

Atlantic Coast Joint Venture News

Partners working together for the conservation of native bird species in the Atlantic Flyway region of the United States.

July 2009

Volume 6, Number 3

Grant Programs Bolster Bird Conservation in the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture

North American Wetlands Conservation Grants

The North American Wetlands Conservation Council on July 8, approved the first round of Fiscal Year 2010 grants for projects in Canada and the United States including eight projects in the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture. If approved by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission in September, projects in Florida, Maine, New York, South Carolina, Vermont, and Virginia will receive almost \$9 million in grant funds to be matched by over \$36 million from partners. More than 53,000 acres of important habitat for migratory birds will be protected or restored.

[View first round pending North American Wetland Conservation Act Grants](#)

Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Grants

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in May awarded \$546,000 in [Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act](#) grants to three projects in the Atlantic Flyway: in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (Migratory Bird Wintering Habitat Conservation Project, Phase III); the Dominican Republic (A Multidisciplinary, Community-based Approach to Protect Biodiversity and Bicknell's Thrush Habitat in the Dominican Republic); and a multi-country project between Quebec and Vermont (Conservation of Strategic Natural Areas on the territory of the Appalachian Corridor). Partners contributed over \$1.65 million in matching funds to carry out projects for research, monitoring, and conservation of neotropical migratory birds.

[View Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Approved Projects](#)

Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund Grants

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in May awarded \$2.3 million to four projects in Georgia, New Jersey and Vermont through the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund Grants Program. The fund provides money through the Recovery Land Acquisition Grants Program to states and territories to acquire habitat for endangered and threatened species with approved recovery plans. These grants will conserve habitat for listed species as well as priority migratory birds in Atlantic Coast Joint Venture focus areas including the Lake Champlain Basin in Vermont. See the article later in this newsletter on the opportunity for 2010 funding for this program.

[View the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund Grants](#)

In total, over \$11.5 million in grant funds will contribute to important habitat protection and research projects for migratory birds species and other wildlife throughout the Atlantic Flyway.



Wetland habitat in New Jersey is being acquired to protect habitat for the federally listed threatened Bog Turtle. USFWS photo



The Dominican Republic received funds for habitat protection, community outreach, and monitoring of Bicknell's Thrush. Photo courtesy of T.B. Ryder



The North Florida Wetland Conservation NAWCA project will help to protect habitat for White Ibis. Photo courtesy of Bill Majoros



Atlantic Coast Joint Venture
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Heads of the Estuaries Partnership

A consortium of governmental agencies, regional conservation organizations and land trusts working across the Downeast Coast of Maine came together in 2007 to form the Heads of the Estuaries Partnership (HEP). [The Pleasant River Wildlife Foundation](#) was a leader in formally organizing this collaboration, which includes the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Refuges, Gulf of Maine Coastal Program, and ACJV), Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, Maine State Planning Office, The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, Downeast Lakes Land Trust, Downeast Rivers Land Trust, Great Auk Land Trust, and Quoddy Regional Land Trust. While many of these partners focus on different geographic regions within Downeast Maine, they all enthusiastically support protection of the largely undisturbed and ecologically valuable Maine coastline from the mouth of the Narraguagus River east to the mouth of the Machias River, and have all committed to this effort. The HEP area covers the eastern half of the ACJV Downeast focus area. In its first year, three locally-based land trusts with the strongest geographic ties to the HEP region--Great Auk Land Trust, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, and Pleasant River Wildlife Foundation--have been exceptionally pro-active in HEP activities.

Downeast Maine is notable for containing extensive intertidal mudflats (tides here exceed 10 feet), pristine expanses of saltmarsh, large networks of freshwater wetlands, and relatively undeveloped shoreline across much of the region. These features provide regionally important habitat for many migratory birds, but are particularly important for migrating shorebirds, passerines, American Woodcock, and support one of the highest international priority areas for wintering habitat for American Black Duck.



