

# Atlantic Coast Joint Venture News

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

*Photo courtesy of Nate Bachele*

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Atlantic Coast Joint Venture  
[www.acjv.org](http://www.acjv.org)

## Eleven North American Wetland Conservation Act Grants Approved in ACJV

On September 13, 2006, the Migratory Bird Conservation

Commission approved the first round of Fiscal Year 2007 North American Wetland Conservation Act grants for projects in Canada and the United States including eleven projects in the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture. Projects in Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, and Virginia will receive nearly \$8 million in grant funds to be matched by over \$22 million from partners. More than 40,000 acres of important habitats for migratory birds will be conserved through acquisition, conservation easements and restoration.

[View approved projects](#)



Phase II NAWCA Greater Pleasant Bay Project in Maine includes the parcel on the West Branch of the Pleasant River as a potential acquisition site. *Photo courtesy of Maine Coast Heritage Trust.*

## Final Projects Approved for Atlantic Coast Joint Venture Partners Utilizing Oil Spill Fines in Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts

Four North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) projects from Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts were approved by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission in September completing the use of \$7 million in Buzzards Bay oil spill fines placed in the NAWCA fund. From 2004-2006, Atlantic Coast Joint Venture staff worked with a broad coalition of partners led by the Coalition for Buzzards Bay to put together eligible projects that could use these funds. Nine projects in the Buzzards Bay watershed were ultimately selected for funding under the NAWCA program including those approved in the most recent round (see map on page two). Projects were funded in every coastal town in the Buzzards Bay watershed of Massachusetts (except for urban coastline in the City of New Bedford). The criminal fines that were placed in the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund and awarded to the selected projects leveraged more than \$16.4 million in matching partner funds from 15 different partners, and resulted in the protection and restoration of 1,773 acres of important coastal habitats in the Buzzards Bay watershed. These projects will conserve head-water swamps, tidal rivers, salt and brackish marshes, beaches, and coastal ponds that support the birds, other wildlife, and fish species most impacted by the oil spill.



NAWCA projects will help to conserve habitat that supports the federally endangered Piping Plover. *USFWS photo*

Efforts by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement working with the ACJV, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Coast Guard, and the prosecuting Assistant United States Attorney resulted in the criminal fines being deposited in the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund ([see fact sheet for additional information](#)). Coordinated efforts by the many dedicated project partners in Buzzards Bay resulted in best use of these funds for significant habitat conservation in the Buzzards Bay watershed.

**Thanks to all the partners that contributed to habitat conservation in Buzzards Bay!**

*Coalition for Buzzards Bay, Fairhaven-Acushnet Land Preservation Trust, Massachusetts Corporate Wetlands Restoration Program, Massachusetts Environmental Trust, Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management, Mattapoissett Land Trust, Sippican Land Trust, The Trustees of Reservations, Town of Mattapoissett, Westport Land Conservation Trust, Buzzards Bay National Estuary Program, Bristol County Mosquito Control, Dartmouth Natural Resources Trust, Ducks Unlimited, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, The Nature Conservancy, and private landowners.*

**The ACJV Families Are Growing**

It's been a banner year for babies for ACJV staff members.

Welcome

Sophie Reynolds, Annelise

Steinkamp Johnson, and Maxwell Hartley

to our

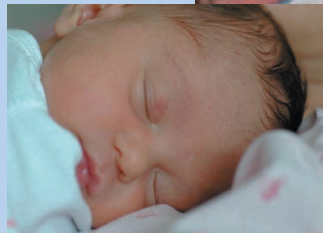
conservation community.

It's a bird club in the making!



