agencies, and private organizations to create a learning environment that emphasizes awareness of bears in the local community. In 2004, over 200 children participated in the festival's hands-on Educational Area.

We have coordinated the preparation of landscape maps that show the most important areas for future reforestation to benefit recovery of the Louisiana black bear. Those maps are now used to set priorities for landscape conservation programs to ensure that we achieve optimum benefits for the Louisiana black bear.

What is the status of the Fish and Wildlife Service's previous proposal to designate critical habitat for the threatened Louisiana black bear?

The Louisiana black bear was listed as threatened on February 6, 1992, but critical habitat was not designated with the final listing. On December 2, 1993, the Service proposed designation of critical habitat for the Louisiana black bear; however, a final rule has not been issued.

What is the status of the Government's efforts to clean up the industrial contamination of the upper Calcasieu Lake estuary of southwestern Louisiana?

The Calcasieu Estuary provides important habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds, and valuable nursery and feeding habitat for numerous estuarine-dependent sport and commercial fishes and shellfishes. The upper Calcasieu Estuary was cited as one of the most contaminated areas in Louisiana in a June 1997 NOAA report. Areas of greatest concern are Coon Island Loop, Bayou Verdine, and Bayou D'Inde. The contaminants of greatest concern to Service trust resources are hexachlorobenzene, hexachlorobutadiene, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, mercury, copper and lead. Consumption advisories are currently in effect for fish and shellfish from Bayou D'Inde.

Contamination of the upper Calcasieu Estuary potentially involves most industries in the Lake Charles petrochemical/industrial complex. The Service has been working with EPA, NOAA, and several State agencies to complete a Cooperative Management Agreement with the various "Potentially Responsible Parties" to conduct a coordinated Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study, Ecological Risk Assessment, and Natural Resources Damage Assessment.

What is the Fish and Wildlife Service doing to restore Louisiana's coastal wetlands?

The Service is very concerned over the ongoing loss of 24 square miles/year of Louisiana's coastal wetlands and its effects on nationally important waterfowl, wading bird, and seabird habitat; sport and commercial fisheries; and 10 National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs). We are actively involved in interagency restoration efforts funded via the CWPPRA Task Force. Sam Hamilton, the Service's Southeast Regional Director represents the Secretary of the Interior on that task force. About \$597 million in Federal (CWPPRA) and matching State funds have been committed for coastal wetlands

restoration projects in Louisiana. The Service is implementing 20 Task Force-approved projects, as well as extensive wetland restoration and preservation actions on several NWRs in coastal Louisiana, using non-CWPPRA funding sources.

We are also a member of the LCA Co-location Team, working on several large-scale coastal restoration feasibility studies. In FY 2004, we assisted the Corps of Engineers in completing the LCA Near-term Plan, which would serve as a vital first step in delivering critically needed large-scale projects to sustainably restore Louisiana's coastal ecosystem over the next 10 years at a cost of \$1.9 billion. We also work closely with the Corps of Engineers to plan and implement marsh creation projects via beneficial placement of dredged material during maintenance of Federal navigation channels, and re-introduction of Mississippi River flows into adjacent coastal wetlands.

What is the Louisiana Statewide Red-cockaded Woodpecker Safe Harbor Agreement (SHA)?

This agreement is designed to enhance conservation of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) through voluntary habitat improvements by private landowners in Louisiana. Signed in January 2005, that 99-year agreement between the Service and LDWF will result in conservation of RCWs, while providing Safe Harbor assurances to participating non-federal landowners throughout the state. The Service, LDWF, Louisiana Forestry Association, and various other partners/stakeholders cooperated in developing this agreement, and to date, 4 landowners, with a total of approximately 216,000 acres, have announced their immediate intentions to enroll in this SHA. Interested landowners should contact either the Louisiana Field Office (337/291-3100), or Mr. Eric Baka, LDWF Safe Harbor Coordinator (225/765-2359).