Waite Creek area in Mason Bay.
Photo courtesy of Lois Winter



The project area supports a large concentration of Purple Sandpiper that is a significant percentage of the eastern North America population.
Photo courtesy of Marshall Lliff, Naturereserve



American Black Duck. USFWS photo

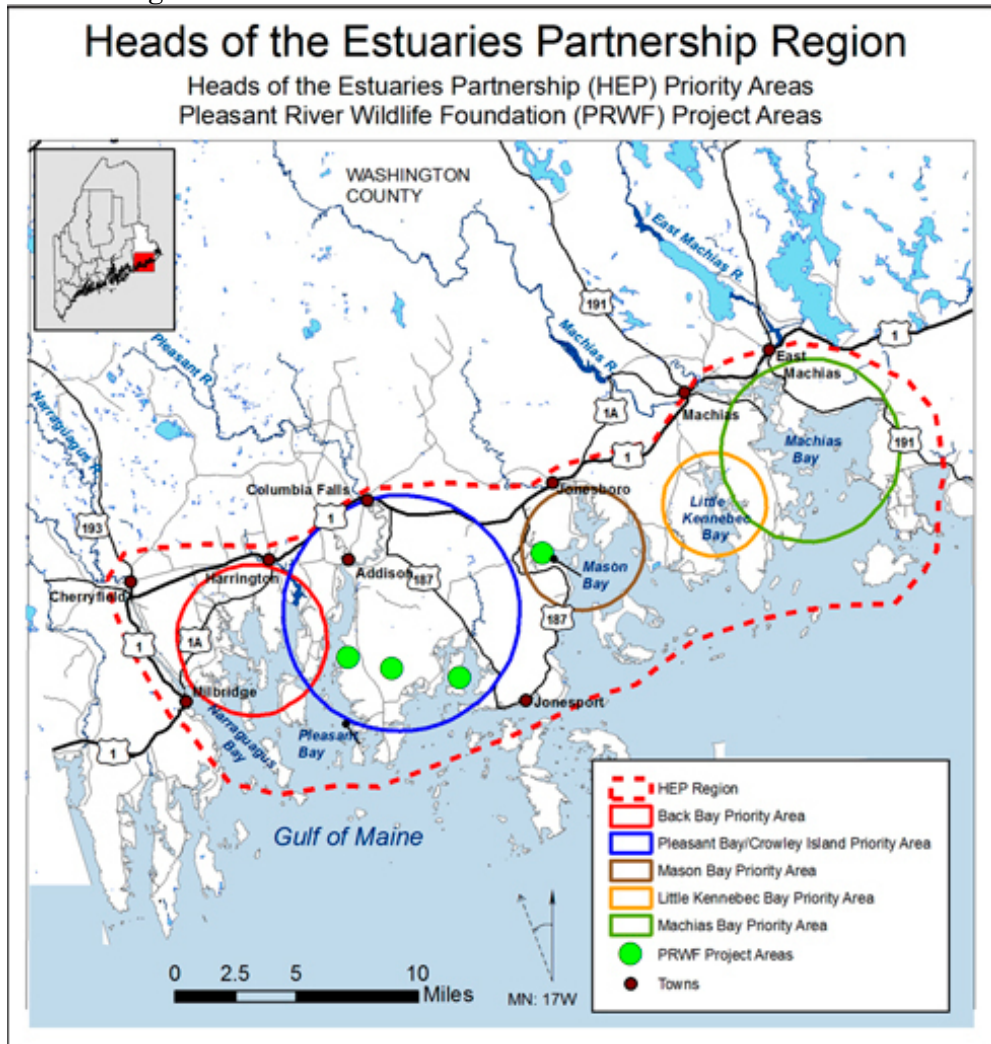


Figure 1. Priority areas of Head of the Estuaries Partnership

Upcoming meetings of the Joint Venture:

Summer Meetings
ACJV Waterfowl
Technical Committee
July 19, 2009
Charlottetown, PEI

ACJV Nongame Bird
Technical Committee
July 19, 2009
Charlottetown, PEI

ACJV Management Board
Summer Meeting
July 10, 2009
via Conference Call

Due to a combination of highest habitat quality and existing opportunities, five priority Areas were selected as the primary focus of HEP efforts: Back Bay/Flat Bay, Pleasant Bay/Crowley Island, Mason Bay/Chandler River, Little Kennebec Bay, and Machias Bay. In these areas, the HEP has set goals of protecting: 5,000 acres of coastal uplands; 2,500 acres of intertidal and freshwater wetlands; and 25 miles of coastal wetland frontage.

