

## Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

### Program Overview

Today, over 70 percent of the fish and wildlife habitat remaining in the nation is on private lands. Consequently, it is imperative that agencies charged with management, conservation, and protection of these resources work collaboratively with the private stewards of this land to conserve our nation's watersheds and landscapes. The President's management agenda calls for a cooperative conservation approach to support citizen-centered stewardship of our Nation's natural resources. This vision, as articulated in Executive Order 13352, "Facilitation of Cooperative Conservation," signed August 26, 2004, calls for coordinated Federal actions in concert with local priorities and with respect for "the interests of persons with ownership...in land and other natural resources." The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is an on-the-ground program that embodies the Administration's vision of government that is citizen-centered, accomplishment-oriented, cost efficient and market-based. The Partners Program is ideally suited to deliver this vision in support of the Service's trust species responsibilities. As a result, the Service has established a solid foundation for working with landowners and communities to protect and restore important

fish and wildlife habitats through financial and restoration expertise that makes stewardship affordable for private landowners and other conservation partners. The program also leverages resources to maximize the benefits and minimize the costs for all its projects. On average, the Services succeeds in leveraging Service resources 2:1 (non-Service to Service resources). Most importantly, its success is because it respects the rights of property owners to maintain compatible economic use of their property. By engaging citizens and the private sector as partners, it helps reduce the reliance on regulation to achieve health and sustainability for our Nation's natural heritage and obtains a substantial return on its resources and efforts.

These habitat restoration partnerships result in substantial contributions to the Service's mission to conserve trust species such as migratory birds and inter-jurisdictional native fish, and threatened and endangered species as well as controlling and reducing the spread of invasive species. Much of the work done through the Partners Program provides landowners with alternative sources of income. Outdoor recreation is a \$120 billion industry supporting individuals, communities, and the Nation's economy. For example, the Partners Program supports the recreation industry by maintaining and enhancing habitat for important game and fish species such as bobwhite quail, Eastern brooktrout, and scores of migratory bird species. In a 2004 "National Survey of Hunters and Anglers" conducted by the National Wildlife Federation, 87 percent of those surveyed approved of the Administration's support for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program achieves mission results through performance-based management in conformance with the DOI Strategic Plan:

- The Partners Program held stakeholder meetings across the country as part of its strategic planning process. Both stakeholder input and recommendations from a FY2003 Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) review, called for the program to sharpen its attention on the identification of geographic focus areas in which to concentrate its resources. In FY2005, the program will complete the establishment of a national system of focus areas and begin developing regional step-down action plans.
- The Partners Program is actively engaged in the Administration's efforts to develop common measures of performance for wetlands to ensure consistency in establishing performance goals and accomplishment reporting.
- Activity Based Accounting was implemented in FY2004. This reporting will assist Partners Program managers make more efficient use of appropriated funds and insure program priorities are being pursued.

The Partners Program works to maintain sufficient habitat to keep species such as the sage grouse from the endangered species list and avoid the potential economic impacts of a listing. The Program has also made significant contributions to the recovery of listed species such as the Karner blue butterfly and the Apache trout. It also helps reduce the risk and cost of wildfire damage by controlling fire prone invasive species, such as cheatgrass.

### **New Paths to Success**

During 2002, the Administration used its Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) to review the program and include recommendations to improve the program. The process generated extensive information on program effectiveness and accountability including the need for strategic planning. In FY 2004, in response to those recommendations and with a goal of improving performance, the Partners Program formally began developing a strategic plan by inviting stakeholder and partner input on program goals, objectives, and approaches to habitat restoration.

In FY 2006, the completed strategic plan will begin guiding the program toward (1) clearly defined national and regional habitat goals, (2) improved accountability for federal dollars expended in support of the program and its goals, (3) enhanced communication to achieve greater responsiveness to local plans and conservation priorities, and (4) an expanded commitment to serving additional partners. The program will sharpen its focus on scientifically-supported, collaboratively-established focus areas to deliver its financial and technical assistance.

As recommended in the PART review, focus areas will be established during FY 2006 through a step-down regional process and will reflect existing landscape priority plans. This will enable Service's staff, who are operating in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, to complement Service trust species responsibilities with local conservation efforts to maximize benefits.

For example, the Partners Program will be targeting restoration activities at the Sandhills region of north-central Nebraska to enhance this wetland-grassland ecosystem in a way that sustains profitable private ranching, wildlife and vegetative diversity, and associated water supplies. The Sandhills represent the largest contiguous tract of grassland remaining in the U.S. and provides valuable habitat for waterbirds, shorebirds, and wading birds. Native grass seedings, rotational grazing systems, and wetland and stream restoration will jointly benefit tall-to-midgrass prairie conservation, grassland nesting bird species, waterbirds and sustainable ranching communities. Over 30,000 acres of upland grasses, 5,000 acres of riparian habitat, 5,000 acres of wetlands and wet meadows, and over 15 miles of streams and rivers are expected to be positively impacted through a wide variety of partnerships with the Sandhills Task Force, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Nebraska Cattlemen, Inc., National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, Natural Resources Districts, and more than 25 ranch families.

### **People and Partnerships**

To date, the Partners Program has worked with over 34,400 landowners to voluntarily restore wetlands, streams, grasslands, woodlands and other important habitats that support fish and wildlife. Partnering organizations number over 2,600 and are comprised of non-government organization, municipalities, conservation districts, private landowners and others.

In FY 2006, the Partners Program will continue to focus on building and expanding partnerships to restore and protect important fish and wildlife habitat on private lands. One example involves a Partners Program team which will work with the Missouri Department of Conservation, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, and the Great Rivers Habitat Alliance, to assist landowners in the restoration of wetlands, wet prairie, and bottomland hardwood habitat in a floodplain area near St. Louis, Missouri. The Confluence Project will ultimately restore 300,000-acre floodplain of the

Mississippi and Missouri rivers. This area is a migration cornerstone of the Mississippi Flyway and also serves as home to 485 species of mammals, birds, fishes, reptiles, and mussels. In addition to providing wildlife habitat for numerous Federal trust species, restoration of this area will afford flood protection to the St. Louis area. Beginning in FY 2006, the goal is to restore 80,000 acres of floodplain habitat per year for the next 4 years.

