U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

2023 Coastal Program Accomplishment Report

Note from the
Chief of Refuges

I wanted to take a moment to express my deep appreciation for the incredible work happening within the Coastal Program to restore wildlife habitats and protect communities from changing ecosystems.

An inclusive community-based approach is required for effective and long-lasting habitat conservation. Working with local communities has always been at the core of the Coastal Program's conservation ethos. Together with partners, we can learn about the challenges impacting wildlife and people and collaborate to find impactful solutions.

In 2023, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) adopted the Standards of Excellence for Community Engagement as our holistic approach to understanding the needs of communities and making a commitment to meaningful conservation.

Over the past year, the Coastal Program has been an ambassador for the Standards of Excellence by modeling how the principles should be applied in practice and participating in discussions on integrating this initiative among all Service programs.

The Coastal Program also took a significant step forward in helping staff build the skills required to implement meaningful conservation by creating a Community of Practice (CoP) – a "place" where staff can connect, learn, and share.

As part of the CoP, the Coastal Program recently published a SharePoint site that will serve as the online home for the CoP and host a trove of resources and training crucial to implementing successful and meaningful conservation.

Results speak volumes. In 2023, the Coastal Program worked with partners and local communities to implement 153 conservation projects across 19 states and territories, restoring and protecting 87,689 acres.

To our partners and Coastal Program team, your dedication is the backbone of our collective success. Your passion fuels on-the-ground conservation.

Let's keep pushing forward, championing community-based conservation. I'm excited about the possibilities ahead as we continue to learn and grow together.

Warm regards,

Cynthia Martinez
Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System

Cynthia Martinez, Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System / USFWS

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Coastal Program

A Conservation Leader

that works with communities to voluntarily and collaboratively protect and improve habitats that benefit fish, wildlife, and people. We also develop resources for decision makers, land managers, and restoration practitioners to better manage and deliver habitat conservation. By working together, we sustain the people and wildlife that rely on coastal and marine ecosystems.

Our Mission

is to achieve voluntary habitat conservation by providing technical and financial assistance, in collaboration with partners, for the benefit of federal trust species.

Working with Communities

along our nation's coasts, we conserve habitat on public and private lands to deliver landscape conservation, build resilient coasts and communities, and maintain habitat connectivity and continuity from headwater streams to the ocean.

Find the Coastal Program online:

Webpage
bit.ly/3Q0leLf

YouTube
bit.ly/3dihu7A

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) is a historic investment in our Nation's infrastructure, including roadways, public transportation, energy, cybersecurity, and safe drinking water. BIL also makes significant investments to protect local communities from the impacts of climate change, such as wildfires, extreme heat, droughts, floods, and sea level rise. BIL funding for climate resiliency is available through a variety of sources, including the Department of the Interior's Ecosystem Restoration, Wildland Fire, and Fish Passage funding through the Service's National Fish Passage Program. In 2023, the Coastal Program acquired BIL funding to implement two hazardous fuels management projects. Currently, we are working on the planning of these projects, which will reduce wildfire risk to local communities and improve habitat conditions for fish and wildlife.

Dune Lakes
California

The Coastal Program is working with a Dune Lakes private landowner, Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County, CalFire, and other partners to reduce wildfire threats on and around the historic lake beds of Dune Lakes in San Luis Obispo County. Depleted groundwater and climate change have caused the lakes to dry out – leaving several hundred acres of dead wetland vegetation. The project will likely involve mechanical removal of vegetation and prescribed fire to reduce fuel loads. Once complete, the Coastal Program will work with other partners to restore the lakes and wetlands for waterfowl, waterbirds, and other wildlife.

Bayview
Texas

The Coastal Program is working with The Nature Conservancy, Cameron County, and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to reduce wildfire threats at the Cameron County Airport. The project will likely involve mechanical and chemical removal of invasive brush, installation of firebreaks, and prescribed fire. The project will complement coastal prairie and thornscrub conservation occurring on the adjacent Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, which supports the recovery of the federally endangered Aplomado falcon and ocelots.

Fire crew carrying a kerosene drip torch / Senior Airman Jensen Stidham, U.S. Air Force. (Opposite Page) Hands on a tree / Shane Rounce, Unsplashed

