



Alaska's Coastal Program

Caring for Alaska's Coastal Habitats



Southcentral Alaska



USFWS photo.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal Program is to conserve healthy coastal ecosystems for the benefit of fish, wildlife, and people. It accomplishes this through cooperative partnerships that identify, restore, and protect habitat in priority coastal areas.

Importance of Coastal Resources

Alaska's world-famous anadromous fish resources and shellfish industry depend on coastal ecosystems. Estuaries, nearshore marine waters, and coastal wetlands are also vital to the state's spectacular seabird and shorebird populations. All of Alaska's threatened and endangered animals live in or near coastal or marine habitats.

Nationwide, coastal ecosystems make up about 10 percent of the land area, but 80 percent of the nation's waterfowl and non-game migratory bird species depend on these areas for nesting, foraging, and resting habitats.

Why Do Alaska's Coastal Habitats Need Help?

More than half of Alaska's people live in southcentral coastal ecosystems. This area supports a diversity of fish and wildlife, while providing jobs, homes, subsistence foods, and recreational opportunities. With continued population increases, there is a growing need to maintain and restore the functions of these irreplaceable ecosystems. Alaska's fish and wildlife habitats are under pressure from:

- Urbanization and increasing population;
- Rapid expansion of recreational and commercial enterprises, such as fishing, tourism, aquaculture, and harbor activities and facilities;
- Oil and fuel spills.

Current Focus is on Cook Inlet

The Alaska Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service received funds in 2000 to expand the Service's Coastal Program to the Cook Inlet Watershed. There may be future opportunities to expand the program to other resource-rich coastal areas in Alaska.

Program Facts

The Coastal Program is a non-regulatory, pro-active program. It relies on voluntary partnership building to restore and protect a variety of wetland, riparian, and upland coastal habitats.

The Coastal Program achieves these goals by:

- Including projects on both private and public lands;
- Working closely with a wide variety of partners, including other Federal, State, Native, and local government agencies, conservation organizations, businesses, and private landowners;
- Providing partners with technical and financial assistance to produce on-the-ground results benefitting fish and wildlife resources in coastal areas;
- Leveraging Service funds with partner funds and in-kind services to increase our ability to conserve important habitats;
- Assisting partners in applying for Service Coastal Wetlands, North American Wetlands Conservation, and other grants.

What Does the Coastal Program Provide?

In Alaska, the Coastal Program provides staff, funds, and assistance to implement:

- Habitat protection and restoration;
- Essential data compilation and analysis;
- Information and education programs.

Project Examples

Projects that would contribute toward goals of Alaska's Coastal Program could include:

- Restoration of stream-side and coastal habitats within the Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound watersheds;
- Improvements to fish passage;
- Control of exotic invasive species;
- Opportunities to gather information about threats to coastal resources, and to develop potential solutions to these threats;
- Outreach projects that inform the public about the values of coastal habitats and low-impact methods of access, use or development;
- Other work with partners to protect undeveloped coastal mud flats, tidal marshes, wetlands, riparian habitats, and forests.



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Accomplishments

Alaska's Coastal Program, with an initial focus on the Cook Inlet region, was established in FY2000. To date, the program has funded twelve projects, including partnerships with diverse agencies and organizations to restore habitat, inventory resources, conduct outreach, and provide technical assistance. On-going projects include:

- Stream bank restoration and protection, in an agreement with a private landowner on Willow Creek in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley and with Alaska Division of Parks and Recreation on the Kenai Peninsula's Crooked Creek;
- Replacement of two bridges that compromise anadromous fish passage and habitat on Bodenbug Creek in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, in an agreement with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough;
- Initiation of a strategic land conservation program to protect important floodplain communities and wildlife habitat on the lower Anchor River, in an agreement with The Nature Conservancy and the Kachemak Heritage Land Trust;
- Support for the Great Land Trust to map important wildlife habitat, reach out to interested landowners, and identify and implement conservation options for high priority lands within the Anchorage Bowl.

Accomplishments (continued)

- Ecoregional characterization and evaluation of conservation priorities of the Cook Inlet Lowlands, in a partnership with The Nature Conservancy with Challenge Cost Share funds;
- Identification of priority habitats through collection of baseline imagery of Kachemak Bay and Lower Cook Inlet kelp beds, in partnership with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve;
- Identification of fish passage problems through an inventory of the condition of road culverts and bridges in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, in partnership with Alaska Department of Fish and Game;
- Technical assistance to the Native Village of Eklutna to evaluate aquatic and riparian habitat of the lower Eklutna River;
- Sponsorship of an eagle electrocution prevention workshop, in partnership with Service law enforcement and other agencies and organizations.

For more information about these or other projects in the Cook Inlet region, please contact John DeLapp of the Ecological Services Anchorage Field Office at 907/271 1799.

Dunlin and other shorebirds migrate to and breed in Alaska by the millions. They are among the many fish and wildlife species that depend on healthy Alaskan coastal ecosystems. USFWS photo.

For more information about the Coastal Program in Alaska, please contact Mike Roy of the USFWS Regional Office at 907/786 3925

Visit the USFWS Coastal Program home page at:
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