Partners for Fish and Wildlife

Technical and Financial Assistance for Habitat Restoration

PROGRAM GUIDELINES
SOUTH CAROLINA

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife program restores, improves, and protects fish and wildlife habitat on private lands through partnerships between the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), individuals, and other organizations, while leaving the land in private ownership. This voluntary program was started in 1987 and has since enrolled thousands of landowners from every state in U.S. including over 170 in South Carolina.

Typical Partners for Fish and Wildlife Project Types

Projects may include but are not limited to:

- Replanting **bottomland hardwoods** on suitable sites such as riparian areas and open fields in floodplains.
- Restoring **wetland hydrology** by plugging drainage ditches, breaking tile drainage systems, installing water control structures, berm construction, re-establishing ephemeral pools, re-establishing microtopography.
- Restoration and improvement of **longleaf pine forest** on suitable sites where the landowner's objective is wildlife. Practices include, site prep, planting, removal of hardwood competition, firebreak disking, and restoration of native ground layer vegetation. See details under "General Information" below.
- Planting suitable open areas with **native warm season grasses** and other native plants.
- Removal of **invasive exotic plants** which compete with native fish and wildlife and alter their natural habitats.
- Reconstruction of degraded **stream habitats** through bioengineering techniques.
- Planting Atlantic white cedar on suitable sites.
- Special management actions for federally listed imperiled species.

General Information

- Program projects include improving habitat for any or all of the following: migratory bird species; anadromous fish species of special concern to the Service; endangered, threatened, or candidate species; species proposed for listing; and other declining or imperiled species.
- The USFWS provides technical assistance as needed and requested, to the extent that workload allows.
- Cooperator cost share is generally 50 percent of total project cost. Exceptions may be considered in certain cases where wildlife benefits are determined to be high, in high priority locations, or when the cooperator agrees to a lower percentage of match.
- The average amount for projects funded is $8,000. Maximum amount per project is $25,000. Landscape-scale project maximum is $200,000.
- After an agreement is signed the cooperator performs or contracts the work. Payment is reimbursement after work is completed.
- Biological significance and cost-effectiveness is important. Try to improve the most acres you can for the least amount of money with a high quality project ensuring long-term conservation benefits.
- Cooperators retain all rights to their land. USFWS personnel do not enter private property without permission.
- USFWS Partners program personnel can assist with information on USDA conservation programs.
- **Longleaf Pine Forest Restoration:** This involves restoring longleaf pine forest on appropriate sites where longleaf pine likely existed prior to European settlement. We offer assistance for: 1) site preparation and re-establishment of longleaf pine seedlings in fields and cut-over areas; 2) removal of dense hardwood midstory using chemical and/or mechanical treatments; 3) re-establishment of the native plant understory (grasses, legumes, flowering herbs); 4) gradual conversion of stands from loblolly to longleaf; 5) firebreak layout and disking, and; 6) invasive exotic plant treatment. The minimum area eligible is 15 contiguous acres (exceptions may be authorized). Cut-over sites must have been non-longleaf before the harvest. Cooperators must be committed to maintaining prescribed fire on the site as needed to reduce hardwood competition and maintain open understory and native ground layer vegetation. We cannot provide funding for prescribed burning (unless the burn is performed by the SC Forestry Commission, The Nature Conservancy, or other contractor that meets NWCG qualification standards). A Safe Harbor Agreement is available for landowners who may be concerned about possible restrictions involving the red-cockaded woodpecker or who want to conserve endangered species.

Eligible Lands

• private • tribal • non-federal • non-state

Projects Not Eligible • having low biologically significance and/or low cost effectiveness • upland ponds / fish ponds • greentree reservoirs • where pen-reared waterfowl will be released • backyard habitats • use as compensatory mitigation for meeting requirements of any federal or state regulatory program

Criteria Used for Determination of Priority Projects

- Project provides significant benefit to threatened or endangered species, species of concern, species or habitats that are declining, imperiled, at-risk, or designated as high priority on the South Carolina Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.
- High biological significance and high cost effectiveness
- Projects that result in self-sustaining systems that are not dependent on artificial structures
- Project site protected by conservation easement or other permanent protection
- Projects that reduce habitat fragmentation and establish corridors between protected lands
- Projects located in close proximity to protected habitat and complement the activities on that land (e.g., national wildlife refuge, private land conservation easements, state wildlife management area, national forest, heritage preserve, WRP easements, state forest, state park, and certain Dept. of Defense and Dept. of Energy lands, etc.).
- Adjacent to other Partners for Fish and Wildlife project sites under agreement, WHIP sites, or CRP sites.
- Habitat restoration is typically favored over habitat enhancement.
- On longleaf pine projects, inclusion of native ground cover restoration as needed (i.e., grass, legumes, etc.)
- Committing to an agreement period longer than the 10-year minimum
- Projects with a significant riparian or wetland restoration component
- Cooperator (multiple partners if applicable) agreeing to share higher percentage (>50%) of project cost.
- Projects located inside the program's priority focus areas: various watersheds in the lower coastal plain, Lynches and Great Pee Dee Watersheds, the Lower Catawba, and Stevens Creek areas. Projects outside of the priority focus areas may also be considered for funding.

Application and Funding Cycle

- If you are interested in pursuing a project under the Partners for Fish & Wildlife program you must contact a program biologist. Application form requirements vary by project so it is essential that you first make direct contact with us:

  Joe Cockrell (843)727-4707ext.305 joe_cockrell@fws.gov
  Jason Ayers (843)727-4707ext.220 jason_ayers@fws.gov

  USFWS - Partners for Fish & Wildlife
  176 Croghan Spur Rd., Suite 200
  Charleston, SC 29407

- Applications compete for funding with other applications from throughout South Carolina.
- October 1: Application deadline for funds becoming available the following spring.
- November: Applications are ranked on criteria listed above by a panel of natural resource professionals.
- April - May: USFWS field office receives annual program allocation. Projects are approved for funding in order of ranking until the allocation is expended. Applicants are notified of status.
- April to July: Landowner and USFWS sign an agreement.
- Note: Reimbursement cannot be made for project activities that began before the initial project planning with USFWS. Any work performed before an agreement is signed is at risk of not being funded.

Agreement

- After the project is approved for funding, cooperator signs an agreement that secures the federal investment. Basically, the agreement describes the contributions of each party and states that the cooperator agrees to leave the habitat improvements in place for at least 10 years.
- Project work must be initiated within one year and completed within three years.

Cost-share Payment

- After the project is completed (portion or whole) and inspected, the cooperator submits an invoice to the USFWS with supporting receipts to claim payment.
- Payment is made via direct deposit to the cooperator's bank account.

Monitoring

- A project biologist maintains contact with the cooperator, follows up with occasional site visits to monitor wildlife benefits and project success, and provides technical assistance as needed and requested.

For more information

Web site: http://partners.fws.gov **Phone: (843) 727-4707 ext. 305 or 220** **E-mail: joe_cockrell@fws.gov**