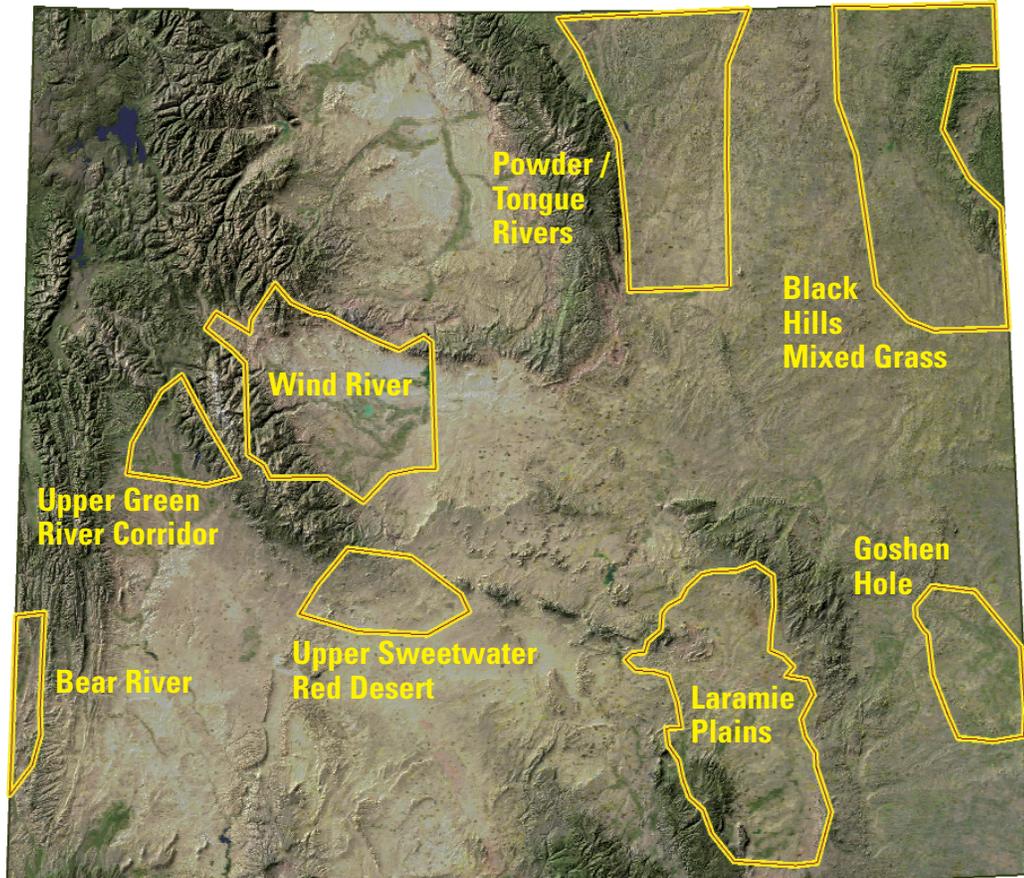


Wyoming



Wyoming Partners Program Conservation Focus Areas

Introduction

Wyoming is where the Great Plains meets the Rocky Mountains; it is situated astride the Continental Divide and provides the headwaters for 4 major river systems — the Colorado, Missouri, Great Basin, and Columbia.

Wyoming encompasses approximately 62 million acres of which 48% is federal, 42% is private, 6% is state, and 4% is tribal. Historic homestead patterns have resulted in private ownership being more homogeneous across the eastern plains and restricted primarily to valley floors and river corridors in western mountainous regions. The Nature Conservancy has identified 52 distinct habitat

types or ecological systems within the state's borders, providing a diversity of habitats for more than 800 species of fish and wildlife.

Agriculture is a major industry and primary land use; approximately 9,300 farms and ranches exist in Wyoming, averaging 3,472 acres in size. It is not uncommon to work with landowners that either own and/or operate ranches exceeding 50,000 acres. As a result, fish and wildlife resources and associated habitats are incredibly diverse on a single ranch or farm, providing a variety of habitat improvement opportunities. The Partners Program targets fish and wildlife species or habitats for migratory trust species; federally threatened,

endangered, and candidate species; Wyoming Game and Fish Department Species of Special Concern identified in the Native Species Status Matrix; and tribal-designated species of importance or cultural significance.