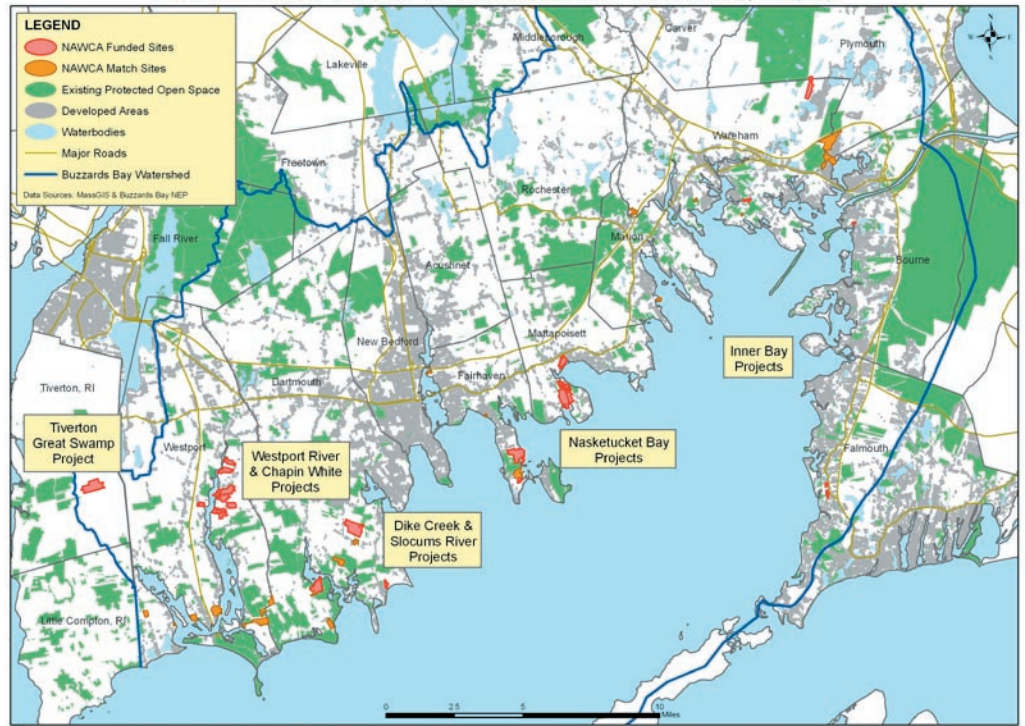
Max  
9/13/06

Sophie  
6/15/06



Annelise  
8/1/06

North American Wetlands Conservation Fund - Buzzards Bay Projects



Map prepared by: Buzzards Bay National Estuary Program, 2870 Cranberry Highway, E. Wareham, MA 02538, August 9, 2006

**NE Coordinated Bird Monitoring Workshop**

For many years, government agencies and non-government organizations (NGOs) have been conducting a variety of bird monitoring programs, using the results to guide conservation efforts and management practices. However, a lack of coordination among these groups has resulted in redundancy and inefficiency in data collection and management. The Northeast Coordinated Bird Monitoring Partnership is a cooperative effort to develop and implement a regional bird monitoring framework in the Northeast region partially funded through a multi-state grant. It will assist States and other organizations in improving the coordination and effectiveness of their bird monitoring efforts. State, federal, and NGOs have collaborated to initiate the partnership, which is dedicated to developing a coordinated approach to monitoring avian abundance, distribution, and demographics across the region. The partnership met for its first workshop September 14-16, 2006, at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in Ithaca, New York. The primary purpose of the workshop was to introduce participants to the concepts and benefits of coordinated bird monitoring and to develop a Bird Monitoring Framework that will help the participating organizations achieve their bird monitoring objectives.

[Link for more information about the partnership and details on the workshop.](#)

**PIF Conservation Design Workshop**

Partners in Flight (PIF) hosted a Conservation Design Workshop April 11-13, 2006 in St. Louis Missouri. The workshop was attended by over a hundred bird conservation partners eager to learn the state of the art in biologically based, spatially explicit landscape planning. Invited experts addressed three topical areas: advances in GIS-based habitat assessment and landscape characterization; methods for linking current bird distribution and abundance with habitat assessments; and projecting bird numbers and habitat conditions into the future. ACJV Science Coordinator Tim Jones helped organize the workshop and presented information on approaches to linking bird distribution and abundance with habitat assessment. The agenda and presentations from the workshop are available at the [PIF web site](#). In addition, several of the presenters wrote articles for the July issue of [The All-Bird Bulletin](#) highlighting information that was presented at the workshop.

# Northeast Projects Funded Through the State Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Support Program

The [State Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Support Program](#) is administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in support of projects that develop and implement regional (multi-state) or national conservation approaches based on the State Wildlife Action Plans. Two projects were selected in August from the northeast region of the United States focused on regional habitat mapping and regional monitoring.

## ***Regional Habitat Maps - A Foundation For Proactive Conservation Projects***

This project was submitted by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries on behalf of the northeast states and partners. This project will compile and standardize terrestrial and aquatic habitat classification systems and provide a basic aquatic habitat dataset and a regional protected areas map that will provide critical tools for state and regional conservation in the Northeastern United States. Another outcome of this project is the creation of a standing Northeast Regional Habitat Mapping Coordinating Committee that will guide this project and promote the application of the resulting classification systems. As part of this effort, a survey was sent to each Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (ACJV) state requesting information on each states' wildlife habitat mapping resources. This information will be compiled and used to assess how to best incorporate each states capabilities and needs toward standardized regional habitat mapping.

