

Partners for Fish and Wildlife in Virginia

Restoring Habitat for Future Generations



Brown-headed Nuthatch chicks. ©tedtucker.com

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 Virginia

The Partners Program in Virginia is administered from the Virginia Field Office in Gloucester, Virginia. The program began in 1989 with restoration efforts concentrated on non-tidal wetland habitats in the coastal plain and stream restoration in the mountains of southwest Virginia. Projects are focused in areas where conservation efforts will provide the greatest benefit for federal trust species. In recent years, the Partners Program has focused more effort on the Chesapeake Bay, especially the James River and Bayside Eastern Shore, and on recovery of aquatic species in Appalachian watersheds. The Partners Program has also been expanded to include a significant focus on longleaf pine community restoration in Southside Virginia.

Threats

Virginia has lost 42% of its original wetlands since the 1780s. Substantial wetland losses have continued, even into recent decades. In the Chesapeake Bay drainage, the heaviest loss of forested wetlands in the 1980s was in Virginia. It is estimated that Virginia lost more

Virginia Partners Program Accomplishment Highlights 1989-2009

- Restored and enhanced over 27,000 acres of wetlands and uplands;
- Restored 200 miles of forested stream corridors;
- Removed 3 in-stream structures to improve fish passage; and
- Partnered with hundreds of partners to complete thousands of projects.



Robert Harrington

Virginia has over 30 federally listed mussel species like the pink mucket pearlymussel. Restoration of riparian and instream habitats on agricultural lands is a major emphasis of the Partners Program.

than 17,800 acres of wetlands in the Chesapeake Bay watershed between 1982 and 1989 - primarily due to conversion for agriculture and urban-related development. Sixty-four percent of Virginia's remaining freshwater wetlands, predominantly forested wetlands, are located in the coastal plain. Of these, an additional 8% have been ditched, impairing many of their natural functions.

Rapid, large-scale development in northern and southeast Virginia has resulted in large wetland losses, stream channel erosion, and serious impacts to water quality in streams, rivers, and bays. Increased sedimentation has wiped out large areas of submerged aquatic vegetation in the Chesapeake and Back Bay watersheds, reducing their value for fish and wildlife. In the mountains of Virginia, coal mining activities and the need for increased use of best management practices in silvicultural and agricultural operations threaten water



N. C. Wildlife Resources Commission

Stream restoration efforts have been expanded to include recovery activities for the federally endangered Roanoke logperch.

quality and stream stability. Accidental spills from highway and industrial sites have caused several significant aquatic species die-offs in recent years. Degraded water quality has led to disease outbreaks in a number of Virginia waterways. Climate change will further degrade habitats for some native species and increase the risk of invasive species and disease outbreaks.

Conservation Strategies

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife program in Virginia was early to recognize the value of landscape-level planning. While landowner interest will always be a driving force, project funds are targeted to areas with greater wetland losses, listed species recovery needs, and waterways federally designated as impaired.

Following are several on-going examples of this approach.

Current Strategies

We are collaborating with our conservation partners to focus our work on the most critical conservation lands

and waters in the Commonwealth. GIS data is used to identify those habitats that support the greatest diversity of fish and wildlife species, and help us target our work to habitats and species that are in greatest need. Newly developed State Wildlife Action Plans have helped us identify species and habitats of greatest concern. In addition, more effort has gone into developing new partnerships that include individuals and groups with helpful insight regarding the economic and social implications of our work.