Several landscape prioritization efforts have taken place since the Partners Program's inception. As in most states early on, program delivery for exposure was statewide. As the program grew in popularity with landowners and stakeholders, it became apparent that a collaborative approach was needed to more effectively target habitat restoration efforts. Priority areas were initially developed based on large-scale watersheds,

with biologists' working knowledge at the state and local level. As technology and information transfer improved with time, especially remote sensing and habitat and species mapping, focus areas became much more refined. Today, conservation focus areas are a blend of local biologists' working knowledge and geographic information, including trust species occurrence, land ownership patterns, emerging threats, partnership opportunities, presence of refuge and unique lands, and tribal trust responsibilities. The result is the emergence of eight conservation focus areas. Wyoming consists of two Partners Program staff located within the Wind River and Goshen Hole focus areas. Staffed conservation focus areas receive approximately 70% of Partners Program staff time; the

remaining 30% is split among the Bear River, Laramie Plains, Upper Green River, Powder/Tongue Rivers, and Black Hills Mixed Grass focus areas. A limited presence is maintained in unstaffed focus areas building program awareness and partner relationships until such time additional program expansion can occur.

Focus area development and refinement incorporated extensive stakeholder knowledge base and existing ongoing planning efforts of several organizations, such as the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Shoshone and Arapaho Tribes (A Plan for the Management of Wildlife on the Wind River Reservation, Wind River Fisheries Management Plan - Lowland Lakes, Reservoirs, Rivers

and Streams); Wyoming Game and Fish Department (Wildlife and Fisheries Strategic Plans and Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy); local conservation districts; The Nature Conservancy (ecoregional planning process); Ducks Unlimited; Audubon (Important Bird Areas); and Partners in Flight and Intermountain West Joint Venture's Wyoming Plans. In addition to daily interaction with stakeholders and the assistance they have already provided in developing Partners Program priority areas, a follow up survey was sent to individual stakeholders asking for specific input in this strategic planning process.



Greater sage-grouse and other sagebrush obligate species benefit from sagebrush-steppe partnership activities. USFWS Photo.

Wyoming

Bear River Focus Area

The Bear River Conservation Focus Area encompasses 322,844 acres of which 64.5% is in public ownership and 35.5% in private. The upper Bear River, with its broad willow-dominated floodplain and adjacent grass and sagebrush uplands makes up the heart of this priority area. Primary Partners Program activities center on wetland, riparian, and stream restoration. Partners that have assisted in project development include USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Uinta County Conservation District,

Trout Unlimited, Ducks Unlimited, and individual private landowners.

Several native fish species of concern that inhabit the 630 miles of perennial streams include the leatherside chub, mountain sucker and, most notably, the Bonneville cutthroat trout. For a species to attain special concern status by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, the population is facing declining habitats, is physically isolated, or is at extremely low density throughout its historic range. Specific and on-going threats to these species include stream modification, urban expansion, declining riparian health, and de-watering. The focus of Partners Program fisheries projects is to remove fish passage barriers, increase available habitat, and improve stream stability using natural channel design.

Approximately 24,000 acres of palustrine wetlands, mainly located within the broad floodplains of the Bear River and its tributaries, are home to several species of concern

including the white-faced ibis, greater sandhill crane, and Wilson's phalarope. Since 2000, 56 acres of palustrine emergent wetland habitat have been restored and 430 acres of wet meadow habitat have been enhanced for migratory waterbirds. In addition, 7,900 feet of willow riparian habitat have been improved through livestock management and off-site water developments. Urban expansion is the primary threat to wetland habitats in the valley.

Priority Species

- Mallard
- Northern pintail
- Greater sage-grouse
- White-faced ibis
- Sandhill crane
- Black-necked stilt
- American avocet
- Wilson's phalarope
- Bonneville cutthroat trout
- Leatherside chub
- Mountain sucker



Palustrine wetlands provide excellent habitat for high priority waterfowl, shorebird, and waterbird species. Photo by Mark Hogan, USFWS.

Bear River Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

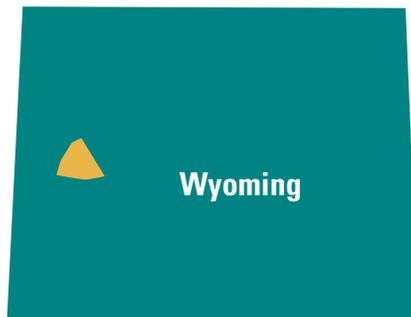
- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 60 acres
- Riparian/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 31 acres (including 5,200 feet of in-stream work and fish barrier removal)

Partnerships

- Number of private landowners: 5
- Amount of technical assistance: 15 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:4

Related Plans

- Intermountain West Joint Venture – Wyoming Plan
- Wyoming Partners in Flight – Wyoming Conservation Plan
- The Nature Conservancy, Rocky Mountain Eco-regional Plan and Wyoming Basins Ecoregional Plan
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan and Intermountain West Joint Venture Region Shorebird Plan
- Wyoming Game and Fish Strategic Habitat Plan, Terrestrial, Aquatic, Non-game Bird and Mammal Plans
- Audubon – Important Bird Areas of Wyoming



Upper Green River Corridor Focus Area

The 503,163-acre Upper Green River Corridor Conservation Focus Area is bordered by the Wind River Mountain Range to the north, Gros Ventre and Wyoming mountain ranges to the west, and the mesa lands to the south. The Upper Green River is a biologically complex and diverse landscape, ranging from 13,000-foot peaks and alpine habitats to 7,000-foot arid, high elevation desert. Positioned between several mountain ranges, the Upper Green River is well known for critical grizzly bear, wolf, moose, and elk habitat, as well as shorebird and waterfowl migration corridors.