The ACJV is working closely with this partnership and linking this northeast-based effort with similar efforts in the southeast. To help facilitate this partnership, the joint venture recently hosted a meeting of regional and national programs working on land cover, habitat classification and mapping in the southeast and northeast.

[View a summary and presentations of this meeting.](#)

For additional information contact [Becky Gwynn](#) or [Dave Morton](#).

## ***Development of a Regional Monitoring Framework***

This one-year project, submitted on behalf of northeast states by New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, will create a more effective and cost-efficient mechanism for successful Wildlife Action Plan implementation and for responsive, real-time reporting to stakeholders and the decision makers who fund the State Wildlife Grants program through the development of a framework for regional wildlife and habitat monitoring in the Northeast. The first phase will convene a core group of state biologists, planners, and managers and key federal, non-governmental organizations, and academic partners to identify potential indicators and measures for Species of Greatest Conservation Need, habitat, threats and strategy effectiveness. The second phase will convene a larger group of state personnel, key partners, and invited experts for a two-day facilitated follow up conference to review draft indicators and measures and develop a framework for regional wildlife and habitat monitoring.

The ACJV will assist with development of this project and coordination with the Northeast Coordinated Bird Monitoring partnership (see article above).

For more information contact [Tracey Tomajer](#) or [Jon Kart](#).



The Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow is endemic to coastal salt marshes on the Atlantic Coast and are a high priority species that would benefit from improved conservation design and monitoring. *Photo courtesy of Ed Sigda*

### **Announcements**

#### **NAWCA Small Grant Program Increases Funding Level**

The NAWCA program recently increased its funding level from \$50,000 to \$75,000. This program supports the same type of projects and adheres to the same selection criteria and administrative guidelines as the NAWCA U.S. Standard Grants Program.

However, project activities are usually smaller in scope and involve fewer project dollars.

#### **Draft Report of North American Waterfowl Management Plan's Continental Assessment Available for Review and Comment**

The draft report of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan's Continental Assessment is now available. The 87-page draft, includes a cover letter with information about the review process

and comment period.

[View draft assessment.](#)

#### **Southeast United States Waterbird Conservation Plan Now Available**

The vision for the plan is to provide regional guidance and perspective to partners, landowners, and land managers for accomplishing waterbird conservation objectives.

[View the full plan.](#)

# Conserving the Altamaha River Basin

The Altamaha River basin is the second largest watershed on the eastern seaboard and drains more than one-quarter of the state of Georgia. Conservation of bottomland forests in the Altamaha River corridor, as identified in the PIF Bird Conservation Plan for the South Atlantic Coastal Plain, is critical to meeting objectives for numerous priority species of landbirds, shorebirds, and waterbirds. The Altamaha River Basin is recognized as a Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network site and as an Important Bird Area by both Audubon Society and American Bird Conservancy. Portions of the Altamaha River basin are included in a network of lands protected by the state and The Nature Conservancy (see Figure 1).

NAWCA Grants have been the key funding component in the acquisition of three major properties along the Altamaha River: Moody Forest, Penholoway Swamp, and Clayhole Swamp. The Moody Forest Natural Area contains high-quality upland and bottomland natural communities, including old-growth forests, slope forests on bluffs overlooking the floodplain, and cypress-tupelo sloughs. The occurrence of these contiguous high-quality natural communities