Total HEP project costs over the next four to five years are estimated at \$15 million. Partners can already boast of significant progress, even though the HEP is little more than a year old. In its first year, partners either acquired or signed purchase options on \$3.5 million in coastal property, made possible in part by state funds (\$750K), a Landowner Incentive Program Grant (\$100K) and other U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service grants such as two National Coastal Wetlands Grants (totalling nearly \$1 million), a NAWCA Small Grant (\$75K), and a NAWCA Standard (\$1 million) Grant that is recommended for approval this year. These projects build on or complement two earlier (2005 and 2007) NAWCA Standard Grants for Greater Pleasant Bay, as well as other recent Standard Grants in nearby Cobscook Bay, the interior Downeast Lakes region, and along the Machias River corridor. The Heads of Estuaries Partnership seems poised to quickly join the ranks of some of the ACJV's most successful focus area partnerships in wetlands conservation, including areas like South Carolina's ACE Basin, New Hampshire's Great Bay, and Maine's Kennebec Estuary, to name a few.

Saving Dirt Along Virginia's Rappahannock River

The seeds of the Rappahannock Land Protection Partnership were sown in the early 1990s, when conservationists recognized that a combined effort would be required to protect the precious resources of the Rappahannock River Valley. Today, those efforts are bearing fruit in the form of a flourishing national wildlife refuge, thousands of acres protected through donated conservation easements, and an innovative program designed to buffer Department of Defense lands from incompatible uses. At the heart of this multi-layered conservation work is "the Partnership."

The prequel to the Rappahannock Land Protection Partnership was the Virginia Joint Venture Management Board. This partnership was established to pursue Virginia's share of the overall goals of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. In 1991, the Virginia Joint Venture Management Board declared that establishment of a national wildlife refuge on the Rappahannock River was their highest priority. That vision is now a reality, as the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge recently surpassed 8,000 acres toward a protection goal of 20,000 acres. Tens of thousands of waterfowl, hundreds of bald eagles, and over 200 species of other migratory birds find food and shelter along the River and its tributaries, and their long-term outlook continues to look promising.

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation was among the first of our long-standing partners to line up in support of the Refuge, first by recommending its establishment, then by securing a grant under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act to purchase the first Refuge property. The bounty of fish and wildlife resources along the River, and the compelling need for their protection, soon attracted other major conservation organizations. Among them are The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, and The Conservation Fund. Of the 8,000+ acres protected as part of the Refuge, partners had an active role in acquisition of over 6,900 acres. The Trust for Public Land acted as interim



Some of the "dirt" along the Rappahannock River. USFWS photo



American Bald Eagle. USFWS photo



The shores of the river. USFWS photo

Grant Proposal Deadlines:

North American Wetlands
Conservation Act
Standard Grants
July 31, 2009

North American Wetlands
Conservation Act Small Grants
October 29, 2009

Neotropical Migratory Bird
Conservation Act
November, 2009

National Fish and Wildlife
Foundation
Deadlines Vary
Check Website

owner or otherwise assisted in protection of 3,054 acres through seven transactions. The Nature Conservancy negotiated four transactions, protecting 1,417 acres. The Conservation Fund purchased and held two properties totaling 641 acres for inclusion into the Refuge. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation received a second NAWCA grant, resulting in a total of 1,339 acres donated to the Refuge.

The partnership received a major boost in 2005 when Fort A.P. Hill entered the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program. The ACUB program was initiated to protect lands surrounding our Nation's most important Army installations to preserve their ability to continue their training missions, which are so vital to our national defense. Many of the highest priority areas identified for protection of the Fort's training mission are also within the refuge boundary, thereby creating an opportunity to expand the partnership to achieve additional national and regional conservation objectives. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed among the major partners with Fort A.P. Hill on December 19, 2006 to facilitate mutual cooperation and collaboration.

