



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Coastal Program Handbook



December 2021

Handbook



This handbook is designed for field staff who are delivering habitat conservation under the Coastal Program (also referred to as “Program,” “we,” and “our”). However, it applies to all U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) staff who administer the Program regardless of location.

Although this handbook was designed as a stand-alone document, Service staff should use the handbook in conjunction with other Program policies and guidances, including:

- Coastal Ecosystems Program Prospectus,
- Coastal Program Manual Chapter (651 FW 2),
- Coastal Program Strategic Plan, and
- Habitat Information Tracking System guidance.

Program headquarters (HQ) staff will review the handbook at least every other year to ensure it is current and will update it as necessary. During the update process, HQ staff must seek input from Regional and field Program staff. Comments from the field will be provided to HQ through their Regional Coordinators.

Find the Coastal Program online at:

- [Webpage](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [YouTube](#)

Table of Contents

| Handbook Section | Page |
|--|-----------|
| <u>Importance of Coastal Habitats</u> | 3 |
| <u>Coastal Program</u> | 4 |
| <u>Overview</u> | 4 |
| <u>Core Values</u> | 6 |
| <u>Major Authorities</u> | 6 |
| <u>Guiding Principles</u> | 7 |
| <u>Goals</u> | 8 |
| <u>Strategic Plan</u> | 11 |
| <u>Habitat Conservation</u> | 12 |
| <u>Strategic Habitat Conservation</u> | 12 |
| <u>Habitat Conservation Definition</u> | 13 |
| <u>Program Implementation</u> | 18 |
| <u>Program Organization</u> | 18 |
| <u>Staff Responsibilities</u> | 20 |
| <u>Funding Requirements and Limitations</u> | 23 |
| <u>New Official Program Offices</u> | 26 |
| <u>Budget Allocation</u> | 27 |
| <u>Habitat Conservation Delivery</u> | 28 |
| <u>Conservation Considerations</u> | 28 |
| <u>Conservation Selection</u> | 29 |
| <u>Conservation Compliance Requirements</u> | 31 |
| <u>Laws, Policies, and Regulations</u> | 32 |
| <u>In-lieu Fee Mitigation Programs</u> | 36 |
| <u>Documentation and Recordkeeping</u> | 37 |
| <u>Project Performance Monitoring</u> | 39 |
| <u>Glossary</u> | 41 |

Importance of Coastal Habitats

Support
More than 85%
of the waterfowl and other migratory birds¹



Support
More than 30%
of the national wildlife refuges¹



Support
45% of the federally listed
threatened and endangered species¹



Support
More than 60 million
jobs in the United States¹



Coral reefs support
4,000
species of fish³

Generate
More than \$43 billion
in recreational fishing and bird hunting¹



Access to nature can save an
Average of \$1,100
in medical costs annually²

Home to
More than 50%
of the U.S. populations¹



Support
More than 90%
of the recreational fish
and shellfish harvest¹



Protected watersheds reduce the
cost of treating drinking water by
10 times²

Proximity to protected lands
can increase home values by
3 - 9%²



Support
More than 75%
of the commercial fish
and shellfish harvest¹



Generate
More than \$23 billion
in hurricane protection annually²



Generate
\$44 billion from coastal
trips by Americans¹



Coastal Program

Coastal Program Overview

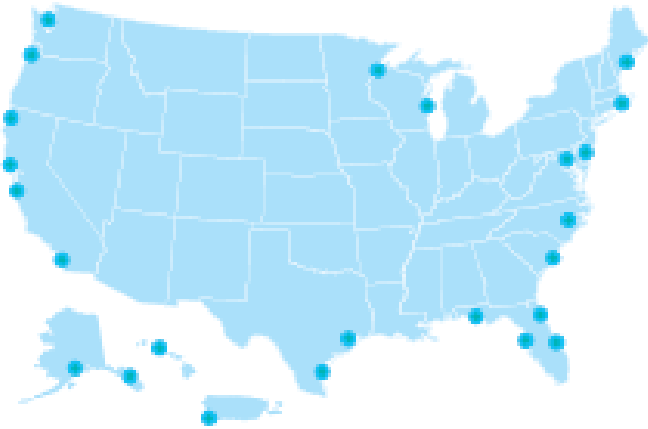
Working with partners, we deliver strategic habitat conservation by planning, designing, and implementing habitat improvement and protection projects. We carry out this mission by:

- Collaborating with other Service programs; Federal, Tribal, State, and local agencies; non-governmental organizations; universities; corporations; communities; and private landowners. Through these partnerships we leverage our technical and financial assistance to maximize benefits to Federal trust resources.
- Focusing our habitat conservation on priority coastal and marine habitats, including those in and along the Great Lakes and in U.S. Territories. We implement habitat conservation on both public and private lands, which allows the Program to deliver landscape-scale conservation and to promote habitat connectivity, continuity, and resiliency.
- Ensuring that there is a local field presence that delivers habitat conservation efficiently and effectively. The expertise of our field staff allows them to maximize partnership opportunities and conservation benefits.
- Increasing partner capacity to achieve shared conservation objectives. By building capacity among our partners, we have a broader impact on habitat conservation by promoting science-based conservation; refining conservation design, planning, and policies; and improving the science of restoration.



Coastal Program

Program Offices



Program Project Highlights



Completed
More than 4,900
habitat conservation
projects



Projects in
39 states and
territories



Worked with
More than 8,200
partners



Improved
More than 399,000 acres of
wetlands



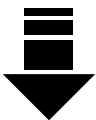
Protected
More than 2.3
million acres of
habitat



Leveraged
More than 1.2
billion in partner
contributions



Improved
More than 209,000 acres of
uplands



Supported the
recovery and
downlisting of
At least 13
species



**Migratory
Birds**
More than
3,300
projects



**Federally-listed
Species**
More than
2,300
projects



**Interjurisdictional
Fish**
More than
2,000
projects

The Start of the Coastal Program



David Rumsey Map Collection

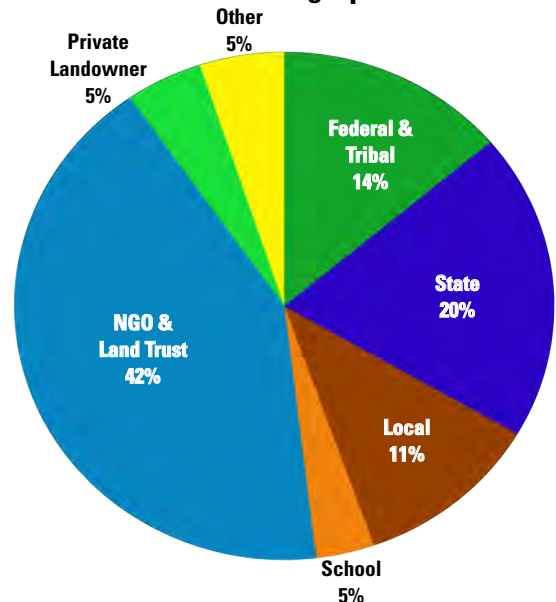
The Chesapeake Bay is the nation's largest estuary. It reflects all the environmental, economic, and social benefits provided by all estuaries as well as the challenge faced by them.

In 1985, recognizing the importance and decline of coastal habitats in the Chesapeake Bay, the Service established the Bay/Estuary Program to address the challenges faced by coastal habitats in this region.

The Bay/Estuary Program successfully demonstrated that locally-based field staff supporting community-led conservation can be an effective tool for achieving the Service's mission and conservation objectives.

In 1991, the Service opened similar offices to work in other major estuaries and changed its name to the Coastal Ecosystems Program. Today, these offices are known as the Coastal Program and are active along all U.S. coasts, and in the Great Lakes and U.S. Territories.

Partner Demographics



Coastal Program

Coastal Program Major Authorities

Fish and Wildlife Act (16 U.S.C. 742a-c and j) authorizes the creation of the Service. It establishes a comprehensive, national fish and wildlife policy that focuses on the commercial fishing industry and recreational use of fish and wildlife resources. The Act promotes research, extension, and information services for domestic and international fish and wildlife issues.

Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (16 U.S.C. 661-666c) authorizes the preparation of wildlife protection plans, wildlife surveys on public lands, and the acceptance by Federal agencies of funds or lands for related purposes. Amendments require consultation with the Service regarding any modification to the waters of any stream or body of water to prevent the loss and damage of wildlife resources. Amendments require the Secretary of the Interior to manage, directly or under cooperative agreements, land designated for preventing the loss or damage of wildlife resources.

National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act (16 U.S.C. 668dd et seq.) consolidates the authorities of the Secretary of the Interior to conserve fish and wildlife, including species that are threatened with extinction, all lands, waters, and interests therein administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as wildlife refuges, areas for the protection and conservation of fish and wildlife that are threatened with extinction, wildlife ranges, game ranges, wildlife management areas, or waterfowl production areas.

Program Core Values

As coastal conservation experts, we **facilitate** voluntary, collaborative habitat conservation that ensures a **thriving and resilient future for coastal habitats, species, and communities.**



We support the core value of the Coastal Program through:

- **Fish and Wildlife:** Species conservation and recovery across a mosaic of public and private lands, including Service lands and waters;
- **Social Benefits:** Thriving coastal economies and livable communities where healthy land, water, and wildlife improve our own health and well-being;
- **Recreation:** Healthy coastal habitats and fish and wildlife populations that support the outdoor activities people love, including hunting, fishing, boating, wildlife viewing, and photography; and
- **Nearby Outdoors:** Opportunities for all communities to restore, protect, and appreciate the wildlife and places they care about.



Diversity & Inclusion

Field staff work to foster an inclusive sense of conservation stewardship among diverse communities.

Coastal Program

Coastal Program Guiding Principles

We have four guiding principles that are embodied in the Coastal Ecosystems Program Prospectus (Prospectus). The Prospectus serves as the original justification for the Coastal Program (previously known as the Coastal Ecosystems Program). The principles are:

Bringing the Service's mission and biological expertise to communities

The Service cannot conserve or manage an entire coastal ecosystem by itself. We provide the Service with access to a large and inclusive network of conservation partners and the unique opportunity to connect and engage communities, thus ensuring that the needs of the fish, wildlife, plants, and people are considered together. These partnerships allow the Service to achieve conservation objectives beyond what it could achieve on our own by adding to the time, talents, resources, and support of others.

