

# South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative



## Purpose

The South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative (SALCC) will facilitate conservation planning and design across state boundaries in the South Atlantic Coastal Plain and Piedmont physiographic provinces, from southern Virginia to northern Florida. The efforts of the SALCC will supplement the State Wildlife Action plans and provide better coverage for wider ranging species. It will also provide a broader geographic scale to address the effects of climate change and other critical challenges such as competition for water, wildlife disease, and exotic species invasion.

The scientific and technical expertise provided by the SALCC will support a landscape-scale, collaborative approach to conservation. This expertise will assist the conservation community as they carry out the functional elements of Strategic Habitat Conservation. These functional elements are: biological planning, conservation design, conservation delivery, monitoring, and research.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service already is moving to collaborate with agencies across the Department of the Interior under the Secretarial Order issued in September.

The SALCC will work closely with USGS' proposed Southern Region Climate Change Response Center to provide support integral to assessing the impacts related to regional climate change. This will include acquiring the expertise to develop, test, implement, and monitor conservation strategies responsive to the dynamic landscape changes resulting from stressors led by accelerating climate change. These strategies will be model-based and geographically defined allowing us to effectively apply our emerging climate knowledge to predict habitat and species changes and to target our conservation actions to address impacts. The support provided by the SALCC will not be limited to climate change; rather, it will work to address broad-scale changes suspected to affect whole ecosystems (e.g. water quality and quantity, wildlife disease, etc).

## The Habitat

The terrestrial and aquatic landscape that comprises the area includes unique and valuable habitats that support concentrated populations of endangered, threatened, and declining species, big and small game species, and a lengthy list of species that Americans treasure such as the Black Bear, Loggerhead Sea Turtle, and Painted Bunting.

Key habitats include Sandhills and Coastal longleaf pine forests and savannahs, Piedmont upland hardwood forest, Piedmont streams, Coastal bottomland hardwood, and the Okefenokee Swamp and similar swamp forests. Some of the characteristic terrestrial species of this landscape include forest-dependent birds (e.g. red-cockaded woodpecker and the Swainson's warbler), migratory shorebirds and waterfowl (e.g. piping plover and American black duck), and forest-dependent mammals (e.g. Rafinesque's big-eared bat and black bear). Aquatic species include freshwater and marine fish (e.g. robust redbreast and Atlantic sturgeon) and freshwater mussels (e.g. brook floater).

## Adaptation Benefits

Building on a conservation legacy established with partners over a century, the SALCC will be one cooperative in a national network of more than 20 that will acquire the necessary expertise working closely with the USGS Climate Change Response Centers. It will be a conservation science partnership between the Service, other federal agencies, states, tribes, NGOs, universities and other entities. What's more, it will be a fundamental unit of planning and science capacity that will help us carry out the



*Pocosin wetlands by USFWS*

functional elements of Strategic Habitat Conservation, filling existing gaps in our science capacity, and ultimately informing our response to accelerating climate change and other stresses.

Some of the data gathered will include climate, land-cover, and land-use trends and patterns as well as species vulnerability and hydrology data in spatially-explicit contexts to develop measurable biological objectives that will guide our resource management decisions and actions. Facing the most compelling conservation challenges of our generation, the science-based partnerships will give our employees and partners the ability to achieve the right conservation in the right places to benefit America's fish and wildlife.

As of this fall, more than \$3 million has been committed by partners - including TNC, Duke Power, and Duke University - for projects focused on designing sustainable landscapes, species modeling, and adapting to impacts of accelerating climate change and sea level rise.

For example, this kind of information will help us better adapt to sea level rise and how fish and wildlife will respond across coastal ecosystems. In addition, it will help us expand carbon sequestration activities to more effectively include other habitats such as pocosin wetlands.

The result: Treasured landscapes connected to one another and healthier fish and wildlife populations.

### Organization and Partnerships

The SALCC is intended to operate as a self-governing partnership with an appropriate committee structure (steering, science, management, etc.) and a core support staff. The partnership structure will be formed to allow partner organizations to provide guidance and support to core LCC staff, ensure management input for science products; utilize the existing science and technical expertise of partner organizations in biological planning and conservation design; and help partner organizations coordinate their individual conservation delivery, monitoring and research efforts toward common goals. The exact process and structure will be developed by LCC partners to ensure that the vision and needs of all the partners are incorporated.

The SALCC's capacity depends upon common interests in partner organizations in the region. Beyond a core partnership including the Service, USGS, and state fish and wildlife agencies, partners could change over time as conservation needs across this geographic area evolve. At this point in its development, partners include:

The Service, USGS, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, the Federal Highway Administration, Natural Resources Conservation Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Defense, The Nature Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, and Environmental Defense.

Existing partnerships in the region include America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative, the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, Okefenokee Association of Land Owners, Partners for Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Partners in Flight, Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council,



and the Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability.

The Service and USGS Units and Science Centers, as well as other Federal and State agencies and conservation organizations will provide and facilitate the core expertise required to build species-habitat models, conduct assumption-driven research and formulate decision-based monitoring programs. Together with the Service, the USGS will form the backbone of our science capabilities, and provide additional gateways to engage universities and other partners to enhance our capacity for biological planning, conservation design, monitoring and research.

### Capacity

The SALCC core team should include a landscape or partnership coordinator who will focus on partnership development and support, and developing and implementing multi-organizational conservation strategies with an emphasis on science-driven decision support tools. The team also will include a science technology coordinator responsible for coordinating with federal, state and non-governmental organizations' science professionals, and a spatial analyst, fisheries/aquatic scientist, ecosystem simulation modeler, population-habitat modeler, hydrologist and a conservation scientist. The Service is funding one of these coordinator positions in 2010.

### Timeline

A temporary coordinator is in place to work on the SALCC. Through the

end of the year, tasks to be completed include identifying ongoing projects that demonstrate conservation on a landscape-scale relying on a collaborative, science-based approach; expanding communication by participating in meetings of existing partners or partnerships; organizing an ad hoc interagency SALCC scoping team; summarizing capacity needs and capabilities of partner organizations; and inventorying and cataloging partners' current landscape-scale conservation projects in the context of the SHC Framework.

In 2010, this SALCC will assist with the organization and implementation of a stakeholder-driven workshop about conservation strategies to cope with climate change that builds on the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture's Designing Sustainable Landscapes project. It also will assist with the organization and implementation of a wildlife adaptation workshop focusing on coastal issues. Partners led by the Service will move to fill the positions including a science technology coordinator, a fisheries/aquatic scientist, a South Atlantic Coast JV conservation scientist, an avian ecologist, and a hydrologist. Further, we intend to fund additional research needs as they are identified. In fiscal year 2011, we expect to fill needs associated with population and ecosystem modeling.

### For More Information

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