Department of the Interior
Priorities

Environmental Justice

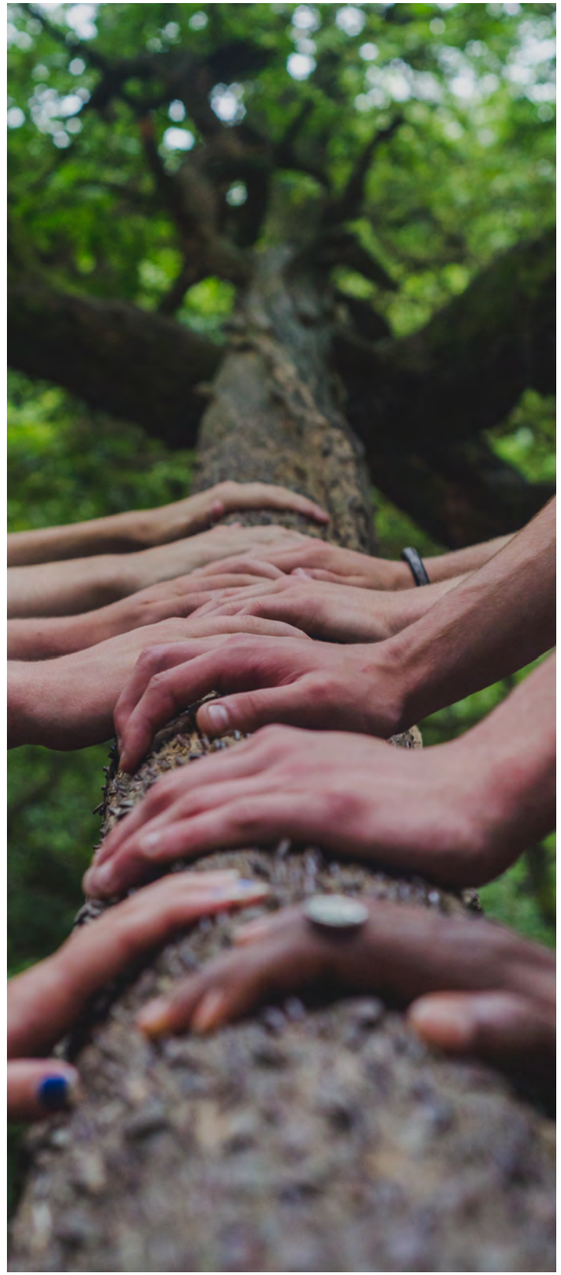
The Department of the Interior (Department) recognizes that advancing environmental justice is integral to achieving the missions of the Department and its bureaus. The Department is administering programs and policies that address long-standing societal injustices and ensure that local communities have greater input on and equitable access to the benefits from federal decisions and actions.

Fundamental to the Coastal Program, we work with local communities, including underserved and underrepresented communities, to deliver voluntary landscape-scale habitat conservation. As the Service implements the Standards of Excellence, Justice40, and similar initiatives, we are refining how we approach communities and co-design conservation projects.

In 2023, the Coastal Program worked with Restore America's Estuaries, the Service's Urban Wildlife Conservation Program, and local organizations to have discussions with marginalized communities in Connecticut, Maryland, and Texas. These discussions informed the development of best practices for engaging communities and incorporating community values in our conservation efforts.

Effective community engagement requires:

- A consistent investment of time and effort, even after the completion of the conservation project.
- An understanding of community values and the historical context of the area.
- Innovative solutions to address community needs, including needs beyond the scope of the conservation project.
- An understanding that community relationships are not transactional.



Standards of Excellence

In 2014, the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program published the *Standards of Excellence for Urban National Wildlife Refuges*, which presents eight principles for building long-term, meaningful relationships with urban communities, especially underserved and underrepresented communities. In 2023, the Service adopted the standards for the entire bureau, expanded the scope beyond urban communities and renamed it to the *Standards of Excellence for Community Engagement*.

Standards of Excellence

1. **Know and relate to the community**
2. **Connect urban people with nature via stepping stones of engagement**
3. **Build partnerships**
4. **Be a community asset**
5. **Ensure adequate long-term resources**
6. **Provide equitable access**
7. **Ensure visitors feel safe and welcome**
8. **Model sustainability**

The principles reflected in the standards are not new to the Coastal Program, as working with local communities and being inclusive are foundational to the way we deliver voluntary habitat conservation. By taking the time to build trust and co-designing conservation with communities, we connect people to nature and foster a sense of stewardship, which is critical to the success and future of habitat conservation.

Within the Service, the Coastal Program is advancing the Standards of Excellence by demonstrating how to successfully use the principles to implement on-the-ground habitat conservation that addresses the needs of fish, wildlife, and people.

Visitors to Long Wharf Nature Preserve, Connecticut / Firefly Imageworks, Inc.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Priorities

Urban Communities

The Department and Service have long recognized that natural spaces in urban areas are important to wildlife, especially migratory birds. There is an increasing acknowledgment that the Service's conservation efforts are not reaching certain urban communities, whether because of economic barriers, environmental injustices, or cultural exclusion, among other reasons. With more than 80 percent of Americans living in urban areas, inclusive and meaningful engagement with urban residents can foster support for the Service and the work that we do.

The Coastal Program has a long history of working with urban communities, including underserved and underrepresented communities. By using principles represented in the Service's Standards of Excellence, we engage and collaborate with urban partners and communities to implement voluntary habitat conservation that benefits fish, wildlife, and people.

Read more about our urban habitat projects in our *Urban Habitat Conservation Report*.