The most striking feature of this glacially formed valley is the 53,000 acres of palustrine emergent wetlands and lakes which provide breeding habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, and waterbirds, including trumpeter swans and common loons. Since 2000, 47.5 acres of palustrine emergent wetland have been restored, with 623 acres of surrounding upland habitat improved through grazing management agreements. Threats to wetland habitats in the valley are drainage, nutrient loading, and subdivision. This part of Sublette County has experienced significant population growth with the current oil and gas boom of the Pinedale Anticline and the Jonah Field.

The valley floor and surrounding foothills are predominately sagebrush-steppe and grassland totaling 310,000 acres. The area is considered primary habitat for greater sage-grouse and is currently facing significant threat from subdivision and extraction industries. Several local land trusts are currently securing conservation easements to maintain open space, migration corridors and unfragmented habitats.

Extensive ribbons of riparian and wet meadow habitats exist along the Green and New Fork rivers and their tributaries, providing important multi-layered structure for migrating and resident riparian avian species. Riparian communities are of great importance to western wildlife. These areas cover only 2-3% of the land surface, yet 75% of Wyoming's wildlife rely on these limited habitats for all or part of their life cycles. The Partners Program has worked with several landowners to construct fence to manage livestock on 2.4 miles of riparian habitat.

Streams and rivers of the Upper Green are home to native fishes like the Colorado cutthroat trout, mountain whitefish, and mountain sucker. Irrigation diversions, road crossings, and dewatering are the major threats to these species. To date, the Partners Program's role has been providing technical assistance to landowners and agencies on stream restoration and fish passage design. There is much interest in this area for improving fish habitat and the Partners Program will continue to explore opportunities with partners.

Priority Species

- Trumpeter swan
- Greater sage-grouse
- Common loon
- Ferruginous hawk
- Green-tailed towhee
- Vesper sparrow
- Colorado cutthroat trout
- Grizzly bear
- Gray wolf



Oil and gas development threatens wildlife habitat by creating roads, wells, and gravel pads, which fragment habitat and create enough disturbance that sensitive wildlife species (e.g., greater sage-grouse) are on the decline. USFWS Photo.



Wetland, grassland, sagebrush-steppe complexes provide ideal habitat for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds, as well as resident species such as grouse. Photo by Mark Hogan, USFWS.

Upper Green River Corridor Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

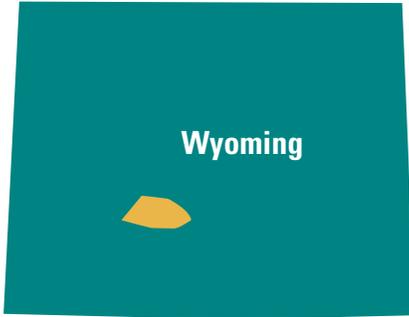
- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 60 acres
- Riparian/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 26.6 miles (includes 3,000 feet of in-stream work and fish barrier removal)

Partnerships

- Number of private landowners: 5
- Amount of technical assistance: 10 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:4

Related Plans

- Intermountain West Joint Venture – Wyoming plan
- Wyoming Partners in Flight – Wyoming Conservation Plan
- The Nature Conservancy, Rocky Mountain Eco-regional Plan and Wyoming Basins Eco-regional Plan
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan and Intermountain West Joint Venture Region Shorebird Plan
- Wyoming Game and Fish Strategic Habitat Plan, Terrestrial, Aquatic, Non-game Bird and Mammal Plans



Upper Sweetwater/Red Desert Focus Area

The Upper Sweetwater/Red Desert Conservation Focus Area was developed over the past few years. Agencies and conservation organizations have identified several terrestrial and aquatic species at risk which inhabit riparian, wetland, and sagebrush communities within this focus area. The Nature Conservancy has identified 29 known rare plant species, eight rare animal species and 18 priority communities under its ecoregional planning process. Similarly, Partners in Flight has developed a priority species classification system which

identifies species that clearly need conservation action based on declining population trends and/or significant habitat loss.

