

**Goal 4: Support and assist each of the North Carolina National Wildlife Refuges in their mission to conserve and protect fish and wildlife resources.**

Eastern North Carolina's 11 National Wildlife Refuges are managed by the Service for wildlife and wildlife-dependent recreation and education. While each refuge has its own professional staff, the RFO both shares in the public trust responsibilities for these refuges and values their role in contributing to our other goals of migratory bird, diadromous fish, and endangered and threatened species conservation. With approximately 400,000 acres under Service stewardship in eastern North Carolina, National Wildlife Refuges are anchors for biodiversity and landscape level conservation. These areas have value now, and they will become more critical for wildlife, fish, plants, and people as eastern North Carolina is increasingly developed. As such, refuges will be a focus of our work in the RFO. Our commitment to refuges is an embodiment of the "One Service" priority of the Southeast Regional Director, an acknowledgement of our role in helping achieve the visions for refuges as provided in the *National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997* and the 1999 *Fulfilling the Promises* report, and recognition of the value of these places to achieving our office's Vision.

The objectives under this goal are designed to ensure that we meet our stewardship responsibilities on refuge lands and waters and take advantage of the conservation benefits they provide. Through implementation of these objectives we will proactively maintain water quality and enhance land protection on and around refuges. The objectives are designed to enable us to be responsive to the technical assistance needs of refuge staff, proactive in addressing actions with the potential to negatively affect refuge resources and the public's use of those resources, and cognizant of opportunities to enhance cooperation. A Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) exists for each refuge, and each includes goals related to *Wildlife, Fish, and Plant Populations; Habitat Management; Public Use; Resource Protection; and Administration*. Because each refuge has its own vision, goals, management objectives and strategies within the CCPs, the actions outlined below are intended to be broad enough to encompass the 11 refuges collectively. Where specific refuge projects we are involved with are known they are listed, and annual work activity guidance will expand on refuge-specific work.

- Objective 4.1: Assist Refuges in meeting their *biological planning* needs so that Service lands are fully functioning components of the broader conservation landscape.
- Objective 4.2: Assist Refuges in meeting their *conservation design* needs to ensure that priority conservation actions on and around Service lands are appropriately identified and coordinated.
- Objective 4.3: Lead implementation of identified *conservation delivery* strategies when it is appropriate for Ecological Services to do so, and assist Refuges and our partners in other conservation delivery actions to benefit Service lands.

Objective 4.4: Assist Service land managers in the development and implementation of *results-oriented monitoring* activities where appropriate given the unique capabilities of the Raleigh FO.

Objective 4.5: Assist Service land managers and partners in the development and implementation of *assumption-driven research* to address priority information needs related to stewardship of Service lands.