2023 Urban Accomplishment Statistics[1]

13
Projects

319
Acres Restored

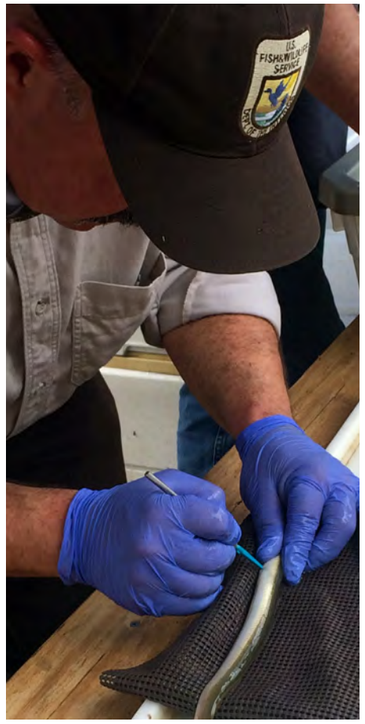
24
Acres Protected

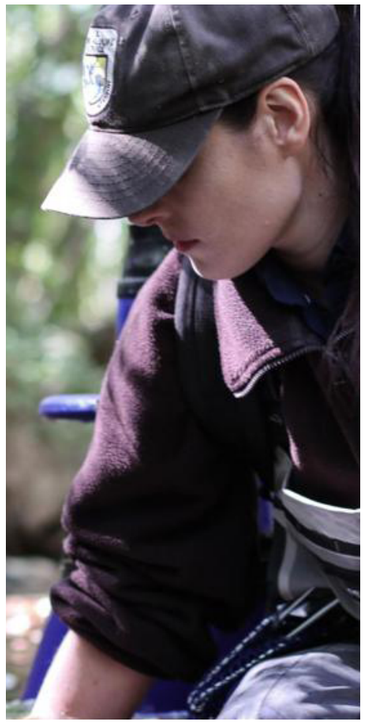
States
with Most Urban Projects

More than
$160,200
in Coastal Program Contributions

More than
$1,807,000
in Partner Contributions

1. Urban as defined by the United States Census Bureau - 2020 Urban Areas National Geodatabase.





Community of Practice

The success of the Coastal Program requires expertise in a wide range of competencies from partnership building to restoration design. To ensure that the Coastal Program continues to be a leader and stellar conservation partner, we are developing a community of practice (CoP) to develop these competencies among our staff. The CoP will also allow our staff to better connect with each other, despite being strategically positioned along our Nation's coasts, which requires some staff to be located far from other staff. The CoP will create a "place" for staff to connect and share resources and lessons learned to build the skills necessary to succeed in conservation and their careers. It will also foster a sense of community and a culture of inclusion, support, and empowerment for staff.

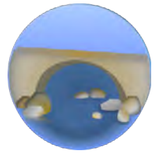
The CoP will initially consist of a SharePoint site (i.e., internal webpage), training resources, and mentorship program; however, it may eventually support communities focused on specific expertise. In 2023, we published our SharePoint site, which will serve as the primary interface for our CoP. The site hosts a searchable staff directory, policies and guidance, training resources, funding opportunities, program announcements, and onboarding resources, among other resources. Next year, we will work to promote and evaluate the effectiveness of the SharePoint site as well as develop a mentorship program.

(Left to Right) Biologist tagging American eels, Biologists monitoring for sea turtle hatchlings, and Biologist conducting a stream survey / USFWS. (Opposite Page) Sea turtle hatchlings / Becky Skiba, USFWS

Coastal Program
Priorities

Species Conservation

Conserving habitats that recover and sustain federal trust species.



Coastal Resiliency & Habitat Connectivity

Building resilient ecosystems and communities, protecting infrastructure, and supporting habitat connectivity on national wildlife refuges and other public and private lands.

Access & Recreation

Enhancing the visitor experience at national wildlife refuges and building a legacy of stewardship by expanding public access and recreation on public lands and elsewhere.

Engagement & Urban Conservation

Working with Tribes, states, and others to implement habitat and species conservation, including in urban areas.