In addition to nationally active organizations, local and State organizations also play a vital role in the Rappahannock partnership. The Virginia Outdoors Foundation holds easements on hundreds of thousands of acres in the Commonwealth, many hundreds within the refuge boundary. Recognizing that the partnership could be more effective with additional regional representation, the Northern Neck Land Conservancy was invited to join in 2006. The historic Northern Neck region between the Rappahannock and Potomac rivers is the birthplace of George Washington, James Madison, James Monroe, and Robert E. Lee, among other notable Americans.

In recognition of the long-standing and successful work of the partners, the Rappahannock Land Protection Partnership was presented with the Secretary of the Interior's Partnerships in Conservation Award in May 2009. While all partner organizations were represented at the ceremony in Washington, D.C., some of the individuals who helped achieve our collective success were not present. They sent their regrets, stating that they were just too busy saving dirt. And that is what it is all about!



The Partnership was presented with the Secretary of the Interior's Partnerships in Conservation Award. USFWS photo

*Article submitted by
Joe McCauley, Refuge Manager*

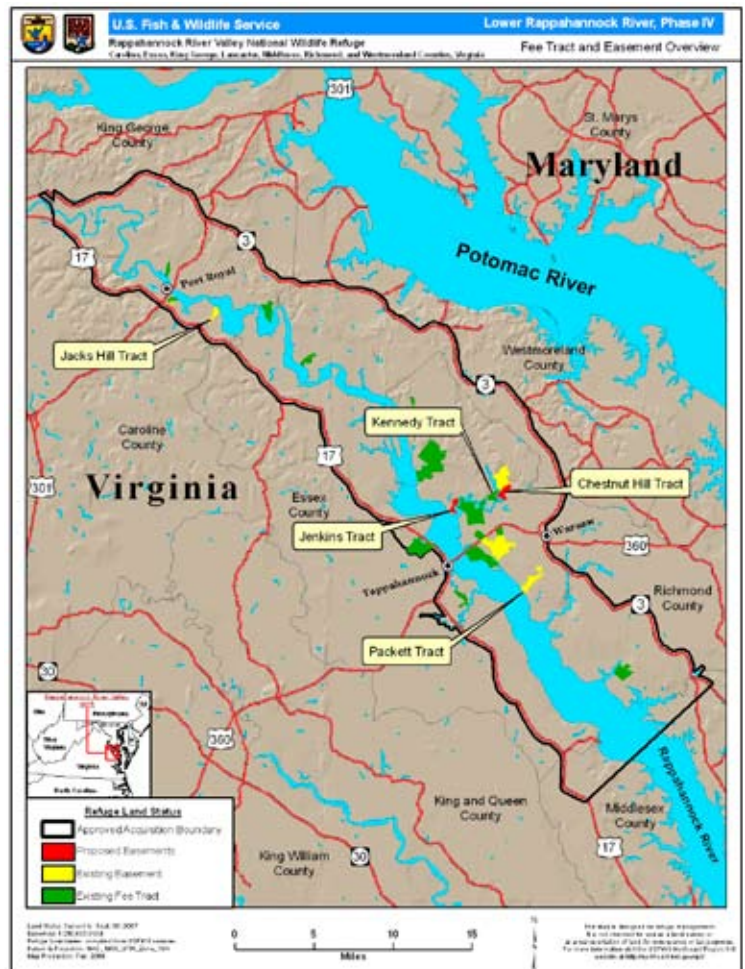


Figure 2. Proposed NAWCA grant and match tracts in the Rappahannock National Wildlife Refuge acquisition boundary

President Obama Issues Executive Order on Chesapeake Bay Protection and Restoration

On May 12, President Barack Obama signed an [Executive Order](#) that recognizes the importance of Chesapeake Bay and the ongoing challenges to and needs for restoring the bay. The order directs federal agencies to work together and to work with partners on a renewed commitment to controlling pollution from all sources as well as protecting and restoring habitat and living resources, conserving lands, and improving management of natural resources. ACJV staff and partners are working on draft reports for accomplishing steps to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay including conserving landscapes and ecosystems and developing focused and coordinated habitat and research activities that protect and restore living resources and water quality.

