

# Southeast Region

## Overview

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The Service's Southeast Region is home to a rich diversity of natural resources spread across ten states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, stretching from the Appalachian Mountains to the Caribbean islands and west to the Ozarks, including the southern half of the Mississippi River Basin. The Regional Office is in Atlanta, Georgia.

### Resource Facts and Figures

- 129 national wildlife refuges – including 67 coastal - with roughly four million acres;
- 14 ecological services offices;
- 14 national fish hatcheries, seven conservation offices, one regional fisheries center, one fish health center, one fish technology center;
- 11 migratory bird offices including six joint venture habitat partnerships;
- 30 law enforcement offices including five designated and two non-designated ports of entry; in 2012, roughly 1,271 investigations were conducted in the Southeast Region, including 178 joint investigations.
- Five full-time employees dedicated to working only on Gulf coast restoration issues;
- 22 employees dedicated to the Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR) effort;
- 337 federally listed species, and 60 candidate species;
- 12 million people visited refuges in 2012 - one of every four visitors to a national wildlife refuge get out on a Southeast Region refuge;
- 7,388 refuge volunteers contributed 327,449 hours of support in 2011
- The Region has 1,487 employees.



Breton NWR by USFWS/Greg Thompson

### Regional Demographics

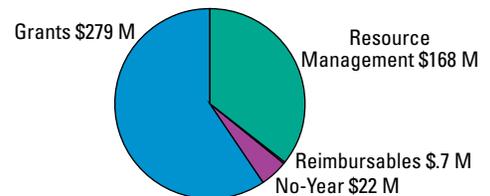
- 108 Members of Congress represent the Southeast Region.
- The Region's 2010 population is 88.8 million.
- By 2025, the population is projected to grow by at least 25 percent.
- 11.1 million citizens across the Region fish, hunt and watch wildlife.
- The Region is home to two of the nation's 10 most populated metropolitan areas.
- The Southeast contains the most diverse temperate aquatic fauna in North America, with 200 endemic fish species, 250 species of freshwater mussels, and the highest diversity of freshwater mussels and crayfish.

### Key Habitats and Ecosystems

The Southeast has a variety of diverse and unique ecosystems and habitats including coastal marshes, coral reefs, bottomland hardwoods, the Appalachian and Ozark Mountains, caves, and longleaf pine forests.

### Regional FY 2012 Budget

Total = \$469.7 M



### Conservation Successes and Challenges

#### Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC)

The Southeast Region has six Landscape Conservation Cooperatives: the Appalachian, Caribbean, Gulf Coast Prairie, Gulf Coastal Plains and Ozarks, South Atlantic, and Peninsular Florida LCCs within the Southeast boundary. They are collaborative science-based partnerships where Federal, State and non-governmental partners share scientific resources to achieve large-scale conservation goals for species, habitats, cultural resources, and ensure sustainable populations for future generations to enjoy.

#### Floods, Fires, Hurricanes, and Tornadoes

Since the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, natural disasters continue to draw the Region's attention. In 2011, floodwaters impacted 27 national wildlife refuges in five states across the Mississippi River

drainage. At the same time, nearly 393 fires burned more than 486,000 acres – roughly 12 percent of the Service's refuge acreage in the region – impacting more than three dozen national wildlife refuges across the Southeast Region. A series of tornados struck the central part of the Region as well impacting habitats and facilities. Hurricane Irene struck five coastal North Carolina refuges and Cape Romain NWR on the South Carolina coast. On August 29, 2012, Hurricane Isaac made landfall on Louisiana's southeast coast coinciding with the seventh anniversary of Hurricane Katrina.

### **Water Issues**

The Southeast has the highest diversity of aquatic dependent species. Rapidly growing human communities rely on the same rivers, streams, and aquifers that support this aquatic diversity. Recent and ongoing droughts in several parts of the region demonstrate that, even in the humid Southeast, water is a limited resource. For example, the Service is playing a key role in finding conservation solutions to meet a range of challenges across the region including water allocation and water quality in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin and the Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa River Basin. And as a result of the Service's participation in a recent settlement agreement to license the Toledo Bend Reservoir in Louisiana, passageways will be constructed for the American eel opening up roughly 14,800 river miles for its use.

### **Marine Coastal Issues**

Predictions related to accelerating climate change for sea level rise along the tidal shoreline will impact fish, wildlife, and their habitats over the next 50 to 100 years. The Southeast Region is home to 26,000 miles of tidal shoreline and its coastal flats include 86 million acres of coastal habitat and fish and wildlife resources and coral reefs. This will have significant impacts on this Region's two most extraordinary ecological restoration efforts – the Everglades and coastal wetlands



*Longleaf pine by USFWS/Randy Browning*

along the Gulf Coast. More than 1.2 million acres of wetlands and marshes have been lost since 1932 along the Louisiana coast.

### **Migratory Bird Joint Ventures (JVs)**

Six JV partnerships - Atlantic Coast, East Gulf Coastal Plain, Appalachian Mountains, Central Hardwoods, Lower Mississippi Valley, and Gulf Coast - support bird conservation across the Southeast Region. JVs are self-directed partnerships comprised of state, federal, NGO, and private partners responsible for achieving the conservation objectives detailed in national and international bird conservation plans that address the needs of waterfowl, landbirds, shorebirds, wading birds, and sea birds.

### **Southeastern Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP)**

More than two dozen state and federal fisheries conservation agencies and private conservation organizations are part of the most aggressive regional partnership in the National Fish Habitat Action Plan. The agency and partners are using landscape conservation tools to conserve and restore valuable populations of aquatic species across the Region. Since 1999, the Service has funded removal of

approximately 94 barriers, opening more than 834 miles of rivers and streams, and over 103,000 acres of aquatic habitat to fish and other aquatic species.

### **Longleaf Pine Restoration**

America's Longleaf Initiative is a successful collaborative effort of more than 30 organizations and agencies in support of longleaf pine restoration and conservation efforts across its range from Virginia to Texas. The vision for the Initiative is to have functional, viable longleaf pine ecosystems with the full spectrum of ecological, economic and societal values inspired through a diverse partnership of motivated organizations and individuals. The Service is an integral part of the Longleaf Partnership Council, which leads this effort.

### **At-risk Species Conservation Strategy**

Working with states and Federal agencies, the Southeast Region is implementing a five-point strategy to proactively conserve more than 400 at-risk and imperiled fish, wildlife and plant species over the next decade. The Region is working with public and private partners on flexible, innovative and cost-effective ways to help maintain ranches, farms, commercial forests and other working landscapes, while precluding the need to list species under the Endangered Species Act. The Region is required to evaluate the possible listing of the species as a result of litigation brought by several conservation groups.

### **Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS)**

The Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the Service, the Southeast Natural Resources Leadership Group, Landscape Conservation Cooperatives across the Southeast Region, and existing regional partnerships are launching an effort to develop a coordinated regional conservation adaptation strategy. This collaborative approach expands science capacity, provides better planning, and makes better long-term habitat management decisions. It builds upon conservation efforts already in place to develop a vision and strategies needed to sustain fish and wildlife populations into the future with a changing landscape.

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