Coastal Program
2023 Accomplishment Statistics

153
Projects

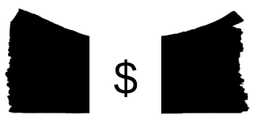
251
Project Partners

19
States and Territories

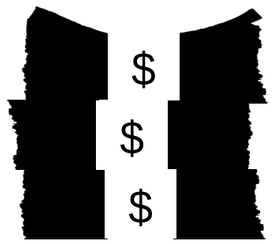
78,632
Acres Protected

9,057
Acres Restored

23
Projects on Federal Lands



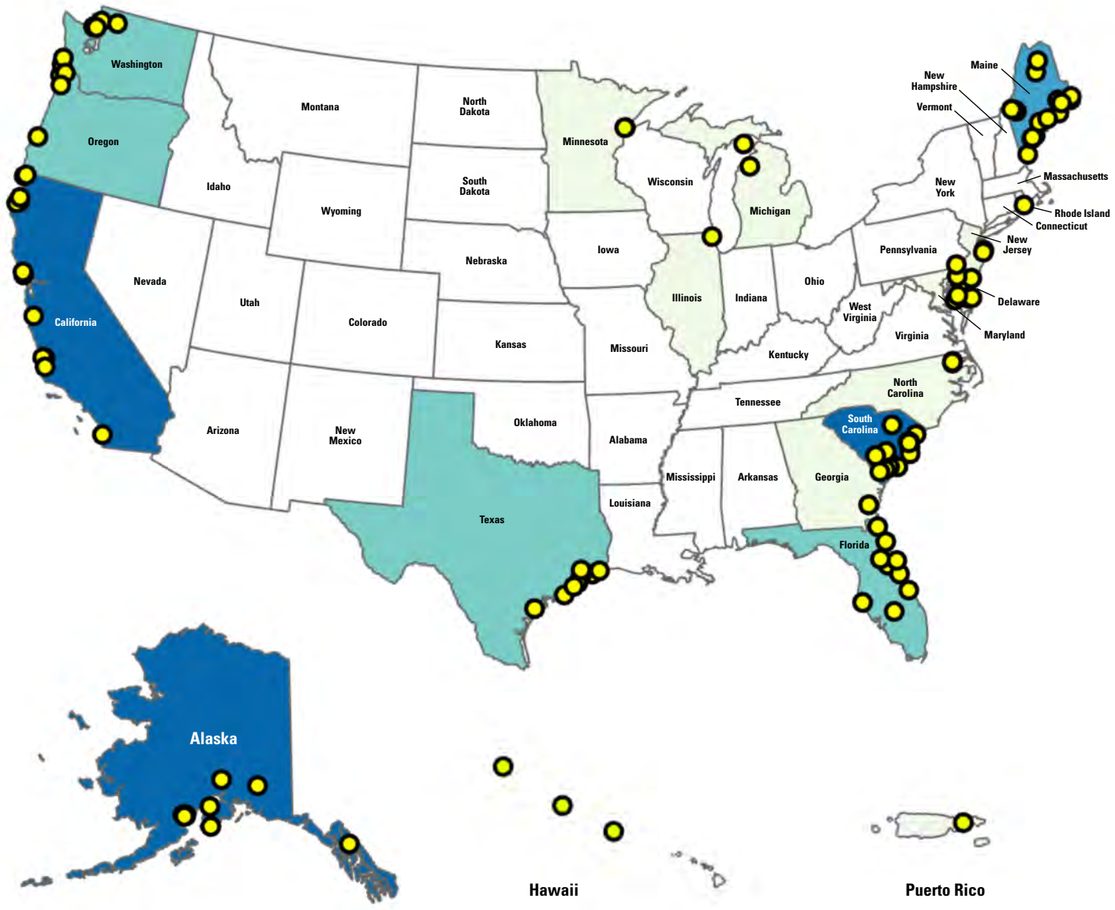
More than
$2,073,000
in Coastal Program Contributions



More than
$6,201,000
in Partner Contributions

$1 to $3
Coastal Program to
Partner Contributions

Coastal Program
2023 Accomplishment Map [2]



Number of Projects

- 1 - 4
- 5 - 9
- 20 - 24
- 25 - 29

2. The accomplishment map includes only habitat improvement projects. Technical assistance (e.g., conservation planning and monitoring) and maintenance projects and accomplishment stories are not included on the map. Technical assistance projects often have a broad geographic impact that does not make projects easy to display graphically.

Accomplishment Statistics

122

Projects for Migratory Birds

103

Projects for Threatened and Endangered Species

48

Projects for Interjurisdictional Fish

Very Hungry Caterpillar
Washington

The sand-verbena moth occurs on a few coastal beaches between Puget Sound, Washington and British Columbia, Canada. Yellow sand-verbena is a coastal dune-loving plant that is the only home for the moth. The moth's limited range and habitat loss contribute to its critically imperiled status.

The Coastal Program worked with the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (WSPRC) and others to restore four acres of beach habitat at Fort Worden State Park. The partnership along with volunteers from Friends of Fort Worden removed invasive European beachgrass and planted native yellow sand verbena.

The sand verbena plugs were grown by the Sustainability in Prisons Project – an innovative program that fosters sustainable change among incarcerated individuals by bringing nature, science, and environmental education into prisons.

In 2023, monitoring of the restoration site found 100 moths, which is a fourfold increase from pre-restoration surveys. WSPRC also worked with a local artist and others to create an interpretive sign for the project site, which is located adjacent to a popular public space.