### **Restoration of Native Habitats**

The Partners Program recognizes the value of restoring native habitats to reverse the decline of at-risk species and to maintain the vigor of healthy fish and wildlife populations. As an operational strategy, the program seeks opportunities that will return project sites, to the extent practicable, to the ecological condition that likely existed prior to loss or degradation. Restoring native habitat promotes both native plant and animal species, is cost effective, and provides many other positive economic and ecological benefits, such as:

- Added value for hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing, and eco-tourism
- Increased profitability for ranch and farm lands
- Improved water quality and reduced sediment management costs
- Enhanced biodiversity
- Reduced risk of fire damage and wildfire control costs.
- Reduced damage from invasive species and future control costs.

For example, in FY 2006, the Partners Program in Hawaii will undertake a project to restore 9,000 acres of native forest habitat aimed at helping the endangered palila (bird), and other endangered species on private lands owned by the Kamehameha Schools. These lands are of high conservation value and have the potential to support the palila since it is within the historic range of the bird, as well as 8 endangered plant species. Palila will be translocated into this former historic range. Two other endangered birds (nene and 'io) will benefit from this project as well.

### **Controlling Invasive Species**

Controlling invasive species positively affects nearly half of the species currently listed as threatened or endangered and addresses a problem which is causing a \$120 billion impact on the U.S. economy. The Service and Partners Program are dedicating large amounts of resources to combat invasive species. In the Southeast Region, for example, the Partners Program has identified South Florida, and parts of Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi as priority focus areas for invasive/exotic species control. Over the past 2 fiscal years, the program has carried out voluntary projects involving about 50 landowners and about 8,000 acres. In Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana efforts will focus on the control and eradication of the invading Cogongrass and the Chinese tallow tree. Projects in Florida will benefit numerous protected species and species of concern including the Florida panther, red-cockaded woodpecker, wood stork, loggerhead sea turtle, and a number of plants species. Primary partners other than private landowners include the Water Management Districts in Florida, State fish and wildlife agencies, several U. S. Department of Agriculture programs, and local community and conservation groups. This initiative is tied to a number of Service planning documents, including specific recovery plans for those listed species that reside within the target ecosystems, and the specific Service ecosystem plans and goals (e.g., South Florida, North Florida, Northeast Gulf, and Central Gulf ecosystems); and, Service Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plans and other National Wildlife Refuge specific station plans.

### **Cooperative Conservation through High Quality Technical Assistance**

The Partners Program staff is dedicated to providing the expertise needed to deliver the Service's trust species mission. Their expertise is applied to on-the-ground projects that are designed and

implemented in concert with the landowner. Program expertise is also called upon other by other Service elements, such as Refuges; other Federal agency partners such as USDA's conservation programs including the Wetlands Reserve Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Environmental Quality Incentive Program, and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program; State agencies; and, community-based planning agencies. In sum, the expertise and trust species knowledge embodied in the Partners Program is a significant asset to the Nation's natural resource conservation goals. In FY 2006, the Service anticipates it will respond to more than 4,370 requests for technical assistance from partners such as these. This is an anticipated increase of 12% compared to FY 2004.

### **Improving Accountability and Performance Reporting**

The Partners and Coastal Programs has been working hard to continually upgrade our *Habitat Information Tracking System* (HabITS). This is our primary means of collecting project accomplishment and monitoring information which is accessible via the world wide web and allows program representatives to enter and analyze project accomplishment data for all habitat types and restoration activities at the field level. These data are entered one time only and can be retrieved, analyzed, and reported at the state, regional, and the national levels. Due to its secure and simple Internet-based design, HabITS will be compatible to accomplishment reporting systems that are likely to be developed in the future. This user-friendly system is already incorporated into the Service's *Environmental Conservation Online System*. In FY 2006, a GIS-based landscape planning tool where information about ecological focus areas (gathered from our stakeholders) will be tied to existing national conservation plans (e.g., Waterbirds Conservation Plan, Partners In Flight, fishery conservation plans). HabITS has also increased the Service's efficiency at the national level by reducing data requests to the regions and states by approximately 35 percent.

The applicability and success of HabITS go beyond the US Fish and Wildlife Service and support the Administration's E-Government initiative. For example, other Federal agencies, such as the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration are using HabITS as a model for the development of a national database to report and monitor coastal habitat restoration projects, helping in the coordination and collaboration between the Service and its partners. HabITS has the potential to become a powerful public outreach tool. With improvements scheduled in FY2005 and FY2006, the system will be able to quickly share program information with the public (e.g., program accomplishments, maps, images) via the Internet while using a secure server with "fire walls" which limit data fields in summary documents; thereby, protecting individual and private information.

In summary, in FY 2006, the Partners Program plans to work with nearly 2,600 private landowners on high priority projects to:

- Restore 45,868 acres of vital wetlands habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, and amphibians.
- Restore 313,817 acres of native grasslands and woodlands for declining grassland nesting birds and cavity dwellers such as woodpeckers.
- Restore 691 miles of stream and riparian (stream-side) habitat for native fish, songbirds, and mammals.
- Remove from stream channels 54 decrepit culverts and obsolete road crossings to allow native fish access to upstream habitats.
- Approximately 78,767 acres of private land will be managed by fire, chemical treatment, bio-controls, mechanical removal, and other means to eradicate or prevent the spread of invasive species.

The program uses collaborative and innovative partnerships to effectively leverage resources (financial and other) at an average ratio of 2:1 (non-Service to Service dollars) to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of its activities. All of these restoration activities will be conducted

through voluntary landowner agreements designed to incorporate habitat restoration into working farms and ranches and other private lands.