Developing partnerships for habitat conservation

We serve as a catalyst for habitat conservation planning and habitat improvement projects that benefit fish and wildlife resources and people. We implement this principle by creating partnerships and leveraging our technical and financial resources to maximize habitat conservation and benefits to Federal trust resources.

Engaging the American public to promote informed conservation stewardship

Strong and inclusive public support is necessary to conserve the quality of our environment. We use targeted outreach and education to inform key audiences and decision-makers about the importance of the ecological resources in priority watersheds or geographic focus areas. This practice allows us to support community habitat stewardship. Our outreach and education efforts are most effective when they are part of a comprehensive strategy and undertaken with habitat conservation and management.

Integrating Service programs and priorities

We are uniquely positioned to bring together Service programs, priorities, and resources to conserve Federal trust species in coastal watersheds.



Antioch Dunes National Wildlife Refuge, California

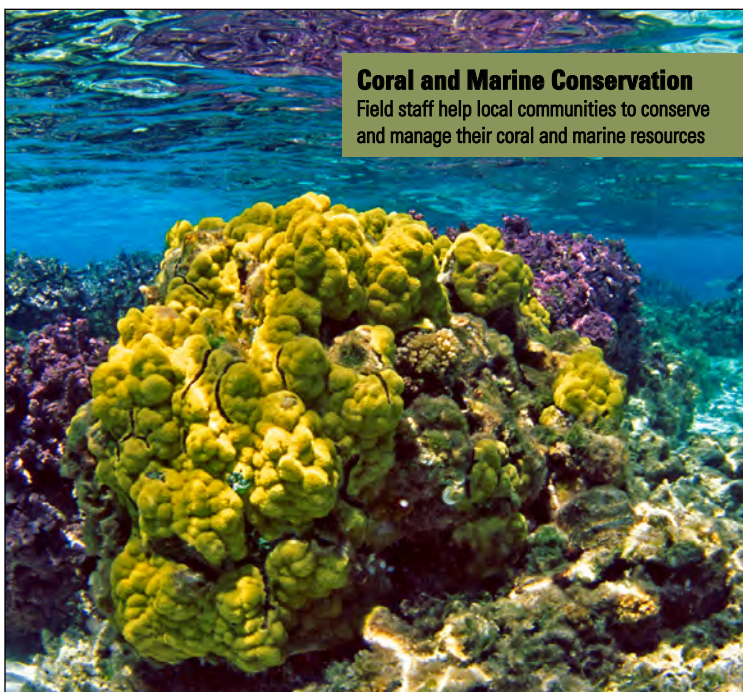
Coastal Program

Coastal Program Goals

We have five goals that define how we will achieve our mission. For more information about our goals, see the *Coastal Program Strategic Vision*. Our goals are:



Alaska landscape (Habitat Conservation) - Carl Johnson; Partners (Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships) - Firefly Imageworks, Inc.; Stream assessment course (Support our Workforce) - Rich Starr, USFWS; Long Wharf Nature Preserve (Support our Workforce) - Firefly Imageworks, Inc.; Salt marsh sparrow monitoring (Enhance Accountability) - Chris Eng, USFWS; and Manini at Kingman Reef NWR (Center) - Kydd Polock, USFWS



Keoki Stender



Firefly Imageworks, Inc.

Goal 1

Conserve Habitat

We conserve priority coastal and marine habitats to increase or maintain Federal trust species populations and achieve long-term resiliency for coastal ecosystems. We support this goal by:

- Supporting conservation planning and investment of Service resources in coastal and marine habitats;
- Promoting strategic habitat conservation by providing technical assistance, financial assistance, and implementing conservation projects;
- Supporting the conservation objectives of the Service and other national and regional conservation plans, initiatives, and programs;
- Supporting the objectives of Federal, State, and local conservation plans and programs, including ecosystem management plans, fisheries management plans, Federal and State threatened or endangered species recovery plans, State coastal zone management plans, and State comprehensive habitat management plans;
- Establishing partnerships that facilitate landscape-scale conservation; and
- Collaborating with other Federal agencies to deliver conservation projects and activities that have broad benefits to Federal trust resources, including air and water quality improvements, soil conservation, and habitat restoration and protection.

Coastal Program



Conservation Partnerships

Field staff develop partnerships with diverse partners to leverage resources, represent citizen interests, and maximize conservation benefits.

Firefly Imageworks, Inc.

Goal 2

Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships

We deliver conservation through voluntary partnerships that allow us to leverage resources and to maximize conservation benefits to Federal trust resources. Our network of partnerships allows the Service to connect and engage with local communities, promote our priorities and objectives, and achieve conservation objectives beyond its reach alone by adding to the time, talents, resources, and support of others. We support this goal by:

- Establishing and strengthening relationships with partners that foster a shared sense of conservation stewardship;
- Providing technical and financial assistance to partners and communities implementing conservation activities for Federal trust species; and
- Assisting conservation managers, practitioners, and individuals to deliver habitat conservation projects more effectively and efficiently.



Volunteer Events

Field staff support volunteer opportunities that build community support for habitat conservation.

Firefly Imageworks, Inc.

Goal 3

Improve Information Sharing and Communication

We depend on voluntary participation, so outreach and education are critical to gaining community support and building partnerships. Sharing information broadens our impact on habitat conservation as we reach those who are responsible for regulating, managing, and delivering conservation.

Effective communication builds trust that fosters a shared sense of stewardship and strengthens the conservation community, which includes other Service programs and Federal agencies. We support this goal by:

- Delivering Service priorities and resources to the conservation community;
- Providing habitat conservation expertise to other Service and Department of the Interior programs;
- Assisting partners, stakeholders, decision-makers, and others responsible for policy-making, land management, and resource decisions;
- Developing and promoting conservation tools, techniques, and resources that improve the science and delivery of conservation; and
- Developing education and outreach resources to address coastal and marine conservation issues.

Coastal Program



Stream Assessment Courses

Field staff enhance the Service's workforce and the broader conservation community by developing and hosting conservation training courses.

Mark Secrist, USFWS



Geomorphic Mapping

Field staff document stream conditions for assessment and comparison to future conditions.

Chris Eng, USFWS

Goal 4

Support our Workforce

We are committed to ensuring that our staff make science-based decisions, are innovative and results-focused, act with integrity, and seek creative solutions. We strive to improve the technical expertise of our staff, which is key to the success of our habitat conservation. We recognize staff members as one of our most valuable assets. We support this goal by:

- Supporting a diverse and motivated workforce;
- Developing highly skilled staff who are results-focused, act with integrity and ethics, and seek innovative solutions to conserve Federal trust resources;
- Providing adequate staffing to address national, regional, State, and local resources priorities, and to meet the needs of the public;
- Providing the technical tools and financial resources necessary to meet the demands of the Service's coastal conservation responsibilities;
- Ensuring adequate training for our staff to support Service's priorities, maintain customer service, and deliver a diverse array of conservation projects and activities; and
- Recognizing and celebrating our accomplishments.

Goal 5

Enhance Accountability

We recognize the importance of project monitoring to evaluate our contribution to specific conservation objectives, improve the science of restoration, and identify opportunities for adaptive management. Measuring, assessing, and reporting on the effectiveness, efficiency, and fiscal fidelity of our conservation projects and activities is also important to maintaining the accountability and integrity of our Program. We must monitor our conservation projects to ensure that they are properly designed and constructed, and have achieved their conservation objectives. The scope of monitoring varies depending on the goals and objectives of the project. We support this goal by:

- Documenting and validating our accomplishments in both the habitat improvement and strategic planning modules in the Habitat Information Tracking System (HabITS);
- Supporting government accountability standards prepared by the Office of Management and Budget, the Department of the Interior, and the Service;
- Evaluating our habitat conservation projects and activities to ensure that they are achieving our conservation and project objectives;
- Ensuring our conservation projects are producing measurable benefits to Federal trust species;
- Evaluating the economic benefits derived from our conservation projects and activities; and
- Concentrating our conservation efforts in geographic focus areas and prioritizing projects based on the benefits to Federal trust resources.

Coastal Program

Coastal Program Strategic Plan

We are guided by a three-part strategic plan that presents the Program's priorities, goals, and objectives for a 5-year period. The strategic plan is developed collaboratively among HQ, Regional and field staff, and conservation partners and stakeholders.

The first part of the plan is the National Vision Document, which presents the goals of the Coastal Program.

The Regional Work Plans are the second part of the plan and include each Region's geographic focus areas (i.e., priorities) and conservation objectives. The Regional Program Coordinators revise the work plans every 5 years.

Each Region has the authority to develop its own process for identifying and delineating geographic focus areas; however, all Regions must use a landscape-scale approach that integrates Departmental and Service priorities and shared conservation objectives among partners.

The final part of the plan is the National Summary Document, which reports on the Regions' previous 5-year accomplishments and summarizes the Regions' conservation objectives for the next 5 years.

Integration of Conservation Goals and Objectives

Our strategic plan integrates the conservation goals and objectives of many national and regional plans, initiatives, and programs. Examples may include:

- National Wildlife Refuge System,
- Chesapeake Bay Executive Order,
- Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan,
- Endangered Species Program,
- Great Lakes Restoration Initiative,
- Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Working Group,
- National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program,
- National Fish Habitat Action Plan,
- North American Bird Conservation Initiative,
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan,
- North American Wetlands Conservation Act,
- National Estuary Program,
- National Fish Passage Program,
- Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program,
- Puget Sound Partnership,
- State Wildlife Action Plans,
- United States Shorebird Conservation Plan, and
- Vision for a Healthy Gulf of Mexico Watershed.



Geographic Focus Areas

Geographic focus areas are priority locations where we concentrate our technical and financial resources. Focus areas ensure that our resources are allocated to habitats and priorities with the greatest need.

Although we concentrate our resources in these focus areas, we may deliver habitat conservation outside of the areas if the projects are of high ecological value.

Habitat Conservation

Strategic Habitat Conservation

[Strategic Habitat Conservation](#) (SHC) is a framework the Service uses to deliver landscape-scale, adaptive habitat management. This framework ensures that we plan, implement, and evaluate our conservation actions. It ensures that we use the best available scientific information to deliver conservation in an efficient and effective manner.

