NOAA HABITAT CONSERVATION

The pressure is on. Development, climate change, and other stressors are causing coastal habitat degradation and loss around the country. One of the most alarming examples of this is happening in the Eastern United States where we're losing 59,000 acres of coastal wetlands each year—that's equal to 122 football fields a day.

Protecting and restoring habitat not only supports healthy natural resources but a strong economy as well. Consider this important example—commercial and recreational fishing activities generate $163 billion in sales in the United States and nearly 1.9 million jobs. Healthy habitat is essential to the reproduction, growth, and diversity of harvested fish and other marine life; we cannot sustain fish stocks without conserving habitat.

But it's not just about fish. Healthy coastal habitat provides value to us in many ways, especially when more than half our country's population lives in our coastal counties and many others like to visit. Did you know that wetlands buffer our coastal communities from storms—saving us more than $23 billion each year?

Finally, conserving healthy habitat is a task for many. To get the job done, we must work together with our federal, state, nongovernment, and private partners—and people like you.

Vision

Healthy and self-sustaining coastal and marine habitats that support vital ecosystem functions, including abundant living marine resources, human uses, and resilient coastal communities.

Mission

To protect, restore, and promote stewardship of coastal and marine habitats.

Conserving Habitat for Future Generations —It's What We Do

"Climate change is real. It is here, and it is happening now, in our backyards and around the globe."
—Jane Lubchenco, PhD,
NOAA Administrator

Restoring the Barrier Islands of Louisiana's Barataria Bay

Barrier islands are the first line of defense against storms and hurricanes that threaten coastal communities. Bays are important habitat for commercial fish species, birds, sea turtles, and other wildlife.

Barataria Bay in Louisiana is facing many threats to its fragile barrier island habitat including sinking land, rising sea level, and erosion. Under the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act, NOAA conducts large-scale projects that protect and restore barrier islands and their associated benefits.

For the Barataria Bay project, NOAA partnered with the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources to re-establish approximately 1,100 acres of beach, dune, and wetland habitat to an area severely affected by 2005's Hurricane Katrina and experiencing one of the highest wetland loss rates in the country.

Our responsibility is to conserve coastal and marine habitat so that we—and future generations—can continue to enjoy the benefits of sustainable fisheries, resilient coastal communities, and a strong economy. For 2011, some of our biggest challenges include:

Protecting and Restoring Gulf Coast Habitat—

The Gulf of Mexico contributes tens of billions of dollars to the U.S. economy through its tourism and commercial and recreational fishing industries and is responsible for nearly one third of the seafood production for the continental United States.

We have been conserving habitat in the Gulf for 40 years and have led 380 restoration projects. Since the Deepwater BP oil spill in April 2010, we have been working closely with federal and state partners on the Natural Resource Damage Assessment and will lead efforts to develop and implement a plan to restore the Gulf's natural resources from the impacts of oil. For more information, visit www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov.

Conserving the Chesapeake Bay through Executive Order—

The Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in the country, supporting 3,600 species of plants, fish, and animals and producing about 500 million pounds of seafood per year.

Through our Chesapeake Bay Office, we have an important role in implementing priority actions to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay. This includes advancing oyster recovery, ecosystem-based fisheries management, and monitoring of ecosystem conditions.

Chesapeake Bay Blue Heron

Re-establishing tidal flow in Bahia Grande, Texas.

Protecting Essential Fish Habitat—

Essential fish habitat includes all types of aquatic habitat where fish breed, feed, or grow to maturity. Estuaries, for instance, provide habitat to more than 68 percent of America's commercial fish catch by value and for 80 percent of the recreational fish catch by weight.

We work with the regional fishery management councils to identify essential fish habitat and provide recommendations to federal agencies on how to avoid or minimize the adverse effects of their actions on the habitat of federally managed commercial or recreational fisheries.

Building the Economy through the Recovery Act—

Healthy coastal and marine ecosystems are vital to coastal economies. In 2007, coastal counties contributed $7.9 trillion to the U.S. gross domestic product and supported 69 million jobs.

We continue our role in supporting jobs and the economy using $167 million in Recovery Act funds for 50 high-priority, large-scale restoration projects around the country. When complete, these projects will restore more than 8,700 acres of habitat, open more than 700 stream miles for fish passage, remove more than 850 metric tons of debris, rebuild shellfish habitat, and benefit nearby coral reefs by protecting 11,750 inland acres.

Preparing for Climate Change—

Healthy coastal habitat such as mangroves and wetlands absorb up to five times more atmospheric carbon dioxide than tropical forests.

Our job is to promote conservation strategies such as natural shorelines that allow habitat to store carbon and adapt naturally to climate change.

Making Way for Migrating Fish

For the first time in 42 years, young fish are able to make the journey past three hydroelectric dams on the Deschutes River in central Oregon and migrate to the Pacific Ocean thanks to the cooperative efforts of NOAA Fisheries, Portland General Electric, and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon.

NOAA was a partner in the engineering of a unique 273-foot underwater tower and fish collection station. It mimics the natural conditions of the river to attract fish into a collection facility where they are sorted by size and piped to a fish handling facility. They are then transported downstream to continue their migration to the sea.

Chinook salmon, steelhead, and kokanee (landlocked sockeye salmon) immediately began taking full advantage of the new travel agent created by the $108 million project. The facility started operations in December 2009 and within two hours had its first customers—two juvenile Chinook.

www.habitat.noaa.gov

Habitat Conservation Progress Report

Administration Priorities

- Implemented 50 large-scale restoration projects around the country using $167 million in funding from the President's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. So far, we've supported hundreds of jobs at projects that have restored more than 1,800 acres of habitat and opened more than 300 stream miles for fish passage.
- Completed a new strategy in 2010 in collaboration with other federal agencies to implement President Obama's Executive Order to restore and protect the Chesapeake Bay.
- Supported the interagency Great Lakes Restoration Initiative by awarding $9.5 million in 2010 for nine projects throughout the Great Lakes Region. These projects will restore more than 700 acres of habitat and open more than 100 miles of river for fish passage.

Habitat Protection

- Protected nearly 980 million acres of fish habitat from impacts of fishing gear since 2000.
- Reviewed about 30,000 permit actions since 2005 to minimize adverse impacts to essential fish habitat.
- Helped open more than 1,000 stream miles through the hydropower licensing process.
- Achieved special designation in 2010 to protect 23,000 square miles of deepwater coral habitat off the southeastern U.S. coast.

Habitat Restoration

- Began the restoration planning process with state and federal partners to address the impacts of the Deepwater BP oil spill.
- Restored 69,000 acres of habitat through 2,300 community-based restoration projects since 1996, inlcuding 300 acres of oyster reefs.
- Conserved more than 8,000 acres of coastal wetlands in Louisiana since 1997.
- Removed 200 dams and other barriers and opened more than 2,000 stream miles for fish passage since 1998.
- Helped settle 235 natural resource damage assessment cases by the end of 2010, generating more than $550 million to protect or restore thousands of acres of habitat.

Habitat Stewardship

- Engaged more than 232,000 volunteers in more than 1 million hours for habitat restoration since 2000.
- Reached an estimated 390,000 students and 17,500 teachers through the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office's Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) Program since 2002.

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