### **2004 Program Performance Accomplishments**

In FY 2004 the Partners Program focused its efforts on activities that support the Resource Protection goal within the Department's strategic plan. Specifically, the program supports the twin goals of *"Improve Health of Watersheds, Landscapes, and Marine Resource"* and *"Sustaining Biological Communities."* Some examples of these activities include:

- In Montana, the Partners Program worked with the Confederated Salish-Kootenai Indian Tribes to restore a portion of the Jocko River and has demonstrated the feasibility of future projects within the Jocko River watershed. This complex stream and riparian restoration project utilized in-stream channel restoration techniques, re-vegetated 3.4 miles of riparian habitat, restored 60 acres of wetland and enhanced 200 acres of wetland, and improved 2,000 acres of upland through grazing management and alternate livestock water sources. The project benefits native fish (bull trout and the westslope cutthroat trout), migratory birds and other terrestrial wildlife. The Montana Bull Trout Scientific Group has identified the Jocko River as a core recovery area for bull trout. Project partners included: USFWS Cooperative Conservation Initiative; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; and private landowners.
- Glacial Heritage Preserve is one of the premier prairie conservation sites in South Puget Sound, Washington. The Partners Program in the Pacific Northwest worked collaboratively with partners to restore and maintain a rich mosaic of native communities providing habitat for a full complement of native plants and animal. The major restoration focus was on controlling Scot's broom, an invasive plant that invades native prairies and alters the ecosystem so that it no longer supports prairie habitat and associated species. Approximately 300 acres of Scot's broom was removed, followed by direct seeding of native grasses and planting of native grasses and forbs. The project is benefiting the Federally-listed golden paintbrush, three candidate species (Mardon skipper, Mazama pocket gopher and streaked horn lark) and several species of concern. Partners include The Nature Conservancy, Thurston County, landowners and volunteers, Washington Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Forest Service, and the Littlerock and Grand Mound Fire Departments. The site is also used for a wide variety of educational efforts.
- In California, the Partners Program worked a private landowner to restore wetlands, uplands and riparian habitats on a working ranch near the Merced National Wildlife Refuge. The Flying M Ranch is located within the Grassland Ecological Area, a wintering stronghold for arctic nesting geese (cackling Canada geese, snow geese, Ross' geese, and white-fronted geese) and is also critical wintering habitat for both lesser and greater sandhill cranes. About 90 acres of riparian habitat was restored, two large wetlands were enhanced through improved management, and 34 acres of upland was enhanced for upland nesting birds. Also, the Program assisted the landowner in the removal of unnecessary roads to benefit migrating waterfowl and shorebirds.
- In Oklahoma, the Partners Program is collaborating to restore 5,900 acres of rangeland on a working ranch that will benefit declining grassland species and wildlife in the mixed-grass prairies of the High Plains such as the lesser prairie-chicken, a candidate species for which there is great local, state, and national conservation interest. The greatest conservation concern on this and surrounding ranches is eastern red cedar invasion due to fire suppression over the last century. By restoring this area to open grassland through prescribed burning and grazing

management, it will not only secure the future of the local remnant prairie-chicken population, but also serve as a catalyst for other neighboring ranchers to become members of the a local prescribed burning cooperative and thus expand conservation efforts within the region. This and several other rangeland restoration projects in northwest Oklahoma are the result of a highly successful collaborative effort between the Service's Partners Program, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, and several non-government organizations including Quail Unlimited, the High Plains Resource Conservation and Development Council, the Oklahoma Wildlife and Prairie Heritage Alliance, and The Nature Conservancy.

- A new partnership was initiated between the Partners Program and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to focus on HUD-assisted projects that improve the physical environment through enhancement of the natural environment.
- Another urban partnership was the Illinois Rain Garden Initiative. The Partners Program provided financial and technical assistance to support nine schools and one museum which created native plant species gardens for educational and water management purposes.

<b>Resource Protection:</b>	<b>FY 2004</b>	<b>FY 2005</b>
<b>Improve Health of Watersheds, Landscapes, and Marine Resources</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Planned</b>
Acres of wetland habitat restored	36,069 ac	26,725 ac
Acres of upland habitat restored	262,931 ac	189,150 ac
Miles of riparian and/or stream habitat restored	375 mi	397 mi
<b>Sustain biological communities.</b>		
Acres treated to control invasive species	73,065 ac	85,332 ac
<b>Other performance measures:</b>		
Number of fish passage barriers removed	28	34
Number of landowner agreements	1,300	1,500

### 2005 Planned Program Performance

In FY 2005, the Partners Program will continue to strengthen its efforts to eradicate and control the spread of invasive species. These efforts will support Executive Order 13112 on invasive species and the Department's cross-program effort to combat the spread of invasive species. Additionally, the Partners Program will continue working to prevent species from needing to be listed as threatened or endangered. Project examples include:

- Nutria management in Maryland and Louisiana: A recent study found that these rodents could destroy more than 35,000 acres of Maryland's bay marshes in the next 50 years and losses to economy by the year 2054 could exceed \$35 million a year. In FY 2005, funds for nutria control will enable the Service to trap nutria on 2,500 acres of wetland.
- Limahuli Valley Restoration Project, Hanalei District, Island of Kauai: the Program will partner with private landowners, the Hawaii Community Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife

Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, Seacology, and scores of volunteers to remove invasive plants and feral pigs from areas inhabited by 14 rare plant species. The project is located in lowland mesic (dry) and lowland wet forest. Activities will include the hand removal of nonnative plant species, construction of four 10-acre pig proof enclosures, removal of the pigs, and propagation of rare plant species in greenhouses for transplanting into the pig-free areas.

- **Prairie Habitat Restoration in the Loess Hills, Iowa:** The Partners Program will join with several landowners, the Loess Hills Alliance, Golden Hills RC&D, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to restore prairie habitat in seven counties in western Iowa. The Iowa Loess Hills are nationally recognized as one of the world's rarest ecosystems. Deep loess soil deposits, which were created by glaciers, wind, and water, are only found in Iowa and China. This unique geological landscape has developed rare plant and animal communities. The seven county area that makes up the Loess Hills is habitat for cactus, yucca, plains pocket mouse, several rare skippers (butterflies) and the sharp-tailed grouse.