At a programmatic level, we use SHC to make decisions regarding where and how to deliver habitat conservation and to allocate resources to achieve specific biological and ecological outcomes. The SHC process is often informed by input and resources from partners. SHC ensures that we base our conservation actions on sound science and we address changing conservation challenges and ecological conditions.

At the project level, we work with partners to plan, design, and implement habitat conservation. By monitoring and evaluating our conservation activities, we can refine our assistance, improve on our successes, and ensure we ultimately achieve our conservation objectives.

Strategic Habitat Conservation

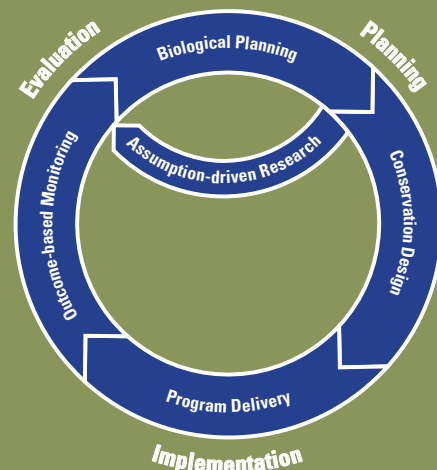
The Service officially adopted the SHC framework (Figure 1) in 2006 as a conservation approach to fulfilling the Service's vision and mission. The purpose of SHC is to coordinate and promote collaboration among Service programs and conservation partners. By aligning our collective expertise, resources, and operations into a unified conservation effort, we can achieve landscape-scale, biological outcomes that support the recovery and sustainability of fish and wildlife populations and the ecosystems on which they depend. The SHC framework consists of five components:

- **Biological Planning.** We work with partners to establish shared conservation and biological objectives and identify limiting factors affecting our shared conservation goals.
- **Assumption-driven Research.** We use science-based assumptions to conduct conservation planning and refine future conservation actions.
- **Conservation Design.** We create tools and resources that can better inform habitat conservation and improve the planning and delivery of habitat improvement and protection projects.
- **Program Delivery.** We work with diverse partners to implement habitat conservation.
- **Outcome-based Monitoring.** We evaluate the effectiveness of our conservation actions in reaching specific ecological/biological objectives, which improves future conservation planning and delivery.

SHC relies on an adaptive management framework that focuses on a subset of shared conservation targets, sets measurable biological objectives, and identifies the information, decisions, delivery, and monitoring needed to achieve desired biological outcomes. SHC helps the Service and the broader conservation community to organize our collective expertise and resources, so our conservation efforts are successful and efficient.

Find more information about the SHC framework in the National Ecological Assessment Team's Strategic Habitat Conservation Final Report and the Service's Strategic Habitat Conservation Handbook.

Figure 1. Strategic Habitat Conservation Framework



Habitat Conservation

Habitat Conservation Definition

Habitat conservation includes projects and activities that assess, enhance, establish, maintain, protect, or restore the ecological function and integrity of an area for the benefit of Federal trust resources. We deliver habitat conservation through technical and financial assistance, planning and design, and implementation of habitat improvement and protection projects. Specific types of activities and projects may vary among Regions and geographic focus areas because of the wide variety of habitats and species, ecological threats, and available conservation resources in these areas. Figure 2 illustrates how the Program categorizes habitat conservation projects and activities.

Figure 2. Habitat Conservation Diagram



Jensen Stidham, U.S. Air Force

Chris Farmer

Ken Rice

Shawn Milar, USFWS

Habitat Conservation

Habitat Conservation Planning and Design

Habitat conservation planning and design is the process of developing strategies, identifying tools, and planning projects to support terrestrial and aquatic (e.g., freshwater and marine) habitat conservation. Planning and design activities can support a broader conservation goal or lead to a conservation project. We provide planning and design capacity to partners and stakeholders as technical assistance (see [Technical Assistance](#) under Habitat Conservation).

Habitat assessment is part of habitat conservation planning and design. It is the evaluation of an area of land or water, or both, as habitat for a species, population, or community. Habitat assessments can contribute to conservation planning (e.g., land use decisions) or lead to a habitat improvement or protection project. Examples of assessment activities include:

- Biological inventories;
- Stream stability surveys;
- Watershed, fish passage, and marine habitat assessments;
- Habitat restoration and management evaluations; and
- Economic and ecosystem service evaluations.

Habitat Improvement

Habitat improvement involves the enhancement, establishment, maintenance, or restoration of ecological function(s) or condition(s) of an area. We must not implement habitat improvement projects that adversely affect habitats that are important to Federal trust or other priority species or displace a unique habitat unless we can demonstrate that the project will not affect Federal trust and other priority species populations or the occurrence of the unique habitat. These projects strive to improve habitats to achieve desired biological outcomes. The term “habitat improvement” attempts to capture all of the on-the-ground projects that we implement for conservation. The types of habitat improvement projects include:

- Habitat enhancement,
- Habitat establishment,
- Habitat maintenance, and
- Habitat restoration.

Habitat Enhancement

The manipulation of the physical, chemical, or biological characteristics to improve the ecological function(s) or change the successional stage of an area that will provide additional benefits to Federal trust and other priority species. Examples of enhancement projects include:

- Water control structure to manage water levels for native plant communities,
- Nearshore breakwater to protect a coastal wetland,
- Prescribed burn to reduce or eliminate invasive species,
- Forest management practice that promotes a particular seral stage, and
- Fencing to prevent the disturbance to sensitive or degraded habitat and allow native vegetation to reestablish.

Habitat Conservation

Habitat Establishment

The manipulation of existing physical, chemical, or biological characteristics to create habitat conditions that did not previously exist in an area. Examples of establishment projects include:

- Tree and vegetation plantings to create a new forest or riparian habitat,
- Oxbow pond and side channel creation to create fish spawning and rearing habitat,
- Water management to create intertidal mudflat habitat,
- Seagrass plantings to create new submerged aquatic habitat,
- Vernal pool construction, and
- Oyster or coral reef construction.

Habitat Maintenance

The periodic manipulation of existing physical, chemical, or biological characteristics required to keep an area in a condition that benefits Federal trust and other priority species. Examples of maintenance projects include:

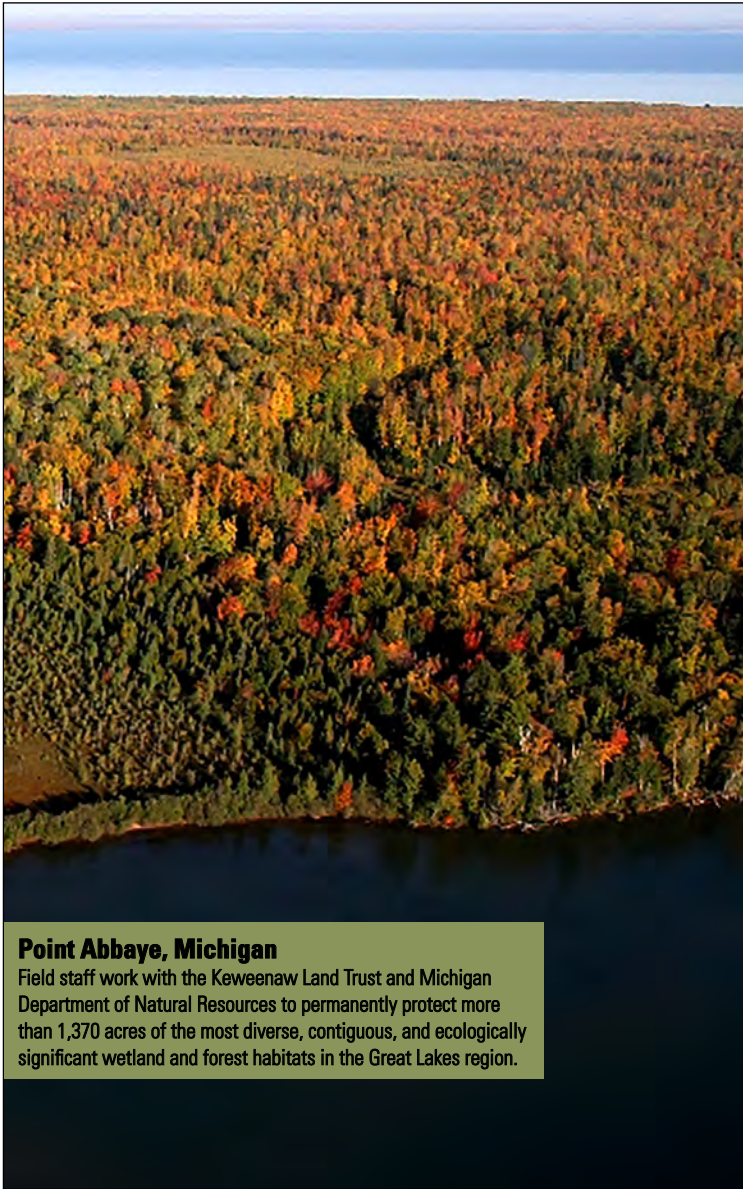
- Prescribed burn to maintain grassland habitat,
- Wetland replanting to maintain a specific vegetation composition of a previously restored wetland,
- Sediment removal from a bio-retention pond to maintain storage capacity, and
- Invasive species control to maintain a restored forest or wetland community.

Habitat Restoration

The manipulation of the physical, chemical, or biological characteristics of an area with the goal of returning self-sustaining, natural/historical ecological function(s) and integrity that have been degraded or lost. For each restoration project, we will attempt to restore as many of the natural/historical and ecologic conditions as practical. Examples of restoration projects include:

- Native vegetation plantings to restore a coastal ecosystem;
- Fish passage barrier removal to restore aquatic species migration;
- Floodplain reconnection to restore wetland hydrology
- Levee removal to restore tidal circulation to a coastal wetland;
- Invasive species removal using biological, chemical, or mechanical control methods; and
- Marine debris removal.

Habitat Conservation



Point Abbaye, Michigan

Field staff work with the Keweenaw Land Trust and Michigan Department of Natural Resources to permanently protect more than 1,370 acres of the most diverse, contiguous, and ecologically significant wetland and forest habitats in the Great Lakes region.

Neil Harri



Matanuska-Susitna Valley, Alaska

Field staff work with the Great Land Trust and Eklitna, Inc., a Tribal corporation and largest private landowner in Anchorage, to permanently protect thousands of acres of wetlands and forests and to preserve iconic Alaskan wildlife and tribal traditions.

