

GOAL 1: Recover populations of endangered and threatened species and conserve at-risk species such that their listing is unnecessary in the North Carolina Piedmont, Sandhills and Coastal Plain.

Maintaining biological diversity is essential to restoring and sustaining healthy ecosystems, which are in turn essential to our own survival and quality of life. The welfare of the rarest members of an ecosystem is an important indicator of its overall health, and increased rates of extinction and species decline are important signals of environmental stress and degradation. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) was enacted in recognition of the increasing role of humans in the loss of biodiversity and the importance of conserving rare species to a healthy human environment. As such, the conservation of rare species is a fundamental component of our mission. There are 33 federally listed species in the RFO work area, and an additional 127 Federal Species of Concern (Table 1). Because we view increases in the number of species at risk of extinction as a symptom of ecosystem degradation, the RFO works throughout the Piedmont, Sandhills and Coastal Plain of North Carolina to protect rare species by conserving the ecosystems upon which endangered and threatened species depend. While the authority and tools afforded through the ESA form the core of our efforts to protect rare species and their habitats, the RFO brings the full range of our capabilities to bear on these issues, and actively involves a broad array of partners and stakeholders. The objectives under this goal are designed to use appropriate provisions of the ESA and other applicable laws in cooperation with our partners to ultimately recover populations of listed species and prevent at-risk species from being listed.

Objective

Ensure that the biological criteria for downlisting and/or delisting have been met for all federally listed species within the RFO work area. Although the RFO does not have the lead responsibility for recovery of all listed species within our work area, our objective is to work with others to ensure that populations of all federally listed species within our work area meet the biological criteria for recovery as identified in the species' recovery plans.

Performance Measure: Percent of threatened or endangered species listed a decade or more that are stabilized or improved (DOI Strategic Plan measure).

Strategy: Determine current status (e.g., populations, density, range), trends and continuing threats, and prioritize the recovery potential, of federally-listed endangered and threatened listed species within the RFO work area.

Performance Measure: Percent of federally listed species of known status.

Strategy: In cooperation with others, implement recovery actions identified in approved recovery plans for all listed species within the RFO work area.

Performance Measure: Percent of recovery actions completed.

Strategy: Promote research aimed at furthering listed species recovery by seeking funding assistance, evaluating research proposals, and coordinating review and issuance of permits for the promotion of scientific information and the enhancement of species' survival.

Performance Measure: Percent of priority research, as identified in approved recovery plans, completed.

Strategy: Use the interagency consultation process with federal action agencies and/or their nonfederal representatives to promote recovery of federally listed species. Performance Measures: Number of recommended voluntary conservation measures implemented by action agencies (higher number better). Amount or extent of incidental take authorized annually (lower number better).

Strategy: Address water quality issues in waters supporting federally-listed endangered and threatened species.

Performance Measure: Percent of stream reaches supporting listed species with documented improving water quality.

Strategy: Promote and assist in the development and implementation of Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP) and Safe Harbor Agreements (SHA) to protect listed species and promote recovery on private lands.

Performance Measure: Acres of listed species habitat and/or miles of stream reaches covered by HCPs and/or SHAs.

Objective

Promote the protection and/or restoration of habitat supporting at-risk species and assess species' needs for additional protection under the ESA.

Performance Measure: Percent of candidate species where listing is unnecessary as a result of conservation actions or agreements (DOI Strategic Plan measure).

Strategy: Evaluate all at-risk species and their habitats to ensure that sufficient information exists to support appropriate action under the ESA.

Performance Measure: Percent of Federal Species of Concern of known status.

Strategy: Promote and provide technical assistance for development of Candidate Conservation Agreements (CCAs) and Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs) for at-risk species.

Performance Measure: Percent of Candidate Species covered by CCA and/or CCAA.

Objective

Develop and maintain staff expertise in listed and at-risk species ecology and issues, and use that expertise to educate the public and others on the importance of conserving listed and at-risk species and ways to sustain their habitats.

Strategy: Identify lead staff for species or species guilds charged with staying abreast of current literature, field techniques, and issues, and for regularly disseminating information to other staff.

Performance Measure: Percent of federally listed species and Federal Species of Concern for which ecological expertise is available in-house.

Strategy: Develop, or use currently available, promotional materials and displays on endangered and threatened species and at-risk species when speaking to groups and attending outreach and education events.

Performance Measure: Percent of promotional materials reviewed, updated and shared with others annually.

Strategy: Expand involvement in programs targeting listed species and at-risk species conservation efforts.
Performance Measure: