Partners for Fish and Wildlife in Delaware

Restoring Habitat for Future Generations

Background

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (Partners Program) is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's most popular and effective program for voluntary, citizen and community-based fish and wildlife habitat restoration activities. The Partners Program serves as a bridge to owners and managers of private lands to develop partnerships for the benefit of federal trust species. The approach is simple: engage willing partners, through non-regulatory incentives, to conserve, restore and protect fish and wildlife habitat on their property. The Partners Program began in 1987 to help farmers restore degraded wetlands for wildlife; today it continues to grow with opportunities to restore wetland, riverine, and upland habitats.

Partners Program in Delaware

The Partners Program in Delaware is administered from the Chesapeake Bay Field Office in Annapolis, Maryland. The program began in 1993 with a primary focus on wetland restoration. Projects are focused in areas where conservation efforts will provide the greatest benefit for federal trust species, which include: migratory birds, anadromous fish, and federally-listed threatened and endangered species. Habitats in one of the largest estuaries in the world are providing important cover, food, water, and breeding areas for many species.

Threats

Delaware has lost in excess of 50 percent of its wetland acreage since European settlement and in the past 300 years. Wetlands continue to decline from invasive plant and animal species, such as nutria and purple loosestrife.

Delaware has lost over 60 percent of its forests, primarily due to agriculture. Riparian habitats have been nearly eliminated in many agricultural areas in rural Delaware which has contributed to the decline in aquatic habitat quality in the Delaware Bays as well as the coastal inland bays. Endangered species such as the Delmarva fox squirrels continue to lose habitat due to commercial forestry practices that convert native deciduous forests to more commercially valuable pine plantations.

Urban sprawl represents a new threat to the remaining forests and wetlands due to the close proximity to three major urban centers (Washington, D.C., Baltimore and Philadelphia). As human populations increase in Delaware, especially in coastal areas, fish and wildlife habitats and the creatures that depend on them will continue to be stressed.

Conservation Strategies

Wetland Restoration

Since 1998, the Partners Program has developed a holistic system of wetland restoration including: the recreation of micro-topography to create more diverse soil moisture regimes; transplanting trees and sapling using convention excavating equipment; adding coarse woody debris that provides long term carbon sources and habitat structure. Straw or hay have been used extensively in restoration projects over the past three years to stimulate the denitrification process and to provide optimum substrates for aquatic invertebrates. These techniques are the product of a partnership between the Partners Program and the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control. Wetland restoration projects have been focused in impaired watersheds in Delaware with a special emphasis on private lands that are in close proximity to State and Federal wildlife management areas and refuges.

Replanting Riparian Forest Buffers

Thousands of miles of riparian buffers have been eliminated in Delaware in the past 100 years. To reverse this trend, the Partners Program began purchasing tree seedlings from the Maryland...
Partner Projects

USFWS

2002.

700 acres were planted in the spring of

acres of agricultural lands. An additional

assistance to landowners to replant 1,005

seedlings and the necessary technical

provided 300,000 native hardwood tree

Forest Service, the Partners Program

Conservation Service and the Delaware

seedlings on marginal agricultural lands.

began a forest initiative to replant tree

forest lands since European settlement in

Delaware has lost over 60 percent of its

riparian buffers.

and grasshopper sparrow.

Grasslands

Grasslands provide nesting cover and a

protein source for a variety of migratory

birds. The loss of native grasslands in the

Northeast has contributed to the

steady decline of grassland dependent

birds such as the eastern meadowlark

and grasshopper sparrow.

The Partners Program, working in

concert with private landowners

and other Federal, state and non-
governmental partners are planting

warm season grasses and forbs (non-

woody broadleaf plants) as buffers

around wetland restoration projects and

riparian buffers.

Growing Forests

Delaware has lost over 60 percent of its

forest lands since European settlement in

the 1600s. In 2001, the Partners Program

began a forest initiative to replant tree

seedlings on marginal agricultural lands.

With the help of the Natural Resources

Conservation Service and the Delaware

Forest Service, the Partners Program

provided 300,000 native hardwood tree

seedlings and the necessary technical

assistance to landowners to replant 1,005

acres of agricultural lands. An additional

700 acres were planted in the spring of

2002.

Fish Passage

Fish passage is a recent priority for the

Partners Program in Delaware. The

Partners Program has been successful

in identifying potential sites for the

installation of fish ladders or other less

expensive restoration alternatives. Mill

ponds represent the best potential for

the restoration of historic spawning and

nursery habitat in Delaware.

Invasive Plant Species Control

Invasive plant species, such as purple

loosestrife, are detrimental to the health

of native fish and wildlife habitats. The

Partners Program is beginning to focus

on the challenges of invasive plant

control.

Farm Bill Conservation

The Partners Program is actively

involved in Delaware providing technical

assistance to the USDA for their

conservation programs, such as the

Conservation Reserve Enhancement

Program, Wetlands Reserve Program

and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program

As members of the USDA-State

Technical Committee, the Partners

Program helps guide the development

and implementation of habitat technical

standards. The relationship with USDA

combines funding with biological

expertise to provide maximum benefits
to the private landowner and to fish and

wildlife resources. Partners Program

biologists work with landowners in the

agricultural community to discuss

conservation practices that meet their

financial needs and benefit fish and

wildlife resources.

Cooperative Conservation

From 1993-2009 the Partner Program in

Delaware worked with partners and over

150 landowners on over 200 projects in

our focus areas. This work contributed to

the protection, enhancement, or

restoration of nearly 5,000 acres of

habitat and 20 river miles of forest

buffers supporting dozens of migratory

and federally protected species.

For additional information or questions

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Restoring grasslands habitat benefits

growth dependent species like the

Eastern Meadowlark

Delaware Skippers thrive on native

milkwood that are often overcome by

invasive plants.