

Goal Four: Enhance Our Workforce

The staff of the Partners Program is our most important resource. Maintaining and enhancing the quality, efficiency and diversity of this staff is the key to success in achieving on the ground results for Federal Trust Species.

Introduction

Successful implementation of the Partners Program requires a diverse, highly skilled and motivated workforce. We are committed to having highly capable staff that is results-focused, competent and acts with integrity, and seeks creative partnerships and solutions to technical fish and wildlife habitat issues on private lands.

For fiscal year 2007, the Partners Program in the Southeast Region consisted of 32 staff positions. Working with voluntary private landowners and other partners, our staff has restored an average of about 14,000 acres and 50 miles of habitat every year over the last seven years, and since 1987, the Program has achieved total accomplishment numbers approaching 345,000 habitat acres and 950 stream miles. This lean but skillful team covering 468,000 square miles includes one Regional Coordinator, 11 State/Commonwealth Coordinators, and an additional 21 Private Lands Biologists strategically located across the Region (Appendix B). Our staff includes a diverse group of biologists who know their own work areas intimately and specialize in their knowledge of the federal trust species and habitats that occur within their work area. Although the work is demanding, the results on the ground are rewarding and there has not been much turnover in these positions. Of the 32 member team, 20 have been in place for over five years.

Our regional vision is to continue to improve and expand the leadership skills and knowledge and expertise of our experienced staff, while simultaneously cultivating these skills within our new and upcoming staff. We believe that we can achieve this vision through strategic education and training, hiring and employee recognition.

Objectives, Targets, and Implementation Strategies for Goal Four

To help us accomplish this goal, we have identified the following objectives, five-year performance targets, and implementation strategies:

- **Objective 4.1:** Ensure that all Partners Program staff have access to and complete a variety of selected training courses involving habitat conservation tools, leadership skills, and team building techniques that will help to achieve the five goals addressed in this strategic plan.

- **Five-Year Performance Target:** All Program staff will develop an annual training plan. To the extent possible, a minimum of one course from the list of recommended Service training courses below, or other approved training or workshops, shall be completed each fiscal year.

- **Implementation Strategies:** Training is essential for both new members to our workforce as well as for experienced members. The Partners Program provides staff funding support for an average of two training courses per year. We have compiled the following list of recommended training courses that are offered through the Service's National Conservation Training Center (NCTC), located in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. The complete catalog of training courses offered through NCTC can be viewed on the internet at: <http://training.fws.gov>

These recommended courses were selected based on our knowledge of the skills needed to carry out our partnership work on private lands, and supporting information

received those that have previously taken these training courses.

Recommended NCTC Training Courses for New Partners Program Staff:

- USFWS Employee Foundations
- Negotiation Strategies and Techniques
- Essential Skills of Communication, Oral and Writing
- Increasing Your Personal Effectiveness
- Education/Outreach Fundamentals
- Conservation Partnerships in Practice
- Basic Habitat Restoration
- Aquatic Habitat Restoration and Enhancement
- ESA Synopsis/Update
- GIS Introduction for Conservation Professionals
- Principles of Habitat Assessment
- Cultural Resources Overview
- NEPA Concepts
- Assistance Agreements Administration
- HabITS

Recommended Courses for Experienced Partners Program Staff:

- Resolving Complex Environmental Issues
- Resolving Conflicts
- Essential Skills of Leadership
- GIS Use For Wildlife Habitat Management
- Scientific Principles and Techniques for Endangered Species Conservation
- Wetland Plant Identification
- Introduction to River Science and Management
- Stream Habitat Measurement Techniques
- River Morphology and Applications
- Endangered Species Recovery Implementation

While the recommended NCTC courses are important, we recognize that other training opportunities, including courses provided by our partnering agencies (e.g., Farm Bill conservation program training offered through the USDA and organizations, as well as professional workshops and conferences, also are important sources of helpful information that can be readily applied to helping us achieve the goals identified in this strategic plan. There are many other advantages to training alongside our partners such as building common approaches to habitat restoration and expanding partnership opportunities.

