

**Stories of Success**  
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Some 380 of the nation's 1,591 endangered and threatened species find a home on national wildlife refuges. The reason is straightforward: Home is where the habitat is.

So it makes sense that restoring habitat and implementing the best science and management techniques are the roads to recovery for species. Sounds simple. It's not.

National wildlife refuges and other parts of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have long faced competing demands that can change and tug and pull in different directions. Multi-year projects can be tough to fund from one year to the next. That's why the Cooperative Recovery Initiative (CRI) is making a difference.

The Service Director some years ago recognized that we needed a focused program that puts combined resources and partnership muscle on refuges and in areas with a close nexus to them if we are to maintain and expand high quality habitat for trust resources. So was born the CRI, a competitive program with specific criteria that gives funding to collaborative projects.

CRI absolutely stresses collaboration – both among Service programs that sometimes operate in silos and with private landowners, who can make all the difference for the health of fish, wildlife and plant species.

The competition for funding has been intense – and beneficial. First there's the regional selection process. Then the top regional projects are submitted to a national review team that represents all Service programs. A second round of reviews at the Service's Headquarters has ensured that funding goes to the projects most likely to succeed.

In fact, the need to show results quickly has set CRI apart from other initiatives. CRI not only requires that each project have a monitoring protocol, but it also decides on funding for up to three additional years by considering data that demonstrate a project is making discernible progress.

At the same time, the CRI process incorporates all elements of Strategic Habitat Conservation. Service staff members employ biological planning and design to develop project proposals. Selected proposals are then implemented – the “conservation delivery” step – and results are monitored. The outcomes then feed back into biological planning and adaptive management.

A prime example of CRI success is the Oregon chub, the first fish ever removed from the federal Endangered Species list. The Oregon chub is found only in the Willamette River Basin. Just eight populations and fewer than 1,000 fish were known to exist when it was listed as endangered in 1993. While the minnow's recovery was thanks to the work of many dedicated

Service partners, the CRI invigorated the recovery program and led to the chub's delisting years earlier than might otherwise have happened.

Collaboration is the key to so much conservation success. It is the centerpiece of the Cooperative Recovery Initiative. Working across program lines and with partners, the Service can recover species listed as threatened and endangered and create a conservation legacy for the next generation.

*To read some CRI success stories, go to the January-February issue of Refuge Update:*  
<http://1.usa.gov/1OxDXuB>