

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Strategic Plan The Coastal Program

National Summary



This “National Summary” is Part 3 of the Strategic Plan for the Coastal Program.

The Strategic Plan for the Coastal 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 (OMB) 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; and, keeping candidate species from becoming listed.

Part 2, “Regional Step-down Plans” is the core of the Strategic Plan. The eight Regional plans were prepared under a guiding set of requirements and expectations; however, 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 accomplishments within the focus areas; and, a description of anticipated benefits to priority fish and wildlife species.

Each of the Regional Step-down 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 within or adjacent to National Wildlife Refuges. The Regions were directed to consult with Service programs having primary responsibility for managing Trust Species to gain essential local knowledge of species status, threats to population sustainability and priority needs for habitat improvement. In addition, the



*The Coastal Program partners with coastal communities to improve the health of watersheds for fish, wildlife and people.
Photo by Joe Milmoie / USFWS.*

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 located within the focus areas. However, special consideration will continue to 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 Coastal Program relies on voluntary participation by many public and private partners, including 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 Coastal Program works with partners to integrate economic development with the conservation of our Nation's coastal resources. USFWS Photo.

The Strategic Plan is designed to cover a 5-year period 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 Coastal Program is a program built on and dependant upon *partnerships* to implement stewardship of fish and wildlife resources. While the program provides limited financial assistance to implement projects, it most often seeks additional 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 and protection projects, including the critical task of earning and maintaining the trust of the partners involved. Maintaining, or expanding when possible, this local presence through field staff is a high priority for the Program.

In addition to the identification of focus areas, the Strategic Plan provides an expanded vision of measuring *accomplishments*. Accomplishments are still quantifiably measured by "acres and miles" of habitat restored or protected and number of stream

barriers removed; but now, there is an increasing effort to quantify the anticipated *biological* benefits of the various projects. What affect on Trust Species will the work ultimately provide? The Regional Step-down Plans attempt to address that question, often by identifying the 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 and protection 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 Step-down Plans. In each Region, habitat restoration and protection projects outside of the focus areas will continue to contribute to overall program performance.



The Coastal Program works to protect the federal trust species, including migratory bird species. Photo by Joe Milmoie / USFWS.

Coastal Program Focus Area Totals

Regional Focus Areas	Habitat Types	Accomplishment Types	Acres	Miles	Structures
Region 1	Rivers/Streams/Shoreline	Restoration		30.00	10
(WA, OR, ID, HI, U.S. Territories)		Protection		2	
	Upland	Restoration	584		
		Protection	20		
	Wetland	Restoration	1,208		
		Protection	25		
Region 2	Upland	Restoration	8,380		
(TX, OK, NM, AZ)		Protection	440		
	Wetland	Restoration	5,580		
		Protection	1,000		
Region 3	Rivers/Streams/Shoreline	Restoration		37	10
(MN, WI, MI, IA, MO, IL, OH, IN)		Protection			
	Upland	Restoration	455		
		Protection			
	Wetland	Restoration	865		
		Protection			
Region 4	Rivers/Streams/Shoreline	Restoration		102.75	2
(NC, SC, GA, FL, MS, AL, LA, AR, KY, TN, U.S. Territories)		Protection		25	
	Upland	Restoration	852		
		Protection	4,750		
	Wetland	Restoration	2,681		
		Protection	6,852		
Region 5	Rivers/Streams/Shoreline	Restoration		39	20
(ME, VT, NH, MA, NY, CT, RI, NJ, PA, DE, WV, MD, VA)		Protection		33	
	Upland	Restoration	825		
		Protection	8,175		
	Wetland	Restoration	3,210		
		Protection	9,700		
Region 7	Rivers/Streams/Shoreline	Restoration		6.00	10
(AK)		Protection		25	
	Upland	Restoration	35		
		Protection	660		
	Wetland	Restoration	30		
		Protection	820		
Region 8	Rivers/Streams/Shoreline	Restoration		30	
(CA, NV)		Protection			
	Upland	Restoration	340		
		Protection			
	Wetland	Restoration	4,750		
		Protection			
Totals			62,237	329.00	52



Schoolyard habitat projects connect children to nature by providing students and teachers the opportunity to learn about wildlife habitat first-hand. USFWS photo.



Culvert restoration promotes natural, self-sustaining populations of native fish species within their historic ranges. USFWS Photo.

Quantifying the anticipated biological benefits of habitat restoration and protection within (or outside) of the focus areas is more problematic. For example, more than 100 at-risk species are referenced in the regional 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 partners seeking assistance, the Coastal Program

will continue to direct its resources to implementing 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 are the official reporting tool for the Coastal 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 program 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 program 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 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 Step-down Plans



Stream restoration and assessment is an integral component of the Coastal Program. USFWS Photo.

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 Coastal Program. The Step-down 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 (NCTC), 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 Step-down 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 program 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 has 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 Coastal Program provides incentives for voluntary protection of threatened, endangered and other species on private and public lands alike.. USFWS photo.

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 1980s, the Service began dedicating staff to the task of developing partnerships with willing partners to improve habitat conditions both on public and private lands. Over the next 2 decades, the program proved that a voluntary, incentive-based approach to habitat conservation works and has a significant future role in the Service's mission.

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 Trust Species. In the case of the Coastal 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 clients of the Coastal Program.

The Coastal 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 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

Coastal ecosystems comprise less than 10 percent of the Nation's land area but support far greater proportions of our living resources. Ultimately, the benefits of the Coastal Program to the Nation are measured by the success of local projects in our coastal ecosystems. This is the "end-game" in which the Service and its partners collaborate 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 Coastal 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.*"

development trends and other significant events will unveil new challenges and opportunities for the Coastal Program. The basic foundations of the program will, however, remain constant and the value of public-private partnerships will only increase.



Our Nation's coasts provide important fish and wildlife habitat, far beyond their limited geographic extent.
Photo by Joe Milmoe / USFWS.

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

Coastal Program
<http://www.fws.gov/coastal>

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