The 706,000-acre Upper Sweetwater/Red Desert Conservation Focus Area is in a high elevation setting, characterized by sagebrush steppe containing numerous playa wetlands, springs, ephemeral and perennial streams, and riparian corridors. Riparian corridors are dominated by either a shrub layer of willow, thin leaf alder and chokecherry, or an herbaceous layer of sedge, rush, and grass species. Land ownership is 93% public and 7% private. Like in much of the West, rivers, streams, lakes, and wetlands are in private ownership. Primary land use is livestock grazing, and a unique feature of this landscape is the lack of fencing which benefits migratory big-game animals like moose, elk, and pronghorn. However, it leaves landowners and land managers little control over grazing patterns and during the warm summer months livestock move off the large

expanse of uplands and spend a significant amount of time around permanent water sources such as riparian corridors, wet meadows, and playa lakes. Much of the Partners Program work has concentrated on fencing and excluding/limiting livestock access to riparian habitats and other water sources on private land while minimizing the influence of fencing on migratory resident wildlife. Since 2000, approximately 28.5 miles of riparian habitat and 88,000 acres of sagebrush steppe have been improved through grazing system development. The catalyst for the priority area is the greater sage-grouse. Along with improving sagebrush/grass plant communities for suitable nesting habitat, Partners Program projects are aimed at improving wet meadow and riparian habitat quality for brood rearing and late summer habitats for sage grouse chicks.

Improperly designed roads and road crossings, irrigation diversions, and historic gold mining practices have all contributed to stream channel, wet meadow, and



Vast open grasslands, sagebrush-steppe, wetlands, and riparian areas provide an ideal mix of habitat to host abundant wildlife. Native fish, upland and wetland migratory bird species, as well as resident grouse all benefit. Photo by Mark Hogan, USFWS.

riparian degradation. In 2005, roughly 3.4 miles of stream restoration were completed for native fishes. Indirect benefits from stream restoration include raised water table and bank storage; as well as wetland, wet meadow, and riparian habitat improvement.

Priority Species

- Mallard
- Gadwall
- Greater sage-grouse
- Bald eagle
- Northern harrier
- Ferruginous hawk
- Mountain plover
- American avocet
- Burrowing owl
- Willow flycatcher
- Veery
- Wilson's warbler
- Sage thrasher
- Yellowstone cutthroat trout

Upper Sweetwater/Red Desert Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 100 acres
- Riparian/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 40.3 miles (includes 1,500 feet of in-stream work and fish barrier removal)

Partnerships

- Number of private landowners: 10
- Amount of technical assistance: 15 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:4

Related Plans

- Intermountain West Joint Venture – Wyoming Plan
- Wyoming Partners in Flight - Wyoming Conservation Plan
- The Nature Conservancy, Rocky Mountain Eco-regional Plan and Wyoming Basins Eco-regional Plan
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan and Intermountain West Joint Venture Region Shorebird Plan
- Wyoming Game and Fish Strategic Habitat Plan, Terrestrial, Aquatic, Non-game Bird and Mammal Plans



Wyoming

Wind River Focus Area

Included in the 2.1-million-acre Wind River Conservation Focus Area is the Wind River Reservation, Ocean Lake drift plain, and upper Wind River drainage. Granite peaks, tilt bed formation foothills, and broad valley floor characterize the Wind River basin. Over 3,000 miles of low elevation perennial streams exist, creating extensive areas of nearly level to gently sloping landforms. As a result, the basin is one of the leading agricultural regions in the state with more than 260,000 acres of irrigated crop and hay lands. Sagebrush and grassland make up the majority of the area at 1.7 million acres, with

livestock production being the primary land use in the valley. Of the total land base in this focus area, tribal lands make up 63%, private lands 27%, and public lands 10%.

In 1998, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed

between the Service and Shoshone and Arapaho Tribes to jointly work on habitat projects for tribally designated fish and wildlife species of cultural importance. With the Tribes being the major landowner in the Wind River Drainage, and having a broad spectrum of culturally significant fish and



Restored wetlands provide habitat for a diversity of waterfowl species. Photo by Mark Hogan, USFWS.

wildlife species, it's not uncommon to have a stream/riparian improvement project targeting Yellowstone cutthroat trout and willow flycatcher that also benefits moose and grizzly bear. Habitat restoration efforts have concentrated on palustrine emergent wetland, sagebrush-steppe, cottonwood gallery, willow riparian, and riverine habitats.

Shaped by glaciation, the Wind River Mountains contain high elevation lakes, ponds, and wetlands that provide breeding habitat for waterfowl such as ring-necked duck, lesser scaup, and bufflehead. The predominant feature of this focus area, the valley floor, holds 43,618 acres of palustrine emergent wetlands, either associated with river floodplains, flood irrigation wastewater, or wind blown depressions. Higher density wetlands occur in three distinctive locations and individual wetland priority areas have been

established for the Wind River. Since 1998, partnerships with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Tribes, private landowners, Ducks Unlimited, Water for Wildlife, Wind River Alliance, Marathon Oil, and Popo Agie Conservation District have led to the restoration of more than 580 acres of wetland habitat.

