

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



The Coastal Program at Delaware Bay

Caring for Our Coastal Habitats

Overview

The Coastal Program is one of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's most successful and effective cooperative conservation programs. The mission of the Coastal Program is to protect and recover Federal Trust Species (threatened and endangered species, migratory birds, and inter-jurisdictional fish) by supporting voluntary restoration and enhancement of high-priority coastal habitats. The Coastal Program provides financial and technical assistance to on-the-ground habitat restoration and protection projects through locally-based field coordinators in 22 coastal areas around the nation.

Coastal Program Accomplishments

FROM 1994-2006

Restored

- 145,494 acres of coastal wetlands
- 50,776 acres of coastal uplands
- 1,484 miles of coastal streamside habitat

Protected

- 1.71 million acres of coastal habitat

IN FY 2006

- 160 Partnership agreements

Restored

- 21,962 acres of coastal wetlands
- 18,976 acres of coastal uplands
- 180 miles of streamside habitat
- 71 fish barriers removed

Protected

- 6,109 acres of coastal wetlands
- 4,594 acres of coastal uplands
- 29 miles of shoreline

As a part of an on-going strategic planning effort, the Coastal Program is working with its Federal, State, local and non-governmental partners to identify geographic focus areas and develop targets to support conservation plans.

Priorities

The Coastal Program is working with the Endangered Species Program to identify opportunities to recover threatened and endangered species, support sustainable populations of candidate species, and preclude new listings. The Coastal Program is also focusing more resources on restoring coastal wetlands in the Gulf Coast Region, which, in addition to providing important wintering habitat for migratory birds and spawning habitat for fish, also provide communities with a critical buffer to storm surge and flooding.

Coastal Program Locations



For More Information

For more information about the Coastal Program, contact the Division of Fish and Wildlife Management, Branch of Habitat Restoration at 703-358-2201 or visit us on the internet at <http://www.fws.gov/coastal/>

Success in Delaware Bay

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Coastal Program in Delaware Bay forges innovative partnerships to protect and restore high priority fish and wildlife habitat in the Delaware River drainage basin. This basin includes portions of New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland.

The beaches, dunes, wetlands, and forests of the Delaware Bay area are important to more than 100 species of migratory and nesting birds, including waterfowl, raptors, shorebirds, and songbirds. For many neotropical migratory birds, the Bayshores region is a critical stop-over site.

In the spring, horseshoe crabs travel toward the shore from their winter habitat along the continental shelf to lay their eggs on the beach during high tide. In concert with this extraordinary event is the arrival of the shorebirds from South America.

Restoring Forest Habitat

Coastal forests provide much needed habitat for a variety of species including neotropical migratory birds. A variety of habitat protection and restoration efforts are underway. One example is in the Milford Neck area, which is one of the largest remaining tracts of coastal forest in Delaware.

The Service is working with its partners to restore coastal forest habitat through a multi-year reforestation effort that will greatly reduce forest fragmentation and stem the loss of palustrine forested

wetlands, the wetland type that has experienced the most significant decline in the Mid-Atlantic Region.

Examples of these reforestation efforts include projects in which the Service assisted the Nature Conservancy, Delaware Wild Lands, Inc., American Forests, the Delaware Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service in planting 37,000 tree seedlings on 93 acres of previously converted marginal farmland.

Conserving Shorebirds

Delaware Bay hosts the largest spawning population of horseshoe crabs in the world and the second largest population of migrating shorebirds in North America. Over eighty percent of the Western Hemisphere's population of red knot depends upon horseshoe crab eggs to double their weight in less than two weeks before flying to the Arctic to nest. These migrants depend on the eggs of spawning horseshoe crabs before migrating from the Delaware Bay beaches to Arctic nesting grounds.

Migratory shorebirds on the Delaware Bay beaches have declined in recent years. The local threats that have been identified include reduced food availability, human disturbance, predation, loss of sandy beaches and suitable roost sites, and risk of oil and hazardous materials spills. The high harvest of horseshoe crabs leading up to the late 1990s has reduced the crab population and may have led to declines in migratory shorebirds including red knot. Human disturbance associated with

recreation is another serious threat to migratory shorebirds.

Erosion of beaches and roosting "islands" has been an ongoing concern, potentially affecting their suitability and use by spawning horseshoe crabs. Shoreline loss due to bulkheads and jetties is also a concern. Some beach area has been restored by beach replenishment operations, and work is underway to improve the design for horseshoe crab and shorebird needs.

The Coastal Program has worked closely with the States, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, Inc., other federal agencies, and private organizations to protect Delaware Bay, a unique resource of international importance for migratory birds.

For more information contact:

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