



Gulf of Mexico - Our Lands and Waters

Commitment to Conservation Beyond



Grand Bay NWR © Pano Carlisle

Overview

The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) protects America's natural resources and heritage, honors our cultures and tribal communities, and supplies the energy to power our future by working with our state partners, Native American tribes, local and municipal governments, non-governmental and nonprofit organizations, and private citizens. As part of our mission, DOI provides healthy lands and waters along the Gulf of Mexico for the use and enjoyment of local communities and visitors, managing over 3.5 million acres on the Gulf coast including cultural, historical, and natural places in each of the five Gulf coast states.

The Gulf of Mexico is a large and diverse landscape, ecologically rich due to influences of coastal geomorphology, climate and hydrology, and its connection to a productive marine environment. This landscape is also reflected in the rich cultural and historic resources, and ports and coastal communities that conduct trade, agriculture, seafood harvest, energy production, and tourism.

Our Lands and Waters

DOI manages 45 national wildlife refuges (NWR's) and eight national park areas spanning the Gulf from Brownsville, Texas, to the Florida Keys, conserving an array of biologically-diverse habitats including barrier islands, beaches, dunes,

coral reefs, and coastal marshes and estuaries, and protecting historical parks and preserves. These areas provide important habitat for migratory birds and fish, including marine species such as Gulf sturgeon and Kemp's Ridley sea turtle. Our lands and waters often connect to existing state or other protected lands and provide important wildlife corridors and migration routes for birds and fish.

These areas also provide local communities and visitors with the opportunity to connect with our natural and cultural heritage through outdoor recreational activities and visits.

DOI is responsible for numerous programs that provide assistance for coastal conservation both on public lands and in partnership with the Gulf states. DOI's Coastal Program provides both technical and financial assistance to all levels of partners on a voluntary basis for coastal restoration. The National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Program (in Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida) and the Coastal Impact Assistance Program (to oil and gas producing states) both provide funding for the acquisition, restoration, management, or enhancement of coastal wetlands. Additionally, DOI provides technical assistance to protect fragile, high-risk and ecologically sensitive coastal barriers through the Coastal Barrier Resources Act.

Living and Working in the Gulf Communities

In addition to working on NWR's and national park areas on the Gulf of Mexico, DOI employees also live in Gulf communities and have invested their personal lives and children's lives on the coast. They support their communities by shopping and eating in local stores and establishments, using local professional services such as doctors and lawyers, and going to local schools and places of worship. They are a part of the fabric of society, living, working, and playing together.

DOI also actively implements on-the-ground conservation on NWR's and parks. For example, along with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Friends of Louisiana Refuges, and other partners, DOI is restoring approximately 400 acres of marsh on Delta NWR in Louisiana. This marsh restoration project will improve wading bird and waterfowl habitat and provide increased hunting opportunities and success on the refuge. The project is located in an area that was once solid marsh but has become a large open water pond due to erosion and tropical storm damage.

Building a sediment diversion crevasse and constructing low level terraces will help provide an avenue for sediment-filled water to flow back into the degraded area and naturally re-build marsh elevations and ultimately allow marsh vegetation to re-establish.



Collaborative Land Conservation and Expertise in Science

In addition to our own lands, DOI works in collaboration with others to conserve and protect lands and waters for fish, wildlife, plants, and people on the Gulf of Mexico landscape, both within and outside of our boundaries. DOI has established Landscape Conservation Cooperatives within the Gulf region and Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units in each of the Gulf states that enable seamless science efforts with universities and other partners; Science Centers that provide exceptional scientific expertise in both research and monitoring of hydrology and other coastal processes; and Migratory Bird Joint Venture offices that work with others to conserve and manage high priority bird habitats in the Gulf region.

