

# Incentives for Conservation on Private Lands

by Susan Pultz



***In Wisconsin, the Endangered Species Landowner Incentive Program has restored and protected important habitat for the massasauga rattlesnake, Karner blue butterfly, and a variety of other species.***

*Photo by Dick Dickenson*



***Feral pigs are a grave threat to many of Hawaii's native plants and animals. Funding for a fence at a Nature Conservancy preserve on the island of O'ahu will help to protect over 20 vulnerable species from habitat destruction by feral pigs.***

*Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i photo*

As the number of species listed or awaiting listing under the Endangered Species Act increases, so do the challenges this situation presents for those of us tasked with implementing the Act and, increasingly, for the public at large. These challenges are compounded by the fact that most listed species depend at least in part on privately owned land for their long-term survival. The cooperation of landowners therefore is necessary for the conservation and recovery of these imperiled species. Fortunately, many private landowners want to help. Often, however, the costs associated with conserving listed species are simply too great for landowners to undertake without financial assistance.

To assist conservation-minded landowners, the Service launched its Endangered Species Landowner Incentives Program in 1999. For the past 3 years, Congress has appropriated \$5 million to provide private landowners with monetary incentives to carry out conservation actions on their lands for listed or otherwise imperiled species. This program already has met with great success. In Fiscal Year 1999, the Service received 145 proposals for projects worth \$21 million. Decisions about which proposals we could fund with a budget of \$5 million were not easy, but 22 of the most beneficial projects received money. In Fiscal Year 2000, we received 138 project proposals, and 34 high quality projects were funded. In Fiscal Year 2001, 48 projects will be funded.

For a project to be eligible for financial assistance, it must: 1) occur on private or tribal land; 2) benefit a listed, proposed, or candidate species, or a

species likely to soon become a candidate species; 3) include a 10 percent cost share on the part of the landowner or other non-federal partner; and 4) be a one-year project or a discrete portion of a larger project that can yield distinct and lasting benefits with a single year of funding, since there is no guarantee for funding in subsequent years. Proposals may be for projects that fit into a larger regional plan for conservation of a species, or they may be for projects undertaken by a single landowner who simply wants to promote species conservation on his or her parcel of land. Factors used to evaluate the merit of the proposals are: 1) the number of species that would benefit from the project; 2) the importance of the project to the recovery of the species; 3) the magnitude and type of anticipated ecosystem benefits; 4) identification of landowners who have indicated an interest in undertaking the project; and 5) the degree of cost sharing by non-federal entities, which may include the landowner, state or county government, or non-governmental organizations.

Examples of some projects that have been funded include:

**Kaluaa Gulch, Hawaii:** This funding is enabling the construction of a 70-acre (28-hectare) fenced enclosure on the island of O'ahu to protect 8 endangered species, 3 candidate species, and 13 other species of concern from the destructive rooting activities of feral pigs in the lowland mesic and wet forest of The Nature Conservancy's Honouliuli Preserve. Feral pigs, among the gravest threats to many native plant and animal species in Hawaii, are expensive to control. After the fence is

completed, The Nature Conservancy will conduct aggressive alien plant and animal control within the enclosure, which will also serve as a reintroduction site for at least three more endangered plant species.

**Karner Blue Butterfly and Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake, Wisconsin:**

Over the past 2 years, Wisconsin's Karner blue butterfly (*Lycaeides melissa samuelis*) and eastern massasauga rattlesnake (*Sistrurus catenatus catenatus*) Endangered Species Landowner Incentive Program has worked with 178 landowners contributing over 3,137 acres (1,270 ha) of habitat restoration and protection in the oak and pine barren regions of central Wisconsin. The Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program serves as the delivery mechanism for this endangered species program. By developing management agreements and habitat restoration projects, the Partners program maintains a positive, results-oriented approach to conservation of endangered species on private lands.

**Red-cockaded Woodpecker Safe Harbor Program:** The successful efforts in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia to conserve the red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis* or RCW) through "Safe Harbor" agreements with

private landowners is being expanded through Landowner Incentive Program funds. Recovery activities such as prescribed burning, planting of longleaf pine, and installation of artificial RCW nesting cavities are being undertaken on over 200,000 acres (80,940 ha) throughout these states. Under the Safe Harbor programs, landowners who reach agreements with the Service to improve habitat for listed species on private lands will not be subject to further restrictions on land use if the improvements attract additional individuals of the protected species. For most of the enrolled landowners, this results in no significant land management changes since they are performing these actions, such as burning and planting longleaf pine trees, anyway. The difference is that these landowners are now actively encouraging the presence of this rare bird instead of discouraging its presence.

**Alaskan Longline Fishery, Alaska:**

Funding of Alaska's longline fishery under the Landowner Incentive Program exhibits the flexibility of the program. Rather than providing a landowner incentive funds to conserve or restore habitat on their lands, this project supplied \$857,300 in funding over 2 years to the Pacific States Marine

Fisheries Commission to be disbursed to longline fishermen for deployment of tori lines on privately owned craft. Tori lines have been shown to be an effective way to minimize seabird bycatch, including taking of an endangered bird, the short-tailed albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*).

As the Service seeks to refine and enhance programs for private sector conservation, the Landowner Incentives Program may have a new name and change slightly in the coming year. One thing that will not change, however, is the Service's commitment to increase and improve its assistance to conservation-spirited landowners.

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**The short-tailed albatross should benefit from funding to reduce seabird bycatch during commercial fishing.**

*Photo by Steve Moore*