The Partners Program in the Southeast Region has responded to direct feedback from the Partners field staff that have recommended the continuation of Regional Partners Program workshops that have proven to be very helpful in orienting new employees and reinvigorating experienced employees.

The Partners Program will strive to carry out a regional workshop for all Program staff every other year. The location of these workshops is varied to include different field trip opportunities for highlighting demonstrative examples of habitat improvement projects, including opportunities to meet the partners involved in the effort and to learn from their successes and failures. The field trips also offer opportunities to expand biological knowledge of species and habitats.



Partners for Fish and Wildlife Regional Workshop

These workshops also include presentations from partners both inside and outside the Service who share their ideas and experiences. And finally, each state has an opportunity to present a project of their own, complete with lessons learned for everyone's benefit. The networking and camaraderie that develop from these workshops instills a sense of purpose and focus, building the Southeast Region's team of Partners biologists into a strong, focused, and motivated group.

The Regional Partners Coordinator also arranges for or develops specific workshops for regional staff to address issues and needs that have been raised by the staff. Recent examples have included workshops on conservation easements, Project Officer responsibilities and management of agreements, and use of the Program's Habitat Information Tracking System.

- **Objective 4.2:** Ensure that the location of Program staff addresses the priority habitats and geographic focus areas identified in this strategic plan.
- **Five-Year Performance Target:** Evaluate the staff positions to determine the best locations to more effectively address private landowner assistance opportunities within designated geographic focus areas and priority habitats.
- **Implementation Strategies:** As positions are filled, care and consideration will be given to diversifying the staff and ensuring highly motivated, well educated, and independent individuals are brought on board. To the extent practicable, the Southeast Region has a vision of

locating staff within designated focus areas. Also, when appropriate and when opportunities arise, we may co-locate new positions with our key partners so that they can efficiently and effectively work together to accomplish technical assistance and habitat improvement for federal trust species. We intend to keep an open mind, looking for unique opportunities to collaborate with others so that our work force, our partnerships, and our accomplishments grow.

In addition, we have an established policy that any Partners biologist position that becomes vacant will be evaluated with regard to its location and expected partnership opportunities. The location of a vacant position may be moved to a new location and re-staffed to more effectively address the private lands opportunities within the designated geographic focus areas. To help promote cross-program collaboration, positions will be located throughout the region at existing Service Office locations, including Ecological Services, National Wildlife Refuges, Migratory Birds, and Fisheries. Under an approved agreement, positions may also be co-located with other agencies (e.g., State agency or Natural Resources Conservation Service) and groups (e.g., The Nature Conservancy).

- **Objective 4.3:** Maintain the institutional knowledge of the Partners Program and build on leadership.
- **Five-Year Performance Targets:** Establish an operating regional Partners mentoring program by the end of fiscal year 2007.

Establish an awards recognition process for the Partners Program staff by the end of fiscal year 2007.
- **Implementation Strategies:** Over the next five years, we expect a number of our highly trained Partners Program staff to retire or be promoted to other positions.

Within the context of our workforce planning process, we expect that some of these positions, as well as some new positions, will be advertised and staffed.

In addition to the previously described educational and training approaches, the Southeast Region will develop and implement a mentoring program to benefit both mentor and mentee.

New staff will work alongside the Regional Coordinator and/or experienced State Coordinators and Partners biologists on details of up to two weeks, assisting with a variety of jobs such as coordination of Partners policy and issues across all Service program areas, including other regions, collaboration with other State and federal agencies and partners, interactions with private landowners, development and implementation of habitat improvement plans, and monitoring and other field work, thereby learning valuable techniques, styles, and ideas.

Following the policy and guidelines of established Service awards and recognition programs, selected Partners Program staff will be recognized each year and rewarded for their successes in front of their peers. We envision the following awards categories:

- Regional Partners Biologist of the Year Award
- One or more Special Achievement Awards

These awards will be presented at approved Service functions, including the Annual Regional Director's Awards.

The Regional and State Coordinators will provide assistance and support to the Partners biologists and will help to coordinate the Program across all Service Programs and with other agencies and partners. The duties and responsibilities of the Regional and State Coordinators are provided in Appendix B.



Partners for Fish and Wildlife field trip