

ESA Success: 110 Wildlife Wins and Counting

A joint at-risk effort of conservation action and recovery across the Southeast Region

Reducing Regulatory Burden

Keeping Working Lands Working and Protecting a Way of Life

Focused Conservation and Recovery Work



Georgia asters do not need federal protection, credit TNC/Michele Elmore



Louisiana black bears were delisted due to recovery, credit USDA/Clint Turnage

The Challenge

More than three petitions beginning in 2010. One legal settlement. Together they covered 496 species.

The first 61 of those 496 species were already designated as candidates for protection, and a settlement laid out a schedule for final decisions on their status. A petition from the Center for Biological Diversity added 404 aquatic species. And in 2012, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) received an additional petition to evaluate 53 reptiles and amphibians. The agency continues to receive petitions seeking action on additional species.

In 2017, the Service's Southeast Region has roughly 60 percent of the agency-wide workload to evaluate these species.

Results of Conservation Action

In 2011, recognizing the overwhelming number of evaluations in front of the Region, the Service began working even more closely with the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA) and a host of other partners and private landowners to implement a bold at-risk effort utilizing the flexibility within the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to do more and ultimately prevent the need to add species to the ESA's list of protected species.

Since 2011, the Service's biologists, working with state partners, have determined that 97 species did not need federal protection as a result of one or more of the following:

- conservation actions;
- additional information such as updated survey data;
- a lack of substantial information;
- reevaluation of threats to their survival.

Another 13 species protected by the ESA now require less protection or no protection at all as a result of recovery actions.





The Challenge

January 2010: 61 candidate species published in Candidate Notice of Review, which became part of the Multi-District Listing Settlement Agreement.

April 20, 2010: Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) submits petition to list 404 southeastern aquatics.

(18 of the 404 species were already designated by the Service as candidates.)

April 30, 2010 - January 2012: 12 species petitioned.

July 11, 2012: CBD submits petition to list 53 reptiles and amphibians. The Southeast Region has the lead for 17.

(3 of the 53 occur in the Southeast, but other Regions have the lead for them.)

January 31, 2013 - now: 17 more species petitioned.
496 southeastern species require evaluation. The Southeast Region is responsible for 374 species listed as either threatened or endangered at this time.



The Success So Far

26	not warranted 12-month findings
26	not substantial 90-day findings
45	species withdrawn by petitioner
97 in total	species do not require protection as a result of conservation actions, updated surveys and reevaluations of threats to their survival, or lack of substantial information

5	listed or proposed for listing as threatened rather than endangered
4	species downlisted as a result of recovery actions*
4	species delisted entirely as a result of recovery actions
13 in total	species require less protection or are recovered and no longer need protection at all

(*One proposed downlisting included here is not yet final)



**110 Species in Good Shape
or Doing Better**



West Indian manatee is proposed for downlisting due to recovery actions, credit USFWS/S. Whitcraft

Photos on previous page, top to bottom:

Pigeon Mountain salamander does not require federal protection, credit John Clare, Creative Commons;

Wood storks were downlisted to threatened due to recovery actions, credit Mary Ellen Urbanski;

Black pinesnake listed as threatened rather than endangered, credit TNC/Jim Lee;

Lagniappe crayfish was withdrawn by petitioner due to scientific analysis, credit USFS/Chris Lukhaup;

White-haired goldenrod was delisted due to recovery, credit Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources/John MacGregor;

Okaloosa darter was downlisted due to recovery actions; credit USFWS.

Leading the Way

The 15 SEAFWA states are now leading the effort and using State Wildlife Grant (SWG) money to support additional surveys, research coordinated status assessments, and restoration projects to conserve at-risk species before they need protection under the ESA. For example, states are using SWG funding to support work to prioritize sandhill habitat restoration to benefit gopher tortoises and roughly 300 other species that use their burrows. Other states are using SWG money to support statewide surveys and restoration work benefitting the eastern hellbender.

The Southeast At-Risk Species (SEARS) Program focuses on collaborative conservation of species at-risk. Implemented by the SEAFWA's Wildlife Diversity Committee in cooperation with the Service, the goal is to preclude the need to list species under the ESA. SEARS establishes a mechanism through which States can collaborate on range-wide surveys and conservation projects for at-risk species.

States within SEAFWA have pooled State Wildlife Grant Funds and other funds to support coordinated status assessments and conservation projects for at-risk species. This information will inform status assessments and conservation programs for these species.

Voluntary, Locally Led and Incentive-based

This at-risk work is a broad effort with states, private landowners, business and industry like ALCOA and Southern Company, Timber Investment Management Organizations and other conservation partners to protect a way of life and create more opportunity for voluntary conservation actions to occur across the landscape.

Biologists from the states and the Service are working with as many of those partners and stakeholders as they can across the Southeast to gather the best available science and undertake voluntary actions to put conservation on the ground in the right places to keep working lands working, reduce regulatory burden, increase regulatory predictability, and conserve fish, wildlife, and their habitats.

One example of this collaboration is the Longleaf Stewardship Fund – a partnership among Southern Company, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), the Service and others that is conserving and restoring the longleaf pine ecosystem. Through this effort federal agencies and corporate partners combine resources to enhance the longleaf pine ecosystem, benefiting at-risk species that depend on the ecosystem, such as the gopher tortoise, indigo snake, black pinesnake and the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker.



Tennessee purple coneflower was delisted due to recovery, credit Michael Hodge

In addition, Southern Company and NFWF's Power of Flight program have accelerated the recovery of the red-cockaded woodpecker by expanding the range and populations through translocations so that down-listing decades ahead of schedule could be a reality. These types of collaboration have helped protect wildlife and wetland resources and become a model for other groups interested in species recovery.