Joint Venture Bill Considered by House Natural Resources Committee

The “Joint Ventures for Bird Habitat Conservation Act of 2009” (H.R. 2188) was introduced on April 30, 2009 by Representative Frank Kratovil, Jr. representing the first district of Maryland along with co-sponsors Representative Henry E. Brown, Jr. of South Carolina, Representative Ron Kind of Wisconsin and Representative Robert J. Wittman of Virginia. The bill was considered at a hearing of the House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife on May 13, 2009. Panelists included Andrew Manus, Director of Conservation Programs for The Nature Conservancy of Delaware and former Chair of the ACJV Management Board and Kristin Saunders Evans, Assistant Secretary for Land Resources, Maryland Department of Natural Resources. The bill was considered by the House Natural Resources Committee on June 10, 2009 and favorably reported to the House of Representatives, as amended, by unanimous consent.

[View hearing statements and video](#)

[View text of bill](#)



Looking for the pot of gold in the Chesapeake Bay. Photo courtesy of Jane Thomas, IAN Library



Willet. Photo courtesy of Bill Majoros



Boreal Forest habitat. Photo courtesy of Garth Lenz, BSI

U.S. Joint Ventures

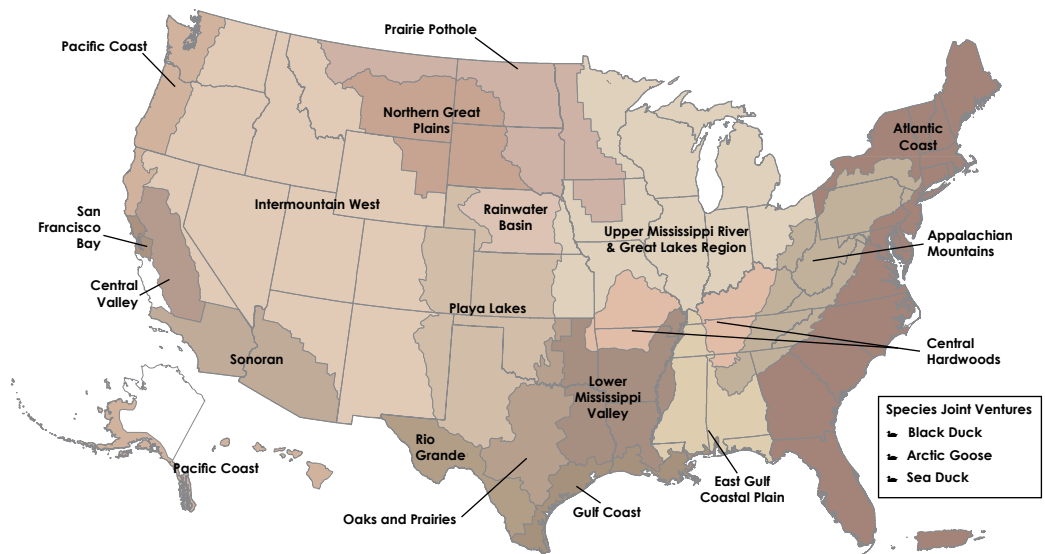


Figure 3. U.S. Joint Venture Boundaries, 2009

Increased Appropriations for Endangered Species Grants Requested

The President's budget request for fiscal year 2010 for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund includes approximately \$100 million in grant funding for conservation planning activities and habitat acquisition benefitting federally protected species, a proposed increase of \$24.5 million over the fiscal year 2009 enacted budget. Grants offered through the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (authorized under [Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act](#)) fund participation in a wide array of voluntary conservation projects for candidate, proposed and listed species. The proposed increase includes \$29.7 million for Recovery Land Acquisition Grants that provide funds to states and territories for acquisition of threatened and endangered species habitat in support of approved and draft species recovery plans. Acquiring habitat in order to secure long term protection is often the critical element in a comprehensive recovery effort for a listed species. Proposals must be submitted to the appropriate U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Offices by August 19, 2009.

