Focal Species
Mallard, Bobolink, Lake Sturgeon and Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid

Strategic Habitat Conservation

Conservation Planning and Design Tools:
UMRGLR JV Implementation Plan, Shiawassee NWR CCP, Great Lakes Watershed Mgt. Tool, Lake Huron Biodiversity Strategy, Saginaw Bay CISMA Strategic Plan, Upper Midwest Great Lakes LCC Strategic Plan

Conservation Delivery:
Wetland restoration and enhancement, Great Lakes coastal marsh restoration, grassland/prairie restoration/establishment, early successional forest management, fish habitat and passage

Conservation Partners:

Comprehensive Partnerships Include
- Partnership for Saginaw Bay
- Saginaw Bay Cooperative Invasive Species Mgt. Area
- Saginaw Bay Coastal Initiative
- Great Lakes Coastal Wetland LCD
- Saginaw Bay WIN
- Saginaw Bay Regional Conservation Partnership Program
- Upper Midwest Great Lakes LCC
- Saginaw Bay to Lake Erie NAWCA Partnership

Initiatives
- Monarch Initiative
- Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
- Michigan NAWCA Partnership
- Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative
- Schoolyard Habitat
- Urban Wildlife Conservation Program (Urban Refuge)

Focus Area Five-Year Targets
- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement/Coastal Marsh: 200 acres
- Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 150 acres
- Fish Habitat: 15 sites
- Fish Passage: 1 Great Lakes barrier
The Saginaw Bay Lakeplain and Headwaters Focus Area includes a diverse mix of community types, current land uses, and habitat restoration opportunities. Presettlement conditions supported interior communities from pine barrens to floodplain forests and coastal communities from beach to lakeplain prairie and coastal marsh. The entire area was once influenced by the water levels of Lake Huron and the connecting rivers before humans began to alter these systems. Much of the topography is very flat with rich soils and is highly conducive to row crop farming. Additional challenges to habitat include large wind farm development, urban and suburban development, parcel division, climate change and invasive species encroachment.

Despite landscape changes, the Saginaw Bay watershed has long had a high wildlife value. It has been identified by the State and partners as a priority area for waterfowl, waterbirds, and shorebirds. Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge, an Important Bird Area as identified by National Audubon Society, is located at the convergence of four major rivers that combine into the Saginaw River and outlets into the Saginaw Bay. The river systems and watersheds have been highly altered by shoreline development, dams, channelizing, and tiling of riparian areas. These changes provide great opportunity for restoration that will not only affect the Saginaw Bay but will increase the benefit of activities at the refuge. Additional habitat opportunities include restoration of small wetlands particularly in the upper reaches of the watersheds, establishment of grassland blocks, and targeted removal of invasive species in coastal marshes to reestablish native vegetation.

All PFW program restoration activities are targeted to benefit migratory birds, federally-listed species, and fish of the Great Lakes including surrogate species for the Upper Midwest Great Lakes geography – monarch butterfly, mallard, wood duck, blue-winged teal, bobolink, and lake sturgeon. In addition, this area holds habitat blocks for the threatened eastern prairie fringed orchid. Finally, the area also has untapped potential, particularly in the northern portion, to setback forest succession to benefit the American woodcock and golden-winged warbler.

In addition to providing fish and wildlife benefits, the Saginaw Bay area provides many benefits to the local citizens. Saginaw Bay is a drinking water source for many communities and thousands still obtain their water from private wells. The projects completed through the PFW program will decrease sediment and nutrients entering the Saginaw Bay, help re-charge groundwater aquifers, help to mitigate the effects of extreme weather events due to climate change and provide recreational opportunities for years to come.

“It’s exciting to see an effort that attempts to pull together both ecological and human well-being values to plan wetland conservation for the future. It truly feels like a collaborative effort and is acknowledging the values of wetlands, not only for wildlife, but for people too.” – Barb Avers, Michigan DNR, PFW partner

The Saginaw Bay has a long history of conservation partnerships and the PFW program will continue to reinforce and build upon these partnerships. The Great Lakes Coastal Wetland Landscape Conservation Design currently being developed by the Upper Midwest Great Lakes Landscape Conservation Cooperative will be a new landscape level partnership that will allow the PFW program to grow and become even more effective in the future. It is bringing new partners to the conservation table to discuss the restoration and management of one of the largest, contiguous fresh water coastal systems in the world.