

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Strategic Plan The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

National Summary





The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program engages willing partners, through non-regulatory incentives, to conserve fish and wildlife on their property. USFWS photo.

The National Strategic Plan for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program consists of three parts, each developed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) headquarters, Regional, and field office staffs in consultation with program stakeholders and partners. In addition, the President’s Office of Management and Budget provided guidance on the structure of the plan and expectations for its results.

Part 1, the “Vision Document” describes the program and five major goals which will guide program operations for the next 5 years. First, and foremost, is the goal to **conserve habitat** for the benefit of Federal Trust Species. In support of this primary goal are four other goals: **broaden and strengthen partnerships; improve information sharing and communications; enhance our workforce; and, increase accountability** to ensure that program resources are used efficiently and effectively.

Together, the five goals support the shared *outcome* of **sustainable populations**

of Federal Trust Species. This includes enhancing populations of migratory birds and inter-jurisdictional fish species; contributing to the recovery of threatened and endangered species; keeping candidate species from becoming listed; and, keeping common species common.

Part 2, “Regional Strategic Plans” is the core of the National Strategic Plan. The eight Regional plans were prepared under a guiding set of requirements and expectations. Importantly, each plan also reflects unique regional characteristics and challenges. Each Regional plan identifies geographic focus areas in which program efforts will be targeted over the next 5 years; estimated project accomplishments within the focus areas; and, a description of anticipated benefits to priority fish and wildlife species.

Each of the Regional Strategic Plans demonstrates a program shift toward identifying areas (geographic focus areas) that provide the best opportunities to affect the well-being of priority migratory bird species; inter-jurisdictional fish species; endangered or threatened species; candidate or at-risk species; or, habitat adjacent to National Wildlife Refuges. The Regions were directed to consult with Service programs having primary responsibility

for the aforementioned Federal Trust Species to gain essential local knowledge of species status, threats to population sustainability, and short-term, priority needs for habitat improvement. In addition, the Regions were instructed to consult the recently completed State Wildlife Action Plans in identifying geographic focus areas, as well as, similar science-based assessments offered by several prominent conservation organizations (The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society, Ducks Unlimited, etc.) and academic institutions. Over the next 5 years, Program resources will increasingly be directed toward projects that fall within the focus areas. In addition, special consideration will be given to unique project opportunities outside of the focus areas to ensure that the Service is investing in the highest-value project opportunities available. It is important to remember that the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program relies on voluntary participation by private landowners and therefore must remain flexible to meet its mission responsibilities. Toward that end, the geographic focus areas are expected to be fluid and responsive to species needs and changing environmental conditions over time.

The National Strategic Plan is designed to cover a 5-year period



The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Schoolyard Habitat Program helps students and teachers to create wildlife habitat on school grounds. USFWS Photo.

and guide the Program toward an ambitious but realistic set of accomplishments. Many factors will continue to influence the Program's ability to meet 5-year target goals. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is built on and dependant upon *partnerships* to implement habitat restoration projects. While the Program provides financial assistance to implement projects, it most often leverages additional necessary funding from other sources. Of equal, or in many instances, greater value is the technical assistance and expertise provided by the Programs' local field staff. These highly-skilled professionals are available to manage all aspects of habitat restoration projects, including the critical task of earning and maintaining the trust of private landowner partners. Maintaining, or expanding when possible, this local presence through field staff is a high priority for the Program.

In addition to the identification of



Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program Biologist coordinates with restoration volunteers.
Photo by Joe Milmoie / USFWS.

focus areas, the National Strategic Plan provides an expanded vision of measuring *accomplishments*. Accomplishments are still quantifiably measured by “acres

and miles” of habitat restored, or number of stream barriers removed; but now, there is an increasing effort to project the anticipated *biological outcomes* of the various projects.



The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program provides an integral delivery mechanism for the recovery of endangered species as well as to maintain common species common. Photo by Joe Milmoie / USFWS.