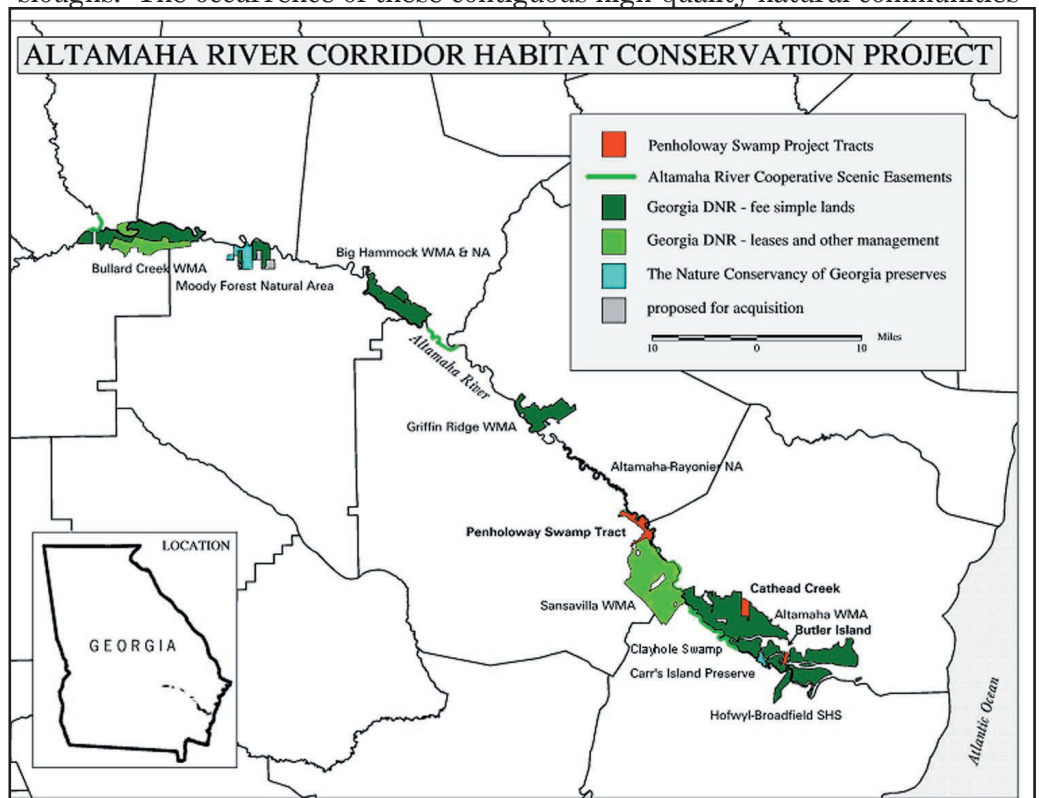


Figure 1. Altamaha Corridor Habitat Conservation Projects.

makes this an irreplaceable, one-of-a-kind site.

Conservation of habitats upstream also helps to protect the managed impoundments of the Altamaha Waterfowl Management Area at the mouth of the Altamaha River. Management is accomplished on three different management units, providing different habitats for different various species of waterfowl, shorebirds, and waterbirds. All of the impoundments are tidal, emergent marsh surrounded by a system of dikes and water control structures. Butler and Champney Island units are freshwater impoundments while the Rhett's island unit is a brackish marsh system that is managed for saltmarsh bulrush and wigeongrass.

Conservation efforts in the Altamaha River basin have been guided by national bird conservation initiatives such as Partners in Flight, the North American

## Upcoming meetings of the Joint Venture:

ACJV Integrated Bird Conservation Committee  
February 12, 2007  
San Juan, Puerto Rico

ACJV Management Board  
February 12-14, 2007  
San Juan, Puerto Rico

ACJV Waterfowl Technical Committee  
March 4, 2007  
Saratoga, New York

Grant proposal deadlines:  
North American Wetlands Conservation Act Standard Grants  
March, 2007

North American Wetlands Conservation Act Small Grants  
December 1, 2006

Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Grants  
December 4, 2006

National Coastal Wetland Conservation Act Grants  
(Proposal due dates changing. Refer to web site for information)

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program  
October 27, 2006  
[View Opportunities](#)



Wood Stork is a high priority species inhabiting the Altamaha River Basin.  
*USFWS photo*



The Ansley Hodges Project in the lower Altamaha River. *Photo courtesy of Ducks Unlimited*



Potential Ivory-billed Woodpecker cavity. *Photo by Paul Mennill*  
[Link to hear recordings](#)  
[Link to view more photos](#)



Salt marsh die back in Georgia. *Photo by Mac Rawson courtesy of Georgia Coastal Research Council.*

Waterfowl Management Plan, the United States Shorebird Conservation Plan, and the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, and more specifically through the South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative (SAMBI) of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture. These national and regional plans have been combined with the efforts of local conservation groups, making habitat acquisition and management a priority in the lower Altamaha River.

*Article compiled by Greg Balkcom (GADNR) from information provided by E.J. Williams (USFWS) and Allison McGee (TNC).*

## New Evidence Suggests Ivory-billed Woodpeckers Persist in Florida

Researchers from Auburn University and the University of Windsor detected a bird that they identified as an Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Choctawhatchee River in the Florida panhandle in May 2005 and in the subsequent year observed birds on 14 occasions. Additional evidence includes tree cavities, foraging signs and numerous recordings of distinctive double knock and kent calls. The results were announced in the online journal [Avian Conservation and Ecology](#). Searches will continue in Florida, South Carolina (see [previous issue of this newsletter](#)) and throughout the woodpeckers historic range.