Restored dunes at Fort Worden State Park and (Inset) Sand-verbena moth / Stella Waxwing, WSPRC

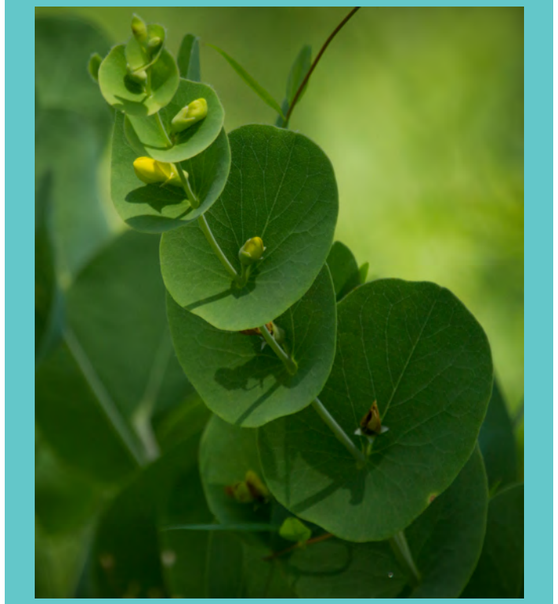
Saltmarsh Sparrow
New England & New York

The Coastal Program improves the delivery of conservation through our technical assistance, including habitat assessments and species monitoring. These monitoring efforts can inform conservation planning, measure conservation outcomes, and improve the science of restoration. In 2023, the Coastal Program worked with Ducks Unlimited, Audubon state chapters, state and local agencies, and other partners to monitor for the at-risk saltmarsh sparrow and seaside sparrow on 13 sites in Southern New England across Connecticut, New York, and Rhode Island.

The monitoring allowed us to determine the presence of sparrows, nesting females, and young birds. Demographic information is critical to the conservation of tidal marsh sparrows, as nest failure is the primary reason for their population decline. In Rhode Island, the monitoring evaluated the success of restoration efforts (i.e., thin layer sediment placement) to create suitable sparrow nesting habitat. In Connecticut and New York, the monitoring evaluated sparrow demographics that will be used to inform and evaluate the success of future restoration efforts.

Juvenile saltmarsh sparrow / Alison Kocek, USFWS

Hairy Rattleweed
Georgia



The Coastal Program worked with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to reintroduce prescribed fire to pine forests at the Sansavilla Wildlife Management Area (Wire Road Tract). The prescribed fire restored more than 109 acres of forest that will benefit several fire-adapted species, including the federally threatened gopher tortoise and federally endangered hairy rattleweed.

After the prescribed fire, surveys of the property found as many as 80 gopher tortoises and 5,000 rattleweed plants on the property. Rattleweed is one of the rarest plants in the world and the largest previously known population had slightly more than 400 plants.

A recovery recommendation for the rattleweed emphasizes the reintroduction of fire to habitats with rattleweed populations. Prescribed fire and future timber thinning will help convert the planted pine on the property to a more natural open pine flatwood and longleaf pine woodland.

Hairy rattleweed / Jeremy Roberts, Conservation Media

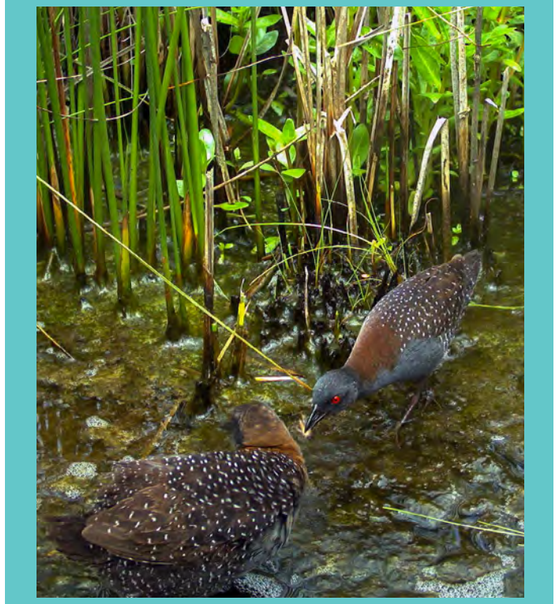
Massasauga Rattlesnake
Michigan

The Coastal Program works with partners to restore habitats as well as improve land management practices implemented by other government agencies, organizations, and private landowners. In 2023, the Coastal Program worked with the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and other partners to restore more than 250 acres of wetland and riparian habitats on the Petobego State Game Area and Skegemog Lake Wildlife Area in Michigan. The partnership also established management practices that benefit the recovery of the federally threatened eastern massasauga rattlesnake and other reptiles and amphibians.

These conservation areas comprise more than 3,400 acres of coastal habitats along Lake Michigan. Together with the adjacent Maple Bay Natural Area, these areas also contribute to nearly 5 miles of contiguous shoreline along Grand Traverse Bay that supports the federally threatened Pitcher's thistle. The conservation of high-quality habitats in this region also supports 25 State Species of Greatest Conservation Need, such as the pickerel frog and Blanding's turtle.