Firefly Imageworks, Inc.

Habitat Protection

Habitat protection is a long-term, voluntary action (e.g., fee title property purchase, conservation easement, land use designation, or reservation of water) to safeguard habitat conditions and functions that Federal trust and other priority species need during their various life stages. We provide technical assistance for terrestrial and aquatic (e.g., freshwater and marine) habitat protection, which includes developing management regulations, preparing conservation plans, and building conservation capacity among partners. Examples of protection projects include:

- Third-party property purchases,
- Farm Bill conservation program easements, and
- Community-based sustainable marine fishing areas.

For more information about habitat protection see [Conservation Easements and Property Purchases](#) under Project Implementation.

Habitat Conservation

Technical Assistance

We provide technical assistance by supporting assessment, planning, design, and monitoring activities, whether or not it leads directly to a specific habitat improvement or protection project. Technical assistance is one way that we can establish substantial involvement in a habitat conservation project.

We provide technical assistance to other Service programs and partners to achieve shared conservation objectives. By providing technical assistance, we have a broader impact on conservation by informing resource managers, restoration practitioners, and others who are responsible for regulating, managing, and implementing habitat conservation. Technical assistance may include:

- Providing decision-support for conservation and guidance for policies,
- Facilitating partnerships and coordinating conservation efforts,
- Conducting ecological assessments,
- Designing and reviewing habitat restoration and management plans,
- Improving the science of conservation through applied research,
- Developing conservation resources and tools and educational materials,
- Designing and delivering conservation training,
- Assisting with grant application for conservation projects,
- Facilitating third-party property purchases,
- Supervising project construction, and
- Monitoring and evaluating restoration projects.



Delmarva Fox Squirrel Habitat



Delmarva Fox Squirrel

Field staff worked with private landowners and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to prepare a National Coastal Wetlands Grant Program application to conserve habitat for the endangered Delmarva fox squirrel. The project was awarded nearly \$1 million to permanently protect more than 440 acres of salt marsh, wetlands, forests, and farmland. Conservation efforts like this one contributed to the Service removing the fox squirrel from the threatened and endangered species list in December 2015.

Technical Assistance National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program

The National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program is an annual competitive grant that provides funds to coastal States and U.S. territories for coastal wetland conservation. We co-administer the grant program with the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program. We collaborate with other Service programs to solicit, evaluate, and select eligible conservation projects submitted by State programs.

Field staff work with partners to deliver wetland conservation. We provide technical assistance by facilitating partnerships, providing technical guidance, developing conservation projects, and preparing competitive wetland grant applications. We also frequently conduct site visits to evaluate the projects and ensure that they meet the objectives of the grant program.

Ryan Hagerly, USFWS

USFWS

Program Implementation

Headquarters Office

The Program is administered by the Service Director; the Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS); the Chief, Division of Natural Resources and Conservation Planning; the Chief, Branch of Habitat Restoration; and the National Team Lead for the Coastal and Marine Programs (Figure 3). Administration of the Program is also coordinated with the Assistant Director, Ecological Services, because of how the Regions administer the Program.

Figure 3: Headquarters Organizational Diagram



Coastal Program and Marine Program

In HQ, the Coastal Program merged with the Marine Program to form the Coastal and Marine Programs. The reason for this merger is the close connection between coastal and marine species and habitats, such as salmon and tidal marshes. The Coastal Program priorities and its project objectives can benefit marine resources, as threats to marine habitats often originate on land. Although merged in HQ, the Marine Program currently does not have any Regional or field staff.

Program Implementation

Regional Offices

In the Regions, the Program is administered by the Regional Directors, Assistant Regional Directors, and Regional Coordinators. In some Regions, the Program is administered under the Assistant Regional Director for Ecological Services, and in others under the Assistant Regional Directors for the NWRS (Table 1).

Table 1. Regional Office Administration

| Unified Interior Region | Assistant Regional Director |
|---|---|
| North Atlantic Appalachian (Region 1) | Ecological Services (Legacy Regions 4 & 5) |
| South Atlantic Gulf (Region 2) | Ecological Services (Legacy Regions 4 & 5) |
| Great Lakes (Region 3) | Ecological Services (Legacy Region 3) |
| Mississippi Basin (Region 4) | Ecological Services (Legacy Regions 3 & 4) |
| Arkansas-Rio Grande Texas Gulf (Region 6) | Ecological Services (Legacy Region 2) |

| Unified Interior Region | Assistant Regional Director |
|--|---|
| Lower Colorado Basin (Region 8) | Ecological Services & National Wildlife Refuge System (Legacy Regions 2 & 8) |
| Columbia Pacific Northwest (Region 9) | Ecological Services (Legacy Regions 1) |
| California Great Basin (Region 10) | Ecological Services & National Wildlife Refuge System (Legacy Regions 2 & 8) |
| Alaska (Region 11) | Fisheries and Ecological Services (Legacy Region 7) |
| Pacific Islands (Region 12) | Ecological Services (Legacy Region 1) |

Field Offices

In the field, the Program is administered by Project Leaders, Coastal Program Managers, and field staff. For field offices that do not have a Coastal Program Manager, the Project Leader has the responsibility of administering the Program.

We are often strategically co-located with other Service programs and facilities (e.g., Fisheries, Ecological Services, National Wildlife Refuge System), and other Federal conservation agencies (e.g., U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration).



Field Staff
In California, field staff prepare for a field trip with the Girl Scouts to build nesting platforms for the federally endangered light-footed Ridgway's rail.

USFWS

Program Implementation

Staff Responsibilities

Administration of the Program occurs at several organizational levels in the Service, including in HQ, Regional, and field offices. Table 2 identifies staff and provides a general description of their responsibilities in the administration of the Program.

Table 2: Staff Responsibilities

| Staff | Responsibilities |
|--|--|
| Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensuring the Program has the resources necessary to fulfill the mission of the Service, 2. Approving Program policies, 3. Ensuring that the Program has adequate oversight at a national level, and 4. Approving National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program projects. |
| Chief, NWRS in coordination with the Assistant Director, Ecological Services | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensuring the Program has the resources necessary to fulfill the mission of the Service, 2. Administering the Program at a national level, and 3. Overseeing Program policy and budget development and allocation. |
| Chief, Division of Natural Resources and Conservation Planning | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensuring the Program has the resources necessary to fulfill the mission of the Service, 2. Implementing the Program at a national level, and 3. Reviewing Program policies and budget formulation. |
| Chief, Branch of Habitat Restoration and National Team Lead for the Coastal and Marine Programs | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing national policy and guidance to administer and implement the Program. This includes reviewing our chapter and handbook at least every other year to ensure it is current and updating it as necessary; 2. Managing the Program at a national level, which includes developing budget requests and allocations, overseeing HABITS development, and reporting program accomplishments; 3. Monitoring the implementation of the Program to ensure compliance and integrity; 4. Maintaining financial assistance training and ensuring that Program staff follow financial assistance policies; |

Program Implementation

| Staff | Responsibilities |
|---|--|
| <p>Chief, Branch of Habitat Restoration and National Team Lead for the Coastal and Marine Programs</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Coordinating resolution of programmatic issues elevated to HQ from the Regions; 6. Representing the Program and the Service in technical committees, workgroups, and public forums; 7. Leading the development and delivery of certain Service conservation programs and initiatives, such as the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program; 8. Supporting the management of Marine National Monuments, including policy development and review; 9. Coordinating the management of the NWRS's coastal and marine resources at a national level, which includes developing policies and partnerships that protect the natural and cultural resources in coastal and marine ecosystems; 10. Supporting national communication and outreach efforts to promote the Program; and 11. Developing and managing national partnerships and coordinating activities related to the Program. |
| <p>Regional Directors and Assistant Regional Directors</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Administering the Program within their Regions, 2. Designating Program Regional Coordinators for their Regions, 3. Allocating and executing the Regional budgets, and 4. Developing and implementing national priorities and Regional priorities. |
| <p>Program Regional Coordinators</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing direction to Coastal Program Managers, Project Leaders, and field staff on Program policy and guidance; 2. Managing the Program at a Regional level, which includes preparing budget recommendations, developing program capacity, participating in HabITS development, and preparing strategic plans and habitat improvement monitoring strategies; 3. Monitoring the implementation of the Program to ensure compliance and funding fidelity by the Regional and field offices; 4. Coordinating resolution of programmatic issues elevated to the Regional office from the field offices; 5. Maintaining financial assistance training and ensuring that Program staff follow financial assistance policies; 6. Supporting national and Regional communication and outreach efforts to promote the Program; |

Program Implementation

| Staff | Responsibilities |
|---|--|
| <p>Program Regional Coordinators</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Assisting with the development and delivery of Service conservation programs and initiatives, such as the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program; 8. Participating in technical committees and workgroups; 9. Developing and managing Regional partnerships and aligning program activities with Service priorities; and 10. Overseeing Regional accomplishment reporting and resolving any reporting issues. |
| <p>Field Program Managers or Project Leaders</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Managing the Program at the field level, which includes developing program capacity and participating in the development of strategic plans; 2. Monitoring the implementation of the Program to ensure compliance and integrity and funding fidelity in their offices; 3. Facilitating and implementing habitat conservation in accordance with Program policies and strategic plans, with concurrence from the field office staff and other appropriate authorities; 4. Maintaining financial assistance training and ensuring that Program staff follow financial assistance policies; 5. Coordinating resolution of programmatic issues raised by field staff; 6. Participating in technical committees and workgroups, such as Regional or local conservation workgroups or watershed organizations; 7. Assisting with the development and delivery of Service conservation programs and initiatives, such as the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program; 8. Supporting national, Regional, and field communication and outreach efforts to promote the Program; 9. Developing and managing field level partnerships that facilitate habitat conservation projects; and 10. Overseeing field office accomplishment reporting and resolving any reporting issues. |
| <p>Field Program Managers and Staff</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Selecting, designing, and implementing habitat conservation projects and activities in accordance with Program policies and strategic plans, with concurrence from the managers in their chain of command; |

Program Implementation

| Staff | Responsibilities |
|--|--|
| <p>Field Program Managers and Staff</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Providing technical and financial assistance to partners who want to implement a habitat improvement project that benefits Federal trust species; 3. Providing additional technical capacity to partners, including the planning and designing of habitat conservation projects; 4. Maintaining financial assistance training and ensuring that Program staff follow financial assistance policies; 5. Serving as Project Officers for cooperative and other financial assistance agreements, and ensuring staff and partners fulfill the responsibilities identified in the agreements; 6. Ensuring substantial involvement when the Program enters into a cooperative agreement; 7. Monitoring habitat improvement projects to ensure that they achieve their biological and structural intent and landowner objectives; 8. Supporting national, Regional, and field communication and outreach efforts to promote the Program; 9. Developing and managing community partnerships that facilitate habitat conservation projects and actions; 10. Participating in technical committees and workgroups, such as Regional or local conservation workgroups or watershed organizations; 11. Assisting with the development and delivery of Service conservation programs and initiatives, such as the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, and Regional restoration initiatives; and 12. Entering technical assistance and habitat improvement accomplishments into HabITS, and ensuring accurate documentation of Service investments, field staff contributions, and project conservation benefits. |

Funding Requirements and Limitations

When using Program funds to administer the Program and deliver habitat conservation, we will follow the relevant funding requirements and limitations.