Native fish declines are well documented and are chiefly a result of non-native species introductions, habitat degradation, dewatering, and fish barriers. For example, prior to European settlement, the Yellowstone cutthroat trout occupied the largest geographic range of the 14 recognized cutthroat trout subspecies (Varley and Gresswell 1988; Behnke 1992). Varley and Gresswell estimated 10% of fluvial historic habitats still contain the subspecies. In general, all cutthroat trout populations are highly fragmented and restricted to headwater environments where

public ownership and relative inaccessibility have moderated detrimental impacts. Restoring lower elevation habitat and improving fish passage are the objectives of the Partners Program. Since 2000, 11 fish barriers have been removed, 14 miles of river habitat have been opened for fish passage, and three miles of riverine habitat have been restored for the benefit of Yellowstone cutthroat trout, ling, and other native fishes.

Priority species

- Mallard
- Lesser scaup
- Bald eagle
- Osprey
- Willow flycatcher
- Yellowstone cutthroat trout
- Grizzly bear
- Gray wolf



River restoration project completed on the Popo Agie River. Photo by Mark Hogan, USFWS.

Wind River Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 350 acres
- Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 20,000 acres
- Riparian/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 68 miles (includes 15,000 feet of in-stream work and fish barrier removal)

Partnerships

- Number of private landowners: 40
- Amount of technical assistance: 75 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:5

Related Plans

- A Plan for the Management of Wildlife on the Wind River Reservation – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Wind River Management Plan – Lowland Lakes and Reservoirs
- Wind River Management Plan – Rivers and Streams
- Intermountain West Joint Venture – Wyoming Plan
- Wyoming Partners in Flight – Wyoming Conservation Plan
- The Nature Conservancy, Rocky Mountain Eco-regional Plan and Wyoming Basins Ecoregional Plan
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan and Intermountain West Joint Venture Region Shorebird Plan
- Wyoming Game and Fish Strategic Habitat Plan, Terrestrial, Aquatic, Non-game bird and Mammal Plans
- Audubon – Important Bird Areas of Wyoming



Wyoming

Laramie Plains Focus Area

Positioned between the Laramie and Medicine Bow mountain ranges, the Laramie Plains Conservation Focus Area encompasses 2.5 million acres of high elevation mixed-grass prairie and sagebrush communities. The plains and associated aquatic systems are relatively intact with only 136,000 acres of irrigated hay or croplands; the primary land use is livestock production. The most common threat to fish and wildlife habitat is fragmentation from residential development and urban

sprawl. The Shirley Basin is included in this focus area, and is known for its large white-tailed prairie dog colonies, occurrence of swift fox, and successful black-footed ferret reintroductions.

More than 101,000 acres of shallow lakes and wetlands are scattered throughout the basin, providing migration and nesting habitat for waterfowl and water birds. Located in the southern portion of the Laramie Plains, Mortenson



Shallow water wetlands, imbedded in thousands of acres of dry upland sagebrush-steppe and short-grass prairie, are key nesting, stopover, and feeding sites for a variety of waterfowl and shorebird species. Photo by Mark Hogan, USFWS.

Lake National Wildlife Refuge and Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge are nestled into a geologic wind blown hollow of higher density wetland sites.

Mortenson Lake National Wildlife Refuge is home to the endangered Wyoming toad, extirpated from its historic range by the early 1990s and recently reintroduced into Refuge as well as restored wetlands and wet meadows of the Partners Program's Buford Foundation Project. A blanket Safe Harbor Agreement has been completed for the area and other reintroduction sites are planned.

More than 14,000 acres of cottonwood gallery and willow riparian corridors provide habitat for a variety of neotropical migrants in this high elevation plain. Seventy-three avian species

have been identified as using riparian habitats and, as such, serve as indicators of riparian health. Several of the riparian obligate and dependant avian species, like the willow flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo, are some of the most imperiled species in Wyoming. One of the best ways to help the largest number of bird species and other wildlife in Wyoming is by maintaining or improving riparian habitats. Most common threats to riparian health are subdivision, over-grazing, stream down-cutting and invasive species. The Partners Program recently partnered with Rock Creek Weed Coordinated Resource Management to develop an integrated pest management strategy for controlling invasive weed species within a 25-mile-long project area. Invasive weed species have reduced or degraded native

riparian and wet meadow habitats for several species of concern, such as wood peewee, willow flycatcher, warbling vireo, and orange-crowned warbler. Biological, mechanical, and chemical control methods have been utilized to manage or eliminate invasive species. Follow-up grazing management plans, the replanting of shrub and herb layers, fencing, and off-site water developments are practices employed to improve riparian health.