[View Endangered Species Grant webpage.](#)

Impacts and Conservation Strategies Related to Climate Change in the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture: Sea Level Rise

The Atlantic Coast Joint Venture Draft Strategic Plan Update being considered this month by the ACJV Management Board includes information on existing and potential roles for the ACJV related to climate change. In this and a series of newsletter articles in future issues, we will discuss the likely impacts of climate change on habitats and birds in the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture area and the role of the joint venture in planning for and addressing those impacts. This article focuses on sea level rise along the Atlantic Coast of the United States.

Of all the impacts from global climate change facing the Atlantic Coast region of the United States, one of the most imminent and conspicuous threats is sea level rise. Since the end of the most recent ice age, sea levels have risen a total of about 120 meters at varying rates. Recently, sea level rise rates have increased due to global warming – in the last half of the 20th century, global sea level rise rates averaged about 1.8 mm (0.07 inches) per year. Higher relative sea level rise rates have occurred in places where the land is subsiding such as the mid Atlantic Coast from northern New Jersey to southeast Virginia and are closer to the global average or lower where the land is stable or rising, such as along the Maine Coast. Predictions based on a warming climate suggest that global sea level rise rates will continue to increase in the 21st Century. [The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report in 2007](#) predicted that global sea level rise would be between 0.18 and 0.59 meters (0.6-1.9 feet) depending on the greenhouse gas emissions scenarios and on models used and recent reports including an [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\) report in 2009](#) suggest that accelerated melting of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets could add contribute an additional 0.2 meters (0.7 feet) or more for a total of 0.79 meters (2.6 feet) or more. Due to the uncertainty in the models, the EPA report suggests using a global sea level rise of about 1 meter (3.3 feet) for planning purposes. For planning and modeling along the Atlantic Coast, the ACJV is using a range of values.



Roseate Terns are listed as endangered in the ACJV area. Photo courtesy of Molly Sullivan, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife



Loggerhead turtles are federally endangered. USFWS photo



Melting sea ice. Photo courtesy of Tim Moser



Flooded wetland. Photo courtesy of Jane Hawkey, IAN Library



American Oystercatcher with chick.
 Photo courtesy of Jack Rogers



Piping plover. Photo courtesy of
 Richard Kuzminski



Red Knot. Greg Breese, USFWS

An assessment of coastal vulnerability to sea level rise for the United States has been developed by the U.S. Geological Survey based on relative rates of sea level rise and exposure to hurricanes and other storms that are predicted to become more intense and frequent (see figure 4). The most vulnerable areas of the Atlantic Coast extend from the mid-Atlantic region through northern Florida. These areas are typically high energy coastlines with low relief terrain and where the major landform is a barrier island. An exception to this characterization is the Chesapeake Bay that has a high vulnerability index, but is a protected estuary. Northern New England (north of Cape Cod) has a lower vulnerability index. The vulnerability index for the Gulf Coast of Florida is moderate primarily because wave energy is lower in the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

Increased rates of sea level rise and increased coastal storms along the Atlantic Coast will impact a variety of coastal habitats important for migratory birds. Coastal wetlands including salt, brackish and freshwater tidal marshes will be reduced, shifted, inundated and altered due to sea level rise affecting species such as Seaside Sparrow, Salt Marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Willet, King Rail, Black Rail, American Black Duck and wading birds that depend upon these wetlands. Other intertidal areas such as mudflats and sand flats used year-round by many birds including dabbling ducks, geese, and shorebirds such as Short-billed Dowitcher and Greater Yellowleg will be impacted by greater inundation and erosion in some areas. Beaches used by beach-nesting birds such as the federally listed threatened Piping Plover, Least Tern and American Oystercatcher and by shorebirds during migration such as Sanderling, Red Knot and Semipalmated Sandpiper will be impacted by greater inundation and erosion and more frequent and severe storm events. For all of these coastal habitats, the joint venture is playing a role by developing more precise sea level rise models and coastal bird species-habitat models to assess impacts.

