



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act of 1998

Region 3 - Great Lakes/Big Rivers

Leadership in Conserving, Enhancing, and Restoring Aquatic Ecosystems



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The Act provides essential resources to state and tribal management agencies to conserve, enhance, and restore Great Lakes fish and wildlife populations and their habitats.



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Native fish species such as the coaster brook trout in Lake Superior have benefited from rehabilitation efforts under the Act.



-photo by D. Jackson

The Act has supported fish population and community dynamics research in areas such as the near-shore habitats of Lake Erie.

The Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act (Act) was enacted as Public Law 101-646 (16 U.S.C. 941) on November 29, 1990, with the purpose “to carry out a comprehensive study of the status, and the assessment, management, and restoration needs, of the fishery resources of the Great Lakes Basin; to develop proposals to implement recommendations resulting from that study; and to provide assistance to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, states, Indian tribes, and other interested entities to encourage cooperative conservation, restoration and management of fish and wildlife resources and their habitat.” Public Law 105-265 reauthorized the Act in 1998 shifting emphasis toward the implementation of restoration projects.

During FY 1998-2004, the Act authorized \$4.5 million annually for State and Tribal sponsored restoration projects, and \$3.5 million annually for Service coordination activities and technical assistance through the Upper and Lower Great Lakes Fishery Resource Offices. Although only authorized through 2004, Congress appropriated \$500,000 for restoration projects and \$1.278 million for Service operations annually in Fiscal Years 2005 and 2006.

Accomplishments

From 1998-2006, 157 restoration project proposals have been received for Act funding, representing a total of over \$15.1 million in requested federal funds. Through Fiscal Year 2005, 65 projects have been funded totaling over \$3.3 million in federal funds and \$2.5 million dollars in non-federal matching funds. These projects are geographically distributed among the Great Lakes as follows: Superior- 14, Michigan- 11, Huron- 10, Erie- 16, Ontario- 8; while several projects address multiple basins and 11 projects are focused basin-wide.

Act funded projects have addressed recommendations to inform the following needs: fish community assessment and modeling; ecological monitoring; developing ecosystem management goals; developing and implementing plans for restoring habitats and species; fish health; and fish genetics. Research has contributed important information and actions toward meeting Great Lakes restoration needs as identified in the 1995 Great Lakes Fishery Resources Restoration Study and priorities of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission Lake Committees. The Act has also provided resources to support meaningful progress toward meeting the Service’s inter-program Great Lakes goals.



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Basic information on fish and wildlife habitats and conditions impeding habitat restoration has been collected through Act programs.



-Council of Lake Committees

The Act has strengthened interagency partnerships and improved coordination of management activities in the Great Lakes.



-photo by Marc Gaden

Tools for addressing conservation challenges are provided through the Act for the benefit of Great Lakes fish, wildlife, and habitat resources, and the people who depend on them.

Despite these accomplishments, most Great Lakes restoration goals remain unachieved and, in fact, the scale and complexity of restoration needs continue to grow. Actions such as establishing interagency databases, creating geographic information systems and initiating cooperative monitoring programs have begun, but will take many more years to be fully established.

Building Partnerships

The Act has been extremely successful in building partnerships among state, tribal, federal and provincial management agencies for cooperative conservation, enhancement and restoration of Great Lakes fish and wildlife resources and their habitat. From 1998-2005, restoration projects were implemented in collaboration with 62 partner organizations providing funds, in-kind contributions and expertise. Interagency partnerships continue to grow and become more effective each year, as additional stakeholders join in Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act supported activities.

Looking to the Future

Much of the work completed during 1998-2005 focused on basic research related to the status of fish and wildlife populations and their habitat, on the conditions impeding restoration, and on establishing a framework, including geographic information systems and interagency databases, to help bring management authorities together as a combined force. This has been an important contribution in the ongoing process of establishing an adaptive, science-based approach in restoring Great Lakes resources.

Given the scale and complexity of restoration needs, there is a lot of work left to do. Increasing stress on the Great Lakes ecosystem from climate change, population growth, demand for water, pollution and contamination, habitat alteration and destruction, fish and wildlife diseases, and invading species, will result in increasing conservation challenges.

The Act provides powerful and effective tools for agencies and organizations to address these challenges together and help resolve the fish and wildlife conservation side of environmental restoration programs in the Great Lakes region. The authorities and interagency processes created through the Act could play an important role in implementing the newly established Great Lakes Regional Collaboration and addressing the Council of Great Lakes Governors' priorities.

Continuing investment in the Act as an interagency strategy will yield direct benefits to Great Lakes fish and wildlife resources and their habitats to the 34 million people living within this unique region.