

Goal Three: Improve Information Sharing and Communications

Collaborate and share information and concerns with our partners, potential future partners, decision-makers, and others to protect, restore and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats.

Introduction

To successfully carry out the mission of the Partners Program (i.e., “to efficiently achieve voluntary habitat conservation on private lands....”) effective communication and information sharing is essential. Every work day, staff within the Partners Program communicate and share helpful information with our partners and stakeholders.

Evaluations of the reasons why potential partners have experienced problems have noted poor communication or no communication at all. So, what are the attributes of successful or effective communication and information sharing? Experience has consistently shown that effective communication must flow in all directions; i.e., from the top down, from the bottom up, across program areas, and between partners. Also, perhaps the first and most important communication skill is effective listening to help ensure that communication is not only clear, but understood.

Further, all parties need to be able to clearly explain what they are trying to do and why, and preferably before it is done. It is essential that important information be shared with stakeholders, as we continue to build credibility and trust.

Finally, it is important to note that communication is much more than the spoken word. Studies have shown that only about seven percent of our message comes from our actual words, whereas about 93 percent of our communication impact comes from our appearance, actions and voice quality.

In order to influence the thoughts and decisions of others relative to the conservation of fish and wildlife resources, sharing information about the Program and the types of projects and activities that we support is very important. This same commitment from our partners further promotes and strengthens our partnerships. The Partners Program shares information through a variety of ways, including use of the internet, brochures and fact sheets, special reports, workshops, formal presentations at conferences, and on-the-ground demonstrations of successful habitat improvement projects and specific project activities.

Over the last 10 years the availability of new communication technology (e.g., internet, internet data tracking, geographic information systems, etc.) has greatly improved our communication and information sharing capabilities at all levels of the Partners Program. For the past four years, all project and technical assistance information for the Partners Program has been entered into our internet based Habitat Information Tracking System (HabITS). Once data is entered into HabITS, the System provides many efficient communication and information sharing capabilities, including customized queries and reports, and featured projects; mapping capabilities; and links to other data sets. In addition, the Regional Office maintains a Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program Internet site at <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/partners>, and most of our field stations also maintain Internet sites with Partners Program information specific to their State.

Objectives, Targets and Implementation Strategies for Goal Three

The following objective, five-year performance targets and implementation strategies will help us accomplish this goal.

- **Objective 3.1:** Improve and expand our communication and information sharing capabilities.
- **Five-Year Performance Targets**
Each Partners Program staff person will complete a minimum of two formal training courses through the Service’s National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) or other Service approved training that address ways to improve communication and information sharing.

Each Partners Program staff person will enter all required information, including project narratives, photographic images, species links and references, for their assigned habitat improvement projects and technical assistance into the HabITS data base by no later than the assigned due date of each fiscal year.

Each Partners Program staff person will prepare a minimum of five education/outreach documents that highlight a successful partnership initiative and project activities, and will make this information available to the public through one or more sources, including the Internet, local newspaper, conference proceedings, Fish and Wildlife Service News, or other approved venues.

Each Partners Program staff person will meet with a minimum of 10 partnering agencies, organizations, industry, local governments or other entities for the purpose of sharing information about private lands conservation activities.

■ **Implementation Strategies:**

Internal

Select appropriate training courses from NCTC catalog or other approved sources, and complete the training.

Continue cross-program approved Partners Notices that provide policy clarification and guidance to field staff.

Develop and carry out specific yearly Work Activity Guidance for the Partners Program.

Monthly conference calls between all Regional Coordinators and National Office.

Monthly or quarterly conference calls between Regional Coordinator and all Partners field staff.

Periodic meetings (both Regional and Field Office level) with other Service operational programs (e.g., Endangered Species, Refuges and Wildlife, Fisheries, Migratory Birds) to discuss partnership opportunities and share information.

Host on-the-ground field demonstrations for Service staff as opportunities arise.

Continue to maintain and periodically update all Program fact sheets, brochures, and Internet sites.

Send examples of successful projects, partnership approaches, and other useful information to External Affairs for publication consideration in E-grits (Regional Office Internet Site for sharing Regional Information), Fish and Wildlife News (Service's National publication), or other sources (e.g., Endangered Species Bulletin).

Continue to enter all Program information into HabITS, and highlight those projects and partnerships to be featured within the System.

Where possible, continue to carry out the Regional Partners Program Workshop every two years in order to exchange conservation strategies and partnership information.

Continue to develop and carry out internal training at the Regional level, based on recommendations from the field (e.g., Project Officer Responsibilities and management of agreements).

■ **External**

Participate in various conferences, workshops and professional meetings and events that address habitat conservation technologies and methods, and partnership development related to private lands.

Periodically meet with our key partners (e.g. State fish and wildlife agencies, other federal agencies, conservation organizations) to share information and discuss opportunities.

Participate in special task forces brought together by partners to address particular issues pertaining to conservation on private lands.

Participate in all scheduled State Farm Bill Technical Committee meetings.

Develop and carry out with our partners field trips and on-the-ground demonstrations targeted to specific audiences

Develop and make available Program Fact Sheets and other summary information.

Submit approved Program articles to be published in various education/outreach sources such as conference and workshop proceedings, news releases, newsletters, bulletins, etc.

Maintain and periodically update all Internet information sources for the Program.

Work with our partners in each State to establish a Habitat Conservation Committee to share information and address conservation issues on private lands.

Establish communication channels with university wildlife, forest and agricultural extension staff

Continue to work with local schools to develop and implement habitat improvement demonstrations as learning tools for students and the local community.

Establish contacts with other agencies, universities and other partners to address monitoring and research needs and share information.

Continue to invite key partners and stakeholders to our Regional Program Workshop held every two years.

Continue to recognize the conservation efforts of our private landowners and other partners through annual awards and other recognition events.

Encourage membership in professional societies (e.g., Wildlife Society, Ecological Society).