Program Implementation

Administrative expenses

Program office administrative expenditures should be proportional and limited to the time spent on specific activities necessary to support the Program, including:

- Staff supervision,
- Accounting and budgeting,
- Development and processing of agreements,
- Vehicle maintenance, and
- Reasonable office expenses.

Administrative Overhead

The national, Regional, and field offices should maintain a reasonable overhead percentage to maximize funds available to field staff for the delivery of conservation projects and activities.

Conservation Easements and Property Purchases

We must not use Program funds for property purchases where legal title or interest is vested with the Service or another Federal agency. In addition, staff must not use Program funds to lease interests in real property or to make rental or other land use incentive payments to landowners. We can provide technical assistance for voluntary property purchases, including:

- Assessing habitats and prioritizing property purchases,
- Preparing management plans,
- Conducting landowner outreach, and
- Preparing grant applications.

We can also provide financial assistance for planning and costs of conveyance for third-party property purchases and conservation easements, including:

- Property assessments (e.g., wetland and forest stand delineations and Phase I environmental site assessments),
- Costs of conveyance (e.g., title searches, boundary surveys, and property appraisals),
- Habitat management plans, and
- Landowner outreach.

This type of support does not require the third-party to conduct a Yellow Book appraisal under the Financial Assistance Interior Regulation (see [Financial Assistance Interior Regulation](#) under Habitat Conservation Delivery).

Financial Assistance Agreements

We have broad authority to enter into financial assistance agreements with Tribal governments and Native corporations, State and local agencies, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, corporations, private landowners, and other partners to deliver conservation projects and activities that benefit Federal trust species and their habitats. We provide financial assistance primarily through cooperative agreements. More information about financial assistance agreements is on the Financial Assistance [website](#), or you may contact your servicing financial assistance office.

Program Implementation

Mitigation

We must not use Program funds to generate compensatory or other mitigation credits under any Federal or State regulatory program. Staff may use Program funds to implement conservation projects that complement mitigation projects. Staff:

- May participate in planning and designing mitigation projects to maximize the overall conservation benefits and incorporate Service priorities,
- May assist with the administration of mitigation recovery efforts, and
- Must avoid any assistance that would subsidize environmental degradation.

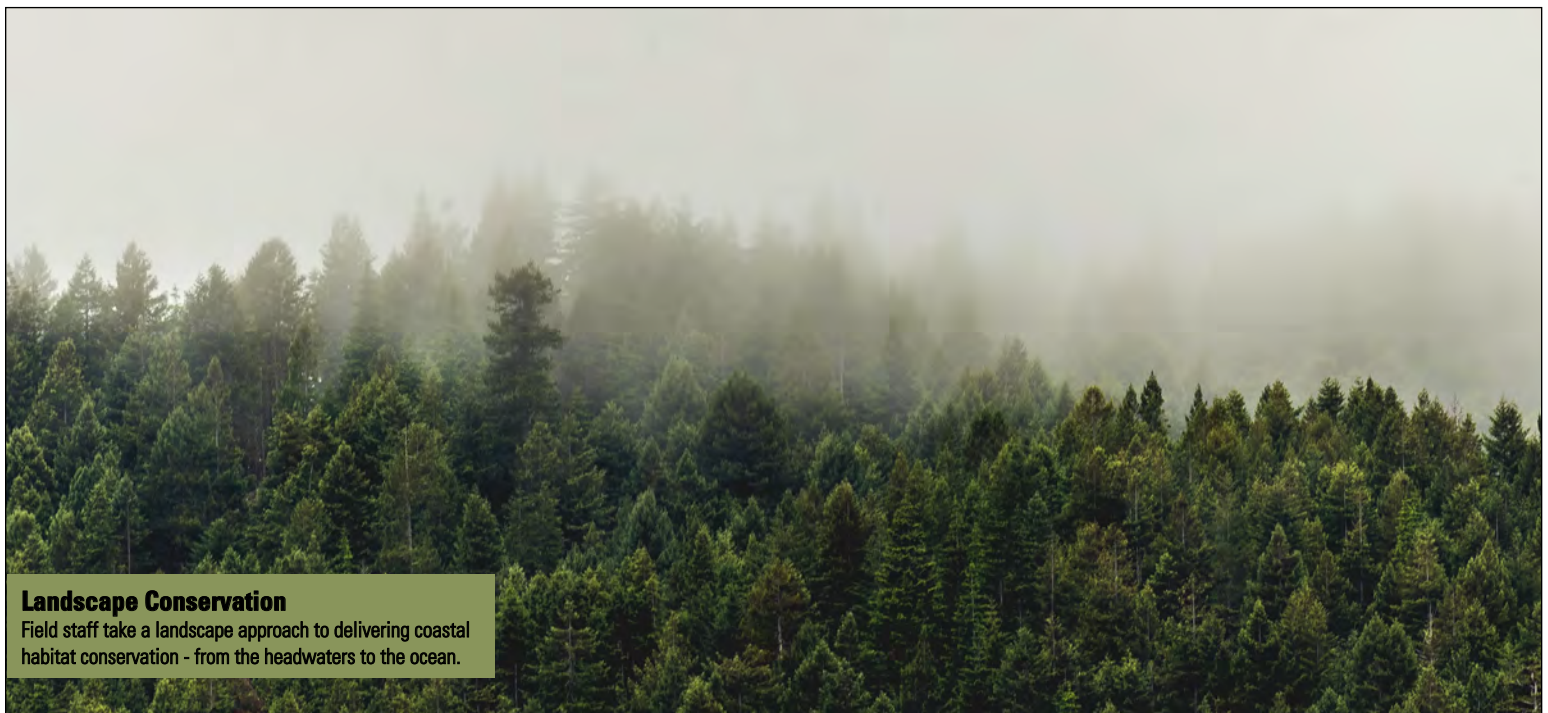
More mitigation guidance is provided in 33 CFR 332.3. For in-lieu fee mitigation guidance see [In-lieu Fee Mitigation Programs](#) under the Habitat Conservation Delivery section.

Program funding fidelity

Regional Directors and others responsible for administering the Program are accountable for ensuring that Program funds are spent only on the administration and implementation of the Program as described in this handbook, the Coastal Program Manual Chapter (651 FW 2), and any Program guidance.

Service Program Collaboration

To achieve the missions of the Department and Service, we routinely collaborate with many other Service programs, including the National Wildlife Refuge System, Ecological Services (e.g., Endangered Species Program), Migratory Bird Program (e.g., Gulf Coast Joint Venture), and Fish and Aquatic Conservation Program (e.g., National Fish Habitat Partnerships). We provide technical assistance to and/or seek the expertise of these programs for planning, designing, and implementing habitat restoration projects and conservation activities.



Landscape Conservation

Field staff take a landscape approach to delivering coastal habitat conservation - from the headwaters to the ocean.

Program Implementation

New Official Program Offices

Limited financial and technical resources require us to be strategic in allocating resources, including where to establish new Program offices. Based on past investments, establishing an official Coastal Program office requires a minimum of \$450,000. Regional Directors and Project Leaders cannot reallocate funds to establish an official Coastal Program office. However, they can strategically locate staff in operational offices to more efficiently deliver conservation.

Only new offices vetted through the process outlined below and approved by the Chief of the NWRS or Assistant Director of Ecological Services are considered official offices. The approval process begins with a Regional Coordinator preparing a prospectus that presents the justification for a new office and describes how the Region will support the new office. At a minimum, the prospectus will:

1. Describe how the proposed office will support the Service's mission,
2. Delineate the area of operation for the proposed office and describe the importance of the coastal resources in that area,
3. Describe the threats to the coastal resources and Federal trust species,
4. Describe potential obstacles to delivering voluntary conservation in the area,
5. Identify existing conservation partnerships and document local partner and stakeholder support for the proposed office,
6. Describe how the proposed office will foster new partnerships to address the coastal resources and Federal trust species threats,
7. Describe how we have been engaged in the area and present examples of successful ongoing or past successful Service conservation projects or activities in the area, and

8. Describe the Service and partner resources available to support the proposed office.

The Regional Coordinator will prepare the prospectus in coordination with the Regional Director, Project Leader(s), and field staff. The completed prospectus must be submitted to the Chief of the Branch of Habitat Restoration, NWRS, in HQ.

1. Regions may submit a prospectus in advance of available funds, but if they do this, HQ will hold the prospectus on file until support for and funds are available for the new office. The Chief of the Branch of Habitat Restoration will work with Regional Coordinators to prioritize establishment of new offices within and among Regions.
2. If funds become available, the Chief of the Branch of Habitat Restoration will coordinate the review of the prospectus, approval of a new office, and changes to the budget allocation with the Chief, NWRS, Assistant Director - Ecological Services, and other leadership.
3. The Chief of the Branch of Habitat Restoration will prepare a written approval for the new office to the Regional Director.

Program Implementation

Program Budget Allocation

HQ and Regional offices must document their allocation methodologies to promote fiscal transparency, for example, through their budget allocation handbook, Regional Step-Down Strategic Plans, or in an annual allocation memorandum.

The national allocation process begins when the Division of Budget and Performance prepares the Congressional Action Table, which provides the national allocations by Service programs (i.e., subactivities). To determine the Program funds available for distribution to the Regions, the NWRS Budget Office deducts any assessments, Director's deferred, line item projects, Regional fund targets, and uncontrollable expenses from the Program's national allocation.