DOI is actively engaging in local land conservation through activities such as our participation on the Florida Invasive Species Partnership. This collaboration of federal, state, and local agencies and non-governmental organizations are working together to manage non-native species in Florida. Through this Partnership, the entire state of Florida is represented by 17 regional Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas that expand efforts to increase non-native invasive species prevention, education, and awareness; early detection; rapid response; and the ability to collectively monitor invasive species across the landscape rather than halting our work at property or other boundaries.

Providing Assistance for Conservation Beyond our Boundaries

DOI also manages and partners with other federal agencies to implement innovative programs that provide local expertise, technical assistance, and funding to state and local agencies as well as private landowners to conserve their natural resources, preserve their history, restore marshes, estuaries and riparian habitats, and create close-to-home outdoor recreation opportunities.

These federal programs help create hunting and fishing opportunities, build trails, return historic buildings to productive use, and recognize and promote local and national history.

Through DOI's State Wildlife Grant Competitive Program, we support State Wildlife Action plans by awarding grants to state agencies for projects that implement strategies and actions to conserve Species of Greatest Conservation Need. For example, in Fiscal Year 2012, DOI awarded \$874,000 to the State of Alabama, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, for the Longleaf Pine Ecosystem Restoration Initiative. Under this agreement, the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries will enhance and restore longleaf pine ecosystem habitat on over 5,000 acres of private lands and state-owned properties in the historic range of the longleaf pine ecosystem, and will amplify agency coordination and on-the-ground activities for 31 Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The State of Alabama has secured \$826,000 in non-federal match for this initiative.

In addition, DOI participates as a Task Force member of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineer's Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act program (CWPPRA or "1990 Breaux Act"). This program provides for targeted funds to be used for planning and implementing projects that are recommended by the general public to create, protect, restore, and enhance wetlands in coastal Louisiana. The Task Force manages the CWPPRA program including project selection and construction, and is composed of the State of Louisiana and five federal agencies.

Conservation and Restoration of Gulf Habitats

The ecological health of the Gulf of Mexico region has suffered as demands on coastal and marine resources have increased. To reverse this trend, DOI is collaborating with the Gulf states and other partners to develop a landscape-scale approach to conserve and restore Gulf coastal and marine habitats through our work with the Gulf of Mexico Alliance and the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration

Task Force. DOI will have a role in the Restore Act and supports expanding the network of state, federal and private conservation areas through easements and/or acquisition. This effort to protect working landscapes and a way of life will ensure a healthy environment across the Gulf region supporting its communities, its culture and the diverse services provided by the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem.

Partners will need to align conservation efforts and identify, conserve and restore key conservation areas and habitat corridors that are capable of:

- maintaining ecosystem services – clean air and water; fertile soil, storm buffering, productive fisheries, and abundant recreational opportunities;
- providing for mitigation and adaptation of natural and human communities in response to a changing climate and sea level rise;
- enhancing landscape connectivity and permeability – improving the quality and sustainability of habitats; and
- reducing the vulnerability of rare or at-risk species, protecting biodiversity, and providing landscapes that support sustainable populations.