Eastern massasauga rattlesnake / Shaughn Galloway, USFWS

Eastern Black Rail
South Carolina



The federally threatened eastern black rail is a small and elusive shorebird that lives in coastal marshes and wet meadows. The Francis Marion National Forest (Tibwin Unit) has suitable vegetation to support black rails; however, some of the habitats lack the proper hydrology.

The Coastal Program worked with the U.S. Forest Service, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, American Bird Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, and other partners to improve hydrological management of these habitats to support black rails. The partnership restored more than 12 acres of habitat by installing dikes, water control structures, and an irrigation system to manage water depth for nesting black rails.

The partnership will monitor the site for nesting black rails during the next breeding season. If these restoration techniques prove to be successful, they will be used for future black rail conservation projects.

Female and male eastern black rails / Christy Hand, SCDNR

Accomplishment Statistics

1,442
Acres Treated with Prescribed Fire

7,943
Acres Treated for Invasive Species

146
Miles of Stream Habitat Conserved

Tribal Conservation
Alaska

The Bristol Bay region is the largest wild salmon fishery in the world – accounting for 57% of global sockeye salmon harvest. Salmon are incredibly important to the economy of southwest Alaska, with the commercial sockeye salmon fishery having an estimated average annual value of $21 million.

A longtime steward for natural habitats and traditional cultural resources, the Pedro Bay Corporation (Corporation) is an Alaska Native village corporation with an ambitious vision to protect its lands and waters for future generations, while supporting the financial wellbeing of their communities.

The Coastal Program worked with the Corporation, The Conservation Fund, and the Bristol Bay Heritage Land Trust to permanently protect more than 44,000 acres of critical spawning and rearing habitats for sockeye salmon in the Iliamna Lake watershed. The project also preserved important cultural traditions and subsistence activities. By selling the conservation easement, the Corporation generates revenue to provide long-term financial stability of the Dena'ina Athabascan people.

Aerial view of Iliamna River Watershed and (Inset) Subsistence fishing for salmon / Bri Dwyer

No Mowing Required
California

Eelgrass is an underwater marine plant that supports a wide range of natural services and functions, including nursery habitat for fish, food for migratory birds, carbon sequestration, and flood protection. These nature-based benefits are important to people, fish, and wildlife and for building resilient coasts, maintaining biodiversity, and mitigating climate change impacts.

In Morro Bay, eelgrass provides habitat for commercially important fish, birds flying along the Pacific Flyway, and the federally threatened southern sea otter. However, from 2007 to 2017, eelgrass in the Bay declined from 344 acres to 13 acres likely due to poor water conditions, such as increased water temperatures, turbidity, and salinity.

For several years, the Coastal Program, Morro Bay National Estuary Program, and the Environmental Protection Agency have been working to restore eelgrass in the region by improving seafloor maps and methods for where, when, and how to best plant eelgrass. Since 2019, the partnership has planted eelgrass in locations where the underwater grass can expand and reclaim habitat. In 2023, the partnership conducted surveys that found more than 350 acres of eelgrass – quantities not observed in the Bay since before 2007.

Sea otter swimming in eelgrass / Joe Tomoleoni, USGS

Recovery in Progress
Florida

The federally endangered Florida golden aster is a perennial flower endemic to Tampa Bay, Florida. When listed in 1986, the aster had only nine populations located in Hillsborough County. Although additional populations were later found, the recovery plan recommended habitat conservation and plantings to protect and expand the aster population.

Since 2008, the Coastal Program has worked with Bok Tower Gardens, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and local agencies to propagate and plant asters on protected lands. These conservation efforts have been very successful – expanding the aster population to more than 30 locations in the region. In 2023, the partnership introduced asters on more than 3 acres of land with the help of local volunteers and others.

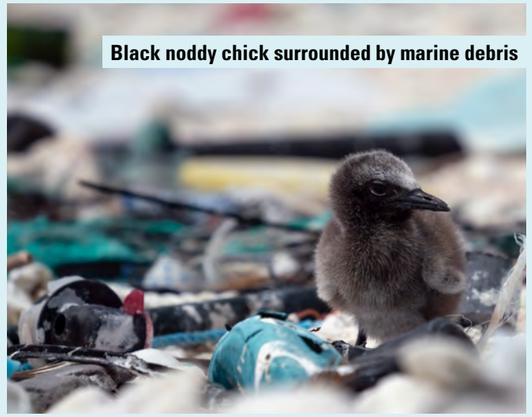
Monitoring of the project recorded an impressive 94 percent survival rate among the transplanted asters. The success of this project and similar projects contributed to the proposed delisting of the Florida golden aster.

Florida Golden Aster / B.J. Maynard, USFWS

Marine Debris Removal
Hawaii

Removing marine debris from beach

Saving entangled green sea turtle



Black noddy chick surrounded by marine debris

The Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument spans 582,578 square miles, including all of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. One of the largest marine conservation areas, the Monument is culturally and spiritually important to Native Hawaiians and hosts more than 7,000 marine species and 23 federally-listed species.

