

## Goal Two: Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships

*“All acts of government...are of slight importance to conservation except as they affect the acts and thought of citizens.” Aldo Leopold*

### Introduction

The mission of the Partners Program is to efficiently achieve voluntary habitat improvement on private lands, through financial and technical assistance, for the benefit of Federal Trust Species. Accomplishment of this mission would not be possible without partnerships. Partnerships are successful when they provide mutual benefits to the voluntary participants that are striving to achieve a common objective. Partnerships also result in increased resources by pooling all available resources for greater impact, better efficiency by reducing duplication of effort, better communication, innovative solutions through the sharing of various technical knowledge, and increased public support. The foundation of the partnerships established through the Partners Program is a shared interest in habitat conservation.

Partnerships established through the Partners Program may be formal or informal. Formal mechanisms include the use of cooperative or landowner agreements where the voluntary parties clarify their roles, responsibilities and other specific details of the agreement. Since 1987, the Partners Program has entered into over 3,000 partnership agreements with a variety of partners, including private landowners; other Federal agencies, Tribal, State and local government agencies; non-government organizations; private corporations; foundations; and land trusts.

The success of these partnerships has relied on building trust and credibility with our partners. We strive to achieve this by providing accurate information and being available to assist our partners in a timely manner, by leveraging all available resources, and by helping to implement cost-efficient and effective projects.

Our Partners Program staff is experienced at helping potential partners come together to forge and implement collaborative solutions that meet local and regional needs for fish and wildlife conservation. An excellent partnership example that was established in 2006, resulted in 21 federal and state agencies, conservation organizations and private companies working to establish, restore, improve and protect fish and wildlife habitats on privately owned land. This group (Mississippi Partners for Fish and Wildlife) has accomplished a number of tasks including: defining the contributions of each partner; selecting a coordinator; dividing the state into five major habitat types and establishing team leaders and subcommittees for each habitat; developing project application forms and landowner agreements; determining ranking criteria for each habitat type; selecting restoration projects for funding; and selecting an organization to secure and monitor partnership commitments. This partnership agreement lays the groundwork for an effective process for all parties to leverage their limited project funds and technical assistance efforts for the voluntary conservation of fish and wildlife resources on private lands in the Southeast Region.

### Objectives, Targets and Implementation Strategies for Goal Two

The following objectives, five-year performance targets, and implementation strategies will help us reach our goal of broadening and strengthening partnerships.

- **Objective 2.1:** Train all Partners Program staff in developing and maintaining partnerships.
  - **Five-Year Performance Target:** Include a formal or on-the-job training component dealing with the development and implementation of partnerships in the Individual Development Plan for all Partners Program staff.
  - **Implementation Strategies:** At least one formal training course is offered at the Service's National Conservation Training Center (NCTC). The name of the course is *Conservation Partnerships*. Also, through narrative reports and examples placed in our habitat information data base, by sharing information at the Regional Partners Program Workshop, held every other year, and through other education/outreach examples, Program staff will share knowledge gained from experience that will help others be more effective in their efforts to promote partnerships.
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- **Objective 2.2:** Work with federal/state agencies, Tribes, local entities, conservation organizations, corporations, educational institutions, and private individuals to implement natural resource conservation programs that benefit federal and state trust resources.
  - **Five-Year Performance Target:** Exclusive of private landowner agreements, establish a minimum of five new partnership agreements within the Southeast Region.

■ **Implementation Strategies:**

Partners Program staff will continue to identify and meet periodically with our key partners (e.g., other federal agencies, State fish and wildlife agencies, Tribes, local governments, non-government organizations, private industry, and others) to discuss ideas for new and expanded partnerships.

All Partners Program staff must become familiar with resources offered through other agencies, organizations and institutions. Many cost-share programs exist to aid the private landowner in getting conservation practices on the ground. Few landowners are familiar with all of the opportunities available to them.

The USDA offers many cost-share conservation programs (e.g., Conservation Reserve Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Wetlands Reserve Program) that offer opportunities for partnering with landowners and other federal and state agencies. Partners Program staff should understand these conservation programs and their implementation processes, including collaboration with local and state staff that administer them. Partners Program staff should also represent the agency by serving on USDA State Technical Committees. This is one of the best places to keep informed about USDA conservation programs, and to interact with other partners.

Educational institutions also make good partners by providing technical expertise, research, literature, and they are often able to partner with the development and implementation of demonstration projects. Partners Program staff should explore partnership opportunities with educational institutions.

Non-government organizations (NGOs) with similar conservation goals also have landowner assistance

programs and personnel dedicated to achieving the same or similar objectives as the Partners Program. Partners Program staff should explore these partnership opportunities.

■ **Implementation Strategies:**

Partners Program staff will assess the capabilities of each potential partner, and negotiate partnership contributions in all Partners Program agreements.

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■ **Objective 2.3:** Encourage public understanding, support, and participation for natural resource private lands programs through partnerships.

■ **Five-Year Performance Target:** Highlight five successful partnerships on our Regional Internet site for the Partners Program, and in news articles, joint publications, or other education/outreach mechanisms.

■ **Implementation Strategies:** When partnerships are formed, their collective efforts to reach larger percentages of the general public have much greater chances of success. News articles and success stories provided on the internet or in publications that include credit for all partners result in a greater response from interested landowners. Partners Program staff will collaborate with our partners to share information and education expertise to help educate the public about conservation partnerships.

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■ **Objective 2.4:** To leverage resources of government agencies, private conservation organizations, corporations, local agencies, educational institutions, and private individuals who have the interest and/or the responsibility of working with private landowners to establish, restore, improve, and protect fish and wildlife habitat on private lands.

■ **Five-Year Performance Target:** Achieve an overall goal of 50 percent cost share for Partners Program funded projects. Cost share may include in-kind contributions (e.g., personnel, materials, services) from partners.