The NWRS uses two different national allocation methods—annual program funding increase and annual program funding decrease. Budget increases and decreases are determined from the previous year's enacted funding level. After determining the funds available, the HQ Budget Office applies the appropriate allocation method:

Annual Program Funding Increase

Available funds are distributed to the Regions based on the number of official Coastal Program offices within each Region. The number of official offices may not include offices established by a Region to facilitate conservation delivery if the office has not been authorized by HQ as an official office.

Annual Program Funding Decrease

Decreased funds are determined by the Regional percentage of the base funds for that fiscal year. This allocation method shares the burden of the decrease equitably (i.e., percent of base funds) across the Regions.



Wetland Sedge

Gary Peebles, USFWS

Habitat Conservation Delivery

Habitat Conservation Considerations

When delivering habitat conservation, we will take into account the following relevant habitat conservation considerations.

Conservation Collaboration

Whenever possible and appropriate, staff should coordinate Program activities with other Federal, Tribal, State, and local government agencies and non-governmental organizations to leverage conservation resources and maximize benefits to Federal trust resources.

Cost-effectiveness

Cost-effectiveness or return on investment compares a project's resource investment (i.e., technical and financial contributions) to its conservation benefits. We should attempt to maximize the return on investment for conservation projects and activities. Other conservation benefits may include ecosystem services, community outreach and education, and Department of the Interior and Service priorities.

Federal Trust Resources and Other Priority Species

Program conservation projects and activities must benefit Federal trust resources or other priority species, including:

- Species listed, proposed for listing, or candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act;
- Migratory birds;
- Interjurisdictional fish;
- Marine mammals;
- State-listed species;
- At-risk species; and
- Service lands and priority species (e.g., focal or surrogate species).

International Habitat Conservation

Under the Compacts of Free Association with the United States and similar agreements, we may provide technical and financial assistance to other countries, such as the Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau.

Landscape-scale Conservation

Effective habitat conservation requires the ability to address community and conservation demands throughout an entire watershed or ecosystem. We should seek to collaborate with partners to deliver landscape-scale conservation and to maintain habitat connectivity and continuity by working on private and public lands and marine areas.

Leveraging Resources

A strength of the Program is our ability to develop partnerships that enable us to leverage technical and financial resources. We should seek partnership opportunities that improve the delivery and effectiveness of our conservation projects and activities.

Habitat Conservation Delivery

Public Funding Opportunity

We may provide Federal financial assistance to other Federal, Tribal, State, and local government agencies; non-governmental organizations; universities; corporations; private landowners; and other partners. HQ staff must post an annual Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) on Grants.gov, as required by the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act.

The NOFO serves as a national announcement under which the Coastal Program can enter into financial assistance agreements with partners. The announcement provides general information on funding levels, funding eligibility, project selection criteria, and project development. We must comply with guidance provided in Service Manual Chapters - Responsibilities for Grants and Cooperative Agreements ([515 FW 1](#)) and Monitoring Financial and Performance Reporting for Financial Assistance ([516 FW 1](#)).

Public and Private Land Conservation

We deliver habitat conservation on both public and private lands, which is especially important because land ownership in coastal areas is often a mosaic of public and private entities. It also allows us to complement NWRs Comprehensive Conservation Plans because habitat conservation projects can take place on and adjacent to national wildlife refuges.

Sound Scientific Principles

Conservation projects and activities, including the development of innovative approaches and techniques, must be based on sound scientific principles.

Substantial Involvement

We must be substantially involved in projects and activities that receive Program financial assistance through a cooperative agreement (see [Substantial Involvement](#) in the Glossary).

Habitat Conservation Selection

Program managers and field staff are responsible for identifying and selecting habitat conservation projects and activities, with concurrence from the Project Leader or other appropriate authority. Since requests for technical and financial assistance often exceed our available resources, it is important that our projects and activities maximize our return on investment.

Staff should give greater consideration to projects and activities that meet any of the conservation selection criteria in Table 3. The criteria are not presented in order of priority. Staff should also check the Coastal Program's annual Notice of Funding Opportunity for any additional selection criteria.

Regional and field offices may develop additional selection criteria that address specific Regional and local conservation priorities. All other considerations being equal, we should give priority to projects that:

- Support Departmental and Service priorities,
- Achieve long-term habitat conservation,
- Involve greater partnership support,
- Provide greater cost sharing, and
- Are the most cost-effective.

Habitat Conservation Delivery



Sand dune restoration on McFaddin National Wildlife Refuge in Texas.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Sand Dune Restoration Project Selection

Working with the McFaddin National Wildlife Refuge, McFaddin and Texas Point Refuges Alliance, Inc., and others, the Coastal Program restored 2 miles of sand dunes on the McFaddin National Wildlife Refuge in Texas along the Gulf of Mexico. This project was a priority for the Coastal Program because it fulfills multiple selection criteria.

The project supports several Department of the Interior priorities, including 1) creating a conservation legacy, 2) ensuring American energy availability, and 3) restoring trust with communities. This restoration creates a conservation legacy by using science and best practices that help Service lands to adapt to environmental changes. The project complements several other restoration projects on the refuge, which collectively protect oil refining, military, and manufacturing infrastructure and local communities from flooding and sea level rise.

The project addresses several other selection criteria. The restoration promotes coastal resiliency because the sand dunes will accrete at an equal rate to sea level rise, thus ensuring long-term protection for the refuge, infrastructure, and communities. The project prevents coastal erosion and saltwater intrusion. The project contributes to the diversity of habitats on the refuge and maintains habitat connectivity for wildlife.

The project will benefit several Federal trust species, including the endangered Kemp's Ridley sea turtle and the threatened loggerhead sea turtle. The restored habitat will provide feeding, breeding, and nesting habitat for black-necked stilts, willets, and shorebirds. The cost sharing ratio for this project was approximately one Federal dollar for every three dollars spent by the project partners.

Habitat Conservation Delivery

Table 3. Habitat Conservation Selection Criteria

- **Department and Service priorities.** Priorities and initiatives as identified by the Secretary of the Interior and the Service Director.
- **Coastal resiliency.** Conservation projects and activities that help wildlife and communities adapt to climate change and recover from changing environmental conditions. Using a watershed or ecosystem conservation approach, our projects and activities can address the causes of the habitat degradation, and provide long-term solutions and habitat resiliency.
- **Habitat continuity and connectivity.** Conservation projects and activities that restore priority habitats, reduce habitat fragmentation, establish conservation buffers, and provide habitat corridors for Federal trust and other priority species.
- **Proximity to Service-managed lands and marine resources.** Conservation projects and activities that complement conservation practices on national wildlife refuges, or on public or private lands near refuges, including national parks, national forests, and other Federal and State land holdings.
- **Regional strategic plans and priorities.** Conservation projects and activities that are located in geographic focus areas identified in Regional Strategic Plans, or that support Region-specific priorities. Field staff may still implement priority conservation activities or projects outside of these focus areas.
- **Federal trust resources or other priority species.** Conservation projects and activities that improve habitat for Federal trust resources, candidate species, species proposed for listing, State-listed species, priority species (e.g., focal or surrogate species), or at-risk species.

Habitat Conservation Compliance Requirements

Projects and activities must comply with applicable Federal laws, policies, and regulations. They must also comply with Tribal, State, and local laws and regulations, as long as those laws/regulations do not conflict with and/or are not preempted by Federal laws or regulations. Projects and activities must also comply with Service Directives (i.e., Service Manual, Director's Orders, policy memoranda, and handbooks) and other program guidance, as applicable. Although the responsibility for regulatory compliance may rest with a project partner, we must ensure that conservation projects and activities comply with all applicable laws and regulations before implementing the project.

The following Federal laws, policies, and regulations are only examples of compliance requirements that may be applicable to a conservation activity or project. You should consult with experts to provide guidance for specific laws, policies, and regulatory compliance. You may also contact HQ or the Regional Coordinators for assistance, as well as the Office of the Solicitor. Policy and regulation training may be available through the [National Conservation Training Center](#).

Habitat Conservation Delivery

Federal Laws, Policies, and Regulations

Archaeological Resource Protection Act (16 U.S.C. 470) regulates the excavation of archaeological sites on Federal and Tribal lands in the United States. It also establishes regulations for the removal and disposition of the archaeological artifacts.

Coastal Barrier Resources Act (16 U.S.C. 3501) designates ecologically sensitive coastal barrier areas and limits Federal financial assistance and expenditures in these areas. It attempts to protect these areas by eliminating Federal development incentives and subsidies.

Endangered Species Act (ESA) (16 U.S.C. 1531-1544) regulates the conservation of threatened and endangered fish, wildlife, and plant species, and their habitats. Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act requires Federal agencies to consult with the Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to ensure that activities authorized, funded, or implemented by these agencies will not jeopardize the existence of the listed species or modify their habitat. For more information, see [Endangered Species Act Compliance](#) under Habitat Conservation Delivery.

Financial Assistance Interior Regulation

The Department of the Interior's Financial Assistance Interior Regulation (FAIR) (2 CFR 1402.329) improves financial assistance programs and consolidates and streamlines financial assistance regulations and policies. Under FAIR (§ 1402.329), when property is purchased using Federal funding, there must be an appraisal following Yellow Book requirements (see 520 FW 6 and 7).

The Coastal Program can provide financial assistance through a Federal award (e.g., cooperative agreement) for planning activities (e.g., habitat assessments, GIS analysis, title search, phase I site assessment, and property appraisals) that support a third-party property purchase. The recipient does not have to perform a Yellow Book appraisal if the scope of the award is limited to planning activities and the Federal award does not directly fund the purchase.

Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (7 U.S.C. 136) regulates the distribution, sale, and use of pesticides to ensure the protection of pesticide applicators, consumers, and the environment. In addition to establishing a registration system for all pesticides, it also establishes a certification process for applicators of restricted use pesticides. The Environmental Protection Agency administers an applicator certification program for States or Tribes that do not have an applicator certification program. Additional guidance is provided in Departmental and Service policies, including Integrated Pest Management Policy ([517 DM 1](#)), Integrated Pest Management ([569 FW 1](#)), and Pesticide Users Safety ([242 FW 7](#)).

