

Lafayette

Ecological Services Field Office

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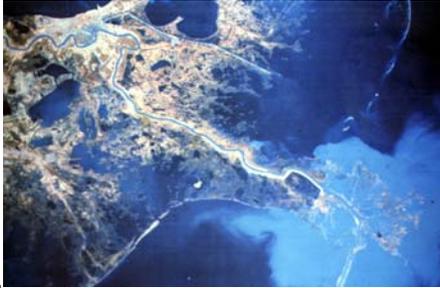


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Photos (top to bottom):

Mississippi Delta.

Louisiana black bear.

Partners activity.

Louisiana coastal wetlands.

Station Facts

- Established: 1972.
- FY 02 budget: \$1,398,500.
- Staff: 22 permanent, seven temporary.

Station Goals

- Protect and restore ecosystems and habitats, with special emphasis on wetlands and other declining habitats that support threatened and endangered species, concentrations of migratory birds, and interjurisdictional fisheries.
- Use an ecosystem approach to address habitat issues and leverage resources through partnerships with other agencies, private landowners, and other entities to achieve the greatest possible benefits to Federal trust fish and wildlife resources.

Services Provided to

- Landowners, private citizens.
- Military bases.
- Other Federal and state agencies.
- Conservation organizations.

Activity Highlights

- Represents Department of Interior (DOI) on Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Task Force: plans and builds wetlands restoration projects under Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act.
- Assists Corps of Engineers and state agencies in implementing Atchafalaya Basin Multipurpose Plan for flood control, water management and habitat protection features.

- Works with Corps of Engineers to plan flood control, navigation, hurricane protection, and freshwater introduction projects in coastal Louisiana and Atchafalaya Basin. Recommends ways to mitigate habitat impacts and increase habitat benefits.
- Coordinates Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in Louisiana by providing technical and financial assistance to landowners and other agencies to restore wetlands and increase habitat benefits.
- Helps develop habitat conservation plans and "Safe Harbor" agreements to allow logging on lands inhabited by endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers. Works with Black Bear Conservation Committee to restore the threatened Louisiana black bear by collaborative partnerships.
- Assesses known or suspected contaminant problems affecting fish and wildlife resources, and recommends ways to resolve them.

Questions and Answers

What is the Fish and Wildlife Service doing to restore the threatened Louisiana black bear?

The Service continues to work in partnership with the Black Bear Conservation Committee (BBCC) to facilitate recovery of the Louisiana black bear. The Service is providing \$25,000 in Endangered Species Recovery funds in fiscal year 2002 to support the BBCC's Executive Director position.

The Service, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the BBCC, USDA Wildlife Services, and Louisiana State University are implementing a project to relocate Louisiana black bear females and their cubs to suitable unoccupied habitat in the Three Rivers/Red River complex in east-central Louisiana. That site comprises more than 100,000 acres of publically

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owned land (National Wildlife Refuge and State wildlife management areas). The purpose of that project is to establish another breeding subpopulation between the Tensas and Atchafalaya River Basin subpopulations to accelerate population expansion. The project began in March 2001 when four female bears and their cubs were released on the Red River Wildlife Management Area. The Service and its partners plan to continue the project and anticipate relocating another group of bears to the area in March 2002.

The Service is working on several refuge acquisition projects that will support the recovery of the Louisiana black bear. We recently acquired about 9,000 acres for the initial establishment of Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), adjacent to the Lower Atchafalaya Basin near Franklin. The Service is also involved in the acquisition of NWR lands in northeastern Louisiana; that action will foster Louisiana black bear recovery.

We have coordinated the preparation of landscape maps that show the most important areas for future reforestation to benefit the Louisiana black bear. Those maps can now be used to set priorities for programs such as our Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the Wetland Reserve Program so that we achieve optimum benefits for the Louisiana black bear.

What is the status of the Fish and Wildlife Service's previous proposal to designate critical habitat for the threatened Louisiana black bear?
The Louisiana black bear was listed as threatened on February 6, 1992. Designation of critical habitat was not included with the final listing. On December 2, 1993, the Service proposed designation of critical habitat for the Louisiana black bear. A final rule has not been issued.

What is the status of the Government's efforts to clean up the industrial contamination of the upper Calcasieu Lake estuary of southwestern Louisiana?
The Calcasieu Estuary provides important habitat for migratory

waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds, and valuable nursery and feeding habitat for numerous estuarine-dependent sport and commercial fishes and shellfishes. The upper Calcasieu Estuary was cited as one of the most contaminated areas in Louisiana, in a June 1997 NOAA report. Areas of greatest concern are Coon Island Loop, Bayou Verdine, and Bayou D'Inde. The contaminants of greatest concern to Fish and Wildlife Service trust resources are hexachlorobenzene, hexachlorobutadiene, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), PAHs, mercury, copper, and lead. Consumption advisories are currently in effect for fish and shellfish from Bayou D'Inde.

Contamination of the upper Calcasieu Estuary potentially involves most industries in the Lake Charles petrochemical/industrial complex. The Service has been working with EPA, NOAA, and several State agencies to complete a Cooperative Management Agreement (Agreement) with the various PRPs to conduct a coordinated a remedial investigation/feasibility study, ecological risk assessment, and Natural Resources Damage Assessment.

What is the Fish and Wildlife Service doing to restore Louisiana's coastal wetlands?

The Service is very concerned over the ongoing loss of 25-35 square miles/year of Louisiana's coastal wetlands its effects on nationally important waterfowl, wading bird, and seabird habitat; sport and commercial fisheries; and nine national wildlife refuges (NWR). We are actively involved in interagency restoration efforts funded via the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA), and administered through the Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force. David Frugé of the Service's Lafayette, Louisiana, office represents the Department of the Interior on the Task Force.

To date, about \$427 million in Federal (CWPPRA) and matching State funds have been committed for coastal wetlands restoration projects in Louisiana. The Service is

implementing 16 of the projects approved by the Task Force, as well as extensive wetland restoration and preservation actions on several NWRs in coastal Louisiana, using other (non-CWPPRA) funding sources. We are a member of the Coast 2050 Co-Location Team, working on several Coast 2050 feasibility studies of large-scale coastal restoration measures. The Service also works closely with the Corps of Engineers to plan and implement projects to benefit coastal wetlands through measures such as marsh creation via placement of dredged material during maintenance of Federal navigation channels, and re-introduction of Mississippi River flows into adjacent coastal wetlands.

Is the Service designating critical habitat for the Gulf sturgeon?

In response to recent court rulings, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service (collectively, the Services) are re-evaluating whether to designate critical habitat for the Gulf sturgeon. This species was Federally listed a threatened on September 30, 1991. It occurs in the Gulf of Mexico bays and estuaries in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, and in freshwater rivers from the Suwannee River in Florida to the Mississippi River in Louisiana. On December 18, 1998, the Sierra Club filed a lawsuit against the Services for failure to designate critical habitat for the Gulf sturgeon. In January 2000, the court issued an order granting defendant's motion for summary judgement and dismissing the complaint. The Sierra Club filed an appeal and in March 2001, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the decision of the district court and instructed the district court to remand the decision to the Services for reconsideration. On August 3, 2001, the district court issued an order directing us to the Services to publish a proposed decision concerning critical habitat designation for the Gulf sturgeon by February 2, 2002, and a final decision by August 2, 2002. The parties have agreed to extend these dates to May 23, 2002, for the proposed decision and to February 28, 2003, for the final decision.