



Conserving Wildlife At-Risk in the Eastern United States

117 Wins

Reducing Regulatory Burden

Keeping Working Lands Working and Protecting a Way of Life

Focused Conservation & Recovery Work

The eastern portion of the United States has some of the most beautiful and iconic places on earth. They sustain our diversity of native fish, wildlife and plants, and they support economies and livelihoods—as well as our dream of leaving this bounty for future generations. It's one giant landscape and the people who live, work and play in it want different things from it.

Some of these places and wildlife are in trouble. Nearly 400 species in the eastern U.S. are awaiting evaluation for potential protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Working hand-in-hand with states, private landowners, federal agencies, industry and businesses, and other partners, we can give at risk fish, wildlife and plants a chance to recover—before they face extinction.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southeast and Northeast regions are looking for collaborators across all levels of government, communities and industries to prevent fish, wildlife and plants from becoming threatened or endangered. From the gopher tortoise in open pine forests, to the spotted turtle basking in the sun, the abundance and diversity of wildlife found across these 23 states benefit from the conservation ethic of landowners, business and industry, federal agencies, conservation groups, and the leading efforts of state fish and wildlife agencies.

Our Goal

We will collaborate with state wildlife agencies and private and public partners to keep our farms, ranches and forests working for people and the outdoors. The best available science and proactive conservation will be used to conserve as many fish, wildlife and plants as possible before they need the ESA's protection. If they end up requiring federal protection, we intend to use all of the ESA's flexibilities to create collaborative incentives for private landowners and our conservation partners that will allow us to bring them back.



The longleaf pine ecosystem is home to some at-risk species, including the gopher tortoise, credit USFWS/Clay Ware.

As the Service develops proactive conservation partnerships, state Species of Greatest Conservation Need also will be considered.

Why At-Risk Species Conservation?

The ESA is like wildlife's emergency room, where people rush in a last-ditch effort to prevent species from going extinct. By that measure, at-risk conservation is the preventative medicine. By identifying and helping these at-risk fish, wildlife and plants early on, we can use funding, partner efforts and expertise to improve their populations.



The gopher tortoise is a federally threatened species in its western range and a candidate for listing in its eastern range, credit USFWS/Randy Browning.

Definition of At-Risk Species

"At risk" fish, wildlife and plants face grave threats to their survival. For the purposes of this conservation strategy, "at-risk species" are those that are:

- Already proposed but not finalized for listing under the ESA by the Service;
- Candidates for listing under the ESA; or
- Petitioned for listing under the ESA, which means a citizen or group has requested that the Service evaluate their status to see if they need the ESA's protection.

We can reduce the need for regulatory measures that may result in land-use restrictions well into the future, too.

Together with our partners, we are the stewards – the caretakers for all fish, wildlife and plants. By conserving one species, we usually help many. For example, the work we are doing to conserve the gopher tortoise is likely to benefit nearly 300 other species. The work to conserve the New England cottontail had a similar conservation impact.

Every species deserves a chance.

Together we have given a second chance to wildlife like the wild turkey, bald eagle, Louisiana black bear and New England cottontail. At-risk conservation builds on decades of partnerships with forward-looking landowners and businesses stepping up to restore wildlife and their habitat.



A consortium of partners worked to save the Georgia aster from extinction, credit TNC-GA/Michele Elmore

Who?

Twenty-six states and the District of Columbia, working through the Northeast and Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, are leading the effort to conserve at-risk species (i.e. the gopher tortoise and nearly 300 species its habitat needs support; New England cottontail). The partnership continues to grow and now includes other federal agencies such as the Department of Defense, the U.S. Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service, utilities and energy companies like Georgia Power and Eversource, timber investment management organizations, timber companies, nongovernmental organizations such as the American Forest Foundation, private landowners, universities and others.

How?

The Service has developed numerous voluntary tools that both protect private land interests and provide incentives. Examples include providing funding and technical expertise, developing conservation agreements with assurances, formulating best-management practices and establishing conservation banks. The Service continues to pursue new ideas and creative ways to use those flexibilities and tools.

Together with states, our strategy for conserving at-risk fish, wildlife and plants:

- Work with states and other experts to prioritize species in need of conservation;
- Promote voluntary conservation actions and develop conservation plans;
- Build partnerships with key stakeholders;
- Improve data collection and sharing; and
- Tell the stories of success and the people conserving them.

A History of Success

Since 2011, the Service and the states have conserved 102 at-risk fish, wildlife and plants; 57 do not need federal protection, thanks to collaboration with state agencies and researchers to assess conservation actions, additional information such as updated survey data, and threats to species' survival. Additionally, organizations and individuals have withdrawn their petitions to list 45 more after further scientific analysis (e.g. additional surveys locating more populations) concluding that listing under the ESA was not justified. Another 15 species were upgraded from endangered to threatened or removed due to recovery from the list of protected species entirely.

For example, the Service, working closely with states, other federal agencies, private landowners, non-governmental organizations and many other partners, has been able to remove the label "candidate for federal listing" from the Florida black bear, New England cottontail, bog asphodel, sicklefin redhorse, Georgia aster, Adams cave



The New England cottontail's rebound is another success story, credit USFWS.

beetles in Kentucky, the Camp Shelby burrowing crayfish and the Yadkin River goldenrod.



With most populations protected on public land, the bog asphodel is another example conservation cooperation, credit USDA.

Next Steps

All hands and All lands* are needed to conserve All wildlife across these 26 states. Successful conservation of as many at-risk species as possible will continue to require that the Service, states and partners:

- Devote time and funding to strategically plan proactive conservation actions and implement them.
- Conduct research to determine habitat and life history requirements of at-risk fish, wildlife and plants. Better information will enable the Service and its partners to make informed decisions and have a positive impact on conservation.
- Increase the use of existing tools and programs, and explore new ways to minimize future regulation on the land and maximize incentives available to landowners for proactive conservation actions.

Contact

For more information about how you can participate in the efforts to conserve at-risk fish, wildlife and plants, please contact:

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*Only through voluntary efforts.