With the help of several partners, Partners Program restoration efforts have concentrated on wetland, riparian, and stream habitats for threatened and endangered species, state species of concern and migratory trust species. Partners include the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Forest

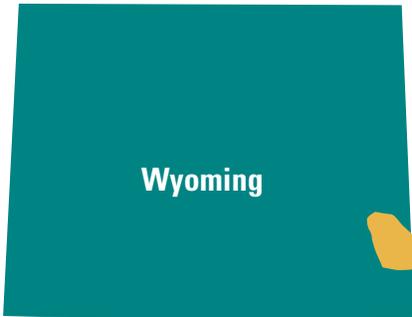


River restoration projects provide key habitat for native trout. Photo by Mark Hogan, USFWS.

Service, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Medicine Bow and Laramie Rivers conservation districts, Wyoming Wildlife Trust Fund, Carbon County Weed and Pest, Ducks Unlimited, and Trout Unlimited.

- Priority Species**
- Mallard
 - Northern pintail
 - Mountain plover
 - Wilson’s phalarope
 - Yellow-billed cuckoo
 - Willow flycatcher
 - Warbling vireo
 - Orange-crowned warbler
 - Wyoming toad
 - White-tailed prairie dog
 - Swift fox
 - Black-footed ferret

- Laramie Plains Focus Area Five-year Targets**
- Habitat**
- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 100 acres
 - Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 10,000 acres
 - Riparian/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 32 miles (includes 10,000 feet of in-stream work and fish barrier removal)
- Partnerships**
- Number of private landowners: 25
 - Amount of technical assistance: 15 staff days
 - Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:5
- Related Plans**
- Intermountain West Joint Venture – Wyoming Plan
 - Wyoming Partners in Flight - Wyoming Conservation Plan
 - North American Waterfowl Management Plan
 - U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan and Intermountain West Joint Venture Region Shorebird Plan
 - Wyoming Game and Fish Strategic Habitat Plan, Terrestrial, Aquatic, Non-game Bird and Mammal Plans
 - Audubon – Important Bird Areas of Wyoming
 - Rock, Foote, and Wagonhound Creek Coordinated Resource Management Plan



Goshen Hole Focus Area

The Goshen Hole Lowlands is a great widening of the North Platte River Valley defined by a 400-500 foot escarpment to the west and south. A part of the Great Plains, the land is undulating to rolling, and the dominant land cover is short, mid and tall grasses. The Goshen Hole Conservation Focus Area has a land area of 861,000 acres, of which 15% is used for irrigated cropland, 15% for dry land cropland, and 60% rangeland. Farmland is concentrated in the center of the lowland and contains the highest wetland densities. As a



Partners Program biologists work with farmers to restore wetlands previously drained for crop production. Photo by Mark Hogan, USFWS.

result, draining and land leveling for cropping account for the greatest causes of wetland losses and continues to be the largest threat. Focus has been on restoring wetland and adjacent shortgrass upland habitats for an assortment of ground-nesting species including mountain plover, McCown’s longspur, bobolink, and a variety of

waterfowl and shorebirds. Since 2000, roughly 400 acres of wetland habitat and more than 1000 acres of upland habitat have been restored with partners, including the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and Ducks Unlimited.

Goshen Hole contains critical riparian habitat for the endangered Preble's meadow jumping mouse and wet meadow habitat for the threatened Ute ladies'-tresses. More than four miles of habitat have been improved through Partners Program projects using practices such as fencing, off-site water development, grazing plans, grassland seeding, and native shrub planting.

Priority Species

- Mallard
- Northern pintail
- Mountain plover
- American avocet
- Long-billed curlew
- McCown's longspur
- Bobolink
- Preble's meadow jumping mouse (Endangered)
- Ute ladies'-tresses (Threatened)

Goshen Hole Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 300 acres
- Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 2,000 acres
- Riparian/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 15.3 miles (includes 1,500 feet of in-stream work and fish barrier removal)

Partnerships

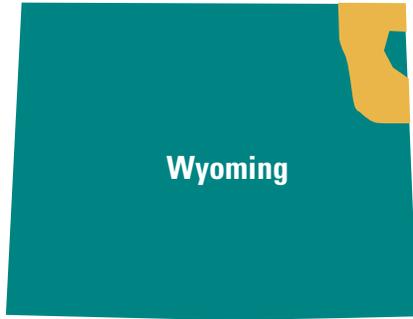
- Number of private landowners: 40
- Amount of technical assistance: 25 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:4

Related Plans

- Intermountain West Joint Venture – Wyoming Plan
- Wyoming Partners in Flight - Wyoming Conservation Plan
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan and Intermountain West Joint Venture Region Shorebird Plan
- Wyoming Game and Fish Strategic Habitat Plan, Terrestrial, Aquatic, Non-game Bird and Mammal Plans
- Audubon – Important Bird Areas of Wyoming



Goshen Hole Lowlands. Photo by Mark Hogan, USFWS.



