



NEW YORK

“This is the best thing the government ever did for me,” said Harold Cole about the 26 acres of restored wetlands on his St. Lawrence County property. Mr. Cole is one of the hundreds of landowners in the county, and among the more than 2,000 in New York, who have joined with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to restore wildlife habitat on their lands. Through its innovative Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, the Service provides technical assistance and funding to help landowners like Mr. Cole realize their goal of making their land a better place for wildlife and in the process, a better place for themselves.



A Partners wetland restoration project.

Introduction and General Description

The destruction and decline of quality fish and wildlife habitat in the United States has generated National and State-wide concerns over the long-term fate of many wildlife species. To combat this decline, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) implements habitat restoration projects through its Partners for Fish and Wildlife (Partners) Program. This voluntary program is National in scope, and is designed to restore habitat through the formation of partnerships with private landowners, conservation groups, local governmental



agencies, and Native American tribes. Through the formation of these partnerships, the Service is able to leverage significant financial and in-kind contributions greatly offsetting the Federal expenditure on habitat restoration projects.

The inception of the Partners Program in New York began in 1990 and has been growing at a steady pace ever since. In New York, the program has focused on restoring several types of habitat: wetlands, uplands, streams, and riparian areas. Projects are focused in areas where conservation efforts will provide the greatest benefit for Federal trust species, which include: migratory birds, anadromous (migratory) fish, and Federally-listed threatened and endangered species. Fish and wildlife habitats that were once in a degraded state are now providing important cover, food, water, and breeding areas for many species.

New York Activities

- Wetland restoration
- Grassland restoration
- In-stream restoration
- Stream bank stabilization and restoration
- Restoration of riparian and floodplain areas

Habitats of Special Concern

The Partners Program has worked with partners to install gates on caves to minimize disturbance to hibernating bats. Wintertime disturbance cause the animals to expend energy reserves that are needed to get them through their winter hibernation. Other projects have involved clearing areas to plant wild blue lupine, the plant which is relied on by the endangered Karner blue butterfly, and constructing fences around the habitat of the State-listed endangered bog turtle, so the unique wetland habitat can be maintained and improved through grazing.

Threats

Lost Habitats

Since settlement in the 1600's, New York's vast forests, wetlands, streams, and grasslands have fueled the State's growth and development. Many of the State's natural resources were greatly diminished or degraded as the landscape was changed to provide for agriculture and urban development. During this period, 60% of the wetlands were drained or filled, 99.9% of the native grasslands were converted to other uses, more than 5,000 dams were constructed that blocked fish movement, and miles of stream were channelized. In addition, the extensive northern hardwood and spruce-fir forests were cut and cleared. As these habitats changed, so did the fish and wildlife populations that relied on them, leading to declines in waterfowl, grassland nesting birds, anadromous fish, and many forest-dependent species.

Conservation Strategies

Wetlands

Wetland restoration is a focus for the Partners Program due to their importance to many Federal trust species, such as migratory birds. Restoration techniques have focused on returning hydrology to drained wetlands. Drainage tile was broken and small berms and ditch plugs were constructed to keep water from quickly leaving the site. These techniques have been refined over the years and

now wetland restoration projects are carefully crafted to blend into the landscape and involve a variety of activities, such as: creating micro-topography, establishing complexes of small seasonal wetlands, and restoring larger permanent wetlands.

Grasslands

Grasslands are required for nesting habitat for many species of migratory birds. The decline of grasslands in the Northeast is directly correlated with the decline of species such as bobolink and eastern meadowlark. The Partners Program uses management techniques such as mowing, burning, planting both warm- and cool-season grasses, and invasive species removal to restore grassland habitat.



Little bluestem

Streams and Riparian Areas

Streams and riparian areas support fish, amphibians, mussels, and many other species needed for a diverse community. One restoration technique that is cost effective and valued by natural resource advocates as well as farm groups and landowners is streambank fencing. The Partners Program purchases



BEFORE: Wetland restoration site.



AFTER: Restored vernal pool habitat.

equipment and provides labor to protect streams from grazing livestock. Along with sediment and nutrient reduction in the stream, excellent habitat is provided for both fish and wildlife. The landowner benefits from having a quality fence to use as part of a rest-rotation grazing system that allows the profitable, yet wildlife-friendly, use of the land. In-stream work concentrates on the concept of natural channel design that reduces sediment, improves fish and wildlife habitat, and cost-effectively creates a stable stream. This is a state-of-the-art approach that requires special expertise but has outstanding payoff for New York's streams.

Invasive Species

Purple loosestrife, a European wetland plant, has invaded many wetlands in New York to

the point of being the dominant plant species. This plant out-competes most native species, keeping native wetland plants that provide important food and cover for wildlife from proliferating, thus reducing plant diversity. Wetland managers have tried to control purple loosestrife with herbicides, water level regulation, hand pulling, and covering with black plastic, but are meeting with very little success. The Partners Program works with Cornell University to release beetles that feed only on loosestrife which stresses the plant and reduces its vigor so native plants can better compete. Another common invasive plant is multiflora rose. This plant is common in old pastures and can dominate a grassland in a few years, if not controlled. The Partners Program works to reduce multiflora rose invasions of fields to make those fields more attractive for grassland nesting birds.



Before stream restoration.



After stream restoration.

Outdoor Classrooms

The Partners Program has worked with schools and nature centers throughout New York State to restore wetlands, grasslands, and savannah that are used in conjunction with environmental educational programs. In addition, Partners staff give presentations at these sites to teach about the biological values these habitats provide.