The Coastal Program, National Wildlife Refuge System, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are working with the Papahānaumokuākea Marine Debris Project – a non-profit organization that protects wildlife and habitats in the Monument from marine debris.

In 2023, the partnership completed two missions to remove marine debris from islands in the Monument. Cumulatively, the missions removed more than 210,000 pounds of trash and debris, including derelict fishing gear, a vast array of plastic and garbage, and a dilapidated seawall. The debris removal reduces the chance of fatal entanglement and entrapment of federally endangered species, such as Laysan ducks, Hawaiian monk seals, and green sea turtles, and the many seabirds that nest in the Monument.

(Clockwise from top left) Hauling marine debris into Zodiac, Carrying marine debris from the beach, Cutting fishing net from a Hawaiian green sea turtle, and Black noddy chick surrounded by marine debris / Papahānaumokuākea Marine Debris Project

Accomplishment Statistics

6,909
Acres Conserved on Service Land

12
Fish Passage Projects

Landscape Conservation
Maryland

The Coastal Program supports the National Wildlife Refuge System by helping to expand and improve the Nation's conservation estate. For example, the Coastal Program is providing technical assistance for the proposed creation of a refuge in southern Maryland, including lands in Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's, Prince George's, and Anne Arundel Counties.

In 2023, the Coastal Program led an effort with Patuxent Research Refuge, Chesapeake Conservancy, and others to prepare the Land Protection Plan (LLP) and Environmental Assessment (EA), which describes the vision, goals, objectives, acquisition boundary, and conceptual management for the potential refuge. The public will have an opportunity to comment on the LLP and EA.

Once the 500,000-acre acquisition boundary is approved, the Service and its partners will have the authority to work with willing landowners to protect up to 40,000 acres of habitat over a 30-year period. The proposed refuge will protect and connect important natural habitats, improve the Chesapeake Bay's water quality, and provide recreational opportunities, such as hiking, hunting, and fishing.

Tributary of Mattawoman Creek, Charles County, MD / Dan Murphy, USFWS

Tribal Stewardship
Michigan

The Coastal Program supports tribal-led habitat restoration and stewardship. The Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians (LTBB) have been implementing habitat restoration and monitoring on High Island, part of the Beaver Island archipelago on Lake Michigan.

The island hosts a wide range of unique habitats, including glacial drift, perched sand dunes, and sandy beach ridges. The island also supports critical habitat for the federally endangered Great Lakes piping plover and suitable habitat for federally threatened plants, including the Pitcher's thistle. The island also offers a variety of recreational opportunities, including hiking, wildlife viewing, and hunting.

Since 2002, the Coastal Program has supported habitat restoration and monitoring efforts by the LTBB by conducting project planning activities, such as habitat assessments and project compliance. In late 2022, the LTBB and volunteers restored more than 3 acres of habitat, which is part of a broader effort to restore more than 13 acres of habitat for the plover and thistle.

In 2023, the LTBB found seven piping plover nests on High Island. The High Island nests contributed to a record 80 nesting pairs – the most nests in the Great Lakes since the piping plover's federal listing in 1985.

Great Lakes piping plover chick / USFWS

Green(er) Thumb
Texas

In addition to project implementation, the Coastal Program invests in building capacity within the conservation community. Since 2018, we have provided assistance to increase plant production at EcoCenter, a native plant nursery, in Baytown, Texas. The nursery provides native plants for restoration projects, including salt marshes, island rookeries, and coastal prairies.

Along the Texas coast, salt marshes provide essential habitat for migratory birds and fish, among other wildlife. The restoration and protection of these habitats are a high priority for conservation agencies and organizations in the region. The EcoCenter has donated nearly 1 million plants that were used to restore more than 3,000 acres of tidal marsh and other wetlands since 2021.

Our investments supported facility upgrades, including ventilation and irrigation system improvements as well as the installation of outdoor shade structures. These upgrades allowed the nursery to produce more than 6,000 milkweed plants and as many as 10,000 prairie plants annually.

Sowing native seeds for habitat restoration projects at EcoCenter / Scott Williams, USFWS

Inclusive Hunting
Texas

Along the Texas coast, eight national wildlife refuges offer waterfowl hunting; however, few provide accommodations for hunters who need adaptive equipment. In 2023, the Coastal Program, National Wildlife Refuge System, Ducks Unlimited, and other partners expanded inclusive hunting opportunities by building an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant hunting blind on Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge.

"Having a place to hunt that is easily accessible is important to people of all abilities. As a fellow hunter, it was important to me that others can enjoy the sport I love so much." – Christopher Tipper Esponge, Waterfowl Hunter

During the waterfowl-hunting season, as many as 20,000 ducks and 15,000 snow geese can be found on the Refuge. In addition to hunting, the Refuge has an educational center and supports numerous other recreational activities, such as hiking, fishing, and bird watching. The partnership also constructed a similar hunting blind on McFaddin National Wildlife Refuge.

Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant hunting blind on Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge / Ducks Unlimited

Accomplishment Statistics

327
Acres Conserved on Indigenous Lands

21
Projects with Public Access

Birds in the City
Minnesota

The St. Louis River Estuary is the largest coastal wetland complex on Lake Superior. The complex is located on the Mississippi Flyway and is an Audubon Important Bird Area because it provides critical habitat for marsh birds and other migratory birds. However, historic industrial activities caused the loss of more than 3,000 acres of coastal wetlands in the region.

A diverse partnership, including the Coastal Program, Natural Resources Damage Assessment Program, Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund, Minnesota Land Trust, City of Duluth, and other partners, is working to restore these wetlands by implementing industrial mitigation and habitat restoration, such as large-scale debris clean-ups, invasive species removals, and native plant revegetation.

In 2023, the partnership restored more than 135 acres of habitats, including forest, tidal marsh, and shallow aquatic habitats. The partnership also expanded public access and recreation in the area by completing a 0.2-mile all-access wildlife viewing trail. The Minnesota Land Trust also hosted five volunteer events that supported citizen science and conservation, including the removal of debris from 3.5 miles of shoreline near the project site.

Excavator restoring tidal habitat / Minnesota Land Trust

Return of Native Lands
Alaska

The Coastal Program is supporting efforts by the Native Village of Tazlina to return indigenous ownership of more than 400 acres of land in southcentral Alaska. In 2023, the Coastal Program, Great Land Trust, and the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund assisted the Native Village with acquiring more than 160 acres of land that was owned by the Archdiocese of Anchorage-Juneau.

Archaeological surveys showed that the property was used by Alaska Natives for subsistence purposes dating back at least 300 years. The property located at the confluence of the Tazlina River and Copper River permanently protects dense forest and other habitats that support a healthy salmon ecosystem.

"We are so happy to know that all future generations of tribal members will have access to this land and will be able to use it in the same way that we do today and have in the past. The people who live here have a huge connection to this place." – Marce Simeon, Tribal Administrator

Confluence of the Copper and Tazlina Rivers / Nathaniel Wilder

Like a Beaver
California

The Coastal Program worked with the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, Stemple Creek Ranch, and other partners to restore more than 1,300 feet of stream and 6 acres of associated wetlands along Fallon Creek.

The project uses an innovative, low cost technique to restore hydrologic conditions by building beaver dam analogues of wood, sod, and soil. This technique is compatible to working lands and serves as a model for other ranchers in the watershed, where more than 12 miles of stream are in need of restoration.

The project will advance the recovery of the federally endangered northern tidewater goby and the federally threatened California red-legged frog. It will also eliminate a source of excessive sedimentation into the Estero de San Antonio lagoon.

Beaver dam analogue / Damion Ciotti, USFWS

Faith in Conservation
Delaware

The Coastal Program provided technical assistance to the National Wildlife Federation's Sacred Grounds, a community engagement program that partners with communities of faith to create native plant pollinator gardens as well as connections between faith practices and the environment. Over the past two years, Sacred Grounds and the Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund created 21 pollinator gardens on properties owned by 19 churches, a mosque, and a synagogue in Wilmington, Delaware. The gardens also incorporated amenities requested by the congregations, such as seating areas for reflection.

Sacred Grounds also incorporates career training in the landscape and horticulture industry. Participants in the career training included individuals from the Delaware Center for Horticulture's ***Branches to Chances*** and the William Penn Foundation's ***Delaware River Climate Corps***. Sacred Grounds partners also helped to organize the *Garden Keepers* – congregation members who maintain the gardens and raise awareness among local communities about the importance of natural spaces in the city.

Faith Will Plant Pollinator Gardens members at New Pentecostal United Holy Church / Blane Henry

Tribal Climate Resiliency
Nationwide

The Coastal Program supports efforts by the Service to engage with underserved communities and collaboratively deliver habitat conservation. For example, we assisted the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs by serving on the review team for the Tribal Climate Resilience Grants.

The grants support projects by federally-recognized Tribal nations and Tribal organizations to plan and implement climate resilience projects, such as climate adaptation planning, coastal community retreat and relocation, and habitat restoration. Since 2011, the grants have provided more than $119 million to support 947 projects.

In 2023, the grant program awarded more than $46 million to 118 projects. There were 11 coastal and ocean-related projects, including a project by the Tulalip Tribes to establish a fish monitoring program in Puget Sound, Washington. The monitoring program will help the Tribe and other stakeholders better manage salmon and herring fisheries by improving their understanding of the climate change impacts on prey availability, early marine growth, and survival of juvenile salmon and herring.

Tulalip Tribes paddling on Puget Sound / Tulalip Tribes

Learn more about the Coastal Program at
https://www.fws.gov/program/coastal

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(Front Cover) Gualupe-Nipomo Dunes National Wildlife Refuge, California / Ian Shive
(Back Cover) Brown bear / Lisa Hupp, USFWS