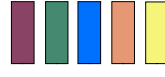
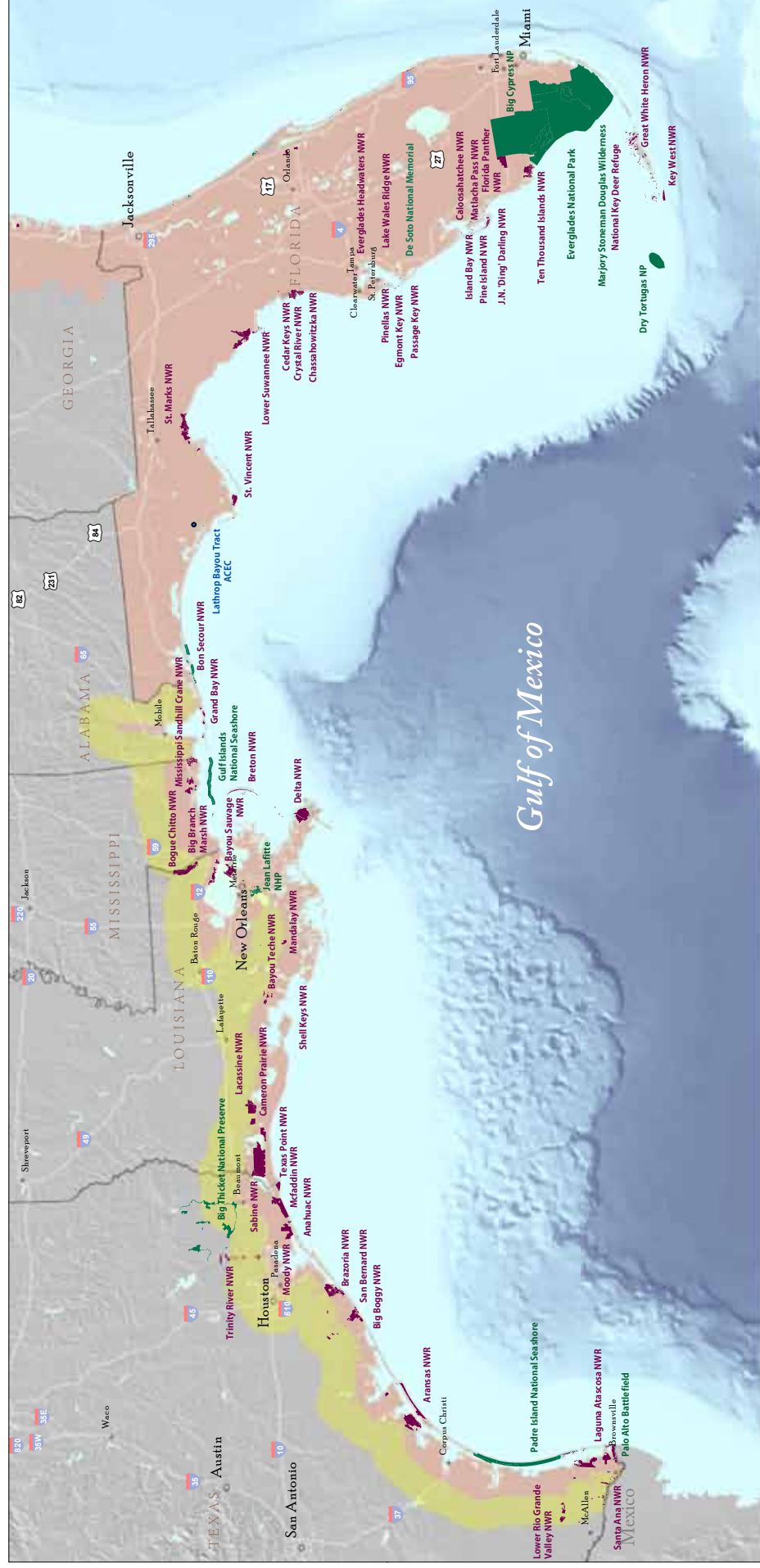
Our Commitment to Public Service and Partnerships

DOI will strive to continue to be a trusted partner in providing healthy lands and waters for Gulf of Mexico communities and visitors, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural and cultural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. Our commitment to the Gulf community includes working collaboratively with the Gulf states and other partners to link protected lands and waters, working landscapes, and other open spaces in an ongoing effort to conserve ecosystem processes and provide important ecological benefits to communities, fish and wildlife across the Gulf region.

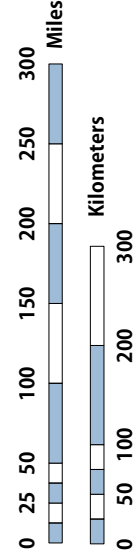
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U.S. Department of the Interior - Gulf Coast Managed Lands



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service land
National Park Service land
Bureau of Land Management land
Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972
25 Mile buffer around the CZMA of 1972



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Data Sources: USFWS cadastral geodatabase
PAD-US 1.2, NOAA, ESRI Streetmap