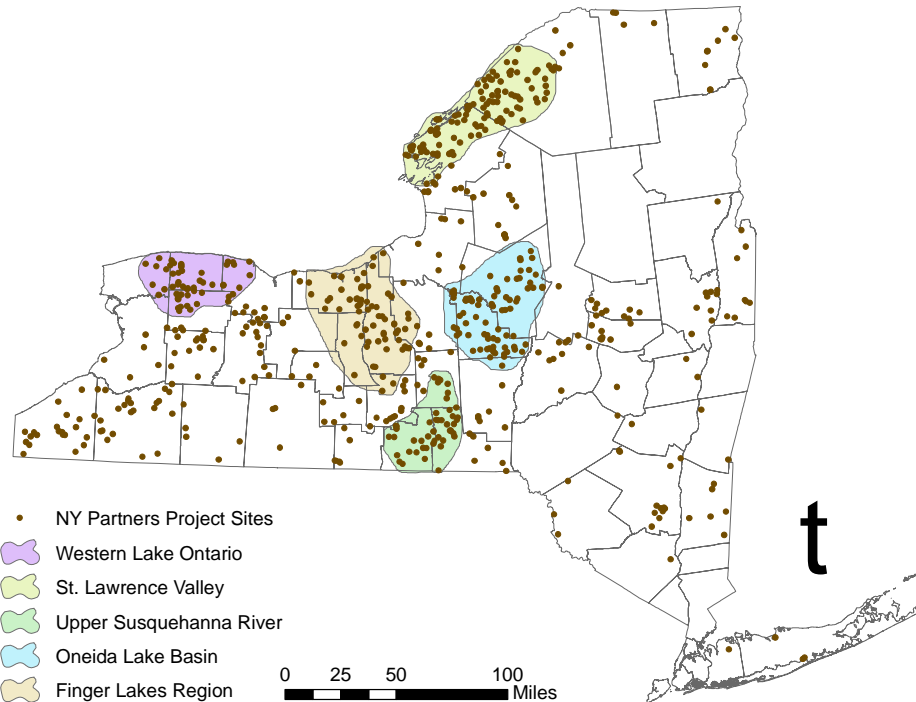
Farming for Wildlife and Profit

In addition to habitat restoration, the Partners Program also improves the effectiveness of the conservation provisions of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) by providing the technical expertise needed to evaluate which projects provide the most benefit to fish and wildlife, demonstrating as well as recommending management and restoration techniques, and providing data that lets the Federal funds be used most effectively. This relationship combines the more extensive funding of the USDA with the biological expertise of the Partners Program in order to benefit the public. The Partners Program recognizes that agricultural lands are more valuable to wildlife than urban development and works with agricultural producers to keep farms both economically and biologically productive. The special expertise of Partners staff has affected more than a million acres of private lands enrolled in various USDA conservation programs.

Partners

Natural Resources Conservation Service
 Farm Service Agency
 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
 New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
 State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry
 State University of New York at Brockport
 Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
 The Nature Conservancy
 Audubon Society
 Trout Unlimited
 Pheasants Forever
 Ruffed Grouse Society
 Huguenot Society
 Albany Pine Bush
 Camp Saratoga
 Saratoga Land Conservancy
 Mohonk Preserve
 Museum of the Hudson Highlands
 Greenwood Conservancy
 Upper Susquehanna Coalition
 Town of Mendon
 Town of Dekalb
 Schuyler County EMC
 Cattaraugus County SWCD
 Cayuga County SWCD
 Chautauqua County SWCD
 Chemung County SWCD
 Franklin County SWCD
 Greene County SWCD
 Madison County SWCD
 Oneida County SWCD
 Oswego County SWCD
 St. Lawrence County SWCD
 Steuben County SWCD
 Tioga County Soil SWCD
 Watershed Agriculture Council
 Great Swamp Conservancy
 Niagara Mohawk Electric Company
 Student Conservation Association
 Boy Scouts of America
 St. Lawrence Valley Sportsmen's Club
 State University of New York at Morrisville
 Private Landowners
 Municipalities

New York Partners for Fish & Wildlife Priority Areas



Accomplishments

- 2,000 landowners visited by Partners staff.
- 675 landowners have had projects completed.
- 14,760 acres of wetland habitat restored.
- 5,261 acres of grassland habitat restored.
- 57 miles of riparian and stream habitat restored.
- Partners has worked with over 40 partners, including Federal and State agencies, local governments, and private organizations.
- 6 educational facilities have wildlife habitat restored on school grounds to be used as outdoor classrooms.

Contact

Carl Schwartz
Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
New York Field Office
3817 Luker Road
Cortland, NY 13045
e-mail: newyorkpartners@fws.gov
website: <http://nyfo.fws.gov/partners>
607-753-9334 **607-753-9699 (Fax)**



Future Needs

- Restore or enhance 300,000 acres of wetlands, primarily in the St. Lawrence Valley and Lake Ontario Plain because these are the most productive wetlands used by waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds, and because they can be effectively restored.
- Manage/establish 100,000 acres of grasslands, especially in the St. Lawrence Valley, because this area has the highest densities of grassland nesting birds in eastern North America.
- Restore, protect, and enhance 10,000 miles of stream habitat, working primarily in the Catskills (the cradle of fly fishing in America) where studies have shown fishing to be worth more than \$9 million to the local economy, and in the Finger Lakes area where important streams are in desperate need of habitat improvements.
- Expand habitat available to species of concern, concentrating in the Albany Pine Bush to benefit the Karner blue butterfly, and in the Allegheny drainage area, the most biologically diverse watershed in the Northeast.
- Work with 500,000 private landowners across New York State to improve habitat on their property.