Recovery of the Endangered Roanoke logperch with Economic Benefits

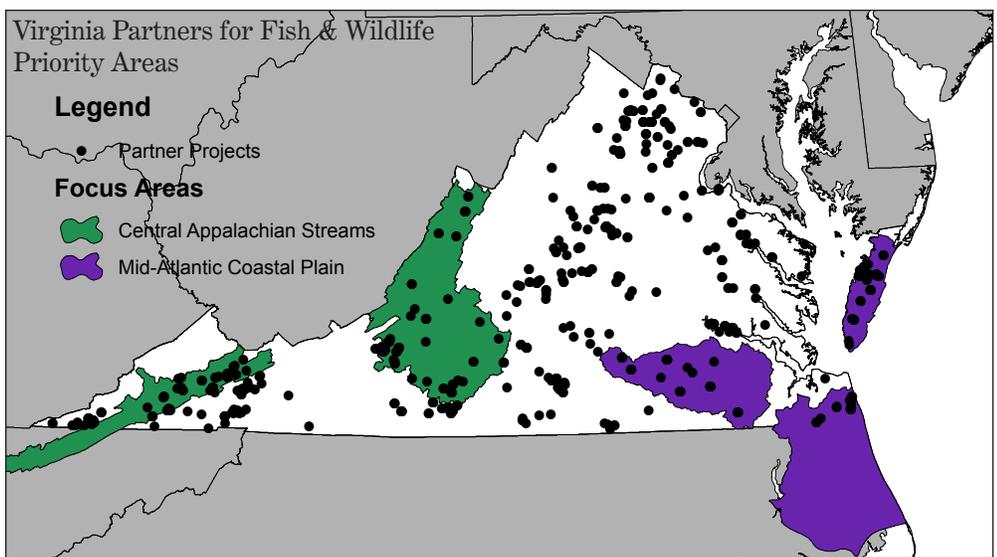
A consortium of partners including the FishAmerica Foundation, the City of Roanoke, Roanoke County, and the Western Virginia Water Authority recently completed the removal of Wasena Dam and the replacement of Wiley Drive Bridge, both within Wasena Park. These two projects improved boating and fishing access in the Roanoke River, and reduced flooding risks, while also restoring instream habitat for Roanoke logperch. The Wiley Drive Bridge was partially funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. A third project is planned to recover additional habitat for Roanoke logperch in the Pigg River; Veterans Memorial Park Dam Removal will be completed in FY11 in partnership with the Town of Rocky Mount, Virginia.

Albemarle-Pamlico Sound Watersheds

The Virginia Partners Program helped form a new partnership in southeast Virginia and northeast North Carolina to address long-term conservation needs in the Mid-Atlantic Coastal Plain with a primary focus on wetlands and migratory bird population declines. Over 40 partners joined forces to successfully obtain over \$27 million in match and grant dollars to restore and protect almost 60,000 acres of bird habitat from 2002-2010. Wetland conservation projects completed under the Sound Investment and Roanoke River Migratory Bird Initiatives spanned Virginia and North Carolina from First Landing State Park and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge in the coastal plain to Great Dismal Swamp and the Upper Roanoke River Watershed in the piedmont region.

Upper Tennessee River Basin, Southwest Virginia

Virginia harbors 66 federally listed species, the highest concentration on east of the Mississippi. The Upper Tennessee River Basin of southwest Virginia is a globally rare ecosystem with an unusually high diversity of species



and concentration of federally listed fish and mussels. Mussel species diversity outranks any other watershed in the world. Water quality in this central Appalachian watershed is impacted by cattle grazing, coal mining, and other industrial and urban sources. Partners Program biologists primarily focus on efforts to improve water quality through installation of best management practices. The Partners Program is currently working under a Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative with the FishAmerica Foundation and NRCS to install up to \$7M in water quality best management practices on cattle farms from 2009-2013.

Eastern Shore

The Eastern Shore of Virginia is a critical area for migratory waterbirds, songbirds, and raptors. The Partners Program has focused on the establishment of vegetative corridors to link blocks of high quality habitats in this coastal zone, providing safe passage for migrating birds. Over \$9M in grant and match support has been expended here for the restoration and protection of critical migration habitats since 2005 under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) partnership with The Nature Conservancy's Virginia Coast Reserve, state, and local partner members known collectively as the Southern Tip Ecological Partnership.

Cooperative Conservation

From 1989-2009, the Partners Program in Virginia worked with hundreds of partners on thousands of projects in our Coastal and Appalachian focus areas. This work contributed to the enhancement or restoration of over 27,000 acres of wetland and upland habitats, almost 200 miles of forested stream corridors, and removal of three in-stream structures to improve

fish passage. An important goal of the Partners Program is to seek non-traditional partnership opportunities to facilitate understanding and cooperation that leads to projects with economic and aesthetic benefits to communities, as well as conservation outcomes.

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