Models that assess the impact of sea-level rise on coastal habitats and species range from simple “bathtub” inundation models to a range of more complex models now under development. Few of the existing models incorporate errors associated with the input data

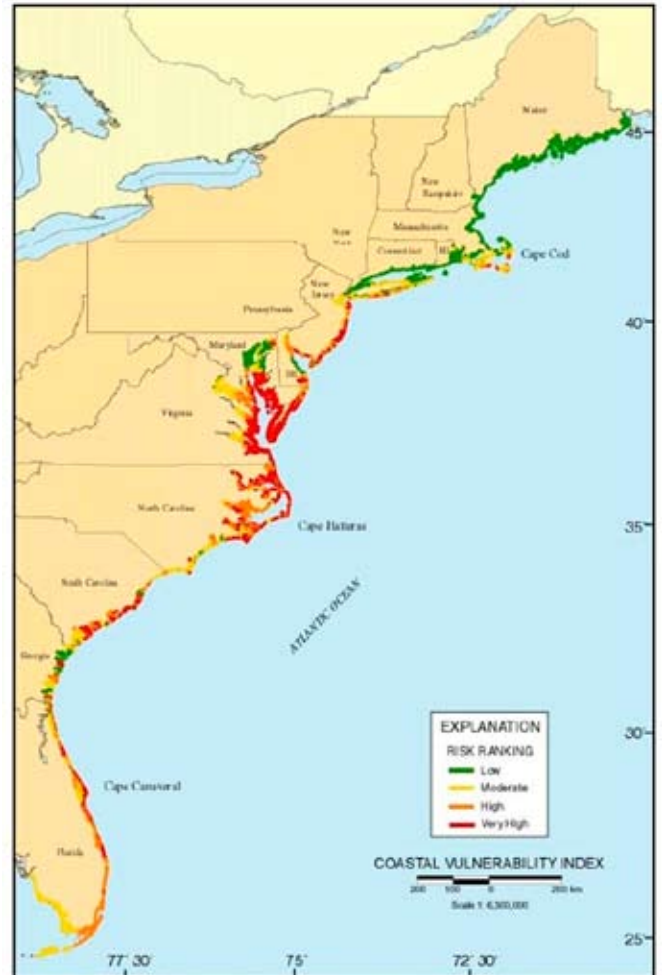


Figure 4. Map of the Coastal Vulnerability Index (CVI) for the U.S. Atlantic Coast. The CVI shows the relative vulnerability of the coast to changes due to future rise in sea-level. Areas along the coast are assigned a ranking from low to high risk, based on the analysis of physical variables that contribute to coastal change. From USGS, National Assessment of Coastal Vulnerability to Sea-Level Rise: Preliminary Results for the U.S. Atlantic Coast



Salt Marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow.
Photo courtesy of Ed Sigda

New webpage on monitoring waterbirds for effective management in the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways is now available as part of the ACJV website (http://www.acjv.org/waterbird_project.htm)



(e.g., errors in the coastal elevation data). [The Sea Level Affecting Marsh Model \(SLAMM\)](#) was developed in the mid-1980s and incorporated the dominant processes in wetland conversions. This model was designed to assess relative risks at regional scales and not for assessments at the local scale. This model is being used to predict impacts to national wildlife refuges in both U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regions 4 and 5 but despite recent improvements to this model, a number of limitations and concerns remain. Because of these limitations, both the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are pursuing alternative models of sea level rise. [NOAA is pursuing the extension of a model widely used in the Gulf Coast to coastal areas of North Carolina.](#) Results are expected within the next six months. The ACJV is partnering with USGS in the use of new simulation model being developed by Dr. Glenn Guntenspergen at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. This project is funded through a [USGS Science Support Partnership Program](#) grant. This model will be applied to representative individual wetland complexes from Virginia northward. The output of this model will be linked to bird-habitat relationship models to assess the impact of sea level rise to bird populations using salt marshes. To support these modeling efforts, the collection and use of Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) – a remote sensing system used to collect topographic data – is being implemented by various partners to make more accurate elevation data available along the Atlantic Coast.