Next to development, the greatest threat to the Loess Hills is encroachment from woody plants due to the elimination of fire from this ecosystem. An estimated 2% of the grassland community is lost each year to woody plant invasion, contributing greatly to the decline of a grassland species that is already scarce. Restoration of the prairie habitat will include mechanical removal, prescribed burning, and reseeded of native grasses after burning. Projects will be monitored before and after burning to assess results and establish future management strategies. Around 1,000 acres will be restored.

- **The Partners Program in the Caribbean** focuses on the restoration tropical forests and the reestablishment of a native shading canopy on coffee plantations. The projects are designed to benefit more than 40 Federally listed threatened and endangered species and more than 75 species of Neotropical migratory birds that winter in Puerto Rico. In a collaborative effort between private individuals, corporations, and Commonwealth, local and Federal government agencies the Service have developed simple habitat restoration procedures in order to protect Federal trust resources in tropical U.S. These projects are strategically located creating buffer zones and corridors around and between natural reserves providing a smooth transition between urban and natural areas. In FY 2005 the main focus within this initiative is to restore tropical forest and shade coffee plantations in areas in or near the Rio Abajo Commonwealth Forest supporting the release efforts of the endangered Puerto Rican Parrot (*A. vittata*), and the conservation of the Puerto Rican Boa (*E. inornatus*) and the Puerto Rico Sharp-shinned Hawk (*A. striatus venator*).

In every project the Partners Program uses native vegetation in a spatial arrangement that provides the maximum habitat value to wildlife while maintaining the agricultural value and the acceptance of landowners. The Service's pro-active efforts with tropical forest and shade coffee restoration projects provide a model to be used as a management tool for private lands around tropical forest reserves in the U.S. These practices are also an economical incentive for a sustainable way of farming which protects the environment and conserves the traditional way of cultivating the land in tropical environments. These projects not only help in the conservation of endangered species but also increase the private stewardship for the land and help keep common species from becoming endangered. Through cooperative conservation principles, the Program will enhance its support of local conservation priorities, increase efforts to protect at-risk species, improve project cost efficiencies, and expand its partner base through shared technical assistance.

## Justification of 2006 Program Changes

Subactivity		FY 2006 Budget Request	Program Change (+/-)
Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program			
	\$(000)	52,197	+4,120
	FTE	245	0
<b>Details</b>			
		0	-986
High Plains Partnership		0	-986
Upper Klamath Basin Restoration		7,450	+5,272
WA Dept. of Fish & Wildlife		0	-1,381
Vermont Natural Heritage-Eagles		0	-99
Fish Habitat Restoration		984	+14
Invasive Species Control – General Base		8,147	-602
Nutria Eradication – Blackwater NWR, MD		0	-487
Nutria Eradication – SE Louisiana		0	-195
Willapa Bay NWR, WA – Spartina Control		0	-690
State of Hawaii Invasive Species Control		0	-690
Lake Sakakawea, ND – Invasive Species		0	-99
Hawaii ESA Community Conservation		0	-740
Nevada Biodiversity Research		0	-1,233
Montana Cold Water Fish		0	-493
NH Audubon Soc/Lake Umbagog NWR Study		0	-419
NH Lakes Assoc – surface water study		0	-54
Thunder Basin Grassland Initiative, WY		0	-247
Georgia Streambank Restoration		0	-493
PA Watershed (Tunkhannock & Bowman Crk)		0	-740
Walla Walla, WA Fish Passage		0	-247
Pacific Northwest Salmon		395	+5
Wildlife Enhancement – Starkville, MS		0	-986
Technical Assistance – NJ Meadowlands		0	-177
Susquehanna Fish Passage, PA		0	-493
AK GIS of NWR to NGO		0	-986
Conservation Work at Don Edwards NWR, CA		0	-532
General Program Activities		30,895	+11,966

The FY 2006 budget request for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is \$52,197,000 and 245 FTEs, a net program increase of \$4,120,000 from the FY2005 enacted level. This net increase includes a \$68,000 reduction for savings associated with improved vehicle fleet management.

**General Program Increase (+ \$11,966,000)**

The Service will use the increase to expand the Secretary's Cooperative Conservation Initiative with private landowners in priority geographic focus areas to achieve the most effective and efficient use of program resources. Projects initiated with the additional funding will be responsive to priorities established in the Partners Program National Strategic Plan and must produce results that can be reported under one or more performance measures of the DOI Strategic Plan. A primary benefit will be the additional landowner agreements which will strengthen the role of citizens in the public/private natural resource conservation partnership. The Partners Program will continue to serve as an on-the-ground broker in merging needs and opportunities for the benefit of trust species.

**Priorities for FY 2006**

The Partners Program will emphasize projects that meet the President's goals for:

*Wetlands* – The program will continue its work with private landowners to protect and restore wetland habitats for the benefit of fish and wildlife species, and local communities.

*Priority Habitats* – Working with landowners, stakeholder organizations, and communities, the Program will focus on habitat conservation projects that support healthy and sustainable populations of at-risk species and lessen the likelihood of endangered species listings.

*Invasive Species* – Controlling non-native species of plants and animals which pose significant risks to native fish and wildlife and cause growing societal costs will receive increased priority in project evaluation. The Partners Program will increase its technical support capabilities and involvement with Service and other Federal agency activities to meet the invasive species challenge.

The Partners Program will also continue to strengthen its contributions to:

*Stream Restoration* – Stream restoration projects continue to generate significant benefits for ranchers, farmers, recreational and commercial fishers, and other water-dependent users, as well as, the myriad of fish and wildlife species that thrive in free-flowing waters. Restored streambeds and shorelines reduce the amount of undesirable runoff from agriculture and other land use practices and enhance wildlife corridors for migratory species making these projects among the most cost effective.

*Healthy Forests* – The Partners Program brings its trust species expertise to private forest land owners, commercial forest managers, and Federal partners such as the US Department of Agriculture who are seeking to improve fish and wildlife values on forest lands. The demand for state-of-the-art technical assistance in forest ecosystems from the Partners Program is increasing in-step with the Administration's support for forest land conservation and management programs.

### **Performance Results**

The Partners Program will improve cost effectiveness of projects that meet national goals by focusing new landowner partnerships in priority geographic areas identified in the Partners Program National Strategic Plan and emerging community-based habitat conservation plans. The \$11,966,000 increase will enable the program to restore 18,061 more acres of essential wetlands; restore 125,644 additional upland acres critical to sustaining at-risk species; improve 266 more miles of valuable stream and stream-edge habitat; remove an additional 19 barriers to fish passage.

Examples of projects that may be funded in FY 2006:

- Upper Yellowstone River, Montana: The Partners Program in Montana has been approached by stakeholder groups to develop a cooperative conservation project with local landowners on fish habitat restoration and in-stream flow augmentation to benefit the Yellowstone cutthroat trout and other high priority native trout species.
- Chesapeake Bay, Maryland: The Partners Program will dedicate \$500,000 to work with private landowners to eradicate nutria from the marsh areas. The program plans on clearing 5,000 acres and eradicate up to 4,000 nutria .
- Sage Grouse Working Group, Wyoming: The Partners Program in Wyoming is working with the State Fish and Game Department, local Conservation Districts, and Sage Grouse Working Groups to identify and map key sage grouse habitat and prepare restoration plans. Currently, four landowners controlling more than 100,000 acres of high value sage grouse habitat have expressed willingness to work with the Partners Program on restoration projects.
- Chesapeake Bay Watershed, West Virginia and Pennsylvania: The Partners Program is teaming with non-government organizations such as The Nature Conservancy and Ducks Unlimited, Federal partners such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service, State fish

and game agencies, and local land trust and watershed groups on a number of site-specific projects in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed that will benefit Federally listed species, neotropical migratory birds, and a variety of other valuable fish and wildlife species. Projected FY 2006 projects include restoration of 50 acres of wetland habitat to benefit Bog turtles, restoration of 10 miles of riparian stream bank, 75 acres of associated wetland and riparian habitat, and 100 acres of sensitive upland forest.

- New England River Restoration, Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts: The Partners Program in the New England region is working with groups such as Trout Unlimited, American Rivers, New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, Maine Department of Fish and Game, several Federal agencies, and local watershed organizations on fish passage projects, including dam removal, to restore native species such as American shad and Atlantic salmon to historic spawning areas.

#### **High Plains Partnership (-\$986,000)**

Efforts of the High Plains Partnership (a public-private collaboration to proactively conserve declining species and habitats on private lands throughout the High Plains region of 11 States in the Great Plains and Southwest Regions), can be funded through existing programs and would likely rank high in any competitive process for grants and cost-sharing. Specifically, the Service is requesting increases in programs such as Recovery, Private Stewardship Grants, Landowner Incentives Program, Challenge Cost Share and other incentive-based programs that can support programs like the High Plains Partnership.

#### **Upper Klamath Basin Restoration, California and Oregon (+ \$5,272,000)**

The Upper Klamath River Basin Restoration Initiative is a cooperative effort among Federal, State and local agencies, tribal governments, public organizations, and individuals to restore the Klamath Basin ecosystem and economic vitality. Since 1996, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program has provided approximately \$1,225,000 to the Klamath Basin for watershed restoration activities. Watershed restoration activities in the upper Klamath Basin emphasize on-the-ground, assessment/monitoring and outreach/public education projects leading to improved water quality and timing of release of water. Specific on-the-ground activities include erecting fences to control cattle grazing, excavating swales to reconnect oxbows to the river, planting native trees and shrubs for shade and stream bank stabilization. These projects directly restore habitats for the Federally endangered Lost River and shortnose suckers, and the sensitive redband trout.

In FY 2005, the \$2.2 million in funding will be used to enter into voluntary agreements with private landowners and other partners to restore approximately 350 acres of wetlands and 250 acres of associated degraded upland habitat. Stream restoration will take place on approximately 11 miles of river and creeks. These efforts will take into consideration the results of the Federally sponsored report "Endangered and Threatened Fishes in the Klamath River Basin: Causes of Decline and Strategies for Recovery" prepared by the National Research Council which is the principal operating arm of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering. The report concluded that the Federal government should be putting more resources into removing fish migration obstacles, improving habitat, and reducing summer water temperatures in tributaries, e.g., restoring shady streamside habitat.

In FY 2006, the increase of \$5,272,000 will be used to restore fish and wildlife habitat on private lands through voluntary agreements and to provide additional technical assistance to landowners and to coordinate similar conservation programs administered by the USDA in the Basin. The proposed funding increase will enhance the Service's ability to restore high priority habitats while working with stakeholders to resolve natural resource issues. The additional funds will improve water quality

in the Upper Klamath River Basin through restoration of wetlands, riparian, and stream habitats for the benefit of Federal trust species, including Lost River and shortnose suckers. It will also be used to restore an additional 497 acres of wetlands, and 355 acres of upland habitat. Projects will include excavating filled-in oxbows, reconnecting former wetlands to lakes and rivers, improving water control, reconnecting springs to river channels, and re-vegetating with native plants. Projects with the greatest potential for water quality improvement will have the highest priority.

In addition, the increase in funds will be used to restore an additional 16 miles of stream and riparian habitat through voluntary partnerships. Riparian and stream improvements may include re-contouring the channel to a natural, and stable, design; installing fences for livestock management; providing offsite water sources; and planting native vegetation. Restoration of riparian and wetland habitats will also greatly assist in improving base stream flow later in the growing season and therefore will be addressing water issues.

These voluntary habitat restoration activities support the Department of the Interior's Strategic Goal of Resource Protection. Specifically DOI end outcome to *Improve Health of Watershed, Landscapes, and Marine Resources* and the end outcome to *Sustain Desired Biological Communities*.

**Performance Results**

Increasing the availability of technical assistance and financial assistance for voluntary habitat restoration will provide private landowners and the agricultural community with additional land use options to resolve natural resource conflicts. Habitat restoration will improve water quality in an area where water quality and quantity are compromised and highly scrutinized. Due to repeated droughts and high demand, insufficient amounts of water have been available for all users. Habitat restoration projects also may offer alternatives to agriculture. Stream restoration may be able to increase the duration of above ground flows thus increasing water availability during droughts.

In addition to providing benefits for the nation's fish and wildlife resources, the Upper Klamath River Basin Restoration Initiative stretches the Federal dollar by leveraging non-Service funding at an average rate of 1:1. Projects are community-based, developed in conjunction with local watershed planning efforts and utilize voluntary stewardship partnerships, thus supporting the President's Management Agenda and Secretary Norton's four C's – Cooperation, Consultation, and Communication all in the service of Conservation. All projects will be monitored for success and use the web-based Habitat Information Tracking System, thereby providing both accountability and improved access to performance results.

**FTE Change**

The Service will relocate 8 FTEs to provide the necessary technical assistance and will use contractors to construct and implement projects when appropriate and cost effective. Field staff will conduct site visits on private lands, provide technical assistance to private landowners and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, design restoration projects, develop partnerships, and oversee the construction and completion of restoration projects.

**Washington Salmon Enhancement (-\$1,381,000)**

In FY 2005, the Service continued to provide funds to 14 Washington State Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups in support of their volunteer habitat restoration and fish passage improvement efforts for salmon recovery. Activities supported by these funds include salmon habitat restoration projects, propagation activities, applied research projects, and acquisition of equipment, real property, or other interest necessary to the operation of these projects and activities. This program however, is not under the direction of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the actions of these fisheries enhancement groups may or may not be coordinated with the recovery efforts of either the Service or

the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Discontinuing the pass through funding to WDFW will enable the Service to focus its efforts on those resource needs and opportunities that are of highest priority. In the future, funding for individual projects sponsored by these regional enhancement groups may be obtained through the Service and other Federal Agency's grants, providing the projects address identified agency priorities.

**Vermont Natural Heritage Bald Eagles (-\$99,000)**

The Vermont Natural Heritage – Bald Eagle Recovery Program is an eagle reintroduction program that is not appropriate for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program which is a habitat restoration program for private landowners. The direction of funds to this project circumvents the Service's priority setting process and redirects funds to lower priority needs at the expense of higher priority needs elsewhere. The State Natural Heritage Program can seek funding for bald eagle reintroduction through numerous other sources such as State and Tribal wildlife grants and Private Stewardship incentive grants and research funds through other agencies. Elimination of this program will have no effect on the Service's ability to contribute to the goals of the DOI strategic plan.

**Fish Habitat Restoration (+\$14,000)**

The fiscal year 2005 Omnibus Appropriation (P.L. 108-447) included two across the board rescissions, netting a 1.3 percent reduction to all Service programs. An increase of \$14,000 will restore funding to the 2004 enacted level and will allow the Service to maintain performance and base program capability. The Service has requested and received Fish Habitat Restoration funds for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program since FY 2000. Fish habitat restoration is a primary objective of the Partners Program and hundreds of fish habitat restoration projects have been successfully accomplished, in collaboration with private landowners, across the country. To alleviate administrative burdens without reducing the resources available to the field for fish habitat restoration, the Service proposes to formally include the Fish Habitat Restoration funds as part of our General Program funding in FY 2006.

**Invasive Species Control (- \$602,000)**

Funding for this program has been reduced to offset funding increases elsewhere in the President's budget that address other high priorities. This reduction will provide the Service with flexibility to address other high priority resource needs and opportunities while having no measurable effect on the Service's contributions to the DOI Strategic Plan. In FY 2004 this program funded a diversity of projects that helped to restore native ecosystems by removing invasive species from approximately 73,065 acres. The Service will continue to pursue protection of our trust resources by controlling the introduction and establishment of non-native invasive species within existing funds, and with additional program funding requested in the President's request.

**Nutria Eradication – Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, Maryland (- \$487,000)**

The Partners Program actively supports invasive species control and the Service's efforts to eradicate nutria from Blackwater NWR have been successful. Nutria have been eradicated from approximately 30,000 acres located on the Refuge and adjacent areas. Because of the demonstrated success of this eradication effort to date, funding for nutria eradication on an additional 175,000 acres within the Chesapeake watershed will continue through base funding.

**Nutria Eradication – Southeast Louisiana (- \$195,000)**

In FY 2005, Congress provided \$198,000 to the Service for this project within its Refuge Program. While the Partners Program actively supports invasive species control, this specific project does not support nutria eradication on private lands and is more appropriately funded through other Service programs such as the Landowner Incentive Program and State Wildlife Grants. The Department of Agriculture invasive species programs addresses nutria control/eradication in Louisiana.

**Willapa Bay NWR Spartina Control (-\$691,000)**

Since FY 2003, Congress has provided funds to the Service to be used to help control Smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) in Willapa Bay, Pacific County, Washington. This funding was provided to the National Wildlife Refuge System and to the Partners Program. The funds provided to the Partners Program have been directed to the National Wildlife Refuge. The Service is proposing to eliminate this specific funding item because the activities proposed will compete well for funding through the normal funding mechanisms of the Partners Program in Washington. This reduction will also have no net effect on the Service's contributions to the DOI Strategic plan. Willapa Bay NWR treated approximately 5,500 acres of Spartina in FY 2004 and expects to do the same in FY 2005. The elimination of this specific funding in FY 2006 will be offset by increases in general program activities. Additional funding may also be available through the Refuge system. The private lands in the Willapa Bay area will be treated for invasive species as outlined in the Regional strategic plan for habitat restoration.

