

Partners for Fish and Wildlife in West Virginia

Restoring Habitat for Future Generations



Cerulean Warbler

Robert Royce

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 West Virginia

The Partners Program in West Virginia is administered from the West Virginia Field Office in Elkins, West Virginia. The program began in 1993, primarily as a wetland restoration program. In 1998, the Partners Program began assisting with riparian (streamside) restoration efforts throughout the State. The Program now includes woodland restoration, red spruce restoration, and control of invasive species. 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.

Threats

West Virginia is mountainous and nearly 70 percent is forested. Remaining wetlands make up less than one percent of the State and are largely confined to Canaan Valley in Tucker County, Meadow River in Greenbrier County and floodplains statewide. West Virginia has likely lost over half its wetlands to agricultural drainage since European

West Virginia Partners Program Accomplishment Highlights 1992-2010

- Restored 130 miles of riparian habitat;
- Restored over 500 acres of wetlands;
- Restored 50 acres of habitats impacted by invasive species; and
- Partnered with over 250 landowners to complete more than 200 projects.



USFWS

Wetland restoration projects have been concentrated in the vicinities of the Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge, the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge (above) and the Chesapeake Bay drainage of West Virginia.

settlement in the 1700s. Urban development continues to reduce wetland acreage statewide. Native grasslands, though never abundant, have all but been eliminated by European grass varieties, agricultural conversion and forest succession. Streamside habitats have been lost or degraded by severe flooding, development, agriculture, and dredging. To a lesser extent, woodlands are degraded by livestock grazing. As a result, fish and wildlife populations that are dependent on these habitats have declined.

Conservation Strategies

Wetlands

Wetlands play an important role in the life support functions of migratory birds that are a trust resource of the Service. Restoration techniques focus on returning hydrology to formerly drained wetlands as economically as possible: drainage tiles broken and small berms and ditch plugs constructed to block the water from draining the site. Wetland restoration projects are carefully crafted to blend into the landscape and involve such methods as creating

microtopography (i.e., little ridges and swales), establishing complexes of small seasonal wetlands, and restoring larger permanent wetlands.

Wetland restoration projects have been concentrated in the vicinities of the Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge, the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge, and the Chesapeake Bay drainage of West Virginia. These areas contain some of the best migratory waterfowl habitat in the State.

Riparian Areas and Streams

Streams and riparian areas support fish, mussels, amphibians and many other species of wildlife enjoyed by West Virginians. Many of our streams and streamside areas have become unstable due to unrestricted livestock grazing. Others have been repeatedly channelized after flood events, further adding to their instability. Unstable streambanks and stream channels will lead to future flooding problems, poor water quality, and reductions in fish and wildlife populations.



Wetland restoration projects benefit migratory waterfowl like Wood Duck.

Streambank fencing is one restoration technique that is cost effective and valued by farm groups and landowners. The West Virginia Partners Program has a highly skilled and well equipped fence construction crew that builds over 100,000 feet of high-tensile fence annually. The landowner benefits from having a quality fence to use as part of a rotational grazing system that allows the profitable yet wildlife-friendly use of the land. Streambank stabilization efforts have largely been re-vegetation and/or state-of-the-art "Natural Stream Design". The West Virginia Partners Program makes thousands of wetland and riparian friendly native shrub and tree seedlings available to the public each spring free of charge. For the NSD work we work in partnership with USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service and West Virginia Conservation Agency and the Conservation Districts.

Upland Forests

Forests provide excellent habitat for neotropical migrant songbirds, threatened and endangered species, and game species. Forest product income often exceeds agricultural income on some farms. The Partners Program works with landowner's to manage livestock access to forests, thereby improving pasture quality and forest quality.

Invasives

The control and eradication of invasive plants is vital to the integrity of fish and wildlife habitat. The West Virginia Partners Program has worked with many landowners to control and eliminate yellow iris, Japanese knotweed and purple loosestrife in the upper Potomac basin and other high elevation areas. Our program has contracted with local certified pest applicators to conduct treatment utilizing grant and program funds. The West Virginia Partners Program has also been instrumental in the formation of the Potomac Highlands Cooperative Weed and Pest Management Area. The PHCWPM will provide

technical assistance, treatment assistance and education to public and private landowners for the control of non-native invasive species.

Endangered Species

The Partners Program has worked with the Endangered Species Program to install gates on bat cave entrances so that the bats aren't disturbed during their winter hibernation. Disturbances during hibernation forces the bats to expend energy reserves needed to get them through the winter. The program also provides assistance to private landowners with restoring high elevation red spruce habitat.

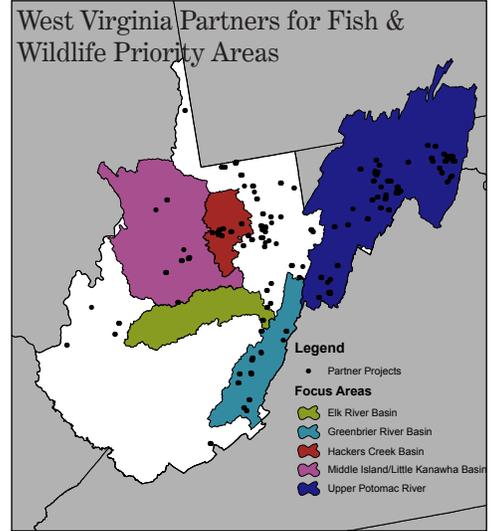
Farm Bill Conservation

In addition to habitat restoration, the Partners Program also improves the effectiveness of the conservation programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture by providing the technical expertise needed to evaluate which projects are best for fish and wildlife, demonstrating as well as recommending management and restoration techniques and providing data that lets the Federal funds be used most effectively. This relationship combines funding from the Department of Agriculture with the biological expertise of the Partners Program to maximize public benefits.

The Partners Program works with agricultural producers to keep farms both economically and biologically productive.

Cooperative Conservation

From 1993-2010 the Partner Program in West Virginia worked with 250 landowners on 200 projects in our focus areas. This work contributed to the protection, enhancement, or restoration of over 630 acres of wetland and riparian habitat and 50 acres of controlling invasive species, supporting dozens of migratory and federally protected species.



Efforts to restore riparian habitat benefit native populations of Brook trout.

For additional information or questions contact:

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