

Partners for Fish and Wildlife in Delaware

Restoring Habitat for Future Generations



Red Knot

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

Delaware Partners Program Accomplishment Highlights 1993-2009

- Restored 4,500 acres of forest;
- Restored 350 acres of native grasslands;
- Restored 20 miles of riparian forest buffers with over 1,000,000 seedlings planted;
- Partnered with over 150 landowners and 8 partners to complete more than 200 projects.



W.H. Julian

Loss of forest habitat threatens the Federally endangered Delmarva fox squirrel.

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;



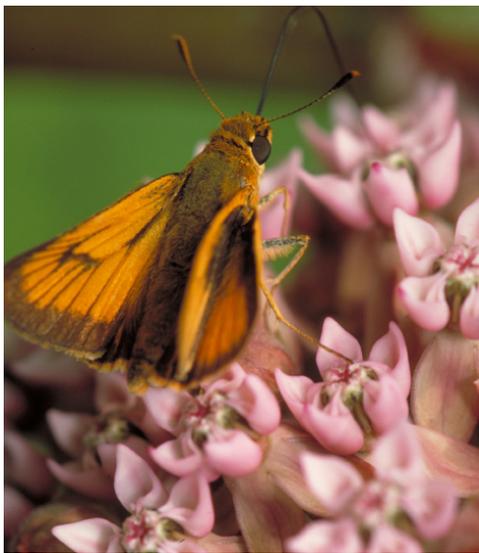
USFWS

One year after shoreline stabilization project on the Mispillion River located in Kent County, Delaware.

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



Delaware Skippers thrive on native milkweed that are often overcome by invasive plants.

State Nursery and International Paper Company and distributing these plants to private landowners so they can reestablish riparian forest buffers on their lands. The forest restoration and riparian forest buffer initiatives in Delaware will ultimately benefit the endangered Delmarva fox squirrel.

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.

Jeff Nadler



Restoring grasslands habitat benefits grassland dependent species like the Eastern Meadowlark.

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

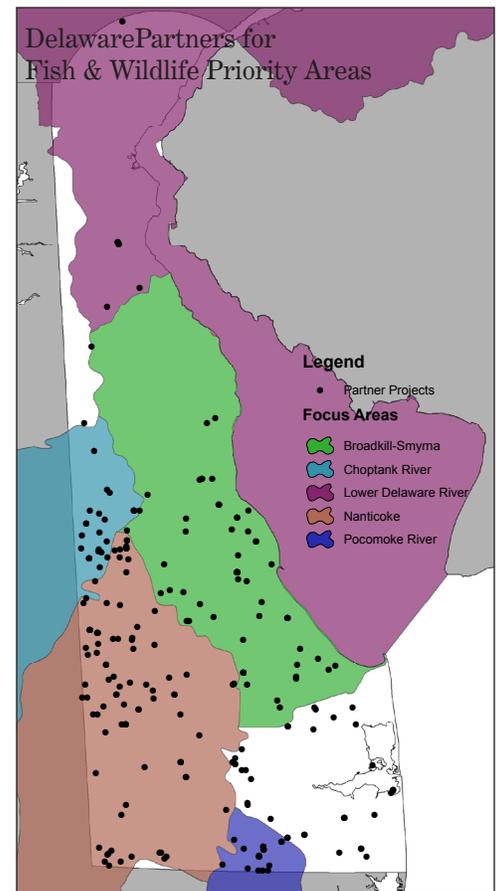
Invasive plant species, such as purple loosestrife, are detrimental to the health of native fish and wildlife habitats. The Partners Program is beginning to focus on the challenges of invasive plant control.

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 contact:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Chesapeake Bay Field Office
177 Admiral Cochrane Drive
Annapolis, MD 21401
410/573 4573
410/266 9127 fax
<http://www.fws.gov/chesapeakebay/>

Federal Relay Service
for the deaf and hard-of-hearing
1 800/877-8339

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1 800/344 WILD
<http://www.fws.gov>

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