Working Lands for Wildlife

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USDA NRCS
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Working Lands for Wildlife

WLFW

Restoring populations of declining wildlife species.

Providing farmers, ranchers, and forest managers with regulatory certainty.

Strengthening and sustaining rural economies.

Executive Summary

The nation's rural landowners—its farmers, ranchers, and forest owners—provide not only food and fiber for the world, but also a host of environmental benefits, including habitat for wildlife.

Nearly two thirds of all species federally listed as threatened or endangered exist on private lands. Conservation efforts on these lands generate outdoor recreation and economic activity that result in sustained growth for local communities and landowners.

Through Working Lands for Wildlife —a voluntary, incentive-based effort—the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and its conservation partners will provide landowners with technical and financial assistance to:

- Restore populations of declining wildlife species.
- Provide farmers, ranchers, and forest managers with regulatory certainty that conservation investments they make today help sustain their operations over the long term.
- Strengthen and sustain rural economies by restoring and protecting the productive capacity of working lands.

The project will target species whose decline can be reversed and will benefit other species with similar habitat needs. Several mechanisms are being used to provide regulatory certainty to landowners regarding their implementation of NRCS conservation practices for species that are protected by the Endangered Species Act or likely candidates for such action. The mechanisms can include informal agreements, conference opinions, biological opinions, Candidate Conservation Agreements, Safe Harbor Agreements, and Habitat Conservation Plans.

The mechanisms provide regulatory certainty for landowners and they lessen confusion or conflict around species legal protection. The mechanisms ensure landowner that the conservation practices they volunteer to implement will not harm the species or its habitat. By taking action now to prevent a species from declining, the potential for future land use limitations and substantial conservation expenses can be avoided.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) along with state fish and wildlife agencies played a key role in providing expertise to determine the management needs of species and the priority areas to focus the work.

Productive working lands are compatible with the needs of wildlife, and through innovative use of existing tools and resources, government can assist private landowners to protect the environment and rural communities.

Top to bottom: New England Cottontail, Lesser Prairie Chicken, Gopher Tortoise
Right: Golden-Winged Warbler

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The Economics of Wildlife and Habitat Conservation

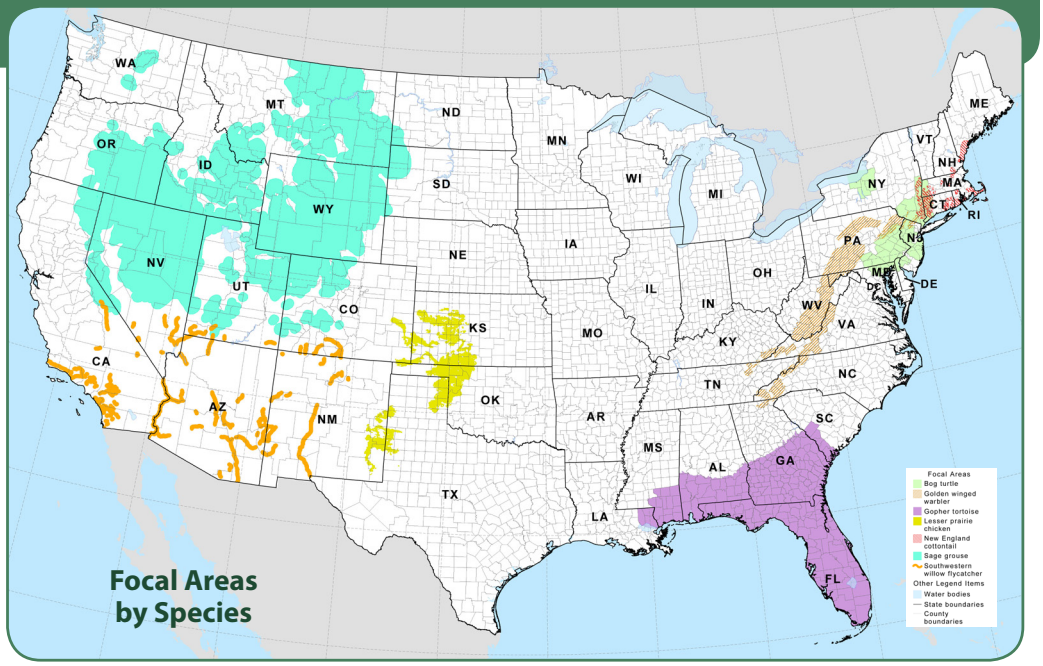
- The 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation found that 87.5 million U.S. residents 16 years old and older participated in wildlife-related recreation that year.
- These wildlife enthusiasts, including hunters, anglers and wildlife-watchers, spent $122.3 billion on their activities.
- A 2006 report prepared for the Outdoor Industry Foundation found that wildlife-based recreation supported 1.4 million jobs, generated $9 billion in tax revenues, and $139 billion in economic activity.

Species Selection Criteria

The Working Lands for Wildlife project will target species whose decline can be reversed and will benefit other species with similar habitat needs. Seven species were identified during a collaborative process with partners for inclusion in the project: bog turtle, golden-winged warbler, gopher tortoise, greater sage-grouse, lesser prairie chicken, New England cottontail, and southwestern willow flycatcher. Selection criteria included the following considerations: conservation on private lands can influence species' outcomes; needs of the selected species are compatible with agricultural practices and rural land management; viable core habitat areas can be protected and habitat recovery opportunities exist; partnership opportunities exist to produce more efficient conservation delivery; Endangered Species Act (ESA) tools are in place to provide regulatory certainty; and habitat improvements benefit a host of other species.

Working Lands for Wildlife Focus Species

Species	Status	Range
Bog Turtle	Threatened	Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania
Golden-Winged Warbler	At-Risk	Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia
Gopher Tortoise	Western Populations: Threatened Eastern Populations: Candidate	Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina
Greater Sage-Grouse	Candidate	California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, South Dakota, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming
Lesser Prairie Chicken	Candidate	Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas
New England Cottontail	Candidate	Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island
Southwestern Willow Flycatcher	Endangered	Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah



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Pictured above left to right:
Bog Turtle, Greater Sage-Grouse, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher

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