Federal Water Pollution Control Act (Clean Water Act) (33 U.S.C. 1251-1376) regulates water quality standards and the discharge of pollutants into "waters of the U.S." (e.g., navigable waters, coastal areas, rivers, perennial and intermittent streams, lakes, and wetlands). The discharge of regulated chemicals into waters of the United States requires a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit issued by the Environmental Protection Agency. The discharge of dredge or fill materials into waters of the United States requires a Federal permit issued by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Habitat Conservation Delivery

Endangered Species Act Compliance

We work with Endangered Species Program staff to ensure that our habitat improvement projects are compliant with Endangered Species Act (ESA) requirements and support ESA species recovery goals. We will also consult with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) staff in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) when species under NMFS jurisdiction may be affected by the project.

ESA Intra-Service Section 7 Consultations

Project managers will evaluate the effects of a habitat improvement project on listed, proposed, and candidate species, and on any designated or proposed critical habitat, by conducting an ESA Intra-Service Section 7 consultation. A consultation is also required for projects that will restore the habitat to pre-development conditions. An ESA Programmatic Section 7 consultation, either formal or informal, is an acceptable method for meeting this requirement. Specific guidance for conducting Intra-Service Section 7 consultations and a blank Intra-Service Section 7 consultation form are included in the [Endangered Species Consultation Handbook](#): Procedures for Conducting Consultation and Conference Activities under Section 7 of the ESA.

ESA Programmatic Section 7 Consultations

Programmatic Section 7 consultations are designed to streamline the consultation process by evaluating the effects of a habitat improvement practice once, rather than repeatedly evaluating similar types of projects or actions. Individual landowners will be covered under the original consultation, if the project meets the eligibility requirements, through stepped-down documentation. This approach could also shorten the consultation process for proposed actions that were not included in the original consultation.

ESA Safeguards for Non-Federal Landowners

Project managers are encouraged to pursue regulatory safeguards for non-Federal landowners if a listed, proposed, or candidate species colonize their property or are attracted to the property because of the habitat improvement project. The following safeguards provide flexibility to landowners to continue certain management practices at project sites affected by the presence of a listed, proposed, or candidate species:

1. Non-Federal landowners may elect to obtain either an incidental take permit or an enhancement of survival permit by entering into a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), Safe Harbor Agreement (SHA), or a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA).
2. ESA Section 10 incidental take permits are required when non-Federal activities will result in the take of listed or candidate species. An HCP must accompany an application for an incidental take permit. The HCP ensures that the effects of the authorized incidental take are adequately minimized and mitigated.
3. Enhancement of survival permits are issued to non-Federal landowners participating in SHA or CCAA. These agreements encourage the landowners to voluntarily take actions to benefit listed or candidate species, while providing assurances that they will not be subject to additional regulatory restrictions because of their conservation actions.

Habitat Conservation Delivery



Whooping Crane

There are many types of fish, birds, and wildlife that rely on coastal habitats. This endangered crane nests and forages in marshes and wetlands.

Ryan Hagerly, USFWS

Geospatial Data Act of 2018 (43 USC Ch. 46) requires agencies to collect, maintain, disseminate, and preserve geospatial data such that resulting data, information, or products are shareable.

Habitat Information Tracking System Spatial Data Sharing Protocol provides guidance on how to respond to data requests and safely share data. In addition, it requires us to obtain consent from our financial agreement partners and/or landowners before the Service shares any potentially sensitive geospatial information data.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 U.S.C. 703-712) makes it illegal to take, possess, import, export, transport, sell, purchase, barter, or offer for sale, purchase, or barter, any migratory bird, or the parts, nests, or eggs of such a bird except under the terms of a valid Federal permit. Migratory bird species protected by the Act are listed in [50 CFR 10.13](#).

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. 4321-4375) requires all Federal agencies to evaluate environmental impacts of a proposed Federal action or project. This process ensures that environmental values are integrated into the decision-making process. Federal agencies must prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that presents the environmental effects of a proposed Federal action.

An EA requires a less in-depth evaluation and its findings may require an EIS or indicate a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). With FONSI determination, the Federal agency may continue with the proposed action. Some Federal actions may not require an EA nor EIS if they meet the categorical exclusion (CATEX) criteria. A CATEX may be project-specific, where a project has proposed environmental impacts are the same as impacts associated with a previous action, or a general category of action.

For habitat improvement projects, we must complete the National Environmental Policy Act Compliance Checklist ([FWS Form 3-2185](#)). Additional guidance is available in the Service's draft [National Environmental Policy Act Reference Handbook](#).

Habitat Conservation Delivery

Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

The Service has adopted the NOAA's Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for a suite of coastal and marine habitat restoration projects (e.g., coral reef restoration, tidal reconnection, living shorelines, oyster reef and wetland restoration, fish passage, and invasive species and marine debris removal). Projects covered under this PEIS are subject to streamlined NEPA compliance requirements.

Project managers assessing their NEPA compliance requirements should review NOAA's [Programmatic Environmental Compliance](#), as well as the Service's August 20, 2019 Director's Memorandum (Process to use the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Coastal Restoration Projects) and the Service's [Record of Decision](#).

National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470) regulates the preservation of national historical and archaeological sites. It requires Federal agencies to evaluate the impacts of a proposed Federal action or project on historical properties (e.g., buildings and archaeological sites). It also created the National Register of Historic Places, the list of National Historic Landmarks, and the State Historic Preservation Offices. Additional guidance is available in Cultural Resources Management ([614 FW 3](#)).

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (25 U.S.C. 3001 et seq.) requires the return of Native American artifacts and remains to the appropriate Tribes. Although it applies to Native American artifacts and remains found on Federal and Tribal lands, other Federal, State, and/or local cultural preservation or cemetery laws may apply. Additional guidance is available in Cultural Resources Management ([614 FW 1-6](#)).

Open, Public, Electronic, and Necessary (OPEN) Government Data Act of 2018 (44 U.S.C. 3506) requires agencies to develop and maintain a comprehensive inventory for all data assets created by or collected by the agency and to ensure all data is open, machine-readable, standards based, secure, and accessible.

Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. 552) regulates the collection, maintenance, use, and dissemination of personally identifiable information maintained by Federal agencies. It incorporates basic principles of fairness, such as: consent from the subject before sharing privacy information; public notice about the kinds of privacy files kept; accuracy and relevancy of the information; adequate safeguards protecting the information; right to access one's own information; and accountability of the agency to fulfill these responsibilities.

Rivers and Harbors Act (33 U.S.C. 401, 403 and 407) requires a permit for the excavation, fill, or alteration of the course, condition, or capacity of any port, harbor, channel, or other areas within the reach of this Act. It also requires a permit for the discharge of refuse matter of any kind into the navigable waters of the United States, lake, or harbor. Although there is some redundancy with the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (i.e., Clean Water Act), this Act retains independent authority under the administration of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

State and Local Laws, Policies, and Regulation

The following State and local laws, policies, and regulations are only examples of the types of compliance requirements that may be applicable to a conservation activity or project:

Habitat Conservation Delivery

- Wetland permitting
- Forestry permitting
- Coastal zone management regulations
- Water quality/resources protection regulations
- Open space and land preservation regulations

You should consult with State and local regulatory agencies or experts to provide specific guidance on policy and regulatory compliance. You may also contact the Regional Coordinators or HQ for assistance.

Service Policies and Guidance

We must comply with Service Directives (i.e., Service Manual, Director's Orders, policy memorandums, and handbooks) and other program guidance, as applicable.



Karner Blue Butterfly

This endangered butterfly is found in coastal habitats, such as oak savannas and pine barrens.

Jill Utrup USFWS

In-lieu Fee Mitigation Programs

In-lieu fee mitigation is a type of mitigation where the permittee pays a fee to a third party to implement a mitigation project, instead of directly implementing a mitigation project or purchasing mitigation banking credits. In-lieu fee mitigation is most often associated with wetland impacts and the Clean Water Act. In-lieu fee mitigation programs use full cost accounting when developing fee schedules to determine what to charge permittees. These schedules account for the absolute costs to mitigate the environmental impacts.

We must not use Program funds to generate compensatory or other mitigation credits or provide any assistance that would subsidize environmental degradation. Therefore, when we collaborate on projects that are partially or entirely funded by in-lieu fees, we must:

Habitat Conservation Delivery

- Ensure that the fee schedules reflect the cost of our involvement,
- Document the cost of our contributions (i.e., technical and financial assistance) to ensure the accuracy of the fee schedules.
- Document (e.g., in HabITS) our technical assistance, and
- Document how Program funds were used for the project.

Documentation and Recordkeeping

We must comply with all applicable Service documentation and recordkeeping policies and requirements. Documentation and recordkeeping requirements may vary by Region, activity, or project type. Additional guidance on recordkeeping and cooperative agreement compliance is available on the [JAO - Financial Systems Support](#) (intranet site) and in Monitoring Financial and Performance Reporting for Financial Assistance ([516 FW 1](#)). We are responsible for ensuring that the Service maintains a complete project file. Project files may include the following documents:

Endangered Species Act

All Federal agencies must ensure that any action they authorize, fund, or implement does not jeopardize the continued existence of a listed, proposed or candidate, endangered, or threatened species or a designated or proposed critical habitat. We will retain documentation and a concurrence letter for an Endangered Species Act Intra-Service Section 7 consultation for the project file.

Federal, Tribal, State, and Local Permits

Projects and activities must obtain all necessary Federal, State and local permits. Although the responsibility of regulatory compliance may be the responsibility of a project partner and not the responsibility of the Service, we will ensure that the conservation activity or project has obtained all necessary permits.

Financial Assistance Application

Projects and activities that involve the transfer of Service funds must have a financial assistance agreement that secures the financial investment. Project files may include copies of the financial assistance application (SF-424, 424A, and 424B) and the Notice of Award letter.

Interim and Final Financial Reports

The project file must include copies of financial reports. Any payment issues or circumstances that affected the progress of the project or required a corrective action also require documentation.

Interim and Final Performance Reports

The project file must include copies of project performance evaluations, including monitoring and/or site visit reports. Any performance issues or circumstances that affected the progress of the project or required a corrective action also require documentation.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

An MOU is an agreement that establishes a formal partnership and the cooperative terms of that partnership. This agreement does not imply a legal commitment for any of the partners. We can use an MOU as a formal commitment among partners to work together towards a common goal or on specific projects.