Recovery

The Service uses a number of tools to support voluntary, locally led and incentive-based conservation to deliver conservation on the ground. One such tool is being finalized now. The Service is finalizing new flexibility to provide landowners, government agencies and others incentives to carry out voluntary conservation actions for non-listed species before they are listed. The new policy allows the benefits to species by such actions to mitigate or serve as a compensatory measure for the detrimental effects of another action undertaken after a species is listed.

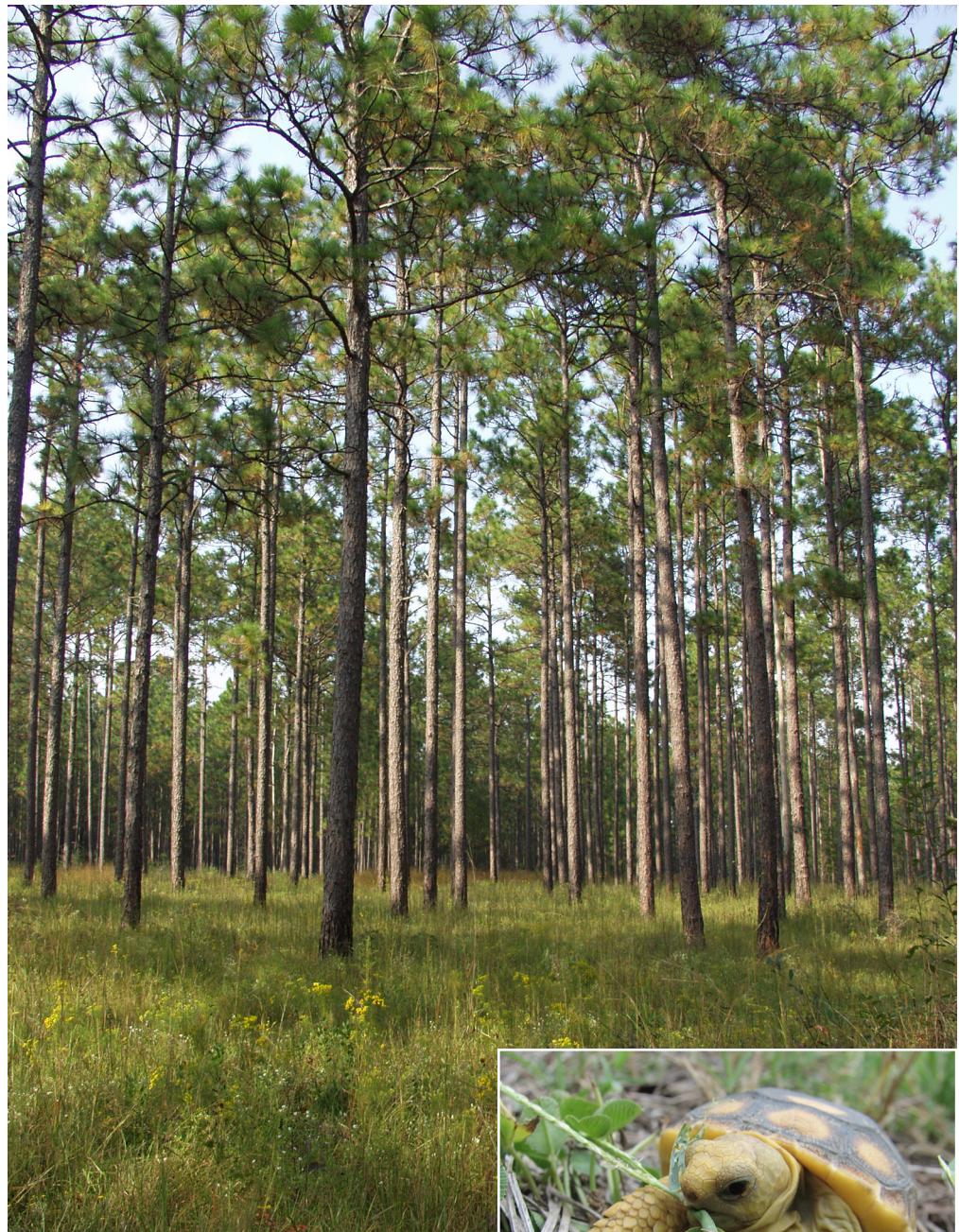


Southeastern snowy plover does not need federal protection, credit Barbara Wheeler Photography, Creative Commons

Results

Beyond that, this way of working led to five species being listed as threatened rather than endangered because of positive conservation actions taken by partners. The threatened status made additional exemptions possible for certain activities under the ESA's Section 4(d).

Another eight species were down-listed to threatened from endangered or proposed for removal from the list as a result of recovery actions taken by the Service and its partners since these species were listed.



Longleaf pine forests are being conserved and restored through collaborative efforts, credit USFWS/Randy Browning

The at-risk effort benefits from the voluntary, innovative work that makes these recovery actions possible by aggressively looking for opportunities to accomplish this conservation before species need protection. The work also provides benefits for other species on the landscape.

So far, the effort and the vision behind it has enabled the Service to determine 110 southeastern species either didn't need the ESA's protection, could be listed as threatened rather than endangered, or could be down-listed or removed altogether from the list as a result of people working together.



Juvenile gopher tortoise is benefitting from longleaf pine conservation efforts, credit Mississippi Army National Guard/Chris Potin

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[www.fws.gov/southeast/
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February 2017