**State of Hawaii Invasive Species Control (-\$690,000)**

In FY 2004 and FY 2005, Congress provided the Fish and Wildlife Service \$690,000 to reduce the impact and potential risk of invasive species to listed species and native ecosystems. The Service is proposing to eliminate this funding through the Partners Program in FY 2006 in order to focus Service efforts on higher priority resources and opportunities. The State of Hawaii, private landowners, and other organizations are eligible to apply for Landowner Incentive Program grants, State Wildlife grants, and funding through other agencies to continue these efforts. Elimination of this funding will provide the Service with flexibility to address other high priority resource needs and opportunities while having no measurable effect on the Service's contributions to the DOI Strategic Plan. In FY 2004 this program funded 10 projects that helped to restore native ecosystems by removing invasive species from approximately 3,000 acres. The decrease in acreage resulting from the elimination of the funding in FY 2006 will be offset through additional funding in the Partners Program as well as other voluntary habitat based programs and the net affect in Service accomplishments will be positive.

**Friends of Lake Sakakawea, North Dakota, Invasive Species Control (-\$99,000)**

In FY 2005 funds were passed through to a local organization to control noxious weed problems made worse by low water levels. This project is eligible for consideration within existing funds or the requested increase for general program activities and, therefore, the Service is not requesting additional funds for this specific project. Elimination of this funding will provide the Service with flexibility to address other high priority resource needs and opportunities while having no measurable effect on the Service's contribution to the DOI strategic plan.

**Hawaii ESA Community Conservation (-\$740,000)**

In Fiscal Year 2002, Congress provided the Fish and Wildlife Service with funding to support a pilot program on the island of Hawaii to allow local communities to implement projects that would reduce the level of conflict between game mammal management and endangered species conservation. In FY 2003, 2004, and 2005, additional funds were provided to continue the program on the island of Hawaii and to expand it to Maui, Molokai, Lanai, and Kahoolawe Islands. The goal of this effort has been to provide the financial resources to local communities to implement strategies that address the needs of endangered species with the continued presence of suitable game mammal populations. Endangered species planning and management issues can be addressed through the private stewardship grant program and other funding mechanisms. Elimination of this funding will provide the Service with flexibility to address other high priority resource needs and opportunities while having no measurable effect on the Service's contributions to the DOI Strategic Plan. The Service is requesting increases in programs such as Recovery, Private Stewardship Grants, Landowner

Incentives Program, Challenge Cost Share and other incentive-based programs and the activities being pursued by the Hawaii ESA Community Conservation program can be addressed by these established programs.

**Nevada Biodiversity Research (-\$1,233,000)**

The Service proposes elimination of this funding request in FY 2006. The Nevada Biodiversity Initiative is a research-oriented program intended to provide State and Federal land management agencies with a planning tool for resource evaluation and impacts. This program is not related to the voluntary habitat restoration efforts of the Partners Program. The other State and Federal agencies involved in this initiative can seek funding through numerous other sources such as State and Tribal wildlife grants and Private Stewardship incentive grants and research funds through other agencies. This research program does not contribute to the goals of the DOI strategic plan and elimination of this program will have no effect on the Service's ability to contribute to the DOI plan.

**Montana Cold Water Fish (-\$493,000)**

The Service is not requesting funding for this fish research program in FY 2006. There is no linkage between this program and the voluntary habitat restoration efforts on private lands promoted by the Partners Program. Elimination of this funding will allow the Service to address other high priority resource needs and opportunities while having no measurable effect on the Service's contributions to the DOI Strategic Plan. Other sources of assistance for fish research are available including the Service's Sport Fish Restoration Grants, and State and Tribal Wildlife Grants.

**New Hampshire Audubon Society and Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge Study (-\$419,000)** – The Service is not requesting funding for this study. The Partners Program focus is on voluntary landowner agreements that result in on-the-ground habitat improvements for the benefit of trust species. Research, studies, and similar activities not directly involving actual habitat work are eligible for funding from a variety of sources within the Service and other agencies. The Service does not consider this activity as a high priority activity for the Partners Program.

**New Hampshire Lakes Association Surface Water Study (-\$54,000)**

The Service is not requesting funding for this study. The Partners Program focus is on voluntary landowner agreements that result in on-the-ground habitat improvements for the benefit of Federal trust species. Research, studies, and similar activities not directly involving actual habitat work are eligible for funding from a variety of sources within the Service and other agencies, such as the U.S. EPA. The Service does not consider this study a high priority for the Partners Program.

**Thunder Basin Grassland Initiative, Wyoming (-\$247,000)**

The Service is not requesting funding for this project because it is eligible for consideration within existing funds. Previous funding has supported mapping and ecosystem plan development but no on-the-ground accomplishments. Funding this project would divert staff time and other resources from existing priorities.

**Georgia Stream Bank Restoration (-\$493,000)**

The Congress provided \$493,000 in FY2005 for this project. The funds were passed through to the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission for work primarily consisting of fencing livestock out of stream channels. The Service is not seeking funding in FY2006 because it is unable to report accomplishments related to previous year funding and does not have the staff necessary to adequately manage and track the funds. Projects of this nature are eligible for consideration for funding through existing Partners Program funding mechanisms in Georgia.

**Pennsylvania Watershed Restoration (Tunkhannock & Bowmans Creeks) (-\$740,000)**

In FY 2004 and FY2005, Congress provided the Fish and Wildlife Service with funding to implement restoration activities in the watershed of Tunkhannock and Bowman's Creeks, in Pennsylvania. There is no linkage between this activity and the voluntary habitat restoration efforts on private lands promoted by the Partners Program. Eliminating this program will provide the Service with flexibility to address other high priority resource needs and opportunities. Funding for these activities will continue to be available through other sources such as the Private Stewardship grant program, and State and Tribal Wildlife Grants.

**Walla Walla, Washington, Fish Passage (-\$247,000)**

The Service is not requesting funding for this pass through to the County of Walla Walla, Washington for projects which may include removal of fish passage barriers. The Service is not able to control or track accomplishments occurring with pass through funds. Fish passage projects are eligible for consideration for funding through several existing programs such as the Fisheries and Partners Programs. This project should apply for consideration for funding through normal funding mechanisms for these programs.