Habitat Conservation Delivery

National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)

For projects and activities occurring within the United States, we must comply with the Service's responsibilities under NEPA. We must retain all documentation of our NEPA compliance for the project file, including the NEPA Compliance Checklist (FWS Form 3-2185).

National Historic Preservation Act

Any project, activity, or program receiving Federal funding, with the potential to impact historical properties, must retain all documentation and a concurrence letter for a National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 consultation or equivalent documentation for the project file.

Other Federal, Tribal, State, and Local Laws, Regulations, and Policies

Projects and activities must comply with all applicable Federal regulations and policies, as well as with all applicable Tribal, State, and local laws and regulations that do not conflict with or are not preempted by Federal laws or regulations. Project files must include documentation of compliance to any relevant regulation or policy.

Pesticide Use Proposal and Compliance

The use of pesticides on Service lands and waters or any pesticide use by Service staff requires a Pesticide Use Proposal (PUP). The Service's proposal review process ensures proper and safe use of pesticides and seeks to minimize impacts to all non-target natural resources and wildlife species. The PUP describes the purpose, site of treatment, target species, and other relevant information associated with the application of a pesticide. Depending on the pesticide and its risk to the environment or human health, PUPs may be reviewed and approved by a Project Leader, or the Regional or National Integrated Pest Management Coordinator.

Prescribed Fire Plan, Landowner Authorization, and Permits

Prescribed fire must have a prescribed burn plan that complies with all Federal, Tribal, State, and local regulations. Prescribed fire on private lands must have an agreement signed by the landowner authorizing the use of prescribed fire on their property. Additional guidance is available in Prescribed Fire Policy for Non-Service Lands ([645 FW 1](#)).

Privacy Notice

We must safeguard all personally identifiable information and comply with all applicable aspects of the Privacy Act, including personal information in our cooperative agreements and geospatial information recorded in the HabITS. Additional privacy guidance for HabITS is provided in the Habitat Information Tracking System Spatial Data Sharing Protocol.

Project Selection Checklist

A project selection checklist is a form that justifies the selection of a project or activity when establishing a cooperative agreement. Based on the conservation selection criteria presented in Coastal Program Manual Chapter (651 FW 2) and this handbook, projects or activities meeting any one of the factors listed in the project selection checklist are eligible for Program funding.

Scope of Work

A work plan describes the goals and objectives of a habitat conservation activity or project, the roles and responsibilities of each partner, project schedule, project deliverables, project outcomes and performance measures, and project monitoring schedule.

Habitat Conservation Delivery

Project Performance Monitoring

Habitat Information Tracking System (HabITS)

Since 2001, HabITS has served as the national accomplishment tracking database for the Program. Authorized users can find guidance manuals and tutorials under the Documentation Module on the HabITS website.

We use the project information entered into HabITS to:

- Improve program accountability and efficiency,
- Improve project and workload planning,
- Develop and justify budget decisions and recommendations,
- Prepare outreach materials,
- Respond to internal and external information requests,
- Report habitat conservation and other program accomplishments, and
- Track technical assistance.

HabITS Technical Assistance Module

The strategic planning module in HabITS allows us to document our planning, monitoring, and other technical assistance activities that may not directly lead to a habitat improvement project. Our technical assistance capacity is a cornerstone of the Program, and is a key contribution we provide to coastal communities. When coupled with our habitat improvement accomplishments, our technical assistance represents the entirety of our habitat conservation effort. Thus, the importance of documenting our technical assistance cannot be understated.

Project Performance Monitoring

We recognize the importance of monitoring habitat conservation projects because it allows us to evaluate our contributions to conservation goals, assess restoration methods, improve the science of restoration, and identify opportunities for adaptive management.



Water Temperature Monitoring

In Maine, field staff work with members from Trout Unlimited to monitor temperatures in streams to identify brook trout and salmon habitats across the State.

USFWS

- We must monitor our habitat improvement projects to ensure they are properly implemented (i.e., compliance monitoring).
- We must monitor our habitat improvement and protection projects to ensure that we are achieving our defined project objectives. The scope and intensity of this monitoring will vary depending on the project type, project objectives, and available resources.

We also recognize the importance of monitoring the biological response of targeted Federal trust species, which relates directly to the mission of the Service and the Coastal Program.

- We will perform ecological and biological monitoring for our projects and conservation activities as available staff and funding allows.
- When resources are not available, we encourage the development of partnerships to perform monitoring of projects and/or conservation activities.

Habitat Conservation Delivery

Regional Project Monitoring Strategy

Program Regional Coordinators must develop a Regional project monitoring strategy that will describe how their Program field offices will implement monitoring and evaluate the success of their conservation projects. The strategy may include resources for developing monitoring plans, potential partners to conduct monitoring, and potential funding sources for project monitoring.

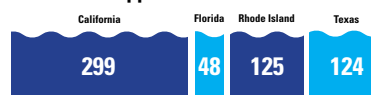
2016 Program Economic Highlights

A Service economist estimated the economic outputs resulting from habitat improvement projects completed in 2016. Habitat protection projects and technical assistance were not included in the calculations.

Project Spending

| | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Coastal Program | \$9.3 million nationally | 1,023 JOBS SUPPORTED |
| Project Partners | \$38.6 million | |
| Total Project | \$47.9 million | |
| Total Economic Stimulus | \$95.9 million | |

Jobs support in Selected States



Economic Returns



Although creating jobs is not the mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, habitat conservation delivered by programs like the Coastal Program can support local jobs and economies.

For every \$1 the Coastal Program invests, \$4.16 in total project funding is leveraged and there are \$10.33 in economic returns.



Eel Migration Monitoring
In West Virginia, field staff implant acoustic transmitters into American eels to track their movement and habitat preference.

Jessica Collier, USFWS

Coastal Program Publications



Coastal Program Strategic Vision



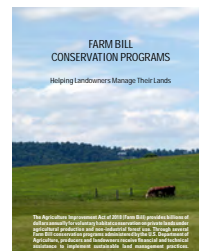
Coastal Program Accomplishment Report



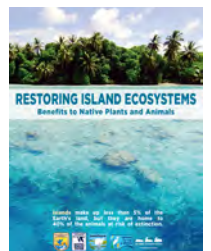
Investing in Nature



Creating Video for Impact



Farm Bill Conservation Programs



Restoring Island Ecosystems



Coastal Restoration Returns



National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program

Glossary

Cooperative Agreement

A legal document that transfers money or another asset between the Federal Government and another entity (e.g., State government, municipality, corporation, or individual) to carry out an action with a public purpose (e.g., restoration project). A cooperative agreement requires that both the Federal Government and the partner be substantially involved in the described action (see [Substantial Involvement](#) in the Glossary).

Ecosystem Services

Benefits and resources (e.g., food and water, climate, and cultural heritage) received by people that are derived from the biotic and abiotic components and processes of the environment. Although it may be difficult to place a value on these services, they have many direct and indirect benefits to people. Examples of ecosystem services include:

- Improving water quality and food production,
- Mitigating impacts from changing environmental conditions (e.g., flooding),
- Improving public safety, and
- Supporting cultural and recreational activities and public access.

Federal Financial Assistance

The transfer of a thing of value from a Federal agency to an eligible recipient to carry out a public purpose as authorized by U.S. law. An agency may provide financial assistance in many ways, including cooperative agreements, grants, direct appropriations, and transfers of property in place of money.

Federal Trust Species

Migratory birds, species that are listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act,

interjurisdictional fish, marine mammals, and other species of concern.

Federal Trust Resources

Federal trust species and Service-managed lands and waters, including marine national monuments.

Geographic Focus Areas

Priority work areas identified in the Program's strategic plan and that integrate shared habitat conservation objectives among Service programs, partners, and stakeholders.

Habitat Information Tracking System (HabITS)

A web-based accomplishment tracking system that integrates mapping capabilities (i.e., geographic information system).

Staff can input and access information on habitat improvement projects in a geospatial context, as well as document technical assistance. We use the information in HabITS to guide Service and Program conservation efforts, evaluate workload and resource allocations, and make informed budget decisions. Employees can access HabITS through the Service's [Environmental Conservation Online System](#).

Private Lands

Lands and interests in lands not owned by the Federal or a State government. Private lands include Tribal and Alaska Native Tribal lands; Hawaiian Home Lands; Tribal corporation lands; borough, county, and municipal lands; and lands owned by private entities.

Public Lands

Lands and interests in lands owned in common by the Federal or a State government, including national wildlife refuges, national forests, national parks



Chris Eng USFWS

Glossary

and monuments, military bases, and State wildlife management areas and parks.

Real Property

One, several, or all interests, benefits, and rights inherent in the ownership of a parcel of land or water. Additional information is available in Real Property ([520 FW 6.4](#)).

Substantial Involvement

A level of engagement required when entering into a cooperative agreement. It is a relative concept and it generally occurs when there is collaboration between the awarding agency and recipient in the management or performance of an activity or project. This collaboration is programmatic in nature and may provide benefits (e.g., technical expertise, specialized equipment, labor) that otherwise would be unavailable to the recipient. According to the Department of the Interior Manual (505 DM 2.9B), the definition

of substantial Federal involvement: a bureau, office, or organizational unit may anticipate substantial involvement when it:

- Participates and collaborates jointly with the recipient partner, volunteer, scientist, technician or other personnel, in carrying out the scope of work, training recipient personnel, or detailing Federal personnel to work on the project effort;
- Reviews and approves one stage of work before the next stage can begin;
- Reviews and approves proposed modifications or sub-grants, prior to award;
- Helps select project staff or trainees;
- Directs or redirects the work because of interrelationships with other projects;
- Has power to immediately halt an activity if detailed performance specifications are not met; and
- Limits recipient discretion

with respect to scope of work, organizational structure, staffing, mode of operations, and other management processes, coupled with close monitoring or operational involvement during performance under the award.

The items listed above are not a checklist, but should be used as a basic guide for establishing substantial involvement. More information about substantial involvement is available on the Financial Assistance [website](#).

Voluntary Habitat Conservation

Any improvement or protection activity undertaken by partners that benefits Federal trust resources and is not required by law or regulation.

www.grants.gov

A public website used to deliver, manage, coordinate, and account for Federal funding opportunities.



Recreation and Public Access

Field staff work with land trusts and others to permanently protect natural places that often support recreation and public access.