[View USFWS Press Release.](#)

## Sudden Wetland Dieback Along the Atlantic Coast

Sudden dieback of salt marsh vegetation has been occurring at several locations along the Atlantic Coast of the United States since at least 2001. In affected areas, salt marsh plants die back suddenly (within one to two years) resulting in areas of plant stubble, bare mud and peat that are susceptible to erosion. The rapid loss of emergent vegetation does not follow the pattern and cannot be explained by typical causes of localized marsh loss including accumulation of wrack, scour by ice or grazing by geese or muskrats. Wetland dieback has been reported from Georgia and South Carolina north to Virginia, New York and New England.

Beginning in 2001, throughout coastal [Georgia](#) and nearby areas of South Carolina there has been an extensive dieback of over 1,000 acres of salt marsh, impacting both smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) and black needlerush (*Juncus roemerianus*), mostly along tidal creeks but also in some interior mid-marsh areas. Observers in [Virginia](#) have also noted a limited occurrence of dieback on the Eastern Shore. In [New England](#) wetland dieback was first noted in a number of marshes on Cape Cod, Massachusetts in 2002 and was subsequently noted along the Long Island Sound coast of Connecticut and New York as well as a few occurrences in the other coastal New England states. In New England and New York, the plant species primarily affected is smooth cordgrass along tidal creeks and low marsh areas, although impacts on salt-meadow cordgrass (*Spartina patens*) and rush species (*Juncus spp.*) have also been noted. Researchers are not sure if the southern Atlantic dieback is related to the more northern dieback events.

It is also not clear if the dieback along the Atlantic Coast is related to the “Brown Marsh” event that has occurred in [Louisiana](#) marshes along the Gulf Coast since 2000. Differences include the presence of standing dead plants in affected Gulf Coast marshes vs. little to no vegetation in affected Atlantic Coast marshes and the location of dieback areas in the marsh interior along the Gulf Coast vs. primarily creek banks along the Atlantic Coast. Brown Marsh in Louisiana is also much more extensive (over 100,000 acres) than along the Atlantic Coast.

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The definitive cause of the salt marsh dieback is not known, although dieback events are correlated with (tend to follow) periods of drought. One hypothesis is that the stress caused by drought is making plants susceptible to other natural stressors such as fungal pathogens, soil acidity, metal toxicity or herbivory. Research into causative factors is ongoing in all geographic areas. Laboratory research in Georgia has indicated that rhizomes from affected plants do not re-grow but that healthy

plants can survive and grow in soil from dieback areas. These results suggest that transplanting and restoration may be possible if natural regeneration does not occur. Natural recovery is occurring in some areas - Georgia marshes have partially recovered since the end of the drought conditions in 2004.

In order to track the extent and severity of salt marsh dieback and recovery, standard monitoring protocols and regular monitoring are being developed. Regular monitoring through analysis of annual high resolution aerial photography at critical sites is now being done in Georgia and centralized reporting is being done in New England through the New England Estuarine Research Society. A pilot project is also underway to develop a dieback signature using archived satellite imagery and apply it to other areas to map dieback across the region. Ongoing efforts by wetland managers and researchers are needed to better understand and limit sudden wetland dieback along the Atlantic Coast including coordinated monitoring, targeted research on causative factors and active restoration and management to enhance recovery.

View links for references and further information including workshop results.

[New England Sudden Wetland Dieback](#)  
[Dieback \(Brown Marsh\) in Louisiana](#)  
[Marsh Dieback in Georgia](#)  
[Marsh Dieback in Virginia](#)

## Longtime ACJV Partner Dave Odell Retires

After 35 years of service with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, most recently as Regional Wildlife Manager for west-central New York, including the Finger Lakes Region, Dave Odell retired this summer. He was also an Adjunct Assistant Professor at Houghton College where he taught wildlife biology and field ornithology. Dave was involved with the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture and Lower Great Lakes - St. Lawrence Basin since the beginning of both joint ventures in 1988, assisting with the development of joint venture-wide implementation plans, focus area plans, and more recently, BCR plans. Dave's leadership and dedication in implementing priority waterfowl and other migratory bird habitat conservation projects resulted in protection, restoration and enhancement of thousands of acres of significant habitats in western New York including over 8,000 acres in the Montezuma waterfowl focus area. Dave served on the ACJV Waterfowl Technical Committee and NAWCA Ranking Committee for many years. Dave and his wife Rebecca will be running the Old Duck Inn Bed and Breakfast in Tyre, New York, just down the road from Montezuma, and would welcome visits from his colleagues in the waterfowl conservation community.



*Spartina alterniflora* die back in Massachusetts. Photo courtesy of Ron Rosza