*The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program restores habitat for the benefit of migratory bird federal trust species.
Photo by Joe Milmoie / USFWS.*

What affect on Federal Trust Species will the work ultimately provide? The Regional Strategic Plans attempt to address that question, often by identifying the Federal Trust Species known to rely on habitat-types within the focus areas. And, while any particular project may be undertaken to benefit a target species, there will always be ancillary wildlife benefits from habitat

restoration. The actual biological results of habitat restoration within a focus area will have to be measured over time by appropriate methods. While many variables will continue to effect final *accomplishment* figures, the Regions have ample experience in projecting realistic targets. The following table represents a consolidation of projected Regional accomplishment targets over the

next 5 years. These targets are for accomplishments **only within geographic focus areas** as identified in each of the Regional Strategic Plans. In each Region, habitat restoration projects outside of the focus areas will continue to contribute to overall Program performance.



Partners for Fish and Wildlife Biologist with landowner at Michigan wetland restoration project. USFWS Photo.

FOCUS AREA TARGET TOTALS

Region	Habitat Types	Acres	Miles	Structures
Region 1	Rivers/Streams/Shoreline		139	83
(WA, OR, ID, HI, U.S. Territories)	Upland	7,964		
	Wetland	4,305		
Region 2	Rivers/Streams/Shoreline		205	4
(TX, OK, N.M, AZ)	Upland	88,400		
	Wetland	5,590		
Region 3	Rivers/Streams/Shoreline		1,182.25	2
(MN, WI, MI, IA, MO, IL, OH, IN)	Upland	50,238		
	Wetland	18,824		
Region 4	Rivers/Streams/Shoreline		125.33	26
(N.C., S.C., GA, FL, MS, Ala, LA, AR, KY, TN, U.S. Territories)	Upland	16,062		
	Wetland	7,042		
Region 5	Rivers/Streams/Shoreline		353.50	40
(ME, VT, NH, MA, NY, CT, RI, NJ, PA, DE, WV, MD, VA)	Upland	7,655		
	Wetland	10,590		
Region 6	Rivers/Streams/Shoreline		539.60	4
(UT, MT, N.D., S.D., KS, WY, CO, NE)	Upland	596,705		
	Wetland	38,243		
Region 7	Rivers/Streams/Shoreline		96.50	26
(Alaska)	Upland	11		
	Wetland	40		
Region 8	Rivers/Streams/Shoreline		4013.50	7
(CA, NV)	Upland	126,933		
	Wetland	23,804		
Totals		1,002,406	6,654.68	192



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Quantifying the anticipated *biological outcomes* of habitat restoration accomplishments within (or outside) of the focus areas is more problematic. For example, more than 100 at-risk species are referenced in the Regional Strategic Plans as dependant on habitat types found within the various focus areas. Working in consultation with species experts, the Program can describe a certain level of potential or expected biological benefits; however, actual benefits are most likely to accrue over time and can only be determined through long-term monitoring. With a backlog of private landowners seeking assistance, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program will continue to direct its resources to implement projects. The Program will rely, in great part, on its in-Service partners such as Endangered Species, Migratory Birds, and Fisheries programs to monitor, assess, record and report the biological benefits of its habitat restoration efforts. Other potential sources for monitoring and reporting

species status include other Federal agencies such as the U.S. Geological Survey; state agencies; conservation organizations; academic institutions; and, citizen volunteers.

Accomplishment reporting by the Regional and field offices will continue to be made within the Habitat Information Tracking System (HabITS) and will be central to the goal of **increasing accountability**. HabITS is the official reporting tool for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

HabITS captures detailed information related to habitat accomplishments, partnership agreements, financial contributions, species, and monitoring activities. It also has evolved as a communication and outreach tool providing national and area-specific Program accomplishments; information on species benefiting from projects; and, other information of value to program partners and the public. HabITS accomplishment data is

geo-referenced as point and polygon spatial features. It contains an extensive, searchable document and image library that serves as both an outreach tool and report mechanism.

In addition to data accessibility, HabITS will continue to be improved as a means of enhancing efficiency, compliance with regulations and public outreach. HabITS contains extensive definitions related to habitat improvement and technical assistance activities that coincide with performance measures outlined in this Strategic Plan. As HabITS data, reports, and maps become more accessible in real-time to Program staff nationwide via a basic Internet browser, the system will increase efficiency in the area of data calls by at least 70 percent. This trend is expected to continue as accomplishment reporting grows more complex and the importance of outcome-based performance measurements increases.

Finally, HabITS importance to outreach activities is increasing



Working together, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program has restored over 2,750,000 acres of upland habitat. USFWS photo.