ACJV partners also working on the development of species-habitat models for coastal bird species including the Ecological Systems models being developed by North Carolina State with ACJV partners in the South Atlantic Coastal Plain through the [Designing Sustainable Landscapes Project](#). By working on improved sea level rise and coastal species-habitat models, the ACJV will be able to assist partners in adaptation to sea level rise in the Atlantic Coast of the United States. The results of these models can be use to guide conservation to those areas that allow these coastal habitats to persist or migrate and by facilitating restoration efforts that maintain these habitat types (including managed wetlands) and sustain coastal bird populations.

Departing Board Members

Three members of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture board are departing due to retirement or job changes. Their contributions to the ACJV are greatly appreciated and they will be missed.

Ed Parker, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection

Edward C. Parker, Chief of the Bureau of Natural Resources in the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) retired and stepped down from the board in June. Ed was a long time ACJV board member and advocate for the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture and the implementation of other regional landscape scale initiatives addressing high priority threats identified in State Wildlife Action Plans. Ed worked for DEP for over 30 years, the last 14 as Chief responsible for the management of four Divisions (Wildlife, Inland Fisheries, Marine Fisheries & Forestry), and a staff of 130. His national and regional leadership roles included: incumbent President of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies; Executive Committee member of the Association of Fish and Wildlife; Chairman of the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission; member of the National Advisory and Acceptance Team for State Wildlife Strategies; member of the National Fish Habitat Board; board member for the Future Fishermen Foundation; member of the Doris Duke Foundation Environmental Advisory Committee; past President of the Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Resource Agencies and past Chairman of National Grants Committee. Bill Hyatt, Acting Natural Resources Bureau Chief, will serve as the ACJV board member until the Chief position is filled.

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Terry Sullivan, The Nature Conservancy

Terry Sullivan, former Director of Government Relations for the Northeast Region of The Nature Conservancy stepped down from the board coincident with his new job as Senior Policy Advisor for Water Resources beginning in May, 2009. In each of his previous roles at the Conservancy, Terry led efforts that made a positive difference on behalf of the Conservancy's mission. These accomplishments include completing the final phase of a \$56 million capital campaign in Rhode Island, leading the Florida Chapter's successful efforts to encourage the state to create and implement Florida Forever (a \$3 billion state conservation program), developing and staffing the Eastern US Conservation Region's (EUSCR) climate change program to effectively advance the Conservancy's objectives in the nation's first and only mandatory cap and trade program (i.e. Eastern Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative), and crafting and implementing a highly successful and active MOU partnership between the Corps North Atlantic Division and the Conservancy's Eastern US Conservation Region. Andy Manus, former board chair and member and Director of Conservation for The Nature Conservancy in Delaware will serve as interim acting board member.

Jim Fenwood, U.S. Forest Service

Jim Fenwood, Acting Deputy Regional Forester for the U.S. Forest Service's Southern Region, retired and stepped down from the board in June. Jim was Director of the Biological and Physical Resources Unit of the Southern Region with responsibility for wildlife, fish, invasive species, rare plants, soil, water, and air. Prior to that, Jim was Forest Supervisor of the Mendocino National Forest in Northern California; Forest Service National Coordinator for Resource information Requirements and a Brookings LEGIS Fellow for Senator Byron Dorgan; and an Ecosystem Planning Specialist assigned to the Forest Service's national headquarters where he worked on policy issues including sustainability, ecosystem management, species viability, forest health, and planning regulations. He has also served as Regional Wildlife Ecologist for the Forest Service's Southern Region and as a wildlife biologist and assistant ranger on the Sumter and Ouachita National Forests. The Forest Service seat on the board will be vacant until a replacement is selected.



Sunset. Photo courtesy of Bill Majoros