Black Hills Mixed Grass Focus Area

Taking in portions of Crook and Weston counties, the Black Hills Mixed Grass Conservation Focus Area contains the forest edge and periphery grass and sagebrush lands around the Black Hills. Being the largest priority area in the state at 2.9 million acres, and with 78% in private ownership, many habitat restoration and enhancement opportunities exist for imperiled grassland species. The southern extent of the focus area includes a small segment of Thunder Basin National Grasslands, known for ferruginous hawks, Swift fox, sage grouse,

burrowing owls, and black-tailed prairie dogs.

Breeding populations of most upland birds, within the grassland and sagebrush-steppe communities, have well documented declines related to a number of complex habitat quality and quantity factors including climate change. More than 80% of the landscape within this focus area remains intact creating a situation in which private landowners will play a key role in providing suitable habitat for these declining species. Partners Program efforts have concentrated on improving these habitats by constructing livestock fencing and water developments, and developing grazing management plans for the benefit of grass and sage dependent species. Implementing grazing strategies or systems allows landowners to move away from season-long grazing patterns toward a rotational system that benefits grass, sage, and forb production.

Threats in the focus area are mainly in the form of habitat fragmentation from subdivision and energy extraction industries; approximately 12% of the land base has been human modified by urban expansion, mining, and agriculture. Habitat restoration partners include the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Crook and Weston conservation districts, Ducks Unlimited, and private land owners.

Priority Species

- Northern pintail
- Greater sage-grouse
- Golden eagle
- Ferruginous hawk
- Greater sandhill crane
- Mountain plover
- Burrowing owl
- Brewer's sparrow
- Western silvery minnow
- Lake chub
- Swift fox
- Black-tailed prairie dog



Wetland restoration project within mixed-grass prairie. Photo by Mark Hogan, USFWS.

Black Hills Mixed Grass Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 200 acres
- Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 5,000 acres
- Riparian/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 10 miles

Partnerships

- Number of private landowners: 20
- Amount of technical assistance: 25 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:4

Related Plans

- Northern Great Plains Joint Venture
- Wyoming Partners in Flight – Wyoming Conservation Plan
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan
- Wyoming Game and Fish Strategic Habitat Plan, Terrestrial, Aquatic, Non-game Bird and Mammal Plans
- Audubon – Important Bird Areas of Wyoming



Riparian grazing systems help maintain healthy meandering stream channels. Photo by Mark Hogan, USFWS.

Wyoming

Powder/Tongue Rivers Focus Area

Starting at the eastern slope of the Big Horn Mountains and extending to the Powder River, this area catches considerable summertime precipitation and more closely resembles the southern Rockies in vegetative land cover. Mixed grass and sagebrush make up more than 92% of the area, and roughly 80% is in private ownership. Wetlands are commonly found in association with floodplain and riparian habitats.

The Powder River is distinctive in that it is one of the few remaining prairie rivers that is free flowing, unregulated by dams or diversions. The Powder River remains relatively intact with endemic fish species, like the sturgeon chub, adapted to turbid water conditions and low summertime flows. Emerging concerns are the effects of higher quality water being added to the system from extractive industries. Closer to the Big Horns, coldwater fisheries are facing threats from irrigation diversions, dewatering, and channel degradation from roads, culverts and subdivisions. The Partners Program and interested partners are replacing fish barriers with in-stream cross-vane structures that allow fish passage at all flow levels. In association with these activities, more than 250 acres of floodplain wetlands have been restored, enhanced, or

established providing habitat for waterfowl, other waterbirds, and native fishes.

The Partners Program has worked extensively to improve more than 19,000 acres of upland habitat and 40 miles of riparian habitat by means of livestock fencing, off-site water developments, and grazing management systems. In 2005, with coalbed natural gas industry support and assistance, the Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and Lake DeSmet Conservation District developed the Johnson County Sagebrush Habitat Improvement Project. This initiative was the first to implement and test methods to rapidly produce habitat inventories and information for private landowners using a combination of geographic information and on-the-



River restoration projects benefit native fish species, as well as riparian nesting neotropical migratory birds. Photo by Mark Hogan, USFWS.

ground data collection. From these inventories, rangeland and habitat management plans were developed that benefit sage grouse and other sagebrush-dependent species of concern. Phase one has recently been completed, targeting 40,000 acres of sagebrush habitat for grazing plans, mechanical treatments, forb plantings, livestock fencing, and water developments.