Stream restoration and assessment is an integral component of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. USFWS photo.

exponentially. The American public will be able to generate reports from HabITS data through the national websites. The public will be able to generate reports on program accomplishments by Region, State, Counties, Congressional Districts, focus areas and watersheds making our data fully transparent to all our constituents.

Supporting Goals

The most significant trend among the Regional Strategic Plans regarding the goals of **broadening and strengthening partnerships, improving information sharing and communication, and enhancing the workforce** is a call for opportunities to expand the skill-sets of Program staff. While certain quantifiable performance measures are identified, such as “establish a minimum of ten new partnership agreements” or “prepare a minimum of five outreach/education documents” or “percentage of employees participating in a mentoring program” or “conduct management control review of two field offices per year” the diversity among Regional plans is such that a simple, quantifiable national

“roll-up” of the supporting goals is not useful. However, there is an underlying recognition of the wide range of skills required to satisfy these goals and successfully deliver the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. The Regional Strategic Plans resonate with optimism and dedication to meeting the primary goal of *conserving habitat* and recognize the vital connections of the supporting goals to that end.

To meet the need for maintaining and upgrading skills and state-of-the-art technical expertise, a national training program will be designed to enhance a wide range of skill sets. Sources for training will come from within Service programs, the National Conservation Training Center, and appropriate outside sources. The desired outcome of this national training program is a staff of professionals equipped to manage all of the challenges in successfully delivering habitat conservation projects.

As the Regional Strategic Plans begin to guide Program operations and performance, the expectation is for improved *efficiency* in how and where Program resources are applied and in *effectiveness* in achieving the desired outcome of

maintaining sustainable populations of Federal Trust Species. Measuring performance for accountability purposes will become more sophisticated through the HabITS database. Innovations in skill-set development will be called for to ensure that Program staff have the requisite tools to turn our Strategic Plan into strategic habitat conservation.

National Program

The Service has long recognized that more than 70 percent of our Nation’s land is privately owned and that the majority of our fish and wildlife resources occur on these lands. Also, that the public increasingly supports and responds to incentives and voluntary partnerships as opposed to more regulations to achieve habitat restoration goals. In 1987, the Service began dedicating staff to the task of developing partnerships with willing landowners to improve habitat conditions on private lands. Over the next 2 decades, the Program proved that a voluntary, incentive-based approach to habitat restoration works and has a significant future role in the Service’s mission.

As ultimate testimony to the



The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program works with interested private landowners to restore the endangered Longleaf Pine ecosystem. USFWS photo.

The benefits of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to the Nation are measured by the success of local projects. This is the “end-game” in which the Service and its partners collaborate with private landowners to deliver habitat conservation for the benefit of fish and wildlife resources. Each project however, is done within the context of a national purpose. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program works toward achieving the mission of the Service which is “*working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.*”

success of the Program and its future, the “Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act” (PL 109-294) was passed by the Congress and signed into law in October 2006. The Act codifies the Program, its purpose and expectation of benefits to the American people. It also adds a new level of accountability and responsibility at the national level to ensure that the public investment in the Program is managed efficiently and effectively and for its intended purposes.

It is anticipated that over the next 5 years, a stronger emphasis will be placed on coordination among Service programs to develop shared performance measures that address the sustainability of Federal Trust Species. In the case of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

this will involve determinations of the degree to which project accomplishments contribute to species goals established by the Service. The cross-program integration of performance measures will allow the Service to strategically focus human and financial resources to priority habitats which support priority species. However, this trend will not change the basic client of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program...private landowners.

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is not just a simple tool among many within the Service...it is a way of doing business. It is a vanguard of change in organizational culture and how the Service will continue to nurture its shared stewardship philosophy. This National Strategic Plan outlines a

number of important refinements in how the program will be managed and how and where its human and budgetary resources will be directed. While these refinements will result in a more focused effort, the flexibility to capitalize on high-value opportunities for habitat restoration will remain.

The effects of climate change, shifting demographics, energy development trends and other significant events will unveil new challenges and opportunities for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. The basic foundations of the program will, however, remain constant and the value of public-private partnerships will only increase.



With over 250 full-time staff throughout the 50 states and territories, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program has worked with over 41,000 partners to restore wildlife habitat! Photo by Joe Milmoie / USFWS.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov>

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program
<http://www.fws.gov/partners>

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