**Pacific Northwest Salmon (+\$5,000)**

The fiscal year 2005 Omnibus Appropriation (P.L. 108-447) included two across the board rescissions, netting a 1.3 percent reduction to all Service programs. An increase of \$5,000 will restore funding to the 2004 enacted level and will allow the Service to maintain performance and base program capability. This would allow the Service to continue on-going projects to restore in-stream and riparian habitat, improve fish passage, and native species propagation in FY 2006 without a reduction in performance due to erosion of base funding.

**Wildlife Enhancement, Starkville, MS (-\$986,000)**

In FY 2004 and FY 2005 Congress provided the Service with funding for Mississippi State University, Starkville, Mississippi, for wildlife enhancement. There is no linkage between this activity and the voluntary habitat restoration efforts on private lands promoted by the Partners Program. Eliminating this program will provide the Service with flexibility to address other high priority resource needs and opportunities. Funding for these activities will continue to be available through other sources such as the Private Stewardship Grant Program, Landowner Incentive Program, cost-sharing programs, and State and Tribal Wildlife Grants. The proposed elimination of this program will initially reduce the Service's contributions toward the end Outcome Goals of the Department's strategic plan. However, the Service anticipates that additional funding in the General Program Activities portion of the Partners Program as well as other voluntary habitat based programs will offset these changes and the net effect in Service accomplishments will be positive.

**Technical Assistance NJ Meadowlands (-\$177,000)**

In FY 2004 and FY 2005, Congress provided the Service with funding for this effort. In FY 2003, the Service and the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife developed a Vision Plan for the Meadowlands which outlines goals and tasks to be accomplished for wildlife at the Meadowlands. The State and other organizations can now pursue funding to implement these tasks through normal competitive funding mechanisms of Federal or Service programs such as the State and Tribal wildlife grants or Private Stewardship Grant Programs. Eliminating the funding for this will have no effect on the outcome goals of the DOI strategic plan.

**Susquehanna Fish Passage, Pennsylvania (-\$493,000)**

The Service is not requesting funding for this fish passage program in order to offset funding increases elsewhere in the President's budget request that are necessary to address higher priority needs. There is no linkage between this activity and the voluntary habitat restoration efforts on

private lands promoted by the Partners Program. Elimination of this funding will allow the Service to address other higher priority resource needs and opportunities while having no measurable effect on the Service's contributions to the DOI Strategic Plan or the Strategic Plan for the Partners Program. Other sources for fish passage improvements are available including the Service's Sport Fish Restoration Grants, and State and Tribal Grants.

**Information Systems Mapping of National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska by a Non-governmental Organization (- \$986,000)** - Congress provided funding for this mapping project in FY 2005. This is not an appropriate activity for the Partners Program which works with private landowners and tribes to restore habitat on their property through voluntary agreements. The funds provided in FY 2005 should be sufficient to complete the project.

**Conservation Work at Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge, California (- \$532,000)**  
The Partners Program is not requesting funding for this effort in FY 2006. Funds were used to hire a biologist to manage conservation efforts on the Refuge's newly acquired land. This is not an appropriate activity for the Partners Program which works with landowners and tribes to restore habitat on private and tribal lands through voluntary agreements. Funds for conservation work on National Wildlife Refuges will be funded, on a priority basis, through the National Wildlife Refuge System.

**Vehicle Reduction (-\$68,000)** – The 2006 budget proposes a reduction of \$68,000 in the Partners program to recognize expected savings to be achieved through improved fleet management within the Service and across the Department of Interior.

**Program Performance Summary: Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program**

<b>Resource Protection - DOI End Outcome Goal: Improve health of watersheds, landscapes and marine resources that are DOI managed or influenced in a manner consistent with obligations regarding the allocation and use of water.</b>						
<b>End Outcome Measure:</b>						
<b>Land Health: Wetland, Riparian and Upland Areas:</b> Percent of acres or stream / shoreline miles achieving desired conditions where condition is known and as specified in management plans consistent with applicable substantive and procedural requirements of State and Federal water law. (Percent for Wetlands, Riparian, and Upland areas)						
	<b>FY 2003 Actual</b>	<b>FY 2004 Actual</b>	<b>FY 2005 Plan</b>	<b>2006 Plan</b>	<b>Change in Performance: 2005 to Planned 2006</b>	<b>Long-term Target (2008)</b>
Wetland acres	4.12 %	4.42%	4.64%	5.01 %	0.38 %	5.8 %
Upland acres	0.52 %	0.61 %	0.67 %	0.78 %	0.10 %	0.86 %
Stream/shoreline miles	0.09 %	0.10%	0.10%	0.11 %	0.01 %	0.15 %
<b>Performance Measures:</b>						
<b>Voluntary Stewardship Partnerships: Habitat Restoration:</b> Number of acres or stream / shoreline miles achieving watershed and landscape goals through voluntary partnerships.						
Wetland acres						
Partners Fish & Wildlife	37,537	35,737	26,175	45,021	18,846	696,000
Upper Klamath	297	332	350	847	497	7,500
High Plains Partnership	--	--	200	0	-200	--
Upland acres						
Partners Fish & Wildlife	184,063	262,931	182,100	313,212	131,112	2,580,000
Upper Klamath	550	0	250	605	355	7,500
High Plains Partnership	--	--	6,800	0	-6,800	--
Stream & Riparian Miles						
Partners Fish & Wildlife						
Upper Klamath	821	375	386	664	278	10,500
High Plains Partnership	12	0	11	27	16	250
Number of fish passage barriers removed.						
Partners Fish & Wildlife						
Upper Klamath	35	28	28	48	20	260
High Plains Partnership	0	0	6	6	0	0
<b>End Outcome Goal:</b> Sustain biological communities on DOI managed and influenced lands and waters in a manner consistent with obligations regarding the allocation and use of water.						
<b>Performance Measures: Voluntary Stewardship Partnerships:</b> Number of acres and stream / shoreline miles achieving habitat / biological community goals through voluntary agreements.						
Acres treated for invasive species.						
Partners Fish & Wildlife	88,435	73,065	85,332	78,767	-6,565	488,000