Priority species

- Northern pintail
- Greater sage-grouse
- Greater sandhill crane
- Wilson’s phalarope
- Sage thrasher
- Sage sparrow
- Yellowstone cutthroat trout
- Sturgeon chub
- Sauger
- Shovelnose sturgeon

Powder/Tongue Rivers Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 100 acres
- Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 50,000 acres
- Riparian/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 17 miles
(includes 10,000 feet of in-stream work and fish barrier removal)

Partnerships

- Number of private landowners: 40
- Amount of technical assistance: 15 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:7

Related Plans

- Northern Great Plains Joint Venture – Wyoming Plan
- The Nature Conservancy, Rocky Mountain Eco-regional Plan and Wyoming Basins Ecoregional Plan
- Wyoming Partners in Flight – Wyoming Conservation Plan
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan and Intermountain West Joint Venture Region Shorebird Plan
- Wyoming Game and Fish Strategic Habitat Plan, Terrestrial, Aquatic, Non-game Bird and Mammal Plans
- Audubon – Important Bird Areas of Wyoming

Wyoming Statewide Goals



Improve Information Sharing and Communication

Funding and technical assistance to Partners Program partners generally has been directed to the project level. State-level networking and coordination varies as opportunities and emerging issues may develop.

Five-year Targets

- Maintain working relationships with partners and stakeholders on individual habitat restoration planning documents.
- Provide partners with an annual accomplishment report.
- Improve congressional outreach with project-related field tours.
- Develop statewide stream restoration and screening guidelines.
- Develop statewide wetland restoration guidelines.
- Initiate state-level landowner and/or partner award/recognition program.

Enhance Our Workforce

The Wyoming Partners Program currently funds two full-time staff, including one field biologist and the state coordinator. In order to maintain a high level of professionalism, each Partners Program staff member will receive, at a minimum, 40 hours of training annually. Training may be in the areas of habitat restoration techniques, GIS, advanced partnership development, communication, and policy/administration.

Wyoming has identified new conservation focus areas that currently have no Partners Program staff to accomplish habitat restoration projects. In order to address the needs of these focus areas, additional staff will be needed. Partnership opportunities already exist within these new focus areas; if additional field staff is added to the Wyoming program, on-the-ground habitat restoration projects can begin immediately. There are already many interested landowners who are eager to undertake habitat restoration projects on their lands.

In accordance with the Service's Employee Performance Appraisal System, performance and special achievement awards will be used to recognize exceptional projects and staff efforts.

Five-year Targets

- Complete a minimum of 40 hours training each year, in any of the following areas:
 - Habitat restoration techniques (e.g., Rosgen method river restoration)
 - Leadership
 - Outreach and communication
 - Partnerships
 - Policy and administration
- Increase current staffing levels to three full-time equivalents, to achieve minimum staffing capacity for the Wyoming Partners Program.
- Use Partners Program state office location in Lander as a mentoring site for new entry-level Partners Program staff.
- Continue to refine prioritization process.
- Develop long-term funding options with Partners Program partner assistance.

Increase Accountability

Five-year Targets

- Implement an annual status review process for a minimum of 5% of all currently active habitat restoration projects.
- Input HabITS entries on a quarterly basis and provide photos with each completed project.

External Factors

The Wyoming conservation focus areas generally involve intact landscapes, with ranching as the primary land use. The economic and social pressures to develop or fragment these areas could have a significant impact on the Partners Program's ability to deliver habitat projects in an effective and efficient manner. Oil and gas development continues to threaten these intact landscapes and has negative impacts on federal trust species. Impacts to Bureau of Land Management lands can also have an impact on the Wyoming Partners Program's ability to deliver an effective private lands habitat restoration effort. Many cattle producers rely on Bureau of Land Management cattle grazing leases for summer pasture. The grazing leases increase the acres of available forage while also taking pressure off their own land, saving that forage for winter pasture or supplemental hay. With the large increase in oil and gas leases in the past few years, there is additional pressure to the ranch economy, potentially putting small producers out of business. Large Wyoming ranches provide a tremendous amount of habitat for broad suites of high priority federal trust resources. The Partners Program has the partnerships in place (i.e., willing landowners and organizations) to expand the delivery of the private lands habitat restoration program to address many of these threats to fish and wildlife populations.

Wyoming has been in a long-term drought, putting stress on cattle ranchers because of low forage yield, minimal available water, and record high temperatures. In addition, fuel, equipment, and supply costs continue to escalate. This has reduced the ability for private landowners to assist with matching funds for habitat restoration projects. If drought continues, and prices stay high for fuel and supplies, this will ultimately reduce how much the Partners Program can stretch its program base funds.