

## **Protecting Alabama's Resources on Private Lands: Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program**

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The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program began almost 20 years ago with only a few biologists and a small budget to carry out restoration projects on private lands Nationwide. This initiative was the genesis of an effort in habitat restoration and enhancement on private lands for the benefit of Federal Trust Resources (e.g. migratory birds, endangered and threatened species, wetlands, floodplains, streams and riparian areas). It is estimated that 73% of the Nation's property and 96% of Alabama property is under private ownership. With the majority of the fish and wildlife resources occurring on private lands, conservation programs such as the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program assist in addressing critical habitat and species needs.

Alabama is home to an unprecedented diversity of wildlife, surpassing all eastern states in plant and animal species and ranking fifth in the nation. Alabama ranks first in the nation in freshwater diversity with an aquatic biota consisting of more than 750 species; probably greater than any area of comparable size worldwide. This level of diversity is due to the State's biological wealth, abundance of water, complex geological terrain and a moderate climate. Unfortunately, no state east of the Colorado River has more wildlife species at risk than Alabama. Alteration of Alabama's natural landscape and waterways, habitat loss and fragmentation, loss of natural community integrity and impacts from disturbance and exotic species has contributed to the extinction or extirpation of at least 111 animal species: 47 mussels, 44 aquatic snail, 11 fishes, five birds and four mammals. To aid in addressing these issues, the Alabama Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources 2005) identifies a total of 1,216 species in need of attention (Table 1). With a significant amount of land in Alabama under private ownership, and these statistics, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is an important component in the restoration of critical habitat for Federal Trust Resources.

Table 1. Alabama's Wildlife Species in Need of Attention as identified in Alabama's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.

Taxa	Total Species <sup>1</sup>	Federally Listed <sup>2</sup>
Mammals	64	5
Birds	247	6
Reptiles	93	9
Amphibians	73	3
Fishes	308	14
Mussels	175	43
Aquatic Snails	174	10
Crayfishes	82	0
Total	1,216	90

<sup>1</sup>Listed as species in need of attention in the Alabama Comprehensive Strategy by the ADCNR

<sup>2</sup>Listed as Threatened or Endangered by U.S. Department of the Interior

## What is Partners for Fish and Wildlife?

*Mission: Efficiently achieve voluntary habitat restoration projects on private lands, through financial and technical assistance, for the benefit of Federal Trust Resources.*

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, made available through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners to restore fish and wildlife habitats on their land for the benefit of Federal Trust Resources. Presently, the USFWS has made Partners funding available through the Soil and Water Conservation Committee and Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. The program focuses on restoring, protecting or enhancing private property for species in need of attention and critical habitat. Examples of projects include, but are not limited to, the restoration or enhancement of degraded wetlands, native grasslands, streams, riparian areas, longleaf pine ecosystems other habitats to their natural condition.

Project goals include that restoration or enhancement activities take place on private property, the landowner must sign an agreement to retain the management activity in place for at least 10 years, the total project cost to the USFWS should be no more than \$25,000 and the landowner must share in the cost (either through in-kind contributions or non-Service funds representing 50% of total project cost). There is no minimal acreage requirement.

## What are Habitats of Special Concern?

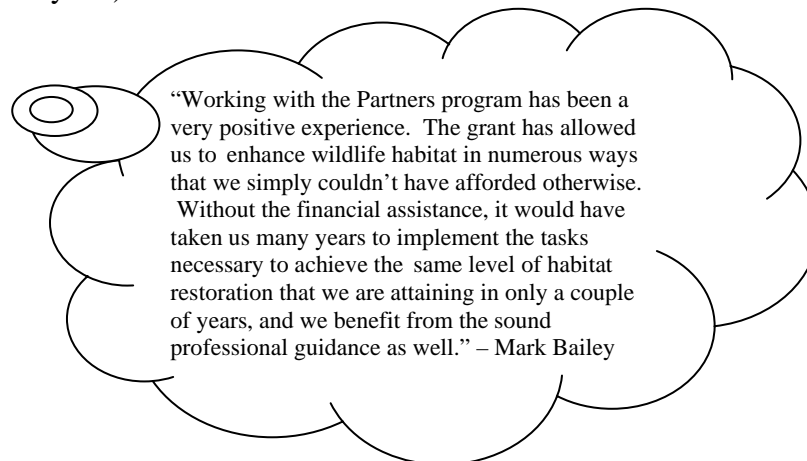
Habitats of special concern are areas that have been identified as showing a significant decline in abundance. Endangered habitats identified in Alabama include:

- Longleaf Pine Forests
- Wetlands
- Savannahs in the Coastal Plain
- Black Belt Prairies
- Atlantic White Cedar Swamps
- Pitcher Plant Bogs
- Riparian Forests
- Bottomland Hardwoods
- Cedar Glades
- Karst Springs and Caves
- Many large streams and rivers

## What might a Partners for Fish and Wildlife Project look like?

### **Gator Pond Restoration - Covington County**

Longleaf pine was once Alabama's most abundant tree, but now exists in just 3% of its previous range throughout the Southeast. Gator Pond Preserve is a 71 acre tract of private property, adjacent to Conecuh National Forest, in Covington County that once supported the longleaf pine ecosystem. When Mr. Mark Bailey acquired this property, he recognized the alterations in the natural landscape and was concerned with the improper habitat for wildlife. With Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Mr. Bailey is taking action to restore his property to its natural state for the benefit of the longleaf pine ecosystem and of 33 species in need of attention. Restoration practices include removal of deciduous hardwood midstory, establishment of longleaf pine and wiregrass and control of invasive weedy grasses. Due to a high mortality rate, juvenile gopher tortoises will be raised, and later released on the property site. A complex of wetlands will be created to establish a breeding population of gopher frogs. Rare bat roosting habitat will also be established to benefit rare woodland bats (Rafinesque's big-eared bat and the southeastern myotis).





Picture 1: The gopher tortoise, a priority 2 species (Federally threatened west of the Tombigbee River), will benefit from longleaf pine restoration and a prescribed burning regime (Photo Credit: Mark Bailey).



Picture 2: Hardwood brush removal to allow burning and planting of longleaf pine trees (Photo Credit: Mark Bailey, 2/17/06).



Picture 3: Prescribed burn of coarse hardwood debris after brush removal (Photo Credit: Mark Bailey, 3/5/06).



Picture 4: Construction of an ephemeral pond for amphibian habitat (Photo Credit: Mark Bailey, 3/8/06).

### How do I apply for a Partners for Fish & Wildlife Project?

If you have any interest in the program, contact a Partners for Fish and Wildlife biologist. The biologist will come and evaluate the property. If the property qualifies, a project proposal will be developed to be reviewed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Soil and Water Conservation Committee and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries personnel. Upon approval, an agreement is signed by all parties and sent to the Service for final approval and processing. Project construction can then begin and reimbursement is based on the cost share identified in the agreement.

Interested parties can contact Traci George, Landowner Incentive Program Coordinator, at 334-353-0503 or [Traci.George@dnr.alabama.gov](mailto:Traci.George@dnr.alabama.gov) . More information on Partners for Fish and Wildlife and funded projects can be found at [www.outdooralabama.com](http://www.outdooralabama.com) (Research and Management Section) and at [www.fws.gov/partners/](http://www.fws.gov/partners/).